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LGBTQ: What Makes Them Invisible

It is said that “Japanese is tolerant of LGBTQ people” (Kazama, 2016). LGBTQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning and queer. Due to the fact that there was less religious suppression of gay and lesbian people in Japanese history, many Japanese people believe Japan is LGBTQ friendly, but this is not the case. Even though Japanese people are kind to members of the LGBTQ community, this is only a surface level kindness. The reality of living on LGBTQ life in Japan has many difficulties. Same-sex Partnership Ordinances, which were introduced recently in Japan, equate same-sex couples to heterosexual marriage. However, in light of the fact that all G7 countries except Japan recognize same-sex marriage or some securities equally same-sex marriage, the circumstances of gender minorities are still behind. Also, because Same-sex Partnership Ordinances in Japan don’t have binding force, there are a lot of gaps compared to legal marriage. For example, they cannot receive their partners’ inheritance without a will, also they are not accepted on spousal visas. Moreover, even for students who aren’t old enough to marry, they are subjected to schools and curriculum are designed based on typical SOGIESC (SO: Sexual orientation, GI: Gender Identity, GE: Gender Expression, SC: Sexual Characteristic). This not only makes gender minorities who may be around students feel invisible, but also contains the implication that gender identity is only male and female. This may cause students of the LGBTQ community to suppress their genuine gender identity regardless of if they feel discomfort in their SAB (Sex Assigned at Birth) or not.

Japan’s hetero-normative social structure is caused by unawareness of multiple gender identities and to improve the invisibility of gender minorities, students should be guaranteed opportunities to face their gender identity with support from education.

As explained before, in Japan, a lot of local governments protect the right of marriage

freedom for LGBTQ people, but this will not protect them nationally. Therefore, they cannot exercise all the same rights that are granted for legal hetero-marriage couples. It is not rare for LGBTQ couples to be looked at with prejudice. This prejudice is the result of an unequal marriage system that is derived from a legal-cultural framework that labels LGBTQ couples as “abnormal” in contrast to “normal” heterosexual marriage. Laws are the values of a society in general. In other words, the fact that same-sex marriage is not allowed by law means, the Japanese government does not think LGBTQ people are real. This means the majority of people in Japan don’t often think about same-sex marriage, instead it is viewed as abnormal because it is not mentioned by the government. The idea that the majority controls the lives and happiness of minority people is unbecoming of a G7 world leader like Japan. Thus, the strongest way to achieve awareness of diversity in society is the institutionalization of national laws that protect same-sex marriage and LGBTQ rights.

Japanese public spaces are structured to promote gender binary ideas. Now, most of our public places are based on conventional wisdom of heterosexual culture, this means that “As a result, the implication that same-sex orientation does not and even should not exist, deeply permeates social beliefs and customs into, the overarching social consciousness. This then leads society to social exclusion of LGBTQ people and ignoring that exclusion.” (Honma, 2019) However, Osaka University had a successful campaign which helped solve this issue. Their campaign had two primary goals, first to change gender binary Male and Female restrooms to All Gender restrooms, and second to include all forms of gender expression (GE) by removing gender binary pictograms that have been in use since the 1964 Olympics. In Japan gender free restrooms are often called “restroom for everyone,” but Osaka University purposefully wanted to stress that their restrooms were open for people of any gender, thus they used the term “All Gender” for their restrooms. “The restroom sign pictograms made in 1964 for the Olympics show a traditional gendered image.” (Sakamoto) Specifically, the blue one of a man in a suit and the red one with a women in a dress, these were originally made for foreigners who could not read kanji. However, recently the second Tokyo Olympics were held, these same designs were used and again they helped foreigners

understand more easily, but this binary structure creates problems for another minority by not recognizing transgender identity. Although, it should be said that these binary structures that exclude transgender people are not necessarily intentional. Often people unconsciously typify GE of men and women, due to socio-cultural upbringing. The policies taken at Osaka University are useful as an example to solve these problems. However, there are still issues when installing “All Gender” restrooms. If there were only “All Gender” restrooms and all of them were private rooms like those for people with disabilities, it may be difficult for businesses because of its financial cost. Yet another, different aspect of that issue is that of awareness. If straight people feel comfortable with traditional binary restrooms, they sometimes don’t think about making transgender people uncomfortable. These straight people are unaware. If straight people refuse to use “All Gender” restrooms without trying to understand the perspective of transgender people properly then everyone may become frustrated. Due to public fears of biological sex differences in the sensitive public restroom space, the only viable solution appears to be offering both gender binary restrooms and at least 1 private “all gender” restroom. Through doing this it may be possible to establish true respect for diversity.

Educational institutions, similarly, plays an important role in forming a person’s consciousness. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2005), compulsory education has a role in “training the people as formers of nation and society based on request of nation and society”, “developing individuals’ characteristics or abilities and improving their personalities”, and “the balance between them should be kept.” Also, as “the opinions about the basic view on the goal of compulsory education”, it says “the goal compulsory education is developing the power for human to live as human through a life”, and it also says “let students pursue their own individuality”, “educate students who establish their individuality and can express themselves accurately” as the specific guideline. However, when we reflect on the present circumstance of education from sexual diversity, our country lags behind other so-called LGBT developed countries. So, I suggest a new school education that replaces the present one which trends

toward heteronormative views and encourages the invisibility of sexual minority. According to Nakanishi (2017), about the relationship between education and sexual diversity, there are some positive opinions that the guidelines for the Course of Study should include sexual minority definition and the writing, “interest in the opposite sex”, of health and physical education should be deleted. On the other hand, however, some have the prudent opinion that teachers should handle the problem with individual counseling because consideration of gender identification is not directly connected to teaching content. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology responded that supporting sexual minority as part of the content of teaching is difficult when they consider teaching students based on differences in their cognitive and physical developmental stages, their guardians’ general understanding of LGBTQ culture and securing the accurate training for teachers. Finally, the writing, “interest in the opposite sex begin to grow” and “interest in the opposite sex grow” remain the latest Guidelines for the Course of Study which was announced in March 31st, 2017. As I explained, education, among others, compulsory education has a contradiction in its meaning or commitment. According to Daisuke Watanabe (2019), education is an attempt to keep and reproduce the society in each age and support students to foster power to live in such societies intentionally. The purpose of education before modern times is acquiring or implanting the rules and norms, order and sense of values in children and "reinforcement" to keep the community of the village. However, after modern times, the worth of "individual" was found because of the changes of the industrial structure, the end of the hierarchical society and the increase of the thought of human right, and developing the ability as the one individual which forms the new community had been attached importance to. Moreover, the education after modern times has to meet the two opposite purposes so there sometimes is friction between education systems and students, education systems and parents. Watanabe says that the education has the function to accept the worth of each student and foster individualities and abilities. On the other hand, Watanabe (2019) adds, it also must produce a citizen who reproduces and perpetuates the existing norm consciousness or sense of value in the society on their own initiative. He says of those elements education has there are two different

dynamics which surround "the citizen." Queer theory is critical of the idea that a particular sexuality is normal and the rest is abnormal. Watanabe (2019) introduces the theory into education using Britzman's theory and positions "queer pedagogy" as "the practice of rethinking of heteronormative education which produces 'knowledge' or 'ignorance', and where 'the student' is "naturalized and normalized.": Queer pedagogy examines the structure of education today and informs of students' of their position as a future society builder within the heteronormative social power structure. Based on these, I suggest a new school education system that still frames students as "the builders of societies" but societies where diversity and mutual understanding between people is the norm. First, teachers present diverse sexualities the societies have, and children think about their own sexual identity. Teachers have to pay attention to not presenting heterosexuality as the only viable option for creating a functioning society. Education systems are required to teach beyond the idea that diversity is only when the majority accepts a minority. They are required to teach that diversity is in fact when everyone understands each other and works together to create a society where everyone has their own sexual identity. Also, in the first place, the majority and minority in this paper are mainly focused on the sexual orientation. So, not the provision of information from teachers who only know the word LGBT, but the presentation of new framework SOGIESC and the opportunity to relativize students themselves is needed. In addition, when the school provides these learning opportunities, teachers have to understand them accurately at first. If their understandings are uncertain or their personal value system favors heteronormative view points, these practices can implant their sense in children. Education is propaganda. So, reinforcement of more open sexual identity education is essential to improve educators' sense of responsibility to urge students to understand themselves or other people accurately.

There are still legislation and school education which can work without the existence of sexual minority in our country, and it is difficult to radically change the social structure to accept sexually diverse identities without rethinking about those sectors. However, right now there are also many overhauls in gender neutral designs of public places and in education itself from the view of

pedagogy, so it can be hoped that the society will have more inclusive perspectives, though it is not definite. In this paper, I discussed education as a practice but my ideas lack diversity of viewpoints from both classical and modern social philosophers who have considered the process of social stereotype construction. The situation where sexual minorities live is much more difficult than what I explained here for example I did not explain deeply the philosophy, ethics and history of LGBTQ people. In the future, it will be necessary to consider what should be more diversified based on the understanding and reality of those fields.

(1948word)

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