



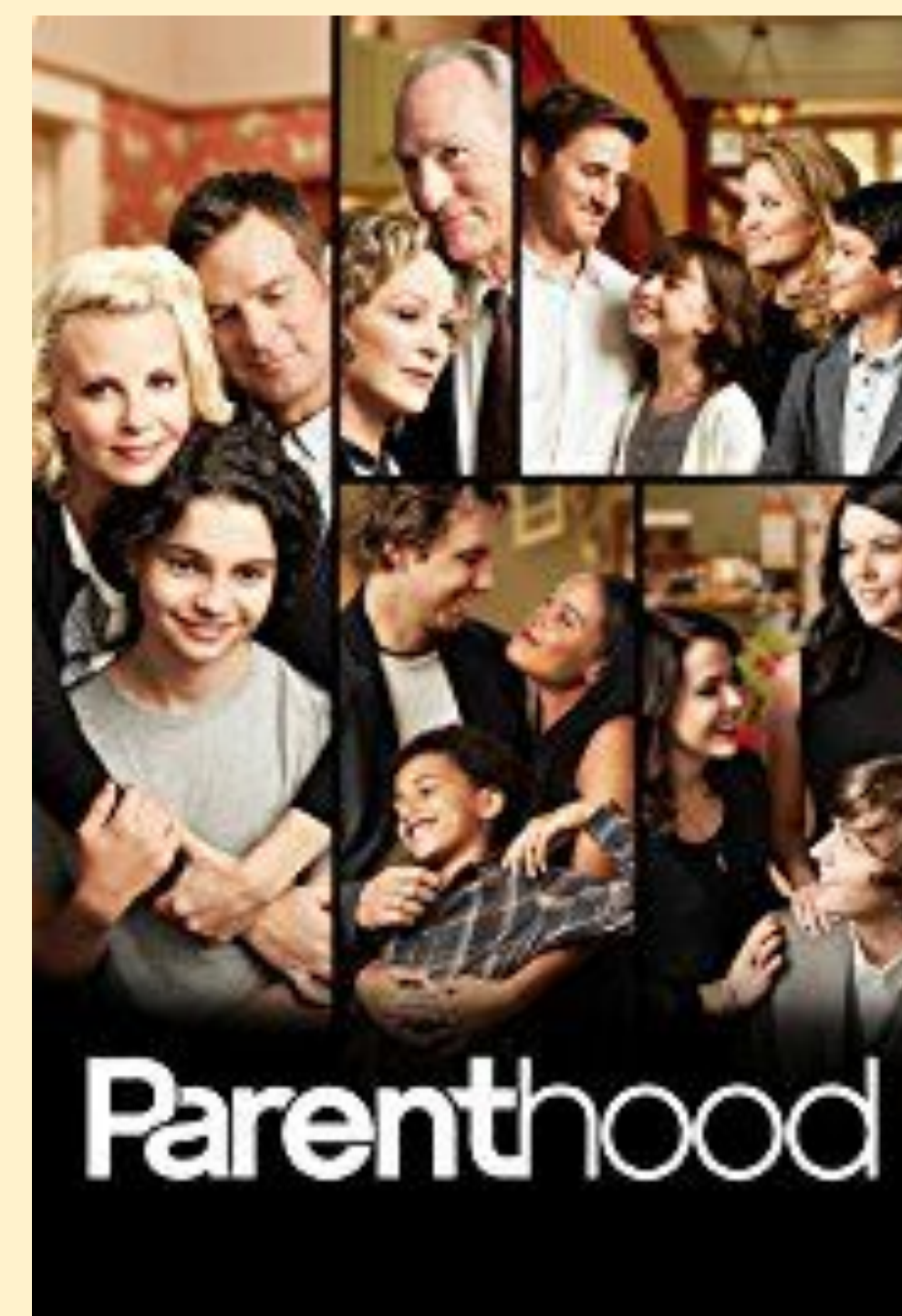
Media Potrayal of Invisible Disablilities

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INTRODUCTION

An invisible disability is a physical, mental or neurological condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities but is invisible to the onlooker. More than 10 percent of the world population lives with some form of disability (World Health Organization, 2010), yet we continue to ignore their difficulties. Furthermore, the depictions of disabilities on television have begun to shift toward progressive models that take into consideration every detail and ensuring that they have a motive. In the past, people with disabilities were featured in the mainstream media in a more negative light. "In general, the depictions of disability on television have begun to shift toward the progressive models in an attempt to move away from stereotypical images of disabled characters" (Hasson 2015). An example of a group of individuals who are stereotyped is the characterization of people with hidden disabilities in the media, specifically on television. Despite there being lots of representation of people with disabilities in the entertainment industry, the actors portraying them are often not actually disabled. This raises the question: *are these depictions accurate, or are they reinforcing a stereotype?* "It's rare to see a disabled actor on TV: A recent study showed that less than 2 percent of actors on screen were themselves actually disabled, despite the fact that people with disabilities make up nearly 20 percent of the U.S. population" (Wagmeister, E., 2016).



RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

An observational study was conducted on how PAUSD high school students are affected by--and view--invisible disabilities in the media. In February of 2019, AAR students took a survey that included media clips and questions regarding respondents' previous knowledge of disabilities as well as their response to examples of characters with a disability in Parenthood and Glee. Both the quantitative and qualitative data the survey were analyzed.

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DATA AND FINDINGS

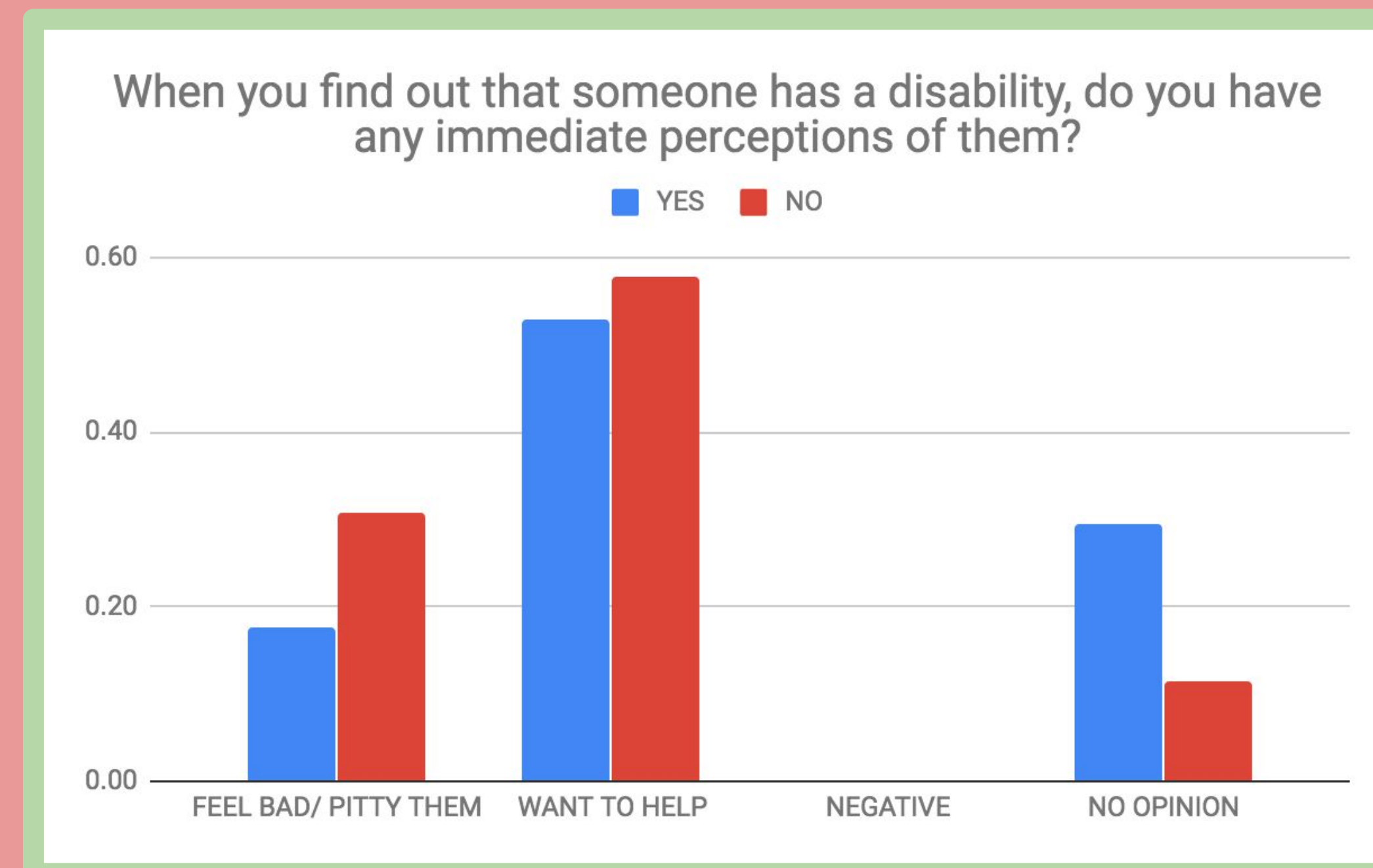


Figure 1

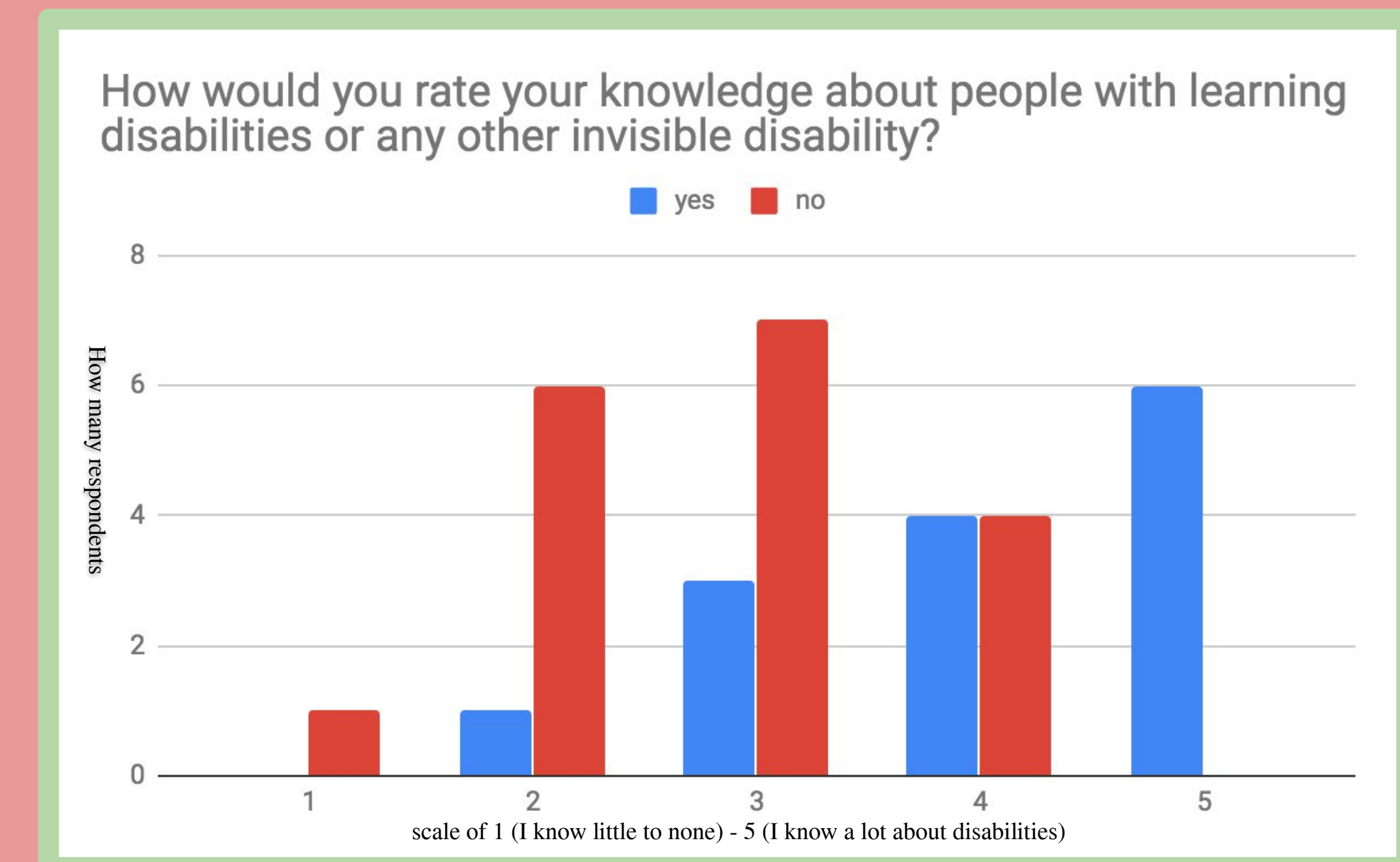


Figure 3

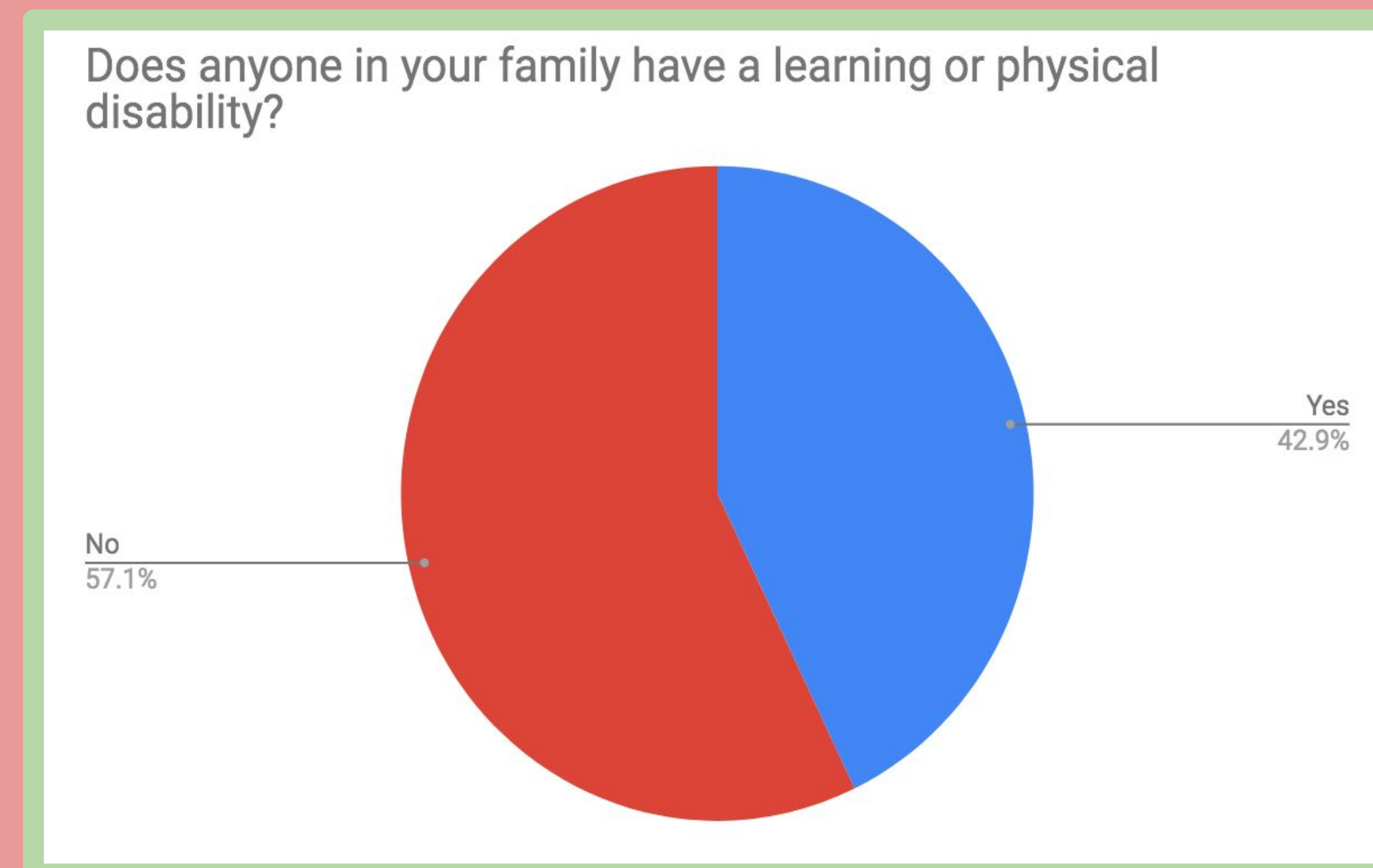


Figure 2

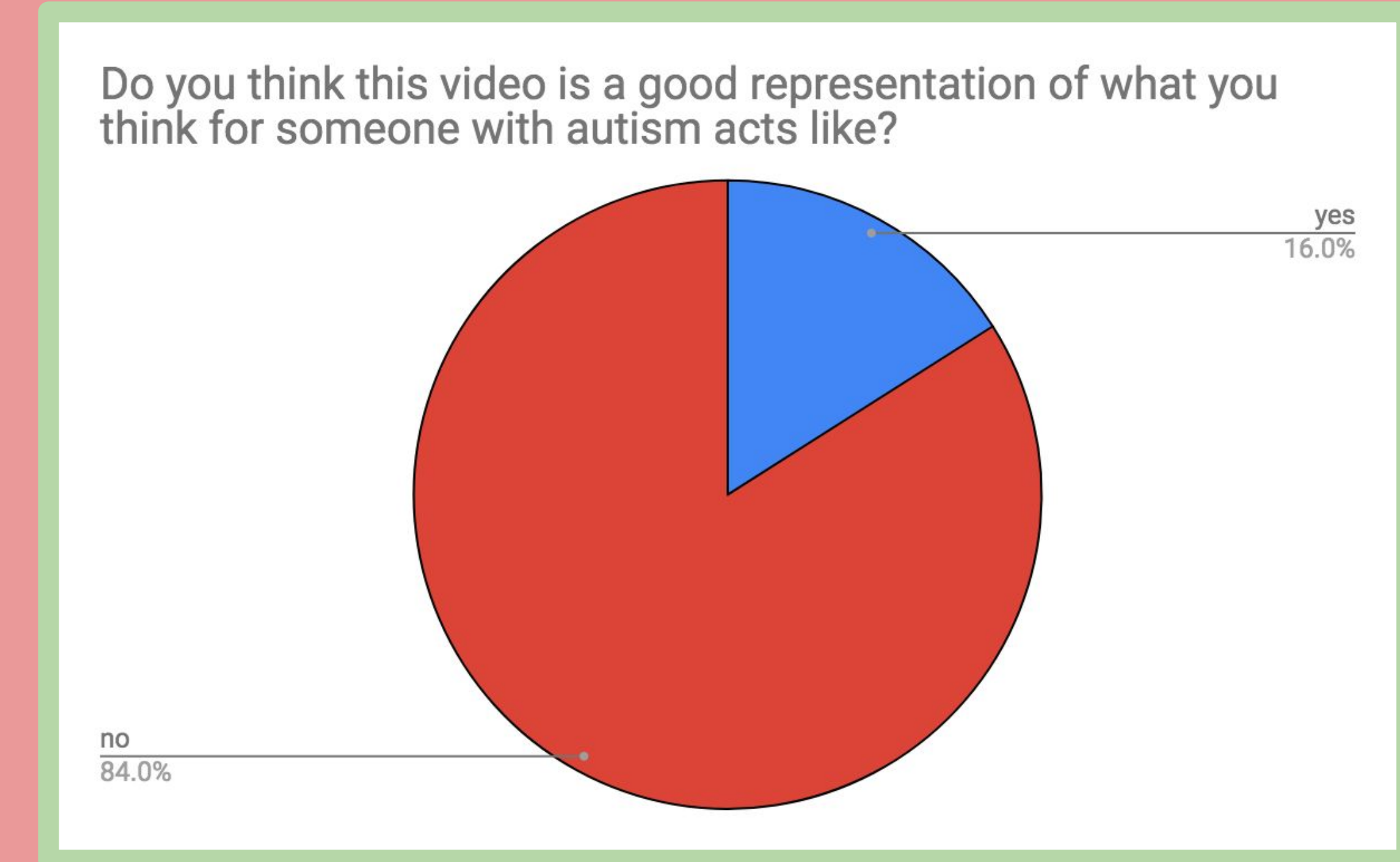


Figure 4

Additional responses:

- *I have autism, so does a friend of mine, and we both aren't represented the way we actually are, but others on the spectrum may say yes.
- *yes, I have seen people with autism act this way before, but it does not describe how everyone with autism would respond

CONCLUSIONS AND ANALYSIS

In reference to a video clip from the show Parenthood, one survey question asks, "Do you think this video is a good representation of what you think someone with autism acts like?" The results demonstrate that 80% of the respondents believe that the clip is "not a good depiction" of autism. In fact, the respondents' comments reflect that not all people with disabilities act the way they do on TV, as suggested by the famous quote: "once you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism" meaning that each individual with autism is unique and has their own character. As a result, accurately portraying someone with a hidden disability such as autism is more difficult and nuanced than how it is currently handled. However, this highlights the value of hiring people with disabilities to play these roles rather than non-disabled actors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The following implications are supported by the data collected:

1. People are aware that individuals with disabilities are underrepresented and often are not represented in a way that is accurate to them, though these representations are not necessarily "wrong." Rather, respondents are aware that television characters with disabilities are only a limited representation, not the full picture nor the only way that someone with a hidden disability might act.
2. There is still a lot of work for television programs to do in order to achieve full and accurate representation.
3. People tend to understand that not all individuals with disabilities are the same.

As for next steps, there is a lot of work to do when it comes to educating the public about invisible disabilities and the importance of understanding that no disability is the same, and people with disabilities should not be treated differently because of those disabilities.