

Science

ANOTHER SHARK 'VIRGIN BIRTH'

DNA testing confirms that a shark pup found last year inside a dead Atlantic blacktip shark at the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center in Virginia Beach was conceived without the help of a male, making it the second known case of asexual reproduction — parthenogenesis — in sharks. The first case occurred in an Omaha aquarium in 2001. The Virginia shark, which died of complications related to the undetected pregnancy, had not been in the presence of any male of the species in eight years, and the DNA testing, reported Friday in the *Journal of Fish Biology*, found no genetic material from a male. Such "virgin births" probably occur in the wild but are rare, lead author Damian Chapman said.



REUTERS

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Shankar Vedantam

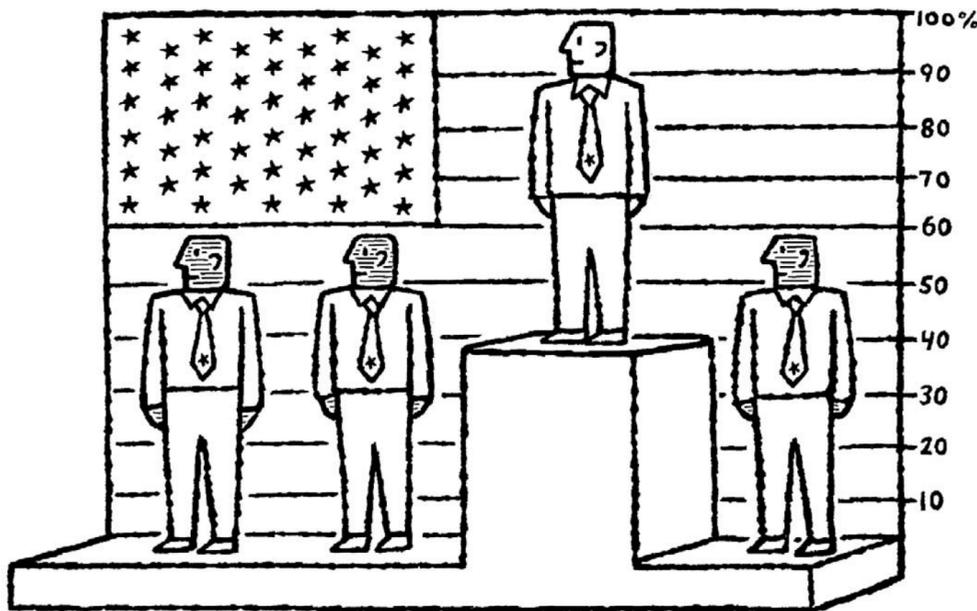
Does Your Subconscious Think Obama Is Foreign?

A few years ago, psychologists Mahzarin Banaji and Thierry Devos showed the names of a number of celebrities to a group of volunteers and asked them to classify the well-known personalities as American or non-American. The list included television personality Connie Chung and tennis star Michael Chang, both Asian Americans, as well as British actors Hugh Grant and Elizabeth Hurley. The volunteers had no trouble identifying Chung and Chang as American and Grant and Hurley as foreigners.

The psychologists then asked the group which names they associated with iconic American symbols such as the U.S. flag, the Capitol building and Mount Rushmore, and which ones they associated with generically foreign symbols such as the United Nations building in Geneva, a Ukrainian 100-hryven bill and a map of Luxembourg.

The psychologists found that the participants, who were asked to answer quickly, were dramatically quicker to associate the American symbols with the British actors, and the foreign symbols with the Asian Americans. The results suggest that on a subconscious level people were using ethnicity as a proxy for American identity and equating whites — even white foreigners — with things American.

The psychologists initially assumed that this bias began and ended with Asian Americans and would not apply to other ethnic groups. But in another experiment involving famous black athletes around the time of the 2000 Sydney Olympics, they found that the same pattern applied to African Americans. Although white volunteers agreed explicitly that hurdlers Allen Johnson and Angelo Taylor, who won two golds at Sydney, "contributed to the glory of America" and "represent what America is all about," they were slower to associate photos of black athletes than white athletes with American symbols. Black participants, on the other hand, were as quick to associate black athletes as white athletes with being American.



BY LEWIS SCOTT FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

"The reason this is powerful is it shows our minds will not just distort our preferences but distort facts," said Banaji, who works at Harvard. "African Americans in their [own] minds are fully American, but not in the minds of whites."

The experiments, based on tests that are accessible at implicit.harvard.edu, have provoked controversy — especially in terms of what they mean. It may embarrass people when they subconsciously associate whites with being American, but does that matter? If people have no trouble distinguishing Americans and foreigners in their conscious minds, why should we care about their subconscious tendencies?

It may matter a lot when it comes to voting behavior, the researchers said. In a new series of experiments, Devos

has shown that the "white equals American" bias could well be playing a powerful role in the presidential election. (Banaji is a registered Democrat; Devos is not an American citizen.)

During the primary season, Devos, at San Diego State University, along with colleague Debbie Ma at the University of Chicago, found that on a subconscious level, people more easily associated Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton with being American than Sen. Barack Obama. Clinton is white; Obama is biracial.

Even more remarkably, the psychologists found that the volunteers were quicker to associate former British prime minister Tony Blair with being American than Obama. Blair is white.

On a conscious level, the participants

had no trouble identifying Obama and Clinton as American, and Blair as a foreigner. But Devos and Ma found that the subconscious associations mattered: People who were slower to see Obama as American on a subconscious level were less likely to be willing to vote for the senator from Illinois than people who more easily associated him with American symbols. This was true of both Republicans and Democrats.

In a final set of experiments completed just last week, Thierry said the researchers had found an identical pattern when they compared people's subconscious associations with Obama and his Republican presidential opponent, Sen. John McCain. On a conscious level, volunteers said that both Obama and

McCain were American, but on a subconscious level, volunteers were quicker to associate McCain with being American than Obama — and the strength of these subconscious associations predicted people's voting intentions.

"The less you see Obama as American compared to McCain, the less likely you are to vote for him," Devos said.

It is important to emphasize that the bias uncovered by the studies was subtle, and only one of many factors that go into people's voting choices. The research in no way suggests that all of Obama's opponents are racially biased — people who do not find Obama appealing may well reach their conclusions based on policy positions, partisan identification and personal circumstances.

But Devos said the difficulty in seeing African Americans as fully American is clearly a drag on Obama's prospects, without which he would probably be further ahead in the polls.

The provocative research also may help explain why Obama has proved vulnerable to negative messages that question his identity and his loyalty to America. From the false rumors that Obama is a Muslim and that he refuses to salute the American flag, to the repeated reminders at Republican rallies that Obama's middle name is Hussein and recent concerns that voters just don't know enough about him, the attacks that have dogged the Democratic presidential candidate are not the traditional racial stereotypes that have been used against many African American politicians.

"We cannot think of him as frightening or a likely criminal — he is the antithesis of that," Banaji said. "So when the mind goes searching for reasons to distrust him, the first thing it lands on are the foreign connections" — Indonesia and Africa, places to which Obama has ties.

"Suggesting Obama is foreign or unknown offers a cover for racism," she said. "You can't say he is black and unfit to be president, but you can say that he is Muslim and therefore unfit to be president."

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