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Given recent calls for theory development and extension relevant to gay relationships, this study examined the relationships of gay men by testing a mid-range model derived from identity theory (Stryker, 1968) and the extant literature. The model asserted that the extent to which one holds a gay status affects his level of identity commitment which, in turn, affects couple verification. Further, couple verification affects couple identity directly and indirectly through distress and relationship satisfaction. Theoretical extensions of the construct of identity commitment included both personal and symbolic dimensions.

Data were collected via an Internet-based survey. The sample consisted of 188 gay men in current relationships of at least 3 months duration and representing 26 states and the District of Columbia; the participation rate was 83%. Overall, the sample was White, well-educated, and middle class.

As a preliminary step, a series of exploratory factor analyses were conducted to assess the factor structure of the measures used. Composite scores were created, and data were fit to the model using path analysis. Results demonstrated that the data did not fit the original model. A modified model was then tested and fit the data. The modified model added direct links from identity commitment to both relationship satisfaction and couple identity. Each path in the modified model was significant except for the path

between couple verification and distress, and 54% of the variance in couple identity was explained. Suggestions for theory and future research are discussed.

LINKS BETWEEN THE STATUSES OF GAY MEN IN RELATIONSHIPS AND  
COUPLE IDENTITY: A THEORETICAL EXTENSION AND EXAMINATION

by

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To my stepdad, who instilled in me the desire and will to never give up, I dedicate this in your memory. To my mother, who never gave up and always was there, I dedicate this to you for teaching me resilience. Last but not least, to my family and friends I dedicate this to you for your unconditional support and devotion.

APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Coinciding with increases in the visibility of gay couples both in number (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003) and in mainstream societal interactions (Arnup, 1999; Brown, 2003), there is a burgeoning literature that examines these couples and their partnerships (e.g., Kurdek, 1995, 2001; 2004; LaSala, 2000 ). This literature is largely atheoretical (e.g., Bowman, 2003; LaSala), limiting the validity and interpretability of the findings (Sabatelli & Waldron, 1995). Research that is based on theory most often has used the investment model (c.f., Luhtanen, 2003; Oswald, 2002), assumed gay couples are monolithic (c.f., Lewis, Derlega, Berndt, Morris, & Rose, 2001), and or used mostly homogeneous samples (i.e., White, middle-class, well-educated, out gay couples; e.g., Berger, 1990; Kurdek, 1998, 2001 ). Further, the primary focus has been on commitment to and stability of gay relationships in comparison to lesbian, heterosexual, cohabiting, and or parent or nonparent couples (e.g., Kurdek, 2001, 2004) rather than within-group couple development in a context of social stigma (c.f., McWhirter & Mattison, 1984), which often has implications for relationship satisfaction and distress (e.g., Lewis, Derlega, Berndt, & Morris, 2001; Luhtanen, 2003).

Given these limitations that pervade much of the literature related to gay relationships, the purpose of this study was to (a) apply and extend a different theoretical framework (i.e., identity theory) to the study of gay men in couple relationships, (b)

examine the effects of holding a gay social status as a context for couple development, (c) examine how identity commitment, couple verification, distress, and relationship satisfaction link one's status as gay to couple identity, and (d) examine these links with a more diverse sample of gay men in relationships. To do this I describe the incidence and demographics of gay men in general and gay couples in particular, and then I discuss the social context in which these men and couples live. Next, I review the relevant literature and identity theory (Stryker, 1968) in relation to the presentation of the hypothesized model tested in the current study.

#### *Incidence of Gay Men and Couples in the U.S.*

Although the incidence of gay men in general and gay couples in particular has increased in visibility over the past few decades (e.g., Arnup, 1999; Brown, 2003, Simmons & O'Connell, 2003), their numbers remain debated both socially, politically, and empirically (e.g., Black, Gates, Sanders, & Taylor, 2000; Gates & Ost, 2004; Smith & Gates, 2001). Kinsey (1948) conducted the first major study of men and sexuality and asserted that 10% of the U.S. population was gay, although a significant proportion of all men had engaged in some form of male-male sexual behavior in their lifetime, most often as young adolescents. Kinsey concluded that sexual orientation likely lies on a continuum. However, current conceptualizations and estimates rely largely on self-identification as gay and or the number and sex of sexual partners within a specified period (e.g., Black et al.; Smith & Gates), often leading to discrepancies in estimates.

The 1990 Census provided the first major set of population estimates of gay couples (145,130 gay and lesbian couples; 81,343 gay male couples; Smith & Gates,

2001). However, the estimates from the 1990 Census significantly underestimated the number of gay couples. For example, many gay couples who reported being in a couple relationship were categorized as heterosexual unmarried couples, because the Census lacked questions that directly asked about sexual orientation (Smith & Gates).

In the 2000 Census, estimates were more reliable, because an unmarried partner category was added (Smith & Gates, 2001). However, problems continued. Specifically, if a man reported he had an unmarried partner and had a male roommate, he was categorized as gay, although the case might be that he had a female partner not living with him. Additionally, some gay men do not identify as gay. For example, Black and Hispanic men are less likely to say they are gay; yet, they may have a male partner or have sex with other men (e.g., Adam, Sears, & Schellenberg, 2000; Crisp, Preist, & Torgerson, 1998; Mays, Chatters, Cochran, & Mackness, 1998; Zea, Resisen, & Diaz, 2003). Again, the 2000 Census questions did not ask directly about sexual orientation, thereby excluding single men or men in noncohabiting gay relationships. Also, no gay men under the age of 18 were identified. Thus, problems remain, and any estimates derived from these data need to be viewed with caution.

Black et al. (2000) used data from the General Social Survey (GSS) and National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLs) and found that how gay men and couples were defined impacted estimates. Specifically, they concluded that about 2.5% of the population is gay, whereas Smith and Gates (2001) suggested a range of 2 – 10%. Taken together, our best guess suggests that approximately 5% of the U.S. population over 18, or about 10,456,405 individuals, are gay or lesbian. Black and associates compared the

1990 and 2000 Census data and found that the number of households in which unmarried partners were the same sex increased from 145,130 to 601,209. Similarly, Simmons and O'Connell (2003) also reported on the 2000 Census data and found that 301,000 unmarried same-sex couples were male (51%), or about 1 in 9 of all unmarried partner households. Rubenstein, Sears, and Sockleskie (2003) replicated the male-male couple estimates of Simmons and O'Connell, whereas Smith and Gates attempted replication, and their numbers were larger at 304,148.

*Demographic Characteristics of Gay Men and Gay Couples in the U.S.*

Demographically we know even less about who these men and couples are compared to simple population estimates. However, additional estimates from the 2000 Census are expected soon that may provide a better picture (Simmons & O'Connell, 2003). To date, available census data suggests that gay cohabiting couples over age 18 live in 99.3% of all counties, 24% live in the 10 largest metropolitan areas (compared to 20% of heterosexuals; Smith & Gates, 2001; Simmons & O'Connell), and approximately 40% have children (Fields, & Casper, 2001). Black and associates (2000) also suggested that gay couples are more likely to have higher education, be similar to one another in terms of race, and own more expensive homes compared to heterosexual individuals. Further, they earn less and have lower rates of home ownership compared to heterosexuals. (These differences remain regardless of the definition of sexual orientation used; Black et al.) Examining the two major studies that included large numbers of gay men, the results of Black et al. stand in contrast to those of Blumstein and Schwartz (1983); yet, they are somewhat similar to those of Bell and Weinberg (1978). This is

surprising given that both the Black et al. and the Blumstein and Schwartz samples were derived from more diverse geographic areas and used a wider range of sampling strategies compared to Bell and Weinberg whose sample was contained primarily to the San Francisco Bay Area in CA. These differences might represent general population growth and changes over time. Thus, the only definitive statement that can be made regarding the demographic makeup of the gay population is that they appear to be as diverse as the general population.

### *Social Context*

Aside from measurement problems that describe the incidence and demographic characteristics of gay men in general and gay couples in particular, the stigma that pervades the social context in the U.S. also keeps many of these men invisible and fearful of allowing others to know their sexual orientation and or that they are in a same-sex relationship (e.g., Earl, 2003; Herek, 2004). Perceived and experienced prejudice, stigma, and homophobia affect many aspects of their lives (Dworkin & Yi, 2003; Herek). Therefore, it is important to understand the prevailing attitudes of others in the broader social context.

Multiple public opinion polls have assessed beliefs about and social acceptance of homosexuality and gay relationships, and most are consistent in their findings (e.g., Herek, 2002; Lemelle & Battle, 2004; Treas, 2002). For example, on average, about half of Americans believe that homosexuality should be legal, whereas acceptance decreases significantly when asked whether homosexual marriage should be legalized and increases significantly when asked about the provision of gay civil rights. However, the

demographic characteristics of respondents affects the likelihood of acceptance and or support of pro-gay responses. Specifically, those most likely to (a) accept homosexuality, (b) believe that homosexuals should be allowed to marry, and (c) believe that homosexuals should be given equal protection and civil rights under the law typically are younger, female, White, hold higher educational attainment, attend church less often, and have higher incomes (Herek, 2002; Lemelle & Battle; Overby & Barth, 2002; Treas). Compared to Blacks, Whites are more likely to accept homosexuality and to support its legality specifically. Blacks, in general, and Black women, in particular, are more likely than Whites to support progay civil rights, even after controlling for education and religion (Lewis, 2003). A recent study replicated these findings and also found that Blacks living in urban areas are more likely to accept homosexuality than are those residing in nonurban areas (Lemelle & Battle). Lastly, those who report knowing someone who is gay (Herek, 2004) and or those who believe that homosexuality is biologically-based rather than choice-based (Wood & Bartkowski, 2004) also are more likely to support and accept homosexuality.

In all, the attitudes of the American public and the judicial system have become more accepting in the past decade (e.g., Chambers & Polikoff, 2001; Earl, 2003). However, a large part of the general public (42 – 48%) continues not to accept homosexuality, and even fewer support progay civil and or equal marriage and adoption rights (e.g., Earl; Herek, 2002, 2004). In fact, many gays continue to experience violence (Dworkin & Yi, 2003), discrimination in earnings and employment (Black et al., 2000), housing (Page, 1998), and psychological distress related to social stigma (e.g., Lewis,

Derlega, Berndt, Morris, & Rose, 2001; Meyer, 2003). Thus, as a society, the U.S. confers a lower status upon these men and couples because they are gay. In turn, this lower status affects their day-to-day lives and the relationships they form.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Scholars (e.g., Bowman, 2003; Elizur & Mintzer, 2003) suggest the need for theory development that specifically addresses unique issues pertinent to gay relationships such as the effects of social stigma and support. Others emphasize the need to test, examine, and refine existing theories and their underlying assumptions that may be relevant to gay families, because existing theories largely were developed and based on heterosexual couples and marriages (e.g., Demo & Allen, 1996; Moorefield & Proulx, 2003). The current study articulated a mid-range model specific to gay couples that was inductively built from the extant literature and that also integrates identity theory (Stryker, 1968). Specifically, the hypothesized model asserts that one's gay status directly affects commitment to a couple identity (identity commitment), which then affects the verification process of that identity. Such couple verification affects couple identity both directly and indirectly through one's distress and relationship satisfaction (see Figure 1). Following is an overview of identity theory and a review of the extant literature that resulted in the hypothesized model.

#### Overview of Identity Theory

Symbolic interaction theory (SIT; LaRossa & Reitzels, 1993) asserts that there is a connection between the shared meanings of symbols and interactions that shape human behavior and sense of self. Stryker's (1968, 1980) structural symbolic interaction theory

further delineated many of the concepts related to SIT's conceptualization of identity and attempted to overcome one of the major critiques. This major critique was that SIT did not give adequate attention to how social structures influence interaction and identity development (Burke, 2003).

Identity theory asserts that through social interaction individuals learn to classify themselves and others by the roles and statuses they hold. Subsequently, they develop behavioral expectations, called identity standards by Burke (1991), associated with the classification scheme and resulting in shared meanings or identities (Stryker, 1968, 1980). Thus, identities are the self-meanings attached to a particular role (e.g., provider), defining what it means to be who one is (Burke, 1991). More specifically, roles provide a set of behavioral expectations that prescribe the basic knowledge of how one should act, feel, and emote in relation to a particular status (spouse, parent, worker) and comprise the identities held related to being in that role. For example, holding a spousal status results in social norms about how one should act (e.g., provide love, support, assistance). The meanings one holds regarding how he or she performs as a spouse becomes one's spousal identity (e.g., as a spouse I am a good supporter).

Stryker (1968) also asserted that there are relatively stable symbols that help individuals classify the world (i.e., provide social structure). Individuals are labeled by others in society with regard to their status in a particular group, institution, or other organization (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). For example, the statuses of father and son are different within a family and prescribe different roles. Thus, individuals become embedded within the broader social structure and are connected to each other in particular ways that

help to define their identities in the associated roles. For example, husbands and wives are connected through socially defined *statuses* such that their expected behaviors are complementary in nature. Taken together, when two people marry they assume the statuses of husband and wife. Society prescribes expectations for how husbands and wives should act, think, and emote; these expectations help to define how they behave in their respective roles. The match between social expectations and resulting role-related behavior verifies husband- and wife-related identities.

Although a socially defined structure exists that helps define the roles attached to statuses, individuals engaged in interaction also engage in the role-making process through negotiation and modification (Burke & Stets, 1999). This process adds unique aspects to individual identities and allows for variation. Further, social constraints also limit some individuals, and this causes a need to modify and or negotiate role-related behaviors and identity standards. For example, newlyweds might enter their marriage with the belief that they will behave in ways that reflect an egalitarian marriage in the division of household labor and income distribution (Burke & Stets). Once married the couple begins to define what works best for them and negotiates and modifies their role behaviors associated with being spouses, creating unique aspects of the spousal status in the context of their marriage (Rutter & Schwartz, 2000). An example specific to this study concerns the constraints placed on gay couples given their lower social status. Society supports and socializes individuals to desire marriage and to have children within the context of marriage. However, society constrains gay couples, because they are not allowed to marry (except in Massachusetts at the present time) and cannot adopt the spousal status. Thus, gay couples

must modify their identity standards and take alternative measures to marriage, such as engaging in commitment ceremonies, which recognizes the desired status. Of interest here is how holding a gay status impacts the relationships of gay men.

Burke (2003) suggested that one of the unaddressed issues in identity theory is how the salience of and commitment to multiple identities is affected by social structure. The concept of commitment connects individuals to a broader social structure (Stryker, 1968; 1987) and is defined as the costs related to no longer performing a role and, accordingly, holding the associated identities (Stryker, 1968, 1987; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Commitment has two dimensions. Interactional commitment is the number of relationships available to support an identity, and affective commitment is the importance of those relationships (Stryker, 1987). As commitment increases so should the salience of the related identity. Salience refers to the probability that an identity will be invoked in a given situation or specific context (Stryker, 1968; Stryker & Serpe). Once an identity is invoked a feedback loop is established that potentially serves to verify an identity. This is reflected in Burke's (1991) verification model.

#### *Overview of the Verification Model*

The self-verification model (Burke, 1991) asserts that individuals seek out interaction to verify their identities, and once an identity is invoked during interaction a feedback loop is established that provides information with the potential to verify or disconfirm that identity (see Figure 2). Because individuals hold identity standards that are composed of ideal standards (Burke & Stets, 1999), when the individual receives input from others during social interaction a comparator is engaged that examines the

congruency between input and identity standards. If congruency is established, the identity is verified, and no adjustments are made to the role-related behavior (output). Theoretically, when an identity is verified salience increases and strengthens the identity. For example, as part of having identities associated with the status of husband, a man holds specific identity standards, such as one that prescribes he co-provide economically for his family. His identity standards give meaning to his co-providing role by prescribing certain behaviors (e.g., work to provide monetary income to support his family and his partner). When the husband is able to add his paycheck to the family account, thereby allowing him to provide monetary support for his family, congruency is established for his co-provider role, verifying the related identities. However, if incongruency results, then he experiences distress. That is, if the husband loses his job and no longer is able to provide monetary support, his behavior no longer matches his identity standards and incongruency results causing distress. To deal with such distress one can either change his or her behavior (output), which requires a shift in identity standards, or continue to experience distress potentially leading to disruption of the identity (Pasley, Kerpelman, & Guilbert, 2001; Stets & Burke, 1999). In this instance, the distress related to not being able to co-provide would disrupt husband-related identities.

Recently, Moorefield and Proulx (2003) offered an extension of identity theory and the verification process. They suggested the concept of couple identity (who we are as a couple) and discussed the couple verification process. What differentiates the couple verification process from Burke's (1991) model is that couple verification can occur on the individual and or dyadic level. Specifically, they argued that both partners in a

relationship have an individual sense of what it means to be a couple, and through modification and negotiation a shared meaning of wholeness also develops. This recognizes the more dynamic and complex process of identity development in that couple verification results from interaction with those outside the relationship and from interaction between partners. For example, a couple holds the identity standard that they should engage in sexual relations twice per week. In this instance their individual identity standards match what they believe as a couple, or the identity standards they hold as a couple. These identity standards provide meaning for who they are as a couple. During an interaction with a friend one partner receives feedback that suggests couples should engage in sexual relations more frequently and this feedback influences one partner to shift his identity standard to match this “more frequent” expectation. Although he shifts his identity standard, his partner maintains the previous standard. Thus, as partners they must engage in interaction and negotiate so both might realign their identity standards and shared meaning at the couple level results. Lastly, Moorefield and Proulx asserted that gay couples seek out and engage in interactive contexts that verify their sense of being a couple. Importantly, the focus of the current study is the couple verification process and its link to distress, relationship satisfaction, and couple identity.

*Reframing Commitment for Gay Couples: Proposed Extension of Identity Theory*

As stated, interactional commitment refers to the number of relationships available to support a given role and, in turn, an identity (Stryker, 1980). Typically, these relationships refer only to other individuals and, thus, are personal in nature. Here, I

extend the common conceptualization of interactional commitment to include the symbolic as well as the personal.

The gay community has a strong symbolic history that serves to make the community, including gay families, more visible (e.g., Moorefield & Proulx, 2003; for a review of the historical use of symbolism in the gay community see <http://www.stonewallsociety.com/gaysymb.htm>). Thus, interactional commitment is reframed here to include two dimensions: the number of *personal* relationships (e.g., family or friends) and the number of *symbolic* relationships that support a given role and its related identities. Symbolic relationships are conceptualized as the dimension of identity commitment that results from the establishment of certain bonding acts like relationship rituals (e.g., Oswald, 2000) that support roles and identities and might be particularly important for gay couples, given the constraints society places on them (e.g., lack of marriage rights). For example, a gay couple might fully or partially join finances (e.g., checking accounts, joint purchases), which espouses an underlying meaning of identity commitment and serves as another support for their couple identity. Another example might be when a gay couple chooses to wear “wedding” rings or use legal documents (e.g., will, power of attorney), both of which become symbolic of joining the two individuals as a couple (i.e., providing a sense of wholeness). Theoretically, as the extent of both dimensions (personal and symbolic) increase, commitment to a couple identity also will increase. Similarly, affective commitment also is conceptualized as containing two dimensions (personal and symbolic), such that the individual and the

couple will attribute importance to both the personal and symbolic dimensions, and that dimensions regarded as important will affect identities.

### Proposed Model

Integrating identity theory with the extant literature resulted in the proposed model. The model asserts a direct effect of holding a gay status on commitment and an indirect effect on couple verification through commitment. Further, the model postulates that couple verification directly affects couple identity, as well as affects couple identity indirectly through distress and relationship satisfaction. Theoretically, each of these effects also is bidirectional. However, because longitudinal and or observational data are needed to test such effects, and those data were not available here, the proposed model focuses on and tests unidirectional effects.

### *Gay Status*

Status is conceptualized by drawing from models of gay identity acquisition (e.g., Cass, 1979) and the literature on gay as a master status. Gay identity models conceptualize identity similar to that found in identity theory (i.e., a sense of who I am). The difference between these models and identity theory is that the identity acquisition models are static, under-developed, and focus solely on identity development, asserting that an individual progresses through a series of predetermined stages that result in gaining a sense of what it means to hold a gay identity; identity development is not viewed as a continuous life-long process. Alternatively, identity theory recognizes the role of context and fluidity in identity development and maintenance. Theoretically, an individual's gay identity acquisition is the extent to which a man comes to self identify as

being gay through a process of disclosing his gay identity to others (out status) and internalizing a positive gay identity into his self-concept as a part of self rather than the defining aspect of self (e.g., Cass; Troiden, 1988). In this way, status is a construct that reflects (a) the extent to which he is out to others, (b) the extent to which he internalizes negativity related to his gay status, and (c) his awareness of others' perceptions of and beliefs about him because he is gay (stigma consciousness). Typically, the process of coming out has been examined as a linear progression in which self-identification and internalization are the desired and theoretical endpoints. Important to the process of developing a gay identity and coming out is the need for verification by others (Cass), which supports using this conceptualization as a template for how one's status might influence identity commitment and the couple verification process.

Conceptualizing identity acquisition as a linear function related to disclosure and status has resulted in difficulty finding empirical support for the process (Brady & Buss, 1994), because it assumes little variability and gives little attention to contextual factors (Elizer & Mintz, 2001). Important to the current discussion surrounding status, previous theorizing about an individual's out status and gay identity acquisition provide a beginning point for the proposed model. As used in the conceptual model, status is related to the concept of gay master status given its connection to gay identity in the models of Cass (1979) and Troiden (1988).

*Gay master status as a connecting construct.* Theoretically, master statuses refer to those statuses conferred upon individuals that become a context for all other relationship processes (Stryker, 1987). Stryker defined master status as “structurally-based attributes

like sex, age, race, social class that” (p. 100) are (a) derived from features of social structure; (b) create specific networks for interaction and thus reflect commitment; and (c) penetrate most of the contexts in which interaction occurs and, thus, affect identity verification processes. Essentially, master statuses are present during identity acquisition and maintenance. In this way, gay is a master status (Moorefield & Proulx, 2003), and theoretically, it directly affects identity commitment and indirectly affects the couple verification processes that are responsible for identity development and maintenance (Burke, 1991).

Armato and Marsiglio (2002) asserted that, with few exceptions, examinations of master status have failed to focus on both theorized influences (internal and external) on identities. Although statuses are conferred upon individuals from external social influences, they also are internalized and, thus, have implications for subsequent identity processes. To account for internal and external influences, status is conceptualized here as including the level of outness, stigma consciousness, and internalized homophobia.

#### *Linking Status, Commitment, Couple verification, and Couple Identity*

In this study, status is conceptualized as a continuous construct. At one end, an individual is not out to anyone other than himself (and maybe a select few others) and does not hold an integrated gay identity (i.e., high in internalized homophobia and stigma consciousness; Cass, 1979). The other end of the continuum reflects individuals who are out to all others and have integrated gay identity statuses (low or no internalized homophobia or stigma consciousness). Thus, both external (stigma consciousness) and internal influences (internalized homophobia, level of outness) are integrated in an

attempt to overcome previous shortcomings in the literature (i.e., sole focus on external influences; Armato & Marsiglio, 2002).

Generally, differences in the extent to which gay men in relationships are out, internalize homophobia, and hold stigma conscious beliefs are expected to affect their ability to establish supportive relationships (i.e., personal and symbolic commitment). Specifically, these two are intrinsically linked. That is, status depends partially on having relationships with others as reflected in level of outness. Also, from an identity theory perspective commitment is defined as the costs associated with no longer holding an identity and is comprised of the number of relationships available to support an identity and their importance (Stryker, 1968, 1980). Thus, lower levels of internalized homophobia and stigma consciousness and higher levels of outness are related to more potential relationships available to support a couple identity. However, support for a gay status may not be present (e.g., Cass, 1978; Savin-Williams, 2001). Because commitment entails the number of supportive relationships available and their importance, it follows that only important supportive relationships are affected by status.

As presented, status acts as a context for interaction among gay couples, and status influences these interactions. Thus, status is linked to the couple verification process. An assumption of the verification model is that individuals seek out interactional contexts in which verification of their identities occurs (Burke, 1991). For gay couples, this is a more arduous task given the social stigma and oppression surrounding them (Brown, 2003). However, logically, gay men in relationships that are out and have less internalized homophobia and stigma consciousness will have more supportive

relationships in which to engage for verification of their couple identities. Also, they will seek out supportive interactive contexts, which should result in verification. Because the link between status and verification is dependent on commitment, it is hypothesized that commitment mediates this relationship. In fact, there is strong support in the literature for the role of supportive important others in providing positive feedback and verification to gay couples (e.g., Elizur & Mintzer, 2003; Elizur & Ziv, 2001; Haas, 2002).

*Personal dimension of identity commitment.* The literature surrounding support provided by families of origin to adult gay children and their partners is mixed. Some studies find that the support provided by families affects gay relationships (e.g., Elizur & Mintzer, 2001), whereas others do not find this same association (Kurdek, 2004; Weston, 1991). This is not surprising given the array of familial reactions to children's coming out and the time needed for families to adjust to having an offspring who is gay (e.g., Cass, 1979, 1980; Savin-Williams, 2001). However, the literature related to friend-related acceptance is more consistent, suggesting high support from friends, including other couples, both heterosexual and gay (e.g., Elizur & Mintzer; Haas & Stafford, 1998; Kurdek; Weston), is associated with gay men believing that support from friends is more important than is support from others. Thus, it appears that support from friends holds more importance (affective commitment) to the couple compared to that received from one's family.

Importantly, use of identity commitment here refers to commitment from an identity theory perspective as defined previously; use of the term commitment has a more general meaning. That is, traditionally, commitment is defined as maintaining some line

or course of action (Becker, 1960) and is an indicator of marital stability (Cate, Levin, & Richmond, 2002). In general, commitment also has been conceptualized as a function of attractions to a relationship and barriers to leaving it (Levinger, 1982; Kurdek, 1995), the likelihood of getting married (Surra & Huges, 1997), and as containing either two (personal and constraint; Stanley & Markman, 1992) or three dimensions (i.e., personal, moral, and structural; Johnson, Caughlin, & Hutson, 1999).

An early study examined the differences in relationship quality between 98 gay men in closed (monogamous) and 34 gay men in open (non-monogamous) relationships; all were cohabiting (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986). Satisfaction, intimacy, security, and commitment were higher among gay men in closed relationships compared to those in open ones. Further, Kurdek and Schmitt found that generally, commitment was not related to social support (i.e., similar to identity commitment as used here). In another study, Kurdek (1988) examined relationship quality in 34 gay men in closed relationships and 31 in open relationships. Of note, closed and open couples did not differ on any of the variables and subsequently were combined for analyses. The lack of differences in social support and dimensions of relationship quality between gay men in open compared to closed relationships have been replicated recently by LaSala (2004). Different from his earlier study with Schmitt, Kurdek found that relationship quality was positively related to social support in gay men. In two more recent studies, Kurdek (2001, 2004) examined differences between heterosexual, gay, lesbian-nonparent couples, and heterosexual-parent couples. He found that gay couples received little relationship support from family members (identity commitment) and reported slightly less relationship commitment than

other couples. However, gay couples functioned better in several areas (e.g., conflict resolution) compared to heterosexual couples. Overall, Kurdek suggested that relationship processes were comparable between types of couples and differences in provision of social support was one of the few distinguishing characteristics between couples. This finding is somewhat consistent with earlier findings (LaSala, 1998; 2000) showing that most of the 20 gay couples interviewed experienced negative familial support for their relationships, and this type of support negatively affected their couple relationships.

Although none of these associations were examined from an identity theory perspective, using identity theory as a guide can help disentangle some of the mixed results. For example, in Kurdek and Schmitt (1986) commitment was measured using questions asking about barriers, alternatives, and attractions to the relationship. In his 1998 and 2001 studies, Kurdek added costs of giving up the relationship to his measure of commitment, consistent with identity theory. Taken together, these studies suggest that interactional commitment (personal dimension of identity commitment) is an indicator of the relationships available to support couple roles and, thereby, couple identities. However, of interest to the current study are the aspects of familial and friend relationships that relate to couple identities.

From an identity perspective (Stryker, 1980), the number of relationships available to support a role, and thereby an identity, result in increased commitment to that identity as reflected in increased salience, or the likelihood that a particular identity will be invoked more frequently. Further, if identity commitment is high (i.e., the number of

relationships available to support an identity are high), then the identity will be enacted more frequently allowing for increased verification opportunities that can enhance identity commitment and, thereby, salience. In other words, the process is recursive. Specific to this study is the link between identity commitment and identity verification.

Oswald examined the inclusion and feelings of family belonging among 400 gay men and lesbians who participated in a family ritual (2002), and 45 gay men and lesbian who participated in a family wedding (2000). Participants in both studies attributed supportive family relationships to the validation of their sense of being a couple. More specifically, if families were supportive, then a wedding invitation was sent and addressed to both members of the couple; couples receiving dually addressed invitations felt validated and affirmed as a gay couple. Stated from the couple verification process, these couples held a couple identity standard that both partners should be invited to and together attend important family rituals. Couples receiving dually addressed wedding and other family ritual invitations (input) experienced congruency with their identity standards, and thus, their couple identity was verified leading to a strengthened couple identity. Couples in which only the one partner received an invitation (input) experienced discrepancy with the identity standard (comparator), which did not verify their couple identity.

Similar support for the association between identity commitment and couple verification is gleaned from a study of 133 cohabiting couples, 50 of whom were gay male couples (Julien et al., 1999). Julien and associates examined the social networks, interdependence, and conjugal adjustment among these couples. They found that

supportive networks were perceived as affirming for all couples. Interestingly, gay couples shared more joint social networks of friends, whereas heterosexual couples shared more family networks. These results suggest that support from friends and family creates a context reflective of interactional commitment that serves to verify their couple identities. Theoretically, support would increase the salience of these identities (there were more costs related to giving up a couple identity); also, the couple identities likely would be invoked more often, and thus, opportunities to verify couple identities would increase as would the costs related to giving up these identities.

*Symbolic dimension of identity commitment.* The literature on the symbolic dimension of identity commitment is more scant than that of the personal. Yet, the symbolic dimension may be an important area from which to glean insight about identity commitment. For example, Kurdek (1998) reported that gay couples were more likely than heterosexual-married and lesbian couples to dissolve their relationships. Additionally, he reported that there were no differences in problem-solving ability, equality, or satisfaction between these couples. Thus, he attributed his finding to the fact that relationships which are supported and legalized have more barriers to leaving than do gay relationships for which there is no legal support. However, 86% of the gay couples remained together over the 5 annual assessments used in the analyses. Given such relationship stability, Kurdek suggested that there may be something more that keeps these couples together, such as the symbolic dimension of interactional identity commitment examined in the present study.

For example, Berger (1990) examined responses from a convenience sample of 92 gay couples, 96% of whom were monogamous, 45% of whom had no previous relationships, 28% of whom had one previous relationship, and 6% of whom had 4 or more previous relationships. Berger found that gay men who decided to cohabit reported an underlying meaning of increased commitment to each other and the relationship. McWhirter and Mattison (1996) elucidated similar stories from clinical interviews with 156 gay male couples. Berger also found that the creation of wills and other legal documents was related to commitment to the relationship (i.e., couple identity). Again, McWhirter and Mattison found similar meanings related to symbolic acts, such as the use of joint legal documents, in addition to the pooling of money-- a finding similar to that of Blumstein and Schwartz (1983).

It appears that the negotiated underlying meanings of these symbolic acts are supportive and facilitate the couple verification process. In other words, the increased use of a such symbolic dimension of identity commitment results in greater overall identity commitment and, theoretically, when couple identities become more salient identity disruption is less likely—an indication that an identity has been verified. This logic is supported by Haas and Stafford (1998), who interviewed 15 gay men and found that sharing tasks, joint activities, and joint decision making solidified their sense of being a couple.

Additional support for the association between symbolic identity commitment and couple verification processes also is gleaned from research on condom use among gay men. Specifically, McNeal (1997) found that among the 45 gay male couples studied

most reported that not using condoms signified commitment to the couple relationship and also was related to relationship satisfaction. The negotiation processes resulting in discontinued use of condoms, and in some instances to undergo conjoint HIV/AIDS testing served as a couple verification strategy. Theoretically, as these couples developed a stronger sense of couple identity, they began to shift their identity standards such that condom use was no longer an identity standard for the couple. This shift resulted in the need to realign their identity standards with their behavior. Once done (stopped using condoms and underwent conjoint testing), verification occurred strengthening their couple identities. In fact, a recent study (Conley & Rabinowitz, 2004) examining contraceptive use among two samples of 133 and 135 heterosexual individuals in relationships found that condom use was highly symbolic and associated with increased closeness and a stronger sense of their relationship. Taken together, it appears that gay men do rely on symbolic acts to demonstrate identity commitment and support of their couple identity. In fact, the symbolic dimension of identity commitment might be more important than the personal dimension, because symbolic acts are controlled largely by the couple, whereas family and other social support is not. Thus, incorporating affective commitment or the importance of both symbolic and personal dimensions in the model is warranted.

No literature was found that specifically examined the association between gay status and either identity commitment or couple verification. However, theoretically it follows that if an individual in a relationship is not out, he likely has fewer relationships available to support and facilitate his identity commitment and, thereby, his couple

identities. For example, a gay man that is not out will keep the knowledge of his respective partner from his family and or friends and will have few opportunities to socially verify his couple identities. It also follows that these men are likely to rely on symbolic acts, although these would be limited as well. More often, gay men's fear of others' reactions precludes them from coming out (e.g., Cass, 1979; Savin-Williams, 2001). If one is fearful of being exposed as gay, and in this case as part of a gay couple, theoretically, he also might limit possible symbolic acts (e.g., joining of finances, cohabiting) for fear of exposing his gay relationship. As such, it makes sense that status is associated with couple verification through identity commitment, and that such couple verification affects couple identity as proposed in the model.

Some support for these links is found in three studies whose major focus was not this specific link. Haas and Stafford (1998) interviewed 15 gay men to examine the maintenance behaviors used in their relationship. Another study (LaSala, 2000) also included qualitative interviews of 20 gay couples. The third (Oswald, 2002) surveyed 400 self-identified gay men and lesbians to examine participation in family rituals and its relation to one's sense of family belonging. In each study, those who were out reported they had more validated relationships (LaSala, 2000), more supportive families, more family inclusion (Oswald; LaSala, 2000), and more access to overall support networks (Haas & Stafford). Additionally, those who were not out reported more stress and a generalized negative impact on their relationship (LaSala, 2000). However, parental disapproval did not negatively affect all gay relationships (LaSala, 2002). In this last finding, this discrepancy may reflect affective commitment, or that for some gay men in

romantic relationships the importance of the parental relationship provides verification of the couple identity, whereas the lack of importance does not affect verification.

*Mediators of the Link Between Couple verification and Couple Identity*

The links between status, identity commitment, and couple verification have been discussed. Specific to gay couples, couple verification is important in solidifying a sense of wholeness (e.g., Berger, 1990; Kurdek, 1994; Moorefield & Proulx, 2003), or couple identity. Here, additional evidence for the link between couple verification and couple identity is offered, focusing on how distress and relationship satisfaction (Kim & McKenry, 2002) mediate this link.

*Distress.* Verification is important given the current social climate that neither provides social legitimization or full affirmation of gay couples (Arnup, 1999; Brown, 2003), bestowing upon them a marginalized social status and making it difficult to locate verifying contexts. As such, it is logical to expect that this disaffirming climate influences the couple verification processes, specifically one's identity standards. If one believes that part of developing a long-term relationship involves getting married (identity standard), and the gay couple is unable to do so, then incongruency results in distress. Theoretically, if one is unable to negotiate this identity standard, distress and nonverification should result in identity disruption possibly leading to relationship dissolution over time. As a caveat, a single nonverifying interaction or one unnegotiated standard does not result in identity disruption, but disruption would be possible if distress and nonverification continued over time. Thus, although there is a theoretical support for a direct effect of couple verification on couple identity, it is plausible that mediating processes exist.

Specific to gay relationships, research has demonstrated that gay couples who engage in joint activities with close others (Bell & Weinberg, 1979; McWhirter & Mattison, 1984), develop specific relationship rituals (Oswald, 2000; 2002), and have mutual friends (Frable, Wortman, & Joseph, 1997; McWhirter & Mattison) also report feeling validated as a couple. Feeling validated is almost synonymous with verification in that validation creates a sense of positive feedback from others that serves to establish congruency in the verification process. Several studies have found that feeling validated as a couple impacts the couple relationship (e.g., Berger, 1990; LaSala, 1998; 2000; Oswald, 2000). Thus, it is logical to assume that in these studies couples received validation from others which verified their sense of wholeness or couple identity.

Theoretically, when input does not match ideal identity standards, couple verification does not occur and distress results (Burke, 1991; Burke & Stets, 1999). In this way, distress should mediate the link between couple verification and couple identity, a mediating link similar to recent findings by King and Smith (2004). Burke (1991) and others (e.g., Burke & Stets, 1999; Cast & Burke, 2002) suggested that distress refers to those emotional outcomes related to nonverification, such as increased anxiety, depression, stress, lower self-esteem, and reduced self-efficacy. Others (e.g., Burke & Stets; Marcussen & Large, 2003) have extended theory and suggested that outcomes of the verification process can be positive or negative. Specifically, in the hypothesized model distress is assessed by depressed mood as well as by gay-related stress, which is unique to the current study.

Previous research has demonstrated that for gay men having supportive friends and family is associated with positive feedback, which theoretically reflects identity verification, and less depression and stress result (Lewis, Derlega, Berndt, Morris, & Rose, 2001; Lewis, Derlega, Griffin, & Krowinski, 2003; Luhtanen, 2003; Meyer, 2003). These studies examined both single and coupled gay men with a focus on individual outcomes. In the hypothesized model here, the focus extends beyond individual outcomes to include associations with relationship outcomes such as couple identity. Additionally, most of the studies cited to justify the pathway between verification and distress focused on stress specific to gays rather than general stress (Lewis, Derlega, Giffin, et al., 2001; Lewis, Derlega, Berndt, et al., 2003; Meyer, 2003), thus tapping a dimension of distress specific to the population studied here. As such, the hypothesized pathway in Figure 1 suggests that a more congruent match to ideal identity standards is associated with lower distress and, thus, a stronger couple identity.

*Relationship satisfaction.* Similar to the pathway of distress as a mediator, the hypothesized model also includes a pathway between couple verification and couple identity mediated by relationship satisfaction. There is a long history of research on relationship quality in general and relationship satisfaction in particular (e.g., Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Burr, 1971; Hicks & Platt, 1970; Spainer & Lewis, 1980). Much of this research focused on the links between satisfaction, commitment, and stability (e.g., Kurdek, 1995, 1998; Rusbult, 1983) or links between satisfaction and individual distress (e.g., Katz & Beach, 1997). This research also examined satisfaction among dating (e.g., Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986), cohabiting (e.g., Brown,

2003b), married (e.g., Brown & Booth, 1996), White gay and lesbian couples (e.g., Kurdek, 1995; 1998), and Black gay and lesbian couples (e.g., Peplau, Cockran, & Mays, 1997). However, much of this research is limited because it focused on comparisons between various combinations of these groups (e.g., Brown & Booth, 1996; Kurdek, 1994, 1995, 1998). Additionally, in spite of the long history of relationship satisfaction research (e.g., Bradbury et al., 2000), confusion remains regarding how to conceptualize and measure the construct (Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002; Sabatelli, 1988).

Relationship satisfaction has been conceptualized in several ways (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2000): happiness, satisfaction, and adjustment. Also, these concepts are measured differently, leading to the continuing confusion in their use (e.g. Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002; Sabatelli, 1998). Others have defined relationship satisfaction from an investment perspective as a function of rewards minus costs relative to investments and alternatives (e.g., Kurdek, 1986, 1995, 1998; Rusbult, 1983). In the current study a satisfaction perspective (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2000) was adopted that defines satisfaction as the thoughts about subjective feelings toward or gratification with a target relationship. This is consistent with others who found this perspective and measurement of relationship satisfaction as particularly important in gay relationships compared to either lesbian or heterosexual couples (Gottman et al., 2003). Theoretically, relationship satisfaction should mediate the link between couple verification and couple identity.

Only one study (Burke & Stets, 1999) specifically examined the link between verification and satisfaction, albeit in a cursory way and with heterosexual couples. Their findings suggested that spouses who perceived a match between ideal identity standards

and actual output (resulting in congruency) reported more relationship satisfaction. Specifically, Burke and Stets examined a sample of 286 newlywed couples over a 3-year period and found that those who felt that their identities were verified also reported more satisfaction than those not perceiving verification of their identities. Other studies also found support for this link, although none were grounded in identity theory. For example, Fletcher, Simpson, and Thomas (2000) examined the match between self-standards of an ideal partner and their actual relationship behavior (output). Similarity predicted higher satisfaction in the relationship than did dissimilarity. This suggests that reporting a match between ideal and perceived identity standards established congruency and, thereby, the identity likely is verified.

Specific to gay men, other research (Bell & Weinberg, 1979; McWhirter & Mattison, 1984) finds that those who engage in joint activities, develop specific relationship rituals (Oswald, 2000; 2002), and have mutual friends also reported high relationship satisfaction (Frable, Wortman, & Joseph, 1997; McWhirter & Mattison). From an identity perspective (Burke, 1991; Burke & Reitz, 1991), having mutual friends increases the opportunities for verification, and because friends are close others, the likelihood of congruence is higher. Thus, by engaging in these activities, verification should occur and relationship satisfaction should increase, because the ideal identity standards are congruent. Recently, Mackey, Diemer, and O'Brien (2004) found that gay couples who reported that their actual intimacy, equity, and communication matched their ideal standards also reported higher relationship satisfaction and desire to maintain the

relationship, suggesting that identity disruption likely had not occurred and a stronger couple identity resulted.

Also specific to gay couples, studies demonstrate that identity verification is important in solidifying a sense of wholeness (e.g., Berger, 1990; Kurdek, 1994a; Moorefield & Proulx, 2003). In these studies, men also reported high levels of satisfaction with their relationships. Although not demonstrating a specific link between couple verification and relationship satisfaction, those couples who reported more relationship satisfaction also perceived having an ideal relationship. Thus, these findings support the proposed link between couple verification and couple identity, partially mediated by distress and satisfaction.

In summary, the hypothesized model asserts a direct effect of holding a gay status on identity commitment and the couple verification process through identity commitment. Further, the model postulates that the couple verification process directly affects couple identity, as well as indirectly through both distress and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, being more out and holding fewer stigma conscious and internalized homophobic beliefs will be associated with higher supportive personal and symbolic identity commitment when those identity commitment relationships hold higher importance. Next, those who report lower identity commitment also will report a lower match to ideal identity standards, which implies lack of couple verification. Lower couple verification will be associated with a weaker sense of couple identity, and this pathway will be mediated by higher levels of distress and lower relationship satisfaction.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### *Procedures and Sample*

One goal of this study was to obtain a diverse and more representative sample of gay men than previously studied. Previous findings show using the Internet results in a more diverse sample (particularly for some marginalized populations), is efficient, and cost effective (e.g., Moorefield & Proulx, 2003; Murray & Fisher, 2002). For example, Rhodes, DiClemente, Cecil, Hergenrather, and Yee (2002) found that their sample of gay men obtained via the Internet was more diverse in terms of age and education compared to samples obtained in bars. A review of published studies whose samples were obtained via newspaper postings and other convenience techniques (e.g., Kurdek, 1998; Oswald, 2002) also suggest Rhodes' et al. sample was more diverse in age and education. As a result, data for the current study were collected via an Internet-based survey

To date, most online research relies on creating survey websites and registering them with search engines (i.e., Lycos, Altavista) or establishing links from other sites (Rhodes et al., 2002; Weiss, 2002). The difficulty with this approach is that independence of participants cannot be established (Copeland & White, 1991). To circumvent potential difficulties with independence, a username and password was programmed so it could be used only once, and only those who contacted the author were provided the secure link to the survey. Because online studies that offer incentives demonstrate completion rates of

up to 86% (Reips, 2002), participants were informed that they could choose from three national charities (Human Rights Campaign; Lambda Legal Defense and Educational Fund; National AIDS Foundation), and an anonymous donation of \$1.00 would be made on their behalf. Data were transformed automatically into tab-delimited files importable into SPSS and emailed from the web server.

A convenience sample of 43 nationally- and locally-based (southeastern) organizations that cater to gay men and or gay couples were contacted (Moorefield & Proulx, 2003). Fourteen responded and agreed to assist in recruitment, and 18 emails were returned invalid. Those who responded and declined to assist in recruitment (11) did so because of organizational policies or their next newsletter would not be sent until after study completion.

After contacting organization representatives and explaining the study, representatives were asked to provide their members with information about the study and contact information via their listserves. They also were asked for available demographic information about their members, including the number of gay men that potentially would receive study notification. Unfortunately, the contacted organizations did not maintain such information with most offering automatic sign-ups for newsletters precluding the maintenance of simple counts. Those with available information maintained lists that included gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexuals, making the information meaningless to estimate the number of potential participants that would receive study notification.

Potential participants were asked to call or email the researcher directly to obtain additional study-related information and be screened for participation (i.e., participants must self-identify as gay and currently be involved in a gay relationship of at least a 3-month duration). Those interested and who met participation criteria were provided with the link to the survey website, a username, and a password; this also maintained confidentiality.

These methods resulted in a total of 249 email inquiries, of which 228 met study criteria and received passwords to complete the survey. The sample reported here contains responses from 188 gay men in current relationships, resulting in a participation rate of 83%. This rate is consistent with previous studies and represents a high rate of participation (Reips, 2002).

Sample characteristics are presented in Table 1. Overall, the goal of achieving a diverse sample in terms of education, income, previous marital history, and presence of children both from previous heterosexual marriages and those brought into the current relationship via adoption or artificial insemination was not met. Of the sample, 72.9% of were in monogamous relationships and from 26 states and the District of Columbia.

#### *Representativeness of the Sample*

Because of the invisibility of the gay population (Brown, 2003), the representativeness of the sample and generalizability of the results are of concern. However, two comparisons can be made that can help situate the sample of the current study in juxtaposition to those from previous studies. First, the obtained sample can be compared to samples of gay men in previous studies (e.g., Kurdek, 2004; Oswald, 2002).

Second, comparisons also can be made between the information available from the U.S. Census Bureau (2003; Gates & Ost, 2004), although as discussed, these estimates are biased (e.g., Black et al., 2000; Fields & Clark, 1999) and lack some of the demographic information obtained here. In terms of race/ethnicity, the current sample is comparable to previous research (e.g., Kurdek), but less diverse than data reported from the Census (Gates & Ost). Related to education and income, the current sample represents a broader range of education and income levels than reported by Kurdek (2004), but is not as broad as that reported in the census. The current sample was older than those of previous research (mean = 41,  $SD = 11.59$ , range = 18 – 67, Kurdek mean = 36,  $SD = 12.04$ ), but within the majority age range of 35 – 44 found in the census data (US Bureau of the Census, 2003; Gates & Ost, 2004). In the current sample, the mean duration of one's current relationship (in months) was 103 (8.6 years;  $SD = 102$ , range = 3 – 444), and this is comparable to that of previous research (Kurdek, 2004). Overall, the diversity goal of the study was not met, because the sample continued to be largely White and middle income.

### *Measurement*

Table 2 provides an overview of measures in relation to their expected underlying factor. This information also relates to how composite measures were formed. For all measures, words referring to husbands or wives and or marriages were replaced with partner and or partnerships. Because relationships that are supportive of verification accumulate over time, relationship duration (in months) was examined as a potential control variable.

*Demographic information.* Demographic information was assessed using single-item questions that asked about age, race/ethnicity, income, education, previous relationships, duration of current relationship, geographic location, etc. (See Appendix B for a summary of demographic and scale items.)

*Status.* As suggested by Armato and Marsiglio (2002), status was conceptualized here as having internal and external components. It was measured using respondent reports on three scales, the Outness Inventory (OI; Mohr & Fassinger, 2000), the Internalized Homophobia Scale (IHS; Meyer, 1995), and the Stigma Consciousness Scale (SC; Pinel, 1999). All scales are scored such that higher scores reflect a more positive status.

The OI is a 15-item summed measure that assesses the extent to which the respondent's sexual orientation is known and openly discussed with various family members and close others (e.g., mother; best friend; Mohr & Fassinger, 2000). Responses vary from *does not know* (1) to *definitely knows, openly discussed* (7). Reported reliability was .79, and construct and concurrent validity have been demonstrated (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000, 2003).

The IHS (Meyer, 1995) consists of 9 items that are summed and measure the extent to which homophobia has been internalized (sample items: "I have tried to stop being attracted to men;" "I wish I weren't gay/bisexual"). All items use a 5-point likert-type scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The IHS has been shown to have construct and concurrent validity and an alpha of .83.

The SC (Pinel, 1999) is a 10-item summed scale measuring the extent to which the respondent expects to be stereotyped because they are gay (sample items: “Stereotypes about homosexuals have not affected me personally;” “I never worry that my behaviors will be viewed as stereotypical of homosexuals”). The SC uses the same anchors as the IHS, except it has a 7-point rather than a 5-point likert-type scale.

*Identity commitment.* Measures of symbolic and personal interactional and affective identity commitment were combined to measure overall identity commitment. Symbolic interactional (SIC) and symbolic affective dimensions of identity commitment (SAC) respectively refer to the extent to which gay couples are involved with symbolic acts that are supportive of their couple identity and the importance of those acts to the couple. SIC was measured using a series of seven questions that ask about the extent of involvement as a couple with gay-related community resources, gay-related Internet resources, rituals (e.g., commitment ceremonies), living together, joint purchases, financial management, and legal documents. Questions were developed for this study and were scored on a 7-point likert scale, ranging from *none* (0) to *a lot* or *all* (6). The items were derived from a review of the literature and appear to have face validity. SAC was measured using the same items, but asked about the extent to which the respondent felt that it was important to engage in these symbolic acts as a couple. It was scored on a 7-point likert scale, ranging from *not important* (0) to *very important* (6) with higher scores representing higher identity commitment.

Personal interactional (PIC) and personal affective dimensions of identity commitment (PAC) refer to the personal relationships with which gay couples are

involved that are available to verify their couple identity and the importance of those relationships to the couple. As with SIC and SAC, these measures were developed for the current study and appear to have face validity. These constructs were measured using a series of 15 items that asked about the extent of involvement (PIC) as a couple with biological family members, nonbiologically related family (chosen kin, families of choice), friends, children, co-workers, and others on a 7-point likert scale, ranging from *none* (0) to *a lot or all* (6). They were then asked how important each of these relationships was (PAC) with item scores ranging from *not important at all* (1) to *very important* (7). Higher scores represented higher identity commitment.

*Couple verification.* The interest in the current study was on measuring only the match between actual and ideal couple identity standards in the couple verification process. If a match exists, verification is assumed. The Marital Comparison Level Index (MCLI; Sabatelli, 1984) was used. The MCLI is a unidimensional 31-item general index measuring the sum of perceptions of how current relationship standards match ideal relationship standards (sample items: “amount of companionship;” “amount of conflict over daily interactions”). Responses are on a 7-point likert-type scale, ranging from *worse than I expected* (-3) to *better than I expected* (+3) with higher scores representing a match to ideals. The MCLI has reported concurrent validity and a reported alpha of .93.

*Distress.* Distress was measured using two scales: the Gay-related Stress Scale (GRSS; Lewis, Derlega, Berndt, et al., 2001) and a short version of the Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depressed Mood Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977).

The GRSS measures the amount of stress related to 10 areas specific to gays. The Misunderstanding and Sexual Orientation Conflict subscales were not used, because they are similar to the internalized and stigma consciousness scales. The remaining 48 items were used and are scored on a 5-point likert scale ranging from *no stress* (1) to *severe stress* (5). Items are summed for a total stress score (sample items: “dating someone openly gay”; “having people at work find out my orientation”). Validity has been demonstrated as well as reliability levels in the low 90s.

The CES-D (Radloff, 1977) is a 20-item measure asking about how the respondent felt during the past week (only the 12 items included in the short version were used here). It is a summed measure of general depressed mood for use with the general population, and it is scored using a 5-point likert-type scale, ranging from *rarely or none of the time* to *most or all of the time* (sample items: “my sleep was restless;” “I felt sad”). The 20-item CES-D has a reported alpha of .85 and concurrent, known-groups, and discriminant validity, whereas studies (Marks, Choi, & Heejeong, 2002; Ross & Mirowsky, 1999) using the short version report an alpha of .93. Higher scores on each of these measures indicates more distress.

*Relationship satisfaction.* Relationship satisfaction was measured using two scales: the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1998) and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS; Schumm et al., 1986).

The RAS (Hendrick, 1998) is a general measure of relationship satisfaction containing seven items scored on likert-type scales with various anchors, but all range from 1 – 5 (sample items: “how well does your partner meet your needs;” “how much do

you love your partner”). It has reported concurrent and predictive validity and an alpha of .86. A summed score can range from 7 – 35 with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction.

The KMSS (Schumm et al., 1986) also provides a summed score with three items that ask about satisfaction with the partnership, their partner, and their relationship with their partner with reported concurrent validity and an alpha of .93. Anchors range from (1) *extremely dissatisfied* to (7) *extremely satisfied*.

*Couple identity.* Couple identity refers to a sense of wholeness as a couple (Moorefield & Proulx, 2003). The Cohesion Subscale (CI) of the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES-III; Olson, 1986) was used to assess couple identity. The subscale contains 10 items that ask about the jointness, or cohesion, between the partners (sample items: “we can easily think of things to do together as a couple;” “togetherness is important”) and should not be interpreted as a measure of enmeshment. The items are scored on a 5-point likert-type scale, ranging from *almost never* (1) to *almost always* (5), and summed with higher scores representative of a stronger couple identity. FACES-III has reported face, known-groups, and discriminant validity, and the cohesion subscale as a reported alpha of .77.

### Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis occurred in three stages. First, preliminary analyses were completed followed by a series of exploratory factor analyses (EFA). A path analysis was then fit to the data to test the hypothesized model. Preliminary analyses assessed item and scale characteristics and appropriateness of the data to examine the hypothesized model (see

Table 3). Specifically, an initial alpha reliability was used to assess internal consistency of each of the scales (Carmines & Zeller, 1979) and to indicate potential measurement problems that might arise in the factor analytic analyses (Holmbeck, 1997). Scale scores were assessed using a correlation matrix to examine initial associations among scales that are related to their respective factors and manifest variables in the path analysis (Howell, 2002). Because some studies (e.g., Kurdek, 1995; 1998) have shown skewness to be problematic, especially when measuring relationship satisfaction, it was expected that the multivariate normality assumption might not be met.

In the next stage of analysis, a series of EFAs were conducted to assess the factor structure of the measures used in the study and to test whether there was a single underlying factor represented by the combined scales. For example, it was expected that the OI, IHS, and SC scales represent one factor-- status. These results were expected to provide a foundation for future studies wishing to test the current model using latent factors and to provide evidence of validity for creating composite measures for use in the path analysis. Further, Bartlett's test for sphericity (Howell, 2002) provides an estimate of the appropriateness of data for factoring. Given the smaller sample size, the number of parameters to be estimated, and the fact that some constructs were measured using only one of two indicators in relation to obtaining identification, along with the lack of previous literature using these variables to examine the relationships of gay men, an exploratory approach was chosen rather than a confirmatory approach. The EFA approach employed here used principal axis factoring without rotation, because all

variables were expected to represent one factor. In this way, there was no need for a rotated solution (Gorsuch, 1983).

The final stage of analysis tested the hypothesized model. Path analysis is based on multiple regression and is used to examine the associations and magnitude of effects between variables (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2000). Standardized composites were calculated to represent the manifest variables in the hypothesized model. The rationale for using this approach was twofold. First, the scales used here have different metrics. Thus, standardization assists in interpretation. Second, because path analysis assumes variables are measured rather than latent constructs, using composites meets this assumption (Raykov & Marcoulides). Correlations between the composite variables were examined to assess initial associations and potential multicollinearity; however, no multicollinearity was detected.

Next, data were fit to the path model using AMOS 5.0 (Arbuckle, 1997). To test for mediating or indirect effects of distress and relationship satisfaction, the following steps were taken and the model fit indices examined for each model (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Holmbeck, 1997). First, the direct effect model and path coefficients were examined. Next, the fit of the model was assessed after including the mediating effects. Lastly, the model fit was compared between the full model and a direct effects model. A significance chi-square test (Baron & Kenny) was used to test the change in fit between the two models. If the direct effect path is reduced to nonsignificance, then a mediating effect is present (Holmbeck). If all paths are significant, an indirect effect is present. Total effects (i.e., direct and indirect) were calculated by summing total direct and

indirect effects, which are calculated by multiplying all direct effects and then all indirect effects. As a caveat, for a true test of mediating effects longitudinal data should be used. Because these are not available here, if there is evidence of a mediating effect it should be interpreted as preliminary and should be cross-validated with longitudinal data.

The overall model fit was assessed using several fit indices:  $\chi^2$  to assess the discrepancy in fit between the hypothesized model and actual data, goodness-of-fit (GFI; Maruyama, 1998) which is appropriate for a least squares approach, the root mean squared residual (RMR) which is the common index to assess residual variance correlations, the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990) to assess confidence intervals around the fit statistic, and the root mean square approximation (RMSEA; Browne & Cudeck, 1993). Additionally, the GFI and RMSEA are appropriate for use with both normal and nonnormal data (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2000). To demonstrate good fit all indices should be or above .90 except the RMR and RMSEA, which should both be at or below .05 to indicate good fit and between .06 and .08 to indicate a moderate fit. Lastly, residuals and modification indices were examined for other plausible solutions to the model or how the fit might be improved. Because modification indices are based on noncentrality distributions and account for sample size and number of estimated parameters, a general estimation of power can be interpreted (Kaplan, 2000).

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### *Preliminary Analyses*

Correlations and descriptive statistics of the individual scale variables are presented in Table 3. As expected, univariate and multivariate assumptions of normality were not met. Specifically, several observed variables depart from 0, demonstrating higher than acceptable levels of kurtosis and or skewness. For example, the kurtosis of Relationship Adjustment Scale (RAS) was 3.23 suggesting a leptokurtic distribution, and the skewness was -1.67 suggesting that the scores tend to cluster at the higher end of the scale. This is not surprising given that most people tend to rate their relationships more positively than they are (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000). The generalized least squares approach (West, Finch, & Curran, 1995), rather than the maximum likelihood estimation, was employed in AMOS 5.0 (Arbuckle, 1997) to handle estimation problems with non-normal data. The alphas were relatively high across scale variables (.75 - .95) except for those indicating status (.63, .67). Further, correlations between status indicators and other variables tended to be somewhat lower as well. These low correlations were examined further in the exploratory factor analyses. Of concern to the hypothesized model was the lack of significant correlations between indicators of distress (CES-D, GRSS) and other variables, except for indicators of relationship satisfaction,

although the latter ones were relatively low (-.19, -.24). Other correlations were as expected. A matrix containing composite score correlations is discussed later with results from the path analysis.

#### *Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA)*

Factor loadings for all variables and factors appear in Table 4. EFAs were conducted to assess all potential factors for which multiple scales were used. The first EFA contained those scales expected to be indicative of status (i.e., OI, IHS, SC). Results suggested that IHS did not load as expected, and extraction was terminated before a factor was determined. Thus, it was deleted from the analysis, and a second EFA was conducted for status using only OI and SC. This EFA resulted in 1 factor with an eigenvalue of 1.58 explaining 78.89% of the variance. The communalities, or the percent of variance that can be accounted for by the factor, were .33 for both variables. Further, both variables loaded equally on a single factor interpreted as status. The Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, suggesting the appropriateness of the data for factoring,  $\chi^2(1, N = 188) = 75.38, p = .00$ .

The second EFA was conducted to examine whether the four identity commitment scales (i.e., PIC, PAC, SIC, SAC) loaded on a single factor representative of identity commitment. As expected, one factor was extracted with an eigenvalue of 2.36 explaining 58.98% of the variance. Communalities were .58, .59, .51, and .52 for PIC, PAS, SIC, and SAC respectively. The Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant,  $\chi^2(6, N = 188) = 291.19, p = .00$ . All loadings also were as expected with personal commitment

scales, reflecting slightly more of the factor scores compared to the symbolic commitment scales.

The next EFA was conducted to examine the relationship satisfaction factor. Again, one factor was extracted with an eigenvalue of 1.835 explaining 91.77% of the variance. Communalities were .70 for both KMSS and RAS. Both factor loadings were high at .91. Again the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 188) = 222.10$ ,  $p = .00$ .

The final EFA examined distress using the CES-D and GRSS scales. Both scales loaded equally with an eigenvalue of 1.32 explaining 65.77% of the variance. Communalities for both were .31. The Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 188) = 19.42$ ,  $p = .00$ .

With the exception of the first EFA for status, all scales loaded well onto their respective factors. Thus, some validity for the proposed factors was demonstrated

#### *Testing the Path Model*

Table 5 contains the correlations between the composite measures and presents the composite alphas. Similar to the full correlation matrix presented in Table 3, correlations between the composites were as expected with the exception of distress. Notably, all alphas were high with the exception of status, which was adequate. As expected, relationship duration also was significantly related to a majority of the composite variables (not shown in Table 5). Further, a correlation matrix controlling for relationship duration showed no change in correlations, and only small changes in coefficients (e.g.,  $r_{12} = .687$  before control imposed and  $r_{12} = .680$  after). A path model

was run controlling for relationship duration to again justify not using relationship duration as a control, and it did not fit the data [ $\chi^2(11, N = 188) = 41.21, p = .00$ ], nor was duration associated with significant changes in path coefficients between the model in which relationship duration was used as a control variable and the models described below. Thus, relationship duration was not retained as a control variable in the final path analysis. Lastly, because relationship satisfaction is a form of happiness, and distress can be thought of as unhappiness, the disturbance terms were correlated for all models to account for shared method variance (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Kenny & Kashy, 1992).

The direct effects model was significant [ $\chi^2(9, N = 188) = 58.90, p = .00$ ], indicating a lack of fit between the estimated covariance matrix and the data. Additional fit indices confirmed this conclusion. The GFI was .90 indicating marginal fit, whereas the RMSEA (.17), CFI (.61), and RMR (.19) all indicated that the direct effects model was not plausible.

The indirect effects model was tested next to examine the influence of mediating and/or indirect paths (see Figure 3). This model represented a significant increase in fit compared to the direct effects model [ $\chi^2(2, N = 188) = 23.75, p \leq .01$ ], but also failed to fit the data [ $\chi^2(7, N = 188) = 35.15, p = .00$ ] although the GFI demonstrated good fit (.94). This is of interest because GFI is considered a good index of fit for non-normal data. However, the RMSEA (.15), CFI (.78), and RMR (.15) all indicated less than adequate fit. Although this model fit the data better than did the direct effects model, it also was disconfirmed as a plausible model.

The unstandardized and standardized parameter estimates and critical ratios for

the hypothesized model are found in Table 6. Each of the paths were significant except for the path from couple verification to distress. Overall, individuals who were more out and held fewer stigma conscious beliefs (status) were likely to report higher levels of personal and symbolic commitment and greater importance of those relationships (identity commitment). Further, reporting higher identity commitment was associated with reporting a higher sense of match between ideal and actual identity standards or couple verification. Feeling more verified as a couple was associated with higher relationship satisfaction and a stronger sense of couple identity. Additionally, those who reported higher relationship satisfaction also reported a stronger sense of couple identity. Further, the link between couple verification and couple identity was reduced, but remained significant when relationship satisfaction was added to the model. Thus, relationship satisfaction had an indirect effect and partially mediated the link between couple verification and couple identity. The total effect of couple verification on couple identity was  $.33 + (.73 \times .53) = .63$ .

#### *Testing a Modified Path Model*

Because the hypothesized model did not fit the data well, the modification indices were examined. Two of the suggested modifications were theoretically logical and were added to the model (see Figure 4): (a) a direct link from identity commitment to relationship satisfaction and (b) a direct link from identity commitment to couple identity. Justifications for these additions are discussed in the next section. The addition of these two links significantly improved the fit of the model compared to the original hypothesized model [ $\chi^2(2, N = 188) = 25.14, p < .01$ ], and fit the data over all [ $\chi^2(5, N =$

188) = 10.01,  $p = .07$ ]. The various fit indices also indicated a marginal to good fit (GFI = .98; RMSEA = .07; CFI = .96; RMR = .06).

The unstandardized and standardized parameter estimates and critical ratios for the modified model are found in Table 7. Each of the previously significant paths were again significant, and the path from couple verification to distress remained nonsignificant. The two new paths also were significant, such that higher levels of identity commitment were related to higher levels of couple identity and higher relationship satisfaction. Further, higher levels of identity commitment were related to higher levels of couple identity indirectly through relationship satisfaction. Of interest, couple verification and relationship satisfaction partially mediated the link between identity commitment and couple identity. The total effect of identity commitment on couple identity was .49. The total effect of couple verification on couple identity was reduced from .63 in the hypothesized model to .47 in the modified model.

The variables in the modified model accounted for 50% of the variance in identity commitment, 53% of the variance in relationship satisfaction, and 54% of the variance in couple identity. These represent increases in explained variance over those in the hypothesized model except for relationship satisfaction, which remained the same in both models. Clearly, the strongest path is through couple verification. However, the variance accounted for in couple verification was reduced to 10% in the modified model.

Although these results suggest a moderate to good fit and an improved fit over the hypothesized model, they should be viewed with caution as cross-validation of the new

model is needed. No further modifications were suggested, and no further analysis was undertaken.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

Although there is strong and consistent evidence to suggest that gay and heterosexual couples are comparable in many respects and report similar levels of relationship quality and functioning (e.g., Kurdek, 2001, 2004), there also are differences such as the lack of social support and who provides actual and or received support (e.g., LaSala, 2000; 2001). Gay couples also face marginalization and discrimination, which constrain their ability to construct and maintain their relationships (Dworkin & Yi, 2003; Lewis et al., 2001). In spite of these constraints, many gay couples do maintain happy, long-term, committed relationships (e.g., Kurdek, 2004; LaSala, 2000), but the key question is how these couples maintain their relationships and develop a sense of couple identity while being targets of social stigma.

This study attempted to investigate the relationships of gay men by examining the influence of holding a socially stigmatized gay status on one's sense of couple identity or weness. The use of status as the first variable in the model serves as an indication of the context in which the rest of the model occurs. Doing so incorporates issues of social structure and its influence on identity processes (Stryker, 1968, 1980). Further, because there is need for theory development and refinement that addresses the unique issues pertinent to gay relationships (Bowman, 2003; Elizur & Mintzer, 2003), this study tested a theoretical model based on identity theory (Stryker, 1968, 1980) and the extant

literature. The model asserted that the influence of status as a gay man was linked to couple identity through identity commitment and couple verification. Further, the link between couple verification and couple identity was hypothesized to be mediated by distress and relationship satisfaction.

#### *Discussion of the Hypothesized and Modified Models*

Because the hypothesized model did not fit the data and all significant paths in the hypothesized model remained so in the modified model, a lengthy discussion of the hypothesized model is omitted here. However, possible reasons why the hypothesized model did not fit are discussed in concert with a discussion of the modified model and the limitations of the study. In doing so, I follow guidelines set forth by McDonald and Ho (2002) and Boomsma (2000). McDonald and Ho suggested that each significant and nonsignificant path be re-examined in terms of theory and measurement so a reasonable estimate for the misfit of the original model can be determined. Further, they asserted that making a few modifications are acceptable as long as a clear theoretical rationale for the modification is made. Such rationale is offered below. Because theoretical justifications are made, the validity and plausibility of a modified model is enhanced; however, cross validation is needed (Boomsma).

As stated, the hypothesized model did not fit the data adequately. The hypothesized model was modified by adding direct paths between identity commitment and both relationship satisfaction and couple identity, and both were significant. Given the moderate to good fit of the data to the modified model, several ways in which the findings add to the literature and theory are acknowledged. Of note, when these paths

were added to the model, the effect of couple verification on couple identity remained significant but was reduced by almost half suggesting partial mediation.

The focus of the model was to examine the role of important relations on relationship processes and outcomes while also attending to how these occur in the context of social stigma by incorporating status in the model. As such, another purpose of the model was to integrate several lines of research (i.e., identity development and outcomes, couple relationship development and outcomes, social networks, context) to form a more complete picture of relationship processes using identity theory as a linking mechanism.

Generally, it appears that couple identity is enhanced when social stigma has less influence on the couple relationship and identity processes. Stated another way, results suggest that those who perceive holding a more positive gay status (i.e., are more out and perceive a less stigmatizing social context) are likely to have higher identity commitment. In turn, higher identity commitment is associated with couple verification (a match to ideal identity standards), which is associated with a higher sense of couple identity directly and indirectly through relationship satisfaction. Further, higher identity commitment was directly linked to higher levels of relationship satisfaction and couple identity. These results are consistent with previous research and theory. However, the lack of findings related to the mediating role of distress is not consistent with either previous research or theory.

*Status and identity commitment.* The strong effect of status on identity commitment, accounting for 43% of the variance in commitment, is not surprising. In

fact, this finding is consistent with other research that found links between being out either as a gay man or as a gay man with HIV and receiving social support (e.g., Bor, du Plessis, & Russell, 2004; Cass, 1979; Kadushin, 1996). These studies conceptualized social support as consisting of both received and perceived support and the number in their social network (i.e., similar to identity commitment), and, thus, they are related to the findings presented. Also, previous studies only examined one indicator of status, most often level of outness or perceived stigma, in relation to social support, so the findings reported here add to the literature. Specifically, status included both level of outness and stigma conscious beliefs, and this might explain the stronger effect.

Originally, status also included internalized homophobia, which did not factor as part of the composite measure and was dropped from the analysis. Although Armato and Marsiglio (2002) asserted that examinations of status should include internal and external influences, these findings suggest that this might not be the case, at least for the measures used here to assess internal influences. Identity theory provides a possible explanation for this finding.

From an identity theory perspective, identity is a sense of who one is, implying individuals internalize a certain set of identity standards attached to a particular status such that one derives meaning for who one is. In this way, identity and status are related, yet distinct. For example, the IHS asks about the extent of agreement with “I wish I weren’t attracted to men.” It is logical to assume that a man with a positive gay identity would hold an identity standard dictating that to be gay he must be attracted to men (i.e., one aspect of what it means to be gay). This provides meaning for who he is such that if

he disagrees with the previous statement, it is assumed that he has internalized what it means to self-identify as gay and then becomes open to accepting a gay status. For example, once he begins self-identifying as gay, he shares his gay identity with others through coming out (Cass, 1979). By sharing his gay identity he inadvertently, and sometimes intentionally, allows others to confer a status on him. It may be that a measure of internalized homophobia is not a part of status but is a part of gay identity, and the two would be related. That is, the extent to which a man internalizes homophobia reflects the extent to which he views himself positively or negatively as gay, or a sense of who he is as a gay man.

Further, IHS was correlated with the symbolic dimension of identity commitment, but not with the personal dimension. If one is fearful of being exposed as gay (i.e., not out), he might limit his use of symbolic acts (i.e., buying a house with a partner). However, he might be more likely to engage in some symbolic acts (e.g. use of an Internet support group for gay men), because there would be less risk of being exposed in that he would not have to be out to someone (personal identity commitment) in order to receive support. An individual who initially begins to develop a gay identity likely has not had that status conferred upon him. Thus, he might engage in symbolic acts which then assist development of his gay identity. Once a more positive internal gay identity develops, holding a gay status is strengthened, and he begins engaging in personal relationships (i.e., come out, establish a social network comprised of those who accept and support him as a gay man). This reasoning suggests that for those who are initially developing a sense of gay identity, some symbolic acts may be particularly important.

From a couple identity perspective, couple relationships likely dissolve when one partner internalizes homophobia and the other does not, compared with couples in which both partners do not internalize homophobia. Examining such discrepancy in gay identity among partners might be an important area for future research. Of course, entering into gay partnership for those who do not hold a gay identity is unlikely, but identity is not absolute; it lies on a continuum. For example, some men have sex with men, but do not self-identify as gay.

Taken together, several recommendations for future research are implied. These include: (a) continued use of multiple indicators of status and disentangle internal and external influences, (b) continued efforts to refine and examine the role of symbolic identity commitment, and (c) initiating examination of the role of gay identity-discrepant couples, or couples in which their statuses differ.

*Identity commitment and couple verification.* Consistent with theory, the link between identity commitment and couple verification was significant, suggesting that gay men in relationships with more important and supportive personal and symbolic dimensions of identity commitment reported more couple verification (a stronger match to ideal identity standards). This further demonstrates the benefit of adding symbolic identity commitment to identity theory as a fit specification for studying gay men in relationships; yet, little of the variance (13%) in couple verification was explained, suggesting that other factors might better explain couple verification as measured here. The link between identity commitment and couple verification also is consistent with previous literature. Oswald (2002) and LaSala (2000) found that gay couples who

reported supportive networks also reported feeling validated as a couple. Identity theory (Stryker, 1968) and the self-verification model (Burke, 1991) posit that identity commitment predicts and is predicted by verification, but longitudinal data are needed to test such a model, and such data were not available here. Thus, future research could build on this model by examining it longitudinally and with nonrecursive elements added between identity commitment and couple verification.

Additionally, Moorefield and Proulx (2003) argued that couple verification occurs on both the individual and dyadic levels; yet, only individual reports were used here. Couple roles attached to statuses are socially conferred, and the relationships of gay men often lack such social confirmation within the broader social context. In concert with previous research that suggests gay couples are more flexible in their roles (Berger, 2000; Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbretch, 1993), examining and measuring couple verification observationally with both members of a couple might better explain couple verification. Thus, examinations into the role-making and modification processes are important to future research.

Further, I believe that additional factors should be added to the model that would increase explanatory power of couple verification. One such factor is an expanded measurement of couple verification, discussed in the limitations section. A second factor includes the addition of the mode of interaction between partner and or couple and their identity commitment network. It might be that although a mother, for example, is highly important and there is extensive interaction with her that such interaction primarily occurs via email rather than face-to-face. Thus, it is important to ask whether type of

interaction influences the verification process. Another factor that should be added is the actual context of interactions. For example, if the couple perceives a work-related party (context) as antigay they might be less likely to enact a couple identity. This is not to say that there will not be individuals there that are progay and those individuals might provide positive identity feedback resulting in verification. Theoretically, it might be that in those contexts the salience of a couple identity is low thereby making verification of a couple identity less likely.

*Couple verification, relationship satisfaction, and couple identity.* Findings also demonstrated an association between couple verification and couple identity both directly and indirectly through relationship satisfaction, accounting for more than half of the variance in couple identity. These links again are consistent with both theory and previous research. Theoretically, those who report verification were expected to report a stronger sense of couple identity, as was found here. More interesting was the indirect and stronger effect through relationship satisfaction that accounted for over half of the variance in relationship satisfaction. This finding adds to the literature and theory in several ways. First, relationship satisfaction was conceptualized as primarily a subjective appraisal of the relationship. Because of its significance in the model, the appraisal of relationship satisfaction may be important particularly for gay men in relationships compared to heterosexual couples, which is consistent with the findings of Gottman and associates (2003). Second, it extends findings from studies examining verification and relationship satisfaction with heterosexual couples to gay men in relationships, suggesting that the link between verification and relationship satisfaction is important for

both gay men in relationships and heterosexual couples. Such similarity between types of relationships (i.e., gay and heterosexual) is consistent with previous research (e.g., Kurdek, 2004). Clearly, a particular strength of the model is that it builds on previous findings related to similarities between types of couple and adds to this focus by also incorporating issues unique to gay men in relationships. Recent research (Stets, 2003) suggested that when a match to ideal identity standards is present, positive emotion becomes dominant in the individual; this positive emotion may be reflected in terms of relationship satisfaction. Lastly, these results offer beginning evidence that relationship satisfaction partially mediates the link between couple verification and couple identity.

*Couple verification, distress, and couple identity.* The failure of distress to mediate the link between couple verification and couple identity was surprising, and this might have affected the fit of the hypothesized model. Theoretically, this, or at least the direct effect of couple verification on distress, should be linked (Burke, 1991; Burke & Stets, 1999). Using an example from Oswald (2002), consider a gay man in a relationship who receives a wedding invitation addressed only to him and not to the couple. Assuming they hold the identity standard that such invitations should be addressed to both, we would expect that (a) he feels upset after receiving the invitation, (b) couple verification does not occur, and (c) distress results. In an attempt to correct or realign his identity standards, the recipient might choose to call the sender and express his discontent. The thought of calling the sender (enacting a behavior to realign his identity standards) might invoke anxiety; however, once the phone call is made, his anxiety might subside and or be replaced with frustration or contempt, depending on the

sender's reaction. Importantly, such emotional responses are not be captured in the way distress was conceptualized and measured here (e.g., depressed mood and gay-specific related stress).

In another example, a couple believes that they argue too much compared with their ideal identity standards. Anticipation of discussing their discontent about the frequency or intensity of their arguing produces generalized stress and or anxiety compared to depression and gay-related stress. Thus, the lack of mediation in the model may lie more with measurement issues than with theory. If the entire process of verification is considered from the perspective of both design and measurement, additional insight is gleaned. That is, couple verification is a process and is best measured with observational and or longitudinal data (Burke, 1991), which may explain the lack of distress as a mediator. In fact, the lack of mediation could be a spurious finding. However, it also may be a measurement issue. Many previous studies examining verification and distress used measures of both anxiety and depression (e.g., Burke, 1991; Stets, 2003), which was not done here. Clearly, anxiety is an important dimension of distress. Thus, future studies should cross-validate this link using an additional measure of general stress and a measure of anxiety.

Although distress did not act as a mediator, the link between distress and couple identity was significant with higher levels of distress associated with a lower sense of couple identity. This may demonstrate a spillover effect from an individual's mood onto the relationship, and previous studies show a strong effect of distress on relationship outcomes (e.g., Lewis et al., 2003). This interpretation should be explored in the future.

*Links added to the modified model.* A direct link between identity commitment and couple identity was found and suggests that those who reported more identity commitment also reported a stronger couple identity. Theoretically, when commitment to an identity is high that identity is said to be more salient (Stryker, 1982, 1987). A salient identity should result in a greater likelihood of it being invoked. Also, an identity has to be invoked in order for the feedback loop to be engaged and verification to occur (Burke, 1991). When affective identity commitment is considered, as it was here, it is more influential to salience compared to interactional identity commitment, and thereby important directly to an identity (Owens & Serpe, 2003), so the use of affective identity commitment here contributes to the literature. Thus, a direct link between identity commitment and couple identity was theoretically justified. Had a measure of salience been included, it would be expected to mediate this link. Further, according to Burke, examining these links over time suggests that identity commitment affects couple identity, which then causes the verification process to engage and results in more identity commitment, reflecting a nonrecursive process. Thus, future studies need to further develop and address the use of affective identity commitment for gay couples.

The second path added to the model showed that higher reported identity commitment was related directly to higher relationship satisfaction. The link between identity commitment and relationship satisfaction was found previously in some studies (Stets, 2003) and not in others (Styker, 1982), all of which used identity theory explicitly. The current findings further support for this theoretical link. Also, this finding is consistent with other lines of research that found couples who engaged in joint activities

(Bell & Weinberg, 1979; McWhirter & Mattison, 1984), developed specific relationship rituals (Oswald, 2000; 2002) and had mutual friends also reported more relationship satisfaction (Frable, Wortman, & Joseph, 1997; McWhirter & Mattison).

### *Limitations*

Although the findings reported here both contribute to the literature and extends theory, the study is not without limitations, and some have been discussed previously. Additional limitations are discussed here. Most notably, technical difficulties might have affected the participation rate, as an unknown number of cases were lost from the web server (Pepper, personal communication December 29, 2004) with a maximum number of lost cases estimated at 40. Because this technical problem occurred in the beginning of recruitment when organizations specifically catering to gay men of racial/ethnic diversity were contacted, a less racial/ethnically diverse sample might have resulted.

Clearly, longitudinal and observational study is needed to obtain a more accurate and process-related view of these couples. Given that identity theory focuses on process and that this sample was surveyed only once, the findings do not truly reflect process. Instead, the study asked about processes at one point in time. Preprocess is more aptly measured with longitudinal and or observational methods. Specifically, the couple verification process is comprised of multiple micro interactions that occur over time and in context. As measured here, couple verification captured only one part of the process (i.e., a match to ideal identity standards). Other parts of the process were assumed. For example, if a respondent reported a match to ideal identity standards, then verification was assumed. However, to capture the complete process, researchers need to (a) measure

identity standards, (b) observe couple interactions in a particular context while (c) coding feedback from others, (d) measure one's interpretation of such feedback, (e) assess distress, relationship satisfaction, and couple identity, and then, (f) measure identity standards again. To gain greater depth of understanding, these methods should be repeated overtime.

Further, data were collected shortly after the election of a conservative president who opposed same-sex marriage and the provision of benefits to same-sex couples, and after several states passed or proposed bans on same-sex marriage. Acting as a threat to external validity, this might have affected participants by altering their ideas about possible symbolic acts (i.e., marriage, benefits) or their identity standards. Conversely, it is logical to assume that participants might experience more distress and less verification related to this event.

Lastly, because the original model did not fit the data, the modified model requires cross-validation. Importantly, the modified model, if examined longitudinally, could be used to examine relationship dissolution as a and outcome of identity disruption as suggested by Pasley et al. (2001). Because dissolution is an understudied area in the gay relationship literature, there is much to learn.

### *Conclusions*

For gay men, living in and navigating a largely disaffirming context can be difficult. For gay men in relationships, living in a disaffirming context is especially relevant given society's focus on and value of marriage and procreation--things unavailable to most gay couples. If the model tested here reflects relationship

development and maintenance, the results offer two particularly important conclusions. First, in spite of findings from previous studies of similarities between gay and heterosexual couples (e.g., Kurdek, 2001, 2004), it is important to situate gay relationships in context. Further, gay couples function comparably to heterosexual couples and report similar levels of relationship commitment and general relationship quality. Second, that they do so within disaffirming and stigmatizing contexts suggests a level of resilience not apparent in their heterosexual counterparts. Future studies need to attend to how these men perceive their social context as either approving or disapproving (status), and then focus on the strategies (symbolic dimension of identity commitment) these men use to affirm their relationships in spite of disapproval when present, as was done here. In other words, social networks and social support play a role in the development and maintenance of couples, and there is a burgeoning literature suggesting this (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). It may well be that a supportive social context also is required for effective development of gay relationships.

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APPENDIX A  
TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 188) in Frequency and Percent*

| Variable                            | N   | Percent |
|-------------------------------------|-----|---------|
| <b>Race/ethnicity</b>               |     |         |
| Asian                               | 3   | 1.6     |
| Black                               | 2   | 1.1     |
| Hispanic/Latino                     | 8   | 4.3     |
| White                               | 170 | 90.4    |
| Other                               | 5   | 2.7     |
| <b>Education</b>                    |     |         |
| ≤ High school                       | 5   | 2.7     |
| Some college                        | 34  | 18.1    |
| Four-year degree                    | 51  | 27.1    |
| Some graduate school                | 19  | 10.1    |
| Graduate degree                     | 69  | 36.7    |
| Other                               | 10  | 5.3     |
| <b>Currently enrolled in school</b> |     |         |
| Yes                                 | 36  | 19.1    |
| No                                  | 152 | 80.9    |
| <b>Employment</b>                   |     |         |
| Unemployed                          | 7   | 3.7     |
| Full time                           | 136 | 72.3    |
| Part time                           | 24  | 12.8    |
| Retired                             | 14  | 7.4     |
| Other                               | 7   | 3.7     |
| <b>Gross annual income (2003)</b>   |     |         |
| < \$10,000                          | 16  | 8.5     |

|                                  |     |      |
|----------------------------------|-----|------|
| \$10,000 – \$29,999              | 33  | 17.5 |
| \$30,000 – \$49,999              | 50  | 26.6 |
| \$50,000 – \$69,999              | 21  | 11.2 |
| \$70,000 – \$89,999              | 29  | 15.4 |
| ≥ 90,000                         | 39  | 20.7 |
| Previous heterosexual marriage   |     |      |
| Yes                              | 39  | 20.7 |
| No                               | 149 | 79.3 |
| Children from marriage           |     |      |
| Yes                              | 28  | 71.8 |
| No                               | 11  | 28.2 |
| Children in current relationship |     |      |
| Yes                              | 6   | 3.2  |
| No                               | 182 | 96.8 |
| Current sexual relationship      |     |      |
| Open                             | 48  | 25.5 |
| Closed                           | 137 | 72.9 |
| Other                            | 3   | 1.6  |

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Table 2. *Indicators of Composite Variables*

| Composite                 |  |  |   |                                     |
|---------------------------|--|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| Variable                  | Indicator 1  | Indicator 2                                    | Indicator 3                             | Indicator 4                         |
| Status                    | Outness Inventory (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000)   | Internalized Homophobia Scale (Meyer, 1996)    | Stigma Consciousness (Pinel, 1999)      | ---                                 |
| Commitment                | Personal Interactional Commitment Scale  | Personal Affective Commitment Scale            | Symbolic Interactional Commitment Scale | Symbolic Affective Commitment Scale |
| Couple Verification       | Marital Comparison Level Index (Sabatelli, 1984)                                   | ---  | ---                                     | ---                                 |
| Distress                  | Gay-related Stress Scale (Lewis et al., 2001)                                      | CES-D (Radloff, 1977)                          | ---                                     | ---                                 |
| Relationship Satisfaction | Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm et al., 1986)                            | Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988) | ---                                     | ---                                 |
| Couple Identity           | Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale- Cohesion Subscale (Olson, 1986) | ---  | ---                                     | ---                                 |

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Measured Variables in the Model\**

| Variable  | 1      | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6     | 7     | 8     | 9     | 10    | 11    | 12    | 13    | 14    |
|-----------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. RD     | --     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 2. OI     | .22*   | --    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 3. IHS    | .19*   | .08   | --    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 4. SC     | .48*   | .58*  | .29*  | --    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 5. SIC    | .52*   | .48*  | .33*  | .91*  | --    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 6. SAC    | .32*   | .34*  | .24*  | .59*  | .62*  | --    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 7. PIC    | .28*   | .43*  | .14   | .39*  | .42*  | .25*  | --    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 8. PAC    | .11    | .33*  | .12   | .28*  | .29*  | .44*  | .69*  | --    |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 9. MCLI   | .08    | .31*  | .10   | .28   | .23*  | .20*  | .29*  | .24*  | --    |       |       |       |       |       |
| 10. GRSS  | -.04   | -.28* | .06   | .03   | .02   | .21*  | -.08  | .04   | .00   | --    |       |       |       |       |
| 11. CES-D | -.07   | -.04  | -.03  | -.03  | -.04  | .07   | -.11  | -.09  | -.07  | .32*  | --    |       |       |       |
| 12. KMSS  | .21*   | .22*  | .18*  | .28*  | .27*  | .17*  | .33*  | .22*  | .72*  | -.07  | -.24* | --    |       |       |
| 13. RAS   | .19*   | .32*  | .03   | .29*  | .27*  | .22*  | .32*  | .26*  | .67*  | -.06  | -.19* | .85*  | --    |       |
| 14. CS    | .25*   | .39*  | .09   | .38*  | .38*  | .32*  | .40*  | .35*  | .59*  | -.13  | -.19* | .67*  | .66*  | --    |
| Mean      | 102.86 | 70.94 | 35.43 | 37.11 | 28.29 | 33.89 | 86.40 | 91.85 | 22.42 | 36.01 | 16.80 | 30.00 | 18.02 | 42.75 |
| SD        | 102.68 | 11.58 | 5.54  | 10.36 | 10.02 | 8.39  | 26.11 | 25.22 | 21.94 | 16.66 | 5.56  | 4.84  | 3.48  | 6.35  |
| $\alpha$  | --     | .63   | .67   | .63   | .92   | .93   | .75   | .76   | .94   | .95   | .90   | .90   | .95   | .92   |
| Kurtosis  | .12    | 2.34  | -.06  | -.42  | -.99  | 1.02  | -.70  | .11   | -.04  | .78   | 2.36  | .90   | 3.23  | 6.08  |
| Skewness  | 1.07   | -.84  | -.06  | .07   | -.06  | -.84  | -.25  | -.53  | -.27  | 1.10  | 1.59  | -1.13 | -1.67 | -1.78 |

\* Note:  $p < .05$ . RD = Relationship duration; OI = Outness Inventory; IHS = Internalized Homophobia Scale; SC = Stigma Consciousness; SIC = Symbolic Interactional Commitment; SAC = Symbolic Affective Commitment; PIC = Personal Interactional Commitment; PAC = Personal Affective Commitment; MCLI = Marital Comparison Level Index; GRSS = Gay Related Stress Scale; CES-D = Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depressed Mood Scale; KMA = Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale; RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale; CS = Cohesion Subscale of the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale.

Table 4 *Factor Loadings for EFA\**

| Factor | Status | Identity<br>Commitment | Relationship<br>Satisfaction | Distress |
|--------|--------|------------------------|------------------------------|----------|
| OI     | .76    |                        |                              |          |
| SC     | .76    |                        |                              |          |
| PIC    |        | .70                    |                              |          |
| PAC    |        | .74                    |                              |          |
| SIC    |        | .63                    |                              |          |
| SAC    |        | .62                    |                              |          |
| KMSS   |        |                        | .91                          |          |
| RAS    |        |                        | .91                          |          |
| CES-D  |        |                        |                              | .56      |
| GRSS   |        |                        |                              | .56      |

\*Note: OI = Outness Inventory; SC = Stigma Consciousness; SIC = Symbolic Interactional Commitment; SAC = Symbolic Affective Commitment; PIC = Personal Interactional Commitment; PAC = Personal Affective Commitment; GRSS = Gay Related Stress Scale; CES-D = Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depressed Mood Scale; KMA = Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale; RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale.

Table 5 *Correlations and Alphas for Standardized Composite Measures.*

| Composite Variable           | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4     | 5    | 6   |
|------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|------|-----|
| 1. Status                    | --   |      |      |       |      |     |
| 2. Identity Commitment       | .68* | --   |      |       |      |     |
| 3. Couple Verification       | .31* | .31* | --   |       |      |     |
| 4. Distress                  | -.08 | .00  | -.04 | --    |      |     |
| 5. Relationship Satisfaction | .32* | .36* | .73* | -.18* | --   |     |
| 6. Couple Identity           | .39* | .47* | .59* | -.20* | .69* | --  |
| Alpha                        | .77  | .95  | .94  | .94   | .94  | .92 |

\* Note:  $p \leq .01$

Table 6. *Unstandardized and Standardized Parameter Estimates, Critical Ratios, and Significant Levels for the Hypothesized Model (Standard Errors in Parentheses; N = 188).*

| Parameter Estimate                              | Hypothesized Model |              |                |
|---|--------------------|--------------|----------------|
|   | Unstandardized     | Standardized | Critical Ratio |
| Status → Identity Commitment                    | .63 (.06)          | .65          | 10.57**        |
| Identity Commitment → Couple Verification       | .40 (.09)          | .36          | 4.56**         |
| Couple Verification → Distress                  | .01 (.08)          | .01          | .13            |
| Couple Verification → Relationship Satisfaction | .72 (.05)          | .73          | 13.85**        |
| Couple Verification → Couple Identity           | .30 (.08)          | .33          | 3.85**         |
| Distress → Couple Identity                      | -.11 (.05)         | -.12         | -2.15*         |
| Relationship Satisfaction → Couple Identity     | .38 (.08)          | .41          | 4.95**         |

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Table 7. *Unstandardized and Standardized Parameter Estimates, Critical Ratios, and Significant Levels for the Modified Model (Standard Errors in Parentheses; N = 188).*

| Parameter Estimate                              | Modified Model |              |                |
|---|----------------|--------------|----------------|
|   | Unstandardized | Standardized | Critical Ratio |
| Status → Identity Commitment                    | .73 (.05)      | .71          | 13.33**        |
| Identity Commitment → Couple Verification       | .31 (.07)      | .32          | 4.50**         |
| Identity Commitment → Couple Identity           | .26 (.05)      | .27          | 4.97**         |
| Identity Commitment → Relationship Satisfaction | .15 (.05)      | .15          | 2.88*          |
| Couple Verification → Distress                  | .01 (.08)      | .01          | .91            |
| Couple Verification → Relationship Satisfaction | .68 (.05)      | .67          | 12.54**        |
| Couple Verification → Couple Identity           | .17 (.07)      | .17          | 2.34*          |
| Distress → Couple Identity                      | -.10 (.05)     | -.10         | -1.94*         |
| Relationship Satisfaction → Couple Identity     | .44 (.07)      | .44          | 5.97**         |

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Figure 1  
*Hypothesized Model*

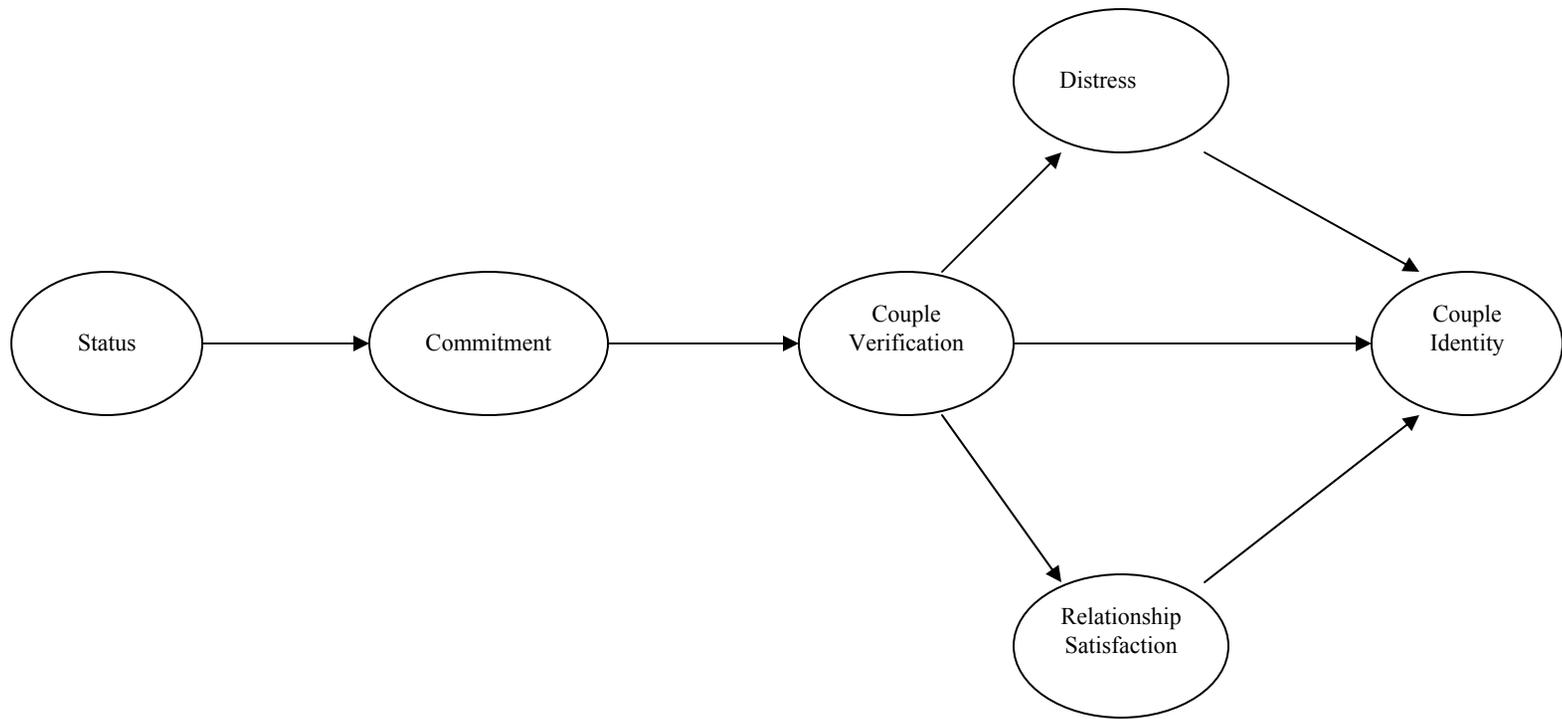


Figure 2

*Couple Verification Process Adapted from Burke's (1991) Self-Verification Model*

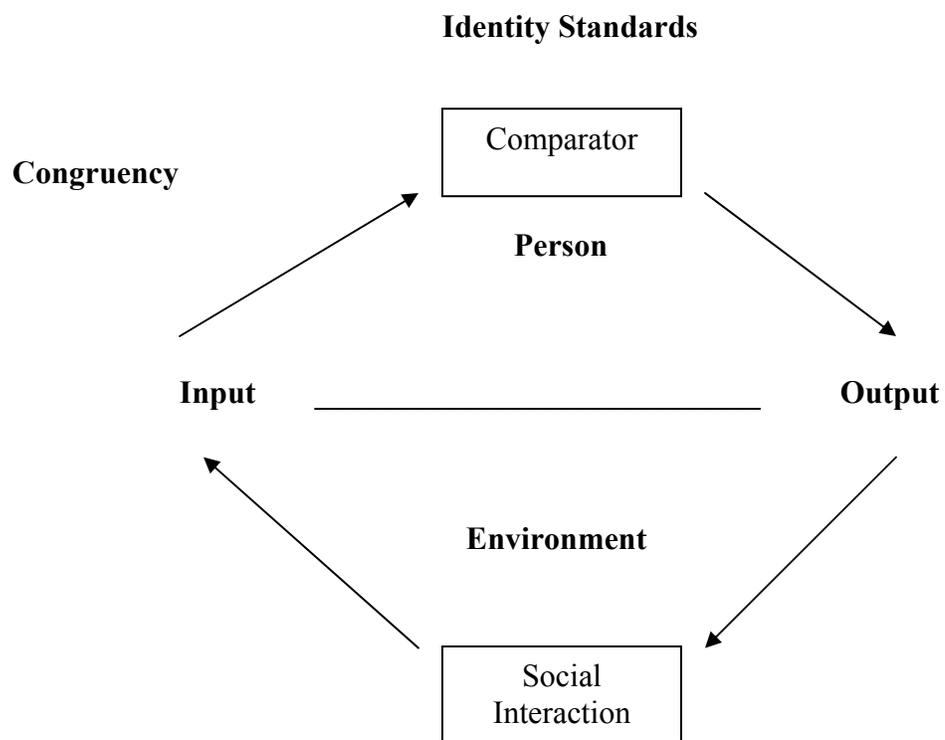
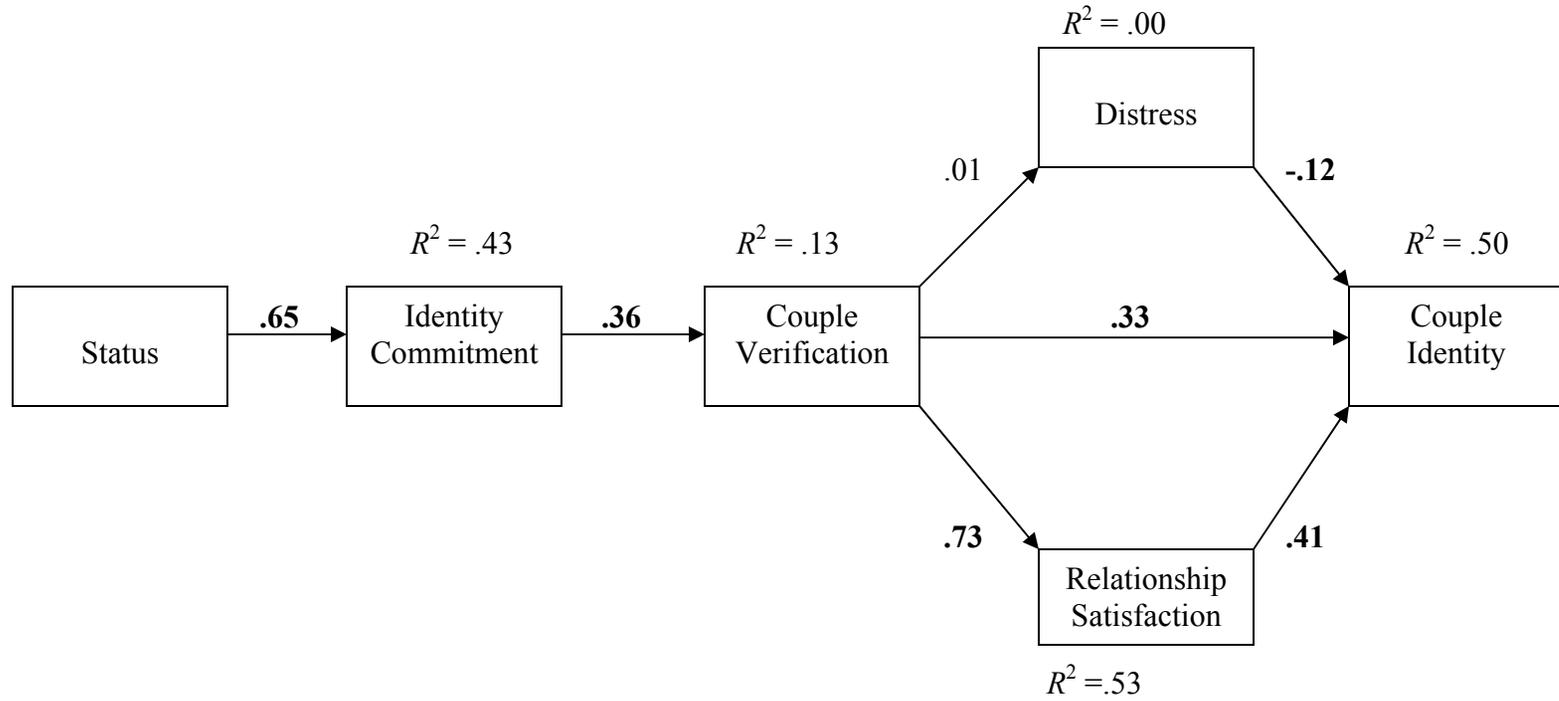


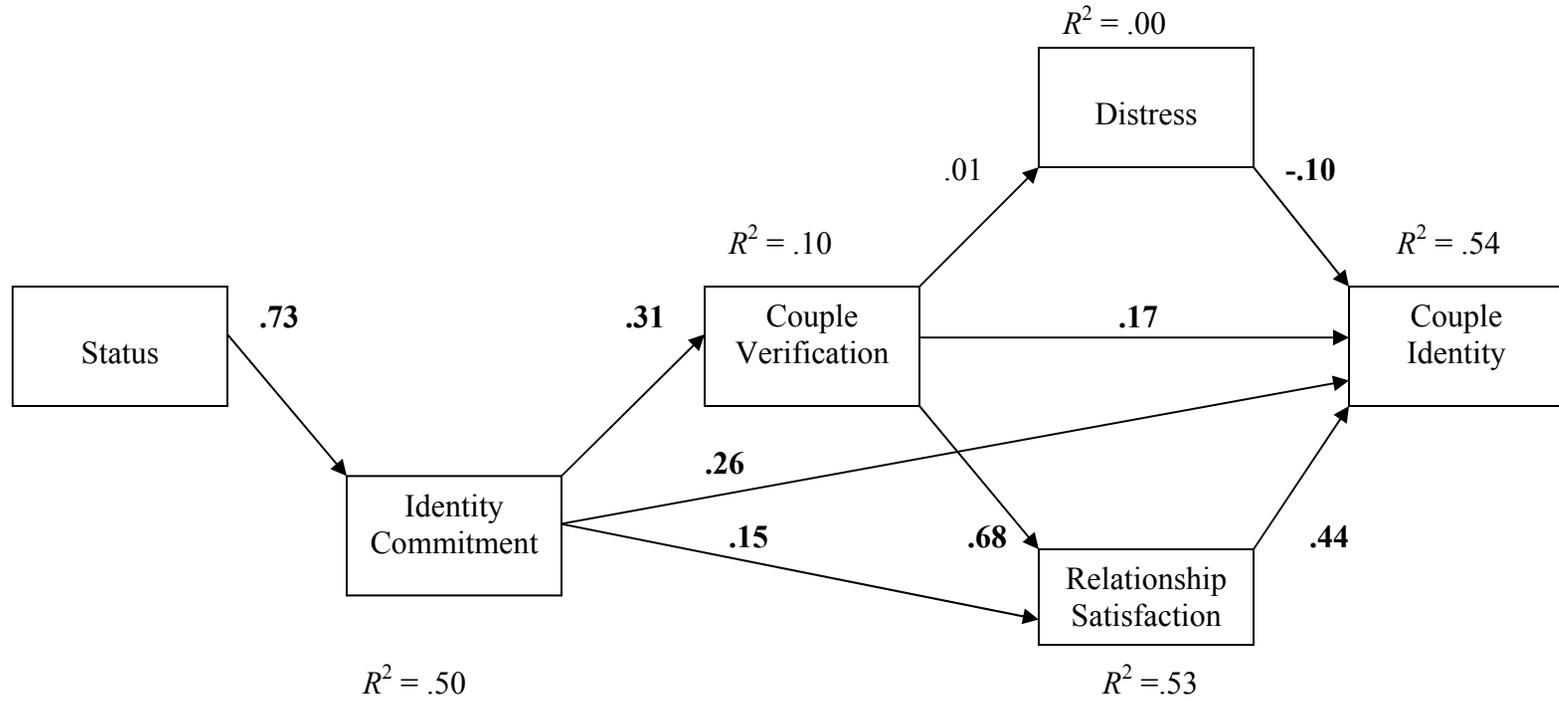
Figure 3. Path Model of the Links Between Status and Couple Identity (Standardized Solution; N = 188)



Note: Significant paths in bold.

$\chi^2 [7] = 35.15, p = .00, RMSEA = .15, CFI = .78, RMR = .15, GFI = .94.$

Figure 4. Modified Path Model of the Links Between Status and Couple Identity (Standardized Solution; N = 188)



Note: Significant paths in bold.  
 $\chi^2 [5] = 10.01, p = .07, RMSEA = .07, CFI = .96, RMR = .06, GFI = .98.$

APPENDIX B  
SURVEY ITEMS

*Demographics*

Q-1 Which of the following best describes you?

| Exclusively<br>Heterosexual |   |   |   |   | Exclusively<br>Homosexual |   |   |   |    |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---------------------------|---|---|---|----|
| 1                           | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6                         | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Q-2 In what year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

Q-3 What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_(yrs)

Q-4 With which race/ethnicity do you identify?

- A ASIAN
- B BLACK/ AFRICAN AMERICAN
- C HISPANIC/ LATINO
- D NATIVE AMERICAN
- E WHITE
- F OTHER (specify)\_\_\_\_\_

Q-5 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- A Less than high school
- B High school diploma
- C Vocation/technical school
- D Some college
- E Bachelor's degree
- F Some graduate school
- G Master's degree
- H Doctoral degree
- I Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_

Q-6 Are you currently enrolled in school? NO YES

Q-7 In which city and state do you live?

City\_\_\_\_\_State\_\_\_\_\_

Q-8 Are you employed:

- A Full time
- B Part time
- C Unemployed
- D Retired
- E Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_

Q-9 What was your gross individual income in 2003?

- A Less than \$10,000
- B \$10,000 to \$19,999
- C \$20,000 to \$29,999
- D \$30,000 to \$39,999
- E \$40,000 to \$49,999
- F \$50,000 to \$59,999
- G \$60,000 to \$69,999
- H \$70,000 to \$79,999
- I \$80,000 to \$89,999
- J \$90,000 to \$99,999
- K Over \$100,000

Q-10 Are your parents currently:

- A Single
- B Married (and in first marriage)
- C Separated (from first marriage)
- D Divorced and both single
- E Divorce and mother remarried
- F Divorced and father remarried
- G Divorced and both mother and father remarried
- H Widowed mother
- I Widowed father
- K Widowed mother and she remarried
- L Widowed father and he remarried
- M Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_

Q-11 Did you live with your last significant other?

NO

YES---- If yes, how old was he \_\_\_\_\_yrs.

---- If yes, how long were you in that relationship?

\_\_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_\_Months

Q-12 Which of the following best describes your last relationship?

- 1 I had sexual partners outside of the relationship
- 2 I did not have sexual partners outside of the relationship
- 3 Does not apply to me

Q-13 Have you ever been married to a woman?

NO

YES--- If yes, how many children do you have from that marriage?

Q-14 Are you currently in a relationship?

NO

YES---- If yes, how old is he \_\_\_\_yrs.

---- If yes, how long have you been in this relationship?

\_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_Months

Q-15 What best describes your relationship?

- 1 I have sexual partners outside of the relationship
- 2 I do not have sexual partners outside of the relationship

Q-16 Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?

- 1 Casually dating more than one person
- 2 Casually dating one person
- 3 Seriously dating more than one person
- 4 Seriously dating one person
- 5 Can see yourself with the same person for the next 5 years
- 6 Can see yourself with the same person for the next 10 years
- 7 Can see yourself with the same person for the rest of your life

Q-17 Have you adopted or used a surrogate mother to bring children into this relationship?

NO

YES

*The Outness Inventory*

In general, to what degree is your sexual orientation known by and openly discussed by the following individuals:

|   | Does not know | Might know, never discussed | Probably knows, never discussed | Probably knows, rarely discussed | Definitely knows, rarely discussed | Definitely knows, sometimes discussed | Definitely knows, openly discussed |
|---|---------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Mother  | 1             | 2                           | 3                               | 4                                | 5                                  | 6                                     | 7                                  |
| Father  | 1             | 2                           | 3                               | 4                                | 5                                  | 6                                     | 7                                  |
| Brothers/Sisters                                | 1             | 2                           | 3                               | 4                                | 5                                  | 6                                     | 7                                  |
| Extended family and relatives                   | 1             | 2                           | 3                               | 4                                | 5                                  | 6                                     | 7                                  |
| Other family members (e.g., stepparent)         | 1             | 2                           | 3                               | 4                                | 5                                  | 6                                     | 7                                  |
| Best friend                                     | 1             | 2                           | 3                               | 4                                | 5                                  | 6                                     | 7                                  |
| Closest friends                                 | 1             | 2                           | 3                               | 4                                | 5                                  | 6                                     | 7                                  |
| Heterosexual friends you have known a long time | 1             | 2                           | 3                               | 4                                | 5                                  | 6                                     | 7                                  |
| Newer heterosexual friends                      | 1             | 2                           | 3                               | 4                                | 5                                  | 6                                     | 7                                  |
| Work and or school peers                        | 1             | 2                           | 3                               | 4                                | 5                                  | 6                                     | 7                                  |
| Work supervisors and or school faculty/staff    | 1             | 2                           | 3                               | 4                                | 5                                  | 6                                     | 7                                  |
| Members of your religious community             | 1             | 2                           | 3                               | 4                                | 5                                  | 6                                     | 7                                  |
| Leaders of your religious community             | 1             | 2                           | 3                               | 4                                | 5                                  | 6                                     | 7                                  |
| Neighbors                                       | 1             | 2                           | 3                               | 4                                | 5                                  | 6                                     | 7                                  |
| Strangers                                       | 1             | 2                           | 3                               | 4                                | 5                                  | 6                                     | 7                                  |

*Internalized Homophobia Scale*

Please rate your agreement with the following statements:

|  | Strongly<br>Disagree |   |   |   | Strongly<br>Agree |
|--|----------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|
| I have tried to stop being attracted to men  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| If someone offered me the chance to be completely heterosexual, I would take the chance                      | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| I wish I weren't gay/bisexual  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| I feel that being gay/bisexual is a personal shortcoming for me  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| I would like to get professional help in order to change my sexual orientation from gay/bisexual to straight | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| I have tried to become more sexual attracted to women  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| I often feel it best to avoid personal or social involvement with other gays/bisexuals.                      | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| I feel alienated from myself because of being gay/bisexual   | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| I wish I could develop more erotic feelings about women  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |

*Stigma Consciousness Questionnaire*

Please rate the extent to which **you** agree with the following statements

|  | Strongly<br>Disagree |   |   |   |   |   | Strongly<br>Agree |
|--|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|-------------------|
| Stereotypes about homosexuals have not affected me personally  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| I never worry that my behaviors will be viewed as stereotypical of homosexuals   | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| When interacting with heterosexuals who know of my sexual orientation, I feel like they interpret all my behaviors in terms of the fact that I am homosexual | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| Most heterosexuals do not judge homosexuals on the basis of their sexual orientation   | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| My being homosexual does not influence how homosexuals act with me   | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| I almost never think about the fact that I am homosexual when I interact with heterosexuals  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| My being homosexual does not influence how people act with me  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| Most heterosexuals have a lot more homophobic thoughts than they actually express  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| I often think heterosexuals unfairly are accused of being homophobic   | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| Most heterosexuals have a problem viewing homosexuals as equals  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |

*Symbolic Interactional Commitment Scale*

Thinking of you and your partner as a couple, please rate the extent to which you use or engage in these types of relationships as a couple.

|  | None                                 |                                  |   |                                  |   |                  | A lot |
|--|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|---|------------------|-------|
| 1. Community resources<br>(e.g., couple support or social groups)                  | 1                                    | 2                                | 3 | 4                                | 5 | 6                | 7     |
| 2. Internet resources<br>(e.g., couple networks, chat groups)                      | 1                                    | 2                                | 3 | 4                                | 5 | 6                | 7     |
| 3. Rituals<br>(for example commitment ceremonies,<br>having dinner together, etc.) | 1                                    | 2                                | 3 | 4                                | 5 | 6                | 7     |
|  | None                                 |                                  |   |                                  |   |                  | All   |
| 4. Joining of finances<br>(e.g., checking accounts, credit cards)                  | 1                                    | 2                                | 3 | 4                                | 5 | 6                | 7     |
| 5. Legal documents<br>(e.g., wills, power of attorney)                             | 1                                    | 2                                | 3 | 4                                | 5 | 6                | 7     |
| 6. Joint purchases (e.g., cars, home)  | 1                                    | 2                                | 3 | 4                                | 5 | 6                | 7     |
|  | Never spend<br>the night<br>together | Spend some<br>nights<br>together |   | Spend most<br>nights<br>together |   | Live<br>together |       |
| 7. Live together   | 1                                    | 2                                | 3 | 4                                | 5 | 6                | 7     |

*Symbolic Affective Commitment Scale*

Thinking of you and your partner as a couple, please rate the extent to which you feel it is important to engage in these types of relationships as a couple.

|  | Not At All<br>Important |   |   | Very<br>Important |   |   |   |
|--|-------------------------|---|---|-------------------|---|---|---|
| 1. Community resources<br>(e.g., couple support or social groups)                  | 1                       | 2 | 3 | 4                 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 2. Internet resources<br>(e.g., couple networks, chat groups)                      | 1                       | 2 | 3 | 4                 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 3. Rituals<br>(for example commitment ceremonies,<br>having dinner together, etc.) | 1                       | 2 | 3 | 4                 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 4. Joining of finances<br>(e.g., checking accounts, credit cards)                  | 1                       | 2 | 3 | 4                 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 5. Legal documents<br>(e.g., wills, power of attorney)                             | 1                       | 2 | 3 | 4                 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 6. Joint purchases<br>(e.g., cars, home)   | 1                       | 2 | 3 | 4                 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 7. Live together   | 1                       | 2 | 3 | 4                 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

*Personal Interactional Commitment Scale*

Thinking of you and your partner as a couple, please rate the extent to which you interact with the following people as a couple.

|  | None |   |   |   |   |   | A lot |
|--|------|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
| 1. Your family<br>(e.g., mother, father, siblings)               | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7     |
| 2. People you consider family, but<br>who are not related to you | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7     |
| 3. Your partner's family   | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7     |
| 4. Friends   | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7     |
| 5. Your children   | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7     |
| 6. Co-workers  | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7     |
| 7. General public  | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7     |
| 8. Others:<br>Please specify _____                               | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7     |

*Personal Affective Commitment Scale*

Thinking of you and your partner as a couple, please rate the extent to which you feel these relationships are important to you as a couple.

|  | Not At All<br>Important |   |   |   | Very<br>Important |   |   |  |
|--|-------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|---|---|--|
| 1. Biological family<br>(e.g., mother, father, siblings)         | 1                       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 | 6 | 7 |  |
| 2. People you consider family, but<br>who are not related to you | 1                       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 | 6 | 7 |  |
| 3. Your partner's biological family                              | 1                       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 | 6 | 7 |  |
| 4. Friends   | 1                       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 | 6 | 7 |  |
| 5. Your children   | 1                       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 | 6 | 7 |  |
| 6. Co-workers  | 1                       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 | 6 | 7 |  |
| 7. General public  | 1                       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 | 6 | 7 |  |
| 8. Others:<br>Please specify _____                               | 1                       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 | 6 | 7 |  |

*Marital Comparison Level Index*

Indicate the appropriate number that represents how your current relationship experiences between you and your partner compare to your ideal relationship expectations.

|  | Worse<br>Than I<br>Expected<br>- 3 | - 2 | - 1 | About<br>What I<br>Expected<br>0 | + 1 | + 2 | Better Than<br>I Expected<br>+ 3 |
|--|------------------------------------|-----|-----|----------------------------------|-----|-----|----------------------------------|
| Amount of companionship                                    | - 3                                | - 2 | - 1 | 0                                | + 1 | + 2 | + 3                              |
| Amount your partner trusts you                             | - 3                                | - 2 | - 1 | 0                                | + 1 | + 2 | + 3                              |
| Amount of sexual activity                                  | - 3                                | - 2 | - 1 | 0                                | + 1 | + 2 | + 3                              |
| Amount of confiding  | - 3                                | - 2 | - 1 | 0                                | + 1 | + 2 | + 3                              |
| Amount of conflict over daily decisions                    | - 3                                | - 2 | - 1 | 0                                | + 1 | + 2 | + 3                              |
| Amount of affection your partner displays                  | - 3                                | - 2 | - 1 | 0                                | + 1 | + 2 | + 3                              |
| Amount of the responsibility for household tasks is shared | - 3                                | - 2 | - 1 | 0                                | + 1 | + 2 | + 3                              |
| Amount your partner is willing to listen to you            | - 3                                | - 2 | - 1 | 0                                | + 1 | + 2 | + 3                              |
| Amount of relationship equality you experience             | - 3                                | - 2 | - 1 | 0                                | + 1 | + 2 | + 3                              |
| Amount of conflict over money                              | - 3                                | - 2 | - 1 | 0                                | + 1 | + 2 | + 3                              |
| Amount of compatibility                                    | - 3                                | - 2 | - 1 | 0                                | + 1 | + 2 | + 3                              |
| Amount of conflict over leisure time                       | - 3                                | - 2 | - 1 | 0                                | + 1 | + 2 | + 3                              |
| Amount of disagreement over friends                        | - 3                                | - 2 | - 1 | 0                                | + 1 | + 2 | + 3                              |
| Amount of interest in sex your partner expresses           | - 3                                | - 2 | - 1 | 0                                | + 1 | + 2 | + 3                              |
| Fairness with which money is spent                         | - 3                                | - 2 | - 1 | 0                                | + 1 | + 2 | + 3                              |

---

|  |     |     |     |   |     |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|-----|---|-----|-----|-----|
| Amount of criticism your partner expresses   | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |
| Amount of mutual respect   | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |
| Degree to which your communication is effective                                      | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |
| Amount of love   | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |
| Degree to which your needs are met   | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |
| Amount of freedom you experience in pursuing other friendships                       | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |
| Amount of responsibility your partner accepts for household chores                   | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |
| Amount that you discuss sex  | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |
| Amount of privacy  | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |
| Amount to which your partner supports your occupation                                | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |
| Amount to which you and your partner agree on your life style                        | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |
| Amount to which you and your partner agree on the number of children to have, if any | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |
| Degree of physical attractiveness of your partner                                    | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |
| Amount of arguing over petty issues  | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |
| Amount of jealousy your partner expresses  | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |
| Amount of commitment you experience from your spouse                                 | - 3 | - 2 | - 1 | 0 | + 1 | + 2 | + 3 |

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### *Gay-Related Stress Scale (GRSS)*

For each of the statements below, please rate the amount of stress caused by these experiences. Scored from 1 (No Stress) to 5 (Severe Stress)

#### Family Reaction

1. Rejection by family members due to my sexual orientation.
2. My family's lack of understanding about my orientation.
3. Distance between me and family due to my orientation.
4. Lack of support from my family members due to my orientation.
5. My family's overzealous interest in my sexual orientation.
6. Rejections by my brothers and sisters.
7. Feeling that my family tolerates rather than accepts my sexual orientation.
8. Fact that my family ignores my sexual orientation.
9. Talking with some of my relatives about my sexual orientation.

#### Family Reactions To My Partner

10. Introducing a new partner to my family.
11. Having my partner and family in the same place.
12. Unwillingness of my family to accept my partner.

#### Visibility with Family and Friends

13. Keeping my orientation secret from family and friends
14. Expectation from friends and family who do not know my orientation for me to date and marry someone of the opposite sex.
15. Hiding my sexual orientation from others.
16. Possible rejection when I tell about my sexual orientation.
17. Telling straight friends about my sexual orientation.
18. Loss of friends due to my sexual orientation.

#### Visibility with Work and Public

19. Dating someone openly gay
20. Having people at work find out my orientation.
21. Rumors about me at work due to my sexual orientation.
22. Being in public with groups of homosexuals (e.g., in a bar, church, rally).
23. Being exposed as homosexual.
24. Image of homosexuals created by some visible, vocal gays and lesbians.

#### Violence and Harassment

25. Threat of violence due to my sexual orientation.
26. Physical assault due to my sexual orientation.
27. Constant need to be careful to avoid having anti-homosexual violence directed at me.
28. Fear that I will be attacked due to my sexual orientation.
29. Possibility there will be violence when I am out with a group of homosexuals.

- 30. Harassment due to my sexual orientation.
- 31. Being called names due to my sexual orientation.

#### Discrimination at Work

- 35. Potential job loss due to sexual orientation.
- 36. Loss of job due to sexual orientation.
- 37. Working in a homophobic atmosphere.
- 38. Harassment at work due to my sexual orientation.
- 39. Lack of security at work because I am homosexual.
- 40. Inability to get some jobs due to my sexual orientation.
- 41. A feeling that I must always prove myself at work because of my sexual orientation.

#### General Discrimination

- 42. Mental health discrimination due to my sexual orientation.
- 43. Housing discrimination due to my sexual orientation.
- 44. Discrimination in social services due to my sexual orientation.

#### HIV/AIDS

- 45. Need to exercise caution when dating due to AIDS.
- 46. constantly having to think about safe sex.
- 47. Limits I have placed on sexual activity due to AIDS.
- 48. Fear that I might get HIV or AIDS.
- 49. Difficulty meeting people due to concern over AIDS.
- 50. Difficulty finding someone to love.
- 51. Fear that my friends might be at risk for HIV.

*CES-D*

Using the scale below, indicate the number which best describes how often you felt or behaved this way—DURING THE PAST WEEK.

- 1- Rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day)
- 2- Some or a little of the time (1-2 days)
- 3- Occasionally or a moderate amount of time (3-4 days)
- 4- Most or all of the time (5-7 days)

During the past week:

- 1. I was bothered by things that usually do not bother me.
- 2. I did not feel like eating: my appetite was poor.
- 3. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends.
- 4. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.
- 5. I felt depressed.
- 6. I felt that everything I did was an effort.
- 7. I felt fearful.
- 8. My sleep was restless.
- 9. I talked less than usual.
- 10. I felt lonely.
- 11. I felt sad.
- 12. I could not get “going.”

*Relationship Assessment Scale*

Please rate the following items.

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?

|        |   |         |   |                |
|--------|---|---------|---|----------------|
| Poorly |   | Average |   | Extremely Well |
| 1      | 2 | 3       | 4 | 5              |

2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

|             |   |         |   |                     |
|-------------|---|---------|---|---------------------|
| Unsatisfied |   | Average |   | Extremely Satisfied |
| 1           | 2 | 3       | 4 | 5                   |

3. How good is your relationship compared to most?

|      |   |         |   |           |
|------|---|---------|---|-----------|
| Poor |   | Average |   | Excellent |
| 1    | 2 | 3       | 4 | 5         |

4. How often do you wish you had not gotten into this relationship?

|       |   |         |   |            |
|-------|---|---------|---|------------|
| Never |   | Average |   | Very Often |
| 1     | 2 | 3       | 4 | 5          |

5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?

|               |   |         |   |            |
|---------------|---|---------|---|------------|
| Hardly at all |   | Average |   | Completely |
| 1             | 2 | 3       | 4 | 5          |

6. How much do you love your partner?

|          |   |         |   |           |
|----------|---|---------|---|-----------|
| Not much |   | Average |   | Very Much |
| 1        | 2 | 3       | 4 | 5         |

7. How many problems are there in your relationship?

|          |   |         |   |           |
|----------|---|---------|---|-----------|
| Very few |   | Average |   | Very many |
| 1        | 2 | 3       | 4 | 5         |

*Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale*

Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following things.

|   | Extremely<br>dissatisfied | Very<br>dissatisfied | Somewhat<br>dissatisfied | Mixed | Somewhat<br>satisfied | Very<br>satisfied | Extremely<br>satisfied |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1. How satisfied are<br>you with your<br>marriage?                          | 1                         | 2                    | 3                        | 4     | 5                     | 6                 | 7                      |
| 2. How satisfied are<br>you with your<br>significant other as a<br>partner? | 1                         | 2                    | 3                        | 4     | 5                     | 6                 | 7                      |
| 3. How satisfied are<br>you with your<br>relationship with<br>your partner? | 1                         | 2                    | 3                        | 4     | 5                     | 6                 | 7                      |

*Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES-III)- Cohesion Subscale*

Using the following scale, please answer the questions in regard to you and your partner.

|  | Almost<br>Never | Once in a<br>while | Sometimes | Frequently | Almost<br>Always |
|--|-----------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|------------------|
| We ask each other for help   | 1               | 2                  | 3         | 4          | 5                |
| We approve of each other's friends                                     | 1               | 2                  | 3         | 4          | 5                |
| We like to do things with just us                                      | 1               | 2                  | 3         | 4          | 5                |
| We feel closer to other than people<br>outside the two of us           | 1               | 2                  | 3         | 4          | 5                |
| We like to spend free time together                                    | 1               | 2                  | 3         | 4          | 5                |
| We feel very close to each other                                       | 1               | 2                  | 3         | 4          | 5                |
| When we plan to get together for<br>activities, both of us are present | 1               | 2                  | 3         | 4          | 5                |
| We can easily think of things to do<br>together as a couple            | 1               | 2                  | 3         | 4          | 5                |
| We consult each other on decisions                                     | 1               | 2                  | 3         | 4          | 5                |
| Togetherness is important  | 1               | 2                  | 3         | 4          | 5                |