

## **LOVE THE SINNER, HATE THE SIN: RELIGIOUS BELIEF DOES NOT EQUATE HOMOPHOBIA**

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If the belief that homosexuality is a sin constitutes an aspect of homophobia, then any person whose religious ideology posits homosexuality as sinful would be judged as homophobic. As such, the assertion that homosexuality is sinful may actually be a mere expression of religious ideology (Rosik 2007a). In response to the spontaneous qualification of their positive regard for gay persons while expressing negative moral evaluation of homosexual behaviour, men's and women's ( $N = 199$ ) attitudes towards homosexuals were analysed. Participants displayed a significant disparity in homophobic beliefs; with Christians expressing elevated levels of homophobia when compared with their non-Christian counterparts,  $F(1, 197) = 20.65, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$ . However, when the anti-religious Condemnation/Tolerance factor (Rosik 2007a) was controlled for, these differences became non-significant. Participants also displayed a significant disparity between their beliefs about the sinfulness of homosexuality and their beliefs in civil rights for homosexuals,  $t(198) = 12.00, p < .001$ . Christians expressed greater agreement that homosexuality was sinful than did non-Christians,  $F(1, 197) = 30.52, p < .001$ . Christians and non-Christians, however, did not differ in beliefs about discrimination based on civil rights. This suggests that the belief in homosexuality as sinful may not be equated with other prejudicial sentiments - like job discrimination. Discussion revolves around the validity of the construct homophobia.

**Keywords:** Attitudes, lesbians, gay men, ATLG, homophobia

### **Introduction**

“... some committed Christians may be homonegative when it comes to the value of behaviour but homopositive when it comes to the value of (homosexual) persons” (Bassett et al. 1997:18).

Weinberg's introduction of the construct *homophobia* (Weinberg 1972) has led to considerable scholarship on the topic, with a resultant shift in understanding behind the term. Weinberg's initial construct pathologised heterosexual persons' reactions to homosexuals. However, contemporary research in the field has led to different understandings of the term – oftentimes representing generalised negative evaluations of gay persons - and a call for a new vocabulary to describe negative sentiment directed at gay persons (Herek 2004).

Herek (2004) presented an in-depth overview of the historical roots of the term, and the implications of its etymology. According to Herek, the clinical suggestions of pathology, as

implicated by the “phobia” suffix, serve to stigmatise opinions and sentiments which may be in opposition to those of persons who are pro-gay. Similarly, he criticised the individualistic, diagnostic effect of the term; saying that it fails to consider the larger social and cultural context from which that negative sentiment emerges. This larger consideration he defined as *heterosexism*: the cultural ideology that perpetuates sexual stigma by denying and denigrating any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship or community (Herek 2004: 16). This heterosexism operates at an individual level, leading to *sexual prejudice* (Herek 2004) – the negative attitudes that one holds based on another person’s sexual orientation.

In the current study, I sought to distinguish the sexual prejudice<sup>1</sup>, to which Herek refers, from the heterosexist background within which religious persons may reside. I also sought to question the concept of sexual prejudice with regards to religious persons, provoking thought on whether academics ourselves might be guilty of similar prejudicial beliefs.

### **Religion and Anti-Gay Prejudice**

Historically, empirical research has found a positive correlation between religious belief and prejudice towards homosexuals (Whitley 2009). In a meta-analysis of existing literature on religious beliefs and anti-gay sentiment, Whitley (2009) found that for all but one form of religiosity, quest – which signifies openness to change - orientation, increasing religious belief was associated with increased prejudice towards homosexuals. Similarly, Núñez-Alarcon, Moreno-Jiménez and Moral-Toranzo (2011) found that of the 47 papers on the topic produced between 1940 and 1990, 37 presented positive relationships between religiosity and anti-gay sentiment, with a mere two papers finding a negative correlation. The literature consistently provides support that religious belief tends to go hand in hand with sexual prejudice.

Batson and Burriss (1994) suggest that the relation is due to religious teachings that serve to underpin anti-gay prejudice. However, there is no consensus among, or within, different religions on the varying levels of acceptance versus rejection of homosexuality (Helminiak 2008). In his review of several world religions – from ancient teachings to today’s more contemporary foci – Helminiak (2008) discussed the complexity of teachings on homosexuality. In this paper, I discuss his findings on Hinduism, Islam and Christianity; the major religions practiced within Trinidad and Tobago. With regards to Hinduism, Helminiak (2008) noted that, historically, there has been an awareness of homosexuality, but not necessarily support for the practice. This softer, mixed message also permeates the Christian teachings. Helminiak (2008) points to different teachings, and understanding throughout the various denominations within the Christian faith. Himself a Roman Catholic priest, he exemplifies this divergence of belief within the religion. While the Catholic hierarchy at the Vatican has consistently denounced homosexual acts, with biblical scripture used as evidence against homosexuality, Helminiak (2008) proposes that the scriptures have been misinterpreted, and actually say nothing negative, or indeed at all, about same-sex attractions – when interpreted with accommodation for the context in which they were written (Helminiak 2008). He also notes that Islam is the only religion that outright condemns homosexuality.

Scholarship on the relation between religion and sexual prejudice oftentimes occurs within a Western, Christian-centric sphere. However, there may be issues with the instruments used to

measure anti-gay prejudice. It is to this issue that I now turn.

### **Religion and Anti-Gay Prejudice: Difference of Ideological Surround?**

Criticism of research in anti-gay prejudice, points towards a particular unidimensional manner in defining and measuring negative attitudes towards gay persons, which does not reflect the multiple components of the attitude and its relation to other variables (Wilkinson 2004). Herek's Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay men scale (ATLG-R; Herek 1998) is one of the most utilised measures for sexual prejudice against homosexuals (Wilkinson 2004; Núñez-Alarcon et al. 2011). Rosik (2007a, 2007b) found that the scale presents a bias when dealing with conservatively religious persons. Following ideological surround analysis (Watson, Morris & Hood 1992), he found that the majority of the items on the scale were deemed anti-religious by Christian participants, thus presenting a bias to categorise Christian participants as considerably homophobic. Rosik refers to the anti-religious items on the scale as "scored in a manner inconsistent with respondents' religious traditions (2007b: 146)." This finding speaks to Herek's (2004) own admission that to ignore an individual's cultural background would result in a narrowing of our frame of reference for that person. Indeed, it would appear that this constriction might occur when this scale is used with religious persons.

Through exploratory factor analyses, Rosik (2007b) went on to partition the scale into various components. He found a primary "Condemnation-Tolerance" factor that consisted of solely anti-religious items. In multiple regression analyses, participants' self-identification as Christian loaded highly, and solely, on this component (Rosik 2007b). These items assess conservative Christian beliefs regarding morality and naturalness; beliefs which the scale classifies as homophobic. The items may be better thought of as anti-Christian. As such, the items on these components appear to obfuscate attitudes towards lesbians and gay men, instead reflecting agreement with moral statements based on religious teachings. Thus, do items such as these prejudice findings on sexual prejudice themselves; rendering religious persons unfairly homophobic?

When it comes to this scale, to avoid being labeled homophobic, an individual would have to believe that homosexuality was not a sin (item 5), was not immoral (item 6), was natural (item 14), and that gay sexual activities were not "wrong" (item 18). Such items distinctively speak to a Christian worldview. Therefore, Christians would be predisposed to homophobia, when measured using the ATLG-R.

This issue speaks to the ideological surround (Watson, Sawyers, Morris, Carpenter, Jimenez, Jonas and Robinson 2003). The model contends that this type of measure fails to account for the worldview of religious persons. In essence, if the belief that homosexuality is a sin constitutes homophobia, then anyone for whom religious ideology conceives homosexuality as sinful would be considered homophobic. Instruments such as the ATLG-R, therefore, assign a negative valence to such a normative worldview (Watson et al. 2003).

Watson et al. (2003) termed this phenomenon "tautological empiricism". When this circularity is built into an instrument, it paints a negative picture of the religious individual. According to the ideological surround model, researchers often differ in their worldview from religious persons. As such, the belief in the inherent negatives of homosexuality may simply be a reflection of a

theological worldview, and not an expression of a propensity towards discriminatory practices. Indeed, when it comes to the ATLG-R, Rosik (2007a) found only a single item regarding civil rights for homosexual persons that refers to the belief in the appropriateness of job discrimination based on sexual orientation. This item may be a better representation of prejudice, as it is independent of religious beliefs.

Furthermore, the ATLG-R, and similarly instruments, examines only a subset of the Christian belief system, neglecting that tolerance and prejudice might be separate beliefs based within religious ideology. Indeed, orthodox Christian beliefs may actually serve as a moral tradition which dampens sexual prejudice (Ford, Brignall, VanValley and Macaluso 2009). LaMothe's (2009) identification of the most salient features of Christianity points toward concepts of love, peace and coexistence. Niebuhr (1963) speaks of a fundamental belief in "imago dei"; that each person is made in the image of some supreme being, and thus possesses an inherent goodness. LaMothe (2009) explains that this concept is fundamental, and part of the theological teachings, engendering a love that is not contingent upon the other being the same as the self. LaMothe (2009) also explains a fundamental belief in forgiveness for those who sin – with the acknowledgement that all persons sin – while still holding true to the belief that, sinful actions are wrong. These teachings suggest a worldview that should value respect for individual persons. Research has found that Christians distinguish between sinful behaviour and people (Wenger and Daniels 2006), and respond in a discriminatory manner to cases of homosexual action (which participants see as a violation of their personal value-system) as opposed to homosexual persons (Mak and Tsang 2008). As such, there would be a distinction in the belief about gay persons, and the belief regarding the acceptability of gay actions. Indeed, a core teaching of the Christian faith revolves around the distinction between the person and the behaviour (Rosik, Griffith and Cruz 2006). So, while acknowledging that all persons sin, and expressing a belief in certain actions as sinful, Christian teachings may also protect against discriminatory behaviour against other persons. As such, simply stating that an action is sinful may not be sufficient to classify an individual as homophobic.

### **The Present Study and Predictions**

The current study sought to utilise Rosik's (2007a,b) identified components on the ATLG-R to compare Christian university students with their non-Christian counterparts, with regards to their attitudes towards lesbians and gay men i.e. homophobic attitudes. Similarly, it sought to explore the discrepancy between different single items from the scale; one which exemplifies a religious bias in comparison with one that is not as religiously subjective. The inclusion of a non-Christian comparative sample allows exploration of Rosik's belief in the need for interpretive sensitivity when dealing with conservatively Christian persons. I hypothesise that increased homophobic beliefs will be found for Christians when compared with non-Christians. However, Christians and non-Christians will not differ on beliefs about civil rights matters for gay persons. Such findings will reflect a bias within the scale which places Christians as more homophobic than other non-Christian counterparts, merely due to the nature of the anti-Christian items within the scale.

The study made several predictions. Firstly, Christians will be found to express greater homophobic sentiment than non-Christians when measured using the ATLG-R (Herek 1998). This will be largely due to differences resulting from the anti-religious character of items on the scale.

As such, Christians and non-Christians will differ along the Condemnation-Tolerance (Rosik 2007a) component of the ATLG-R, with Christians expressing more homophobia than their non-Christian counterparts. This would be due to the anti-Christian nature of the items within this component, predisposing such participants to respond in a homophobic manner. After controlling for the variability due to items on the Condemnation/Tolerance component (Rosik 2007a), Christians and non-Christians will show no difference in the level of expressed homophobia along the ATLG-R. Secondly, item-level analysis of the belief in the sinfulness of homosexuality will reflect the religious bias in this item, with Christians exhibiting greater belief in the sinfulness of homosexuality than their non-Christian counterparts. Analysis of beliefs in civil rights for gay persons will exhibit no differences based on religious belief, as the item is not a function of a religious ideology.

## Method

### *Procedure and Participants*

As part of a larger study, participants indicated their attitudes towards gay persons using the ATLG-R. Participants then indicated the religious group to which they belonged, their sexual orientation, as well as the number of gay persons they knew.

Participants were 199 students from the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago campus. The original sample consisted of 204 participants, of which 7 participants were excluded during analyses as they expressed a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, since this study only focused on heterosexual persons' attitudes towards homosexual persons.

Participants were recruited from foundation courses offered at the university, on three consecutive weekdays. The courses are mandatory for all students at the campus; and thus, the sample is assumed to reflect the inter-faculty distribution of the campus. Participation was voluntary, and there was no remuneration for participation in the study. The sample was relatively young ( $M = 20.65$ ,  $SD = 3.96$ ), predominantly female (64%), and identified primarily as Christian (65%). 19% of participants identified as Hindu, 6% identified as Muslim, 4% identified as other and 6% identified as belonging to no religion. There were no religious differences with respect to age and previous contact with homosexual persons.

Table 1. *Demographic makeup of the sample.*

| Sample Size<br>( <i>N</i> ) | Religious Affiliation       |                         |                          | % Female<br>( <i>n</i> ) | Age<br><i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
|                             | % Christian<br>( <i>n</i> ) | % Hindu<br>( <i>n</i> ) | % Muslim<br>( <i>n</i> ) |                          |                               |
| 199                         | 65 (129)                    | 19 (38)                 | 6 (12)                   | 64 (127)                 | 20.65 (3.96)                  |

\* 4% (n=8) of sample identified as Other, and 6% (n=12) of the sample identified as belonging to No Religion.

\*\* No religious differences with respect to mean age, or previous contact with gay persons.

*Measures*

As part of a larger study which was granted ethical approval by the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus Ethics Committee, attitudes towards homosexuals was measured using the Attitudes towards Lesbians and Gay Men scale (ATLG-R; Herek 1998). The 20-item scale measures participants' beliefs and attitudes regarding gay men and lesbians. The ATLG-R ( $\alpha = .94$ ) is composed of two subscales; the Attitudes towards Lesbians (ATL) subscale and the Attitudes towards Gay Men (ATG) subscale. Each subscale is comprised of 10 items. Subscales cannot be compared to one another, as a means of comparing attitudes towards lesbians with those towards gay men, due to the different wording of items on each subscale (Herek 1998). As such, the subscales were aggregated, and the scale used as a single entity. The subscales were not used separately for analyses. Responses were provided on a 9-point Likert scale, with lower scores representing increasingly negative attitudes towards lesbian and gay men; homophobia. Item 6 on the ATLG-R was modified, replacing the words "North American" with "Trinidadian" for the scale to make sense in the local context. The items were placed into components according to Rosik's (2007a) factor loadings (see Table 1). Values for the Condemnation/Tolerance component (Component 1) were standardised by dividing the sum of scores for each item by 11 (the number of items comprising said component).

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Table 2. *Full Sample ATLG-R Items Descriptive Statistics and Component Loadings according to Rosik (2007a)*

| Item   | Mean (SD)   | Component Loading |   |   |   |
|--|-------------|-------------------|---|---|---|
|  |             | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 1. Lesbians just can't fit into our society.   | 5.88 (2.77) |                   | * |   |   |
| 2. A woman's homosexuality should not be a cause for discrimination in any situation.*                     | 7.43 (2.53) |                   |   |   | * |
| 3. Female homosexuality is bad for society because it breaks down the natural divisions between the sexes. | 4.52 (2.71) |                   | * |   |   |
| 4. State laws regulating private, consenting lesbian behaviour should be abolished.*                       | 4.26 (2.67) |                   |   | * |   |
| 5. Female homosexuality is a sin.  | 4.13 (2.38) | *                 |   |   |   |
| 6. The growing number of lesbians indicates a decline in Trinidadian morals.                               | 4.68 (2.96) | *                 |   |   |   |
| 7. Female homosexuality in itself is not a problem, unless society makes it a problem.*                    | 5.25 (3.07) | *                 |   |   |   |
| 8. Female homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic social institutions.                              | 5.12 (2.67) |                   | * |   |   |
| 9. Female homosexuality is an inferior form of sexuality.  | 5.08 (2.84) | -                 | - | - | - |
| 10. Lesbians are sick.   | 5.89 (3.05) |                   | * |   |   |
| 11. Male homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt children the same as heterosexual couples.*         | 4.34 (3.19) | *                 |   |   |   |
| 12. I think male homosexuals are disgusting.   | 4.83 (3.21) |                   | * |   |   |
| 13. I think male homosexuals should not be allowed to teach schools.                                       | 5.77 (2.89) |                   | * |   |   |
| 14. Male homosexuality is a perversion.  | 4.60 (2.87) | *                 |   |   |   |
| 15. Just as in other species, male homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in men.*             | 4.32 (2.81) | *                 |   |   |   |
| 16. If a man has homosexual feelings, he should do everything he can to overcome them.                     | 3.86 (2.91) | *                 |   |   |   |
| 17. I would not be too upset if I learnt that my son were a homosexual.*                                   | 3.41 (2.85) | *                 |   |   |   |
| 18. Homosexual behaviour between two men is just plain wrong.  | 3.85 (3.03) | *                 |   |   |   |
| 19. The idea of male homosexual marriages seems ridiculous to me.  | 3.68 (3.00) | *                 |   |   |   |
| 20. Male homosexuality is merely a different kind of lifestyle that should not be condemned.*              | 4.65 (2.98) | *                 |   |   |   |

\* indicates items that are reversed scored. Items have already been reverse scored, with lower reported values reflecting greater homophobia.

## Results

The study compared Christians' and non-Christians' homophobic beliefs as measured using Herek's (1994) ATLG-R scale. The Condemnation-Tolerance component of the scale, as identified by Rosik (2007a), was used as a covariate to determine whether any differences found were solely as a result of variability along this factor. Beliefs about the sinfulness of homosexuality were also compared with beliefs about civil rights regarding job discrimination.

ANOVA and ANCOVA were utilised to examine the differences in expressed homophobia between Christians and non-Christians in the sample. Results showed that Christian participants ( $M = 85.44$ ,  $SD = 37.30$ ) expressed greater homophobic attitudes than did their non-Christians counterparts ( $M = 111.49$ ,  $SD = 40.32$ ),  $F(1, 197) = 20.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .09$ . However, when variability along the Condemnation/Tolerance component (component 1), as identified by Rosik (2007a), was utilised as a covariate, this difference became non-significant,  $F(2, 196) = .53$ ,  $p > .05$ . From these findings, it appears that the difference in levels of homophobia expressed may be singly due to differences along this factor, and not due to an overall discrepancy in other attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.

Comparisons of single items on the ATLG-R revealed that Christians ( $M = 3.27$ ,  $SD = 2.99$ ) expressed greater agreement that homosexuality was sinful (item 5) than did non-Christians ( $M = 5.79$ ,  $SD = 3.19$ ),  $F(1, 197) = 30.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .13$ . Christians and non-Christians, however, did not differ in beliefs surrounding civil rights for homosexuals (item 2),  $F(1, 197) = .01$ ,  $p > .05$ . Interesting to note, while Christians expressed greater belief in the sinfulness of homosexuality than their non-Christian counterparts, non-Christians still expressed a discrepancy in their beliefs about the sinfulness of homosexuality and that regarding civil rights for gay persons ( $M = 7.46$ ,  $SD = 2.60$ ),  $t(67) = 3.48$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .39$ .

Further exploratory analyses were conducted after separating the non-Christian component into individual religious groups (Muslim and Hindu). These tests were conducted to explore differences in levels of homophobic sentiment across participants from three major religions; Christianity ( $N = 131$ ), Islam ( $N = 11$ ) and Hinduism ( $N = 38$ ). In addition to the ANOVA being a very robust test to the departure from equal  $N$ s, Levene's test revealed that despite the difference in numbers within each religious group, the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated,  $F(4, 194) = .69$ ,  $p > .05$ .

ANOVA and ANCOVA revealed that there was a significant difference for religion along the Condemnation/Tolerance component,  $F(4, 194) = 9.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .16$ . All possible pair-wise comparisons conducted using the Bonferonni adjustment revealed that Christians ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 2.00$ ) and Muslims ( $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = 2.58$ ) did not differ along this factor. However, they both expressed significantly more homophobic attitudes along this factor than did Hindus ( $M = 5.65$ ,  $SD = 1.99$ ). Similarly, while initially there was a significant effect for religion and overall attitudes towards lesbians and gay men,  $F(4, 194) = 7.71$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .14$ , the effect became non-significant when the variability along the Condemnation/Tolerance factor was utilised as a covariate,  $F(4, 193) = .56$ ,  $p > .05$ .

## **Discussion**

The findings echo Rosik's (2007a) call for "interpretive sensitivity" when conceptualising anti-gay sentiment. The findings show that the initial anti-gay sentiment held by Christian participants was largely due to their values along the Condemnation/Tolerance dimension of the scale. When this factor was controlled for, the group differences disappeared. Taken at an item-level analysis, the data showed that for Christians, the belief in the sinfulness of homosexuality was not equivalent with their beliefs about job discrimination based on sexual orientation. Thus, even though Christians expressed increased "homophobic" belief in how sinful it is to be gay, they did not express a concomitant elevated belief in the acceptability of job discrimination – an elevated belief that would be expected for traditionally prejudiced individuals. Indeed, these may be two separate beliefs, and scales that assume sinfulness equates homophobia may be tautological (Watson et al. 2003) - commingling religious ideology and anti-gay prejudice.

An interesting finding was the discrepancy that existed for non-Christians regarding the beliefs in sinfulness versus civil rights. With the idea of sinfulness speaking to a primarily Christian perspective, it was puzzling to find this similar discrepancy among non-Christians. However, as Inglehart and Baker (2004) posit, the dominant religion of a society may become institutionalised and transmitted via social institutions. Thus, other religious institutions may internalise similar values. As such, in a multicultural society like Trinidad and Tobago, it may be regular for persons to participate in, as well as express doctrine from, other religions. Anecdotal evidence may be taken from the local political scenario, where, in 2011 a Hindu minister quoted the famous Leviticus chapter as justification for an absence of debate on same-sex matters at a governmental level (The Trinidad Express, February 2011). As such, I interpret this finding to also represent a religiously-based expression, as opposed to anti-gay belief, particularly as it bears difference from attitudes towards civil rights.

Comparison of attitudes based on participants' religious denomination revealed that for Christians and Muslims, beliefs about homosexuality along the Condemnation/Tolerance factor were similar. This is not surprising, for, as Helminiak (2008) posits, Islam is the only religion that outright denounces homosexuality. As such, the views would be more consistent with those of a conservative Christian worldview. Hindus, on the other hand, expressed less anti-gay prejudice than persons in the other two groups – possibly a manifestation of the ambiguity within the religion on the matter. Still, when this factor was controlled for, all group differences again disappeared, suggesting a similar explanation as presented above; that differences may not be due to prejudice per se, but more likely due to the nature of the items on the scale.

Adding to the evidence for instrumentation issues with the ATLG-R were some participants' ( $N = 5$ ) spontaneous justifications on their responses to item 5 on the scale – regarding their beliefs in the sinfulness of homosexuality. Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957) posits that counter-attitudinal actions lead to psychological discomfort, which can manifest as guilt and shame (Monteith et al. 1993; Devine et al. 1991). This discomfort must be reduced through dissonance-reduction strategies (Elliot and Devine 1994). This discomfort does not dissipate on its own, but must be actively reduced. Participants' spontaneous justifications seem to exemplify a form of reduction strategy. By affirming the value of the person, while rejecting the violating behaviour, participants may be able to distinguish their sentiments regarding gay persons from those regarding

homosexual behaviour (Bassett et al. 1997, 2005).

*“Homosexuality to me is a sin, but we all sin. So I say Love the sinner hate the sin.”* The above statement, written by a 22-year-old Christian male is typical of the type of justification expressed by participants. The statement appears to be an attempt to explain his belief in the sinful nature of homosexuality while upholding his sentiments of positive regard for gay persons. This appears to support the distinction between attitudes towards homosexuals as a social group, and those towards homosexuality as a behaviour; a value violation. As such, it suggests differential sentiment towards the action versus the person and, in accordance with this study’s findings, represents a separate attitude from the intent to treat homosexuals with prejudice. This is consistent with Mak and Tsang’s (2008) findings. The authors found that students high in intrinsic religiosity showed the same level of discrimination for sexually promiscuous homosexual and heterosexual persons. Thus, the belief in the sinfulness of the activity appears to lead to differential treatment, and not the personal quality of the individual.

### **Limitations**

A major limitation inherent to the current study is the use of gross categorisations for the religion variable. The categorisation as Christian, Muslim or Hindu does not shed light into the depth of religiosity experienced by individuals; a variable that has been found to be related to anti-gay prejudice (Whitley 2009). The gross categorisations fails to account for the plethora of religious beliefs on the matter (see Helminiak 2008 for a review). This stems from the study’s post hoc methodology. Spontaneous justifications to item 5 on the ATLG-R led to a more in-depth investigation. Thus, the issue of religious belief was based upon previous demographic data on religious denomination.

A second limitation of the current study involves the ambiguity in the use of the construct homophobia. While contemporary literature has begun to move away from the term “homophobia”, there is still no agreement on the use of an alternate term (Wilkinson 2004). I lean to the definition as provided by Plummer (1996: 6, as seen in Wilkinson 2004) referring to homophobia as “a provisional term not to be taken too literally.” The question remains as to what aspects of this construct are of importance for social scientists. Herek’s (2004) review of the historical roots of the term, and suggestions for contemporary substitutes, puts forth “sexual prejudice” as an alternative. However, he includes the concept of sinfulness as part of this prejudicial belief system. Ultimately, his concern is to find a term that allows for understanding the “hostility and oppression based on sexual orientation,” with the ultimate aim being its eradication (Herek 2004: 20). Thus, I ask, does the belief in the sinfulness of homosexuality lead to this oppression and hostility? Further investigation may delve into which beliefs actually predict the hostility to which Herek refers. From the above data, it appears that regarding homosexuality as sinful may not be one such belief.

### **Conclusion**

The findings suggest a disparity in religious beliefs and the concept of homophobia. Indeed, taken in conjunction with some participants’ justifications, which affirmed the values placed on gay persons, it suggests that persons’ expressions of homophobia, according to the scale, may originate

from a religious ideological background, in accordance with Rosik's (2007a, 2007b) assertions. As such, the belief in sinfulness regarding homosexuality may not be taken to mean prejudice towards gay persons. Overall, I end in calling for increased sensitivity with academics in the pathologising of religious persons when it comes to anti-gay sentiment. I see the findings from this paper as echoing Rosik's (2007b) call for open discussion and dialogue regarding the diverse perspectives on the topics of religion and sexuality. I also see this as a means of escaping a prejudice on the part of social scientists themselves, failing to acknowledge ideological differences and belief systems.

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<sup>1</sup> From this point, I utilise the terms anti-gay sentiment, prejudice, homophobia, etc. to denote generalised negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. For the purpose of this paper, the terms are utilised interchangeably. The discussion focuses on the issue of operationalisation of homophobia in the social sciences.