

Rethinking Gay Liberation: Sexual Minority Movements in Contemporary Japan

By

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Anthropology

in the

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DAVIS

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2021

## Abstract

This dissertation aims to develop a critique of gay liberation based on an ethnographic study of LGBT movements in contemporary Japan. Tensions within the so-called LGBT community in Japan appear to grow along with intensifying debates about marriage equality, which is increasingly becoming a barometer for national development and fought for in the name of anti-homophobic resistance in today's globalizing world. Against this backdrop, this dissertation examines the distance between two primary groups—a non-profit LGBT organization Tokyo Rainbow Pride and one segment of their audiences, Tokyo amateur gay volleyballers—by asking the following questions: (1) Is gay liberation necessary in Japan? (2) How do divergent ways of living a queer life unfold in Japan? (3) What does the existence of diversity among LGBTs do to the Euro-American(ized) notion of gay liberation? Based on long-term participatory fieldwork in Tokyo (2018-20) and by braiding together queer studies, Japan scholarship, and social-movement research, I argue that disagreements over what constitutes gay liberation complicate the very cause in family-oriented Japan. More specifically, Japan demands the suspension of anti-homophobia in intersectional analysis and in the politics of gay liberation, as the existence of anti-homosexual discrimination is as fragile as the state of an anti-discrimination foothold among sexual minorities in the nation. At present, it is difficult to gauge the prospect of Japanese LGBT movements given the whims of the Japanese government under international pressure. In short, this context-sensitive, comparative, and policy-relevant study of gay liberation contributes to discussions about sexual inequality, nation-state formation, and social activism in the discipline of anthropology.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the following individuals and institutions. First, Dr. Amy Sueyoshi and Dr. Gust Yep at San Francisco State University taught me the importance of engaged scholarship when I began my study in the US. At Yale University, Dr. William Kelly and Dr. Karen Nakamura helped me prepare for doctoral study in anthropology, and Dr. George Chauncey and Dr. Daniel Botsman encouraged me to consider history seriously in my anthropological work. At the University of California, Davis (UCD), the department of anthropology accommodated me warmly. My dissertation chair Dr. Janet Shibamoto-Smith encouraged me to be uncompromising in writing and translation and tremendously helped me throughout my research and time in the anthropology program at UCD. Other anthropology faculty, including Dr. Donald Donham, and colleagues, in particular Doris Duangboudda, Mei-chun Lee, and Ishani Saraf, stood as pillars of support. Additionally, Dr. Lynette Hunter and Dr. Larry Bogad, along with Dr. Shannon Riley at San Jose State University, helped me equip myself with performance studies perspectives. This research benefited from financial supports from UCD. During fieldwork in Tokyo, Dr. Tom Gill at Meiji Gakuin University and Dr. James Welker at Kanagawa University allowed me to share my research with their undergraduate students and receive much inspiration. Bunkyo Gakuin University allowed me to have teaching experiences while conducting fieldwork, and my zemi students posed good intellectual questions and helped me sustain my motivation. At Japan Studies Association's annual conference, Dr. Shingae Akitomo and Dr. Genaro Castro-Vázquez stimulated my thinking. I would also like to thank TRP staff and Ni-chōme volleyballers, who enabled this research. Finally, many thanks go to my family, who unconditionally supported my decision to pursue an academic career. I would sincerely like to thank all of you.

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## Explanatory Notes

Pseudonyms are used for participants, groups, and third parties except for public individuals and organizations. Japanese names are given in the culturally appropriate order, family name first, except when I discuss scholars who have published in English. All quotes from Japanese sources are my translations unless otherwise noted. Japanese terms are italicized, followed by English translations. Occasionally, I break this rule for flow by placing Japanese transliterations after English translations. Key Japanese terms are given in Japanese script along with the proper romanization. For long quotes from Japanese participants and sources, Japanese orthographic texts are used instead of transliterations, followed by English translations.

Some parts of this dissertation come from my earlier work: *Homonational Tongue?: Onē-Kotoba (Queen’s Language) among Tokyo Amateur Gay Volleyballers* by Journal of Asian Pacific Communication (© 2021 John Benjamins Publishing Company); *Making Japan “Out-and-Proud” through Not-Yet-Consensual Translation: A Case Study of Tokyo Rainbow Pride’s Website* by Queer Cats Journal of LGBTQ Studies 1(1) (© 2015 Queer Cats Journal of LGBTQ Studies).

## Introduction

On July 23rd in 2021 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the postponed Tokyo Olympics finally kicked off under the official motto, “United by Emotion,” meant to stage the power of sport for diverse people to surpass differences.<sup>1</sup> Aside from looming worries about a likely surge of new coronavirus infections, the mega-sport event appears to have marked a new phase in global gender and sexual politics, having recorded the highest ratio of female participants (48.8%) and the highest number of out LGBT participants (142) in Olympic history (Sankei Sports 2020; YAHOO Japan 2021).<sup>2</sup> None of these out LGBT athletes were Japanese, however. In fact, about one and half months earlier, the leading Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) shelved the submission of an LGBT bill to the immediate Diet session despite its promotion of the Tokyo Olympics as a symbolic event for diversity (The Japan Times 2021). The prospect of LGBT movements in Japan is difficult to anticipate in light of the whims of the LDP-led Japanese government under pressure from intergovernmental organizations like the United Nations. This dissertation concerns ongoing LGBT movements in Japan, as I engage with two primary groups: a non-profit LGBT organization Tokyo Rainbow Pride (TRP) and one segment of their audiences, Ni-chōme volleyballers (NVs).<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, TRP staff from diverse backgrounds organize themselves out of their firm commitment to LGBT equality and anti-discrimination. On

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<sup>1</sup> The emblem of the Tokyo 2020 Games was designed to reflect “Unity in Diversity,” one of the three concepts, along with “Achieving Personal Best” and “Connecting to Tomorrow.” For more information, visit the official website ([olympics.com/tokyo-2020/ja](https://olympics.com/tokyo-2020/ja)).

<sup>2</sup> Japanese people adapt the globally circulating English acronym “LGBT,” as they use English-loan words, such as *rezubian* レズビアン, *gei* ゲイ, *baisekushuaru* バイセクシュアル, and *toransujendā* トランスジェンダー (often shorthanded as *erujībūī* using the alphabet LGBT), which at least linguistically correspond to “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual,” and “transgender.” Throughout my writing, I follow Japanese critics and interchangeably use “LGBT,” “sexual minority,” or “queer” as an inclusive category for people with various gender and sexual identifications, although these terms have distinct connotations; I note these when it’s important and necessary to do so. In discussing the particular, I use Japanese terms (e.g., *rezubian*) to stress sexuality as a lived concept and experience. See Chapter 2 for more on terminology.

<sup>3</sup> “Ni-chōme” (a Shinjuku district known as a “rainbow” hub) affectively signifies same-sex desire in NVs’ colloquial usage.

the other hand, as volleyball-loving gay men, who have little else in common, NVs discreetly sustain what they call the Ni-chōme volleyball world (NVW). Disagreements over gay liberation exist between these two groups, constituting the so-called LGBT community. Given the distance between TRP and NVW, as symptomatic of general tensions between sexual minorities, the LGBT community in contemporary Japan appears far from being in solidarity for good or ill.

Today, TRP spectacularly carries forward attempts, as dared by precursors including late activist Tōgō Ken (Kawasaka 2015, 76-113), to break silence about same-sex desire and gender non-conformity in Japan. Since the late-20th-century, silence breakers have punctured Japan's family-oriented common sense (Lunsing 2001) through a budding ethos of coming-out (Maree 1997). However tenacious, their efforts seem tenuous in the absence of such an overarching "glue" as decidedly homophobic discrimination (religious demonization, legal exclusion, medical intervention, etc.), which has dramatized the so-called gay liberation elsewhere (Lunsing 2005a; McLelland & Sukanuma 2009). In order to popularize "out-and-proud" activism in Japan, TRP combines protest and play through its signature event Parade & Festa aimed at attracting many audiences, including heterosexual families, LGBT expatriates, and sponsoring institutions. As TRP promotes Japan as one of Asia's most progressively LGBT-friendly nations, its activism increasingly appears in line with Japan's (at least superficial) agenda for diversity and inclusion.

In the meantime, NVW quietly stands apart from "out-and-proud" attempts by such organizations as TRP to enlist allies far and wide under the globally circulating acronym "LGBT." NVW is sustained by predominantly same-sex desiring men, some of whom are married or seek to marry women. Many NVs currently express concerns with TRP, which focuses on visibility as a necessity despite its organizational commitment to diversity. As an arena for those who discreetly share a passion for men and volleyball, NVW seems to stray from



the Japan of the 21st-century that is circumspectly venturing to accommodate TRP's activism and its broadly targeted beneficiaries. In Japan's increasingly LGBT-concerned social current, NVs might attract blame or pity due to their relative indifference to coming-out-based fights against alleged homophobia in Japan, as seen, for example, at the International Day Against Homophobia rallying events.

At present, Japanese society is a timely field of study to reconsider gay liberation (Altman 1993; D'Cruz & Pendleton 2013). First, the relationship between capitalism and gay identity seems less linked in Japan because its transition to, and the advancement of, the capitalist mode of production hasn't smoothly facilitated the development of a coherent gay consciousness at a societal level unlike many Western societies (D'Emilio 1983a, b; Greenberg 1988; Plummer 1981). Also, historically, the Japanese government has proactively used sex (pleasure more broadly) as an instrument for social control. This historical inclination to pleasure-affirming governance distinguishes Japan from other Asian, Middle-Eastern, African, and Latin American countries; otherwise, Japan has much in common with these regions in that male sexual behavior within the parameters of supporting a family tends to be mostly condoned, sometimes even encouraged (Allouche 2020; Blackwood 2010; Boellstorff 2005; Engebretsen 2014; Gaudio 2009; Howe 2013; Huang 2011; Jackson 2011; Jeffreys 2006; Mann 2011; Massad 2007; Sullivan & Leong 1995; Yue & Zibillaga-Pow 2012). On top of all that, given Japan's arguably sexually indulgent history relatively unaffected by predominantly anti-homosexual religions, gay liberation appears unnecessary in the first place. What if homophobia in Japan has been produced through gay liberation, which now comes close to the Japanese state's shifting agenda of creating, at least superficially, a diversity-accommodating nation?

Against this backdrop of the official symbiosis between state governance and

homosexuality (Puar 2017), this dissertation asks the following three questions: (1) Is gay liberation necessary in Japan? (2) How do divergent ways of living a queer life unfold in Japan? (3) What does the existence of diversity among queers do to the Euro-American(ized) notion of gay liberation? These inquiries are informed by, and speak to, queer studies (Boellstorff 2007a), Japan scholarship (Kelly 1991), and social-movement research (Edelman 2001). I pose these questions in a moment when Japan's collapsing homogeneity myth (Befu 2001; Kelly & White 2006; Oguma 2002; Sugimoto 2009; Toyosaki & Eguchi 2017) coincides with Euro-America's enduring interest in radical coalition among unequally resourced, varying ignored populations (Allen 2013; Cohen 1997; Kafer 2013), as valorized, for example, in queer of color critique (Ferguson 2003; Muñoz 1999).

To answer the above questions about multiple routes to fulfillment among queers, I employ an ethnographic approach, consisting of participant-observation and interviews, supplemented by archival research both online and offline. Japan demands the suspension of anti-homophobia in intersectional analysis and in the politics of gay liberation, as the existence of anti-homosexual discrimination is as fragile as the state of an anti-discrimination foothold among LGBTs in the nation. Disagreements over what constitutes gay liberation complicate the very cause in family-oriented Japan in a globalizing world, where marriage equality is becoming a barometer for national development. In short, this dissertation aims to theorize about gay liberation in a context-sensitive, comparative, and policy-relevant manner, and contribute to debates about sexual inequality, nation-state formation, and social activism in the discipline of anthropology.

### **Toward Queer Anthropology of Japan as Method**

Theoretically and methodologically, this research adopts an ethnographic approach heavily anchored in performance studies in order to perform and critique disagreement through my

embodied translation (Chávez 2009; Locayo 2014; Yep 2013) grounded in heterolingualism (Sakai 1997; Savcı 2021a).<sup>4</sup> More specifically, I pursue three lines of inquiry—1) queer anthropology, 2) Japan studies, and 3) social-movement scholarship—by engaging with TRP and NVW through fieldwork. Throughout my ethnographic writing premised on the mutually distinct yet reinforcing theory-method relationship, I restage a sense of intimacy from my fieldwork involving TRP staff and NVs in order to backcast Japan and conceptualize, if not proprietorially (Nash 2019, 59-110), queerness as an anthropological contribution (e.g., Blackwood 2010; Boellstorff 2005; Dave 2012; Donham 1998; Engebretsen 2014; Gray 2009; Kulick 1998; Manalansan 2003; Merabet 2014; Murray 2012; Newton 1979; Rofel 2007; Rubin 2011; Valentine 2007; Wekker 2006).

### *Literature Review*

This project links 1) queer anthropology, 2) Japan studies, and 3) social-movement scholarship, as these facilitate my discussions about ongoing sexual minority movements in Japan. My corresponding objectives are the following: i) highlighting the complexity of sexual discrimination, ii) contesting Japan's specificity within a globalizing world, and iii) exploring play (including sport) as a mode of activism. By pushing these aims, I seek to make intellectually and socially relevant contributions to the anthropological theory of gay liberation.

To begin, one ongoing controversy in queer anthropology (Boellstorff 2007; Robertson 2004) is the conditions of discrimination against queers in diverse societies across the globe.

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<sup>4</sup> Among other translation studies scholars (e.g., Liu 1995), Naoki Sakai challenges homolingualism, the idea of a language as a bounded medium for normatively intelligible interpersonal contact (1997, 1-17). Instead, he supports heterolingualism based on the premise that "every utterance can fail to communicate because heterogeneity is inherent in any medium, linguistic or otherwise" (ibid., 8). Sexuality studies scholar Evren Savcı (2021a) has recently identified the homolingual tendency of much queer studies scholarship. Savcı calls for framing language as more than just discourse and translation as a relationally disjunctive practice (ibid., 142-50). Her proposition can be cross-fertilized by insights on embodiment from communication studies in order to consider the sociopolitical potential of translational activity and the role of language in authority formation (Gal & Woolard 2001).

Homophobia as a form of sexual discrimination might appear to be a global phenomenon at first glance. However, many anthropologists (e.g., Engebretsen 2014; Merabet 2014; Murray 2009) remain cautious about universalist human-rights rhetoric, often deployed by some as a means to speak for queers under the catchword “LGBT.”<sup>5</sup> Anthropologist David Murray’s ethnography (2012), a study of Barbados in the allegedly homophobic Caribbean, is an insightful example built on forerunning critical work (e.g., Adam 1998). Instead of (ab)using “homophobia” as a judgmental measure, Murray urges us to contextualize homophobic discrimination and examine its workings from an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1989; Graham 2014; Puar 2012).<sup>6</sup> Rather than arguing for context-specific manifestations of homophobia, however, this dissertation will examine common assumptions shaping much of the evidence of homophobia in Japan.

By suspending “an anti-homophobic approach” conventionally adopted under the banner queer anthropology (Wilson 2019, 1), I discuss sexuality in Japan through geopolitically-minded lenses (Arondekar & Patel 2016; Chauncey & Povinelli 1999; Green 2002; Khor 2010; Liu 2015; Tellis & Bala 2015).<sup>7</sup> In hindsight, gay liberation in Japan has expanded through the HIV/AIDS

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<sup>5</sup> These anthropologists often consult pioneering works, such as *Theorizing Homophobia* (Adam 1998) and *Homophobia: On the Cultural History of an Idea* (Wickberg 2000). Sociologist Barry Adam spearheads an effort to formulate the trio—homophobia (anti-homosexuality), heterosexism (systematic heterosexual privileging), and heteronormativity (a power-laden hetero-homo binary)—as conceptual kin by acknowledging their respective parental disciplines: psychology, sociology, and literary criticism. He approaches homophobic phenomenon as both embodied experiences and institutional forces inseparable from specific sociocultural contexts and their changing histories. While Adam provides interdisciplinary theoretical groundwork, historian Daniel Wickberg ironizes the emergence of “homophobia” against the post-WWII liberal U.S. background of “healthy” attempts (Weinberg 1972) to de-stigmatize homosexuality in return for creating another psycho-pathology. By now, “homophobia” has received criticisms from within the old-haunt discipline of psychology (Herek 2004).

<sup>6</sup> In order to depart from an overdeterministic account of structural power, queer theorists, such as Mark Graham and Jasbir Puar, criticize the monolithic and additive treatment of identity in discussions about intersectionality. Instead, they encourage us to consider multiplicity and becoming in intersectional thinking.

<sup>7</sup> I also have reservations about the notion of “political homophobia” (Boellstorff 2007b, 161-80; Weiss & Bosia 2013), which can confound articulations (Hall 1986; Slack 1996) mostly irrelevant to anti-homosexuality. Importantly, neither correction nor rejection is my aim, inspired by critical work on homophobia (e.g., Mikdashi & Puar 2016, 219).

crisis (now disproportionately affecting the poor). While the epidemic has triggered homophobic backlashes in an often-cited birthplace of gay identity politics (i.e., the Western sphere), such activism has crystallized as a channel for the “gay community” to utilize state-power for the vulnerable in Japan (Moriyama 2017, 110-18; Shingae 2013). Notably, it is late-20th-century Japanese lesbian and gay publications that have minted such words as *rezubianken*’o レズビアン嫌悪 (lesbophobia) and *dōseiaiken*’o 同性愛嫌悪 (homophobia) for accumulating anti-homosexual evidence and resisting socioculturally specific manifestation(s) of homophobia (e.g., Kakefuda 1992, 104-19; Kawaguchi et al. 1997, 109-112). In this dissertation, I refrain from arming myself with the vernacular translation of homophobia for anti-homophobic resistance and, instead, reimagine gay liberation by revisiting Japanese history.

So, what does Japan’s modernity look like?<sup>8</sup> In pursuit of capitalist and imperialist dreams to dominate Asia vis-à-vis world powers (Befu 2001; Oguma 2002), modern Japan appeared to paternalistically formalize its heterosexual future by masking its homoerotic past under the restored reign of the emperor (Benedict 1946; Frühstück 2003; Leupp 1995, 2007; Pflugfelder 1999). Such an ambitiously patriotic “two-timing” mindset (Vincent 2012, 1-23) has persisted despite Japan’s WWII surrender and aborted colonialism. Through postwar reconstruction rife with cold-war tensions (Chen 2010; Mackie & McLelland 2015), the Japanese nation-state has served as a loyal retainer of the US empire in Asia and reinforced its archetypal mask in a dual-coded social landscape (Doi 2005, 85-9; Lunsing 2002; Sugimoto 2014, 33-6). Obligating household continuation while privatizing adult recreation, pro-US Japan has streamlined a conformist and consumer-friendly social current hospitable to many entertainments (Linhart &

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<sup>8</sup> Japan’s science-driven modernization, though responsible for discriminating the ab/normal, hasn’t institutionalized corrective therapy. Many critics (e.g., Fushimi 1991; Kakefuda 1992) have challenged medical discourses about homosexuality. Its removal from the category of “abnormalities” dates back to 1995, when the advocacy group OCCUR pressured the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology.

Frühstück 1998). Legally, the LDP-led government permits ostensibly parent-child gay families through adult adoption under the Family Registration Law (Maree 2014), thereby silently containing same-sex sexuality and sidestepping marriage equality.<sup>9</sup>

Although Japan’s tacit regulation—if framed as a “Japanese” version of homophobia—can be an anti-homophobic rallying point, this dissertation invests in radical emergence (Povinelli 2001, forthcoming 2021) by displacing Japan from a search for a common enemy (i.e., anti-homosexuality).<sup>10</sup> I forsake anti-homophobic argumentation because it risks demeaning both homosexuals and homophobes in a preconditionally alienating formula as in the “tolerantly homophobic” debate about Japan (Horie 2007, 2015, 194-204; Kazama 2013, 2016; Tamagawa 2016, 2018, 2020; Vincent 1996); “tolerant” suggests the abject nature of the tolerated, while “homophobic” judges the anti-homosexual identity of the interpellated. For gay liberation in Japan, I engage with Japanese feminist debates (Kano 2016) concerning frustrations and fulfillments inseparable from Japan’s patriarchal and pronatal policies and practices. More specifically, this research challenges what I call family-obligation (*kazoku eno ongi* 家族への恩義): literally, a filial imperative of hetero-marriage and child-rearing; metaphorically, an intragroup demand for sustaining conformity. Like an ever-present nimbus, family-obligation hovers over Japanese people (Baudinette 2020b; Chalmers 2002; Dasgupta 2017; Mackintosh 2010; Maekawa 2017; McLelland et al. 2007; Sambe 2014; Sueyoshi 2012; Summerhawk et al. 1998). The *ie* (house/family) “tradition” (Ronald & Alexy 2011, 1-24), as filially upheld by individuals enculturated to pursue freedoms discreetly, makes it difficult to establish a common

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<sup>9</sup> The Japanese government passed the legislation of the Gender Identity Disorder Act in 2004, but changing legal sex is inhumanely difficult as one must meet all the strict requirements, including sex reassignment surgery.

<sup>10</sup> Consider the inexcusable murder in 2000 known as the Shinkiba Incident. A group of young perpetrators brutally killed a victim in a cruising park. Citing this case as an example of Japan’s homophobia hardly contributes to gay liberation. How and why did the youth come to be homophobic to the degree of targeting gays for extreme violence? Since the emergence of homophobes is gay liberation’s flipside, we must examine both parties multidimensionally.

frame of reference (Snow & Benford, 1988) for coalitional action (Nakamura 2007, 269-71; Ryū, 2010). Japan's coercively indulgent capacity to defer radical coalition resembles *nurumayu* (literally, lukewarm bath water; metaphorically, a hard-to-get-out-of circumstance).

Finally, social-movement scholarship, as it increasingly incorporates the notion of play (Caillois 1979; Huizinga 1950), helps us grasp ongoing attempts at social reformation by actors situated in networks of agency and authority.<sup>11</sup> Although playful social protest has had a presence throughout Euro-American political history (Hart & Bos 2007; Hiller 1983), including gay liberation (Engel 2001; Gamson 1989; Shepard 2009, 2011), it has received little systematic attention in social-movement research until the new millennium, because social movements in many Western societies have tended to be oppositional to the authoritative (e.g., the state) and theorists have conventionally framed their analyses around "resistance" (e.g., Crossley 2002; Fraser 1990; McAdam et al. 1996; Tarrow 2011 [1994]; Tarrow & Tilly 2007; Tilly 2008; Warner & Berlant 2002). Within such a serious framework in favor of opposition, questions have mostly revolved around whether social movements either object to or comply with the powerful, and a great number of analyses have featured agonism (assuming enemies) or antagonism (assuming adversaries if not necessarily enemies). The resistance-oriented framework doesn't work suitably when applied elsewhere, including Japan, where conflict is predominantly managed by both individuals and institutions in seemingly passive, subtle manners in the first place (Krauss et al. 1984).

In order not to privilege heroic resistance, from which other modes of activism are

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<sup>11</sup> Several social scientists are known for their committed engagement with play and game concepts, including sociologists Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984) and Thomas Henricks (2006) as well as anthropologists Sherry Ortner (1996), Clifford Geertz (1972), Victor Turner (1969, 1982), and Gregory Bateson (1972). Attentive to contingency, liminality, and embodiment, the concepts of play and game are better suited to examine not only tense relationships between multiple players situated in webs of power, but also their experiences of negotiation (whether it be gender, class, etc.) through power-laden collective processes.

measured to be polite contestation at best and eye-rolling compromise at worst, a broader concept of play remains useful to better address collective action (e.g., Bogad 2016; Cassegård 2012; Cohen-Cruz 1998; Harvey et al. 2013; Haugerud 2013; Kutz-Flamenbaum 2014; Melucci 1989, 1996a, 1996b).<sup>12</sup> In fact, an array of delicate interplays between citizens and those in authority unfold in Japan, where, as observed by many area specialists, civil networks and negotiations tend to appear non-confrontational and symbiotic in the face of the state (Goodman & Neary 1997; Kingston 2004; Nakamura 2006; Pekkanen 2006; Schwartz & Pharr 2003; Weiner 1997). While highlighting play, including relatively rule-based games like sport (Besnier & Brownell 2012), as a potentially powerful mode of organizing and sustaining collective action, however, I also acknowledge the state's immense capacity to absorb playful protesting. Indeed, Japan has long been using play as a disciplinary mechanism, dating back to its premodern Tokugawa regime (Hendry & Raveri 2002). In other words, studying Japan helps us assess the radical potential of play as social-movement tactics within a globalizing world.

By braiding together queer anthropology, Japan studies, and social-movement scholarship, this dissertation spotlights such a historically playful state as Japan and reevaluates the politics of pride and visibility in the face of the globally contested Stonewall tale (Armstrong & Cragg 2006; Manalansan 1995).

### *Methods and Methodology*

In the face of globally reverberating “out-and-proud” protests, how can I involve TRP staff and NVs into ethnographic research (Weiss 2011), which is understood by anthropologists as

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<sup>12</sup> Examples of playful activism include the use of radical simulacra in environmental campaigns (Bogad 2016); ACT-UP's creative engagement with such a difficult time as the late-20th-century HIV/AIDS crisis plagued with fear and death (Gamson 1989; Shepard 2009, 2011); the satirical “Billionaires,” who parodied established (serious) protests and criticized a wealth gap in the US (Haugerud 2013); and feminist anti-war movements known as “Raging Grannies” (Kutz-Flamenbaum 2014).



participant-observation, the theoretical-methodological bedrock of anthropology? My answer is to take TRP's seriously playful activism and NVs' playfully serious recreation as both an object and method of study by framing this ethnographic research as a performatively sustained theory-method nexus (Castaneda 2006; Conquergood 1991, 1992; Denzin 2003; Garfinkel 1984; Hunter & Riley 2009; Madison 2012; Wolcott 2005). Because I examine the negotiation of difference between and within the two divergent focus groups—or “publics” (Ikegami 2005a, b)—, frictions are part of my ethnographic research design (Tsing 2005).

Two major field sites were 1) TRP's social activism and 2) NVs' community building.<sup>13</sup> Data were collected through participant-observation, interviewing, and library research during preliminary summer stints (2016 and 2017) and long-term research (January 2018-August 2020) in Tokyo. Participant-observation was for first-hand observations on the two sites, interviewing was for personal backgrounds and experiences among research participants, and archival research at the National Diet Library was for contextual knowledge and up-to-date information about LGBT movements in Japan.<sup>14</sup> A long duration of fieldwork was intended to cover TRP's yearly cycle adapted to an operation of the annual event. During my fieldwork spanning thirty-two months, I accompanied both TRP and NVs in their respective pursuits by taking time out from my own social life in Tokyo.

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<sup>13</sup> Social activism and community building are analytical distinctions, as each has the other's element more or less although they are not the same. While site 1 includes TRP's annual event implementation, same-sex marriage advocacy, and multi-language website management, site 2 includes NVs' weekly volleyball practice, sporadic social gatherings, and periodic tournament participation.

<sup>14</sup> A total of forty-five individuals were interviewed either individually or in a group (3 TRP board staff, 3 TRP general staff, 18 TRP event participants, and 20 NVs). Formal interviewing was conducted in a semi-structured manner based on an interview guide and audio-recorded except for on-site interviews with TRP's event participants and when participants expressed discomfort about the use of an audio-recorder. As for street interviews, I recruited participants during the 2018 and 2019 TRP events as I randomly talked to individuals, who were hanging out in the food and drink area. I took notes during these on-site interviews. Conversations with TRP staff took place at their office primarily, while I interviewed NVs at cafés in Tokyo. Informal interviewing, which spontaneously took place throughout fieldwork, involved more than 20 TRP staff and 80 NVs. See Chapter 2 and 3 for further discussion.

Since research activities had to be planned in accordance with my work schedule (university lecturing and English language school teaching), I generally spend a few weekdays a week with TRP and weekend holidays with NVs, except if there were important TRP-related meetings during weekends. On the one hand, I joined TRP as an observing-staff member, sat in organizational meetings (e.g., preparatory meetings, social gatherings, and study workshops), and attended TRP's annual event.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, I followed various events (e.g., athletic practices, home parties, and weekend excursions outside Tokyo) by joining my affiliated team V6 as an observing-player, formally interviewed twenty NVs (ten teammates included), and chatted with more than eighty men whenever opportunity arose.<sup>16</sup> Although a lot of adjustments were made to my original research plans due to my own social and personal demands (work, family, etc.), I was able to immerse myself in everyday life in Japan.

Both the TRP staff and NVs are diverse except for their shared passion for LGBT activism and volleyball. While TRP primarily consists of young and middle-aged well-educated staff members, NVW is a primarily homosocial and gay group. At first glance, class and education might appear to be a divisive factor as in sexual studies scholar Evren Savcı's ethnographic study of queers (activists and bar-goers) in urban Turkey (2016; see also 2021, 109-22). Although class and access to (a certain form of) knowledge matter and help shape self-determination, what plays a significant role in group formation appears to be a fundamental difference in basic personality: many TRP staff being predominantly serious or diligent and many NVs being predominantly

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<sup>15</sup> Because interviews with TRP board staff didn't fare as I had hoped, I had to modify my approach (see Chapter 2 for further discussion).

<sup>16</sup> Logistical processes with NVs were far easier because I had personally been involved in NVW prior to the initiation of this research (see Chapter 3 for further discussion). As for interviews with my V6 teammates, I recruited ten willing members. In order to recruit non-V6 NVs, I asked captains from ten different teams to distribute my recruitment ad to their teammates via email. 5 non-V6 NVs contacted me and we proceeded to interviews. To recruit more non-V6 NVs, I accompanied V6 whenever it had a practice match with other teams and asked around to find potential interviewees.

playful or laid back. Thus, when TRP staff play, they play seriously, and when NVs play, they play carefreely.

Participant-observation in this research was inspired by the notion of “performative ethnography” (Riley 2009). In performative ethnography, the participant-observer is assumed to develop a sense of self, or knowledge so to speak, by un/learning through field conduct (i.e., a field persona). I explored such an idea of a performative participant-observer by adopting “serious play,” activist-minded tactical performance (Bogad 2016, 1-74), with which to affect and analyze the processes of fieldwork. Serious play fitted my field persona for TRP staff as well as NVs, who were both engaged in their respective “play.” Through radical simulacrum (Bogad 2016, 211-30), I genuinely respected the spirit of fun and engaged with TRP staff and NVs, routinely bombarding them with queries during my fieldwork, full of co-created dramas. Throughout, I followed the notion of “engaged ethics” (Hunter 2014), which posits that “difference does not exist before we make it” (ibid., 9). I anchored myself in engaged ethics, a respectful and dialogical ground for those who enact and create selves in relation to others, however conflicting such processes may be.

In fact, conflict was unavoidable in my research on processes of divergence among queers in Japan. A major challenge was how to do justice to such differing groups as TRP and NVW without privileging one or the other. Because it had already been clear, after my preliminary fieldwork, that a consensus over the meaning of gay liberation would less likely emerge, I made the most of anthropologist Anna Tsing’s approach, “friction” (2005), for studying diversity. Tsing proposes that we, when faced with divergent social movements, frame our analysis around “[the] negotiat[ion of] more or less recognized differences in the goals, objects, and strategies of the cause” (ibid., x).

To examine an emergent shift in power dynamics among queers in increasingly LGBT-concerned Japan, I made the most of textual analysis (Wutich et al. 2015) by conducting theoretically informed, grounded analyses of my data (various “texts,” such as field observations, interview transcripts, and archival sources including audiovisual materials), all gleaned from my fieldwork in Tokyo. During my fieldwork, I began coding my data based on preliminary questions: How do the TRP staff and NVs perceive “Japan” in relation to the “foreign”?; how do they make sense of their own desires, and what are these?; how do they frame and pursue their fulfillment?; and how does Tokyo-centered Japan continue to regulate sex? These questions, as informed by existing debates and notions (e.g., identity and discourse) in my chosen fields of study, helped develop codes (desire, vision, etc.) and identify further themes for later analysis. Participants’ autobiographical narratives, combined with my field observations (Emerson et al 2011), helped my overall analyses. Throughout this dissertation, I highlight the disagreements (Rancière 2010) that emerge when I draw TRP staff and NVs into discourse, positing that living with/in difference approximates, as stressed by anthropologist Jafari Allen, “a violent clash,” which is far from “a happy partnership or an articulated tension between two equally valued constituents” (2011, 98).

In sum, this ethnographic research, best characterized as queer anthropology of Japan as method, contributes to debates about sexual discrimination, nation-state formation, and social-movement performance in the discipline of anthropology. In particular, this dissertation frames disagreement as part and parcel of gay liberation in a globalizing world. By taking Japan as a primary field, I develop a critique of the “out-and-proud” model of gay liberation that dominates Japanese as well as Euro-American scholarship and activism.

## **Chapter Outline**

This dissertation addresses the difficulty of gay liberation for all by discussing what has been in Japan in relation to Euro-American resistance-oriented queer theory. In order to develop a critique of gay liberation in Japan within a globalizing world, this dissertation juxtaposes two divergent groups: Tokyo Rainbow Pride (TRP) and the Ni-chōme volleyball world (NVW). Rather than attempting to overcome their hard-to-bridge distance in search of coalitionally oppositional resistance, this dissertation highlights how difficult it is to discuss sexuality in Japan due to its lukewarm social control.

Chapter 1 contextualizes Japan's lukewarm context. This chapter examines five interrelated yet distinctive domains one by one. More specifically, I consider Japan's historical, legal, social, political-economic, and linguistic specificity in order to establish Japan's family-oriented sociality that forces people to pursue freedoms discreetly rather than coming together under the globally recognized objective of anti-homophobic resistance.

Chapter 2 traces queer activism in Japan by focusing on TRP. This chapter begins with surveying Japanese queer academic and activist scholarship, from which TRP draws for its organizational pursuit anchored in a seriously playful tactic. In order to assess its increasingly powerful presence and presumably promising future, I situate TRP in ongoing attempts of public disclosure and rights claiming dating back to the immediate postwar years.

Chapter 3 focuses on NVW, one segment of TRP's audience. This chapter introduces the history of volleyball in Japan and examines the development of amateur gay volleyball in Tokyo. I dig deeper into NVW so that playing gay volleyball can be seen as one way to pursue fulfillment in family-oriented Japan, however discreet it might appear in the shadow of TRP's "out-and-proud" activism.

Chapter 4 explores marriage equality, an issue over which TRP staff and Ni-chōme

volleyballers (NVs) have disagreements. This chapter situates debates around same-sex marriage in Japan as part of ongoing lifestyle diversification. I show that although both TRP and NVs appreciate lifestyle diversification, marriage equality remains a contentious issue, where a disjunction among the so-called LGBT community gets exposed.

Overall, this dissertation frames disagreement as what drives gay liberation by considering contemporary Japan. Although Japan has made “Gay Liberation” difficult by deferring the establishment of a common frame of reference among queers, the nation has paradoxically allowed the flourishing of many freedoms in discreet networks. Concluding discussions center on such key words as community, conflict, and play in order to rethink gay liberation in and beyond the borders of Japan.

## Chapter 1

### Japan's *Nurumayu* Context: Lukewarm Play

#### Introduction

This chapter contextualizes Japan in terms of sexual control. Anthropologist Nakane Chie, who is known as one of the major *nihonjin-ron* (theory of the Japanese) intellectuals, once considered Japanese academia to be socially *namanurui* なまぬるい (lukewarm) and inconducive to straightforward intellectual debate due to the prevailing expectation of sensitivity to others (2010, 177). While her sweeping claim about Japan being homogenous was criticized subsequently, Nakane did raise many salient points about Japanese social life, including lukewarmness.<sup>17</sup> Around lukewarmness, I center my discussion about the *sei* 性 (sex/gender/sexuality) ideology.

Below, I discuss five interrelated domains—1) history, 2) law, 3) social structures, 4) political-economy, and 5) language—in order to demonstrate that sexual regulation in contemporary Japan is as indulgent as it is oppressive. More specifically, Japan's systematic oppression of homosexuals isn't so much "agelong" intolerance as silent suspension in that the male-dominated establishment continues to ignore same-sex sexuality by relegating it to the shadows of the state apparatus. Japan remains a difficult site of study because the existence of homophobia is in question in the first place.

To begin, stigmatization of same-sex desire through modern medical science hasn't led to the institutionalization of anti-homosexual practices such as corrective therapy in Japanese history. Legally, those in authority have largely ignored, rather than excluded, same-sex

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<sup>17</sup> In *Japanese Society*, Nakane offers such notions as *ie* 家 (house/family) and *tate* タテ (verticality) for an analysis of hierarchically organized institutional and interpersonal management mechanisms in Japan.

sexuality, as Japanese law neither accepts nor rejects lesbians and gays. In today's globalizing world rife with post-cold-war tensions, Japanese social life pivots on what I call “*kazoku eno ongi* 家族への恩義 (family-obligation)”: literally a filial imperative of hetero-marriage and child-rearing and metaphorically an intra-group demand for conformity.<sup>18</sup> Family-obligation has shaped the corporate world and the national economy, regulated almost exclusively by the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP). On top of family-obligation, distance-sensitive communication, ideologically essential to the Japanese language—a foundation for the *sei* discourse—makes it difficult for diverse speakers to have dialogue about sexual issues publicly and coalitionally. In short, Japan's context resembles *nurumayu* ぬるま湯 (literally, lukewarm bath water; metaphorically, a hard-to-get-out-of circumstance).

## 1. Indulgent History

A number of scholars (e.g., Chalmers 2002; Horie 2007; Tamagawa 2020) have asked whether Japan has been either tolerant or homophobic historically. Yet, in retrospect, the frame of the discussion seems out of place, as neither “tolerance” nor “homophobia” helps explain Japan, which has relatively indulged (especially adult male) sexual pursuit rather than reinforcing anti-homosexual intolerance religiously, legally, and medically as observed elsewhere; female-female sexuality in general remains understudied (Lunsing 2005a; McLelland 2005; McLelland & Suganuma 2009). Indulgence is a better word with which to characterize sexual control in Japan.

### *Premodern Japan: The Tokugawa/Edo Era (1603-1868)*

Premodern Japan (1603-1868) is known for the ubiquitous presence of (especially male-

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<sup>18</sup> Family pressures permeate the Asian region (e.g., Boellstorff 2005; Engebretsen 2014). To analyze such a regional pattern in Japan, I have specifically chosen “obligation,” following in the footsteps of Japan anthropology (Benedict 2018, 111-36). Just like Nakane's work, anthropologist Ruth Benedict's work has received a considerable number of both fair and not-so-fair criticisms (e.g., Kelly 1996; Watsuji 2016). Rather than scrutinizing her (sometimes inaccurate and oftentimes overgeneralizing) assertions for scientific validity, I adopt anthropologist Kelly William's coping technique for handling *nihonjinron* and its bashing (1988). More specifically, I treat her text as a creative source of imagination, with which to develop a critique of contemporary Japan.



male) homoeroticism in everyday life. It was compatible with samurai (warrior) ruling and pleasure-affirming culture (Benedict 2018, 163-77; Leupp 2009, 137-43; McLelland 2005, 16-8).<sup>19</sup> First and foremost, same-sex intimacy was part and parcel of a code of ethics among the ruling military and bureaucratic class of samurai, who engaged in sexual pursuit with other (usually younger) men, ranging from unfledged disciples to stage actors and street prostitutes (McLelland 2005, 16-8). Such male-to-male engagement was referred to as *nanshoku* 男色 (male color) as opposed to *joshoku* 女色 (female color), which is male-to-female sexual pursuit; note the male being the subject in both *nanshoku* and *joshoku* (ibid.).<sup>20</sup>

Capitalism was, though pervasive by the 18th-century, yet to be dominant in the Tokugawa social landscape due to the samurai class reluctance for financial pursuits.<sup>21</sup> As work was

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<sup>19</sup> According to historian Gary Leupp, the warrior-peasant separation policy (*heinō bunri seisaku*), starting in 1582 and being effective until the 1620s, played a key role in the development of capitalism in premodern Japan (2007, 137-8). Although most members of the samurai class (5-10% of the total population back then) were agrarian residing in rice-producing or fishing villages, the year 1582 marked their shift into an urban class. Feudal rulers urged samurai to leave for castle-towns, while at the same time the peasant population was disarmed and placed under local administrative control (ibid., 137). The Tokugawa family formally acceded to power in 1603. The Tokugawa family grounded its rule in the Confucian ideology that deemed samurai above peasants, artisans, and merchants (these four groups being major social strata aside from court nobles and outcast groups), and maintained the shogunate for a couple of relatively peaceful centuries (ibid., 138). While consolidating the foundation of social life (safe transport infrastructure and bureaucratic administration), the Tokugawa shogunate established a centralized network of control through a confederation of over 250 semi-independent domain barons in charge of their assigned land territories (ibid.). Although many samurai families, except for the Tokugawa family and powerful barons, were financially unstable earlier, they had come to form a literate class of hereditary bureaucrats, who contributed to relative peace during the Tokugawa era (ibid.).

<sup>20</sup> In “The Comparative Sociology of Same-Sex Love,” historian Furukawa Makoto historicizes homoeroticism in Japan vis-à-vis the Euro-American sphere (1996, 113-30). He juxtaposes premodern Japan’s male-male relational model to an age-based model (e.g., ancient Greek and Sambia) and a gender-based model (e.g., the Native American berdaches and India’s hijras). On the one hand, premodern Japan’s male transgender kabuki theater actors resemble berdaches and hijras in terms of gender presentation and sexual practice. Yet the former were on the social margin without any status or prestige, unlike the latter (ibid., 122). On the other hand, the relationship between older samurai warriors and their younger disciples has a lot in common with that between older philosophers and younger students in ancient Greece or with that between initiated elderly men and uninitiated youthful boys in Sambia. However, the operation of power differs among these three groups. Although the senior determined the code of conduct in Greek and Sambia cases, it was more often than not a young member, who was considered to be beautiful, who could exercise a considerable degree of control over the rest in the samurai in-group interaction (ibid.).

<sup>21</sup> Leupp notes that unlike relations of production in the Euro-American societies of the Enlightenment period, capitalism in premodern Japan didn’t bring about antagonism between competing classes, namely capitalists and workers (2007, 140). He reminds us that “[t]he Japanese bourgeoisie never generated a movement questioning the four-class system. Instead, *chōnin* [commoner] thinkers found ways to validate the role of the merchant or artisan *within* the existing order” (ibid.). Writing about modern and contemporary Japan, anthropologist Nakane Chie also

commodified through short-term contractual wage-labor, merchants as well as townsmen vitalized commerce and consumption, leading to the flourishing of the *ukiyo* 浮世 (floating world) culture: a pleasure-affirming urban lifestyle anchored in entertainment, including state-licensed prostitution (Leupp 2007, 140-3). In order to regulate, rather than liberate, commercial sexual pursuit, the Tokugawa shogunate permitted the establishment of *yūkaku* 遊郭 (pleasure quarters) in major cities. Pleasure quarters served as cultural hubs for *asobi* 遊び (play), where guests, mostly male samurai and commoners, sought recreation at various facilities, such as teahouses and kabuki theaters (ibid., 141). Whereas courtesans entertained male guests at brothels, kabuki actors would customarily take in male and (elite) female patrons for sexual services (ibid., 141-2). As play blossomed within the confines of the pleasure quarters, marriage steadily became a business of household continuation and class reproduction in official discourses (ibid., 141). As for the great majority, farmers, although we need to wait for more research in the English language (Leupp 2007, 143), it is possible to speculate about their sexual life being relatively libertine from anthropological research on agrarian villages in modern Japan (e.g., Embree 1939; Smith & Wiswell 1982): see also Akamatsu (1993) and Nakayama (1983) for Japanese-language historical research on sexual life in farming communities.

Religiously, syncretism took root in premodern Japanese society, which had remained perversely unaffected by predominantly anti-homosexual religions, including Christianity (McLelland & Suganuma 2009, 329). While the Tokugawa shogunate had thoroughly suppressed

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makes a similar claim about capitalist relations in Japan (2010, 96-114). She contends that antagonism usually takes place between those positioned in the same social strata or group (e.g., company A vs. company B or school C vs. school D) rather than between those differentially positioned in terms of power (ibid., 96). Nakane gives an example of union formation in Japan, as she argues that it tends to occur within a particular company rather than across companies involving workers with the same qualification(s) (ibid., 97-8). This social situation is attributed by Nakane to the difficulty of forging a sense of solidarity among union members, whose status considerably differs (ibid.). Although Nakane hardly pays attention to the complex history of unionization in Japan, including the trajectory of occupation-based labor organizing, I still find quite compelling her point about the rarity of coalitional attempts among those placed in the same-level footing to overturn class relations.

the permeation of Christianity during the Edo era (Fujita 1991, 147-247), Shinto (Japan's indigenous mythology-based religion) and Buddhism had assumed prominence. These religions contributed to the creation of an environment compatible with same-sex desire and behavior, since neither Shinto nor Buddhism essentially condemned homoeroticism.<sup>22</sup> Confucianism also became widespread among the samurai class during Tokugawa Japan, although it is debatable whether it can be regarded as a proper religion. Confucianism, as it places much importance on filial piety and ethical conduct, suited samurai life and augmented feudal loyalty (Pflugfelder 1999, 102-4). Homoeroticism posed few problems as long as household continuation and work devotion were ensured. Premodern Japanese social circumstances, despite their official isolation from foreign gazes, would often stun the Christian missionaries permitted at a few ports, as historian Gregory Pflugfelder notes their astonishment; "In the eyes of these visitors, the prevalence of male-male erotic practices, particularly among the Buddhist clergy, furnished proof of the diabolical character of the local religion and of the heathen's need for conversion" (1999, 65). Their missionary attempts, however, were severely challenged by the Tokugawa shogunate, which outlawed Christianity.<sup>23</sup>

Homoeroticism wasn't free of control, however, given historical records of regulatory attempts as demonstrated by historians of Japan (Furukawa 1994; Leupp 1995, 2007; Pflugfelder 1999). According to Pflugfelder, the number of legislations primarily dealing with male-male sex began increasing since the 17th-century on, as the Tokugawa shogunate sought to pacify the country by centralizing power through a confederation of relatively independent regional and

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<sup>22</sup> The Shinto tradition was less concerned about, and generally silent on, male-male sex in contrast to male-female sexual activity, which was understood in terms of pollution (Pflugfelder 1999, 99). Buddhism regarded both male-female and male-male sexual behavior as worldly temptation that can be distractive to enlightenment, but it required celibacy regarding cross-sex coitus primarily (ibid., 101).

<sup>23</sup> The Tokugawa shogunate intensely persecuted Christians. To verify Christian faith among suspects, the Tokugawa shogunate used the method of *fumie* (trampling on a picture) and tested whether they could step on plaques of the Madonna and/or Christ (Fujita 1991, 173).

local authorities (1999, 10-2, 97-145). Notably, legislative measures by both central and local lawmakers under the Tokugawa regime rose out of what he calls the “perisexual,” factors such as status and moderation (ibid., 97-145). Authorities were concerned about not so much same-sex desire and behavior per se as class transgression and moral fall, which could have compromised social life. While attempting to build a peaceful country, Tokugawa regulations focused on the propriety of homoerotic conduct.

Overall, homoeroticism was a mundane part of premodern Japan as it was observed beyond a specific class stratum. As samurai administrators and warriors cosseted younger disciples, townsmen patronized kabuki theater actors, and monks and clergy members indulged in carnal pursuit at Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, a theme of male-male homoeroticism was explored through a wide range of philosophical texts and artistic expressions, including literature, painting, and theater along with the burgeoning publishing industry and city culture. However, it is important to note that the majority of the available historical records are about men and that women’s same-sex sexuality still remains underresearched (Pflugfelder 1999, 14) despite an increase of historical and contemporary research on female homoeroticism (e.g., Chalmers 2002; Okano & Maree 2018; Pflugfelder 2005; Robertson 2000; Wieringa et al. 2007).<sup>24</sup>

### *Japan’s Turn to Modernity*

Such a history of indulgent sexual regulation was going to be swept under the rug through the succeeding Meiji era (1868-1912), as Meiji elites set out to modernize the Japanese nation-state alongside imperial dreams to dominate Asia vis-à-vis world powers (Befu 2001; Oguma

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<sup>24</sup> Some records of female-female homoeroticism are available, as Leupp notes that “we encounter [it] where we might expect to: in popular marketed literature, in advertisements for sexual products and in literature pertaining to the prostitution districts” (2007, 152; see also, 150-1). Investigation into these historical records is hoped for.

2002). After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, when the imperial family regained its symbolic representation and power upon the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate, the then newly emergent government aspired toward a strong militarist and affluent capitalist nation. To achieve this objective, more specifically, Meiji Japan absorbed Western knowledge (first from European nations and then the US), idealized a male-headed heterosexual household by applying the feudal relationship of lord and vassal to sovereign (emperor) and subject (the Japanese people), and hoped *datsu-A nyū-Ō* 脱亜入欧 (leaving Asia, entering Europe) (Oguma 2006, 38-47): see the subsequent section on Japanese law for further discussion about the emperor. Meiji elites' hierarchical worldview—Euro-America (top), Japan (middle), and Asia (bottom)—helped justify Japan's colonization of Asia to catch up with, if not assimilate into, the West (Sugimoto 2014, 196-97). Imperial Japan played a great role as a channel of Euro-American knowledge into East Asia from the late-19th-century until Japan's defeat in WWII (McLelland & Mackie 2015, 3); despite Japan's WWII surrender and aborted colonialism, Japan's tripartite worldview has continued, as Japan has served as a loyal retainer of the US empire in Asia.

As Japan adopted Western sexology in order to control a domestic population and prepare for expansion under the imperial policy of *fukokukyōhei* 富国強兵 (enrich the nation, strengthen the military), a personified and pathologized view of sexuality emerged through the Japanese sexual discourse (Cornyetz & Vincent 2010; Driscoll 2005; Frühstück 2003; McLelland 2005, 18-22). A conceptual link between male-male and female-female erotic behavior engendered in the Japanese sexual ideology through the adaptation of such concepts as homosexuality from Western sexological texts (Cornyetz & Vincent 2010; Pflugfelder 1999, 5; Saitō 1996, 223-49). Indeed, Japan criminalized “sodomy” momentarily during the Meiji era (Furukawa 1994, 108;

Pflugfelder 1999, 146-92).<sup>25</sup> While homosexuality gradually fell out of the rubric of normative development, heterosexuality came to take on the public face of the *ie seido* 家制度 (family system) encoded in the Meiji Civil Code (1898), which granted patriarchal authority to the male head of each household: see the subsequent section for further discussion.

Meanwhile, Japan's modernity placed an equally heavy, yet different, responsibility on women through the state-led *ryōsaikenbo* 良妻賢母 (good wife, wise mother) ideology (Koyama 2012)—which is powerful even today. As the Meiji administration nationalized the samurai model of family, chastity was increasingly expected of women in Japan. Meanwhile, the government continued to exploit state-licensed prostitution even in the presence of the budding anti-prostitution movements from the late-19th-century to the early-20th-century (Kovner 2012, 10-7), driving prostitutes into further precarity. While a woman's role was normatively confined to the home as a subservient wife and affectionate mother in charge of children's moral education, social capital began getting accumulated in the hands of a small number of women along with modern Japanese feminism (Koyama 2012.; see also Kano 2016; Mackie 2003, 2013); though, women's suffrage wasn't realized until Japan's postwar democratization (1964).<sup>26</sup> Although women might have gained little recognition and respectability without marriage and childbearing as child rearing had become, to borrow words from anthropologist Merry White, “unequivocally the responsibility of the mother” (1987, 21), motherly indulgence had been allowed and human relations appeared to develop primarily between mother and child in modern, and arguably contemporary, Japan (see also Benedict 2018, 163-77).

The Meiji government promulgated the idea of family based on the heteronormative

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<sup>25</sup> Japan forbade “sodomy” from 1873 to 1881, only to remove it from the penal code before long.

<sup>26</sup> By “Japan's postwar democratization,” I do not mean that democratization first happened after Japan's WWII defeat. Such processes had already been in effect, however tensely, through the creation of modern democratic institutions, such as the constitution, the bureaucracy, and the parliament by the Meiji and subsequent governments.

discourse of civilization, which had relegated any sex other than conjugal and reproductive sex to the shadows of the state apparatus. The civilizational discourse was founded on, as Pflugfelder notes, “the view that sexual behavior outside the bounds of male-female marriage should be dealt with in silence or euphemism rather than with public acknowledgement” (1999, 8). Simply put, modern Japan appeared to paternalistically formalize its heterosexual future by masking its homoerotic past under the restored reign of the divine emperor entitled to legitimize what Meiji elites aspired to—family-orientation as it were—in the empire of Japan.

As Meiji elites embarked on modernization by shaming Japan’s sexually indulgent history in the name of rational science and civilized morality (Pflugfelder 1999, 146-285), Japan’s burgeoning temporality was thematized in modern Japanese literature (Reichert 2006; Vincent 2012). Literary scholar Keith Vincent surveys a range of classic works by such nationally recognized authors as Mori Ōgai, Kawabata Yasunari, Natsume Sōseki, and Mishima Yukio in his monograph *Two-Timing Modernity: Homosocial Narrative in Modern Japanese Fiction* (2012). In this work, Vincent argues that modern Japanese fictional narration centers on “two-timing” or the present coexistence of a heteronormative future and a perverse past (ibid., 1-23). He points out that “the forward movement of time has not always brought unambiguous progress and liberation with regard to sexuality” and, on the contrary, that “for at least the first half of the twentieth century in Japan it was the past and not the future that beckoned with the most imaginative possibilities for men who loved other men” (ibid., 2-3). Indeed, the modern Japanese social current appears to have unfolded, as often expressed in much of the modern Japanese fiction Vincent carefully analyzes, in a “two-timing” temporality with the so-called double life being nationally sanctioned. Yet, it is a point of contention today as Vincent limits the purview of his argument to “at least the first half of the twentieth century in Japan.”

It is an ongoing debate whether same-sex sexuality itself has bothered those in authority in Japanese history. The debate is complicated by the claims about the existence of homophobia in Japan (e.g., Kazama 2013; Vincent 1996): see chapter 2 for details. Sociologist Kariya Ayumi regards Japan's science-driven modernity as evidence of Japan's institutional homophobia, as it pathologized and excluded same-sex desire (2003).<sup>27</sup> Lesbian critic Kakefuda Hiroko asserts that homophobia is deep-seated in the Japanese lesbian psyche (1992, 104-19), while gay sociologist Kawaguchi Kazuya et al. also insist that homophobia manifests itself in Japanese context-specific ("quiet") manners (1997, 109-112). Many have followed in the footsteps of these Japanese foundational lesbian and gay studies texts and accumulated examples of homophobia as a socioculturally specific construct (e.g., Chalmers 2002; Horie 2007, 2015, 194-204; Tamagawa, 2016, 161-4, 168-9, 175-8, 2020, 28). Gay sociologist Kazama Takashi refashions the either-tolerant-or-homophobic debate, as he considers Japan to be "tolerantly homophobic" (2013, 2016). However, the refashioned debate remains in the identitarian paradigm; "tolerant" suggests the abject nature of the tolerated, while "homophobic" judges the anti-homosexual identity of the interpellated.

In short, modern Japan covered up its premodern predominantly male-centered pleasure-affirming culture and appropriated Western sexology in order to serve its own imperial and colonial ambitions within a globalizing world. The emergence of the medico-scientific idea of homosexuality as abnormality and pathology through Japan's turn to modernity, however, has not necessarily led to homophobic oppressions like the institutionalization of corrective therapy. That

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<sup>27</sup> Japan's science-driven modernization, though responsible for discriminating the ab/normal, hasn't institutionalized corrective therapy. Many critics (e.g., Fushimi 1991; Kakefuda 1992) have challenged medical and developmental discourses about homosexuality. Its removal from the category of "abnormalities" dates back to 1995, when the advocacy group OCCUR pressured the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology (Fushimi 2004, 375).



is, modern Japan has swept the rich history of (especially male-to-male) homoeroticism under the rug as if to ignore, rather than exclude, same-sex desire. Indeed, Japan's modernity appears to be couched in terms of, as often expressed in modern Japanese fiction, the "two-timing" narrative that strives toward, while preserving homosexuality as a fondly remembered thing of the past, a heterosexual future developmentally.

## **2. The Hands-Off Law**

An overview of Japanese law is paramount to debating contemporary Japan. Japan's national law was first promulgated as the Constitution of the Empire of Japan (informally the Meiji Constitution) in 1889, as Meiji elites modeled after European, in particular German and French, legal systems. Japanese law underwent major amendments during the postwar American occupation (1945-52) and has been re-enacted as the Constitution of Japan to this day. The New Constitution explicitly defines the role of the emperor as purely symbolic. Also, as part of post democratization, two major legal reforms took place: the abolishment of centuries-long state-licensed prostitution as well as of the *ie seido* 家制度 (the age-based and male-headed household system privileging stem-families). There were a few important changes additionally made in the late-20th-century and the new millennium (e.g., the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society), shaping present-day gender and sexual relations. Notably, lesbians and gays have been consistently ignored under Japanese law.

### *The Constitution of the Empire of Japan*

The emperor became the center of the modern Japanese polity (*kokutai*) in 1868, and his ultimate authority was legally defined three years later in 1898 at the proclamation of the Constitution of the Empire of Japan (Ben-Ami 2008; Titus 1980). The emperor himself didn't order the restoration of his reign, however. It was the government that politically capitalized on

his symbolic power for nation-state building under state-led Shintoism (Shimazono 2008, 53-78). In fact, modern democratic institutions (the parliament, the bureaucracy, compulsory education, etc.) were all built around the religiously sacred, aesthetically resonant figure of the emperor (Yamaguchi 1989, 159-229), who was granted the sovereign power to legitimize national policies and actions.<sup>28</sup> These, again, had been determined beforehand by the elected ruling elite consisting of politicians, militarists, and bureaucrats, all committed to the supreme role of the emperor for national development. The Japanese emperor, historian Shillony Ben-Ami reminds us, “neither initiated nor controlled [modern reforms]. To the outside world and to his own people he was the paramount symbol of the rising Japanese nation” (2008, 2). Despite his actual impotency, the emperor as a monarch was the only figure, who, within the modern Japanese legal framework, “could bestow legitimacy on the actual rulers and provide them with coveted imperial titles” (ibid., 2).

The Constitution of the Empire of Japan included the Meiji Civil Code (1898) and the Family Registration Law (1871): two administrative keystones of modern Japanese governance pivoted on the *ie* (family) system. The *ie* system supported by these two regulatory mechanisms might appear feudalistic at first glance, especially if Japan’s postwar democratization is defined as a neat transition from feudalism to democracy. On second glance, it was actually modern in that the Meiji government deliberately rearticulated a particular premodern class (samurai) ideology for the sake of national growth under the restored emperor’s reign (Itō 1982; Ronald & Alexy 2011, 1-24; Sand 2003; Ueno 2009). Under this modern family-oriented governance, the emperor reigned (but not ruled) his imperial subjects formally described as *shinmin* 新民 (new

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<sup>28</sup> Anthropologist Yamaguchi Masao highlights the importance of studying not only religious but also aesthetic aspects of the imperial system by going beyond a simplistic (structural-functionalist) analysis of its formal political power; to gauge the potential influence of the emperor on the Japanese psyche, he analyzes popular national mythologies and literature, including poems (1989).

subjects) (Ikegami 1995, 186), whose subjectivity (loyalty) was sociolegally contracted to the will of the divine family.

The Meiji Civil Code and the Family Registration Law functioned to nationalize the model of a patriarchal stem-family system (Itō 1982; Ronald & Alexy 2011, 1-24; Sand 2003; Ueno 2009): the emperor family being, of course, the longest and the most respectable family line of all modern Japanese families. Prior to the Meiji era, family practices were diverse.<sup>29</sup> Such diversity was under pressure of homogenization, as the Meiji government forced all families to register their members for national belonging, follow the principle of filial piety, and give devotion to the emperor (Ronald & Alexy 2011, 1-5). In return, legal privileges and patriarchal authority were given to the male head of a family, who was taxed but entitled with land and property ownership (ibid.).<sup>30</sup> The *ie* system helped the modernization of Japanese families, positioning households as the basic unit of the imperial nation-state (ibid., 17).

With respect to the regulation of sexuality, during the Meiji era, Japan in fact criminalized “sodomy” in order to be equally “respectable” as Western powers. It was a brief period from 1873 to 1881 (Furukawa 1994, 108; Pflugfelder 1999, 146-92). Nonetheless, the so-called sodomy law was repealed relatively quickly, presumably because of the actual difficulty of changing sexual habits shaped by the preceding pleasure-affirming Tokugawa shogunate (ibid.). Instead of explicitly regulating same-sex sexuality, the Constitution of the Empire of Japan just ignored it.

### *The New Constitution of Japan*

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<sup>29</sup> Primogeniture (inheritance through the line of eldest sons) was only predominant among the samurai class, and family practices had largely depended on class as well as regional conventions: e.g., farmers and merchants in western regions of Japan relying on ultimogeniture (inheritance by the last-born child) and matrilineal inheritance along the line of the eldest daughter (Itō 1982, 46-68).

<sup>30</sup> Thus, the intent of the family head (a father) played an essential role in all family matters, including marriage.

Postwar legal reforms are notable in a few respects. First, the New Constitution of Japan officially deprives the emperor of all power other than symbolic; all executive power rests on the Cabinet as appointed by the Prime Minister. The call for abandoning *tennōsei* 天皇制 (the emperor system) had been made by some, including socialists and left-leaning critics (Titus 1980, 534-64).<sup>31</sup> Despite petitions submitted to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Douglas MacArthur, for the removal of the emperor, the ultimate decision was to re-fashion his role, rather than abrogating the system altogether, simply because it had actually been working well, allowing a fledgling democracy under early-20th-century Japan's constitutional democracy (Dickinson 2019, unpagged). According to Ben-Ami, "The postwar constitution, imposed by the allied occupation and embraced by the Japanese public, demoted the emperor to the status of a symbol of the state and unified people. Although that had, in fact, been his role throughout history, it was the first time that his [formal political] powerlessness was explicitly admitted and decreed" (2008, 2-3). What remains alive today is the citizenry's reverence for the symbolic role of the imperial family as well as the Japanese government's continuous diplomatic use of the imperial system for national unity, as noted by political scientist David Titus (1980): see the section on LDP rule for further discussion.

Also, the *ie* system was formally abolished by the New Civil Code of 1947. The legal abolishment of the *ie* system was part of Japan's postwar democratization aimed at gender equality and personal freedom. And yet, the idea of *ie* as social practice has survived until today, as the *ie* norm takes root on the Japanese soil with the family rhetoric often being used to refer to

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<sup>31</sup> According to political scientist David Titus, although "*tennōsei* 天皇制 (the emperor system)" had originally been used by socialists in the Japan of the early-20th-century to criticize the capitalist and totalitarian regime set by the Meiji government, such a Marxist-bent meaning is one of many possibilities today as the word is used as both pros and cons of Japan's constitutional monarchy and state control (ibid., 534). Another popular term in circulation is *shōchōtennōsei* 象徴天皇制 (the symbolic emperor system), which more precisely reflects the postwar and contemporary role of the emperor.

a sense of belonging in the corporate world (Ronald & Alexy 2011, 1, 8): see a subsequent section for further discussion.

Along with these key legal changes, moreover, the Japanese government has enacted the *Baishun Kinshi Hō* 売春禁止法 (Anti-Prostitution Law) as a critical administrative pillar of its contemporary sexual regulation. The year 1956 was a threshold year, when the government implemented Japan's first national Anti-Prostitution Law under the commands of the US allied occupation forces after a few centuries of state-licensed prostitution (Kovner 2012).<sup>32</sup> Japan's official ban against male-female commercial sex made such former red-light districts as Shinjuku Ni-chōme meet a strange (indeed queer) fate in postwar Japan.

According to gay activist Ryū Susumu, the implementation of the Anti-Prostitution Law has played an indispensable role in the development of Shinjuku Ni-chōme as an urban queer (in particular gay) enclave home to many recreational venues and activist hubs (2009, 24-30).<sup>33</sup> More specifically, the geographical, symbolic, and real-estate conditions of the neighborhood were ideal for clandestine recreation among gay men; it was easily accessible from both subways and trains that run through Tokyo City and suburban outskirts; it wasn't densely populated due to its reputation as a formerly red-light district; and the land price and tenant fees for buildings in the neighborhood were relatively low due to its stigmatized history (ibid., 29-30). The "disgraceful" history of the neighborhood actually worked well for gay men, who took advantage of its stigma to create their own "home" (i.e., bars) quietly (ibid., 29-30). Shinjuku Ni-chōme was more than a perfect place for those who wanted to run businesses discreetly or play

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<sup>32</sup> In hindsight, Japan's official ban against male-female prostitution has not so much helped prohibit commercial sex as forced it underground, creating difficult situations for sex workers (Parreñas 2011).

<sup>33</sup> The district has a rather different face during the day and at night, as there are residential buildings and corporate offices as well as sexual minority activist hubs and many recreational venues (lesbian and gay bars, transgender show pubs, etc.). See also Baudinette (2015), Fushimi (2019), and Sunagawa (2015).

surreptitiously (ibid., 29-30).

### *Lesbians and Gays under the Family Registration Law*

Despite the formal dissolution of the *ie* system in the New Civil Code, the Family Registration Law (Chapman & Krogness 2014) has remained relatively intact. Although it still requires every newborn baby to be registered for Japanese citizenship, the stem-family system has gone and every newly forming household registers itself as a nuclear family with its head being either husband or wife. Notably, the Family Registration Law as well as the New Civil Code maintains same-sex sexuality as a deliberately unstated constitutive counterpart of heterosexuality. And yet, although Japanese law neither permits same-sex marriage nor grants support to same-sex couples, it allows lesbians and gays to use *yōshi engumi* 養子縁組 (adult adoption) (Maree 2004, 2014) in order to form a superficially parent-child relationship and maintain a same-sex household. In other words, legally, the Japanese government silently contains same-sex sexuality and sidesteps marriage equality (see Chapter 4).

Unlike ignored lesbian and gay people, transgender people have been interpellated under Japanese law. Obviously, the Family Registration Law complicates transgender issues, as legal sex on the family register cannot be changed based only on individual will. The government passed the legislation of the Gender Identity Disorder Act in 2004, but it is inhumanely difficult as one must meet all the strict requirements, including sex reassignment surgery (Taniguchi 2013). Unlike officially ignored lesbian and gay subjects, however, transgender people have been taken “care” of: see Chapter 2 for the difficulty of discussing LGBT people altogether.

### *Women’s Standing*

Although contemporary social practice isn’t entirely liberated from the patriarchal legacies of the *ie* system, the Japanese government has been at least superficially promoting women’s

active social participation through various legislations since the late-20th-century. The Equal Employment Opportunity Law (*Danjo Koyō Kikai Kintō Hō* 男女雇用機会均等法) was promulgated in 1986. The Japanese government has further adopted the idea of a “gender-equal society” (*danjo kyōdō sankaku shakai* 男女共同参画社会) by enacting the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society (*Danjo Kyōdō Sankaku Shakai Kihon Hō* 男女共同参画社会基本法) in 1999 (Kano 2011, 42). Japan scholar Kano Ayako touches on the multitude of women-friendly legal measures made between the 1990s and 2005, when state-feminism gained strength (2011, 43).<sup>34</sup> Indeed, many legal gestures for protecting women’s work and family life have been made in the past couple of decades. However, penalties are rarely applied when corporations do not obey with the Equal Employment Opportunity Law as it is more of a guideline in practice (Assmann 2014, 7-8). Furthermore, it is extremely difficult to prosecute rape in court due to Japan’s force-based rape regime despite increasing societal attentions to domestic violence and sexual abuse (West 2011, 105-19).

### *From Ignoring to Caring?*

As noted above, in its attempts to emulate Western powers, the Meiji government momentarily forbade “sodomy” from 1873 to 1881, only to remove it from the penal code before

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<sup>34</sup> I quote a long list of legal changes and their implications from Kano’s article below, not to celebrate how far we have come, but to highlight how difficult it is to change the status quo despite the impressive list of legislation: “The 1992 Childcare Leave Law (*ikuji kaigo kyūgyō hō* 育児介護休業法) guaranteed up to a year of partially paid childcare leave for either the mother or the father; the 1997 Nursing Care Insurance Law (*kaigo hoken hō* 介護保険法) socialized the cost of caring for the elderly, and thus reduced the symbolic and practical burden of daughters and daughters-in-law; the 1998 Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities (*tokutei hieiri katsudō sokushin hō* 特定非営利活動促進法), also known as the NPO Law, made it easier for women’s groups to gain legal status for their organizations; the 1999 Law for Punishing Acts Related to Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and for Protecting Children (*jidō baishu jidōporuno ni kakawaru kōi no shobatsu oyobi jidō no hogo tō ni kansuru hōritsu* 児童買春児童ポルノに係る行為等の処罰及び児童尾保護等に関する法律) sought to curb sexual abuse of children including child prostitution and pornography; the 2000 Anti-Stalking Law (*sutōkā kōi tō no kisei tō ni kansuru hōritsu* ストーカー行為等の規制等に関する法律) and the 2001 Law for the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims (*haigūsha kara no bōryoku no bōshi oyobi higaisha no hogo I kansuru hōritsu* 配偶者からの暴力の防止及び被害者の保護に関する法律), also known as the DV Law, criminalized behavior that was previously dismissed as personal, i.e., domestic violence” (Kano 2011, 43).

long presumably due to the entrenched tradition of male-male sexual practices (Furukawa 1994, 108; Pflugfelder 1999, 146-92). With its general hands-off attitudes toward same-sex sexuality, the Meiji government rather enforced family-oriented control with the emperor as its supreme head under the Constitution of the Empire of Japan. Although a few radical legal changes (e.g., the annulment of the emperor's political power, the dissolution of the *ie* system, and the abolishment of state-licensed prostitution) were made after World War II, the Family Registration Law remains relatively intact and continues to ignore same-sex sexuality.

Although lesbians and gays (and bisexuals), if not transgender people, are unrecognized by Japanese law, the Japanese government no longer seems able to ignore LGBTs today as demands for their rights (e.g., proposition of an LGBT Anti-Discrimination Bill) are intensifying due to the absurdly difficult process of legal sex alteration as well as deferred marriage equality. At present, in the face of nationwide LGBT anti-discrimination movements, the Japanese government is slowly leaning toward the promotion of LGBT rights as part of its own interest in making Japan at least appear to be a diversity-accommodating nation. Organizations such as the Japan Alliance for LGBT Legislation (J-ALL) are currently pushing specifically LGBT anti-discriminatory claims (especially in schools and the workplace) in parallel with recent legal enforcement of workplace improvement statutes (i.e., the Power Harassment Prevention Law, which covers SOGI-related harassment and “outing”).<sup>35</sup> The Power Harassment Prevention Law affects big companies today and will affect small and mid-size ones when it goes fully into effect in 2022 (Kamiya & Matsuoka 2020). The prohibition of LGBT discrimination at work (and

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<sup>35</sup> Founded in 2015, J-ALL consists of LGBT-concerned activists, educators, and lawyers, aimed at 1) policy recommendation, 2) policy drafting, 3) workshop hosting, and 4) information transmission, primarily for LGBTs. Networked with diverse groups (listed on its official website: <http://lgbtetc.jp>), J-ALL pressures the Japanese government to establish LGBT anti-discrimination laws by asserting that the implementation of such policies is “globally standardized” as in European countries, Australia, and the US, a common foreign-pressure tactic for nation-wide reforms. J-ALL catalogs in a downloadable PDF the “difficulties” LGBTs concretely face in Japan.



school) alone, however, is less likely to be able to challenge Japan's age-long family-orientation, to which I now turn.

### 3. Family-Obligation

Nothing appeared impossible, when Japan was striving toward an "all-middle-class" society (Kelly 2002) through the postwar national reconstruction of the 1960s and 1980s in particular. Although such a dream ended in disillusionment when bubbles burst in 1991, the family has continued to be an organizing principle and rhetoric for Japan, which obligates household continuation and privatizes adult recreation. In a world rife with post-cold-war tensions (Chen 2010; Mackie & McLelland 2015), the pro-US Japanese nation-state has streamlined a conformist and consumer-friendly, family-oriented social current hospitable to many entertainments. While anthropologist Wim Lunsing discusses Japan's sociocultural family-orientation using "*jōshiki* 常識 (common sense)" (2001), I repurpose *jōshiki* with "family-obligation" in order to highlight institutional and discursive mechanisms of Japan's social control throughout this dissertation.

#### *Family-Oriented Course of Life*

"The family" in family-obligation predominantly signifies a middle-class mainstream household that the Japanese government has idealized through its attempts to recover from war defeat. The rigidity of class relations appeared largely loosened up due to the 1947 national reform of compulsory education. The possibility of social upward mobility did seem (and perhaps was in a way) magnified during the early period of postwar years (1950s and 1960s) and the 1980s in particular, when the nation was experiencing a bubble economy thanks to the governmental lead in the enforcement of family-obligations. What became the standard to maximize household management as promoted by the state apparatus is the coupling of a white-

collar salaryman husband and a full-time home-maker wife dedicated to kids (Lunsing 2001; Vogel 1963; Sugimoto 2014, 187-9). Anthropologist Satsuki Kawano et al. write about such a gendered dream of family in Japan:

For a man, rather than working on a family farm or in a family business, obtaining a diploma (preferably a university degree) and becoming a salaryman was the course leading to a stable lifestyle. For a woman, marrying such a man and becoming a full-time homemaker and mother of two children was seen as more desirable than joining a family farm or small business as an unpaid worker (2014, 3).

This family has been primarily supported by the corporate world, as the metaphor of the family prevails there. Corporations usually offer family welfare benefits packages: (male) employees are expected to dedicate their lives to their employers, who are expected to reciprocate favor by supporting the employees and their families as if they make, to borrow an expression from anthropologists Richard Ronald and Allison Alexy, “a social contract mimicking the parent-child (*oyabun-kobun*) relationship” (2011, 8); such corporate paternalism, however, is destabilized now due to neoliberal restructuring (see the subsequent section for further discussion).

The middle-class mainstream family standardization has been closely knotted with the Japanese corporate culture strictly monitored by Japan’s state bureaucracy. Government officials and state bureaucrats thoroughly intervene in the national economy, as they decide which industries to assist financially, give close guidance to businesses, and protect them in competition both domestic and international (Hirata 2002, 2; Johnson 1982).<sup>36</sup> This tightly controlled

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<sup>36</sup> Senior and retired bureaucrats often find employment at civil organizations (and corporate enterprises) that they “advised” during their administrative careers. This institutionalized practice is called *amakudari* 天下り (“descent from heaven”). The prevalence of *amakudari* indicates that the bureaucracy is closely involved in (both) the public and the private sectors in Japan.

corporate world has enabled the postwar expansion of both industrial and white-collar sectors that rapidly eclipsed agriculture (Ishida 2001, 600). Japan's middle-class mainstream household pattern is characterized by the simultaneous expansion of the industrial and white-collar sectors over the agricultural industry. This feature distinguishes Japanese society from many Euro-American societies in terms of class formation, where an agricultural decline, a blue-collar development, and a white-collar expansion took place at wider intervals (ibid.). Although Japan's corporate world, as closely controlled by the government and bureaucracy, did seem to promise social upward mobility for all, the bubble burst in 1991. Through Japan's stagnant national economy, class divides (Ishida & Slater 2011) as well as poverty and disparity (Hashimoto 2018; Yuasa 2018) have reared their ugly heads: see the subsequent section on Japanese politics for further discussion.

When the family-oriented life course appears too much to bear, some Japanese people appear to turn to the realm of the "foreign" (mostly Western, dominated by the US). Anthropologist Karen Kelsky focuses on a group of Japanese women she terms "internationalists" (2001, 3). While situating her research against post-bubble Japan, Kelsky highlights these women's projects against such a family-oriented life course in Japan. She argues that internationalist Japanese women invest in romantic and sexual relationships with white men (deemed to be a fetishized symbol of modernity) as a means to resist their gendered life course shaped by Japanese patriarchy, however compromising it might appear on the global stage (ibid., 1-22). Kelsky demonstrates one way for adults to manage family-obligations.

For kids, studying diligently in school (White 1987) is essential to prepare for college entrance exams; entering a good university increases the possibility of getting a good job, which more likely leads to a good marriage. In reality, only approximately 50% of Japan's youth move

on to (four-year) college and the so-called examination hell is more often than not exaggerated in national media (Sugimoto 2014, 130-1)), but the national school system in conjunction with the educational industry (e.g., cram schools) is generally designed to prepare students for the passing of university entrance exams (Rohlen 1983, 77-110; Sugimoto 2014, 134-5). Such an entire arrangement helps uphold, Sugimoto writes, “[t]he ideology of educational credentialism pervades Japanese society and spreads an examination culture across considerable sections of Japan’s schools” (ibid., 131). Students (are made to) undergo state-controlled conformist education; conformity is expected in not only content (e.g., textbook censorship) but also social conduct including general appearance (e.g., dress) (ibid., 140-50). The costs of such highly regimented schooling manifest in many manners, including *ijime* いじめ (bullying) and *tōkōkyōhi* 登校拒否 (school refusal) (ibid., 9. 148-50).<sup>37</sup>

### *Family-Minded Sex Education*

Japan bureaucratically incentivizes family-minded knowledge (Kawahara 1996; Okano & Tsuchiya 1999). As anthropologist Kawahara Yukari asserts (1996), the current family-oriented content of Japanese sex education is a product of the more-than-century-long ideological negotiation of what should be taught officially (and unofficially): see also Takahashi (1993). National curricular standardization has unfurled in close liaison with bureaucratic institutions, in particular the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and been

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<sup>37</sup> The issue of LGBT bullying in school has been addressed by one Mainichi Newspaper article (Fujisawa 2017), whose English translation title reads, “Over Half of LGBT People in Japan Were Bullied in School.” The article problematizes related issues, such as truancy, self-harm, and suicidal wishes by citing a large-scale online survey among 15,141 individuals (Hidaka, 2016); according to the survey, approximately 60% of the sampling were bullied in elementary, junior high, and/or high school. Based on these alarming statistics, the Mainichi Newspaper article asserts “that proper knowledge and information [about gender and sexuality] have not fully spread at schools, and that teachers have been unable to deal with these teenagers’ concerns” (ibid., unpagd.) Although it remains debatable whether homophobia hinders sex education and school mentorship, the above claims direct our attentions to the disconcerting state of Japanese schooling, where children act under the supervision of schoolteachers, one of the most “overworked and underpaid” professional groups in Japan (Tsuboya-Newell 2018).

constantly challenged by multiple actors including the Japan Teachers Union and the Japanese Sex Education Association. The late-20th-century international controversies (e.g., the HIV/AIDS epidemic) have forced the Japanese government to revise the sex education guideline if not its core (pronatal) content; same-sex sexuality remains unmentioned as it's neither dismissed nor taught in the shadow of heterosexuality (Kawahara 1996, 42-50).

Gender-sensitivity, as promoted by many institutions in differing ways (e.g., the government advocating a “gender-equal society” while education, a “gender-free society” (*jendā furī shakai* ジェンダーフリー社会), has influenced sex education, only to complicate its systematic operation in the new millennium. Backlashes have intensified since 2003, when the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education accused a special support school of teaching sex “inappropriately” (using dolls and songs) to kids with mental disabilities; the case was taken to court, and Japan’s Supreme Court ruled in favor of the school in 2013 (Asai 2018, 88-9). Today, the time is ripe for the Japanese government to reconsider children’s learning rights (Asai 2018; Izumitani et al. 2020), as has long been discussed in media including the 2014 special issue of the quarterly journal *Sekushuaritī* (Sexuality), which takes inspiration from UNESCO’s *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* (for its Japanese translation, see Asai et al. 2017).

What students formally learn during compulsory (and higher) education varies across Japan, as the nationally approved family-oriented sex education guideline gets negotiated prefecturally, municipally, and even school by school (Kawahara 1996, 2000). In the case of Tokyo, the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education (2020) has recently revised its sex education guideline in response to lifestyle diversification (e.g., singlehood), new concerns (e.g., gender identity disorder), and problems (e.g., Internet-facilitated sex offending). The revised guideline, however, continues to ignore same-sex sexuality. The guideline is a model, however coercive, open to

negotiation at each educational institution in a given municipality. Statistics on sex education indeed show that its implementation rate and instruction contents vary between and within schools (Inaba 2010; Toshiro et al. 2011). In other words, personal circumstances and encounters unequally shape student sexual knowledge, as adults exercise considerable discretion over the sex education curriculum authoritatively and situationally out of their presumably best intentions. Japan's present condition makes it extremely difficult to discuss sex publicly, since there is no common frame of reference to begin with, other than family-oriented common sense (Lunsing 2001).

#### *Private Recreations Along with Family-Obligations*

Although Japanese social life might appear serious and even oppressive at first glance, Japan has incubated an ample repertoire of private recreation behind the state's emphasis on family-obligations. The operation of Japanese (middle-class nuclear) households has run parallel to Japan's recreational culture as a consumer-friendly space for *asobi* 遊び (play) (Linhart & Frühstück 1998; Lunsing 2002). Entertainments include the Takarazuka Revue (Nakamura & Matsuo 2003; Robertson 1998), Boys' Love manga (Lunsing 2006), and televisual gay effeminacy (Fujii 2013). Japan's consumerism has gained a momentum thanks to the so-called digital revolution (understood as the popularization of the Internet through the use of portable phones) in the new millennium (Gottlieb & McLelland 2003; Itō et al. 2005). Also, such cultural artifacts as manga (Pasfield-Neofitou & Sell 2016) have been globally circulated under the state-led promotion of "cool Japan" (McLelland 2016). Sexual entertainments for women (pornography, drinking, etc.) have been enriched as well (e.g., Hambleton 2016; Takeyama 2005). These diverse forms of entertainment for different kinds of people in multiple age categories help sustain serious (work or study) life among people in Japan.

Such duality falls well within Japan's national moral spectrum underpinned by double codes (Doi 2005, 85-9; Lunsing 2002; Sugimoto 2014, 33-6). Nationally promoted double codes include *tatemae-honne* 建前本音 (formally established principles and informally felt feelings) and *omote-ura* 表裏 (front and back). Such a dual-coded social landscape channels citizens into performing heterosexual parental roles publicly for the *seken* 世間 or, in Sugimoto's translation, "an imagined community that has the normative power of approving or disapproving of and sanctioning individual behavior" (2014, 335), while pursuing diverse interests (including same-sex relationships) privately. Obligating household continuation while privatizing adult recreation, Japan has streamlined a conformist and consumer-friendly social current hospitable to many entertainments.

The Japanese family-oriented nation-state has reinforced such a dualistic archetypal mask for the past few decades. Today, like an ever-present nimbus, family-obligation hovers over Japanese people (Chalmers 2002; Dasgupta 2017; Mackintosh 2010; Maekawa 2017; McLelland et al. 2007; Sambe 2014; Sueyoshi 2012; Summerhawk et al. 1998). The *ie* "tradition" is filially upheld by individuals, who are enculturated to pursue freedoms discreetly. Under the national slogan of working and playing hard, individualism is allowed to the extent that it maximizes collective outcomes for the nation (Hirata 2002, 24). What follows is a discussion about Japanese politics, which has considerable responsibility for Japan's current circumstances.

#### **4. The Hegemony of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan**

The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) has dominated the postwar Japanese political sphere. Except for a couple of brief terms (the early 1990s and right after the 3.11 disaster), the LDP has maintained the lead over the nation. The new millennium appeared to herald radical changes in national policy at the advent of a revolution-seeking administration headed by

populist Koizumi Jun'ichirō (2001-6), only to reinforce broad neoliberal restructuring schemes implemented by the earlier LDP-led administrations. The LDP has molded Japan's sociopolitical landscape through "friendly authoritarianism" a seemingly painless and festive way of discipline (Sugimoto 2014, 325-39), which reinforces the family-obligation under the grace of the emperor family and discourages social movements.

### *The Diplomatic Use of the Emperor*

To begin, the LDP has made the best of the imperial system domestically and internationally throughout its exceptionally long political domination. The LDP relying on the palace bureaucracy (Imperial Household Agency), as well as national media, humanized and idealized the imperial family as a model of modern democratic family in postwar Japan and continues to make the most of the respectable and affectionate symbol for the aspirationally middle-class Japanese citizenry concerned about such issues as peace, internationalism, and individual rights (Titus 1980, 575-6). Indeed, the previous/Heisei emperor is still remembered as, political scientist Frederick Dickinson writes, "an advocate of peace. He devoted his entire reign to apologizing to Japan's neighbors, hammering home that post-war Japan symbolized peace, peace, peace, nothing but peace" (2019, unpagged).

For both the former/Abe and current/Suga administrations, the present emperor Naruhito is an essential figure as he represents a modern gentleman and can attract national and international admiration. The emperor is well and internationally educated (an Oxford alumni) and married to the empress Masako, a Harvard alumni and former diplomat, and who has given him a daughter (now 19 years old).<sup>38</sup> When the emperor Naruhito succeeded the throne from his father in 2019, the then prime minister Abe Shinzō immediately and directly asked the former US president

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<sup>38</sup> The Japanese government has procrastinated debates about an empress reigning.



Donald Trump to be the first foreign top official to meet him so that the Abe administration could demonstrate its commitment to the US-Japan security alliance (Dickinson 2019, unpagged).

President Trump did visit Tokyo to greet the then newly enthroned emperor Naruhito, who was the very object of much national respect regardless of whether Trump had, as diplomatically invited by Abe, actually presented himself or not. Titus rightly captures the national sentiment around the emperor in Japan, “Regardless of the form of state, locus of sovereignty, or actual political operations, reverence for the emperor has never ceased in the course of Japanese history” (1980, 546).

### *Tightly Controlled Civil Society*

The development of civil society in Japan (e.g., Kingston 2004; Sugimoto 2014, 305-25) is linked to that of LDP rule, dating back to the immediate postwar years (1945-57). As Japan attempted to recover from its WWII defeat, the nation witnessed an emergence of many interest groups, especially producer groups. These included industrial and professional associations (e.g., The Federation of Electric Power Companies and The Japan Iron and Steel Federation), all close to the national bureaucracy. In addition to these business-oriented interest groups in close liaison with the LDP-led government, a number of so-called policy beneficiary groups (e.g., farmer and labor unions) gradually arose from the 1960s on; Japan grew to achieve an economic “miracle” in the 1970s and enjoyed a bubble economy in the 1980s.<sup>39</sup> The number of geographically-based voluntary associations also increased, as local municipalities put efforts to facilitate a cooperative sense of community among residents.

The year 1995 (just like the year 2011) remains a significant year in the history of civil

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<sup>39</sup> Japan’s postwar miraculous economic development, which is internationally regarded as a successful case of a non-Western (Asian) capitalist society, prompted both positive and harsh evaluations by Japanese and non-Japanese scholars, often explicitly or implicitly engaged in national character debates (e.g., Johnson 1982; Vogel 1979).

society development in Japan. A severe earthquake hit the Kansai and Kinki (southwest) regions and its devastating consequences inspired so many citizens to volunteer collectively and nationwide in support of the most severely affected. These didn't necessarily act as a formal volunteer group due to notoriously burdensome government rules about fundraising on a formal basis. A similar increase in civil activities was observed when the Great Earthquake Disaster of Eastern Japan happened in 2011. In this case, not only volunteer services but also anti-nuclear and student movements gained momentum, criticizing the government for poorly dealing with the aftermath of the nuclear meltdown and reinforcing Japan's international militarist role under US-Japan security treaties (O'Day 2015, 3-8).

In the new millennium, the LDP-led government has permitted the growth of new types of civil organizations by enacting the new NPO Law in 1998. The 1998 NPO Law is called Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities (*Tokutei Hieiri Katsudō Sokushin Hō*), which has made it easier for civil organizations to register themselves as such in Japan. Prior to the implementation of the new NPO law, it was extremely difficult to register as non-profit and gain legal status as a tax-exempt organization in Japan, because the government had required all applicants to fulfill the category of "public interest legal persons (*kōekihōjin* 公益法人)"; Japanese law doesn't define non-profit technically as those who do not distribute profits to shareholders as in the US (Pekkanen 2006, 17). More specifically, it is primarily the bureaucrats who define what is in the public interest. Political scientist Robert Pekkanen reminds us that "Japanese law stipulates that public interest legal person groups can acquire legal status only through the explicit permission of a competent bureaucratic authority and grants this authority continuing powers of supervision and administrative guidance" (*ibid.*); that is, institutionalization hasn't guaranteed civil organizations' autonomy from the state in Japan, as the former in fact appears to hinder the

latter.<sup>40</sup>

Thanks to the enactment of the new NPO law in 1998, however, it has become possible for a group to be non-profit without necessarily passing the criteria for public interest legal persons, facilitating the birth of new types of civil groups (Ogawa 2009), which advocate issues including environmental protection, gender equality, aged care, international aid, and so on; Tokyo Rainbow Pride is one of these groups, focused on issues of sexuality. The proliferation of the new civil groups appears to have created a new tension in the history of Japanese civil society as strictly regulated by the LDP-led government, which has suppressed confrontational social movements against the state and its policies (Weiner 1997).<sup>41</sup> The present is a timely moment to examine the state of “Japan’s dual civil society”: a government-controlled situation congenial to the growth of small neighborhood associations—suitable for reinforcing family-obligation—rather than that of large professional advocacy organizations, making it hard for citizens to push for (especially legal) changes (Pekkanen 2006, 7-8).

### *Friendly Authoritarianism*

The LDP-led government’s social control is aptly described by Sugimoto as “friendly authoritarianism”: a dualistic technique aimed at domesticating citizens from school early on all the way up to the corporate world and the familial life through seemingly pleasant events such as

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<sup>40</sup> One example of a successful civil organization in Japan that has tactfully maneuvered through tightly controlled Japanese civil society is the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD), as examined by anthropologist Karen Nakamura (2006). In her ethnography, Nakamura attributes the success of the JFD to its multi-level strategies sustained by a collaboration of the national main office and its local associations (ibid., 104-114).

<sup>41</sup> A few (rather oppositional and sometimes even militant) exceptions are peace movements, resident movements concerned with local issues (e.g., pollution), and (perhaps the most confrontational and successful) *dōwa* 同和 movements. *Dōwa* movements were initiated by former outcast groups in Japan. These movements were originally called *burakumin* 部落民 (literally “hamlet people,” referring to outcast groups in feudal Japan and their descendants) movements. Those involved in these movements have begun using the term *dōwa*, “the same circle,” as a replacement of *burakumin* which has highly stigmatized connotations. The Buraku Liberation League (BLL), one of the leading groups for *dōwa* movements, “has been the largest, most vociferous and most effective human rights movement in postwar Japan” (Goodman & Neary 1996, 2).

festivals (Sugimoto 2014, 325-39). Japan is no doubt authoritarian in a sense that it “encourages each member of society to internalize and share the value system which regards control and regimentation as natural and to accept the instructions and orders of people in superordinate positions without questioning” (ibid., 325). At the same time, Japan is friendly as it “does not normally exhibit its coercive face, generally dangling soft incentives of various kinds” (ibid., 325). In particular, as part of friendly authoritarianism, Japan makes the most of “joyful, amusing, and pleasant entertainments such as songs, visual arts, and festivals to make sure that authority infiltrates without obvious pains” (ibid., 326). Using such seemingly power-free methods, Japan disciplines citizens so that they “play well” in Japanese life (Hendry & Massimo 2002). I suggest that Japan’s general predilection to play stems from premodern Japan’s use of pleasure (including sex) as a means of regulation.

Friendly authoritarianism, which is infiltrated by the state apparatus in every aspect of Japanese social life, has four distinct characteristics: 1) mutual surveillance within small groups, 2) visible and tangible power, 3) manipulation of ambiguity, and 4) moralizing and “mind correctness.” Number 1 starts early on in school (as early as primary school), when students are divided into small units (*han*) and encouraged to forge an intra-*han* relationship while working as a class on the whole. The *han* ideology continues throughout the rest of Japanese life (e.g., the corporate world and the neighborhood relations). As for number 2, authority is made visible, for instance, in the realm of law enforcement, as police stations are placed throughout or as in-vehicle public announcements are constantly played on public transportations such as buses and trains. Regarding number 3, Sugimoto notes that in Japan “equivocation rather than articulation [has been] promoted, allowing those in dominant positions to manipulate what is meant, what is

right, and what should be done” (2014, 333).<sup>42</sup> Such a tendency manifests in many domains including the legal. Number 4 refers to a sense of groupness inculcated among citizens early on and relates to the concept of *seken* (the public eye).

*The “Koizumi Theater”: Worsening Family Inequality*

The so-called *koizumi gekijō* 小泉劇場 (Koizumi theater), a term popularized by Japanese media to refer to the Koizumi-led administration (and its theatrical techniques), had initially appeared to carry the hope of Japanese citizens worn out by the prolonged recession since the 1991 bubble burst. The prime minister, Koizumi Jun’ichirō, promised to reinvigorate Japanese families by revolutionizing the depressively stagnant Japanese economy under his motto “no growth without reforms (*kaikaku nakushi te seichō nashi*)” (Chiavacci 2010, 61). By this, Koizumi meant radical (neoliberal) restructuring in the management of the Japanese governmental system, a political drama he hoped to perform for the recession-affected citizenry: for the exceptional scope and scale of his reform program, see Mulgan (2012, 17-9).<sup>43</sup> Although Koizumi had LDP credentials, he showed little interest—as if he were an LDP outsider—in buttering up the LDP’s traditional support bases with vested interests in the status quo. In the end, however, the Koizumi administration could restructure the political system only to a limited degree and the very changes his administration effected appear responsible for the family inequality that ensued. Despite Koizumi’s general alignment with the LDP’s (middle-class-favoring) family-oriented policy (Fleckenstein & Lee 2017), the “Koizumi theater” made

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<sup>42</sup> Consider the legal category of “public interest legal persons,” which I touched on above. This ambiguous category has been used by national bureaucrats to decide, based on their interests, which civil group to grant institutional status.

<sup>43</sup> Political scientist Kaneko Ayumu succinctly defines neoliberalism as follows: “Neoliberalism is a comprehensive historical project that emerged in the political arena as a response to the recession, deindustrialization, and fiscal crisis of the 1960s and 1970s, and has been dominant since the 1980s. Its scheme is to promote and naturalize the dominant status of the principle of the free market, to shrink the public sector by commodifying or privatizing it, and to legitimize these transformations by promulgating a new culture celebrating private corporate management and trumpeting the virtues of self-help, self-reliance, and self-management for the individual” (2015, 171).

untenable for many citizens the mainstream family model—which the LDP continues to use rhetorically for national unity.<sup>44</sup>

His (now notorious) silver tongue did offer hope to Japanese citizens initially. He boldly set out to rework what political scientist Keiko Hirata calls the “iron triangle,” a collusive relationship between the government, bureaucracy, and business (2003, 2). Despite expected and expressed concerns from the corporate world, Koizumi undertook sticking the knife into the iron triangle. The affected business interest groups, however, fiercely protested and the “traditional policymaking structure” (Mulgan 2012, 21) that Koizumi attempted to alter stood as an insurmountable obstacle to the political maverick.<sup>45</sup> As a result, Koizumi had difficulty altering the close alliance among government officials, national bureaucrats, and business leaders (Mulgan 2012, 2-9, 21).

Although Koizumi battled valiantly as a lone hero, it turned out, his administration ended up doing the same sort of thing. Just like earlier Japanese prime ministers, Koizumi pursued nation-benefiting policy causes, such as deregulation, privatization, and market liberalization; indeed, one of his accomplishments was postal privatization (Chiavacci 2010, 61-2). While pushing these under his favorite phrase “structural reform (*kōzō kaikaku*)” (Mulgan 2012, 3), Koizumi asked individual citizens to endure potential costs for national regrowth (Yambe 2001, 10). Koizumi’s solicitation for self-sufferance corresponded with the growing discourse about poverty as self-responsibility in the post-bubble era (Kami 2020).<sup>46</sup> Although Japan’s economy indicated

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<sup>44</sup> Although the LDP had traditionally promoted conservative family values, the party generally placed homemaking responsibility on each household (women in particular). Thus, LDP-led policies weren’t necessarily family-supportive with limited public childcare only available for low-income families at least until the late 1990s, when more robust considerations were given to child welfare and female workforce participation.

<sup>45</sup> The structure is dualistic with institutions comprising the ruling LDP and the bureaucracy. In this policymaking system, the executive (the prime minister and the cabinet) is subordinate to the bureaucracy (which, again, closely works with national businesses as Hirata aptly captures in describing their three-way relationship as the iron triangle).

<sup>46</sup> According to sociologist Kami Yoshifumi, the discourse about poverty as self-responsibility (*hinkon no jikosekinin*

an upward trend from 2003 up to the autumn of 2008 thanks to Koizumi's preferential treatment of (in particular big) corporations, political scientist David Chiavacci reminds us that "this economic growth did not translate into higher incomes or a full turnaround in the labor market. Although company profits increased strongly, average household income continued to stagnate" (2010, 59).

Although the word *kakusa shakai* 格差社会 ("disparity society") had been in circulation from the bubble burst of 1991 to express sentiment toward existing inequality, its widening reality had become hard to deny as a result of the Koizumi structural reforms that bore heavily on two domains: the employment sector and rural development (Chiavacci 2010, 60.-4). The Koizumi administration is held accountable for the growing number of atypical workers (approximately 27.2% and 33.5% of the total workforce in 2001 and 2007 respectively) with lower salaries and less social security coverage (ibid.): see the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's 2017 labor market report for irregular employment statistics).<sup>47</sup> His administration is also considered responsible for gradually increasing poverty among adults and kids (especially single-mother households) with the poverty rate being about 15% in 2001 and 16% in 2007 (Hashimoto 2018; Yuasa 2018): see the 2020 report on long-term trends in relative poverty rates published by Tokyo Metropolitan University. Furthermore, disparity manifested in the rural-urban divide as the Koizumi administration decoupled economic growth from development in the countryside, whose traditionally LDP-favoring constituents did not welcome the cutbacks in public projects there (Chiavacci 2010, 59, 64-5). During the period of Koizumi rule (2001-6),

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*ron*) is not a brand-new product of neoliberalism. Rather, he surveys social attitudes toward begging practices (*monogoi* 物乞い) in Japan from premodern to contemporary periods and argues that the idea of poverty as self-responsibility is deep-seated in Japanese society (ibid.).

<sup>47</sup> The rate of irregular employment in 2017 was 37.3%, 4.2% higher than the figure in 2007, a year after the end of the Koizumi administration. For statistics, visit the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's website (<http://www.mhlw.go.jp>).

voters in rural areas were alienated from the economic revival felt elsewhere in Japan (ibid.).

The historic defeat of the LDP in the Upper House election of September 2007 and the Lower House election of August 2009 led to the birth of a coalition government directed by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). The primary cause of defeat was the LDP's defeat in the countryside, a traditional LDP voter base, which increasingly grew dissatisfied with the consequences of the Koizumi structural reforms (Chiavacci 2010, 48-50, 55.68; see also Krauss & Pekkanen 2010). However, the LDP quickly came back to power in the winter of 2012, ousting the DPJ-led coalition government after its short (three years) rule. Since then, the LDP has controlled Japanese politics as usual. The LDP hegemony is resilient.

## 5. Distance-Sensitive Communication

The Japanese language, a product of ongoing negotiations between institutional regulation and individual practice (Hasegawa 2018; Heinrich & Galan 2011; Heinrich & Ohara 2019; Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith 2004; Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2016), places much importance on the linguistic marking of social distance through negative politeness strategies at both the morphosyntactic and discursive levels (Brown & Levinson 1987). Distance can be about age-based respect, status-related propriety, gender performance, or a complex combination of these factors. Distance is managed by Japanese-language speakers, who creatively draw on linguistic features (e.g., honorifics) influenced by pro-silence aesthetics (Alexy 2019; Došen 2017; Hamera 1990; Lebra 2007). As Nakane once complained (1967, 177), the sociolinguistic expectation of *enryo* 遠慮 (mannerly restraint) and *sasshi* 察し (sensitivity to context) heavily influences Japanese *amae*-based (interdependent) communication (Doi 2005, 2007; Donahue 1998, 23-5; Miike 2003). The *amae*-based communication makes it difficult to perform critique in social life aside from the existence of expert spaces, such as *rondan* 論壇 (discussion podium),



exclusively dedicated to debating (Kano 2016, 6).<sup>48</sup>

*“The” Japanese Language*

The Japanese language as we know it today is a product of modern Japan’s national standardization, which traverses various axes of power such as class, regionality, and gender. According to linguistic anthropologists Shigeko Okamoto and Janet Shibamoto-Smith, the Meiji government officials concerned about national control and security found it necessary for such a rising nation-state as Japan to establish, however forcefully through the newly (1872) founded establishment of the universal compulsory education system, a common language for intelligible and effective communication among diverse populations (2016, 27-73). What was then selected as the basis for Japanese national language (*kokugo* 国語) was, Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith note, a particular variety of Japanese used by such educated (male) Tokyoites as Meiji government officials (ibid., 28).

The emergence of *kokugo* was accompanied by the policy of dialect eradication (*hōgen bokumetsu*) (Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2016, 41) as well as the creation of gendered speech patterns (Nakamura 2007; Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2016, 203-44). As the Meiji government promoted a Tokyo acrolect through standardization, other speech patterns were subordinated to the emergent national language as regional dialects. The standardization of the Japanese national language through the eradication of what were deemed “dialects” also involved the creation of gendered speech patterns. As female subjects were educated in schools and by media, both promoting the state-sanctioned good-wife-wise-mother ideology, *joseigo* 女性語 (women’s language) came to take shape in its (usually assumed) counterpart *danseigo* 男性語

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<sup>48</sup> The advent of the Internet appears to make it far easier for the general public to express social critique casually on SNSs in a relatively unrestrained manner. Because the *amae* principle still largely conditions (face-to-face) social interactions in Japan in general, the cyberspace seems to function as a ground for unshackled outlets.

(Inoue 2006; Nakamura 2007; Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2016, 203-44). Women's and men's languages have developed rather distinctively, however equally regulated, as if their developments reflect women's and men's asymmetrical positioning vis-a-vis Standard Japanese (Nakamura 2007).

While the gendered Tokyo-City-inflected *kokugo* continues to be prescribed by the Japanese nation-state officially, diverse speech patterns also exist, including *onē-kotoba* おネエ言葉 (queen's language), a speech style highly associated with gay male characters in Japanese media (Fushimi 1995; Maree 2008, 2013, 2018, 2020a; Okamoto 2018). According to linguist Claire Maree (2013), *onē-kotoba* has a tense relationship with Japanese mainstream media. More specifically, the mainstream media capitalize on professional queeny TV personalities to make nationally consumable *onē-kotoba*, a cultural invention of what she calls the LGBT community (ibid., 26-27). Yet, discerning the community-spoken *onē-kotoba* from its mediatized version seems more difficult than Maree argues. Some of the professional queeny TV personalities identify themselves as queens and speak, on television, as they personally join the LGBT scene. Also, *onē-kotoba* among these media persona itself is quite diverse. However, by slotting diverse queeny personalities into the category of *onē*, Japanese media do play an essential role in making their speech deceptively coherent and easily marketable (in contradistinction to normatively masculine and feminine speech patterns) as Maree points out: see below for further discussion.

*Amae-Based Communication Informed by Pro-Silence Aesthetics*

Japanese communication is built on the notion of *amae* 甘え (mutual indulgence or interdependence) (Doi 2005, 2007).<sup>49</sup> Throughout his work, psychologist Takeo Doi stresses the

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<sup>49</sup> Psychologist Takeo Doi argues that *amae* can be pathological if it goes extreme. The great reception of his *amae* theory in both domestic and international contexts is attributed to his attempt to explain “indigenous” cultural patterns by reconciling prewar ideals of Japanese ethnic homogeneity (groupism) with postwar ideals of Western/Christian-inflected humanistic liberal democracy (individualism); by positing that *amae* is applicable

emotional undertone of *amae* in Japanese social interactions characterized by such patterns as non-verbal empathy, surface agreement, ambiguity, and reservation (2007, 1-43). *Amae* is fostered early on as in a mother-child relationship and it infiltrates the Japanese psyche oriented toward such (arguably peaceful) mutual indulgence (ibid.). In adult social life, this interdependence is facilitated by the spirit of *enryo* 遠慮 (mannerly restraint) and *sasshi* 察し (sensitivity to context) (Donahue 1998, 23-5; Miike 2003), which at least superficially suppresses unrestrained self-assertion.

Importantly, Japanese *amae*-based communication is influenced by, and influences, the aesthetics of *ma* 間 (spatiotemporal intervals) (Došen 2017; Sue 1991). The space-time concept of *ma* can be translated as being an empty space, a gap, a pause, or an interval between movements or structures (Došen 2017, 118). As an aesthetic principle, *ma* promotes an emphasis on the distance between (two) things and animates Japanese art, ranging from traditional performing arts such as *kabuki*, *noh* (masked dance-drama), and *bunraku* (puppet play) to cinema, calligraphy, music, and painting. This distance (or silence), as expressed nonverbally—that is, silently—by performing bodies, moving images, or playing sounds, demands audience engagement, allowing the multiplicity of perceptions and interpretations (Došen 2017, 118-20). In other words, what lies at the heart of the aesthetics of *ma*/distance is the power of silence, which sustains intersubjective relations.<sup>50</sup>

According to anthropologist Takie Lebra, Japanese communication thrives on silence as valued in Zen-inflected art (2007, 115-26). Silence implicates all, but its distribution is gendered;

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elsewhere to think about human interdependence, Doi made his work approachable for a wider audience (Borovy 2012, 263-92).

<sup>50</sup> Media studies scholar Reito Adachi (2016) investigates the cross-cultural significance of silence in media products by analyzing sound modifications (audiovisual translations) made to the English and other foreign language versions of the Japanese animated film *Spirited Away* created by popular animator Miyazaki Hayao. His study of the localization of silence reveals the differential degree of editing made to silence (the US English version having removed more silences than any other compared languages) in Japanese and non-Japanese contexts (ibid., 147-53).

reticence is reserved for, and expected of, men, whereas women find themselves free, and destined, to speak up despite their little chance of due consideration (Lebra 2007, 121). For such a potentially erotic zero-sum game laden with silence, both verbal and visual expressions need artful control, working with prescriptive linguistic features, including three-tier honorification in consideration of age-based respect.

### *The Space for Critique*

Reflecting on the dynamism of feminist debates in Japan, literary scholar Ayako Kano writes:

What seems paradoxical is that Japan is not exactly famed for people who forcefully disagree with one another in public. Japan is often viewed as a consensus-seeking society, a nonlitigious society that shuns confrontation. In the political world as well, disagreements are often understood to be settled via backroom deals rather than through public expression of dissent. One explanation for this paradox lies in the location where debate takes place: in many English-speaking nations, the quintessential form of debate is that of face-to-face verbal parrying between two sides, such as presidential candidates or teams of debaters in educational competition; in Japan the *ronsō* [debate] is a genre that primarily takes place on the printed page. (2016, 5-6)

According to Kano, the space for critique in Japan is generally limited to the specific genre (*ronsō*) of print media. Although Kano does not specify the primary audiences of the genre above, it is clearly for intellectual elites as she analyzes archival materials written and read by highly educated individuals, if not always academics. While even such critical spaces might not be entirely free of Japanese sociolinguistic patterns of mannerly restraint and context sensitivity as Nakane bemoaned the general “lack of critical sense” in Japan (1965, 215), Kano’s statement at least points to the rarity and difficulty of critique outside the compartmentalized *ronsō* space;

it is of course possible to express critique in general social life but at the risk of it being deemed as mere complaint rather than authorized critique.

If we understand “critique” loosely, television is also a vibrant space; it is more accessible although those who perform critique are still professional talents. One group of “critics” in Japanese media is *onē tarento* おネエタレント (queenly talents), highly stereotyped characters/speakers of *onē-kotoba*, who often take on the role of a “special” commentator (Eguchi 2017; Maree, 2020a; Okamoto 2018; Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2016, 281-91; Suganuma 2018). Much of the earlier research, focused on television personalities, views *onē-kotoba* as a “feminine” (polite and polished) art of buffering as regulated by the media eager to entertain and educate audiences. Anthropologist Hideko Abe (2010) offers ethnographic discussions about queen’s language in *Queer Japanese*. Based on library research and fieldwork, Abe broadly characterizes *onē-kotoba* as 1) inseparable from gay bar culture, 2) unpopular among gays, 3) linguistically analogous to women’s speech, 4) always acerbic, and 5) campy parodying of women’s speech (2010, 97-134).<sup>51</sup> In Abe’s definition of *onē-kotoba*, however, its “masculine” (impolite and crude) aspect (Marcello, 2016) still remains de-emphasized, a point worthy of further ethnographic inquiry. Regardless of the diversity in personal intellectual and political stances toward the qualification of *onē-kotoba* as resistance against normativity, all scholars agree on its playful potential for questioning the Japanese language and Japanese communication.

To recap, the Japanese language has emerged out of Japan’s rather coercive modernization

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<sup>51</sup> Abe links the provenance of queen’s language to a speech style shared by postwar cross-dressing male prostitutes known as *danshō* 男娼. She posits that the development of queen’s language has run in parallel to that of contemporary gay bar culture. According to Abe, however, many gay men “negatively evaluate” and even “hate” *onē-kotoba* (ibid., 97, 102). One of her interviewees, for example, posits that queen’s-language-bashers “believe that it diminishes masculine qualities (*Otoko-rashisa ga teigen suru* ‘Masculinity gets reduced’)” (ibid., 106). Other interviewees insist that *onē-kotoba* performance makes gays unpopular and that the majority of gays refuse it (ibid., 106).

(e.g., state-led dialect eradication policies). Japanese-language speakers, as ideologically expected to be interdependent with, and indulge, one another through deferent (hence distance-creating) communication by making the most of the notoriously rich and complicated system of Japanese honorifics (Cook & Shibamoto-Smith 2011). Such *amae*-based communication founded on the aesthetically pro-silence principle is in conflict with straightforward expression of criticism and disagreement in places other than formal debate or professional entertainment (e.g., television).

## **Conclusion**

In short, the institutional act of ignoring has characterized Japan's sexual regulation (especially of homosexuality), maintaining contemporary *nurumayu*. Historically, those in authority have been concerned more about social repercussions of homoeroticism (including gender non-conformity) rather than same-sex desire per se by maintaining hands-off attitudes. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual subjects have been just out of Japanese legality, if transgender subjects have been given consideration however partially and strictly. The social legacy of the formally dissolved *ie* system still affects individuals through their family-obligations. Politically, the LDP hegemony still seems very much alive. And Japanese-language speakers more often than not face difficulty breaking free from distance-sensitive communication accompanied by pro-silence aesthetics. Overall, the complex intertwining of Japanese history, law, social structures, politics, and language creates such a lukewarm context. This lukewarm context, equally liberatory and oppressive, makes it difficult to debate Japan's sexual control for coalitional action (Nakamura 2007, 269-71; Ryū 2010).

Why does *nurumayu* continue? One cogent answer is the extreme busyness of Japanese social life. Diligence, as cultivated out of necessity during the postwar development years (Hirata

2002, 24), still persist as a social ideal today (Iwasaki et al. 2006; Kitanaka 2011), recording the internationally distinct weekly workload of 49 hours or longer for one in five Japanese employees (Kawashima 2018, 170). Despite the implementation of work-style reform (Kawashima 2018; Su 2018), current circumstances are hardly different than before as *karōshi* (death by overwork) remains a social problem.<sup>52</sup> *Nurumayu* appears preserved best when people find themselves too exhausted with “playing hard” to start something new with little leeway at their disposal. In chronically overworked Japan, lukewarm play is to be continued.

Theoretically, Japan demands rethinking of the relationship between male-domination and homophobia, as stated by feminist and queer theorist Eve Sedgwick (2015). Although Sedgwick focused on modern Euro-America by explicitly provincializing her claim about patriarchal society as relentlessly homophobic, she thought beyond both time (ancient Greek) and place (“Sambia”), as if to invite us to inquire about the diversity of male-domination: “[I]t has yet to be demonstrated that, because most patriarchies structurally include homophobia, therefore patriarchy structurally *requires* homophobia” (2015, 4). Her provocation, however, has not been taken sufficiently seriously to date, even (or perhaps especially) in queer anthropology, where “an anti-homophobic approach” is the norm (Wilson 2019, 1). The rest of this dissertation forsakes anti-homophobic argumentation in order to re-envision gay liberation. How is *nurumayu* experienced by diverse individuals and groups? The subsequent chapters address lived experiences of two divergent groups: Tokyo Rainbow Pride and the Ni-chōme volleyball world.

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<sup>52</sup> “*Hatarakikata kaikaku* 働き方改革 (work-style reform)” has been in circulation as a catch-all slogan, encompassing institutional attempts to readjust business-related issues from working hours to interpersonal relations.

## Chapter 2

### Queer Activism in Japan: Tokyo Rainbow Pride

#### Introduction

Fall 2014 in California: It was when I was brainstorming my dissertation project online that I encountered an increasingly vocal and visible advocacy group *Tōkyō reinbō puraido* 東京レインボープライド (Tokyo Rainbow Pride: TRP hereafter) (Figure 1). Its organizational website (<https://tokyorainbowpride.com>) stimulated my intellectual curiosity about Japanese sexual minority movements. After studying TRP digitally for one year, I wrote up a preliminary report, hoping to build a rapport with the organization when I'd return to Japan. Several months passed. Slightly before the summer of 2016, I flew back to Tokyo and sent TRP an introduction email about my research involvement. I exchanged a few messages with the then co-representative Yamagata-san, and we agreed to meet in person in August. On the day of our scheduled meeting, I was anxious in both senses of the term. My anxiety has only intensified throughout my participant-observation.



Figure 1. The 2013 TRP pride parade participants marching in Tokyo while hoisting a rainbow flag to promote diversity. ©TRP

TRP has a distinct presence in the history of queer (broadly defined including LGBT) activism in Japan.<sup>53</sup> As a formerly volunteer, now government-registered not-profit organization,

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<sup>53</sup> I use the term “queer” as an expansive term for gender and sexual non-conformity without strictly connoting a heroically intended anti-normativity; “queer” can be a person, an act, or a feeling. In a Euro-American intellectual and political context, the term made an appearance to facilitate addressing broader power relations for social justice, what lesbian and gay (or identity-based) studies and activism had allegedly failed to accomplish (Hall et al. 2013). However, it is often said that throughout the development of queer studies and politics (Eng et al. 2005), “queer” has come to be associated with heroic resistance (Wiegman & Wilson 2015) and, to some extent, has limited itself to



TRP has expanded its networks in and beyond Japan by involving both Japanese and non-Japanese audiences. TRP's annual event of parading and partying in Tokyo helps mobilize domestic and international supporters in pursuit of LGBT rights in Japan. At the same time, TRP puts its energy into outreach and consciousness-raising too, as the organization holds cultural and educational programs primarily in the Tokyo metropolitan region. Today, using Tokyo-centered Japan in its organizational narrative, TRP balances play and protest for diversity promotion against Japan's lingering homogeneity myth (Befu 2001; Kelly & White 2006; Oguma 2002; Sugimoto 2009; Toyosaki & Eguchi 2017).

What do the past, present, and future of queer activism in historically sexually indulgent Japan look like, in light of such a burgeoning, and relatively successful, organization as TRP? After the decades chronically fraught with institutional barriers (HR, funding, etc.), the present moment seems to open up a window of opportunity for LGBT groups which valorize *kaminguauto* カミングアウト (coming-out); TRP appears to coincide with increasingly LGBT-concerned Japan in promoting diversity. From the uncertain postwar years until the late-20th-century, speaking out about difference inevitably conflicted with Japan's reconstructive efforts to unify the country. Although the postbubble 1990s accelerated the appearance of silence-breakers, the new millennium seemed to exhaust those involved in queer activism in stagnant Japan. Out of Japan's economically and politically slumping context, TRP has arisen. With a decidedly "out-and-proud" orientation, TRP attempts to lead queer activism into the 21st-century Japanese national landscape by promoting Japan as Asia's progressively LGBT-friendly nation. Although

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narrow agendas such as same-sex marriage; to name these single-issue agenda, scholars use various terms, including "queer liberalism" (Eng 2010) and "homonationalism" (Puar 2017). In retrospect, the neat distinction between lesbian/gay and queer efforts appears difficult, as they often overlap despite claims to the contrary (e.g., Altman 1998; Edwards 1998; Newton 1993). In a Japanese context, gay activist Fushimi Noriaki is one of those who have attempted to promulgate the English-loan word *kuia* クイア (queer) in advocating the justice-seeking and pleasure-affirming praxis of *hentai* 変態 (deviation or perversion); Fushimi edited a book series called *Kuia japan* (queer Japan) from 1999 through 2001 and in 2005.

“out-and-proud” activism might alienate some groups (e.g., Ni-chōme volleyballers: NVs), it has the potential to catalyze overdue changes to rigid social systems (e.g., the Family Registration Law) as TRP commandingly combines playful and serious elements of social protest through its spectacularly dual tactic.

## 1. Sexual Minorities in Japan: Without a Common Frame of Reference

The shorthand “LGBT” has entered into the Japanese lexicon through the “LGBT era” (2015-16).<sup>54</sup> In fact, “LGBT” ranked 3rd in the 2015 “new word” ranking by the publishing company Sanseidō, which specializes in dictionaries and textbooks.<sup>55</sup> Writing about Japan’s circumstances, critic Ryū Susumu avoids notating lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders as “LGBT,” which assumes their closeness and coalition (2010, 14-16). Instead, he punctuates them (“L · G · B · T”) and acknowledges intergroup tensions (ibid.). It is at this point that TRP enters the scene, extending prior attempts by many public figures, including academics and activists, to specify relevant challenges and establish a firm anti-discrimination platform. Notably, the anti-discriminatory discourses inspiring TRP allege the existence of many kinds of phobia as if these “enemies” stood between sexual minorities by undermining a common frame of reference.

Below, I will dispassionately try to provide an overview of *rezubians*, *geis*, *baisekushuarus*, and *toransujendās* in turn by following the notation “LGBT” so that I can begin my TRP narrative.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The period, now dubbed as the “LGBT boom,” refers to an upsurge in mainstream media attention to sexual minorities under the umbrella term (Wallace 2018), reminiscent of the early 1990s “gay boom,” a media-driven upsurge of societal interests in (especially male) homoeroticism.

<sup>55</sup> For the new word ranking, visit [dictionary.sanseido-publ.co.jp/topic/shingo2015/2015Best10.html](http://dictionary.sanseido-publ.co.jp/topic/shingo2015/2015Best10.html). As an aside, the LGBT Kōjien-Dictionary Definition Incident (*Kōjien Erujībī Teigi Mondai* 広辞苑 LGBT 定義問題) happened in January, 2018 (Kamiya & Matsuoka 2020, 38). The word “LGBT” and its definition were added to the Kōjien-Dictionary Seventh Edition by the Iwanami publisher, but explanations for transgender persons were omitted: LGBT being defined as “people who have different sexual orientations from the majority (*tasūha to wa kotonaru seitekishikō wo motsu hitobito* 多数派とは異なる性的指向をもつ人々).” The Iwanami publisher received criticisms and has corrected the definition.

<sup>56</sup> Following international trends, TRP has recently begun using “LGBTQ” by adding another alphabet “Q” to the common acronym. Yet, the appearance of the longer acronym on the TRP website is sporadic, and the organization still uses “LGBT” in the official introduction of its group mission and history.

## *Lesbians: Against Lesbophobia?*

Lesbians in Japan appear largely silent and invisible, a problem identified by the handful of existing publications on the topic (e.g., Horie 2015; Kakefuda 1992; Iino 2008; Maree 2007). It's certainly true to the extent that Japanese lesbian studies is, to borrow from linguist Claire Maree, "almost non-existent" (2007, 293). Lesbian knowledge-building appears utterly difficult to be seen as a comprehensive field of study given its state of traversing research, commerce, and politics through personal and collective efforts among lesbians. One notable figure is Kakefuda Hiroko. Literary scholar Suganuma Katsuhiko (2006) acclaims her "enduring" contributions alongside those of her gay counterpart Fushimi Noriaki. Kakefuda published what has become a foundational text, *On Being a "Lesbian"* (1992). Her text frames lesbian silence/invisibility as a reflection and result of "*rezubian ken'o* レズビアン嫌悪 (lesbian-phobia)" in Japan.<sup>57</sup>

Kakefuda's *On Being a "Lesbian"* offers a look at what it takes and means to live as such in Japanese society. First and foremost, Kakefuda identifies Japan's patriarchal family system as a source of heavy strains on lesbians. She contends that female same-sex desire unavoidably conflicts with the familial role of a daughter expected to be a wife and a mother in lockstep with the persistent state-promoted *ryōsaikenbo* 良妻賢母 ("good wife, wise mother") ideology (ibid., 56-103). Additionally, Kakefuda expresses her concerns about the absence of lesbian role models in Japanese mainstream media, problematizing rampant stereotypes of lesbianism produced by and for male pornography (ibid., 23-54).

Notably, Kakefuda rigidly views silence/invisibility in negative terms, as she analyzes related ordeals by using the term lesbian-phobia (ibid., 104-19). Lesbian-phobia manifests in

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<sup>57</sup> Except when I discuss Kakefuda's work, I use "lesbophobia," which is more commonly used in English, in my writing for a stylistic reason; "lesbian-phobia" looks a bit out of place when written along with other non-hyphenated words (i.e., homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia).

“*mite minu furi* 見てみぬふり ([the general public’s] pretending not to see [lesbians])” and “*kakurete iru koto* 隠れていること ([lesbians’] hiding)” (ibid., 105). Kakefuda regards the act of ignoring as oppressive and the pressure for closeted life as detrimental to lesbians (ibid., 105). Despite her withdrawal from the limelight by today, her work still stands as classic, offering the fundamental language with to address *rezubians* in Japan.

Although subsequent critics (e.g., Iino 2008; Horie 2007, 2015; Maree 2008) more often than not assume the existence of lesbian-phobia in Japan, the resonance of such framing among other publics remains under-analyzed. Take *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan* written by lesbian-identifying scholar Sharon Chalmers (2002) for example. As the monograph titles suggests, Chalmers presents many interview quotes from Japanese lesbians. Although few articulate experiences of lesbophobia, the language of homophobia creeps into Chalmers’ analysis throughout (e.g., 5, 33, 139).

Such tendency strikingly manifests when Chalmers highlights a case of physical violence against lesbians in Japan after discussing some challenges attendant on the act of coming-out:

An incident in which two lesbians were attacked on a very public thoroughfare took place while I was in Japan. The perpetrator assumed they were lesbian and yelled out pejorative names. When they challenged his behaviour they were assaulted. This situation is rare in Japan, or at least remains unreported and undocumented, but it is naïve to think that as lesbian visibility increases that there will be no homophobic backlash. The incident above was precipitated by the women’s refusal to back down in face of his aggressive behaviour, not because they did anything to suggest they were lesbian, but because of the assumption also pervasive in Japan that female (sexual) autonomy = man hater = lesbian. (140)

Peculiarly, although Chalmers herself attributes the man’s violent conduct to “the women’s

refusal to back down,” she uses such an unacceptable case to forward her general argument that “it is naïve to think that as lesbian visibility increases that there will be no homophobic backlash.” Maybe, what the man in question uttered in calling the women lesbians might have reminded Chalmers of homophobia; she doesn’t clarify his utterance. To say the least, the male perpetrator was so entitled that he picked a quarrel with, and forcefully harassed, two female utter strangers on the street. Put differently, Chalmers is rightly concerned about such potential aggression against (unapologetic) women, but she hastily presumes its nature to be homophobic.

Sociologist Horie Yuri has been open to thinking about silence/invisibility differently despite her overall frame remains in the tolerant-or-homophobic debate about Japan (2007, 2008, 2015, 194-204). In her 2008 article “The Im/possibility of Coming Out of the Closet: The Assumed Lesbian Crossroads,” Horie set out to contemplate the difficulty, even impossibility, of coming-out among some lesbians without necessarily downplaying her own attachment to the increasingly respectable act/choice for visibility (2008, 106-7). Rather than imposing coming-out in search of coalition, Horie calls for dwelling in crossroads, where difference-within exposes itself (*ibid.*, 113). However divisive such a power-laden node might appear, Horie invests in seeing through it in order to sustain lesbian identity politics critically.

As many lesbian critics problematize socially ignored sexuality (lesbianism in particular) in arguably homophobic Japan, gender studies scholar Iino Yuriko (2007; see also 2008) brings up another sociological register, ethnicity, for discussion by introducing *Zainichi* (resident-Korean) lesbians. In her discussion about power dynamics about lesbians in Japan, Iino highlights Japanese lesbians’ insensitivity to *Zainichi* lesbians, which was observed during the two Asian Lesbian Network conferences she participated in; Iino calls this oblivious tendency among Japanese lesbians “the politics of disregarding” (*ibid.*, 77-82). All in all, however, Iino maintains

a faith in Japanese lesbians “because they have also experienced anger and sadness of being disregarded, although in a different [sexuality] context” (ibid., 82). “By telling our stories to each other as listeners,” Iino continues, “‘we’ who are positioned differentially within the lesbian community in Japan are able to establish common ground. Such common ground would help ‘us’ to tell the story of ‘lesbians in Japan’ in ways that would facilitate rather than undermine coalitional politics” (ibid.). Yet, is such coalition necessary and feasible when it remains a question whether Japanese lesbians frame their experiences around such affects as “anger and sadness”? In anchoring lesbian experiences to those affects related to feminism (e.g., Frye 1983), Iino makes a (utopian?) leap from the difficult, and perhaps uncomfortable, question about intersectional thinking for coalition.

Rather than rethinking the necessity of coalition, Iino hones in the feminine-charged affects, in particular anger and sadness, by specifying it from a (radical) lesbian perspective in her later work (2008, 73-88). She asserts that although feminists begin with anger at patriarchy, lesbians experience anger at another object: the impossibility of their own storytelling as lesbians. What thwarts such narrative and potential alliance with heterosexual women/feminists is the presence and power of, she reminds us, *dōseiaiken*’o 同性愛嫌悪, a Japanese vernacular translation of “homophobia” (ibid.); the English-loan word *homofobia* ホモフォビア also exists (see the subsequent section on gay men for further discussion). She refers to discriminatory words actually directed at one lesbian feminist by heterosexual ones as manifestations of homophobia (ibid., 76). For Iino, the challenge of solidarity with hetero women/feminists adds another spice to the anger, a central affect/analytic she anchors herself in, lesbians experience. As Iino herself expresses that the frame of anger itself might potentially alienate many women, she still anchors herself in it by regarding anger as an a priori affective/analytical story in order to overcome

divides among women. What if, however, such framing fuels divides as Iino herself acknowledges that it might alienate many women (ibid., 74-5)? What would happen if we suspend such a priori framing in seeing through the existing divides?

The popularization of social media in our digital age has made it easier for aspirational lesbians to be seen and heard. The significance of social media as a tool for lesbian activism has been proven by one of two (2007 and 2013) widely publicized lesbian weddings. The second was held at Tokyo Disney Resort as part of social media advocacy for gay consumption and marriage; the wedding holders posted their negotiative exchanges with Tokyo Disney Resort, which had initially, and coercively, requested one of the women to “dress as to appear male” (Maree 2015, 214). The controversy, as spread through their posts on Twitter, Facebook, and the like, became “an online discussion point,” (ibid., 219) ultimately pressuring the Tokyo Disney Resort to permit the wedding as the lesbian couple wished. It’s somewhat ironic to see Disney support a lesbian wedding though, because the production company has yet to have produced a lesbian “princess” despite increasing diversification of its female characters (a non-white heroine like Jasmine or a stout one like Moana). It’s perhaps a matter of time whether lesbians come to demand lesbian heroines of Disney, claiming that its lack of such representation is lesbophobic.

*Gays: Against Homophobia?*

The number of gay publications in both Japanese and English is comparatively and conspicuously high. Critics have attempted, to a varying degree, to articulate the specific nature of the oppression gay men in Japan face. *Gei Sutadīzu* (gay studies), as conceived of by three scholars concerned about *gei* issues personally and politically (Kawaguchi et al. 1997), has laid out a foundational precept: *Geis* must fight homophobia in Japan at both individual and institutional levels. Yet, what oppresses gay men in Japan remains a debate.

As Japan increasingly became paranoid about the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the late-20th-century, sociologists Kawaguchi Kazuya and Kazama Takashi in collaboration with literary scholar Keith Vincent published *Gei Sutadīzu* in 1997. Their *tōjisha* 当事者 (those concerned about or implicated by a given issue) move to institutionalize sexuality studies in Japanese academia has helped legitimize the subject matter as a topic worthy of public discussion. More specifically, the trio assert that *otonashii homophobia* おとなしいホモフォビア (quiet homophobia) characterizes Japan, where breaking the *tacit* permission of same-sex desire appears to cause allergic, even violent, responses despite the infrequently reported cases of extreme violence targeted at gay men (ibid., 109-112; see also Kazama, 1997; Vincent, 1996).<sup>58</sup> Their approach has considerably influenced followers (e.g., Mano, 2014), including Komiya Akihiko, who juxtaposes Japan and the UK in exemplifying, in his words (both Japanese and English), Japan's *mokujiteki dōseiaiken* 'o 黙示的同性愛嫌悪 (latent homophobia) in contrast to the UK's *meijiteki dōseiaiken* 'o 明示的同性愛嫌悪 (evident homophobia) (Komiya 2015).

Just like many other academics, literary scholar Suganuma Katsuhiko argues that rarity doesn't mean absence, invoking Ishihara Shintarō, a notoriously insensitive past governor of Tokyo, as an exceptional reminder of homophobia in Japan. According to Suganuma, after Tokyo had officially bid to host the 2016 Olympics, Ishihara condemned Shinjuku Ni-chōme as “‘unfit’ and ‘damaging to the decency’ of the Tokyo metropolis” (2011, 346).<sup>59</sup> Although Ishihara—if we take his explicit remark at face value—simply sounds as though he intended to use the bid as an excuse to gentrify Tokyo, his commentary is interpreted by Suganuma as “unambiguously

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<sup>58</sup> Academics debate over how to interpret the state of “infrequently reported,” asking whether it means under-reporting or relative absence. Even those who argue in the direction of the latter still stress that we should not equate rarity with non-existence (see below).

<sup>59</sup> Suganuma appears to quote from Ishihara's public interview. As a reference for the interview, Suganuma cites *All About*'s online article “*Shinjuku Ni-chōme ga kisei sareru?* [Will Shinjuku Ni-chōme be regulated?].” Yet the URL provided is not working currently and I have been unable to confirm exactly what Ishihara said in his interview.



homophobic” (ibid.). Suganuma contends that the link between queerness and indecency made by Ishihara through his reference to Shinjuku Ni-chōme served as part of his tacit strategy to “construct the heterosexual nuclear family as the norm” (ibid.). Suganuma then generalizes Ishihara’s speech as “a rhetorical tactic that is prevalent in Japanese mainstream society” (ibid., 346). “This is how homophobia operates [in Japan],” contends Suganuma (ibid.).

Yet Ishihara’s presumed intentions to reinforce heterosexism through his perverted characterization of Shinjuku Ni-chōme do not neatly translate into the operation of homophobia in Japan. From (Suganuma’s presentation of) Ishihara’s comments, we do not know whether Ishihara, much less Japan, is phobic about same-sex desire. If you’re familiar with Ishihara’s past provocations against queers (and many “others”), you might judge Ishihara as a homophobe in advance and interpret his above remarks as homophobic. However, Ishihara, as he calls Shinjuku Ni-chōme being “unfit” and “damaging to the decency” of Tokyo, isn’t so much homophobic as exceptionally ignorant of Shinjuku Ni-chōme’s history; the urban enclave has been an oasis for many in postwar heterosexist Japan (Fushimi 2019; Hirano 1994; Sunagawa 2015). Criticizing Ishihara as “politically homophobic” (Boellstorff 2007, 161-80) doesn’t sound fair either, since, again, he sounds just heteronormative. It’s more productive to explore critically when, how, and why the label “homophobia” is attached to particular statements, events, or persons; such exploration is in order.

The HIV/AIDS panic is also remembered, in the academic and activist circle, as a manifestation of Japan’s homophobia. According to Kazama, the epidemic helped homophobia in Japan to *kenzaika suru* 顕在化する (come to the surface) (1997, 405-21). Indeed, the Japanese government appeared obsessed with locating a same-sex desiring (male) population as if to provoke fear of gays as a national threat at least until Japan began projecting its fear on the

foreign as the culprit infecting Japanese citizens (Kawaguchi & Kazama 2003, 180-197; Vincent, 1996); some gays and lesbians together objected to the notorious AIDS Prevention Act back then. Yet, did latent homophobia in Japan rear its ugly head through the HIV/AIDS panic as Kazama's word choice suggests? Don't any kinds of public health risks (e.g., nuclear pollution) tend to trigger allergic reactions? Even though Kazama urges gays to self-accept and resist both societal and internalized homophobia (1997, 420), such a *tōjisha* imperative prescribed from an authoritative position perhaps alienates those who disagree with his assumption about Japan's homophobia.

The Fuchū Public Lodging Facility Incident (Lunsing 2005a & b) remains as another common example of homophobia in Japan. In 1990, a few OCCUR members faced discrimination at the facility<sup>60</sup> To begin with, some other guests threw such slurs as “*okama* おかま/お釜/オカマ (fag or queen)” and “*homo* ホモ (a shorthand for *homosekushuaru* ホモセクシュアル homosexual)” at the OCCUR members. They then reported the incident to the facility director, who opted out of offering future accommodation to OCCUR by citing their potential violation of the facility's sex segregation policy aimed at inhibiting male-female lewd conduct.

But wait. First, the use of “*okama*” and “*homo*” does not immediately qualify as evidence of a homophobia allegedly internalized by harassers, unless we know why they directed those potentially discriminatory words at the OCCUR members. In fact, these words are time and again used to ridicule and discipline effeminacy rather than same-sex desire. The verbal harassment might have little to do with homophobia and more to do with gender performance. Second, the facility administrative body seems to have wanted to prevent any kinds of sex from happening there, if we consider both the existing bedroom policy and the immediate on-site

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<sup>60</sup> OCCUR filed a discrimination lawsuit against the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the Fuchū public lodging facility administration in 1992, and ultimately won in 1997.

decision. The administration might have been just unprepared to handle difference (e.g., same-sex desire) publicly rather than being homophobic. To be fair, it would have been an absurd assumption to make if the administration had worried that assigning the OCCUR members (gay men) to the same room would result in their sexual activities; the presumption of all gay men being promiscuous is a prejudice that proves ignorance. The whole incident has been analyzed by those involved in it and the subsequent trial in terms of heterosexism (Kawaguchi & Kazama 2010, 37-71). Yet, I now and then hear some individuals hark back the “homophobic” incident.

Another frequently cited instance of homophobia in Japan is the murder case that took place in Shinkiba in 2000—known as the Shinkiba Incident or in sociologist Tamagawa Masami’s words “an illustrative example of the problem of Japan’s homophobia” (2016, 177). On February 11, 2000, a 30-some-year-old man was murdered by a group of young perpetrators at Yumenoshima Ryokudō Park, known to locals as a gay cruising spot. This murder was violent; the victim was hit and trampled until he died. The murder is often described as an instance of *homo gari* ホモ狩り, literally translated as homo hunting, loosely gay bashing: reminiscent of *oyaji gari* 親父狩り (“elderly men hunting”), a sensational phenomenon in the mid-1990s. According to Kawaguchi and Kazama (2010, 139-42), the perpetrators gave statements, including but not limited to, “The main reason for my doing homo hunting is to hit [gays]”; “I was angry at homos, men who have sex with not women but men”; and “I came to think that it’s okay to target homos because they are trash.” These utterances do sound homophobic.

Although we are certain that the Shinkiba Incident perpetrators have committed an inexcusable violence (categorizable as a hate crime), we do not know 1) they have acted only because they are homophobes and 2) how and why they have become homophobic in the first place. Viewing the perpetrators as those who have internalized homophobia entails an

assumption that Japanese society is homophobic. However, it is an ongoing controversy whether Japan is homophobic or not. And the Shinkiba Incident is an extreme case, as many agree on the relative lack of such events in Japan.<sup>61</sup> Thus, we should examine the incident as an admittedly special, rather than simplistically homophobic, case. What motivated the youth to commit the crime? More broadly, how and why do individuals come to be homophobic? Why do homophobes continue to fear/hate queers to the degree of extreme violence? Answers to these questions help analyze such identity politics as gay liberation, whose flipside is the emergence of the villains (Wickberg 2000). Two faces of the same coin deserve analysis, although no victims of violence should be blamed under any circumstances.

Examples of homophobia allegedly lurk in Japanese literature too, as critic Fushimi Noriaki (2007, 21-23) discusses in his analysis of the late author Mishima Yukio's novels: *Confessions of a Mask* and *Forbidden Colors*, published in 1949 and 1951, respectively. Fushimi first identifies the literal meaning of homophobia, fear and hatred of the same group/tribe/family (*dōzokuken'ō* 同族嫌悪), and its tendency to be intense among gays. He then attempts to draw examples of both societal and internalized anti-homosexual sentiment from Mishima's novels. Yet quoted passages (see below) reveal the association between same-sex desire and effeminacy (Ishida & Murakami 2006). Thus, we cannot conclude what the protagonist is phobic about: same-sex desire or effeminacy, or alternately their entanglement? Effeminacy discomforts many gays because it can "out" their unremarkable sexual orientation? Many tend to bash each other, not because they are homophobic, but perhaps because the task of de-coupling same-sex desire and effeminacy overwhelms them.

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<sup>61</sup> Physical assaults against gays in cruising parks seem to occur occasionally (if underreported), as the novelist and screenwriter Izawa Mann/Mitsuru expresses his thoughts (Miller 2000, 92n14). To identify these assaults as homophobic, we must ask: What motivates assaulters?

As evidence of internalized homophobia, Fushimi first draws from *Confessions of a Mask* a passage, in which the protagonist expresses the difficulty of self-acceptance among same-sex desiring men. The protagonist exposes his fear of “*ano ningen no nichijō seikatsu* あの人間の日常生活 (the everyday life/practice of that person)” (Mishima 1949, 180-81). “That person” with whom the protagonist identifies, however, seems more than just same-sex desiring. “That person” is, if constituted by what concerns the protagonist throughout the novel, also effeminate with “unmasculine” features, such as his childhood interest in make-up, physical weakness, and hyper sentimentality (ibid., 17-20, 54-56, 77-78, 168, etc.).

A passage from *Forbidden Colors*, which Fushimi considers to be further evidence of societal homophobia, similarly shows same-sex desire’s entanglement with effeminacy, as the protagonist gender-codes (the conduct of) same-sex desiring men. Notably, the protagonist “feminizes” same-sex desiring men’s manner of walking by using expressions conventionally used to reference women, such as “*shina wo tsukuru*,” literally translated as behaving flirtatiously, loosely sashaying (emphatic points in original; bold emphasis added for my analysis):

階級も職業も年齢も美醜もさまざまながら、たった一つの情念で、いわば恥部で結ばれ合ったお仲間だ。何という紐帯！この男たちは今さら一緒に寝る必要はない。生まれながらにわれわれは一緒に寝ているのだ。憎み合いながら、妬み合いながら、蔑み合いながら、そしてまた温め合うために、ほんの少し愛し合いながら、あそこに行くあの男の歩き方はどうだ。全身でしなをつくり、肩を交互にせばめ、大きな尻を振り、首をゆらゆらさせ、いわば蛇行を思わせるあの歩み。あれが親子よりも兄弟よりも妻よりももっと身近な僕の同類なんだ！ (Mishima 1951, 78)

Rank, occupation, age, beauty notwithstanding, they [men cruising in a park] are all attached with

one another by the same desire—by their crotches, so to speak. What a bond! These men do not have to sleep together. By nature, we are always already sleeping together. In hatred, in jealousy, in scorn, coming together for a short moment of love to feel the warmth. **What is there about the walk of that man over there? He is sashaying along, shoulders and broad hips asway, head bobbing. His walk reminds one of the meandering slither of a snake.** Closer than parent or child, more than wife, brother, or sister, they are my comrades! (my translation)<sup>62</sup>

If the protagonist is phobic about an affected/effeminate (but not necessarily a woman's) manner of expressing same-sex desire, is “homophobia”—as well as “misogyny (*misojini* ミソジニ— or *onnagirai/joseibesshi* 女嫌い/女性蔑視)”—an appropriate term to represent his feelings? Understanding what the protagonist fears and hates above is deceptively difficult. The association between same-sex desire and effeminacy is part of why I call for suspending such confusing a label as “homophobia” to discuss affects among queers (not just) in Japan.

More recently, in the context of increasing demands for marriage equality, sociologist Tamagawa Masami views “[t]he Japanese [f]amily as the [g]rounds for homophobia in Japan” (2016, 175). According to Tamagawa, “Contemporary Japanese society contains two different types of homophobia: quiet (*otonashii*) homophobia and familial (*uchi*) homophobia” (ibid., 176). While applying “familial homophobia” (Schulman 2009) to Japan by translating the foreign concept as *uchi* 内/家 homophobia, Tamagawa builds on the notion of quiet homophobia developed in *Gei Sutadīzu*. He locates the hotbed of homophobia in such a racialized construct (closet?) as the “Japanese family” as if to justify a push for marriage equality in Japan as part of a global fight against anti-homosexuality. But same-sex marriage can be objected to for reasons other than homophobia, as both national and individual priority is diverse; the maintenance of

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<sup>62</sup> My translation differs from, though I consulted, Alfred Marks' 1968 English translation.

the emperor system can be one reason, and (stereotypical) images of marriage equality activists can be another: see Chapter 4 for further discussion.

### *Bisexuals: Against What?*

It's difficult to pinpoint what *baisekushuarus* fight for in contemporary Japan, primarily because there isn't much solid research on bisexuality aside from introductory references in LGBT-themed books (e.g., Ishida 2019; Moriyama 2017). For instance, sociologist Moriyama Noritaka only devotes a three-page subsection to bisexuals (2017, 45-7), compared with lesbians, gays, and transgenders who appear in their respectively assigned chapters. Similarly, in *Introduction to LGBT* written by another sociologist Ishida Hitoshi (2019), references to bisexuals accompany where lesbians or gays are given explanations. Does the absence of bisexuality in LGBT research reflect a low bisexual population? Do researchers ignore bisexuality or do bisexuals themselves have little interest in speaking out? How to make sense of the current state of bisexuality fuels an ongoing debate.

Openly bisexual literary scholar Barbara Summerhawk, one of the three editors of *Queer Japan: Personal Stories of Japanese Lesbians, Gays, Transsexuals and Bisexuals* (1998), finds Japanese social situations surrounding bisexuality “interesting”:

[F]ew queers in Japan so far claim bisexuality as a long-lasting identity. The concept of bisexuality, as elsewhere, is new even though it has a long history. People are just beginning to explore what bisexuality means. Is it a sexual identity, or as some think, “not just a sexual orientation but rather a sexuality that undoes sexual orientation as a category? [quoted from Garber 1995, 65-6]” Biphobia often prevents people of both sexes from identifying themselves as bisexual, preferring the closet in both straight and gay communities. According to gay men, married gay men sometimes identify themselves as bi when on Gay Net [a gay dating website] or in personals to inform potential partners of their marital status. In both lesbian and gay communities, bis remain suspect. Stereotypes of

bisexuality are yet to be challenged seriously. (9)

Just like Marjorie Barger, who views bisexuality “as a sexuality that undoes sexual orientation as a category” (1995, 65-6), Summerhawk exposes her faith in it to reimagine human sexuality radically. But she stops short of delving into Japanese bisexual cases. Rather, she is quick to regard “biphobia” as what “prevents people of both sexes from” bisexual identification. Such diagnostic rhetoric invalidates potentially diverse modes of being bi. Furthermore, it is Summerhawk herself who, by quoting from Japanese gay informants, reinforces Euro-American “stereotypes of bisexuality” as political “suspects” (Queen 1992), often stigmatized as being unable or unwilling to declare same-sex engagement in the post-Stonewall age, when some queers have taken “out-and-proud” action against homophobia by risking consequences. Why not ask, for instance, how come some men inform potential sexual partners of their own marital status by identifying themselves as bi when such disclosure itself isn’t necessarily necessary in the first place? How does bi identification benefit (or compromise) both the informer and informed, and are there any similarities or differences in consequences between lesbians and gays?

*Queer Japan* presents one Japanese woman Matsunaga Kazumi, who identifies herself as “a lascivious bisexual” (Summerhawk et al. 1998, 37-45). Word choice “lascivious,” she explains, signals her general sex-positivity. Matsunaga retrospectively traces the ways in which she has come to become bisexual. For Matsunaga, bisexual identification and sex positivity coincides, as she begins her narration, “But before I became this kind of person, I was backward about sex and couldn’t even look at my vagina in a mirror. You could say my vision of love was limited to males; I was an unaware, conforming hetero. So why did I change? I’ll try to explain by looking back at the time of my conforming non-individuality” (ibid., 37). Her opening statement contains



a few key words, such as “unawareness” and “conformity,” which characterize her progressive identity formation anchored in a spiral of limitation and liberation. Not to invalidate a sense of liberation Matsunaga personally felt through her journey, it is another thing to conflate ignorance with conformity, and that with “non-individuality” because such conflation risks denying coevalness and overvaluing “knowledge.” Importantly, since Matsunaga consented to her chapter contribution to the edited volume in English translation, she is part of the “out-and-proud” discourse resistant to biphobia which, as Summerhawk argues, inhibits bi identification.<sup>63</sup> Still, Matsunaga is one of the few bisexual-identifying persons who proactively discuss bisexuality.

Ryū also comments on the pervasiveness of negativity toward bisexuality from a standpoint of a gay man, who has felt intensely emotional, if not carnal, attraction to women (2010, 58-64). According to Ryū, bisexuality is deemed as problematic by gay-identifying women and men, but reasons behind vary along the gender line; bisexuality appears to bother lesbians financially and gays existentially. Some lesbians reduce bisexuality to married lesbians who, arguably exploit men as money pits, whereas some gays suspect self-denial among bisexual men (including married gays) allegedly unable to accept same-sex desire (ibid., 58-9). In the course of his discussion about distanced bisexuality, Ryū points to women’s sexual fluidity positing that erotic orientation is more pliable among women than men (ibid., 58). Aside from this largely speculative assertion (no matter how worthy of further exploration), he gauges the tendency for bisexuals to be distantly respected as insatiable others, even by heterosexuals as well as lesbians and gays (ibid., 62-4). Ultimately, Ryū comes to wonder—as the Kinsey scale has revolutionized the understanding of sexuality as a continuum—whether bisexuals constitute the sexual majority.

Japanese social life characterized by the *tatemaehonne* 建前本音 (public principles/private

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<sup>63</sup> There is a criticism directed against the Orientalist “framing”/translation of the volume (McLelland 2003).

feelings) duality appears quite “bisexual” by default, stashing sexual plurality behind the parental face. Adult same-sex desire is, if not rejected entirely, expected to remain backstage as if homoeroticism were part of childhood mischief in a socially enforced developmental narrative; it’s commonly assumed that individuals eventually grow out of potentially homoerotic childhood into responsibly heterosexual adulthood (e.g., Fushimi 1991; Kakefuda 1992). The private indulgence of same-sex desire doesn’t, of course, automatically mean the social acceptance of bisexuality in and of itself, as discussed by many scholars versed in such notions as “compulsory heterosexuality” or “heteronormativity.” Still, Japanese society is most likely quite congenial for bisexuals with decent earnings to maintain middle-class comfort, who hardly find discretion troubling, because bisexuality alone doesn’t seem to be a life-and-death problem in Japan.

#### *Transgressors: Against Transphobia?*

Just like *rezubians* and *geis* alongside *baisekushuarus*, *toransujendās* (transgressors) have, due to internal diversity, faced difficulty establishing a position from which to fight discrimination. Many sub-labels, such as *toransusekushuaru* トランスセクシュアル (transsexuals), *nyūhāfu* ニューハーフ (“new half”), and *iseisōsha* 異性装者 (cross-dressers) coexist under “transgender” in its broader sense of the term; thus, attendant experiences are diverse as well. Narrowly, “transgender” refers to those whose felt gender identity is not necessarily aligned with their legal sex as assigned at birth in contradistinction to cross-dressers/transvestites, transsexuals (those hoping for medical transition), and professional entertainers (“new half”) (Moriyama 2017, 47-54). Historically, transgender phenomena have been, as so intimately and even conflictedly tied to same-sex desire, associated with theater performance (Dasgupta & McLelland 2005; Ishida & Murakami 2006; Mitsuhashi 2008; Robertson 1998). Transgender issues have perhaps most sensationally come under public purview since media turned its

spotlight on *seidōitsuseishōgai* 性同一性障害 (gender identity disorder) in the new millennium, followed by legal consolidation to regulate transgender life.<sup>64</sup> Today, transgender persons, in particular those seeking transition, have a tense relationship with medical authority, in the name of which both same-sex desire and gender expression have been mis/managed. Japanese transgender scholarship and activism have recently identified transphobia in Japan as a target to be resisted.

Coupled with continuous publishing efforts by transgender advocates (e.g., Torai 1996, 2003a, b; Kamikawa 2007), mainstream media have helped put transgender issues on the Japanese archipelago's map. The subject matter was sensationally spotlighted by the long-running television program *Kinpachi-Sensei of Class 3-B*. The sixth series of this popular program (October 2001-March 2002) featured a student character, Tsurumoto Nao, who painfully struggles with *seidōitsuseishōgai* 性同一性障害 (gender identity disorder) through self-harming behavior; this series also thematized heterosexuality and same-sex sexuality in the seventh episode. Shortly after such a “shocking” series thematized on gender (and sexuality), the Japanese Diet passed a special law in response to growing concerns for transgender people (see below for further discussion about the policy).

Indeed, television is a multitudinous, if male-dominated, space as a reservoir of *onē* おネエ (queeny) talents (Eguchi 2017; Maree 2020a; Suganuma 2018) who often, whether intentionally or not, prompt audiences to have a think on LGBT issues. These entertainers include transsexual and transgender women as well as effeminate and/or gay men: note the underrepresentation of

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<sup>64</sup> Gender identity disorder has been understood and treated as “disability” in Japan due to the official adoption of the word *shōgai* in the Japanese translation, enabling transgender persons to claim disability status unlike in Euro-American societies (Nakamura 2012, 2-3). Although the diagnostic label still remains as *seidōitsuseishōgai*, alternative terms such as *seibetsuiwa* 性別違和 (gender dysphoria) and *seibetsufugō* 性別不合 (gender incongruence) have emerged since 2013 in accordance with international trends to reconsider the “disorder” component of the initial label and its socially stigmatizing implications.

transgender men and gay women. These personae are predominantly cast to entertain presumably heterosexual audiences (McLelland 2000, 2001, 2003); sometimes they serve as social critics of some sort speaking in *onē-kotoba* おネエ言葉 (queen's language), a gayly effeminate speech style (Abe 2010; Eguchi 2017; Maree 2020; Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2016, 281-91; Suganuma 2018). A few of the most widely recognized shows include *A Spring of Aura* (Asahi TV, 2005-2009), *OnēMANS* (Nippon TV, 2006-9), and *Sanma's Empty/Real Queens' Fuss about Love Affairs* (TBS, 2011, 2012, 2013), where queenly talents stand out, whether spiritually, charismatically, or humorously. Apparently, the entertainment television platform is good at showcasing spectacular gender performance and thus eliciting a range of affects (pity, sympathy, respect, fun, discomfort, and so on) among viewers.

Though fewer in number, educational television programs also exist. One example is *Bridging Hearts* aired by NHK, which deals with social controversies. Unlike entertainment programs, the NHK program highlights everyday problems transgender persons face, including sex change, job discrimination, physical appearance ("passability"), and bathroom usage.

These serious yet neglected issues have been addressed primarily by transgender academics and activists, such as the leading scholar Mitsuhashi Junko and the current TRP representative Sugiyama Fumino. They consensually stress that current procedures for sex change are too demanding. Indeed, the Gender Identity Disorder Act, effective since 2004 as passed by the Japanese Diet in 2003, back then in response to media-driven growing concerns for transgender issues, remains rather oppressively stringent. The special law permits individuals to change legal sex on the family register only if meeting strict requirements, including sex reassignment surgery and sterilization (Taniguchi 2013). The problem is that not all want to undergo sex-reassignment surgery, and imposed sterilization violates human rights.

One of the most prolific critics in Japanese transgender studies, Mitsuhashi Junko, has recently contributed an article to the feminist journal *Women's 21st-Century*, whose issue title reads "Feminism and Trans Exclusion" (2019, 17-21). Her article is entitled "What Is Expected of Japanese Feminism: Overcoming Transphobia and Forging Solidarity with Trans Women." She situates it against the emergence of the allegedly increasingly transphobic online backlash by self-proclaimed feminist women and their camp followers since Ochanomizu Women's University's decision to permit applications from trans women in 2018. Without presenting and analyzing actual online allegations by some feminists, Mitsuhashi moves on to introduce her own experiences of exclusion by some Japanese feminist scholars. Although such discriminatory incidents obviously deserve reference, I'm equally curious about their background(s), motivation(s), and objective(s). According to Mitsuhashi, Japanese feminism contrasts with, and arguably lags behind, Euro-American feminism that has allegedly relatively succeeded in inclusion upon contemplating own transphobic consciousness (ibid., 20); orientalism is not so much her individual problem as a common (perhaps strategic) rhetoric in Japanese research and activism. After thanking anti-transphobic Japanese feminists she personally knows, Mitsuhashi concludes that Japanese feminism is currently at a crossroads, confronted with the question of whether it remains transphobic by excluding trans women or overcomes it by including them (ibid., 21).

Mitsuhashi assumes the existence of not only transphobia but also homophobia in Japan. Notably, in her discussion about homophobia, she posits that it is less intense among women than men (2008, 353). It has been difficult until perhaps even today (prior to the 1990s for sure) for men to be out and proud of their attraction to male-to-female transgenders because, Mitsuhashi contends, homophobia, as internal to the desiring self and as expressed by others, forecloses such

embrace and exposure (ibid., 355). But, what does homophobia do with such trans-women-loving men?; aren't they after all heterosexual, who either prefer a particular kind of women (i.e., transwomen) or prefer women including transwomen? What exactly do these men fear or hate? Also, does Mitsuhashi extrapolate her assertion based on the men she has encountered? Mitsuhashi's assumption appears to be the foil of Ryū's assumption about women's sexual fluidity (see above), both of which remain a debate worthy of research.

*Others: Against What?*

TRP's video glossary identifies possible further specifications (asexuality, intersexuality, X-gender, etc.), I argue that here "LGBT" serves as a reasonably adequate starting point to address sexual diversity in its full complexity and depth. In seeking to solidify LGBTs in Japan, academics and activists discursively argue for the presence of many kinds of phobia with "Japanese" examples. At first glance, such phobic forces allegedly prevailing in Japanese society might appear to prevent sexual minorities from coming together. Yet, what if it is the analytical and rhetorical frame of anti-phobia itself that defers our coalition? After all, otherizing homophobes, biphobes, and transphobes as if they were victims of phobic social currents is a flipside of "out-and-proud" identity politics and prone to problematize disagreement as a sworn enemy to be resisted. Ongoing disagreement is part and parcel of intellectual and political vitality.

To delve into the observable absence of common language among sexual minorities in Japan (McLelland & Suganuma 2009, 329; Nakamura 2007, 269-71; Ryū 2010) without anti-phobic analytic and rhetoric is a more challenging, albeit potentially rewarding, task for debating radical difference in a globalizing world. Such a context-specific pursuit requires creative engagement with burgeoning Japanese queer studies and politics heavily influenced by Euro-

American resistance-oriented counterparts (Wilson 2019). If not phobia, then, what commonly challenges sexual minorities in Japan, though? In the following section, I will turn to the act of coming-out in the broader sense of the term—public disclosure (of anything potentially discrediting)—as dared by predecessors, both individuals and groups.<sup>65</sup>

## 2. Predecessors (1945-2011): Many “Comings-Out”

Ongoing demands for breaking silence about same-sex desire and gender non-conformity in Japan are an amalgam of cumulative steps taken by forerunning individuals including academics, activists, and artists, as well as many ordinary folks. During the last half of the 20th-century, especially since its last decade, silence breakers have both individually and collectively punctured Japan’s family-oriented “*jōshiki* 常識 (common sense)” (Lunsing, 2001) through a budding ethos of coming-out (Maree, 1997), facilitated by the power of consumer-friendly mass media. However tenacious, their efforts seem tenuous in the absence of such an overarching “glue” as decidedly homophobic discrimination (religious demonization, legal exclusion, medical intervention, etc.), which has dramatized the so-called gay liberation elsewhere (Lunsing, 2005a; McLelland & Suganuma, 2009). In a Japan perversely unaffected by anti-homosexuality (McLelland, 2005), individuals and groups have painstakingly attempted to promote the value of speaking out against the family-obligation in aesthetically pro-silence Japan. I chronologically outline their attempts of public disclosure in relation to Japan’s evolving context and other social movements. While asking what they have done, I will establish my narrative on queer activism—a space-moment through which to express same-sex desire and gender non-conformity among many other “discreditable” features—in Japan.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> By “anything potentially discrediting,” I mean not just sex/uality, but whatever is deemed different from the statistically and ideologically average Japanese.

<sup>66</sup> My purpose here is to loosely historicize my narrative. Individuals and groups mentioned below deserve more extensive research on their performances (e.g., research that questions the how, why, and what of them), although

### *1945-70: Postwar Loss and Longing*

WWII tremendously impacted individuals who were going to play an irreplaceable part in queer activism in postwar Japan. After the end of WWII, Japan set out to democratize the nation under Allied supervision. The American occupation of Japan lasted for a little less than a decade. Afterward, the nation would tread a “miraculously successful” path, as the Japanese government decided to adopt a retainer role of the US empire in Asia (Befu 2001; Oguma 2002). The more Japan’s economy accelerated, an increasingly consumer-friendly social environment (especially the publishing and television industries) gave prominence to a few extremely talented artists as broadly defined, including entertainers, writers, and even want-to-be politicians. These individuals, often socializing with and being influenced by one another, exhibited strong characters, who have shaped the contours of the queer activist debates.

The immediate postwar years in Japan were, as easily assumed, cataclysmic, as the severity of existing poverty, the momentum of nascent reconstruction, and the hope for future prosperity all coexisted (e.g., Gordon 2020; Miyoshi 1991). After the WWII surrender as announced through the Jewel Voice Broadcast by Emperor Hirohito on August 15th, 1945, Japan undertook waves of significant, if not entirely radical, transformations under the presence and guidance of the Allied US occupying forces (1945-52). These changes included the humanized emperor system, gender equality under the law, the abolition of state-licensed prostitution, and the creation of the Self-Defense Forces to name a few. However tumultuous these transformations might have been, Japan was on the road to economic bubbles. As Japan grew its national unity and pride, what’s now known as *nihonjin-ron* 日本人論 (the theory of the Japanese) gathered

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this dissertation touches on these questions. I use both library research (primarily for published academic work) and online research (when there seems to be little published academic work). In the latter case, I record URLs for websites other than Wikipedia.



force, drowning minority issues (Befu 2009, 21-37; Sugimoto 2009, 1-20, 2014, 196-224).

If we define activism loosely as a set of striking performances beyond direct political action, Mishima Yukio (1925-70) remains one of those who have famously contributed to what I want to narrate under the rubric of “queer activism in Japan.” First as a novelist and later as a body-builder and playwright, ultra-right ideologue Mishima peacocked one facet of same-sex desire through his prolific work both solo and collaborative (perversely themed novels, self-portrait semi-nude photographs, self-directed filmed dramas, etc.). Through these, Mishima explored his concerns about Japan’s postwar “emasculating” democratization, which had, in his opinion, de-privileged the history and value of the emperor.

However suggestive of his gay identity through his creation, Mishima did not come out in the contemporary sense of the term: going public as gay explicitly. And he committed suicide at the Ground Self-Defense Force Eastern Corps Headquarters in Ichigaya on November 25th, 1970. It is his suicide, however, that makes Mishima one of the most vocal and visible figures in postwar and even today’s Japan, a last samurai of some sort concerned about Japan’s postwar pro-US direction. In fact, his death has rather generated considerable scholarly and journalistic attention to the sociocultural and political significance of his antemortem productions (Kawasaka 2015, 45-75, 109-11; Mackintosh 2012, 131-49). Lesbian critic Izumo Marou, for instance, offers one possible interpretation by describing the author in question as “a self-denying homophobe,” who lived in a heterosexual marriage while participating in the Tokyo underground scene and exploring same-sex desire in artwork (Izumo 1993, 193).<sup>67</sup> Mishima has virtually left it up to us.

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<sup>67</sup> Izumo writes: “Mishima was too homophobic to accept his gayness despite his identification as such. His almost insane break-in incident is, if we take a different look at it, perhaps the sad act of undermining democracy as a result of his frustration about the role of a good husband which entailed a suppression of his own inexpressible desire in his married life, however beautifully he could have created a character in his literary work and however freely he could have manipulated it there (明らかにゲイ・セクシュアルであったにもかかわらず、自らのセクシュアリティを受け入れることができなかつたホモフォビアの三島由紀夫が、気でも狂ったかのように自衛隊に乱入した事件は、見方を変えれば、たとえ審美主義の鎧を纏って、自分の完結した世界のなかだけでは自分らしくふるまうことが可能だったとしても(小説の世界の三島)、現

Mishima continues to “speak” through his “ugly” suicide as interpreted by contemporary critics, as if he (beautifully?) proves that even death cannot silence him.

Mishima was a friend of Miwa Akihiro (1935-), a multitalented chanson singer who has, unlike his deceased comrade, explicitly come out as a same-sex desiring man in media (Miwa, 1968). Born into an affluent family running restaurant businesses near the Maruyama pleasure district in Nagasaki, Miwa was living a comfortable life until Japan’s decision to go to WWII. After surviving the atomic bombing of Nagasaki on August 9th, 1945, Miwa developed interests in music and moved to Tokyo for schooling. Although financial aid from his family was cut due to his rift with his sponsoring father, Miwa got by working part-time as a waiter and bartender at night recreational places and performing at US military bases. While networking with culturati, including Mishima, Miwa worked his way up to making a professional debut in 1957. At that time, he covered the French chanson *Méqué Méqué* in Japanese and sang it in a splendid cross-dressing appearance, which sparked his reputation as a “sister boy.” As Miwa has taken an “out-and-proud” path since his coming-out in a tabloid magazine (Asahi Entertainment 1957), he hasn’t always enjoyed popularity in the entertainment world, undergoing ups and downs. Today, however, Miwa stands unabashed about his commitment to pacifism through his “godmotherly figure” (Fujii, 2013, 3-54), a performance Mishima would continue to respect as he had had a faith in the queen (Miwa) by the time he offered a preface to “her” 1968 autobiographical writing *My History in Purple*.<sup>68</sup>

And one cannot overlook Mishima and Miwa’s contemporary Tōgō Ken (1932-2012), as he adopted a gayly effeminate persona for leftist political participation. While organizing and

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実生活のなかで挫折した欲望を抑え込んで、よい夫として結婚生活を送るということに耐えかねた結果、その道行に「民主主義の抹殺」を企んだ悲しい行為のように思えてくるのだ” (ibid., 193).

<sup>68</sup> Presumably, Miwa chose “purple” (the color between red and blue) as it suggests the fusion of both femininity and masculinity and evokes beauty and artistic quality.

representing *Zatsumin-no-kai* 雑民の会 (A Motley Assembly of People) and *Zatsumin-tō* 雑民党 (the Party of Miscellaneous People) to radicalize common-sense, Tōgō had begun challenging national elections as an openly same-sex desiring, over-madeup candidate since 1971, only to “fail” consistently. Tōgō had concerns about the emperor system like Mishima, but their reasons differed considerably. While Mishima found it necessary for Japan to sacralize, rather than humanize, the emperor in reconstructing itself, Tōgō directly attacked it/him as a token of oppression: the Japanese patriarchal family built on the precarity of many, including homosexuals, transgender prostitutes, and more. Also, Tōgō and Miwa shared unapologetic effeminacy but the two differed in appearance: the former was striving toward ugliness, while the latter was stressing beauty, although their intentions wouldn’t necessarily have guaranteed such meaning. Tōgō appears to have made the best of his “privileges” (maleness, educational credentials, heterosexual marriage, etc.) politically/sexually and left many “legendary,” meaning uncompromisingly failing, deeds (Oikawa 2007, 263-69) for succeeding generations, including Ōtsuka Takashi and Fushimi Noriaki to tread on.

Women as well worked to invigorate queer activism from the 1960s on. Lesbian-identifying freelance photographer Kiyooka Sumiko (1921-91), for example, published six publications during 1968 and 1973 with the aim of providing both her fellows and general readers with fair information about lesbianism (Welker 2017, 153-5); these volumes are highly erotic, with photographs of women’s intimate and sexual interactions interwoven into her discussions about lesbian sexuality and practices (occasionally including life tips for lesbians, e.g., how to find a socializing space or manage finances). Kiyooka used her second volume *Confessions: The Delight of Women with Women* as an official means to come out as a lesbian (1969, 12) and continued producing relevant information for her primary audience, Japanese lesbians. Yet,

literary scholar James Welker (ibid.) reminds us that despite her early “coming-out,” Kiyooka is ironically omitted in a contemporary lesbian community narrative due to the explicitly erotic nature of her many publications—corresponding to the then burgeoning representations of lesbians in perverse magazines (see below) and androcentric pornography (Chalmers 2002, 7, 37-8). Such contents were, as Welker suspects, most likely based on her strategic decision to build financial and social capital as she promoted sales by reaching out beyond just lesbians to male audiences. Kiyooka’s case exposes constantly shifting, never completely resolvable tensions between community activism and commercial pornography, and suggests the parochialism of pure forms of identity politics, however useful to some extent they may be.

While the postwar era produced the above individuals in the media spotlight or in the publishing world, underground social as well as discursive spaces were expanding in tandem with growing consumerism. Sexually exploratory magazines, including *kasutori-zasshi* カストリ雑誌 (dregs magazines) and *hentai-zasshi* 変態雑誌 (magazines for perverts), began appearing in postwar Japan. Unlike the earlier explosion of sex-oriented magazines published by “experts” (sexologists) during the Taishō era (1912-26), which is known as the *ero-guro-nansensu* (erotic, grotesque, nonsensical) phenomenon, the postwar phenomenon was facilitated by those who had commercial and/or genuine interests in non-normative sex including same-sex desire and sadomasochism (Maekawa 2017, 62-121). According to sociologist Maekawa Naoya, these magazines were a predominantly male site, where subscribers negotiated a sense of self with others including the editors, who would often label them as *dōseiaisha* (same-sex desiring persons), although readers’ subjectivity and identity were not definitive as seen in their comments (ibid.). In other words, these magazines steadily helped develop the self-understanding of desire and the process of “coming-out” among readers individually and

collectively. In the meantime, the last three years of the 1960s in particular are called a “lesbian boom” (which would extend well into the 1970s) due to increasing media attention paid to lesbianism by both male and female authors (Sugiura 2015). However, we need to wait for further research to see how the lesbian-themed publications of postwar Japan affected Japanese lesbians.

In addition to discursive spaces, bar spaces were also emerging. While one of the earliest cruising bar space for same-sex desiring men was *Buraunzuwikkū* ブラウンズウィック opened in 1948 in Ginza, where Miwa was working and Mishima was, almost certainly, frequenting (Ryū 2009, 17-24). For same-sex desiring women, a few drag king bars, including *Kikōshi* 貴公子 in Roppongi, were available by the mid-1960 (Welker 2010, 363-65).

#### *1970-80: Along with Burgeoning Media and Accelerating Consumerism*

As Japan was becoming affluent, consumerism began thriving along the development of media (not always strictly commercial), a key means of creative expression as well as of information sharing. Both financial capital and human resources were put into various kinds of media production, such as fanzines, magazines, manga, and broadcast shows for a potentially infinite number of audiences across Japan under global capitalism. These allowed audiences to be exposed to “unofficial” sexual information, grow a sense of self, and even sometimes engage with like-minded others through correspondence and actual meetups as mediated through publishers/editors’ go-between.

Consumerism in Japan entered another phase of intensification in the 1970s, when the nation was at the peak of its economic growth (Gordon 2012; see also Dower 1999). All kinds of media consumption flourished, as “[a] voracious public consumed,” historian Gordon Andrew writes, “all manner of books, magazines, radio broadcasts and movies, ranging from the so-

called ‘dreg literature’ obsessed with the erotic, to political satire and analysis, to English conversation manuals and programs” (2012, 498). Such a consumerist social current facilitating the segmentation of various niche markets influenced, and was influenced by, the movements of those concerned about gender and sexuality in Japan within a globalizing world.

Circulation of ミニコミ (“mini communications” or zines and newsletters) by and for women including lesbians became quite active in the 1970s, as ウーマンリブ *Ūmanribu* (women’s liberation) accelerated under the influence of U.S. second-wave feminism (Chalmers 2002; Izumo et al. 2007; Maree 2015). According to sociologist Iino Yuriko, the 1970s, in particular the latter half, was a threshold for Japanese lesbian feminism (2008, 65-73; see also Welker 2018). During the first half of the decade, consciousness-raising (especially around the issue of the liberation of women’s eros) speeded up, as radical feminist Tanaka Mitsu established ぐるーぷ闘う女 *Gurūpu Tatakau Onna* (Group of Fighting Women) in 1970 and the group created リブ新宿センター *Ribu Shinjuku Sentā* (Lib Shinjuku Center) as a feminist hub in Shinjuku, Tokyo in 1972. In the same year, the Japanese government submitted to the Diet a proposition to revise the now defunct Eugenic Protection Law (*Yūseihogo Hō Kaiseian* 優生保護法改正案), a source of oppression for women (regarding their reproductive rights and health) as well as people with disabilities, which forced feminist groups to act against it collectively; the proposition was withdrawn in 1974.<sup>69</sup> While an increasing number of women turned to feminism in Japan, it was gaining momentum globally as the following year, 1975, was named International Women’s Year by the United Nations. Following such a historic year, 1976 saw the birth of the *mini-komi Wonderful Women*. It was collaboratively created by women’s liberationists and allegedly

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<sup>69</sup> The three major features of this proposition were 1) the prohibition of abortion for economic reasons, 2) the permission to abort fetuses expected to develop severe physical or mental disabilities, and 3) the institutional encouragement of women to bear children early in order to minimize the risks associated with late childbearing.

formerly marginalized lesbians, all based in Lib Shinjuku Center. Indeed, “the *ūman ribu* movement,” as Welker argues, undoubtedly “helped set the stage for the emergence of lesbian feminism (*rezubian feminizumu*) in Japan” (2018, 51).

The lesbians who joined in the creation of *Wonderful Women* were from the first lesbian group 若草の会 *Wakakusa no kai* (Grass Club), which had emerged earlier in 1971. *Wakakusa no kai* was founded by lesbian Suzuki Michiko, who was hoping to create a safe social space for lesbians to congregate and chat. While strictly screening members in order to protect everyone’s privacy, Suzuki prioritized discretion rather than wider public messaging, forcing some to feel discontent and create their own groups. Thus appeared such lesbian feminist groups as まいにち大工 *Mainichidaiku* (Everyday Dyke) and ひかりぐるま *Hikariguruma* (Shining Car). These groups published their *mini-komi*, *The Dyke* and *Shining Car* respectively. Although both were soon forced to cease their publications (only two volumes), their *mini-komi* still affected the individuals and groups that followed them and came into fashion in the 1980s.

In the meantime, Itō Bungaku came out as a supporter of *homo*-men, beginning the first nationally distributed gay commercial magazine *Rose Tribes* in 1971 (Maekawa 2017, 123-68; Mackintosh 2010).<sup>70</sup> The founding of *Rose Tribes* did not come out of the blue. As a married heterosexual businessman who succeeded the small publishing company (Dainishobō) his father had originally founded, Itō was assuming that erotic topics would help his small-scale business to survive. In 1966, Dainishobō issued the bestseller *Lone Sexual Life*, a book on masturbation, for which Itō’s publisher received many responses from readers, including ones who expressed same-sex interests (Maekawa 2017, 160). As Itō sensed their market potential, Dainishobō then

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<sup>70</sup> Within the following three years, there emerged a few competing magazines, such as *Adon* (no longer in print), forming the genre of the *homo*—an abbreviation of the English-loan word *homosekushuaru* (homosexual)—magazines. *Bādi*, first published in 1994, targets young gays. *Bādi* has undergone some editorial changes (e.g., reducing page count).

published *Homo Techniques: Male-to-Male Sex Life* in 1968, which sold quite well (ibid.). These runups prepared Itō to conceive such an interactive media as *Rose Tribes* distributed at major bookstore channels. Similar to postwar magazines for perverts, *Rose Tribes* had correspondence sections for readers to express their concerns, explore and affirm a sense of self, and network with other like-minded individuals through the mediation of the publisher. Although Itō didn't necessarily encourage all *homo*-men to come out and compromise family-obligation, he unapologetically, through his business, exposed his decided support for these men and those interested in such men (e.g., heterosexual women seeking marriage with them) (Lunsing 1995). Itō remains a great businessperson, who has socially served many in increasingly "stable" Japan; like lesbian-activist Kiyooka's case, Itō's case forces us to rethink the symbiotic, rather than antagonistic, relationship between activism and capitalism in theorizing sexuality in a given nation.

In the field of manga, its oft-credited father Tezuka Osamu (1928-89) produced *MW*, serialized in *Big Comic* during 1976 and 1978.<sup>71</sup> Unlike his other "signature" (Disney-inspired and upbeat) comics, *MW* stands out stylistically and thematically by featuring same-sex desire among many other issues including bizarre murder in a dramatically gritty way as if to emulate with the increasingly present dramatic pictures artists of the day. In *MW*, the two male protagonists (elite banker Yūki Michio and Catholic priest Garai Iwao), as the only survivors from a poisonous-gas leakage at a military base in Okinawa (a chemical weapon "MW" developed by the Occupying American Force), share a same-sex relationship. Aside from its

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<sup>71</sup> A Japanese adaptation film was released in 2009 and caused some controversy over the depiction of same-sex sexuality (what to do with it), which concerned both talent agencies (not to mention individual actors themselves) and sponsors. Although the talent agencies the main actors were affiliated with were fine with a relatively explicit depiction of same-sex desire, film sponsors objected, forcing the producer to represent same-sex desire in a suggestive manner whose interpretation is up to viewers. Ironically, due to the contemporary social climate, we cannot "see" on screen what is seen in the original manga dating back to the late 1970s.



complexity, what is important for my narrative is its simple existence in a time when, as often retrospectively characterized by contemporary scholars, same-sex desire was “silenced”; as a comic MW was accessible to a broader audience regardless of sexuality compared to most academic or activist texts geared toward specific (usually elite) readers.

In broadcasting, cinema critic Osugi and fashion critic Pīko (1945-) made their debut in 1975, and since then the twin talents have been open about their identity as same-sex desiring men. Taking advantage of their “nature” and selling themselves as an *okama* duo on TV and radio, the two have pioneered a path socially and linguistically for later queenly talents who have constituted the *onē-būmu* おネエブーム (“queen era”) molding *onē-kotoba* おネエ言葉 (queen’s speech) in mainstream media in the new millennium as studied by many scholars (e.g., Abe 2010; Eguchi 2017; Maree 2003, 2018, 2020a, 29-57; Suganuma 2018; see also Shibamoto 1985, 150-9).

Also, activist, artist, writer, and gay-bar owner and master Ōtsuka Takashi (1948-) came out to radio listeners on *Snakeman Show*, one of the extremely popular TBS radio shows (1976-80) at that time.<sup>72</sup> The radio show hosted Ōtsuka as a personality for Wednesdays during 1979 and 1980; he uploaded all the audio-recordings on his personal website *TAQ\*O*.<sup>73</sup> Since the show swept the Japan of the late 1970s through the early 1980s, a pool of listeners who heard Ōtsuka’s coming-out and his successive affirmative talks on gay lifestyle was presumably wide and diverse. Although it’s difficult to glean their voices, Ōtsuka’s voice itself is available for research.

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<sup>72</sup> The primary personalities for the show were Kuwahara Moichi, Kobayashi Katsuya, and Ibu Masatō, a CM-creator and comic group. The edgy choice of song as well as comedy skits during intervals between songs made the show catch on. Although *Sunēkuman-shō* got cut in 1980 due to some controversy over management and Kobayashi left the group in 1983 due to his discord with the other two, their activities did resonate with a number of listeners nationally.

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~km5t-ootk/index2.html>. For the audio materials, specifically visit [http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~km5t-ootk/snakeman\\_show.html](http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~km5t-ootk/snakeman_show.html).

### *1980-90: Home and Civil-Rights Groups*

Perhaps without having the slightest idea that the nation would enter a long (arguably ongoing) recession, the Japan of the 1980s was enjoying its affluence as its bubble economy peaked in the decade. During such economic booming, lesbian and gay networking was steadily occurring in shared spaces such as local centers and apartment rooms. But the bubble finally burst and the global HIV/AIDS pandemic (Kazama & Kawaguchi 2010, 1-36) reared its ugly head. Although the number of HIV infections had already been increasing among hemophilia patients even by the early 1980s, the first carrier officially identified in 1985 by the National AIDS Surveillance Committee (led by the former Ministry of Health and Welfare) was a gay Japanese artist temporarily returning to Japan from the United States (Kawaguchi & Kazama 2003). Japan's exponentially growing paranoid social current was going to force those sharing personal experiences inside small rooms to go out on the street and hit the limelight in media so that they could object to mainstream representations of the HIV/AIDS as a "gay disease" (Ibid.).

In 1984, the International Gay Association in Japan was founded by Minami Teishirō (1931-) and his fellows; they shortly renamed the organization the International Lesbian and Gay Association in Japan (ILGA Japan) in accordance with the renaming of the international front office.<sup>74</sup> The founding of ILGA Japan was not so much his original intention as a result of his encounter with Bill Shure, the secretary of the IGA in Sweden, who contacted Minami upon reading his magazine *Adonis* (Horikawa 2015, 66-8).<sup>75</sup> Despite his initial skepticism, Minami eventually found ILGA Japan, as persuaded by Shure and encouraged by the fellows who became its early members. They all pitched in renting an apartment room in Yotsuya as a space for social-movement preparation, including study groups and workshops for consciousness-

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<sup>74</sup> ILGA is now known as the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association.

<sup>75</sup> See Abe (2011, 196-218) for a content and comparative analysis of *Adonisu* and other gay and lesbian magazines.

raising (as gay) (Horikawa 2016). However, Minami wasn't so sure about such activities at first, as what he had had in mind was militant demonstration like the Anpo-Struggle (*Anpo-tōsō* 安保闘争), a series of massive protests that took place in Japan from 1959 to 1960, and again in 1970, against the US-Japan Security Treaty (permission of US military bases to be located in Japan); Minami knew Tsurumi Shunsuke, one of the several founders of 声なき声の会 *Koe-naki-koe-no-kai* (Voice of the Voiceless Association) (Sugawara 2008).<sup>76</sup> Yet Minami gradually shifted his thinking, interacting with Shure and others. Minami had a dual objective: educating a next generation of activists and learning from the world (US). Minami's serious and diligent character was going to come to fruition in the implementation of the first pride demonstration in Japan in the following decade.

While Minami enthusiastically held study gatherings, a few participants, in particular the young ones he hoped to educate, developed a desire for autonomy, which resulted in the launch of another organization OCCUR (*Ugoku-gei-t-rezubian-no-kai* 動くゲイとレズビアンのかあ) in the March of 1986 (Horikawa, 2015, 68-9).<sup>77</sup> When Minami organized a conference in the August of 1986, the question of who/where should lead the organization became a focus of debate (Tokyo or Osaka?). Furthermore, a few young participants demanded that the shared apartment be used as a residence, to which Minami objected, viewing it as a public space for organizational activities. In either case, the debate intensified and the split occurred, fueling a nation-wide, if not nationally unified, movement itself (ibid., 68). In 1988, OCCUR grabbed media attention, having an official press conference for the pronouncement of their objection to

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<sup>76</sup> Founded in 1960, the Voice of the Voiceless Association was a major anti-war citizen group decidedly and persistently speaking against the Japanese (Kishi) administration, which forcefully approved Japan's assistance to the US during the Vietnam War. The association didn't require formal membership and consisted of a diverse array of fully voluntary citizens, including housewives, teachers, public intellectuals, and small-business owners, who came together under anti-war slogans.

<sup>77</sup> OCCUR runs its official website: <https://www.occur.or.jp>.

the AIDS Prevention Act (Iino 2008, 155). Both ILGA Japan and OCCUR came to lead gay movements in the decade to come.<sup>78</sup>

The 1980s was perhaps the first era, during which Japanese gays and lesbians found a common cause. Iino notes that the HIV/AIDS panic provided an opportunity to OCCUR (primarily gays) and the lesbian-group れ組スタジオ *Re-gumi-sutajio* (Group-L Studio) to fight together as in the press conference above, where lesbians as well as gays were present expressing their collective opposition to the infamous policy known as the AIDS Prevention Act (*Eizu Yobō Hōan* エイズ予防法案) (ibid., 139-73; see also Chalmers 2002, 31-2).<sup>79</sup> Since its founding in 1987 by a few lesbian-identifying Japanese women, *Re-gumi-sutajio* had primarily been acting for lesbians by publishing its official *mini-komi Re-gumi tsūshin* れ組通信 (group-L journal) and facilitating small-group meetings at shared rental rooms among lesbians they called “*pafu supēsu* パフスペース (PA/F space).”<sup>80</sup>

In 1989, the very last year of the decade, novelist Hiruma Hisao received the 26th Bungei Prize for *Yes, Yes, Yes!*, a fiction about gay male prostitution, as if to prognosticate the decade to come. Indeed, during the 1990s, queer activism in Japan accelerated. Such acceleration was due to the advent of new generations of activists, who took inspiration from their predecessors and raised diverse voices in the last decade of the 20th-century, a period popularly referred to as Japan’s “lost decade” due to a prolonged economic recession caused by the 1991 asset price bubble’s collapse.

### *1990s: The Gay Boom*

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<sup>78</sup> While ILGA Japan hosted the first parade in Japan (Tokyo) in 1984, OCCUR pressured the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology to remove homosexuality from the category of “abnormalities” in 1995 and later obtained not-for-profit organization status (the first time for a sexual minority organization) for their HIV/AIDS-related and lesbian/gay social services in 1999.

<sup>79</sup> *Re-gumi sutajio* runs its official website: <https://regumi.sakura.ne.jp/retsushin>.

<sup>80</sup> “PA/F” is a shorthand for performance arts and feminism.

After bits and pieces of “out-and-proud” protests by individuals and groups, such budding orientation began gaining a certain currency in the Japan of the 1990s—a decade often referred to as Japan’s “gay boom” in academic and activist circles (Lunsing 1997; Hall 2000; McLelland 2000, 32-7, 2003c). Back in those days, a fraction of long separated lesbians and gays as well as other sexual minorities resonated with one another in asserting the importance of coming-out. These individuals voiced their respective concerns contemporaneously, however difficult their coalition might have been due to the stark differences (gender, class, etc.) that manifested in their very attempts to come together. Their mobilization might have remained unrealized without the 1990s’ multiple coincidental forces that motivated many coming-outs and dramatized the gay boom—a productive site for a situated study of mediatization, a tense interface between reality and representation as well as critique and commerce, all inseparable from the context of a globalizing world.

One such contingent force that swelled in the 1990s was the HIV/AIDS epidemic that had primarily been affecting same-sex desiring men since the preceding decade. Sociologist Kazama Takashi (1997) emphasizes gays’ agentive response to the pandemic and resistance against stigmatization (e.g., an objection to the AIDS Prevention Act), while anthropologist Shingae Akitomo (2013) contends that gay collectives have shown themselves able to exist within state-led public health mores.<sup>81</sup> Aside from their differing takes on gay men’s political distance from the nation-state, both highlight the significantly positive role of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the formation of the gay identity/community in Japan. That is, Japan has witnessed the crystallization of gay identity politics as a channel for the “gay community” to mobilize state power for supporting the vulnerable, unlike the Western sphere, the alleged birthplace of such

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<sup>81</sup> For lesbians’ involvement in the objection to Japan’s notorious HIV/AIDS-related policy, see Chalmers (2002, 31-2) and Iino (2008, 139-73).

activism, which has experienced skepticism toward gay liberation and even homophobic backlashes because of the global pandemic (Moriyama 2017, 110-18). Indeed, a few *gei* men (Minami Teishirō, Ōtsuka Takashi, Fushimi Noriaki, etc.) as well as a few *gei* and HIV-positive men (Ōishi Toshihiro, Hasegawa Hiroshi, etc.) have come out along with the global phenomenon as if, just like Kazama and Shingae argue, to politicize sexuality as responsible (and presumably patriotic) members of an ever-expanding *gei* community.

The Japanese media, another powerful force, increasingly featured same-sex intimacy, in particular male-male homoeroticism during the period. First, Japanese film allowed both real individuals and fictional characters to highlight same-sex desire on screen. A few persons, including Hirano Hiroaki, the author of *Anti-heterosexism* (1994), did move into the limelight with the 1991 appearance of *Rough Sketch of a Spiral*, the first documentary film about gay life in Japan (Ogawa & Shibamoto Smith, 1997), followed by movies, such as *Fag-Hag* and *Twinkle*, both released in 1992 (Buckley 2000; Hall 2000).<sup>82</sup> In addition to cinema, television also stood as another exemplary site of exposure. *Reunion*, a dramatic series that arrestingly thematized homoeroticism, was aired during prime time by Nippon Television Network Corporation in 1993 (Miller 2000).<sup>83</sup> The TV serial took the then unfamiliar Shinjuku Ni-chōme out of the shadow, shooting many scenes in the neighborhood now popularly known as Japan's gay/est district. In *Reunion* as the serial title suggested, the lives of a few former high school classmates, including the female protagonist Natsuki, whose fiancé turns out to be same-sex desiring, converged in a

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<sup>82</sup> The label “*okoge*” (literally scorched rice sticking to a cooking pot) is part of the Japanese kitchen-related sexual lingo and refers to the heterosexual female companions of gay males. Related terms include *okama* (literally a cauldron, metaphorically a queen) and *onabe* (literally a pot, metaphorically a butch) (Lunsing 2005).

<sup>83</sup> Why was such an unapologetically gay-themed television program able to hit TV screens and enjoy relative success? According to literary scholar Stephen Millers, it was because the show peaceably rather than radically represents and narrates a homoerotic theme within socially acceptable mores using historically familiar, if outdated, codes such as *nanshoku* (2000). Lesbian critic Claire Maree regards this show as “homophobic” but “it developed myth-like status because of its trendy male actors who kissed in mediocre sex scenes” (2000, 119). Both are possible scholarly evaluations of *Reunion*, but neither take into account audience engagement.

“dramatic” way that exceeds a simplistically binaristic sexual framework. The above movies and TV shows tended to represent gay male relationships usually in the company of straight women as if these two parties make a “good,” if unconventional, marriage due to their respective alienation from Japan’s heteropatriarchy (Hall 2000; McLelland 2003).

These cinematic and televisual representations corresponded to homoerotically-themed contents in print media, including women’s magazines and comics. *Gay Renaissance* (*Crea*, February 1991) is said to have set off a series of similarly featured articles in women’s fashion and lifestyle magazines (e.g., *More* and *Peach*) as well as men’s (e.g., *Da Vinci*) (Hall 2000, 41; Lunsing 1997, 272; McLelland 2003, 61-2). Women’s comics also played with same-sex intimacy between predominantly androgynous men for recreational consumption, often romanticizing and idealizing such fictional relationships; this variant of girls’ comics is now established as a genre: Boy’s Love (Hall 2000; Lunsing 1997, 272-4; McLelland 2003, 60-1). An increasing number of serious publications began appearing as well (see below for further discussion on this), including research monographs by sociologist Yajima Masami who presented many voices from same-sex desiring women and men to a reading public even if these individuals might have been remaining discreet in their respective lives (1997, 1999) Presumably, except for a few political radicals who jeopardized, or perhaps took advantage of, credentials (whether it be education, gender, etc.)—e.g., Tōgō Ken (McLelland 2012)—, many same-sex desiring women and men had been discreetly enjoying their surrounding social milieus since the 1970s; the former primarily used rental rooms as a space for chatting and writing, whereas the latter developed their niche commercial market (mostly bar and pornographic). The Japanese mainstream media of the 1990s, however, enthusiastically, if not always sensationally or voyeuristically, publicized gay concerns for multiple purposes, fueling the gay boom.

While gay men steadily increased their social, representational, and financial capital through the 1990s, *rezubians* struggled to accumulate it, carrying on feminist efforts that had begun even before the gay boom years. Long before *gei* men became vocal and visible in the early 1990s, same-sex desiring women had been engaging in grassroots organizing for *rezubian* consciousness as early as the 1970s. They began politicizing their lives as not only women, but also *rezubian* while accelerating women's liberation in Japan in the aftermath of the 1960s US second-wave feminist movement (Chalmers 2002; Izumo et al. 2007; Maree 2015; Welker, 2015). Although *rezubian* organizing seemed largely ignored in heterosexist and male-dominated Japan, many *rezubians* in the 1990s followed the still male-centered, but gradually more anti-heterosexist, social current.

Out sexual minority personae appeared one after another alongside the emergence of (coalition-seeking) Japanese lesbian/gay studies (Noguchi 2002) and advocacy publications during the 1990s. In 1991, critic Fushimi Noriaki came out as *gei* in *Private Gay Life*. The tone of his coming-out at this point was very serious, as he criticized the “*hetero shisutemu* ヘテロ システム,” literally translated into English as hetero-system, and loosely, heteronormativity (1991, 167-70).<sup>84</sup> Similarly, in 1992, writer Kakefuda Hiroko declared her *rezubian* identity, problematizing the *koseki seido* 戸籍制度 (the Family Registration System) as a pillar of Japan's heteropatriarchy (1992, 56-83).<sup>85</sup> For Kakefuda, coming-out was a risk worth taking, especially if willing to make the personal political by fighting social ignorance and prejudice through the act (ibid., 196-212). Although both Kakefuda and Fushimi appeared to invest in coming-out as if

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<sup>84</sup> In his later work, Fushimi (2004) notes that sociologist Ueno Chizuko has renamed *hetero shisutemu* as *seibetsu nigen sei* 性別二元性 (dual sex system), credited him for the idea, and circulated it among the (Japanese) academic audience.

<sup>85</sup> The year 1992 was when the first Tokyo International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival was held; the festival is now called Rainbow Reel Tokyo.



it were a prerequisite for entry into the fight against family-obligation, a common rhetoric of the era, Fushimi has come to modify his stance toward the act; so would Kakefuda have perhaps, but she withdrew from the public sphere and thus hasn't published since then, unlike Fushimi, who continues to write. Fushimi has significantly lessened, if not retracted a call for coming-out (2007, 25-45); fluent in *onē-kotoba*, he has humorously taken on an effeminate persona (a figure quite different from the one he took in his maiden work), identified himself as *ribugama* (gay liberationist queen), and adopted a sense of sarcasm, often complaining that he wouldn't have participated in gay liberation if he were handsome (e.g., 2004, 2007).

The gay boom decade witnessed comings-out among lesbian and gay couples. In *Couple*, a photo collection by Hashiguchi Jōji (1992), anthropologist Wim Lunsing and his then Japanese partner Onitsuka Tetsurō came out as a gay and interracial couple (among many other kinds of couples) through a photograph in which the two sit side by side with their faces fully exposed (Figure 2). After this visually revealing lovely shot, Izumo Marou and Claire Maree, a Japanese-

Australian lesbian couple, co-authored a monograph (1993) speaking to issues attendant on fostering an international same-sex relationship, such as immigration and cross-cultural understanding: see the 2000 version for English translation. In the same year, *Two Men Living Together: My Gay Pride*



Figure 2. A *gei*-gay couple. © Hashiguchi Jōji

*Declaration* by Itō Satoru came out, as he declared

his gay identity in order to fight stereotypes and discrimination through such a declaration motivated by his male-male relationship with his late Japanese partner Yanase Ryūta. Their pride grew, culminating in the 1994 publication of a book on their gay lifestyle. The pair's writing has

made the couple, as they wished early on, one of the pioneering gay couples in (and beyond) Japan: see the 2001 version for English translation.

The artists of the day (e.g., Sasano 1997) also penned autobiographical writings on coming-out. Unlike those who literally wrote about the act, pop singer-songwriter Makihara Noriyuki artistically explored a highly subtle and creative way of expression through his song *No Matter When* released in 1991.<sup>86</sup> Although this song is not specifically about gay men, it can be read as an unapologetic, however discreet, voice for same-sex desire as expressed by the lyrics in combination with the visual:

Japanese Line (JL)1:	どんなときもどんなときも
English Line (EL) 1:	No matter when, no matter when
JL2:	僕が僕らしくあるために
EL2:	To be myself [this “self” is gendered with the masculine-coded “ <i>boku</i> ”]
JL3:	「好きなものは好き!」と言えるきもち抱きしめていたい
EL3:	I want to embrace my feeling that I can say “I like what I like”

While Makihara sings the above hook-lines of *Donnatokimo* (the official music video, 1:22-37), the camera features a group of blue-collar construction workers. When he reaches the last line “I want to embrace my feeling that I can say ‘I like what I like,’” the camera zooms in onto the crotch of one of these men as well as the smiley face of a youthful(-looking) conventionally handsome one—as if to suggest that the loved object is what we are made to see. The lyrics reads as if the subject wants to love what he likes “no matter when”—including the very present, not just back in childhood. But, again, this song doesn’t have to be gay; it is for anyone who loves

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<sup>86</sup> The official music video is available on YouTube ([youtube.com/watch?v=b88pxLpMZKk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b88pxLpMZKk)).

something or someone.

The year 1994 was a historic moment as the International Lesbian and Gay Association in Japan (ILGA Japan), supervised by *gei* activist Minami Teishirō, launched its first Tokyo Lesbian · Gay Parade. The parade attracted an increasing number of—but allegedly less than a couple of thousand—participants in the following two years. Yet, the volunteer parade-hosting committee of ILGA Japan underwent infighting in 1997 due to the senior Minami’s overbearing organizing and the general sexism prevalent among the staff (Sunagawa 2007, 282-83). Some *rezubians* even refused participation and preferred staging a *daiku* ダイク (dyke) march, as they felt excluded from earlier parades’ decision-making process (McLelland & Suganuma 2009, 336). Minami himself organized smaller parades until 1999. These events prompted what Japan scholar Claire Maree (1997) calls *shūdan kaminguauto* 集団カミングアウト (collective coming-out). Indeed, by the end of the gay-boom decade, the act of speaking out had been practiced in various ways by individuals (e.g., Ikeda, 1999) and in groups (e.g., OCCUR), however “out of place,” “Western/ized,” or “American/ized” such voicing might have been criticized as against the grain of Japan’s aesthetically pro-silence social current. So what happened after the gay boom and at the turn of the century?

### *The New Millennium: Community as Pride*

The first decade of the 21st-century seemed ambivalent, heralding the emergence of what is discursively and politically valued as *komyunitī* コミュニティ (community) among sexual minorities on the one hand, and the difficulty of sustained “out-and-proud” mobilization on the other hand. Especially in the eyes of those involved in queer activism, the digital age appeared double-edged; it facilitated discreet consumption and curtailed social-movement motivation, as evidenced in the spread of recreational pursuits (e.g., lesbian clubbing and gay cruising) against

the deadlock of pride events in Tokyo.<sup>87</sup> As the rhetoric and politics of community became part and parcel of queer activism, tensions around its boundary seemed to heighten, alienating (people, activities, and places associated with) the so-called *kurōzetto* クローゼット (closet) (Sedgwick 2008).

The English-loan “community” had originally been used in local administration before the appropriation by queers (and other social minority groups) of the now catchword for activism. As mainly used in the context of local city- and town-building in the late-20th-century (e.g., Imamura, 1987), “community” had had strong geographic connotations. When queers appropriated “community” in the late-20th-century (in particular through the HIV/AIDS crisis) and attempted its actualization, the word seemed liberated from geography. But the majority of those writing about and advocating for “community” were, after all, based in the city of Tokyo, where major publishers and civic centers were (and still are) located. Japanese authors, such as Fushimi Noriaki (2004), also interchangeably used the word *kyōdōtai* 共同体 although this vernacular word might have sounded rather formal and distant to many readers. The gay boom era prepared a steady map to the age of “community,” whose existence had often been in question due to the small-scale pride events and their general unpopularity in the face of the allegedly already liberated foreign/West/America.

At the dawn of the new millennium, anthropologist and *gei* activist Sunagawa Hideki organized a new volunteer parade-hosting committee to revive the large-scale pride parade in Tokyo and became its head—as if to sustain a faith in the existence of “community” among those committed to anti-discrimination (Sunagawa 2001; see also Sunagawa 2007; Moriyama 2012). The executive committee slightly altered the name of their pride parade from the “Tokyo Lesbian

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<sup>87</sup> Not much research has been done on lesbian/gay social events and pride parades outside Tokyo. See Wallace (2018) for LGBT activism in Osaka.

·Gay Parade” to “Tokyo Lesbian & Gay Parade” by replacing “·” with “&.” Sunagawa put forth much effort to make a parade more fun and approachable (e.g., play with fashion and body shape), a shift in tactics from Minami’s serious and demonstrative parade style (Horikawa 2018). Furthermore, the parade was paired with what Japanese sexual minorities affectionately call *reinbō matsuri* レインボー祭り (rainbow festival) in Shinjuku Ni-chōme. In fact, queers in Japan had been using the symbolic term *reinbō* for their private coming-out parties long before TRP began highlighting it to draw participants into public demonstrations. The festival had taken place every year since 2000 to 2019, but the parade was cancelled in 2003 and remained dormant in 2004 due to insufficient funding and organizational infighting (Ogiue 2013).<sup>88</sup>

In 2005, the committee started afresh as TOKYO Pride (TP), a volunteer sexual minority advocacy and parade-hosting NPO—a forerunner of TRP. Yet TP faced an impasse in 2008, and again cancelled the annual parade. TP at one point offered an explanation on the website: problems in funding and management.<sup>89</sup> As for funding, TP relied on two sources: 1) HIV/AIDS research institutions sponsored by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare and 2) Shinjuku Ni-chōme commercial bars willing to donate. Both of these sources tightened their budgets due to Japan’s end-of-century lingering economic recession. Consequently, TP had trouble collecting funds. Also, TP failed to enlist support from diverse sexual minorities in Japan.

The usage of the Internet among sexual minorities in relation to social-movement participation has also become a point of inquiry in the 21st-century. For some scholars (e.g., McLelland, 2003, 2008), the Internet serves primarily as an expressive and recreational tool for sexual minorities in Japan to write about personal experiences and explore non-normative

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<sup>88</sup> The official name of the festival is the Tokyo Rainbow Festival. The Shinjuku Ni-chōme Promotion Association (Shinjuku Ni-chōme *shinkōkai*) hosts it by running small events and food stalls within the limits of the district. For details, see Sunagawa (2015).

<sup>89</sup> TP used to run its own website (<http://www.tokyo-pride.org>). It closed in 2013, when TP dissolved.

practices fairly unrestrictedly in a discreet manner. Understandably, gay critic Fushimi Noriaki (2008) expresses his concerns about the potentially adverse effects of the Internet by regarding its advent as not only what enhanced communication among diverse audiences but also what impeded TP's efforts to mobilize them. Why bother with visibility when they can pursue diverse desires relatively easily and in privacy thanks to the Internet, however heterosexist Japan still may be? Given the sheer fact that many activist groups (see above) also utilize their own websites for their activities, the relationship between civic engagement and recreational consumption in a given nation in the cyber age is more complex, dynamic, and interrelated, it is not as if one simplistically curtails the other.<sup>90</sup> At any rate, as far as large-scale sexual minority social movements in Japan are concerned, from the perspective of those proactively involved in queer research and activism, the majority of audiences in the digital age appeared to favor consumption rather than activism, challenging TP's mass organizing.

Nonetheless, in 2010, after a two-year-long hiatus, TP resumed with the 7th Tokyo Pride Parade (formerly Tokyo Lesbian & Gay Parade), as they had renamed its annual pride parade from the "Tokyo Lesbian & Gay Parade" to "Tokyo Pride Parade" in 2007. As the pride event was sustained, its primary audience, a queer community, also barely expanded along with further coming-outs. Indeed, it was not only public figures such as politicians (e.g., Otsuji 2005) who came out; private individuals and their families came out as well, as discussed in such publications as *Coming-out Letters* (Sunagawa & RYOJI 2007) and *Parents and Children who Come Out: A Sociology of Homosexuality and Families* (Sambe 2014). New groups, both standing and ad-hoc, including the now state-authorized not-for-profit outreach organization

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<sup>90</sup> In Japan, the Internet has made easier for authorities to identify when and where exactly same-sex activities take place; bathhouses run websites and BBS, where potential guests announce their intention to come and exchange messages about sexual interests using mostly euphemistic, sometimes explicit, language.

ReBit (since 2009) and an International Day against Homophobia (IDAHO) rallying group (since 2006), emerged.<sup>91</sup> As more and more individuals and organizations came out as proud and anti-discriminatory constituents, their growing pride had become at odds with the *kurōzetto*, previously protected by both ILGA Japan and TP during their parades with, for instance, a no-photograph section (Romero 2010). Those left behind the closet, especially socioeconomically dire ones, found themselves trapped in such precarious labor as sex work (Sugiyama 2012). The increasing visibility of sexual diversity has indeed exposed stark inequality in the “out-and-proud” LGBT community often represented by elite and able LGBTs, the likely target and beneficiary of corporate attentions in terms of consumption and recruitment (Horikawa 2017, 59-61).

In the meantime, sociologist Moriyama Noritaka (2012) sheds light on a fraction of *tōjisha* 当事者 (people concerned) who felt alienated from “out-and-proud” community formation. Moriyama takes particular note of *tsuiteikenasa* ついていけなさ (alienation) as uttered by some gay and bisexual Japanese men (akin to NVs, see Chapter 3). Moriyama’s problematization of their alienation appears to overlap his own from preceding academic debates about gay activism, especially OCCUR-related gay studies, which has valorized the act of coming-out despite its proclaimed theoretical alignment with queer theorist Michel Foucault vigilant about such a seemingly liberatory act (ibid., 149-53). Moriyama’s 2012 monograph is an attempt to highlight such prescriptive forces in the established Japanese gay studies and an exercise to see his alienated participants from a less imposing angle, proving the existence of a connection, if not a

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<sup>91</sup> An IDAHO rallying event has taken place in Japan since 2006 on May 17th, which is the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. In Japan, the same date has been officially registered by the Japan Anniversary Association since 2014 as *Tayō na sei ni iesu no hi* 多様な性にYESの日 (Day for Affirmation of Diversity).

“community,” among sexual minorities in Japan.<sup>92</sup> Moriyama’s contribution lays in his undertaking of such a difficult and uncomfortable task as internal critique within Japanese academia as its difficulty due to the family-oriented culture that has been deplored by anthropologist Nakane Chie (2010, 215, 1967, 177). *Tsuiteikenasa* might well deserve more serious attention from those who attempt to organize such large scale-events as pride parades in support of queer activism.

In 2011, TP once again suspended the parade. A few younger staff grew discontent, as they found their diverse voices all silenced under TP’s top-down management. Although such organizational style allowed TP to act effectively with media, a key site to which to send information on anti-prejudice and anti-discrimination against sexual minorities in order to make it easier for them to live in mainstream society, these young members began feeling uncomfortable with TP’s disciplinary and hierarchical culture aimed at gaining respectability. Shortly, the discontents left TP. And these dissidents have created TRP, adding the catchword “rainbow” to their parental group’s name and bearing hope of leading sexual minority movements into 21st-century Japan, building on the act of coming-out as practiced by its predecessors.

In short, research on queer activism in Japan requires us to approach “coming-out” more broadly as public exposure of the potentially discreditable. Although the question of coming-out has been complicated with the issue of context and audience (Butler 1993; Kawasaka 2008;

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<sup>92</sup> Such forces might appear to be “homonormative” in the sense that OCCUR-related gay studies attempts to create norms among/within gays, but such a usage of “homonormativity” radically deviates from its original formulation in Lisa Duggan’s 2003 seminal work. Duggan defines homonormativity as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (ibid., 50). In the meantime, criticizing those who express their *tsuiteikenasa* as homonormative (as they are at least willing to consume discreetly) is equally problematic, since such a criticism appears to assume that critics are in the absolute position of defining the political.



Plummer 1995), the resilient premise of the debate is the existence of a “marginalized” or “abject” subject who intentionally and heroically comes to speak up in order to fight against (homo)phobia coalitionally. Queer ethnographic engagement with and in Japan, however, demands the suspension of such an assumption about a “common enemy” without dismissing “out-and-proudness,” since the cause of queer activism is arguably Japan’s societal aversion to diversity or what goes beyond family-obligations. It’s the ongoing challenge of asserting the importance of speaking up as dared by many predecessors that TRP attempts to carry on in their “out-and-proud” pursuit of LGBT rights in conventionally pro-silence, albeit increasingly LGBT-concerned, Japan.

### 3. TRP Trajectory: In Pursuit of Human Rights

TRP states its own organizational objective on the official website:

らしく、たのしく、ほこらしく

Be yourself, have fun, and be proud.

「特定非営利活動法人 東京レインボープライド」は、「らしく、たのしく、ほこらしく」をモットーに、性的指向および性自認にかかわらず、すべての人が、より自分らしく誇りをもって、前向きに楽しく生きていくことができる HAPPY!な社会の実現をめざしています。

As a not-for-profit organization with the motto “Be yourself, have fun, and be proud,” TRP aims to create a society, where all persons can be truer to themselves and live positively and happily.

- 1.可視化： 多様な性が存在することをすべての人に見えるようにし、理解を促進する。
- 2.場づくり： 多様なセクシュアリティの人たちの交流が生まれる場をつくり、全国へ、世界へ、未来へと、LGBTQ コミュニティをつなげる。

3 : 課題の解消 : LGBTQ に対する差別や課題を解消し、Happy ! な社会の実現に向け行動する。

1. We make the existence of diverse sexualities visible to all and facilitate understanding.
2. We create a space which generates interactions among sexually diverse persons, and expand LGBTQ communities nation-wide, world-wide, and for the future.
3. We take action to create a happy society by tackling LGBTQ discrimination and issues.

First and foremost, the scope of TRP's goal is ambitiously broad as the organization aims to create a "happy society," where all can "be themselves, have fun, and be proud." Pursuing the three-fold goal is about attaining basic human rights and eliminating obstacles and prejudices, although these conceptions are context-specific and thus often a focus of much debate (see Chapter 1); the act of rights-based and anti-discrimination pursuit isn't necessarily "Western" or "non-indigenous" (e.g., Richardson 2000).

To push this *rashiku-tanoshiku-hokorashiku* goal, TRP rhetorically and politically advocates the catchword "diversity" (Ward 2008). First, TRP stresses the exposure of diversity (through actual people as photographed, researched, and the like) so that everybody can "see" it, as thematized in the 2014 annual event, "*Jinsei iroiro, ai mo iroiro* 人生色々、愛も色々 [many ways to live, many ways to love]." Second, along with the line of exposing diversity, TRP hosts its signature event "parade & festa" as a space (*ba*), through which to "celebrate the diversity of livelihood (生) and sexuality (性)"—both pronounced as *sei* and thus alliterated here. Third, in order not to end up just parading and partying through such celebratory performances as live-music and drag shows, TRP uses its annual event as a social-movement repertoire to mobilize publics, ranging from academics and activists to celebrities and politicians, who varyingly have economic and social capital, for queer activism.

In order to analyze TRP in the rest of this chapter and dissertation, this section traces how

TRP has become the organization as we know it today. TRP emerged in the aftermath of the 3.11 triple—earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear—disasters in Japan. After acting as a voluntary LGBT group for slightly more than four years, TRP gained state-authorized non-profit organization status in 2015. Today, based in Shinjuku, TRP has roughly fifty, most Japanese core part-time and volunteer staff. TRP annually hosts *Parēdo Ando Festa* パレード&フェスタ (Parade & Festa), which attracts what they call *arai* アライ (allies), such as heterosexual families, LGBT expatriates, and sponsoring institutions (including allegedly LGBT-friendly foreign embassies and multinational corporations, like the embassy of the United States and the clothing retailer GAP).<sup>93</sup> As an increasingly powerful “out-and-proud” NPO, TRP promotes Japan as Asia’s progressively LGBT-friendly nation in pushing human-rights issues. Tracing TRP’s trajectory helps sketch the evolving nexus between many actors, objects, and activities: governmental registration, office establishment, human resources, networking, fundraising, and public messaging, all hitching one another to undergird TRP’s increasing presence.

#### *2011 Debut: After 3/11*

TRP quietly arose when a few volunteer members came together to pursue their aspirations collectively in 2011, when a big earthquake struck off eastern Japan, in particular the Tōhoku region (Gill et al. 2011, 1-24). An earthquake of approximately magnitude 9 happened in the afternoon on March 11, 2011; the national damage would have been less disastrous without the subsequent massive tsunami and unexpected nuclear disasters. The tsunami, roughly as high as forty meters (the height of a 12-story building), smashed the northeastern coast and took the toll of 18,600 persons primarily in Miyagi, Iwate, and Fukushima prefectures. The flooding damage to Fukushima Prefecture posed a serious challenge, as the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant

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<sup>93</sup> It’s said that anthropologist and activist Sunagawa Hideki first began using, and circulated, the word *arai* in the context of queer activism in Japan (Horikawa 2015, 77).

run by Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) was severely compromised along with the failure of its cooling system and a series of hydrogen explosions within. In short, the magnitude of the natural phenomenon coupled with the leniency of governmental and corporate risk calculation and management has made the disaster both a natural and man-made one. Japan was seriously in trouble.

Although I experienced the national catastrophe “remotely” by watching online news (I was based in California then), my families and friends in Japan regularly informed me via email of what was going in Japan. A Ni-chōme-goer gay friend of mine kept me posted digitally, as he told me that some gay bars were calling for volunteers and collecting donations for the worst-hit region and its immensely affected residents. The Internet also allowed me to receive and digest a digitalized consolation message from the emperor delivered nationally five days after the event. Anthropologist Tom Gill et al. point out that the 3.11 is distinguished from previous similar disasters in that it has occurred in the digital age, and they set out to study the role of the Internet and social media (e.g., communication among citizens and media-representations of the disaster) in their ethnographies (ibid.).

While anti-nuclear protests gained strength in the aftermath of the 3.11 disaster, the year 2012 was a busy year for queer activism in Japan, as both TP and TRP had their respective pride parades in Tokyo (Siguenza 2012). When TRP had asked TP whether they would hold a parade in 2012, they couldn’t give a definite answer (ibid.). According to TRP’s then marketing director Inui-san as interviewed by journalist Ogiue Chiki (2012), although TRP was originally intending to be a backup community organization without immediate plans to host its own pride parade, dreams grew quickly especially when TP wasn’t sure about its annual parade. Monko Daisuke, a TP organizer since 2011, was ambivalent because the existence of two parades could confuse the

publics (Siguenza 2012). However, TRP ended up seeing the implementation of two parades in Tokyo as part of necessary development, as Inui-san said, “[W]e needed another parade to create dynamism. [...] If you only have one parade, the organizers don’t feel the necessity of creating a better pride (march) each year. Healthy competition is important” (ibid.). The two groups did have their respective parades in 2012. TP, however, dissolved shortly after. Since this year (2012) on, TRP has taken sole control of Tokyo’s parade scene.

### *Institutionalization as An Event-Hosting Non-Profit Organization*

TRP obtained state-authorized not-profit organization (NPO) status in the summer of 2015, four years after its birth.<sup>94</sup> A move to be a government-registered organization has both merits and demerits institutionally. Its immediate merit is qualification to open a bank account and manage financial exchanges, which helps overcome the lack of funding endemic to (queer) activism in Japan.<sup>95</sup> As an NPO, TRP now can manage funds, make contracts (including recruitment), and establish social trust/reputation, while being obligated to follow strictly monitored logistical procedures (e.g., board meeting and accounting) and maintain organizational transparency (e.g., financial reports); TRP has a paid accountant for such specialized tasks. Even if the many responsibilities that are required to be met by an NPO (but not required of volunteer groups) can be onerous, those obligations are unavoidable if an organization is to expand and cover its often-costly activities. Also, decision-making is stricter as it has to go through the administrative board (see below for descriptions of the diverse board members). This rigidity may appear constraining at first, but the time was ripe for experimentation since TRP’s

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<sup>94</sup> In the same year, coincidentally, the Shibuya district council approved a same-sex partnership certificate, which grants some of the rights of married heterosexual couples to same-sex couples. It’s been effective ever since. For the behind-the-scenes story about the realization of the Shibuya ordinance, see (Esumuraruda & KIRA 2015).

<sup>95</sup> Full-time activists are rare, as the government rules about fundraising on a formal basis are burdensome. Thus, activists (of any kinds) in Japan have tended to prefer generally acting as volunteers, who have day-job professions but perform fund-raising in their spare time for activism. As for TRP, the organization ran into the red for the first couple of years, when staff, in particular the former co-representative Yamagata-san, kicked in personal money.

predecessors often experienced organizational infighting without formal procedures for resolution of disputes.

Slightly before becoming an NPO in 2015 (October 2014), TRP had incorporated Tokyo Rainbow Week (TRW) to prepare for institutionalization. In 2013 and 2014, TRW hosted an LGBT celebration week during Japan's holiday week known as "Golden Week" that spans from late April through early May. This LGBT week is now promoted nationally by TRP. TRP hosts its prime event "parade & festa" during this special week called "Rainbow Week." A variety of events take place at local facilities primarily in cities across Japan, ranging from outdoor picnics to open lectures on such topics as (LGBT) schooling, loving, and aging. These activities are made possible by an ever-expanding network that TRP is pioneering through its diverse staff and their connections.

One example is a free-access, no-appointment-necessary seminar, entitled as "*shucchō kuia riron kōza* 出張クィア理論講座 [a dispatch lecture on queer theory]," organized by a committee of Tokyo University Professor Shimizu Akiko, part-time Lecturer Iseri Makiko, and International Christian University Center for Gender Studies assistant staff Sasaki Yuko at Akta, an LGBT community center located in Ni-chōme during the 2016 rainbow week. The seminar allowed participants to engage with sessions such as "About Queer Theory," "Visibility & Queer Politics," and "LGBT Mainstreaming & Homonormativity," all promoted as critical opportunities to reflect on queer theory and politics amid Japan's pervasively commodified social landscape. Such an educational moment must have been, indeed, fun for those already versed in "queering" as well as by-chance attendees surprised to learn such a deconstructive art-science. In reality, it is impossible (and even unnecessary perhaps) to distinguish education and recreation in the first place, as each of the two defines itself through the other during Rainbow Week. Since it

fares as dual moments of learning and pleasure, it's better to regard TRP event activities as sites of tension between critical thinking and consumer indulgence.

Rainbow Week has attracted a few to several thousand participants for the past years (Appendix A). Golden Week is good for attracting those from outside Tokyo as they are more likely to travel to the Tokyo metropolitan area during the holidays. Yet those residing in the Tokyo region (e.g., TAGVs) might be out somewhere; indeed, they usually have a trip to another city for a volleyball game.

#### *Diverse Staff and Office Establishment*

TRP is operated by seven board members. These core staff negotiate organizational activities for a given year, including its parade & festa. To facilitate the general operation of the annual event, TRP has nine sections: public relations, sales and marketing, stage and performance, parade, logistics and cleanup, reception and venue management, first-aid, office work, and Rainbow Week operation. Each of these sections is managed by several staff, including a section leader, who form an acting committee. The acting committee is thus comprised of about forty-five staff. TRP launches an acting committee every year; generally, the committee is comprised of the same members unless a person leaves or a new experienced or eager staff person comes in. Before an annual event, TRP makes a call for volunteers (about a few hundred to one thousand persons) and allocates a certain number of volunteers to each section upon request from the section leader.

Operational costs (e.g., travel fares) are generally covered at and above the sectional level, but most staff are volunteers with either full-time or part-time jobs. Even the two “fully paid” co-representatives do work outside because the salary they have been receiving since 2019 (about ¥100,000/\$1000) is not enough. The necessity of regular salaries among staff is being discussed

as TRP is attracting more and more sponsors and its budget is expanding. At least, after its annual event closes, TRP covers an incentive trip for the core staff (including board members and acting committee) and hosts a “thank-you” (meaning drinking and eating) party for all the volunteers. I was also paid for general expenses while volunteering for TRP.

TRP’s NPO status has enabled the renting of an apartment room as an office for staff. It is on the fourth floor of one of the multi-tenant buildings located in Shinjuku Ni-chōme. The office is small, but comfortable enough for a bit more than ten persons to work, equipped with necessities such as a staff computer, an air-conditioner, a mid-size refrigerator, and the like. My first-time visit was in early February 2018, shortly after I returned to Tokyo to conduct dissertation fieldwork. It was a bleak day. When I rushed in the office to escape from outside cold, cigarette smell was a bit irritating to my nose. I quickly had a growing suspicion the office isn’t smoke-free, but my doubt dissipated when Yamagata-san, who was already there working among a couple of other staff, told me that it is. Then one staff came in from the veranda, where she had been smoking, and let another take his turn. The odor must have come from his clothes.

What I did first and foremost was get a briefing on TRP’s privacy policy (demarcating what I can and cannot write/speak about) and general rules (e.g., I wasn’t allowed to participate in board-level meetings). For instance, I cannot disclose which organization donates how much money but I can write about TRP’s annual total budget as TRP is obliged to report it publicly; though, it’s possible to roughly estimate such figures as TRP ranks sponsors using various labels (“rainbow sponsors,” “silver sponsors,” etc.) based on the amount of their investment; these financially supportive institutions are “listed” on the TRP website.

TRP has both Japanese and non-Japanese well-educated staff (approximately fifty persons),



ranging in age from their twenties to fifties, at an almost even male-female ratio.<sup>96</sup> The majority of these core staff are not heterosexual. These non-heterosexual staff say that their activist motivations come from either experiences of frustration during youth (e.g., unable to tell friends about gender identification or sexual orientation), and heterosexual staff express genuine interests in supporting LGBT activism.<sup>97</sup> All seven board members (including one resident-Korean staff) are Japanese, although TRP has proactively attempted to recruit non-Japanese persons at sectional levels (e.g., Brenden-san who acts for the sales and marketing section or Svetlana-san who is in charge of the parade section). The board members organize the nine sections headed by their respective sectional leaders, who manage activities and volunteers within. As for gender and sexual identification, again, “diversity” characterizes TRP, as the current co-representative and female-to-male transgender activist Sugiyama Fumino-san says in a streaming video available on TRP’s website, “The core members are of four lesbians, four gays, two trans, and two heterosexuals, aren’t they? Wait, no, I’m getting confused and just don’t know [laugh out loud]”—as if to suggest that neat categorization and numbering, though both category and number are valuable social-movement means for TRP (e.g., “counting” is important

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<sup>96</sup> All the core staff, except for Igei-san, have college degrees from either two-year or four-year universities. Although Igei-san told me that he dropped out of college, I am not sure whether it is true or part of his activist persona. In fact, I came to learn about his real name by accident during my fieldwork. Not all the TRP staff use their real names for organizational activities, although most do. Similarly, not all NVs reveal their true identities publicly, but my involvement with Ni-chōme volleyball is much longer and I am more familiar with them as individuals beyond their public persona.

<sup>97</sup> Although formal interviews with TRP staff didn’t fare as I hoped, their personal motivations for activism can be summarized as a combination of 1) experiences of discrimination, 2) personal relationships with senior LGBT activists, 3) encouragement by and gratitude for parents, 4) interest in social projects, and 5) fulfillment from fighting oppression and injustice while pursuing official LGBT recognition. As I had difficulty scheduling one-on-one interviews, I switched to having more informal talks during regular meetings and social gatherings. The former representative Yamagata-san also helped me a lot, informing me of staff demographics so that I could use the information to open up conversations with them. The whole incident made me think about the issue of access. In the end, I was able to talk to NVs more easily (in terms of procedural negotiations for formal interviews) and intimately than to TRP staff simply and importantly due to the (corresponding) length of my personal involvement with these two groups of people prior to the initiation of my fieldwork. To compare and contrast core TRP staff individually (like I discuss NVs in Chapter 3), more formal interviews are necessary through my continuous engagement with TRP for (winning their) trust despite our divergent interests: see below for further discussion.

for the sake of diversity promotion), are not the ultimate organizational goal. Fumino-san and Yamagata-san had acted as co-representatives until the end of 2018. Since 2019, lesbian staff Yamada-san has taken on Yamagata-san's post. Attempts to diversify membership and operate through an open and free dialogue among the staff distinguishes TRP from its predecessors, who had limited membership to Japanese nationals and assumed harmony through hierarchical management (Nakane 1970).

As TRP is institutionalizing itself, a certain sense of commonality also seems to be appearing among the staff despite their sheer diversity: seriousness. Most of the staff take what they do very seriously, including play.<sup>98</sup> Seriousness is even magnified when combined with diligence, as many TRP staff seriously work extremely hard literally by sloganizing “never give up.” Serious stories of “never-give-up” diligence are also often featured in TRP's magazine. Igei-san regularly complains about not-so-serious persons, who, as he often generalize, “lack rationality and responsibility (*gōrisei to sekininkan ni kakeru* 合理性と責任感に欠ける).”

Yet, wasn't I one of those, as I was aiming to play my research persona “Professor Ethical Bitch [PEB],” which I had developed as part of my preparation for dissertation fieldwork? While I was browsing online dictionaries including *Urban Dictionary* and *Aruku*, I serendipitously learned that “bitch” stands for “beautiful intellectuals that cause hard-ons.” Besides, I noticed that the co-chair of the 2016 TRP event, Kamiya Edo, used the word in his self-introduction on the website; he ended his introduction with “Bitch Forever!!!” Kamiya might “get” PEB. Maybe, PEB can penetrate his network? My ballooning hope had induced my determination to go with PEB. But I learned that Edo-san had some issues with TRP's organizing and left TRP right before I returned to Japan for fieldwork. My plan shattered. I didn't have the guts to risk the

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<sup>98</sup> In contrast, playfulness appears to characterize NVs predominantly. TRP staff and TVs are significantly different in character and behavior.

upcoming two years of engagement by giving not-so-serious impressions. So, rather, I decided to be moderate, if not conservative, simply trying to be a NV when hanging out with TRP, and a TRP staff with NVs in the spirit of radical simulacra.

### *Allies and Fundraising*

TRP's commitment to diversity manifests in the array of allies as well. These include heterosexual families (adults and kids); foreign expatriates (queer or otherwise); social clubs such as local associations and hobby groups (in and beyond Tokyo); celebrities; activists; academics; artists; athletes; politicians; and institutionalized organizations such as foreign embassies and both domestic and multi-national corporations. In the past annual event guides downloadable on the TRP website, we can actually see a fraction of many allies' faces.

As the stage and performance section leader Usuda-san expresses her excitement, "I really do feel more people are becoming concerned," increasing support from public figures through various means (contributing messages, marching together, giving performances, etc.) is noticeable.<sup>99</sup> In addition to many local-level long-time LGBT-supportive politicians, including Kamikawa Aya, Ishikawa Taiga, and Ishizaka Wataru, an increasing number of congressional representatives are beginning to express support publicly. The former president of the Democratic Party of Japan, Kaieda Banri, the former head of the Social Democratic Party of Japan, Fukushima Mizuho, and the policy chief of the Democratic Party of Japan, Hosono Goshi, have been supportive of TRP and LGBT-related policy moves (The TBS News 2015). The 2014 TRP annual event welcomed first lady Abe Akie, a wife of the former conservative Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo (The Japan Times 2014). TRP has saluted many nationally popular

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<sup>99</sup> I'm keeping my eye on TRP's alliance with disability activist Ototake Hirotsada, who has recently caused a scandal (an extra-marital affair with multiple women, arguably consented to by his wife). How does TRP maintain their alliance with him in celebrating diversity? Does his scandal add to diversity or does it pose any threats to the respectability of TRP's movement? After taking a "break," Ototake has returned to the public scene.

singers, including MISIA, Nakashima Mika, Chara, and Hamasaki Ayumi, who have performed for the annual event. In addition, well-known academics such as feminist sociologist Shibuya Tomomi and political philosopher Shirai Satoshi are known TRP allies.

Although anyone or any organization can be an ally by an expression of a genuine sense of support, a further step can be pursued upon providing financial assistance. Any individual or organization can individually and organizationally obtain membership by filing out a web form and paying the annual membership fee of at least ¥3000/\$30. Members receive TRP's publications as part of membership benefits.

As for institutionalized organizations such as corporations and foreign embassies, they can purchase advertising and/or sales space on TRP's official website, in TRP's publications, and during the annual "parade & festa." First, TRP attracts an increasing number of corporate enterprises as seen in the annually published TRP event guide. The size of the guide increased from four pages in 2013 to eleven in 2014, but advertisements for recruitment or consumption (targeting a middle-class or higher audience) dominate more than half of the space. The guide kept becoming thicker and thicker with an increasing volume of corporate and organizational ads but TRP has simplified and streamlined its annual guide (only five pages) since 2018 perhaps due to the soaring number of sponsors; instead, TRP makes the most of its website to pay its debt to its generous allies.

GAP is one example of long-time supportive multinational corporations. TRP receives sincere (and financial) support from GAP for "Out in Japan," which is a 5-year-range project to collect photographs of ten thousand sexual minorities—clothed in GAP outfits—in Japan (Figure 3).



Figure 3. GAP supports TRP's "Out in Japan" project. Courtesy of GAP and TRP.

TRP allows financially generous (at least) foreign embassies to appear in the official guide and set up their own booths for advertising during the annual event. Controversially, TRP let the Israeli embassy hyperbolize Israel as “the only gay-friendly nation among Middle Eastern nations” in the 2014 official guide. TRP bolsters “pinkwashing,” or in theorist Jasbir Puar’s words, “Israel’s promotion of a LGBTQ-friendly image to reframe the occupation of Palestine in terms of civilizational narratives measured by (sexual) modernity” (2013, 337). In short, TRP encourages queers (and allies) in Japan to shop and travel as “out-and-proud” lavish consumers for sponsors whom the staff identify as *arai*.

As the number of sponsors and participants has dramatically increased for the past few years (see also below for “numbers”), so has TRP’s operational budget. When TRP kicked off, its budget was about a few thousand dollars, often covered by donations as well as out-of-pockets payments by the staff themselves. Yet, TRP’s annual budget became more than six figures by 2018. This growth is a result of painstaking efforts by the TRP staff, including a hired salesperson Matsubayashi-san, who has been leading the sales section. Although the commercialization and corporatization of (queer) activism has attracted some criticisms (e.g., Ward 2008), a certain amount of money is necessary as the foundation of TRP’s pursuits however materialistic it might sound.

TRP handles inquiries about study groups including corporate workshops and school lectures as part of their outreach, an extension of its ally making, especially in close cooperation with two notable allies: LGBT 法連合会 (Japan Alliance for LGBT Legislation or J-ALL) and LGBT 総合研究所 (Japan LGBT Research Institute Inc.). First, J-ALL helps TRP address LGBT discrimination in sociolegal terms. Founded in 2015, J-ALL consists of LGBT-concerned activists, educators, and lawyers (including a few LGBT-identifying ones), collectively aimed at

1) policy recommendation, 2) policy drafting, 3) implementation of study groups, and 4) transmission of information, primarily for sexual minorities. Networked with diverse sexual minority groups (listed on its official website), J-ALL seeks to persuade the Japanese government to establish LGBT anti-discrimination laws by asserting that the implementation of such policies is “globally standardized” as in European countries, Australia, and the US: a common *gaiatsu* 外圧 (foreign-pressure) tactic—as if the organization exposes and manages the difficulty of conducting internal critique in Japan, a challenge TRP (as well as I) faces in its every step.<sup>100</sup>

The Japan LGBT Research Institute, another powerful ally, is a Hakuōdō-affiliated marketing agency, which provides TRP with research data about LGBTs in Japan.<sup>101</sup> The agency is managed by Morinaga Takahiko. He won “AD+VENTURE,” a competition by Hakuōdō DY Holdings (one of the most powerful public relations companies in Japan), and founded the agency in 2016. Based on his own experiences of growing up as a son of the late devout Christian mother, who had, just like himself, struggled to understand and respect difference, Morinaga is personally committed to promoting diversity and making sexuality “‘correctly’ understood (*tadashii rikai* 正しい理解)”; I’m curious how his attempt to bracket “correctly” is understood by elite companies. In order to “bridge LGBTs and the corporate world from the perspective of ordinary citizens (*seikatsusha hassō de erujībītī to kigyō wo tsunagu* 生活者発想で、LGBTと企業を繋ぐ)” as expressed on its website, the agency encourages Japanese businesses in search of potential sources of profits to promote diversity while taking advantage of its qualitative and quantitative research for targeting LGBTs in Japan. At present, the Japan LGBT

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<sup>100</sup> The official website of the organization (<http://lgbtetc.jp>) shows a PDF list (downloadable online) for “difficulties” that LGBTs concretely face in Japanese social life. Just like TRP, J-ALL also dispatches specialists upon workshop requests from national bureaucratic institutions and big corporations.

<sup>101</sup> For the agency’s official website, visit <https://lgbtri.co.jp>.

Research Institute urges potential (in particular elite) clients to adjust themselves to Sexual Harassment Prevention Guidelines (effective since 2017) and Power Harassment Prevention Law Guidelines.<sup>102</sup> As the agency itself conducts research and accumulates data on LGBTs in Japan, TRP makes the most of its scientific evidence in asserting the significance of diversity.

### *Decidedly “Out-and-Proud”*

Its “out-and-proud” orientation significantly distinguishes TRP from its predecessors. Like TP, TRP had initially discouraged unlimited photographing of the event, in particular of the pride parade, to protect some participants’ privacy (“a no-photograph section”), and accommodated both visibility and invisibility—at least until 2014. A major shift occurred in 2015, the year TRP became an NPO. It was in that year that TRP abandoned the pride parade’s “no-photograph section.” In the parade participation precaution for the 2015 TRP pride march scheduled on April 26th, TRP stated, “Please take self-protection by wearing hats or sunglasses if you prefer not being photographed during the parade (パレード道中から撮影されると困る場合は帽子をかぶるなど自己防衛をお願いします).” Based on the group’s faith in visibility, TRP now shifts responsibility to individuals by instructing participants to protect themselves in case of not wanting to be photographed. This is a fair decision given TRP’s organizational objective—though, of course with some consequences (e.g., alienating those who prefer discretion)—, which overlaps with Japan’s interests in promoting itself as a diversity-accommodating nation.

While TRP has solidified its “out-and-proud” orientation, Japan has also been processing LGBT concerns quietly since before Tokyo was officially nominated as an Olympics hosting city in 2013. On August 28 in 2012—the year when TRP had its first pride parade—the Japanese government announced its decision to consider special policies for sexual minorities in the

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<sup>102</sup> Power Harassment Prevention Law Guidelines cover SOGI-related harassment and “outing,” it affects only big companies today and will affect small and mid-size ones when it goes fully into effect in 2022.

comprehensive suicide prevention measures (*jisatsu sōgōtaisaku* 自殺総合対策), as if they are subjects worthy of legal protection. Hase Hiroshi, the then head of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, commented on his intentions to enforce LGBT accommodation in school, reportedly a hotbed of anti-LGBT bullying (Murai 2015). These administratively monumental moves resulted in part from social research by Japanese academics, such as Hidaka Yasuharu, who utilizes statistics and quantifies (Japanese) LGBTs’ ordeals (e.g., verbal harassment, lack of information on sexuality, and suicidal wishes). In response to such research findings, more and more national-level politicians (especially those belonging to the all-party parliamentary LGBT group) began participating in relevant study workshops among themselves, occasionally inviting academics, activists, and sexual minorities both adult and student.

Immediately after the 2015 TRP parade & festa in April, the former Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Japan, Caroline Kennedy, cheered on TRP on behalf of the US embassy; “[t]he US government, under President Obama’s leadership, is working hard to create a brighter future for LGBT individuals in the United States and around the world,” and “engaging foreign governments to promote and protect the human rights of LGBT persons everywhere. [...] Here in Japan, I have worked with Mrs. Akie Abe to promote a message of equality and zero discrimination” (Figure 4).<sup>103</sup>

While incorporating diverse allies into its movement, TRP looked ahead to the “postponed” 2020 Tokyo



Figure 4. The TRP(/Japan)-US alliance.  
© TRP

<sup>103</sup> She probably helped arrange a space at the International House of Japan (a prestigious location) for those involved/interested in the “Queer Japan Project,” a documentary film directed by U.S.-Japan Creative Artists Program fellow Graham Kolbeins. It is difficult to book a space there without an endorsement by such VIPs as Kennedy.



Olympics. The 2014 TRP official guide presented a forward-looking message from the former co-representative Yamagata Shinya. He sounded convinced that Japan's qualification for handling the Olympics depends on whether Tokyo embraces multiculturalism: "I believe our activism to be a touchstone issue for making Tokyo a city accommodating diversity. You may gauge whether or not Tokyo deserves to be an Olympics venue based on the acceptance of TRP [’s movement]." TRP's Tokyo-based activism meets Japan's national politics, as TRP uses the upcoming Tokyo Olympics as an impetus for change in Japan. According to the 2015 event proposal for institutional allies, TRP aimed to make Tokyo "*sekai ni hokoru daibāshiti taun*" ([my translation] a world-class diverse city)—where queers flourish—by 2020. Overall, TRP's multicultural activism roughly meets Japan's national politics, as TRP encourages Japan to embrace diversity proudly (that is publicly).

In the corporate world, Japan Business Federation (JBF) has been attempting to adopt *daibāshiti* ダイバーシティ/多様性 (diversity) and *inkurūjon* インクルージョン/包摂 (inclusion) as part of making Japan reputable internationally (Keidanren, 2017); JBF periodically conducts and publishes survey on Japanese corporate efforts on LGBT-related issues (e.g., recruitment and sexuality training). For instance, a few big firms, like the electronics company SONY and the insurance company Dai-ichi Life, have set out to experiment with LGBT-sensitive training and policies (Takeo 2016). In addition to Japan Inc., Science Council of Japan has also encouraged the government to consider LGBT rights seriously, as they published in 2017 recommendations on sexual minority rights especially in marriage, education, and labor. Furthermore, the official statement on marriage equality by Japan Federation of Bar Associations in 2019 has put pressure on the government regarding the legalization of same-sex marriage.

To sum up, along with these institutional pushes for LGBT rights, TRP attempts to forge a

symbiotic, rather than antagonistic, relationship with the Japanese nation-state. As much as TRP politely appeals to Japan for formal acceptance of LGBTs by advocating diversity in cooperation with multiple authoritative institutions, national elites of today seem likely to listen to, if not immediately accept, such polite contestation. Without much resistance against those in authority, TRP brings its “out-and-proud” politics to the fore in its attempts to bolster the tradition of public disclosure and rights claiming for LGBTs in contemporary Japan.

#### **4. TRP Parade & Festa 2019: A Seriously Playful Tactic**

TRP’s Parade & Festa has been held since 2012; the last year’s event took place online due to the outbreak of the COVID-19. As part of the “rainbow week,” TRP’s annual event serves as a spectacle to draw attention to LGBT issues in and beyond Japan. In the history of pride parades in Tokyo, Japan. This section offers an overview of the past annual events and outlines the 2019 Parade & Festa as I took part in its whole process of preparation and implementation.

##### *Past Annual Events*

Earlier on the website, TRP situated its birth in the up-and-down history of pride parades in Japan:

The very first pride parade for sexual minorities to take place in Japan was in August, 1994. However, due to problems in funding and organizing, the event was unable to continue in further years. Determined to make the parade an annual event, TRP was finally established as a not for profit organization. [...] [W]e aim to make the parade an event fitting of such a colorful city as Tokyo and to continue running it for many years to come. [TRP’s English translation]

As this declaration sounded committed and energetic, TRP has come to be the first and only organization to have been able to continue hosting a pride parade in Tokyo, Japan for more than

five years in a row successfully, when it had its fifth annual event in 2016.

Indeed, the scale of TRP's annual event has been nothing but expanding both on- and offline, as evidenced in a lot of "numbers": event duration, parade and event attendee, revenues, and so on (Appendix A). TRP had spent only one weekend (two days) on the event for the first three years, but event duration was extended to about ten days since 2014, when the organization incorporated TRW. A major shift has occurred since 2015, when TRP's pride parade and festival became part of the rainbow week. In 2015, there were 3,000 parade attendees, the same as in 2014, but TRP witnessed a sharp increase in the number that attended the event itself (60,000, which is 45,000 higher than that in the previous year). Both parade and event participants have had a spiral rise ever since. The 2019 event heralded 203,000 event attendees, 10,915 of whom also walked in the parade. The organizational revenues, corresponding to TRP's increasing budget as already addressed above, has become an order of magnitude greater along with the increasing number of attendees as well as sponsors (from ¥5,000,000/\$50,000 in 2012 to ¥109,615,298/\$1 million in 2019). The number of openly supportive public figures has increased to the degree that such nationally recognized popular singers as Nakashima Mika and Hamasaki Ayumi served as a special guest performer during the 2017 and 2018 annual events respectively.

Cooperation with the state apparatus (the police in particular) is a prerequisite for its TRP's activism. Every year, TRP negotiates with the Shibuya-Ward police office and obtains a permit to occupy public spaces (i.e., Yoyogi Park, a main locale for the festival and Inokashira Street, a main road



Figure 5. TRP's Pride Parade Route Map. © TRP

for the parade) for this event (Figure 5).<sup>104</sup> One of the contingencies from the Shibuya police is

<sup>104</sup> Through this process required by the Public Safety Regulations (*Kōan Hō* 公安法), the police gets the picture of a given public demonstration and prepares for security for the day. Because security measures are usually

that TRP keep the parade a public demonstration, not a venue for corporate advertisement. Thus, TRP politely asks participating corporate representatives to have general social messages rather than specific sales blurbs, by directing their promotional aims elsewhere (e.g., online or at the festival site); the staff check all the “props” before parading. Compliance is necessary in order to maintain smooth communication with the police, which has ultimate discretion on whether to accept or reject an application for a given year.

The performance of coming-out is affirmed throughout. For instance, the 2015 TRP event staged the NYC-based Japanese musician Ki-Yo’s coming-out. Ki-Yo offered a musical performance for the promotion video of the TRP’s “Out in Japan” project and came out during the 2015 event. In a Huffington Post article (Sasakawa 2015), Ki-Yo recounted what induced his ultimate coming-out: his experiences in the U. S. (more specifically, NYC), his British best friend, and his inspiring encounter with the Japan-based Singaporean photographer Leslie Kee through TRP’s aforementioned “Out in Japan” project, to name a few. The parents of Ki-Yo rushed over from their Sendai home to support their son’s coming-out scene. Ki-Yo hopes that his coming-out will encourage youth, whether queer or not, to embrace openly queer life as “*futsū* 普通 (normal)”. As an aside, his coming-out adds to the Japanese entertainment world, as he looks and sounds like a gender-conforming man unlike other out male celebrities, who adopt gender non-conforming personae (e.g., IKKO and Matsuko Deluxe).

In addition to Ki-Yo’s coming-out, the public lesbian wedding of Ren and Yae served as another spectacular display of queer visibility during the 2015 TRP Parade & Festa.<sup>105</sup> The same-

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implemented in a way that they encompass the given public demonstration, the police can effectively inhibit the spontaneous growth of the protest on the day. The occurrence of a large-scale, spontaneous public demonstration is relatively rare. A recent notable exception is the anti-nuclear protest that took place after the 3.11 disaster. In the US, an increasing number of anti-protest legislation are being introduced in many states due to heightening concerns by state officials about Black Lives Matter protests after the killing of George Floyd in 2020.

<sup>105</sup> On 1 March 2013, the ex-Takarazuka Revue actress Higashi Koyuki and her partner Masuhara Hiroko held a same-sex-wedding at the Tokyo Disney Resort, attracting much national media attention. In the same year, the two

sex wedding acted as part and parcel of their experimentation with a same-sex partnership certificate approved earlier that year. Ren excitedly speaks, “I hope that our wedding will encourage other LGBTs to propose to their true love and have a wedding” (Kuze 2015).

Although Japan has yet to recognize same-sex marriage, Ren and Yae sound extremely delighted with the Shibuya district’s proactive support of same-sex coupling.

Although the 2020 event had been cancelled due to the worldwide pandemic COVID-19, TRP nonetheless hosted an “online pride parade and festival” called *Ouchi de puraido* おうちでプライド [a pride at home] through Twitter. The event attracted 438,786 participants.

### *Event Preparation*

TRP begins to prepare for the following year’s Parade & Festa in fall, when the staff resume regular meetings after taking a summer break. The core staff individually execute their respective event-related work during the short summer break so that TRP can jump-start its preparation in September. TRP recruits hundreds of event volunteers in winter and hold orientation meetings in early spring, while working with supportive institutions throughout. TRP’s annual event takes place during Japan’s national holiday week that spans from late April to early May, when a great number of domestic tourists visit Tokyo. As the scale of TRP’s Parade & Festa is getting bigger every year, event preparation requires a considerable degree of commitment.

Fall 2018: I received an email from Igei-san, a TRP staff member of indeterminate age (perhaps in his late thirties or early forties) in charge of office operation, about an upcoming preparation meeting for the 2019 annual event. He told me that all the board members and section heads would attend and so I might want to come along. Following the information on the time and location of the first preparatory meeting, I found myself at the TRP office one Sunday

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also published an autobiographical book/manga entitled *Rezubian teki kekkon seikatsu* [A lesbianish married life].

evening. It turned out that a couple of board members were running late, but those present decided to proceed as scheduled at 5 pm.

The meeting began as everybody shared what they had been doing during the summer, when TRP usually has a break after an incentive trip, a brief moment of rest and recreation for the staff to reflect on the bypast Parade & Festa and look forward to the following year's. Then, the section heads took turns addressing their concerns and questions as well as roughly estimating requests for the number of volunteers needed for the next year's annual event. Although the talk often digressed to personal, rather than organizational, updates, such digressions filled the time while waiting for the latecomers. Everyone was present by 6:30 pm and it took another one and a half hours to have every section head brief the group. By the end of the meeting, it was decided that the preparatory committee would continue to meet once or twice a month for the rest of the year. As the office director, Igei-san reminded everyone to keep him posted (meaning LINE him) if anything happens. This was one of the shortest committee meetings I've attended.

Organizing a section for the event is basically a lonely, if not completely independent, task, as each section pursues highly specialized activities. I was assigned to assist Igei-san and work at the office, handling office chores and managing emails. Although Igei-san works as a waiter at a franchise restaurant, he begins to reduce his shifts as TRP kicks off its event preparation. He had been involved in TP organizing before joining TRP. Igei-san once said that he is extremely happy to be able to work at the TRP office as if he were a full-time activist, even if at the expense of job shifts during TRP's busy season; he "works" (minimally paid) at the TRP office from 8 am to the evening almost every day and then goes to his job which required him to work past the midnight. As I also had to teach during my fieldwork, I tried my best to come to the office as many days

and hours a week as possible; two or three days of several hours was my weekly best.

In addition to my office work, I also sat in on various meetings (e.g., ones for prospective volunteers or potential sponsors). When I told Ige-san that I wanted to take a look at a volunteer recruitment meeting, he prompted me to see Takehiko-san, who was supposed to oversee prospective volunteers at a local welfare center in Okubo. On the date of one orientation session in October, I arrived at the venue slightly earlier than I was supposed to. I was planning to meet Takehiko-san in front of the building. When Takehiko-san showed up, he introduced himself. Takehiko-san apologized for his inability to walk fast as well as his slurred speech—his disability, I understood, which is something he doesn't have to apologize for. We went inside and headed to the conference room. On the way, another TRP staff appeared. It was Takino-san, who is a salaryman-ish person much younger than mid-aged Takehiko-san. Takino-san quickly prepared the room, checking all the equipment and handouts. Potential volunteers showed up one after another, quickly filling the room. The meeting began at the appointed time and Takehiko-san was in charge of taking the role of a facilitator giving a presentation on the history of TRP and LGBT struggles both in and beyond Japan as well as logistics for volunteering. Takehiko-san's presentation finished fifteen minutes over the scheduled time. A Q&A session then started. When Takehiko-san began his answer to a question as raised by one attendee, Takino-san suddenly took over. Takino-san then had addressed all the questions posed afterwards. Our meeting went over two hours, which was how long it was supposed to take. Takino-san apologized to the attendees. After they left, we put everything back in place. Takino-san then said, "I'm busy having an appointment after this, so see you guys." He left in a hurry. I was also busy that day, so was Takehiko-san perhaps. I had to take some time digesting what I perceived of as a tension between efficiency and equity in practicing TRP's faith in diversity. The whole

meeting could have ended on time if Takino-san had facilitated it. Yet facilitation wasn't his job. The attendees could have left if they had had to do so. What did Takehiko-san feel and think about what happened? On the way to the reception at the local center, Takehiko-san said, "There're many issues going on." Although he didn't specify exactly what those are, the issue of disability in TRP's organizational operation is one thing. Although TRP promotes diversity and welcomes guests with disabilities at its annual event, tensions between able-bodied staff and staff with disabilities have yet to be resolved in practice as seen in the above case.

Similarly, sponsor meetings were also an important venue for TRP to sustain its organizational pursuit. One evening, Igei-san asked if I wanted to use a taxi or train to get to the sponsor meeting venue scheduled at 7 pm. I was thinking to myself that a taxi would definitely be better if covered, but was feeling reluctant to utter it outright and remained quiet. Igei-san then began murmuring as he calculated the costs and benefits of our options; taking a cab is comfortable but expensive and has a risk of delays due to traffic, while taking the train is stressful, especially during rush hours, but cheaper and most likely quicker. As Igei-san ended up choosing the option of the train, I regretted not expressing my thoughts since we had to carry equipment and meeting materials, like computers, brochures, etc.

At the meeting venue, I worked at the reception desk, greeting potential sponsors and checking attendance. Although most potential sponsors were quite polite (as they were attending as representative of their institutions), some attendees were more critical and demanding during the Q&A session after Makishi-san finished a presentation. One Japanese attendee introduced himself as a representative from a European embassy, who came to this meeting after his regular work hours, and said that he wanted to know why TRP has raised its sponsorship fees. He added that his question absolutely had to be answered as his institution has responsibility for justifying



investment as part of global promotion of anti-discrimination as observed in their “home” (European) countries. Such a concern itself was fair. But he went on demanding, rather than questioning, an English translation of the presentation material, as he would have to communicate with his non-Japanese English-speaking colleagues and bosses. I wondered how he was entitled to assume that the translational work was TRP’s responsibility rather than seeing it as part of his own job. Matsubayashi-san, TRP’s saleswoman, responded that TRP would appreciate understanding since sponsorship fees had been underpriced and activists had been underpaid. The co-representative Yamagata-san politely and diplomatically made closing and thanking remarks to every potential sponsor so that all attendees could leave with comfort and invest in TRP’s endeavor; this pattern of micro-level interpersonal interaction conforms to Japan’s predominant social tendency to avoid outright conflicts and maintain surface peace—at the expense of individual feelings (Krauss et al. 1984).<sup>106</sup> The meeting itself ended at about 9 pm, but we the TRP staff lingered a bit, having a reflective session. While reflecting on what kinds of questions we received and how best to address them politely, we found it necessary that the history of queer activism in Japan had to be presented in a succinct way for potential sponsors beforehand so that they could learn it at their disposal; after all, questions about TRP’s fee increase come down to it. It was after 10 pm that we finally called it a day. I stopped by the office to leave our materials and headed home.

As Tokyo turned colder, the new year began. The number of postal items steadily increased, and so did that of emails. While excited about increasing organizational donations and ad revenues thanks to an expanding circle of allies that I could confirm at the office desk handling

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<sup>106</sup> Although TRP promotes “out-and-proud” activism, it does not necessarily mean that the group adopts outright confrontation during interpersonal and organizational negotiations. Both individual staff and TRP on the whole are very polite in terms of asserting needs and wants.

emails, I was increasingly feeling oppressed by the already-small apartment room now stuffed with equipment, materials, and brochures for the event. The ample living doll of TRP' mascot Toby conspicuously occupied much of the space (See below for a discussion about the mascot). Yet congregating in such a packed space forges a certain sense of intimacy among those present.

Life is never without unanticipated events. One day in March, a month before the annual event, Igei-san picked up a phone call at the office and it was from another staff reporting the news about the head of a sponsoring company, who had just been arrested due to groping a man on a train. The company had an introductory message in our event guide and the employees from the company were planning to participate in the parade. Igei-san reported this at the acting committee meeting held right after he heard the news, and the decision was that, although TRP would remove the company introduction from our event guide as we cannot promote a company headed by a criminal, the employees were still allowed to join as it was too close to the date of the annual event and they were in no way responsible. As TRP was making final adjustments, including this one, our annual event (April 27-May 6) stood on the verge of its staging.

### *The Day of the Parade*

On April 28th, the date for our parade, it was clear and sunny; many TRP staff were attributing such good fortune to their habitual hard work. After having taught at my cram school, I took a train to Yoyogi. On the train I saw a few people with rainbow keyholders and suspected that they would, just like myself, get off at JR Harajuku Station near the event venue. And we all got off at Harajuku.

By 1:30 pm Yoyogi Park was already more than full of people for differing purposes from volunteering and selling to parading and just visiting and hanging out. A tree-lined driveway, near the park entrance, was a waiting area for those who would be joining the parade. From a

distance, I was able to recognize a few familiar faces. Igei-san and a few others in charge of managing participating individuals and groups were busting their butts guiding excited participants.

I was tempted to join them but needed to meet up with an old gay friend who wanted to see what this increasingly high-profile TRP event was all about. We were planning to meet at the entrance of the park. Shizuo (a pseudonym) works at a national travel agency and has been telling me that chances to hear not only “LGBT” but also “TRP” within his company have increased for the past couple of years. Although Shizuo says that he generally has little interest in activism itself as he prefers discretion, he wanted to come and see, as I was doing research. As we digressed off to our respective whereabouts, the clock pointed to 2 o’clock in the afternoon and the parade began; we can virtually “see and experience” TRP’s 2019 parade on YouTube.<sup>107</sup>

First and foremost, the appearance of TRP’s annual Parade & Festa was nothing but flamboyant. During the event, Yoyogi Park (the festival venue) got filled with colorful and creative booths decorated by allies. These allies ranged from corporations and embassies to hobby circles and advocacy groups. They all competed with one another for attention from event participants, as they worked on flamboyancy (to promote their respective activities). They gave out promotional brochures to event participants, who could flip through those elaborate handouts while having a rest in the drinking and eating area. The feasting area served as a semi-educational space for those who needed a snack time after strolling around huge Yoyogi Park or after coming back from walking in the parade. In such moments, various forces (individual needs and wants, corporate interests, activist objectives) entwined and facilitated consumption, with which TRP could generate revenues, something its predecessors had had difficulty with in the

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<sup>107</sup> Visit [youtube.com/watch?v=gjcdSdi5gPQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjcdSdi5gPQ).

history of queer activism in Japan.

The stage area in Yoyogi Park was a space for various performances, from the serious to the playful. The space was used only for a couple of brief serious moments (opening and closing ceremonies) during the Parade & Festa. The facilitators and invited guests (e.g., activists and politicians) gave their short congratulatory comments and expressed their respective commitment to LGBT anti-discrimination in and beyond Japan. Other than these moments, the stage area was entirely occupied by diverse performers, from professional performance artists and drag queens to choir groups, who entice diverse audiences from families with kids and same-sex couples holding hands or leaning on each other to lone visitors and groups of friends.

The parade looked nothing like a conventional social movement. Many participants were clothed in colorful, even bizarre outfits, while some were skimpy and almost bare naked only wearing a loincloth. This non-social-movement-like “look” was of course part of TRP’s strategy so that general passersby would stop, wonder what was going on, and, hopefully, go online to check it out. The former TRP co-representative Yamagata-san once said that the conventional appearance of social movements (i.e., demonstrators holding picket signs) can either put off or even intimidate onlookers. Indeed, if they cannot immediately tell what parade participants are doing (i.e., calling for LGBT anti-discrimination and promoting LGBT rights), only flashy and amusing impressions stick in their minds, which might prompt their further search. However, these images might have little incentives for those who find that their mobility is blocked by the parade (e.g., logistics drivers and driving commuters).

The use of celebrities was also part of TRP’s seriously playful tactic with which to create an attractive and approachable atmosphere for such serious aims as LGBT anti-discrimination. Although TRP did not have a special guest for the 2019 Parade & Festa, the annual event still

welcomed many nationally known figures, including comedian Shimizu Michiko, entertainer RYUCHELL, and the hip-hop group M-Flo, who took part in the scheduled performances.<sup>108</sup>

Amid carnival-like revels, TRP's Parade & Festa provided attendees with opportunities to question dominant media-representations of queers in Japan. The media (in particular television) play a great role in manipulating images about queers playfully (Eguchi 2017; Maree 2020a; Suganuma 2018). Although the media, much like the Japanese law, do not necessarily discriminate against queers explicitly, they tend to sensationalize queer figures (predominantly effeminate and cross-dressing gays) by exaggerating their allegedly inherently unique nature, presumably in order to entertain the mainstream (McLelland, 2000, 2001; Suganuma, 2011). During TRP's annual event, however, attendees had a chance to see a diverse array of performers, including heavily stereotyped queen-type ones, both on and off stage. If hanging out in the food and beverage area, event attendees could easily recognize these performers, who were lounging around in a group there before and after their scheduled show times; they were using a part of the food and beverage area as a dressing and chatting "room" because the event venue had a backstage space too small to accommodate all. Once stepping out of the food and beverage area, all kinds of people were there, any of whom could have been queer.

Although the use of play specifically in activism might appear radical, the Japanese nation-state has used it as a means of social control historically.<sup>109</sup> Play characterizes contemporary

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<sup>108</sup> A special guest for the previous year (2018) was the nationally recognized model and singer Hamasaki Ayumi. Hamasaki was known by sexual minorities as an LGBT-friendly figure, as she had frequented Shinjuku Ni-chōme and established fan networks among Ni-chōme goers for a long time. Hamasaki remained an influential performer by regularly holding domestic and international tours for her vocal performances, although her popularity had peaked in the first decade of the new millennium. Her declining popularity, however, worked well for both TRP and Hamasaki herself. While TRP could relatively easily negotiate with her affiliated talent agency to invite her to its sociopolitically charged annual event, Hamasaki also could gain publicity, which is always good for a performer's career; and she gave a speech during the event, thankful that she could finally return a favor to her Ni-chōme friends through her public performance for the LGBT community in Japan.

<sup>109</sup> Playful social protest has had a presence throughout Western political history although scholarly attention to playful activism in Euro-American social-movement scholarship is relatively short. Recently, however, an increasing

Japan's means of social control, described by sociologist Sugimoto Yoshio as "friendly authoritarianism" (2014, 325-39): a dualistic technique aimed at domesticating citizens from school early on all the way up to the corporate world and familial life through seemingly pleasant events such as festivals. Japan is no doubt authoritarian in a sense that it "encourages each member of society to internalize and share the value system which regards control and regimentation as natural and to accept the instructions and orders of people in superordinate positions without questioning" (ibid., 325). At the same time, Japan is friendly as it "does not normally exhibit its coercive face, generally dangling soft incentives of various kinds" (ibid.). In particular, as part of friendly authoritarianism, Japan makes the most of "joyful, amusing, and pleasant entertainments such as songs, visual arts, and festivals to make sure that authority infiltrates without obvious pains" (ibid., 326). Using such seemingly power-free methods, Japan disciplines citizens so that they "play well" in Japanese life. I suggest that Japan's general predilection to play stems from premodern Japan's pleasure-affirming culture, as the Tokugawa shogunate used sex (more broadly pleasure) as a means of regulation (see Chapter 1).

Anthropologists of Japan have been concerned about Japan's use of play for social regulation. Joy Hendy and Massimo Raveri (2002) present examples of how play penetrates many social domains, like work, school, and leisure, in their edited monograph *Japan at Play: The Ludic and the Logic of Power*, a collection of essays from many (mostly anthropologist) contributors, who address play's ludicrously disciplinary force (both physical and ideological) among citizens born and raised in such a friendly-authoritarian nation as Japan. Eyal Ben-Ari examines *bōnenkai* or an end-of-year drinking feast as a complex nexus for group dynamics, as held among corporate workers; they are not the only group of people who have *bōnenkai* as it is

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number of scholars (e.g., Bogad 2016; Hart & Bos 2007; Kutz-Flamenbaum 2014; Shepard 2011, 2013) has identified play as one potentially powerful form of organizing and sustaining social movements.

held among non-family people like students and friends. Ben-Ari analyzes the feast as a stage for individual performance (e.g., paying attention to others) and improvisation (e.g., coming up with a good joke) aimed at making interaction smooth and promoting group harmony. William Kelly similarly examines *karaoke* performance as a (self-)disciplinary mechanism; as people sing, they monitor themselves in relation to audiences (often coworkers, bosses or peers) for group cohesion.

These insights help us think about some of those who joined TRP's 2019 Parade & Festa, especially ones on behalf of their affiliated companies. There were many parade attendees, who walked as a corporate ally representing their own company of affiliation. These corporate participants were enlisted based on either their will or their company's (or maybe both), using their days off for participation in TRP's Parade & Festa. On the one hand, the participating (financially generous) companies were organizationally able to create their liberal and inclusive images as a result of the attending employees, and some of these companies fulfilled their longtime commitment to supporting LGBTs. On the other hand, the attending employees' experiences appeared to have varied depending on how they came to participate in the event; some perhaps put up with the sacrifice of days off, thinking about employer evaluation and individual promotion; others might have been just coerced into joining the event for the sake of their bosses or they might have had LGBT friends to support personally; and some others maybe had a complex combination of these reasons and enjoyed (or not) their event participation. For these corporate allies and their employees, participation in TRP's Parade & Festa wasn't purely for either fun or work, as they had to act in the presence of potential competitors (e.g., rival companies or co-workers). It might have been possible to genuinely have fun parading and partying, but individual "play" was constantly monitored by work-related individuals in groups,

each representing their place of employment during TRP's Parade & Festa.

In spite of the Japanese state apparatus that readily attempts to use and absorb such play as TRP's Parade & Festa, what remains uncontainable is TRP's investment in an "out-and-proud" activism through the annual event. The culture of public disclosure (of anything potentially discreditable) is what TRP ultimately aims to cultivate through its seriously playful social protest in such a nation as Japan, which has a history of regulating citizens and "quieting" dissident movements through play. The potential of TRP's seriously playful tactic lies in its seemingly aligned, yet actually tense, relationship with the Japanese nation-state.

### *Post Handling*

Before the event, EZ-san, a lesbian staff member in her twenties, had kindly reminded me that I didn't necessarily come to help with cleanup since a holiday season is one of the busiest times for school businesses; and I did have to work most of the time during Golden Week. I sent an apology email to Igei-san, who picked up all the trash and cleared away the equipment along with the TRP staff and volunteers.

The end of cleanup, however, didn't mean the end for TRP organizational activity in 2019, a year before New York City was about to have the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. The board members and some other acting committee had been discussing earlier whether or not they would fly to NYC and participate in its pride event. It had been decided that TRP as an organization would join the NYC pride parade by preparing a float, but a couple of board members and some other acting committee, including my good contact Igei-san, were thinking whether to go or not until the last minute. He asked me if I also would like to come along. While I wasn't able to, Igei-san made up his mind to fly and join. The trip was for the TRP staff to not only have fun and sustain their motivations, but also learn from, in their words, "the birthplace of



gay liberation and the world-class parade that TRP can model after.”

Although TRP officially has a break during the summer, the core staff never stop working. Over brutally hot summer days, sectional leaders continue expanding their personal networks in the hope of having a more successful annual event in the following year. They often say, “I’m too busy to say, ‘I’m exhausted!’” Indeed, the core staff go non-stop acting for TRP’s success, as if they never burn themselves out.

### *Audiences and Responses*

Audience responses appear diverse. When I conducted brief curbside interviews with those present at the 2019 parade about this very event, interviewees expressed likes and dislikes as well as making critical comments and asking spontaneous questions. These in a way resonated with survey responses as collected and analyzed by sociologist Matsunobu Hiromi, who has longitudinally been following TRP with her quantitative research on those who (in particular LGBTs) participate in TRP’s annual event. As difference has manifested itself through diverse voices, however, a general feature, a shared orientation of some sort, has also become clearer: a positive attitude toward the act of coming-out in the common sense of the term.

In the snacking and resting area, I did on-the-street interviews, randomly talking to individuals (students, singles, couples, parents, etc.). A 27-year-old single mother of a 3-year-old daughter told me, “My lesbian friend introduced this event to me. I think it’s great for all kinds of people to be able to be together like this. There’re many festivals in Japan but I think most are for families and kids. Those events are fun in a way but don’t provide the sense of freedom TRP’s event offers.” Contrasting TRP’s annual event to other festivals in Japan, she highlights that it welcomes “all kinds of people.” A 35-year-old heterosexual single male corporate worker said, “This is my first-time attending. My gay colleague and I were planning to come. He didn’t

make it because he's unfortunately sick. I had nothing else to do, so he encouraged me to go and see all the happenings, including stage performances and the parade. I wish LGBTs could come out like this in their daily lives, which is I think still quite difficult here." Having seen all the cheerful event where openly LGBT persons performed, he recognizes the difficulty of coming-out in everyday life in contemporary Japan. A 24-year-old heterosexual hairstylist expressed, "I've come to learn about TRP's activism as owner of my salon is a gay man committed to LGBT activism. He and I have been regular attendees for the past couple of years. I have really felt the momentum of TRP's event attracting more and more people every year. I believe coming-out will become less troublesome in the near future." Amidst TRP's increasingly popular annual event, this heterosexual professional woman, like the heterosexual male attendee above, has faith in the positive outlook for the act of coming-out in Japan.

In collaboration with TRP, Komazawa University Professor Matsunobu Hiromi and her seminar students have conducted a visitor survey since 2015. The format of the survey has generally remained the same, asking broad and specific questions about both general social and specific LGBT life among TRP event participants. These were all to clarify personal opinions about the TRP annual event as well as general experiences as LGBTs (or otherwise) in Japan. Survey participants are required to choose the best answer among the responses offered for each question and write comments in a free space if they want to. Presumably, the research team intended to design the survey to be fairly helpful for their academic analysis and TRP's event implementation. What sparked my curiosity about the survey is its questions regarding coming-out, the increasingly respectable ethos for queers. In the surveys conducted from 2015 until 2018, the research team asked only whether the surveyed are out or not, and if so, to whom. The research team did not include in the survey, options for the surveyed to express whether they

prefer coming-out, and why or why not.

In the 2019 survey, however, a question about why coming-out is not chosen has been added. The question offers six answer choices, including “Other and Explain” (respondents can choose as many answers as applicable): 1) it’s impossible to be understood precisely, anyway; 2) uncertain about reactions from others; 3) reluctant to jeopardize existing social relationships; 4) unnecessary, 5) possibility of risking damage to everyday life. Looking at this survey, the act of coming-out is assumed/defined as an explicit/verbal/oral telling of sexual orientation to others. Also, the constellation of these questions assumes that the respondent has full control over their “coming-out”; their audiences might already be variously interpreting their conduct as same-sex desiring or gender non-conforming. The answers are worth reporting. The dominant answer among the 722 respondents (including those who answered online/361 and at the event site/364) was option 4 (23.6%), followed by option 3 (23.3%). As for those who are “out,” 75.3% marked yes to friends. Compared to friends, the respondents chose not to come out to parents, but there were some respondents who did. When the respondents chose to come out to parents, 21.1% of them came out to fathers, 39% to mothers. This finding affirms the reality of coming-out practice among Japanese LGBTs and their families in earlier sociological research (Sambe 2014). Family-obligation still continues to affect LGBT individuals in Japan. When LGBT individuals try to express a potential break from it, it is mothers that they have an explicit conversation with. Although this does not necessarily prove that fathers have little ideas about (LGBT) children, the reality of their coming-out practice at least points to the verbal silence maintained between the two groups (fathers and LGBT kids).

As TRP advocates diversity, interested audiences and their responses appear quite diverse as well. A close look reveals that event participants generally share positive attitudes toward the act

of coming-out. In short, “out-and-proudness” is what coheres TRP and its supporters through its seriously playful tactic that vocally and visibly culminates in the annual event Parade & Festa.

## **5. TRP Website: Multiculturalism without Multilingualism?**

At present, the TRP website is audiovisually rich and primarily in Japanese. It has gone through multiple transformations since its original multilingual version. Over the course of these changes, TRP has accentuated its website’s advertising and advocacy functions for those situated in present-day Japan, as the organization continues to showcase memories of parading and partying via their mainly Japanese webpages to push “out-and-proud” activism. To my disappointment, however, TRP has suspended its multilingual, if not multicultural, operation through grassroots translational acts.

### *Design and Language*

TRP’s website is Japanese-centered and multimodal text, offering not only literal texts (with partial English translations) but also many visuals and sounds. TRP had originally attempted to create a multilingual platform. However, TRP has delegated website management to an IT company since 2015 despite initial attempts made by technologically savvy Japanese staff and non-Japanese staff to manage their global communication; I was told by some of the board members that “TRP can now focus on its annual event operation and other civic activities.” Today, on the website, TRP interlaces written descriptions of relevant events (e.g., the annual parade & festa) with audiovisual materials (e.g., photographs and video clips): see “Archives.” TRP’s globally accessible (partly English) multimodal website projects its organizational promotion of diversity within the firmly national (Tokyo-centered) direction.

### *Ongoing Transformation*

Although some features have been put aside organizationally (e.g., multilingualism), TRP

maintains a gesture at multiculturalism and glosses its online platform by offering many cyber contents. TRP オンライン (TRP Online) is one emerging attempt since 2020 to upload short streaming videos on a range of LGBT-related topics as well as introduce LGBT-related happenings (e.g., events and publications). Such subjects as health and ageing often appear on those streaming videos, and the latest event news, including a live performance by an LGBT-friendly entertainers or a lecture by an activist from various parts of Japan, are announced so that site visitors can participate in these events. Also, TRP Online makes references to non-Japanese LGBT information and media from foreign countries (in particular neighboring East Asian countries) so that those interested can further follow up. On-san, one of the TRP board members and a resident-Korean lesbian, regularly updates relevant information from Korea especially for Japanese resident-Korean LGBT audiences.

#### *Advertising and Advocacy Channel*

A number of sponsoring companies use the TRP website to promote their brands and products, offering streaming corporate commercials. As I introduced GAP as TRP's longtime ally, the clothing retailer appears as an LGBT-friendly company; LGBT or LGBT-aware viewers might decide to buy their goods preferentially or apply for its job positions, thinking that GAP is a liberal-minded place to work for. Other companies in varying sizes also have their corporate descriptions on the TRP website for its users, who might come to be their good customers or employees.

One of the advocacy voices available on TRP Online is the column “*Erujībītī de kangaeru jinsei no renshūmondai* LGBTで考える人生の練習問題 [practice exercises for life from the LGBT perspective]” serialized by gay journalist Kitamaru Yūji. Based on his longtime experiences in New York City and in an US-inflected manner, he comments on various topics (health, cultural

production, politics, etc.) so that readers can have a glimpse into a fragment of US queer history from his knowledge and apply some of these learnings to life in Japan. His primary objective is to teach US examples to Japanese audiences.

### *A Deferred (or Divergent) Dream?*

What TRP has forsaken in its development is multilingualism, if not multiculturalism, on which my earlier research staked (and so is my ongoing work).<sup>110</sup> Diversity promotion demands linguistic investment literally and figuratively, however much it takes “time.” This is part of why TRP organizationally had to drop multilingualism as well as of why I keep dwelling on the concurrent valorization of multiculturalism and multilingualism in the spirit of diversity; I have “time” in the name of research. My preliminary digital ethnographic research is presented below in order to situate our divergent directions.

### *Preliminary Digital Ethnographic Research on TRP*

I remember that uncanny sensations penetrated me when I first browsed TRP’s activist-consumerist website. On the one hand, I became struck by new attempts at public messaging; TRP embellishes the website with diverse audiovisual materials, introduces LGBT movements happening in and outside Japan, and lists sponsoring embassies and corporations as if to advertise foreign countries and the latest goods. On the other hand, not-so-surprising material

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<sup>110</sup> The data in this section are all gleaned from the Japanese and English pages I monitored from September 2014 to January 2016. The multi-language website consists of Japanese, English, and Chinese versions. Yet interestingly, their layout designs and general contents do not necessarily correspond, as though TRP unequally relates to (or invests in) the respective conceptual worlds. In terms of layout, the Japanese and English versions have many sections (e.g., organization history), while the Chinese version does not and appears to be quite nascent. And yet, even in the Japanese and English sections, the contents do not strictly match. Remarkably, TRP inconsistently translates the group objective (as stated in Japanese) into non-Japanese languages. For this paper, I navigate bilingually (Japanese and English), since my Chinese language ability is rudimentary. Analytically, I adopt multimodality. According to linguist Luis Pérez-González, “multimodality does not prioritize language at the expense of other meaning-making modes [such as sound, music, and image]” (2014, 182). By juxtaposing the Japanese and English versions of the TRP website, I ask: what is said (how and why), left unsaid, and encouraged to be felt in what language(s) alongside what audiovisual contents? And what can be said and felt through translation?

appeared; TRP casts Japan as a protagonist, creates a cute mascot for publicity, and boosts the US as an emancipatory and touristy destination. In the novel yet familiar cyberspace, I noticed that it is only in the Japanese language that TRP’s dualistic objective—of 1) attracting the Japanese mainstream public and 2) making Japan Asia’s most powerful parade-hosting nation—is articulated, as if the very diversity of the staff proves their complicity in the nationalized project regardless of their intentions. Such an impulse to sweep over Asia in the US-led world uncannily resembles Japan’s modernization.

Before the 2014 annual parade & festa, representative Yamagata Shinya appreciated the increasing presence of non-Japanese folks as well as heterosexual families in the previous year’s event, and reaffirmed TRP’s goal on the website (The English translation immediately following the Japanese text, offered to highlight what is “lost” in TRP’s English translation, is mine):

L1: マイノリティ当事者がそのコミュニティの内側に向かってのみ活動してはムーブメントに広がりは生まれません。

If a minority group only acts facing inward toward its own community, the movement will not spread.

L2: 社会は変わっていきません。

Society will not change.

L3: **マジョリティ**に向かって「私達はここにいる」と声を挙げ、**マジョリティ**の中に分け入って「共に生きよう」と手を携える。

[We queers] must voice our existence to the **majority**, saying “We’re here,” and hand in hand push in among the **majority** so that we convey the message, “Let’s live together.”

L4: LGBT フレンドリーな支援者達と共に行進し、多様性を共に祝福することがその第一歩。

Celebrating diversity through a parade with LGBT allies is the first step.

However, the gist of Japanese-language L3—where Yamagata articulates TRP’s core direction of joining together with the **majority** for coexistence through coming-out—disappears in TRP’s English translation:

L1: [corresponding to Japanese-language L1] If a minority group keeps to itself, the movement will not spread to greater society.

L2: [corresponding to Japanese-language L2] Nothing will change.

L3: [a combination of Japanese-language L3 and L4, a rather new message] So I think our next step is really to embrace diversity by reaching out to different minorities and saying “let’s work together” and really support all manners of LGBT friendly people.

In constructing English-language L3, the translator combines some parts of original L3 and L4 (e.g., “Let’s live together” as replaced with “let’s work together”), while adding new elements, such as “reaching out to different minorities.” The English translation makes it sound as if TRP were willing to “support all manners of LGBT friendly people,” whomever these may be (e.g., non-citizens). The 2014 TRP official guide presents a message from disability activist Ototake Hirotada, which might signal TRP’s alliance with people with disabilities. Yet, Yamagata does not mention any coalition with other social, if not sexual, minorities in Japan. Rather, he underscores joining the heterosexual public—the majority—in asserting sexual difference.

Because Yamagata claims equality with Japanese (especially married) heterosexuals (who have kids) by inducing their respect for queerness, TRP’s English translation fails to capture his vision of pursuing LGBT recognition within Japan’s *mainstream* logic. Maybe Yamagata did not



check his inconsistently translated message. Or the translator did not have him proofread it. On whom or what does TRP place responsibility for such inconsistent translation?

Through translation, TRP also twists “foreign” thought. According to TRP spokesperson Inui Hiroteru (Ogiue 2012), the group models itself after a foreign activist mantra—presumably propagated by English-speaking staff—that “there’s no dance, there’s no revolution.” Yet TRP introduces its foreign-inflected motto in Japanese as “*Saikō no pāti wo teikyō suru* [translated literally back into English, ‘We provide the best party’].” The English-loan word *pāti* resonates with “dance” in the supposedly foreign thought. Yet, the Japanese-language catchword contains no linguistic reference to revolution.

Perhaps, TRP chose “*pāti*” as a metaphor for revolution by indirectly encouraging website viewers to assume the latter without words. Inui stresses that TRP prioritizes partying over complaining, in the expectation that resistance to change would be reduced rather than exacerbated. But what if partying ends up being just commercialization? Last year, TRP hosted an after-party at a posh restaurant in Shinjuku. Who can squeeze the entrance fee (which was about \$40), after perhaps having already traveled to Tokyo and purchased special goods including T-shirts, flags, and badges, all sold presumably as a way for TRP to fundraise during the parade & festa? What is revolutionary about such an event open only to those who can afford participation? I recall critic Ryū Susumu’s work about the Japanese sexual minority movement’s tendency to privilege sexuality over other issues including class and income disparity.

Remarkably, the inconsistencies in translation peaceably coexist with upbeat and colorful audiovisual contents on the website—through which the diverse staff collectively, but perhaps not entirely consensually, establish Japan’s position in Asia vis-à-vis the West. First, the website allows site visitors to glimpse short video clips of past TRP events. If we click the streaming icon

for the 2012 pride parade, rhythmic music kicks in. And we can see diverse (in terms of age, fashion, and race) participants gleefully marching in Tokyo. Such virtual experiences made me momentarily high, not only numbing my memories of normative silence about same-sex sexuality in Japan, but also ballooning my hope that Japan is becoming publicly queer-friendly

Also, TRP produces a rainbow-colored mascot named トビー *Tobī*: a pun on phonetically similar Japanese and English terms, “*tobu*” meaning to fly and “to be” as in being who you are (Figure 6). The name perhaps reflects TRP’s sentiment for fusing seemingly opposing concepts, “*tobu*” (mobility) and “to be” (stability), as though TRP wishes that all queers could come out like flying birds in the sky. Although the mascot name consists of a mixture of Japanese and English words,



Figure 6. The TRP mascot *Tobī*.  
© TRP

TRP defines *Tobī*—on both Japanese and English pages—as “*Nihon koyūshu no musasabi de shinjuku no mori ni seisoku* (a giant flying squirrel, **native to Japan** and residing in the forest of Shinjuku).” Even if TRP appropriates a global LGBT ecumene’s rainbow symbolism, the group insists on *Tobī*’s indigeneity as if to locate *Tobī* in Japanese, rather than Western, history. What memories or meanings are the diverse TRP staff and heterogeneous supporters creating through the mascot?

Despite the desire to center Japan in queer space-time, TRP maps out its authority by exceptionalizing America as a “liberated” nation—whose shamefully white-gay-male-dominated queer history is privileged over subordinate queer histories elsewhere.<sup>111</sup> To begin, on both Japanese and English pages, TRP designates the U.S. 1969 Stonewall Riots as the catalyst of

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<sup>111</sup> Queer theorist Judith (Jack) Halberstam (2005) discusses racial and gender power dynamics in U.S. queer communities, as she (he) shames white gay masculinity. As for the concept of shame in regard with whiteness and queerness, I recall *Gay Shame*, co-edited by historian David Halperin and literary scholar Valerie Traub (2009).

pride parades elsewhere by offering a photograph of the historic moment (Figure 7).<sup>112</sup> In the picture, it is gender-conforming, presumably gay, white men who were taking rebellious actions against a police raid at Stonewall Inn in Manhattan.

Historian Susan Striker reminds us that diverse bar patrons, such as women and gender non-conforming queers of color, fought back against the police (2008, 83). Yet they make no appearance in the snapshot

presented to visualize the event. TRP’s narrative casts American white gays as visible heroes (as opposed to all the rest, who are perhaps supporting characters at best).<sup>113</sup>



Figure 7. The Stonewall Riots as the “origin” of pride parades worldwide.

The Japanese-language section on pride parades conceptually divides the world into three parts—“Asia,” “Japan,” and “the global”—and has three subsections reflecting the tripartite world: pride parades in 1) Asia, 2) Japan, and 3) the global, all instrumental in elevating America. The first two subsections still remain under construction (*Tobī* politely instructs us to wait as if to make a vague promise able to be indefinitely deferred). TRP tucks a variety of regions—except for the Middle East—under the category of the “global” in the third subsection, where Central America serves as a foil for (legally progressive or pro-same-sex-marriage) North

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<sup>112</sup> As for TRP’s literal descriptions of the milestone, the Japanese version uses words, such as *dōseiaisha* (same-sex loving persons), and *sekushuaru mainoritī* (sexual minority), which do not appear in the English version. Both versions use “LGBT,” but the English version adds another letter “Q” to the acronym.

<sup>113</sup> When I had email correspondence with TRP to obtain permission for my use of the snapshot in this work, a staff responded that the group picked it up somewhere from cyberspace and thus did not have credits. I wonder if TRP purposefully chose such an image in which white (gay) men stand out or the group was simply unable to find something else. In the former case, we can ask who ultimately made a decision to use the snapshot and why, and in the latter case, who did the search of images, how, and why alternatives are unavailable in the first place. About a week after my first contact with TRP, I received an email from co-representative Yamagata-san. He told me that the provenance of the snapshot is beyond his recollection. What Yamagata-san remembers is, as he continued, that TRP searched relevant images by entering “Stonewall” in some Internet search engine.

America.<sup>114</sup> TRP confesses that more pride parades do take place in Central America than the group—or the website manager(s)?—expected. TRP additionally acknowledges that the actual circumstances of queers in the Central American region remain generally unknown. But after having made such a remark, TRP conclusively highlights the legal plights of LGBTs in Central America rather than respecting different challenges Central and North American LGBTs, respectively, confront. Unfinished areas are South America, Europe, Oceania, and Africa. Simply put, TRP gestures at representing the heterogeneity of the global with multiple geographical labels, only to expose that such differences have yet to receive (or deserve?) equal treatment.

In contrast, the English-language section on pride parades employs a West-versus-other paradigm and has no subsections. It begins, “Pride parades occur annually in cities around Europe and America.” After such a simplistic, yet powerful, statement, the English page recounts the Stonewall Riots and asserts, “The concept of Pride Parades has spread to other cities in America and all over the world.” The circumstances of queers in rural America (Gray 2009) is unmentioned in the English (and Japanese) version(s) of the website.

So far, it is the US that comes out as an epicenter of sexual liberation on the TRP website. TRP frames the Stonewall Rebellion as the origin of pride parades worldwide by dealing in so-called from-Stonewall-diffusion fantasy (Bacchetta 2002). In the narrative, Japan is no doubt the subject, but as a nation entitling the U.S. to occupy the top of the relational hierarchy.

In such a hierarchical world, TRP strives to rise as the “gayest” parade-hosting nation in Asia. Although TRP does not necessarily aim to overtake America, the TRP staff do make it explicit that the group endeavors to reach the top in the East Asian region. Ogiue (2012)

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<sup>114</sup> It is not clear why TRP leaves out the Middle East in the section on global pride parades. Such events take place in the region (e.g., Tel Aviv Gay Pride Parade), and TRP seems aware of it as the group does allow the Israeli Embassy to advertise the nation as a queer-welcoming tourist destination in the TRP official guide.

interviews a TRP staff, who enunciates TRP's immediate goal; "By the year of 2016, we hope to host a pride parade that beats Taiwan, whose pride parade attracts fifty thousand participants and is currently the biggest in [East] Asia." TRP explicitly endeavors to leave Taiwan behind. When it comes to a long-term goal, TRP places the size of the NYC pride parade at the farthest point in the ascending scale. And the group merely hopes to match it. TRP rarely identifies Western nations as rivals, but rather names Asian ones, as more proximate (and thus appropriate?) competitors.

### *Multiculturalism without Multilingualism?*

How can I do justice to my participant-observation research on TRP when we have differing priorities and preferences just at this moment?; TRP promotes multiculturalism without multilingualism, however it might sound oxymoronic since culture and language are intimately linked. I was presumptuous about what TRP is attempting to do by digitally studying it as "homonational" (Puar 2017, xvii-xxxvi, 1-36) from afar without situated engagement with Japanese social life. While recognizing my own presumption upon completing my fieldwork, I have also begun to know in my bones that my orientation, as well as TRP's, both shaped by prior objectives and emergent aspirations, is about to diverge, however tangentially they overlap. TRP is within an inch of achieving substantial growth in the history of queer activism in Japan and has at least as an organization decided that it is unnecessary to debate the above transitional activities among the diverse staff. Meanwhile, I am assuming the role of its critic, writing this dissertation.

Observation and participation are less clear-cut than that which sociologist Alberto Melucci (1989) prescribes for a participatory researcher in his research on social movements involving multiple groups. Calling the relationship between the researcher and those under study as

“contractual,” he views their “contract” as “a temporary convergence of two demands: the scientific objectives of the researcher, and the actors’ need to respond to problems arising from their social practice” (1989, 240).<sup>115</sup> Melucci further asserts:

[In the contractual relationship], [t]he researcher processes ‘know-how,’ consisting of a research hypothesis and techniques which cannot be verified or utilized without the participation of the actors. Meanwhile [the] actors exercise control over action and its meanings, but they also require reflective knowledge to increase their potential for action. The relationship is thus one of interdependence, but not of coinciding or overlapping roles. [...] The contract serves to safeguard the distance that exists between the parties—their non-identification. Each pursues a different goal: the researcher pursues the scientific (or personal, or professional, or political) interests that motivate his or her work; the actors want to learn something about their activities to help them increase their potential for action. The distance is never fixed, but it must be reassessed continually by treating the researcher-actor relationship as a constant object of analysis. Each side thereby maintains control over, and [has] responsibility for, its investment in the relationship. (1989, 240-41)

I agree with Melucci in that we examine “the researcher-actor relationship as a constant object of analysis” in participant-observation research. Based on my fieldwork, however, contributions the researcher can make to actors appear less certain than he would have hoped, and the definition of the two components (“researcher” and “actor”) in the contractual relationship is less clear-cut in the first place. Although TRP and I spent a short amount of time together, TRP didn’t necessarily develop interest in my research on its “activities [e.g., translation] to help them increase their potential for action” as the organization produces its own knowledge to act. Also, my participant-

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<sup>115</sup> The term “contract” reminds me of traditional Western political philosophy (e.g., Rousseau and Hobbs) and the attendant idea of personhood premised on self-containment and stability. As Japanese law has highly adapted European conventions in response to local needs and wants, the social meanings of such a seemingly universal signifier “contract” needs to be contextualized, as was covered in Chapter 1.

observation has gone with the flow of, rather than “safeguarding,” “the distance that exists between the two parties,” as TRP and I have found ourselves caught up in life demands. We were not so much decidedly “interdependent” as—when viewed with hindsight—rather indifferent to each other’s priorities. Being indifferent to each other, both of us are still socially engaged in queer activism in Japan (see Chapter 3 for further discussion about indifference).

## **Conclusion**

TRP didn’t come out of nowhere. The organization has built on the cumulative efforts—often described in the academic and activist circle as resistance against many kinds of phobia—made by its predecessors from the last half of the 20th-century up until the first decade of the new millennium. Today, TRP is committed to bolstering an “out-and-proud” political culture of rights claiming by valorizing coming-out in Japan. As practiced by TRP as well as by its diverse predecessors, the act of coming-out is better conceived of as a multipurpose and multimodal, not fully conscious or controllable process that exceeds the purely sexual and discursive. With coming-out understood in this way, it’s possible to place TRP as an increasingly successful part of queer activism in Japan, a history and field loosely sustained by ongoing acts of speaking out about potentially discreditable attributes, including sexual orientation and gender non-conformity.

TRP might appear to be “homonationalist” (Puar 2017, xvii-xxxvi, 1-36), helping produce depoliticized subjects anchored in domestic consumption (Duggan 2003, 50). In a way, TRP does attempt to mainstream LGBTs and pursue marriage equality (see Chapter 4) by appealing to Japan in a non-confrontational, playfully pro-consumption manner. Yet, TRP’s overall serious investment in coming-out makes TRP non-normative or queer in contemporary Japan, as the Japanese nation-state hasn’t really ever appreciated the act of public disclosure that TRP

promotes at present.

It's difficult to theorize delicate social protesting if we continue privileging "resistance" for analyses of social movements.<sup>116</sup> Take for example political scientist Sidney Tarrow's work. In *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (2011), Tarrow defines contention as follows: "Contentious politics occurs when ordinary people [...] join forces *in confrontation with elites, authorities, and opponents*" (ibid., 6: emphasis mine). For Tarrow, it is an opposition against power-wielders and adversaries that qualifies a herd of citizens as "contentious." The idea(l) of resistance also manifests in his definition of social movements. Tarrow defines social movements as "collective *challenges*, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities" (ibid., 9: emphasis mine). In the framework anchored in "opposition," however, TRP's seriously playful tactic for maintaining tensions with the state becomes polite contestation at best, and eye-rolling compromise at worst.

Although TRP's vocally and visibly unreserved presence helps reinforce a highly politicized culture of rights claiming (Langlois 2014), a few concerns have arisen out of its organizational pursuits. First, TRP has forsaken its multi-language operation due to its attendant complication and time-consuming nature. Also, TRP's diversity promotion has created some tensions on the ground: e.g., operational efficiency with respect to staff members with disabilities and the place of the so-called closeted people. Furthermore, TRP's commitment to LGBT anti-discrimination is heavily reliant on the rhetoric of (homo)phobia prevalent in Japanese academic and activist publications, the backbone of ongoing queer activism (see Chapter 4 for further discussion).

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<sup>116</sup> Anything other than resistance against authority or normativity appears to be deemed politically or morally suspect by theorists of counter-publics (e.g., Fraser 1990, Warner 2002; Berlant & Warner 2002), as the very term "counter" signals it.



Despite these concerns, TRP's human-rights pursuit does counteract Japan's lingering homogeneity myth. Flexible recruitment and the stress on equality among staff members still maintain contradictory tensions, through which to question the Japanese language system, which makes it difficult for speakers to address each other as equals under prescriptive rules for linguistic deference reflecting an age-based hierarchy. And the annual Parade & Festa serves as an opportunity for participants to develop an interest in learning more about the history of queer activism in Japan, which remains omitted from school textbooks (see Chapter 1). Moreover, powerful institutions have joined TRP in its attempts to pressure Japan to execute legal reforms to the out-of-date Household Registration Law, a longstanding barrier to immigration and (same-sex) marriage between Japanese citizens and non-citizens (see Chapter 4 for further discussion). In short, TRP stands as an "out-and-proud" actor in the face of the Japanese nation-state, which strictly controls the civil sector through politico-legal and financial instruments, curtailing the growth of large professional activist organizations while facilitating that of small voluntary local associations—a situation that makes it hard for citizens to push for (especially legal) changes, as described by political scientist Robert Pekkanen as "Japan's dual civil society" (2006, 7-8).

On the up-to-date TRP website (2021), TRP has stated a theme for this year's event: "Our Voices, Our Rights." TRP continues to commit itself to ensuring the right to speak up. TRP's organizational spirit is sustained by those who diligently live to pursue their passion for sexual advocacy more than anything even at the expense of their time to rest in increasingly LGBT-concerned Japan.

## Chapter 3

### In the Shadow of Japan's Queer Activism: The Ni-Chōme Volleyball World

#### Introduction

“Kyohei, over here!” Noboru hailed me as soon as I went through the JR Shinjuku Central East ticket exit. I waved at familiar faces and ran up toward a flock of Ni-chōme volleyballers (NVs), Tokyo-based amateur volleyball-loving gay men. These NVs in the flock play for V6. The team, my long-time hobby circle, is one of the oldest amateur gay volleyball teams in Tokyo. “Don’t embarrass us! You’re overt,” Fujita-san struck up a dialogue as if to toss a volleyball. I tried my best to hit it back quickly, “I wasn’t sashaying along, was I?” The flock giggled. I felt at home.

V6 is part of what NVs affectionately call the *Ni-chōme barēkai* 二丁目バレー界 (Ni-chōme volleyball world: NVW): an arena for those who discreetly share a passion for men and the sport (Figure 8). “Ni-chōme” refers to Shinjuku Ni-chōme 新宿二丁目, a district increasingly known as a “rainbow” hub in Tokyo (Fushimi 2019; Ryū 2009; Sunagawa 2015). “Ni-chōme,” when NVs colloquially utter it, affectively signifies same-sex desire.

Accordingly, Ni-chōme volleyball means amateur gay volleyball. It involves at least fifty teams playing in and around Tokyo. The figure hits more than one

hundred nationally. Each team consists of about six to twenty players and meets at its home gymnasium on weekends. Some teams recruit women (male-to-female transgender persons included) and non-Japanese men. Networking expands beyond the city and even Japan, as NVs play with local and foreign (East Asian) gay teams. Since the late-20th-century, NVW has



Figure 8. V6 teammates playing discreetly. Photo by the author.

developed in the shadow of Japan's burgeoning queer activism (Fushimi 2004, 366-80; McLelland et al. 2007, 317-28).

What can volleyball tell us about some (men in particular) who explore same-sex intimacy by playing together the US-born sport, legendized in Japan by female textile workers? Volleyball has peaceably served as a pivotal moment-space to affirm institutionally ignored same-sex desire against the aesthetically pro-silence backdrop of contemporary Japanese society inhospitable to "out-and-proud" activism. Below, I first contextualize the history of volleyball in Japan in order to highlight the spell the sport continuously casts on those involved. After comparing and contrasting personal trajectories toward volleyball, I outline what it's like to belong to a gay team by using V6 as an example. I then trace the growth of NVW as I anchor my narrative in my affiliated team V6. I further dig deeper into NVs' everyday life, analyzing their *onē-kotoba* おネエ言葉 (queen's language) use. Overall, Ni-chōme volleyball appears at least superficially "homonormative" (Duggan 2003, 50) and even "homonational" (Puar 2017, xvii-xxxvi, 1-36), sustaining a collective of men colorfully playing with their family-obligations in Japan.

### **1. Volleyball in Japan: Women's Field**

As a friendly and respectable sport, volleyball remains sociohistorically associated with women rather than men in Japan (Arata 2013; Kietlinski 2011; Merklejn 2013; Orlansky 2007). Internationally, it is relatively unknown that those who struck gold at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics were female textile workers, who have ultimately attained status of housewife by marrying up based on their nationally remembered athletic accomplishment. Domestically, although mainstream media feature both women's and men's national volleyball, the predominant use of male idols as poster boys for the sport appears to limit fans primarily to females. Indeed, volleyball has been less mainstreamed as a men's sport than other sports like baseball and soccer

(Kelly 2009, 2013). Perhaps due to such a not-so-manly history, volleyball maintains its approachable identity and attracts, accordingly, a fraction of men including but not limited to such stereotypically emasculated populations as same-sex desiring men (McLelland 2000), who would otherwise be too diverse to congregate on a regular basis.

### *The Introduction and Popularization of the US-born Sport*

The worldwide establishment of originally recreational, and later competitive, sports (e.g., volleyball) has paralleled nation-state formation amidst the expansion of modern capitalism (e.g., Anderson 1955). As such, many social scientists have regarded sport/ing as a power-laden field of embodiment and socialization worthy of scholarly inquiry (e.g., Besnier & Brownell 2012; Blanchard 1995; Blanchard & Cheska 1982; Bourdieu 1978, 1988; Elling et al. 2003; Kelly & Sugimoto 2007; King 2008; Klein 2014; Moore 2004; Palmer 2002).<sup>117</sup> More recently, anthropologists Niko Besnier, Susan Brownell, and Thomas Carter highlight “[the] role [of sport] in setting boundaries between groups, contesting them, defining what is normal and what is extraordinary, and entangling the everyday lives of ordinary people with the state, the nation, and the world” (2018, 1). If sports are, as the trio contend, “a microcosm” of today’s globalizing society (ibid.), we can shed some light on contemporary life by studying volleyball, which originates in the United States.<sup>118</sup> Throughout its development in many parts of the globe (Japan

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<sup>117</sup> For literature on the relationship between sport, gender, and sexuality specifically, see Cahn (1994); Elling et al. (2003); Hargreaves & Anderson (2014); Krane (2018); Sykes (2017).

<sup>118</sup> Solid field-based research on amateur gay volleyball does exist in addition to many brief references to the subject matter in the scholarly literature (e.g., Boellstorff 2005, 230; Kazama 2015, 22). Queer ethnographic explorations of volleyball colorfully animate the sport as a field for power-laden processes of community building (Hamill 2003; Perez 2011; Rickard 2011). Volleyball is, as documented by sociologist Gregory Hamill (2003), a lively space to play with hegemonic masculinity in post-Stonewall America. His first-hand observations of the Chicago gay volleyball network, in combination with its participants’ life narratives, demonstrate their reiterative negotiations of masculinity involving many audiences (e.g., families and friends). Likewise, psychologist Keilan Rickard (2011) features the Pittsburgh gay volleyball scene in his (auto)ethnography, intellectually inspired by queer theorist Michel Foucault (1978). Rickard decidedly practices a playful prose in scholarly writing, conventionally uncongenial to play, out of his attempt to enact the spirit of not only such a pompous academic player as Foucault but also the recreational league Rickard intimately belongs to. Even beyond the US border, amateur gay volleyball appears quite active, as anthropologist Justin Perez introduces street volleyball in Peru as a linguistically and kinesthetically

included), the US-born sport has distinctively come to win a name as a women's sport.

Against the backdrop of industrialization in the late-19th-century U.S., William G. Morgan, physical director of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Holyoke, Massachusetts, witnessed growing demands for recreational exercises accessible to all (Trevithick 1996, 436-37). Morgan especially had in mind his clients, who consisted of "businessmen, middle-aged, frankly stout and unathletic, and in general not up to the challenges of basketball" (ibid., 436). It was (an early form of) volleyball that he invented in 1895 as a come-at-able option by combining elements of many sports including tennis. Volleyball was then, along with the 1928 founding of the United States Volleyball Association, expected to develop into "on one level a simple recreational game and on another level an intensely competitive sport," as promoted in and beyond the U.S. (predominantly in communist countries such as the Soviet Union) by both the YMCA and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in the muscular-Christian spirit (ibid.).<sup>119</sup>

Sociologist Arata Masafumi (2013) among others carefully chronicles the introduction and popularization of volleyball as a female-oriented sport in Japan. In 1908, roughly thirteen years after the 1895 invention of volleyball in the U.S., Japan received casual introductions to the sport at the YMCA Tokyo by physical educator Ōmori Hyōzō, a returnee from study at the International YMCA Training School in Springfield, the predecessor of Springfield College (ibid., 96). Volleyball did not gain wide-reaching recognition until 1913 when those who participated in lessons held by the YMCA-delegate Franklin H. Brown in the Kansai region

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vibrant theater to articulate gay identity, open to any passersby regardless of sexual orientation (2011, 835). This body of ethnographic research on the relationship between sport and sexuality contributes to norm-questioning discourses in broader social scientific endeavors (Caudwell 2006; Sykes 2006).

<sup>119</sup> Even in the history of sports in the US, the association between volleyball and women is observable; "Significantly, the first U.S. national training center for [volleyball], near Houston, Texas, was dedicated to women's volleyball: a rare case of a sport being led, in development and top-level participation, by women" (Trevithick 1996, 437).

began spreading the sport domestically (ibid.).<sup>120</sup> Volleyball was linked to women's athletics in Japan from the outset, as scholars of sport Allun Guttmann and Lee Thompson note that "[it] was more popular as a women's sport" (2001, 79). While volleyball, as propelled by the Japan Volleyball Association (JVA) since its founding in 1927, steadily attracted a growing playing population (mainly students) by enlisting support from the state and media (newspapers) alongside leisure movements in the first half of the 20th-century, the outbreak of the world wars intermittently delayed volleyball's diffusion (Arata 2013, 94-106).<sup>121</sup> After WWII, the textile industry, one of the basic industries at that time, enthusiastically managed an increasing number of corporate, albeit amateur, volleyball teams by encouraging (especially female) workers to playing the sport (ibid., 107-36; see also Faison 2007, 12-80, 137-62). A NV friend of mine Tatsuzō-san in his early sixties expressed surprise, "Who would have guessed such stars rose of these blue-collar women?"

*"Oriental Witches": The 1964 Tokyo Olympics*

In the history of volleyball, the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics remains remarkable. Internationally, it has acted as a steppingstone to the officialization of volleyball (a team sport generally bypassed earlier) as a medal sport and the authorization of women's participation into the newly registered sport at such a mega sport event (Arata 2013, 153-61); "In 1961, the Olympic Organizing Committee [now the International Olympic Committee, often shorthanded

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<sup>120</sup> The founding of YMCA Japan was much earlier (1880) and in Tokyo. Because volleyball arrived in Japan before its rules as a competitive sport were formalized through YMCA programs in the U.S., the development of the sport in a Japanese (as well as Asian) context generated some distinct patterns, such as the nine-player rule as opposed to the six-player one. It was in 1930 that standard rules for volleyball were created in Japan primarily for competition. Since the mid-20th-century when the consolidation of international standard rules for volleyball began through the 1947 creation of the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB), however, Japan has adopted the six-player rule for competitive volleyball in order to participate in international games, while the nine-player rule has remained dominant for recreational volleyball. See Arata (2013, 94-106).

<sup>121</sup> JVA is now *kōkyōzaidanhōjin* 公共財団法人 (a public interest incorporated foundation), running its official website ([jva.or.jp](http://jva.or.jp)) as a platform for both international and domestic up-to-date information about volleyball.

as IOC] voted to allow volleyball into the Games” (Trevithick 1996, 436). As for Japan, the event helped stage the *tōyō no majo* 東洋の魔女 (“witches of the orient”), who spectacularly contributed to the promotion of volleyball amid Japan’s postwar economic miracle.<sup>122</sup>

Most of the legendary women worked for the Dai Nihon Bōseki Corp. while playing for its corporate, if not yet professional, team under the command of the now iconic fatherly figure Daimatsu Hirobumi (Arata 2013, 107-52, 183-93). Known as *oni* 鬼 (ogre or demon) for his militaristic, torturous coaching style, Daimatsu (a war veteran himself) trained his disciples by ignoring their humanity—the ultimate goal of winning in mind though. His training was nothing but brutal: several hours of daily training after eight hours of regular clerical work, no excuses for absence from practice during menstruation, etc. (Whiting 2014, unpagged; see also Daimatsu’s autobiographical and philosophical publications and the 2019 TV drama *Idaten* [“Running Like Lighting”]).<sup>123</sup> The female players, while postponing marriage, did grow by leaps and bounds; a few, including Kasai Masae, the captain of the 1964 women’s national volleyball team, have published memoirs (e.g., Kasai 1992).

On the final evening of the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games, the female factory workers made a stellar jump to being, as historian Andrew Gordon acclaims, “national hero[ines].” (2009, 263). These women, after surviving the dual (corporate and athletic) life, mesmerizingly dispelled orientalist stereotypes by beating the Soviet women’s team, a group of salaried and stout white athletes (Arata 2013, 107-52, 183-93). The deed remains a pride still often nostalgically deployed as a nationally sanctioned narrative on television (Merklejn 2013).<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> The English translation phrase was coined at the time; in a contemporary context, “orient” would most likely be replaced with “East Asia.”

<sup>123</sup> His work includes *Follow Me: My Game Spirit* (1963) and *Whom to Live for?: My Life Philosophy* (1971).

<sup>124</sup> Japanese women’s national volleyball is ranked seventh, men’s, ninth in the world ranking as of this writing, September 8, 2020 (FIVB.com).

Such a proud history pioneered by the working-class women affects the enduring flourishing of volleyball, as evidenced in national statistics. According to JVA, in terms of player populations (both professionals and amateurs included), volleyball follows soccer, basketball, golf, soft tennis, and track & field, with approximately 420,000 persons playing volleyball (see also the 2017 White Paper on Sports, 28). The ratio of female players to male ones is 2:1 (270142: 146131) (ibid.). The figure of player populations by gender corresponds to that of the acquired Olympics medal number by sex.<sup>125</sup> With respectable records of international performance among national athletes, volleyball remains a popular sport for girls in all ages, while an increasing number of male high school students play the sport despite baseball and soccer dominating dream professional fields of sport for boys (ibid.): see below for men's volleyball.

So, is the provenance of the national heroines remembered today? Arata reminds us that the factory-rooted past of such housewife celebrities as the witches of the orient get collectively forgotten by “the Japanese” as women's desire for (full-time) homemakers rather than laborers intensifies in a consumerist social current (2013, 201). Just like Arata does meticulously pen their exceptionally aspirational, and yet cutthroat, history, many NVs, as dedicated volleyballers, have borne in mind the very “forgotten” past as far as I know.

### *Barēbōru in Media*

*Barēbōru* バレーボール (volleyball) in tandem with the mascot character *babo-chan* バボちゃん have a distinct presence in mass media and cultural products.<sup>126</sup> Today, TV broadcasting and

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<sup>125</sup> So far, not only female but also male national volleyballers have achieved internationally splendid records of performance in the Summer Olympic Games, receiving nine medals in total (three gold, three silver, three bronze) by 2020—six medals by women (two of each medal color respectively) and three medals by men (one each medal color).

<sup>126</sup> Fuji Television uses *Babo-chan* in their volleyball broadcasting. The name of the mascot is a shortened form of *barēbōru* (“ba” plus “bo”) with the affectionate honorific “chan,” as if to gender-code, anthropomorphize, and arguably infantilize volleyball.



paper publishing take advantage of the Internet, facilitating the appearance of volleyball both online and offline and shaping the recognition of the sport among the public. In such a digitally enhanced surrounding, the masses enjoy many options of engagement besides actually playing volleyball: watching broadcasted matches, playing computer games, reading popular manga, and the like.<sup>127</sup> All of these mass-mediated activities help NVs maintain contact with volleyball in the digital age.

Volleyball attracts a considerable amount of mainstream media attention, in particular broadcasting, throughout the year. Television features periodically held domestic volleyball tournaments among students and professionals. These include the Spring High School Volleyball Championship; the V League; and the Emperor's Cup and Empress's Cup All Japan Volleyball Championship. Internationally organized games, such as FIVB World Cup and World Championship, also hit the air. These domestic and international games operate under the auspices of sponsoring organizations and corporations (Coca-Cola Japan, ANA, Hisamitsu Pharmaceutical, Nippon Life Insurance, Meiji, etc.), as well as of the Japanese television business, especially Fuji Television, one of the most powerful nationwide broadcasting stations.

While remaining regular audiences of televised volleyball games, NVs also often take inspiration from other volleyball-themed media products, such as the girls' comic *Attack No. 1* and a Japanese rendition of the 2000 Thai-movie *Satree-Lex (The Iron Ladies)* translated as *Attack No. 1/2*. For instance, 50-year-old Fujita-san is attached to *Attack No. 1*, a story about women's high school volleyball, written by Urano Chikako and originally serialized in Weekly

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<sup>127</sup> A sample list of old and recent volleyball games, cartoon films, and comics. Games include *Volleyball* (Nintendo, 1986, Family Computer); *Exciting Volleyball* (Athena, 1998, PlayStation); *Hit the Volleyball* (Oizumi Amuzio, 2019, PlayStation4). Cartoon films and comics include *You, Spiker* (Koizumi Shizuo, 1984-85, TV Tokyo); *Kenta Will Do It* (Mitsuda Takuya, 1988-89, Weekly Sunday); *Libero Revolution* (Tanaka Motoyuki, 2000-02, Weekly Sunday); *Girl Fight* ((Nihonbashi Yooko, 2006-present, Evening); and *The Girl Is Musashi* (Tanaka Ai, 2015, ITAN).

Margaret from 1968 to 1970. The plot revolves around a female protagonist, who has a never-give-up spirit; this resonates with subsequent comics, including *V Sign* (Weekly Little Girlfriend, 1968). He recalls, “I’ve always liked volleyball, but there weren’t any other volleyball-themed manga when I was a kid, so I inevitably gravitated toward *Attack No. 1*, which was available. And I was hooked on instantly.” The comic was made into anime in 1969 and had a sequel *New Attack No. 1* in 1975.

*The Iron Ladies*, a fact-inspired movie about a queer volleyball team in Thailand, has been translated as *Attack No. 1/2* in Japan. The word *hāfu*, meaning one of two equal parts of a divisible whole, signifies, if premised on the two-sex model, queerness; “*hāfu*” is also used for mixed-race kids as in *hāfu no kodomo*. More specifically, the *hāfu* element of *Attack No. 1/2* denotes ambiguous or incomplete, and thus entertaining and even moving, gender performance among queers, especially transgender women and effeminate gays, often bracketed under the media-driven word *nyū hāfu* (“new half”), whose difference (well, deviation) from the original “No.1” is in focus/question; singer-songwriter Kuwata Keisuke is often alleged to be the one who coined “*nyū hāfu*” as sales copy for the debut of a cross-dressing singer in 1981 (Mitsuhashi 2008, 213). The Thai film has a sequel *Satree-Lex 2* (*The Iron Ladies 2*). In Japan, the sequel came out as *Attack No. 1/2 All Set!* in 2002, followed by its remix *Attack No. 1/2 Deluxe* in 2016, when Ryōta, one of my close NV friends, won a ticket to attend its prerelease; the former national women’s volleyball player Ōbayashi Motoko MCed the event, he excitedly told me.

In the meantime, Weekly JUMP’s serialized manga *Volleyball*, Furudate Haruichi’s ongoing comic since 2012, features unexceptional men, as if to masculinize the sport and encourage more boys to play it in lockstep with the increasingly competitive men’s national volleyball team. Before serialization, *Volleyball* appeared as a one-shot story in Weekly JUMP and JUMP NEXT!

during 2011. A couple of young NVs in their twenties remember *Volleyball* as what has turned their attention to the sport and subsequently inspired their participation in gay volleyball.

The so-called digital revolution in Japan (Gottlieb & McLelland 2003; Ito et al. 2005) has increased the media exposure of amateur gay volleyball, which used to be limited to television.<sup>128</sup> Previously, the late-morning information and variety TV program *Please Answer*: 2001-2007), aired by Fuji Television, offered a glimpse into the Ni-chōme volleyball world. The show occasionally featured NVs' practice matches with high school women's volleyballers from Hachiōji Jissen, a school well-known for having produced many national women's volleyball players, including the aforementioned Ōbayashi Motoko as well as Kanō Maiko, who won a bronze medal at the 2012 London Olympics; her agemate, Hachiōji Jissen alumna and former professional volleyballer Takizawa Nanae, came out as lesbian in a TV program in 2017, and she appeared on the cover of TRP's 2018 official magazine BEYOND.<sup>129</sup>

As an aside, a former national men's volleyball player Kawai Shunichi, who was an emcee on *Please Answer*, sometimes visits Hachiōji Jissen along with NVs. He affectionately calls NVs “*shinjuku ni-chōme no okama-chan* (queens from Shinjuku Ni-chōme).”<sup>130</sup> NVs often visit

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<sup>128</sup> The so-called digital revolution in Japan dates back to the 1990s. Commercial and personal use of the PC Internet spread slowly across Japanese society from the mid-1990s through the late-1990s. Prior to the 1990s, research institutions, large corporations, and governmental agencies primarily used the PC Internet to experiment and elaborate network technology. Computers remained expensive and beyond most citizens' ability to purchase until the 1990s. Yet, once Japan saw the influx of inexpensive devices after the opening of the national market to foreign computer companies in 1992, the number of general Internet users started growing. The more computers became affordable through the late-1990s, the more people became casual users of the Internet. The number of Internet users skyrocketed after 1999, when Japan's major telephone company NTT DoCoMo introduced i-mode through *keitai* 携帯, literally translated, “something one carries with oneself,” loosely “mobile phones.” Sociologist Misa Matsuda observes, “The barriers of technological knowledge and pricing that inhibited PC Internet adoption do not apply to the *keitai* Internet, and many Japanese first connected to the Internet through *keitai*” (2005, 33).

<sup>129</sup> Hachiōji Jissen has had an intimate relationship with Fuji Television although their relationship seems to be less tight after Kikuma Takashi, the former coach of the high school volleyball team, retired formally. His daughter had worked as a Fuji Television news anchor until her scandal (drinking with underage male idols from Johnny's & Associates Talent Agency), which forced her to resign and pursue another career; she is now a lawyer, having passed the Japanese bar exam. When Kikuma Takashi was active, the team often had visits by Johnny's (male idols from Johnny's & Associates) in Fuji Television's special programs during the annual Spring High School Volleyball Championship.

<sup>130</sup> For his official blog and the relevant entry about his excursion to the school, visit <https://ameblo.jp/kawasyun> and

Hachiōji Jissen as guest coaches, as Batā-san, a master of the volleyball-affiliated Shinjuku Ni-chōme bar *Deppare*, is close to the team. A few NVs upload relevant photographs on social media sites.

Furthermore, the Ni-chōme volleyball world flits in and out of a website run by the prestigious national volleyball magazine *Volleyball Magazine*.<sup>131</sup> The website has a special column entitled “Nigh-Time Talks about Ni-chōme Volleyball,” contributed by Takai Nozomu, an NV, who is a free-lance writer.<sup>132</sup> In an entry “Women’s Volleyball”, he comes on to gay men’s attraction to women’s, rather than men’s, volleyball over other women’s sports like soccer. Here we can also ask: Why do gays in Japan love volleyball in the first place? It’s because, I suggest, volleyball is approachable (see below for further discussion), not too masculinized, unlike nationalized baseball and soccer, and yet, as legendized by the 1964 “witches,” a true sport, worthy of the Olympics.

#### *Male Idols as Poster Boys*

Through a nation-wide venture endorsed by the JVA in collaboration with the entertainment industry, male idols affiliated with *Janīzu jimusho* ジャニーズ事務所 (Johnny & Associates) (Nagaike 2012) have come to take over the role of promoting volleyball nationally.<sup>133</sup> Known as Johnny’s, these widely recognized good-looking idols unveil and perform (as if to advertise) their songs and dances dashing in the name of inspiring major national and international volleyball games at both student and professional levels (usually the Spring High School Volleyball Championship and FIVB World Cup). The dominance of Johnny’s in volleyball

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<https://ameblo.jp/kawasyun/archive3-200912.html#main> respectively.

<sup>131</sup> The magazine has an official website: <http://vbm.link>.

<sup>132</sup> For the entry, visit <http://vbm.link/5088>.

<sup>133</sup> Johnny & Associates is currently managed by Takizawa Hideaki, formerly a Johnny’s *tarento* (talent) himself. He has taken on the current executive position since Jānī Kitagawa, the founder of the talent agency, passed away in 2019.

publicity in Japan fuels intense media discussions. At any rate, the symbiotic relationship between volleyball and Johnny's is undeniable.

Johnny's idols didn't always occupy the slot of volleyball promoters. Prior to the 1990s, other figures, such as female idol Moritaka Chisato and musician Maeda Nobuteru, served as official supporters for international volleyball tournaments held in Japan. From 1995 on, however, Johnny's idols have come to dominate the position. It was *Bui-shikkusu* V6 (not the same as my affiliated team) that was created, upon talent-spotting six promising *janīzu junia* ジャニーズジュニア (“Johnny's Jr.” or pre-debut trainees), that became the first official volleyball-supporter Johnny's idol group; the group began as a poster child for the V League (jijimami 2016; Mimu 2017). Consisting of the six volleyball-supporting male idols, V6 presented their debut song “Music for the People” to the 1995 FIVB World Cup and pioneered a path for junior fellows.

In total, six major Johnny's groups have acted as designated poster boys for volleyball. The tradition began with V6 (again, not my team) in 1995, followed by *Arashi* 嵐 (Storm) in 1999; *Nyūsu* NEWS in 2003; *Hei sei jampu* Hey!Say!JUMP! in 2007; *Sekushī zōnn* Sexy Zone in 2011; and most recently *Janīzu uesuto* ジャニーズ WEST (Johnny's WEST) in 2019 (jijimami 2016; Mimu 2017). All the groups, except for the latest ジャニーズ WEST, officially made their debut as a Johnny's group when they presented their premiere song to the FIVB World Cup; they usually started off supporting the FIVB World Cup and then continued on the Spring High School Volleyball Championship, elevating the name and popularity of volleyball (and themselves) throughout the Japanese archipelago.

Unlike their predecessors, Johnny's WEST had already been active when the group was officially appointed to support the 2019 FIVB World Cup. Moreover, Johnny's WEST is, as the

group name suggests, the first Kansai-based (western-region-based) Johnny's group to be nominated to serve as the special volleyball support. The theme song for the 2019 FIVB World Cup was their *Big Shot!!*, which combines lyrical elements of their predecessors' songs (ORICON NEWS 2019). On Fuji Television's official website, Kiriyama Akito, one of the seven members comments, "Our predecessors made volleyball their steppingstone to successful careers. I feel thankful of our appointment despite our not-so-fresh status. At the same time, we certainly feel a bit of pressure because five years have already passed since our group debut. I had been a backup dancer for NEWS and Hey!Say!JUMP!, so I really look forward to being able to have the excitement with us being the official supporter this time!" (July 2019).<sup>134</sup> For Johnny's WEST, the business of supporting the FIVB World Cup, over which Fuji Television has conventionally had exclusive broadcast rights, wasn't necessarily the first step up the ladder of Johnny's idol career trajectory.

Aside from the ongoing pros and cons of the Johnny's groups' dominance in volleyball advertising in general, the appointment of Johnny's WEST for the 2019 FIVB World Cup in particular galvanized online criticism. For instance, on July 30th, 2019, Asagei+ reported that both volleyball and Johnny's fans harshly criticized the inauguration of Johnny's WEST online; the former denounced the potential influx of Johnny's, not necessarily volleyball, fans, whereas the latter complained asking why Johnny and Associates didn't let hopeful Johnny's Jr. boys debut.<sup>135</sup> On August 26th, 2019, Business Journal published a speculative article on the root cause of the appointment of Johnny's WEST by highlighting the circumstances of volleyball as well as the entertainment world; volleyball's declining viewership in recent years has discouraged Johnny's & Associates against the risky investment of sending trainees out using

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<sup>134</sup> For the full-length interview, visit <https://www.fujitv.co.jp/wcv2019/supporter.html>.

<sup>135</sup> <https://www.asagei.com/excerpt/130742>.

volleyball broadcasting on slumping Fuji Television.<sup>136</sup> On October 14th, 2019, sport journalist Nitta Akira contributed an article to Livedoor News, in which he problematized first the “excessive” Johnny’s performance, and then much more the overreliance on Fuji television and Johnny & Associates to promote volleyball in Japan, attributing to it the irony of the 2019 FIVB World Cup.<sup>137</sup> There, although the men’s national volleyball team performed splendidly, the news was overshadowed by the almost concurrent staging of the Rugby World Cup 2019 during which Japan’s rugby team played outstandingly.

As much as a new promotional approach to volleyball might appear necessary and ideal, it seems difficult to attract visitors to professional volleyball games without male idols, as the above news articles touch on the fact of many national games being in the red without the promotional appearance of Johnny’s. Mutually reinforcing effects for both volleyball and Johnny’s are apparent and powerful (a potential fan pool, performance enhancement, name recognition, etc.). Yet, the volleyball world (as well as Johnny & Associates) might need, in the near future, to carve new paths for promoting, respectively, volleyball and up-and-coming idol groups.

#### *Men in Volleyball: A Bunch of “Dorks”?*

In Japan, men’s volleyball tends to have been overshadowed by women’s. “Men’s volleyball is somehow dorky (*Nanka danshibarētte dasai* 何か男子バレーってダサイ),” is what I often hear from both NVs and others; and I kind of get it. Yet, the international records of Japanese men’s national teams aren’t necessarily bad if not as striking as women’s. Recently, there has emerged “NEXT4,” a group of four nationally potent professional male volleyballers. Despite the presence of such star players, many NVs appear attached to women’s volleyball.

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<sup>136</sup> [https://biz-journal.jp/2019/08/post\\_115713.html](https://biz-journal.jp/2019/08/post_115713.html).

<sup>137</sup> <https://blogos.com/article/410496>.

As noted, the history of Japanese men’s national volleyball doesn’t necessarily compare poorly with Japanese women’s (Japan Olympic Academy 2004, 94). At the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, the record of the men’s national team fell under the shadow of the women’s, as the former received the bronze medal. While the national male volleyballers won second place in the tournament of the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, they finally seized the gold medal at the 1972 Munich Olympics. For the following few Olympics, the men’s national team didn’t perform well, and from the 1992 Barcelona Olympics on, it lost in a regional preliminary round for three consecutive Olympic Games. After sixteen years of slumping, the men’s national team made it to the stage of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, but it didn’t make it to the final round; in fact, the men’s national team was completely defeated in the preliminary round, which was an absolute first in its history. However, men’s national volleyball has recently been experiencing a return to popularity thanks to the appearance of four stellar players (Ishikawa Yūki, Yanagida Masahiro, Yamauchi Akihiro, and Takahashi Kentarō) often referred to as “*nekusuto fō* NEXT4” in the media (Miraikanai Books 2016); Nishida Yūji, another young talented player, is also becoming high-profile lately. There is a film thematized on these players, entitled “*Ganbarēbu nekusuto* ガンバレー部 NEXT! [Hang in there, the team NEXT!]”; “*Ganbarē*” is a pun for *ganbare* 頑張れ (hang on there) and *barēbōru* バレーボール (volleyball). These promising players promote men’s volleyball, which has tended to be eclipsed by the history of women’s volleyball in Japan.

In fact, men’s volleyball in Japan does provide much fan service as seen in a kiss incident performed by two national professional men’s volleyball players during a fan appreciation game in 2017; if you google the incident, many YouTube video clips come up.<sup>138</sup> In the game, the Suntory Sunbirds player Yamamoto Yū provoked the Toyoda Gosei Trefuerza player Takamatsu

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<sup>138</sup> Visit, for instance, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVnF8C\\_krjI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVnF8C_krjI): available as of this writing, September 6th, 2020.



Takuya, it turned into a bicker, and the two eventually kissed to make their peace “silently.” The whole incident was a performance staged for volleyball fans in Japan, especially female ones, whose jubilant exclamations can be heard on the YouTube video clips. Such serious service intended primarily for heterosexual women might contribute to the tongue-in-cheek appearance of men’s professional volleyball in Japan.

Despite all of these efforts by male national volleyballers, many NVs find themselves attracted to women’s volleyball as a source of inspiration and a subject of conversation. Kubo-san echoes the sentiments of others by expressing, “Men’s volleyball’s definitely punchy but tends to revolve around short rallies. Rallies are longer in women’s volleyball, which sustains tensions and entertains my spectator desire.” According to 2016 statistical reports by the International Volleyball Federation (downloadable from FIVB.com), the average rally duration in (top-ranking) women’s volleyball with and without pseudo-rallies (i.e., rallies involving only services) is 7.25 and 8.25 respectively, whereas in men’s it is only 5.51 and 6.9; imagine how the cumulative duration of women’s and men’s games differs. Similarly, as Fujita-san humorously puts it, “I enjoy watching women’s volleyball as an eye-catching rally sport, and men’s volleyball as eye-candy soft-core porn.” Ryōta also expresses, “In men’s volleyball, individual performance, whether attacking, blocking, or jump-serving, tends to stand out. In women’s volleyball, individual performance might not be as powerful and phenomenal as in men’s volleyball, but teamwork is often stressed!” Indeed, broadcasted television programs of women’s professional games are often edited in a way that emphasizes teamwork rather than individual performance (Kambara 2009).

In sum, volleyball is primarily regarded as a women’s sport in contemporary Japan. Although the gendered aspect of volleyball often stands out, its class origin in relation to Japan’s

modern industrial development shouldn't be forgotten. At present, much capital is being invested by the entertainment industry to promote volleyball nationally, and men's volleyball is increasingly gaining publicity thanks to the emerging star players, however dorky it might appear in the face of the women's national volleyball history carved out by the witches of the orient.

## 2. Ni-Chōme Volleyballers (NVs): The How and Why

Not all NVs recognized same-sex desire at the time of taking up volleyball; for many, gay identification has unfolded alongside playing the mass-mediated sport throughout their lives. When, how, and why then, did they begin to play volleyball? Why have they come to play gay volleyball specifically? The key word *shitashimiyasusa* 親しみやすさ (approachability) frequently pops up when NVs reflect on their volleyball involvement. Many voluntarily initiated a playing career in school days and have continued on with gay volleyball as a multi-purpose platform. Despite our striking diversity, NVs share one common sentiment: “I'd rather play volleyball discreetly than being vocal and visible (*Hade ni sawagitateru yori shizuka ni barē shiteitai* 派手に騒ぎ立てるより静かにバレーしていたい).”

### *Demographic Diversity*

Thirty-six-year-old Noboru often tells me that amateur gay volleyball has provided him with opportunities to encounter someone whom he'd otherwise never socialize with. Noboru laughs, “Without playing gay volleyball, how could I have friends like Shinobu?” Shinobu, a high school graduate, frequently changes jobs and has followed a freewheeling life. In contrast, Noboru is an elite alumnus of one of the top private colleges in Tokyo and has been traveling internationally as a white-collar businessperson. Noboru has cohabited with his highly educated and affluent partner for more than a decade, unlike Shinobu, who shares an apartment room with another NV and is currently in a long-distance relationship with a tattooed day laborer. Such an

encounter between those whose backgrounds seem too different to intersect abounds in Ni-chōme volleyball.

The youngest NV I know is eighteen years old (right out of high school) and the oldest in his mid-60s. Those in their twenties, thirties, and forties constitute the core of Ni-chōme volleyball. When they reach fifty, NVs confront a difficult question: continue or quit playing volleyball. If they decide to continue, a further question needs to be answered: remaining in or leaving their teams. In the case of the latter path, many join *shinia barē* シニアバレー (senior volleyball), which is opportunity-based organizing for those who like to enjoy playing volleyball in a relaxed rather than competitive environment. In fact, a couple of senior teams exist and they annually host a tournament for seniors. These teams are based in Asakusa and Ueno, areas home to gay commercial venues for older men.

The majority of NVs identify themselves as manly gays to some degree or another. Masculine identification doesn't preclude the practice of gender play such as cross-dressing, though. SPADE is a team for those fond of playing volleyball while dolled up. Those who see themselves as effeminate are in the minority, and such identification takes place within the domain of the masculine. As for sexual identification, many NVs date the awareness of same-sex desire to adolescence. Thirty-six-year-old Ryōta is one of the few who have recognized, in early childhood, intense attraction to the male body, a feeling quite distinct from his curiosity about, in his words, "the simply different and thus fascinating female body." Whatever the case, many are uninterested in the origin of same-sex desire, a longstanding academic topic.

The English-loan word *gei* ゲイ (gay) resonates with young NVs, as the label has been popularized for healthy same-sex desiring men through gay media in contradistinction to such terms as *homo* ホモ (homosexual) and *okama* オカマ (fag or queen): see below for a further

discussion about these competing labels.<sup>139</sup> Although older NVs also use “*gei*” especially in the company of younger players perhaps as a polite way to facilitate communication, the older cohort more often than not sees themselves as *kocchi no hito* こっちの人 (“people in the know”).<sup>140</sup> As an expression for an imagined “perverse” (including gay) world, *kono sekai* この世界 (“this [gay] world”) is also common among those who frequent Shinjuku Ni-chōme. The term *dōseiaisha* 同性愛者 (same-sex desiring persons) is used as a relatively neutral descriptor today, although it has its roots in (Japanese) sexology (Driscoll 2005).

As an aside, amateur gay volleyball attracts untargeted, if not unwelcome, participants (e.g., heterosexual men as well as women). Kanagawa-based team Takeshita’s Club has Tōru-san, a heterosexual man, who attributes his involvement to an instrumental factor; the team is based in Yokohama, close to his residence. I once disbelieved such reasoning and felt like uncovering a hidden agenda, only to find such an impulse itself strange. Simply, why not? In fact, the Ni-chōme volleyball world at large accommodates a few married players (both actual and alleged) and some seeking female spouses. Additionally, a few teams allow women to join. They usually like keeping company as ministrants just like ones for varsity teams. A few current or former professional female volleyballers join competitively; they do better than most of us athletically. Also, a few male-to-female transgender persons partake in amateur gay volleyball. They had been involved in Ni-chōme volleyball long before transition and have continued playing with

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<sup>139</sup> The word *gei bōi* ゲイボーイ (gay boy) appeared in the 1950s as a label for cross-dressing male professionals involved in the entertainment (including bar) world (McLellan 2005, 101-26). The meaning of the term *gei* has gradually been disassociated from transgenderism and entertainment in the following few decades. The late-20th-century Japanese gay activism has played a major role in promoting “*gei*” for masculine homosexuality.

<sup>140</sup> In “‘We’ Coming Up,” sociologist Moriyama Noritaka analyzes the use of “*kocchi* こっち (this side/world)” among gay- and bisexual-identifying Japanese men (2012, 175-205). Moriyama sees the potentiality of the word *kocchi* in its very ambiguity, which allows individuals to locate self and share personal experience within a loosely named collective without contracting to the discursive and ideological baggage of such community specific words as *gei*. “*Kocchi*” might sound akin to “queer,” but the former does not connote a particular form of activism as in the latter.

us.<sup>141</sup>

Non-Japanese individuals participate actively as well. *Zainichi* 在日 (resident-Koreans), one of the major ethnic minorities in Japan (Sugimoto 2014, 196-224), are predominant among non-Japanese NVs. Threads on the Japanese cyber textboard *2channeru* 2チャンネル (“2channel”) are sometimes used as anonymous sites, where a few express personal grudges against some non-Japanese players by picking up ethnicity in a reductive, if not essentially xenophobic, manner. In reality, many NVs sympathize with minority issues (e.g., job discrimination). Such sympathy is out of not so much grand commitment to social justice as simple care for friends unfairly troubled by their historically stigmatized ethnicity.

The racial(ized) label “Asian” appears foreign to many NVs, as we tend to see ourselves as Japanese, reminiscent of modern Japan’s national construction ideologically distinguished from Asia vis-à-vis the West (Befu 2001; Oguma 2002). NVs do at least linguistically adopt such a tripartite worldview. Its alleged hierarchy—Euro-America (top), Japan (middle), and Asia (bottom)—is negotiated day to day, however. The exact number of non-Japanese players involved in Ni-chōme volleyball remains unknown, but I’m acquainted with a few, including those from neighboring Asian countries such as Taiwan and China and one Austrian white male (my teammate Bunta’s ex-boyfriend), who has already left Japan for his home country.

More than two thirds of the NVs I know hold college degrees. Most have graduated from either four-year universities or two-year vocational colleges. The rest either have dropped out of college or have only high-school diplomas. A few NVs from relatively wealthy families have long-term study abroad experiences. For education, most NVs have financially relied on parental

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<sup>141</sup> One such player is Kanae, who used to be playing as Taiki. He had been known for his unapologetic effeminacy as well as his stellar volleyball performance. He was tall and fit without being muscle-bound, a figure suitable for volleyball. Taiki transitioned when I was abroad. If my friend and former V6 player Shin hadn’t told me the whole story about his transition, I would have had no clue; Kanae beautifully “passes.”

supports; part-time earnings tend to go into recreation. Some have even pursued graduate education and obtained master's degrees in fields like engineering or kinesiology. I haven't yet met anyone (else) pursuing doctoral education in the social sciences.

Most NVs earn a decent, if not always stable, amount of income from blue and white-collar jobs. Either part-time, temporary, or full-time, NVs work in diverse professional fields, such as advertising, engineering, publishing, service, and teaching, not necessarily corresponding to their college majors. Having side jobs (official or unofficial) is common. I know a few NVs in economically dire circumstance (just over the national poverty line). And yet, the financially challenged experiment with various survival means (sex work, friend reliance, etc.). Most student players have part-time employment to allow them to engage in recreation in their spare time.

NVs reside in, though not all come from, the Kanto region. Some live alone. Others live with families, roommates, or lovers. Reasons for residential choices include caring for parents, saving up money, and experimenting with cohabitation. We rarely visit each other's residences. But some do like to have home parties by inviting others. When NVs relocate themselves to outside the Kanto region for a long period of time (e.g., job transfer), they usually leave a team and join gay volleyball teams in nearby cities.

### *Family, School, and Work*

Although disclosing what NVs perceive of as *kojintekinakoto* 個人的な事 (“private matters”) isn't a must for our solidarity, most are willing to share. I compare and contrast the life histories of the NVs I formally interviewed in order to give a sense of how they live beyond the Ni-chōme volleyball world. NVs recognize the entanglement of sexuality with class, gender, ability, and other axes of identification and power. Notably, in making sense of their experiences, many NVs

remain cautious about indiscriminately (ab)using the word *sabetsu* 差別 (discrimination) (Watano 2019) and trivializing the contentious, and challenging, social phenomena.

My twenty-seven-year-old teammate Masao, currently a corporate worker, discusses what it has taken to realize his current life:

ずっと夢だったんです、独立した生活。言い方悪いんですけど、ウチの家族貧乏なので。もうすぐ高校卒業する妹しかいないんですけど、ウチの両親未だにすごい苦勞してます。郊外の市営住宅にずっと住んでいますし。高校卒業後すぐ働いてほしかったみたいなんですけど、それには猛反対しました。だって両親みたいな生活になりますよね、高卒で安定した仕事がないっていう。父は大工、母はパート3つしてます。幸いにも、実家近くの良い国立大学に受かったので、学費負担するという条件で両親も納得してくれました。エンジニア専攻して、なかなか給料いい仕事にも就けて、今みたいな実家から離れて念願の一人暮らしってわけなんです。それからですかね、自由になったのは。覚えてる限り、男には高校以降ずっと惹かれていましたけど、当時は受験勉強で精一杯でした。今は仕送りもしなきゃですが、格段に自由満喫できてます。

It's always been my dream to live by myself. My family is, excuse my language, poor. I have only one sister who is now about to graduate from high school, but my parents are still struggling to make ends meet. You know, they still live in city-provided housing in a suburban area. My parents wanted me to go to work right after finishing high school, but I totally went against their wish because I thought I'd end up living a life like my parents', both high school graduates without stable jobs. My dad works as a carpenter and my mom has three part-time jobs. Luckily, I got accepted by a nearby well-rated public college, so parents gave in on one condition that I'd pay my own tuition. A degree in engineering has led to my decent-paying job, which has allowed me to live away from my family as I'd so long dreamed. It's only after that that I became free. I've been attracted to men ever since high school as far as I remember, but again [then] my whole energy went into preparing for college entrance exams. Today, I have to send my parents money as an allowance, but I enjoy my freedom

very much.

Masao started gay volleyball three years ago, when he was twenty-four, which isn't early and maybe even a bit late. In order to realize his dream of an autonomous life, he focused on studying for the deadly competitive college entrance examinations. During college, he diligently studied and worked to cover his tuition partially, leaving little energy to be sexually active despite his same-sex desire. Although Masao has been obliged to support his parents financially ever since he entered the corporate world, he appreciates his current circumstance. Masao has, quite reasonably, had a rather different faith in college education than our V6 teammate Bunta, who has found it unuseful and unnecessary, "Not many folks work in a field related to a college degree here. College is like a moratorium before adult life. I'd rather have gone to work as soon as possible." After graduating from a local high school in Ibaraki prefecture, Bunta moved to Tokyo, where he met us.

Also, Takeo-san, a forty-five-year-old self-employed eatery owner, who plays for the team FIG, reflects on his family life:

ウチの親、成金で金銭的余裕のおかげか比較的他人の自由には干渉せずだった。「好きなことしなさい、ただ責任は持ちなさい」が口癖で、金銭援助のみで、あとは好きにさせてくれた。唯一覚えているのは、子供の時だけど、姉のピンク色の輪ゴムで髪結って外出しようとしたら注意されたこと位。それはウチの基本的にキャパ広い親でも NG だったみたい。実家暮らしだから今でも一緒。タメでその辺にいそうな男の彼もよく連れて行くから、気づいているとは思うんだけど。子の結婚に干渉する親が多い中、ウチの親そういうこと一切触れずで、助かってる。

My parents are sort of nouveau riche upstarts and such financial security has perhaps given them a



certain sense of generosity toward individual freedom. With the habit of saying, “Do what you want to do, just be responsible,” they’ve let me do whatever and financially supported me. The only thing that, I still remember, discomfited my parents back in my childhood was when I tried to go out with my hair being tied with my older sister’s pink rubber band. It did bother my generally permissive parents. I still live in my family home. I often take my same-age guy-next-door-type boyfriend to home for stay-over, so I think my parents know my being gay. Unlike many parents here who tend to harass their adult kids by saying things like “When are you going to get married and let us see your kids?,” my parents are just hands-off, which I appreciate.

For many other things (e.g., education and marriage), his parents have remained “generally permissive” without making much interference. Even the idea of two middle-aged gender-conforming adult males’ frequent overnight stayover doesn’t seem to upset his parents. Although it’s unclear whether his parents are aware of their son’s being gay, we know that his unmarried status is less trouble than his childhood performance of tying his hair with a pink rubber band; that can indeed be visually a bit too flamboyant for a boy. It is gender performance, not sexuality, although these have historically been associated with each other, that his parents perhaps primarily seemed to care about.

In addition to the family, school is also an equally salient site about which NVs have differing memories. Twenty-year-old NV Hayato, a player for DAWN, one of the best performing teams, recounts one notable incident in elementary school:

五年の時、男子の一人が「オカマ」って言葉発しただけで、それ聞いた担任激怒。誰かに向かってじゃなくてですよ。子供だったからみんなビックリだったけど、後で考えるといわば言葉狩りですよ。今はそれこそ苦情とか炎上かもしれないけど、当時おネエが流行り始めていて、テレビつければオカマなんてよく見聞きしました。担任が帰りの会で少し

所かガツツリ話し合いとか設けちゃって、問題男子はみんなの前で一人超怒られて泣いてました。可哀想なことなんです。その担任何でその言葉が悪いとか説明せず、ただダメの一辺倒。生徒はみんな唾然として、先生何でそんなキレてるの？って感じでした。普段は静かな女の先生でしたけど。

In the fifth grade, one boy uttered the term *okama* [fag or queen] not at some particular peer. He just uttered it. Our homeroom teacher heard it and got mad. It scared us kids, but on second thought it was censorship so to speak, wasn't it? Today, the word can attract grievance or come under fire, but back in those days [2010], we'd frequently see *okama* [queeny talents] whenever we turned on TV, where they were gaining popularity. So, the teacher made us sit for more than a few minutes to discuss the incident during home room hours. In front of everyone, the teacher harshly scolded the boy for merely uttering "*okama*" and he began crying. Poor guy. The teacher just insisted on "Don't," without explaining why it's bad to use the term. We were all like, "What on earth is going on? Why is the teacher so upset?" She is usually quite calm.

Language censorship appears to have been an issue in Hayato's school experiences. His homeroom teacher censored her students by forcefully forbidding the use of the contentious word *okama* (Fushimi 2005, 492-545; McLelland 2009) out of anger. Although she seems unfair without giving any explanations, she is also not a specialist. And school teaching has already been identified as one of the most "overworked and underpaid" occupations in Japan (Tsuboya-Newell 2018), presumably leaving little time left for individual teachers to learn about LGBT issues. Are media then responsible for the circulation of the potentially discriminatory word *okama* (and its queeny stereotypes) in the first place, allowing kids to call effeminate peers *okama*? In Hayato's case, however, the concerned student was "just uttering" the word in conversation with his peers. Could their homeroom hours have been a moment for discussion rather than for the homeroom teacher to admonish students one-sidedly? The issue is perhaps the

nature of education itself in Japan.

In a related incident, Shunsuke-san, a middle-aged player for WOOLONG, recalls the use of the contentious term *okama* in school years and identifies sexuality as one factor in bullying, a major problem in Japanese schools:

中学校の時にすんげえ女っぽい奴いて、そいつ男好きて隠してもいなくて、よく女子とタイプの男の話とかしてた。性格も明るいけどズルくて凶々しい部分もあった。でもいじめの対象ではなかったね。そいつ見た目もまあ整っている方だったし、勉強もスポーツもできてたからかな？対照的に、ダサくていつも一人で静かにしてるタイプの奴は、何かと言えばからまれてたね。全く女っぽくないのに、なぜかオカマって呼ばれてたし。自分もグルでからんだことあるけど、受験とか他に大事なことあってそれどころじゃなくなった感じ。

In junior high school, there was an awfully effeminate classmate, who was even open about his interests in boys as he often chatted with girls about their “types.” He was bright but also a bit slick and brash. Yet he wasn’t a target. Perhaps because he was relatively good looking as well as good at both studying and sports? In contrast, there was another homely student, who liked to hang out by himself quietly. He was often a target, being called *okama* for no reason, even though he wasn’t at all feminine. I also joined in bullying him, but I ultimately got too busy to be involved as other important things like high school entrance exams came up.

In his classroom, same-sex sexuality alone didn’t seem to matter much; frequency of sexuality-based *ijime* in Japanese schools remains debatable though its rarity in middle school has been reported (Akiba 2004, 225). Shunsuke-san evaluates one of the two classmates, the effeminate and openly gay one, as “slick and brash” rather than genuinely likable, but he was exempt from being targeted. His good looks and/or blessed ability were probably powerful factors. Perhaps,

such cultural capital of academic and athletic competence helped the nice-looking classmate negotiate classroom politics effectively even if he had a not-so-likable personality; he drew heterosexual women friends to his side, indirectly pacifying heterosexual male classmates, who might avoid displeasing him due to their potential romantic interest in his female friends. On the contrary, the other “homely” classmate, who preferred solitude, was hailed as “*okama*” and bullied even though he didn’t literally fit the label. In other words, the successful policing of such contentious words as *okama* in school most likely doesn’t guarantee the disappearance of *ijime*, since another potentially pejorative word, say *otaku* オタク (geeks), can easily come into use as a replacement to harass the vulnerable (e.g., less sociable kids). Incidentally, the event of school entrance exams, the so-called examination-hell (e.g., Morita & Kiyonaga 1994, 87-8; Naitō & Gielen 2005, 172-4), not so much motivated as inhibited Shunsuke-san’s bullying behavior. And yet, even if Shunsuke-san withdrew from the persistent bullying activity, he still didn’t intervene. His decision not to can be attributed to “other important things,” including school entrance exams, all of which we should continue to examine in order to ascertain what maintains an *ijime*-accommodating environment.

According to young NV Ren, sex education lingers in his memories:

高校時の性教育で、当事者だか何だかってゲスト講師がきて、ゲイとレズビアン一人ずつね、セクマイに関する話してた。いやー、熱心な方々で、セクマイの生活がどんだけ大変かって。しかも、メディアにでてくるセクマイは実際のセクマイとは違うだと。「ほとんどのセクマイはテレビで露出している方々とは違いカミングアウトもしておらず日々差別を経験しています」、ってその二人が言ったの今でも覚えてる。まじ？って感じ。当時俺ら高校生でもテレビのおネエタレントは特殊って認識あった。しかも、おネエが特殊な位セクマイに関して講義なんてしちゃう二人だって特殊なんじゃないの？って思っちゃって、

どちらもセクマイの中では少数派、俺に意見求めるならね。被差別者って勝手に括ること自体特殊！

During sex education in my high school, we had a couple of, you know, *tōjisha* (directly concerned) guest speakers, one gay man and one lesbian, who spoke about sexual minority issues. God, they were so passionate about how rough life can be for sexual minorities. They also stressed that the media personae of sexual minorities and actual sexual minorities are different. “Unlike those TV talents, who are openly performing sexual minority personae, most sexual minorities remain closeted and experience daily discrimination,” which is what the two said I still remember. Hello? Back then, even most of us [school mates] already recognized that queeny talents are specific people. The thing is that those two [guest speakers] who talked about the [performative TV talent] queens being “special” [that is, not representative of everyday sexual minority men and women] were themselves a special category. Queeny talents and those people are both in the minority of the sexual minority category if you ask me. It’s peculiar to stuff everybody into the category “the discriminated against.”

Bothered by the assumption presumably held by the guest speakers that high school students cannot distinguish representation from reality, Ren points out that those who lecture about “sexual minority stuff” are also as much a minority and particular as those in the limelight, including queeny talents. Ren expresses his lingering discomfort with the generalization made by the two guest speakers about sexual minorities as “the discriminated against.” Notably, it’s not the existence of the category itself, whether L, G, B, or T, but social entitlement with which to speak for minorities sweepingly, however well intended, that Ren views as troubling.

As for work, Yoshio-san, a salaryman working in the Japanese corporate world for more than fifteen years, thinks back on his early days:

同性愛自体が問題って感じたことはあまりないかな、そもそも恋愛のこととか話したいってタイプではないから。異性愛者だったとしても、ひっそりやってると思うよ。まーでも

ウザったい上司とか強制の飲み会とかは当たり前だよ。女は帰れるのに男は強制。その分男の輪から外されてるって思うのかもだけど、こっちからすれば付き合いよりもさっさと帰ったりしたい。ずるいなーと思う。恋愛関係とかしつこく聞いてくる人もいるけど、2年位我慢すればそれもなくなるし。そのうちに飲み会とかもみんながでるような忘年会とか以外誘われなくなるよ。最初の数年我慢できないと辛いかもね。過ぎればまあなんとかなる。ただ昇進したりすると結婚のこと触れてくる上司もいる。もう腫れ物に触らないでって感じ。

I haven't really felt sexuality itself has been a problem for me in the workplace. I'm not the kind of person who wants to be open about love and such matters. Even if I were heterosexual, I'd be as discreet as now. Well, that said, things like obnoxious bosses and obligatory drinking meetings have been part of the picture. Women can skip those meetings, but men cannot. Women might think that they are being excluded from a male circle, but I have been jealous. I'd rather go home early than strictly follow a promotion track. There're nosy people who get into private matters but if you can put up with such interference for the first couple of years, it will disappear. Eventually, you're not going to get invited to drinking except for a few occasions like a year-end party. It might be painful if you wouldn't be able to endure the first few years. If you can, you survive. Of course, when it comes to promotion, there're bosses who might bring up the issue of marriage. My feeling is "don't touch on a sore spot."

Identifying himself as someone fond of discretion, Yoshio-san finds the workplace not necessarily congenial as it involves such occasions as "obligatory drinking meetings," where participants are forced to share the personal. Yoshio-san envies women, who can "skip"—perhaps with certain consequences—such male-bonding, which plays a key role in navigating corporate life successfully (Allison 1994). Although Yoshio-san speaks as if corporate life is a great opportunity to learn patience, I wonder such years of endurance are necessary, much less productive; can energy go into something else like work itself?

Hideo-san, a middle-aged former V6 player, similarly discuss corporate life by recalling one openly gay co-worker:

仕事は実力。一人問題になった人いるんだ、オープンリーゲイの社員。彼はゲイだからって差別されているって言っていたけど周りは彼の基本的な所作とか仕事裁きに不満だったんだ。けど、何いっても受け入れないの。注意とか提案も自分の都合に合わないと全部差別だって。結局は辞めたけど。ゲイ以前の問題。そんなんじやどこいっても仕事任せてもらえない。そもそもそんな人柄になっちゃったことに過去にゲイってことで酷い思いしたとかいう事が起因しているのであれば、それは全くの別問題だよ。それはそれで問題。

What matters in professional life is raw ability. I remember one openly gay co-worker, who'd always complain about how he'd been discriminated because of being gay. The thing is people around were unhappy about his general propriety and his job performance. But he never listened. No words, whether warning or advice, resonated with him unless they fitted what he wanted to hear, everything else was discriminatory for him. He quit in the end. His problem wasn't gayness but general character. No one wants to entrust jobs to someone like that. If past traumatic experiences due to being gay have played any role in making such a personality, that is a different problem which itself is highly problematic.

According to Hideo-san, there is a significant perceptual gap between his former openly gay colleague and the rest of the people in the workplace. While the former tended to highlight gayness in making sense of experiences not entirely favorable, and arguably thus discriminatory, to him, the others were attempting to communicate concerns about things not necessarily related to sexual orientation. As Hideo-san suggests, “past traumatic experiences due to being gay” may have twisted the general character of his openly gay colleague. Indeed, the presence/absence of past trauma can significantly influence the ways in which individuals make sense of the present,

making it difficult for diverse persons to work collectively toward such goals as anti-discrimination.

Although NVs have diverse experiences as seen above, the awareness of same-sex desire generally didn't lead to a long and intense period of frustration for the vast majority of the NVs I know; this is not to say that they have never felt discriminated against or frustrated with their own desire. What they fretted over was not so much same-sex desire itself but the idea of being different from the socially assumed heterosexual majority. Because same-sex desire doesn't necessarily matter singularly in most NVs' experiences, the anti-homophobic rhetoric of gay liberation activism hardly appeals. Rather, it is thought to be more beneficial to get involved in something else (i.e., playing volleyball). So, how did they come to play gay volleyball? When did they start playing volleyball in the first place?

### *Toward Volleyball*

The majority of NVs began playing volleyball during their years of compulsory education. Most wanted to play a sport, while some were encouraged, and in some cases forced, by families or friends to participate in athletic clubs in school. Many proactively chose volleyball but a few, including 29-year-old Arata, arrived at the sport by the method of elimination:

マサとは比べないでね、付属中高でもプレーして日本でも有名な大学のバレー部で生粋のバレーボーラーなんだから。自分のバレー歴なんてお気楽。中学の時、両親、特に父親が何かスポーツしろって。お父さんは野球かサッカーはどうかなんて言っていたけど、野外スポーツに魅力感じない。日焼け嫌だし。友達はバスケ部が多かったけど、それもね。バスケ部部員多くて、競争も熾烈。武道なんてもってのほか、身体ぶつかりあいなんてごめん。ガツガツしてなくて人気もそんなになくて、でも身体を使ってお気楽にプレーできる競技探してたの。お母さんがバレー部顧問はうるさくないし、部員も地味だからどうかつ



て。その流れで高校でも続けて、大学もバレーボールサークル参加！

Don't compare me with [our teammate] Masa, a trueborn volleyballer who's followed an elite path by playing for a nationally well-known varsity team after six years of playing competitively in the university-affiliated combined junior high and high school. My relationship with volleyball is more casual. My parents, my dad in particular, wanted me to play sports when I entered junior high school. He suggested baseball or soccer, but outdoor sports didn't appeal to me. I didn't want to sunburn, you know. Some of my friends were into basketball but it wasn't appealing to me either. The basketball team had many students and competition seemed extreme. Martial art was a big no, too much body-contact. I was in search of something less aggressive and popular, but still athletic, something I could play casually. My mom then told me about the volleyball team, which might be a good fit for me with a laid-back coach and a few low-key students. I kept playing in high school. I even joined a hobby circle in college!

Arata encountered volleyball when he was “in search of something less aggressive and popular, but still athletic, something [he] could play casually.” Although a few NVs (graduates of schools well known for volleyball) have undergone fierce competition, most have, just like Arata, had a “casual” engagement with the sport regardless of whether they chose it proactively or by the method of elimination. Many NVs affirm volleyball for, in their words, *shitashimiyasusa* 親しみやすさ (approachability).

Indeed, the attraction of volleyball is multi-faceted; it is 1) well-recognized, 2) less aggressive, 3) affordable, and 4) adaptable [location, headcount, etc.]. First, volleyball has name recognition. Major land broadcasters as well as some satellite ones regularly televise volleyball, whenever domestic and international professional tournaments are held. Also, students in Japan, which we all once were, play volleyball as one of the required or optional sports in physical education during compulsory schooling. Volleyball's big name and ubiquitousness fuel a sense of

self-worth among players, including my teammates who take pride in being volleyballers.

Second, as Arata touches on above, many NVs attribute the appeal of volleyball to its non-contact (between teammates and opponents) rule. After being an amateur volleyballer for more than fifteen years, thirty-four-year-old Fujimura-san summarizes, “Volleyball involves strenuous acts like rolling or flying receives, a frequent cause of injury, but we don’t have to tackle opponents as in rugby or aggressively get past defenders as in soccer and basketball. Physical contact is generally only among teammates for a high five or hug upon scoring.”

In addition to the non-contact nature of volleyball as well as its national presence, NVs often point out its relative inexpensiveness. Tomishige-san, a forty-year-old former V6 player, explains, “Volleyball doesn’t cost much. No bats, rackets, or whatsoever. We need general sporting goods, like shirts and shoes, plus administrative fees for booking a gymnasium, but equipment, the net, poles, and stuff like that, is available for free in local centers and schools.” Indeed, Critic Okuno Takeo even asserts that volleyball is a sport [suitable] for the poor (1964, 117). Furthermore, volleyball can be played both indoors and outdoors by those present on a given occasion. We can play volleyball in a park or on a beach as long as there is a ball to play with among whoever is there. “Convenience,” my forty-seven-year-old V6 teammate Hattori-san, “counts as an attraction.” In short, name recognition, non-contact nature, inexpensiveness, and convenience all constitute volleyball’s general approachability.

### *Toward Gay Volleyball*

Volleyball immediately comes to mind, when same-sex desiring men seek out something to do for fun, fitness, friendship, and more, as NVs name one or a combination of these reasons as what motivates their participation in gay volleyball. According to 40-year-old Naoto-san, who had been heavily involved in the Shinjuku Ni-chōme gay bar scene prior to gay volleyball:

大学卒業して企業に就職した後、ゲイスポーツサークル参加って超魅力的に感じたんだ、楽しみながら健康維持もしたかったしね。友人の一人がテニスサークルに誘ってくれたの、こっちのね。でもテニスってちょっと敷居が高かった。ラケットとか色々揃えなきゃいけないものあるでしょ。自分はずっと単純で親しみやすいスポーツがよかった。そしたらその友達がんばってゲイバレーにしなよって、新宿拠点に活動してるチーム紹介してくれて。学生時代学校でバレーはやったことあったから、腕前は初心者同然だったけどね。そういう成り行きがあるわけ。

After graduating from college and taking up a full-time corporate job, joining an exclusively gay athletic circle sounded pretty cool because I wanted to have fun and stay healthy. A friend of mine invited me to a tennis circle, a gay one, but the entry threshold to tennis was high. You had to buy a lot of stuff, including a racket. I wanted to play something simple and approachable. So my friend then recommended some gay volleyball team based in Shinjuku. I'd previously taken some volleyball classes when I was a student, but I was absolutely like a first-timer when I began playing. Anyway, here I am.

Naoto-san found it perfect to join “an exclusively gay athletic circle” as a means to “have fun and stay healthy” while working as a salaryman who had already been active as a gay man for some time. Although tennis came up as a candidate upon his friend’s earlier suggestion, Naoto-san felt hesitant to “prepare a lot of stuff including a racket.” Having seen Naoto-san reluctant to play such an “upper-class” sport as tennis, his friend introduced him to a Shinjuku-based gay volleyball team, which Naoto-san is currently still a member of.

Similarly, 36-year-old Ryōta reflects on his involvement:

やっぱ体形維持とか友人作りかな。おまけでエロもついてくればいいって感じ。ゲイバレー

ーって絶好の場だと思った。しかもなぜかバレーやってる人って他のスポーツに比べるとお気楽なイメージだった。実際そうだと思うよ。もともと男らしいスポーツではないと思うから、典型的な体育会要素のあるザ・日本男児みたいな人が少ないのかも？そうはいつでもスポーツだから競争心は皆あるよね。全く競わないのもつまらないだろうから、みんなでキャーキャーできるのがゲイバレーのいいところ。他だとそうはできないじゃん、男らしさのデフォルト保たなきゃだから。ゲイバレーは別。ただモテを意識したら結局べつたらおネエはNGだけど・・・

I wanted to stay in shape and make some friends, and I also wanted sex while I'm at it, you know. Playing gay volleyball seemed perfect. I somehow always thought that folks playing volleyball would be as lighthearted as the sport. I believe they are. Perhaps volleyball isn't considered as a manly sport in the first place, so there aren't, among the playing population, many "Mr.-Japanese-male-type" guys with the typical athlete bodies and attitudes? With this said, we amateur gay volleyballers are also more or less competitive. No spirit of competition would be boring. Gay volleyball is nice because we can play while romping around and yelling. We would otherwise have to maintain our masculine default [demeanor].<sup>142</sup> In gay volleyball, we don't have to. But if you want to be popular sexually, you cannot be super queeny after all, though.

While gay volleyball allows Ryōta to “to stay in shape and make some friends,” it also brings an added bonus, “sex,” as he can encounter a number of potential romantic and sexual partners. Ryōta sees gay volleyball as a space where men can deviate from their expected gender performance and “romp around and yell” thanks to the surroundings crowded by whom he perceives of “lighthearted” participants who do not rigidly adopt “the typical athletic persona,” allegedly part and parcel of the dominant masculinity that holds ideologically in Japanese society at large. Yet, Ryōta acknowledges the “spirit of competition” retained among NVs and pinpoints

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<sup>142</sup> The type of masculine conduct Ryōta refers to here is a stoic demeanor, often expected of male athletes (*taiikukai danshi*).

one major contradiction. More specifically, Ryōta knows he “cannot be super queeny” and should “maintain our masculine default [demeanor]” for sexual popularity. More research is in order, however, to determine whether this “masculine default” serves the same purpose as alignment with hegemonic Japanese manhood narratives when NVs perform this “default” persona to (or for) each other.

In the case of 56-year-old Yoshito-san, a gay volleyball circle has helped overcome a sense of isolation:

同性愛自体は比較的早い段階から受け入れられてたんだけど、相談とかできる人周りになくて。自分にとってゲイバレーは非公式の性教育ってところ。我々の世代って性教育はあったけど、LGBT って言葉なんてもちろん当時はなかったし、今みたいではなかったのね。先生が男女の性器とか月経とか夢精の説明して終わりみたいな、しかもその先生も恥ずかしそうに話すもんだからみんな爆笑。そもそもそんなことある程度の歳になりゃみんな知ってるじゃないですか。だから性の事色々ざっくばらんに話せるゲイバレーは自分にとってただの遊びではなくて大事な学びの場。みんなとバレーできたおかげで漠然とした不安とか孤独感は飛んでいっちゃいました。だからゲイバレーはかけがえのない場所なんです。

I could accept my same-sex desire itself relatively early, but there weren't any people I could talk to about it. So, gay volleyball has been like a place for informal sex education for me. Our generation received sex education, but it was completely different from today's, and we didn't have the word “LGBT” back then. Teachers gave explanations about male and female genitals, girls' period, boys' nocturnal emissions, and stuff like that. That was it. To make things worse, those teachers spoke with embarrassment, which made us students laugh hard. In the first place, when we hit a certain age, we all know that kind of stuff without being taught by schoolteachers, right? So, for me, gay volleyball, where we can talk about sexual stuff freely, is a space for not just playing, but learning. My sense of

isolation as well as general uncertainty due to same-sex desire has gone away, as I have played volleyball with like-minded folks. Volleyball has much significance for me.

For Yoshito-san, gay volleyball has complemented what the sex education his generation received lacked: a space to “talk about sexual stuff freely.” As a result of such an educationally meaningful bastion as gay volleyball, such feelings as “isolation” and “uncertainty” have dissipated. His experience resonates with many old and middle-aged players.

Ganko-san, ten years young than Yoshito-san above, has a slightly different story:

バレー自体は中学校の頃からプレーしてたのね、野球部とかなんて絶対無理だったと思う、監督が熱血体育男児だったから。バレー部は緩くて、女々しい自分でもとりあえず生きていけた。まあ、別に隠す気もなかったというか、動作とか身体しなっっちゃうから、隠そうとするのは無駄な抵抗みたいな・・・バレーの場合は多少しなってもプレーの一環みたいな感じだったから自分にはフィットしてたのかも。ただバレー部の同級生とか先輩と恋愛の話とかはできなかったから、今のように同性愛のこと自由に話せる空間、ゲイバレーがあるのは有り難いことだと思う。

I began playing volleyball in junior high school. It was utterly impossible to be on a baseball team directed by a hot-blood male athletic coach. The volleyball team was rather lax, where I, an effeminate boy, could survive. I didn't really attempt to hide or anything. I mean my movement was feminine like my body always making an S-curve, and so it was useless to try to hide it. When I was playing volleyball, it was like my habitual movement was just part of playing the sport properly, so maybe it was fitting. But I wasn't able to talk about romantic matters with my peers or older players, so I appreciate gay volleyball, where we can talk about same-sex love freely.

Indeed, volleyball requires, as Ganko-san refers to an “S-curve,” many physical movements in

which liveness is needed: e.g., when we receive a ball, we need to put our weight on one leg and lean while slightly pushing our hip out, which in a way looks like the “S-curve,” a lithe posture associated with the feminine as Ganko-san discusses.

Forty-six-year-old NV Hirotaka-san is one of the few I know who have had difficulty accepting same-sex desire itself:

同性愛者ってことにすごい引け目を感じていて、いけないことなんじゃないかなってずっと思ってたのね。しかも自分学校で結構いじめられたから、そもそも基本の性格自体すごい屈折してるっていうか、ネガティブで。いじめられた理由はウジウジしていたからなのかな。突っ込みやすいついていうか。そういうのもあって、さらに同性愛なんて肯定的に考えるの大変で。受け入れられたのは、ゲイバレー始めて友人できてからかな。きっかけは発展場でやった人がバレーやってて。自分そもそも人付き合い苦手にしてたから、サークルなんて始めようなんて思っていなかったんだけど、その人が誘ってくれて、ついていってこの通り！ゲイバレーなかったら人に同性愛のこと打ち明けるなんてできなかっただろうし、一人で悶々としていたと思う。そう考えると本当ゲイバレーのおかげ。

I was feeling so down about my being a same-sex desiring person, thinking to myself that same-sex desire was bad. Also, I was bullied in school, so my general personality was extremely twisted and negative. I was probably bullied because I was wishy-washy, a trait which classmates could pick up and pick on easily. Taking all of this into consideration, it was extremely hard for me to think about same-sex love positively. It was after I began playing volleyball and making some friends that I have been able to see myself in a positive light. I was introduced to gay volleyball by a NV I hooked up with at a bathhouse. I wasn't sociable in the first place, so I didn't have the slightest idea that I'd join a hobby circle, but he invited me and here I am! Without gay volleyball, I probably wouldn't be able to talk about same-sex love to anybody else, and I'd be agonizing alone. I thank gay volleyball.

After years of being a target of bullying in school that made himself “extremely twisted and

negative,” Hirotaka-san, by chance, came to encounter gay volleyball, which has dispelled his negative feelings about same-sex desire. Thus, Hirotaka-san, just like many other NVs, appreciates Ni-chōme volleyball.

Compared to older NVs, younger NVs (especially ones under twenty-five) I have spoken with, including Kū-chan, more aggressively articulate their participation into gay volleyball as an enhancement of the so-called gay life:

ゲイに関する情報はある程度ネットで簡単に調べられたから特に違和感とか疎外感とかもなかったです。ドラマとかでもゲイ役がでてたりしますよね、きのう何食べた?とか。ただ逆にネットは情報があり過ぎて、やっぱり先輩の人から直接に聞くのとは違うと思います。ゲイバレーは純粹にゲイの人たちとバレーしたいって気持ちで探しました。ゲイライフ満喫したかったの。ひそひそ楽しむっていう感覚はあまりないかもしれないですけど、わざわざ公表する必要もあまり感じません。聞かれれば大抵の場合答えちゃいます、面倒臭いじゃないですか、隠すのって。それはそれで面白い時もありますけど。カミングアウトに興味ありますかって聞かれたら、興味は特にないって答えると思います。ほとんどの人はオープンにしたいわけじゃないですよ。

I haven't felt a sense of confusion, discomfort or isolation thanks to the information about gay issues I can easily access online. You turn on the TV and can watch a gay-themed show like *What Did You Eat Yesterday?* There's actually too much info on the Internet, though. Browsing online for gay info and listening to actual people who have lived ahead of me are totally different. As for gay volleyball, I genuinely wanted to play volleyball with other gay men. I have wanted to enjoy a gay life fully. I don't necessarily mean to play discreetly, but I don't find it absolutely necessary to be out voluntarily either. If asked, I don't mind answering that I'm playing gay volleyball in most cases. Hiding can be kind of a pain. But again, I don't have any urgent interest in coming-out. It's not like most people want to be out.



Although Kū-chan has been able to learn about gay issues by accessing what is available online, he still appreciates gay volleyball as a space to interact with, and learn from, “actual people who have lived ahead of [him].” Kū-chan then makes it explicit that he has joined gay volleyball to “enjoy a gay life fully.” His desire, however, doesn’t necessitate an impulse to be out all the time. Kū-chan himself remains open to coming-out because “[h]iding can be a pain [in the neck],” but he isn’t particularly interested in the act and recognizes that coming-out is an unpopular act.

### *Why Not Gay Liberation Activism?*

A glossary of key terms helps map subject positions and relational dynamics among NVs. Using Japanese gay slang, NVs play with gender (Livia & Hall 1997; Ortner 1996) and rank one another in terms of visibility. Although visibility doesn’t necessarily connote disrespect, NVs’ play predominantly revolves around invisibility as the center of gravity.

Take-san once discouraged my evolving identity in a strikingly gender-coded, not entirely tongue-in-cheek, fashion, “I know you’ve come out to your family so you can pursue graduate study on gay activism, but *ribugama wa kanben* リブ釜は勘弁 (don’t turn into some gay liberationist queen)!” Indeed, when I confessed my research aspiration to Shinobu, my “older sister” as my teammates like to call “her” based on his effeminacy, she made her little sister’s ears hurt. Shinobu cackled, “Pushing your nose into silence, you’re letting yourself nosedive sexually.” Others sing the same refrain as if to worry about and warn me of my progressively limp desirability, “Hadn’t you better *otonashiku suru* 大人しくする (loosely be quiet, but literally be adult)?”

Perhaps yes, since predecessors, such as Fushimi Noriaki (2004), Itō Satoru (Itō & Yanase 2001), and Ōtsuka Takashi (1995), have established a reputation as *ribugama* リブ釜: an abbreviation of *geiribu-na-okama* (gay liberationist queen). On the one hand, the English-loan

word *geiriberēshon* (gay liberation) has come out of late-20th-century Japanese publications. On the other, the vernacular term *okama*, literally a cooking pot, has a longer history and is a slang word for effeminate, if not necessarily gay, men (Long 1996; Lunsing 2005b; Valentine 1997). The term *ribugama* has most likely emerged through a tug of war between pros and cons of gay liberation. Cons have bantered pros with the potentially discriminatory (“feminizing”) label *okama*. The discreditable designation in turn has been reclaimed by gay liberationists, in particular gender-non-conforming ones (e.g., Fushimi 2000, 2004, 2007), who have sarcastically called themselves *ribugama*.<sup>143</sup> Why “queen” over “fag” in translating *ribugama* though? In English slang, both can be used for and against gays. Lexically, however, “fag” doesn’t denote authority, like “queen” does. In Japanese gay slang “*ribugama*,” however “feminized,” connotes such ascendancy by grace of its blessed title “*ribu*.”

“*Ribugama*” is one of many Japanese gay slang expressions for diverse personae.<sup>144</sup>

Consider also “*aruku-kaminguauto* 歩くカミングアウト,” which literally refers to those who “out” themselves by their manner of walking. Loosely, the term *aruku-kaminguauto* means “telltale” or effeminate gays. “*Aruku-kaminguauto*” is often interchangeably used with *okama* and *onē* for effeminate gays. Another Japanese gay lingo “*ika-homo* イカホモ” is short for *ikanimo* (obviously) *homo-rashii* (homosexual-looking), used to name the so-called gay clones.

Although *ika-homo* rarely appear beyond gay media (e.g., BÁdi), *aruku-kaminguauto* as well as *ribugama* dominate mainstream media. Japanese media highly stereotypify *aruku-kaminguauto* by means of effeminate, predominantly gay men known as *onē-tarento* (queeny

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<sup>143</sup> Activist Ōtsuka Takashi also observes that gay liberationists are often joshed as “*obasan*” (aunties) (1995, 59, 2007, 247-62).

<sup>144</sup> The term *ribugama* was initially unknown to some NVs, but they would often use a striking analogy for gay activists. For instance, my teammate Masa once said, “Gay activists are annoying like our mothers, unable to hold their tongue.” These NVs tended to be less exposed to pillars of gay liberation (bars, magazines, and the like). Reasons for inexperience vary; some are just newcomers, whereas others have little interest in gay venues and media.

talents) epitomized by Matsuko Deluxe, a cross-dressing *onē-kotoba*-speaker (Eguchi 2017; Maree 2020, 117-45; Suganuma 2018). Not all *aruku-kaminguauto* are *ribugama*, and vice versa. The former don't always intend activism, while the latter can "pass" unless they camp it up. Yet, unlike *ika-homo*, both break silence as it were. *Ribugama* stand out vocally, and *aruku-kaminguauto*, visually; *onē-kotoba* hypes their flamboyancy. NVs often compare *ribugama* and *aruku-kaminguauto*, while distinguishing these two parties from the masculine-coded *ika-homo*.

Moreover, "*nonke* ノンケ" (heterosexual and masculine men) remains another pivotal in-group sign. It is a modified abbreviation for "*ke ga nai*"; while *ke* (predilection [for men]) is retained in the shorthand, *ga nai* (not having) is replaced with the English word *non* and prefixed to *ke*, perhaps to make the word sound smoother and roll off the tongue better. Lately, the argotic status of "*nonke*" seems diminishing due to its exposure by queenly talents on television. *Nonke-rashisa* (straightness), if not intrinsically about straight men, is one of many "types" pursued by gays using the suffix "*sen* 専 ('phile')" like *nonke-sen*; many NVs value *nonke-rashisa* (see below).

While coloring out(loud)ness through gay argot within the Japanese language (Bardsley & Miller 2011; Ogawa & Shibamoto Smith 1997; Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2004, 2016), many NVs call *ribugama* "*busu* ブス (literally ugly, loosely vulgar)."<sup>145</sup> It is a colloquial word for the exterior of a woman who is considered physically unattractive. Etymologically, "*busu*" stems from "*busaiku* 不細工," which is casually used to refer to a man's face that is deemed unbeautiful, and formally, an unsophisticated way of making objects or doing tasks. To discipline (mis)conduct ritually, NVs often express "*busu*" at an underperformer during a volleyball game.

*Ribugama* (media spokespersons) are *busu* because they, so the argument goes,

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<sup>145</sup> "*Iro* (color)" is used to discuss one's erotic ambience in a contemporary Japanese context.

unnecessarily make a fuss out of frustrations about their aesthetically challenged appearances.<sup>146</sup> My senior teammate Naoto-san says, “I don’t dismiss coming-out, but look around at *ribugama* out there. Coming-out is a last resort, like a hysteric outlet, for *busu*. They can’t help unclenching their *kuchi-manko* (mouth pussies) due to their parched *ketsu-manko* (ass pussies). *Ribugama* are *yakamashii* (yakky) like feminists because they don’t get laid.” My former teammate and age-mate Junpei similarly believes, “Sexual hunger makes *ribugama* squeal like feminists.” While provocatively associating *ribugama* and feminists as sex-starved persons, many NVs prioritize their family-obligations and shy away from speaking up. If at issue is *ribugama*’s allegedly looks-driven “yakky” way of pushing gay liberation, “vulgar” works as a loose translation of *busu*.

Unlike vocally and visibly distinct *ribugama*, most NVs belong to such a racialized body as the Japanese family by negotiating their family obligations discreetly. One day, I dined with former V6 player Yoshio-san, one of our heart-throbbers. With a top-college diploma, the youngest son of the Wada family works at a prestigious company. We planned to meet at JR Shinjuku Station at 7:00 pm. I made it by leaving unfinished work, but Yoshio-san bemoaned his full-time workload in excuse of his tardy arrival. It was my pleasure to look up his *shōyu* (soy sauce or “typically Japanese”) face and be agog over a looming moment with such an attractive bachelor. At a nearby pub, we made a toast. Our dishes were served in no time. I got the ball rolling by dishing out food. As I chatted on and on, Yoshio-san nibbled here and there and reached for my portion with his chopsticks. Marginally disconcerted by his silence, I smiled and

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<sup>146</sup> It is an interesting question where Masaki Koh (Baudinette 2020a), openly gay Japanese porn actor, stands in discussions about *ribugama*. Masaki, who sadly passed away in 2013, had many fans in Japan and globally as he acted as a decidedly (and exceptionally) masculine figure. Although many NVs don’t identify Masaki as *ribugama* since he is neither effeminate nor not-so-good-looking, his lifetime activity did have an activist element. His “out-and-proudness” seems to be something less relatable to many NVs, as they prefer discretion.

queried the reason for it. Yoshio-san muttered, “You weren’t letting me speak.”

As I embraced my surging intoxication upon copping to my chatty habits in silence, Yoshio-san embarked on his own story:

お袋既に知ってると思う。大学ん時、酔っぱらって家帰った時、台所にうっかりリュック置き忘れちゃって。何入ってたと思う？ゲイビデオ数本、ちょうどその日に買ったやつ、使った運動着の間に入れておいたのね。翌日、自分の部屋の机の上に洗濯済のシャツが重ねられてて、その上にビデオが置いてあった。話はしてないんだけども。

I guess my mom already knows. Back in my senior year in college, when I went home drunk, I left my backpack on a table in our kitchen with gay abandon. Who knows what’s in it? A couple of gay pornographic videos I bought that day, slipped into my used work-out shirts. The following day, I found my videos on top of my freshly cleaned shirts piled on the desk in my room. No talking though.

If his mother already knows, why is he still reluctant to discuss his sexuality upfront? I asked once again. No response. Or it was perhaps his family-obligation. “It’s cool that you’ve gone your own way,” Yoshio-san said, and paid two thirds of our bill. We then said good night.

The majority of NVs stress *onē-kotoba* moderation to remain discreet and desirable. 36-year-old Ryōta acknowledges my flamboyancy, “It’s too much when *ribugama* play *aruku-kaminguauto* and use *onē-kotoba*. You know TPO [a Japanese-English acronym for time, place, and occasion].” As much as Ryōta sounds uncomfortable with my queeny conduct—which I attribute to my inborn character exaggerated by my research persona—he politely and diplomatically treats, rather than marginalizes, the “telltale” cohort alongside his discreetly performed family-obligation. Yet Ryōta occasionally parodies, and inadvertently exceeds, my *onē* demeanor on the street. So do many other NVs I know. Most use *onē-kotoba* competently

and few essentially disrespect or dread queens and women. Because our mutual indulgence (Doi 2007) doesn't necessarily disavow the feminine, I part ways with the frame of effeminacy as a regulatory mechanism resting upon their disavowal (Hennen 2008, 32-58).

In our play blinking through the cracks in family-obligation, the ground remains challenging for *kaminguauto* カミングアウト (coming-out) in the broader sense of the term: public disclosure (of anything potentially discrediting). According to anthropologist Takie Lebra, Japanese communication thrives on silence as valued in Zen-inflected art (2007, 115-26). Silence implicates all, but its distribution is gendered; reticence is reserved for, and expected of, men, whereas women find themselves free, and destined, to speak up despite their little chance of due consideration (ibid., 121). For such a potentially erotic zero-sum game laden with silence, both verbal and visual expressions need artful control. Discretion constitutes a salient feature of (especially male) adulthood (Matsumoto 1996, 42-78) or a sexual appeal in a silence-affirmative “field” like Japan (Green 2013, 1-56). Silence breakers perhaps echo the proverb, “*Deru kui/kugi wa utareru* (the nail that sticks out gets hammered down).” More crudely, coming-out can be ugly, no matter how serious it is. Gay liberation appears romantically challenged in family-oriented Japan.

### **3. Belonging to a Team: V6 as an Example**

The year 2020 marked the 30th anniversary of V6's founding. At present, V6 has fourteen active players predominantly ethnic Japanese. Cumulatively, about one hundred fifty men have played on the team. One of those related to the V6 family is my good self. I regularly played from 2007 to 2009, when I migrated to the US for graduate education. I've known V6 for more than a decade although it's only been a few years since I began relating to the team as an observing-player. Just like other teams, V6 has its own face with organizational conventions and

rules. Recently, to keep itself going, V6 has struggled with one persistent question: How to handle a teammate red-flagged as a troublemaker by many within and beyond our own team? More generally, what do we do to someone unfitted for teamwork when, after years of efforts at coexistence, exclusion seems the only option?

### *Team Color*

V6 is, to borrow from the current captain Noboru, “*kyoyō han’i ga hiroi* 許容範囲が広い (not too picky).” For membership, V6 requires neither athletic experience nor gay identification, though these are desirable of course. Inexperienced newcomers tend to have played at least in some varsity sports, if not volleyball. V6 members are, if anything, comfortable with intra-team age variation, which results both from and in V6’s very eclectic approach to recruitment. The key to “fit” for V6 is whether one can accept the pros and cons of such internal age difference.

At present, three generational cohorts compose the team: *babā* 婆 (aunties or those above forty), *chūken* 中堅 (main force or those in their thirties), and *yangu* ヤング (the young or those under thirty). Why gender-code older players as *babā*? First, their desirability has ebbed in our collective due to aging; however, there of course exist those who, such as *fukesen* フケ専, fetishize older men. Second, older players have embraced the “feminizing” label as if their aging has loosened rigidity in gender identification. Unlike the term *babā*, “*chūken*” is a corporate and athletic word, as often used in *chūken shain* 中堅社員 (mid-career employees) and *chūken senshu* 中堅選手 (mid-career players), indicating the state of being in one’s prime. “*Yangu* ヤング” is an English-loan word corresponding to “young,” which sounds foreign but buckish. Among the fourteen V6 players, the youngest has turned twenty-five, and the eldest is fifty; the recently retired Kubo-san is even older (currently fifty-eight).

Age diversity, something many V6 players are proud of, obviously facilitates mutual

learning. The younger members can solicit a piece of general life advice from the older on a range of topics. The older can take advantage of up-to-date knowledge among the young on smartphone operation, trends in gay dating apps, buzz words, and so on. I often wonder whether, if one doesn't participate in a hobby circle like ours not stiffened by an age-based hierarchy (Nakane 2010, 70-94), there isn't much opportunity in Japan to socialize cozily with a jumble-jumble pool of individuals.

And yet, intergenerational conflict mundanely erupts as well. Such friction manifests when the members have to make decisions as a team on matters in varying degrees of seriousness. One of the relatively light issues is eating preference. We often spend some time trying to decide on where and what to eat after weekly practice. Older players stress food quality and nutrition, whereas younger ones prioritize quantity and price. We also debate over volleyball practice: e.g., frequency, duration, and body maintenance (gym training). "Heavy" matters (leaving the team, expressing disagreements over team management, finalizing a frontline for an organized game, etc.) remain where the method of approach appears divergent, if not entirely unnegotiable, along the line of generational distinction. For example, on the matter of using digital communication as a way to arrange an offline meeting, older players prefer discussing team-related matters in person. On the contrary, younger ones, especially *dejitaru neitibu* デジタルネイティブ ("digital natives" or ones born in the late-20th-century and the new millennium), consider exclusively online communication acceptable for whatever topic.

All the current V6 members work as *shakaijin* 社会人 ("full adults") (Roberson 1995). The only student player, Dai, has recently left V6 for another team. Employment among today's V6 members appears rather stable, if not lucrative, which isn't necessarily the case if OBs are included; a few are involved in murky jobs (e.g., pyramid finance) or abusive companies known



as *burakku kigyō* ブラック企業 (“black” companies). Sōta, the former V6 player with a high school certificate, has long worked in *fūzoku gyōkai* 風俗業界 (the sex industry), encompassing *mizu shōbai* 水商売 (“water business” or entertainment, in particular bar, business); these as informal part-time jobs are popular among young NVs.

Sexually, individual experiences exceed “gay” despite such categorical identification. Twenty-five-year-old Teru, for instance, doesn’t exclude occasional affairs with women. I once asked Teru whether he’d identify himself as bisexual. “Strictly speaking maybe, but I’m lenient about labelling,” Teru smiled abashedly. Indeed, loose naming resonates with many involved in Ni-chōme volleyball. All the current V6 members are unmarried and have little interest in marriage (either heterosexual or gay), or even coming-out. A few suspect that they’re being *barebare* バレバレ (obvious) (Kaneta 2003). A couple of teammates of mine have come out to a carefully selected circle of families and friends. According to my “out” teammates, life is as mundane as before, as same-sex desire rarely, for good or for ill, dominates dialogue. All my teammates, except for Bunta, prefer Japanese/Asian men.<sup>147</sup> Some are in a relationship. Others are single. V6 no longer forbids intra-team relationships (although they are still somewhat ill-loved), as the team doesn’t focus on winning games.

V6 is infamously known for having Shū-san, who is a classic *mondaiji* 問題児 (troublemaker). Although every team similarly has one or two (or even more) trouble-makers, the NVs I know unanimously treat him as a special case. Shū-san, now in his early forties, has been playing for V6 for more than fifteen years and has never been asked to hold a leadership position. Kubo-san and Fujita-san, the *babā* who decided to let Shū-san in long ago, express their

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<sup>147</sup> In Japanese gay argot, Bunta would be *gaisen* 外専 (those who predominantly seek out romantic and sexual relationships with non-Japanese, in particular white men). In recent years, Bunta has begun exploring with Japanese and Asian men sexually by going beyond his former *gaisen* identification. For an extensive discussion about “Typing” among gay men in Japan, see Baudinette (2015).

regret. Shū-san came to V6 along with his age-mate Yoshio-san, when the two were in their early twenties and playing for 777, whose athletic performance wasn't necessarily great due to its predominantly senior makeup. Kubo-san and Fujita-san explain that they wanted and needed only Yoshio-san. But he seemed unlikely to join V6 without the company of his friend Shū-san. So, V6 accepted both. Although Yoshio-san now plays for his own team upon having left V6 a while ago, Shū-san remains on his haunches.

Unapologetically self-centered, Shū-san pursues any means, including egregious lying, for his own ends and has little interest in listening to others. His father, a former professional athlete (not a volleyballer though), is also a troubling figure in his own field, for which he's serving as one of the honorary chairmen upon retirement from active service. Although the two are troubling personally, both are good businesspersons; Shū-san has been running a few gay bars successfully while his father makes a lot out of his non-athletic management business. "Both nature and nurture are playing a role," Noboru sighs.

V6 teammates analogize Shū-san to (malignant) cancer, as if V6 has to find a way to coexist however destructive he can be for the entire team. Although I have mixed feelings about this analogy, especially in the presence of actual cancer patients, I also find it quite compelling because V6 still sees Shū-san as part of its organic whole, however dreaded interaction with him may be; "otherizing" him through deliberate neglect is easy. In fact, there are a few moments we could have kicked him out. But V6 has missed (well, chosen not to undergo) such a violent and potentially dangerous survival process. Many (including Shū-san perhaps) know that he would have nowhere else to go, if V6 had the guts to give him an ultimatum.

### *Team Management*

V6 members manage the team based a set of rules. *Shunōjin* 首脳陣, or those in leadership,

manage the team. V6 chooses one captain and one (or two) vice-captain(s). Their term spans one year at the shortest and three years at the longest. As a rule, current leaders appoint the next. Leaders are more often than not skilled volleyball players. They have a bird's-eye view of inner circles within V6 and know all the members well; most are willing to share personal information, but it isn't a must in consideration of privacy. Players take turns at miscellaneous tasks, such as booking gymnasiums and carrying balls. A few genuinely take on those bothersome responsibilities.

V6 makes the most of a free schedule management website Group Schedule along with social media, such as LINE (a popular freeware app for instant communications on electronic devices) and Twitter, for intra-team contact. Group Schedule provides V6 members with a virtual in-out board to confirm attendance. LINE allows members to communicate with one another expeditiously via electronic devices. Some absentees also tweet updates during their absence. These tweets often (deliberately) contradict given excuses for absence and trigger infighting; for instance, one says on Group Schedule that he is sick, but he tweets his participation in another team. This often happens when a member is unhappy about team politics and wants to express dissatisfaction. Group Schedule records attendance. Leaders, if necessary, use the record to finalize the front-line for games.

Such magic words as “*aishō* 相性 [fit]” and “*en* 縁 [fate]” contribute to management, especially in moments when it's awkward and difficult to give an explanation. I remember one incident where I've glimpsed V6's setting a certain boundary despite its general openness. Last year, we were supposed to welcome a prospective player, Haru-chan. Haru-chan had responded to an online recruitment ad posted on a gay dating app by one of our teammates, Yoshinori. Haru-chan's self-introduction read, as Yoshinori recited it to the rest, “5'10, 140 lbs., competitive

but not contentious.” The two didn’t exchange photos but Yoshinori assumed that Haru-chan would be a great fit, judging from the general profile described over their email correspondence. So did we, and were excited about Haru-chan’s first visit.

On the expected day of a trial meet-up, Yoshinori along with another teammate, Hirofumi, was anxiously waiting for Haru-chan at an uncrowded café. Yoshinori received a text from Haru-chan “I’m running a few minutes late,” which gave the anxious two a polite impression. Several minutes past the scheduled time, a long-dark-haired slender person clothed in a stripe dress came into the almost empty café. “Dear, is Haru-chan a *josoko* 女装子 (cross-dresser)?,” Hirofumi spoke in Yoshinori’s ear.<sup>148</sup> Yoshinori had no clue. The three awkwardly exchanged introductions and quickly got out of the café. It had turned out that Haru-chan wanted to transition fully and that she wasn’t cross-dressing but “just dressing naturally.” Yoshinori and Hirofumi didn’t inform the rest of us, who were looking forward to Haru-chan’s appearance at a nearby gymnasium.

Haru-chan visually upset everybody, in particular Shū-san, who was hard on her during practice. On this rare occasion, no one really braked Shū-san. To make matters worse, Haru-chan was athletically challenged; her muscle force was declining due to hormonal therapy; she couldn’t push the volleyball very far; she was unable to run fast; and she even lacked stamina. At the end of the practice, the captain Noboru politely reminded Haru-chan that she’d be welcomed to join. Yet, Haru-chan seemed to sense our discomfort, “I did my best, but I felt bad being unable to play like all of you.” V6 didn’t follow up with her, and she didn’t contact us either. V6 has a couple of part-time cross-dressers but no transsexual or transgender players. Should V6 have prepared a more welcoming space for Haru-chan or suggested a better team to approach?

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<sup>148</sup> 女装子 is read “*josoko*” rather than “*josōko*” in gay colloquial speech.

Or should she have tried to blend in? In either case, Noboru said that it was all about “fit.” Yoshinori saw it as “fate.” As a predominantly gay male homosocial group organized around the idea of discretion, V6 did not want such a “visually upsetting” figure as Haru-chan. Her visual difference was coupled with her athletic inaptitude, helping V6 members tacitly justify her compatibility with the team. Despite V6’s general flexibility in recruitment, no one in particular took issue with Shū-san, who was unnecessarily harsh on Haru-chan. Although it is debatable whether this episode is a “transphobic” incident, it at least shows that V6 has a boundary for membership, which was rather quietly managed so as not to cause an outright conflict (Krauss et al. 1984).

### *Time and Place*

Sundays are when V6 players meet for weekly volleyball practice at an elementary school gymnasium in Tokyo. Elementary schools permit adult groups to use their gymnasiums on weekends upon registration and advanced booking. These institutions do not require applicants to specify sexual orientation. Generally, a group must pay a small amount of use fees and have at least one resident member of a given municipality from which the group seeks to obtain permission. Currently, V6 uses elementary school gymnasiums in Shinjuku. Previously, V6 would almost always practice alone and rarely meet other teams for joint practices. Today, V6 nearly always gets together with other teams because it is less frequent for more than twelve players, the number that allows intra-squad games, to show up at once. After volleyball, V6 routinely pursues social activities, such as dining and drinking, often involving non-V6 NVs. Close players within and beyond V6 frequently hang out beyond volleyball.

V6 occasionally takes excursions outside Tokyo. For example, we go on an overnight weekend camp, when someone leaves the team or someone’s birthday approaches. Although V6

hardly ever competes in gay volleyball games outside the Kanto region or Japan, a few teammates like to do so by forming a hybrid team with non-V6 NVs (see below for gay tourism). During the summer, some V6 players along with other NVs go to play beach volleyball in Zushi, Kanagawa.

### *Costs*

V6 players spend approximately ¥15000 (roughly \$150) a month for relevant activities. V6 collects ¥1000 per month from employed members for intra-team incidentals. These cover supplies (balls, kinesiology tape, etc.), fees for enrolling in organized games, and so on. When V6 goes out eating or drinking, the employed players traditionally pay more than the student ones so that the team can retain them. In addition to intra-team incidentals and social expenses, players individually need to purchase sporting goods (a pair of volleyball shoes, workout outfits, and uniforms) and an optional sports insurance policy just in case of an injury. V6's overall expenditures should be roughly the same as other teams'. Joining gay volleyball is financially modest compared to other gay sport circles, such as baseball and tennis; playing these sports simply costs more although the social expenses might not differ greatly. We generally avoid lending or borrowing (a good deal of) money among ourselves, but I know that it happens once in a long while.

### *Intra- and Inter-Team Politics*

Team activity cannot be free from politics. Shū-san sets off most of the troubles. He creates divisions within V6, feeds on internal fights to defend himself, and sometimes even pretends to be a hero leading the team by “mitigating” whatever trouble he has spawned in the first place. Whenever potential players, who play the same position as his position (a setter), visit V6 for a trial participation, Shū-san becomes defensive and picks up their every bad move despite his own

rapidly and unstoppably deteriorating athletic performance; he habitually boasts about his athletic prowess but none of us, other than *babā*, have seen it. Shū-san also nags teammates as soon as he finds their performance weaker than his own. Knowing there's little we can do, Shū-san's target(s) grows frustrated and keeps away from the team. The attendance record tells so much; for some years, his attendance has been 100%, while the rest of the team members' has been sporadic and on average below 70%. Such a team cannot attract newcomers.

However, V6 frequently receives invitation to a joint practice or practice match from others teams despite, and ironically due to, the presence of Shū-san, who is a member of the organizing committees of *Rankingu-hai* ランキング杯 (Ranking Cup), a feature tournament increasingly popular among NVs. Since its emergence in 2013, Ranking Cup has steadily attracted gay teams, as it explicitly focuses on ranking compared to other organized games. Because these organized gay tournaments are generally recreational (although they still decide on a winner), Ranking Cup provides a rare opportunity for teams to expose a competitive spirit aggressively. Ranking Cup ranks teams in six tiers, each consisting of six to eight teams, based on volleyball performance. The tournament is held biannually, so teams have two chances a year to move up or down the hierarchy; within each tier the top two teams can move up to a higher tier, while the bottom two move down to a lower tier. Those ranked in between remain in the same tier. As contingencies for entry, an entering team has to be active as a team; an entering team cannot rely on external players from other teams; participation has to be approved by the organizing committees. A gay-bar-owning player originally envisaged Ranking Cup and Shū-san was allegedly invited to organize it. Potential entrants often kiss up to the organizing committees and their affiliated teams (V6 included); Shū-san seems to enjoy the right to permit or disqualify entries personally. Ranking Cup fuels a sense of rivalry among existing teams.

Although many NVs still regard switching a team to be a bad sign, its stigma has considerably lessened in recent years, paralleling the demise of life-time employment system in the Japanese corporate world (Kawano et al. 2014). Just as newly hired employees might leave their companies without hesitation after a few months or years of working, NVs, especially younger ones, have less reluctance to switch to another team. If their reason for leaving a team is reasonable, it won't cause much trouble. Yet, some NVs change teams frequently for reasons that would neither convince nor please most players. Such individuals are often yellow-flagged.

Even if one doesn't want to belong to a team, it's still possible to be part of Tokyo amateur gay volleyball by joining spontaneous practice meetings held by a few volunteer organizers. These organizers have an ever fluid list that has more than a hundred players' email addresses. Free organizing fits noncommittal players. Some of those belonging to a team also have their names on the lists and sporadically join up for a change of pace.

#### **4. The Growth of Gay Volleyball in Tokyo**

At the turn of the 21st-century, the existing amateur gay volleyball teams in Tokyo, including V6, began calling their burgeoning solidarity the *Ni-chōme barēkai*. Just like V6, NVW has grown along with a few key social happenings in Japan. These include the emergence of gay commercial venues, in particular the rise of Shinjuku Ni-chōme as a queer, predominantly gay, commercial hub; the proliferation of gay print media; the advent of the Internet coupled with the popularization of mobile phones; the flourishing of leisure activities, including tourism (not necessarily gay); and the HIV/AIDS crisis. As NVs have played volleyball peaceably while capitalizing on Japan's consumer-friendly social current (Linhart & Frühstück, 1998) since the late-20th-century, NVW appears arguably "homonormative" (Duggan 2003, 50) and even "homonational" (Puar 2017, xvii-xxxvi, 1-36).



## *Gay Bars and Bathhouses*

Early on, gay commercial venues, especially bars in Shinjuku Ni-chōme, served as a hub for gay men interested in playing volleyball. A few NVs opened gay bars in the locale as early as the mid-1980s. These volleyball-affiliated bars owned by NVs allowed existing teams to build up intra-team bonds, broaden out inter-team contacts, and bring in new players. Teammates' referrals were a primary recruitment tool. For instance, Hideo-san, a former sociable V6 player, would regularly scout gay bars for potential players. Also, Tanaka-san, the manager of *Bar Hige*, has screened his customers for prospective players and acquainted them with his team CCC or elsewhere based on "fit." Chikara is a V6 member, who was refereed to V6 by the *Bar Hige* master Tanaka-san. One night, Chikara visited *Bar Hige* along with his gay friends, who had asked him to tag along. He wasn't necessarily looking for a gay volleyball team back then. Tanaka-san immediately asked Chikara whether he played volleyball or not; Chikara is extremely tall. Chikara said yes, and Tanaka-san took him to his team CCC at a later date. But it didn't work out and Tanaka-san recommended V6 to Chikara. Today, Shinjuku Ni-chōme accommodates approximately ten volleyball-affiliated bars; there are also many non-volleyball-affiliated gay bars, where NVs work as part-time bartenders.<sup>149</sup>

Less often, cruising places, such as bathhouses and parks, have similarly stood as venues for NVs and prospects to encounter each other. Tanabe-san and Shibata-san, a longtime couple, had originally met at a bathhouse in Tokyo. It was around the mid-1990s. Tanabe-san had already been playing gay volleyball, but Shibata-san hadn't. Tanabe-san saw Shibata-san (5'10, 147 lbs. back then) and thought he'd be suitable for volleyball. When Tanabe-san invited Shibata-san to gay volleyball after fooling around, it turned out that Shibata-san was an experienced

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<sup>149</sup> Bar masters, including Jōji-san at *CountSix*, also have a close, if not necessarily sympathetic, relationship with those involved in "out-and-proud" activism, as activists often visit gay bars to distribute event flyers for publicity.

volleyballer. The two hit it off immediately. Shibata-san began not only gay volleyball but also a romantic relationship with Tanabe-san. The two have continued their couplehood until today and both still actively play volleyball on the same team.

Twenty-nine-year-old Takuma reflects back on an incident in a cruisy public park in Nakano, “One NV kept chasing me even after I expressed ‘not interested.’” Because the NV was persistent, Takuma attempted to deflect by chatting. The two began talking and the NV brought up the topic of gay volleyball out of nowhere. Takuma suddenly became interested in the idea of playing volleyball with other gays and agreed to visit a team but politely declined for the night. The two didn’t develop into a couple, like Tanabe-san and Shibata-san, but Takuma has been playing and hopping around teams ever since then. Despite the predominance of anonymity and silence (“no-chatting” rules) in these cruising spaces, many do talk and make transactions beyond the merely sexual, expanding such an athletic network as gay volleyball.

Although cruising places can serve as venues for NVs and potential players to encounter one another, bars are more preferred because many teams generally discourage sex among teammates. The above example of Tanabe-san and Shibata-san (a longtime NV couple) is rare. Many teams, including V6, encourage team members to seek romantic or sexual partners outside their affiliated teams. These teams are concerned about the repercussions of relationship problems; when a given relationship goes awry, one person in the relationship (or both in the worst case) more often than not leaves his team, which is a big loss for the team.

V6 kicked off in 1991, when a few NVs splintered off from another team SQUID due to love-related intra-team divergence. SQUID was organized by Mizuno-san, a middle-aged volleyball beginner. The team was not the best in terms of volleyball performance. Mizuno-san was in love with his teammate Sugihara-san, a young but experienced volleyballer, and they did

fool around. As a skilled player, however, Sugihara-san was not content with SQUID and was participating in another team based in Kamata, where my recently retired teammate Kubo-san was playing. Sugihara-san recognized a feeling of indebtedness to Mizuno-san but ultimately decided to create another team V6 and invited a few NVs, including Kubo-san.

### *Gay Print and Digital Media*

Gay magazines, like *Rose Tribes*, *Adon*, and *Bádi*, also helped existing teams recruit new players. These publications all had a circle introduction column and a correspondence column. The former provided existing teams with space to introduce their teams to subscribers, while the latter allowed both NVs and potential volleyballers to correspond about their interests via mail. This means of recruitment, however, was cumbersome due to third-party mediation; publishers mediated all correspondences. It was not only generally time-consuming, but also sometimes unreliable. For example, a publisher can misplace a received correspondence letter or send it to a wrong address. A 40-year-old former V6 player, contacted V6 via mail after he found an announcement that the team was “accepting teammates” in *Bádi* back in 2003. It took a few months to hear back from V6, another few months to schedule a face-to-face meeting, and another few months to meet up with the then V6 captain Fujita-san in person.

The number of V6 players as well as that of other existing teams grew exponentially in the late 1990s through the first decade of the new millennium, receiving a logistics boost from Japan’s digital revolution. Earlier, the primary means of contact among NVs were home telephone and a voice-mail/information-providing service *DaiyaruQ* (“DialQ”), casually known as DialQ2, run by the telecommunications company NTT from 1990 to 2014. The introduction of the Internet and cell-phones, enabling NVs to run a website or a blog, has enhanced both intra- and inter-team communication, and has been especially helpful in the area of recruitment.

Ongoing recruitment proceeds smoothly via gay apps. My former V6 teammate Tomo, in his twenties, who now plays for TOOTH, came to V6, as he fell for a trick set up by Fujita-san on a gay match-making website; Fujita-san attached a (fake) picture of some attractive man to a recruitment ad. Although Fujita-san turned out to be not as attractive as he looked on the website, Tomo still joined V6 and Fujita-san enjoyed the success of his trick.

In the meantime, it was in 2007 that my introduction to V6 happened by a strange change and it would have taken much longer without the availability of cellphones and the Internet. Back then, I was a junior in college, finding myself bored and out of shape upon my return from an English-language study abroad in California (too many cheesy burgers and sugary sodas). One day, I told my gay friend Dawson that I wanted to play volleyball again for fun (I played in junior high and high school). He mentioned his buddy Cheng-san, an NV. I asked Dawson to give my number to Cheng-san, hoping he could introduce me to some team. A couple of weeks later, Cheng-san texted me. We arranged a meeting. Cheng-san then hooked me up with V6, as he took me to a Shinjuku-ward volleyball tournament, where the team was competing (discreetly); Cheng-san, though not actively playing gay volleyball then, had a close friend Kazuya, who belonged to V6.

Now, the by-products of today's digitally enhanced communication are becoming as striking as its outright benefits. The Internet has rapidly facilitated not only domestic but also international (in particular inter-Asia) communication (Berry et al. 2003), but convenience seems to indulge development of interpersonal relationships, curtail team loyalty, and compromise privacy. Many captains of existing teams have told me that although their teams see an increasing number of those interested in trial participation, retention does not necessarily improve. Seiji-san, the current captain of OOLONG, complains, "We get many inquiries from

potential players of varying ages, but last-minute cancellation happens a lot. Much more, no-shows are quite common. How impolite.” He adds, “Retention is also getting harder because folks can now easily find another team to try. It’s much easier to come and go. I wonder how it’s possible to learn about a given team without staying more than a year or so. No teams are perfect you know.”

Additionally, issues of privacy concern NVs. Many routinely upload audiovisual materials on social networking websites. My teammate Yoshinori loves posting team photographs, from recent ones to relatively old ones, on his Instagram account, which is followed by many NVs. One day, when I was having dinner with a few NVs from another team FF, Motoki-kun said, “My brother was in one of Yoshinori’s pictures. I had no idea my brother played for V6!”; later his brother Ryōta, a former V6 player and my close friend, told me that they had been suspecting each other but that he did not appreciate such involuntary disclosure. The cyber era does present opportunities for such “surprises.”

Although the exposure of NVW primarily occurs in gay print and digital media, NVs sometimes appear on mainstream television screens. In mainstream media, Ni-chōme volleyball is referred to as *kama-san barē* カマさんバレー (queens’ volleyball), just like *mama-san barē* (mothers’ volleyball). Kawai Shunichi, now a sports commentator who once played for Japan’s national men’s volleyball team, is rumored to be the one who originally used “*kama-san barē*” to refer to gay volleyball in his flagship television shows such as *Please Answer* and *Please Understand* (2007) broadcast by Fuji Television. NVs use the term, but it is unlikely that they coined it. NVs rarely refer to one another as *kama-san*. *Kama-san barē* sounds like a word used by non-gays to describe gay volleyball specifically and politely (via the addition of the honorific “san”).

## *Gay Tournaments and Tourism*

Prior to the new millennium, primary avenues for NVs to compete were limited to bi-yearly tournaments hosted by Tokyo wards such as Shinjuku and Setagaya.<sup>150</sup> Ward-hosted games are what NVs now call *nonke no taikai* ノンケの大会 (straights' games), distinguished from "ours." According to older NVs, it was possible, but difficult, to organize gay tournaments in the 1990s, because there were not many teams and existing teams were as-yet not that well connected. Participation in ward-hosted games has, as older NVs look back, entailed *nonke no furi* (straight-acting). My teammate Take-san told me, "Straight-acting involves much work, but it's fun trying to look and sound straight. Most of us are far from such a figure in reality, but it has forged a sense of us-ness in the heat of non-gay tournaments."

The emergence of NVW appears to have coincided with the 2001 birth—just slightly after the September 11 attacks—of an annual tournament called Super Volleyball Gay Cup (SVGC), enlisting more than twenty teams. An organizing committee consisted of NVs from several teams including V6, and enrolled teams covered the use fee of ¥174000 (approximately \$1740) for the Shinjuku Cosmic Center venue. A few NVs told me that they learned about the Ni-chōme volleyball world as the event was featured in *Bádi*. Within a few years after the SVGC kickoff, new gay tournaments appeared, including the MSK-cup hosted by the former national women's volleyball player Masuko Naomi.<sup>151</sup> Although neither the SVGC nor the MSK-cups are held any

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<sup>150</sup> Ward-hosted games are held at ward-owned gymnasiums or high schools in respective wards. Every once in a while, these games give us cold sweats (e.g., running into acquaintances such as high school peers and teachers). I had a couple of such moments, one with my high school volleyball teammate and another with my high school volleyball coach. These encounters left splashy armpit stains on my shirt. On the other hand, these non-gay games can surprise us in a positive way (e.g., acquaintances participating as a member of another NV team and turning out to be one of "us") as well.

<sup>151</sup> "MSK" stands for her family name (Masuko).

longer, many gay games presently take place, including the Ranking Cup and the Summer Princess Gay Cup (Figure 9); incidentally, these are also sites of public-health outreach by those who attempt to recruit participants into “community-based” research on the actual state and effective prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. These organized events have solidified our sporting network to the degree that we casually call it the *Ni-chōme barēkai*.



Figure 9. A flyer for the Summer Princess Gay Cup from Bādi. © TERRA PUBLICATIONS INC.

In the name of *ensei* 遠征 (“road trips”), mobile NVs participate in gay tournaments held in cities throughout Japan, including Sapporo, Sendai, Osaka, Fukuoka, and Naha, while incidentally hopping around gay commercial venues there. Some NVs also take part in gay tournaments overseas, traveling as far as Korea and Taiwan. These neighboring countries are approachable destinations for many, being within their times off and budgets. NVs can travel in East Asia relatively easily, as Korean-descent NVs accompany trips to Korea while many Taiwanese amateur gay volleyballers in Taiwan can speak Japanese. Traveling beyond East Asia remains inconvenient for most NVs in terms of cost, distance, and language; this is perhaps why such explicitly gay-oriented mega-sport events as the Gay Games does not capture NVs’ interest much; most NVs simply don’t seem to prefer going beyond their discreet networks.

### *The HIV/AIDS Crisis*

V6 is not unaffected by the HIV epidemic (Shingae 2013), and even V6, my own team, lost a member. Back in the 1990s, AIDS took Eda-san. He did not inform my older teammates of his infection, but they sensed it when witnessing his dying at a hospital. Reflecting on the loss, Fujita-san said, “Neither my teammates nor I had any idea what to do back then. So, we just

continued getting together. I didn't know how to process my sudden, overwhelming feeling of loss." In such a heartsick state, my older teammates just kept playing volleyball.

While V6 remained as discreet as usual in the 1990s, some gays, including ones associated with the lesbian and gay advocacy group OCCUR, became vocal and visible in the obsessively public-health-concerned, if not necessarily homophobic, Japan. Back then, Japan attempted to locate a same-sex desiring (male) population first as the culprit for disseminating HIV domestically and then as a risk group susceptible to the pandemic (Kazama & Kawaguchi 2003, 2010). OCCUR-affiliated sociologist Kazama Takashi (1997) emphasizes gays' agentic response to the crisis and resistance against stigmatization (e.g., an objection to the AIDS Prevention Act: see Chapter 2), while anthropologist Shingae Akitomo (2013) contends that gay collectives have shown themselves able to exist within state-led public health mores. Aside from their divergent takes on gay men's political proximity to the nation-state, both highlight the significant role of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the formation of the gay identity/community in Japan.

Although the epidemic triggered a backlash against, and skepticism toward, gay liberation in many Western societies, the catastrophic event has played a discursive role in the "out-and-proud" construction of the *gei* identity/community in Japan (Moriyama 2017, 110-18). Indeed, a few *gei* men (Minami Teishirō, Ōtsuka Takashi, Fushimi Noriaki, etc.) as well as a few *gei* and HIV-positive men (Ōishi Toshihiro, Hasegawa Hiroshi, etc.) came out along with the global phenomenon as if, just like Kazama and Shingae argue, to politicize (male) same-sex desire as an identity and join an ever-expanding *gei* community. Notably, the advent of the HIV/AIDS crisis has not led to the closure of *hattenba* (gay cruising facilities) in Japan; my older teammates rather remember its amplification since the early 1990s.

Yet again, my older teammates were no remarkable heroes, who just continued discreetly



playing volleyball while trying to live with their inconsolable feelings of grief at the death of their teammate. Hattori-san and Take-san both in their late forties recount, “It was like we had no choice but to keep playing because we didn’t have anyone in particular to consult with. Our weekly volleyball was the only moment of exposing our concerns, fears, and ....” That is, sporting has helped some HIV/AIDS-affected gays to assuage overwhelming feelings in an aesthetically silence-affirmative social environment that discourages men from speaking up, crying out.

### *Community or What?*

Finally, what stigmas, if any, are NVs collectively managing (Goffman 1963) in Japan? It is perhaps not so much same-sex desire (or any other potentially discreditable factors) itself as its “out-and-proud” expression in the lingering silence. After all, NVW is an aggregate of hobby circles, a collective of those who have happened to get by by tolerating inequality together. It thrives because Japan continues to be friendly (as in being accommodating same-sex sexuality discreetly as confined in such a space as Shinjuku Ni-chōme) and authoritarian (as in downplaying the public acknowledgment of difference). Although the Ni-chōme volleyball collectivity doesn’t fit the conventional definition of “community” as a bounded and homogenous entity of individuals with similar interests (Lunsing 2002; Moriyama 2012), much freedom and unpredictable potential appears to lie in such a loose, seemingly recreational network as NVs’ intimacy that blinks through the crack of the family-obligation.

## **5. Erotic Silence: Queen’s Language Use**

A moment of discomfort during fieldwork is intellectually meaningful as it forces serious thought to something important personally and politically: the role of *onē-kotoba* for NVs. One illustrative incident occurred during a Ni-chōme volleyball social gathering. While reflecting on

the moment of learning, I explore NVs' *onē-kotoba* play from inside.

One weekend afternoon, I heard *onē-kotoba* being condemned as if it were proof of gay misogyny. Back then, my teammates and I were snacking at a Ni-chōme diner. At a table within hearing distance to us, one gay man and his female companion (perhaps graduate students) problematized *onē-kotoba* balls and all. The gentleman tub-thumped, "As a gay-male feminist, I can't tolerate *onē-kotoba*, which insults girls." The lady nodded and noted, "I appreciate your anti-misogynist commitment." Were they talking sarcastically because we were romping and yelling? We looked at each other and rolled our eyes without words. Is *onē-kotoba* misogynistic?

The couple probably hails lesbian critic Watanabe Mieko's *onē-kotoba* definition as quoted by anthropologist Hideko Abe: "a speech style that makes fun of women in general" (2010, 33). Abe herself regards *onē-kotoba* as "transgressive" yet "complicit with the violence of misogyny," and expresses her sentiment:

I cannot help but feel that something—perhaps my own "linguistic space"—has been invaded, tainted, altered, and penetrated by the use of [*onē-kotoba*]. If this were the case, however, why is Watanabe a lone voice compared to the thousands of female fans of [popular TV] figures such as Miwa [Akihiro] and Kariyazaki [Shōgo] and their friends? Why would they embrace the misogyny of [*onē-kotoba*]? I believe it starts with the fact that it is so fascinating, playful, and smart, but mainly it is because these personalities and their [*onē-kotoba*] offer an escape from the misogyny of heteronormative life and real male-female relationships. (ibid., 151)

But we cannot say with certainty about many female fans, who, since incorporated into neither Abe's nor my work, remain silent about whether they see *onē-kotoba* as misogynistic, let alone whether their fandom is escapism.

Amid the difficulty of proving otherwise, earlier research (Eguchi 2017; Fushimi 1995;

Maree 2008, 2013, 2018, 2020a; Okamoto 2018; Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2016, 281-91; Suganuma 2018) views *onē-kotoba* as a “feminine” (polite and polished) art of buffering as regulated by media eager to entertain and educate audiences. In *Queer Japanese*, for instance, Abe (2010, 97-134) characterizes *onē-kotoba* as a campy and acerbic delivery style linguistically analogous to women’s speech—its parody in a nutshell—tied to gay bar culture but dismissed by gays. My research surveys the de-emphasized, or “masculine” (impolite and crude), aspect of *onē-kotoba* (Marcello 2016) and its alleged unpopularity among gays. At the risk of sounding anti-feminist, I affirm the vulgarity of *onē-kotoba* and contextualize its (dis)appearance among NVs by withholding the a priori judgement of misogyny.

One day, gossip blossomed at Ni-chōme Café Vanilla crowded with teatime customers:

**Hirota (H):** やっぱデキる男は控え目でなきゃ。ペラペラ喋る奴には萎える！

Men who play well have got to be discreet. Chatty guys are such a turnoff!

**Kyohei (K):** ホント、だからアンタには絶対欲情しない自信あるわ。

That’s why I don’t find you, you Nellie, attractive.

**H:** あら、アタシもアンタは無理！デキる男には程遠いかもしれないわ。でもアンタよりはまだマシ！バレバレじゃないもん。落ち着きがあってノンケっぽって言われるしー。健さんには敵わないかもだけど。健さんノンケっぽくて絶対バレないわよね。女も落とせそーだし。イケるわ～！

Sweetie, it goes both ways. I’m perhaps far from the figure but closer to it than yourself! I’m *not* a queen. Folks recognize my discretion and straight-acting. I probably don’t outplay Ken [a NV who plays for SUPPON], though. He’s so not obvious. He looks capable of attracting women as well [as men]. He’s SEXYYY.

**K:** 健さんは別格よ。でも健さんだって結構お喋りよ、飲み会とかでは静かにしてるけど。

Ken is an exception. He can be chatty but remains quiet in public like when we're drinking.

**H:** みんなの前では上手くやってるわよね。それでいいのよ。見習わなきゃ。あ～、  
健さん！憧れる！

He's good at pretending. There you go. We'd better model ourselves after Ken. Jeez, what a dude!

Our chat about our “type” generates entangled themes: 1) a friendly use of *onē-kotoba*, 2) masculinist male-bonding, 3) straightness as charming, and 4) sensual silence.

*Onē-kotoba*'s cheeps and peeps give the flavor of friendship among diverse speakers; I'm a grad student in my thirties unlike my younger teammate Hirota, a job-hopping high school graduate. Among teammates, *onē-kotoba* functions to prevent intra-team relationships, often analogized to “incest.” As soon as one of us in a group trills out in *onē-kotoba* at public places (cafés, gymnasiums, etc.), so do the rest increase their own use exponentially. In never fully outsider-free spaces, *onē-kotoba* helps us have the time of “our” life. The closer we're to Ni-chōme, the louder our *onē-kotoba* becomes. Location undoubtedly impacts our “code-switching.”

While Hirota places me behind himself in a race toward potent manliness, he attributes discretion to men who play well. I ran around asking other NVs about this. Noboru muses, “It's those who can be sensitive to a context and cause no trouble, men able to act discreetly and avoid the public eye (*seken*).” Many others say in chorus, “*Kamokusa* 寡黙 (reticence) and 落ち着き *ochitsuki* (discretion) are important.”

Our *onē-kotoba* cheerleads the figure of discreet men as someone to emulate, as Hirota evokes Ken-san as an object of “*akogare* 憧れ.” Its verb form, “*akogareru*,” can mean either “wanting to become like” or “wanting.” In our dialogue, Hirota means both (“model after” and

“sexy”) as if Ken-san approximates a paragon. Senior NV Taguchi-san once expressed, “Ken is like Ishikawa Yūki [a top national volleyballer], a tall, fit, clean-cut, handsome, athletic guy, except Ken isn’t professional. Ken is pretty but masculine.” Ken-san is often gossiped about by many NVs as “male beauty personified.”

The source of power for such discreet men as Ken-san appears to be *nonke-rashisa* ノンケらしさ (straightness). Recall Hirota swelling with pride, “Folks recognize my discretion and straight-acting.” Asked to specify “folks,” he answered, “*Kocchi no hito* (gays).” Straightness then has less to do with straight men per se than with our fantasies about these men as enacted by ourselves. Notably, Hirota adores Ken-san by keeping within a span of his erotic influence *women* (this perhaps translates best to afterimages). In our game, “very straight gays” (Connell 2005, 143-63) are Japanese men by default who, through their discretion evocative of an ability to win over women, enable us to project heterosexual masculinity onto their persona. It is straightness (a superordinate category perhaps) that NVs tend to love; a similar tendency is observed among men on the down-low (McCune 2014, 131-61).

I, as well as Hirota, “know” that Ken-san chats and even uses *onē-kotoba* sometimes. Whenever I graciously help Ken-san raise awareness of his *onē-kotoba* “incompetence” as he doesn’t at all sound “fluent,” he goes so far as to appear to get shy by smiling coyly. Does his *onē-kotoba* really suck, am I being fooled, or is his in/competence his male potency? Hirota and my good self, as we confabulate, appreciate Ken-san as he doesn’t yield to *onē-kotoba*.

After all, it’s such a deceptively discreet figure as Ken-san that many of us silently gravitate toward. Ken-san silences many NVs, including a couple of young perky teammates of mine who bite their tongues by repressing *onē-kotoba* in his presence; they want to be pursued should chance serve. In our sensually shared silence, what matters is whether to *bareru ka barenai ka* ば

れるかばれないか (“pass” or not), rather than *barasu ka barasanai ka* ばらすかばらさないか (come out or not); this linguistic choice in discussing men who play well signals our collective investment in “invisibility.”

Our silence-affirmative race intensifies in exceptional moments like cruising. One evening, Kazuki asked me to keep him company at TOWER, a gay-cruising facility in Yoyogi. Despite our 8:00 pm rendezvous, neither managed to complete work on time. We grabbed dinner at 9:00 pm and rushed to our destination. TOWER at 10:00 pm. When heading to the bath area after undressing, we ran into our former teammate Kentarō, in/famous as one of the most proficient *onē-kotoba*-users. We greeted him flamboyantly, “*Ara ~, oku-san, ohisashiburi* (Oh dear, señora, long time no see)!” Kentarō ignored our loaded greetings and tiptoed away. We giggled and decided to stalk him. At the indoor bathtub, our target was sitting beside a twenty-some-year-old guy who was cruising our buddy. Instead of addressing Kentarō, we blatantly rattled to ruin the atmosphere as a payback for playing ignorant upon our piss-elegant hello. Later, he caught me and whispered into my ears, “You know we can’t get laid unless we keep our mouths shut, don’t you?”

Although *onē-kotoba* in and of itself bothers some since it seems to burlesque (thus disrespect) women, NVs optimize its vulgarly masculine leverage to eroticize silence collectively. In fact, many NVs cherish, rather than bash, *onē-kotoba* as an amalgam of women’s and men’s speech and applaud its proficient users as *neitibu* (“natives”), while acknowledging its “feminizing” power over our glamour. Perhaps, *onē-kotoba* prevents our play from aggravation. Anthropologist Sunagawa Hideki observes that *onē-sei* (queen-ness) lubricates potentially aggressive male-bonding (2015, 154-8, 190-1). As a double-edged lubricant, *onē-kotoba* inversely relates to our sexiness (at least among *geis*) no matter how much respect our

spectacular performance receives. I bear it philosophically and stride toward the position of *ribugama* by “globalizing,” while contesting, the semiotics of *onē-kotoba* outside its heavily stereotypified use in Japanese media (Boellstorff & Leap 2004; Savcı 2016). What follows is a glimpse into the complexity of NVs’ disjunctive voices as kept in my field diary.

### *Voices in My Closet*

If fieldworkers want “to carve out new possible paths, not to a triumphant cleaning up but to gritty survival” as anthropologist Martin Manalansan notes (2018, 1289), fieldnotes can be our treasure however disorganized; my diary is something I feel like locking in a damp closet (poor or lucky Malinowski!). It houses overwhelming memories about women. Many NVs recoil from ladies based on lived experiences, except for a few who stress their alleged female allergy.<sup>152</sup>

26-year-old corporate worker Masa sounds worn out, “*Mō honto yannacchau* (ugh), my mom lives to meddle.” Hardly surprising. “My mom probably knows about my being gay,” Masa explains, “so she tries to trick me into disclosure by sounding a note on her willingness to listen, like ‘Please let me know if there’s something bothering.’ So manipulative. *Atashi ni kimesasete chōdai* (Let me determine).” Making Masa compromise his autonomy is as unfair as having his mother sense what vexes her son (“coming-out,” not same-sex desire). For now, Masa and his mother seem peaceably boxed in their middle-class life of comfort.

My good friend Ryōta has reached a conviction, “*Okā-sama* (my dearest mother) doesn’t listen, notwithstanding my efforts to keep her from meddling, like buying my underwear.”

“Some spinster contends,” I chimed in, “women (mothers and wives) rule over men’s (sons and

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<sup>152</sup> According to Mizoguchi-san (my teammate Noboru’s boyfriend), women get on his nerves: “A flabby body and its feel ... long hair ... a soft speech with a high voice conjuring up porn actresses ... a body and perfume odor, all of these I hate. I hate women because I say so.” Mizoguchi-san has little sexual interest in women for sure, but why does he repeat such a strong word as “hate” when he can simply say he isn’t interested? One day over drinks, he spoke, “I cannot have biological kids between myself and my lover, when many women get impregnated recklessly, bear kids, and refuse to raise them responsibly, just like my older sister.” Not to over-psychoanalyze Mizoguchi-san, but does his frustration about children perhaps find expression in his female aversion?

husbands’) pants and genitals” (Ueno 1992, 73-98). It clicked with Ryōta, “Uh.” I cocked my head inquiringly. He frowned, “In my childhood, my mom often forcefully rolled my foreskin to ‘clean’ my cockhead for hygiene.” I gave my head a shake. Ryōta rattled, “It was painful because my bare cockhead was sensitive back then, but she didn’t care. I wanted to bathe with my dad, not my mom who manhandled my body.” Was his mother overcareful? Adults can encourage kids to unmuzzle early on, since even the best parental intentions can traumatize their treasures.

29-year-old service worker Arata points fingers at his older boss, “That *kuso onna* (motherfucker) asks, ‘Have you, you *kawaikochan* (‘cutie’), got a girlfriend yet?’ I say, ‘No, I have no interest in dating women.’ And she murmurs, ‘*Mottainai* (what a waste),’ which pisses me off.” Can’t Arata take “*mottainai*” as innocuous flattery, since his boss probably means that it’s a shame for such a “cutie” as himself to be without a girlfriend? Arata, however, decides not to. He remains sexually undeclared by, at least, clarifying his indifference to heterosexual dating. Arata grumbles, “Is she assuming men are bound to screw women? Or is she an *okoge* (fag-hag)?” At a place of work, it’s reasonable to refrain from inquiring about relationship status in order to avoid sexual harassment. Or we can unspecify relational nature in our inquiry, using neutral expressions such as *koibito* (a significant other).

43-year-old schoolteacher Toshirō complains about a colleague who allegedly has a “gaydar,” “This bitch, a fan of *yaoi* [girls’ comics featuring same-sex intimacy between predominantly androgynous men], throws out the topic of homoeroticism and attempts to induce my coming-out.” “Uh-oh,” I gave a bitter laugh. Toshirō lifts his voice, “It’s obtrusive. Does she want to show off her *manko kurai yurunda kokoro* (heart that’s as loose as her vagina)?” Does Toshirō read too much into his presumably open-minded colleague when she perhaps genuinely expresses her *yaoi* interests to one of her coworkers? Or, is she, as turned into a bitchy, even



slutty, manipulator through his *onē-kotoba*, pushing him out of his comfort zone?

My age-mate teammate Takeshi recalls one high school classmate, “She’d usually ask me to crash. One day, she made me miss my last train. She then suggested having sex to prove our friendship.” “Wait,” I had to interrupt Takeshi, “there’s a leap in her logic.” He agreed, “I tried to beg off, only to offend her. She began crying. I gave in and she just rode on me.” “You spoiled that *abazure* (whore)!,” I ragged on Takeshi. He grinned, “Not sure if I liked it, but I was hard. I was eighteen. So be it for the *yariman* (slut). I was *maguro* (literally tuna, metaphorically a person who just lies there during sex). Was I raped?” I responded, “‘Rape’ sounds too strong, but it was coercive. Why didn’t you resist?” “Because,” Takeshi answered, “I didn’t want to ruin our relationship. I loved her. Now, I just try not to pal around women. No more social sex.” “Yet even a gay friendship can go awry as one develops feelings for another?,” my will to knowledge expands. “I’m gay, so it’s an okay risk,” Takeshi sounds confident. “Friends with *costs*,” not benefits, is perhaps a neglected theme in friendship research.

Toshirō grows skeptical about lesbians, “Many seem to see men only as sperm donors. I’ve gotten asked more than a few times. They sounded obsessed! *Seishi banpaia da wa* (they’re sperm vampires).” “*Anta mo desho, pokochin shabushabu shiteru koto wasure nai de* (you’re too, don’t forget that you suck cocks),” I interjected. He struck back, “*Chinko-gurui ni iwaretaku nai wa* (you cocksucking nut)!” “Anyhoo, your lesbian contacts are only a fraction. Also, some gay couples, seeking a surrogate mother, appear just as desperate,” I chirped. Aside from his tongue-in-cheek address, our brief exchange is one of the rare instances, where lesbians appear. A (dis)connection between lesbians and gays in Japan (Iino 2008, 139-73) deserves more research considering the advent of assisted reproductive technology for family-making.

The nonsense of *onē-kotoba* eases the sharing of uncomfortable experiences (meddling,

coercion, harassment, etc.). Once again, NVs are no more or less than a circle of men who want to smile through Japan's chokingly sticky family-oriented sociality. As a linguistic resource, *onē-kotoba* facilitates a potentially erotic friendship off the ball and chain of political correctness; I'm not claiming its unimportance. Admittedly, *onē-kotoba* among NVs shows potentially offensive language features. Yet, silencing their *onē-kotoba* lips narrows a window of opportunity to learn about their lives outside the Ni-chōme volleyball world and hatch out ways to channel their social capital for feminism, however tangentially.

Far from deadly silent, my diary keeps the spontaneous buzzes of *onē-kotoba*. Just like my unruly diary, the potential of *onē-kotoba* contingently takes shape among its equally creative, multi-role speakers in this particular circle. Ultimately, *onē-kotoba* communication remains resistant to all-knowing, black-and-white, and proprietary theorization.

## **Conclusion**

The Ni-chōme volleyball world is pivoted on the principle of discretion. A glimpse into it sheds light on its diversity and vibrancy. Individual NVs are as diverse as Tokyo-based gay volleyball teams. NVs discreetly sustain their intimacy as they play volleyball (the nationally recognized and friendly sport) and remain distant from "out-and-proud" activism. In their diversity, NVs share a preference for straightness and pursue it through their *onē-kotoba* play.

While some scholars tend to view gay men's alignment with straightness as replication of hegemonic masculinity and limitation of political agency (e.g., Baudinette 2015, 165-275, forthcoming 2021), I have argued otherwise. Straightness, as imagined by NVs, is a playful form of masculinity colored by the dis/appearance of *onē-kotoba*, however hegemonic it might appear in the eyes of some. Admittedly, potentially discriminatory language features characterize *onē-kotoba* communication among NVs, but listening to it can help learn about their lives outside the

Ni-chōme volleyball world and find ways to relate to “others,” however tangentially.

Retrospectively, it is possible to ask whether NVW is a homonational collective of sorts. At first glance, it appears to have run in parallel to the Japanese nation-state amid US-led globalization. But answering the question is deceptively difficult given Japan’s specificity (historical background, sociolinguistic orientation, aesthetic culture, etc.: see Chapter 1), which is radically different from the allegedly already liberated, predominantly English-speaking US context out of which queer theorist Jasbir Puar has formulated the notion of “homonationalism”: a state of some homosexuals coming to place themselves inside, rather than outside, the national formation (2017, xvii-xxxvi, 1-36).<sup>153</sup>

By highlighting the resilience of the nation-state in sexual discourse, Puar has attempted to theorize the relationship between (homo)sexuality and nation in the post-9/11 age of the war on terror (ibid.). By building on the notion of “homonormative” subjects (anchored in depoliticized domestic life of consumption) (Duggan 2003, 50), Puar asserts that these subjects (liberal white queers and aspirational queers of color [i.e., model minorities]) increasingly gain recognition, legitimacy, and acceptance at the expense of “others” in the contemporary US; the rising social standing of homonormative subjects necessitates the abjection of perversely racialized terrorists (in particular Muslims) as a foil (ibid.). While the history of homonationalism in now increasingly permissive Euro-American societies is relatively short, the sociopolitical standing of coming-out in Japan appears less entrenched and the nation has rarely excluded homosexuals systematically in the first place. At the beginning, research on Japan requires the examination of such often presumed words as “visibility” and “exclusion” in queer theory.

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<sup>153</sup> According to Puar, homonationalism is a gay-inclusively patriotic shift from a homophobic past, facilitated by three primary factors: 1) US imperialism as in sexual exceptionalism, 2) regulatory queerness as in heroic resistance, and 3) aspirational whiteness as in multicultural tolerance (ibid.).

First and foremost, homonational subjects, as theorized by Puar, are implicitly predicated on the “out-and-proud” progress model (Rhaman 2000, 15-29). Yet, even in the United States, the respectable status of coming-out is not very long (Armstrong 2002, 57-69), and neither is visibility fully embraced in the countryside (Gray 2009). Meanwhile, Japan’s social control has gathered force through pro-silence aesthetics maintained through sociolinguistic and cultural practices, shaping a field uncongenial to “out-and-proud” activism.

In the case of Japan, it is intellectually and politically worth reconsidering the power dynamics around disclosure and discretion because coming-out appears to be gaining standing in the face of increasingly LGBT-concerned Japan which uses diversity as a catchword (as in the Tokyo Olympic Games). It’s now said that the *komyunitī* コミユニテイ (community) among sexual minorities exists in Japan (see Chapter 2). The presence of vocal and visible queers is hard to ignore due to the flourishing of coming-out publications by politicians (e.g., Otsuji 2005) as well as private individuals (Sunagawa & RYOJI 2007) and their families (Sambe 2014). Remarkably, after the longstanding legal silence as an unofficial means to control same-sex desiring populations, Japanese elites (national politicians, municipal officers, business leaders, etc.) are now gesturing at making Japan at least appear to be a nation accommodating to the overtly and unapologetically asserted forms of diversity, which challenge the family-obligation (Dale 2016; Kawasaka 2015; Pendleton 2015, 21-34; Shimizu 2017). The Japanese government and corporate world have begun experimenting with “LGBT-friendly” policies (e.g., diversity training on sexuality) as if to consider, at last, the pro-LGBT words of the former U.S. Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Japan Caroline Kennedy, who represented the allegedly already LGBT-inclusive US and proactively supported “out-and-proud” movements driven by such groups as TRP in Japan. Those who, including NVs, stand apart from such an

increasingly respectable ethos, seem to be in growing tension with the 21st-century Tokyo-centered Japan that is venturing to accommodate those stressing visibility at present.

Although the Japanese government today leans toward diversity promotion after a decades-long silence on same-sex sexuality under the law, it remains an ongoing debate whether same-sex sexuality itself is what has bothered those in authority, as I argued in Chapter 1 (see also Chapter 4). Japan's systematic oppression against homosexuals isn't so much "agelong" intolerance as silent suspension in that the male-dominated establishment has historically ignored same-sex sexuality by relegating it to the shadows of the state apparatus; I put the word *agelong* in quotation marks because the US history of intolerance of homosexuals is not as long-established as it is often presented in American rhetoric discursively (Chauncey 1994, 2005). Thus, Japan's shift to overt and explicitly stated lesbian and gay inclusion, if it is taking place, has a radically different contextual baggage from the US where Puar based her theory.

Maybe, homonationalism is a matter of form or degree contingent on changing national interests and social regulation, and it doesn't necessarily have to be a shift from a homophobic past; in the case of Japan, it is more accurate to say that the shift is from the tacit acceptance of homoeroticism. NVs appear silently homonational, whereas TRP staff seem so unreserved that they are "out-and-proud." Both homonationalist formations are specific to Japan, where lesbians and gays have never been able to be "outside" but not fully "inside" either, making it difficult to forge social movements (understood as oppositional action) in the Euro-American sense of the word.

And yet, what if neither NVs nor TRP staff are engaged in formations other than homonationalist ones in the first place? Asking whether they are homonationalist or not centers on my research around US English-speaking queer theory, however context-sensitive. Although

Puar herself has called for decentering US queer theory in sexuality research, her work is founded on the homolingual address prevalent in English-dominant queer studies scholarship; sexuality studies scholar Evren Savcı (2021a) has recently critiqued homolingualism in queer studies. Perhaps, my work is better off not so much searching for a decided alternative as acknowledging the difficulty of writing about sexuality in such a non-white-majority society as contemporary Japan in a globalizing world. When we insist on Japan's specificity vis-à-vis Euro-America even if it matters, the question of authenticity comes to haunt our inquiry, and it becomes difficult to discuss anyone or any group attempting to maintain autonomy from the family or state; both NVs and TRP staff are acting within a Japanese frame and neither are acting "foreign" (predominantly understood as white).<sup>154</sup> In fact, it is difficult to prove patriotism among NVs or TRP staff. The majority of NVs and TRP staff I spoke with would immediately answer that they are ambivalent about Japan, as they expressed during informal chats their appreciative yet antipathetic feelings about Japan's past LDP-led governmental policies and those outcomes. This complexity may well be studied by examining more carefully the idea of patriotism itself while forsaking attempts to frame institutional acts of ignoring as a kind of exclusion of homosexuality in Japanese history (Povinelli 2001, 2021forthcoming).

For the time being, rather than asking how close to or far from "out-and-proud politics" NVs (or TRP staff) are or what alternative they offer to it, it is more fruitful to examine

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<sup>154</sup> Savcı (2021a) insightfully points out that autonomy from kin has been theorized as "white" in much US queer studies research (e.g., Altman 1993; D'Emilio 1983a, b; Weston 1992) (61). According to Savcı, "when our critiques center on the United States and its particular history and, as a result, focus on particular understandings of whiteness as a force that has shaped subjects' proximity and distance from particular institutions, such as the family, we risk the danger of reifying, for instance, the relationship of people of color to the institution in question in our attempts to critique the Western liberal center by reducing it to whiteness. In other words, when we critique a rejection of the family for being white, are we not inevitably repeating the treatment of family as the locus of cultural difference? Are there no queers of color in America, or queers elsewhere in the world for that matter, who have complicated relationships to the sign and the institution of the family, including a plain rejection of it? And if they do, are they acting white?" (ibid.). See also Savcı (2021b) for her discussion about epistemic challenges to research on sexuality in non-Western countries, especially Turkey.

“indifference” itself more carefully and respectfully, which often receives moralistic judgment in liberally-minded feminist and queer of color scholarship. Feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe, for instance, expresses her concerns about “lack of curiosity” about something (e.g., feminism) (2004, 1-4). Such concerns are fair and indeed should deserve scholarly inquiry. Enloe appears a bit hasty, however, when she conflates indifference with political and intellectual trouble:

The moment when one becomes newly curious about something is also a good time to think about what created one’s previous *lack* of curiosity. So many power structures—inside households, within institutions, in societies, in international affairs—are dependent on our continuing lack of curiosity. “Natural,” “tradition,” “always”: each has served as a cultural pillar to prop up familial, community, national, and international power structures, imbuing them with legitimacy, with timelessness, with inevitability. Any power arrangement that is imagined to be legitimate, timeless, and inevitable is pretty well fortified. Thus we need to stop and scrutinize our lack of curiosity. We also need to be genuinely curious about others’ lack of curiosity—not for the sake of feeling self-satisfied, but for the sake of meaningfully engaging with those who take any power structure as unproblematic. (2004, 4)

When Enloe urges us to “be genuinely curious about others’ lack of curiosity,” she sees these others as “those who [presumably such individuals as non-feminists] take any power structure as unproblematic” in contrast to those curious about it (e.g., feminists). Yet, we don’t know whether lack of curiosity about, say, feminism, automatically means not taking issue with “any power structure [e.g., patriarchy].” In other words, at the beginning of the discussion, Enloe “knows” indifferent people by implicitly defining them as politically uncritical and uncommitted, rather than genuinely asking who those indifferent people are and how they experience “any power structure,” whose form, meaning, and perhaps even existence differs considerably across time and space in the first place. Although Enloe’s inclination to critique as a political engagement is

reasonable, it is another thing to preconceive indifference as a sign or evidence of complicity with existing inequality (see Chapter 4 for this point in marriage equality debates).<sup>155</sup> Here, we can follow Savcı (2021a), who argues that “instead of simply accepting critique as a queer or progressive good, we might do better [by] attending to the moments of its failure to speak to the very subjects it seeks to hail” (10). When confronted with indifferent people, we can ask why some remain indifferent to particular issues over others, however uncomfortable it might feel especially when critics recognize their own devotion (whether it be feminism or gay liberation) is being ignored.

To sum up, although Puar’s concept “homonationalism” is a useful starting point for discussion, it benefits from context-based critique (e.g., Allen 2013; Atshan 2020; Savcı 2021b) as Japan (a sexually indulgent retainer of the US empire in Asia) remains a provocative site for theorizing about the present symbiosis between state governance and homosexuality. The idea of homonationalist articulations is founded on the “out-and-proud” model, whose seeming universality needs sustained investigation. Such investigation is possible if we respectfully analyze what appears to be indifferent to, uncritical of, or even complicit with the object(s) of our critique, such as NVW.

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<sup>155</sup> We might need to rethink “critique” broadly (e.g., Atshan 2020; Fassin 2017). Although NVW might appear to have little to do with space for constructed intellectual or political criticisms, many NVs casually debate contentious issues, such as Japan’s militarism or international terrorism, using rather playful expressions through “jokes” rather than “arguments” as their mode of critique. “*Eroterorizumu* (erotic terrorism)” is one exemplary term which NVs sometimes use to express their sentiment that it’s more productive to polish one’s sexual appeal and silence others than faultfinding (which they seem to equate critique with). The word was originally coined by Taiwanese talent Yinling in her 2008 publication in which she identifies herself as *eroterorisuto* (erotic terrorist). The modality of critique seems more diverse in everyday life than it is formally defined and practiced in academia, which itself seems to be accustomed to a particular mode of critique over other competing ones within its world.



## Chapter 4

### Marriage Equality: Disagreements

#### Introduction

As of today (September 2021), same-sex marriage has yet to be legalized in Japan. Its legalization necessitates radical reinterpretations of, and attendant modifications to, the *minpō* 民法 (Civil Code) and the *koseki hō* 戸籍法 (Family Registration Law) within the Constitution of Japan (effective 1947); constitutional revisions are unnecessary. To this date, the Japanese government has hesitated to alter family-related laws, even if gesturing toward consideration of same-sex sexuality.

This chapter juxtaposes Tokyo Rainbow Pride (TRP) and the Ni-chōme volleyball world (NVW) vis-à-vis one particular issue that directly affects same-sex desiring populations: marriage equality. I situate my discussion about these two groups against the backdrop of increasing concerns for marriage equality, which is often fought for in the name of anti-homophobia in and beyond Japan. Below, I first describe how TRP and NVW converge and diverge in their ongoing engagement with lifestyle diversification, discuss relational options available for same-sex couples, and then analyze disagreements as expressed by Ni-chōme volleyballers (NVs) about marriage equality activism as pursued by TRP and other advocacy groups. Despite little objection to same-sex marriage itself, NVs generally show reluctance to conflate marriage equality with anti-homophobic resistance, expressing reservations about pro-gay-marriage campaigns. These, as often rhetorically and politically positioned as anti-homophobic actions, have little space for positions other than alignment or opposition.

#### 1. Lifestyle Diversification: “Out-and-Proud” or Discreet Promotion

Both TRP staff and NVs wholeheartedly celebrate ongoing lifestyle diversification in Japan. Yet these two groups contrast in that TRP outspokenly promotes diversity through its nationwide

activism while NVs discreetly welcome the current condition of increasingly lessened family-obligation. Furthermore, although TRP decidedly calls for marriage equality in Japan, many NVs remain personally distant from the institution of marriage (whether heterosexual or gay) even if they support their (heterosexual) siblings or friends performing their family-obligations. To compare and contrast the two groups meaningfully regarding their contestations over family relations, I begin with a review of marriage in Japan.

### *Marriage in Japan*

The institution of marriage resiliently functions as a commonsense marker for entry into adulthood in Japan (Lunsing 2001). Sociolegal conditions around the institution are summarized by Japan scholar Claire Maree as follows:

With the promulgation of the Constitution of Japan in 1946 (effective 1947), marriage was legally defined in Article 24 as being entered into [only] according to the free will of both sexes (*kon'in wa, ryōsei no gōi nomi ni motozuite seiritsu* [婚姻は両性の合意のみに基づいて成立]). The Civil Code was also revised in 1947 to define marriage in more egalitarian, if heterocentric, terms. Partners register their application to marry at their local government office as “the one who will be husband” and the “one who will be wife.” Once registered, the partners take up the position of husband and/or wife on a family register (*koseki*) wherein they must share the family name of the primary registrant (*hittōsha*). The primary registrant (*hittōsha*) may be either the husband or wife, but it is more common for the couple to adopt the man’s family name. (2017, 215-6)

As Maree introduces the short, albeit critical, phrase in the Japanese law— “the free will of both sexes”—, contestation over the interpretation of “both sexes” has been the core of marriage equality debates in Japan. Gay-marriage supporters argue that it’s possible to interpret the contested phrase as “two persons” by taking “sex” as individuality rather than as literal

biological sex strictly. Opponents subscribe to the conventional understanding of the phrase, “one man and one woman,” as the Civil Code and the Family Registration Law indicate the term “husband and wife.” The Japanese government has pursued the latter line of argument as part of its deferment strategy (KYODO 2018). Despite the ambiguity of the phrase “two sexes,” it’s reasonable to assume that those in authority had heterosexuality in mind when undertaking democratic reforms in the immediate postwar years. We can condemn such a past act of ignoring same-sex desiring individuals as evidence of homophobia retrospectively, since it shapes the arguably homophobic present. Throughout, however, I refrain from such condemnation for the sake of delving into issues the word “homophobia” might obscure.

Today, marriage as a locus for middle-class nuclear family-making (e.g., Vogel 1963) appears ever more destabilized in reality and practice alongside lifestyle diversification in Japan (Aoyama et al. 2015; Kawano et al. 2014; Ronald & Alexy 2011). 27-year-old teammate Masao once expressed his lifestyle design:

家族観が急速に変化している時代なので、女性との結婚は全く考えていません。両親にもそう伝えてあります。今の所何も言ってきません。カミングアウトしてないですし、おそらくバレていないので、独身でいたいのだと思っているはずです。最近同性婚を日本でも的な運動に関するニュースよく見聞きします。反対というわけではないですが、権利を下さいという押しの強い運動にはあまり関わりたくないですかね、参加している人に恩義ありませんし。それにそもそも暇がないので。

The idea of family is quickly changing today, so heterosexual marriage isn’t at all in my life plan. I’ve already told my parents about my indifference to heterosexual marriage. So far they haven’t said anything in particular. I’m not out, and I’m not obvious either, so they must be thinking that I prefer being single. Recently I’ve often seen and heard the news featuring demands for same-sex marriage in Japan. I’m not necessarily against [same-sex marriage], but I don’t want to be associated with

rights-demanding pushy movements. I don't feel indebted to those involved. And I don't have much free time.

Masao articulates his relative indifference to marriage, both heterosexual and gay. His stance resonates with many NVs in the context of rapidly changing family relations in contemporary Japan. Except for a few NVs interested in marrying for various reasons (e.g., procreation), most NVs don't name marriage as part of their life plans. In the case of Masao, however, his parents maintain a relatively hands-off attitude to their son; I've heard many older NVs, especially ones in their thirties and above, complain about persistent parental pressures for heterosexual marriage. As far as I know, a decent number of NVs remain "single" in the eyes of their family members rather than explicitly rejecting heterosexuality like many TRP staff. At the same time, some NVs also suspect that they are *barebare* (obvious) without explicit communication or even already *bareteru* (known) due to past inadvertently self-outing incidents; confirmation requires family testimonies though.

Just like Masao says that he "[doesn't] have much free time," both NVs and TRP staff are no way free of chronic busyness in family-oriented Japan. NVs, many of whom are bachelors, "squeeze (*nejikomu*)" a weekly volleyball gathering into their schedules and stand apart from organized pro-same-sex-marriage demands by activists, including TRP staff, who "happily devote their limited spare time (*yorokonde kagirareta jikan wo sasageru*)" to activism. At a fundamental level, lack of time appears to play a major role in maintaining their affective and political distance, aside from competing factors (personality difference, education, etc.) for their disagreements over the issue of marriage equality.

### *The Current State of Heterosexual Marriage*

Heterosexual marriage is in trouble at least from the perspective of the family-oriented state

concerned about population maintenance (Japan's population estimated at 125.6 million as of 2021).<sup>156</sup> According to the 2019 national report on countermeasures to the falling birthrate (the Cabinet Office, 13-8), the marriage numbers have shown a downward trend since their peak in 1972 (1,099,984). The figure for 2017 is considerably lower with 606,866. The marriage ratio per 1,000 citizens for the same year is 4.9, which is roughly 5% lower than that in the early 1970s.

The percentage of unmarried people has dramatically risen for both men and women; bachelorhood has consistently risen during the observed period (from 1947 to 2017) while women's unwed tendency has accelerated since 1990. In 1985, 60.6% of men between the ages of 25-29 remained single, then the figure decreased as men became older (28.2% for the 30-34 year old group and 14.2% for the 35-39 year old group). Thirty years later, in 2015, the figure had risen to 72.7%, 47.1%, and 35.0% for men in the respective age ranges. As for women, 30.6% of females in the 25-29 age group remained unmarried (10.4% in the 30-34 and 6.6% in the 35-39 age groups). In 2015, the figure hit 61.3%, 34.6%, and 23.9% in each of the three age categories. When it comes to lifetime singlehood at age 50, it was 1.7% for men and 3.3% for women in 1970. However, the figure had significantly increased by 2015 (23.4% for men and 14.1% for women). These statistics demonstrate the decline of heterosexual marriage in practice.

The decreasing number of heterosexual marriages, however, doesn't automatically seem to mean the weakening of its ideological hold, as seen in the 2015 survey on marriage consciousness among those in the age of 18-34 (the Cabinet Office, 2019, 18-20). 85.7% of male respondents answered that they would get married someday, whereas 89.3% of female ones did so, signaling the resilient attraction and felt necessity of heterosexual marriage among those

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<sup>156</sup> Nationwide census data are managed by such governmental agencies as the Statistics Bureau of Japan (<https://www.stat.go.jp>) and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (<http://www.mhlw.go.jp>).

surveyed. The survey result gives the impression that marriage has been not so much rejected entirely as delayed for various reasons, especially in light of the predominant idea among both sexes who are single that there is “no suitable partner” (ibid.).

Still, it’s difficult to gauge the reality of *mikonsha* 未婚者 (not-yet-married people)—are they *just delaying marriage?*—because the national survey design is heteronormative. For reasons for their single status, participants are allowed to pick three answer options out of the prepared (and ideologically inflected) ones, which include “too young,” “lack of money,” “not yet necessary” among others. The survey doesn’t ask whether participants proactively reject heterosexual marriage (i.e., “never marrying”) and if so, why. Participants might also seek, or have already engaged in, forms of intimacy other than heterosexual marriage (e.g., “in a lesbian/gay relationship”). These practices, however, remain out of the survey design.

Through such a heteronormative statistical process, the national survey ignores populations, for whom heterosexual marriage is already, and perhaps continues to be, not included in their life plan. The heteronormative questionnaire format works for those in authority, who would rather sweep marriage-rejecting populations under the rug. These populations are a source of concern to Japan confronted with socioeconomically alarming depopulation and ageing (see below).

According to 59-year-old Kubo-san, who has determined to remain single:

両親は既に亡くなったのだけれども、結婚の事は習慣的にちょこちょこ聞いてきたよね。いい加減にしてと感じていたのは事実なんだけど、両親なりに心配してくれていたと思う、寂しくないかって。孫の顔見れないということもあつただろうし、それはハッキリ言っ  
てこなかったけどね。結婚と育児が絶対義務の世代の人達だから。自分の場合は、今同居し  
ている姉に子どもがいる、離婚したけどね。まあでも子どもを持たないってことにはどう  
しても後ろめたさを感じてしまうよね。申しわけないっていうか。独身であることそれ自

体にそういった感覚はないの、でも親孝行してあげられたかと聞かれると疑問が残る。

My late parents had a habit of asking me about marriage. Honestly, I did feel bothered, but they were perhaps worried about me, whether I would be lonely or not [when old]. They also must have had their own reasons, like being unable to see grandkids, although they didn't say that explicitly. My parents were part of the generation when marriage and child-rearing were nothing but obligatory. In my case, my older sister has kids, though she's divorced and lives with me. Well, I cannot help having a sense of guilt about not having kids. I just feel bad. I don't feel sorry about my being single, but I'm not sure if I've been able to be filial to my parents.

In making sense of his decision to be unmarried, Kubo-san attempts to be in the shoes of his deceased parents, for whom heterosexual marriage and child rearing were “nothing but obligatory.” Although self-affirmation of singlehood doesn't liberate Kubo-san from “a sense of guilt about” no direct involvement in procreation and parenting, his sister has, luckily, produced offspring (if not to the Kubo family), having enabled their parents to see grandchildren. I know Kubo-san treasures his time with his niece and nephew despite little social recognition of his indirect contribution to raising a younger generation expected to bear the future of Japan.

Such a decidedly single position as Kubo-san's, however indirectly family-minded, is a source of anxiety at present, since national concerns about Japan's ageing society and falling birthrate have been around for the past few decades. The 2020 White Paper on the Ageing Society and the 2020 Annual Report on the Declining Birthrate, both published by the Cabinet Office, statistically warn against the not-so-happy state of improved longevity combined with baby bust. In 2016, national male and female longevity was 80.98 and 87.14 respectively; healthspan was 72.14 for men and 74.79 for women (The White Paper on the Ageing Society 2020, 3-6). Although enhanced life and health expectancy in and of itself is great news, it becomes a concern given Japan's steadily declining actual and total birth rates. According to the

2020 Annual Report on the Declining Birthrate (4-5), during 1947 and 1949 (the first baby boom period), 2.7 million babies were born and the total birth rate was over 4.4. During 1971 and 1974 (the second baby boom period), 2.1 million babies started life and the total birth rate was 2.1, which is less than half of the first baby boom period figure. Both actual and total birth rates had decreased from 1975 until 1989, when the latter rate hit 1.57 (known as the “1.57 shock”). Ever since 1990 onward, the figure had, overall, moderately declined with some fluctuations; it was 1.26 in 2005 and 1.43 in 2017. Japan’s decreasing number of children is an issue, while the senior population is quickly expanding; there are 35.9 million people over the age of 65 (the population aging rate being 28.4%), and it is expected by 2036 to hit 33.3% (one per three persons over the age of 65) (The White Paper on the Ageing Society 2020, 3).

As shown statistically above, it is difficult and even optimistic to assume an increase in the number of heterosexual marriages in Japan. Many NVs, as spearheaded by my oldest and retired teammate Kubo-san, might not be going to contribute directly to population growth in Japan. Yet they have already found their own ways to engage with the younger generation (kin, friends’ kids, etc.) they are related to. As for TRP, although the majority of the core staff decisively leave their family-obligations behind, they highly value the institution of marriage itself as the organization is committed to marriage equality. At present, the Japanese government is faced with difficult questions, including distribution of (elderly) care burden and provision for population maintenance. Although the LDP-led government has long been aware of the untenability of Japan’s extant social welfare and pension system (Sugimoto 2014, 85-93), it has yet to come up with compelling visions and policies for assisting Japan’s changing demographic landscape.

*TRP and NVW on the Issue of Lifestyle Diversification*



Contemporary Japanese family reality does not neatly fit the ideologically lingering filial middle-class nuclear household model. Although the model underpinned, and was reinforced by, Japan's postwar reconstruction and socioeconomic development, its unattainability began looming large through Japan's recession in the closing decade of the last century (Alexy & Ronald 2011; Aoyama et al. 2015, 1-5; Kawano et al. 2014, 1-24). The difficulty of fulfilling family-obligation is now widely recognized, and diverse family articulations in Japan (single-parent household, international marriage, etc.) have fully come to the fore in the new millennium (ibid.). Although an increase in the number of single-parent households (i.e., divorce) is not observed between modern and contemporary Japan (Sugimoto 2014, 167-8), its social recognition has been promoted as part of lifestyle diversification (Ueno 2007).<sup>157</sup> While lifestyle diversification is explicitly embraced and believed to affect Japan positively by TRP staff, NVs variously interpret the destabilization of the "Japanese family."

On the one hand, TRP organizationally considers lifestyle diversification, in particular alternative family-making practices among LGBTs, to be productive for Japan. What TRP stresses through its promotion of diversity, however, appears to be primarily same-sex and queer *couplehood*, as celebrated in its annual event. This is not to say that TRP downplays singlehood; TRP staff individually do express sympathy for the difficulty of being unmarried and childless in family-oriented Japan. Yet, TRP's organizational emphasis has consistently been on affirming the livelihood of same-sex and other queer couples as a historically ignored yet vibrant part of family-oriented Japan. As often mentioned in conversations during social gatherings or

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<sup>157</sup> The predominant reasons for this low divorce rate include economic considerations and child rearing. It is difficult especially for women to raise kids in a single-parent household. Because the family registration system strictly distinguishes between children born in lawful marriage and those born out of wedlock in terms of rights (Sugimoto 2014, 166), unmarried pregnant women more often than not have to decide on either marriage or abortion, rather than aiming for single parenting.

organizational meetings I attended, many TRP staff currently have partners or are seeking to be in a relationship other than heterosexual. Among many LGBT-related issues (e.g., school bullying), TRP has proactively featured the topic of relationship and marriage in its official yearly magazine BEYOND since its inaugural issue in 2015.

TRP is publicly proud of its organizational embrace of diversity as practiced by its staff. Consider Sugiyama Fumino, who is a female-to-male transgender activist. Sugiyama acts as a spokesperson on transgender issues in Japanese mainstream media and is in the forefront of alternative family practices. More specifically, Sugiyama has become a “father,” as his partner had a baby in 2018 after having receiving sperm donation from their longtime friend and gay activist Matsunaka Gon (Furuta 2019). Other TRP members like to call Sugiyama “a celebrity activist,” as he does a lot of media work by appearing on television shows and giving public lectures. Although Sugiyama is an exception in terms of media exposure, other TRP staff are equally committed to, and take pride in, their diverse relationally adaptive practices: see a subsequent section for marriage workarounds.

On the other hand, NVW is a bit more divided on the interpretation of increasing freedom. While NVs appreciate the increasing presence of singlehood as part of lifestyle diversification, a few, in particular ones already married heterosexually or seeking to do so, express a range of somewhat wistful concerns; NVW has accommodated marriage-seeking players as well as married and allegedly married ones. Although no one in particular discredits the increasingly acceptable status of singlehood, female-spouse seekers often worry about such issues as educationally-driven financial insecurity or deeply-rooted economic expectations placed on men. These NVs tend to view the present as a moment of frustration by pointing to the existing,

arguably widening socioeconomic gap (Hashimoto 2018; Ishida 2001; Ishida & David 2011).<sup>158</sup>

Although the majority of NVs genuinely appreciate the growing acceptance of singlehood in Japan, 40-year-old Satoru-san, a married NV, has once told me about a sense of slight sadness about an increasing number of people who don't find conjugal and parental life attractive. Satoru-san plays for the team KO, but he currently lives abroad for his work. Satoru-san is a typical breadwinner husband and father supporting his whole family in Canada. Satoru-san brings his wife and kid to team activity whenever the family is in Tokyo. V6 had a practice match with KO in the summer of 2018, when Satoru-san was on a business trip. According to Satoru-san:

物心つく以前から同性への性的興味は自覚していて、自身の事はゲイだと認識しています。ですが女性との結婚と子育てに強い願望があって、同性愛とそれらは全く葛藤起こさなかったんです。両親は私の結婚生活をももちろん喜んでいるんですが、それ以上に私自身が本当に嬉しいです。妻も私がゲイであること知っていますし、話し合いを通じてお互い家庭と息抜き含めたプライベートのルールを作ってうまくやっています。子育ては学べることが多いので、どのような形であれ皆一度関わってみてほしいと感じています。ストレートの方はもちろん、こっちの方でもチャンスがあればぜひ結婚して、子どもをと思っています。独身子なしばかりも何か悲しいかなと、ただ独身が悪いというわけではないのですが。

I've recognized my same-sex desire since early on and I identify myself as gay. But I've really wanted

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<sup>158</sup> Some economically unstable NVs, especially ones working as non-regular workers, similarly tend to frame the present somewhat negatively, but most don't complain as they have chosen such employment status following their lifestyle ideals (e.g., relative flexibility in requesting paid leaves). Not all of these NVs prefer demanding workplace improvement publicly. The potentially discreditable label "*urusaihito* うるさい人 (a complainer)" appears to inhibit these NVs. Even if at the risk of sounding demanding, however, they might come to find the importance and even necessity of direct action due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has shaken the corporate world now undergoing a series of big layoffs. Those who have prioritized personal life through non-regular employment are easy targets as managers can use the pretext of such "selfishness" in a moment of crisis although they accept it in more normal times. One example is Take-san in his later forties, who received the unannounced deposit of termination payment to his bank account by the employer—as if the company wishes and forces his early retirement.

to get married and have kids, which hasn't at all caused any psychological conflict with my same-sex sexuality. My parents are happy about my marriage, but it has made me happy more than anyone else. My wife knows that I'm gay. We get by through talks, creating rules for our family and respective private matters including recreation. Since parenting is eye-opening, I'd like everybody, not only straights but also gays, to experience it if chance should serve. It's, you know, sad to see single and childless people, although singlehood isn't necessarily bad.

Satoru-san and his wife maintain privacy within their domestic life as the two explicitly negotiate “through talks,” thereby “creating rules for [their] family and respective private matters.” For the married couple, not everything is transparent, but what remains outside the purview of the household is still consensually located within their personal relationship despite its opacity. Also, Satoru-san creates moments for his single and gay teammates to experience quasi-parenting, however momentarily, as in a weekend practice when he is present. Such an action at first glance might appear to normalize domestic life, since he doesn't stress the potential of singlehood as one of socially non-mainstream (albeit increasingly common) actions (Kelly & White 2006, 65-6, 73-5). On second thought, we might as well refrain from judging Satoru-san's experimentation as normative (whether hetero or homo) in that its implications have yet to be grasped carefully in demographically changing Japan. Importantly, Satoru-san doesn't deprecate single life, and parenting can indeed be “eye-opening” as both altruism and self-respect, rather than one or the other, is underscored by some NVs who interact with kids on a regular basis (e.g., Kubo-san). In order to develop a critique of such a family-oriented nation as Japan, therefore, we would be better off analyzing the public commingling of the married people and singles that has been taking place through a seemingly private gathering (e.g., gay volleyball).

28-year-old Ryūnosuke, my former teammate, is a married NV as well, but he primarily

relies on his wife financially, unlike Satoru-san. Ryūnosuke moved to Kyoto when he got married in 2017 with his current wife, one of the fervent female clients of the Shinjuku Nichōme gay bar he had owned. Ryūnosuke was (and still is) financially unstable due to the volatile nature of the bar business and his self-admitted (and infamous) trait of being far from careful about money. But his current wife has encouraged and supported him throughout. As she runs her own beauty-related business in Kyoto, Ryūnosuke decided to relocate himself upon getting married. His wife has helped him start a gay bar there. The two now have a two-year-old son, whom Ryūnosuke cherishes:

子どもがとにかく欲しかったんだよね、ペットみたいで可愛いじゃん。結婚は、めちゃくちゃしたいっていうわけでもなかったんだけど、自分でいいって言う人がいるならいいかなと思ってノリでした。バリバリ働いてて金銭的なこと任せられるだらしない男の世話好きな子なの。だめ男甘やかすのがたまらないんだって。かつゲイがいいっていう子だから、無理して騙しているっていう形でもないしね。お互い自然体でいられてるよ。どっちも両親とはもともと距離あるから、面倒な問題もないしね。

I've really wanted to have kids, who are like cute little pets. I didn't necessarily want to get married, but I've just gone with the flow, following my current wife who says she is okay with me. She's a career woman, who is financially secure and loves mothering a lazy guy. She has a thing for indulging a bad guy. And she's a fag-hag, so it's not like I'm tricking her. We can be as we are. Neither of us are so close to our parents, so there're no cumbersome household issues.

Despite his genuine desire for kids, Ryūnosuke originally wasn't interested in marriage itself. Yet he has ultimately “gone with the flow,” as his current wife is a “fag-hag,” willing to commit herself to a man with an unstable job and carefree personality. However opportunistic Ryūnosuke might appear (and he is in a way), gay identification as well financial leniency has served his

sexual capital (Green 2014, 1-23, 25-56) for heterosexual marriage.<sup>159</sup> Aside from his parentally possessive take on kids as “cute little pets,” Ryūnosuke has been cosseting their son, while he, as well as his wife, places a distance from their respective families. Although their marriage appears ostensibly quite filial in family-oriented Japan, Ryūnosuke says that neither he or his wife has chosen to be together for their parents.

Though fewer in number than those who have little interest in heterosexual marriage, there are NVs currently seeking a female spouse, such as 25-year-old Takuma:

両親のためにも自分のためにも女性と結婚したいんだけど、難しいだろうなと思います。きっとプロフ的に良いて言ってくれる子が見つかるかどうか。見た目もこの通りそんなによくないし、サービス業なので収入的にもたくさんあるわけではないし。低収入は仕方ないですよ、だって低学歴ですもん。両親だって優秀で高収入ではないですし、見た目も似ているんですから。とりあえず結婚生活ではやっぱり男らしく家族のことは支えたいなと思います。バイというわけではないんですが、女性との関係も自分の同性愛と問題なく両立できそうです。男ほど欲情しませんが、嫌悪感で無理なわけではないので。

I want to get married for not only my parents but also myself, but perhaps it's difficult. I'm not sure if there's anyone who is fine with my profile. I don't look so cool, and I don't make a bucket of money either as I work in the service industry. My income is low, which is due to my not-so-great educational background. My parents aren't really either smart or high-earning, and we resemble each other. If married, I would like to support a family like a man. I'm not bisexual but I find a heterosexual relationship compatible with my same-sex sexuality. I feel less an attraction for women than for men but it's not that I have absolute disgust [at women] and cannot [interact with them].

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<sup>159</sup> According to sociologist Adam Green, sexual capital refers to embodied attributes (appearance, personality trait, etc.), which individuals often combine to achieve a particular personhood through their desirability negotiation constitutive of a power-laden social field (Green 2014, 15-6, 48-50).

For Takuma, although marriage is a potential source of happiness for both himself and his parents, his alleged undesirability stands in the way. His circumstances are perceived of in a familial cycle, as Takuma views his sexual capital compromised by his mediocre appearance as well as his unimpressive academic credentials that have predetermined his current low-paying job. Takuma might be better off with a financially stable woman as in Ryūnosuke's case, but he wants to entertain the conventionally masculine gender performance of a breadwinning husband.

In fact, the LDP-led Japanese government continues to stress family-obligation ideologically and it has yet to invest in the potential of, by giving public recognition and support to, already existing alternative family formations. Given the persistence of Japan's family-oriented nature of governance, it is no wonder that anthropologists Richard Ronald and Alison Alexy assert that the *ie* (family) system “remains a formidable cultural notion and normative social influence, despite the ways in which realities of contemporary family life may be quite removed from this model” (2011, 17). Indeed, “the realities of contemporary family life” are by far messier due to the availability of various ad hoc means to maintain same-sex intimacy.

## **2. Marriage Workarounds: Adult Adoption, Notarized Deeds, Partnership Certification**

In the background of the heteronormative state apparatus in Japan, same-sex couples have conventionally had to rely on a couple of compromises. One is adult adoption; the other is notarized deeds. These two methods have both advantages and disadvantages. At any rate, neither adult adoption nor notarized deeds are on equal footing with heterosexual marriage in terms of privileges (and obligations). Additionally, an increasing number of municipal governments recognize the existence of same-sex couples in their local areas through same-sex partnership certification, which is considered by activist groups, including TRP, to be a step toward the legalization of same-sex marriage in Japan.

### *Adult Adoption*

*Yōshiengumi* 養子縁組 (adult adoption) allows same-sex couples to maintain, however insecurely, their relationships as a “bypassing” strategy “intrinsically linked to continuation of the family household and operates within the family registry system” (Maree 2004, 543): see chapter 1 for the Family Registration Law. The obvious benefits of adult adoption for same-sex couples are family allowances as parent and dependent, hospital visitation, and inheritance rights. An attendant repercussion is that each partner potentially gets in competition with the other’s families over property distribution. Also, although adult adoption can be dissolved upon agreement between the two, the former adopter and adoptee will not be allowed to contract marriage later on; in other words, they cannot get married legally when same-sex marriage is permitted (Shimizu 2008, 104). Additionally, when a Japanese person adopts a non-Japanese partner, the foreign partner has to be naturalized by abandoning their original nationality; Japan doesn’t permit dual citizenship. Such a complication has forced lesbian activist and writer Izumo Marou to give up this option, when she was in search of a means to secure the resident status of her partner (linguist Claire Maree) who was then residing as a student in Japan, as reflected in an interview (Akasugi et al. 2004, 18-32; see also Izumo 1993, 21-2). Aside from these potential disadvantages, application is quite easy and simple, as Maree touches on logistical procedures required at a local municipal office:

Registering such an adoption with the municipal office is not an overtly complicated process if both parties are legal adults. All that is required is for completed adoption documents to be stamped with both party’s official seals in the presence of two adult witnesses. The elder of the two is required to become the parent and the younger the child. From the day the document has been accepted, the two can use the same surname and are legally recognized as family. (Maree 2004, 544)



There are personal accounts from same-sex couples, who have chosen adult adoption (Akasugi et al. 2004, 36-58). Some public figures also indirectly reveal their same-sex engagement by alluding to “parental-child” relationships with their respective partners. Gay activist and writer Ryū Susumu, for instance, dedicates his publication to his younger partner, who is addressed as his “*musuko* 息子 [son]” in its afterword, as if to expose their legal arrangement (2010, 197). Yet it remains unknown approximately how many couples have chosen adult adoption to maintain same-sex relationships.

As far as TRP core staff and NVs I know are concerned, none of the individuals who are in a relationship have arranged adult adoption, the availability of which isn’t always known outside the activist circle in the first place.<sup>160</sup> I often heard many NVs ask “Can we do such a thing?” during fieldwork. As a matter of fact, few have expressed interest, perhaps because they have so far been content with their separate residential arrangements or discreet cohabitation. In the latter case, at least one of the partners is usually from the Greater Tokyo Area and pretends to live in his natal family home without changing his resident register. Good or bad, many NVs tend to be not so much future-oriented by planning ahead (for moments like a partner being hospitalized) as focused on the now by worrying little about such matters.

### *Notarized Deeds*

Along with adult adoption, *kōseishōsho* 公正証書 (notarized deeds) are another possible means to maintain same-sex relationships. Unmarried couples can formally declare a joint living agreement and have it registered as a notary deed. Such official agreements help prioritize,

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<sup>160</sup> Nonetheless, participation in activism alone does not seem to lead to the acquisition of knowledge about marriage workarounds, including adult adoption for queer family-making, as some (longtime) TRP staff at a sectional level were not familiar with this option.

though are not able to guarantee, personal wishes in case of medical and other emergencies, when partners are placed under the care of their immediate family (Maree 2004, 546). Notarized deeds, however, are equally insecure as adult adoption, since “agreements drawn up between same-sex partners are yet to be tested in a court of law” (ibid.). Furthermore, executing notarized deeds can be costly due to not only processing fees but also incidental charges including hiring lawyers for preparation (Shimizu 2008, 103); in contrast, adult adoption (as well as marriage) doesn’t require any logistical or financial burdens other than processing paperwork. The Japanese-Australian lesbian couple Izumo Marou and Claire Maree are known for their joint living agreement (see also Izumo 1993 and Izumo & Maree 2000 for their autobiographies); see Akasugi et al. (2004) for other same-sex couples. Like adult adoption, the means of notarized deeds had been largely unknown to many NVs until our discussion, and it hardly interests them; they tend to view it as a rather cumbersome procedure, something that is of little use to mull over.

Given the availability of adult adoption and notarized deeds as compromisingly discreet schemes to sustain same-sex intimacy, it’s admittedly hasty for TRP to assert “lack of rights” among LGBTs in Japan in their marriage equality advocacy; queers are unequally placed in the Japanese sociolegal structure though. TRP considers marriage equality to be not so much a demand for special minority rights or luxuries as an attempt to “*mainasu wo zero ni suru* マイナスをゼロにする (eliminate lack),” as expressed in TRP’s 2018 annual event announcement. Yet, “*mainasu* (lack)” is a misnomer as there are ad hoc means available for queers, however compromising. Rather than discussing domestic complexity, TRP more often than not cites relevant and progressive overseas examples (e.g., Taiwan and the US). As a strategy before “allies” swelling in size exponentially, TRP organizationally prioritized an important, albeit

apparently short-term, goal of the legalization of same-sex marriage in Japan by minimizing the exposure of already convoluted realities.

### *Same-Sex Partnership Certification*

It was Shibuya, one of the most affluent wards in Tokyo, that embarked on the first institutional attempt to recognize same-sex couplehood in Japan. Since Shibuya became a pioneer in 2015, more and more municipalities have made a similar administrative move.<sup>161</sup> With as-yet-to-be-legalized same-sex marriage, same-sex partnership certification is the only authoritative, if limited, means to affirm same-sex couples publicly.

Attempts to promote and protect same-sex couplehood have been gaining steam for the past few years, especially since Shibuya Ward's municipal ordinance to recognize same-sex couples in 2015. As part of the city's gender-sensitive ordinance on diversity, Shibuya has taken sexuality into account and decided to offer partnership certificates to same-sex couples by regarding their relationships as socially, if not yet legally, comparable to heterosexual ones. Shibuya's milestone move has been followed by many municipal bodies across the Japanese archipelago, including Setagaya Ward in Tokyo, Iga City in Mie, Takarazuka City in Hyogo, Sapporo City in Hokkaido, and Naha City in Okinawa. Despite locally specific interests and corresponding differences in the degree of assigning a priority on sexual orientation, these municipalities share the idea of diversity, which resonates with Japan's increasing interest in promoting itself as a diversity-accommodating nation on the global stage.

There are two primary contingencies attendant on partnership certification: 1) the creation of notarized deeds regarding joint living agreement and 2) the registration of notarized deeds

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<sup>161</sup> Same-sex couplehood was highlighted by a symbolic lesbian wedding during TRP's 2015 annual event (see Chapter 2I). Lesbian weddings had in fact attracted attention from national media, especially through a 2013 one, which was held at Tokyo Disney Resort as part of social media advocacy for gay consumption and marriage.

attesting to agreement on mutual voluntary guardianship (Esumuraruda & KIRA 2015, 51). Unlike adult adoption, obtaining a partnership certificate doesn't ensure any rights as a family. Yet, it is the one and only option currently available in Japan that explicitly recognizes same-sex couples as they are; its psychological impacts (e.g., dignity) on certified individuals cannot be overestimated. Although preparing notarized deeds costs a good round sum, it serves as a midway choice for same-sex couples until the legalization of same-sex marriage; when it actualizes, transition would be logistically smooth.

The approval and implementation of Shibuya's same-sex partnership certification are a product of a chain of encounters between many exceptionally talented and politically committed individuals dating back to 2005 (Esumuraruda & KIRA 2015, 8-99).<sup>162</sup> These individuals included the current TRP co-representative and transgender activist Sugiyama Fumino and the former Shibuya-Ward assembly member and current mayor Hasebe Ken. Despite their differing backgrounds, what they have in common is an aspiration to drive forward social projects for minorities under the liberal framework of diversity in Japan, where human rights have been considered along the line of such social identities as gender, disability, and former outcast class, but not sexuality (e.g., the *danjo kyōdō sankaku shakai kihon hō* 男女共同参画社会基本法 [Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society], the *shōgaisha kenri jōyaku* 障害者権利条約 [Rights of Persons with Disabilities], and the *buraku sabetsu kaishō suishin hō* 部落差別解消推進法 [Act on the Promotion of the Elimination of Buraku Discrimination]).<sup>163</sup>

Notably, however, liberal rights-seeking calls for LGBT inclusion in the name of diversity

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<sup>162</sup> In addition to Shibuya Ward, Setagaya Ward is also one of the earliest to allow same-sex partnership certificates in Tokyo. Where Kamikawa Aya, a male-to-female transgender ward council officer, serves, Shibuya-Ward has been proactive in addressing sexual minority issues. Both Shibuya and Setagaya are highly affluent wards.

<sup>163</sup> It's difficult to discuss LGBT rights altogether in Japan, as each group has its relatively distinct history (see chapter II). For instance, the Gender Identity Disorder Act (effective 2004) is a significant measure for transgender persons in terms of their rights; changing legal sex, however, remains inhumanely difficult due to strict screening. In contrast, lesbians and gays, let alone bisexuals, are ignored by the current Japanese law.

has been in tension with, if not entirely negligent of, issues of class and capital(ism), as Shibuya has continued gentrification in the shadow of such a landmark event as the inception of same-sex partnership certification. In the same year (2015) that Shibuya officially began issuing same-sex partnership certificates, the municipal administration made a further step in its cosmopolitan town-making project. More specifically, the Shibuya municipal administration enlisted cooperation of the Mitsui Fudosan Co., a major real estate developer, in order to gentrify Miyashita Park, a public area known as home to the homeless, and press forward development plans along with the longtime sponsor NIKE (Kubota 2021, 1005).<sup>164</sup> Although the Shibuya Ward mayor Hasebe Ken expresses his willingness to support the homeless, including youth who take refuge at an Internet café (the so-called Internet café refugees), he equivocates about the root problem of socioeconomic disparity and encroaching poverty among citizens.

Shibuya Ward's liberal promotion of diversity and inclusion in fact fits the general direction of national politics dominated by the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP), even if the Japanese government remains far more wary about overt reference to sexual orientation than Shibuya Ward. The LDP, a conservative political party, has exercised and maintained considerable control over national politics since the end of WWII (see chapter 1). In terms of sexual regulation, the LDP has been quite consistent in that it has virtually foregrounded heterosexuality and kept silent on its shadowy counterpart, same-sex sexuality. Such a heteronormative approach still characterizes the LDP, although it is now forced to at least break

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<sup>164</sup> According to urban design scholar Kubota Aya, Miyashita Park has been a site of negotiations between multiple actors, such as ward residents (including the poor), artists, and authorities ever since it opened as a locally-run public park in 1953 (2021, 1001-11). For the past decade in particular, Miyashita Park has been subject to forces of privatization. The Shibuya municipal administration has drawn powerful corporations, such as NIKE and Mitsui Fudosan Co., into its cosmopolitan town-making project and augmented security enforcement, which has deterred the use of the space by many individuals, including the forcibly expelled homeless. Although the Shibuya administration has been paternalistically supporting the homeless by encouraging their residence in a self-reliance support center, the former is far from proactively involving the latter in the municipal decision-making process through dialogue, sidestepping the issue of socioeconomic disparity and encroaching poverty.

silence about same-sex sexuality by confronting opposition parties that drafted an LGBT Anti-Discrimination Bill in 2015. Rather than adopting such explicitly LGBT-specific anti-discriminatory policy, the LDP proposes to promote “understanding” among citizens of LGBT issues (Liberal Democratic Party Policy Research Council 2016; see also Khor et al. 2020, 287-92). The LDP’s approach focused on promoting general understanding isn’t the same as Shibuya’s proactive demands for rights and protection, but the LDP and Shibuya Ward aren’t necessarily in conflict either. Knowledge of, and sympathy toward, LGBT-related issues are logical precedents of drawing voters into attempts to realize LGBT-sensitive policies.

Although TRP celebrates the accomplishment of same-sex partnership certification as a step toward the legalization of same-sex marriage in increasingly LGBT-concerned Japan, the organization is relatively silent on the issue of poverty. While TRP promotes diversity in cooperation with such allies as Shibuya Ward, such diversity promotion forces the homeless to pay the cost of eviction from public areas such as Miyashita Park or Yoyogi Park (a venue of TRP’s annual event) (Sykes et al. 2018). For the short-term goal of legalizing same-sex marriage, however, complexity (e.g., socioeconomic inequality) is perhaps nothing but inconvenient. In fact, the news about liberally characterized municipal efforts at same-sex partnership certification, as sensationalized by the media, appears to allow the Japanese government to divert public attention from the national issue of imminent socioeconomic disparity, a problem that affects a greater number of individuals regardless of sexual orientation.

### **3. Is Gay Marriage Anti-Homophobic Resistance?: TRP’s and NVW’s Different Answers**

TRP and NVW have different understandings of what marriage equality is all about. If asked about whether the legalization of same-sex marriage is anti-homophobic resistance, most TRP staff would immediately reply in the affirmative whereas the majority of NVs would

question why marriage equality has to be about fights against homophobia. Although few NVs dismiss gay marriage advocacy itself, its conflation with anti-homophobic resistance makes many NVs remain distant from an ongoing nationwide litigation TRP is part of. After providing an overview of the nationwide litigation to contextualize marriage equality movements in Japan, I delve into the disagreements between TRP and NVs over marriage equality in Japan.

### *The Freedom of Marriage for All Litigation*

The nationwide litigation began in 2018. The litigation was initiated by an array of pro-same-sex-marriage individuals and organizations in order to prod the not-so-eager Japanese government.<sup>165</sup> Not only TRP organizationally supports marriage equality, but also individual TRP staff are variously networked with key advocacy groups, which proactively take part in the ongoing litigation; this constantly evolving personal network was something I (a lone researcher) couldn't sufficiently track and collaborative research would have alleviated this difficulty. Although the litigation has been featured in national media, not all NVs are familiar with it.

Against the hands-off attitudes of the Japanese government and legislature toward lesbians and gays, the Same-Sex Marriage Bill was proposed in June 2019, starting out later than Taiwan (Fabre 2019).<sup>166</sup> The bill was submitted by a group of opposition party members a few weeks after Taiwan became the first place in Asia to permit same-sex marriage. Otsuji Kanako, a House of the Representative member and affiliated with the Constitutional-Democratic-Party (*Rikkenminshutō*), was a key player; she is a TRP supporter.<sup>167</sup> Despite the unlikely chance of the bill to be immediately and proactively discussed in parliament, the bill was intended to enter

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<sup>165</sup> At present, those in authority appear to want to maintain heterosexuality as the default in Japanese law without modifying the Civil Code and the Family Registration Law (Chapman & Krogness 2014). Modifications of these would impact the maintenance of family lineage, property inheritance, and biosocial reproduction, all essential to Japan's emperor system valued by the LDP-led Japanese government (and many citizens).

<sup>166</sup> Marriage equality became a cynosure issue in Taiwan during 2017, having led to its legalization in May 2019.

<sup>167</sup> Otsuji is said to be the first openly lesbian national politician. Ever since her 2005 so-called coming-out publication, she has publicly spoken about LGBT issues in the Japanese political arena.

marriage equality into a national debate in the face of conservative constituents in favor of the LDP and its ally “Clean Government” Party (*Kōmeitō* 公明党). The submission of the Same-Sex Marriage Bill in June 2019, however certain an LDP ruling would have seemed to defer its passage, did encourage collective civil moves, which were made earlier in the same year.

On February 14th, 2019, thirteen same-sex couples simultaneously began taking legal actions against the Japanese government (Kitazawa & Yamashita 2019). More specifically, these couples filed lawsuits at four district courts in metropolises (Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, and Sapporo), seeking compensation (ten thousand dollars per claimant) for their unfair experiences. Six of the couples live in the Greater Tokyo Area, three couples live in Osaka and Hokkaido respectively, and one couple lives in Nagoya. Earlier, these couples individually had attempted to process their marriage certificates at their municipal offices, but all were declined as expected.

Both gays and lesbians have joined the legal challenges. One gay couple is based in Saitama Prefecture. 44-year-old Kozumi Ken and 40-year-old Aiba Kenji together attempted to submit their marriage application on January 4th at the Kawagoe municipal government office, only to get rejected on grounds there are no legal provisions for same-sex marriage (Sugihara & Yamashita 2019). Another was an international lesbian couple in Kanagawa. 40-year-old Nakajima Ai and 32-year-old Kristina Baumann found themselves in a similar conundrum, when the Yokohama local government office rejected their marriage application despite their marital status being recognized by Germany (Sugihara 2019; see also *Zenseishi* 2019, 5-7 for an autobiographical narrative by the international lesbian couple). These diverse couples have simultaneously come into the national media spotlight, as they have performatively taken part in the legal actions by passionately narrating common struggles about disadvantages as a result of being unable to marry (taxation, corporate benefits package, etc.).



The 14th of February, Valentine’s Day, was a perfect date for the unfairly treated same-sex couples to act collectively against the Japanese government in the hope of soliciting nation-wide sympathy. Hoping that attention from Japanese society at large ultimately leads to consideration by the Supreme Court, these plaintiffs push a quite simple and straightforward demand. They argue that the violation of constitutional stipulations such as equality under Japanese law (i.e., not giving conjugal status and privileges to same-sex couples) infringes on freedom of marriage (Nankawa 2019, 2-4). This nationally organized campaign for marriage equality is the first domestic litigation radically questioning the unconstitutionality of ignoring same-sex marriage rights (ibid.; see also Akiba 2020; Ōhata 2020), which TRP demands as part of its queer activism.

This nationwide litigation, named after the leading advocacy organization Marriage for All Japan (MFAL), is referred to as *kon’in no jiyū wo subete no hito e* 婚姻の自由を全ての人へ [freedom of marriage for all]” in media.<sup>168</sup> Lawyer Terahara Makiko is one of the founding members and she currently serves as a board member of the organization (Terahara 2019, 4-11). MFAL consists of the supportive lawyers who have helped initiate the freedom-of-marriage-for-all litigation (see below) as well as newly added public relations specialists (Akiba 2020, 57). On its website, MFAL launched crowdfunding and collected the sum of ¥10,570,000/\$105,700 from 1172 supporters in total, which is phenomenally successful for a crowdfunding campaign for such civil cases (ibid.).

In addition to the leading group MFAL, other advocacy organizations, such as the Equal Marriage Alliance (EMA) and Lawyers for LGBT & Allies Network (LLAN) support the

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<sup>168</sup> According to the advocacy organization Marriage for All Japan (<https://www.marriageforall.jp/en>), another lawsuit was filed at a district court in Fukuoka in September 2019. Since March 26th, 2021, eight more Tokyo-based plaintiffs, including transgender persons, have joined the ongoing lawsuits at the Tokyo District Court, marking a new phase in the ongoing process (ibid.).

litigation.<sup>169</sup> EMA extensively aims to reach many members of the public by providing workshops for companies, dispatching lecturers to universities, and lobbying politicians for legislative pressures. Openly gay corporate worker Imagawa-san, one of the TRP board members, serves as vice president for EMA out of his commitment to gay activism. In contrast with EMA, LLAN targets a rather narrow audience by hosting fundraising events involving foreign guests (e.g., American lawyer and activist Evan Wolfson) at luxury hotels, as the organization consists of elite lawyers from large Tokyo-based firms and in-house legal experts at national and foreign-affiliated finance firms. Additionally, marriage equality falls under the purview of the Japan Alliance for LGBT Legislation (J-ALL), which networks with grassroots activist groups across Japan and appeals to the Japanese government in order to push LGBT anti-discrimination legislation. The “difficulties” LGBTs face in Japan, as catalogued by J-ALL in a downloadable PDF, include disadvantages due to unrecognized rights to marry.<sup>170</sup> On the whole, it is precisely because each of these organizations has a distinct network and speaks to its own primary audience that they can draw many different kinds of individuals into the freedom-of-marriage-for-all litigation and hasten its pace.

Amid the unfolding of the freedom-of-marriage-for-all litigation, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations (JFBA) started putting pressure on the Japanese government on July 18th, 2019, by officially making a statement on the legalization of same-sex marriage while citing human rights complaints from the public (KYODO 2019). In the beginning of the official statement, JFBA discloses the reception of complaints from 455 individuals in 2015 in order to highlight the significance of considering same-sex marriage domestically (2019, 1). In reference to human-rights recommendations from the United Nations (UN) as well as concrete

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<sup>169</sup> EMA and LLAN also have their own official websites respectively: [emajapan.org](http://emajapan.org) and [llanjanpan.org](http://llanjanpan.org).

<sup>170</sup> Visit <http://lgbtetc.jp>.

disadvantages same-sex couples face in Japan, JFBA urges the Diet to legalize same-sex marriage following after the examples of other permissive European and North American countries (ibid., 4-5, 17). The opinion brief by JFBA is a great assurance for those seeking legal recognition of same-sex couples involved in the freedom-of-marriage-for-all litigation.

The nationwide litigation didn't come out of the blue. According to legal scholar Akiba Takeshi, its preparation dates back to 2007, when lawyer Yamashita Toshimasa took a leading role in launching the LGBT supporting lawyers network (*Erujībītī shien hōritsuka nettowāku* LGBT 支援法律家ネットワーク) (2019, 52). Out of its members sympathetic with grassroots issues, thirty-one lawyers voluntarily created the human-rights redress legal team for same-sex marriage (*Dōseikon jinken kyūsai bengodan* 同性婚人権救済弁護団) on July 7th in 2015 (ibid.); such an ad-hoc forming of voluntary advocacy groups is common in Japan, as there are few large professional advocacy organizations due to the strictly controlled civil sector (Pekkanen 2006). The team gathered civil complaints from same-sex couples across Japan, compiled a human-rights redress statement, and submitted it to JFBA, which has accepted it as a first step in the freedom-of-marriage-for-all litigation (ibid., 53).

#### *TRP's Stance: Same-Sex Marriage as Anti-Homophobic Resistance*

Even before the onset of the freedom-of-marriage-for-all litigation, TRP often made references to up-to-date information about the legalization of same-sex marriage—which was allegedly fought for in the name of anti-homophobia—in various parts of the world in the earlier issues of its official magazine BEYOND. When TRP refers to Japan with respect to lesbian and gay legal rights, the organization stresses Japan being the only country among the G7 countries that has yet to permit same-sex marriage (BEYOND 2017, 20). In the year 2018, when the freedom-of-marriage-for-all litigation started, TRP just right at the moment had a theme, “Love

& Equality,” for its annual event in order to express the staff’s personal and political investment in marriage equality. In the BEYOND magazine published shortly before the 2018 annual event, TRP introduced a “super shiny” story about a Japanese-Brazilian gay couple, who got married under Brazilian law, as if the organization inspires readers to go beyond whatever “border” (national, linguistic, ideological, etc.) one faces in pursuit of love (BEYOND 2018, 6-7).

Although TRP is well aware of common criticisms of same-sex marriage advocacy as neoliberally depoliticized queer politics (e.g., Duggan 2003; Kaneko 2015; Shimizu 2017), the organization finds it valuable as anti-homophobic resistance by consulting with existing academic and activist literature: see a subsequent section for further discussion about how exactly TRP came to mesh the quest for love (a code for marriage equality) with anti-discriminatory resistance. The TRP core staff, including the current co-representative Fumino-san, who has a master’s degree from a top private university in Tokyo, regularly update each other on primarily Japanese LGBT-related academic and activist publications. In the literature (e.g., Kaneko 2015; Shimizu 2008; Shimizu 2017), indifference to supporting activism tends to be interpreted as a morally questionable and even politically dangerous act of (inadvertent) complicity with discrimination. The tendency manifests in a “good” article on marriage equality—which was mentioned during a dinner conversation with a few TRP staff and other sympathetic activists—which is written by legal scholar Shimizu Yūdai (2008) and published by International Christian University, well known for its gender (and sexuality) studies center facilitating publications in both Japanese and English. Shimizu begins by asking why not in Japan—which itself is a good question—when some of the countries around the globe, in particular ones in Europe and North America, have already begun permitting same-sex marriage. Regarding marriage equality as an anti-discrimination momentum builder, Shimizu attempts to

debunk point by point seven frequently posed, interrelated arguments against the legalization of same-sex marriage in contemporary Japan (*ibid.*, 95-111). Notably, Shimizu frames attempts to legalize same-sex marriage, including his objection to the seven counterarguments against marriage equality, as a fight against homophobia in Japan (*ibid.*, 112).

More specifically, three of the seven points of contention in contemporary Japan introduced by Shimizu deserve contextualization as opposed to the rest, which appear relatively common around the globe. The seven points of counter-argumentation against marriage inequality are: 1) marriage as a male-female institution for reproduction, 2) crisis of mankind, 3) repercussions on child welfare, 4) unnecessary, 5) the issue of prioritization, 6) extant alternatives, 7) rejection of the institution of marriage itself (*ibid.*, pp. 95-111). Point 1, 2, 3, and 7 are observed in many societies even if appearance and intensity of each largely depend on social variables (e.g., religion) in a given context. Yet point 4, with regard to its relationship with point 5 and 6, needs explanation, because it is specific to Japan.

As I have touched on the existence of adult adoption and notarized deeds and their respective advantages and disadvantages, these methods allow same-sex couples to sustain, however conditionally, their relationships in Japan. Importantly, those who have arranged adult adoption cannot cancel their arrangement and marry, as the former adoptee is not permitted to be the spouse of the former adopter. Thus, same-sex couples already in this arrangement might not express special interest in marriage equality, especially if they are happy with it. As for those who have prepared notarized deeds, if this arrangement is enough to support their needs and wants, they might not come to support marriage equality either; unless of course they want to support LGBT friends who want to get married. These individuals are implicated when Shimizu problematizes point 4 by identifying its tendency among sexual minorities (*ibid.*, 100).

Shimizu goes far as to assert:

無関係でいたい者は無関係のままでもいいが、それは安易な反対につながってしまわないだろうか。法的保障へのニーズは確実にあり、それらを求める人の選択肢を奪う権利まではないはずである。また、そうした態度は、同性間の関係は性的なものにすぎず法的保障に値しない、などといったホモフォビアを内在化させてしまっていないだろうか。

If you want to be indifferent, that's fine, but don't you inadvertently get in the way [of marriage equality]? There are needs among same-sex couples for legal protection, and you don't have the right to deprive people of such an option [i.e., same-sex marriage]. In addition, isn't indifference a reflection of internalized homophobia that deems same-sex relationship just carnal and unworthy of legal protection? (ibid., 100)

Shimizu appears to tolerate indifference at the outset, but he quickly contradicts himself by morally problematizing those who remain indifferent. For him, indifference translates into “inadvertent objection” to the legalization of same-sex marriage. Recognizing the presence of “needs among same-sex couples for legal protection,” Shimizu interprets indifference (and objection) as an act of “depriving” marriage equality. Shimizu further views the indifferent act of blocking same-sex marriage rights as an evidence of internalized homophobia.

In his polemic article, Shimizu then proposes “*senryakuteki dōseikon yōkyū* 戦略的同性婚要求 [strategic same-sex marriage demanding]” as a means to move toward the legalization of same-sex marriage, which he equates with the fight against homophobia in Japan, where many sexual minorities themselves, as he writes, appear to turn their backs (ibid, 110-12).<sup>171</sup> Once

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<sup>171</sup> Shimizu considers it to be strategic because 1) it aims at social recognition of sexual minorities through legal fighting, 2) it has potential to catalyze changes from within the Japanese system of matrimony, and 3) it might be able to bring in partnership systems, if not same-sex marriage, in negotiation with the conservatives (ibid., 111-2)

again, however, Shimizu only alleges the existence of the indifference and does not go further than that allegation. Although NVs are just one (of many existing) collective(s) Shimizu tucks under the “indifference” and even “homophobia,” they don’t necessarily view same-sex legal protection unnecessary despite their general disinterest in supporting marriage equality movements, as I have shown above; and their decision not to has to do with the incompatible stereotype activists themselves have established perhaps in negotiation with media that are partially responsible (see below).

And point 5, the issue of prioritization, remains perhaps the most difficult and salient point for marriage equality debates, since contemporary Japanese society is confronted with growing socioeconomic inequality and poverty as popularly captured by the term *kakusa shakai* 格差社会 (disparity society). The issue of prioritization haunts what is now dubbed the Sugita Mio’s “LGBT No Productivity” remark in 2018 (*Sugita Mio erujībītī seisansei nai hatsugen* 杉田水脈 LGBT 生産性ない発言). Through this not fully resolved incident, the politician in question has come to be (regarded as) the enemy of LGBT activism, including marriage equality movements, as she questioned the necessity of using public funds for lesbians and gays in her controversial publications: see a subsequent section for further discussion.

In short, as influenced by the existing Japanese academic and activist literature, TRP has a faith in the legalization of same-sex marriage as anti-homophobic resistance in Japan. TRP’s faith, however, is not necessarily shared by broader LGBT audiences (e.g., NVs). Their positions on the question of marriage equality, as will be shown below, are perhaps too ambiguous to be accommodated by TRP despite its organizational commitment to diversity.

#### *NVW’s Stance: Reservation, Not Rejection*

NVW generally stands apart from activist attempts to legalize same-sex marriage in Japan.

Just like NVs' relative indifference to heterosexual marriage doesn't necessarily translate into their enthusiasm about gay marriage, their reluctance to support marriage equality doesn't mean that NVs reject it either. After reflecting on my conversation with V6 teammates on the question of marriage equality, I delve into interviews with other NVs and identify activist language and stereotypes—not to mention the emphasis on coming-out—as what inhibits their motivations to learn about, and participate in, ongoing pro-same-sex-marriage (and broader LGBT) movements in Japan.

One weekend evening in the spring of 2019, a few V6 members, both current and former, had a get-together at Noboru's place in Shibuya. Our chat touched on the freedom-of-marriage-for-all litigation that was then increasingly heating up:

- Kyohei (K):** 皆さん今の同性婚法制化運動盛り上がりどうお考え？  
Folks, what do you make of the current increasingly active freedom-of-marriage-for-all movement?
- Shinobu (S):** 何だって？そんな運動あるの？  
What did you say? Is there such a movement?
- Noboru (N):** ネ～さん新聞読むかニュースチェックした方がいいわよ。  
Oh dear, you'd better read the newspaper or check the television news.
- S:** そうね、同性婚したいっていうか、おじさんに囲ってもらうのが憧れよ。金持ちのおじさんが結婚したいっていうなら、もちろん同性婚したい。でも今の彼氏は結婚っていう玉じゃないもの。バツイチだし、子なしだけど。  
Well, yeah. I yearn for a sugar-daddy rather than getting married strictly speaking. If a rich daddy asks me for marriage, yes, I want to get married. But my current boyfriend isn't ideal for a spouse. He is divorced [from his former wife], no kids.
- Minoru (Mi):** そんな不純な動機で結婚したいんですか？ここにいるメンバーで結婚という流れ



に一番近いのはノボルさんですよ？もう十年以上もここで彼氏さんと同棲しているわけですし。同性婚という方向には向いていないんですか？

Do you [Shinobu] want to get married for such a corrupt motive? Among all of us here, I think Noboru is the closest to the direction of tying the knot. Noboru, you've been living with your boyfriend here for more than a decade. Are you two not considering same-sex marriage?

**N:** うーん、特にそういう方向ではないかな。面倒臭そうじゃん、家族の事とか。いちおう彼氏の事は既に家族に紹介済んでいて一緒に住んでいることも報告済。「彼氏」とは言っていない。察しているとは思うけどね。法的保障ないと不都合もあると思うけど、まだその実感がないというか。後でいいやみたいなの。アンタこそどうなのよ、アンタも彼氏と同棲始めたじゃない？

Not really. Sounds like a pain. All the family issues, and so on. I've already introduced my boyfriend to my family and told them that we live together. I haven't told them that he is my boyfriend. I think they know, though. There might be some inconvenience without legal protection, but I just don't feel like dealing such an inconvenience at the moment. It's like, maybe later, when real hardships arise. How about you, Minoru? You've begun living with your boyfriend.

**Mi:** 私達はお二人より年月浅いですし、年齢も下なので、そもそも結婚という言葉すら会話にあがってきません。お京さんはどうなんですか？

The word marriage just doesn't come up in our conversations, as we both are younger than you [Noboru and his partner], and we're still in the early days of our relationship. How about Kyohei?

**K:** そもそも相手がないし、大学院生活終わらない事にはプライベート充実なんて考えられないわ。ネ～さんたちみたいに要領良いなら色々上手くこなせるのかもしれないけど。マサオ君さっきからずっとおだまりだけお元気かしら？

I'm not in a relationship, and I cannot think much about my personal life until I get my dissertation research done. I'd perhaps be able to handle multi-tasking if I knew how to

swim with the tide like you girls. Masao, you've been silent for so long. How are you doing?

**Masao (M):** すいません！同性婚自体に今の所あまり興味ないですね。権利獲得運動のノリは正直あまり好きではないです。

I'm sorry! Not really interested in same-sex marriage so far. Honestly I don't really like the feel of the rights-seeking movement.

In general, none of us are desperately interested in same-sex marriage itself, except for perhaps 41-year-old Shinobu, who said that he “want[s] to get married.” Yet, Shinobu is actually more interested in having a “sugar-daddy” rather than the idea of same-sex marriage, as he doesn't necessarily see his current boyfriend (a financially precarious day laborer) as a suitable spouse; Shinobu himself is financially unstable due to his temporary employment status. 37-year-old Noboru is in a de-facto same-sex marriage relationship, but he isn't interested in proceeding further due to his laidback personality and family-obligation. In the case of 26-year-old Minoru, an elite white-collar corporate worker who has graduated from the same prestigious private university as Noboru, he is too young to care about same-sex marriage and thinks that marrying someone for socioeconomic security is “a corrupt motive.” 27-year-old Masao expresses indifference to gay marriage and reveals his distance from the “feel of the rights-seeking [freedom-of-marriage-for-all] movement.” Masao doesn't necessarily object to the idea of marriage equality, and neither do the rest.

During fieldwork, I attempted to find out whether there are any NVs interested in same-sex marriage as well as why the freedom-of-marriage-for-all litigation, if not the idea of marriage equality itself, is not proactively supported. I did find a few supportive NVs although there's a difference among them as to whether, and how much, to support the freedom-of-marriage-for-all

litigation. 46-year-old service worker Ganko-san is one of the few who not only passionately seek to marry but also proactively express supports for the nationwide litigation:

同棲したことはないけど、同性婚が可能になればそれを機にきっと一緒に住もうって話が進むかも。今までもそういう話題は上がったけど、お互い面倒臭がりということもあり、行動するまでは....。お互いに既に両親は亡くなっているし、兄弟はいるけど、疎遠な方だからうるさく突っ込まれることもない。同性婚は選択したい場合のために可能であるべき。強制力のある制度で自分たちの関係を認めてもらっているというような感覚がでそう。そうすると義務も生じるし、次は子供とかあらたな欲も生まれてくるのかもしれないけど。運動も簡単なことであれば相手と一緒に協力したいと話してる。メディアに露出したいとかではないけど、署名とか選挙で同性婚支持の人に投票するとかであればぜひ。

I've never lived with my boyfriend, but the legalization of same-sex marriage might open up a dialogue about it. We've talked about living together here and there, but we've never gotten around it as we both are too lazy to act. Our parents have already passed away. We have siblings, but they are distant and so they're not going to butt into our relationship. Same-sex marriage should be available as an option. Its legal power can make us have a sense of recognition of our relationship. It bears obligations and perhaps leads to another desire, like having kids, though. We're willing to support the litigation if there're things we can do easily. We don't want to get ourselves exposed to the media or anything, but we'd love to sign a petition or vote for political candidates in favor of marriage equality.

Ganko-san thinks that the legalization of same-sex marriage can force him and his partner in his late fifties to live together. It can, Ganko-san further says, "make [them] have a sense of recognition" of their same-sex relationship. Because the two are in midlife and have been in a relationship for long, they would be "willing to support the litigation" with simple (albeit important) activities such as signing a petition and voting for sympathetic political candidates.

It's also important to note that Ganko-san and his partner no longer need to deal with their parents at least in a direct, if not spiritual, fashion as they passed away, and there's an improbability of intervention from distant relatives. Such familial conditions perhaps contribute to the desiring and supporting of marriage equality relatively directly, since Ganko-san and his partner have little else to prioritize; some might rather find same-sex marriage as an opportunity to come out as gay (or otherwise) to their own families.

Similarly, 25-year-old graduate student Naoki expresses sympathy with both activists and nonactivists and then looks beyond Japan in order to locate its current state:

静かにしたいというのもわかりますし、堂々と権利主張もかっこいいなと思います。ネットメディアとかでも話題にされていたりするので関心はあります。自分たちから動かなければおそらく誰も何もしてくれないし、状況は変わらないと思うので。ヨーロッパの国とかアメリカなど可能な場所があるので、日本でもというのはもっともだと思います。反対の人たちもまともな理由があるならまだしも、今の時代男女の結婚が常識って主張は時代遅れだと思います。

I totally sympathize with those who want to be quiet. At the same time, I also find it cool to demand rights fiercely. I'm interested in the media-buzzing marriage equality stuff. Nothing changes unless we act because no one is going to do anything for us. Same-sex marriage has been legalized in places like many European countries and the US, so why not in Japan as well? As for anti-same-sex-marriage people, it's ok if they have decent reasons, but it's backward to assert heterosexual marriage is common sense. Go online and learn about the existence of other kinds of people.

While positively evaluating the act of “demand[ing] rights fiercely,” Naoki places Japan in competition with Euro-American nations over marriage equality. Although Naoki doesn't necessarily dismiss objection itself, the assertion of heterosexual marriage as common sense is

for him “backward” in the now, when the information on “the existence of other kinds of people,” including LGBTs, is readily available after almost three decades of gay liberation in Japan. What counts as “decent reasons” for objection to gay marriage is a question worth exploring, however.

Unlike the above group of NVs, most are not only generally indifferent to gay marriage, but also distant from pro-same-sex-marriage movements as represented by the freedom-of-marriage-for-all litigation. I individually had an interview with Masao, who tends to be quiet in a group (see above). Masao isn’t passionate about supporting gay marriage movements.

やっぱり同性婚とか運動に関わっている人のイメージですかね。あくまでも主観ですが、どうしても我を張って他人の話聞かなさそうなタイプの人間がやっているイメージなんです。GWにあるイベントとか、派手な色の服着て、何かにつけて反差別って。大雑把に言えばうるさい人と言いますか。メディア向けのパフォーマンスかもしれないですかね。普通にかっこよくて応援したくなるような人が運動に全くいないんです。それから個人的にはカミングアウトの問題ですかね。カミングアウトが前提ですよ。プライドパレードも、アウトな人もしくはしたくてもできない人、その手の人達がせめてそういう所で集まりましょうというムードがある気がします。いくら楽しくみせてもそこでつながれないので僕にはハードルが高すぎます。そこまでカミングアウトにこだわらなくてもって。こういうとすぐに怒られそうなので最初から避けてるとするのが正しいかもしれないです。

It’s got to do with the activist stereotype. I might be biased, but they seem like people who stick to their opinions and don’t listen to others. At events like the pride parade during Golden Week [Japan’s holiday week], they dress flamboyantly and call out for anti-discrimination. It’s annoying, to put it crudely. They might be performing for the media. But they aren’t at all people, who are ordinarily cool and relatable. In addition, the issue of coming-out is a big hurdle. Activism is premised on coming-out. I have a sense that the pride event serves as a get-together for people, who are either

already out or, willing yet unable, to come out. No matter how playfully it is presented, the event is so much of a hurdle for me. No need to be fixated on coming-out. I feel like I'm going to get criticized for saying this, which is why I try to avoid them in the first place, I guess.

First and foremost, those involved in social (including marriage equality) movements through such events as TRP's annual Parade & Festa tend to be, Masao argues, pushy. As they "dress flamboyantly and call out for anti-discrimination," Masao perceives their actions as "annoying, to put it crudely"; as an aside, most, if not all, of marriage equality plaintiff and activists dress rather moderately (that is, respectably) in the press. While acknowledging his subjectively based perception as well as the possibility of their actions having more to do with media performance than with actual personality, Masao points to the absence in the activist scene of "cool" role models he "want[s] to support." Although activists can jeer at such a point, it's perhaps beneficial to strategize for enlisting a support from a movie hunk or stellar athlete Masao might get drawn to. When the source of a disagreement is such a "joke," an equally ludic solution might as well serve perfectly. A bit (or a lot perhaps) more serious, however, is the issue of coming-out that characterizes contemporary LGBT activism. Masao sees LGBT events including TRP's annual event as "a hurdle" and "avoids them in the first place." Indeed, because such events stress the now respectable ethos of coming-out, they perhaps alienate those who, such as Masao, don't aspire to it, a sentiment he is unable to tell "out-and-proud" individuals.

Middle-aged former V6 player Hideo-san, who now plays for the team JAIL, similarly places a distance from LGBT (in particular marriage equality) movements:

全く響かない言葉で訴えられてもそりゃ応援したくならないでしょ。多様性認めましょうって言うのはごもっともだけど、アンチホモフォビアとかトランスフェミニズムと連帯と

かわけわからない事ばかりいう最近の LGBT 団体に関与してる人はどうかと。自分だって在日だから仕事の場面とか理不尽だなと思ったりするから社会運動自体には抵抗はない。ただどわけわからないことやってる人に関わろうとは思えない。既にマイノリティであろうとなかろうと親身になってくれる人達はいるわけだし、その範囲でみんな幸せであればいいかなと思う。パレードみたいなのは知らない人が多すぎるっていうか、面倒な事に巻き込まれる確率が高そう。同性婚運動もそう。気軽に参加なんてしようもんなら、あんたみたいな人に勉強不足とかいって怒られそうだしね。結局やっぱり気さくにバレーしてたいてなる。

Who wants to support voices of social protesting that aren't at all relatable? I get the call for diversity, but I just don't understand those involved in LGBT groups that speak out for unfamiliar things like anti-homophobia or transfeminism solidarity. I myself am a resident-Korean, so I more often than not feel discriminated against in social life including the workplace and actually sympathize with social protesting. But I'm not going to relate to people who do odd things. I'm already surrounded by people sympathetic with minorities, and I think it's fair to pursue happiness within such a mutually familiar network. Events like the pride parade are where there are just too many unfamiliar people and more chances to get into trouble, I think. The same is true for the marriage equality movement. I feel like people like you [activist-leaning individuals] are going to blame laid-back participants for lack of knowledge. I'd rather play [gay] volleyball in the end.

Hideo-san first refers to the increasingly multi-issue nature of social protesting including LGBT movements. While expressing sympathy toward activism itself as he is one of the major social minorities in Japan (resident-Korean), Hideo-san appears inhibited by the usage of such “unfamiliar” words as “homophobia” and “trans feminism” in ongoing LGBT activism. These are indeed jargony, and predominantly appear in activist or academic publications as well as in college or graduate school elective (rather than general) classes. In other words, even highly educated individuals (ones with college degrees, including Hideo-san) might not understand

these terms unless pre-exposed to the language of queer studies. Also, it is the difficulty of relating to, or forging solidarity with, strangers through mass movements that Hideo-san feels uneasy about, as he viewed himself as “already surrounded by people sympathetic with minorities.” Hideo-san argues that “it’s fair to pursue happiness within such a mutually familiar network.” Put differently, what is at issue is not so much difference per se as unfamiliarity. This is a challenge for any large-scale organized event. Finally, Hideo-san remains vigilant against activist-leaning persons, who are, he thinks, in tension with “laid-back participants.” For activists, how to evenly maintain conversation with people who might not be committed to a given issue as passionately as themselves is a question worthy of pondering; angering, blaming, and otherizing/pathologizing them are available options, but they are questionable in terms of both efficacy and sustainability.

It’s important to maintain contact with members of the public such as NVs in the field alongside library research, media analysis, and online exploration for burgeoning discourses about marriage equality. Although academic and activist publications often criticize the promotion of gay marriage as it can reinforce consumer indulgence rather than radical potential, they commonly regard the pursuit of gay rights as anti-homophobic resistance. Such framing, however, is actively questioned by NVs. To put it differently, there is much to be discussed before, or perhaps through, the legalization of same-sex marriage in contemporary Japan. Discussions about marriage equality among many audiences are difficult at best, as activist discourses are admittedly influenced by the rather jargony academic language and lay persons might have preconceived, if not entirely inaccurate, ideas of activists, who are often sensationalized by the media.

#### **4. Widening the Distance: Sugita Mio’s “LGBTs Having No ‘Productivity’” Remark**



The distance between TRP and NVW widened along with the national politician Sugita Mio's discriminatory remark incident. LDP-affiliated Sugita Mio had been quite consistent in her pro-family and pro-natal position even before she published a controversial article in 2018. In the article, Sugita remarked that LGBTs would need no special support because they "have no productivity" (ibid., 58-9). The remark went viral online, galvanizing both anti-Sugita protesting and Sugita defense.<sup>172</sup> Although her remark in question served as a rallying point against which LGBT activists (including TRP staff) and allies organized themselves, it remains worth asking why it was the year 2018 that she became so widely known in Japanese society at large despite her fairly consistent position as well as her longtime problematic reasoning. The appearance (or making) of such an enemy enabled LGBT anti-discrimination activism to gain momentum and establish a stronger platform for the freedom-of-marriage-for-all litigation that went underway in the subsequent year of 2019.

### *Sugita Publications*

Sugita Mio is an LDP-affiliated Japanese politician, currently an incumbent member of House of Representatives for the proportional Chugoku Block. She has come under criticism both domestically and internationally especially since her 2018 *Monthly Shinchō* 45 article on an LGBT issue; she had published a similar article earlier. Sugita had consistently made pro-family and pro-natal, LGBT-insensitive remarks on her official blog (<https://ameblo.jp/miosugita-blog>) as well as, infamously, on the online conservative television program Channel Sakura.<sup>173</sup> Her remark on LGBTs as "unproductive" went viral when another LDP openly lesbian politician

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<sup>172</sup> There are relatively impartial voices within both the so-called pro and anti Sugita positions.

<sup>173</sup> On July 2, 2015, on Channel Sakura, Sugita expressed her controversial thoughts on LGBT issues that had come to find a way into her later articles in question. In 2018, the TV show was circulated online with an English subtitle by Al Jazeera, a Qatari government-funded international Arabic news channel. Sugita's 2018 article then attracted criticisms from many media outlets both domestic and international (BBC News, the Guardian, the Japan Times, etc.).

Otsuji Kanako tweeted her criticism against the remark. Reactions to such a contentious politician as Sugita are as messy and entangled as her own remark.

Before going over her 2018 article, a review of her earlier article helps show that Sugita has had a coherent position since early on. In 2016, Sugita contributed an article provocatively entitled “‘*Erujībītī*’-*shien nanka iranai* 「LGBT」 支援なんかいない [No need for LGBT support]” to *Monthly Shinchō 45*’s special issue “*Misekake no ‘seiron’ ni tsuite* 見せかけの「正論」について [On the deceptively right thing]” (2016, 58-61). In this article, Sugita made it explicit that it was a personal and political response to a train of heightening concerns about LGBT rights set off by the 2015 Shibuya Ward same-sex partnership ordinance (ibid., 58); it was the year that republican Donald Trump beat democrat Hilary Clinton in the presidential election for the position of the 45th president of the United States, where marriage equality had been vehemently pursued as a neoliberal agenda under the pro-LGBT Obama administration (Kaneko 2015).

In her 2016 article, Sugita had three primary reasons for her “no” to LGBT rights. First, according to Sugita, LGBT equality is vainly built on, as seen in the Shibuya-Ward ordinance, the idea of “*danjo byōdō* 男女平等 [gender equality].” She (rather extremely) understands gender equality as radically impossible attempts to homogenize biologically different beings. Second, Sugita insists that basic human rights have already been guaranteed for all Japanese citizens, including LGBTs, under the current Constitution. Thus, although individuals like the sick and disabled should be accommodated according to their unfortunately pathological deviation from normality, demands for LGBT rights are about seeking privileges rather than rights in her interpretation. Third, Sugita asserts that prioritization matters as local administrations are already significantly overworked, handling public assistance and childcare. These claims—rather cock-

and-bull if we dispassionately dissect them by referring to existing debates about the word, say, “gender equality”—expose pro-family and pro-natal stance firmly and complacently upheld by Sugita. Sugita is concerned about LGBTs being “*seisansei ga nai* 生産性がない [literally unproductive, or loosely and generously in the context of her argument, unable to reproduce [their] own biological offspring and continue a family]” (ibid., 60), however problematic and even inaccurate such a claim might be in both theory and practice.

Moreover, Sugita problematically denies the necessity of comprehensive sex education in schools in the same article. She lists three reasons: 1) the complexity surrounding the issue of sex, 2) the already hectic state of schoolteachers, and 3) the risk of protraction of such a transient state as same-sex desire (ibid., 60). Again, these assertions can be easily, if existing debates are consulted, called into question. Yet, by ignoring what has already carefully been discussed, Sugita worries that the idea of taking LGBT issues seriously is arising from within the LDP (e.g., the special committee for SOGI as headed by Furuya Keiji). She then expresses her objection against international pressures on Japan to overcome domestic “problems” in accordance with foreign standards. Sugita warns against *jakusha bijinesu* 弱者ビジネス (“minority businesses”), as she attributes the current state of Japan to a post-war Japanese education system that has been encroached upon by Leftist thought (ibid, 61).

In her 2018 article equally provocatively entitled “‘*Erujībītī*’-shien no do ga sugiru 「LGBT」支援の度が過ぎる [LGBT supports going a little too far],” Sugita continues her faith in what she has already said, adding that challenges against LGBTs in Japan is about a conflict with parents rather than sexual orientation or gender identity per se (2018, 57-60). She begins by pointing out that more and more LGBT-concerned articles appeared in national newspapers, in particular liberal ones, by the time she had written up the 2018 article; the year is said to be an

“LGBT era” (see chapter II). Sugita notes her discomfort with what she perceives of as a Western-inflected LGBT anti-discrimination call by Japanese liberal media. These media, she argues, attribute *ikizurasa* 生きづらさ (life difficulty) erroneously to Japanese social structure despite Japan being “tolerant” as opposed to (presumably homophobic) Euro-America (ibid., 58-9). Again and provocatively, Sugita reminds us that LGBT support is unnecessary because “*karera kanojora wa kodomo wo tsukuranai, tsumari ‘seisansei’ ga nai* 彼ら彼女らは子供を作らない、つまり「生産性」がない [LGBT individuals are not going to have kids, that is, having no ‘productivity’]” (ibid.) Although this utterance is, I do think, ignorant and indeed insensitive, Sugita still brackets the word productivity. The act of bracketing is perhaps her “best” gesture at expressing her pro-family and pro-natalist position.<sup>174</sup> Although it’s unclear whether anti-Sugita individuals and groups have read her past articles in their entirety (both quite short, each being four to five pages long), Sugita is now infamous due to the phrase “LGBTs having no productivity,” which has travelled widely through national media.

#### *Anti-Sugita Protest*

Immediately after the publication of Sugita’s 2018 article in July, criticisms erupted domestically and internationally. In the evening on July 27, a large-scale protest took place in front of the LDP’s main office in Nagata-cho. According to gay activist Udagawa Shii (2018), the protest involved about four to five thousand participants, as instigated by a tweet by gay *tōjisha* Hirano Taichi, who created the hashtag “the LDP’s main office on-site protest demanding Sugita Mio’s resignation.” The protesters included those who belong to the LGBT municipal parliament group, such as Kamikawa Aya and Ishikawa Taiga with the protest statement in their hands to be handed to the LDP (Nikkansports 2018). Although the protestors were not permitted

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<sup>174</sup> In terms of political distance from mainstream LGBT activism, Sugita might resemble such figures as Anita Bryant (McCreery, 186-207). Yet, Sugita isn’t necessarily anti-LGBT unlike Bryant.

to enter the building, the security guards received the protest statement (ibid.). This protest has been described by the openly gay Meiji University professor Matsunaka Gon as “the day of revolution in Japan” (Udagawa 2018)—or even as Japan’s “Stonewall” (TRP co-representative Sugiyama Fumino’s Facebook post, July 27, 2018)—as if to herald Sugita’s whole incident in constructing the narrative and history of LGBT anti-discrimination in Japan.<sup>175</sup>

*Erujībītī no ko wo motsu kazokuyūshi* LGBT の子を持つ家族有志 (“We Are Parents of LGBT Children”) solicited for a petition to the LDP on the political-campaign initiation digital forum “change.org” (change.org). The group was concerned about the psychological repercussions of Sugita’s digitally circulating words on their kids and found it necessary to push LGBT anti-discrimination laws in Japan. The solicitation was posted on SNSs such as Facebook and Twitter, as it was also translated into English, “Please help [the] LGBTQ community in Japan now!! This petition is about [a] homophobic politician in Japan who said LGBT people are un-productive and laughed at [the suicide rate among LGBT people]. [The] LDP allows her terrible comments and she said she was happy to join the major party.” The content of the petition itself was translated as follows:

The LDP should address Mio Sugita’s anti-LGBT comments and host a press conference for Sugita to give an apology for the anti-LGBT comments; remove Sugita from the party should there be no improvement observed in Sugita’s behavior; and make a law that does not tolerate unfair treatment of marginalized people. Whether you identify as LGBT or not, let’s make our voices heard.

To be fair, Sugita is neither “homophobic” nor “anti-LGBT,” no matter how her commentary is

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<sup>175</sup> Sugiyama might not be the first one to use the expression publicly as it appears in some media reports dated to around the event of anti-Sugita protesting.

personally unlikable. Nevertheless, the group importantly does point to the accountability of the LDP as a leading political body for Sugita's speech as well as of Sugita's own.<sup>176</sup>

Resonating with the importance of speaking up, TRP also took a decided organizational stance against Sugita's 2018 article and acted accordingly by making a call to join the anti-Sugita protest. On Facebook, Sugiyama Fumino, one of the two TRP representatives, wrote as he regarded Sugita's article as an act of undermining longtime efforts by forerunners:

僕個人としても、ひとつひとつの意見は全て尊重すべきであると、そのスタンスはこれまでもこれからも変わることはありません。杉田水脈議員の論考は、明らかな事実誤認が多数見られ、「多様な意見のひとつ」ではなく、事実無根の間違い。[...] 今までパレードを応援し、ご参加いただいた方の中には、今回のような今までと違うアプローチに驚かれたり、残念に感じられた方もいらっしゃるかもしれません。しかし、今後もセクシュアリティにかかわらず、すべての人が自分らしく誇りを持って生きていくことができる社会の実現を目指して行くことに変わりなく、またその為にも今回は声を上げる必要があったことをご理解いただければ幸いです。TRP がこういった形をとるのは初めてのことで、でもそれほどのことだと思います。しっかりと声を上げるのは大切です。悔しいです。今回は怒っていいと思っています。

Personally, my stance to respect every opinion in and of itself is not going to change. There are many apparent factual errors in Sugita's [2018] article and it's not so much "one of diverse opinions" as a groundless assertion. Those of you who have participated in the TRP event might find our action shocking or disappointing. However, we're going to keep working toward a society where everybody can live confidently with a sense of pride in themselves. And to sustain our objective, it was necessary to speak up, which I hope you would understand. It was the first time for TRP to act like this. Sugita's remark deserves a committed action. It's important to raise our voices in protest. It's ok to be angry

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<sup>176</sup> Criticisms against Sugita arose even from within the LDP. Inada Tomomi and Koizumi Shinjirō, for instance, publicly expressed concerns about Sugita's remark.

this time. (Facebook post, July 27, 2018)

But why this timing (2018)? Why would TRP unusually and explicitly “raise our voices in protest” in 2018, when Sugita had been expressing her family-oriented position since early on? In the summer of the year 2018, roughly three years since the implementation of partnership certification in Shibuya, TRP’s action coincided with the freedom-of-marriage-for-all litigation that was gaining force as part of LGBT anti-discrimination activism. Although it’s certainly fair to point out, as Sugiyama does, “factual errors in Sugita’s [2018] article,” Sugita isn’t necessarily anti-LGBT despite her poor and discriminatory prose. What Sugiyama directs his anger at appears to be the decontextualized phrase “LGBTs having no productivity,” as he refuses to regard Sugita’s opinion as “one of diverse opinions” and judges it as “a groundless assertion.” In other words, “diverse opinions” for Sugiyama are ones that are error-free and respectful if different. But again, what is Sugita’s primary point? However poorly written including the phrase in question “LGBTs having no productivity,” it is family-orientation, not anti-LGBT discrimination, that Sugita aims for. “[T]his time,” Sugiyama set a boundary, out of “anger,” of what is appropriate for himself/TRP/allies while closing off a dialogue with Sugita.

### *Diverse Public Opinions*

Although the magazine *Monthly Shinchō 45* ultimately took editorial responsibility by suspending its whole publication after coming under attack for “insufficient” contents check (Schreiber 2018), it had presented a featured topic “*Sonnani Okashiika Sugita Mio Ronbun* そんなにかおかしいか杉田水脈論文 [Is Sugita Mio’s 2018 article that absurd]?” earlier. This special issue compiles eight independently written article contributions by those who don’t entirely dismiss Sugita and her argument. Most authors attempt to contextualize the word “*seisansei* 生産性”

within Sugita's overall argument without attacking Sugita personally, while they agreed on the ill-chosen use of the word and pointed out some false recognition as well as an underresearched and weak, if not morally wrong, argument.

Although not all contributors are sound, most forward decent, dispassionate arguments about Sugita's position. For example, Tokyo University professor Fujioka Nobukatsu views the entire incident as an instance of decontextualization and media censorship. He, unlike most media reportage, first presents an overview of Sugita's broad argument and then focuses on the contentious word “生産性,” which has traveled far through national media as well as SNSs. Fujioka asserts that we should understand its meaning narrowly as “an ability to reproduce offspring,” rather than productivity broadly, within the context of Sugita's family-oriented argument on public resource allocation and prioritization (2018, 77-83).

In a different vein, Matsuura Daigo, a former-DPJ member of the House of Councilors, focuses his critique on Sugita's argumentation. For instance, he points out that municipal activities involved in same-sex partnership certification haven't cost much, although Sugita writes as if they have (2018, 91). Matsuura suggests that it is the use of disaster reconstruction funds for LGBT tourism in the affected region that needs a critique, if Sugita wants to pursue the line of public funding allocation and prioritization; to attract foreign LGBT guests there, improvement work at accommodating facilities (presumably, the bathroom and hot-spring areas and the like) is underway (*ibid.*). Matsuura also expresses concerns about the LGBT anti-discrimination proposition submitted by the opposition party, which potentially compromises freedom of speech. By critiquing Sugita's article, Matsuura ultimately seeks to open up a conversation with Sugita in the aim of creating a fair society (resonating with the LDP stance),



where LGBTs, including such an openly gay man as himself, can live safely and happily.<sup>177</sup>

Another contributor and blogger Kazuto problematizes the action taken by pro-LGBT politician Otsuji Kanako, who has sparked the whole controversy by decontextualizing Sugita's article (2018, 97-101). He begins by asking whether Otsuji could have had a dialogue with Sugita in person over her article (as both are politicians) rather than one-sidedly tweeting an excerpt. Kazuto suspects that Sugita has a point Otsuji fears; public money doesn't need to be used for sexual minorities specifically (if excluding transgender persons who benefit from such public-funded projects as the creation of unisex bathrooms) in Japan. Kazuto expresses his disappointment in Otsuji, as he recalls that her 2005 publication encouraged his own coming-out as a gay man. Kazuto regards her current move as nothing but protective of her own business opportunities. If the LGBT anti-discrimination law proposition is passed upon the recognition of LGBTs as *jakusha* 弱者 (literally the weak or vulnerable, loosely social minorities), she as well as her fellows would most likely receive requests for lectures and the like (ibid.). Although the above relatively candid voices ("pro-Sugita" as media call them) offer decent points to consider, these didn't get featured compared to Sugita's word "LGBTs having no productivity," which has turned out to be so powerful in that activists and allies have solidified themselves against Sugita by marking their resistance as historic. And TRP didn't officially engage with the above multiple and complex voices that had neither supported nor dismissed Sugita's family-oriented position.

TRP and NVs ended up maintaining a distance. On the one hand, with an increasing sense of crisis, TRP held a small protesting parade "TOKYO LOVE PARADE" on October 8, which happened to be a national holiday. TRP was determined to host this event because the organization wanted to express, along with allies, a firm stance against many insensitive

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<sup>177</sup> Matsuura came out after having lost in the 2017 House of Councilors election.

comments from politicians, in particular Sugita Mio.<sup>178</sup> I received an invitation email from the TRP in-chief office secretary Igei-san; I politely excused myself for having other commitments on the national holiday. On the other hand, many NVs expressed a sense of being fed up with not only such problematic politicians as Sugita but also the entire protest. As for the holiday protest, many of my teammates discreetly said, “Let’s let protesters take out their frustrations on Sugita.” Indeed, the holiday was used as an extra day for team activity, through which they gossiped about many weekly happenings, including the loud demonstration. Iwao later told me, “People like Sugita are not going to disappear. Can’t we just ignore those rare cases? Maybe, just find a way to punish them appropriately without making such a fuss.” I didn’t know whether we could come up with such “a way to punish [insensitive politicians] appropriately” unless it was social protesting of some sort. I asked Iwao and he looked away as if he wanted time to respond to my question.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, the marriage equality debate has loomed large alongside global and domestic concerns about LGBT rights. Currently, municipal same-sex certification is the only institutional procedure to recognize same-sex couples socially in Japan. Perhaps lesser known internationally (as well as domestically), adult adoption remains one of the most pragmatic means available for same-sex couples to form and maintain a household under Japanese law. Amid the increasingly heated legal debate about same-sex marriage as animated by the freedom-of-marriage-for-all litigation, heterosexual marriage itself is being becoming ever more unstable as both men and women have been delaying marriage in contemporary Japanese society currently faced with

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<sup>178</sup> The parade was also meant to herald the passing of the anti-discrimination ordinance by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government as part of making the city an appropriate place for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games that thematizes “diversity and inclusion” (Maree 2020b, 4).

declining fertility and ageing demographics. Against such an eventful national backdrop, TRP organizationally prioritizes marriage equality as part of LGBT anti-discrimination activism by criticizing allegedly anti-LGBT figures (e.g., Sugita) in Japan, a nation home to diverse collectives, including the relatively disinterested NVW.

In Japan like elsewhere, the so-called LGBT community is far from a monolith, however solidified it is made to appear. TRP staff and NVs, sustain group formation as they respectively share and develop a certain orientation at a time when the coherence of the “LGBT community” is increasingly at issue in the context of the marriage equality debate. At its roots, NVW, like TRP, is an aggregate of like-minded individuals despite the diversity within, constituting one segment of the broader LGBT network in Japan. What plays a critical role in group formation is general personal disposition, highly influenced yet never determined by social variables, such as gender and class.

TRP is organizationally future-minded and aspirational, framing the present as discriminatory against LGBTs specifically. Devoting life to LGBT activism, TRP staff diligently seek to procure rights and security for LGBTs in Japan. In the recent past, TRP has put forth its effort to highlight marriage equality for the LGBT community, criticizing such political figures as Sugita as morally dangerous (i.e., homophobic) for calling “LGBTs being unproductive.” TRP might appear (and, in a way, is) “homonormative” (Duggan 2003, 50) and even “homonational” (Puar 2017, xvii-xxxvi, 1-36), as the organization pushes for LGBT domestic life by promoting Japan as one of Asia’s most progressively LGBT-friendly nations. Yet TRP’s “out-and-proud” approach is quite radical, a non-mainstream mode of political engagement vis-à-vis both the mainstream society and (many) LGBT audiences, which has value in and of itself.

Considering the present to be not-so-bad, if precarious, NVs tend to hardly care about

socially upward mobility. They might appear as self-denying, even “homophobic” individuals as they prefer the so-called closet, but their practices defy easy characterizations (e.g., victimization). While remaining discreet within their familiar networks, NVs don’t entirely leave their family-obligations behind and keep a distance from queer activism. NVs also might appear homonormative as they are family-oriented consumers, but their stress falls on not so much their “homo” as “deceptively heterosexual and single” aspect. Principally, NVs express discomfort about TRP’s all-encompassing community narrative. Their discomfort was heightened when TRP forcefully took a stance against “enemies” (i.e., Sugita) on behalf of the LGBT community in Japan.

Fieldwork was difficult as I aimed to study both groups with equal respect. I felt increasingly distant from TRP, especially its attempt to rush in to demonize Sugita, however offensive her poorly written 2018 article might have been. As a result of my increasing distance from TRP, I ended up accompanying, if not necessarily sympathizing with, NVs more. I yearned for a space, where I could ramble on about tense issues such as Sugita’s remark without letting the burden of political correctness stop me from speaking.

The marriage equality debate has expanded, rather than closed up, the distance between TRP and NVW. Intersection might be possible, but both need to work at familiarizing themselves with the others’ frame of reference. For TRP, such moralistically charged words as “homophobia” need suspension to listen to actual diversity, however uncomfortable. For NVs, the activist stereotype should be held in suspension and an overview of the history of queer activism in Japan might be beneficial. For both groups to do these tasks, however, a bit of leeway appears necessary, which is sabotaged by the brutally busy pattern of adult social lives in Japan. Such chronically hectic social lives encourage individuals to group up with like-minded ones

rather than with people having fundamentally different personalities, a point raised by anthropologist Nakane Chie (2010, 171-2).

### *Coda*

In February 2019, roughly one year since the onset of the freedom-of-marriage-for-all litigation, TRP-ally Matsuoka Munetsugu (2000), a representative director of the non-profit LGBT-supporting group Fair, reflected on the collective action and comments about its future. Supportive voices have emerged from within the LDP, which on the whole still remain wary of same-sex marriage. Matsuoka points out that although 60% of LDP candidates expressed objection to same-sex marriage in 2017, it decreased to slightly more than 40% in 2018. Yet the number of LDP candidates explicitly supporting same-sex marriage is still low, being 9%. He regards the LDP's slow but steady leaning as consistent with the public opinion as gauged based on the 2015 survey by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research among other national questionnaires; half of the respondents said yes to same-sex marriage with approximately 70% in the age category of 20-30 answering positively (*ibid.*).

Matsuoka, however, cautions against the LDP's seemingly benevolent interest in same-sex marriage. At first glance, the LDP seems to take same-sex marriage seriously through related-moves, including explicit reference to same-sex marriage as an issue worthy of debate by the chairman of the LDP policy affairs research committee Shimomura Hakubun or the introduction of European same-sex-marriage-permissive laws by the Liberal Democratic Women's Affairs Division. Yet, Matsuoka urges us not to rush in to celebrate such moves, as the LDP introduces same-sex marriage within the context of constitutional revision debates as if to deflect from other issues (e.g., national security and defense as related to Article 9) and manipulate the public toward voting for constitutional changes. Indeed, if the LDP is serious, however, it can just

immediately debate the same-sex marriage bill submitted by opposition parties rather than considering changes to the Constitution; again, constitutional revisions are unnecessary for the legalization of same-sex marriage in Japan.

Indeed, it's once again important to remember that constitutional modifications are unnecessary for marriage equality; same-sex marriage can be realized with changes to relevant clauses in the Civil Code and the Family Registration Law currently written for “*fūfu* 夫婦 [husband and wife].” Interpretations of the current Constitution can be broadened to accommodate same-sex couples if we recall why it has come to be the way it is since post-war democratic reforms. According to lawyer Nankawa Mayuko, Section 1 of the Article 24 in the current Constitution has been intentionally designed to ensure self-determination and agreement as well as gender equality within a household (2019, 3). These were not possible under the Meiji Constitution, which required consent from the head of a family (a father) for marriage; as a result, the intent of the family/parents, rather than that of the two about to marry, would be prioritized at times (*ibid.*).<sup>179</sup> The postwar democratic legal reforms have aimed at stipulating consent from the two marrying persons as the most important and only necessary condition for marriage, not at prohibiting same-sex marriage.

Lawyer Hattori Saki warns against the LDP's draft revision to Article 24 of the current Constitution, as it can enable conventionally family-oriented interpretations, which uncannily remind us of the Meiji Constitution (2017).<sup>180</sup> The LDP's draft revision has three pillars of change: 1) the introduction of a new clause that promotes family as a basic and natural social

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<sup>179</sup> Nankawa notes that such coercive tendency would weigh more heavily on women, who were sociolegally subordinate to men within a household and in society at large (2019, 3). While I sympathize with Nankawa's feminist concerns about women's past (and ongoing) vulnerability, the intent of men (in particular, sons) appears to remain understudied in research on such a historically coercive institution as marriage.

<sup>180</sup> Appendix B provides a comparative table for Article 24 of the current Constitution and the LDP's draft revision, which is adapted from Hattori's website entry.

unit worthy of respect; 2) the omission of the word *nomi* のみ (only) from the original clause I that defines “marriage being entered into only according to the free will of both sexes”; and 3) an addition of few key terms—*kazoku* 家族 (family), *fiyō* 扶養 (subsistence), *kōken* 後見 (custody)—to the original clause II as well as a deletion of some—*haigūsha no sentaku* 配偶者の選択 (choice of spouse) and *jūkyo no sentei* 住居の選定 (choice of domicile). First, the creation of a new clause for underscoring the importance of family is understandable as the pro-family and pro-natal LDP is concerned about Japan’s current social landscape characterized as an ageing society and falling birthrates. Second, the proposition to delete “only” from the current clause I is utterly regressive and even dangerous as the new clause would possibly allow family intervention in individual decision making. Third, the addition of the key terms to, and the deletion of some from, the current clause II, if read in combination with the introduction of the new clause, would increase the power of family members (parents) to intervene in (children’s) conjugal matters. Altogether, the LDP’s draft revision would serve as a legal mechanism to ensure the power of family and place responsibility for family care on family (most likely women) against the backdrop of destabilizing family relations (ibid.). The LDP’s draft proposition hardly takes into account the reality of diverse family relations in contemporary Japan.

On March 17th, 2021, two years after the onset of the marriage equality litigation, the Sapporo local district court became the first to hand down a decision.<sup>181</sup> The Sapporo local district court has ruled unconstitutional the statutory interpretation of marriage only between a man and a woman, news which has made it to national media and set off divisions between and within political parties.<sup>182</sup> Like variously positioned media outlets, national politicians express

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<sup>181</sup> According to the legal team for the freedom-of-marriage-for-all litigation, attitudes of juries in charge vary considerably. The jury of the Tokyo District Court appeared overbearing, expressing that it was unnecessary to listen to oral allegations from same-sex couples in such an abstract debate as constitutional revision (Matsuoka 2020).

<sup>182</sup> The Sapporo local district court might appear to be more progressive than other local district courts about this

differing takes (Asahi Newspaper, March 17, 2019a, b). On the one hand, affiliates with such opposition parties as the Constitutional Democratic Party and the Japanese Communist Party tended to regard the news as a milestone event. On the other hand, LDP members generally remained circumspect about, if not dismissive of, the incident, as the chairman of the LDP policy affairs research committee Shimomura Hakubun spoke on behalf of the party in a press conference that the legalization of same-sex marriage would lead to confusion unless understandings of sexual minorities are adequately expanded at a social level (ibid.). Indeed, a comment from Suga Yoshihide, the LDP-affiliated current prime minister, was as conservative as that by the former LDP-affiliated prime minister Abe Shinzō. During one question session in the Diet, Otsuji asked Suga, “If your son told you that he would like to couple up with a male partner, what would you say to him?” (Asahi Newspaper, February 21, 2021). Suga answered, “It’s necessary to consider it carefully because it’s an issue that touches on the foundation of the Japanese family” (ibid.), which is reminiscent of former prime minister Abe’s stance (Matsuoka 2020).<sup>183</sup> It’s time for the Japanese government to re-imagine its family-oriented social vision by considering diverse forms of the “Japanese family” as practiced by TRP staff and NVs.

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decision, but it maintains a passive stance towards poverty and public assistance cases (Miwa, 2021)

<sup>183</sup> The legalization of same-sex marriage would also raise the question of same-sex divorce. There has lately been a lawsuit over compensations for an extra-relationship affair among a lesbian couple, which has resulted in their breakup (Asahi Newspaper, March 17, 2021).



## Conclusion

This dissertation began with the three primary questions of 1) the necessity of gay liberation in Japan, 2) the diversity in queerness, and 3) its implications on both Japanese and Euro-American resistance-oriented queer theory. Chapter 1 elucidated Japan's lukewarm context that effectively defers efforts for coalitional organizing among sexual minorities in a predominantly family-oriented social current. Chapter 2 introduced the tradition of "out-and-proud" activism in Japan as currently being carried on by Tokyo Rainbow Pride (TRP), which makes the most of a seriously playful tactic in its pursuit of human rights, especially the right to voice one's concern(s) publicly, against Japan's pro-silence aesthetics. Chapter 3 featured a rather distant segment of TRP's audience, Ni-chōme volleyballers (NVs), who discreetly manage their family-obligations and come into the Ni-chōme volleyball world (NVW) for a pro-silence erotic play. Chapter 4 juxtaposed TRP staff and NVs in terms of their divergent attitudes toward marriage equality. Overall, this dissertation has shown that it is difficult to tuck their diverse experiences and aspirations under the unified "LGBT community" narrative. What follows is my attempt to consider these findings further anthropologically as I revisit the theory of gay liberation.

### *Gay Liberation Revisited*

Regarding gay liberation theory, sociologist Denis Altman's *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* remains a seminal text, as it has been kept re-printed ever since its publication in 1971. *Homosexual* has influenced the "out-and-proud" development of lesbian and gay anthropology (Weston 1993) and queer anthropology (Boellstorff 2007a) in and beyond Euro-American academia. Although the "out-and-proud" model has been critiqued (e.g., Engebretsen 2014; Manalansan 2003), criticisms are often either explicitly or implicitly presented in the name of anti-homophobic resistance.

Writing in the context of the early 1970s United States, Altman privileges coming-out as the beginning of gay liberation even if he admits that the act is not enough to achieve the cause:

The essence of gay liberation is that it enables us to come out. ‘Out of the closets and into the streets’ becomes a liberating process which if not sufficient to overcome oppression—in the short run it may indeed bring oppression more heavily to bear—is certainly a necessary first step. Those who are touched by the new affirmation discover a new perception of how they have been oppressed by society and social norms, and out of this realization comes peace with oneself and anger at the victimization that we and others have suffered. (1993, 237)

Although Altman believes that the “necessary first step” (coming-out) leads to the awareness of “the victimization that we [out ones] and others [presumably those in the closet] have suffered,” this dissertation has demonstrated the difficulty of establishing common victimhood for homosexuals due to a split in the understanding of discrimination. Problematically, a pre-coming-out stage (discretion) is assumed to be a state of arrested development, as Altman further writes that “[f]or the homosexual, the new affirmation involves breaking away from the gayworld as it has traditionally existed and transforming the pseudo-community of secrecy and sexual objectification into a genuine community of sister- and brotherhood” (ibid., 238). The establishment of egalitarian sisterhood and brotherhood among Japanese-language speaking homosexuals, however, is socioculturally circumscribed by the *ie* legacy of hierarchy based on age, gender, and so on (e.g., Chalmers 2002, 52). Furthermore, despite Altman’s faith in the “homosexual assertion—‘Blatant is beautiful!’—” (ibid., 246), such blatancy goes against the grain of predominantly silence-affirmative Japanese communication in the first place.

The universality of “out-and-proud” gay liberation has been challenged by a number of

anthropologists and other scholars as well as by Altman himself. Anthropologist Mary Gray (2009), for instance, problematizes city-centered assumptions about gay liberation by featuring American rural queer youth, who negotiate “out-and-proud” demands of visibility. Instead of perpetuating the prevailing stereotypes of the U.S. countryside as hopelessly oppressive and rural queer youth as silent and invisible victims of homophobia, Gray acknowledges a significant gap between urban and rural areas in terms of infrastructure and capital (both human and financial) (ibid., 3). She shows subtle negotiations of visibility among rural queer youth in the US, as she accompanies them in moments of occupying public spaces (e.g., local churches and shopping centers) for their own ends, however hard-to-see and even fragile these moments might be. Similarly, performance studies scholar Jeffrey McCune (2014) legitimizes the unique and elusive (“discrete/discreet”) way of survival among queer black men by analyzing the “down low” (DL) phenomenon in his ethnographic research. By rejecting the common understanding of DL men as closeted cases or self-denying gays, McCune discusses their seemingly passing performances as queerly straight (as they are predominantly heterosexual and eclectically same-sex desiring). He contends that “[w]hile the growth of queer visibility for those who desire it is praiseworthy, it is important to recognize the error in its establishment as the privileged or desired state” (ibid., 171). By aligning with the above queer ethnographic work, this dissertation has tried to affirm discretion among NVs while respectfully discussing the “out-and-proud” activism TRP pursues. As part of this challenge, I have stressed the importance of forsaking anti-homophobic argumentation, which tends to judge dissident voices as morally and politically questionable. This is important because the idea of gay liberation as anti-homophobic resistant remains unquestioned by many, including Altman, who has come to pay more attention to the significance of context for, and the existence of disagreements over, sexual politics within a

globalizing world after he proposed “global queering” (popularization of American gay identity politics worldwide) earlier (2001a, 2001b, 2013: see also Altman & Symons 2016). In suspending anti-homophobic argumentation for sexual minority movements in Japan, I would like to elaborate on a list of key words (eroticism, play, violence, diversity, community, and normality), which appear in Altman’s norm-questioning and peace-loving definition of gay liberation: “Gay liberation affirms full eroticism and play, rejects violence; it seeks human diversity and community and discards the narrow roles that ‘normality’ has prescribed” (ibid., 246).

*Play to Be Continued: Loose Network, Affective Anchor, and Distancing Silence*

If visibility is a kind of “erotic capital” (Green 2014, 15-6, 48-50), an attribute that individuals attempt to embody for their desired persona in a given relationship, TRP staff and NVs give significantly differing value to it. Although both TRP staff and NVs generally respect the act of coming-out itself, many NVs would not necessarily find it sexually appealing. Rather, visibility is deemed unsexy in NVW. The ethos of discretion shapes NVs’ “erotic habitus,” “a socially constituted complex of dispositions, appreciations, and inclinations arising from objective historical conditions that mediate the formation and selection of sexual scripts” (Green 2008, 614-5; see also Green 2014, 27, 36). When NVs collectively develop and reinforce their erotic habitus over time as sociologist Adam Green (2008, 2014) reworks the Bourdieusian concept of habitus in his discussion about collective sexual life as a psyche-society interface, change is possible but difficult. Although some might invert this and say that it’s not easy but possible, I stick to the former and avoid suggesting that the preference for discretion needs to be changed for gay liberation. Understandably, the idea of the “LGBT community,” as its membership has long been prescribed by those in favor of “blatant assertion” and predicated on

the act of coming-out, alienates, if not oppresses, those who, such as NVs, prefer discretion.

The “LGBT community” can be oppressive when it narrowly conflates the act of coming-out—as well as lesbian and gay consciousness and commonality—with anti-homophobic resistance, a tendency found among queer theorists. Judith Butler recognizes diversity among lesbians but notes a probable exception “that we all know something about how homophobia works against women—although, even then, the language and the analysis we use will differ” (1993, 310). Kazama Takashi (1997) similarly equates gay consciousness with awareness of internalized and societal homophobia and attendant objection to it. However, it is when demands for fighting homophobia are placed on the shoulders of NVs through the now respectable ethos of coming-out that many of them question their belonging to the LGBT community. From the perspective of social-movement mobilization, this is unfortunate because NVs don’t necessarily reject activist concerns (e.g., marriage equality) despite their distance from activists due to their own presumably media-driven preconceptions about these figures. Perhaps, the catchphrase “community,” as rhetorically used to demarcate an imagined solidarity among sexual minorities in the context of research and activism (Moriyama 2012), now has too monolithic an overtone to resonate with a broad LGBT audience, including those who hardly see Japan as homophobic or have little interest in overt campaigning. In order to sustain and theorize LGBT collectivity, we can perhaps be better off letting go of the idea(l) of “community” as a heroically oppositional solidarity. Instead, for queer organizing and critique, we can explore the idea of networks and sphere (Latour 2005; Melucci 1989, 1996a, 1996b; Merabet 2014, 112-33; Povinelli forthcoming 2021), which highlights not so much identity and resistance as association and intimacy, however “loose” or “disorganized” such relations might appear.

At the moment, the LGBT community in Japan is being increasingly and powerfully

represented by TRP, motivated by anger (at Sugita Mio's "LGBTs being unproductive" remarks) as discussed in Chapter 4. Anger can trigger a barrage of immediate and intense movements. Yet, its long-term effects on activism (and its sustainment in particular) is questionable. While the potential exhaustion of TRP staff as a result of insurgent protesting is relatively easy to imagine, it is not entirely unrelatable that an increasing number of NVs feel like backing off from such anger-driven protesting. These NVs simply appear to have no time for oft-times insensitive and misleading family-oriented politicians, whom TRP has decided to put its energy into criticizing. During my fieldwork, when I asked each about the other's take on the Sugita issue, I was received with a lot of silence from both parties—as if they wanted to avoid conflict. Avoidance is indeed identified as a predominant conflict management method in Japan by Anthropologist Ellis Krauss et al., who argue that it is practiced at the expense of individual feelings (1984, 379, 381). They note that "[w]ithout the options of exit or expression, the lack of cathartic resolution and fundamental adjustment in the relationship may produce a deep and persistent sense of malaise. This outcome implies that it is the individual, rather than the group or society, who bears the cost of conflict in Japan" (ibid., 381). The relative absence of mutual engagement between TRP and NVW appears unproductive for the LGBT community in the long run, but on second thought, I wonder: What if TRP staff and NVs actually answered, rather than avoided, my question through silence at least for the time being and such silence is far from a sign of "conflict avoidance"? If we take silence as part of answering and a pause before the next speech, we can see TRP staff and NVs are in the midst of thinking—or better put, disagreeing. If silence continues, that is then their answers perhaps.

For now, TRP staff and NVs maintain a distance. Both groups neither affirm nor abject the other in particular. Rather, the existence of each collective constantly questions the other and

animates LGBT diversity. That is, TRP and NVW engages in not so much antagonistic or agonistic conflict as what political philosopher Jacques Rancière calls “dissensus,” the egalitarian suspension of the normative (2010, 69, 80).

Even if both versions or “dreams” (Duncombe 2007) of gay liberation are equally true, however, they would less likely gain equal value depending on the whims of the Japanese nation-state. TRP co-representative Sugiyama Fumino, who served on the Japanese Olympic Committee as an openly transgender person, pressures Japan in this “out-and-proud” direction, as he reflected on the Tokyo Olympics after it ended on August 8th, 2021:

この東京大会では「多様性と調和」が基本コンセプトに掲げられていますが、とても大きな意味を持つものだったと改めて実感しています。というのも、皮肉にもこのコンセプトのおかげで、「日本では多様性が尊重されていない」という現実があぶり出されたからです。女性蔑視、容姿侮辱、いじめなど、僕たちの社会に巣くう差別や偏見は、内側には見えづらいもの。忖度、あるいは空気を読むという言葉があるように、弱い人たちの立場を守るよりも、強い人たちの権利を守ることにみんなが犠牲を強いられてきたからです。それが今回、ホスト国として国際的なイベントを開催したことで、いかに日本社会が国際基準からズレているかが白日に晒されました。

The Tokyo Olympics held out the motto of “Diversity and Unity,” which I do think had a lot of meaning. As a matter of fact, this motto ironically exposed Japan’s reality, in which diversity is not respected. From inside, it’s difficult to see the discrimination and prejudice that plague our society, like misogyny, looks-based insult, and bullying. Accustomed to the existence of expressions like *sontaku* [sense others’ feelings] or *kūki wo yomu* [be sensitive to context], everybody has been forced to sacrifice themselves in order to protect the rights of the powerful rather than those of the weak. This time, Japan’s hosting of the international mega-event has utterly exposed how Japanese society deviates from international standards. (unpaged)

After pointing out Japan's "deviation from international (read UN-inflected) standards," Sugiyama asserts that we should use the Tokyo Olympics as "*sutāto chiten* (a starting point)" to recognize and discuss "*sekai kyōtsū no kadai* (global issues)," such as LGBT rights (ibid.). Again, this dissertation has shown the sheer difficulty of addressing LGBT rights in a globalizing world, as exemplified in the distance between TRP and NVW in family-oriented Japan, which seems to move in the direction of legitimizing "out-and-proud" life after having conventionally favored discretion for nationally enforced family-obligations for decades.

To summarize, disagreement lies at the heart of gay liberation—or better put, human adult play (Burghardt 2001, 2006; Lewis 2010). Its modes are diverse as shown in this dissertation focused on TRP staff and NVs. Their respectively shared modes of play radically differ aside from their commonality as biocultural beings. Such emergent differences are shaped by the past experiences among, and the current temperaments of, TRP staff and NVs oriented toward a certain direction. On the verge of shifting power dynamics among queers in increasingly LGBT-concerned Japan amid the prolonged coronavirus pandemic, TRP and NVW remain in play.

#### *Further Research*

As queer theorists produce humorously esoteric texts (e.g., Butler 1999; Foucault 1978; Puar 2017; Sedgwick 2008), the question of humor (Davis 2006; Morreall 1987; Yamaguchi 1990) deserves further exploration, as it doesn't always translate personally or cross-culturally, even if humor is intended in principle. Various groups, such as TRP and NVW, are anchored in differing modes of humor. How will their modes of humor be received in increasingly LGBT-concerned Japan accompanied by diversity-sensitive national media and everyday censorship? If moments of mutual laughter can be identified, coalition might be possible; if not, it simply



means that coalition is unnecessary for the time being. Also, this dissertation has, as concerned with disagreement narrowly (discursively), only experimentally addressed the issue of multimodality. In reality, our communication materializes through the concurrence of language and other modes of meaning-making (sound, imagery, etc.). Multimodal research is theoretically and methodologically challenging, as it demands anthropologists of multi-media fieldwork and production to collect and analyze audiovisual data on instances of disagreement. Perhaps, collaborative research on social movements would help us track evolving networks among and unexpected encounters between diverse actors, who negotiate webs of power day to day. Finally, although gay liberation needs a wider audience, it is primarily a limited circle of elite specialists, who read such academic texts as ethnographies after all. Hopefully, anthropologists will find a way to pursue anthropological relevance creatively through accessible “language” in the spirit of public anthropology (Beck & Maida 2015) by “translating” such arcane critique as Queer Theory for gay liberation in a globalizing world.

## Appendix A: TRP's Annual Event Theme(s) and Scale

	Theme	Parade Participants	Event Participants
2013	N/A	2,100	12,000
2014	人生いろいろ ♪ 愛もいろいろ ♥ [Diverse Ways to Live, Diverse Ways to Love]	3,000	15,000
2015	N/A	3,000	60,000
2016	BEYOND THE RAINBOW	4,500	70,500
2017	CHANGE—未来は変えられる— [Change—We Can Change Our Future]	5,000	105,000
2018	LOVE&EQUALITY～すべての愛に平等を。 [Love & Equality～Equality for All Love]	7,000	150,000
2019	I HAVE PRIDE あるがまますを誇ろう。 [I Have Pride: Let's Be Proud As We Are!]	10,915	204,000
2020	YOUR HAPPINESS IS MY HAPPINESS	167,727 (online)	438,786 (online)

## Appendix B:

### Article 24 of the Current Constitution and the LDP's Draft Revision

Article 24 of the Current Constitution	the LDP's Draft Revision
	<p><b>Clause I</b>  <u>家族は社会の自然かつ基礎的な単位として尊重される。家族は、互いに助け合わなければならない。</u> (新設)                      The family is a natural and basic social unit worthy of respect. Family members much help each other. (New)</p>
<p><b>Clause I</b>                      婚姻は、両性の合意<u>のみ</u>に基づいて成立し、夫婦が同等の権利を有することを基本として、相互の協力により、維持されなければならない。                      Marriage shall be entered into <u>only</u> according to the free will of both sexes. It shall be maintained through mutual cooperation with the equal rights of husband and wife as a basis.</p>	<p><b>Clause II</b>                      婚姻は、両性の合意に基づいて成立し、夫婦が同等の権利を有することを基本として、相互の協力により、維持されなければならない。                      Marriage shall be entered into according to the free will of both sexes. It shall be maintained through mutual cooperation with the equal rights of husband and wife as a basis.</p>
<p><b>Clause II</b>  <u>配偶者の選択</u>、財産権、相続、<u>住居の選定</u>、離婚並びに婚姻及び家族に関するその他の事項に関しては、法律は、個人の尊厳と両性の本質的平等に立脚して、制定されなければならない。                      With regard to <u>choice of spouse</u>, property rights, inheritance, <u>choice of domicile</u>, divorce and other matters pertaining to marriage and the family, laws shall be enacted from the standpoint of individual dignity and the essential equality of the sexes.</p>	<p><b>Clause III</b>  <u>家族、扶養、後見</u>、婚姻及び離婚、財産権、相続並びに親族に関するその他の事項に関しては、法律は、個人の尊厳と両性の本質的平等に立脚して、制定されなければならない。                      With regard to <u>family, subsistence, custody</u>, marriage and divorce, property rights, inheritance and other matters pertaining to kinship, laws shall be enacted from the standpoint of individual dignity and the essential equality of the sexes.</p>

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