

**AN EXAMINATION OF SELF-PRESENTATIONAL CONCERN
OF TURKISH ADOLESCENTS:
AN EXAMPLE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION SETTING**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine self-presentational concern of Turkish adolescents with regard to the gender composition of physical education (PE) class and also to investigate the attitude toward PE and PE class preferences of Turkish adolescents based on this concern. A total of 1,807 eighth-grade students (936 females and 871 males) completed the Attitudes Toward Physical Education Scale and Social Physique Anxiety Scale (SPAS). The findings indicated that although self-presentational concern did not differ according to the gender composition of PE class, there was a significant difference in class preference among adolescents based on this concern with most of the females who had a high self-presentational concern preferring noncoed PE class. Additionally, no significant difference was found in attitude toward PE among self-presentational concern groups. These findings are discussed in relation to the sex composition of PE class and self-presentational concerns of adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly image-based society, it is important to understand the roles adolescents' bodily concern and self-presentation play in their lives. The culturally accepted ideal stereotype appears to promote a "societal obsession" with body shape, size, weight, virility, and appearance of one's body (Stice & Shaw, 1994). Physical appearance is a particularly important psychological construct associated with social acceptance among adolescents (Lerner, Lerner, Hess, Schwab, Jovanic, Talwar, & Kicher, 1991) and the drive for thinness among adolescent females in Western societies is a prominent issue (Gray, 1993; Sands, 2000; White, 1992) that is of concern to educators, health professionals, and sports trainers. The drive for thinness has been associated with

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self-concept (Strauman & Glenberg, 1994), body image (Slade, 1994), body weight (Striegel-Moore, Scriber, Pike, Wilfley, & Rodin, 1995) and social physique anxiety as an important dimension of self-presentation (Hart, Leary, & Rejeski, 1989).

Self-presentation is an attempt to selectively present aspects of oneself or to omit revealing information to maximize a positive impression and avoid an undesired impression (Leary, 1992; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). The nature of self-presentation has been the focus of research on a wide variety of interpersonal phenomena, including attitude development (Schlenker, Forsyth, Leary, & Miller, 1980), perceived exertion (Hardy, Hall, & Presholdt, 1986), and exercise adherence (Crawford & Eklund, 1994). Self-presentation is also an essential part of interpersonal conduct and influences one's social life, employment, and romantic involvement (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). It also may be an important determinant of behavior, cognition, and affect in the exercise and sport setting (Hausenblas, Brewer, & Raalte, 2004).

Impression management pervades all areas of life. Those who are particularly attuned to others' perception of them are concerned with behaving in accordance with situational norms, social approval, and evaluation of their physical appearance. Concern for how one's body is judged by others is called Social Physique Anxiety (Leary, 1992). This has been found to correlate with a number of psychosocial variables such as global self-esteem, body esteem, weight dissatisfaction, and body dissatisfaction (Crawford & Eklund, 1994), in addition to eating attitudes, motives to exercise, and exercise behavior patterns (Crawford & Eklund, 1994; Eklund & Crawford, 1994). Social physique anxiety may also play an important role in determining where and with whom people exercise (Spink, 1992), one's affective responses to exercise (Focht & Hausenblas, 2001), and level of effort while exercising (Boutcher, Fleischer-Curtian, & Gines, 1988).

Social physique anxiety is an important self-presentational concern for adolescents in particular. Besides being seen by others as cool, fun to be with, and risk takers, physical attractiveness is highly valued by adolescents (Ginis & Leary, 2004). Thus, the school environment is an important setting for studying their self-presentational concerns—particularly in physical education class where the body is subject to evaluation by others. Previous research has indicated that exercisers with high social physique anxiety may prefer exercising in a private setting (Spink, 1992), prefer to exercise alone (Belling, 1992), and tend to have a less favorable attitude toward coeducational classes (Bain, Wilson, & Chaikind, 1989). In addition, high social physique anxiety is related to excessive (Frederick & Morrison, 1996) or low (Lantz, Hardy, &

Ainsworth, 1997) exercise participation. Furthermore, those who suffer from social physique anxiety prefer fitness types of activity (Frederick & Morrison, 1996), dislike coed aerobic dancing classes (Eklund & Crawford, 1994), and exercise for self-presentational reasons (Eklund & Crawford, 1994; Frederick & Morrison, 1996).

Psychological research on adolescents has tended to underestimate the importance of context (Johnson, Roberts, & Worell, 1999), and while a multitude of contexts impinge upon the daily behaviors of adolescents, this study focused on physical education within the school setting. Most previous research on self-presentation has been conducted in exercise and sport settings.

Based on previous research, the sex composition of physical education classes (coed/noncoed) may have the most influence on social physique anxiety of adolescents and the level of social physique anxiety may influence attitudes toward PE and the preference for gender composition of PE class. The social construction of the body in physical education and sport focused on issues of slenderness, muscularity, and physicality, becomes an important site for the study of bodily concerns of adolescents. Keeping in mind the definition of social physique anxiety that is experienced when persons feel that their bodies are being devalued (Hart et al., 1989), it seems important to gain an understanding of the role that adolescents' anxiety plays in different physical education contexts that convey significant messages about body and gender.

Thus, the purpose of this study was twofold: (1) to investigate the social physique anxiety of Turkish adolescents in relation to sex composition of PE class in order to explore the nature of environmental effects on the self-presentational variables, (2) to study attitudes toward physical education and physical education preferences of adolescents with regard to social physique anxiety in order to understand the role of this anxiety in determining attitudes and preferences of adolescents. Based on previous research, the following hypotheses were proposed: (1) there would be a significant difference in social physique anxiety scores between adolescents in coed and noncoed PE class, (2) there would be a significant difference in attitudes toward PE between high and low social physique anxiety groups, (3) there would be a significant difference in PE class preferences between adolescents in high and low social physique anxiety groups.

Participants

This study consisted of 1,807 students (936 females and 871 males) from six high schools that represented middle level socioeconomic status participants and was located in the center of Ankara, Turkey; 411 female ($M_{\text{age}} = 14.96 \pm 0.37$) and 420 male ($M_{\text{age}} = 14.96 \pm 0.36$) students from coeducational PE classes and 525 female ($M_{\text{age}} = 14.96 \pm 0.38$) and 451 male ($M_{\text{age}} = 14.96 \pm 0.34$) students from noncoeducational PE classes participated voluntarily.

Data Collection Instrument

Social Physique Anxiety Scale (SPAS). The 12-item SPAS was used to measure social physique anxiety (Hart, Leary, & Rejeski, 1989). Items are presented on a 5-point Likert scale with total scores ranging from 12–60. SPAS also has two subscales which are “feeling of discomfort about the presentation of one’s physique” (5 items) and “expectations of negative evaluation of physique by others” (7 items). The reliability and validity of SPAS for the Turkish population were determined by Mülazımoğlu Balı and Aşçı (2004).

Attitude toward PE Scale. This instrument was developed by Demirhan and Altay (2001) for Turkish students. It is a paper-and-pencil self-report instrument using a 5-point Likert-type scale with responses ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) summed across 24 items, resulting in a range from 24 to 120. A score of 24 represents the most negative attitude; a score of 25–48 represents a negative attitude; 49–72 a neutral attitude; 73–94 a positive attitude; and 95–120 the most positive attitude. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.93, the intraclass correlation coefficient is 0.85, and the scale validity coefficient is 0.83. The following statements are sample items from this scale: “I am bored with PE and sporting activities,” “It is not necessary to include a PE course in the school curriculum,” “I am not interested in PE activities,” “I am always afraid of PE lessons,” “I am participating in PE because it is compulsory,” “I am always interested in PE activities,” and “I believe that PE contributes to a healthy development.”

PE class preferences of students were determined by asking: “Which PE class do you prefer?”

Data Collection Procedure

The research was conducted during the 2002-2003 summer semester. In this study two Girl Vocational High Schools and two Industry

Vocational High Schools were selected as noncoeducational schools and two public high schools were selected as coeducational schools. The ninth grade was chosen because physical education lessons are mainly ignored in tenth and eleventh grades.

Prior to data collection, permission was requested and granted from the Ministry of Education. The Social Physique Anxiety Scale and the Attitudes Toward PE Scale were administered to participants in a classroom setting. Researchers provided verbal and visual information on how to respond to items in each questionnaire. Participation in the study was voluntary and responses were anonymous.

Male and female participants were classified as low ($n = 492$; $n = 462$, respectively) and high ($n = 379$; $n = 474$, respectively) social physique anxiety groups based on a median split of total social physique anxiety values separately. Two social physique anxiety groups were formed to test attitudes toward PE and PE class preferences with regard to social physique anxiety scores. The median social physique score for females and males were 34 and 32, respectively.

Data Analysis

A 2×2 (Sex = Female/Male \times PE Class Context = Coed/Noncoed) Multivariate Analysis of Variance was carried out to examine social physique anxiety with regard to PE class context and sex. The attitude of adolescents toward PE with regard to social physique anxiety scores was tested by using 2×2 (Sex = Female/Male \times Social Physique Anxiety Group = Low/High) Analysis of Variance. Chi-square analysis was used to test differences in preferences for physical education class among females and males in the low and high social physique anxiety groups.

RESULTS

PE Class Context and Social Physique Anxiety

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation for the total social physique anxiety score and two subscales of social physique anxiety with regard to sex and sex composition of PE class contexts.

With respect to the first hypothesis, a 2×2 MANOVA for examining the social physique anxiety of adolescents in the different PE class contexts revealed an overall significant main effect of sex (Hotelling's $T^2 = 0.04$; $F_{(2, 1802)} = 31.51$; $p < 0.01$) and Sex \times PE Class Context Interaction effect for self-presentational concerns (Hotelling's $T^2 = 0.00$; $F_{(2, 1802)} = 3.49$; $p < .05$). However, the results indicated no sig-

Table 1
Social Physique Anxiety Scores, by Sex and Sex Composition of PE Class

Variable	Coed PE Class Context				Noncoed PE Class Context			
	Female		Male		Female		Male	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Social Physique Anxiety Total Score	34.01	8.77	32.00	8.12	34.71	9.20	31.05	7.83
Feeling of Discomfort About the Presentation of One's Physique	14.61	4.26	13.24	3.94	14.59	3.86	13.02	3.94
Expectations of Negative Evaluation of Physique by Others	19.40	5.91	18.76	5.67	20.12	6.53	18.03	5.60

nificant differences in self-presentational concerns with regard to sex composition of PE Class Context (Hotelling's $T^2 = 0.00$; $F_{(2, 1802)} = 0.26$; $p > 0.05$).

A follow-up univariate analysis revealed a significant sex main effect for the social physique anxiety score ($F_{(1, 1807)} = 49.43$; $p < 0.01$), feeling of discomfort about the presentation of one's physique ($F_{(1, 1807)} = 60.69$; $p < 0.01$), and expectations of negative evaluation of one's physique by others ($F_{(1, 1807)} = 23.34$; $p < 0.01$). Males had lower scores on social physique anxiety, the expectation of negative evaluation of one's physique by others, and feeling of discomfort about the presentation of one's physique than did females.

A significant sex \times PE class context interaction effect was found for social physique anxiety ($F_{(1, 1806)} = 4.16$; $p < 0.05$) and expectations of negative evaluation of one's physique by others ($F_{(1, 1806)} = 6.54$; $p < 0.01$). Females in coed PE class and noncoed PE class contexts had higher social physique anxiety scores than did males in coed and noncoed PE class contexts. In addition, the expectation of negative evaluation of one's physique by others score of females in the noncoed PE class context was higher than that of males in coed and noncoed contexts. Furthermore, females in the coed PE context had a higher score on expectation of negative evaluation than did males in the noncoed context.

Social Physique Anxiety and Attitudes Toward PE and PE Class Preferences

A 2×2 (Sex = Female/Male \times Social Physique Anxiety Group = Low/High) Analysis of Variance revealed significant differences in attitudes toward physical education between males and females ($F_{(1, 1803)} = 16.84$; $p < 0.01$) in favor of males. Males had higher attitude scores toward physical education than did females.

With regard to the second hypothesis, no significant difference was found in attitude toward physical education between high and low social physique anxiety groups ($F_{(1, 1803)} = 1.09$; $p > 0.05$). However, analysis of variance indicated significant differences in male and female attitudes toward physical education based on social physique anxiety ($F_{(1, 804)} = 4.17$; $p < 0.05$). Females in the low social physique anxiety group had more unfavorable attitudes toward physical education compared to males in high and low social physique anxiety groups (Table 2).

To test the third hypothesis, the differences in PE class preferences among females and males in the low and high social physique anxiety groups were examined by Chi-square analysis, which indicated a sig-

nificant difference in PE class preferences among the four groups ($\chi^2(3, N = 1807) = 34.33; p < 0.01$). Most of the females in the high social physique anxiety group preferred noncoed physical education classes. However, the PE class preferences of females in the low social physique anxiety group seemed to be similar for coed and noncoed PE classes. Males in high and low social physique anxiety groups generally preferred the coed PE class (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicated that self-presentational concern did not differ with regard to sex composition of physical education classes. This finding did not support the first hypothesis that there would be a significant difference in self-presentational concern between adolescents in coed and noncoed PE class. Although this finding is consistent with that of Walton and Finkenburg's (2002) study that found no significant difference in SPA between members of all-female exercise facilities and members of coed exercise facilities, it is incompatible with the findings of most of the studies that investigated the social physique anxiety of women with regard to gender composition of exercise settings (Belling, 1992; Eklund & Crawford, 1994; Spink, 1992; Yin, 2001). In these studies, the characteristics of the exercise setting environments such as the presence of mirrors, observation windows, the presence of others, and the use of fitness equipment are considered to be related to self-presentational concerns. Although the social construction of the body in PE that focused on issues of slenderness, muscularity, and physicality has been of central importance to the self-presentational concerns, PE class environments contain different characteristics for individuals than do other exercise settings in terms of critical evaluation of self-presentational variables. Therefore, future research should examine other moderating variables in the PE class setting such as curriculum content, instructional methods, student-teacher and student-student interactions, and teachers' behavior that might influence the relationship between the PE class environment and self-presentational concerns.

Although this study found no significant difference in self-presentational concern between adolescents in coed and noncoed PE classes, other studies found a significant gender and PE class context interaction effect for social physique anxiety and expectations of negative evaluation of one's physique. Females in coed PE and noncoed PE class contexts had higher social physique anxiety scores than did males in

Table 2

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Attitudes Toward PE,
by Sex and Social Physique Anxiety Group

Sex	High Social Physique Anxiety Group		Low Social Physique Anxiety Group		Total	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Female	69.24	7.55	67.98	8.02	68.63	7.81
Male	70.11	8.89	70.52	10.23	70.34	9.67
Total	69.64	8.15	69.29	9.31	69.45	8.79

Table 3

PE Class Preferences,
by Sex and Social Physique Anxiety Group

PE Class Preference	High Social Physique Anxiety Group		Low Social Physique Anxiety Group	
	Female <i>n</i>	Male <i>n</i>	Female <i>n</i>	Male <i>n</i>
Coed PE Class	204	207	238	303
Noncoed PE Class	270	172	224	189

coed and noncoed PE class contexts. In addition, the expectation of negative evaluation of one's physique by others score of females in the noncoed PE class context was higher than for males in coed and noncoed contexts. Furthermore, females in the coed PE context had a higher score on expectation of negative evaluation than did males in the noncoed context.

Since self-presentation may be an important determinant of behavior, cognition, and affect in the exercise and sport setting (Hausenblas et al., 2004), the present study, examined whether the level of social physique anxiety would have an influence on adolescents' attitudes toward physical education. A significant difference in attitudes toward PE was not found between high and low social physique anxiety groups. Thus, the second hypothesis was not supported. However, analysis of variance indicated significant differences in males' and females' attitudes toward physical education based on social physique anxiety. Females in the low social physique anxiety groups had more unfavorable attitudes toward PE than did males in high and low social physique anxiety groups.

As noted earlier, social physique anxiety has been demonstrated to contribute to individual preferences for exercise environment (Crawford & Eklund, 1994; Spink, 1992). Since the findings of this study indicated a significant difference in PE class preferences between high and low social physique anxiety groups, the third hypothesis that there would be significant differences in PE class preferences between adolescents in coed and noncoed PE class was supported. Most of the females in the high social physique anxiety groups preferred noncoed physical education class. This finding is similar to those of the previous studies (Bain et al., 1989; Belling, 1992; Spink, 1992; Yin, 2001). Belling (1992) found that women high in SPA were more likely than women low in SPA to express a preference for exercising alone. Similarly Eklund and Crawford (1994) found that undergraduate women who are high in SPA reported disliking coed aerobic dancing classes and being highly aware of members of the opposite sex who are participating in such classes with them.

Tiggemann (2001) suggested that the school environment might be an important sociocultural factor in determining young women's attitudes toward their bodies. Keeping in mind the social environment of coed PE for girls and boys, it seems understandable that most of the females in the high social physique anxiety would prefer noncoed physical education classes. According to Scraton (1993) many girls do not want mixed-gender PE because their bodies become the focus of comment, staring, admiration, and/or criticism during adolescence when

young women are physically developing. The physiologically inevitable changes in appearance, often occurring quite rapidly during adolescence, commonly result in body image disturbances, especially in girls (Grogan, 1998; Keel, Fulkerson, & Leon, 1997). Gilligan and her colleagues (Gilligan, Lyons, & Hammer, 1990) emphasized that during this period girls start worrying about their weight and how they look to others, especially boys. This concern may result in negative experiences in coed PE class for girls with high social physique anxiety.

Although this study provides insight into the role of self-presentational concern in the exploration of attitudes toward PE and PE class preferences of Turkish adolescents and also provides some explanation for self-presentational concern of adolescents in different PE classes, there are a number of limitations. First, it should be noted that the present study was conducted in high school PE classes, and was representative only of a restricted sample (9th graders). The attitudes of students toward PE, their level of social physique anxiety, and their preferences for coed or noncoed PE may vary with grade level. Therefore, this study should be repeated with various populations. In order to provide meaningful and comprehensive knowledge of the role of social physique anxiety in determining attitudes and preferences of adolescents, additional research into the effect of age/grade level must also be undertaken. Second, since this study focused only on students in public high schools, it is important to explore whether adolescents' experiences are similar in private schools.

Physical education class environments are critical to the development of girls' and boys' positive and negative feelings and attitudes toward their bodies and physical activity. Physical education teachers should direct their efforts toward the needs and interests of girls who have a high social physique anxiety level in coed PE in order to encourage them to develop a more positive attitude toward their bodies. Additionally, the ongoing challenge will be for physical education teachers to promote changes in the PE class environment which will make PE a more enriching experience.

In conclusion, the findings of the present study suggest that although self-presentational concerns did not differ according to sex composition of PE classes, there is a significant differences in PE class preferences between adolescents in high and low SPA groups and that most of the females in the high social physique anxiety group prefer noncoed physical education classes. It would be important for future studies to explore the relationship between self-presentational concerns and sex composition of PE regarding other moderating variables in PE and sport settings.

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