

Nature or Nurture? A Qualitative Study of the Source of Homosexuality

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have debated, asserted and posited that the source of homosexuality in both gay men and lesbian women is found either in nature or nurture. Of specific interest to this research was the self-identified source of homosexuality in gay men through their lived experience. A Malaysian-based context was taken due to the growing interest, both politically and socially, of the social phenomenon of homosexuality in Malaysia. As personal experience was the data source selected for this research and social construction of identity was the perspective taken, phenomenology acted as the theoretical underpinning through which the shared experience of the respondents was analysed. The geographic setting of the research was Penang, Malaysia as it was an urban area that had been identified as having a population of self-identified gay men. A qualitative perspective was taken due to the sensitive nature of the research. The sample population was gathered via purposive sampling and the snowball technique and a total of 33 respondents were recruited. All respondents were interviewed in-depth where a semi-structured interview questionnaire was utilised. All data were transcribed and analysed via a content analysis matrix. The findings suggest that the source of homosexuality for the respondents was nature and not nurture. Respondents attribute their homosexuality to genetics, inborn hormonal influence and biology. However, the findings do point out that nurture has a part to play in the development of self-identified gay men as individuals. Nurturing via friendships, role-modelling and environments that are affirming and positive portrayals of homosexuality in the media allow the respondents to internalise positive attitudes towards their homosexuality. Research into the source of homosexuality from the viewpoint of complementarity as opposed to opposition is a direction that would benefit studies of homosexuality. Longitudinal research would deepen understanding of the source of homosexuality.

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INTRODUCTION

The debate as to the source of homosexuality being natural or nurtured has orbited the issue area of human sexuality since studies into this area were delved into by scholars like Benkert, Ellis, Kinsey, Ulrich and Hirschfield (McConaghy, 1987; Edwards, 1994; Jenkins, 2006). While some scholars posited that homosexuality was a natural predisposition in the spectrum of sexual attraction, others asserted that homosexuality was a learned behaviour and was subject to change and/or modification (Savin-Williams & Vrangalova, 2013). To date, this debate regarding gender identity continues within the social sciences (Steensma, Kreukels, deVries, & Cohen-Kettenis, 2013). This paper puts forward the question of whether homosexuality is natural or is nurtured.

Nature and Nurture Perspectives of Homosexuality

Various scholars have attributed the source of homosexuality to nature and have argued that it was related to heritability, biology, hormones and genetics; in other words that homosexuality was innate (Alanko et al., 2010; Jannini et al., 2010; Morgan, 2012). Bailey et al. (2013) argued that homosexuality had a high heritability rate, was partly genetic, was related to an in-utero experience and was biologically determined as did Zietsch et al. (2008). Goodman (1997) asserted that homosexuality was

a genetically heritable family trait and tentatively identified a region of the X chromosome as the cause of same-sex sexual attraction. Other scholars had noted incidents of high heritability of homosexuality (Bailey et al., 1991; Bailey & Bell, 1993; Bailey et al., 1999) that implied that there was a biological/genetic (Blanchard et al., 1996) or hormonal (Schwartz et al., 2010; Blanchard, 2012; Alanko et al., 2013; Diamond, 2013) component to the same-sex sexual attractions of gay men.

Aside from heritability, arguments that homosexuality was formed biologically, hormonally or genetically were put forward by various scholars (Rice et al., 2012). Mondimore (1996) posited specifically that the third interstitial nuclei of the anterior hypothalamus (INAH3) brain functions and anterior commissure of gay men differed from those of heterosexual men, therefore forming a biological argument that attraction to men by homosexual men and heterosexual women were biologically determined. A study conducted by Witelson et al. (2008) in the USA found that that the isthmus of the corpus callosum in homosexual men was greater than in heterosexual men. The isthmus of the corpus callosum was thought to determine sexual attraction, thus again supporting the biological argument for homosexuality.

Based on a study conducted across five nations, namely the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, Lippa (2007) suggested that exposure to the hormone androgen during gestation caused same-sex sexual attraction in males. While the

study by Lippa supports the argument for a hormonal cause of homosexuality, research conducted by Turner (1995) hypothesised that homosexuality was genetically determined by a gene at Xq28 of the human DNA structure. Perhaps the most provocative argument for a biological, genetic and hormonal source of homosexuality has been put forward by Whitam (1983) based on a cross-cultural study that found that homosexual men appeared in all societies, that the percentage of homosexual men in most societies were the same and remained stable over time, that homosexual subcultures appeared in all societies where there was enough of an aggregation of people and that social norms did not impede or facilitate the emergence of homosexuality.

Conversely, other scholars have asserted that homosexuality was learnt or nurtured. Taylor (1999) asserted that sexual identity was defined by the meaning attributed to it by an individual. The crux of what Taylor asserted suggested that homosexuality was nurtured through attribution by external sources (such as media, see Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2014) and not sourced from a natural predisposition within homosexuals. Matthei (1995) argued that sexual identity was formed via engagement in gendered professions, asserting that environment engendered homosexuality. For Wilkerson, Ross and Brooks (2009), heteronormativity (the acceptance that heterosexuality, heterosexual norms and heterosexual values were superior to homosexuality, homosexual norms and homosexual values) constructed

homosexuality as inferior and therefore, homosexuality was adopted and nurtured in those who did not meet the superior standards of a society. More recently, studies by Bailey, Hoskins, Green and Ritchie (2014) asserted that environment played a part in sexual inclination and behaviour in different social contexts, and a study by Crowson and Goulding (2013) raised questions that supported the need for socialisation to occur in order for homosexuality to be manifested.

Homosexuality in the Asian and Malaysian Contexts

Some Asian cultures had romanticised homosexuality in past eras. For example, according to Ng (1989) and Van Gulick (1974) the Chinese term *longyang* came from the name of Jun Longyang, a 4th century BC minister who had a homosexual relationship with the Prince of Wei. This is also where the term “cut sleeve” (*duanxiu*) comes from. Schalow (1989) found that gay sexuality was also part of the feudal Japanese culture in the form of romantic/sexual relationships between a samurai and his boy lover known as *nanshoku*. Peletz (2009) found that in the Malayo-Indo archipelago in past times the *sida-sida* (effeminate men) were considered sacred, were attributed high social status and were essential to the running of royal courts.

However, this acceptance of same-sex sexuality was eroded over time and in the present, homosexuality and homosexuals tend to be maligned in the Malaysian context, where society seems to

be becoming more conservative in nature socially, religiously and politically (Rehman & Polymenopoulou; 2012; Owoyemi & Ahmad, 2013a, 2013b; Yodfallah et al., 2014; Pandian, 2015; Wan Roslili, 2015; Brown et al., 2016), and this potentially caused a more negative stance towards homosexuality (Wilkison & Pearson, 2013). According to Poon and Ho (2002), homosexuality worked against well-defined gender roles, family structures, filial piety and family expectations in an Asian context. Based on findings by Baba (2001), common terms used to refer to the sexual identity of gay men in Malay were derogatory (e.g. *bapok*, *kedi*, *pondan* and *darai*). Baba also stated that homosexuality in Malaysia attracted a great deal of attention, although it was not accepted widely socially or politically. Baba further added that there was a lack of positive role models (socially, politically and in the media) and there was discomfort with homosexuality within Malaysian society.

In another study conducted by Baba (2002), it was found that male homosexuality in Malaysia was often mistakenly associated with HIV/AIDS. Baba further found that gay men in Malaysia had no cultural, political or social point of reference from which homosexuality could be developed and accepted. Additionally, the stigma faced by gay men was fuelled by beliefs that same-sex sexual attraction and same-sex sexual activity were not part of the culture of Malaysia. Soraya (2008) and Watney (2000) reported that often gay men were viewed as hedonistic, had chosen to break away from

heterosexuality to satisfy lustful desires and were systematically casting aside traditional Asian (Malaysian) values for values espoused by Western nations. Other research pointed out that within the Malaysian context homosexuality is an ideology that is engendered and can be changed, and that that through counselling homosexuality may be converted to heterosexuality (Ahmad Zaharuddin et al., 2014). The findings of other scholars, however, point out that such views led to negative mental health as well as a lack of interpersonal closeness with other members of society (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014), suicide (Russel & Toomey, 2012) and persistent hiding of the true self from society in general (Ott et al., 2013).

In terms of the literature reviewed, three main points may be made. First, that there were both proponents for homosexuality as natural and homosexuality as nurtured, and neither one of the opposing views had reached a definitive answer; second, that homosexuality in Malaysia was maligned despite homosexuality having been acceptable in different Asian cultures at different points in history; and third, that more research was needed from a Malaysian perspective to understand the source of homosexuality in self-identified gay men in Malaysia as well as other studies on homosexuality in the country.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The philosophy of phenomenology was the theoretical framework that underpinned this research. In phenomenology, social actors determine the aspects of the social world

that is important to them and meanings and interpretations (hermeneutics) of individual worlds are determined inter-subjectively through interaction with peers and other members of society (Basset, 2004; Bishop, 2007). For the purposes of this research, the meanings and interpretations of their individual world facilitated the analysis of the interpretations of the respondents of the source of their homosexuality as well as identified if the source was internal or external to their selves.

From the determination of the aspects of the social world and inter-subjectively determined meanings, social actors created realities of the self that are based on lived experience, introspection and retrospective glances after an action had occurred (existentialist) (Berger & Luckman, 1972). Phenomenology allowed the respondents of this research to reflect on their lived experience of their homosexuality, thus allowing them the reflected-upon view of ascertaining the source of their sexuality, be it internal or external.

Phenomenology also allowed for actions or mental processes that had taken place and were objective to be studied scientifically (Ritzer, 2003, p. 71). As such, phenomenology allowed for the identification of the source of homosexuality from the standpoint of the lived experience of self-identified gay men from a scientific standpoint to be analysed. This in turn created a theoretically reliable basis for the interpretation and discussion of the data.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Opposing views of the source of homosexuality were found in the literature, and while strong arguments were put forward, no definitive answer could be reached. While this research could not provide a definitive answer, the view of the researcher was that by taking an emic view of the experience of gay men in Malaysia a deeper understanding of the experience of self-identified gay men as to the source of their homosexuality would facilitate further discussion, debate and openness on the subject of the source of homosexuality in the country. This would additionally add to the growing body of knowledge of non-heterosexual experiences of Malaysians within a social context. Additionally, a gap in the literature exists where the assertions of the source of homosexuality are made by natural scientists as well as theorists, but very few from the social science perspective that bases the source of homosexuality on the lived and interpreted experience of self-identified gay men.

Therefore, the research question put forward was: "What is the source of homosexuality as interpreted by self-identified gay men?" The research objectives put forward, based on the research question, were: (1) To describe if self-identified gay men attribute their homosexuality to nature or to nurture; (2) To qualitatively analyse the source of homosexuality among self-identified gay men via their lived experience; (3) To add to the discourse of the experience of self-identified gay men in identifying the

source of their homosexuality as viewed through the lens of phenomenology.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The geographic location chosen for the research was Penang, Malaysia. This was because Penang had been identified as a geographic location in Malaysia that had a population of self-identified gay men (Key informant interview conducted with Dr Chow Ting Soo of the Infectious Diseases Unit of Penang General Hospital, Mr Hisham Hussein of the Malaysian AIDS Council and Dr Ilias Yee of the Family Health and Development Association Penang during the period May-June, 2009; Personal Communication, Dr Chow Ting Soo, Head of the Infectious Diseases Unit, Penang General Hospital, October 3, 2010; Personal Communication, Mohd. Shahrani Mohamed Tamrin, Head of MSM Cluster Outreach PT Foundation, Kuala Lumpur, August 4, 2010; Personal Communication, Hisham Hussein, Malaysian AIDS Council, September 28, 2010). Additionally, Penang was classified as an urban geographic region in Malaysia with a large population, thus leading to a higher possibility of gaining rich qualitative data as opposed to the possibility of gaining the needed research data in a rural setting in Malaysia.

The data collected was qualitative in nature. This route was chosen as the aim of the research was to gain rich data and to allow for expression of individual experience as well as out of consideration that self-identified gay men formed a minority that valued their privacy, safety

and security. Additionally, qualitative research was the route chosen due to the sensitivity of the issue of homosexuality in Malaysia. Qualitative methodology was also chosen as the target population was not easily identifiable and formed a minority within Malaysia. A list of structured open-ended interview questions was utilised in a one-on-one in-depth interview setting. Also, the use of the in-depth interview method and tool allowed the researcher to probe (where necessary) to gain more information as well as a deeper explanation and more detail of the experience of the respondents in terms of the source of their self-professed homosexuality. In total, there were nine interview questions, with appropriate probing and segue questions where applicable.

A semi-natural setting for the interviews was chosen where both the researcher and the respondent felt both comfortable and safe to speak freely and openly about the experience of the respondents. Each respondent was interviewed for an average of an hour, with the longest interview being an hour and 15 minutes and the shortest, 57 minutes.

Sampling

As the nature of this research was sensitive, the purposive sampling method and the snowball method were utilised to gather respondents who met the set criteria of the research. The purposive sampling method was used when respondents who were known to be self-identified gay men were referred to the researcher by

the AIDS Action and Research Group (AARG) of Universiti Sains Malaysia and the NGO PAYUNG; and the snowball method was utilised when the self-identified gay men who were identified by AARG and PAYUNG referred acquaintances, colleagues and friends who were self-identified gay men to the researcher. All respondents were self-identified gay men who were residents of Penang, Malaysia; were citizens of the country; and were above the legal age of consent. No age, educational or ethnic parameters were set for the research. This consideration was set by the researcher to allow for as wide and deep a breadth of collection of data for as rich a sampling as possible. Additionally, the aforementioned parameters were not utilised to get as wide an experience of as varied a population of self-identified gay men as possible. Respondents were sought until the point of data saturation was reached and this was achieved when a total of 33 respondents were gathered.

Research Tool and Research Analysis Tool

All respondents were interviewed using the one-on-one in-depth interviewing method, which focussed on the following three subjects:

1. Source of the respondent's sexual attraction
2. Internal factors that shaped the respondent's sexual attraction
3. External factors that shaped the respondent's sexual attraction.

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed via a content analysis matrix. All data were transcribed within 24 hours of the interview to maintain accuracy. All audio recordings were played back twice in the initial transcription process. Each transcription was then checked by replaying the audio recording a third time for accuracy. This processing of the data allowed the researcher to determine the accuracy of the data and if necessary, clarification was sought from the respondent.

All data were first grouped in the content analysis matrix thematically for similarity of content. The data were then analysed for content shared with the researcher that specifically named the source of the respondents' homosexuality as either nature or nurture and appropriate separation of these two categories was made in the content analysis matrix. Following this, the data were analysed a second time for content regarding the internal factors that shaped the respondents' sexual attraction for confirmation of the respondents' answer on the source of their homosexuality. The data were then analysed a third time for external factors that shaped the respondents' sexual attraction for confirmation of the respondents' answer on the source of their homosexuality.

These thematic groupings of the findings were further analysed for verbal expressions and words that denoted a natural or nurtured source of their sexuality; furthermore, as the researcher was interested in the lived experience of the respondents, particular attention was paid to the verbally-expressed

explanations of how they understood the source of their sexuality from a reflective standpoint. Further data analysis was done via cross-referencing the identified source of the respondents' sexuality with these verbally-expressed explanations in the content analysis matrix to gain a holistic interpretation of their lived experience.

Privacy, Confidentiality and Ethical Approval

Privacy and confidentiality of the research was based on the following protocol:

1. When the potential respondent was referred to the researcher, either through purposive sampling or through the snowball method, the researcher contacted the potential respondent via an email address or telephone number that had been provided to the researcher.
2. The researcher would explain to the potential respondent the academic purpose of the interview, either verbally or in writing, depending on the medium of communication used.
3. If the potential respondent refused to participate in the research, the potential respondent was thanked and no further communication was maintained; however, if the potential respondent agreed to participate in the research a date and time for the one-on-one in-depth interview was negotiated based on the availability of the respondent. The venue was chosen by the respondent in deference to the respondent's need for privacy and security.
4. When the respondent was met, the researcher reiterated the academic purpose of the interview and presented the interviewer with the approval letter from the Ethics Committee of Universiti Sains Malaysia for the research.
5. The respondent was then presented with a consent form that was approved by the Ethics Committee of Universiti Sains Malaysia for perusal and signature if the respondent agreed to proceed with the one-on-one in-depth interview.
6. If the respondent agreed to the one-on-one in-depth interview it was then conducted. If the respondent refused, he was free to leave and no further contact was established.
7. Within the protocol, had the respondent at any time during the data collection process refused to participate or participate further in the research, all data and contact information were deleted by the researcher.
8. All respondents were given a pseudonym for the research and this pseudonym was used when the respondent was referred to and when the respondent was quoted verbatim.
9. The content of the one-on-one in-depth interview was audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher within 24 hours. Extensive notes were taken where applicable.
10. All data, researcher notes and signed consent forms were secured either using 128-bit encryption or locked

within a safe location known only to the researcher.

FINDINGS

Demographics and Background of the Respondents

The demographics of the respondents for age, race, profession and highest level of education achieved are presented below.

In terms of age, 17 respondents were between 20 to 30 years of age and 13 respondents fell in the age range of 31 to 40 years of age. Two respondents fell in the age range of 41 to 50 years of age and one respondent fell into the age range of between 51 to 60 years of age. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of the respondents according to age group.

By ethnicity, 15 of the respondents were Chinese Malaysian, 10 respondents were Bumiputra Malaysian, four respondents were Indian Malaysian, two respondents were Eurasian Malaysian, one respondent was of Chinese-Thai descent and one

respondent was of Kadazan-Murut descent. The breakdown of the respondents based on race is shown more clearly in Figure 2.

Eleven of the respondents were students. Of these 11 respondents, 10 were pursuing undergraduate degrees at a local public university. The one remaining respondent had just completed a Diploma course at a local private college, and was preparing to begin studies in a foreign undergraduate degree programme offered at a private institute of higher learning.

Two respondents were employed in the field of Information Technology as either IT support or in IT Graphics. Eight respondents considered themselves professionals who were employed in various departments of multi-national companies (MNC) such as Human Resource, Engineering, Accounts and Finance as well as Management. Two of the respondents were entrepreneurs while three respondents were employed in blue-collar professions. One respondent worked in sales, one respondent worked

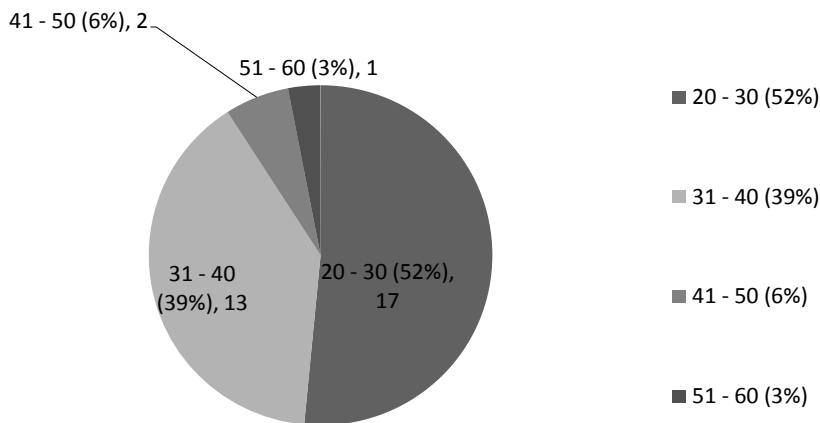


Figure 1. Breakdown of Respondents by Age

in theatrical performance, one respondent was an educator, one respondent was self-employed and one respondent worked in the hospitality industry. Finally, one of the respondents was a retiree. This breakdown is shown in Figure 3.

In terms of highest level of education achieved, the respondents fell into the five basic categories of pursuing an undergraduate degree at a local institution of higher learning, achieved an undergraduate

degree at a local institution of higher learning, achieved an undergraduate degree at a foreign institution of higher learning, achieved a diploma at a local institution of higher learning and had completed secondary-school education. Overall, it could be said that all of the respondents had received or were receiving at the time of the interview an education that was considered acceptable by any standards. This suggested that all of the respondents, in general, were

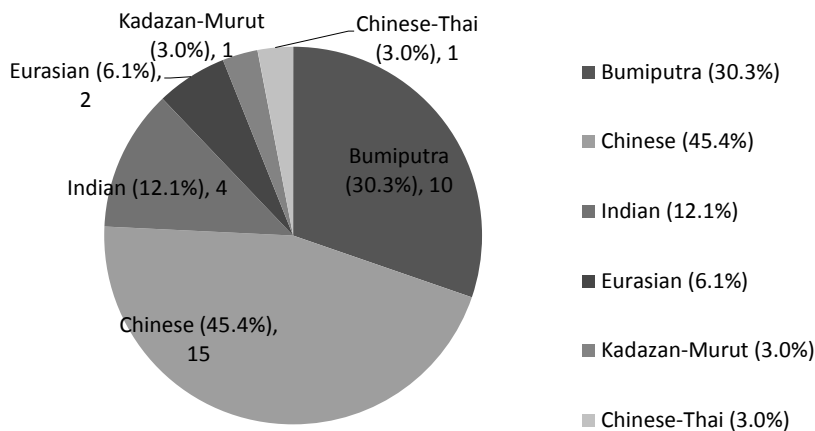


Figure 2. Breakdown of Respondents by Race

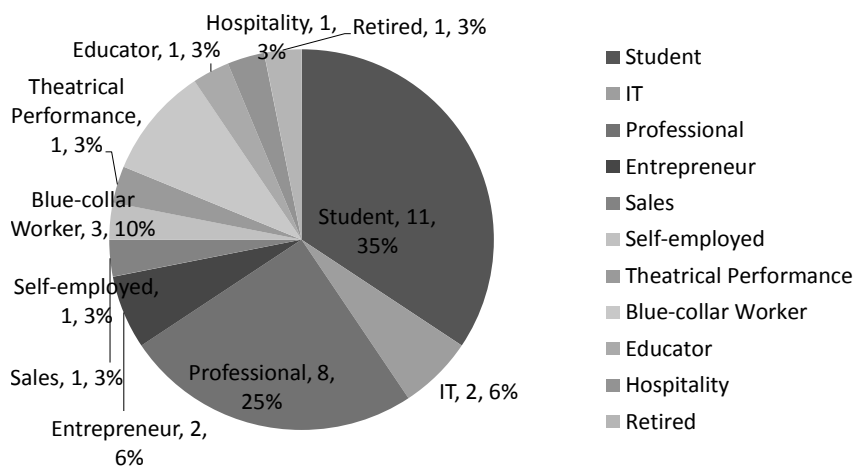


Figure 3. Breakdown of Respondents by Profession

educated men who were able to understand the questions put forward to them in the interviews and were able to lucidly answer the questions with enough clarification on the part of the researcher. This demographic is found in Figure 4.

Nature: Genetics and Homosexuality

The findings gave credence to the assertions of scholars who have asserted that the source of homosexuality is genetic and is not constructed by a process of nurturing. This is seen through the verbatim interview excerpts of the following three respondents on their belief that their homosexuality is genetic.

I would think that most of it comes from genes, we are born with it. It is a genetic thing. Scientists are trying to study this. They have not found the gay gene, but I believe we are wired that way. One study has shown that the gay male brain is similar to that of a straight

woman. I think the size of the brain or the chemicals in the brain have something to do with it. I think it is biological, I think it is genetic. I have cousins who are gay and uncles whom I suspect are gay because they have never gotten married. – Ben, Self-employed, 44 years of age.

The source for me is something internal. I cannot quite put my finger on it, what or how the whole thing is initiated, so to me it is quite genetically programmed that way. – Joe, Entrepreneur, 39 years of age.

It is from my blood. It is the attraction to males. You like the smell of a male. You feel the satisfaction of holding his hand, or cuddling or hugging him. The trust and feeling of being with a man is much better than being with a woman. – Mike, Entertainer, 27 years of age.

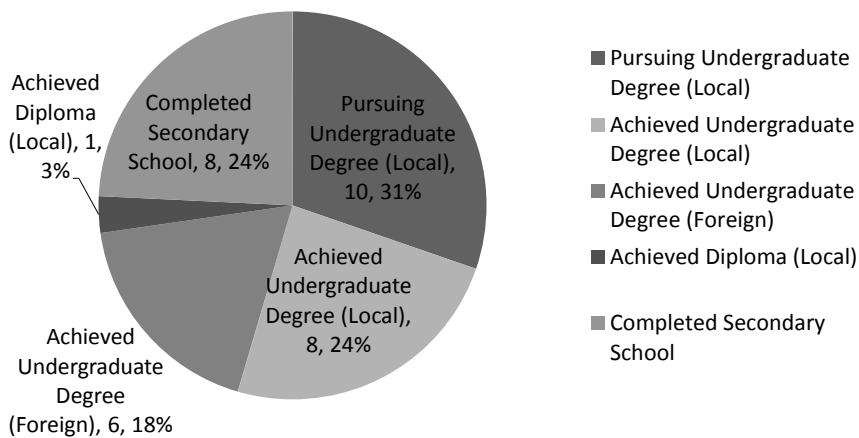


Figure 4. Highest Education Received

Nature: Natural and Inherent

The data collected from the respondents suggested that they believed homosexuality to be natural to them. The source of the respondents' sexual attraction to other men is not attributed to a passing phase, a trend or an external source of influence. Rather, based on the data collected, the respondents had much to say to support the assertion that the source of their same-sex sexual attractions came from within themselves. The respondents used terms such as "born like this," "naluri" (natural instinct) and "in my blood" to describe their belief that their same-sex sexual attraction is natural to them. Examples of this belief in the natural cause of homosexuality are found in the following three interview excerpts.

I am born this way. I definitely believe this. There is always a tell-tale sign of who I am and how feminine I am when I was young. Then again it was all a big confusion when I was in school. From there I start to believe and start to recognize what I am. – Jack, Graphic Designer, 31 years of age.

It is naluri. At the time I started to realise what I am I did not know any other gay guys. It is just me. When I am close to a guy I feel something. I am very interested in guys and I think when I am near a guy I think of sexual things. I think of guys in a certain (same-sex attracted) way. – Kamal, Undergraduate, 22 years of age.

I think it is part of my nature and it is not something nurtured. You are who you are. It (homosexuality) is natural; I mean who is there to nurture you as a gay man? Think about it, when we were children did anyone walk into a classroom and say this is how you can be gay and this is how to be a gay? – Karl, Professional, 40 years of age.

Nature: Surfacing of a Natural Inclination

Additionally, the belief of the respondents was that homosexuality is inherent, and as fluid as sexuality may be, a person's nature will come to the fore. The responses on this finding are presented below:

I feel that there are some people who become gay because they have been hurt by a girl but to me my homosexuality has been there since I was young. If I look at my past I can see that I have been looking at guys since I was in kindergarten. I know that there are some people who are born gay and some people who become gay after being hurt by a girl. But for me being gay has been there my whole life. – George, Hotelier, 23 years of age.

I have met a lot of people who from heterosexual become homosexual. I have heard that there are some people who have been influenced to be gay but I do not think this is real. I have tried to make some

people gay but this did not happen. It is a very individual experience. – Bobby, Entrepreneur, late 30s.

Nurture: Nurturing a Health Perspective of Homosexuality

However, the findings also pointed out that nurturing was necessary to developing sexual attraction to fruition as part of an integrated and whole identity for the individual. As stated by the respondents, their homosexuality was not nurtured. Rather, forces external to them assisted in nurturing a healthy perspective of their homosexuality. Namely, these forces were peers, role models, friendship with other gay men and environments that are nurturing of homosexuality and the media. The following interview excerpts are examples of these forces and the way they nurtured the homosexuality of the respondents.

I think whether you are gay or not you should really have a very passionate lifestyle and express it and nurture it. If I map out from there to my gay friends I find them more colourful. Colourful in the sense that they put in a lot of effort, they are all very hardworking people, they understand their passion and they actually nurture that. I actually admire that kind of expression of each and every one of my friends' passions. This is in comparison to my straight friends or my siblings who get married at a young age. With marriage

came a lot of responsibilities. They give up a part of themselves, their passion, because they have to live up to their responsibilities and to their children. So, when comparing the gay friends I have and the straight friends I have, straight people are less colourful. Between the two I would gravitate more to the colourful people. – Joe, Entrepreneur, 39 years of age.

I had a three-year relationship with my ex-boyfriend who was much older than me. He is an ex-boyfriend because he passed away quite unexpectedly. We were happy together and lived together for three years. He taught me a lot about how to be a gay guy because I started at a young age and he was of a more mature age. He molded me to be a confident and strong gay person. Not just in terms of being confident, but also to be mature in my way of thinking. It is important to be mature in my way of thinking so that I will be able to make good decisions in my life instead of just enjoying short-term things. – George, Hotelier, 23 years of age.

I think I have a very good role model in the sense that I have an elder brother who is also gay. There is a very big age difference between us and when I was going through my formative years he was overseas and I did not see much

of him. But I knew he was gay and subconsciously it has allowed me to think that it is alright to be gay. This is because I see that he is happy and all that. – Alex, Professional, 46 years of age.

Through where I studied and worked in Australia. I was surrounded by people who are more open. In a big city I would get people who are more able to be open, whereas when you work in a smaller town people tended to cover up. I think that a lot of gay men are more creative than the straight ones. You tend to have flair which combines the masculine and the feminine. You are not too hard and you are not too soft, you are in between. It gives you the opportunity to be close to gay people who are already successful, so they tend to be more open-minded and they tend to help each other out. – Peter, Educator, 36 years of age.

When I was growing up I needed to fund my own education. So I started working in this restaurant where the owner, manager and most of the other staff are gay. They gave me a sense of security and allowed me to see that it was okay to be what I am and to accept who I am. The people around me at this workplace helped me develop security in who I am. – Chai, Professional, 36 years of age.

When I was in school I mixed around with friends who are the same as me (homosexual). We had the same interests, the same behaviors. Initially we were not so open to sharing that we had sexual interests in men but after we mixed around more the issue of sexual interest in became normal and was not seen as weird. When I moved to the city I became more exposed to gay men and sex between two men. In my kampong (village) it is difficult to see gay male couples, but in a big city it is easier to see such a thing. It makes me think that it is okay for me to be a gay man. – Badrul, Undergraduate, 22 years of age.

I have never thought of being gay as something different, or being the only one, or the only one who has it, or being the only gay on the planet. When I was young I watched a lot of TV and my first image of a gay man was Boy George. This gave me the reinforcement that I am not the only one out there. This made me comfortable with myself. – Dennis, Professional, 35 years of age.

I grew up in a village. Actually it is Alor Setar (the state capital of the state of Kedah Darul Aman, Malaysia) but I call it a village. I could not explore who I am as a gay man in such a village. So I used the Internet and from there I read a lot about male sexuality; whether it is heterosexuality, bisexuality or homosexuality. Then I made a

decision for myself based on what I read that I am attracted to men only.

– Mike, Entertainer, 27 years of age.

DISCUSSION

The data suggested that while the respondents recognised that the source of their homosexuality was inborn and/or genetic and therefore natural, the respondents as a whole also recognise that nurture was necessary for self-acceptance, personal growth and self-discovery. Analysis of the data suggested that the biological, hormonal and genetic assertions as the source of homosexuality put forward by past scholars are shared by the respondents. As seen from the verbatim responses shared with the researcher, the respondents claimed that their homosexuality was inborn and that they did not in any way nurture their sexual/romantic/affectionate attraction to members of their own sex. Additionally, the analysis of the data showed that to some of the respondents, their homosexuality was neither caused by nor was it an effect of an external catalyst such as rejection by members of the opposite sex that nurtured their same-sex attractions. The natural instinct of the respondents is to be sexually drawn to other men and to recognise other men as sexual beings. It may be conceded that while the responses of the respondents did not pinpoint the exact internal source of their homosexuality, the variety of expressions of the perceived source of their homosexuality may be grouped thematically into that of an internally intuitive response.

When viewed through the theoretical lens of phenomenology, the lived experience of the respondents allowed them to ascertain that the source of their homosexuality was not found in an external lived experience but in an *internal* lived experience. This suggested that the inter-subjective meaning (hermeneutics) of the homosexuality of the respondents was not only in the evaluation and reflection of the source of their homosexuality with other members of society and their peers but also with themselves. Additionally, the details provided to the researcher verbatim indicated that the source of the homosexuality of the respondents was one that they were comfortable with, and more importantly, there was acceptance that homosexuality was natural to them (existentialist) and required no external confirmation as valid and acceptable. The findings showed that phenomenology as a philosophy and a theory that orbits around heuristics and existentialism is not only an external process. Rather, an internal process of reflection is possible wherein the individual weighs and balances two polar perspectives of a lived experience and reaches a conclusion of the reality of that lived experience. The use of phenomenology as a theoretical framework then becomes more valuable as a tool for exploring the underlying experiential process of individuals as they create individualised meaning of their lived experience.

However, the data also suggested that while the respondents identified the source of their homosexuality to be internal, they

also expressed that external factors or players were relevant to their homosexuality. The characteristics of these external factors or players, based on the interviews, were supportive, affirming and nourishing of the homosexuality of the respondents. In identifying that both the recognition of the internal source of homosexuality and the relevance of the external factors or players to the respondents in the context of their homosexuality, it is plausible to state that nature and nurture are necessary to a holistic development of homosexuality. The findings above point out that although past scholars and scientists may make assertions on the source of homosexuality being natural, for the respondents there was no need for scientific absolutism as they were living their homosexuality. They could state with certainty that it was natural to them. When viewed through the lens of phenomenology, what is additionally found is that it is not the source of the homosexuality that requires nurturing but rather the continued development of the individual as a self-identified gay man.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research add the dimension of complementarity of nature and nurture to studies of homosexuality. Based on the literature reviewed, this complementarity is relatively untouched and understudied in the social sciences of human sexuality. The implications of this are twofold: First, that studies in human sexuality may need to be viewed from the standpoint of complementarity instead of

dogmatism so that new paradigms in human sexuality may be put forward; and second, that a more in-depth understanding of homosexuality is contingent not only on the source of the homosexuality but also social factors that encourage further exploration, development and self-acceptance.

This complementarity between the nature and nurture aspects and arguments for and against homosexuality was not the main aim of the researcher. However, in viewing this overall finding from a holistic perspective, the researcher is able to recommend that future research on the source of homosexuality include longitudinal studies of men who self-identify as homosexual and their exploration of the internal source of their homosexuality from an internalised heuristic perspective; longitudinal studies of the relevance of peer influence on homosexuality among men who self-identify as homosexual from the perspective of socialisation; and longitudinal studies of the complementarity of nature and nurture in the existentialist development of homosexual male identity.

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