

Social Norms and Feedback about Prejudice:  
Religious Justification or Suppression?

By  
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### **Abstract**

People often experience conflict between their prejudiced feelings and social norms that condemn prejudice. The Justification and Suppression Model (JSM) argues that people will either suppress or justify their prejudice when this conflict occurs. I hypothesize that the social norms about prejudice predict which strategy people will use. I propose that people will use their religious worldview to justify prejudices that are moderately acceptable, but they will suppress less acceptable prejudices. Study 1 (n = 95) found that Christians who were given false feedback indicating high amounts of prejudice against gay men agreed with Biblical justifications of prejudice less after the feedback than before. Study 2 (n = 170) found that Christians given false feedback indicating high amounts of prejudice against highly sexually active people agreed with Biblical justifications of prejudice more than participants given low prejudice feedback. Study 3 (n = 61) showed that prejudice against highly sexually active people is more socially acceptable than prejudice against gay men. Studies 4 (n = 464) and 5 (n = 193) added to Studies 1 and 2 by including prejudice target as a between subjects factor. In Study 4, prejudice feedback did not affect support for Biblical justifications, and there was no interaction with prejudice feedback and the target group. Study 5 also found no support for the hypothesis, as there was no interaction between prejudice feedback and the target of prejudice. Study 6 (n = 183) found a positive correlation between both prejudices and Biblical justifications for those prejudices.

*Keywords:* prejudice, religion, false feedback, justification

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## Social Norms and Feedback about Prejudice: Religious Justification or Suppression?

People often experience a conflict between their personal, genuine feelings about people in different outgroups, and the social norms that dictate what is acceptable to say about members of those outgroups. This conflict can create dissonance, as people feel inconsistency between their personal feelings and the norms that dictate that those feelings are prejudiced, and therefore unacceptable to express. People then have a few options; they can explain their feelings in a way that does not violate the social norms, or they can suppress those feelings.

Social norms are not stable, as they are constantly changing with different social and political movements (Crandall, Ferguson, & Bahns, 2013). Norms about particular groups may change quite quickly, causing people to rethink the explanations they formally used for their prejudiced feelings. People will have either double down on their explanation and risk the negative consequences that coincide with a violation of social norms, or suppress their feelings by no longer endorsing their formally used explanation.

The Justification and Suppression Model (JSM; Crandall & Eshleman, 2003) formalizes these ideas by claiming that people with prejudice will either create justifications (explanations) for their prejudice, or suppress the prejudice. Justifications will reduce the negative consequences that occur when someone violates societal norms while still allowing the individual to express the prejudice.

Worldviews (belief systems that imbue the world with meaning, order, and permanence; Arndt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Simon, 1997) are common and useful justifications of prejudice, as they generally contain content about how one should live their life. This content can be useful in justifying prejudice against people who do not live their life in a way consistent with that worldview.

If someone uses their worldview to justify a prejudice that is becoming more unacceptable, people may have to choose between supporting the part of the worldview that justifies a prejudice, or abiding by the shifting social norms about that prejudice. People may label the individual and the worldview as prejudiced if they choose to double down on their worldview, as it violates new social norms about which prejudices are acceptable and which are not. If they choose to abide by the new social norms, they will have to reject a part of their important worldview. This will result in suppressing the prejudice by removing prejudice-linked content from the worldview.

### **Genuine Prejudice and the Motivation to Suppress**

The JSM begins with the assertion that people have a variety of “genuine” prejudices toward different outgroups (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). Crandall and Eshleman define genuine prejudice as “pure, unadulterated, original, unmanaged, and unambivalently negative feelings” toward people in outgroups (p. 418). While pure, genuine prejudice cannot be measured directly, research suggests that people harbor a variety of prejudices against different outgroups (Crandall & Schaller, 2005).

Egalitarian values endorsed by most Americans are at odds with prejudice (Katz, Wackenhut, & Hass, 1986). People will try to demonstrate their commitment to egalitarian values by controlling the expression of their prejudices. People can create positive, unprejudiced self-images by showing their commitment to American egalitarian values. The maintenance of this unprejudiced-self image creates a strong motivation to suppress most prejudices.

People want to appear unprejudiced to themselves as well as to the world around them. This means that people suppress prejudices to themselves and to others. Plant and Devine (1998) demonstrated these two different suppression motives. Suppression motives can be internal (e.g.

an effort to live up to personal values about prejudice) or external (an effort to project an unprejudiced self to the world). Which motivation is strongest at any given time depends largely on one's audience. A diverse public audience will increase one's external motivation to suppress prejudice, whereas suppression in anonymous settings is primarily motivated by internal factors.

### **Social Norms as a Suppressor of Prejudice**

This project focuses on the most common external suppressor of prejudice: social norms. Research has found high correlations between the social acceptability of prejudice toward a group (social norms) and the willingness to express negative attitudes toward members of that group (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002). These findings suggest that direct expressions of prejudice are largely a function of the social acceptability of that prejudice. This study included a variety of groups that covers the complete spectrum of social acceptability (e.g. murderers, Black Americans, blind people). This allows the researchers to study the phenomenon prejudice more broadly, without being limited to studying groups for whom the social norms are contested.

I am focusing specifically on descriptive norms, which are norms that describe what normal behavior is. Descriptive norms influence people by signaling what the typical behavior is in any given situation. People then infer that typical behavior is the correct behavior, which causes them to engage in that behavior (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). Cialdini (1988) demonstrates how descriptive norms are useful in decision-making, as people can choose what to do in any given situation by following the behavior of those around them. These descriptive norms are especially useful in the realm of prejudice, as people can examine the expressed attitudes of those around them to determine what attitudes and feelings are acceptable to express.

Experimental studies help demonstrate that people will use social cues before expressing a prejudice. Stangor, Sechrist, and Jost (2001) found that participants who already reported high

levels of racial prejudice will report less prejudice after being told that a large amount of their peers hold positive attitudes about African Americans. Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham, and Vaughn (1994) conducted an experiment that manipulated the expressed racial attitudes of a single confederate in the study. They found that people's expressed racial attitudes generally aligned with that of the confederate, such that participants expressed the most negative racial attitudes when the confederate also expressed negative racial attitudes.

Most prejudice research to date has focused on attitudes toward targets for which the social norms of prejudice are contested, meaning there is a large amount variability in what people think is acceptable to say about these groups. Groups with these contested prejudice norms are considered to be in the "normative window" of prejudice (Crandall et al., 2013). A study examining attitudes toward 115 groups found that participants report the most disagreement among society about how we should feel toward groups that are in the middle of the distribution for social norms. This suggests that society agrees on how to feel toward groups at either end of that distribution (groups that are totally acceptable targets of prejudice, or not acceptable targets of prejudice), but there is less agreement for how we should feel toward groups in the normative window (Crandall, Miller, & Furgurson, 2018). Groups in the normative window are primarily studied because some Americans believe that prejudice expression against these groups is unacceptable, while others believe that prejudice expression against the groups is acceptable.

Groups that make up the normative window tend to change over time, and that change generally goes in the direction of reducing the acceptability of prejudice. For example, Allport (1954) talks at length about prejudice against Irish and Italian Americans. While prejudice toward these groups was contentious during the 1950s, these prejudices are largely considered

unacceptable now, as these groups seldom encounter explicit racial discrimination today.

### **Motivation to Seem Unprejudiced**

The prevalence of egalitarian values in the United States suggests that most Americans strive to promote an unprejudiced self-image. People try to promote this image to other Americans, as well as to themselves. The motivation to preserve this unprejudiced image will be threatened when people are given feedback suggesting that they have a lot of prejudice. When people are given this false feedback, they are motivated to find ways to preserve and protect this positive identity. In one study, participants given false feedback indicating high amounts of racial prejudice tried to protect this identity by donating more money to a black panhandler compared to a white panhandler, while there was no difference in donation in the low prejudice feedback condition (Dutton & Lake, 1973).

In another study, participants high in prejudice threat (given false feedback indicating high prejudice) engaged in downward social comparison by choosing to watch a film about gang members that killed some black men in a hate crime, while participants in the low threat condition were more likely to engage in upward comparison by watching a film about a law firm offering free legal services to racial minorities living in inner city Los Angeles (O'Brien et al., 2010).

These studies show a few strategies people can use when trying to defend against threatening prejudiced information. People can try and compensate by going out of their way to help an outgroup member, or they can engage in downward social comparison by exposing themselves to people who are very highly prejudiced.

### **Worldviews as Justifications of Prejudice**

The suppression of prejudice does not reduce the prejudiced effect itself; it just prevents

the expression of that prejudice. Prejudice, like other affects, has a strong motivational component (Brehm, 1999). This results in a motivation to express a prejudice even if social norms dictate suppression of prejudice. In this case, people can deploy justifications that allow the expression of a prejudice. Justifications of prejudice are cognitions that removes a suppressor, allowing the expression of a prejudice without any of the negative consequences that go along with the expression of that prejudice (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). A justification allows the expression of a genuine prejudice while protecting one's unprejudiced self-image.

Worldviews can serve as justifications for prejudice. Worldviews come from different places and are generally not created with the intention of justifying a prejudice. Despite this, they are still useful when trying to justify particular prejudices. Political ideologies are an example of worldviews that can be useful in justifying prejudice against different groups (Webster, Burns, Pickering, & Saucier, 2014). Worldviews contain ideas about what behaviors should or should not be valued. When worldviews condemn different behaviors, people could use that worldview to justify their prejudice. The Protestant Work Ethic (a component of political conservatism), for example, can be useful as a justification of prejudice against lazy people because the Protestant Work Ethic places a high value on work, and condemns laziness.

### **Religious Worldviews and Prejudice**

Religion and prejudice have a very complicated relationship. As Allport (1954) noted, "The role of religion is paradoxical. It makes prejudice and it unmakes prejudice" (p. 444). Religiosity has been consistently linked to a few prejudices, in particular anti-black prejudice (Howard & Sommers, 2015; Johnson, Rowatt, & LaBouff, 2010), and prejudice against sexual and/or gender minorities (LaBouff, Rowatt, Johnson, Thedford, & Tsang, 2010; Whitley Jr, 2009), with recent work demonstrating that Christian religiosity can be used to justify prejudice

against gay people (Hoffarth, Hodson, & Molnar, 2017).

Early work on religion and prejudice found two distinct types of religiousness, both of which differentially predict prejudice. Allport and Ross (1967) found that intrinsic religiosity (people for whom religious belief is the ultimate end) does not correlate with prejudice, while extrinsic religiosity (people motivated by external factors such as social status and acceptance from others) correlates positively with prejudice. A meta-analysis found the same relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity over a large number of studies (Hall, Matz, & Wood, 2010). This meta-analysis also found that the correlation between extrinsic religiosity and expressed prejudice has decreased overtime. A third type of religiosity, religious quest, has been studied as well. Its open-ended and questioning approach to religion and spirituality (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993) is not a justification for prejudice, and is associated with reductions in racial prejudices (Batson, Flink, Schoenrade, Fultz, & Pych, 1986) and authoritarianism (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992).

Extrinsically religious people are less worried about the true values espoused by their religion but still identify as religious. Their religious identity still allows them to use that worldview to justify prejudice. It is possible that extrinsic religiosity is becoming a less strong predictor of prejudice because social norms have shifted. Prejudice expression has become less acceptable, which causes prejudice to be expressed more subtly (Pearson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2009). This shift in social norms may have caused extrinsically religious people to feel less comfortable using their religion to justify prejudice, resulting in more prejudice suppression.

Religiosity is not always positively related to prejudice, as parts of religious belief can be suppressors of some prejudices (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). Religions that do not have rigid, dogmatic worldviews, focus on positive intergroup emotions, do not focus on strict hierarchies,

and generate positive intergroup contact will reduce or reverse the relationship between religiosity and prejudice (Burch-Brown & Baker, 2016).

The current studies focus on religious beliefs as a justification of prejudice. Religious worldviews contain strong beliefs about the way people should live their lives. These beliefs could be useful when justifying a prejudice against people who do not live by those same values.

### **Worldviews as Prejudice and Shifting Social Norms**

A psychological conflict can occur when people use worldviews to justify a prejudice and the social norms about that prejudice change. People may feel comfortable justifying a prejudice that is moderately socially acceptable, but if the norms shift in a way indicating prejudice expression is no longer acceptable, people may no longer feel comfortable using their worldview to justify the prejudice. People may use their religious worldview to justify a moderately acceptable prejudice, but when that prejudice moves into, and through, the normative window, more audiences see that prejudice as unacceptable. A result of a prejudice moving through the normative window is that negative expressions against that group are now labeled as prejudice. People generally want to avoid making statements that will be labeled as prejudice, as this could harm their unprejudiced self-image.

People need to be confident they are speaking to an audience that will accept their prejudice justification and will not label the justification as prejudiced. If the audience does not accept the justification, or labels that justification as prejudiced, than someone's unprejudiced image may be tarnished. Using an important worldview to justify a prejudice to the wrong audience may result a negative perception of the worldview. Attempting to justify an unacceptable prejudice risks harming one's self-image and having one's worldview be labeled bigoted.

Attitudes toward gay men have changed greatly over the past few decades, which could provide some useful material in studying religious justifications of prejudice, and how shifts in social norms change people's willingness to justify prejudice with their religious worldview. Christianity has a long history of harboring anti-gay attitudes as a part of its worldview (Herek, 1990, 2004) but this history conflicts with recent changes in the social norms regarding prejudice against gay people. This reduction in the acceptability of anti-gay prejudice seems to be in large part due to the arrival of legal marriage rights for gay and lesbian people, which culminated in a Supreme Court case that legalized gay marriage across the country in 2015.

Tankard and Paluck (2017) found that people who were told the Supreme Court would legalize gay marriage reported less social acceptability of prejudice against gay people compared to people who were told the Supreme Court would not legalize gay marriage (data were collected in 2014). A second longitudinal study showed that the legalization of gay marriage by the Court caused people to see anti-gay prejudice as less acceptable. This shift in social norms is likely one reason for the increase in gay-friendly Christian communities in the United States (Chaves & Anderson, 2014) as people began to suppress prejudice against gay men by removing the anti-gay content from their worldview. These findings suggest that the content of people's important worldviews may shift as a function of social norms regarding prejudice, as people try to remove content linked to unacceptable prejudices.

### **Hypotheses**

People who are given false feedback indicating high amounts of prejudice will be motivated to preserve their unprejudiced self-image by using one of two strategies; they will either justify the prejudice or suppress the prejudice. If the prejudice is moderately socially acceptable, people will use their worldview to justify that prejudice. If the prejudice is not

socially acceptable, people will suppress parts of their worldview that could be associated with that prejudice. In this way, people will actively try to maintain their unprejudiced self-image by justifying acceptable prejudices, while also ensuring their prominent worldview does not contain unacceptable prejudices by suppressing those prejudices.

### **Present Studies**

Study 1 examines how people respond to false feedback indicating high levels of prejudice against gay men. Study 2 examines how people respond to the same false feedback against a more acceptable target of prejudice (highly sexually active people). Study 3 verifies that prejudice against gay men is less acceptable than prejudice against highly sexually active people. Studies 4 and 5 combine studies 1 and 2 by testing if there are differential responses to false feedback about prejudice toward groups that differ on the social acceptability of prejudice expression. Study 6 investigates the relationship between reported prejudice and religious justifications of that prejudice.

### **Study 1**

This study tests how people will respond to false feedback indicating high levels of prejudice against gay men. If people are justifying their prejudice, then they should respond to the feedback by strongly endorsing parts of the Bible that condemn homosexuality. If people are suppressing their prejudice, then they should not endorse Bible verses that condemn homosexuality after the feedback.

### **Method**

**Participants.** I recruited 112 people on Amazon Mechanical Turk (Litman, Robinson, & Abberbock, 2017) to participate in a survey titled “Attitudes about Bible verses (Christians who use the Bible as a guide to daily life only please).” Participants were paid 50 cents for their

participation in this study. The sample was predominately white (83%), age ( $M = 36$ ,  $SD = 12.2$ ). Ten participants indicated being LGBT+, and 7 others indicated that they were not Christian. These participants were removed resulting in a final sample of 95 participants.

**Procedure.** Participants were told that this study is about how people feel about different parts of the Bible. They were asked to answer a few questions about three different Bible verses (see complete verses in in measures section). The first two verses condemned homosexuality, and the third was unrelated to sexuality. After evaluating these three Bible verses, participants were instructed to complete what they are told is a measure of subtle prejudice against gay men. Participants were told

*“It can be difficult to tell from looking at the items what kind of response indicates prejudice. Most people with subtle prejudices toward gay people are unaware of it, and people who claim to be the least prejudiced often score the highest. These questions are specifically designed to be vague, so you do not know whether a particular response predicts increased or decreased prejudice, but this measure has been well tested and can accurately predict someone’s subtle prejudice.”*

After completing this ten-item scale, participants were told that they finished in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of subtle prejudice against gay men. Participants were then asked to evaluate three more Bible verses. The first verse was unrelated to sexuality, and the next two verses condemned homosexuality. The order of the verses was randomized so that each verse was equally likely to go before or after the prejudice threat for each participant, allowing me to claim that any difference in scores before and after the false feedback can be attributed to the feedback and not to differences in the verses themselves. Participants then completed some basic demographic questions.

### **Measures.**

***Bible verses.*** Participants evaluated a total of six Bible verses in this study. Four of those verses specifically condemned homosexuality and two were not about sexuality.

The four verses about homosexuality were:

Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body (1 Corinthians 6:18).

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them (Leviticus 20:13).

And the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error (Romans 1:27).

Understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, for men who practice homosexuality (1 Timothy 1:9-10).

The two unrelated verses are:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that ask receive; and he that seek find; and to him that knock it shall be opened (Matthew 7:7).

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

***Support for Bible verses.*** Participants answered three questions about each Bible verse. They were asked, “How meaningful is this verse to you?” “Is the message conveyed by this

verse very important to your personal religious belief?,” and “How strongly do you support the moral message discussed in this verse?” Participants answered each question using seven-point Likert-type scales. I calculated Cronbach’s alphas on the three items for each verse independently. They showed good internal consistency (all  $\alpha$ ’s > .89).

## Results

To test the effect of the false feedback on support for different parts of the Bible, I conducted a one-way within-subjects (before or after prejudice threat) ANOVA. There was a strong effect of verse order, as participants endorsed anti-gay Bible verses more before the prejudice feedback ( $M = 4.8$ ,  $SD = 1.9$ ) than they did after the prejudice feedback ( $M = 4.4$ ,  $SD = 2.0$ ),  $F(1, 94) = 9.46$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta^2 = .011$  (see Figure 1).

Did this shift away from parts of the Bible after the prejudice feedback only occur for the verses about homosexuality? To test this, I conducted one-way within-subjects (before X after prejudice threat) ANOVA, predicting support for the unrelated Bible verses by time point. Participants agreed with the unrelated verses more before the prejudice feedback ( $M = 6.4$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) than they did after the prejudice feedback ( $M = 6.2$ ,  $SD = .97$ ), but this effect is only marginally significant,  $F(1, 94) = 3.27$ ,  $p = .074$ ,  $\eta^2 = .009$ .

Did people move away from the verses about homosexuality more than the verses unrelated to sexuality? To test this, I ran a 2 (before or after prejudice threat) X 2 (related or unrelated to homosexuality) within-subjects ANOVA. There was a strong main effect of time point, as participants endorsed Bible verses less after the prejudice threat ( $M = 5.31$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ), than before ( $M = 5.59$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ),  $F(1, 94) = 11.34$ ,  $p = .001$ . There was also a strong main effect of relevance to homosexuality, as people endorsed the unrelated verses ( $M = 6.29$ ,  $SD = .80$ ), more than the related ones ( $M = 4.6$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ),  $F(1, 94) = 101.5$ ,  $p > .001$ . The predicted

interaction, however, was not significant  $F(1, 94) = 1.83$   $p = .179$ , suggesting people moved away from the related and unrelated verses equally after prejudice threat.

## Study 2

Study 2 aims to see if the same trend found in Study 1 will occur for another target of prejudice. This study examines how people will respond to false feedback indicating high levels of prejudice toward highly sexually active people.

### Method

**Participants.** I recruited 202 different people on MTurk using TurkPrime.com to participate in a study with the same instructions used in Study 1. Participants received one dollar for their participation in this study. The sample was predominately white (73%), and female (104 women, 97 men), age ( $M = 36$ ,  $SD = 11$ ). Nine participants failed the manipulation check, six more indicated that they were not Christian. I also excluded eight LGBT+ participants and nine who reported having seven or more sexual partners in the past two years, resulting in 170 for the final analyses.

**Procedure.** This study took place after participants completed a short unrelated study. After completing the first study, participants were told that the second study was about people's attitudes toward different verses of the Bible. They were told at the beginning of the study that we try to avoid too much repetition in our studies, so we will ask for their opinion toward different parts of the Bible, then have them complete an unrelated task before answering more questions about the Bible. They proceeded to evaluate 3 Bible verses that had nothing to do with sexuality. They then completed the ten-item fake subtle prejudice against highly sexually active people scale. Participants were informed that they scored very high (91<sup>st</sup> percentile) or very low (9<sup>th</sup> percentile) in subtle prejudice. After completing a few manipulation check questions, they

preceded to evaluate three more Bible verses. The first verse was unrelated to sexuality, the next two condemned sexual behavior. After this, participants completed a measure of religious commitment and some basic demographic questions.

**Measures.**

***Bible verses.*** I used a total of six Bible verses in this study, three before the manipulation and three after the manipulation, all in a fixed order. The three unrelated verses participants evaluated before the manipulation were:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness Romans 1:18.

He replied, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it Luke 11:28.

In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome 1 John 5:3.

The three verses that followed the manipulation were:

God will repay each person according to what they have done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger Romans 2:6-8.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry Colossians 3:5.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul 1 Peter 2:11.

***Support for Bible verses.*** Participants evaluated each Bible verse using the same three questions used in Study 1 using seven-point Likert-type scales. The participant's evaluation of

the two Bible verses about sexuality that followed the false feedback was the dependent variable. I created an average score of participant responses to each of the three items about those two verses. These six items showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

***Endorsement of negative stereotypes about highly sexually active people.*** This measure was embedded in the fake subtle prejudice scale. These four questions asked participants how much they agree with negative stereotypes about highly sexually people. These items were: “Highly sexually active people tend to have more issues with substance abuse compared to less sexually active people,” “Highly sexually active people generally have had many different sex partners,” “Highly sexually active people have more general health problems than non-sexually active people,” and “Highly sexually active people have more sexually transmitted diseases than less-sexually active people.” This measure was included as a covariate, and showed good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .78$ ).

***Manipulation checks.*** Participants completed two items to ensure that they read and believed the false feedback. Immediately after feedback, participants were asked to enter the score they received on the prejudice measure in an open textbox. Participants in the high prejudice condition who reported a score of 60 or less, and participants who were in the low prejudice condition and reported a score of 40 or more were not included in the final analyses.

After participants entered their prejudice score, they responded to “Do you think this score suggest you are high or low in subtle prejudice against highly sexually active people?” on a seven-point Likert-type scale.

***Religious commitment.*** I used three items from (Worthington Jr et al., 2003) to measure religious commitment. The items I used were: “I spend time trying to grow in understanding of my faith,” “It is important for me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and

reflection,” and “Religion is especially important to me because it answers many important questions about meaning in life.” This was used as a covariate, and showed good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

## Results

**Manipulation check.** To test if participant understood and believed the feedback, I submitted the manipulation check item to a one-way ANOVA. There was a very strong effect of condition, as participants in the high prejudice feedback condition scored significantly higher on this item ( $M = 6$ ,  $SD = 1.6$ ) than participants in the low prejudice feedback condition ( $M = 1.8$ ,  $SD = 1.6$ ),  $F(1,168) = 291$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen’s  $d = 2.63$ .

**Support for Biblical justification of prejudice.** To test if prejudice feedback shifted people’s support for Bible verses about sexuality I conducted a one-way ANCOVA, including endorsement of negative stereotypes about highly sexually active people and religious commitment as covariates. These two variables strongly predict support for Biblical justifications of prejudice, but do not moderate the effects. In these cases, it is sensible to include these variables as covariates, as it will statistically reduce experimental error. There was a significant effect of condition, as participants in the high prejudice feedback condition endorsed Bible verses about sexuality more ( $M = 5.4$ ,  $SD = .98$ ) than participants in the low prejudice feedback condition ( $M = 5$ ,  $SD = .74$ ),  $F(1,166) = 4.62$ ,  $p = .033$ ,  $\eta^2 = .021$  (see Figure 2).

Did participants only shift their attitudes toward Bible verses about sexuality? To test this, I ran the same ANCOVA, but I changed the dependent variable to endorsement of the 1 non-sexuality Bible verse that followed the manipulation. The effect of condition was not significant,  $F(1, 166) = 2.55$ ,  $p = .11$ ,  $\eta^2 = .011$ .

Did people move away from the verses about sexuality more than the verses unrelated to sexuality? To test this, I ran a 2 (condition) X 2 (sexuality verses, non-sexuality verses) between-within-subjects ANCOVA, controlling for religious commitment and support for negative stereotypes about highly sexually active people. There was a marginally significant main effect of condition, as people in the high prejudice feedback condition endorsed the verses ( $M = 5.59$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ) more than the people in the low prejudice feedback condition ( $M = 5.23$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ),  $F(1, 160) = 3.39$ ,  $p = .067$ . There was not a significant main effect of relevance  $F(1,160) = .493$ ,  $p = .483$ , and the predicted interaction was not significant  $F(1,160) = .405$ ,  $p = .526$ , suggesting that people in both conditions responded to related and unrelated verses in the same way.

### **Discussion of studies 1 and 2**

Studies 1 and 2 show differing effects of prejudice feedback. Study 1 found that people did not use parts of the Bible to justify a prejudice, but just the opposite, as feedback indicating high amounts of prejudice cause people to actively move away from parts of the Bible related to that prejudice. Study 2 showed the opposite effect, as people who were given feedback indicating high amounts of prejudice endorsed Biblical justifications for that prejudice more than participants who received low prejudice feedback.

I hypothesize that the difference in these two findings is a function of the social norms about prejudice toward those groups. I expect that prejudice against gay men is less socially acceptable than prejudice against highly sexually active people. I expect that people will feel more comfortable using the Bible to justify prejudices that are more socially acceptable, as they can do so without harming their unprejudiced self-image. Prejudice against less acceptable targets may be more likely to be suppressed altogether. This is likely because people will not

want to risk the positive image they have of their worldview by using it to justify unacceptable prejudices.

### Study 3

This study investigates the hypothesis that there is a difference in how socially acceptable it is to express prejudice against gay men and highly sexually active people.

#### Method

**Participants.** I recruited 61 new participants on MTurk using TurkPrime.com with the same instructions as Studies 1 and 2. Participants were paid 10 cents for their participation in this short study. The sample was 70% white, with 29 men and 32 women, age ( $M = 34.2$ ,  $SD = 9$ ).

**Procedure.** After completing the informed consent, participants read these instructions:

*“We are interested in how “acceptable” it is to say negative things about specific groups of people. Please use the sliding scales that follow to tell us how socially acceptable is it to express negative feelings toward members of these different groups in the United States. We are NOT asking you what you feel, but rather what the rules in the U.S. about what attitudes are OK to express, and what attitudes are NOT OK to express. Please use the scale provided to indicate how acceptable, or unacceptable it is to express negative feelings toward members of that group in the U.S.”*

Participants then evaluated nineteen different social groups using 0-100 feeling thermometers. Participant then completed some basic demographic questions.

#### Results

As predicted, participants indicated prejudice against gay men ( $M = 42.2$ ,  $SD = 28.5$ ) as less acceptable than prejudice against highly sexually active people ( $M = 61.0$ ,  $SD = 27.16$ ; see Table 1).

### Study 4

Study 4 aims to replicate the effects from Studies 1 and 2 by showing differential reactions to false feedback indicating high amounts of prejudiced toward groups that differ in the social acceptability of prejudice expression.

If participants are shaping their worldview as a function of prejudice feedback and social norms, they should shift the importance of sexual teachings in the Bible. To capture this, I included a second dependent variable, which asked participants to rank the importance of different Biblical themes, one of which was sexuality. If participants want to use their religious worldview to justify a sexual prejudice, they should say that sexuality is an important Biblical theme. If participants are motivated to suppress that prejudice, they should say that sexuality is not an important Biblical theme.

### Method

**Power analysis.** I used a Monte Carlo method to estimate power. This method is preferred because I will have significantly more control in specifying my parameters compared to more traditional methods (such as G\*Power). Specifically, the Monte Carlo method allows me to specify non-normally distributed dependent variables. This is useful because the ratings of Bible verses in the first two studies were negatively skewed, as most participants supported the verses above the midpoint of the scale. Programs such as G\*Power assume the dependent variable is normally distributed, which could result in an overestimate of power if our observed dependent variable is not normally distributed.

I used the results (means, SD's, skewness, and kurtosis) from Studies 1 and 2 to create an estimate for how strong the hypothesized effects might be. I simulated 500 datasets across 7 different n values (360, 408, 456, 504, 552, 600) where the scores fall between 1-8 (the model

did not converge if I restricted the range from 1-7). For each different level of N, I created a percent of datasets that produced a significant interaction between high and low levels of prejudice threat and the target group using an alpha level of .05. I intended on finding a power of 90%. The 90% value fell between the n values 504 and 552, so I decided to collect 570 participants, anticipating a usable n of approximately 520.

**Participants.** I recruited 569 new participants on MTurk through TurkPrime.com using the same instructions as previous studies. Participants were paid 50 cents for their participation in this study. The sample was 74% white, with 333 women and 230 men and 6 people who did not indicate a gender, age ( $M = 37$ ,  $SD = 12$ ). I used the same exclusion criteria as the previous studies, removing manipulation check failures ( $n = 31$ ), non-Christians ( $n = 31$ ), LGBT+ people ( $n = 34$ ) and people with more than 7 sexual partners in the past 2 years ( $n = 9$ ). This left 464 participants for the final analyses.

**Procedure.** This study used a 2 (prejudice feedback: high or low) X 2 (target of prejudice: gay men or highly sexually active people) design. The general procedure for this study was very similar to the first two studies. Participants started by evaluating 2 Bible verses unrelated to sexuality. Participants were randomly assigned to the gay men or highly sexually active condition. They proceeded to complete the fake subtle prejudice measure toward the target of prejudice they were randomly assigned to. After completing this scale, participants received false feedback indicating they are in the 91<sup>st</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> percentile of prejudice. They then completed the manipulation check measures before evaluating 2 more Bible verses. Participants in the gay men condition evaluated verses specific to homosexuality. Participants in the highly sexually active condition evaluated verses about sexual morality.

After evaluating Bible verses, participants were told that the researchers are writing an article for a website about the importance of different Biblical themes. To understand this, we asked participants to rank 9 different Biblical themes. After ranking the importance of different Biblical themes, participants completed a measure of religious commitment and some basic demographic questions.

**Measures.**

***Bible verses.*** The two verses about homosexuality were:

And the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error (Romans 1:27).

Understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, for men who practice homosexuality (1 Timothy 1:9-10).

The verses about sexual morality were:

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry Colossians 3:5.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul 1 Peter 2:11.

The two unrelated verses that were evaluated before the prejudice feedback were:

Thus says the Lord, preserve justice and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come and My righteousness to be revealed Isaiah 56:1.

In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome 1 John 5:3.

**Support for Bible verses.** Participants evaluated each Bible verse using the same 3 questions used in Studies 1 and 2. The participant's evaluation of the two Bible verses that followed the false feedback was the first dependent variable in this study. I created an average score of participant responses to each of the three items on both verses. These items showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

**Manipulation check.** Participants completed the same 2 manipulation check items from Study 2.

**Endorsement of negative stereotypes about target of prejudice.** I included three questions in the fake subtle prejudice measure that measure endorsement of negative stereotypes for each groups. These items are reliable for both groups ( $\alpha > .77$ ).

**Religious commitment.** I measured religious commitment using the same scale used in Study 2 ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

**Ranking of Biblical themes.** Participants were asked to rank the importance of nine different Biblical themes (*Drink or drugs in excess, Family values, Giving and generosity, Gluttony, Greed, Love, Prayer, Salvation, Sexuality*). The original order was alphabetic, and participants dragged themes in the order they chose. I reverse scored each item, meaning larger scores indicate the theme was listed as more important.

## Results

**Manipulation check.** To test if people believed and understood the feedback, I conducted a t-test, predicting responses to the manipulation check item by the prejudice feedback condition. There was a strong effect of prejudice feedback condition, as people in the high

feedback condition reported having more prejudice ( $M = 6.19, SD = 1.36$ ) compared to those in the low feedback condition ( $M = 1.61, SD = 1.11$ )  $t = 39.8, p < .001, d = 3.69$ . To test if the feedback was more believable for one of the two targets of prejudice, I conducted a 2 (target of prejudice) X 2 (high or low prejudice feedback) ANOVA. There was a strong main effect of prejudice feedback  $F(1, 460) = 761, p < .001, \eta^2 = .77$ . The main effect of target and the interaction term were both not significant  $F_s < 1$ , suggesting the prejudice feedback was not more believable for one of the prejudice targets.

**Support for Bible verses.** I hypothesized that those participants who are given feedback indicating high amounts of prejudice toward a more acceptable target (highly sexually active people) will justify that prejudice using their worldview, but people given the same feedback about a less acceptable target of prejudice (gay men) will suppress that prejudice. To test this, I conducted a 2 (target of prejudice) X 2 (high or low prejudice feedback) ANCOVA, predicting support for the Bible verses that followed the feedback, while controlling for religious commitment and support for negative stereotypes. Neither main effect was significant,  $p_s > .16$ . I predicted that participant high in prejudice threat would justify prejudice against highly sexually active people by strongly endorsing Bible verses about sexuality, but I predicted that participants high in threat against gay men would suppress their prejudice by not endorsing Bible verses about homosexuality. This predicted interaction, however, was not significant  $F(1, 458) = .91, p = .34, \eta^2 = .002$  (see Figure 3).

**Importance of Biblical themes.** I hypothesized that participants would indicate sexuality as an important Biblical theme after receiving high prejudice feedback against highly sexually active people, but would say sexuality is not an important theme when they receive high prejudice feedback against gay men. To test this, I conducted a 2 (target of prejudice) X 2 (high

or low prejudice feedback) ANCOVA, predicting participant's ranking of sexuality as an important Biblical theme. Neither the main effect of target,  $F < 1, p = .992$  nor prejudice feedback,  $F < 1, p = .59$  nor the predicted interaction,  $F < 1, p = .48$  were significant.

## **Discussion**

I predicted that people would differentially respond to false feedback indicating high amounts of prejudice depending on the target group. I expected participants to justify prejudice if the target group was a more acceptable target of prejudice (highly sexually active people), but suppress a prejudice if the target is a less acceptable target of prejudice (gay men). I did not find support for this hypothesis across both dependent measures in this study, as both predicted interactions were not significant. One possible explanation for these findings is that the between-subjects design lacked a true control condition. It is possible that people who got low feedback felt reassured about their own beliefs and prejudices. The low prejudice feedback may have given people a moral credential that allowed them to feel more comfortable endorsing prejudiced Bible verses. If this is true, any justification effect that may exist as a function of threatening feedback may have been masked by the increased endorsement of prejudiced Bible verses for people in the low feedback condition. To address this concern, I conducted another study using a within-subjects design. This design allows me to compare people's responses to Bible verses before and after the feedback.

## **Study 5**

Study 5 is designed to test the same hypotheses as Study 4, but I used a within-subjects design, such that I recorded support for Bible verses about the target of prejudice before and after the feedback, and all participants received high prejudice feedback. This study will have a better true control condition, as participants' responses to Biblical justifications after the false feedback

will be compared to their responses before the feedback. This may act as a better control than the other studies, where I compared high feedback participants to low feedback participants. Low feedback participants may have interpreted their feedback as a license to express prejudice. This alternative explanation will be addressed in Study 5.

## **Method**

**Participants.** I recruited new 237 participants on MTurk through TurkPrime.com using the same instructions as previous studies. Participants were paid 50 cents for their participation in this study. The sample was 75% white, had 130 women and 106 men, age ( $M = 38$ ,  $SD = 13$ ). I used the same criteria as other studies, removing manipulation check failures ( $n = 13$ ), non-Christians ( $n = 21$ ), LGBT+ ( $n = 16$ ) and people with more than 7 sexual partners in the past 2 years ( $n = 6$ ). This left 181 participants in the final analyses.

**Procedure.** Participants started the study by evaluating 4 different Bible verses; the first 2 were related to the target of prejudice they will receive during the false feedback part of the study. The next two verses were unrelated to the target of prejudice. Participants then completed the fake prejudice scale for gay men or highly sexually active people. All participants received feedback indicating a high amount of prejudice, and then answered the manipulation check questions. After the manipulation check, participants evaluated 4 more verses, the first two were unrelated to sexuality and the next two were about the target of prejudice they were assigned to. After evaluating these verses, participants completed the ranking task, the measure of religious commitment and demographics, which was identical to Study 4.

## **Measures.**

**Bible verses.** The 4 verses about homosexuality were the same as in Study 1. I used the same 2 verses about sexuality from Studies 2 and 3, and added these two verses:

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people Ephesians 5:3.

You say, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both." The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body 1 Corinthians 6:13.

The 4 unrelated verses I used were a collection of unrelated verses used in the other studies.

***Evaluation of Bible verses.*** I used the same 3 items from the first 3 studies to measure evaluation of each verses ( $\alpha > .94$ )

***Manipulation check.*** Participants completed the same 2 manipulation check items from Studies 2 and 3. Participants were removed if they reported a prejudice score lower than 60.

***Covariates.*** I measured religious commitment ( $\alpha = .89$ ) and support for stereotypes about the target group (gay men  $\alpha = .86$ , highly sexually active  $\alpha = .77$ ) just as I did in the previous studies.

***Ranking of Biblical themes.*** This measure was the same as Study 4.

## **Results**

**Support for Bible verses.** I hypothesized that participants would be willing to justify their prejudice against an acceptable target of prejudice, but would suppress their prejudice against less acceptable targets of prejudice. To test this, I conducted a 2 (target of prejudice) X 2 (before or after feedback) mixed-design ANCOVA, predicting support for relevant Bible verses. There was a strong main effect of prejudice target, as participants supported the verses about sexual immorality ( $M = 5.8, SD = 1.4$ ) more than the verses about homosexuality ( $M = 4.8, SD =$

1.8),  $F(1, 354) = 38.96, p < .001, d = .62$ , but there was no main effect of time,  $F < 1$ . The predicted interaction was not significant  $F(1, 354) = .918, p = .67$  (see Figure 4).

**Importance of Biblical themes.** I hypothesized that participants in the gay men condition would be motivated to suppress their prejudice by indicating sexuality as a less important Biblical theme, while I expect participants in the highly sexually active condition to justify their prejudice by indicating more importance to sexuality themes in the Bible. To test this hypothesis, I conducted a one-way ANCOVA, including religious commitment and endorsement of negative stereotypes as covariates. The scores trended in the predicted direction, as participants reported sexuality as a more important theme in the Bible in the highly sexually active condition ( $M = 2.7, SD = 1.6$ ) compared to the gay men condition ( $M = 2.4, SD = 1.4$ ), however this effect was not significant  $F(1, 176) = 2.05, p = .15$ .

## **Discussion**

As in Study 5, I predicted that people would justify prejudice against highly sexually active people but suppress prejudice against gay men. Again, these hypotheses were not supported.

One possible explanation for the lack of justification effects being found in these studies is that the motivation to justify a prejudice is very different if that prejudice is real, as opposed to given through false feedback. People may be highly motivated to express and justify their own prejudices, but this does not mean people have the same motivation to justify prejudice they are told they have via false feedback. To address this concern, I conducted a study that measures people's actual prejudice toward a few different groups, and measures endorsement of Biblical justifications of those prejudices.

## **Study 6**

This study investigates the relationship between actual prejudices and Biblical justifications of that prejudice. If people are using the Bible to justify prejudice, there should be a positive correlation between that prejudice and justifications of that prejudice.

## **Method**

**Participants.** I recruited 222 participants on MTurk through TurkPrime.com using the same instructions as previous studies. The sample was 74% white, had 115 women and 106 men, age ( $M = 36$ ,  $SD = 13$ ). I removed non-Christians ( $n = 29$ ) and LGBT+ people ( $n = 23$ ). This left 183 participants in the final analyses.

**Procedure.** Participants began by reporting their prejudice against a variety of different social groups. Participants were asked to indicate how positively or negatively they feel toward each social group. Among these groups were gay people, lazy people, highly sexually active people, fat people, and atheists. People evaluated how they felt about each group using a sliding scale. They were asked to drag a dot to the place in the scale that best indicates how they feel about members of each social group. Responses were recorded on a 0-100 scale.

After indicating how they feel about members of each group, participants evaluated a set of Bible verses. Some of the verses contained possible justifications of prejudice. I included two verses that could justify prejudice against gay people, two that could justify prejudice against atheists, and one verse that could justify prejudice lazy people, with one more that could justify prejudice against fat people and one for highly sexually active people. After evaluating these verses, participants completed an unrelated study, and then answered some basic demographic questions.

## **Measures.**

**Bible verses.** Participants evaluate each Bible verse on the same 3 dimensions used in previous studies. Participants evaluated two Bible verses unrelated to any of the measured prejudices and two verses about homosexuality, all of which were taken from Study 1.

Participants then evaluated 2 verses that could justify prejudice against atheists, which were:

The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good Psalm 14:1.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God John 3:16-19.

One verse that could justify prejudice against fat people:

Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags Proverbs 23:20-21.

One justifying prejudice against lazy people:

For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

The final verse was a verse about sexual activity that was used in Study 5.

## **Results**

To test the relationship between prejudice and religious justifications of that prejudice, I calculated Pearson’s R correlation coefficients for each prejudice and its Biblical justification. Prejudice against gay people was positively correlated with endorsement of the verses about homosexuality  $r = .39, p < .001$ . Prejudice against highly sexually active people was positively correlated with endorsement of the Bible verse about sexuality  $r = .15, p = .043$ . Atheist

prejudice was marginally correlated with religious justifications  $r = .13, p = .072$ . Prejudice against lazy and fat people was uncorrelated with support for religious justifications ( $r = .12, p = .1$ ;  $r = -.11, p = .13$ , respectively).

## **Discussion**

This study lends some support to the hypothesis that people will use parts of their religious worldview to justify a prejudice. This study is only correlational, so it does not show a causal relationship of prejudice leading to endorsement of justifications.

### **General Discussion**

Six studies tested the hypothesis that people would use their worldview to justify moderately acceptable prejudices, but suppress unacceptable prejudices. These studies had mixed results. Studies 1 and 2 find that people react differently to false feedback about prejudice depending on the target of that prejudice. Participants in these studies were told that they were high in prejudice, and then asked to evaluate Bible verses that condemn the behavior of members of the target group. People could respond to the feedback by either increasing their support for the Bible verses, or reducing their support for the verses. If participants endorsed the Bible verses, they would be able to explain their prejudice as acceptable, but something that is supported by the Bible. This would reduce the threat that goes with false feedback about prejudice because that prejudice is supported by their worldview. Participants in Study 2 seemed to take this option, as participants in the high prejudice feedback condition supported Bible verses about sexuality more than participants in the low prejudice feedback condition. The second option would be to suppress the prejudice from their worldview. This would result in a reduction of support for parts of the Bible that condemn the behavior of the target group. This

option allows people to reduce prejudiced-linked content from their worldview, preserving their unprejudiced self-image.

I hypothesized that the reason these two studies had conflicting findings was the difference in the social acceptability of both of those prejudices. The social acceptability of prejudice against gay men has been shifting greatly in the past few years, and that prejudice is largely unacceptable in society today. Prejudice against highly sexually active people, however, is a more socially acceptable prejudice. Study 3 verified this intuition, as it showed a difference in the social acceptability of prejudice against those two groups.

The difference in norms between the two groups suggests that false feedback indicating prejudice against gay men is more threatening to one's unprejudiced self-image than false feedback indicating prejudice against highly sexually active people. I expect that people would prefer to stick to their religious worldview if possible, but would move away from it if the prejudice threat became too strong. Therefore, people would stick to their religion and use it as a justification if the prejudice is moderately acceptable (highly sexually active people), but would suppress the prejudice from their worldview if it were less acceptable (gay men).

Studies 4 and 5 were designed to test this hypothesis in one complete study using a between-subjects design (Study 4) and a within-subjects design (Study 5). Neither of these studies supported my hypothesis. These studies showed that people supported the anti-gay Bible verses less than the anti-sexuality verses, which supports the notion that anti-gay prejudice is less acceptable than prejudice against highly sexually active people. I did not detect an interaction with prejudice threat; however, as prejudice threat seemed not to change support of these Bible verses. These findings do not replicate the reverse findings in Studies 1 and 2, as responses to the feedback were the same for both targets of prejudice.

While these findings do not show people justifying prejudice with their religious worldview, there is some evidence that this still occurs. Study 6 found positive correlations with prejudice, and support for Bible verses that could justify that prejudice. While this is only a correlational design, it suggests that people who are high in prejudice agree with Biblical justifications of that prejudice more than people low in prejudice. Hoffarth et al. (2017) also found support for the hypothesis that people will use their worldview to justify prejudice. These authors show that Google searches for religious justifications of prejudice (primarily “Hate the sin, love the sinner”) increase in places where justifications of that prejudice are required for the expression of prejudice.

I expect the reason I did not find reliable justifications effects in these studies is the fact that managing real, affective prejudice and responding to false feedback about prejudice are two separate psychological processes. Responding to feedback about prejudice is largely associated with the preservation of an unprejudiced self-image (Dutton & Lake, 1973; O’Brien & Crandall, 2005), such that people responding to this feedback are only concerned about maintaining their unprejudiced self-image. Real, affective prejudice has a very different motivation, as people are generally motivated to express their true affect (Brehm, 1999; Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). With real prejudice, there are competing motives, the motivation to express an affect, and the motivation to preserve an unprejudiced self-image. With false feedback, there is only one motive, the preservation of an unprejudiced self-image. When there are competing motives, people may be willing to risk their unprejudiced self-image by expressing and justifying a prejudice. When the motivation to express a real affect is removed, the motivation to justify a prejudice (as opposed to suppressing it) goes away, which will likely result in general suppression of prejudice.

One methodological change that may have allowed me to find support for my hypothesis would be if people had to explain their prejudice score to an actual audience. People may not have been as threatened by the false feedback as I was planning. People know how they feel about members of these groups, so maybe one score on a prejudice scale did not actually convince people they were high in prejudice. People who were unthreatened by the feedback were unlikely to respond to that feedback in the way I hypothesized. If people had to explain the score to others maybe this would have been different. The need to explain their score to other people may motivate them to justify that prejudice using their worldview, especially if that was a prejudice that was moderately acceptable.

One constraining aspect of these studies is that they were all conducted using MTurk participants. MTurk samples tend to be more liberal than other samples (Huff & Tingley, 2015). Political liberals are going to be more sensitive to shifts in social norms, and will be more likely to abide by changing norms about prejudice (Crandall et al., 2013). This means Christians on MTurk may be more likely to use suppression as a more global strategy, and will be less likely to stick to parts of their religion that are linked to unacceptable prejudices. These studies were also limited in the types of religious justifications measured. All these studies looked at Biblical justifications of prejudice, relying mostly on support for specific Bible verses, as well as support for different Biblical themes. The verses chosen are generally very specific, and quite strict in their condemnation of these sexual behaviors. Other prominent religious justifications are quite common in their use (e.g. “love the sinner, hate the sin”, “God supports traditional marriage”). These justifications sound more positive than the verses from the Bible used in these studies. If I had used support for these justifications instead of Bible verses, it is possible that I would have

found some justifications effects, as people may have been more comfortable endorsing these ideas instead of the Bible verses about sexuality.

### **Conclusion**

People experience conflict when they are told that they have a prejudice that is socially unacceptable. People are motivated to either explain (justify) the prejudice or suppress the prejudice when this conflict occurs. In these studies, people were given false feedback indicating high amounts of prejudice. People could choose between violating social norms that dictate that prejudice is unacceptable by supporting prejudice-linked religious content, or disavowing parts of their religious worldview that are related to that prejudice. I hypothesized the social acceptability of a prejudice would predict which strategy people will use. These studies had mixed findings, and they did not lend strong support for my hypotheses, as the findings suggest people are more comfortable disavowing prejudiced-linked religious content than they are using their religion to justify prejudice. These findings are specific to false feedback about prejudice and should not be generalized to explain how people manage real, affective prejudice, as responding to false feedback about prejudice and managing affective prejudice are two separate psychological processes.

Table 1

*Social acceptability of prejudice among Americans*

Group	Mean	SD
Members of the IRS	69.22	29.37
Lazy people	67.08	30.25
Men who see prostitutes	63.72	32.11
Rich people	63.55	29.17
Porn stars	62.92	28.45
Alcoholics	61.68	27.29
<b>Sexually active people</b>	61.00	27.16
Socialists	56.30	30.12
People in an open marriage	52.97	29.67
Fat people	52.15	31.56
Abortion advocates	51.43	26.81
Atheists	49.92	31.20
Feminists	49.72	29.12
Immigrants	48.47	31.94
Muslims	46.62	30.03
Transgender people	43.16	29.29
Women who had an abortion	42.64	27.60
<b>Gay men</b>	42.20	28.45
Lesbian Women	40.42	30.75
Jewish people	34.62	29.04

Figure 1

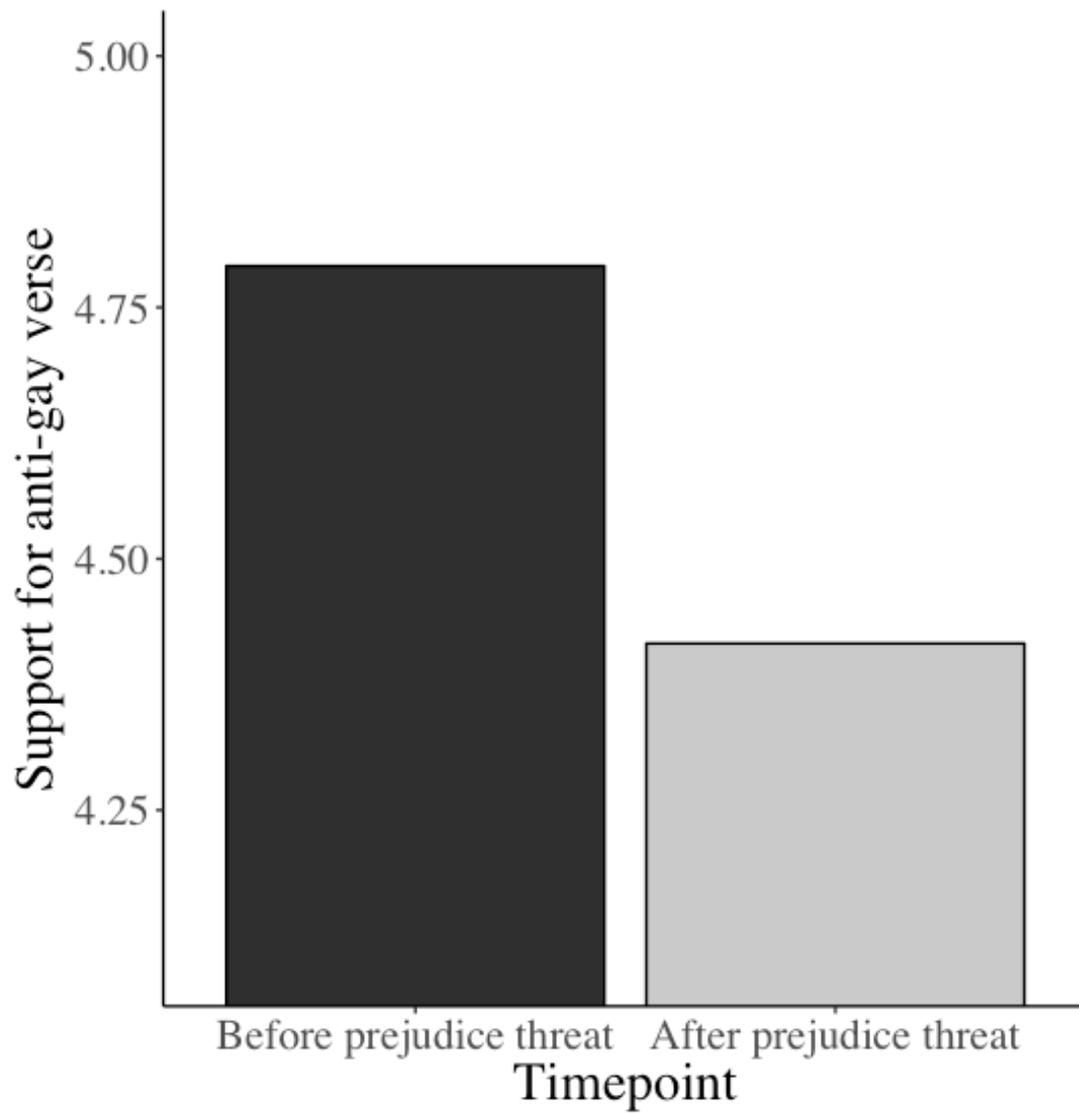
*Results from Study 1*

Figure 2.

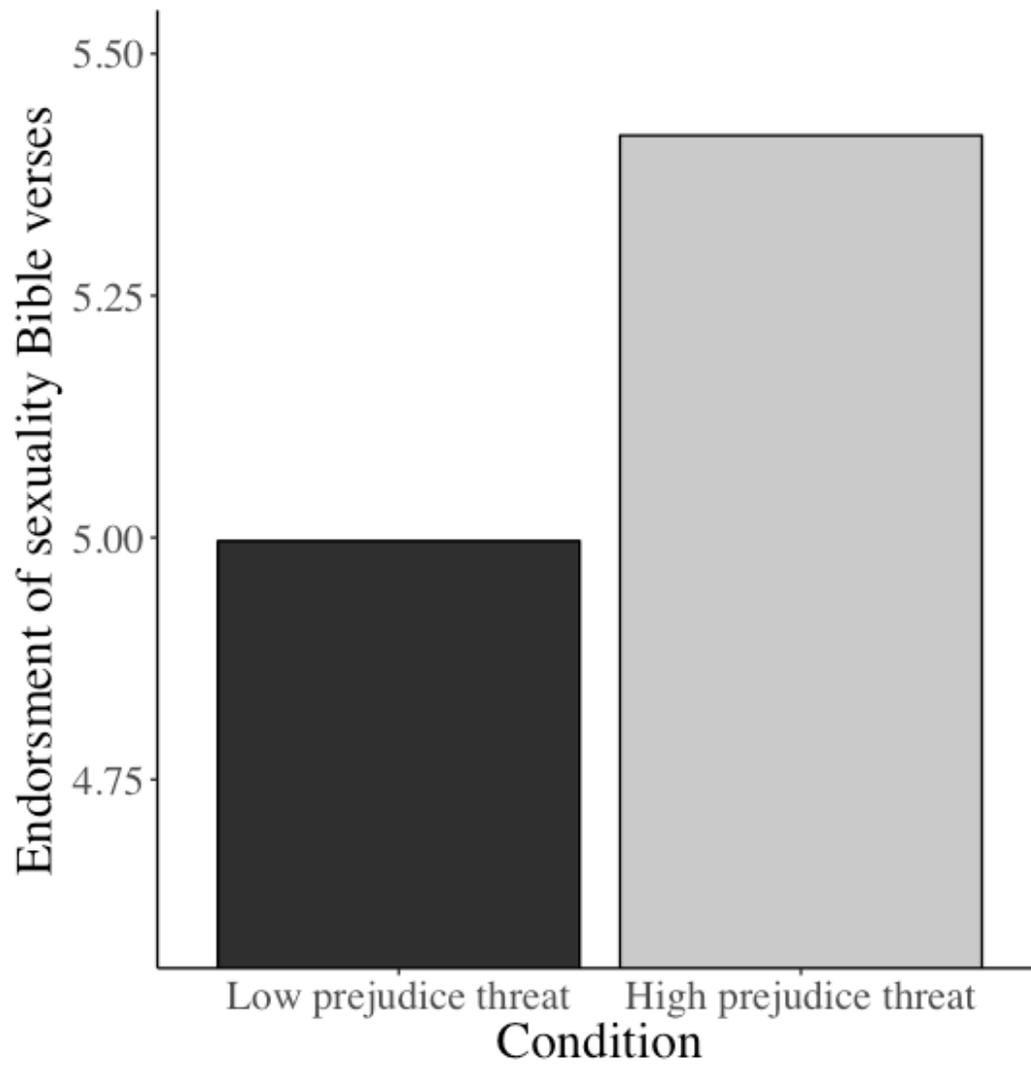
*Results from Study 2.*

Figure 3

*Results from Study 4.*

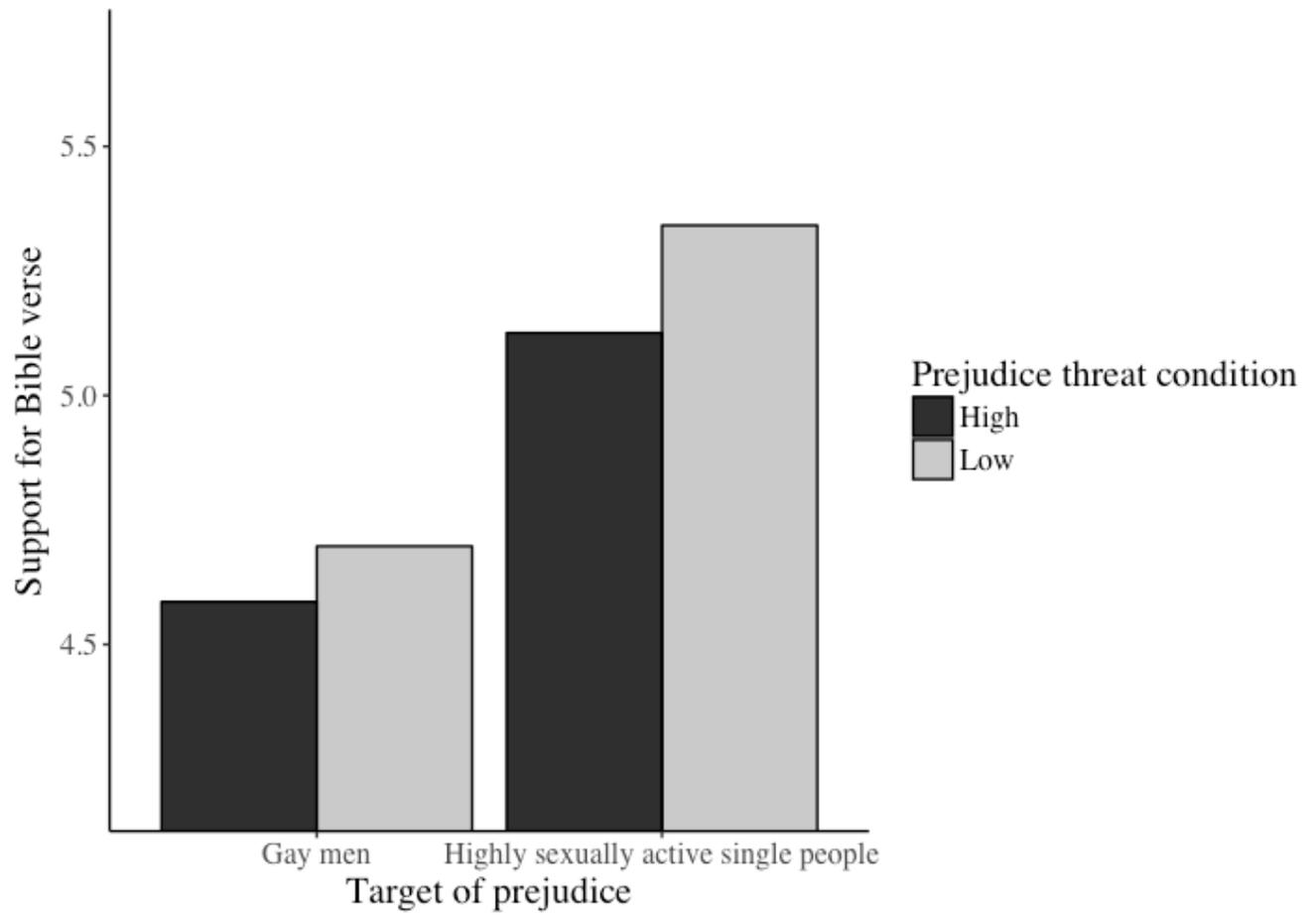
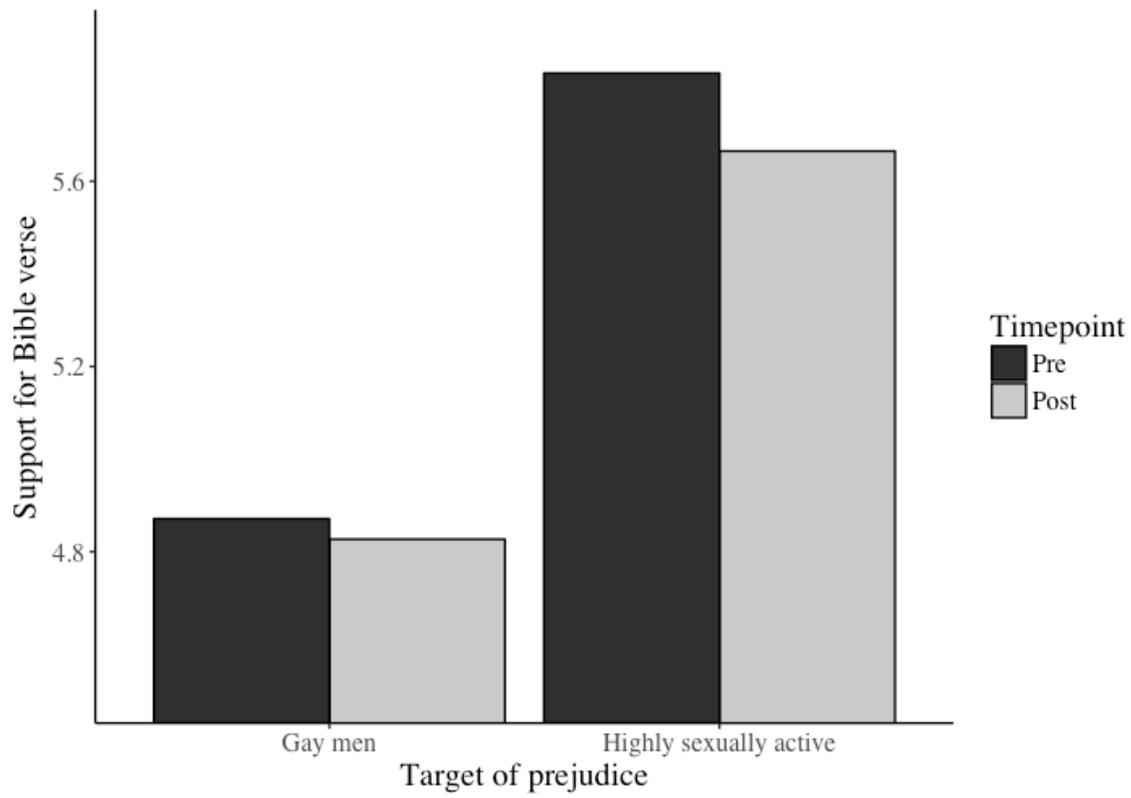


Figure 4

*Results from Study 5*

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