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"Less Is More" for Health: How Minimalism Reshapes Food Consumption Patterns and Preferences

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ABSTRACT

Minimalism has become an increasingly prevalent lifestyle, yet its influence on consumers' food consumption patterns and preferences has not been examined previously. Across three main studies and a supplementary study ($N = 1{,}105$), we find replicating evidence that minimalism can reduce preference for unhealthy food consumption while promoting healthier choices. We identify a *minimalism = healthy* association that consumers explicitly recognize and apply in their dietary decisions. Specifically, minimalism influences food consumption patterns, through a dual self-control process of increasing the internal conflict and reducing the strength of desire for consuming unhealthy foods. The findings hold regardless of consumers' dietary habits (e.g., restrained eating, dietary restrictions, or time since last meal) and demographic factors, and are supported by studies using diverse methodologies and food options. Our research shows that the effect of minimalism on food consumption extends beyond reducing overall quantity of intake (as suggested by the *less is more* philosophy)—it also shifts consumption patterns toward qualitatively healthier options. These findings advance the literature on consumer minimalism, food-related intuitions, and self-control, offering valuable insights for public health policymakers, wellness influencers, content creators, and marketers aiming to promote healthy eating.

1 | Introduction

Unhealthy diets driven by changing lifestyles and mass consumerism pose significant risks to public health. It is estimated that over one billion people worldwide are obese due to excessive consumption of food high in fat, sugar, and salt (WHO 2022). Various factors influence consumers' food behaviors, including lifestyle, social norms, attitudes, cultural upbringing, and food-related knowledge (Ganglbauer et al. 2013). In addition, subtle interventions, such as nudges or strategic changes to the choice environment, have been shown to alter behavior in meaningful ways (Thaler and Sunstein 2008). Beyond these factors, broader societal narratives also shape how individuals make food decisions. For example, the growing popularity of minimalism-oriented "What I Eat in a Day" content encourages intentional, simplified eating habits. In contrast, impulse-driven "CheatDay" vlogs and reels celebrate indulgence and excess, reflecting the conflicting cultural signals surrounding food consumption. In this context, our research investigates a previously unexplored question: whether minimalism is associated with healthiness, and subsequently, whether, how, and why it influences food consumption decisions. Specifically, we investigate how adopting minimalism—a lifestyle characterized by the mindful acquisition and

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ownership of a few, carefully curated possessions, and a preference for a sparse aesthetic (Wilson and Bellezza 2022)—can shape food preferences.

Minimalism emphasizes simplicity and essentialism, promoting a lifestyle centered on owning less, reducing excessive consumption, and finding fulfillment in fewer material possessions (Kang et al. 2021). Although its core principle suggests a general reduction in consumption, we argue that in the food domain, minimalism's mindful and intentional approach reshapes consumption patterns toward healthier choices. Specifically, we posit that individuals implicitly relate minimalism with healthiness, and that this association is reflected in their food preferences. Minimalism encourages strategic and mindful consumption, which inherently requires self-control (Mathras and Hayes 2019). We show that adopting minimalism as a lifestyle promotes healthier food choices through a dual self-control process — concurrently intensifying the experienced conflict and reducing the desire for unhealthy foods.

This study contributes to the growing empirical work on minimalism by demonstrating how adopting it as a lifestyle can shape consumers' food consumption patterns. Existing studies have focused on defining minimalism, exploring its role in reducing consumption, and examining its indirect effects on sustainability and consumer well-being (e.g., Chen et al. 2024; Chen and Liu 2023; Hook et al. 2023; Pangarkar et al. 2021; Shafqat et al. 2023; Taylor et al. 2025; Wilson and Bellezza 2022). We explore a novel outcome of minimalism: its ability to reshape food consumption patterns by promoting healthier eating behaviors. We also extend the literature on food-related intuitions, lay-beliefs, and associations (e.g., Raghunathan et al. 2006; Niu et al. 2023; Ding et al. 2024) by introducing the *minimalism = healthy* association and its impact on food preferences. Furthermore, we extend the self-control literature (e.g., Carver 2005; Hofmann et al. 2009; Strack and Deutsch 2004) by showing that adopting minimalism spontaneously increases internal conflict and reduces impulsive desires for unhealthy foods. In studying these effects, our research complements the recent work emphasizing the influence of situational cues and nudging strategies on healthier consumption habits (e.g., Cesareo et al. 2022). We propose that minimalism promotes a conscious mindset that reduces impulsivity and guides food preferences toward healthier choices. These findings imply that policymakers, influencers, and socially responsible marketers can collaborate on campaigns that promote adoption of minimalism to encourage healthier eating habits, thereby contributing to improved health and well-being and simultaneously supporting SDG 3.4.1 (United Nations 2017).

2 | Conceptual Background

2.1 | Consumer Minimalism and Food Preferences

Consumer minimalism is a deliberate lifestyle choice that prioritizes simplicity over materialism by reducing excessive consumption and finding satisfaction in owning fewer, more meaningful possessions (Kang et al. 2021). Rooted in the "less is more" philosophy, minimalism promotes mindful consumption and a conscious resistance to material excess (Kang et al. 2021; Lee and Ahn 2016). Wilson and Bellezza (2022) identify three core dimensions of minimalism: limiting possessions and purchases, embracing a sparse aesthetic characterized by clean lines and simplicity, and practicing intentional, thoughtful consumption. Kondo (2014) advocates for decluttering by keeping only items that "spark joy", a practice that, as Pinsker (2016) notes, is often a privilege of those with the means to reduce their belongings. Minimalists actively simplify their lives, finding fulfilment in the process. They are typically driven not by financial necessity but by a conscious effort to curate meaningful possessions and avoid impulsive purchases. The reflective approach of minimalism fosters a deeper sense of purpose and emotional well-being, ensuring that each possession contributes to a more intentional life (Kang et al. 2021; Pangarkar et al. 2021).

Extant research on consumer minimalism has examined its definitions and typologies (Wilson and Bellezza 2022; Pangarkar et al. 2021), as well as select antecedents (Chen et al. 2024; Taylor et al. 2025; Gong et al. 2023) and outcomes (Shafqat et al. 2023; Martin-Woodhead 2022; Kang et al. 2021). However, many of its potential drivers and consequences have only recently begun to receive attention and remain underexplored. Findings suggest that minimalist consumption is primarily shaped by social motives and driven by needs for status (Chen et al. 2024), control (Gong et al. 2023), and affiliation (Taylor et al. 2024). For example, minimalist consumers often curate their purchases to set themselves apart from the mainstream, favoring fewer high-end products that avoid display of wealth. These items typically feature subtle design elements—such as understated logos and refined aesthetics—that signal a sophisticated lifestyle (Pangarkar et al. 2021;). Additionally, research highlights the positive impact of minimalism on personal fulfillment (Kang et al. 2021), emotional well-being (Shafqat et al. 2023), and sustainable consumption practices (Martin-Woodhead 2022). Taken together, this body of work presents minimalism as a multi-dimensional, socially influenced lifestyle with important implications for consumer well-being. Table 1 summarizes the findings of select papers from the literature.

Extending minimalism research into the domain of dietary choices—a previously unexplored area—we argue that minimalism can meaningfully influence food consumption patterns. Grounded in its core principles of mindful consumption and impulse restraint, we propose that individuals form an implicit association between minimalism and healthiness—an association that, to our knowledge, has not been empirically tested. This association is likely reinforced through repeated exposure to media—such as TV shows (e.g., *Tiny House Nation*), books (e.g., Marie Kondo's *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*), podcasts, and blogs (e.g., *The Minimalists*), which consistently portray minimalism as a purposeful, intentional lifestyle. Over time, we suggest, minimalists internalize this association, fostering more intrinsically motivated behaviors (Deci and Ryan 2000). Building on prior work showing that minimalists align their behaviors with their values (Lloyd and Pennington 2020), we propose that the internalized minimalism-healthiness association shapes dietary preferences

TABLE 1 | Literature Review of Select Papers.

Article	Methods	Key findings
Oliveira de Mendonça et al. (2021) *Journal of Consumer Behavior*	Qualitative (Netnography, Textual Analysis, In-depth Interviews and Event Participation)	The process of becoming a minimalist is a nonlinear trajectory comprising awakening, learning, transformation, and adaptations. Community interactions support and reinforce the values associated with a minimalist lifestyle, but also impose constraints.
Pangarkar et al. (2021), *Journal of Business Research*	Qualitative (Conceptual Typology)	Minimalistic consumption can be classified in four distinct approaches or types: voluntary simplicity, reduced consumption, anti-consumption, and inconspicuous minimalism.
Hook et al. (2023), *The Journal of Positive Psychology*	Systematic Literature Review (SLR)	A review of 23 empirical studies reveals a positive link between voluntary simplicity and well-being, identifying "consumption control" and "psychological need satisfaction" as key mechanisms.
Kang et al. (2021), *Sustainable Production and Consumption*	Quantitative (Survey)	Minimalism, as a sustainable lifestyle, is characterized by four behavioral tendencies (clutter removal, cautious shopping, self-sufficiency, and longevity of products), and is associated with greater positive emotional well-being (flourishing) and reduced negative emotions (depression) among consumers.
Martin-Woodhead (2022), *Journal of Consumer Culture*	Qualitative (In-depth Interviews)	While some minimalists adopt the lifestyle out of concern for environmental issues, others see sustainability as an unintended consequence of minimalism. Regardless of the initial motivation, minimalism often leads to sustainable outcomes.
Wilson and Bellezza (2022), *Journal of Consumer Research*	Quantitative (Scale Development)	The research conceptualizes consumer minimalism as a multi-dimensional construct - distinct from related constructs such as voluntary simplicity, frugality, materialism etc.
Blackburn et al. (2024), WIREs *Climate Change Journal*	Systematic Literature Review (SLR)	A minimalist lifestyle can reduce material consumption and enhance well-being. However, its often individualistic nature may limit its broader societal impact.
Chen and Liu (2023), *Psychology & Marketing*	Quantitative (Field and Experimental Studies)	Consumers with lower socioeconomic status (SES) often prioritize getting more for their money, which can make them less responsive to minimalist brand appeals. However, emphasizing product-usage frequency in advertisements can make even low SES consumers view minimalist brands more favorably.
Gong et al. (2023), *Journal of Business Research*	Quantitative (Experimental Studies)	Social crowding can encourage consumers to opt for products with minimalistic designs, driven by consumers' innate need for control. This effect is contingent upon group membership and self-construal.
Shafqat et al. (2023), *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*	Quantitative (Survey)	Minimalism supports emotional well-being by increasing positive emotions (flourishing) and reducing negative ones (depression). It can also enhance life satisfaction and social connectedness, particularly when individuals can manage their consumption desires.
Chen et al. (2024), *Psychology & Marketing*	Quantitative (Field and Experimental Studies)	Consumers with a busy mindset are more likely to prefer minimalistic advertisements, driven by their desire for relaxation and avoidance of processing dis-fluency.
Chen et al. (2024), *Journal of Business Research*	Quantitative (Experimental Studies)	Consumers adopt minimalist consumption through downward (vs. upward) comparisons, with status

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Article	Methods	Key findings
		motives as a psychological mechanism. This effect is moderated by consumers' spending-implies-wealth (SIW) beliefs, indicating stronger effects when belief is strong (vs. weak).
Taylor et al. (2025), *Psychology & Marketing*	Quantitative (Experimental Studies)	Inconspicuous minimalists purchase "quiet luxury" products to align with a knowledgeable elite group, rather than to differentiate themselves from the masses. Their preference for "quiet luxury" is driven by a need for affiliation and social connectedness.
Findings and Theoretical Contributions of Present Research	Quantitative (Implicit Association Test and Experimental Studies)	– Consumers associate minimalism with healthiness and minimalists use this association in their dietary decisions. – Minimalism shapes food consumption through a dual self-control process—heightening internal conflict and diminishing the desire for unhealthy foods. – Beyond simply reducing the quantity of overall food intake, as the "less is more" philosophy suggests, minimalism shifts consumption patterns toward healthier choices.

by encouraging a shift toward healthier food choices—specifically, that greater adoption of minimalism increases preferences for healthy foods while decreasing preferences for unhealthy ones.

H_1: Individuals hold an implicit *minimalism = healthy* association in their minds.

H_2: The effect of higher (vs. lower) minimalism on food responses will be moderated by food-type (unhealthy vs. healthy), such that higher adoption of minimalism will lead to lower preference and choice for unhealthy foods.

Our research refers to healthy foods as those high in nutrients that support healthy body weight, while foods with opposite effects are considered unhealthy (Wang et al. 2022; United States Department of Agriculture 2015).

2.2 | Minimalism and the Dual Process of Self-Control

When faced with temptations (e.g., unhealthy foods), people often experience feelings of conflict or psychological discomfort, prompting them to resist indulgence to protect their long-term objectives (Baumeister 2002; Botvinick et al. 2001). The dual-process framework of self-control (Carver 2005; Hofmann et al. 2009; Strack and Deutsch 2004) conceptualizes self-control as a struggle between two opposing forces: *strength of desire* that seeks immediate gratification and *internal conflict* that restrains behavior to align with long-term goals. This framework suggests that distinct cognitive systems govern impulsive, automatic behaviors on one hand and deliberate, controlled behaviors on the other (Hofmann et al. 2009). Prior research defines desire as an affectively charged state associated with either the anticipation of pleasure or the relief of discomfort (Kavanagh et al. 2005). Internal conflict, by contrast, introduces reasons to resist the desire and helps distinguish between unproblematic desires and problematic ones (Hofmann et al. 2012). Failures in self-control can occur when desire becomes overwhelming and irresistible (Redden and Haws 2013) or when individuals experience insufficient internal conflict to recognize the need for restraint (Schmeichel and Inzlicht 2013). Our research focuses on the dynamic interplay of desire and internal conflict, conceptualizing these dual self-control processes as situationally triggered by minimalism (e.g., Hur et al. 2015; Hofmann et al. 2009).

Minimalism encourages deliberate consumption and impulse management (Mathras and Hayes 2019). As consumers seek to align their actions with minimalist values, they are more likely to find self-regulation rewarding (Berkman et al. 2017) and to experience greater conflict when confronted with temptations (Shah et al. 2002). In this context, healthy options such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains may resonate with minimalist values, strengthening desire for these choices and reducing internal conflict. Conversely, the ideals of conscious consumption and impulse management may heighten internal conflict when encountering unhealthy foods, thereby diminishing desire for them (Botvinick et al. 2001). We therefore propose that minimalism shapes food preferences by spontaneously increasing internal conflict and reducing desire for unhealthy foods, while eliciting the opposite pattern for healthy alternatives.

H_3: Higher (vs. lower) adoption of minimalism will lead to higher experienced conflict while choosing unhealthy (vs. healthy) foods.

H_4: Higher (vs. lower) adoption of minimalism will lead to lower strength of desire for unhealthy (vs. healthy) foods.

H_5: The effect of minimalism on food preferences will be spontanously mediated by heightened internal conflict and reduced strength of desire.

By examining these effects, our research provides insights into minimalist food consumption, showing that its impact goes beyond merely reducing overall intake to promoting a more intentional, conscious approach to food decisions.

3 | Methodology

We conducted three main studies and one supplementary study to test our hypotheses. Study 1 examines the *minimalism = healthy* association (H_1) using the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald et al. 2003). We employed the IAT to address potential subconscious biases related to social desirability, such as individuals overreporting their levels of minimalism or exaggerating their healthy (vs. unhealthy) food consumption. The IAT enabled us to assess automatic associations between minimalism and healthiness, providing strong evidence for the proposed effects. After establishing this implicit association, we experimentally manipulated minimalism in two pre-registered studies to examine its causal effect on consumers' food responses. Study 2 examined whether minimalism reduces preference for unhealthy (vs. healthy) foods (H_2) through heightened internal conflict (H_3) and weakened desire strength (H_4). In doing so, it tested the dual self-control process by assessing whether internal conflict and desire spontaneously mediate the effect of minimalism on food preferences (H_5). In Study 3, we replicated the effects on food choices using a different category (i.e., snack bars) and additionally ruled-out perceived socioeconomic status as an alternative explanation. Figure 1 summarizes our conceptual framework.

We conducted two additional studies to replicate and extend our findings. In a supplementary study, included in the main report, we demonstrated that minimalism not only reduces

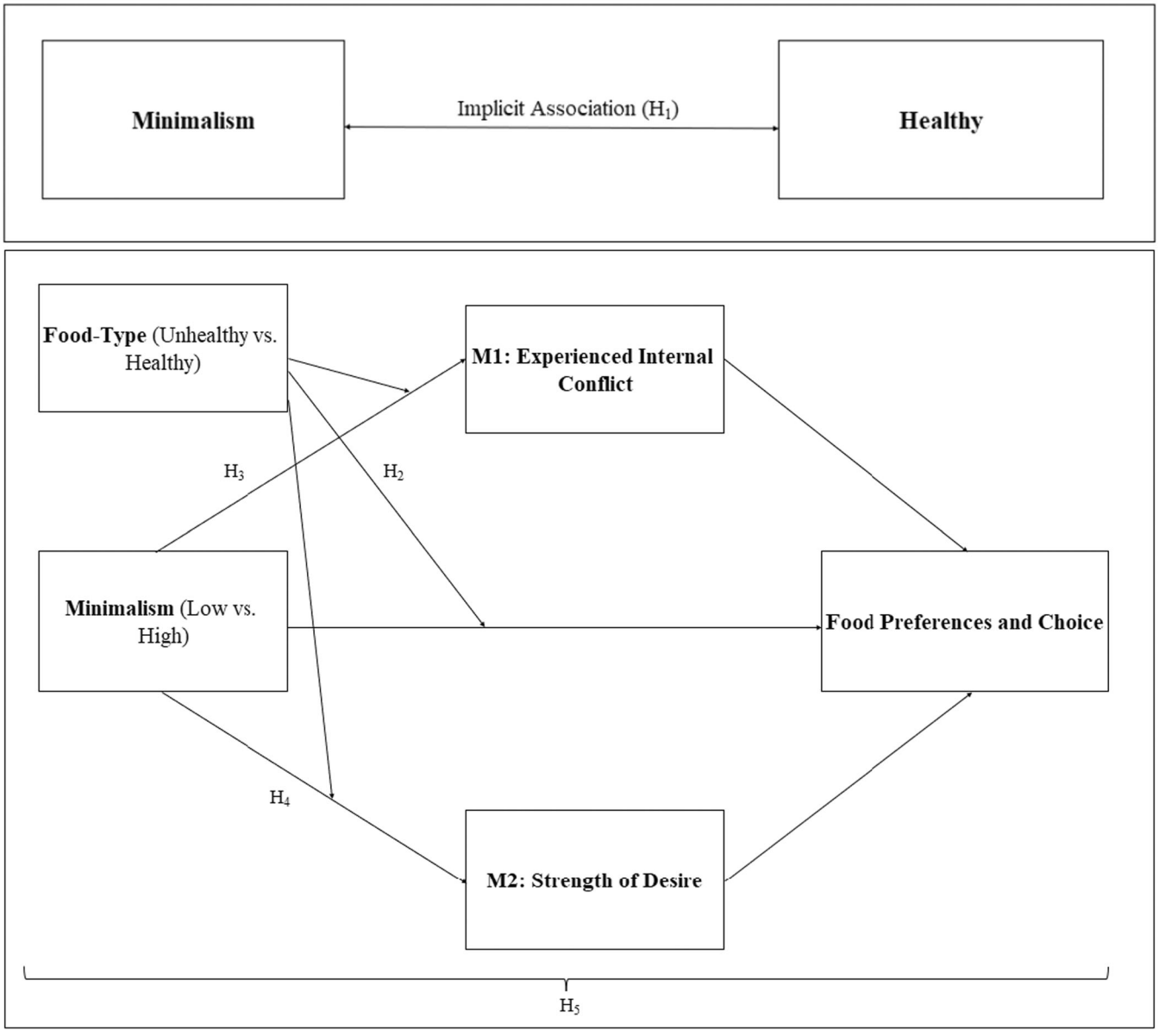

FIGURE 1 | Conceptual Framework.

overall food consumption quantity (i.e., number of snack bars) but also qualitatively shifts the consumption patterns toward healthier options (i.e., type of snack bars likely consumed) - resulting in fewer unhealthy and more healthy choices. We also addressed potential concerns about social desirability bias in self-reported responses through an additional study reported in Web Appendix A. This study replicated the main effect using a perspective-taking approach, where participants assumed the viewpoint of a fictional protagonist living a minimalist lifestyle (Galinsky et al. 2005; Ku et al. 2010). The perspective-taking method has been shown to reduce socially desirable responding (e.g., Todd et al. 2011). The details of all studies are summarised in Web Appendix B.

4 | Study 1: The *Minimalism = Healthy* Association

This study used the IATGen platform (Carpenter et al. 2019) and adopted the standard procedures of the Implicit Association Test (IAT) to examine the *minimalism = healthy* association in the food context. Additionally, we assessed the explicit component of attitude by asking participants to report whether they perceive a link between minimalism and healthiness. Research suggests that combining implicit and explicit attitude measures provides a more accurate prediction of actual preferences and behavior than relying solely on explicit self-report measures (Maison et al. 2004). We expected participants to respond more quickly when pairing minimalism-related words with images of healthy foods, indicating a stronger implicit association. If minimalism were merely associated with reduced quantity, we would not have observed a difference in its association with healthy versus unhealthy foods.

4.1 | Sample, Design, and Measures

We recruited U.S. participants ($N = 198$, $M_{age} = 41.90$; 65.65% female) from Prolific Academic platform. Nine participants were excluded due to excessive speed (i.e., having 10% of responses below 300 ms.; indicative of 'button-mashing'; Carpenter et al. 2019), thereby leaving a sample of 189. The drop-rate of 4.54% was lower than 11-18% reported on previous IATs with MTurk and student samples (Carpenter et al. 2019). This study had two target concepts (i.e., words describing 'high minimalism' and 'low minimalism') and two attribute dimensions (i.e., pictures of 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' foods). We used only processed food as stimuli in both conditions to avoid any potential confounds. Participants were asked to sort the stimuli appearing in the middle of their screen (in fully-randomized order) with a concept-attribute pair either on top-left or top-right of the screen. The left-right starting position of the target concepts was counter-balanced.

IAT procedure is based on the premise that participants would be faster when pairing a stimulus to a congruent than incongruent concept-attribute pairing. The IAT recorded pairing speeds in milliseconds (ms.) with faster pairing implying more intuitive (than cognitive) responses. The speed of classification was measured through the standardized difference score (*D*-score), which reflects the difference between the response time of incongruent and congruent associations divided by the pooled standard deviation (See more details about the IAT study procedure and *D*-score interpretation in Web Appendix C). Table 2 summarizes the different concept-attribute pairs on the IAT. The stimuli were selected based on separate pre-tests (refer Web Appendix D and E).

To assess explicit attitudes, we asked the question: "*How strongly do you associate high minimalism with healthy"?* rated from 1= not at all associate to 7 = associate a lot. Finally, all participants reported their age and gender.

4.2 | Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed a significant and positive *D*-score for *minimalism = healthy* association [$D = 0.57$, $SD = 0.47$, $t_{(187)} = 16.74$, $p < 0.01$, *95% CI* = (0.50, 0.64), Cohen's $d = 1.22$], which suggests that participants were faster in pairing stimuli relating *high minimalism with healthy* and *low minimalism with unhealthy*. Furthermore, the results of one-sample *t*-test confirmed that participants also explicitly acknowledged the association [$M = 4.46$, $t_{(197)} = 3.73$, $p < 0.01$, 95% *CI* = (0.22, 0.70)].

TABLE 2 | Concept-attribute POairs of IAT.

Category	Items
High Minimalism	Frugal, modest, deliberate, essential, non-excessive, simple, plain
Low Minimalism	Excessive, extravagant, superfluous, rich, lavish, complex, unthoughtful
Healthy	
Unhealthy	

Study 1 supported our hypothesis that people implicitly associate minimalism with healthiness (H_1) and explicitly recognize this association. Building on these findings, Study 2 experimentally manipulated participants' adoption of a minimalist lifestyle to test its effect on food preferences and examine the underlying mechanism.

5 | Study 2: Dual Process Mechanism of Self-Control

This pre-registered study (https://aspredicted.org/c4b3-7ycg.pdf) investigates the effect of minimalism on food preferences and test the dual self-control mechanism. Specifically, Study 2 tests whether participants in the high minimalism condition show a greater preference for healthy over unhealthy foods (H_2), mediated by two parallel processes: increased internal conflict (H_3) and reduced desire for unhealthy foods (H_4), which together reflect the proposed dual self-control mechanism (H_5).

5.1 | Sample, Design, and Measures

We recruited 403 participants ($M_{age} = 39.81$; 56.8% female) from Prolific Academic platform. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions, with minimalism (low vs. high) and food-type (unhealthy vs. healthy) as the between-subject factors. First, they read: "*Throughout 2024, you saw several social media posts, blogs, movies, and TV shows on a lifestyle that is high (low) on minimalism. Now, imagine you have resolved to adopt the high (low) minimalism lifestyle: owning fewer (more) possessions and having sparse (rich) aesthetics and décor. Specifically, pursuing your high (low) minimalism lifestyle, you have decided to avoid (enjoy) accumulating stuff by (not) restricting yourself on the number of possessions you can have. Also, you have planned to remodel your home to have emptier (fuller) spaces and simple (complex) decorative designs.*" We omitted mindful consumption—the third dimension of minimalism (Wilson and Bellezza 2022)—from our scenarios, focusing instead on aesthetic and decluttering dimensions. This approach allowed us to demonstrate that minimalism shifts preferences toward healthier foods even without emphasizing consumption-related mindfulness.

Participants imagined attending a party with various foods and rated their preferences (main dependent variable): "*to what extent would you prefer consuming foods such as vegetable mix salad, fruit salad, broccoli salad, apples etc. (chocolate waffles, cakes, cupcakes, butter tarts etc.*) on a scale from 0 (would not prefer to consume at all) to 100 (would strongly prefer to consume). Participants were additionally asked about the strength of their desire: "*how strong is your desire to eat foods such as vegetable mix salad, fruit salad, broccoli salad, apples etc. (chocolate waffles, cakes, cupcakes, and butter tarts etc.)*?" and whether they experienced conflict: "*how conflicted do you feel about eating the foods on a scale anchored from 0 (not conflicted) to 100 (highly conflicted)*?" The questions on strength of desire and experienced conflict were randomly-presented.

Next, participants completed manipulation checks by rating their newly adopted minimalist lifestyle and the healthiness of the food options. To ensure a consistent understanding of key concepts, all participants reviewed definitions of minimalism (Wilson and Bellezza 2022) and healthy/unhealthy foods (Wang et al. 2022) before responding. Finally, they completed control measures (dietary restrictions, dietary restraint, hours since last eating, gender, and age) based on prior research (e.g., Herman et al. 1978; Read and Van Leeuwen 1998; refer Web Appendix F for theoretical justifications and measures). In all studies, we controlled for these variables, and the main effects remained robust with and without their inclusion.

5.2 | Results and Discussion

Two separate ANOVA tests confirmed the effectiveness of the minimalism ($M_{low\text{-}minimalism} = 3.18$, $M_{high\text{-}minimalism} = 5.19$, $p < 0.01$) and food-type manipulations ($M_{unhealthy} = 2.36$, $M_{healthy} = 6.19$, $p < 0.01$). We conducted a 2(minimalism: low vs. high) x 2(food-type: unhealthy vs. healthy) between-subjects ANCOVA test on food preferences, including all control variables. The findings revealed a significant interaction effect ($F_{(1,394)} = 29.75$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$; H_2) but nonsignificant main effects of minimalism ($p = 0.79$) and food-type ($p = 0.33$). Post-hoc contrasts showed that participants in the high minimalism condition preferred healthy foods ($M_{healthy} = 70.73$ and $M_{unhealthy} = 53.26$, $p < 0.01$) more than those in the low minimalism condition ($M_{healthy} = 56.66$ and $M_{unhealthy} = 68.76$, $p < 0.01$; refer Figure 2). Gender was the only significant covariate ($p = 0.01$) and had a marginally significant two-way interaction with minimalism but its three-way interaction with the predictors was not significant ($p = 0.58$). The hypothesized effects remained significant without the control variables ($p < 0.01$).

A 2(minimalism: low vs. high) x 2(food-type: unhealthy vs. healthy) between-subjects ANCOVA test on experienced conflict, including all the control variables, revealed a significant minimalism x food-type interaction [$F_{(1,394)} = 4.89$, $p = 0.03$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$], and a significant main effect of food-type ($p < 0.01$), but a nonsignificant main effect of minimalism ($p = 0.46$). High minimalism led participants to experience higher conflict for unhealthy ($M_{unhealthy} = 42.48$) compared to healthy ($M_{healthy} = 20.67$; $p < 0.01$) foods. However, in the low minimalism condition, experienced conflict was smaller for unhealthy foods ($M_{unhealthy} = 33.77$) than healthy foods ($M_{healthy} = 24.98$, $p = 0.04$; Figure 3). Participants' gender and dietary restraint ($p's < 0.01$) had a significant effect on experienced conflict. However, other covariates did not reach significance ($p's > 0.09$) and the model remained statistically significant without the covariates ($p = 0.03$). These findings suggest that minimalism amplifies the experienced conflict, especially for unhealthy foods (H_3).

Another 2(minimalism: low vs. high) x 2(food-type: unhealthy vs. healthy) ANCOVA test on the strength of desire, including control variables, revealed a significant interaction between minimalism and food-type [$F_{(1,394)} = 17.27$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$] but nonsignificant main effects of minimalism ($p = 0.69$) and

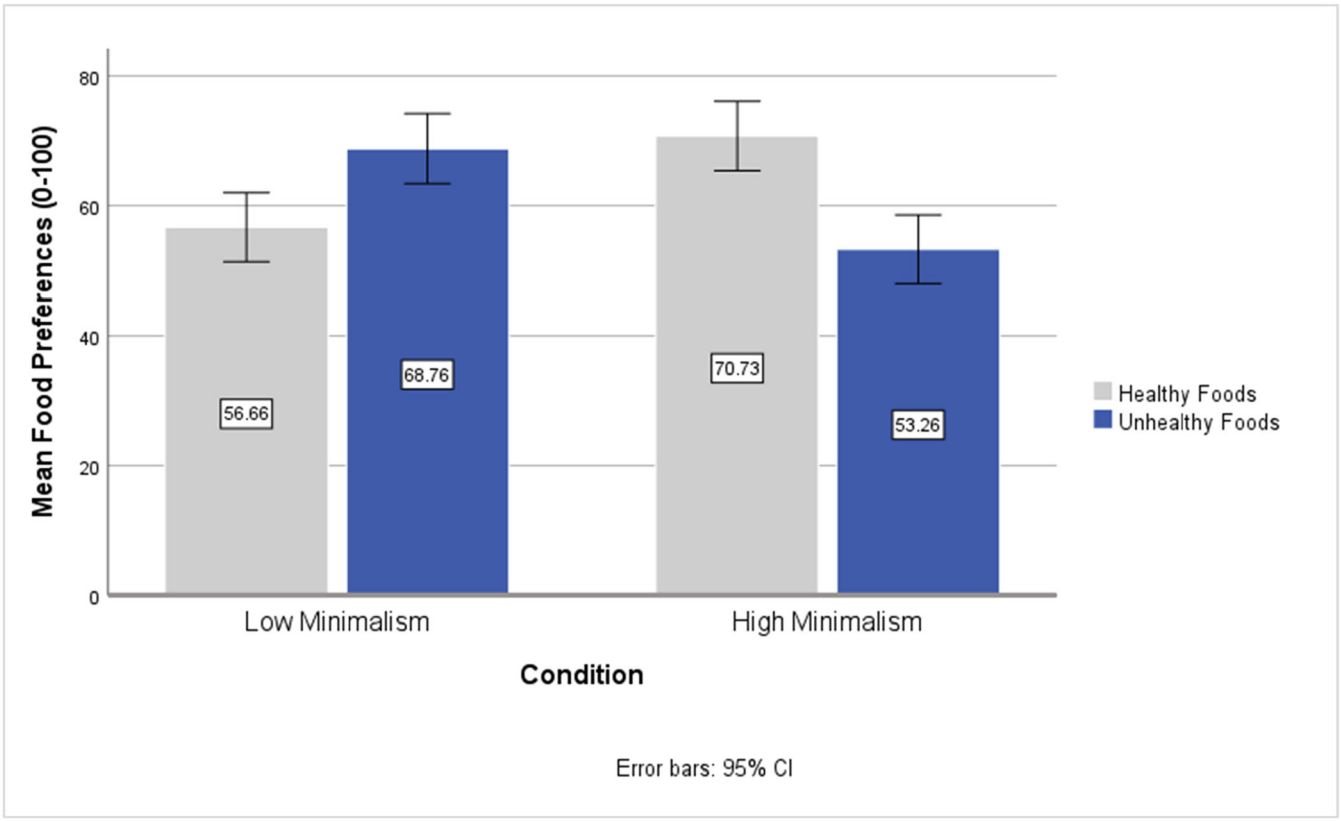

FIGURE 2 | Minimalism and Preferences by Food-Type.

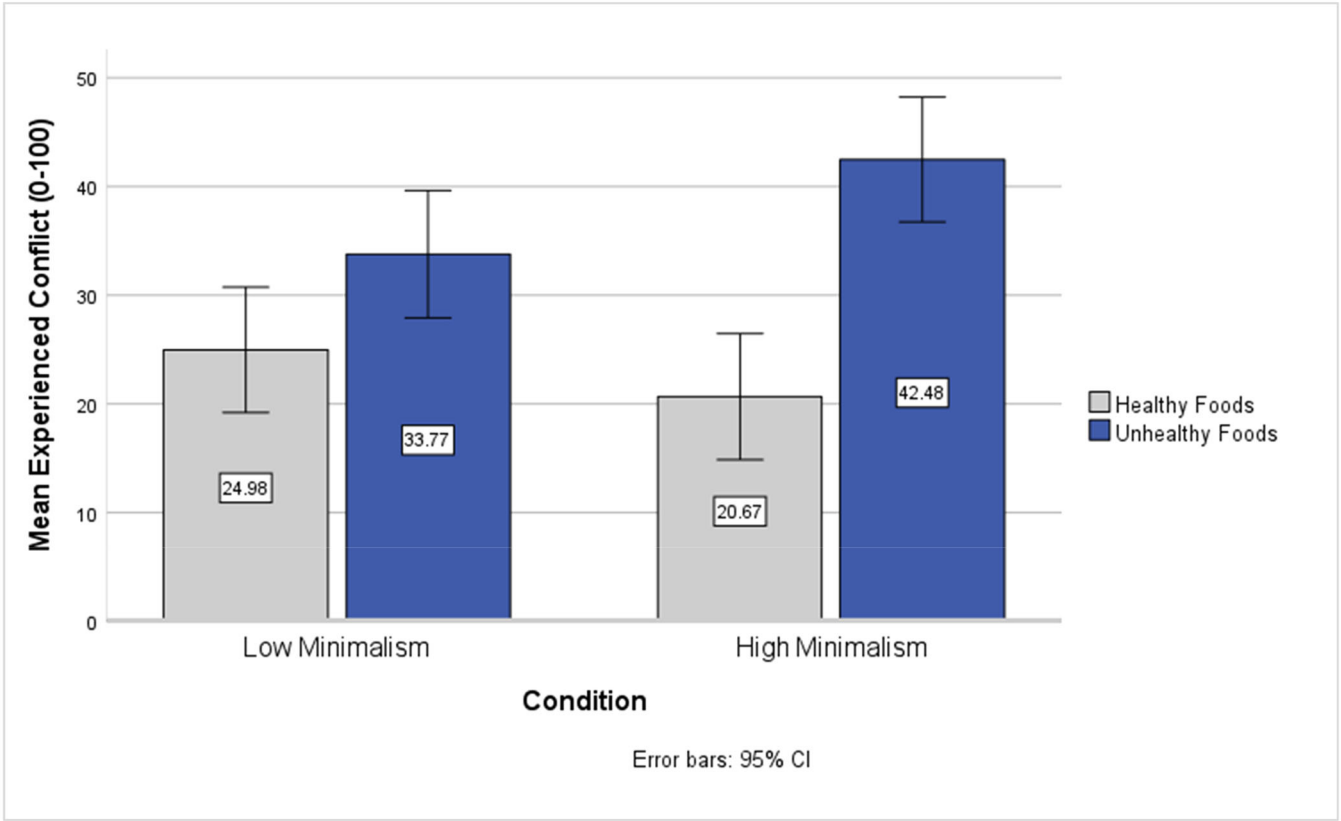

FIGURE 3 | Minimalism and Experienced Conflict by Food-Type.

food-type ($p = 0.71$). Pair-wise comparisons revealed that high minimalism led to stronger desire strength for healthy ($M_{healthy} = 68.10$) than unhealthy foods ($M_{unhealthy} = 57.30$; $p < 0.01$). Contrarily, low minimalism increased the desire strength for unhealthy ($M_{unhealthy} = 68.04$) compared to healthy foods ($M_{healthy} = 55.09$; $p < 0.01$; Figure 4). Only dietary restraint had a marginally significant effect ($p = 0.06$) but did not interact with the predictors ($p = 0.65$). The model remained significant without the control variables ($p < 0.01$). The results show that minimalism influences the strength of desire, with high minimalism increasing the desire for healthy foods (H_4).

A moderated mediation analysis using PROCESS Macro Model 8 (Hayes 2013; 5,000 bootstrapped samples) examined the effect of consumer minimalism [low:0 vs. high:1] on food preferences through the parallel mediators i.e., experienced conflict (M1) and strength of desire (M2) with food-type [unhealthy:0 vs. healthy:1] as the moderator, while controlling for the same variables. The effect of minimalism on experienced conflict (M1) was significant ($\beta = 8.71$, $SE = 4.17$, $p < 0.04$) with a significant interaction of minimalism and food-type ($\beta = -13.01$, $SE = 5.88$, $p = 0.03$). Minimalism increased experienced conflict for unhealthy foods [$\beta = 8.71$, $SE = 4.17$, $p < 0.04$; 95% CI (0.50, 16.91)] but not did not significantly vary for healthy foods [$\beta = -4.30$, $SE = 4.16$, $p < 0.30$; 95% CI (−12.48, 3.87)]. Furthermore, the effect of minimalism on desire (M2) was significant ($\beta = -10.74$, $SE = 4.05$, $p < 0.01$) with minimalism x food-type interaction also significant ($\beta = 23.75$, $SE = 5.72$, $p < 0.01$). Specifically, minimalism reduced the strength of desire for unhealthy foods [$\beta = -10.74$, $SE = 4.05$, $p < 0.01$; 95% CI (−18.71, −2.76)] but increased the strength of desire for healthy foods [$\beta = 13.02$, $SE = 4.04$, $p < 0.01$; 95% CI (5.07, 20.96)]. The overall effect of minimalism on food preferences including both mediators (M1 and M2), food-type as the moderator, and the control variables was significant [$R^2 = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$] with a significant interaction between minimalism and food-type [$\beta = 10.35$, $SE = 3.11$, $p < 0.01$; 95% CI (4.24, 16.47)]. The index of moderated mediation was significant for both experienced conflict [$\beta = 0.84$, $SE = 0.56$, 95% CI (0.0004, 2.13)] and strength of desire [$\beta = 18.38$, $SE = 4.45$, 95% CI (9.77, 27.21)].

These findings provide support for our hypotheses that minimalism affects food preferences (H_2) via a dual self-control mechanism: experienced conflict (M1) and strength of desire (M2; H_5). Specifically, minimalism decreases the strength of desire (H_3) and increases the experienced conflict for unhealthy foods (H_4). In contrast, minimalism increases the strength of desire for healthy foods but does not significantly alter the experienced conflict – possibly due to a ceiling effect, as healthy foods align with the minimalist lifestyle. A strong correlation between strength of desire and food preferences (Pearson's $r = 0.83$, $p < 0.01$, 95% $CI = [.80, 0.86]$) raises concerns about its use in mediation analysis (Pieters 2017). Consequently, in pre-registered Study 3, we test only experienced conflict as the mediating mechanism.

6 | Study 3: Validation of the Process Explanation

This study examines how minimalism affects perceived conflict and food preferences for healthy versus unhealthy snack bars, extending the findings to a new food category. Prior research indicates that consumers' socio-economic status may influence minimalist appeals through social comparisons (Chen et al. 2024). To address this, we rule out the alternative

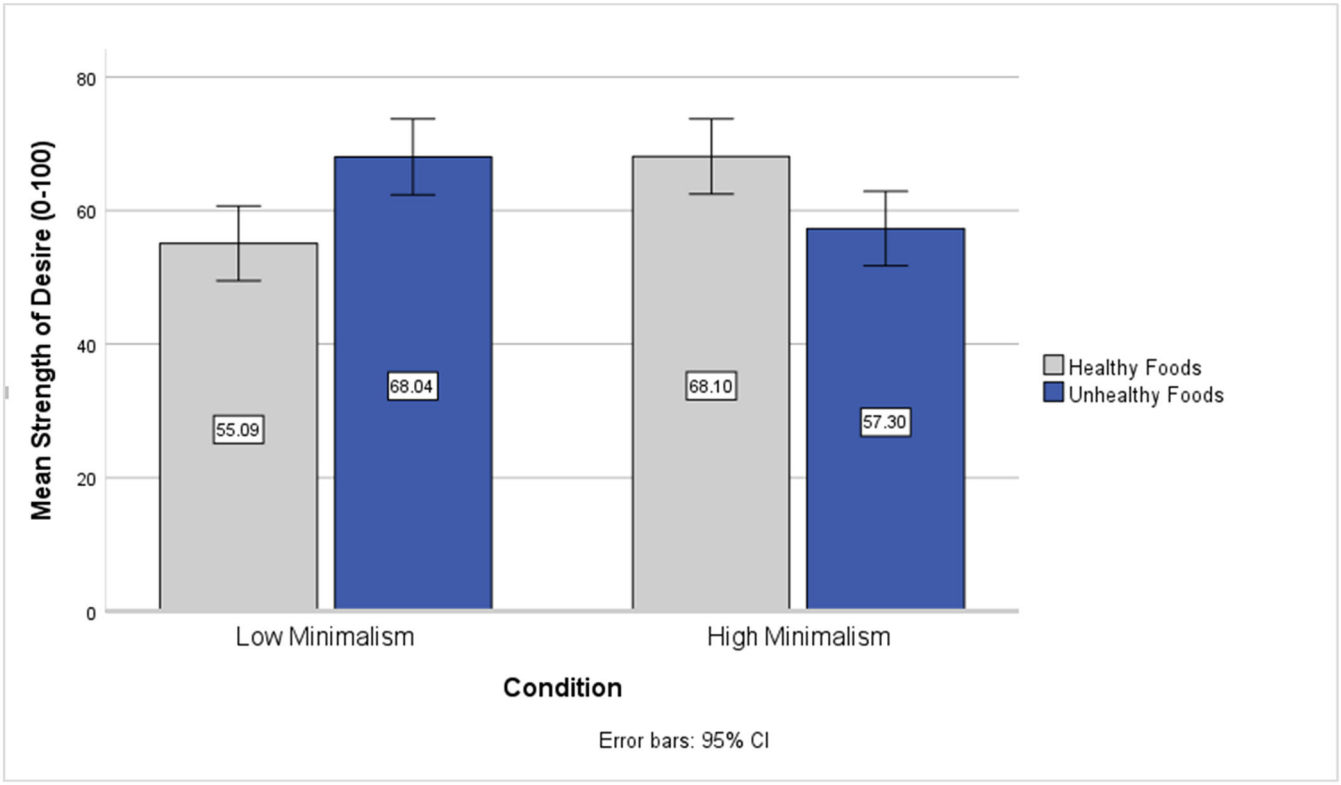

FIGURE 4 | Minimalism and Strength of Desire for Different Food-Types.

explanation that minimalism simply alters social status perceptions, thereby leading to healthier choices.

6.1 | Sample, Design, and Procedure

Participants ($N = 301$, $M_{age} = 36.55$; 47.80% female) were randomly assigned to either low or high minimalism conditions in this pre-registered study (https://aspredicted.org/cyr7-62gx.pdf). The participants read the same scenario as Study 2, which made them imagine adopting a low (vs. high) minimalism lifestyle, followed by a situation in which they make a choice between two gift baskets. All participants read the descriptions of the options: "*The gift basket contains 10 bars, including chocolate bars, caramel-filled bars, and sugary nougat bars (granola bars, dried-fruits bars, and high-fibre digestive bars). These bars have ingredients such as chocolate, butter, marshmallows, toffee, and sweeteners (whole oats, raisins, berries, chia seeds and dates). Each bar is prominently labelled with a tagline 'Indulgent (Healthy) Moments*".

After reading the descriptions of the gift baskets, participants indicated their preferred type of bar in a dichotomous choice task. The participants next responded to a four-item measure of perceived conflict (conflicted, uncomfortable, uneasy, and bothered; adapted from Elliot and Devine 1994) – separately measured for both types of bars i.e., chocolate bars, caramel-filled bars, and sugary nougat bars ($a = 0.93$) and granola bars, dried-fruits bars, and high-fibre digestive bars ($a = 0.94$; randomly-presented). Next, they shared their perception of social status upon adopting the new lifestyle and food preferences, rated from 0 (lower social status than before) to 100 (higher social status than before). Subsequently, they responded to the manipulation checks on minimalism and healthiness of the food options and the control variables (the same as in Study 2).

6.2 | Results and Discussion

A one-way ANOVA showed that participants perceived the minimalism manipulation as intended ($M_{low\text{-}minimalism} = 3.42$, $M_{high\text{-}minimalism} = 5.18$; $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the results of a one-sample *t*-test showed that participants perceived the chocolate bars, caramel-filled bars, and sugary nougat bars as unhealthy [$M_{Unhealthy} = 2.39$; $t_{(300)} = -18.01$, $p < 0.01$, 95% $CI = (-1.79, -1.44)$; hereinafter, unhealthy bars] and granola bars, dried-fruits bars, and high-fibre digestive bars as healthy [$M_{Healthy} = 5.69$; $t_{(300)} = 26.78$, $p < 0.01$, 95% $CI = (1.56, 1.81)$; hereinafter, healthy bars].

We conducted a binary logistic regression with consumer minimalism (low:0 vs. high:1) as the predictor variable, participant's food choice as the binary outcome variable, all control variables, and participant's perceived social status. The overall model was statistically significant [$\chi^2(8) = 35.63$, $p < 0.01$] and explained 15.1% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in preferences. The minimalism condition significantly predicted preferences ($\beta = 1.39$, $SE = 0.26$, Wald $\chi^2 = 28.29$, $p < 0.001$; H_2). Within high minimalism condition, participants chose healthy bars (65.2%) more than unhealthy bars (34.8%). In contrast, within low minimalism condition, participants chose unhealthy bars (69.2%) more than healthy bars (30.8%). That is, high minimalism increased the likelihood of preferring healthy snack bars by approximately 4.02 times [Exp (β)] = 4.02, (95% CI = 2.41, 6.70)]. The model did not have any significant control variables ($p's > 0.26$) and the effect remained significant without covariates ($p < 0.001$).

We conducted a repeated measures ANCOVA with minimalism (low vs. high) as the between-subjects factor and perceived conflict for the bar options (unhealthy vs. healthy) as within-subjects variable, including all control variables and perceived social status. The analysis showed a significant interaction with conflict for different bar options, ($F_{(1,293)} = 15.18$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$), but no main effect of food-type ($p = 0.55$) and nonsignificant between-subjects effect of minimalism ($p = 0.30$).

Pair-wise comparisons showed that participants experienced higher conflict for unhealthy foods across both minimalism conditions. However, the experienced conflict was amplified and statistically significant in high minimalism condition ($M_{unhealthy} = 42.04$, $M_{healthy} = 17.13$; $p < 0.01$) than low minimalism condition ($M_{unhealthy} = 30.68$, $M_{healthy} = 24.42$, $p = 0.06$; Figure 5). The hours since last eating was a significant covariate ($p = 0.05$). However, the interaction effect of minimalism and conflict for different bar options remained significant without all control variables ($p < 0.001$). Perceived social status did not interact with experienced conflict ($p = 0.74$). These findings suggest that minimalism influences experienced conflict differently depending on the food healthiness.

We conducted a mediation analyses (Model 4, PROCESS Macro; Hayes 2013; 5,000 bootstrapped samples) with minimalism (low: 0 vs. high: 1) as the predictor, perceived conflict for unhealthy and healthy foods as parallel mediators, and food choice (dichotomous choice) as the outcome variable, with all control variables (including participant's perceived social status). The overall model was significant ($p < 0.01$) with predictors explaining a 42.90% (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.43$) of the variance in preference. This analysis showed a significant direct effect of minimalism on preferences ($\beta = 1.21$, $SE = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$). High (vs. low) minimalism led to higher conflict ($\beta = 11.36$, SE = 3.42, $p < 0.01$) for unhealthy food but lower conflict for healthy foods ($\beta = -7.29$, $SE = 2.73$, $p < 0.01$). The indirect effect of minimalism through experienced conflict on preference was significant for healthy foods [$\beta = 0.24$, $CI = (0.06, 0.55)$] and unhealthy foods [$\beta = 0.45$, $CI = (0.18, 0.84)$]. The total indirect effect was also significant [$\beta = 0.69$, $CI = (0.34, 1.26)$] indicating that experienced conflict for unhealthy and healthy foods collectively mediate the effect of minimalism on food choice. Perceived social status was not a significant predictor of food preferences ($p = 0.76$). The effect of minimalism on food choice through experienced conflict for unhealthy and healthy foods remained significant ($p < 0.01$) despite inclusion of perceived social status.

These findings support H_3, showing that minimalists experience greater internal conflict when selecting unhealthy foods and lower conflict when choosing healthier options. Furthermore, we rule out the possibility that the effect of minimalism on food

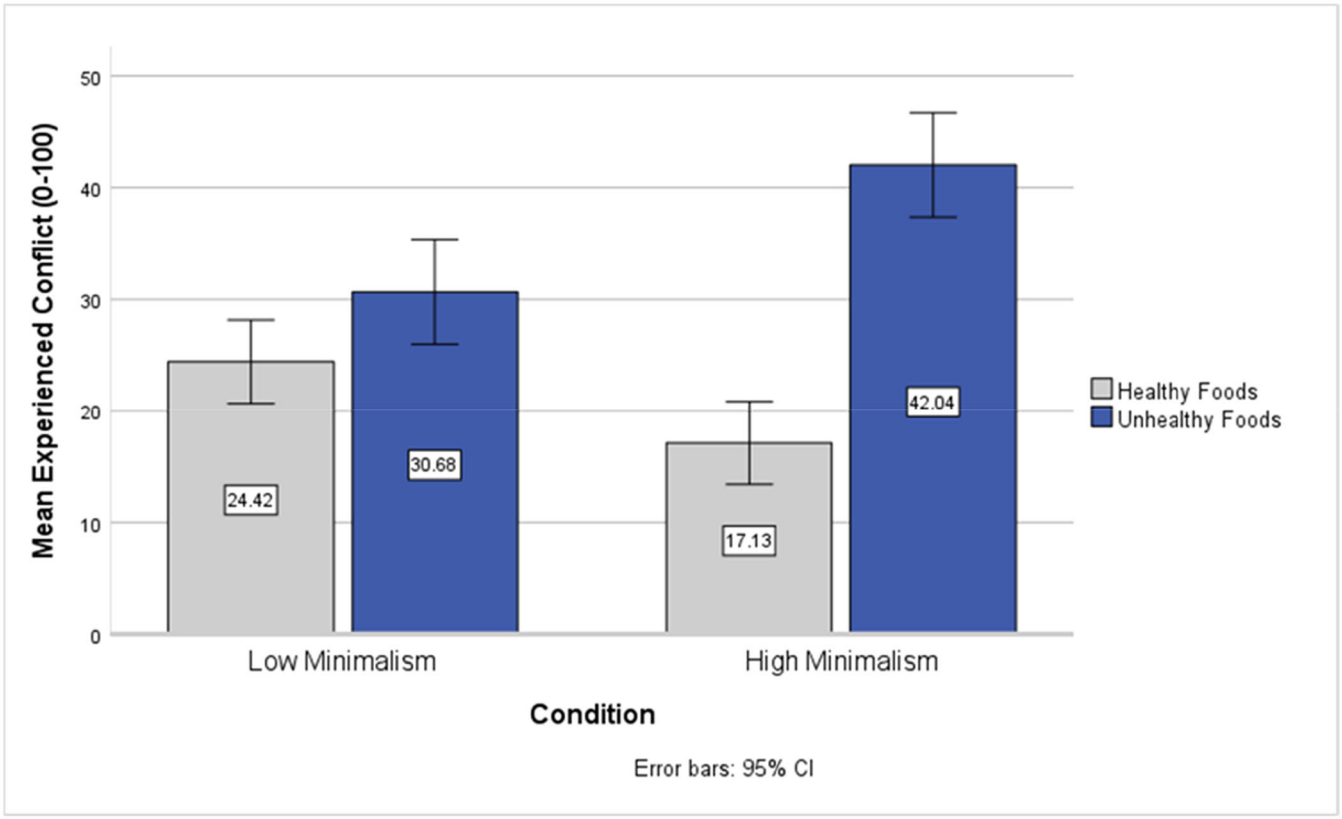

FIGURE 5 | Minimalism and Experienced Conflict by Food-Type.

choices is driven by perceptions of higher social status. Although other individual differences—such as trait self-control or self-discipline—could potentially influence the observed effects, we believe that the use of random assignment and consistent manipulation of minimalism in Studies 2 and 3 adequately controls for any such pre-existing trait differences.

7 | Supplementary Study – Minimalism and Consumption Amount

Studies 2 and 3 demonstrate that minimalism reshapes consumption patterns by influencing food preferences. In this supplementary study, we provide additional evidence to our conceptualization, by showing that minimalism shifts consumption patterns toward healthier options, even as overall intake is reduced.

7.1 | Sample, Design, and Measures

Participants ($N = 201$, $M_{age} = 39.0$, 48.2% female) were randomly assigned to either low or high minimalism conditions. They read the same descriptions of the healthy and unhealthy gift baskets from Study 3 and indicated their preference in a randomly-presented dichotomous choice. They reported the expected consumption quantity separately for both gift baskets with healthy and unhealthy options (randomly-presented): "*how many from the basket of 10 bars would you consume in the next 5 days? You can move the slider to indicate the number of bars you would consume yourself.*" We indicated that participants would consume the bars themselves to avoid any ambiguity about third-party consumption. Next, they completed manipulation checks and shared their responses for the control variables as the main studies.

7.2 | Results and Discussion

A one-way ANOVA confirmed that minimalism manipulation was effective [$F_{(1,199)} = 65.35$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.25$], with participants perceiving a significant difference between the high minimalism ($M_{high\text{-}minimalism} = 4.99$) and low minimalism ($M_{low\text{-}minimalism} = 3.01$) conditions. Additionally, a one-sample *t*-test showed that participants perceived the unhealthy bars as unhealthy ($M = 1.98$; $t(200) = -24.22$, $p < 0.01$) and healthy bars as healthy ($M = 5.67$; $t(200) = 20.94$, $p < 0.01$).

We conducted a binary logistic regression to examine the effect of minimalism (low:0 and high:1) on the dichotomous choice between healthy bars (coded:1) and unhealthy bars (coded:0), including all the control variables. The overall model was significant ($\chi^2_{(7,201)} = 54.76$, $p < 0.01$) and explained 31.8% of variance in choices (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.32$). This analyses revealed that minimalism significantly influences the choice of bars ($\beta = 2.06$, $SE = 0.33$, Wald $\chi^2 = 39.30$, $p < 0.01$) with those adopting high minimalism approximately 7.86 times more likely to prefer healthy (vs. unhealthy) bars compared to low minimalism [$Exp(\beta) = 7.86$, 95% *CI*: 4.13, 14.84]. None of the control variables were statistically significant. This finding replicated Study 3's results, regarding the effect of minimalism on explicitly-elicited food preferences (H_2).

We conducted a repeated-measures ANCOVA test with minimalism (low vs. high) as the between-subjects factor, consumption amount of healthy and unhealthy bars as the within-subject, and including all the control variables. The analyses found a significant main effect of minimalism [$F_{(1,194)} = 8.68$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$] indicating that high minimalism reduces the expected consumption amount in general. The pairwise comparisons showed that individuals with high minimalism ($M = 4.06$, $SE = 0.21$) expected to consume significantly fewer number of bars than with low minimalism ($M = 4.96$, $SE = 0.21$). There was no significant main effect of type of bars ($p = 0.21$). Interestingly, we found a significant interaction effect of minimalism and expected consumption amount ($F_{(1,194)} = 20.25$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.09$). Post-hoc tests showed that for high minimalism, the unhealthy bar consumption declined such that the amount of healthy bars exceeded that of unhealthy bars ($M_{unhealthy} = 3.37$, $M_{healthy} = 4.76$; $p < 0.01$; refer Figure 6). However, for low minimalism, unhealthy bar consumption was significantly higher than healthy bar consumption ($M_{unhealthy} = 5.34$, $M_{healthy} = 4.57$; $p = 0.02$). Only gender had a significant interaction with expected consumption amount ($p < 0.01$). Notwithstanding, the minimalism x expected consumption amount interaction remained significant without the covariates ($p < 0.01$). This study showed that minimalism not only reduces the consumption amount, but also reshapes its pattern. Specifically, higher (vs. lower) consumer minimalism leads to a significantly lower consumption of unhealthy foods but does not alter the amount of healthy foods – potentially due to a ceiling effect.

8 | General Discussion

Our interest in minimalism stems from its potential to address a pressing societal issue: promoting healthy food consumption. Our research demonstrates that adopting minimalism as a lifestyle significantly motivates healthier food choices. Across three studies employing diverse methodologies, we provide consistent evidence for our hypotheses, demonstrating the *minimalism = healthy* association and the dual process: heightened internal conflict and reduced desire for unhealthy foods, which together shape consumers' food preferences. Our research contributes to the literature by showing that minimalism's effect on food consumption extends beyond simply reducing overall intake—it also shifts consumption patterns toward healthier options, indicating a qualitative shift in food composition.

8.1 | Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study contributes to the nascent yet growing literature on consumer minimalism (Mathras and Hayes 2019; Shafqat et al. 2023; Wilson and Bellezza 2022) by introducing the *minimalism = healthy* association. It also extends prior research on consumer intuitions, learned associations, and lay beliefs, such as *unhealthy = tasty* (Raghunathan et al. 2006), *proximal food depiction is tastier* (Malik et al. 2022), *unattractive = natural* (Niu et al. 2023), and *sweet = feminine* (Ding et al. 2024). While recent research has examined factors like

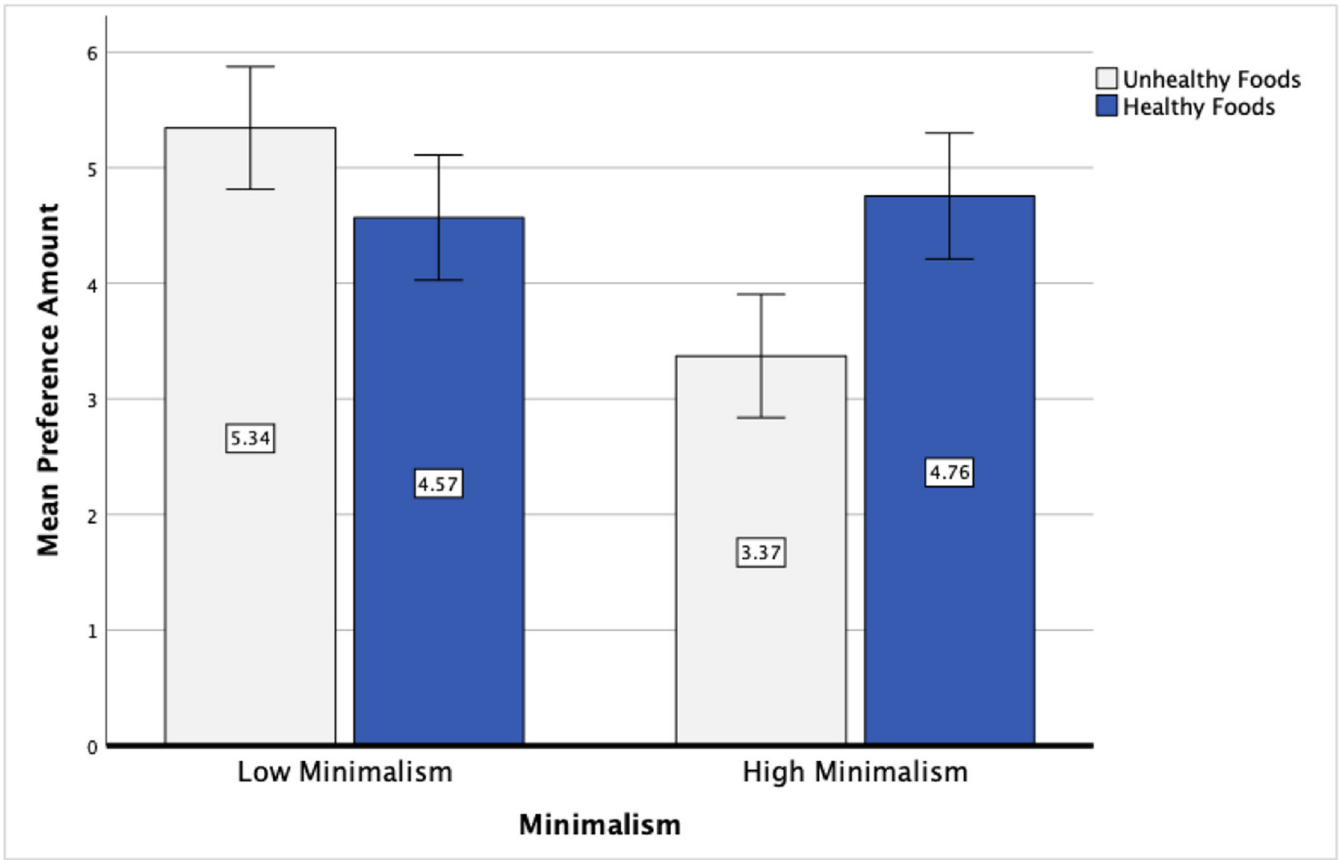

FIGURE 6 | Minimalism and Mean Preference Amount.

ambient sensory cues (Grace Chae et al. 2023), goal orientation (Wright and Schultz 2022), and healthy eating nudges (Cadario and Chandon 2020) in relation to food preferences, our work positions minimalism as an antecedent to healthier dietary decisions. We also contribute to the self-control literature (Carver 2005; Hofmann et al. 2009; Strack and Deutsch 2004) by demonstrating how high (vs. low) minimalism differentially influences consumers' experienced conflict and desire for healthy versus unhealthy foods, ultimately reshaping their preferences. Specifically, we extend this literature by showing that minimalism helps reduce the impulsive reactions and enables individuals to resolve their heightened internal conflict by switching from unhealthy to healthier foods.

Policymakers and socially responsible marketers can leverage these insights to design targeted campaigns that promote minimalism as a pathway to healthier food choices. Campaigns might feature testimonials or endorsements from influencers who embody minimalist lifestyles, reinforcing the link between minimalism and healthiness. Marketers in the food and beverage industry, particularly those specializing in healthy products, can also leverage minimalist messaging to enhance brand appeal. For instance, brands such as Nestlé, which has recently committed to a healthier product portfolio (Nestlé n.d.), can adopt minimalist aesthetics in their packaging and advertising by using clean, uncluttered visuals. Such an approach would signal a commitment to health, differentiating their products and appealing to consumers who prefer deliberate, value-driven consumption. By adopting minimalist messaging, brands can create a strong, distinctive identity that resonates with health-conscious consumers and may increase consumer engagement by aligning with contemporary health-conscious trends. Ultimately, adopting minimalist messaging can enhance brand perception and encourage healthier consumer choices.

8.2 | Limitations and Future Directions

Using multi-method approach, this study provides valuable insights into consumer attitudes and expectations related to minimalism and food choices. However, several limitations present opportunities for further investigation.

One limitation is the reliance on experimental methodologies. While controlled experiments offer strong internal validity by precisely manipulating variables to test causal relationships, they may limit the generalizability of findings, raising questions about how well observed effects translate to real-world consumer behavior (Cook and Campbell 1986). Future research could incorporate field studies in natural settings, such as grocery stores, restaurants, or online food-ordering platforms. Longitudinal studies tracking consumption behaviors over time could also provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of minimalism on behavioral change.

Another area for future research is the role of social influence on adopting a minimalist lifestyle. Minimalism, like many lifestyle choices, is shaped by peer networks, social media, and cultural narratives. Exploring how social dynamics affect the adoption of minimalism and its impact on food choices could yield valuable insights. For example, investigating whether social endorsement enhances minimalism's appeal or whether social pressure generates resistance could illuminate broader societal implications.

This study examines the dual-process of self-control as the mechanism driving the effect of minimalism on food preferences. Our experiments did not directly measure the participant's baseline level of self-control as we focused on how nudging interventions like minimalism activate self-control processes of internal conflict and desire. Additionally, random assignment of participants (who likely varied in trait self-control) across conditions helped control for individual differences. However, it remains possible that trait self-control (Tangney et al. 2004) interacted with minimalism and influenced the activation of the dual-process, thereby affecting food preferences. Future research could explicitly measure trait self-control and examine its interaction with minimalism in shaping consumption outcomes.

Cultural factors also warrant further investigation. This study does not examine how cultural orientations influence the relationship between minimalism and healthy eating. In individualistic societies, where personal choice and autonomy are prioritized, people may experience heightened internal conflict when consumption decisions clash with minimalist values. Conversely, in collectivistic cultures, where group norms are more influential, such conflict may be reduced. Cross-cultural studies could clarify whether the health-related benefits of minimalism are consistent across cultures or vary depending on cultural context.

Additionally, our study does not address the potential psychological and emotional outcomes associated with minimalism. While we focus on its impact on food preferences, minimalism is often linked to well-being, reduced stress, and enhanced mindfulness. Future studies could investigate whether adopting minimalism as a lifestyle leads to long-term improvements in mental health and life satisfaction.

8.3 | Conclusions

Our research makes a novel contribution to the growing body of literature on consumer minimalism by establishing its direct impact on healthier food choices. By demonstrating a dual self-control mechanism—heightened internal conflict and reduced impulsive desire—we show the psychological mechanism through which minimalism influences consumer preferences. These findings highlight minimalism as a powerful behavioral driver with significant implications for public health, consumer well-being, and food marketing.

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Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in OSF at https://osf.io/92pa7/?view_only=b3a8470f8f2442aca43f8dbb06d891c9.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.