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# IDEOLOGICAL CONCERNS IN THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF HOMOPHOBIA, PART I: AN ANALYSIS OF HEREK'S ATLG-R SCALE

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Utilizing Watson's Ideological Surround Model (Watson, et al., 2003) as a backdrop, the present study examined the structural properties of Herek's (1998) Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (ATLG-R) for a sample of 155 conservative Christian students. Ideological perceptions of the ATLG-R items were derived from a smaller ( $N = 36$ ) sample of students similar in demographic make up and religious devotion. Factor analytic and ideological surround analyses indicated that the ATLG-R was disproportionately comprised of items perceived to be antireligious, with the primary "Condemnation-Tolerance" component consisting exclusively of such items, the majority of which related directly to respondents' beliefs about the morality and naturalness of homosexuality. Furthermore, respondents' degree of self-identification as Christian, when factor analyzed as an additional item in the ATLG-R, loaded singularly and to a greater degree than over half of the items on the "Condemnation-Tolerance" component. Potential implications of these findings are discussed.

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The concept of homophobia has now been utilized for over a third of a century in the contemporary cultural and psychotherapeutic lexicon. Since the term was coined in 1972 by George Weinberg (Weinberg, 1972), it has evolved from signifying a rejection of one's own homoerotic desires to being understood as a means to challenge heterosexuals' reactions to and misconceptions of gay and lesbian persons (Herek, 1994). Aided by the

American Psychiatric Association's declassification of homosexuality in the 1973 Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM; American Psychiatric Association, 1973), research related to homosexuality began to focus increasingly on heterosexuals with negative attitudes, beliefs or actions toward gay men and lesbians (O'Donahue & Caselles, 1993). Within this climate, the terminology of homophobia has been well suited to create implicit demands that those who react negatively toward homosexual behavior should themselves become the objects of concern and widely viewed as potentially deviant and problematic (Herek, 1994, 2004; Stein, 2004).

The treatise giving rise to this article and the one that follows (Rosik, 2007) is that the study of homophobia and religion has unfolded in a manner far too insulated from critical scholarship. Furthermore, it will be argued that this insularity constitutes a disservice to the provision of psychological services to religiously conservative clients. In an effort to shed some light on this problem, some background will first be provided concerning the role ideological assumptions may play in the development of research instruments, with special reference to the measurement of homophobia and homonegative attitudes. By examining a sample of undergraduate students at a Christian university, some limitations of the term homophobia for this population will be highlighted using a widely respected measure of homonegative attitudes. Toward this end, the factor structure of this instrument will be examined and the ideological salience of the items for a sample of devoutly religious students explored.

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### *The Importance of Comprehending Ideological Influences*

Although making an effort to comprehend the ideological context of research on attitudes toward lesbians and gay men may seem an arcane and impractical pursuit for therapists, in actuality ignorance of these issues can have direct and potentially deleterious consequences for clinical practice with religiously conservative clients. The recognition of ideological considerations in this literature can serve to emphasize the multidimensionality of attitudes and reactions to homosexuality, even among persons identified with traditional forms of organized religion (O'Donahue & Caselles, 1993). This can reduce the incidence of simplistic or inaccurate labeling of these clients as homophobic or anti-gay.

Working with religious clients should be considered a specialty area for which clinicians need to ensure their competence in order to avoid the risk of inducing harm (American Psychological Association, 2002, Ethical Principles 2.01, 2.03). It is therefore critical that discussion of attitudes toward gay men and lesbians among religious individuals be characterized by specificity rather than generalizations (Bassett, Kirnan, Hill, & Schultz, 2004). Developing cultural competence in providing clinical services to religious clients is dependent upon developing a respectful awareness of their cultural worldview (Hodge, 2004), including dimensions of religious ideology that may have particular salience for understanding their views concerning homosexuality. This can go a long way in enabling the clinician to avoid therapeutic missteps and promote empathic alliance with religious clients.

Therapists knowledgeable about the potential for ideological insensitivity in measuring homophobia among the devoutly religious will also be in a better position to avoid the misuse of research findings in their clinical practice (American Psychological Association, 2002, Ethical principle 9.02). Studies revealing high levels of homophobia among conservatively religious persons may reflect a clash of ideologies rather than any meaningful sort of pathological condition. Mental health practitioners who understand this can exhibit appropriate restraint when speaking or writing about the attitudes of religious individuals toward homosexuality.<sup>1</sup> In keeping with this perspective, O'Donahue & Caselles (1993) question the attempt to recast the ethical and moral positions of people as mental

health issues. "It is most unfortunate," they conclude, "when scientists attempt to pass implicit or explicit pejorative evaluations of individuals holding certain open and debatable value positions as part of their science" (p. 194).

### *Potential Ideological Influences in Survey Research*

Philosophers of science have long averred that all data are theory laden, which is to say that any study of human beings will be profoundly affected by the conceptual presuppositions of the researcher (Barbour, 1974; Jones, 1994; Kendler, 1993; Messer & Woolfolk, 1998; Slife & Whoolery, 2006). This may be a liability for social scientists that is particularly evident in the study of religious sentiment. Recently, one promising attempt to make these influences more explicit has been the development of the Ideological Surround Model (Watson, 1993; Watson, Morris, Hood, Milliron, & Stutz, 1998; Watson, et al., 2003). This model stipulates that all research of religious variables operates within a surround of ideological influence. This includes normative value and epistemic assumptions, which place implicit conditions on the field of study. Watson noted that research in psychology tends to be dominated by metaphysical naturalism and epistemological empiricism, an ethos that assumes only naturalistic causal explanations are valid ways of determining how we should live. Such a worldview stands in stark contrast to the mindset of conservative religious persons, who often allow for supernatural causal attributions and typically adhere to a revelatory epistemology that centers on a sacred text.

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<sup>1</sup>Two examples of such insensitivity, from within different ideological surrounds, can well illustrate this problem. On the one hand, religious conservatives will sometimes refer to sexual orientation as if it were always a simple matter of choice among lesbians and gay men. This position reveals a belief that is derived from a religious ideology isolated from the lived experiences of homosexual persons, with the unfortunate result that such claims discredit other statements about homosexuality offered by religious conservatives in the eyes of the gay community. Similarly, gay-affirmative advocates have sometimes equated the pursuit of gay marriage as an extension of the racial civil rights movement, a comparison that displays little sensitivity to the worldview of traditional Judeo-Christian religion. The analogy equates the straightforward Mendelian characteristic of race with the etiologically complex experience of same sex attraction. It also has the distinct drawback of logically classifying those who oppose same sex marriage as the moral equivalent of the Ku Klux Klan, an inference that is not lost on those who adhere to a conservative religious ideology, including (ironically enough) many African Americans.

This divergence in ideological surrounds can lead to serious misinterpretation when findings based on measurement instruments developed within one ideological framework are uncritically applied to religious individuals who do not share that same worldview. This can occur, for example, when scale items purporting to measure some construct refer negatively to the normative value assumptions of a religious ideological surround. Watson and colleagues (2003) suggest that such antireligious bias can lead to a tautological empiricism, a sort of ideologically driven circularity that has been built into an instrument when used with religious populations. For example, if a scale of self-esteem has been operationalized with items that ideologically presume reliance upon God as inherently an indicator of poor self concept, then religious conservatives will inevitably be found to have problems with self image that need to be remedied (Watson, 1993; Watson, Hood, Morris, & Hall, 1985; Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1987). Watson rightly argued for a "hermeneutical empiricism" that is sensitive to the interpretive frameworks of other belief systems.

Without this kind of sensitivity, one can encounter the sorts of problems displayed in the literature concerning Right-Wing Authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1981), a construct often associated with prejudice among the religious community toward gay men and lesbians (Wilkinson, 2004; Wylie & Forest, 1992). The difficulty is that many of the RWA scale items focus on conservative religious and moral beliefs rather than authoritarian beliefs, embedding within this instrument the ideological presumption that conservative religious belief must always reflect a narrow minded authoritarian fundamentalism (Watson, et al., 2003). This has led some researchers to classify the RWA scale as a social attitude scale measuring conservatism rather than authoritarianism (Ray, 1983; O'Donahue & Caselles, 1993) or suspect cognitive rigidity as mediating the RWA-religion relationship (Crowson, Thoma, & Hestevold, 2005). Scales of religious fundamentalism (RF) likewise tend to define religious fundamentalism in a manner unsympathetic to the normative assumptions of traditional religious belief systems (Watson, et al., 2003). It appears that the association of conservative religion with hostility toward lesbians and gay men has more to do with the use of religious doctrine to fortify interpersonal boundaries ("us-them" dichotomies) rather than with the orthodoxy of the beliefs per se, a distinction that is often overlooked in the discussion

of religious homonegativity (Bassett, et al, 2000; Fulton, Gorsuch, & Maynard, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 1993). Within the ideological surround of the RWA and RF instruments, no consideration seems given to the possibility that tolerance and prejudice might be separate constructs for some religious individuals (rather than ends of a single continuum).

It is not surprising that among conservatively religious persons the most strongly endorsed "anti-gay" items in homophobia scales have to do with the normalization of homosexual behavior and the morality of homosexual relationships (Finlay & Walther, 2003). Depending on the researcher's ideological vantage point, items measuring homonegativity could be viewed as reflecting either anti-gay attitudes among the conservatively religious or anti-religious sentiment among those outside of traditional conservative faith communities. For example, items reflecting religiously based moral disapproval of homosexual behavior could be negatively or positively regarded, depending upon the ideological context.

### *Measuring Homophobia and Homonegativity*

Although numerous scales have been developed to measure attitudes toward homosexuality, arguably the most influential of these has been Herek's Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men (ATLG) Scale (Herek, 1994, 1998). In the late 1970s, Herek began to lay the empirical groundwork for what would eventually become the ATLG. He especially wanted his instrument to be able to assess attitudes toward lesbians separately from attitudes toward gay men, something the literature up to that point had failed to do. The ATLG includes items that ask respondents to make a variety of evaluations concerning gay men and lesbians. These cover such areas as moral beliefs, affective reactions and social policy.

Herek's factor analytic studies of the ATLG generally resulted in the identification of a primary factor accounting for the majority of explained variance in responses (Herek, 1984; 1994). Based on his interpretive framework, he labeled this the "Condemnation-Tolerance" factor. Typically, Herek also found a few smaller factors present as well, one of which he identified as a beliefs factor. Herek does not appear to have developed the ATLG with sensitivity to traditional Christian ideological norms, such as the distinction between the positive value of all persons as created in the image of God and the negative evaluation of sinful behavior

(including same-sex behavior) as defined within historic Christian teachings.

Although the ATLG-R is intended to measure negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men rather than homophobia per se, the present analysis included the terminology of homophobia for a number of reasons. First, even Herek (1994) acknowledged that many of the items of the ATLG correspond "... to the personal and cultural attitudes popularly termed homophobia" (p. 208). Second, there is no universally agreed upon definition of homophobia, and the measurement instruments employed in this area may assess different components of homophobia or different constructs altogether (Wright, Adams, & Bernat, 1999). Third, there is a significant degree of item overlap evident between the ATLG and scales purporting to measure homophobia (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980; Wright, Adams, & Bernat, 1999). Some items utilize approximately the same language and many more seem to inquire into similar content domains. In light of these considerations, it did not seem improper to appropriate the language of homophobia into the present study.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The sample for this analysis was comprised of 155 students from psychology and sociology courses at a small Christian liberal arts college in California's central valley who were surveyed in February and March of 2005. The average age of participants was 20.68. Broken down by gender, 113 (72.9%) participants were female and 42 (27.1%) were male. Ethnicity of the sample was overwhelmingly white and therefore was not assessed to further protect the identity of minority respondents. Freshman were the most represented class of students ( $n = 52$ , 33.5%), followed closely by juniors ( $n = 46$ , 29.7%), sophomores ( $n = 33$ , 21.3%), and seniors ( $n = 24$ , 15.5%). In response to the question, "I am a Christian," the average response was 5.48 ( $SD = .97$ ) on a 6-point scale (with 6 indicating "strongly agree").

A second smaller sample ( $N = 36$ ) was obtained to assess ideological surround of the ATLG-R as experienced by conservative Christian students. This sample contained 30 (83.3%) women and six (16.7%) men. The average response to the "I am a Christian" statement was 5.5 ( $SD = 1.2$ ). Chi-square and independent t-tests indicated that the two samples were equivalent for the demographic variables

jointly available, namely age, gender, Christian identification and intrinsic religiousness.

### *Materials*

*Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale, Revised Version (ATLG-R)*. As noted previously, the ATLG-R is a brief measure of heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay men and women (Herek, 1998), which served as the dependent variable in this analysis. The scale consists of 20-items that assess affective responses to homosexuality and gay men and lesbians. Ten items reference gay men (the ATG subscale) and ten items reference lesbians (ATL subscale). For example, "Female homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic social institutions." Participants responded to each item on a 9-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 9 = *strongly agree*). Seven items of the ATLG-R are reverse scored, so that a higher score indicates greater homonegativism. Thus, total scores can range from 20 to 180 for the full scale and 10 to 90 for the subscales.

Herek reported that the ATLG and its subscales have consistently shown high levels of internal consistency, with *alpha* levels greater than .85 for the subscales and .90 for the full scale among samples of college students. In the present study, Cronbach's *alpha* was .93, suggesting excellent internal reliability. Herek reported a full scale test-retest reliability after three weeks of .90 with a student sample. Herek also found that ATLG scores were not linked to socially desirable response sets. Subscales of the ATLG-R were not utilized separately as this was not a specific focus of the present study. Herek slightly reworded five items from the original ATLG to update their content or clarify their meaning. There is no indication from his subsequent writings that these minor revisions have changed the psychometric properties of the original ATLG scale.

*Additional Measures*. The cover page included a summary of the nature of the questionnaire, basic demographic information, and several single-item measures of religious identification. The demographic information consisted of the participant's age, gender, and year in college.

### *Procedure*

The content and administration of the project was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. Participants in the larger sample volunteered to complete a five-page questionnaire during class

time for extra credit. The questionnaire included a cover page and two scales, the second of which will be described in the next article of this series (Rosik, 2007). Missing data for the scales were encountered for 12 respondents. In most cases this involved a single item and in no case did this account for more than 30% of a scale. For these items a corresponding scale or subscale mean imputation was employed to replace missing values.

The smaller sample was also administered the ATLG-R, but in this instance with the aim of identifying the ideological implications of each of the scale items. A complete description of this procedure can be found in Watson, Morris, and Hood (1992). Briefly, respondents in this sample were instructed to respond with specific reference to the degree they viewed each item as consistent with their personal religious beliefs. A five point scale was used with responses ranging from *very inconsistent* (0), *inconsistent* (1), *neither inconsistent nor consistent* (2), *consistent* (3) and *very consistent* (4). Through a series of chi-square analyses, an attempt is made to determine empirically if any items display an ideological imbalance.

An initial three-category chi-square was obtained for each item, utilizing as groups the sum of both inconsistent responses (0 + 1), the number of neutral responses (2), and the sum of both consistent response (3 + 4). Non-significant results would suggest that responses to the statement are balanced and therefore the item is ideologically neutral for these students. Significant chi-square findings suggest imbalance and prompt a second series of clarifying two-category chi-square analyses. *Inconsistent* (I) responses are compared with all *Other* (O) responses and then *Consistent* (C) responses are compared with all the *Other* (O) responses. An item with a polarizing pattern would have large numbers of respondents in both the inconsistent and consistent extremes. Thus, the chi-square results would be non-significant when comparing the number of responses in one extreme with all other responses (i.e.,  $I = 0$  &  $C = 0$ ). When responses clustered in the "neither" option, the other responses would be greater than both of the extremes ( $I < 0$  &  $C < 0$ ), resulting in a second type of neutral outcome. All of the other possible patterns of findings would implicate an item as having either proreligious or antireligious connotations, based on the pattern of findings and the scoring of the item. Clarifying analyses determine if and how the students experienced the item

as ideologically extreme. For example, an item the scale deems as bad (homophobic) could be identified as consistent ( $C > 0$  when  $I = 0$  or  $I < 0$ ) with the religious beliefs of the sample. Such contrast between the ideology of the item and that of the respondents could suggest antireligious bias.

In order to scrutinize in detail respondents' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men as well as potential ideological influences on the measurement of these attitudes, two analytical approaches were employed in this study. First, the ATLG-R item descriptive information was analyzed and then the items were factor analyzed using the initial sample. Second, the potential ideological meaning of each scale item for the conservative Christian students employing the methodology of Watson, Morris, and Hood (1992) described above. All analyses were performed using SPSS 13.0 for Windows.

## RESULTS

### *Item Descriptive Data and Factor Analysis*

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation for each of the ATLG-R items. On four of the items (ATL1, ATL2, ATL10 and ATG3) these conservatively religious students responded on average in a manner that was actually in slight disagreement with the homonegative sentiment. Five other item averages were near or at the mid-range of the response scale, indicating that for nearly half of the ATLG-R items the average respondent lacked a clear homonegative endorsement. An overview of these items suggested that participants moderately endorsed the fundamental civil rights of gay men and lesbians (e.g., employment and privacy matters) and are noncommittal when it comes to viewing homosexuality as a sickness. By contrast, those items which were scored the highest by participants (ATL5, ATG5, ATG7 and ATG8) appear to relate to their moral evaluation of homosexual conduct and the "naturalness" of sexual contact between members of the same sex. While item-level analysis is an intriguing pursuit, examination of item means in the absence of population norms cannot be viewed as revealing definitive findings of ideological imbalance. Therefore, the employment of Watson, Morris and Hood's (1992) ideological interpretive procedure is necessary to provide an initial empirical basis for assessing potential bias.

In preparation for factor analysis, the 20 ATLG-R items were first screened for univariate normality.

**Table 1**  
*Full Sample ATLG-R Item Descriptive Statistics and Component Pattern Matrix*

Item	Mean	SD	Components			
			1	2	3	4
ATL 1. Lesbians just can't fit into our society.....	3.79	2.42	-.08	<b>.81</b>	-.11	.11
2. A woman's homosexuality should not be a cause for job..... discrimination in any situation*	4.33	2.88	.07	.10	.02	<b>.81</b>
3. Female homosexuality is bad for society because it breaks down ..... the natural divisions between the sexes	5.30	2.93	.41	<b>.55</b>	.14	-.13
4. State laws regulating private, consenting lesbian behavior ..... should be abolished*	5.03	2.79	.11	.12	<b>-.92</b>	-.04
5. Female homosexuality is a sin.....	7.43	2.64	<b>.75</b>	.07	.10	-.08
6. The growing number of lesbians indicates a decline in..... American morals	6.38	2.83	<b>.71</b>	.12	.06	.00
7. Female homosexuality in itself is not problem, unless society ..... makes it a problem*	6.75	2.79	<b>.61</b>	-.13	.12	.37
8. Female homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic ..... social institutions	5.24	2.84	.30	<b>.53</b>	.06	.07
9. Female homosexuality is an inferior form of sexuality .....	5.30	2.84	.24	.43	.44	-.13
10. Lesbians are sick.....	4.47	2.88	.04	<b>.80</b>	.04	-.05
ATG 1. Male homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt children ..... the same as heterosexual couples*	6.72	2.78	<b>.83</b>	-.06	-.17	-.18
2. I think male homosexuals are disgusting.....	5.25	3.10	.03	<b>.82</b>	-.04	-.03
3. Male homosexuals should not be allowed to teach school .....	4.47	2.91	.03	<b>.62</b>	-.03	.44
4. Male homosexuality is a perversion .....	6.42	2.88	<b>.53</b>	.19	.18	.17
5. Male homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in men* .....	7.19	2.48	<b>.72</b>	-.11	.18	.08
6. If a man has homosexual feelings, he should do ..... everything he can to overcome them	6.87	2.59	<b>.82</b>	-.02	-.13	-.06
7. I would not be too upset if I learned that my son were ..... a homosexual*	7.21	2.48	<b>.58</b>	.11	-.14	.22
8. Sex between two men is just plain wrong.....	7.54	2.50	<b>.66</b>	.27	.10	-.07
9. The idea of male homosexual marriages seems ridiculous to me .....	6.77	2.83	<b>.63</b>	.28	.05	-.06
10. Male homosexuality is merely a different kind of lifestyle that ..... should not be condemned*	6.56	2.90	<b>.71</b>	.08	-.02	.22

\*Indicates items that are reversed scored. Higher item scores indicate greater homonegativity. N = 155.

Results indicated that 12 of the items demonstrated significant negative skewness and one item (ATL1) was positively skewed, with significance defined as the skew statistic divided by its standard error being outside the +2 to -2 range. Negatively skewed items were first transposed and then all skewed items were transformed using the least invasive method (in order, square root, logarithmic, and inverse transformations) to bring skewness to acceptable levels. Even with these transformations, two items (ATL5 and ATG8) retained significant skew. This was not surprising given the sample composition and the nature of these items (both overtly moral evaluations). Since the purpose of this study was primarily to examine the ways in which a measure of homophobia might misrepresent a religiously conservative sample and not necessarily generalize the data to all religious individuals, this limited amount of skew was not considered to be an impediment to proceeding with the analysis.

Item-total correlations were calculated and values suggested that all items displayed satisfactory correlations with the total scale score ( $r_s = .49$  to  $.79$ ) with the sole exception of an  $r = .04$  for ATL4. Bartlett's (1954) test of sphericity was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), suggesting that the data were appropriate for factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olin (Kaiser, 1974) statistic was  $.92$ , indicating that the analysis could proceed without concern for item multicollinearity.

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted with principal components extraction and, in keeping with Herek's (1984) analytical strategy, an oblique rotation that allowed for intercorrelation of the factors. Two, three, four and five component solutions were obtained and compared. On the basis of examining the Kaiser-Guttman criteria (i.e., eigenvalues  $> 1$ ), scree tests and the clarity and interpretability of the alternative component solutions (Floyd & Widaman, 1995; Preacher & MacCallum, 2003), a four component solution was deemed most appropriate for these data and retained. The four components are displayed in the pattern matrix in Table 1. Examination of the R-matrix indicated again that only item ATL4 did not correlate well with the other ATLG-R items. Communalities after extraction for the ATLG-R items ranged from  $.52$  (ATG7) to  $.83$  (ATL4). Component loadings  $> .45$  were considered to be significant for a sample of this size (Floyd & Widaman, 1995; Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998), and these are highlighted in bold in

the pattern matrix. The positive or negative values of the individual loadings were reversed if this was called for by the nature of the item transformations. As a whole, the components accounted for 65% of the total common variance, with the first component accounting for 47% of the variance alone.

This first component was comprised of 11 items and resembled what Herek (1984, 1994) interpreted as the "Condemnation-Tolerance" factor, which he reported accounted for 35-45% of the total common variance in his studies. Herek (1984) also noted a "Beliefs" factor that accounted for about 5% of the total common variance. The present analysis, with a sample of religiously devout students, revealed three additional factors that accounted for approximately 8%, 6% and 5% of the total common variance. The first of these components contained five items, which appear to signal concerns about social cohesion and negative affective reactions to homosexuality. While more difficult to interpret, labeling this a "Social Concerns" factor may be heading in the right direction. The third component loads almost completely on item ATL4 and can be interpreted as a "Right to Privacy" factor. The fourth component loads with similar singularity on item ATL2 and could be termed a "Freedom from Job Discrimination" factor. It should also be observed that item ATL3, with a near significant loading on component 1 as well as a significant loading on component 2, lends further credence to the aforementioned interpretation of these components, as the language of the item alludes to both social concerns and the naturalness question. Item ATL9 had two loadings near significance and appears to be somewhat of an interpretive misfit.

An additional analysis was conducted to attempt to bring further clarity to the interpretation of the ATLG-R with this sample. First, after negative skewness was reduced but not completely eliminated in respondents' self-reported Christian identity, this item was added to the ATLG-R items for a further EFA with principal components extraction and oblique rotation. Christian identity (i.e., agreement with the item "I am a Christian") evidenced a communality of  $.57$  with the ATLG-R items, a communality actually greater than that found for three of the scale items (ATL7, ATG1 and ATG7). The new pattern matrix revealed a component make up similar to that of the earlier one, with Christian identity loading only on the "Condemnation-Tolerance" component and quite highly at that ( $.70$ ). This loading was higher than that found for six of the ATLG-R items on this component.

**Table 2**  
*Antireligious and Proreligious ATLG-R Items as Evaluated by Conservative Christian Students (N=36)*

ATLG-R Item (+ or -) <sup>a</sup>	Frequencies <sup>b</sup>	Inconsistency (I) vs. Other (0)	Consistency (C) vs. Other (0)	Ideological Meaning
ATL2 (+)	7/6/23***	I < 0***	C = 0	Proreligious
ATL3 (-)	6/9/21***	I < 0***	C = 0	Antireligious
ATL4 (+)	22/9/5***	I = 0	C < 0***	Antireligious
ATL5 (-)	0/5/31***	I < 0 <sup>c</sup>	C > 0***	Antireligious
ATL6 (-)	6/9/21**	I < 0***	C = 0	Antireligious
ATL10 (-)	19/14/3**	I = 0	C < 0***	Proreligious
ATG1 (+)	24/6/6***	I > 0*	C < 0***	Antireligious
ATG2 (-)	21/9/6**	I = 0	C < 0***	Proreligious
ATG3 (-)	16/15/5*	I = 0	C < 0***	Proreligious
ATG4 (-)	5/11/20**	I < 0***	C = 0	Antireligious
ATG5 (+)	24/10/2***	I > 0*	C < 0***	Antireligious
ATG6 (-)	2/12/22***	I < 0***	C = 0	Antireligious
ATG7 (+)	25/7/4***	I > 0*	C < 0***	Antireligious
ATG8 (-)	3/9/24***	I < 0***	C > 0*	Antireligious
ATG9 (-)	3/13/20**	I < 0***	C = 0	Antireligious
ATG10 (+)	21/10/4**	I = 0	C < 0***	Antireligious

*Note:* ATLG-R = Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale – Revised. <sup>a</sup>Positively scored (+) items are those in which agreement is presumed by the scale to represent a gay-affirming response. Negatively scored (-) items are those in which agreement is presumed to indicated a homophobic response. <sup>b</sup>Frequencies represent the number of respondents in each group that rated an item Inconsistent (I), Neither Inconsistent nor Consistent (N) or Consistent (C) with their religious convictions. The I total includes respondent who chose the Inconsistent and Very Inconsistent responses while the C total encompasses participants who responded with Consistent and Very Consistent. <sup>c</sup>Chi-square could not be computed due to one cell having no responses.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$  for the initial and clarifying chi-square analyses.

### *Ideological Surround Analysis*

Analyses suggested that only four items of the ATLG-R were ideologically balanced for this sample, all of which related to lesbians (ATL1, ATL7, ATL8 and ATL9). Table 2 displays the ATLG-R items that analyses indicated were viewed as proreligious or antireligious by respondents. Five items were viewed as being proreligious (ATL2, ATL10, ATG2 and ATG3). Twelve items were experienced as being antireligious by these conservative Christian students (ATL3-ATL6, ATG1, and ATG4-

ATG10). The preponderance of antireligious statements among items that assessed attitudes toward gay man is a finding with potentially significant implications, as will be discussed later.

Referencing the component pattern matrix on Table 1, it is evident that factor 1 consisted entirely of items that respondents perceived to be antireligious. Furthermore, the items with the highest loadings appear to address issues of moral values and respondents' sense of the natural order. Factor 2 included three items (ATL10, ATG2 and ATG3)

respondents felt to be proreligious, one item (ATL3) judged as antireligious and two items (ATL1 and ATL8) appearing to be ideological neutral. The single item factor 3 addressing privacy issues (ATL4) was perceived to be antireligious and the single item factor 4 affirming antidiscrimination (ATL2) was viewed as proreligious, i.e., consistent with respondents' religious beliefs.

## DISCUSSION

Though preliminary in nature, this analysis highlights the value of examining attitudes toward homosexuality in a manner that displays awareness of a conservatively religious ideological surround. It appears likely that respondents experienced the majority of items on the ATLG-R as antireligious, suggesting an inherent ideological imbalance in the scale for these individuals. Moreover, the primary "Condemnation-Tolerance" component was comprised of items all viewed as inconsistent with the teachings of participants' religious tradition. Considered as a whole, the findings of the present study give rise to several observations.

### *Implications for Psychotherapeutic Practice*

The first lesson suggested by this analysis has to do with the complexity of conservative religious ideology regarding homosexuality. Given how the literature on this subject is often presented, there is a risk that some therapists, when presented with a religiously conservative client who disapproves of homosexual practice, will simply attribute to them the descriptor "homophobic" in a monolithic fashion. The findings of the present study should at least raise questions about the ethics of such a practice. As measured by the ATLG-R items, and consistent with the review by Finlay and Walther (2003), the Christian students in this study had fairly negative views of the morality and naturalness of sexual behavior among gay men and lesbians.

In light of respondents' strong negative moral evaluations of homosexual behavior, it could be considered quite remarkable that they still affirmed slightly homopositive attitudes on the civil rights issues. The data thus provide evidence that at least for some conservatively Christian individuals in North America, a certain degree of tolerance and prejudice (in the form of moral disapproval) toward homosexuality can and does coexist. To briefly illustrate this point in the present sample, 56 participants

(45 women and 11 men) responded to item ATL2 (job discrimination for being a lesbian is wrong) with a score of 4 or below ( $M = 2.02, SD = 1.09$ ) and to item ATL5 (female homosexuality as a sin) with a score of 6 or above ( $M = 8.59, SD = .78$ ). Thus, over one third of these students were highly tolerant of this civil right for lesbians even though they strongly affirmed their moral disapproval.

Another reason it is important for mental health professionals to pay close attention to ideological considerations is in order to gain familiarity with the worldview of the measurement instrument and how it may differ from the belief system of the reference sample.<sup>2</sup> In the present study, for example, it was essential to notice that only four of the ATLG-R items were experienced by the sample of conservative religious students as being ideologically balanced and only four items were viewed as being proreligious, i.e., consistent with their conservative Christian religion. This means that the 12 remaining items were all evaluated as being antireligious, an apparent ideological bias of the ATLG-R that becomes all the more plausible considering all of the 11 items of the primary "Condemnation-Tolerance" component are among those deemed antireligious.

The broader implications of ideological imbalance will be addressed shortly, but for the moment it is sufficient to observe that the majority of items highly endorsed and perceived to be antireligious are *morally* prescriptive in nature. As such, they are a function of ideology, not derivable from science per se, and cannot be validated empirically (Kendler, 1993, 1994, 2003). By contrast, those ATLG-R items that appeared to be more *socially* prescriptive, were generally viewed as ideologically neutral or proreligious and endorsed with much less homonegativity and, in some instances, even slight homopositive sentiment. These items involved not the presumption of normative values toward same sex behavior but rather what are proper emotional responses and actions toward lesbians and gay men, e.g., the affirmation basic civil rights. The make up of ATLG-R scale items seem to suggest an ideological perspective wherein homonegative moral beliefs and anti-gay behavioral actions always go hand in hand. Although this distinction between gay civil rights and

<sup>2</sup>It is critical to realize that while conservative religious persons often do hold certain negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men represented accurately in the ATLG-R, the ideologically relevant component is the scale's implicit evaluation of these attitudes as uniformly objectionable.

the morality of same sex behavior has been noted for the American population at large (Herek, 1994; Loftus, 2001), it appears to be eroding rapidly apart from the most religiously devout (Altemeyer, 2001).

Mental health professionals reading the literature on homophobia and conservative religion should be mindful that there may often be an undisclosed but inherent ideological collision among competing visions of sexual morality that is packaged in the language of social science. For example, the ATLG-R appears to have been operationalized (as implied in how scale items are scored and their general lack of perceived ideological balance) in a manner that invalidated the normative moral vision regarding same sex behavior held by the students in this study. This feature of the literature, when considered in the aggregate, may have had the unfortunate effect of preempting critical examination of moral and social issues from diverse perspectives within society in general and the discipline of psychology in specific.

#### *Implications for the Conceptualization of Homophobia among Religious Conservatives*

The factor analytic examination of the ATLG-R combined with the ideological surround analysis revealed the items concerned with morality and naturalness beliefs comprised the primary component of the scale and were without exception evaluated as being antireligious. In addition, these students' degree of self-identification as Christian, when factor analyzed as an additional item in the ATLG-R, loaded singularly and to a greater degree than over half of the items on the "Condemnation-Tolerance" component. This suggests that something very central to the religious identity of participants was being represented in this component.

In light of these findings, the precise manner in which Herek (1984, 1994, 1998) defined the primary component of his scale is of particular relevance to this discussion. Examining this may provide the most transparent example of how ideological surround considerations can influence social science in this literature. Herek interpreted this component as a "Condemnation-Tolerance" factor. It is worth noting that only one item (ATG10) in this component (and, for that matter, the entire ATLG-R scale) actually uses the word "condemn," and that all of these component items were perceived to be antireligious by religiously conservative students. In addition, the vast majority of the items, including the ones loading

most highly, appear to relate to the morality and naturalness of homosexuality and some related applications of these judgments (e.g., the value of trying to overcome same sex attractions). Thus, Herek may have inadvertently given this factor a hermeneutically insensitive and ideologically loaded interpretation.

This can be further highlighted by viewing the situation from within a religious ideological surround, applying the normative value assumptions of conservative Christian ideology to the ATLG-R items of this component. High item scores could be considered to reflect consistency with orthodox Christian theological teaching about same sex behavior while low scores would indicate departure from this tradition. Within this ideological surround, it would be consistent to interpret the component as a "Faithfulness-Apostasy" factor.<sup>3</sup> Of course, this would be just as myopic and unfair to those outside a conservative religious worldview as the all-inclusive "Condemnation-Tolerance" interpretation is to those within it. One could therefore legitimately argue that the most scientifically appropriate and ideologically neutral interpretation would label this the "Morality-Naturalness" factor. Evidence of this kind of interpretive sensitivity when evaluating claims of homophobia among conservatively religious persons will help indicate the degree to which the discipline of psychology values hermeneutical empiricism or instead promotes a covert, singular and potentially anti-religious ideological approach to research and practice.

Much to his credit, Herek (2004) has recently acknowledged the limitations of the term homophobia. It is by no means apparent that traditional religious views regarding sexual behavior are intrinsically pathological or create a clinically recognizable degree of phobia (O'Donahue & Caselles, 1993; Herek, 2004; Linneman, 2004). Nor is it in the best of spirit of science to pathologize a set of beliefs and attitudes as a means of discrediting those who adhere to them. Herek now believes that the term has outlived its scholarly usefulness, although he remains supportive of its employment in political discourse.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>It is worth noting that the language of faithfulness and apostasy is precisely the terminology being used by conservatives in main-line denominations to frame the debate within these religious institutions over the endorsement of gay ordination and same sex marriage.

<sup>4</sup>Given that the terminology of homophobia is likely to be included in the professional lexicon of psychology for the foreseeable future, it may now be helpful to distinguish two different uses of the concept. When a mental health professional uses homophobia

Herek has recommended that the term sexual prejudice now replace homophobia in professional and academic circles as a broader, non-pathologically oriented term (Herek, 2000, 2004). Unfortunately, there is nothing in this terminology as defined that suggests this change will promote greater sensitivity to religious conservatives. The term does not appear to take into account the difference between prejudice and a formed moral judgment, whereby individuals conduct a rational assessment of relevant concerns and make moral evaluations, while allowing for a legitimate diversity of belief. Rather, the sexual prejudice terminology could be used to expand the range of social opprobrium, going beyond a focus on individuals to include religious and other organizations that do not equally value all sexual orientations. Should this prove to be accurate, future research into sexual prejudice could be at risk of demonstrating the same kind of interpretive insensitivity with religious conservatives that the present analysis suggests may exist in past studies of homophobia.

O'Donahue and Casselles (1993) have recommended that homophobia be conceptually defined as "... the emotional reaction of fear, plus the behavioral reaction of avoidance, in the absence of the intellectual reaction of negative moral or aesthetic arguments" (p. 192). Such an ideologically sensitive definition might suggest that those students in the present sample most likely to display an irrational fear of lesbians and gay men would be those scoring higher in their negative affective reactions (component 2) and lower in their homonegative moral beliefs (component 1).<sup>5</sup> This possibility is supported by the proreligious evaluation of the items rejecting negative affective reactions and the antireligious nature of the items in the "Condemnation-Tolerance" component, suggesting that such a definition would be viewed as being truly homophobic from within a religiously

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in a manner intended to preemptively squelch dialogue with those having other viewpoints (e.g., "Why are you so homophobic?"), we may consider this a *sociopolitical* application of the term. The individual is functioning in the role of a partisan social activist. Alternatively, when a therapist surfaces the term in a manner that carefully delineates some therapeutically relevant dimension (e.g., "This client is homophobic in the sense that she has intensely negative affective reactions in the presence of lesbians and gay men"), we may consider this a *clinical* application of the concept. The individual is functioning in the role of a professional clinician. Despite the unfortunate pathological sound to the term, this individual at least uses the homophobia descriptor more sensitively to communicate about conservatively religious clients in ways that enhance professional understanding and practice.

conservative ideological surround. The subset of individuals falling within this definition could be most at risk of hostile behavior toward lesbians and gay men, in that recent research has linked increased anger reactions with physical aggression toward homosexual persons (Parrott & Zeichner, 2005). This more nuanced approach to homophobia among religious conservatives avoids overgeneralizations and is supported by the literature on hate crimes, which finds no justification for indicting organized religion as a whole, in that most such criminal activity is perpetrated by single or small gangs of young males unaffiliated with any organized group (Steinberg, Brooks & Remtulla, 2003).

A final concern regarding the ATLG-R is based on the observation that while the ATL subscale contained a relative ideological mix of items (4 neutral, 2 proreligious and 4 antireligious), the ATG subscale was comprised of mostly antireligious items (8 items versus no neutral and only 2 proreligious items). This ideological imbalance of items when perceived within a conservatively religious ideological surround may conceivably influence responding on these subscales. That is, the oft documented greater homonegativity toward gay men in contrast to lesbians might simply be an artifact of the overwhelming antireligious nature of the ATG items, which religious or culturally conservative respondents would be expected to reject in a more emphatic manner. Future research is needed to provide greater clarity on the interpretive validity of the ATLG-R subscales.

### *Limitations of the Study*

Some limitations of this study need to be conceded. This convenience sample of west coast students from a more conservative Christian university may not yield results that can be generalized to the entire population of religious conservatives or even to Christian students from other regions of America. The interplay of moral disapproval and tolerance found with these students may not translate in a similar fashion to certain conservative Christian subgroups or to other religious ideologies, such as Orthodox Judaism or conservative Islam. While statistical measures were taken to

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<sup>5</sup>In order to obtain some idea of the size of this subgroup for the larger sample, I identified respondents who scored 6 or more on ATG2 (male homosexuals are disgusting) and 4 or less on ATG8 (sex between two men is wrong). There was only one student (a male) in the entire sample whose responses met this criterion.

correct skewness for a great deal of the data prior to analysis, some items did retain high skew and this further suggests caution in generalizing the findings.

The sample size used for factor analysis would have preferably been larger. However, while the sample was smaller than optimal, it still exceeded minimum size criteria (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). Furthermore, the factor structure seemed generally similar to that reported by Herek (1994, 1998). Nevertheless, caution is in order in interpreting these findings.

It would also have been preferable for respondents in the larger sample to have retaken the ATLG-R to assess their perceptions of the ideological balance of the items, thus ensuring that the ideological determinations represented those of the respondents for whom the factor analytic and multiple regression analyses were conducted. However, logistical considerations did not enable such a readministration to be conducted. Given this limitation, the effort was undertaken to survey a different sample of students who were equivalent in age, gender ratio, Christian identity and intrinsic religiousness. While the utilization of these ideological ratings with the larger sample is a reasonable step, the results should only be considered putative and are undoubtedly in need of replication that employs a single sample.

### Conclusion

This analysis examined the factor structure of Herek's ATLG-R scale and the ideological experience of the scale items among conservatively religious Christian students. Findings indicated that respondents experienced the majority of the ATLG-R items as being antireligious; furthermore, the primary "Condemnation-Tolerance" component consisted of only such items. Participants' self-identification as Christian loaded highly and solely on this component, suggesting that devout Christians by scale definition broadly condemn gay men and lesbians rather than uphold a nuanced disapproval regarding the morality and naturalness of same sex behavior.

Although these findings are very intriguing, they are insufficiently definitive in telling us what role conflicting ideological surrounds may play in the relationship between homophobia and conservative religion. The second article of this series will present empirical analyses to determine the degree to which the relationship between homophobia as measured by the ATLG-R and conservative religion may be based on antireligious items.

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