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Les Séminaires de
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The Coming out
Process:
A Family Experience

Par
Roberto BAIOCCO, PhD

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Roberto Baiocco is an assistant professor of Developmental psychology at the Faculty of Medicine and Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome. His primary research interests focus on family functioning and the implications for adolescent adjustment. The second area of research concern sexual minority youth and parent-child relationships in the transition from adolescence to young adulthood - including the implications for risk behaviors such as substance use and abuse.

From 2008 he is the Director of the Counseling Service named "BE as you ARE" (Faculty of Medicine and Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome), that offers support and understanding, listening and responding to adolescents, young adults, couples and families who are facing problems related to sexual orientation and/or "gender identity".

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The topic

The coming out process has been suggested as an essential component in homosexual identity formation and integration (Cass, 1979). Identity integration includes acceptance of one’s gay, lesbian, bisexual identity and sharing this aspect of the self with other individuals. While coming out may provide psychological benefits, disclosing one’s sexual orientation is a highly complex process because it can yield the potential for both benefit and harm.

Coming out to family, especially to parents, is often the biggest challenge for people with non-heterosexual identities (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003; Savin-Williams, 1998). Coming out or disclosing a gay/lesbian sexual identity is one indicator that identity development has occurred. While coming out to parents is considered a difficult task for both gay men and lesbians there are many psychological benefits.

The coming out process is a developmental joint venture, whose outcomes, including family dynamics and long-term adjustments, vary greatly across families. Despite the risk of disapproval and victimization, the majority of gay and lesbian adolescents decide to come out to their parents (La Sala, 2000).

From a systemic point of view, we analyse the coming out process as a “whole family experience”, a phenomenon “interpersonal in nature”. This presentation reviews and integrates findings from studies of the individual, dyadic, and family-level variables associated with positive outcomes, focusing particularly on relationship variables.

Bibliography