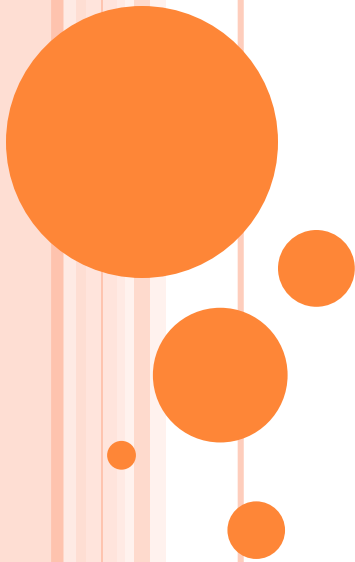


The School of Natural and Behavioral Sciences
UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM
APRIL 19, 2012 – FORT LEWIS COLLEGE

DEATH & PUNISHMENT: ENTER COMPASSION, BUT TOWARD WHOM?

Norcross, K. E., Burke, B. L., & Kraus, S. (2012).
FLC Department of Psychology.

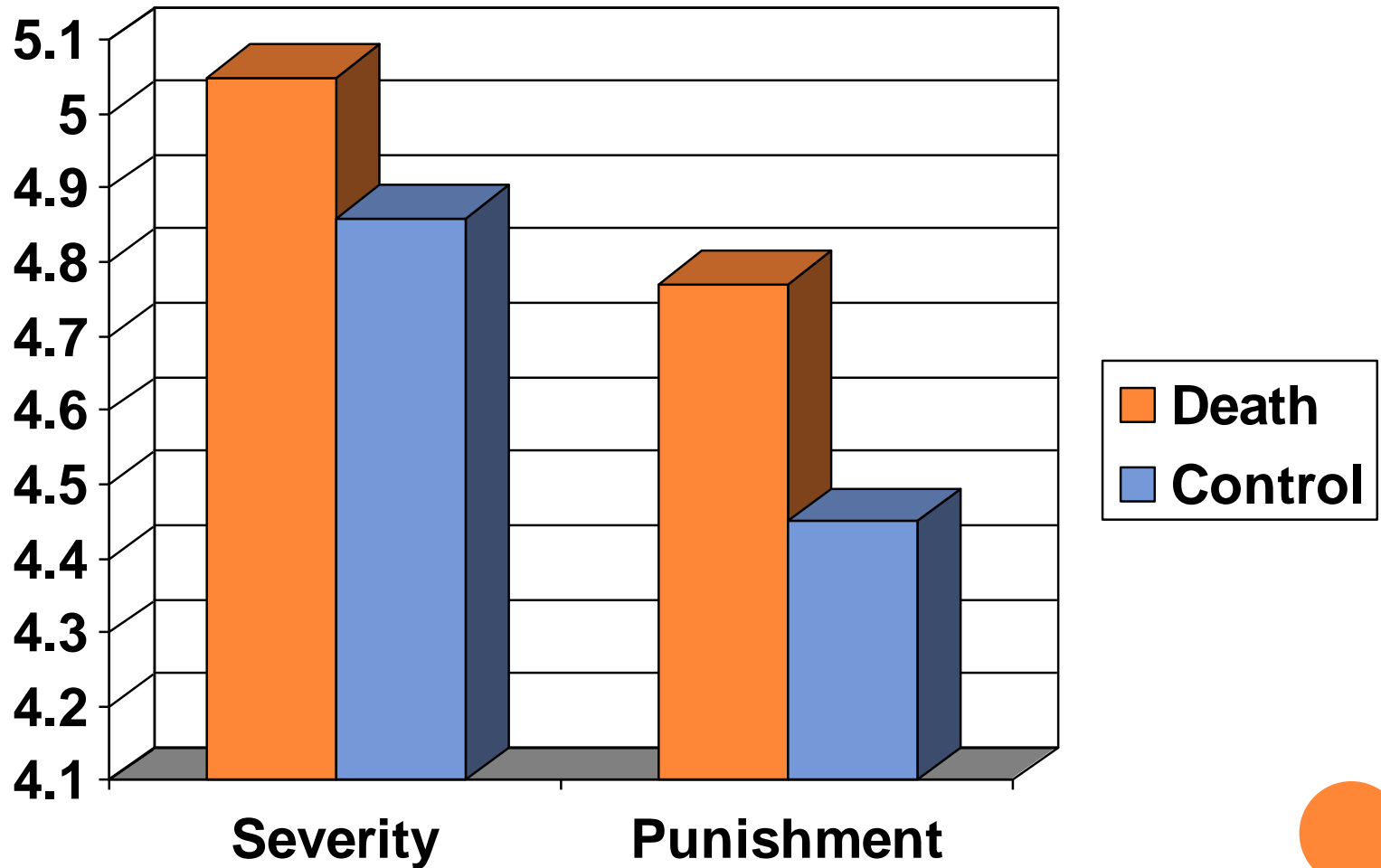


FLORIAN ET AL. (1997) EXPERIMENT

- Method:
 - 190 Israeli college students (98 women, 92 men)
- Experimental Group:
Took FPDS (Florian & Kravetz, 1983), a self-report scale that taps 31 reasons for fear of personal death
- Control Group: No death survey
- Rated severity of crimes & punishments via interpersonal vignettes (MSTS)
- What do you predict happened? Who wanted more severe punishments?



FLORIAN ET AL. (1997)

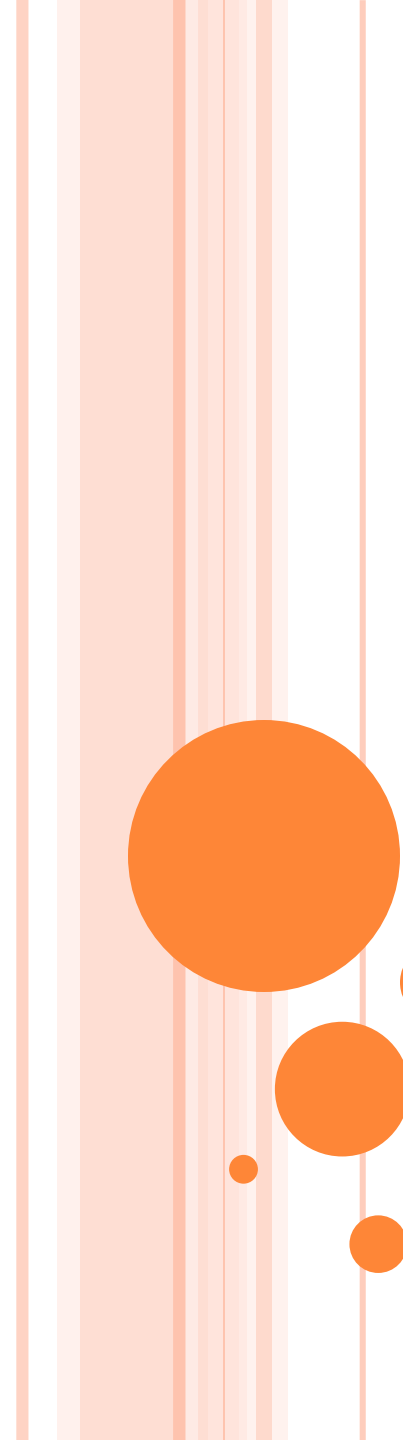


WITH 2-3 OF YOUR NEIGHBORS...

- Discuss possible explanations for these empirical results:
- WHY did people recommend higher punishments for crimes in the “death reminder” condition vs. the control?







“The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity - designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny of humans.”

● – Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death

BURKE, MARTENS, & FAUCHER (2010)

- 300+ experiments in 10+ countries have shown that death reminders cause increases in ($r=.35$):
 - bias against those of different religion or gender (Greenberg et al., 1990; Fritzsche & Jonas, 2005)
 - desire to have children (Wisman & Goldenberg, 2005)
 - emphasis on physical appearance & dieting for women (Goldenberg et al., 2000, 2005)
 - materialism & greed (Kasser & Sheldon, 2000)
 - belief in afterlife & supernatural (Vail et al., 2010)
 - positive ratings of romantic partners (Florian, 2002)
 - charitable donations and helping (Hirschberger, 2010)
- 

COULD COMPASSION CHANGE THESE RESULTS?

- Trait vs. State compassion
- TRAIT compassion: SOFI scale (designed by FLC Psychology Professors Drs. Sue Kraus and Sharon Sears)
- STATE compassion: 3-minute youtube video clip about kids living in poverty




METHODS

○ **Participants**

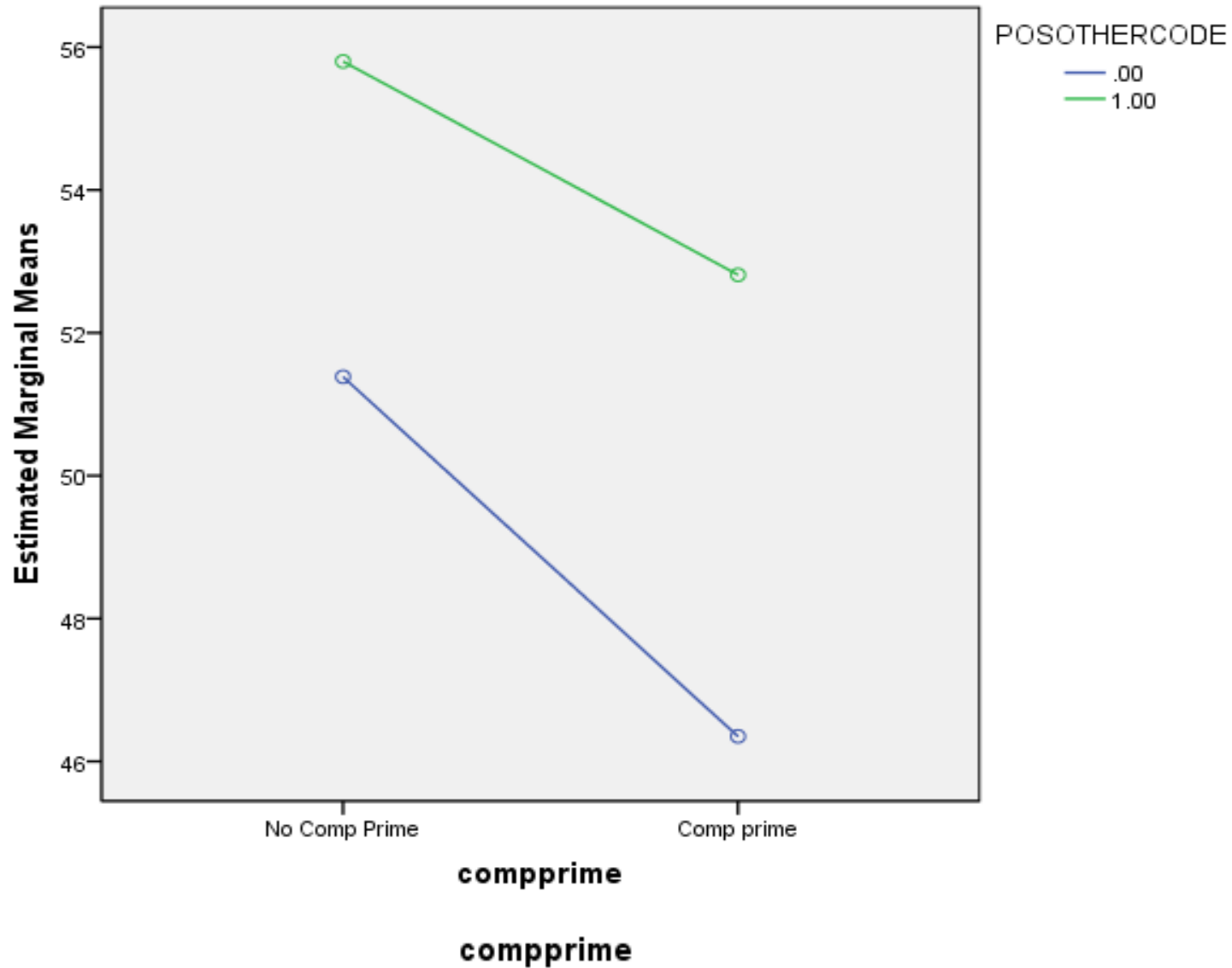
- 54 total FLC students from two Intro to Psychology classes
- 31 women, 23 men
- 20 years old (age mean)

○ **Procedure**

- Basic information
 - Self-Other Four Immeasurables (SOFI) scale
 - (example: friendly toward myself, angry toward others, *scale from 1 [very slightly] to 7 [extremely])
 - In each class half got a death prime ["Describe the emotions that the thought of your death arouses in you"] while the other half were asked about dental pain (control group).
 - One class got the compassion prime (video of kids living in poverty) and the other class did not.
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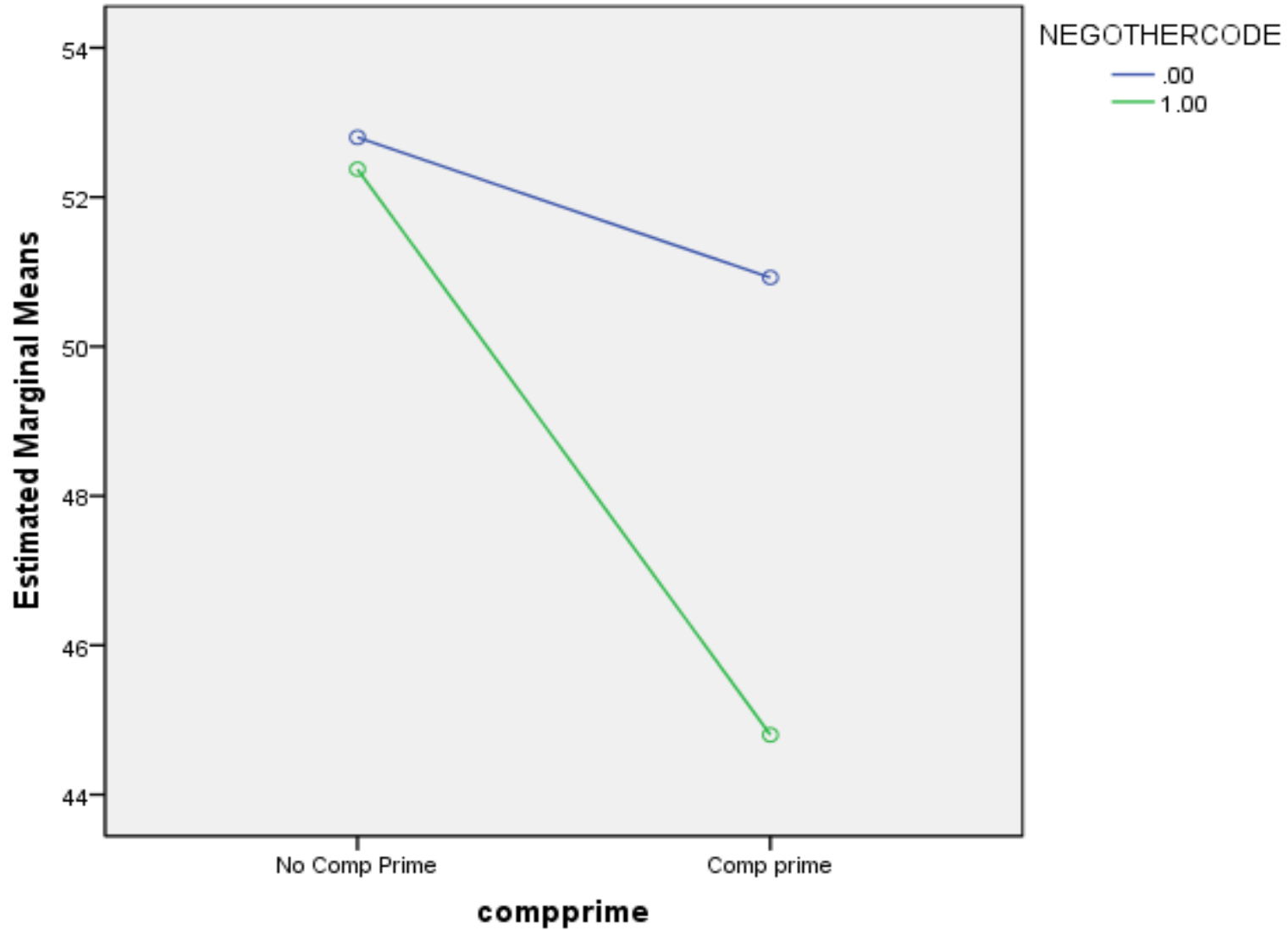
RESULTS

Estimated Marginal Means of mtstotb



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Estimated Marginal Means of mtstotb



DISCUSSION

- People with higher compassion (SOFI) scores overall may be more compassionate toward the VICTIMS of crimes and therefore endorse higher punishments
 - The “state” manipulation of compassion (video of kids living in poverty) may have changed participants’ perspective on bad things.
 - i.e., “maybe theft isn’t so bad” in light of all the poor children in the world → reduced punishment for criminals
 - Compassion: Real world implications. What impact can state compassion have on judges and juries in our legal system?
- 