

Gay Self-Disclosure at Work

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Abstract—As marginalized minority, some gays can find friends in community or at work. In his community, a gay person will certainly have no difficulty in establishing communication with each other. However, this is not the case in the workplace, where a gay person is faced with the challenge of self-disclosure to his co-workers. Based on this phenomenon, this research wants to understand the self-disclosure of a gay person regarding his sexual orientation to his heterosexual male friends at work. Using qualitative approach and phenomenological methods, the primary data was obtained through in-depth interview and observation, while secondary data in this research was obtained through literature study. Results of the study show that self-disclosure between gay men and their heterosexual male friend has not been fully achieved. Self-disclosure that occurs limited to the scope of work, because the tendency of communication that exists is more dominant in in-group communication with other co-workers.

Keywords— Interpersonal communication, self-disclosure, homosexual, gay

I. INTRODUCTION

The existence of homosexuals is still considered minority and also marginalized in social life (Bayrakdar & King, 2021; Cyrus, 2017; Indah R. & Susilastuti, 2020). This fact also happens in Indonesia (Jocson & Adihartono, 2020; Khoir, 2020). Their presence, apart from being looked down upon, often identified as a catastrophe (Boellstorff, 2004; Rakhmahappin & Prabowo, 2014). Their life behavior is considered deviant (abnormal) because it is not in accordance with the norms that adopted by the Indonesian people (Fauziah et al., 2020; Sujana et al., 2018). This opposition, in turn, will lead to discriminatory attitudes towards gays (Jäckle & Wenzelburger, 2015; Janssen & Scheepers, 2019; Papilaya, 2016; Puspitasari, 2019).

From legal perspective, the existence of homosexuals in Indonesia is also weak (Asyari, 2018; Hidayat, 2021). Provision related to same-sex marriage are not regulated in statutory law. In fact, it is very impossible to get the recognition of society as is the case with male and female marriages. So, there is no statutory law in Indonesia legalizes its citizens having same-sex love relationships. The law clearly states that *marriage is an inner and outer bond between man and woman as husband and wife* (Undang-Undang No. 1 Tahun 1974 tentang Perkawinan).

The strong control of religion and culture in turn makes most gay prefer to hide rather than having to deal with social sanctions (Andara et al., 2007; Boellstorff, 2004). Finally they have difficulty in order to establish relationships with community. In fact, they also need to interact as social beings, apart from the difficulty of achieving social acceptance of different sexual identities (Hidayat, 2019; Mastuti et al., 2012; Schnabel, 2018). Therefore, most painful thing for a gay is to be rejected by family and friends (Reczek, 2016; Taylor & Neppel, 2021; Vincke & Bolton, 1994).

In the midst of narrow space for gay movement, some gays find friend at works (Lewis & Mills, 2016; McFadden & Crowley-Henry, 2018; Oetomo, 2001). In this context, what is interesting to observe is the process of self-disclosure of a gay person to his heterosexual male friends at work. Courage to open up is not an easy thing for gay people to do (Asmara & Valentina, 2018; Duc

et al., 2020; Wells & Kline, 1987). But, hiding one's identity as gay can also make gay person depressed.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is the process of sending and receiving (messages) among small group of people with immediate effect and feedback (DeVito, 2014). In this study, interpersonal communication takes place in friendship relationships at work, namely between gay who decide to open up (self-disclosure) to their heterosexual male friends. Communication between gay and his heterosexual male friends can be described using communication model of Lawrence Kincaid, which focuses on exchange of information between individuals to achieve a common understanding (Winett, 2013)

2.2. Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure is an attempt to reveal personal information about oneself that other individuals cannot know or find in other ways (Wood, 2012). This concept comes from psychotherapy (Stiles, 1995) where the disclosure of patient's thoughts, emotions, and personal conflicts is very important during therapeutic process (Farber, 2006). Experts then conceptualized tendency to disclose personal information as self-disclosure and emphasized various aspects of self-disclosure. Altman and Taylor (1973) emphasize the social function of self-disclosure, in which individuals allow themselves to be known by others (Altman & Taylor, 1973). In this research, if a gay person decides to open up to his heterosexual male friend, worst possibility that may be experienced is rejection. If his heterosexual male friends are not ready to accept differences in sexual orientation, the gay who opens up can suffer personal losses, which in turn will affect their friendship

2.3. Social Penetration Theory

Social Penetration Theory seeks to understand the close relationship between two individual. This theory describes the pattern of relationship development through the bonding process that moves a relationship from superficial to more intimate (Altman & Taylor, 1973). This intimacy includes physical, intellectual, and emotional intimacy to the extent that the couple engage in activities together. Referring to theory of social penetration, this study will focus on how intimacy between a gay person and his heterosexual male friend will lead to self-disclosure. Based on social penetration model developed by Altman and Taylor (1973), there are four (4) stages to reach stages of an intimate relationship: (1) orientation stage; (2) exploratory affective exchange stage; (3) exploratory exchange stage; and (4) stable exchange stage. In this study, researcher limited only to the fourth stage (stable exchange stage) in interpersonal communication between gay and straight men.

2.4. Homosexuality

Homosexuality refers to feelings of attraction (affection, emotional connection), and/or erotically either predominantly (more prominently) or exclusively (solely) toward other individuals of the same sex, with or without the physical relationships (Oetomo, 2001). Meanwhile, there are three (3) specific criteria to be able to identify whether a person has homosexual tendencies or not: (1) self-identification as gay or lesbian; (2) sexual attraction to individuals of the same gender; and (3) sexual involvement with one or more persons who are of the same gender as oneself (Kendall, 2016). Homosexual relationship has two types: gay and lesbian, which in this study will focus on men (gay), where homosexual stamp attached to a gay person is always seen as taboo or disease in Indonesian society (Aryanti, 2019; Setiaji, 2020; Yudiyanto, 2017).

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses qualitative approach and phenomenological methods. Informants involved in this study were eight individuals, consisting of four (4) gay men and four (4) heterosexual men who became friends of gay men in their workplace. The primary data sources were obtained through observation and in-depth interviews, while secondary data were obtained from literature studies. In analyzing data, there are four stages: transcribing, bracketing, horizontalization, and cluster of meaning. The technique of checking the validity of the data used is the data triangulation technique.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study limits to only the fourth stage or stage (stable exchange stage) in the context of interpersonal communication between gay and straight men. This limitation is also related to the use of Johari Window self-disclosure model as a bridge between the first and third stages of the social penetration process

4.1. Prejudice and Fear of Discrimination

Communication feels more comfortable for gay who have come out (*coming out*), and they are confident enough to appear in public. They also more confident when communicate. On the other hand, gay who are still *in the closet* will feel uncomfortable when they have to act like heterosexual men. Not only discomfort, gay who are still *in the closet* often harbor prejudices if other people and the environment around them will reject them.

Negative prejudice also often makes gay *in the closet* feel anxious about presence of other people around him, which in turn becomes an obstacle in communicating and interacting with other people or coworkers. Conversely, negative prejudice is not experienced by gay who have come out (*coming out*). Acceptance and self-recognition as homosexuals make gays who come out feels comfortable to be open, and in turn are able to encourage the establishment of communication that understands each other.

Thus, the basic difference between gay *in the closet* and gay *coming out* will be seen in way they communicate. Gay *coming out* are more daring to appear as they are in behavior and communication, while gay *in the closet* have difficulty being able to appear as they are, and this leads to a closed attitude and experiences barriers to communication. In this context, they are still trying to be two different figure: as gay in themselves as well as heterosexual men in the eyes of others.

Prejudice tends to be negative is also experienced by heterosexual men who work with gay. Fear due to differences in sexual orientation is often felt. The prejudice of straight men lead to a fear of turning gay when interacting with gay. In short they are afraid of falling into gay world or even becoming secondary homosexuals. This prejudice was also felt by other informants despite their more open attitude towards gay. Prejudice makes them not want to interact alone, but takes place with other co-workers.

Prejudice that appears in heterosexual men in the above context is certainly a natural thing, which leads to socio-religious basis of Indonesian society. One of the informant also stated that religious factors are one of the considerations in interacting with gay.

4.2. Equation of Interpretation of Verbal and Nonverbal Message Meaning

Straight men's communication is more direct, while gay usually use the heuristic languages that associated with something. Gay tend to have their own equivalent in communication, where their vocabulary tends not to be understood well by their co-worker. In this context, they have to ask first in order to understand the meaning of talking to gay. For gay men have come out, they often use special language because they are used to hanging out and being open with anyone. The use of special language is rarely used by gay *in the closet*; they do not want to mention those special words so they don't come across as gay men.

Not only from verbal messages through the words, in terms of body gestures or facial expressions, straight men also often have difficulty understanding the meaning of gay. The level of difficulty of nonverbal messages is not as difficult as verbal messages, since communication through body movement tend to be not much different from heterosexuals. In this context, understanding of heuristic language used by gay is more related to how straight men respond: some do not mind and some choose not to use heuristic language that gay men often use in communicating

4.3. Stable Exchange Stage in Communication as Colleagues at Work

In interpersonal communication outside of work, self-disclosure between gay and his heterosexual male coworkers has not yet reached stable stage of exchange. That is, new self-disclosure occurs at the surface stage which is dominated by things related to work. Meanwhile, a relationship can be said to be intimate if there is a desire to know more deeply between each other.

The layer of personality that are revealed have not penetrated the self-concept of one's personality. Some of the informants even admitted that they did not know their colleagues personally well. Some of the informants also looked doubtful when responding to questions about personal introductions from their colleagues. In fact, psychological relationship of friendship at work can be seen as second family after nuclear family at home. However, since difference in sexual orientation are still not well accepted in Indonesian society, a person tends to be difficult to open up to his co-workers in the office, especially regarding personal matters.

4.4. In-Group Communication: Atmosphere between Gay and Straight Men

Friendship relationships between gay and straight men at work involve more colleagues in office. For gay who have come out, the disclosure of sexual orientation is done clearly to all his co-workers in the office. Meanwhile, even though gay *in the closet* has opened up to his coworkers, he still keeps himself closed in in-group communication that takes place at work.

Communication that takes place face-to-face and outside of work is rare between gay and straight men. What often happens is to go with other co-workers so that the conversation that occurs is more of communication in groups. However, gay who come out also tend to be less open about personal issues. Likewise, gay who are still *in the closet*, indeed prefer to close themselves.

TABLE 1. SELF-DISCLOSURE IN STABLE EXCHANGE STAGE

Stable Exchange Stage		Prejudice	Equation of Interpretation of Message Meaning	Forms of Communication
Gay	<i>In the closet</i>	→ Fear of rejection → Low self → Tends to be closed → Difficult to socialize	→ Using heuristic language → Exclusive to the community	→ Formal → In-group
	<i>Coming out</i>	→ Show as is → Tends to be open → Easy to socialize	→ Using heuristic language → Exclusive to the community	→ Formal → In-group
Straight Man	No Interaction	→ Somewhat antipathy → Suspicious → Fear of falling	→ Less sensitive → Still confused	→ Formal → In-group
	Have Interacted	→ Tolerance	→ Less sensitive → Still confused	→ Formal → In-group

V. CONCLUSION

Self-disclosure at stage of stable exchange between gay and his heterosexual male coworker has not been fully achieved. Self-disclosure at stage of stable exchange occurs only within the scope of work. In this context, communication tendency is dominated by in-group communication with colleagues. Both gay and their co-workers (heterosexual men) do not include sexual orientation in their work pattern. That is, treatment as co-worker does not recognize gay status. Straight men also admit that the presence of gay does not have significant impact on quality of work. Even gay are recognized to have their own advantages that straight men rarely have; they are considered to be better at building relationships with other, sensitive in responding to situations and circumstances at work, and more organized in managing the work.

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