

# Examining Internalized Homonegativity

Narratives of Same Sex Attracted Black Men

P. RYAN GRANT, *La Salle University*

**Abstract:** Research describes how Black cisgender queer men become limited in their sexual identity development when they internalize anti-gay messages disseminated from familial, religious, and social spaces. A hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative research study was conducted to explore nine Black cisgender same gender loving men's experiences with homonegativity. Results suggest that internalized homonegativity may reflect challenges that transcend same sex sexual and romantic engagement. Internalized homonegativity may arise due to fear of lost privilege that is contingent on masculine performance in various social contexts.

**Keywords:** internalized homonegativity, Black, men, sexuality, sexual orientation, masculinity

THE FOLLOWING PIECE WILL SERVE AS A THEORETICAL NARRATIVE that will use labels such as same gender loving, same sex attracted, queer, and gay interchangeably as a way of acknowledging the many terms that can be used to describe men who have desires for, or engage sexually and romantically with, other men. The term 'Black' will also be used throughout this narrative to denote any person who identifies with the African diaspora.

There exists a societal belief that cisgender Black same gender loving men struggle with self-acceptance (Ford, 2015; Harris, 2014; hooks, 2004; Lemelle, 2010; McCune, 2008). Behaviors such as avoiding the “coming out” process (the process of sexual orientation disclosure), down-low (private homoerotic) engagement, and adhering to rigid performances of hegemonic masculinity (a performance of masculinity rooted in the dominance of others) further support a general belief that some Black queer men are uncomfortable with their sexual identities (hooks, 2004; Lemelle & Battle, 2004; McCune 2008; Snorton, 2014). However, these behaviors may be manifestations of survival tactics cisgender Black queer men learn to adopt in order to thrive in a White supremacist, hetero-supremist, society that has fundamentally rejected their multiple identities (McCune, 2008; Stone, 2011). Homonegativity—a more insidious form of homophobia—describes the negative feelings toward homosexuality that stem from socially constructed stereotypes and attitudes about same gender loving identity and practice (Berg et al., 2013; Lemelle, 2010; Ward, 2005; Winder, 2015). Homonegativity exists a historic theme in the lives of Black queer men, as evidenced by the ostracizing and rejection many of this cohort have experienced from family, social groups, religious institutions, and other spheres that usually serve as social supports within the Black experience (LaSala & Frierson, 2012; Ward, 2005; Winder, 2015). Reflective of Badura’s theory of modeling, the external homonegativity Black queer men experience from their communities may lead to internalized homonegativity (negative perceptions of homosexuality directed inward) and may influence Black same gender loving men’s efforts to separate themselves from perceived associations with gayness (Han, 2015; Lemelle, 2010; Lemelle & Battle, 2004; McCune, 2008).

### *Theory*

The relationship between gay Black men and homonegativity can be conceptualized through various theories of sexual identity development. Possi-

bly the most culturally integrative of queer identity development models to date, Morales (1989) highlights that ethnic same sex attracted persons have the task of maneuvering three distinct identities—racial, sexual, and social. He suggests that some Black same gender loving men may be less advanced in their identity development as a consequence of adhering to strict norms perpetuated in the spheres in which they have been nurtured; whereas others may have discovered ways to actualize their sexual identities at varying levels, based on the spaces in which they exist. The following study expands upon Morales' (1989) model and uses Black men's engagement with their influential spheres—religious, familial, and social—to further understand how Black same gender loving men experience internalized homonegativity.

### *The Study*

The following study investigated the phenomenological impact of internalized homonegativity among cisgender Black same gender loving men and highlighted the functional domains that may be affected when Black men experience self-prejudice due to their sexual orientation. Specifically, this study sought to answer the question, “What are the ways Black same sex attracted men experience internalized homonegativity?” The external factors that influence Black queer male internalized homonegativity, as well as how the experiences of internalized homonegativity impact the development of sexual identity appraisal, relationship building, and overall functioning in cisgender Black queer men were also examined. This study did not explicitly observe Black gay male life in relation to HIV/AIDS contraction, as literature studying the lives of Black same gender loving men has historically observed this cohort through the lens of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment (Moseby, 2017; Quinn & Dickson-Gomez, 2016; Quinn et al., 2015; Quinn et al., 2016). Increased understanding of homonegativity's impact on the functioning of Black queer men is hoped to aid in their psychological treatment. It may be assumed that the therapeutic goals for Black same gender loving men center around actualizing sexual identities and journeying toward coming out. However, literature highlights that coming out may not be prioritized by many Black queer men (Fassinger, 1996; McCune, 2008; Stone & Ward, 2011). It is the researcher's hope that the findings from this study will offer insight into the needs of cisgender Black gay men who are navigating their sexual identities, which may inform clinicians working with this population and may provide further data on Black queer male identity development.

## Method

A hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative research design was selected to provide a detailed report of the lived experiences of homonegativity among Black same gender loving men (VanManen, 1990). This design was chosen for its effectiveness in acquiring culturally specific data about a specific cohort, when said cohort or issue is relatively under-investigated (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliot, 2016; Kafle, 2013; Mack et al, 2005). This design also allows for data collection in a natural setting, which affords the researcher and participants greater opportunity for spontaneous interaction (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliot, 2016; Mack et al, 2005). The following study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at La Salle University in Philadelphia, PA.

### *Researcher*

The primary researcher is a first-generation Jamaican American, cisgender, same gender loving, man. Born and nurtured in a conservative Caribbean and Seventh-Day Adventist Christian culture, the researcher has a personal relationship with internalized homonegativity that has motivated his investigation of homonegativity among other Black cisgender same gender loving men. To address researcher bias and support the credibility of the study, the researcher kept reflexive journal research memos throughout the study (Hays & Singh, 2012). In addition to the primary researcher, two research assistants who were trained in qualitative data analysis served as peer debriefers. A faculty advisor also served as a consultant throughout the process of data collection and analysis.

### *Participants*

The current study explored the lived experiences of nine cisgender, non-Hispanic/Latinx, Black, same gender loving men. In concert with expectations for qualitative data collection, recruitment and data collection continued concurrently until a level of saturation was met (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012). All participants in the study: (a) self-identified as Black, or as a part of the African diaspora; (b) identified as cisgender; and (c) acknowledged having sexual or romantic attractions to individuals of the same gender (which does not require self-identification with labels such as gay, queer, down low, discrete, etc.). Individuals under the age of 18 years were excluded from the study, which allowed the researcher to

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Highest Education Attained</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Religious Affiliation</i>
I	56	Doctorate (MD)	Medicine-Retired	Single (Div.)	No
II	41	Masters	Educator-Employed	Committed Rel	Yes
III	32	Masters	GIS Tech-Employed	Committed Rel.	No
IV	59	Masters	Educator-Retired	Committed Rel. (M)	Yes
V	37	Masters	Therapist-Employed	Committed Rel.	Yes
VI	58	Doctorate (PhD)	Educator-Employed	Committed Rel. (M)	Yes
VII	29	Doctorate (DMD)	Dentistry-Employed	Committed Rel.	Yes
VIII	30	Masters	Prog. Officer-Employed	Committed Rel.	No
IX	30	Masters	Educator-Employed	Single	Yes

avoid additional methodic measures of assent needed when dealing with underage participants (Hays & Singh, 2012). Those who reportedly did not experience internalized homonegativity were excluded from the study in efforts to have the collected data align with the focus of the investigation. It was not required that the study participants have experience with dating the same gender or disclosing their identity to others, as literature recognizes the barriers that prevent many ethnic gay persons from having this experience (Lemelle, 2010; Morales, 1989; Trotten, 2015).

The primary researcher developed a demographic questionnaire in order to collect data on participants' race, age, education level, and occupation. Participants' demographic data were collected and depicted in Table 1. Data from three participants who completed the consent and demographic questionnaire were not included in the final report, as these participants did not engage the primary researcher's numerous outreach attempts to participate in the qualitative interview. The nine men whose data were collected were

aged between 29 and 59 (median = 37). Saturation in this study was met, as similar experiential themes arose throughout the interviewees' responses (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012).

All participants in the study were college graduates who held some sort of graduate or terminal degree. A majority of participants were either married or in a committed relationship ( $n = 7$ ; 78%) and employed ( $n = 7$ ; 78%); while the other participants identified as single ( $n = 1$ ; 11%), divorced ( $n = 1$ ; 11%), and retired ( $n = 2$ ; 22%). Fifty-six percent ( $n = 5$ ) of participants currently participated in religious engagement while 44% ( $n=4$ ) reported that they did not. The reported frequency with which the participants engaged in religious activity spanned from daily to monthly participation.

### *Measure*

The primary researcher developed a semi-structured interview and used this tool as the main method of data collection (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliott, 2016; Creswell, 2013; Hays, & Singh, 2012; VanManen, 1990). This approximately 90-minute interview protocol was used to explore participants' perceptions of, and experiences with, internalized homonegativity (Appendix A). The interview questions were open-ended to influence expansive responses that aligned with the participants' experiences (Hays, & Singh, 2012).

### *Procedure*

A convenience outreach methodology was conducted to recruit the participants of this study. The primary researcher used his social networks (professional and social) to amass a snowball sample of Black, cisgender, same gender loving men to participate in the study (Brewis, 2014; Hays & Singh, 2012). Both openly and non-openly expressing same gender loving cisgender Black men were recruited for the study. After identifying potential participants for the interview, the primary researcher used cold calling to contact and inform the potential participants of the study. Upon receiving expressed interest in the study, the primary investigator provided potential participants with consent and demographic questionnaires through Qualtrics. This was done to initially assess whether participants met the inclusion criteria. All interviews were conducted at approved participants' residences.

All interviews were conducted in person. At the beginning of the inter-

view, the primary researcher provided participants with a personal study identification (ID) number to deidentify participants and ensure confidentiality during data analysis. The primary researcher then re-informed participants of the purpose, benefits, and potential risks of the study. Nine, 90-minute, audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the primary researcher, in which participants were asked a series of open-ended questions that explored their experiences with internalized homonegativity. The primary researcher provided each participant with a \$20.00USD Amazon gift card upon completion of the interview.

### *Data Analysis*

The primary researcher was the main source of data collection and analysis, which occurred concurrently, as newly collected information could impact the data collection process (Hays & Singh, 2012). Throughout the data collection process, the primary researcher audio recorded and transcribed each interview to immerse himself in the data. The primary researcher identified and coded each statement in the transcript into short phrases of 5–8 words that encapsulated the meaning of each statement—a process referred to as open coding (Hays & Singh, 2012). The primary researcher distributed all of the coded transcripts to the RAs and allowed the RAs to read the codes; after which, the primary researcher and RAs collectively reviewed the codes and agreed upon any necessary code revisions. The primary researcher then arranged the codes into higher order themes and sub-themes in a process called axial coding (Hays & Singh, 2012). The primary researcher then engaged the RAs in a peer debrief meeting, in which the axial codes were reviewed and changed as needed. The primary researcher repeated the process of axial coding and re-organizing the codes into higher order themes and sub-themes until he, the RAs, and the faculty advisor agreed that the themes best represented the essence of the data (Hays & Singh, 2012). The primary researcher periodically met with his faculty advisor to collaborate on the processes of open and axial coding. Upon completion of the study, all data materials (including the audio recorded interviews, transcripts, and demographic data) were securely stored electronically. The primary researcher will store these items for a minimum of seven years, at which they will be subsequently erased.

## Results

### *External Homonegativity*

All participants defined homonegativity as self-hate, discomfort, or discrimination related to either having a queer identity, or sexually or romantically engaging an individual of the same sex. While the experience of internalized homonegativity was endorsed by all participants during some part of their lives, homonegativity was also conceptualized as an expected performance used by heterosexual men to assert their masculinity. Additionally, some conceptualized homonegativity as a state of confusion and an experience that limits one's fullness of life.

### FAMILIAL INTERACTION

The qualitative data communicates that experiences with homonegativity can be moderated by external messaging and interactions had with family members, religious communities, and social peers. Participants who reportedly experienced more salient struggles to embrace their queer identities endorsed anxieties that were connected to explicit and implicit anti-queer messaging they received from family members and loved ones. One participant stated the following about hearing negative messages from family members:

Let's say we were watching *The Real World* and there would be two women kissing. And my mom would always say, "Ugh, that's so disgusting. Ugh, that one's the man." As if gender and identity are one in the same. How you identify your gender—it's still two women, unless one wants to identify as *they* or a man. But if two women identify as women, one is not a man. Or even into my adulthood I've heard my mom say, "Oh I just think it's so unnatural" or, "Ugh, the population's gonna go down because they're all gonna have AIDS and die." Just things like that. So when you hear things like that it's definitely going to affect you and affect how they're gonna perceive you down the line.

In addition to messages received from family members, some participants reflected on how their relationships with their fathers influenced personal difficulty with feeling affirmed in their queer identity. For example, one participant shared:



My dad also reinforced that [homo-negative] message in different ways. Like, “Why are you sitting like that?” when it would literally be like I was sitting and wasn’t thinking about it. It became like, “Nope! You now need to be aware of how your body looks at all times.” How you walk; where your hands are; how much your wrist is doing anything. Like, who you’re hanging out with and what you’re doing with them. What you’re watching; what you’re listening to; what you’re singing along to. All of it became stuff to be hyperaware of; for me *and* for other people.

#### RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL NURTURING

Continuing to highlight a theme of anti-gay messaging embedded in cultural and communal experiences, participants communicated that their religious upbringing influenced their development of homonegative feelings over time. As one participant put it:

We talk about this deity—this being that’s higher than us. And on the one side, he loves us—cares about us. But if you’re *like that*, he no longer wants you, or don’t want anything to do with you.

To the men interviewed, religious adherence meant abiding by the traditions of said religion and rejecting queer identity and exploration. If one were to go against religious expectations, he would risk being ostracized from a space that commonly offers refuge and community to Black people; and would seemingly be rejected from his Creator’s love.

Participants identified that their experiences with their social environment also contributed to the internalized homonegativity they experienced throughout their lifespans. By interacting with their social environments, many participants learned from a young age to associate the gay label with decreased social ranking. They were taught that exhibiting a gay affect could place them at risk of facing different forms of violence. Further complexing these perceptions, some of the study participants reported past experiences with various forms of abuse, which prompted them to question whether their queer identities were related to their trauma. During the interview, one participant asked himself, “if [he] wasn’t molested, would [he] still be attracted to guys?”

Some men described not being nurtured in environments where sex and sexuality were commonly discussed. These participants stated that while

their racial identities were cultivated by their social environments, they experienced neither consistent nor explicit support in sexual identity development. Further, these men stated that as they were developing their queer identities, they also struggled with the lack of diverse Black queer male representation in media. Many participants only found a monolithic portrayal of Black gay men—a portrayal that was steeped in promiscuity, effeminacy, and other ideals that juxtaposed their conditioned view of Black masculinity. For example, one participant stated:

Expressions—particularly of Black same gender loving men—are rather limited. And for me [popular culture] always got to be a space where it was like picking and choosing pieces and being like, “I like that, I like that, I like that. I DON’T look like that—that’s not me at all.” You know, those of us who’ve all watched *Noah’s Arc*, for example. That was the moment for us, right? Like that was the Black gay *Sex and the City* and it was like, “Yup, find your character! Who’s your Charlotte?” But I’d be like, “No, I’m—I am none of these people.” But there are pieces of them and I’m like, “Yup, that feels like me. That feels like me.” And being able to say, “Okay, well that can be okay too.” To take these pieces and let those pieces be me.

The participant highlights how the limited portrayal of Black men in media seemed to have a confusing impact on his self-image. While the monolithic portrayals limited his view of self, there seemed to be pieces of this representation that he could adopt to develop his overall identity.

Another theme related to homonegativity is that of hypermasculinity and Black identity. Many participants reported interacting with queer and heterosexual social environments that reinforced an expectation of Black male masculine performance. One participant provided insight related to messages he received about being a Black man:

To be a Black man is to be a strong man, right? I was always taught that when I was younger. There’s this whole conversation now that’s really relevant about toxic masculinity; and to be a man is to be tough and macho and no real emotions—that’s what was pretty much projected onto me.

External messaging from familial, religious, and social influences conditioned a foundation of homonegativity in the participants and reinforced hyperawareness of gay affect, religious dissonance, and identity confusion.

## *Internalized Homonegativity*

### COGNITIVE MANIFESTATIONS

As participants reflected on their developing same sex attraction while living in anti-gay environments, they endorsed having fears of what it would mean to have a queer identity, as well as fears of how this identity would impact their relationships with family members and loved ones. Some participants endorsed beliefs that queer identity would limit their chance at acquiring career and social privileges. Others endorsed developing a mental and emotional aversion to the gay label. One participant presented that, “the thought of someone calling [him] gay or perceiving [him] as gay made [him] cringe.” The men’s narratives showed that internalized homonegativity manifested through participants’ negative self-perceptions of same gender loving identity; hypervigilance to the ways in which the participants expressed gay affect; feeling like an outsider in social spaces; and having a heightened sense of anxiety when around both heterosexual people, queer people, and other Black cisgender men who were queer, out, and effeminate.

### COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL MANIFESTATIONS

Participants identified a variety of reactions they experienced as a consequence of internalized homonegativity. A majority of men endorsed anxiety related to having their identity disclosed to family members and loved ones. In response, many of the participants isolated themselves and attempted to hide both their identities and behavioral, sexual, or romantic identity expressions. Others engaged in code-switching and heightened their performance of masculinity in various spaces, as they did not feel comfortable risking potential disclosure of gay identity by performing femininity. For example, one participant stated:

I lived a lie. And I just never thought about it, you know. Even though I know I had these thoughts sometimes, when I saw a guy that was very attractive and I wanted to be with him, I was like “No, no, no! Go back over here because you got a girlfriend,” you know?

Some participants reported that they avoided disclosing their identities until disclosure could not be avoided. Other respondents reported that they had yet to disclose their identities to loved ones and conceptualized their queer identities as unspoken truths in their social spheres (i.e., a topic that

is known but that does not need to be discussed). A sect of participants further reported that the anxiety of being outed to their loved ones was once so intense that they considered suicide as an option to avoid being outed. One participant detailed his experience:

I absolutely contemplated suicide when I was younger. There was a point—and this ties to the negative—after I was essentially blacklisted from joining a fraternity and one of my best friends who was already a brother in the organization came to me on the side and was like, “You are never going to get the votes because the higher ups have already blacklisted you because they *think* you’re gay.” At that point I had never said anything out loud—had never done anything. Nobody had witnessed anything. But because I wasn’t undeniably straight in their eyes, I was a liability. And so, like that was sort of just the, like, proverbial straw that kind of tipped it all over the edge.

Consequences of internalized homonegativity were further expressed in the way participants engaged with other same gender loving men. Some of the respondents expressed negative judgment toward queer Black men who performed femininity. Others, seemingly comfortable with being sexually and romantically engaged with men, described how they intentionally sought out sexual and romantic interactions with masculine presenting men, or men who were not fully open with their sexuality. Such action reportedly led to occasional negative consequences, as the participants found themselves interacting with men who would hide and confine the participants’ queer identities. One participant discussed his experience:

I could date people who [my loved ones] would think were my friend. And that came from my own inner hatred, within myself. I don’t want people to know, I don’t want people to perceive me; so, I’m going to get these—not hypermasculine—hetero passing guys. But what I found with them—not all, but the one’s I dated—that they had way more internalized conflicts than I ever did. To the point where I’m like damn, well I’m the secret!

The participants also identified internalized homonegativity in their efforts to avoid over-association with gay identity. Some of the men justified their efforts to be distanced from gay identity as a tactic to maintain professionalism in the workplace. Others conceptualized their queer identity as an unimportant facet of their overall being. Some of the participants iden-

tified efforts to be distanced from queer identity as a clear manifestation of internalized homonegativity, and further reported that they would engage in behaviors such as avoiding other queer men in an effort to maintain that separation. As one participant offered:

Let's say I was in school and there was this person who was also perceived as gay wanted to be my friend. I would not even speak to them because that would draw more attention to me; because that would be gay.

#### INTERNALIZED HOMONEGATIVITY AND GENDER EXPRESSION

As the participants shared their experiences with internalized homonegativity, a consistent theme arose in which the men equated gay identity to the performance of femininity. One participant, after excavating homonegativity's definition, highlighted that, "It's not like if I come out, I'll conquer homonegativity;" and further asked, "is that really the issue at hand—homonegativity?" Throughout the interviews, participants framed their perception of internalized homonegativity through the context of idealizing masculinity and rejecting femininity. Participants' distancing from gay identity did not include separating from sexual and romantic engagement with other men. Instead, the rejection of queer identity seemed to involve a separation from feminine expressions that would suggest queer affiliation to heterosexual audiences. This became further apparent as the participants detailed their attempts at sexual identity code-switching. One participant described:

Even now, I'm a little more free so you're getting a little bit of the "baby"s and the "yeah." Like, you're getting what we have deemed as gay vernacular, if you will. In certain places, I don't use the vernacular—ah, tying it back to the party. The fact that the vernacular was being used so loosely and organically made me feel uncomfortable because I don't demonstrate that behavior in front of my mother; or if I do, it is in small doses. When it comes to my sexual identity, and especially as it pertains to being a man, because so much of our desires are gendered, or the ways in which we've been socialized are gendered—the top, the bottom, the verse, all of the things—I typically code-switch to present in the most masculine form and not in the most feminine form; which actually then is a manifestation of femmephobia for me.

Participants' adherence to masculinity and masculine scripts was further

highlighted as they connected their experience with homonegativity to their perceptions of transgender people who were assigned male at birth (AMAB). When asked about their current discomfort with sexual orientation, many participants reported that although they have come to accept their own sexual orientation, they experienced discomfort with being in physical proximity AMAB transgender people. Additionally, some men reported feeling a similar discomfort with feminine presenting Black queer men as they did transgender women. One participant observed and described:

[My] chest gets tight. That means I'm dealing with something internally; like something's not right within me. Whenever I saw someone who was transgender it would make me super uncomfortable. So uncomfortable. Which was probably a projection of myself—or someone who was too feminine. Not even feminine—I don't like using that word. Someone who is *perceived* as being feminine.

These reflections communicate that for cisgender Black men, internalized homonegativity is a phenomenon that speaks to the overlap of sexuality with gender, gendered expectations, and one's ability to perform a gendered script.

#### INTERNALIZED HOMONEGATIVITY AND PRIVILEGE

The interviewed participants highlighted privilege as a salient risk factor for the experience of internalized homonegativity. When prompted to reflect on their various privileges, the participants communicated that some privileges could lead to the propagation of internalized homonegativity. Many of the identified privileges in this study were connected to religion (i.e., Christian faith), education, career, and social connection. One participant offered:

I think the fact that if I say that I am not Christian, how it makes then other people feel uncomfortable with their Christian beliefs. Can they then engage with me? Am I seen as human? Am I seen as even more deviant than I already quote-unquote can be? I think it's like the idea of still trying to present as straight. There's still then this proximity to privilege that I want to be able to have because if I don't identify as Christian, then that continues to further subjugate me to the margins.

Additionally, various members of the sampled cohort reflected on straight passing privilege and reported that they either had the privilege of

presenting, and being treated as, heterosexual; or that they did not have the privilege of being received as straight. One of the participants noted:

I present a gay all the time and, even among gay people. I'm not afforded straight privilege in that way. I have gay friends who are—my partner gets some of that. Straight men appreciate my partner more than they appreciate me, which is fine. I think that there's this attraction to my partner as a man because he's more straight acting. I think more effeminate men make straight men who are not—make them more uncomfortable. I think that's true, particularly straight acting gay men who can—who pass among their friends. It's funny, we often think about down low as sort of gay sex engagement—sort of straight men doing gay sex engagement. I think what's more interesting is the up low. How gay men who act straight engage with other straight people. The down low is about engaging with gay men, people who see you as straight. The down up is how . . . yes, passing for straight. And as engendering certain kind of—I used to call them affordances. It's like Black people passing as White. So White people are more authentic with you. So straight people are more authentic with you and they'll tell you how they feel about gay people. They're talk about you—they don't recognize it! And sometimes *you* don't recognize it either because you're talking about gay people too, because that's not you. Even though you're fucking somebody—but they're gay, but not me. So they justify that—“I'm just like *them*.” So, I can hate you too.

Many of the participants reported that while their sexualities were not always nurtured throughout their lifespans, they were raised in environments that cultivated a high racial awareness. This racial salience taught participants to engage in behaviors that include scrutinizing information disseminated about Black folx and the Black community. Yet this allegiance to community also triggered hyperawareness of the ways Black masculinity could be challenged if one did not adhere to certain performative scripts. Additionally, high racial salience seemed to increase participants' awareness of privileges amassed over time, which reinforced efforts to reduce the risk of losing said privileges. Some identified risk-reduction efforts included racial code-switching in the workplace; over-performing hypermasculinity or under-performing femininity; and avoiding disclosure of one's sexual identity in professional spaces. One participant described that, “[Being Black and gay] is a lifelong project . . . because you can be denied a job because you're gay.”<sup>1</sup>