

Perceptions of Relationships and Casual Hookups Among Gay Individuals in Malaysia

Nafis Halifin*

Independent Researcher, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Abstract: This study explores the experiences and perceptions of gay men in Malaysia regarding casual hookups and long-term relationships. The research examines how societal pressures, cultural norms, and the stigma surrounding homosexuality in Malaysia shape the attitudes and behaviors of individuals within the LGBT community. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data from 278 respondents, the study investigates the extent to which casual hookups are perceived as a barrier to forming meaningful, long-term relationships. It also addresses the impact of societal discrimination and minority stress on the emotional and relational well-being of gay men. The findings indicate that while casual hookups are prevalent, there is a strong desire for deeper, long-term connections, but the societal stigma often inhibits individuals from pursuing such relationships. The study highlights the role of social media in fostering community and offering a sense of belonging, yet also emphasizes the ongoing challenges posed by Malaysia's conservative values. The research suggests that greater societal acceptance, along with support from families and peers, is crucial for fostering healthier relationships within the gay community in Malaysia.

Keywords: gay men, Malaysia, casual hookups, long-term relationships, societal stigma.

1. Introduction

LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) issues have long been a sensitive and controversial topic in Malaysia. As a Muslim-majority country with Islam as the federal religion, heterosexuality is considered the societal norm, while non-heteronormative identities and behaviors are often stigmatized and deemed taboo. This deeply ingrained perspective has left LGBT individuals, particularly homosexuals, marginalized and subjected to various forms of discrimination (Ting, Kwin, & Xinyi, 2016). News reports about police raids targeting LGBT individuals, widespread media censorship, and public vilification further highlight the challenges faced by this community (Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2013).

Homosexuality remains illegal in Malaysia, with legislation explicitly criminalizing same-sex relationships. Section 377A and 377B of the Federal Penal Code criminalize "carnal intercourse against the order of nature," with punishments including imprisonment of up to 20 years, whipping, or both. Furthermore, Shariah courts, which govern the personal conduct of Muslims in Malaysia, enforce laws against same-sex relations. For instance, under Pulau Pinang's Syariah Penal

Code, offenses such as sodomy (liwat) and lesbianism (musahaqah) are punishable by fines of up to RM 5,000, imprisonment for three years, and six strokes of the cane (Carroll & Mendos, 2017). These legal frameworks reflect Malaysia's adherence to traditional Islamic values, which reject non-heteronormative expressions of sexuality.

Despite isolated efforts to promote inclusivity—such as initiatives like Seksualiti Merdeka, a festival advocating LGBT rights (Zurairi, 2013), or the establishment of gay-affirmative churches (Yuan, 2011)—the combination of cultural and religious conservatism continues to suppress such endeavors. Society often overlooks the humanity of LGBTQ individuals, dismissing their lived experiences and struggles as incompatible with the dominant moral framework (Goh & Kananatu, 2019).

The stigma against homosexuality in Malaysia also manifests in public health narratives. According to the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC), approximately 7% of men who have sex with men (MSM) in the country are HIV-positive, with unsafe sexual practices significantly contributing to this statistic. Dr. Anita Suleiman, Head of the HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Sector at the Ministry of Health, has reported that men account for 90% of HIV/AIDS cases in Malaysia, and homosexual individuals are often labeled as "promiscuous," "high-risk for HIV/AIDS," or "immoral." Such labels perpetuate discrimination and reinforce societal prejudices, further alienating this community (Parker & Aggleton, 2003).

The association of casual hookups with the homosexual community is often rooted in the perception that gay men engage in multiple partner-based sexual encounters, contributing to the stigmatization of their relationships. This paper explores the experiences of gay men in Malaysia, particularly their perspectives on relationships and casual hookups, within the broader context of societal norms and challenges.

2. Literature Review

Hooking up is commonly defined as engaging in casual sexual activities, such as kissing, oral sex, or penetrative intercourse, without the expectation of a current or future romantic commitment. This behavior has been long associated with the homosexual male community, where casual hookups

*Corresponding author: nafishalifin@gmail.com

are widely prevalent across both Western and Asian contexts. Studies have investigated the reasons and justifications behind the prominence of this culture. For instance, Byers (2005) noted a connection between relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction, suggesting that men who report higher relationship satisfaction tend to experience greater sexual satisfaction.

Research indicates that many men, regardless of sexual orientation, are drawn to casual and emotionally uncommitted sexual encounters (Clark & Hatfield, 1989; Schmitt, 2005). This inclination is often more pronounced among men than women (Buss, 2003; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). While men tend to have a natural motivation for sexual activity, women are often more driven by emotional bonds in forming their sexual connections (Van Lankveld, 2018). Interestingly, studies show that gay and heterosexual men exhibit similar levels of interest in casual sexual experiences (Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, & Gladue, 1994; Schmitt, 2006).

In contexts where traditional monogamy or limiting factors, such as women's influence, are absent, men who have sex with men (MSM) often adopt more casual sexual styles. Research also highlights that MSM tend to report high levels of emotional and sexual fulfillment from casual encounters (Mark *et al.*, 2015). However, this pattern might also contribute to the challenges faced by homosexual men in establishing long-term relationships.

In traditional heterosexual marriages, children are often regarded as a natural extension of the couple's love and union. They serve as a relationship-specific investment, providing a stabilizing force against dissolution (Levinger, 1965). Research suggests that children often act as a deterrent to separation (Brines & Joyner, 1999; Kurdek, 1998). However, in the context of same-sex cohabiting couples, especially in Malaysia, such relationship-specific capital is either lower or entirely absent due to legal and cultural constraints (Payne, 2014).

Another significant factor is societal attitudes. Many communities are not yet fully accepting of same-sex couples or marriages. Homosexual relationships remain stigmatized in numerous societies and are often considered taboo due to prevailing cultural and religious beliefs. This stigma manifests in various forms, including bullying, social discrimination, physical violence, and psychological abuse. Such adverse experiences create a sense of minority stress, making it challenging for individuals to defy societal norms without facing severe judgment and consequences.

The minority stress model underscores how stressors unique to minority groups—such as violence, stigma, and discrimination—contribute to adverse physical and mental health outcomes (Kelleher, 2009; Lick *et al.*, 2013; Meyer, 1995). Theories of minority stress (Meyer, 1995) and incomplete institutionalization (Cherlin, 1978) suggest that same-sex relationships tend to be less stable due to limited institutional recognition and insufficient social support (Kyle, 2017). This lack of societal validation may explain why same-sex relationships often result in casual hookups rather than long-term partnerships.

Adolescence is a critical stage for relationship development, during which individuals learn essential skills like handling

breakups and navigating conflicts. However, many gay individuals miss out on these experiences because the average age for coming out is around 20. This delay means they lack the relationship experience their heterosexual peers gain during adolescence. Consequently, when they enter early adulthood and gain more independence, many gay individuals seek the youthful love they missed. This often materializes in the form of hookup culture, with many delaying serious, long-term relationships until their late twenties or thirties (Ethan Khun, 2023).

In Malaysia, the social environment remains largely unwelcoming toward the homosexual community. As a result, many individuals have shifted to online dating apps as a primary means of communication and connection. Platforms like Tinder, Grindr, Tantan, and Blued enable gay individuals to connect within their community, whether for casual hookups or relationships. However, these apps primarily cater to short-term engagements, with most users seeking casual encounters (Strugo, 2019; Me Febvre, 2018). While these platforms provide a sense of connection, they may inadvertently further isolate users from the heterosexual majority by offering instant gratification that discourages broader social integration. Later in this paper, we will examine the correlation between the frequency of casual hookups and the use of dating apps in greater detail.

Most existing studies on homosexual relationships and hookup culture focus on Western contexts, which limits their applicability to Malaysia. Western societies are historically more inclusive of LGBTQ communities, and their cultural norms differ significantly. Consequently, applying Western models to Malaysia requires consideration of local nuances, such as the distinct social environment, personal beliefs, and life circumstances of LGBTQ individuals. In Malaysia, where LGBTQ topics remain highly sensitive, researchers face additional challenges in studying the dynamics of the local LGBTQ culture. This paper seeks to investigate the perceptions of homosexual men in Malaysia regarding relationships and casual hookups. It also explores the impact of hookup culture on relationship formation and its potential long-term consequences.

3. Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design, utilizing a survey questionnaire to explore the perceptions of gay individuals in Malaysia regarding relationships and casual hookups.

The target population for this study consists of gay individuals residing in Malaysia who use dating apps or platforms for meeting potential partners. A total of 278 responses were collected, all from individuals who self-identified as gay and bisexuals. The survey was distributed online through various channels, particularly focusing on dating apps such as RedNote, Tinder, and Tantan, as these platforms were identified as the most commonly used by the participants. Given the online nature of the survey and the voluntary participation of respondents, the sample was a non-probability convenience sample.

4. Data Collection

Data was collected through an online survey distributed via social media platforms and dating apps commonly used by the target demographic. The survey consisted of 15 questions divided into four sections:

A. Demographic Information

Participants were asked about their age, current location in Malaysia, sexual orientation, race, and religion. These questions aimed to provide background characteristics of the respondents.

B. Dating App Usage

This section included multiple-choice and checkbox questions to gather information about the dating platforms participants use, the frequency of usage, and their primary purposes for using these apps (e.g., casual hookups, long-term relationships, friendship).

C. Relationship and Casual Hookup Behavior

Questions in this section explored participants' current relationship status, the importance they place on long-term relationships, challenges faced in forming meaningful connections, and their frequency of engaging in casual hookups. Participants were also asked to identify motivations for casual hookups using a checkbox format.

Table 1
Background characteristics

Characteristic	Categories	N	%
Age	Below 18	15	5.40
	18-24	138	49.64
	25-34	96	34.53
	35-44	21	7.55
	45 and above	4	1.44
Locations	Kuala Lumpur	102	36.69
	Selangor	54	19.43
	Melaka	7	2.52
	Johor	44	15.84
	Kelantan	1	0.36
	Negeri Sembilan	3	1.08
	Pahang	2	0.72
	Pulau Pinang	24	8.63
	Perak	13	4.68
	Sabah	3	1.08
Sarawak	11	3.96	

Table 2

Sexual Orientation	Gay	242	87.08
Race	Bisexual	30	10.79
	Chinese	271	97.48
	Malay	6	2.16
	Indian	1	0.36
Religion	Buddhist	184	66.2
	Muslim	6	2.16
	Hindu	1	0.36
	Christian	26	9.36
	Atheism	24	8.63
	Other	37	13.31
Dating App Usage	Grindr	130	46.83
	Tinder	68	24.46
	Tantan	11	3.96
	Blued	23	8.27
	JackD	11	3.96
	HeeSay	15	5.4
	None	92	33.1

Table 3

Frequency of Dating App Use	Daily	55	19.79
	Several times a week	37	13.33
	Weekly	24	8.63
	Monthly	21	7.56
	Rarely	81	29.14
	Never	54	19.42
	Other	6	2.16

D. Perceptions and Suggestions

Open-ended questions were included to capture nuanced views on the differences between casual hookups and meaningful relationships. Participants were also invited to share suggestions on how dating apps could better support individuals seeking meaningful relationships and provide additional comments on their experiences.

Ethical considerations were a crucial part of this study. All participants were informed of the study's purpose and assured that their responses would remain confidential. They were provided with the option to withdraw from the survey at any time, ensuring that participation was voluntary. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were anonymized. By completing the survey, participants implicitly provided their consent to participate in the study.

This study acknowledges limitations that may affect the findings; there is a potential sample bias, as the survey was distributed primarily through online platforms, which may exclude individuals who do not use dating apps or have limited access to these platforms.

5. Findings & Discussions

A. The Percentage in Frequency of Homosexual Men Engage in Casual Hookup

Based on Figure 1, it was observed that among the 300 men who identified as gay or bisexual, the majority reported rarely (35.6%) or never (35.3%) engaging in casual hookups. It is important to note that a significant portion of the participants were from the Chinese community, and they were primarily recruited through the RedNote app, which may have influenced the results. This suggests that cultural factors, particularly those prevalent within the Chinese community in Malaysia, could play a role in shaping attitudes towards casual hookups. The emphasis on traditional values, family expectations, and the social pressures faced by individuals in this demographic might contribute to a preference for more meaningful, long-term relationships rather than casual sexual encounters.

In Chinese culture, the continuation of the family lineage holds significant importance. Many Malaysian Chinese adhere to Confucian values, emphasizing family cohesion and the perpetuation of ancestral lines. In Confucian thought, the family is regarded as the cornerstone of individual relationships and the foundation of social organization. Within this framework, a husband and father is expected to display both authority and kindness toward his wife in exchange for her obedience and affection, while also providing guidance and protection to his children in return for their respect and compliance.

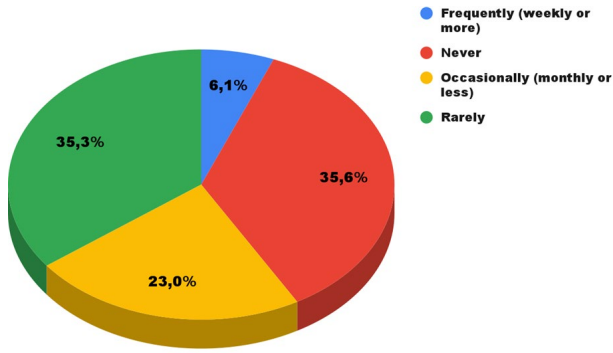


Fig. 1. The percentage in frequency of homosexual men engage in casual hookup

Marriage is highly valued, as it is often seen as a pivotal step towards adulthood and a key aspect of fulfilling one’s familial responsibilities. For many, the idea of marriage goes beyond personal fulfillment, serving as a means to honor familial expectations and uphold the legacy of previous generations. The principle of filial piety further underscores this obligation, highlighting the duty of children to respect their parents and ensure the continuation of the family lineage, typically through marriage and procreation (Chara, 2017).

After understanding the specific circumstances of our demographic background, let us magnify the ones that engage with casual hookup more than frequent. At this stage, we aim to find the correlation between the frequency of having casual hookup with the usage of dating apps.

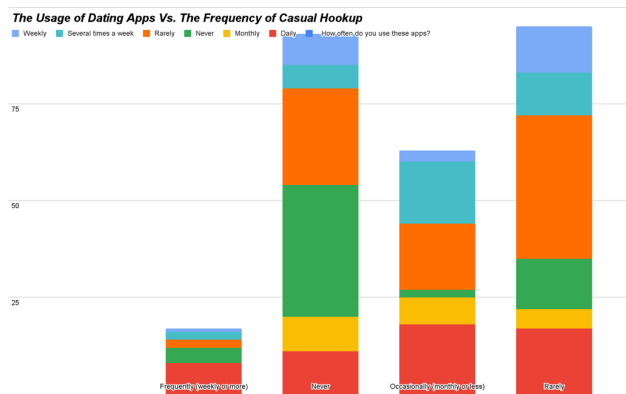


Fig. 2. The correlation between the usage of dating apps and frequency of casual hookup

Previously, we discussed how modern technological devices have become central to the search for sexual partners, ushering in a new era of social connectivity. Similar to the early adoption of the Internet by gay men, online mobile hook-up apps have emerged as platforms that often frame sexual encounters as “no-strings-attached” or commitment-free interactions (Race, 2015).

Based on Figure 2, there appears to be a positive relationship between the frequency of dating app usage and engagement in casual hookups. Among participants who reported the most frequent hookup lifestyle, approximately 47.06% used dating apps daily. Similarly, a notable portion of those who occasionally engaged in casual hookups also reported daily app

usage, accounting for 28.57%—the second-highest rate of app usage among all groups.

Conversely, participants who rarely or never engaged in casual hookups showed the lowest levels of dating app usage, with 38.95% and 36.56% respectively reporting rare or no usage. These findings highlight a clear association between the frequency of dating app usage and the likelihood of engaging in casual hookups.

B. What are the Reasons that Drive Gay Men to Use Dating Apps?

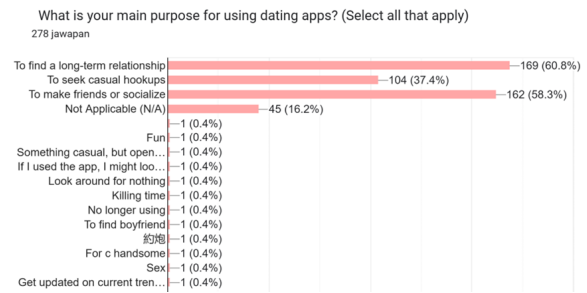


Fig. 3. What is your main purpose for using dating apps?

According to Figure 3, a significant proportion of participants in this sample (60.8%) reported using dating apps with the intention of finding a long-term relationship. This contrasts with typical research findings, which often indicate that dating apps are predominantly used as platforms for seeking sexual partners. This discrepancy may be influenced by the unique Chinese social environment within the Malaysian context. It seems that the participants in this sample prioritise forming long-term relationships, and are more emphasis on emotional satisfaction rather than sexual satisfaction. Later, we will discuss their opinion on casual hookups and relationships with them, where we can clearly understand why hookups are not preferable in this sample.

Notably, 58.3% of participants indicated that they use dating apps to make friends and socialize within their community, while 37.4% expressed their willingness to engage in casual sex or find compatible sexual partners through these platforms. It is important to note that participants could select multiple responses for their reasons for using dating apps, which explains why the percentages do not total 100%. Additionally, 16.2% of participants reported not using dating apps at all, and a very small proportion cited other reasons for their app usage.

C. Relationship Patterns in Local Gay Men Community

Most Malaysian homosexual men in the study (69.1%) reported being single and not in a committed relationship. Meanwhile, 27.0% indicated they were in a committed relationship, and a smaller proportion (4.0%) stated they were in an open relationship. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that societal stigma and limited dating opportunities often contribute to the high percentage of single homosexual men in Malaysia.

In exploring why many homosexual men in Malaysia remain single, the survey data reveals several key challenges. Among the 190 single men in the sample, 157 participants (82.63%)

reported that finding a compatible partner within their immediate surroundings is difficult. Additionally, 95 participants (50%) expressed feelings of distrust or fear of commitment, citing the significant time and effort required to invest in a relationship. Another 83 participants (43.68%) mentioned a fear of societal judgment or stigma, which can be a barrier to pursuing a relationship. The least common reason, reported by 30% of participants, was a lack of time and resources to dedicate to a relationship.

COUNTA of What is your current relationship status?

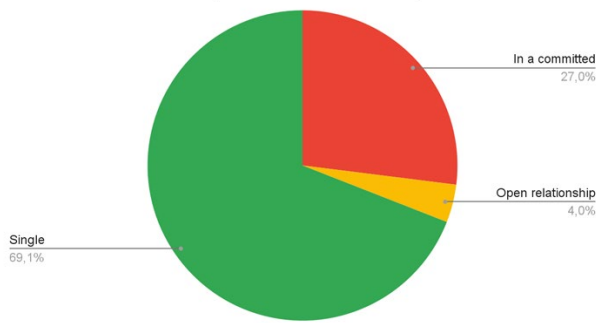


Fig. 3. What is your current relationship status

Other valid reasons provided by the respondents include parental acceptance (2 people), novelty (2 people), communication issues (2 people), appearance anxiety, concerns about income, shared interests, vision alignment, betrayal, and unrealistic standards within the LGBTQ+ community. These reasons indicate the complexity of forming meaningful relationships among homosexual men in Malaysia.

Single Vs. What are the biggest challenges you face in forming meaningful relationships? (Select all that apply)

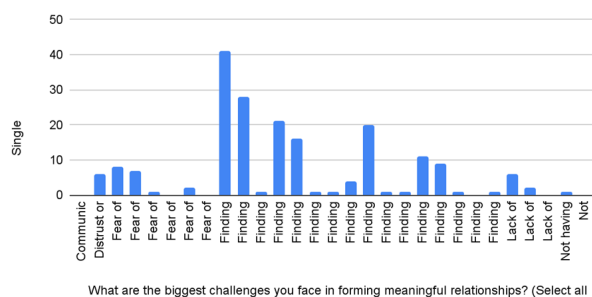


Fig. 4. Correlation between single men and biggest challenges face when forming meaningful relationship

An open relationship is a form of consensual non-monogamy where partners agree to engage in sexual activities with others outside their primary relationship, while maintaining emotional exclusivity with each other. This arrangement allows for sexual freedom with external partners, but emotional intimacy remains reserved for the primary relationship. (Kyrstian 2024)

Based on the data, it appears that open relationships have not been fully embraced or widely adopted by local gay men in Malaysia. This could indicate that self-identified gay men in the country tend to aspire toward relationships that are grounded in loyalty and emotional satisfaction, reflecting a preference for traditional notions of commitment and connection.

D. Casual Hookup Culture in Local Context

In this context, we will focus on homosexual man that adapting hookup culture in the sample. To start with it, it is essential to let us understand what are the particular reasons that drive them to having one night stand , friends with benefit and no-strings-attached encounter in MSM community.

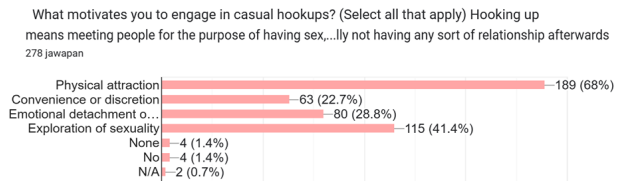


Fig. 5. Demographic of what drives participants to engage casual hookup

Around 68% of the gay men report being primarily attracted to physical appearance when engaging in casual hookups, with specific traits like a handsome face, muscular build, big chest muscle and abs, facial hair, deep voice and a larger penis size being major factors. This attraction to physical features can be seen as rooted in broader societal perceptions of masculinity. Herek (1984) highlighted that gay men often exhibit a preference for masculine traits in their partners, a pattern that mirrors the general societal valorization of masculinity. Masculine characteristics, including physical fitness and facial features, are frequently linked to sexual desirability and dominance, making them highly attractive in casual encounters.

Additionally, Rostosky et al. (2007) suggested that the preference for masculine traits in gay men is not only a biological inclination but also influenced by cultural norms that elevate traditional masculinity. This cultural framework can shape how gay men view attractiveness, reinforcing a desire for partners who embody strength, assertiveness, and physical appeal. In this context, physical attraction to masculine features in casual hookups reflects a broader societal trend that associates masculinity with sexual desirability and fulfillment of lustful desires.

The second largest percentage (41.4%) of gay men see casual hookup as an opportunity to explore sexual orientation. This may relate to one's sexual identity and sexual orientation development, as most of the gay men will going through a phase where they need to confirm their sexual orientation as gay by using external environment factors, which is having casual hookup. This is the stage where they refine and redefine their selves. They see this as a chance to know themselves better, as they didn't get to know these things due to conservative social environment in this country. They can even explore their sex positions, whether they are top, bottom or versatile when doing casual hookups.

A "top" refers to the partner who takes the active role during intercourse. The top is typically the one who penetrates and enjoys leading in the sexual encounter. This role is often associated with a sense of dominance or control, but it's primarily about physical preference.

A "bottom" is the partner who takes the receptive role, typically being the one who is penetrated. They tend to enjoy being on the receiving end of physical pleasure and may also embrace a more submissive position. The bottom's preference

is usually related to comfort and the enjoyment of the experience rather than power dynamics. A "versatile" person enjoys both the top and bottom roles. This flexibility allows them to alternate between giving and receiving pleasure depending on the partner or situation.

28.8% of gay men reported engaging in casual hookups due to emotional detachment and a lack of alternatives, while 22.7% of participants attributed it to discretion or convenience. These reasons are prevalent in both Western and local gay communities. Emotional detachment, often stemming from previous hurt or avoidance of deeper emotional connections, can lead individuals to seek casual encounters. Furthermore, a lack of alternatives or exposure to others engaging in similar behaviors can push gay men to participate in casual hookups. This aligns with the "just world belief," where individuals perceive that they get what they deserve, reinforcing the idea that societal stereotypes about promiscuity in gay men are justified. As gay men internalize these beliefs, they may adopt behaviors that align with the stereotype, feeling pressured to conform to societal expectations of casual sex and promiscuity (Kyle, 2017).

Next, we will explore the significance of long-term relationships for gay men and examine how engaging in casual hookups may influence their capacity to establish and maintain such relationships.

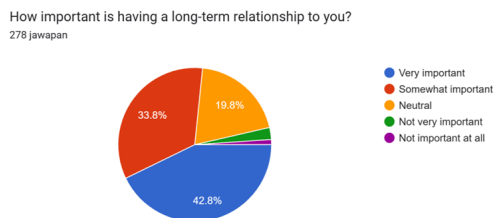


Fig. 6. Importance of having long-term relationship towards homosexual men

Figure 6 highlights that a majority of respondents place significant value on long-term relationships. A combined 76.6% of participants view long-term relationships as either "very important" (42.8%) or "somewhat important" (33.8%). This demonstrates a strong desire among gay individuals in Malaysia for stable and meaningful connections, even within a social environment that may not always support or validate such aspirations.

The 19.8% of respondents who are neutral on the subject may represent individuals who prioritize other aspects of life, such as career or personal growth, over relationships. Meanwhile, the small proportion (3.6%) considers long-term relationships "not very important" or "not important at all".

The largest group, 31.3%, is unsure about the impact of casual hookups on forming long-term relationships. This uncertainty could stem from cultural taboos or a lack of open conversations surrounding casual relationships and their role in personal growth within Malaysia's gay community.

Among those with a clear stance, 25.9% believe casual hookups have a positive impact, viewing them as opportunities to explore preferences, build confidence, or develop emotional

readiness for future commitments. Conversely, 24.8% perceive them negatively, associating casual hookups with challenges such as emotional detachment, fear of commitment, or societal stigma. The remaining 18% feel that casual hookups have no impact, suggesting a more neutral perspective on the issue.

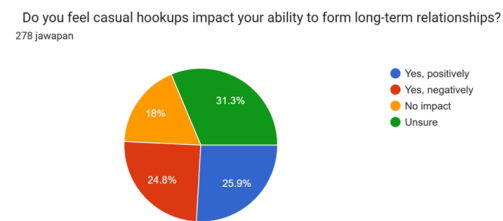


Fig. 7. The perception of gay men towards the effects of casual hookup towards formation of long-term relationship

E. Insights from Open-Ended Responses

The following section presents a discussion based on the responses to the open-ended questions from the questionnaire, providing a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of gay men regarding casual hookups and meaningful relationships. The three questions explored key differences between casual encounters and long-term commitments, suggestions for improving dating apps to support individuals seeking meaningful relationships, and additional insights on dating and relationships. By analyzing these responses, we aim to uncover the underlying factors and attitudes that shape relationship dynamics within Malaysia's gay community.

F. In Your Opinion, what are the Key Differences Between Casual Hookups and Meaningful Relationships?

1) Emotional Depth and Commitment

"I think the main difference is how deep the connection is. Casual hookups are more about short-term fun, no strings attached. It's like, you don't really need to get to know the person well. But meaningful relationships are on another level — it's about trust, understanding each other, and being there for the long run. For LGBTQ+ people, a meaningful relationship can also mean supporting each other through challenges like societal judgment, which can make the bond even stronger."—(18 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Buddhist)

"In hookups, I don't feel the need to commit beyond the immediate interaction. In contrast, commitment is a cornerstone of meaningful relationships. Lastly, in a meaningful relationship, I tend to give and share everything I have, feel, and experience because I want my partner to do the same. I want us to connect on a deeper level. On the other hand, hookups are mostly about fulfilling physical needs; while we may become friends, it doesn't usually go beyond that."—(18-24 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Atheism)

"Casual hookup means seeking novelty by having intimacy with someone else, but emotionally still devoted to your partner (of course, this requires mutual discussion between both parties; if there's an agreement, it works, but if there's no compromise, then this idea doesn't apply)."—(25-34 years old, Pulau Pinang, Chinese Buddhist)

“Casual hookups can potentially influence individuals who have lower tolerance for challenging or conflict situations that may arise in typical relationships. Over time, this might contribute to a tendency to avoid committing to long-term relationships.”---(25-34 years old, Pulau Pinang, Chinese Buddhist)

Meaningful relationships are often associated with emotional intimacy, trust, and long-term commitment. Many respondents highlight the deeper connection and mutual support inherent in such relationships. These relationships are seen as opportunities to share life experiences, navigate challenges together, and build a lasting bond. In contrast, casual hookups are typically viewed as fulfilling immediate physical desires without the emotional investment required for a meaningful relationship. They are often more about short-term satisfaction and less about long-term emotional fulfillment.

2) Societal and Cultural Factors

“In my opinion, casual hookups frequently happened in a society that do not recognise gay marriage where by gays only able to release their sexual needs or desires secretly and hiddenly. When they know somehow the “meaningful relationship” does not have a result, this contributes to casual hookups rather than looking for a meaningful relationship. In fact there is no much difference between casual hookups and meaningful relationship but the result and outcomes does dependent variables.”-----(25-34 years old, Kuala Lumpur)

“LTR needs responsibility and commitment which most people within this community are reluctant to embrace.”---(25-34 years old, Chinese Christian)

“Meaningful relationships, for me exploring along the gay path, are relationships that both partners are willing to grow together, commit to each other with honesty, sincerity, etc of the bare minimum. Yet, it is hard to find the compatible one since generally speaking lgbt people are born to be this or affected by other factors like parents’ divorce or lack of love, then it is super important to find a “normal” person with good upbringing and personalities to get along with, rather than how they look or the novelty of love. It is equally vital to think twice to avoid hurting other’s feeling like leading on someone, typically in situationships.”----- (18-24 years old, Pulau Pinang, Chinese Buddhist)

“Casual hookups are to feed my desire. It could help me relax in that moment and satisfied. While a meaningful relationships is to ensure that I won't be alone in this reality as not many friends or family support LGBT. It could let me to know about there's a guy truly care about and love a guy, which is me. A meaningful relationships also ensure my body health from having sex with different guys.”----(18-24 years old, Pahang, Chinese Buddhist)

“For me, having casual hookups is only a way to address my physiological needs. I do get to know new friends through this, and I eventually found my current partner via hookups. “--- (18-24 years old, Selangor, Chinese Christian)

“Casual hookup is quite normal nowadays, it can be a way to identify whether the one you date is compatible with your sexual behaviour, of course normally people just seek for fun, not only single people but those who are partnered too. I guess

love and sex can be a separate topic while people are going to engage in a meaningful relationship.”---(18-24 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Buddhist)

“Having a meaningful relationship is hard as hookup culture is widely used and it has been very hard to find a partner that would commit”---(18-24 years old, Sarawak, Chinese Buddhist)

“Meaningful relationships, for me exploring along the gay path, are relationships that both partners are willing to grow together, commit to each other with honesty, sincerity, etc of the bare minimum. Yet, it is hard to find the compatible one since generally speaking lgbt people are born to be this or affected by other factors like parents’ divorce or lack of love, then it is super important to find a “normal” person with good upbringing and personalities to get along with, rather than how they look or the novelty of love. ”--(18-24 years old, Pulau Pinang, Chinese Buddhist)

Several responses indicate that societal barriers, such as the non-recognition of gay marriage, significantly influence the prevalence of casual hookups. These barriers discourage individuals from seeking meaningful relationships, leading to a preference for hookups that are less complicated or burdened by societal judgment. The lack of legal recognition or social support for LGBTQ+ partnerships further reinforces this tendency, as individuals may feel safer or more accepted in casual, non-committal encounters rather than formal, emotional relationships

3) Overlap and Transition

“Casual hookups are normally for individuals who want to satisfy their sexual needs without committing into a relationship. Sometimes it can be one of the ways to test out “compatibility” before getting into a relationship. For hookups, an individual can generally have different sexual partners at a given timeframe while relationships on the other hand, generally require an individual to be loyal to each other and spend more effort to understand and manage their partners’ needs.”----- (18-24 years old, Selangor)

“Casual hook ups can become meaningful relationships when both parties find their communication moves beyond sex, and you both enjoy each other's company even when there is no sex.” —(45 and above years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Buddhist)

“Hookups means NSA (no-strings-attached) , but sometimes it could lead to relationships tbh. It's happened to me. “—(25-34 years old, Selangor, Chinese Buddhist)

“Hookups probably happens when i am unready yet to engage in any romance relationship while having an actual meaningful relationship on the other hand, in my opinion, is when i am down for a long term investment and other essential moral values, i.e. trust and love”----- (18-24 years old, Selangor, Chinese Atheism)

Some respondents note that casual hookups can sometimes evolve into meaningful relationships, particularly when the interaction progresses beyond physical attraction to emotional bonding. In these cases, what initially starts as a simple hookup can lead to a deeper connection as both individuals invest emotionally.

4) Physical vs. Emotional Needs

“Hookup can be with anyone as long as you are drawn to them for physical appearance or some qualities that meet your criteria, normally for the purpose of lust or basic desire. Sometimes people in open relationships in which both partners reach a consensus might do so.”---(18-24 years old, Pulau Pinang, Chinese Buddhist)

“They differ in terms of what you want to obtain from that person or from the interaction with that person, during all the time spent”---(18-24 years old, Perak, Chinese Buddhist)

“I don’t really think that hookup would affect the relationship. Individually, both of them are individual and you can get the different meaning or emotional and physical support from both of them.”---(18-24 years old, Selangor, Chinese Buddhist)

“For me, casual hookups are mainly about physical connection, with limited sharing of feelings or personal aspirations. However, in a long-term relationship, we need to invest time to build understanding and provide deeper emotional support to each other. Meaningful relationships often involve personal growth and emotional development as well.”--(18-24 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Atheism)

“One is obsessed with handsome looks or only wants sex, and wants to know the size of the reproductive organs, and the other is to have a formal introduction to their own advantages and disadvantages.”---(18-24 years old, Pulau Pinang, Chinese Buddhist)

“In my opinion, casual hookups are a response to physical desires and needs, without a sense of right or wrong—purely about the body seeking to be embraced and to connect with someone. This is more suitable for those who have adapted to separating sex from emotions, engaging in sexual relationships purely for physical desire. Long-term relationships, on the other hand, are more about pursuing an emotional and trusting bond. They involve not just physical aspects but also a multifaceted connection and interaction on emotional and life levels.”----- (18-24 years old, Negeri Sembilan, Chinese Atheism)

Many respondents distinguish between the purpose of casual hookups and meaningful relationships, highlighting how each serves different needs. Casual hookups are primarily seen as a way to satisfy physical needs, explore sexual compatibility, and enjoy short-term pleasure. They allow individuals to meet immediate desires without the complexities of emotional commitment. In contrast, meaningful relationships are often focused on providing emotional support, shared life goals, and a deeper connection.

G. What Do You Think Dating Apps Could Do to Better Support Individuals Seeking Meaningful Relationships?

1) Skepticism toward dating apps' effectiveness

- “Worst, because most of them were just for fun.” (18-24 years old, Chinese Buddhist)
- “Dating app overall doesn’t help at all as gays are visual animals.” (25-34 years old, Johor, Chinese Buddhist)
- “Idk... Our group always prioritizes sex.” (18-24

years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Buddhist)

- “I think the things that should change is the mind of the people, depends on what they want in apps, thus not the app’s problem.” (25-34 years old, Selangor, Chinese Buddhist)
- “Change is impossible; human nature cannot be constrained.” (18-24 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Buddhist)
- “Hard. Dating apps on the market are wired to make people remove and re-download the app in an endless cycle. That’s how they make money out of the app.” (25-34 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Taoist)

Many respondents express doubts about the ability of dating apps to foster meaningful connections. They view these platforms as primarily catering to casual encounters, with little emphasis on deeper relationships.

2) Challenges of finding true love

- “Nothing can be done because users are typically looking for someone who can satisfy their desires. I believe it’s extremely difficult to find true love on a dating app.” (18-24 years old, Selangor, Chinese Buddhist)
- “Most of the time, people on dating apps tend to look for casual hookups rather than finding a ‘true’ person to build a meaningful relationship.” (18-24 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Atheism)
- “There’s probably no solution, as everyone seeks different things.” (18-24 years old, Johor, Chinese Buddhist)
- “I can only say that in this circle, most people hook up first before falling in love, and some people only have sex after falling in love.” (25-34 years old, Selangor, Chinese Buddhist)
- “Nope. There is no straight cut between hookup and meaningful relationships. They both build up from people’s preferences and stereotypes at first sight.” (18-24 years old, Perak, Chinese Buddhist)
- “Dating apps just want to earn money, tbh. Nothing much to do unless there is a totally free platform.” (25-34 years old, Chinese Christian)

Many users believe that most individuals are there for casual interactions rather than long-term commitments. Some suggest that this behavior stems from cultural norms within the LGBTQ+ community or personal preferences, making the search for “true love” particularly challenging.

3) Suggestions for improvement

“I believe the environment and atmosphere are the most important factors. Currently, most LGBTQ dating apps generally assume that everyone is there primarily for casual hookups, rather than actively promoting the development of long-term relationships. I think these apps should be designed with different sections to cater to and differentiate between users with varying needs.” (18-24 years old, Negeri Sembilan, Chinese Atheism)

“I believe clear distinctions can be made, such as creating apps specifically for pure friendship or purely for casual

hookups. This would allow users to make more precise choices or better fulfill their personal goals.” (18-24 years old, Johor, Chinese Buddhist)

“Honestly, dating apps could make it easier for people to find what they’re looking for. Like, maybe have a filter for ‘serious relationships’ or something like that. And instead of just focusing on looks or swiping, maybe add features that match people based on shared values or deeper interests.” (18 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Buddhist)

These suggestions aim to help users navigate the platforms more effectively and align their usage with their personal goals.

4) *Personal responsibility and personality in relationships*

- *“In my opinion, seeking relationships is dependent on personality and not what dating apps could do.” (25-34 years old, Chinese Buddhist)*
- *“Apps are just providing a platform to socialize or make the circle bigger. Meaningful relationships are based on individuals’ personalities and attitudes, which the apps couldn’t provide.” (25-34 years old, Melaka, Chinese Buddhist)*
- *“Maybe yes, but it depends on who you meet. Anyhow, these dating apps increase the probability of finding someone compared to simply staying at home and waiting for love to come your way.” (18-24 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Atheism)*
- *“People treat dating apps as applications for hookups mostly. People looking for long-term relationships on those apps will eventually find someone who does too. Most likely.” (25-34 years old, Johor, Chinese Buddhist)*
- *“Dating apps are serving their intended purposes. The atmosphere of the apps is shaped by people’s needs and preferences. There’s nothing inherently wrong with the apps themselves.” (18-24 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese GuanYin)*

Some respondents believe that while apps can provide opportunities to meet new people, the success of a relationship ultimately relies on the individuals involved.

In conclusion, to better support individuals seeking meaningful relationships, dating apps could introduce features like intent-based filters to distinguish between those seeking casual encounters and those interested in long-term connections. Creating separate spaces for different types of relationships and matching users based on shared values or interests, rather than just appearance, could foster deeper connections. However, the mindset of users is the key, as apps can only do so much to shape the environment; ultimately, users need to approach these platforms with a focus on building meaningful relationships.

5) *Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences or perceptions regarding dating and relationships?*

“First of all, I genuinely believe that being gay is tough, especially when your values about emotions, body, and relationships are not in alignment with those of other gay people, which makes you a smaller minority within the already marginalized group. From my personal experience, I cannot accept the separation of sex, which seems to prevent me from

having more meaningful connections with other gay individuals. Secondly, from my observations, the ‘side’ role seems to be widely unrecognized (this might be due to regional differences), as people still seem to only know the binary concept of ‘top’ and ‘bottom’. I find this quite sad because while we’ve broken away from heterosexual binary thinking, we’re still imposing binary classification on ourselves, failing to create a more diverse concept. Additionally, it seems that building long-term relationships is quite difficult. The primary issue is the limited channels for meeting others. As a result, most gay friends can only meet through dating apps, but most people on these apps are looking for casual hookups, which makes the already limited avenues for connection even more complicated. Lastly, I’m not sure how accurate this is, but in most cases, the more masculine body image, like big muscles, being strong, or short hair—basically the stereotypical ‘man’ image—is more favored.” (18-24 years old, Negeri Sembilan, Chinese Atheism)

“I have never been in a relationship or gone on a date, but I have had a few hookups with ‘side’ partners. I believe it’s just about fulfilling sexual needs, but it never satisfies my deeper needs for companionship, listening, care, tolerance, and the need to love and be loved. I still feel like a lonely individual. Hookups, based on sexual needs, are cold and don’t involve emotional exchange. In the end, I still hope to find a long-term relationship (LTR). For me, hookups are just a helpless choice made because I haven’t been able to find an LTR.” (18-24 years old, Johor, Chinese Buddhist)

“Gays are not so different from the others. Their minority problems get magnified by ppl because of hatred and disgust from a lot of communities. Pls be kind to others, respect their sexuality, they are also human beings...” (18-24 years old, Perak, Chinese Atheism)

“Considering the culture and laws in Malaysia, many LGBT+ members choose to stay discreet, finding someone who’s willing to form a long term relationship publicly can be even more difficult.” (18-24 years old, Johor, Chinese Christian)

“Nowadays, love feels like fast food. It’s hard to find someone on the same wavelength due to long working hours. Many LGBTQ individuals struggle to find a partner, often because they’re used to living alone and unsure how a new person would fit into their routine. Love is important, but often seen as materialistic. I’m open to open relationships right now, but my views may change in the future.” (25-34 years old, Pulau Pinang, Chinese Buddhist)

“Dating in Malaysia, especially on gay dating apps, is challenging. However, there is still a small group of people seeking true love. Interestingly, most individuals in this group are over 35 years old, rather than younger guys.” (18-24 years old, Selangor, Chinese Buddhist)

“For a gay person, taking a relationship seriously is crucial. Unlike heterosexuals who have marriage as a goal, marriage can sometimes effectively keep both partners in check, but for homosexuals, we only have “love” to guide us through life. The lack of constraints often leads to more risky behavior, which is why many people think gay relationships are “messy.”

Unfortunately, humans cannot abandon the concept of "love." Throughout a gay person's life, they are constantly seeking love, which raises the concern of growing old alone. Some may say they will live without being "love-driven" and grow old by themselves, but do I really have the strength to do that? I don't know, only time will tell." (18-24 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Buddhist)

"First of all, I think dating apps are a great social platform that allows us, especially the LGBT+ community, to express our sexual desires. Everyone has sexual desires because we are all human, and that's natural and normal. I hope that one day the word "Gay" will become a positive or neutral term, instead of a derogatory one. Ultimately, all I want in life is to simply be a normal person in this world." (25-34 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Buddhist)

"I've noticed that some people in this group are influenced by their family dynamics, such as growing up in single-parent households or having strict families, or even experiencing depression themselves. As a result, they may have shorter relationships, often breaking up after just a few months. I think that before falling in love, people in this group should be mentally prepared to commit for a lifetime. Only then should they confess their feelings or accept someone else's confession, leading to a passionate yet ordinary love."(18-24 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Buddhist)

"Love is like a fast food chain to a lot of minorities. They come and go really really fast, but I do think this would change with age, the younger we are we tend to go for fast foods. As we age, we appreciate having healthy meals, even taking the effort to create a meal that we want. " (35-44 years old, Selangor, Chinese Buddhist)

"It seems like there's a toxic cycle in this community, where many people don't think about long-term relationships. They may promise a lasting commitment but eventually end the relationship. This creates a polarized community, where those truly worthy individuals tend to enjoy life without being in a relationship, and only a small portion of people fall into this category. Most others just seek temporary relief or escape. Thankfully, I found my "bagel," and we've been together for over two years. Honestly, I'm scared of losing this relationship because I don't want to go back and try to find someone else in this community—it's really hard." (18-24 years old, Sarawak, Chinese)

"For LGBTQ+ folks, dating isn't always straightforward. There's the fear of coming out or worrying about how others might judge your relationship. But when you meet someone who really understands and accepts you, it feels amazing. Whether it's casual or serious, I think the key is knowing what you want and respecting each other's boundaries." (18 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Buddhist)

"Although homosexuality has become more widely accepted in society, it is still stigmatized by many. People often associate it with negative labels such as "HIV high-risk group," "marriage fraud," or "sexual harassment." I oppose the act of marriage fraud by homosexuals, and believe that when engaging in sexual activity with mutual consent, safety measures should always be followed. If you find true love in this

short life, that's incredibly lucky, as love between same-sex individuals is often sincere and beautiful, without the responsibility of reproduction. If you don't find it, don't be discouraged—enjoy being single! What we can do is keep improving ourselves and creating value. We need to prove through our actions that homosexuals are no different from others and can even be better, as they have higher resilience and endurance to withstand societal pressure and judgments." (18-24 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Christian)

"As mentioned above, casual hookups and meaningful relationships do not make much difference. The main difference is the result and personal pattern in a relationship, some might prefer to start with hookup and follow by a meaningful relationship while certain people are vice versa. " (25-34 years old, Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Buddhist)

Dating within the gay community often comes with its own set of challenges, particularly when it comes to finding meaningful connections. Many respondents share how difficult it is to connect on a deeper emotional level, especially with the dominance of casual hookups, especially on dating apps. While some still long for long-term relationships, they express frustration with the limited opportunities to meet like-minded individuals who seek the same type of commitment. The focus on physical appearances and stereotypical ideas of masculinity further complicates matters, limiting the diversity of potential partners.

Despite the hurdles, there's a strong desire for genuine love and lasting relationships. Many individuals feel that casual encounters don't fulfill their emotional needs and continue to hold out hope for deeper connections. However, societal stigma surrounding homosexuality and the absence of traditional structures like marriage make it difficult for many to take relationships seriously. Yet, there is a shift in perspective over time, where the fleeting nature of love gives way to a more meaningful pursuit of commitment and self-growth.

Ultimately, while the journey of dating and relationships in the gay community is filled with complexity and societal pressures, the desire for true love, mutual respect, and emotional fulfillment remains strong. Many hope to challenge societal stereotypes, showing that LGBTQ+ individuals can build healthy, resilient relationships just like anyone else.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the complex realities that gay men in Malaysia face when it comes to dating, relationships, and societal expectations. The challenges they encounter, such as societal stigma, legal restrictions, and cultural pressures, significantly impact their ability to form long-term, meaningful relationships. While there is some level of acceptance in certain social spaces, the larger societal framework continues to present barriers, making it difficult for gay individuals to fully express their identities and pursue stable, long-term connections.

The prevalence of casual hookups, driven by factors like delayed emotional development and limited opportunities for open relationships, further complicates their ability to engage in long-term commitments. However, the support of the LGBT

community and close personal circles plays a crucial role in helping individuals navigate these obstacles and find spaces of acceptance.

Ultimately, this study serves as an important starting point for understanding the experiences of gay men in Malaysia, but further research is needed to capture a more comprehensive view of their challenges and how societal norms, technology, and changing attitudes can influence their journey toward acceptance and meaningful relationships.

References

- [1] Bailey, J. M., Gaulin, S. J. C., Agyei, W. K., & Gladue, B. A. (1994). Sexual Orientation and Evolutionary Theory. *Psychological Science*, 5(2), 38-43.
- [2] Brines, J., & Joyner, K. (1999). The Ties That Bind: Principles of Cohabitation and Marriage. *American Sociological Review*, 64(3), 467-485.
- [3] Buss, D. M. (2003). *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating*. Basic Books.
- [4] Byers, E. S. (2005). Relationship Satisfaction and Sexual Satisfaction: A Longitudinal Study of Their Relationship. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 22(2), 206-228.
- [5] Carroll, L., & Mendos, L. A. (2017). *State-Sponsored Homophobia 2017: A World Survey of Sexual Orientation Laws: Criminalisation, Protection, and Recognition*. ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association).
- [6] Chara, M. (2017). Confucian values and their influence on family dynamics in contemporary society. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology Studies*, 4(2), 70-80.
- [7] Cherlin, A. J. (1978). *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*. Harvard University Press.
- [8] Clark, M. A., & Hatfield, E. (1989). Gender Differences in Receptivity to Sexual Offers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56(6), 962-973.
- [9] Goh, H. F., & Kananatu, K. (2019). Repressing Identities: The Role of Religious and Cultural Norms in Shaping LGBT Lives in Malaysia. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 47(3), 340-355.
- [10] Herek, G. M. (1984). *The social context of sexual identity: A theoretical model*. *Journal of Social Issues*, 40(4), 65-80.
- [11] Kelleher, M. (2009). The Minority Stress Model: Sexual Orientation and the Experience of Mental Health. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 3(1), 33-45.
- [12] Kyle, S. (2017). Relationship Stability in Same-Sex Couples: A Comparative Analysis of Institutionalization. *Journal of Social Issues*, 64(3), 199-220.
- [13] Kyle, R. J. (2017). *Gay men's internalized stereotypes and casual sex: The 'just world belief' theory revisited*. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 11(2), 101-112.
- [14] Kyrstian, D. (2024). *An overview of open relationships: Definitions and dynamics*. *Journal of Relationship Studies*, 13(2), 142-153.
- [15] Levinger, G. (1965). Marital Adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 64(5), 329-360.
- [16] Lick, D. J., Durso, L. E., & Johnson, A. K. (2013). Minority Stress and Physical Health Among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Adults. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 8(5), 521-530.
- [17] Mark, K.P., Janssen, E., Milhausen, R. R. (2015). Infidelity in Heterosexual Couples: Demographic, Interpersonal, and Personality-Related Predictors of Extradysadic Sex. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 44(5), 1549-1564.
- [18] Meyer, I. H. (1995). Minority Stress and Mental Health in Gay Men. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 36(1), 38-56.
- [19] Parker, R., & Aggleton, P. (2003). HIV and AIDS-Related Stigma and Discrimination: A Conceptual Framework and Implications for Action. *Social Science & Medicine*, 57(1), 13-24.
- [20] Payne, J. (2014). Same-Sex Relationships: The Impact of Cultural and Legal Factors. *Journal of Social Issues*, 69(2), 254-265.
- [21] Rehman, S., & Polymenopoulou, E. (2013). Public Perceptions of Homosexuality in Malaysia: A Cross-National Study. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 43(6), 609-627.
- [22] Race, K. (2015). *The intersection of technology and intimacy: An exploration of hookup culture and online dating apps*. *Journal of Sexual Research*, 53(4), 423-431.
- [23] Rostosky, S. S., Riggles, E. D. B., & Home, S. G. (2007). *The role of masculinity in shaping sexual preferences and behaviors in gay men*. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 53(3), 77-91.
- [24] Schmitt, D. P. (2005). The Evolution of Human Mate Preferences. *Annual Review of Sex Research*, 16(1), 13-60.
- [25] Schmitt, D. P. (2006). Sexuality and Relationship Commitment: The Role of Sexual Orientation in the Prediction of Relationship Satisfaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91(2), 242-256.
- [26] Simpson, J. A., & Gangestad, S. W. (1991). Individual Differences in Sociosexuality: Evidence for Convergent and Discriminant Validity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60(6), 870-883.
- [27] Strugo, R. (2019). Social Media and Online Platforms as New Forms of Connection for the LGBTQ Community. *International Journal of Social Research*, 34(3), 112-127.
- [28] Ting, K., Kwin, F., & Xinyi, Z. (2016). The Stigmatization of Homosexuality in Malaysia: A Societal Analysis. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 31(4), 101-115.
- [29] Van Lankveld, J. (2018). Gender Differences in Sexual Desire and Its Relationship with Emotional Intimacy. *Sexuality & Culture*, 22(2), 207-220.
- [30] Yuan, Y. (2011). Gay Affirmative Religious Practices in Malaysia: A Case Study. *Asian Journal of LGBTQ Studies*, 12(4), 215-223.
- [31] Zurairi, A. (2013). Seksualiti Merdeka: A Movement for LGBT Rights in Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Social Advocacy*, 8(1), 55-67.