



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN AND GAY IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

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4 JULY 2021

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to investigate what it is to be a lesbian or gay undergraduate student at a public university. In this study, we identify the experiences of becoming one of the members of sexual minorities at public universities in Malaysia. This study examines the challenges, love relationships, emotional state, and coping strategies. 8 homosexual participants at the age of '20s from different public universities overall Malaysia were interviewed in this study where they narrated their experiences on challenges, their love relationships, and coping strategies in the university which consists of their social life, psychological state, and society. Participants narrated that they face challenges such as difficulty in social life and facing negative emotional consequences. Next, this study is an exploratory study that also highlights their love relationship based on Eric Erickson Theory and how they cope after facing those challenges using Transactional Model. The data were analyzed by studying the transcription of recording interviews and identifying the themes that emerged based on the objective of the study. The results of this study are expected to provide new insights into the challenges of gay and lesbian students in Malaysia, thus helping future researchers in conducting the future study in this sexual spectrum. In conclusion, such studies can contribute ways of raising awareness of Malaysian gays and lesbians' experiences in a public university.

ABSTRAK

Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat apakah pengalaman seorang lesbian dan gay yang juga memegang identiti sebagai seorang pelajar sarjana muda di universiti awam. Kajian ini mengklasifikasikan pengalaman menjadi seorang pelajar minoriti (lesbian dan gay) dari segi cabaran, pengalaman bercinta, emosi dan strategi daya tindak. Sebanyak 8 homoseksual pelajar daripada universiti awam yang berumur dari anggaran 20 an menyertai sesi temu ramah dalam kajian ini. Selain itu, kajian ini melibatkan pengalaman yang melingkungi kehidupan sosial, psikologi pelajar, dan comuniti yang terlibat. Peserta kajian melaporkan bahawa cabaran mereka adalah seperti kesusahan bersosial dan menghadap emosi negative. Kemudian, kajian ini juga meneroka percintaan homoseksual pelajar berdasarkan Eric Erickson theory. Cara strategi daya tindak selepas menghadap cabaran juga dikaji di dalam kajian ini menggunakan model daripada Lazarus dan Folkman. Data ini dianalisis dengan cara mengkaji transkrip rakaman temu ramah dan kemudian data tersebut diklasifikasikan megikut tema dan objektif kajian. Hasil kajian dijangka memberi penerangan baharu tentang cabaran sebagai pelajar lesbian dan gay yang menuntut di universiti awam Malaysia. Penyelidik masa hadapan boleh menjadikan kajian ini sebagai rujukan terutamanya dalam bidang homoseksual. Akhir kata, kajian ini juga akan meningkatkan kesedaran pengalaman gay dan lesbian di universiti awam.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter discussed the details of the research which contains the introduction of the study, the background of the study, statement problems, the purpose of the study, research objective, research questions, research framework, the importance of research, limitation of the study, and the definition of terms used in this study.

1.1 Introduction

Code 377A. of Malaysia's archaic penal code "Any person who has sexual connection with another person by inserting the penis into the anus or mouth of the other person is said to commit carnal intercourse against the order of nature" ("LAWS OF MALAYSIA," 2018). According to code 377B. "Whoever willingly commits carnal intercourse against the order of nature shall be punished with imprisonment for a period which may extend to twenty years ("LAWS OF MALAYSIA," 2018). These codes have been controversial codes in Malaysia's archaic penal code which have been recognized in articles and newspapers for demolition. Due to these codes, gays and lesbians are hiding for their safety. Malaysia is a theocratic state. Next, the Malaysian community stigmatized different sexual orientations such as homosexuals as an immoral act that is against the law. The stigma is embedded in Malaysian mentality where they exclude lesbians and gays from becoming a member of the community. However, these communities gain their voices and rise in Malaysia eventually (Juaini, Halim, Mohamad, Riza, & Chik, 2017, p. 1008).

Furthermore, Malaysia is a theocratic state which prioritizes religious practices in administration, and it is declared by national philosophy instituted by royal proclamation on

Merdeka Day 1970. The declaration emphasized believing in God as the first principle. Furthermore, homosexuality is clearly stated in Quran as a despicable act where it mentioned in verses 80-84, *Surah al-Araf* (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2016) while, in the Bible there

1

are seven texts often cited by Christians condemn homosexuality (Gnuse, 2015, p. 76). So, the idea of going against homosexuals is not only practice in the constitution but also religion.

Later, discussing this issue of lesbians and gays in Malaysia publicly is considered taboo and unaccepted in any institution including in university, which was also known as an institution of higher education in Malaysia. Ironically, the university is a space to provide broad discussion about gender sexuality optimistically in a knowledgeable spectrum, exploring boundaries of knowledge and getting to know the world without a spectrum. In Malaysia today, gay, and lesbian identities might exist in public universities. It has been recorded there has been a huge phenomenon of more than one sexual orientation in Malaysia. In social media, we can spot certain pages such as on Facebook and Twitter; developed by gay and lesbian communities (Juaini, Halim, Mohamad, Riza, and Chik) (2017, p. 1007). From my findings too, I found a page on Facebook of *The Malaysian LGBT+ Confession* with a total number of followers of 3, 250 people in 2020.

Recently in one public university in Malaysia, there was a forum conducted for gay and lesbian to help university students convert to dominant sexual orientation, heterosexual (Joles, 2018). Homosexual students found it insensitive and unaccepted in the community. Nevertheless, of how much social media and movies have been flooded with the installation of the minor community (homosexual) coming from various ages, backgrounds, and colors, the Malaysian community did not seem to respect the differences they have. Movies and social media available were to increase the awareness of homosexuality in Malaysia, demolish discrimination, and

enhance a better community. However, there is still a research gap in conducting a study on homosexuality. Studying their experiences as gay and lesbian students in public universities as they are blooming in the Malaysian community closed the gap by conducting this research. It is necessary to lessen discrimination and prejudice against homosexuals when it comes to research. The lesbian and gay community may need help in their sexuality, confused, or being bullied. Therefore, this research paper broke the pattern by exploring the challenges and experiences of undergraduate lesbian and gay students in public universities. Two majors focused on this research are undergraduate public university students and their experience in public university.

There were several types of research and studies conducted in the lesbian and gay sexual identities spectrum based on Malaysian demographics. For instance, "Being Lesbian and Gay in Malaysia" (Singaravelu & Cheah, 2020, p. 122) and "Social Media and Lesbian" (Juaini, Halim, Mohamad, Riza, & Chik, 2017, p. 1009). It is unethical as a researcher to be unconcerned on a lesbian and gay issue especially in the scope of the education system. Knowledge is the base key to unlock the secret to the lesbian and gay phenomenon in our country. Particularly, in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed the diagnosis of "homosexuality" from the second edition in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). This resulted after comparing competing theories, from those that pathologized homosexuality and compared to those that viewed it as normal (2015, p. 373).

Next, some research and studies available online are inaccessible and mostly adapted from Western institutions. Besides, the theories are usually adapted and applied to Malaysian demographics. Is the past research being enough to understand the situation of lesbians and gays students in Malaysia? How much of these studies and data available online are eligible for

Malaysian demographics? How must we understand the phenomenon of this issue from the perspective of youth if undergraduate students in public universities are not put in any of the study settings? The experience of lesbian and gay sexual orientations at the university level in Malaysia needs to be discussed in the orientated study. Therefore, my opinion that this study is a crucial step in exploring the experience of lesbian and gay undergraduate students, in the aspect of challenges in university, coping strategies, emotional state, and love relationship in this sexual identity spectrum at the public university level. This study further can enhance understanding and insight of gay and lesbian sexual orientation based on Malaysian demographics. This community too is believed to be facing higher emotional distress, depression, and anxiety (Russell & Fish, 2016, p. 474). Studies need to be conducted on their experience so, we can help adhere psychological problems and produce alternatives in future research of the new phenomena of gay and lesbians in Malaysia.

Most notably, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community are growing increasingly, in youth, women, racial and ethnic minorities due to reduced social stigma and advancement in legal equality (Gates, 2017, p. 1220). Due to this point, it is important to research the emergence of the lesbian and gay community among youth, especially university students in Malaysia too. They are more open and freer from obligations where they can make decisions on choices of sexual preference that differ from their biological gender. Public universities are a good platform to conduct this study. University students' environment is a background that contributes to the highest influence in their decision-making in becoming part of the queer. This study will discuss gay and lesbian experiences among undergraduate students in public universities.

1.2 Background of the Study

Stigma and discrimination against gay and lesbian society are the consequence of today's culture in cultivating beliefs and knowledge in accepting truths that seems the norm of the country.

The word 'stigma' describes the situation of a person who is excluded from full social acceptance (2008, p. 294), this is according to the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman. Indeed, there have been some interesting changes over recent decades concerning areas of stigma addressed by Goffman, for example, homosexuality. Goffman explained that people tend to agree on the same issues through human interaction, laying expectations on people's beliefs and holding behavior that has a social meaning which allows the functioning of the social structure. Besides, collectivist perspectives suggest beliefs ascribe to a certain community to action and way of behaving are recognized in society (2008, p. 294). From my observation in media social, Malaysians tend to follow the law and religious practices in a way that discriminates the homosexuals mentally which causes their well-being to deteriorate.

If we opened the case of a transgender woman who was killed in Klang, a trans sex worker was beaten to death, and the sentence of two women to can when they are proved guilty in homosexual relations (2020); it was all based on the laws in Malaysia and could be associated with hatred of the society towards LGBT. These situations in Malaysia have been occurring and allowing research gaps. With this critical state of LGBT in Malaysia, researchers need to work on matters of studying gay and lesbian experiences which fit Malaysian demographics.

Next, the voices and experiences from gay and lesbian perspectives need to be heard and brought forward so we can have equal perspectives. In addition, these compilations of interviews can be used for further research that certain fields require. This will benefit Malaysian society too.

In conclusion, gay and lesbian perspectives need to be heard from university students as matter as this generation is the one that will lead the country.

Nature and nurture concepts play the leading role in studying the concept of gay and lesbian from the perspectives of various fields of study. However how about studying their experiences as being lesbian and gay? The study conducted among Chinese university students highlights homophobic prejudice, social rejection, discrimination, and harassment of being a queer led students of LGBT to experience mental health problems. The study continued highlighting the voices of lesbians and gays in campus climate who share experiences involved in discrimination and avoidance among peers and faculty which are detrimental to their health (Chi & Hawk, 2016, p. 2). In the gay and lesbian study on “*My coming out story: Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth identities*” on YouTube share most of their experience coming out with their new sexual identities are negative. Participants feel emotions of fear, disgust, and awkwardness (Seventeen, 2017, 03:15-05:21).

1.3 Statement of the problem

The experiences of gays and lesbians among undergraduate students in public universities need to be studied on purpose to explore and have a better understanding of this sexual orientation spectrum among undergraduate students in the aspect of their challenges, coping strategies, and love relationship with their partner in a public university. The high statistics of the gay and lesbian community in our society is a widespread phenomenon with an absence of significant limited information and data on theoretical research in Malaysia.

According to Juaini, Halim, Mohamad, Riza, and Chik (2017, p. 1007), today's generations in Malaysia are highly accessible to media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and other websites

that are related to lesbian. However, most of them remain anonymous because of the stigma in a society where they identify lesbians as deviant and immoral. Next, Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) (2019, p. 81), has discovered there are 310, 000 people of LGBT people by 2013, and this number are increasing since.

The research by Juaini, Halim, Mohamad, Riza, and Chik continued to address the number of lesbian visitors to social media platforms on ‘Malaysia Lesbian Personals’ is high by 74.6%. The fact that these populations hide and remain anonymous needs to be addressed as they are part of the community. This community of lesbians and gay are part of the community, they have the right to live peacefully without hatred and discrimination received from society. The anonymity of sexual beholders could be students in public universities.

The gay phenomenon in Malaysia also has been highlighted in a study hold by the Health Government of Malaysia. In a study conducted by the Ministry of Health Malaysia's Sector HIV/STI/Hepatitis C Disease Control Division (2018, pp. 1–3), it was explored men who have sex with men (MSM) contribute to the high prevalence of HIV transmission in society. The research continues to state men who have sex with men population are highly registered in gay-oriented online dating apps. Next, the survey conducted from this study recorded that 57.4% of MSM that are on social media reside in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor while the ones that not in social media are assumed of 1.3% among this sub-population applied. This data is collected for concerns that emerged on the transmission of HIV disease among the Malaysian community and enhancing HIV response and interventions. Despite the high number of these minorities in our community and their prevalence in medical conditions yet, there is still a lack of research being done in studying their challenges and the way they cope with discrimination and stigma. These conditions could be

interrelated. Homosexuals that prone to the medical conditions mentioned above could be the ones that study in universities or institutions of Malaysia.

This is the time for us to be thoughtful and concerned about gay and lesbian. Having an advanced understanding of their experience of being gays and lesbians, could help to establish a better education system in the society to curb the issue of discrimination and stigma in campus climate. Besides, open the mindset of society in recognizing these minorities' existence in the community.

We can enhance student disclosure and central student support services in public universities by breaking the stigma and instilling a culture of inclusion in the public university of Malaysia as one of the steps in improving the Malaysian education system. Besides, this can be one of the potential opportunities to robust innovative approaches for future research on sexual orientations which focus on homosexuality based on Malaysian demographics. Failing to recognize their experience in university will have implications for the community and individuals. University is a place where students need to be included overall in diversity, shaping new and relevant ideas, inclusion, equality, and justness with confidence.

This research aims to systematically study gay and lesbian undergraduate students' experience in a public university in exploring these population sexualities. Furthermore, this study could contribute to their academic achievement, the establishment of public protections as a student, take care of health, well-being, and social support in university. These generations which are now studying in public universities are the ones that will provide back to the country in the form of stability, economy, and education. It is essential to recognize this sexuality in a public university. Gay and lesbian undergraduate students' voices from public universities need to be considered and

be heard. The qualitative method will be used to gain in-depth insights into the challenges, coping strategies, emotional state, and love relationship in the university of students from the age of 18 who are in public universities across states from various courses in Malaysia. This data will be contextualized with a review of recent literature on homosexuality. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to explore the experience of gays and lesbians in a public university setting.

1.4 Objectives of study

General Objectives: To explore the experience of being gay and lesbian undergraduate students in a public university.

Specific Objectives:

1. To identify the challenges of gay and lesbian undergraduate students in a public university.
2. To investigate the coping strategies used after encountering the challenges of gay and lesbian undergraduate students in a public university.
3. To identify any love relationship of gay and lesbian undergraduate students in public universities based on Eric Erikson Theory.

1.5 Research of Framework

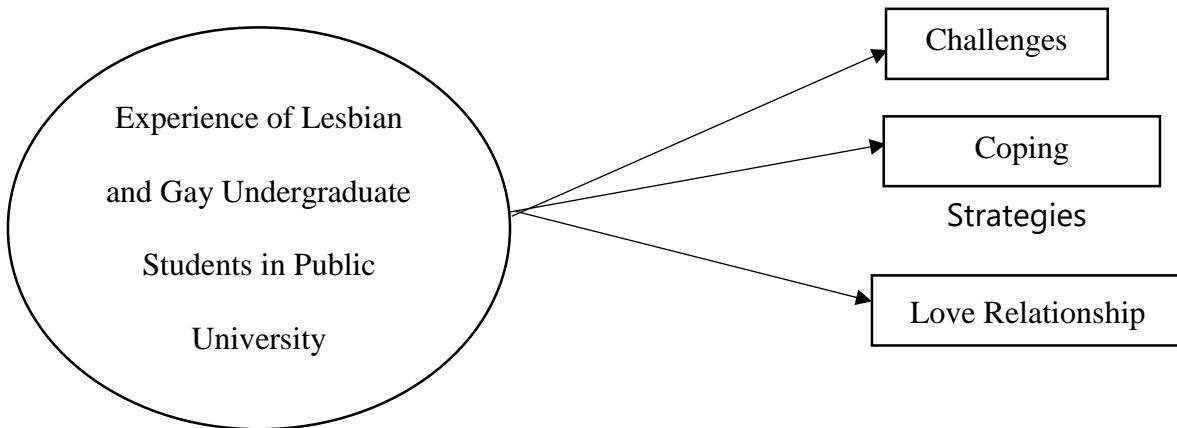


Figure 1: Research Framework

Figure 1 shown above is the framework of this study. The researcher focused on exploring the experience of gay and lesbian undergraduate students in the issues of challenges and struggles, coping strategies, and the love relationship in university. Thus, this research study set out to explore the experience of gay and lesbian undergraduate students in public universities.

1.6 Importance of Research

The findings of this study redound to benefit society as it increases the awareness of gay and lesbian as part of the community today. The greater the amount of data on the involvement of students in queer groups from previous research from other parts of countries justifies the need for more effective, life-changing research approaches in Malaysia. Thus, exploring gays and lesbians' experiences in public universities will be able to help to understand their challenges as part of the minorities especially from the perspective of youth. Society could increase awareness of their struggles associated with their sexual orientations in public universities. Then, society get to know this minority group's strengths and weaknesses from their experience. Furthermore, the

semistructured interview data can provide insight and lessons that can be learned for the public in respecting every sexuality and not emphasized in discriminating culture.

Again, this study could improve the education system in providing better education and healthcare system and well-being for gay and lesbian minorities in public universities as we study their experience thoroughly. This research can be applied in future studies regarding needs in investigating and exploring further the spectrum of sexuality from different scopes or fields. For researchers, the study would help them uncover critical areas in their experience as a student in a public university and member of the queer, challenges, and support. Researchers get a much wider view based on Malaysian perspectives which many researchers were not able to explore yet. Thus, this study could pose as a reference for researchers who are conducting similar studies in the future.

1.7 Study Limitations

This study conducted biased and judgmental on the informants' side. The information gained from the participants conducted only to suit the study and satisfy the researcher's needs. Besides, inaccurate data are probable because of certain questions that informants do not answer truthfully. Therefore, there will be limited findings or information in this study. Moreover, the results may incorrectly interpret for the generalized population of gays and lesbians because the research involves a small sample group. Although the students come from all over Malaysia, there is limited generalizability to the Malaysian education system overall. Additionally, this study consumed more time and energy to complete because this study required time in recruiting participants who meet the criteria to participate in the study. The interview session between the researcher and participants and the transcription process of the interview was also consumed the time of the researcher.

1.8 Operational and Conceptual Definition

1.8.1 Challenge

Conceptual definition: The term "challenge" refers to an invitation or a call to action (Beghetto, 2018). Scope and intricacy of challenges differ. The problem, procedure to solve the problem, the solution, criteria in evaluating the solution are the basic structures of a challenge (Beghetto, 2018). The situation encounters by an individual involves great mental or effort which results in the person being successful by testing the person's ability (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020).

By (n.d.) challenge is an invitation to action, which varies from scope and complexity. The basic structure which involves challenges is problem, process, product, and criteria.

Operational definition: In this study, challenges faced by undergraduate students of gays and lesbians are well-defined by problems and difficulties faced in their choices of sexual orientation in public universities. The challenges can be in terms of discrimination, difficulty in social relationships, be a homosexual student. The challenges may be influenced by the law of Malaysia, religion, culture, and family values.

1.8.2 Coping

Conceptual definition: Coping can be defined as an operationalized system based on an individual's resources, the context in which they grow, and the context in which they are exposed to stressors (Frydenberg, 2017). At the elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels, coping theory can be utilized as a preventative and intervention: as the initial response to adversity, as a response to the impact of adversity, or as a result of an intervention (Frydenberg, 2017). From the APA

Dictionary of Psychology (“APA Dictionary of Psychology,” n.d.), coping is the use of cognitive and behavioral strategies in managing the demands of the situation. Next, coping (2016a) is a fundamental adaptation to survive in detect, appraise, and deal, and learn from stressful situations.

Operational definition: This research paper describes coping as ways of overcoming the challenges from their experience as undergraduate gays and lesbians in public universities. They deal with the challenges by various coping mechanisms such as isolation and hiding fluidly in heterosexual groups.

1.8.3 Emotional State

Conceptual definition: An emotional state is the combination of two words. Emotional is focused on emotion and feelings while state on the other hand refers to a state or way of being that exists at a specific point in time (“Emotional state definition and meaning | Collins English Dictionary,” 2021). Emotion on the other hand, is a term that is used to describe individual, subjective feelings that influence moods (“Emotional state,” n.d.). In psychology, emotion is defined as a physiological response to stimuli that includes physiological changes such as an increase in pulse rate, a rise in body temperature, increased or decreased activity of certain glands, and a change in breathing rate, and which tends to motivate the individual to engage in more activity (“Emotional state,” n.d.). According to psychologists Sylvan Tomkins (1963) and Paul Ekman (1982), "fundamental" emotions may be measured because all humans use the same facial muscles while expressing them (“Emotional state,” n.d.).

Operational definition: According to this research paper negative emotional is refer to the state of the participants emotion in aspect of loneliness, sadness, stress, fear, or overthinking.