

# Psychological Dynamics of Coming Out among Homosexual Individuals

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.91200078>

Received: 16 December 2025; Accepted: 23 December 2025; Published: 31 December 2025

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to determine the psychological dynamics that arise in homosexual actors. In this research, case study methodology was combined with qualitative methods. This research involved three gay individuals who declared themselves homosexual. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were the main method of data collection, with field observations as additional data. The findings showed that the three participants felt satisfied after being gay. In the past, these people believed that their depression stemmed from fear of revealing their sexual identity. This is shown by a closed attitude towards other people, a hostile atmosphere, and unkind thoughts towards other people

**Keywords:** Psychological Dynamics, Coming out, Homosexual

## INTRODUCTION

Men and women are biologically constituted with the primary purpose of producing offspring. Human reproduction begins when a female ovum and a male sperm cell unite during sexual activity, implying that this process is biologically possible only through heterosexual relationships. However, in reality, there are individuals who identify as homosexual and experience sexual preferences toward individuals of the same sex rather than the opposite sex. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Health in 2012 indicated that approximately 1,095,970 men were identified as gay or same-sex oriented. Other estimates suggest that there are around seven million homosexual individuals in Indonesia, representing at least 3% of the total Indonesian population (Usman, 2017).

Adolescence is a critical period for the formation of identity and sexual orientation. Psychosocial developmental theory posits that adolescents are in the stage of identity versus role confusion (Santrock, 2006). During this crucial developmental phase, individuals must explore and learn the roles they will assume in adulthood. Adolescents reassess their identities and strive to understand who they truly are. Erikson proposed that two key aspects of identity formation during this stage are one's adolescent status and sexual identity. Individuals explore various options during this period and begin to construct their personal identities based on these explorations (Erikson, 1963).

Research findings from the Priangan Foundation in West Java revealed a significant increase in the number of gay students in Bandung in 2003. Approximately 21% of junior high school students and 35% of senior high school students were believed to have engaged in homosexual activities (Asteria, 2008). These findings suggest that homosexual behavior may emerge during adolescence and may be influenced by developmental tasks and phases. Identity formation continues into early adulthood, particularly between the ages of 18 and 25, a period considered highly sensitive in the developmental process (Santrock, 2012).

At this stage, the primary source of conflict involves developing deeper and more intimate relationships with others. Individuals begin to disclose more about themselves and seek long-term partnerships with people outside their immediate family.

According to the American Psychological Association (2009), sexual orientation refers to an individual's internalized understanding and evaluation of their sexuality, encompassing self-recognition, self-awareness, self-exploration, group affiliation, cultural influences, and internalized stigma. The American Psychological Association's 2008 publication "Answers to Your Questions: For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality" defines sexual orientation as a persistent emotional condition involving romantic and sexual attraction to men, women, or both. Sexual orientation reflects an individual's feelings and self-concept. Kaplan defines sexual orientation as a person's sexual inclination, which may be heterosexual (attraction to the opposite sex), homosexual (attraction to the same sex), or bisexual (attraction to both sexes) (Sadock & Ruiz, 2015). Homosexuality is further categorized into two terms: lesbian, referring to female homosexuality, and gay, referring to male homosexuality.

According to Kadir (2007), homosexuality is sexual attraction toward individuals of the same sex and has historically been viewed negatively across many cultures. Oetomo (2008) defines homosexuality as a sexual preference or orientation focused on individuals or objects of attraction of the same sex. In general, sexual orientation can be classified into three categories: bisexuality, which involves attraction to both the same and opposite sexes; heterosexuality, which involves attraction to the opposite sex; and homosexuality, which involves attraction to the same sex (Dermatoto, 2010).

Kartono (1989) states that individuals who experience sexual attraction toward members of the same sex are considered homosexual. Craig (1992) further categorizes homosexuality into two types: lesbianism, associated with women, and gay identity, associated with men who are attracted to other men.

Fajriani, citing Gunardi et al. (2013), explains that coming out, or self-disclosure within the gay community, is a process through which a gay individual informs others about their sexual orientation. This process can facilitate greater self-acceptance. According to Oetomo (2008), coming out is often the most challenging phase, as it requires individuals to affirm their sexual identity as lesbian or homosexual both to themselves and to others. Coming out can help individuals develop a stronger and more positive identity, enhance coping abilities in dealing with stress, and foster closer and more meaningful relationships with friends, family members, and partners (Cass et al., as cited in Vaughan, 2007).

Coming out involves accepting one's sexual identity as homosexual, which may enhance self-esteem and support psychological adjustment (Kelly, 2001). However, identifying as gay may also expose individuals to adverse experiences, such as social exclusion or rejection within their communities (Corrigan & Alicia, 2003). Due to frequent exposure to negative social experiences, including discrimination and rejection, gay individuals may continue to face psychological challenges even after disclosing their sexual orientation (Karangora, 2012).

Being open about one's sexual orientation represents an acknowledgment to both oneself and others of being gay, allowing individuals to move beyond feelings of guilt or hesitation in expressing their unique sexual identity. Although coming out may occur at any stage of life, in the United States it most commonly occurs during adolescence, particularly between the ages of 12 and 17 (Rahardjo, 2012)

## **Research Problem Formulation**

This study focuses on understanding the psychological dynamics of the coming-out process in homosexual behavior.

## **Research Method**

This study employs a case study research design using a qualitative approach. As a research procedure, Yin (2002) defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon ('case') within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident." In situations where it is not possible to separate a phenomenon from the context in which it occurs, case study research seeks to explore research questions and problems in depth.

This type of research, categorized as qualitative research, does not require statistical techniques or numerical calculations (Sugiarto, 2015). Data are collected from real-life settings, with the researcher serving as the primary research instrument. This approach enables a comprehensive and contextual understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Emphasis is placed on processes and meanings from the participants' perspectives through descriptive analysis using inductive analytical techniques.

Three openly gay men served as informants in this study. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with the informants. The data collection methods employed included interviews and case study documentation. To ensure that participants felt comfortable sharing their personal experiences, the interviews were conducted in public locations that were relatively quiet and conducive to discussion.

The interview method used in this study was face-to-face direct interviews employing an unstructured interview format. Although the interviews were flexible and adapted to the interview context, the questions posed by the interviewer were guided by a previously planned interview framework (Moleong, 2008).

In this study, the researcher compiled summaries of interview results obtained from homosexual individuals who provided in-depth information. Based on the interview findings, the researcher then drew conclusions regarding the psychological dynamics of the coming-out process among homosexual individuals. These findings are presented in the following table.

First Informant	<p>Subject BN acknowledged experiencing attraction toward individuals of the same sex; however, he consistently denied these feelings and reported feelings of sadness and unhappiness. He also experienced fear and low self-confidence in relation to his social environment, accompanied by feelings of impurity and shame regarding his condition. Nevertheless, the persistence of same-sex attraction and ongoing feelings of admiration ultimately led him to engage in a romantic relationship with a male partner.</p> <p>Subject BN stated that he is currently relatively open about his relationship with his male partner and does not feel embarrassed discussing it in public settings. Although he is aware that his sexual orientation is socially perceived as a sexual deviation, he reported feeling proud and comfortable with his identity. Based on the interview findings, the individual appears to have formed a distinct emotional and relational bond with other men.</p>
Second Informant	<p>Initially, Subject F was reluctant to express his emotions; however, over time, he became increasingly comfortable sharing his feelings with friends and family members. He described himself as a kind-hearted, sensitive, and emotionally responsive individual. As a result of these personal characteristics, he came to believe that his sexual orientation was not socially normative. Subject F reported that his acquaintance with individuals who were involved in long-term same-sex relationships appeared to have influenced his own experiences.</p> <p>Although he experienced concerns when initiating a same-sex relationship, he acknowledged that fear of social rejection did not ultimately prevent him from continuing his relationship with his current partner.</p>
Third Informant	<p>When he first became aware that something felt different, Subject SN reported a lack of interest in individuals of the opposite sex and instead experienced attraction and emotional comfort toward men. After years of feeling ashamed to disclose his sexual orientation, SN ultimately informed his family and friends, based on his belief that each individual is responsible for their own moral actions and that the relationship he was involved in did not cause harm to others.</p>

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## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The psychological dynamics of self-disclosure among homosexual individuals constitute the focus of this study. The research subjects disclosed their sexual orientation to others, including family members and close acquaintances. Within the gay community, this process is commonly referred to as coming out or self-disclosure. The researcher selected gay individuals as research subjects due to an interest in examining the process of coming out to others. The coming-out procedure is considered the most challenging stage, as it requires individuals to affirm their sexual identity as lesbian or gay both to themselves and to others (Oetomo, 2008).

Family factors, psychological trauma, and social environments are among several variables that may contribute to an individual identifying as gay (Praptiningsih, 2017). Coming out involves acknowledging one's sexual identity as homosexual, which can facilitate psychological adjustment and enhance self-esteem among gay individuals (Kelly, 2001). Identifying as gay is associated with several potential benefits, including increased self-esteem, more positive self-perception, improved mental health, enhanced interpersonal relationships, and greater engagement in social activism.

Three openly gay men—referred to as Subject BN, Subject F, and Subject SN—participated in this study.

Subject BN is a 25-year-old male. Family background and social environment were identified as major contributing factors to his homosexual identity. According to BN, he came from a broken home, as his mother engaged in an extramarital relationship and subsequently lived with his father. However, BN reported receiving little attention from his father during childhood, and later also experienced neglect and verbal abuse from his mother. BN stated that he sought attention from other men due to the absence of a father figure in his home environment. He explained that he became involved in the gay community through a WhatsApp group that connected him with other gay individuals, attributing this involvement to the lack of paternal affection. BN reported that these feelings had emerged during adolescence. He described initial emotional experiences such as a rapid heartbeat and admiration toward individuals of the same sex. Over time, BN realized that he was attracted to men, although he initially denied these feelings and experienced sadness, fear, shame, and low self-esteem. Despite these internal conflicts, his feelings of attraction intensified, eventually leading him to pursue same-sex relationships.

BN eventually came out to people in his surrounding environment. Initially, he experienced bullying, particularly from family members who perceived his sexual orientation as deviant. However, BN persisted in explaining his identity and the process he had undergone. Gradually, he reported greater self-acceptance, and his family also began to accept his condition. BN expressed that he now feels more accepting of himself, as attempting to suppress his identity or engage in heterosexual relationships had previously caused him significant psychological distress.

Subject F, a 24-year-old male, was primarily influenced by social and environmental factors. He reported that his close friendship with individuals who were already involved in long-term same-sex relationships influenced his own experiences. F stated that he frequently attended gay social gatherings with friends, which eventually led to his first encounter with his current same-sex partner. He acknowledged that many people in his social circle had engaged in same-sex relationships, which aroused his curiosity and motivated him to explore such relationships himself. This finding aligns with Irfan's (2014) research, which suggests that LGBT individuals have increasingly sought openness about their identities, including through online media.

F acknowledged the existence of homosexual organizations and communities in Ternate. He recognized that his same-sex relationship conflicted with prevailing social norms, yet his strong emotional attachment motivated him to continue the relationship beyond friendship. Although he initially feared social exclusion, this concern did not prevent him from maintaining his relationship. F reported that he first felt confident disclosing his relationship to family and friends after someone outside his immediate circle informed his family. Following open discussions initiated by his parents, F chose to come out despite experiencing emotional difficulty. He reported full self-acceptance, clarifying that his openness was not an expression of pride but rather an effort to live authentically. F expressed a desire to live according to his own values without attempting to change others' opinions, while remaining optimistic that others would not interfere in his relationship. According to Savin-



Williams and Ream (2003), gay individuals disclose their sexual orientation to their parents to achieve freedom, honesty, and relief from concealment. In daily life, F reported feeling more honest and confident after coming out, as he no longer felt compelled to live in secrecy.

Subject SN, also 24 years old, identified family dynamics and social environment as influential factors in his homosexual identity. SN reported being raised by an overly indulgent mother in the absence of a positive father figure during his early years. He disclosed that his father had been emotionally distant and physically abusive, resulting in psychological trauma. SN expressed distress over not experiencing the parental affection observed in his peers' families. He noted that within gay social circles, individuals openly acknowledge their sexual orientation without shame, even though they may refrain from displaying affection publicly.

SN acknowledged limited emotional closeness and harmony within his family. He stated that his attraction to men emerged from a desire to seek a paternal role model, given his upbringing by a harsh and emotionally unavailable father. Nugroho (2010) suggests that family parenting styles significantly influence sexual orientation, particularly in households characterized by disharmony. Issues of identity confusion may arise from maternal dominance and paternal passivity within the family structure. SN reported that his emotional attachment to his male partner had become deeply integrated into his identity, particularly as he received greater emotional attention from this relationship.

According to Compton (2005), individuals inherently seek to modify their circumstances in ways that positively influence their subjective well-being. SN's family began to suspect his same-sex relationship due to behavioral changes, which ultimately prompted him to disclose his sexual orientation. He reported that coming out felt necessary, as it represented his authentic identity and needed to be acknowledged by those around him. SN stated that he no longer rejected his feelings after coming out, whereas prior to disclosure he felt as though he was living dishonestly. He expressed the belief that his relationship did not harm others and that individuals bear responsibility for their own moral judgments. SN reported no specific expectations, expressing only the hope that his current relationship and connections with loved ones would remain healthy.

## CONCLUSION

Data collection regarding the self-disclosure (coming out) process experienced by the participants revealed that this process began with an awareness of feeling different from same-sex peers, based on observations and in-depth interviews. The participants underwent prolonged and varied psychological processes in order to accept their homosexual identity. They reported experiencing negative emotions and low self-esteem as part of their psychological adaptation. Their daily lives were often disrupted by feelings of impurity, degradation, or even perceiving themselves as sinful. These experiences reflect internal conflicts that frequently contradicted societal perceptions of sexual deviation.

All three participants explained that they chose to come out because they felt compelled to stop hiding, to be honest with themselves and others, and to express themselves freely. These pressures—both internal and external—ultimately strengthened their determination to disclose their sexual orientation. Curiosity about the homosexual community emerged as one form of internal pressure experienced by the participants. Coming out was found to have positive effects, including increased self-acceptance, greater emotional stability, and reduced anxiety and fear. The participants reported no negative consequences following their disclosure. Overall, they experienced positive reactions after revealing their sexual orientation to people in their surrounding environment.

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, the coming-out self-disclosure process experienced by the participants began with an awareness of feeling different from same-sex peers, as identified through observation and interview data. The participants underwent prolonged and complex psychological processes in accepting their homosexual identity. They reported experiencing negative emotional states and low self-esteem as part of their psychological adjustment. Their daily lives were frequently affected by feelings of impurity, degradation, or perceiving themselves as sinful, reflecting internal conflicts related to societal interpretations of sexual deviation.

The three participants disclosed their sexual orientation because they felt the need to stop concealing their identity, to be honest with themselves and others, and to express themselves freely. Both internal and external pressures contributed to strengthening their resolve to come out, with curiosity toward the homosexual community identified as one form of internal pressure. Coming out resulted in positive psychological outcomes, including enhanced self-acceptance, emotional stability, and reduced anxiety and fear. The participants reported no negative effects following disclosure and described generally positive responses from individuals in their social environment.

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