A Content Analysis of Exercise Related Posts on Instagram

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INTRODUCTION

- Body dysmorphia is a mental health issue when the affected person spends a lot of time worrying about perceived flaws in their body
- Body dysmorphic disorder begins at an early age; and is a common disorder due to worrying about a perceived flaw in the body
- A person due to negative evaluations or experiences about their body or self image
- Body dysmorphic disorder affects 2.5 percent of males and 2.2 percent of females in the United States
- Body dysmorphia is on the rise among adolescents due to fitness influencers showing off the "perfect bodies on social media

Gap: It is unclear on how body dysmorphia is shown on fitness related posts on Instagram, as well as how the issue of body dysmorphia is discussed in conjunction with the posts.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to try to find the amount of exercise related posts on Instagram that contain information on trying to change your body in a certain way to get rid of flaws.

METHODS

Design
- Content analysis on Instagram

Subjects & Data Collection
- Five Instagram fitness influencers were randomly selected using a random name generator
- Selected the first 5 exercise related posts and 5 comments longer than 4 words from each post from each influencer
- Posts must be related to exercise and fitness; not lifestyle or get ready with me posts

Variables
- Social Media Demographics
  - Average number of comments on posts
  - Average number of likes on posts and comments
  - Post types (Pictures vs Videos/Reels)

Variable	Definition
Body Dysmorphia	Preoccupied with a flaw in the body
Obsessing over flaws	People mentioning their size, weight, muscles
Low Self esteem	Feelings of imperfection
Calories/nutrition/diets	Eating a certain way to get rid of flaws
Exercise/workout tips	Working out to get rid of a flaw
Goals/motivation	Making it a goal to get rid of bodily flaws
Commenting on bodies objectively	Commenting on someone's size, weight

Analysis
- Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the post and comment demographics and frequency of each variable occurring in each comment and post
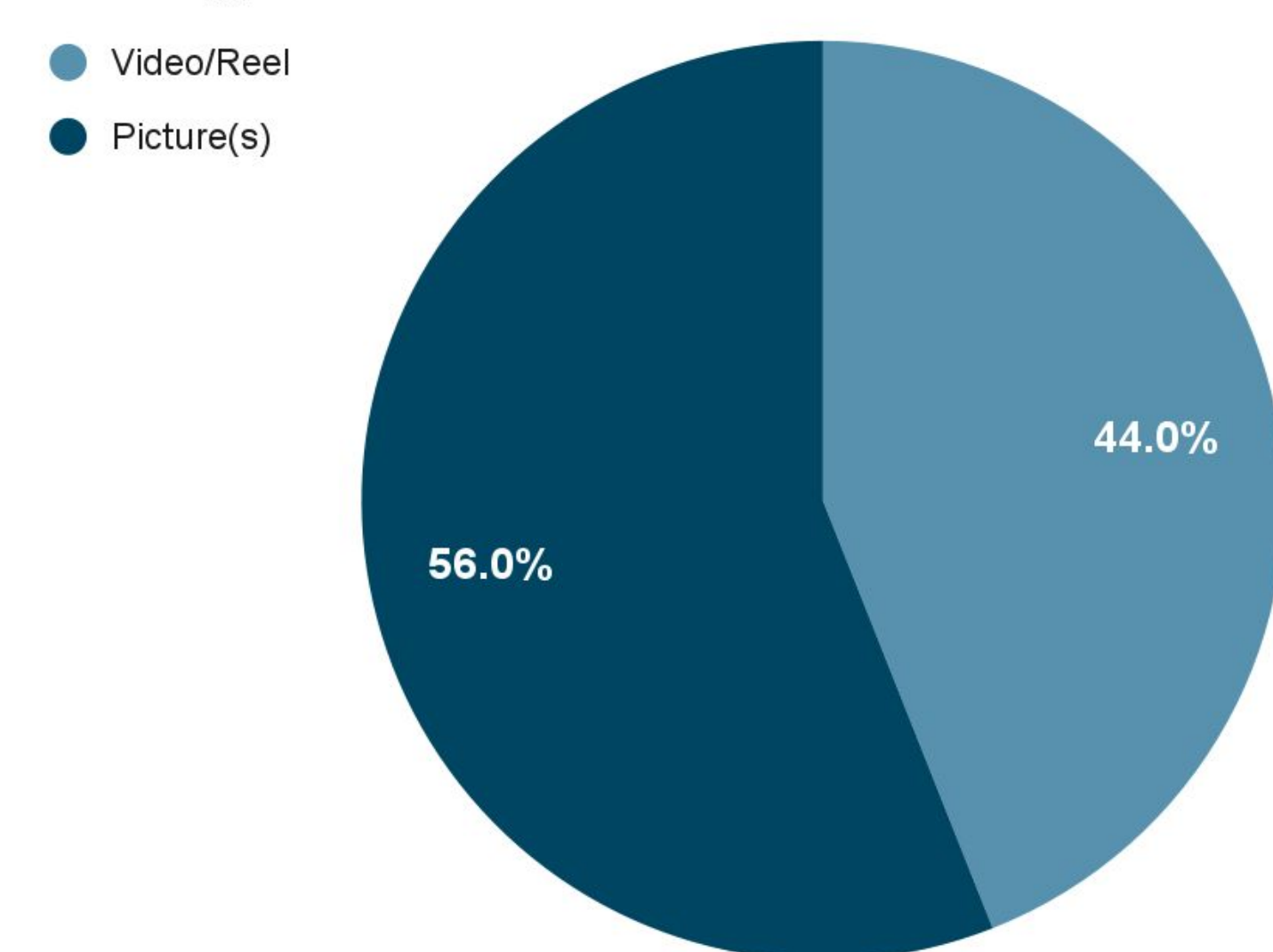
RESULTS

Subjects

- Posts: N=25, Comments: N=125

- Social Media Demographic Statistics
  - Average # of likes for all posts: 268,058
  - Average # of comments on all posts: 683
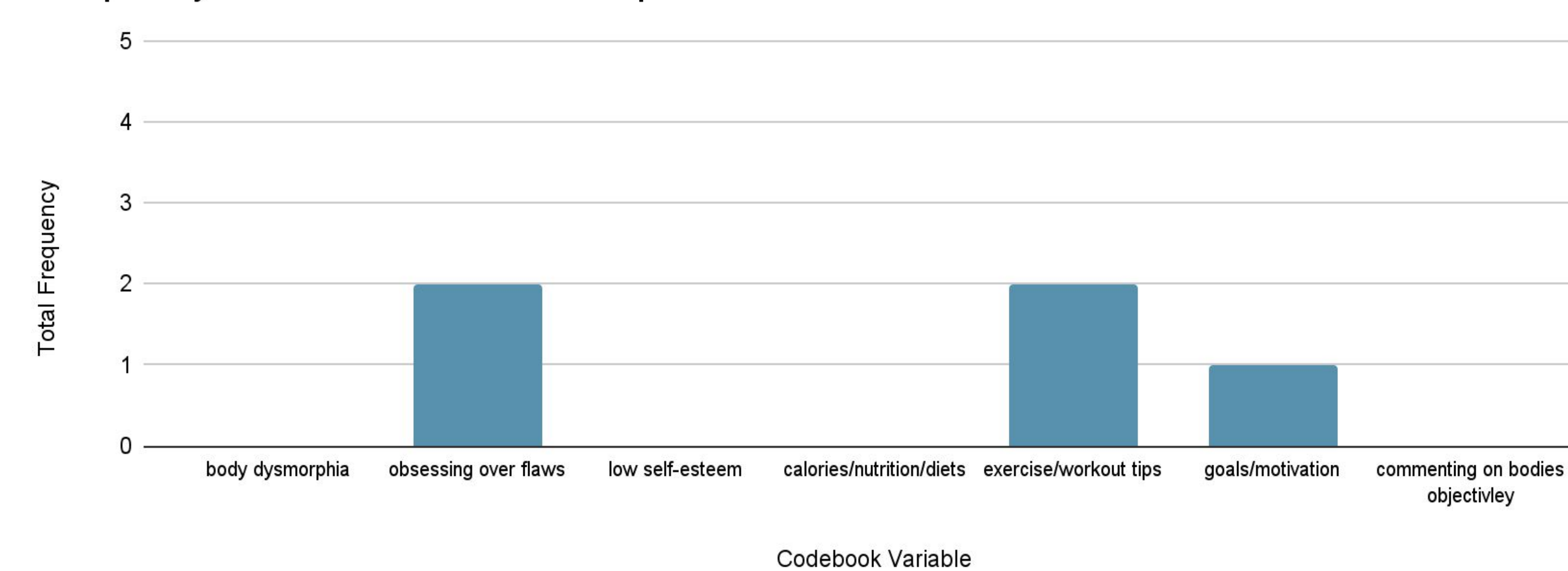 - Average # of likes for all comments: 254

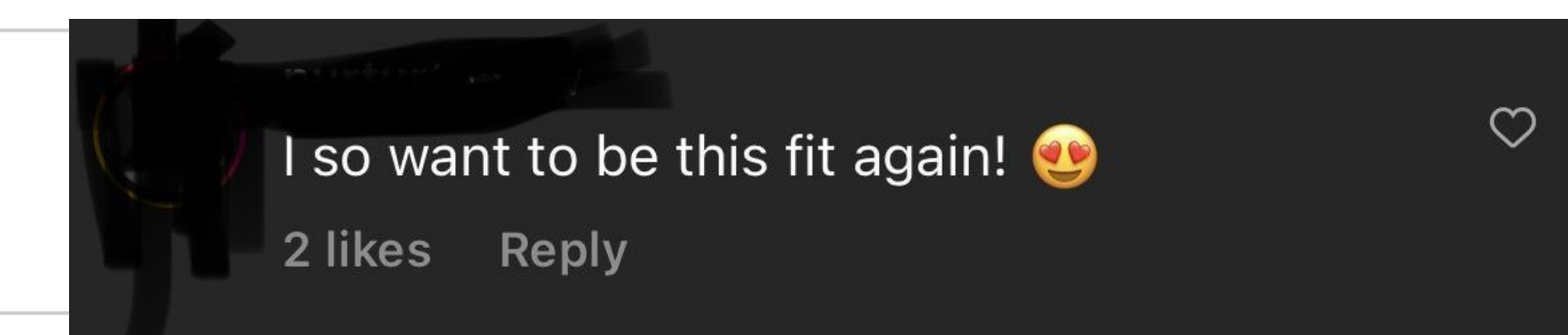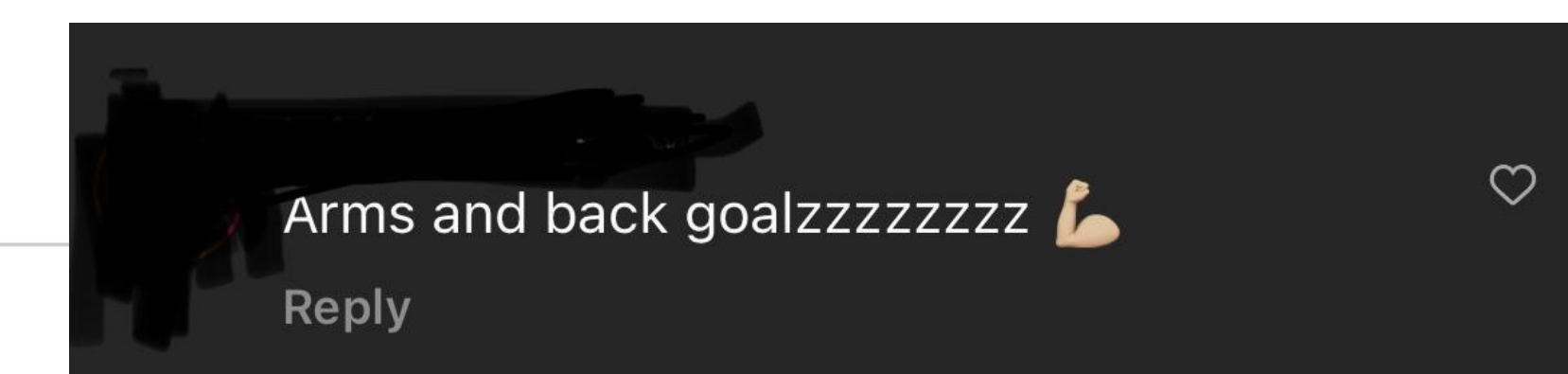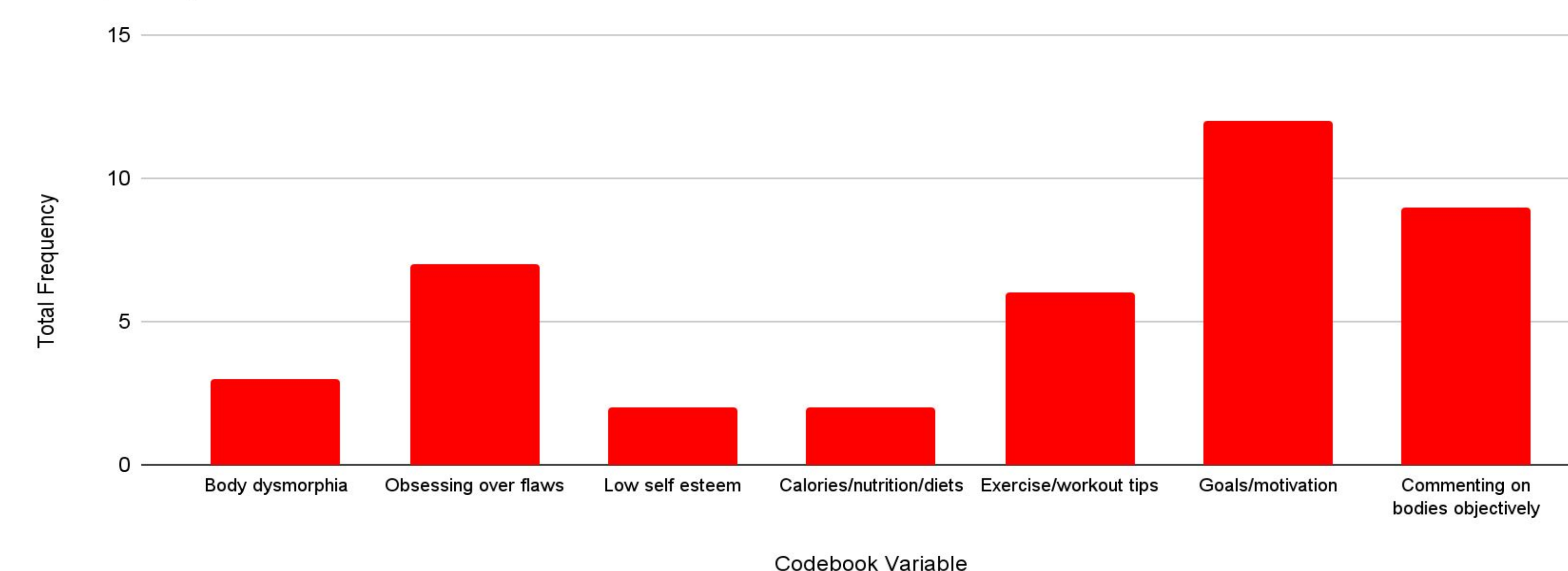**Average number of comments on each post**

Post types
- Video/Reel
- Picture(s)

56.0% / 44.0%
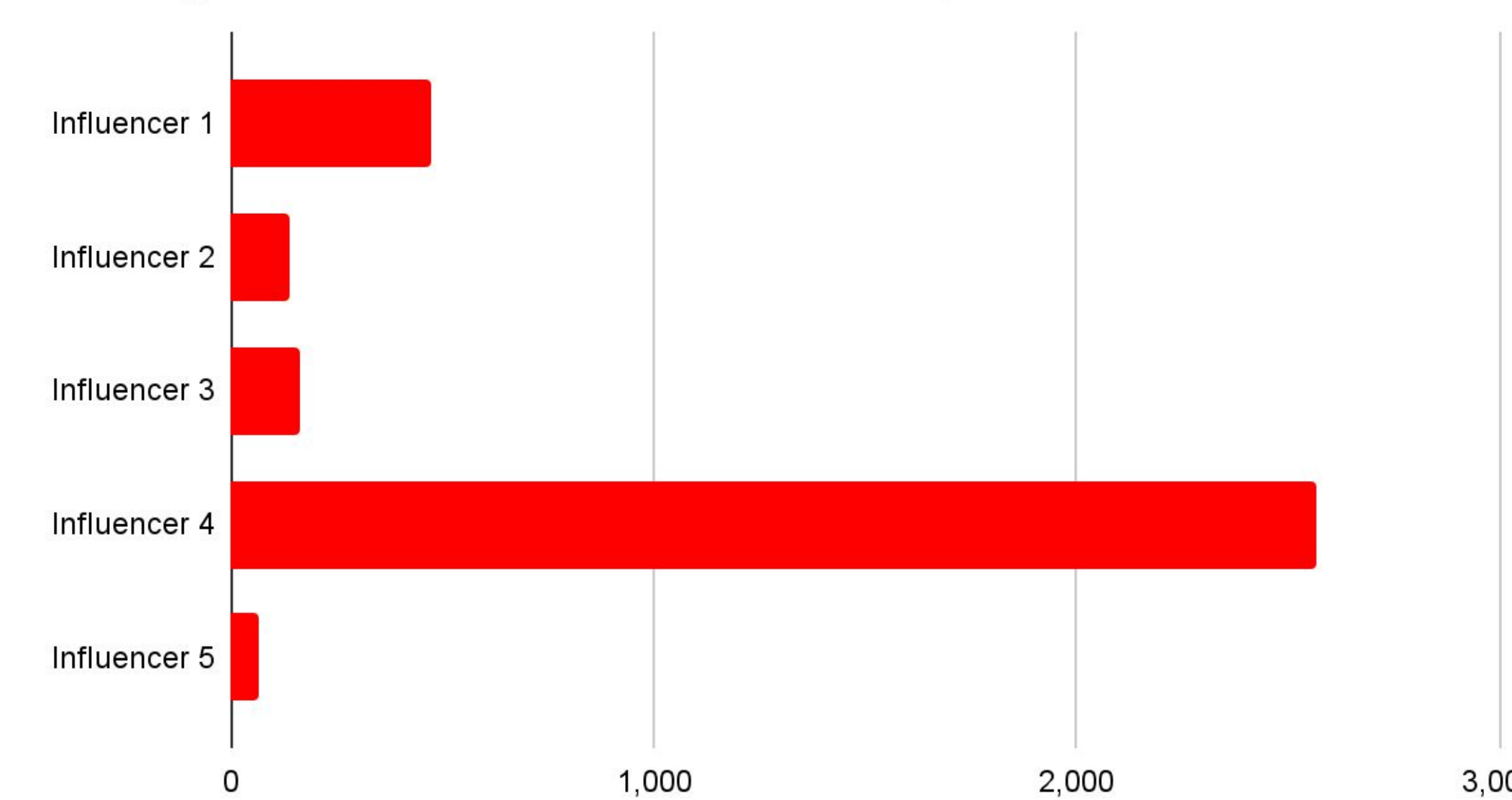
Frequency of codebook variables in posts

Frequency of codebook variables in comments

Arms and back goalzzzzzzzz 💪
Reply

I so want to be this fit again! 😍
2 likes   Reply

CONCLUSIONS

Main Points
- Posts on Instagram posted by fitness influencers were more likely to have had elements about obsessing over flaws and exercise/workout tips rather than low self esteem, calories/nutrition/diets, and body dysmorphia
  - This means that influencers might be posting about exercise and workout routines to achieve perfection due to the fact that they obsess over perceived flaws in their body

- Comments on fitness influencers' Instagram posts were more likely to have had content about goals/motivation for exercising and commenting on bodies objectively and were less likely to include content about low self esteem and calories/nutrition/diets
  - This may suggest that commenters are more likely to set unrealistic goals and expectations for themselves to achieve bodily "perfection"

Limitations
- The sample size of my study could have been larger to acquire more meaningful results
- The scope of my study was limited to content analysis and I could not determine how the presence of variables affected people on a daily basis

Implications
- Adolescents should be careful about reading the comments on exercise related posts on Instagram and feeling like they have to compare themselves to influencers
- Adolescents should be careful about setting unrealistic body composition and appearance goals and expectations for themselves in order to look a certain way

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