

Finding the Fit: Undergraduate Identity and Career Pathways

Gisele Garcia, Noah Ramby, Lauren Lauzon with Dr. Aleksandra Zimmerman

Abstract

This study examines how identity shapes undergraduate students' major choice, career development, and post-graduate pathways. While professions are working to diversify, they still lack a clear understanding of how social and cultural identity influence economic outcomes such as major choice, access to opportunities, and career trajectories. Findings aim to inform educators, students, and employers seeking to strengthen career development support and improve transitions into the workforce. With our data, we can pursue avenues to help diversify different professions and destroy the barriers holding undergraduate students back.

Using survey data, our research explores patterns in major choice, career preparation experiences, and perceived support to better understand inequities in professional pathways. The survey questions are not based on a particular hypothesis but rather meant to reveal patterns that can explain why undergraduates do or do not make choices in their careers. To garner data, our team built a survey using Qualtrics, based on a foundational survey geared toward professionals in established career paths, created by our research mentor, Dr. Zimmerman, and her team. Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive and comparative methods to identify patterns, inequities, and differences between groups. Thus far, we were able to have 180 complete responses to our survey from undergraduate students at different institutions across the US. Results revealed patterns in major choice related to social identity.

Objectives

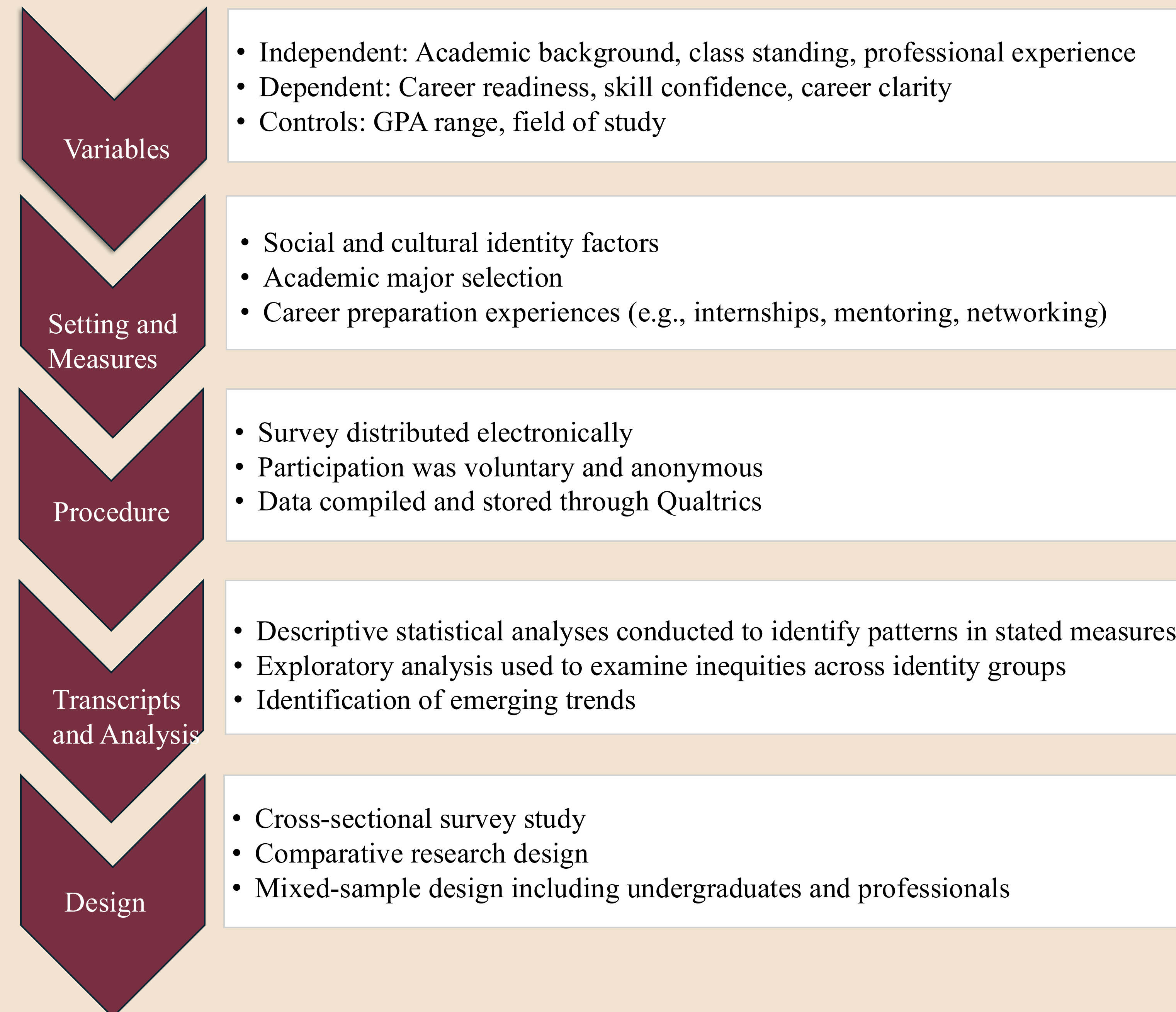
- To examine how social and cultural identity influence undergraduate students' academic major selection.
- To identify patterns in career preparation experiences (e.g., internships, mentoring, networking) across identity groups.
- To explore differences in perceived institutional and social support related to career development.
- To analyze how identity relates to post-graduate plans and career aspirations.
- To uncover potential inequities in professional pathways among undergraduate students.
- To generate data that can inform educators, institutions, and employers in strengthening career development support systems.
- To provide foundational insights that support efforts to diversify professions and reduce structural barriers in career advancement.

References

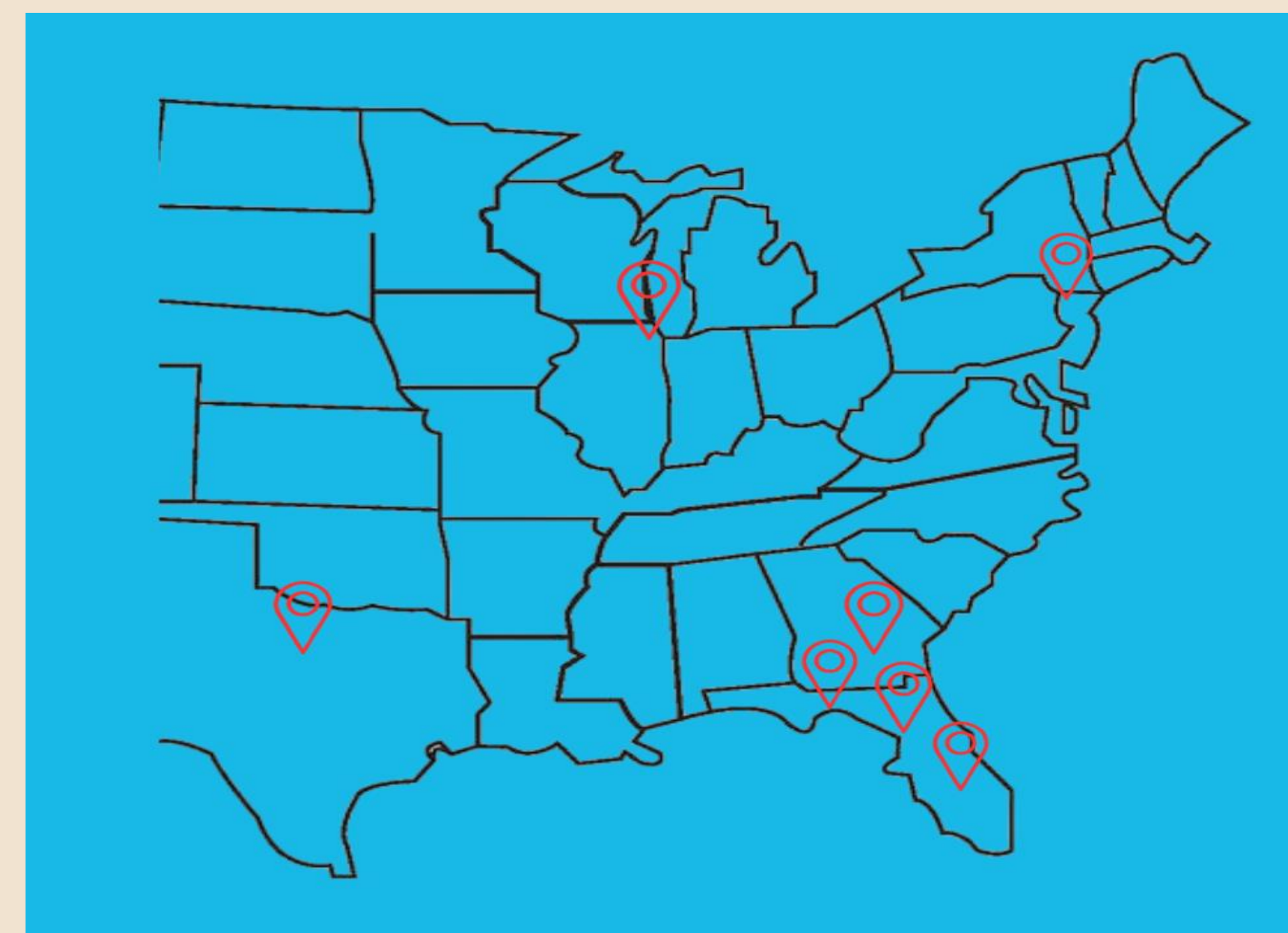
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Methods



Responses (Demographics)



- Florida State University- 96 Responses
- Rutgers University- 32 Responses
- DePaul University- 57 Responses,
- University of Florida- 1 Response
- University of Central Florida- 1 Response
- Abilene Christian University- 1 Response
- Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College- 1 Response

FIG. 1. Map of United States with location markers for each participating University.

How important are the following qualities in a job or career?

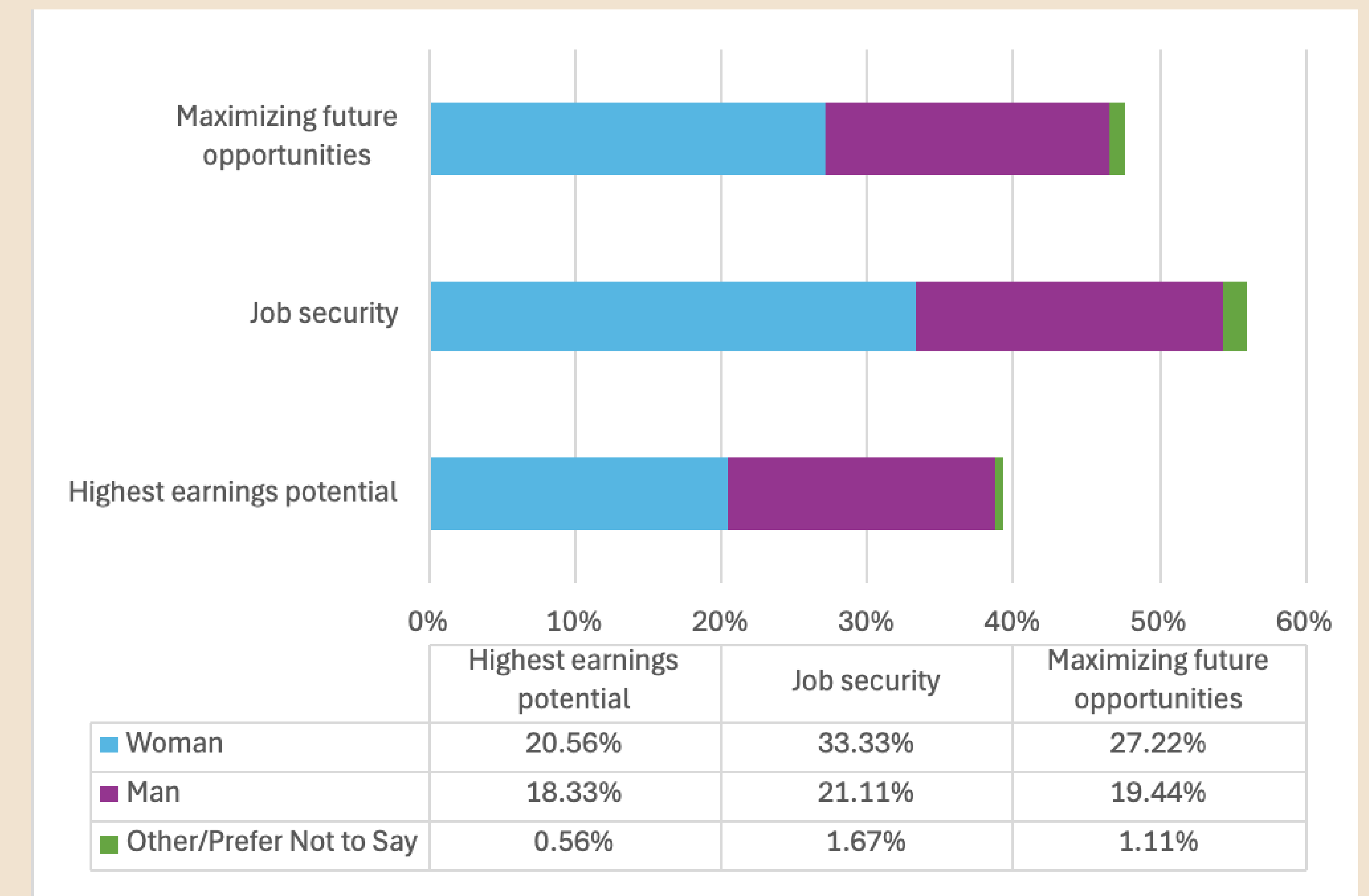


FIG. 2. Gender differences in the perceived importance of key career priorities. Across groups, job security received the highest ratings for "Extremely Important", with similar patterns observed for maximizing future opportunities and earnings potential.

Results & Conclusion

This study examined how social and cultural identity relate to undergraduate students' academic major selection, career preparation experiences, perceived institutional and social support, and post-graduate plans. The data succeeds in identifying related patterns across identity groups, as exemplified in Figure 1.

These takeaways are preliminary and are not a summation of the research as a whole:

- Research is ongoing to gather a broader range of responses from undergraduates across the US.
- There is sufficient data to find patterns in how identities impact career pathways.
- Preliminary findings indicate variation across identity categories in major selection priorities, access to internships and mentorship, perceived support systems, and post-graduate intentions.
- Additional analysis and expanded sampling will further clarify these observed patterns.
- Limits of our research involved the large amount of time and effort required to utilize the data.

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Sincerely yours,
Lauren Lauzon, Gisele Garcia, and Noah Ramby
Florida State University Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program Students