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Best Version of Yourself? TikToxic Effects of That-Girl Videos on Mood, Body Satisfaction, Dieting Intentions, and Self Discipline

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Abstract

The "That Girl" self-optimization trend on TikTok, promoting beauty and productivity, had over 17.4 billion views by August 2024. "That Girl" video clips showcase perfectly organized daily routines, fitness activities, and healthy eating—allegedly to inspire other users to aspire to similar flawlessness. Based on social comparison theory, the "That Girl" archetype serves as an upward comparison target. We expected detrimental effects of viewing "That Girl" content on young women in terms of positive and negative affect and body satisfaction. Expanding other research in this area, possible effects on self-discipline and dieting intentions were explored. Focusing on immediate intraindividual changes, a preregistered two-group online experiment using a pre–post measurement design was conducted. Female participants (N = 76) watched four minutes of either 16 video clips showing "That Girl" content or nature videos (control condition). Mixed ANOVAs provided evidence of a significant adverse influence of watching "That Girl" videos on female recipients regarding all dependent variables with medium or large effect sizes. Post-hoc analyses revealed that these effects were driven by participants who reported upward comparisons to "That Girls". Based on these results, the positive impact on self-improvement—as proclaimed by contributors of the "That Girl" trend—is critically questioned.

Keywords: social comparison; digital media; self; body image; self-discipline; TikTok

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1. Introduction

At the beginning of 2021, the archetype of a woman who seemed to have complete control over herself and her everyday life appeared on TikTok (Sekertzi 2022): she is characterized as the personification of a woman who stands out from the masses as an ideal, resulting from the continuous process of self-optimization, a central socio-cultural trend in Western societies (Nehring and Röcke 2024). On TikTok, the hashtag #ThatGirl has become a trend that encourages women to reimagine their lives with a structured routine to optimize productivity and beauty. The trend promotes an idealized lifestyle, often featuring aesthetically pleasing visuals of morning routines, sports outfits, and healthy meals. Thus, #ThatGirl contains the same components as videos used in studies about the thin ideal (for meta-analyses, see Mingoia et al. 2017; Paterna et al. 2021) or the fitspiration trend (for a review, see Nuss et al. 2024). In addition, however, the optimization of almost all areas of life is addressed in the videos. As of now, the #ThatGirl hashtag on TikTok has over 17.4 billion views (TikTok 2024). However, while the trend apparently aims to inspire

others to become the best version of themselves, it has also been criticized for promoting unrealistic and unhealthy standards and has faced scrutiny over how it affects viewers' well-being (Sekertzi 2022; Wallis 2022). The depicted content could make women feel inadequate in comparison with the seemingly perfect lives portrayed in the videos. This might have an impact on mood, body satisfaction, and health behaviors.

This study aims to examine the influence of the #ThatGirl TikTok trend on female recipients, which—thus far—has not received much attention from psychological researchers. Grounded in social comparison theory (Festinger 1954), we extend the growing body of research showing that some TikTok content may detrimentally affect young people. Going beyond previously examined variables such as affect and body satisfaction, we examine the potentially detrimental effect of #ThatGirl content on behavioral aspects such as self-assessment of daily routine, self-discipline, and dieting intentions. Methodologically, we focus on immediate intraindividual changes by implementing an experimental pre–post-measurement design.

1.1. Social Comparisons on TikTok

Social comparison theory (Festinger 1954; see also Gerber et al. 2018) suggests that people have an innate drive to evaluate themselves, often in comparison to others. This act of comparing oneself to others serves a variety of psychological and social needs and can influence a person's judgments, decision-making, and behavior. In the context of digital media, media portrayals can serve as reference points for individuals, thus influencing their perceptions of social norms and ideals (Fardouly and Vartanian 2016). Social media users (and influencers in particular) tend to present their best selves while concealing imperfections (Schlosser 2020), leading to upward comparisons where individuals compare themselves with those they perceive as superior in some way (Collins 1996; McComb et al. 2023; Schreurs et al. 2023). This is especially prevalent on highly visual social media platforms like TikTok, where users share videos that seemingly reflect societal (yet unrealistically high) standards of appearance and behavior (Gurtala and Fardouly 2023). The #ThatGirl trend fundamentally relies on recipients comparing themselves with the depicted women to find out in which areas they do not reach the standards of perfection and where they might have potential for improvement. The trend suggests that success in performance and beauty is purely due to personal effort; other factors like individual differences, situational circumstances, and the fact that the displayed content is heavily filtered and edited are largely neglected.

Meta-analytic evidence suggests that upward comparisons on social media can lead to negative self-perception and body dissatisfaction, as well as lower well-being and self-esteem (e.g., Bonfanti et al. 2025; McComb et al. 2023). In particular, the use of highly visual social media, such as Instagram and TikTok, is associated with body image concerns and symptoms of disordered eating (Sharma and Vidal 2023). While many findings are based on cross-sectional and correlational research designs, often leaving the question of causality unresolved, there is also ample experimental research showing causal effects. Some research suggests that negative social comparison effects become particularly important when consuming short-form videos on social media platforms such as TikTok. Just a little exposure to short-form social media videos reflecting unattainable appearance standards, known as appearance-ideal content, may be enough to have a negative impact on body image and lead to adverse effects on appearance satisfaction, negative mood, and self-objectification (Seekis and Kennedy 2023; Westenberg and Oberle 2023). TikTok usage has been shown to be positively associated with body dissatisfaction, mediated via increased upward appearance comparison and body surveillance (Mink and Szymanski 2022). Similarly, the consumption of Fitfluencer content on TikTok—a social media move-

ment that shares many characteristics of the #ThatGirl trend—can lead to more appearance comparison and, thus, less body satisfaction (de Brabandere et al. 2025).

1.2. Behavioral Consequences of #ThatGirl Content

TikTok videos in general, but also the #ThatGirl trend, often focus on weight control and body image (Westenberg and Oberle 2023). Thus far, most studies have examined the (detrimental) effect of TikTok content on mood or appearance satisfaction (Mink and Szymanski 2022; Pryde and Prichard 2022). Yet, it is also of interest whether the consequences of consuming such body-focused content may go beyond emotional and cognitive responses and translate into behavioral intentions, particularly dieting. For instance, it has been shown that women who watch videos featuring thin-ideal women report a stronger intention to eat healthier (Stewart and Ogden 2021). The theory of planned behavior suggests that an individual's decision to engage in a specific behavior can be best predicted by their intention to engage in that behavior (Ajzen 1991). This is determined by personal attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Women who voluntarily follow the #ThatGirl trend on TikTok supposedly have a positive attitude towards the depicted behavior and body ideal. Additionally, the #ThatGirl trend conveys the messages that it is highly regarded to become "That Girl" (= subjective norm) and that it lies purely within one's own control, given that some of the videos are titled and framed as "How To"-guides. Thus, we assume that consuming #ThatGirl videos may influence recipients' behavioral intentions, increasing the likelihood that they actually engage in dieting behavior.

The trend is often criticized for conveying unrealistic, potentially unhealthy extreme standards as a universally valid, desirable ideal and for encouraging the endless pursuit of perfection (Wallis 2022). The typical phrase "best version" makes it clear that good is not good enough to be "That Girl". It conveys that strict and, above all, constant productivity is the only way to maximize self-improvement (Sekertzi 2022). The display of the supposedly societal standard of what it should look like to have one's life under control can create the pressure to conform to this model solution. To empirically examine these critical assumptions, we intend to explore whether and how the confrontation with apparently consistently highly productive, organized people negatively influences the assessment and evaluation of one's own self-discipline and daily routine.

1.3. The Current Study and Hypotheses

To evaluate the impact of TikTok content, implementing a pre–post-design allows for the assessment of change in variables of interest before and after exposure to specific types of content. This approach provides more nuanced insights than designs using a posttest only, as demonstrated by Pryde and Prichard (2022), who showed that TikTok fitness videos, but not control videos, lead to an increase in negative affect immediately after viewing the content. Similarly, Blackburn and Hogg (2024) utilized a pre–post-test experimental design to assess the impact of pro-anorexia (pro-ana) TikTok content on body image dissatisfaction among women. Adding a pre-test allows for the examination of group differences and interactions, offering a richer and more nuanced view of the phenomena under study. This means that each participant serves as their own control, reducing the impact of individual differences that could confound the results. Resulting from the empirical, theoretical, and methodological assumptions outlined above, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1. *The reception of ThatGirl TikToks has a negative effect on the mood of the participants compared with the control group, leading to (a) a stronger increase in negative affect and (b) a stronger decrease in positive affect.*

H2. *The reception of ThatGirl TikToks causes a greater decline in body satisfaction compared with the control group.*

Additionally, we plan on examining the following explorative research questions (RQs):

RQ1: Can an effect of the reception of ThatGirl TikToks also be shown for the self-assessment of daily routine and self-discipline compared with the control group?

RQ2: Can an effect of the reception of ThatGirl TikToks, compared with the control group, also be shown for dieting intentions?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Sample and Design

An a priori sample size calculation using G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al. 2007) was used to determine the required sample size (mixed ANOVA, $\alpha = 0.01$, power = 0.95). We assumed an effect size of $\eta_p^2 = 0.096$ on body dissatisfaction (Pryde and Prichard 2022) and used the default of $r = 0.50$ for the within-factor. The calculated sample size of $N = 46$ was increased to $N = 75$ as we aimed for 30 participants per condition considering 20% exclusions (see preregistration, created on 26 April 2023: https://aspredicted.org/K65_SB5). A total of 82 women took part in the study, 6 of whom were excluded for the following reasons: two participants (2.4%) did not hear the audio track, one participant (1.2%) had a jerky video, one participant (1.2%) stated that she did not pay attention to the study, and two participants (2.4%) failed the diligence check.

The final sample consisted of $N = 76$ women ($Md = 23.0$ years old, range: 18 to 63). An experimental design with a pre–post-measurement was implemented, with the experimental group ($n = 40$) watching #ThatGirl video clips and the control group ($n = 36$) watching #nature video clips. Regarding their employment situation, $n = 44$ (57.9) were students, $n = 3$ (3.9%) were trainees, $n = 24$ (31.6%) were employees, $n = 1$ (1.3%) was currently not working, and $n = 4$ (5.3%) reported another occupation. Approximately half of the participants ($n = 39$, 51.3%) reported using TikTok. On average, these participants used TikTok for $M = 1.42$ ($SD = 0.89$) hours per day (one outlier reported 20 h and therefore was excluded from this analysis).

2.2. Stimulus Material

We intended to create a user experience that was as realistic as possible. Therefore, we selected original TikTok content as stimulus material. The experimental group was presented with 16 TikTok videos of the #ThatGirl trend. The selection criteria were the phrase "That Girl" or "best version of yourself" in the video clip itself. The videos for the control group were also selected from TikTok, found under #nature. The 16 video clips visualized a wide variety of nature scenes with landscape shots or depictions of animals and flowers. No people were depicted as potential social comparison targets. Likes, shares, and comments in both conditions were hidden. The video clips varied in length between 7 and 49 s. In total, the 16 clips per condition lasted 3 min 51 s for each condition. See Figure 1 for Screenshots from the videos and Supplement B for the complete list of links.

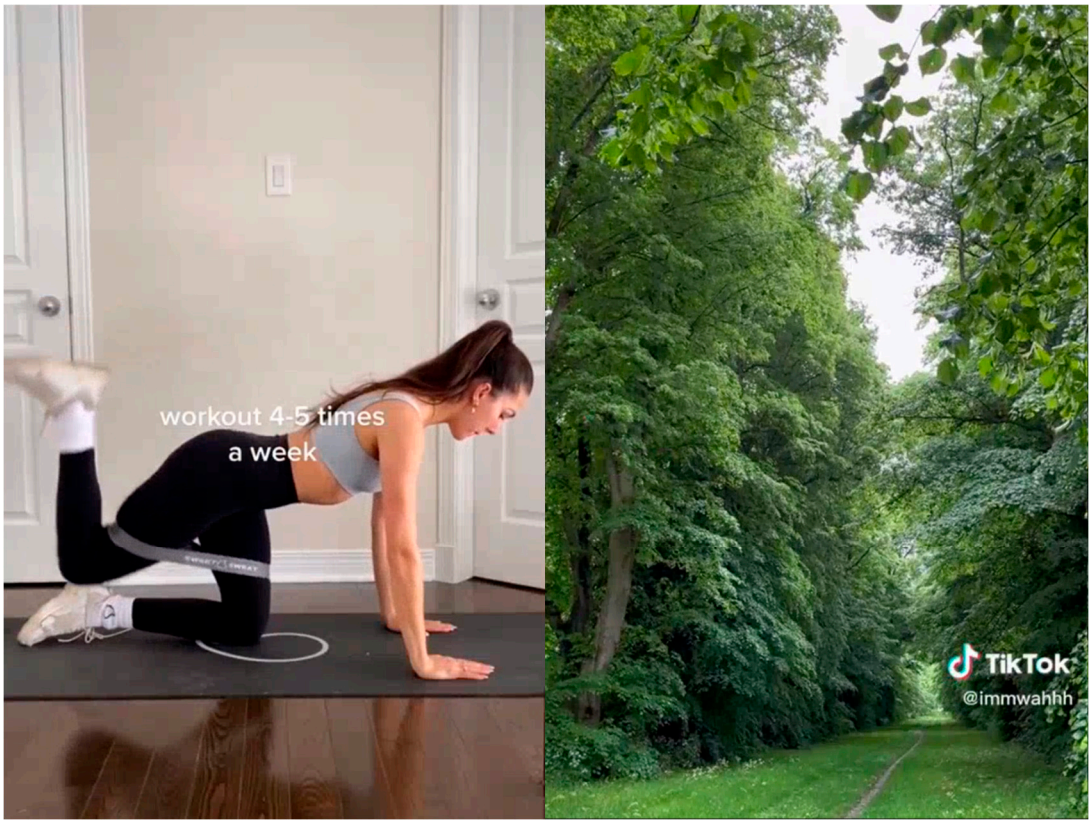

Figure 1. Screenshots from That-Girl videos (**left**) and nature videos (**right**). Note: Screenshots from @kaylieestewart (**left**) and @immwahhh (**right**).

2.3. Measures

Affect was measured using the Positive and Negative Affect Scales (PANAS, Krohne et al. 1996; Watson et al. 1988). Participants rated ten adjectives per sub-scale on a Likert scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). The scales were reliable, McDonald's omega from 0.85 up to 0.91.

State body satisfaction was measured by translating three items from Rounds and Stutts (2021), e.g., "How satisfied are you with your weight at the moment?" that were answered on a visual analog scale from 0 (*not at all satisfied*) to 100 (*very satisfied*), McDonald's omega pretest 0.91, posttest 0.93.

We developed a scale to measure people's self-assessment of daily routines and self-discipline consisting of 13 items (see Supplement B), e.g., "At this moment, I consider my lifestyle to be productive". The items were answered on a rating scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), McDonald's omega pretest 0.92, posttest 0.95. We calculated exploratory factor analyses to check for the internal validity of the scale (see Supplement B). The results supported a one factor solution.

Dieting intention was measured using the Dieting Intention Scale (Cruwys et al. 2013). Two items ask about the intention to change dieting and eat more healthily using a rating scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Five further items use a semantic differential to ask about the evaluation of diets on a seven-point rating scale, e.g., from bad to good. The seven items were reliable, McDonald's omega pretest 0.91, posttest 0.94.

For scoring, we calculated the average across all items of a scale for each participant.

2.4. Procedure

Participants were recruited via convenience sampling on social media and via Survey-Circle. The online experiment was implemented in Qualtrics, and participants were asked

to use their own smartphone, use their headphones, and to take part in the experiment in a quiet place. First, informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. They were then presented with the questionnaires measuring the dependent variables in standardized order: (1) positive and negative affect, (2) body satisfaction, (3) daily routine and self-discipline, and (4) dieting intentions. Then, participants were randomly assigned to the two conditions, i.e., #ThatGirl or #nature videos. They manually started to watch each of the 16 video clips and were not allowed to pause or watch the video clip again. After each video clip, participants were asked how likely they were to share the video in order to maintain their attention (Pryde and Prichard 2022). After viewing, participants in the experimental group were asked to rate the perfection of the women just seen in comparison with themselves on a three-point scale (*more perfect, as perfect as me, less perfect*) to evaluate the direction of social comparison. Subsequently, participants completed the scales again in the same order as in the pretest. Finally, demographics and questions about TikTok usage and technical problems were asked, and participants were debriefed about the study. As an incentive, participants could win 2 × 15 Euros in a lottery.

3. Results

Data analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 28.01.0. For negative affect, we adjusted 2 outlying values for the pretest and 3 outlying values for the posttest as preregistered. The error type I level was set to $\alpha = 0.01$. To test the hypotheses, 2 (time: pre vs. post) × 2 (condition: That-Girl vs. nature) mixed analyses of variance for each dependent variable were calculated (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics). Histograms of all dependent variables showed no violation of the normal distribution except for negative affect. Therefore, we calculated a robust mixed-ANOVA for negative affect in addition to the standard ANOVA (Wilcox 2017). The manipulation check for the #ThatGirl condition showed that $n = 25$ (62.5%) participants rated the women in the videos to be more perfect, $n = 14$ (35.0%) equally perfect, and $n = 1$ (2.5%) less perfect compared with themselves, indicating the tendency for upward comparisons. There were no significant differences in any dependent variable between TikTok users ($n = 39$) and non-users ($n = 37$; all ts < 1.27, all ps > 0.207, all ds < 0.30), except for dieting intentions being somewhat higher for TikTok users than for non-users before—$t(74) = 2.11$, $p = 0.038$, $d = 0.48$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.94]—and after watching the videos—$t(74) = 1.97$, $p = 0.026$, $d = 0.45$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.90].

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for dependent variables.

Variable	Nature (n = 36)				That Girl (n = 40)			
	Pre		Post		Pre		Post	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Negative affect [a]	1.58	0.56	1.27	0.35	1.52	0.51	1.91	0.78
Positive affect [a]	2.71	0.70	2.57	0.78	2.81	0.59	2.31	0.62
Body satisfaction [b]	52.2	26.2	57.3	26.5	58.1	19.6	55.0	23.4
Routines and self-discipline [c]	3.96	1.22	4.21	1.23	4.41	1.23	3.93	1.39
Dieting intention [c]	3.71	1.37	3.54	1.51	3.66	1.55	3.89	1.71

Notes. [a] from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*), [b] from 0 (*not at all satisfied*) to 100 (*very satisfied*), [c] from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

The predicted interaction effect time x condition was significant for all dependent variables, that is negative affect[1], $F(1, 74) = 20.53$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.22$; positive affect, $F(1, 74) = 7.25$, $p = 0.009$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$; body satisfaction, $F(1, 74) = 11.97$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.14$; daily routines and self-discipline, $F(1, 74) = 17.61$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.19$; and dieting intentions,

$F(1, 74) = 10.54$, $p = 0.002$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.13$ (see Figure 2 for interaction effects and simple effects). We found the expected significant effects within the #ThatGirl condition for increased negative affect, decreased positive affect, decreased self-assessment of daily routines and self-discipline, and increased dieting intentions. Interaction effects for body satisfaction were due to significant effects within the #nature condition, where body satisfaction was increased after exposure, as can be inferred from the significant simple effects (Figure 2).

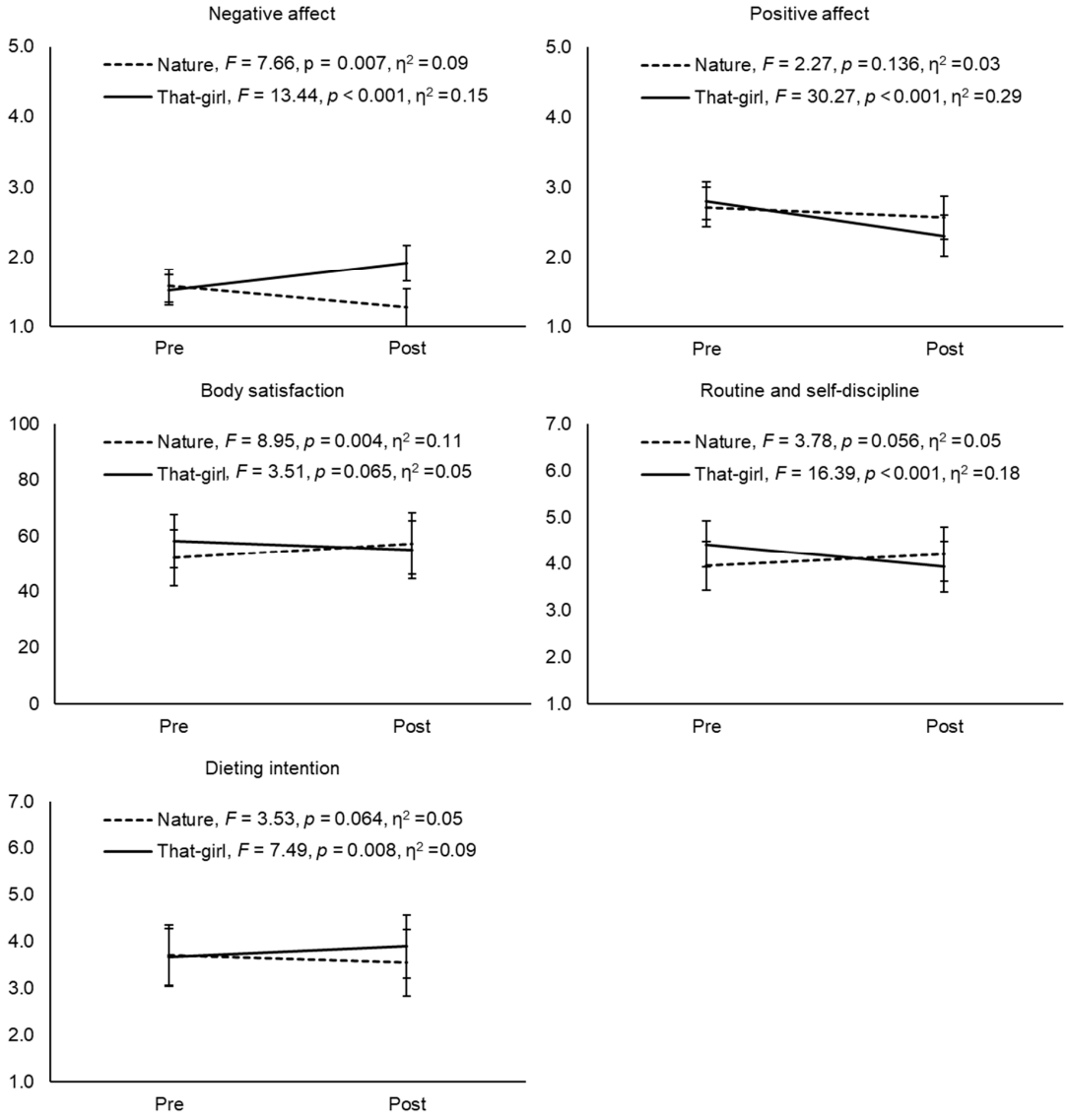

Figure 2. Interaction effects and simple effects for dependent variables. Note: All interaction effects between condition and time were significant ($p < 0.01$). Error bars show 95% confidence intervals. Simple effects within each condition are reported within the legend of the figures. Robust Yuen's *t*-tests (Wilcox 2017) replicated the significant simple effect for negative affect.

For the following exploratory analyses, only participants in the #ThatGirl condition were included. As a post-hoc analysis, we checked if effects were stronger for participants ($n = 25$) who reported an upward comparison (i.e., being less perfect than the women in the #ThatGirl videos) compared with those participants ($n = 15$) who reported no upward comparison (i.e., being equally or more perfect). The interaction effect time × social comparison was significant (i.e., $p < 0.05$) for body satisfaction, $F(1, 38) = 4.23$, $p = 0.047$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.10$, and dieting intentions, $F(1, 38) = 5.59$, $p = 0.023$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.13$, and there was a tendency towards an interaction effect for positive affect, $F(1, 38) = 3.36$, $p = 0.075$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.08$, and

daily routines and self-discipline, $F(1, 38) = 3.72$, $p = 0.061$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$. For participants who reported upward social comparisons, positive affect, body satisfaction, and daily routines and self-discipline significantly decreased and dieting intentions significantly increased, whereas there was no difference among those who indicated no upward comparison. However, no significant interaction effect emerged for negative affect, $F(1, 38) = 2.74$, $p = 0.106$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$. Thus, despite the small sample size and the resulting low power, these results provide some support for upward social comparison being a driving factor of the detrimental effects within the #ThatGirl condition (see Figure 3 for interaction effects and simple effects).

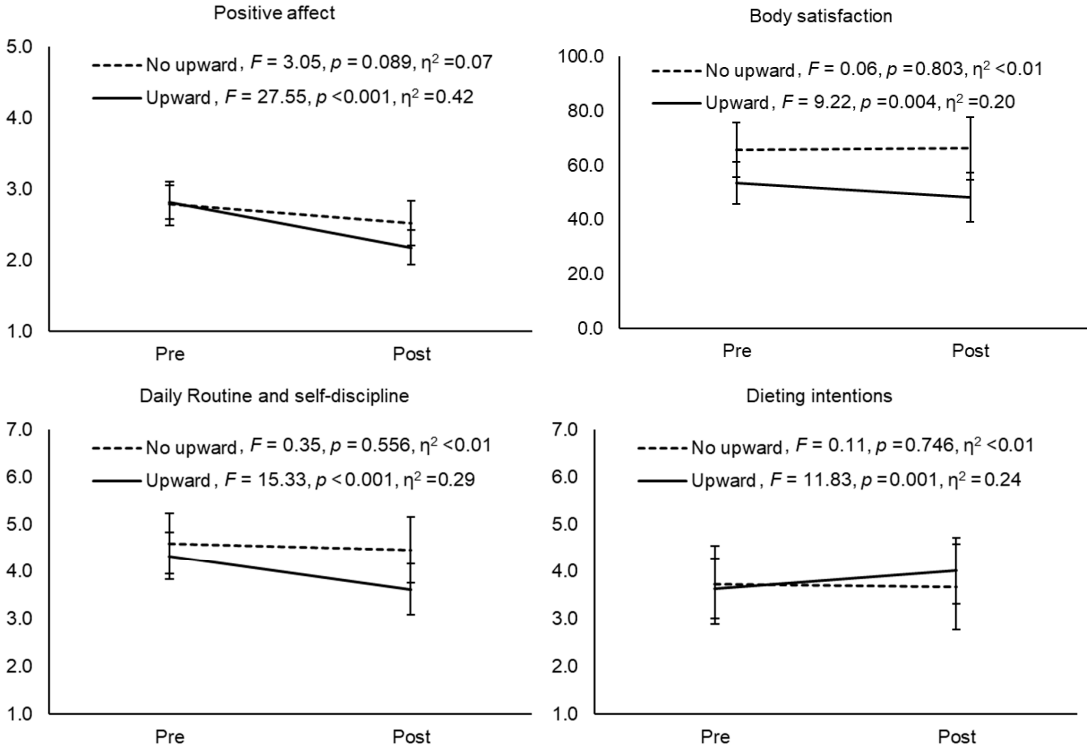

Figure 3. Effects of social comparison on dependent variables within the #ThatGirl condition ($n = 40$). Note: Error bars show 95% confidence intervals. Simple effects within each condition are reported within the legend of the figures.

4. Discussion

While social media platforms like TikTok can offer entertainment and community, they also present challenges related to social comparison, body image, and mental health. It is crucial for users to be mindful of these potential impacts and for researchers to continue investigating these effects to inform policy and practice. This study supports the results of previous studies (Pryde and Prichard 2022; Rounds and Stutts 2021) and extends our knowledge of potential negative effects of watching TikTok videos of seemingly perfect people. We showed that women may experience not only adverse effects on their body satisfaction (at least compared with the control condition) and emotional states, resulting in an increase in negative affect and a decrease in positive affect, but also an increase in dieting intentions. Additionally, confrontations with the seemingly perfect displays of highly productive, disciplined women as superior comparison targets resulted in a poorer self-evaluation of one's own daily routine and self-discipline. Our results are consistent with previous research on similar social media content, such as Fitspiration, as outlined in the introduction—regardless of the specific platform on which it is displayed. Along with our finding that, except for dieting intentions, TikTok users did not significantly differ

from non-TikTok users, these results suggest that the content of the videos may be the primary driver of the observed effects, while the type of medium (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube) may be of lesser importance.

In contrast to just displaying ideal bodies, fashion, or financial privileges (e.g., luxury products), as other social media trends do, the #ThatGirl videos suggest that "simply" establishing a routine and practicing more self-discipline will lead to success. They even provide instructions of how to achieve this. The protagonists make it seem as if it could be effortlessly implemented in every domain. For recipients, this might seem attainable and easy to implement, yet the standards set by the #ThatGirl videos are very extreme. Therefore, recipients are usually left with a feeling of failure or even laziness, because they fail in apparently simple tasks such as getting up early or doing a morning workout on a daily base. We suggest that the social comparison in that respect might be particularly toxic for women's self-respect and self-esteem. According to a recent meta-analysis, perfectionistic concerns are correlated with anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorders, and depression in non-clinical ($0.38 < rs < 0.41$) and clinical samples (Callaghan et al. 2024). Another meta-analysis found self-criticism to be correlated ($r = 0.37$) with disordered eating (Paranjothy and Wade 2024). Thus, the promotion of self-optimization and perfectionist tendencies like #ThatGirl video clips may have unintended side effects on mental health.

Importantly, social media use does not exclusively produce negative effects. The dual-use phenomenon suggests that content can elicit both positive and negative emotional outcomes depending on individual user experiences and contexts of consumption (e.g., Valkenburg et al. 2022). Even upward social comparisons may yield positive consequences such as increased inspiration and reduced feelings of loneliness (Meier and Johnson 2022). Moreover, the question of causality remains unresolved, as researchers have proposed reciprocal effects between social media use and body-related outcomes. Longitudinal studies indicate that the internalization of thinner body ideals may predict increased social media use over time (Maes and Vandenbosch 2022). Future research is encouraged to acknowledge the complexity of social media effects (see also Bonfanti et al. 2025) and to consider individual differences, boundary conditions, and potential bidirectional influences by employing experimental and longitudinal research designs.

4.1. Limitations and Future Research Perspectives

An experimental design with a pre–post-measurement bears several strengths. However, it is important to note that pre–post-test designs can be vulnerable to carryover effects. One limitation of the present study concerns the timing of the manipulation-check question regarding social comparisons. Specifically, participants were asked to evaluate the perfection of the women in the videos immediately after viewing the content but prior to completing the dependent measures. This sequencing may have inadvertently primed participants to engage in social comparison, thereby influencing their responses on the dependent variables. While this approach allowed us to verify the effectiveness of the manipulation, it may also have introduced experimental expectations or demand characteristics. Future research should consider alternative designs, such as placing manipulation checks after the dependent measures or using implicit indicators of social comparison, to minimize potential bias and better isolate causal effects. As the interaction regarding body satisfaction was driven by significant changes within the #nature condition, we suggest that our control condition was not completely neutral, instead influencing participants' emotional and cognitive state. Additionally, there was a bottom effect and no normal distribution regarding negative affect, making these results less conclusive. The study was conducted online with participants using their personal devices; thus, we were unable to control for environmental factors such as distractions, ambient noise, buffering, screen-size

differences, and other potential confounding variables. Additionally, the compliance of participants might have varied, leading to potential noise in the data. The sample consisted of a rather homogeneous group of highly educated women, with the majority between 20 and 30 years old. While this is indeed part of the target audience of the #ThatGirl trend, it still does not allow generalizability to other groups who might be differently affected by viewing such content, e.g., younger girls or women who do not self-identify as cis-heteronormative. Also, cultural differences may apply (the study was conducted in Germany). We suggest that taking a larger variety of both recipients and displayed women into account might be a promising future research perspective. The daily routine and self-discipline scale that we developed for this study showed very good reliability, and exploratory factor analyses supported a one factor solution. However, the ad-hoc-scale was not validated, i.e., no data about divergent and convergent validity is available, and we therefore encourage the future psychometric validation of the scale using larger samples. Nevertheless, it might be suitable for use in future studies to investigate effects on daily routines and self-discipline in more detail. Last, we only examined short-term effects immediately after viewing #ThatGirl videos without any chance of interacting with the content. Future studies should take repeated exposure (e.g., implementing longitudinal designs or using experience sampling methods; see Fardouly et al. 2017) and the potential active engagement with instead of passive reception of the content into account.

4.2. Practical Implications

The findings of this study have implications at multiple levels including individuals, mental health professionals, and schools, as well as social media platforms and policy makers. There is a high need for an increased awareness of the psychological risks associated with idealized content on social media platforms like TikTok, particularly body-focused trends such as #ThatGirl that promote extreme self-optimization. It has been shown that certain social media usage can contribute to an increased risk of developing eating disorder symptoms and other mental health issues, with social comparisons being one of the driving mechanisms (e.g., Bonfanti et al. 2025; Dane and Bhatia 2023; Sharma and Vidal 2023). Users should be encouraged to critically evaluate the content they consume and to curate their feed to include more diverse and authentic content, as this can help protect mental well-being. This goes hand in hand with a call for more social media literacy and preventative interventions in general. Schools could integrate discussions about social media's impact on mental health into health or digital citizenship curricula in order to provide safe spaces for students to discuss their experiences with social media. More research on the nuanced effects of different content types (e.g., productivity vs. beauty ideals) is needed to tailor and scientifically evaluate more targeted interventions in educational contexts and on the individual level.

5. Conclusions

Our study shows that the #ThatGirl trend is true to the motto "the road to hell is paved with good intentions": the content is (supposedly) created to inspire and motivate recipients, yet it backfires and negatively influences women's affect, body satisfaction, dieting intentions, and even their self-assessment of self-discipline. In sum, this study confirms that the renewed use of a homogeneous body ideal as the aesthetic of a TikTok trend in combination with an extreme standard of displayed behavior contributes to detrimental effects of digital media use on female recipients.

Supplementary Materials: Supplement A: Video Clips; Supplement B: Items Daily Routines and Self-Discipline Scale. Data, materials, and supplement can be found in the OSF repository: https://osf.io/sq5y9/, accessed on 14 July 2025.

Author Contributions: S.W.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Writing—original draft; Writing—review & editing; M.S.: Investigation, Methodology, Visualization, Writing—review & editing; C.M.: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Visualization, Writing—review & editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: In the country where this research was conducted, it is not required to obtain institutional ethics approval for psychological research as long as it does not concern issues regulated by law. The reported research was carried out in full accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, as well as the ethical guidelines and data protection policies provided by the American Psychological Association and the German Psychological Society.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study prior to the experiment.

Data Availability Statement: Data, materials, and supplement can be found in Supplementary Materials.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Note

[1] A robust mixed-ANOVA (Wilcox 2017) calculated using R version 4.3.2 and the WRS2 package version 1.1.6 replicated a significant interaction effect.

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