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# Kiasu (怕輸) and its moderating effects on multicultural experiences on creativity and persistence tasks.

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## The “Abridged” Version:

**Question:** Can a cultural norm exert both positive and negative influence on its subscribers?

**Method:** Three experimental studies explored this question in creativity and persistence tasks.

**Findings:** The answer is **YES**. Kiasu (a Singaporean cultural norm) can either impair creativity performance or help boost persistency.

## The Background

### ❖ Multicultural experiences & Creativity in Singapore

- ❖ One way to have multicultural experiences is to live in a society which is culturally diverse like Singapore.
- ❖ Singapore’s population comprises of ethnic Chinese, Indians, Malays, Eurasians and other ethnic groups. Examples of multicultural policies and social practices adopted:
  - Usage of four official languages (Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English).
  - Designating various ethnic and religious festivals as national holidays (e.g., Christmas Day, Hari Raya Puasa, Vesak Day).
- ❖ Given the positive effects multicultural experiences has on creativity performance (e.g., Leung & Chiu, 2010), it is surprising that Singaporeans are not known for their creativity (e.g., Lau, 2007).
- ❖ One possible reason could be due to Kiasu being a national fixation within Singapore.

### ❖ What is Kiasu?

- ❖ A Hokkien (Chinese dialect) translation of the Chinese word 怕輸, which literally means “fear of losing”.
- ❖ A mindset in which an individual tries to get the most out of every interaction (Kirby et al. 2010). Examples of Kiasuism:
  - Gathering too much food on one’s plate during a buffet for the fear of having no more food later.
  - Queuing up overnight to ensure that one successfully gets a place for their child in a prestigious school.

### ❖ But, is a cultural norm like Kiasu all that bad?

- ❖ We think not. Prior research (e.g., Hwang et al. 2002) shows that students high (vs. low) in Kiasu persisted more in schoolwork-related activities, indicating that Kiasuism may have positive influence on an individual when he/she faces a task that requires persistence.
- ❖ It is likely that Kiasu can benefit a Singaporean when it comes to persistence tasks.

## Research Purpose

- ❖ We sought to investigate whether Kiasu is a boundary condition that limits the positive effects of multicultural experience and creativity within Singaporeans. Additionally, we also explored its positive effects on tasks that require persistence.

## Methodology of Present Studies

- ❖ **In Study 1**, 187 Singaporean undergrad participants completed 2 tasks: (1) Description writing and (2) Remote Association Task (RAT).

### ➢ Description Writing

- Participants were randomly assigned to write 10 sentences about their culture, or country or favourite sports.
- Those tasked to write about their culture, descriptions were read for the presence of Kiasu and these participants were divided into (recalling) Kiasu and no Kiasu conditions.
- 4 conditions in total: Culture (with Kiasu), Culture (without Kiasu), Country, Sports.

### ➢ Remote Association Task (RAT)

- 15 items; example: Peas, Envy, Golf: \_\_\_\_\_ (Ans: GREEN)

- ❖ **In Study 2**, 191 Singaporean undergrad participants completed 3 tasks: (1) Picture rating, (2) Gift idea generation task, and (3) survey questions.

### ➢ Picture rating task

- All participants rated 6 pictures on colourfulness or likeability.
- Kiasu condition: 3 of the 6 pictures were Kiasu related (e.g., Mr Kiasu).
- Control condition: 6 pictures were neutral pictures (e.g., flowers).

### ➢ Gift Idea Generation task

- To write down the first 6 gift ideas that come to mind for school alumni.

### ➢ Survey

- 16-item measurement of Need for Cognitive Closure (NFC; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996).
- 3 questions on Kiasu with a 5-point Likert scale
  - ❖ How much do you understand this cultural tendency, Kiasu? (Kiasu knowledge)
  - ❖ To what extent do you think this cultural tendency of “Kiasu” describes a typical Singaporean? (Kiasu typicality perception)
  - ❖ **To what extent do you think this cultural tendency of “Kiasu” describes you? (personal Kiasu tendency)**

- ❖ **In Study 3**, 90 Singaporean undergrad participants completed 3 tasks: (1) Picture rating, (2) Word search, and (3) Kiasu survey questions.

- The picture rating task and survey questions on Kiasu were identical to those used in Study 2.

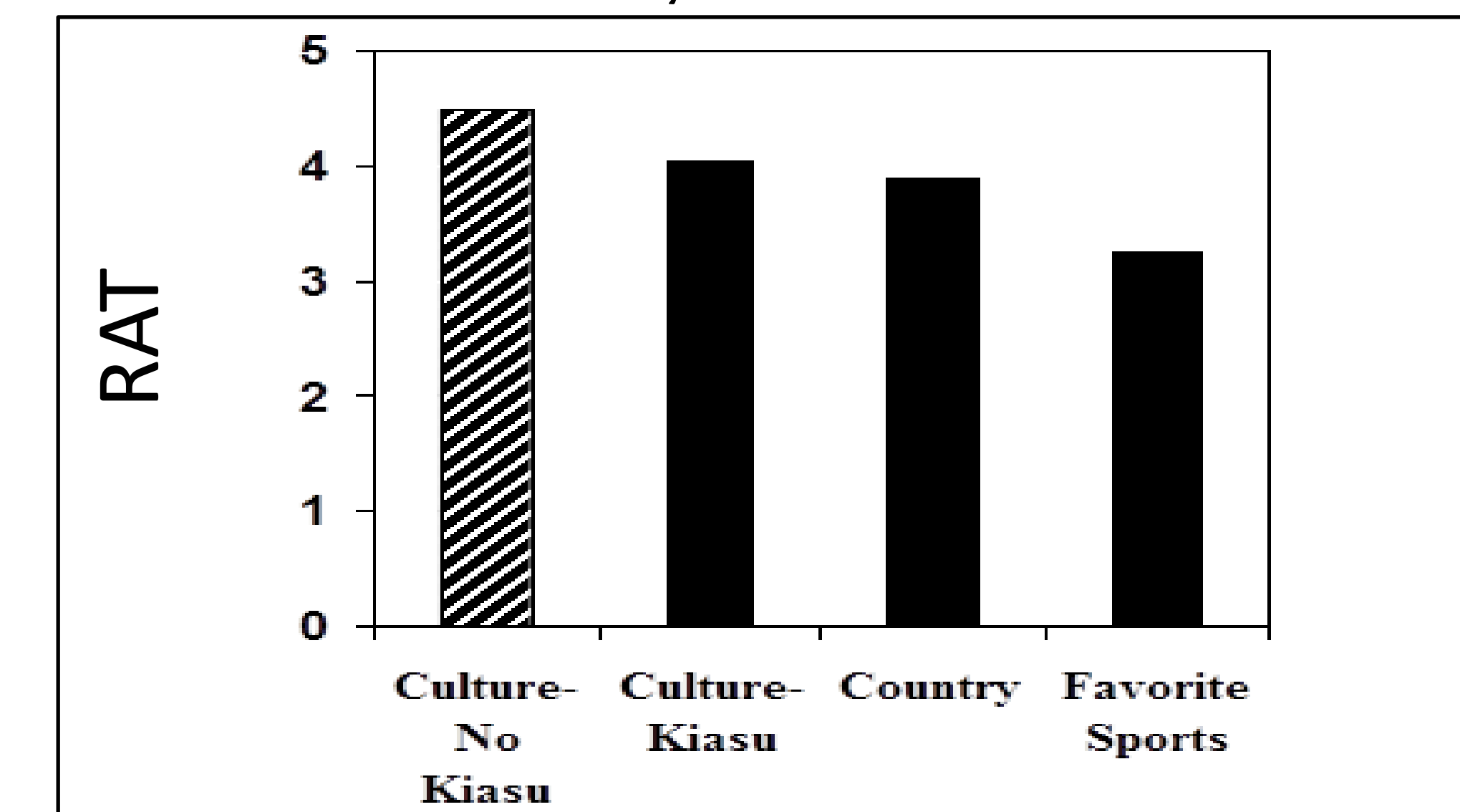
### ➢ Word Search Task:

- Participants had 5 minutes to search for 15 or more words (>3 letters).
- Before starting, participants also read this paragraph:

*In the following task, you have 5 minutes to search for 15 words in the word grid. On average, Singaporean students can find more than 15 words within 5 minutes. If you have found 15 words and have extra time left, you may choose to 1) move on to the next task OR 2) continue searching for more words till you run out of the 5 minutes.*

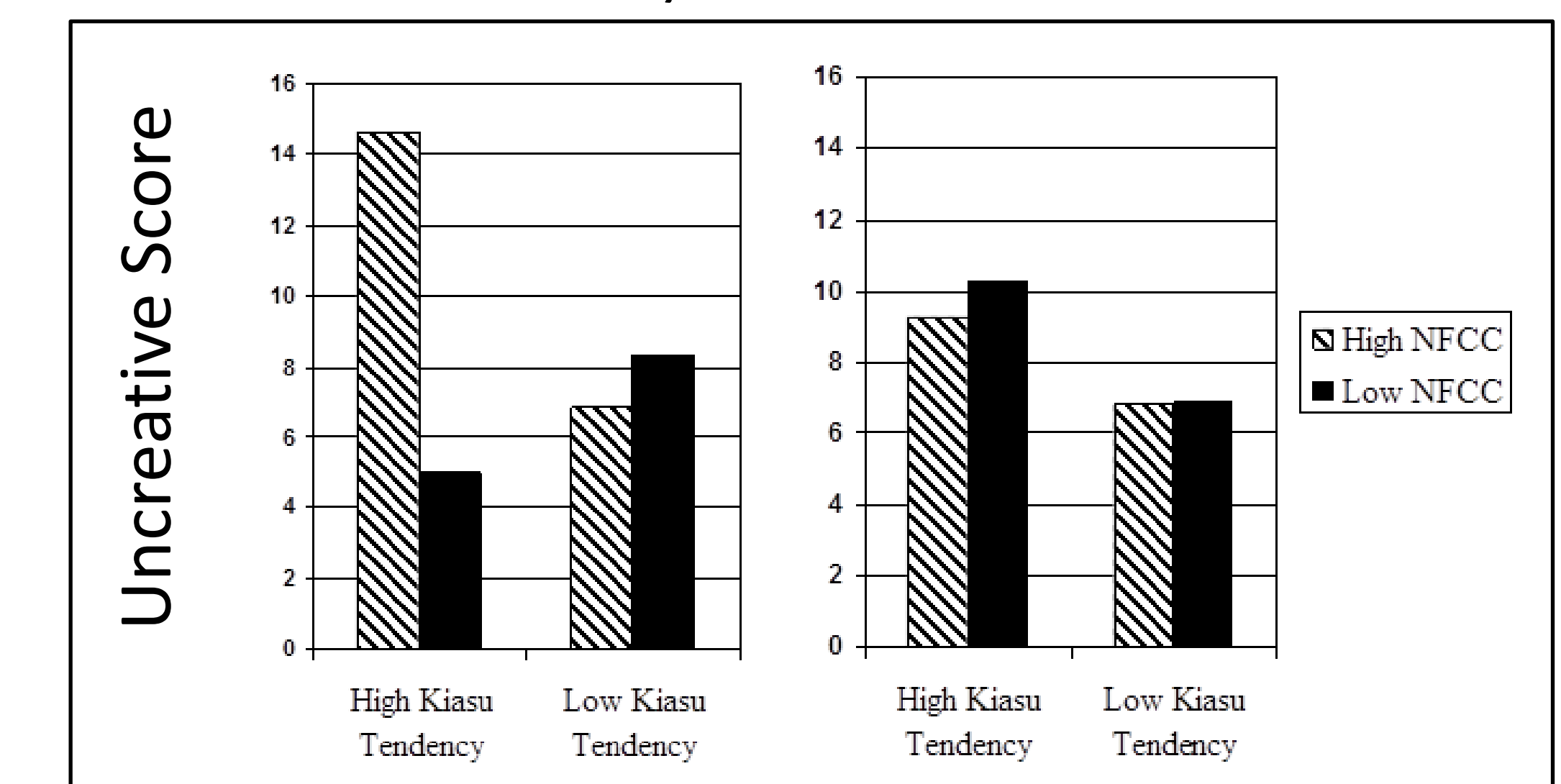
- For data analysis, we calculated the score by  $X - 15$ , where X is the number of words found by participant, since we were interested in how much participants persisted to hit 15 words and beyond.

## Study 1 Results



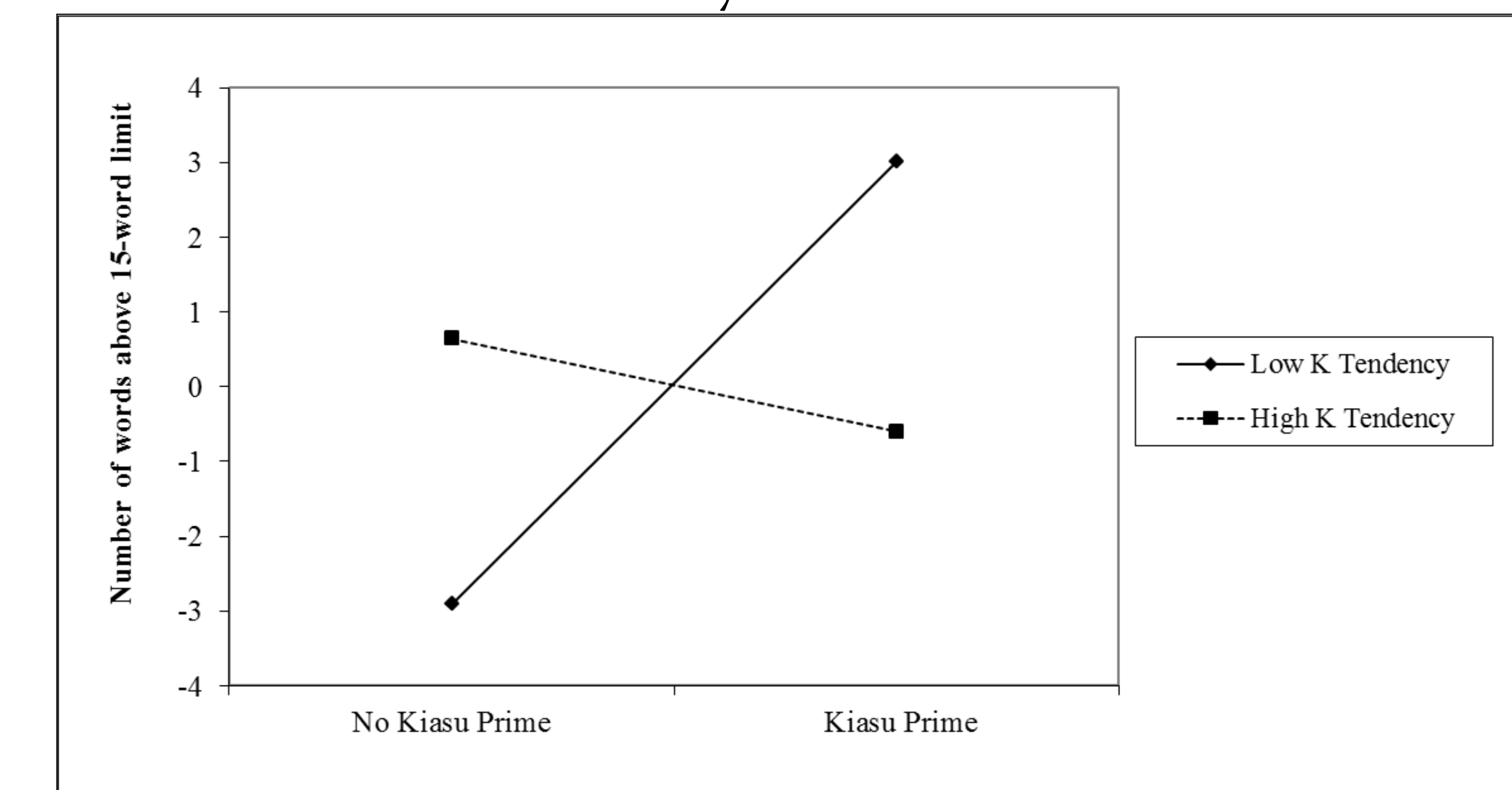
1-way ANOVA with the 4 priming conditions as IV and total RAT score as DV was conducted. A significant main effect of priming conditions was found; highest RAT score was found in the Culture (without Kiasu) condition.

## Study 2 Results



As the regression supported the 3-way interaction (picture prime condition X Kiasu tendency X NFC), data was split between picture prime conditions. Least creative participants were those high in NFC and Kiasu tendency, and were primed with Kiasu.

## Study 3 Results



We regressed individual Kiasu tendency, picture prime condition, Kiasu x prime interaction against persistence (# of words found beyond 15). Participants high in Kiasu tendency tend to find around 15 words, regardless of whether Kiasu was primed or not. However, participants low in Kiasu showed an increase in persistence in the Kiasu prime condition, as compared to the control condition.

