

The Mediating Effects of Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Between Secure Attachment and Disclosure Outcomes Among Gay Men

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ABSTRACT. Past research has found that a stronger secure attachment style, developed in childhood, enhances one's ability to acknowledge negative feelings, cope with negative life events, and develop satisfying social relationships. Because an integral part of the "coming out" process for gay men is the ability to seek support from the gay community in order to reevaluate negative beliefs toward homosexuality, a gay man's attachment style may strongly impact this critical stage of his life. Results demonstrated that men who more strongly endorsed a secure attachment style reported more positive attitudes toward their own homosexuality,

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and that these more positive attitudes could mediate the relation between more secure attachment style, greater levels of self-disclosure regarding their homosexuality, and greater self-esteem. Implications of these data for internalized homophobia, the coming-out process, and effective social functioning are discussed. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2003 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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Most children are raised by heterosexual parents in a world that reinforces heterosexual traditions (Gonsiorek, 1995; Malyon, 1982; Meyer & Dean, 1998). These heterosexual values in our society are perpetuated through an “ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community” (Herek, 1995, p. 321). Thus, children learn anti-homosexual attitudes and pro-heterosexual attitudes at a very young age (Gonsiorek, 1995; Malyon, 1982; Meyer & Dean, 1998). These social attitudes can have detrimental effects on young adults who eventually experience homosexual feelings because these beliefs influence their evaluation of their own sexuality (Shidlo, 1994). The current study examines how developmental processes (i.e., secure attachment) relate to gay men overcoming internalized homophobia and successfully working through the “coming-out” process.

In their youth, gay men experience gender-inconsistent interests (Bell, Weinberg, & Hammersmith, 1981) and, because they generally have not acquired the necessary sexual scripts to understand the reasons for these feelings (Troiden, 1989), the emerging homoerotic feelings may be distressing (Malyon, 1982) because their interests and behaviors seem inappropriate (Troiden, 1989). As homoerotic interests continue to develop, these negative attitudes toward homosexuality are then utilized to evaluate their own sexuality. Young gay men may come to harbor negative feelings toward their own homosexuality because the negative social attitudes toward homosexuality become personally relevant, leading to avoidance techniques, such as denial (Cass, 1984; Schneider & Tremble, 1986), endorsing negative attitudes toward homosexuality, and even constructing a heterosexual identity (Troiden, 1989).

However, for many gay men, over time, these avoidance techniques may no longer function in repressing their homosexual feelings, and these men may come to explore their homosexuality through a process of “coming-out” (Cass, 1984; Coleman, 1982; Hanley-Hackenbruck, 1988; Malyon, 1982). Progressing through the coming-out process involves incorporating positive beliefs and reevaluating one’s internalized negative attitudes toward one’s own homosexuality usually through social interaction and intimate disclosure (Hanley-Hackenbruck, 1988). As in childhood, adults gain an understanding of who they are through identification and interaction with others (Baumeister, 1998). Gaining support from the gay community seems to be an integral component in developing a positive gay self-concept (Hammersmith & Weinberg, 1973). Involvement in the gay community allows for the acquisition of positive gay role models (Warren, 1980), acts as a buffer against heterosexism (Herek, 1995), and helps with the acceptance of one’s sexuality (Wagner, Serafini, Rabkin, Remien, & Williams, 1994). During this time, relationships are developed, self-confidence is gained, and many old homophobic beliefs are questioned and reevaluated. As gay men become more committed to their homosexuality, they begin to be more disclosing to a broader range of individuals in a greater number of social situations and express their homosexual identity more often in public (Cass, 1984). For many gay men, the progression toward a positive homosexual identity is a smooth transition with little or no enduring negativity (Malyon, 1982). However, for some gay men, even after accepting their homosexual orientation, residual negative attitudes toward one’s own homosexuality may persist (Meyer & Dean, 1998; Troiden, 1989). The current study seeks to understand a personality factor that can identify those for whom these internalized negative feelings will be lessened and coming-out processes will be more successful.

It has been suggested that gay men may not be conscious of the consequences of their internalized homophobic beliefs and may continue to perpetuate them through the rationalization of self-destructive and self-devaluing homophobic behaviors (Shidlo, 1994). A large body of research has demonstrated that internalized negative gay attitudes (i.e., internalized homophobia) can affect gay men’s coping strategies, intimate relationships, level of self-disclosure, and their self-esteem. For instance, Nicholson and Long (1990) demonstrated that gay men with greater levels of internalized homophobia are less likely to use proactive techniques, such as seeking social support, in order to cope with HIV-infection-related stress. In addition, greater levels of internalized homophobia in gay men have also been shown to relate to less relationship

commitment and greater anxiety surrounding intimacy (Dupras, 1994; George & Behrendt, 1988; Meyer & Dean, 1998), less involvement within the gay community and less self-disclosure regarding one's homosexuality (Meyer & Dean, 1998), and lower self-esteem (Lima, Lo Presto, Sherman, & Sobelman, 1993).

Although many studies have reported the prevalence of residual negative attitudes toward homosexuality among gay men, few have explained its wide variability among the homosexual population (Shidlo, 1994). Even though many environmental factors play important roles in the coming-out process (Gonsiorek, 1988), it has been suggested that individual differences in the ability to handle distress and to adapt to the changes in one's life may affect levels of internalized homophobia in gay men (Malyon, 1982). It is suggested in the current study that some gay men have better strategies for dealing with negative attitudes toward homosexuality, which in turn assists them in successfully progressing through the coming-out process. It is the purpose of the current research to assess whether the attachment style that one develops relates to attitudes toward homosexuality, especially self-relevant attitudes, among gay men.

Early work conducted by Ainsworth and her colleagues (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) demonstrated three general patterns of attachment styles between young children and their caregivers: secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent. A secure attachment style develops when caregivers are consistent and predictably respond with warmth and acceptance toward the child, producing trust in the availability and attentiveness of the caregiver (Bowlby, 1973). In addition, because secure children know that their caregiver will be near in moments of distress, they will generally feel safe to explore their surrounding environment (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

If the caregiver is inconsistent, rejecting, or does not display positive emotion, children will adapt to this uncertainty in the environment (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Children who develop an avoidant attachment style may perceive their caregiver to be emotionally distant and opposed to physical contact. Conversely, children who perceive their caregiver as unpredictable or unaware of their needs tend to display behavior characterized as anxious-ambivalent. Avoidant children tend to not rely on the caregiver at all and distance themselves from the caregiver, whereas anxious-ambivalent children tend to cling to their caregiver for security and refrain from exploring their environment (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

These different strategies evolve during the development of the attachment style, and they serve as mechanisms to assist children in relating to their caregiver and in regulating emotions during moments of uncertainty and stress. The attachment style utilized in childhood is then carried into adulthood and has been shown to influence how people view their romantic relationships and their social environment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). These attachment styles serve as working models that help one assess new or ambiguous social situations, influencing relationship development and problem solving strategies in adulthood.

In contrast to nonsecure (i.e., avoidant or anxious-ambivalent) adults, the internalized working model of secure adults assists in relationship and social development, as well as the adaptation to and resolution of negative life stress. Kobak and Sceery (1988) found that adults who report secure childhood relationships tend to turn to others for support when dealing with negative feelings and distress. In addition, secure adults tend to be more self-disclosing because they are comfortable with intimacy (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991), and they tend to be more self-confident in social situations than nonsecure adults (Collins & Read, 1990). Finally, adults with secure attachment styles tend to report greater self-esteem than do individuals with nonsecure attachment styles (Feeney & Noller, 1990).

As in childhood, adults utilize their internalized attachment style model to control and predict the actions of others, and in so doing, attempt to maintain a sense of security with oneself, reduce self-relevant distress in social situations, and interpret the social environment. Because those exhibiting greater secure attachment styles tend to be more self-disclosing, more self-confident, and higher in self-esteem, we reasoned that gay men who more strongly endorse a secure attachment style would exhibit more positive attitudes toward their own homosexuality. Further, it was hypothesized that those with more positive attitudes toward their homosexuality would exhibit greater levels of self-disclosure regarding their sexuality and higher levels of self-esteem. Finally, it was hypothesized that the positive relation between the endorsement of a secure attachment style and greater levels of self-disclosure regarding one's sexuality and greater levels of self-esteem would be mediated by positive attitudes toward one's own homosexuality. Thus, it is suggested in the current work that the strategies gay men acquire through developing a secure attachment style assist in the acceptance of one's own homosexuality, which is critical to increasing self-disclosure and self-esteem.

METHOD

Participants

A sample of 40 gay men was recruited through flyers and announcements, 19 from around a large midwestern university and 21 from around the gay community in a large urban area in the southwestern U.S. Participants were predominately Caucasian, ranging in age from 19 to 63 ($M = 31.80$, $SD = 10.69$). The number of full years since coming out to another person ranged from 0 to 36 ($M = 9.53$, $SD = 8.80$). They each received \$10 for their participation.

Materials and Procedures

Each participant was seated in a private workspace where they completed a series of questionnaires.

Attachment style. Participants completed the Hazan and Shaver (1987) *Attachment Style Measure*. It consists of three paragraphs that describe an individual's feelings and behaviors in relationships that each correspond to a different attachment style: secure, avoidant, or anxious-ambivalent. Each participant rated the extent to which each paragraph characterize their feelings about their social relationships on a scale ranging from 1 (completely unlike me) to 7 (completely like me).¹

Explicit attitudes toward homosexuality. Participant attitudes toward homosexuality were assessed by the *Nungesser Homosexual Attitudes Inventory* (NHAI; Nungesser, 1983), a 34-item self-report measure (NHAI-overall, $\alpha = .88$), which consists of three subindexes that assess attitudes toward one's own homosexuality (10-item NHAI-self; e.g., Whenever I think a lot about being gay, I feel critical about myself; $\alpha = .71$), attitudes toward the disclosure of one's homosexuality (14-item NHAI-disclosure; e.g., When I am sexually attracted to another gay man, I do not mind if someone else knows how I feel; $\alpha = .88$), and attitudes toward homosexuality in general (10-item NHAI-general; e.g., Homosexual lifestyles are not as fulfilling as heterosexual lifestyles; $\alpha = .45$). The NHAI has strong construct validity (Shidlo, 1994) and is widely utilized in both the gay and lesbian literature (e.g., Allen & Oleson, 1999) and in numerous subareas of psychology (e.g., developmental and clinical psychology; Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999; Nicholson & Long, 1990).

Respondents rated each attitude item on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and were reverse-scored when appropriate. In order to explore the unique influence of attitudes toward one's own homosexuality separate from attitudes toward homosexuality in general, the NHAI-overall and its subindexes were summed separately such that larger scores reflected relatively more positive gay attitudes.

Disclosure outcome. A modified version of the Environmental Factors Questionnaire (EFQ; Nungesser, 1983) was used to assess the amount of self-disclosure about each participant's sexuality. The EFQ was designed as a companion measure to the NHAI to assess the behavioral consequences of gay men's attitudes toward homosexuality. The modified 96-item EFQ was utilized because it assesses a wide range of behaviors that were particularly relevant to the current study (i.e., level of self-disclosure, level of social support). The EFQ assessed *personal gay-relevant experiences* through endorsements of openness to gay-relevant experiences and endorsements of appropriate behavioral manifestations of sexuality (e.g., behavioral manifestations of homosexuality are appropriate). The EFQ also assessed *involvement within the gay community* (e.g., number of close friends who are gay men, how frequently do you socialize with gay men, how involved are you in the gay rights movement). In addition, the EFQ assessed participants' *level of direct disclosure* regarding their homosexuality (e.g., who knows about your sexuality, how often do you attempt to pass as straight, to what extent are you out of the closet). Finally, the EFQ assessed *gay sexual encounters and gay romantic relationships* (e.g., what percentage of sexual encounters with men are relatively anonymous, what is the length of your longest romantic relationship with a man).

A series of data reduction steps was undertaken to identify the underlying structure of the EFQ and thus simplify the data analyses. Items were combined to create new composite variables:

1. Of the items assessing gay-relevant experiences, a total number of gay-relevant experiences was calculated by summing the number of checklist items from 20 gay-relevant experiences endorsed by participants (e.g., marched in a gay pride event or parade, joined a gay organization). Larger scores reflected more gay-relevant experiences ($\alpha = .79$).
2. A total number of homosexual friends was calculated by summing the responses for the number of gay male friends and the number of lesbian friends ($r = .57, p < .01$).

3. The degree of time spent with homosexual friends was calculated by summing the responses for the frequency of time spent with gay male friends and the frequency of time spent with lesbian friends ($r = .35, p < .05$).
4. The amount of disclosure was computed by summing the number of endorsements of people who know about each participant's sexual orientation from a list that included family members, close friends, and others (e.g., co-workers, acquaintances; $\alpha = .82$). Larger scores reflected a greater number of people who knew about the participant's sexuality.

Finally, these 4 new composite variables, 5 remaining items assessing gay-relevant experiences, 12 remaining items assessing community involvement (e.g., how often do you go to a gay bar, how important to you is the gay community), 2 remaining items assessing level of disclosure, 3 items assessing the duration of gay romantic relationships and types of sexual encounters, and 2 additional items that assessed feelings toward homosexuality were submitted to a principal components factor analysis with a varimax rotation. A scree plot suggested one primary factor, and its item factor loadings are displayed in Table 1.² These factor items were standardized and multiplied by their factor loadings. These items assessed the degree of disclosure regarding one's sexuality through direct disclosure (i.e., actual degree of disclosure and the degree to being out), as well as other behaviors associated with sexuality (i.e., openness to gay-relevant experiences, not attempting to pass as straight, endorsement of homosexual manifestations of behavior, and spending time with homosexual friends). For all items, greater scores reflected more gay-positive disclosure. This factor score was used in all subsequent analyses as the *self-disclosure outcome* variable, with larger values reflecting greater disclosure.

Global self-esteem. The 10-item Rosenberg (1965) *Self-Esteem Scale* assessed each participant's global feelings of self-worth (e.g., I feel that I am a person of worth at least on an equal basis with others). Participants rated each item on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). These responses were summed such that greater scores reflected more positive self-esteem ($\alpha = .91$).

RESULTS

A series of independent samples t-tests and chi-square analyses were conducted to examine whether there were differences between the two

TABLE 1. Self-Disclosure Outcome Variable Items with Factor Loadings

| Item Description | Factor Loading |
|---|----------------|
| Amount of disclosure (Number of people who know) | .837 |
| Openness to gay-relevant experiences | .829 |
| Degree to being out of the closet | .709 |
| Frequency of not trying to pass as straight | .551 |
| Endorsement of behavioral manifestations of homosexuality | .503 |
| Degree of time spent with homosexual friends | .472 |

location samples in attachment style endorsements or any of the dependent measures. Results revealed that the two samples did not differ on any of these items, and thus both samples were combined for subsequent analyses.

A series of zero-order correlations assessed relations between the three attachment style endorsement ratings. Results demonstrated negative correlations between secure attachment style ratings and the two nonsecure attachment style ratings (i.e., anxious-ambivalent, $r = -.41$, $p < .01$, and avoidant, $r = -.73$, $p < .01$). This demonstrates that respondents who more strongly endorsed a secure attachment style were less likely to endorse either of the nonsecure attachment styles. No relation was found between the two nonsecure attachment style endorsements. These results are consistent with other attachment researchers who have suggested that secure and nonsecure attachment styles are unipolar in nature (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins & Read, 1990). Thus, subsequent analyses utilized the extent to which participants endorsed the secure attachment style in examining the role of attachment style.

According to the predictions, gay men who more strongly endorse a secure attachment style should have more positive attitudes toward their own homosexuality, experience more social outcomes that reflect greater disclosure of their sexuality, and report greater global self-esteem. First, zero-order correlations were computed and demonstrated that secure attachment, attitudes toward homosexuality (i.e., NHAI-overall, NHAI-self, NHAI-disclosure, NHAI-general), self-disclosure outcomes, and self-esteem were related as predicted.

As Table 2 reveals, as the endorsement of a secure attachment style increased, gay men reported more positive attitudes toward homosexuality (NHAI-overall), greater self-disclosure about their homosexuality, and greater self-esteem. Furthermore, as positive overall attitudes to-

TABLE 2. Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations Between Attitudes Toward Homosexuality, Attachment Style, Self-Disclosure, Self-Esteem, and the NHAI Subindexes

| Variables | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--|----------|-----------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1) Secure attachment style | 4.10 | 1.95 | .40* | .35* | .45** | .44** | .24 | .40* |
| 2) Attitudes (NHAI-overall) | 132.60 | 16.17 | – | .71** | .52** | .87** | .89** | .68** |
| 3) Self-disclosure outcome ^a | | | | – | .49** | .57** | .78** | .24 |
| 4) Self-esteem NHAH subindexes | 33.28 | 5.77 | | | – | .55** | .49* | .15 |
| 5) One's own homosexuality (self) | 40.65 | 5.85 | | | | – | .63** | .59** |
| 6) Disclosure of sexuality (disclosure) | 53.25 | 9.17 | | | | | – | .36* |
| 7) Homosexuality in general (general) | 38.70 | 4.27 | | | | | | – |

Note. *N* = 40; **p* < .05, ***p* < .01

^aBecause self-disclosure outcome is a standardized factor score, descriptives are not presented.

ward homosexuality increased, self-disclosure and self-esteem increased. Finally, as self-disclosure about one's homosexuality increased, self-esteem increased. In addition, also displayed in Table 2, even though the three NHAI subindexes were related to each other and the NHAI-overall, only attitudes toward one's own homosexuality (NHAI-self) related to self-disclosure behavior, self-esteem, and secure attachment style endorsement. The NHAI-disclosure subindex was unrelated to secure attachment style endorsement, and the NHAI-general subindex was unrelated to self-disclosure outcome and self-esteem.

These zero-order correlation results supported the predictions, however, it was further hypothesized that the relations between a secure attachment style and related outcomes (i.e., self-disclosure and self-esteem) would be mediated by the attitudes that one holds toward homosexuality, specifically attitudes toward one's own homosexuality. A mediational analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Judd & Kenny, 1981) was conducted using endorsement of a secure attachment style as the antecedent variable, self-esteem and self-disclosure as outcome variables, and attitudes toward homosexuality (i.e., NHAI-overall) as the mediator. As predicted and displayed in the top panel of Figure 1, multiple regression analyses demonstrated that once attitudes toward homosexuality

was included in the regression equation, the relation between secure attachment style and self-disclosure outcome was no longer statistically significant, $\beta = .08$, $t(39) = .60$, *ns*, suggesting mediation by attitudes toward homosexuality ($\beta = .68$, $t(39) = 5.46$, $p < .01$). Similar results were also found for self-esteem. As the bottom panel of Figure 1 reveals, once attitudes toward homosexuality was included in the regression equation, the relation between secure attachment style and self-esteem was no longer statistically significant, $\beta = .28$, $t(39) = 1.94$, *ns*, suggesting mediation by attitudes toward homosexuality ($\beta = .41$, $t(39) = 2.77$, $p < .01$).

In order to assess whether specific attitudes toward one's own homosexuality would also serve as a mediator, additional mediational analyses were conducted using endorsement of a secure attachment style as the antecedent variable, self-esteem and self-disclosure as outcome variables, and attitudes toward one's own homosexuality (i.e., NHAI-self) as the mediator. As displayed in the top panel of Figure 2, multiple regression analyses demonstrated that once attitudes toward one's own homosexuality was included in the regression equation, the relation between secure attachment style and self-disclosure outcome was no longer statistically significant, $\beta = .12$, $t(39) = .79$, *ns*, suggesting mediation by attitudes toward one's own homosexuality ($\beta = .52$, $t(39) = 3.50$, $p < .01$). Similar results were found for self-esteem. As the bottom panel of

FIGURE 1. The Mediational Role of Attitudes Toward Homosexuality on the Relation Between Secure Attachment Style Endorsement, Self-Disclosure Outcome (Top Panel), and Self-Esteem (Bottom Panel)

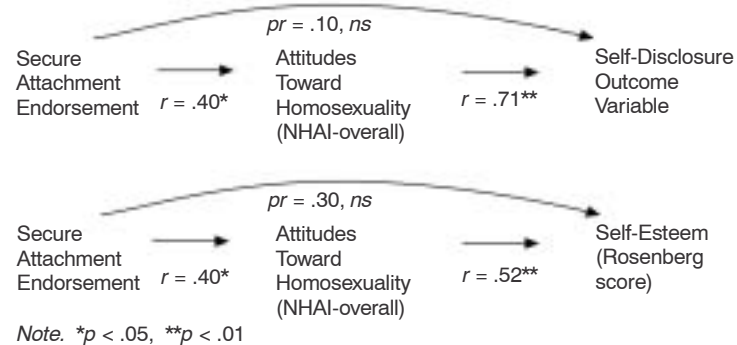
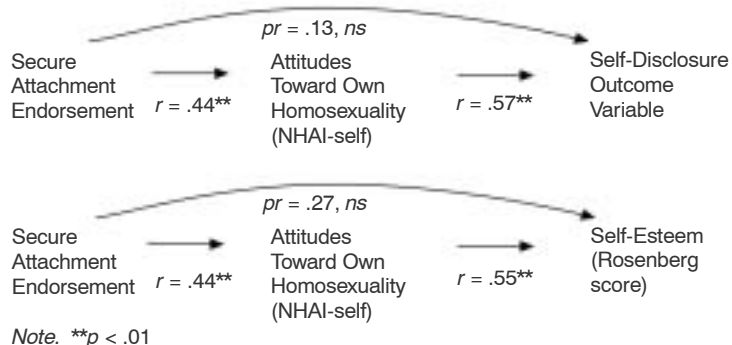


Figure 2 reveals, once attitudes toward one's own homosexuality was included in the regression equation, the relation between secure attachment style and self-esteem was no longer statistically significant, $\beta = .25$, $t(39) = 1.71$, *ns*, suggesting mediation by attitudes toward one's own homosexuality ($\beta = .44$, $t(39) = 2.95$, $p < .01$).

The current results provide suggestive evidence that attitudes toward homosexuality more generally, and attitudes toward one's homosexuality in particular, play a mediational role in the link between stronger secure attachment style endorsement and greater self-disclosure. That is, stronger endorsement of a secure attachment style had its impact on increased self-disclosure through gay men holding more positive attitudes about their own homosexuality. However, because attitudes toward one's own homosexuality are strongly related to self-esteem, an alternative explanation might propose that a plausible mediator is self-esteem, rather than attitudes toward one's own homosexuality. In other words, perhaps positive attitudes toward one's own homosexuality result from greater self-esteem, and accounting for self-esteem would eliminate the ability of attitudes toward one's own homosexuality to predict self-disclosure outcome. Thus, self-esteem, rather than attitudes toward one's own homosexuality, might mediate the link between secure attachment and self-disclosure outcome.

To assess this possibility, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted where self-disclosure was regressed on self-esteem, endorse-

FIGURE 2. The Mediational Role of Attitudes Toward One's Own Homosexuality (NHAI-Self) on the Relation Between Secure Attachment Style Endorsement, Self-Disclosure Outcome (Top Panel), and Self-Esteem (Bottom Panel)



ment of secure attachment style, and attitudes toward one's own homosexuality in successive steps. Table 3 reveals in step 2 that self-esteem can mediate the relation between more strongly endorsing a secure attachment style and reporting more self-disclosing behaviors, because secure attachment style endorsement no longer reliably predicts self-disclosure outcome. However, Table 3 also demonstrates that the relation between self-esteem and self-disclosure became nonsignificant when attitudes toward one's own homosexuality was added to the regression equation in Step 3. Indeed, attitudes toward one's own homosexuality remained a significant predictor of self-disclosure even when self-esteem and secure attachment style endorsement were simultaneously included in the regression equation.³ This reveals that attitudes toward one's own homosexuality account for unique variance in predicting self-disclosure outcomes above and beyond self-esteem. Thus, an alternative account that suggests that the predictive value of attitudes toward one's own homosexuality is actually a consequence of its redundancy with self-esteem is not tenable.

DISCUSSION

Results of the current study are consistent with previous research on attachment style, which demonstrate that greater secure attachment is

TABLE 3. Influence of Self-Esteem, Secure Attachment Style Endorsement, and Attitudes Toward One's Own Homosexuality on Predicting Self-Disclosure Outcome in a Hierarchical Regression Analysis

| Predictors entered | <i>pr</i> | β | <i>t</i> (39) |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| Step 1 | | | |
| Self-esteem | .49 | .49 | 3.44** |
| Step 2 | | | |
| Self-esteem | .40 | .42 | 2.62* |
| Secure attachment style | .17 | .16 | 1.04 |
| Step 3 | | | |
| Self-esteem | .23 | .23 | 1.41 |
| Secure attachment style | .07 | .06 | .39 |
| Attitudes toward one's own sexuality | .40 | .42 | 2.58* |

Note. *N* = 40; **p* < .05, ***p* < .01

related to greater self-esteem, positive social behavior in relationships, and beneficial social outcomes in adulthood (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991). This research extends these previous findings by showing that among gay men their attitudes toward their own homosexuality mediates these relations. Much of the research addressing internalized homophobia has suggested that these negative internalized feelings are the catalyst for many self-destructive behaviors. In contrast, the current study suggests that it may be instead the mental models of attachment that one acquires in childhood that influence social and self-esteem outcomes. Such a position would suggest that these mental models influence social and self-esteem outcomes through assisting in the acquisition of positive attitudes toward one's own homosexuality. Although causation cannot be established by correlational data like these, the current data suggests that developmental factors may affect gay men's self-esteem and self-disclosure outcomes, but they may do so through the adoption of more positive self-relevant gay attitudes.

Although most of the research on adult attachment styles has been conducted with heterosexual individuals, attachment style may have particular ramifications for gay men, especially in the attainment of positive attitudes toward one's own homosexuality. Residual internalized negative attitudes toward homosexuality can hinder gay men from fully accepting their sexuality (Malyon, 1982), can lead to self-sabotaging behaviors such as abandoning career or educational goals (Gonsiorek, 1995), can encourage excessive eating and drinking to cope with stress (Nicholson & Long, 1990), and can promote a wide range of overt behaviors that could have long-term effects on others, including unsafe sexual practices (Stokes & Peterson, 1998) and domestic violence (Pharr, 1988; see also, Shidlo, 1994). Therefore, it is crucial that researchers continue to explore the mechanisms that perpetuate gay men's negative attitudes toward homosexuality in order to reduce their undesirable impact on the self and on others.

Although the current work suggested a causal role for negative attitudes toward one's own homosexuality in reduced self-esteem and social disclosure, some limitations should be noted. First, because all of these data are correlational, evidence of causal links is, at best, speculative. As with many fundamental developmental factors, it is difficult to implicate the role of attachment styles or attitudes toward homosexuality without a sophisticated longitudinal design. As with most research on attachment style (see Feeney & Noller, 1996, for a review), the correlational data must be interpreted with caution when attempting to

account for causal mechanisms. These limits notwithstanding, an important first step to more sophisticated studies is establishing that the current relations do indeed exist. Clearly, additional longitudinal studies are required to more confidently ascertain the underlying causal mechanisms.

In addition, a couple of issues relevant to conducting research with gay men need further exploration. First, research on gay men is often limited to those individuals who are more comfortable with their sexuality and are involved within the gay community. Men who have sex with men, but do not consider themselves “gay” or gay men who are newly “out” may hold greater negative attitudes toward their homosexuality, but may refrain from volunteering in psychology studies (Meyer & Dean, 1998). In addition, given the recruitment opportunities available, research sampling involving gay participants is overrepresented by men who have a greater connection to the gay community, and thus the participants involved in the current research have, to some degree, come to accept their sexuality. Thus, the current findings that internalized homophobia mediates the relation between attachment style and its consequences would probably be more striking if the sampling of gay men was less restrictive.

Also, these results should not be generalized to lesbians. Even though women with same-sex romantic attractions are exposed to similar social norms and negative attitudes toward homosexuality, lesbian women are afforded socialization experiences that differ from those of gay men (Gonsiorek, 1995). Women are socialized to create affectional bonds with other women and often receive support for doing so. Because the expression of affection is socially less restrictive for lesbian women, compared to gay men, their emerging sexual identity tends to be more gradual and ambiguous, and may not be met with the same level of distress experienced by gay men (Gonsiorek, 1995). Even though there may be some similarities in the developmental experiences of gay men and lesbian women, there are significant psychological differences, and it would be erroneous to assume that a model developed to predict the behavior of gay men could equally predict the behavior of lesbian women (Brown, 1995).

Lastly, the current research focuses on understanding a developmental individual difference that has been identified as important in influencing how people relate and disclose to others and in affecting feelings of self-worth. Indeed, the current study found evidence suggesting that a secure attachment style may play an important role in successfully coming out and enhancing self-regard. This work, however, acknowl-

edges that many other environmental factors (e.g., stigmatization, violence) also influence a gay man's attitudes toward his homosexuality and subsequent social and esteem outcomes. Future work should consider the array of influences on gay men to more fully understand what promotes beneficial adjustment to acknowledging and valuing one's sexual orientation.

In the past decade, a great deal of research has been conducted exploring how being a member of a stigmatized minority can affect individuals' sense of identity and self-worth, and limit their behavioral options (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989; Pinel, 1999; Steele, 1997). Much of this research addresses specific stigmatized groups (e.g., African-Americans, Women) or explores specific psychological mechanisms that presumably are consistent across minority groups. However, the experiences of one minority group are not the same for all minority or all stigmatized groups. For example, the realization of one's homosexuality occurs later in one's life, and thus, gay men may not develop the mechanisms to protect themselves as readily as other minorities who have lived knowing their minority status their entire lives (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989). In addition, unlike many stigmatized individuals who have readily observable stigmatizing characteristics (e.g., the physical features of racial minorities), gay men have the option of hiding their stigmatized group status. Finally, even in these "politically correct" times, it is still acceptable for individuals to express strong negative attitudes against homosexuals (Herek, 2000). In fact, homophobia, unlike racism and sexism, is still widely accepted by many religious and government institutions (Herek, 1995). It is necessary to continue to explore how these distinguishing characteristics may affect the developmental process of gay men and the long-term consequences of their stigmatization. In so doing, researchers can continue to explore the differences, as well as the similarities, between members of different stigmatized groups.

NOTES

1. Each participant completed the Likert-scales and also provided a forced choice rating of which of the three paragraphs was most descriptive of them. Analyses will focus on the continuous scale ratings because using the forced-choice categorical data results in low cell sizes for each of the three attachment styles (i.e., there were 14 secure gay men, 10 anxious-ambivalent gay men, and 16 avoidant gay men), which greatly reduces statistical power. Also, the continuous measures allow for greater sensitivity in measuring the respondent's endorsement of attachment style.

2. The first nine eigenvalues were 5.35, 3.04, 2.95, 2.59, 2.03, 1.72, 1.48, 1.18, 1.03. Because of the distinct elbow formed by factor 2, the one-factor solution was adopted.

3. Similar results were also found for the NHAI-overall. The relation between self-esteem and self-disclosure became nonsignificant when attitudes toward homosexuality (NHAI-overall) was added to the regression equation. Attitudes toward homosexuality remained a significant predictor of self-disclosure even when self-esteem and secure attachment style endorsement were simultaneously included in the regression equation, $\beta = .62$, $t(39) = 4.53$, $p < .01$.

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