

**Title: PADDLING FORWARD: PSYCHO-SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF BREAST
CANCER SURVIVOR DRAGON BOATERS**

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Abstract:

Physical activity enhances physiological and psychological health following breast cancer treatments (e.g., Courneya et al., 2002). Dragon boat is a popular physical activity for survivors of breast cancer. Physical benefits of dragon boating have been investigated, but little is known about the social and psychological implications. This research program examines physical self-perceptions, social support, and body-related concerns among breast cancer survivor dragon boaters. It is guided by theories of the self and social perceptions and uses multiple research methods to represent both individual voices and common trends. Study 1 followed novice dragon boaters' (N=16) experiences of physical and social changes. Study 2 examined psychological growth reported by veteran dragon boaters (N=20). In study 3, 10 women participated in a focus group about stressors related to survivorship and dragon boating. Results demonstrated that dragon boat provides unique opportunities to develop perceptions of sport competence, strength, endurance, and athletic identity. Participation in an activity with women who have undergone similar experiences provides an environment for social support and information sharing. However, the visibility of breast cancer dragon boat teams, coupled with the physical changes endured by survivors, may create an environment in which body-related concerns are emphasized. Participants reported unique stressors and challenges related to being a breast cancer survivor. For many of these women, these challenges have contributed to positive psychological growth and their participation in dragon boat has facilitated this process. Future research will examine the themes of psychological growth and stress and coping strategies in a larger quantitative study.

Format: Paper presentation

Level of Presentation: intermediate/advanced