

Ethnic Matters: Gender Differences in Behaviours and Attitudes

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Abstract: *The study examined gender differences in behaviours and attitudes towards own and other ethnic groups among Sarawakians. The questionnaire data were from 70 respondents living in Sarawak, Malaysia. The questionnaire was on social interaction, attitudes towards ethnic relations, ethnic group perceptions, and ethnic group importance in the context of the Malaysian society. The results showed that there were no significant differences between female and male participants who reported frequent social interactions with people from their own ethnic groups and other ethnic groups. However, they seldom discuss interethnic issues and attend inter religious dialogues with other ethnic groups. The female and male participants were also not significantly different in their ethnic group perceptions. They preferred to be with people from the same ethnic groups in various settings, and acknowledged that people from different ethnic groups are different and yet similar. However, there was a gender difference for attitude towards ethnic relations. The participants reported positive attitude towards ethnic relations. Compared to the female participants, the male participants expressed a strong support for the right of ethnic groups to maintain their own unique traditions and, at the same time, expressed a stronger belief in the need for minority groups to accept the established system of government in this country to attain the Malaysian dream of racial harmony. There was also a significant gender difference for ethnic group importance in that the female participants were more selective in which ethnic group they felt warm towards unlike the male participants who felt similar levels of warmth towards Malay, Indigenous, Chinese, and Indians. The male participants were more upfront in asserting pride in their ethnic identity and the right for ethnic groups to maintain their distinctiveness. This analysis of gender differences in ethnic attitudes using a model of behaviour-attitudes-values is eye-opening because it shows that Malaysians can display social interaction behaviour that shows ethnic openness, and somewhat express attitudes that show ethnic openness but at the values level, they are still in the comfort zone of their own ethnic group.*

Keywords: Social Interaction, Ethnic Attitudes, Malay, Sarawakians, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Ethnic attitudes are influenced by social and individual variables such as gender, ethnic background and socio-economic status. Early studies have shown that women tend to use standard speech because they are status conscious (Trudgill, 1983), and White (2003) found

some evidence of self-correction towards standard speech among female native English speakers in Birmingham. In attitudes toward language learning, Abu-Rabia's (1995) study showed that male students are inclined towards instrumental attitudes while females tend to learn English to become integrated into Canadian society. In comparison, less is known about gender differences in ethnic attitudes.

In the area of attitudes towards ethnic diversity, Verkuyten (1997) found that the Dutch adolescents' attitudes toward three different ethnic groups are formed by complex factors, including stereotypes, symbolic beliefs, emotions, and behaviours. Researchers have investigated the effect of gender on ethnic attitudes in some settings, and the findings have been inconsistent. For example, In Sweden, Munobwa et al.'s (2021) study on immigration and ethnic diversity found greater inclination towards positive attitudes among women, urban dwellers, younger people, those with higher education, and those with more contact with people with foreign background. Also about anti-immigrant sentiments, in Belgium, Hooghe and De Vroome (2017) reported that younger people and women were likely to overestimate the presence of ethnic minorities based on data from 1,816 Belgian-born respondents.

The findings did not clearly indicate whether women were more positive towards the ethnic minorities than men. Different findings were obtained in the United States, and males were found to hold more positive attitudes towards ethnic diversity. Sawyerr et al.'s (2005) study of 165 business students at a major Southwestern University showed that males were more likely to seek interactions with diverse others than females. More specifically, males who hold conservation values (i.e., respect for tradition and desire to maintain the status quo) felt comfortable with those who are different from themselves than females, and recognised and valued difference and similarities.

In yet another study covering 19 countries, Steele and Abdelatty (2018) did not find statistically significant differences for the coefficient of gender (female) in individual-level attitudes based on the analysis of the 2014 wave of the European Social Survey, combined with country-level data from the World Bank's World Development Indicators, the Manifesto Project Dataset, and five different databases of ethnic diversity measures. It is not easy to draw a simple conclusion on how gender influences ethnic attitudes because of the different aspects of attitudes and settings involved.

Little is known about ethnic attitudes of female and males in Malaysia. To our knowledge, the gender differences on ethnic-related diversity engagement was specific to intercultural sensitivity (e.g., Tamam & Krauss, 2017) rather than their attitudes towards ethnic groups. Studies on ethnic tolerance like Nizah et al. (2017) and Masrukhin and Sriyanto (2017) did not investigate possible gender differences. However, as studies on ethnic attitudes in other countries have found inconsistent findings, it is eye-opening to find out if females or males lead in the way of ethnic tolerance in the plural Malaysian society. In Malaysia, the 34.3 million-population consists of 70.1% Bumiputera, 22.6% Chinese, and 6.6% Indians (Statista Research Department, 2023). Ethnic attitude is an important area of investigation because ethnic divisions have grown wider, jeopardising interethnic unity and impairing social harmony (Francis-Granger, 2023; Pusat Komus, 2022).

The study examined gender differences in behaviours and attitudes towards own and other ethnic groups among Sarawakians.

2. Method

The participants of this study were 70 participants living in Sarawak, an East Malaysian state on Kalimantan Island. Table 1 shows the demographic background of participants, comprising 71.43% female, 84.29% below 30 years old, and 65.71% Malay 43%. A total of 70% had post-secondary education (58.57% degree; 11.43% certificate or diploma) but 44.29% were students. Their monthly income placed most of the participants in the B40 income category. B40 monthly income is less than RM5,250 and this represents 3.16 million households in Malaysia, M40 income is RM5251-RM11,819 and this also represents 3.16 million households while T20 income is RM11,820 or more and this represents 1.58 million households (Romeli, 2023). while 15.71% earned less than RM2000 per month and 37.14% earned RM2000-RM3999 per month. This is because only 2.86% of the 70 participants reported a monthly income in the range of RM4000-RM5999.

Table 1: Demographic background of participants (N=70)

Background		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	50	71.43
	Male	20	28.57
Ethnic group	Malay	46	65.71
	Chinese	2	2.86
	Indigenous	22	31.43
Age	18-19 years old	3	4.29
	20-29	56	80.00
	30-39	1	1.43
	40-49	2	2.86
	50-59	2	2.86
	60 and above	6	8.57
Marital status	Single	57	81.43
	Married	12	17.14
	Widowed/Divorced	1	1.43
Highest qualification	Primary 6 or below	2	2.86
	Form 3	2	2.86
	Form 5	15	21.43
	Form 6	2	2.86
	Certificate/Diploma	8	11.43
	Degree or higher	41	58.57
Monthly income	Not working/ students	31	44.29
	Less than RM2000	11	15.71
	RM2000-RM3999	26	37.14
	RM4000-RM5999	2	2.86

The questionnaire focused on social interaction (10 items), attitudes towards ethnic relations (10 items), attitude towards ethnic relations (11 items), ethnic group perceptions (10 items), and ethnic group importance (7 items). The social interaction items were on a scale of 1 (very frequent) to 4 (almost never) while a five-point Likert scale was used for the other three sections (1 for strongly agree and 5 for strongly disagree). Table 2 shows that the questionnaire is reliable.

Table 2: Reliability results for questionnaire

Variables	Total Items	Cronbach Alpha	Indicators	Distribution
Social Interaction	6 Items	.743*	Acceptable	Normal for t-test
Attitude towards ethnic relations	11 Items	.890	Good	Not normal, hence parametric test
Ethnic group Perception	10 Items	.716	Acceptable	Normal for t-test
Ethnic group Importance	7 Items	.712	Acceptable	Not normal, hence parametric test

*The results for 10 items are reported in this paper but four items in Table 3 (Items 1, 2, 4 and 5) need to be excluded for the Cronbach Alpha value to reach .743.

The questionnaire was constructed in Google forms, and the link was sent by the second researcher to her contacts among family and friends. The data were downloaded in the form of an Excel sheet, coded, and analysed. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to determine the social interaction behaviours, attitudes towards ethnic relations and group perceptions.

3. Results and Discussion

The results in this section are reported under the headings social interaction, attitude towards ethnic relations, ethnic group perceptions, and ethnic group importance.

3.1 Social interaction

Table 3 shows the means for participants' social interactions with their own ethnic group by gender. The score of "1" means "Very Frequently" whereas the score of "4" means "Almost Never". The average mean scores of 1.21-1.26 for Items 1-4 show the high frequency of participants having recreational activities, work projects, and meals with people from their own ethnic group. They also discussed culture or traditions with people from their own ethnic group very frequently.

Table 3: Social interactions with own ethnic group by gender (N=70)

Social interactions with own ethnic group	Female (n=50)		Male (n=20)		Average (N=70)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1. I have sports/recreation (e.g., shopping) with friends who are from my ethnic group	1.32	0.62	1.10	0.45	1.21
2. I do school/work projects with people from my ethnic group	1.40	0.78	1.05	0.22	1.22
3. I eat out with friends who are from my ethnic group	1.34	0.63	1.15	0.67	1.25
4. I discuss culture/traditions with people who are from my ethnic group	1.36	0.66	1.15	0.67	1.26
5. I share personal problems with close friends who are from my ethnic group	2.50	1.33	3.30	1.26	2.90

Note: 1 for Very frequently and 4 for Almost never

The male participants seemed to have slightly more frequent social interactions with people from the same ethnic group than female participants. However, for sharing of personal problems with close friends, the female participants confided in close friends from the same ethnic group (M=2.50 which is 2, close to Frequently) more frequently than the male participants (M=3.30 which is close to 4, Almost Never). The male participants might have preferred to keep the personal problems to themselves.

Next, the results on social interactions with other ethnic groups are described. Table 4 shows that participants frequently helped people from other ethnic groups to solve their problems, buy things from shops belonging to different ethnic groups, and sing songs of other ethnic groups.

The average mean scores for Items 1-3 are between 1.18 and 1.48 (close to 1, Very frequently). However, a different pattern was observed for more sensitive matters. The participants sometimes discussed interethnic issues with other ethnic groups (average $M=2.90$) and hardly attended inter religious dialogues (average $M=3.18$).

Table 4: Participants' social interactions with other ethnic groups by gender (N=70)

Social interactions with other ethnic groups	Female (n=50)		Male (n=20)		Average (N=70)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean
1. I help people from any other ethnic groups to solve their problems*	1.22	0.46	1.15	0.67	1.18
2. I buy things from shops belonging to different ethnic groups*	1.46	0.73	1.35	0.75	1.40
3. I sing songs of other ethnic groups	1.66	0.96	1.30	0.73	1.48
4. I discuss interethnic issues with other ethnic groups*	2.50	1.33	3.30	1.26	2.90
5. I attend inter religious dialogue*	3.10	1.07	3.25	1.02	3.18

Notes: 1 for Very frequently and 4 for Almost never

*These four items were excluded when the independent t-test was run because of low internal consistency

The participants' responses for six items (all 5 items in Table 3 and Item 2 in Table 4) were analysed for the independent t-test, that is, interactions with own ethnic group and with other ethnic groups. The results showed that there were no significant differences in average social interaction score by gender. There were no outliers in the data as assessed by inspection of a boxplot. Table 5 shows that the social interaction scores for each gender were normally distributed, as assessed by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p>.05$). Homogeneity of variances was violated, as assessed by Levene's Test for Equality of Variances ($p=.287$). Male participants reported less frequent social interaction with people from the same ethnic group ($M=2.90$, $SD=.27$) than female participants ($M=2.73$, $SD=.35$). However, the differences were slight. The t-test results revealed no statistically significant difference in social interaction by gender, $t= -1.908$ $p= .061$. The effect size is low. The female and male participants are similar in the frequency of social interactions with people from the same and different ethnic groups.

Table 5: Comparison between Social Interaction by Gender – T-Test Tests of Normality

Gender	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk			
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.	
Social Interaction	Female	.129	50	.038	.960	50	.092
	Male	.164	20	.166	.957	20	.483

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

3.2 Attitude towards ethnic relations

Table 6 shows that the participants have good attitudes towards ethnic relations on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The average mean scores are close to 1. Items 1 to 5 are about appreciation for the uniqueness of different ethnic groups and the average mean scores of between 4.83 and 4.92 show strong agreement with the statements.

Table 6: Attitudes towards ethnic relations by gender (N=70)

Attitude towards uniqueness of ethnic groups	Female		Male		Average Mean
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1. We must appreciate the unique characteristics of different ethnic groups in order to have a cooperative society	4.84	0.65	5	0	4.92
2. I would like my children to be exposed to the language and cultural traditions of different ethnic groups	4.82	0.66	5	0	4.91
3. If we want to help create a harmonious society, we must recognise that each ethnic group has the right to maintain its own unique traditions	4.82	0.60	5	0	4.91
4. In order to live in a cooperative society, everyone must learn the unique histories and cultural experiences of different ethnic groups	4.74	0.75	5	0	4.87
5. When interacting with a member of an ethnic group that is different from your own, it is very important to take into account the history and cultural traditions of that person's ethnic group	4.66	0.87	5	0	4.83
Attitudes towards the Malaysian dream					
6. People from all ethnic backgrounds should embrace the Malaysian dream of ethnic harmony	4.82	0.66	5	0	4.91
7. Children from all ethnic groups should be taught to adopt Malaysian values from an early age	4.72	0.73	5	0	4.86
8. The established system of government in this country can serve all the people well, so long as minority group members are willing to work within its structure	4.68	0.79	5	0	4.84
9. We should have a single unified language in this country - Bahasa Malaysia	4.62	0.88	4.8	0.89	4.71
10. In order to have a smoothly functioning society, members of ethnic minorities must better adapt to the ways of majority groups	4.28	1.16	5	0	4.64

Note: 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree

There are gender differences in attitude towards the uniqueness of ethnic groups. Interestingly, all the male participants chose “1” (strongly agree) when they responded to the items, giving rise to a standard deviation of “0”. The female participants were mostly in agreement, some more strongly than others.

Next Items 6 to 10 are about the Malaysian dream of racial harmony, and the male participants reported stronger agreement than the female participants. The results show that the participants held strong beliefs in the necessity of give-and-take for Malaysians of various ethnic groups to live peacefully together. The participants believed in that people from all ethnic backgrounds should embrace the Malaysian dream of ethnic harmony (average M=4.91). They also believed the inculcation begins from young; children should be taught the Malaysian values (average M=4.86). The participants believed that Bahasa Malaysia should be the language to unite the different ethnic groups (average M=4.71).

However, for the Malaysian dream of racial harmony to materialise, the minority ethnic groups are expected to recognise the privileged position of the majority group, the Malay. The results showed that the participants strongly agreed that the established system of government in this country can serve all the people well, so long as minority group members are willing to work within its structure (average M=4.84). They also agreed that members of ethnic minorities must better adapt to the ways of majority groups in order to have a smoothly functioning society (average M=4.64). The results point to the male participants expressing a stronger stance on the need for the minority groups to have a spirit of compromise to attain racial harmony.

A Mann-Whitney test was run to determine if there were significant differences in ethnic attitudes by gender (Tables 7-8). Male participants reported more positive ethnic attitudes ($M=4.98, SD=.08$), than female participants ($M=4.65, SD=.61$). Results revealed statistically significant differences in ethnic attitudes by gender, $U= 299.000, Z=-3.132, p= .002$. Effect size is low. Both female and male participants had positive attitude towards ethnic relations but the level is higher for male participants. The male participants expressed a strong support for the right of ethnic groups to maintain their own unique traditions and, at the same time, expressed a stronger belief in the need for minority groups to accept the established system of government in this country to attain the Malaysian dream of racial harmony.

Table 7: Comparison between Ethnic Attitudes by Gender

		Tests of Normality					
		Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
Ethnic attitudes	Gender	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
		Female	.286	50	.000	.605	50
	Male	.538	20	.000	.236	20	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 8: Test statistics for Mann-Whitney U Test and Wilcoxon W Test for Ethnic Attitudes by Gender
Test Statistics^a

	Attitudes towards ethnic relations	
	Statistic	Sig.
Mann-Whitney U	299.000	
Wilcoxon W	1574.000	
Z	-3.132	
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

3.3 Ethnic group perceptions

Table 9 shows participants' ethnic group perceptions by gender. The results showed that the participants had a conflict between having a strong ethnic identity and being tolerant of ethnic diversity. The average mean scores for Items 1 to 3 are below 3 (the mid-point) on a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The participants admitted that they were not completely comfortable in a social setting (such as a party) where there were very few people from their ethnic group (average $M=2.83$). The female participants were marginally positive ($M=3.26$) but the male participants were negative ($M=2.40$)

Table 9: Participants' ethnic group perceptions by gender (N=70)

Group perceptions	Female		Male		Average
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean
1. I would be completely comfortable in a social setting (such as a party) where there were very few people from my ethnic group	3.26	1.66	2.40	1.79	2.83
2. I would rather work alongside people of my same ethnic group	2.86	1.68	2.80	2.04	2.83
3. I would prefer to live in a neighborhood with people of my same ethnic origin	2.92	1.58	2.8	2.04	2.86
4. If I were living with others in a house or an apartment, I would be more comfortable if they were from my same ethnic background	2.92	1.63	3.00	2.05	2.96
5. I would be completely comfortable dating someone from a different ethnic group (if I was single)	2.74	1.69	1.85	1.48	2.46

6.	The various ethnic groups in Malaysia (Malay, Chinese, Indian, Indigenous group) are more similar to one another than they are different	4.14	1.28	3.20	1.91	3.87
7.	Because people come from different ethnic backgrounds, they often behave very differently	3.80	1.54	4.80	0.89	4.09
8.	Belonging to one ethnic group versus another profoundly shapes what your life is like	4.46	0.97	4.95	0.22	4.60
9.	Different ethnic groups often have different approaches to life	4.52	0.91	5	0	4.76
10.	I want my children to learn that all people are basically the same - even though they may be from different ethnic groups	4.74	0.69	5	0	4.87

Note: 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree

For colleagues, neighbours and housemates (Items 2-3, 5), often one does not have a choice of who they are. The mean scores were similar for female and male participants, and the difference in mean scores ranged from only 0.06 to 0.12. Both genders still felt more comfortable being in the company of the same ethnic group than to be with people from other ethnic groups. At the same time, the participants wanted to appear as if they were open to other ethnic groups. They marginally disagreed that they would rather work alongside people of the same ethnic group ($M=2.83$) or to live in a neighborhood with people of the same ethnic origin ($M=2.86$). The participants had mixed responses when asked whether they would be comfortable living with others in a house or an apartment if they were from my same ethnic background ($M=2.98$). As 44.29% of the participants were students, they knew they cannot choose who their roommates would be in university hostels. They also have limited control over the ethnic background of their housemates in rented accommodation around the university because they have to take up available rooms.

The participants' openness to mixed marriages were explored through a question on dating. The participants were not comfortable dating someone from another ethnic group (average $M=2.46$). A gender difference can be also seen in that the male participants reported stronger disagreement for cross-ethnic dating ($M=1.85$) than female participants ($M=2.74$). It was a hypothetical question with the clause "if I was single" because some of the participants were married. It seems that female participants were open to cross-ethnic dating and, by extrapolation, mixed marriages than male participants.

The results for Items 7, 8 and 9 show that the participants acknowledged the cultural and behavioural differences among ethnic groups. The participants agreed that people who come from different ethnic backgrounds often behave very differently (average $M=4.09$). They strongly agreed that belonging to one ethnic group versus another profoundly shapes what one's life is like (average $M=4.60$) and different ethnic groups often have different approaches to life (average $M=4.76$). The male participants were more likely to see the differences than female participants and the mean score differences for the three items ranged from 0.49 to 1.

However, the participants were able to see the commonality of the human race (Items 6 and 10). The participants agreed that various ethnic groups in Malaysia (Malay, Chinese, Indian, Indigenous group) are more similar to one another than they are different (average $M=3.87$). The female participants expressed stronger agreement than the male participants, and the difference in mean scores was 0.26. The participants also reported that they wanted their children to learn that all people are basically the same – even though they may be from different ethnic groups (average $M=4.87$). However, for this item the male participants had stronger intentions than the female participants, and the difference in mean scores was 0.94.

An independent t-test was run to determine if there were differences in group perception score by gender for the 10 items. There were no outliers in the data as assessed by inspection of a boxplot. Group perception scores for female and male participants were normally distributed, as assessed by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p > .05$). Homogeneity of variances was violated, as assessed by Levene's Test for Equality of Variances ($p = .540$). Male participants had higher scores on group perceptions ($M = 3.69$, $SD = .66$) than female participants ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .63$). Results revealed no statistically significant difference in group perception by gender $t = -.405$ $p = .687$. Effect size is low. The gender differences reported earlier were not large enough to be statistically different, and female and male participants held similar ethnic group perceptions, that is, feeling comfortable in the company of ingroup members in various settings, and acknowledging that people from different ethnic groups are different and yet similar.

Table 10: Comparison between Ethnic Group Perception by Gender – t-Test

Group Perceptions	Gender	Tests of Normality					
		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
	Female	.089	50	.200*	.981	50	.591
	Male	.126	20	.200*	.919	20	.094

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

3.4 Ethnic Group Importance

Table 11 shows the means for participants' ethnic group importance by gender. The participants agreed that ethnic groups in Malaysia are very different from one another (average $M = 4.54$). This covers lifestyle encompassing cultural practices, food, rituals, language, and mindset. The participants also agreed that their ethnic group membership is very important to the sense of they are (average $M = 4.74$). They also believed that if Malaysia want to help create a harmonious society, Malaysians must recognize that each ethnic group has the right to maintain its own unique traditions (average $M = 4.83$). For all these three items, the male participants attributed greater importance to ethnic group distinctiveness than female participants.

Table 11: Participants' Ethnic Group Importance by Gender (N=70)

Ethnic Group importance	Female		Male		Average Mean
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1. Ethnic groups in Malaysia are very different from one another	4.38	1.12	4.70	0.98	4.54
2. My ethnic group membership is very important to my sense of I am	4.48	0.89	5.00	0	4.74
3. If we want to help create a harmonious society, we must recognise that each ethnic group has the right to maintain its own unique traditions	4.66	0.80	5.00	0	4.83
4. In general, how cool (distant) or warm (close) do you feel towards Indians?	3.82	1.22	4.70	0.73	4.07
5. In general, how cool (distant) or warm (close) do you feel towards Chinese?	3.98	1.17	4.70	0.73	4.19
6. In general, how cool (distant) or warm (close) do you feel towards Malays?	4.32	1.15	4.90	0.45	4.49
7. In general, how cool (distant) or warm (close) do you feel towards Indigenous people?	4.32	1.15	4.90	0.45	4.49

Note: 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree

The next set of four items measure distance or closeness to people from different ethnic groups. The participants were asked "In general, how cool (distant) or warm (close) do you feel towards ...?" The results in Table 11 showed that the participants felt closer to Malays and Indigenous

people (average $M=4.49$) than Indians (average $M=4.07$) and Chinese (average $M=4.19$). These results can be partially explained by the ethnic composition of the participants because a majority of the 70 participants (65.71%) are Malays, 31.43% are Indigenous, and only 2.86% are Chinese. As the Malay participants are likely to feel closer to other Malays, it is expected that the results would be skewed towards closeness to the Malays. A similar conjecture can be made for the Indigenous. The distance from Indians can be explained by the small Indian population in Sarawak. Indians account for only 0.2% of the 2.5 million population in Sarawak, which consists of 30% Iban, 23.7% Malay, 23.4% Chinese 8.6% Bidayuh, 5.7% Melanau and other indigenous (Statista Research Department, 2023). Since there are fewer Indians in Sarawak, this results in less contact and familiarity with Indians. The participants have fewer opportunities to befriend and work with Indians.

The male participants had similar feelings towards various ethnic groups (mean scores between 4.70 and 4.90) but the female participants had different feelings. The female participants felt the closest to Malays and Indigenous people (both $M=4.32$) compared to Chinese ($M=3.98$) and Indians ($M=3.82$).

A Mann-Whitney test was run to determine if there were differences in ethnic group importance by gender (Tables 12 and 13). Male participants had higher scores on ethnic group importance ($M=3.86$, $SD=.27$) than female participants ($M=3.58$, $SD=.53$). Results revealed statistically significant difference in ethnic group importance by gender, $U= 331.000$, $Z=-2.338$, $p= .019$. Effect size is low. The male participants were more upfront in asserting pride in their ethnic identity and the right for ethnic groups to maintain their distinctiveness. On the other hand, the female participants were more selective in which ethnic group they felt warm towards unlike the male participants who felt similar levels of warmth.

Table 12: Comparison between Ethnic Group Importance by Gender

		Tests of Normality					
		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
Group Importance	Gender	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
	Female	.204	50	.000	.870	50	.000
	Male	.442	20	.000	.575	20	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 13: Test statistics for Mann-Whitney U Test and Wilcoxon W Test for Ethnic Group Importance by Gender

Test Statistics ^a	
	Ethnic Group Importance
Mann-Whitney U	331.000
Wilcoxon W	1606.000
Z	-2.338
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.019

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The study showed that ethnic behaviours and attitudes are influenced by gender based on a study of Malaysians living in Sarawak. There were no significant differences among female and male Sarawakians in their social interactions and ethnic group perceptions. However, the

female and male Sarawakians were significantly different in their attitude towards ethnic relations and ethnic group importance.

Figure 1 summarises gender differences in ethnic attitudes based on a model of behaviour-attitudes-values often used to explain organisational culture. The external behaviour is visible but may or may not be congruent with underlying attitudes. Values are deep set and influences attitudes, but are often hidden and may lie below one’s conscious awareness. We posit a model of behaviour-attitudes-values which explains this group of Malaysians’ ethnic attitudes, and those of people with similar characteristics living in a multiethnic society.

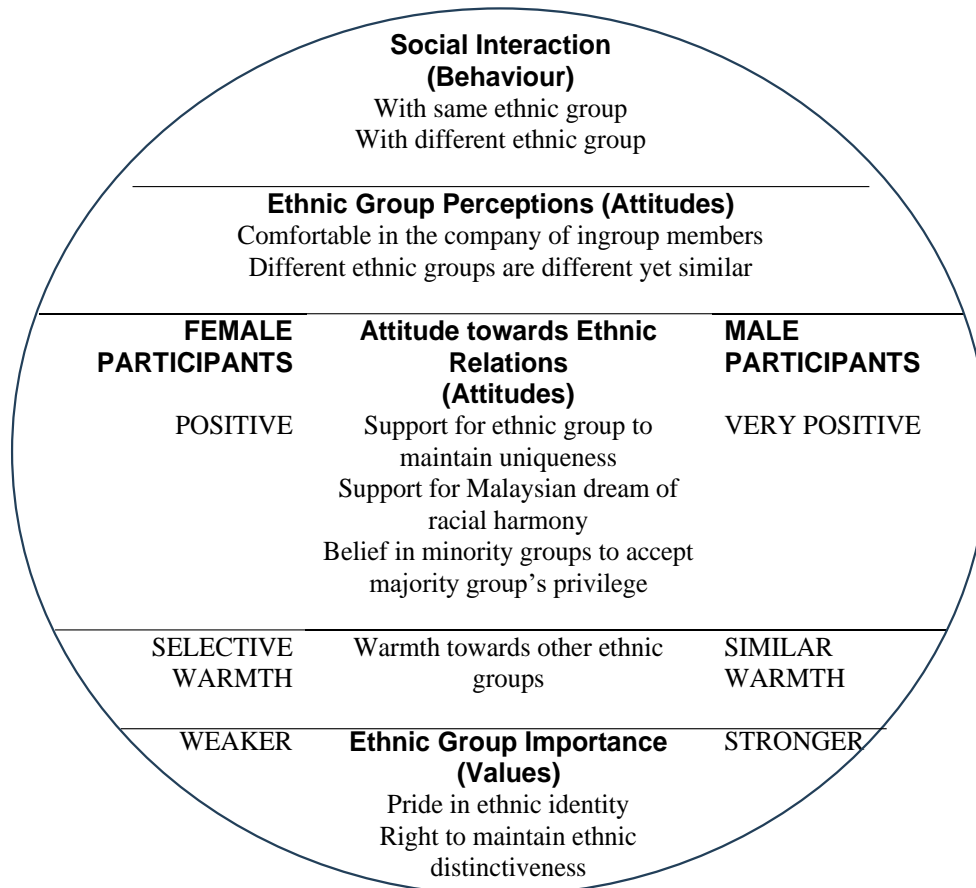


Figure 1: Behaviour-Attitudes-Values Model on gender differences in ethnic attitudes

Our study shows that the external social interaction behaviour demonstrates mixing of ethnic groups, and this is considered desirable behaviour in a multiethnic society. Other studies have found that Malaysians express support for racially mixed neighbours but still prefer to have neighbours from the same ethnic group (Al Ramiah et al., 2016; Aminnuddin, 2020; Lee, 2017). Similarly, Malaysians mix with other ethnic groups but rarely develop close friendships outside of their ethnic group (Lee, 2017; Mohd Tamring et al., 2020).

Beneath the visible level of ethnic behaviour is the attitudes level. When asked via the questionnaire, the participants reported attitudes that reflect a move away from groups that “mix but do not combine”, which is characteristic of the plural society as described by Furnivall (1956). The participants “hold by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways” (Furnivall, 1956, p. 304) but at the same time, the participants have the positive other-group orientation to live together harmoniously with other ethnic groups by accepting their place as the minority group. The co-existence of the ingroup identification and ethnic

openness may signal a gradual breakdown of the rigid divisions that separate the ethnic groups in Malaysia. At the attitudes level, it can be seen that the male participants reported more intense attitudes for both ingroup identification and ethnic openness than the female participants. The results on the warmth towards other ethnic groups are consistent. The male participants reported high warmth scores to Malay, Indigenous, Chinese and Indian but the female participants were selectively warm towards Malay and Indigenous. At the attitudes level, it seems that the male participants have better attitudes towards ethnic relations.

At the deepest level of the culture is the values, elicited via questionnaire items on ethnic group importance. The participants held on to two values, which are pride in their ethnic identity and the right to maintain ethnic distinctiveness. These values reveal that the participants still strongly retain their religion, language and culture. At the values level, it can be seen that the male participants had stronger ingroup values than the female participants. Values are not visible but serve as principles that shape the attitudes.

This analysis of gender differences in ethnic attitudes using a model of behaviour-attitudes-values is eye-opening because it shows that Malaysians can display social interaction behaviour that shows ethnic openness, and somewhat express attitudes that show ethnic openness but at the values level, they are still in the comfort zone of their own ethnic group. Our findings have indicated that the females possibly lead the way in ethnic tolerance, and this conclusion can only be reached through an analysis of the congruence at three levels of culture. However, the findings are based on a small segment of the Malaysian population. The findings should be verified in future research delving into the visible and invisible layers of culture to attain a better understanding of the dynamics of living together in a multiethnic society.

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