

# Perspectives on LGBT in Malaysia: Sexual Regulation from Below

Sharifah Ahmad<sup>1\*</sup>, Su-Hie Ting<sup>2</sup>, Collin Jerome<sup>2</sup>, Jacinta Jiin-Yih Yeo<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Social Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

<sup>3</sup> Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA UiTM (Sarawak), Malaysia

\*Corresponding Author: wassophia@unimas.my

Accepted: 15 July 2021 | Published: 1 August 2021

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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 were 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 valuation 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, sexual regulation, sociology of knowledge, LGBT

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## 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 harassments (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 Baliah Yusuf opined there is no evidence that the translation of the book into "Allah, Kebebasan dan Cinta" could cause a public disorder. The tale of two courts illustrate 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 practices, but also demonstrated the workings of moral regulation in our society.

In view of the overwhelming forces against the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people in Malaysia, what does it mean when people say they "accept" or "reject" those