

What Does Sexual Arousal Look Like?

Temperature and Color Changes in the Face

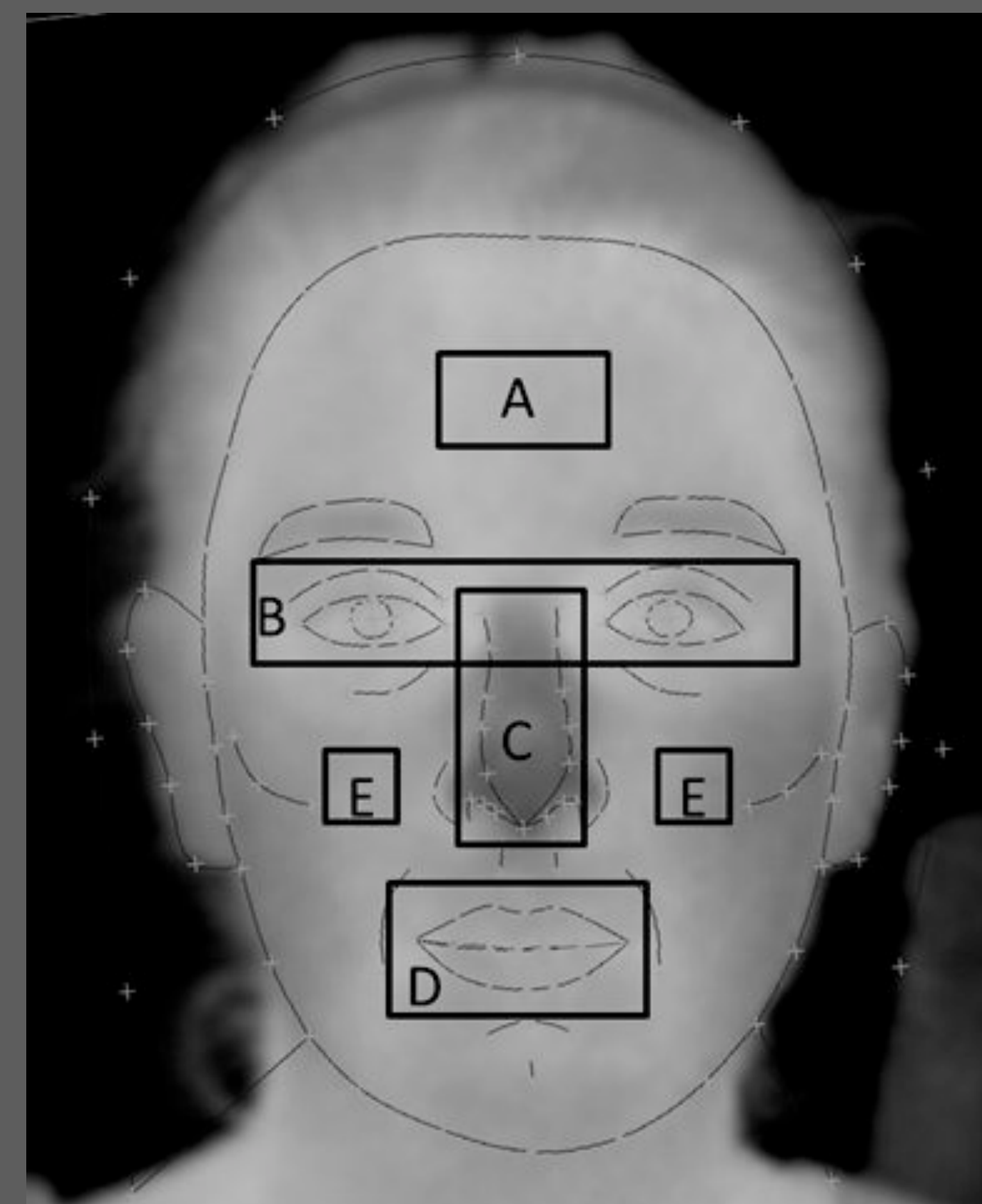
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Thermal imaging studies have suggested that face and body temperature increase during periods of heightened arousal including: sexual arousal, fear, and stress. The present study was designed to determine the time-course and topography of facial temperature and associated color changes in females during sexual arousal.

Full face thermal images and standardized 2D photographs were taken of 23 heterosexual, Caucasian women (mean age = 20.3 years) while viewing a video clip depicting a sexual encounter. Participants continuously self-reported their sexual arousal during the experiment using a 5-point slider.

As seen in the graphs below, sexual arousal in women is associated with both thermal and color changes in the skin, but these changes are not necessarily concordant.

Temperature was analyzed at 5 facial regions and the chest:



Images were analyzed for skin temperature and skin color (i.e. redness, a*) at 3 time points: neutral, mildly arousing, and most arousing (based on average self-reported sexual arousal).

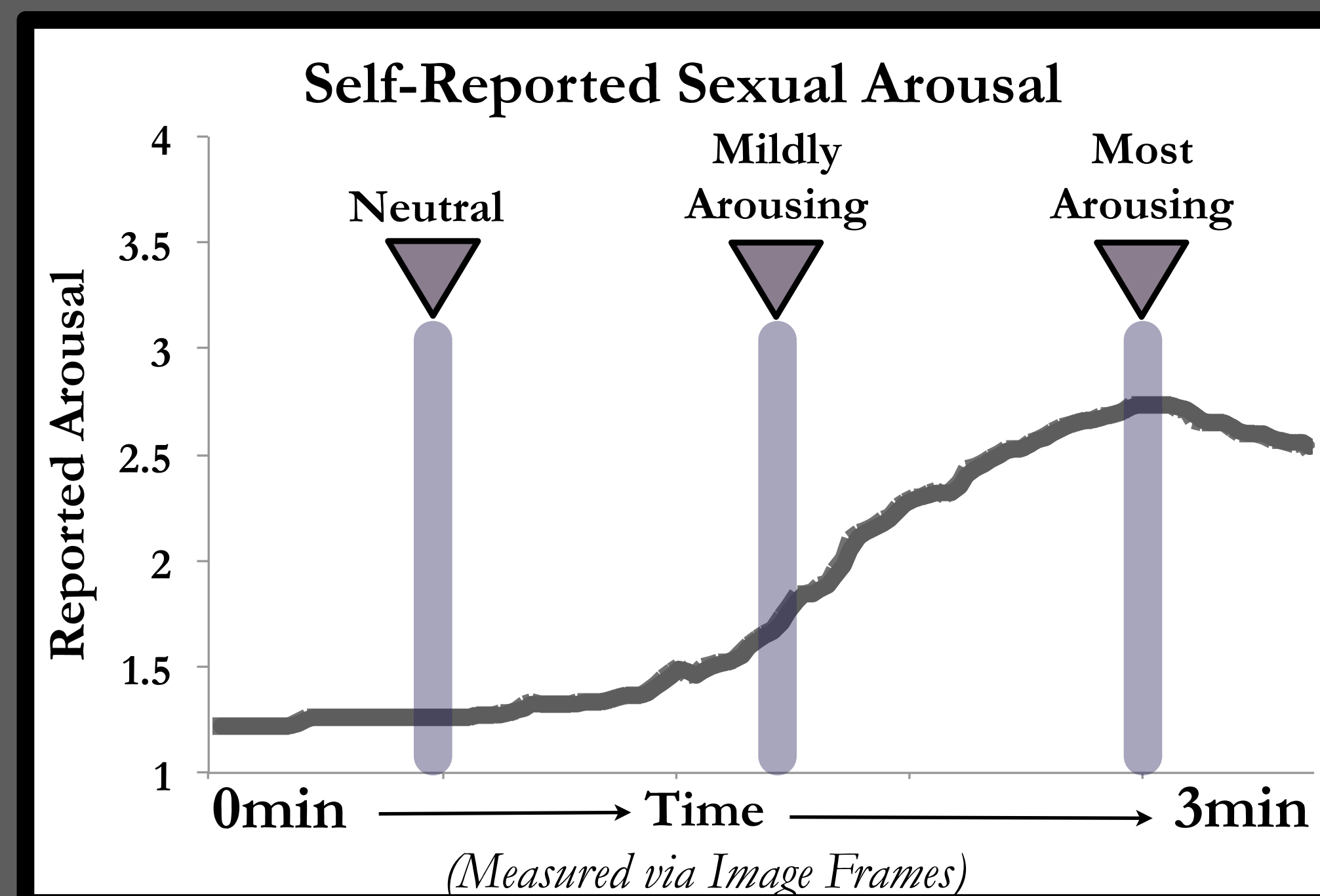
Neutral



Mildly Arousing



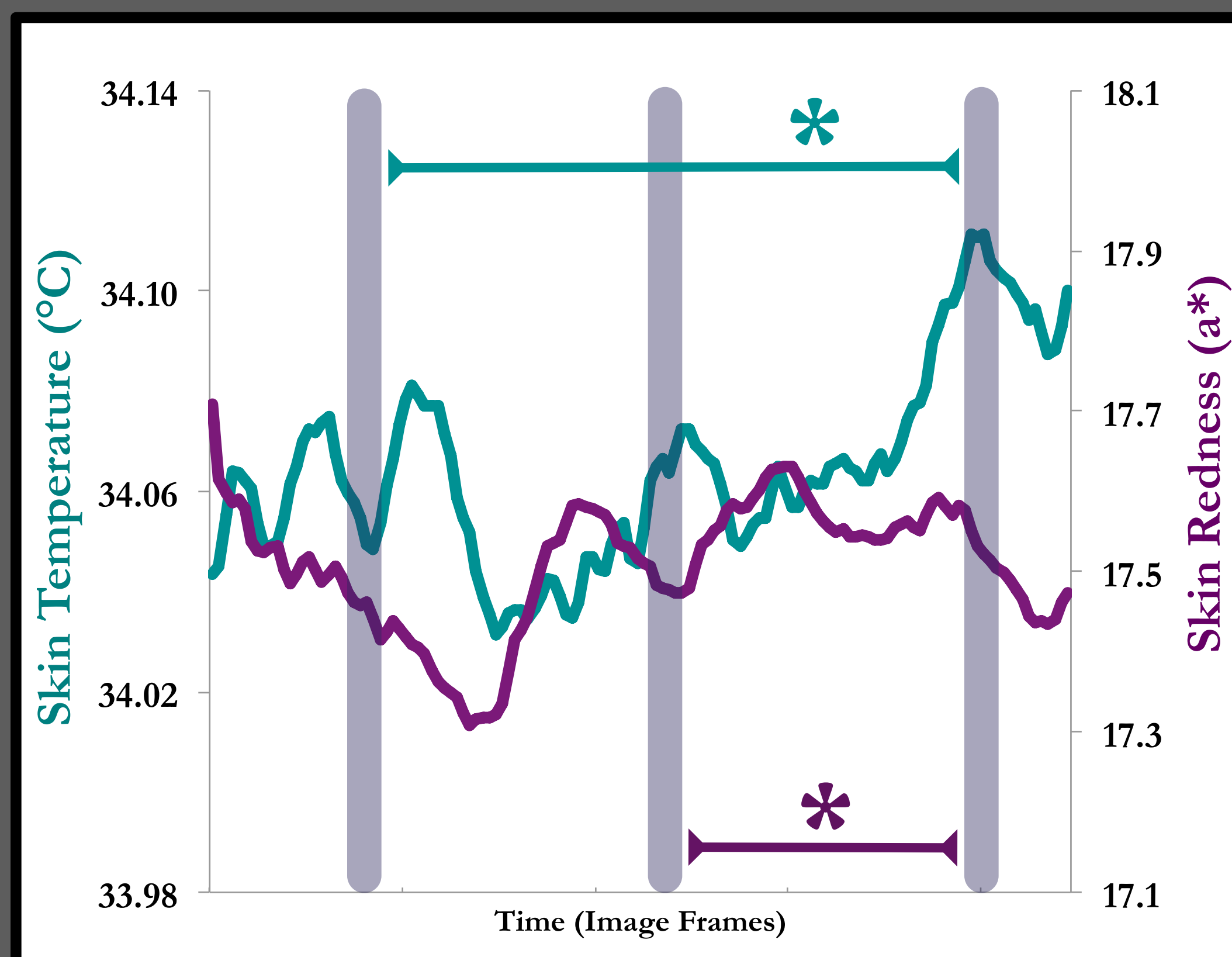
Most Arousing



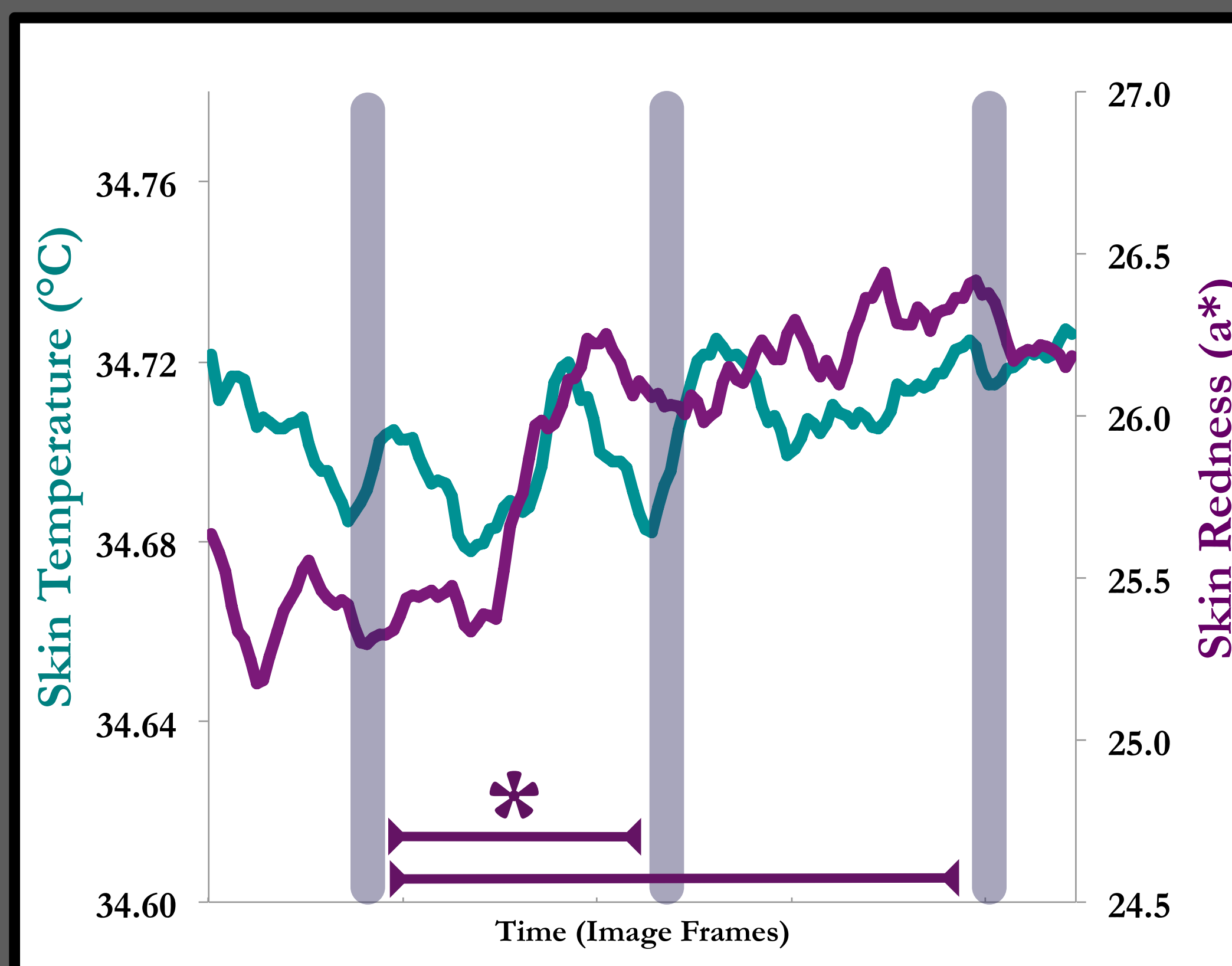
Relationship Between Skin Temperature and Color Changes

*all $p < .05$

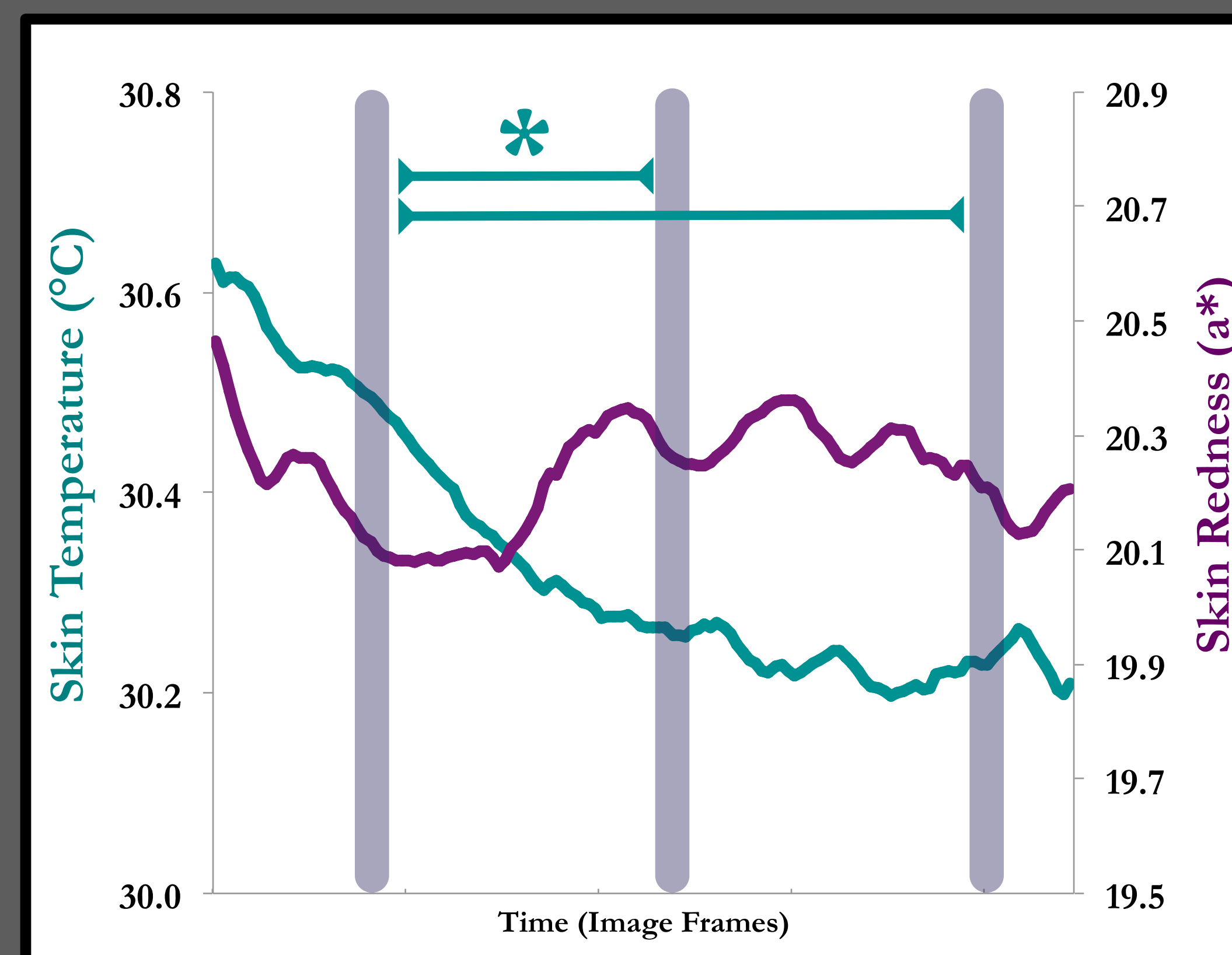
Forehead ($r = .06, ns$)



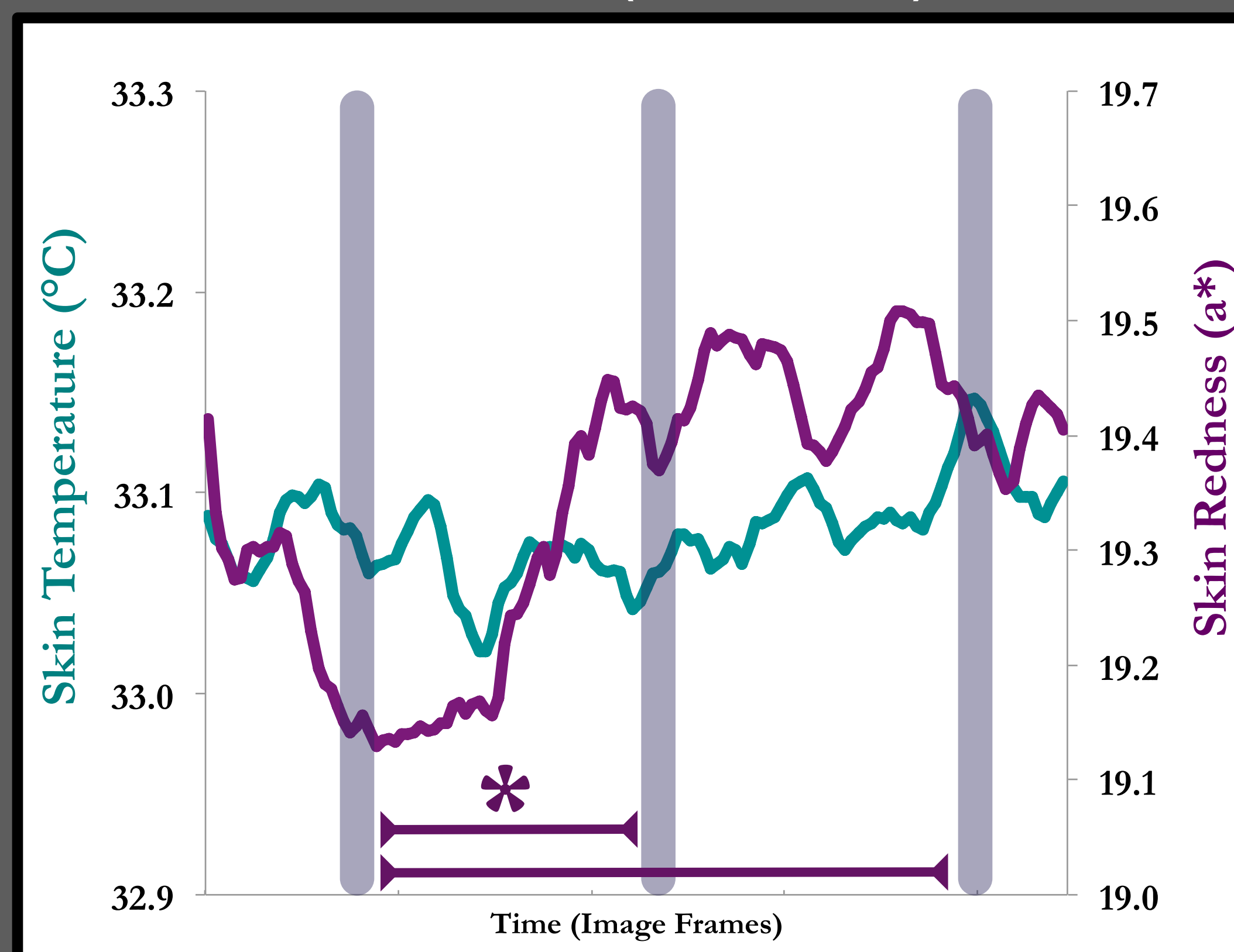
Periorbital Region ($r = .54^*$)



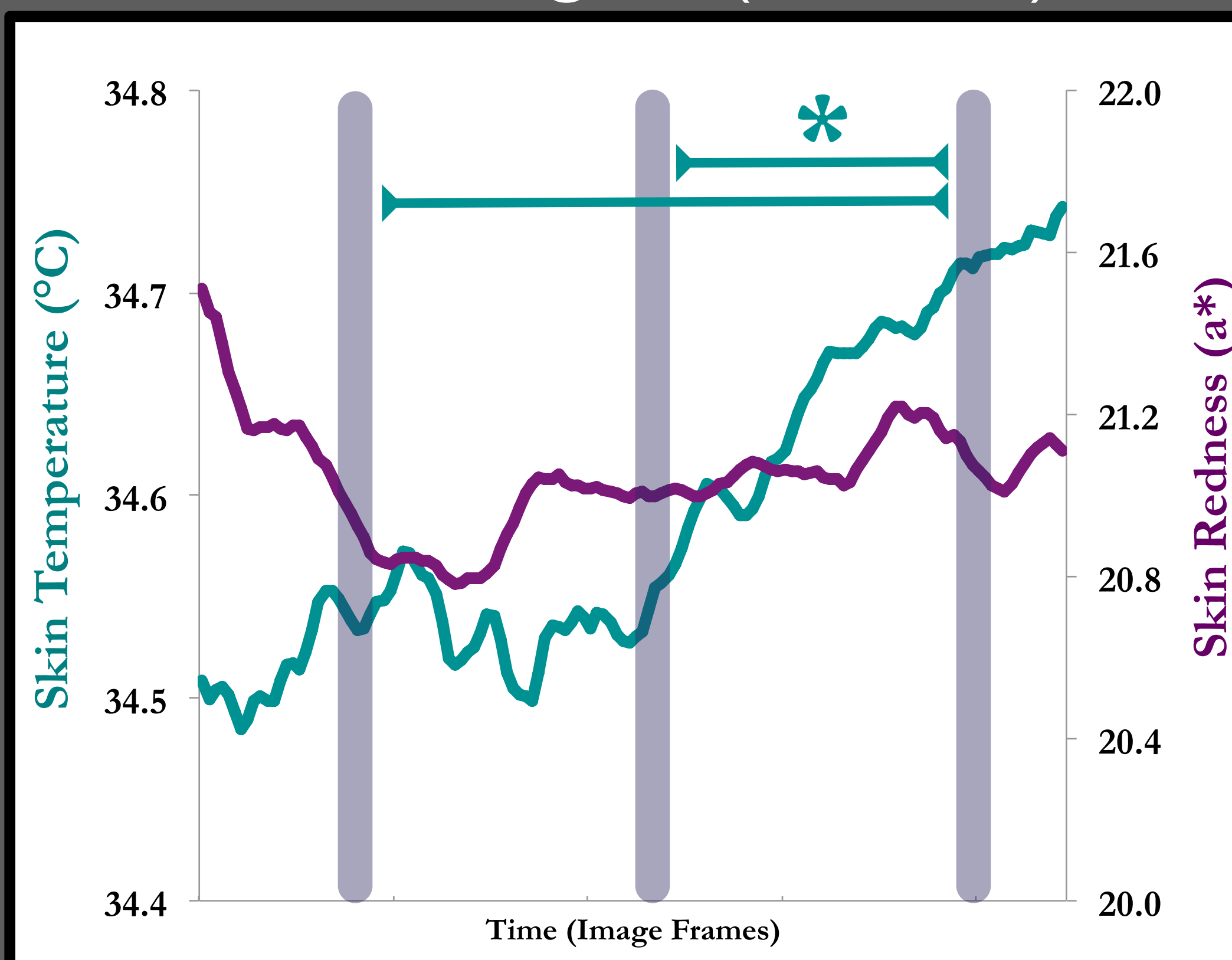
Nasal Region ($r = -.22^*$)



Cheeks ($r = .29^*$)



Mouth Region ($r = .22^*$)



Chest Area ($r = -.10, ns$)

