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### Prevention of School Shootings: Understanding Generational Perceptions of School Shooters

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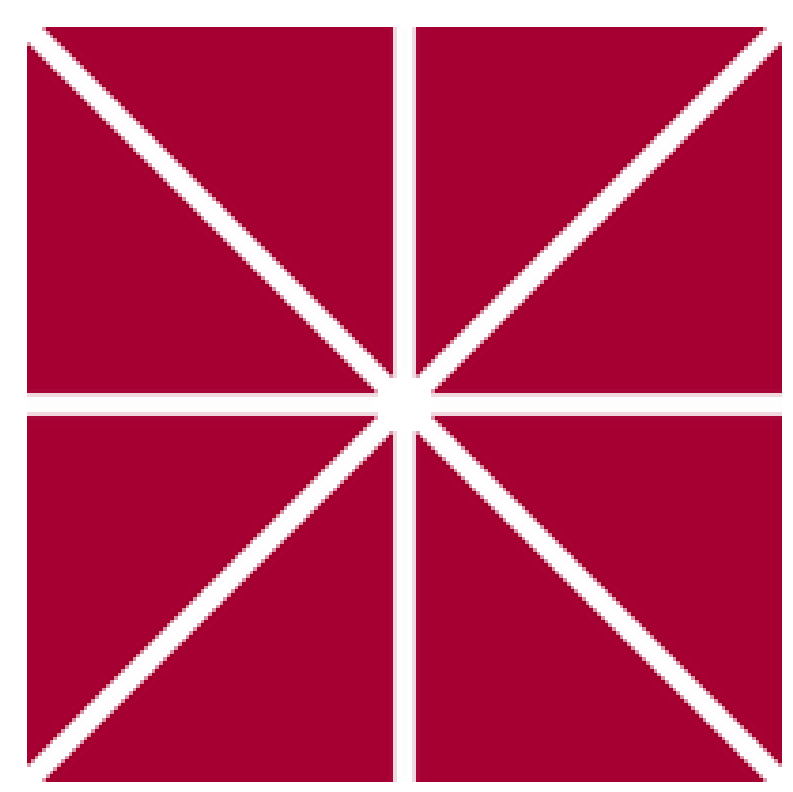
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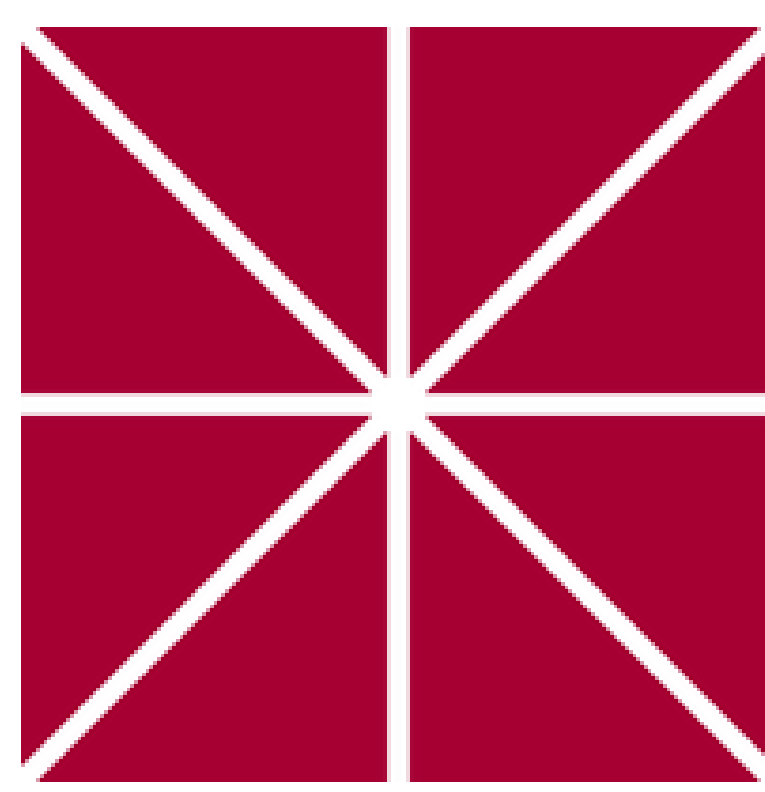
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# Prevention of School Shootings: Understanding Generational Perceptions of School Shooters



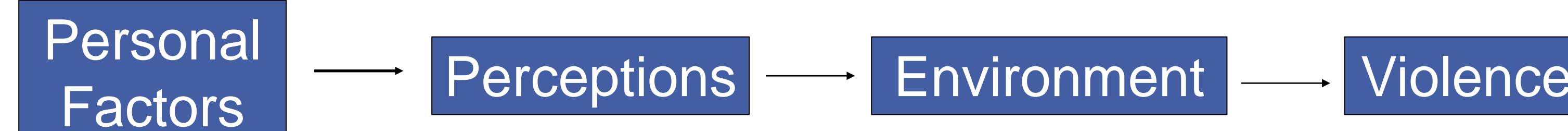
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## Background

- School shootings are a global phenomenon that have attracted massive public and academic interest since the Columbine shooting in 1999 (Raitanen, Sandberg, & Oksanen, 2019).
- Research on school shooters focuses on underlying causes, profiles, and safety and identifies many factors that may lead to these acts of violence, including individual, community and social causes.
- The master narratives, or frameworks that are used to make sense of our experiences and create a coherent identity, of bullied school shooters are 1. school shooters have been victims of bullying and 2. bullying and other social problems the shooters suffered are a cause of the shootings (Raitanen et al., 2019).
- Vossekuil et al. (2002) found that 61% of the 41 offenders who carried out school shootings had a history of depression and 78% had either attempted suicide or expressed suicidal thoughts. In addition to depression and suicidal ideation, Langman (2014) identified mental disorders and symptoms that school shooters exhibit. Through extensive research on 10 school shooters' histories, these mental conditions include Antisocial Personality Disorder, Schizophrenia, Narcissistic Personality Disorder, and overall Psychopathy.
- Masculinity may 'script' violent behaviors in boys. Additionally, there is widespread acceptance and availability of guns that perpetuate a culture of violence which is fueled by gender norms (Muschert, 2007). Additionally, gender socialization plays a vital role in the era of school shootings. Physical aggression is viewed as part of men's culturally defined gender role (Baron & Branscombe, 2012) and is a driving force of school shootings.
- Gen Z is deemed to be more educated, have more experienced with diversity, and grew up in the era of school shooters compared to Baby Boomers (Parker and Igielnik, 2020). One study investigating the narratives from people who have a deep interest in school shootings found that their participants, who were an average age of 20 years old, defined shooters as victims due to their perceived experiences (Raitanen et al., 2019).
- Republicans and Democrats differ on the basis of internal vs. external locus of control (Sweetser, 2014).

## Hypotheses

- Perceptions of school shooters will vary according to generation
  - Gen Zers and Millennials will perceive school shooters as social victims
  - Baby Boomers and Gen X will perceive school shooters as only offenders
- Explanations for shootings will vary according to political party affiliation
  - Republicans will focus on individual-level factors
  - Democrats will focus on societal-level factors



## Methods

- 151 participants, ages 16-81 ( $M = 40$ )
- More females (76%,  $n = 116$ ) than males (22%,  $n = 33$ )
- Majority Caucasian/white (72%,  $n = 110$ )
- More Democrats (54%,  $n = 83$ ) than Republicans (11%,  $n = 17$ ) and No Party Preference (22%,  $n = 34$ )
- Perception of school shooters was measured through a survey distributed on social media platforms and email
- Survey included 14 Likert-scale questions, including the Forms of Bullying Victimization Scale (FBS-V), Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ-9), Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), Gender Socialization Scale, and Mental Illness Scale which each measured different individual and societal-level experiences
- Participants indicated the extent to which they believe each of these experiences occur in a school shooter's life on a scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always).
- Non-experimental and cross-sectional design
- Non-random purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling

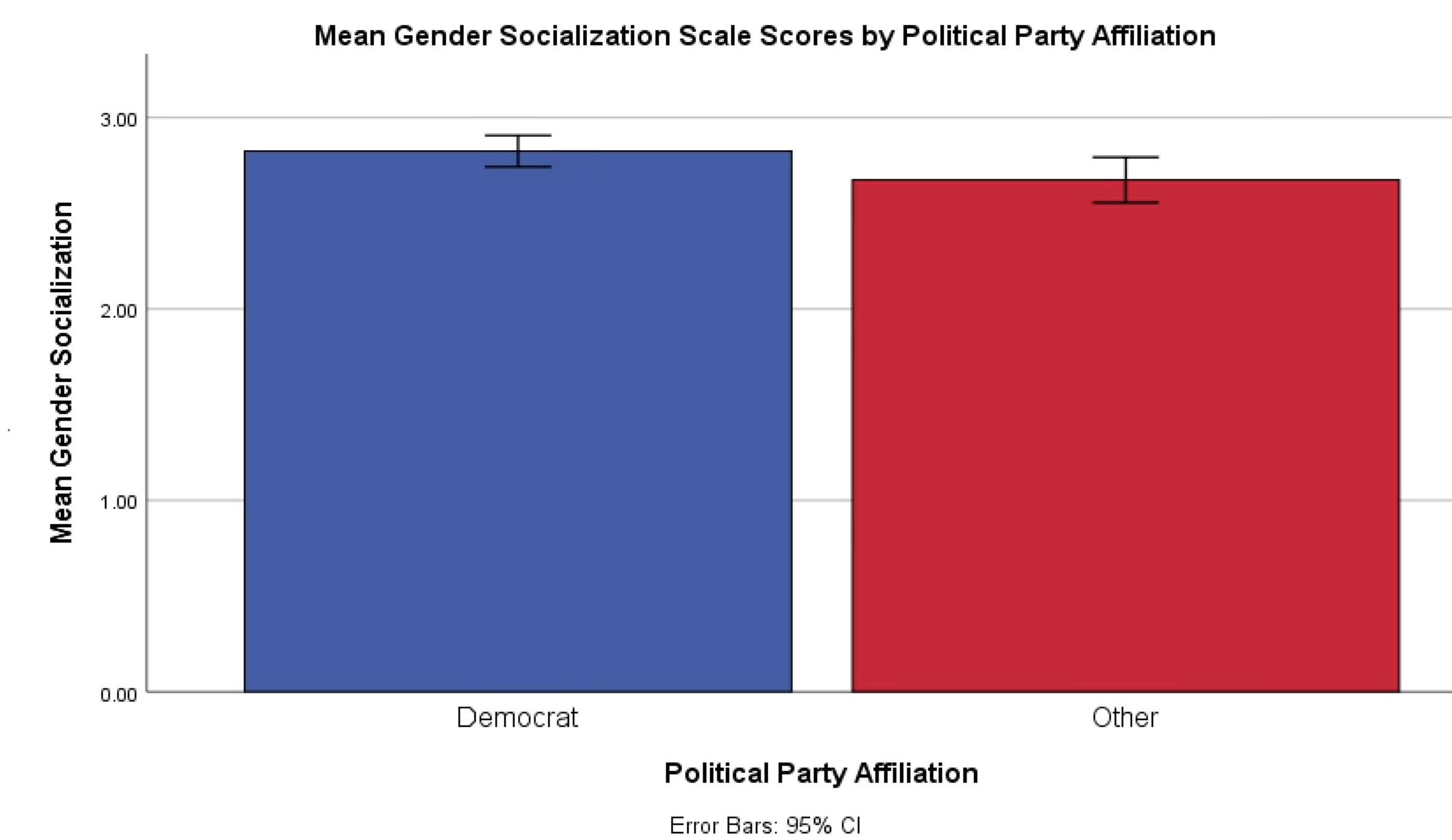


Figure 1. Mean gender socialization scores by political party affiliation

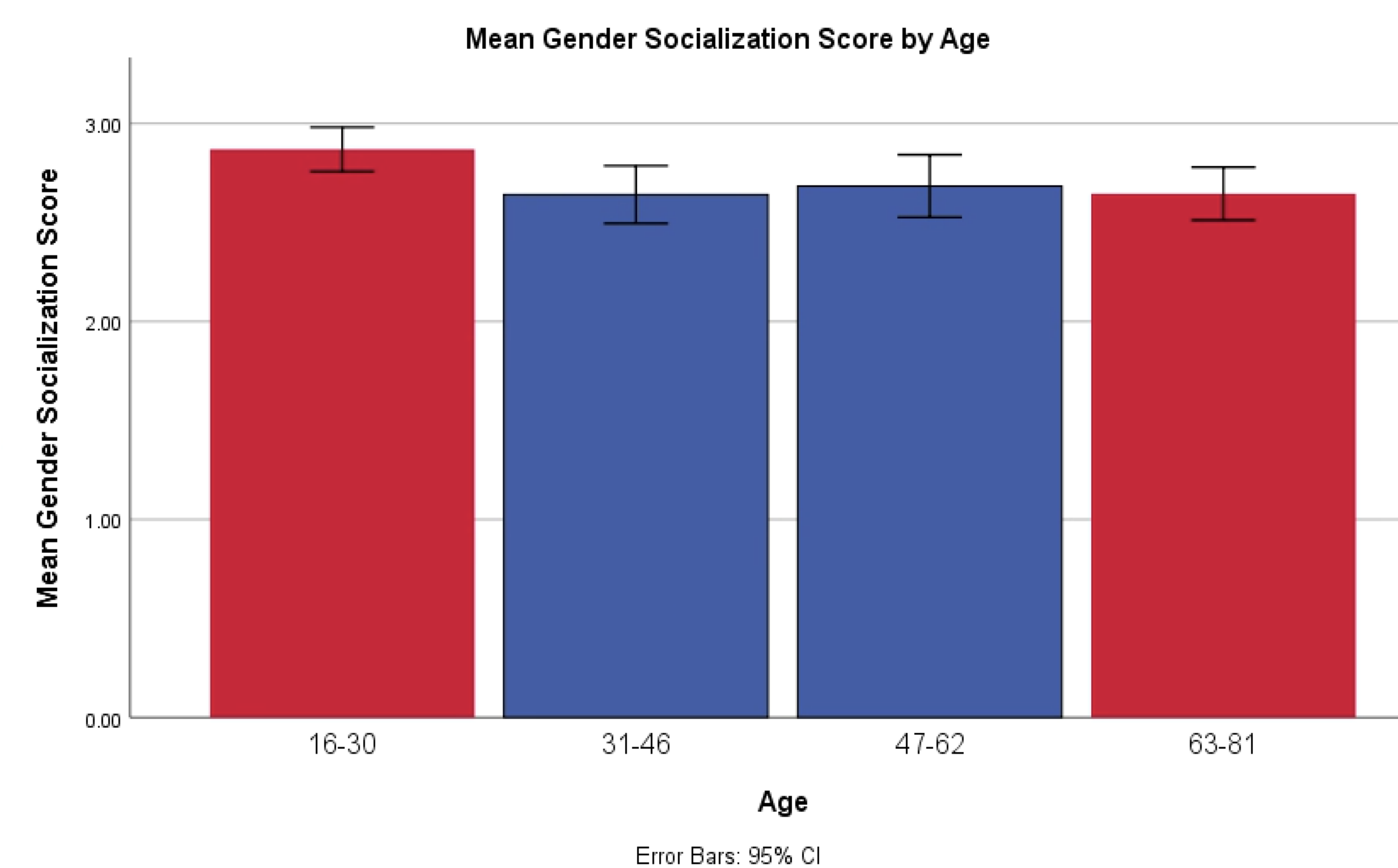


Figure 2. Mean gender socialization scores by age group

## Findings

- Independent samples T-test between political party affiliation (Democrat vs. Other) and gender socialization scale indicate that the ideology within the Democratic party plays a role in their perception of school shooters [ $t(125.265) = 2.084, p = .039$ ]. Democrats report higher gender socialization scores indicating they perceive school shooters as often experiencing stereotypical gender socialization (see Figure 1).
- One-way ANOVA between political party affiliation (Republican, Democrat, Other) and gender socialization scale confirmed a significant difference between scores of Republicans and Democrats [ $F(2, 149) = 5.243, p = .006$ ]. Republicans report lower gender socialization scores indicating they perceive school shooters as experiencing gender socialization less than other factors.
- Independent samples T-test between political party affiliation (Democrat vs. Republican [ $t(98) = -3.196, p = .002$ ] & Republican vs. Other [ $t(150) = -3.239, p = .001$ ]) and PHQ-9 Scale scores indicate significant differences between Republicans and Democrats view of school shooter's experience with depression. Democrats PHQ-9 scale scores were higher than those of Republicans.
- Independent samples T-test between age groups and gender socialization scale indicate generational experiences play a role in perceptions of school shooter's experiences [ $t(94) = 2.297, p = .024$ ] (see Figure 2).

## Discussion

- Findings support initial hypotheses as they indicate significant differences between age groups and political party affiliation on perceptions of socialization and mental illness in school shooters
- I focused on age but I found it didn't prove to be as relevant as I expected. Younger generations view of gender socialization playing a greater role in school shooter's lives compared to older generations is supported by Raitanen et al., 2019.
- I found political party affiliation mattered more which could be due to the "culture wars" and political party polarization we see in the U.S (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008).
- Fundamental Attribution Theory, people tend to perceive others as acting as they do because they are "that kind of person," rather than because of the external factors that may influence their behavior, and Stereotypes, beliefs about social groups in terms of traits or characteristics that they are believed to share, most likely play a role in the participant's perceptions of school shooters (Baron & Branscombe, 2012).
- The findings are beneficial to society as teachers, policymakers, therapists, and other professionals will understand the widespread perceptions of school shooters, and they will know how to better communicate with others about school shootings. This has the potential to decrease school shootings in the future.
- Future research can expand on perceptions and determine which personal factors are the most influential, research the public's view on various school shooting prevention strategies, and create concrete conversations and prevention strategies with the findings in mind

