

# Gross Gods and Icky Atheism: Disgust Responses to Rejected Religious Beliefs

*Ryan S. Ritter & Jesse Lee Preston*

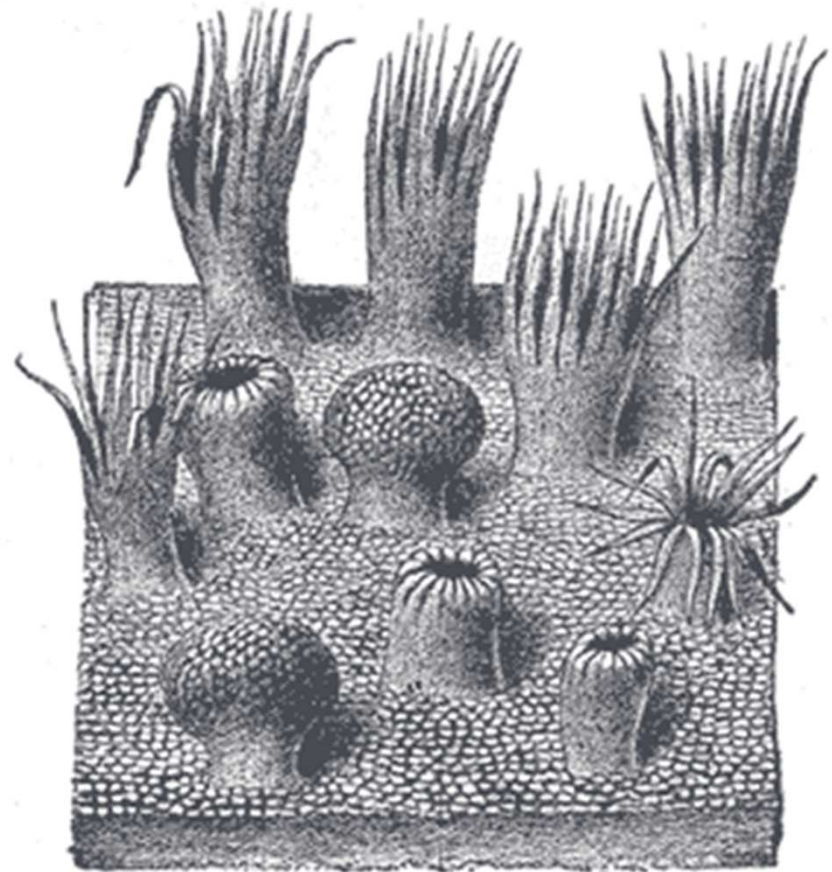


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# Taste as Metaphor for Morality

## Universal Taste Receptors:

Sweet  
Savory  
Salty  
Sour  
Bitter



# Taste as Metaphor for Morality

Universal Social Receptor(s):  
Purity



# Disgust



- In response to unfairness (Chapman et al., 2009)
- Causes more harsh moral judgments (Schnall et al., 2008; Wheatley & Haidt, 2005)
- Causes stronger approval/disapproval of purity virtues/violations (Horberg et al., 2009)



# What is a Purity Violation?

- “In these cases a person disrespects the sacredness of God, or causes impurity or degradation to himself/herself, or to others. To decide if an action is wrong, you think about things like sin, the natural order of things, sanctity, and the protection of the soul or the world from degradation and spiritual defilement” (Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999).

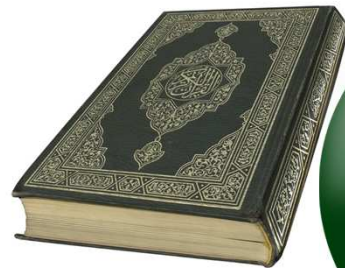
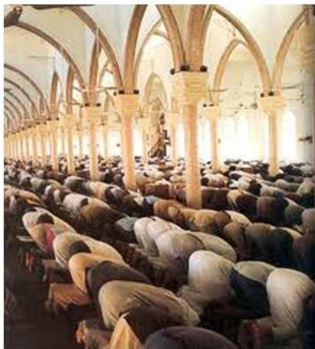
# Taste as Metaphor for Morality

- o Religion as a culturally variable “cuisine”:



# Taste as Metaphor for Morality

- Religion as a culturally variable “cuisine”:



# Embodiment of the Physical/Moral Purity Metaphor

- Causing people to feel morally unclean also causes feelings of physical uncleanliness (Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006)
- People tend to want to clean the part of their body that has transgressed (Lee & Schwarz, 2010)





# The Present Research

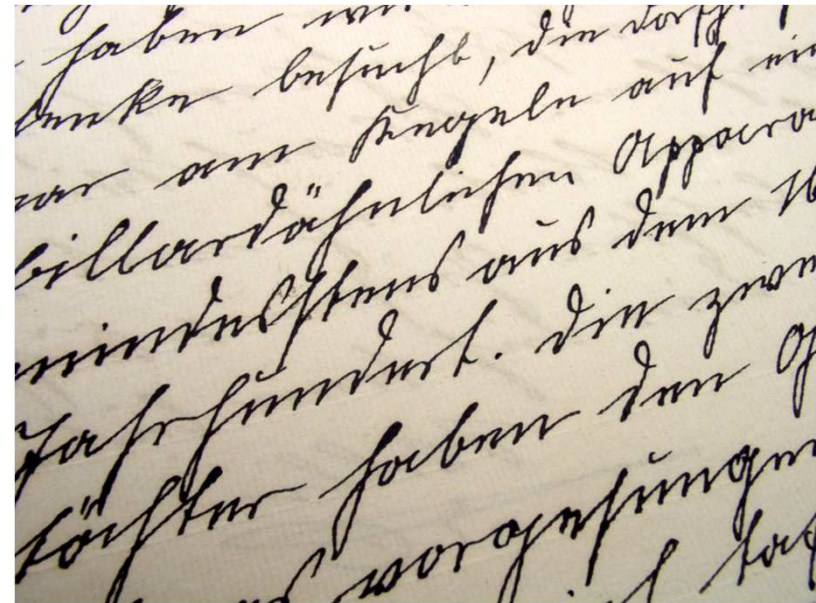
- Are people disgusted by rejected religious beliefs?
- Does physical cleansing (hand washing) after writing an outgroup religious passage ameliorate or remove feelings of disgust?

# Experiment Overview

- N = 95 Christian Undergraduates
- 2 (Passage: Bible/Qur'an) x 2 (Hand Washing: Yes/No) Between Subjects Design
  - Repeated Taste Test Paradigm

# Cover Story

- Two Separate Studies:
  - Consumer marketing (beverage tasting)
  - Relation between handwriting and personality



# Beverage

- 1 Gallon Water
- 1 Cup Lemon Juice Concentrate
- Pretesting (n=29) showed beverage rated moderately disgusting (M = 3.6, SD = 1.63; 7-point scale)



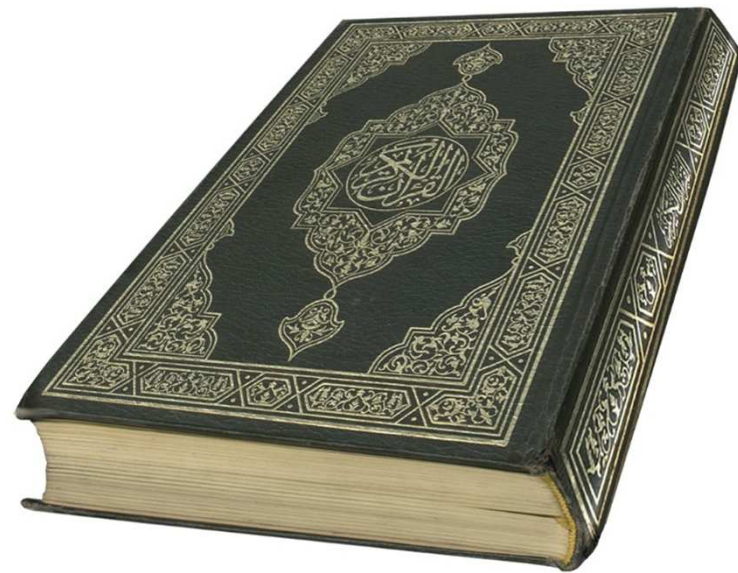
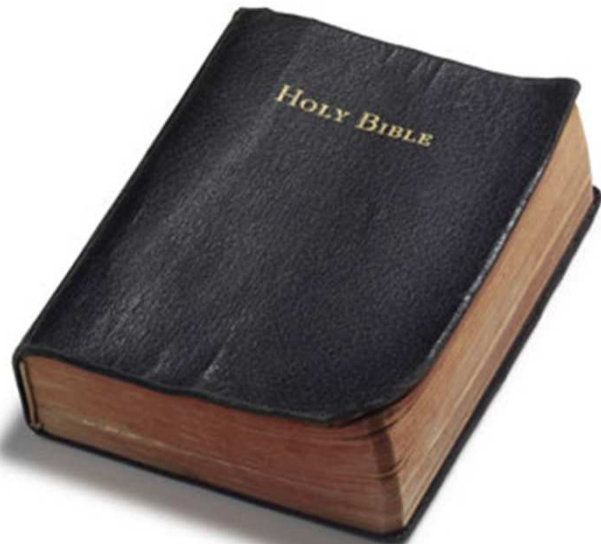
# Procedure

- Beverage tasting at time 1
  - Disgust, Sweet, Sour, Delicious, Bitter
- Positive/Negative Affect rating at time 1



# Procedure

- Hand-copy passage from either Bible or Qur'an





## Bible Passage

- But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Romans 5: 8-10).

## Qur'an Passage

- As for those who are bent on denying the truth and on barring others from the path of God – all their good deeds will He let go to waste; whereas those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds, and have come to believe in what has been bestowed on high on Muhammad – for it is the truth from their Sustainer – shall attain God's grace: He will efface their past bad deeds, and will set their hearts at rest (Surah 47: 1-2).

# Procedure

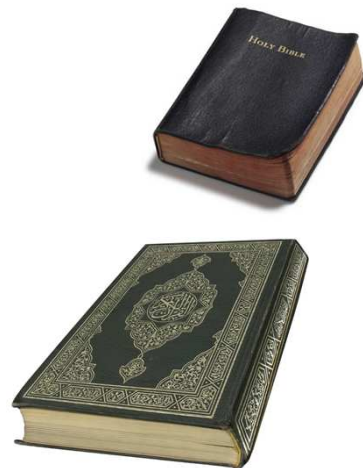
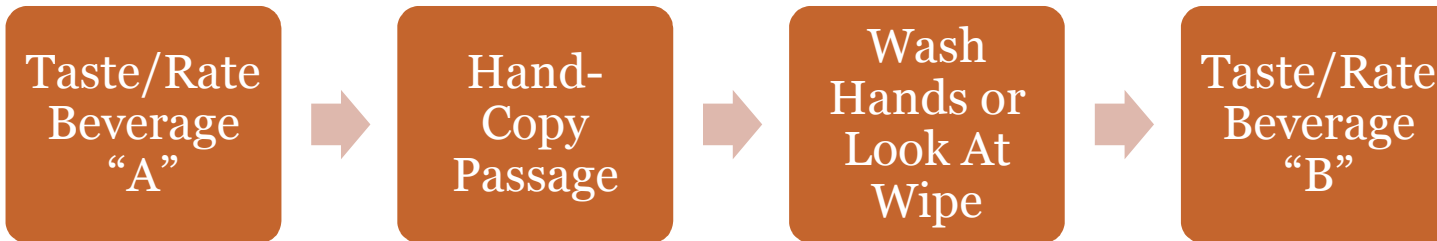
- Use wipe or look at wipe before estimating its retail price (Lee & Schwarz, 2010)



# Procedure

- Beverage tasting at time 2
  - Disgust, Sweet, Sour, Delicious, Bitter
- Positive/Negative Affect rating at time 2

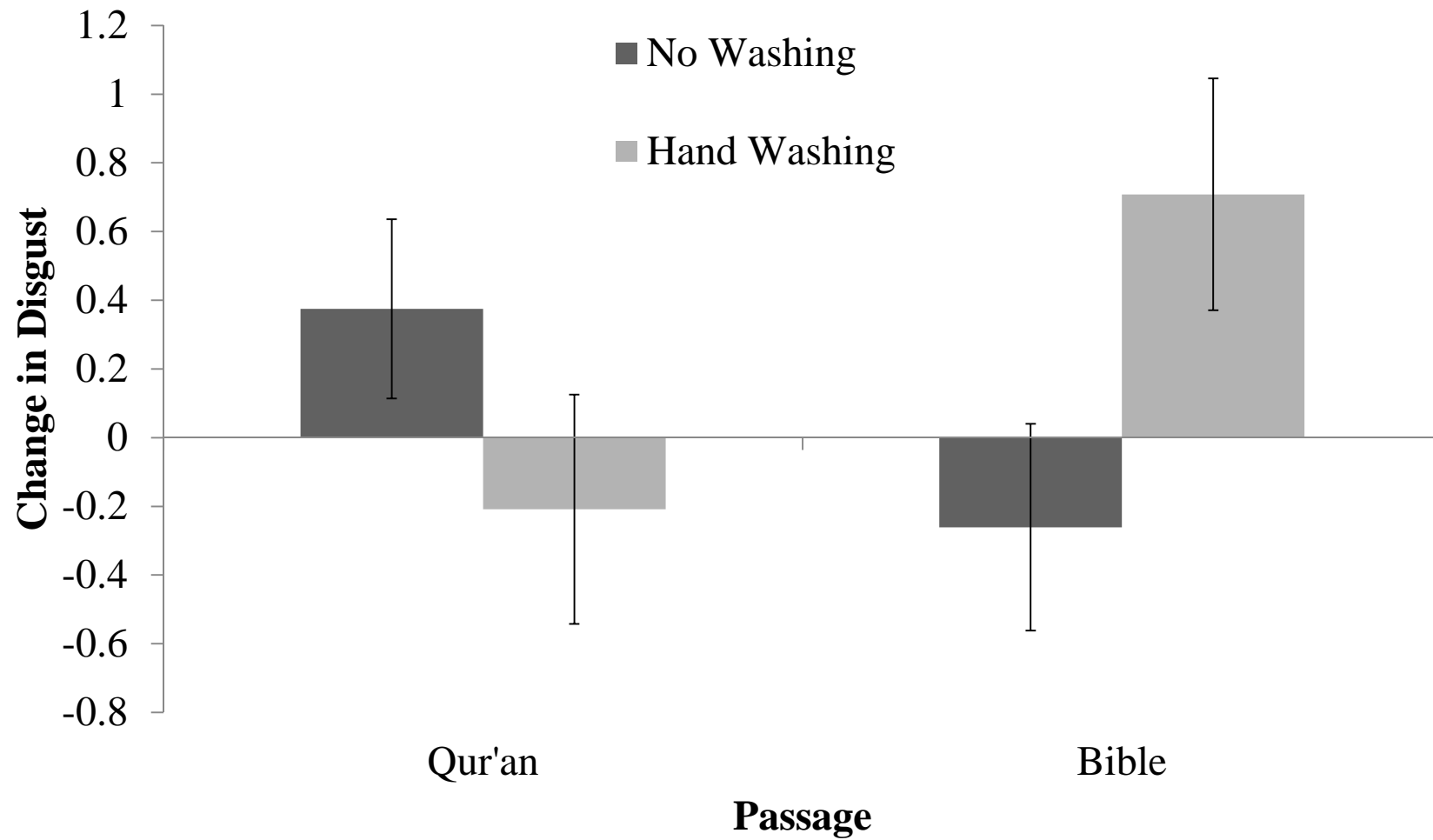




# Hypotheses

- When not washing hands after writing the passage:
  - Disgust response in Qur'an condition
  - No disgust response in Bible condition
- When washing hands after writing the passage:
  - Disgust response in Qur'an condition reduced or completely removed

# Results



*2 x 2 interaction,  $F(1, 91) = 6.3, p = .01$*



## Results Summary

- Christians copying a passage from Qur'an without washing their hands were literally left a bad taste in the mouth
- Hand washing eliminated the effect
  - Initial evidence also suggests that cleaning after contact with a positive essence is “distasteful”



# Conclusions

- Holding a culturally valued religious belief may be an important part of one's sense of moral purity.
- Feelings of disgust may provide the affective input for our intuitions letting us know that another belief system is “wrong”



# Future Directions

- Is this something unique to Christianity, or does the effect hold for other religious groups as well?
- Is this something unique to religious beliefs, or does it extend to any morally relevant belief?

# Thank You!

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