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How Moral Foundations and Traditional Sex Ideologies Influence Attitudes on Bystander Intervention Among College Students

Bailey Lytle

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, blytle65@gmail.com

Kyle Bizal

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, kbizal92@gmail.com

Haley Hansmeier

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, haleyhansmeier@gmail.com

Taylor Brumbaugh

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, brumbaughtaylor@gmail.com

Joshua Magee

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, jmagee3@huskers.unl.edu

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Bailey Lytle, Kyle Bizal, Haley Hansmeier, Taylor Brumbaugh, Joshua Magee, Julia Sullivan, Shaina Kumar, Sarah Gervais, and David DiLillo

How Moral Foundations and Traditional Sex Ideologies Influence Attitudes on Bystander Intervention Among College Students

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INTRODUCTION

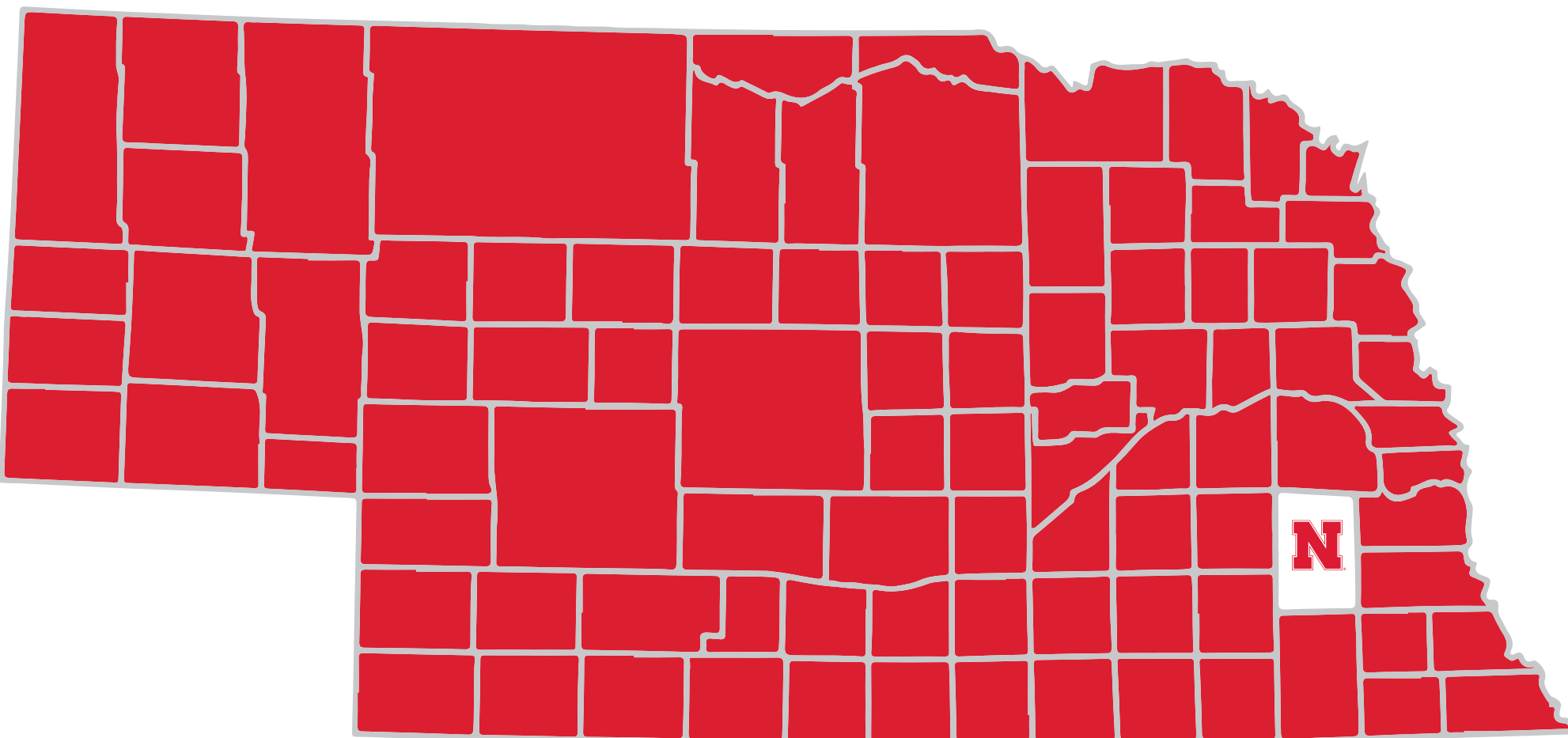
- ❖ Many researchers highlight the need for bystander prevention programs on college campuses to mitigate the risk of sexual assault among college students (Caver, 2013).
- ❖ However, Hoxmeier, O’Connor, and McMahon (2020) found that college students often hold different attitudes towards bystander intervention based on adherence to traditional gender roles.
- ❖ Other researchers have found that those who do intervene tend to be higher in moral values such as altruism and social responsibility (Moisuc, Brauer, Fonseca, Chaurand, & Greitemeyer, 2018).
- ❖ To date, there is little known about the specific link between traditional sex roles and moral values as they relate to bystander attitudes, yet this is an important gap to fill in order to pinpoint the characteristics of those who are more likely to intervene.

Hypothesis: We predict that individuals who adhere to more traditional sex role ideology will hold more negative attitudes toward bystander intervention, whereas those with higher moral values will hold more positive attitudes toward intervening in a risky sexual scenario.

METHOD

Participants:

- ❖ Participants were 1,018 undergraduate students (67.8% female; $M_{age} = 20.11$, $SD = 2.56$). Approximately 35% were freshmen ($n = 357$), 23% sophomores ($n = 238$), 21% juniors ($n = 215$), 15% seniors ($n = 156$), and 5.1% in their fifth year or above ($n = 52$).
- ❖ Participants identified as White ($n = 805$; 79.1%), Black or African American ($n = 97$; 9.5%), Asian ($n = 98$; 9.6%), American Indian or Alaska Native ($n = 15$; 1.5%), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ($n = 4$; 0.4%), and/or Other ($n = 40$; 4.0%). Ninety-five participants (9.3%) identified as being of Latinx/Hispanic origin.



METHOD

Procedures:

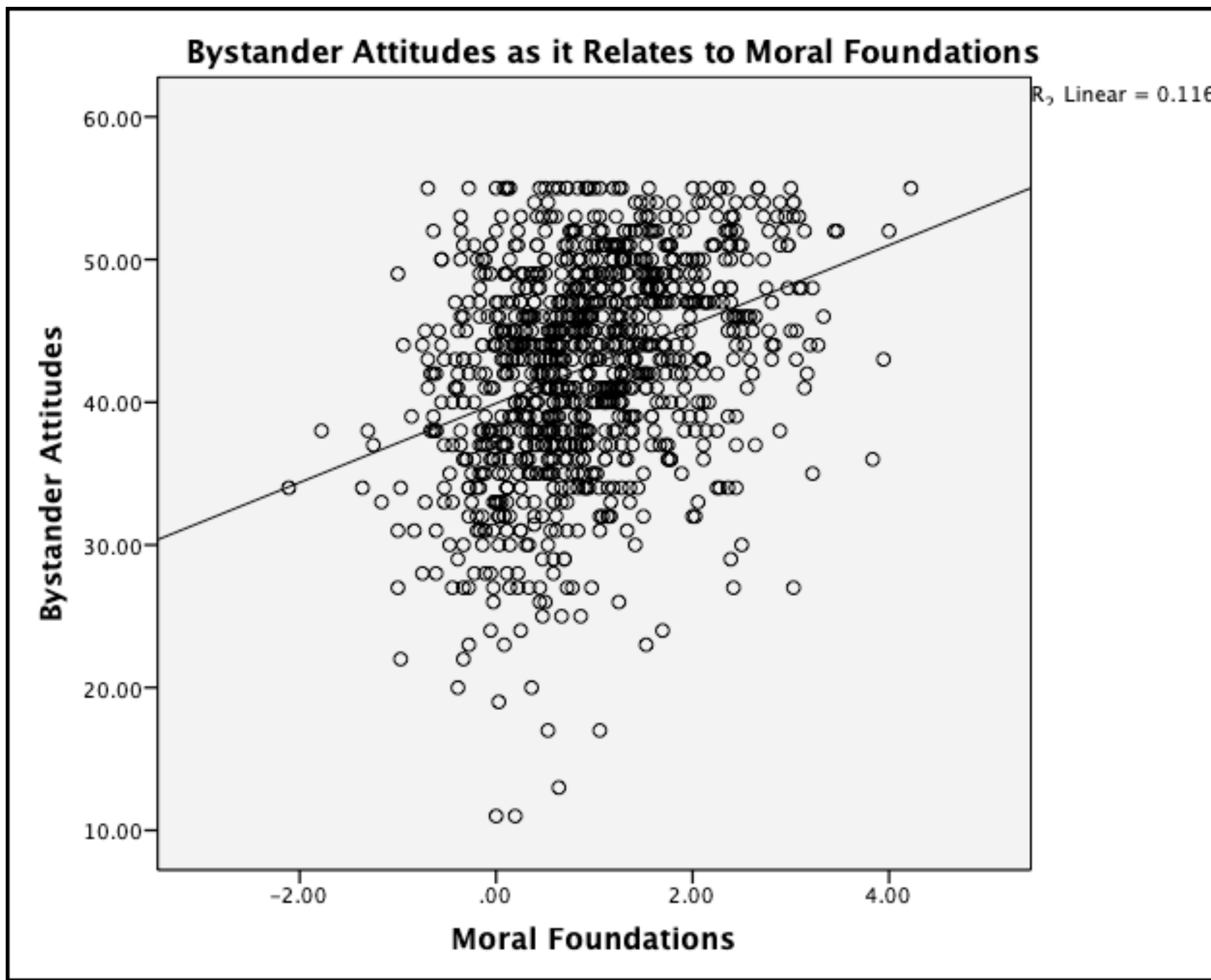
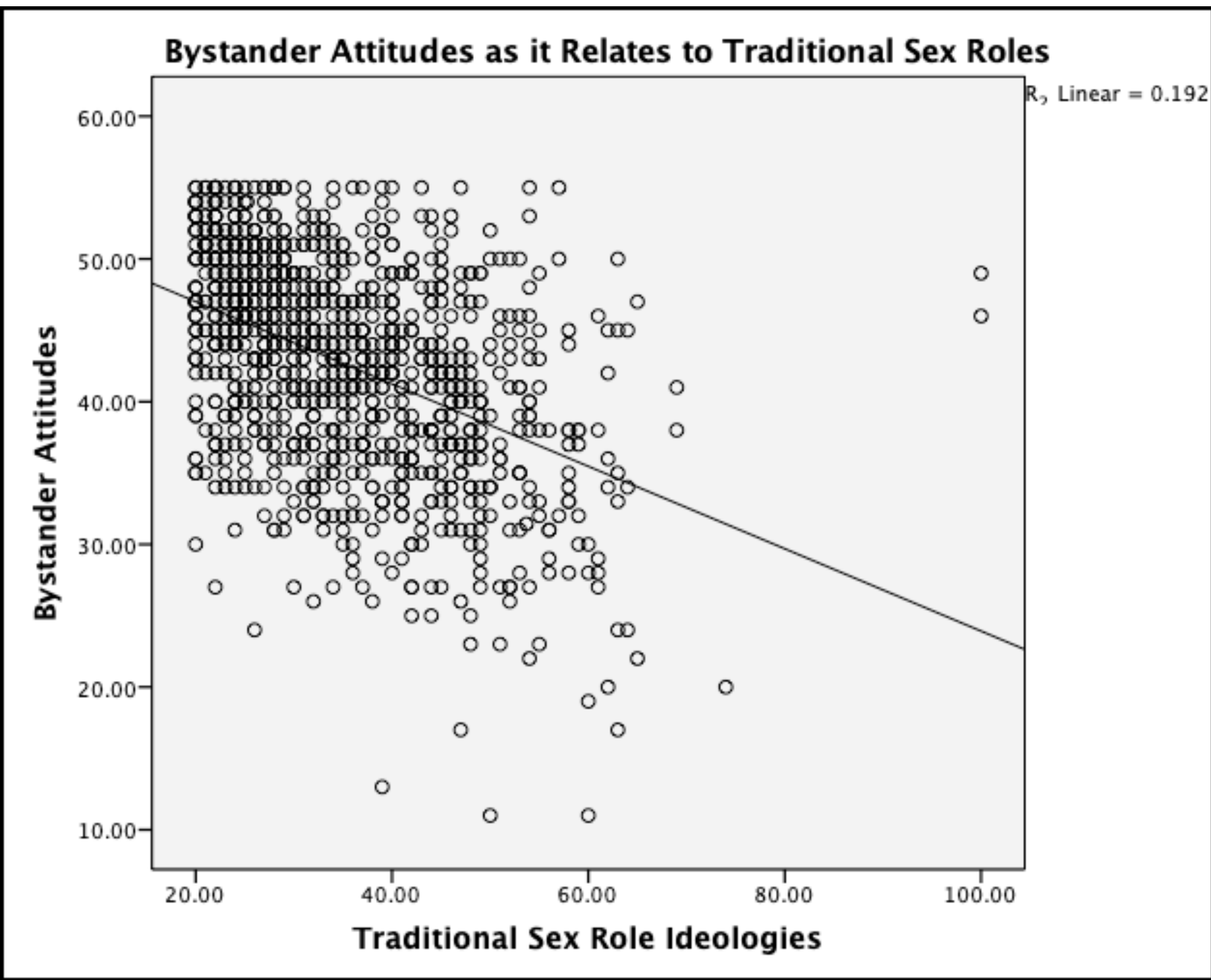
- ❖ Undergraduate students were invited to participate in a study related to “Perceptions of Everyday Life.”
- ❖ Participants were recruited through an online advertisement in the Psychology Department subject pool or directly e-mailed by the research team from a randomized list of undergraduate students on campus.
- ❖ Following informed consent, participants completed a series of questionnaires via Qualtrics while seated at a private computer.

Measures:

- ❖ **Moral Foundations.** The *Moral Foundations Questionnaire* (MFQ; Graham, Nosek, Haidt, Iyer, Koleva, & Ditto, 2011) is a 32-item two-part self-report measure designed to assess one’s moral values. Part 1 is a measure of right or wrong (e.g., “Whether or not someone suffered emotionally.”). Participants rate each item on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*not at all relevant*) to 5 (*extremely relevant*). Part 2 is a measure of individual differences on the importance of moral values (e.g., “It can never be right to kill a human being.”). Participants rated each item on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Items were summed to obtain an overall score such that higher scores indicate higher levels of moral values ($\alpha = .85$).
- ❖ **Traditional Sex Roles.** The 20-item *Traditional-Egalitarian Sex Roles Scale* (TESR; Larsen & Long, 1988) was used to assess participants’ gender role ideology (e.g., “It is just as important to educate daughters as it is to educate sons.”). Participants rated each item on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). Scores were summed to obtain an overall score such that higher scores indicate more traditional sex role ideology ($\alpha = .91$).
- ❖ **Bystander Attitudes.** The *Bystander Attitude Scale-Revised* (BAS; McMahon, Allen, Postmus, McMahon, Peterson, & Hoffman, 2014) was used to measure of how likely a participant would be to intervene in a sexual risk scenario (e.g., “Check in with a friend who looks drunk when she goes to a room with someone else at a party.”). Participants rated each item on a five-point Likert scale of 1 (*unlikely*) to 5 (*very likely*). Items were summed to obtain an overall score such that higher scores indicate positive attitudes toward bystander intervention ($\alpha = .84$).

RESULTS

- ❖ In a test of regression, those with greater traditional sex role ideology endorsed more negative attitudes toward bystander intervention, $r = -.438$, $t(1010) = -15.48$, $p < .001$.
- ❖ In a separate test of regression, those with higher moral foundations endorsed more positive attitudes toward bystander intervention, $r = .341$, $t(1012) = 11.54$, $p < .001$.



DISCUSSION

Main Findings:

- ❖ Individuals who hold greater traditional sex role ideology hold more negative attitudes toward bystander intervention.
- ❖ Those with more progressive moral foundations show more positive attitudes toward bystander intervention.
- ❖ Both of these findings support the proposed hypotheses and lend further evidence to the notion that both traditional sex role ideology and moral foundations are factors that influence attitudes toward bystander intervention.

Limitations:

- ❖ A limitation from this study was the homogeneity of the current sample: There was an attempt to gather more ethnically diverse participants, however the majority (79%) were White. Additionally, there were slightly more females (67.8%) than males in our sample, which may limit generalizability.
- ❖ Another limitation is the use of self-report data to gather information on bystander intervention behaviors, which may not be entirely accurate. However, we are currently conducting a second part to our study, wherein we examine *in vivo* bystander intervention behaviors using virtual reality technology. Our future research will report on these findings.

Future Directions:

- ❖ Future studies should examine the origins of traditional sex role ideology in order to potentially uncover an intervention point to decrease the likelihood of these ideologies impacting bystander intervention behaviors.
- ❖ Given our findings, administrators of bystander intervention programs may consider placing individuals with higher moral values in a leadership role to encourage more positive attitudes toward bystander intervention behaviors in their peer groups.

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