

Changes in Physical Self-Perceptions and Physical Characteristics Among Novice *Abreast in a Boat* Participants

Meghan McDonough, Catherine Sabiston, Don McKenzie, Diana Jespersen, & Peter Crocker
The University of British Columbia

Abreast in a Boat is a dragon boat program for survivors of breast cancer. The physical benefits of dragon boating for breast cancer survivors have been investigated, but little is known about the social and psychological implications of participating in this program. This study aimed to better understand the physical self-perceptions of novice *Abreast in a Boat* participants, examine changes in physical self-perceptions over the first season in the program, and compare perceived physical-self changes to changes in actual strength and body composition. Fifteen novice *Abreast in a Boat* volunteers participated in two 45-60 minute interviews at the beginning and end of the three-month dragon boat season. The semi-structured interviews included discussions of physical self-perceptions and any perceived changes in physical self. Eight of these women also completed assessments of height, weight, BMI, sum of skinfolds, maximum strength, and VO₂. A content analysis of the physical self interview data indicated that the women varied greatly in the degree of change they experienced. Perceived changes were experienced in strength, endurance, general feelings of fitness, dragon boating skill, confidence and motivation to try other physical activities, weight, and body composition. Several women also discussed a sense of athletic identity as a result of their participation in the dragon boat program. Physical measures indicated that there were significant changes only in strength and VO₂ over the three month period. While the women experienced significant changes in strength and endurance, many of them perceived changes in multiple facets of the physical self. While exercise programs for breast cancer survivors, like *Abreast in a Boat*, have a positive impact on participants' physical health, they can also play a role in contributing to positive physical self-perceptions after breast cancer.