

# Debasing Sacred Rituals: Changes to Rituals Trigger Moral Outrage and Punishment

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**1 INTRODUCTION**

- Rituals are often central to the most meaningful traditions around the world.
- Many group rituals do not change over time, suggesting there might be something psychologically distinct about rituals which keeps them immutable.
- Since group rituals represent group values and group values are considered moral, we propose rituals are also considered moral by ingroup members. As a result, changes to group rituals pose a threat to group values.
- We hypothesize that changing a group ritual (versus not changing it) elicits moral outrage (constellation of anger and judgments of immorality) and induces social punishment.

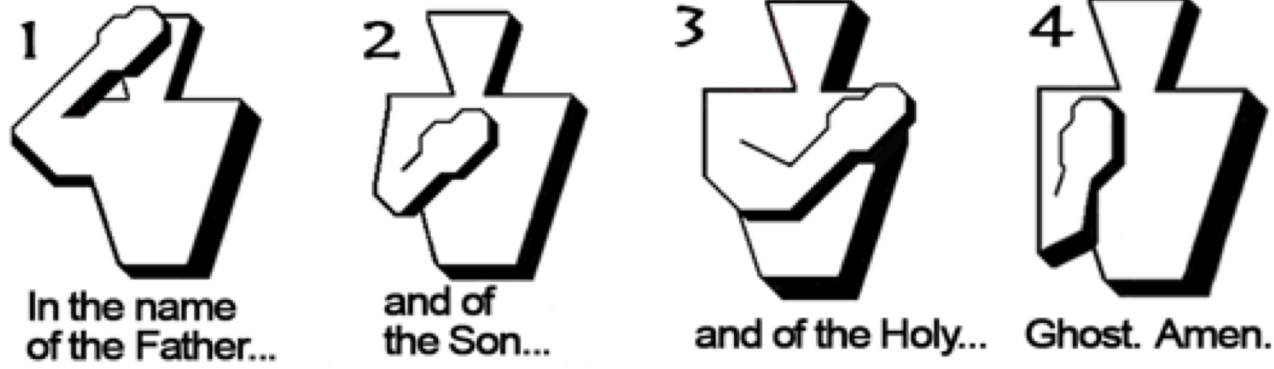


**2 Study 1: Catholic Sign of the Cross**

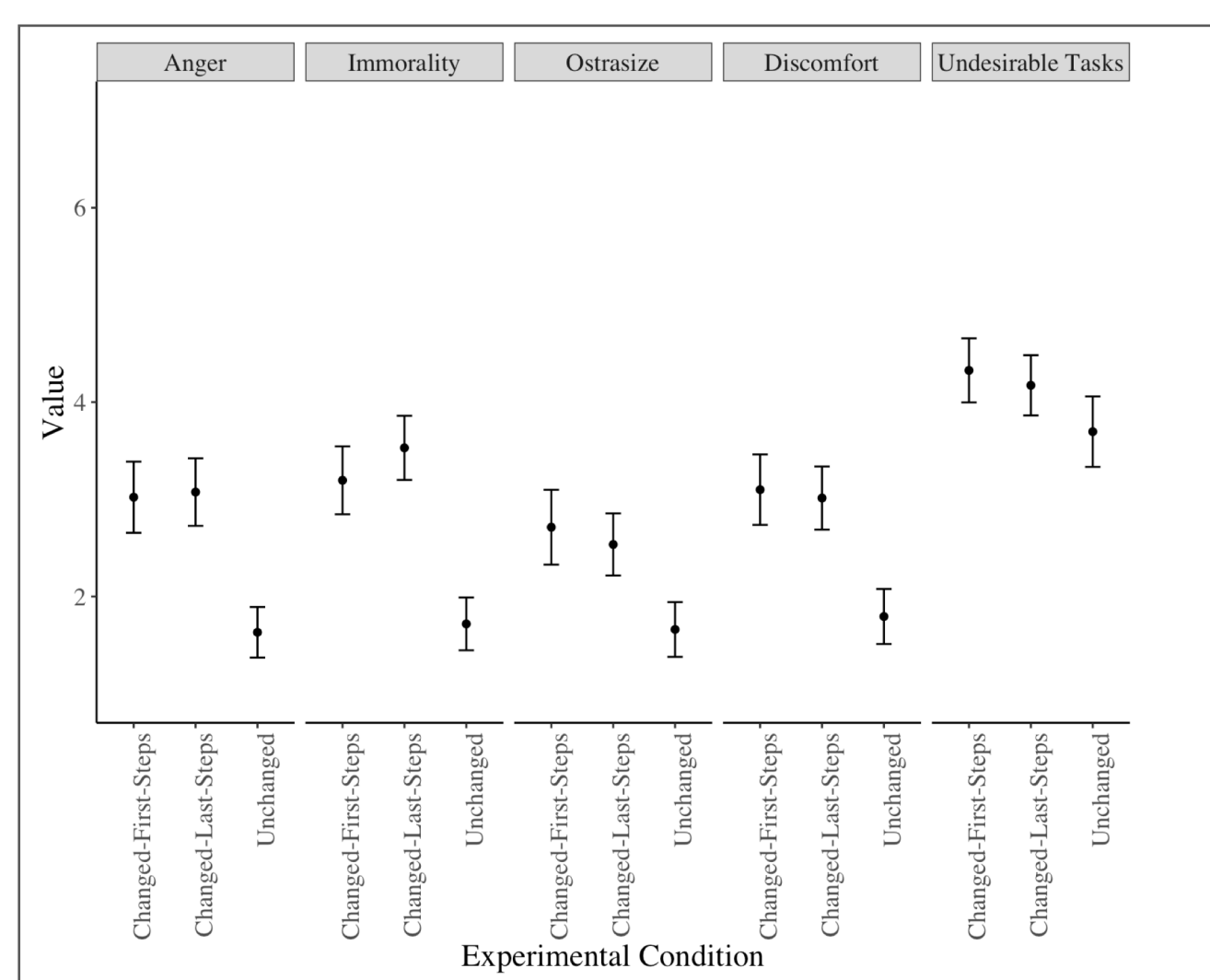
**Participants: 337 self-identified Catholics**

*Design:* Ritual 3 (unchanged ritual vs. changed-first-steps ritual vs. changed-last-steps ritual) between-subjects design

- Perform all four steps of the cross steps (**unchanged** condition)
- Perform the last two steps of the sign of the cross (**changed-first-steps** condition)
- Perform the first two steps of the sign of the cross (**changed-last-steps** condition)



- Dependent Variables:
  - Moral outrage (anger and judgments of immorality)
  - Punishment



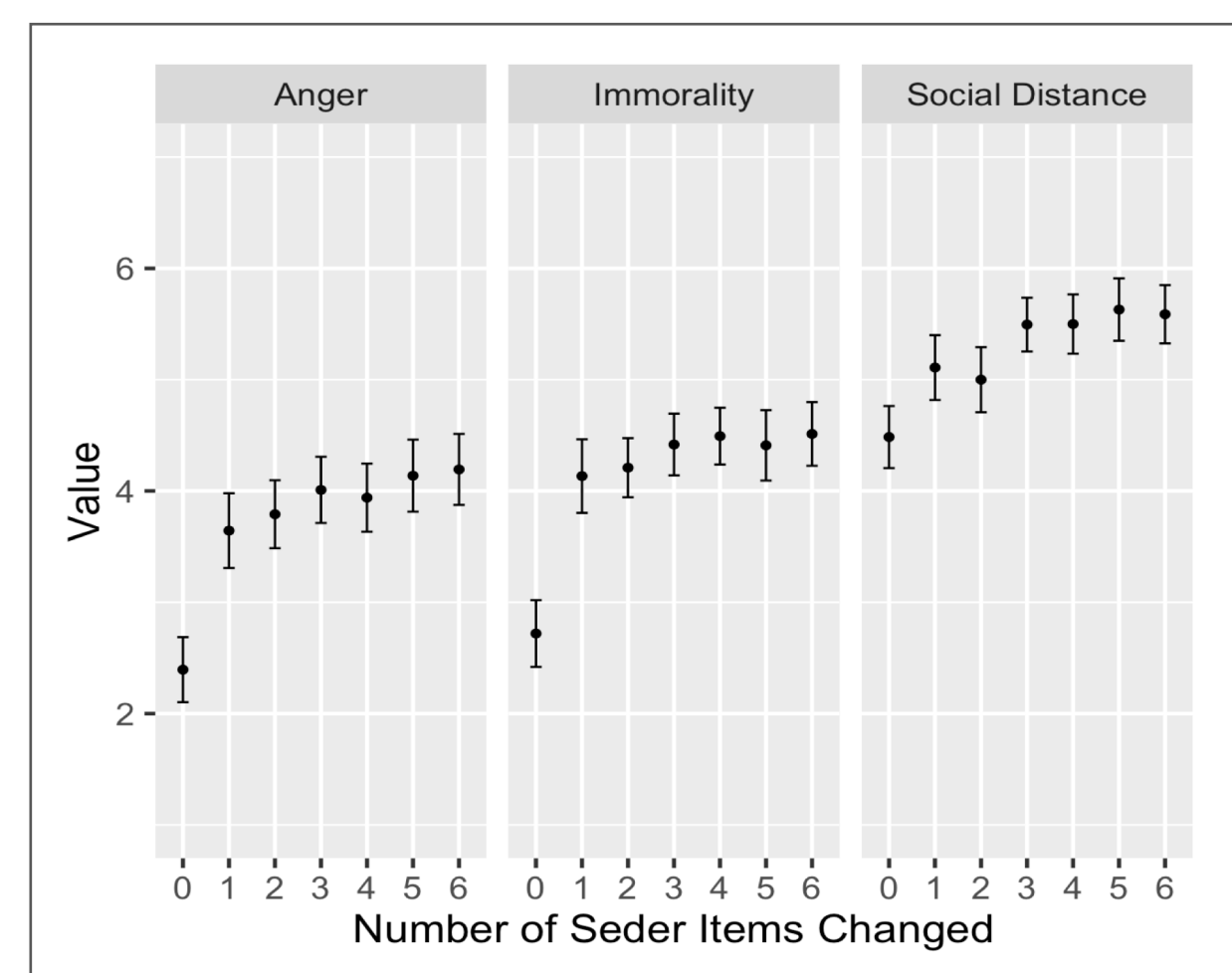
**3 Study 2: Passover Seder Scope of Change**

**Participants: 707 self-identified Jews**

*Stimuli:* Jewish Passover Seder plate (six items with each possessing unique meaning)

*Design:* Ritual (unchanged, change-1-item, change-2-items, change-3-items, change-4-items, change-5-items, change-6-items) between-subjects design

- Dependent Variables:
  - Moral outrage (anger and immorality)
  - Punishment

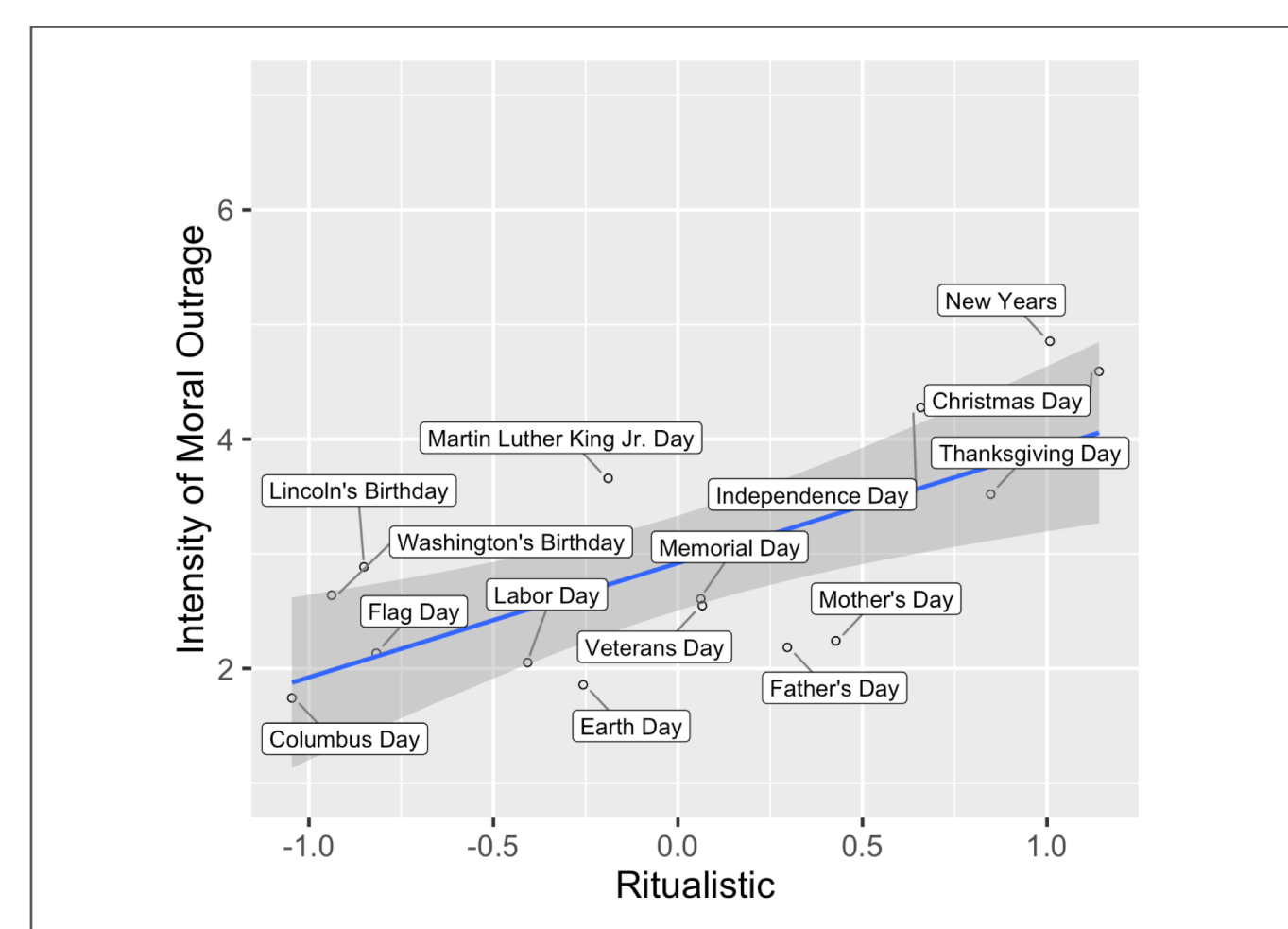


**4 Study 3: Fifteen U.S. Holidays**

**Participants: 107 U.S. citizens**

*Stimuli:* 15 different U.S. holidays moved forward one week by the U.S. government (i.e., the change)

- Independent Variables:
  - Physical features of ritual (9-items)
  - Meaningfulness (1-item)
- Dependent Variables:
  - Moral outrage (anger and immorality)



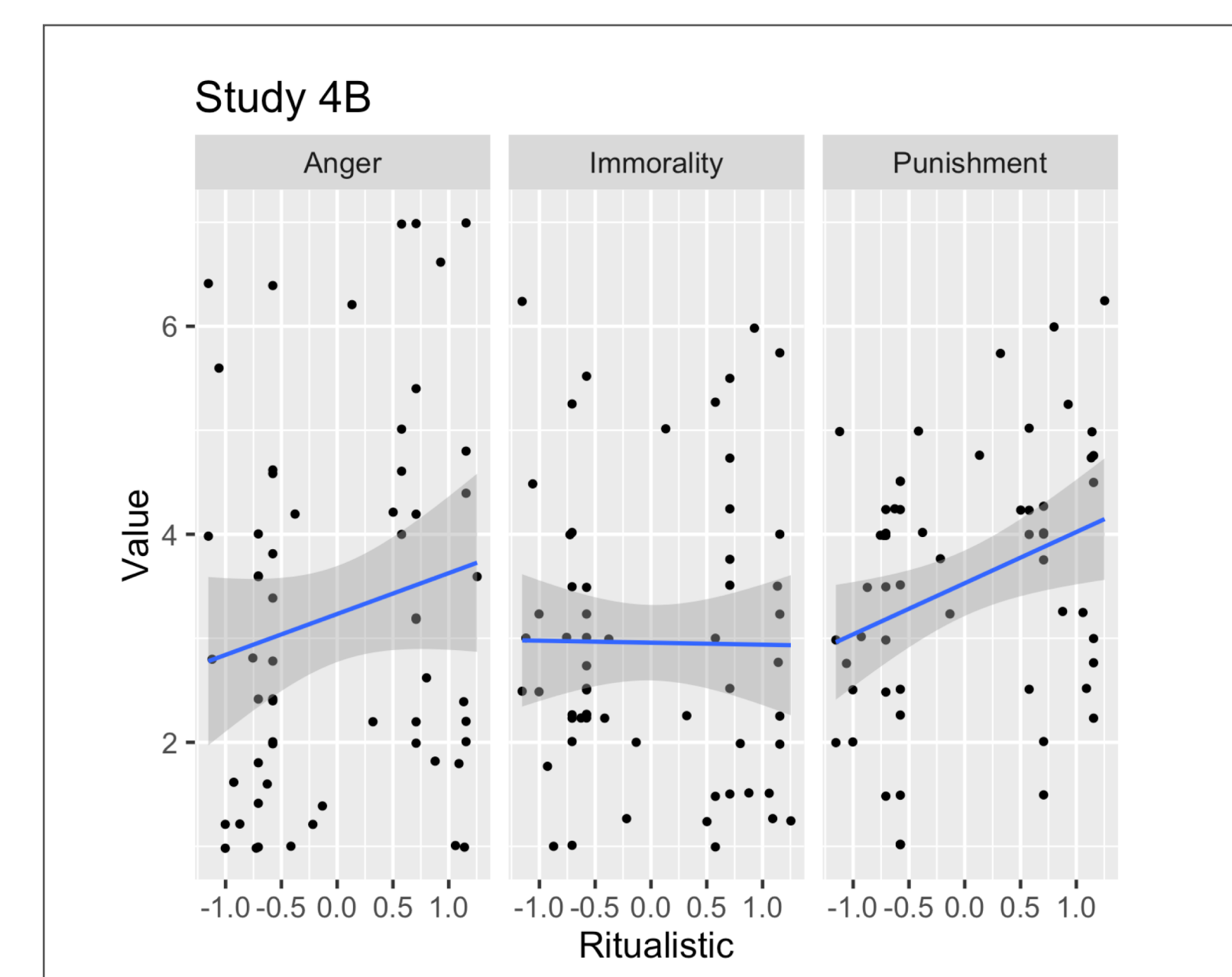
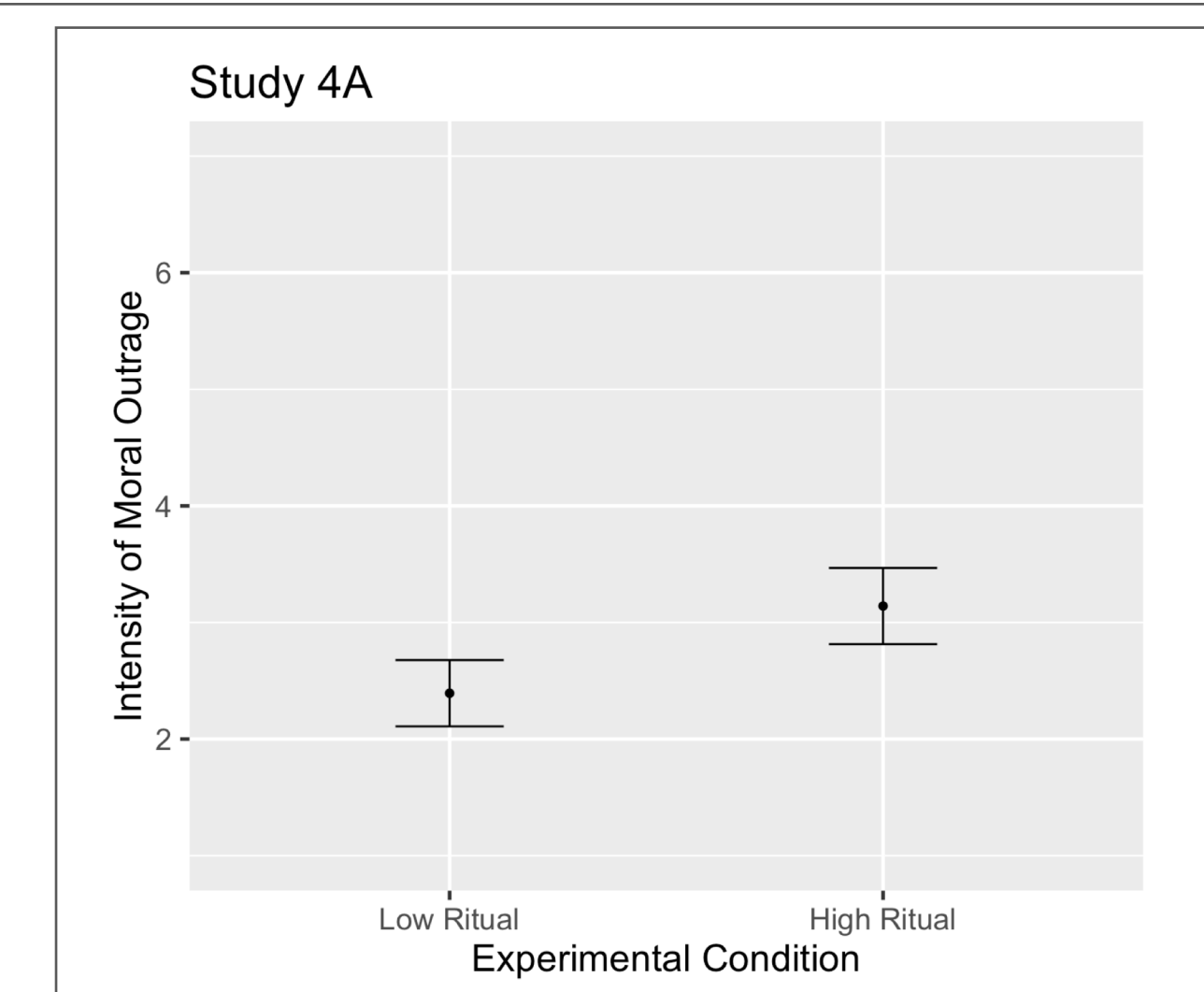
**5 Studies 4A and 4B: Fraternity Rituals**

**Participants: 35 members of a collegiate social fraternity** (52% of entire organization)

*4A Design:* View profiles of new members, who changed group activities either high or low in number of ritual features (within-subjects design)

*4B Design:* Recall real instances that new members changed group activities (high or low in ritual) and the consequences

- Dependent Variables:
  - Moral outrage (anger and immorality)
  - Real-world punishment (Study 4B only)



**6 CONCLUSION**

Five studies show that changes to group rituals elicit moral outrage and punishment. The results suggest one reason group rituals are immutable is because changes to group rituals produce immediate consequences (moral outrage and punishment), making it functionally difficult for rituals to change.

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