



**GAY SELF-PRESENTATION IN SOCIAL INTERACTION  
(A DRAMATURGICAL STUDY OF THE GAY COMMUNITY IN  
PALEMBANG CITY)**

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***Abstract***

*The increasing of gay in Indonesia, including palembang, does not make their existence recognized and accepted in society. Society considers that gay groups do not conform to existing religious and customary norms. This study uses the Dramaturgy theory of Erving Goffman, which suggests that human life is like a theater, which has a front stage and a back stage. This study aims to determine the self-presentation of gay people in Palembang City on the front stage and back stage. The research method used is a qualitative research method by conducting observations and in-depth interviews. The results of this study indicate that there are differences in the self-presentation of gay people on the front stage and back stage. On the front stage, gay people camouflage and hide their true identity. On the backstage, they are themselves, without hiding the identity that they are gay.*

**Keywords:** Back Stage; Dramaturgy; Front Stage; Gay; Homosexual; Self Presentation

**Abstrak**

Perkembangan kaum gay yang kian meningkat di Indonesia tak terkecuali di Kota Palembang, tidak menjadikan keberadaan mereka diakui dan diterima di tengah masyarakat. Masyarakat menganggap bahwa kelompok gay tidak sesuai dengan norma agama dan adat yang ada. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori Dramaturgi dari Erving Goffman, yang mengemukakan bahwa kehidupan manusia layaknya sebuah teater, yang memiliki panggung depan dan panggung belakang. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui presentasi diri kaum gay di Kota Palembang pada panggung depan dan panggung belakang. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode penelitian kualitatif dengan melakukan observasi, dan wawancara mendalam. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa terdapat perbedaan presentasi diri kaum gay pada panggung depan dan panggung belakang. Pada panggung depan, kaum gay berkamuflase dan menyembunyikan jati diri mereka yang sebenarnya. Pada panggung belakang, mereka menjadi diri mereka sendiri, tanpa menutupi identitas bahwa mereka adalah seorang gay.

**Kata Kunci:** Dramaturgi; Gay; Homoseksual; Panggung Depan; Panggung Belakang; Presentasi Diri



## **I. INTRODUCTION**

A Homogeneous Relationship is a relationship between people of the same sex. Homosexuality itself is a sexual attraction and behavior between individuals of the same sex (Pangesti, 2016). Homosexual groups are divided into four types: lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender groups, abbreviated as LGBT. The LGBT group has a distinctive flag that characterizes them, the rainbow flag (Widyastuti, 2017).

The homosexual group focused on in this research is the gay group. A characteristic of this gay group is their fashionable and trendy appearance. Most of them pay close attention to their appearance to maintain a neat and fashionable appearance. The emergence of the gay phenomenon itself is inseparable from the cultural context. No one "becomes gay" without a process. Becoming gay is experienced by an individual usually through a process of socialization. Therefore, several factors contribute to an individual becoming gay (Widyastuti, 2017).

One factor that triggers an individual to become gay is the habits practiced during childhood within a family. This is then confirmed during adolescence, contributing to the emergence of gay people (Pangesti, 2016). Not all gay people are open about their gay identity; this is done to protect their own reputation and that of their family. Therefore, most prefer to hide their gay identity rather than reveal it (Anshari, 2017). Furthermore, societal rejection of their existence makes gay people more cautious in expressing their identity. Although gay people have now received recognition from various Western countries, and some states in the United States have laws legalizing same-sex marriage, the reality is that, from the past until now, gay people have never received full recognition from society or the government in many countries (Praptiningsih, 2018).

In Indonesia, gay people struggle to gain support from various parties. This is not without reason; many believe that gay people do not conform to religious and cultural norms. They are considered deviant behavior. Furthermore, this is based on the fact that Indonesia adheres to Eastern culture, which adheres firmly to norms, religious values, morals, and customs. Despite facing societal opposition, the number of gay people in Indonesia is

growing every year. This is reinforced by the growing number of followers of gay-specific social media pages.

Gay people possess characteristics that allow them to identify with each other in social life. Within their community or group, they accept each other's sexual orientation. They are free to be themselves, revealing their true sexual identity. However, when interacting with the outside world, these gay people choose to conceal their true identities and appear as heterosexuals in general. Although they present themselves as gay, it is usually only to certain people who have previously recognized them (Anshari, 2015).

Previous research on dramaturgical analysis of gay people serves as a reference. The first previous study is entitled "Dramaturgical Analysis of the Presentation of "Coming Out" and "Not Fully Coming Out" Gay People in Jakarta." This study aimed to examine the self-presentation of gay people coming out and not fully coming out in Jakarta, and to explore the models and patterns of dramaturgical communication of gay people coming out and not fully coming out in Jakarta. The final research objective of this study is to understand the dramaturgical process of self-presentation on the front stage and back stage of gay men who are coming out and not fully out in Jakarta. The research method used an interpretive paradigm with a subjective approach, employing qualitative research. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, observation, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document review. The results of this previous study indicate that gay men in Jakarta's front stage self-presentation, those who have fully come out, employ self-promotional tactics and even exaggerate their identity. However, gay men who have not fully come out often resort to disclaimers, attempting to deny and conceal their gay identity. However, on the back stage, gay men, both fully out and not, employ self-promotional strategies as a way to present themselves openly, especially within the gay community. Recommendations include strengthening religious beliefs and humanistic, harmonious, and close relationships between family members as a solution to prevent the nation's generation from becoming trapped in the LGBT world. The second previous study was entitled "Self-Presentation of Gays in Cirebon Regency" written by Ainul Fazriah, Siti Nursanti, and Nurkinan. This study aims to determine how gays in Cirebon Regency present themselves in their social and community environments according to their desires. In this study, the researcher used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method and supported by a study of Erving Goffman's

dramaturgy theory with a sub-focus on front stage and back stage research. Informants in this study numbered 4 (four) people with 3 (three) people as primary informants and 1 (one) person as additional informant. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data acquisition in this study was carried out through several methods, namely observation, interviews, and literature studies. Data analysis was carried out through data collection, data reduction, data display, and verification and drawing conclusions. The results of the data obtained indicate that when on the front stage, most gays try to hide their identity by carrying out certain management of their behavior. Meanwhile, when they're backstage, they have more freedom to show their true identity as gay men. The study concluded that gay men present themselves by concealing their identity and downplaying their femininity in social settings.

According to Erving Goffman, impression management is an individual's ability to regulate their behavior in all aspects of their life to convey the desired self-image. Impression management is embedded in a broader concept proposed by Erving Goffman, namely the theory of dramaturgy. Goffman argued that human life is a theatrical performance, that is, social life is a series of dramatic performances similar to a stage performance. Actors play their roles in everyday life (Mulyana, 2018).

Dramaturgy itself is an approach born from the development of Symbolic Interactionism Theory. Dramaturgy emerged to fulfill the need for self-preservation and as a model for studying human behavior, specifically how people assign meaning to their lives and the environment in which they live.

(Annisa, 2016). Goffman argued that human social life consists of a front stage and a back stage. The front stage is the stage where actors perform their roles, watched by the audience. Meanwhile, the backstage is the area behind the play, where actors prepare everything they need to perform their play on the front stage. It's a place where actors relax and be themselves without playing any roles (Mulyana, 2018).

Goffman further divides the frontstage into two parts: appearance and manner, which actors display while performing their roles. Appearance encompasses attributes that indicate their social status to others. Manner, on the other hand, reflects the role model or style an actor plays in a given situation (Ardiansyah, 2016).

Self-presentation is a person's attempt to create an impression when interacting with others. This impression can be formed by structuring their behavior in such a way that others can interpret their identity according to their desires. During the process of producing this identity, a person will make extensive considerations regarding the attributes they use, ensuring that these attributes are appropriate and support the overall impression and identity they desire to convey (Nugraha, 2020).

Based on the explanation above, the researcher formulated the problem: how gay people in Palembang present themselves in social interactions. Using a dramaturgical approach, the researcher sought to uncover how gay people in Palembang present themselves when interacting with society. They put on a front-stage act to conceal their true identities, and then backstage, where they present themselves as gay within their community.

Several factors underlie the selection of Palembang as the research location. Palembang, located in South Sumatra, is a metropolitan city that adheres to certain beliefs and considers deviant sexual behavior wrong and inconsistent with existing norms. The development of the gay community in Palembang continues to grow, as evidenced by the growing membership of gay-specific social media groups. However, most gay people remain reluctant to reveal their true selves. Consequently, in everyday life, gay individuals interact with their surroundings without realizing it. The purpose of this study is to examine how gay people in Palembang present themselves in social interactions, both on the front-stage and backstage.

## **II. RESEARCH METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people or observed behavior (Moleong, 2018).

Furthermore, data collection methods are techniques or methods researchers can use to collect data (Kriyantono, 2014). The data collection techniques used in this research are observation and in-depth interviews. Observation is the process of collecting data by researchers going directly into the field to observe what occurs in the field. Observation techniques also allow researchers to see and observe for themselves, then record behaviors and events as they occur in real-life situations (Moleong, 2014).

The type of observation chosen is participant observation, where the researcher, as a neutral outsider, has the opportunity to join the group and participate in the group's activities and lifestyle while conducting observations (Kriyantono, 2014).

The next data collection technique is in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are a method of collecting data or information by meeting directly with informants to obtain complete and in-depth data (Kriyantono, 2014). The subjects in this study were gay men in Palembang City. The reason for choosing these research subjects was because they were considered capable of providing the information and data needed in the study. Key informants in this study consisted of 5 key informants and 2 supporting informants. The research location was Palembang City, South Sumatra. One of the places commonly used by gay men to gather is around Kambang Iwak (KI).

### **III. RESEARCH RESULTS**

Dramaturgical studies confirm that each individual cultivates and presents different performances on the front stage and back stage. The front stage represents how and what they want to be seen and judged by everyone based on prevailing societal norms and values. Meanwhile, the back stage tends to showcase and present themselves as a whole person, without regard for societal norms and values. It's certain that the back stage will be very different from the front stage.

#### **The Front Stage of Gays in Palembang**

Of the five gay key informants, three are students at a university in Palembang, while the rest are employees at private companies. The three student key informants are identified as GW, MAI, and FS. The two private employees are SI and MW.

Goffman's concept of dramaturgy further divides the front stage into appearance and manner. GW, FS, and SI all agreed that their appearance on campus, at the office, in the community, and at home was no different from their appearance in the gay community. This is because they maintain a masculine appearance, like men in general. They prefer to wear clothing that emphasizes their masculine side, such as plain shirts or t-shirts and jeans. To enhance their appearance, they usually use perfume that reflects a masculine spirit.

However, unlike MAI and SI, who are gay bottoms, on stage they still appear masculine and must conceal their feminine side. To distract from this, they tend to wear brightly colored and patterned clothing. They do this to deceive those they meet and avoid

suspicion. Furthermore, they prefer facial treatments to enhance their appearance, a practice not shared by the other three informants. Despite their hidden feminine side, MAI and SI strive to project their authority as men on stage, much like GW, FS, and MW do.

Furthermore, regarding manners, gay men adopt the attitudes and behaviors of men in general on stage in the workplace and on campus. However, most of them prefer a more reserved and reserved demeanor. The habits they typically display in the gay community are certainly not displayed on stage.

The informants realized that even the slightest mistake on the front stage regarding their sexual identity would significantly impact their self-presentation as straight men. If this happened, they would face the fears of rejection from their families and their surrounding community. This led them to put on a front stage act to conceal their identities.

### **Back Stage of Gays in Palembang**

When it comes to the back stage, there's a significant difference from the front stage. In the back stage, informants tend to present their true selves as gay. They no longer limit themselves and hide their gay identities. Their appearance and behavior demonstrate that they feel much more comfortable and enjoy being on the back stage, which is their gay community. They are more relaxed and free to present themselves as gay.

The informants admitted to feeling less controlled in their speaking style with their peers in the gay community. Similarly, MAI and SI don't need to pretend to be real men. They would display their feminine speaking style to fellow gay men in the community. Not only did their speaking style differ, but their appearance also differed from what they displayed on stage. When gathering with the gay community, MAI and SI didn't hesitate to dress like women, wearing makeup and carrying feminine accessories like handbags was not uncommon.

However, they did so only when meeting with fellow gay men in private settings, such as designated clubs or cafes. When gatherings were held outdoors, they preferred to forgo full feminine attire, instead wearing only handbags and minimal makeup. They did this out of concern that relatives might recognize them.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

### **1. The Front Stage of Gays in Palembang**

Based on the research above, all key informants who are gay engage in dramaturgy to present themselves when interacting with others on the front stage. In terms of appearance and behavior, performing on the front stage is not difficult for gays in the upper class, as they don't have to change much. However, this is different for gays in the lower class, who have feminine traits and attitudes. On the front stage, they must restrain themselves from appearing effeminate and not acting like women. They must manage their impressions so that those around them don't suspect they are gay. They do this to protect their reputations, as most of them are still students, from being tarnished.

## 2. The Back Stage of Gays in Palembang

Meanwhile, on the back stage, when they are in the gay community, they don't engage in dramaturgy when socializing. They are themselves and behave naturally, especially gays in the lower class. They are free to dress and act like women, are free to hold hands with their same-sex partners, and they freely speak the typical language of the gay community in the bottom category. Furthermore, they are more free to socialize with other gay people because they feel easily accepted, respected, and feel safe. Researchers recommend research involving gay people in Palembang City, as they can be invited to collaborate in collecting data. Although they did ask not to be photographed and not to provide their names clearly to protect their privacy. Challenges faced by researchers were the short research time and the sometimes unscheduled time to visit their gathering places.

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