

Hope College

Hope College Digital Commons

19th Annual Celebration of Undergraduate
Research and Creative Activity (2020)

Celebration of Undergraduate Research and
Creative Activity

4-17-2020

Understanding Moral Foundations: Gender, Politics, and Religion Within a Sample of First Year Pre-health Students

Grace Hannah
Hope College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/curca_19



Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Repository citation: Hannah, Grace, "Understanding Moral Foundations: Gender, Politics, and Religion Within a Sample of First Year Pre-health Students" (2020). *19th Annual Celebration of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity (2020)*. Paper 16.

https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/curca_19/16

April 17, 2020. Copyright © 2020 Hope College, Holland, Michigan.

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the Celebration of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity at Hope College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in 19th Annual Celebration of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity (2020) by an authorized administrator of Hope College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.

Understanding Moral Foundations: Gender, Politics, and Religion within a sample of first year pre-health students

Grace Hannah and Aaron B. Franzen, Ph.D. | Department of Sociology and Social Work

1. Introduction

Purpose

One's moral foundation impacts the way one goes about and behaves in the social world. But what does moral foundation consist of and how do people develop emphasis on different ones? I chose to focus on gender, religious affiliation, and political affiliation for this research.

Past research has shown that people who consider themselves to be liberal rely on the moral foundations of harm and fairness, while those who identify as conservative tend to lean on the in-group, authority, and purity moral foundations (Day, M. V., Fiske, S. T., Downing, E. L., & Trail, T. E., 2014).

Past research has also concluded that women score significantly higher than men on the harm, fairness, and purity moral foundations, with men only slightly scoring higher than women on in-group and authority (Graham, J., Nosek, B. A., Haidt, J., Iyer, R., Koleva, S., & Ditto, P. H., 2011).

Background

Moral Foundations Theory was created by a group of social psychologists who were interested in trying to understand why people's morality changes so much cross-culturally, however recurrent themes and similarities remain very present. In order to clarify and study this, they separated the moral foundations into five measurable categories: harm, fairness, in-group/loyalty, authority, and purity/sanctity (Moral Foundations Theory).

Breaking down the five moral foundations in order to fully comprehend them, they each serve a certain purpose in explaining similarities within cultures while controlling for the culturally specific morals. Harm is meant to examine our capacity as humans for kindness and gentleness towards others, fairness looks at people's feelings towards justice and autonomy, in-group focuses on the emotions of pride and loyalty to their group, authority takes a look at leadership and humans interactions with hierarchical structures, and finally purity is shaped by the idea that the human body is a "temple" that may be damaged by immoral actions (Moral Foundations Theory).

In past research regarding gender, it was shown that education and culture do not impact moral judgement, however the cognitive-emotional processes in men and women are the primary differentiations (Fumagalli, et. al, 2009). For religiosity, the noticeable differentiation is the high self-reports of prosocial behavior and subsequent high moral foundations, yet previous data concluded that prosociality and religiosity are uncorrelated (Shariff, 2015).

There have been studies conducted and published that examine the Moral Foundations of students in medical school, however not of undergraduates interested in the health field. To identify the ways in which this population's moral foundations shift, we wanted to begin studying them at a younger age.

2. Methods and Data

Our survey consisted of 143 Hope College freshman students who indicated their interest in a health related major from an initial survey before they came to Hope. In order to measure the 5 moral foundations (Harm, Authority, Ingroup, Fairness, and Purity), we took questions 13 and 14 and separated them using the formula from the creators of the Moral Foundation Theory to create the categories.

With regards to the variables used, all of the religions are being compared to Evangelicals. The 'Other religions' variable includes all religions in which the respondent inserted his or her own religion outside of the options listed. Respondents were asked to identify their religious groups and Protestants were then split into Mainline and Evangelical.

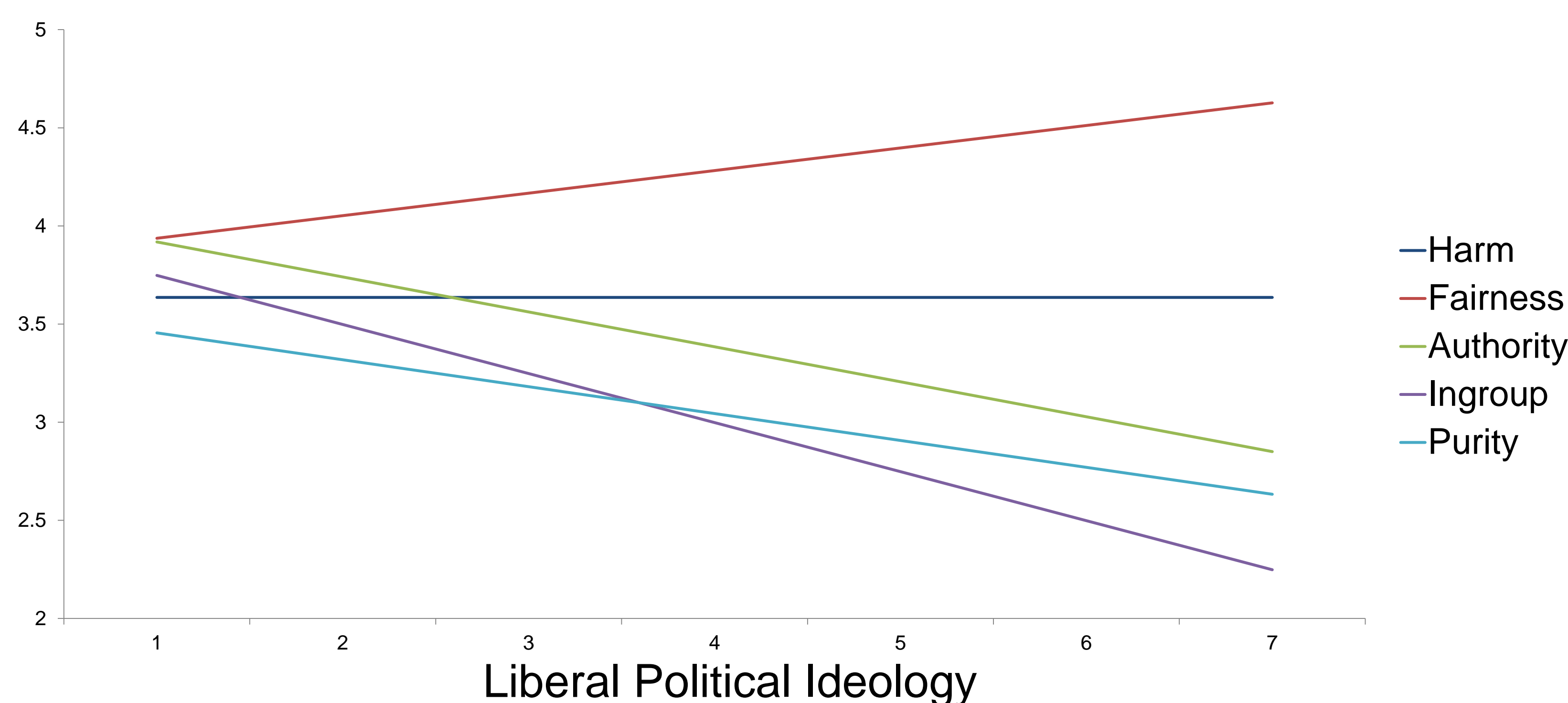
Political Ideology is how liberal people view themselves with a scale from 'extremely conservative' to 'extremely liberal'. Same Rel Beliefs had students assess if they view themselves as having the same religious beliefs as their Hope peers. Compared Religiosity is how religious other students seem in comparison to themselves, Attend Rel Service outside of on-campus services, Attend Chapel, Changed Major, and Gender are our other variables.

	Range	Mean/%	Std. Deviation
Harm	1 - 6.5	3.84	0.75
Fairness	1 - 6.5	3.92	0.77
Authority	1 - 6.5	3.31	0.80
Ingroup	1 - 6.5	3.22	0.91
Purity	1 - 6.5	3.10	0.89
Agnostic	0,1	1%	
Atheist	0,1	1%	
Eastern Orthodox	0,1	3%	
Evangelical	0,1	38%	
Mainline	0,1	23%	
Male	0,1	34%	
Mormon	0,1	5%	
Other	0,1	1%	
Attend Rel Service	1 - 9	5.87	2.25
Changed Major	0,1	27%	
Political Liberalism	1 - 7	3.55	1.47
Same Rel Beliefs	1 - 10	6.60	1.70
Roman Catholics	0,1	24%	
Compared Religiosity	-5 - 5	-0.87	2.07
Attend Chapel	0,1	63%	

	Harm	Fairness	Authority	Ingroup	Purity
	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>
Other religions ^a	1.248	1.088	0.578	0.29	-0.378
Mainline ^a	0.119	-0.034	-0.125	-0.196	-0.035
Agnostic ^a	0.044	0.502	-0.134	0.598	0.033
Atheist ^a	1.165	0.55	-0.338	-1.736 *	1.217
Mormon ^a	0.138	0.6 *	-0.357	0.132	-0.312
Eastern Orthodox ^a	0.033	0.246	-1.152 ***	-0.11	0.01
Roman Catholic ^a	-0.012	0.094	-0.368 *	-0.038	-0.305
Male	-0.169	-0.151	0.125	0.249	0.072
Political Liberalism	0.051	0.115 *	-0.178 ***	-0.25 ***	-0.137 **
Same Rel Beliefs	-0.02	-0.032	-0.037	-0.03	0.009
Compared Religiosity	0.063	0.07	0.060	-0.027	0.08
Attend Rel Service	0.019	0.002	0.074 *	0.062	0.02
Attend Chapel	0.15	-0.122	-0.271 *	-0.059	-0.109
Changed Major	0.008	0.084	0.156	-0.174	0.117

Note: $p < .001 = ***$; $p < .01 = **$; $p < .05 = *$; a=Evangelical is comparison

Figure 1: Chart for Moral Foundations based on Liberal Political Ideology



3. Results

We concluded that the most impactful variable was Political liberalism. This was shown to be significant in every Moral Foundation except Harm.

The variable, Atheist, was also found to be significant for In-group in this study. This makes sense for freshman pre-health students at since it is a Christian college with a majority of its students identifying as members of the Christian faith. Therefore, people who are Atheists are -1.679 less likely to think of themselves as part of the in-group than Evangelicals.

Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox were both significant with Authority with Roman Catholic students being -0.381 less likely to focus on hierarchical structures than their Evangelical counterparts and Eastern Orthodox individuals being -1.152 less likely to think value Authority. With this moral foundation, people are making choices based on that idea of hierarchical importance, which fits with Evangelicals as they are more likely to maintain established societal roles.

Both Attend Rel Service and Attend Chapel were significant with Authority. With regards to attending religious services, it was 0.074 more likely that they rely on Authority and for attending Hope Chapel, they were -0.263 less likely to rely or value on Authority.

As represented in Figure 1, when liberal political ideology increases, fairness increases but authority, in-group, and purity all decrease. Harm is not significant and therefore represented by a horizontal line. This means that the more someone identifies as Conservative with regards to politics, the more likely they are to have strong Ingroup, Authority, and Purity moral foundations.

4. Discussion

Over all of the moral foundations examined in this study, there were higher levels than anticipated for this population. This is most likely due to the age of the respondents and their current stage in life, as they were incoming college freshman and, at least for the majority of the sample, it is their first time living away from home. We expect that these will all decrease as their time on the pre-health track continues and they grow older. Authority, specifically, is very high at this point in time because the respondents came to Hope most likely from their parents or guardians' homes where there were stricter rules and regulations in place. We imagine that the overall constant responses will lower as they continue throughout college and especially in medical school if they choose this path.

5. Thoughts for the Future

In another possible future survey, it would be interesting to include a question regarding one's race to see if that would be a control variable which would impact the data. Especially with Hope having a predominantly white population, it would be intriguing to see if the Moral Foundations of college freshmen interested in a health profession is different when controlling for race.

Another compelling factor could be knowing how students' parents would respond to questions on religious affiliation, church attendance, and political ideology. Generally, children commonly share morals with their parents, at least until they depart from the family home. I would be interested to see how quickly, if at all, college students shy away from the views their parents hold.

6. Literature Cited

(Day, M. V., Fiske, S. T., Downing, E. L., & Trail, T. E. (2014). Shifting liberal and conservative attitudes using moral foundations theory. *PubMed Central*. doi: 10.1177/0146167214551152).

(Fumagalli, M., Ferrucci, R., Marnelli, F., Marcegaglia, S., Mrakic-Sposta, S., Zago, S., ... Priori, A. (2009). Gender-related differences in moral judgments. *Cognitive Processing*, 11(3), 219-226. doi: 10.1007/s10339-009-0335-2).

(Graham, J., Nosek, B. A., Haidt, J., Iyer, R., Koleva, S., & Ditto, P. H. (2011). Mapping the moral domain. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 101(2), 366-385. doi:10.1037/a0021847).

Moral Foundations Theory. (2019). Retrieved November 29, 2019, from <https://moralfoundations.org/>.

(Shariff, A. F. (2015). Does religion increase moral behavior? *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 6, 108-113. doi: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.07.009)