

Perspectives on LGBT in Malaysia: Sexual Regulation from Below

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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

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

who assumed sexual life that are considered deviant in their society? Does it make a difference that the acceptance or rejection is made in the context of an intensified moral regulation? In our essay, we positioned people's view of LGBT within the context of everyday life. Our paper will show that the discussion of LGBT is relying on the use of reductionist and stereotypical representation. It was through the recourse to a simplified yet oft-repeated common sense on sexual norms, a social consensus is enhanced and deepened. In Malaysia, the discourse of sexuality is animated and produced in the sphere of social interaction relies on the use of signs and common sense. For that reason, the participants' understanding of LGBT individuals and identities are determined by a condition of knowledge that makes typification not only necessary but a significant harbinger of a sexual regulation.

The study investigated perceptions of LGBT identities in Malaysia by examining social interaction as the source of social knowledge about LGBT. There are three questions explored in the paper. First, does the social knowledge constitute an effective sexual regulation? Next, how is the knowledge of sexual norm is learnt in the everyday interaction? Finally, how is one's thinking and action related to LGBT is shaped by everyday interaction?

2. Literature Review

LGBT

LGBT is a collective sign adopted in the late 1980s to denote non-heterosexual practices, namely, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender. The assemblage of contradictory sexual practices signalled a shift of theoretical orientation from theorising inequality, stigma and morality to a culture-power nexus. Such an orientation entails the harnessing of the knowledge produced by feminist theorists into the advocacy for social movement and activism. Queer theory, for example, has been responsible for the articulation of objectives within LGBT activism (Amaya & Gonzalez, 2019). The integration of queer theory and real-world activism becomes the model for other forms of social mobilisation, such as the disability right and the new-left movements, reminiscent of the partnership between intellectuals and the labour and the anti-war movements in Europe and USA in the 1960s.

In our research, we have found that the thinking about LGBT among ordinary Malaysians are not simply expressions of norm consensus and compliance. We discovered among our participants the attempts at rationalising sexual difference within the worldview of religious/cultural systems. Granted, the LGBT identities are still perceived as deviant; however, the understanding of these identities are formulated in both interactionist and discursive ways. The participants were conscious of the presupposed ideological function of western media in disseminating ideas on non-heterosexual identities. Nevertheless, the heavy reliance on the western media in providing the knowledge-input on the taboo topics revealed that engagement with western thought on gender, albeit, in reductive, stereotypical way. Therefore, while the new media, whose content is tilted towards a neoliberal worldview on individuality, assumed to have had an ideological pull over the minds of the non-western, we found that our participants were not oblivious to the soft power of the new media. Hence, the moral panic over an alleged western toxic culture among ordinary Malaysians is unwarranted. Instead, our research data suggest that the bounded nature of social interaction is more believable, more real and has forceful effect over the ways knowledge about sexual norms are learned among the participants. We also found that religion does not have a monopoly in the normalisation of sexual practice. Instead, the participants' engagement with religious ideas on sexuality first and foremost took place in social space such as by reading or watching videos online, as well as observing and conversing with peers. In short, religious ideas are transmitted

in social signs and stereotypes, thereby turning religion and culture into a useful ally in normalisation. It goes to show the systemic effect of information “blackout” and censorship in the name of moral regulation.

Sexual Norms

Norms, according to a feminist philosopher Judith Butler (2004), are “implicit standard” that are known and acknowledged by social participants. It is “implicit” because it is contained in the law, culture and religion. Participants are reminded of norms in their everyday life, for example, through socialisation, conversation and observation, so much so that one does not require an elaborate description to recognise that certain acts are against norms.

Sexual practices like LGBT are examples of *that* recognisable acts considered deviant from the norm. “Normal” sexual practice only accepts a binary gender identity female/male, feminine/masculine and they are recognised by social participants regardless of how one feels or thinks about it. Butler (2004) echoed a longstanding moral theory of society in Durkheimian tradition that asserts the centrality of morality in social life (see Durkheim, 2006). Its persistency is underlined by its institutionalisation in every facet of human life and relationship, such as in the spheres of family, economy, education, religion, law, media and social interaction. While norms may cite its origin from varying sources such as religion, philosophy, cultural precedent or folk wisdom, these sources nevertheless owe their existence to a society. In a functionalist view, norm is what makes society ‘hang together’, while its formalisation ensures a consensus achieved between members of society of an act passes as acceptable and normal. Inherent to a society’s logic in achieving a ‘normal’ society, any deviation constitutes an act of transgression of the social consensus, thereby, justifies a sanction. The recourse to punishment as a mechanism to achieve compliance and restore normality constitutes a very act of “contradiction” that norms seemed to serve in social life.

Judith Butler pointed out the contradictory functioning of norms – creating values as well as supervising them – has real consequence to the lives of those whose sexuality are criminalised (Butler 2004, 41). As a result, individuals who exhibit or profess their recalcitrance from the sexual norm invite an array of sanctions already in disposal through the formal channels of law as well as social intimidation and violence. In the social order of things, the policing of gender and sexuality became legitimate and necessary condition for a moral life. It was in the latter’s context that the contrarian sexual identities became un-liveable.

Perspective on Sexuality: Post-Modern

It has been declared there has been a “paradigm shift” in the western feminist theories on sexuality (Barrett, 1992), from the analysis of class, structure and biological to ones that focuses on symbolisation and representation. The shift was motivated by the feminist reflection of the implication that materialist conception of gender and sexuality that they once beholden to had led to the essentialising of the gender/sexual category. Social science theories such as Marxism, functionalism and psychoanalysis thrived on a “determinist model of social structure” (p. 204) had privileged the explanation for the known loci and structures of inequality over the ambiguity and fluidity of sexual identity. The feminists contend that while gender inequality and social control remain, the trajectory of power is evolving towards individualisation enabled by technologies in medicine, communication and surveillance. Hence, a new mode of analysis is required.

The feminist theorists argued the time has come to recognise the multifaceted yet anonymous operation of power that characterises the late post-industrial society. The preferred analytical

mode is deconstruction à la Foucauldian which examines the effect of scientific rationalisation had on the notion of individuality. Citing an example of psychiatry, its claims of knowledge over a “mad” mind renders the latter in absolute state of subjection, deprived of right from legal point of view and totally subjected to medical intervention. The “new” form of power is the unconscious control over the body, not in the hands of specific male hierarchy or greedy capitalist but the power to discipline the mind and body (see Foucault, 2006). Feminists found the latter’s argument compelling due to the development in medical technology in gender change and sexual reassignment and the effect it has on the stability of gender/sexual categories (see Butler, 2004). However, does the feminist “turn” to post-modern signal a demise of a rationalist model of agency and social action that modern social theory presupposes?

Sociologists of constructivist and interactionist schools would be quick to point out that post-modernists such as Foucault (2006) and even Butler (2004) are modelling their philosophies on a familiar terrain of social constructivism (Walby, 1990, p. 115). This means post-modernists did not depart on the conception of social practice and micro-processes as the primary site of meanings and knowledge reproduction. Post-modern analysis too concurred with constructivists on the emergent nature of meanings continuously negotiated in the everyday interaction. However, the key difference between them is the ellipsis of intention from the subject-participant. Post-modernists view the subject as agency that performs an identity while the constructivists view the subject as agency that rationalises and whose intention and behaviour to each other are mutually intelligible. As a result, post-modernists can reveal the contradiction that inheres in a presupposed rational power such as in the repressive power of norm and morality while constructivists can explain the social logic embedded in the practices of norms and its contextual variation.

Epstein (1994) proposed a line of inquiry for an investigation of how meaning of sexuality is negotiated at a micro-interpersonal level. He asserts that the evidence of contemporary studies revealed personal beliefs on sexuality which functions at the macro-level systems of difference around class, race and gender. In other words, Epstein (1994) argued that constructivism analysis is capable of contributing to the understanding of how discrimination is systematised and “trickle-down”. Epstein’s (1994) remark may now seem to be dwarfed by the mighty force of post-modernism. Yet, the question of knowledge and meaning-making remains the key to understanding how sexuality is naturalised in everyday life.

Perspective on Sexuality: Everyday Knowledge

A variant of sociological theory of knowledge by Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that social life is experienced by its participants as ordinary and common-sense. By common-sense reality it assumes that the subject accepts their reality as a taken-for-granted. The mundane nature means the everyday reality must come across normal for its subject. Reality is also experienced immediately, constantly forcing its immediacy upon its subject’s consciousness. This means the internal motivation is mainly responding to the moment. The deeper thought processes such as reflection or contemplation is sublimated for the immediacy. This makes the questioning of the normal in the everyday reality a demanding cognitive task, an unnecessary distraction to the mundane order of life.

So, what kind of knowledge one learns and express in their everyday interaction? Berger and Luckmann assert that the most important knowledge earned and imparted in everyday reality are “signs” circulated in a given society serve as “index of subjective meanings”. For example, social participants recognise facial expression that conveys an intended meaning. They are also able to recognise the seriousness or the understatement conveyed by the sentences uttered by

its speakers. They are also able to reciprocate an act that convey expectation. These “signs” circulating in social life are visible to their participants and must be learned in order to become effective players in the social ‘game’.

In the same way, sexual identities are understood between social participants in terms of signs. A woman is expected to display her femininity through signs such as the colour of clothes, the footwear, the act, the voice and the haircut. These may strike as stereotypes that all women are pigeon-holed although in reality variation and context do saturate the typecast. Nevertheless, stereotype is socially appealing and sensible to its participants precisely because they appear normal, require less cognitive process and makes sense. It becomes a framework one falls back on when they try to understand the ‘strange’. Such is the reason why, despite lacked in empirical corroboration, stereotype remains a persistent frame that keep on reproducing itself as long as the site of knowledge production on sexuality remains in society. Philosophy and social science have less influence than social stereotypes when it comes to norms and morality. The complexity of their arguments and the nuances they entailed are irreducible to “signs”, making them out of reach from the language and habits of everyday life.

3. Method

A descriptive study involving 12 participants living in Kuching and Kota Samarahan districts of Sarawak, Malaysia was conducted. The participants were mainly Muslim (five) and Christian (six) and there was one Buddhist. Four were male and eight were female. There was a spread of ethnic groups (four Chinese, four Malay, and four indigenous) and age groups (four were aged 18-20; three in their twenties; two in their thirties; two in their forties; one in her fifties). Using a semi-structured interview, the fourth researcher asked participants their view on LGBT individuals, the sources of their information and the people that they are predisposed to share conversation with on the topic. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. For the data analysis, the interview transcripts were read repeatedly to identify themes and sub-themes on the source of social knowledge about LGBT, including how sexual norm are learnt through everyday interaction, and how thinking and action related to LGBT are shaped by everyday interaction.

4. Findings

The analysis of the 12 interview transcripts generated three main results, and excerpts are used to illustrate these results.

The regulation on sexuality is mediated by implicit consensus on taken-for-granted morality

The participants we interviewed are generally aware of how LGBT people are viewed in their society. They also understand that LGBT topic is a taboo in the sense that it is not appropriate to talk about it with their family or to display overt expressions of its practices such as holding hands with partners or publishing an intimate photograph in social media. Participant 1, a male Chinese said, “The topic (is) still a taboo topic to discuss and the general public, so from that I ... implies (sic) ... people don’t normally talk about this topic ... in an open way.”

The taboo surrounding LGBT is linked to religious beliefs. The Christian perspective on LGBT is expressed by Fritz (2021, para. 1) as follows: LGBT movement is against “God’s design of gender, marriage, family, and purpose of sexual relations”. As for the Islamic perspective on LGBT, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Malaysia stated that LGBT lifestyle deviates from Islam, the official religion in Malaysia (Palansamy, 2019). Participant 3, a Malay female

university student, said “most of the Malaysia (sic) citizens is full of ... Islamic people”. Her reasoning is that the large proportion of Muslims in Malaysia would mean that a large segment of the Malaysian public would be against LGBT. The social disapproval of LGBT is manifested in non-verbal expressions like “*goyang kepala*” (Participant 9), and “bashing” (Participant 6), and public “backlash” in social media (Participant 12). The participants also said that they knew of incidents where LGBT individuals are rejected: “chased out from the family” (Participant 3) and “constantly getting harassed” (Participant 2). Although most participants felt the discrimination is not ideal, but it makes sense to them that it is just how society works.

From the interviews, we found that the participants rehearsed the moral arguments against homosexuality unproblematically irrespective of their personal belief. Moral consensus on LGBT is known to our participants. For example, Participant 1, who thought it was “not morally right” to discriminate LGBT individual but somehow believed that “God made human ... in terms of sexual orientation, male and female”. By saying so, Participant 1 implicitly acknowledged there was something wrong about the LGBT persons. Another Christian, Participant 5, mentioned “Sodom and Gomorrah” from the Bible to justify that that being gay is wrong. Participant 10, a Chinese female student, cited cultural beliefs prohibiting LGBT as she learnt through her “Chinese education”. Participant 1 seemed to have internalised his moral arguments against homosexuality from his family upbringing, evident in the expression used such as “family value from three generations”. Replace Christianity with Islam, and the moral reasoning is similar. Participant 2, a Muslim Malay male, expressed sympathy for the way gay people are threatened “just because of being who they are”, but he also acknowledged that it is *known* from the Quran that “being gay is forbidden”.

Moral consensus is not just known but externalised in the acts of the participants ranged from rejection to tolerance. Participant 1 admitted that being around gay people made one felt “awkward”. Participant 9 said that she avoided interacting with a gay co-worker, and admitted her negative reactions to him: “I feel he is very dirty”. Participant 3 found it her religious duty as a Muslim to speak to two of her gay classmates who were “not really close friends”. She told them that what they did was “bad” and they “should stop” being gay. Other participants who were aware of the moral gambit pertaining to homosexuality, tolerated LGBT as long as they were not publicly displaying who they were. For Participant 5, it was not a problem going out with a nice, “single” gay colleague from work. Participant 6, an educator, suspected one of her Muslim students was transgender or “not the normal guy” but tolerated his presence in the classroom because he always appeared alone. Another educator, Participant 8, confessed that she still kept a gay friend in her Facebook contact because he “never declares” his sexuality openly. Sometimes, suspicion itself allows some latitude for tolerance. Participant 9 suspected one of her friends is a gay, but felt that she should keep his sexual practice a secret so to protect him from getting “hurt” and “because we know that he doesn’t want people to know”. However, even without the confirmation of the said friend, the sharing of mutual suspicion with few friends seemed to be a good enough reason to believe that he is indeed, a gay person.

The discourse of sexual norm in the everyday interaction is shaped by “useful” typification
The participants articulated their understanding of LGBT by using typification such as “LGBT”, “religion”, “culture” and “human rights”. These typification are in essence stereotypes or necessary reductions of multiplicity of forms, meanings and grammar into shorthand in order to make sense of the inherently complex reality. In effect, stereotypes are what makes the unknowable accessible. With repeated use over time, they create a consistency of meanings to all participants, effectively, everyone partakes in the socialisation of ‘truth’.

In our research, we found that the term “LGBT” itself is unproblematic for the participants in that everyone agrees what it denotes and are able to relate the term to some reality directly and indirectly encountered. Participant 7 described LGBT as a “sexual orientation” whereby one is “attracted to the same gender”. Further, he reasoned that LGBT is “abnormal” because “they are attracted to the same gender”, and for that reason, they cannot – as opposed to the heterosexual relationship – “have a normal life and have a normal marriage and have kids through the ... scientific thing”. Participant 9 said that she could not understand the same-sex attraction: “... why you have to attract to same sex? ... I never attracted to the same sex”.

However, other participants rationalised that LGBT is normal because love is a universal affection. Participant 7, a Bidayuh male student, despite recognising that the practice is socially viewed “abnormal”, found that the “LGBTQ community” is “more of a love thing”. To him, the “LGBTQ community” shared his value in “love” and “self-love”. Love between the same gender is arguably equivalent to other forms of love: “we love the environment, we love our clothing, we love our money, we love our pets ...”. Participant 10 has also expressed similar thinking that LGBT practices are about “love”: “I think they are same with us ... they just love ... same gender only”.

The biological explanation was the most obvious typification referred by the participants to arrive at the “abnormality” of the LGBT practice. Participant 8 thought that the “natural law of nature” is sensible because reproduction ensures a continuation to the cycles of life on earth: “... we have those sexual organs that God created specifically for men and women for reproduction ... but to have a woman and woman ... beyond the natural way of reproduction ...”. Participant 1 found LGBT to be a “sexual orientation” that is anomalous to God’s “original design of human kind to propagate and fill (sic) this earth”. Furthermore, Participant 1 felt that the “sexual orientation” of the LGBT individual does not permit them to fulfil God’s “original design”. He questioned “how LGBT is going to raise up ... holistic ... children on their own”. In his mind, LGBT is illogical because they against the law of nature.

Another typification used by participants is “religion”, often linked to negative views on LGBT. All participants claimed to know what their religion says about LGBT practices and almost all entailed rejection. Participant 4 assumes quite simplistically that people reject LGBT because of their “religious belief”, “What they do against the religion” (sic), so, it follows that “people don’t agree to the deviation”. Participant 2 saw a consistency between Islam and Malay culture when it comes to a rejection of LGBT practices: “your religion doesn’t allow it ... your culture feels like ... too different”. Participant 3 also considers LGBT “a sin and our God doesn’t really accept it” and that “a punishment in hell” awaits those who committed the LGBT “sin”. We were also told by Participant 5 that there was a precedent in the Bible on the potential fate befalling “people who are gay and lesbian”. The book of Genesis describes how the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by sulphur and fire because of their wickedness (Genesis 19:24). Participant 10, however, offered a mixed version of how Buddhists understand LGBT practices. Buddhism taught her “to accept everyone”, but the followers are in general, “not really open minded”. Here, a discord between the official Buddhist stance and the personal stance of the Buddhists is evident. Participant 12 explained that she had researched the official Islamic stance on LGBT and accepted it as her own: “... Do I just follow it blindly? No. ... this is actually based on ... my reading and ... the perception of why they become like this ... and to me ... this is actually going against the norms”. While all participants accepted that religion holds absolute truth when it comes to LGBT practices, they displayed creative interpretation when it comes to articulating a specific point in their religious worldview that could enhance their personal belief either in the direction towards acceptance or rejection.

Furthermore, typification is also applied to “human right” linked to positive views on LGBT. Participant 4, a Bidayuh female in her twenties, thought that the LGBT individuals “have the right be (sic) who they want ... Human right ... and all those kinds of rights”. Participant 11, a Malay female in her twenties, equated “human right” with concepts of humanity and non-discrimination. She considered LGBT individuals to be equivalent to everyone “because they are also human beings”. She was able to make sense as to why society tend to pass negative judgement to LGBT people, however, does not personally condone the social exclusion. Participant 11 argued that the discrimination against the LGBT individuals is contrary to the “essence” of religion. To this she believed that “... as a Muslim ... we need to brought up peace and harmony around us ...”. By placing faith in what is believed to be the “essence” of religion, Participant 11 felt that religion has an emphatic role to play in dealing with the hostility demonstrated towards the LGBT community.

The “LGBT” is encountered through actual experience and simulated abstraction

While all the participants we interviewed claimed familiarity with what LGBT is, only some had interacted with LGBT at a personal level. Participant 2 said that he had friends among “gays” and “lesbians” while studying in one of the public universities. The interaction was close enough to allow disclosure about their struggles and how his gay friends deal with harassments directed at them. We also discovered another instance of deep familiarity with LGBT in Participant 11 (a Malay female in her twenties) who had “quite a lot” of LGBT friends during her university years. They were “good friends” and continued their friendship until the present. Disclosures by LGBT individuals allow a heterosexual person an insight into what had been going on in the life of LGBT individuals. Participant 11 learnt that ‘coming out’ was more common among people who were studying in university as opposed to the time at school. However, once the LGBT individuals entered formal employment, they tend to retreat into background: “I can see that when they are working now, they don’t really ... say in Facebook or Instagram ... if they’re dating with their boyfriend”. Through their interaction with gay persons, the participants’ worldview has acquired some nuances especially when it comes to the relationship between religion and LGBT practices. Participant 11, for example, found that “as a Muslim”, “hates and hatred” have no place, “... so when a person does something (wrong) ... it is between him and God, right?”. Participant 2, claimed that “Islam influences” him “to learn the other side of the story”, led him to believe that “just because it is wrong ... to be gay ... doesn’t mean that you should hurt the person who is gay”. These emphatic responses were possible because of the friendships forged with the LGBT individuals allowed for nuanced understanding of personal conflicts and dilemma faced by the sexual minorities.

Not all direct, face-to-face encounters resulted in a softening of views towards LGBT individuals mainly because of the social bias. Participant 6, a female Malay educator, found herself feeling “pity” towards gay students in the classroom. She claimed to “understand” how it must had felt feeling “trapped” “in a boy’s body or in a girl’s body”. Participant 6 felt it may not be sensible for her to approach the students on the topic, instead, she felt it should have been the role for a religious instructor, however, added that religious intervention might be too late for some: “... even I think some of the Ustaz, I’m sure they saw this ... they are tired already ... they don’t want to say anything”. Participant 9, a Chinese female in her forties, confessed to being unable to coming to terms with a gay colleague from almost a decade ago, despite him being “a very good guy”. She said, “... so I was thinking ... I don’t dare to talk to him ... I don’t know ... what cause him ... to have this kind of relationship”. The close contact with her gay colleague left her battling between her personal belief that being gay is wrong and needed to be disciplined, and a personal sensibility to mind her own business.

LGBT individuals are also encountered through the effect of social media or what we propose to describe as a *simulated abstraction*. We took a cue from Jean Baudrillard's (2005) notion of an "inauthentic simulation" that he applied in relation to the disembodiment of the social world in artwork. An artwork such as Andy Warhol's *Campbell Soup* in the first instance asserted an original critique of political economy marked by repetition, de-humanisation and commodification. However, when the art style turned into a fashion or a trend, what spectators were seeing was no longer an "authentic" experience but a stereotyped simulation or an exaggerated version of a copy. This is a sense that the researchers found as we read our participants' relating their worldviews with what they found in the social media and online. While Baudrillard was talking about the consequence of an exaggerated stereotype on the way arts are understood, we found that a similar form of stereotyped simulation has rendered the LGBT individuals into an exaggerated construct or a hyper-real abstraction.

Our research participants believe in what they saw and read in the social media. After reading negative Facebook posting sent by "mutual friends", Participant 4 thought that the harsh attitude towards the LGBT people was driven by "their religious belief". Participant 3 watched videos from the YouTube about the LGBT people who were confronted with abuse and attack by people and surmised that they should not "expose too much to the public" to escape the social persecution. Participant 5 found out a harsh punishment like public whipping of LGBT individuals in an "Islamic country ... like Indonesia", mostly from YouTube. After watching videos posted in Facebook and You Tube about LGBT talking about their alienation from their families, Participant 10 questioned how parents could be so cruel in abandoning them

Since our participants believe in what they saw, they became alarmed by what they believe to be a negative infiltration of LGBT content into the minds of people. Participant 6 reflected on how the younger generation seems to be untroubled by LGBT. She said, "the idea of LGBT" has been enthusiastically spread in social media Twitter, Instagram and Tic-Toc". The students who are consumers of social media were thought to be susceptible to the idea that "gay and lesbians" are "acceptable in the modern era". Similar sentiment was repeated by Participant 7, who claimed that the "younger generations", unlike the older generations" who "are used to ... a religious kind of thing", are open to the corruption brought by the western influence as they are "searching or browsing through the Internet, the You Tube, Twitter". Participant 8 have also blamed the "western world" for popularising LGBT practices.

Irrespective of the extent to which our participants' mind is shaped by the new media, their responses revealed to us how the media itself becomes the enabler by which existing stereotypes and common sense are circulated and entrenched in the society. There seemed to be an ellipsis in the LGBT character one encounters in the media, that the person is only known to our participants through the effect of a character that fleets from one discourse (for example, sex is a biological truth) to another (for example, sex is a human right). The participants in our study, therefore, learns about LGBT from the characters they encountered in the new media, albeit, a character that exists only in abstraction.

The findings we presented earlier epitomises a perspective of sexuality that is produced within the context of a normal, unproblematic, everyday life. The findings also illustrated the knowledge that is not impetuous or impromptu, but one that is carefully considered and reflective. In the next section, we shall discuss the effects of everyday knowledge had on the sexual regulation of LGBT in Malaysia.

5. Discussion

The results inform us of the ‘content’ of everyday knowledge pertaining to LGBT and the ‘sources’ of the knowledge. Based on the findings, we argue that the social production of knowledge on LGBT has led to the reinforcement of the norms relating to heterosexual identity. Far from being the threat to the so-called moral fabric of society, the LGBT community is threatened by increasing social stigmatisation and incessant intimidation resulting from the intensified sexual regulation. The subsequent discussion explores the consequence of sexual regulation had on understanding of sexuality and the collective ignorance it engendered.

Firstly, the participants generally believe that an acceptable social norm of sexuality is heterosexual. Their belief is articulated in tandem with their religious knowledge, social interaction and engagement with the new media. Of the three, it is the social interaction that carries a significant weight to the way sexual norm is understood and externalised. This is because the participants who have an extended interaction with LGBT persons, are more likely to develop a better personal understanding of sexual difference. However, one needs to be reminded that the conversation taking place with the research participants are a reflection of what had happened. We should expect that during the historic interaction, our participants were more likely encountered some personal struggles to reconcile what they have been socialised into and to make sense of what they found to be “LGBT” in either workplace or university. Our research does not explore the conflict experienced then. However, we may surmise from the theoretical assumption that the subject-participant face everyday reality as emergent and immediate; therefore, their action would be tending towards either outright hostility or a reluctant reservation. What our results reveal is that most of the participants were going through a journey from a state of mental shock and disarray, into one that is capable at articulating a worldview that considers a wide array of factors such as religion, biology, humanity and affection. Our analysis does not privilege LGBT acceptance over rejection or vice versa. Instead, we would like to put forward an argument that the subject-participants’ understanding of sexuality in the context of everyday interaction is not imposed externally but is emergent. Given its uncertain nature (supportive or otherwise), it is not uncommon for the dominant group to try to exert force on social opinion by using methods such as press coverage, popular culture, censorship and advocacy using celebrity or opinion-leader. In the case of LGBT, our participants were sensitised to the alleged role played by the caricature called the ‘West’ in spreading the LGBT influence in the society. However, the participants did not seem to be aware by the use of local agents such as their friends, media and politicians in promoting a heterosexual practice, precisely because the latter is accepted as normal in their society, conveniently leaving them unscrutinised. Such is the reason for the lack in contestation of sexual norm in the society, despite the proliferation of new media usage among Malaysians and the increasing spotlight over LGBT in public consciousness.

Next, sexual practice is regulated through the use of reductive knowledge. As the discourse of religion and sexuality descending to the realm of everyday interaction, the way the discourse is framed and expressed is likely to be in a reductive, stereotypical manner. A complex, or nuanced knowledge may be disruptive, yet it has been prone to creative selection and may just simply be forgotten from the popular memory. We found that a successful way of regulating sexual practice is by denying subject-participants knowledge of the “other” position. Our participants reported how they read with unease the verbal “bashing” and rude sentences used to dehumanise any attempt at displaying acts of sexual “abnormality”. They also disapprove the overt signs like LGBT individuals holding hands or showing affection in public because these behaviours are seen as not only revolting but inviting a violent backlash. Against the

backdrop, so we were told by Participants 1, 2, 3 and 6 that the LGBT should keep their viewpoints out from the public. The exclusion of the other's perspective works in tandem with the promotion of a taken-for-granted "normal" perspective. Participant 8 thought that "families" and "educators" should not be ashamed to speak about the "truth": "As in male, you must be a man, a female, you be (sic) female". Participant 12 suggested studies be done "about these people", "what influences them and ... how can they get treated?". The framing of LGBT as a moral and psychological problem exemplifies the argument we put earlier on the consequence of information asymmetry to the forming of stereotypical knowledge. The information blackout is an apparatus for moral regulation. What must be underlined here is the fact that the participants did not feel their views were being coerced or imposed upon them. While our participants generally disapproved of discrimination towards LGBT individuals, their assertion for a heterosexual dominance can only be possible at the expense of silencing the others' perspective. Such is an irony of sexual regulation where compliance is best achieved through ignorance and indifference.

6. Conclusion

The paper reiterates the importance of studying how knowledge on sexuality is produced in everyday interaction. Our study finds that the knowledge produced through the everyday interaction enhances personal choice in a way that one *chooses* to construct a view that closer to personal aspiration and values. However, the knowledge produced through such encounter is reductive and stereotypical, rarely addressed to the LGBT individuals who were mostly left out of the actual interaction due to the fear of intimidation and discrimination. We conclude by raising an ethical concern of what knowledge asymmetry may bring to the extension of discrimination in any form of social categories, not exclusive to sexuality alone, but also to race, class and generation.

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