Abstract

Christianity preaches tolerance and peace, yet some Christians are prejudiced and violent. Three studies explored how over-claiming academic and biblical concepts correlated with prejudice and support for religious terrorism. Study 1 found that Christians claiming familiarity with *imaginary* Bible concepts were prejudiced and supported terrorism, whereas actual Bible knowledge was negatively correlated with these outcomes. Study 2 found that, among Christians, academic over-claiming had no correlation with support for terrorism or prejudice, however, academic knowledge was negatively correlated with these outcomes. Study 3 replicated both of these findings in a religiously heterogeneous sample. In sum, those familiar with the Bible reject religious violence and are mostly unprejudiced, whereas those who falsely claim Bible knowledge endorse both prejudice and religious violence.

Keywords: Prejudice, violence, terrorism, over-claiming, religion

God hates you! …or so I've heard: Over-claiming Bible Knowledge predicts prejudice and support for religious terrorism

The books of the Christian Bible, especially those based on the word of Jesus Christ (the most influential figure in Christianity), contain messages of kindness, peace, and love for one another. Although not all passages in the Bible are about peace, and a few are quite violent, forgiveness and peace is a central theme of the *New Testament.* These books further emphasize barriers to salvation such as the love of money and hatred. In spite of these teachings, the Christian religion has been cited as a motivation for bigotry (e.g., Glock & Stark, 1966), wars (e.g., Batson, 1976), and even money schemes (Frankl, 1987; Hadden & Swann, 1981). These associations seem to undermine Christian teachings (e.g., Conkle, 1993; Piper, 1979). Even in historical records, Jesus spent his time with prostitutes and tax collectors (i.e., "sinners" of the time) and preached forgiveness and tolerance – messages that are similar to most major religious prophets and holy teachings (Gritsch, 2009; Moon, 1992).

Most religions have a "Holy Book" from which their teachings derive. In Christianity, it is the *Holy Bible*. The Bible remains routinely quoted not only by religious figures, but by political and judicial ones as well (e.g., Zgonjanin, 2005). However, individuals may cite not only what they read, but what they *think* they read. For example, Atran (2001; 2007) has argued that information does not get passed down through generations in the way genes or other material do (e.g., Atran, Medin, and Ross, 2005). Instead, cultural awareness significantly alters the interpretation of information. Individuals add what they know about their cultural landscape to information they acquire. For example, as cited in Atran (2007), an unpublished manuscript by Konrath found that most individuals inferred different meanings from the famous statement,

"Let a thousand flowers bloom," based largely on differential cultural and personal experiences. Furthermore, humans do not process information passively, but rather in a motivated fashion. People often interpret what they want to interpret from a message (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). Moreover, people often ignore threatening information or selectively expose themselves to welcomed information only (e.g., Frey, 1986). With respect to religious texts, high levels of religious fundamentalism (RF) is associated with falsely perceiving the presence of statements that are not actually present in text (Galen, Wolfe, DeLeeuw, & Wyngarden, 2009). In addition to fundamentalist beliefs, personal meaning, comprehension, and resonance have an impact on recall and interpretation as well, especially in memory and recall (Yeatts, 1988).

Perceptions of Biblical teachings may not only be interpreted in a biased fashion by the reader, but may additionally be passed on by interpersonal interactions, where further distortions may take place. Individuals may even seek out like-minded individuals to interact with, who may share extreme views. For example, Ginges, Hansen, and Norenzayan (2009) found that it was the frequency of attending religious meetings, not prayer, that predicted support for terrorism. Thus, it is entirely possible that messages of hate come from group think or word of mouth, and gets re-interpreted as gospel. In fact, it does not take much for a religious message – when passed on by many – to be misconstrued. Instead of proper interpretation, a group's sacred values can obfuscate the main message behind religious teachings (Atran, Axelrod, & Davis, 2008).

One may wonder why individuals would ever be certain that something was in the Holy Bible when, in fact, it never was. Research has shown that individuals who are most convinced of their knowledge often know the least about the topic (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). For

example, Kruger and Dunning found that unskilled people were dangerously unaware of their lack of knowledge. Such lack of knowledge has been linked to certain dispositions, such as self-deception (Paulhus, 1984).

Individuals who are self-deceptive engage in counter-productive coping behaviors (e.g., Paulhus, 1984). Such inaccurate self-knowledge also has a darker side. For example, Paulhus, Harms, Bruce, and Lysy (2003) demonstrated that narcissistic individuals commonly over-claim their own knowledge in order to bolster their self-concept (see also Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

Over-claiming religious information may be unique when compared to other types of over-claiming (e.g., academics, consumer products, or popular media). Self-deception also has a sanctimonious element, which provides people with a sense of moral superiority (Paulhus & John, 1998). In fact, religiosity is linked to self-enhancement strategies (Sedikides & Gebauer, 2010). In this way, individuals can use religious views and teachings as a means of enhancing the self-perceptions of being good or moral. As a consequence, the more individuals claim to know about their religion, the better they may feel about themselves, and consequently, the more they may feel entitled to say things that may be perceived by others as negative. Such negative behavior often stems from a sense of "moral licensure" (Khan & Dhar, 2006; Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010), where individuals who engage feel good and moral in one sense often feel entitled to act in ways that are bad or immoral in the next. In this way, individuals who falsely believe they know more of the Bible than they actually do may feel "moral licensure" to engage in acts that are otherwise counter to their belief systems. For example, Monin and Miller (2001) found that individuals who first demonstrated egalitarianism were more likely to let prejudice affect future decisions (see also Merritt, et. al., 2010). In the same way, Christians who claim more

familiarity with the Bible than is warranted may feel licensed to support messages counter to Biblical teachings such as prejudice and violence.

Summary

In sum, there are several lines of evidence to suggest that over-claiming Bible knowledge may be associated with attitudes that are counter to religious teachings: (a) Individuals who are most convinced of their knowledge tend to know the least about a subject, (b) word-of-mouth information can often get confused and reinterpreted (c) such reinterpretation is often biased by motivated processing, (d) those who over-claim their knowledge tend to have special characteristics (e.g., self-deception, sanctimonious attitudes, sense of moral licensure) that would predispose them to endorse moral judgment and deny truth. Thus, Bible over-claiming may help explain the paradox of why some religious individuals may endorse egalitarianism and peace, yet others are prejudiced and violent.

I predict that individuals who are high in over-claiming Bible knowledge will be prejudiced against different religious groups (e.g., Jews, Muslims), and ethnic minorities (i.e., those of African heritage). In addition, and perhaps a dangerous combination with prejudice, such individuals are hypothesized to support religious terrorism. However, considering the message of Christianity is mostly peaceful, I predicted that actual Bible knowledge would be negatively related to these outcomes.

General Method

Participant source and recruitment

All participants were adults recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) website and each participant had a unique IP address (www.mechanicalturk.com). MTurk produces excellent and diverse data without sacrificing reliability (e.g., Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010), even in the realm of morality (e.g., DeScioli, Christner, & Kurzban, 2011).

Participants in Studies 1 and 2 were recruited for a survey entitled, "Calling all Christians! Bible Familiarity survey," to maximize the number of Christian volunteers. Individuals indicating another religion were removed from analysis. In Study 3, participants signed up for a study entitled, "information and personal beliefs" and individuals of any religion were included in the analyses.

General design and procedure

Following Paulhus and colleagues (2003), I searched the Christian Bible to generate a list of stories, people, and books that varied from familiar (e.g., Judas Betrays Jesus) to relatively unfamiliar (The death of Abijah). These familiarity distinctions were made through several discussions with members of a United Methodist church in the Northeast of the United States.

Next, false items were generated by taking common themes (e.g., the temple of, the journey of, the Roman injunction of) and adding a false ending. For example, "The Roman Injunction of Paulhus" (named after the creator of the measure) served as one of the foils.   The plausibility of these foils was discussed with the Methodist church members. Discussions with church members and www.Google.com searches both served to confirm the non-existence of

foils. The final Bible Over-Claiming Questionnaire (BOCQ) can be seen in Appendix A (as was presented to participants).

General Statistical Approach

An examination of descriptive statistics (see Table 1) revealed that most variables were free from normality deviations. Some variables, however, were not normally distributed. As a result, logarithmic transformations were performed on these measures to assure that the results were not biased. This procedure ensures that such normality deviations do not affect Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) assumptions. In all reported cases, transformations do not change the overall message. For interpretation simplicity, I will report non-transformed data.

Although Studies 1 and 2 included only Christians only, those of African Heritage were removed from all studies prior to analyzing any racial/ethnic prejudice data. Similarly, individuals who reported being Jewish or Muslim were removed in Study 3 prior to analyzing religious prejudice data.

Scoring for the overclaiming measures was identical to that of Paulhus and colleagues (2003). First, indication of familiarity with a concept was coded as a "1" whereas non-endorsement was coded as "0." This process was repeated across the different Likert options to create an index of both bias and accuracy. Scores were then summed for foils (imaginary concepts) and hits (actual concepts). These two scores were added together to create a measure of *Bible over-claiming* (see Paulhus et al., 2003). Next, the sum of the foils was subtracted from the sum of true items to create a measure of *Bible Knowledge*. This procedure creates a measure that closely approximates actual knowledge relatively free of bias (see Paulhus & Harms, 2004).

The same procedure was conducted for the academic over-claiming measure as well to create measures of *Academic over-claiming* and *Academic knowledge*.

Study 1 – Bible over-claiming

Participants

A total of 187 adults volunteered, however, given the focus on the Christian Bible, only participants indicating that they were a member of the Christian religion were included. The final sample (all Christian) was 155 (65 men, 90 women; Mean age = 31.60, SD = 10.35; 80% European heritage, 7% African Heritage, 3% East Asian, 10% other mixed ethnicities).

Measures

Bible measures. Study 1 included the computed measures of Bible over-claiming and Bible knowledge obtained from the BOCQ. The Bible foils and real Bible items used to generate these indexes had acceptable reliably (α's > .90).

Prejudice measures. In order to measure religious prejudice, I used a modified version of the Pettigrew's subtle and blatant prejudice scales (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). To reduce response burden, participants were randomly assigned to a prejudice measure focused on Jewish individuals or those of African heritage. Each item was answered on a 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*) Likert scale. After reverse scoring appropriate items, all items were averaged to form a composite measure of racial prejudice (α = .94) and anti-Semitism (α = .93).

In addition, Herek's (1988) 9-item homophobia measure was also included to assess anti-gay or anti-homosexual attitudes (α = .94).

Right-Wing Authoritarianism. Six items (with equal numbers of pro and con trait items) were used from Altmeyer's 15-item RWA scale (Altmeier, 1981; see also Duckitt & Sibley, 2007). Previous research by Duckitt and Sibley (2007) have found that six items are sufficient for assessing RWA attitudes. The items used were x1, …. Found in the 15 item scale. These items formed a reliable composite ($\alpha = .81$).

Social Dominance Orientation. In addition, all participants filled out six items each from the SDO (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) scale (three pro and three con trait items). Like RWA, six items have been previously used to assess both the RWA and SDO constructs (Duckitt & Sibley, 2007). The items used were x1…. From Pratto and colleagues. After reverse scoring these items were averaged to form a composite of SDO ($\alpha = .80$).

Political attitudes. To measure political attitudes, participants were asked three questions: "how conservative/liberal are you socially?" "How conservative/liberal are you economically?" and "Overall, how do you see yourself politically?" Each question ranged from 1 (*extremely liberal*) to 5 (*extremely conservative*). The three items were averaged and formed a reliable composite ($\alpha = .87$).

Religiosity. Participants were also asked how many times per week they prayed, and with how often they attended religious meetings (see Ginges, et al., 2009), and were asked "How religious do you see yourself." (from 1 - *not at all religious* to 5 - *extremely religious*). All of these items were then standardized and averaged for a composite score of religiosity ($\alpha = .77$). It is important to note that analyzing these variables separately do not change the overall message.

Religious terrorism. In addition to the above measures, participants also filled out a brief two-item measure of support for religious terrorism: "Those who use violence to defend the Bible are heroes" and "There is no excuse for abortion clinic shootings" (reverse scored). These two items formed a two-item composite ($\alpha = .53$). It should be noted that this two-item composite does not reach conventional criteria for internal reliability. However, analyzing the questions individually did not change the overall results.

Results and discussion

Most variables were normally distributed across Study 1, with a few exceptions (see Table 1). Bible over-claiming and Bible knowledge were unrelated, (see Table 2 for all inter-correlations among independent variables). As predicted, Bible over-claiming was positively correlated with anti-Semitism, racial prejudice, and support for religious terrorism (see Table 3). By contrast, however, actual Bible knowledge was *negatively* correlated with these outcomes.

A multiple regression was conducted to determine the unique contribution of each independent variable. The results indicated that Bible Overclaiming accounted for significant and unique variance with respect to support for religious terrorism. Moreover, Bible Knowledge was significantly and negatively related to support for religious terrorism.

Bible over-claiming also positively correlated with SDO, whereas Bible knowledge was negatively correlated with SDO. This finding makes sense given that SDO overlaps with several malevolent personalities, including narcissism (Jones & Figueredo, in press). Given that narcissists are focused on themselves and Social Dominance individuals are focused on group oppression, self-enhancement may be differentially related with respect to these two dispositions.

For example, narcissism may be the best predictor of agentic self-enhancement, whereas Social Dominance may be the best predictor of communal or moral self-enhancement.

Interestingly, religiosity was positively and independently related to both Bible over-claiming and Bible knowledge ($\beta = .24$, $p < .05$; $\beta = .17$, $p < .05$, respectively). As a consequence, individuals who frequently attend religious services and consider themselves religious may do so because of genuine interest and knowledge about the Bible and their religion. However, individuals who attend these services and claim to be religious may also be driven by false claims of knowledge and sanctimonious self-enhancement (cf. Sedikides & Gabauer, 2010). Neither political views nor Right Wing Authoritarianism had a relationship with either Bible over-claiming or Bible knowledge.

Study 2 – Academic over-claiming

Study 1 was an important first step showing that Bible over-claiming predicts both prejudice and support for terrorism among Christians. However, it is possible that among Christians, any type of over-claiming may have the same effect – and Bible over-claiming is not unique. To test this possibility, Study 2 was conducted on a similar Christian sample investigating similar outcomes with Academic over-claiming.

Participants and measures

Participants were 123 adults. Once again, non-Christians were removed leaving a total sample of 106 adults (41 men, 65 women; Mean age = 33.70; 80% European heritage, 6% African-American, 4% East Asian, 10% other mixed ethnicities). All procedures were identical to Study 3 with two exceptions. First, the BOCQ was removed and a 90-item academic over-

claiming measure was added (Paulhus, et al., 2003). Second, to increase power, all participants

filled out only an adapted Pettigrew scale for anti-Semitism as a measure of religious prejudice.

Third, participants filled out a modified version of the Modern Racism Scale (MRS:

McHonahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981) to measure racial prejudice.   The same terrorism items that

can be found in Study 1 were used, but the alpha reliability of this two item composite was again

poor ($\alpha = .35$), all other alphas had acceptable internal reliability (i.e., >.76).

Results and discussion

The measures of Academic over-claiming and Academic knowledge were uncorrelated, r

$= .02$, $p = .818$. As can be seen in Table 2, Academic over-claiming did not correlate with

religious prejudice, racial prejudice, or support for religious terrorism. One potential criticism of

Study 2 could be that the sample size was smaller than Study 1, which may make it more

difficult to detect significance. Although unrelated, Academic over-claiming was actually

negatively related to these outcomes. As a consequence, the direction of relationship was

opposite that of Bible over-claiming. These findings make the claim that different sample sizes

are responsible for different findings unlikely. Moreover, the findings of Study 2 also call into

question the argument that it is the mere process of over-claiming knowledge that is driving the

Bible over-claiming effect. The lack of association between Academic over-claiming and the

outcomes of interest provides support against the argument that merely claiming to know things

that do not exist is responsible for the results of Study 1.

Importantly, however, Academic knowledge was negatively related to Right Wing

Authoritarianism, anti-Semitism, and support for religious terrorism.   In other words, individuals

who are knowledgeable across different academic subjects are less likely to endorse religious violence or religious prejudice.

In sum, among Christians, over-claiming academic knowledge had little effect on prejudice or violence. These findings support the idea that one must be invested in the over-claiming domain in order for over-claiming to have an impact on behavior or attitudes (see Paulhus et al., 2003).

Study 3

A third study was conducted in order to directly compare the two over-claiming measures in a population with different religious beliefs. The sample consisted of 246 adults (112 men, 132 women; Mean age = 30.29; SD = 12.43). Given the interest in generalizability, individuals of any religious faith were included, and the final sample was: 43% Christian, 7% Muslim, 5% Jewish, 3% Hindu, 2% Buddhist, 2% Mormon, 13% Agnostic 17% Atheist, and 8% other mixed religions. Participants also reported their ethnicity: 4% were African in heritage, 70% European heritage/Caucasian, 5% East Asian, 10% South Asian, 2% Middle Eastern, 5% Latino(a) and 4% reported another mixed ethnicity.

Materials and procedure

Study 3 included the Bible and Academic over-claiming measures (counter-balanced among participants), Pettigrew scales for both Muslims and Jews (α's .93 and .94 respectively), the Modern Racism Scale (MRS) assessing racial prejudice against those of African Heritage (α = .71), and the same measures of RWA, SDO, religiosity, and political attitudes. In addition, I included 13 of the 15 items in the *Religious Knowledge Quiz* (PEW Research Center, 2011).

This measure ($\alpha = .65$) was included to demonstrate that the Bible knowledge index obtained from the BOCQ was accurately measuring real Bible knowledge. Given that this measure is scored 1 = correct answer, all others = 0, Cronbach's alpha reliability represents a lower-bound estimate of reliability (see Brown, 2006). Last, an improved 11-item measure of support for religious terrorism was included. Given that these items were generated for use in Study 3, a full psychometric profile is provided in Table 3.

Results and Discussion

Bible over-claiming and Bible knowledge indexes were uncorrelated, $r = .01$, $p = .896$, as were Academic over-claiming and Academic knowledge indexes, $r = .03$, $p = .702$. By contrast, however, Bible and Academic over-claiming measures were highly correlated, $r = .66$, $p < .001$, as were Bible and Academic knowledge, $r = .68$, $p < .001$.

In spite of these correlation patterns, Table 2 shows that *only* Bible over-claiming was correlated with anti-Semitism (although this correlation was marginally significant $p = .057$). In addition, only Bible over-claiming predicted anti-Muslim attitudes, and neither over-claiming measure predicted racial prejudice. Of critical importance was the finding that only Bible over-claiming predicted support for religious terrorism. Last, Bible over-claiming, but not Academic over-claiming, predicted Right Wing Authoritarianism and Social Dominance measures.

By contrast, both Bible and Academic knowledge were *negatively* correlated with religious prejudice, racial prejudice, and support for religious terrorism. The only exception was a non-significant relationship between Bible knowledge and racial prejudice. Of critical importance, the PEW quiz was highly and independently associated with both Academic and

Bible knowledge, further supporting the assertion that these indexes were assessing actual knowledge (see Paulhus & Harms, 2004), and that both general knowledge and religious knowledge can contribute to religious knowledge. Finally, both Academic and Bible knowledge were negative predictors of both Social Dominance and Right Wing Authoritarianism.

Given the overlapping relationships among Bible and Academic indexes, all four variables of interest (Bible over-claiming, Academic over-claiming, Bible knowledge, and Academic knowledge) were entered into multiple simultaneous regressions predicting the outcomes of interest independently. The findings of these regressions (Beta weights are found in parentheses in Table 2) indicate that Bible over-claiming contributed significantly to racial prejudice and support for religious terrorism. By contrast, and similar to Study 2, Academic over-claiming did not predict these outcomes.

Both knowledge indexes were negative and independent predictors of racial prejudice and support for religious terrorism. In particular, Academic knowledge was a strong and negative predictor of religious prejudice against Jews and Muslims. Interestingly, in spite of both knowledge indexes positively and independently predicting PEW quiz religious knowledge, Bible knowledge was positively correlated with religiosity and conservative political views, whereas Academic knowledge was *negatively* associated with these things. In the regression, Bible knowledge was unrelated to Right Wing Authoritarianism or Social Dominance, whereas Academic knowledge remained highly negative in relation to both of these measures.

The above findings provide support for the notion that Bible over-claiming is more directly related to religious terrorism than is academic overclaiming, in an overall sample. However, it is unclear what it means for non-Christians to overclaim Bible stories. In other

words, Christians who overclaim Bible stories should be different from non-Christians who over-claim Bible stories. The difference would stem from the fact that the two groups might have different reasons for over-claiming knowledge of the Bible.

To address this issue, a regression analysis examined the interaction of Academic and Bible Overclaiming, as well as Academic and Bible Accuracy, with being Christian (dummy coded Christian = -1; non-Christian = 1). The first step of each regression contained Academic and Bible Overclaiming indexes, Academic and Bible Accuracy indexes, SDO, RWA, and Christian vs. non-Christian religion. The second step contained four interactions: Christian x Bible Overclaiming, Christian x Academic Overclaiming, Christian x Bible Accuracy, Christian x Academic Accuracy. Political views and religiosity were removed because they did not contribute or affect the model in any meaningful way.

The results found that neither the main effect of Bible Overclaiming ($\beta = .14$, $p = .075$) or Academic Overclaiming ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .210$) were significant, and neither was being Christian ($\beta = .10$, $p = .083$). As predicted, however, both SDO ($\beta = .37$, $p < .001$) and RWA ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$) were positive and unique predictors of terrorism support. In addition, both Bible ($\beta = -.22$, $p = .005$) and Academic Accuracy ($\beta = -.22$, $p = .004$) were *negative* and unique predictors of terrorism support.

Importantly, the interaction between Bible Overclaiming and being Christian ($\beta = .15$, $p = .036$) was significant (all other interactions: $\beta < .08$ or $> -.12$; all $p \geq .08$). Figure 1 shows that being Christian and engaging in Bible Overclaiming was the best predictor of supporting religious terrorism. Simple slopes analysis revealed that among Christians, the slope was

significant for Bible Overclaiming ($B = .22$, $p = .010$), however, for non-Christians, the Bible

Overclaiming slope was not significant ($B = .14$, $p = .155$).

In sum, Bible over-claiming seems to be an excellent correlate of both prejudice and

support for terrorism even in a sample that included individuals of any religion. In fact, the

Bible over-claiming measure, but not the Academic over-claiming measure predicted a host of

negative outcomes, in spite of their high correlation. These findings suggest that domain specific

over-claiming may be informative in predicting various outcomes.

General Discussion

To be included:

- Both religious and academic knowledge reduce support for terrorism and religious

  violence and have a reduction in certain forms of prejudice.

- Only religious knowledge seems to slightly support homo-negative attitudes

- Bible overclaiming is unique in its ability to account for variance associated with

  support for religious terrorism.

Religion has been cited as a motivating force behind prejudice among some individuals,

in spite of religious messages consisting of peace and harmony. In fact, the mere thought of God

leads individuals to be more altruistic to others (e.g., Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007). Yet, some

religious individuals harbor prejudice and support acts of violence. The present study provides a

first glimpse into how over-claiming one's religious knowledge can have a negative impact on

actions and attitudes towards others.

Among Christians, Bible over-claiming, but not Academic over-claiming, predicted prejudice and support for religious terrorism. By contrast, actual Bible knowledge was strongly and *negatively* related to these outcomes. As a consequence, I can assert that actually knowing and studying the Christian Bible is associated with reduced prejudice and terrorist support – but claiming to know things in the Bible that do not exist is associated with increased prejudice and terrorist support. Although among Christians, Academic over-claiming was unrelated to the outcomes; actual academic knowledge also had some protective qualities as well. Thus, it appears that individuals who are well educated and knowledgeable are less prejudiced and violent – which supports previous research (see Allport, 1954).

Importantly, when these findings are examined against a sample that had no religious restrictions, Bible over-claiming still contributed to anti-Semitic attitudes and support for religious terrorism, and Bible knowledge was (again) negatively related to these things. Academic over-claiming, however, had a similar pattern of results. Nevertheless, it appears as though Bible over-claiming was still a slightly better correlate of these negative outcomes.

There are two potential mechanisms for the present findings: First, claiming to know Bible stories provides a form of license or permission to act out prejudiced and violent feelings, while maintaining a moral sense of self. A second contributing mechanism could be that individuals who are dispositionally most likely to over-claim Bible stories have certain motivations or characteristics typical of those who might be prejudiced or violent (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Jones, in press). For example, Jones (in press) found that dark personalities, which are traditionally associated with selfish manipulation, are drawn to racist organizations when politically or socially motivated. In the same way, religious individuals may be drawn to

religious self-presentation for the ego reinforcement or self-enhancement such associations and displays provide (Sedikides & Gabauer, 2010).

Over-claiming is a behavior that is not subject to social desirability concerns (e.g., Paulhus et al., 2003), nor does it fall victim to transparent and easily figured out methods. Instead, it is clear that over-claiming Bible knowledge can be an invaluable tool in predicting prejudice and violence in surreptitious ways.

Moreover, Bible over-claiming accounts for some of the variance associated with prejudice toward members of other religions and ethnicities. This finding contributes knowledge to a long-standing paradox about religion in general – how can those who follow a message of peace be filled with such hate? In fact, the present research suggests that it is not those who are familiar with the real message of Christianity that have such negative attitudes, but rather it is those who are overconfident in *thinking* they know the message.

Bible over-claiming predicted prejudice against African-Americans, although this finding was exclusive to the Christian sample (Study 1). This finding suggests that individuals who over-claim Bible knowledge may feel moral licensure to engage in prejudicial thinking. As a result, individuals who think they know the Bible perhaps feel as though they can pass judgment on others – including other religious members and even other ethnicities.

Limitations

There were several limitations of the present study, two in particular should be acknowledged. The first was that the outcome variables of interest consisted of self-reported

measures. Future research should determine if overclaiming Bible stories also predicts

behavioral aspects of supporting terrorism such as through monetary donations.

Another limitation had to do with the poor internal reliabilities of the terrorism measures

in Studies 1 and 2. Although a poor internal reliability in a two-item composite is to be

expected, it should be noted that analyzing the items independently yielded a similar result.

Moreover, Study 3 was designed to have a face valid measure of terrorism support that did have

a good internal structure.

A third limitation is that the data are purely correlational in nature. As such, no causal

direction can be determined. It is entirely possible that over-claiming Bible stories leads to

prejudice and violence. However, it could be that violent and prejudiced individuals are more

likely to over-claim Bible stories. Still, a third variable (e.g., moral licensure) could be driving

the correlation between the two.

A fourth limitation is that the data used an online crowdsourcing website "Mechancial

Turk." It has been shown that participants who rush through surveys used more basic level

processes to answer questions, which might predict prejudice more readily (e.g., Devine, 1989).

However, MTurk is beneficial in this respect when compared to student samples, in that students

rarely, if ever, report a desire to do the study as motivation for participation (rather, it is always

course credit or extra credit). As a consequence, one could argue that students would be more

motivated to "rush" through surveys when compared to MTurk workers because student reasons

for participation are almost always compensatory. By contrast, however, more than 70% of

MTurk workers report reasons *other* than compensation for participating in studies (Paolacci et

al., 2010). Nevertheless, future replication is needed with different terrorism support scales and more objective outcome variables.

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Terrorism

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Terrorism is a very critical concern in modern day society. This concern stretches from the domestic issues (e.g., abortion clinic shootings) to issues involving Israel, Palestine, and the Middle East. Christians who over-claim Biblical knowledge supported terrorism. In fact, in both Studies 1 and 2, the alpha of the two-item support for terrorism measure was poor. However, Study 3 used a longer and more face-valid measure of support for religious terrorism. This measure had a coherent factor structure with all items loading on a common factor. In addition, Study 3 used a sample of participants representing many different religious beliefs (including atheists). The results of Studies 1 and 2 replicated in Study 3 in that Bible over-claiming is associated with support for religious terrorism, whereas Academic over-claiming is not.

It is possible that a similar association exists with other religious members and over-claiming with respect to their holy books as well. One possible way to test this hypothesis is by designing a Qur'an or a Torah over-claiming measure. Given the innocuous nature of the over-claiming procedure, it is entirely possible that high risk profiles can be gleaned from over-claiming measures and perhaps even predicted and prevented using these measures, rather than ineffectual self-assessment.

It should be noted that academic knowledge may not have motivated religious participants due to a growing anti-intellectual culture in the United States, especially among

religious individuals. Nevertheless, the main purpose of Studies 2 and 3 was to show that it is not sufficient to simply have a predisposition to claim knowledge that does not exist. Instead, one must be claiming moral or religious knowledge fraudulently. It is entirely likely, however, for atheists or non-religious individuals, over-claiming secular laws or moral principles may have a similar effect to that of over-claiming Bible stories on Christians (Shariff & Norenzyan, 2007). Future research should examine this possibility.

General Conclusion

Findings from three studies supported the notion that those who over-claim Bible knowledge harbor prejudice against other religious groups, other ethnicities, and support religious terrorism. These findings were especially pronounced among Christians, but were still present in an religiously unrestricted sample. Last, over-claiming Bible knowledge predicted strong support for violence in the name of God. This association should be examined further because of its potential utility in staving off future religious conflicts.

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Table 1.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Normality Estimates for all Study Variables.

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
	M (SD) Skew Kurtosis	M (SD) Skew Kurtosis	M (SD) Skew Kurtosis
Bible Over-claiming	1.06 (0.45) 0.89 -0.42	----------------------------	0.98 (0.60) 0.52 -1.07
Bible Knowledge	0.46 (0.28) -0.37 -0.97	----------------------------	0.32 (0.25) 0.05 -0.96
Academic Over-claiming	----------------------------	1.09 (0.41) 0.51 -0.30	1.12 (0.50) 0.42 -0.99
Academic Knowledge	----------------------------	0.45 (0.27) -0.18 -0.86	0.36 (0.28) 0.11 -1.07
PEW Quiz (out of 13)	----------------------------	----------------------------	8.47 (2.57) -0.25 -0.61
Political views	3.17 (1.13) -0.06 -0.83	2.98 (1.16) 0.04 -0.79	2.65 (0.97) 0.38 -0.24
Anti-Jewish	1.99 (0.57) 1.69 5.17	1.99 (0.57) 1.81 6.31	2.19 (0.61) 0.77 0.22
Anti-Muslim	----------------------------	----------------------------	2.57 (0.67) 0.16 -0.69
Anti-Black	2.04 (0.67) 1.24 1.42	2.67 (0.68) -0.16 -0.35	2.65 (0.63) 0.00 0.43
Religiosity	0.00 (0.83) 0.09 -0.66	.00 (0.82) -0.47 -0.61	0.00 (0.87) 0.68 -0.64
Right Wing Auth.	2.71 (0.76) 0.37 0.33	2.56 (0.76) 0.11 -0.45	2.48 (0.75) 0.10 -0.18
Social Dominance	1.96 (0.71) 0.60 0.87	1.89 (0.75) 0.62 -0.49	2.05 (0.78) 0.45 -0.27
Terrorism	1.58 (0.78) 1.59 2.67	1.59 (0.68) 1.16 0.47	1.99(0.65) 0.54 -0.52

Table 2.

Correlations among Independent Variables across Studies 1 and 2.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.	Overclaiming	-----	.02	.11	.08	-.06	**-.23**	-.07	.11
2.	Knowledge	-.05	-----	-.03	.03	**-.23**	-.15	-.03	**.34**
3.	Age	-.03	.30*	-----	**.28**	**.25**	-.10	.16	**.28**
4.	Gender (1=m, 2=f)	-.13	.13	.14	-----	**.41**	**.26**	.00	**.24**
5.	Right Wing Auth.	.14	.02	-.01	.01	-----	**.31**	.01	**.35**
6.	Social Dom.	.20*	-.22*	-.05	-.21*	.36*	-----	-.08	-.18
7.	Religiosity	.32*	.28*	.01	.05	.47*	.08	-----	.16
8.	Conservative Pol.	.13	.13	.09	-.09	.60*	.36*	.49*	-----

Note: Significant correlations are in **bold.** Study 1 (n = 155) (Bible Overclaiming) is below the diagonal.

Study 2 (n = 106) (Academic Overclaiming) is above the diagonal.

Table 3.

Regression and Correlation Results from Studies 1 and 2.

	Terrorism Support				Anti-Semitism				Anti-Black				Anti-gay			
	r	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*r*	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*r*	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*r*	*B*	*SE*	*p*
Study 1 (n = 155) Bible Overclaiming																
Overclaim.	**.36**	**0.22**	.27	.01	**.26**	0.10	.20	.27	**.26**	0.05	.35	.66	.14	-0.05	.26	.22
Accuracy	**-.32**	**-0.24**	.34	.01	**-.42**	**-0.32**	.24	.01	**-.37**	**-0.33**	.44	.01	**.18**	0.12	.33	.05
Religiosity	.14	0.06	.10	.56	**.21**	0.11	.07	.32	.08	0.11	.12	.42	**.52**	0.18	.09	.01
Conservative	**.23**	0.04	.07	.74	**.26**	**-0.24**	.06	.04	.12	0.02	.09	.90	**.61**	0.18	.07	.01
R. W. Auth.	**.21**	0.03	.11	.74	**.51**	**0.44**	.09	.01	**.30**	0.24	.11	.06	**.69**	0.48	.10	.01
Social Dom.	**.41**	**0.25**	.10	.01	**.56**	**0.35**	.08	.01	**.42**	**0.25**	.11	.03	**.31**	0.08	.10	.18
Gender	**-.29**	-0.16	.12	.04	-.15	-0.05	.10	.58	**-.30**	**-0.23**	.14	.04	-.10	-0.11	.12	.06
Age	-.06	0.07	.01	.40	**-.27**	-0.01	.01	.89	-.06	-0.06	.01	.59	.05	0.03	.01	.57
Study 2 (n = 105) Academic Overclaiming																
Overclaim.	-.14	-0.10	.22	.29	-.14	-0.07	.14	.44	-.13	-0.16	.20	.09	.07	0.06	.26	.39
Accuracy	**-.29**	**-0.21**	.36	.04	**-.49**	**-0.40**	.22	.01	-.10	-0.15	.33	.15	-.09	0.02	.43	.80
Religiosity	.10	**0.23**	.09	.02	.02	**0.20**	.05	.03	-.05	-0.18	.08	.06	**.44**	**0.25**	.10	.01
Conservative	.09	-0.04	.06	.70	.05	-0.11	.04	.25	**.36**	**0.22**	.06	.03	**.49**	**0.21**	.08	.01
R. W. Auth.	**.24**	0.02	.11	.87	**.33**	0.11	.07	.32	**.41**	0.17	.10	.14	**.67**	**0.51**	.13	.01
Social Dom.	**.39**	**0.32**	.10	.01	**.39**	**0.31**	.06	.01	**.32**	0.19	.09	.06	.17	0.00	.12	.98
Gender	**-.27**	**-0.33**	.13	.01	-.19	-0.19	.08	.03	-.08	-0.15	.12	.10	-.01	-0.05	.16	.45
Age	-.12	0.01	.01	.91	-.17	0.05	.01	.66	**.20**	**0.26**	.01	.02	**.36**	0.06	.01	.50

Note: Significant effects are in **bold.**

Table 4.

Psychometric Details of the Support for Religious Terrorism (SRT) Scale.

	Item-Total *r*	FUPC	Factor1	Factor2
1. I swell with pride when a member of my religion uses violence to get our message across.	.552	.680	.795	-.137
2. I feel shame when someone acts aggressively in the name of God.	.308	.418	.503	-.154
3. There is never a reason for using violence in the name of God.	.496	.616	.594	-.014
4. Those who purge the world of evil have a special place in heaven.	.562	.662	.240	.499
5. Being brave enough to bring death in the name of God is a sign of devotion.	.631	.750	.741	.018
6. There is no excuse for acts like abortion clinic shootings.	.364	.455	.302	.133
7. Those who use violence to defend the Holy Bible are heroes.	.622	.738	.716	.032
8. The modern world needs a no mercy attitude towards the wicked.	.525	.605	-.025	.796
9. Evil should be destroyed wherever it exists in the world.	.292	.371	-.236	.749
10. Bloodshed is necessary for the world to be clean once again.	.547	.661	.352	.349
11. I see Christians in a real war with the world, and anything goes.	.590	.696	.490	.230

Note: FUPC = First Unrotated Principal Component. Correlation between Factor 1 and Factor 2 = .535. Item-Total *r* = the corrected item-total correlation. Factor 1 Eigenvalue = 4.194, accounting for 38.128% of the total variance. Factor 2 Eigenvalue = 1.490, accounting for 13.55% of the total variance. All other Eigenvalues < 1.00.

Table 5.

Regressions predicting interactions between Christianity and academic vs. Bible overclaiming.

Variables	Terrorism Support				Anti-Semitism				Racism			
	r	B	SE	p	r	B	SE	p	r	B	SE	p
Age	-.15*	0.03	.05	.57	-.25*	-0.01	.05	.79	-.12	-0.01	.06	.88
Gender	-.27*	-0.01	.03	.67	-.30*	-0.02	.03	.58	-.17*	-0.01	.03	.83
Political views	.27*	0.09	.09	.17	.16*	-0.01	.06	.92	.38*	0.15*	.07	.03
Religiosity	.24*	0.13*	.06	.03	.17*	0.10	.06	.09	.06	-0.12	.07	.08
Social Dominance	.50*	0.26*	.05	.01	.45*	0.25*	.06	.01	.57*	.48*	.06	.01
Right wing Auth.	.48*	0.21*	.06	.01	.39*	0.17*	.06	.01	.44*	.26*	.07	.01
Christian or not	.09	-0.04	.05	.42	.03	-0.11*	.05	.04	.16*	-0.01	.06	.93
Bible Accuracy	-.47*	-0.30*	.08	.01	-.50*	-0.09	.08	.29	-.14*	0.00	.09	.97
Academic Accuracy	-.58*	-0.16*	.08	.05	-.64*	-0.41*	.07	.01	-.24*	0.04	.09	.63
Bible Overclaiming	.20*	0.05	.08	.55	.12	-0.12	.08	.11	.06	0.03	.08	.71
Academic Overclaiming	.00	-0.05	.07	.46	-.02	0.04	.07	.61	-.13*	-0.14	.07	.07
Bible Overclaiming x Christian	-----	-0.15*	.07	.04	-----	0.00	.07	.99	-----	0.01	.08	.99
Academic Overclaim x Christian	-----	0.10	.07	.13	-----	0.02	.07	.73	-----	0.05	.07	.52
Bible accuracy x Christian	-----	0.01	.07	.99	-----	-0.18*	.08	.02	-----	-0.11	.08	.19
Academic accuracy x Christian	-----	-0.10	.07	.19	-----	0.15*	.07	.05	-----	0.08	.08	.32

APPENDIX A: Bible Over-Claiming Questionnaire (BOCQ)

BIBLE FAMILIARITY

Below is a list of stories, concepts or people who appear in the Bible…Please indicate how familiar you are with each on a scale of 0 (never heard of it) to 6 (extremely familiar).

For example, if the item said "Jesus," you would probably select "6" because Jesus is very familiar. However, if the item said "Fred Gruneberg" (my next door neighbor) you would write a "0" to indicate you never heard of him.

e.g., 6 = Jesus; 0 = Fred Gruneberg

In other words, the difficulty of the items ranges from easy to impossible.

1. PENTECOST
2. BOAZ MARRIES RUTH
3. JUDAS BETRAYS JESUS
4. THE PROPHET OF HAGGAI
5. THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM
6. CAIN AND ABEL
7. TOBIT'S SONG OF PRAISE
8. THE LAST SEVEN PLAGUES
9. CAST OF NISSIUS
10. JESUS CALMS THE SEAS
11. JOHN THE BAPTIST
12. STEPHEN'S MARTYRDOM
13. VICTORY OVER LYSIAS
14. NOAH AND THE ARK
15. THE DECREE OF DARIUS
16. THE JOURNEY OF ARUK
17. THE SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL
18. THE PRODIGAL SON
19. THE BOOK OF JUDGES
20. SOREN'S TEMPLE
21. MENELAUS OF JERUSALEM
22. THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH
23. THE CRIME OF AMNON
24. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS
25. THE SERVANTS OF ANNOINTMENT
26. MANNA FROM THE HEAVENS
27. TO TOUCH HIS CLOAK
28. KING HEROD
29. THE ROMAN INJUNCTION OF PAULHUS
30. THE EXODUS OF EGYPT
31. THE BOOK OF LAW
32. DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN
33. THE SECOND PLAGUE
34. MOSES PARTS THE RED SEA
35. PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

36. THE BOOK OF BARUCH
37. PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN
38. FROM EGYPT TO SINAI
39. CARDINAL LAW OF THE PROPHOCIES
40. THE MACCABEAN REVOLT
41. THE SINS OF SOLOMON
42. THE REPLY TO CASPAR
43. ABRAHAM, ISSAC, AND JACOB
44. FLIGHT TO HOREB
45. THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH
46. THE FOUR HORSEMEN
47. PETER DENIES JESUS
48. BARABUS THE MURDERER
49. THE CAVE OF DURBAN
50. DAVID AND GOLIATH
51. JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE
52. LEADERSHIP OF JUDAS MACCABEUS
53. THE CURSE OF LEVENSON
54. VISIT OF QUEEN SHEBA
55. THE WORSHIPERS OF BAAL
56. THE ARMY OF SEVENTEEN
57. LAWS CONCERNING NAZIRITES
58. DEATH OF ABIJAH
59. HOUR HORNS AND FOUR BLACKSMITHS
60. THE LAST SUPPER
61. THE ALTAR OF KHARTOUM
62. THE SECOND ROYAL DECREE
63. COUNT OF THE TWELVE TRIBES
64. THE BOOK OF AMOS
65. THOMAS DOUBTS JESUS
66. INVASION OF SENNACHERIB
67. THE BOTTLE OF ELI
68. THE STORY OF AMORELUS
69. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT
70. ACHIOR IN BETHULIA
71. JESUS CURSES A FIG TREE
72. THE BOOK OF JOB
73. THE BOOK OF NEHEMAIH