

PLUHO with Pride in Research

# Building Bridges to Self-Acceptance

Understanding LGBTQIA+ Persons  
in Malaysia's Experiences of  
Pride and Resilience





In conjunction with International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersex Discrimination, and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) and in preparation for Pride Month in 2025, People Like Us Hang Out! (PLUHO) invited LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia on their social media page to anonymously share their honest reflections on shame, resilience, and pride. The goal of the survey was to understand LGBTQIA+ individuals' experiences of self-acceptance. This survey is part of PLUHO's #ProgressWithPride campaign.

104 LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia aged between 18-57 responded and shared their stories in PLUHO's #ProgressWithPride survey. To analyse the data collected, PLUHO collaborated with Pride in Research (a community-led queer research organisation) to work on mapping the narratives of shame, resilience, pride, and self-acceptance among LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia. Through thematic narrative analysis, we've identified five interconnected domains that shape our collective experiences of self-acceptance, revealing both individual resilience strategies and systemic barriers that must be addressed.

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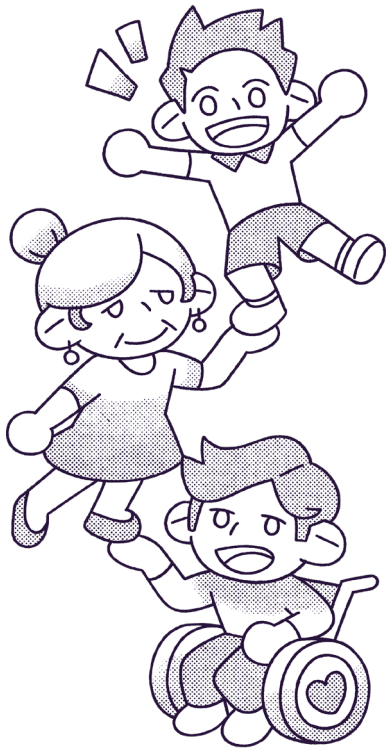
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# Who This Report Is For



## Primary Audience

LGBTQIA+ Persons in Malaysia

### **Newly questioning and seeking validation individuals**

For LGBTQIA+ individuals who are navigating their own experiences from shame to pride and would need diverse examples and reassurance that self-acceptance is possible.

### **Isolated community members**

LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia in areas without visible community who need connection and hope through shared experiences.

### **Different generations**

From young people seeking guidance to older community members wanting to understand evolving experiences.



## Secondary Audience

Allies & Support Systems

### **Family members and friends**

People with family members and friends identified as LGBTQIA+ individuals and want to better understand their experiences and how to provide support.

### **Service providers**

Medical professionals, counselors, therapists, and social workers working with LGBTQIA+ clients who need culturally relevant insights as well as affirming care to LGBTQIA+ patients.

### **Educators and youth workers**

Teachers, researchers, university counselors, and youth organization staff who interact with LGBTQIA+ young people.

# How This Report Can Be Used

## For Individual Healing & Growth:

### Personal Validation Tool

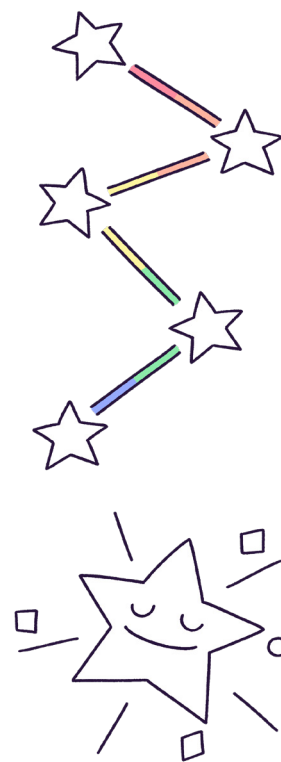
LGBTQIA+ individuals can use this report to recognize their experiences are not isolated or abnormal. The five domains provide frameworks for understanding personal experiences and identifying areas for growth. Quotes from community members offer affirmation that survival strategies are valid forms of resilience.

### Self-Advocacy Resource

LGBTQIA+ individuals can use this analysis to articulate their needs to family, friends, or professionals. The report provides language for explaining why certain supports (financial independence, community connection, etc.) are crucial for wellbeing.

### Experience Mapping Guide

People can identify which domains resonate most with their current situation and focus energy accordingly. The non-linear understanding helps normalize setbacks and celebrate small victories.



## For Community Building & Organizing:

### Program Development Blueprint

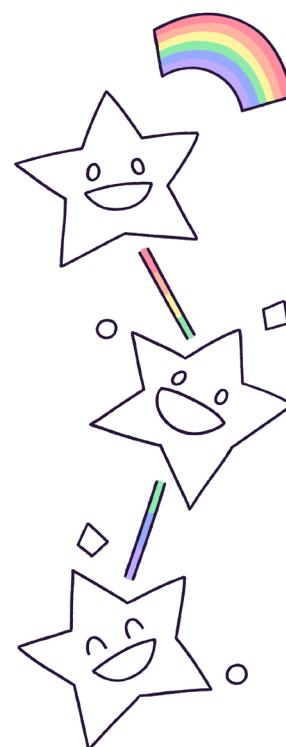
Community organizations can use the five domains to design targeted support programs. Identifies specific needs (language justice, cross-class building, digital infrastructure) for strategic planning. Provides evidence base for funding applications and grant proposals.

### Intergenerational Bridge-Building

Helps different age cohorts understand each other's strategies and challenges. Creates common vocabulary across diverse LGBTQIA+ experiences in Malaysia.

### Coalition Building Tool

The intersectional analysis helps build bridges between LGBTQIA+ advocacy and other social justice movements. Identifies shared concerns around class, colonialism, and cultural inclusion.



# Understanding the contexts of LGBTQIA+ Persons in Malaysia



Unique historical and socio-cultural factors shape our experiences as LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia. Intersections of race (or ethnicity), religion, and class within Malaysia's multicultural society create complex terrains that affect how LGBTQIA+ individuals navigate their identities. Understanding these patterns helps us realise that our struggles are shared, our strategies are valid, and our experiences of self-acceptance are both personal and collective.

LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia face criminalisation under both civil and Syariah law. State authorities have used Section 377A and 377B of the Penal Code, which criminalise "carnal intercourse against the order of nature", and Section 377D, which penalises "gross indecency with another person", against LGBTQIA+ individuals. State authorities, including religious bodies, periodically conduct raids and impose punitive measures that intrude upon sexual and gender minority community spaces. Under Syariah criminal law, Muslim LGBTQIA+ individuals may be subjected to so-called "conversion therapy", including mukhayyam camps and the hijrah diri (self-transformation) digital programme administered by federal and state Islamic authorities. At the state level, Syariah criminal enactments, which vary across Malaysia's states and apply exclusively to Muslims, further criminalise same-sex conduct and gender non-conforming expression through provisions such as liwat (anal intercourse between men), musahaqah (sexual conduct between women), and cross-dressing offences.

Beyond criminalisation, the absence of legal gender recognition and a lack of protection from discrimination and violence are significant risk factors that shape how LGBTQIA+ individuals navigate safety and well-being in Malaysia.

# Survey Questions and Data Collection

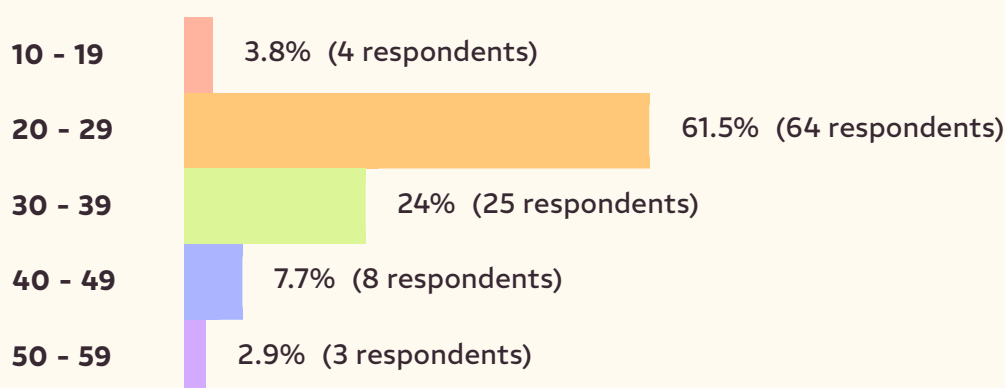
## Activity Introduction

PLUHO is deeply interested in hearing the inner thoughts we hold about ourselves and our identities: the things we carry, the moments that shaped us, and the truths we may not always say out loud. Your responses will help us better understand the inner conflicts or external challenges that affect your self-acceptance and help us design the next steps of our campaign in navigating shame and promoting radical self-acceptance.

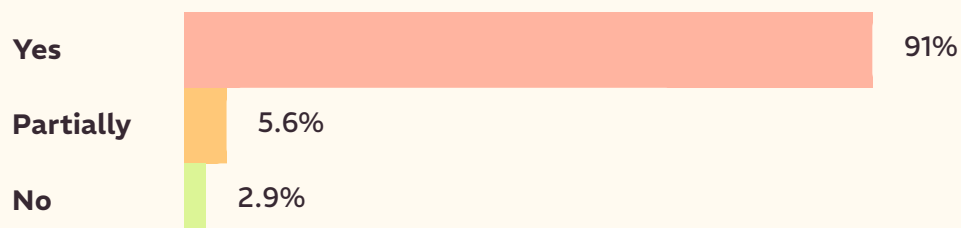
## Data Collection Summary

**Total responses:** 104 (as of 10 June 2025)

### Respondent Ages:

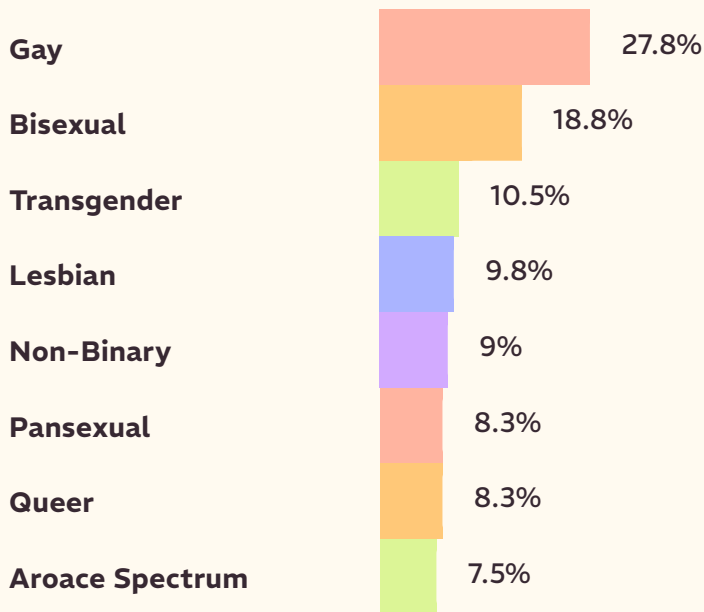


### Outness (Visibility):

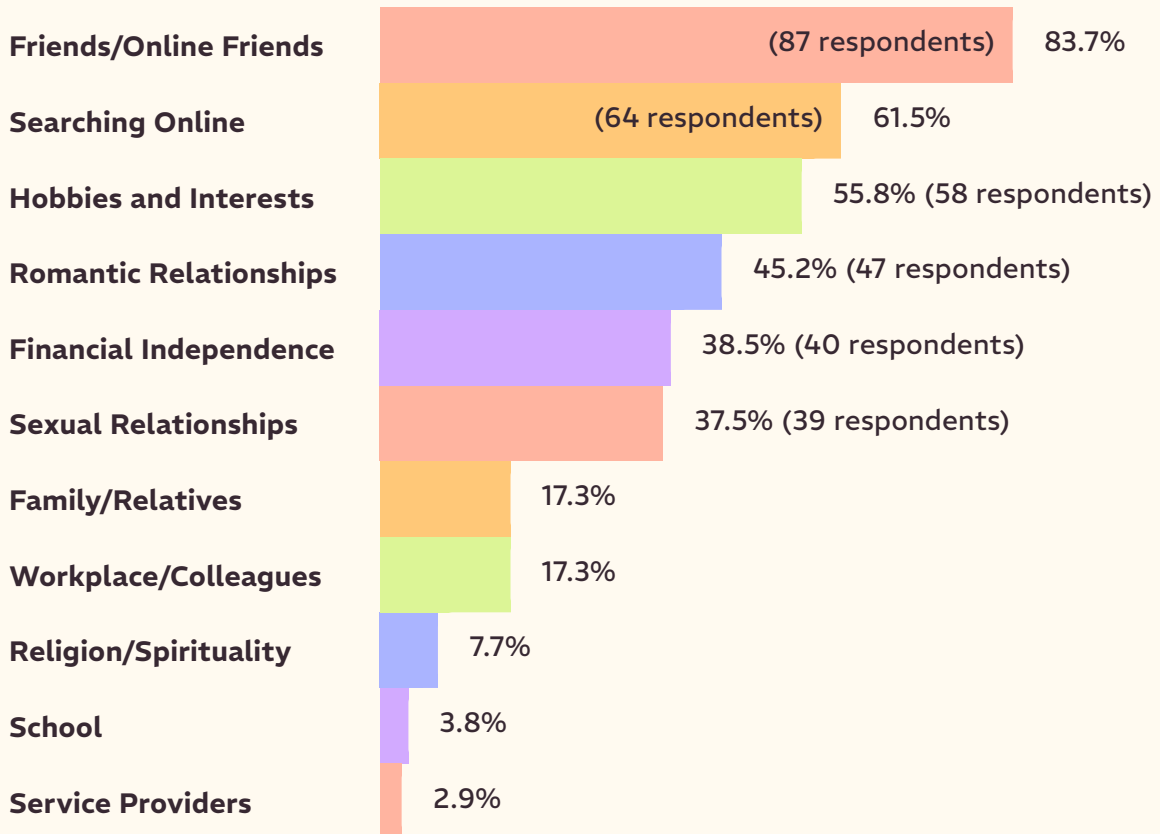


### Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation:

Respondents identified with a variety of LGBTQIA+ identities



### Factors Supporting Self-Acceptance:



# The Five Domains of Self-Acceptance



Through thematic narrative analysis, we have identified five interconnected domains that shape LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia's experiences of self-acceptance. These domains reveal both individual resilience strategies and the systemic barriers that must be addressed. Rather than representing linear progressions, they reflect ongoing, contextual negotiations that people engage with throughout their lives.



## Domain 1

# Navigating Authenticity and Disclosure

A majority of respondents (91.3%) identified as “out” with at least one person, and their detailed responses display the complexities of coming out, as suggested by this statistic: a resilient motivation to practice authenticity and self-celebration, even amid difficult negotiations within relationships and communities.

## 1.1 Strategic authenticity shapes how to navigate safety and self-disclosure

Community members demonstrated a sophisticated awareness of context in managing their safety, recognising that different environments may require varying levels of openness and discretion to ensure their well-being. Universal disclosure is not a requirement for authenticity; rather, it is a strategy to overcome internalised shame while navigating real-world risks.

Coming out is optional. Prioritize safety—not everyone deserves your truth.



Age 29  
Nonbinary Bisexual

Be safe and discreet but seek out others from within and outside community.



Age 57  
Gay

Just be myself, but still need not too open.



Age 38  
Bi

Close friends.



Age 42  
Gay (*selective but intentional community*)

## 1.2 Boundary-setting allows individuals to establish limits that safeguard their well-being and foster healthier relationship

Many respondents described a practice of careful discernment — actively minimising exposure to harmful people and environments — as a meaningful step toward authenticity.

Remove yourself from people that won't accept you if they ever find out.



Young community member

Never care about what people says about you.



Age 35  
Transwoman

Knowing the boundaries, and that boundaries are different from one person to the other.



Age 38  
Gay

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## 1.3 Choosing authenticity on safer terms serves as a way for individuals to reclaim their agency

This deliberate movement toward safety, and the active creation of spaces outside dominant and oppressive environments, marks a pivotal shift for many community members. They have transitioned from seeking external acceptance to trusting in their inherent worth.

Be shameless.



Age 32  
Gay

I have no shame  
lmao it's the world that is wrong.



Age 35  
Pansexual

My life, my choices, and start celebrating 'me'.



Age 51  
Gay

Don't waste this one life to make other people happy. It's our one responsibility to make ourselves happy.

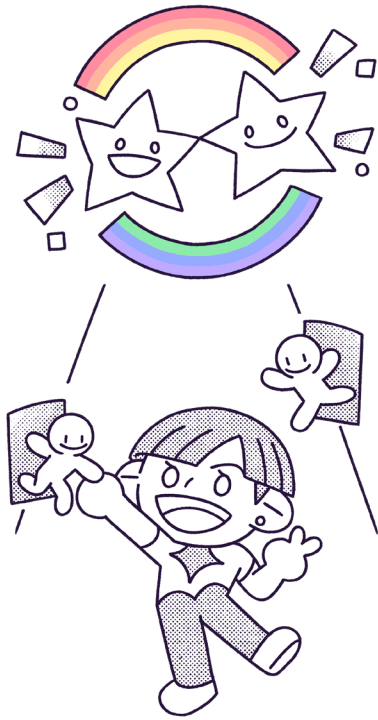


Age 44  
Lesbian

Acceptance yourself, embrace yourself, be who you are.



Age 48  
Gay



## Domain 2

# Community Connection and Chosen Family

Friends and online friends emerge as strong factors in self-acceptance (83.7% of respondents), indicating that community validation is a transformative force for overcoming internalised fear and homophobia.

## 2.1 Community and chosen family offer healing from the isolation and shame imposed by discrimination

Concerted state actions that diminish sexual and gender minority spaces, particularly community spaces, impose isolation that perpetuates shame. The community has been a healing space for LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia to address their internalised shame and homophobia. Creating and protecting chosen families holds significant value in the absence of broader societal acceptance and in the face of ongoing discrimination, as these connections offer essential support and understanding that help individuals through a hostile environment to navigate their identities and experiences.

My friends accepted me for whoever I am. They've been my pillar of support.



Age 18  
Bisexual

Having queer friends online and offline made me feel 'normal'—I realized I wasn't alone.



Age 23  
Queer Cis Woman

Find a group of people you can call family, whether blood-related or chosen.



Age 29  
Non-binary  
Trans Femme

## 2.2 Types of Supportive Relationships

### Romantic Partnerships as Affirmation (45.2%):

Young community members especially obtain validation through romantic relationships where they are loved as they are.

My partner shows me that as a transgender, he still loves me regardless of my body and my gender identity.



Age 23  
Transgender

### Chosen Family Networks:

Friends who become family provide consistent support.

THEY'RE VERY SUPPORTIVE OF ME COMING OUT!!!!



Age 23  
Transgender

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## 2.3 Digital spaces as a way to find community and connection

Digital spaces function as an alternative space to connect with other LGBTQIA+ individuals and like-minded people. These online relationships represent real forms of intimacy and support.

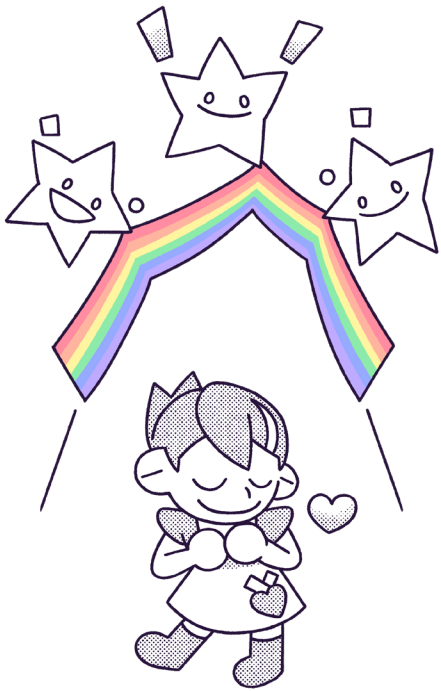
The Malaysian queer community online is bustling. Make friends and meet up with others.



Age 24  
Queer/Bisexual/Nonbinary

### Understanding the Deeper Patterns:

Community building becomes both a survival mechanism and a form of resistance. In societal exclusion, networks of belonging serve to validate community member's identities. Self-acceptance is not just an individual achievement — it is a community effort that requires support, encouragement, and shared experiences among members of the community to foster a sense of belonging and validation.



## Domain 3

# Financial Independence as Foundation for Safety and Thriving

Financial independence was identified by 38.5% of respondents as crucial for self-acceptance. However, the relationship between economics and LGBTQIA+ experience is more complex than just being visible—it's about access to safety, community spaces, healthcare, and the ability to escape toxic environments.

### 3.1 The safety net allows individuals to risk rejection and escape harm, rather than focusing solely on visibility or freedom from shame

Financial independence doesn't make people more visible or less ashamed—it provides the safety net to risk rejection and escape harm. Wealthy LGBTQIA+ individuals may still be closeted or struggle with internalised shame, while many trans individuals have limited options because they remain highly visible in their transition, regardless of financial status.

Once I started being financially independent, I decided to full on accept that I'm trans and started transitioning. Prior to that I was mainly scared that I'd be homeless.



Age 26  
Bisexual Trans Man

Financial independence was the foundation of my self-acceptance. Knowing I could support and sustain myself no matter what meant I didn't have to rely on anyone's approval or fear losing anything for being who I am.



Age 29  
Gay

Financially independence means I can live on my own even if family were to disown me... Self-acceptance comes from the willingness to let go. To let go of the people who are against it. But to do it after having financial freedom will be a better choice.



Age 28  
Queer-Pansexual

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### 3.2 Financial independence enables physical escape from harmful family situations, religious communities, and hostile environments

For many, financial independence translates to the capacity to leave harmful family situations, religious communities, or hostile neighbourhoods—not just emotional independence, but physical safety.

Financial stability and moving out from toxic environment would definitely is what worked for me.



Age 25  
Lesbian

Friends provided emotional support, financial independence gave me the freedom and choice to stay away from homophobes.



Age 29  
Lesbian

If still a minor, work hard in your studies and work in part time jobs after SPM so you can go far.



Age 19  
Pansexual/Genderfluid

### 3.3 The gap between personal security and collective thriving varies across different social classes

Financial independence encourages self-acceptance and safety, but community voices reveal a gap between individual security and collective responsibility.

#### The Individualism Trap:

Financial independence can enable authentic living, but when only those with financial privilege are able to thrive, class hierarchies are recreated within our community. This phenomenon is, in part, a characteristic effect of living within a capitalist society that encourages competition between individuals, further widening the divide between classes. We must therefore remain mindful of how broader societal conditions compound the harm of rhetoric that perpetuates shame.

#### Community Voices on Self-Acceptance:

Be independent firstly, build your finance, career and personal life in order to have better self acceptance.



Age 35  
Lesbian

I live only once, and I must be myself in this one life bestowed to me.



Age 44  
Lesbian

Did not feel ashamed. [via financial independence]



Age 38  
Lesbian



### Economic precarity shapes the survival strategies of many LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia, whose experiences are under-represented in this survey

Many LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia who lack economic resources must employ different survival strategies—remaining in hostile family situations longer, delaying transition, or avoiding community spaces that require spending money (events, venues, and even transportation costs). Our survey's demographic skew toward financially stable, English-educated, urban, cisgendered respondents is likely not reflective of these experiences.

**For community consideration, these are valuable questions to explore:**

How do economically secure LGBTQIA+ individuals use privilege to support precarious community members?

What mutual aid networks exist or need building?

How do we create economic pathways for trans people, rural queer folks, and working-class community members systematically excluded from formal employment?

What does collective economic liberation look like beyond individual financial independence?

*Financial independence provides the infrastructure for authentic living -- the safety net to leave toxic situations, access healthcare, and participate in community spaces. However, when it is individualised, it risks replicating broader inequalities within LGBTQIA+ spaces, where middle-class urban queers access resources while working-class, rural, and economically marginalised community members remain isolated.*



## Domain 4

# Self-Education, Media Representation, and Knowledge Seeking

Online searching (61.5%) and hobbies/interests (55.8%) represent how LGBTQIA+ individuals turn to alternative knowledge sources—digital platforms, media representation, creative communities, and self-directed research—to fill the gaps created by institutional censorship and the absence of affirming educational programmes.

### 4.1 Self-directed research as a means of survival and self-understanding

In the absence of LGBTQIA+-affirming education in schools, universities, and mainstream media, community members become their own educators. This isn't preference—it's a necessity that emerged from systematic shaming and censorship.

Do lots of research online, learn more about LGBT and form my own opinion.



Try to educate yourself more through Google, Wikipedia or other websites, learn the history.



Googling everything I don't know, finding support and community online. It really helps to see representation and lived experiences.



Age 21  
Non-conforming/Pan-Asexual

Searching online was super helpful in educating me on my own community and also other's perspectives and perceptions of our community. I learned that people's ignorance comes from a lot of places but the best we can do is to educate and advocate for ourselves.



Age 23  
Gay/Agender

## 4.2 Online resources help to counter shame-based narratives, particularly around health and identity

Online resources offer an opposing idea that LGBTQIA+ identities are wrong, sinful, or shameful. This phenomenon is particularly significant for medical and health information, which has long been suppressed, distorted, or filtered through stigma and shame-based messaging by health and religious institutions.

Reddit and queer forums normalized my identity. I learned HRT isn't 'sinful'—it's healthcare.



Age 39  
Trans woman

YouTube videos taught me LGBTQIA+ pride isn't shameful.



Age 21  
Lesbian

Youtube video about it is fine to be LGBTQIA+, and teach us how to accept and love ourself.



Age 21  
Lesbian

I learned so much about the queer community, how queer Muslims also exist, and how my feelings are valid.



Age 29  
Gay

## 4.3 Representation in media and online spaces affirms for LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia that their identities are valid and worthy

Seeing LGBTQIA+ characters and stories—especially in media that portrays queer love as normal, joyful, and worthy—lends to more positive narratives, directly challenging dominant cultural images that position it as either deviant or tragic.

Anime like Yuri On Ice showed me queer love is valid. Fanfiction was my safe space to explore.



Age 23  
Demi+Pansexual

Trans people sharing their happy lives on social media, and international sites like Reddit.



Age 39  
Trans woman

I don't feel alone whenever I see my people online, living their life.



Age 33  
Bisexual

And better yet, Yuri On Ice (an anime) taught me that I could date and love another man, that it was alright to do so. Animated series like Deadendia also helped bc for the first time in forever there was an unapologetic transmasc MC.



Age 28  
Pansexual Transman

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## 4.4 Creative expression and online communities provide a space to explore identity and find connection

Fanfiction, art, online creative communities, and hobbies — both digital and offline — provide safe spaces for identity exploration and experimentation. These are not mere pastimes for personal entertainment; they are avenues of identity-making that allow people to try on different expressions without immediate social consequences.

I began navigating my sexuality and intimacy early on through media, specifically consuming queer themed movies, books and of course, fanfiction.



Age 23  
Demi+Pansexual

Knowing that im not alone in the way that i feel about myself. Especially online artists who express their queerness through their art.



Age 26  
Nb Butch Lesbian

## 4.5 Digital spaces connect isolated individuals to broader networks of support and affirmation

Digital spaces connect isolated LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia—particularly those in rural areas, conservative families, or regions without visible queer communities—to broader networks of support and affirmation.

I had exposure to the queer community online as a teenager and that helped to normalise queer experiences.



Age 26  
Bisexual Transmasc Genderqueer

Online spaces and friend spaces allow free flow of information related to HRT, emotional support.



Age 30+  
Bisexual

It helped me minimize the mindset of internalised homophobia and being incredibly relieved that there were many people like me in Malaysia. Just very hidden.



Age 19  
Pansexual/Genderfluid

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## 4.6 Digital spaces and self-directed learning transforms access to knowledge into a source of empowerment and self-understanding

Beyond specific LGBTQIA+ information, the process of self-directed learning becomes empowering—taking control of one's own education about identity, history, and community when institutions fail to provide it.

Knowledge and information I gained from media to understand myself and the topic.



Age 33  
Gay

Understanding individual differences, understanding personal values.



Age 33  
Gay

Made me understand myself better.



Age 39  
Queer

Education.



Age 33  
Agender Demisexual

I have always embraced my queer identity and felt a sense of empowerment when I finally understood what has always felt different or wrong for me... as I continue to learn and expand my knowledge on LGBTQ+ history and queerness in nature.



Age 21  
Pansexual/Transgender



## Systematic erasure drives LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia toward self-directed education as an act of survival and resistance

The need for self-directed research reveals institutional failure: Malaysian education systems don't teach LGBTQIA+ history, healthcare systems don't provide affirming information, mainstream media censors queer content, and religious/state institutions often spread misinformation. LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia become their own educators out of necessity.

### Critical accessibility issues remain:

**Language barriers:** English dominance in global LGBTQIA+ discourse creates significant barriers for working-class and rural LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia, who are more comfortable in Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin, Tamil, or other languages. The lack of LGBTQIA+-affirming resources in local languages compounds isolation.

**Class and digital access:** Not all LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia have reliable internet access, devices, or data plans to conduct extensive online research. Those in rural areas or from working-class backgrounds face additional barriers to self-education, such as limited access to educational materials, fewer community support networks, and a lack of mentorship opportunities that could facilitate their learning.

**Education level:** Self-directed research assumes literacy, research skills, and critical thinking to distinguish credible information from misinformation—privileges not equally distributed.

**The political domain:** That LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia must educate themselves about their own identities and communities—rather than receiving this information through formal education, healthcare, or media—is itself a form of systemic violence. Self-education serves as both a survival strategy and a political act, resisting erasure by pursuing knowledge that institutions refuse to offer. Community members don't just learn about LGBTQIA+ identities—they learn that they are systematically erased, that there are laws criminalising them, and that institutions designed to support young people (schools, families, and religious communities) often actively harm them. This knowledge-seeking becomes consciousness-raising, connecting personal experiences to broader systems of oppression.



## Domain 5

# Navigating the Perceived Conflict Between Religious and Queer Identities

Only 7.7% of respondents identified religion/spirituality as beneficial for self-acceptance; however, comprehensive responses indicate intricate negotiations among community members who contest the prevailing narrative that religious and LGBTQIA+ identities are fundamentally incompatible.

## 5.1 The perceived conflict between religion and queer identity constructed through the country's intertwined religious and ethnic politics

Many respondents had internalised the belief that being LGBTQIA+ means abandoning faith or that being religious requires rejecting a queer identity. This perceived conflict is not natural – it is constructed through the intertwined religious and ethnicity-based politics that have shaped Malaysia's historical and contemporary landscape. As a result, Malaysians broadly, including LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia, inherit a narrative that religion and queerness cannot coexist, that choosing an authentic identity means abandoning cultural heritage and spiritual life.

## 5.2 Leaving religion as an act of self-preservation, particularly for Malay Muslims for whom apostasy carries legal and social consequences

Many respondents chose to leave religious institutions and beliefs altogether, recognising that staying within systems that actively harmed them wasn't sustainable.

Leaving the church freed me from shame.



Age 19  
Trans gay man

Understand that religion is not the be all end all, there are other things more important than religion.



Age 27  
Transgender Man

My main source of shame was religion. I was born Malay Muslim, but once I accepted myself I stopped believing, because I refuse to believe in a God who is cruel.



Age 26  
Bisexual Trans Man

Choosing pride over religious faith. As someone who grew up religious, the best thing I've done to unlearn bigotry is to leave faith and acknowledge its patriarchal origins.



Age 23  
Aroace/Genderqueer

If you're religious, try your best to distance yourself from it & unlearn alot of the homophobic/transphobic ideals. It's never gonna be good for your mental health & self-acceptance to cling to something that is against you.



Age 29  
Lesbian

*Leaving religion represents active self-preservation—refusing to participate in systems that demand self-denial or self-hatred. This isn't "losing faith"; it's prioritising survival and wellbeing. For Malay Muslims, this choice carries additional weight—officially leaving Islam (apostasy) can have legal consequences and social ostracisation, making the decision a particularly courageous act of self-preservation.*

## 5.3 Reclaiming and reinterpreting religious narratives forges an affirming framework in which spiritual and queer identities coexist

Other community members actively challenge conservative religious interpretations, seeking or creating affirming theological frameworks that allow spiritual and queer identities to coexist.

As a Malay Muslim, I unlearned that being queer is 'haram.' Now I believe God loves me as I am.



Age 29  
Gay

I found queer-affirming spiritual groups. Faith shouldn't erase identity.



Age 24  
Queer

If you're a spiritual person, acceptance can come from the realisation that we are meant to be how we are, you were not created by accident.



Age 23  
Bisexual/Pansexual

With a refusal to limit themselves to conservative interpretations of faith, community members reclaim spiritual traditions, seek alternative interpretations, or develop personal theologies that affirm rather than condemn their full identities – demonstrating a resilience that challenges the authority of dominant institutional religious narratives.

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## 5.4 Critical deconstruction of religious indoctrination develops an understanding of how religion can function as a tool of social control

Some community members undergo intellectual and emotional processes of examining religious indoctrination, researching historical contexts, and developing critical understanding of how religion functions as social control.

I used to be anti lgbt for a while due to homophobia and Christian indoctrination. I spent a lot of time researching this topic and looking for the truth. Eventually I became radicalized, skeptical and on path for mental and emotional healing.



Age 21  
Non-conforming/Pan-Asexual

*Such an approach represents agency through self-education—recognising that religious teachings aren't final but are socially constructed, often serving patriarchal and heteronormative power structures. "Radicalisation" here means developing a critical analysis of religious systems, not extremism.*

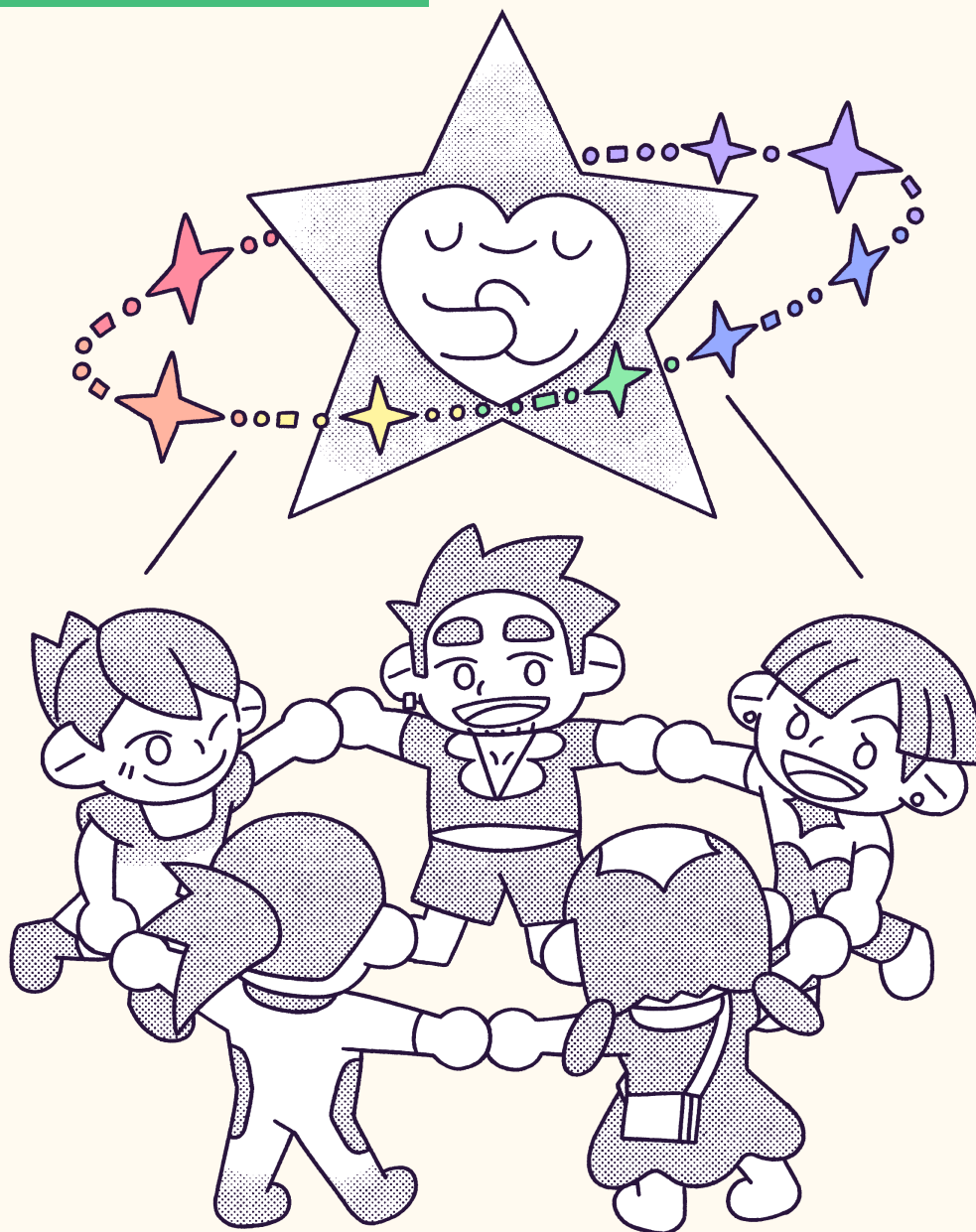
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## **Whether leaving, reclaiming, or reinterpreting faith, LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia resist the constructed narrative that queerness and spirituality cannot coexist**

Whether community members choose to abandon religion entirely or fight to reclaim affirming interpretations, both strategies resist the dominant narrative that queerness and spirituality cannot coexist. The problem isn't religion itself—it's how religious institutions have been shaped by discriminatory legal frameworks, global conservative movements, and national identity politics to position LGBTQIA+ identities as incompatible with faith. There's no single "right" way to navigate religious identity as LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia. Leaving religion, reclaiming it, or developing personal spirituality are all valid strategies for preserving self while navigating systems that demand conformity. The diversity of approaches reflects our community's creativity and resilience in finding paths forward when institutions offer no support.

# Understanding Our Interconnected Experiences



Self-acceptance doesn't follow predictable stages. Community members move between different experiences and domains depending on circumstances, relationships, and personal growth. Some people find community first, others achieve financial independence, still others begin with creative expression—all valid starting points.

## Age and Life Stage Differences

While individual experiences vary, community responses reveal some patterns across life stages:

**Young community members (18-25)** tend to focus on safety and education, rely heavily on online resources and communities, and navigate family and educational environments. "Remove yourself from people that won't accept you if they ever find out."

**Mid-career community members (26-35)** emphasise financial independence and career stability, building chosen families and support networks, and making major life decisions around transition and coming out. "Financial independence gave me the freedom and choice to stay away from homophobes."

**Older community members (36+)** display greater confidence in boundary-setting, focus on living authentically regardless of external opinion, and often mentor younger community members. "My life, my choices, and start celebrating 'me'."

# Critical Interpretation

## Legacies and Contemporary Stigma

Malaysia's Sections 377A, 377B, and 377D are colonial remnants that the state has embraced to impose discrimination and shape social attitudes, positioning LGBTQIA+ identities as criminal even when not actively enforced. Together with Syariah law, it is important to recognise the continued use of discriminatory legal frameworks as state tools to influence social attitudes. The community's experiences of self-acceptance therefore require active resistance to these legacies of criminalisation and moral policing, which are sustained and evolved by the state into a dominant narrative that positions LGBTQIA+ identities as deviant and sinful.



## The Politics of “Coming Out” in a Malaysian Context



Out of 104 responses, only 2.9% said they were not out to anyone. However, their following responses revealed that opening up to trusted friends helped them navigate shame and self-acceptance. This raises important questions: What does “coming out” mean in different cultural contexts? At which point does someone consider themselves “out”?

This overwhelming “yes” response suggests some degree of acceptance among peers and family members, hinting at the evolving acceptance of LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia despite dominant national narratives. But the survey may have reached people in more supportive environments and doesn't reflect the experiences of those in less accepting or more conservative settings.

## Digital Access and Class Barriers

**Internet Access as Liberation:** Internet accessibility enables crucial identity development through self-discovery, education on health and medical topics, and digital intimacies through supportive online communities and international connections.

**Critical Accessibility Issues:** English dominance in global LGBTQIA+ discourse creates significant barriers for working-class and rural LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia. Our survey responses reveal that many participants come from urban, middle- to upper-middle-class backgrounds with proficient English knowledge.



## Multiculturalism and Intersecting Identities



In Malaysia's multicultural context, the intersection of race, religion, politics, and class creates unique challenges. A Malay Muslim person's experience differs significantly from a Chinese Christian's or Tamil Hindu's experience, yet all navigate how their cultural heritage intersects with their LGBTQIA+ identity.

## Systematic Community Strategies

Each act of visible queerness challenges dominant narratives, creates cultural memory, and builds infrastructure for collective liberation. Our community employs systematic approaches to overcome internalised shame:



### Unlearning Cultural Programming:

- Undoing normative religious and socio-cultural narratives about shame and sin
- Recognising how colonial legacies are used to shape contemporary attitudes
- Self-educating about LGBTQIA+ identities and rights

### Reclaiming Agency:

- Centering ourselves and reclaiming voice in societies that demand silence is essential for self-empowerment and fostering resilience among LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- Adopting strategic approaches toward dominant negative narratives
- Building chosen families and affirming communities

# Community Takeaways and Action Steps

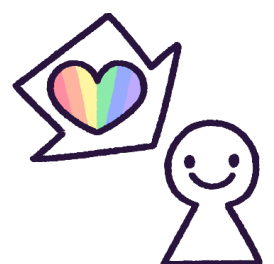
## For Individual Support:

**Provide culturally and linguistically relevant** counselling and support services.

**Create intergenerational mentorship programmes** connecting different age cohorts.

**Develop financial literacy and career support** specifically for LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia.

**Address geographic isolation** and access barriers.



## For Community Infrastructure:

**Support LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia content creators** who develop locally relevant representation.

**Create safe physical spaces** across different regions and language communities.

**Establish sustainable funding** for community programmes.

**Build partnerships** with mainstream institutions ready for change.



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## For Cultural Transformation:

**Build interfaith and intercultural dialogue** around LGBTQIA+ acceptance.

**Create art, media, and cultural events** that celebrate experiences of LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia.

**Document and celebrate positive transformation stories.**

**Develop celebrations** that honour Malaysian cultural diversity.



Conclusion:

# What This Means for

# #ProgressWithPride



# Key Insights for Our Movement:

## Self-acceptance requires comprehensive support.

Community connection, economic security, safe spaces, affirming representation, digital access, and family education aren't luxuries—they're necessities for LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia to

move from shame to resilience. However, our research reveals that this support must be accessible across class, language, cultural, geographic, and ability lines. Currently, these resources concentrate in urban, English-speaking, middle-class spaces, leaving rural, working-class, and non-English-speaking community members isolated. The #ProgressWithPride movement must prioritise building infrastructure where it doesn't yet exist—creating Bahasa Malaysia resources, supporting rural organising, establishing mutual aid networks, and ensuring that self-acceptance pathways are available to everyone, not just the privileged few.

## Resilience is strategic resistance.

Our community has developed sophisticated strategies for surviving and thriving under systems designed to erase us—strategic disclosure, boundary-setting with unsupportive family, building chosen families, self-

educating when institutions fail us, and reclaiming or leaving religion on our terms. These aren't signs of weakness or compromise; they're evidence of collective strength and political resistance. When discriminatory laws still criminalise us, when religious institutions condemn us, when families pressure conformity, and when national narratives position queerness as "Western corruption"—simply living authentically becomes an act of defiance. The #ProgressWithPride movement recognises that every strategy our community employs, from passing as survival to drag as rebellion, represents valid forms of resistance that deserve celebration and support.

## Identity is contextual and strategic.

Rather than having fixed identities that are either revealed or hidden, LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia express authenticity in ways that shift depending on safety, community, and personal

growth. That a majority of respondents (91.3%) chose to be "out" to at least one person, supported by their detailed responses, reflects this contextual authenticity — being fully themselves with chosen family while maintaining strategic boundaries at work; celebrating queerness online while navigating religious spaces carefully; and living openly in urban Kuala Lumpur while remaining discreet when visiting conservative hometowns. Contextual awareness and a sense of self-security serve as anchors for the resilient practice of being authentic through discernment and boundary-setting. The #ProgressWithPride movement reflects the dynamic and fluid ways community members balance authenticity with safety and self-celebration with survival.

## Experiences are personal and political.

Broader social change supports individual self-acceptance experiences, and vice versa. We cannot separate healing personal shame from challenging the systems that create it—discriminatory laws, religious conservatism, family expectations, economic precarity, and cultural erasure. When one person achieves financial independence and can finally transition, that’s both personal triumph and resistance against employment discrimination. When someone finds queer-affirming theology online, that’s both spiritual healing and a challenge to conservative religious monopolies. When chosen families form, that’s both personal support and rejection of heteronormative family structures. The #ProgressWithPride movement understands that individual healing and systemic change aren’t separate goals—they’re interconnected processes. Supporting individuals in their self-acceptance journeys while simultaneously organising for legal reform, cultural change, and economic justice isn’t a contradiction; it’s interconnected domains.

## Colonial legacies shape contemporary struggles.

Sections 377A, 377B, and 377D—British colonial imports criminalising “carnal intercourse against the order of nature” and “gross indecency”—continue to be used in their modern evolution as state tools to impose the dominant narrative toward LGBTQIA+ people, even when not actively enforced. These laws create legal frameworks, positioning our identities as criminal and contributing to internalised shame and external stigma. The #ProgressWithPride movement recognises that our struggles are not isolated Malaysian issues but are connected to the global histories of colonialism and their ongoing influence. True liberation requires both challenging colonial-era laws and reimagining how we understand sexuality, gender, religion, and Malaysian identity itself.

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## Access shapes equality.

Not all LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia have equal access to community, healthcare, safety, or authentic expression. Working-class, rural, non-English-speaking, transgender, and multiply marginalised community members at the margins face systemic barriers to self-acceptance through no fault of their own. The #ProgressWithPride movement must implement targeted approaches reaching marginalised community members: subsidised mental health services, rural outreach programmes, multilingual resources, trans-specific healthcare support, economic mutual aid, and leadership development centring the most-marginalised voices. Equality doesn’t mean treating everyone the same; it means ensuring everyone can access what they need to thrive.

# The **#ProgressWithPride** movement recognises that:

**Internalised shame and homophobia are learned, culturally imposed, and historically shaped—which means they can be unlearned through community action and systemic change.**

The shame LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia experience isn't inherent; it's produced by specific systems—discriminatory laws, conservative religious interpretations, heteronormative family structures, cultural erasure, and economic precarity. If shame is constructed, it can be deconstructed. Community education, affirming representation, legal reform, economic support, and cultural transformation can dismantle the systems producing shame. Individual therapy and personal growth matter, but they're insufficient without also challenging the sources of shame itself.

**Resilience requires both individual healing and collective resistance to oppressive systems.**

Supporting individuals in their self-acceptance journeys while leaving oppressive systems intact isn't liberation—it's helping people cope with oppression. True resilience involves both healing personal trauma AND organising

collectively to dismantle systems causing that trauma. The #ProgressWithPride movement holds both: providing immediate support for community members navigating shame while simultaneously working toward legal reform, cultural change, economic justice, and decolonisation.

**Authentic self-expression is both personal achievement and community responsibility that must be accessible across differences.**

When some community members achieve self-acceptance while others remain isolated, that's not collective progress—it's inequality within LGBTQIA+ spaces replicating broader societal hierarchies.

Middle-class community members have a responsibility to support working-class members; English-speaking activists must create space for non-English speakers; urban organisers should connect with rural communities; cisgender LGBQ+ people must centre trans experiences; younger generations should honour elders' wisdom while elders support youth innovation. Authentic expression for all requires redistributing resources, sharing platforms, and building infrastructure accessible to everyone.

**True progress addresses class, language, cultural, and colonial barriers to full inclusion.**

Single-issue politics that focus only on “LGBTQIA+ rights,” while ignoring how class, race, religion, language, geography, and colonialism shape who gets

access to those rights, will not achieve liberation -- it will achieve liberation for a privileged few while leaving marginalized community members behind.

The movement commits to intersectional organising:

- addressing economic inequality alongside anti-LGBTQIA+ discrimination
- challenging legacies of criminalisation and moral policing while building affirming futures
- creating multilingual resources while advocating for legal reform
- supporting rural communities while organising urban spaces

Yet notably absent from our data are reflections on using privilege to support others, build community infrastructure, or redistribute resources. The question becomes: what do we do with our privilege once we have achieved independence?

**Malaysian LGBTQIA+ liberation must develop locally relevant approaches rather than simply adopting Western models.**

Much of global LGBTQIA+ discourse originates from Western, particularly American, contexts and doesn't necessarily translate to Malaysian realities. Coming out narratives assume

individual autonomy over collectivist family structures; pride celebrations assume public space access unavailable under restrictive laws; identity categories developed in English don't always capture how Malaysians understand gender and sexuality. The #ProgressWithPride movement honours global solidarity while insisting on Malaysian-specific approaches—understanding how our multicultural context, colonial histories, contemporary politics, and cultural values shape what liberation looks like here. We learn from international movements without assuming their strategies automatically apply.



*Choosing to be visible, creating queer art, setting boundaries with unsupportive family, seeking chosen family, expressing gender non-conformity — these seemingly individual acts accumulate into collective resistance. They demonstrate that LGBTQIA+ persons in Malaysia refuse to disappear, refuse to be ashamed, and refuse to let hostile systems define the limits of possibility. This is what #ProgressWithPride means: not just individual journeys from shame to pride but a collective movement from oppression to liberation through resilience – together.*