Social Physique Anxiety, Reasons for Exercise, and Attitudes Toward Exercise Settings

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Hart, Leary, and Rejeski (1989) hypothesized that social physique anxiety (SPA), self-presentational anxiety associated with the physique, may deter some people from participating in fitness programs. This contention was explored in the present investigation. Data were collected from 104 undergraduate females regarding SPA, weight satisfaction, body satisfaction, and reasons for exercise. Following each of two video presentations of aerobics classes as stimulus materials, attitudes toward the favorability of the exercise settings were assessed. One class wore attire emphasizing the physique; the other appeared in shorts and T-shirts, deemphasizing the physique. Multiple regression analyses revealed SPA was associated with favorability of attitudes toward both exercise settings. SPA was negatively associated with favorability of the setting emphasizing the physique and was positively related to favorability of the setting de-emphasizing the physique. The results indicate that self-presentational, theoretical perspectives may be useful in understanding exercise behavior patterns.

Key words: self-presentation, aerobic dance, women

Researchers interested in exercise psychology have been struggling to understand the current state of affairs in exercise behavior patterns. Despite a generalized awareness in the lay population and research confirming the numerous benefits associated with physical activity and exercise (Stone, 1987), adherence to exercise programs is disturbingly low (Dishman, 1988), and only a small minority of the adult population is sufficiently active to improve physical fitness (Powell, Spain, Christenson, & Mollenkamp, 1986).

Recently, efforts to apply self-presentational perspectives to examine this area have emerged (Hart, Leary, & Rejeski, 1989; Leary, 1992). Self-presentation involves the selective presentation and omission of aspects of the self to create desired impressions and avoid undesired impressions with specific people in a
particular social encounter (Leary, 1992). Because exercise participation often occurs in social contexts, it seems reasonable that self-presentational strategies would have an impact on exercise behaviors.

People are motivated to garner social approval and frequently employ acquisitive strategies in their self-presentations to this end (Arkin, 1981). Certainly, acquisitive self-presentation can be intuitively understood as an important process underlying motivated behavior in exercise settings. Leary (1992) has suggested that many of the reasons commonly given for participating in exercise settings clearly reflect self-presentational motives. Desires to improve or maintain physical appearance through exercise or to construct a certain social identity or image (such as being fit or athletic) clearly reflect acquisitive self-presentational motives.

Notwithstanding these observations, individuals differ in the degree to which these types of motives are important. For example, recent research has found that college women are more likely to report their exercise to be motivated by weight-related reasons than are college men (Klesges, Mizes, & Klesges, 1987; Silberstein, Striegel-Moore, Timko, & Rodin, 1988) and that homosexual men (compared to heterosexual men) were more motivated to exercise by a desire to improve physical attractiveness (Silberstein, Mishkind, Striegel-Moore, Timko, & Rodin, 1989). Silberstein and colleagues (Silberstein et al., 1989; Silberstein et al., 1988) have suggested that the emphasis placed upon attractiveness and the proneness to body dissatisfaction among both women and homosexual men may underlie these observations.

Individuals also want to avoid significant losses in social approval or avoid social disapproval when they believe they are not capable of making a desired impression (Arkin, 1981). People may assume shielding postures or even abstain from situations stimulating these concerns to minimize or avoid feared presentational losses. So, in addition to motivating people to exercise, physique-related perceptions may also stimulate protective self-presentational behaviors or deter individuals from being active when they have concerns about being negatively evaluated while exercising (Hart et al., 1989; Leary, 1992). Such self-presentational concerns have been little explored with regard to exercise settings (Leary, 1992), although there is evidence that this may be a fruitful area to examine. For example, overweight female exercisers have reported the most influential factor limiting their willingness to exercise in public or to attend exercise studios to be a concern about being observed and evaluated by others (Bain, Wilson, & Chaikind, 1989).

Social anxiety describes an affective consequence that may be experienced when people doubt their ability to make desired impressions on others (Leary, 1983; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). The degree of chronic concern or chronic social anxiety has been associated with a number of protective self-presentational behaviors outside of exercise settings (see Dykman & Reis, 1979; McGovern, 1976; Watson & Friend, 1969). It seems likely that chronic social anxiety would also be associated with protective self-presentational behaviors within social exercise settings.

Recently, Hart et al. (1989) developed a measure of social anxiety specific to the physique, which they have termed social physique anxiety (SPA). The Social Physique Anxiety Scale (SPAS) may be useful for examining the effects of physique-related self-presentation concerns in exercise settings. In preliminary
investigation with the SPAS, Hart et al. (1989) found that high-SPA women reported more stress during physique evaluations, experienced more negative thoughts about their body’s appearance, and felt less comfortable having their body evaluated than did their low-SPA counterparts. It seems that SPA would be particularly salient in social exercise activity, because the body is central in such settings.

The purpose of the present investigation was to explore how SPA may be associated with exercise behaviors. More specifically, we were interested in examining the following questions: Are physique-related self-presentational concerns associated with the frequency and duration of exercise? Is there an association between SPA and people’s attitudes toward exercise settings? Does SPA tell us anything more about attitudes toward exercise settings than related self-perception variables such as body size satisfaction (BSS) or weight satisfaction (WS)? Is SPA a significant individual difference associated with the reasons why people engage in exercise?

A number of specific hypotheses were generated regarding these questions. First, the most fundamental proposition in the interactionist perspective is that behavior is a function of the interaction between dispositional and situational factors (Vealey, 1992), and hence, we hypothesized that in the absence of consideration of situational factors, SPA would not be associated with the frequency and duration of women’s exercise. Consistent with notions of acquisitive and protective self-presentation, we hypothesized that SPA would be negatively associated with the women’s ratings of the favorability of exercise settings that emphasize the physique and positively associated with the favorability of settings that deemphasize the physique. We also hypothesized that anxiety associated with physique-related self-presentational concerns would be a stronger predictor of attitudes toward the exercise settings than related self-perception variables not specific to self-presentation. Finally, we hypothesized that SPA would be associated with self-presentational motives for exercise but unrelated to motives for exercise that were independent of self-presentation.

Aerobic dance was selected to examine these questions, because this exercise mode is popular and is frequently practiced in group settings in which self-presentation—particularly with regard to the physique—may be a central factor. Further, there is a wide variety of acceptable workout attire evident across aerobic dance classes. Some classes appear to have group norms dictating clothing that emphasizes the body, whereas participants in other classes appear to adhere to a much less revealing dress code. These notable differences allowed for the manipulation of physique salience in the investigation stimulus materials while remaining consistent with what can be found in natural settings.

The investigation was limited to women for several reasons. First, aerobic dance classes are largely populated by women. Second, women are particularly vulnerable to body dissatisfaction (although men are not immune), and this has been linked to the current sociocultural emphasis on female appearance and thinness (Rodin, 1992; Silberstein et al., 1988). Third, body-image dissatisfaction and the direction of this dissatisfaction differs between men and women (Cash, Winstead, & Janda, 1986; Franzoi & Shields, 1984; Miller, Linke, & Linke, 1980; Silberstein et al., 1988). Finally, popular media images of female exercise attire place a great deal of emphasis on the display of the physique.
Method

Subjects

College-age females (N = 104) volunteered to participate in this study. The subjects ranged in age from 18 to 25 years (M = 20.8), had a mean weight of 131.1 lb (SD = 16.8), and had a mean height of 65.3 inches (SD = 2.2). On average these women worked out 3.3 days a week (SD = 1.7) for a mean time of 56.7 minutes per day (SD = 40.1).

Instruments

Social Physique Anxiety Scale (SPAS). The SPAS is a 12-item self-report inventory developed by Hart et al. (1989) to measure the construct of social physique anxiety. Subjects are asked to indicate the degree to which statements are characteristic or true of them on a 5-point Likert type scale with anchors of not at all (1), slightly (2), moderately (3), very (4), and extremely (5). Hart et al. (1989) presented evidence to suggest that the SPAS demonstrates construct validity, test–retest reliability, internal consistency (alpha = .90), and minimal social desirability bias.

Body Size Satisfaction (BSS). BSS was measured by using Fallon and Rozin's (1985) procedure utilizing body size drawings. Nine drawings of a female figure, ranging from extremely thin to very obese, were presented to the subjects. The subjects were asked to indicate the number of the drawing considered to most closely represent their current appearance and the number of the drawing representing their ideal appearance. A BSS score was derived by subtracting the ideal rating from the current rating. For descriptive purposes the raw BSS score was utilized; however, the absolute value of the discrepancy was used in further analyses. Only 3 of the women indicated an ideal size that was bigger than their current size, and for the purposes of this investigation, the direction of dissatisfaction was not considered as important as the magnitude of dissatisfaction.

Weight Satisfaction (WS). WS was determined by asking subjects to identify their current and ideal weights. The difference between the current and ideal weights divided by current weight was utilized to represent WS. The raw WS score was utilized descriptively, but the absolute value of the discrepancy was used in further analyses for the same reasons as indicated in BSS. Again, only 3 women indicated an ideal weight that was heavier than their current weight.

Reasons for Exercise Inventory (REI). The REI is a 24-item self-report inventory with seven subscales purporting to address motives for engaging in exercise activities (Silberstein et al., 1988). The seven REI subscales include exercising for Weight Control, for Fitness, for Health, to improve Body Tone, to improve overall Physical Attractiveness, for Mood Enhancement, and for Enjoyment. The seven subscales were reported to have adequate internal consistency (Silberstein et al., 1988), although the alpha of the Enjoyment subscale was .65, which falls somewhat below the desirable minimum alpha coefficient of .70 (Nunnally, 1978).
Stimulus Materials. Two videotapes of aerobic exercise classes (each 2 minutes in duration) were professionally developed to serve as stimulus materials for the investigation. Except for the manipulation, these videos were identical in all regards, including participants, relative floor positions, music, the simple aerobic dance routine, camera angles, and timing of camera angle changes. The portrayal of the aerobics classes was designed to be consistent with classes that might be encountered at any local health club. A total of 9 exercisers were visible in the videotaped exercise classes. Among these were a female instructor and 7 female and 1 male class participants. As judged by independent viewers of the videos, the class members all appeared to be between the ages of 20 and 35, reasonably fit, proportional in body composition, coordinated, and experienced in aerobics.

The manipulation of the aerobic dance setting involved changing only the attire that the participants were wearing. In the "aerobics fashion attire" video, participants were wearing tights and thong leotards, which emphasized the physique/figure. This attire was not in any way risqué or unusual but, nonetheless, was relatively revealing. In the "shorts and T-shirt attire" video, participants wore contemporary style T-shirt and shorts workout gear over their tights and leotards to deemphasize the salience of the physique/figure.

Attitudes Toward Exercise Settings Questionnaire (ATES). The ATES was developed for the purposes of the present investigation. This 9-item questionnaire was scored on a 5-point Likert scale with anchors of not at all (1) and extremely (5). Three of the questions were diversionary and not part of the analyses. The remaining 6 questions regarded subjects' attitudes toward the favorability of participation in the exercise setting: Statements that the subjects responded to included "This would be a good group to exercise with"; "I would be comfortable exercising with this class"; "I would enjoy exercising with this group of people"; and "I would feel out of place in this exercise class." The ATES was completed for both the aerobics fashion attire video presentation (ATES-aerobics fashion attire) and the shorts and T-shirt attire video presentation (ATES-shorts and T-shirt attire). From these ratings, a comparative favorability score (ATES-comparative favorability) of the two exercise settings was also calculated by subtracting ATES-aerobics fashion attire ratings from ATES-shorts and T-shirt attire ratings.

Procedures

Female subjects were recruited from a wide variety of undergraduate liberal arts courses for participation in this investigation. Women interested in taking part were given appointments for data collection. Informed consent procedures were completed upon arrival for the appointment. Instructions designed to minimize social desirability effects were given, and data were collected on demographics, SPAS, REI, WS, and BSS.

Upon collection of these data, subjects viewed one exercise setting videotape and responded to the appropriate ATES questionnaire. Subsequently, subjects viewed the other exercise setting videotape and responded to the second ATES questionnaire. The presentation of videos was balanced across subjects to manage order effects, although statistical examination of data revealed no significant order effects in the ATES-aerobics fashion attire ratings, t(102) = 1.12, p > .05, or the ATES-shorts and T-shirt attire ratings, t(102) = .17, p > .05).
Results

Reliability of Measurement

Cronbach’s alpha was calculated on the SPAS, REI, ATES-aerobics fashion attire, and ATES-shorts and T-shirt attire questionnaires (see Table 1). The SPAS was found to have satisfactory internal consistency with an alpha coefficient of .92 (item-to-total correlations ranged from .16 to .83). Consistent with the observations of Lantz, Hardy, and Ainsworth (1991), SPAS item Number 2 (“I would never worry about wearing clothes that might make me look too thin or overweight”) was found to have a very low item-total correlation. It appears that the negative wording of this item creates some confusion in responding to the item and rephrasing this item in future use may be appropriate. Nonetheless, this item did not detract from the internal consistency sufficiently to merit removal from the analyses.

Separate reliability evaluations of the ATES-aerobics fashion attire and ATES-shorts and T-shirt attire ratings were conducted. Although the internal consistency of the six target questions making up each inventory was satisfactory, one of the six items was removed from consideration as a consequence of low and negative item-total correlations in ratings of both video settings. This question was worded as a negative and, apparently, was problematic in interpretation for the subjects. With this item removed, the alpha coefficient of the ATES-shorts and T-shirt attire responses was .84 (item-total correlations from .42 to .81), whereas the alpha coefficient of the ATES-aerobics fashion attire responses was .91 (item-total correlations from .73 to .83).

The REI subscales of Fitness, Health, and Body Tone all demonstrated

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics on Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPA</td>
<td>40.12</td>
<td>9.75</td>
<td>20.00–58.00</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSS</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>−2.00–5.00</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WS</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>−0.06–0.33</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATES-shorts and T-shirt attire</td>
<td>20.04</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>10.00–25.00</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATES-aerobics fashion attire</td>
<td>14.66</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>5.00–25.00</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATES-comparative favorability</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>6.72</td>
<td>−13.00–20.00</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REI—weight control</td>
<td>11.71</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>2.00–14.00</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REI—fitness</td>
<td>21.47</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>11.00–28.00</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REI—mood enhancement</td>
<td>13.27</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>3.00–21.00</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REI—health</td>
<td>22.12</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>11.00–28.00</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REI—physical attractiveness</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>2.00–14.00</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REI—enjoyment</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>2.00–14.00</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REI—body tone</td>
<td>17.05</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>6.00–21.00</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SPA = Social physique anxiety; BSS = body size satisfaction; WS = weight satisfaction; ATES = attitudes toward exercise settings; REI = Reasons for Exercise Inventory.
sufficient reliability (alpha coefficients of .80, .78, and .73, respectively). The Weight Control, Mood Enhancement, Physical Attractiveness, and Enjoyment subscales were not as satisfactory and required the deletion of an item from each to obtain satisfactory alpha coefficients (.81, .79, .70, and .71, respectively). The small number of items within each subscale no doubt contributed to the instability of this inventory (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989).

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the sets of predictor variables for multicollinearity. Intercorrelations among SPA, BSS, and WS variables revealed a potential problem. Specifically, BSS was correlated with SPA at .78 and with WS at .73. Tabachnick and Fidell (1989) have suggested that intercorrelations above .70 should be subjected to further tolerance examination. Sufficient tolerance was found among the variables to reasonably include all in regression analyses. RE1 subscale intercorrelations ranged from -.15 to .68 and hence multicollinearity was not a concern.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables (see Table 1). In particular, on average, the subjects perceived their ideal body size to be two sizes smaller than their current perceived size, desired to lose about 9% of their body weight, and had a preference for the shorts and T-shirt attire exercise setting over the aerobics fashion attire exercise setting. Also, Table 2 reveals the simple correlations among all study variables.

SPA and Amount of Exercise

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationship between SPA and amount of exercise. SPA was not significantly correlated with the number of days per week exercised ($r = .10$), with minutes per day exercised, ($r = .01$), or with minutes per week exercised ($r = .03$).

Predicting Attitudes Toward Exercise Settings

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between SPA, WS, BSS, and ATES ratings. Stepwise multiple-regression analyses were also conducted to assess the association between SPA, BSS, and WS as predictor variables for the criterion variables of ATES-aerobics fashion attire, ATES-shorts and T-shirt attire, and ATES-comparative favorability.

ATES-Aerobics Fashion Attire. Simple correlations between ATES-aerobics fashion attire, and SPA, BSS, and WS were $r = -.52$ ($p < .001$), $r = -.45$ ($p < .001$), and $r = -.27$ ($p < .007$), respectively. SPA was the only significant predictor of ATES-aerobics fashion attire in the stepwise multiple regression, $F(1, 102) = 37.46$, $p < .001$, accounting for about 27% of the variance (adjusted $R^2 = .26$). Examination of the standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = -.52$) revealed that increasing levels of SPA were associated with decreasingly favorable ratings of the aerobics fashion attire setting.

ATES-Shorts and T-Shirt Attire. Simple correlations between ATES-shorts and T-shirt attire and SPA, BSS, and WS were $r = .30$ ($p < .002$), $r = .21$
Table 2  Pearson Product Moment Correlations Between Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SPA</th>
<th>WS</th>
<th>BSS</th>
<th>ATE1</th>
<th>AFA</th>
<th>STSA</th>
<th>CF</th>
<th>REI</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WS</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSS</td>
<td></td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATE1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFA</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STSA</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REI</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. WS = weight satisfaction; BSS = body size satisfaction; SPA = social physique anxiety; ATE1 = attitudes toward exercise settings; AFA = aerobic fashion attire; STSA = shorts and T-shirt attire; CF = comparative favorability; REI = Reasons for Exercise Inventory.

(p < .04), and r = .02 (p > .05), respectively. Table 3 reveals both SPA and WS to be significant predictors of ATE1-shorts and T-shirt attire in the stepwise multiple regression, accounting for about 13% of the variance. Examination of the standardized regression coefficients revealed SPA to be positively associated with ATE1-shorts and T-shirt attire, whereas the negative weighting of the standardized regression coefficient for WS indicates, interestingly, that increasing weight dissatisfaction was associated with decreasingly favorable ratings of the shorts and T-shirt attire setting. Further examination of the WS standardized regression coefficient and the univariates reveals WS to be a marginal contributor that only increased the variance accounted for by about 3.5%.

ATES-Comparative Favorability. Simple correlations between ATE1-comparative favorability and SPA, BSS, and WS were r = .58 (p < .001), r = .48 (p < .001), and r = .23 (p < .019), respectively. SPA was the only significant predictor of ATE1-comparative favorability ratings of the two video settings, $F(1, 102) = 52.51$, $p < .001$, and it accounted for about 34% of the variance (adjusted $R^2 = .33$). The positive weighting of the standardized regression coefficient ($\hat{\beta} = .58$) reveals that increases in SPA were associated with increasingly positive comparative ratings for the shorts and T-shirt attire video, whereas decreases in SPA were associated with increasingly positive comparative ratings for the aerobics fashion attire video setting.
### Table 3  Stepwise Multiple Regression Predictors of ATES-Shorts and T-Shirt Attire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPA</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WS</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. F(2, 101) = 7.05, p < .001, R^2 = .12, adjusted R^2 = .11. SPA = social physique anxiety; WS = weight satisfaction; BSS = body size satisfaction.  
* p < .05.

### Table 4  Stepwise Multiple Regression Predictors of Social Physique Anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body tone</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical attractiveness</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mood enhancement</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight control</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. F(3, 100) = 18.15, p < .001, R^2 = .35, adjusted R^2 = .33.

### REI and SPA

Both Pearson correlation coefficients and stepwise multiple regression were used to examine the hypothesis that SPA would be associated with reasons for taking part in exercise.

**Correlations Between SPA and REI Subscales.**  Three of the seven REI subscales were significantly correlated with SPA. Specifically, SPA was significantly correlated with Body Tone (r = .51, p < .001), Weight Control (r = .44, p < .001), and Physical Attractiveness (r = .37, p < .001). SPA was not significantly correlated with Fitness (r = -.10), Mood Enhancement (r = .03), Health (r = -.19), or Enjoyment (r = .22) as reasons for exercise.

**REI Subscale Multivariate Prediction of SPA.**  A stepwise multiple-regression analysis was conducted to assess the hypothesized association between REI subscales as predictor variables and the criterion variable, SPA. Table 4 contains the significant multiple regression results for SPA and reveals that Body Tone, Fitness, and Physical Attractiveness were significant predictors (p < .001), explaining 35% of the variance. Weight Control, Health, Mood, and Enjoyment
did not enter as significant predictors. Examination of the standardized regression coefficient reveals exercising for tone and for improving overall physical attractiveness to be significant positive predictors of SPA, whereas Fitness was a negative predictor of SPA.

Discussion

The results of this investigation provide several clues to the role that SPA may play in influencing exercise behaviors. First, as would be expected from the interactionalist perspective, it appears that the disposition to have self-presentational concerns related to the physique, in and of itself, is not associated with the frequency or duration of exercise. It appears that if SPA influences exercise behavior, it must be through an interaction with situational factors (Vealey, 1992) related to the display of the physique. This interaction may be manifested through selection of exercise settings based upon factors such as the social context and normative exercise attire (Leary, 1992). This absence of evidence of a relationship between SPA and exercise frequency and duration observed in this investigation, however, should be interpreted with some caution, because these subjects—although reporting a range from inactive through several hours of exercise on a daily basis—were on the average quite an active group. Caution is also warranted because self-report measures of frequency and duration of exercise can be problematic.

Second, people varying in SPA have differential attitudes toward the favorability of exercise settings. SPA was associated with the favorability of attitudes toward both exercise settings and, notably, the situational manipulation provoked divergent favorability ratings. Specifically, SPA was negatively associated with the setting emphasizing the physique and positively related to the setting minimizing the salience of the physique. These findings support Hart et al.’s (1989) contention that self-presentational concerns regarding the physique influence perceptions of exercise settings and suggest that these perceptions may deter some from participating in some settings.

Also of interest was the observation that SPA accounted for considerably more variance in ATES-aerobics fashion attire than in ATES-shorts and T-shirt attire. Consistent with Arkin’s (1981) notion of protective self-presentation, SPA should be emphasized as an important individual difference in situations (e.g., the physique on display) that stimulate self-presentational concerns relative to the physique. Conversely, SPA should be a far less influential individual difference factor in situations in which the physique is a less salient factor stimulating such concerns. The finding that SPA accounted for even more variance in the prediction of the comparative favorability scores reinforces the importance of this individual difference.

The magnitude and direction of physical self-perception variables (BSS and WS) is consistent with other empirical findings in the area (Cash et al., 1986; Fallon & Rozin, 1984; Miller et al., 1980; Rodin, 1992; Silberstein et al., 1988). For example, our findings mirror Miller et al.’s (1980) observation that female college students had a desired weight that was 14 pounds lighter than their actual weight. However, it is important to note that, across analyses, the physical self-perception variables, although correlated with SPA, were less effective predictors
of ATES than SPA. Indeed, BSS did not enter into any of the regression models. WS entered only into the prediction of ATES-shorts and T-shirt attire and in a counterintuitive way. Specifically, WS, although uncorrelated with ATES-shorts and T-shirt attire, entered second into the prediction model, accounted for a small portion of the variance, and in contrast to SPA, was negatively associated with the criterion variable. It appears that WS was acting as a suppressor variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989) on SPA and, hence, may be accounting for variance among those for whom no particular public exercise setting would be desirable. This is an interesting result that merits further examination, although it is certainly consistent with the commentary of overweight exercisers reported by Bain et al. (1989). Nevertheless, SPA seems to be a more important index of the effects of self-presentation concerns on exercise choice than are other physical self-perception variables.

Significant correlations were observed between SPA and Weight Control, Body Tone, and Physical Attractiveness. Because all of these reasons for exercise relate to easily observable physical qualities, they can easily be construed as related to self-presentation (Leary, 1992). By contrast, Fitness, Mood Enhancement, Health, and Enjoyment can be argued to be motives that are relatively independent of self-presentation (Leary, 1992). In prediction of SPA, Body Tone, Fitness, and Physical Attractiveness all entered the regression model. SPA was positively associated with Body Tone and Physical Attractiveness and negatively associated with Fitness. The entry of Fitness is interesting because it was uncorrelated with SPA in the simple correlations and, hence, must act as a suppressor variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). Weight Control did not enter into the multiple regression model despite its significant correlation with SPA, probably because of its correlations with Body Tone and Physical Attractiveness.

It does appear that the reasons that women engage in exercise activities are differentially associated with SPA. Reasons that can be construed as self-presentational (Physical Attractiveness, Body Tone, Weight Control) seem to be important and positively associated with SPA. Reasons that are not as clearly self-presentational motives (Health, Enjoyment, Mood Enhancement, Fitness) do not seem to be associated with SPA, although Fitness may be indirectly and negatively associated as a suppressor variable. In addition to shedding light on associations between SPA and reasons for exercise, these results also could be interpreted to provide some interesting evidence for the discriminant validity for the SPAS.

In summary, the results of this investigation indicate that self-presentational perspectives may be very useful in helping to understand exercise behavior patterns and that the SPAS may be a useful instrument for such investigation. Clearly, future investigations need to examine actual exercise behaviors from this perspective. Further, current practice in the promotion of exercise and exercise attire merits additional examination from a self-presentational perspective, particularly with regard to its impact upon exercise behavior. However, the present findings suggest this may be a fruitful theoretical perspective to pursue.
References


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