

## **BODY-RELATED CONCERNS IN BREAST CANCER SURVIVORS INVOLVED IN DRAGON BOAT ACTIVITY.**

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Exercise is a common prescription for women who have survived breast cancer. Research indicates that physical activity protocols are effective in enhancing both physiological and psychological health during and following breast cancer treatments (e.g., Courneya et al., 2002). Dragon boating is a popular form of exercise that survivors of breast cancer engage in for both physical and psychosocial reasons (McDonough et al., 2004). However, the prominence and public awareness of breast cancer dragon boat teams may create situations in which evaluations by others are inevitable. Participants may also feel evaluated by others as a result of the physical changes their bodies have endured due to invasive medical treatments. It is therefore important to examine the perceptions and prevalence of body related concerns in breast cancer survivors. Concern about body-specific evaluations by others is referred to as social physique anxiety (SPA). SPA is theoretically grounded in self-presentation/social anxiety frameworks, as well as indirectly associated with stress and coping perspectives (Hart et al., 1989; Kowalski & Leary, 1995; Lazarus, 1993). Investigations of SPA in special populations have been limited.

The purpose of this research was to examine reports of social physique anxiety among novice and experienced participants in *Abreast in a Boat*, and compare SPA in both social environments and in sport situations (including dragon boating). 15 novice and 20 experienced *Abreast in a Boat* participants volunteered to take part in 60-90 minute interviews. Qualitative methodologies were used given the scarce measurement instruments specific to this population, and the need to gain in-depth reports of SPA. The semi-structured interviews were grounded in self-presentation and physical self theoretical perspectives. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, QSR NUDIST 6.0 was used as a data storage tool, and themes were induced using content analysis.

Most novice and experienced paddlers discussed awareness of concerns and perceived evaluations about their physiques. Appraisals of these concerns ranged from threat to acceptance. Some women reported having little to no thoughts about their bodies in social situations. Conversely, some paddlers discussed general feelings of being uncomfortable in environments where their altered feminine body would be noticed. Issues around weight change as a result of breast cancer treatments also emerged as potential precursors to SPA. In sport situations, lack of competence was reported as an antecedent of SPA. Experienced and novice women reported different experiences of SPA influenced by being around other breast cancer survivors in the dragon boats. Overall, differences in SPA between novice and experienced paddlers emerged, and some of the antecedents, perceived appraisals, and consequences of social physique anxiety were unanticipated and are explained from self-presentation and stress perspectives.

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