



Social Interaction as the Source of Social Knowledge about LGBT in Malaysia

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Abstract: *The study investigated perceptions of LGBT identities in Malaysia by examining social interaction as the source of social knowledge about LGBT. The perception is relevant now as the topic of sexual orientation is once again occupying the discourse of morality and human rights in the country. As they re-enter into mainstream consciousness, question should be asked about the sources that inform public opinion when talking about LGBT. Using a semi-structured interview, 12 participants living in Kuching and Kota Samarahan districts of Sarawak, Malaysia, were asked about what they thought about LGBT individuals, the sources of their information and the people that they are predisposed to share conversation with on the topic. The results showed that people's opinions are informed by social interaction. Those who tend to develop a positive evaluation are more likely to encounter the LGBT individuals through personal friendship. Further, we discover that people who talked with parents and friends tend to look for information that corroborate pre-existing tendency. The study concludes by emphasising the role of social interaction as a key source of social knowledge about LGBT among Malaysians.*

Keywords: social interaction, LGBT, sociology of knowledge, sexual regulation

1. Introduction

For a sense of perspective, homosexual behaviour remains illegal in 71 countries. In 2012, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights reported that 79% of transgender people in Europe was reported to have suffered from varying degree of verbal, physical and sexual harassment (FRA-European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). In Malaysia, two women were caned six times in a Shariah court room witnessed by 100 people in the state of Terengganu for attempting to have sex (Lamb, 2018). Earlier in 2015, the Court of Appeal rejected a challenge from the Ministry of Home Affairs to the decision made by the High Court that overturned a ban on a translation of a book by a lesbian Canadian author Irshad Manji titled "Allah, Liberty and Love: The Courage to Reconcile Faith and Freedom" (Lamb, 2015). The Appellate Judge Datuk Bahiah Yusof opined there is no evidence that the translation of the book ("Allah, Kebebasan dan Cinta") could cause a public disorder. The court episode illustrates the structural mechanism that legitimises and enhances sexual politics in Malaysia. Collectively, the facts above speak not only of what happened to those who assumed contrarian sexual beliefs, but also demonstrate moral regulation in our society.