

Social Construction of Sexual Minority Men's Experiences:A Phenomenological Study in Multicultural Counseling

Nina Fitriyani

Bimbingan Konseling Islam Fakultas Dakwah UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten

nina.fitriyani@uinbanten.ac.id

Tri Windi Oktara

Bimbingan Konseling Islam Fakultas Dakwah UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten

tri.windi@uinbanten.ac.id

Agus sukirno

Bimbingan Konseling Islam Fakultas Dakwah UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten

agus.sukirno@uinbanten.ac.id

A.M. Fahrurrozi

Bimbingan Konseling Islam Fakultas Dakwah UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten

fahrurrozi@uinbanten.ac.id

Maya Aufa

Bimbingan Konseling Islam Fakultas Dakwah UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten

maya.aufa@uinbanten.ac.id

Hilda Rosida

Bimbingan Konseling Islam Fakultas Dakwah UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten

hilda.rosida@uinbanten.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to explore the social construction of the lived experiences of Sexual Minority Men's Experiences individuals and its implications for multicultural counseling. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to understand participants' experiences from their own perspectives. The participants consisted of six gay, bisexual, and pansexual men aged 17–37 years living in Banten, Indonesia. Participants were recruited using the snowball sampling technique, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, including data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. The findings reveal that the lived experiences of Sexual Minority Men's Experiences individuals are socially constructed through three interconnected processes: externalization, objectivation, and internalization, as proposed by Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality theory. Externalization was shaped by family experiences, parenting patterns, social interactions, traumatic events, educational settings, and peer relationships. Objectivation reflected the influence of social norms, religious values, cultural expectations, stigma, discrimination, labeling, and social acceptance in constructing sexual identity. Internalization involved self-acceptance as well as conflicts between sexual orientation and religious or social values. The findings also indicate that stigma and discrimination negatively affect participants' psychological well-being, while support from peers and communities facilitates self-acceptance. These findings highlight the importance of multicultural counselors possessing cultural awareness, self-awareness, and non-judgmental counseling skills to provide culturally responsive and empathetic services for clients from diverse socio-cultural and religious backgrounds..

Keywords: Social Construction , Sexual Minority Men's Experiences, Phenomenological Study, Multicultural Counseling

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with a diversity of ethnicities, religions, cultures, and social values that influence the way society views various life phenomena, including sexual orientation. In social life, sexual orientation is not only understood as an individual issue but is also closely related to religious norms, customs, and evolving cultural values. As a result, Sexual Minority Men's Experiences individuals often face various complex social dynamics, ranging from stigma, prejudice, discrimination, to rejection from both family and community environments (Terutung & Sukmaningrum, 2024). These various experiences have the potential to affect psychological conditions, interpersonal relationships, and the process of self-identity formation (Azmi, 2025).

Social life for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Sexual Minority Men's Experiences individuals not only involves personal identity issues but also social norms, cultural values, and religious beliefs that develop in society (Bartels et al., 2024). The societal perspective toward Sexual Minority Men's Experiences is shaped thru a continuous process of social interaction, resulting in meanings, values, and norms that are considered social reality (van der Star, 2024). In the view of Berger & Luckmann (2016), social reality is not something natural, but rather constructed thru the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization that occur in societal life (Berger & Luckmann, 2016). Berger & Luckmann (2016) explain that society is a human product, then develops into an objective reality, and finally shapes individuals as social products. Thus, society's views on Sexual Minority Men's Experiences are the result of social construction influenced by culture, religion, education, family, media, and other social institutions. This process can result in various forms of labeling, stereotyping, stigma, and discrimination that affect the daily lives of Sexual Minority Men's Experiences individuals (Bartels et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context, social attitudes toward Sexual Minority Men's Experiences are also shaped by broader cultural norms and public discourse, including perceptions of heteronormativity and changing representations in social media (Kinoshita, 2025).

Several studies in Indonesia show that Sexual Minority Men's Experiences individuals still face social stigma, discrimination, family rejection, and limitations in gaining social acceptance (Arnett, 2022). Research by Poernomo & Tondok (2025) shows that prejudice against homosexuals in Indonesia is influenced by a strong heteronormative culture, leading society to tend to have negative attitudes toward individuals with minority sexual orientations. Additionally, Khoir's (2020) research found that gay Muslim men in Indonesia experience conflicts between sexual identity, religious beliefs, and social demands, leading them to choose to hide their identity as a strategy to cope with social pressure. These conditions indicate that the experiences of Sexual Minority Men's Experiences individuals are not only influenced by personal characteristics but also by the social realities constructed by the environment in which they live.

In the phenomenological perspective, lived experience is the primary source for understanding how individuals interpret the reality they encounter (Miller & Zakrisson, 2024). The phenomenological approach allows researchers to deeply explore how Sexual Minority Men's Experiences individuals in Banten experience interactions with family, society, religious environments, and local culture, as well as how they make sense of these experiences in their daily lives (Sengco et al., 2024). By using the Social Construction of Reality theory by Berger & Luckmann (2016), this research aims to understand how the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization shape the lived experiences of Sexual Minority Men's Experiences individuals in Banten.

The study of the life experiences of Sexual Minority Men's Experiences individuals also has important implications for multicultural counseling. Multicultural counseling requires attention to clients' cultural backgrounds, social identities, experiences of discrimination, and sources of social support (Hambour et al., 2023). In the context of sexual minority clients, counselors need to understand how social stigma and cultural expectations may shape clients' experiences and identity-related concerns (Poernomo & Tondok, 2025). According to Sue et al. (2022), multicultural counseling competence includes awareness of one's own values and biases, knowledge of clients' cultural backgrounds, and skills in providing services that are responsive to cultural diversity. In the context of Banten society, which has strong socio-cultural characteristics and religiosity, understanding the social construction that influences the experiences of Sexual Minority Men's Experiences individuals becomes important so that counselors can build empathetic counseling relationships, sensitive to the cultural context, and in accordance with professional ethics.

The novelty of this study lies in three aspects. First, it shifts the focus from merely describing stigma, discrimination, or identity conflict toward examining the social processes through which Sexual Minority Men's Experiences individuals' experiences are constructed and internalized. Second, it combines phenomenological inquiry into lived experience with Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality theory to explain the relationship between individual experiences and socially produced meanings. Third, it situates these experiences within the specific socio-cultural and religious context of Banten and explicitly connects the findings to the development of culturally responsive multicultural counseling. Thus, this study contributes a contextual and theoretically grounded understanding of Sexual Minority Men's Experiences individuals' lived experiences and provides an empirical foundation for strengthening multicultural counseling competence in culturally and religiously diverse Indonesian settings.

Based on the aforementioned description, this research aims to uncover the social construction of Sexual Minority Men's Experiences individuals' experiences in Banten thru a phenomenological approach using the Social Construction of Reality theory by Berger & Luckmann (2016). This research is expected to contribute to the development of multicultural counseling science, particularly in understanding the influence of social construction on clients' life experiences and to serve as a foundation for developing counseling services that are more sensitive to the socio-cultural context of Indonesian society, especially in Banten Province.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach, defined as a research method employed to deeply understand social phenomena thru the collection of descriptive data in natural conditions, with the researcher as the primary instrument striving to uncover the meaning of the experiences or events being studied (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019). This research uses a phenomenological approach because it aims to understand the meaning of the life experiences of Muslim men with diverse non-heterosexual sexual orientations. The phenomenological approach allows the researcher to deeply explore how participants interpret their sexual identity, religious beliefs, and social experiences. Thus, the research does not focus on testing theories, but rather on uncovering the essence of the life experiences of the participants. Participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling based on predetermined inclusion criteria. Participants were Muslim men residing in Banten who identified with a non-heterosexual sexual orientation and were willing to share their lived experiences. Recruitment continued until the information

obtained was considered sufficiently rich and subsequent interviews no longer produced substantially new information relevant to the research questions.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The interviews explored participants' experiences related to sexual identity, family relationships, religious beliefs, social interactions, stigma, acceptance, and the ways they interpreted these experiences. Follow-up and probing questions were used to obtain detailed descriptions of participants' lived experiences. Interviews were conducted in a private setting agreed upon by the participants, and recordings were made with their permission. Because the research addressed sensitive issues related to sexual orientation and religion, ethical considerations were prioritized. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, their right to refuse to answer questions or withdraw, and the confidentiality of their information. Participant codes were used instead of real names, and identifying information was excluded from the research report.

The trustworthiness of the findings was enhanced through repeated examination of transcripts, comparison of codes and themes across participants, reflexive notes, and the use of direct quotations to support interpretations. The emerging themes were reviewed against the original interview data to ensure that they represented participants' accounts accurately. Where applicable, participant clarification and peer or supervisor discussion were used to strengthen the credibility of the interpretations. The final themes were interpreted by relating participants' lived experiences to the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization in Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality theory.

The data analysis technique used is thematic analysis according to Braun & Clarke (2006), which states that all interview transcripts are processed using Microsoft Word, where the researcher manually codes the data using the comment and highlight features to mark important segments. The analysis process consists of six main stages: data familiarization, initial coding, grouping codes into themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and report writing. Each transcript is analyzed line by line to maintain the accuracy of the participants' experiences. Thus, the use of words not only facilitates the coding process but also upholds the principle of trust in qualitative research.

Tabel informasi demografi

No	Kode Partisipan	Age	Agama	Status	Orientasi seksual	Pendidikan Terakhir	Domisili
1	F	37	Islam	Single	Biseksual	SMA	Tangerang
2	S	20	Islam	Single	Panseksual	SMA	Serang
3	V	17	Islam	Single	Homoseksual	SMP	Serang
4	K	21	Islam	Single	Biseksual	SMA	Cilegon
5	M	21	Islam	Single	Homoseksual	SMA	Tangerang
6	N	26	Islam	Single	Homoseksual	SMA	Merak

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. SEXUAL MINORITY MEN'S EXPERIENCES Individuals' Experiences in Social Construction

Based on interviews with informants with the initials F, S, V, K, M, N, it was found that the homosexual identity they possess is not formed instantly, but rather thru a long process of

interaction between personal experiences, social environment, family, and societal norms. The findings of this research are analyzed using the social construction theory by Berger and Luckmann (1966), which explains that social reality is formed thru the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization.

a. Externalization

1) Participant F

The externalization stage is the process when individuals express their subjective experiences in social life. Based on the interview results, the informant began to realize an attraction to the same sex from elementary school to high school. During that time, the informant was unable to accept their feelings and tried to live life as a heterosexual man by attempting to establish relationships with women.

The informant revealed that he experienced rejection eight to nine times when expressing his feelings to women. That experience caused deep disappointment and became one of the factors that drove him to try to establish a relationship with other men. Additionally, the informant admitted to feeling attracted to men since school age, marked by feelings of excitement, comfort, and a desire to always interact with men he found attractive. The findings indicate that the informant's homosexual identity was formed thru subjective experiences that occurred gradually. Emotional experiences, social interactions, and the process of identity search become part of the externalization process in shaping their reality (Setyawan & Muhiddin, 2023).

2) Participant S

The externalization stage is the process in which individuals create meaning based on their experiences in social life. Based on the interview results, S began to feel an attraction to the same sex when he was in the eighth grade of junior high school thru intense interactions in the online game Roblox. Additionally, the informant links the development of their sexual orientation to a traumatic experience of sexual harassment they endured from 1st to 5th grade in elementary school. This experience became part of their subjective reality, which then shaped S's perspective on interpersonal relationships and emotional attraction. In this process, the social world faced by the informant, both thru the digital environment and childhood experiences, becomes the initial space for the formation of meaning regarding their sexual identity. This finding shows that the construction of sexual identity is inseparable from the social experiences encountered by the individual. Berger and Luckmann explain that humans actively generate meaning from the reality they face, including in understanding their own identity (Tan et al., 2022).

3) Participant V

Externalization is the process by which individuals construct meaning based on their experiences and interactions. Based on the interview results, the participant perceived the pesantren environment as an important context in which he interpreted and understood his interpersonal and emotional experiences. This finding is consistent with a social constructionist perspective in which meanings attached to identity develop through interactions within particular social contexts (Bartels et al., 2024). The environment was dominated by men, so almost all activities, social interactions, and emotional relationships took place with other men. The informant explained that the

high intensity of interactions with male friends and the minimal contact with women led him to build more emotional closeness with the same sex. In the process, feelings that were initially considered as mere closeness eventually developed into emotional and sexual attraction. In addition, the living conditions of the informant, who lives with their grandmother and not fully with their parents, also become part of the social experiences that shape their life. These experiences serve as the foundation for the informant in building an understanding of themselves and their sexual orientation. These findings indicate that life experiences and social environments serve as the initial spaces for individuals to construct meaning regarding their identity. In the perspective of social construction, the reality of sexual orientation does not simply exist, but is shaped thru the social experiences individuals encounter in their daily lives

4) Participant K

The externalization stage describes how individuals construct meaning thru the life experiences they undergo. Based on the interview results, the informant began to realize their attraction to the same sex since they were in elementary school. The informant associates that experience with family relationship dynamics, particularly the relationship with a father who is considered temperamental and lacking in emotional attention. The lack of warmth and closeness with the father figure caused the informant to feel the absence of a man who could provide a sense of security and affection. This condition led him to seek emotional closeness from other men he encountered in daily life. The informant interprets that experience as one of the factors contributing to the emergence of same-sex attraction. Beside the family environment, the bullying experience from elementary to middle school also became an important social experience. The informant often faced mockery and discriminatory treatment because he was perceived as having a feminine character. That experience made him more comfortable interacting with women than with men. Even until college, most of his social circle was dominated by women. In the perspective of social construction, family experiences, parenting styles, and social interactions serve as the foundation for the informant in constructing the meaning of their identity (Susmayani et al., 2024).

5) Participant M

The externalization stage is the process when an individual expresses themselves and builds meaning based on their life experiences. Based on the interview results, M.S. revealed that since childhood, he felt different from his male peers. He preferred games, activities, and appearances that are typically associated with girls. Additionally, M.S. interacted and played more with girls than with boys. Another condition that shaped M.S.'s social experience is the fact that since childhood, he did not live with his biological parents, but was raised by another family that he considers his own. That caregiving experience shaped a social environment that became the initial space for M.S. to understand himself. In the perspective of social construction, the experience of playing with girls, the patterns of social interaction, and the different upbringing environments become subjective experiences that M.S. then interprets as part of the formation of his identity (Hambour et al., 2023).

6) Participant N

Externalization is the process when individuals express themselves and create meaning thru interactions with the social environment. At this stage, individuals strive to adapt to the social reality they face. Based on the interview results, the informant began to show tendencies of feminine behavior since childhood. He preferred playing with dolls, often played with female friends, and felt more comfortable interacting with boys. That experience became a form of self-expression that continuously emerged in daily life. The process of externalization is also evident when the informant began to realize their attraction to the same sex since elementary school. At first, he felt confused and questioned himself. However, thru social interactions that took place during the developmental period, the informant began to express their identity and feelings more openly. In social life, he tends to build closer relationships with female friends because he feels more accepted and comfortable compared to the male group. In addition, the romantic relationships formed with the same sex since high school also demonstrate a form of externalization of the informant's sexual identity. Thru these experiences, the informant expresses their need for affection, emotional closeness, and self-identity in social life (Matsick et al., 2024).

b. Objectivation

1) Participant F

The stage of objectivation is the process when the formed social reality is then considered an objective reality by society. Based on the interview results, the informant lives in an environment that still views homosexuality as something that does not conform to religious or social norms. As a result, the informant chooses to hide their sexual identity from society and most of their family members. The informant explained that only the immediate family knows their sexual orientation. However, the family has not fully accepted his condition and still hopes that he can return to being "normal." Meanwhile, neither the extended family nor the surrounding community are aware of his sexual identity at all. To maintain social acceptance, the informant presents an image as a religious person, actively participates in community activities, and strives to exhibit behavior typical of heterosexual men in general.

In addition, the informant also admitted to making comments about women when gathering with friends to avoid raising suspicion. This strategy shows that social norms have become an objective reality that influences the way the informant behaves in daily life. On the other hand, the informant experiences a different social reality when in the gay community. In that community, he feels accepted, receives emotional support, and shares information about reproductive health, HIV, and life experiences as a homosexual. This shows that individuals can experience two different social realities, namely the dominant reality in society and the alternative reality within peer groups.

Across participants, objectification was reflected in the process through which personal experiences became socially recognizable identities through labeling, acceptance, rejection, and interaction with social groups. This pattern is consistent with the social constructionist view that meanings associated with sexual and gender identities are

produced and negotiated through social categories and normative expectations (Bartels et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context, heteronormative expectations and negative social attitudes may further shape how sexual minority identities are recognized and responded to by others ((Poernomo & Tondok, 2025).

2) Participant S

The stage of objectification occurs when meanings that were initially subjective begin to gain recognition in social life and become realities that are considered real. In the case of informant S, this process is evident when he began to realize that he had romantic feelings for both boys and girls while sitting in the ninth grade of middle school. That awareness evolved from a bisexual identity until he eventually identified himself as pansexual. Objectification is also evident thru the informant's involvement in Sexual Minority Men's Experiences friendship networks via fan communities on Discord. In that group, the informants find a space to share experiences, discuss, and receive social support from individuals with similar experiences. In addition to receiving support, the informant also faces social realities in the form of stigma and bullying. During the second semester of college, SI experienced taunts, verbal harassment, catcalling, and bullying from their classmates. That experience shows that society also shapes the social reality of sexual identity thru processes of labeling, acceptance, and rejection. Thus, the pansexual identity possessed by the informant gains social meaning thru interactions with both accepting and rejecting environments.

3) Participant V

Objectification is the process when an individual's subjective experience begins to take on a more tangible form and is recognized in social life. In informant V, this process is evident when he begins to realize that his attraction to the same sex is not just an ordinary friendship, but rather a part of his identity. That awareness grew stronger after various experiences he had in the pesantren environment. The informant then identified himself as a gay man and understood that his feelings were different from the majority of people around him. The process of objectification is also evident thru the environment's response to the informant's identity. V's homosexual identity was known by the pesantren community after a case was recorded on CCTV and subsequently became known to many people. The incident caused the previously private homosexual identity to become a social reality known by the surrounding community. In this process, society assigns various meanings to the informant's homosexual identity. Family and some neighbors know about his sexual orientation, while the informant himself chooses to maintain privacy and limit that information to certain people. This shows that the reality of homosexuality is formed not only thru personal experience but also thru responses, judgments, and social recognition from the environment.

4) Participant K

Objectification occurs when the subjective experiences of an individual take on a more tangible form and become part of social reality. In the informant, this process is evident when he begins to understand that he is attracted to both men and women

simultaneously. That awareness developed as he grew older and gained social experiences. The informant then identified himself as a bisexual. In this process, he began to understand his position as an individual with a sexual orientation different from the majority of the society around him. The process of objectification is also evident thru the various social responses received by the informant. On one hand, he once experienced discrimination and bullying from a group of boys who rejected his feminine character. That experience strengthened his awareness of himself as an individual considered different by the social environment. On the other hand, the informant also receives acceptance from certain environments. The older sister is the only family member who knows his sexual identity and provides full support. In addition, the community around his residence also accepted his presence well without showing open discrimination. These findings indicate that the reality of bisexual identity is shaped thru the interaction between personal experiences and social responses from the surrounding environment.

5) Participant M

Objectification is the process when an individual's subjective experience gains legitimacy and becomes a reality that is considered real. In the informant, this process is evident when the different feelings he experienced since childhood intensified into adulthood and were eventually identified as a homosexual orientation. M. began to realize that his attraction was more toward the same sex and then accepted his identity as a gay man. This awareness was reinforced by the social experiences he went thru daily, including acceptance from the surrounding environment that had long known him with his feminine characteristics. In this process of objectification, the society around M also plays a role in shaping the social reality regarding his identity. Although there are some individuals who hold negative views, the social environment generally continues to accept M's presence as a cheerful, active person who is capable of interacting well. That social acceptance makes M's identity increasingly regarded as part of their life reality.

However, objectification is also evident thru the bullying experience the informant once faced. That experience shows that society has certain social constructs regarding masculinity and femininity. When someone's behavior is considered inconsistent with prevailing gender norms, rejection or discriminatory treatment arises from some members of society.

6) Participant N

Objectification is the process when the results of repeated social interactions become a social reality that is considered real, normal, and recognized by the environment. Based on the interview results, the feminine behavior exhibited by the informant since childhood has been recognized by the family and the surrounding environment. The family is aware of this tendency, although they have not fully accepted the subject's homosexual identity. In the community, some neighbors are aware of the informant's identity and respond in various ways, both with acceptance and negative comments. The experience of bullying since elementary school also shows the objectification of social norms regarding masculinity. The informant was considered different from boys in general, making him a target for mockery and discrimination. In

this context, society has constructed a social reality that men should behave in a masculine manner. When the informant exhibits different behavior, the environment assigns certain labels that then become part of their social experience.

On the other hand, acceptance from close friends shows a different social reality. In friendship groups, the informants feel more accepted and valued, so their identity is not always viewed negatively. This shows that objectification can produce various forms of social reality depending on the values and norms that develop within an environment.

c. Internalization

1) Participant F

The internalization stage is the process when individuals absorb social values and make them a part of their identity. Based on the interview results, the informant showed an internal conflict between their sexual identity and the religious values and societal norms they believe in. Although he has been in same-sex relationships for years, the informant revealed that he still hopes to become heterosexual again. Since 2021, the informant has chosen not to engage in relationships with either men or women as an effort to give themselves space to change. That decision shows that the social and religious values adhered to still influence the way the informant views themselves. On the other hand, the informant also shows development in self-acceptance. He admitted that he is no longer too afraid if one day his sexual identity is known by others. Although still cautious in revealing his identity, he no longer experiences the excessive fear he had in the early days of realizing his sexual orientation. This condition shows that the internalization process experienced by the informant is not linear, but rather a continuous negotiation between personal identity and social demands.

2) Participant S

The internalization stage is the process when the formed social reality is accepted and becomes part of the individual's consciousness. The interview results show that S has accepted their pansexual identity as part of themselves. He no longer views his attraction as something confusing, but rather as a condition that is personally understood and accepted. That acceptance is evident in his courage to be open about his sexual identity when entering the world of college. Although still hiding their identity in the workplace to avoid discrimination, in general, the informant has shown openness to close friends and certain social environments. Internalization is also evident in the way the informant interprets their life. S has a principle to keep moving forward, make peace with the past, and not let trauma or social stigma hinder their personal development. These principles have become a form of identity construction that has become ingrained in him as a result of a long process of social interactions he has experienced.

3) Participant V

Internalization is the process by which an established social reality is accepted and becomes part of an individual's consciousness. Based on the interview results, V experienced a gradual process of self-acceptance. When he first realized his attraction to

the same sex, the interviewee admitted to experiencing confusion, curiosity, and concern about how he would be perceived by others. However, as time went by, he began to understand his feelings and accept that he was attracted to the same sex. The process of internalization is evident in the way the informant views himself now. Although choosing not to be open with many people, he has understood his identity and is able to live his daily life with awareness of that condition. The informant also hopes to be accepted by the environment without being constantly judged based on their identity or past experiences. That hope shows that the informant has built a personal meaning about themselves and is trying to adapt to the social reality they face. In the perspective of Berger and Luckmann, reality that is initially formed thru social experience then becomes part of the individual's subjective consciousness.

4) Participant K

Internalization is the process when the formed social reality is accepted and becomes part of the individual's consciousness. Based on the interview results, the informant showed a process of acceptance toward their bisexual identity. Although accepting the existence of those feelings, the informant also experiences inner conflict because their sexual identity contradicts the religious values they believe in. He understands that same-sex sexual orientation is considered incompatible with the teachings of the religion he adheres to. This awareness led the informant to take a stance of not actively engaging in the Sexual Minority Men's Experiences community and to strive to maintain certain boundaries in their life. The process of internalization is also evident from the strategies employed by the informant in managing their identity. He chooses to be open only to people he truly trusts, while he tends to hide his sexual identity from others. This attitude is taken as a form of self-protection against the possibility of stigma and discrimination. In addition, the informant hopes that society will better understand the diversity of individual experiences without resorting to discrimination or judgment. That hope shows that the identity he possesses has become part of his self-awareness, while also influencing the way he views social relationships with others.

5) Participant M

Internalization is the process when the formed social reality is accepted and becomes part of the individual's consciousness. The interview results show that M has accepted his homosexual identity as part of himself. This is evident from his openness about his sexual orientation and his unwillingness to hide that identity. M expressed that he feels happy, comfortable, safe, and considers his attraction to the same sex as something normal within himself. These feelings indicate that the sexual identity he possesses has been internalized and has become part of his self-concept. The process of internalization is also evident in the way M handles the various social responses he receives. Although he has experienced bullying and negative views from some people, he chooses not to pay too much attention to it and continues to live life positively. This attitude shows that M has built a relatively stable self-meaning regarding their identity. Furthermore, M's hope to live happily without paying attention to others' negative words

indicates a strong process of self-acceptance. He not only accepts his identity personally, but also strives to place himself positively in social life.

6) Participan N

Internalization is the process by which an individual absorbs and internalizes the social reality that has been formed, making it a part of their identity. Based on the interview results, the informant experienced the process of internalization when he began to accept himself as a homosexual. Although at first he felt confused and questioned his identity, over time he began to understand and accept his condition. The informant stated that they feel more at ease and comfortable when they can be themselves without having to pretend. The experience of being accepted by close friends strengthens the positive internalization process of his identity. The social support received makes the informant feel they have a safe space to express themselves. On the other hand, experiences of bullying and negative comments from the environment have also been internalized in the form of emotional experiences that shape his perspective toward society. The informant's decision to continue living according to the identity they feel, despite having once wished to change for the sake of their family, shows that their homosexual identity has become part of their self-concept. At this stage, the reality that was previously shaped thru social experiences has been internalized as part of the personal identity that provides a sense of comfort and self-acceptance.

2. Implications in Multicultural Counseling

Based on the results of interviews with the aforementioned Sexual Minority Men's Experiences informants, it was found that the informants' life experiences were shaped thru interactions with family, peers, and society. If analyzed using Berger & Luckmann's social construction theory (2016), the informant's orientation and self-identity are influenced by the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. These findings have several important implications for multicultural counseling practices.

a) The Importance of Multicultural Competence and Counselor

Bias Awareness The informant admitted to having experienced bullying, discrimination, and negative comments from the social environment because they were considered different. That experience has the potential to cause psychological wounds, anxiety, low self-esteem, and distrust of others. In multicultural counseling, counselors need to be aware of their values, beliefs, and personal biases to avoid bringing prejudices into the counseling relationship. Counselors must be able to separate personal views from professional needs to provide effective assistance. According to (Sue et al., 2022), multicultural competence includes self-awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills that enable counselors to work effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds.

b) Counselors Need to Understand Client Identity as a Result of Social Construction

Interview results show that since childhood, the informant has had a feminine tendency, felt more comfortable playing with female friends, and received various social responses from their surroundings. In the perspective of social construction, self-identity is not formed separately from the environment, but is the result of continuous social interaction. The implication is that multicultural counselors need to understand that the identity and experiences of homosexual clients cannot be viewed simply or from just one

particular factor. Counselors need to explore family experiences, parenting styles, social relationships, culture, and life experiences that shape how clients interpret themselves. According to Berger & Luckmann (2016), social reality is constructed thru a dialectical process between individuals and society, making the understanding of the client's social context an important part of counseling assessment.

c) Building a Safe and Non-Judgmental

Counseling Relationship The findings indicate that the informants feel more accepted by their friends compared to their families. This indicates the importance of the need for social acceptance and a sense of security in interpersonal relationships. In multicultural counseling, counselors need to create a therapeutic relationship that is safe, empathetic, and non-judgmental. When clients feel accepted, they will find it easier to express their experiences, inner conflicts, and psychological needs. This principle aligns with the concept of Unconditional Positive Regard proposed by Rogers (2007), which is the unconditional acceptance of clients as individuals with value and dignity.

d) Development of Empathy and Appreciation for Diversity

The interview results show that the informants have the same basic needs as other individuals, namely the need for acceptance, affection, security, and appreciation. These findings reinforce the fundamental principle of multicultural counseling that every individual should be treated with dignity and without discrimination (Tan et al., 2022). Counselors need to develop cultural empathy so that they can understand clients' experiences from the clients' perspective, rather than based on the counselors' assumptions or stereotypes. According to (Ridley & Lingle, 1996), cultural empathy is the ability to accurately and appreciatively understand the experiences of individuals from different cultural backgrounds. According to (Ridley & Lingle, 1996), cultural empathy is the ability to accurately and appreciatively understand the experiences of individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes a contextual understanding of how the lived experiences of sexual minority men are socially constructed through the interconnected processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. The specific novelty of this study lies in integrating a phenomenological exploration of lived experiences with Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality theory within the socio-cultural and religious context of Banten, Indonesia. Rather than viewing participants' experiences solely as individual identity issues, this study demonstrates how family relationships, peer interactions, gender norms, religious values, stigma, discrimination, social acceptance, and support networks become important contexts through which participants interpret and negotiate their identities. The findings also extend the application of social construction theory to multicultural counseling by showing how socially produced meanings may influence clients' self-understanding, disclosure decisions, interpersonal relationships, and experiences of acceptance or conflict.

Based on these findings, several concrete recommendations are proposed for multicultural counseling practice. First, counselors should conduct regular self-reflection and

bias-awareness activities to identify personal, cultural, and religious assumptions that may influence their responses to sexual minority clients. Second, counselor education and professional training should strengthen cultural humility, knowledge of sexual minority experiences, and skills for working with clients whose identities intersect with religious and cultural values. Third, counselors should establish confidential, safe, empathetic, and non-judgmental counseling environments in which clients can discuss identity-related experiences without fear of stigma or discrimination. Fourth, counseling assessment should explore the client's family relationships, social networks, cultural and religious context, experiences of stigma, and available sources of social support rather than reducing the client's experience to sexual orientation alone. Finally, future research should involve more diverse participants in terms of gender, age, sexual orientation, religious background, and geographical context to examine whether the patterns identified in Banten are also evident in other Indonesian socio-cultural settings.

Overall, the study emphasizes that culturally responsive multicultural counseling requires counselors to understand clients within the social worlds in which their identities and experiences are continuously interpreted and negotiated. The findings therefore provide an empirical basis for developing counselor training, assessment practices, and counseling approaches that are culturally sensitive, ethically responsible, and responsive to the complexity of sexual minority clients' lived experiences in Indonesia.

REFERENCES

- Arnett, J. J. (2022). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469.
- Azmi, D. (2025). Stigma and Its Impact on the Psychological Well-Being of SEXUAL MINORITY MEN'S EXPERIENCES Individuals in the Context of Community Life. *Jurnal Psikologi Perseptual*, 10(2), 139–167.
- Bartels, M. S., Le Forestier, J. M., Hug, A. M. O., Morgenroth, T., & Roselló-Peñaloza, M. (2024). The influence of essentialist and social constructionist notions on perceptions of “realness”: Implications for SEXUAL MINORITY MEN'S EXPERIENCESIQ+ experiences. *Journal of Social Issues*, 80(3), 843–870.
- Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (2016). The social construction of reality. In *Social theory re-wired* (pp. 110–122). Routledge.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Hambour, V. K., Duffy, A. L., & Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (2023). Social identification dimensions, sources of discrimination, and sexuality support as correlates of well-being among sexual minorities. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 53(11), 1045–1058.
- Khoir, A. B. (2020). SEXUAL MINORITY MEN'S EXPERIENCES, Muslim, and heterosexism: The experiences of muslim gay in Indonesia. *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama Dan Sosial Budaya*, 5(1), 1–19.
- Kinoshita, H. (2025). The changing attitudes towards SEXUAL MINORITY MEN'S EXPERIENCESQ issues in Indonesian society: An analysis of Twitter posts. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 53(156), 171–188.

- Kusumastuti, A., & Khoiron, A. M. (2019). *Metode penelitian kualitatif*. Lembaga Pendidikan Sukarno Pressindo (LPSP).
- Leong, F. T. L., Comas-Díaz, L. E., Nagayama Hall, G. C., McLoyd, V. C., & Trimble, J. E. (2014). *APA handbook of multicultural psychology, Vol. 1: Theory and research*. American Psychological Association.
- Matsick, J. L., Sullivan, J. T., Todd, E., Kruk, M., & Cook, J. E. (2024). A social ecological approach to belonging in SEXUAL MINORITY MEN'S EXPERIENCESQ+ people. *Nature Reviews Psychology*, 3(3), 181–197.
- Miller, E. L., & Zakrisson, I. (2024). Between the dog and the wolf: an interpretative phenomenological analysis of bicultural, sexual minority people's lived experiences. *Discover Psychology*, 4(1), 4.
- Poernomo, N., & Tondok, M. S. (2025). Prejudice against homosexuals in Indonesia's heteronormative cultural context: The roles of cultural humility and right-wing authoritarianism. *Jurnal Psikologi Tabularasa*, 20(1), 148–163.
- Ridley, C. R., & Lingle, D. W. (1996). *Cultural empathy in multicultural counseling: A multidimensional process model*.
- Sengco, B. T. S., Bernalte, J. A., & Galang, A. M. (2024). The Phenomenological SEXUAL MINORITY MEN'S EXPERIENCES Youth Experience in an Educational Institution. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 17(10), 1.
- Rogers, C. R. (2007). *The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change*.
- Shalahuddin, H., Rahman, R. A., Fadhli, F. D., & Daâ, R. A. N. R. (2023). Homosexuality arguments according to the American psychological and psychiatric association: an Islamic prespective analysis study. *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Agama Dan Ilmu Pengetahuan*, 20(1), 52–69.
- Sue, D. W., Sue, D., Neville, H. A., & Smith, L. (2022). *Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Setyawan, J., & Muhiddin, S. (2023). Antara penolakan dan penerimaan: Eksplorasi sikap dan persepsi orang muda terhadap SEXUAL MINORITY MEN'S EXPERIENCES+ di Indonesia. *Gadjah Mada Journal of Psychology (GamaJoP)*, 9(1), 101–122.
- Susmayani, U., Shaluhiah, Z., & Surjoputro, A. (2024). Literatur Review Fenomena Stigma Terhadap Homoseksual Di Indonesia. *Jurnal Ners*, 8(2), 2169–2175.
- Tan, S., Cen, P., Fang, T., Yang, X., Zhang, Y., Zhu, J., Huang, H., Wang, M., Jiang, L., & Mo, J. (2022). Chained multimediator model of sexual orientation disclosure, sexual minority stigma, sexual minority identity, social support, and resilience among ymsms. *BMC Public Health*, 22(1), 797.
- Terutung, B. C., & Sukmaningrum, E. (2024). Sexual stigma in young adult femme lesbian women. *ANIMA Indonesian Psychological Journal*, 39(2), E02–E02.
- Van Der Star, A. (2024). The socioecology of sexual minority stigma: Advancing theory on stigma-based mechanisms underlying sexual orientation-based disparities in health. *Social Science & Medicine*, 363, 117484.