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1 **ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

2

3 **Social Physique Anxiety and physical activity behaviour of male and female exercisers**

4

5 RUNNING HEAD: SPA and PA behaviour of males and female exercisers

6

7 **KEYWORDS:** Body Composition, Exercise, Fitness, Gender, Health.

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**Abstract**

1  
2 Despite females consistently reporting greater Social Physique Anxiety (SPA), previous  
3 literature has yet to demonstrate whether SPA gender differences are linked to the way males  
4 and females perform physical activity. This study investigated an association between SPA  
5 and physical activity frequency, history of exercise, and physical activity intensity.  
6 Participants were represented by currently active users (N = 33 males; N = 31 females) of an  
7 on-campus university-run gym and completed a background physical activity questionnaire  
8 and the 9-item Social Physique Anxiety Scale. Participants also performed an exercise  
9 session at a self-selected level of exertion, with the intensity of each session measured via  
10 heart rate monitor. SPA was not associated with physical activity frequency, history of  
11 exercise (length of gym membership), or intensity for male and female exercisers. With  
12 respect to male participants, females reported higher SPA and a preference for performing  
13 higher intensity physical activity. Females and males also indicated a preference for  
14 performing aerobic and anaerobic physical activity respectively. Our findings suggest the  
15 experience of SPA does not deter body-conscious individuals from the performance of  
16 regular physical activity. Findings also suggest the discrepancy in male and female SPA is  
17 not linked to differences in the way physical activity is performed.

1 **Introduction**

2 The performance of regular physical activity can be remarkably beneficial to long-term  
3 physiological (Blair & Morris, 2009; Jeon, Lokken, Hu, & Van Dam, 2007; Wilson, Ellison,  
4 & Cable, 2016) and psychological well-being (Kowalski, Crocker, & Kowalski, 2001;  
5 McAuley, Blissmer, Katula, Duncan, & Mihalko, 2000). Nevertheless, a considerable  
6 proportion of the general population commonly report failing to meet basic weekly physical  
7 activity recommendations (Townsend et al., 2012). Social Physique Anxiety (SPA) (Hart,  
8 Leary, & Rejeski, 1989) has previously been identified as a potential barrier to regular  
9 physical activity participation for body conscious individuals (Kowalski et al., 2001;  
10 Treasure, Lox, & Lawton, 1998), and refers to a negative affective response to the perception  
11 that others are unfavourably evaluating aspects of one's physique (*e.g.*, highlighting the  
12 presence of excess body fat, assessing evidence of muscular toning, and the general  
13 assessment of body proportions) (Hart et al., 1989). SPA's origins are deeply rooted in  
14 impression management and self-presentation theory (Leary, 1992), with an individual  
15 striving to present themselves in a socially desirable manner in order to reap perceived  
16 associated social benefits (Benzeval, Green, & Macintyre, 2013; Weiss & Feldman, 2006).  
17 Those with heightened self-presentational concerns may opt to avoid situations where they  
18 believe their ability to promote a desirable social impression may be compromised (Brewer,  
19 Diehl, Cornelius, Joshua, & Van Raalte, 2004). Accordingly, individuals with high SPA may  
20 be deterred from performing regular physical activity as they are apprehensive about  
21 displaying their physique in a physical activity context where it is likely to be scrutinized  
22 (Sabiston, Pila, Pinsonnault-Bilodeau, & Cox, 2014). Females of all ages have consistently  
23 been demonstrated to experience greater SPA compared to similar aged males (Chu,  
24 Bushman, & Woodard, 2008; Kowalski et al., 2001; Treasure et al., 1998). However,  
25 heightened female SPA has yet to be linked to differences in physical activity behaviour (Chu

1 et al., 2008; Lanfranchi, Maïano, Morin, & Therme, 2015).

## 2 ***SPA and physical activity frequency***

3 A clear obstacle when attempting to delineate an association between SPA and physical  
4 activity frequency relates to the potential for similarly high levels of body-image concern to  
5 manifest as contradictory physical activity behaviour (Kowalski et al., 2001; Leary, 1992).  
6 For example, highly body-anxious individuals may perform significantly less physical  
7 activity (than those with low SPA) as they opt to avoid fitness environments due to the  
8 heightened threat of negative interpersonal evaluation (Hart et al., 1989; Sabiston, Sedgwick,  
9 Crocker, Kowalski, & Mack, 2007). In contrast, high SPA individuals may be motivated to  
10 exercise frequently in an attempt to improve the appearance of their physique and thus reduce  
11 the prospect of experiencing future body-related anxiety (Sabiston et al., 2007). The  
12 commonly reported non-significant association between SPA and physical activity frequency  
13 (Chu et al., 2008; Crawford & Eklund, 1994; Lanfranchi et al., 2015) suggests these  
14 influences counterbalance each other in a manner that prevents a directional association  
15 between SPA and physical activity frequency from being suitably discerned. The distinction  
16 between individuals who feel similarly high levels of evaluative threat but choose different  
17 coping mechanisms, withdrawal or adherence, is becoming an increasingly important variable  
18 in identifying the influence of SPA on physical activity behaviour (Focht & Hausenblas,  
19 2004). As is the identification of factors that may influence this decision (Raedeke, Focht, &  
20 Scales, 2007).

21 Previous research has primarily investigated SPA in relation to variations in short-  
22 term (*i.e.*, weekly) physical activity frequency (see Chu et al., 2008; Crawford & Eklund,  
23 1994; Lanfranchi et al., 2015). In respect of these studies' non-significant findings, it may  
24 suggest operationalizing exercise frequency to represent such a short period of time may

1 provide a poor representation of an individual's true exercise behaviour. Whilst individuals  
2 with high SPA may not always appear to engage in more or less frequent physical activity on  
3 a weekly basis, they may be less likely to adhere to a consistent exercise programme over a  
4 prolonged period of time (Mülazimoğlu-Balli, Koca, & Aşçi, 2010). For example,  
5 Mülazimoğlu-Balli et al. (2010) reported participants presenting with the lowest SPA also  
6 reported a greater volume of weekly physical activity and had been performing regular  
7 physical activity for a considerably longer period of time than those with higher SPA. It  
8 should also be considered physical activity frequency may remain constant, whilst individual  
9 physical activity sessions can fluctuate considerably in terms of duration and intensity (Cox,  
10 Gorely, Puddey, Burke, & Beilin, 2003). Individuals reporting similar physical activity  
11 frequency but of longer duration and higher exercise intensity may be expected to reap  
12 greater physiological benefits from their physical activity performances, which may have  
13 important consequences for SPA. To date, there has been a surprising lack of investigation  
14 into a potential association between SPA and physical activity intensity. Ekkekakis' (2003)  
15 dual-mode theory of physiological exertion suggests an individual's ability to seek and form  
16 negative cognitive appraisals becomes markedly reduced during the performance of vigorous  
17 intensity physical activity. In this regard, it may be possible those with high SPA are opting  
18 to perform physical activity in a more physically intense manner in an attempt to combat their  
19 heightened self-presentational concerns during exercise.

## 20 *The present study*

21 The reported lack of association between SPA and weekly exercise frequency (Chu et al.,  
22 2008; Crawford & Eklund, 1994; Lanfranchi et al., 2015), may indicate those with SPA are  
23 finding ways to perform regular physical activity regardless of their heightened self-  
24 presentational concern (Kowalski et al., 2001). However, there has been a lack of empirical

1 investigation whether regularly physically active individuals differ in the way they perform  
2 physical activity in relation to their SPA. It is possible body-conscious exercisers may modify  
3 their physical activity behaviour in terms of frequency, duration, and intensity in a manner  
4 conducive to their experience of SPA. The identification of training patterns commonly  
5 employed by regularly physically active individuals with high SPA may allow the provision  
6 of guidelines designed to make the performance of physical activity less daunting for body  
7 conscious individuals (Focht & Hausenblas, 2004; Raedeke et al., 2007; Sabiston et al.,  
8 2007).

9         This study investigated the relationship between SPA and physical activity behaviour  
10 in regularly active male and female exercisers. The primary aim was to investigate whether  
11 higher SPA was associated with the adoption of particular training methods (*e.g.*, higher or  
12 lower frequency, duration, or intensity of physical activity sessions) compared to low SPA  
13 exercisers. The decision to compare physical activity behaviours of male and female  
14 exercisers may also provide further understanding regarding the commonly reported SPA  
15 discrepancy between males and females (Chu et al., 2008; Greenleaf, McGreer, & Parham,  
16 2006; Lanfranchi et al., 2015). A deliberate attempt was made to preserve high ecological  
17 validity by avoiding extraneous experimental manipulation. A limitation of previous SPA  
18 literature has been the inclination for researchers to manipulate the research environment in  
19 order to maximise the experience of body-related anxiety. For example, participants have  
20 previously been required to wear standardized forms of attire (Focht & Hausenblas, 2004),  
21 exercise in specific locations within the fitness environment (*e.g.*, directly in front of a full  
22 length mirror) (Focht & Hausenblas, 2004), and perform designated forms of physical  
23 activity (Ekkekakis, Lind, & Vazou, 2010). While this research has been valuable in  
24 identifying specific sources of anxiety-inducing stimuli within the physical activity

1 environment (Focht & Hausenblas, 2004), it is likely a poor reflection of how regular  
2 exercisers navigate the fitness environment on a day-to-day basis.

3 Similarly, we utilised HR monitors to measure physical activity intensity to limit the  
4 possibility for participant response bias to confound a potential relationship between SPA and  
5 physical activity intensity. For example, during Appleton's (2013) investigation into the  
6 effectiveness of a short-term exercise intervention to reduce SPA, participants were instructed  
7 to perform moderate intensity physical activity using the definition of "an exercise intensity  
8 capable of resulting in shortness of breath and perspiration" (Appleton, 2013, p.112). Such  
9 an approach to operationalizing physical activity was deemed unsuitable for the current study  
10 as it is susceptible to subjectivity (*e.g.*, participants may fail to correctly classify the intensity  
11 of their performed activity as moderate rather than strenuous, or vice versa), and invites the  
12 possibility for response bias (*e.g.*, participants may willingly under, or overestimate true  
13 exertion levels).

14 This study will test the hypotheses (H) that there will be a significant association  
15 between SPA and physical activity behaviour in terms of frequency (H1), gym membership  
16 length (H2), and intensity of physical activity (H3), and that there will be a significant  
17 difference in the physical activity behaviours reported by male and female exercisers (H4).  
18 Additionally, consistent with previous literature we expect a significant difference in SPA  
19 according to gender (H5).

20



1 **Method**

2 ***Participants***

3 Data collection took place in a north of England University-run gym. There were 64  
4 participants, ranging in age from 18-53 years, with a mean (*SD*) age of 25.2 years (7.8 years).  
5 There were similar numbers of males [ $n = 33$ , mean age 27.2 years (9.2 years) and females [ $n$   
6 = 31, mean age 23.0 years (5.2 years)]; just under half were students (students  $n = 29$ ; 45.3%  
7 vs. non-students  $n = 35$ , 54.7%). Participants were predominantly Caucasian ( $n = 58$ , 90.6%)  
8 and used the gym approximately three times per week with male participants reporting using  
9 the gym for significantly longer than the female participants at time of data collection. Table  
10 1. displays participant physical activity behaviour [Table 1 near here].

11 ***Measures***

12 ***Social Physique Anxiety Scale (SPAS)***

13 The 9-item Social Physique Anxiety Scale (SPAS) was administered to measure the degree of  
14 anxiety an individual experiences as a result of perceived negative interpersonal evaluation of  
15 their physique (Martin, Rejeski, Leary, McAuley, & Bane, 1997). Participants were presented  
16 with a series of 9 statements and asked to respond according to how well that statement fitted  
17 their interpersonal body-image beliefs. For example, participants were presented with the  
18 statements ‘It would make me uncomfortable to know others were evaluating my physique or  
19 figure’, and, ‘In the presence of others, I feel apprehensive about my physique or figure’.  
20 Participants respond via a 5-point Likert scale with possible answers ranging from 1 (*not at*  
21 *all characteristic of me*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic of me*). Two of the items represent  
22 positively worded body-image statements and require reverse scoring (Items 5: ‘I am  
23 comfortable with how fit my body appears to others.’ and 8: ‘I usually feel relaxed when it’s

1 obvious that others are looking at my physique or figure’). Individual item scores are totalled  
2 to provide a total score for social physique anxiety; Scores can range from 9 to 45, with a  
3 higher score indicating greater social physique anxiety. Adequate internal consistency and  
4 convergent and divergent validity have previously been demonstrated using the 9-item SPA  
5 (Hausenblas & Martin, 2000; Martin et al., 1997), with Cronbach’s alpha for the 9-item  
6 SPAS in the current study reporting similarly high internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ).

### 7 *Demographics*

8 Participants were asked to report their age, gender, employment status and ethnicity.  
9 Participants were also asked to report how long they had been an active gym member, and  
10 how many times they use the gym in a typical week in order to build a profile of each  
11 participant’s exerciser status.

### 12 *Heart rate monitors*

13 The Polar FT2 heart rate monitor is comprised of a synchronised chest strap and wrist watch  
14 component. The monitor displays the wearer’s current heart rate as beats per minute (BPM)  
15 and provides information regarding the duration, average heart rate and maximum heart rate  
16 achieved as a result of each physical activity session. Each participant’s age-predicted  
17 maximal heart rate (max HR) was calculated using the following formula:

$$18 \quad (220 - \text{age} = \text{max HR})$$

19 Maximal heart rate was then divided by the average beats per minute (avg BPM) of each  
20 participants’ session and multiplied by 100 to give percentage of maximal heart rate, *e.g.*:

$$21 \quad 220 - \text{age} (21) = 199 \text{ max HR}; (\text{avg BPM} (140) / \text{max HR} (199)) = 0.70 \times 100 = 70\% \text{ average} \\ 22 \quad \text{exercise intensity.}$$

1 Percentages of age-predicted maximal heart rate were used to classify physical activity  
2 intensity and allow accurate comparisons of physical activity intensity in a sample that  
3 included participants of varying age. In consideration of the lack of a recognised  
4 classification system to distinguish between exercise intensity boundaries (Scully, 1998),  
5 frequency distributions were performed on the current data to differentiate between low,  
6 moderate, and vigorous intensity exercisers. Exercise intensity in the current study was  
7 operationalized as avg HR  $\leq$ 64.9% representing low intensity, 65% - 79.9% representing  
8 moderate intensity, and  $\geq$ 80% as representing vigorous intensity physical activity.

### 9 ***Procedure***

10 The current study employed a correlational design to investigate potential relationships  
11 between SPA and physical activity behaviour in male and female participants in a naturalistic  
12 fitness environment. Ethical approval was granted by the School Research Ethics Panel  
13 (SREP) at the University of Huddersfield prior to data collection. Recruitment posters were  
14 positioned in and around the gym informing participants that data collection would be taking  
15 place on selected dates. The study was also advertised via announcements posted on the  
16 gym's corresponding social media outlets (*e.g.*, Facebook, Twitter). Data were collected  
17 during 16 days (2 days per week) over an 8-week period (March - May 2016), with the first  
18 researcher (RMP) stationed near the entrance where members had to pass through in order to  
19 gain access to fitness equipment. Convenience sampling was used to recruit any individual  
20 over the age of 18 years that used the gym during times of data collection. Participation was  
21 not dependent on gender, ethnicity, or body composition and was open to both students and  
22 non-students. Individuals were approached and invited to participate by the researcher before  
23 the onset of their exercise regime. Subsequent volunteers were presented with a participant  
24 information sheet and asked to provide written consent. Participants were then fitted with a

1 Polar FT2 heart rate monitor and instructed to perform their session of physical activity as  
2 they were originally intending upon entering the gym before opting to take part in the study.  
3 The fitness environment was representative of a typical gym in its provision of a varied  
4 selection of free weights, and weight and cardio machine apparatus, with participants  
5 permitted to use any apparatus at their disposal and encouraged to perform physical activity  
6 at their preferred level of exertion. After successful completion of their exercise session,  
7 participants returned the HR monitor equipment and were fully debriefed with regards to the  
8 study's aims. The debrief sheet contained contact information for the research team as well as  
9 details of the University's counselling service should they have any concerns about their  
10 participation. Readings for each participant's exercise duration and average HR readings  
11 were taken from the monitors before being sanitised ready for next participant use.

## 12 *Data analysis*

13 Sample size calculations indicated an optimal sample of 64 participants for medium effect  
14 size at power = 0.80 for  $\alpha = 0.05$  to investigate potential relationships between SPA and  
15 physical activity behaviour (Cohen, 1992). Participant data from the SPAS and demographic  
16 questionnaire were entered into the statistical package SPSS (Version 22; IBM Corp, 2013),  
17 with preliminary checks for accuracy and data entry error indicating no mistakes.

18 Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests of normality indicated data were normally distributed enabling  
19 the use of parametric testing to investigate gender invariance in SPA and the relationship  
20 between SPA and PA behaviour ( $KS = 0.94, P = > 0.20$ ). Data were analysed using a  
21 combination of independent sample t-test and Pearsons correlations, with Chi-square tests for  
22 independence used to compare categorical data in lieu of appropriate parametric alternatives.

23

## 1 **Results**

2 Mean (*SD*) SPAS for the total sample was 24.35 (9.15), with scores ranging between 9.00  
3 and 41.00.

### 4 ***Correlates of SPA and PA behaviour***

5 Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to investigate the relationship between SPA  
6 and physical activity behaviour. There was no relationship between SPA and weekly physical  
7 activity frequency for the whole sample ( $r = -.0114, P = 0.26$ ), for females ( $r = 0.023, P =$   
8  $0.90$ ) or for males ( $r = -0.046, P = 0.80$ ); no relationship with length of gym membership ( $r =$   
9  $-0.193, P = 0.13$ , females  $r = 0.145, P = 0.44$ , males  $r = 0.084, P = 0.64$ ); and no relationship  
10 with intensity of physical activity ( $r = 0.103, P = 0.42$ , females  $r = -0.070, P = 0.71$ , males  $r$   
11  $= -0.186, P = 0.30$ ).

### 12 ***Gender differences in PA behaviour***

13 Table 2 shows differences in male and female participant gym use [Table 2 near here].  
14 Type of workout was significantly different by gender, with men preferring anaerobic and  
15 women preferring aerobic workouts ( $X^2 (2, n = 64) = 19.897, P < 0.001, Cramer's V = 0.59$ ).  
16 Analyses revealed no significant association between gender and weekly physical activity  
17 frequency  $X^2 (1, n = 64) = 3.00, P = 0.08, phi = -0.25$ , or gym membership length  $X^2 (1, n =$   
18  $64) = 1.64, P = 0.20, phi = -0.19$ . There was a significant association between gender and  
19 physical activity intensity, with female participants reporting significantly higher HR  
20 responses,  $X^2 (2, n = 64) = 10.200, P = 0.006, Cramer's V = 0.40$ .

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1 ***Gender differences in SPA***

2 Table 3 displays SPA differences by gender [Table 3 near here].

3 Males reported significantly lower SPA compared with females [( $M = 18.76$ ,  $SD = 5.60$  vs.  $M$   
4  $= 30.32$ ,  $SD = 8.43$ ),  $t(52) = -6.423$ ,  $P < 0.001$ , two tailed]. The magnitude of the difference  
5 in the means (mean difference =  $-11.57$ , 95%  $CI$ :  $-15.18$  to  $-7.95$ ) was considered moderate  
6 ( $\eta^2 = 0.74$ ) in accordance with guidelines proposed by Cohen (1992) for  
7 interpreting effect sizes.

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1 **Discussion**

2           The aim of this study was to explore whether variations in key principles of physical  
3 activity behaviour (*i.e.*, physical activity frequency, length of gym membership, and intensity  
4 of physical activity) were linked to feelings of SPA in male and female exercisers. Previous  
5 literature has predominantly focussed exclusively on identifying a relationship between SPA  
6 and physical activity frequency, often failing to associate SPA with either frequent or  
7 infrequent physical activity performance (Chu et al., 2008; Crawford & Eklund, 1994;  
8 Lanfranchi et al., 2015). Similarly, the current study revealed no relationship between SPA  
9 and physical activity frequency, adding further support to Kowalski et al's. (2001) contention  
10 that individuals with high body-related anxiety are not definitively deterred from the  
11 performance of regular physical activity.

12           A strength of the current study related to the consideration of long-term adherence  
13 (gym membership length) and physical activity intensity, allowing a more in-depth  
14 investigation into links between physical activity performance and SPA. However, the  
15 current study failed to identify a significant association between SPA and gym membership  
16 length, as participants reported similar SPA whether they had been performing regular  
17 physical activity for a sustained period of time (*i.e.*, over 12 months), or not. There was also  
18 no relationship between SPA and physical activity intensity, suggesting those with  
19 heightened self-presentational concerns do not perform physical activity more or less  
20 strenuously. In consideration of Ekkekakis' (2003) dual-mode theory of exertion, the current  
21 study proposed body-conscious individuals may perform physical activity at higher intensity  
22 in an attempt to combat the experience of SPA. However, the lack of relationship suggests  
23 regular exercisers do not purposefully modify their behaviour in this regard. Subsequent  
24 analyses indicated the lack of association between SPA and physical activity behaviour to be  
25 consistent among both males and females, with no identified differences between the physical

1 activity performances of males or females with high SPA compared to their low-SPA  
2 counterparts.

3 Females reported significantly higher SPA than males, providing further support for the  
4 consistent SPA gender gap prevalent throughout the literature (Mack, Strong, Kowalski, &  
5 Crocker, 2007; Melbye, Tenenbaum, & Eklund, 2007). However, whilst this SPA gender  
6 imbalance has led to an abundance of research conducted using female-only samples, the  
7 current study attempted to illuminate this discrepancy by investigating potential differences  
8 in the way males and females perform physical activity. However, males and females did not  
9 differ significantly in terms of physical activity frequency or gym membership length. Males  
10 and females did differ significantly in regards to physical activity intensity and the type of  
11 physical activity performed. Females performed at a higher intensity and were significantly  
12 more likely to perform an aerobic form of physical activity (*i.e.*, stationary cycling, treadmill  
13 use), whereas males performed anaerobic physical activity at lower levels of physiological  
14 exertion (*i.e.*, weightlifting/resistance training). The strong inclination (*i.e.*, large effect size  
15 separating males and females) for males to favour anaerobic and females to favour aerobic  
16 activity in the current study may provide support for the prominence of culturally perpetuated  
17 physique goals to influence physical activity behaviour (McCreary & Sasse, 2000). Females  
18 and males opting to perform their culture-salient forms of physical activity is likely a  
19 reflection of the emphasis for minimizing body fat for females and the pursuit of enhanced  
20 muscular mass, muscle definition and achieving a low body fat percentage for males (Brunet  
21 & Sabiston, 2009; Corson & Andersen, 2002; McCreary & Sasse, 2000).

22 Accordingly, the significant gender difference in physical activity preferences  
23 suggests the finding for females to perform physical activity at a significantly higher intensity  
24 must be interpreted with caution. For example, it may be logical to assume those performing  
25 anaerobic activity (*i.e.*, weightlifting) to report lower average heart-rate responses due to the



1 incorporation of regular rest periods (to allow adequate recovery time in-between sets), and  
2 the flexibility to perform their session of physical activity whilst isolating specific body parts.  
3 In contrast, those performing aerobic activity may ultimately perform a more physiologically  
4 demanding workout (*i.e.*, utilising the full body) in an uninterrupted manner (*i.e.*, without  
5 regular rest periods). Participants in the current study were given free-rein over their choice  
6 of exercise apparatus in a bid to maintain high ecological validity. Whilst instructing male  
7 and females to have performed physical activity using the same standardised apparatus may  
8 have allowed a more comprehensive comparison between male and female exercisers  
9 preferred levels of exertion, it likely would not have provided an accurate representation of  
10 the exercises each gender typically opts to perform (as highlighted by our findings).  
11 Nevertheless, it must be considered the significance reported here may simply reflect  
12 discrepancy between male and female exercise preferences rather than true gender  
13 differences in the performance of physical activity intensity. Gender differences among SPA  
14 literature are commonly ascribed to a stronger emphasis for females to adhere to the  
15 corresponding cultural norms for body attractiveness (Greenleaf et al., 2006), with heightened  
16 female SPA interpreted to represent a psychological manifestation of the enhanced  
17 externalised pressure. In this regard, the finding for females to report significantly higher  
18 heart rate even before their intended physical activity session had begun suggests heightened  
19 SPA may also manifest physiologically in the guise of an elevated HR.

20 A limitation of the present study relates to the failure to recognise other forms of physical  
21 activity participants may have performed outside of the gym. The decision to isolate exercise  
22 frequency pertaining to participant gym use was made as individuals with existing self-  
23 presentational concerns typically self-select 'fitness-type' behaviours as their preferred form  
24 of physical activity (Frederick, Morrison, & Manning, 1996). Accordingly, variation in the  
25 frequency of which individuals perform such activity is likely indicative of their desire to

1 modify certain aspects of their body and may be considered directly analogous to their sense  
2 of body-satisfaction and feelings of SPA (Murnen & Don, 2012). Nevertheless, it must be  
3 considered the sole focus on gym-going exercise frequency may have served to obfuscate the  
4 relationship between SPA and physical activity frequency.

5 A further limitation relates to the utilisation of heart rate monitors to assess physical  
6 activity intensity. HR monitors were selected in an attempt to promote standardisation in the  
7 assessment of participant physical activity intensity (Yuen et al., 2013). This decision was  
8 also made as HR monitors were reasoned to be less invasive than the metabolic analysis  
9 systems used to collect other pertinent physiological data (*e.g.*, Oxygen uptake, Carbon  
10 Dioxide production) (Sylvia, Bernstein, Hubbard, Keating, & Anderson, 2014). Heart rate  
11 responses in the current study are likely to reflect a combination of both physical activity-  
12 induced, and anxiety/affect-induced, physiological activation (Ekkekakis, Hall, &  
13 Petruzzello, 1999). Accordingly, the reported discrepancy between male and female physical  
14 activity intensity may be a consequence of heightened female SPA manifesting as heightened  
15 physiological activation, rather than reflecting a true inclination for females to favour the  
16 performance of more strenuous physical activity.

## 17 **Conclusion**

18 While considerable gender differences remain a prominent feature of SPA and may influence  
19 the type of physical activity males and females perform, our findings suggest discrepant  
20 experiences of SPA are unrelated to differences in the performance of physical activity.  
21 However, the absence of a relationship between SPA and PA behaviour should not be  
22 interpreted to suggest there are no differences between high and low SPA exercisers in a  
23 physical activity context. High inter-individual variability may remain in terms of how  
24 regular exercisers with body image concerns interact and present themselves within an

1 exercise environment (Brewer et al., 2004). Given the presence of mirrors and the wearing of  
2 form-fitting attire has been associated with enhanced SPA during physical activity (Crawford  
3 & Eklund, 1994; Focht & Hausenblas, 2004; Raedeke et al., 2007), it is recommended those  
4 with high self-presentational concerns take this information into consideration before entering  
5 the exercise environment. With the current study providing the latest evidence for females to  
6 be more prone to negative experiences of SPA, these recommendations may be particularly  
7 salient for female exercisers. Future research should endeavour to maintain ecological  
8 validity when attempting to identify behavioural strategies regular exercisers use to minimise  
9 their experiences of SPA. Further investigation is needed to develop a better understanding of  
10 the factors that influence body-conscious individual's decision to adopt or avoid the  
11 performance of regular physical activity.

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13 ***Disclosure Statement***

14 No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

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SPA and PA behaviour of males and female exercisers

1 Table 1. Mean (*SD*) weekly gym use, length of physical activity session, and number of  
 2 months as an active gym member, for the whole sample and by gender.

	Total		Males		Females	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Weekly gym use (days/week)	2.79	1.46	3.09	1.53	2.48	1.34
Duration (mins/session)	46.81	14.22	48.60	13.26	44.92	15.17
Gym member (months active)	29.39	46.07	43.59	59.21	14.27	16.14

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SPA and PA behaviour of males and female exercisers

1 Table 2. A comparison of the number (n) and percent (%) of males and females by workout  
 2 type, weekly physical activity, gym membership length, and physical activity intensity.

	Males		Females		$X^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>	Effect size
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%				
Type of workout								
Anaerobic	18	86	3	14	19.897	2, 64	<0.001	0.59†
Aerobic	7	23	23	77				
Mixed	8	62	5	39				
Weekly PA frequency								
≤ 2 times	10	37	17	63	3.00	1, 64	0.08	-0.25‡
> 2 times	23	62	14	38				
Gym membership length								
≤ 12 months	15	43	20	57	1.64	1, 64	0.20	-0.19‡
> 12 months	18	62	11	38				
PA intensity								
Low	13	87	2	13	10.200	2, 64	0.006	0.40†
Moderate	11	37	19	63				
Vigorous	9	47	10	53				

3 *Note:* PA = physical activity,  $X^2$  = Chi-square, *df* = degrees of freedom and number of  
 4 participants, effect size † = *Cramer's V* and ‡ = *phi*.

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SPA and PA behaviour of males and female exercisers

1 Table 3. Differences in SPA by gender

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	Male		Female		<i>P</i>	Effect Size
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>		
SPA	18.76	5.60	30.32	8.43	<0.001	0.74

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