

CHANGES IN THE IDEAL BODY TYPE

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## ABSTRACT

The human body comes in all shapes and sizes. Each different body shape allows onlookers to evaluate at least some aspects of the subject's lifestyle and priorities. All eras choose a body type that they exalt above the rest. The goal of this research is to evaluate the considered ideal body type from three different eras in order to better understand these time periods and their values. A compilation of books and journal articles were used from the Cunningham Memorial Library Database, the library itself, and other personal libraries to better understand this topic. The most pertinent question was what Sparta, Medieval Europe, and the 1920's in the United States considered to be the ideal body type. From here a comparison between the time periods and their values was needed to understand why these ideal body styles differ so greatly. Lastly, a record of events that happened during each reign was needed so understand the external factors acting upon the choosing of the body styles. These findings can be used to deeper understand history, sociology, body image, and reproduction.

body type, Sparta, Medieval, 1920's

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

According to the textbooks humans have been around for 200,000 years, and since they have been around they have had different body types. Many things can be determined by a person's body type. Doctors can determine whether a woman is going to have an easier delivery based on the woman's body type and personal care. At a track meet the fastest athletes can be picked out due to their slim build. The best swimmers are defined by their strong shoulders and back. At one point criminologist believed that they could even determine the general demeanor of a person and if they were going to be a criminal or not strictly based off of their body type and fat content. Human bodies are judged every day on their appearance and upkeep, and society has a huge role to play in this perception of the perfect bodies. Although bodies are evaluated constantly, these evaluations are not always precise. For instance when a basketball player is brought to mind, normally a very tall, thin individual is pictured. However it is undeniable that Muggsy Bogues was a great basketball player, with only a height of 5'3". Not one body type is undoubtedly perfect, but society tries to refute this idea. There are many different body types, specifically female body types. They range from apple to pear, thick to thin, tall to short, curvaceous to delicate. Although there are so many different body types, each society attempts to make people believe that there is an "ideal body type." This body type can be used to determine what the society at that time deems important. Evaluating the ideal body of different eras combines various disciplines such as history, reproductive biology, fashion, sociology, and pop-culture. Societies have established different body types as the perfect body type throughout time, allowing us a glimpse into what each era placed emphasis on, whether that was children, religion or themselves.

## The Unknown

Out of the array of body types each era seems to pick a favorite, but what does this “ideal body type” portray about the eras’ values? Women currently are told that they must have medium to small sized breasts, a miniscule waistline, a flawless complexion, and pristine hair and make-up. Were women always told that they had to be these specific traits? No, throughout history different body types have been exalted. As the roles of women changed so did society’s view of the idyllic woman body style. Each body type had its time in the limelight, casting the others by the wayside. Is the ideal body solely based on what men want at the time or are there other factor as well? Did the current events in that time period depict how the women were perceived? There are so many considerations to be taken in when evaluating body type. Society’s perfect body says a lot about what that era, place, and people store value in. What does it mean for each era to have a different ideal body type? When comparing the differing eras, it can be expected that children were prioritized more at certain times than others. When the preferred body type did not support natural child bearing, were these societies more self-centered than those who chose a procreating body? With research it will be apparent whether this prioritization is demonstrated in their views of women. A factor that is not addressed is whether there are external factors, such as wars, that reinforce a certain body type for women. Researching this topic will aid in establishing whether the ideal body type changed throughout history and how it changed. When similar body types are in different eras, does this support that these eras have similar values and looks on children? The perfect body is something that society is obsessed with, but it is not historically evaluated to see what can be learned from it. If research can be compiled on the ideal form, and compared to past historical periods, then better understanding of each period and current body can be obtained and appreciated.

## Thesis

Although the ideal female body has been documented throughout history, a comparison and evaluation of why each type was prominent is not fully established. Therefore I propose to compile data from the Spartan Era (around 400 B.C.), the Medieval Times (the 5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century), and the 1920's in the United States. I will compare how their ideals changed the woman's body along the way.

## Research Questions

The first question that needs to be asked is "What do these time periods consider to be the ideal woman's body type?." It is important to understand that each era prioritized different body types. This question provides the main sustenance for comparison and evaluation throughout the rest of the paper.

The next question of "How do these time periods compare?" allows for similarities and differences to be expressed amongst the ages. This question makes it easy to compare how not only the body types differ, but also what the eras place value in. Did these time periods support womanly figures that promoted child rearing or did they support a more live-in-the-moment type of life style? This question poses another question in if the time period prefers a less motherly figure, then what is promoting them to be going against their biological purpose?

The last question addressed will be "What was historically going on to influence these views?." The purpose of this question is to decipher if something was going on in that era that made men and women less or more desiring of children and a womanly stature. If there are external factors working upon the outlooks of women, then are these external factors more important than an individual's selfish desires?

## Methods and Materials

Initially I will use common knowledge to start my research in the library database in order to collect books from the time periods mentioned previously. These books will range from historical accounts of the women's roles to how the women were treated sexually and portrayed in art from each time period in pictures as well as how the children were treated during the time. These books will allow me to compose a general basis of how the women lived and were represented. From here I will research books that can generalize the multiple time eras in question, so that I may see what was considered important during each time frame. Lastly I will use Google Scholar, the library database, personal libraries, and JSTOR to search for articles pertaining to women's ideal body type from these ages.

## Summary

Differing body types have been around since the beginning of humanity. A person's frame-work and body can tell many things about them such as their activity level, birthing ability, and possible criminality. Society determines what the ideal body type is for each era, as time continues, this perfect form changes. What society deems as its ideal body can be used to establish what that era placed value on, such as religion, self, children, or something else entirely. I will compile data from various time periods such as the Spartan Era, the Medieval Times, and the 1920's in order to determine their ideal bodies, compare them, determine what this means to these times' values, and what historically influenced them to choose this body type. I will ask: What do these time periods consider to be the ideal woman's body type?, How do these time periods compare?, and What was historically going on to influence these views?. Historical books from the library, Google Scholar, the library database, personal libraries and JSTOR will all be used to compile this needed information.



## CHANGES IN THE IDEAL BODY TYPE

### Introduction:

Each era has a different body type that they consider to be the ideal figure. The Spartans valued women who were built for making babies. These bodies were athletic and strong. In Medieval Times women who had a dainty upper torso, but hefty lower were considered ideal. This meant that they were still delicate, but the heftiness implied that they were close to God. American women in the 1920's, were fighting societal pressures by dressing to minimize their feminine curves. They considered the ideal woman to be slender and almost boy-like. Each era had reasons for their different chosen body styles. Although each era had a different body type, they also had similarities as well. The Spartans and medieval Europeans valued very different womanly body figures, but when searching for a wife both chose similar qualities. When courting, both men from these groups chose a woman who was devoted to his cause, whether that be God or country. The more slender women were valued in both medieval Europe and the United States in the 1920's. A caveat for this is that European men preferred their women to be fuller underneath the skirt. Women were both fiercely independent in Sparta and the United States. Though the Spartans celebrated the differences between males and females more, the Americans celebrated in their own ways. Each time period had a reason for their views of women. In Sparta athletic women were needed to produce capable boys for the Spartan army, since this state always seemed to be at war. There was a great increase in Christianity in the medieval era and they believed that eating brought you close to God. In the 1920's, women were questioning society and earning the right to vote, so they portrayed themselves as close to men as they could. There are many different reasons for the changing in ideal body types amongst times and geographical areas that can elaborate the different values of women.

## What is considered the ideal body type?

### *Sparta*

Women in Sparta were drastically different from the other women in tenth century B.C. Their main purpose in life was to produce sons in order to protect Sparta (Blundell, 1995). The girls were expected to exercise just as much as the boys (Pomeroy, 2002). They believed that this would increase the chances of the woman giving birth to a physically capable baby boy (Pomeroy, 2002). The women continued to run and exercise through their child-bearing years because their slaves did all of the common household work, normally accomplished by the lady of the house (Pomeroy, 2002). Below is a picture of a bronze statuette of a Spartan girl who is



**Figure 1: (Pomeroy, 2002)**

thought to be running or perhaps dancing because her head is turned (Blundell, 1995). As children, both boys and girls exercised without clothing and participated in festivals such as the Gymnopaedia (Pomeroy, 2002). Xenophon, a Greek historian, claimed that Spartan women were the only women who were fed generously (Pomeroy, 2002). The Spartans evaluated more than just the physical appearance of their children, especially when it came to marrying later on. The women who proved to be fertile were valued and actually shared amongst the men (Blundell, 1995). If a woman had a cowardly brother she was not considered for marriage, for fear of her passing on this horrendous trait (Pomeroy, 2002). Along with familial traits, hair color was a stipulation of marriage. If a woman had blonde hair, her only life choice was to change her hair color or

become a prostitute (Blundell, 1995). Brunettes were preferred. This could be due to Helen, a promiscuous queen of Sparta, being perceived as a blonde. By the outside world, Spartan women were considered promiscuous because their common dress was a Doric peplos, a dress that was split up the side to allow the wearer to have a greater range of motion (Blundell, 1995). The Spartans' ideal woman was toned from all the exercise, extremely fertile, came from an upstanding family, and a brunette.

### *Medieval Europe*

The women in medieval times were not as valued as those in Sparta. The majority of women in the Medieval Era were considered evil temptresses (Power & Postan, 1975). The women were to be delicate, but society had a great emphasis on food. They believed that eating was the best way to encounter God (Bynum, 1985). Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth



**Figure 2: (Power & Postan, 1975)**

centuries famine was becoming common once again, so those capable of indulging in food did so without reserve (Bynum, 1985). Amongst the aristocracy, it was valued for a woman to be larger, for that showed that she came from wealth and was Heavenly favored (Bynum, 1985). The women who worked and ate less were farther from God, and therefore not wanted as deeply by the male populous. To the left is a picture of Cristine de Pisan, a French Italian author, leading a group of

ladies about (Power & Postan, 1975). As shown in this picture, most of the women look fragile and slim at the top, yet round about the midsection. The artist Titian portrayed women as fleshy and lush around the fifteenth century (Mazur, 1986). The women were to have small breasts and upper body (Mazur, 1986). Those parts of their bodies were not hidden behind the restraints of fashion, but the hips and legs were of a different story (Mazur, 1986). Since the hips and legs were not displayed, due to the large round skirts, they were perceived to be luscious and generous (Mazur, 1986). The women of the medieval times were to have small breasts and arms, but then were of generous girth.

### *1920's in the United States*

The woman's ideal body type has changed in the United States, but throughout the 1900's there was an emphasis on slenderization and breast size. In the 1920's the nation moved from a bustier ideal woman to a woman with an almost boyish figure (Mazur, 1986). An example of this is the items sold in the Sears catalog. In 1900 the catalog showcased only wasp-waisted corsets (Mazur, 1986). These corsets accentuated the breasts of the women, but in 1923 the catalog sold only curve-less corsets that suppressed the hips (Mazur, 1986). The dresses hid the complete figure of the woman, excluding her bare legs (Mazur, 1986). All of the undergarments flattened the young women (Mazur, 1986). As show in the picture to the right, the women's outfits concealed their curves, making them appear more boy-like



**Figure 3: (Ward & Papachristou, 1975)**

(Ward & Papachristou, 1975). This was due to the challenge of whether women and men were actually designed to be very different or if society determined their differences (Wald & Papachristou, 1975). During this time there was also a steep increase in the use of cosmetics (Wald & Papachristou, 1975). Before the 1920's, cosmetics were solely used by the aristocracy and harlots (Wald & Papachristou, 1975). The nude models of this time were petite and slender with little curves and small breasts, which was a great contrast with the pinup girls of the 1930's (Mazur, 1986). Women in the 1920's were seen as a symbol of status and achievement for men (Wald & Papachristou, 1975). She was to be beautiful at any cost, for she was her husband's trophy (Wald & Papachristou, 1975). Although this was the type of woman that men wanted and idealized, they tended to marry a woman who was intelligent, sensitive, kind, orderly, and had an interest in intercourse (Wald & Papachristou, 1975). The women of America in the 1920's were clothed so that their curves were eliminated and were judged on beauty solely by their faces, which were now adorned with cosmetics.

#### How do these time periods compare?

##### *Spartans and Medieval Europeans*

Both Spartans and Medieval Europeans chose and valued women based on their beliefs. Spartan men valued women who were athletic and brunette, whereas those who lived in the medieval times valued women who were dainty on top, but large everywhere else. These times greatly contrast in their values of the external womanly body, but internally they were both looking for the most dedicated woman. In Sparta it was vital for the women to be athletic in order for them to carry and give birth to healthy athletic males so that they may defend Sparta. The medieval women were more concerned with the great rise in Christianity. They believed that eating was the most literal way of encountering God (Bynum, 1985). If there was so much

emphasis on eating, then it can be concluded that this would place a value on women having fuller thighs, stomach, and buttocks. Women of Sparta also ate a great deal, when compared to other Greek states, but they exercised so much that they were not rotund (Pomeroy, 2002). To the right is a depiction of a medieval lady hosting a feast (Power & Postan, 1975). Another difference between the ages was the reasons for families to marry off their daughters. In Sparta a



**Figure 4: (Power & Postan, 1975)**

woman was married so that she may bring honor to her family by producing soldiers for the Spartan army, while in Europe the daughters were almost sold off to the highest bidder by the means of a dowry (White, 1965). Marriage in medieval times was a very complicated business transaction, resulting in the pursuer of the daughter owing the maiden's family money in order to obtain her hand in marriage (White, 1965). Families living in the Medieval Eras had to concern themselves with having enough coin to exchange for the necessities they could not produce themselves, whereas the Spartans did not have a coinage system (White, 1965; Brinkley, 2005). Another commonality between the time periods was that both had dangerous women, but the Spartans used these women to make stronger children, whereas the medieval men attempted to shy away from them (Mason, 1901). Overall these time periods are united in their value of devoted women, but differ in their reasons for marrying and what they believed to be the ideal body type.

## *Medieval Europeans and 1920's Americans*

The most pertinent commonality between the women of the Medieval Era and women in the 1920's was that they placed an emphasis on beauty. Both hid their bodies, either in very large skirts or with shapeless corsets (Mazur, 1986). Women in the 1920's were perceived to be shapeless, whereas Medieval women were form fitted and slender on top, but fuller under their large skirts (Wald & Papachristou, 1975; Power & Postan, 1975). A proper lady living in 1920's did not leave the house without her corset and make-up, much like the ladies of the Medieval Ages (Batchelor, 2002). This is shown in the 1920's advertisement below (Brown, 1987). Men



**Figure 5: (Brown, 1987)**

valued medieval women to be beautiful, virtuous, talented, and graceful (Mason, 1901). Women who did not fit these criteria were not considered for marriage (Mason, 1901). During the medieval era, there was a sensual age where men were more interested in making the acquaintance of women with questionable extracurricular activities (Mason, 1901). This also seemed to be a trend in the Americas with the flappers of the 1920's (Brown, 1987). The country was celebrating the end of World War I, and some of these celebrations became excessive, as depicted by F. Scott Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* (Boykin, 1963; Brown 1987). In both ages, women who were not considered ladies were dangerous (Langdon-Davies, 1927; Brown, 1987). In contrast, the upheld medieval women were expected to be extremely Godly and to show this by eating (Partner, 1993). American women had more freedom in terms of religion, politics, and work (Brown, 1987). Both eras had a great differentiation within the classes. There was a very

high class and an extremely low working class with very little individuals considered in between (Batchelor, 2002). Women of each era had the responsibilities of bearing heirs and keeping face with those of who they associated with (Brown, 1987). Both sets of women were expected to be beautiful and have slender upper bodies. Although the 1920's women were to have skinny legs, the medieval men valued curves below the corset.

### *1920's Americans and Spartans*

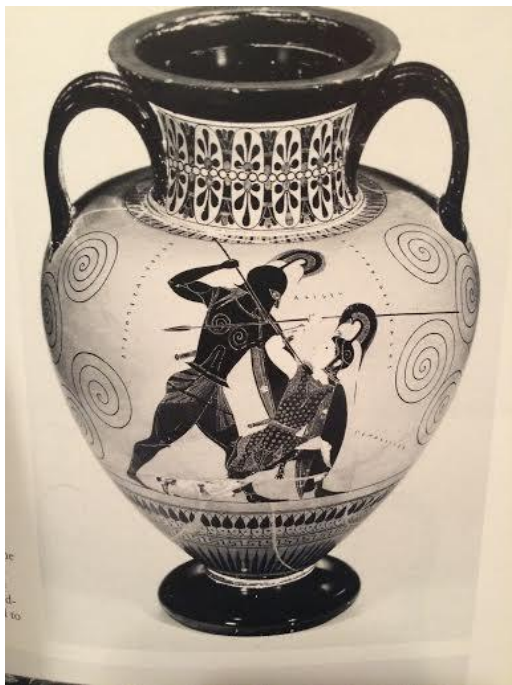
Both America in the 1920's and Sparta in its prime were very revolutionary for women. The Spartans gave women the right to own land and even interfered in politics (Blundell, 1995). It was an unwritten rule that women were allowed to intervene in the men's department such as politics and war, but men were not allowed to have a say when it came to the woman's domain (Blundell, 1995). While the men were off to war, the women worked hand-in-hand with the men who were not currently fighting, either due to age or position, to upkeep the state (Blundell, 1995). This is similar to America in the 1920's because this was a time where women were questioning society and the constraints it placed upon them (Wald & Papachristou, 1975). They wondered if biology had really contributed to these drastic differences in men and women, or if society had placed so many pressures on the sexes to be different (Wald & Papachristou, 1975). This explains why women were wearing clothing that concealed their womanly figures, making them appear more boy-like. A great contrast between the times was that the Spartans always seemed to be involved in war, whereas the 1920's were a time of peace and prosperity. Both Spartan women and women of the 1920's had a sense of pride, for both had accomplished a great deal. In both eras the more slender women were valued, although this slenderization appeared very different. The Spartan women that were extremely athletic were valued, whereas the 1920's women with a hidden feminine figure had value.



## What was historically going on to influence these views?

### *Sparta*

Sparta started up in 1490 B.C when Lacedaemon married Sparta, and named a city after his bride (Hull, 1999). Prior to being dubbed Sparta, this area was simply a conglomeration of villages (Hart-Davis, 2012). Sparta was utterly unique in the fact that it had a biarchy, meaning they had two kings ruling after 1100 B.C. (Hull, 1999). This was because when Aristodemus died in 1100, both of his sons succeeded him, making them both jointly the rulers of Sparta (Hull, 1999). This state was involved in a great number of wars, which supports their need for strong able bodied sons and warriors. They displayed a great defense using each other's shield in order to protect not only himself, but his companions as well (Buckley, 2010). Each man had



**Figure 6: (Blundell, 1995)**

to be incredibly strong in order for their phalanx to work properly without weakness (Buckley, 2010). One of the most commonly known wars, thanks to Homer, is the Trojan War. The Trojan War occurred from 1194 B.C. to 1184 B.C (Hull, 1999). It occurred because one of the princes of Troy took off with Helen, the wife of Menelaus, a Spartan ruler (Hull, 1999). To the left is a vase painted with Achilles, a Greek demigod who died in the Trojan War (Blundell, 1995). After the ten year Trojan War, Sparta was involved in the First and Second Messenian Wars for approximately a hundred years (Rhodes, 2010). The Persian Wars followed in 400 B.C (Brinkley, 2005). All of Greece allied in order to fight off the Persians, but later on, when the Greeks turned in on each other, the Persians would aid the

Spartans (Brinkley, 2005). Much to the dismay of the Spartans, Athens eventually became the most powerful state in Greece and demanded allegiance (Brinkley, 2005). In this time state pride was more common than pride in one's country (Hart-Davis, 2012). This caused the Peloponnesian Wars between the Greek states extending from 431 B.C. to 404 B.C. (Brinkley, 2005). Sparta actually asked the Persians for help in defeating Athens, putting them in charge of Greece (Brinkley, 2005). Sparta was a very different ruler from Athens. They not only abstained from interfering with the states' internal issues, but only asked for men and weapons (Brinkley, 2005). They even helped Athens defeat invaders (Brinkley, 2005). Another factor that made Sparta a unique ruler was that they did not have a form of coinage (Brinkley, 2005). Also instead of simply having one ruler who came up with everything, they had a Society of Equals, or Homoioi (Brinkley, 2005). This group was a council that came up with the regulations of Sparta (Brinkley, 2005). The Spartans also relied a great deal on their serfs (Hart-Davis, 2012). Women in other Greek cities, such as Athens, were expected to perform the household chores such as preparing food and making clothes, but the women of Sparta were not (Pomeroy, 2002). The Spartans relied on their serfs for these tasks, while the women exercised both physically and politically (Pomeroy, 2002). Eventually Sparta was defeated by Thebes and lost its power in 371 B.C. (Brinkley, 2005). The Spartans persevered until they were conquered by Rome in 146 B.C. (Hull, 1999). With Sparta constantly being in a state of war, it makes sense for them to have so much emphasis on their women being independent and capable of bearing strong children.

### *Medieval Europe*

The Medieval Times existed from approximately the fourth century to the fifteenth (Cantor, 1969). It is responsible for giving people the Catholic Church, experimental sciences,

universities, representative governments, romanticism, and capitalism (Cantor, 1969). The Medieval Period began with the decline of the Roman Empire (Cantor, 1969). The Europeans turned to religion to establish their foundations for their countries, spreading religion rapidly (Cantor, 1969). This religious strive led to many battles and deaths. Charlemagne was ruler of the present day France and Germany in the eighth century (Hart-Davis, 2012; Hull, 1999). He was a strong believer in Christianity, and forced his subjects to choose between their pagan beliefs and his beliefs (Hart-Davis, 2012). In one day in 782, he beheaded 4,500 prisoners who chose the paganism life style (Hart-Davis, 2012). By the eleventh century the people had determined what they considered important, causing the artistic movement to explode creating an abundance of art, literature, and philosophy (Cantor, 1969). In the thirteenth century, the Europeans were back to arguing with each other over ideals and priorities (Cantor, 1969). The Bubonic Plague struck Europe in the fall of 1346 (Hart-Davis, 2012). It is believed that Christians returning to Europe on the Silk Road contracted the disease on their journeys (Hart-Davis, 2012). The European civilians had very little protection from a bacterium that was this evolutionarily advanced (Hart-Davis, 2012). Although the death toll is not precisely known, it is estimated that more than 25 million Europeans perished from this plague (Hart-Davis, 2012). Religion played a dominant role in the medieval ages. It was a cornerstone for establishing each government, and those closer to God were highly valued (Bynum, 1985). Food was a way of expressing ones closeness to God (Bynum, 1985). Those who were rotund were wealthy and must be favored in Heaven through the experience of eating (Bynum, 1985).

### *1920's in the United States*

World War I started in 1914, but the United States refrained from entering until 1917 under the direction of President Woodrow Wilson (Boykin, 1963). The First World War ended

in 1918, leading the American populous into a celebration in the 1920's (Boykin, 1963). After the war, Americans were tired of war, Europe, worrying, and politicians so they elected Warren G. Harding as the next president (Boykin, 1963). Harding promised to work towards making their former carefree lives their future (Boykin, 1963). The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution issued the Prohibition Law in 1920, making it illegal to sell alcohol (Hart-Davis, 2012). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century women started to question which was more influential in the differences between men and women, DNA or society (Wald & Papachristou, 1975). This led to the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution in 1920, which granted women the right to vote (Hart-Davis, 2012). When President Harding passed away, Calvin Coolidge took office in 1923 and lead American into the grand party that they so desired (Boykin, 1963). During his presidency, industry boomed and wages increased, while the prices of things decreased (Boykin, 1963; Brinkley, 2005). This resulted in a large group of newly rich people, who had nothing to do but spend their money on frivolous things such as grand parties and anything else they desired (Brinkley, 2005). Along with the 1920's came the rise of the radio, movies with sound, sports, jazz, and the tango (Brinkley, 2005; Boykin, 1963). The first Academy Awards were established in 1929 (Hart-Davis, 2012). There was also the epic flight of Charles Lindbergh, across the Atlantic to Europe (Boykin, 1963). Although there were many high points in the 1920's there was also devastatingly low points. Along with the prohibition came large amounts of bootlegging and crime (Boykin, 1963). An example of this increase in crime is the mobster Al Capone and his bootlegging and other criminal activities in the Chicagoland area (Schram & Tibbetts, 2014). The Ku Klux Klan even experienced a vast increase in popularity during the 1920's (Brinkley, 2005). After many years of access, the New York stock market crashed on October 29, 1929 (Boykin, 1963). The crash led to both a national and international economic depression, which

was not aided by the western drought that killed many crops (Hart-Davis, 2012; Boykin, 1963).

These grand parties and won liberties are shown in the way women chose to portray themselves as equals of men.

## CONCLUSION

The human body comes in all shapes and sizes. Each different body shape allows onlookers to evaluate at least some aspects of the subject's lifestyle and priorities. All eras choose a body type that they exalt above the rest. The goal of this research was to evaluate the considered ideal body type from three different eras in order to better understand these time periods and to compare their values. A compilation of books and journal articles from the Cunningham Memorial Library Database, the library itself, and other personal libraries to better understand this topic were used. The three most pertinent questions were what Sparta, Medieval Europe, and the 1920's in the United States considered to be the ideal body types. From here a comparison between the time periods and their values was needed to understand why these ideal body styles differ so greatly. Lastly, a record of events that happened during each reign was needed so understand the external factors acting upon the choosing of the body styles. These results allow for a deeper understanding of why and how each body figure is chosen as idyllic.

The Spartans were found to prefer women who were athletic in build and brunettes. This is partially due to the great emphasis that this community placed on soldiers and fighting to defend Sparta. The women would exercise just as much as the men did in order to keep their bodies fit for delivering strong healthy babies. Not only did the women have to be strong, but they had to come from noble families. If a young girl's brother was considered a coward she was not allowed to marry, because no man wanted his children to be cowards. The medieval women were very different. Strength was no longer of importance. In fact, they almost preferred their women to be a bit more delicate on top. Large skirts were in fashion at the time, which hid the woman's figure from below the breast. This caused men to begin to wonder what was actually beneath their large skirts. Artists support that men preferred a woman who were

fuller underneath her skirt as opposed to one who was on the lean side. It was also believed at this time that eating brought you closer to God. Therefore women who were larger were more treasured because they must be nearer to the heart of God than a skinnier woman. Women of the 1920's were facing their own internal trials. They were debating whether biology or society determined the majority of the differences between males and females and decided to experiment a bit on this endeavor. The women went from tight corsets that emphasized their bust to ones that diminished any type of feminine curve. Their dresses were baggy and square making the women appear to be more boy-like in appearance. This only lasted for a short while before the pinup girls emerged in the 1930's.

Although each of these time periods valued different bodies, they all had some similarities as well. Both the Spartans and Medieval Europeans placed emphasis on a woman who was dedicated to their cause, whether that is a dedication to one's God or a dedication to one's state. Another similarity was that both of these eras promoted their women in eating, which a lot of other societies did not. In the 1920's there was an emphasis on facial beauty, much like there was in the medieval times. These time periods also realized that there were mischievous women who were dangerous to the integrity of the eligible bachelors, but chose to flirt with them anyway. In contrast to each other, the American women had more freedom than those in past Europe. The American women were allowed to question society and its norms, while the medieval maidens had no choice but to conform. It is abundantly clear that the Spartan and American women were vastly independent. The Spartan women not only trained with the boys, but were allowed to own land and be involved in politics. The American women had just been granted the right to vote and were using their newfound opportunity to explore the resistance against other cultural norms.

These focused areas all experienced external effectors that influenced their society's view of each woman's body type. Sparta, for instance, was involved in a multitude of wars. They were involved in the Trojan War, The Persian Wars, and The Peloponnesian Wars just to name a few. Because they seemed to always be in a state of war, it was vital to continue to produce new soldiers for the next upcoming battle. Sparta stayed strong, and was at one point in control of all Greece, until the Romans conquered them in 146 B.C. The medieval period begins at the fall of the Roman Empire. When the empire fell, new countries were formed with the help of their chosen religions. Christianity was increasing rapidly at the beginning of the era. They believed that a larger woman ate more food, which was their most direct way to God. There were many battles due to religious beliefs and endeavors. After the Europeans had established their newfound countries, the art industry boomed causing art, literature, and philosophy to be the focus for many years. A couple hundred years later the Europeans were back at fighting when the Bubonic Plague struck killing tens of millions. Unlike the two previous time periods, the 1920's in the United States was not a time of war, but a time of postwar celebration. The First World War was over, alcohol was illegal to sell, and women had just gained the right to vote. The people were living in a time of constant celebration and selfishness. Wages were high and prices were low. They no longer cared what was happening around them, or about their own actions. The radio had just been invented as had movies with sound. Crime also peaked during the 1920's and the stock market crashed in October of 1929 putting an end to the people's celebration.

This study allowed for a complete analysis of why these seemingly perfect body types were chosen for each time period. It also gives a perspective on how other time periods chose their view of perfection. Although this research is mostly historical, it can be used to determine



what each time periods health issues were in comparison to body shape. It also gives a glimpse of what each period valued, such as children, religion, or themselves. This research was first influenced by the biological aspect of reproduction. Each generations purpose was to guarantee its survival by offspring to the next generation, so why would certain generations stray from the body type that tends to be more reproductively successful. Although this research only touches on topics such as reproduction, history, fashion, sociology, and self-image, it can be used to delve deeper into each one of these disciplines.

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