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Fall 2023

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## Moral Preferences of Different College. Majors

Angela Sabates

a-sabates@bethel.edu

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## INTRODUCTION

- Advising undergraduates re: choice of major usually entails career interest and personality measures.
- Yet, choice of college major is a more multi-faceted process with lots of implications.
- Different careers are related to different life values.
- **QUESTION:** Could different college majors also have different moral preferences?
- This study explored whether category of major predicts moral preferences according to **Moral Foundations Theory** (Graham et al., 2009).



## RESEARCH QUESTION

Do students of different college major categories have different moral preferences?



## METHOD

### SAMPLE

- -419 undergraduate students from Bethel University and University of St. Thomas.
- - 63.2% women ( $n = 265$ ) and 36.5% men ( $n = 153$ ). One participant (.2%) selected "prefer not to say" for the gender identity question
- -82.6% **White**, 4.1% **Hispanic/Latino**, 4.1% **Black/African American**, 6% **Asian or Pacific Islander**, and 3.3% "other."

### MEASURES

#### Moral Foundations Questionnaire

30-item Likert-scale questions regarding **moral preferences** related to: **loyalty to one's group**, **avoiding harming others**, **fairness over cheating**, **regard for authority**, and **preference for purity** (homogenous groups/institutions).

#### RIASEC Test – Basic Interest Markers

48-item measure of career interests associated with Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional

### PROCEDURE

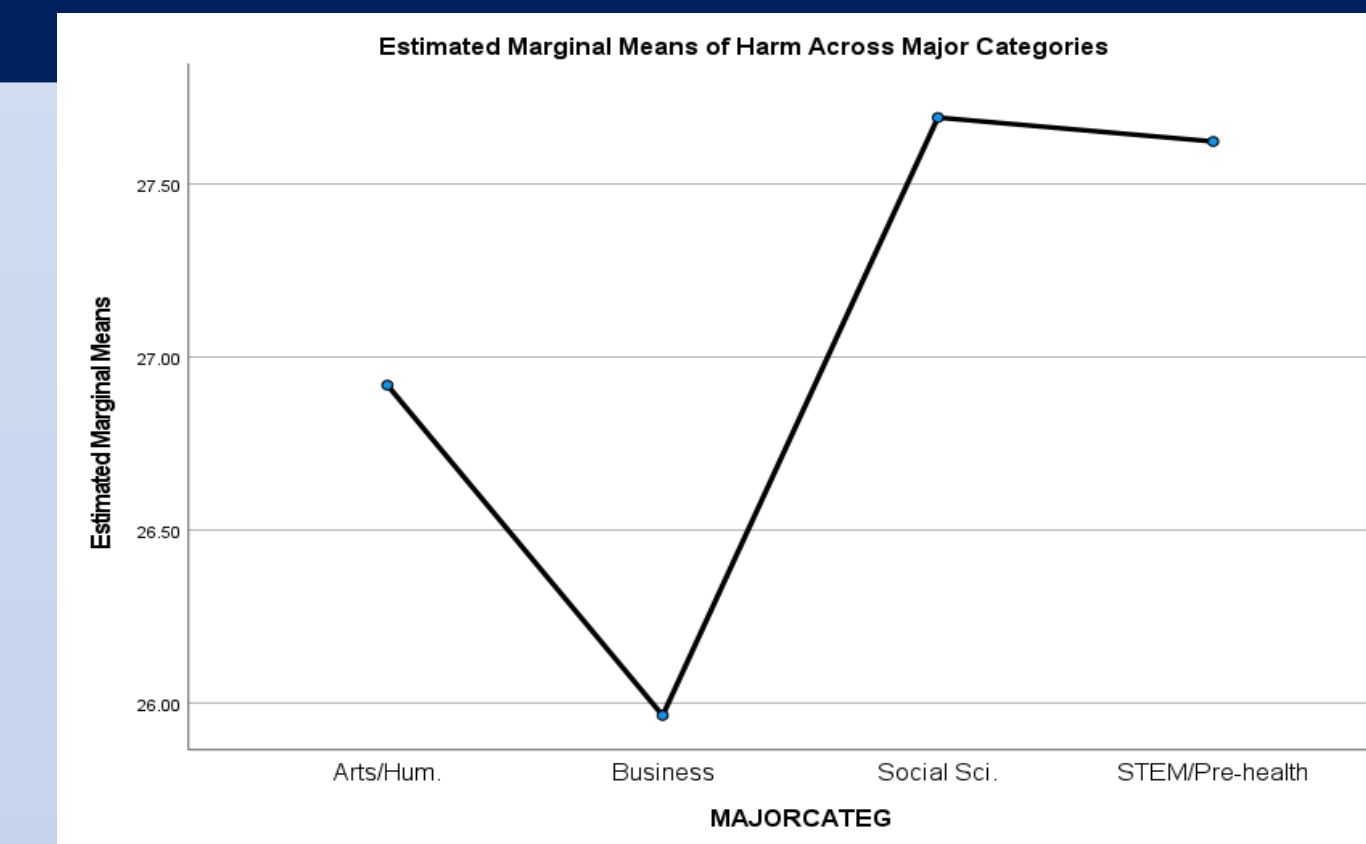
Questionnaires were administered online.

## Preference for FAIRNESS OVER CHEATING

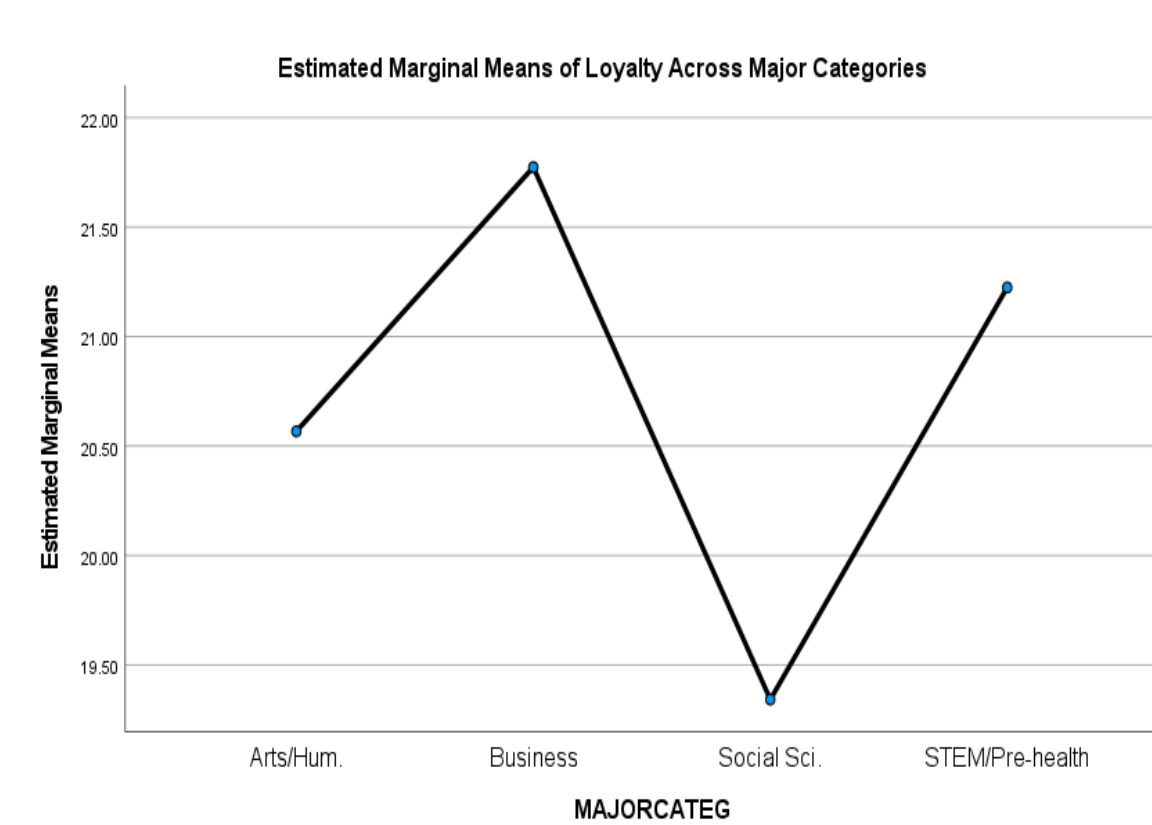
No significant differences among college major categories.

## Preference for AVOIDING COMMITTING HARM TO OTHERS: Business majors scored significantly LOWER than most other groups

- **Business majors** (EMM = 25.96, SE = .42) scored significantly lower than did **social sciences majors** (EMM = 27.69, SE = .32,  $p = .017$ ) and **STEM/Health-related majors** (EMM = 27.62, SE = .33,  $p = .028$ )
- No other significant differences



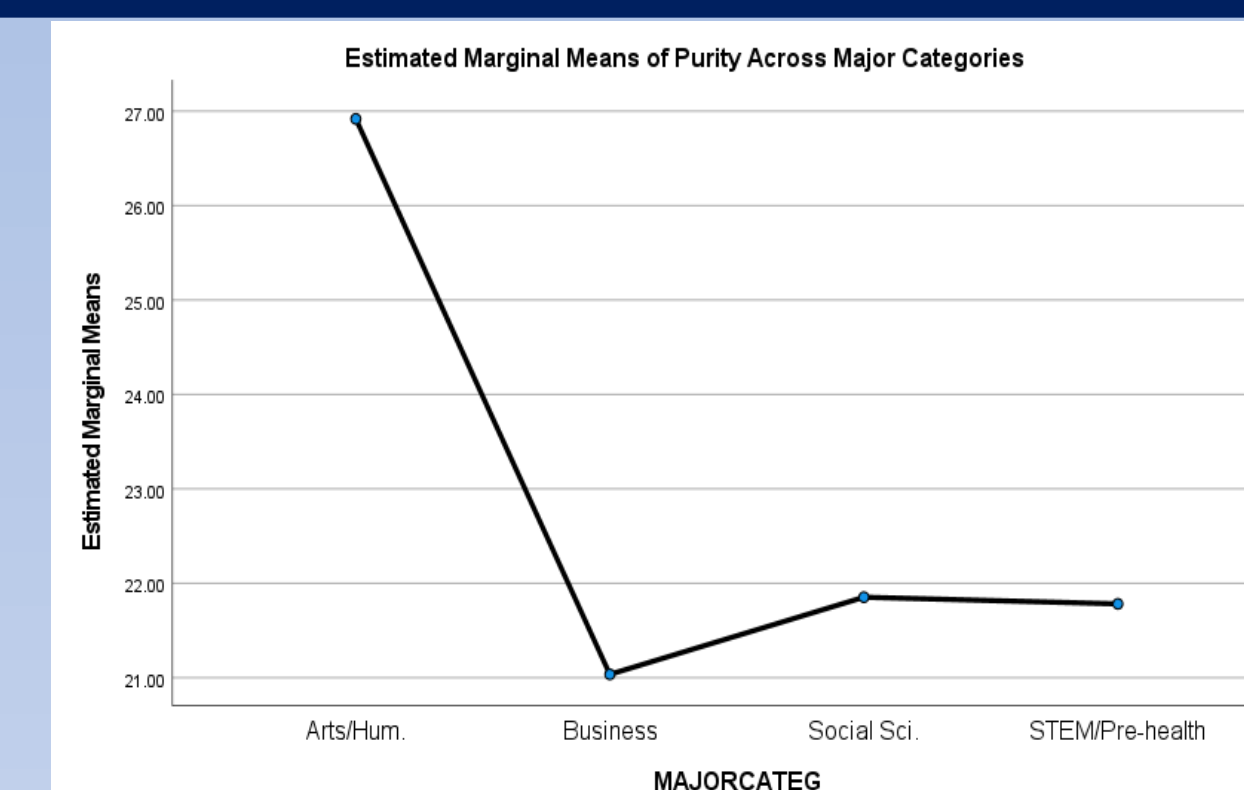
## Preference for LOYALTY TO ONE'S GROUP/NATION: Social Science students scored the LOWEST



- **Business majors** (EMM = 21.78, SE = .75,  $p < .001$ ) scored significantly higher than did **social sciences students** (EMM = 19.34, SE = .38,  $p < .001$ ).
- **STEM/Pre-health majors** (EMM = 21.23, SE = .39) also scored significantly higher than did **social sciences majors** ( $p < .004$ ) on this variable.
- No other significant differences

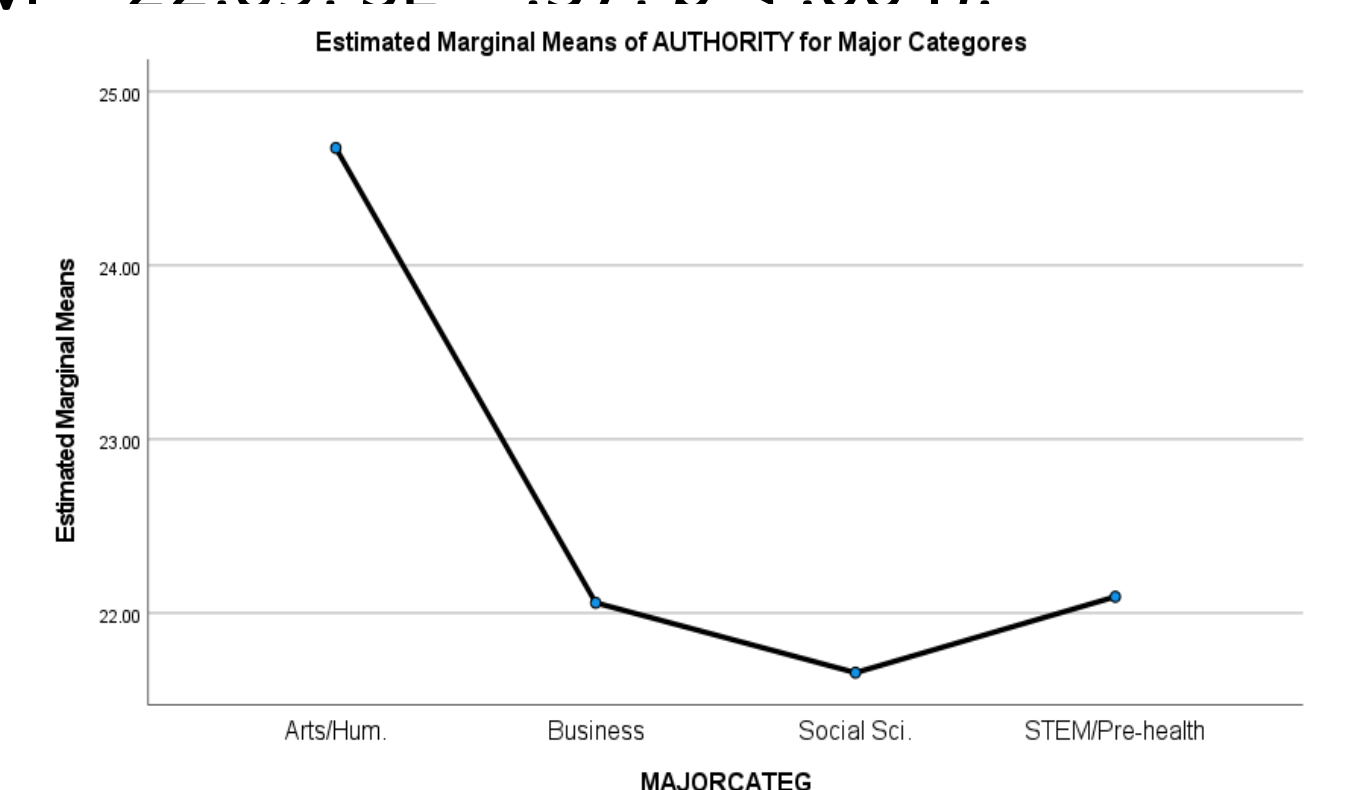
## Preference for PURITY (keeping sameness in one's group/affiliation): Arts and Humanities students scored significantly HIGHER than all others

- - **Arts and humanities majors** (EMM = 26.92, SE = .85) scored significantly higher than did the **business majors** (EMM = 21.04, SE = .56,  $p < .001$ ), - **Social sciences majors** (EMM = 21.85, SE = .43,  $p < .001$ ), and **STEM/Health-related majors** (EMM = 21.78, SE = .44,  $p < .001$ ).



## Preference for AUTHORITY (Respect for tradition/those in authority): Arts and Humanities students scored significantly HIGHER than most other groups.

- students in the **arts and humanities majors** (EMM = 24.68, SE = .71) scored significantly higher than did **business majors** (EMM = 21.06, SE = .47,  $p = .004$ ), **social sciences majors** (EMM = 21.66, SE = .36,  $p < .001$ ), and **STEM/Health-related majors** (EMM = 22.09, SE = .37,  $p < .004$ ).
- No other significant differences



## TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

Assessment of students' moral preferences may improve the ability of advisors to suggest possible majors .

## DISCUSSION

- Students in **some college major categories** seem to have **different moral preferences** than do those in other categories.
- These preferences are consistent with differing values in different careers.
- Future research should consider ways in which to **add measures of moral preferences** to the standard measures of personality and career interests to better advise students for college major choice.

## References

- Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B. A. (2009). Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96, 1029–1046.
- Gillis, A. & Ryberg, R. (2021). Is choosing a major choosing a career or interesting courses? An investigation into college students' orientations for college majors and their stability, *Journal of Postsecondary Student Success* 1(2), 2021, 46-71.