

# PSYCHOLOGICAL PREDICTORS OF SELF-PRESENTATION CONCERNS IN SPORT

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## Abstract

This study examined predictors of self-presentation concerns in sport. Two hundred and twenty eight competitive athletes (171 men and 117 women) completed measures of self-presentation concerns, social physique anxiety (SPA), self-handicapping (SH), athletic identity (AI), and perfectionism. SPA and SH were consistent predictors across all but one self-presentation dimension in females. Gender differences were evident in the predictors of different dimensions of self-presentation concern. Parental criticism (a perfectionism dimension) was found to be a predictor in males, whereas concern over making mistakes (a perfectionism dimension) and athletic identity were found to be predictors of females' self-presentation concerns. Apart from AI, all relationships were positive. Addressing SPA and SH may help athletes to deal with their competitive self-presentation concerns.

**Key words:** impression management, social physique anxiety, perfectionism, self-handicapping, athletic identity

## PREDITORES PSICOLÓGICOS REFERENTES À AUTO-APRESENTAÇÃO NO ESPORTE

### Resumo

Este estudo examina os preditores psicológicos da auto-apresentação no esporte. Duzentos e vinte e oito atletas competidores (171 homens e 117 mulheres) completaram questionários referentes à auto-apresentação, ansiedade sócio-física (ASF), auto-incapacidade (AI), identidade atlética (IA), e perfeccionismo. ASF e AI são preditores consistentes para todos sujeitos, mas uma dimensão de auto-apresentação marcante entre o gênero feminino. Diferenças de gênero são evidentes ao se considerar diferenças dimensionais entre os preditores de auto-apresentação. Criticismo parental (uma dimensão do perfeccionismo) foi registrado como um preditor para o gênero masculino, enquanto que sobrepujar erros (uma dimensão do perfeccionismo) e identidade atlética foram registrados como preditores significativos de auto-apresentação entre o gênero feminino. A parte da IA, todas as outras

relações foram positivas. Se direcionadas ASF e AI podem ajudar atletas a melhor lidar com sua auto-apresentação competitiva no esporte.

**Palavras-chave:** gerência da impressão pessoal, ansiedade sócio-física, perfeccionismo, auto-incapacidade, identidade atlética

## **PREDICTORES PSICOLÓGICOS EN RELACIÓN CON LA AUTO-PRESENTACIÓN EN EL DEPORTE**

### **Resumen**

Este estudio analiza los predictores psicológico de auto-presentación en el deporte. Doscientos veinte y ocho competidores atletas (171 hombres y 117 mujeres) completaron cuestionarios acerca de la libre presentación, la ansiedad social y físico (ASF), la auto invalidez (LI), la identidad de Atletismo (IA), y perfeccionismo. ASF y AI son consistentes predictores para todos los temas, sino una dimensión de la auto-presentación marcada entre las mujeres. De las diferencias de género son evidentes al considerar las diferencias entre lãs dimensiones predictores de auto-presentación. Criticismo parental (una dimensión de lo perfeccionismo) se registró como predictor para el Género Masculino, mientras que los pujar sobre errores (una dimension del perfeccionismo) y identidad atlética como preditores se registraron importantes de la auto-presentación entre el género femenino. La parte de la IA, todas las demás relaciones son positivas. Si dirigida ASF y la IA pueden ayudar a los atletas a hacer frente mejor a su auto-presentación en el deporte competitivo.

**Palabras clave:** gestión de la impresión personal, la ansiedad social y física, perfeccionismo, la libre discapacidad, la identidad de atletismo

### **Introduction**

Self-presentation refers to the conscious and non-conscious processes individuals employ to monitor and manage how they are perceived by those around them (Schlenker, 1980). Leary (1992) made the proposal that in both training and competition athletes are faced with numerous self-presentational demands and opportunities. He suggested that self-presentation is central to four aspects of competitive sport participation: participation motivation, choice of activity and context, quality of performance, and affective responses. These initial proposals have stimulated interest in self-presentation issues in competitive sport.

Much of this research has focused on the role of self-presentation in athletes' experiences of stress and anxiety. A great deal of research attention has been directed towards social physique anxiety in athletes. This is a form of social anxiety that derives from concerns about the potential or actual evaluation of one's physique by others (Hart, Leary, & Rejeski, 1989). Studies with sports participants have identified that social physique anxiety is associated with a number of body image related constructs. This research has demonstrated that social physique anxiety and physical self-presentation confidence are associated with trait competition anxiety, that social physique anxiety is associated with disturbed eating attitudes and, is predicted by self-esteem, body-esteem, weight concern, and public body consciousness (Haase & Prapavessis, 2001; Martin, Engels, Wirth, & Smith, 1991; Martin & Mack, 1996).

The links between self-presentation and competitive stress and anxiety have also been examined, albeit to a lesser extent. Qualitative research by James and Collins (1997) revealed that over two thirds of athletes' competitive stressors were underpinned by concerns about self-presentation. Quantitative research has also identified that competitive trait anxiety is associated not only with physique-related self-presentation concerns (Martin & Mack, 1996), but also with competitive self-presentation concerns (Hudson & Williams, 2001; Wilson & Eklund, 1998).

Self-handicapping is another psychological construct that has been explored in relation to its self-presentational function. Self-handicapping strategies in sport might include claiming an injury or illness, partying the night before a competition, or reducing training input in the run up to a competition. Indeed, Rhodewalt, Saltzman, and Wittmer (1984) demonstrated that swimmers and golfers high in the trait of self-handicapping did reduce the amount of training they completed prior to an important competition. Although the motivation for self-handicapping was initially felt to center on personal self-esteem maintenance (Jones & Berglas, 1978), other authors have suggested that self-handicapping also serves an impression management (or self-presentation) function (e.g., Kolditz & Arkin, 1982; Leary, 1992). In a recent review of the self-presentational role of self-handicapping in sport, Prapavessis, Grove, and Eklund (2004) discussed both the potential impression management benefits and costs of self-handicapping strategies. Although self-handicapping may allow the augmentation of ability following success and the discounting of ability following failure it is equally possible that reductions in perceived competence and assumptions of character flaws may be experienced (Prapavessis et al., 2004).

Nevertheless, research has identified significant correlations between impression management concerns and self-handicapping tendency in athletes (Hudson, Williams, & Stacey, 1998). The self-presentational implications of self-handicapping have also been shown by associations between high levels of self-handicapping and low levels of perceived team cohesion (Carron, Prapavessis, & Grove, 1994) and an environment that emphasised competition and other-referenced standards (Thill & Cury, 2000). The former association has been interpreted to indicate that athletes low in perceived team cohesion and high in self-handicapping are likely to shift blame for potential failure from themselves to other team members and the latter, that self-handicapping will protect the individual against the negative self-presentational implications of failure in a competitive other-referenced climate (Prapavessis et al., 2004).

A recent study by Grove, Fish, and Eklund (2004) extended this line of research to examine the self-presentational processes involved in changes in athletic identity following team selection or non-selection. Brewer, Van Raalte, and Linder (1993) define athletic identity as the extent to which an individual identifies with their role as an athlete. Each individual's sense of self is multifaceted (e.g., Harter, 1990) and for some individuals a strong athletic identity is an integral and influential dimension of this self-concept. An individual with a strong athletic identity apportions high importance to their sport or exercise involvement and is likely to interpret events such as high work commitments in the context of this involvement (Brewer et al., 1993). Of relevance to self-presentation, an athletic identity may be strongly influenced by significant others (Heyman, 1987) and therefore is a social role (Pearlin, 1983) that offers opportunities to self-present as a fit and athletic individual (Grove & Dodder, 1982).

Grove et al. (2004) found that changes in athletic identity occurred only for players who were not selected for the team. The decreases seen in these athletes' athletic identity provided evidence of a self-protection mechanism but the absence of increases in the athletic identity of athletes who were selected for the team did not provide support for the use of self-enhancement processes. As the authors note however, their data did not allow them to determine if the decreases in athletic identity were linked to concerns about maintaining one's private identity or to self-presentational concerns about maintaining one's public identity.

The body of evidence in support of Leary's intuitively compelling argument is therefore increasing but has concentrated mainly on the relationship between self-presentation,

anxiety and self-handicapping in sport. Little is currently known about other psychological correlates or predictors of self-presentation concerns in sport.

Recent research has identified the relevance of perfectionism within competitive sport. Associations have been revealed between perfectionism and goal orientations, social physique anxiety, self-esteem, cognitive anxiety, self confidence, and disturbed eating attitudes (Dunn, Causgrove Dunn, & Syrotuik, 2002; Haase, Prapavessis, & Owens, 2002; Koivula, Hassmén, & Fallby, 2002). According to Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenblate (1990) although perfectionism has proved difficult to define, a number of central characteristics can be identified: setting excessively high personal standards (including concerns over mistakes and doubts about the quality of one's performance), the perception that parental expectations and evaluation are beyond one's reach and achieving them determines parental love and acceptance, and an over-emphasis on precision, order, and organization. Based on findings from a series of studies Frost et al. (1990) have highlighted the need to consider perfectionism as a multidimensional construct and that, in contrast to the remaining dimensions, personal standards and organization can be seen as positive aspects of perfectionism. Other authors have also proposed a socially prescribed dimension to perfectionism that incorporates a perceived need to achieve standards and expectations defined by significant others (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Thus, according to Hewitt and Flett (1991), socially prescribed perfectionism increases the individual's fear of negative evaluation and the avoidance of others' disapproval. The two parental dimensions of Frost et al.'s (1990) model of perfectionism are both theoretically and empirically linked with socially prescribed perfectionism. Given this social dimension of perfectionism and these authors' findings that socially prescribed perfectionism correlates highly with social anxiety, it is likely that high levels of perfectionism, particularly socially prescribed dimensions related to parental expectations and criticism, will predict self-presentation concern.

The aim of this study was to examine potential relationships between self-presentation concerns and the following psychological variables: social physique anxiety, self-handicapping, athletic identity, and perfectionism. These constructs were selected on the basis of theoretical contention and previous research findings in both sport and non-sporting contexts. It was hypothesized that all variables of interest would demonstrate positive relationships with competitive self-presentation concerns.

## Method

### *Participants*

The convenience sample used comprised 288 competitive sports participants including 117 females and 171 males. The participants' mean age was 21.03 years ( $SD = 3.65$ ) and their average length of competitive experience was 10.18 years ( $SD = 4.47$  years). They competed in a wide range of sports including both individual ( $N = 85$ ) and team ( $N = 203$ ) sports. Participants competed in a wide range of 39 different sports, including mainstream participation sports such as soccer and athletics and less mainstream sports such as kickboxing and tenpin bowling. The participants also competed across a wide range of levels, although some did not provide this information: international/professional (7%), semi-professional/national (16%), county/regional representative (15%), collegiate (16%), amateur club (11%), and recreational (27%).

### *Measures*

All measures tap into trait based constructs rather than situation specific responses.

*Self Presentation Concern.* The Self Presentation in Sport Questionnaire (SPSQ; Wilson & Eklund, 1998) measures four dimensions of self presentation concern: concern about physical appearance (SPCAPP; 6 items), concern about appearing athletically untalented (SPCATH; 7 items), concern about performance/composure inadequacies (SPCPERF; 10 items), and concern about appearing fatigued/lacking energy (SPCFAT; 10 items). Respondents score each of the 33 items using 5-point Likert-type scales anchored by 1 = never and 5 = always. Wilson and Eklund (1998) supported the factorial validity and internal consistency of the SPSQ subscales with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .90 to .93.

*Social Physique Anxiety (SPA).* The original Social Physique Anxiety Scale, developed by Hart et al. (1989), comprises 12 items. However, recent research by Martin, Rejeski, Leary, McAuley, and Bain (1997) identified that SPA was more appropriately measured by the removal of 3 items from this original scale to produce a 9-item unidimensional measure. In line with the subsequent confirmation of this 9-item model by Motl and Conroy (2000) and its use in recent research (e.g., Haase et al., 2002), the current study employed the 9-item version of the SPA Scale. The scale employs a 5-point Likert-type scale with the anchors 1 = not at all and 5 = extremely. The factorial and construct validity of this 9-item version have been demonstrated by Motl and Conroy (2000)

and its internal consistency has been demonstrated by Haase et al. (2002) with a Cronbach's alpha of .87.

*Athletic Identity (AI).* The Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS; Brewer et al., 1993) was used to measure athletic identity. This 10-item unidimensional measure employs a 7-point Likert-type response scale anchored by 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. Brewer et al. (1993) have provided evidence of the factorial and construct validity of the AIMS, and supported its internal consistency ( $\alpha = .93$ ) and temporal stability ( $r = .89$ ).

*Self-Handicapping (SH).* Self-handicapping was measured by the short form of the Self-Handicapping Scale developed by Strube (1986). This is a 10-item unidimensional measure that employs a 6-point Likert-type response scale with the anchors 1 = disagree very much and 6 = agree very much. Strube (1986) has demonstrated the scale's factorial and construct validity and adequate internal consistency ( $\alpha = .70$  and  $.66$  for 2 separate samples).

*Perfectionism.* Frost et al. (1990) developed the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) to account for the multidimensional nature of this construct. The MPS comprises 35 items assessing 6 dimensions of perfectionism: excessive concern over making mistakes (CM; 9 items), high personal standards (PS; 7 items), perception of high parental expectations (PE; 5 items), perceptions of high parental criticism (PC; 4 items), doubts about the quality of one's actions (DA; 4 items), and a preference for order and organization (O; 6 items). Respondents use a 5-point Likert type response scale anchored by 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Frost et al. (1990) provided evidence of the factorial validity and internal consistency of the MPS with alpha coefficients for the different dimensions ranging from .77 to .94 in two independent samples. Preliminary data identified the scale's construct validity as acceptable and the need to consider perfectionism as a multidimensional construct. Frost et al. (1990) have also suggested that the PS and O subscales/dimensions represent more positive aspects of perfectionism, particularly in relation to task planning and completion, whilst the CM, PE, PC and DA subscales/dimensions represent more negative aspects of perfectionism.

### *Procedures*

The study was approved by the University Ethics Committee and all participants provided their consent to take part in the study with the assurance that their individual results would remain confidential to the researchers. The study measures were administered and completed in group settings outside the participants' normal training and competition

environments. The first author or an experienced colleague was present to deal with queries. Following completion of the measures, all participants were debriefed as to their purpose and, where participants requested, were provided with summaries, including explanations, of their own results and those of the group.

## **Results**

### *Preliminary analyses*

Preliminary multivariate analyses, with alpha set at .05, to screen for gender and sport type (individual versus team) differences revealed significant gender differences between the following variables: PC, O, AI, SPA, SPCPERF, SPCFAT, SPCAPP, SPCATH, PS, and, PE and sport type differences for O. Given the large number of gender differences the data were subsequently analysed by gender but not by sport type. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics, including Cronbach's alpha, for all variables of interest. All variables initially demonstrated good internal consistency apart from PC, SH and DA (for males only). When item 4 (I always try to do my best, no matter what) was removed from SH and item 5 (My parents never tried to punish my mistakes) from PC they reached acceptable levels of internal consistency for the overall sample and for males (although for females on the SH scale,  $\alpha$  was still just below acceptable levels at 0.69). For males, item removal did not improve the internal consistency of DA, remaining just below acceptable levels at 0.69. Thus readers are advised to consider results obtained with these subscales with a degree of caution.

### *Relations between SPC, SPA, AI, SH and perfectionism*

Zero order correlations between self-presentation dimensions and the remaining variables are presented in Table 2. Due to the relatively small sample sizes resulting from the separate analyses conducted for males and females, only independent variables that significantly correlated with the dependent variables of each regression analysis were included in individual regression analyses. For males, these variables were as follows: SPCAPP (SPA, SH, PE, PC, CM, DA); SPCATH: (SPA, SH, PC, CM, DA); SPCPERF: (SPA, SH, PC, CM, DA); SPCFAT: (SPA, SH, PC, CM, DA), and for females: SPCAPP (SPA, SH, AI, PE, PC, CM, DA); SPCATH: (SPA, SH, PE, PC, CM, DA); SPCPERF: (SPA, SH, PE, PC, CM, DA); SPCFAT: (SPA, SH, PE, PC, CM, DA).

### *Regression analyses*

Four hierarchical regression analyses were conducted with the four self-presentation dimensions as dependent variables and the independent variables in each analysis as specified above. All independent variables were entered simultaneously. Preliminary data screening indicated that all the assumptions required for this analysis were met.

#### *Males*

*Prediction of concern about physical appearance.* The SPA, PC, and SH constructs accounted for 40% of the variance in SPCAPP ( $F(6,170) = 19.85, p < .01$ ). As the beta weights in table 3 illustrate, SPA made the largest contribution in the equation followed by PC and SH. The effects of SPA, SH and PC on SPCAPP were positive as hypothesized but, contrary to expectations the effects of CM, PE, and DA were not significant.

*Prediction of concern about appearing athletically untalented.* Only SPA and SH significantly predicted any of the variance in SPCATH. The adjusted  $R^2$  indicated that these variables accounted for 25% of the variance in SPCATH ( $F(5,170) = 12.55, p < .01$ ). Again, as shown by the beta weights in table 3, SPA made the largest contribution and both variables made a positive contribution to the prediction of SPCATH. PC, CM and DA did not predict any of the variance in SPCATH.

*Prediction of concern about appearing fatigued/lacking energy.* Results indicated that SPA and SH significantly predicted 20% of the variance in SPCFAT ( $F(5,170) = 9.39, p < .01$ ). As the beta weights in table 3 show, both variables made a positive contribution to the variance in SPCFAT; the SPA construct made the largest contribution while SH had a lesser effect. CM, PC, and DA did not significantly predict any of the variance in SPCFAT.

*Prediction of concern about performance/composure inadequacies.* SPA and SH significantly predicted 17% of the variance in SPCPERF ( $F(5, 170) = 7.95, p < .01$ ). As the beta weights in table 3 show, SPA made the largest contribution to SPCPERF followed by SH and both variables made a positive contribution to the variance in SPCPERF. PC and DA did not make any contribution to the prediction of SPCPERF.

#### *Females*

*Prediction of concern about physical appearance.* The SPA, SH, CM and AI constructs accounted for 54% of the variance in SPCAPP ( $F(7,116) = 20.47, p < .01$ ). As the beta weights in table 4 illustrate, SPA made the largest contribution in the equation followed by SH, AI and CM. The effects of SPA, SH and CM on SPCAPP were positive as hypothesized but, contrary to expectations AI was negatively related to SPCAPP and the effects of PC, DA and PE were not significant.

*Prediction of concern about appearing athletically untalented.* SPA, SH and CM significantly predicted 32% of the variance in SPCATH ( $F(6,115) = 10.06, p < .01$ ). As shown by the beta weights in table 4, all variables made a positive contribution with the largest contribution coming from SPA, followed SH and CM. PC, DA and PE did not predict any of the variance in SPCATH.

*Prediction of concern about performance/composure inadequacies.* Results indicated that only SPA and CM significantly predicted any of the variance in SPCPERF. The adjusted  $R^2$  indicated that these variables accounted for 26% of the variance in SPCPERF ( $F(6,116) = 7.89, p < .01$ ). As the beta weights in table 4 show, both variables made a positive contribution to the variance in SPCPERF; CM made the largest contribution while SPA had a lesser effect. SH, PC, DA and PE did not significantly predict any of the variance in SPCPERF.

*Prediction of concern about appearing fatigued/lacking energy.* SPA and SH significantly predicted 20% of the variance in SPCFAT ( $F(6, 116) = 5.74, p < .01$ ). As the beta weights in table 4 show, SPA made the largest contribution to SPCPERF followed by SH and both variables made a positive contribution to the variance in SPCPERF. PC, CM, PE and DA did not make any contribution to the prediction of SPCFAT.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between social physique anxiety, self-handicapping, athletic identity, and perfectionism and different aspects of self-presentation concern in competitive sports. As expected, each of these variables contributed to the prediction of self-presentation concern, but the pattern of prediction varied across the sub-types of self-presentation and in relation to gender.

In males, only three variables were related to competitive self-presentation concern: social physique anxiety, self-handicapping and parental criticism, and parental criticism was only related to concern about physical appearance. Social physique anxiety consistently demonstrated the strongest relationship with all four aspects of self-presentation concern. In contrast, a slightly different and more varied pattern of results was obtained for females. All four dimensions of self-presentation concern were related to different combinations of predictor variables. Self-presentation concerns about physical appearance were related to social physique anxiety, self-handicapping, concerns over making mistakes and athletic

identity. Self-presentation concerns about appearing athletically untalented were related to self-handicapping and concerns over making mistakes. Self-presentation concerns about performance/composure inadequacies were related to social physique anxiety and concerns over making mistakes. Self-presentation concerns about appearing fatigued were related to social physique anxiety and self-handicapping. As with the males, social physique anxiety shared the strongest relationship with self-presentation concerns about physical appearance, about appearing athletically untalented and concerns about appearing fatigued. However, concern over making mistakes was most strongly related to self-presentation concerns about performance/composure inadequacies.

Before considering these gender differences in more detail, two observations can be made about the commonalities evident between males and females. First, for this sample, the most influential predictors of self-presentation concerns in sport were social physique anxiety and self-handicapping. Second, although two dimensions of perfectionism (parental criticism and concern over making mistakes) were related to different aspects of self-presentation concern, the association between self-presentation concern and perfectionism was substantially weaker than expected.

It is of course not surprising that social physique anxiety was most strongly related to self-presentation concerns about physical appearance in both males and females as these measures tap very similar constructs. Of more interest is the finding that social physique anxiety was strongly related to the three remaining dimensions of self-presentation concern which, unlike social physique anxiety and concerns about physical appearance, are not related to physique and physical appearance. Instead they are related to being seen as a fit, competent, and composed athlete. It seems that self-presentation concerns about portraying an image of a competent, fit athlete cannot be completely distinguished from anxieties about how one's physique is evaluated by others. For the current respondents, presenting a desirable image of a competitive athlete inextricably involves presenting an image of a desirable physique. This is consistent with Petrie's (1996) finding that a particular physique is felt by many athletes and coaches to be essential for optimal sports performance. This result also fits with previous findings in females that social physique anxiety is related to other competitively oriented psychological variables such as competitive trait anxiety (Martin & Mack, 1996). However, current results also support the role of social physique anxiety as a predictor of competitive self-presentation concerns in both males and females. As has been the case in previous research (e.g., Haase et al., 2002) in the current study females reported significantly higher levels of social physique anxiety but the role of social

physique anxiety as a predictor of competitive self-presentation concerns was similar for males and females. Thus although these male athletes experience less social physique anxiety than their female counterparts this social physique anxiety is equally important in predicting their competitive self-presentation concerns. Competitive trait anxiety and competitive self-presentation concerns share similar conceptual underpinnings but are clearly not identical constructs which may explain this incongruence between our own and Martin and Mack's (1996) findings. Alternatively, this may reflect the increasing emphasis placed on males' physical appearance in society as a whole since these earlier findings were obtained. Although research has tended to focus on the female athlete (Russell, 2002), current results would suggest that future studies should begin to address this imbalance and investigate social physique anxiety more thoroughly in male athletes.

A fairly recent development in sport psychology is the notion that the level of an athlete's competitive anxiety is not the only important dimension of anxiety for researchers and practitioners to consider (Jones, 1995). Instead Jones (1995) argued that we also need to consider the athlete's interpretation of their anxiety as either facilitative or debilitating for performance. It is possible that the current results may be interpreted in a similar fashion. Hence, examining the levels of self-presentation variables, such as social physique anxiety, may not provide a full account of their influence in sport.

Apart from self-presentation concerns about performance/composure inadequacies in females, self-handicapping was strongly associated with the competitive self-presentation concerns of athletes in the current study, lending support for the proposed links between self-handicapping and impression management (Kolditz & Arkin, 1982; Leary, 1992). Higher levels of self-handicapping were associated with greater competitive and physique related self-presentation concerns. Previous research that has examined the impression management function of self-handicapping has mainly been conducted in contexts other than competitive sport (e.g., Hobden & Pliner, 1995) although Hudson et al. (1998) did support this relationship in a preliminary study involving a small sample of largely male, national level competitive runners. The current study extends this initial support for Leary's (1992) contention that these two constructs are related to a more heterogeneous sample in terms of gender, competitive level and sport. Given the relationship revealed here it seems likely that, as Leary (1992) and more recently Prapavessis et al. (2004) have suggested, the impression management function of self-handicapping extends to the competitive sports domain. It is important to highlight however that the correlational nature

of the current study does not allow a full examination of the impression management function of self-handicapping. It does not allow causal inferences to be made or to state with certainty that self-handicapping plays a functional role in self-presentation. Future research should attempt to further elucidate this relationship; causality and functionality could be explored using experimental, qualitative, and cross-lagged panel designs.

The association between self-presentation concern and perfectionism was substantially weaker than expected. Only two perfectionism dimensions, parental criticism and concern over mistakes, were associated with self-presentation concerns about physical appearance and performance/composure inadequacies, respectively. Parental criticism was associated with self-presentation concern about physical appearance for both males and females and concern over making mistakes with competitive self-presentations about physical appearance, appearing athletically untalented and performance/composure inadequacies in females. The relationship between parental criticism and self-presentation concerns about physical appearance supports the proposal that socially prescribed dimensions of perfectionism, in particular, are related to and may influence self-presentation as they heighten the fear of negative evaluation and the need for others' approval (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Why high levels of perceived parental criticism were associated with self-presentation concern about physical appearance and not more performance related self-presentation concerns is not easily explained. Nor are the associations between concern over making mistakes and self-presentation concern about physical appearance and the fact that parental expectations was not related to any forms of self-presentation concern. The associations between concern over making mistakes and self-presentation concern about performance/composure inadequacies and appearing athletically untalented in females are, however, entirely consistent with theory. This self-presentation dimension taps into a range of concerns about factors that may lead to mistakes, for instance, lacking necessary focus, not performing to potential, choking under pressure, and lack of mental and physical readiness for competition. It is not clear why this was only the case for females in the current study. We can offer no logical reason why concern about making mistakes should not predict competitive self-presentation concern in males, in fact logic would predict a similar result in male athletes.

Both parental criticism and concern over making mistakes are considered as negative or maladaptive dimensions of perfectionism (Frost et al., 1990). This maladaptive role appears to extend to the self-presentation concerns that are experienced by competitive

sportsmen and women. In the current study and previous research, it appears that self-presentation concerns have been considered only from a negative perspective. They have been linked with negatively interpreted stressors (James & Collins, 1997), high levels of competitive trait anxiety (Wilson & Eklund, 1998) and, in the current study, social physique anxiety, self-handicapping, and maladaptive dimensions of perfectionism. Although some positive effects have been demonstrated (e.g., Ryska, 2002) these constructs and processes are thought to negatively influence cognitions, emotions, and behaviors in sport (Gould, Horn, & Spreeman, 1983; Haase et al., 2002; James & Collins, 1997; Rhodewalt et al., 1984). Thus it could be suggested that self-presentation concerns carry similar detrimental influences for the individual who takes part in competitive sport.

It is possible however, that self-presentation concern may also play an adaptive or positive role in competitive sport by motivating the individual to increase their effort and optimize performance in attempts to present a positive image to significant others. Certainly Leary (1992) has argued that self-presentation demands may result in increased effort and reduced social loafing in sport and exercise contexts. He has also argued that self-presentation may act as a stimulus for some individuals to participate in sport or exercise, to either enhance their physical appearance or maintain a social identity of a fit and athletic person. If this leads to continued involvement in sport and exercise this may be seen as a positive outcome of self-presentation concerns when the short and long term psychological and physiological benefits of physical activity are considered (Biddle & Mutrie, 2001). Others (Tedeschi & Norman, 1985) have suggested that successful impression management can lead, through the development of social power, to increased self-esteem. Moreover, Hackfort and Schlattmann (2002) have recently presented a training model to assist athletes to develop their self-presentational strategies as they argue that these strategies serve to regulate emotions and actions displayed in sport. Although research into self-presentation in sport has tended to focus on self-presentation as maladaptive, it seems that self-presentation may also play an adaptive, or functional role. Future research that explores this adaptive function of self-presentation should therefore be encouraged.

The final gender difference found was in the role of athletic identity as a predictor of self-presentation concern about physical appearance for females but not as a predictor of any of the males' self-presentation concerns. With the exception of athletic identity all of the relationships between self-presentation concern and the predictor variables were positive. The negative association between females' athletic identity and self-presentation

concern about physical appearance indicates that, contrary to expectations, a stronger athletic identity was associated with less self-presentation concern about physical appearance. The hypothesised positive relationship between self-presentation concern and athletic identity was based on the assumption that competitive sport is likely to be more important to those individuals who have a strong athletic identity. Thus, it was suggested that being positively evaluated by others in this context would also be highly important to these individuals and would result in heightened levels of self-presentation concern. However, it seems that female sports participants with a strong athletic identity are less concerned about the self-presentation of their physical appearance than those with a weaker athletic identity. A possible explanation for this is that a stronger athletic identity acts as a protective mechanism against the experience of self-presentation concern about physical appearance. A strong athletic identity may give the individual a sense of security in themselves and their status as an athlete so that positive evaluations from others are of reduced importance. In contrast, the individual with a less well developed athletic identity may report heightened self-presentation concern as they are less confident in their athletic status and therefore making positive impressions on and gaining approval from others is more important.

Another possible explanation for this relationship is that the motives for participating in competitive sport differ between individuals with a strong athletic identity and those whose athletic identity is less well developed. Sports participants with a less well developed athletic identity may be motivated to participate in competitive sport for more physique-related self-presentational motives such as weight loss. Hence, identity would make a greater contribution to experienced self-presentation concern. This explanation gains initial support from current findings as the negative association revealed between self-presentation concern and athletic identity was only evident for self-presentation concerns about physical appearance in female athletes. It is also corroborated by previous research that has identified links between social physique anxiety and self-presentational motives (Eklund & Crawford, 1994). However, these interpretations of current findings are largely speculative as this study did not examine the mechanisms and mediators of the relationship between athletic identity and self-presentation concern. Future research that attempts first to replicate this initial finding and to uncover potential mechanisms and mediators, such as motives for sport participation, would therefore seem important. Further investigation into the apparent gender specificity of this finding is also warranted.

Based on these results we would suggest that if coaches and sport psychologists wish to address the athlete's competitive self-presentation concerns, tackling some of the underpinning factors may provide a good starting point. Although athletic identity and perceived parental criticism were revealed here as factors that predict competitive self-presentation concern about physical appearance in females and males, respectively, current evidence leads us to also propose that these less influential factors are less appropriate targets than the stronger predictors of competitive self-presentation identified here. Thus, attempts to manage athletes' competitive self-presentation concerns might benefit from a focus on diminishing social physique anxiety and self-handicapping tendencies, and, in female athletes, concerns over making mistakes.

Before drawing together conclusions from the current study, it is important to highlight its limitations. First, the study employed a correlational design that does not allow causal inferences to be made about the relationships between the psychological variables that were examined. For instance, although current results identify that individuals with high levels of trait self-handicapping display higher levels of self-presentation concern, it is not clear how these variables are causally related. Experimental and longitudinal designs would help to tease out this issue. Second, only trait measures of the variables of interest were obtained. It would be useful if subsequent studies were to obtain additional state measures to determine if the associations identified here are maintained or are mediated by situational factors. Third, the measures used here to assess self-handicapping and perfectionism were not sport-specific. Shields, Paskevich, and Brawley (2003) have recently developed a scale for assessing self-handicapping in exercise contexts and Dunn et al. (2002) have produced a modified version of the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale to increase its sport specificity. Future research that employs these sport specific measures may reveal interesting comparisons with the current results.

In summary partial support was found for the expected positive relationships between self-presentation concerns in sport and social physique anxiety, self-handicapping, perfectionism, and athletic identity. The strongest predictor of self-presentation concern was social physique anxiety, followed by self-handicapping, concerns about mistakes, athletic identity, and parental criticism. Instead of the expected positive relationship between self-presentation concern and athletic identity, current results support a negative relationship between athletic identity and self-presentation concern about physical appearance. If self-presentation concerns are considered dysfunctional cognitions, the associations revealed

here would seem to draw a profile of a competitive sportsman or woman who tends towards maladaptive cognitions and behavioral strategies. Whether and how these are causally related should be the subject of future research. A number of other research avenues are also warranted on the basis of these results: the impression management function of self-handicapping in competitive sports, factors mediating the relationship between self-presentation concern and athletic identity, and the potentially adaptive motives for and consequences of self-presentation.

Although a number of predictor variables have been identified here, others clearly exist as not all of the variance in any of the self-presentation concern dimensions was explained. Indeed it may not be possible to identify these variables as a number of authors have highlighted the unconscious nature of self-presentation (e.g., Leary, 1992; Wilson & Eklund, 1998) which may limit our understanding of the sources of self-presentation concern using deliberative social cognitive means. However, the role of self-presentation in competitive sport is becoming increasingly apparent, thus increasing the importance of identifying the sources of self-presentation concerns and processes. This study has made an initial contribution towards this effort.

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**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics, including Cronbach's alpha, for the variables of interest in this study (both = males & females)*

	SPCAPP		SPCATH		SPCPERF		SPCFAT		SPA	SH	AI	PE
	PS	CM	DA	O								
PC												
Males												
<i>M</i>	12.7	17.4	25.9	23.0	22.6	32.7	46.4	13.3	9.0	23.4	22.7	11.0
<i>SD</i>	5.5	6.8	9.2	8.5	7.2	6.9	11.0	3.9	2.7	4.4	6.1	3.0
<i>α</i>												
Females												
<i>M</i>	0.90	16.0	0.92	20.2	0.94	28.4	0.95	25.3	0.88	28.1		
<i>SD</i>	0.71	32.1	0.87	40.2	0.76	12.1	0.74	8.3	0.76	21.3	0.77	21.5
<i>α</i>	0.87	21.7										
<i>SD</i>	6.4	6.2	8.4	8.3	7.9	6.9	12.6	4.0	2.7	4.7	5.9	3.2
<i>α</i>	0.93	0.89	0.92	0.93	0.90	0.69	0.91	0.77	0.75	0.81	0.85	0.76
Both												
<i>M</i>	14.0	18.5	26.9	23.9	24.8	32.4	43.9	12.83	8.7	22.6	22.2	11.0
<i>SD</i>	2.43											
<i>SD</i>	6.10	6.70	8.90	8.50	8.0	6.90	12.10	3.99	2.70	4.64	6.00	3.10
<i>α</i>	4.83											
<i>α</i>	.92	.91	.93	.94	.90	.70	.90	.77	.75	.79	.83	.72
<i>α</i>	.89											

*Note.* SPCAPP = concern about physical appearance; SPCATH = concern about appearing athletically untalented; SPCPERF = concern about performance/composure inadequacies; SPCFAT = concern about appearing fatigued/lacking energy; SPA = social physique anxiety; SH = self-handicapping; AI = athletic identity; PE = parental expectations; PC = parental criticism; PS = personal standards; CM = concern about mistakes; DA = doubts about the quality of one's actions; O = organization

**Table 2**

*Zero-order correlations between potential predictors and self-presentation variables*

SPA	SH	AI	PE	PC	PS	CM	DA	O
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Males	SPCAPP	.60**	.32**	.00	.18*	.35**	.05	.32**	.28**
	.01								
	SPCATH	.47**	.31**	.01	.04	.23**	.03	.30**	.34**
	SPCPERF	.39**	.28**	.10	.03	.17*	.10	.27**	.26**
	SPCFAT	.40**	.34**	.01	.11	.19*	.00	.23**	.26**
Females									
	SPCAPP	.66**	.52**	-.28**	.20*	.34**	-.15	.32**	.32**
	SPCATH	.48**	.54**	-.04	.19*	.24**	.10	.38**	.40**
	SPCPERF	.42**	.33**	.12	.23*	.19*	.18	.42**	.32**
	SPCFAT	.37**	.37**	.06	.28**	.21*	.06	.29**	.27**
Both									
	SPCAPP	.66**	.38**	-.19**	.14*	.29**	-.10	.28**	.29**
	SPCATH	.50**	.34**	-.06	.07	.20**	.01	.30**	.36**
	SPCPERF	.41**	.29**	.05	.10	.16**	.10	.31**	.28**
	SPCFAT	.41**	.34**	-.01	.15**	.18**	-.01	.24**	.26**

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$ ; SPCAPP = concern about physical appearance; SPCATH = concern about appearing athletically untalented; SPCPERF = concern about performance/composure inadequacies; SPCFAT = concern about appearing fatigued/lacking energy; SPA = social physique anxiety; SH = self-handicapping; AI = athletic identity; PE = parental expectations; PC = parental criticism; PS = personal standards; CM = concern about mistakes; DA = doubts about the quality of one's actions; O = organization

**Table 3**

*Multiple regression analysis examining relationships between SPCAPP, SPCATH, SPCFAT and SPCPERF and the predictor variables in males*

	Adjusted $R^2$	$\hat{a}$	$t$	
SPCAPP	SPAPCSH	0.40	0.520.190.15	
7.80**2.54**2.40*				
SPCATH	SPASH	0.25	0.360.16	4.84**2.16*
SPCFAT	SPASH	0.20	0.300.24	
3.90**3.17**				
SPCPERF	SPASH	0.17	0.290.17	3.66**2.27*

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

**Table 4**

*Multiple regression analysis examining relationships between SPCAPP, SPCATH, SPCFAT and SPCPERF and the predictor variables in females*

	Adjusted $R^2$	$\hat{a}$	$t$	
SPCAPP	SPASHAICM	0.54	0.50	0.23-0.22 0.20
6.73**3.07**-3.17*2.30*				
SPCATH	SPASHCM	0.32	0.310.230.22	
3.47**2.59**2.18*				

SPCERF	CMSPA	0.26	0.350.30	
3.37**3.21**				
SPCFAT	SPASH	0.20	0.240.22	2.45*2.28*

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

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