

Muscle gains, emotional strains, and social designs? Conflicting experiences of change among overweight women participating in an exercise intervention program

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This research program examines change in physical self-perceptions, social support, and body-related concerns among overweight women involved in a 12-week dragon boat intervention. It is guided by theories of the self and social perceptions and uses multiple research methods to represent both individual voices and common trends. Women ( $M_{age} = 42.64$ ,  $SD = 11.79$ ) who had a BMI of 26 or higher participated in two weekly dragon boating practices. A random selection of 8 women (24%) from the experimental group agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews before and after the intervention. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and QSR N6 was used as a data storage tool. Results from the interviews demonstrated that the dragon boat experience provides unique opportunities to improve health and fitness, lose weight (or gain muscle mass), and develop perceptions of sport competence, positive emotions, and motivation. Participation in an activity with other overweight women also provided a context of both social benefits and constraints. The camaraderie, sense of belonging, and having other women as role models were important, but at times were overshadowed by the visibility of the activity and perceptions of negative stereotypes around overweight status. Combined, the findings confirm some of the salient propositions of the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) by linking psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness perceptions to motivation. The results also provide support for contextualized social physique anxiety.