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 thin 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 blurred intentionally to control for attractiveness.

### Results

#### Main Effect of Gender

**Women** generated significantly more negative social comparisons (M = 2.06, SE = 3.0) than men (M = 1.54, SE = 2.53; F(1,186) = 9.75, p < .002, n² = .05).

**Main Effect of Body Type:**

- Marginal significant difference of body type condition on the mean number of NSC generated, F(2,189) = 2.85, p = .06, n² = .03. Post hoc comparisons (Tukey HSD):
  - Women in the athletic condition (M = 4.12, SE = 5.3) generated a significantly higher number of NSC (p <.01) than women in the thin condition (M = 1.96, SE = .52).
  - The muscular condition (M = 2.15, SE = .50) did not significantly differ from either the thin (p = .94) or athletic (p = .72) conditions. See Figure 1.
  - No significant differences among men across conditions.

#### Ideal Body Type x Gender Interaction:

- Significant ideal body type condition and participant gender interaction for the number of NSC generated, F(2,189) = 3.74, p = .03, n² =.04.
- Women generated significantly more NSC in the athletic condition than did men.
- The mean number of counterarguments generated in the thin and muscular conditions did not differ between men and women. See figure 1.

#### Counter Arguments (CA)

**Men** generated significantly more counter arguments (M = 2.33, SE = 0.30) than men (M = 1.30, SE = 0.24; F(1,189) = 8.04, p = .003, n² =.05).

**Main Effect of Body Type:**

- Significant difference of body type condition on the mean number of CA generated, F(2,189) = 3.13, p =.05, n² =.03. Post hoc comparisons (Tukey HSD):
  - Women in the thin condition (M = 3.32, SE = .53) generated a significantly higher number of CA (p <.05) than women in the athletic condition (M = 1.40, SE = .55).
  - The muscular condition (M = 2.40, SE = .50) did not significantly differ from either the thin (p = .45) or athletic (p =.40) conditions. See Figure 2.
  - No significant differences in the mean number of CA from men were found across conditions.

#### Ideal Body Type x Gender Interaction:

- Men and women did not differ in the extent to which they generated CA across each ideal body type condition, F(2,189) = 1.34, p = .27, ns.

### 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 (Sico & Presnell, 2007) might have led to decreases in thiness-oriented body dissatisfaction over time (see Karazia, Murken, & Tylka, 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 musculatory body dissatisfaction overtime (Karazia et al., 2016).

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).

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### References


