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# Validation of the Internalized Sexual Prejudice Scale

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## Abstract

A deconstruction of the existing concept of internalized homophobia demonstrated the need for a new understanding of this 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 Sexual, and Substance Use Risk Behavior (SSRUB) questionnaires to aid in validation.

The results indicated a valid construct of internalized sexual prejudice consisting of the 5 domains supported by theory. Validity was substantiated by the ability of the tool to predict certain sexual and substance use behaviors. Practitioners have 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 as 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 Bem (1996). 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.

- *Civil* – This domain reflects the sociopolitical norms that may be internalized by members (Lind, 2004).
- *Sexual Attitudes* – This domain can be seen as an interaction between what a queer individual believes about same-sex attraction, how they feel about same-sex attraction and what, if any, same-sex behaviors they make (Haddock, Zanna & Esses, 1993).
- *Moral* – This domain is based in the internalized religious norms in queer members linking the internalization of social norms concerning same-sex behavior, and negative psychological, and social outcomes (Herek, 1987; Howsepian, 2004; Wilkinson, 2004; Ream, 2001).
- *Gender-Role Conformity* – This domain is based in research efforts that reinforce the importance of viewing internalized sexual prejudice as having a component derived from the internalization of the gender-role conformity norms of society (Herek, 2000; DeCecco, 1987).

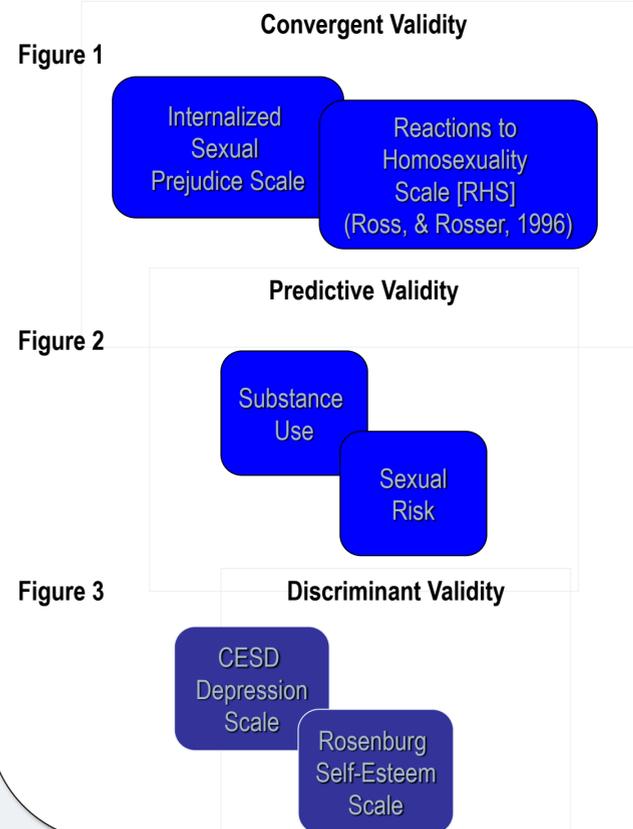
## Introduction / Background of the Study (cont.)

- *Group Alignment* – Group alignment is also an important aspect of the unified theory of internalization which posits that, whether manifesting as the positive resiliency factor or the negative self or other image factor, group alignment plays an important role in the internalization process, and ultimately serves to place a queer individual in the final stages of identity development (Diaz, Ayala, & Bein, 2004; Meyer, 2003)

## 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 (RSES), and the Internalized Sexual Prejudice Scale (ISPS).

The survey hyperlink and an invitation to participate was distributed to various websites known to facilitate online cruising of MSM as well as other websites of interest to MSM. In addition, a brief description of the study and the survey website were printed on business cards that were left at various venues attracting 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. Figures 1 through 3 indicate the type of validity tested for in this study and the specific comparators used.



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## Methods (cont.)

Principal components analysis (PCA) was used to reduce the items into a parsimonious subset and establish construct validity. Convergent, predictive, and discriminant validity were assessed using Pearson r and multiple regression analyses.

## Results

- **Construct Validity:** PCA resulted in the theorized five factor solution, thus demonstrating content validity. Cronbach's alpha scores for each subscale were:

• Civil (7 items):	0.84
• Sexual Attitudes (4 items):	0.90
• Moral (4 items):	0.81
• Gender Conformity (5 items):	0.78
• Group Alignment (4 items):	0.88

- **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,  $r(125) = 0.26$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Additionally, the ISPS and the 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

## 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.

This study improved upon the conceptualization of internalized homophobia by de/reconstructing 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 granularity to the psychic 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 MSMs 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.

## Special Thanks

Our thanks go out to all who are assisting in this research endeavor. The modification of traditional psycho-social models is often an up-hill battle. Recruitment has relied strongly on personal contacts and the wonderful assistance of Dr. Raphael Diaz and J. Antonio Aguilar-Karayanni of the César E. Chávez Institute, San Francisco, CA.