# SELF-DISCOVERY: PSYCHOANALYSIS OF THE FILM
## *BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY* (2018)

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*Abstract*
This study focuses on the discussion of self-discovery and its depiction reflected in the film *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018). This study is expected to be able to contribute in completing the theory in the fields of culture, literature, media, etc. and to enrich people's knowledge of self-discovery. The objective of this library research is to identify the concept of self-discovery as well as to analyze the issue of self-discovery portrayed in the film. The primary data needed for analysis was acquired from dialogs along with the descriptions of film scenes. This study used Freud's psychoanalytic approach to analyze the data. From the psychoanalysis point of view, the results of the study suggested that self-discovery is strongly related to one's self - a person's life journey to search for his true self or the life he wants. The results of analysis also showed that self-discovery was portrayed in the film through several images such as a unique style or physical appearance, loneliness and disclosure of sexual orientation.

*Keywords*: self-discovery, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, psychoanalysis, self

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In everyday life, many people are bound to experience various problems. This condition can cause some people to get stress. As a matter of fact, people need to understand that basically, everyone's life is a path. In this path, there is a process that must be passed by each person to discover the real him or her. This process of self-discovery unwittingly becomes one of the most essential goals in human life. However, not many people are aware of it. From this point, self-discovery can be perceived as a crucial phase in human's life.

Understanding of self-discovery becomes something significant to have. Regarding this, Bench *et al*. (2015, p. 170) explained that the term self-discovery reflects that a person has found an appropriate trait, personality or something that he or she uses to show his or her true self. There are many people in society who are stuck in a stressful situation because they have not been able to find out the kind of life they want. As a result many of them often experience stress and anxiety. Therefore, the discussion of self-discovery is necessary because the phenomenon of self-discovery has lately been highlighted, particularly among individuals who live an urban life.

Generally, the theme of self-discovery is often discussed from a psychological perspective. This is considered relevant because many researchers argue that self-discovery is

influenced by psychological factors. This situation is also often portrayed in movies. It is true to say that films have a fundamental role to make audience know and learn about something (Adi, 2011, p. 71; Rudy et al., 2021, p. 42). This explanation shows that what is depicted in the films can actually be studies to understand the meaning or concept. The need of studying about movies critically By this way people will explore the knowledge in the films. That is also the reason why observing films can be fascinating and useful (Buckland, 2003, p. 1; Rudy, Zalukhu & Manurung, p. 190) Therefore, discussing self-discovery can also be done by observing movies. There are many films describing about self-discovery and one of them is *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018). This film has its own uniqueness and its popularity made it one of the most successful movies in 2018. News from all kinds of media stated that it was nominated and has won several categories in Academy Awards in 2019. Thus, it is interesting and significant to use the film *Bohemian Rhapsody* as an object of research to study and explore more about self-discovery. In regard to the research questions above, this study intends to explain the concept of self-discovery and to identify the representation of self-discovery found in the film *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018).

This study can contribute in terms of theory enrichment, especially in cultural studies literature, media, education and other studies whose object of study is relevant to this research. Therefore, it is expected that this study can be used by researchers as the main or supporting reference. In addition, from a practical point of view, this study can also help increase people's knowledge about the concept of self-discovery and the usefulness of films in revealing significant values about self-discovery which can be a lesson to learn.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is conducted on a number of research results in the form of journal articles which also discussed about self-discovery in movies. This is necessary so that this study can fill the research gap that has not been covered by previous studies. A number of themes about self-discovery were discussed through literary works, for example, a study conducted by Subaşi (2017) about self-discovery as a journey in prose; Mangwada (2020) who talked about self-discovery in a short story; Couple (2020) who focused more on self-discovery in Indian literature; as well as a study of self-discovery involving spiritual views in literary works discussed by Sahbana (2018) and Sebastian (2019). Research on the film *Bohemian Rhapsody* was conducted by Ea-Irene (2020) who observed the aspects of masculinity in it and Andani (2020) who specifically focused on the humanistic aspects in the film. So, this literature review can show that previous studies have not connected self-discovery to the film *Bohemian Rhapsody* with the application of a psychoanalytic approach.

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is categorized as a qualitative research. According to Mohajan (2018, p. 2) it usually examines the experiences of people including minority groups, meanings in social relationships, process of social interactions etc. This means that the data obtained is in the form of texts (statements) which can be acquired from any techniques (Miles et al., 2019, p. 321). The texts refer to the notes taken in the process of collecting data. The main data for this study comes from the

American-British film *Bohemian Rhapsody* which was released in 2018 in English language. It was directed by Bryan Singer and produced by Graham King and Jim Beach. The length of the film is 134 minutes and it stars an American actor Rami Malek.

The primary data to be analyzed is taken from dialogs and scenes from the film *Bohemian Rhapsody* which focuses on content related to elements portraying the aspect of self-discovery as shown in the following table:

| primary data | dialogs | text |
|---|---|---|
| | film scenes | |

The table above shows that the text used as the data source is from dialogs of films and film scenes described in the form of statements. In addition, supporting data to explain and provide information on the main data are in the form of references relevant to this study. These references are mostly taken from research journal and books.

The process of primary data collection for this study is divided into two stages. The first stage is watching the film *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018) for several times to find out the parts (dialogs, scenes, or images) of the film reflecting aspects related to self-discovery. The most essential point in this stage is to observe the main character of the film. The second is the transcription stage. The dialogs, scenes and images from the films are converted into written form known as a text. This text contains all the important data from the result of film observation and the text is to be analyzed. The kind of data analysis carried out in this study is content analysis. According to Prasad (2008, p. 173) this type of analysis is frequently applied to observe something such as documents, letters, stories, messages from radio, TV programs, symbols, songs, etc. Through the content analysis, researchers can usually obtain a lot of information from the object they study (Adi, 2011, p. 144). So, the content analyzed from the movie *Bohemian Rhapsody* is the main character with his dialogs, the scenes as a part of the film plot, and the images that emerge from the main character such as his fashion style, accessories, etc.

Freudian psychoanalytic approach is applied in this study to interpret the dialogs, scenes as well as images of the main character in order to understand the meaning or concepts related to self-discovery in the film. Adi (2011, p. 185) explained that psychoanalysis can be seen as a method to analyze literature, cultural text, and so on in humanities, for example, one can use this method to analyze the psychological aspects of a character in a story. In addition, Storey (2006, p. 91) explains that Freud's psychoanalytic theory focuses on consciousness - things related to the life that can be seen and unconsciousness - instinct and desires within an individual's mind. So, the data which has been complied in the form of text is analyzed and interpreted by involving this psychoanalytic approach to find answers to the research questions of this study.

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis results of the study suggested that there were two essential points to be presented in this section – the importance of understanding the concept of self-discovery as the main keyword of this study and the images of self-discovery portrayed in the film *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018). The discussion begins with a specific explanation of the term self-discovery.

## 4.1. The Significance of Self-Discovery.

The term self-discovery needs to be clarified so that it can be understood. This is necessary because many people are not aware of the need of self-discovery because they are not familiar with the term. Interpreting the concept of "self-discovery" is not easy because each individual has a different concept of the term. The most fundamental point is to understand the basic meaning of the term "self-discovery". Firstly, to know the basic concept of self-discovery it is necessary to have clear definitions derived from a dictionary. Self-discovery consists of two words, namely the words "self" and "discovery". These two words seem familiar to most people. However, when the two words are combined, it will form a more complex meaning.

From the *New International Webster's Student Dictionary* (Landau, 1996, p. 663) put several meanings of the word "self" and there were two meanings considered relevant to the concept of self-discovery discussed in this study – "self" as a noun means (a) one's own person known or considered as the subject of his own consciousness (b) The distinct and characteristic individuality or identity of any person or thing. If the two meanings of the "self" are carefully observed it can lead to a basic understanding that the "self" is closely related to traits or characteristics inherent in an individual. In other words, it tells who he or she is. The word "self" can have a more personal meaning or it may refer to the person who uses it.

Regarding the use of the term "self", according to Oyserman, Elmore, and Smith (2012, p. 70) many researchers who discuss about 'self' often relate it to identity and self can be perceived as a product of conditions and it can shape behavior. This explanation can be interpreted that "self" is strongly connected to the personality of an individual and it is to show who he or she is through the attitudes and behaviors. This opinion is in line with the statement of Freund and Smith (1999, p. 55) who stated that "self" is defined as a subjective concept and tend to be essential for an individual to describe himself or herself. Not many people want to delve deeper into the "self". This causes most of them fail to understand that basically the "self" within them is working to show who they are.

So the word "self" becomes something significantly meaningful when it is conceptualized. Since "self" is identical with the word "I", Oppenheimer (1991, p. 113) also argued that "I" contains an element of "self" which functions as "the one who knows" and this means "self" is also viewed as "the one who does" by involving uniqueness, conscious choice and self-image. Again, this emphasizes the state that an individual as a subject knows about him or herself which can be different from other people and does something consciously to realize what is in accordance with him or herself. Many people often question or even doubt about what they want and what kind of life can describe themselves. This can be seen as the turmoil or complexity of the 'self'. So, "self" can be understood as a concept that is generally used to express how a person sees himself or herself (Rashid et al., 2015, p. 46). In general, an individual will view everything connected to his "self" as something significant.

After understanding the word "self", the word "discovery" is also a key word because it will be attached to the word "self" to form a meaning. The term "discovery" can be used to describe the state of an individual. In the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, the

word "discovery" as a noun defined as: *an act or the process of finding somebody/something or learning about something that was not known about before* (Wehmeier, 2000, p. 358). The term "self-discovery" according to Bench et al. (2015, p. 170) is a concept that can be applied in the condition that a person has found a trait or attitude that can describe who he or she really is. In other words, it can be interpreted as a process experienced by a person to find or construct an identity that suits his wishes and comfort. As a result, he or she will show his or her true self in public.

This is something that is often found in society. Many people do not want to show their true identities and tend to hide them from others for various reasons. There are also people who are expressive in showing who they are to people around them. Regarding this, the question that arises is whether self-discovery is significant in someone's life. Everyone may have a different response about the importance of self-discovery in their life. However, every individual basically wants to show who he or she really is without pretending to be what other people want or hide his or her true identity. Each individual has a different image and way of thinking about themselves which can be related to feelings, opinions, and all the complexities of whatever they experience which they make as their principles (Mehrad, 2016, p. 62). This point reflects that a person's experience will help shape an image of him or herself that shows his or her life principle.

In the process of living a life, an individual must go through various kinds of experiences, especially those that are bitter and painful for him or her. Further, Oppenheimer (1991, p. 113) argued that the pain experiences by a person in his

or her life will be a valuable lesson so that he or she knows him or herself better. From this discussion, it can be summarized that self-discovery is associated with the principle of life, therefore, it is viewed as something that a person needs to live a real and carefree life in a society. For instance, in today's digital era, internet-based social media has influenced many people in terms of expressing themselves in various ways. People use it as a platform for self-discovery.

The process of self-discovery involves different ways. In general, according to Rashid, Iqbal and Khalid (2015, p. 46) people can describe or reveal their identities by using several categories such as age, gender, abilities, things they like, personalities or characteristics related to their psychology. This idea is crucial to help people understand what a person wants to show others about him or herself. Basically, in every individual there is an instinctual drive which according to Freud is innate and connected to individual's basic needs. According to Freud, such an impulse is called "Id" which functions to influence "ego" to obtain pleasure and satisfaction (Freud, 1940, p. 29; Lapsley & Stey, 2011, p. 5; Siegfried, 2014, p. 1).

People seldom realize that there is a drive within them that leads them to seek for what they want. When it is related to "self-discovery", psychologically, there is a close relationship between the desire to show one's true self and the "ego" that is affected by the 'Id' as Freud explained. From this point, it is obvious that everyone actually has experienced or will experienced the process of "self-discovery" in his or her own way. Therefore, one wants to show his true self (about what he wants), for example, what he likes, how he want to be treated and called, etc. to people because it is

the reaction an inner drive. Self-discovery is considered significant in one's life because it is a process that everyone experiences due to an innate instinctive drive that every human has. However, many people are not aware that they are in a process of 'self-discovery". A more specific discussion about self-discovery is seen through the analysis of the film *Bohemian Rhapsody* to show the representation of self-discovery contained in the film.

## 4.2. Portraying Self-Discovery

The results of analysis of *Bohemian Rhapsody* in this study suggested that there were at least three images (or aspects) portrayed by the main character, Freddie Mercury to reflects his identity. In other words, the three aspects also showed how the main character in the film experienced the process of self-discovery. It can be represented through three images that frequently appeared as follows:

### 4.2.1. Through a Unique Style

Basically, everyone must have seen family members, friends, neighbors, or public figures who have a unique style. The style mentioned in this context may refer to style of dressing, appearance in work, physical characteristics, etc which can vary. Style is always something that an individual uses to express his or her feelings and interests. Therefore, everyone has his or her own styles such as the outfit style, make up style, etc. Very often people show their unique different types of fashion styles and appearances for different kinds of purposes. However, in general, people understand that they want to show to others that their styles can reflect who they want to be.

Starting from the understanding that clothing is a product that distinguishes one social class from other social classes (Simmel, 1957, p. 543), the concept of

fashion in the current era has undergone a significant change. Many studies have revealed that appearance (fashion) and self-expression are two things that cannot be separated. In fact, according to Hutson (2010, p. 213) a person's appearance and sexual orientation are interrelated, for instance, a challenging and conspicuous style of dress may be used by a gay man to express his identity. *Bohemian Rhapsody* also depicted the main character who was very enthusiastic in the fashion for his stage performance:

> Brian : I didn't know it was fancy dress, Fred.
> Freddie : I've gotta make an impression, darling.
> Brian : You look like an angry lizard. It's your best work. Very subtle. (00:21:13)

The dialog taken from the film reflects that the main character Freddie Mercury wanted to show his confidence with a unique costume which would make him stand out on stage and believe that he could entertain his fans.

Another example, there was a dialog in the film showing Freddie's girlfriend, Mary Austin, praising his style as follows:

> Mary : You have such exotic look. I love your style. I think we should all take more risk. What do you think? (00:10:45)

A person's style can be broadly influenced by his or her style of dress. Freddie Mercury had a thought that he would feel gladly convenient if he could appear in an eye-catching, whimsical and impressive style as a public figure. This tells that clothing can represent a person's identity. People may use their fashion style as a tool to show that they are different from others (Cole, 2000, p.

2). As a matter of fact, people who live in cities often think that the way people dress can represent who they are and it may also their identity.

When people choose what kind of fashion they want, they actually show how they feel and what they want to show from the style of dress. It is because what a person wears can express and convey something to others about him (Cole, 2000, p. 3; Yonezawa & Nakatani, 2009, p. 327). If an individual is sure that he has found a style that fits what he desires or that can reflect his true self then he will express it confidently. This could be called a self-discovery experience. In addition, Freddie Mercury's unique style could also be seen from his enthusiasm for the characteristics of his band. He considered that his style had to be different from other singers. This was found in the following dialog:

> Mary    : So the new name is Queen?
> Freddie : As in "Her Royal Highness" because it's outrageous, and I can't think of anyone more outrageous than me. (00:16:15)

He used the word "outrageous" to describe his style. Even though his style might seem embarrassing, at least, he felt convenient and confident. This can prove that he has discovered his unique characteristic in him. By this way, according to Maluth (2015, p. 10) will let an individual know what he or she can do for his life such as career, achievement, etc.

Unique style can also be shown through a person's physical appearance. In everyday life, many people have certain physical characteristic that they consider unique. Without realizing it this could be something unique. For instance in the film *Bohemian Rhapsody*, the main character, Freddie Mercury was described as a man who had teeth shape that was considered unattractive as shown in the following dialog:

> Brian   : Our lead singer just quit.
> Freddie : Well, then you'll need someone new.
> Brian   : Any ideas?
> Freddie : What about me?
> Roger   : Uh, not with those teeth, mate. (00:08:32)

He became the joke of his new friends when he requested to join their musical group. Nevertheless, he had a great singing talent. His weakness seemed to be covered by his confidence to show his friends that he felt comfortable of being himself. Related to this, there is an explanation from Mehrabian and Blum (1997, p. 39) stating that physical beauty may include various things such as body movement patterns, facial expressions, speech, etc. In other words, they can all be perceived as attractive points about a person that can distinguish him from other people.

However Freddie Mercury in the film was able to show that he was comfortable with his appearance and proud of his talent as a singer. This was what made him discover his own strength to become who he really was. The explanation above can be linked to the individual's condition that there is a strong internal drive to fulfill the desire to show one's uniqueness through clothing and stage styles that might seem wild and embarrassing. In fact, this is a way to show that he wants himself to be the central of attention. It goes with the idea that Freud (1940, p. 29) explained about the ego pursuing satisfaction and avoiding dissatisfaction.

### 4.2.2. Through Loneliness

One of the issues related to the psychology of the main character frequently portrayed in the film was

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loneliness. Everyone in this world has experienced loneliness. It may be defined in several kinds of concepts and it is not something simple because it is affected by many things ranging from the characteristics of the person to the social environment he lives (Ward et al., 2019, p. 9). Loneliness also seems to be a condition that is often experienced by many people who live in urban areas. People who are busy with their work and have many friends would also experience loneliness. It is something quite complicated to understand.

Loneliness has become something natural to be pictured in films. However, the depiction of loneliness has something to do with the mental of the character. In *Bohemian Rhapsody*, this kind of portrait often appeared. There was a part of dialog spoken by the main character, Freddie Mercury in the film as shown below:

Freddie : Being human is a condition that requires a little anesthesia. (01:29:52)

This sentence has a deep meaning. Anesthesia is a medical method used to reduce pain when a person is undergoing surgery. If it is related to the conditions experienced by the main character in the film, this could symbolize that the main character experienced pressure due to the problems he faced, including the feeling of loneliness. In other words, it may reveals that what had been experienced by the character such as trauma, fear or hatred of things or people that had hurt his heart could possibly have an impact on his life.

There was also another scene depicting how much Freddie wanted his friend to be with him so that he would not feel lonely:

Freddie : Oh, I knew you'd appreciate it. Stay for dinner, anything you fancy.
Roger : Wife, kids, you know.
Freddie : Of course. Well, come on. We'll eat off the floor. It's clean enough.
Roger : Another time, Fred. (00:57:37)

The meaning of loneliness is often considered as something negative and experienced as by each person with different conditions connected to the relationship of an individual to another individual in terms of the intensity and quality of the relationship (Gierveld et al., 2006, p. 486). In other words, the loneliness experienced by an individual must be different from that felt by other individuals because each individual's relationship with family members, friends or colleagues may also vary based on many kinds of factors.

As the point mentioned previously, it can be caused by various experiences such as a problem in social interactions or any problems that arise in family or friendships (Jung & Lee, 2018, p. 1104). Even though, Freddie had talent, fans, and friends, he still felt lonely, for instance in the dialog below:

Jim Hutton : So, all your friends have left you alone?
Freddie : They're not my friends, not really, just distraction.
Jim Hutton : From what?
Freddie : The in-between moment, I suppose. I find them intolerable. All of the darkness you thought you left behind comes creeping back in.
Jim Hutton : I know what you mean.
Freddie : Really? (01:04:15)

When Freddie replied that "They're not my friends", he seemed to have discovered the truth about himself and what he knew about himself. Loneliness can also reflect a condition that a person can find the true nature or attitude of himself. It makes an individual realize that he must be more patient in dealing with the problems in his life. That way, he will discover that his true self turns out to have the strength to face hard times.

Many people do not realize that loneliness can be perceived as a part of the self-discovery process. A number of scenes and dialogs portraying loneliness experienced by the main characters in *Bohemian Rhapsody* can reflect that this condition will be a pressure for the lonely individual and will cause him to feel what he really needs and the kind of life he has been searching for. This way according to Ea and Kahl (2014, p. 9) as a condition experienced by people that they must accept themselves as they are and expect that others can also accept them. Loneliness is indeed an unpleasant condition and often mentally tortures the individual who experiences it. However, it should be realized that the experience can be a moment that makes the individual know the real situation he is facing. This could be a significant point in the self-discovery process. That way, the individual will know who his loyal friends are; who or what he actually needs in his life; what he really wants to do in his life, and so on.

### 4.2.3. through the expressing of sexual orientation

One of the scenes in *Bohemian Rhapsody* that is considered essential is the main character's expression of his sexual orientation. This becomes a sensational issue in the true story of Freddie Mercury's life journey.

Revealing one's true sexual orientation to family members or friends is not an easy thing to do. This will obviously put pressure on individuals who have unusual sexual orientation. For instance, in one of the scenes showed such a dialog:

Mary : Something's been wrong for a while now. Say it, Say it.
Freddie: I've been thinking about it a lot, I think I'm bisexual
Mary : Freddie, you are gay. (00:53:49)

The dialog above Freddie's girlfriend found out that he was actually a gay. People have different ways of acknowledging their sexual orientation, for example, telling a story how he accepts himself as a gay or revealing his sexual orientation to his family members (Marcus, 2005, pp. 40–41). This is not an easy thing to do for gay men.

Since centuries ago, societies dominated by hetero-normative influence have strongly constructed a culture and norms that regard homosexuality as a taboo and immoral behavior. Therefore, according to D'Augelli (2006, p. 203) there are a lot of gay men who have been scared to face the consequences of revealing their true sexual orientation to people who close to them. The character Freddie Mercury in the film was portrayed as a man who dared to show his attraction to men. This is depicted in the following dialog:

Freddie : Let me get you a beer.
Jim Hutton : I wouldn't mind a beer.
Freddie : Can you just tell me where we keep them? You're very handsome. I love a man in uniform
Jim Hutton : So do I. (01:03:53)

His sexual attraction to men made him show his true sexual orientation. He

could no longer hide his passion and love for Jim Hutton. Self-recognition or coming out as a gay certainly has a serious impact on one's life, especially in career.

Based on Hawkins' perspective (2012, p. 236), the society is not yet a safe place for homosexual men and studies reveal that one out of four people who identify themselves as gay are forced to leave their homes or experience physical violence. Showing identity as a gay in most societies still seems to be something stereotyped and can be harmful because it may trigger acts of verbal or physical violence from the community, including the family (Adams, 2010, p. 237). Thus, many people with homosexual orientation hide their sexual identity to avoid problems. However, this does not mean that there are no gays who reveal their sexual identity to the public. There are also many gay men who are brave enough to take the risk to tell their family members, friends, and neighbors who they really are.

Being gay an also be associated with self-expression, especially with regard to sexual orientation. Sexual identity, clearly includes physical, mental and all behavior that is in accordance with one's sexual orientation which makes him comfortable and leads him to accept his own uniqueness (Cuomo, 2007, pp. 82–83). In other words, through the disclosure of sexual orientation, one can find his own true identity. A gay man wants himself to be accepted and recognized by society. Thus, scenes showing that Freddie having a romantic relationship with Jim can actually reflect his way of getting rid of pressure. He did not want his mind to be depressed to hide his love for men even though he had a girlfriend. This portrait can prove that the main character in *Bohemian Rhapsody* had the courage to let people

know his sexual identity. This is perceived as a way to live the life one wants and is a part of his journey in the process of self-discovery.

## 5. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of psychoanalysis, the results of this study can be summarized into five points. First, "self-discovery" is a combination of the word "self" which is associated with something that comes from within a person which is personal and fundamental and the term "discovery" is identical with a process experienced by someone.

Second, self-discovery can be conceptualized as the path or process experienced by an individual to search for his or her own identity or the life he or she wants to live, including showing his or her existence and it can take many forms depends on the situations. Therefore, self-discovery can be considered as an essential stage in a person's life even though many people do not realize it. Third, the self-discovery experienced by the main character in *Bohemian Rhapsody* was shown through the unique style including the style of fashion and the characteristics of the main character of the movie. The study revealed that a person's unique style can basically reflect his or her own identity and become a part of self-discovery process.

Forth, loneliness felt by everyone is a natural condition and is an unpleasant moment and can affect a person's psychology and so is the loneliness depicted in the film Bohemian Rhapsody. The main character realized that his loneliness made him know the true meaning of life such as friendship, love, and career. Finally, the portrait of the character revealing his sexual orientation in the film can be perceived as a part of self-discovery process.

Hetero-normative influence in mainstream culture in society has categorized homosexuality as a bad behavior. However, this is also a challenge for gay men to reveal their true sexual orientation to the public.

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