



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

Kenson Moore¹, Lily Jones¹, Madeline R. Wick, MS¹, Sean P. Dougherty, MS¹, Jennifer A. Harriger, PhD², & Pamela K. Keel, PhD¹

¹Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida; ²Pepperdine 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. Exposure to the thin-ideal has been demonstrated to lead 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).
- We 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

Variables Included in the Coding Process

- Used the many of the same variables coded for in previous studies examining similar content (Boepple et al., 2016; Boepple & Thompson, 2016)
- Appearance-based variables with multiple forms of code included the following: Post Type (text-only, visual-only, visual and text); gender; ethnicity; age; body size; adherence to culturally based-beauty ideals; number of skincare products used in the video; nail polish; nail design; nail length; nail shape; hair color; hair style; styling hair with heated tools; shoe type; clothing exposure; clothing fit; clothing color; clothing type
- Variables with "yes/no" or "0/1" codes were as followed: separate variables for presence of perceived flaws such as acne, wrinkles, cellulite, and obvious; brands mentioned (and a corresponding free-response); objectification (and a corresponding free-response); creator doing exercise such as pilates, yoga, walking, weight-training; the presence of buzzwords such as "glossy/dewy skin" and "clean eating"; and the presence of various other appearance choices such as brushed up eyebrows, gold jewelry, and designer bag; Hashtag themes such as Health and Wellness and Dieting/Weight Loss
- Overall Video Theme variable included the following codes: supportive, humorous, educational,, motivational, opinion, promotional, and other overall themes
- Selected theme variables coded for are included in Table 1.

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

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

Preliminary results of this study indicated the following:

- Creators in 84% of videos were coded as "Women"
- Creators in 68% of videos of were coded as "White", with only creators in 6% total videos being coded as other identifiable ethnicities
- 80% of creators were coded as the "20s" age group
- Creators' body size in 60% of videos were coded as the second thinnest on the body rating scale, with <15% of creators' videos coded as other body sizes
- Almost no "Yes/No" codes for apparent "flaws" were coded as present
- Creators in 66% of videos were coded as "Adhering to culturally based beauty ideals to a great extent"
- 33% of videos mentioned brand-names
- 96.0% of videos were coded for as having "No Objectification"
- Most videos were coded as "No" for mentioning any of the various exercise types
- Similarities in beauty and style choices were noted: 44% of videos were coded as having "Brushed up eyebrows", 54% of videos were coded as having an "Almond" nail shape, 60% of videos were coded as wearing "Gold Jewelry", 66% of videos were coded as wearing "Neutral" clothing colors, etc.
- Creators in 56% of videos were coded for as having "Straight" and "Blonde" hair, with only 16% total coded for as having "Wavy" or "Curly" hair textures
- Creators in 58% of videos were coded as wearing "Not revealing" or "Slightly revealing" clothing, and the highest percentage of videos (40%) were coded as having creators wearing "Normal fitting" clothing
- "Overall Themes" frequencies for videos appeared as follows: 24% coded as "Humorous", 4% coded as "Educational", 22% coded as "Motivational", 22% coded as "Opinion", and 28% 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.

Contact:

Kenson Moore
Florida State University
1000 West Brevard Street Tallahassee, FL.
32304 Apt. 246
Kdm22b@fsu.edu
(352)-459-4733

Lily Jones
Florida State University
206 S Woodward Avenue, Tallahassee, FL
Lkj22@fsu.edu
(848) 234-2414

References:

Fink. (2010). *Thinking About Being Thin Need For Cognition Predicts Internalization Of The Thin Ideal*. Florida State University.
Saul, Rodgers, R. F., & Saul, M. (2022). Adolescent Eating Disorder Risk And The Social Online World. *Child And Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics Of North America*, 31(1), 167-177. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chc.2021.09.004>
Boepple, & Thompson, J. K. (2016). A Content Analytic Comparison Of Fitspiration And Thinspiration Websites. *The International Journal Of Eating Disorders*, 49(1), 98-101. <https://doi.org/10.1002/Eat.22403>
Boepple, & Thompson, J. K. (2016). A Content Analytic Comparison Of Fitspiration And Thinspiration Websites. *The International Journal Of Eating Disorders*, 49(1), 98-101. <https://doi.org/10.1002/Eat.22403>
Boepple, Ata, R. N., Rum, R., & Thompson, J. K. (2016). Strong Is The New Skinny: A Content Analysis Of Fitspiration Websites. *Body Image*, 17, 132-135. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2016.03.001>