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What I eat in a day videos: the influence of visual body cues on body dissatisfaction and eating intentions

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Introduction: This study investigates how visual body cues in TikTok videos affect young viewers' perceptions of body image and general eating intentions.

Methods: In this study, 78 female participants viewed six messages: three without body cues and three with either thin or muscular ideal cues in a randomized order in a 2 (thin ideal versus muscular ideal) × 3 (repetition of messages) × 2 (present vs. absence) mixed factorial design. After viewing each video, self-reported eating intentions and body dissatisfaction were measured.

Results: Results suggested that participants who view videos with body cues reported significantly lower eating intentions and higher body dissatisfaction. Although thin ideal cues led to higher body dissatisfaction compared to muscular ideal cues, no significant effect on eating intentions was found. Findings showed that body shape concerns significantly moderated the effects of body cues on body dissatisfaction and the effects of ideal cues on eating intentions, with individuals having higher body shape concerns experiencing more pronounced changes.

Discussion: These findings indicate that comparisons to influencers' body ideals in TikTok "What I Eat in a Day" content can lower eating intentions and heighten body dissatisfaction, particularly among young women with body image concerns. Those results highlight the need for platform policies and body image interventions that separate food content from aesthetic ideals and instead promote functional, diverse body representations

KEYWORDS

what I eat in a day, TikTok, body image, eating intention, social media, social comparison, experiment

Introduction

Short-form video platforms such as TikTok attract millions of young adults to highly visual, appearance-oriented content. Visual-centric social media trends are heavily influencing eating patterns and body image among young adults, which has been shown to carry health risks when unhealthy behaviors are promoted (Modrzejewska et al., 2022; Suhag and Rauniyar, 2024). Scholars have increasingly linked social media use to appearance concerns, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating, particularly when platforms emphasize physical appearance and idealized physiques (Dane and Bhatia, 2023). TikTok, in particular, facilitates the rapid circulation of appearance ideals through trends, algorithms, and influencer culture. In TikTok, video is displayed in full-screen vertical format, with text hidden behind an expansion tap. Visual cues dominate attention before captions are read. Popular genres such as "fitspiration" not only idealize specific body types but also frame appearance management as a marker of health and discipline, a portrayal that has been shown to contribute to body

dissatisfaction, compulsive exercise, and unhealthy self-evaluation (Bowles et al., 2021; Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2018). TikTok videos could influence negative body image through visual body cues in this context.

Within this environment, the trend of sharing ‘What I Eat in a Day’ (WIED) videos on TikTok presents a unique intersection of food and body ideals. Typically, WIED videos contain content related to meal preparation, ingredient breakdowns, macronutrient and calorie breakdowns, daily meal plans, and examples of what influencers consume on a daily basis (Pfender et al., 2024). The hashtag #WhatIEatInADay had been viewed 17.2 billion times on TikTok as of June 2023 (Drivas et al., 2024). Davis et al. (2023) examined 100 popular WIED TikTok videos and found these videos frequently depict thin, feminine-looking individuals, sometimes discussing calorie counts of less than 1,500 per day, showing exercise for weight loss, or even openly discussing disordered eating behaviors such as laxative misuse or meal skipping. It was concluded that WIED videos could be detrimental to vulnerable youth due to their potential to induce self-comparison and promote disordered eating.

Previous work has largely examined exposure to appearance-focused posts via social media (Maes and Vandenbosch, 2022) but rarely investigates the influences of specific visual body cues in food-related posts. These cues may provide immediate comparison standards by pairing the creator’s physique with depicted eating, shaping body image and eating intentions. The effects of distinct body cue types (thin vs. muscular) remain understudied, despite the popularity of this format. Therefore, this study investigates whether exposure to WIED videos that contain visual body cues influences body dissatisfaction and eating intentions, and whether these effects differ between thin and muscular body cues.

Literature review

Body image and media influence on eating

Media play a significant role in influencing young people’s perceptions, attitudes, and feelings about one’s body (Grabe et al., 2008; Mayer-Brown et al., 2016; Zuair and Sopory, 2022). Studies consistently highlight the adverse effects of media consumption, attributing it to the rise in body dissatisfaction, decreased self-esteem, and the development of disordered eating behaviors among individuals, particularly in relation to the thin ideal for females (Markey et al., 2025; Miljeteig and von Soest, 2022). However, an investigation of the effects of thin and muscular images on women’s body satisfaction found that both thin and muscular images led to a decrease in body satisfaction, while hyper-muscular images did not produce the same negative effect (Benton and Karazsia, 2015). Rather than general media use, content types matter. A meta-analysis of 127 studies reports that thin- or athletic-ideal exposure is associated with body dissatisfaction, internalization of appearance ideals, and disordered-eating tendencies across ages and countries (Huang et al., 2021). Appearance-related media exposure was most strongly linked to eating-disorder outcomes and thin-ideal internalization (Huang et al., 2021). These patterns suggest that effects depend on the dimension of the ideal emphasized and the salience of the body and that shifting

ideals over time warrant further study. This literature motivates testing cue-specific effects on body dissatisfaction and general eating intentions.

Additionally, scholars examined the correlation between the utilization of prevalent social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok) and concerns related to body image (Kleemans et al., 2018; Mink and Szymanski, 2022). Unlike traditional media (e.g., television or magazines), social media facilitates frequent, interactive, and highly personalized interactions concerning body image, dieting, and appearance ideals, increasing user engagement and psychological involvement (Dane and Bhatia, 2023). WIED content often facilitates these outcomes as well. For example, Drivas et al. (2024) investigated the psychological and behavioral effects of viewing low-calorie WIED TikTok videos compared to high-calorie videos. It was found that low-calorie videos prompted upward social comparisons and a decrease in positive mood, whereas high-calorie videos prompted downward social comparisons and an increase in positive mood. Also, Davis et al. (2025) found that WIED TikTok videos showing only eating led to an increase in weight preoccupation and a small increase in the urge to vomit. Further, Pfender et al. (2024) found that many “What I Eat in a Day” videos convey weight-normative messages, which may contribute to heightened body dissatisfaction and disordered eating tendencies among viewers. While studies are beginning to explore the effects of food content, there is little research on how different body ideal cues impact body image perceptions and eating behaviors, especially in the context of the increasingly popular WIED videos. Furthermore, considering that females have consistently shown greater susceptibility to the adverse effects of social media on body image and disordered eating behaviors (Dane and Bhatia, 2023), further targeted and tailored investigations remain essential. Therefore, these findings support examining short term responses to WIED exposure and isolating the role of specific visual body cues within that content.

Appearance comparison

The concept of how one’s appearance compares with others is one of the primary contributors of individuals’ dissatisfaction with their bodies (Kim and Chock, 2015). One of the main mechanisms involved in the perception of body image is social comparison combined with the internalization of ideals (Rodgers et al., 2015). Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) emphasizes that individuals possess a natural tendency to evaluate their opinions and abilities. In the absence of objective measures, people are compelled to compare themselves with others (Festinger, 1954). The concept of social comparison has been widely used in media research over the years, particularly to understand how exposure to idealized images of bodies in advertisements and other visual media can contribute to body dissatisfaction (Tian et al., 2023; Tiggemann and Anderberg, 2020). Building on this mechanism, we focus on the moment where a visual body cues appears alongside food to understand how this co-presentation heightens body dissatisfaction and general eating intentions.

Platforms like TikTok, with their short-form video content, frequently present idealized body images, offering numerous opportunities for comparison in a short amount of time. TikTok’s

full-screen, rapid scroll format heightens the salience of visual cues, making TikTok's WIED content particularly influential because they present aspirational body images alongside food in an immediate comparable frame. As body comparison plays a key role in moderating the relationship between body surveillance and disordered eating (Tylka and Sabik, 2010), this study explores how individual differences in body shape concerns might moderate the effects of media exposure on body dissatisfaction and general eating intentions (i.e., intentions to eat in the near future).

TikTok's WIED content, uniquely combines lifestyle habits with physical appearance in a highly accessible and easily consumable format, yet research on their influence remains limited. Despite TikTok's growing popularity and the increasing amount of video content on social media, few studies have examined how specific visual body cues in food-related influencer videos shape young people's body image and eating behaviors. Prior studies showed that upward comparison on social media is linked to greater body dissatisfaction and disordered eating tendencies (Ho et al., 2016; Kirkpatrick and Lee, 2023; Tiggemann et al., 2009). Additionally, previous studies using social comparison predominantly focus on the thin ideal among females (McComb and Mills, 2021; Tiggemann et al., 2009). However, due to the growing ideal of muscular body types due to fitspiration trends, it is necessary to examine how individuals respond to these different body cues (i.e., thin vs. muscular). Therefore, we examine the effects of thin versus muscular body cues on body dissatisfaction and general eating intention, and whether individual differences in body shape concerns moderate the effects of these body cues on body dissatisfaction and eating intentions.

Body cues and body dissatisfaction

This study investigates the direct and moderating effects of visual content features embedded within WIED videos on two key outcomes: body dissatisfaction and eating intentions. Studies have demonstrated an association between exposure to body cues and increased disordered eating compared to an absence of body cues (Fardouly et al., 2023; Tiggemann and McGill, 2004; Tylka and Sabik, 2010). Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H1a-b: Videos with the presence of body cues will lower eating intentions (H1a) and evoke more body dissatisfaction (H1b) compared to the absence of body cues.

Although some studies have shown that viewing muscular body types negatively impacts female body image (Benton and Karazsia, 2015), a substantial body of research continues to demonstrate that exposure to the thin ideal more consistently increases body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Grabe et al., 2008). Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H2a-b: Participants exposed to thin ideals will exhibit lower eating intentions (H2a) and increased body dissatisfaction (H2b), in comparison to exposure to visual cues depicting muscular ideals.

A variety of individuals respond differently to media content, and there is an unexplained variance that deserves consideration (Oliver,

2002). Based on a meta-analysis of body image and media among women, media type and age can moderate body dissatisfaction and disordered eating among females (Grabe et al., 2008). Research also has shown that extensive social media use among young adults can amplify body dissatisfaction and reinforce the internalization of body ideals (i.e., thin), increasing their vulnerability to developing eating disorders (Jiotsa et al., 2021). Moreover, individuals with higher levels of body dissatisfaction are more likely to engage in disordered eating behaviors (Yang et al., 2022).

However, there is limited research exploring how individuals with trait body shape concerns, defined as preoccupation with body size and shape, are differentially impacted by media, specifically in the context of eating intentions and body dissatisfaction in response to ideal body cues. Understanding how body shape concerns moderate these effects is critical, as research suggests that those with pre-existing body concerns have increased susceptibility to eating disorder pathology (Dane and Bhatia, 2023). By focusing on trait body shape concerns, this study seeks to explain why certain individuals, particularly those with pre-existing concerns, are more vulnerable to body dissatisfaction and unhealthy eating behaviors when exposed to body cues in TikTok's WIED videos compared to others. Understanding this increased susceptibility to negative outcomes will help researchers understand the mechanisms involved, including social comparison. Therefore, we propose following research questions:

RQ1: How do individual differences in trait body shape concerns moderate the relationship between the presence of the body cues in WIED TikTok videos and eating intentions and body dissatisfaction across participants?

RQ2: How does the interaction between exposure to ideal cues and trait body shape concerns influence the eating intention and body dissatisfaction?

Method

Design

A 2 ideal cues (thin ideal vs. muscular ideal) \times 3 (repetition of messages) \times 2 body cues (present vs. absence) mixed factorial design was used to test eating intentions and body dissatisfaction. Body cues and repetition were within-subjects factors. Participants were randomly allocated to one of the two body type ideal visual cue conditions using the Qualtrics randomization feature. Thus, participants were exposed to six messages: 3 videos with body cues absent and 3 videos with body cues present. For the videos with the body cues present, they either saw 3 videos with the thin ideal cues or 3 videos with the muscular cues. For instance, a participant assigned to the body cue thin condition would view in a random order: e.g., body cue absent—body cue present (thin)—body cue absent—body cue present (thin)—body cue absent—body cue present (thin). We used multiple exemplars in order to generalize findings beyond each specific stimulus used. Without multiple message exemplars, it is not possible to determine whether the observed effects are attributable to the manipulations or to idiosyncratic characteristics of the selected videos (Cummings and Reeves, 2022; O'Keefe, 2003; Reeves et al., 2016; Slater et al., 2015; Thorson et al., 2012).

Stimuli

Publicly available WIED videos on the TikTok platform from influencers who have 10,000 followers were used as stimuli. They were presented for 2 min each. A total of 15 WIED videos (3 videos for male thin, male muscular, no body, female thin, and female muscular) were initially selected, but only the videos that featured female body ideals were included in the final analysis due to the study's focus on female participants. Therefore, nine WIED videos were specifically chosen for this study. To maintain ecological validity, we restricted the manipulation to either thin or muscular ideals as prior content analyses of WIED videos show two body cue ideals dominate visible creator bodies. Each video was standardized to a duration of 18 s of cue exposure: 3 s dedicated to displaying the body and 15 s showcasing food items. Videos with absence of body cues were standardized showcasing food items for 18 s. Notably, these videos were intentionally devoid of sound to ensure uniformity in manipulation across all selected content.

Pretest

To ensure that our manipulation of different ideals cues was valid, we conducted a pretest using Stunkard's figure rating scale (Stunkard et al., 1983). The scale utilized silhouette drawings representing a spectrum from extremely thin (rated as 1) to very obese (rated as 9) in appearance. Participants ($N = 35$) identified the perceived body image from the selection of 9 body figures that best matched the bodies displayed in the videos. It was confirmed that the videos in the thin ideal group ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.71$) depicted bodies that were rated significantly smaller than the muscular ideal ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.97$), $t(34) = 13.78$, $p < 0.001$. Participants who took part in the pretest were excluded from participating in the main test.

Procedure

Recruitment, informed consent, and participation were all conducted online. Participants were directed to an instruction page, which presented a scenario for them to imagine they are going through TikTok on their own feed and see influencers' videos. The participants were presented with a total of six WIED videos (three absent of body cues and either three thin or muscular ideal body cues) in a randomized sequence. After each video, participants responded to eating intentions and message-based body dissatisfaction (MBBD). Upon completion of all six video responses, participants were instructed to complete questionnaires regarding trait body shape concerns (in order to avoid priming thoughts about body concerns prior to video viewing) and demographics. The entire procedure lasted approximately 30 min. This study received approval from the local Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Independent variables

Body cues. Each video featured either body cues followed by food videos or food videos alone without any body cues. The video featured the person's entire body.

Ideal cues. Videos featured either thin ideal cues or muscular ideal cues, with a subset of videos devoid of any body cues designated as the absent condition.

Measured independent variables

Trait body shape concerns. Self-reported measures of trait body shape concerns were reported using the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ; Cooper et al., 1987; $\alpha = 0.89$). BSQ is a 34 items scale designed to measure concerns about body shape. Participants rated each item on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from never (1) to always (6), with higher scores indicating greater body dissatisfaction.

Dependent variables

Eating intentions. Eating intentions were assessed with 2 items with response options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7): 1. I would like to eat more after watching the video (reverse code) and 2. I would like to eat less after watching the video. Thus, higher scores indicate stronger intention to eat less or have greater restraint. We used a general quantity measure (more vs. less intended intake) because prior work shows WIED content is heterogeneous on food types (Davis et al., 2023) so health focused eating intention would mix divergent interpretations. A quantity-focused general eating intention maps directly onto the visible pairing of body cues and eating to avoid between-person variability in what healthy eating means. The correlation showed a moderate positive correlation (Pearson's $r = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$).

Message-based body dissatisfaction (MBBD). Participants self-reported their message-based body dissatisfaction ($\alpha = 0.81$) using 4 items with response options ranging from "do not agree at all" (1) to "completely agree" (7): 1. I want my body to be like the people/person's body in the video, 2. I want to change my body, 3. Watching the video made me think that I need to eat less to be better, 4. Watching the video made me feel bad about my body (see [Supplementary material](#) for exploratory factor analysis for MBBD).

Participants

A total of 78 undergraduate students who identify as women and who are enrolled in communication courses at a large southeastern university in the United States were recruited in the spring and summer of 2023 using an online recruitment system. They were compensated with course credit for their effort. In the sample, the average age was 20.57 years ($SD = 2.98$) with a range of 18 to 26 years of age. For ethnicity, 62.1% of participants identified as White, followed by Hispanic (11.5%), Black (9.2%), Asian (4.6%), Multiracial (11.5%), and Other (1.1%).

Power and sensitivity

Based on the G*Power analysis (Faul et al., 2009) for a planned 2×6 (two levels of body cues, six measures of 3 videos in each condition) F -test aimed at detecting a small effect size (0.25) with a

conventional alpha level of 0.05, it is necessary to enroll 76 participants to reach a power estimate of 0.80. This power analysis was conducted prior to the study, although a multilevel model analytic approach was ultimately taken. Thus, sensitivity analyses were also conducted post analysis.

Using analytic formulas for within-subject designs ($\alpha = 0.05$, two-tailed, power = 0.80), the minimal detectable difference (MDE) for eating intentions was 0.27 points on the 7-point scale, assuming the observed within-person SD of 0.89 and ICC = 0.56. The observed effect ($B = 0.43$) exceeded this threshold, suggesting the study had sufficient sensitivity to detect the within-person impact of body cues.

Using the same analytic formula ($\alpha = 0.05$, two-tailed, power = 0.80), the minimal detectable difference for message-based body dissatisfaction was 0.14 points on the 7-point scale, assuming ICC = 0.71 and the observed within-person SD = 0.58. The observed body-cue effect ($B = 0.88$) was also well above this threshold, indicating high sensitivity to detect within-person differences.

Analytic method

Multilevel modeling accommodates unobserved individual variations that Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) analysis fails to account for (Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002). In this study, we employed two-level random slope and intercept multilevel models to analyze the repeated measures data. The first level unit of analysis was the measure of each dependent variable ($n = 78$ participants \times 2 body cues \times 3 repetitions = 468). After excluding missing data, the final first level units were reduced to 462. These first level units were nested within individual participants ($N = 78$), which served as the second level of analysis, grouped by ideal cues (thin vs. muscular). HLM 8.0 software was used to estimate random slopes and intercepts by using full maximum likelihood estimation (Raudenbush and Congdon, 2021). A likelihood ratio model test was used to test the fit of the null model to level 1, level 2, level 2 with BSQ and level 2 with ideal \times BSQ interaction models.

Results

Null model. Though our data structure is nested and therefore should be accommodated with a multilevel model, we confirmed this using intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) by estimating unconditional models (see Tables 1, 2) before testing the hypotheses. The ICCs represent the proportion of between-individual variance to total variance for each variable. The ICCs for message-based body dissatisfaction and eating intention were 0.71 and 0.55, respectively. Multilevel modeling was appropriate for testing the hypotheses based on these findings.

Body cue model (level 1 model). Results of a level 1 model are shown in the second column of Tables 1, 2. Body cues (0 = absence of body cues, 1 = presence of body cues) were added to the within-subject equations.

Ideal cue model (level 2 model). Results of a level 2 model are shown in the third column of Tables 1, 2. Ideal cues (0 = thin ideal, 1 = muscular ideal) were added to the between-subject equations.

Ideal cue with BSQ model (level 2 with BSQ model). Results of a level 2 with BSQ model are shown in the fourth column of Tables 1,

2. That is, BSQ (continuous variables: the higher the score, the more trait body shape concerns the participant has) was added to the between-subject equations.

Ideal \times BSQ model (level 2 with ideal \times BSQ interaction model). Results of a level 2 with ideal \times BSQ interaction model are shown in the fifth column of Tables 1, 2. That is, the interaction term between ideal cues and BSQ was added to the between-subject equations.

We tested a sequence of nested models because videos were nested within participants. In multilevel modeling, it is standard practice to estimate a sequence of nested models and compare them to examine whether each added predictor explains additional variance and to arrive at a parsimonious final model. By comparing nested models, we can show that our conclusions are based on a model that both fits the data well and avoids unnecessary complexity. According to the Likelihood Ratio Test, all four models showed significant improvements over the null model for eating intention (see Tables 1, 2). Since all three models showed significant improvements, we considered both the Akaike information criterion (AIC) and the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) to balance model fit with complexity to decide on the final model. Therefore, we selected the level 2 model with BSQ as the final model due to having lowest BIC and AIC and insignificant ratio test between the level 2 model with BSQ and the level 2 with ideal \times BSQ interaction ($\chi^2(1) = 3.23$, $p = 0.07$). For body dissatisfaction, all four models also showed significant improvements over the null model. As shown in Table 2, the level 2 model with BSQ was selected as the final model due to it having the lowest in BIC and AIC and insignificant ratio test between the level 2 model with BSQ and the level 2 with ideal \times BSQ interaction ($\chi^2(1) = 0.19$, $p > 0.50$).

Hypothesis 1a-b predicted that videos with body cues present would lower the eating intentions (H1a) and increase the body dissatisfaction (H1b) compared to the absence of body cues. As reported in Tables 1, 2, there was a significant mean difference between the presence vs. absence of body cues on eating intentions and MBBD across participants on average. Participants self-reported that videos with body cues present elicited significantly lower eating intentions ($B = 0.43$, $S.E. = 0.14$, $p < 0.001$) and higher body dissatisfaction ($B = 0.88$, $S.E. = 0.14$, $p < 0.001$) compared to videos without body cues. In other words, participants wanted to eat less and felt worse about their bodies when they viewed videos with body cues compared to videos without body cues. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2a-b predicted that thin ideal cues would reduce eating intentions (H2a) and increase body dissatisfaction (H2b) more than cues depicting muscular ideals. As reported in Tables 1, 2, on average, there was no significant mean difference in body cue slope between thin and muscular ideal cues on eating intentions ($B = -0.13$, $S.E. = 0.19$, $p = 0.49$) across participants. However, there was a significant mean difference in body cue slope between thin and muscular ideal cues on body dissatisfaction ($B = -0.39$, $S.E. = 0.17$, $p = 0.02$) across participants. Thus, although thin ideal cues were associated with lower eating intentions, we did not find a significant main effect of ideal cues. Interestingly, when individual differences of BSQ were removed from the level 2 model, there was no significant mean difference in body cue slope between thin and muscular ideal cues on body dissatisfaction ($B = -0.31$, $S.E. = 0.19$, $p = 0.11$). In other words, participants felt worse about their bodies when they viewed thin ideal cues compared to muscular ideal cues. However, participants

TABLE 1 Influences of body shape questionnaire and body type on message based body dissatisfaction.

Predictors	Message based body dissatisfaction																								
	Null					Level 1				Level 2 (body type)					Level 2 (with BSQ)					Level 2 (interaction)					
	B	S.E.	t	df	p	B	S.E.	t	df	p	B	S.E.	t	df	p	B	S.E.	t	df	p	B	S.E.	t	df	p
Intercept	3.07	0.14	21.35	77	<0.001	2.74	0.14	19.82	77	<0.001	2.74	0.14	19.82	77	<0.001	2.74	0.10	26.57	76	<0.001	2.74	0.10	26.57	76	<0.001
Body cue						0.66	0.09	6.95	77	<0.001	0.83	0.15	5.39	76	<0.001	0.88	0.14	6.22	75	<0.001	0.75	0.24	3.08	74	0.003
Body type											−0.31	0.19	−1.64	76	0.11	−0.39	0.17	−2.31	75	0.024	−0.17	0.44	−0.38	74	0.703
BSQ (intercept)																0.02	0.002	7.88	76	<0.001	0.02	0.002	7.88	76	<0.001
BSQ (body cue slope)																0.007	0.002	3.22	75	0.002	0.008	0.003	2.26	74	0.027
Interact																					−0.002	0.004	−0.46	74	0.65
AIC	1322.54					1178.18					1177.46					1115.81					1117.62				
BIC	1402.23					1305.94					1315.24					1269.13					1277.21				
ICC	0.71																								

Random effects																									
	Null					Level 1					Level 2 (body type)					Level 2 (with BSQ)					Level 2 (interaction)				
Effects	VC	S.D.	df	χ^2	p	VC	S.D.	df	χ^2	p	VC	S.D.	df	χ^2	p	VC	S.D.	df	χ^2	p	VC	S.D.	df	χ^2	p
WS variance	0.62	0.79				0.34	0.58				0.34	0.58				0.34	0.58				0.34	0.58			
BS variance	1.51	1.23	77	1222.83	<0.001	1.37	1.17	77	1025.63	<0.001	1.37	1.17	77	1025.63	<0.001	0.71	0.85	76	570.92	<0.001	0.71	0.85	76	570.92	<0.001
Body cue slope						0.49	0.69	77	245.36	<0.001	0.46	0.68	76	236.83	<0.001	0.39	0.62	75	212.03	<0.001	0.39	0.62	74	211.17	<0.001
ICC	0.71																								
Deviance	1316.54					1166.18					1163.46					1097.81					1097.62				
Parameters	3					6					7					9					10				
Likelihood ratio model test						$\chi^2(3) = 150.36, p < 0.001$					$\chi^2(4) = 153.07, p < 0.001$					$\chi^2(6) = 218.73, p < 0.001$					$\chi^2(7) = 356.05, p < 0.001$				

BSQ, body shape questionnaire; WS/BS, within and between subjects.

TABLE 2 Influences of body shape questionnaire and body type on eating intention.

Predictors	Eating Intention																								
	Null					Level 1				Level 2 (body type)					Level 2 (with BSQ)					Level 2 (interaction)					
	B	S.E.	t	df	p	B	S.E.	t	df	p	B	S.E.	t	df	p	B	S.E.	t	df	p	B	S.E.	t	df	p
Intercept	3.76	0.13	29.16	77	<0.001	3.58	0.14	26.46	77	<0.001	3.58	0.14	26.46	77	<0.001	3.58	0.12	30.29	76	<0.001	3.58	0.12	30.29	76	<0.001
Body cue						0.36	0.10	3.47	77	<0.001	0.39	0.15	2.63	76	0.01	0.43	0.14	2.99	75	0.004	−0.12	0.30	−0.39	74	0.70
Body type											−0.06	0.20	−0.28	76	0.78	−0.13	0.19	−0.70	75	0.49	0.89	0.55	1.64	74	0.11
BSQ (intercept)																0.02	0.003	4.92	76	<0.001	0.02	0.003	4.92	76	<0.001
BSQ (body cue slope)																0.004	0.002	1.74	75	0.09	0.009	0.003	2.69	74	0.009
Interact																					−0.009	0.004	−2.10	74	0.04
AIC	1465.86					1446.43					1448.35					1418.96					1417.72				
BIC	1545.55					1574.76					1586.12					1572.33					1577.32				
ICC	0.56																								

Random effects																									
	Null					Level 1					Level 2 (body type)					Level 2 (with BSQ)					Level 2 (interaction)				
Effects	VC	S.D.	df	χ^2	p	VC	S.D.	df	χ^2	p	VC	S.D.	df	χ^2	p	VC	S.D.	df	χ^2	p	VC	S.D.	df	χ^2	p
WS variance	0.93	0.96				0.79	0.89				0.79	0.89				0.79	0.89				0.79	0.89			
BS variance	1.15	1.07	77	654.82	<0.001	1.17	0.57	77	422.89	<0.001	1.17	1.08	77	422.91	<0.001	0.83	0.91	76	322.66	<0.001	0.83	0.91	76	332.66	<0.001
Body cue slope						0.33	0.57	77	126.39	<0.001	0.33	0.57	76	126.25	<0.001	0.30	0.55	75	122.84	<0.001	0.28	0.53	74	119.89	<0.001
ICC	0.56																								
Deviance	1459.86					1434.43					1434.35					1400.96					1397.72				
Parameters	3					6					7					9					10				
Likelihood ratio model test						$\chi^2(3) = 25.43, p < 0.001$					$\chi^2(4) = 25.51, p < 0.001$					$\chi^2(6) = 58.90, p < 0.001$					$\chi^2(7) = 259.36, p < 0.001$				

BSQ, body shape questionnaire; WS/BS, within and between subjects.

wanted to eat about the same amount after watching thin or muscular ideal cues. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported.

In RQ1, we explored whether the individual differences of trait body shape concerns moderated the relationship between body cues in WIED TikTok videos and eating intentions as well as body dissatisfaction across participants. First, in examining the influence of body cues present on body dissatisfaction, our analysis revealed significant differences in the amount of change between levels due to the presence of body cues, further moderated by BSQ on average. Individuals with higher trait body shape concerns experienced a greater average amount of change in higher body dissatisfaction ($B = 0.007$, $S.E. = 0.002$, $p = 0.002$) when exposed to videos with body cues present. However, the analysis revealed that the presence of body cues in videos did not significantly affect eating intentions, even when considering the moderating effect of BSQ ($B = 0.004$, $S.E. = 0.002$, $p = 0.14$). Though individuals with more trait body shape concerns experienced a greater amount of change in lower eating intentions when exposed to videos with body cues present, trait body shape concerns did not moderate this effect as it only approached statistical significance. Interestingly, our analysis revealed significant differences in the amount of change in response to the absence of body cue videos, which was moderated by BSQ. Individuals with higher trait body shape concerns experienced a greater average amount of change in lowering eating intention ($B = 0.02$, $S.E. = 0.003$, $p < 0.001$) and increasing body dissatisfaction ($B = 0.02$, $S.E. = 0.002$, $p < 0.001$). In other words, participants with higher body shape concerns felt more dissatisfied with their bodies when a body was shown on screen than participants with lower body shape concerns watching the same videos.

In RQ2, we explored whether the interaction between ideal cues and BSQ influences eating intentions and body dissatisfaction when body cues were presented in the video. Our analysis revealed significant interaction effects of BSQ and ideal cues on eating intentions but not on body dissatisfaction. Individuals with higher BSQ who viewed muscular ideal videos experienced a greater average amount of change in eating intentions ($B = -0.009$, $S.E. = 0.004$, $p < 0.04$). Individuals with higher BSQ who viewed muscular ideal videos had no significant average amount of change in body dissatisfaction ($B = -0.002$, $S.E. = 0.004$, $p = 0.65$). In other words, among participants with higher body shape concerns, muscular bodies led participants to plan to eat less than thin bodies and this moderation did not extend to body dissatisfaction.

Explained parameter variance. The estimated parameter variances for each of the models just described are shown in [Tables 1, 2](#). Based on the difference between unexplained variance from the null model and unexplained variance from the final model, the proportion of variance in both outcomes was calculated. Pseudo-R² revealed that the complex model accounted for an additional 53% of the variance and 20% of variance in the body cue slope for body dissatisfaction. We also found that the complex model accounted for an additional 28% of the variance and 7% of variance in the body cue slope for eating intention.

Discussion

Considering TikTok is primarily a visual social media platform, concerns have been raised about the possible detrimental effects of TikTok contents on body images and subsequent dieting practices. From a theoretical perspective, this study suggests that social comparison to influencer referents may be part of the mechanism leading to significant

declines in eating intentions and increases in body dissatisfaction among viewers. Prior work on fitspiration content shows that exposure to idealized bodies is associated with higher body dissatisfaction and unhealthy self-evaluations (Bowles et al., 2021; Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2018). Our findings extend that pattern to WIED content that viewers reported higher body dissatisfaction and stronger intention to eat less when influencers' body was shown. While prior work has extensively examined the impact of idealized images on body dissatisfaction (Jiotsa et al., 2021; Kirkpatrick and Lee, 2023; Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2018), WIED videos represent a distinct form of content that combines physical appearance with food demonstrations. By focusing on these combined cues, this study extends the literature by exploring how such integrated presentations may heighten appearance-related evaluations and restrictive eating intentions among female viewers.

This pattern yields few implications. First, thin ideal body cues were associated with greater body dissatisfaction than muscular cues, consistent with evidence that thinness functions as a particularly punitive comparison standard for women's self-evaluation (Tiggemann et al., 2009). Also, both ideals were associated with lower intended intake, aligning with reports in the fitspiration literature that health framing often functions as aesthetic discipline by encouraging self-evaluation of eating and weight control rather than adaptive healthy nutrition practices (Bowles et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2023; Pfender et al., 2024). Taken together, the results indicate that WIED videos may instantiate the same negative impact on consumers. The observed patterns of higher body dissatisfaction and lower eating intention may carry negative consequences. Continuous exposure may strengthen internalization of idealized bodies which could be a pathway linked to disordered eating tendencies. It may increase restraint goals that prioritize aesthetic control rather than balanced nutrition. This study utilized social comparison theory as a framework for predicting that the visibility of influencers' body cues and ideals in WIED videos would influence eating intentions and body dissatisfaction. As predicted, viewing influencers' bodies in WIED videos were associated with a decrease in eating intentions and an increase in body dissatisfaction. These findings are in accordance with those of prior studies that have utilized social comparison theory (Ho et al., 2016; Kirkpatrick and Lee, 2023; Tiggemann et al., 2009). Thus, it can be surmised that consistent watching of food-related videos along with influencers' bodies may be associated with detrimental outcomes. One possible explanation is that participants may have felt compelled to adopt dietary habits modeled by TikTok influencers with the expectation that adopting similar dietary habits would lead to a body appearance that resembles the influencer's body. This reflects a conflation of aesthetic body ideals with perceived healthiness, which may contribute to misguided eating behaviors.

Additionally, this study examined whether individual differences in preexisting body shape concern moderated the relationship between the presence of body cues and ideal cues and eating intentions as well as body dissatisfaction. We found evidence that those with higher trait body shape concerns experienced a more pronounced association with a decrease in eating intentions and an increase in body dissatisfaction when viewing WIED videos. Interestingly, even when body cues were not present at all, the more trait body shape concerns a participant had, the greater their body dissatisfaction and decreased eating intentions were when they viewed videos about eating. A possible explanation for the observed results may be that the interaction between preexisting concerns about body image and

complex relationships with food can significantly increase body dissatisfaction, even without explicit body cues in dietary content. Prior work shows that individuals with eating disorders exhibit altered implicit responses to food and body cues that operate outside conscious awareness (Paslakis et al., 2021). Building on this, individuals with such concerns may exhibit a nuanced sensitivity to references to body ideals or eating practices, where even indirect references may elicit negative reactions. This study demonstrates the complexity of factors influencing body dissatisfaction and eating intentions and highlights the need for a better understanding of the psychological impact of individual trait body shape concerns.

Practically, this study highlights the necessity for a comprehensive approach towards mitigating the adverse effects of social media on body image issues, emphasizing the need for both regulatory measures on social media platforms and additional body image interventions. In addition to more active platform moderation of content that may exacerbate body shape concerns or disordered eating risk, advertisements should separate idealized bodies from diet by highlighting functionality while modeling diverse bodies (Fardouly et al., 2024). Body neutrality interventions can further de-emphasize appearance focused mindset by redirecting attention to what the body does rather than how the body looks (Seekis and Lawrence, 2023). Additionally, a school-based intervention that combines body image education with social media literacy has been shown to increase positive body embodiment and reduce dietary restraint (Mazzeo et al., 2024). For increased relevance and uptake, a body image and media literacy toolkit could be developed in collaboration with young people. The need for body image interventions for young adult women is particularly important. Currently, only eight digital interventions have been found to improve at least one body image outcome; however, effect sizes have been mostly small-medium, and few effects have been sustained over time (Mahon and Seekis, 2022). These findings should be leveraged to advocate for more in-depth studies that would facilitate a collective move towards healthier interactions with social media content. The use of such a multifaceted strategy acknowledges the complex dynamics at play, while also fostering an environment that is more inclusive and supportive for individuals who are navigating social media and body image issues.

Although this study focuses on WIED videos on TikTok, the findings have broader implications that extend beyond this trend or platform. Especially among younger audiences, the rise of short-form video content, driven by platforms such as TikTok, has fundamentally changed the way media is consumed and shared. Regardless of whether TikTok were to cease operations, short-form videos will continue to be popular, as evidenced by Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts' growing popularity. It is also important to note that the implications of this research are not limited to WIED videos but likely extend to a wide range of other videos trends (e.g., meal prep, 80/20 challenges, or 75 hard challenges, which feature prominently displayed body ideals). The findings provide valuable insights into how visual cues in short-form videos can affect individuals' self-perceptions, making it important to continue to examine these dynamics across a variety of content formats and platforms.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, message limitations should be considered; the 6 influencers were selected with the purpose of limiting

message heterogeneity which could limit the generalizability of the results. Additionally, only thin ideals and muscular ideals were selected as ideal cues. Thus, future research should consider more diverse bodies to see if there are any differences such as plus size models or average body cues, as well as a diverse population, including male and non-binary audiences (Abdoli et al., 2024; Burstall et al., 2024). Further, the videos were edited down to 18 s, rather than using the original full-length videos as intended by TikTok users. The edited clips may not fully capture the context or intended impact of the original content, decreasing the ecological and external validity of the study, as the study's use of TikTok videos is not fully representative of the content that people find on their own feed on TikTok. Moreover, there is a possibility of desensitization through repeated-measures design to the edited clips and self-report questionnaires. However, we randomized the presentation order of the edited clips and questionnaires to minimize the potential desensitization due to the repeated-measures design. Additionally, to maintain comparability, the study used real videos taken from TikTok to enhance its relevance, and the length of all videos and conditions was ensured to be consistent. Future research may wish to consider other social media platforms, such as YouTube shorts or Instagram Reels with full-length videos to ensure ecological validity and provide a more naturalistic context.

Furthermore, future research should examine additional factors that may shape audiences' eating intentions and body dissatisfaction, such as pre-existing attitudes toward WIED videos or the influencers, parasocial relationships with the influencers, and the degree of liking for the influencers as potential moderating variables. It would be valuable to explore whether the effects of WIED videos differ depending on the nature of the relationship between the source and the audience.

Next, although social comparison theory guided this study, we chose to measure body dissatisfaction rather than using a direct social comparison measure. This decision was made with the repeated-measures design in mind. Cuing comparison by asking about it would invalidate that the comparisons occurred unaided. However, we know social comparison often leads to body dissatisfaction, and by focusing solely on body dissatisfaction, we directly assess the outcomes of exposure to idealized body cues without interference from the recognition of social comparison itself. This approach provides a clearer understanding of how viewing these cues influences self-perception, which aligns with the goals of the study. However, future studies should examine mediation effects of comparison strength and direction to gain more insight into the visual aspects of food-related videos that include body cues to determine direct and indirect effects on differences in eating intentions, body dissatisfaction, and other related perceptions and behaviors such as physical activity (Drivas et al., 2024).

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Florida State University Institutional Review Board. The studies were conducted in

accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

SP: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Software, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. RB: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Software, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. JP: Formal analysis, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fhumd.2025.1694787/full#supplementary-material>

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