



# Implicit Effects of Religious Priming on Prejudice and Prosocial Behavior



Jody Herrmann, Chance Boley, Cody Butcher, Baanu Jevanba, and Marina Eggen  
Faculty Mentor: Jeffrey Goodman; Department of Psychology, University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire

## Introduction

- The relationships between religion, prejudice and prosocial behavior are complex. Past research from our lab demonstrated that believers, compared to non-believers, evidenced higher prejudice toward Blacks, Muslims, gay and lesbian individuals, and women who have had an abortion. However, the only difference on a self-report measure of helping was toward the abortion rights group. (Butcher, DeLaPena, Selvanathan, & Goodman, 2013).
- In the present study, we aim to extend our consideration of the relationship between religion, prejudice and prosocial behavior, by tapping into unconscious or uncontrolled processes.
- Religious primes may increase prosociality for both believers and non-believers (e.g., Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007). However, the prosocial option we employed in the present study involves supporting a group (LGBT) that believers tend to evince higher prejudice toward than non-believers (e.g., Leak & Finken, 2011; Butcher et al., 2013).
- We predict that priming with religious concepts, compared to control concepts, will result in lower rates of support among believers, while non-believers' support will be unaffected by religious primes. Regardless of priming, we also anticipate non-believers to support the LGBT group more than believers.

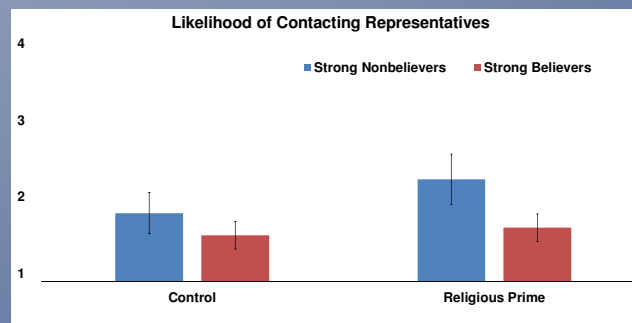
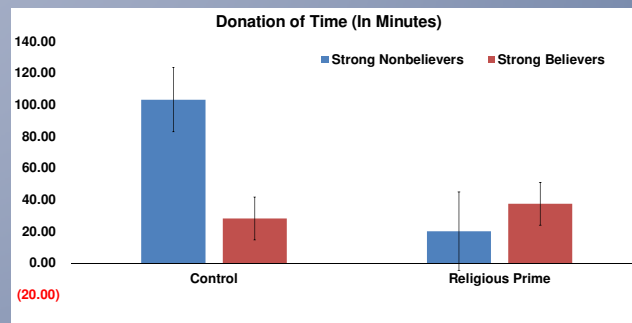
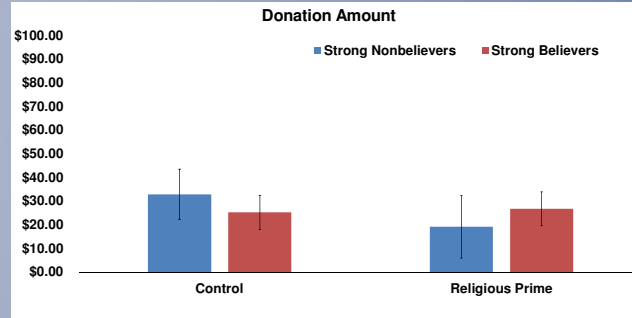
## Methods

### Participants

- N = 55 UWEC students (40 Strong Believers; 15 Strong Non-Believers; 70.91% Female) selected from a larger pool of participants.

### Procedure

- Participants signed-up for the study through the SONA system, and arrived to the lab at a timeslot during which they were scheduled.
- Participants completed a word recognition task, in which they were randomly assigned to either religious or control primes (Johnson, Rowatt, & LaBouff, 2010).
  - Participants decided if a letter-string was a word or non-word. Prior to each letter-string, a prime appeared in the foveal region for 30 ms immediately followed by back-mask (xxxx).
  - Control primes included: shirt, butter, switch, hammer, hat, broccoli, stage, and shoes.
  - Religious primes included: miracle, faith, belief, prayer, doctrine, shrine, scripture, and ritual.
- Next, participants were given information about the Human Rights Campaign and were asked about their likelihood of supporting the organization in various ways (donation of time, \$\$, willingness to sign a petition or call a representative, and to receive information regarding the HRC).
- Thereafter participants completed measures of religious orientation, belief in God, religious affiliation, empathy, political orientation, need for closure, and mood.
- Finally participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.



## Acknowledgements

- We would like to thank the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs for supporting this research.
- In addition we would like to thank LTS services for their assistance in printing this poster.

## Results

- A series of 2 (Prime: Religious vs. Control) × 2 (Belief: Strong Nonbeliever vs. Strong Believer) ANOVAs resulted in mixed support for our hypotheses.
- Donation Amount: Neither main effects nor the interaction were significant.
- Donation of Time: There was a main effect of belief indicating that strong nonbelievers reported a willingness to spend significantly more time calling potential donors than did strong believers.
- Calling Representatives: A marginal main effect of belief suggested that strong nonbelievers, compared to strong believers, reported a greater willingness to contact their local and state representatives to ask that they support the Human Rights Campaign.
- Chi-square analyses were conducted to determine potential differences in willingness (Yes/No) to have the researchers share participants contact information with the HRC, and willingness to sign a petition in support of the HRC.
- Contact Information: 40% of strong nonbelievers indicated they would like the researcher to share their information compared to 10% of strong believers,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.60, p < .01$ .
- Measures of conservatism, empathy, and need for closure were included because they have been found to be related to religious beliefs and prejudice toward various groups. We correlated these measures with our donation and prosocial actions variables.
  - Conservatism was negatively correlated with empathy,  $r = -.31, p < .023$ .
  - Conservatism was negatively correlated with willingness to donate time ( $r = -.28, p < .05$ ), contact representatives ( $r = -.28, p < .05$ ), and sign a petition ( $r = -.28, p < .05$ ), but positively associated with willingness to allow researchers to send their contact information to the HRC ( $r = .28, p < .05$ ).

## Conclusions

- Despite using conventional subliminal priming tactics, and with no participants reporting awareness of the primes, we failed to find any significant priming effects.
- While we did find support for our hypothesis that non-believers would be more likely to support a LGBT group, the study, specifically in regard to non-believer participants, was too underpowered for this design to make any definitive conclusions. A-priori power analyses indicated a per-cell sample size of 25 for 80% power to detect a medium effect size. We were only able to recruit a total of 15 nonbelievers.
- For future research, alternative methods of data collection could be utilized to obtain a larger and more diverse sample.
- We may also explore alternative stimuli to achieve a more effective religious prime.