



Spring 5-17-2010

# The Effects of Oppression on Queer Intimate Adolescent Attachment

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# The Effects of Oppression on Queer Intimate Adolescent Attachment

## **Abstract**

In America's privileged majority, one of the primary focuses of adolescence is to establish independence from the youth's family of origin and develop primary attachment to an intimate partner. Unlike heterosexually identified youth, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning (LGBTQ) youth receive limited support from society when developing their sexual orientation identity and same sex, intimate relationships. Furthermore, LGBTQ youth are exposed to an insufficient number of public, same sex relationships, have access to few supportive spaces to explore same sex sexuality and relationships, and are met with a societal understanding of relationship building that is entrenched in heterosexism. This societal oppression is concretely illustrated by the lack of consistent legal recognition of LGBTQ relationships in American society.

Informed by Bowlby's attachment theory, this qualitative research study sought to understand how experienced societal oppression of gay, bisexual, and queer male identified adolescents impacted the attachment process and attachment security of same sex relational intimacy. Through the use of in depth interviews, fourteen, male identified, African-American young adults between the ages of eighteen through twenty-four provided relational narratives in an effort to understand the factors that contributed to their ability to form positive, secure attachment to intimate, same sex partners while contending with homonegativity. An understanding of the diverse ways in which gay, bisexual, and queer male identified youth maintained feelings of secure attachment to their same sex partner when contending with homonegativity was identified. These findings contribute to the understanding of resilience in the attachment process of LGBTQ youth.

## **Degree Type**

Dissertation

## **Degree Name**

Doctor of Social Work (DSW)

## **First Advisor**

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## **Keywords**

queer youth, attachment theory, oppression, homophobia

## **Subject Categories**

Social Work



**THE EFFECTS OF OPPRESSION ON QUEER INTIMATE ADOLESCENT**

**ATTACHMENT**

**Cynthia Closs**

A DISSERTATION

in

Social Work

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Social Work

2010

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**THE EFFECTS OF OPPRESSION ON QUEER INTIMATE ADOLESCENT  
ATTACHMENT**

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**Cynthia Closs**

*Dedicated to Denise and India*

*In Memory of Noir*

## Acknowledgments

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation for my dissertation chair, Ram Cnaan, whose general demeanor was charmingly gruff. Throughout this endeavor, he unknowingly supplied me with quotes that made me laugh in times that required humor to persevere and comments that I will cherish *forever*. Without his ongoing support, encouragement, patience, knowledge, and expressed belief in the value of this work, I would have never completed this process. I continue to hope that he is aware of how important he was to me during this undertaking and how honored I am that he was a part of my process. Thank you.

Secondly, I would like to express my indebtedness to my committee members Theo Burnes, Linda Hawkins, and Carrie Jacobs for their insight, support, critique, challenges to cultivate and expand my thought processes, general cheerleading, and reminders of what life is like post-defense. They nourished my determination.

Thirdly, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues whose humor and emotional support kept me sane, grounded, and strengthened the stamina needed to complete this work.

Fourthly, I am indebted to the amazing youth who participated in this study and were willing to share their story. I learned more from them than words can capture.

Fifthly, I would like to thank the B.C. and Mother Breakfast for allowing me to disseminate information about my study and for not throwing that bucket of water on me because she believed I called the police.

Finally, I would like to thank my amazing partner for her love, consummate acceptance of my crazy work schedule, willingness to sacrifice without complaint, commitment to helping me achieve this degree, and general ability to cope with me.



## ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTS OF OPPRESSION ON QUEER INTIMATE ADOLESCENT  
ATTACHMENT

Cynthia Closs

Ram Cnaan, Ph.D.

In America's privileged majority, one of the primary focuses of adolescence is to establish independence from the youth's family of origin and develop primary attachment to an intimate partner. Unlike heterosexually identified youth, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning (LGBTQ) youth receive limited support from society when developing their sexual orientation identity and same sex, intimate relationships. Furthermore, LGBTQ youth are exposed to an insufficient number of public, same sex relationships, have access to few supportive spaces to explore same sex sexuality and relationships, and are met with a societal understanding of relationship building that is entrenched in heterosexism. This societal oppression is concretely illustrated by the lack of consistent legal recognition of LGBTQ relationships in American society.

Informed by Bowlby's attachment theory, this qualitative research study sought to understand how experienced societal oppression of gay, bisexual, and queer male identified adolescents impacted the attachment process and attachment security of same sex relational intimacy. Through the use of in depth interviews, fourteen, male identified, African-American young adults between the ages of eighteen through twenty-four provided relational narratives in an effort to understand the factors that contributed to their ability to form positive, secure attachment to intimate, same sex partners while contending with homonegativity. An understanding of the diverse ways in which gay,

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## Chapter I: Introduction

Adolescence is the transitional period from childhood to adulthood. During adolescence, youth experience rapid changes physically, emotionally and mentally. Many times these changes create a sense of ambiguity and insecurity. In America, the fundamental focus of adolescence is the development of an adult sense of self and identity with ensuing independence from family of origin. Resolution of this stage of development is achieved when youth diverge from their family of origin to develop their place in life while cultivating feelings of attachment to persons who will become the construct of their support system within their community.

In recent years, the period of adolescence has been extended in America (Arnett & Taber, 1994). Typically, young adults between the ages of eighteen through twenty-four are still considered youth despite acquiring many legal privileges available to adults only. These privileges include the acquisition of a driver's license, the right to withdraw from schooling, the right to enlist in the military, the right to participate in the political process, the right to have sexual relations with another consenting adult without legal repercussions, the right of heterosexuals to marry in all fifty States, the right to purchase and own a firearm, the right to gamble, and the right to purchase and possess legal substances that intoxicate. The federal established age for legal purchase and possession of alcohol was established in 1984 through the National Minimum Drinking Age Act (Lautenberg, 1984). This federally established age determinant eradicated state laws with differing legal ages for possession of alcohol and provides further proof of the growing postponement of adulthood in America. Further, these legal rights also bring with it an understanding that the person of age is now responsible for self. Confusingly, this extension of adolescence results in youth walking a precarious line between adulthood

and childhood in which youth are held legally responsible for their behavior, but are still viewed as being dependent on family of origin.

The exact cause for this extenuation of adolescence within the United States is unknown. More than likely this extenuation is the result of a combination of factors including better health care, increased longevity, increased knowledge about neuroscience and brain development, and a changing economic structure. This current period of extended adolescence within the United States impacts the way many caregivers view their adolescent child. Caregivers may feel responsible for continuing to assist their children both financially and emotionally even when the adolescent has reached legally defined, adult status. Whatever the exact cause of this developmental extension, the age of eighteen no longer brings connotations of adulthood, but a prolonged adolescence.

The view that separation and independence from family of origin is essential to traditional adolescent development is informed by Caucasian, heterosexual, American values. Different racial and ethnic groups that value interdependence or do not possess a privileged status within the United States may hold diverse beliefs about what constitutes an adolescent's transition into adulthood. Many times communities that fall outside of the privileged majority experience societal discrimination. In a resilient response, adolescents from these discriminated communities may maintain close ties to their family of origin as a way to learn how to combat and cope with discrimination and oppression (DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006; LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006).

Another chief focus of adolescence is the creation of attachment bonds outside of the youth's family of origin (Erikson, 1968). Bowlby (1979) viewed attachment to the

primary caregiver as the focal point between infancy to three years of age existing to promote the survival of the child. Despite Bowlby's later research (1988) focusing on attachment in children, he viewed attachment to others as existing until one's death. Central to Bowlby's theory (1973) of attachment is the understanding that the attachment system is triggered during times of threat and anxiety. This felt or perceived threat triggers behaviors that induce physical closeness to the primary attachment figure.

This theory of attachment and proximity seeking in times of perceived threat has implications for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth whose same sex relationship is the target of homophobia and discrimination in America. Youth with a sexual minority identity contend with an additional challenge in developing secure attachment to their same sex partner when this same sex relationship can be a target that triggers environmental threat resulting in a lack of safety and security. Despite this, sexual minority youth have been able to develop secure attachment to their intimate partner. To date, no research exists exploring the ways these resilient LGBTQ youth have been able to develop secure intimate attachment despite societal oppression.

### *Queer Youth*

Sexual orientation (Fausto-Sterling, 2000) is understood as existing on a continuum and connotes a person's emotional, physical, erotic, and/or sexual attraction to another. This should not be confused with gender identity, which is a personal, social construction, conceptualization, and psychological understanding of an individual's maleness, femaleness, third gender, both, or neither. As indicated, LGBTQ youth are a minority subset in America. For the purpose of simplicity, I will use the word queer to designate LGBTQ sexual orientation when reviewing the findings of existing literature

and research. More specifically, this research focused on gay or bisexual African-American, male identified youth. When discussing the research findings of this study in particular, queer will be used to denote a gay or bisexual sexual orientation identity.

Despite significant societal changes, queer youth are still experiencing pervasive discrimination and societal oppression due to homophobia. Different from other minority groups in which family members share and support each other through similar experiences of oppression, queer youth typically do not have access to immediate family of origin that have experienced a lifelong history of contending and coping with homophobia. As a result, youth are typically left to figure out how to manage homophobia without the availability of familial resources.

A sexual minority status brings additional challenges for queer youth to grapple with during adolescence. Sexual and gender variant minority youth must contend with and deconstruct a lifetime of messages communicated by a society that are transphobic, homophobic and heterosexist. Without developed defense mechanisms to guard against societal hostility, these youth cannot achieve a healthy sense of self and understanding of their sexual orientation, sexual identity, gender identity, relationships, and sexual behaviors. Supportive relationships that could help to validate and mirror their developing identity and intimate relationships may be insufficient or absent. The few cases in which same sex relationships are made public are often portrayed as deviant, illegal, and repulsive.

A ready made and accessible queer friendly community typically does not surround sexual and gender variant minority youth. Queer youth must actively search to find queer friendly spaces. This is very different from their heterosexual counterparts, who are



surrounded by solidly developed, longstanding, heterosexual friendly spaces called mainstream society. This absence of ready found, supportive individuals, couples and community leave youth limited in their ability to explore, understand, accept and nurture their identity. Without the foundation of solid identity formation, healthy, intimate relationships are thought to be impossible. The lack of social and familial support and, sometimes, overt societal hostility seems as if it would negatively impact the ability of queer youth to successfully develop and maintain securely attached, intimate relationships. However, the acceptance and development of a sexual or gender variant minority identity in conjunction with the ability to successfully cope with a homophobic, transphobic and heterosexist society can result in the adolescent or young adult's ability to develop securely attached, healthy, satisfying, intimate relationships.

In securely attached, intimate relationships, individuals turn to their partner in times of stress (Forgas, Williams, & von Hippel, 2003). Unlike heterosexual intimate relationships, the attachment object within queer intimate relationships is also the target of societal oppression and a source of social stress. This experience may challenge the queer, intimate, attachment process. The ability to negotiate this minority stress and develop satisfying, intimate relationships is truly illustrative of the resiliency of queer youth.

### *Adolescent Identity Development*

Erikson (1968) developed an eight stage, theoretical model of human development. He viewed these developmental life stages as the epigenesis of identity with each stage starting in a place of crisis due to a fundamental, drastic shift in perspective (Erikson, 1980). Core to the psychological developmental process of adolescence is identity

formation. This is the first juncture in Erikson's human developmental theory in which the person diverges from the childhood stages of development. Erikson (1968) identified the core struggle of and indicator for adolescence as the search for identity versus identity confusion.

The Eriksonian model of development offers that youth in the identity formation stage gain an increased awareness of society with these societal expectations becoming more influential on youth. In this stage, youth also begin to analyze the roles they have been given by family of origin and society and actively explore and synthesize these roles to develop a comfort of fit with their developing sense of identity. Successful completion of this identity formation stage is reached when optimal identity solidification and integration results. This is usually indicated when the adolescent has developed a commitment to a norm based, value system, direction with an employment path and an understanding of her or his orientation (Kroger, 2004).

During Erikson's (1980) stage of identity formation, youth become increasingly focused, if not painfully focused, on self image and how others view this image of self. This shift from the previous reliance and focus on family to an increased sense of importance, reliance and trust in the adolescent peer group becomes central to this developmental stage. When beginning to transition from dependence on family of origin for emotional support to the peer group, adolescents may begin to avoid any and all activity that feels as if it will make them look foolish in the eyes of their peers. This paradoxical concern about peer judgment exists despite the typical American, adolescent desire for independence and is also illustrative of the transition of attachment from family of origin to peers.

If given enough encouragement and validation from society, youth of this age begin to explore options for their future with a focus on investigation of career choice, the development of heterosexual identity, intimate relationships and an exploration of the possibility of developing their own family. Erikson (1968) felt that this examination of life options came from a psychosocial moratorium which allowed youth to explore and develop core characteristics of their identity independent from their family of origin. This self image development focuses on the cultivation of ideologies and values, worthy vocational goals, awareness of interests and talents and the development of commitments (Hoare, 2002). Erikson viewed the resolution of this identity versus role confusion stage as existing when the youth obtains a stable sense of internal identity. Even though youth are at a crucial stage of development and could benefit from adult support, they may reject any overt displays of adult assistance at this time.

Erikson's (1968) theory of development does not discount the impact societal and environmental constructs have on the adolescent's emerging identity. Hoare (2002) highlights Erikson as understanding each person as fundamentally integrated into and influenced by their family, culture, community and societal values and belief system. Erikson regarded the internalization of these external forces as largely impacting the development of identity. Society and the youth's community have the power to offer recognition and support for the identity the youth chooses and also the influential power to devalue that identity. These social constructs may also limit the possibilities youth envision within their identity developmental stage.

Society marks the adolescent transition to adulthood by giving legal, adult status to persons eighteen years of age. As previously identified, these legal rights include the

right to acquire a driver's license, the right to withdraw from schooling, the right to enlist in the military, the right to participate in the political process, the right to gamble, the right to have sexual relations with another consenting adult without legal repercussions, the right of heterosexuals to marry in all fifty States, the right to purchase and own a weapon, and the right to purchase and use legal substances that intoxicate. Even with this legal status, legally defined adulthood is inconsistent in American society and seems to change dependent upon the circumstance and is habitually informed by race, gender, class, and societal privilege (Currie, 1993). This is often illustrated in the American judicial system. Despite being under the legal age of adulthood, youth are often criminally charged as adults especially when youth are of color and disadvantaged. This unpredictable and fluid understanding of adulthood informed by privilege may also have contributed to this extended adolescent phase of development. Additionally, prolonged adolescence in America may also be the result of economic, trade and industry changes making a prolonged adolescence beneficial to privileged American society (Arnett & Taber, 1994; Cushman, 1995). Further, adolescence may have become extended because of an improved understanding of brain development (Applegate & Shapiro, 2005; Nelson & Bloom, 1997) and improved medical care resulting, generally, in a longer lifespan (Christensen & Vaupel, 1996; Wilmoth, 2000).

### *Adolescent Intimacy Development*

With resolution of identity development, Erikson identified youth as moving into the developmental stage of intimacy versus isolation (1968). This stage is the first stage of a purposeful joining with another to create a sense of togetherness (Hoare, 2002). This stage's primary task is to develop the capacity to engage in intimate relationships with

others, sustain developed mutuality and gain interdependency. This intimacy or mutuality can be developed within friendships, within a love relationship or established within the camaraderie seen amongst persons in combat (Stevens, 2008). The importance of this stage is to test the identity development from the previous stage and determine whether this identity development can withstand intimacy with another who has also successfully completed identity formation all while maintaining her or his previously established identity (Kroger, 2004). Successful resolution of this phase means that the youth's identity is secure and stable and, further, that the youth can maintain a secure sense of self when intimately involved with another. Erikson theorized that successful resolution of this identity stage results in decreased emotional disturbance. Erikson conversely proposed that unsuccessful resolution of identity formation will result in individuals who struggle to create a shared identity with another person, feel fearful of intimacy and, ultimately, revert to isolation. An underdeveloped, unstable sense of self precludes the ability to create a shared identity and shared sense of intimacy.

Heterosexuality is the default sexual orientation and, as a result, is viewed as normal. Due to its normalcy status, little research has been done to explore and understand heterosexual identity formation. To develop an understanding of heterosexual identity formation, Eliason (1995) studied a sample of twenty-six, heterosexually identified, young adults through the use of a qualitative research approach. Through this research, Eliason identified six, consistent themes within their perceptions of heterosexual identity formation. These themes are as follows: the sample indicated no other possible sexual orientation identity options existing other than heterosexuality, organized religion's assistance in sexual orientation identity formulation, the perception that heterosexuality is

genetic and, as a result, constant, the effects of societal socialization on gender identity and its determination of sexual orientation, other unidentified, outside influences causing heterosexuality and a lack of thought about sexual identity due to assumed heterosexuality.

Eliason's study illustrates the absence of any questioning regarding one's sexual orientation when a person identifies as heterosexual. Eliason found this absence of questioning to be especially true of the male research participants and concluded that the socialization of masculinity negated the ability to explore other sexual orientation identities. This study also points to the absence of any effort to contend with conflicting thoughts and emotions about heterosexual identity, any ambivalence felt about heterosexual identity, felt ambivalence about disclosure of heterosexual identity, the need to seek out community support for this identity, a nonexistent need to develop a positive view of a heterosexual identity or any struggle to accept one's heterosexual identity within society. Eliason's research also typifies the foreclosure of heterosexual identity exploration through the research participant's acceptance of society's imposition of a heterosexual identity formation. Most importantly, Eliason demonstrated that societal values and norms fully support heterosexual identity formation through the research participants' absence of any struggle coming to terms with their heterosexuality.

For heterosexually identified persons, American society is celebratory of heterosexual intimacies and has created societal rituals to honor heterosexual intimacy. One way society celebrates heterosexual intimacy is through the institution of marriage. This legally recognized sanction also allows the couple to access certain privileges within American society. For instance, a heterosexual couple's relationship is legally recognized

in all fifty States and is given legal protection under the law within the United States. Heterosexual couples who marry can apply and obtain citizenship for their non-citizen partner and heterosexual relationships are recognized as a family under United States' law and are dually given familial benefits. If children are the result of or become part of this heterosexual union, each partner has legal parenting and custodial rights without court mandates (Morrow & Messinger, 2006). Finally, most heterosexual couples do not fear displaying their connection to or affection for each other in public venues. Through the institutionalization of heterosexuality and subsequent heterosexism within American society, queer identity and relationships are unsupported, unrecognized, and invalidated.

#### *Queer Legal Protection and Discrimination*

In 1996, the United States' Senate passed and President Clinton signed into law the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in response to the possibility that Hawaii would begin to recognize same sex, civil marriage (Human Rights Watch & Immigration Equality, 2006). DOMA provided two legal sanctions: it federally defined marriage as only existing between two, opposite sex persons and ensured that no other state would be forced to recognize same sex unions. In 2004, President George W. Bush gave his support and approval for an amendment to the United States' Constitution banning same sex marriage.

Currently, the United States has no federal law protecting queer sexual orientation from employment discrimination (Human Rights Campaign, 2008). However, in 2007, the United States' legislature instituted a version of the originally proposed Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act/Matthew Shepard Act to provide federal grants to states to investigate hate motivated crimes. With these Acts, crimes against persons

based on their queer sexual orientation is subject to prosecution. Additionally, if local or state government is unable to pursue prosecution of hate related violence, the Federal government will take over any prosecution efforts (Human Rights Campaign, 2007).

Still, there is no standing, federal law to explicitly protect individuals with queer sexual orientation from general and persistent discrimination. Despite this, the United States has made legal progress in protecting queer persons at the state level. In June of 2003, the Supreme Court of the United States declared Texas' law banning same sex behavior unconstitutional (American Psychological Association, 2003). Since this legal decision, queer identified males can no longer be incarcerated or punished within the United States for their sexual behavior. Additionally, United States' citizens are now protected from state intrusion into consensual behaviors that take place in their private life. Furthermore, twenty states and the District of Columbia have laws that protect queer persons from discrimination (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2008).

Only Massachusetts, Iowa, Vermont, Connecticut, and New Hampshire recognize same sex marriages. New Jersey recognizes Civil Unions and California, the District of Columbia, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington State recognizes domestic partnerships (Human Rights Campaign, 2010). The District of Columbia recently signed into law the Religious Freedom & Civil Marriage Equality Amendment Act of 2009. This Act will recognize marriage licenses of same sex couples issued in other states. Finally, Colorado allows same sex couples the option of entering into a Designated Beneficiary Agreement, Hawaii offers same sex couples the status of reciprocal beneficiaries, and Maine, Maryland, and Wisconsin offer same sex couples the title of domestic partners. These three States limit statewide partner rights.



On May 15, 2008, California recognized same sex marriage after the Supreme Court of California ruled that persons have the fundamental right to marry and cannot be discriminated against because of sexual orientation (re Marriage Cases, 2008). However, in opposition to this legal decision, political conservatives and organized religious conservatives introduced Proposition 8 in an effort to ratify the California Constitution and define marriage as existing between a man and woman only. When voted into effect on November 4, 2008, this measure changed the California Constitution and eliminated the rights of same sex couples to marry, nullified past same sex marriages in California while defining marriage as being a civil right only accessible to mixed gender relationships.

In other countries, protection against queer discrimination is markedly less accepting. Out of the 192 United Nations (UN) member states, eighty-six countries criminalize queer sexual behavior among consenting adults (International Lesbian and Gay Association & Ottosson, 2008). The repercussion for sexual acts among same sex consenting adults in these countries can be incarceration. Seven UN state members have laws that punish queer persons' sexual behavior with the death penalty. In Asia, approximately eighteen countries have laws that punish queer persons for their same sex sexual behavior with only three countries protecting queer persons from discrimination. In Africa, thirty-six countries have laws to punish queer identified persons for their same sex, sexual behavior and only three countries have laws that protect queer persons from discrimination. Today, ten North American countries legally punish persons for their queer sexual behavior. Interestingly, no European country has laws that punish persons for same sex sexual behavior and fifteen of its countries have laws that protect queer

identified persons from discrimination. Many of these European countries also ensure legal recognition of same sex relationships (International Lesbian and Gay Association & Ottosson, 2008).

### *Impact of Queer Oppression on Identity Formation*

Historically, queer youth have been a marginalized, ignored group. Within the past two decades, researchers have begun to draw attention to this dynamic group of adolescents (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Diamond, 1998; Hetrick & Martin, 1988; Martin, 1982; Martin & Hetrick, 1988; Savin-Williams, 1987; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). Prior to these key researchers of adolescent queer youth, research has primarily focused on queer identified adults (Furnell, 1985; Sophie, 1985-1986; Troiden, 1988). However, the minimal research focused on queer youth does show that queer adolescents tackle extra challenges than their heterosexual counterparts. Society assumes that all persons are heterosexual and societal beliefs and messages perpetuate this heterosexism. This social assumption results in an oppressive construct that adds additional layers to contend with during the stage of identity formation. The majority of queer youth do not typically enter adolescence considering the possibility that they will become part of the sexual minority (Morrow & Messinger, 2006), but typically begin to develop an awareness of their sexual orientation difference during this period.

Most adolescents grow up hearing homophobic language and witnessing homophobic behavior within their primary socializing environments. Additionally, most youth are socialized to hold homophobic attitudes (Poteat, 2007). Adolescents are prepared by society to be part of the sexual majority and are rarely introduced to an orientation other than heterosexuality. Moreover, social supports such as educational institutions and

family of origin who are intimately involved with the development of the child and adolescent rarely consider or introduce the idea of a queer, sexual orientation as a possibility for sexual identity formation. Even if these primary caregivers question or have some awareness of their child's queer sexuality, caregivers may struggle in providing adequate support due to their own homophobia or lack of homo-supportive strategies.

Typically, adult family members, role models and social supports suggest the idea of marriage to an opposite sex person as the ideal and emphasize the importance of children coming from this opposite sex union at a very early age. In addition to developing a secure identity, queer youth must also adjust to and contend with a stigmatized social identity compounded by years of internalized homophobia and heterosexism (Herek, 2007). Further, a sexual minority identity is exacerbated by the tendency of our American society to define sexual minorities by their same sex, sexual behavior and less by how they may view the world, envision partnerships and/or perceive their roles in their communities.

### *Queer Identity Formation Theories*

Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin's (1948) famous studies regarding sexual orientation established that sexual orientation exists along a continuum. From these studies, the Kinsey Scale was developed and has been used to assess where individuals fall within the continuum of sexuality and sexual orientation. Since the Kinsey studies, increased debate has transpired as to whether a queer sexual orientation is the result of genetics or environmental influences.

Cass' (1979) stage theory of queer sexual orientation identity development is the most widely known and used six stage model of sexual identity development for minority sexual orientation. In this developmental process, Cass identified persons as first discovering an awareness or identification of a queer sexual orientation. This awareness progresses into the second identified stage of confusion, comparison and exploration of sexual identity and, finally, moves into the third stage of identity tolerance. During this third stage, a person's sense of isolation becomes heightened motivating persons to seek out and interact with other persons of queer identity. Cass noted that the tolerance of sexual orientation found in this stage does not equate to acceptance. In stage four, persons become accepting of their sexual orientation. Peer interactions seem to help facilitate this acceptance. In the fifth stage, deemed identity pride, persons begin to develop feelings of appreciation of and respect for their marginalized sexual orientation. Anger at heterosexist society may be communicated during this stage. Finally, Cass identified synthesis of sexual orientation identity as the final stage. This sixth stage is illustrated with a relinquishment of any felt queer / heterosexual dichotomy.

Much like Erikson's theory on the stages of human development, Cass' theory of sexual orientation development is linear and has some limitations. Many queer identified persons will note that their process of identifying and accepting their sexual orientation was not linear in progression. Additionally, Cass' theory of sexual orientation identity development was drawn from the accounts of Caucasian, gay and lesbian identified persons. Therefore, generalizations are challenging when considering our contemporary queer young people.

*Research on Sexual Identity Development and Oppression*

Scholars (Dube and Savin-Williams, 1999; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004) found sexual identity developmental differences amongst sexual minority youth of color. Specifically, existing racism within the queer Caucasian community obstructs queer youth of color's ability to seek or gain support from a limitedly profiled, queer community (Garnets & Kimmel, 2003). Many times the majority profiled and visible, Caucasian, male identified, urban, queer community is viewed as having greater access to resources due to racial and gender privilege and perceived financial stability. This queer stereotype leads to the exclusion and invisibility of queer persons living in poverty, queer persons of color, queer persons living in rural areas and queer persons who are female identified.

Same sex relationships hold different meanings within different cultures. Within the United States, cultural norms regarding queer sexual behaviors for persons of different ethnic groups may impact the ability to and comfort with disclosing their sexual identity to peers and family for fear of losing ethnic and cultural connection and acceptance (Garnets & Kimmel, 2003). Additionally, queer persons of color may not have the same developmental process as queer Caucasians in regards to sexual identity development. Queer persons of color may need to develop and integrate dual and triple identities including sexual orientation, culture and gender. Consequently, queer youth of color have additional stages that need exploration and resolution to achieve secure identity integration. This security in identity formation is thought to enhance the ability to achieve secure, queer, attachment intimacy.

Like Winnicott's (1960) theory on the development of a false self to protect the vulnerable, true self from a holding environment that is inadequate and flawed due to its

lack of support, nurturing or caretaking, researchers have found that many queer adolescents develop a “false self” in an effort to contend with a homophobic and heterosexist community (Harter, Marold, Whitesell, & Cobbs, 1996). Concretely, this false self may also be necessary to maintain both emotional and financial support from their primary caregivers to ensure survival. During the very time that youth are expected to discover and develop their identity while exploring their maturing sense of sexuality, many are forced to hide a core characteristic of selfhood. Subsequently, this hidden characteristic of self may result in the loss of possible safe, secure connection to family, friends and supports. According to Harter et al., many youth lead double lives and must monitor their behavior and disclosures to their primary support system. This constant monitoring while maneuvering between two worlds seems as if it would inevitably affect the way queer youth attach within their relationships.

Maguen, Floyd, Bakeman, and Armistead (2002) found that most queer youth explored heterosexuality and identified these sexual experiences as unnatural feeling and lacking in emotional intimacy. This research would lead one to conclude that these opposite sex sexual experiences did not foster feelings of attachment. Further Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, and Braun (2006) found that many queer youth initially identify as bisexual and later transitioned to a consistently lesbian or gay sexual orientation. These youth who transitioned from bisexuality to a queer sexual orientation were still in a stage of sexual identity formation. From an Eriksonian understanding, prolonged identity exploration would prohibit successful, intimate attachment.

Queer youth may lose access to supports that can assist in understanding the process of developing healthy, intimate relationships. Further exacerbating this issue, society

offers few positive, substantive, queer identified, relationship role models that youth can observe to learn how to become a supportive, nurturing, intimate companion within their same sex relationship. Even key political and entertainment figures are hesitant to disclose their queer sexual orientation due to the fear of societal stigmatization and discrimination. In addition, development of same sex sexuality is rarely addressed within learning institutions leaving queer adolescents little, readily accessible resources to assist in guiding identity and intimate relationship development.

The bulk of research on queer youth has focused on drug and alcohol abuse, engagement in “risky” sexual behaviors, anti-gay victimization, depression and suicide (Harper & Schneider, 2003; Meyer, 2003; Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, & Gwadz, 2002; Sandfort, Melendez, & Diaz, 2007; Ueno, 2005; Weber, 2008; Zamboni & Crawford, 2007). The behaviors found in the above research are not exhibited by queer youth only. This research focus may be an indication of the homophobia that still exists within the psychological community where being of queer identity is considered a deficiency. In a diversion from this antiquated research perspective, recent published research from Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, and Sanchez (2009) found that the lack of familial support or outright rejection of queer youth’s sexual orientation was the factor that led to negative health outcomes for queer youth such as higher suicide rates, increased symptoms of depression, increased drug and alcohol use and increased participation in sexual behavior that put youth in jeopardy of contracting sexually transmitted infections or HIV. Overall, most research focused on queer youth has not addressed the resilient behaviors, attitudes and characteristics many queer youth and adults develop to assist in negotiating a homophobic and heterosexist society.

Past research coming from a queer disadvantage stance has been useful in drawing clinical attention to the impact homophobia and stigmatization has on queer persons. Another benefit of this research viewing the queer experience as a disadvantage is that it has drawn attention to the fact that heterosexism and homophobia exists. The acknowledgment of the existence of homophobic and heterosexist oppression may contribute to today's youth's resiliency. Similar to the benefits of the feminist movement in forcing attention to be paid to misogyny and male gender privilege, identifying and acknowledging the societal trauma queer youth contend with may assist with developing solutions and creating a healing process. Finally, no research to date has explored the ways in which queer youth negotiate societal stigma, heterosexism and homophobia to develop attachment within their same sex relationships in healthy, helpful, and individually meaningful ways.

#### *Statistics of Queer Individuals*

Typically queer identified persons are thought to comprise ten percent of the population of the United States. Although argued to be grossly underreported, the United States 2000 Census information found 657,048 same sex couples (United States Census, 2000). In Philadelphia, a Youth Risk Behavior Survey of randomly sampled, public high school students is conducted every few years to understand youth sexual risk. In 2003, three percent of the City's sampled youth reported same sex, sexual behaviors and an additional two percent reported both same sex and opposite sex, sexual behaviors. More male than female identified students reported same sex, sexual partners. From the data collected on sexually active female identified students, four percent had sex with same sex partners and three percent had sex with both female and male sex partners. From the



data collected on sexually active, male identified students, six percent had sex with a same sex partner and two percent had sex with both female and male identified partners (City of Philadelphia, 2007).

In 2004, Philadelphia Health Management Corporation (PHMC) conducted a randomized household, health survey for the southeastern region of Pennsylvania. Four hundred and seventy-five youth between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four participated in Philadelphia County alone. Five percent of these participants reported sex with same sex partners and two percent reported sexual behaviors with both same sex and opposite sex partners. From this data, PHMC projected 9,300 Philadelphian youth between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four that, behaviorally, could be classified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (City of Philadelphia, 2007).

A new trend among queer adolescents is to reject the lesbian, gay or bisexual label (Savin-Williams, 2005). This label rejection makes census type surveying challenging and ultimately inaccurate. Savin-Williams found that the queer label is less important to the current adolescent generation. Savin-Williams attributes this non-labeling change to a “redefining” of sexuality. What was not mentioned by Savin-Williams was that this trend may also be indicative of youth socioeconomic status and/or possible backlash to and resiliency of youth challenging queer stigma. Despite this resilient adaptation, both Savin-Williams (1994) and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) have documented the discrimination queer youth face on a consistent basis when seeking an education. In a 2005 national high school survey, the GLSEN found that 75.4% of United States’ students heard derogatory remarks made about queer persons and nearly 89.2% of students frequently heard the phrase “that’s so gay” used as a negative

connotation. Approximately thirty-eight percent of students experienced some form of physical harassment due to their sexual orientation and approximately twenty-six percent experienced physical harassment based on their expression of gender. Approximately eighteen percent of students reported being physically assaulted due to their sexual orientation and approximately twelve percent reported a physical assault based on their gender expression. Further, the GLSEN found that this harassment resulted in youth skipping school and that youth who experienced frequent physical harassment more often reported a decision to abandon the pursuit of post secondary education (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, 2005).

### Legal Policy

In Pennsylvania, persons who identify as queer or gender variant are not protected from discrimination under Federal and State law. As a result, many queer youth in Pennsylvania leave their secondary educational institutions to begin their adult life only to continue to experience lack of protection and security while pursuing their career aspirations within Pennsylvania. There is no Federal recognition of same sex partnerships and, currently, Pennsylvania State legislators are proposing to amend the State Constitution to ban marriage for same sex partners. Both of these legal barriers impact the ability of a same sex couple to develop a legally recognized stable relationship and family construct within Pennsylvania that includes all of the financial securities afforded therein. Further, youth in Philadelphia, as throughout the United States and far reaching countries, know what legislation like this means for their near and far future relationship potentials. Most importantly, this lack of governmental recognition explicitly informs our

youth as to what the current governing bodies think about the value and importance of their same sex relationships.

Many poor youth are faced with the decision to pursue a career in the United States military. The current “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Pursue, Don’t Harass” (DADT) policy of the United States military forces queer identified persons to lie or hide their sexual orientation when joining the military and/or to maintain their military career. If sexual orientation is disclosed, the military reserves the right to discharge or imprison queer identified military personnel. The United States is identified as the only Western, democratic country with this discriminatory policy in place (Human Rights Commission, 2010). In 2010, the Military Readiness Enhancement Act (MREA) was introduced to the House by Representative Ellen Tauscher (D-CA). MREA would replace the current policy of DADT and would forbid the United States military from discriminating based on sexual orientation. Additionally, this Act would allow persons previously discharged from the military because of their sexual orientation to re-enter.

Currently, the Federal government does not ensure domestic partnerships, does not grant same sex couples equal tax breaks as are given to married heterosexual couples if they access their partner’s health insurance benefits and does not include and, ultimately, protect same sex couples’ right to access the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 if their partner becomes ill (Human Rights Campaign, 2008). This lack of legal protection and overt policies to deter recognition of and support for same sex relationships and protection of employment and employment benefits for same sex couples directly impacts an adolescent / young adult who is beginning to establish independence, financial stability and a family. Further, these discriminatory policies and blatant overlook of legal

protection sends a clear and concise message about the value and worth society and the government considers queer individuals and their relationships to have. Despite this discrimination, queer youth negotiate these homophobic and heterosexist messages and policies, attach to a same sex partner, and develop fulfilling and stable relationships ensuring survival.

### *Queer Relationship Development*

As previously stated, most research on queer youth has focused on the negative impact oppression has on the queer community and how this marginalization, discrimination and rejection creates minority stress. Some of these queer youth continue to contend with the negative effects of oppression and many more overcome the negative impact of minority stress to live productive, healthy, satisfying lives with gratifying, secure, intimate relationships. Despite lack of current institutionalized support by society and the likelihood that queer youth may be at different stages of their identity development when first considering partnering, many queer identified persons develop long term, same sex, committed partnerships.

Most populations that contend with oppression and subsequent marginalization can and will use their family and intimate partner as a secure base to receive support for managing and coping with this discrimination. When a threat is perceived or fear or discomfort is felt because of societal oppression, the attachment system of a person is activated to provide safety and support. Seeking close proximity to an attachment figure is an indication of a functional attachment process and an effective coping strategy (Forgas, Williams, & von Hippel, 2003). Queer youth may not have many support options or attachment figures they can seek out for comfort when experiencing fear,

threat or discomfort as a result of their sexual orientation. For queer youth, their sexuality and subsequent same sex relationship is the primary target for the oppressive societal messages. As a result, seeking emotional and physical affection may be uncomfortable for either partner because it can draw unwanted attention to this same sex union possibly putting each partner in danger both emotionally and physically.

Persons who are avoidantly or anxiously attached tend to appraise others more negatively than securely attached individuals. These appraisals of others are also transferred onto a person's intimate relationship partner (Forgas, Williams, & von Hippel, 2003). If queer youth feel negatively about their sexual orientation identity, it is possible the youth will project these homonegative beliefs and feelings onto their same sex partner. In turn, this homonegativity could challenge the ability of youth to provide comfort and security to their same sex partner especially if this partner experiences discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Further compounding this issue, attachment insecurity has been found to limit the caregiving and nurturing abilities of the insecurely attached person. This inability is displayed even when another is in need of nurturing and caregiving rupturing the ability to form a securely attached relationship. Additionally, queer youth have not escaped the socialization process in which queer identified persons are believed to be of insignificant value to society. This socialization process may also interfere with partners viewing each other as persons who are trustworthy, valuable and healthy both emotionally and physically.

This socialization process may also affect queer youth self esteem and the projection and internalization of low self esteem and societal worth may impact the queer relationship attachment process. Without positive messages of self-worth, queer youth

may experience challenges in developing feelings of attachment making it difficult for youth to adjust and master intimacy, develop feelings of self-worth, develop interpersonal skills and, finally, develop satisfying relationships that provide emotional support.

Queer youth also do not typically have caregivers who are in same sex relationships allowing queer youth access to an intimate, relational construct model they can either emulate or oppose. Additionally, this family of origin may not be a secure attachment source the queer identified youth can access for support due to the family of origin's homophobia. Primary caregivers who have not been subjected to the oppression felt by persons who have a same sex sexual orientation may only be able to provide limited knowledge, insight and understanding into the ways in which a queer identified couple can manage the effects societal oppression has on their relationship.

Due to this individual, familial, social, and societal discrediting and oppression, queer identified persons may struggle with developing secure attachment to their same sex partner. Few safe spaces exist for young queer persons to explore how to negotiate and develop positive, loving, secure and supportive intimate relationships. Even when queer persons, young and old, succeed in developing a secure, intimate relationship, they do not receive the same societal recognition and support as their heterosexual counterparts. Despite these challenges, many queer persons have found resilient ways to develop long lasting, nurturing and securely attached, intimate relationships.

## Chapter 2

With the influences of Darwinism, Bowlby (1969) developed a theory of attachment to explain human behavior and to understand the human psyche. The basis of Bowlby's theory understands human beings as driven to attach to other human beings in an effort to promote and ensure continuation of the species. Succinctly, Bowlby (1979) conceived of attachment behavior as any behavior "...that results in a person attaining or retaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual..." (p.129). Although most early research focused on the attachment behaviors of infants and children, Bowlby understood attachment driven behavior as enduring from infancy until death or, in Bowlby's words "from the cradle to the grave" (1988, p. 82) and viewed the ability to form emotionally intimate bonds with others as a fundamental part of humanity.

### Bowlby

In an effort to understand the development of attachment theory, a brief history of Bowlby's early life experiences will be reviewed. Bowlby grew up in a financially stable family and most of his rearing was done by hired caregivers resulting in limited, direct, affectional experiences with his mother and father (Holmes, 1993). This familial experience seems to have laid the groundwork for Bowlby's lifelong interest in and pursuit of understanding attachment. In his early twenties, Bowlby moved to London and began his medical studies. Like many other theorists of this time, Bowlby (Fonagy, 2001) became interested in human development when working clinically with institutionalized, adolescent males. Bowlby explored the impact disruption and separation from the youths' primary, maternal attachment had on the youth's adjustment. This work experience peaked Bowlby's curiosity about the impact institutionalization had on youth and their

relationships and a developing belief that infants are biologically driven to attach for survival. Bowlby's emerging theory countered Freud's (1896) theoretical work on infants and their drive to meet libidinal needs. While working with two social workers, Bowlby was introduced to "transgenerational transmission of neurosis..." (Holmes, 1993, p. 20). With this introduction, Bowlby began to explore the impact environmental influences had on a child's attachment style.

### Attachment Theory

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) grew out of object relations theory and identifies and emphasizes three core elements. Firstly, the identification of a primary, biological human function of developing and maintaining emotional bonds with others through the use of "...working models of self and attachment figure in relationship with each other" (p. 120). Bowlby understood the development and perpetuation of this emotional intimacy as controlled by the central nervous system. Secondly, Bowlby viewed the mother-child relationship and other relational experiences in childhood as having a powerful effect on childhood development. This mother-child relationship was viewed as primary and as having the most impact on the development of attachment style. Lastly, Bowlby challenged Freud's topographical and structural hypotheses and emphasized his belief that persons do not develop through stages of psychological progression, become fixated in a stage of psychological development or regress to a specific phase of psychological development.

Breaking from Freud's theory, Bowlby (1979) viewed humans as attaching to persons who are viewed as wise and can provide support, protection and comfort; Bowlby viewed attachment as enduring and connected to strong emotional responses; and he viewed



attachment as focal from infancy throughout the third year of life with attachment being a learned, organized and biological process. Attachment processes were understood by Bowlby (1969) as an innate process within the infant that existed to ensure that the biological and emotional needs of the infant are met. If threatened with real or imagined harm, the child experienced anxiety or fear. This anxiety (Bowlby, 1973) or fear was seen as the trigger for the attachment behavioral system to be activated. Bowlby felt that this response confirmed his belief that the attachment process was a behavioral system. Although lasting throughout a person's lifetime, Bowlby understood attachment styles as primarily forged during childhood, but fluid in nature. Finally, Bowlby identified infants as having specificity and preference for attachment figures especially an attachment figure that provides for the infant's basic needs, is accessible, fosters feelings of comfort and felt security.

#### *Secure and Insecure Attachment*

The ability to forge intimate, emotional connection is fundamental to all humans with this intimate bond existing and persisting if a secure base is provided for the infant. Support, consistency, comfort and protection are essential components to promoting a secure base for infants and Bowlby (1973) identified this secure base as central for the development of secure attachment. Secure attachment exists when a child views the primary attachment figure as being responsive to need and readily and consistently accessible. According to this theory, caregivers who do not provide a child with a strong, secure base to support and foster attachment will have a child who is insecurely attached. Bowlby believed that a person who has insecure attachment early in life will have challenges developing healthy, affectional bonds throughout the lifecycle. Despite this,

Bowlby also indicated that the provision of a secure base later in life could effect positive change in regards to attachment style.

Bowlby (1969) identified children as working to maintain close proximity to their mother. He indicated that the type of caregiving a mother provides her child impacts the way in which attachment to others develops. Children who are raised in an environment in which secure attachment is challenged respond initially with protest when threatened with the loss of accessibility to the primary attachment object, leading to the development of feelings of despair and, finally, detachment. Bowlby also noted that, by age three, children can accept their caregiver's departure and engage in play, maintain a conditional feeling of security and use other figures as attachment objects as necessitated.

In addition to the premise that attachment is biological and exists to ensure that the child gets her or his primary needs met to support survival, Bowlby felt that a child would deny her or his own internal desires and inclinations in an effort to ascertain and maintain attachment. As a result, Slade (2000) identified and understood this component of attachment theory as the child developing a false self. Secondly, Bowlby (1969) felt that children would sacrifice their self needs and wants to maintain attachment and a relationship to the primary figure even if this caretaker was abusive. This was done to protect against any disruption to the primary attachment relationship because, if disrupted, the child would experience vulnerability. Initially, Bowlby felt attachment only assisted in maintaining physical needs, but later viewed attachment as central to meeting the emotional needs of the child.

Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) identified three different styles of attachment dependant on caregiver availability, accessibility and responsiveness to the

child's behavioral efforts to ensure proximity and comfort. These attachment styles are as follows: secure, anxious/ambivalent and avoidant. If caregivers were available, accessible and responsive to their child, then the child developed a secure attachment style.

Caregivers who abandoned or rejected the child or if the child perceived caregiver abandonment or rejection, threatened loss of love or actual loss of love or if the caregiver is unresponsive to the child's needs, then an anxious/ambivalent or avoidant attachment style will develop. The anxious/ambivalent attachment style manifests in attachment protest whereas the avoidant attachment style manifests as detachment. Bowlby determined that anxious/ambivalent or avoidant styles of attachment were the cause of neuroses in adulthood.

#### *Internal Working Models and Homophobia*

Bowlby (1973) further developed attachment theory to include internal cognitive constructs that Bowlby identified as internal working models (IWM). These IWMs were created and developed out of the child's experience of the accessibility of the primary attachment figure. According to Bowlby, IWMs were also thought to create the basis of a person's understanding of self and other. These IWM are developed by the child's actual and perceived historical ability to engage the caregiver in responding to her or his needs. Through these experiences, Bowlby stated that an IWM is created for the other and of the self. If a child experiences rejection by the primary attachment figure, then feelings of low self-worth develop.

Individual IWMs are significantly influenced by socially determined norms on behavior and relationships. Persons living in America experience entrenched societal homophobia and heterosexism. These messages also communicate an ascribed value and

worth to individuals. If and when an adolescent begins to question sexual orientation identity, they must also contend with societal and familial messages that informed their understanding of queer and heterosexual sexuality. Ultimately, these messages impact an adolescent's developed IWM and feelings of self-worth. When an adolescent questions sexuality and begins to form an awareness of same sex attraction, they have an additional layer of stigma and resulting psychological distress to contend with during identity development (Herek & Garnets, 2007).

Sherry (2007) found that persons who develop insecure attachment styles report an increased amount of internalized homophobia. Sherry argued for increased attachment focused, therapeutic treatment to rectify this issue so that clients can experience a secure attachment base and alter pre-existing, negative IWMs. Although therapeutic treatment may be an advantageous means to developing a secure attachment base, this does not seem to be the essential solution for an amplified positive effect. Rather, challenging societal homophobia and heterosexism may be a more productive and long lasting route possibly guaranteeing a positive impact on attachment in queer identified persons. Despite this ingrained, societal experience of discrimination and oppression, Sherry (2007) stated that IWMs can be reversed later in life if the child or adult has reparative attachment experiences in good quality and quantity.

#### *Queer Relationships and Attachment*

Bowlby (1969) noted the change in attachment style during adolescence. Similar to Erikson's theory, adolescents move from primary attachment to family of origin to seeking a primary attachment that exists with other peers or adults outside of the family of origin. Additionally, adolescents are thought to begin to forge attachments to groups

and organizations with ideological beliefs that coincide with the adolescent's developing beliefs, morals, ethics and interests versus prior partiality to areas of caregiver interest. During adulthood, Bowlby identified adults as seeking close proximity to their primary attachment figure in times of distress, sickness, danger or adversity. When experiencing a traumatic event or threat, adolescent or adult persons may not initially seek comfort and protection from their family of origin. Instead, attachment behavior is educed and adolescents and adults are thought to seek comfort and closeness from a primary partner or individual they view as trusted and safe. For queer youth, this primary partner and same sex relationship can be the target creating the feelings of distress, danger or adversity due to societal homonegative oppression.

Little empirical research has been published on the impact homophobia has on same sex couples and their attachment process. One of the few studies conducted on this issue was completed by Rostosky, Riggle, Gray, and Hatton (2007). Using qualitative methods, Rostosky et al. studied twenty male and twenty female same sex couples and the impact perceived stigma, discrimination, rejection, disclosure and internalized homophobia had on their same sex relationship. These researchers explored ways couples negotiated societal biases limiting legal rights; lack of positive, visible, couple role models; anticipated and real rejection; disclosure of their intimate relationship, concealment of sexual identity and internalized homophobia. Rostosky et al. found that differing states of sexual orientation disclosure and internalized homophobia impacted the quality of the couple's relationship. Additionally, couples generally reported that coping with societal homophobia actually enhanced their relationship because they depended on each other for support. Some couples also bonded by politicizing their sexuality and sexual identity

through engagement in political activism specifically focusing on queer rights as a way to combat homophobia. Rostosky et al. concluded that this politicizing seemed to empower the couple and was identified as a resilient coping strategy.

Conversely, sexual orientation disclosure and inadequate social support negatively impacted these relationships because of the chronic stress related to disclosure decisions and limited social support. Additionally, Rostosky et al. identified inadequate social support and a general sense of invisibility as exacerbating "...this sense of isolation among these same-sex couples" (2007, p. 398). Critiques of this study are as follows: no reflexivity statement was included, the population was predominantly Caucasian, couples were interviewed together, there was no triangulation of data and no deviant case analyses were included.

To understand the impact gender fluidity had on attachment, Landolt, Bartholomew, Saffrey, Oram, & Perlman (2004) analyzed gender non-conformity and the attachment styles of 300 gay and bisexually identified men and 876 heterosexually identified men. The study consisted of two phases; the first being a telephone survey and the second being a face to face interview. Landolt et al.'s study utilized in-person interviews for data collection. One hundred and ninety-one gay and bisexual men completed both portions of the study. At the time the study was conducted, two of these participants were in an opposite-sex intimate relationship. The study interviews lasted approximately two hours and also included a questionnaire.

Landolt et al. found that gender non-conformity in childhood contributed to attachment avoidance. It was concluded that this avoidant attachment style was the result of gender non-conforming behavior in childhood contributing to "...maternal, paternal,

and peer rejection” (Landolt et al., 2004, p. 124). Specifically, paternal rejection “...predicted adult attachment anxiety...” and “...adult attachment avoidance” (p. 124). Previous studies on heterosexuals found that parental relationships affected the quality of intimate adult attachment (Hazen & Shaver, 1987). That is, the recollection of the childhood relationship with their opposite sex parent was a predictor of the attachment style with their adult, opposite sex, intimate partner. Landolt et al. used similar reasoning to conclude that same sex, parental relationships may impact the quality of adult, same-sex, intimate, attachment security.

Landolt et al. (2004) also found that positive peer relationships favorably influence attachment styles and that peer relationships were a deterrent in the development of anxious and avoidant attachment styles. This may be an indication that queer identified persons rely more on their peers than on their families of origin for emotional caretaking which challenges Bowlby’s idea that caregiver/child attachment is the most important relationship especially when considering emotional survival. Increased attachment feelings towards accepting peers or one’s intimate partner may foster the ability for queer youth to challenge past IWMs contributing to low self-worth developed through familial and societal messages of homophobia.

When exploring attachment styles in relation to sexual orientation stigma, Zakalik and Wei (2006) determined that anxious attachment had a “strong positive association with perceived discrimination” (p. 310). Zakalik and Wei recruited 234 participants who identified as gay and male and were over the age of eighteen years through queer community sources. Participants identified as Caucasian approximated 77 percent of the sample while four percent identified as African-American and about eleven percent did

not identify their race. The remaining sample in this study identified as Latino, Asian, Native American or multiracial. Participants were contacted through the Internet and directed to a web based survey. In addition, the researchers had direct contact with participants who were recruited at various queer identified agencies and groups. Face to face contacts were given a pencil and paper version of the Internet survey. Through this data collection, Zakalik and Wei found that high levels of attachment anxiety may cause individuals to pay increased attention to rejection messages. This increased sensitivity for detecting discrimination was related to queer males with anxious attachment styles. This attachment style in conjunction with perceived or experienced discrimination caused the research participants studied to be more susceptible to depression. The dynamic of an anxious attachment style joined with the experience of discrimination created a vicious cycle in which an increase in perceived discriminatory signals enhanced or activated depressive symptoms. Zakalik and Wei concluded that anxious attachment may contribute to the development of a negative sense of self.

Contrarily, Zakalik and Wei (2006) also found that avoidant attachment styles in queer men may be more likely to foster the development of a positive sense of self. This positive working model allowed individuals to ignore or defend against discriminatory and negative behaviors and validate their sense of self and sexual orientation because these men were less likely to feel dependent on the person making the negative statement about the person's sexual orientation. Attachment avoidance may serve as a coping mechanism for queer identified persons in an effort to regulate affect. Additionally, the tendency to withdraw or feel less dependent on another may reduce any risk of being rejected by another. Although an avoidant attachment style may benefit queer persons in



defending against oppressive messages, Bowlby's theory of attachment indicates that this avoidant attachment style would interfere with the development of an emotionally connected and nurturing, intimate relationship.

Mohr and Fassinger (2006) explored the impact stigma, sensitivity, identity confusion resulting from stigma, identity superiority and internalized homophobia had on same sex couples through a mail survey. This is one of the first studies to examine the idea of collective identity within the same sex, couple construct. Mohr and Fassinger's study recruited 922 queer identified participants through queer email lists and an advertisement in a queer identified newspaper. Two hundred and seventy-four participants identified as female, same sex couples and 187 identified as a same sex, male couple. Participants ranged in age from eighteen to 68 years and the length of time of the relationship was a mean of 6.31 years. Approximately 85% of the participants identified as Caucasian, 2.3% identified as African-American and 2.7% identified as Latino/a/Hispanic, 4.2% identified as multiracial.

Results of this quantitative research found that the perception of the quality of the same sex relationship was generally predicted by the individual's identity, not their partner's identity (Mohr & Fassinger, 2006). High levels of internalized homophobia were equated with low levels of relational quality. Among the research findings, men were found to experience greater sensitivity to stigma than women causing decreased ratings of relationship quality. Perceived similarity with the comfort of identifying as queer between the two individuals of the couple construct had a significant effect on the perceived quality of the relationship. Additionally, persons who identified a sense of queer superiority were less satisfied in their relationship. Mohr and Fassinger concluded

that projected queer superiority may be the result of low self-esteem combined with identity confusion. Additionally, this sense of queer superiority may be indicative of the developmental stage of acceptance of a queer sexual orientation as indicated by Cass' theory (1979) of sexual identity formation.

Similar to Zakalik and Wei's findings (2006), Mohr and Fassinger found that "high levels of attachment anxiety are characterized by emotional hyperarousal and preoccupation with fear of abandonment..." (2003, p. 483) with attachment avoidance decreasing the likelihood of a person relying or trusting another's responsiveness to their emotional needs. When queer persons disclose their sexual orientation to another adult with an unspecified sexual orientation identity, they may anticipate fear, rejection, physical harm and disapproval.

Using participants from an earlier and larger study of same sex relationships, Mohr and Fassinger (2003) looked at same sex intimate relationships to analyze attachment in queer persons. In an effort to increase the potential respondents of color, Mohr and Fassinger advertised and sought research participants at a Black Pride event. This study had 288 female identified respondents and 201 male identified respondents ranging from eighteen to 68 years of age. Despite their efforts for inclusivity, the bulk of the respondents identified as Caucasian (n=415) with a n=13 for African-American participants, n=7 for Asian identified participants and a n=13 for Latino/a/Hispanic participants. To reduce the correlation of scores between same-sex couples, random selection of one partner from each couple within the larger study of same-sex intimate relationships was used.

In this research, Mohr and Fassinger found that negative identity formulation and decreased self acceptance were correlated with high levels of anxiety and avoidance. Conversely, persons who disclose their sexual orientation indicated decreased levels of anxiety and avoidance. Furthermore, these findings tended to correlate with a paternal level of acceptance of the subject's sexual identity. Avoidant individuals were less likely to trust others or disclose their sexual orientation. This is important for queer persons because secure attachment increases the likelihood that queer persons will seek support and ultimately develop a positive, secure sense of self allowing for rich, fulfilling relationships. Support seeking and emotionally nurturing relationships also allow persons to counter the negative effects of stress. Furthermore, a secure attachment style fosters secure intimate attachment to one's partner.

Looking solely at female identified queer persons, Gold (2003) found that lesbian relationships were intensely fused compared to male-female intimate relationships. It was proposed that this may be a survivor strategy allowing female partners to negotiate the impact a sexist, patriarchal, heterosexist and homophobic society has on the relationship. This attachment pattern may also be typical of relationships in which each partner has not experienced societal privilege. As a result, the partners adjust their attachment approach in relation to their partner which results in a viable coping strategy to counteract societal experiences of oppression. Additionally, many women have been socialized and/or are biologically predisposed to attach emotionally to others. This dynamic may also impact attachment processes and styles and gender differences with attachment was given little to no exploration by Bowlby.

Finally, Sherry (2007) used the following instruments to determine whether internalized homophobia was related to insecure attachment: Harder Personal Feelings Questionnaire, Internalized Homophobia Scale, Relationship Scales Questionnaire. The female and male identified participants (n=286) responded to Internet postings requesting participation in this research with the majority of the sample identifying as Caucasian. Sherry found that insecurely attached adults were more likely to contend with internalized homophobia causing increased anxiety within interpersonal relationships. Secure attachment usually resulted in decreased feelings of shame, guilt and internalized homophobia, fostering the development of secure, interpersonal relationships. These findings suggest the importance of further research to understand resiliency characteristics that promote secure, same sex relationships.

These reviewed studies (Gold, 2003; Landolt, Bartholomew, Saffrey, Oram, & Perlman, 2004; Mohr & Fassinger, 2003; Mohr & Fassinger, 2006; Rostosky, Riggle, Gray, & Hatton, 2007; Sherry, 2007; Zakalik & Wei, 2006) undoubtedly illustrate the impact homophobia, heterosexism, lack of social support and gender have on queer attachment. Further, these studies succinctly illustrate Bowlby's conceptualization of the environmental impact on the system of attachment, IWMs and attachment behaviors. These studies demonstrate the resilient ways queer adults have learned to negotiate environmental stressors related to their sexual orientation and gender identity and its impact on their intimate attachment behavior.

#### Queer Youth Attachment

Sexual orientation identity is not usually thought to enter awareness until late childhood or early adolescence (Diamond, 2006). Many caregivers assume their child is

heterosexual because this has been deemed the societal norm. As a result, caregivers treat their child accordingly. Therefore, most attachment theorists and other theorists of human development have not acknowledged the impact assumed sexual orientation has on sexual identity development (Patterson, 1995).

Unfortunately, no researcher has explored how assumed heterosexuality may alienate and challenge the attachment of the child to the caregiver. Along these same lines, researchers believe there is little support for the idea that attachment processes are different for queer identified persons. Although I am not suggesting that queer persons are inherently different from other persons, I do believe that the child/caregiver attachment process of queer identified persons is inevitably and understandably affected by homonegativity, heterosexism and the gender binary that is pervasive and ingrained in American society. This is an underdeveloped, critical aspect that needs further examination through the use of attachment theory and almost all other theories of human behavior.

Busseri, Willoughby, Chalmers, and Bogaert (2006) found that heterosexual youth feel more connected to their heterosexual caregivers than queer youth regardless of previous attachment experiences. To further support this, Maguen et al. (2002) found that queer youth were more withdrawn from their heterosexual families of origin as a result of their sexual orientation identity. These researchers attempted to determine what characteristics allowed queer youth and adults to come out to their families of origin and within close relationships. It is interesting to consider this finding. Almost all stigmatized and discriminated populations have caregivers or families who are challenged by the same stigmatization. Queer youth typically do not. This may be the precipitating reason

for the decreased feelings of attachment some queer youth experience towards their predominately heterosexual families or origin. Disclosing sexual orientation may foster feelings of secure attachment because there is no longer an unspoken secret between the queer youth and their family of origin.

As stated in chapter one, an infinitesimal number of research studies have focused on the resiliency of queer identified youth or how their developed attachment styles may promote resiliency. Instead, the bulk of research has focused on drug and alcohol abuse, engagement in “risky “sexual behaviors, anti-gay victimization, depression and suicide (Harper & Schneider, 2003; Meyer, 2003; Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, & Gwadz, 2002; Sandfort, Melendez, & Diaz, 2007; Ueno, 2005; Weber, 2008; Zamboni & Crawford, 2007). Opposing these studies, Diamond (2003) found that queer youth were more focused on coming out and relationships than on drug and alcohol use. Comparable to Maguen et al.’s (2002) findings, Diamond identified queer adolescent peer relations as serving an important function in maintaining mental health stability than their heterosexual counterparts because these relationships mitigated rejection from the community, families of origin and general societal stigma. These peer relationships seem to provide the secure base for a queer youth’s emotional and physical survival.

Diamond makes a strong case for future studies centering on the importance of fostering positive messages of queer adolescent attraction because of the impact societal stigma has on self-esteem and feelings of social competency. Without positive messages of self-worth, queer youth may experience challenges in developing feelings of same-sex attachment making it difficult for youth to adjust and master intimacy, develop feelings of self-worth, develop interpersonal skills and then develop satisfying relationships that

provide emotional support. Diamond identified this as even more important for queer youth because these youth rarely have access to queer role models due to the heterosexual relational construct portrayed by dominant society. Since the development of Bowlby's theory (1969) on attachment and Erikson's (1980) understanding of the increased awareness and importance of community during adolescence, limited research has been done to understand how intimate attachment styles may be a distinctive process for queer youth.

Despite historical and current heterosexism and homophobia clouding research, research pioneers have found that queer youth rely on attachments to their peers more than their families of origin and have begun to explore the resiliency of queer youth. Diamond (2003) furthered that queer youth sometimes pursue opposite sex friendships with heterosexuals in an effort to gain acceptance within dominant heterosexual society. This was found to be especially true of queer, male identified youth and was understood as an indication of resilient behavior. Diamond concluded that queer, male identified youth perceived female identified peers as more empathetic than heterosexual males leading to efforts to develop friendships and inclusion with female, heterosexually identified peers.

Tracy, Shaver, Albino, and Cooper (2003) found that youth with avoidant attachment styles had sex to lose their virginity, used drugs or alcohol while having sex and experienced a decreased sexual drive with decreased feelings of intimacy with their opposite sex partners. It could be concluded that this attachment style may very well relate to queer youth if they are having sex with opposite sex partners. This tactic may be

a coping strategy so that queer youth can engage in opposite gender, sexual behaviors to ensure connection to their much needed peer supports.

Queer youth intimate relationships may also experience this challenge because youth are contending with societal homophobia and oppression. Each partner of the relational dyad symbolizes and reminds youth of the oppression they experience because of their queer sexual orientation. Moreover, queer youth may perceive their partner negatively due to societal homophobia and heterosexism causing disruption within the attachment process. No literature or research exists explaining or providing an understanding of how queer youth provide the secure base and care necessary to have a fulfilling relationship when contending with societal oppression and discrimination.

### Sexuality

Bowlby (1969) understood attachment behavior and sexual behavior as being connected, but from two discrete behavioral systems. These two behavioral systems are understood as separate because activation the two systems are triggered by different events. A person could be attracted to and seek sexual gratification from another, but not necessarily feel attached. Further, the development of functional attachment behaviors is understood as occurring in infancy whereas a functional, sexual behavioral system develops at a later stage in human development. Bowlby understood sexuality through evolutionary theory and saw queer sexual identity and same sex sexual behaviors as an evolutionary glitch. Despite this, Bowlby acknowledged same sex, sexual behaviors in many animals and saw this as a way of illustrating the existence of environmental variability. Despite never directly researching same sex attachment, Bowlby (Mohr, 2008) in no way indicated a belief that intimate attachment processes existed only for



heterosexual couples. Furthermore, Ainsworth (1985) indicated that queer sexual attachment likely functions in the same way that heterosexual attachment functions, but that queer couples experience additional challenges because of the lack of societal and legal recognition of their same sex feelings of intimate attachment.

Eyre, Milbrath, and Peacock (2007) found that African-American, queer identified youth spent more time getting to know their sexual partners while appearing distant and reproachful before initiating sex. Eyre et al. concluded that youth may do this in an effort to ensure safety with sex. These researchers also hypothesized that queer, African-American youth may engage in this type of behavior in an effort to learn how to develop intimate relationships since they have not been subjected to same sex, intimate, relational role models. Elizure and Mintzer (2003) found similar findings and hypothesized that queer identified youth have an extra step in identity formation which may impact attachment processes within relationships. If queer youth do not have a positive sense of self-worth or a viable understanding of their sense of self due to societal degradation, it is an exceptional challenge to develop secure, intimate attachment. Finally, Gwadz, Clatts, Leonard, and Goldsamt (2004) found that queer male youth who had disclosed their sexual orientation displayed more resilient behaviors than male youth who identified as having sex with men, but did not identify as bisexual or gay.

### *Environmental Influences and Attachment*

One of the interesting elements of Bowlby's attachment theory is that Bowlby incorporated his understanding of environmental influences when developing his theory on attachment and placed increased emphasis on the ways in which environmental factors influenced people. Within attachment theory, a person was not viewed as existing in a

separate, closed system, but was interconnected with the power to influence and be influenced by others. Attachment theory's inclusivity of the environment allows reparation of insecure attachment through a dyadic relationship existing within the environment. When in therapy, reparative work can be achieved when the client and therapist create a secure relationship. While the client relates to the therapist through her or his IWMs, the therapist works to create a secure base so that securely attached feelings and bonds can be fostered.

Additionally, insecure attachment can be healed through peer and intimate relations creating an option to heal outside of a therapeutic relationship. Attachment theorists (Bowlby, 1979; Main, 1991) believed that most persons continue to perpetuate their established attachment beliefs and experiences within adult relationships, but persons can also experience their peers or intimate partner, at times, quite differently than their previous childhood attachment experiences.

Although Bowlby took into consideration the impact the environment and human relationships have on attachment, his discussion of the environment was limited. Little to no writings by Bowlby exist exploring the impact poverty, classism, racism, homophobia, sexism or violence have on the attachment process. There was no found exploration of a caregiver who faces the challenges of poverty, racism, classism, sexism or homophobia while attempting to ensure basic survival in a violent world and foster emotional safety between child and caregiver. Further, it seems as if Bowlby's attachment theory has been impacted by society's focus on consumerism (Cushman, 1995). A basic assumption of Bowlby's attachment theory is that the role of the child is to consume caregiver affection. This assumption becomes complicated when the foremost need of a child or adolescent

may be a stable society. It seems virtually impossible for a caregiver to create a secure base on a consistent basis when the caregiver is contending with hostile environmental forces.

In looking at environmental stressors, Iwaski and Ristock (2007) used focus groups to gather qualitative data in an effort to increase understanding of experienced stress with lesbian and gay identified adults. Iwaski and Ristock developed focus groups broken into three categories: all men, all women and a mixed sex group. Though qualitative analysis, Iwaski and Ristock sought to understand the meaning, perception and major sources of stress in lesbian and gay identified adults. These researchers found eight stress themes: coming out about sexual orientation, relationship and family issues, conflict with sexuality, societal stigma and discrimination, sexuality and aging, sexual and cultural orientations, and finances and work. Specifically, lesbian and gay persons discussed the lack of support they perceived in finding an intimate partner, maintaining an intimate relationship once it was found and the lack of emotional support available to them when ending an intimate relationship as stress inducing events. Additionally, these three groups identified emotional distance between their families of origin and their heterosexual peers as contributing to their feelings of stress. In the end, these researchers concluded that lesbian and gay persons “perceive stress as life itself” (Iwaski & Ristock, 2007, p. 306) with lesbians interpreting stress more negatively than gay men. It is well documented that increased stress levels impacts a person’s physical and emotional health. Increased stress levels felt by queer persons may lead to an increase in susceptibility to psychiatric challenges possibly complicating a partner’s emotional availability and stability within an intimate relationship.

Lannutti (2003) reviewed the impact legalized, same sex marriage had on the queer community after the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court declared that barring civil marriage to same sex couples was unconstitutional. Lannutti recruited 288 subjects through the use of snowball sampling with most participants identifying as Caucasian. A little over half the participants were single females. An anonymous, web-based survey with both open and closed ended questions was used to collect the data. This research found that the ability to access legal civil marriage impacted the queer community. Lannutti identified the following themes: legal equality through the formalization and/or institutionalization of same sex commitment and a belief that societal recognition of queer relationships would add respect and validity to queer relationships.

Lannutti (2005) identified an additional theme of dissenting views in the queer community regarding same sex marriage. Unfortunately, Lannutti never quantified the number of dissenters. For the same reasons the queer community sought legal marriage, queer dissenters disapproved of legal marriage. Specifically, dissenters identified concern about bridging the heterosexual and queer community, dissenters identified concern that same sex marriage would enhance visibility of same sex couples resulting in increased scrutiny of queer couples and queer marriage dissenters identified concern that legalized same sex marriage would alter a queer conceptualization of relational commitment. Lannutti identified these dissenting beliefs as a way to combat internalized homophobia by considering queer identity formulation and queer relationships as fundamentally different and unique.

*Importance of Understanding the Impact of Queer Oppression on Intimate Attachment*

Due to queer oppression, queer identified persons may struggle with developing secure attachment to their same sex partner. Few safe spaces exist for young queer persons to explore how to negotiate and develop positive, loving, secure and supportive intimate relationships. Many times, if queer persons even express reserved feelings of attachment towards their same sex partner in the general public, they are accused of lacking modesty and jeopardizing societal morality. Additionally, queer behaviors of affection and attachment are viewed as flaunting of sexuality even when these behaviors are similar to heterosexual, intimate, public behaviors. This societal double standard continues to send the message that a queer sexual orientation is not acceptable, is immoral and shameful. Even when queer persons succeed in developing a secure, intimate relationship, they do not receive the same societal recognition as their heterosexual counterparts.

Further, the identified research studies point to the strong need for a secure attachment base for queer adolescents and may be an indication that queer youth need safe, supportive queer spaces in an effort to challenge and deter the negative effects of homophobia and heterosexism while nurturing healthy identity formation, sexuality and intimate attachment. Without a safe, supportive environment, queer youth may become psychologically harmed and ultimately challenge the ability of queer youth to develop secure, intimate attachment. Within a created, accepting queer space, queer youth would be given the opportunity to have discourse about homophobia and heterosexism and interact with role models. A safe, supportive queer space may be the secure base queer youth need to explore and develop intimate relationships and attachment bonds. Further,

queer supportive spaces allow queer youth to verbally explore their intimate relationships, voice their concerns about their intimate relationships and problem solve collaboratively on how to address relationship conflicts. Youth can also practice and experience sexual behaviors and attachment focused physical contact in an effort to learn what amount of physical contact feels good, safe and comforting within their relationships. In American society, it seems as if this can rarely happen safely without youth worrying about their physical and emotional safety.

It seems necessary to research the attachment styles of queer identified youth. Without a better understanding of the attachment processes of youth who contend with discrimination and oppression while attempting to develop an adult identity, the field of social work and psychology may continue to pathologize the attachment styles and processes of discriminated populations without information available to make necessary societal changes or recognize resiliency. Elimination of societal homophobia and heterosexism will positively impact the attachment process of queer identified youth allowing youth to display consistent attachment behavior instead of switching between secure, avoidant and anxious attachment styles.

#### *Implications for Clinical Social Work*

As identified by Bowlby, the attachment behavioral system is activated in times of stress or threat. When queer youth experience a lack of safety or general threat because of their sexual orientation, it is thought that they would seek close proximity to and comfort from their intimate partner. Unfortunately, this partner is also symbolic and the target of the oppression. If queer youth are working on the development of their queer sexual orientation, seeking close proximity to their partner may not only be uncomfortable due

to a working through of sexual orientation identity, but also unsafe due to the societal perpetuation of isolation and othering of same sex couples. Therefore, an understanding of how queer youth negotiate this additional stressor to attach to their partner and develop a secure relationship is important for the field of clinical social work.

Given this, youth who develop queer identity undergo a different set of experiences. Therefore, I focused this research on exploring and acquiring information on queer youth's ability to develop attachment as young adults. Despite these challenges, many queer youth have found resilient ways to develop long lasting, nurturing and secure intimate relationships. Subsequently, intensive interviews were conducted in an effort to explore how queer youth negotiate oppression and foster resilient, securely attached, same-sex relationships while working to develop an understanding of how queer youth negotiate attachment to their same sex partner in times of perceived threat due to their queer intimate relationship.

If clinical social workers have access to this empirical knowledge, then the social work field could better assist queer youth in developing healthy, satisfying, secure relationships. Although attachment processes are understood to be biological, the impact homophobia, racism, sexism, poverty, classism and violence has on attachment style cannot be underestimated. For these reasons, attachment processes would require fluidity to ensure survival and proximity seeking based on environmental safety. To date, there is no found research available addressing queer youth attachment when contending with societal oppression. The research herein seeks to fill this gap and serve to encourage both additional research and implementation of findings to better the lives of our extraordinary queer youth.

## Chapter 3: Methods

### Research Questions

This study examined the impact experienced societal oppression of gay, bisexual, and queer male identified, African-American adolescents had on the attachment process and attachment security of their same sex relationship. Through the use of qualitative methods informed by grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), the study's purpose was to develop understanding of the following:

- i) Of the youth surveyed, to what extent does societal homophobia and oppression impact the process of attachment in queer youth's same sex, intimate relationships?
- ii) What factors do the queer youth surveyed identify as contributing to their ability to form positive attachment to intimate same sex partners when contending with oppressive experiences because of their sexual orientation?
- iii) How do the queer youth surveyed maintain feelings of attachment to their same sex partner when their relationship is the target of homonegative hostility?

### Problem Statement

Adolescence is the transitional period from childhood to adulthood. In America, the fundamental focus of adolescence is the development of an adult sense of self and identity with ensuing independence from family of origin. Resolution of adolescence is achieved when youth separate from their family of origin and develop an independent identity. Additionally, this transition is marked with the development of attachment to



persons outside of family of origin who will become the construct of the youth's support system within their chosen community.

Queer youth are a minority subset within America. Despite significant societal changes to ensure equality for all persons, queer youth and the queer community still experience pervasive discrimination and societal oppression due to homophobia. Different from other minority groups, queer youth typically do not have immediate family to teach them how to manage this oppression. More often than not, queer youth are left to figure out how to negotiate and manage societal homophobia and oppression independently. This minority stress brings additional challenges for queer youth to navigate during their transition into adulthood. Supportive relationships that could help to validate and mirror their developing queer identity and assist with navigating the development of intimate relationships are typically insufficient or absent.

On average, a ready made and accessible queer friendly community does not surround sexual and gender variant minority youth. Queer youth must actively search to find queer friendly spaces. The absence of a supportive, easily accessible community leaves youth limited in their ability to explore, understand, accept and nurture their identity. Acceptance and the development of a sexual or gender variant minority identity in conjunction with the ability to successfully cope with a homophobic, transphobic and heterosexist society cultivates the adolescent or young adult's ability to develop securely attached, healthy, satisfying, intimate relationships. Without the foundation of solid identity formation, healthy, intimate relationships are thought to be difficult.

Unlike heterosexual, intimate relationships, the attachment object within queer, intimate relationships is the target of societal oppression. In securely attached, intimate

relationships, individuals turn to their partner in times of stress (Forgas, Williams, & von Hippel, 2003). In queer, intimate partnerships, this relationship may be the target or symbolic of the experienced stress. This experience may challenge the queer, intimate, attachment process. The ability to negotiate this homonegative stress and develop satisfying, intimate relationships is truly illustrative of the resiliency of queer youth.

### Research Design

Since no found research has been completed on the effects of oppression on queer youth and intimate partner attachment, this research was qualitative in design in an effort to develop an understanding of the attachment process of queer youth to their intimate partners when experiencing acute stress due to homophobic oppression. Through the use of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), this qualitative research project was designed to explore the impact of oppression on queer youth attachment. Grounded theory was chosen as the research methodology due to the lack of theory related to queer oppression and adolescent intimate attachment. To assist in understanding queer youth intimate attachment, I used an exploratory, semi-structured interview format with the inclusion of open ended questions. Saturation of themes was met. By identifying and analyzing the themes that emerged from research participant interview responses, I developed an understanding of the impact oppression had on intimate partner attachment, the ways in which queer youth negotiate oppression to maintain felt connection to their same sex partner, and the characteristics of their relational dynamic that those queer youth interviewed believed assisted in maintaining feelings of secure attachment.

### Selection Criteria

Due to the limitations of time, resources, and the need for participant accessibility, a specific subset of the queer community and number of recruited research participants was identified. I reached theme saturation after conducting fourteen interviews. Youth between the ages of eighteen through twenty-four who identified as male, African-American, and queer and had a history of or were currently in a relationship with a person of the same sex were recruited for this study. The age range of eighteen to twenty-four years was chosen because of Erikson's stage theory (1968) indicating the age range for the transition of primary attachment from family of origin to intimate partner attachment.

Further, inclusion eligibility for research participation required youth to be engaged, currently or historically, in a same sex, committed relationship for at least three months. Youth who were not currently engaged in a same gendered relationship needed to have been involved in a committed same sex relationship no more than six months ago. This six month timeframe was established to ensure that the research participants remembered necessary details for the conducted in depth interview process.

Youth who identified and were living as male gendered were included in this research study. Accordingly, youth who identified as transmen, bois and/or were intersexed and identified as male in addition to current or historical engagement in a same-gendered, male with male, relationship met the inclusion criteria for this study.

There was no inclusion criterion established to define a committed relationship other than the research participant identifying the relationship as being emotionally committed to an identified primary partner. Additionally, each research participant agreed to discuss their sexual attraction, any experiences of homophobia or discrimination based on their

sexual orientation, agreed to discuss the dynamics of their relationship, and identified the relationship as currently or historically having the potential for a long term, future oriented commitment. Research participants did not need to have shared living space with their identified primary partner to qualify for this study. To protect youth and ascertain their comfort discussing these issues, I informed the youth at our initial contact about the interview focus.

Exclusion criteria for this research study was as follows: lack of an ability to provide participation consent, an unwillingness to be recorded during the in depth research interview and youth who identified as female or femininely, but were assigned male at birth. Additionally, youth who identified a history of childhood sexual abuse were excluded from the research study because this history of sexual trauma could have lifelong implications on the process of attachment (Brown, 2008). Subsequently no youth identified a history of childhood sexual abuse during the interview process.

I am currently employed by both Mazzoni Center and The Attic Youth Center. Due to my multiple roles as clinician, employee and researcher, I did not recruit any participants whom I directly worked with either currently or historically.

### Instrumentation

For this research, I used a self-developed, in depth, open ended interview guide (appendix A) to direct the qualitative interviews. These questions focused on the identification and development of the attachment process to the participant's same sex partner while exploring the impact societal oppression has on the attachment process. Further, I focused the interview on questions which explored and developed a working knowledge of how the research participants' negotiated this oppression in connection to

their relationship in an effort to maintain feelings of secure attachment when experiencing societal oppression because of their sexual orientation. I reassessed the in depth interview guide after completing the pilot interview and after each of the first five interviews. From this assessment process, I was able to identify pertinent questions that were necessary in developing an understanding of the research participant's relational experience when contending with homophobia. In appendix A, these questions are highlighted yellow.

### Recruitment Strategies

To recruit youth for this study, I created an IRB approved flyer (Appendix B) identifying research participant criteria, the goal of the qualitative study, and the approximate length of the interview, payment for the interview, contact information, and acknowledgment that the interviews will be recorded. I utilized four primary strategies to recruit research participants: dissemination of study information to the Attic Youth Center and Mazzoni Center, which are the primary queer identified agencies within the City of Philadelphia; I conducted outreach efforts at queer venues and community events; informed colleagues who work within the queer community; and utilized snowball sampling.

The Attic Youth Center and Mazzoni Center are two Philadelphia, non-profit agencies who work with queer identified persons. These agencies provide inclusive social services to youth and adults who identify as queer. Specifically, The Attic Youth Center only provides services to youth between the ages of fourteen through twenty-four years. Both the Mazzoni Center and The Attic Youth Center were supportive of this research endeavor. Of these two agencies, five research participants were recruited from outreach

efforts conducted at The Attic Youth Center, one research participant was recruited from the Mazzoni Center, and the remaining eight research participants were recruited from outreach efforts at LGBTQ events in the City of Philadelphia. From the recruited participants, I had three youth who scheduled appointments to be interviewed, but did not follow through with the scheduled appointment.

Outreach efforts were conducted at Philadelphia's Pride event and during two mini-balls at a North Philadelphia located nightclub often frequented by youth who meet the inclusion criteria. Additionally, flyers were posted at a LGBTQ community center within Philadelphia and a Philadelphia-based LGBTQ bookstore. In addition, I distributed flyers to local universities who have LGBTQ student run organizations.

Further, I informed colleagues who work at two major hospitals within Philadelphia that provide medical services to youth. I informed colleagues who are employed by an agency that provides holistic care to the HIV/AIDS community, study information was disseminated to colleagues at the largest HIV/AIDS case management service provider in Pennsylvania, information was provided to medical care providers working at community health centers who reported work with the LGBTQ community, and study information was given to persons who work with LGBTQ adolescents in the Philadelphia public school system. Finally, I informed youth who participated in this study of my continued interest in interviewing persons who meet the inclusion criteria of the study and provided them with flyers so that this information could be forwarded to interested friends or their partner. The initiation of recruitment began in April 2009 and concluded in July 2009.

Through these recruitment strategies, my primary source of participants came from my outreach efforts at the North Philadelphia nightclub, the Attic Youth Center, and

Philadelphia's Pride event. Although flyers were offered to youth at these venues, many persons who expressed interest in participation asked that I contact them to schedule the interview. Due to the marginalized status of these youth, contacting their home and providing identifying information about this study could create an unsafe situation for the youth. As a result, I discussed with youth necessary strategies for phone call backs to ensure essential precautions were in place before contacting youth by phone.

After completing interviews, participants began to refer their friends and primary partners and I achieved the remainder of my recruitment needs through snowball sampling. One of the interesting outcomes of snowball sampling was illustrated during the month of June when most major cities hold their Pride events. After outreach efforts were conducted at Philadelphia's Pride event, I had many youth follow through with interviews because of expressed interest in the topic and a need for financial compensation so that they could attend New York City's Pride event. The week before New York City's Pride event, I conducted five interviews.

### Interview Process

Youth who expressed interest in being interviewed for this study were given a choice between conducting the interview at The Attic Youth Center or Mazzoni Center with at least two different days and times offered as possible interview options. Four out of the fourteen interviews, in addition to the pilot interview, were conducted at The Attic Youth Center and ten interviews were conducted at Mazzoni Center.

Although it was hypothesized that youth may not feel comfortable entering the Attic Youth Center because it is not an anonymous building, I believe that more interviews were completed at Mazzoni Center due to my ability to be more flexible with scheduling

when located at this agency. Further, three youth indicated that they would prefer to be interviewed at Mazzone Center because they were trying to avoid interaction with some of their community peers. Finally, the length of time of the interviews ranged from twenty minutes to sixty minutes with the average interview length being forty minutes. All interviews took place in a private, secure space with the use of white noise machines to protect youth confidentiality.

At the beginning of the interview process, I informed youth that the information collected during the interview process was for the purposes of research. Youth were informed of confidentiality laws and I gained consent for participation in the research study (Appendix C). After consent was obtained, youth were asked basic demographic information including: age, identified sexual orientation, gender identity, racial identity and the length of time of their committed same sex relationship. If youth identified no current committed relationship, I ascertained the last time they were involved in a relationship, the duration of this past relationship and the length of time since the last relationship. All youth who expressed interest in this research study met eligibility criteria. Upon arrival for the scheduled interview, youth were paid \$25.00 for their participation.

An operational definition was offered to clarify queer oppression and racial oppression. The operational definition of queer oppression was defined as discriminatory experiences resulting from a person or system's homophobia and/or dislike of, judgment of, disagreement with or opposition to the participant's sexual orientation or same sex relationship. The operational definition of racial oppression was defined as



discriminatory experiences resulting from a person or system's dislike of, judgment of, opposition to or prejudiced beliefs about the participant's race.

Additionally, an operational definition of attachment was communicated to research participants. This definition of attachment was defined as follows: a person having some feelings of trust in a boyfriend or partner with a belief that this boyfriend/partner more than likely would not purposefully hurt the youth interviewed, a desire to seek out their boyfriend/partner when feeling upset or unsafe, feeling as though the boyfriend/partner can be relied upon for emotional support, affectionate feelings towards the boyfriend/partner and a general feeling of comfort expressing feelings or thoughts to this boyfriend/partner. These definitions were provided to decrease the possible confound variable of racial oppression. All youth interviewed gave verbal confirmation that they conceptualized their feelings of affection towards the current or past boyfriend/partner as matching the operational definition of attachment.

All youth verbalized understanding of these definitions. Interestingly, most youth needed clarity regarding the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation identity. If future research is conducted, this researcher suggests that clarifying definitions regarding these two terms be incorporated into the interview structure.

One of the primary challenges I faced when interviewing the young adults who expressed interest in this study was each youth's tendency to commit to an interview appointment and then arrive at a radically different designated appointment time and, sometimes, day. This challenge was ongoing despite reminder calls made a day prior to the scheduled appointment date and time. This experience created personal difficulties negotiating my work schedule so that I could conduct the interview. As a result, it is

recommended that scheduling flexibility exist when future research is conducted. This schedule flexibility would allow the researcher to meet the research participants' needs for scheduling flexibility.

In an effort to protect the confidentiality of participants, the details of youth's legal and / or chosen names were altered and I modified references to location and event names that could jeopardize the research participant's confidentiality (Appendix D). When transcribing the recorded interviews, I did not include all speech sounds such as contrived starts or sighs. I attempted to identify any pauses or reiterations that seemed significant to the research question. The process of transcription took approximately four months to complete. Finally, interview recordings were destroyed after transcription and hard copies of transcribed interviews were locked in a filing cabinet. Only this researcher had access to the locked filing cabinet. No identifying information was connected to the transcribed interviews or electronic records.

#### Research Participant Statistics

I conducted one pilot interview and completed fourteen subsequent interviews with youth who met the study's criteria for inclusion. Upon the completion of the fifteenth interview, saturation of themes was achieved.

Research participants ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-three years with the average age being 20.8 years. All youth identified as cisgendered due to their identified comfort with their assigned gender at birth (Serano, 2007). In total, eleven research participants identified as either African-American or black. Out of this racial breakdown, six identified as black and five identified as African-American. Three participants identified as racially mixed. The breakdown of racially mixed participants is as follows:

African-American and Japanese, black and Haitian, and black, white and Native American.

Out of the fourteen research participants, twelve identified as gay, one identified as bisexual, and one youth identified as non-label conforming. Nine of the research participants identified an adult attachment figure in childhood that they felt comfortable going to when feeling upset, hurt, had a problem, or felt unsafe. Four identified no adult attachment figure in childhood and one research participant identified feelings of ambivalence about having an attachment figure. To compensate for a lack of an adult attachment figure, one participant identified utilizing a journal to express his emotions and felt that this was his secure object that brought feelings of safety and comfort.

The length of time each participant had been in a relationship ranged from three months to six years. Using youth's identified official length of relationship duration, the average relationship length was seventeen months. Youth used different terminology to identify their same sex partner. Nine out of the fourteen participants termed their same sex partner as their boyfriend. One youth identified his same sex partner as his fiancé, had recently gotten engaged, and was planning a marriage ceremony. Three out of the fourteen youth identified their same sex partner as their lover. One research participant identified his same sex partner as his significant other.

Out of the fourteen participants, two participants were not in a relationship at the time of the interview. One of these two participants had been in a seven month relationship that terminated approximately two months prior to the interview. Another participant identified his one year six month relationship as ending the week prior to the interview, and one interviewee anticipated his relationship ending within the next month due to

experienced homophobia. The pilot interviewee also indicated a plan to terminate his relationship with his partner within the next month due to emotional and physical abuse.

I was also able to interview two sets of couples for this project. Each person in the relational dyad was interviewed individually. One couple had been together for approximately eight months and the other couple had been together for approximately two years. This provided, what felt to be, a comprehensive perspective on these relational dynamics. Out of the fourteen youth interviewed, only one research participant identified being in a mutually agreed upon open relationship.

Ten out of the fourteen youth interviewed were either historically or currently connected to the Attic Youth Center and had received services from this agency. The four remaining research participants were aware of queer youth services in the city, but never engaged in services. All research participants were made aware of counseling services available at both the Attic Youth Center and Mazzoni Center, but none requested a referral from this researcher.

It was thought that the research participants who had received or were receiving services from the Attic Youth Center or Mazzoni Center would have developed a level of comfort with their sexual orientation identity while receiving ongoing adult and peer support with this facet of identity development. It was suggested that this factor would nullify the impact a lack of developed or stable sexual orientation identity may have on the development of queer intimate relationships. Given the constraints of this study, the outcome of this suggestion is inconclusive.

#### *Reflexivity Statement*

Homonegativity and heterosexism are entrenched in American society and inform perspectives. As a researcher engaged in a qualitative methodology, it was necessary to employ tactics that would work to contain my biases, thoughts, feelings, and values while maintaining awareness and insight into the ways in which my identities were impacting interviews and content analysis. Additionally, these inherent biases, values, and thoughts impact critical assessment of the information gathered from each interviewee. As a result, I utilized journaling and coded memos to maintain awareness of my biases and contain my thoughts, feelings, and values.

One of the more challenging issues I faced conducting these interviews was the research participant's inconsistency in committing to agreed upon interview appointment dates and times. Although this dynamic seems consistent with youth presentation, it was often hard to feel relaxed and focused during the interview process due to juggling work responsibilities and schedules to accommodate youth scheduling needs. I am concerned that this added pressure and need for scheduling flexibility may have impacted the quality of the interview process.

Often I noticed myself feeling angry when hearing youth recount their experiences with homophobia. This was especially relevant when youth were discussing their experiences with family members who were the source of experienced homophobia. Youth tended to display flat affect, emotional withdrawal and/or expressed acceptance of familial homophobic belief systems and their resulting experiences. Theoretically, I can understand the need to remain emotionally connected to a primary attachment object despite emotional hurt (Bowlby, 1969; Herman, 1992), but it was often difficult to imagine youth returning to environments in which familial attachment objects were also

sources of pain. To contain these emotions, I utilized journaling at the conclusion of each interview to develop understanding of the sources of my felt emotions.

Further, I noticed feeling anger and upset regarding the societal constraints established by society's homonegativity that youth endured limiting their ability to express their feelings of attachment towards their boyfriend, partner, fiancée, significant other, and/or lover. Although this is the focus of my study, I was not prepared for my emotional reaction to the pervasiveness of this experience. Additionally, many youth expressed acceptance of this stressor and did not indicate interest in directly challenging this experience. This may be due to feelings of disempowerment and a need to maintain environmental safety and security or may indicate identification with the aggressor.

Due to my personal rejection of heterosexual norms such as marriage, I did not ask youth about their interest in marriage, whether they had or were planning a commitment ceremony or ritual, if they had exchanged rings or if they termed their partner their husband or fiancé. Thankfully, my second interviewee indicated his plan to marry his fiancé, which allowed me to ask further research participants about their interest in marriage, a commitment ceremony or some ritual to commemorate their relationship.

Additionally, many youth indicated their surprise at the length of time their relationships had lasted expressing a belief that male, same gendered relationships do not last for long periods of time. Due to my own internalized homonegativity, I noticed that I tended to offer affirmations coinciding with these statements instead of exploring them further. Through self-reflection, I determined that I may not have had the same level of surprise regarding the duration of each participant's relationship if I were interviewing heterosexual youth.

Furthermore, I noticed an ongoing tension between my role as researcher and clinician (Heshusius, 1996). This tension often caused me to pause during the interview in an effort to contain my instinct to pursue a clinical path of inquiry versus a researcher's path of obtaining the youth's experience through narrative. Journaling to maintain my awareness of this tension and remain in my role as researcher was again useful in containing this experience.

In closing, I believe that my emotional reactions of anger, sadness, irritation, and general upset regarding the oppression each youth experienced was challenging to contain during the interview process. Use of journaling and consultation with my Chair, Ram Cnaan, Ph.D. and committee member Theo Burnes, Ph.D. assisted in keeping these feelings contained while developing awareness of my bias and its subjectivity.

#### *Consultation Plan*

As previously stated, the Attic Youth Center is located in Philadelphia and provides a wide range of social services for queer identified youth. This non-profit agency is the primary social service agency for queer youth in the City of Philadelphia and is well known and utilized center for African-American, male identified youth. The Attic Youth Center provides services to youth between the ages of fourteen through twenty-four years. Most of these youth reside in Philadelphia and are from a low socioeconomic status. The staff employed by The Attic Youth Center are among Philadelphia's experts in working with queer youth. During my research, I had reliable, easy access to staff members for consultation when necessary. Linda Hawkins, Ed.D. is a member of my dissertation committee and the Director of Clinical Services at The Attic Youth Center. Dr. Hawkins is an expert in the care of adolescents living with HIV/AIDS and has an

extensive history working with queer youth both therapeutically and in providing social services to queer youth. Dr. Hawkins was available for consultation throughout this research endeavor. Additionally, Carrie Jacobs, Ph.D., the Executive Director of The Attic Youth Center, is on my dissertation committee and was utilized for consultation as needed.

The Mazzoni Center is a queer non-profit agency in Philadelphia that services both queer identified youth and adults. Mazzoni Center has multiple social service outreach programs and is committed to providing and meeting the mental and physical health needs of the queer community. Judy Morrissey, LCSW, the Director of Clinical Services at Mazzoni Center, offered support with recruitment efforts and worked to secure space for me to conduct interviews.

Theo Burnes, Ph.D. is a professor at the University of Pennsylvania and a member of my dissertation committee. Dr. Burnes has done extensive research on queer identified persons and was utilized for consultation purposes as needed throughout my research process. Specifically, Dr. Burnes provided consultation with the coding of my data.

Finally, Ram Cnaan, Ph.D., the Chair of my dissertation committee, and was utilized in guiding this research study in addition to providing ongoing consultation with the coding of data, recruitment strategies, and analysis of collected data.



## Chapter 4: Findings

Through the in depth interviews conducted with fourteen queer, male identified youth, eleven themes emerged. These themes are as follows:

1. ambivalence about the intimate relationship being the target of homophobia despite concrete reports of experienced homophobia,
2. admiration of the interviewee's boyfriend,
3. relationship dynamics that nurture relational success,
4. causes of other's homophobic beliefs,
5. contending with and understanding of experienced microaggressions,
6. homophobia's impact on queer attachment,
7. reattachment processes after experienced homophobia,
8. contradictory statements about experienced homophobia,
9. internalized homonegativity,
10. the impact of homophobia on the intimate relationship, and
11. resiliency.

In an effort to organize this presentation of qualitative data, I will begin by discussing the felt ambivalence some interviewees expressed when exploring whether their relationship was the target of homophobia. Following this, I will explore the expressed admiration for, love of, and felt connection to each participant's boyfriend. Next, the dynamics for relational success, the interviewee's conceptualization of the causes for homophobia, and the participant's management of microaggressions will be illustrated through the data collected. Analysis of these themes will lead into the impact homophobia had on queer attachment to same-gendered partners and the ways in which

these youth negotiated this discrimination in an effort to preserve felt attachment after experiencing homophobic oppression and discrimination. Additionally, two youth interviewed were in relationships with boyfriends who were contending with feelings of internalized homonegativity. Through the data, I will illustrate the youth's perception of the impact homophobia had on their relationship and, finally, I will explore the characteristics and techniques these youth either innately hold or have developed over time to manage oppressive, discriminatory forces which marginalize. These techniques not only ensure emotional and physical survival, but also uphold the survival of their relationship when experiencing homophobia and heterosexism. In end, two youth offered advice for other queer youth.

1. *Ambivalence about the Intimate Relationship being the Target of Homophobia*

Of the fourteen interviews, three interviewees, Mu'Sad, Calvin, and Demetrios, expressed ambivalence about whether their relationship had been the target of homophobic discrimination. In particular, Mu'Sad expressed felt ambivalence about experienced homophobia or discrimination despite having to hide his relationship from his family of origin for fear that he would be rejected. In our interview, I asked Mu'Sad about the ways in which experienced homophobia impacted his relationship. The following is an exchange that indicates his felt ambivalence about homophobia and the need to maintain continued attachment to his family for survival stability:

**Mu'Sad:** Well, I don't really feel like homophobics has impacted me yet so I don't know that feeling yet.

**Interviewer:** What does your family think about folks who are gay?

**Mu'Sad:** Well, they haven't met him [boyfriend] because they don't like it.

**Interviewer:** How would you make a decision to tell your family that you're in a relationship?

**Mu'Sad:** When I'm comfortable and I feel as though the relationship has been going on long enough where as though I can tell my family and he would be there to support me just in case anything happens. When I'm more stable. Like just in case anything goes wrong. Like parents kick kids out of their thing. I just wanna be in a stable predicament so that I can tell them.

**Interviewer:** Did your family ever talk to you about their feelings about persons who are gay?

**Mu'Sad:** Never talked about that. Never talked about that.

**Interviewer:** How did you figure out that they might not be comfortable with you being gay?

**Mu'Sad:** Just because of the things they might say if we're driving downtown to go shopping or something. They just might laugh at someone who's very effeminate or flamboyant.

**Interviewer:** What's that like for you?

**Mu'Sad:** I try to ignore it, but I really don't have big feeling towards that. It doesn't impact my life. It doesn't make me upset or anything.

From this interview excerpt, the data suggest that Mu'Sad had not connected his family's expressed homophobia to his decision to withhold information about his same sex relationship. In fact, Mu'Sad denied that his family was homophobic and reported that their comments did not impact him even though he had made a conscientious decision to avoid disclosure about his relationship or sexual orientation due to a fear of being rejected. Later in the interview, Mu'Sad expressed his feeling that homophobia is "...understandable. To a certain extent. 'Cause everyone has the same outtake. Oh, what about they trying to come on to me or something like that. That's the understandable part, but then again I look at it as we're the same as everybody else."

I was also able to interview Mu'Sad's boyfriend, Calvin. According to Calvin, his mother identifies as a lesbian and has been in a long term relationship with another woman. This familial support led to quite a different trajectory of identity development. When discussing his experience of informing his family about his queer identity, Calvin recalled that:

She always asked me...She asked me a couple of times 'was I gay' and I told her no. But she always told me she always knew. Just like my aunt told me she always knew. She even made a joke that said when I came out of my momma's womb, I snapped my fingers. She silly. They've always known.

Calvin noted the difference between his family dynamic and his boyfriend's family dynamic due to Calvin's family's comfort with his sexual orientation:

At the time when my friends didn't like the situation [Calvin's relationship with Mu'Sad] and I was talking to my partner I went to my mom and talked to her about it. She was like 'it's always going to be one person out of the group or the group that don't like your decision'. She was like 'just pay it no mind'. And that's exactly what I did.

Further, Calvin indicated a close relationship to his mom and how these feelings of attachment and comfort allowed him to seek support regarding his relationship, explore his challenges with homophobia and peer rejection while straddling the stages of identity integration and intimacy:

**Interviewer:** Do you talk to anyone about your relationship?

**Calvin:** My mom. I talk to her. I talk to my aunt sometimes. My mom she's a lesbian now. So it's just easy to talk to her about everything. She gives good advice...when I talk to her about it. She'll tell me she can relate 'cause her girlfriend, her girlfriend like, when you're in a relationship it kinda pulls you away from your family a little bit. And that's what it did with her and her girlfriend. It pulled them away from their families. And it's kinda like pulling me away from my family, but since I live with them, I still got that bond with them.

Although Calvin identified peer rejection due to his same sex relationship with Mu'Sad, Calvin also identified ambivalence about his relationship being the target of experienced homonegativity. This incongruence was further identified when Calvin pointed out the disparity of experienced familial support regarding his intimate relationship with Mu'Sad':

Well, really, I haven't experienced like homophobia. Somebody treating me different because I'm gay. Only thing that kinda gets to me is that I really don't know his family because he is more in the closet so I let him stay that way. Later on, if I get to meet his family, I'm not worrying about it like that. I want to. I

think everybody knows when you're gay. I think his family knows. It just the fact that, when we're in the closet, we just don't wanna accept the fact that they know.

Both Calvin and Mu'Sad did not identify the reason for Mu'Sad's decision to avoid disclosure of his sexual orientation as the result of perceived familial homophobia. Calvin also utilized his familial experience of sexual orientation disclosure to create a frame for understanding Mu'Sad's process in contemplating sexual orientation disclosure to his family of origin. This may be elucidatory of the usefulness of intimate partner support when contending with fear of familial rejection due to sexual orientation. This excerpt also illustrates the negotiation of Erikson's stage theory (1968) and the transition from identity integration to intimacy.

Another important aspect that warrants noting is Calvin's assessment of persons who identify as bisexual. When asked what he felt would be important for me to know about homophobia and its impact on queer relationships, Calvin expressed his belief about bisexuality: "It could impact some relationships if like one of the mates is bisexual and the other one is full blown out gay. The bisexual one could get, you know, bashed and feel like it's not right to be homosexual no more."

## 2. *Admiration for Boyfriend*

When discussing their partners, all fourteen youth interviewed identified a long list of their partner's traits they admired. When asked to describe his fiancé, Nasir made the following statement:

He's kind, like physically attractive...he wasn't like everybody else. He has a steady job, he has his own place. Like you know 'cause a lot of times people are clubbing at night or don't have steady jobs or crafting. He was of a different breed... My fiancé loves to help people. Like he doesn't want to see anybody on the street...Just you know we came from similar backgrounds. Like my family is more religious, but we both are missing our fathers. Like both our fathers are in

jail for murder for the same thing. Since we were very young. So it's like we grew up by ourselves and we just had that connection. We been through bad relationship in the past and everything and we just you know like two peas in a pod.

When asked what he likes about his lover Mu'Sad, Calvin offered the following descriptive:

His whole attitude, how he looked like. He was energetic. I like energetic people...It was about a month into it when I started knowing he was telling me the truth about things...He was just honest with me just like I was honest with him from the beginning. That just let me know that it would work out.

Demetrios expressed the following about his boyfriend when asked:

He's awesome! He's just awesome! Like he has this way of thinking when you really talk to him and he's so motivated, you know? He likes to work, he doesn't like to party, you know? He likes to save his money. He taught me how to manage my money and you know still go out and have fun and told me like what's good to do when I'm out like at the club. He really helped me because I was really immature before I met him and I never had my own apartment before, you know what I'm saying? So it was just like he taught me a lot.

At the time of the interview, Khalil had been in a relationship with Gabriyel for approximately two years. Khalil offered the following about his boyfriend:

His personality. First I was like: he is cute, he is real cute. He's sexy. And then when we just started talking, it was his conversation, the way he talk to me, the things that he would say. And he made it seem like the things that he was saying, it wasn't, it was the same stuff that people had said to me in the past to get me, but it wasn't just words. It was an actual meaning behind it. Like when he told one thing that he said to me he said 'I want you to do one thing for me' and I was like what it is baby? He was like 'just open your heart and your mind one more time for me and give me a chance.' And there I was like I don't have no choice, but to take a chance with him. So that's how we you know we started talking...Now I have him and he be like 'well what is it that I can do for you? What is it that you need?' That leaves him out from all the bad people. It shows you that everybody is not the same.

Raheem noted the following about his boyfriend:

Something struck me about him...personalities. We just click. I like his goals and aspirations in his life. I like the fact that he has them. For some strange reason I like the fact that he's great with kids. I dunno what that is. Must be that maternity

thing. The fact that like he's a family oriented person. I love that. And the fact that he's always there for me emotionally. My mother she had passed away in [date given] and he was there for me and for her actually. Between the time that he met her which was [date given] of last year until [date given] when she passed away. He was actually in the room when she left. And he was there for her. And I dunno it was just something. There is something that just draws me to him since the first day that I knew him.

When asked to describe his lover, Zamir said the following:

His personality. I like his personality. His care towards people in general. Like he's kind, he's honest, he's real. He don't hold nothing back whether it's good or bad. He tell me the truth about myself whether it hurt me or not so. It's just his humor. He's, how can I say this? He's always there when I need him. He's more than my love. He's like my best friend, my lover, my companion.

Finally, Galan described his boyfriend in the following way:

He's romantic, caring. He's not all like wanted his way all the time. Sometimes I let him have his way, sometimes he lets me have my way, but most of the time we just talk it out or whatever or think something else to do if we don't like each other's ideas. We don't get mad at each other all like that or we try not to. 'Cause like he knows when I'm mad, he taps me on my leg. He won't be attacking me when sometimes I don't answer him so he'll just go you know sit across from me and let me cool off for like fifteen minutes and I'll be okay. I mean he's a real sweet person.

What is hard to capture is the tone and excitement each youth had when discussing his boyfriend during the interview process. The ways in which each interviewee discussed his boyfriend created a living experience that illustrated their felt admiration for their boyfriend and indicated feelings of mutuality, care, and concern. Nasir may have gave the most comprehensive explanation of this experienced admiration, care, and concern for his fiancé: “This is the first person other than my mother that it was like I would actually go to bat for and take a bullet for. It's real.”

### 3. Relationship Dynamics that Nurture Relational Success

Throughout the interview process, youth indicated the ways in which their relationship had been successful. This theme was deconstructed into the following subthemes based on researcher experience:

- 3.1 relational goals,
- 3.2 boyfriend characteristics,
- 3.3 history,
- 3.4 communication,
- 3.5 emotions,
- 3.6 personal characteristics,
- 3.7 felt attachment, and
- 3.8 support.

These subthemes are woven throughout each interview.

Zamir describes his relationship as working because both he and his lover prioritize it over other relationships indicating the subtheme 3.1: "...we got to worry about us, not everybody else on the outside because they not gonna help us make our relationship be great 'cause we gotta worry about that so...". In the next quote, Zamir indicates the importance of creating a family unit and having a shared focus on family. This data also illustrates subthemes 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.7, and 3.8:

Honestly that's a challenge I took on [raising children]. I love it. It's fun. It ain't everything I want it to be 'cause sometimes it's hard to raise kids, but at the same time I like it. I enjoy it. It's my only fix every day to make it all worth it...I'm happy for myself 'cause like looking in the past it's like we had to do this, that, that, that, that to get here and finally it's all worth it. Our past helped make our strong relationship. What should I say...oh wow, I known him for ten years, I been with him for almost six years and we, we talk about a lot of stuff; we face a lot of challenges in life. Like people be talking 'bout our relationship and it's not okay for two men to be together. It's not right. You should be ashamed to bring



anybody in here this, that and the third, but we just feel like we got each other. We took this relationship. We took it. We said we wanna deal with each other so we gonna deal with the consequences and, for the whole years we been together, it's been...people talking down on us. They talking very bad about us.

Later in the interview, I asked Zamir how he and his lover show their care and concern for each other illustrating subthemes 3.2, 3.5, and 3.6:

Wow. Like on rainy days he'll just call me or text me and say 'I love you boo'. Boo bear. He call me boo bear. I call him Pooh bear. He text me and say 'I love you, I miss you' and I'll go do the same thing to him. Or like alright say if I'm home and he out working or something and he'll go get some flowers or something and bring it home to me or since I like teddy bears he'll get me a teddy bear and a little card that say 'I love you Zamir' and bring it to me. And since I know he like pictures, I got a picture of me, him and the babies together when they was younger. Very younger. When they was like a year old. Last time I got him a picture of all four of us together and a little card and was like I love you Rafiq [name change]. Thank you for being there for me for so long. It's like the relationship I've always wanted, but I was scared to go for it. But as soon as it finally got here, I'm like wow.

Zamir also indicated the importance of spending time with his lover as a means for making their relationship successful: "Wow. Oh my God. A lot. We live together. We see each other every day. Well, we see each other every night. We work during the day, but at night time we see each other. Every night." Finally, Zamir discussed the process in which he and his lover decided to commit to each other. Before making this commitment, Zamir and his lover had a conversation about their past relationships and their personal concerns about the ways in which these past relationships could or could not impact their ability to commit to each other emotionally. The importance of honest communication was necessary in Zamir making this relational commitment and connects to subthemes 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, and 3.6 :

Oh my God! How did we get that? It took a lot. We sat down one day and was like okay we in this for the long run. It was four years ago. He was like 'Do you wanna go for a long ride?' And I was like 'Yeah'. So, we sat down and was like we gonna be honest no matter what. I want you to tell me the truth about me no

matter whether it hurts me or not and I'm gonna do the same thing to you. And ever since then it was like we been honest with each other. Ever since then. Like honestly I never knew that we could get where we at now...if something not right in both of our parts, we tell each other so we can work it out and make it better...Because it's like we learn off each other. We grow into knowing. We pretty much was boys. We was teenagers. Now, we adults now so it's like we grew up off each other. We got to know each other. We got to make a life a whole 'nother way.

Zamir also acknowledged the importance of being present for his boyfriend emotionally and that this personal characteristic (subtheme 3.6) adds to their relationship success: "Say like he was to call me now, I would go directly to him...or if his mom would call me and be like 'Zamir, Rafiq's in the house snappin'. I'd be like, I got to go". Additionally, he expressed the importance of mutual support in the following quote: "He's, how can I say this? He's always there when I need him, always there when he need me. It's like when I'm upset, he knows it". Further, Zamir identified felt attachment (subtheme 3.7), the impact physical separation has on him emotionally, and the importance of communication in maintaining feelings of attachment security:

When I went to [location name] a couple months ago and he was in Philadelphia and I couldn't come up here because I had to stay down there with my mom and help her doing stuff. I just, I would sit in the window and look outside. I wouldn't go outside for nothing. My best friend be like 'Zamir, you gonna go outside?' And I'd just sit in the window and look outside. I get depressed. I call. We talk on the phone, but if I can't talk to him on the phone it's really stressful. Really, really stressful. I cried a couple times because I couldn't talk to him or see him. Like, four years ago I actually cried when we couldn't be together because he wasn't there.

Galan indicated the positive impact his family's support (subtheme 3.8) had on his relationship with his boyfriend. Additionally, this quote includes subthemes 3.2, 3.4, and 3.7:

**Galan:** My mom adores him. My mom loves him to death.

**Interviewer:** What does she love about him?

**Galan:** Just how sweet he is. He actually cares about me. He's there for whatever I need. He always has his phone. If he doesn't answer his phone, he calls me right back or texts me. So my mom, she likes that about him. He makes sure I'm not in trouble, makes sure I'm safe when I go out with my friends or what not. She just adores him. 'When's [boyfriend's name] coming over? Tell him to come over for dinner on Sunday' ... Sometimes he'll come up my house and we'll all, me, him, my little brother, my sister, my mom and we'll all play the Wii, Xbox, and Play Station 3. And my mom, she'll make cakes, cookies, snacks and stuff. I mean, we have fun. So, I'm praying every day that we stay together and that we're together for a while so. Plus, I don't want us to split because my family likes him. I love his family. My little brother and sister adore him.

Further, Galan pointed to the importance of compromise and communication in their relationship:

He's not all like wanted his way all the time. Sometimes I let him have his way, sometimes he lets me have my way, but most of the time we just talk it out or whatever or think something else to do if we don't like each other's ideas. We don't get mad at each other all like that or we try not to... If we argue, we don't just leave it there and move on. We will talk it out, you know, make sure it's squashed before we move on to the next thing.

Tyrice specified the ways in which he and his boyfriend show their care, concern, and felt emotion for each other and identified this felt attachment and expressed emotion as contributing to his relationship's success: "Words. I mostly have his back. As soon as he call and he says he stuck somewhere, I'll leave. Abruptly. My job or whatever and go get him." When asked about the ways in which his boyfriend helped make the relationship successful, Tyrice stated the following which illustrates subthemes 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4:

He takes me out. He calls. Keeps calling me everyday. 'Whatcho doing? What you doing over there?' ... and sex. He'll hold me. Carry my bags if I go shopping. I'm very lucky. In this day and age, it's very hard to find somebody like him. Very, very hard. 'Cause everybody's like they'll say slick stuff in your head just to try to get you in the bed that one night. I have experienced that one time... we didn't have sex right away when we first started talking to each other. We waited. We started going on dates and things like that.

In the above quote, Tyrice also expressed the importance of felt respect from his boyfriend and physical intimacy as contributing to their relationship's success.

When Tavon was asked about the different ways in which he and his significant other developed relational success, Tavon focused on the expression of affection, care, and concern between him and his significant other. The following was his response:

Numerous ways. We hold each other, we kiss. You ever have like one of those things where it's just like you don't have to say anything, but you have that look and you kinda can just give each other that look and you just know? We have that. We make love...we're more than just friends.

Jayden, who is in an open relationship with his boyfriend, recognized the importance of honest communication to cultivate relational success:

We're honest about everything we do. Even though we have an open relationship, we have rules set within guidelines. Certain things we do not discuss where others we will. Such as, if you choose to have sexual relations with someone else and something happens like the condom broke or you didn't protect yourself, then you need to tell me because that is something I need to know. That is important. Not the fact that you involved yourself with someone else as far as being emotional. That we don't have to discuss unless we feel as though it's something extremely important. That must be brought to the other's attention...I would rather have an open relationship and allow you to go and do what I already know you're going to do versus we are in a closed relationship and you cheat on me. I'm not setting myself up for the failure and get hurt because I'm allowing you to do this...we have that level of honesty.

To explore felt attachment, youth were asked how they felt if their boyfriend had a bad day. Interviewee answers often coincided with qualities that added to relational success. When Shahir was asked about his experience when his boyfriend had a bad day, he identified the emotional connection he felt towards his boyfriend and how this supported relational success: "I felt bad as he did. I felt like as if it was my situation. The reason I was mad was the same reason he was mad. I hurt when he hurt."

In addition, Khalil, who had been in a two year relationship with Gabriyel, discussed the ways in which his relationship remained successful. Khalil illustrated the importance of each person's characteristics (3.2, 3.6), their shared history (3.3), communication (3.4),

emotional connection (3.5), attachment (3.7), and support (3.8) in nurturing relationship

success:

I think about him all the time. He's always on my mind. When I'm at work I can't wait 'til I see my baby. I really be counting down the hours and the seconds until I get home. I be like I wanna go home, I wanna cook for my baby and you know it's, that's how I feel about it. I guess it's true love...I cook for him, I clean, he get off of work. The nights he get off of work and he don't feel like going home, he'll come over my house. I have his dinner ready, run his bath. Certain stuff like that. Just spending time with each other. That's how we rock out. We have fun, we go out. I got his initials tattooed on me and he got mines...The one thing that I asked for, and this is in any relationship that I'm in, I just ask for attention and affection. And if I'm going through anything, he's right there for me. He's, I never have to say okay I'm going through something who I'm gonna talk to about it? If I'm short when it come to my rent, that's the person that's gonna give me the money to make sure my rent is covered. Like certain stuff like that lets me know that he cares. Let's me know that he loves me. When I ask him to call me, he calls me all the time. Sometimes he pick up the phone like 'I just called you to see what you was doing. I miss you'. Or simple things like a text message. He'll text me. Like 'I'm just texting you to make sure that you up for school'. So certain stuff like that...I don't want for anything. I don't have to ask for nothing. If like, yesterday, he was like 'babe, I ain't even tryin' to play you, but you need to go to the barber shop and get your hair cut.' There's certain things I just don't have to ask for. Him as my boyfriend, he just knows the things that I need and he'll just get them for me and make sure I'm okay...But I think one thing that we do that it's actually helpful to our relationship is that we're not always around each other. We're around each other enough, but we're not always around each other. And that's why I say we don't need to move in together now. Stuff like that 'cause then you start getting tired and when you all do get together you all have nothing to talk about. And that's a good thing. Like when we together we always have stuff to talk about...I know he's there... and I don't wanna say that we don't get into arguments and we don't go through times where I just be like you know what I don't wanna be in this relationship. 'Cause it happens, but yet and still it never gets that serious where I'm like you know what we can't overcome this. I don't wanna be with you no more. It never gets that serious...I don't go through his phone. That's stuff that makes your relationship worse. It makes it seem like you insecure about something and it causes problems. So, I don't do anything that he'll wanna be like go on about your business...It's all about trust. I know that he's not gonna do nothing. I know that, at the end of the day, he's still come home to me. So I don't have to worry about being all up under him just so people know we together. That causes conflict in your relationship too. That's a trust issue.

After interviewing Khalil, I was able to interview Gabriyel. When Gabriyel was asked to describe his relationship and what made it successful, one can hear the ways in which Gabriyel and Khalil share relational values and how these shared characteristics and values positively impact the relationship's success. Additionally, Gabriyel illustrated the importance of respect for each other and the relationship while understanding the relationship as the shared goal:

It's nice. I'm not gonna say it's perfect 'cause it's not. 'Cause I had told him before he had done his thing, we both still men and we gonna be looking at other men and we gonna be complimenting them on their dress and then the way they look and stuff like that. You know what I mean? The thing is I told him don't let it get too serious where it's gonna mess up me and your relationship. Like okay he look cute and this, that and the third, but I wouldn't dare disrespect him around him. I wouldn't say that around him. I'll say it if I'm with my friends or whatever, but I wouldn't say oh he's cute and this, that and the third around him because you know what I mean that's disrespecting him and I wouldn't want him to do that around me.

When asked about his feelings when Khalil had a bad day or was upset, Gabriyel offered the following illustrating subthemes 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8:

I'll let him know you can talk to me about anything...I'll talk to him, tell me what's wrong ma. I want to know. I need to know so I can know where I stand in that position...Then I'll give him time to think about it. I'll give him time to work. But I tells him: look if you going through something, go through it, but the thing is don't be down there too long 'cause it may mess up our relationship. It may mess up your life and it may mess up mines. 'Cause I'm like we're one, you know? Once we made that commitment we're one and that may mess up what we trying to do... if we going through something like a relationship problem like I think he looking at another dude or this, that and the third and if it's something like little like that, then we'll talk about it outside of the relationship. But if it's something very important that it's confidential and we keep it in, then we won't talk about it to nobody and we just keep it between us. For example if, God forbid, if I had got HIV and I told him, he wouldn't take it out the relationship. He'll keep it in.

When I asked Gabriyel how he and Khalil handle relational discord, he identified the importance of communication, relationship goals, and support:

If I feel as though my relationship is not working out, I'll talk to him. We'll sit down somewhere. We'll go somewhere to eat and talk and we'll work it out. Like I asked him [inaudible] am I doing something wrong that you don't like that you're not speaking up on? Or, he'll ask me the same thing and we'll talk about it...I'll let him explain... 'cause I can tell when somebody lying so I'll let him explain. Like I'll put it on a calm note instead of making it all hype and out there like that...It was times when people they liked me, but they didn't like him because the way he talk to people. The way he presents his self. I believe he presents his self real well, but I can agree on the way he talk to people and stuff like that and that's what we working on now. That's what we working on now. Him talking to people with common sense. You know what I mean? If you want respect, then you got to give it. If you don't give nobody respect, how can we give you respect? It's just his mouth...If he said something to somebody...this the time I would curse him out. Because like you not I'm not gonna put nobody before ma. Never. Never. But he's not gonna try to take away the friends that I already had before I had him. He'll be like, 'Oh, okay baby. I know and I'm sorry about that and I'll try. I'ma fix it.' If I ask him to apologize, he will.

Gabriyel also discussed their relational history and familial support and identified this as leading to a strong relational foundation: "We got to know each other and we went out to eat and all kinds of places and we share some things and stuff like that with each other about our past and stuff. And we met each other family members."

#### 4. *Causes of Homophobia*

When I asked the youth who participated in this research study what they considered the causes of other's homophobia, they identified the following subthemes:

- 4.1 religion,
- 4.2 history of sexual abuse or assault,
- 4.3 society's heterosexism and mores,
- 4.4 stages of identity development, and
- 4.5 ignorance.

As previously documented, Mu'Sad alluded to a belief that homophobia was "understandable" and tolerable. The following quote further illustrates his thoughts about

homophobia and belief that homophobia has not impacted him. Additionally, Mu'Sad's quote suggests a belief that homophobia is the result of the lack of monitoring of his behaviors or communication:

I don't experience homophobia at school. At school, I feel safe being me in my school. I go to a public school and I feel as though I can be safe and I don't run into homophobia at school. I mean you might get it here and there because of the things you might say or the things you might do, but that's about it.

Mu'Sad expresses his felt comfort at school, but also intimates experiences with homophobia. These experiences seem to happen when Mu'Sad feels he has not displayed socially acceptable behaviors or communication.

The thirteen remaining youth identified an amalgamation of causes of homophobia. Four out of the fourteen youth identified religion as a contributing factor towards the development of homophobic beliefs, four out of the fourteen youth indicated that a history of sexual abuse or sexual assault may contribute to feelings of homophobia, five youth signified the impact socially ingrained heterosexism has on person's development of homophobic beliefs, six youth expressed a belief that homophobia is the result of a person's internal discomfort with their sexual orientation and/or continued identity development, and five youth indicated a belief that ignorance due to a lack of education or experiences with diversity contributed to a person's homophobic belief system.

When asked what he believes is the cause of homophobia, Raheem explained that homophobia originates from a person's religious teachings and ignorance. He discussed how he has handled differences in religious interpretations of the Bible:

Misinformed. Or, also, I think it just sometimes it's a religious aspect for them. I never look down on them. I don't call them back out of their names. I'm a religious person so it never really bothers me too deeply. I just feel sad that they think that way...I was having a religious discussion about homosexuality and the Bible and stuff and how they believe that I was gonna be damned to hell for all



eternity and my opinion was I think it's left up for God. Just reading the Bible, for me, I don't interpret the Bible as homosexuality is a sin. I think there are certain acts that can lead into temptation and can be a sin for you. But, I don't think homosexuality, love, men and men love or lesbian love, I don't think they are all sins.

Additionally, Raheem discussed the way in which he and his father negotiated his father's homophobic perspective due to his father's religious teachings and ignorance.

This negotiation allowed Raheem and his father to maintain feelings of attachment:

...because my family themselves, at one point in time, my father in particular was a homophobic person. But, it was either him being a homophobe and losing his son or getting rid of that homophobia and just loving your son because he's your son. I think, for him, it's still just a learning process and he's communicating to me. And like just really trying to establish a closer bond with me.

Zamir conceptualized causes of homophobia as a combination of a possible history of sexual assault, religious teachings, and identity development.

It's a lot of different things. Like they could've been molested, molested when they was young. Or they could be molested or it can be just something that been there since they was little. The curiosity is what it's about and then they act out on the curiosity and the curiosity gets the best of them...they [religious communities], they push you so far so as to being straight that you run from it and go in the opposite way. Like in the Bible it say you gotta be straight. You gotta be this, that and the third, but the more you push a person into doing something, the more they gonna run from it.

Gabriel indicated a belief that homophobia originated from a history of sexual assault in the following quote "...maybe they had got raped by somebody". Tavon, on the other hand, expressed a belief that homophobia is a combination of a possible history of sexual assault, closed mindedness, and ignorance. When asked about causes of homophobia, Tavon identified subthemes 4.2, 4.3, and 4.5:

I have times where I encounter a lot of homophobic people and it's like I can't be mad at them. Like it's not always their fault. It's their lack of knowledge that they have about the situation so I can't be mad at them for not understanding my lifestyle. They could have had some bad experience. They could have had a really bad experience of something of the nature. In some extreme cases, they could

have been molested by someone of the same sex when they were younger and just have that whole homophobia towards it because of that... I kinda want to say I feel sorry for them because they close themselves off to so much for whatever reasons that they don't want to accept it or understand it. They close their selves off to so much that's out there and they're so close minded of something that's so small. Like what about what's larger that's going on in life?

Nasir believes that persons who hold homophobic beliefs are "...just being close minded people" which connects to subtheme 4.5. Additionally, when asked about causes for homophobia, Shahir identified ignorance, intergenerational teaching, internal discomfort when developing identity, and privileged society's mores, but not a history of sexual assault or abuse:

Their upbringing. Not nothing that they see. It's just something that maybe their parents were taught and then their parent's parents were taught. I don't never think it's something physically that someone had something happen to them whereas though they feel this way about gay people. I think it's, a lot of homophobic people, I think it's some of it has to deal with people themselves trying to be gay and then just like I guess the DL people. People who appear to be straight. It's something that they wanna do. They may wanna be the flamboyant boy on the block or the outwardly gay person on the block, but they can't because what people in their family or in their area may say or think about them. And that's why I think people envy us so much because we're ourselves. Because if we wanna walk outside and wear tights, we do it because that makes us comfortable. Whereas though they could think about it, but they won't physically do it because it makes them even madder 'cause we can freely do it.

Shahir spoke of persons on the DL or "down low." This euphemism refers to persons identifying as heterosexual within their primary community, but engaging in same sex sexual behaviors or queer relationships without their primary community's awareness. Shahir shared his insight that this resulting homophobia may be the consequence of the person's feelings of anger because s/he does not feel comfortable with her/his own sexual orientation identity. Finally, Shahir indicated that many persons may not have experiences with queer folk resulting in discomfort and resulting homophobia.

Jayden reported that homophobia originates from subthemes 4.3 and 4.5: "...lack of understanding and knowledge...they haven't been or they've been miseducated on LGBTQ people...a lot of things in culture now are so against it that it just teaches hate against us". Tyrice believes that "...stereotypes and labeling us as statistics" contributes to the development of homophobic beliefs. Interestingly, Tyrice also expressed a belief that "sometimes they may be more accepting of two women depending on where you at" indicating that queer, male identified persons may have a different experience of homophobia than queer, female identified persons.

Calvin offered his belief that homophobia originates from societal messages: "It's kinda like we was raised up on society's standard. Gay is wrong. You not supposed to be gay." Demetrios felt that homophobia is "Just ignorance. They don't know so they're scared". Finally, when asked about causes of homophobia, Cade offered an understanding of homophobia as originating from hate and a combination of subthemes 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5:

Just because they're so hateful and not opening up their mind towards you know the change. I think that homophobia is taught in a way because of the lack of knowledge there is of bisexual, gay, transsexual, all those people...Some of it is just hate. Just hate. Because they're miserable or hate because they wanna live their lives or wanted to do something with their lives at one time and because they couldn't be as open as we are, they're hateful.

##### 5. *Microaggressions*

Youth interviewed for this research study tended to identify homophobia as overt, aggressive acts and typically did not consider daily, subtle messages discounting queer sexuality as a form of homophobia. Subthemes of these microaggressions were:

5.1 assumed heterosexuality by others,

- 5.2 a belief that queer folk should not display their feelings of love or attachment towards their same sex partner because of heterosexual discomfort,
- 5.3 tolerance of heterosexuals determining when it is acceptable to display queer affection,
- 5.4 the internalization of and self-blame for offending heterosexuals due to queer sexuality,
- 5.5 a belief that queer affection should not be displayed in front of children or elders,
- 5.6 deriving self-worth when heterosexual persons identify feelings of attraction towards you, and
- 5.7 experiences with supports who view queer identity as a phase that is subject to change.

In illustrating youth's understanding of experienced homophobia, Jayden identified homophobia as "...a problem with the LGBTQ community to the extreme". Shahir offered the following as his way of determining when someone is homophobic:

I guess like when you enter the bus. Maybe you're dressed a certain way or because you are too close to another guy you may hear little stuff like 'that's why I don't get on the bus.' Little stuff like that. As far as the bus...They might say something to you depending on how appearance wise you look to them. Like, if you appear to them as extraordinarily gay they might say something to you. Like a month ago, I wore, like I was dressed regular, but the jeans I had they were cut offs. And I heard somebody say, I don't know if they was referring to me, but when I got on the bus I heard somebody go: 'Yeah that's why I don't get on the bus now. That shit crazy' I'm like, okay well.

Although sexuality and sexual orientation is fluid and exists on a continuum (Kinsey, 1948), this desire for queer youth to change their sexual orientation or to identify a queer

relationship and sexuality as a “phase” was indicated in the interview with Khalil. Khalil discussed his boyfriend’s family’s belief that Khalil’s relationship with Gabriyel and, subsequently, his sexuality was transitory. The following quote illustrates subthemes 5.1 and 5.5:

He was out and they wasn’t expecting that. They thought it was a phase and they didn’t really think he would really get into a relationship because, at that time, he was still messing with females. So, they didn’t know if it was a bisexual thing or if it was a just for the time being thing.

Shahir articulated how heterosexuals determine when queer affection is appropriate and how he, in end, changed his affectional behavior in an effort to create comfort for heterosexual persons. In the following quote, Shahir discussed subthemes 5.2 and 5.3:

...it made me feel weird. ‘Cause one, people watching. And because someone felt weird about the situation and it made me feel weird...I was more cautious about stuff I did and said. Only out of comfort to the cousin. If I would hug him, it wouldn’t be as long. It would just be like a regular hug like if you were hugging your brother or sister. Things I said to him it would be kinda short answers. It wouldn’t be as heartfelt as if they weren’t there.

Tavon also expressed his concern about remaining “respectful” in a heterosexual space and noted the difference between his behaviors in a queer friendly space versus a heterosexually dominant space. Tavon identified himself as “selfish” if he continued to display attachment behaviors towards his significant other. This conceptualization of selfishness is illustrative of subtheme 5.4:

I think it’s the whole like PDA. Like public displays of affection. And when I’m in uniform and in that work environment it’s just like, I’ve been raised in a semi-military family and I’ve been in a military program since I was twelve so like the whole PDA, public displays of affection, I dunno. I don’t like them when I’m in uniform or in a professional setting. It’s a cultural thing...Like so when I’m in a gay friendly space it’s definitely okay. Everyone in that space kinda feels the same way so it’s okay there. I don’t have to worry about offending anyone or anyone taking any offense or anything to it or looking at me in certain ways or whatnot. I’ve had experiences in the past. No one says anything. I’ll see older people where they’ll give that look or make a face...There were times where I

was being really selfish and didn't care so I would hold them closer and look at the person and smile.

Four out of the fourteen youth used the same phrase of a "time and a place for everything." This phrase was often indicative of subtheme 5.3. On this other hand, by assessing the environment for safety before expressing feelings of physical affection towards their boyfriends, queer youth were able to maintain their physical and emotional safety. Khalil intimated that persons who are harassed due to their sexual orientation may also be to blame for this experience. This verbalization of perceived blame is illustrative of subtheme 5.4 and the internalization of a fear of offending heterosexuals. In the following quote, Khalil used the phrase "time and place for everything" and how this is connected to heterosexually defined norms:

I think with that situation a lot of times people, gay people, they bring attention towards they self and I'm saying this as a gay man. I feel as though when people that go through that [homophobia] on a regular basis 'cause they bring it to they selves. They wanna be out in the middle of the street. They wanna be vogueing. They wanna see and be seen. They wanna be loud and it just gives people something to say. If you not giving people something to say, it's gonna happen. People gonna say stuff. The majority of the times, if you not saying nothing, you not bothering nobody and you not affecting people, you alright. Me and my boo, we don't go through it that much. We not out in public kissing and that's why it limits it. Then you got couples that is out there kissing and all you hear is 'get this f'ing faggot away from me'. 'Cause, you know, it's not the time and the place for it.

Similar to this "time and place for everything", Khalil takes the famous military euphemism in regards to queer identity and applies it to his family when negotiating his disclosure of sexual orientation:

You have certain people in your family that you just don't tell certain things to and then you got people in your family that they know so. I don't necessarily hide. It's just some peoples that don't ask, don't tell and then the rest of the family is open to it.

Nasir also used this military euphemism of “don’t ask, don’t tell” and how it impacted his fiancé’s behavior at work: “And like he was upset at that [homophobia] at first ‘cause it wasn’t like he was closeted at work, but he just like was like don’t ask don’t tell ‘cause he was in the military so it was like don’t ask, don’t tell.” Nasir also expressed the subtheme 5.3 through the phrase “time and place for everything” when discussing affection in the public: “We don’t have a problem holding hands, touching, kissing or something like that. Whereas, though, in public it’s like, there’s a time and place for everything.” Previously in his interview, I had asked Nasir what characteristics he liked about his fiancé. In the following quote, Nasir illustrates subtheme 5.6 in which he suggests that verbalized attraction from someone of the opposite sex is esteemed:

Before I came there, before I started working there, a lot of females hit on him. He’s a very attractive guy, tall, nice, beautiful smile, pretty eyes, nice hair, not skinny, built guy. He had a lot of females coming on to him and it was like you know ‘no I’m not interested’ or he would befriend them. The same thing for me. Like people like a lot of the ladies would be like ‘oh he’s so cute’ and all this other stuff. Why the cute one’s always have to be gay? That’s what we got the most.

Additionally, three out of the fourteen youth identified subtheme 5.5 in which these youth internalized a societal message wherein displayed queer affection in front of children or elders is not acceptable. Galan advised the following:

I mean everybody is not gonna wanna see everybody kissing when they walking down the street and they got little kids too. So when I’m walking down the street, I just try to keep it PG and just hold hands or something...I mean there’s a time and place for everything.

Zamir, who is raising two children with his lover, also reported this belief:

...we got to still remember we got the girls with us and we can’t be us, us. We got to be us and still respect the girls because we don’t want them going off of our sexuality. We want them growing up as two regular girls.

Further, this comment of his children "...growing up as two regular girls" is indicative of subtheme 5.1.

Finally, Calvin, who was raised by a mother who identifies as a lesbian, also holds a belief that queer folk should not display behavioral affection to their same sex partner in front of children or elders. He made note of this belief three times during our interview. His first indication was when I asked him about public displays of affection: "...I don't kiss around little kids or anything like that." Later, when asked about displaying affection in front of his friends, he offered more information about his decisions regarding displayed physical affection which included his belief that queer persons should not be affectionate in front of youth:

It's kinda like we was raised up on society's standard. Gay is wrong you not supposed to be gay. I just respect the elders. You know, not to kiss in front of their children. We just don't do all the affection stuff in front of kids.

I asked Calvin how he handles affectionate behavior when at home. He responded with an affirmation that he is affectionate towards his boyfriend, but "...in front of my mom. Just not in front of kids."

## 6. *Relational Management of Homophobia*

When youth were asked about the ways they manage experiences with homophobia when with their boyfriend or partner, six subthemes emerged:

- 6.1 assessment of safety,
- 6.2 fight versus soothe,
- 6.3 relational coping,
- 6.4 environmental nuances,



6.5 outside support, and

6.6 personal response to homophobia.

In regards to the couple response of fighting versus soothing, Khalil and Gabriyel discuss the division of this response within their relationship. When showing public affection, Khalil addressed the way in which they manage being called a “faggot” by persons who witnessed their physical affection. Khalil identifies himself as the person who wants to fight whereas Gabriyel typically works to soothe Khalil. In the following quote, Khalil also illustrates the interchangeable role both have when managing homophobia in addition to subtheme 6.3, 6.4, and 6.6:

Now see, that’s my other half and he’s the calm one. I’m not the calm one. I’m the one that turns around and I’m ready to fight and I’m cussing these people out and he’s just be like ‘It’s cool. You know I love you, I know you love me, so why does it even matter? It’s just words.’ So, I be like alright. Now, if I get into something and somebody say something back, he just like he the calm one, but people let that fool them. ‘Cause when I’m getting into something with somebody, he’ll be like ‘alright see, you gonna step back and now I’m gonna handle it’ ‘cause he feel as though he the man in the relationship and I’m supposed to be wifey and I shouldn’t be out there arguing and fighting and making a scene. So then he takes over...When some be like ‘oh faggot this’, he’ll keep on walking. If I don’t say nothing, he won’t say nothing. But now, when I turn around and say something and then somebody act like they want get tough with me, that’s when he be like ‘now you messin’ with my baby. Now we have a problem’...I don’t wanna put words in his mouth. But I know him and he just he’s calm. He has a type of personality that I don’t care. They’re not gonna harm me. They’re not gonna do nothing to me. That’s his reaction to every time that happens. He tries to make me look at it the same way. And me, being the loud one and the aggressive one, I be like I ain’t letting nothing go.

When I asked for clarity regarding the ways in which Khalil and Gabriyel assess safety within the environment and environmental nuances, Khalil discussed the subthemes of his personal response to homophobia, he and Gabriyel’s relational coping in respect to experienced homophobia, and environmental assessment of safety in the following quote:

I mean we kiss, we hug, but it's like it's a time and a place for everything. So we don't necessarily, when we out, we don't necessarily always be kissing. That's why I say when we be out, people think we friends 'cause we have a good time and we know that when we get home, we gonna be laying aside each other. We gonna be chillin'. It's a time and a place for everything. So why draw negative attention to yourself that don't have to be? It's not necessarily how you are, it's just avoiding conflict. We may kiss or something when we separating, but other than that we not all in front in the boys faces when you know they gonna say something, kissing and all of that...I don't necessarily say that we distant. I just think that we just on chill. We don't have to always kiss me out in public and tell me that he love me for me to know that he loves me. We just be chilling... We let it roll off our shoulders. Most of the time people say stuff, we don't even talk about it later on. We look at it and laugh why it happen and then once it's done and over with, we keep walking...I always say if you're homophobic, it's something within yourself that you're uncomfortable with. There's something that you need to ask yourself why? I really feel like that. I feel as though people that's homophobic have something within themselves. They have an unsureness within they self that they are wondering about and that's the reason they open up they mouth to say something about what I'm doing. So if you're comfortable with yourself, then there's no need for you to say nothing about me and what I'm doing.

When I interviewed Gabriyel, he corroborated Khalil's assessment of the ways in which they manage homophobia within their relationship indicating subthemes 6.2, 6.3, 6.5, and 6.6:

**Gabriyel:** We pay it no mind. We pay it no mind. I tell him and he's the type that somebody call him faggot he'll like be like what and just...but I'll tell him don't pay it no mind 'cause they just want you to say something so they can have a reason to fight you. Don't say nothing. Just ignore it.

**Interviewer:** So, he reacts to it and confronts them and you are more laid back?

**Gabriyel:** Yup...and we won't be all flamboyant and this, that and the third. We won't vogue and stuff like that. No. We'll keep it professional... 'cause I know who I am and my grandmother always told me 'don't change for nobody else unless you ready to change for yourself'. She said 'wherever you go, be professional about it' and you know what I mean? 'Don't worry about what nobody else say 'cause they not the ones gonna judge you on judgment day'.

When I asked Gabriyel to give me a life example of a time in which he and Khalil experienced homophobia, he offered the following illustrating subthemes 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3:

**Gabriyel:** One day we was walking down in West Philly and we was holding hands and stuff and somebody had said ‘Oh my God, these fucking faggots’ and this, that and the third and we just kept walking. He was about to turn around and say something ‘cause I felt him shaking and I was like no babe don’t do that. Just keep walking ‘cause they want you to feed into it and when you feed into it they got you where they want you to be then that’s when they have reason to fight you.

**Interviewer:** Did the two of you continue to hold hands?

**Gabriyel:** Yup. We continued.

**Interviewer:** Were you feeling afraid when that happened?

**Gabriyel:** No.

**Interviewer:** What do you think helped when you were in that situation?

**Gabriyel:** Just continuing doing. Like, talking on another subject.

**Interviewer:** Did you ever want to stop holding hands?

**Gabriyel:** Yeah, but I just I said ‘cause you know if you say something back to them, they walk up to you and hit you. But the thing is for us to protect ourselves and each other we’ll stop holding hands, take a peek, look in the back of us and see if somebody coming towards us and if there is somebody coming towards us, then that’s when we just handle our business. But if nobody coming towards us, then we just keep on walking.

While exploring this fight versus soothe relational role phenomenon, Tavon identified his tendency to move away from his significant other when experiencing homophobia indicating subtheme 6.3. This was also connected to personal management techniques (subtheme 6.6) when contending with environmental homophobia in an effort to maintain physical and emotional safety. Specifically, Tavon indicated differences between physical affection in queer friendly spaces versus spaces predominately viewed as being occupied by heterosexuals illustrating subtheme 6.4:

**Tavon:** ...But in certain places I won’t want to hold his hand, or I won’t want him to hold me or I won’t hold him. I don’t think it really hurts the relationship, but I mean I’m sure he feels some type of way ‘cause in other spaces I will. So, in other spaces, if he goes to hold my waist or something or grab my hand, I’ll let him. In other spaces, like he’ll go to do it and I’ll like step back or I’ll push him away or something. He’ll feel some type of way about that.

**Interviewer:** How do you make this determination? When do you know it’s safe to be affectionate in a public space and when it’s not okay?

**Tavon:** The environment. How I feel towards the environment. The people that are in the environment. The area of the city we may be in.

**Interviewer:** Can you give me an example where you would feel comfortable being outwardly affectionate?

**Tavon:** Center City, the malls, the movies, places like that...

**Interviewer:** Would you say that your outward affection or outward displays of PDA change in a gay friendly space?

**Tavon:** Definitely. Like so when I'm in a gay friendly space it's definitely okay. Everyone in that space kinda feels the same way so it's okay there. I don't have to worry about offending anyone or anyone taking any offense or anything to it or looking at me in certain ways or whatnot...

**Interviewer:** How did you handle that?

**Tavon:** A few different ways depending on who I was with and how I did it. There were times where I was being really selfish and didn't care so I would hold them closer and look at the person and smile...

**Interviewer:** When you distanced yourself, how did your significant other respond?

**Tavon:** We never talked about it. I'm sure he knows why I did it, but I always done it where it's not like okay get off me. It's always like oh look at this and I'll like walk away and go look at something and come back.

**Interviewer:** When you've made efforts to increase your physical affection towards each other because of somebody's response, how did your significant other respond?

**Tavon:** The situation where it happened, we just kinda looked at each other and we smiled and he said 'what was that for?' And I told him what it was about and we kinda just laughed about it.

**Interviewer:** Do the two of you ever disagree about how much PDA to display in public spaces?

**Tavon:** Yes we do. He's a lot more affectionate than I am. Especially in public. I'm quite sure if I was okay with it, he would love to hold my hand or hold each other when walking down the street all the time. I mean, we've talked about why I don't like it. We have those disagreements.

**Interviewer:** What's the compromise?

**Tavon:** That we'll do it as long as I'm comfortable. As long as we're comfortable. But when I'm not comfortable, then we're not going to do it.

Shahir talked about his approach to hiding his physical affection towards his ex-boyfriend in public: "I don't walk down the street holding hands or like holding each other hip by hip. I don't do that kind of stuff." When asked to clarify his reasoning behind his decision not to display affection in public, Shahir offered the following: "Cause it made me feel weird." Further, when asked how he and his boyfriend negotiated affection in public (subtheme 6.3), Shahir stated: "...it was kinda a mutual thing. The things he felt uncomfortable about, I felt uncomfortable about. So it never was really like it was kinda a straight role with that part."

To further clarify this division of felt comfort with physical affection, I asked Shahir if he ever felt unsafe expressing his feelings of affection towards his boyfriend in public. In the following quote, Shahir's response supports subtheme 6.1, 6.3, 6.4, and 6.6:

**Shahir:** In certain parts of the neighborhood. Like if I was in West Philly...there would be a lot [of affection] around there. Not too much in North Philly 'cause I knew mostly everyone around there. But more so in West Philly...We just wouldn't be all like, we wouldn't, we would hug occasionally, but more than that we wouldn't kiss. We would give a hand shake or something like that. Something to show each other okay I'll see you later or something. But nothing too out there.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that impacted your relationship at all?

**Shahir:** I don't know. Maybe on those particular days, but not on a whole. Because I knew how he felt and he showed me and I didn't want to like put him in any harm. Like as far as I leave or leave him in a situation and then he go maybe minding his business and someone had seen us doing that and they may try to retaliate on him because of what they saw. So I never would put somebody in harm...there's still people you don't really wanna bust a trade. They may physically tell you that they don't like gay people so you tone it down or you keep it moving. You keep moving like who you are. If you know someone doesn't like something whether you bringing that thing to them every day, it's not going to help the situation. If you know they don't like it, you take it away from them. You don't bring them to the situation.

Although Cade was not physically present in the first part of this example of experienced homophobia, he offered a good example of the fight versus soothing role within his relationship when managing homophobia:

**Cade:** It was, okay, so he was walking home one day and there was a group of guys standing on the corner and as he was walking home they had said something like you know 'whatcho doing around here faggot?' And so he had texted me, but I was, I was sleep so I didn't hear anything and I have a really bad problem of turning off my ringer and so it be on silent and so I didn't really hear anything. And he kept on texting me saying like 'you know I'm scared' or something like that and I'm like you know well when I woke up I got the text messages and I'm like where you at now? And he's like 'don't talk to me' and I'm like why? And he was like "because I almost got beat up for me being gay' and I'm like huh? And he was like 'yeah and it was not a good feeling and that's why I wish you coulda been here and you couldn't.' And I was like wow...I'll still bring it up or he'll still bring it up just to touch base and let each other know that what happened wasn't right and that you know justice will be served if anything was to happen harmful to him...I was outraged. I was outraged because I feel as though that it was a group of people. Not only a group of people, even if it was one person I feel as I was feeling before because of the miserable lives that they live...and maybe it's not miserable, but maybe it's just because they have to put their eye on someone that isn't

doing anything. Just being out because they like to be gay. It kind of made me mad because it's like okay you could have picked on anybody. What if that was your brother? What if that was your sister? You know? How would you feel?

**Interviewer:** Have the two of you ever been together when someone said something to you because of your sexual orientation or relationship?

**Cade:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** What did you do then? How did you two handle that?

**Cade:** I got a little nasty with the person and they backed off.

**Interviewer:** What did your boyfriend do?

**Cade:** He was kinda like just he was like 'oh just don't say nothing' and I'm like no! I'm like fuck this because I don't have anything to do with their insecurities. I'm being me and they're being them. I didn't say nothing to them about doing anything with what they doing with you know? So I just got really upset. That was just a little mild part of what I said. I wanna fight so I don't want him to hold on to me, but his whole thing is like 'baby'. He'll like wanna hold me or something and be like 'calm down' and I'll be like no it is that serious...I'll just be like you know back off of me and let me handle this. Like kinda in an angry way and I'll be letting him know afterwards that it's not about me being angry towards you, but it's like I feel as though my rights are being taken away from me. And he'll be like 'I understand' and we'll talk about it.

**Interviewer:** Was there ever a time when he got upset and you were the calmer one?

**Cade:** Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. He'll get mad and I mean I'll be angry, but I won't get as mad as he had got at that point. It happened to us about three times. About the name calling and we never had physical harm done except for when he was followed by himself, but with us it just a lot of name calling.

**Interviewer:** Can you recall what happens when the two of you have had name calling? Did the two of you separate physically or remain physically close? Or something else?

**Cade:** At the first time we separated. The second time we moved closer. We hugged each other and held each other's hand. The third time we kissed.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me what you recalling happening?

**Cade:** Nothing. They really backed off then because they like 'oh wait a minute. You know like they not bothering anybody. They were walking past'. We were in the past. They were walking past and they was like 'faggots' and I was like oh okay and kissed him. And he was like he looked at the guy and started laughing and the guy was like 'shh, they gay.' They kept on walking. It was nothing.

**Interviewer:** How did you feel in the moment?

**Cade:** I just felt like I was with him so I was happy. And because we had grown so much progress over the last two times I was like this not nothing new. But we planned. That's why we kissed. That was part of the plan. The first time we was like we gonna hold each other's hand which we did. And the second time we kissed. The second time we held each other's hand they threw something. Yeah. So it didn't touch us so we kept on walking. So, you know, the first time I felt outraged, the second two times like I said I'ma hit this head on. I'm tired of being you know put in to this shell that you know straight America wants you to be in so I'm going to fight back. The third time it didn't bother me at all. I just grew immune to it.

**Interviewer:** How do you think this may have impacted your relationship if at all?

**Cade:** It made us stronger. It made us stronger, but at the same time it grew us apart because of the incident that happened to him for me not answering the phone. So you know yeah it was a real hurt piece for him, but there was really no intent on my part. And I had to let him know you know that there was no intent, but when things happen...

**Interviewer:** How often would you say the two of you have experienced homophobia?

**Cade:** Not that often. Those three times. Those three times was when it really mattered. If anything's being said it's like under someone's breath so we'll look back and like you know, but not really that much. No. Probably about once a week

**Interviewer:** How do you feel about the way you two handle discriminatory experiences?

**Cade:** Well he's growing like I am so I kinda feel as though he's doing a good job...I will say that it made our relationship because it's like okay wow okay at least like one of us is gonna stand up for if not both one of us is going to stand up for like the cause or stand up for each other.

Galan also identified subtheme 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, and 6.6 within his relationship while managing homophobia:

**Galan:** I'm the type of person who says if you wanna say something, I'm not gonna hold back. It's just gonna hurt. People can say stuff out they mouth. Like when I'm on the train people be like 'oh there go a faggot' da, da, da. I just listen to my iPod and ignore what they say. I'm the type of person usually as much as it sound smart I'm gonna always wanna fight. I'm breaking out the habit slowly so I'm trying to get in less trouble. Trying to start classes this summer for this fall, modeling classes, dance classes. I wanna grow and have something good going for me and not just fight. But, with him, the last time [Galan experienced homophobia] was Tuesday and we were walking back to his car. We went to the movie theatre and we was walking back to the car and somebody said "that them faggots." I was gonna go turn around and say something smart back and my boyfriend, he just cut me off 'cause he knows I have a smart mouth at times and he goes: 'keep walking, keep walking, keep walking. Get in the car. It's just words, don't worry about it. Let them say what he wanna say.'

**Interviewer:** How did you feel when that happened?

**Galan:** Oh, okay. At least he just saved me from a fight. So that's a good thing...When we got back to his house he was like 'well don't let what people say get to you. You gonna have to fight if you say something smart back and you don't never know what could happen to you. They could pull out a gun and shoot you' or so I mean I'm just (inaudible). Now I miss him...I know how sometimes he don't like to hold hands outside. I mean the only times we really kiss is when we downtown or something or we in the car. You know like I mean there's a time and place for everything, but most of the time he'll grab my hand or he'll stop me and kiss me and we'll keep walking...

**Interviewer:** Does your behavior towards your boyfriend change when you are in a gay friendly space?

**Galan:** You know what I mean you don't have to worry about somebody running up to you or wanting to fight you or just getting jumped and just being around people that's you know what I mean you around people that's like you: gay, bi, lesbian, transgendered.

It's like, okay, you're safe down here and it's like you can be yourself and don't have to worry about anybody coming to fight you or you don't have to worry about getting jumped...

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me a little bit about how experiences of homophobia affected your relationship?

**Galan:** I think it's affected in kinda like a good way 'cause that way you have the experience of in case you know people wanna be saying something smart and you know if you hear it a lot you just let it go compared to: huh? What? You just said something smart about me. I wanna go fight them. No. It's not always about fighting and that's what everybody wants to do these days. It's senseless. They act like they all just wanna fight over something stupid. It's just stupid. And I realized fighting ain't the way to solve things. If you wanna solve things, just ignore it or talk about it and move on. Just say hello, goodbye or don't speak at all... People's gonna say what people's gonna say so just ignore it. I mean don't really make me feel like I don't wanna be in a relationship so it's just something I got to deal with.

Zamir also offered evidence of this fighter versus soother role within his relationship:

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me about an experience when the two of you were out together and somebody called you out your name?

**Zamir:** Wow. When we was in [location name] visiting my [relative] before she passed. We was walking down the street on [name] bridge and somebody got out the car and said 'you f'ing faggots' and he went to just lash out and I was like this is something we gotta face. Like we took on this relationship and instead of no matter what is the outcome we took on this relationship and was like we gotta face a lot of stuff so get ready for it. And this is one of those things we gotta face so that's that.

**Interviewer:** So he wanted to...

**Zamir:** Attack them.

**Interviewer:** And you were the one...

**Zamir:** I calmed him down. And like that's honestly I don't know how that is 'cause like his mom and them can't calm him down. I can calm him down.

**Interviewer:** When that person called you 'f'ing faggots', do you remember what happened in the moment?

**Zamir:** I was walking slowly. He ran ahead of me and I was like Rafiq! He didn't pay me no attention so I called him a nickname I call him. R! And he stopped, turned around and started smiling, but you could look in his face and see that he was mad. I was like calm down. Remember we stand and we gonna deal with the obstacles. We gonna go through with people and talk about it whether it's good or bad and he was like 'okay'. And I was like no matter what they say, we still here. We still gonna live our life regardless of what they say and I'm here for you. You here for me so let's do what we gotta do and forget what they got to say because they negativity. There's something about us that they don't like, but they don't have to like us. We like each other and keep it moving.



Moreover, Zamir discussed the strategy he and his lover adopted when coming out to their family which illustrates subtheme 6.3. In particular, Zamir talked about coming out to his father who holds a prominent position within a church. This church's religious teachings identify queer sexuality as a sin. This example illustrates the ways in which this couple utilized physical proximity to feel safe and secure in times of stress and anticipated homophobia:

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me some about how you make a decision to tell somebody you're in a relationship?

**Zamir:** Wow. Tell a person we in a relationship? Like how me and him make a decision together? Well, usually he'll tell it with no problem. 'That's my boyfriend'. I'm the type of person that be like it depend if I'm comfortable. But like I'm really comfortable now, but he the person that say 'okay, that's my boyfriend' with no problem. Like when we first sat down to tell my mom and his mom. We sat them down together. We was in the [location name] outside the [location name] and we was like we gonna tell our parents. And he was like 'alright and so how we gonna do it?' We sat down and was like okay they gonna find out eventually. And he was like 'what if they don't accept us? You got me and I got you.' And I went to his momma's house with him and told her and she said 'welcome to the family'. We went to my mom, told my mom, and my mom was like 'I knew it, but I was waiting till you confirmed it'. 'Cause she was like 'you always together like every single day. You two been together more than you is with your own brothers and sister'. My mom was like 'okay, welcome to the family'. Then our dads was the very hardest. My dad was. We tell his dad first. His dad was like what he say? At first he wasn't kind of it. He was like 'not, I don't want my son doing that'. He said 'dad listen I've been with Zamir for a year now and I'm falling for him. I'm falling in love with him and there's no one who can take that from me and you either accept me or you don't 'cause I'm not gonna give him up under any circumstance'. So his dad had to accept it. Now my dad, being a preacher, it was a very hard thing to do. I told my dad I was like dad, we need to talk. I had Rafiq right there with me. I had Rafiq by my side and my dad was like 'okay' and he sat down and I was like dad this is I was like oh my God. I don't know how to break it down to him. Daddy the Bible says about homophobia you can't be this, that and the third, but I said well I said Daddy this is something I gotta tell you. He sorta had it in his head already when he seen me and Rafiq 'cause Rafiq got he was like this when we was talking to my dad [makes motion of moving close to someone] and he got real close to me and I was like this is my boyfriend. He said 'are you serious?' and he gonna say, 'but that's not in the Bible', but I was like Daddy this a lot of things different now a days. We can't always live by the Bible 'cause you can't help who you love. And I was like, listen I'm head over heels about Rafiq and my mom already accept it so. And he was like 'I got no choice'. So he said 'I wanna see you in church every Sunday. Together. And welcome to the family'.

**Interviewer:** Wow. Do you remember whether you felt comfortable when Rafiq was getting closer to you when you was talking to your dad?

**Zamir:** Honestly, in my heart, I wanted him to scoot over. It was just like he was reading my mind. I was like Rafiq scoot over, but I didn't say it out my mouth. Rafiq scoot over please. I was saying to myself. Rafiq, please scoot over. And he just moved over. It was like oh my God he can hear me thinking. He can hear me thinkin'. He moved over and I was like yeah! And once he scoot over and sat close to me, I said dad this is my boyfriend. It's like I don't know how to explain my relationship with him. It's *the* relationship. The most strongest relationship I've known to be in the gay relationship...we face a lot of challenges in life. Like people be talking 'bout our relationship and it's not okay for two men to be together. It's not right. You should be ashamed to bring anybody in here this, that and the third, but we just feel like we got each other. We took this relationship. We took it. We said we wanna deal with each other so we gonna deal with the consequences.

Additionally, Zamir recognized varying comfort levels with physical affection depending on the area of the city he and his lover were in which connects to subtheme

6.1. When asked a direct question about physical affection and different sections of Philadelphia, Zamir stated the following:

...it's like North Philly would be the roughest place...I wanna grab him or hold him, but I can't. Then it gets like sometime I can't deal and we go right ahead and do it...We still walks together, but we gotta put on. We gotta try to blend in with everybody else... anywhere besides North Philly we can be us.

Zamir also noted that a friend pointed out that he and his lover behave differently towards each other when in North Philadelphia.

He was like 'y'all always having fun and then, when y'all amongst North Philly, y'all are still together, but y'all don't act as though you still like each other when you in North Philly'. I was like we do we just gotta hold a certain thing 'cause we don't want people to put bad negativity into him or me 'cause that affects our daughters. Our biggest concern right now is the girls. If they wasn't in the picture, it'd be a whole 'nother story.

When asked about the impact homophobia has had on his relationship, Gabriyel expressed his belief that experiences with homophobia made his relationship "greater". This idea of homophobia positively impacting his relationship also seems connected to relational coping and his personal response to homophobia:

It made it greater because the thing is I'm happy because they are called haters. That's what they called. Haters. And you know living the life and you know there's gonna be some haters around you. There's gonna be some haters in your life. That's what make you. That's what make me. That's what make me my haters. Because you know what I mean 'cause you hating for no reason. Why are you hating anybody? You just nice, you got a good girlfriend, looking good, dressed good, hair done every day, looking nice. You sitting everyday looking nice. Why are you hating on me?

After being asked how he learned to manage homophobia, Gabriyel responded with the following:

Honestly I would say myself. Nobody necessarily helped me. It was me because I went through it in middle school. People just saying stuff in middle school like 'oh he's feminine' so automatically he's gay. A lot of things I actually dealt with on my own. Being as though things that I've been through in my childhood I had to deal with it on my own. I couldn't tell nobody. So I learned how to hold a lot of stuff in. And that's basically where that comes from...It made me better. Each and every day that somebody comes to me and hate on me. It make me better. Each and every day. Each and every day. Because when somebody put you down, you shouldn't feel sad, you shouldn't feel mad. You should feel happy 'cause that'll make you wanna be greater. It motivates me...I'm not gonna change for nobody. I don't worry about it. I do not worry about it.

Khalil also stated that he learned how to manage homophobia independently, but identified the positive outcome of having both biological and chosen family. Khalil terms this chosen family as "gay family". "Gay family" typically identify as queer and provide support to each other. Khalil illustrates how these family members are built in supports that have assisted him in learning how to successfully manage homophobia:

Within my family, my uncle, he's older, he's pushing 30 now. My family they had to deal with him so it's like he just made it easier for me when I came out. Like everybody was so accepting of it. When I go around there I don't have to feel different. I don't have to feel like I'm walking on egg shells. This my family. So we chilling and you know....And I talk to my gay family. We talk about it [homophobia]. Like I said, it's not a constant conversation, but it's something that does come up when in the process of us talking and stuff. We all just say the same thing. Our gay mom and our gay dad just let it roll off. Just like my gay mom tell us: 'I'm not coming to picking nobody up from jail with something that you could have avoided. If it don't have nothing to do with you, keep it moving. People

gonna talk about you till the day you die'. And they will. And we take heed to what she says.

When I asked Khalil if he felt that homophobia impacted his relationship, he had a similar conceptualization as Gabriyel who also interpreted experiences with homophobia as making the relationship stronger:

I don't think it necessarily impacted our relationship. If it did, it only brought us closer together. Like you have people. When we walk down the street a lot of times people think we just best friends though. But you do have times where like we'll walk down the street and we'll be going our separate ways and we'll kiss or something and someone be like 'oh those faggots' da da da, but it only makes us stronger and it makes us like each other that much more 'cause we can show each other affection in public. We can do things like that. If we didn't love each other, we wouldn't care. We wouldn't do it. We'd be in the house kissing. When we be outside, we be like girl get away. But it's not like that. When we outside, we pull each other closer to each other.

Once asked how he developed personal skills to manage homophobia, Khalil offered the following:

I feel like people that say stuff about it, they're petty. They have something within themselves that they uncomfortable with. But in the beginning it used to bother me, but now it just like people gonna talk about me till the day I die. If they not talking about my sexuality, they gonna talk about my shoes and if they not talking about that, they gonna talk about the way my hair look. So it's always something that somebody gonna have to talk about so it's just one more thing that they gonna talk about. If it's not right for them, it doesn't necessarily mean it's not right for me. I'm not gonna get mad at you 'cause you don't like something that I'm doing just as well as you shouldn't get mad at me 'cause I'm doing what you don't like.

When asked about the developmental process he and Gabriyel went through when learning how to deal with homophobia as a couple, Khalil responded:

We used to [feel uncomfortable] like a long time ago, but not any more 'cause it's like it doesn't bother us anymore. That was in the beginning of the relationship so it's like we was a little bit nervous and we don't know what this person and that person is going to say, but not anymore...I know he's walking right beside me. I don't walk ahead of him, he don't walk behind me. We walk side by side. So long as I know that he's right there and that he got me, then I'm good. I don't need validating from nobody. Nobody needs to validate anything 'cause I know how he

feel about me so we good...I feel as though now we handle it in the most mature way possible. We just, you call me a faggot that's nothing new in the world. Come up with something else. We just keep walking. And I think what it is people, straight people in general, they don't know the definition of a faggot. Definition of a faggot: a faggot is somebody that's not doing anything with they lives. We both working, we both in school so you're not talking to us 'cause it doesn't apply to us. We both have our own places, we're both in school, we're both working so you're not talking to us. It doesn't bother us. If it don't, apply let it fly...I don't think that homophobia necessarily impacts, it I just think that you know it makes us closer. Because we have peoples that's gonna talk, but it doesn't do anything but bring us closer. It doesn't do anything, but show me that he loves me that much more. 'Cause my boyfriend you would never know that he was gay until you see him with me so it makes me realize oh he love me that much more that he can walk down the street and don't care what nobody has to say. He's still gonna walk beside me. So it makes me feel good. That's a good thing.

Tyrice also identified a fight and soothe response within his relational dynamic. When I first asked Tyrice how he and his boyfriend managed experiences with homophobia within their relationship, Tyrice responded with "Fight. Just the same as me. Fight." Later in the interview, Tyrice offered differences within the relational dynamic when managing experiences with homophobia.

**Tyrice:** I have plenty of scenarios that I would handle that [homophobia] which is really not good because I be, I'm not a shady person, but I know how to throw shade so I be like: really you're a fucking faggot 'cause I fucked your father and he was taking my dick.

**Interviewer:** What does your boyfriend do when that happens?

**Tyrice:** He be telling me to shut the hell up and if they would approach me he would literally attack them and I would fight with him. Sometimes he would say 'I don't feel like fighting and being all violent. I don't feel like going to jail' da da da. I'm a fighter so, I'm a fighter.

Tyrice offered a concrete example of an experience with homophobia, how he and his boyfriend handled the situation, and how he felt once the situation was resolved. When asked if he ever felt like he was treated differently because of his sexual orientation when with his boyfriend, he identified the following:

**Tyrice:** I would say in a restaurant situation yes. We had service, but they was just a little bit rude. I didn't handle it very lightly. He would have handled it different. He would

have said 'I feel some type of way'. No. I just started roughly. I said I need a new waiter. I want to speak to your manager. I said something quick

**Interviewer:** What would he have done?

**Tyrice:** He would actually, he would of explained it. Me, not so not so much explaining 'cause I would be just reading the waiter. I'm not a rude person, but I don't respond to rudeness very positively. I said I wanna speak to your manager. She said 'why?' and I said I just wanna speak to your manager.

**Interviewer:** What did he do?

**Tyrice:** He just looked at me like you gonna have us fighting in this restaurant. 'Cause he knows how I am. I don't respond to negativity very calmly.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me how you felt or what you thought about your boyfriend when that was going on?

**Tyrice:** I felt just about the same. Sometimes I question whether I should be in this relationship. Sometimes.

**Interviewer:** When does that happen?

**Tyrice:** After the restaurant scenario. Well, basically after any scenario. I start thinking about my safety. And being out with him and fighting causes problems.

**Interviewer:** Do you ever seek comfort from him when you are feeling hostility from others when you are out?

**Tyrice:** I do seek comfort. He knows that I need affection. He gives me a hug or kisses me. We also talk about what happens and he says I need to be more calm and I say no. No I don't. I need to knock some heads off.

Tyrice identified experiences with homophobia as impacting his relationship "not so much in a negative way, but ...in a positive way. It bring us together. Closer." When asked to explain further, Tyrice gave the example of his family of origin who no longer maintains contact with him because of his sexual orientation:

**Tyrice:** I see my family, but I don't associate with them like that. So, if they, if they would have met my boyfriend, it's gonna be a lot of side comments and I don't wanna be hearing it, snapping and cuss them all out...Like the same situation when we was talking about my family. When we was walking down the street and he was with me at the time and he kissed me and I kissed him back. That felt as though our bonds was really strong and close because it's like, like I don't care if my family standing there. I'm still gonna love him and kiss him and what not in front of them because I'm not ashamed of who I am...they didn't say anything to me 'cause I gave them an evil look like go ahead and start.

**Interviewer:** What did you think about that experience?

**Tyrice:** It was well, (a) it was like start a little trouble and, (b) it was romantic. It was cute.

Tyrice also offered distinctions regarding the environment as to when he feels safe or comfortable expressing physical affection towards his boyfriend. This awareness of environmental nuances (subtheme 6.5) allowed him to maintain feelings of safety and connection to his boyfriend when in public space:

**Tyrice:** Let's say me and him was holding hands together and we was walking like North Philly. People would probably be like 'Oh, I hate fucking faggots' da da da this, that and the third. I would respond very negatively to that. Versus same scenario, but the difference is it's not as loud or obnoxious. They just talking amongst themselves. I know you did it, but I don't care because it's not like you was trying to draw attention to yourself...It was one time, but we was out we was out in New Jersey. Camden, but that's all. I was out of our comfort zone. In Philly, but anywhere else, well, except for in New York 'cause New York is, I feel comfortable, but outside of that I feel out of my comfort zone so I don't know how people over there will respond. It's not that I'm scared. I just don't know how they will respond...'Cause I look. I'm very observant so I'll look and I hear. Like in Center City I feel really comfortable because it's Center City. All walks of life walks these streets. But if I'm in a part of the city that I don't know, then I'm not comfortable.

**Interviewer:** How does your boyfriend handle this?

**Tyrice:** Like he's more let's hold hands. I'm like more nah except at night

**Interviewer:** So you're more comfortable holding hands at night? Why do you think that is?

**Tyrice:** 'Cause I don't wanna be everyday I don't wanna be going down the street gotta battle like every single day.

Nasir also discussed this division of fighting and soothing within his relationship:

Usually I'm the one who I can ignore everything. I have the patience of a saint. So it's like I'll just let someone run back 'cause I've been experiencing that all my life. Since I knew what gay was back in like third grade, I've been called gay. So, it's not really a thing. My fiancé, on the other hand, he's said the first time he's ever been called gay or a faggot or references when he met me when we used to go out. So it's like he'll have words with a person before I will, but it's never like led to anything physical. It's just been like they not used to anyone responding...I tried to be the mediator and make sure that it doesn't get too heated 'cause I don't want to see anybody in any sorta physical altercation. I'm like just let it go. They're losers. They have no lives.

Nasir indicated a different style of handling homophobia when it is directed towards others and he is not with his fiancé:

I've seen people downtown harass transgender man who was dressed as a female and they'll say something and then like they'll like look at me for confirmation or whatever, but I'm like that's not right. I've walked down [location] one day and this group of guys rode by in a car and it was a girl who was a basketball player who plays for [school name] and they called her a dyke. And I'm like you all need to get a life. I feel as though it like, being in this relationship, it made me stronger when it comes to like a self-perception and an identification and not caring.

Jayden identified this division of fight or soothe within his relational dynamic when managing homophobia: "I'm the angry aggressive one in the situation and he's the scared one and sometimes he has to calm me down because he sees how angry I get because I do have a fierce temper and I would use it."

Despite Jayden identifying his desire to protect and/or becoming physically aggressive as the result of experienced homophobia, Jayden identified an incident in which he used reasoning and rationale as a way to manage homophobia while separated from his boyfriend:

I had a gentleman who came to my [school] to pick up his wife's homework because she was sick, tried to tell me that what I was, was wrong, that it was against the Bible and I got in trouble for it. He was told he can never come back to the [school] if he behaved in that manner. I was told that it was my fault for allowing him to say as much stuff as he had said to me and that I could've walked out at any point. Because he also told me that I shouldn't be allowed to get married. He also told me I shouldn't be allowed to have children and that I should never be allowed to adopt children. He told me that one of the worst things that America ever did was allow gay couples to adopt children...I was angry, but I wasn't angry like how I normally violent angry. I was just angry to the point where I was expressing some really valid points. I was bringing up the fact that there are animals that are gay and it's been shown and they've been watched and studied. Like the penguins in the zoo in New York, who are both male, who attach themselves to an egg and hatched the egg and raised it. Now they're separated, but it was a valid point...I brought up the fact about that there are gay dolphins off the coast of Australia. He tried to find that point invalid. They were actually proud of me that I handled it the way I did, but I still got in trouble by another instructor who came to me and told me that, although what he did was wrong, I'm just as wrong for the way that I carried myself and that because I carry myself the way I do that I won't be able to get jobs and that I won't be able to get promotions in jobs if I was able to obtain one because I was gay. And I had to tell her: but let me let you know, I'm feminine and it's not going to change. I've been feminine



my whole since I was a little kid. It's not hard to tell that I'm gay. Everyone has known since I was a little kid before I even knew what gay was... You need to masculinize yourself and go back into the closet and keep it a secret... This is my everyday daily. Like this is what it's like.

#### 7. Relational Reattachment Processes after Experienced Homophobia

After experiencing homophobia, youth discussed tactics employed to secure feelings of attachment. These subthemes were as follows:

7.1 outside support,

7.2 emotional soothing within the relationship,

7.3 communication,

7.4 the relational unit, and

7.5 physical intimacy.

In relation to these subthemes, eight out of the fourteen youth identified contact with supports as the most helpful experience in maintaining connection to their boyfriend, partner, or lover after experiences with homophobia.

Calvin, whose mother identifies as a lesbian, identified seeking support from his mom after experiencing homophobia when with his boyfriend:

...I didn't like the situation and I was talking to my partner and I went to my mom and talked to her about it. She was like 'it's always going be one person out of the group or the groups that don't like your decision'. She was like 'just pay it no mind'. And that's exactly what I did.

Indicative of subtheme 7.4, Calvin also used the word "we" and "us" when describing experiences with homophobia and how he and his boyfriend felt when negotiating or contending with homophobia:

We act the same. We act more closer in the house, but like we don't really hold hands outside. We kiss outside. I would never you know if we on the SEPTA bus. I would never sit on the other side of the bus. I would sit right next to him. I'm

not really scared of nothing. We not really scared of what nobody else think of us except for his parents. He just don't want them to know right now.

Galan, who also identified a particularly close relationship with his family of origin, identified the importance of talking to his biological, gay identified brother about experiences with homophobia: "I mean with him growing up and coming out I mean he told me some of his stories and gave me advice." Galan also discussed advice seeking and comfort from his mom who gave Galan the advice that "Peoples gonna say what peoples gonna say so just ignore it." Galan pointed out that this advice was very similar to what his boyfriend suggested when coping with homophobia: "...she said the same thing he said basically." Towards the end of the interview, Galan began to use "we" indicating the relational unit when discussing how he contends with homophobia. In the following quote, Galan indicates the advice given by both his mom and boyfriend in the following phrase: "We just let it go." This consistent message from both important attachment figures seemed to provide Galan with emotional soothing while providing internal support for his decision to manage experiences with environmental homophobia by disregarding it.

Nasir indicated the importance of emotionally soothing his fiancé after experiences with homophobia. This behavior also seems to be part of the reattachment experience after contending with homophobia:

...it almost felt as though they were really disrespecting him and chipping away at his manhood. And I just do everything I can to reassure him. Like you have a steady job and you're doing so much better than a lot of these people and being gay is just a small portion. It's not you. It does not make you... We have plenty of straight friends. We have more straight friends than we have gay friends that accept us. So we know that everybody does not feel the same way and they're just being close minded people.

When separated from his fiancé, Nasir discussed the ways in which he manages experienced homophobia through subthemes 7.2 and 7.3:

Nine times out of ten if something that serious happen I'll like step away and call him on the phone and let him know and he'll do the same thing for me. He'll be like 'it'll be okay, it'll be alright. He didn't physically hurt you. You know how you are' this, that and the third. Just being encouraging.

Nasir also indicated the importance of talking about his experience with his fiancé and his friends:

We'll talk about it. We have people that we like bounce stuff off of and get feedback or whatever...I feel as though there is strength in numbers. So it's like I wouldn't only just be with him, I'd be like call up some friends. Oh come on over. Bring a bottle. We need a drink. Not like substance abuse is the problem, but we need to chill. A lot of the times by the end of the day we're like don't bother.

Cade discussed the importance of communication with his boyfriend after experiences with homophobia: "...I'll be letting him know afterwards that it's not about me being angry towards you, but it's like I feel as though my rights are being taken away from me. And he'll be like I understand..." Interestingly, Cade will talk to his chosen gay parents, but does not talk with his gay children about experienced homophobia:

...my gay mom Sophie and my gay stepdad. It's kinda weird, but my gay stepdad Davis. I'll talk to them about it. Not to my gay children or anything...I try to keep my life in a way as though they won't know too much. They'll know just enough.

Cade also indicated that physical intimacy with his partner increases after experiences with homophobia and offers the following reasoning: "Cause it's like to let each other know that we're okay. Let each other know mentally and kinda emotionally, but to take that extra step it's like just a greater feeling." Finally, Cade's relationship illustrated the importance of communication in maintaining attachment when experiencing homophobia or after an experience with homophobia. As stated earlier in this chapter, Cade indicated that his relationship was negatively impacted because he was not emotionally available to

his boyfriend to process his experience with homophobia. Cade felt that his inaccessibility after his boyfriend's experienced harassment was a primary contributor to the demise of the relationship.

...I didn't really hear anything and he kept on texting me saying like 'you know I'm scared' or something like that and I'm like you know well when I woke up I got the text messages and I'm like where you at now? And he's like 'don't talk to me' and I'm like why? And he was like 'because I almost got beat up for me being gay' and I'm like huh? And he was like 'yeah and it was not a good feeling and that's why I wish you coulda been here and you couldn't' and I was like wow.

Tyrice and Jayden both used physical intimacy to maintain feelings of connection towards their boyfriend while experiencing homophobia. This also seemed to offer a dual purpose because it seems as though it helped both Tyrice and Jayden feel as though they were challenging the other's homophobia directly. Tyrice identified his family of origin as homophobic. When Tyrice saw his family of origin while with his boyfriend, he stated that his boyfriend gave him a kiss in front of his family. Tyrice discussed his assessment of this experience: "It was well (a) it was like start a little trouble and (b) it was romantic. It was cute." Tyrice also indicated the importance of physical intimacy, emotional soothing, and communication after experiencing homophobia:

I do seek comfort. He knows that I need affection. He gives me a hug or kisses me. We also talk about what happens and he says I need to be more calm and I say no. No I don't. I need to knock some heads off.

Despite this desire for physical intimacy, Tyrice made a distinction between when he desired emotional soothing from physical comfort and when this was not helpful. With his familial experience, Tyrice identified his desire for physical comfort because "It's not like my family doesn't know. They know". When experiencing homophobia with the belief that the other person does not know Tyrice's sexual orientation, Tyrice reported the

following: “I was a little pissed and I didn’t want nobody to touch me and he tends to touch me when I’m upset and I tend to back away.” There is a contradiction with this quote given that persons were already assuming Tyrice’s and his boyfriend’s sexual orientation. As a result, he and his boyfriend became the target of homophobia. It may be that the assumption of queer identity is angry making for Tyrice. When Tyrice is able to disclose his sexual orientation and same sex relationship at will, he is able to exert some sense of control over resulting homophobia. Additionally, Tyrice may have needed physical displays of affection and attachment when contending with his family’s homophobia because Tyrice is illustrating the transition between Erikson’s (1968) psychological stages of development.

Tyrice also identified the importance of talking with his gay family about his experiences with homophobia and how this communication and support led to reevaluation of how he handled the situation while with his boyfriend:

I talk with my gay family. They say ‘do whatever you think is necessary’. But they say, on the turn around, ‘as long as they don’t (inaudible) to you, then be more considerate and be more how would you persuade yourself. So if she wasn’t nothing and didn’t hurt you, then lean back’.

Finally, Tyrice discussed the ways in which he and his boyfriend maintain attachment when unable to display physical affection: “We talk when we not holding hands. We talk. Like I know he’s there...It’s not, like it’s more like deep [the communication]. It’s like real deep. In situations where we not holding hands. It’s deep.”

Jayden also identified the use of physical intimacy to challenge homophobia:

There was a group of us and me and him were holding hands and there were other people holding hands and being affectionate and people started calling us ‘faggots’ that were walking past us. We gave them these dirty looks...I became overly affectionate and went over top with it. Since it was such a problem, then I’ll show you more. I wasn’t feeling scared because I know that there is power in

numbers and there was enough of us to take those people on and I know how to fight.

Jayden indicated his boyfriend's discomfort with his expressed affection:

In the beginning, he kinda did [feel uncomfortable] and that's when I became overly affectionate with him to show him like that there's nothing wrong with us. There's nothing wrong with what we're doing. What we're doing is perfectly fine. It happens all the time. Everyday. You will see it anywhere you go in the world. There's nothing wrong with it.

When asked if there were persons he talked to about homophobia, Jayden identified the importance of talking to his friends about "...incidents that have occurred and how we've handled them, maybe how we didn't handle them, maybe how they should've been handled or could've been handled in the environments they occurred in."

Khalil identified a progression in reattachment experiences since the inception of his relationship with Gabriyel. Khalil stated that:

We used to like move close together a long time ago, but not anymore 'cause it's like it doesn't bother us anymore. That was in the beginning of the relationship so it's like we was a little bit nervous and we don't know what this person and that person is going to say, but not anymore...I know he's walking right beside me. I don't walk ahead of him, he don't walk behind me. We walk side by side. So long as I know that he's right there and that he got me then I'm good. I don't need validating from nobody. Nobody needs to validate anything 'cause I know how he feel about me so we good...we let it roll off our shoulders. Most of the time people say stuff, we don't even talk about it later on. We look at it and laugh why it happen and then once it's done and over with we keep walking.

Both Khalil and Gabriyel identified the positive impact Gabriyel's family has had on helping them manage homophobia and maintain feelings of attachment after experiences with homophobia. Khalil identified Gabriyel's brother as setting a standard with his friends in relation to harassing Gabriyel and Khalil because of their sexual orientation and relationship:

His brother, at first, his brother is a little hood so his brother was a little standoffish, but when he realized I wasn't go nowhere and we was talking for a while he just was like 'that's my homie' and you know what I mean 'don't

disrespect him'. He tells his friends when his friends come over and we all cool now.

Khalil also identified his biological family's acceptance of his sexuality as a tool in assisting in management of homophobic experiences when with Gabriyel: "my mom, my friends, and the two of us. So, basically outside of those people what other people think it doesn't bother us." Gabriyel also identified his family as a positive support in helping him manage experiences with homophobia to support his relationship. Gabriyel identified his mom as assisting him in learning to manage homophobia and stay connected to his boyfriend:

She'll let me know, you know what I mean, 'Gabriyel, don't worry about it.' She'll be like 'Gabriyel, don't worry about it. Long as your mother is cool with it, then you don't have to worry about nothing else'. So that's what I think. I think about my mom and how she's cool with it. She don't have no problem with it. If she don't have no problem with it, then I'm cool.

Familial acknowledgement and willingness to emotionally support the relationship is what Zamir identified as assisting him and his lover in managing homophobia and maintain feelings of attachment post experienced homophobia. Zamir also identified the ways in which he and his lover provide verbal comfort as a means to secure feelings of emotional attachment after experienced homophobia:

Remember we stand and we gonna deal with the obstacles we gonna go through with people and talk about it whether it's good or bad and he was like 'okay'. And I was like no matter what they say, we still here. We still gonna live our life regardless of what they say and I'm here for you. You here for me so let's do what we gotta do and forget what they got to say because they negativity. There's something about us that they don't like but they don't have to like us. We like each other and keep it moving.

Zamir also indicated the progression in which he and his lover used communication to manage homophobia:

We got negativity like that more than one time. The first time it hurted. Yeah we had a conversation about it. We had a conversation before. A couple

conversations about it...I said okay from the future reference if they say it, just forget it 'cause they either envy our relationship because we been together for so long or they just don't know. If you don't know us, don't judge us.

Zamir also indicated the importance of friendship in managing homophobia as a way to repair attachment after experienced homophobia:

We talk to each other, our friends. It's even got to the point where like my friends and his friends they associate with each other now. Even the ones I don't like. Even the ones he don't like. We all sit amongst each other and talk about a whole bunch of stuff. We talk about better ways to help us in our every day life. Like, despite the fact that it was us giving out information to help others keep their relationship stronger, we all help each other as friends. We all help each other to keep our environment positive. Like I told some boy earlier today; he asked me 'how do you all, you and your friends, live your life every day and doing y'all no matter what people say?' I told him not this weekend, next weekend come to my house and see how me and all our friends we all sit up and talk about situations. Like how to deal with people who doubt our relationships or doubt you because you gay or whatever. We all sit up there together and talk and throw ideas out at each other. Do this, do that, dat dat dat and make like my best friend [name] he say 'pay it no mind because it not gonna kill you and what don't kill you, help build you so keep going'.

In end, Mu'Sad discussed the importance of code words to convey care, love and concern for his boyfriend when talking to his boyfriend in front of family members who are homophobic: "I feel comfortable, but I don't say certain things to him when I'm at home. Like we use a code word for I love you when I'm at home..."

#### 8. *Contradictory Statements about Experienced Homophobia*

Part of the inclusion criteria for this study was a verbalized belief that the research participant had experienced homophobia. Although all youth interviewed verbalized concrete examples of experienced homophobia, throughout the interview process, eleven out of the fourteen interviews repeatedly expressed uncertainty in regards to any experienced homophobia. This contradiction broke into two subthemes:



## 8.1 self-blame, and

## 8.2 family rejection

Despite making the connection that he and his significant other made decisions about displayed feelings of affection towards each other dependent upon the environment and feared homonegativity, Tavon also stated that he did not feel that persons discriminated against him because of his same sex relationship or his sexual orientation. Similarly, Demetrios stated that he “kinda” felt he and his boyfriend had been treated negatively because of homophobia while together. This response of “kinda” may indicate Demetrios’ ambivalence about whether their relationship was the target of homophobia or more severely impacted by his boyfriend’s internalized homonegativity.

Later in the interview, Demetrios discussed a time when he was gay bashed. When discussing this experience with violence, Demetrios identified the reason for the violence as being the perpetrators’ boredom while acknowledging an awareness that he was victimized because of his sexual orientation. Additionally, Demetrios tends to conceptualize homophobia as the result of a queer person’s behavior or identity presentation indicating subtheme 8.1:

Like I think it depends on what neighborhood I’m in too. Like what time I’m in that neighborhood because when I got jumped that evening it was like nine o’clock and I was in Southwest Philly. Like the hood. Like the ghetto hood and I think the boys were just bored and I guess they saw a guy with a yellow [name] shirt on and they said, ‘oh he’s gay’. So, and I also see a lot of and I’m not gonna say I think some gay people deserve to be, you know, gay bashed, but I see a lot of gay people, young gay people, they mess around with straight people. Like you know a lot of the drag queens, the cross dressers, they you know, they try to tempt the straight men to you know, do things with them and I would say that’s not very smart. That’s not...Like if you like to dress in women’s clothes, I don’t think there’s anything wrong with it you know. I like to dress in women’s clothes at home, but I think that if you like to do that, then you should don’t try to push up on a straight man. If you know he’s straight. If he says he’s straight. I’ve seen a couple weeks ago actually, I’ve seen somebody at the Attic, one of the kids that

were in girl's clothes. They still looked like a boy and very muscular and there was this straight man with his girlfriend walking down the street and the gay guy was like, 'I can take your man if I wanted to'. Then the girl got mad and the guy got mad and he was calling him all kinds of faggots and I was walking behind them and I knew the person, but I didn't know whether I should just keep walking or help him. You know what I'm saying? It's stuff like that that makes everybody, the whole gay community, look bad. I think that's where a lot of homophobia comes from. From like a lot you know disrespectful gay people because there are some gay people that you know that like to dress in girl clothes and trick straight men into having sex with them or you know. Gay people that mess with gay men like you know flirt with them and you know. I mean if they're not comfortable, you shouldn't do it. So I think that's where a lot of homophobia comes from, the way people carry themselves. I don't think, yeah, I think a lot of the gay people made us, the whole community look bad... That's disrespecting yourself. You're gonna get smashed in your face because you're coming on to somebody that doesn't want you, you know? And I just think that it's very important for people, especially gay people, to carry themselves in like you know a decent way.

Interestingly, Mu'Sad has a similar assessment of homophobia indicating a belief that homophobia is the result of improper monitoring of behavior, language, and presentation which may be the result of his family of origin verbally criticizing persons with "effeminate" or "flamboyant" behavior which is also indicative of subtheme 8.1:

I don't experience homophobia at school. At school, I feel safe being me in my school. I go to a public school and I feel as though I can be safe and I don't run into homophobia at school. I mean you might get it here and there because of the things you might say or the things you might do, but that's about it.

Mu'Sad also identified his belief that homophobia is "...understandable. To a certain extent. 'Cause everyone has the same outtake. Oh what about they trying to come on to me or something like that." Again, Mu'Sad illustrated his belief that homophobia is the result of queer behavior and this behavior may warrant negative reactions as if a queer person is the cause and deserving of punishment.

Five youth did not identify their family's rejection of their same sex relationship or their decision to withhold communicating their sexual orientation or their same sex relationship to their family as the result of concerns about their family's homophobia. An

example of this is Mu'Sud who made a decision to withhold disclosure of his sexual orientation or his relationship because of a desire to be "...stable. Like just in case anything goes wrong. Like parents kick kids out of their thing. I just wanna be in a stable predicament so that I can tell them" which signifies subtheme 8.2. Despite this reasoning, Mu'Sad does not once identify his family's behavior as the result of homophobic beliefs and goes so far as to say "...I don't really feel like homophobics has impacted me yet..."

Calvin, Mu'Sad's boyfriend, did not identify Mu'Sad's family's behavior and possible rejection of Mu'Sad as the result of homophobic beliefs: "I think everybody knows when you're gay. I think his family knows. It just the fact that when we're in the closet we just don't wanna accept the fact that they know" despite identifying that "we not really scared of what nobody else think of us except for his parents."

Nasir and his family no longer have regular contact because of his family's religious beliefs. Without calling their beliefs homophobic, Nasir stated the following:

My mother knows, but like I said they very religious. So it's like it's almost like they don't acknowledge it. It's like we don't talk about it so we won't get into an argument or a disagreement. I deal with them separately.

This non-labeling of homophobia may be a way to maintain attachment and connection to family of origin. Additionally, this may also be a contributing factor to the reasons why these interviewed youth often conceptualized persons who are homophobic in ways that evoked feelings of compassion. It would be very hard to maintain a relationship or feelings of connection to family of origin if persons overtly identified their family as having feelings of hatred of or disgust with persons who are queer.

Cade also identified an inability to spend time with his boyfriend at his family's house, but did not feel that this familial decision was the result of his family's

homophobic beliefs: "...like we'll go over a friend's house and we'll just chill there or if his family isn't home, we'll chill there. Or if my family isn't home, we'll chill at my house." Despite this decision, Cade does not identify this as being connected to his family's feelings of discomfort with his same sex relationship.

Additionally, Shahir reported making a decision not to introduce past boyfriends to his family of origin because of his belief that none of his relationships lasted long enough to take this step:

I never introduce people because it seem like every time I get ready to introduce someone, something goes wrong. So I never introduce. There has never been a particular person I introduce to my family. Like everyone knows about me, but there is never a point in time in my relationships that I'm like, okay, it's time let's go meet my parents.

Shahir identified his decision not to inform his family of origin about his same sex relationships as a means of emotionally protecting self, but does not make a connection to his family's possible homophobia and this needed defense mechanism: "...because I mean, although people know that I'm a gay man, I don't physically talk...or I don't talk as frequently about my relationship with my family just out of comfort for myself and yeah I just think it's better that way." This may be related to Winnicott's false self.

#### 9. *Internalized Homonegativity*

Raheem and Demetrios were two youth interviewed who were in relationships with boyfriends struggling to contend with their internalized homonegativity. These relationships were difficult to place within the themes previously identified because some of the challenges they faced seemed to be the result of the internalized homonegativity of their partner. This internalized homophobia seemed to have a significant impact on the

relational dynamics of these two youth in a way that was different from the remaining twelve interviews.

In fact, Raheem identified annoyance with his boyfriend's bisexuality and current closeted status. Subsequently, Raheem chose to ignore this labeled sexual orientation throughout the interview by continuing to identify his boyfriend as gay: "...Well his roommates or my old roommates and his old roommates, they all knew he was gay and stuff. Or he's bisexual, excuse me...He sounds gay and I sound gay." Raheem goes on to identify his boyfriend's current closeted status as:

At times, it's a little, it's very annoying. Sometimes I do get frustrated. Just dealing with my [death of parent] and then dealing with this, it's just kind of, it feels like I'm being whipped in the back. But, he tries to keep me calm about it and stuff and just reminds me that it's almost over...Containing my emotions becomes challenging.

Further, Raheem identified his belief that being "closeted" negatively impacted his boyfriend's ability to successfully manage experiences with homophobia:

I think being queer, gay, lesbian or transgendered, I think that whenever you are out actually about it I think that you set up early in life...you have to start developing a thick skin for stuff like that in your life. I think it's harder for folks who are in the closet to actually get used to that.

Raheem discussed the ways in which he has learned to manage his boyfriend's current disclosure status when spending time with his boyfriend's friends who do not know his boyfriend's sexual orientation:

**Raheem:** It's awkward. 'Cause since I'm open they'll know that I'm gay and then they'll ask me 'who are you dating' and stuff and it goes into a weird, awkward moment where it's like if I tell you, I gotta kill ya kinda joking. Yeah, it puts me, personally, in an uncomfortable position.

**Interviewer:** Do you and your boyfriend talk about how that puts you in an uncomfortable position?

**Raheem:** Yes. We have. His opinion is that I have to wait because it's just something we already established in our relationship. Well actually within the next couple of months

he's wanting to come out, but he's trying to wait until he graduates and after he gets out of school and stuff and gets himself established.

**Interviewer:** How did the two of you establish that in your relationship?

**Raheem:** Just something we talked about. Sort of like ground rules and stuff. It was part of that little detail. Coming out has to be a process.

When asked about displays of affection in public, Raheem reported feelings of emotional disconnection resulting from his boyfriend's current closeted status and resulting discomfort with physical affection:

**Interviewer:** Do the two of you ever disagree on how to show your care or love or affection for each other in a gay friendly space?

**Raheem:** Yes, all the time. For him, he still feels uncomfortable in showing any type of affection sometimes. For example, we were at, there's a bar, a gay bar near here. It's sort of like a couple of doors down from [location]. I can't remember its name. There was an incident there where he just didn't feel comfortable at all. Like just even physical touch or he would feel uncomfortable with me identifying him as my boyfriend or something. I could just see it written all over his face.

**Interviewer:** What did his face look like?

**Raheem:** He'll give me that look like don't say nothing. Shut up.

**Interviewer:** Had you made an attempt to be physically affectionate?

**Raheem:** Yeah I did.

**Interviewer:** Was his facial expression in response to you being physically affectionate?

**Raheem:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** How did the two of you handle that afterwards?

**Raheem:** I communicated that to him and he understood that I was frustrated and he just wanted to remind me that he wasn't comfortable being out yet.

**Interviewer:** What was that like for you?

**Raheem:** I was annoyed.

**Interviewer:** Did you feel close to him emotionally at that point?

**Raheem:** I didn't at that point in time. I felt connected later on that day. That evening. He went home and I went with him to go home.

**Interviewer:** Did you talk about it that night or the next day?

**Raheem:** That night.

Raheem also acknowledged the challenges he and his boyfriend encounter expressing physical affection within Philadelphia because of his boyfriend's current discomfort with being out as someone who identifies as bisexual:

Well, it's a little weird 'cause he's in the closet. As in he's not out to his family or his friends. A lot of his friends don't know that he's gay. I'm the opposite of him. I'm out. Everyone knows. I don't care. It's impacting us when it comes down to

like public display of affection. Like we'll have to leave the area. Like an area unknown to him or unknown to everyone else that he thinks people know about. We'll have to leave those areas and just go to a small town or something. There's this location called [location]. I love that place. And he loves it too. And we just try to escape out of Philly and go in there and stuff and just easing out of it.

Additionally, Raheem identified the ways in which he and his boyfriend manage physical intimacy when in a public setting:

**Interviewer:** Tell me how you and your boyfriend show your love or care for each other in a public space that is not gay friendly?

**Raheem:** Sometimes what we'll do is text message each other or if we'll sitting down he'll like tap my foot and he'll just rub it with his foot. Or sometimes he'll just touch me while no one's looking...I just go by what he's doing. I pay attention to his body language...Just basic subtle signs. What I'll just do is sometimes I'll just move back away from him and then just watch what he does; if he'll drift closer to me or if he'll continuously move back away from me or something...It's just this distance rule thing where I won't even touch him or anything like that. I'll just move myself back and then the eye contact thing...at times, when I feel uncomfortable if someone actually notices us together and stuff, there have been times where I myself have pushed him back a little bit where I didn't feel comfortable with the situation. Or what I do is just that whole dancing move thing where we are just reading each other's body language. He'll try to read me and see where I'm at.

Raheem discussed the negative impact this relational management of physical affection has on his emotions in relation to his boyfriend and the subsequent relational dynamic:

We were actually in a club or something. A straight club. I was intoxicated at the time. He was introducing me to a group of people as his roommate and stuff. And sometimes I have an issue with that. He sees that and I know he knows what I'm feeling, but what he'll just do is he'll just disregard my emotion for that point in time. He's one of those people that he tries to avoid arguments and stuff. And I'm a person, whenever I'm angry, I'll confront you on it. And I'll confront my anger on you. I'm not verbally or physically abusive. It's just that sometimes I have a hard time distinguishing what's an appropriate location to vent and what's not. At times I'll just push him back away from me and I'll just get incredibly rude to him if I'm in an inebriated state. Or if I'm not inebriated, I'll just emotionally and physically distance myself from him. Or if he's trying to communicate to me, I'll just block him out.

Raheem identified an instance in which he and his boyfriend were together and were called faggots. In this quote, he illustrated the way in which he and his boyfriend managed this experience through use of communication and humor:

**Raheem:** There was a time when, it wasn't because we were in a relationship, it was because we were both gay. And we were just walking down the street one day with each other. Actually no we were just sitting on the step and somebody had just called us out and said faggots.

**Interviewer:** What did the two of you do?

**Raheem:** Well, he just clammed up like a little old clam or something and I just said I don't care.

**Interviewer:** Did you care?

**Raheem:** No, I don't.

**Interviewer:** Did the two of you talk about it afterwards?

**Raheem:** A little bit. We addressed it and he said 'why would they think I'm gay?' and stuff.

**Interviewer:** What did you say?

**Raheem:** Well, look at you. And we just started to laugh...I think it was sort of a new growing pain for him. For coming out and stuff...I learned that he needs to develop thicker skin.

In addition to using humor to manage disclosure issues with his boyfriend's friends, after experiencing overt homophobia on the street, Raheem also reported that he used humor when talking with his friends about experiences with homophobia as a means to cope with his feelings: "Usually [I talk] with my friends [about experiences with homophobia]. I guess it's a defense mechanism. We'll just joke around and start making fun of them or something."

Raheem also recognized the negative impact his boyfriend's internalized homophobia and current closeted status is having on their relationship:

I think it gets hairy. I think it's deteriorating over time. As we continue on this path where he's in the closet and I'm out and stuff. I think if something does not change at some point in time within our relationship, we will have to break up.



When addressing a time in which his boyfriend declined or “shrugged off” Raheem’s attempts at physical affection in public, Raheem acknowledged the ways in which his boyfriend attempted to repair this attachment rupture through communication:

...later on he’ll address it when we’re alone...Sometimes it’s like I don’t want to address the issue anymore because it happened and it passed. I don’t wanna continue on with it. And what he’ll do is, for me, it seems like he’ll try to make it sound like he doesn’t know why. He doesn’t understand why I’m upset or something. He’s like ‘why were you upset?’ and stuff. But I think it’s just him trying to, I think he’s like emotionally blocked in certain areas in his life...Usually he’ll calm me down and he’ll just hug me and stuff and us talking and getting it out in the air...I communicated that to him and he understood that I was frustrated and he just wanted to remind me that he wasn’t comfortable being out yet...And then to really calm me down and just cool me off, it’s just the emotional and physical part that really gets me calm.

Moreover, Raheem established the importance of having a safe space to explore their feelings associated with discriminatory experiences and repair ruptured attachment. After he and his boyfriend were called ‘faggots’ by passersby, Raheem indicated the importance of being alone and safe: “Once we were home and stuff, I would just comfort him and stuff. I wouldn’t say anything about it. It was just me holding him and stuff...I just wanted to be with him. Alone.” The above examples given by Raheem also exemplify the impact internalized homonegativity and partners’ differing stages of identity development has on the quality of the relational dynamic and the ability to maintain firm ties of attachment.

Demetrios was in a long term relationship that ended approximately one week prior to our interview. Demetrios identified the cause of the relationship termination as a result of his ex-boyfriend’s internalized homophobia:

...he’s not out to his family. He’s actually kinda homophobic himself. That’s why I kinda understand homophobia because he’s not comfortable with himself. His family doesn’t know about him and, for a whole year, I’ve been like this big secret. I just got kinda tired of it. Like, we lived together. I wanted to hang

pictures of us up in our apartment and he wouldn't let me because his [family members] might come over. It been times like when his [family member] would just pop up in the middle of the night and I would have to leave the apartment because he didn't want me to be there. So, it was kinda horrible...my ex doesn't want his family to know because his family is very Christian. Like he grew up in a church so he thinks that they'll disown him. And I used to think that too before I came out to my family, but I noticed that a lot of my friends who do come out and, including me, your family they get upset, they talk a lot of smack, but they don't disown you. They're just upset for a little while. I see him talk to his family and they've asked him. So I'm like, if they're asking you, why don't you just tell them you know?

Demetrios also discussed the impact this separation from his ex-boyfriend's family not only had on their relationship, but also on Demetrios' comfort with his identity:

...when his [family member] came over and I was going to work and I was leaving the apartment and he gave his [family member] the key and, as soon as I shut the door, his [family member] was standing right there and I said that I was just a friend and I had just come by to get a CD or something. It was hard. I thought I could deal with it, but I can't be with somebody like that because I'm very comfortable with myself. And I'm pretty sure he's comfortable with himself, but in five years from now, are we still going to be playing this game, you know? His family is from [location]. So when he goes to [location] like he can't talk to me on the phone because he doesn't want his family to know. One time I got into an accident, a car accident and I had a friend of mine call him because I was in the hospital and his [family member] had his phone and his [family member] asked my friend was my ex-boyfriend gay. And my friend just said, he didn't answer, he just said 'he's not coming'. So it's like times when I need him to be around, he's with his family and I can't really say well I need you. He can't say 'well my boyfriend needs me to do something for him'. It was real hard. I kept it quiet for a long time. Like I didn't say anything about it. I just pretended like I didn't care, but as time went on it started to build up and I started to feel insecure. Like maybe I was ugly or he didn't want me to be around his family because I was too flamboyant. He's kinda masculine and I would hear some of the stuff he said about like my friends. Like I always he know my friends, family, everything so I'll hear some of the stuff he says. Like my friends how they go down 13<sup>th</sup> Street and then go to clubs and he just talk a lot of shit about my friends. And I could just tell he's kinda homophobic too. He doesn't understand. He's not you know the typical gay man. Like he sits in the house and plays on the computer and plays videogames. So he's not really in the kinda lifestyle I'm in. Like I used to go to clubs and everything. I don't do it anymore, but he doesn't so he thinks that's bad, the behavior I guess. I don't know. Like, it's just that, from what my friends have told him or what he's seen on TV or what he's seen from the club scene, it seems like everybody who goes to clubs goes home with a different person every time they go. And I told him it's not like that. Some people just go to have fun. He

doesn't really like that too much; he thinks that gay people you know are promiscuous. That speaks a lot where I think homophobia comes from. Like stereotypes. And that's very homophobic because I'm not promiscuous and I'm gay and I like to go out and drink and you know, have fun with my friends, but I don't go home with anybody you know?

Demetrios also identified how his boyfriend's internalized homonegativity caused physical and emotional distance which led to decreased feelings of emotional connection and intimacy:

He actually disappeared for a month. It was horrible. I cried everyday. I heard nothing from him for a month. I talked to him the night before because my dad is really sick. My dad is HIV and he knows how I feel about that and I wanted to stay with my dad for a little while just to be there. And I talked to him one night, he told me he was going to call me back and I didn't hear from him for another month. I sent him emails and called his phone. He said he was in [location] and his [family member] needed his help and you know. And I was like, that's when I really knew the relationship was over. I didn't break up with him, but I knew it was over because you can't be with somebody for a year and just disappear when you're used to seeing somebody everyday you know talking to them. A phone call or a text message or an email or a letter you know telegram, something...that's why he's not boyfriend material. He needs to work on himself and get comfortable with himself. I need somebody who is comfortable with them self, but not right now because now I feel like it was my fault. I still look at it like it's kinda my fault. Maybe I should just let it go on for a little while longer. Maybe he would've came out in maybe a year. Why should I have to hide in my own apartment where I pay bills and where my stuff is? And he's not the most masculine guy in the world. He hasn't had a girlfriend since he was about eighteen. He's [age] now. So I don't see what the problem is. He doesn't live with his family and he don't take care of them. I don't see the problem, but you can't force people to come out like this...I would try to get him to talk about it, but he was like, he's really touchy, he gets really like ugh about it. Like I don't want to talk about that anymore.

Additionally, Demetrios discussed the insight he had on his ex-boyfriend's ability to love another when he is contending with his internalized homonegativity:

**Demetrios:** I mean we were pretty intimate with each other, but it was just like we were always together by ourselves. But when there was other people around it would be like, 'eww! don't touch me'...after a while, I stopped wanting him to like I think I stopped like loving him because I didn't want him to touch me anymore. I just felt like uncomfortable. Like I just felt like I'm with some guy, he doesn't like himself so it means he can't like me or maybe he does like himself and then he just doesn't like me that I'm

just here because he doesn't want to be alone. He was a really nice guy. He's really, really nice, but at the same time he just wasn't comfortable with himself and making me uncomfortable with myself because his insecurities made me think it was something wrong with me by him not wanting me to meet his family. He's met everybody from mom to my dad. I have a lot of gay people in my family. I grew up in a foster home and my foster mom was gay. And, on my biological side, I have a gay brother and a gay sister so it wasn't really that bad for me coming out because I had so many gay people around me, but for him I could understand. But, I told him if it's just me and him, he can talk to me like no matter what his family says. I'm still gonna be there for him. I mean I'm just his boyfriend, but you know for the time being, his family is not going to hate him forever. His family is really tight. I can tell that they are really tight and they don't seem like the type to judge. They might be mad and say mean things, but they'll apologize later.

**Interviewer:** So you offered your support if he decided to come out to his family?

**Demetrios:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** And he wasn't...

**Demetrios:** He was like no. He just didn't want to do it. And it was really hurtful because him and his [family member], they would talk about things and like I felt like I couldn't be involved. I think for that whole year I was shut out from the world. Like I go home and go to work and sleep and be with him, but he was always with his family and it kinda made me sad a little bit... like on holidays I was alone on Christmas and Thanksgiving and my birthday and our one year anniversary. And that's all around the same time because our anniversary is in [month], Christmas, our birthdays are both in [month]. Every holiday in the winter season I was by myself and he was with his family... I didn't say anything about it. I just pretended like I didn't care. I didn't put it like I didn't care. I just said it's okay. Like I had a real nonchalant attitude about it, but deep down inside I was like this isn't the kind of relationship I want to be in. Like I love him to death and he's like a great guy, but you know, I don't know. I feel like I sacrificed so much for him, but he couldn't do it for me. And, I don't know. I feel like it's kinda my fault because maybe if I would've said something to him and if like when I first started realizing it then it wouldn't have got as bad. Or maybe we wouldn't have moved in together because really I think a gay couple shouldn't live together unless their family knows or you know or unless they're comfortable with each other because what if somebody just pops up? Like say if you were my guy and your mom didn't know and your mom would have just popped up 'surprise' and we were just chilling on the couch in our underwear. Like what would we say?... I told him if he's ever going to be in a real relationship, he has to learn how to be, live for himself. He doesn't live for himself. He lives for his family. And nobody is going to, you know, other gay men. Who is going to put with all the stuff I put up with him? Like nobody's gonna. And he talks about how I hang out with all my friends and how we all sleep together and how we get drunk and we like to touch each other. Me and all my friends we're like very affectionate. Like we hug each other, we kiss each other, but we don't have sex with each other. We're just very affectionate and I have a really like tight knit you know groups so it's just like he just hates the fact that my friends are so gay and I think that's him not being able to you know be comfortable with himself.

Demetrios also discussed his foster mother who identifies as a lesbian. His foster mother's relationship also ended due to her girlfriend's familial influence and internalized homonegativity:

... my mom, well my foster mom, I live with her now. That's where I moved. Back in with her. She is going through something because she has she, her girlfriend actually left her the same way my ex-boyfriend left me. And they lived together. They have kids together. They adopted a baby and, my foster mom, she has a [age] child too. So the girl just left and she left because her girlfriend's mom is very Christian and she doesn't like gay people. So the girl just said she needed to be with her mom and then left her...I tell her to cry, just cry about it. Crying is the best thing. You can't go to work upset and 'cause you're not going to do your job right. My mom hasn't really dealt with homophobia. She lived a really sheltered life so from what she's told me and her parent's are okay with it. Her parents are very open-minded and her family is okay with it, so she never had to deal with it until now. You know, so it's really hard for her and, I don't know. And she teaches my little [siblings] like okay. She thinks if kids see two men or two women and they're loving each other, not fighting and they're just together, they're gonna except it and I agree with that because I have a [age] sister. She [sister] knows I'm gay. She knows I had a boyfriend, she knows our mom's gay, she knows what gay is. She fully understands it. She never says anything disrespectful and she brings her friends over. You know, [name of sibling] really comfortable with herself and with us. So I tell my mom look at that. Like if your family's comfortable with it and the people you love is comfortable with it, you shouldn't have anything to worry about because the other people, her ex-girlfriend, she's missing out. And so she's gonna live a closeted life forever because of her mom doesn't like gay people.

Demetrios reported that he and his ex-boyfriend rarely went out together due to his boyfriend's internalized homonegativity. Demetrios reported that "...sometimes I just felt like he embarrassed to be around me." Further, Demetrios discussed an incident in which he was verbally harassed on the street due to his sexual orientation. His ex-boyfriend distanced himself from the situation:

...he was in the store and I was outside and it was actually, we were next to our apartment and he was buying some sneakers and I was eating a cheeseburger and some guys was like, 'yeah, they faggots' or whatever like that. And I don't like that word at all. I don't like it. I don't even use it and I'm a bit of a fighter so I got kinda angry and you know I started you know acting crazy and he would just walk away from me like he was just embarrassed. Yeah, so I guess he doesn't look very, very like gay, but I guess I do. I guess the way I carry myself or whatever so he really doesn't get the bashes as much as I do. Like I get bashed.

Additionally, Demetrios discussed a situation in which he was alone and was physically assaulted because of his sexual orientation. Demetrios' ex-boyfriend offered no physical comfort upon Demetrios' return home and seemed to blame Demetrios' for the assault.

**Demetrios:** I was pissed. I was very pissed. Just the fact that I was by myself at the bus stop minding my business. Then, I see a fist in my face. Out of nowhere, minding my business not bothering anybody listening to music and then. He just said that he didn't know how to handle himself like that. He was like, 'oh my gosh, oh my gosh' like he was just 'so like maybe you shouldn't go that way anymore'. Like he didn't know how to like, he didn't want to touch me or nothing like that. That's how I know he feels like he didn't know how to be in a relationship with a man.

**Interviewer:** What would have been helpful to have from him after this experience?

**Demetrios:** A hug or like 'are you okay?' Maybe give me a Band Aid or something. Ice bag. Because I was really like my face was really, really beat up because I had my face on the ground on the curb so this whole side was really swollen and he was just looking at me like 'oh my God'. I mean, I said I was sore a couple of times and like he said he asked me what happened and I told him what happened and that was it. We just let it go. He's not really, he can't, he doesn't really know how to comfort people. Maybe because he wasn't comforted as a child, but neither was I. Gosh, read a book or something...I just want to be there for me, but I feel like he can't be there for me because of his internal homophobia.

Due to Demetrios' ex-boyfriend's discomfort going out in public with Demetrios, Demetrios discussed an experience with a friend when they were together in Philadelphia:

**Demetrios:** I don't like being affectionate too much because I had another homophobic problem when I was holding some guy's hand. We weren't even dating. We were just holding hands and talking and a lady and her two daughters and I think she had a son too. She got really offended because she was like 'take that gay shit somewhere else' or whatever. We were at [location] actually. And she was like, 'take that gay shit somewhere else. I don't want my kids seeing that bullshit' and I said oh wow.

**Interviewer:** How did you handle that?

**Demetrios:** I just walked away. I apologized and walked away. I could've understood if she would've said it in a nicer way like she don't want her kids to see that. Then, I would have understood. But she didn't have to talk to me like that. I didn't know her and she didn't know me. Like I could've flipped out, pushed her over into the water, but I was like okay, I apologize and I just walked away.

**Interviewer:** And the person you were with, how did they handle it?

**Demetrios:** They were actually very upset because he felt he wasn't doing anything wrong. We were just we weren't even holding hands more than two minutes. We just

grabbed each other's hands and was like, yeah and gave each other a hug. And then because I think we made a really funny joke...But, so I understand why some it's stuff like that, that people that make gay people not want to be affectionate in public.

Demetrios also discussed his personal conflict about how to handle experiences with homophobia:

I feel scared. My heart beats a mile a minute. I can give an example. When I was in a bus one day, some girl was calling me 'faggots'. I think I was upset about that for the whole day 'cause they were talking about like you know gay people. All gay people have AIDS and stuff like that. I think that kinda of homophobia really hurts me the most. Like when they say gay people are dirty and they have AIDS and they sleep with each other and that really hurts me the most. I think that if they say it to me all day, for a couple of days, if somebody said something like that. All these like I hear something like that all the time. 'Faggots, you know, you need to go somewhere and die 'cause they giving everybody the AIDS.' I'm just like, oh my God, why would somebody say that? I heard gay people saying it too and that makes me I get really offended. It's really offensive...sometime when I hear it, I say something about it, but then like I don't want to like you know come off the same way. Like I'm judging them just like they judging me so I'm just like whatever. I hate when people say stuff like that about gay people. It's just, that's the part that hurts the most. It burns me up. It burns, burns, burns me up.

#### *10. Impact of Homophobia on the Intimate Relationship*

Excluding Raheem and Demetrios whose relationships were impacted by their boyfriend's internalized homophobia, youth identified the following subthemes in relation to homophobia's impact on their intimate relationship:

- 10.1 negotiating affection in public settings,
- 10.2 homophobia's impact on sense of self,
- 10.3 lack of familial involvement, and
- 10.4 belief that homophobia makes the relationship stronger.

Five out of the twelve youth interviewed identified societal homophobia impacting their comfort displaying affection in public. Tyrice indicated that he only feels

comfortable displaying affectional behaviors towards his boyfriend when in his “comfort zone”. When outside of his comfort zone, he and his boyfriend decrease their affectionate behavior because “...I don’t know how people over there will respond. It’s not that I’m scared. I just don’t know how they will respond.” Additionally, Tyrice identified increased comfort with affection at night due to homophobic feedback regarding his relationship because “...I don’t wanna be going down the street gotta battle like every single day.” Finally, Tyrice stated that experiences with homophobia sometimes cause him to question whether he can be in his current relationship: “Sometimes I question whether I should be in this relationship. Sometimes... Well basically after any scenario. I start thinking about my safety. And being out with him and fighting causes problems.”

Jayden also discussed his discomfort expressing affection towards his boyfriend when not in a gay friendly space: “He’ll try to be affectionate and I won’t. I’ll just shoot him down... He gets mad. He just doesn’t understand because we don’t talk about homophobia and our relationship... after this now I realize that I do have to discuss it with him.”

Shahir indicated that societal homophobia makes him question his sense of self and how he can continue to negotiate experiences with homophobia. The following is illustrative of subtheme 10.2:

It kinda discourages you because it kinda makes you feel like well this person doesn’t think I should be this way. Maybe they’re right. Maybe for some odd reason tomorrow I should wake up and I should be a straight man and everything would be right and they would accept me and I’ll maybe be happier than what I am now. But in the real world that’s not how it is. You feel the way you feel because that’s how you feel. Because I mean things people say, although you try to ignore it, things people say do stick to you and in your mind and you may not think about it in a day, but eventually you gotta go over what they said and maybe it’s true. Maybe I am this person that they that society makes me out to be. Maybe there’s something I can do to change it.



Shahir also stated that he does not display affection in public: "...I don't walk down the street holding hands or like holding each other hip by hip. I don't do that kind of stuff."

Shahir identified his reason for not displaying affection in public as the result of concern that he would put his boyfriend in harm's way:

Like as far as I leave or leave him in a situation and then they go maybe minding their business and someone had seen us doing that and they may try to retaliate on them because of what they saw. So I never would put somebody in harm.

Although Tavon does not feel that his discomfort with displaying affection due to anticipated homophobic responses negatively impacts his relationship, he identified a belief that his significant other becomes upset:

But in certain places I won't want to hold his hand, or I won't want him to hold me or I won't hold him. I don't think it really hurts the relationship, but I mean I'm sure he feels some type of way 'cause in other spaces I will. So in other spaces if he goes to hold my waist or something or grab my hand, I'll let him. In other spaces like he'll go to do it and I'll like step back or I'll push him away or something. He'll feel some type of way about that...He's a lot more affectionate than I am. Especially in public. I'm quite sure if I was okay with it, he would love to hold my hand or hold each other when walking down the street all the time. I mean, we've talked about why I don't like it. We have those disagreements.

Tavon identified his decision to decrease his displays of affection towards his significant other as a concern that he will offend another, assumed, heterosexual person:

Like so when I'm in a gay friendly space, it's definitely okay. Everyone in that space kinda feels the same way so it's okay there. I don't have to worry about offending anyone or anyone taking any offense or anything to it or looking at me in certain ways or whatnot. I've had experiences in the past. No one says anything. I'll see older people where they'll give that look or make a face.

Calvin also discussed how his concern about other's homophobic responses impact his comfort with and decision to display affection in public:

Yes because before I was like no public affection. I was just scared of public affection because I was always you know worried about what everybody else would see. I don't kiss around little kids or anything like that. He used to like

public affection, but now it's like even. We do it sometimes and then we don't. I guess being around each other a lot and getting to know each other. You just kinda attach and pick up on each other's ways...I don't think we decided together. When they kept coming towards us about our relationship and how they didn't like it, that's when we stayed more in the house so we wouldn't have to deal with it.

Further, Calvin also identified his desire to meet his boyfriend's family and how this is not possible because his boyfriend is not out to his family suggestive of subtheme 10.3: "Only thing that kinda gets to me is that I really don't know his family because he is more in the closet so I let him stay that way."

Nasir has an estranged relationship with his family of origin because of his sexual orientation. Although Nasir is engaged to get married and is planning his ceremony, he has not informed his family: "My mother knows, but like I said they very religious. So it's like it's almost like they don't acknowledge it. It's like we don't talk about it so we won't get into an argument or a disagreement. I deal with them separately." When asked if he was going to inform his family of his wedding or invite his family to his wedding ceremony, Nasir responded:

Probably not. 'Cause it's like I was raised Jehovah's Witness so being gay is a big no no as opposed to any other religions it's like somewhat acceptable. It's really different. So I don't think I could. Like, even if I did extend the invitation, they wouldn't come.

When youth were asked about the ways in which homophobia may have impacted their relationships, five out of the twelve youth interviewed identified a belief that homophobia made their relationship stronger (subtheme 10.4). Galan stated "I think it's affected in kinda like a good way. 'Cause that way you have the experience of in case, you know, people wanna be saying something smart and, you know, if you hear it a lot, you just let it go..."

Khalil stated:

...it only makes us stronger and it makes us like each other that much more 'cause we can show each other affection in public. We can do things like that. If we didn't love each other, we wouldn't care. We wouldn't do it...I don't think that homophobia necessarily impacts it. I just think that you know it makes us closer because we have peoples that's gonna talk, but it doesn't do anything, but bring us closer. It doesn't do anything but show me that he loves me that much more.

Gabriyel, Khalil's boyfriend, identified the same sentiment:

No it made it greater because the thing is I'm happy because they are called haters. That's what they called. Haters. And you know living the life and you know there's gonna be some haters around you. There's gonna be some haters in your life. That's what make you. That's what make me. That's what make me my haters because you know what I mean 'cause you hating for no reason. Why are you hating anybody? You just nice, you got a good girlfriend, looking good, dressed good, hair done every day, looking nice. You sitting everyday looking nice. Why are you hating on me?

Although Cade identified homophobia as being the cause of his relationship's demise, he also identified a belief that experiences with homophobia made his relationship strong: "It made us stronger. It made us stronger, but at the same time it grew us apart because of the incident that happened to him for me not answering the phone."

### *11. Resiliency*

Approximately seven subthemes were identified under the primary theme of resiliency. All of these subthemes seem to support queer identified youth in maintaining identity and, ultimately, supporting their relationships. These subthemes are as follows:

11.1 support,

11.2 focus on relationship and boyfriend's support during experienced homophobia,

11.3 the development of skills in managing discrimination through time,

11.4 the dynamic of fighter and soother that indicates activation of attachment system when facing adversity, feeling unsafe, or fearful due to homophobia,

11.5 assessment of safety within the environment,

11.6 conceptualizing homophobia as an experience that makes a person stronger, and

11.7 the conceptualization of causes of homophobia that often creates feelings of compassion for the other.

By far, most youth identified the importance of support in managing homophobia (subtheme 11.1). Seven of the fourteen youth discussed the positive impact of support throughout their interviews. Zamir identified structured time built into his week in which he and friends get together to discuss life challenges and offer each other advice:

We talk about better ways to help us in our every day life. Like despite the fact that it was us giving out information to help others keep their relationship stronger, we all help each other as friends. We all help each other to keep our environment positive. Like I told some boy earlier today he asked me ‘how do you all, you and your friends, live your life every day and doing y’all no matter what people say?’ I told him not this weekend, next weekend come to my house and see how me and all our friends we all sit up and talk about situations. Like how to deal with people who doubt our relationships or doubt you because you gay or whatever. We all sit up there together and talk and throw ideas out at each other. Do this do that, dat dat dat and make like my best friend [name] he say say ‘pay it because it not gonna kill you and what don’t kill you, help build you. So keep going.’

As discussed in the previous section on relational management of homophobia, Zamir and his boyfriend relied on each other to offer and provide support when they collaboratively decided to inform their family of origin about their sexual orientation and relationship.

Gabriyel consistently identified the importance of his family's support in relation to his intimate relationship. In this, he also verbalized the messages that his family communicated to him through time and applied these messages when attempting to emotionally manage experienced homophobia:

... I know who I am and my grandmother always told me 'don't change for nobody else unless you ready to change for yourself'. She said 'wherever you go be professional about' and you know what I mean? 'Don't worry about what nobody else say 'cause they not the ones gonna judge you on judgment day'.

Additionally, Gabriyel recognized the integral role his mother played in helping him learn to manage homophobia. In this quote, Gabriyel identified his mother's acceptance of his sexual orientation as bringing him emotional comfort and security when managing homophobia:

My mother...How she helped me? She'll let me know you know what I mean 'Gabriyel don't worry about it.' She'll be like 'Gabriyel don't worry about it. Long as your mother is cool with it, then you don't have to worry about nothing else.' So that's what I think. I think about my mom and how she's cool with it. She don't have no problem with it. If she don't have no problem with it, then I'm cool...My mother always told me 'don't worry about what nobody else said 'cause they gonna have their say. And the thing is whatever they do to you, it's gonna come back ten times worsen than what happened to you'. Yes, I'm not gonna say I haven't gotten gay bashed. Yes, I have gotten gay bashed. And I have felt some type of way. I wanted to die and this when I had low self esteem. At the point in my life where I wanted to just give everything up and just die because of I'm not accepting who I am. One day my mother had came to me 'cause she knew I was feeling down and she had came to me and she had told me she was like 'Gabriyel, I'm okay with your sexuality. I'm alright. Don't worry about what nobody else say. I had you. I'm alright with your sexuality.' That's what brung me up. That's what I think about up until this day. My grandma told me the same thing. She told me the same words that my mother had told me. She was like 'don't worry about what nobody else say 'cause we alright with it.' Long as my grandmother and mom is alright with my sexuality, then I'm cool with it. That's what I think about up until this day.

Gabriyel also identified his perception of the impact limited family support has on queer youth. As a result, Gabriyel identified the important role queer accepting space has on helping queer youth combat homophobia:

It's sad to me. It's sad...it's crazy how they put their children out. Out the house just because of their sexuality. Just because they don't wanna have no sex with a girl or get in love with a girl or get married to a girl. Or a girl getting married to a female. It's crazy how they do that. It just making them feel lesser than what they feel now. I know my mom loves me and I don't gotta worry. I won't tease them about it. Like oh well my mom she don't care about what I do...no sometime maybe it may change one day. But the thing is, I'll just let them know you know what I mean? Just do you have somewhere else to go? I wonder...I be wondering why when they go down 13th Street or go to the gay clubs and stuff they just be all out there and acting crazy because they don't get that kinda stuff at home. They don't get that kinda stuff at home. And that's fine. And then that's when I was talkin' to somebody. One of the instructors at [agency name] and they was like that's why we build these types of programs for gay young black gay men and young black gay womens because they don't get this type of love at home. They can't vogue around the house, they can't you know what I mean, curse around the house, they can't be feminine around the house or manly around the house because their folks not gonna do that.

Finally, Gabriyel identified not only the importance of his biological family in supporting him, but also his gay, chosen family:

My gay mother she the one that put me into that school. She the one that help me go and get my carfare and everything for that school and help me pay for my tuitions and everything. She the one that's helping me. She's not in the gay scene, but she's the one that's helping me. My gay brother...I couldn't have made it without him. I couldn't have made it without him because it was him that helped me through high school. It was a time in my life when I was getting ready to fail. Like fall out of school. Like give up. But I was in a junior ROTC Air Force Academy, my grandmother, Jesus, my best friend and his sister and his grandmother actually helped me stayed in school. They was like 'Gabriyel don't worry about what people say about you. You may not get the problem this time, but I guarantee next time you'll get it.' You know what I mean? 'Don't worry about what people say, don't worry about what people do. Long as you get your education. Long as you doing what you got to do to get out of there. You keep saying it's not moving fast, it's not moving fast. Don't think about the time and don't think about what's not moving. Just do what you gotta do to get out of there and I guarantee it you'll make it.' And when they put those words in my life, I knew that I could strive to be the best that I can be. My grandmother always told me whatever you know and whatever you can do, go for it. Do not give up. Don't

never give up. There was some times that I gave up, but the support was important. Yup.

Cade also discussed the impact his chosen gay family had on helping him manage homophobia:

**Interviewer:** Have your gay parents ever told you tidbits of information about how to handle homophobia?

**Cade:** Yes. Just that usually when someone says something out of the ordinary it's because you're extraordinary. And that you just supposed to let it not let it ride. 'Cause my gay mom is like she'll let you know whatever she feels, but at the same time it's like just be there for each other and let each other know that it'll be okay. It's okay that we're who we are and things like that.

Khalil discussed seeking support from his chosen gay family when determining ways to manage homophobia:

Yeah, I talk to my gay family. We talk about like I said it's not a constant conversation, but it's something that does come up when in the process of us talking and stuff. We all just say the same thing. Our gay mom and our gay dad just let it roll off. Just like my gay mom tell us 'I'm not coming to picking nobody up from jail with something that you could have avoided. If it don't have nothing to do with you, keep it moving. People gonna talk about you till the day you die.' And they will. And we take heed to what she says.

Galan identified the ways in which his biological mom has not only supported him, but also his friends:

I know a few friends, yes. I mean they've been through like 'cause they're parents aren't accepting of them and kicked them out. Treat them as if they were somebody on the streets. Some of my friends they will come to me for like advice or something. There's been time when my friends, I mean they're like ask my mom. She's the type of mom who's like okay. She's a real big help. It's been a couple of times when my best friend, his mom had put him out when he first came out. His mom put him out 'cause he's gay. So my mom let him stay at our house for like a couple of days just to give his mom some time to you know cool down. After that, he moved back home. His mom was a little bit okay with it. She was just shocked about it and just upset. She's like real supportive in a way. I know if I need anything, I can just go to her.

Finally, Jayden discussed the importance of community support and events in managing homophobia: "Pride. Gay Pride made me very happy this year because it

just...it ended a long series of homophobia from March until Pride that I have been dealing with since I started school.”

Khalil, Zamir, and Calvin both identified use of their intimate relationship to manage homophobia. When describing experiences with homophobia, Khalil used the word ‘we’. Khalil discussed how experienced homophobia showed him that his boyfriend loves him:

I don’t think it necessarily impacted our relationship. If it did, it only brought us closer together...you do have times where like we’ll walk down the street and we’ll be going our separate ways and we’ll kiss or something and someone be like ‘oh those faggots’ da da da, but it only makes us stronger and it makes us like each other that much more ‘cause we can show each other affection in public. We can do things like that. If we didn’t love each other, we wouldn’t care. We wouldn’t do it. We’d be in the house kissing. When we be outside, we be like girl get away. But it’s not like that. When we outside, we pull each other closer to each other.

Zamir also discussed reliance on his relationship to manage homophobia. As previously indicated, he and his lover disclosed their sexual orientation and relationship to their family of origin together. Zamir also indicated the importance of talking with his lover and relying on each other for emotional support and comfort when contending with homophobia:

We was in the bed talking and I started crying ‘cause I was like I don’t know how, this was years ago, I was like I don’t know how I’m a deal with this, be together and people talking about us or whatever and he was like ‘it’s not gonna be perfect. So we gonna do us. We gotta stay strong. We gotta believe in each other. We gotta take one day at a time. We gotta stick with each other no matter what because in order for us to be in this relationship, people are gonna look at it. Okay them two are two black gay men, they been with each other since whenever and they still together now.’ Dis is something that people should you shouldn’t criticize us because of our sexuality. You shouldn’t criticize us unless you get to know us on something besides our sexuality because okay I don’t like Zamir because of whatever. I don’t like that relationship because something different besides the fact that we’re homosexual.

Youth also suggested a progression in their approach to managing homophobia. Khalil discussed his experiences with homophobia beginning in childhood. In this quote, he



identified holding in his feelings as a child whereas, in a previous quote, Khalil identified support seeking behavior in an effort to manage homophobia:

...I went through it in middle school. People just saying stuff in middle school like 'oh he's feminine' so automatically he's gay. A lot of things I actually dealt with on my own. Being as though things that I've been through in my childhood I had to deal with it on my own. I couldn't tell nobody. So I learned how to hold a lot of stuff in.

When asked about seeking comfort from his boyfriend after experienced homophobia,

Khalil also identified change through time:

We used to [feel uncomfortable] like a long time ago, but not any more 'cause it's like it doesn't bother us anymore. That was in the beginning of the relationship so it's like we was a little bit nervous and we don't know what this person and that person is going to say, but not anymore.

Galan also discussed a change in response to homophobia over time:

When I'm out with my friends or out by myself, yes, but I don't I'm the type of person who says if you wanna say something I'm not gonna hold it's just gonna hurt. People can say stuff out they mouth. Like when I'm on the train people be like 'oh there go a faggot' da da da. I just listen to my iPod and ignore what they say. I'm the type of person, usually as much as it sound smart, I'm gonna always wanna fight. I'm breaking out the habit slowly so I'm trying to get in less trouble. Trying to start classes this summer for this fall, modeling classes, dance classes. I wanna grow and have something good going for me and not just fight.

Furthermore, Cade self-identified a change in his emotional response to homophobia:

Like I said, the first time I felt outraged, the second two times like I said I'ma hit this head on. I'm tired of being you know put into this shell that you know straight America wants you to be in so I'm going to fight back. The third time it didn't bother me at all. I just grew immune to it.

Additionally, Cade reported that he and his boyfriend developed a plan to manage experienced homophobia when together:

**Cade:** I just felt like I was with him so I was happy. And because we had grown so much progress over the last two times, I was like this not nothing new.

**Interviewer:** Do you remember if the two of you talked about those experiences right after they happened?

**Cade:** The third time we didn't. We was just kept on doing us. The first time we really had a big discussion about it because I was so outraged. The second time we talked about it, but not as much.

**Interviewer:** Did the two of you develop a plan about how you would handle any future situations of discrimination?

**Cade:** Yes, that's why we kissed. That was part of the plan. The first time we was like we gonna hold each other's hand. Which we did. And the second time we kissed. The second time we held each other's hand. They threw something. Yeah. So it didn't touch us so we kept on walking.

Gabriyel, Khalil, Cade, and Galan illustrated the role division of fight versus soothe when managing homophobia. When contending with experienced homophobia, this balanced approach seems to illustrate the activation of the attachment system and seems to assist in supporting resiliency. Gabriyel discussed this division in the following quote:

One day we was walking down in West Philly and we was holding hands and stuff and somebody had said 'oh my God, these fucking faggots' and this, that and the third and we just kept walking. He was about to turn around and say something 'cause I felt him shaking and I was like no babe don't do that. Just keep walking 'cause they want you to feed into it and when you feed into it, they got you where they want you to be then that's when they have reason to fight you.

Khalil, Gabriyel's boyfriend, discussed his approach to managing homophobia and how it is different from Gabriyel's approach:

Now see, that's my other half and he's the calm one. I'm not the calm one. I'm the one that turns around and I'm ready to fight and I'm cussing these people out and he's just be like 'It's cool. You know I love you. I know you love me. So why does it even matter? It's just words.' So, I be like alright.

Cade also discussed this division within his relationship: "He was kinda like just he was like 'oh, just don't say nothing' and I'm like no! I'm like fuck this because I don't have anything to do with their insecurities."

Galan discussed this division as well:

The last time was Tuesday and we were walking back to his car. We went to the movie theatre and we was walking back to the car and somebody said 'that them faggots.' I was gonna go turn around and say something smart back and my boyfriend he just cut me off. 'Cause he knows I have a smart mouth at times and

he goes 'keep walking, keep walking, keep walking. Get in the car. It's just words, don't worry about it. Let them say what he wanna say'... At least he just saved me from a fight. So that's a good thing.

Youth also discussed the importance of assessing the environment before expressing physical affection towards their boyfriends. Four of the fourteen youth identified this through the phrase a "time and place for everything". Mu'Sad specifically stated "We feel as though there is a time and place for everything. We still show that we care about each other, but we're not as gay as if we were at [location name] or any other place."

Galan stated:

I know how sometimes he don't like to hold hands outside. You know like I mean? There's a time and place for everything, but most of the time he'll grab my hand or he'll stop me and kiss me and we'll keep walking.

This dynamic of environmental scanning is illustrated with the identification of certain locations within the City of Philadelphia in which youth feel more comfortable displaying affection. Zamir identifies Center City as a place of environmental comfort: "Very comfortable because Center City is like the Attic. They open. Like that's where we met at... it's like North Philly would be the roughest place." Gabriyel also discussed this difference in behavior dependent upon the environment "We won't be all flamboyant and this, that and the third. We won't vogue and stuff like that." Additionally, Gabriyel discussed the use of environmental scanning to determine safety and the necessity of fighting persons after they make a homophobic comment:

...but the thing is for us to protect ourselves and each other we'll stop holding hands, take a peek look in the back of us and see if somebody coming towards us and if there is somebody coming towards us, then that's when we just handle our business. But if nobody coming towards us, then we just keep on walking.

Khalil also discussed this environmental scanning and expression of physical intimacy dependent on the environment:

I mean we kiss, we hug, but it's like it's a time and a place for everything. So we don't necessarily, when we out, we don't necessarily always be kissing. That's why I say when we be out, people think we friends. 'Cause we have a good time and we know that when we get home, we gonna be laying aside each other. We gonna be chillin'. It's a time and a place for everything. So why draw negative attention to yourself that don't have to be? It's not necessarily how you are, it's just avoiding conflict. We may kiss or something when we separating, but other than that we not all in front in the boys faces when you know they gonna say something, kissing and all of that.

Interestingly, five youth identified experiences with homophobia as making both themselves and their relationships stronger. Cade identified the complication of this statement since he and his boyfriend were terminating the relationship due to Cade's inaccessibility when his boyfriend was experiencing harassment due to his sexual orientation: "It made us stronger. It made us stronger, but at the same time it grew us apart because of the incident that happened to him for me not answering the phone."

When asked about homophobia's impact on his relationship, Galan responded with the following:

I think it's affected in kinda like a good way. 'Cause that way you have the experience of in case, you know, people wanna be saying something smart and, you know, if you hear it a lot, you just let it go. Compared to: huh? What? You just said something smart about me? I wanna go fight them. No. It's not always about fighting and that's what everybody wants to do these days. It's senseless. They act like they all just wanna fight over something stupid. It's just stupid. And I realized fighting ain't the way to solve things. If you wanna solve things, just ignore it or talk about it and move on. Just say hello, goodbye or don't speak at all.

When asked how homophobia may or may not impact him, Gabriyel responded:

It made me better. Each and every day that somebody comes to me and hate on me. It make me better. Each and every day. Each and every day. Because when somebody put you down, you shouldn't feel sad, you shouldn't feel mad. You should feel happy 'cause that'll make you wanna be greater. It motivates me.

Gabriyel went on to further state his belief that homophobia not only made him stronger, but also made his relationship stronger:

No, it made it [the relationship] greater because the thing is I'm happy because they are called haters. That's what they called. Haters. And you know living the life and you know there's gonna be some haters around you. There's gonna be some haters in your life. That's what make you. That's what make me. That's what make me my haters because you know what I mean 'cause you hating for no reason. Why are you hating anybody? You just nice, you got a good girlfriend, looking good, dressed good, hair done every day, looking nice. You sitting everyday looking nice. Why are you hating on me?...That's what they looking at the sexuality. And I'll be just like well, get away from me 'cause I don't got time for it.

Khalil also identified a similar sentiment: "I don't think it necessarily impacted our relationship. If it did, it only brought us closer together..."

Conceptualizing homophobia as another's ignorance or as the outcome of childhood trauma seemed to help youth in managing homophobia. Tavon identified use of compassion as a means to negotiate homophobia:

I have times where I encounter a lot of homophobic people and it's like I can't be mad at them. Like it's not always their fault. It's their lack of knowledge that they have about the situation so I can't be mad at them for not understanding my lifestyle. They could have had some bad experience. They could have had a really bad experience of something of the nature. In some extreme cases, they could have been molested by someone of the same sex when they were younger and just have that whole homophobia towards it because of that...I don't let it get to me. I do my best not to let it get to me because I'm gonna continue to live my life and do me happily. And by dwelling on how they feel, it's gonna impact my life and I refuse to let that happen. I kinda want to say I feel sorry for them because they close themselves off to so much for whatever reasons that they don't want to accept it or understand it. They close their selves off to so much that's out there and they're so close minded of something that's so small. Like what about what's larger that's going on in life?

Calvin discussed his belief that homophobia is the result of ignorance: "To be honest, I think I'd pay it no mind because that's just a sign of ignorance." Finally, Zamir conceptualized causes of homophobia as a combination of a possible history of sexual assault, religious teachings, and identity development.

It's a lot of different things. Like they could've been molested, molested when they was young. Or they could be molested or it can be just something that been

there since they was little. The curiosity is what it's about and then they act out on the curiosity and the curiosity gets the best of them...they [religious communities], they push you so far so as to being straight that you run from it and go in the opposite way. Like in the Bible it say you gotta be straight. You gotta be this, that and the third, but the more you push a person into doing something, the more they gonna run from it.

In end, Khalil offered a unique way in which he and his lover negotiate environmental homophobia through the use of reframing:

I feel as though now we handle it in the most mature way possible. We just you call me a faggot, that's nothing new in the world. Come up with something else. We just keep walking. And I think, what it is, people, straight people in general, they don't know the definition of a faggot. Definition of a faggot: a faggot is somebody that's not doing anything with they lives. We both working, we both in school so you're not talking to us 'cause it doesn't apply to us. We both have our own places, we're both in school, we're both working so you're not talking to us. It doesn't bother us. If it don't apply, let it fly.

#### *Advice for Queer Youth*

In summary, Demetrios and Tyrice offered advice to queer youth in managing homophobia. Demetrios stated the following:

Honestly, I don't even know how I can handle homophobia so I would just say, you gotta be strong. You gotta be strong. Be very, very strong and don't give in just because somebody calls you a faggot or look at you funny. That doesn't, you know, give you a reason to jump up and fight. But that's what I used to do in my teenage years. I used to want to fight everybody that called me a faggot and I had to realize that one of these days I'm gonna fight somebody and I'm not gonna get back up. They're gonna wind up hurting me. You know, words are just words. You know who you are, you know what you do, you know what you like, you know what you don't like so just, you know. If somebody calls me a faggot, I'm gonna be like, well that's your opinion. I can say I think you look like shit and I think your breath smells, but that'll be my opinion about you so just keep it moving...Don't take them in. Just let them roll off your back because I think that I think that gay people are some of the strongest people in the world 'cause we can go through a lot. We go through a lot...I think a lot of people who have experienced homophobia has made them. For me, it made me stronger because it made me realize like...I just need to be around people who I feel comfortable with and who feel comfortable around me. And whoever doesn't like it, they can just not like it, you know?

Tyrice offered this information for queer youth:

I would say for homophobia, you're still a person. That to try to not try on a person's stigmatism. To not stigmatize yourself, but to make yourself better than that stigmatism. The way you carry yourself is important. Yeah. It's like what Martin Luther King said, 'Don't judge somebody by the color of they skin, but judge them by they character.' How you hold yourself means something.

In conclusion, Demetrios offered advice about dating:

Take you time and be comfortable with yourself and date people who are comfortable with themselves...You shouldn't settle. If someone is your dream guy that treats you like shit ran over twice by an ice cream truck, you know, you shouldn't be with him. You know? Because they'll probably be somebody else that won't look as nice, but they'll treat you ten times better. You know you gotta keep your options open and you know just be good to yourself. If you not good to yourself, then you're gonna let him treat you like shit.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

As was shown in chapter four, fourteen, queer, male identified youth of color engaged in qualitative interviews in an effort to develop an understanding of the extent to which societal homonegativity impacts the process of attachment in their same sex, intimate relationships. Further, this research focused on ascertaining the factors in which the queer youth surveyed recognized as contributing to their ability to form positive attachment to intimate, same sex partners when contending with homophobia. Finally, this research focused on developing an understanding of the ways in which the queer youth surveyed maintained their feelings of attachment towards their same sex partner when their relationship was the target of homonegative hostility.

Through the in depth interviews conducted, eleven themes emerged. These themes are as follows: felt ambivalence about the intimate relationship being the target of homophobia despite concrete reports of experienced homophobia, feelings of admiration for the interviewee's boyfriend, dynamics that foster relational success, the conceptualization of causes of other's homophobic beliefs, contending with and an understanding of experienced microaggressions, concrete, relational management of homophobia, engagement in reattachment processes after experienced homophobia, contradictory statements regarding the incidence of homophobia, the impact of a boyfriend's internalized homonegativity on the relational dynamic, the effect homophobia has on the intimate relationship, and resiliency. In addition, two youth offered advice to other queer youth.

From these qualitative interviews, queer youth reported a divided conceptualization of the extent to which societal homophobia impacted the process of felt attachment towards



their same sex partner. Core themes which arose in relation to this research question are as follows: felt ambivalence about the relationship being the target of homonegativity, the conceptualization and understanding of the causes of homophobia, the youth's perception of microaggressions, contradictory statements made about experienced homophobia, the bearing a partner's internalized homonegativity had on felt relational attachment, and the youth's interpretation of the influence homophobia had on their relationship.

Interestingly, many of these core themes were often connected to the resiliency of queer youth.

Three out of the fourteen youth identified feelings of ambivalence about their same sex relationship being the target of homophobia. Two of these youth, Calvin and Demetrios, were raised by queer identified, primary caregivers who were also in same sex relationships. As a result, these youth expressed comfort seeking emotional support and guidance from their primary caregivers in relation to their identity development and their intimate relationships. Further, both these youth had spent formative years witnessing a same sex relationship. This support, understanding, and the ability to have a ready made, easily accessible template for same sex relationships may have assisted these two youth when straddling Erikson's (1968) stages of identity development and intimacy. This felt ambivalence about their relationship being the target of homonegativity may also be the result of familial support and understanding which offered protection from and witness to developed techniques to manage societal homophobia. Familial support seems to have helped shape these two youth's resiliency.

Conversely, Mu'Sad also expressed ambivalence about his relationship being the target of homophobia. At the time of the interview, Mu'Sad was living with his family of

origin. He expressed fear that disclosure of his sexual orientation could result in familial rejection and identified an instance in which his family conveyed their negative feelings about effeminate behaviors in queer identified persons. This identified ambivalence about his relationship being the target of experienced homophobia and denial of his family's homophobic beliefs may be the result of Mu'Sad's defensive processes. These defensive processes may perhaps exist to maintain secure feelings of attachment towards his family of origin while ensuring continued acceptance and support from his family to preserve stability and financial survival. This attempt to preserve attachment ties is indicative of resiliency.

Additionally, Mu'Sad was in a relationship with Calvin who, as indicated above, had a primary caregiver who was queer identified. Both Mu'Sad and Calvin reported spending a significant amount of time at Calvin's house. Time spent at home was also motivated by the desire to limit interactions with peers who were not accepting of their relationship. Interaction with an adult who was encouraging of their intimate relationship may have also contributed to Mu'Sad's felt ambivalence about his relationship being a target of homonegativity.

Youth surveyed offered compassion for persons who were homophobic and determined that homophobia was the result of religious teachings, a history of sexual abuse or assault, societal mores and heterosexist messages, emergent and evolving identity development, and ignorance. These identified causes of homophobia seemed to create objectivity while making homophobia less about who the youth were as people. Instead, emphasis was placed on the other's developmental process, ignorance, and history. Through use of compassion for the other, this separation seemed to protect youth

from fully introjecting homophobic messages and seems to contribute to queer resiliency. Equally notable, this dynamic could suggest identification with the aggressor and a potential belief that experienced homophobia is deserved.

Youth interviewed for this research study often identified homophobia as overt, aggressive acts and typically did not consider subtle messages discounting queer sexuality as a form of homophobia. Consequently, microaggressions, such as an internalized belief that queer folk should not display their feelings of love or attachment towards their same sex boyfriend because of heterosexual discomfort, often led to acquiescence of heterosexuals determining when it is acceptable to display queer affection. Subsequently, this acquiescence resulted in the internalization of blame for troubling heterosexuals with queer affection. Further, microaggressive messages resulted in the accepted belief that queer affection should not be displayed in front of children or elders. Although internalization of these messages could create feelings of shame about queer sexuality, youth tended to utilize these microaggressive messages to maintain emotional and physical safety when in the community.

Eleven youth identified concrete experiences with homophobia such as being gay bashed. Despite this awareness and indication of experienced homophobia, youth verbalized incongruent statements about experienced homophobia throughout the interview process. This was especially true in relation to family of origin. Youth discussed conscientious decision making to reduce communication about their same sex relationship and sexual orientation within their biological, familial configuration. Five of the fourteen youth did not identify their family's rejection of their same sex relationship or their decision to withhold communicating their sexual orientation or relational status as

a result of their family of origin's homophobia. Further, youth also verbalized their belief that experienced homophobia was the direct outcome of unmonitored behaviors that may communicate queer identity.

Raheem and Demetrios identified the impact of their boyfriend's internalized homonegativity on their relational attachment process. Although this internalized homonegativity was the consequence of societal discrimination, the source of homophobia emanated from the boyfriend. These feelings of internalized homonegativity were identified by Raheem and Demetrios as creating discomfort with affection, negative perceptions of the other, heightened sensitivity towards societal homophobia, and impacted the boyfriend's ability to express compassion and empathy for Raheem and Demetrios.

Lastly, youth reported that societal homophobia impacted their felt comfort with displaying affection towards their boyfriend in public settings that were not identified as a queer friendly space. Further, two youth stated that experienced homophobia created feelings of discomfort with their sexual identity. Interestingly, five out of the fourteen youth felt that experienced homophobia secured their feelings of attachment towards and affinity for their boyfriend and, ultimately, strengthened their relationship. One youth identified experienced homophobia as both contributing to felt attachment to his boyfriend and also the cause of the demise of his relationship.

When working to ascertain the factors that youth recognized as contributing to their ability to form positive feelings of attachment towards their boyfriend despite homonegativity, youth surveyed recognized feelings of admiration for their boyfriend and relational dynamics that nurtured successful attachment processes. Consistently, youth

excitedly listed their boyfriend's qualities that created feelings of attraction towards their boyfriend and felt that these attributes helped form secure attachment bonds. These characteristics were: feelings of mutuality, shared history, the boyfriend's feelings of care and concern for the interviewee, honesty within communication, physical appearance, personality, and respect for their boyfriend's identified goals. When discussing dynamics that led to relational success, youth stated that co-created relational goals, their boyfriend's characteristics, shared history, sound communication, expression of emotions, the interviewee's personal characteristics, feelings of reciprocal attachment, and outside support as cultivating attachment and solidifying relational success. These subthemes were woven throughout each interview conducted.

Youth identified techniques to manage experienced homophobia while with their boyfriend and reattachment processes after experienced homophobia. These techniques were employed in an effort to maintain felt security with attachment when contending with homophobia. When negotiating encounters with homophobia while with their boyfriend, six subthemes emerged: assessment of safety, the relational role division of fight versus soothe, relational coping through communication, awareness of environmental nuances, support seeking behaviors from their boyfriend and extended support system, and utilization of personal conceptualizations of the causes of homophobia to manage emotional upset and make meaning of the experience.

Eight out of the fourteen youth discussed this role division of fight versus soothe when contending with homophobia. The illustration of this role division seems connected to the activation of the attachment system and is ignited in an effort to maintain feelings of safety and security. Further, youth often discussed assessing the environment, its cues,

and known safety spots before displaying any physical signs of affection towards their boyfriend. This was best captured in the phrase “a time and a place for everything”. These subthemes allowed youth to maintain emotional connection to their boyfriends while ensuring physical safety.

After experienced homonegativity, eight out of the fourteen youth surveyed discussed the importance of support seeking behaviors in fostering relational reattachment. This support could originate from the boyfriend, family of origin, chosen gay family, or friends. Youth also identified the importance of communication with their boyfriend after experiencing homophobia in an effort to debrief and reestablish feelings of attachment. Khalil stated that, through time, he and his boyfriend have relied less on communication post homonegative experiences and focus more on conceptualizing the origins of homophobia. Additionally, youth utilized physical intimacy as a means to reestablish felt attachment after experienced discrimination. To finish, if safety necessitated physical distance from their boyfriend when contending with homophobia, youth identified the importance of communication both during and after experienced homophobia in an effort to preserve attachment bonds.

### Conceptual Implications

Upon review, no new research was found exploring the impact homophobia has on same sex, adolescent, attachment processes. As stated in chapters one and two, Erikson (1968) developed an eight stage, theoretical model of human development. Core to Erikson’s psychological developmental process of adolescence is the stage of identity formation. Successful resolution of this identity versus role confusion stage (Erikson, 1980) exists when youth obtain a steady sense of internal identity. Erikson’s (1968) initial

theory of development incorporates the impact societal and environmental constructs have on the adolescent's emerging identity and, per Hoare's extrapolation (2002), Erikson understood each person as fundamentally integrated into and influenced by their family, culture, community, and societal values and belief system. Fittingly, society and the youth's community have the power to offer recognition of and support for this identity and also the influential power to devalue identity. The research findings of this study, especially those associated with the relevance that internalized homonegativity has on attachment security, correspond to Erikson's understanding of societal influence and the importance of positive identity integration in developing and maintaining attachment security.

Youth who had not achieved identity integration at the time of the interview were particularly challenged in developing secure, intimate, attachment bonds. When interviewed, Calvin intimated his belief that persons who identified as bisexual may struggle more with experienced homophobia resulting in damaged relational attachment. What is interesting about this youth's analysis is his connection between the importance of identity integration and/or a stable sense of self which may assist in managing experiences with homophobia within a same-gendered relationship. This is similar to Elizure and Mintzer's (2003) findings that queer identified youth have an extra step in identity formation. If queer youth do not have a positive sense of self-worth or a viable understanding of their sense of self due to societal degradation, it is an exceptional challenge to develop secure, intimate attachment. Although Calvin's analysis of bisexuality may have roots in his misinterpretations of this identity as a valid and integrated sexual orientation, it does not retract from the intuitive understanding that

prolonged identity exploration interferes with successful, intimate attachment (Erikson, 1968). In end, Calvin's interpretation of bisexuality and sexual orientation development also corresponds to the research conducted by Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, and Braun (2006) which found that many queer youth initially identify as bisexual and later transitioned to a consistently lesbian or gay sexual orientation once identity integration was achieved.

The ambivalence verbalized by both Calvin and Demetrios regarding both their relationships being the target of homonegativity may be the result of the emotional support received from their family of origin regarding their sexual orientation and same sex relationships. Not only do Demetrios' and Calvin's experiences illustrate the value of family support in identity development, but it also corresponds to the research conducted by Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, and Sanchez (2009). As found in chapter one, this research established that the lack of familial support or outright rejection of queer youth's sexual orientation was the principal factor that led to harmful health outcomes for queer youth such as higher suicide rates, increased symptoms of depression, increased drug and alcohol use and increased participation in sexual behavior that put youth in jeopardy of contracting sexually transmitted infections or HIV. In relation to this, Gabriyel also acknowledged his life observations concerning the negative impact a lack of familial support had on himself and his peers. From this observation, Gabriyel verbalized the importance of supportive queer spaces in allowing youth to explore and develop their identity.

Five youth expressed their belief that experiences with homophobia enhanced their felt attachment to their intimate partner. This finding corresponds to the research



conducted by Rostosky, Riggle, Gray, and Hatton (2007) who found that couples generally reported that jointly coping with societal homophobia enhanced their relationship because each partner relied on the other for support. Rostosky et al. (2007) further determined that one partner's internalized homophobia had a negative impact on feelings of attachment and that differing stages of each partner's sexual orientation disclosure and potential sexual identity development impacted the quality of the couple's relationship. This was similar to Raheem's and Demetrios' report in which both identified their boyfriend's feelings of internalized homonegativity and/or their differing stages of being out about their sexual orientation as creating a rupture in the development of and ability to maintain secure feelings of attachment. Raheem's and Demetrios' boyfriend's discomfort with public affection, disclosure of the relationship, and felt distress with their sexual orientation seemed to rupture the secure base that is necessary to sustain an attachment relationship and contend with societal homophobia. The inability to seek comfort or support from their boyfriends when upset due to an increased need to protect their partner's disclosure of sexual orientation was viewed as frustrating attachment bonds.

Raheem and Demetrios' relational experience also matched the findings of Harter, Marold, Whitesell, and Cobbs (1996) who found that queer youth often utilize a "false self" (Winnicott, 1960) necessitating constant monitoring of behavior and disclosures when relating to their primary support system. Raheem and Demetrios illustrated how their boyfriends' constant monitoring of behavior to avoid sexual orientation disclosure when maneuvering in a world of assumed heterosexual identity, social norming, and behavior governing negatively impacted the development and internal acceptance of a

gay or queer identity. This issue affected the progression of attachment security and, ultimately, impacted the intimate attachment bonds. This finding also corresponds to Erikson's theory of psychological development indicating that healthy identity integration is necessary for queer youth to develop secure feelings of attachment to an intimate partner. Similarly, Sherry (2007) found that persons who develop insecure attachment styles often report increased amounts of internalized homophobia.

Conversely, Nasir discussed a resilient approach to managing differing stages of comfort when confronted with societal homophobia. Nasir identified his awareness of his fiancé's discomfort with being the target of homophobia and how this experience was new to his partner. As a result, Nasir provided the bulk of emotional comfort after experiences with homophobia in an effort to soothe his partner emotionally. Raheem also identified this role within his relationship and his belief that his boyfriend must develop thicker skin to manage homophobia.

One interviewed youth, Cade, identified the cause for the demise of his relationship as the result of homophobia. Although this was an anomaly in this study, it is worth noting. As a result of the interviewee's inability to protect or provide his boyfriend with emotional comfort directly after the boyfriend's experienced homophobia, the relationship was moving towards termination. This experience illustrates Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment. A secure, safe, attachment object is important in soothing during experiences that are fear provoking or life threatening. When this secure attachment base is not available, feelings of secure attachment are ruptured.

Calvin, Demetrios, and Raheem discussed the negative impact their partner's lack of disclosure of their sexual orientation to their family of origin had on their felt intimate

attachment. This points to Iwaski and Ristock's research (2007) in which emotional stress was found to increase during the coming out process and Calvin, Demetrios, and Raheem illustrated the impact this stress had on felt attachment to their intimate partners. Nasir discussed the way in which he negotiated his family's rejection of his sexual orientation and relationship by a lack of disclosure of his relationship's progression to his family of origin while shielding his partner from interactions with his family of origin in an effort to decrease felt stress and maintain feelings of attachment to both his fiancé and his family of origin.

Landolt, Bartholomew, Saffrey, Oram, and Perlman (2004) found that positive peer relationships favorably influence attachment styles and that these peer relationships were a deterrent in the development of anxious and avoidant attachment styles. Additionally, Diamond (2003) identified queer, adolescent peer relations as serving an important function in maintaining mental health stability to mitigate rejection from a privileged, heterosexist community, families of origin, and general societal stigma. Similarly, this research study found that youth identified the positive impact outside support had on reducing subsequent negative feelings because of experienced homophobia. Specifically, Zamir and Nasir identified planned meetings with friends to explore homophobia and its impact on self. Both found these structured, planned times to confer with peers as helpful in strategizing and problem solving when relating to a homonegative environment.

When exploring attachment styles in relation to sexual orientation stigma, Zakalik and Wei (2006) determined that anxious attachment had a "strong positive association with perceived discrimination" (p. 310) and that avoidant attachment styles in queer men were more likely to foster the development of a positive sense of self. This positive working

model allowed individuals to ignore or defend against discriminatory and negative behaviors and validate their sense of self and sexual orientation because they were less likely to feel dependent on the person making the negative statement about sexual orientation. Although youth identified their tendency to contend with homophobia and homophobic beliefs by “paying it no mind”, most youth expressed feelings of secure attachment towards their partner and friends. These findings may be illustrative of the plasticity of attachment.

Furthermore, all youth conceptualized homophobia as the outcome of religious teachings, societal heterosexism, discomfort with identity, ignorance, or the result of trauma. This conceptualization seemed to have given the surveyed youth the ability to maintain feelings of compassion for the person expressing homophobia and, ultimately, a sense of control over experienced homophobia through use of objectivity. This finding corresponds to trauma theory (Herman, 1992) in which felt control within a situation decreases the likelihood of trauma symptoms and, ultimately, supports resiliency.

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) provided a sound theoretical construct in understanding how queer youth maintain feelings of attachment to their same sex partner when contending with homonegativity. As observed by Bowlby (1973),

...human beings of all ages are found to be at their happiest...when they are confident that, standing behind them, there are one or more trusted persons who will come to their aid should difficulties arise. The person trusted provides a secure base from which his (or her) companion can operate” (p. 359).

Most interviewed youth identified an adaptable and rotating role division within their relational dynamic in which one partner would prepare to fight and challenge the source of homonegativity while the other partner worked to soothe the partner’s feelings of upset and anger. This dynamic illustrates the activation of the attachment system when

contending with hostile, environmental dangers and seemed to assist youth in maintaining feelings of attachment towards their same sex partner. Further, youth identified this fight versus soothe breakdown as flexible because of the soother's willingness to fight along with their partner if their partner's safety was compromised. This was also consistent with Bowlby's (1973) findings in which he noted that:

A healthy self-reliant person is thus capable of exchanging roles when the situation changes; at one time he is providing a secure base from which his companion(s) can operate; at another he is glad to rely on one or another of his companions to provide him with just such a base in return (p.359).

Moreover, a few youth discussed the ways in which they soothed their partners verbally when contending with homophobia. Youth would remain in communication with each other reminding themselves of the identified causes for homophobia and how homophobic beliefs are not a reflection on self, but on the other. Additionally, youth would give each other verbal affirmations and reminders that it is not necessary to take in or believe homonegative messages. This was indicated in the repetitive statement "pay it no mind".

Youth also discussed their belief that there is a "time and a place for everything". This identified phrase denotes the necessity of determining when it is safe and appropriate to display physical affection or intimacy. In addition, understanding and determining environmental safety brings a sense of control and power over experienced societal homophobia. Unfortunately, it also illustrates a need for hypervigilance when monitoring the environment to maintain emotional and physical safety and sustain feelings of attachment to their same sex partner.

Finally, having a safe environmental space to seek refuge after experiences with homophobia was identified as important to youth. Youth identified queer positive spaces

such as the Attic Youth Center and accepting environmental spaces such as Center City, Philadelphia as a means to decrease hypervigilance and feel secure and uninhibited in expressing behaviors or feelings of attachment towards their same sex partner. This refuge was noted as being especially important after experienced homophobia because it provided a place for validation of attachment bonds.

### *Clinical Implications*

As identified by Bowlby, the attachment behavioral system is activated in times of stress or threat. Due to societal homophobia, queer youth relationships can become the target of this homonegative hostility. During times of stress or threat, Bowlby found that persons move towards their secure attachment figure for protection, comfort, and safety. Since same sex relationships are the target of homonegative hostility, it was proposed that queer youth have found resilient tactics to successfully contend with the additional barrier of accessing felt safety and security from their intimate partner while maintaining feelings of secure attachment.

This research illustrates the importance of a working knowledge of Bowlby's attachment theory when providing therapeutic treatment to queer youth. Through the use of Bowlby's theory, clinical social workers can begin to note the resilient behaviors youth engage in to maintain safety, security, and feelings of secure attachment towards their same sex partners because of this activated attachment system. Through noting these resilient qualities, clinical social workers can draw awareness to resilient behaviors and work towards encouraging continued use of these behaviors. This research found that male identified, queer youth of color negotiated experiences with homophobia by responding with a relational division of roles in which one partner typically responded to

societal homophobia by working to protect the relationship and his partner while the other focused on emotionally soothing the activated protector. This role division was not rigid, but adjustable in nature with partners alternating roles as necessitated. Further, this role division appears to assist these youth in maintaining both emotional and physical safety and gave youth indication of their partner's care and concern for them while experiencing the homophobic assault. Queer youth also identified the necessity of assessing the environment for safety, the value of increased communication with their partner, assessment of environmental nuances, support seeking behaviors, and a conceptualization of the causes of homophobia as a means to contend with homonegativity.

From these findings, youth identified the usefulness of emotionally supporting their boyfriend, seeking emotional support outside of the relationship, increased communication when there is physical distance, and physical intimacy as a means to repair attachment bonds after experienced homophobia. While engaged in providing clinical support to queer youth who are contending with homophobia, clinical social workers can utilize therapeutic space to enhance these reparative attachment processes as a means to provide queer youth with a supportive environment that allows for continued development of healthy, satisfying, same sex intimacy.

Use of attachment theory when approaching clinical treatment can also assist in fostering a secure, stable base within the therapeutic relationship which could facilitate clinical social workers in beginning to address any internalization of homophobic, societal messages. This secure base may be necessary for queer youth to express any feelings of low self-worth while deriving comfort in and security from a queer positive

clinical social worker. This created secure base can lead to reparative attachment experiences that result in an enhancement of a youth's feelings of self-worth and felt value within their community and society. If queer youth do not have strong feelings of self-worth and value, they may be hesitant to seek support from their community. A decreased comfort with support seeking behaviors may result in rapid introjection of homophobic messages.

Use of these findings to understand the relational negotiation of homophobic discrimination will also benefit clinical social workers when conceptualizing the attachment styles of queer identified youth. Through the incorporation of a working understanding of the division of protector versus soother, clinical social workers can assist youth in understanding the reason for this relational negotiation while offering other techniques to support each other after contending with experienced homophobia. Additionally, through therapeutic intervention, clinical social workers can begin to work to assist queer youth with insecure attachment styles in developing secure attachment styles to better enhance their intimate relationship attachment security. This reparative attachment work might be best achieved through a therapeutic relationship with a queer positive therapist who can also manage a person's feelings of internalized homonegativity. The use of queer affirming couples counseling can also assist queer youth in developing a secure attachment style.

A working knowledge of trauma theory (Brown, 2008; Davies & Frawley, 1994; Herman, 1992) may also assist clinical social workers in understanding the impact homophobia and heterosexism has on queer youth's sense of self worth, self-efficacy, sense of empowerment, and a belief in their life's permanence and agency to achieve life



goals. The use of trauma and attachment theories will allow clinical social workers to persist in viewing queer youth and the queer community as resilient entities while working to challenge and reconstruct any homonegative beliefs held by the clinician or the client.

In a final summation of clinical theory, it would be imperative for clinical social workers to have an operational knowledge of the impact of lack of identity integration has on the development of securely attached same sex relationships. This may be especially true for queer youth contending with feelings of internalized homonegativity which negatively impacts identity development. Through clinical interventions, clinical social workers can address feelings of low self-worth due to this internalization of homonegativity. Supporting a positive conceptualization of queer identity can better assist queer youth in finding emotionally satisfying intimate relationships.

This research also points to the strong need for an environmentally tangible, secure community for queer adolescents when moving from Erikson's stage of identity formation to relational intimacy. A safe, accepting, supportive environment can work to challenge and deter the negative effects of homophobia and heterosexism while nurturing healthy identity formation, sexuality, and intimate attachment. Without this safe, supportive environment, queer youth may not have access to an environment and supports they may need to begin to address their experiences with homophobia and heterosexism resulting in psychological harm. Continued psychological harm due to homophobia ultimately challenges the ability of queer youth to develop secure, intimate attachment. Further, queer supportive spaces allow queer youth to verbally explore their intimate relationships, voice their concerns about their intimate relationships, and

problem solve collaboratively on how to address relationship conflicts. Youth can also practice and experience sexual behaviors and attachment focused physical contact in an effort to learn what amount of physical contact feels good, safe, and comforting within their relationships. In American society, it seems as if this can rarely happen without youth worrying about their physical and emotional safety.

Clinical social workers can also play a vital role in advocating for and creating safe, secure spaces in which queer youth can express feelings of attachment towards their same sex partner. Not only is queer friendly space important for the youth's ability to practice developing feelings of secure, intimate attachment, but may also be important in challenging society's homophobic beliefs in an effort to effect change. Through the provision of a safe, secure environment, youth will be able to maintain healthy intimate relationships, continue to engage in these relationships within heterosexually dominated settings, persist in successfully negotiate experiences with homophobia through use of peer support, and maintain feelings of secure attachment to their partner. This space can give queer youth agency to voice their feelings of security with their sexual orientation and identity.

Illustrative of queer resiliency, queer youth have created their own reparative attachment processes without the assistance of caregivers or social service providers. In Philadelphia, queer youth have developed a chosen, gay familial system. These youth identify queer elders and peers as their gay mom or dad, gay brother or sister, or gay aunt or uncle. These relationships are taken quite seriously and are viewed as family; it is with this gay family that they often share their emotional experiences. Many times these gay families provide support for and knowledge about how to come out to families of origin,

manage homophobia, provide information on sex, dating, and the development of intimate relationships. These familial constructs seem invaluable to many queer youth since this knowledge is not communicated to youth by educational institutions, family, or by dominant society. If youth choose not to come out about their sexual orientation to their families of origin or cannot openly discuss their sexuality to their family of origin, youth still get the experience of having a family who knows their sexual orientation identity. If youth are disowned or experience relational struggles with their family of origin, these gay families can provide a holding environment and secure base and have, many times, supported queer youth financially, socially and emotionally. Clinical social workers can play an essential role in witnessing these bonds by acknowledging, supporting, and encouraging the development of these queer support networks and chosen families. Further, it would be remiss not to incorporate these connections into our clinical work with queer youth.

Although the queer youth who participated in this research study made no disapproving comments about interactions with their queer chosen family, my clinical experience has intermittently suggested that these chosen family members are inconsistent with their investment in the best interest of the youth. As a result, clinical social workers can play an integral role in encouraging queer youth to assess the integrity of chosen family while working to develop or support an already existing queer network to continue to provide the queer adolescent community a self-sustaining, emotional resource outside of therapeutic intervention.

Furthermore, queer youth who participated in this study discussed the benefit of having biological familial support and acknowledgement of their same sex intimate

relationship. Youth identified the desire to have their partner be considered a part of their family of origin with ongoing family involvement. Clinical social workers may be able to assist in biological familial inclusion in the support of queer youth relationships. If families of origin hold homophobic beliefs that have ruptured attachment, clinical social workers may be able to offer a therapeutic setting in which both queer youth and caregivers can work to repair these attachment ruptures. As a consequence, familial attachment repairment may result in stronger intimate relationships between same sex partners.

What seems unreservedly obvious and trumps all clinical social work with queer youth is the need for the social work profession to work to effect equality for all persons. Continued silence and colluding with societal discriminatory forces which impact queer youth daily is no longer acceptable within our profession. If queer youth and adults lived in a society that was inclusive and ensured their equality, many queer persons would no longer have to struggle to overcome the impact homonegativity and heterosexism has on their sense of self and on their ability to persevere in protecting their relationships. If queer youth and their developing queer intimate relationships were protected against adversity by ensuring legal protection and recognition of their relationships resulting in the overall reduction of societal stigma and outright, shameless discrimination, then the development of securely attached same sex intimate relationships without the need for environmental hypervigilance could be fortified.

Through the use of this research's findings, clinical social workers can begin to successfully assess relational dynamics and reported responses to homophobia while concentrating on enhancing and supporting these characteristics and techniques as a

means of successfully coping with experienced homophobia. It is the hope that the profession's continued focus on the development of safe, queer positive spaces and ongoing work to ensure equality for all will help queer youth successfully manage experiences with homophobia and maintain feelings of secure attachment to their same sex partners.

### Limitations

This research was limited due to the homogeneity of the population study. The sample size of the study may have also skewed these research findings. Furthermore, all research participants resided in Philadelphia and no persons outside of Philadelphia County engaged in this research study. Consequently, these research findings may not apply to youth living outside of Philadelphia or suburban or rural areas of the country.

The youth interviewed for this study seemingly developed some felt comfort with their sexual orientation and may have resolved Erikson's identity formation stage of psychological development. This was illustrated by youth's comfort meeting in queer identified spaces during the interview process and engagement in queer spaces such as Pride events. Further, no youth who were besieged with debilitating feelings of internalized homonegativity were interviewed. As such, this also skewed the collected data.

Unfortunately, not all partners of the interviewees could be interviewed for this study. Interviews with both partners within the identified couple could have been helpful in collaboratively developing a shared relational history, checking the shared facts about the constructed relationship, and expanding on the understanding of each partner's

attachment style. Additionally, youth were not asked about the race of their primary partner. This deficiency of information may have impacted this study's findings.

Due to the lack of past research on the impact of oppression on queer adolescent attachment, a measure was not employed to determine a youth's preexisting attachment style. In the future, use of measurements to establish attachment style could prove useful in determining whether a partner has an insecure attachment style. This insecure attachment style would negatively impact the quality of the relational attachment. Insecure attachment also heightens the perception of homophobia and is connected to a reduction in nurturing behaviors and an increase in negative perceptions of a relational object. A working understanding of each interviewee's attachment style may have offered more insight into the interviewee's responses to the semi-structured in depth interview.

Feelings of low self-worth and low self-esteem also impact the attachment process and style of interviewees. A working understanding of each interviewee's self-perception derived from a reliable measure would have given more information about responses in relation to the exploration of feelings of attachment when contending with homophobia.

In addition, assessment tools to rule out a history of emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse in childhood would have been advantageous when assessing findings because these experiences of abuse or neglect affect the development of secure attachment in childhood.

As well, the development of a comprehensive understanding of the historical family dynamic during each research participant's childhood would also have proven useful. Familial dynamics inform the foundation of internal working models which impact attachment style. This attachment style could be determined by asking intentional

questions about relational experiences with primary caregivers. Finally, any emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse that may have existed within the intimate relationships of the queer youth interviewed may also affect the data gathered from these qualitative interviews.

The impact of a partner's internalized homonegativity was not considered when developing this research study. As an outcome of this study, it was determined that one partner's internalized homonegativity significantly influences the attachment quality and relational dynamic within queer youth, same sex relationships.

Youth surveyed may have known that this researcher was affiliated with both Mazzoni Center and the Attic Youth Center. This affiliation may have influenced each participant's willingness to engage in this research study. Additionally, this researcher identifies as female and Caucasian. Since queer, male identified youth of color were recruited for this study, this difference in gender identity, gender expression, and race may have skewed these research findings. Also, youth may have only participated in this research study for the financial compensation impacting these research findings. In end, my emotional reactions of anger, sadness, irritation, and general upset regarding the homophobia youth experienced posed a personal challenge during the interview process and may have skewed the findings of this research.

### *Future Research*

If future research is conducted in the area of queer, adolescent attachment, it would be beneficial to utilize measures to determine secure or insecure attachment styles as a result of childhood experiences and incorporate a measure to determine the level of internalized homonegativity of each research participant. Further, ruling out a history of emotional,

physical, or sexual abuse or neglect may also assist in determining the research participant's attachment style.

With future research, one might consider recruiting couples versus one partner from the relational dyad. This could offer a rich understanding of the relational dynamic and assist with checking relational perceptions and experiences.

Given that many of the youth surveyed expressed ambivalence about the impact homophobia had on their relational attachment, it may be beneficial to conduct a multi-city and multi-ethnic study to determine whether this perception of homophobia's impact on queer relationships is specific to queer, male identified, youth of color living in Philadelphia or if this experience is consistent with other youth living in different areas of the United States. Further, a study with a broader sample may assist in determining whether there is a differing perspective of the impact homophobia has on queer relationships if the research participant's demographics vary in age, location, race, and year in which participants first developed comfort with their sexual orientation.

Queer, female identified youth of color may also benefit from research determining the effects of homophobia on their intimate, same-sex attachment. If future research on this topic is pursued, efforts to recruit youth who do not engage in queer agency spaces may also prove beneficial so that a diverse sample of research participants can be had.



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## Appendix A: In Depth Interview Guide

*(Highlighted items are those of greater importance)*

### *Demographics:*

How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

What race do you identify as? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your sexual orientation? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been in a relationship with someone of the same gender as you? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently in a same sex relationship? If so, for how long? \_\_\_\_\_

If not in a relationship currently, how many months ago were you in your last same sex relationship? \_\_\_\_\_ How many months were the two of you together? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you consider this person your boyfriend, partner, lover, fiancée, other? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you/did you feel you and your boyfriend/partner will/would be together for some time?

---

Did you ever feel like you and your boyfriend were treated negatively or differently because someone knew the two of you were in a relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

When you were growing up, did you have an adult in your life that you trusted and felt you could go to for support or care when you felt upset, were hurt, had a problem, or felt unsafe?

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### *In depth Interview Guide:*

This is an interview focusing on same sex intimate relationships and feelings of perceived or experienced discrimination because of your same sex relationship. Specifically, I am going to ask you questions about your same sex relationship, feelings of attachment to your boyfriend/partner, possible experiences with discrimination because of your relationship, how you and your boyfriend/partner handled this discriminatory experience, and how this experience of sexual orientation discrimination may have affected your feelings of attachment to your boyfriend/partner.

During the interview, I will be using certain words like attachment when discussing your boyfriend/partner and discrimination when discussing experiences of homophobia.

I am defining **attachment** to your boyfriend/partner as meaning you have/had some feelings of trust when with him and believe(d) he would not purposefully hurt you, you can/could typically go to him when feeling upset or unsafe, you can/could usually rely on him for emotional support, you feel/felt affectionate towards him, and usually feel/felt comfortable telling him how you feel/felt and what you are/were thinking.

I am defining **discrimination** as homophobia or dislike of, judgment of, disagreement with or opposition to your sexual orientation and same sex relationship.

To clarify, racial **discrimination or racism** is: discriminatory experiences resulting from a person or system's dislike of, judgment of, opposition to or prejudiced beliefs about the participant's race.

It will be important to think about homophobia in relation to your relationship, not racism.

If you have any questions during the interview, please ask. If you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, please let me know. You do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. If you feel uncomfortable with the interview process, you can end it at any time. If you need a break, please let me know.

***Research Questions:***

- To what extent does societal homophobia and oppression impact the process of attachment in queer youth's same sex, intimate relationships?
- What factors do the queer youth surveyed identify as contributing to their ability to form positive attachment to intimate, same sex partners when contending with oppressive experiences because of their sexual orientation?
- How do the queer youth surveyed maintain feelings of attachment to their same sex partner when their relationship is the target of homonegative hostility?

*Questions:*

How do you identify, define, and/or understand homophobia?

What do you think makes folks homophobic?

**Relationship**

**\*\*Tell me about when you first realize that you liked your boyfriend...**

**Probe:** What did you like about him?

When did you realize that you cared for or loved your boyfriend?

What made you realize that you cared or loved him?

**\*\*Tell me about your relationship with your boyfriend...**

**Probe:** What is your relationship like?

How did the two of you decide to be in a relationship with each other?

**\*\*Tell me how you feel when you weren't with your boyfriend or weren't able to spend time with him...**

**\*Who is supportive of your relationship with your boyfriend?**

**\*Do you talk to anyone about your relationship? How did you decide they were okay to talk to?**

**Attachment**

**\*\*Tell me about how you and your boyfriend show your love or care for each other...**

**Probe:** What types of things did your boyfriend do to make you know he liked or loved or cared

about you?

Can you tell me about how or the ways you show your boyfriend you care or love him?

**\*How do you feel if your boyfriend is upset, sad, or had a bad day?**

**Probe:** What do you do if **he's** upset, sad or had a bad day? If you aren't able to do anything in the moment, what would you like to do for him if he's upset, sad or had a bad day?

Can you tell me what your boyfriend would do if **you** felt upset, sad or had a bad day?

**\*\*\*What do you think helps to make your relationship successful?**

**\*\*\*What helps you feel close to him?**

*Probe:* Talking to each other? Spending time with each other? Telling him that you care about him? Hearing that he cares about you? Being physically affectionate? Something else?

\*What do you and your boyfriend do if you feel like your relationship isn't working out?

*Probe:* Do you talk to each other about it? Do you talk to your friends about it? Do you spend time together? Less time together? Something else?

**\*\*\*\*\*Tell me about how you think experiences with homophobia may have impacted your relationship?**

When did you notice you felt comfortable with your same sex relationship?

### Relational Dynamic

**\*\*\*Tell me about how you and your boyfriend show your love or care for each other in a public space that is not gay friendly or is predominately used by heterosexuals?**

*Probe:* What do you do? How do you maintain feelings of attachment or love in this space? Do you ever feel less connected or like you are not in a relationship when in this type of environment?

*Probe:* How does your boyfriend behave in this space? Do you notice a change in his behavior? Language? Or approach towards showing affection? Do you notice a change in your behavior? Language? Or approach towards showing affection? Does he ever say he notices a difference in your behavior? Language? Or approach towards showing affection?

**\*\*How do you think persons can tell the two of you are in a relationship when in a non-gay space?**

*Probe:* What do you think other people notice that shows you are together?

**\*Do the two of you ever disagree on how to show your care or love for each other in a space that is not gay friendly or is predominantly heterosexual?**

--> **\*\*\*If you disagree on how to show attachment in public spaces, how do you handle or negotiate this difference in displaying attachment in a space that is not gay friendly or is predominately heterosexual?**

**\*\*\*\*\*Have you ever felt unsafe expressing affection or attachment towards him?**

**\*\* How do you and your boyfriend show your love or care for each other in a space that is gay friendly or is predominantly used by persons who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender? Tell me about how others would know the two of you were together.**

*Probe:* Do you behave or act differently towards each other in a gay friendly space or a space that is predominately used by persons who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or



transgendered? Do you show more or less affection? More or less attachment towards each other?

**\*\*\* Do the two of you ever disagree on how to show your care or love for each other in a space that is gay friendly or predominately used by gay, lesbian, bisexual or persons who are transgender?**

-> If you disagree, how do you handle or negotiate this difference in displaying attachment in a space that is gay friendly?

### Experienced Relational Discrimination

**\*\*\*Tell me how you make the decision to tell someone about your relationship? Or sexual orientation?**

*Probe:* Do you usually tell **new** persons about your relationship or sexual orientation?

**\*\*\*\*Have you felt someone discriminated against you and your boyfriend because of your relationship? Tell me about this experience. What happened?**

*Probe:* Have you ever felt you and your boyfriend were treated differently because of your relationship? Or that a person disagreed with your relationship with your boyfriend? What happened?

**\*\*\*\*What did you and your boyfriend do to handle this experience?**

*Probe:* Were either of you upset? Angry? Sad? Did you talk about it with each other afterwards? Did you confront the person? Did you leave the situation? Something else?

\*If no experience of discrimination, how do you think you and your boyfriend would handle it?

**(End interview if no experienced relational discrimination)**

**\*\*\*\*Tell me about your thoughts or feelings after you and your boyfriend experienced this discrimination...**

*Probe:* how did you feel about being in a relationship with your boyfriend?

**\*\*\*\*Did you seek comfort from your boyfriend or get physically closer to your boyfriend when experiencing the discrimination? \*\*\*\*Tell me what you did.** If upset because of the discrimination, what did you do?

*Probe:* Did you physically distance yourself from your partner when experiencing the discrimination? How did you feel about your relationship after this experience? Did you consider ending the relationship? Did you feel closer to your boyfriend? Did you feel worried about being in a predominately heterosexual or non gay friendly space with your boyfriend in the future? How did you support each other after this experience?

**\*\*\*Did you and your boyfriend talk about this experience with homophobia afterwards?**

**Probe:** Did you spend time with each other after the experience? If so, what did you discuss? Did you discuss it right away? Did you tell him how you felt? How did you support each other?

**\*\*\*\*\*Tell me about how, if at all, you expressed your feelings of attachment to your boyfriend during this experience?**

**\*\*\*After this experience, how did you express feelings of attachment towards your boyfriend?**

**Probe:** Did this experience of homophobia change the way you felt about your boyfriend? If not, tell me how you know your feelings were the same... **What do you think helped to prevent your feelings from changing?**

**Probe:** Did you notice any change in your feelings of attachment towards your boyfriend? Did you feel concern and care towards him? Did you feel secure in your relationship?

\*If so, how did your feelings change? What do you think contributed to your feelings changing?

**\*\*Did it change the way you acted towards your boyfriend when in a predominately heterosexual or non gay friendly space again?** Tell me about this... What was different?

**Probe:** Did you notice any change in your behavior towards your boyfriend? Did you notice any change in his behavior? Did you still express feelings of attachment towards each other when in public after this experience? How do you express feelings of attachment now? Has anything changed? Do you act differently towards each other when in a predominately gay friendly space? What's different with your display of affection?

**\*\*\*Thinking back on this experience now, did you want to spend time with your boyfriend right after experiencing homophobia directed towards your relationship? Did you need time away from him?**

**\*How did you feel about the way your partner handled this discriminatory experience?**

**Probe:** When you think back on this experience now, how do you feel about how your boyfriend handled it?

\*How did you feel about the way you handled this discriminatory experience?

**Probe:** When you think back on this experience now, how do you feel about how you handled it?

**\*How often would you say the two of you experience homophobia when together?**

\*Has your relationship with your boyfriend or sexual orientation impacted your other relationships with friends? Family? Church? Work? School? Housing? Anything else? Tell me about these relationships/changes...

**\*\*\*Do you think that homophobia has an impact on your relationship? On the physical intimacy of your relationship? Tell me about this...\*\*\***

\*Do you seek comfort from or talk to anyone else when you've experienced homophobia?

\*In the moment, how did you feel when experiencing homophobia?

**Auxiliary Questions:**

How do you define a relationship?

Who taught you how to deal with racism or racist people?

Who taught you how to deal with the police?

Do you and your partner ever disagree about how to handle homophobia?

--→Do these differences impact your relationship?

What advice would you give youth about how to handle homophobia?

What advice would you give youth to make their relationships successful?

What advice would you give youth to deal with homophobia when they have a boyfriend?

**Debriefing**

Is there anything you wish to add? Any questions you have about the interview? Any loose ends? Anything you think is important for me to understand in regards to the relationship discrimination you and your boyfriend experienced? Anything you think is important for me to understand about your feelings of attachment towards your boyfriend?

Thank you!

**Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer****INTIMATE ATTACHMENT IN PERSONS AGES 18-24**

**Identify as African-American?**

**Identify as male?**

**Between the ages of 18 through 24 years?**

**Currently in a same sex relationship for three or more months?**

**Or, in a same sex relationship that ended less than six months ago?**

**Did you and your partner experience discrimination based on your sexual orientation?**

If you answered yes to the above questions, then you qualify to participate in a research study focusing on your same sex attraction and feelings of attachment to your same sex partner.

This interview will last between 45 - 75 minutes and will be tape recorded.

The interview will be held at The Attic Youth Center, Mazzoni Center, or a location of your choosing.

**YOU WILL BE COMPENSATED \$25.00 FOR YOUR  
PARTICIPATION**

If interested, please contact:

**Cynthia Closs, LCSW**

**215.694.2383**

This study has been approved by the University of Pennsylvania's  
Institutional Review Board

**Appendix C: Informed Consent Form**

*IRB Approval*  
*From: 02/07/2009*  
*To: 02/06/2010*

University of Pennsylvania  
Informed Consent Form

**Title of the Research Study: The Effects of Oppression on Queer Adolescent Attachment**

**Protocol Number:**

**Principal Investigator: (name, address, phone and email) Ram Cnaan, Ph.D. Research building, 3815 Walnut Street, Room 400 Philadelphia, PA 19104-6214 215.898.5523 (phone); 215.573.2099 (fax)**

Co-investigator: (name, address, phone and email) Cynthia Closs, LCSW, doctoral candidate Research building, 3815 Walnut Street Philadelphia, PA 19104-6214 215.694.2383 (phone); 215.573.2099 (fax)

**Emergency Contact: (name, address, phone and email) Cynthia Closs, LCSW**

Research building, 3815 Walnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6214  
215.694.2383(phone); 215.573.2099 (fax)

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This is not a form of treatment or therapy. It is not supposed to detect a disease or find something wrong. Your participation is voluntary which means you can choose whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate or not to participate there will be no loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Before you make a decision you will need to know the purpose of the study, the possible risks and benefits of being in the study and what you will have to do if decide to participate. The research team is going to talk with you about the study and give you this consent document to read. You do not have to make a decision now; you can take the consent document home and share it with friends, family doctor and family.

If you do not understand what you are reading, do not sign it. Please ask the researcher to explain anything you do not understand, including any language contained in this form. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and a copy will be given to you. Keep this form, in it you will find contact information and answers to questions about the study. You may ask to have this form read to you.

University of Pennsylvania  
Informed Consent Form

**What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of the study is to learn more about the impact oppression has on same sex relationships. This study is being conducted for a dissertation.

**Why was I asked to participate in the study?**

You are being asked to join this study because you are between the ages of 18-24, identify as gay, bisexual or queer, are male identified and have been in a same sex relationship lasting three months or longer in duration and, if this relationship ended, it was no longer than six months ago. Additionally, you have indicated you experienced discrimination based on your same sex relationship.

**How long will I be in the study? How many other people will be in the study?**

The study will take place over a period of one year. This means, on one occasion, we will ask you to spend approximately one and a half hours participating in this study. Each session will last approximately one and a half hours.

You will be one of 26 people in the study.

**Where will the study take place?**

You will be asked to come to The Mazzoni Center, located at 1201 Chestnut Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor or The Attic Youth Center at 255 South 16<sup>th</sup> Street on at pm or am. If neither of these locations feel comfortable to you, the audiotaped interview will be in a location of your choosing. The time of the interview will also be of your choosing.

**What will I be asked to do?**

You will be asked to meet with the interviewer one time to discuss your same sex relationship and the impact experienced or perceived homophobia or discrimination based on your same sex relationship had on your feelings of attachment to your boyfriend/partner. This interview will be audio recorded.

University of Pennsylvania  
Informed Consent Form

**What are the risks?**

No anticipated risks for participating in this study are anticipated. The interview will be held in a room that is secure and white noise machines will be used to decrease the likelihood that others can hear what you are saying during the interview process. You do not have to give your name or your boyfriend/partner's name. If you choose to disclose your name, it will not be included in the transcription of the interview. Your interview will be destroyed after transcription and only this interviewer and the primary investigator (PI) will have access to your transcribed interview. No identifying data will be connected to your transcribed or audiotaped interview.

If you feel upset and emotional discomfort while participating in the study you may contact the PI or the emergency contact name on the first page of this form. Also, you may contact your own doctor, counselor or seek treatment outside of the University of Pennsylvania. Bring this document, and tell your doctor/counselor or his/her staff that you are in a research study being conducted at the University of Pennsylvania. Ask them to call the numbers on the first page of this form for information.

If you feel emotional discomfort from being in the study, the appropriate care will be provided without cost to you, but financial compensation is not otherwise available from the University of Pennsylvania. If you feel emotional discomfort while in the study but it is not related to the study, you and your insurance company will be responsible for the costs of that care.

If you are interested in receiving individual or couples therapy after participating in this study, you can contact: The Attic Youth Center at 215.545.4331 and leave a message on the Counseling Staff's voice mail requesting services. Therapeutic services are free of charge to persons under the age of 24 years who identify as LGBTQ. Additionally, you can contact Mazzoni Center at 215.563.0663 and request intake for counseling services. These services are provided for persons of any age who identify as LGBTQ and are provided on a sliding scale.

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**How will I benefit from the study?**

There is no direct benefit for participating in this study. However, your participation could help us understand the impact homophobic oppression has on attachment to same sex partners, which can benefit you indirectly. In the future, this may help other people understand how to support persons in same sex relationships negotiate and maintain secure attachment to their same sex partner.

**What other choices do I have?**

Your alternative to being in the study is to not be in the study.

**What happens if I do not choose to join the research study?**

You may choose to join the study or you may choose not to join the study. Your participation is voluntary.

There is no penalty if you choose not to join the research study. You will lose no benefits or advantages that are now coming to you, or would come to you in the future. Your therapist, social worker, nurse, doctor will not be upset with your decision.

If you are currently receiving services and you choose not to volunteer in the research study, your services will continue.

**When is the study over? Can I leave the study before it ends?**

The study is expected to end after all participants have completed the interview and all the information has been collected. The study may be stopped without your consent for the following reasons:

- o The PI feels it is best for your safety and/or health-you will be informed of the reasons why.
- o You have not followed the study instructions
- o The PI, the sponsor or the Office of Regulatory Affairs at the University of Pennsylvania can stop the study anytime



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You have the right to drop out of the research study at anytime during your participation. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decide to do so. Withdrawal will not interfere with your future care.

If you no longer wish to be in the research study, please inform the interviewer Cynthia Closs, at 215.694.2383 and take the following steps:

Inform Cynthia Closs that you do not wish to participate in the study.

There is no penalty for not participating in the study.

### **How will confidentiality be maintained and my privacy be protected?**

The research team will make every effort to keep all the information you tell us during the study strictly confidential, as required by law. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Pennsylvania is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research volunteers like you. The IRB has access to study information. Any documents you sign, where you can be identified by name will be kept in a locked drawer in Cynthia Closs' office. These documents will be kept confidential. All the documents will be destroyed when the study is over.

### **Will I have to pay for anything?**

There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

### **Will I be compensated for participating in the study?**

To show our appreciation for your time, we will give you \$25.00. If you decide to withdraw from the study before the study is over, your compensation will be paid in full.

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**Who can I call with questions, complaints or if I'm concerned about my rights as a research subject?**

If you have questions, concerns or complaints regarding your participation in this research study or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you should speak with the Principal Investigator listed on page one of this form. If a member of the research team cannot be reached or you want to talk to someone other than those working on the study, you may contact the Office of Regulatory Affairs with any question, concerns or complaints at the University of Pennsylvania by calling (215) 898-2614.

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When you sign this document, you are agreeing to take part in this research study. If you have any questions or there is something you do not understand, please ask. You will receive a copy of this consent document.

Signature of Subject

Print Name of Subject

Date

## **Appendix D: Interviewee Data**

### **Cade**

Cade is a twenty-two year old, bisexual, male-identified person. Cade identified his race as being both Black and Haitian. At the time of the interview, Cade was in a ten month relationship with another male identified person whom he considered to be his boyfriend. Cade reported a belief that he and his boyfriend had been treated negatively because of their same sex relationship. Cade also identified his mom as his primary attachment figure in childhood. Cade also identified the belief that his relationship would soon end due to experiences with homophobia.

### **Calvin**

Calvin is a twenty year old, male identified person who does not label his sexual orientation, but identified as same-gender loving. Calvin identified his race as African-American. At the time of the interview, Calvin was in an eight month relationship with Mu'Sad whom he considered to be his lover. This was Calvin's first same sex, intimate relationship. Calvin reported a belief that he and Mu'Sad had been treated negatively because of their same sex relationship. Calvin identified his mom as his primary attachment figure in childhood. Calvin identified a desire to be with his lover in the future.

### **Demetrios**

Demetrios is a twenty-three year old, gay, male identified person who identified his race as Black. Demetrios was in a relationship that lasted one and a half years, but had ended a week prior to the interview. Demetrios considered this person to be his boyfriend and partner and had once believed that he and his boyfriend would be together in the

future. Per Demetrios' report, his boyfriend seemed to be struggling with feelings of internalized homophobia which impacted the quality of their relationship and resulted in the termination of the relationship. Demetrios identified a belief that his relationship was "kinda" impacted by homophobia. Demetrios did not identify an attachment figure in childhood, but indicated that he had utilized journaling and friends when feeling emotionally upset or unsafe. Demetrios and his boyfriend were living together, but Demetrios had moved out a few months prior to the demise of their relationship. In childhood, Demetrios reported that he was raised by a lesbian-identified woman.

### **Gabriyel**

Gabriyel is a twenty year old, gay, male identified person and identified his race as Black. At the time of the interview, Gabriyel had been in a two year relationship with Khalil. Gabriyel considered Khalil to be his lover and felt their relationship would continue in the future. Gabriyel believed that he and his lover had been treated negatively due to their sexual orientation and same sex relationship and identified an attachment figure in childhood.

### **Galan**

Galan is an eighteen year old, gay, male identified person who identified his race as Black. At the time of the interview, Galan had been in a relationship with his boyfriend for seven and a half months. He believed that his relationship had a future, identified his relationship as being impacted by homophobia and noted his mom as his attachment figure in childhood. Galan and his boyfriend were planning on moving in together in the very near future.

**Jayden**

Jayden is a twenty-one year old, gay, African-American, male identified person who had been in a relationship for three months with a male identified person Jayden deemed his boyfriend. The longest relationship Jayden had was one year in duration. Jayden believed that he and his current boyfriend would be together in the future and had experiences with homophobia which impacted their relationship. Jayden and his boyfriend also had an open relationship in which they were both allowed to have sexual relationships with other persons. To maintain their feelings of emotional intimacy and connection they both agreed that these sexual relationships could not include emotional intimacy. Jayden did not identify a childhood attachment figure. Also noteworthy was that, at the time of the interview, Jayden was homeless.

**Khalil**

Khalil is an eighteen year old, gay, African-American, male identified person who was in a relationship with Gabriyel. Although Gabriyel identified his relationship as being two years in duration, Khalil identified the relationship as being one and half years in duration. Khalil considered Gabriyel his boyfriend and believed that they would be together in the future. Additionally, Khalil felt that he and Gabriyel had experienced discrimination based on their same sex relationship. Khalil identified feelings of ambivalence about having an attachment figure in childhood.

**Mu'Sad**

Mu'Sad is an eighteen year old, African-American, gay, male identified person who was in a relationship with Calvin. Mu'Sad identified this relationship as being approximately six to seven months in duration, but Calvin identified the relationship as

being with Mu'Sad for eight months. Mu'Sad considered Calvin to be his boyfriend and identified his aunt as his primary attachment figure in childhood. Mu'Sad identified feelings of ambivalence about his relationship being the target of homophobia.

### **Nasir**

Nasir is a twenty-three year old, Black, gay, male identified person who was in a three year relationship with a person who was male identified. Shortly before the interview, Nasir and his boyfriend had gotten engaged, were planning a ceremony, and Nasir now termed his boyfriend as his fiancé. Nasir believed that he and his fiancé's relationship had been the target of homophobia. Nasir identified no attachment figure in childhood. He also considered his relationship with his fiancé as his "first real relationship". At the time of the interview, Nasir and his fiancé shared living space. Nasir identified his family as religious with resulting belief that Nasir's relationship was morally wrong and in direct conflict with his religious upbringing. As a result, Nasir restricted his interactions with his family of origin providing very little detail about his personal life.

### **Raheem**

Raheem is a twenty-three year old, African-Japanese, gay, male identified person who had been in an official relationship with his boyfriend for approximately four months. Prior to the official time marker of their relationship, Raheem and his boyfriend had been together for one and a half years. Per Raheem's report, his boyfriend was struggling with internalized homophobia and was not out to his friends and family about his sexual orientation. Raheem felt that homophobia had impacted his relationship with his boyfriend and identified a secure attachment figure in childhood. Raheem and his boyfriend lived together.

**Shahir**

Shahir is a twenty-two year old, Black, gay, male identified person who, at the time of the interview, was not in a relationship. Shahir's last relationship lasted seven months in duration and ended approximately two months ago. The longest relationship Shahir had been involved in lasted one year in duration. In his last relationship, Shahir considered the person to be his boyfriend and, at one time, believed that his relationship would have longevity. Shahir identified his relationship as the target of homophobia and identified a secure attachment figure in childhood.

**Tavon**

Tavon is a twenty-one year old, gay, male identified person who identified as Black, White and Native American. Tavon termed his relational partner his significant other. Officially, Tavon and his significant other had been together for one year, but had been unofficially dating for two and half years before deciding to commit to each other. Tavon identified an attachment figure in childhood. Tavon and his significant other lived together.

**Tyrice**

Tyrice is a twenty-one year old, African-American, gay, male identified person who was in a six month relationship at the time of this interview. Tyrice considered this person to be his boyfriend, he felt that he and his boyfriend had been the target of homophobia, and believed that he and his boyfriend would be together in the future. Tyrice did not identify a secure attachment figure in childhood.

**Zamir**

Zamir is a twenty-one year old, Black, gay, male identified person. Zamir termed his relational partner as his lover. Zamir and his lover had been together for six years, he felt that his relationship had been the target of homophobia, and believed that he and his lover would be together in the future. Zamir and his lover lived together and were raising two young children. Zamir identified both his mom and his aunt as his attachment figures in childhood.