2010

Validation of the Internalized Sexual Prejudice Scale

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A deconstruction of the existing concept of internalized homophobia demonstrated the need for a new understanding of the experience and a different means of operationalizing the construct in men who have sex with men. This study introduces a new unified theory of sexual prejudice and a valid and reliable new psychometric tool to assess the concept of internalized sexual prejudice (ISP).

A sample of 125 men who visited websites popular among men who have sex with men (MSM) were recruited to complete a survey that assessed ISP. Instrument development procedures, including factor, reliability, and validity analyses were conducted to refine the new ISP measure. Participants also completed the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression scale (CESD), the Rosenberg Self esteem scale (RSE), the Reactions to Homosexuality Scale (RHS), and the Internalized Sexual Prejudice Scale (ISPS).

Convergent, discriminant, and validity analyses were conducted using Pearson r and multiple regression analyses. The results indicated a valid construct of internalized sexual prejudice consisting of the five domains supported by theory. Validity was demonstrated by the ability of the ISP to predict certain sexual and substance use behaviors. The results provide a new assessment tool useful in continuing treatment of MSM. The behavioral HIV intervention campaigns in the MSM population can modify their social marketing campaigns to account for the experiences of ISP among MSM.

Introduction / Background of the Study

While internalized homophobia is an established determinant of psychological sequelae, its influence on physical health is not well understood. Likely due to incomplete conceptualization of the concept of internalized homophobia (Williamson, 2004), this study provides a new model of internalized homophobia based on the works of Herek (2000), Diaz (2004), and Bein (2004). The concept of internalized homophobia is deconstructed and reconstructed into the concept of internalized sexual prejudice, defined as the internalization of homophobic socio-cultural norms within one or more of the following domains: civil, sexual attitudes, moral, gender-role conformity and group alignment. The concept of internalized homophobia has been deconstructed and reconstructed into the concept of internalized sexual prejudice, defined as the internalization of homophobic socio-cultural norms within one or more of the following domains: civil, sexual attitudes, moral, gender-role conformity and group alignment.

Methods

A survey was developed and delivered online using a popular website that allows for the hosting of online-surveys. The complete survey included informed consent documentation as well as a demographics questionnaire, Sexual and Substance Use Risk Behavior Questionnaire, Centers for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), Rosenberg Self esteem Scale (RSE), and the Internalized Sexual Prejudice Scale (ISPS).

Construct validity: The internal scales were distributed to various websites known to attract MSM such as bathhouses, video rental locations, bars, and outdoor cruising locations. Also, a third party recruitment firm was hired to mass email and target MSM with an informational email containing a link to the survey website. 125 viable surveys were collected.

Results

Convergent validity was demonstrated by the significant correlation of the ISPS and the Reactions to Homosexuality scale, r (125) = 0.65, p<0.01.

Discriminant validity was not satisfied as the ISPS and CESD were significantly correlated, r (125) = 0.28, p<0.01. Additionally, the ISPS and RSES were significantly correlated, r (125) = 0.34, p<0.01. It should be noted that while significant, these are weak associations. Additionally, in predicting substance use, ISPS explained variance unique from depression and self esteem scores.

Predictive validity was demonstrated by the ability of the ISPS to predict sexual risk and substance use behaviors. As a result, the only sexual and substance use items that were positively correlated were:

- Number of female sexual partners
- Use of alcohol during sex
- Gave or received money/drugs for sex with a man/boy

In addition to the overall predictive validity, the following correlations were also observed:

- Experienced a "one-night-stand" positively correlated to the ISPS Sexual ID Domain
- Gave or received money/drugs for sex with a woman/girl positively correlated to the ISPS Moral Domain
- Had sex with a known or suspected HIV positive person negatively correlated to the ISPS Sexual ID Domain

Methods (cont.)

Convergent, discriminant, and validity analyses were conducted using Pearson r and multiple regression analyses. The results in indicated that the new Internalized Sexual Prejudice Scale contains five domains as theoretically expected and is reliable and valid. Results of follow-up multivariate regression analysis indicated that ISPS scores predict certain risky sexual and substance use items independent of self esteem or depression. The testing for unique variance explained in risk-based dependent variables is a contribution to the literature (Williamson, 2000) and supports establishment of discriminant validity. In addition, regression analyses by subscale showed that subscale domains predicted risk behavior outcomes.

This study improved upon the conceptualization of internalized homophobia by deconstructing it into a more complete internalized sexual prejudice concept and clearly laid a psychologically plausible theoretical foundation for the new construct resulting in the development of a more appropriate measurement tool giving researchers unprecedented validity to the psychometric damages of internalized sexual prejudice. Unfortunately, sample size was far smaller than anticipated and thus any inferences of the data to a larger population must be made with caution. The largest limitation of this research study is found in the sampling techniques used. Given that the current social and political climate is still largely heterocentric, convenience snowball sampling is still the method of choice. Additionally, men may not be willing to freely admit same sex behavior. Snowball sampling methods have been used in these populations in the past with some success (Bowen, 2005).

This study contributes to our understanding of internalized sexual prejudice by proposing a solid theoretical foundation for the internalization of sexual prejudice norms that has been lacking in existing measures of internalized homophobia. This research would give credibility to the premise that MSIMs are psychologically affected by negative social norms. If a specific model was available that focused on internalized homophobia in terms of sexual prejudice and its five domains described previously, then society could begin the process of altering those societal norms, and thus preventing the internalization process from occurring.

Discussion

The results indicated that the new Internalized Sexual Prejudice Scale contains five domains as theoretically expected and is reliable and valid. Results of follow-up multivariate regression analysis indicated that ISPS scores predict certain risky sexual and substance use items independent of self esteem or depression. The testing for unique variance explained in risk-based dependent variables is a contribution to the literature (Williamson, 2000) and supports establishment of discriminant validity. In addition, regression analyses by subscale showed that subscale domains predicted risk behavior outcomes.

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