Cookie Cutter Girls: A Content Analytic Investigation of the "Clean Girl Aesthetic" on TikTok

Kenson Moore[1], Lily Jones[1], Madeline R. Wick, MS[1], Sean P. Dougherty, MS[1], Jennifer A. Harriger, PhD[2], & Pamela K. Keel, PhD[1]   [1]Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida; [2]Pepperdine University, Malibu, California

Introduction

- "Clean Girl Aesthetic" is defined as content associated with perpetuating the thin ideal through minimalistic or "clean" fashion and makeup trends.
- Thin ideal content tends to include images or videos of women in media who physically meet the beauty standard. Increased exposure leads to higher risk of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. Fink. (2010).
- Physical appearances portrayed in the media often are not representative of those who consume the content. Saul, Rodgers, R. F., & Saul, M. (2022).
- Hypothesized that the clean girl aesthetic would claim to support inclusivity, body positivity, and body acceptance but in reality, would include images of women meeting the thin ideal standard of beauty.

Coding Process

- Coders were both undergraduate psychology students
- Coders utilized a codebook based on previous literature
- Clean girl aesthetic was typed into the TikTok search bar
- If a variable was present it was coded as a '1'
- If a variable was not present it was coded as a '0'
- If a video had multiple girls, it was coded as '888'
- Discrepancies in coding was resolved through discussion between the two coders

Selection of TikTok Videos

- 'Clean Girl Aesthetic' was typed into the search bar
- "Date Posted" filter was set to "This Week"
- "Sort by" filter was set to show most liked videos
- The first 50 videos that were generated through the filtered search were collected
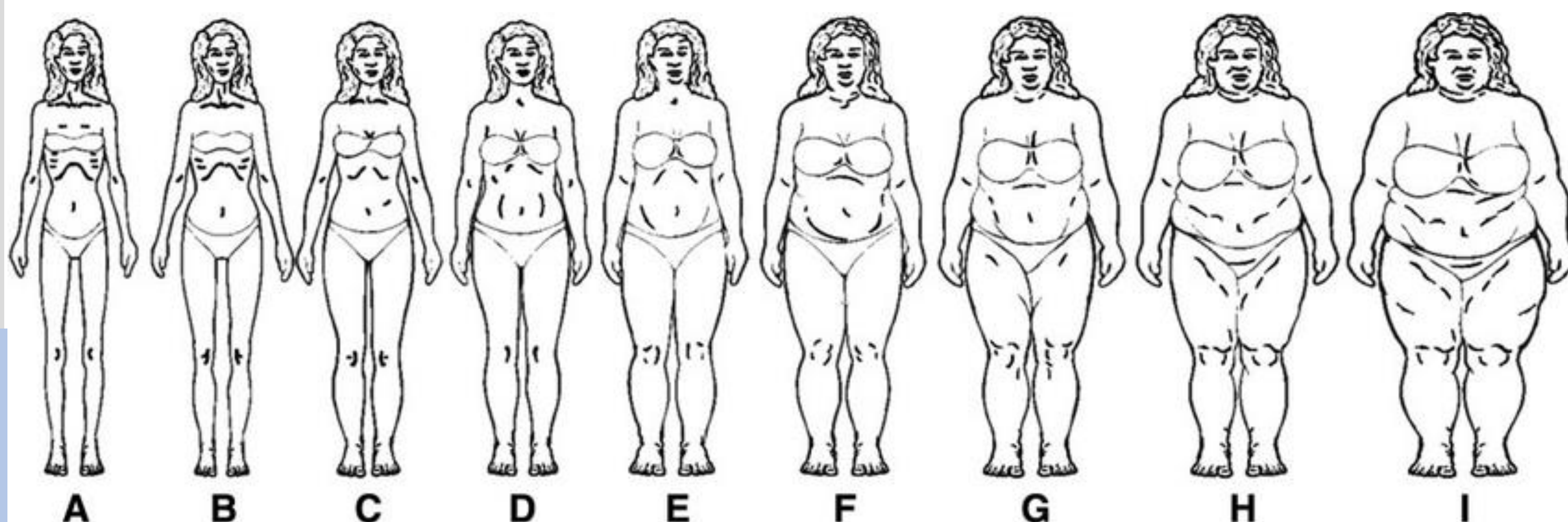
Figure Rating Scale

A B C D E F G H I

Table 1. Selected Variables Coded for in the Present Study

Variable	Definition
Body Acceptance/Love	Post encourages acceptance of one's body (or body parts) that don't conform to ideal standards
Inner Positivity	Post encourages cultivation inner characteristics and positive feelings (e.g. body confidence, optimism, happiness) that may be expressed in outer behaviors (e.g. kindness, mindfulness, helping others)
Protective filtering Information in a Body-Protective Manner	Post challenges the unrealistic nature of media images and appearance ideals, as well as interprets and internalizes messages that are compassionate towards one's body
Conceptualizing Beauty Broadly	Post depicts a wide range of appearances, body sizes/shapes, and inner characteristics as attractive
Body Appreciation	Post encourages appreciating the features, functionality, and health of the body
Adaptive Investment in Body Care	Post emphasizes respecting and taking care of one's body by engaging in positive, health-promoting self-care behaviors
Fat Acceptance	Acceptance, celebration and/or admiration, specifically of higher weight individuals
Weight/Fat Stigmatizing	Post negatively portrays being overweight/having fat
Minimalism	Post about simple aesthetics, not too much makeup, jewelry, accessories, items
Body/Weight/Food Shaming	Post expresses guilt or shame about one's body, weight, or food behaviors
Clothing/Beauty Appearance	Post emphasizes clothing and beauty tips for appearance purposes
Fat/Weight Stigmatization Text Post	Implies negativity in regard to being overweight
Thin Praise Text Post	Implies positivity in regard to being thin
Eating Disorders	Post refers to eating disorders and/or recovery
Mental Health	Post refers to mental health
Dieting/Restraint Text Post	Discusses dieting or restraint around food
Activism	Post explicitly encourages others to support a social cause
Thin Stigmatizing	Post ridicules or stigmatizes thinness
Wealth	Post about making money and the importance of buying expensive things
Productivity	Emphasizing getting things done and routines
Haul Video	Showing a lot of items the individual has purchased or received from PR brands potentially

Results

Significant patterns in preliminary coding were as follows:
- Creators in 86.7% of videos were coded as "Women"
- Creators in 80% of videos of were coded as "White", with only creators in 6.6% total videos being coded as other identifiable ethnicities
- 80% of creators were coded as the "20s" age group
- Creators' body size in 53.3% of videos were coded as the second thinnest on the body rating scale
- 96.7% of creators had no acne
- 100% of creators had no cellulite, scars, stretch marks or an obvious disability
- Creators in 70% of videos were coded as "Adhering to culturally based beauty ideals to a great extent"
- 16.7% of videos mentioned brand-names
- 93.3% of videos were coded for as having "No Objectification"
- 100% of videos did not show exercising
- Similarities in beauty and style choices were noted: 40% of videos were coded as having "Brushed up eyebrows", 63.3% of videos were coded as having an "Almond" nail shape, 76.7% of videos were coded as wearing "Gold Jewelry", 63.3% of videos were coded as wearing "Neutral" clothing colors, etc.
- Creators in 66.7% of videos were coded for as having "Straight" hair. 46.7% were coded for having "Blonde" hair, with only 13.3% total coded for as having "Wavy" or "Curly" hair textures
- Creators in 70% of videos were coded as wearing "Not revealing" clothing and 13.3% were coded as wearing "Slightly revealing" clothing
- 50% of creators wore loose fitting clothes , 10% wore normal fitting, and 20% wore tight fitting
- "Overall Themes" frequencies for videos appeared as follows: 3.3% coded as "Supportive", 10% coded as "Humorous", 26.7% coded as "Educational", 46.7% coded as "Motivational", 0% coded as "Opinion", and 6.7% coded as "Promotional"
- Most common "Hashtag Themes" included "Fashion and Beauty", "That Girl", "Health and Wellness", and "Other Hashtag Theme"
- Most common video themes included "Clothing/Beauty Appearance", "Commercialism", "Wealth", "Minimalism", etc.

Conclusions

- Most videos were of thin, young, blonde, straight-haired Caucasian women adhering to the "Clean Girl Aesthetic" trend who possessed no "visible flaws"
- Product promotion of name brands is heavily emphasized and "haul videos" are praised
- Most "Clean Girl Aesthetic" participants adhere to said aesthetic in almost all aspects of appearance
- Clean Girl Aesthetic does not emphasize objectification/bodily display, exercise, or diet as heavily as adolescent/young female-targeted trends in the past ("Thinspo", etc.)
- Limitations include only collecting a small sample of videos, having preliminary results and human error in coding.
- Future research should examine how social learning theory relates to trends focused on the thin ideal.