Sexual Morality: The Cultures and Emotions of Conservatives and Liberals[1]

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Political conservatives and liberals were interviewed about 3 kinds of sexual acts: homosexual sex, unusual forms of masturbation, and consensual incest between an adult brother and sister. Conservatives were more likely to moralize and to condemn these acts, but the differences were concentrated in the homosexual scenarios and were minimal in the incest scenarios. Content analyses reveal that liberals had a narrow moral domain, largely limited to the "ethics of autonomy" (Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997) while conservatives had a broader and more multifaceted moral domain. Regression analyses show that, for both groups, moral judgments were best predicted by affective reactions, and were not predicted by perceptions of harmfulness. Suggestions for calming the culture wars over homosexuality are discussed.

The year 1998 may be remembered in America as the year of sexual morality debates. President Clinton's affair with a 21-year-old intern became a moral Rorschach test for the nation, in which conservatives saw sin and liberals saw consent. Adulterous conservative politicians ended their careers after being "outed," while liberals declared that private behavior should be irrelevant to the conduct of public office. The present study attempts to identify potential causes of this moral division over sexuality in a sample of American conservatives and liberals.

Sex and the Culture War

Americans have long held ambivalent feelings about sex. On the one hand, American morality has, from the very beginning, emphasized the right of people to be left alone. William James captured this position succinctly: "The first thing

to learn in intercourse with others is noninterference with their own particular ways of being happy, provided those ways do not assume to interfere by violence with ours" (quoted in McWilliams, 1993, p. 10).

Yet, also from the beginning, Americans have moralized and criminalized a variety of consensual sex acts. The enduring effects of 16th-century English regulations can be seen in America's current sex laws. These laws criminalize many forms of "deviate sexual intercourse" (Posner & Silbaugh, 1996), describing them as "crimes against nature" and "abominable and detestable acts." Of the 27 states that still have sodomy statutes, 14 make sodomy a felony, and 13 make it a misdemeanor. Seven states explicitly prohibit same-gender sexual acts, while most of the remaining states with sodomy statutes prohibit anal and oral sex by anyone, with anyone (Posner & Silbaugh, 1996). Some states enacted these laws in the past 25 years.

Incest is a felony in almost every state, even when the participants are consenting adults. Since many states prohibit incestuous relations, even between step relatives and adoptive relatives, concerns about genetic inbreeding cannot fully explain the statutes. Posner and Silbaugh (1996) state that "the strongly held community norms against incest are reason enough, in the minds of most people, to criminalize incest" (p. 129).

Since the mid-1800s, sexual "perversions," such as masturbation, have been pathologized, moralized, and battled by such influential figures as J. H. Kellog and Sylvester Graham. Kellog proposed that boys should have their genitals covered with a cage, their hands tied together, or their foreskins sutured shut over the glans in order to prevent an erection (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, & Kolata, 1994). Parents were encouraged to curb their daughters' sexual desires by applying carbolic acid to their clitorises if found guilty of masturbation (Michael et al., 1994). These Victorian fears of autoeroticism have lessened in recent years, but have not disappeared. In 1995, United States Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders provoked outrage and calls for her resignation in part by talking about the value of masturbation.

But even more than masturbation and incest, the front line of the culture wars in recent years has been homosexuality. Liberal initiatives on gay marriage, gays in the military, gay rights, and hate-crime legislation have all provoked a strong conservative reaction. Republican leaders such as United States Senator Trent Lott declared that homosexuality was a disease, like alcoholism, sex addiction, or kleptomania (Lacayo, 1998). The Reverend Pat Robertson declared that "the acceptance of homosexuality is the last step in the decline of Gentile civilization" (Lacayo, 1998, p. 35). Even in Hawaii, a state known for its progressivism on issues of gay rights, the governor said that "same-sex marriage shouldn't be legal for the same reason that 'marrying your sister' isn't legal" (Cloud, 1998, p. 44). A recent poll of Americans found that 48% of those surveyed believed that homosexual relationships between consenting adults are morally wrong, and

64% of those surveyed believed that homosexual marriages should not be recognized by law (Lacayo, 1998). Clearly, the American people, and those who represent them, are divided on matters of sexual morality in general, and on homosexuality in particular.

Causes of the Division

Why do people disagree so strongly about sexual morality? Turiel, Hildebrandt, and Wainryb (1991) studied moral judgments about sexual issues, including homosexuality and incest. They analyzed reactions to sexual issues using Turiel's (1983) domain theory, in which moral issues are those that involve issues of harm, rights, welfare, or justice. From their interviews with American high-school and college students, they concluded that one of the major causes of variation in moral judgments is that people vary in their informational assumptions about the acts in question. In other words, if people believe that homosexuality causes harm to people, or that it is a deviation from what they believe to be normal psychological functioning, then they judge it to be morally wrong. Conversely, when people's informational assumptions lead them to see no harm or illness in these actions, the actions are judged to be matters of personal choice, or of social convention, not cases of moral violation.

There are good reasons, however, to mistrust people's stated reasons. Nisbett and Wilson (1977) argued that people often have no introspective access to the causes of their decisions, judgments, and actions. Decisions are made automatically and unconsciously, and people then draw on a priori causal theories to construct, ex post facto, a plausible story about why they made such a decision. Haidt (in press) argues that the same process occurs in moral judgment: Judgments are made quickly and automatically, driven by emotions and gut feelings. When asked by an interviewer to justify such a judgment, the person draws on a priori moral theories, which are the moral arguments and values that one's culture makes available. The justification sounds plausible, but it is the result of the judgment, not the cause.

Haidt, Koller, and Dias (1993) found strong support for this intuitionist model of moral judgment. They asked 180 children and 180 adults (of upper and lower social class, in Brazil and the United States) to judge five stories involving harmless yet offensive taboo violations, including using the flag to clean one's toilet, eating one's dead pet dog, incestuous kissing, and (for the adults only) masturbating into a chicken carcass and then cooking and eating the chicken. Two major findings are relevant to the present study.

First, they found that the domain of morality varies across cultures and social classes. Among the generally liberal student sample at the University of Pennsylvania, the moral domain was limited to the narrow class of issues described by Turiel (1983): harm, rights, welfare, and justice. Since the harmless taboo

violations were indeed seen to be harmless, participants separated their own personal sense of disgust from their moral judgments, declaring that people have a right to do whatever they want, as long as they do not hurt others. Haidt et al. (1993) described this narrow kind of morality as "harm-based morality." It is similar to what Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, and Park (1997) call the "ethics of autonomy."

Among Brazilians, however, and especially among lower class participants in both countries, the moral domain was broader. Actions that were disgusting or disrespectful were declared to be moral violations, even when participants explicitly acknowledged that the actions were harmless. Among these groups, the moral domain included two additional sets of issues, described by Shweder et al. (1997) as the "ethics of community" (concerns about respect, duty, and the integrity and proper state of the social order) and the "ethics of divinity" (concerns about purity, sacredness, and living a life commensurate with the divinity implanted in each person's soul).

The second major finding of Haidt et al. (1993) was that moral judgments were generally best predicted by participants' affective reactions (from the probe question: "If you actually saw this happening, would it bother you or would you not care?"), rather than by their statements about harm or the consequences of the actions.[3] This correlational finding fits with the observational finding that participants were generally very quick to condemn the violations, but when asked to provide justifications, they often had great difficulty. Participants would sometimes pause, stutter, and then offer a reason that seemed farfetched (e.g., "She shouldn't clean her toilet with the flag because . . . um . . . it might clog up the drain").

Haidt, Bjorklund, and Murphy (1999) dubbed this behavioral pattern "moral dumbfounding," which is defined as "the stubborn and puzzled maintenance of a moral judgment without supporting reasons" (p. 6). They brought participants into the laboratory, presented them with stories about harmless taboo violations (including consensual incest and harmless cannibalism of a body in a morgue), asked for an initial judgment, and then argued with them. On these stories, when compared to a standard moral reasoning dilemma (Heinz dilemma; Kohlberg, 1969), participants showed a pattern of quick judgment, slow justification, frequently saying "I don't know," and frequently admitting that they could not find a reason to support their judgment.

Haidt et al. (1999) concluded that moral dumbfounding seems to occur primarily when people have strong emotion-backed intuitions, as is often the case in matters involving sexuality. In the absence of strong intuitions, people are less

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[3]It is important to note, however, that among the three samples of (generally liberal) college students, the pattern was reversed: The harm probe was a better predictor of judgments than was the probe question about affective reactions.

stubborn and are more likely to change their judgments in response to facts about the case, such as harmlessness. This finding fits with the voluminous literature on affectively based attitudes: People often use their affective reactions as a source of information about their beliefs (Schwarz & Clore, 1996); and when the origin of an attitude is emotional, it is highly resistant to persuasion by reasoning (Edwards, 1990; Shavitt, 1990; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956).

On this intuitionist account, the culture war cannot be explained as a difference in informational assumptions. It is, rather, a true conflict between cultures. *Culture* can be defined as "a morally enforceable conceptual scheme instantiated in practice (including linguistic practice) which is upheld by those who think they are parties to some implicit agreement to do so (a local moral community)" (Shweder, 1995, p. 120). According to this definition, conservatives and liberals live in different cultures. They hold different conceptual schemes, have different linguistic practices (e.g., appealing to Scripture, joking about sex), and attempt to form socially distinct moral communities and "lifestyle enclaves" (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Hunter, 1991). Jensen (1997a) found just such a cultural divide between the members of a fundamentalist Baptist church and a mainline (more liberal) Baptist church in the same city, when discussing the issues of suicide, abortion, and divorce. Both groups invoked all three of Shweder's ethics, but members of the fundamentalist church made less use of the ethics of autonomy and greater use of the ethics of divinity. Drawing on Hunter (1991), Jensen (1997b) argues that moral worldviews, which provide an account of the nature of reality and of what it means to be human, are the key to understanding the culture war.

The Present Study

The present study attempts to elucidate the moral worldviews of conservatives and liberals with respect to issues of sexuality. Conservatives and liberals were interviewed about their reactions to a variety of harmless sexual taboo violations in three domains of activity: homosexuality, masturbation, and consensual sibling incest. We began with three hypotheses.

> *Hypothesis 1.* Liberals will show a narrow morality, largely limited to Shweder's (1995) ethics of autonomy, in which no action is wrong, unless it is directly harmful to someone. Conversely, conservatives will show a broader moral domain, including Shweder's ethics of community and divinity, as well as autonomy, within which all unusual sexual practices will be condemned.

> *Hypothesis 2.* Because American college discourse heavily favors the ethics of autonomy, liberals will have few problems justifying

their tolerance. However, because conservatives will face pressure to justify their condemnation in the language of the ethics of autonomy, we expect to find more signs of moral dumbfounding among conservatives.

Hypothesis 3. Moral judgment will be based more on affective reactions than on reasoning about harm. While harm may be cited often, it will not be as strong a predictor of judgment as will affective reactions.

Method

Location and Participants

Participants were 36 undergraduate students at the University of Virginia (17 women, 19 men; *M* age = 19.7 years). Thirty enrolled in a study on "attitudes toward social issues," which asked that only self-described liberals and conservatives sign up. These participants received credit toward their research participation requirement for introductory psychology classes.

An additional 6 participants (4 liberals, 2 conservatives) were obtained by soliciting people on the campus of the University of Virginia. Any person who appeared to be an undergraduate who was walking or sitting alone was approached and asked to take part in the study. These students were asked whether they were indeed undergraduates, and were also asked to state whether they were liberal or conservative in their political views (self-described moderates were not interviewed). These participants were paid $7 each.

Because there was also a self-report question on the demographics questionnaire about political ideology, rated on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very conservative*) to 9 (*very liberal*), some discrepancies were discovered between the initial sign-up sheet designation and the later self-report of ideology. It appeared that a few participants may not have noticed the requested ideologies on the sign-up sheet. We therefore split the sample on the basis of their self-reports into three groups. A histogram of ideology showed a bimodal distribution with peaks at 4 and 7. Participants who gave ideology ratings of 1 through 4 were called *conservatives* (*n* = 15); those who gave ratings of 7 through 9 were called *liberals* (*n* = 15), and the 6 people who gave ratings of 5 or 6 were called *moderates*. The moderates are ignored in future analyses that contrast liberals and conservatives, but they are included in correlational and regression analyses that treat ideology as a continuous variable.[4]

Religious strength of the participants was obtained by self-report on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*none*) to 4 (*strong*; *M* = 2.78, *SD* = 0.99). The

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[4]The 6 additional participants were solicited in public to replace these 6 moderates.

conservative and liberal groups did not differ in religious strength[5] (3.00 vs. 2.47, respectively), $t(28) = 1.42$, *ns*; in gender ratio (47% female vs. 53% female); or in age (20.1 years vs. 19.5 years), $t(28) = 0.41$, *ns*.

Materials

In order to elicit concerns about sexual morality, six scenarios were created to violate three classes of sexual norms: homosexuality, unusual masturbation, and consensual sibling incest. The full text of the scenarios was as follows:

> A 27-year-old man is having anal intercourse with a 25-year-old man who is his partner or lover.

> A 30-year-old woman is orally stimulating a 29-year-old woman who is her partner or lover.

> A 34-year-old woman enjoys masturbating while cuddling with her favorite teddy bear.

> A 25-year-old man likes to masturbate while his dog willingly licks his owner's genitals and seems to enjoy it.

> A 29-year-old man is having sexual intercourse with his 26-year-old girlfriend. After they had been dating and been sexually active for over a year, they discover that they have the same father. So, they are actually half brother and sister, but were raised in separate families from the time they were born. They decide that they really like each other a lot and that the new information of their relation to each other doesn't matter.

> A 25-year-old man and his 23-year-old adopted sister decide to have sexual relations with each other. They were raised together in the same family and decide that they have a good enough relationship to just see what it's like to have sex with each other. She has been on the pill, and he uses a condom during intercourse.

The scenarios were always given in this order because they formed a progressive sequence (as described shortly). The only exception was when participants

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[5]The lack of significance on religious strength may have been a result of the small sample size. In a large lecture class taught by the first author, liberals and conservatives showed almost exactly the same means as were found in the present study, and that difference was significant, $t(208) = 3.62, p < .001$. Religious strength will therefore be included in subsequent regression analyses.

were visibly uncomfortable with a scenario. The half-sibling incest seemed to evoke such negative feelings for 6 of the participants. In these cases, the interviewer skipped over the adopted-sister incest scenario (which followed) to alleviate the discomfort.

After reading each scenario, the interviewer asked probe questions that addressed seven issues:

Evaluation. "What are your feelings about this act/situation?" This question was meant to elicit participants' spontaneous reactions to the scenario, prior to any counterarguments or specific probe questions.

Justification. "Why is it okay/wrong?" This probe elicited participants' self-generated reasons for their initial reactions.

Harm. "Is anyone harmed by this act?" This probe was intended to elicit a clear declaration of whether or not an act was perceived to be harmful, since harm is the crux of many theories of morality (e.g., Turiel, 1983).

Stop. "Should [they/he/she] be stopped?" This probe was intended to determine whether participants saw outside interference as appropriate.

Negative affect. "If you saw a photograph of this act happening, how would this make you feel?" This probe was designed to give participants an opportunity to express any negative affect, such as disgust, in a way that would not necessarily contradict their condemnation or acceptance of the act on the earlier probe questions.

Contamination. "If [they/he/she] invited you over for dinner, how would this make you feel?" This question probed for concerns about moral contagion or contamination.

Universality. "If you were in another country where this act was a custom, and you witnessed or heard about the act occurring, would you consider it wrong or okay?" This question was designed to determine whether participants universalized their judgment, which is said to be the hallmark of a moral judgment (Turiel, 1983).

Each of the probe questions, except for contamination, was taken either directly or with some modification from Haidt et al. (1993), who had taken them in turn from Turiel (1983) and from Miller, Bersoff, and Harwood (1990). The contamination probe was added to look for fears of interpersonal contagion resulting from immoral activity, based on the work of Nemeroff and Rozin (1994).

Two other scenarios were given without probe questions. First, before reading the six main scenarios mentioned previously, the interviewer started with a "warmup" scenario about a heterosexual couple that has anal sex. This scenario was intended to get conversation going about a heterosexual sexual practice before moving on to the similar practice (anal sex) in the homosexual couple of Scenario 1. Then, after the six main scenarios were completed, the interviewer asked the following question about gay marriage: "If you were living in a state

where the law on gay marriage was about to change in favor of the right for gay people to marry legally, would you support this law or oppose it? What do you think about it?" This question was included because of its relevance to current events (in 1997), but it was not treated as a full scenario, and no probe questions were asked, beyond a short open-ended discussion. In some of the tables reported in this article, the anal-sex and gay-marriage questions are reported as "short scenarios."

Design and Procedure

Participants came individually at their scheduled times to a room in the Psychology Department and sat down at a table opposite the interviewer. The interviewer read aloud a brief introduction outlining the material that would be discussed and describing what the participant would be asked to do. After the participant read and signed the informed-consent form, the interviewer started an audiotape recorder and began reading the warmup scenario (heterosexual anal sex), followed by the six main scenarios and the gay-marriage question. For the last 6 participants, who were recruited in public areas of the University of Virginia campus, interviews were held in a quiet location, generally on a bench away from foot traffic.

Although each interview generally followed the interview script, the interviewer sometimes departed to probe in more detail or to pose hypothetical counterexamples. This was done to elicit each participant's moral worldview more fully. If the participant appeared uncomfortable or resistant about elaborating on any issue, the interviewer moved on to the next question on the script.

When the interview was completed, the interviewer stopped the audiotape and handed the participant a demographics questionnaire to complete. The participant was then thanked and debriefed. All interviews were conducted by the second author of this study, who was an undergraduate student at the University of Virginia.

Coding and Reliability

All interviews were transcribed from audiocassettes, and three kinds of codes were applied: numerical condemnation codes, moral content codes, and response-style codes. Reliability was established for 100% of the sample using intraclass correlation coefficients for all three coding schemes. After each of two coders made ratings, consensus was achieved by discussion on all disagreements for the entire sample.

Numerical condemnation codes. The degree of condemnation expressed on each of the six probe questions was quantified. The *stop* probe was scored as a binary variable ($0 = No$, $1 = Yes$). For the other probes, participants' verbal responses were converted into a number from 0 to 4, expressing the degree of

condemnation. A "0" indicated a very tolerant attitude (e.g., "It's perfectly okay," "It wouldn't bother me at all to see a photograph of it"). A "2" was neither tolerant nor intolerant, or else showed signs of ambivalence; and a "4" reflected a very condemning or critical attitude (e.g., "It's very wrong," "It would gross me out to see a photo of it"). Reliability was computed for each scenario separately, for each of the six probe questions (evaluation and justification were treated as a single probe question, since respondents generally answered them together). The average intercoder reliability across all 36 ratings (6 probes × 6 stories) was .92, ranging from .77 to 1.00. On the two short scenarios (heterosexual anal, and gay marriage), reliability was computed only on ratings of overall condemnation, since there were no other probes asked. Intercoder reliability on these two scenarios was .92 (heterosexual anal) and .98 (gay marriage).

Moral content codes. To determine what kinds of moral issues participants spontaneously raised, we read through the full responses to the *evaluation* and *justification* probes, since these were open-ended questions that did not direct participants to specific issues (e.g., harm or contamination). We identified common moral themes and references to moral virtues and vices, and then grouped conceptually similar items together. Since the resulting clusters mapped neatly onto Shweder's (Shweder et al., 1997) three ethics of morality, these ethics guided the final coding scheme (see the Appendix for full descriptions of each code). The first four codes are contained within Shweder's ethics of autonomy: *harm to self* and *harm to others* were generally given as reasons to condemn the acts; and *harmlessness* and *rights* (i.e., "He has a right to do what he wants to") were generally given as reasons to tolerate the actions. The remaining two codes were used almost exclusively to condemn the acts in question. They are Shweder's ethics of community (mostly statements about how the family or social order "ought" to be), and Shweder's ethics of divinity (mostly statements about the proper use of the human body, or else references to God's will or the Bible). Responses were coded for *no presence* (0), *moderate or subtle presence* (1), or *clear and full presence* (2) of each of the six codes.

Response style codes. We examined several additional variables that focused not so much on what participants said, but on how they said it. There were three such variables, each of which was coded on the same 3-point scale as mentioned in the previous paragraph:

Dumbfounding. This code was applied when participants showed marked confusion and incoherence; for example, by frequent stuttering, saying "I don't know," or reversing and negating their own statements in mid-sentence (Haidt et al., 1999). It was also applied when participants directly stated that they were dumbfounded; that is, they said that they could not explain their answers.

Ambivalence. This code was applied when respondents qualified a tolerant judgment with a critical addition (e.g., "[It's not wrong] to an extreme, but I think there's a point where he should know if it's too much. Then it's wrong"). It was

also applied for the opposite pattern, a critical judgment qualified by a more tolerant statement (e.g., "I would probably feel it's wrong, but . . . that's their own choice"). Any time a participant reversed judgment within a scenario, or saw both sides of an issue, it was counted as ambivalence.

Affective condemnation. Because of the theoretical significance of affect in moral condemnation (Haidt et al., 1993), we coded all cases where the participant's own affective reaction was cited as a source of, or was said in conjunction with, a negative evaluation. The following two quotes illustrate the code: "It's more along the gross lines, sort of repelling. I just don't think it's normal"; and "That's foul, that's nasty. I mean that's not right. That's not right."

The moral-content codes and response-style codes were nonexclusive; a single sentence could trigger more than one content code, and more than one response-style code. Reliability was computed for the moral-content and response-style codes together. All codes for each of the eight scenarios (including the two short scenarios) were computed for each participant. The average intercoder reliability across all 72 ratings (9 codes × 8 scenarios) was .85, ranging from .64 to .98.

Results

Numerical Condemnation Codes

We first looked for gender differences, since prior work (Herek, 1988; Kite, 1993) has found that males are more critical of homosexuality, particularly male homosexuality. Independent-sample t tests, however, revealed no significant or nearly significant differences between men and women in their overall condemnation of any of the eight scenarios (including the two short scenarios). Gender of participant is, therefore, ignored in future analyses.

Tables 1 and 2 show the basic means for the six probe questions, for conservatives as compared to liberals. To facilitate comparisons on specific items, the tables show the results of one-way ANOVAs comparing conservatives and liberals on each probe question for each story. However, since the *stop* probe was coded as a binary variable ($0 = No$, $1 = Yes$), Mann–Whitney U tests were used on that variable.

To simplify the main statistical analyses, responses to the two scenarios within each of the three scenario types (homosexuality, masturbation, and incest) were averaged. We then performed a 2 × 3 repeated-measures ANOVA on each of the probe questions, using politics (conservative vs. liberal) as a between-groups measure, and scenario type (homosexuality, masturbation, and incest) as a within-group repeated measure. All tests are multivariate tests that do not assume sphericity of the variance. Alpha is set at .05, but marginal effects ($p < .08$) are mentioned when they occurred.

Table 1

Evaluation, Universality, and Legitimacy of Interference (Stopping) by Political Ideology

	Evaluation		Universality		Stop (% yes)	
	C	L	C	L	C	L
Homosexuality						
Gay male anal sex	2.00	0.33**	1.67	0.27**	0	0
Lesbian oral sex	1.80	0.40**	1.36	0.13**	0	0
Unusual masturbation						
Woman with teddy bear	1.00	0.13*	1.00	0.00*	7	0
Man with dog	1.80	1.67	2.00	0.62*	31	0*
Consensual incest						
Half-siblings	2.27	2.13	2.00	1.36	57	0**
Adopted sister	2.08	1.92	2.25	0.13**	50	25
Short scenarios						
Heterosexual anal sex	1.20	0.23*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Gay marriage	2.40	0.27**	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Average across all scenarios	1.82	0.89	1.71	0.44	24	4

Note. Evaluation and universality are on 0 to 4 scales, where higher scores reflect more condemnation or universalization. C = conservative, L = liberal, N/A = not applicable.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$, for contrasts of liberals and conservatives.

Evaluation. On the first probe question ("What are your feelings about this act/situation?"), there was an effect of scenario type, $F(2, 27) = 7.67, p < .01$; and an interaction of politics with scenario type, $F(2, 27) = 3.69, p < .05$. There was a marginal main effect of politics, $F(1, 28) = 3.71, p = .064$. In other words, conservatives were generally more condemning, but the difference varied across scenario type, being largest in the homosexuality scenarios (including gay marriage), while being small and not significant on matters of incest.

Universality. There was a large effect of politics: Conservatives were more likely to universalize their condemnation, $F(1, 22) = 28.42, p < .001$.

Stop. Participants were generally reluctant to say that these private, consensual acts should be stopped, with the exception of conservatives talking about incest. Conservatives were more likely to say that acts should be stopped, $F(1, 22) = 5.81$, $p < .05$. There was a main effect of scenario type, $F(2, 21) = 7.54, p < .01$; and there was a marginal interaction of politics with scenario type, $F(2, 21) = 3.39, p = .053$, reflecting the absence of any differences on the homosexuality scenarios.

Table 2

Harm, Negative Affect, and Contamination Fears by Political Ideology

	Harm		Negative affect		Contami- nation	
	C	L	C	L	C	L
Homosexuality						
Gay male anal sex	0.53	0.33	2.93	1.60**	1.20	0.80
Lesbian oral sex	0.47	0.00	2.07	1.00*	1.21	0.53
Unusual masturbation						
Woman with teddy bear	0.33	0.00	1.36	0.69	0.79	0.67
Man with dog	1.08	0.20	2.42	2.54	2.58	1.71
Consensual incest						
Half-siblings	2.44	1.54	2.00	0.85	0.63	0.91
Adopted sister	2.20	1.22	1.83	0.14	1.86	0.57
Average across all scenarios	1.18	0.55*	2.10	1.14*	1.38	0.87

Note. All values are on a 0 to 4 scale, where higher values reflect more condemnation.
C = conservative, L = liberal.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Harm. There was a main effect of scenario type, $F(2, 25) = 12.80, p < .001$. Only the incest scenarios elicited frequent statements of harm. There was also an effect of politics, $F(1, 26) = 13.02, p < .01$. Conservatives were more likely to state that the acts were harmful.

Negative affect. Conservatives were more likely to say that seeing a photograph of the act in question would bother them, $F(1, 22) = 10.64, p < .01$.

Contamination. There were no significant effects of politics or scenario type on participants' responses to the question about how they would feel about dining at the home of the person in each scenario.

Summary of effects. The findings so far can be summarized as follows: Conservatives generally had stronger negative reactions and moral judgments. The differences, however, varied by scenario type. Consistent with the importance of homosexuality in the culture wars, it was the homosexual scenarios that generally elicited the largest differences between liberals and conservatives. The differences between liberals and conservatives also depended on the probe question used. Consistent with claims by Hunter (1991) that the belief in absolute moral truth lies at the heart of the culture wars, it was the universality probe that elicited the largest absolute difference between liberals and conservatives. When conservatives said an action was wrong, they generally said that it would be wrong in

Table 3

Percentage of Conservatives and Liberals Who Used Each Moral-Content Code

| | Ethics of community | | Ethics of divinity | | Ethics of autonomy | | Subcodes of autonomy | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | Harm to self | | Harm to others | | Harm-lessness | | Rights | |
	C	L	C	L	C	L	C	L	C	L	C	L	C	L
Homosexuality														
Gay male anal sex	13	7	40	7*	80	100	13	7	7	0	0	0	73	100*
Lesbian oral sex	13	0	47	7*	67	87	0	7	0	0	0	0	67	87
Unusual masturbation														
Woman with teddy bear	27	7	33	7	60	87	7	0	0	0	7	33	60	73
Man with dog	20	27	20	13	73	67	7	0	27	13	7	27	40	60
Consensual incest														
Half-siblings	60	53	7	7	80	87	7	13	73	67	0	7	0	47
Adopted sister	83	67	8	8	42	50	8	17	25	17	0	25	17	42
Short scenarios														
Heterosexual anal sex	7	0	27	7	73	67	20	7	0	0	0	0	60	67
Gay marriage	60	0	27	0*	80	93	0	0	33	0*	0	0	53	93*
Average across all scenarios	35	20**	26	7*	69	80	8	6	21	12	2	11*	49	71*

Note. C = conservative, L = liberal. Conservatives contrasted to liberals by Mann–Whitney U test.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

another country as well. But for liberals, even when they said that an act was wrong, they were much more likely to say that the act would be acceptable in another culture. Hypothesis 1 (main effect of politics) was therefore supported, but with the important qualification that liberals are not more tolerant on all sexual matters, since there were few significant differences on the consensual incest stories.

Moral-Content Codes

It is not clear that the reasons people give for their judgments reveal the true causes of those judgments (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). However, the analysis of moral justifications can reveal the participant's a priori moral theories (Haidt, in press), showing what he or she thinks counts as an acceptable moral argument. Table 3 shows the percentage of conservatives and liberals who used each of Shweder's three ethics in their spontaneous responses to each scenario. Since the dominant ethic for both liberals and conservatives was the ethic of autonomy, the four subcodes that make up that ethic are shown separately in the right half of the table. Table 3 shows individual contrasts that were significant at .05 by the Mann–Whitney U test.

To test for overall effects of politics and scenario type, 2 × 3 (Politics × Scenario Type) repeated-measures ANOVAs were performed, as before, on the average of the scenarios within each scenario type. (We included the gay-marriage scenario with the other two homosexuality scenarios, since it elicited similar discourse.) Illustrative quotes are given after each quantitative analysis.

Ethics of autonomy. There were no significant effects or interactions involving the overall likelihood of using the ethics of autonomy. However, there were several significant effects involving the subcodes of the ethics of autonomy. On the harm-to-others subcode, there was an effect of scenario type, $F(2, 27) = 21.25, p < .001$. It was primarily on the incest stories that participants reported concerns about harm to others. On the harmlessness subcode, there was an effect of scenario type, $F(2, 27) = 7.80, p < .01$. Harmlessness was mostly cited in the masturbation stories. There was an effect of politics, $F(1, 28) = 8.06, p < .01$. Liberals cited harmlessness more than did conservatives. There was also an interaction of politics and scenario type for harmlessness discourse, $F(2, 27) = 3.90$, $p < .05$. The effect of politics was strongest in the masturbation stories, and was absent in the homosexuality stories.

The rights subcode was the most frequently applied subcode. Liberals were more likely to discuss rights, $F(1, 28) = 4.40, p < .05$; and there was a main effect of scenario type, $F(2, 27) = 11.53, p < .001$. Rights discourse was most common on homosexuality issues, and was least common when discussing incest.

Even though conservatives frequently referred to issues of harm and rights, it was the liberals who spoke most forcefully about autonomy issues, and who were

most likely to rely exclusively on autonomy in their justifications. Issues of consent and free choice loomed large for liberals on the homosexuality and masturbation scenarios: "As long as they're consenting adults . . . such is their choice"; "Everybody can do whatever they want. I'm not going to say anything about it at all"; and "If you're gay, you're gay. And if they want to do it, they can do it." Issues of harmlessness were also brought to the fore for these scenarios. One male liberal paraphrased William James' dictum from the introduction of this paper:

> There's absolutely no harm done to anybody about it. I mean there's just no reason why people shouldn't be allowed to do it. As long as you're not, you know, openly offending other people by doing it in public, or whatever.

Ethics of community. Conservatives used the ethics of community marginally more often than did liberals, $F(1, 28) = 4.04, p = .054$. There was an effect of scenario type, $F(2, 27) = 18.07, p < .001$, since the ethics of community was used most frequently in the incest scenarios.

The ethics of community included two major concerns that seem to be central to conservative morality: a teleological view of social roles, and fears about social decay. Conservatives took a teleological stance when they justified their condemnation by appealing to the way that social relationships were "intended" to be. Sex and love are "supposed" to be between a man and a woman: "A man and a woman by nature [is] the proper social relationship for humans, whereas men and men, insofar as sexuality goes . . . don't belong together in the sexual sense."

The man and the woman also must not be related, for family relationships are "supposed" to be nonsexual. One participant opposed the half-siblings incest scenario because she did not "think you're meant to . . . be with, I mean love someone in another way than like . . . familial love . . . I don't think it should be anymore than that kind of love." (This last quote was from a liberal participant; it was only on the incest scenarios that liberals made such teleological statements.)

Given such concerns about the way social relations "ought" to go, it should be no surprise that many participants objected to the man-with-dog scenario. As one conservative said. "The sexual act is, you know, meant to [be] between, you know, at first between two people, preferably male and female. But it shouldn't, you know, it should never extend into the animal kingdom because . . . that's just a total breach of . . . what is [the] moral attitude of society."

The concern that sex "ought" to involve the proper pairings of people was linked for many conservatives to fears about threats to the social order. On the gay-marriage scenario, the majority of conservatives, and no liberals, talked about the importance of protecting society and social norms. Sometimes the threat was said to be the infertility of homosexual sex:

> The problem with homosexuality is that it totally refutes the idea
> of reproducing to benefit society, whereas heterosexual anal sex
> does not totally refute that. I mean, there still is, you still have a
> man and woman there; whereas homosexuality, you just have a
> man and man, or a woman and a woman.

But often the threat had a more diffuse form: "[Gay marriage] can lead to corruptions of the system, and it undermines the whole institution of marriage . . . It is important for the government [to] not encourage homosexuality, to discourage it, as an evil in society." One conservative woman was tolerant of homosexual acts that occurred in private, but feared that if gay marriage were legalized, "society would begin to crumble because . . . society is built upon traditions."

Traditions carry far more moral authority for conservatives than for liberals (Hunter, 1991). Part of the value of traditions is that they are seen as a bulwark against the chaos that would ensue if people were left free to do as they pleased. One conservative warned that to allow gay marriage would be to "allow anybody to do whatever they want, like voting for a slippery slope, voting to do whatever." Another conservative, responding to the man-with-dog scenario, insisted that he would be against the act "because that's [an] outright perversion. That's not a preference, I mean, it's so far from what . . . society has traditionally accepted." Another said:

> Once any moral taboo is lifted by the government, a certain part of
> society is hurt. With homosexuals, where do we stop? I mean do
> we stop with homosexuality or with polygamy? Or, I mean, bestiality, or I mean there are a variety of other behavioral deviances.

Speaking about gay marriage, another conservative said, "I guess I'm just really big on tradition and it's just not traditional. It's different. I think I'm afraid of things that are different."

Ethics of divinity. Conservatives used the ethics of divinity more often than did liberals, $F(1, 28) = 4.28, p < .05$. There was an interaction of scenario type and politics, $F(2, 27) = 3.72, p < .05$. The difference between conservatives and liberals was largest on the homosexuality scenarios.

Conservatives frequently saw sexuality as related to a vertical dimension on which God and purity are up, while carnality and sin are down. Sexual relations between a married man and woman who are in love can be elevating, but most other forms of sexuality are degrading, and therefore wrong. One conservative said:

> Homosexuality, I mean [long pause] there's really no societal purpose for it other than, to allow individuals to express themselves. I

mean [long pause], let's see [long pause], in such a way that they really, really demean the sexual act more so than heterosexual intercourse would. And homosexuality is, again, this is more toward my religious views than my societal views.

Another conservative condemned masturbation for similar reasons:

It's a sin because it distances ourselves from God . . . It's a pleasure that God did not design for us to enjoy because sexual pleasures . . . through, you know, a married heterosexual couple . . . [were] designed by God [in order] to reproduce, and masturbation fits none of these criteria.

Conservatives also sometimes invoked a teleological view of the body, in which each part of the body must play the role for which it was "designed." One female respondent said, "Males and females should be placed together. It's because, like, the physical structure of the body." Another respondent objected to lesbian oral sex because "Obviously, like the anatomy of a man and a woman were intended to be together. Two people of the same sex [is] just not meant to happen." Such concerns about the proper and improper use of the human body have been linked to the emotion of disgust, and to concerns about the misuse of the "temple of the body" (Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 2000).

Summary of effects. The ethics of autonomy was the dominant mode of moral discourse for liberals as well as conservatives. However, as Table 3 shows, when liberals invoked the ethics of autonomy, they were most likely to invoke notions of rights, specifically the rights of the parties involved to do as they pleased. Conservatives were less likely to cite such rights. As predicted, conservatives were more likely than were liberals to refer to the ethics of community and divinity. Conservatives appeared to have a broader moral domain, including all three ethics. They talked about sexuality within social and religious contexts in which individuals do not have unrestricted rights to do as they please. Liberals, in contrast, showed a narrower focus on the ethics of autonomy. With the exception of the incest scenarios, they generally thought that people should be left alone and granted freedom from censure and condemnation. This difference is shown graphically in Figure 1. Hypothesis 1 was therefore further supported.

Response-Style Codes

Thus far we have been discussing the content of the moral judgments of conservatives and liberals. We now turn to three aspects of the form of judgment. Table 4 shows the percentage of conservatives and liberals who showed signs of dumbfounding, ambivalence, and affect-based condemnation. As described

Table 4

Percentage of Conservatives and Liberals Who Exhibited Each Response Style

	Dumb-founding		Ambivalence		Affective condemnation	
	C	L	C	L	C	L
Homosexuality						
Gay male anal sex	60	7**	80	40*	40	0*
Lesbian oral sex	60	13**	60	20*	40	7*
Unusual masturbation						
Woman with teddy bear	33	20	33	20	13	0
Man with dog	33	60	67	73	40	33
Consensual incest						
Half-siblings	60	53	67	60	7	7
Adopted sister	50	42	58	42	8	8
Short scenarios						
Heterosexual anal sex	40	20	73	36*	13	7
Gay marriage	47	20	53	27	20	0
Average across all scenarios	49	33	61	48*	25	9

Note. C = conservative, L = liberal.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

previously, dumbfounding (a confused inability to explain one's position) and affective condemnation (directly offering one's own emotional reaction as a reason to condemn an act) are clear signs of emotion-driven judgment. Ambivalence (pointing out or taking both sides on an issue) points to some form of internal conflict, although the conflict could involve emotions, reasoning about harm, or both. As before, we performed 2 × 3 (Politics × Scenario Type) repeated-measures ANOVAs on the average of the scenarios within each scenario type. We included the gay-marriage scenario with the other two homosexuality scenarios.

   Dumbfounding. There was an interaction between scenario type and politics, $F(2, 27) = 6.83$, $p < .01$. Conservatives showed much more dumbfounding than did liberals when discussing homosexual issues, but there was little difference on the masturbation or incest scenarios.

   Conservatives often directly confessed their inability to justify their immediate condemnation of homosexuality. As was found by Haidt et al. (1999), participants frequently inserted "I don't know" into long sentences in which they

appeared to be searching around, while speaking, for a justification. For example, when asked to explain her condemnation of the gay anal-sex scenario, one conservative said, "I don't know, um [long pause], I guess, I don't know, I just don't really believe in premarital sex anyway, but, and obviously they're not married so. . . ."

Additional signs of moral dumbfounding include laughter and a direct acknowledgment of one's own state of confusion. One female conservative had condemned the man-with-dog scenario. When asked to explain why it was wrong, she said, "Well, I just, I don't know, I don't think that's, I guess [long pause], I don't really [laughter] think of these things much, so I don't really know but, I don't know, I just [long pause], um. . . ." Another female conservative, reacting to the gay-marriage scenario, said, "Gosh, this is such a hard thing because I think I'm probably contradicting myself throughout this tape, and you're going to listen to it and think I don't know what I'm talking about [laughter]."

Ambivalence. Conservatives showed more ambivalence than did liberals, $F(1, 28) = 5.47, p < .05$. Their ambivalence was often manifested as an attempt to balance their general belief in rights and autonomy with the various issues of community and divinity described previously. One conservative female, discussing gay male intercourse, said:

> I don't have a problem with homosexuals as like individuals, I don't like, I'm not a homophobic or anything like that. I just, I think that, God created us to be with man and woman, but as far as like, I don't, I think though, that people probably are, you know it's biological, for most people I think it's biologically linked into something. It's different, it's not, I don't think it's their fault, I don't blame them, but I still, I, I have a problem, morally with it, I should say.

Another conservative, discussing the same scenario, said, "I mean I, I think it's their choice. I don't agree with it, um . . . but I wouldn't . . . not like them because of that."

Sometimes participants changed their judgment while speaking, as they switched back and forth between moral perspectives. An example is seen in this conservative woman discussing gay marriage:

> Well, I just think getting married just defines like a man and a woman being joined together for the rest of their lives, and that in my image of marriage there's not two people of the same sex. I don't know why they need to get actually married. It doesn't even change the relationship . . . I don't know. I guess it's okay. Yeah,

maybe I would support the, um, gay-marriage thing because they should be treated equally and, you know, get the same benefits that heterosexual people do because . . . they're, you know, upstanding citizens . . . and they shouldn't be excluded.

Affective condemnation. There was a significant effect of scenario type, $F(2, 27) = 4.27, p < .05$; and an interaction with politics, $F(2, 27) = 3.73, p < .05$. Conservatives showed marginally more affective condemnation than did liberals overall, $F(1, 28) = 3.74, p = .063$; but, as the interaction term indicates, the difference was not consistent across scenario types. Conservatives showed much more affective condemnation on homosexual issues.

In the course of searching for justifications, conservatives often turned to their own affective reactions of shock, disgust, and discomfort. A conservative explained her condemnation of the man-with-dog scenario by saying, "I just think it's disgusting and, um, I don't think anyone should be doing that because it's disgusting and it's strange."

Several participants explicitly acknowledged that their judgments were based on affect, rather than reasoning. Responding to the man-with-dog scenario, one female liberal said, "Um, ah, that I don't, I don't think I could explain. That's more of just a gut response than a like logical-answer kind of question." A conservative qualified her condemnation of the woman masturbating with the teddy bear by saying:

I don't know if that's [a] rational train of thought . . . ah, I don't know how to feel about that, I really don't. . . . I would say it just seems sort of like, sort of sick to me. Yeah, that's what I would say.

Liberals also had strong negative affective reactions to the scenarios, particularly the man-with-dog scenario. But, as was found by Haidt et al. (1993), liberals often separated their own emotional reactions from their moral judgments. One liberal eloquently captured this forced separation while discussing his conflicting reactions to the gay anal-sex scenario:

I'd have to say it would make me feel weird. That's my first instinct. Yeah, I mean there's a weird kind of thing going on in my head there. I feel like there's a way I'm going to act and a way to act based on this preconceived ideology I have about sex being okay between people, no matter what sex they are. You know, instantly a warning bell comes up, and that bugs me. I quickly discard it; I mean I recognize it and then discard it because it makes me feel silly.

Consistent with an intuitionist theory of moral judgment (Haidt, in press), this liberal participant feels a flash of disgust or discomfort. But because his political culture (liberalism) has a preconceived ideology that sex is entirely a matter of personal choice, he feels compelled to override his intuition, or "warning bell," and to declare that the act in question is morally acceptable.

Summary of effects. As was found in the analysis of the numerical condemnation codes (Tables 1 and 2), the principal differences between conservatives and liberals appear to be concentrated in the homosexual scenarios. Conservatives showed more signs that affective reactions were involved in their judgments. The majority of them showed some sign of dumbfounding while talking about homosexuality, and 40% of them made direct statements that the gay male and lesbian scenarios were wrong in part because they were disgusting or offensive. Hypothesis 2 (greater difficulty in justifying reactions for conservatives) was therefore supported.

Is Moral Judgment Predicted by Harmfulness or by Offensiveness?

We can now return to the central theoretical question raised in the introduction: What drives the moral condemnation of sexual practices? Is it informational assumptions about their harmfulness (Turiel et al., 1991), or is it affective reactions such as disgust and discomfort, which are later cloaked by harm-based rationalizations (Haidt et al., 1993)? The harm-based view is supported by the fact that conservatives were significantly more likely to state that somebody was harmed in the stories. However, the affective view is similarly supported by the fact that conservatives were more likely to say that seeing a photograph of the act in question would bother them. On both probe questions (Table 2), the average response by conservatives (on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 to 4) was approximately twice as high as the average response by liberals.

To tease apart these two hypotheses, we examined the contribution that each probe makes to the prediction of the overall *evaluation* probe. We conducted linear regressions for each of the six main scenarios, attempting to predict condemnation (i.e., the *evaluation* probe, which was coded on a 0 to 4 scale). We used all 36 participants, including the six moderates. In each regression, we included participants' self-ratings of politics (conservative to liberal on a 1 to 9 scale) and self-ratings of religious strength (on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 [*none*], to 4 [*strong*]), as well as the *negative affect* and *harm* probes for the scenario in question.

Table 5 shows the standardized beta weights and *t* values for all six regression analyses. Table 5 shows that the *negative-affect* probe was a significant predictor of condemnation in four scenarios, while the *harm* probe was a significant predictor of condemnation in no scenario. Furthermore, the *negative-affect* probe was the best of the four predictors (mean absolute value of standardized β across

Table 5

Regression Analyses Predicting Condemnation

	Politics		Religious strength		Harm		Negative affect	
	β	*t*	β	*t*	β	*t*	β	*t*
Homosexuality								
Gay male anal sex	-0.38	2.59	0.45	3.43**	0.05	0.43	0.17	1.18
Lesbian oral sex	-0.28	1.79	0.26	1.67	0.01	0.05	0.35	2.14*
Unusual masturbation								
Woman with teddy bear	-0.13	0.87	0.23	1.53	0.11	0.70	0.46	2.88**
Man with dog	0.11	0.72	0.31	1.90	0.27	1.73	0.41	2.67*
Consensual incest								
Half-siblings	-0.03	0.45	0.32	1.66	-0.05	0.26	0.60	3.26**
Adopted sister	-0.25	0.88	0.07	0.22	0.22	0.78	0.20	0.80

Note. β = standardized beta coefficient.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

six scenarios = 0.37), even better than politics ($M = 0.20$) and religious strength ($M = 0.27$), while the *harm* probe was the weakest predictor ($M = 0.12$). Hypothesis 3 was therefore supported: Moral judgment (at least in the domain of sexual morality) is better predicted by affective reactions than by informational assumptions about harm.

Discussion

We can summarize the findings of the present study by returning to the three hypotheses presented in the introduction:

As predicted, liberals showed a narrow, harm-based morality, largely limited to the ethics of autonomy, while conservatives showed a broader morality, including the ethics of community and the ethics of divinity (Figure 1). However, we found an unexpected interaction with scenario type, in which the difference between liberals and conservatives was greatest for homosexuality, and was minimal on the incest scenarios. The liberal insistence that people have a right to do whatever they choose, so long as they don't hurt anyone, did not extend to the powerful taboo against incest. It should still be noted, however, that no liberals thought that the half-sibling incest case should be stopped, *and only 25% of*
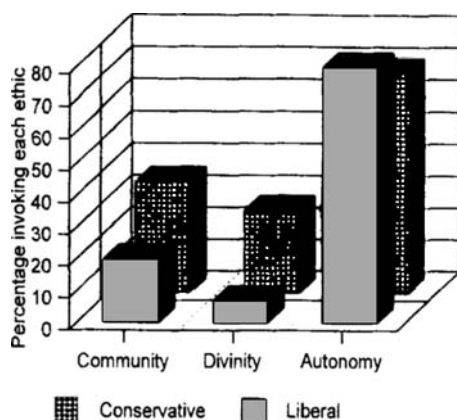
Figure 1. Average percentage of conservatives and liberals invoking the ethics of community, divinity, and autonomy, across all eight scenarios.

liberals thought that the adopted-sister incest case should be stopped, while half of the conservatives thought that each case should be stopped.

We had predicted that liberals would show fewer signs of dumbfounding when justifying their judgments, since they were able to rely on the well-elaborated modal discourse of American moral life, the ethics of autonomy. However, the predicted difference was found only on the homosexuality scenarios, which caused the highest level of dumbfounding for conservatives and the lowest level for liberals (Table 4). This finding, along with a similar pattern on the ambivalence code, indicates that liberals have a position on homosexuality that is in harmony with the rest of their ethical system. Talking about homosexuality is easy for them. Conservatives, on the other hand, faced an internal contradiction: As Americans and as college students, they held strongly to the ideals of the ethics of autonomy. Yet, on issues of homosexuality, they found these ideals in conflict with other deeply held values and fears—the value of following biblical teachings on sexuality, and fears about the "collapse" of society if people are left free to follow their sexual desires in "nontraditional" ways. This conflict, played out in many of our conservative participants, may show in microcosm the conflict now going on in the American Republican Party as it strives to balance both its libertarian free-market members and the social conservatives of the Christian right.

As predicted, moral judgment was better predicted by participants' emotional reactions than by their perceptions of harmfulness (Table 5). Harm was often cited, especially on the incest scenarios, but even there it was not a significant predictor of judgment, once negative affect was included in the analysis. This finding fits with the qualitative finding that participants often condemned the

scenarios instantly, and then seemed to search and stumble through sentences laced with pauses, "ums" and "I don't knows," before producing a statement about harm. This general pattern of quick affective judgment and slow, awkward justification fits well with an intuitionist model of moral judgment (Haidt, in press; Haidt et al., 1993; Shweder & Haidt, 1993), while it does not fit well with models in which moral reasoning drives moral judgment (e.g., Turiel, 1983).

Conservative Complexity

These results might suggest to some readers the unflattering portrait of conservatives as more driven by affect, less able to explain their judgments, and therefore less intelligent and thoughtful than liberals. Such a portrait would fit with work in political psychology that finds a higher level of integrative complexity in the speech of moderate liberals than in the speech of moderate conservatives (Tetlock, 1981; Tetlock, Bernzweig, & Gallant, 1985). However, Tetlock's (1986) value-pluralism model argues that there is nothing inherently integrative or complex about liberal thought; liberals in the United States just happen to hold values that frequently conflict, such as equality and freedom, forcing them to make more subtle distinctions and difficult tradeoffs. In cases where the liberal position is unconflicted, as in the opposition to slavery in the 1850s, it appears to be moderate conservatives who show the highest levels of integrative complexity (Tetlock, Armor, & Peterson, 1994).

The same thing appears to be happening with gay rights currently. The liberal position on homosexuality is quite simple, requiring no tradeoffs: People should be allowed to love, have sex with, and marry whomever they want, as long as they do not hurt anyone else. The fact that homosexuals are frequently subjected to discrimination and violence makes it even more important for liberals to stand up for them and to affirm their rights. For conservatives, however, gay rights and gay marriage create a value conflict: Deeply held values of individual liberty clash with deeply held values of religion and traditional family structures. When pressed for explanations by the interviewer in the present study, conservatives showed higher levels of ambivalence and dumbfounding because they were trying to make tradeoffs among three moral ethics (the shaded bars in Figure 1), while liberals were able to handle most issues of sexual morality with less difficulty by staying within a single moral ethic, the ethic of autonomy (the tall white bar in Figure 1).

This value-pluralism perspective can also explain why the differences between liberals and conservatives were concentrated in the homosexuality stories. The reason might be that there is not a clear group of people in American society who are discriminated against because of their desire to have sex with their dogs or their siblings. When responding to the dog and the incest stories, liberals may not have felt the need to protect a class of victims by championing

individual rights above all else. Liberals, therefore, took a more condemning stance on these stories, partially and sometimes entirely closing the gap between themselves and the conservatives.

Limitations of the Present Study

The present study has several limitations. First, it was based on a small sample (15 liberals and 15 conservatives, plus 6 moderates), and the sample was a student sample, not necessarily representative of the larger American society. Yet, the fact that so many significant effects could be found indicates the magnitude of the differences between conservatives and liberals. A second limitation is that all interviews in the present study were done by a single interviewer, who could quickly figure out the political orientation of each participant, and who may have unintentionally treated the two groups differently. However, the fact that few differences between the groups were found on the incest scenarios suggests that the interviewer did not exert a constant biasing effect.

A third limitation is that all participants were drawn from one community, the University of Virginia. Students at the University of Virginia are not known for being very conservative or for being very liberal. Studies done by the first author in large classes consistently find that Virginia students' self-descriptions of their political views fall into a normal distribution, with a mean slightly on the liberal side of the midpoint of the scale. The fact that all participants were drawn from this politically moderate community should make it more difficult to find evidence of divergent and discrete moral cultures. Future studies of sexual morality should contrast more morally homogeneous groups, such as political activists on both sides, or congregations of liberal and conservative Protestant denominations (e.g., Jensen, 1997a).

A fourth limitation is that the division between conservatives and liberals was made using a single self-report measure. There are likely to be subtypes of liberals, and subtypes of conservatives, which may have very different sexual moralities. Future studies of sexual morality should use either self-selected real groups or else multi-item attitude measures that would allow division into more precise political–moral groups.

Implications for the Culture Wars

The current American debate over sexual morality is divisive, bitter, and even at times violent. Anti-gay graffiti adorns many public bathrooms. Gay men are beaten and sometimes murdered for being gay. No state currently permits gay people to marry. Christian groups boycott Disneyland and other businesses that are friendly to gay people. Even puppets were recently dragged into the culture war when the Reverend Jerry Falwell accused the Teletubby character

"Tinky-Winky" of being a gay role model designed to spread homosexuality. How can these sometimes vicious, sometimes silly culture wars be calmed? The present study offers several suggestions.

Recognize that all combatants are morally motivated. It seems to be part of the nature of moral argument that one's opponents are seen to be motivated by evil. Conservatives see liberals and homosexuals as driven by the immoral force of "perverted" sexual desire. Liberals see conservatives as motivated by the immoral forces of hatred, homophobia, and narrowmindedness. But such moralization and demonization obscure the true nature of the conflict, and make moderation or compromise into a moral failing—one should not negotiate with the devil. It is more accurate, and certainly more conducive to cooperation, to acknowledge that both sides are driven by their moral commitments. Liberals have a narrower conception of morality, so they see only the injustice and the violations of civil rights to which homosexuals are subjected. Conservatives have a broader moral domain in which homosexuality is felt to be incommensurate with the traditions of society or the commandments of God. The two sides differ in their conceptions of the good, not in the goodness of their motivations.

Recognize that American morality is plastic and pluralistic. American morality has, from the very beginning, been woven out of two strands, which Bellah et al. (1985) call the *republican* and the *biblical* strands. It has always struggled to grant independence and autonomy to individuals within a society that believes strongly in Christianity and in some elements of Puritanism. Sexual morality, therefore, has always been complex and contested. If history is any guide, neither side can ever win the culture war and eliminate the other. It is especially important to recognize that conservatives have the more complex moral system, balancing a larger number of competing moral codes and moral goods. Conservatives in the present study showed frequent evidence of "code switching," going back and forth among the ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity in a single speaking turn. Therefore it may be possible to find common ground on the ethics of autonomy, if homosexuality can be presented in a way that does not directly threaten the conservative ethics of community and divinity.

Recognize that moral discourse is an ex post facto product. One of the most frustrating aspects of moral argument is that the other side is not swayed by one's arguments, no matter how good they are. The failure to respond to reason makes the other side seem unreasonable, and invites charges that their "real" motivations are hidden and sinister. But this inference is based on the naïve idea that moral reasoning drives moral judgment, so that one can change people's minds by refuting their reasons. The present findings are more compatible with an intuitionist model of moral judgment (Haidt, in press), in which moral judgment is based on gut feelings and emotional intuitions. People then create moral arguments by drawing on a priori moral theories, which they put forth as social

products, required by the discourse rules of an argument (i.e., one must provide reasons for one's judgments). The refutation of such arguments does not cause people to change their minds; it only forces them to work harder to find replacement arguments.

Several researchers have found that affectively based attitudes do not respond well to cognitively based arguments (Edwards, 1990; Shavitt, 1990). If the intuitionist model of morality is correct, then the best way to change moral judgments may be to trigger competing moral intuitions. Just as a reversible figure in a perceptual psychology experiment can seem to flip back and forth between two stable interpretations, the conservative participants in the present study sometimes flipped back and forth between their intuitions that homosexuality was a private choice (ethics of autonomy) and their intuitions that it was a deviant or antisocial activity (ethics of community and divinity). The question then becomes: How does one get a person to "see" a moral question in a new way?

The three points just described lead to a few concrete suggestions. First, moral arguments and debates, whether in public or private, may very well be futile, and may even have the unfortunate effect of escalating hostilities by convincing each side that the other is not responsive to reason. Rather, speakers and writers on both sides should acknowledge the moral motivations of the other side. Concessions generally lead to reciprocal concessions (Axelrod, 1984; Komorita & Esser, 1975).

Next, speakers, politicians, and opinion leaders should emphasize the common moral ground that can be found. The ethics of autonomy are clearly shared by all Americans, but liberals will have to reach beyond this in some way to defuse the fear that conservatives have of a purely harm-based or rights-based morality. One powerful appeal might be based on simple common humanity. For example, one conservative woman in the present study began by condemning homosexuality, but as she thought about the possibility that sexual orientation is innate rather than chosen, she came to the following thought:

> If you get right down to it, then their act shouldn't be condemned either. Because if that's how their genetic makeup is, then it shouldn't be their fault because everybody wants to have that love and that reciprocated feeling.

Emphasizing that gay people want the same things as do heterosexuals—physical safety, job security, social acceptance, and lifelong love relationships—may be the most effective way to build common ground and to allay conservative fears. If conservatives and liberals ever fully understand the moral basis of each other's views, then perhaps the culture war over sexuality will cool down to a respectful disagreement.

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Appendix

Definitions of Codes Used in Moral-Content and Response-Style Analysis

Code	Definition
I. Moral-content codes:	
Ethics of autonomy	Includes any of the four following kinds of statements
Harm to self	Statements citing physical, spiritual, or mental harm that might befall the actor(s) of the scenario
Harm to others	Statements citing physical, spiritual, or mental harm done by the actor(s) to others
Harmlessness	Statements that no physical, spiritual, or mental harm has been done to anyone or anything
Rights	Statements that people should have the right, choice, freedom, or prerogative to do the things they want to do
Ethics of community	Statements that the social order/system must be maintained and protected; traditional roles of the family and community must be respected; social roles ought to be a certain way
Ethics of divinity	Statements about how the world ought to be, with respect to the relationship between humans and God; metaphorically speaking, the body is a temple, and its parts are sacred and designed for a specific purpose
II. Response-style codes	
Dumbfounding	Direct confessions that one does not know or cannot explain why one believes what one believes, especially if accompanied by puzzlement or laughter; frequently saying "I don't know," or stuttering
Ambivalence	Statements reflecting both sides of an issue: tolerant responses followed by condemnatory qualifiers, or condemnatory responses followed by tolerant qualifiers
Affective condemnation	Negative affect words (e.g., bother, disgust, sickness, shock, sadness, grossness, discomfort) paired with or cited as a justification for a condemnatory statement