

‘Running Punks: more than just turning up’

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Abstract

This study explored why runners have joined an online running group called the Running Punks that was set up in 2020. Running Punks espouses running for pleasure and repudiating the ‘rules’ of running groups which are mainly concerned with speed and performance. This research aimed to discover, through semi structured interviews, why people joined a group that differs so significantly from others. In total 44 semi structured interviews were undertaken, and the data was analysed using Thematic Analysis. The results constructed three broad themes: belonging; connected; and catalyst for change which are discussed by applying two theoretical strands: community of practice (CoP) and self-determination theory

(SDT). The results discovered that while individuals benefited enormously from being connected and related as part of a community, they identified as ‘Running Punks’ as they valued their autonomy as individuals.

Keywords: Running Punks, Community of Practice, Self Determination Theory, Belonging, Motivation.

Introduction

Much has been written about punk and the ways in which it is used to describe rebellion against established economic, social and cultural practices (Crossley, 2015), through a preference for ‘DIY’ anti-capitalist and anti-establishment cultures (Holtzman et. al. 2007), which in the 1970s was anarchic and reactionary. There is some suggestion that punk as a subculture was over quickly (Clark, 2003) and is now, for many people, simply reimagined through consumerism, fashion, and nostalgia for mohawk haircuts and ripped tartan (Morgan, 2024) arguably, the very thing it was opposed to (Clark, 2003). Yet the central precepts of punk in terms of rebellion and DIY culture, clearly lives on (Way, 2021; Way and Grimes, 2024; Morgan, 2024), and as Way puts it, punk is for many people, clearly, a “state of mind” (Way, 2021, p. 108).

One of the ways in which punk is present as a DIY culture, as a state of mind and reflects outsiderness, is in the running group, Running Punks. While punk and running might conjure up images of Joe Strummer running the London Marathon in 1983 after allegedly drinking ten pints of beer the night before (Morgan, 2024), or Boff Whalley, founding member of British pseudo anarchic pop group, Chumbawamba (Smith 2012), simply turning up at a

British Fell Championship Race and winning, arguably, this merely suggests that some punks run. For example, Joe Strummer had been a champion cross country runner while at boarding school (Morgan, 2024) and Whalley's preponderance for winning, rather than taking part, the 'let's turn up and do it anyway' approach begins to seem less authentically punk, and certainly does not seem so allied with punk ideologies, therefore, this relationship between punk and running is not so clear cut. Moreover, many people might have drunk beer before a marathon, especially in the 1980s, when the benefits of hydration for runners were not especially well known at the time. In terms of anarchic sensibilities or a DIY approach to either their attitudes or training regimes, neither Strummer nor Whalley seem especially 'punk', they are more punk by association with music, and arguably have more of a flavour of 'Boy's Own Adventures' about them.

In this paper, we chart the relationship between punk and running through the DIY, and outsiderness mentality, combined with anarchic rejection of traditional 'sporty endeavours' such as speed and alliance with 'sportiness' as a form of identity, through the running group, Running Punks (Morgan, 2024). Running Punks is a virtual and in-person running group, which was established in 2020. The group was set up by ex-athlete and musician, Jimmy Watkins, and drummer and teacher, Rhodri Morgan in order to 'create human motivation through running and music' (Watkins, 2020). Both Jimmy and Rhod wanted to encourage people who didn't really care about speed or looking good when running, but who wanted to run together with a group of likeminded people, and Running Punks was born (Morgan, 2024). Virtual running groups are not uncommon, for example Vegan Runners where the values of veganism set out by the Vegan Society are combined with running (Vegan Runners, 2024). Other virtual running groups have been set up which are connected to health, for example, Cardiac Athletes (Cardiac Athletes, 2024) or specific achievements as in the 100

Marathon Club (100 Marathon Club, 2024). However, one of the reasons that Running Punk was set up, was to encourage people who hadn't had much experience with running, and to further motivate those who had. Running Punks advocates 'Slow Running' which focusses on 80% slow running and 20% fast running, which improves speed and stamina fairly quickly (Morgan, 2024). One of the things that appears to put people off running is speed and competitive behaviours, which Running Punks is keen to address.

The term 'punk' in this context refers to the outsider nature of the members (many of whom would never consider themselves to be 'sporty' (Morgan, 2024)), and the DIY attitude to group membership and running itself. It is not uncommon for membership of regular running clubs to involve subscription fees and to focus on personal bests and encourage competitive behaviours (Morgan and Inglis, 2024). Membership of the Running Punks running group is open to all who enjoy running, and members of the group are encouraged to run and tag the Running Punks on the social media platforms of X/Twitter®, Instagram®, and Facebook®. As of May 2024, Running Punks X/Twitter® has 11.3 thousand followers worldwide who claim membership of the group.

A great deal of academic information exists on running for sport and pleasure, (Jarvie, 2012; Hitchens and Latham, 2017; Oswald, et.al 2020) punk music (Bennett, 2006), fashion (Guerra and Grimaldi Figueredo, 2019) as a way of life (Way, 2021) and punk attitude to sport (Pavlidis, 2012). There is also considerable primary research on why people take up running, especially the global success of parkrun (Wiltshire et al 2018). Many authors have focused on the DIY ethos of punk, in which people have been encouraged to 'have a go' (Crossley, 2015 p. 4), and from that, music and information about different groups of people through Zines, emerged (Way, 2024). Since the birth of punk, DIY has taken on a new realm through the advent of cultural production through online apps and social media. For example,

a number of musical artists, especially rappers, emerged from 2016 through posting on the social media platform, Soundcloud. ‘The DIY aesthetic of the production and the raw, low fidelity sound meant they were more aligned to punk than traditional rap music’ (Whittaker and Morgan, 2021, p. 100). In this research, the aim was to discover why people have joined Running Punks, given its ethos of outsiderism, and inclusivity, and to find out more about the wider issues of being part of the group which combines such diverse facets.

This introduction includes a brief review of academic literature pertaining to running. As the field of research about running is so large, we have focused on research on the impromptu nature of some running groups, and the ways in which running can foster a sense of community. Two main theoretical strands will underpin this research. Firstly, we use Wenger’s ideas of ‘communities of practice’ which is about learning from each other in a group (Wenger and Wenger-Trayner, 2005), and secondly, we use Self Determination Theory, which examines human motivation and ways in which it can be encouraged and supported as individuals, and by others, as part of a group (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

This research builds on the autoethnographic account of the Running Punks community already published by two academic members of Running Punks, Ashley Morgan and Chris Inglis. Morgan and Inglis argue that membership of the Running Punks allows for “age-convergence” (2024, p. 73). Age-convergence means that because the focus of the group is about running and music, people of any age and social background can access, people of vastly different ages have come together, and enjoy a sense of shared. Moreover, it reinforces the fact that running is for everyone, and that punk music, and ideas of punk and anarchy, have considerable longevity. Additionally, Morgan (2024) argues that Running Punks is more

than simply an ad hoc group of people, but has developed as a community of practice (CoP) (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger, Trayner, 2015), which is defined as:

[A] group of people who share a passion, a concern, or a set of problems regarding a particular topic, and who interact regularly in order to deepen their knowledge and expertise, and to learn how to do things better. A CoP is characterized by mutual learning, shared practice, inseparable membership, and joint exploration of ideas (Mohajan, 2017, p.1).

There are many other types of running groups that can be considered as a CoP. These include national, regional and local running clubs where runners are signed up members (Shipway et. al., 2013), and other types of non-membership running clubs which support people's health and well-being (Dawes et. al., 2019). One study targeted 'Serious Runners' and their sense of belonging when training or running within a group (Pedersen et. al., 2018). Pederson et. al. (2018) refer to Bauman's (2007) concept of 'peg communities', which are "ad hoc togetherness" (Pedersen et. al., 2018, p. 237) and can be considered a type of CoP. Running 'peg communities' provide a theoretical space that joins running as an individual to running as part of a club, by breaking down "the dichotomy of either running individually or running with others in organised running clubs" (Pederson, et. al., 2018, p. 244). This aspect of running together in a study undertaken in China, was important for "shared identity and positive social interaction" (Xie et. al., 2020, p. 204). The concept of 'peg communities' as an example of CoP with a focus on shared running was found to be important in Dawes et. al. (2019) study of homeless women in London and can also apply to the increase in 'unofficial' running clubs that include those that are virtual communities.

One example of a peg-community and running that started in the United Kingdom and is the now global event, parkrun (Parkrun, 2023). Parkrun “organises free, weekly (and thus regular), timed 5km mass participation events for people to participate as runners/walkers” (Quirk et. al., 2021, p. 2), although it is not uncommon for more ‘serious’ runners to also take part. Studies undertaken with parkrun participants found a panoply of reasons for joining in with parkrun. For some, taking part was to increase their fitness and physical health, and also to improve their mental health, rather than getting fit for competitions (Quirk et. al., 2021). A study with Australian parkrun participants also found positive health benefits in relation to their wellbeing (Grunseit et. al., 2018). For others, it gives a sense of freedom to participate; reciprocity for personal gain and helping others (Stevinson et. al., 2014) and a change in a subjective self-perception from being a ‘non-runner’ to a ‘runner’ (Bowness et. al., 2021). Whilst parkrun has the word ‘run’ firmly in the title, taking part through walking is also strongly encouraged.

The concept of learning as part of a community is present in research on punk. For example, Way’s research into the way older women who consider themselves punks, foster communities which allow them to be politically active (Way, 2021). Yet Morgan (2024) found that research about such collectivity in a community was absent in existing literature on both running and punk. Communities in which people foster and build in terms of physical development and running, only really seem to exist in running groups in which athleticism is highly valued, and information on personal development is lacking in terms of running. Therefore, the Running Punk virtual community can be considered as a CoP, where there is a shared passion for both running and music. It exists on a physical and experiential level where similar interests are discussed, which results in encouraging the motivation to run (Morgan, 2024). This research takes the concept of Running Punks as a community of

practice and seeks to develop a more nuanced, individualised and profound knowledge relating to the impact that belonging to such a community has had on individual members of the group.

The benefits of running, listening to music, and being part of a community have each been well-documented and researched. For example, research on running has indicated benefits concerning depression (Craft and Perna, 2004) and other psychological benefits (Szabo & Ábrahám, 2013), physical and emotional well-being (Dawes et. al., 2019; Poczta and Malchrowicz, 2018; Yeh et. al. 2017; Oswald et.al, 2020), learning and memory (Berchtold et. al., 2010), and longevity (Lee et. al. 2017). When considering listening to music, the benefits include fulfillment of emotional and social needs (Tarrant and North 2000), increased cognitive abilities (Schellenberg and Hallam 2005), and both distraction and relaxation when experiencing chronic pain (Mitchell et. al. 2007). Moreover, being part of a community has the benefits of having a sense of belonging and acceptability (McMillan, 1996).

Involvement in parkrun is being part of a community which aims to provide a safe space to run or walk (Quirk and Haake, 2019). Seemingly, there are a myriad of benefits to running in parkrun and it also provides a space for people who don't run, to engage voluntarily as stewards, helping participants, ensuring they understand the route, for example. However, Reece et. al. (2022) found that barriers to taking part in parkrun, particularly for women, were the inconvenient start time (in the UK, parkrun is 9am on a Saturday morning), or the psychological barrier of feeling unfit, which it seems that parkrun as a community, does little to assuage.

Lizzo and Liechty (2022) undertook a study of an online virtual community group ‘Hogwarts Running Club’ (Hetzell, 2015), a running group where the commonality is running and Harry Potter. Analysis of the participant's social media posts found the virtual online running community had a sense of social support and being able to share experiences, and discursive information, both of running and that of Harry Potter (Lizzo and Liechty, 2017). This social support is evident with the Running Punks virtual running community, where, as with the online Hogwarts Running Club, the community provides the motivation to run.

The motivation to run has been studied within the theoretical framework of self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci and Ryan, 2000). SDT is based on three psychological needs: autonomy; relatedness; and competence. The research on running and SDT has included promoting running (Blacket et. al., 2024; Johnson et. al., 2022), increased motivation to run (Tsai et. al., 2021), constraints in running (Koronios et. al., 2017), running and exercise (Teixeira et. al., 2012), and commitment to running and well-being (Silve and Sobreiro, 2021; Johnson et. al., 2022). As stated previously, both SDT and CoP provide a useful theoretical basis for this study. Therefore, this study aims to explore why people have joined the Running Punks community with the simple research question, ‘Why are you a Running Punk?’

The following sections chart the method used, gives participant information, and describes the process of analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen as a means by which to generate information based on the researchers’ ‘hunch’ (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2015 p. 129), as members of Running Punks, wider knowledge of a number of running punks, and the previous research undertaken on running punks. Morgan’s (2024) existing research on running Punks was a review of the literature on punk and running, and links were made to

community of practice. Morgan and Inglis's (2024) research was limited to autoethnographic accounts of their personal experiences of music, running and membership of the group. Therefore, as researchers, we thought it was time that information from the wider group was gathered. In conclusion, we aim to uncover the reasons why people might join such a group, and what membership means to them.

Method

The broad research question 'Why are you a Running Punk?' provided the basis for an exploratory type of study (Kumar, 2011) to find out how and why people got into running and how important music played a part in this. In addition, a focus on membership of the Running Punks community provided the scope to explore people's involvement in consideration of CoP (Morgan, 2024) and SDT (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

The research design was based on semi-structured interviews where a "written list of questions and topics are covered in a particular order" (Bernard, 2013, p. 182). This has similarities with structured interviews but allows for "the freewheeling quality of unstructured interviews" (Bernard, 2013, p. 182). This was important as both researchers were conducting semi-structured interviews and it provided consistency of asking the same set of questions, while allowing the flexibility to probe. The study was granted ethical approval from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Swansea University. The semi-structured interview involved each participant being asked the following questions:

Q1: Tell us about your background.

Q2: How did you get into running?

Q3: How did you hear about Running Punks?

Q4: Why are you part of the Running Punks community?

Q5: How is music important as part of this community?

Q6: What have you got out of being part of the Running Punks community?

Q7: If Running Punks did not exist, what running communities would you connect with?

Q8: Do you have anything else to add?

Question 1 was deliberately left open to allow participants to offer as much, or as little information as they wanted to provide.

Participants

The only inclusion criterion was being a member of the Running Punks group. Participants were recruited through social media of X/Twitter® and Instagram® linked to the Running Punks handles. Written permission was obtained from the Running Punk administrators to promote the research and recruit participants. Tweets and Instagram messages were posted independently by each researcher in March 2023 to recruit participants. The Tweets and posts provided the work email addresses of each researcher for participants to contact and to gain more detailed information about the study. Participants were sent the Participation Information Sheet (PIS) and consent form and were asked to sign and return the latter. While a number of people expressed an interest in taking part, not all who wanted to were able to give the time, given work and family commitments.

All interviews were undertaken remotely using either the Zoom® or Teams® platform over a period of March 2023 and September 2023. This synchronous approach enabled a face-to-face interview to be undertaken and recorded for transcription and analysis. All participants

were reminded of the purpose of the study, confirming informed consent was granted, and participants were aware of their right to withdraw at any point during the interview.

Participants were also informed there was a week, cooling off period between the end of the interview and for the data to be withdrawn from the study. After the week, the data was used.

In total, forty-four Running Punks were interviewed, and the group was split between the researchers, with one of the researchers conducting twenty-five interviews, and the other, nineteen. The Running Punks interviewed included participants from England, Wales, Scotland, Greece, the United States of America, and Canada. Although participants were not asked directly their age, for those who did provide this information concerning question 1, the range was 35 years to 60 years. Moreover, more detailed demographic data was not considered germane to the research.

The length of time the participants had been regularly running varied enormously. Some people reported having started running at school, and simply continued to run as regularly as possible. Others had run intermittently throughout their lives, stopping and starting for a range of reasons. Many had taken up running since the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown.

Analysis

All interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft Word® document and then uploaded into the Nivivo 13® software for analysis. The analysis involved reading and re-reading each transcribed interview for immersion into the data (Green et al., 2007). The data analysis was undertaken using the six-step thematic analysis framework developed by Braun

and Clarke (2006) that involved the process of constructing themes from the initial coding.

This is a process in qualitative research termed ‘collapsing the data’ (Elliot, 2018).

The thematic analysis was undertaken independently by the two researchers on the interviews they had undertaken and transcribed. The rationale for each coder to code independently enables a test for ‘inter-rater reliability’ (O’Connor et. al., 2020) which supports the credibility of the analysis (Shenton, 2014). When both researchers had constructed the themes and sub-themes, a discussion was undertaken to agree on common themes and sub-themes. When both researchers agreed on the themes and sub-themes, they were coded to a sample of interview transcripts, and no new initial codes were being constructed from the data, which indicated that the data had reached saturation point (Fusch and Ness 2015).

In order to seek confirmation of themes, the final themes were sent to all participants for comments, which Shenton (2004) refers to as a ‘member’ check to support the trustworthiness of the themes, and that they adequately represented the interview participants views. The broad theme, main themes and sub-themes were sent as a table to everyone who participated in the study, by email, and a one-week cut-off point was set for comments. In total, ten participants responded, and all agreed the broad themes, main theme and sub-themes were an accurate reflection of being in the Running Punks. This process of agreement between the researchers, or inter-rater reliability (Shenton, 2004) and confirmation from the participants, addressed the aspect of dependability and credibility of the results within the concept of trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004).

Results

The results from using Bruan and Clarke's (2006) six-stage thematic analysis are shown in Table 1 below. The richness of the data resulted in the construction of three broad themes: Belonging; Connected; and Well-being. Each broad theme is broken down into main themes and sub-themes.

Broad Theme	Main Theme	Sub-Theme
1. Belonging	Inclusive	Diverse Interest Diverse Backgrounds Diverse Ability
		Camaraderie Virtual Community In Person
		Non-competitive Non-Judgemental Common Ground
	Like-Minded	Merchandise Running Reviews Lone Runner
		Social Media Music Interest Running Experiences
		Encouragement Motivate Love
	Meet Ups	Official Running Events Unofficial Running Events Music Events
		Switch Off Distraction Get outside
		Mental Health Physical Health Lockdown
	Well-being	Be Yourself Set Own 'Goals' Positive
3. Catalyst for change	Enjoyment	

Table 1: Broad Themes, Main Themes and Sub-themes

Broad Theme 1: Belonging

Belonging is a fundamental human need that all people are driven to satisfy (Allen et. al., 2021). There has been considerable academic interest in the concept of belonging, since the publication of Maslow's definitive work on human motivation in 1943 (Maslow, 1943). In this research, we found that a sense of belonging was a crucial element of being a Running Punk, which was not always contingent on knowing people in real life.

Belonging emerged as one of the broad themes, which was further broken down into sub-themes which were: inclusive; friendship; like-minded; and identity. We understand that inclusivity might mean different things to different people, but in this instance, we use it to refer to running ability, which is reflected in the ethos of the group. It is also reflected in the ethos and advertising of the group, which is 'all abilities are welcome'. Arguably, the 'all abilities welcome' might well have attracted people who feel insecure about whether they are running 'fast' or not and further reflects the DIY, 'give it a go' element of punk (Crossley, 2015).

Moreover, when considering the sub-theme of inclusivity, this also referred to the diverse interests that people might have in their musical tastes, and their background (university lecturers, teachers, and project workers). The following comment reflects this theme and sub-theme:

"It's, it's an inclusive community where I feel welcomed, not judged, and included in the highs and lows in this running journey whilst sharing the joys of music" (Running Punk No. 13).

"So, I guess like initially that attracted me was, I think the message initially of, kind of included inclusivity" (Running Punk No. 28).

Inclusivity also refers to the fact that there are many women in the group, some of whom spoke of negative experiences with men in other running groups. Moreover, as Running Punk No. 13 suggests, the actual act of running, and the feelings, ‘the highs and lows’, both emotional and physical might vary widely.

While friendships might not always be supportive, the following quotation suggests that support is a huge part of being part of the community.

“And the levels of mutual support and friendship and emotional support and psychological support is phenomenal, and the amount I've learned from people in this group about from their various specialisms” (Running Punk No. 8).

There are a number of points raised in this quotation from Running Punk No.8, including the idea of learning from each other, which us a principal factor in being part of a CoP (Wenger et al).

Whilst friends have been made online through reading and posting on social media, friendships have also developed ‘in person’, whether at a running event or at a music gig:

“I see on social media you guys out together at concerts and things like that, but the music just brings people together, it always has” (Running Punk No. 21).

“. It's friendships which I, ...never... I didn't go in for friendships, but they've happened and I was thinking the other day. You know, kind of existential moment whilst running, like we're just a group of strangers who meet up and move our legs”
(Running Punk No. 36)

Friendship and camaraderie seem to be intrinsic to the sense of belonging that some members feel.

“once you are brave enough to kind come out, and come down to one of the kind of communal runs, I think I just felt like, you know, kind of very tangible sense of friendship and love and belonging or finding” (Running Punk No. 38).

Whilst the participants varied in age, types of music listened to, and the length of time involved in running, there was a clear sense of like-mindedness reflected in the three subthemes of non-competitive, non-judgemental, and common ground as illustrated in the following comments:

“Accomplished runners to a high standard and some very much beginners and dabblers and nobody is judged for either really, its more of a celebration. You don't see anybody judging anybody” (Running Punk No. 22).

“And you know, there doesn't have to be a competitive element to it. There doesn't have to be” (Running Punk No. 10).

“We would have a lot in common. I feel part of a supportive running community”
(Running Punk No. 20).

“I live for fitness and running. But it fits beautifully, in that I live for community and making new friends and connections and all that. I think Running Punk sits somewhere across everything in terms of my values” (Running Punk No. 35).

“That is still a really different community to most other communities because it's so positive and there's so little negativity....‘I think that's the genius also of the Running Punks...it's not difficult there. No rules. You don't have to do anything in particular” (Running Punk No. 36).

Running Punks was set up as an antidote to competitive running groups, who tend to focus on speed and greater proficiency when running. Examples of competitive running groups exist at local and national levels such as those within the United Kingdom Athletics (UKA) structure (UKA, 2022). Whereas in Running Punks, there is a considerable focus on running for pleasure, and the lack of ‘rules’ about what it should and shouldn’t be, and sharing that feeling with likeminded people (Morgan, 2024). Therefore, it is not surprising that many people seem to enjoy the positivity and support.

The Running Punks have a clear identity, reflected in the double safety-pin logo (Fig. 2) which is emblazoned on the merchandise (running shirts, caps, etc.). Safety pins have long been associated with punk as a subculture (Rutten and van Denderen, 2013), as they were cheap, easily available, and had practical applications (Dethu, 2020), so they are symbolic of the DIY approach to running that Jimmy and Rhod wished to convey (Morgan, 2024). Moreover, Running Punks merchandise is distinctive in that most of the t-shirts have small logos on the front and larger logos on the back. This means that Running Punks are highly visible from most angles.

Furthermore, many people who had watched Jimmy Watkins's album reviews, which he does whilst running, and are posted online, were already fans of his and became intrigued as to what Running Punks was.

The theme of Identity was reflected in the merchandise and the 'Running Music Reviews', which for some was the introduction to the running group:

"I actually really think the merch is really cool. That was the first thing that caught my eye was the logos" (Running Punk No. 5).

"I came across the fact that there was a review out there of this guy running listening to the Wildhearts and I'm a huge, huge Wildhearts fan, have been since my teens basically. I thought "oh I'll have a look at that" and it just made me laugh" (Running Punk No. 14).

"I've been a big music fan of rock and metal and some punk bands...And one of the bands is one of my favourites, since 2016 is a French band called Gojira, and Jimmy was reviewing their album" (Running Punk No. 42).

"I think it was at a parkrun and I saw somebody with a running punks T-shirt, and I thought, wow! And he looked pretty bohemian. And, you know, a very sort of, out there person. And I just saw the T-shirt. I thought ohh that was cool" (Running Punk No. 27).

"I love it. I also love the imagery that merchandise and it's gone international as well, cause there's the guy I really love, who's post I always follow,.... He's a lecturer or a student in the states" (Runing Punk No. 40).

In addition to the merchandise, there was also a clear identity in running alone, reflected in the following comment:

“It's also wonderful that I have this group that I physically don't have to run with every day. I'm very much a solitary runner” (Running Punk No. 6).

This quotation further suggests that for some people, shared identities can and are formed virtually and are not always about sharing information in person. The main theme of sharing relates to how social media plays a large role in connecting people from around the world

Broad Theme 2: Connected

The second broad theme was connected. According to Crisp: ‘...connectedness relates more to participation in societal organisations or social networks... (Crisp, 2010 p. 124). Being connected refers to taking part, and may not necessarily be as profound a relationship as belonging. In the data, we found three main themes of sharing (with the sub-themes of social media, music interest, and running experiences); support (with the sub-themes of encourage and motivate), and meet ups (with sub-themes of official running events, unofficial running events, and music events) below:

Whilst many of the participants expressed their preference for lone running, the sharing of both music and running experiences on social media enabled people to engage with each other:

“I might start posting about running on social media and see who else is on there but its kind off, the other nice thing about the Running Punks are people who are doing ultramarathons and you’ve got some people going out and doing 10km” (Running Punk No. 2).

It was clear that whilst most of the Running Punks have never met each other face-to-face, and were possibly unlikely to ever, due to distance, there was a strong sense of feeling supported through mutual encouragement and motivation:

“It motivates me to get back out there particularly when things haven’t gone so well, if I run a race and hate it or not enjoying my running, if I am seeing other people posting similar things, like they’re not enjoying it sometimes it’s helpful” (Running Punk No. 3).

This suggests that running is not always an enjoyable or successful experience, for people who do it regularly. ‘Having a go’, not enjoying it, yet not giving up, appears to be a radical approach to running, where other running groups, and competitive athletics appears to focus on the positivity gained from winning.

The Running Punks have had the opportunity to meet up with other members through both official running events, for example, the Llanelli Half Marathon that took place in September 2023, and the unofficial, but regular running events; the most common is the Sunday Run Club in Cardiff. They are also present at music events such as gigs or festivals:

“Saw that Running Punks were at Green Man, bought a couple of tee shirts, thought this was my thing and I’m going to get back into this and now I’m doing my first ultra in July” (Running Punk No. 13).

The following comment reflects the broad theme of connected and the main themes of sharing, support and meet up:

“You got the three sides, you’ve got the running camaraderie, you meet up and run with people. You’ve got the online support of people you are never likely to meet as they live on the other side of the world but they are invested in things in your life and likewise you with them. Then the third side is the talk about music” (Running Punk No. 1)

Broad Theme 3: Catalyst for change

The term catalyst for change came about in response to question 2, ‘how did you get into running?’ As we state from the outset, the people who formed our participant group has different experiences in terms of when they began running, and whether or not they had kept it up.

One of the things that emerged from many people’s answers was that many had reached a point in their lives where they felt the need to ‘do something’. Whether this was physical or emotional, was never really fully discussed but seemed to allude to physical strength and health. As running can be done from the home involving little equipment, it was considered, by many, to be a useful option of exercise.

From this emerged theme of well-being, enjoyment, and the importance of having Headspace: the time to think. This main theme of well-being also reflects the period when the Running Punks formed around the time of COVID-19. Well-being includes both mental and physical health, as reflected in the following comments:

“Punks community kind of matches that beauty of running with the beauty of music. That’s two important things to me, my mental health and my physical health. Yeah, I don’t think there is anything else similar” (Running Punk No. 13).

“I have severe mental health problems. I've incredible depression, anxiety problems. So that was the thing as well. And I was like, I need to improve. I need to do something to change my situation” (Running Punks No. 32).

In addition to supporting well-being, running provides the opportunity to have headspace and switch off from the outside world. Running provides the space to think and reflect, the Headspace reflected in the comments below:

“It distracts you but helps your mind. I think a lot when I run because I’m on my own and I do spend sometimes in my own head” (Running Punk No. 21).

“It’s a real opportunity for head-clearing time, and it works most of the time. I hadn’t probably appreciated that in my earliest years of running and that’s a good thing to come out of the last few years with the Running Punk” (Running Punk No. 2).

It was evident that being part of the Running Punks community had for the participants brought back, or enhanced the enjoyment of running:

“The Running Punks are about just getting out there and going for a run and enjoying it and not focusing on, say you have to be running 10K under an hour or you’re not welcome to be part of our club” (Running Punk No. 12).

The health benefits and the emotion of enjoyment were felt to be important factors in running and being part of the Running Punks community, particularly during the period of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic:

“I found the Running Punks group online was quite supportive during the COVID lockdown period. It came to the fore in that period of lockdown” (Running Punk No. 20).

“The main thing that I often think about with the Running Punks is since I found that group like I feel, I feel I have got a lot of the fun back in running” (Running Punk No. 17).

“Ok, then I just ran, and it was lockdown. I guess that’s when I discovered Running Punks” (Running Punk No. 27).

Whilst the health benefits of running have been extensively researched (Oswald et. al., 2020), this aspect along with coping during the COVID-19 period of lockdown, and the subsequent lifting of restrictions has provided the positive effect of enjoyment, the pleasure of running for personal reasons and needs of the individual Running Punk.

Summary of the Results

The three broad themes of belonging, connected, and well-being along with the main themes and sub-themes reflect the statement on the Running Punks (2024b) website “Our online community is a hub to share experiences and offer the support people need to succeed”. The findings from this study also reflect the three psychological needs of autonomy, connectedness, and relatedness with self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and the key concepts within being a community of practice (CoP) (Morgan 2024).

Discussion

Punk and running have not been considered in academic research until now (Morgan, 2024; Morgan & Inglis, 2024), and this empirical study provides a good starting point. The Running Punks is an online community that has grown into a worldwide supportive and encouraging group of runners (Morgan & Inglis, 2024) that combines running with a punk ethos (Morgan, 2024). This study aimed to build on the auto-ethnographic study of Morgan and Inglis (2024) to “gain insight into a range of perspectives” (p. 73) of people who are part of the online Running Punk community. This led to the simple research question ‘Why are you a Running Punk’?

The benefits of running have been well documented where it contributes to people’s physical health (Henderson, 2003), mental health (Markotic et. al, 2020), socialising (Carnes, 2016), and overall well-being (Skead & Rogers, 2016; Stenseng et. al, 2023). These benefits are reflected within the broad theme of catalyst for change. Running, and being part of the Running Punks community were important to provide headspace and well-being to be able to ‘switch off’ and focus on both mental and physical health, particularly during the period of

Lockdown, the time Running Punks formed (Morgan, 2024; Morgan & Inglis, 2024). The relationship between well-being and running was identified by Silva and Sobreiro's (2021) cluster analysis, Grunseit et. al's. (2008) study on parkrun, and a study linking in with Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) undertaken by Johnston et. al. (2020). Another important aspect of the theme catalyst for change was the importance of enjoyment, or finding enjoyment back in running, an important aspect also stated by Morgan & Inglis (2024).

The broad theme of belonging included a strong sense of identity as Morgan and Inglis (2024) stated:

What Running Punks ultimately does for its members is the facilitation of this shared identity: one which draws from both the constituent elements that make up this group, and one that transcends generations (p. 86-87).

This Running Punks Identity is helped by a distinctive logo of two open and crossed safety pins and the popular running merchandise including running tops and hats where “Running Punks merchandise bought and proudly displayed by members is another way of publicly demonstrating their belonging to this group” (Morgan & Inglis, p. 87).

In addition to having a shared identity, the inclusivity of the group was highlighted with a diverse interest, backgrounds and running ability. Inclusivity was one of the key drives for the formation of the group (Morgan, 2024). Silva and Sobreiro's (2021) systematic review

used the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) as a framework for considering running involvement and running loyalty focusing on runners who participated in an organised running event. Whilst this study focused on competitive-type running, which is the complete opposite of the Running Punks ethos (Morgan, 2024), when considering loyalty to running, runners with a high level of loyalty had a moderate level of running involvement. This was reflected in the Running Punks study as participants had a strong loyalty (identify) to the Running Punks community, and this resulted in more motivation to continue to run on a regular basis.

Being part of the Running Punks community meant people felt connected to other people, even when only communicating through social media. The main theme of connected included three aspects of sharing through social media (X/Twitter®, Instagram®, Facebook®), being supported, and meeting up at running events or at gigs. Running requires motivation. Tsai et. al's. (2021) study found that social support through sharing their activity information motivated “themselves to exercise more” (p. 2) and Grunseit et. al. (2018) study with Australian parkrun men increased community connectedness. However, motivation can be influenced negatively when running focuses on the outcome, where there is more of a feeling of having to rather than wanting to run which leads to a reduction in autonomy and a reduction in sustained activity or running involvement (Koronios et. al., 2017; Teixeira et. al., 2012).

Through belonging and being connected, the Running Punks community group has a joint enterprise (sharing of social media posts, music interests, and running experiences), a mutuality (like-minded, friendship); and a shared repertoire (support, meet-ups, friendship)

(Wenger, 1998). The Running Punks, through the clear identification of the logo and merchandise, have developed an ‘inseparable membership’ (Mohajan, 2017). Whilst Running Punks enjoy the isolation of running, particularly those who stated this lone running suits their autism, being part of the virtual running group reflects the breaking down of the running alone v running in a group dichotomy (Pederson, et. al., 2018).

This breaking down of the dichotomy is also reflected in the Running Punks logo on their merchandise. Running Punks will run with a running top, hat or sweatshirt with the distinct twin safety pin logo. It is not uncommon, for example at an organized running event for Running Punks to pass each other, give a ‘high five’ to acknowledge being part of this peg community. Running Punks share their passion for running and music, and whilst not focusing on fast times or any specific genre of music, there is a “mutual learning, shared practice, inseparable membership, and joint exploration of ideas (Mohajan, 2017, p. 1) which underpins this virtual online running group being a CoP (Wenger, 1998).

The combination of the main themes of belonging, connection, and catalyst for change (along with the main and sub-themes) provide the content for Running Punks to be a peg community (Bauman, 2007) and reflect a Community of Practice (CoP) (Mohajan, 2017; Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015. The three broad themes also reflect the three basic psychological within Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Tsai et. al., (2021) summarises these below:

Autonomy refers to a person’s sense of control over his or her own choices.

Competence refers to a person’s sense of knowledge and skills required to achieve a

goal. Last, relatedness refers to a person's sense of community and psychological connection to others, which can influence decision-making. When one's needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met, one has positive psychological well-being and motivation to achieve a goal (p. 2)

With regards to running, when these three psychological needs are met “individuals are more likely to be autonomously motivated and are subsequently more likely to continue with their running behaviour” (Johnson et. al., 2020, p. 104). In a study undertaken by Pereira et. al. (2021), older runners were more autonomously motivated than younger runners. The Running Punks interviewed were mostly aged over 40 years and could be considered ‘older runners’ (by age) and this aspect of running alone, being yourself, and setting your own running goals would support the aspect of autonomy. Autonomy runs a ‘thread’ through the three broad themes where being a lone runner, being yourself and setting your own ‘goals’, and sharing experiences is a choice, rather than an obligation. The two aspects of age and being a lone runner resonate with Morgan and Inglis’s (2024) auto-ethnographic account of being a Running Punk.

In the short time they have been formed since 2020 (during COVID-19), the Running Punks reflect a clear community of practice (CoP) of the three main elements of joint enterprise; mutuality; and a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). These three main elements reflect the identity of the Running Punks logo, the two-crossed open safety pins with a sense of belonging and acceptability (McMillan, 1996) along with the ad hoc togetherness (Pedersen et. al., 2018) found within Bauman’s (2007) peg communities. This ad hoc togetherness exists both online through social media, but also in the same physical space where local

groups of Running Punks now meet once a week on a regular basis. This meeting once a week on a regular basis is how parkrun has established being a running-based peg community throughout the UK.

Running Punks is not about winning races, and being better than others, it's about creating an online and real-life atmosphere in which people can be themselves, to run as fast or as slow as feels comfortable, and gain confidence and autonomy. Arguably, many people were drawn to the group because of the word punk, and its associated 'coolness', such as outsiderness, and the DIY ethos of simply turning up for a run. Others thought the merchandise stood out and was designed in a way which made them look different from other runners, in terms of colour and patterns. This reinforces the autonomy and outsiderness of punk as a concept. Moreover, many interviewees spoke about being surprised at how much they enjoyed being members, both in person and virtually, and how much they looked forward to posting their runs.

The sample size for this study was very good, and the results provide a clear reflection on why people consider themselves Running Punks and very much part of this community of runners. There are limitations to the study. Whilst Running Punks is global, the sample was mainly from Wales, where the Running Punks concept was initiated,

Conclusion: So, Why Running Punks?

One of the things which emerged from the data was that many people had no interest in joining 'real' running clubs. The three broad themes of belonging, connected, and catalyst for

change along with the main themes and sub-themes reflect the statement on the Running Punks website “Our online community is a hub to share experiences and offer the support people need to succeed” (2024b). The findings from this study also reflect the three psychological needs of autonomy, connectedness, and relatedness with Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and the key concepts within being a community of practice (CoP).

One of the things which emerged from the data was that many people had no interest in joining ‘real’ running clubs: the ones which rely on speed and performance. Furthermore, running clubs tend to be dominated by men, for whom competition is key. As one of the interviewees put it, when talking about other running clubs:

“they seem a bit aloof and there is a bit of classic running club, like there's a few of.....like there is a bit of that arrogance maybe about them, which like, I don't know if that's just from the look of what they give off” (Running Punk No. 39).

In this way, Running Punks as a community running group, fills a societal gap for people who exist outside of the norms of running or ‘sportiness’ (Morgan, 2024: p.431). Many of the people who are part of the Running Punk community would be considered as outsiders in a conventional running club due to their self-sufficient and outsiderist nature, and their DIY approach to running. Running Punks is ‘more than just turning up’, because people join and are members in a range of different ways. Some people simply follow the group, whether they are runners or not is unknown. Some people within the group feel such a huge sense of Belonging and Connectedness that if they become unable to run through illness or injury, they have created their own hashtag, #brokenpunks, so they still follow and are included in

the group. This allows people membership on their own terms, and one of the most important things to emerge from this research, is the autonomy and punk nature of Running Punks as individuals. While autonomy might refer to individuality, it also refers to being uncontrolled, untethered by the norms of running, which is possibly the most punk idea of all.

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