

Look Good, Feel Bad: Social Media and Eating Disorder Perceptions

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Background

- Anorexia and bulimia are psychiatric eating disorders that occur from body image distress arising from the fear of gaining weight.
- 17% of university students are at risk of developing negative eating habits from the normalization of unhealthy lifestyle patterns, often found on college campuses.¹
- Both men and women are influenced by social media trends that promote the “ideal” body type set by unrealistic beauty standards from “influencers.”^{2,3}

Objective

- To examine the association between beauty and lifestyle TikTok and Instagram reels’ and eating disorder perceptions among UCSD undergraduates



Methods

- Cross-sectional study conducted through a Google Forms survey administered to current UCSD undergraduates (n=104) April-May 2023
- Participant recruitment via word of mouth, the UCSD Public Health department’s email announcements, UCSD-affiliated Discord groups, UCSD-affiliated Facebook pages, and UCSD Reddit.
- Fisher’s Exact Test conducted via SPSS.



Results

Table 1: Demographics Table (N=104)

	N (%)	
Age	<18	1.0%
	18-20	44.2%
	21-22	38.5%
	23-25	13.5%
	26+	2.8%
Major	Arts and Humanities	6.7%
	Business or International Business	3.8%
	S.T.E.M (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics)	42.3%
	Social Sciences (Sociology, Psychology, Political Science, Economics)	26.0%
	Public Health	21.2%
College Standing	1st year	18.3%
	2nd year	14.4%
	3rd year	25.0%
	4th year	36.5%
	5th year or more	5.8%

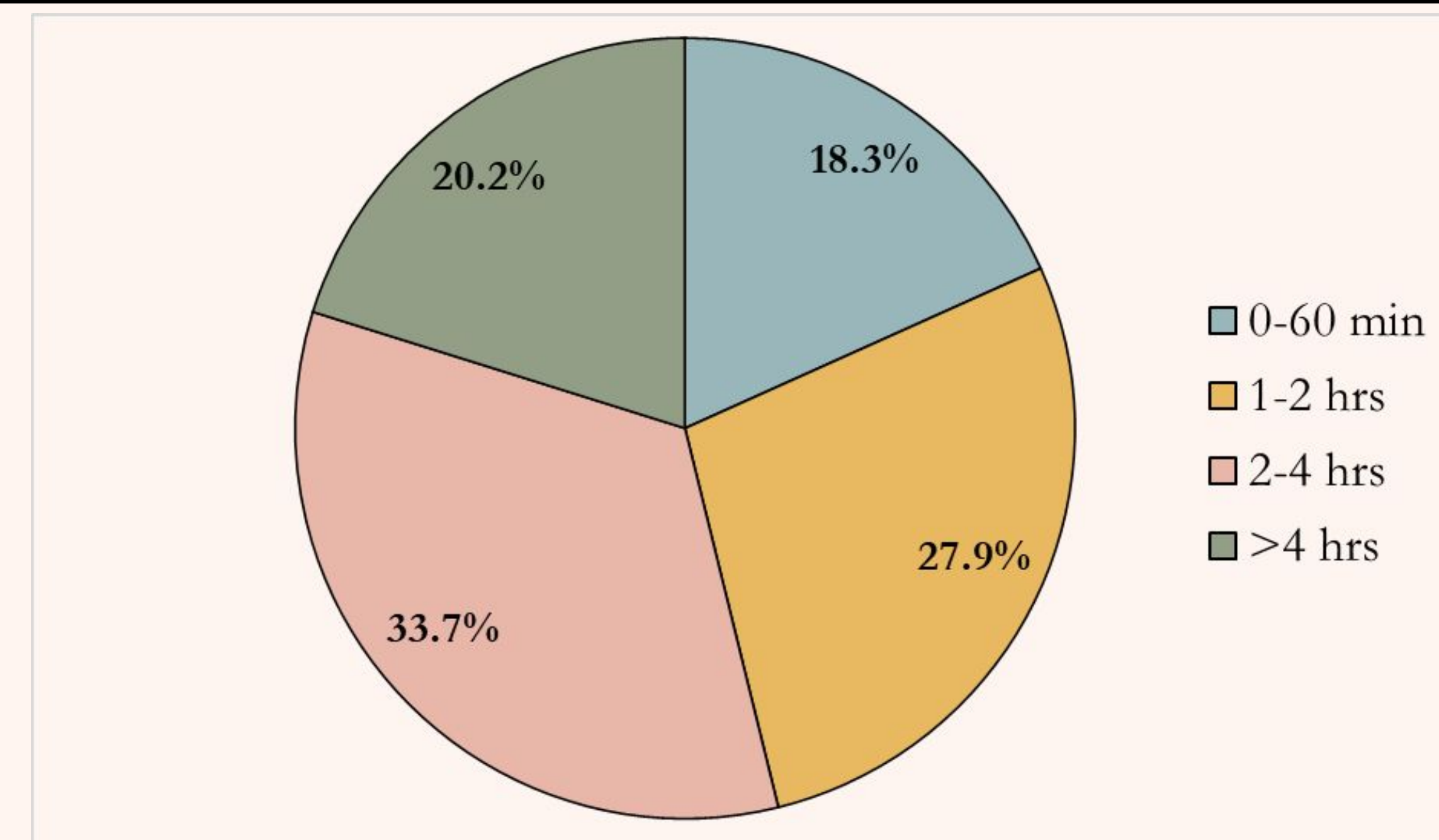


Figure 1. UCSD undergraduates’ perceived daily average time spent on TikTok and/or Instagram reels

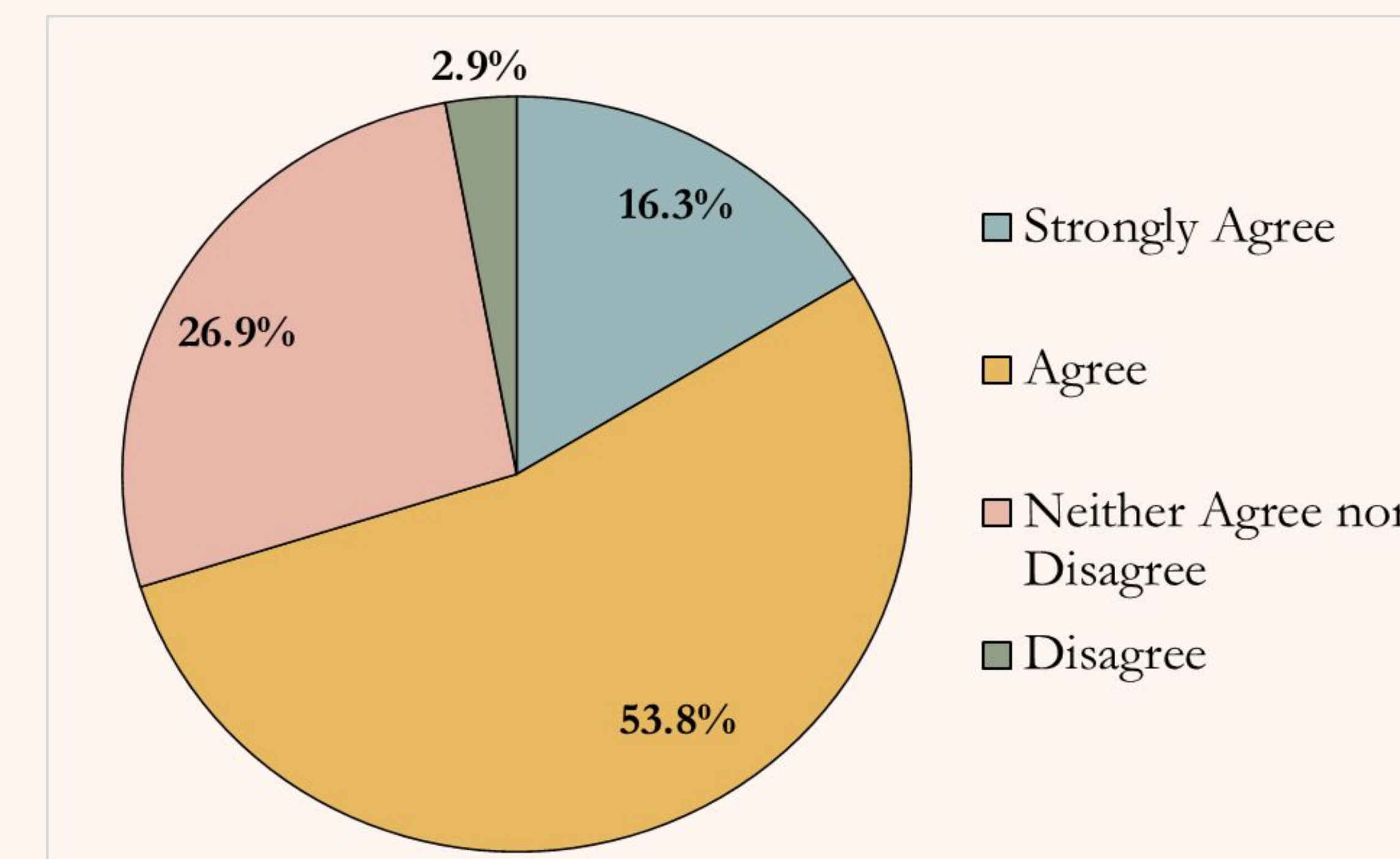


Figure 2. UCSD undergraduates’ perception of social media use affecting eating behaviors

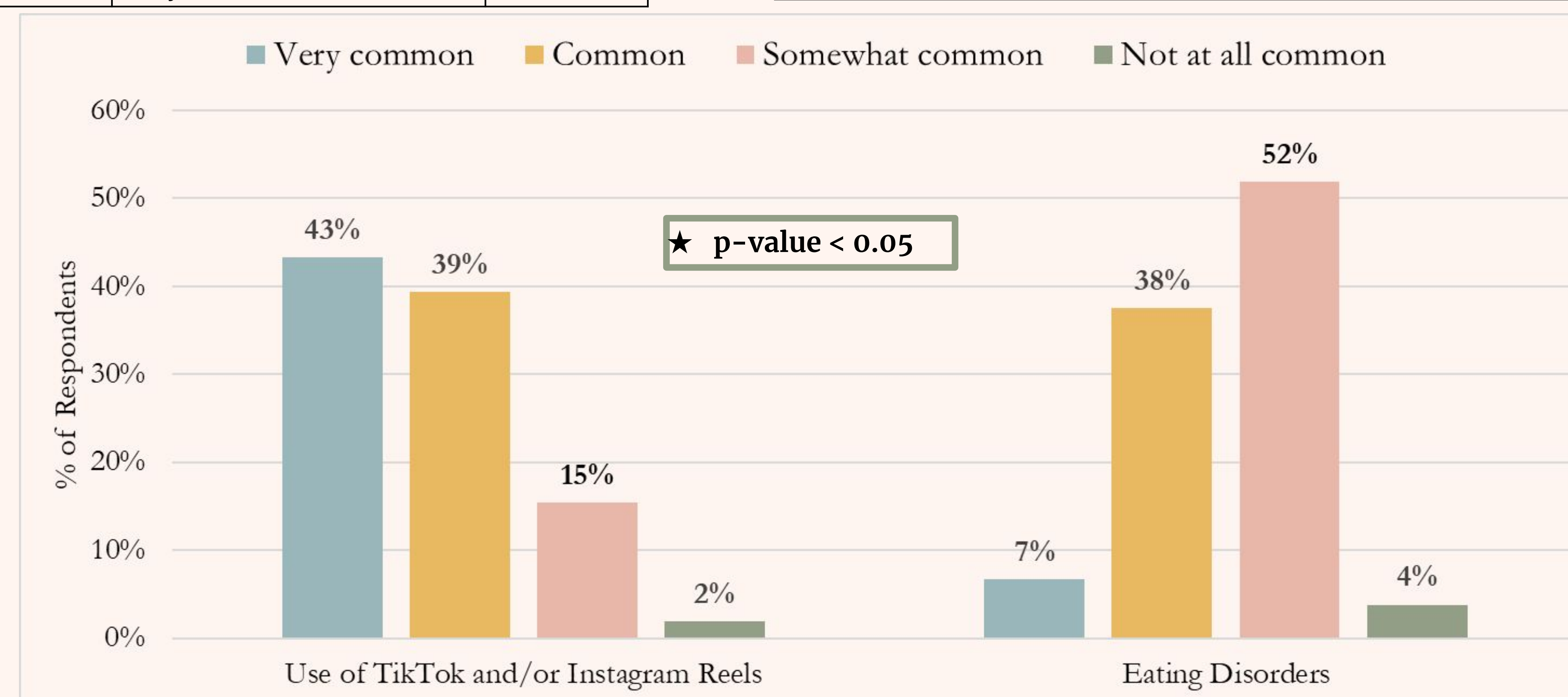


Figure 3. The perceived prevalence of social media use and eating disorders among UCSD undergraduates

Conclusion

- Our findings suggest that there is a **positive association** between watching TikTok and Instagram reels and eating disorder perceptions among UCSD undergraduates.
- TikTok and Instagram reels may negatively influence eating habits among UCSD undergraduates .
- Further research at other institutions is needed to investigate this relationship.

Policy Implications

Policies to mitigate negative eating disorder outcomes may involve expanding counseling services to provide accessible nutritional counseling with registered dietitians and campus health educators for students.

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