

RUNNING HEAD: IMPLICIT PURITANISM

Implicit Puritanism in American Moral Cognition

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## Abstract

Three studies provide evidence that the judgments and behaviors of contemporary Americans are implicitly influenced by traditional Puritan-Protestant values regarding work and sex. American participants were less likely to display traditional values regarding sexuality when implicitly primed to deliberate, as opposed to intuition and neutral primes. British participants made judgments reflecting liberal sexual values regardless of prime condition (Study 1). Implicitly priming words related to divine salvation led Americans, but not Canadians, to work harder on an assigned task (Study 2). Moreover, work and sex values appear linked in an overarching American ethos. Asian-Americans responded to an implicit work prime by rejecting revealing clothing and sexually charged dancing, but only when their American identity was first made salient (Study 3). These effects were just as strong among non-Protestant and less religious Americans as among devout American Protestants.

The United States of America is a country—like all other countries—bound inexorably to its roots. Today, a wide variety of societal achievements (economic power) as well as stumbling blocks (discord in interracial relations) can be traced to events in the last four hundred years of American history. The roots of the America we currently know are firmly planted in the soil of some of the earliest and most influential Americans—a zealous group of Puritan-Protestants, who intended to create an inherently spiritual nation, envisioning it as a land of purity and spiritually righteous people (Fisher, 1989; McNeil, 1954; Weber, 1904/1958).

Since the inception of the first New England colonies, both Protestant work values (views on work and salvation articulated by John Calvin), and the pursuit of piety through sexual purity, have been at the forefront of American culture (Landes, 1998; Sanchez-Burks, 2002). This primacy is abetted by links between the two systems of belief. A disdain for worldly sexual pleasure complements norms against spending hard earned capital.

The present research suggests the implicit influence of traditional values regarding work and sex still lingers in American minds (Sanchez-Burks, 2002, 2005; Uhlmann, Poehlman, & Bargh, in press). We hypothesize that by virtue of living in American culture, most Americans are implicitly (and distinctly, relative to members of other cultures) affected by these belief systems, wherein the ethics of sexual purity and work have been combined into a more overarching American ethos. These predictions are based on America's cultural history (Fisher, 1989; McNeil, 1954) and theories of implicit social cognition (Dijksterhuis & Bargh, 2001; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995).

*America's unique cultural history*

Almost as a rule, wealth and democracy engender secular, less traditional values (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Because historically Protestant countries industrialized and became wealthy prior to other cultures, they were also the first to secularize and are today among the world's *least* traditional societies (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). The major exception is the United States, which remains deeply religious and traditional in key respects. Data from the World Values Survey indicates that 96% percent of contemporary Americans believe in God, compared to 68% of Germans and 53% of Swedes (Inglehart, Basáñez, Díez-Medrano, Halman, & Luijkx, 2004). Seventy-five percent of Americans believe in the devil, compared to twenty percent of Germans and ten percent of Swedes (Inglehart et al., 2004). More than half of contemporary Americans are fundamentalists who believe the universe was created less than 10,000 years ago (Harris, 2006). As Wald (1987) points out, over half of Americans say that religion is extremely important to them personally (i.e., a "10" on a ten-point scale), but based on economic development alone, the prediction would have been that only *five percent* of Americans would see religion as so central to their lives.

One reason for this disparity is America's unique cultural heritage as a nation founded, to no small degree, by Puritan Protestants fleeing religious persecution. A self-selection process, in which especially devout Protestants left England to settle in the New World, helps explain the persistent prominence of religion in American life (Bellow, 2003; Fisher, 1989). While the early English settlers were followed by others pursuing economic goals, it was the devout Protestants who laid the foundation of American culture. Because religiously devout settlers got in on the "ground-floor" of a new society,

they exerted an enormous influence over what eventually became the American creed. Persistently high rates of religiosity in turn help explain why contemporary Americans report such surprisingly traditional values regarding work and sexuality on international surveys (Baker, 2005; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). As we will argue, the implicit cognitions of contemporary Americans are especially likely to reflect traditional Puritan-Protestant morality.

*Implicit social cognition*

Recent empirical advances indicate that many of our social judgments are determined by causes far removed from awareness (Dijksterhuis & Bargh, 2001; Epstein, 1994; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Haidt, 2001; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Wegner & Bargh, 1998; Wilson, 2002). People evaluate social targets not only at an explicit (i.e., deliberative and conscious) level, but also at an implicit (i.e., intuitive, automatic) level.<sup>1</sup> Importantly, implicit and explicit attitudes can diverge sharply, and implicit attitudes are highly sensitive to the cultural context (Devine, 1989). Implicit mental processes are often based on simple associations, which are readily learned from the environment (Olson & Fazio, 2001). As a result, even individuals who do not consciously endorse prevailing cultural attitudes nonetheless seem to internalize them at an implicit, intuitive level.

For example, individuals who consciously reject gender stereotypes nonetheless exhibit an implicit association between the concepts Male and Career, along with Female and Family (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). Without drawing any moral comparison between religion and social stereotyping, we suggest that traditional American religious values similarly influence the judgments and behaviors of

contemporary Americans. We further predict that Catholics, other non-Protestants, and even individuals who are not religious are susceptible to the implicit influence of America's Puritan-Protestant heritage. This is based in part on prior research indicating both children and adults implicitly absorb their local culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001; Sperber, 1985). Consistent with these ideas, the social intuitionist model (Haidt, 2001) proposes that moral judgments and behaviors are typically intuitive rather than reasoned, and culturally socialized rather than individually chosen.

Another key feature of implicit attitudes and beliefs is that they obey the principle of cognitive balance (Greenwald et al., 2002; Heider, 1958). Heider's (1958) Balance Theory proposes that attitudes towards multiple targets shift to remain consistent with each other. For example, if Larry likes Sue, and Sue likes folk music, Larry's attitudes towards folk music should shift in a positive direction to remain consistent (i.e., achieve balance) with his positive attitude toward Sue. Recent empirical investigations indicate implicit attitudes are if anything *more* likely than explicit attitudes to exhibit balance (Greenwald et al., 2002). For example, to the extent women implicitly associate themselves with the category Female, and associate the category Female with Humanities (as opposed to Math), they are significantly more likely to associate themselves with Humanities than with Math.

This leads to the prediction that Americans implicitly link traditional values regarding work and sex. As a consequence of America's cultural heritage, not only sexuality, but also hard work falls into the moral/religious domain. Historically, both sex and work values are closely linked to American cultural identity (Fisher, 1989; Landes,

1998; McNeil, 1954; Weber, 1904/1958). These common links with morality, divine salvation, and cultural identity may bind work and sex morality into an overarching American ethos. If so, among Americans, implicitly priming work values should activate traditional sex values and vice versa.

### *The present research*

The present studies investigated the influence of traditional Puritan-Protestant work and sex values on the judgments and behaviors of contemporary Americans. Study 1 tested the hypothesis that American participants would be more likely to exhibit traditional values regarding sex in an intuitive than a deliberative mindset. Study 2 examined whether implicitly priming words related to divine salvation would lead Americans, but not Canadians, to perform better on an assigned work task. Study 3 examined whether implicitly priming the ethic of hard work would lead bicultural Asian-Americans to reject revealing clothing and sexually charged dancing, but only when their American identity was first made salient.

### Study 1

Study 1 tested the hypothesis that Americans intuitively condemn sexual promiscuity, and further that their intuitive judgments about sex are more traditional than their deliberative judgments. Americans and a comparison sample of British participants were implicitly primed with words related to intuition, deliberation, or neutral concepts using a scrambled sentence task (Srull & Wyer, 1979). These primed concepts were designed to put participants in either an intuitive, deliberative, or baseline mindset. Subsequently, participants read about a young woman who revealed to her boyfriend that she was either promiscuous or a virgin. We expected that American participants primed

with deliberation would report relatively less negative evaluations of the sexually promiscuous target (relative to the virgin) than American participants primed with words related to intuition or neutral words. Based on prior survey results indicating low levels of religiosity and endorsement of traditional attitudes (Inglehart et al., 2004), British participants were expected to exhibit liberal attitudes towards sexuality regardless of prime condition. Consistent with the social intuitionist model (Haidt, 2001), which proposes that people's moral judgments are usually intuitive, we expected no difference between the intuition prime and baseline conditions.

### Method

59 American and 259 British participants took part in the study. The study employed a 2 (nationality: American or British) x 3 (prime condition: deliberation, intuitive, or neutral) between subjects design.

Participants were primed using a scrambled-sentence task (Srull & Wyer, 1979). For each of the 12 scrambled sentences, participants were presented with five words—four of which comprised a viable sentence—in a nonsense order. They were instructed to unscramble these words to make a viable sentence (while ignoring the one word that did not belong). In the deliberation prime condition, 8 of the 12 scrambled sentences contained a word relevant to deliberation: *control*, *deliberately*, *brain*, *rational*, *objective*, *logic*, *thoughtful*, and *reasoning*. In the intuition prime condition, 8 of the 12 scrambled sentences contained a word relevant to intuition: *intuition*, *emotional*, *feelings*, *automatic*, *inclinations*, *feels*, *instincts*, and *hunch*. In the neutral prime condition, the scrambled sentences contained neutral words (e.g., *gallons*, *chair*).



Participants next reported how much social respect a woman who revealed to her boyfriend that she was either 1) a virgin or 2) had had sex with five random men deserved ( $1 = do\ not\ respect\ at\ all$ ,  $9 = respect\ very\ much$ ). Participants were asked to make these judgments on three different dimensions: their own degree of respect for the woman, the extent to which the woman's boyfriend should respect her, and the extent to which the woman deserved to respect herself. These ratings were combined to form a scale of overall respect for the virgin relative to the promiscuous target ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

To examine whether the priming manipulation had any effects on participants' mood, they subsequently completed the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson & Clark, 1988). Next, a funneled debriefing (Bargh & Chartrand, 2000) was administered, composed of three questions designed to assess participants' awareness of the influence of the prime and their theory about how the prime may have influenced their responses.

Finally, participants reported demographic information, including their religion and the extent to which they considered themselves a religious person ( $1 = not\ at\ all\ religious$ ,  $7 = very\ religious$ ).

### Results & Discussion

An 2 x 3 ANOVA conducted on the differential respect index (virgin respect rating–promiscuous respect rating) revealed a significant effect of nationality,  $F(1, 308) = 5.43$ ,  $p = .02$ , prime condition,  $F(2, 308) = 6.41$ ,  $p = .002$ , and a significant interaction between nationality and prime condition,  $F(2, 308) = 4.49$ ,  $p = .012$ .

As seen in Figure 1, among Americans differences in respect for the virgin vs. promiscuous target emerged between the three priming conditions,  $F(2, 52) = 3.81$ ,  $p =$

.03. For Americans differences in respect were attenuated in the deliberative prime condition ( $M_{\text{difference}} = .62$ ,  $SD = 3.40$ ), when compared with the intuitive ( $M_{\text{difference}} = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 2.79$ ) and neutral prime ( $M_{\text{difference}} = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 3.37$ ) conditions. Further tests revealed a significant difference between the deliberative and intuitive conditions,  $t(32) = 2.49$ ,  $p = .02$ , as well as the deliberative and neutral conditions,  $t(34) = 2.36$ ,  $p = .02$ , but not between the intuitive and neutral conditions,  $t < 1$ . There were no effects on mood ( $F_s < 1$ ), and no participants thought they had been influenced by the sentence unscrambling task. The observed results were not moderated by participant religion (Protestant vs. non-Protestant) or religiosity,  $F_s < 1.70$ ,  $p_s > .19$ . Further, all significant effects remained statistically significant when Protestants ( $N = 16$ ) were removed from the analysis.

As seen in Figure 1, the comparison sample of British participants were less likely than American participants to evidence a bias against the promiscuous woman ( $M_{\text{difference}} = 1.54$  and  $2.56$ ,  $SD_s = 2.28$  and  $3.35$ , respectively). British participants reported similar attitudes towards the promiscuous target relative to the virgin across the three priming conditions,  $F < 1$ .

In sum, implicitly priming concepts related to deliberation (relative to neutral concepts and concepts related to intuition) led American participants to exhibit less negative responses to a promiscuous woman. British participants were less likely than Americans to display a bias against the promiscuous woman, and reported similar attitudes across the three prime conditions. These striking results provide evidence that Americans' have intuitive gut feelings about sex that are more in line with their Puritan-Protestant heritage than are their deliberative judgments.

## Study 2

Perhaps the most unique aspect of traditional Protestant beliefs is the link made between work and divine salvation. The influential Protestant theologian John Calvin believed that material success revealed that the individual was among God's chosen. While Protestants eventually did away with Calvin's doctrine of predestination, this emphasis on work as a source of divine salvation remained. Unlike religions such as Catholicism, which sanctioned the accumulation of capital, Protestantism promoted it. Non-Western cultures also did not share this ideological belief in the relation between material success and spiritual righteousness (Fukuyama, 1995; Landes, 1998).

In Study 2, American and Canadian participants were implicitly primed with either words related to divine salvation or equally positive but nonreligious words. We expected that American participants primed with salvation would subsequently perform better on an assigned work task. Contemporary America's unusual status as a devoutly religious Protestant country led to the prediction that participants from Canada, a historically Protestant but now comparatively secular culture, would not respond to the salvation prime by working harder.

As pointed out by Seymour Martin Lipset, one of the foremost scholars of American culture, differences between the attitudes and beliefs of Americans and Canadians provide some of the strongest evidence of American distinctiveness (Lipset, 1990, 1996). The United States and Canada are neighboring North American countries and 75% of the population in Canada is concentrated within 100 miles of the U.S.-Canada border (National Geographic Atlas of the World, 2004). Given shared borders, history, and media, it would be somewhat surprising if Canadians evidenced no

judgments or behaviors reflective of implicit Puritanism. Differing responses on a work task among American and Canadian participants primed with divine salvation would therefore provide compelling evidence that American attitudes towards work are special and distinctive.

### Method

108 American and 207 Canadian adults (mean ages = 31 and 35, respectively) were primed via a sentence unscrambling task (Srull & Wyer, 1979) with words related to salvation (e.g., *heaven, salvation, saved*) or non-religious words pre-tested as equal in valence. After receiving the sentence unscrambling manipulation, participants were presented with an anagram task in which they were to make as many 4-or-more letter words out of 4 different words as they could.

Previous research suggests that anagram performance is a valid operationalization of work (Chartrand, Dalton, & Fitzsimons, 2007). In one relevant study, participants primed with the name of a significant other who nagged them to work hard responded by performing *worse* on an anagram task (Chartrand et al., 2007). This suggests that participants perceive anagram tasks as a type of work task.

After the anagram task, participants completed the PANAS and funneled debriefing measures, and reported demographic information including their religion and religiosity.

### Results & Discussion

A significant nationality X prime condition interaction emerged,  $F(1, 312) = 4.05$ ,  $p < .05$ . As seen in Figure 2, American participants primed with salvation words solved more anagrams ( $M = 16.65$ ,  $SD = 12.74$ ) than did participants in the control condition ( $M$

= 12.37,  $SD = 8.20$ ),  $t(107) = 2.08$ ,  $p = .04$ . There were no effects on mood ( $F_s < 1$ ) and no participant thought they had been influenced by the sentence unscrambling task. For these American participants, the priming effect was not moderated by participant religion (Protestant vs. non-Protestant) or religiosity,  $F_s < 1.30$ ,  $p_s > .25$ . The effect of the salvation prime remained statistically significant when all Protestants ( $N = 14$ ) were removed from the analysis.

In contrast, Canadian participants evidenced no effect of prime condition on anagram performance ( $M_s = 10.25$ ,  $10.15$  and  $SD_s = 7.36$  and  $7.71$ , in the salvation and neutral prime conditions, respectively),  $F < 1$ .<sup>2</sup>

In sum, American participants primed with salvation appeared to have worked harder on the anagram task, as suggested by the greater number of anagrams they solved. Also consistent with expectations, Canadian participants did not respond to salvation primes with improved performance on the task.

### Study 3

As a consequence of America's Puritan-Protestant heritage, not only sexuality, but also hard work falls into the moral/religious domain. While many major religious faiths condemn sexual promiscuity, Protestantism is distinct in its characterization of hard work as a moral and religious calling (Weber, 1904/1958). Historically, both work and sex values are closely linked with American cultural identity (Fisher, 1989; Landes, 1998; McNeil, 1954; Weber, 1904/1958). Consistent with the principle of cognitive balance (Heider, 1958; Greenwald et al., 2002) these common links may bind work and sex morality into an overarching American ethos.

Study 3 tested the hypotheses that 1) priming work would activate traditional sex values, but that 2) an American versus Asian cultural identity would moderate this effect. Bicultural Asian-American participants were asked to complete a questionnaire highlighted either their Asian identity or their American identity (a manipulation developed by LeBoeuf, Shafir, & Belyavsky, 2002). Next, participants were implicitly primed with either words related to work or neutral concepts. We hypothesized that priming work would lead bicultural Asian-American participants to reject revealing clothing and sexually charged dancing, but only when they were first led to think of themselves as American.

#### Method

101 bicultural Asian-Americans participated in the study. The study employed a 2 (Asian identity vs. American identity activated) x 2 (work prime vs. neutral prime) between subjects design.

First, participants first completed an ostensive consumer survey designed to highlight either their Asian identity or their American identity. For example, one item asked participants to list either their favorite American movie or their favorite Asian movie (LeBoeuf et al., 2002).

Second, participants completed a scrambled sentences task designed to implicitly prime either work or neutral concepts. In the work prime condition, 8 of the 12 scrambled sentences included words related to work (e.g., *work, job*). In the neutral prime condition, the scrambled sentences contained words pre-tested as equivalent in valence to the work-related words.

Third, participants responded to two vignettes about sex norms interspersed among theoretically irrelevant vignettes. In the first sex norms scenario, a school principal canceled prom because of too much sexually dancing. In the second sex norms scenario, a school instituted a conservative dress policy prohibiting revealing clothing. Participants indicated whether they agreed with the actions taken by the principal and the school ( $1 = \text{strongly disagree}$ ,  $9 = \text{strongly agree}$ ). Responses to the two sexuality related vignettes were correlated ( $r = .65$ ) and averaged. (Results were the same when each scenario was examined separately.)

Finally, participants reported demographic information including their religion and religiosity.

### Results & Discussion

The predicted identity prime X work prime interaction emerged,  $F(1, 97) = 4.51$ ,  $p = .04$ . As seen in Figure 3, bicultural Asian-Americans whose American identity had been made salient were more likely to agree with policies prohibiting revealing clothing and sexually charged dancing when further primed with work ( $M = 5.68$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ) as opposed to neutral concepts ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ),  $t(50) = 3.81$ ,  $p < .001$ . Bicultural Asian-Americans asked questions which activated their Asian identity showed no difference in their attitudes regarding revealing clothing and sexually charged dancing between the work prime and neutral conditions ( $M = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 2.13$ ;  $M = 4.71$ ,  $SD = 2.21$ , respectively),  $t < 1$ . Participant religion (Protestant vs. non-Protestant) and religiosity did not moderate the observed effects,  $F_s < 1$ . Removing Protestants ( $N = 60$ ) from the analysis reduced the identity prime X work prime interaction to marginal

significance ( $p = .07$ ), but the effect of the work prime among participants primed with their American identity remained highly significant ( $p < .001$ ).

In sum, implicitly priming the ethic of hard work led bicultural Asian-American participants to condemn revealing clothing and sexually charged dancing, but only when their American identity had been made salient. This provides evidence that American work and sex values are linked at least in part due to their mutual association with American cultural identity. However, further empirical research is needed to directly assess whether the American moralization of work helps explain this phenomenon.

### General Discussion

The present studies shed new light on the underpinnings of American moral cognition and identify noteworthy differences between the United States and several comparison cultures. Specifically, they provide evidence that traditional Puritan-Protestant work and sex values continue to implicitly shape the judgments of contemporary Americans. Study 1 showed that American participants were less likely to display traditional values regarding sexuality when implicitly primed with deliberation, relative to American participants assigned to the neutral prime or intuition prime conditions. In contrast, British participants exhibited liberal values toward sexuality regardless of prime condition. Study 2 demonstrated that subtle priming of the concept of divine salvation led Americans, but not Canadians, to perform better on an assigned work task. Moreover, among Americans, work and sex values appear implicitly linked. Study 3 found that bicultural Asian-American participants responded to an implicit work prime by rejecting revealing clothing and sexually charged dancing, but only if their American identity was first made salient.



As predicted based on prior work on implicit social cognition, which indicates that most members of a culture implicitly internalize prevailing attitudes (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Haidt, 2001), non-Protestant and less religious Americans were as likely as devout American Protestants to exhibit effects associated with traditional work and sex values. This striking result supports the argument that America's Puritan-Protestant tradition has powerfully shaped the intuitive morality of American culture. It is exposure to American culture, and not necessarily devotion to a particular religion, that appears to underlie these phenomena.

Of course, there are important differences demonstrated in prior research between American Protestants and non-Protestants in domains like workplace norms and moral cognitions (Cohen, Siegel, & Rozin, 2003; Sanchez-Burks, 2002). The present results do not imply that there are no differences in the judgments of Protestants and non-Protestants. What they do show is that one does not have to be an American Protestant to exhibit judgments and behaviors consistent with traditional Puritan-Protestant values—one may only have to be an American.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> The term *implicit* is used to refer to cognitions that are intuitive, spontaneous, effortless, unintentional, uncontrollable, and/or unconscious (Bargh, 1994; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Wegner & Bargh, 1998; Wilson, 2002). However it is rare for all of these characteristics to occur together (Bargh, 1994). In the present article, we use the term implicit to refer to cognitions that are intuitive, spontaneous, effortless, and which do not require a conscious intention on part of the social perceiver in order to occur. But the social perceiver is in many cases consciously aware of her cognition (e.g., negative judgments of a promiscuous woman).

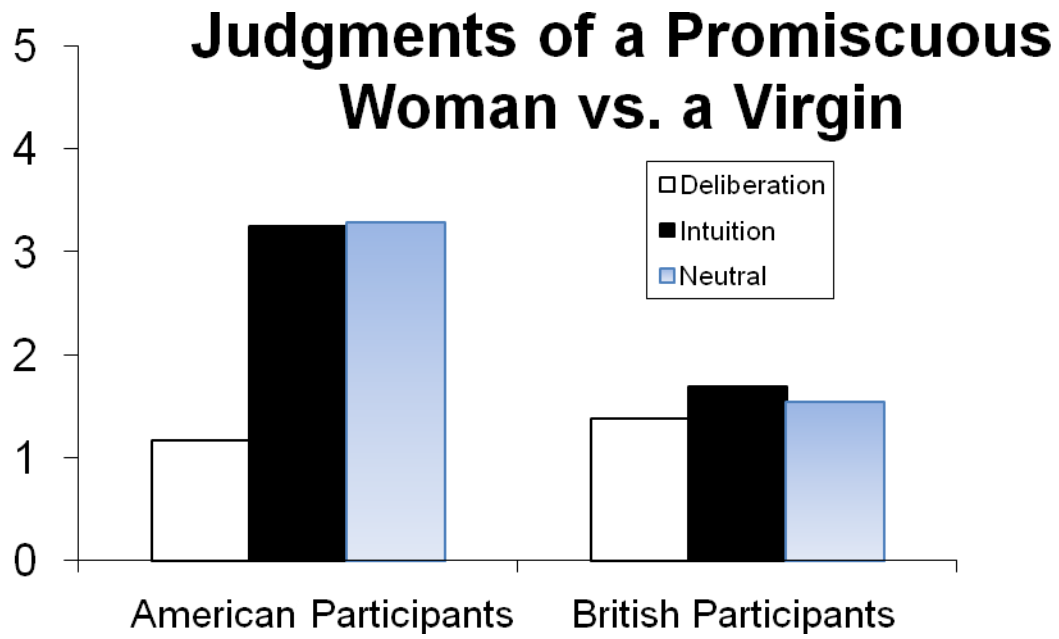
<sup>2</sup> Additional comparison samples of participants from Argentina, Germany, and Italy likewise evidenced no effect of the salvation prime on anagram performance, all  $F_s < 1$ . However, the sample sizes were small ( $20 < N_s < 40$ ), precluding conclusive statistical tests.

## Figure Captions

*Figure 1.* American and British participants' respect for the virgin vs. promiscuous woman in the deliberation prime, intuition prime, and neutral prime conditions. Higher numbers indicate relatively greater respect for the virgin than the promiscuous woman.

*Figure 2.* American and Canadian participants' anagram performance in the salvation and neutral prime conditions. Numbers indicate the total number of anagrams solved.

*Figure 3.* Asian-American participants' judgments of restrictive sexual policies after receiving either an American or Asian identity prime, and then a work prime or neutral prime. Higher numbers indicate approval of sexually restrictive policies.





## Anagram Performance

