

1 **A Novel Approach to Quantify the Assistive Torque Profiles Generated by Passive Back-**  
2 **Support Exoskeletons**

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20 **Abstract**

21 Industrial exoskeletons are a promising ergonomic intervention to reduce the risk of work-  
22 related musculoskeletal disorders by providing external physical support to workers. Passive  
23 exoskeletons, having no power supplies, are of particular interest given their predominance in  
24 the commercial market. Understanding the mechanical behavior of the torque generation  
25 mechanisms embedded in passive exoskeletons is, however, essential to determine the efficacy  
26 of these devices in reducing physical loads (e.g., in manual material handling tasks). We  
27 introduce a novel approach using a computerized dynamometer to quantify the assistive torque  
28 profiles of two passive back-support exoskeletons (BSEs) at different support settings and in  
29 both static and dynamic conditions. The feasibility of this approach was examined using both  
30 human subjects and a mannequin. Clear differences in assistive torque magnitudes were  
31 evident between the two BSEs, and both devices generated more assistive torques during  
32 trunk/hip flexion than extension. Assistive torques obtained from human subjects were often  
33 within similar ranges as those from the mannequin, though values were more comparable over  
34 a narrow range of flexion/extension angles due to practical limitations with the dynamometer  
35 and human subjects. Characterizing exoskeleton assistive torque profiles can help in better  
36 understanding how to select a torque profile for given task requirements and user  
37 anthropometry, and aid in predicting the potential impacts of exoskeleton use by incorporating  
38 measured torque profiles in a musculoskeletal modeling system. Future work is recommended  
39 to assess this approach for other occupational exoskeletons.

40

41 **Keywords:** Biomechanics; Musculoskeletal Modeling; Stiffness; Wearable Technology

## 42 **Introduction**

43 Occupational exoskeletons act to support/augment the physical capacity of a worker and thus  
44 have the potential to reduce physical demands and prevent work-related musculoskeletal  
45 disorders. Most commercially-available occupational exoskeletons are currently passive  
46 systems, which include compliant elements (e.g., springs or other elastic materials) to provide  
47 external torques about a joint of interest (e.g., back or shoulder). These external torques are  
48 generated as a function of the included angles between proximal and distal segments  
49 comprising the joint of interest. Compared to active/powered systems, passive exoskeletons are  
50 technologically more mature, and have been considered for a range of applications, including  
51 automotive manufacturing (Hensel & Keil, 2019; Ferreira et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2021),  
52 agriculture (Upasani et al., 2019; Thamsuwan et al., 2020), and construction (Kim et al., 2019;  
53 Moore et al., 2021). To promote the safe adoption and use of an exoskeleton, though, it is  
54 critical to determine the effects of using an exoskeleton in diverse task scenarios. Indeed,  
55 numerous lab- and field-based studies have quantified the biomechanical effects of different  
56 exoskeletons on the user (e.g., Kim et al., 2018; Alabdulkarim & Nussbaum, 2019; Baltrusch et  
57 al., 2019; Koopman et al., 2019; Alemi et al., 2020; Koopman et al., 2020; Madinei et al., 2020;  
58 Kim et al., 2021). Given the resource-intensive nature of lab or field testing, however, and the  
59 increasing availability of different exoskeleton designs, an effective approach is needed to  
60 simulate or predict the impacts of exoskeleton use for potential occupational applications  
61 (Nussbaum et al., 2019).

62  
63 Musculoskeletal modeling software could facilitate assessing exoskeleton use under various  
64 work scenarios. In fact, there are several reports of the impacts of exoskeleton use or different  
65 exoskeleton designs (e.g., support torque profiles) in which estimated muscle activities and joint  
66 forces/torques were derived using the AnyBody Modeling System (Agarwal et al., 2016; Jensen  
67 et al., 2018; Fritzsche et al., 2021) or OpenSim (de Kruif et al., 2017; Khamar et al., 2019; Zhou

68 & Chen, 2021). When simulating human-exoskeleton interactions, however, mechanical aspects  
69 of an exoskeleton need to be defined in the modeling software environment. These aspects  
70 include component inertial properties, available degrees-of-freedom, and supportive torque  
71 profiles (i.e., torque-angle relationships). The latter is of particular importance, since  
72 exoskeletons have distinct torque-generating mechanisms. Exoskeleton manufacturers, though,  
73 typically treat these torque profiles as proprietary, likely because the profiles can substantially  
74 affect the effectiveness of an exoskeleton and a user's perception regarding exoskeleton use  
75 and its effectiveness. Furthermore, even if the manufacturers provide some baseline profiles for  
76 their device, systematic measurement of assistive torque profiles might be still needed, since  
77 some torque generation mechanisms may not be purely elastic, instead exhibiting viscoelastic  
78 behaviors (e.g., speed dependency and hysteresis).

79

80 Though some exoskeleton torque profiles have been reported using simulated data (Bartel &  
81 Davy, 2006; Hyun et al., 2019), there are only few reports of results using direct measures.  
82 Koopman et al. (2019; 2020) measured the torque profile of a particular back-support  
83 exoskeleton (BSE; Laevo™ V2.4, Delft, Netherlands). They placed a force transducer under the  
84 chest pad of the exoskeleton, likely because this pad is coupled with an external torque  
85 generator about each hip, and monitored the BSE kinematics (i.e., hip flexion/extension angle)  
86 using three markers. They reported no effect of flexion/extension speed on torque profiles, but  
87 that there was hysteresis present (i.e., supportive torques were larger during trunk flexion than  
88 extension). This approach is seemingly straightforward and easy to implement, but it permits  
89 only a limited control over exoskeleton angular velocity since a participant needs to voluntarily  
90 flex/extend the trunk. Further, placing a force transducer under the chest pad of a BSE could  
91 present a practical challenge depending on the design of the pad (e.g., having a large surface  
92 area), or if the torque-generating mechanism at the hip is structurally connected to the backside  
93 of a user's trunk.

94

95 Thus, we describe here an alternative approach to quantify torque profile(s) of an exoskeleton.

96 We specifically implemented this approach on two different BSEs with distinct support settings,

97 yet a similar approach may be used to quantify the torque profiles generated by passive arm-

98 support exoskeletons. This approach uses a computerized isokinetic dynamometer, which

99 permits accurate control of limb flexion/extension angles and angular velocities. We

100 implemented this approach using both human subjects and a mannequin, to determine whether

101 both might be feasible.

102

## 103 **Methods**

### 104 ***Back-support exoskeletons***

105 We used the BackX™ Model AC and Laevo™ V2.5, which both incorporate passive torque-

106 generating mechanisms about the hip that are intended to augment the trunk extensor muscles,

107 yet which also have distinct design features. BackX™ support settings can be adjusted, four

108 combinations of support, consisting of two *modes* (instant vs. standard) and two *support levels*

109 (low vs. high). The instant mode provides assistive torque immediately after the wearer bends

110 forward, while in the standard mode supportive torque is provided when trunk flexion reaches

111 ~35°. In contrast, the Laevo™ allows for adjusting an “angle button” (0-35°) to alter support to a

112 comfortable angle. According to the manufacturers’ user manuals, these ranges of support

113 levels are offered to allow flexibility for the users to balance the work demand and external

114 support required ([suitx.com](http://suitx.com), [laevo-exoskeleton.com](http://laevo-exoskeleton.com)). The BackX™ was tested at low and high

115 support levels in the instant mode, and the Laevo™ was tested at low (35°) and high (0°) angle

116 buttons; these settings are subsequently referred to as BSE<sub>LOW</sub> and BSE<sub>HIGH</sub>, respectively. To

117 isolate the torque profile mechanisms, an additional condition was included for both BSEs in

118 which supportive torques were turned off (i.e., BSE<sub>OFF</sub>).

119

120 ***Experimental design and procedures***

121 Torque profiles (i.e., torque vs. angle/speed relationship) were measured using both the  
122 isometric and continuous passive motion (CPM) modes of a computerized isokinetic  
123 dynamometer (HUMAC NORM, CSMi, Stoughton, MA, USA). The former was used to obtain  
124 torque profiles under static conditions (i.e., constant joint angle) and the latter to obtain torque  
125 profiles during motion (i.e., flexing/extending the joint of interest). For a given BSE, separate  
126 torque profiles were measured in each of three supportive torque settings (i.e., BSE<sub>OFF</sub>, BSE<sub>LOW</sub>,  
127 and BSE<sub>HIGH</sub>) in both static and dynamic conditions. These torque profiles were obtained using  
128 both an articulated mannequin (MZ-HM01, RoxyDisplay, East Brunswick, NJ, USA) and human  
129 subjects. To derive the offset torque data, the torque profile of the mannequin was measured  
130 without “wearing” the BSEs (i.e., NO BSE). The mannequin had a hinge joint at the hip allowing  
131 for pure hip flexion/extension. Since the mannequin lacked soft tissues and had a body shape  
132 not representative of actual populations, testing using human subjects may produce more  
133 realistic motions of a BSE. However, human subjects testing would present other confounding  
134 factors due to potential voluntary or reflexive muscle activation during dynamic conditions.

135

136 Use of the mannequin: To measure torque profiles, the mannequin was fitted with a BSE, then  
137 positioned and secured on the dynamometer bed such that the rotational center of the BSE  
138 torque generation mechanism (i.e., left hip joint center of the mannequin) was aligned to the  
139 rotational center of the dynamometer motor. Then, the left thigh of the mannequin was  
140 connected to the hip adapter of the dynamometer (Figure 1). For the static condition, the  
141 isometric mode was configured to passively move the left thigh of the mannequin to 13 different  
142 hip joint angles (0, 10, 20, ..., 120°), then each angle was maintained for 10 seconds. For the  
143 dynamic conditions, the CPM mode was configured to operate over a range from 0° (neutral hip  
144 angle) to 120° (hip flexion) at five different angular speeds (20, 40, 60, 80, and 100°/sec.) that  
145 were intended to capture typical occupational task demands (e.g., Marras et al., 1993; Lavender

146 et al., 2012). At each speed, the left thigh of the mannequin was driven passively and  
147 isokinetically over the set angular range 14 times, mimicking repetitive hip flexion and extension.  
148 In both static and dynamic conditions, dynamometer torques and angles were recorded at 100  
149 Hz.

150

151

Figure 1 here

152

153 Use of human subjects: Two male participants with respective mean (SD) age, height, and  
154 mass of 26.5 (3.5) yrs, 182.0 (5.7) cm, and 70.0 (7.1) kg completed testing. The research  
155 procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Tech, and informed  
156 consent was obtained from the participants prior to any data collection. Participants were fitted  
157 with a BSE and asked to stand in the trunk modular component (TMC) of the HUMAC NORM.  
158 The TMC foot plate on which participants stood was then adjusted vertically so that the  
159 rotational center of the BSE torque-generating mechanism was aligned to the rotational center  
160 of the TMC, and participants were secured to the TMC following the manufacturer's  
161 recommendations (Figure 2). For the static condition, as when the mannequin was used, the  
162 isometric mode was configured to passively move the trunk of participants to each of 10 trunk  
163 flexion angles (0, 10, 20, ..., 90°), and isometric torques were measured for 10 seconds. During  
164 dynamic trials, the CPM mode was configured to operate over a range of 0° (standing upright) to  
165 90° (trunk flexion) at the same five joint speeds as when the mannequin was used. Note that we  
166 used 90° instead of 120° as the maximum trunk flexion angle due to a mechanical limitation of  
167 the TMC and to accommodate participant range-of-motion and comfort.

168

169

Figure 2 Here

170

171 For each angular speed, participants first completed 10 training trials, during which they were  
172 repeatedly asked to limit abdominal muscle activity to minimize confounding effects on  
173 measured torques. This training was accomplished using real-time visual feedback of bilateral  
174 rectus abdominus (RA) activity, via normalized surface electromyography (EMG). Trunk  
175 extensors were not monitored as they did not show any reflexive responses to  
176 flexion/extensions. Electrode placements were performed based on previous guidelines  
177 (Criswell, 2010). Participants completed initial maximum voluntary isometric contractions  
178 (MVICs), using the dynamometer to isolate the pelvis and lower extremities. Participants were  
179 secured to the trunk adapter with their trunk flexed 20° and performed active trunk flexion  
180 (Marras & Mirka, 1993). MVICs were replicated twice, during which non-threatening verbal  
181 encouragement was provided. Raw EMG signals were recorded at 2 kHz using a telemetered  
182 system (TeleMyo Desktop DTS, Noraxon, AZ, USA), and rest breaks of 30s or longer were  
183 provided between MVICs. A rest break of 1 minute or longer was provided after the training  
184 trials. EMG signals were band-pass filtered (20–450 Hz, 4th-order Butterworth, bidirectional)  
185 and subsequently low-pass filtered (3 Hz cut-off, 4th-order Butterworth, bidirectional) to create  
186 linear envelopes. During dynamic trials, the trunk of participants was driven passively and  
187 isokinetically over the set range-of-motion 14 times. Processed EMG signals during the dynamic  
188 trials were normalized (nEMG) to maximum values collected during MVICs. nEMGs were  
189 displayed during the noted trials via a monitor at roughly the participant's waist level, and  
190 participants were asked to maintain their nEMG values below 10% MVIC.

191

### 192 ***Data reduction and outcome measure***

193 Raw torque data were low-pass filtered (2<sup>nd</sup>-order, bidirectional Butterworth filter, cut-off  
194 frequency = 9 Hz). Raw torque and angle data were resampled at 100 points per angle (e.g.,  
195 120° x 100 = 12,000 data points for the mannequin) for subsequent analysis. These data were  
196 then separated into flexion and extension phases, and mean values were obtained across the



197 14 trials. Dynamic torques reported hereafter are for the low angular speed only (20°/sec), since  
198 at higher speeds there were more substantial effects of dynamometer acceleration/deceleration  
199 (see Results). We considered two approaches to derive the exoskeleton-generated net torque  
200 profiles: 1) subtracting angle-specific raw torques in the BSE<sub>OFF</sub> condition from each respective  
201 support condition (BSE<sub>HIGH</sub> and BSE<sub>LOW</sub>), and 2) subtracting angle-specific raw torques in the  
202 NO BSE condition from each respective support conditions (BSE<sub>HIGH</sub> and BSE<sub>LOW</sub>). For brevity,  
203 results presented hereinafter are focused on the former. However, additional data on the offset  
204 raw torque profiles for the NO BSE condition are reported in the Appendix (Figure A3). Assistive  
205 torque profiles are reported unilaterally (per torque-generating mechanism). Peak (95th  
206 percentile) nEMG values for the bilateral RA were obtained to characterize abdominal muscle  
207 activity.

208

## 209 **Results**

210 No substantial effects of speed were apparent for the assistive raw torques of either BSE during  
211 the flexion and extension phases, and the dynamic mannequin trials were qualitatively highly  
212 repeatable over the 14 replications (Figure A1). Different raw torque profiles were recorded at  
213 the beginning and ending phases of movement, likely due to the angular  
214 acceleration/deceleration of the hip adapter. Both BSEs, though, generated more assistive  
215 torque during flexion than extension (Figure 3). The maximum net torques offered by BackX™  
216 were respectively 24.8, 19.2, and 17.9 Nm for the flexion, extension, and static conditions at  
217 high support, and 14.7, 11.3, and 11.3 Nm at low support. The respective values for the  
218 Laevo™ were 9.7, 6.4, and 8.5 Nm at high support, and 7.9, 6.4, and 5.9 Nm at the low support  
219 condition. (Recall that these values are torque outputs per unilateral mechanism.)

220

221

222

Figure 3 Here

223

224 Assistive torques obtained from the human subjects were overall within similar ranges to those  
225 from the mannequin, with differences at each joint angle that were ~0-10 Nm depending on the  
226 specific BSE, joint angle, and support condition (Figures 4 and 5). Further, peak RA activity was  
227 relatively low overall (<~8 %MVIC) and remained consistent when using either BSE at the  
228 different flexion/extension speeds (Table A1).

229

230

231 Figure 4 Here

232

233 Figure 5 Here

234

## 235 Discussion

236 We developed an approach to measure the assistive torque profiles of a BSE using a  
237 computerized dynamometer and used this approach to characterize torque profiles of two BSEs  
238 in different support settings (high and low) in both static and dynamic conditions. With this  
239 approach, we obtained raw torque profiles by manipulating hip flexion/extension angles of a  
240 mannequin, and trunk flexion/extension angles of a human subject. For both inanimate and  
241 animate subjects, comparable ranges of assistive torques were obtained, yet values differed by  
242 up to ~10 Nm depending on the joint angle (Figure 5). The use of the human subjects also  
243 produced effective torque profiles only over a relatively narrower range of joint angles due to  
244 several practical limitations as discussed below.

245

246 Our results indicate that in case passive BSEs are used for heavy lifting tasks, they may provide  
247 higher hip/trunk extension torque during the lowering (i.e., trunk flexion) phase than the lifting

248 (i.e., trunk extension) phase. Given that lumbar mechanical loads can be higher during lifting vs.  
249 lowering – including external flexion moments (Lee & Nussbaum, 2012) and lumbar extensor  
250 muscle activation (Madinei et al., 2020) – the lower level of support provided in this phase may  
251 suggest that the design is suboptimal. Furthermore, the higher hip/trunk extension torque  
252 provided by the BSE during the lowering phase could increase chest discomfort if the device  
253 has a chest pad coupled with torque generators (as was the case for the BSEs used in this  
254 study). Active exoskeletons, with controllable torque profiles, could address these limitations of  
255 passive BSEs.

256

257 In the dynamic condition (i.e., flexion/extension speed  $> 0^\circ/\text{sec.}$ ), larger assistive torques were  
258 generated during the flexion vs. extension phases (Figure 3), consistent with the finding of  
259 Koopman et al. (2020; 2019). They also reported no effect of flexion/extension speed on torque  
260 profiles and noted that the difference between torques during the flexion and extension phases  
261 is due to friction in the torque generation mechanism. We similarly found no obvious effect of  
262 controlled flexion/extension speeds (Figure A1). Both the BackX™ and Laevo™ utilize a gas-  
263 spring mechanism for torque generation (Kazerooni et al., 2019; Panero et al., 2021). As is  
264 typical of a gas spring, friction forces are added or subtracted to static forces generated  
265 respectively when being compressed (i.e., flexion phase) or extended (i.e., extension phase).  
266 The BackX™ (vs. Laevo™) had a larger difference in assistive torques between the flexion and  
267 extension phases, indicating that friction forces in the torque generation mechanism may be  
268 higher for this device (Figure 3). While the use of gas springs might be anticipated to yield  
269 velocity-dependent effects, it is possible that such effects are only observable outside the  
270 kinematic range tested here. Interestingly, some assistive torques were generated even when  
271 the torque-generating mechanism was not engaged (i.e., BSE<sub>OFF</sub>), with peak values on the  
272 order of 5-10 Nm. These torques were higher for the Laevo™ vs. BackX™ (Figure A2), and  
273 likely were caused by intrinsic resistance/friction present in the torque generation mechanism.

274

275 Assistive torque profiles in the static condition obtained for Laevo™ here were comparable with  
276 the results reported by Koopman et al. (2019). Specifically, the Laevo™ was estimated here to  
277 generate total net torques (i.e., combined bilateral mechanisms) of up to ~18 Nm depending on  
278 the support setting. Similarly, the torques reported by Koopman et al. (2019) were mainly lower  
279 than 20 Nm at different bending angles (see Figure 4 in their paper). Results for the dynamic  
280 condition found here were also comparable to those reported by Koopman et al. (2020), though  
281 only when aggregating the raw torque profiles from the BSE<sub>OFF</sub> and BSE<sub>ON</sub> conditions.

282 Specifically, the Laevo™ was estimated here to generate total net torques (i.e., combined  
283 bilateral mechanisms) of up to ~40 Nm depending on the support setting and bending direction,  
284 and Koopman et al. (2020) reported similar torques within the same range of motion. Further,  
285 the net torque profile pattern found here for the Laevo™ (i.e., inverse parabolic shape with  
286 maximum torque at ~50–60°) was comparable to those of Koopman et al. (2020). This  
287 combined effect of BSE<sub>OFF</sub> and BSE<sub>ON</sub> conditions is further evident from [Figure A2](#), which shows  
288 a similar pattern and torque magnitude compared to those of Koopman et al. (2020); note,  
289 though, that the net torques presented here need to be multiplied by two for direct comparison.  
290 We believe the raw torques obtained from the BSE<sub>OFF</sub> condition incorporate the effects from the  
291 mechanical properties of the BSEs (e.g., mass, moment of inertia, strap tension, intrinsic  
292 stiffness of the torque generation mechanism), and such effects were extracted from the torque  
293 measurements. Future research, however, is needed to develop a unified approach to  
294 measuring and presenting the assistive torques of exoskeletons.

295

296 As noted above, we also measured the raw torque profiles generated by the mannequin without  
297 “wearing” the BSEs (i.e., NO BSE) to determine any offset torques caused by the mannequin  
298 and the dynamometer adapter (e.g., mass, moment of inertia, intrinsic stiffness in the  
299 mannequin “thigh” joint). These raw torque profiles are presented in [Figure A3](#). The NO BSE

300 condition was estimated to generate flexion/extension raw torques of up to ~8 Nm during both  
301 static and dynamic conditions. These torque values are within similar ranges measured for the  
302 BSE<sub>OFF</sub> condition, though only for the BackX™. This inconsistency between the NO BSE and  
303 BSE<sub>OFF</sub> Laevo™ torque profiles might stem from the intrinsic stiffness (or resistance) present in  
304 the Laevo™ torque generation mechanism, whereas BackX™ appears to have a low intrinsic  
305 stiffness (or resistance) in the BSE<sub>OFF</sub> condition. These findings thus indicate that exoskeleton-  
306 generated torque profiles might differ depending on the method used for defining the assistive  
307 torque of a BSE. Future research is clearly needed to better understand the contribution of the  
308 intrinsic stiffnesses/resistance of the BSE torque generation mechanisms to the actual torque  
309 that users experience.

310

311 Measuring supportive torque profiles while a human subject wears a BSE may provide more  
312 realistic torque profiles, such as by capturing relative motions between the BSE and the human  
313 user. With the current approach, though, we found it challenging to measure torque profiles  
314 using human subjects, especially during dynamic conditions. BSE torque profiles obtained using  
315 human subjects were often within a similar range as those obtained using the mannequin, yet  
316 they were also not always consistent (Figure 5). Torque profiles in the static condition were  
317 more comparable than in the dynamic condition over a larger range of flexion/extension angles  
318 examined. Differences in torques on the order of 0-10 Nm were evident (Figure 5), and these  
319 differences were non-trivial in some cases. Given that peak RA muscle activity was rather small,  
320 suggesting minimal active torque generation, we posit that the noted challenges in measuring  
321 assistive torques using human subjects under a dynamic condition arise from some combination  
322 of several sources:

- 323 • When accelerating to reach a target flexion/extension angular velocity, or decelerating to  
324 stop, rotational moments due to the inertia of a participant's trunk and the dynamometer  
325 trunk adapter occur in a direction opposite to movement. This effect results mainly

326 because the continuous passive mode of the dynamometer was used, so that the trunk  
327 of a participant was moved passively by the dynamometer, rather than the participant  
328 voluntarily flexing/extending the trunk. In addition, effects of wobbling masses in the  
329 human trunk can affect measured torques during angular acceleration and deceleration  
330 (e.g., Bazrgari et al., 2011). A more gradual angular acceleration/deceleration could  
331 help, though would still limit the angular range over which isokinetic data could be  
332 obtained.

- 333 • There is a limit on the feasible trunk range-of-motion using the TMC of the dynamometer  
334 when a participant is inside and wearing a BSE. Participants reported considerable  
335 discomfort beyond 90° of trunk flexion while in the TMC. Of note, the supine position  
336 used for the mannequin allowed a large range-of-motion (0°-120°). Yet, our preliminary  
337 testing indicated that position still presented difficulties with human subjects, such as  
338 discomfort with hip flexed exceeded 90°-100° and lack of control over knee movements.
- 339 • A possible misalignment of the hip flexion axis and the axis of rotation for the  
340 dynamometer adapter could have resulted in a mismatch between human subject results  
341 and the mannequin results, despite tightly securing the subjects to the trunk adapter of  
342 the dynamometer.

343

344 In summary, we captured net torque profiles of BSEs using a computerized dynamometer in  
345 both static and dynamic conditions and with different BSE support settings. This approach  
346 permits control over joint kinematics and appears to be more effective using a mannequin vs.  
347 human subjects. Future work is recommended to assess this approach for other occupational  
348 exoskeletons, such as soft devices (exosuits) and for arm-support exoskeletons. Characterizing  
349 exoskeleton assistive torque profiles can help in better understanding how to select a torque  
350 profile for given task requirements and user anthropometry, and assist in predicting the potential

351 impacts of exoskeleton use by incorporating measured torque profiles in a musculoskeletal  
352 modeling system.

353

#### 354 **Conflict of interest statement**

355 The authors declare that they have no known conflict of interests or personal relationships that  
356 could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

357

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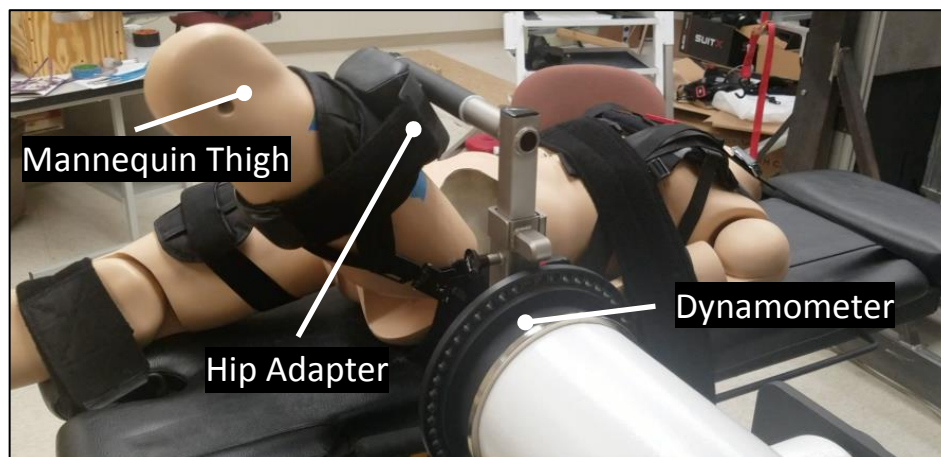
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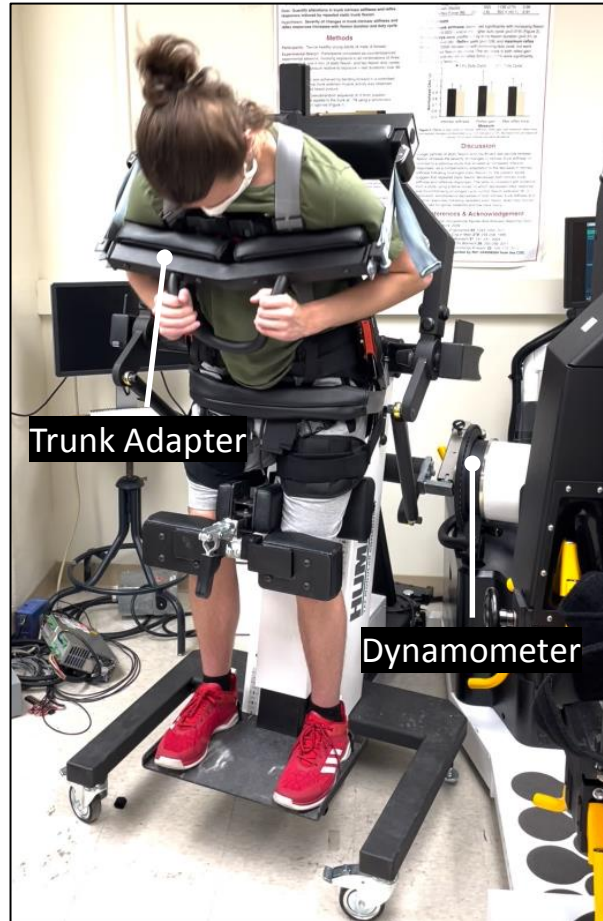


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3 Figure 1. Illustration of the experimental setup using a mannequin lying supine on the bed of a  
4 dynamometer. The mannequin is “wearing” the BackX™, and the left “thigh” was positioned or  
5 moved using a hip adapter connected to the dynamometer.

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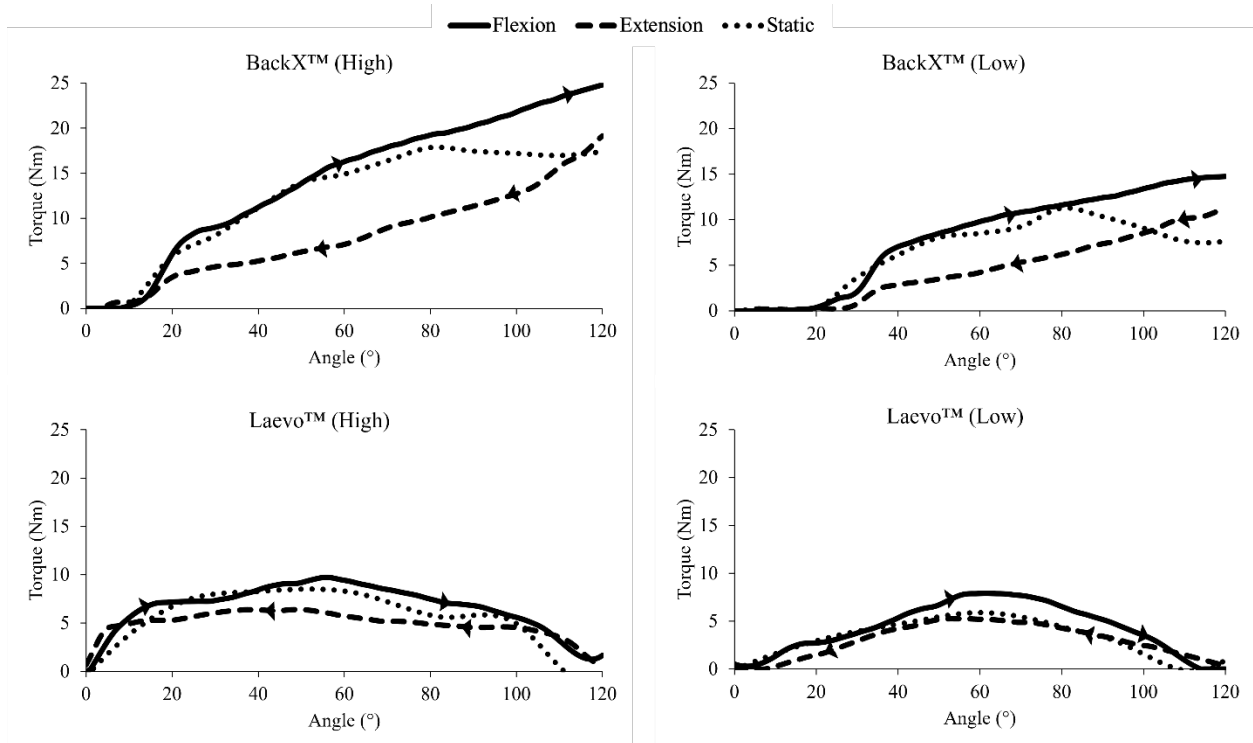


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9 Figure 2. Demonstration of the experimental setup using human subjects in the trunk modular  
10 component (TMC) of the HUMAC NORM. A participant is wearing the BackX™, and the trunk is  
11 positioned or moved using the trunk adapter of the dynamometer.

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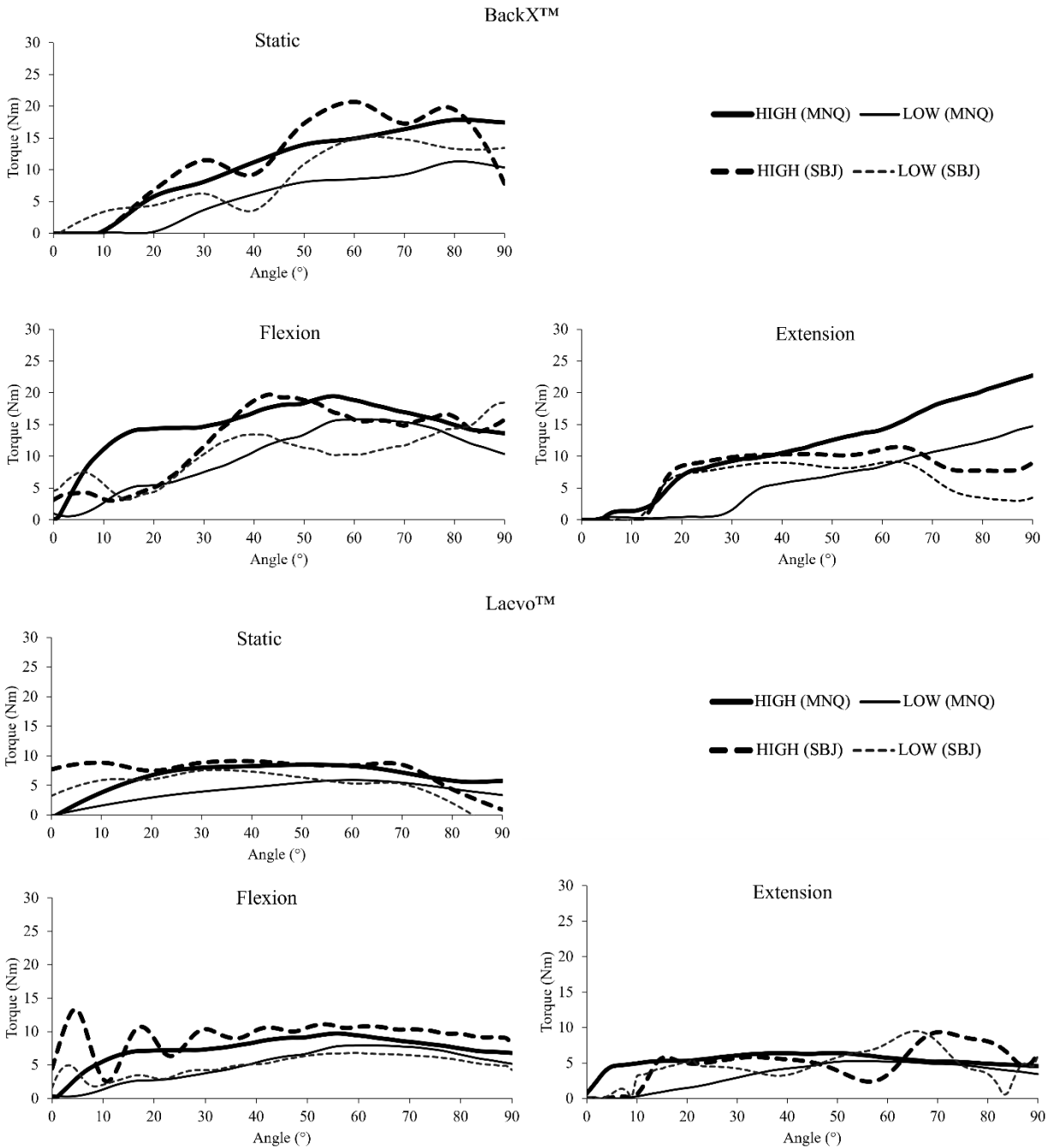


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15 Figure 3. Net torque profiles obtained from the mannequin with the BackX™ and Laevo™  
 16 during flexion, extension, and static phases, separated by support settings (High and Low). Net  
 17 torque profiles are for each (unilateral) mechanism, with dynamic data shown for the 20°/sec  
 18 condition, and angles indicate hip flexion.

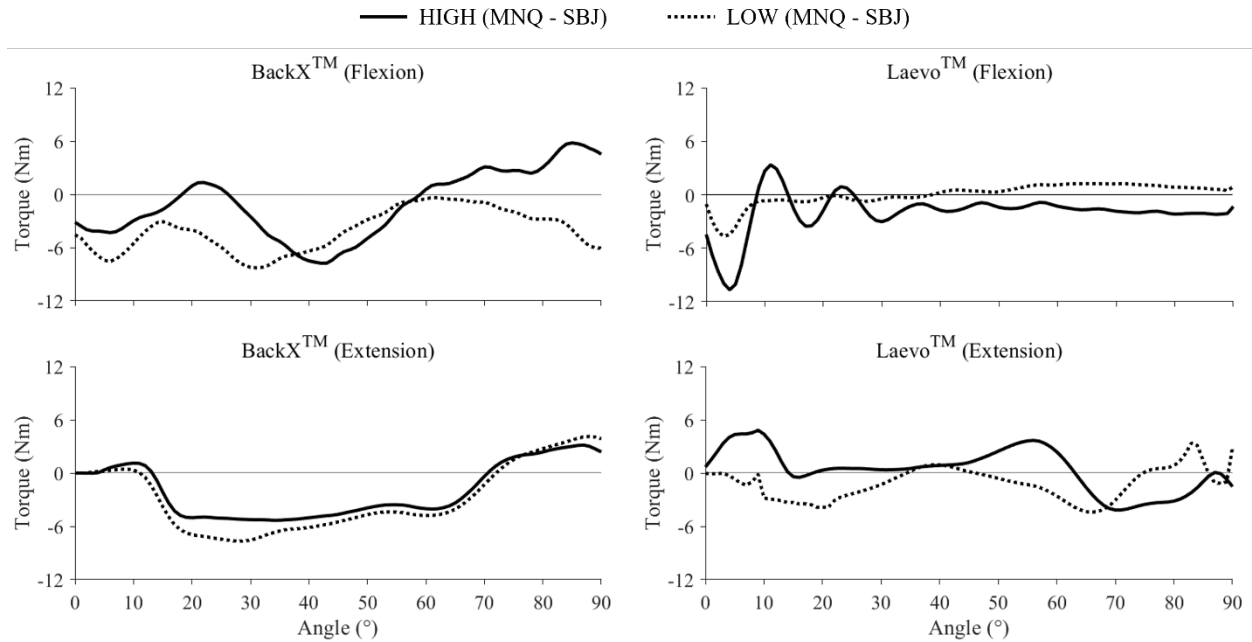
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21 Figure 4. Net torque profiles obtained from the mannequin (MNQ) and human subjects (SBJ) for  
 22 BackX™ (top) and Laevo™ (bottom) in two support conditions (LOW and HIGH), separated by  
 23 static and dynamic (i.e., flexion and extension phases) conditions. Torque profiles are for each  
 24 (unilateral) mechanism, with dynamic data shown for the 20°/sec condition.

25



26

27 Figure 5. Differences in mean net torque profiles obtained from the mannequin (MNQ) and

28 human subjects (SBJ). Results are shown for the two exoskeletons in both flexion and

29 extension as a function of hip joint angle.

30

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Appendix

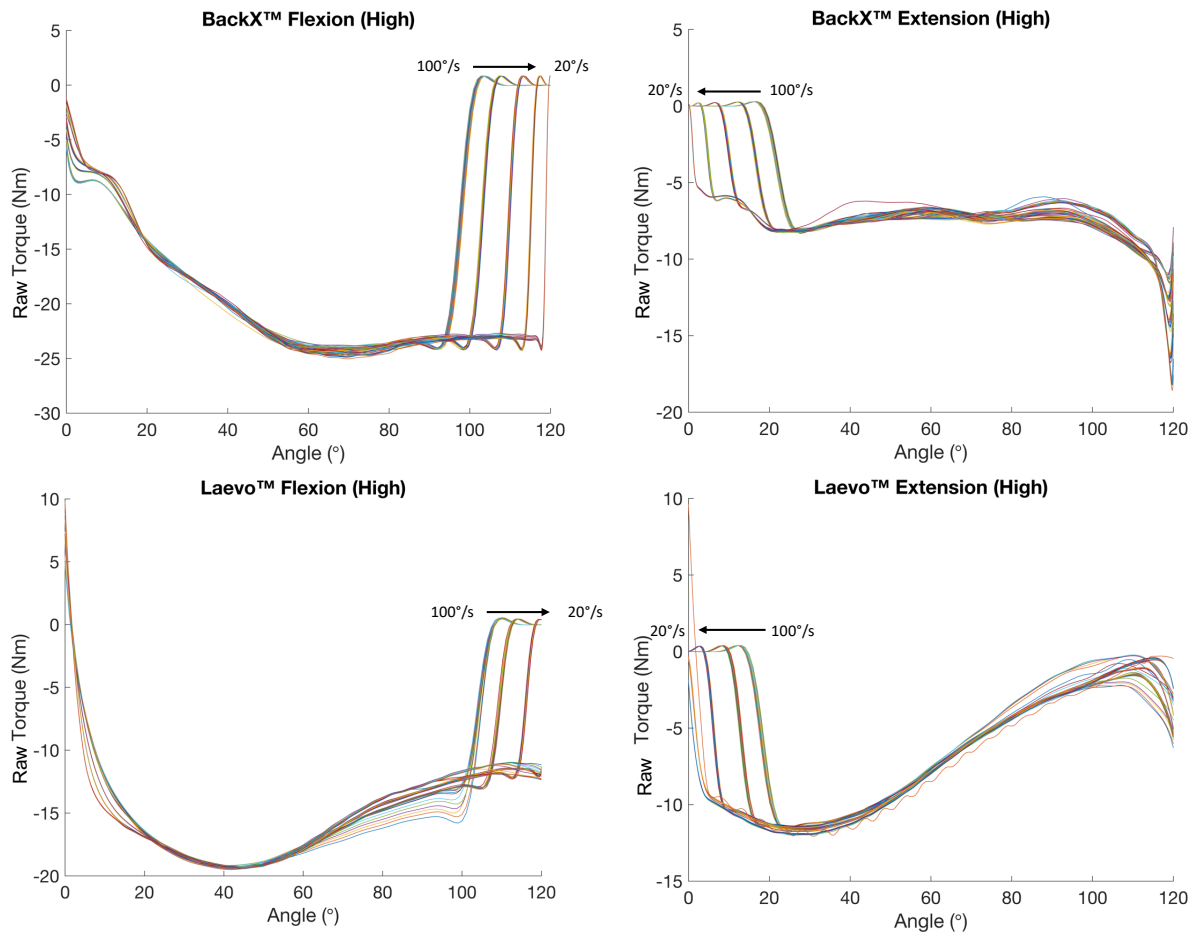


Figure A1. Examples of the effects of flexion/extension speed on raw torque profiles for the mannequin “wearing” the BackX™ and Laevo™ at high support levels. Angles indicate hip flexion for the mannequin. Illustrations at each of the five angular velocities include 14 replications. Torque profiles are similar across angular velocities, except for the beginning and ending phases of movement (likely due to the acceleration/deceleration of the hip adapter).

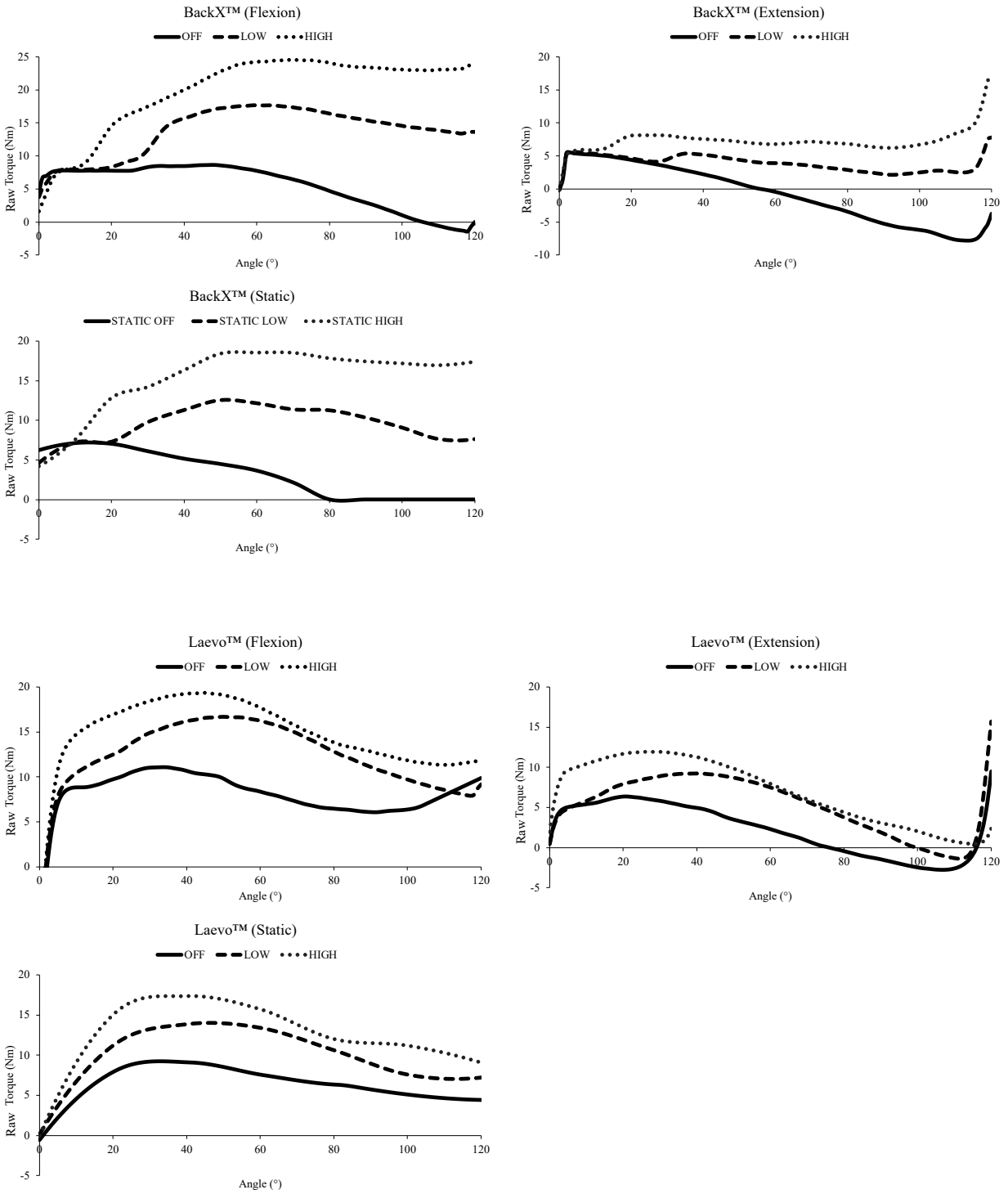


Figure A2. Demonstration of the raw torque profiles obtained from the mannequin for BackX™ (top) and Laevo™ (bottom) in three support conditions (OFF, LOW, and HIGH), shown separately for static testing and separately for the flexion and extension phases in dynamic testing. Torque profiles are for each (unilateral) mechanism, with dynamic data shown for the 20°/sec condition.



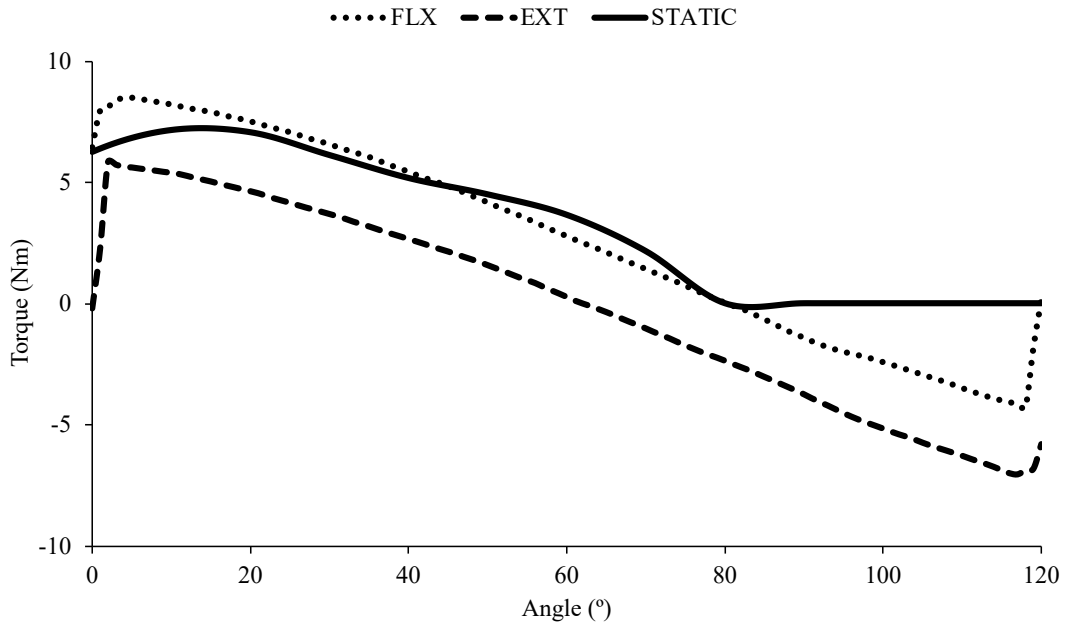


Figure A3. Demonstration of the torque profiles obtained from the mannequin without “wearing” the BSEs “(i.e., NO BSE) shown separately for static testing and separately for the flexion and extension phases in dynamic testing. Torque profiles are for each (unilateral) mechanism, with dynamic data shown for the 20°/sec condition.

Table A1. Peak (95%ile) activation levels of the bilateral rectus abdominus muscle, separated by support level (high, low, off) and angular velocity (25, 50, 75, 100°/sec). Cell entries are means (SDs) and values are percent of MVICs.

		BackX™		Laevo™	
Speed (°/sec)	Support Level	Left	Right	Left	Right
25	Off	6.3 (0.28)	5.37 (2.48)	6.12 (3.25)	6.84 (1.7)
	Low	5.72 (1.29)	5.61 (3.37)	6.54 (3.72)	6.26 (3.73)
	High	5.75 (0.79)	5.14 (2.74)	6.11 (2.9)	6.04 (2.46)
50	Off	5.65 (1.25)	5.53 (3.12)	5.94 (3.55)	7.25 (0.84)
	Low	5.27 (1.86)	5.01 (3.39)	6.32 (3.19)	5.53 (3.47)
	High	5.94 (0.95)	5.16 (3.29)	6.04 (3.02)	6.42 (2.44)
75	Off	5.74 (1.32)	5.17 (2.55)	6.32 (3.73)	7.18 (1.86)
	Low	5.09 (1.44)	4.83 (3.5)	6.24 (3.18)	5.58 (3.59)
	High	5.67 (1.45)	4.92 (3.54)	6.26 (3.02)	6 (2.7)
100	Off	5.44 (1)	5.15 (2.65)	5.92 (3.03)	7.35 (2.3)
	Low	5.37 (1.56)	5.25 (3.92)	6.46 (3.73)	5.72 (3.63)
	High	5.33 (1.08)	4.69 (2.98)	6.47 (3.52)	6.21 (3.24)