Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Schooling

The Nexus of Research, Practice, and Policy

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In recent years, there has been emerging awareness of school bullying and discrimination experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) students. Although Japan does not have a cultural history of strong stigma against homosexuality and gender nonconformity in the ways that are true in West, there is growing evidence that homophobia and transphobia are a concern for the climate of schools and the well-being of students. This chapter begins with brief history of LGBT issues in Japan, most of which has focused on the experiences of gay men and lesbians. In contrast, most existing social or behavioral research on LGBT people has focused on transgender people, the most common terminology and understanding framed as gender identity disorder (GID); this body of research is briefly reviewed. Finally, a brief review is provided on emerging research on the school experiences of LGBT students.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LGBT ISSUES IN JAPAN

Japanese culture and the major religions in Japan do not have a history of hostility toward LGBT people. As a result, Japan historically has not been explicitly "homophobic" or "transphobic." Traditional Japanese religions, such as Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism, do not prohibit homosexual behaviors and have, in certain contexts, viewed them positively. Until the mid-19th century, Japan was tolerant toward same-sex sexual conduct and relationships (mainly between males; Shoushi, 2008). For example, Japan's samurai capital, Edo (Tokyo) was inhabited by large numbers of samurai and their retainers, among whom nan-shoku or "male eroticism" was openly practiced (Hirata, 2014). However, after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, newly imported ideas pathologizing "perverse desires"
meant that same-sex eroticism could not be openly practiced, although multiple scandals surrounding the Kabuki theater and students at Tokyo's military academies suggest that homosexual desire continued to be expressed in these environments well into the 1920s (McLellan, 2000). Despite this history of neutrality toward same-sex desire and relationships, since the Meiji Restoration, thoughts and structures that have been introduced, encouraged, and standardized through westernization have made the male–female (heterosexual) model for families and relationships a norm in Japanese society (Shoushi, 2008).

Over the course of several decades beginning in the 1970s, prominent public incidents involving LGBT people received gradual public attention and are credited with having raised public awareness about LGBT issues. In 1973, a fire at a Fuji high school resulted in the arrest of two gay students accused of committing this crime. Although falsely accused and eventually found innocent, in the course of the investigation the police exploited the students’ homosexuality and treated one of the students with extreme contempt, branding him “abnormal.” Police officers not only shouted verbal abuse at him but also threatened him and fabricated a confession. When they were found to be innocent, it became clear that their arrests and treatment were fueled by homophobia.

Ten years later, in 1983, a female store clerk at a department store in Miyazaki Prefecture discovered an 11th grade high school student (age 17) shoplifting a gay magazine and called the boys’ parents. Immediately afterward, the boy announced that he was going to the bathroom; instead, he jumped off the roof of the building, dying by suicide. In 2000, the Shinkiba Gay Murder Case occurred, in which a group of young men brutally murdered one gay man in addition to beating up and attacking numerous other individuals. In 2006, at the Yumenoshima Athletic Park, a group of young people beat up and robbed a gay man who suffered serious bruises all over his body. Later, four minors, aged 17 to 18, were arrested.

These highly public incidents spanning 30 years brought gradual public attention to LGBT discrimination and its effects on LGBT people and set the stage for gay and lesbian community organizing (see Lunsing, 2005). Between 1970 and 1980, the young generation of gay men and lesbians formed a number of gay organizations that engaged in community organizing activities for several years. In 1984, the Japanese Branch of the International Gay Association (IGA), an international organization of LGBT people, was launched, which, in May 1986, organized and held the first Asian Gay Conference. Prior to the conference, in March 1986, OCCUR (Japan Association for the Lesbian and Gay Movement) was formed. Three years later (1990), OCCUR decisively won a lawsuit against the Tokyo Metropolitan Government concerning the Fuchū Youth Hostel, a hostel managed by the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education, for not allowing LGBT groups to use their facility. Despite the Board of Education arguing that it was against their policy to allow LGBT groups to use the facility, OCCUR successful sued the Board on the grounds of discrimination.

Following the growing public visibility and LGBT community organizing activities over several decades, governmental advances to recognize the needs of

LGBT individuals have also occurred. For the first time in 2007, the 6th Tokyo Pride Parade received the backing of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, as well as the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. This support occurred 13 years after the Ministry of Health and Labor's eliminated homosexuality from the list of targets of medical treatment (a change consistent with the views of the World Health Organization [WHO]). In addition, around this same time, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT; at the time referred to as the Ministry of Education; see Ministry of Education, 2014) eliminated homosexuality from the official list of sexual delinquencies included in the country's teachers' guidance manuals. In response to initiatives taken by several LGBT advocacy groups, the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology also declared in 1995 that it would respect the views of the WHO.

Despite these basic advances, measures by the Japanese government regarding education against discrimination (which included education on LGBT issues; Ministry of Justice, 2002) have not been seriously implemented. Overall, a conservative perspective within the Japanese educational system prevents discussion of the rights of sexual minorities. This perspective is consistent with the portrayal of LGBT people in Japan as abnormal, which is perpetuated through often ignorant and derogatory comments used in mainstream Japanese society, which are often reinforced by mainstream Japanese media. For example, various Japanese television informational programs as well as entertainment shows present (or rather misrepresent) LGBT people as cross-dressers, and LGBT people are often portrayed in ways that are derogatory or as objects of humor or ridicule.

EMERGING UNDERSTANDINGS OF GENDER IDENTITY IN JAPAN

In Japan in the 1990s, GID became a subject of scientific research. Much of this research occurred within the medical/scientific community, and most of the language and discourse in Japan regarding gender identity uses “GID” rather than “transgender.” Historically, gender reassignment surgery was rare: in 1969, a physician was convicted for performing gender reassignment surgery on the grounds that it violated the Eugenic Protection Act. This changed in 1995, however, when a professor of plastic surgery at Saitama Medical University filed an application to the Ethics Committee to perform sex-change surgery on two patients (Yamauchi, 1999), and the Ethics Committee issued a report that approved gender reassignment surgery as a treatment for GID. Since that time, numerous individuals have visited the hospital to undergo treatment (Shono, 2001). In 1997, the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology officially acknowledged medical treatment for GID and established guidelines for treatment. In 1998, the first gender reassessment surgery in Japan was completed at Saitama Medical School.

These changes in medical understanding of gender identity took place in the context of similar changes in the workplaces, media, and law. For example, in
RESEARCH ON THE EXPERIENCES OF LGBT PEOPLE IN JAPAN

There is a small but growing body of research on the experiences of LGBT people in Japan, most of which has focused on mental health, and the vast majority has focused on the experiences of people with GID. In one of the few studies of mental health that does not focus on GID in particular, Hidaka et al. (2008) conducted a survey with 2,095 gay and bisexual men and reported that 66% of them had suicidal thoughts and 86% had attempted suicide.

Few studies have included measures of same-sex behavior or identity in Japan; in those studies, the percentages are notably consistent with studies from other parts of the world. In a questionnaire survey conducted by the Japanese Association for Sex Education in 1981 targeting 4,990 university and high school students, 5.5% of male high school students, 6.3% of male university students, 5.7% of female high school students, and 3.9% of female university students answered “Yes” to the question, “Have you ever had sexual physical contact with someone of the same sex?” (Japan Association for Sex Education, 1981). In addition, a 2009 survey documented the percentage of men who have sex with men (MSM) among Japanese adult males: 2.0% had had sexual intercourse with both same-sex and opposite-sex partners (Shiono, Shingai, Ichikawa, Kaneko, & Ito, 2009). In an Internet survey conducted in 2012 by Dentsu Innovation Institute targeting approximately 70,000 adult men and women, 5.2% of the subjects responded that they identified as LGBT (Dentsu Souken, 2012). This number indicates that, in terms of the compulsory education setting, there are one or two LGBT students in every 35-student class.

Much more research attention has focused on transgender people, who are known to encounter difficulties on a daily basis. Transgender individuals reported difficulties especially frequent in school settings. They experience intense stress in connection with school uniforms, bathrooms, physical measurements as part of health checkups, club activities, and gym classes (Kasai, 2015). Many report the emergence of depression and suicidal feelings during junior high school (Nakatsuka, 20:0).

Yamauchi, Shono, and Kasawa (2001) studied these issues, arguing that inconsistencies between one’s biological sex and self-recognition and self-awareness of one’s gender triggers extreme pain and a variety of functional disorders that manifest in the form of difficulty attending school or as mental health problems.

Persons with GID have experiences of being victimized (Tsukada, 2005) and suffer stress from a sense of isolation. In a survey of the 1,138 people who reported GID (average age of female-to-male [FtM] was 25.4 years, and male-to-female [MtF], 32.6 years) conducted by Harima and Ishimaru (2010), 62.0% had reported suicidal thoughts, and 10.8% had engaged in suicidal behavior. Suicidal thoughts and behaviors were reported most frequently among junior high school students, with the following cited as the most common motivators: (1) bullying, (2) a sense of isolation, (3) a sense of physical dysphoria, (4) breakup of a relationship (such as “I cannot have a child with you”), (5) transphobia that has become internalized, (6) a wish to be born a different person, (7) A lack of feeling like they are living an authentic life and a sense of worthlessness, (8) impediments to receiving physical treatment (e.g., opposition by family members), and (9) despair/hopelessness about the future (Harima & Ishimaru, 2010).

Nakatsuka and Emi (2004) conducted a self-recorded questionnaire survey with 329 individuals who reported GID and found that, compared to FtMs who often begin to acknowledge a sense of gender dysphoria before entering elementary school, MtFs develop a sense of gender dysphoria around the beginning of adolescence. The most frequent incidents experienced by GID students during adolescence were nonattendance at school (29.2%), suicidal thoughts (74.8%), and self-harm and suicidal behavior (31.0%). Moreover, 17.9% of them also showed a secondary condition in adolescence, such as obsessive-compulsive neurosis or depression, and these conditions are more frequent among MtFs.

Japanese psychiatrist Katsumi Harima (2013) reported suicide-related data for GID as a result of questions asked of patients who visited his office and were diagnosed as GID between 2008 and 2009. The mean age was 25.4 for FtM (age range from 13 to 54) and 32.6 for MtF (age range from 14 to 66). They experienced suicidal thoughts and attempts during junior high school years most frequently, with bullying as the most common reason given for suicide attempts, followed by isolation, physical dysphoria, lost love, internalized transphobia, wish for rebirth, lack of reality or worthlessness, barriers to physical treatment, and hopelessness for the future.

LGBT ISSUES IN SCHOOLING IN JAPAN

In the context of this research on LGBT lives in Japan, some recent research has begun to focus on the experiences of LGBT adolescents and developmental milestones in the development of their sexuality, as well as their school experiences.
In March 2000, the national government cited LGBT issues as one of the human rights needs to be addressed in Japanese society. In addition, the Ministry of Justice and MEXT included LGBT people and issues in a report focused on human rights education. Ten years later, in 2010, MEXT issued a circular to each board of education regarding special care for transgender students. During this period, each regional board of education has grappled with LGBT-related issues: notably, most of the focus has been on issues regarding gender identity rather than LGB identity. Most recently, in 2014, MEXT reported that 656 students had grappled with issues related to gender identity and expression in schools.

In the context of these changing attitudes about LGBT issues in schooling, several studies have been conducted to understand students’ experiences in schools or the attitudes and understandings of teachers. Hidaka et al. (2007) conducted a survey on life events (or sexual identity milestones) with 1,025 gay and bisexual youth and found that they “started to realize being a gay” at age 13.1, “learned the words of homosexual or gay” at 13.8 years of age, “faced they were not heterosexual” at 15.4, and “realized being a gay” at 17 years of age. What is important is that most of these milestones happen during junior and high school years. According to three Internet surveys conducted by Hidaka in 2006, between 50% and 60% of gay and bisexual males experienced being verbally bullied with words such as “homo” and “faggot,” 64.1% harbored suicidal wishes, and 15.1% had attempted suicide (Hidaka, 2006). In a 2005 study, 2,255 LGBT youths were asked about their experiences at school and whether they had learned about sexual minorities: 78.5% had not learned at all, 3.9% learned of them as abnormal, and 10.7% learned negative information about sexual minorities (Hidaka, Kimura, & Ichikawa, 2005). In a 2013 study, 5,979 teachers were asked whether they have taught LGBT issues in class: 77.5% reported that they did not include any attention to LGBT issues in classroom. When asked why, the first reason given was that they did not feel the necessity of teaching these issues, and the second was that they did not have knowledge about LGBT (Hidaka & Hoshino, 2013).

The Inochi Rispekuto Howaito Ribon Kyanpein (which translates to “the life respect white ribbon campaign”) conducted a survey in 2013 with 609 LGBT youth and adults, aged between 10 and 35 (average age was 22.9) (Inochi Respecto Howaito Ribon Kyanpein, 2014). Among them, there were 154 gay and bisexual men, 210 lesbian and bisexual women, and 245 transgender youth and adults (65 PtM and 180 MtF). Among the transgender respondents (or those reporting GID), in response to the question “Did you talk to anyone [when you began to feel your gender discomfort?]” between 20% and 30% answered yes, citing that they talked to classmates and their mothers. Among LGB respondents, in response to the question “When did you notice your feeling toward same sex?” males responded on average around 7th grade, and females around 8th grade, with 10% of respondents citing that they talked to somebody, primarily classmates or friends of a similar age group. MtF transgender youth experienced the most isolation in class, not wanting to go to school, experiencing flashbacks from early school years, suicide attempts, and distrust of people.

Sexual and Gender Minorities and Bullying in Japan

Regarding their classroom environments, 84% of transgender youth had heard LGBT-related jokes and experienced teasing in school, and 65% had experienced LGBT-related bullying.

Among students who experienced LGBT-related bullying, 53% experienced either physical or verbal violence, and 49% experienced being ignored or excluded in class. These incidents happened most frequently in 8th grade, and transgender females (MtF) experienced the most severe physical and/or sexual assaults. Some bullying had happened only during the most recent school year (28%), but most students reported that bullying had been ongoing for more than 1 year (72%). Transgender males (PtM) in particular reported that they had experienced bullying for more than 5 years on average (43%). When asked about how they responded to bullying, 52% had not talked to anybody, 29% had talked to their mothers, 19% had talk to homeroom teachers, and 10% had talked to classmates. For those who had talked to others, 69% reported that the listener was sympathetic, 37% discussed solutions with the victim, 20% blamed the victim, and 16% did not care (Inochi Rispekuto Howaito Ribon Kyanpein, 2014).

CONCLUSION

Although there has not been a strong cultural history of homophobia and transphobia in Japan, discrimination toward LGBT people clearly exists, and many LGBT people experience a conflict between cultural values for heterosexual roles and their sexual identities. Several support organizations have been formed to support LGBT people in recent years. Along with researchers, growing understanding of LGBT issues in education in Japan will help people working in schools and other educational sites to deepen their understanding that LGBT issues are human rights issues that need to be addressed in schools. With such a change in awareness, it will be possible to provide more support to school-aged children and improve the school climate in Japan for LGBT and all students.

REFERENCES


