

THE SOCIAL MEDIA SKINNY: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF BODY IMAGE

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INTRODUCTION

Scholars have expressed concern about social media sites containing objectified images of women that visually and verbally emphasize a thin, sexualized outward appearance.

The present study extends previous research by focusing on specific body image features of four social media sites, examining the neglected issue of racial portrayals of women, and exploring objectified and unhealthy aspects of posts.

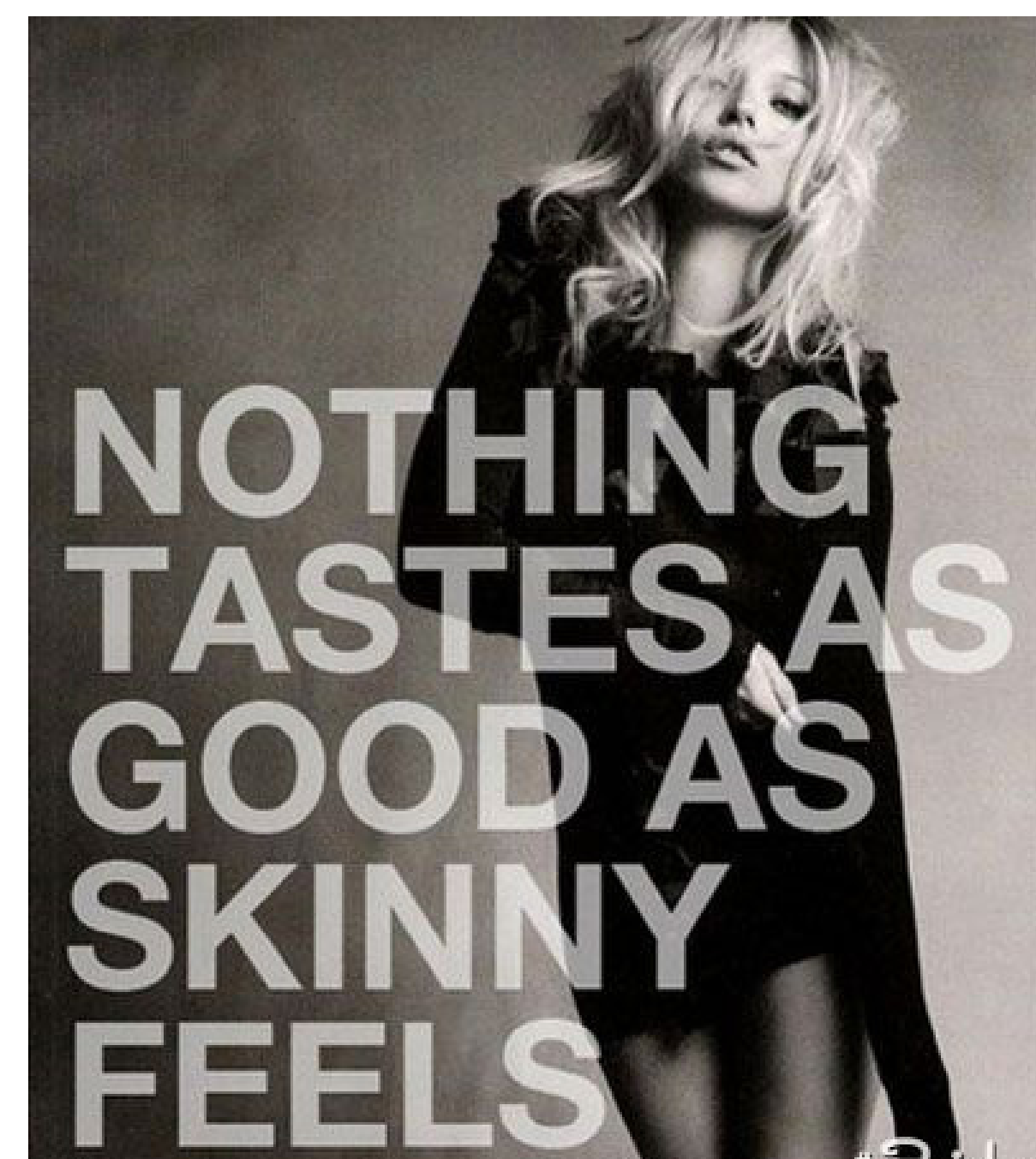


Image example analyzed during study.

METHODOLOGY

The content analyzed sites were:

- (1) Pinterest, #thinspiration
- (2) Pinterest, #thinspo
- (3) Twitter, #thinspo
- (4) Instagram, #thinstagram
- (5) Tumblr, #thinspiration

Trained coders examined the following variables: gender, race, physical build, muscularity, sexuality, objectification, depiction of skin, body parts shown, thematic focus, healthfulness, and praise.

Coders established strong reliability by reaching agreement on how to code the variables prior to the actual study.

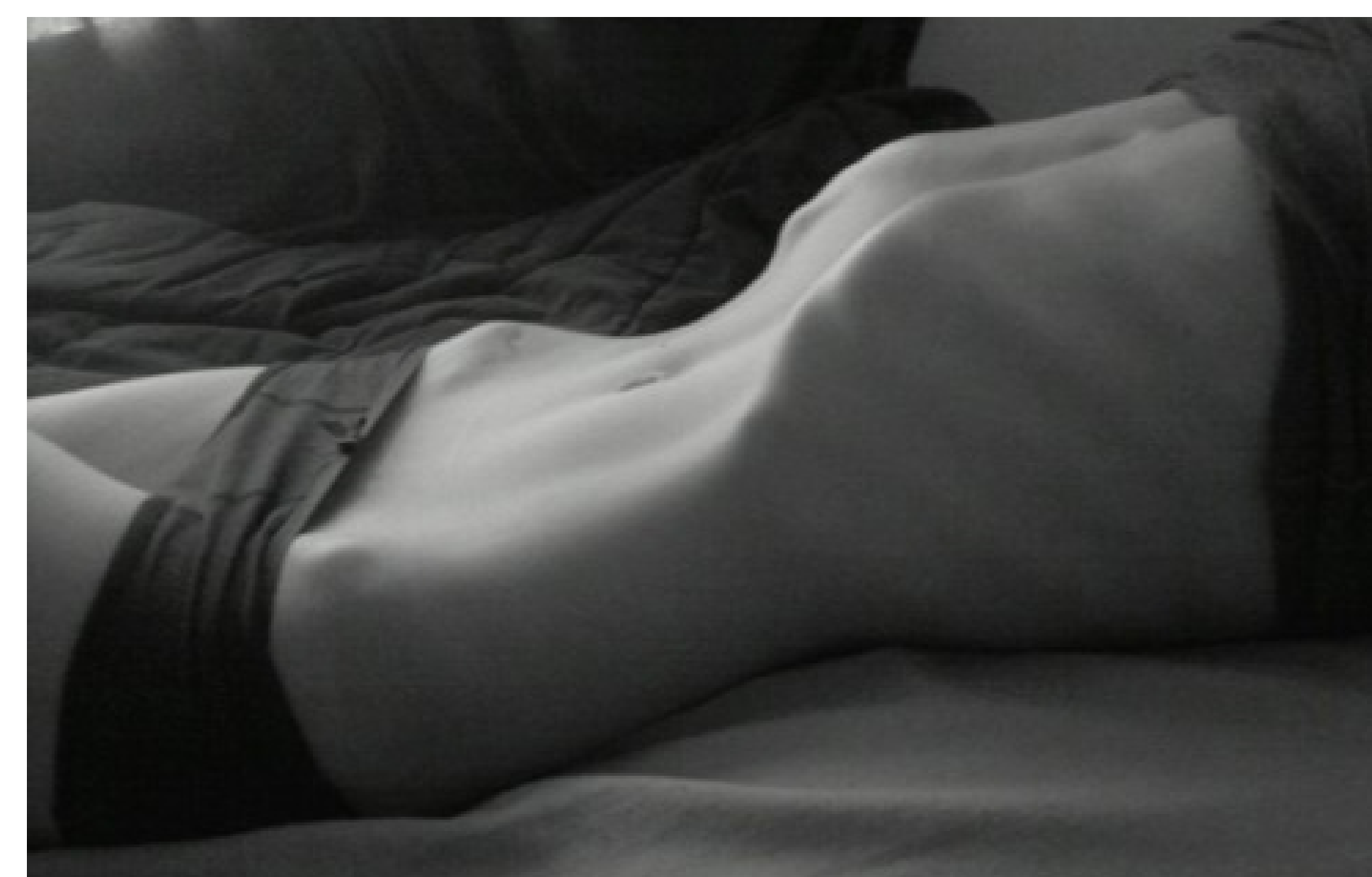


Image example analyzed during study.

RESULTS

Images analyzed included:

Gender & Race

99% Women
75% Whites
6% Asian
4.5% Latina
< 1% Black

Body Type

94% thinner build
5% medium build
1% larger build

Muscularity

79% none
19.6% little
2% high

Public Response

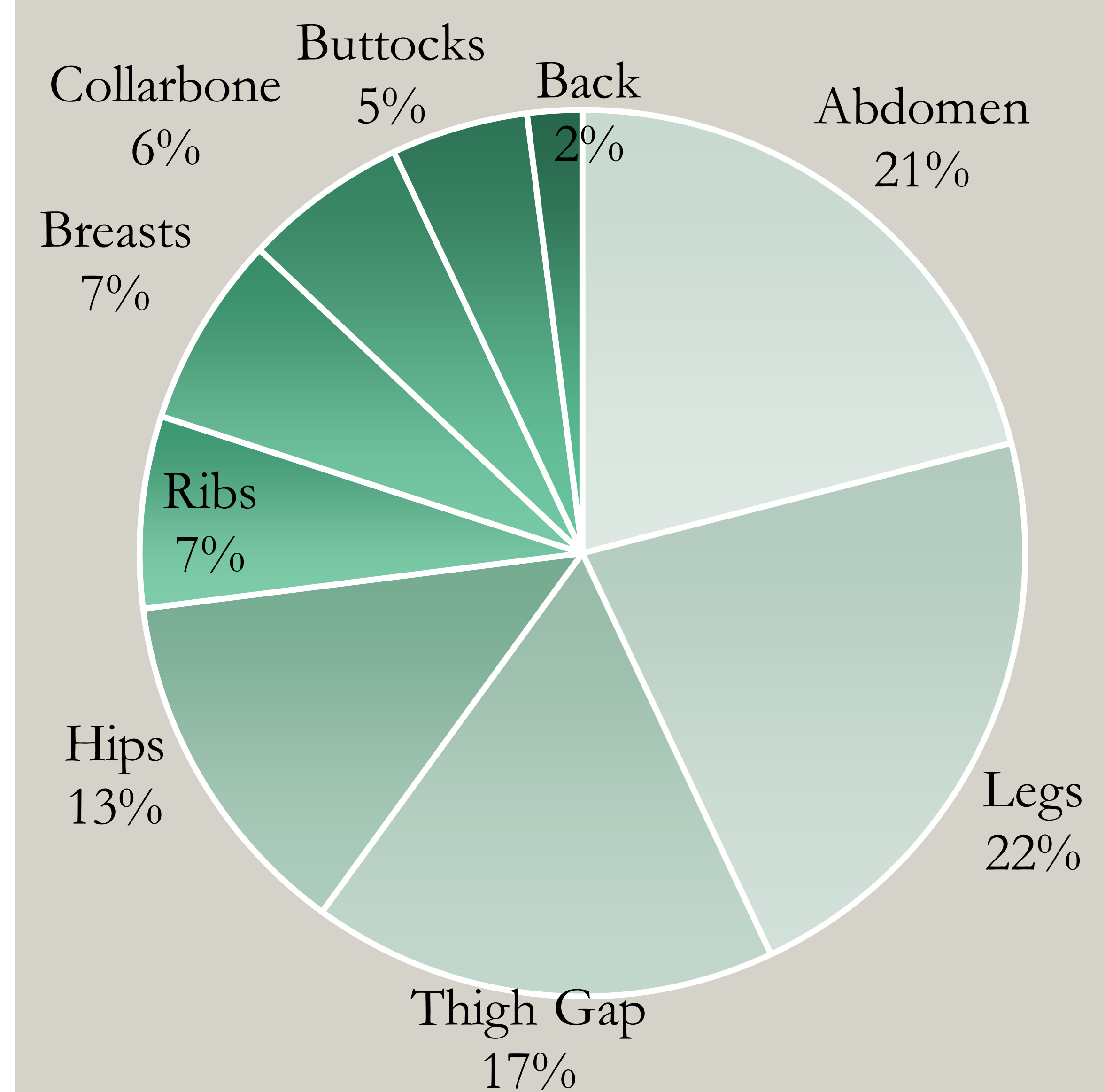
72% unhealthy praise
1% critical
27% neutral

40% of images displayed a sexual or suggestive connotation.

DISCUSSION

The content analysis found an abundance of imagery displaying thin, low-muscular, White women. Most of the images showed an objectified body, with a thin physique.

Given the popularity of such sites with young women (see Perloff, 2014), it is likely that heavy exposure to such posts, coupled with users' unfavorable social comparisons, may aggravate body image concerns.



Results: Body parts displayed in coded images.

