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Men's and Women's Responses to Idealized Body Types

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We examined men and women’s cognitive processing style in response to idealized body types (exposed to either thin model images, athletic, or muscular). Women who were exposed to the athletic condition were significantly more likely to generate negative social comparisons than women in the thin condition. Moreover, women in the thin condition were significantly more likely to generate counterarguments than women in the athletic condition. Yet, there were no significant differences across body type conditions for men.

The images above are one set of the photos used in the study for Idealized Body Type Condition (Thin, Athletic, Muscular, respectively). Faces are blunted intentionally to control for attractiveness.

Participants
- N = 195 men and women recruited via Amazon Turk (53% male, M age = 28, 73% Caucasian, 84% Heterosexual, all U.S. citizens)
- Compensated $2.00 for participation.

IV: idealized Body Type Images
- 36 photos were validated in a pilot study of 20 participants to determine levels of thinness, muscularity, and athletic build for various racially diverse images. Two images of each body type for men and women were chosen (i.e., 2 thin, 2 athletic, 2 muscular)
- Participants were randomly assigned to view one of the 3 sets of idealized body types (i.e., Thin, Athletic, Muscular) corresponding with their gender (see examples above next column)

Constant (open-ended thought-response task):
All participants engaged in an open-ended thought-response task (adapted from Englem-Maddox, 2005):
- List the first 10 things that come to mind in response to the person in each of the two images List up to five thoughts that they had about themselves while looking at either image (After the thought-response task, participants completed a list of measures about body image that are not included in the analyses presented here.)

Coding Response Strategy:
Two coders blindly coded responses with a high percent agreement (97%) and inter-rater reliability (Cohen’s Kappa = .95) for the variables of:

- Negative Outcome Social Comparisons: Statements indicating the desire to have a certain body type, expression of dissatisfaction with any elements of one’s own body, any negativity related feelings or expression, etc. (See sample responses)
- Counter Arguments (Critical Processing): Criticizing the body type (e.g., too thin, too muscular, unhealthy, etc.) and indicating a desire not to have the body type by questioning the appearance, doubting the body type, or rejecting it entirely. (See sample responses)

The above data were analyzed using the following measures:

- **Counter Arguments (Critical Processing)**: We used a critical processing variable of our own creation that included the elements of the counter-argumentation task and rated the responses generated by participants (e.g., negative social comparisons, critical processing, relationship of counter arguing and social comparisons in response to three body types).
- **Negative Social Comparisons (NSC)**: We also used a negative social comparisons variable that included the elements of the negative social comparisons task and rated the responses generated by participants (e.g., negative social comparisons).

The data were analyzed using a series of ANOVAs, with body type (thin, athletic, muscular) as a within-subjects factor and gender (male, female) as a between-subjects factor. Significant main effects and interactions were explored further using post hoc comparisons (Tukey HSD).

The results indicated that women generated significantly more NSC in the athletic condition than did men. Women made more NSC in the thin condition than the athletic condition. However, no significant differences among men across conditions.

Future research could explore whether responses made to idealized body types can predict other body image related variables (e.g., internalization of appearance based ideals and body appreciation, a conceptually and theoretically similar construct).

Acknowledgements
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References

Discussion
Women made marginally more NSC in response to athletic images than the thin and muscular images. Women made more CA in response to thin images than the athletic images. Findings reflect the changing nature of sociocultural appearance-related pressures for women:
- Decades of media campaigns teaching women to critically evaluate and reject ultra-thin ideals portrayed in media (Sicce & Presnell, 2007) might have led to decreases in thinness-orientated body dissatisfaction over time (see Karazia, Murben, & Tykka, 2016 for a meta-analysis across 31-years).
- As such, women may be more readily able to make counter arguments (CA) toward thin ideal images. Accordingly, the athletic ideal may be replacing or providing a new option to the thin ideal, thus leading women to make more NSC when shown athletic images.

Among men, no emergent condition differences on CA and NSC responses were found.
- Appearance ideals for men more flexible/diverse than they are for women (Buote et al., 2011), and men are more valued for their internal (versus their external) characteristics (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), so they do not experience increased muscularity body dissatisfaction overtime (Karazia et al., 2016).

Sample Coded Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Sample Counter Arguments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thin Image (n=30)</td>
<td>This guy needs some meat on the bones. He needs to gain some weight...and eat more protein.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Image (n=30)</td>
<td>I wouldn’t want to look like THAT, but I would like to be more in shape. This person cares about their looks too much. Thighs could be a bit more muscular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscular Image (n=40)</td>
<td>Does he use steroids?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Sample Counter Arguments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thin Image (n=33)</td>
<td>I think the guy is too buff. I wonder if this picture is photo shopped.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Image (n=30)</td>
<td>I wish I had abs like hers. I think this person cares about their looks too much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscular Image (n=40)</td>
<td>I think this guy is too buff. This is way too much effort.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Negative Outcome Social Comparisons

| Thin Image (n=30) | Maybe I should lose some weight though to be skinnier. I wanted my stomach to be flat like hers. I wish I had abs like hers. |
| Athletic Image (n=28) | I need to diet. |
| Muscular Image (n=34) | I need to get a six-pack. |

Sample Positive Outcome Social Comparisons

| Thin Image (n=30) | I think the guy is too buff. I wonder if this picture is photo shopped. |
| Athletic Image (n=30) | I would love to look like THAT, but I would like to be more in shape. |
| Muscular Image (n=40) | Does he use steroids? |

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