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Is It a Fit or Is She Just Skinny? A TikTok Hashtag as a Site of Ambiguity Around Fashion, Gender, and Women's Bodies

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Between early 2021 and 2023, the hashtag #IsItAFitOrIsSheJustSkinny gained popularity on TikTok. The hashtag is primarily associated with videos in which plus-size women assemble and try on outfits previously worn by thin women, inviting their followers to judge whether the assembled outfits are objectively fashionable or are only considered fashionable when worn by skinny women. The videos mostly claim to critique the fashion industry for its lack of size inclusivity and historic promotion of thinness, although most creators argue that it is not their intention to "skinny-shame." Nevertheless, the structure and premise of the videos invite judgment of individual women, their bodies, and their fashion sense, subjecting women's appearance to increased scrutiny. Employing critical discourse analysis, I aim to demonstrate how #IsItAFitOrIsSheJustSkinny videos assimilate women's dissatisfaction and anger with the discriminatory aspects of the fashion industry into happy, palatable expressions of postfeminist aesthetic productivity, where empowerment is constructed in terms of access to fashion labor and proficiency in it.

Keywords: TikTok, women's culture, ambivalence, economy of visibility, body image

Between 2021 and 2023, TikTok saw a surge in videos marked by the hashtag #IsItAFitOrIsSheJustSkinny. In the videos, recorded predominantly by young women, creators emulated outfits previously worn by "thin" women, then asked their audience: "Is it a fit, or is she just skinny?" The trend, which suggests that non-skinny women lack the same access to fashion as thin ones do, has spread to Instagram and YouTube and been taken up by fashion media, prompting reflection on the "plus size-friendliness" of celebrities' style.

Most TikTok's #IIAFOISJS videos follow a standard structure. They open with a creator showing a picture of a "skinny" woman dressed in an outfit, prompting the question of whether the outfit is indeed fashionable or only considered stylish when worn by a "skinny" woman. This is often followed by a disclaimer stating that the creator does not intend to "skinny-shame." The author of the video, who typically self-identifies as "non-skinny," "plus-size," or "fat," then reconstructs the outfit. At the end of the video, the creator invites the audience to judge whether they consider the outfit fashionable. Typically, the videos feature either a voice-over with a soundtrack or just upbeat music and are often recorded at home, with bedrooms and living rooms as the backdrop. All shorter than one minute, the videos exemplify the kind of

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content that has become TikTok's signature–humorous, snappy, and designed for virality, with their unpolished style, relatable message, and invitation to react (Abidin, 2021; Hautea, Parks, Takahashi, & Zeng, 2021; Kennedy, 2020).

The popularity of the hashtag from 2021 to 2023 coincided with when the body positivity movement seemed to achieve its maximum impact (Darwin & Miller, 2021; Hill, 2023). Spurred by an attitude that all bodies deserve equal appreciation, body positivity has developed into an impactful cultural and social media trend, paving the way for the visibility and seeming acceptance of bigger bodies in culture, specifically in the fashion industry (Sastre, 2014). However, the visibility of bigger women's bodies has still been regarded as sensational and paradoxical, rendering individual women susceptible to misogynist and fat-phobic backlashes (Hamera, 2019). Importantly, as the popular body positivity movement has clamored for acceptance, its messages have remained situated within the capitalist postfeminist culture, presenting women's bodies as a site of labor and a spectacle (Elias & Gill, 2018). Still, the empowering potential of the body positivity movement has been most dramatically undercut by the mainstreaming of conservative ideologies on gender and femininity, most notably heralded by Donald Trump's second presidency in the United States. At the beginning of 2025, as this article is being finalized, the body positive moment is all but over, exemplified, among other things, by the eminence of thin models on international runways (Mac Donnell, 2024). Alarmingly, as reactionary attitudes to gender have become the emblem of the ongoing mainstreaming of the right politics across the West, the currently trending TikTok hashtag #SkinnyTok testifies to a significant shift in the cultural understanding of femininity.

Drawing on theoretical literature on popular feminism and postfeminism, this article analyzes the #IIAFOISJS hashtag as a site of ambivalent coexistence between conflicting tropes and motivations—a political desire for recognition borne of systemic deprivation; a claim to postfeminist success rooted in conventional femininity; and a desire to succeed within TikTok's attention economy. I suggest viewing #IIAFOISJS videos' engagement with size inclusivity as political in a broader sense, as—quoting Wendy Brown (2019)—it is involved in "plotting the coordinates of justice" (p. 56). To grasp the ambivalence of the #IIAFOISJS videos, I turn to Lauren Berlant's writings on the political dimensions of personal pain and the conventional attachments and intimate publics of women's culture. While I situate the #IIAFOISJS videos within the confines of women's culture (Berlant, 2008), I refer to studies on TikTok to understand how the infrastructure and techno-social affordances of the platform accommodate and nurture the ambivalences of women's culture.

My study employs a multimodal discourse analysis of #IIAFOISJS videos and the lively commentary around them (Machin, 2012; Rose, 2016). Before I proceed to discuss my analysis, I offer an overview of relevant literature on popular women's culture and a brief discussion of TikTok's affordances.

Women's Culture, Popular Feminisms, and Postfeminism

Engaging with personal hurt as a symptom of systemic discrimination, the #IIAFOISJS trend highlights the political dimensions of a personal experience (feeling excluded from fashion). Addressing the personal as the political has been an effective but ambiguous instrument of minority politics. Thus, in Lauren Berlant's (2008) view, the focus on personal pain risks creating "a groove of self-repetition and habituated

resentment" (p. 128) within minority politics. Equally, Berlant warns against over-reliance on the repertoire of sentimentality for political struggle, deeming it unproductive. They highlight sentimentality as an affective and rhetorical repertoire that the political movement of feminism inherited from a broader women's culture. With its rehabilitation of feeling and attention to personal suffering, feminism draws on the connective power of what Berlant describes as the "intimate publics" of women's culture but is also impeded by it (Berlant, 2008). In these "intimate publics," sentimental expression promises relatability, empowerment, and connection through cathartic sharing of stories, suggesting commonality in women's lived experiences while remaining repetitive and often banal. "The marriage of aesthetic conventions and subjective conventionality" (Berlant, 2008, p. 28) embodied by repetitiveness, imitation, and dependence on consumer trends are key characteristics of women's culture.

These stable features of women's culture come to the fore and are further explicated in theories of contemporary palatable feminisms and postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2017; McRobbie, 2009; Rottenberg, 2017). In her writings on popular feminism, Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) highlights the cozy relationship that popular feminism has with consumerism, fashion, and beauty, as it seeks to celebrate and elevate women, promoting (repetitive) stories of women's success. A media-friendly, unabashedly fashionable mode of claiming and celebrating feminist identity, popular feminism entered the mainstream in the 2010s, proliferating images of "can-do" women (Harris, 2004). Ambivalently, popular feminism took in its stride the story of women's systemic disenfranchisement, rooted in sexism and most famously espoused by the international #MeToo movement. Its predilection for popularity, however, imposed a limit on the range of themes and emotions allowed by popular feminist expression (Glatt & Banet-Weiser, 2021).

In the current neoliberal era, the contradictory appeal of women's culture is augmented by postfeminist sensibility. "A cultural but also an affective and psychological phenomenon" (Gill, 2019, p. 150), postfeminism has been described as celebrating entrepreneurialism; focusing on choice, agency, and autonomy; emphasizing femininity as embodied, intensifying the scrutiny of feminine appearance; and repudiating pain, anger, and injury (Gill & Orgad, 2017; Kanai, 2017; Scharff, 2016), while prioritizing positivity. Postfeminism celebrates the joy of femininity but renders it a series of repetitive, imitative, and competitive acts of self-optimization–of one's body and appearance, love life, or psychological attitude. Postfeminism, nevertheless, offers the richness of feeling and a satisfying possibility of connection through the relatability of gendered experience.

Women's aesthetic self-betterment has long been a key aspect of postfeminist self-actualization. Achieving an optimal appearance becomes possible through a profound knowledge of fashion and beauty trends, imitation of trendsetters, and persistent surveillance of women's looks and behaviors (Gill, 2019). The need to work on the self to achieve the most appropriate aesthetic self-presentation has been described, using the theory of "aesthetic labor," as gendered, classed, and racialized work geared towards projecting the optimal image (Elias, Gill, & Scharff, 2017; Fahs, 2017). In postfeminist women's culture, aesthetic labor becomes a condition for connection, recognition, and respect. Alison Winch notes that the work women undertake to achieve aesthetic self-improvement is activated by homosocial intimacy, exemplified by "the girlfriend gaze," an evaluating view of women by other women (Winch, 2012, p. 21). This association between homosocial intimacy and gender

normativity echoes Lauren Berlant's (2008) concept of the intimate publics of women's culture, which, while offering gratification and acceptance, are insidiously disciplinary.

As Berlant (2008) argues, the conventionality and affect of women's intimate publics render gender norms effortlessly natural. The perceived naturalness of femininity hinders critical observation of it. As Brooke Erin Duffy and Emily Hund (2019) demonstrate in their study of women bloggers on Instagram, online performances of femininity draw on the notion of gender as inherent and authentic, erasing the labor that women invest in their self-presentation. The perception of online performances of femininity as effortless is sustained and reinforced by the aesthetics and vernaculars of digital platforms (Gibbs, Meese, Arnold, Nansen, & Crater, 2014), which prioritize expressions of fun and enjoyment. Particularly on TikTok, where silliness and playfulness are entrenched in the platform's aesthetic vocabulary, the prevalent mood of fun obscures the labor invested in the gendered performance (Abidin, 2021; Kennedy, 2020).

The Fun and Digital Cultures of TikTok

The popularity of #IIAFOISJS videos is inextricable from the context of TikTok. Its popularity boosted by the COVID-19 lockdowns, TikTok is currently the most popular platform worldwide among young people and, as of late 2023, has more than a billion users. TikTok's content consists of multimodal posts that include elements of video, text, music, voice-over commentary, and superimposed images. TikTok's algorithm prioritizes repetition, driving virality for trends and hashtags, thus encouraging viewers to participate in communities structured around a trend or genre rather than an individual creator (Southerton, 2021). TikTok has been described as a "mimetic text" and is said to foster "imitation publics," "wherein networks form through processes of imitation and replication, not interpersonal connections, expressions of sentiment, or lived experiences" (Zulli & Zulli, 2022, p. 1873).

The omnipresence of repetition and imitation on TikTok creates a space saturated with affect and silliness (Abidin, 2021; Hautea et al., 2021). Even activist and political statements on TikTok tend to be packaged in fun and silly expressions, with political resistance articulated through TikTok's vernaculars and adapted to the platform's cultures of replication and mimesis (Cervi & Divon, 2023). This aesthetic of fun adopted by political and activist creators is strategic in two ways—it allows them to circumvent algorithmic invisibility and to appeal to wider audiences, while retaining a subversive message (Abidin, 2021).

TikTok's focus on fun and its highly affective environment augmented through a relatably unpolished aesthetic have fostered the girly "bedroom culture" (Banet-Weiser & Maddocks, 2023; Kennedy, 2020; McRobbie & Garber, 2006). Described in feminist studies as a safe space for girls (McRobbie & Garber, 2006), girls' bedrooms become "spectacles" (Kennedy, 2020). The silly, cute aesthetics of the platform make young women and girls the most visible users and therefore alleged winners of its attention economy—in popular media and academia alike, the platform has been described as a "hub for girls" (Kennedy, 2020). At the same time, girls' self-presentation is subject to evaluation by users and algorithmic metrics. Given the constant possibility of self-exposure within TikTok's attention economy, girls' presence on TikTok is caught between the dynamics of pleasure and empowerment, alongside the risk of potential humiliation. The precariousness of self-presentation on TikTok evokes the contradictions of postfeminist girlhood, where

young women are encouraged to have a "can-do" attitude (Harris, 2004) but are also suspected of lacking confidence and self-esteem (Banet-Weiser, 2014).

Methodology

My study of #IIAFOISJS videos started with a long preliminary soak (Hall, 1975, p. 15), which helped me get a better feel for the videos, their structure, and content. During this phase, I watched, rewatched, and saved approximately 600 videos with the hashtag. Similar to other TikTok researchers (see Southerton, 2021, for example), I acknowledge that the videos I accessed were in part predetermined by the vague workings of TikTok's search algorithm, based on the user's location, gender, and demonstrated interests. Although I registered a separate account for this research, my geographical location and unconscious behavior on the platform (Schellewald, 2023) could have affected the videos the algorithm suggested to me.

From the larger pool of videos, I selected 110 that I considered representative of the ambivalence within the #IIAFOISJS trend. These included 93 videos that clearly adhered to the trend's standard structure, as described in the Introduction; 15 videos that attracted rich commentary and active discussion, each amassing over 1000 comments; and 8 videos that provided critical reflection on the trend. These selection criteria ensured a balanced representation of users' interaction with the hashtag. Focusing on videos that were more visible and discussed allowed me to better assess the controversies at the heart of the trend. Subsequently, 19 videos by 15 different creators were randomly selected for a more detailed multimodal analysis (Machin, 2012; Rose, 2016). In what follows, I focus on both the videos and the comments they have attracted. Although the videos are situated within TikTok's economy of visibility and are easily accessible, with many attracting numerous views and comments, following the ethical guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (Franzke, Bechmann, Zimmer, & Ess, 2020), I have decided not to use the actual TikTok handles of the creators mentioned in this work. Following an established practice of TikTok researchers, usernames were omitted from my research findings, and accompanying images have been blurred (Kaye, Chen, & Zeng, 2020). This approach aligns with the article's intent to shift attention from women's bodies to the discourse surrounding them.

#IsItAFitOrIsSheJustSkinny—Body and the Fashion Industry

Is It Fashion? The Hashtag's Claim to Objectivity

The question within the hashtag reflects the structure and experimental modality of the videos, as their creators seek to establish what is considered fashionable. The majority of videos start by showing a photo of a skinny woman wearing a "fit," which the video creator intends to recreate to test whether the ensemble is really fashionable. According to the narrative of one creator, "Parisian girls are revered internationally for their sense of style. But I've only seen this sense of style on one type of body type. I'm gonna try a Paris 'it' girl look and find out [whether it is fashion]. Let's do it" (personal communication, December 3, 2023). This suggests that, by recreating the outfit on a different body type, the creator can objectively establish its fashion value. At the heart of this statement is the belief that clothes cannot be

considered fashionable unless they fit different bodies equally well. This highlights the emancipatory potential of the trend, as women insist that plus-size bodies deserve inclusion in mainstream fashion.

At the end of their fashion experiment, creators confirm whether the outfit they tried on was indeed fashionable: "Actually, it's a fit. I love this look, it's not just [that she is] skinny," "Just skinny, sorry," "It's a fucking fit, I already know it's a fucking fit"; "This is a 'no,' she's just skinny" (personal communication, December 3, 2023) Statements like this reinforce the idea that the fashion experiment, staged by the video creator, should yield an objective result. Objectivity is often echoed in the viewers' comments, confirming that the recreated look is, indeed, a fit ("it's not just skinny"). The expectation of objectivity from fashion speaks to an underlying desire for equality and the claim that access to a fashionable appearance is every woman's right. In this paradigm, the experimentation that #IIAFOISJS involves is political (Brown, 2005; Mouffe, 2005), as it is conducted in the name of providing women equal access to fashion that they are currently denied. This unequal access to fashion is further elaborated on in creators' remarks: "I love [name of a brand], but it almost never has my size," or "[I'm] attempting to find my new style but it's so hard when i only see skinny bodies on pinterest [sic]" (personal communication, December 3, 2023).

At the same time, by emphasizing that fashion's value lies in its universality, and that only clothes that fit different bodies equally well can be considered fashionable, the #IIAFOISJS videos champion fashion vigilantism, in which any individual expression of fashion might be suspected of fakery, as its appeal could be downplayed as an individual woman's privilege. The malleable formula of the hashtag provides numerous opportunities for critique and scepticism. Users have tweaked it to ask: "Is it a fit or is she just rich?," "Is it a fit or is she just lazy?," "Is it a fit or is she just [the model] Bella Hadid?," or even an ironic "Is it a fit or is she just wearing sunglasses?" (personal communication, December 3, 2023). These questions demonstrate instances of unfairness and absurdity in the fashion system. However, they also appear to burden individual women with the responsibility of solving systemic contradictions through personal visibility and aesthetic labor (Elias et al., 2017). Accordingly, the commentary section of the videos reflects the intrinsic contradictions in the possible interpretations of the #IIAFOISJS trend. Users expressed confusion about the meaning and message of the hashtag: "What will look good on a curvy body, might not look right on a thin body and so on. It doesn't mean stuff isn't a cute outfit cause it doesn't look [good]," "Some outfits work better on some body types than others??!? I think that's just a fundamental rule of fashion," "Something about this type of videos makes me really uncomfy," "i don't think outfits have anything to do with bodytype [sic]," "Isnt [sic] this literally bodyshaming 💀" (personal communication, December 3, 2023). Such attacks, in turn, are answered with counter-criticisms: "Some outfits are praised just because they are on a thin body and that's annoying," "I think the problem is that not enough fashionable clothes are made for bigger bodies," and "It's about how so many 'trendy fits' recently and historically have just been centred around a flat stomach as the main accessory" (personal communication, December 3, 2023). These different and indeed contradictory interpretations of #IIAFOISJS not only highlight the ambivalence within its structure and message, but also testify to the structural ambiguity inherent in TikTok's trends. The "technological mimesis" (Zulli & Zulli, 2022) of TikTok plays a role in suppressing clarity of expression in favor of imitation and the opportunity to participate in a trend (Abidin, 2021).

The criticism expressed within the trend does not have a clear target—the #IIAFOISJS videos do not engage with the reasons for the lack of size inclusivity in fashion, as the many iterations of #IIAFOISJS

are further dispersed within TikTok's imitative attention economy. While the trend purportedly intends to expose the discriminatory aspects of fashion, the logic of the hashtag and users' comments continuously shifts the focus from the fashion industry as a structure to the bodies and conduct of individual women. The users' comments are centered on the appearance, behavior, and choices of women creators, praising or criticizing not only their fashion style but also their looks. The comments range from praise ("I can't tell you are so pretty," "You're literally gorgeous oh my god" (personal communication, December 3, 2023) to expressions of incredulity—"Is it a fit? Or does your hour glass [sic] body make everything stylish?" (personal communication, December 3, 2023). Comments like this testify to the regime of aesthetic surveillance (Gill, 2019; Winch, 2012), in which women's bodies are either an asset or a liability, and therefore require constant monitoring. The aesthetic surveillance within #IIAFOISJS speaks to the deep-seated ambiguities of women's "intimate publics" (Berlant, 2008), which provide a sense of homosocial belonging while remaining insidiously disciplinary. The inclusion of information on weight and body measurements in some of the videos clearly illustrates such ambiguities. On the one hand, this type of information is often interpreted as relatable and empowering, as it defies the stigma of having a bigger body ("Omg YES SOMEONE WITH MY DIMMENSIONS [sic] 🥰🥰🥰🥰" (personal communication, December 3, 2023); on the other, it testifies to the regime of scrutiny, in which women and their bodies exist.

The regime of aesthetic surveillance promoted by the #IIAFOISJS videos is intensified by the culture of comparison, enforced by the formula of the hashtag and structure of the videos (Figures 1–2). The majority of the #IIAFOISJS videos start with the creator showing a picture of a "skinny" woman, whose outfit she intends to replicate. This juxtaposition of the two women and their interpretation of a similar outfit invites judgment on who wears it better, but also sharpens the focus on what the two women look like. The merit of their fashion choices becomes inextricably bound to the shape of their bodies. The competitive dynamic between different women persists in the comments to the videos, where users tend to compare the two women wearing the "fit" ("both r cute but I like it on u better😍" (personal communication, December 3, 2023), but also themselves to the creator of the video ("thats [sic] unfaaaaair😩 you look stunning i wish i'd look like that" (personal communication, December 3, 2023)). Ultimately, it is women's individual bodies that appear to bear the brunt of the critique of the fashion system. Paradoxically, while the trend seems to criticize an aspect of "women's culture" (the fashion industry), it is also firmly anchored within "women's culture" with its logic of comparison and imitation.

Figure 1. Creator shows a photo of a "skinny woman" whose outfit she intends to replicate.

Figure 2. Creator in the outfit that riffs on the look previously worn by a model.

The structure of the videos further exposes how women's bodies are subject to the critical gaze, as images of "skinny" women are normally used in the #IIAFOISJS videos—apparently without their consent—following TikTok's common quotation practices (Abidin, 2021). They are simply *there*—circulating on social media and readily available for judgment, observation, or criticism. The rationale of #IIAFOISJS repurposes these readily available images as a vehicle for creativity, critique, and further production of videos. At the same time, the intrusiveness of evaluation is muted by the atmosphere of intimacy and the richness of positive affect, underpinned by the abundance of emojis, exclamation marks, and enthusiastic compliments.

Or is She Just Skinny? Conundrums of Self-presentation

Situated within TikTok's algorithmic infrastructure, each video marked with #IIAFOISJS has the potential to go viral, attracting numerous views and comments, which may range from complimentary and encouraging to derogatory and hurtful. Each video creator, thus, acts as a risk-taker and entrepreneur in the economy of visibility (Banet-Weiser, 2012), where exposure through the hashtag may lead to an accrual of social capital and, potentially, financial profit, or a traumatizing experience. While they appear to expose discriminatory aspects of the fashion industry, the #IIAFOISJS videos are also a platform for the self-presentation of individual women.

Furthermore, although they appear to create a relatable and friendly space, the #IIAFOISJS videos seem to call for certain standards of self-presentation, where light-heartedness and the performance of youthfulness and conventional femininity are prominent (Figure 3). In most of the videos I analyzed, the women wear make-up, have styled hair, and smile and gesticulate in a manner evocative of TikTok's signature girlish silliness (Kennedy, 2020). In one video, a creator is wearing make-up and is smiling as she tests outfits previously worn by TikTok's "biggest star" Charlie D'Amelio.

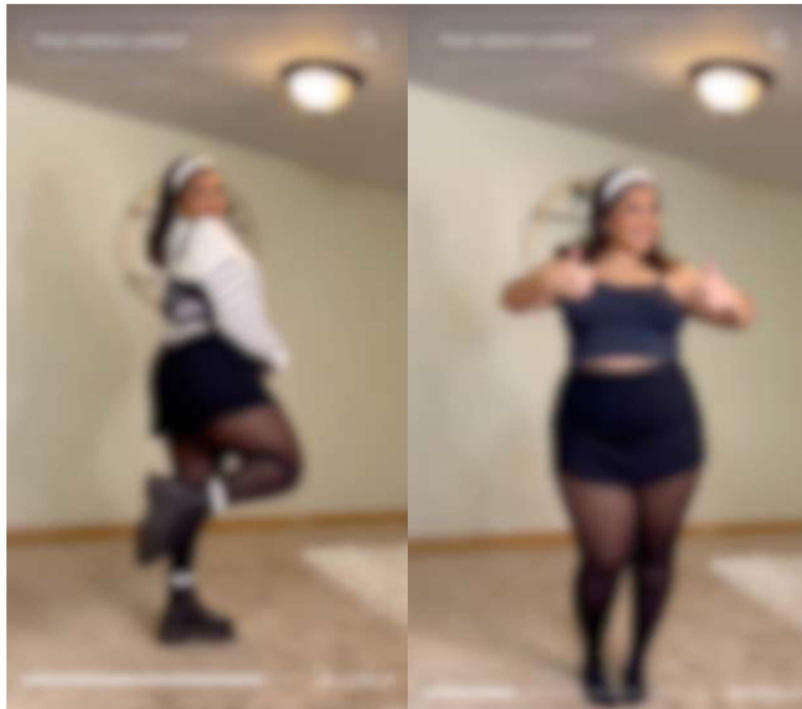

Figure 3. Creator gesticulating enthusiastically as she tries an outfit.

The 24-second-long video sees the creator wearing three outfits and three different hairstyles, as she continues to smile into the camera, gesturing animatedly towards the viewer. Similarly, another creator gestures silently and excitedly towards the items of clothing she intends to try, a happy smile plastered on

her face. Under 30 seconds long, these and similar videos emphasize the effortlessness and playfulness of the fashion performances they show, collapsing the time that the women producing the videos spend on creating the looks into short snippets, which mostly last less than a minute and do not show the processes of selecting and styling the outfit or choosing and applying make-up. Created for the pleasure and entertainment of their viewers, the videos eclipse the effort and labor that creators invest in assembling the outfits and making the clips. The illusion of effortless, light-hearted, and optimistic femininity that the videos offer evokes Brooke Erin Duffy's (2016) work on the invisibilization of gendered labor online, in which stereotypically gendered appearance and behavior are characterized as "authentic" and effortless.

Most #IIAFOISJS videos strive to steer clear of negative emotions, and the creators reiterate that they do not intend to "skinny-shame" or criticize other women's bodies: "Sometimes on a skinny body anything would look good, and I don't mean it in a negative way" (personal communication, December 3, 2023). This performance of non-threatening femininity is amplified by expressions of modesty, as the women creators ask their audiences for reassurance that their outfits look good or make self-disparaging or self-critical comments ("I don't know if I look too momsy," "I look like a little lad who likes berries and cream," "I hate when the ears show ... on me" (personal communication, December 3, 2023)), revealing heightened aesthetic self-scrutiny. The creators' self-presentation as smiling, playfully silly, normatively feminine women produces the impression of a non-threatening, postfeminist, girly form of femininity (Gill, 2016; Kennedy, 2020; McRobbie, 2009). Set against the backdrop of women's living rooms and bedrooms, the videos offer an intimate glimpse into their lives and homes. By showing wardrobes and beds in different states of disarray, the clips present an example of the postfeminist "bedroom culture," conveying the intimacy and vulnerability that accompany this.

The videos that depart from the emotions of modesty and positivity, or are angry and complex, rarely receive a significant number of views and comments, and meet with mixed reactions from their audiences. The viewers' comments either express confusion and irritation or seek to re-establish the atmosphere of positivity. In one video, the creator is seen staring into the camera for 15 seconds, showing both middle fingers with her protruding belly exposed, as the words "is it a fit or is she just skinny" are superimposed in pink onto the video. What seems like an expression of anger (either at the trend or the fashion industry) receives the following comments from users: "Pretty 🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰," "the strech [sic] marks🥰 the swag👩🏻🕶️🤏🏼," "This is 👊powerful 👊," "You are so gorg [sic]" (personal communication, December 3, 2023). The comments, teeming with affectionate emojis, appear to neutralize the video's angry message, reaffirming its positive tone. Such comments appear to render the site of #IIAFOISJS a safe and positive space, where every woman can find appreciation and support.

However, by complimenting the creator's looks, the comments shift the focus from discussing the creator's intention or message towards the appearance of an individual woman. The discursive space around each video acts as a laboratory (Banet-Weiser, 2014), where not only the value of an outfit is established, but also that of a woman's appearance and fashion choices. Though largely positive, users' comments also serve as a tool for critique and discipline, offering advice on how the creators' outfits can be improved: "Necklaces and an anklet would make it pop even moreee," "ur hoodie needed to be larger, I think it's more of an off white than the one in the pic and that's always less," "the boxy jacket feels a little bit matronly, but I'd probably like it in a different fabric that wasn't boucle" (personal communication, December 3, 2023).

Comments like this convey a longing for aesthetic perfection, as they advise on more effective ways of recreating the "fits." They also discipline the creators, pointing out imperfections in their execution of the looks and urging them to make more effort. Simultaneously, such comments, once again, introduce opportunities for women to compare themselves and the efficiency of their aesthetic labor with one another in the manner of the "girlfriend gaze" (Winch, 2012). Although the costs of the labor of visibility remain largely unacknowledged by the creators and their audiences, the former are still expected to make an effort in selecting and styling their outfits. The overall regime of positivity and the proliferation of complimentary comments could be interpreted as an insidiously disciplinary instrument of "women's culture" (Berlant, 2008), which determines the norm and the normal.

The expenses associated with shopping for fashion and the labor of consumption needed to achieve perfectly replicated looks are rarely addressed. Instead, items of clothing are shown as enjoyable and fun through expressions of delight and silly, cute gestures, such as widened eyes, surprised gasping, or happy laughter. When clothes are discussed in the videos or in the comment section, they are framed as a source of pleasure but also a necessity: "I don't care what size you are, a black miniskirt is a staple in your wardrobe" (personal communication, December 3, 2023), admonishes one creator before extolling the virtues of her black, stretchy Target skirt. Video creators often give their viewers advice on where to shop for the items in their videos. Shopping for fashion and performing fashion emerge as normal and perfectly natural behavior—these notions are occasionally disrupted by references to the cost of "the perfect outfit," as this exchange between a commenter and video creator demonstrates:

> @name *(commentator)*: I wish you had the boots and olive fur top too. Not because I don't think you slay the outfit you did but because I think youd [sic] really slay the full fit
> @name *(video creator)*: I would if I had any money (personal communication, December 3, 2023).

Such references to the cost of fashion undermine the overall regime of positivity in the #IsItAFitOrIsSheJustSkinny videos, as they challenge the idea that shopping for fashion is purely enjoyable and effortless.

Another recurring motif within the comments is "slaying," "rocking," or "killing" outfits. "Slaying" or "rocking" outfits refer to successful and self-assured behavior, and ubiquitous encouragements such as "slay, queen" express admiration for confident self-presentation. The users' comments ("I love how confident you are 😍😍👏slay queen," or "i wish i had your confidence❤️it makes you look 10x prettier than you already are" (personal communication, December 3, 2023)) imply that confidence enhances women's self-presentation. Positive and complimentary comments also serve to restore the creator's belief in themselves. One creator's statement that she looks like "a little lad who likes berries and cream" is met with a barrage of complimentary, confidence-boosting comments, reassuring her that she looks "super nice" (personal communication, December 3, 2023). The value of confidence in discussions around #IIAFOISJS evokes what Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad (2017) refer to as a "confidence cult(ure)," which sees "women's lack of confidence as the fundamental obstacle to their success and happiness" (p. 18), encouraging women to work on themselves to gain confidence. Calls for women to be confident emerging from the #IIAFOISJS trend are thus part of the "confidence cult(ure)" as they recognize a systemic deficit of confidence among

women, while encouraging work on the self to achieve more confidence. Particularly when women's bodies are seen as nonstandard, confidence acts as a desirable component of an attractive appearance. Remarkably, confidence is praised in association with gendered and stereotypically feminine performances of fashion. However, confidence emerges not only as a covetable accessory, which can amplify women's appearance and self-presentation, but also as a resource to be gained from richly affective (albeit fleeting) connections made on TikTok. Largely supportive and confidence-boosting reactions create an almost therapeutic environment of acceptance, validating women's self-image and self-presentation.

Still, while confidence appears desirable, it is also placed in a discursive space where its performance is subjected to evaluation by other users, which makes it tenuous and potentially risky. In another video, a creator attempts to reconstruct an outfit by the model Bella Hadid—she tries a pair of extra skimpy shorts, a leather jacket, and a cropped T-shirt that leaves her stomach exposed. The video has attracted around 2000 predominantly negative comments. The users criticize the creator for her overconfident attitude, which led her to style her plus-size body after Bella Hadid; they comment disparagingly on her weight and make assumptions about her unhealthy eating habits. Thus, it appears that confidence is constantly being negotiated and assessed. While in some contexts, where it is concomitant with feminine, conventionally attractive, and "cute" femininity, it appears desirable, in other situations, it is considered "too much," unwelcome, and subject to judgment. The community of commenters on TikTok acts to keep the balance of confidence in check, penalizing the "wrong" expressions of confidence. Consequently, even though confidence is a resource (it can enhance a woman's self-presentation), not every woman is considered worthy of access to and use of this resource. The barrage of disparaging comments accompanying the video raises questions about the contradictions between the neoliberal requirement to be more confident and love one's body (Gill & Elias, 2014) and the potentially punitive response to someone with too much confidence.

The over-saturation of affect at the site of #IIAFOISJS evokes Sara Ahmed's writings on the workings of emotions and affect (Ahmed, 2014). Ahmed highlights the "stickiness" of affect, noting how positive and negative affect attach to things and ideas, framing them as "good" or "bad." In the #IIAFOISJS videos, ubiquitous expressions of happiness and positivity seem to "stick" to being feminine, fashionable, and conventionally attractive. The association between conventional femininity and "positive" affect seems reinforced by the imitative character of TikTok's content, where the repetition of mannerisms and behavioral patterns further entrenches the normative representation and understanding of gender.

Conclusive Remarks

This article analyzes TikTok's #IsItAFitOrIsSheJustSkinny as a site where the ambivalence of women's culture comes to the fore, augmented through the infrastructure and vernaculars of TikTok.

At the heart of the #IIAFOISJS trend is the dissatisfaction with the lack of size inclusivity in fashion, the nature of which is inherently political and systemic. Several comments from creators and their viewers point to examples of systemic discrimination in fashion (lack of sizing in fashion stores or a dearth of images of plus-size women on social media). However, despite the critical undertones of #IIAFOISJS, the trend has not conveyed a clear message about the systemic factors contributing to a lack of acceptance of different

bodies in fashion. Instead, it shifts the focus to the bodies and conduct of individual women, offering repetitive takes on who wore an outfit better and inviting comparisons between different women's bodies. This vagueness appears exacerbated by the infrastructure of the platform, which rewards repetition and virality. While the infrastructure of TikTok diverts users' attention away from an individual creator's work and disperses it among various interpretations of a trend, the viewer's gaze is firmly on an individual woman's performance. In this sense, the infrastructure of TikTok seems to reinforce the normativity of popular "women's culture" (Berlant, 2008), which the trend critiques but also is part of.

With its analysis of the #IIAFOISJS trend, this article addresses the ambivalence of "women's culture" amplified and fostered by the imitative and mimetic culture of TikTok. It recognizes the political potential of the trend, expressed through dissatisfaction with fashion's lack of inclusivity, but also highlights the limits of how this political impulse is articulated within TikTok's attention economy. The dispersed nature of reactions to #IIAFOISJS, while driving its popularity, prevents a thoughtful articulation of its message. As a contribution to the growing body of scholarship on TikTok, it seeks to illuminate how gender performance on social media is normalised and disciplined. At the same time, it draws attention to the possibly inescapable ambivalence of political expressions on social media, as these require visibility to achieve impact, but need to be adjusted to be more visible. Especially in the imitative cultures of TikTok, political messages tend to attract multiple (mis)interpretations, which dilute their empowering potential.

With their focus on the body, appearance, and fashion choices of individual women, the videos embrace presentations of conventional postfeminist femininity, expressed through feminine tropes such as make-up, silly and cute gestures, and signals of non-threatening self-presentation. The latter is communicated through frequent demonstrations of modesty and self-doubt. While a conventional, postfeminist appearance might well be the driver of the videos' popularity and is at the core of the creators' entrepreneurial efforts, it is performed as effortless and authentic. The apparent effortlessness of self-presentation is enhanced by the video structure, which eclipses the time and effort women spent choosing their outfits and make-up, substituting it with the presentation of a smiling woman clearly enjoying herself. This happy self-presentation is starkly at odds with the regime of aesthetic surveillance, fostered by #IIAFOISJS. As desirable and undesirable aspects of self-presentation are negotiated at the site of #IIAFOISJS, confidence emerges as a mercurial resource, which can make or break a performance. At the same time, a delicate balance of confidence emerges, where self-assurance can either amplify a creator's self-presentation or jeopardize it if perceived as excessive or unfounded.

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