

How Transgender Minority Groups Communicate with the Majority Society in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative descriptive research will critically analyze about how people in minority groups choose different ways to eliminate or overcome stereotypes on transgender issues and try to build good relations with dominant groups in order to be accepted in their environment. studied at the level of co-cultural communication theory by Mark Orbe. Information was obtained through informant interview techniques from the largest transgender community in Indonesia. The research results show that transgender groups in Indonesia still experience violence, discrimination and do not have a safe space. Minority groups have succeeded in adapting by using non-assertive communication methods in the majority community environment.

INTRODUCTION

Communication problems often arise and are felt by minority cultural groups, this occurs because the communication carried out has failed to be understood by the wider surrounding environment (Nordby, 2008: 17). This problem still occurs even if someone from the dominant cultural group wants to interact with a minority cultural group. Because, often the dominant culture has certain beliefs about minority cultural groups, and members of the majority cultural group do not have much knowledge about minority groups (Nordby, 2008: 17). Cultures with different values clearly cause social differences, and the gap between majority and minority cultural groups is what causes communication problems in society.

This communication problem causes the development of negative stigma about certain groups which society cannot directly avoid. These communication problems cannot be overcome simply by increasing knowledge about other cultural groups. However, with increasing knowledge of members of the majority group towards minorities, communication problems arising from this gap can be reduced (Nordby, 2008: 17). With visibility between the majority culture and minority sub-cultural groups, a movement will emerge where the minority sub-cultural group overcomes differences with the majority culture. This marginalized group will try to communicate with dominant society and culture (Littlejohn, 2012: 264).

Among the minority sub-cultures in Indonesia that have increased in number, one of them is the transgender minority sub-culture. Transgender is a word used to describe people who act, feel, think or look different from the gender assigned at birth. The identity currently attached to transgender people is the result of a construction. Religious values that allow only two genders, men and women, have formed the general public's belief that there are only two normal genders. This social construction associates a transgender person with an abnormal transgender identity. When a transgender person asserts their identity, the consequences are incalculable. The most obvious consequence is that transgender people are considered abnormal and ostracized from their environment, there is no difference between the roles of transgender people in society (Widayanti, 2009:38). The construction of transgender identity is also carried out by the government. The government has not recognized the existence of transgender people (Widayanti, 2009:38). The image of transgender identity is revealed through various raids aimed at reducing transgender activities.

One of the largest transgender minority groups in Indonesia is the Indonesian transmen community. *Transmen Indonesia* more using social media as an arena for self-articulation and performative space in the discourse battles that often occur in today's youth environment. Issues discussed on social media. *Transmen Indonesia* tells the story of the journey in fighting for transgender lives in Indonesia. Apart from that, they also use social media to illustrate the complexity of young people's problems from the perspective of gender minorities, including cases; (1) dating life; (2) work, and (3) safe space.

From a communication science perspective, communication between minority communities will always be faced with problems of discrimination and stereotypes. To reduce the problems of discrimination and cultural differences, an approach using co-cultural theory can be taken. In the book *Theories of Human Communication: Eleventh Edition*, it is explained that co-cultural theory looks at differences where communication is defined from the perspective of members of underrepresented groups. In other words, this theory seeks to understand when members of co-cultural groups perceive cultural differences as salient (Littlejohn et al., 2017). Meanwhile, in the book *A First Look at Communication Theory Tenth Edition*, it is explained that in order to maneuver within the dominant culture and achieve a level of success, members of a co-cultural group will adopt one or more specific communication orientations in their daily interactions. Co-cultural theory identifies patterns in what they say and do. (Lapinski & Orbe, 2007; Griffin et al., 2019).

This qualitative descriptive research will critically analyze how co-cultural communication is carried out by sub-minorities in voicing their existence in the sub-majority environment at the level of co-cultural communication theory by Mark Orbe. Based on the explanation above, researchers are interested in conducting research entitled "How to Communicate Transgender Minority Groups in Society in Indonesia".

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Communication Theory

Cultural communication is the art of understanding and mutual understanding between audiences of different cultures (pakarkomunikasi.com). Culture is the basis of a human's perspective on life and various things related to the reality of life, it provides a set of ways of understanding things, building attitudes and determining behavior. (Prasetya, 2017) Culture is a configuration of learned behavior and the results of behavior whose elements are used together and transmitted by community members (Linton in NH Kistanto, 2017). Culture itself has seven elements, according to Koentjaraningrat (2000:203). namely: religion, art, social systems, tools and equipment of life and language. Each element of culture is included in the three forms of culture, namely: ideas, activities and artifacts. Language is one of the elements of culture but also as a communication tool that people use to carry out social interactions between people. Language has several social functions, namely social communication, social control, and social cooperation. The function of language in communication is to send messages.

Co-Culture Communication Theory

Originator of the theory co-cultural This is Mark Orbe, a professor in communications at Western Michigan University. This theory focuses on social inequality that affects the communication process of marginalized groups. In this theory, society is separated into two groups, namely *dominant group* and *minorities*. Minority groups are referred to as co-cultural which is central to this theory. Orbe chose the word co-cultural to represent them, because this word

does not contain negative connotations and does not provide particular specialization to one minority group.

Co-Cultural Theory attempts to explain how people in Co Culture groups choose different ways to eliminate or overcome stereotypes, work to build relationships with dominant groups or even avoid dominant groups. Because Orbe himself assumes that there is no social group that is superior to other social groups, and this is one of the reasons why Orbe uses the word co-cultural rather than sub-ordinate or minority (Littlejohn, 2012: 264).

This theory starts with the assumption that there is a hierarchy in society that privileges certain groups. This hierarchy shows that there are dominant members on the basis of various levels of privilege. In a hierarchical circle and in the presence of a dominant group, a communication system is formed by the dominant group which functions to keep members of the accompanying cultural group outside the boundaries of the dominant culture. Meanwhile, there should be diversity that is worth considering in the companion culture. This results in members of the accompanying cultural group strategically communicating to overcome the system in which they find themselves (Littlejohn, 2012: 264).

The focus of this theory is to provide a framework in which underrepresented members negotiate efforts to convey their silent voice within the dominant structure of society (LSS Utami, 2015).

Mark Orbe added, there are three approaches taken by Co Cultural groups in their interactions with dominant cultural groups. Firstly, a non-assertive approach with the assumption that the communication approach taken prioritizes the needs of other people, is non-confrontational and tends to slow down communication. Second, take an assertive approach. This means that companion cultural groups communicate expressively by taking into account the interests of themselves and others. And finally through an aggressive approach where the co-cultural group clearly promotes itself even though sometimes it takes away the interests of others (Chand, 2014: 110).

METHODOLOGY

In this research, the author uses a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. This research aims to explore data and analysis carried out simultaneously and involving several sources. According to Sukmadinata (2017:73), the qualitative descriptive research method is a method used to describe and describe existing phenomena, both natural and human engineered, which pays more attention to the characteristics, quality and interrelationships between events. Meanwhile, for the type of research the author chose the type of case study research, to be able to understand a particular problem or situation in depth and specifically. So you can understand the various facts of the case with the context and related scientific fields.

This research data was obtained from interviews, observations, literature studies, and documentation obtained from 20 informants in the largest transgender community, namely the Indonesian transmen transgender

community. Data collection was carried out in several large cities such as the city of Yogyakarta and the city of Jakarta, which is the capital of Indonesia and is also the place where the largest transgender community was first formed. Research data collection was carried out for six months, starting from the month January 2024 to July 2024. Data collection was carried out on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. This day was chosen because it was in line with the usual schedule for community activities and also regular gatherings of community members. The author conducted an in-depth search for information by interviewing informants regarding the communication methods of minority groups in voicing their existence so that they can be accepted by the dominant community, as well as what issues are the concerns experienced by transgender minority groups in the community environment, both in the world of work and the environment in which they live, and family, as well as other dominant societal environments.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Based on the research results that the author obtained, several minority groups in Indonesia admitted to experiencing some unwanted treatment. One of them is discrimination, harassment, violence and unfair treatment by the dominant society. Transgender actors admit that there are still several obstacles they feel that make them anxious and uncomfortable. In LBHM research (2018) providing news in online media throughout 2017, it was found that of the 973 victims, 715 (73.86%) of them were transgender. The conditions above show the vulnerability of transgender groups to violence and discrimination due to negative prejudice towards individual gender identity and expression (Debineva & Pelupessy, 2019).

One other problem is in terms of love life. This happens because of a lack of inclusive understanding and education about gender diversity, they are faced with doubts about whether they should reveal their identity or not. Meanwhile is not an obligation, because disclosure of personal identity must be done voluntarily by considering the security and comfort conditions of the individual. Identity issues that are not legitimized by the state also have implications when looking for work. Young transgender people experience discrimination in the work environment, because not all formal or informal jobs are transgender-friendly. Discrimination in public spaces requires transgender people to deal with administrative documents, such as KTP (Resident Identification Card), SIM (Driving License), health insurance card, school diploma, or other documents that include a name and gender that is not their own. Transgender people also feel the lack of safe space as a gender minority, even when they want to go to the toilet or food stall. Transgender people must manage the gender dysphoria they experience when people look at them in a different way and call them with pronouns that refer to a gender that is not their own (*misgendering*).

The discrimination felt by transgender minorities covers many things, including economic, religious and health issues. In economic terms, there are no jobs available for transgender people, so some of them have to work as

scavengers, buskers, and even sex workers to survive. In terms of health, transgender minorities do not receive health services because they do not have identity cards and some medical workers are reluctant to examine transgender patients. Meanwhile, in terms of religion, they often receive discrimination in places of worship. It is not uncommon for people to choose to leave and not worship near people who have transgender status.

In this research, the researcher will explain the methods or communication efforts made by transgender groups as part of a minority group in interacting with the dominant community in their environment. What is meant by Effort here is the way in which transgender people can be accepted by the majority community in their environment. Mark Orbe as the initiator of this theory explains that there are three approaches taken by underrepresented groups in interacting with dominant cultural groups which include (Nurwahid, 2017: p.4-5):

- a. A non-assertive approach, which is carried out by prioritizing other people's needs, is non-confrontational and tends to slow down communication.
- b. Assertive approach, which refers to how underrepresented cultural groups communicate expressively and take into account the interests of themselves and others.
- c. An aggressive approach, which refers to underrepresented cultural groups, clearly promotes itself even though it sometimes takes away the interests of others.

These three approaches are three approaches that Mark Orbe formulated as approaches that are often used by underrepresented groups in interacting with dominant groups. From the data that the author obtained during interviews and observations with informants, the author concluded that the transgender minority group chose the non-assertive method as an effective method and could minimize conflict in the adaptation process with society. With several behavioral characteristics that show that transgender groups use a non-assertive way of interacting with the dominant community in their environment. These behaviors include:

- a. Introvert
- b. Hiding one's identity
- c. Put your partner first when talking
- d. Communication is slow, messages are rarely delivered
- e. Put your partner first when talking
- f. Prioritize the dominant opinion
- g. Speak softly and try to agree with the dominant opinion

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the research above, which is carried out by transgender groups in interacting with dominant society, it can be seen that transgender groups use co-cultural methods by Mark Orbe which are non-assertive during the communication process. Non-assertive communication is a method of communication that is carried out by prioritizing other people's needs, which is non-confrontational and tends to slow down communication.

Transgender groups claim that using this method allows them to be more integrated with the dominant culture of society. The author analyzed and found the results that informants as actors from minority groups in society, had an attitude that would prioritize and prioritize the interests of community groups in their environment. This is done to hide his identity and try to act as an equal to the person he is talking to. Informants are more likely to avoid the possibility of hostility, contradictions and rejection that may occur when interacting for the first time with people in their environment. Informants are more likely to screen the person they are talking to first, in order to know the attitude they should take when responding. This is often done by transgender people even though it has the impact of slowing down communication and resulting in communication not having the reciprocity expected by the informant. Often informants cannot convey their desires so that they can be accepted in society, and this makes informants feel uncomfortable interacting with people in their environment. These methods are used by transgender groups to try to assimilate themselves so they can be accepted by the dominant society in their environment.

By using non-assertive communication methods, transgender minority groups will form an easier communication adaptation process. This is done by a minority group, namely the Transmen Indonesia transgender community, when interacting with the majority community in dealing with transgender issues in their environment. This was obtained based on the answers from the research results above which the author has described which the author then linked to one of the communication theories, namely the co-culture theory by Mark Orbe. This theory focuses on social inequality that affects the communication process of marginalized groups. In summary, co-cultural theory discusses the imbalance of power in social life. Co-culture theory is very important to be applied by minority groups because it is necessary to adapt several communication orientations in daily life in order to achieve success in communicating with dominant groups. The focus of this theory is to provide a framework in which underrepresented members negotiate efforts to convey their silent voice within the dominant structure of society (LSS Utami, 2015). So that the writer will find out how people in minority groups choose different ways of communicating to eliminate or overcome stereotypes on transgender issues and work to build good relationships with dominant groups in order to be accepted in their environment. This approach is one of the approaches from Mark Orbe's study which is often used by underrepresented groups in interacting with dominant groups.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The various phenomena of one of the minority groups, namely the transgender group, that occur in Indonesia are very interesting things to research. In the study of communication related to gender identity, we will see how transgender groups adapt and voice their existence so that they can be accepted within the majority community in Indonesia. Transgender groups still feel vulnerable to violence and discrimination due to negative prejudices

imposed by society on individual gender identity and expression. Transgender people feel that they do not have a safe space in public spaces such as places of worship, public transportation, toilets, hospitals, police stations and other public places. Apart from that, transgender groups also feel unrest in the economic sector, such as difficulties in the world of work, inadequate income, and unfair treatment. Then in terms of recognizing self-identity, such as when transgender actors have difficulty in the field of romance to confess their identity to their partners, and also difficulties in the process of having personal identity files such as KTP, SIM, health insurance, or other documents that include name and gender. which is not theirs.

Therefore, transgender groups use an effective way of communication according to Mark Orbe's theory is non-assertive communication. This effort is made so that underrepresented groups interact with dominant cultural groups so that acceptable to the majority community in their environment. Non-assertive communication is communication carried out by prioritizing other people's needs which is non-confrontational and tends to slow down communication. This method is used to minimize existing conflicts and is a different way to eliminate or overcome stereotypes on transgender issues and make it easier to build good relationships with dominant groups in society.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Problem limitations are used to avoid deviations or broadening of the main research problem. The limitation of the problem in this research is that this research only looks at and discusses the co-culture communication methods applied by transgender sub-minorities in communicating and voicing their existence in the majority community environment, as well as looking at the phenomenon of issues that are often felt by marginalized groups, namely transgender groups in Indonesia. This research is not intended to generalize to other aspects that also address culture. Therefore, the author hopes that this research can be developed in other cultural communication journals.

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