

**The impact of beauty influencers on young women's self-esteem and facial satisfaction**

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## Abstract

This study aims to understand the effects of TikTok beauty influencers on young women's self-esteem and facial satisfaction. Therefore, an experiment was conducted, including 442 Dutch female participants between the age of 16 and 24 years old. All participants viewed one of two conditions; authentic beauty influencers on TikTok or ideal beauty influencers on TikTok. These results were analyzed using SPSS 27.0 and a Hayes Mediation model 4 was performed via PROCESS. The results of the experiment showed no significant difference between authentic and ideal TikTok beauty influencers and their impact on young women's self-esteem and facial satisfaction. A significant effect was however found for perceived similarity on facial satisfaction, which hints that the extent to which a young woman recognizes themself in a beauty influencer impacts their facial satisfaction. Further research on TikTok and the effects of beauty influencers on young women's self-esteem and facial satisfaction is proposed to ensure more insight and certainty about the current results.

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## **The impact of beauty influencers on young women's self-esteem and facial satisfaction**

Estee Lauder, which is one of the world's largest cosmetics companies and owns approximately 30 beauty-related brands, spent 75% of its 2019 marketing budget on influencer marketing (Stewart, 2019). Due to the popularity of social media among mostly young people, influencers have started to make an appearance and have become more important to brand marketing (Enke & Borchers, 2019). Influencers are people who exert influence through their online social networks (Leader et al., 2020). Influencers often present themselves as experts and influential figures who mainly focus on beauty; therefore, one of the largest categories of influencers is "beauty influencers."

According to Tran et al. (2020), beauty influencers can be seen as aesthetic experts who provide teaching on topics of enhancement and beautification practices to their followers. On their social media channels, such as Instagram and TikTok, beauty influencers mostly post pictures and videos about make-up, skincare, or hair (Karjo & Wijaya, 2020). Make-up and beauty routines are popular since these were found to increase the perceived attractiveness of the person wearing the make-up or using the skincare routine. Researchers have noted that if women feel more attractive, then their self-esteem levels increase (Kellie et al., 2021). These types of content creators usually target women since the makeup industry mainly targets this gender (Tran et al., 2020). Therefore, this experiment specifically studied women.

Given the popularity of social media and influencers, researchers have raised concerns regarding the effects of social media on people's mental well-being (Verrastro et al., 2020). This concern relates to social media users' tendency to post unrealistic and idealized pictures. For instance, highly popular social media trends such as "thinspiration" (i.e., posting pictures to inspire weight loss) and "fitspiration" (i.e., posting pictures that act as inspiration to achieve fitness goals) are associated with unrealistic body images (Cohen et al., 2019). Being

exposed to this type of social media content is associated with body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem (Robinson et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Furthermore, researchers who conducted a study on Instagram found that depicting life in a more idealized way by emphasizing happiness and appearances contributes to lower levels of self-esteem by facilitating social comparison (Staniewski & Awruk, 2022). Most people desire to evaluate their capacities and opinions, and Festinger (1954) found that most individuals tend to compare themselves to others when there is no objective information available, which is called social comparison. Jarman et al. (2021) studied the effects of social media on adolescents' body satisfaction and mental well-being. They found a connection between higher social media usage and lower body satisfaction.

In response to the idealized, often edited, bodies shown in fitspiration and thinspiration content, body positivity has become an established trend on social media over the past few years; body positivity content focuses on broadening social appearance ideals and fostering acceptance (Cohen et al., 2019). The body-positive trend aims to respect all body types without passing any judgment on shapes or sizes. Additionally, the functionality and health aspects of the body are more appreciated instead of judged based on an individual's appearance (Sastre, 2014).

While previous researchers who have investigated the effects of influencers on body satisfaction have highly focused on overall body satisfaction (see for instance Jarman et al., 2021), less research is available on people's facial satisfaction. This is because the body positivity trend and associated research are based on overall body appreciation (Cohen et al., 2019) and do not specifically focus on the face, even though the face is one of the most distinguishing characteristics of the body (Kuh, 2003). Newton & Minhas (2005) found that exposure to "ideal" facial images decreased women's facial satisfaction specifically but found no effect on body satisfaction. Facial images were physically shown to participants, so social

media was not included in this study. However, the effects of influencers or social media use on facial satisfaction specifically have yet to be studied.

In contrast to ideal influencer content, authenticity, which is the opposite of what most influencers post, can be defined as the quality of being genuine, real, and true (Arnould & Price, 2000). Specifically for social media influencers, Lee and Eastin (2021) investigated the different predictors of authenticity. According to the authors, sincerity (i.e., which is when followers evaluate whether influencers are showing their true, unedited personas) is a predictor of influencers being perceived as authentic (Lee & Eastin, 2021). When influencers are found to be more authentic, people also tend to feel more connected to them (Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2019). Additionally, Bailey et al. (2020) found that someone expressing themself more authentically on social media is related to greater life satisfaction, which is a component of well-being.

In comparison to Instagram, which highly focuses on idealistic imagery, TikTok can be considered a platform that features more authentic content (Barta & Andalibi, 2021). TikTok has two main age groups that are most active on the platform in the Netherlands: the biggest one is between 15 and 19 years old, and the second one is between 20 and 24 years old (Oosterveer, 2021). Therefore, both of these age groups were included in this study. Since TikTok's worldwide popularity only started at the beginning of 2020, fewer studies have been performed to analyze this platform. In addition, very few studies have been done on the psychological mechanisms related to TikTok use (Montag et al., 2021).

Building relationships between people is one of the main goals of social media (Reinikainen et al., 2020). Leary and Baumeister (2000) found that social relationships have a significant impact on one's self-esteem. These effects have even been found to be predictors of self-esteem. For influencers, these relationships can be expressed in followers experiencing

the feeling of having a para-social relationship with an influencer (i.e., an imaginary relationship with a media performer through media consumption) (Brown, 2015).

Given that the cosmetic industry is extremely present on social media and that TikTok exhibits more authentic and realistic content, facial satisfaction and, therefore, self-esteem may be positively influenced by this platform. Furthermore, the insights into perceived similarities could suggest that people feel more attracted to authentic influencers, which could influence the level of impact that influencers have on their self-esteem.

This study analyzes how beauty influencers on TikTok impact the self-esteem of young women (see Figure 1) and, therefore, attempts to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** *To what extent do authentic beauty influencers (vs. idealized beauty influencers) on TikTok impact young women's (ages 16 to 24) self-esteem and facial satisfaction in comparison to ideal beauty influencers?*

**RQ2:** *To what extent does perceived similarity mediate this relationship?*

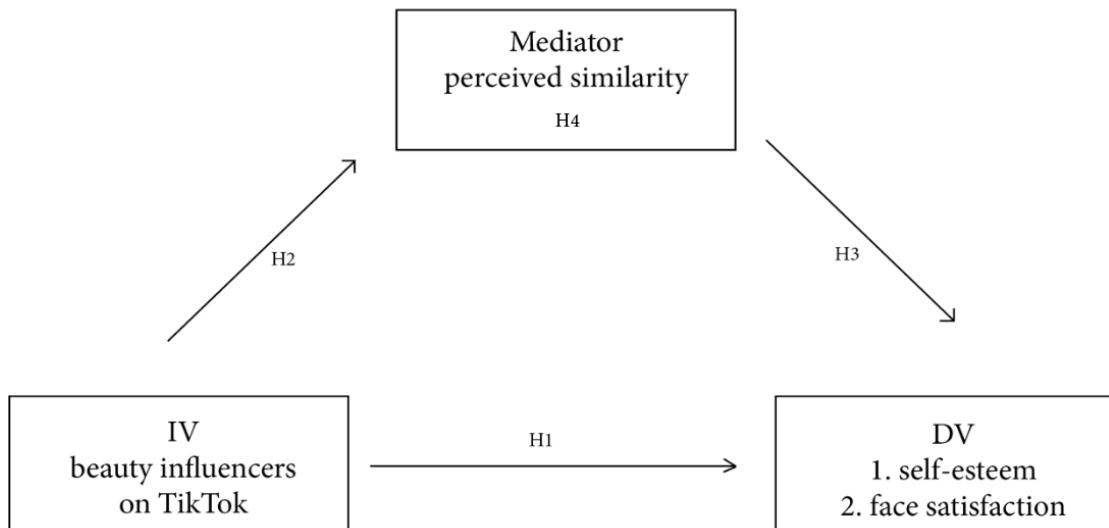


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

## Theoretical framework

### Social media effects on young women

Multiple researchers have established that social media is related to young women's physical and mental health. This may partially be explained by the fact that physical appearance is also the center of what is depicted on social media platforms (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017). For instance, Choukas-Bradley et al. (2019) established that young women (ages 18 to 19) struggle with constantly being aware of the way they look. Bartsch and Subrahmanyam (2015) found that social media is a part of the developmental process of young adults. Currently, young women are pressured to be aware of their own bodies at any given moment because pictures can be taken and posted on social media at any time (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2019). Social media has made young women's lives more centered on posting online and creating content, which has increased the pressure to compare their bodies with their peers' bodies (Nesi et al., 2018). Staniewski and Awruk (2022) found that Instagram has a remarkable impact on its users' mental well-being. The increased usage of social media was found to relate to an overall lower sense of self-esteem.

While researchers have acknowledged the negative impacts of social media, other researchers have acknowledged that social media may positively impact upon its user's well-being. Staniewski and Awruk (2022) found that during the pandemic in 2020, Instagram usage among young adults seemed to positively impact them because it filled a void through virtual reality with minimal personal contact during a difficult time. In line with this finding, researchers who have studied the body positivity movement have also found that body-positive images on social media might positively impact social media users' self-esteem, specifically concerning their body images (Rodgers et al., 2022).

The body positivity movement is a response to idealized appearance-focused images that have been dominant on social media for years. Concerning body image, idealized images

are explained as “thin-and-toned female bodies” that are promoted to create unrealistic ideals for most people (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). These idealized images have encouraged feelings of body dissatisfaction among social media users (McLean et al., 2015). This body positivity movement supports displaying all body types and sizes online and accepting them (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015). Young women have been the focus of most studies because they seem to process images that are based on appearance more deeply than men do (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004). Additionally, young women have been found to put more trust in the people they see on social media (Warner-Søderholm et al., 2018). Therefore, the current study focusses on this specific group of social media users.

The effects of social media and influencers on women’s body images have been studied before, but these studies have always targeted Instagram, YouTube, or Facebook users (Cohen et al., 2019; Fardouly & Rapee, 2019). Researchers have suggested that these effects vary and that these may either positively or negatively impact young women’s body images and self-esteem. While apps such as Instagram have been studied frequently, the currently popular social platform TikTok has not yet been studied in this context regarding young women. Very few studies have been conducted on the psychological mechanisms related to TikTok influencers and TikTok use (Montag et al., 2021).

Influencers can reach their audiences through multiple social media platforms by creating their own profiles where they display and discuss subjects that they have an affinity with or knowledge of; therefore, influencers can build a following of people who trust their perspectives (Burke-Garcia, 2019). More specifically, beauty influencers are people who have knowledge of aesthetics and share information about those topics online. Social media influencers often reach very large audiences within the specific niche or market that they have chosen to build their profile around (Sudha & Sheena, 2017) and they have the ability to

choose their own branded image on social media through self-generated content (de Veirman et al., 2019).

The TikTok algorithm presents users with an endless feed that features video content that is specifically based on users' interests. This algorithm distinguishes the app from other social media platforms on which users view content from creators whom they do not necessarily follow (Bhandari & Bimo, 2020). Barta and Andalibi (2021) found that TikTok users describe the app as a "fun" platform where a "just be you" attitude is prioritized, which makes the platform seem more authentic. Authentic content such as body positivity content has often been found to positively affect users' self-esteem (see for instance Rodgers et al., 2022). Additionally, TikTok has been found to be a platform that features more authentic content in comparison to other social platforms, making it relevant to study if TikTok positively affects its users' self-esteem.

### **Authentic versus ideal content**

According to Monacis et al. (2021) distinguishing authentic from ideal social media content can be done based on the theoretical framework of authentic personality that was developed by Winnicott (Winnicott et al., 2017), which defines the division between the "true self" and "false self." The true self is seen as more spontaneous and real, whereas the false self is more defensive and protective of that true self (Monacis et al., 2021). Furthermore, Gilpin, Palazzolo, and Brody (2010) defined authenticity specifically regarding online engagement as being credible, reliable, forthcoming, and engaging. In line with the theory by Winnicott, this definition suggests that authentic content on social media should come across as real and therefore unedited.

Williams et al. (2008) distinguished ideal images from average images by using ideal images that they took from popular magazines and portrayed women in their study. The average images contained women who were retrieved from a platform where women were

ranked based on their appearance and attractiveness. More recently, Politte-Corn and Fardouly (2020) studied the effects of women's selfies, which are self-portraits, on young women's facial satisfaction and body image. Both studies found that exposure to idealized portraits of women on social media had a significant negative effect on young women's facial satisfaction.

Fardouly and Rapee (2019) compared the effects of women's no-makeup selfies to the effects of makeup selfies on young women's body images. In their experimental study, they distinguished two types of selfies, which they described as portraits taken by the person seen in the image and feature them wearing no makeup and makeup, respectively. The no-makeup selfies portrayed possible skin blemishes or discolorations. The makeup selfies contained the same women wearing makeup that enhanced their natural features. The women in these photos wore black mascara and eyeliner to enhance their eyes, some brow fillers, natural lipsticks, and other neutral makeup on the face (Fardouly & Rapee, 2019). In line with Fardouly and Rapee (2019), this study conceptualizes authentic social media content as content that is created without make-up or filters, while idealistic social media content includes clear make-up or filters.

### **Self-esteem**

As mentioned above, researchers have studied the many psychological effects that have arisen due to the popularity of social media; changes in self-esteem are one of those effects. Self-esteem is a psychological construct in which an individual evaluates their self-worth based on how they assess their quality as an object to determine how good or valuable they are (Thoits, 1999). From adolescence through young adulthood, people's self-esteem increases. However, self-esteem can vary based on someone's experiences, and failures or successes may greatly impact an individual's level of self-esteem (Orth & Robins, 2014). Additionally, individuals assess their self-worth based on their interactions with others. When

an individual's loved ones do not think highly of them, the individual may start to think negatively about themselves (Rosenberg & Pearlin, 1978). When someone's self-esteem is considered high, that means that the individual values themselves to be worthy and respects themselves, while low self-esteem indicates that an individual ascribes to self-rejection and feels dissatisfaction (Rosenberg, 1965).

Self-esteem can be divided into two categories: state self-esteem and trait self-esteem. State self-esteem can be defined as momentary fluctuations in how a person feels about themselves, whereas trait self-esteem is someone's general value of themselves, which is not immediately influenced by one event or incident (Leary, 1999). Leary and Baumeister (2000) found that social relationships greatly impact one's trait self-esteem. Social relationships can also serve as predictors of self-esteem. No previous researchers have studied the effects of social media on specifically one of those levels of self-esteem. Since the direct effect of TikTok videos is most relevant to this study, state self-esteem was studied; meanwhile, trait self-esteem was used as a control variable.

### **Women's facial satisfaction**

The social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) could explain why social media could be harmful to women's self-esteem. This theory suggests that women tend to self-evaluate and, therefore, compare themselves to ideal and unrealistic images, which is mainly an upward comparison. Festinger (1954) described that this upward comparison takes place when individuals compare themselves with someone they view socially above themselves. To conduct this comparison, people tend to compare themselves to people whom they feel are similar to them; they do not need to know these people personally. Therefore, this type of comparison, which has been found to influence body dissatisfaction, can also arise from seeing someone online. Another theory that contributes to this potential explanation is the objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This framework suggests that the media

portraits women as sexual object, which leads women to view themselves as objects and therefore evaluate themselves based on appearance. Both self-objectification and body dissatisfaction have been found to have a negative impact on depression, which has previously been associated with low levels of self-esteem (Battle, 1978).

Cohen et al. (2017) demonstrated that active social media engagement is negatively associated with body image. More specifically, a study on Instagram found that exposure to body positive content increased young women's body satisfaction, but viewing ideal body images decreased that satisfaction (Cohen, Fardouly, et al., 2019). As mentioned previously, women's exposure to idealized facial images was found to decrease their facial satisfaction, while no effect was found on body satisfaction (Newton & Minhas, 2005). Thus, facial and body satisfaction can be distinguished.

Furnham et al. (2002) studied the self-esteem and body image of adolescents who were between 16 and 18 years old. The results of this study suggest that young women associate body image with self-esteem in contrast to young men, who do not associate these factors with each other. Furthermore, Wang et al. (2019) found that adolescents who view others' selfies are more likely to feel facial dissatisfaction. Portrait images of women without any make-up had a less negative influence on young women's body image and facial satisfaction in comparison to idealized images (Politte-Corn & Fardouly, 2020). Additionally, Fardouly and Rapee (2019) found that young women's facial satisfaction decreased when they looked at idealized selfies. But viewing no-makeup images of those same women reduced the feeling of facial dissatisfaction. Since authentic content was found to have a positive effect on women's body image and self-esteem on other platforms, it could be that in comparison to ideal content, authentic TikTok influencers have a positive effect on young women's self-esteem and facial satisfaction.

Based on the literature described previously, the following first hypothesis was formulated:

**H1: Authentic beauty influencers, in comparison to idealized beauty influencers, on TikTok increase women's (ages 16 to 24) self-esteem and facial satisfaction.**

### Perceived similarity

As previously mentioned, the social comparison theory suggests that people tend to compare themselves to others whom they feel are similar to them (Festinger, 1954). Festinger (1954) also found that the tendency for someone to compare themselves with another individual decreases when they feel less similar to the other individual. As such, the value of similarity is related to how much an individual would like and feel attracted to another individual. This similarity can be “actual” when two individuals actually share common attributes. Additionally, a similarity can be “perceived” when an individual only believes they are similar to another individual (Montoya et al., 2008). Perceived similarity has been found to be associated with an individual’s desire to imitate or copy the behavior of others (Bandura, 1986).

Previous researchers found that people are more likely to be attracted to a media figure whom they feel is similar to themselves in character, appearance, lifestyle, etc. (Fiske, 2020). When influencers seem more authentic, people tend to feel more similar to them (Schouten et al., 2019). Individuals feel more similar to others who appear to be similar to themselves based on gender, age, behavior, and personal characteristics. These perceived similarities encourage people to want to be more like other individuals (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Perceived emotional similarities were found to be a stress reducer since they allow an individual to find comfort within another individual (Townsend et al., 2013). This same effect applies to the perceived similarity that followers feel to influencers whom they follow, which is called follower-influencer similarity (Naderer et al., 2021). However, this has not been addressed concerning beauty influencers, who promote make-up usage, which could also positively influence the feeling of similarity.

In addition, de Veirman et al. (2019) found that relatable and approachable influencers are more likely to be perceived similar by their followers. This sense of similarity can result in their audience adopting the influencers' opinions and behavior more. Since people have been found to feel more similar to individuals who are more like themselves. Therefore, it could be expected that perceived similarity is higher for authentic beauty influencers who seem more real and relatable. Because authentic images can be defined as reliable and credible, one could expect that people feel more connected and, therefore, similar to influencers whom they see in authentic videos. The following hypotheses were based on the previously described theories:

***H2: Authentic beauty influencers on TikTok score higher on perceived similarity in comparison to idealized beauty influencers on TikTok.***

***H3: Higher levels of perceived similarity with a TikTok beauty influencer positively influence women's (ages 16 to 24) self-esteem and facial satisfaction.***

***H4: Perceived similarity explains the effect of authentic beauty influencers on self-esteem and facial satisfaction.***

## **Methodology**

The hypotheses were investigated using a between-subjects design that contained two experimental groups (authentic vs. ideal) to which participants were randomly assigned. The dependent variables were facial satisfaction and self-esteem. Trait self-esteem was taken into account as a control variable, and perceived similarity was used as a mediating variable.

## **Participants**

A total of 463 Dutch females participated in this experiment, with a mean age of 20.84 ( $SD = 2.42$ ). If the participants were outside of this age range, they were excluded from the study. After data cleaning, 442 females were left. The average age of the participants was 21. All the participants were invited to be part of the study through voluntary response sampling

that was conducted via social media. Both of the largest age groups on TikTok, as mentioned previously, were combined to form the target group of this study: women between the age of 16 and 24 years old.

## **Procedure**

To conduct both the pre-test and the experiment, Qualtrics surveys were used. For the experiment, the participants had to provide their consent, and by doing so, they were allowed to engage in the experiment. This consent informed the participants about the length of the experiment, their rights, the usage of the retrieved information, and the goal of the study as much as possible without giving away too much information about the study. The remaining information was clarified after the participants had finished engaging in the experiment. After reading a short explanation of the study that clarified what was expected of the participants, all the participants were randomly divided into one of the two groups. Thereafter, the survey began with demographic questions that asked the participants about their average social media use per day. Each participant was redirected to the videos that were assigned to them: idealized or authentic beauty videos. After watching three ideal or three authentic beauty videos, all the participants answered questions about their trait and state self-esteem and facial satisfaction. Finally, the participants' perceived similarities with the three influencers in the videos were measured. The survey ended with a short debriefing to explain the actual intention of the study since this explanation could have influenced the study had it been provided before the participants began the survey.

## **Stimuli**

Before starting the experiment, a pre-test was conducted to determine whether the stimuli materials were indeed authentic or ideal. Manipulations were checked with 28 participating women between the ages of 16 and 24. This pre-test revealed significant differences between the stimuli materials, which were determined to be usable for the study.

For the experiment, all the participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions: authentic beauty influencers or idealized beauty influencers. Regardless of the condition that the participants were divided assigned to, each participant viewed three TikTok videos, each video including one of three beauty influencers. These videos contributed to the realism of the experiment since people scroll through many different videos and view different faces when using TikTok. Each video included the same background music and excluded speech to keep the participants' focus on the influencers' faces and make-up. All three beauty TikToks were made by three influencers who all made one authentic beauty video and an ideal beauty video; therefore, all the participants saw the same influencers, regardless of which condition they were assigned to. These influencers are actual beauty influencers with over 350,000 followers each on TikTok. However, half of the participants were exposed to those three influencers in authentic beauty videos, and the other half of the participants were exposed to the same three influencers in idealized beauty videos. The content of the videos was the same across the conditions, except for the manipulation, to make sure that the faces would not affect the results. Three different influencers instead of one were used to make the study more realistic, although using only one influencer could have been better for the perceived similarity measurement. When scrolling on TikTok, users see many different faces, which is why three different influencers were used for the study while keeping them the same across conditions.

The requirements for all the videos were that the three influencers in the videos were within the same age category as the participants. For both conditions, all three influencers made a make-up transformation video. All the videos depicted the influencer engaging in the same TikTok make-up trend with a trending sound. This means that the influencers transformed themselves using a specific make-up look and presented a before and after clip with a transition connecting the two clips. However, the only difference between the authentic

and the ideal beauty videos was the first clip. For the videos that fit the authentic condition, the three influencers started the first clip without any make-up and no filters and appeared completely natural and authentic by showing possible skin blemishes, acne, scars, or pores. In contrast, in the first clips of the ideal videos, the influencers already wore some make-up and used a beauty filter. Therefore, the difference in the authentic and ideal videos were solely the first clips; completely natural without any filters versus unnoted makeup and skin blurring filters. The second clips of all the videos were the same for both conditions; the three influencers appeared wearing heavier make-up looks.

The videos were specially created for this experiment to make sure that all the requirements were met. The TikTok application is based on scrolling through a feed; therefore, multiple videos were presented to each group of participants to imitate the feeling of actually scrolling through the application. To demonstrate to the participants that they were watching TikToks and no other short video content, the TikTok watermark was kept in the videos.

## Measures

Before and after being exposed to the videos, all the participants filled in questionnaires to measure their levels of self-esteem, facial satisfaction, and susceptibility to the influence of perceived similarity. The entire questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

***Trait self-esteem.*** Blascovich and Tomaka (1991) studied and compared multiple ways to measure self-esteem. Based on those results, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was found to be the most relevant tool for measuring trait self-esteem. This is a 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring one's positive and negative feelings about themselves. To explain, one item stated "I feel like I have some good qualities" and all those were answered using a 4-point Likert scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" (Winch & Rosenberg, 1965). The scale for trait self-esteem gave a great reliability ( $\alpha = .848$ ).

**State self-esteem.** State self-esteem was measured with a shortened six item version of the State Self-Esteem Scale that was developed by Heatherton and Polivy (1991). This scale originally consisted of 20 items and measured a participant's self-esteem at a specific time. Webster et al. (2020) found that the SSES6 model comprising six items is a good substitute for the original 20-item scale with items such as "I feel unattractive" or "I feel like I'm not doing well". All the items were answered using a 5-point Likert scale (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). The scale for state self-esteem gave a very good reliability ( $\alpha = .753$ ).

**Facial Satisfaction.** The participants' facial satisfaction was also measured using a questionnaire that was based on the Body Cathexis Scale; it was adjusted for the face by utilizing only the facial aspects of the scale (Hammond & O'Rourke, 1984). This scale focuses on the full body, but for this study, it was adjusted for face and appearance giving a scale that consisted of eight facial parts such as "nose" or "eyes". Participants answered these with a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (*strongly negative*) to 5 (*strongly positive*). The scale for facial satisfaction also gave a very good reliability ( $\alpha = .733$ ).

**Perceived similarity.** Perceived similarity was measured in combination for the three beauty influencers using the subscale of the Perceived Homophily Measure that focuses on appearance (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Using a scale from 1 to 7, statements such as "this person looks similar to me" were measured; higher scores indicated that a participant had a higher perceived similarity with each influencer. The scale for perceived similarity again showed great reliability ( $\alpha = .839$ ).

## Analysis

After the data were collected, SPSS was used to analyze all the data. The hypotheses were tested using an analysis that incorporated the SPSS Hayes Mediation Model 4 via PROCESS (Igartua & Hayes, 2021).

## Results

### *Effects of beauty influencers on young women's self-esteem*

A mediation analysis was conducted using SPSS PROCESS Hayes Model 4 (5,000 bootstrap samples) to examine how authentic (versus idealized) TikTok beauty influencers affected young women's self-esteem and whether this effect was mediated by perceived similarity. The overall data demonstrated no violation of assumptions such as normality; therefore, no adjustments were made before the analysis was conducted.

As presented in Figure 1, Hypothesis 1 states that authentic beauty influencers, in comparison to idealized beauty influencers, on TikTok increase women's (ages 16 to 24) self-esteem and facial satisfaction. The analysis revealed that TikTok beauty influencers had no direct effect on self-esteem ( $B = 0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $t = 0.90$ ,  $p = .369$ ), as presented in Figure 2. This indicates that authentic beauty influencers ( $M = 4.35$ ) do not have a significant effect on self-esteem in comparison to idealized beauty influencers ( $M = 4.44$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 cannot be assumed for self-esteem. Furthermore, no significant effect was found between authentic beauty influencers ( $M = 3.21$ ) and idealized beauty influencers ( $M = 3.14$ ) regarding their levels of perceived similarity. Consequently, Hypothesis 2, which predicted that authentic beauty influencers on TikTok would score higher on perceived similarity in comparison to idealized beauty influencers on TikTok, cannot be assumed ( $B = 0.08$ ,  $p = .485$ ). This indicates that an authentic beauty influencer has no different effect on young women's self-esteem than an idealized beauty influencer does. Additionally, perceived similarity led to no significant differences in the participants' self-esteem. This indicates that a higher level of perceived similarity does not lead to higher levels of self-esteem. Thus, Hypothesis 3 for self-esteem was rejected as well ( $B = 0.05$ ,  $p = .125$ ).

Finally, Hypothesis 4 predicted that perceived similarity explains how authentic beauty influencers affect self-esteem and facial satisfaction. No significant indirect effect was

identified regarding the authentic TikTok beauty influencers' impacts on young women's self-esteem via perceived similarity ( $B = 0.06$ ,  $SE = .007$ ,  $95\%CI = [-0.0204, 0.0078]$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was rejected.

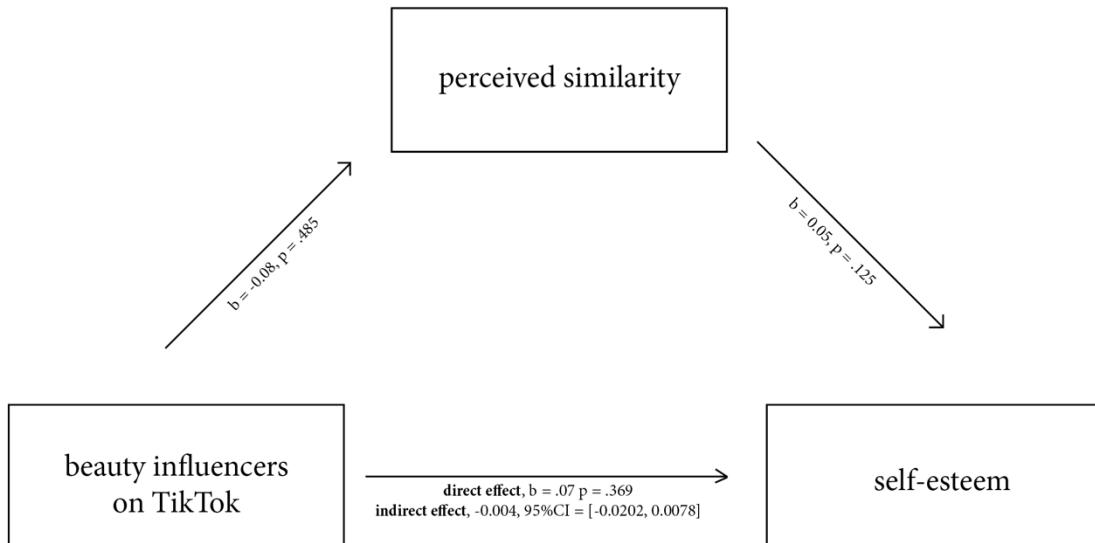


Figure 2. Results mediation model for self-esteem

### **Effects of beauty influencers on young women's facial satisfaction**

A second mediation analysis was conducted that used facial satisfaction as the dependent variable via PROCESS Model 4 (5,000 bootstrap samples) to examine the effect of TikTok beauty influencers (0 = authentic, 1 = ideal) on young women's facial satisfaction; perceived similarity acted as a mediator. The analysis revealed no direct effect for TikTok beauty influencers on facial satisfaction ( $B = 0.02$ ,  $SE = .042$ ,  $t = .40$ ,  $p = .686$ ), as presented in Figure 3, and this result indicates that there is also no difference on the effects on facial satisfaction between authentic beauty influencers ( $M = 3.45$ ) or ideal beauty influencers ( $M = 3.47$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was rejected regarding facial satisfaction.

As stated previously, no significant effect was found between authentic beauty influencers ( $M = 3.21$ ) and idealized beauty influencers ( $M = 3.14$ ) regarding their levels of perceived similarity. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was rejected. Hypothesis 3 implied that higher levels of perceived similarity with a TikTok beauty influencer would positively influence

women's (ages 16 to 24) self-esteem and facial satisfaction. For self-esteem, this hypothesis was rejected, but for facial satisfaction, a significant effect was found ( $B = 0.05, p = .010$ ) as zero was not crossed within the 95%CI ([0.0113, 0.0814]). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 could be partially assumed.

Finally, no significant indirect effect was identified regarding authentic TikTok beauty influencers' effects on young women's facial satisfaction via perceived similarity ( $B = 0.01, SE = 0.04, 95\%CI = [-0.0167, 0.0064]$ ). Hypothesis 4 predicted that perceived similarity explains the effect of authentic beauty influencers on self-esteem and facial satisfaction. Since no significant indirect effect was found, Hypothesis 4 was rejected for both self-esteem and facial satisfaction.

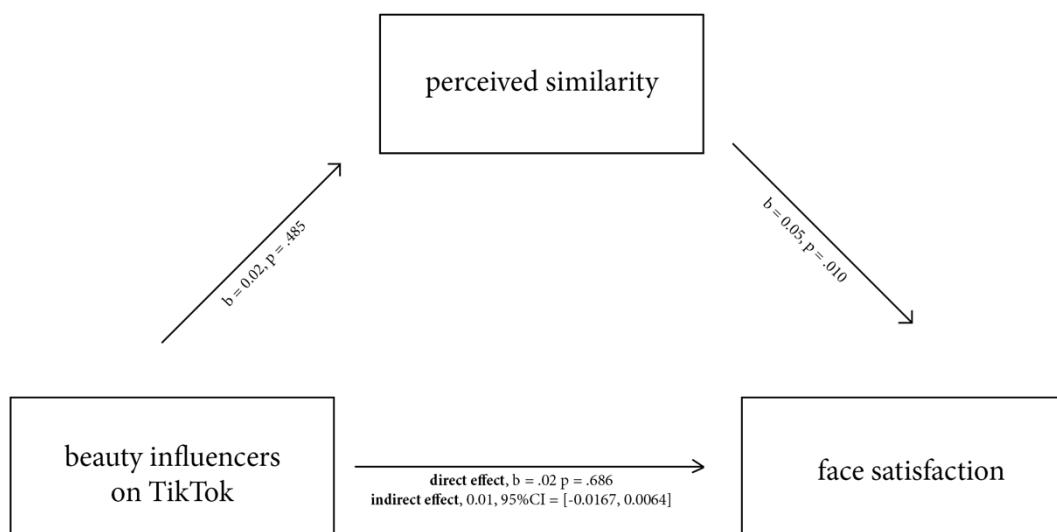


Figure 3. Results mediation model for facial satisfaction

## Discussion

This study aimed to examine whether authentic beauty influencers on TikTok influence young women's self-esteem and facial satisfaction positively in comparison to idealized beauty influencers on TikTok. It was predicted that TikTok beauty influencers would have a positive effect on young women's self-esteem and facial satisfaction. Additionally, perceived similarity with those beauty influencers was also believed to increase those variables.

First, the results indicated that the participants who saw the authentic beauty influencers did not differ in their levels of state self-esteem in comparison to those who saw the idealized beauty influencers. This suggests that authentic TikTok beauty influencers do not have a different effect on young women's self-esteem or facial satisfaction in comparison to ideal TikTok beauty influencers. This finding is surprising since previous researchers did find those effects on body image on other social media, whether those were positive effects on users (Rodgers et al., 2022) or negative effects (Politte-Corn & Fardouly, 2020). These results, therefore, suggest that other factors besides the considered variables are important. Since no significant effect was found between authentic beauty influencers and idealized beauty influencers, future researchers could include a control group to determine to what extent beauty influencers impact young women's self-esteem and facial satisfaction, if at all. This study focused on the lack of prior research on authentic TikTok videos and facial satisfaction, but by including a control group, the level of impact of beauty influencers could be found on self-esteem and facial satisfaction.

This study focused on TikTok, as previously mentioned, because it is a less studied platform and has been found to be more authentic than other social media platforms. The negative impact that social media might have on self-esteem or body image is partially caused because influencers create and promote idealized content. Barta and Andalibi's (2021) findings on TikTok being a more authentic platform led to the assumption that authentic TikTok videos would increase young women's self-esteem, and because the focus was on beauty, it was also assumed that such content would increase young women's facial satisfaction. No significant effect was found, which indicates that authentic TikTok beauty influencers do not have any other influence on young women's self-esteem and facial satisfaction in comparison to idealized TikTok beauty influencers. It might be that beauty influencers automatically portray an ideal image to young women when doing make-up

transformations and that the distinction cannot be made for this specific category of influencers.

A significant effect was found for perceived similarity and facial satisfaction. These results indicate that the levels of perceived similarity that young women feel with beauty influencers, regardless of whether they are authentic or idealized, do influence their facial satisfaction. Notably, perceived similarity did not demonstrate any significant effect on self-esteem—it only affected facial satisfaction. This indicates that the extent to which someone recognizes themselves in a beauty influencer does impact young women's facial satisfaction, which is interesting since facial satisfaction is an understudied factor, as previously mentioned. It could be that facial satisfaction is influenced specifically because beauty influencers focus on the face. These results also demonstrate that facial satisfaction specifically can be interesting for future researchers who wish to study self-esteem and body satisfaction.

Another significant effect was found for the control variable trait self-esteem. These results indicate that trait self-esteem predicts state self-esteem and that trait self-esteem should be further investigated regarding its effects on facial satisfaction and perceived similarity. For this study, trait self-esteem was included as a control variable because it could have influenced all the variables. Additionally, the focus of the study was the effects of the TikTok videos; therefore, the main focus was state self-esteem. Future researchers could examine how beauty influencers affect young women's trait self-esteem specifically with a longitudinal study that does not focus on a direct effect but is more long-term.

### **Theoretical and practical implications**

This study examined the effects of TikTok beauty influencers on young women's self-esteem and facial satisfaction. Theoretically, this study adds to the knowledge about TikTok and the effects of social media on its users. Mainly, the effect found for perceived similarity

in young women's facial satisfaction contributes to the existing literature. Previous researchers found that social media either positively or negatively affects self-esteem and body image, while the current findings suggest a specific effect on facial satisfaction. These results suggest that TikTok beauty influencers' effects on self-esteem and facial satisfaction do not differ. Additionally, the significant effect found on trait self-esteem should not be overlooked, and further investigation is recommended.

### **Limitations**

Although this study has provided insight into the effects of TikTok on self-esteem and facial satisfaction, but several limitations should be noted. The first limitation is the three beauty influencers who were used for the conditions of the experiment. During the pre-test, the videos were tested to see whether the participants found those videos ideal or authentic and whether they felt any similarities with the beauty influencers. The results of the pre-test indicated that the videos were correct translations of the necessary conditions. However, the participating influencers are existing TikTok influencers with over 350,000 followers each; they regularly make beauty-related videos. Although this increased the experiment's overall realism, it might have caused a bias regarding the perceived similarity that the participants felt with those influencers since some participants may already be familiar with some of the influencers.

The second limitation is that no manipulation check was conducted to replenish the pre-test. To ensure that the manipulation was correct for the participants, a manipulation check should have been conducted. Finally, the quality of the TikTok videos created the third limitation. To ensure that the videos were realistic for participants, they were indeed created in the TikTok app. During the development and execution of the experiment TikTok had an error which decreased the quality and sharpness of TikToks. The videos were not unsharp, but the quality could have been better and that could have caused that participants saw less of the

manipulations. Future research could use the phone camera to record the videos and add sounds later, instead of recording in the TikTok app.

## **Future research**

Some recommendations for future research can be made. Studying the general effects of beauty influencers on facial satisfaction by conducting an experiment that includes a control group to determine the level of impact that beauty influencers have on facial satisfaction is recommended. Furthermore, a distinction should be made between the effects that make-up and filters have on young women's self-esteem and facial satisfaction. During this experiment, both make-up and filters were used, but future researchers could compare the effects that those might have. Finally, this study involved perceived similarity as a mediator, but future researchers could examine the influence that wishful identification might have on the impact that influencers have on young women. Wishful identification is the level of desire that people have to become or act like a certain media figure (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). It could be that a level of wishful identification determines the ways young women are impacted by beauty influencers. Future researchers could include wishful identification as a mediator.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the results of this study suggest that authentic TikTok beauty influencers do not influence the self-esteem and facial satisfaction of young women differently than idealized TikTok beauty influencers do. In addition, this experiment did not find any effect for beauty influencers on perceived similarity. However, a striking result was that perceived similarity was found to impact young women's facial satisfaction. Indicating that the extent to which someone recognizes themselves in a beauty influencer impacts facial satisfaction. Thus, to answer the research question, TikTok beauty influencers do not significantly affect the self-esteem and facial satisfaction of young women. Furthermore, perceived similarity does not function as a mediator but does influence the level of facial satisfaction of young women.

This research could function as a base for future research on beauty influencers and TikTok. It also contributes to the currently understudied psychological mechanisms related to the social media platform TikTok. Moreover, future studies could include other variables like wishful identification or control groups to expand the current findings.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A: Experiment questionnaire



#### **Welkom en bedankt dat je de tijd hebt genomen om deel te nemen aan mijn experiment!**

Je doet mee aan een onderzoek naar TikTok. Lees de volgende informatie aandachtig door. Het is belangrijk dat je begrijpt waar je aan meedoet en wat dat inhoudt. Als er iets niet duidelijk is, stuur dan een bericht naar de onderzoeker. Het doel van dit onderzoek is om de invloed van TikTok video's te vinden.

Je beantwoordt eerst enkele demografische en algemene sociale media-gerelateerde vragen, waarna je wordt doorgestuurd naar enkele TikTok-video's. Na het bekijken van de video's beantwoord je enkele vragen over de influencers te zien in de video's en jouw gevoel van zelfvertrouwen, daarna kan je de enquête beëindigen.

Deelname aan de enquête duurt ongeveer 5 minuten en je deelname is vrijwillig. Je hebt het recht om je op elk moment tijdens dit onderzoek terug te trekken. Jouw antwoorden worden anoniem ingediend door op de 'pijl'-knop te klikken die u zult vinden na het beantwoorden van alle vragen.

Ik zou je willen vragen om de tijd te nemen en de vragen te beantwoorden op een manier die voor jou goed aanvoelt, er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden. Je komt in aanmerking voor deelname als je jezelf als vrouw identificeert en tussen de 16 en 24 jaar oud bent. Mocht je nog vragen hebben over het experiment of je deelname, mail me dan gerust op: s.m.alhoei@tilburguniversity.edu.

Nogmaals bedankt, ik waardeer je tijd en input!

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Door op onderstaande knop te klikken, bevestig je:

- Jouw deelname aan het onderzoek is vrijwillig.
- Je bent 16 jaar of ouder.
- Je bent je ervan bewust dat je ervoor kunt kiezen om deelname aan het onderzoek op elk moment en om welke reden dan ook te beëindigen.

Ik geef toestemming, start deelname

Ik geef geen toestemming, stop deelname

Als welk gender identificeer jij jezelf?

Man

Vrouw

Non-binary / third gender

Zeg ik liever niet

Hoe oud ben je?

16      17      18      19      20      21      22      23      24

Leeftijd:



Hoeveel uur per dag besteed je gemiddeld aan Instagram?

0      2      4      6      8      10      12      14      16

... uur per dag



Hoeveel uur per dag besteed je gemiddeld aan TikTok?

0      2      4      6      8      10      12      14      16

... uur per dag



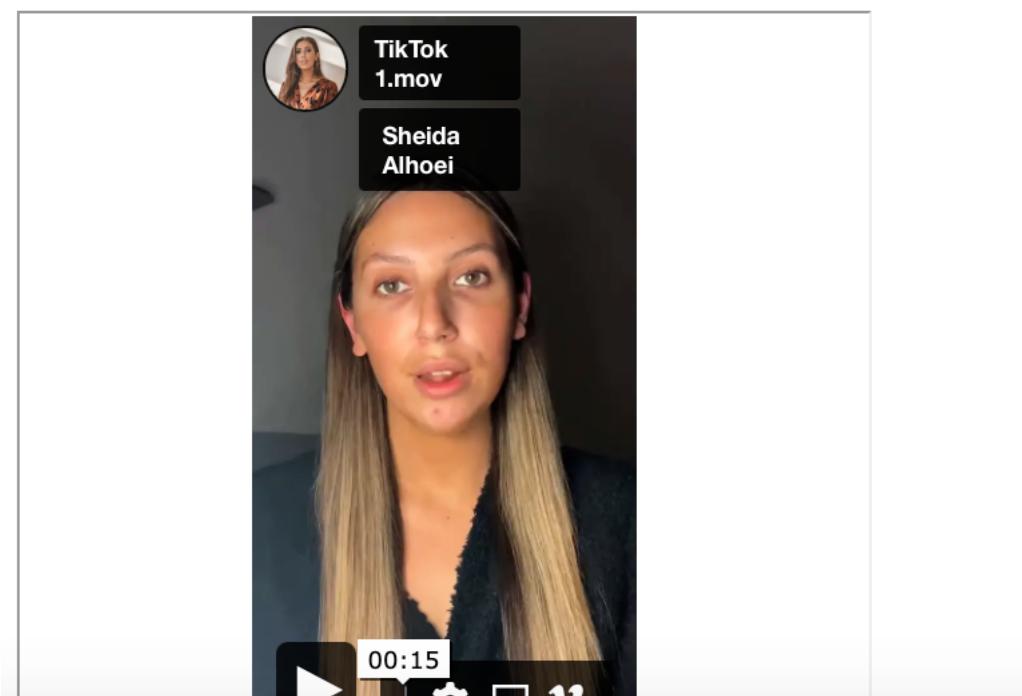
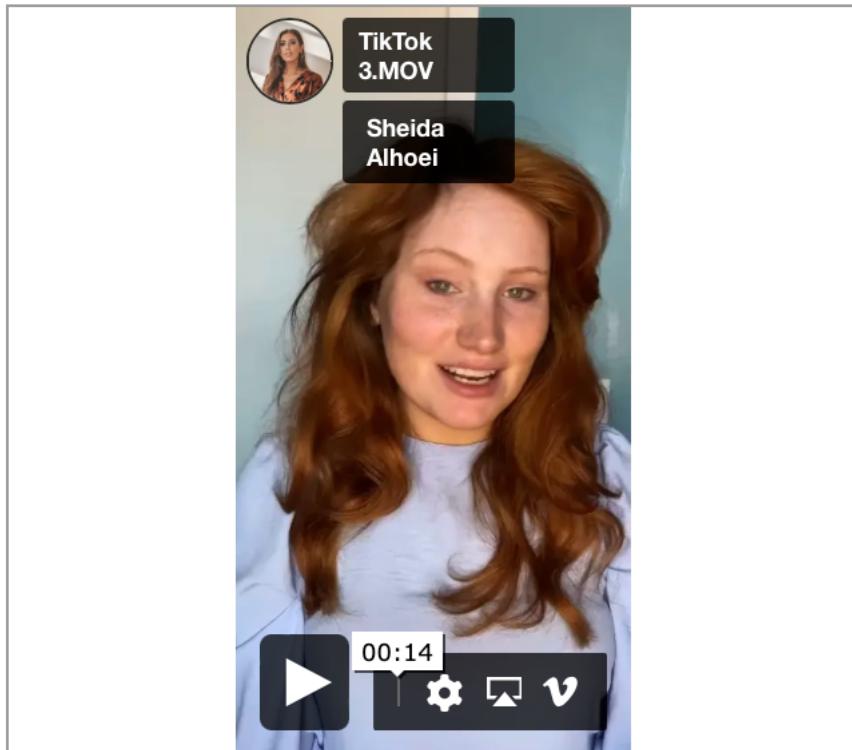
Hoeveel uur per dag besteed je gemiddeld aan Youtube?

0      2      4      6      8      10      12      14      16

... uur per dag



Beeld je in dat je aan het scrollen bent op TikTok en de je komt de volgende drie video's tegen.  
Bekijk ze alle drie.



Vul voor elk statement in wat voor jou geldt:

	Sterk mee eens	Mee eens	Mee oneens	Sterk mee oneens
Ik heb het gevoel dat ik een persoon van waarde ben, tenminste gelijk aan anderen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik heb het gevoel dat ik een aantal goede eigenschappen heb.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Al met al heb ik het gevoel dat ik een mislukkeling ben.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik kan dingen net zo goed als de meeste andere mensen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik heb het gevoel dat ik niet veel heb om trots op te zijn.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik heb een positieve houding ten opzichte van mezelf.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Over het algemeen ben ik tevreden met mezelf.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik zou willen dat ik meer respect had voor mezelf.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik voel me zeker waardeloos op bepaalde momenten.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Soms denk ik dat ik helemaal niets goed kan.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Vul voor elk statement in wat voor jou geldt:

	Sterk mee oneens	Mee oneens	Enigszins mee oneens	Niet eens/niet oneens	Enigszins mee eens	Mee eens	Sterk mee eens
Ik voel me tevreden met hoe mijn lichaam er nu uitziet.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik voel me gefrustreerd of van streek over mijn eigen prestaties.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik maak me zorgen over wat andere mensen van mij denken.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik voel me onaantrekkelijk.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik heb het gevoel dat het niet goed met me gaat.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben bang dat ik er belachelijk uitzie.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Geef hieronder aan hoe jij jezelf voelt over jouw volgende lichaamsdelen:

	Sterk negatief	Negatief	Neutraal	Positief	Sterk positief
Neus	<input type="radio"/>				
Voorhoofd	<input type="radio"/>				
Gezicht	<input type="radio"/>				
Ogen	<input type="radio"/>				
Tanden	<input type="radio"/>				
Huid	<input type="radio"/>				
Oren	<input type="radio"/>				
Profiel	<input type="radio"/>				

Lees onderstaande statements en vink bij elk statement aan welk antwoord jij het meest voelt op basis van de personen in de video's die je zojuist hebt gezien. 'Deze personen...

	Sterk mee oneens	Mee oneens	Enigszins mee oneens	Niet eens/niet oneens	Enigszins mee eens	Mee eens	Sterk mee eens
lijken op mij'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
gedragen zich zoals ik'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
zijn zoals ik'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
zien eruit zoals ik'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*Bedankt voor het deelnemen aan dit onderzoek, ik waardeer je input enorm!*

Je hebt zojuist vragen beantwoord over zelfvertrouwen, omdat ik met dit onderzoek wil zien wat de effecten van beauty TikTokkers zijn op het zelfvertrouwen van hun volgers. Mocht je hierover nog vragen hebben, dan mag je me mailen op [s.m.alhoei@tilburguniversity.edu](mailto:s.m.alhoei@tilburguniversity.edu).