

Exploring Lesbian Identity: Attraction and Repulsion Factors among The Lesbian Community in Selangor, Malaysia

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Abstract

This study narrows its focus to rigorously investigate the distinct factors that either attract or repel lesbians in Selangor, Malaysia, from participating in same-sex sexual activities. Conducted within the framework of qualitative research, the study utilizes a phenomenological methodology to delve into the emotional and psychological complexities that contribute to these behaviors. The study population consists of five lesbian individuals, who were identified through a snowball sampling technique. Data was meticulously collected through a combination of online and face-to-face semi-structured interviews, aiming to allow participants to express themselves freely and comprehensively. For data analysis, a thematic approach was employed to interpret the nuanced motivations and deterrents identified by the study participants. The study successfully isolated several significant factors of attraction. Notably, familial influence, compatibility with partners, negative experiences with men, identity confusion, engagement with social media, and strong social support networks were found to be key motivators for lesbians to engage in same-sex sexual activities. Conversely, the research also identified two main factors that serve as deterrents. These were rooted in concerns about family acceptance and a deep-seated desire for a more traditional family structure. By isolating these key factors, the study aims to offer a focused, nuanced understanding of what encourages or deters sexual activity within the lesbian community in Selangor, Malaysia. This focused examination can serve as a crucial resource for social scientists, policymakers, and LGBTQ+ advocacy groups looking to understand the unique challenges and motivators within this specific demographic.

Keywords: Lesbians, Factors of Attraction, Factors of Resistance, Qualitative, Selangor, Malaysia

Introduction

Malaysia is generally considered a nation characterized by peace and harmony among different ethnicities, cultures, and religions. However, it is not immune to various social issues that impact diverse strata of its society (Husin et al., 2021). A growing concern in Malaysia is the increased visibility and discussion of issues related to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community (Ghosh, 2020). While not a new phenomenon, being traceable back to the early 1980s, the LGBT topic has evolved to include an expanded acronym, LGBTQ, adding 'queer' to the classification (Yang, 2019). This reflects a broader social movement advocating for equal rights for these marginalized groups, who face oppression due to widespread homophobia and transphobia (Herek, 2009).

The current study narrows its focus to the lesbian community in Malaysia. This community has been argued to be influenced by Western culture (Fahs & McClelland, 2016), despite being in a country that does not legally recognize Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) as human rights (Meyer, 2015). The study aims to delve into various factors influencing the lived experiences of lesbians in Malaysia including both the attraction to and resistance against the non-normative sexual orientation. In light to this, lesbians in Malaysia tend to remain closeted (Adam, 2018), rendering reliable statistics hard to obtain (Brown, 2016). Despite this, social media has demonstrated an undeniable visibility of this community (Duguay, 2016). The lesbian community often faces criticism, yet also receives support from social activists who advocate for their rights (Chou, 2018). The Western cultural wave and secular ideology appear to contribute to the local acceptance and the behaviors related to this issue (Fahs & McClelland, 2016).

Meanwhile, traditional media outlets have increasingly included stories related to lesbians, although the portrayal is often mixed (Pullen, 2014). With the advent of various platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and Netflix, the promotion of lesbian issues has become more straightforward (Craig & McInroy, 2014). In addition to this, from the legal and religious context, Malaysian laws and religious beliefs generally regard same-sex relationships as immoral and illegal which has a ripple effect on marital stability in the country (Teh, 2001). This sociocultural environment raises the risk of psychosocial challenges for the lesbian community (Meyer, 2003).

Lesbian Issues in Malaysia

The issue of lesbians is already known to the community, but the increase in this population is difficult to describe because there are no statistics as a reference to clarify how serious the issue is. At a glance, this study has revealed a drastic increase in the number of lesbians who actively use social media (Juaini et al., 2017) and serve as a free space for lesbians to communicate with each other because the social environment in Malaysia does not allow for the open disclosure of lesbian identity. However, this situation cannot be taken lightly as social ostracization against this group will increase risky behavior, including depression, alcohol addiction, HIV/AIDS infections, family neglect, and abuse. As a result, the individual's social functioning will decline, particularly among productive youths, and also increase social risk in the country.

Therefore, a positive social environment for individuals in facing the phase of same-sex sexual identity formation is very important, and it will not be effective without proper social support. Effective social support resources not only need to be established during the early formation

of identity but are also important as individuals live their lives as lesbians, as well as support and open opportunities for their desire to return to life like other individuals.

In addition, this study is also important in identifying the influence of social support systems on the formation of sexual identity and the survival of lesbians in Malaysia. Past studies show that lesbians experience more rejection than acceptance by the social support systems in their environment. Moreover, this group also faces issues of discrimination and are made victims of persecution by a section of society. A positive social environment in society is important to encourage effective social inclusion for lesbians. Moreover, this study is also significant to expose the community to the factors that drive women to engage in same-sex sexual activities. This is because society generally sees same-sex sexual activities only broadly, without knowing that discrimination and stigma by homophobic society can affect the mental and physical health of lesbians. Furthermore, based on past studies such as those conducted by Herek (2004); Link and Phelan (2014) there are a few lesbians who have a desire to change, but societal stigma can influence them to reject that desire.

Moreover, at present, human sexuality education is rarely taught either in secondary schools or in universities in Malaysia because it will vilify the community involved in sexual activity before marriage (Baba, 2001). According to Crabtree and Baba (2001), religion remains a stronghold that prevents enlightenment on homosexual issues from being implemented; however, from an educational standpoint, this study is important especially in educating individuals, particularly lesbians, about sexual identity development, especially when they are in a phase of confusion and need information resources as a guide to understanding such same-sex desires. According to Baba (2001), effective education will be a tool for this group to be more rational in solving and thinking about the pros and cons of being homosexual. Moreover, the influence of media and urban life will also be social factors contributing to their desire to come out and disclose sexual identity (homosexual).

Based on the research problems that have been discussed, the following research questions are formed

1. What is the profile of the lesbian community in Malaysia?
2. What are the attractive factors that drive the lesbian community to engage in same-sex sexual activities?
3. What are the repelling factors that cause the lesbian community to no longer engage in same-sex sexual activities?

Research Methodology

This study aims to investigate various dimensions surrounding the lesbian community in Selangor, Malaysia, including their profile, factors attracting and repelling them from same-sex activities, psychosocial risks they face, and resilience factors that help them cope. To attain an in-depth understanding, the researcher will employ a qualitative research approach to collect relevant data and information.

Research Design

The research employs a qualitative methodology, a form of inquiry that is particularly useful for exploring complex issues and phenomena that require detailed, nuanced perspectives. Qualitative research enables the study of situations and individuals in depth to obtain comprehensive information.

Sample Selection

The study focused on the lesbian community in Selangor, Malaysia, selected diverse sample of individuals who identify as lesbian. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling technique used to find participants with specific characteristics starting with one or a few participants and asking them to refer others. Towards the end, five lesbian individuals participated as informants.

Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and through participant observation. The interviews and discussions were conducted both online and in person, taking into consideration the safety and comfort of the participants. All sessions were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data was coded and analyzed using thematic analysis. This approach helped in identifying patterns within the data, which can be grouped into themes related to the research questions.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the topic, special attention will be given to ethical considerations such as informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Participants made aware of the study's aims, procedures, potential risks, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Results and Discussion

Objective 1: To identify the informant's profile from the Selangor lesbian community.

Table 1 shows the five informants that involved in this study. Details for each informant as below.

Informant 1

The first informant, a 24-year-old, a Malay Muslim, resides in Rawang, Selangor, living solely with her mother. She is the youngest among four siblings. Her education journey spanned from kindergarten to a special needs high school, owing to her Learning Disability (LD) diagnosis. Although she lacks a Malaysian Certificate of Education, she gained specialized certificates from her school. She briefly worked at a childcare center but was terminated for disciplinary reasons. Currently, she is awaiting job opportunities from a nearby factory, contingent on his mother's consent. The interview session was conducted openly and enthusiastically over 60 minutes in an open park setting.

Informant 2

Informant 2, a 24-year-old Malay Muslim, lives in OUG, Selangor. She holds a diploma in accounting from a private institution in Kuala Lumpur and currently works in Human Resources in a security company. The youngest among four siblings and the only daughter, she felt emotional pressure from her male family members. Despite family objections, she decided to move out and live with her partner close to her workplace.

Informant 3

The third informant is a 25-year-old, a Malay Muslim, from Selangor and currently residing in Rawang. She completed her diploma in Culinary Arts in 2018 and is an assistant chef at a five-star hotel in Petaling Jaya. Being the eldest of five siblings and raised by a strict father, as her mother works abroad, she has developed independence and responsibility. Although she aspires to pursue a degree, she has set aside these plans to allow her younger siblings to continue their education.

Informant 4

The fourth informant, 25 years old, from Shah Alam, Selangor, and a student at the Technical University of Malaysia Melaka (UTEM). Born in Johor Bahru, she is the fourth child among six siblings. Her upbringing influenced her ambition to become a ship crew member. She completed her diploma in Mechanical Engineering in 2019 and is now in her 7th semester at UTEM, expecting to graduate by the end of 2023.

Informant 5

The fifth informant is a 21-year-old, a Malay Muslim studying Law Enforcement at a private higher education institution in Kuala Lumpur. Originally from Negeri Sembilan, she now resides in Pantai Dalam, Selangor. She's the youngest child with three older siblings. After a short stint at the University of Kuala Lumpur studying Culinary Arts, she dropped out due to high tuition fees. Currently, in her fourth semester, she enjoys the freedom to explore Kuala Lumpur.

Each informant's profile was carefully collected to provide a diverse perspective for the study.

Table 1

Informants background

INFORMANT PROFILES								
Informant	Age	Religion	Ethnicity	Place of residence	Education level	Work	Number of siblings	Child order
1	24	Islam	Malay	Rawang	High school	Unemployed	4	4
2	24	Islam	Malay	OUG	Diploma	HR in private sector	4	4
3	25	Islam	Malay	Rawang	Diploma	Assistant hotel chef	5	1
4	25	Islam	Malay	Shah Alam	Degree	Student	6	3
5	21	Islam	Malay	Pantai Dalam	Diploma	Student	4	4

Objective 2: To analyze the attraction factors that drive individuals in the Selangor lesbian community to engage in same-sex sexual activities.

Theme 1: Family

In this theme, three sub-themes have been identified as primary factors contributing to lesbian individuals' engagement in lesbian communities. The first sub-theme relates to restrictive family environments that do not allow children to develop independently. The second sub-theme concerns parental upbringing that involved dressing children in male clothing from a young age. The final sub-theme pertains to families who live far away from their children.

Sub-theme 1: Familial Constraints

Sarwar (2016) assert that overly controlling parents limit the mobility and desires of their children. Such restrictions often lead to rebellion and actions that contravene familial norms. This was evident in the cases of the first and second informants who rebelled due to feeling constrained by their parents. Statements from the informants highlight the restrictive family environment:

"... Since my father passed away when I was young, and my older brother died in a motorcycle accident in 2019, and my sisters have all moved out of the house, my mom doesn't trust me anymore. She restricts everything I do. I can't go anywhere. Being the youngest child, I feel really restricted; this is not allowed, that's not allowed, even going out is not allowed! ... I've thought about running away from home before..."

(Informant 1)

"... My father and older brothers have always been directive, and I don't want to be like my mom, who just follows whatever they want. I can't even rest, always have to do this and that. I felt trapped living in that house, exhausted, stressed, that's why I moved out when I first started working, I couldn't stand living there anymore..."

(Informant 2)

Based on the accounts provided by the informants, parents who exert excessive control and do not provide room for their children to grow will encourage rebellion. These circumstances lead some children to contemplate leaving their home and indeed some informants proceeded to do so. Family conflict has been identified as a factor contributing to lesbian issues (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Farr et al., 2019).

Sub-theme 2: Upbringing

The upbringing discussed here refers to parents who dressed their children in clothing traditionally meant for the opposite gender from a young age. Interviews revealed that informants were often dressed in male clothing when they were young.

"... Since I was little, my mom would always dress me in boys' clothes. My mom and dad really wanted a son but couldn't have one, so she just dressed me in boys' clothes. Finally, the last child was a boy, the only male among his five sisters. That's why, even now, I don't know how to wear dresses or anything like that; it feels strange..."

(Informant 4)

"... I'm really comfortable wearing just pants and a t-shirt. Besides, my mom and dad mostly buy clothes like that for me, so when I have to dress like a woman, it doesn't feel right; it feels like I'm an auntie... Now that I'm grown up, every time my mom comes back from the Arab

countries, she always buys me robes or t-shirts because she knows her eldest child really likes simple t-shirts..."

(Informant 3)

According to the informants, their parents dressed them in male clothing from an early age, which had long-lasting effects on their comfort and style preferences.

Sub-theme 3: Distant Families

Based on the context of this study, a distant family refers to parents who do not reside with their children. According to Rohner and Veneziano (2001), parents are the closest individuals to children and shape their personality development from birth to adulthood.

"... My mom is far away because she works in Saudi Arabia as a nurse, and my dad is a key person at MBPJ and is also active in Selangor soccer. Being the eldest child, sometimes I feel torn, but I think about my younger siblings and my parents, so I have to be strong. Sometimes I want to complain but I don't want to appear weak, so I look for a girlfriend who can listen to my troubles..."

(Informant 3)

"... Since starting my diploma, I've been living in KL. Before this, I lived with my uncle, brother, and sister because they work here. But after a few months, we moved to live together, just the three of us. My brother and sister looked for a rental house. Before, I stayed in the college apartment for 2-3 semesters, but after that, I didn't stay there anymore; I ran out of money. My parents persuaded me to live with my brother and sister, especially since they were complaining about the external housing that the college provided. Paying college fees is expensive, so I just went along with it... Since I came to KL, that's when I met my first partner..."

(Informant 5)

The statements provided by the informants suggest that geographical distance between parents and children affects their behavior. Parents' occupational demands and busy schedules have been found to contribute to lesbian issues (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006). Moreover, opportunities for higher education in different states influence children's behavior due to the lack of familial supervision.

Theme 2: Compatibility with Partner

The second theme focuses on compatibility with a partner. Within this theme, there are two sub-themes: first, the partner's understanding of the informant, and second, the emotional support provided by the partner to the informant.

Sub-theme 1: Partner's Understanding

This sub-theme concentrates on the informants sharing their experiences of life as a lesbian with a female partner. The partner becomes a pillar of strength in times of emotional distress.

"... Ever since I started working at the daycare, I've known her. She's the one who always takes me out because I don't live at home; the daycare provides a room. So, whenever I want to go anywhere, she's the one who takes me out, sometimes even at night when I'm stressed. She knows a lot, but ever since I quit that job and moved back home, it's been hard to go out. My mom usually doesn't allow it, and she's even had to hang around outside my house waiting

for me. If I were with a man, they would have given up by now. I'm used to men leaving me because of this. So, the person I'm with now really understands me, she calls me every night to keep me company..."

(Informant 1)

"... I don't have anyone else anymore, ever since leaving my family home, she's the only one who's always been there for me. She knows everything; she's really the person I rely on a lot. No friend understands me like she does. Plus, living with her means I share 100 percent with her..."

(Informant 2)

"... My first partner always said that I was stern, firm, and that everything had to go according to what I said. But I didn't believe her. Then when I broke up with her and had a new partner, the new partner gave up and ended things as soon as I started loving him. Since then, I've gone back to my first partner and, reluctantly, had to admit she was right. Ever since, I feel like no one understands me like she does. So now, I keep in touch a lot with her and my siblings. Even when looking for another partner, I always ask her; we're really close now..."

(Informant 3)

Based on the informants' disclosures, it can be concluded that a strong mutual understanding between same-sex partners amplifies the emotional intensity of the individuals involved. According to research by Gottman et al (2003), lesbian couples demonstrate more positive emotional expressions compared to heterosexual couples in resolving conflicts, attributable to their higher level of mutual understanding.

Sub-theme 2: Emotional Support

Here, the partner serves as a source of encouragement for the informants, particularly in the context of pursuing higher education.

"... I'm proud that my partner is continuing their education. Because of her, I'm also continuing my studies. At first, I wasn't confident, but she provided a lot of support. Even now, there are times when I feel like giving up because the higher the level, the harder it gets. But she suggests going to the library, studying together, staying up late just to finish assignments. I'm grateful to have her; otherwise, I'd feel like stopping already. They always say, 'Don't quit; remember your parents have spent money on your education, let's continue for their sake, please.' I can't handle it when it comes to family; I'm a bit weak. Hahaha, but she's the one who strengthens me when I'm down..."

(Informant 4)

"... Before studying in KL, I studied at MSU but only made it through the first semester because it was too expensive. Then I started working in KL, and it was fun to have money. Then just for fun, I used an LGBT app, haha, and ended up connecting with this one woman. She encouraged me to go back to school. So, from there, I started studying in KL. My sister had always encouraged me, but working was more fun. I don't know, when it's a partner who encourages you, it feels motivating to continue my studies..."

(Informant 5)

The partner's encouragement to continue education appears to be a significant motivational factor for the informants, reinforcing their commitment to academic pursuits.

Theme 3: Negative Experiences with Men

Previous negative experiences with men have made the informants more comfortable with their lesbian partners. Based on the interviews conducted, the researchers identified two sub-themes: sexual harassment and deception.

Sub-theme 1: Sexual Harassment

Based on the interviews, the researchers found that some informants had been sexually harassed by their heterosexual partners, both verbally and physically. Here are some shared experiences from the informants:

"...like you see my body now, my breasts are somewhat larger than my body, right? So every time I date a man, they would make inappropriate comments... I broke off with him. I didn't give up on men; I dated another man, yet it was still the same. I was even molested after school...now I feel safer with a woman."

(Informant 2)

"...Since childhood, I was molested by my uncle. It still happens every night..."

(Informant 5)

According to these accounts, negative sexual experiences can lead individuals to engage in homosexual relationships. The informants' negative feelings towards men directly influenced them to choose same-sex partners. They feel safer from negative elements such as sexual harassment in such relationships.

Sub-theme 2: Deception

According to Nimna et al. (2023), love fraud is a crime where the perpetrator deceives women for financial or sexual gain. This was also experienced by informants, who were repeatedly deceived by men due to sexual issues and witnessing their fathers cheating.

"...I'm tired, I want to be loved by a man, but why do all men deceive? Even my father cheated on my mother, which makes me hate men..."

(Informant 4)

Theme 4: Identity Confusion

Identity confusion refers to the ongoing discomfort individuals feel regarding their biological sex and their desire to change their physical appearance against their natural birth state.

Sub-theme 1: No Attraction to Men

The identity confusion found in the interviews shows that the informants themselves are not sure about their sexual hormones. Physically she's still a woman wearing a hijab, but internally, she feels different.

"... I don't know, as you see, outwardly I'm still a woman, and wearing a hijab is my own choice, no one is forcing me. But my demeanor, which isn't as soft as other women, and being active in extracurricular activities make the boys call me 'aboy' since my diploma days. But I'm okay

with it, I don't mind if they say I'm like a man. I'm sometimes confused too haha, but the thing is, I don't bother anyone's life... plus, I don't feel like coupling up with men, I don't even have the urge to get married. I have more male friends than female friends; guys are easygoing, while women, when you become friends, it's like there are cliques..."

(Informant 4)

"... Do you think I'm rough? Haha, I'm okay with it. Sometimes I wonder why I'm not a man, especially because I'm the eldest child, and I have to look after my younger siblings. I need to be strong. Also, I feel like a man when I'm with women. I initially wore the hijab because I didn't like my curly hair. Eventually, I got used to it. Sometimes, I like staying in my younger brother's room listening to their stories... haha, I don't know, sometimes I feel more comfortable being a man than a woman..."

(Informant 3)

The informants are discussing their complex relationship with traditional gender roles and how their own identities blur the lines between what is culturally considered "masculine" and "feminine." They both mention the hijab as a symbol of feminine identity, but also discuss how their behaviors and friendships challenge these norms. Both appear to be comfortable with this ambiguity, although they do acknowledge some occasional confusion.

Theme 5: Social Media

Social media serves as a home for this lesbian group to gather. This is because social media provides a platform for the lesbian community to speak and promote their rights freely.

Sub-theme 1: Applications

Lesbian individuals are becoming prominent in social media applications, and participation in these communities is gradually increasing without public awareness. They can be seen on apps like TikTok, Instagram, Her, Litmatch, Tinder, and many more.

"... Because I had to stay at home and couldn't go out, that's why I started using a lot of apps. I downloaded Tinder, it's free. That's where I met my current partner. The first time I found out about this kind of app was through an ad that suddenly popped up while I was playing a game. Also, at that time, TikTok was trending about relationships; people were showing off their lesbian partners..."

(Informant 1)

"... People use lesbian dating apps just to kill boredom. I met my current partner on Litmatch. Hahaha, it's funny, but that's how it is. Even now, I'm still using it, but just for fun..."

(Informant 3)

"... I started using apps when I was living in K.L. [Kuala Lumpur]. There are a lot of apps available. Initially, I started with Omey, then moved on to Litmatch, Tinder, and Her. It's all according to the trend at the time; now, I mostly use Facebook because Facebook has rooms for us. It's fun, but not everyone knows about it. Actually, there are a lot of apps about lesbian relationships now; you can just go to the Apple Store or Play Store, there are a lot of them..."

(Informant 5)

The informants discuss how their use of dating and social apps is influenced by the pandemic restrictions, trends, and their need to connect with like-minded individuals. They mention

various platforms where they have found partners or continue to engage in social interactions. The conversation reveals that the informants find these platforms useful not only for dating but also for combating boredom.

Theme 6: Social Support

Social support is also a factor in the informants' involvement in the lesbian world. The social support for this sub-theme includes friends and family as factors influencing the informants to become lesbians.

Sub-theme 1: Friends

Friends are individuals who are close after family; if the individual is not close to their family, friends become a strong source of support for them. Interviews conducted with informants outlined that friend who often listened to their stories later became their partners; in addition, some friends also serve as a source of support for the informant to become involved as a lesbian. Below are excerpts from the informants related to this:

"... Actually, my current partner used to be my best friend. She knew all about my relationships with men. But when we started going for our diploma, that's when I met her and eventually grew close, and she's the one taking care of me now. I initially met her through school friends, so that's how it happened..."

(Informant 2)

"... People used to go to all-girls schools, and that's where you'd already see this lesbian group, mostly Indians though. Malay individuals are rare because it was a Christian school. I still have my bestie, who supported me in coupling with a girl since school days, and if we change partners, she knows everything..."

(Informant 3)

"... Of course, my friend knows because she's like that too. Haha. So we share, but she doesn't know all the details, only when we go out on a date or sometimes go out in a group, she with her partner and me with mine..."

(Informant 5)

Therefore, social support from friends is a factor influencing informants to be involved with lesbianism. This is because informants receive encouragement and support to continue and remain involved in being lesbians. According to Azizi and Muhamad (2018), peers consist of individuals who are approximately the same age. They also note that teenagers tend to follow the behavior of the group in which they are.

Sub-theme 2: Family

In addition, there are a handful of family members who support individuals in the lesbian world. Based on the interviews, there are informants who receive support from their siblings and also support from cousins and uncles. The excerpt below is taken from informant feedback:

"... All my siblings knew from the first time I coupled with a woman. I even used to bring that partner home. Dad thought we were just studying, but sometimes she would stay at our house while waiting for her parents to pick her up. So both families are acquainted, just that our

parents don't know the details. Whether sad or happy about the partner, I share it with my siblings, and they're fine with it..."

(Informant 3)

"... My cousins and uncles know about me being like this, because my uncle is gay haha, my cousin is lesbian, so we share a lot. Especially with my younger cousin, the age difference is only 3 to 4 years but it doesn't feel like a difference, feels like a friend, because I get along with her. Sometimes when I'm broken, I invite her to ride a motorbike to watch the sunset, looking at the sky while talking to her..."

(Informant 5)

Based on the feedback provided by informants, there is social support received from family regardless of age; siblings, relatives become examples for informants to become part of the lesbian group. The findings of this study are in line with the excerpt from Kuswana (2014) stating that the environment influences individual behavior.

Objective 3: To analyze the deterrent factors that lead individuals in the lesbian community to disengage from the same-sex sexual activities.

The objective of this study is to analyze the deterrent factors that cause lesbians to disengage from same-sex sexual activities. This section looks at whether the informants have ever considered leaving the lesbian community. Based on the interviews conducted, two themes emerged: family acceptance and the desire to have a family.

Theme 1: Family Acceptance

Parents naturally want their children to be good physically, mentally, and morally. It's well known that Malaysia does not recognize the lesbian community; thus, all informants interviewed are from the lesbian community who conceal their identities. Informants expressed concerns that their parents and families would not be able to accept their current identities. The sub-theme for family acceptance is parental love.

Sub-Theme 1: Parental Love

The informants still think of both of their parents. The love shown and given by their parents makes them hesitant to reveal their lesbian identities. They have considered leaving the lesbian community because of the love given by their parents and are not willing to hurt them. This is evident from the following statements:

"...I still think of my mom and dad. I know I'm rough; I find it strange to date men anymore, I'm attracted more to women. But I won't be like this forever. Who knows, maybe one day I'll change. I can't bear to think of disappointing my parents by letting them know I'm lesbian..."

(Informant 3)

"... If my current partner leaves me, I won't date anyone else, male or female. I just want to take care of my parents. I want to buy a big house to live with them. I don't want to think about anything else. I love my parents as much as they love me..."

(Informant 4)

"... I've thought about going back to the way I should be. I won't be like this forever. I once promised my ex-boyfriend that if we are still single later on, we'll just get married. Haha. My older brother has already messed up; I don't want to bring my parents more pain..."

(Informant 5)

Based on the statements given by the informants, it can be concluded that they also wish to revert to their original nature, but the timing for such a change is uncertain. What is certain is that they wish to change for the love they have for their parents and do not want to hurt them.

Sub-Theme 2: Desire to Have a Family

It is natural for every human to want to have a partner and a family. This is also what some of the informants feel. They wish to get married so that they can leave the lesbian community. Here are some excerpts from the interviews:

"... If there is a man who likes me and is brave enough to ask my mom for marriage, I'm okay with marrying. I won't stay with women anymore and can leave this world..."

(Informant 1)

"... I really want a man who can marry and accept me. I don't want to be like this anymore. Ah, I really hope there's a man who proposes directly. But hmm, I'm also afraid to marry because if possible, I want my partner to marry first..."

(Informant 2)

From the statements of the first informant, she is willing to get married if there is a man brave enough to marry her so that she can leave the lesbian community. The second informant also expresses the desire to get married to be free from being a lesbian but is worried about her homosexual partner's situation. Clearly, there are lesbians who want to get married to leave the community, but there are still obstacles to overcome, such as finding a male partner and considering the risks to their homosexual partners.

Study Implications to Individual and Society

The recent study investigating the factors of attraction and resistance among lesbians in Selangor, Malaysia provides insightful data with several implications. This paper aims to elaborate on the implications of the study's findings at both individual and societal levels, substantiated by current research in the field. One of the seminal implications at the individual level pertains to identity formation and sexual orientation. Understanding factors such as familial influence and compatibility with partners can be monumental in shaping mental health interventions (Pachankis et al., 2020). Mental health professionals can utilize this knowledge to craft targeted therapeutic frameworks that cater to individuals grappling with sexual orientation and identity crises (Lick et al., 2013). Additionally, understanding deterrents like family acceptance and desires for a traditional family offers nuanced perspectives for mental health services (Snap et al., 2015; Witeck, 2014). Tailored coping strategies and advice can be developed to help individuals resolve internal struggles positively, which is often missing in generalized counseling approaches (McDanal et al., 2022).

The study's findings can empower advocacy groups and policymakers to create more inclusive environments. The role of social support and community engagement as factors of attraction accentuates the need for establishing safe spaces for the lesbian community in Selangor and possibly extending such models to other regions (Vo et al., 2021). Notably, the study identifies family acceptance as a key factor of resistance which implies the need for educational and

awareness programs (Fish et al., 2020). Such programs aimed at families can instill understanding and acceptance, reducing the personal and social stigma associated with being a lesbian in Malaysia (Logie et al., 2019).

The impact of social media as a factor of attraction suggests avenues for effective public engagement (Smith, 2020). Awareness campaigns utilizing these platforms can directly address community needs, combat misinformation, and foster open dialogue (Bandopadhyaya & Kenix, 2023). The study's cultural and geographical focus highlights the necessity for region-specific solutions by considering the unique intersectionality of sexual orientation with religious and cultural beliefs in Selangor, Malaysia (Singaravelu & Cheah, 2020). Policymakers and activists must develop culturally sensitive resources that serve both individual and community needs (Arthur, 2015).

The implications of the study on factors of attraction and resistance among lesbians in Selangor, Malaysia are manifold. These range from impacting individual mental health interventions to influencing broader societal attitudes and policies. The integration of these findings with current research enhances the relevance and applicability of the study, offering a multi-dimensional lens through which to understand and support the lesbian community both locally and globally.

Limitations

While the study offers important insights into factors of attraction and resistance among lesbians in Selangor, Malaysia, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. One of the primary limitations is the small sample size, consisting of only five lesbian individuals which may not be representative of the diverse experiences within the lesbian community in Selangor or Malaysia at large. Additionally, the study employs a qualitative and phenomenological approach, which, although rich in contextual detail, limits the generalizability of the findings. The study is also geographically and culturally specific, focusing only on Selangor, Malaysia, thus potentially limiting its applicability to other cultural or geographical settings. Lastly, the use of snowball sampling could introduce bias, as the sample may not be entirely random and could be influenced by the social networks of the initial participants (Smith et al., 2019; Lick et al., 2013).

Conclusion

The present study serves as a significant stepping stone in understanding the complex factors that attract or deter lesbians in Selangor, Malaysia from engaging in same-sex relationships. By isolating key motivational and resistant elements, such as familial influence, compatibility with partners, and concerns about family acceptance, the study provides a nuanced portrait of the lived experiences of lesbians within a specific socio-cultural context. The findings have a multitude of implications ranging from the formulation of targeted mental health interventions to the shaping of public policy and community support structures.

However, the study is not without its limitations, which include a small sample size and geographical specificity. Despite these constraints, the research opens doors for further investigation, notably in the realm of regional or culturally specific influences on sexual orientation and behavior. Policymakers, activists, and healthcare providers could greatly benefit from these insights, using them as a springboard for more inclusive and effective strategies to support the lesbian community in Malaysia and potentially other similar socio-

cultural settings. By acknowledging both its strengths and weaknesses, this study stands as a valuable contribution to the ongoing dialogue surrounding LGBTQ+ experiences, offering a localized yet deeply insightful look into the dynamics of attraction and resistance among lesbians.

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