

## Background

- Social media platforms, especially Instagram, have transformed how we engage, communicate, and perceive the world.
- Instagram's influence on individuals, particularly young girls, in shaping beauty and body image perceptions is significant.<sup>2,3</sup>
- Instagram employs filters, hyper-sexualization, and Eurocentric beauty standards, contributing to body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, and body dysmorphia among young girls.<sup>2</sup>
- There is a need to reevaluate our digital landscape, emphasizing responsible content creation and comprehensive educational programs for youth.<sup>4</sup>
- These efforts are crucial for safeguarding the mental and emotional health of the next generation in an era of digital interconnectedness.

## Research Question

What are the sociological perspectives of body image in society today based on the gendered media of the female body?

## Method

- A curated dataset was assembled by collecting the first 25 public images in a newly created Instagram account and associated with each of the five selected generic hashtags: #women, #femalebodies, #girls, #beauty, and #pretty.
- These images underwent an in-depth analysis which encompassed the evaluation of:
  - Photo Modification and Filters
    - any noticeable photo alterations or filters that contributed to the visual appeal of the content<sup>5,6</sup>
  - Tonal Attributes
    - each image was studied to discern the emotional tone it conveyed, providing insights into the sentiments and messages conveyed through visual content using codes such as:
      - Affirmative: means it contained content that aimed to empower women by promoting self-love and sharing personal journeys related to their bodies.
      - Neutral: did not contain any overtly positive or negative content regarding self-image or body image.
      - Disapproving: the content potentially included harmful imagery that could negatively impact the self-perception and body image of young girls.
  - Beauty Perspectives
    - shedding light on prevalent trends and ideologies related to beauty and body image that has been shaped by society and advertised on social media

## Results

1. The inclusion of the word and hashtag "body" in social media discourse appears to be instrumental in promoting greater diversity compared to hashtags like "women."
  - the term "body" has become synonymous with the body positivity movement shown in Figure 1 compared to Figure 2



Figure 1

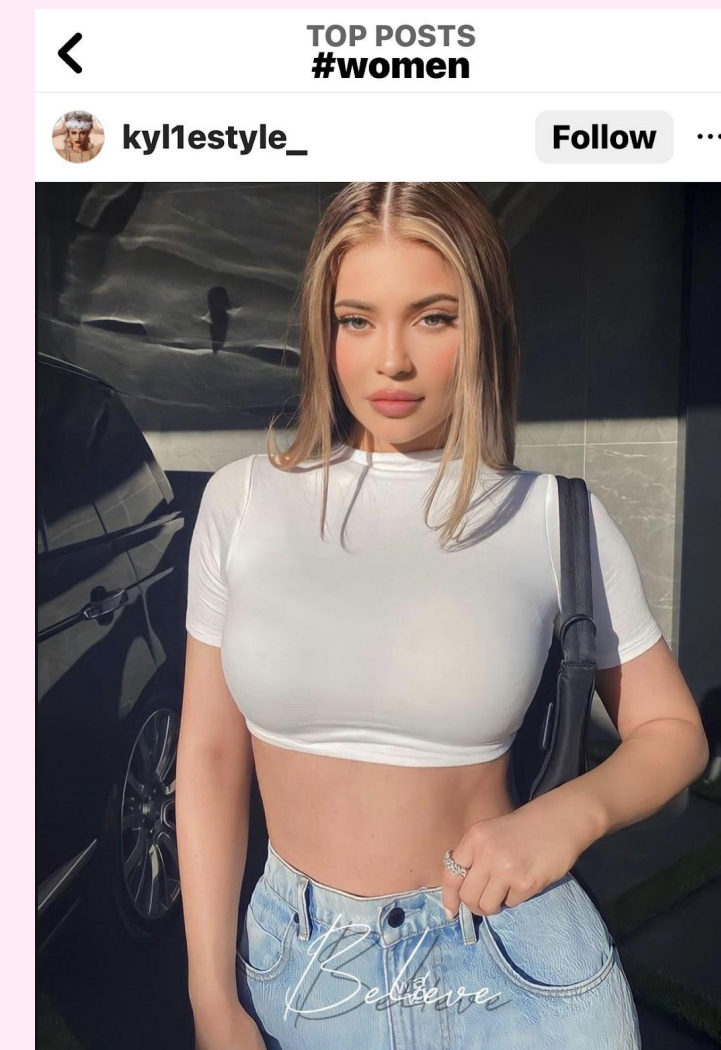


Figure 2

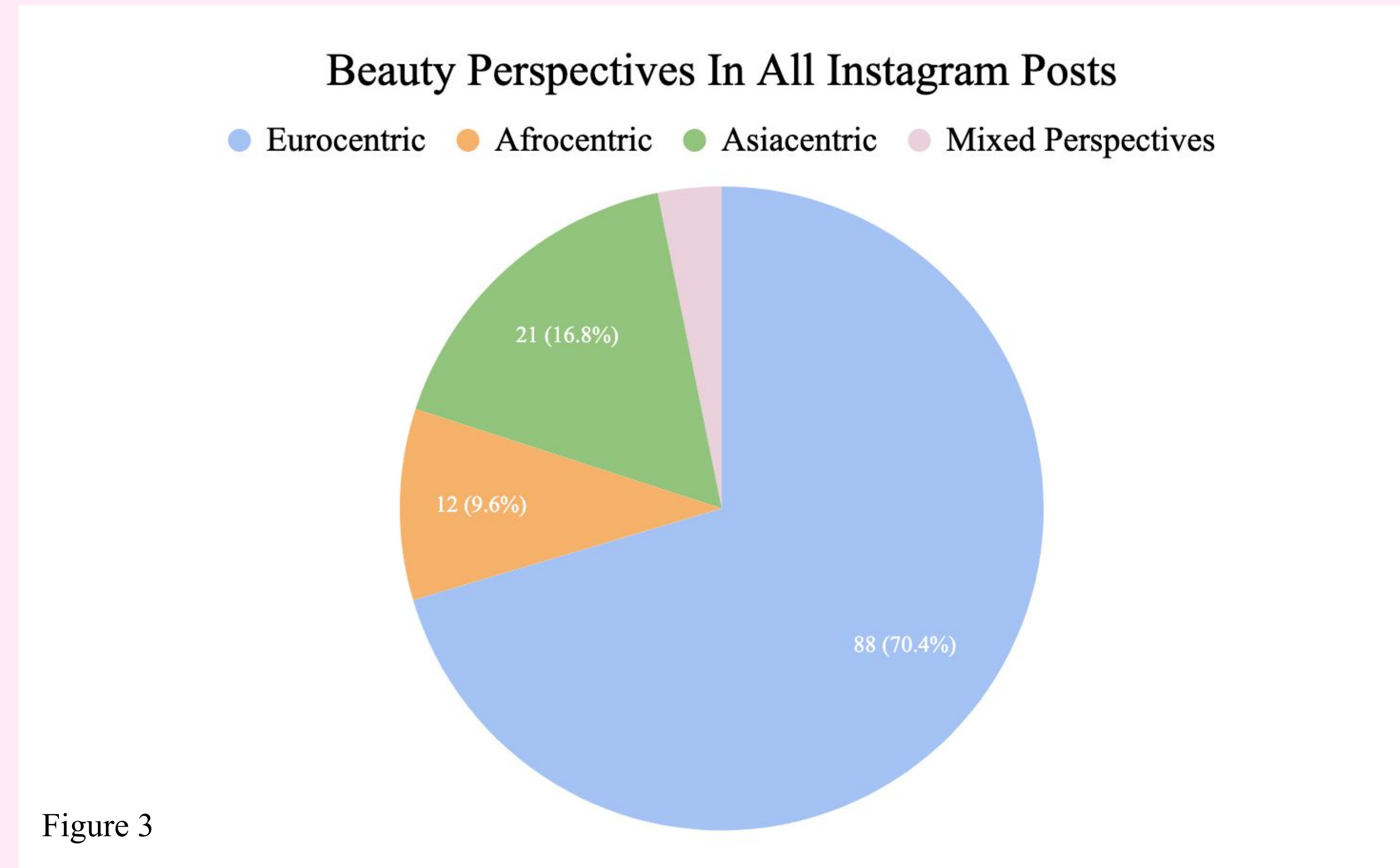


Figure 3

2. Further analysis of these Instagram posts unveiled a disturbing trend, shown in Figure 3. Many posts consistently and unapologetically promoted Eurocentric beauty standards, glorifying features like fair skin, slender yet toned hourglass figures, high cheekbones, and sharp jawlines. This lack of representation for diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds can have harmful effects, particularly on young girls of color. When they see such a narrow definition of beauty being celebrated repeatedly, it can erode their self-worth, as they may feel that their own unique features are not valued or appreciated in society's eyes.<sup>6</sup>

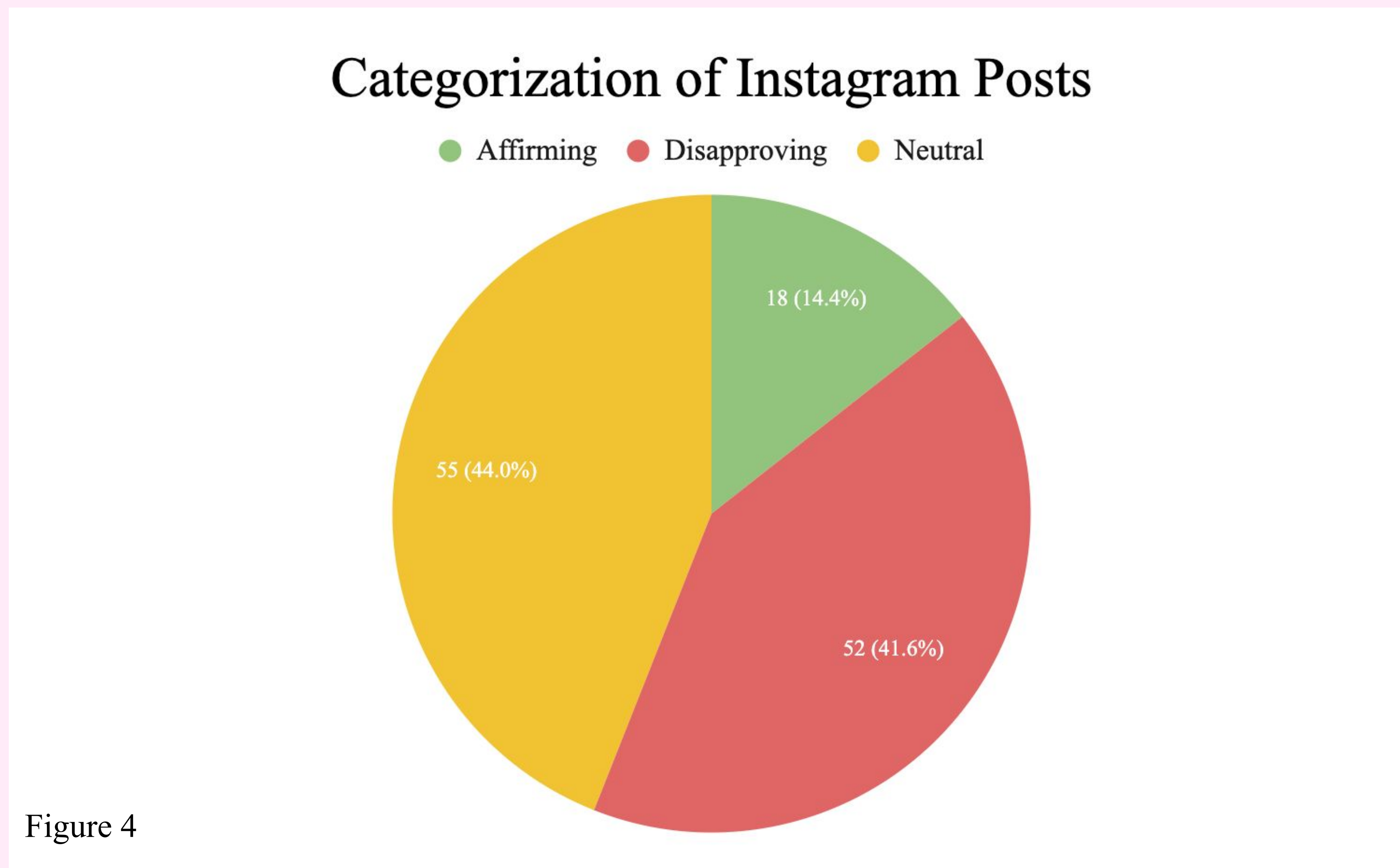


Figure 4

3. Many of the Eurocentric posts fell under the neutral or disapproving ratings, Figure 4, highlighting the disconnect between societal ideals and real-world perceptions.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, posts that championed self-love, body acceptance, and the celebration of diversity tended to receive affirmative or neutral ratings. In Figure 4, the figure shows just how much more disapproving posts there are compared to affirming, indicating that there is a need for change.

## Discussion

- Filters can distort reality, smoothing away imperfections and erasing blemishes shown in Figure 5. They create unrealistic beauty standards that are nearly impossible to attain naturally and are harmful for both the viewer and creator.<sup>2,6</sup>
- The platform is full of sexually suggestive imagery and poses, especially when searching generic terms. This overt sexualization seen in Figure 6, can lead to a distorted sense of self-worth among young girls, as they grapple with societal expectations surrounding their bodies and sexuality.<sup>7</sup>
- One can easily notice a preponderance of posts featuring individuals with all the Eurocentric features, like in Figure 7, all throughout the platform. This perpetuates the idea that these features represent the pinnacle of attractiveness.<sup>6</sup>
- The only affirming theme was that of the body positive movement where messages of self-love, like Figure 8, are shown. However, it is important to realize these images may not reach a broad audience and can have gaps in representation.<sup>8</sup>

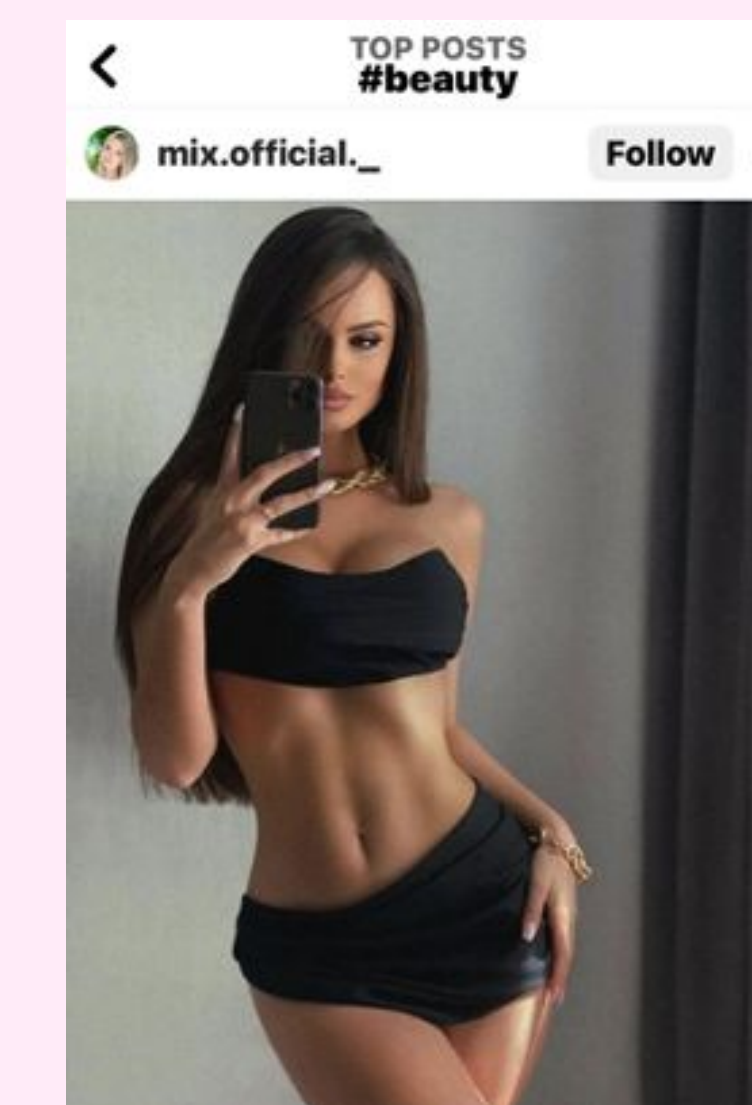


Figure 5



Figure 6

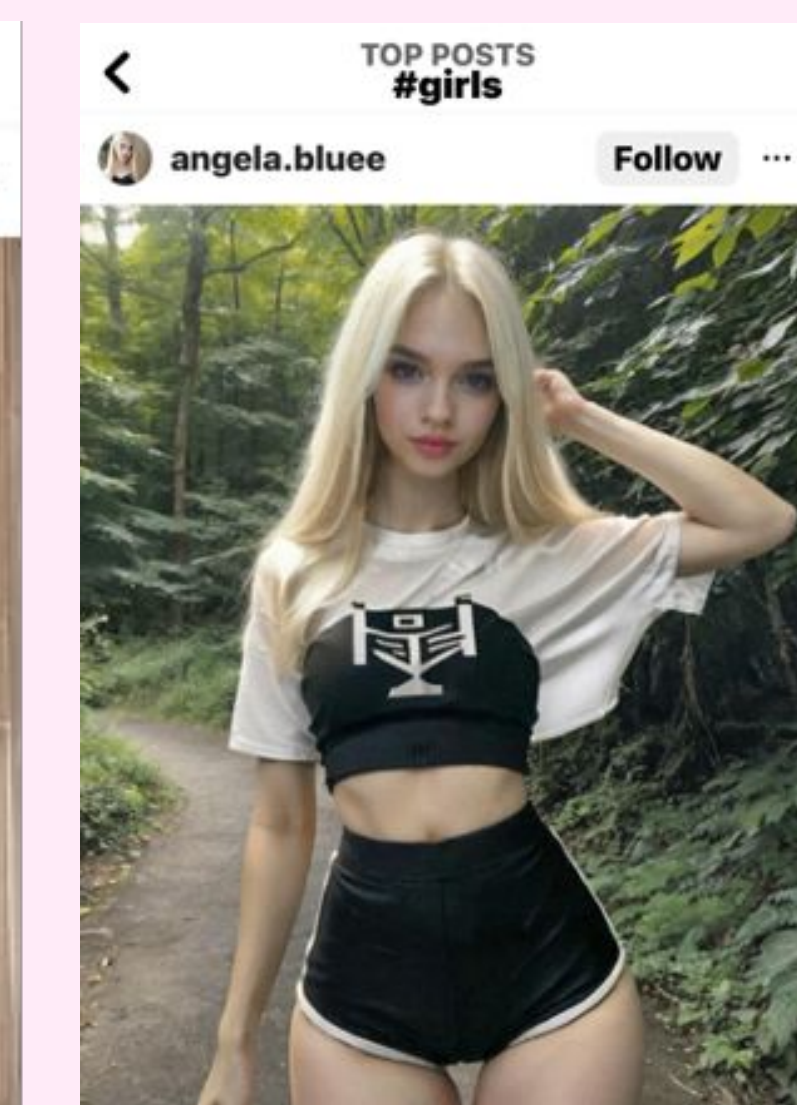


Figure 7



Figure 8

## Conclusion & Next Steps

- Using this research we hoped to foster a greater understanding of the role that social media plays in shaping society, our perceptions of self, and others.
- Policymakers, parents, guardians, and, critically, social media platforms and creators must collectively take proactive steps to cultivate a more nurturing digital environment for our youth.<sup>9</sup>
- Soon, we aspire to engage in one-on-one interviews with individuals to explore the impact of Instagram on the lives of real people to search into the intricate connections of self-image and perception.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my research advisor, Dr. Helen B. Marrow, whose guidance and mentorship have been invaluable throughout this journey. Additionally, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the Laidlaw Foundation for their generous support, which has played a pivotal role in enabling this research endeavor.

## References

1. Verrastro, V., Fontanesi, L., Liga, F., Cuzzocrea, F., & Gugliandolo, M. C. (2020). Fear the Instagram: Beauty stereotypes, body image and Instagram use in a sample of male and female adolescents. *Querty - Open and Interdisciplinary Journal of Technology, Culture and Education*, 15(1), Article 1.
2. Piccoli, V., Carnaghi, A., Grassi, M., & Bianchi, M. (2022). The relationship between Instagram activity and female body concerns: The serial mediating role of appearance-related comparisons and internalization of beauty norms. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 32(4), 728-743. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2586>
3. Feltman, C. E., & Szymanski, D. M. (2018). Instagram Use and Self-Objectification: The Roles of Internalization, Comparison, Appearance Commentary, and Feminism. *Sex Roles*, 78(5), 311-324. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s1199-017-0796-1>
4. Lazuka, R. F., Wick, M. R., Keel, P. K., & Harriger, J. A. (2020). Are We There Yet? Progress in Depicting Diverse Images of Beauty in Instagram's Body Positivity Movement. *Body Image*, 34, 85-93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2020.05.001>
5. Rousseau, A., Eggermont, S., & Frison, E. (2017). The reciprocal and indirect relationships between passive Facebook use, comparison on Facebook, and adolescents' body dissatisfaction. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 73, 336-344. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.03.056>
6. Nerini, A., Matera, C., Romani, F., Di Gesto, C., & Pollicardo, G. R. (2022). Retouched or Unaltered? That is the Question. *Body Image and Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery in Young Female Instagram Users. Aesthetic Plastic Surgery*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00266-022-03225-7>
7. Schettino, G., Capasso, M., & Caso, D. (2023). The dark side of #bodypositivity: The relationships between sexualized body-positive selfies on Instagram and acceptance of cosmetic surgery among women. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 140, 107586. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107586>
8. Papageorgiou, A., Fisher, C., & Cross, D. (2022). "Why don't I look like her?": How adolescent girls view social media and its connection to body image. *BMC Women's Health*, 22(1), 261. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-022-01845-4>
9. Frison, E., & Eggermont, S. (2017). Browsing, Posting, and Liking on Instagram: The Reciprocal Relationships Between Different Types of Instagram Use and Adolescents' Depressed Mood. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 20(10), 603-609. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2017.0156>