

Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport
 ©2005 by the American Alliance for Health,
 Physical Education, Recreation and Dance
 Vol. 76, No. 4, pp. 507–513

Examining the Moderating Effect of Appearance Impression Motivation on the Relationship Between Perceived Physical Appearance and Social Physique Anxiety

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Key words: body image, self-presentation, social anxiety

Self-presentation is the process by which individuals attempt to present themselves in a particular way to real or imagined audiences (Schlenker, 1980). By omitting undesired aspects of the self and revealing favored aspects, individuals attempt to control how others perceive them (Leary, 1995; Schlenker, 1980). Self-presentation occurs in all areas of life, including sport and physical activity settings (Leary, 1992).

Despite the general desire to present oneself in a particular way, there are occasions in which people may doubt their ability to create a desired impression or avoid making an undesired impression on others. When this occurs, individuals will likely experience social anxiety (Leary & Kowalski, 1995), which can be described as anxiety resulting from the perceived likelihood or existence of personal evaluation in real or imagined situations (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). In the context of physical activity, for example, individuals may doubt their ability to impress on others that they are physically attractive and, thus, will become anxious when put into a situation in which others may evaluate their physical appearance (e.g., wearing a bathing suit at the beach). The anxiety resulting from doubting one's ability to create a desired impression or avoid an undesired impression specifically regarding the physique or body has been labeled social physique anxiety, or SPA (Hart, Leary, & Rejeski, 1989).

Submitted: September 15, 2003

Accepted: March 26, 2005

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Experiencing any form of social anxiety, including SPA, can affect people's experiences and behaviors (Leary & Kowalski, 1995; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). For example, SPA is linked with preference for certain types of physical activity (Frederick & Morrison, 1996) and preferences for exercising in specific situations (Crawford & Eklund, 1994; Eklund & Crawford, 1994; Spink, 1992). When combined with the research indicating other important consequences of SPA, such as disturbed attitudes toward eating (e.g., Hausenblas & Mack, 1999), understanding the antecedents of SPA is critical.

A variety of situational and personal factors can contribute to social anxiety (see Leary & Kowalski, 1995; Schlenker & Leary, 1982); however, based on the definition of the construct, one of the most critical determinants involves an individual's confidence in her or his ability to create a desired impression and avoid creating an undesired impression. Thus, experiencing SPA will be determined largely by an individual's belief in her or his ability to present her- or himself to others as physically attractive, or at least not unattractive. The studies examining SPA have consistently found strong support for this relationship (e.g., Frederick & Morrison, 1996; Hart et al., 1989; Kowalski, Crocker, & Kowalski, 2001; McAuley & Burman, 1993). For example, Kowalski and colleagues (2001) reported a strong negative correlation ($r = -.82$) between SPA and the body attractiveness subscale of the Physical Self-Perception Profile (Fox & Corbin, 1989) in a sample of female undergraduate students. Nevertheless, it is not only one's perceived physical appearance (PPA) but also the importance or value one places on being perceived as physically attractive that will ultimately determine SPA.

In general, the greater one's motivation to create a particular impression on others the more likely he or she will experience social anxiety (Leary & Kowalski, 1995).

According to the self-presentational theory of social anxiety (see Leary, 1995; Leary & Kowalski, 1990, 1995; Schlenker & Leary, 1982), however, the amount of social anxiety a person experiences is actually a function of the interaction between the individual's belief in her or his ability to create a desired impression on others *and* the extent to which he or she is motivated to make the desired impression. In other words, the degree of impression motivation will moderate the relationship between self-presentation confidence and the amount of social anxiety experienced. If an individual's impression motivation is high, possessing low self-presentation confidence will lead to elevated levels of social anxiety, whereas high self-presentation confidence will result in low social anxiety. If, on the other hand, one is not motivated to control the impressions of others (e.g., one does not care whether he or she is perceived as physically attractive by others), possessing low or high levels of confidence should not be associated with social anxiety.

Despite the conceptual importance of impression motivation in predicting social anxiety (Leary & Kowalski, 1995; Schlenker & Leary, 1982), no research has tested the link between impression motivation specifically regarding one's physical appearance (appearance impression motivation, or AIM) and SPA. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to determine whether AIM moderates the relationship between PPA and SPA. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Kowalski et al., 2001), we hypothesized that people with positive PPA would report low SPA, and those with negative PPA would report high SPA. We also expected that AIM would be positively related to SPA. However, consistent with the self-presentational theory of social anxiety, we expected a significant interaction between PPA and AIM. Specifically, we expected a strong relationship between PPA and SPA for those with high AIM; however, the strength of the relationship was expected to decline with decreasing AIM. In other words, the less one cares about making a desired impression regarding his or her physique or body, the less one's perception of his or her appearance, either positive or negative, will influence SPA.

Method

Participants

A total of 690 college students initially agreed to participate in the study. Nevertheless, 33 students were dropped from the final sample due to incomplete data and/or failure to follow directions. Consequently, the final participant sample included 657 students (376 women and 281 men), who ranged in age from 18 to 39 years ($M_{age} = 20.75$, $SD = 2.81$). Most of the sample iden-

tified themselves as Caucasian (88.7%). The average height and weight of male participants was 1.81 m ($SD = .08$) and 83.78 kg ($SD = 13.48$), respectively, whereas the female participants were on average 1.68 m ($SD = .08$) and 64.58 kg ($SD = 12.70$), respectively. The respective body mass index (BMI; kg/m^2) scores of the men and women were 25.51 ($SD = 3.77$) and 22.93 ($SD = 3.76$).

Procedures

Participants were recruited from a variety of undergraduate and graduate classes at a university in the midwestern portion of the U.S. using standard institutional review board procedures. After providing informed consent, participants responded to a multisection questionnaire, which took 10–15 min to complete.

Measures

Social Physique Anxiety. The Social Physique Anxiety Scale (SPAS) developed by Hart and colleagues (1989) was designed to assess the degree to which a respondent experiences anxiety as a result of perceived observation and evaluation of her or his physique by others. Each of the 12 items asks the respondent to indicate the degree to which the statement is characteristic or true of her or him (e.g., "In the presence of others, I feel apprehensive about my physique/figure"). The response options range from *not at all true* to *extremely true* and are scored on a five-point scale. The SPAS has demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity (see Bane & McAuley, 1998). Based on the recommendation of Motl and Conroy (2001), the seven-item version of the SPAS was used for all analyses. The alpha coefficient for the present study was .87.

Perceived Physical Appearance. The participants' PPA was assessed using the body attractiveness subscale from the Physical Self-Perception Profile (Fox & Corbin, 1989). This six-item scale is presented in a structured alternative format, which requires respondents to make two choices per item. First, the respondent is asked to read two opposing statements and select the option most like her- or himself. For example, "Some people feel that compared to most, they have attractive bodies, BUT, others feel that compared to most, their bodies are not quite so attractive." Following this choice, the respondent decides whether the statement he or she selected is *really true*, *true*, or *sort of true for me*.¹ The responses are scored from 1 to 6, with higher scores reflecting a more positive evaluation of one's body. This scale has consistently demonstrated adequate psychometric properties (see Fox, 1998). The alpha coefficient for the present study was .87.

Appearance Impression Motivation. Items modeled after the impression motivation construct of Leary and Kowalski's (1990) two-component model of impression management were created and used to assess the par-

ticipants' AIM. According to Leary and Kowalski, impression motivation represents an individual's desire to control the perceptions and impressions that others form. The items developed for this study focused specifically on the value or importance individuals place on being perceived by others as physically attractive or having a nice body.² The four items include: (a) "It is important to me that others view me as physically attractive," (b) "I want to be known as someone who is good looking and has a nice body," (c) "I want to be thought of as someone who is physically attractive," and (d) "Looking good and having a nice body is something I value as a person." Respondents are asked to circle the response option that best reflects their thoughts and feelings. The options are *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *somewhat disagree*, *somewhat agree*, *agree*, and *strongly agree*, and are scored from 1 to 6, respectively. The mean score was calculated and used as an indicator of the participant's AIM, with higher scores reflecting greater AIM.

Given that the AIM scale was newly developed for this study, we tested the factorial validity of this measure using both exploratory and confirmatory procedures. Results from a principal axis factor analysis with an oblique rotation revealed a single factor (eigenvalue = 2.88), which explained 71.99% of the variance in the items. The factor loadings for the four items were .76, .93, .81, and .67, respectively. The absolute values of all residual correlations were less than .05. Results from a confirmatory factor analysis specifying that all four items loaded on a single latent factor further supported the factorial validity of the scale. Specifically, results indicated an acceptable fit of the single factor model to the data, $\chi^2(2) = 14.53, p < .001$, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation = .09, Goodness-of-Fit Index = .99, Comparative Fit Index = .99, Non-Normed Fit Index = .98, and each of the four items demonstrated a strong posi-

tive loading on the latent variable (range = .65–.94). The AIM scale also demonstrated acceptable reliability in the present sample with an alpha coefficient of .88.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

The descriptive statistics and correlations for the study variables are presented in Table 1. As expected, there was a strong negative relationship between PPA and SPA. There was also a significant positive relationship between AIM and SPA, albeit perhaps weaker than we might have expected. In an absolute sense, the participants as a group reported moderate levels of SPA and PPA and high AIM; although the male and female participants appeared to differ in their responses. To test whether these differences were significant, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted, with SPA, AIM, and PPA serving as the dependent variables. Results revealed a significant gender effect, Wilk's $\Lambda(3, 653) = .84, p < .01, \eta^2 = .16$. Univariate F values indicated that female and male participants differed in SPA, $F(1, 655) = 122.29, p < .01, \eta^2 = .16$, and PPA, $F(1, 655) = 46.93, p < .01, \eta^2 = .07$. No significant differences, however, were found for AIM ($p > .05$). Based on the mean scores (see Table 1), the women reported significantly higher SPA and significantly lower PPA.

Main Analysis

A hierarchical regression analysis was used to determine whether AIM moderates the relationship between PPA and SPA. Both PPA and AIM were entered

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for study variables

Variable	SPA		PPA		AIM		PPA x AIM
SPA	—		-.64		.21		-.24
PPA	-.64		—		.04		.16
AIM	.21		.04		—		-.07
PPA x AIM	-.40		.81		.60		—
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Total sample ($N = 657$)	2.77	.89	3.25	.89	4.32	.91	—
Women ($n = 376$)	3.08	.84	3.06	.85	4.33	.91	—
Men ($n = 281$)	2.36	.79	3.52	.89	4.31	.92	—

Note. SPA = social physique anxiety; PPA = perceived physical appearance; AIM = appearance impression motivation; M = mean; SD = standard deviation; all correlations with an absolute value greater than .07 are significant at $p < .05$; correlations among variables in raw score form are presented in the lower diagonal, and the correlations among the centered variables are presented in the upper diagonal; means and standard deviations are based on raw scores.

on Step 1 of the hierarchical regression, followed by the interaction of these variables on Step 2. Consistent with the recommendations of Aiken and West (1991), the predictor variables were centered and the interaction term was formed as the cross-product of the centered variables. Determining whether the interaction entered on Step 2 significantly added to the prediction of SPA above and beyond the independent effects of the PPA and AIM was the critical test of the moderating effect.

As seen in Table 2, the results of the hierarchical regression analysis revealed that AIM did moderate the relationship between PPA and SPA. Specifically, the interaction term entered on Step 2 significantly added to the prediction of SPA above and beyond the indepen-

dent effects of PPA and AIM ($\Delta R^2 = .02, p < .05$). In this regression equation, all three predictors (i.e., PPA, AIM, interaction) were significant, together accounting for 48% of the variance in SPA.

Given the significant interaction, predicted values were computed by systematically substituting values equal to the mean, +1 standard deviation and -1 standard deviation for both PPA and AIM into the final regression equation (see Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen & Cohen, 1983). As a result, three separate regression lines could be plotted representing individuals with higher, average, and lower levels of AIM. These regression lines, illustrated in Figure 1, reveal some support for the study hypotheses. As predicted, there was a nega-

Table 2. Summary of regression analysis predicting social physique anxiety

Predictor variables	Regression coefficients		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> <	<i>r</i>	Correlations	
	<i>B</i> (<i>SE B</i>)	β				<i>sr</i>	<i>sr</i> ²
Step 1							
Constant	2.77 (.03)	—	108.61	.01	—	—	—
PPA	-.65 (.03)	-.65	-22.61	.01	-.64	-.65	.42
AIM	.23 (.03)	.24	8.29	.01	.21	.24	.06
Step 2							
Constant	2.78 (.03)	—	110.17	.01	—	—	—
PPA	-.63 (.03)	-.63	-21.88	.01	-.64	-.62	.38
AIM	.22 (.03)	.23	8.05	.01	.21	.23	.05
PPA x AIM	-.13 (.03)	-.13	-4.35	.01	-.24	-.12	.02

Note. PPA = perceived physical appearance; AIM = appearance impression motivation; overall regression results for Step 1, $F(2, 654) = 282.95, p < .01, R^2 = .46$; overall regression results for Step 2, $F(3, 653) = 18.91, p < .01, R^2 = .48, \Delta R^2 = .02$.

Prediction of SPA

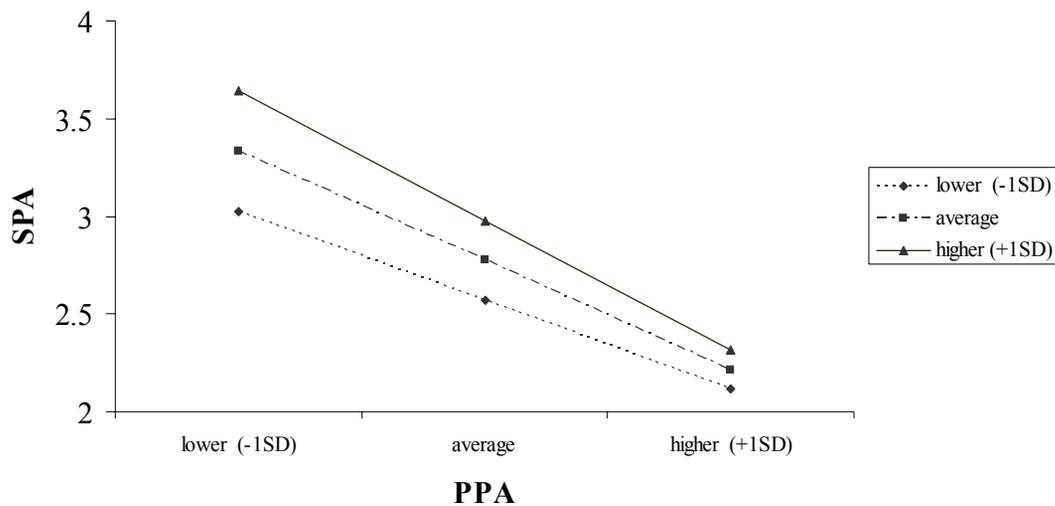


Figure 1. Regression lines illustrating the significant interaction of perceived physical appearance (PPA) and appearance impression motivation (AIM) on the prediction of social physique anxiety (SPA).

tive relationship between PPA and SPA. This was the case across all levels of AIM. However, the strength of this relationship declined as AIM decreased. For example, high or low levels of PPA had relatively less influence on SPA for those indicating they were less motivated for others to view them as physically attractive. Conversely, the relationship between PPA and SPA was particularly strong for those with relatively higher levels of AIM. It should be noted, however, that although the PPA and AIM interaction was significant, the moderating effect of AIM was not strong ($\Delta R^2 = .02$).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to test whether AIM moderates the relationship between PPA and SPA. As expected, there was a strong negative relationship between PPA and SPA. That is, students who reported higher levels of SPA tended to view themselves as less physically attractive, whereas those who felt more positive about their physical appearance reported lower SPA. This relationship is consistent with previous research (e.g., Frederick & Morrison, 1996; Hart et al., 1989; Kowalski et al., 2001; Martin, Rejeski, Leary, McAuley, & Bane, 1997; McAuley & Burman, 1993) and the self-presentational theory of social anxiety (see Leary, 1995; Leary & Kowalski, 1990, 1995; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). That is, people who generally do not believe they are physically attractive (e.g., hold negative views about their body shape and weight) are likely to doubt their ability to create an impression on others that they are attractive and, as a result, will tend to experience social anxiety when they believe others are evaluating their physique.

Results of this study also revealed a positive relationship between AIM and SPA. This is consistent with the general predictions of the self-presentational theory of social anxiety in that the greater the desire one has to create a desired impression on others, the higher the probability that he or she will experience self-presentational concerns (see Leary & Kowalski, 1995). The results of the study further support the self-presentational theory of social anxiety, however, in that AIM was found to moderate the relationship between PPA and SPA. Specifically, the results indicated that the strength of the relationship between PPA and SPA was greatest for those with high levels of AIM but declined with decreasing levels of AIM.

Although the results supported the study hypotheses and the basic tenets of the self-presentational theory of social anxiety, the magnitude of the moderating effect of AIM was relatively small. Together the three predictors (i.e., PPA, AIM, and the interaction of PPA and

AIM) accounted for 48% of the variance in SPA. The amount of unique variance accounted for by the PPA and AIM interaction, nevertheless, was only 2%. Based on the squared semipartial correlations (sr^2), PPA clearly explained the largest amount of the unique variance in SPA (38%), followed next by AIM (5%).

While we initially expected a stronger moderating effect to emerge, in retrospect the findings seem somewhat reasonable. For instance, previous research has consistently found a strong negative relationship between PPA and SPA (e.g., Hart et al., 1989; Kowalski et al., 2001; McAuley & Burman, 1993). As such, expecting *not* to find a significant relationship between PPA and SPA, even for those who indicated they were not motivated to be viewed by others as physically attractive, was unlikely.

Part of the issue, perhaps, is that most of the study participants indicated that being viewed by others as attractive and having a nice body was relatively important. In fact, over 60% of the participants indicated agreeing at least somewhat with statements on the AIM scale such as, "It is important to me that others view me as physically attractive," whereas less than 5% indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements. Based on the self-presentational theory of social anxiety, the only point at which self-presentation confidence will not affect social anxiety is when there is a total lack of impression motivation, and this was clearly not indicative of this sample. Given the cultural value placed on physical appearance (see Grogan, 1999) and the many social and psychological implications of people's appearance (e.g., Cash & Kilcullen, 1985; Harter, 1999; Nezek, 1999), it is unlikely that many people would not be interested in having others positively view their appearance. Nevertheless, it is possible that we might find a stronger moderating effect of AIM on the relationship between PPA and SPA with a more diverse sample, specifically, a sample with a greater percentage of individuals with truly low AIM. For instance, examining these relationships with older adults may provide a stronger demonstration of the moderating effect of AIM, as there is evidence that with increasing age adults' standards of physical appearance, the importance placed on being seen as physically attractive, and appearance anxiety all decrease (Grogan, 1999; Tiggeman & Lynch, 2001).

Another possible explanation for the relatively weak, albeit significant, moderating effect of AIM on the relationship between PPA and SPA involves the level of specificity of the AIM construct. According to Leary and colleagues (see Leary, 1995; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; 1995; Schlenker & Leary, 1982), by a variety of situational and personal factors can influence the degree to which individuals are motivated to present themselves in a particular way. For example, the characteristics of the audience, the evaluative implications of the perfor-

mance, the centrality of the image to one's identity, and a variety of other personal and situational factors can all contribute to the degree one is motivated to make a particular impression on others (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). The desire to present oneself as physically attractive, for instance, may depend on whom one is interacting with at the time (e.g., one's teacher vs. a potential romantic partner), whether creating this impression is likely to lead to a valued goal (e.g., getting asked on a date, making a new friend), or perhaps the value one places on her or his physical appearance as a key element of self-concept. Assessing AIM in the current study focused only on the degree of importance the students placed on being viewed by others as physically attractive and having a nice physique in a general sense. It is more likely, perhaps, that we would see increased variability in impression motivation, especially low impression motivation, when considering these feelings on a more specific level. In other words, under specific circumstance (e.g., a student interacting with parents at home) an individual may feel little desire or motivation to be viewed as physically attractive, despite generally feeling it is important for others to view him or her as good looking. As such, testing the moderating effect of AIM on the relationship between PPA and SPA under more situationally specific circumstances might result in stronger findings.

A related possibility involves the psychometric properties of the newly developed AIM scale. This study provides initial support for the reliability and validity of the AIM scale; however, we would have expected a stronger relationship between AIM and SPA based on the self-presentational theory of social anxiety (see Leary, 1995; Leary & Kowalski, 1990, 1995; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Clearly, more research needs to be conducted to be truly confident that the weak moderating effect is not simply a function of the AIM measurement.

Finally, it would also be advisable to consider using more advanced statistical techniques to test the potential interaction of AIM and PPA in future research. Advances in structural equation modeling methods for examining interactive effect is becoming more readily available (see Li et al., 1998). Ultimately, adopting these procedures might provide a more sensitive test of the theory.

In summary, the results of this study contribute to the growing literature on SPA. Our results indicated that both PPA and AIM were significantly related to SPA, and AIM appears to have at least some moderating effect on the relationship between PPA and SPA. Based on these findings, research should continue to consider AIM along with the other personal and situational factors associated with SPA (see Crawford & Eklund, 1994; Frederick & Morrison, 1996; Hart et al., 1989; Martin et al., 1997), as our ability to develop effective strategies to reduce SPA should increase with a more complete understanding of the antecedents of SPA.

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Notes

1. The original scale did not include *true* as a response option; however, this option was added to increase response variability (see Amorose, 2001).
2. The Self-Presentation in Exercise Questionnaire (SPEQ) developed by Conroy, Motl, and Hall (2000) included an impression motivation subscale; however, the focus of the scale was on people's motivation to be seen by others as an exerciser, not the degree to which they desired others to view them as physically attractive. As such, the SPEQ was seen as inappropriate for this study.

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