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SYMBOLIC CONVERGENCE IN THE INDEPENDENT MEN OF FLOBAMORA COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

This research examines fantasy themes and symbolic convergence in the Independent Men of Flobamora community, focusing on how these elements build group cohesiveness. Using symbolic convergence theory as its theoretical framework, this qualitative descriptive study employs fantasy theme analysis methodology. Data was collected through observation, focus group discussions, interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal that the community's cohesiveness develops through an ongoing process, beginning with the formation of a collective identity that serves as the foundation for fantasy themes. This process is initiated by shared experiences of stigma and discrimination among community members. Through message exchange and dramatization, these experiences evolve into symbolic interactions, leading to symbolic convergence. The dramatized messages elicit responses from participants, ultimately creating a chain of shared fantasies.

INTRODUCTION

LGBTQ, which is an abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ), has become a national and international issue. This group received a negative response from society because they were considered to have immoral sexual disorders, contrary to religious values. Strong rejection came from various groups and even the desire to criminalize LGBTQ people (Zulkifli Ismail, 2021).

This phenomenon is reinforced by national survey data from Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) in May 2022, there were 44.5% of citizens who agreed 40.4% and strongly agreed 4.1% with the opinion "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) must be respected as human beings." Meanwhile there were 49.3%, 36.6% disagreed and 12.7% strongly disagreed. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) must be respected as human beings.

Based on the results of pre-research carried out on February 15 2023, researchers found information that the Independent Men of Flobamora community has a location that is used as a place to gather together with other members called Rumah Pelangi Kasih, having his address at Kolhua, Maulafa District, Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara. When they gather, members of the Independent Men of Flobamora community establish more intensive communication. They share information, knowledge and experiences about how something should be understood, believed and applied together, thereby creating cohesiveness in the Independent Men of Flobamora community.

"Independent Men of Flobamora (IMOF) actually started because in the early 2010s, Beta wanted, why isn't there a forum, an organization or whatever, actually it was originally for gay and bisexual friends. "Because with the beta process of having self-acceptance, we see that beta goes through quite a long process, poor fellow friends, at least there is a place for them." (Informant F, 28 August 2023) "...Since childhood, he has been called *bencong*, sissy. That term has stuck with me since childhood. Maybe because I'm used to it, it's finally normal. Even in my area. I'm called madam." (Informant G, 28 August 2023)

When gathered in a relaxed atmosphere, humorous conversations take place, sharing stories and experiences known as fantasy. This fantasy is what Ernest Bormann intended as a dramatized message such as puns, stories, analogies and speeches that have "emotional content" that enlivens interactions in groups. Fantasies can include past events of community members as well as events that may occur in the future. The joke or fantasy is the result of a

dramatization of the message from the creative and imaginative process of the members involved which causes the fantasy theme to be born.

The fantasy theme is expressed in a phrase, sentence, or paragraph. Usually, members of the Independent Men of Flobamora community who have interacted for a long time have developed some kind of symbolic signal, which is a code, expression, slogan, or a verbal sign or gesture that can only be understood by members or parts of their group itself. This is what Ernest Bormann later called symbolic convergence. Convergence occurs when each or several people develop their personal symbolic worlds to complement each other, so that they have a basis for creating community, for discussing shared experiences, and for creating shared understanding.

The phenomenon of symbolic convergence occurs within the communication processes of the Independent Men of Flobamora community. Shared understanding among members enhances social awareness and strengthens community cohesiveness. The members, who share similar stories and life experiences as part of the LGBTQ community, dramatize events, actions, and symbols during their interactions, further fostering a sense of unity and connection.

This phenomenon attracted the attention of researchers to carry out research with a focus on looking at fantasy themes and also symbolic convergence that occurs in the communication process within the Independent Men of Flobamora community in carrying out message exchange interactions between its members. The stigma and discrimination that often befalls and is accepted by members of the Independent Men of Flobamora community, makes them create and share various symbols that are used to stay connected with fellow community members. This symbol was created as a collective identity and characteristic of the community, as well as the cohesiveness that is maintained through interaction between members, making the community able to survive to this day.

This phenomenon made researchers interested in conducting research with a focus on seeing Symbolic Convergence in the Independent Men of Flobamora (IMOF) Community. The researcher hopes that with this research, readers can understand what fantasy themes are intertwined in the communication process in the Independent Men of Flobamora community and how to build cohesiveness through the evolution of fantasy themes and symbolic convergence in the Independent Men of Flobamora community.

Based on a background phenomenon where there is a collective identity, namely the stigma and discrimination that is often received by members of the Independent Men of Flobamora community due to their gender expression and sexual orientation. Make them have experiences and stories of having experienced the same stigma and discrimination. This is because of the collective identity of the stories and experiences that they share with each other in meetings and gatherings, which ultimately creates unification, a sense of unity or cohesiveness in the Independent Men of Flobamora community.

Thus, the researcher can formulate the problem in this research, namely to see how the Independent Men of Flobamora community succeeded in creating and maintaining cohesiveness in their community through fantasy themes and symbolic convergence in their message exchange interactions. This research aims to analyze fantasy themes formed from collective identities that build cohesiveness and describe the symbolic convergence that is formed in the communication process in the Independent Men of Flobamora community.

Through this research, of course the contribution is not only limited to theoretical benefits, namely providing additional knowledge references in communication science, especially regarding symbolic convergence theory with the instrument of analysis methods for fantasy themes. However, it also supports the development of new research in the field of social sciences, especially communication, as well as opening the way for research related to cohesiveness and analysis of fantasy themes in the future and research regarding the analysis of fantasy themes in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) groups can be reference for new research in the future.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses the constructivism paradigm. Ontologically, this paradigm views meaning as being created collectively as shaped by language conventions and other social processes (Denzin and Lincoln, 2009). Constructivists view reality as a phenomenon that is not permanent and has a relationship with the past, present and future. Reality in such conditions can be understood based on constructions as contained in the researcher's awareness and experiences related to life (Farida, 2014). Using a type of descriptive qualitative research which is intended to explore or clarify an existing symptom, phenomenon or social reality. Descriptive research attempts to describe several variables relating to the problem and unit studied (Samsu, 2017).

Ernest Bormann's fantasy theme analysis method to study the symbolic convergence of the Independent Men of Flobamora community in building cohesiveness. Ernest Bormann operationalized his theory with the term Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA). Fantasies include events of a group member's past, or events that may occur in the future. Fantasy does not include communication that focuses on what happens within the group (Suryadi, 2010).

This research was conducted in June 2023 with 1 month of pre-research in May and 3 months of data processing. The research took place in Kolhua Village, District. Maulafa, Kupang City, NTT. This location has become a gathering place for the IMOF NTT LGBTQ group because there is a joint community secretariat that the group has built since 2010 until today under the name Rumah Pelangi Kasih, where in daily observations by researchers, both directly and indirectly, there is interaction with the surrounding community. This is the reason the researcher chose the research location

In this research, the subjects involved were 7 people based on selection using a purposive sampling technique. The focus of the research is to see how the Independent Men of Flobamora community succeeded in creating and maintaining cohesiveness in their community through fantasy themes and symbolic convergence in their message exchange interactions.

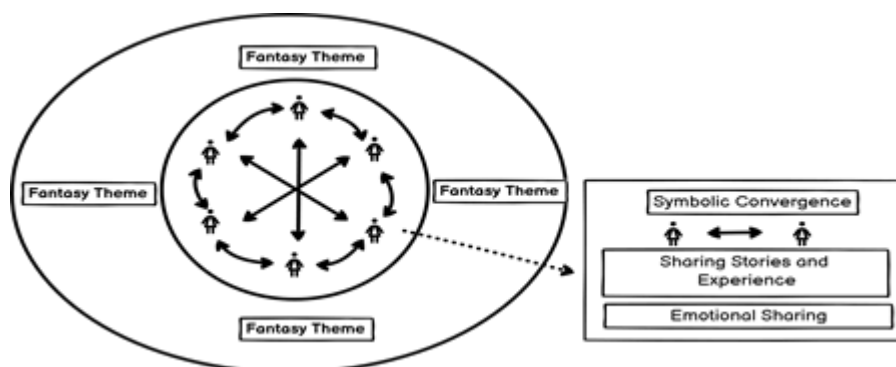
Data collection techniques in this research are observation, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), in-depth interviews, and documentation. The data obtained will be validated through triangulation techniques. The data analysis technique used in the research is the Miles and Haberman Model Interactive Analysis method.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Fantasy Theme

Fantasy themes are dramatized messages, such as puns, stories, analogies, and speeches that enliven group interactions. The fantasy theme also focuses on the story of a character with narrative characteristics. Message dramatization does not occur in the context of the task or work that is being experienced or carried out. All acts of communication that discuss joint actions or activities that occurred at the time the event took place, do not have imaginative content. However, if the discussion is about events that occur outside the group. Or talk about similar events experienced by group members in the past. Or talk about

something related to the future. Such things can be categorized as fantasy (Ernest Bormann in Suryadi, 2010).



Pic. 1. Formation of Fantasy Themes in Independent Men of Flobamora

Source: Researcher's Process 2024

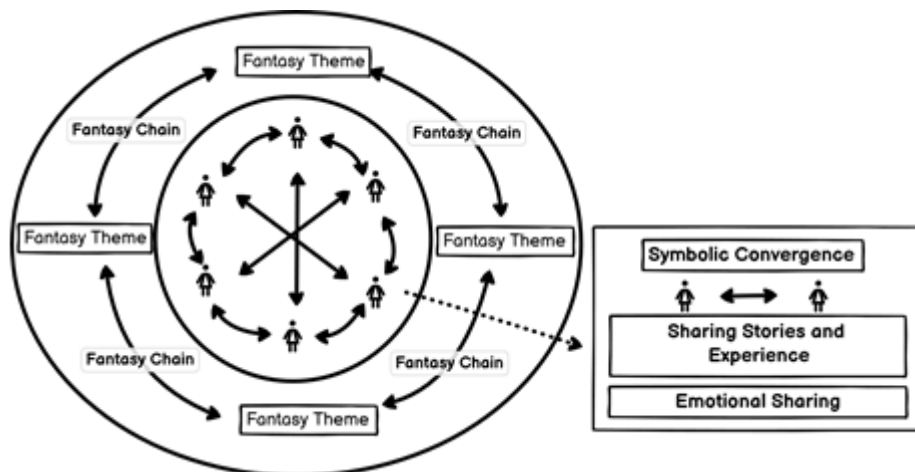
The fantasy theme formed in the Independent Men of Flobamora community is related to the desire to feel accepted and appreciated by the surrounding community, and to have the freedom to live with their sexual identity and orientation without fear of discrimination or stigmatization. However, due to experiences of discrimination and inequality, the themes of their fantasies evolved into dreams of building a more inclusive and supportive community, where all individuals, including those from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) groups, could feel safe and accepted.

Fantasy Chain

A fantasy chain is when a dramatized message succeeds in getting a response from communication participants, thereby increasing the intensity and excitement of participants in various types of fantasies. When fantasies in a group begin to develop, a chain of fantasies is created. When a fantasy chain is created, the tempo of the conversation increases, enthusiasm from the participants also begins to emerge, so that the sense of empathy and feedback between communication participants will also increase.

The chain of fantasies created in the Independent Men of Flobamora community develops along with the experiences of individuals who face discrimination and inequality in their social interactions. They initially shared stories about their experiences with rejection

and discrimination, but as time went on, they began to talk about joint efforts to build networks of support and solidarity within Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) groups and outside the community to fight back. discrimination and promotion of equality.



Pic. 2. Formation of Fantasy Chains in Independent Men of Flobamora
Source: Researcher Process, 2024

The fantasy chain in this group develops along with the growing awareness and struggle of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) groups. Initially, they talked about their personal experiences with sexual identity and orientation, but as time went on, they began to talk about joint efforts to overcome stigma and discrimination, and achieve the goal of equality and justice for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) groups). The chain of fantasies in this community grows along with the bitter experience of discrimination. From individual stories detailing abuse to collective efforts to respond and fight back, this fantasy chain reflects a journey full of struggle and solidarity against rampant oppression.

Based on the fantasy themes that researchers found in the Independent Men of Flobamora community, they have developed through the dramatization of messages that researchers found in conducting research through observations and which were confirmed in interviews, the fantasy themes that were formed were stories and experiences of stigma and discrimination that they received. dramatization in the process of exchanging messages, which can be described in the following fantasy chain process.

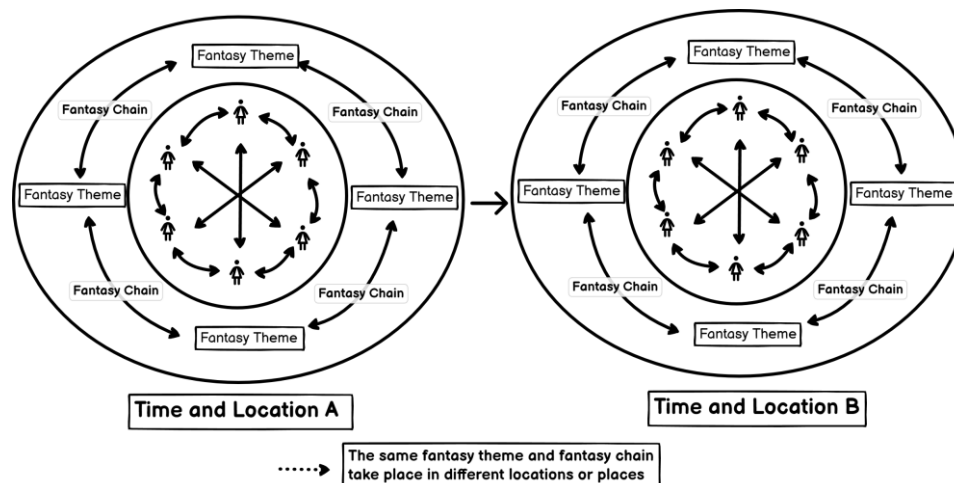
Next, when the focus group discussion process was finished, there was a kind of enthusiasm from Informant F regarding the researchers' impressions after hearing the stories and experiences of the informants during the focus group discussion process. Then the researcher himself answered, who told his experience with people with different orientations, where the researcher himself had also discriminated against people with different orientations. Then, the story continued from one of the other researchers in the focus group discussion process, who said that during the research process, the researcher himself also experienced stigma and ridicule from his friends. Furthermore, informant welcomed the researcher's answer, that this was the feeling and experience of stigma and discrimination experienced by those in the Independent Men of Flobamora community.

Fantasy Type

Ernest Bormann in Suryadi, 2010 describes this concept as fantasy themes that recur and are discussed in other situations, with other characters, but in the same storyline. If the narrative framework is the same, but the figures, characters or settings are different, then the themes can be grouped into the same type of fantasy. However, if there are several different fantasy themes or narrative frameworks, that means there are several types of fantasy. The fantasy types in this group experience changes as their awareness and struggles grow.

Initially, they dreamed about living in an accepting and supportive environment where they could feel safe to express themselves fully, but as time went on, they began to dream about creating broader social change that promoted equality, justice, respect for all individuals, vulnerable groups, including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) groups. The types of fantasies in this group have changed along with changes in the needs and aspirations of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) group.

Initially, they had expectations about being themselves without fear of rejection or violence, but as time went by, they began to have expectations about creating significant social change and fighting for LGBT rights collectively.



Pic 3. Types of Fantasy that occur in Independent Men of Flobamora

Source: Researcher Process, 2024

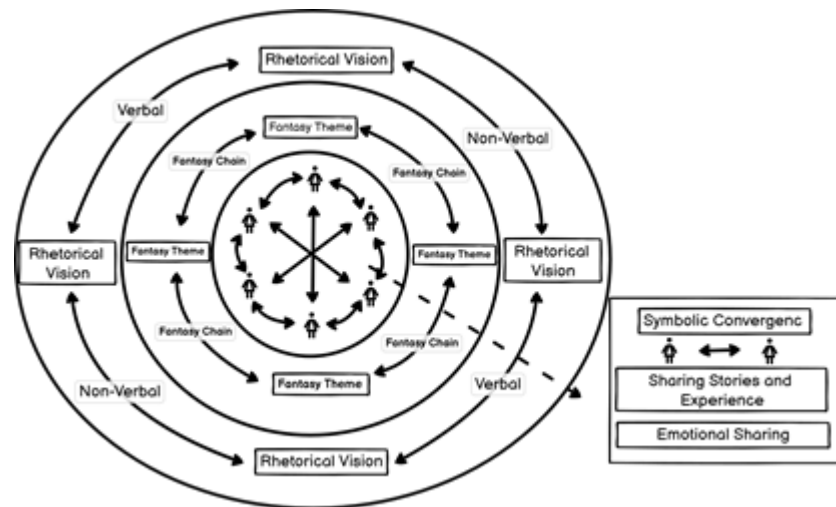
An illustration of the fantasy chain formed in the Independent Men of Flobamora community which occurred at a family gathering event on January 27 2024, members of the Independent Men of Flobamora community held a family gathering, gathered at one of the tourist attractions, in Penfui. At that time, the researchers were invited and came together to chat and discuss several things. While in the middle of the discussion, informant C suddenly asked one of the people who took part in the family gathering. Still at the same family gathering, when the event was about to finish and he was getting ready to go home, the researcher heard when one of the members of the family gathering suddenly called Informant D by his pun name, namely Chikita Meidy.

Rhetorical Visions

Rhetorical vision is defined as "...sharing a fantasy theme and types across under a wider community". At this stage the fantasy themes have developed and expanded many times beyond the group that developed the fantasy in the first place. Because of this development, these fantasy themes have become fantasies of the wider community and formed a kind of rhetorical community. The rhetorical vision in the Independent Men of Flobamora community has developed along with their efforts to fight discrimination and inequality in society.

They began to think not only about how they could protect themselves from discrimination, but also about how within the Independent Men of Flobamora community they could act as agents of positive change in their society, promoting awareness, education, and

advocacy for the rights of Lesbian groups, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) and equality in their social environment



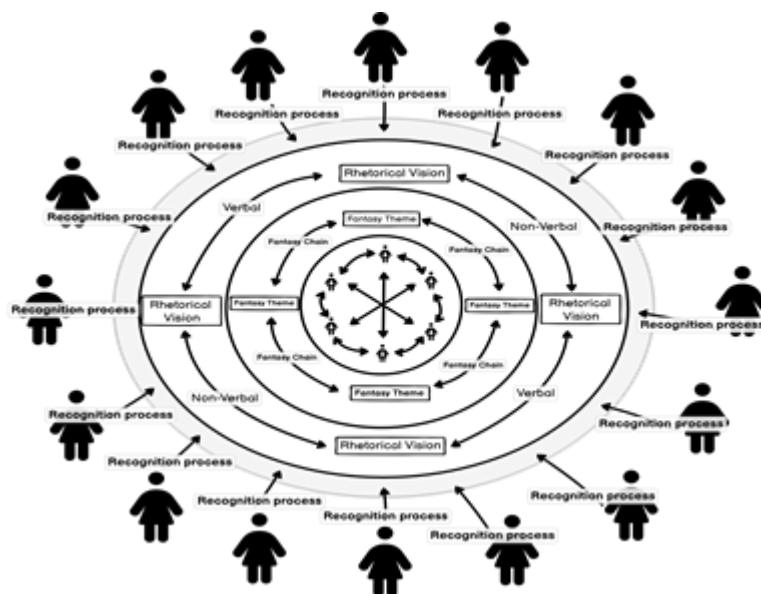
Pic 4. Formation of Rhetorical Vision in Independent Men of Flobamora

Source: Researcher Process, 2024

The Independent Men of Flobamora community began to think not only about how they could fight for their own rights, but also about how they could become agents of positive change in society more broadly, fighting for equality and justice for everyone, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity. They. This rhetorical vision within the Independent Men of Flobamora community developed into a call for profound change at various levels. They began to think about strategies to mobilize support, press for changes in government policy, and speak out for human rights. Their rhetorical vision involves broader efforts to overhaul social and political narratives, give voice to diversity, and promote justice for the entire LGBT community.

Researchers found that there are three (3) symbols included in the rhetorical vision in the Independent Men of Flobamora community, these words are Rhetorical Vision in the form of verbal symbols, namely the concepts of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Expression, Sex Characteristic (SOGESC), the slogan of Being a Friend and Safe space, in the form of non-verbal symbols there is a logo from the Independent Men of Flobamora community which is used as a representation of the Independent Men of Flobamora community to the outside community via social media channels

Symbolic Convergence of Independent Men of Flobamora



Pic. 5. Symbolic Convergence Process in Independent Men of Flobamora

Source: Researcher Process, 2024

According to researchers at this point, symbolic convergence does not only stop at the point of internal convergence or unification or only applies within the community, but when a rhetorical vision has been formed, a convergence process occurs that involves individuals from outside or externally.

This is what researchers call symbolic convergence of rhetorical vision. Convergence occurs when several people develop their personal symbolic worlds to complement each other, so that they have a basis for creating a community to discuss shared experiences, and to create shared understanding (Arianto, 2012).

Symbolic convergence itself is reciprocal, meaning that the symbolic convergence that is formed influences the collective identity and cohesiveness of the Independent Men of Flobamora community, but symbolic convergence also applies external reciprocity, meaning that in this section symbolic convergence has become the outermost layer of the Independent Men of Community. Flobamora. When a subject from outside the Independent Men of Flobamora community wants to know about the Independent Men of Flobamora, the first thing the subject knows or sees is the symbolic convergence of the Independent Men of Flobamora community.

CONCLUSION

The research conducted on the Independent Men of Flobamora (IMOF) community evolutionary and continuous process. This process begins with the formation of a collective identity, which becomes the foundation for the emergence of fantasy themes and symbolic convergence, expressed through verbal and nonverbal symbols. The stigma and discrimination experienced by the members of the IMOF community serve as the initial catalyst for the formation of their collective identity. These shared experiences are communicated within the group through message exchanges, which are subsequently dramatized. Through dramatization, symbolic interaction emerges, which evolves into symbolic convergence.

The dramatized messages elicit responses from group members, leading to the creation of a series of fantasies. These shared fantasies, rooted in the community's collective identity, later evolve into specific fantasy themes unique to the IMOF community, such as humorous elements like "Cash on Delivery (COD), Chikita Meidy, and Tono." These fantasy themes undergo continued dramatization, resulting in a "fantasy chain," which is further elaborated into recurring expressions or events known as fantasy types. Over time, these fantasy themes and types give rise to a broader rhetorical vision that encompasses key principles of the community, such as Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGESC), as well as the creation of safe spaces and the slogan "Being a Friend." These rhetorical visions are communicated to society through distinct verbal and nonverbal symbols, including the IMOF community logo.

Symbolic convergence emerges as the outermost layer of this process, formed through the stages of fantasy theme creation, fantasy chaining, fantasy types, and the consolidation of rhetorical visions. Symbolic convergence not only serves as a connection to the external audience but also reciprocally strengthens the community itself. This reciprocity fosters greater cohesiveness within the IMOF community and reinforces its collective identity, amplifying the members' shared sense of purpose and belonging.

The research highlights the relevance and adaptability of Bormann's Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) and fantasy theme analysis methods for communication research, particularly within community-based and group dynamics. However, the study identifies a gap in research utilizing these methodologies and suggests further exploration of the intersection between collective identity and fantasy theme analysis. Incorporating the concept of collective identity as a supplementary analytical framework could enhance

researchers' ability to discern and classify elements, such as fantasy themes, within complex community phenomena.

Additionally, the study underlines the importance of ethical considerations in research involving marginalized groups, such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) individuals. Researchers are strongly advised to exercise sensitivity and self-awareness during both the research process and the development of scientific outputs. Addressing ethics rigorously will help ensure an authentic and balanced understanding of the lived realities of community members, offering a more nuanced view of dualities and the broader phenomena at play.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on how symbolic convergence fosters unity and a shared identity within the Independent Men of Flobamora community while also engaging with external audiences through distinctive symbolic expressions. These findings not only enrich our understanding of SCT but also offer practical suggestions for its application in contemporary communication research.

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