Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Master's Degree program
in Language and Civilisation
of Asia and Mediterranean
Africa (Japan)

Final Thesis

LGBTQ+ in Japan: A Case Study in the Northern Kyushu region

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Academic Year
2024 / 2025

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor,
Prof. Miyake, and my assistant supervisor, Prof. Kitsnik,
for their guidance and support throughout this research.
I would like to acknowledge the help provided by the
NGO Stonewall Japan, in particular, by Prof. Zhang,
at the Kyushu Rainbow Pride. Lastly, I would like to thank
my family and friends for their unwavering support, and Alessia,
without whom this would not have been possible.
My heartfelt thanks go to everyone who contributed to this work.

要旨

この 20 年間で、世界における LGBTQ+の人々の状況は大きく変化してきた。これらの変化は多くの研究者の関心を引きつけ、社会的、経済的、法的観点から分析されてきた。

この種の研究は、歴史的観点から重要であるだけでなく、特に若年期において、当事者が社会の代表であり、理解されていると感じる助けとなり得るという点でも重要である。彼らの状況を研究し、どのように感じているのかを理解し、直面している問題を明らかにすることは、人類がより包摂的な方向へ発展することにつながるのである。

さらに、これらの研究の成果により、近年では幼稚園から大学に至るまでのあらゆる教育段階において LGBTQ+に包摂的な教育が導入されてきたのである。その結果、LGBTQ+当事者の経験はより可視化され、若い世代の LGBTQ+当事者が自分自身について混乱や羞恥を感じにくくなってきているのである。

それにもかかわらず、福岡、長崎、大分などの、日本の九州北部に位置する都市では、十分な学術的検討の対象となっていない地域も多く存在するのである。これらの地域に関して、これまで福岡においては男性同性愛者に関する研究のみが行われてきただけにすぎず、その他の同性愛者や他地域の実態は依然として十分に明らかにされていないのである（Zhang, 2019）。

このような背景から、本論文は、2024 年末から 2025 年初頭にかけて九州全域で実施されたアンケート調査の結果および、福岡における主要な LGBTQ+団体の代表者へのインタビューに焦点を当てるものである。これにより、LGBTQ+の当事者が社会的スティグマとの関連の中でいかにして自身のジェンダーやセクシュアリティを生きているのか、私生活および職業生活における経験、そしてそれが自らの人生にどのような影響を与えていると感じているのかを明らかにするのである。特に、日本において比較的早い時期（2018 年 4 月）に同性パートナーシップ制度を導入した都市の一つである福岡に着目し、近隣のより小規模な都市である長崎および大分との相違点を検討したい。

本研究はまた、LGBTQ+当事者、および団体が社会からの受容を拡大するために法制度や社会規範をどのように変革しようとしているのかを考察することも目的とする。

社会的スティグマおよび法制度をより深く理解するために、本論文ではまず世界的文脈における LGBTQ+の歴史を概観し、次に日本における文脈を取り上げ、最後に本研究の結果を提示する構成を採用する。

このようなアプローチにより、福岡・長崎・大分の相違点、さらにそれらと日本全体および世界の他地域との比較を明らかにすることを意図しながら考察したい。

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Introduction

According to the 2024 Ipsos Pride Survey, which covered 26 countries worldwide, the average percentage of individuals identifying as LGBTQ+ is 7% (Ipsos, 2024). The 7% may appear small compared with the remaining 93%, although, given that the global population reached 8.19 billion on November 19, 2025, 7% of the world population corresponds to approximately 560 million people (Statista, 2025). For this reason, it is possible to estimate that non-straight people are not that rare to find, even if not everyone of them is "out". At the same time, although this number appears high, in 2022[1] 68 countries, mostly in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, continue to criminalise homosexuality. Of these 68 countries, 11[2] still impose or at least consider the possibility of the death penalty in case of private, consensual same-sex sexual activity (Statista, Number of countries that criminalize homosexuality as of 2022, 2022).

The fear of punishment or judgment leads a big part of queer people to hide their sexual orientation, not only from strangers, but also from their close ones, and live in fear. According to a study by the Yale School of Public Health published in 2019:

> The vast majority of the world's sexual minority population — an estimated 83 per cent of those who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual — keep their orientation hidden from all or most of the people in their lives, and that could have major implications for global public health. Concealing one's sexual orientation can lead to significant mental and physical health issues, increased healthcare costs, and a dampening of the public visibility necessary for advancing equal rights […] (Poitras, 2019)

[1] The majority explicitly criminalises sex between men via 'sodomy', 'buggery', and 'unnatural offences' laws. 41 countries criminalise private, consensual sexual activity between women using laws against 'lesbianism', 'sexual relations with a person of the same sex', and 'gross indecency', and 14 countries criminalise the gender expression of trans people (Human Dignity Trust, 2024).

[2] These countries are Iran, Northern Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Brunei, Mauritania, Pakistan, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (Statista, Number of countries that criminalize homosexuality as of 2022, 2022).

Even though activists are working every day to improve the LGBTQ+ situation, making LGBTQ+ people feel safer and supporting better their mental health, and even though LGBTQ+ rights have seen numerous improvements in different parts of the world since the beginning of the 21st century, there is still a long way to go before complete equality in treatment between straight and LGBTQ+ people is achieved in every country.

In fact, according to the data collected by the School of Law, the Williams Institute, in a survey of 1902 LGBTQ+ adults in the USA workforce, conducted in the summer of 2023:

> 46% of LGBTQ+ workers have experienced unfair treatment at work at some point in their lives; of these, 38% reported experiencing harassment at work, and 9% have experienced discrimination in the past year (Williams Institute, 2021, p. 11).

In addition to these kinds of discrimination in the workplace, these people appear to suffer from harassment outside the workplace as well. According to the "Hate Crime Report 2021" (Hubbard, 2021, pp. 5-7):

> Two-thirds (64%) of respondents had experienced anti-LGBTQ+ violence or abuse. Of those who had experienced anti-LGBTQ+ violence and abuse:
>
> - 9 in 10 had experienced verbal abuse (92%);
> - 3 in 10 had been subject to physical violence (29%);
> - 2 in 10 had experienced sexual violence (17%).[3]

These forms of violence also include online abuse, harassment, doxing, blackmail, and sexual and physical violence. The study highlights that, even in countries where the LGBTQ+ community is legally recognised, individuals still do not feel fully accepted and encounter various forms of assault daily.

For instance, recent years have seen bullying become a significant issue for LGBTQ+ youth in Japan. A survey by Tokyo-based nonprofit ReBit, conducted between February and March 2025, found that among 4,733 participants aged 12 to

[3] Surveys of 1166 LGBT+ people in the UK, and 15 interviews, which both asked about experiences of hate crime and interactions with services.

34 nationwide, 53.9% of those aged 10 to 19 said they had considered suicide in the past year, along with 40.5% in their 20s and 30.3% in their 30s. Over 40% of those aged 10 to 19 reported engaging in self-harm, while just under 20% said they had attempted suicide. Moreover, 63.8% of students facing difficulties and harassment indicated that teachers and staff contributed, often through unnecessary gender separation (46.2%) or assumptions that students are not LGBTQ+ (30.1%). An overwhelming 94.6% of junior and senior high school students said they cannot safely discuss their sexuality with their homeroom teachers. Reports of bullying or violence included 40.1% of junior high students and 24.0% of senior high students. Among junior high students, 8.0% experienced sexual violence, such as unwanted touching, removal of clothing, or sexual comments from peers, while 2.4% reported similar acts from teachers or staff [Mainichi Shinbun, 2025].

On the bright side, when considering one of the most relevant and most discussed rights recently gained for queer people, the mind immediately turns to equal marriage. As a matter of fact, at the end of 2022, in 32[4] countries around the world, same-sex marriage was permitted[5] (Statista, Number of countries that have legalized same-sex marriage as of 2022, by continent, 2025), and in the other 12[6] countries, same-sex couples had access to some kind of "civil unions", which can or cannot also give the possibility to apply for stepchild adoption[7]. But this is just a starting point, especially considering that "civil unions" do not give access to the same rights and legal protection as marriage.

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[4] Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Costa Rica, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Iceland, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, New Zealand, Portugal, United Kingdom, Slovenia, Spain, United States of America, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, and Uruguay.

[5] The majority of which are in Western Europe and North America. In fact, in Asia, the only country that recognises same-sex marriage is Taiwan, where it is now possible to marry a same-sex person even if one of the two is a citizen of a country where this kind of marriage is illegal, like Hong Kong and Macao (CHAU, 2023).

[6] Israel (2022) in Asia; Croatia (2014), Cyprus (2015), Czechia (2025), Hungary (2009), Italy (2016), San Marino (2018), Latvia (2024), Lithuania (2025), Monaco (2020), Montenegro (2021) in Europe; Bolivia (2020) in South America (Equaldex, 2025).

[7] Stepchild adoption is for a stepparent to adopt their spouse's child. The legal parent-child relationship created by adoption survives divorce or the death of a spouse. This means that adoptive parents are legally responsible for their adoptive children, regardless of their relationship to their spouse (Legal Assistance Department, 2021).

While analysing global LGBTQ+ rights advances and ongoing risks could make an interesting thesis, this subject has been extensively researched. Hence, this study explores a different topic.

The main point of this study will be to analyse the most recent situation of the LGBTQ+ people in Japan in general and, more specifically, in the prefectures of Fukuoka, Nagasaki, and Oita in the northern area of Kyushu. The investigation will offer a critical confrontation of information from international and national scenarios, as well as information gathered through a questionnaire personally distributed at different LGBTQ+ events and multiple interviews. The data gathering took place in the span of two years (2024-2025), while participating in Kyushu Rainbow Pride in Fukuoka, both in the 2024 and 2025 editions, as a guest at the Stonewall Japan booth; at Oita Rainbow Pride in 2025 as a participant; and finally at a small Pride Parade held at Nagasaki University in 2024.

In recent years, numerous studies have examined the situation in cities such as Tokyo, Osaka, and Sapporo, where same-sex partnerships, now widespread across Japan, were first permitted (Marriage for all Japan, 2025), and where Japanese homosexuals appear to find a freer and more accepting place to express themselves, particularly in gay wards full of LGBTQ+ friendly bars and associations. In the meantime, little is known about the situation on one of Japan's four largest islands, Kyushu, and, more specifically, in its main cities.

The prefecture of Fukuoka has the fourth-largest population in Japan and is the second-largest port city after Yokohama. Given its large population and the potential to reach a significant share of the Japanese homosexual and non-homosexual population, the city of Fukuoka, and with it the whole prefecture, represents an interesting and relevant research subject. In addition to its large population, Fukuoka is relevant to this kind of research because, although less well known, it is one of the Japanese cities that has recognised same-sex partnerships for the longest time. In fact, Fukuoka City has recognised same-sex partnerships since April 2018, making it the second government-designated major city after Sapporo and the second municipality in the Kyushu-Okinawa region after Naha to implement such an initiative [Mainichi Shinbun, 2018].

By contrast, the prefectures of Nagasaki and Oita ranked 30th and 34th in population [Statistics of Japan, 2025], suggesting that a study of them would provide insight into the situation of LGBTQ+ people in more rural, less touristy areas, where the influence of people from other countries is minimised. Nagasaki and Oita both recognised same-sex partnerships more recently, on September 2, 2019, and April 1, 2024, respectively (Out Japan, 2018) (TOS News, 2024).

Despite the vast population of Kyushu, until this research started, only studies about the young male gay community in Fukuoka (Zhang, 2019), and more specifically, in Kyushu University[8], and the queer associations (Benkhart, 2014), more specifically, those created for the gay audience, in Kyushu, were conducted, leaving the rest of the queers still in the shadows.

For the reasons outlined below, this study aims to provide an overview of the situation of LGBTQ+ people in Fukuoka, Nagasaki, and Oita in late 2024 and early 2025. In the following pages, not only the social aspects of being a queer person in these areas will be explored, but also their legal aspects. To do so, the thesis will analyze, with the support of personal interviews with the presidents of the biggest LGBTQ+ associations in Fukuoka, like HACO, Fukuoka Community Center and Rainbow Soup, and a questionnaire specifically created for this study and diffused between queer people all around the identified area, how they feel in being part of the Japanese society, if or what they think changed from the past and what they think should change in the future to improve their life, not only as simple citizens but in particular as part of the LGBTQ+ itself.

In addition, this research aims to analyse the differences and similarities identified across the Fukuoka, Nagasaki, and Oita areas, to identify common ground for the different communities to learn from one another and grow more united in pursuit of a common purpose. This thesis will use the answers to these questionnaires to comprehensively represent the LGBTQ+ people of Fukuoka, Nagasaki, and Oita's prefectures as they are perceived, and how they live and choose to engage with society in late 2024 and early 2025.

[8] Founded in 1911, Kyushu University is a leading research-oriented institute of higher education, now covering the 135th position in the world university ranking (Topunivesities, 2024).

However, to better understand the research results, a general overview of the significance of LGBTQ+ issues and their global context, particularly in Japan, is necessary. Only by doing so and reviewing step by step the most recent evolutions all around the country and the world, will it be clearer how Fukuoka, and the other areas, differ or not from the rest. Because of reasons of time and space, this thesis does not intend to propose a solution to the possible problems of the LGBTQ+ people in the areas that will appear during the research, but wants to inform and bring more awareness about a part of the population that may be more present than what is commonly known.

Lessical choices

In recent years, the term "LGBT community" has become commonly used when referring to queer people. However, given the definition of the term "community" in this thesis, it will be mentioned only through direct citations. Typically, when people use the word "community" elsewhere, they mean:

> the people living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, social group, or nationality [Dictionary Cambridge, 2026].

However, when applied to LGBTQ+ individuals, the term often loses this significance. In Japan, in particular, there is a strict division between gay and lesbian communities, with separate bars and organisations, which tends to exclude other queer identities such as transgender and gender-fluid people.

This is why this term is not considered appropriate for this research, and for this reason, it will not be used.

An introduction to LGBTQ+

1.1 Key terms and definitions

> Many people live in a society where being LGBTQ+ is so dangerous that they risk being assaulted, imprisoned, or—worse—brutally murdered, simply for expressing their sexual identity. Living in constant fear, they are afraid to reveal their secret inner life to anyone by exposing their sexual orientation, which could place them at the mercy of a hostile stranger, neighbour, or state apparatus. This situation is a daily reality for millions of people around the world (Rainbowpedia, 2026).

About 7% of the world's population does not consider themselves straight (Ipsos, 2024), but what does society consider as "not straight"?

To start, an explanation of the general terminology is needed:

1) *Sexual orientation* indicates who the subject is attracted to and to whom this person feels drawn romantically, emotionally, and sexually (Sexual Orientation, 2023).
2) *Gender identity* indicates who the subject is attracted to, but how the subject represents themselves: women, men, non-binary, etc. Gender identity may or may not correspond to the sex assumed or assigned at birth. When the gender identity matches the sex assigned at birth, the definition *cisgender*, or *cis*, is used; in the other case, it is commonly used as *transgender*[9] (Watson, 2022).
3) *Gender expression* refers to how a person presents their gender. This can include their clothing, mannerisms, pronouns, and names (OutrightTeam, 2022).
4) *Sex characteristics* refer to genitalia and other sexual and reproductive parts; chromosomes, genes, hormones, and secondary physical features that emerge because of puberty (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

[9] In Latin, "cis" means "on this side," while "trans" means "on the other side."

Figure 1 The Intersex-Inclusive Progress Pride Flag

[10] Considering this, it became easier to analyse the meaning of the LGBTQ+ acronym letter by letter.

A lesbian[11] is a woman who has a significant sexual attraction, primarily to members of the same gender. The word comes from the Latin *Lesbius* or Greek *lesbios* "of Lesbos," which indicates the pertaining of the island of Lesbos, a Greek island in the northeastern Aegean Sea, home of Sappho[12], the first lyric poet who can be considered openly attracted to other women (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2021).

Figure 2: Lesbian Pride Flag

[13]*Gay* is a man who has significant sexual attraction primarily to members of the same gender or sex. The word comes from the Old French *gai* “full of joy”,

[10] The Intersex-Inclusive Progress Pride Flag underwent various mutations during the years to become more and more inclusive. The modern pride flag now includes: a brown stripe to represent the experiences of people of color; a black one to represent those living with HIV/AIDS, people who have passed from the virus and the overall stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS that remains today; white, blue and pink stripe to represent the transgender flag; and the intersex flag on the side (HRC Foundation, 2026) (Volvo, 2022).

[11] The seven-stripe lesbian flag is the most commonly used lesbian pride flag, with each stripe having its own meaning. Since seven colours represent seven different aspects of the flag, it serves as a bit of a catch-all for the lesbian identity: the red stands for Gender Nonconformity; the bright orange for Independence; the light orange for community; the white for relationships unique to womanhood; the pink for serenity and peace; the dusty pink for love and sex; and the dark pink for femminity (S., 2025).

[12] Born around 630 a.C., Sappho was a Greek lyric poet who, among other things, represented in her poems her attraction for different women and her lack of interest in other men. Unfortunately, only a few fragments of her poems survive today, but it is still possible to consider her poems the earliest written traces of a lesbian relationship in the world (Britannica, 2025). For a long time, before the word lesbian became commonly used, the girls attracted to the same sex were referred to as *sapphic*, from the name of the poetess (Merriam Webster, 2025).

[13] The modern gay men’s pride flag is a revision of an earlier gay men’s pride flag that featured a range of blue tones. That version of the flag evolved because it used colours perceived as stereotypically associated with the gender binary. The updated flag is meant to be inclusive of a

but starting from the 1600s, it slowly started to represent, at first, a carefree sexual attitude, like that of a prostitute or a brothel, and later, from the 1900s, it started to be used as a synonym of homosexual (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2022).

Figure 1 Gay Pride Flag

Bisexual[14] is used to identify a person with the potential to be sexually attracted to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree.

Figure 2 Bisexual Pride Flag

Transgender[15] indicates those whose gender expression or identity is not congruent with the sex assigned at birth. (South Dakota State University, 2023) These people can undergo surgical operations for gender reassignment, but not everyone seems to feel the need to do so. In fact, for some of them, only

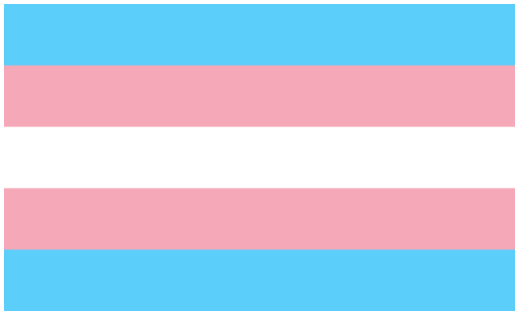

Figure 3 Transgender Pride Flag

much wider range of gay men, including, among others, transgender, intersex, and gender nonconforming men (Volvo, 2022).

[14] The flag was created in 1998 by Michael Page to bring awareness to the bisexual community. It represents pink and blue blending to make purple, in the same way that bisexual people can blend into the straight community and the gay community. The flag's colours also represent attraction to different genders: the pink represents bisexual attraction to the same gender, while the blue represents attraction to the opposite gender. The purple stripe in the middle represents attraction to two genders (Volvo, 2022) (HRC Foundation, 2026).

[15] The Transgender Pride Flag debuted at Phoenix Pride in 2000 and was created by US Navy Veteran Monica Helms, a transgender woman. She created the flag as a symbol of both the diversity of the trans community and the rights that trans folks are fighting for today. Light blue and pink are featured because they’re the traditional colours associated with baby boys and girls, respectively. The white stands for those who are intersex, transitioning, or those who don´t feel identified with any gender (Volvo, 2022) (HRC Foundation, 2026).

dressing like the gender they identify with is sufficient enough to feel comfortable with their body.

Queer [16][17] *or Questioning* [18] describes sexual and gender identities other than straight and cisgender. Queer is sometimes used to express that sexuality and gender can be complicated, change over time, and might not fit neatly into either/or identities, like male or female, gay or straight (PlannedParenthood, 2023). The use of the term queer is not approved by the whole LGBTQ+, especially the oldest activists, who are used to hearing the term negatively and are against its use.

Figure 4 Genderqueer Pride Flag

A more complete acronym for the queers also includes the letters "I" and "A" that respectively stand for: *Intersex* [19], a term used to describe a person born with differences in their sex traits or reproductive anatomy that don't fit typical definitions of female or male. There may be differences regarding genitalia, chromosomes, hormones, internal sex organs, and/or secondary sex

Figure 5 Intersex Flag

[16] People have historically used the term as a harmful slur against those whose sexuality, gender, or gender expression did not conform to their expectations. Today, however, some people have reclaimed the word "queer" to describe their sexual orientation or gender identity (Medical News Today, 2020).

[17] The Genderqueer Pride Flag was created by Marilyn Roxie in 2011 to represent those who reject the static categories of gender. Genderqueer people may see themselves as both male and female, neither, or beyond the binary. The lavender stripe represents androgyny and other queer identities, while the white stripe stands for agender people. The green stripe symbolises those who fall outside the binary (HRC Foundation, 2026).

[18] It is a term used to describe a person who is exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity (Le, 2022).

[19] In 2013, the co-chair of Intersex Human Rights Australia, Morgan Carpenter, chose the colours yellow and purple for the intersex flag. The circle, perfect and unbroken, represents the wholeness of intersex people. It is a reminder that intersex people are perfect the way they are or choose to be (Volvo, 2022) (HRC Foundation, 2026).

characteristics (e.g., pubic hair, breasts, facial hair, etc.) (Le, 2022); and *Asexual*[20], a term used to describe a person who lacks sexual attraction or desire for other people, or has a low sexual interest. It's different from celibacy, in which people choose to abstain from sexual activity. For some people, it may mean that they rely on other types of attraction instead of or in place of sexual attraction (South Dakota State University, 2023) (Volvo, 2022).

Figure 6 Asexual Pride Flag

In addition, the "+" is a symbol that represents members of the LGBTQ+ who identify with a sexual orientation or gender identity that isn't included within the LGBTQIA acronym. It's an inclusive way of representing gender and sexual identities that letters and words cannot yet fully describe (Le, 2022).

There is a broad spectrum of genders and sexual orientations that are not yet recognised as distinct categories or are not yet accepted or normalised within other groups.

One example of this is the term *Sapiosexual*[21][22], which means that a person is sexually attracted to highly intelligent people, so much so that they consider it to be the most essential trait in a partner (Brennan, 2021). Sapiosexual people can also describe being attracted to the mind, irrespective of gender. This is similar to pansexuality, but in this case, one finds

Figure 7 Sapiosexual Pride Flag

[20] The Flag for the Asexual Community was created in 2010 by the Asexual Visibility and Education Network. Because the term asexual is an umbrella term, each colour in this flag also represents something unique. Black stands for asexuality. Grey represents demisexuality, for those who develop sexual attraction to someone only after forming a deep emotional bond with them. White represents the community's allies. Purple represents the entire community of asexual folks (Volvo, 2022) (HRC Foundation, 2026).

[21] Some claim it as a sexual orientation or sexuality, and certain dating apps even allow users to identify as sapiosexual. Other people say it's an inappropriate bid for queerness from a community that is not marginalised the way other sexual orientations are.

[22] The meanings and origins of the flag are unknown (LGBTQIA+ Wiki, 2023).

explicitly intelligence or intellectual beauty to be the main source of attraction (LGBTQIA+ Wiki, 2023).

Another example is the term *Gynosexual,* which represents people who are attracted to a person who identifies as female or displays stereotypically feminine characteristics. The person to whom someone is attracted may be male, female, trans, or nonbinary. Unlike many other sexual identity terms, gynesexuality doesn't specify the person's own gender. People who identify as gynesexual may also identify as male, female, nonbinary, or another gender identity (Gillespire, 2024).

Figure 8 Gynosexual Pride Flag

There are also newer terms related to sexual orientation that include *monosexual*, which refers to people who are attracted to only one gender, such as straight, gay, and lesbian people; *non-monosexual*, which describes people attracted to more than one gender (including bisexual people), and *pansexual*[23], which refers to people attracted to people regardless of their gender identity. Even if some of them can have a sexual preference between the gender identities, the gender does not constitute a relevant factor in their attraction.

Figure 9 Pansexual Pride Flag

The Sexual and Gender Minority Research Office at the National Institutes of Health defines sexual and gender minority populations as including "individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, transgender, Two Spirit[24], queer, and/or intersex. Individuals with same-sex or gender attractions or behaviours and

[23] The pansexual flag was created in 2010. The flag's meaning has been loosely defined. Still, most interpret pink as representing attraction to women, yellow as representing attraction to non-binary individuals, and blue as representing attraction to men. This entails problems and the creation of a new flag in 2021, which is considered more inclusive but has not yet been widely adopted (LGBTQIA+ Wiki, 2024).

[24] Is a term that traditionally originated from Native American culture that describes people who are male, female, or intersex and have both a male and female spirit within them. It's sometimes referred to as a third gender (Le, 2022).

those with a difference in sex development are also included" (Office of The Director, National Institutes of Health (OD), 2019).

So, coming back to the initial question, "what it means not to represent themselves as a straight person", it is now possible to define that it indicates:

> Every person who does not feel sexual or romantic attraction only for the opposite gender and/or does not represent themselves as cisgender or conform to the cisnormativity construction of gender.[25]

1.2 LGBTQ+ in the world: first examples

Looking at the importance that the LGBTQ+ people have reached recently, it is possible to believe that the presence of these people has only been recognised in recent years, but in reality, homosexual couples can be seen all around the world throughout history. In Sappho's poems and Omero's "Iliad", with the relationship between Patroclus and Achilles, for example, there are already references to what could be considered a homosexual relationship, but without ever directly addressing it as such. These references can also be seen in the Chinese Han Dynasty, through the story of Emperor Ai and his companion Dong Xian, whose tale inspired the birth of the Chinese term "the passion of the cut sleeve," still used to indicate intimacy between two men (Jstor Daily, 2020)[26].

Until the diffusion of Christianity, homosexual relationships seemed to be accepted in the majority of the world. Starting from the 5th century, due to the interpretation of the Bible verses about the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Christian society started to refer to homosexuals as *sodomite.*[27] In the Bible, Lot gave shelter to two angels in his house in Sodom, but when the other men in the city learned of their arrival, they went in groups to Lot's house to abuse the two angels. When Lot refused, even proposing to give his virgin daughters in exchange, but the men forced their way into Lot's house, God's fury destroyed the two cities.

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[25] Author definition.

[26] The tale narrates that the couple was asleep, but when the emperor woke up, in order not to wake up his lover soundly asleep, he decided to cut off his clothes sleeve.

[27] In the current use, it refers to sexual intercourse between men, but more properly it refers to any anal intercourse, so also between a straight couple (Treccani, 2025).

This episode was interpreted as if those men wanted to have physical or sexual intercourse with the angels, but the most recent interpretation of the verses refers to the punishment as a result of not respecting the guests (Progetto Gionata, 2019).

With the colonisation of Africa and other countries, Christianity and its precepts were diffused by missionaries all around the world. One example of how Christian beliefs influenced the local approach to non-conforming people is the figure of the *hijra* in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Considered a third gender, indicates people who are often born male but look feminine, or people born intersex. While hijras had, for centuries, worked as spiritual guides, harem protectors, or in the imperial court, their figure did not survive British colonialism. Following Christian beliefs, in 1871, the British named all *hijras* as criminals, even if this did not influence too much the presence of these people, especially due to their religious presence.

The law was partially cancelled in 1911, and only in 2014 did the Indian Supreme Court follow Pakistan and Bangladesh in cognising the *hijras* as a third gender deserving of equal rights (Harvard Divinity School, 2025).

At the same time in Lesotho[28], the figure of the *Motsoalle* was criminalised by the arrival of the British colonists. This word is used to indicate a marriage between two women, which sometimes can include a sexual connotation (The edge of Africa, 2017). Since culturally, sex was considered to be an act only between women and men, even when the *Motsoalle* engaged in intimate acts, they did not consider it to be sex. This kind of relationship was misunderstood by the British when they colonised the country and marked it as a lesbian relationship, and as such, it was banned.

Unfortunately, Lesotho was not the only African country influenced by Christian beliefs. For example, in Nigeria, where the *Yan Daudu*[29] still have to live secluded even now (Mark, 2013), or in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where

[28] Formerly known as the Kingdom of Lesotho, it is the world's largest sovereign enclave, situated in South Africa (Wikipedia, 2025).
[29] It refers to "men who act like women".

the figures of the *okule* and *agule*[30] were stigmatised as not conforming (Purday, 2013, p. 26).

The colonies are not the only countries to witness the worsening of the treatment of non-cisgender, non-conforming people. The two World Wars represented a dark moment not only for Jewish people but also for LGBTQ+ people.

1.3 Germany's situation between the two World Wars

Between the end of the First World War and the beginning of the Second, Germany, and in particular Berlin, became the queer capital of the world. This gave all LGBTQ+ people the opportunity to live more openly and find freedom (Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center, 2025) during a period that took the name of the Weimar Republic[31].

The sexual reforms during the republic were not perfect; if on one side they approved of consensual same-sex behaviours between adults in a private environment, on the other side, they condemned improper sexual expression in public, like prostitution. (Oosterhuis, 2017). On top of that, groups like prostitutes, transgender people, lower-class venereal patients, etc., were subjected to police control. For example, trans people had a sort of "trans passport" that permitted them to move around in their preferred attire (Rowe, 2021).

One figure I consider more relevant to this period for my thesis is Magnus Hirschfeld, a researcher on sexuality and gender in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries.

He was one of the first theorists to believe that there are gender identities that lie outside of the male-female binary, and observed that some individuals' sense of gender is contrary to the sex assigned at birth (today we refer to them as trans or transgender). He believed that when these people dressed up or decided to undergo some surgical operations, it was only to present in a way that affirmed their

[30] The term *okule* is used to indicate people "like women" and *agule* is used for people "like men". These people still guide spiritual ceremonies.

[31] Indicates the government of Germany from 1919 to 1933, so-called because the assembly that adopted its constitution met at Weimar from February 6 to August 11, 1919 (Britannica, 2025).

gender identity, and as such, science should help those who want to transition medically (Bryan-Quamina, 2024).

To do so, he founded the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee (S-HC) in 1897, which became the centre of the movement to reform repressive anti-homosexual laws in Europe in the first decades of the 20th century. In 1919, he established the Institute for Sexual Research[32] to study all aspects of human sexuality (The Legacy Project, 2024).

He also worked with the Berlin Police Department to educate officers on gender non-conformity and the needs of trans people, and to protect his transgender patients from harassment, he presented them with a medical certificate where he explained that their gender expression was aligned with their true nature (Bryan-Quamina, 2024). These certificates were later substituted by a special permit issued by the Belin Police Department that gave transgender people the right to dress according to their preferred gender and protected them from being arrested or charged with the criminal offence of exhibitionism.

But Doctor Hirschfeld did not stop there. Under his guidance, the Institute for Sexual Science performed some of the very first male-to-female gender-affirming surgeries on trans women experiencing gender dysphoria: Dora Richter, an employee at the Institute.

The Institute, unfortunately, had a short life. In January 1933[33], the Nazis came to power, and on May 6, a collective of Nazi-supporting youths, the German Student Union, occupied the building and destroyed the institute's book collection (Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 2025). After the attack, the Nazis continued their persecution of gay men by expanding and enforcing legislation that criminalised homosexuality, helped by the new version of Paragraph 175.

The new version of the statute went into effect on September 1, 1935, and says as such:

[32] The institution offered medical services, counselling, and sex education to the queer community (Bryan-Quamina, 2024), becoming a central point in the Belin queer community soon.
[33] The year when Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany.

> A man who commits sexual acts (Unzucht) with another man, or allows himself to be misused for sexual acts by a man, will be punished with prison[34].

The new version of Paragraph 175 had two additional sections: 175a and 175b. Section 175a listed four specific behaviours that the Nazis saw as particularly egregious violations of Paragraph 175. These included a man

- coercing another man to have sex;
- initiating sexual relations with a male subordinate or employee;
- having sexual relations with a male minor (under the age of 21);
- engaging in prostitution with another man.

Section 175b became the statute banning bestiality. As before, this prohibition applied to both men and women (Museum, 2021).

Figure 10 The pink triangle

From 1936, this law was enforced by the Reich Central Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion[35]. Under the leadership of the criminal police inspector and SS member Josef Meisinger [36] (1899-1947), this office collected data on men convicted – or suspected – of homosexuality and then used it to prosecute them. The tightening of Paragraph 175 led to the sentencing of more than 50,000 men. After the start of the war, convicted homosexuals, considered repetitive offenders, were increasingly likely to be sent to concentration camps, where, identified by pink triangles, they occupied the lower rungs of the prisoner hierarchy (GHDI, 2024).

[34] The 1871 version of Paragraph 175 read: Unnatural sexual acts (*widernäturliche Unzucht*) committed between persons of the male sex, or by humans with animals, is punishable with imprisonment; a loss of civil rights may also be imposed (Museum, 2021).
[35] *Reichszentrale zur Bekämpfung der Homosexualität und der Abtreibung.*
[36] In 1939, he was sent to Warsaw as the Commander of the Security Police, and from 1941 to 1945, he was stationed at the German Embassy in Tokyo. In that position, he made unsuccessful attempts to convince the Japanese to exterminate the Jewish population of Shanghai. He was captured by the Americans in Japan but extradited to Poland, where he was executed in 1947 (EHRI, 2024).

The Pink Triangle prisoners suffered enormous abuse, not only by the Gestapo and the SS but also by the other prisoners.

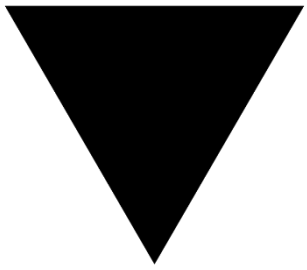

Figure 11 The Black Triangle

A different fate befell the lesbian girls. Not considered a threat to German society, and considering the idea that they could still be forced to procreate for the nation, the majority of the incarcerated women were of double background, for example, lesbian and Jewish.

When sent to a concentration camp, these lesbian women were identified by the Black Triangle. The black triangle[37] was for "asocial" individuals, which included many types of people, including people with mental health issues, people living with addiction, sex workers, beggars, homeless people, pacifists, and lesbians, or other "asocial" women (Prager, 2022).

After the end of the war in 1945, Germany was divided into two new states, the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), which adopted two distinct approaches to the application of Paragraph 175.

The first decided to use the 1871 version, but to keep Paragraph 175a, for the non-consensual sex acts between men. It abolished both statutes in 1968.

The second, a communist country, decided to keep in use the 1935 version, sending to prison more than 10000 men. The prison sentences were typically much shorter than during the Nazi era. In some cases, they lasted days or weeks. Other men did not serve time; instead, they paid a fine. In 1969, West Germany deemphasised enforcement of the statute.

Paragraph 175 was then repealed from the German criminal code in 1994, following the reunification of East and West Germany as the Federal Republic of Germany (Museum, 2021).

[37] Later, this symbol was reclaimed as a lesbian pride symbol.

1.4 The "Lavender Scare" in the United States (1940s-1960s)

The Lavender Scare, a lesser-known yet significant chapter of United States history during the Cold War, targeted gay employees within the federal workforce from the late 1940s through the 1960s.

This campaign, driven by anti-Communist sentiments and congressional investigations, saw thousands of gay individuals fired or forced to resign due to their sexuality. It coincided with an era where greater public awareness of homosexuality, fueled by works like Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, did not lead to greater acceptance, but instead, increased repression, especially in Washington, DC.

The harassment was amplified by the political climate, where homosexuality was often linked with communism. Senator Joseph McCarthy[38]'s infamous speeches linking the two, particularly his claims that homosexuals were susceptible to communist recruitment due to "peculiar mental twists," further fueled the paranoia. This rhetoric led to an official purge, culminating in the dismissal of 91 homosexual employees from the State Department, which triggered public outcry and further legislative scrutiny.

While McCarthy's actions escalated the hysteria, a narrower Senate investigation, led by Senator Millard Tydings[39], focused on loyalty risks rather than the broader security concerns posed by homosexuality, thereby limiting the scope of the inquiry. Nevertheless, political pressures led to additional investigations,

[38] He did not draw significant national attention until 1950, when he claimed to have a list of known Communists still working in the Department of State. A special subcommittee investigated McCarthy's charges and rejected them as "a fraud and a hoax," but the outbreak of the Korean War lent credibility to the charges. When McCarthy became chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations in 1953, he launched a series of investigations into alleged subversion and espionage. In 1954, a confrontation with the army led to the nationally televised Army-McCarthy hearings, which tarnished McCarthy's public image, undermined his charges, and prompted his censure by the U.S. Senate (United States Senate, 2024).

[39] Appointed as chairman of a subcommittee to investigate charges of communist infiltration of the State Department, Tydings dismissed McCarthy's claims, stating that the senator had committed "a fraud and a hoax." McCarthy successfully sought retribution by helping to defeat Tydings in the 1950 election, making him one of the first high-profile victims of what would become known as McCarthyism (United States Senate, 2024).

deepening the association between Communism and homosexuality in the federal workforce and resulting in the prolonged repression of thousands of gay individuals.

From late March to May of 1950, Senator Kenneth Wherry[40] J. Lister Hill led the first investigation into the employment of homosexuals in the U.S. government, uncovering highly speculative and dramatic claims, including the assertion that 3,700 of the 5,000 homosexuals in Washington, DC, were federal employees. The investigation led to the creation of procedures within the Civil Service Commission (CSC) to address the rehiring of "moral perverts" who had been dismissed due to their sexuality. Wherry emphasised the link between homosexuality and Communism, suggesting that homosexuals could be used by Communists for subversive purposes, which further fueled public fears and led to a broader inquiry.

The second, more comprehensive investigation, known as the Hoey Committee investigation, broadened its scope to gather information from multiple federal agencies, law enforcement, and medical experts. The committee sought to determine the number of suspected homosexuals in the federal workforce and to question the appropriateness of their employment. Most agencies strongly opposed employing homosexuals, citing security concerns, though a few, such as the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, expressed more leniency, arguing that homosexuals could be effective employees.

The committee also explored medical perspectives, consulting psychiatrists and other medical professionals about the psychological implications of homosexuality and its potential as a security risk. Despite the varying viewpoints within the medical community, the committee's stance reflected the prevailing view that homosexuality posed a serious threat to national security and the moral integrity of the government workforce. This investigation, along with the broader

[40] As a businessman, Wherry disliked high taxes, intrusive regulations, and attempts to control prices, even during wartime. He also opposed federal programs that he regarded as social engineering and called on Congress "to stop the biggest giveaway show on earth." A staunch nationalist in foreign policy, he opposed the Marshall Plan, NATO, and other Cold War initiatives of the Truman administration. Wherry's "scrappy" style of debate and staunch defence of his party's positions in the Senate led to his election as Republican whip in 1944 and minority leader in 1949 (United States Senate, 2024).

cultural climate, solidified the discrimination and persecution of gay individuals in the federal government, tying their sexuality to subversion and security risks.

The congressional investigations of the early 1950s, particularly the Hoey committee's efforts, led to increased scrutiny and systematic targeting of gay federal employees. Procedural changes, such as mandatory full disclosure of resignation reasons and FBI coordination with law enforcement, made it nearly impossible for these workers to leave their jobs without being labelled as homosexuals. The investigations also influenced court procedures, increasing penalties and public exposure for those accused of same-sex activity. Additionally, anonymous tips and inter-agency information sharing contributed to the removal of numerous employees.

These measures created a pervasive atmosphere of fear and anxiety within Washington's gay community, as government agencies and officials intensified efforts to root out and expose suspected homosexuals.

The Hoey committee's final report, *Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government*, solidified institutional discrimination against gay federal employees by labelling them as security risks and moral threats. The report's findings, based on selective evidence and dismissive of more nuanced perspectives, reinforced existing policies banning gay workers and called for stricter enforcement.

Its influence extended beyond government, shaping employment policies in the private sector and ultimately leading to President Eisenhower's 1953 Executive Order #10450, which formally barred gay individuals from federal employment.

This widespread purge, known as the *Lavender Scare*, resulted in thousands losing their jobs, financial hardship, emotional distress, and even suicides. Unlike the Red Scare, the Lavender Scare operated in secrecy, reducing its visibility in historical memory and making its victims seem like faceless statistics rather than real individuals whose lives were devastated by government-led discrimination (Adkins, 2016).

1.5 The Homophile Movements

From the 1950s to the 1960s, following the Stonewall uprising that marked a significant shift in attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people, organisations of queer people emerged, demanding respect and equal rights regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. Most activism focused on providing a safe environment, addressing workplace and housing discrimination, and encouraging medical, legal, and other professions to adopt a more sympathetic view of homosexuals (Cornell University, 2024).

One of the first to be founded was the COC, *Cultuur en Ontspanningscentrum* (Centre for Culture and Leisure), in the Netherlands in 1946. The group had two main goals: to contribute to social emancipation and to provide culture and recreation for queer people. The focus was on getting Article 48bis[41] in the Wetboek van Strafrecht[42], which made sexual contact with someone of the same sex between 16 and 21 years old punishable by up to one year imprisonment, was revoked (COC, 2025).

In 1950, a similar organisation was founded in Sweden: the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights (RFSL[43]), whose primary focus was on the right to same-sex marriage[44] (RFSL, 2022).

In the same year, in the United States, and in particular in Los Angeles, a secret organisation, the Mattachine Society[45], took form, which quickly spread throughout the whole country (Library of Congress, 2024).

Founded in late 1953, the French "homophile" movement *Arcadie* was active for 28 years. In January 1954, the movement began publishing a monthly magazine, opening pubs, and establishing "regional delegates" in several provincial towns. Even if Paris was considered the European capital for homosexuals, from

[41] Article published in 1911.
[42] The main code for Dutch criminal law.
[43] It sends for *Riksforbundet for Sexuellt Likaberattigande.*
[44] Since 2009, Sweden has had gender-neutral marriage legislation, which means that same-sex couples can get married under the same conditions as opposite-sex couples (RFSL, 2022).
[45] Initially called the Mattachine Foundation, it was founded by the Communist organiser Harry Hay, modelled on the Communist Party (Library of Congress, 2024).

August 6, 1942, a law was passed punishing any person engaging in "one or more indecent or unnatural acts with a minor of the same sex under the age of 21" with six months to three years in prison and a fine of 2,000 to 6,000 francs, deteriorating the situation of French homosexuals. This measure was then confirmed by a decree of February 8, 1945, and became Article 331, paragraph 3, of the Penal Code, necessitating the establishment of a “homophile” movement foundation, such as “Arcadia” (Jackson, 2006, pp. 150-174) .

1958 was the year Great Britain founded the Homosexual Law Reform Society (HLRS), which worked hard to gain the legalisation of same-sex relationships[46] (UK Parliament, 2025).

These movements were not limited to a single country; in 1951, the International Committee for Sexual Equality (ICSE) convened for the first time. Held in Amsterdam, it hosted representatives from Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, linking existing homophile groups across Europe's borders. The new body sent a telegram to the United Nations demanding equal rights for homosexual minorities based on the principles of the UN, the “findings of modern psychological, biological and medical research,” and “mankind’s greater awareness of social injustice,” an apparent reference to the Nazi Holocaust (Rupp, 2014, pp. 29-49).

Although this committee's work ceased in the 1960s, it represents an important step toward defining a homophilic identity.

1.6 The 1960s and Stonewall

In the late 60s, more LGBTQ+ people tried to organise themselves more strongly. For example, in 1966, different groups unified under the North American Conference of Homophile Organisations (NACHO, pronounced Nay-Ko), which,

[46] Their popular appeal was highlighted in 1960 when an unprecedented crowd of over 1000 people attended an HLRS open meeting at Caxton Hall, London. However, it wasn't until the passing of the Sexual Offences Act in 1967 that they achieved complete vindication for their endeavours (UK Parliament, 2025).

among other things, coordinated a fundraiser to cover the legal expenses of the battle against the anti-LGBTQ+ laws (LGBT Historical Society, 2025).

In 1967, in Buenos Aires, the *Nuestro Mundo* organisation was founded. The organisation worked to contrast the military dictatorship.[47] LGBTQ+ repression, and to stop the police brutality against said people. It was considered more reformist than revolutionary, as it showed little interest in the country's political situation (BBC MUNDO, 2004).

In a period of violent repercussions on the LGBTQ+ people, more of them decided to seek refuge in bars and pubs frequented predominantly by homosexuals. And it is precisely in one of those that, in the early hours of June 28, 1969, in New York City, the police decided to raid the Stonewall Inn,[48] a gay club located in Greenwich Village, marking one of the most critical events for LGBTQ+ people worldwide.

The Stonewall Inn was purchased by the Genovese crime family, which already controlled the majority of Greenwich Village. By bribing the police, they could cheat out whatever they pleased, such as emergency doors or current water to wash the glasses. Moreover, because most patrons wanted to remain anonymous but were required to sign with their names upon entering the inn, the wealthier patrons were blackmailed by the Genovese family (History, 2017).

Nonetheless, Stonewall Inn quickly became a critical Greenwich Village institution. It was large and relatively cheap to enter. It welcomed drag queens, who received a bitter reception at other gay bars and clubs. It was a nightly home for many runaways and homeless gay youths, and it was one of the few—if not the only—gay bar left that allowed dancing.

Raids were still common, but usually corrupt cops would tip off bars owned by the Mafia before they occurred, allowing owners to stash the alcohol (sold

[47] Called the "Argentine Revolution", it is the dictatorship of Juan Carlos Onganía between 1966 and 1970 (DG., 2021, pp. 89-90).

[48] In 2016, then-President Barack Obama designated the site of the riots—Stonewall Inn, Christopher Park, and the surrounding streets and sidewalks—a national monument in recognition of the area's contribution to gay rights (History, 2017).

without a liquor license) and hide other illegal activities (History, 2017). However, the day the riots began, there was no tip from the police.

During the early hours of the 28th, the police officers, armed with a warrant, entered the inn and arrested 13 people, including employees and people violating the state's gender-appropriate clothing statute. The last ones were identified after being brought to the bathroom to check their sex by female officers. Already exhausted by the police's constant harassment and the social discrimination, the inn patrons, later fortified by some neighbourhood residents, decided to remain in front of the pub instead, bringing about an escalation of events.

Within minutes, a full-blown riot involving hundreds of people began. It is not clear which side started the rebellion, but the police, a few prisoners, and a *Village Voice* writer end up barricading themselves in the bar, which the mob attempted to set on fire after breaching the barricade repeatedly.

The fire department and a riot squad were eventually able to douse the flames, rescue those inside Stonewall, and disperse the crowd. However, the protests, sometimes involving thousands of people, continued in the area for five more days, intensifying at one point after the *Village Voice* published its account of the riots (History, 2017). The "riots", or as the Stonewall veterans prefer to call "rebellions", went on for 6 days in total.

The Stonewall rebellion was not the main reason, but after these events, more oppressed homosexuals decided to start rebelling against the oppression. Within months, this movement spread all around the United States.

These rebellions culminated on the first anniversary of the riots, on June 28[49], 1970, when thousands of people gathered to march from the Stonewall Inn to Central Park, marking the birth of the first American gay pride parade[50]. The parade's official chant was: "Say it loud, gay is proud" (History, 2017).

The events at Stonewall have been celebrated ever since, though only in recent years have people of colour and transgender people been widely recognised for their pivotal role (Blakemore, 2023).

[49] The participants renamed the day: Christopher Street Liberation Day.
[50] These walks started to be referred to as "Pride Parades" only after the 80s.

1.7 After Stonewall: The Transgender Liberation Movement

> All our lives, we've been taught that sex and gender are synonymous- men are "masculine", and women are "feminine". Pink for girls and blue for boys. It's just "natural," we've been told. But at the turn of the century in this country, blue was considered a girl's colour and pink was a boy's. Simplistic and rigid gender codes are neither eternal nor natural. They are changing social concepts (Feinberg, 1992, p. 5).

After the Stonewall events in 1969, while gays and lesbians were trying to gain the support of the progressive social movements, trans people and all non-gender-conforming people were occupied with earning the recognition of gays and lesbians.

Even if it was present in human history all around the globe, like the *Chirurgia magna*[51], published in 1296 by the doctor Lanfranco da Milano, or the *renyao*[52] in China, the figure of the trans or gender non-conforming (CNG) person usually finds more difficulty in gaining recognition by the surrounding society.

When, in 1952, an American trans woman named Christine Jorgensen underwent sex-reassignment surgery, outing herself when her story caught the attention of the media, many trans people, probably for the first time, realised that they were not alone, symbolising a first step in their social recognition. Before that, trans and CNG people lived in fear of being outed, even by their family, due to numerous discriminations in private and work life, bringing them to isolation. (Ellis, 2020, pp. 1-20)

One of the first riots historically reconnected to the transgender liberation movement was the riot at Cooper's Doughnuts, a Los Angeles doughnut shop. Usually, the customers of the shop were drag queens and gay men, many of whom were Latino/a or African American. When, one night, in May 1959, the police arrived at the shop and began harassing the customers for their gender appearance, the customers, tired of the police harassment, began to react, forcing the officers out.

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[51] Talked about a kind of surgery to correct the atypical genitalia and bring them back to their "natural form".

[52] Translate as "human monsters" indicates the commonality that revested a different gender from the birth one.

The riot, the publicity surrounding Christine Jorgensen, the development of inclusive correspondence networks, and publications such as Transvestia brought trans people into broader community networks where they could share personal experiences, information about medical and financial aid, and help one another form new communities able to speak up about their needs.

After the Stonewall riot, gays and lesbians started to create their movements, excluding the trans and GNC people, who decided to form their organisations like the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), Transvestite and Transsexual Activist Organisation (TAO), and the Queens' Liberation Front[53] (QLF) (Ellis, 2020, pp. 1-20).

Between this and STAR, it's probably one of the most relevant. Even if it lasted only for 3 years, STAR helped not only with the legal protections for gays and trans people, advocating for their legal rights, but it also provided housing and personal care for unhoused queer youth. Both STAR and TAO actively enabled transgender and GNC people's ability to fight for their rights and educate people within and outside their communities. This outward-reaching community-building style helped increase allyship, further strengthening the trans and GNC liberation movement (Ellis, 2020, pp. 1-20).

The publication of *Drag*[54] by the QLF, and the formation of a new movement in 1975 called Fantasia Fair allowed stronger coalitions to form between drag queens, cross-dressers, transgender people, and transsexual people amidst their erasure from mainstream gay and lesbian liberation movements (Ellis, 2020, pp. 1-20).

More united than ever, the trans and GNC community often found it hard to create strong relationships with gay and lesbian groups. These movements frequently promoted a cisgender mentality that alienated trans and GNC people and

[53]QLF was formed in 1970 by heterosexual cross-dresser Bunny Eisenhower and drag queen Lee Brewster in response to the erasure of drag and transgender people from the queer liberation narrative, particularly at the Christopher Street annual liberation march to commemorate and celebrate the Stonewall Riots (Ellis, 2020).

[54]Drag was a magazine published throughout the 1970s and 1980s by Lee's Mardi Gras Enterprises, Inc., which covered topics related to crossdressing and drag, including drag balls, civil rights demonstrations, and profiles of popular drag queens (Digital Transgender Archive, 2025).

minimised LGBTQ+ people's ability to socialise, organise, and mobilise as a unified community.

On top of that, in 1973, homosexuality was removed from the DSM[55], while the Gender Identity Disorder remained considered as a mental illness, further stigmatising trans people and increasing restrictions in receiving medical treatments, like hormonal therapy and gender affirmation surgeries, causing more disparities between the movements.

The trans and GNC community was not helped by the feminist and lesbian activists either. Some of them used to consider them "male infiltrates" or even rapists, and for this, excluded them from their movements.

This division between the movements persisted throughout the 70s and 80s. It was only in the 90s, with the diffusion of the internet, that the previously scattered communities started to easily organise, share information, and slowly form a more cohesive national transgender movement, bringing, among other things, the inclusion of the "T" in the LGBT acronym and the start of new transgender studies.

1.8 The AIDS crisis

HIV (*human immunodeficiency virus*) is a virus that attacks cells that help the body fight infection, making a person more vulnerable to other infections and diseases. It is spread by contact with certain bodily fluids of a person with HIV, most commonly during unprotected sex (sex without a condom or HIV medicine to prevent or treat HIV), or through sharing injection drug equipment.

If left untreated, HIV can lead to the disease AIDS (*acquired immunodeficiency syndrome*). AIDS is the late stage of HIV infection that occurs when the body's immune system is badly damaged because of the virus (HIV.gov, 2023).

The first official report of AIDS can be traced back to June 5, 1981, when the US Centres for Disease Control (CDC) published an article in its *Morbidity and*

[55] The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders was first published in 1952 by the APA (American Psychiatric Association) as a way to diagnose mental illness. Only in 2013 were all the diagnoses referring to the LGBTQ+ people completely removed from the DSM.

Mortality Weekly Report (*MMWR*): *Pneumocystis* Pneumonia—Los Angeles. The article describes cases of a rare lung infection, *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia (PCP), in five young, previously healthy gay men in Los Angeles. Los Angeles immunologist Dr Michael Gottlieb, CDC's Dr Wayne Shandera, and their colleagues report that all the men have additional unusual infections, indicating that their immune systems are not functioning correctly. Two have already died by the time the report is published, and the others will die soon after (HIV.gov, 2025).

The disease, initially called *Gay-Related Immune Deficiency* (GRID), because it was thought to only affect gay men, by the end of the year, had already been diagnosed in 337 people, 130 of whom had already passed away.

Over time, it was noticed that not all the infected were gay; some travelled in specific parts of the world, others were drug addicts, and others just received blood transfusions. For this reason, the CDC decided to start using the term AIDS in 1982 instead. Due to the numerous infections in AIDS patients, it was difficult to study the origin of this pathology, but in 1986, the International Committee on the Taxonomy of Viruses announced that the virus causing AIDS was HIV.

Even if it was soon proved that AIDS was not correlated strictly with homosexuality, the stigma surrounding these people made it harder for them to have access to HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and care services. As a result, some LGBTI people with HIV did not know they had it, or they got diagnosed late, when HIV is harder to treat, and had already infected others (Be in the known, 2025).

In the beginning, when it was not clear how the disease spread, it was a common belief that it could be transmitted even by saliva or sweat, or even by touch, and even after this was proved to be untrue, the stigma around these people remained strong, determining their isolation.

It was only in April 1987, when the disease was already spreading all around the world, that with a simple gesture, the general idea about AIDS diffusion changed. Thanks to Princess Diana shaking hands with an AIDS patient, it was possible to show the world that this disease did not need to be feared, and that the patients needed help and compassion, not discrimination (BBC, 2017).

Since then, studies about AIDS have continued, with the discovery in 1987 of AZT, an anti-retroviral drug. Unfortunately, HIV soon became resistant to AZT. Recently, it was discovered that the best treatment, the antiretroviral therapy (ART), is the combination of different medicines (called an HIV treatment regimen) (GIV.gov, 2024).

The death rate of AIDS patients reached a peak in the late 90s, at the beginning of the 2000s, becoming the reason for the death of 3% of those years' deceased. Due to medication, this value is half today, although the African Continent remains the most affected, partly because distributing the cure is difficult (One World In Data, 2024).

Referring to the most recent World Health Organisation (WHO) report, at the end of 2023, an estimated 39.9 million people were living with HIV, 65% of whom are in the WHO African Region, and the spread of the disease is ongoing in all parts of the world, even if with access to correct medications, it has become manageable and not life-threatening (WHO, 2024).

1.9 From the beginning of the new century till today

During the last decade of the previous century, the LGBTQ+ movements around the world began to take more steps forward, like the affirmation of the bisexual community, the prohibition of conversion therapy (in some countries), or the legalisation of equalitarian marriage.

According to the British Psychological Society (BPS), conversion therapy - sometimes called "reparative therapy" or "gay cure therapy" - tries to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity. In practice, it means trying to stop or suppress someone from being gay, or from identifying as a different gender than the sex recorded at birth. It can include talking therapies and prayer, but more extreme forms can consist of exorcism, physical violence, and food deprivation (BBC, 2024).

Brazil was the first country to ban it in 1999. Followed, until now, only by Canada, Ecuador, Spain, Germany, France, Malta, and New Zealand, leaving conversion therapy still legal in the majority of the world. At the same time,

legislation against it is being drafted in multiple countries, and Taiwan has already banned its use by medical professionals (Fleck, 2023).

Speaking of marriage, it is necessary to distinguish between civil unions and equalitarian marriage.

Civil unions for same-sex couples were first recognised in Denmark in 1989 and constitute a legal arrangement between two people that provides state-level legal protections. Although they have many of the same legal protections as a marriage, couples in a civil union may have difficulty sharing access to their partner's health insurance or inheritance, or making decisions on their partner's behalf in emergencies. Additionally, civil unions are not always nationally recognised. For example, in the United States, the law varies by state (Schreiber, 2024), whereas in Japan, it is recognised only in certain prefectures and lacks nationwide validity.

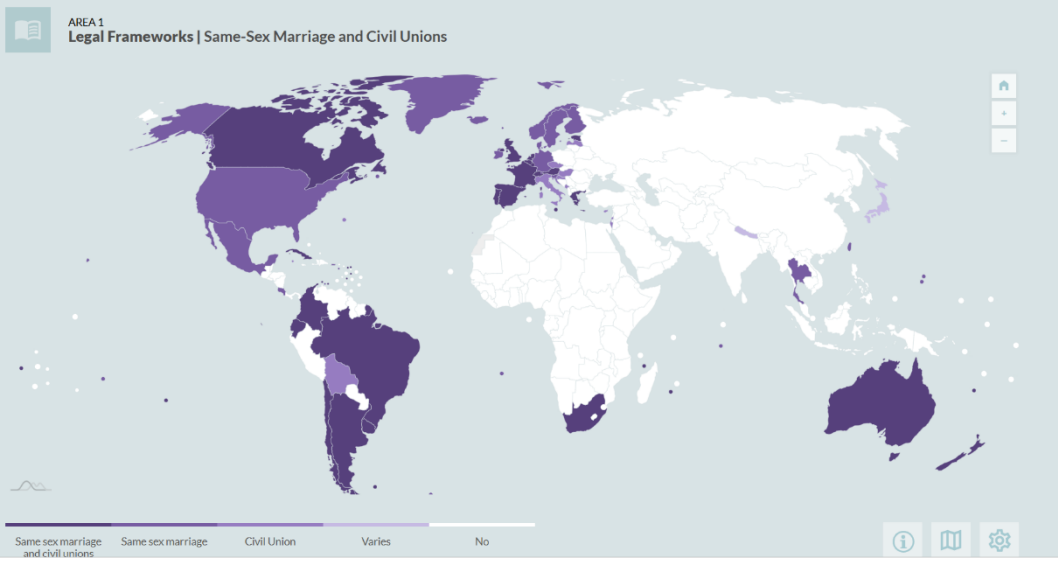

Figure 12 Same-Sex Marriage and Civil Unions

As of April 2025, 34 countries worldwide recognise same-sex civil unions, and only 37 have achieved full marriage equality (Ilga database, 2025).

Of these 37 countries, the Netherlands was the first one, in 2001, to lawfully recognise same-sex marriage. As shown in Figure 14, the majority of countries that recognise same-sex marriage are concentrated in Europe and the Americas, accounting for 49% and 45%, respectively. In contrast, recognition of civil unions is lower at 44% and 36% (Ilga database, 2025).

The areas that appear to have more difficulty in accepting these rights are Asia and Africa, continents where there are still countries with laws against homosexuality. In fact, in countries such as Brunei, Iran, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Uganda, and the northern states of Nigeria, people can still be sentenced to the death penalty if they engage in homosexual behaviours (Biplov, 2024), making the country unsafe for its LGBTQ+ citizens and the foreigners travelling there.

Just this year, though, on January 24th, Thailand's emperor signed a new law regarding equal marriage rights, allowing all LGBTQ+ couples to get legally engaged and married, manage their assets, inherit from their partners, and adopt children like any other couple (Luo, 2025), making Thailand the second country in Asia, after Taiwan in 2019, to recognise them.

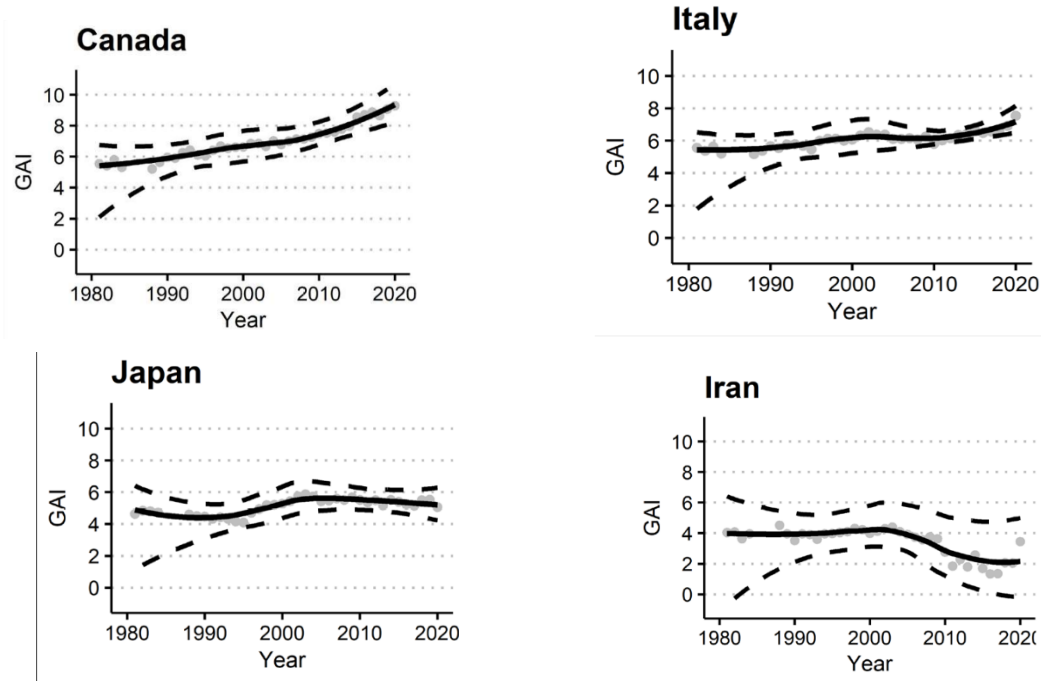

Figure 13 Trends in acceptance for four different countries

Even with such a huge disparity between different Nations' approaches to the LGBTQ+ people, there seems to be a general increase in the global acceptance of the community itself (Flores, 2025). According to Flores' article, which analysed the situation in 172 countries worldwide[56] 56 of these countries have experienced

[56] The resulting dataset of the research included 6,198 country-question-years (meaning results for a particular country in a particular year for a particular question) under analysis with 98 different question wordings, 175 different countries and locations, and 37 years. The combined individual-

an increase in acceptance, while 57 have experienced a decrease. Of these 172 countries, Iceland, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Canada were the most accepting.[57] (Flores, 2025)

Looking at Figure 15,[58] extracted from the same study, the trend in acceptance levels in Canada, Iran, Japan, and Italy is evident, and it changed between 1981 and 2020.

These four countries have been selected as examples of four distinct trends: consistent improvement (Canada); mostly constant deterioration (Iran); mostly constant status quo (Japan); and recent modest improvement (Italy). However, let us analyse their situation more specifically.

The first is Canada, which represents one of the countries with the highest acceptance level in the world in 2020,[59] but also the country with the most progressive LGBTQ+ rights in the Americas (Global Citizen Solutions, 2024). In Canada, until 1969, the year the government passed an omnibus bill,[60] with the decriminalisation of non-underage same-sex sexual activities, homosexuality was considered a crime punishable by imprisonment.

In 1996, the Canadian government included sexual orientation as one of the 11 grounds of discrimination in the Canadian Human Rights Act[61], giving LGBTQ+ people the right to complain to the competent commission if they believe they are

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level sample comprises 7,059,822 responses to questions about LGBTQ+ people and rights (Flores, 2025).

[57] These data refer to 2020.

[58] Flores, Andrew R. "Social Acceptance of LGBTQ+ People in 175 Countries and Locations." Figure 6, pages 37-41. Using advanced statistical methods and computer modelling, we analysed survey data from 175 countries and locations to produce a single score, known as the Global Acceptance Index, for each country and year (Flores, 2025).

[59] It is visible in Figure 12, where in 2020 Canada reached 10% of acceptance, while the other countries did not exceed 8%.

[60] An omnibus bill is a large bill composed of numerous smaller bills on the same broad topic. For example, an omnibus tax bill may encompass changes across several areas of tax law, including income, corporate, and sales taxes. Often, the smaller bills are heard in committee and then laid over for possible inclusion in the omnibus bill rather than passing each bill separately (Minnesota Legislature, 2025).

[61] The Canadian Human Rights Act was redacted in 1977 to ensure equality of opportunity for all its citizens. It applies only to federal jurisdiction, leaving each province and territory to enact its own human rights legislation, which applies to local entities such as schools and hospitals (Kirkup, 2021).

discriminated against for their sexual orientation. In 2000, allowed same-sex couples to receive the same social and tax benefits as any other couple, through Bill C-23, the Modernization of Benefits and Obligations Act[62].

This new legislation influenced 68 federal acts on topics such as income tax deductions and pension benefits. Even if the legal concept of "common-law relationship" was broadened, it did not influence the right to get legally married for non-heterosexual couples (Canadian Pride Historical Society, 2023). It was only in 2005, with the enactment of the Civil Marriage Act,[63] that same-sex couples gained the right to get married and divorced, anywhere in Canada (Government Of Canada, 2024). These gradual improvements are shown in Figure 14, where Canada's appreciation levels increase steadily.

On the opposite side, it is the situation of Iran[64]. In Iran, under the Penal Code 2013, same-sex activities like "*live*[65]", "*tafkhiz*[66]", and "*musaheqeh*[67]" can be heavily persecuted. In the case of "*livat*", and "*tafkhiz*", when the passive part is a Muslim man and the active one is a non-Muslim, the penalty can reach the death sentence. In the case of "*tafkhiz*", when both parts are Muslim, and "*musaheqeh*", the penalty will be a different number of lashes (Human Dignity Trust, 2024). Through the years, several thousand people were executed due to these laws.

In 2019, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammed Javad Zarif, responded to a German reporter asking him about these executions:

[62] Which is indicated by an increase in acceptance, as highlighted in Figure 12.

[63] This enactment extends the legal capacity for marriage for civil purposes to same-sex couples in order to reflect values of tolerance, respect and equality, consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It also makes consequential amendments to other Acts to ensure equal access for same-sex couples to the civil effects of marriage and divorce (Canadian Civil Marriage Act, 2005).

[64] Unlike Canada, Iran's appreciation percentage tends, from the 2000s, to decrease rapidly.

[65] Under Article 233, *livat* is explained as penetrative anal intercourse between men.

[66] Under Article 235, it is explained as putting a male sex organ between the thighs/buttocks of another man.

[67] Article 238 defines it as a woman putting her sex organ on the sex organ of another woman.

"Our society has moral principles. And we live according to these principles. These are moral principles concerning the behaviour of people in general. And that means that the law is respected and the law is obeyed (Walsh, 2019)."

During the Universal Periodic Review[68]organised by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, on January 24th, 2025, though, it was explained how the Iranian government ignored the previous requests to implement the legislation in favour of LGBTQ+ people, and, on the contrary, continues to impose severe punishments, including flogging and the death penalty. At the same time, transgender and non-binary people face restrictions and penalties. Medical practices often misdiagnose and abuse LGBT+ individuals, including the use of harmful conversion therapies. State and nonstate actors perpetrate physical and psychological violence against LGBT+ persons with impunity. LGBTQ+ human rights defenders are prosecuted and may have faced the death penalty (UPR Working Group, 2025).

Iran was not the only country reprimanded by the UN Human Rights Council. Also, Italy was one of them. It was highlighted how, in Italy, the respect of the human rights of LGBTQ+ people is undermined by often incomplete legislation. Even if some regions (Tuscany, Umbria, Emilia-Romagna, Liguria, and Marche) have been taking an active part in fighting against discrimination of all kinds and, in particular, discrimination based upon sexual orientation and gender identity, there is still a hole[69] in the national legislation. In fact, in recent years, hate speech against LGBTQ+ persons has directly come from public officials and politicians. Moreover, when incidents occur, there is often an inadequate response from leading public officials (Council for its Universal Periodic Review of Italy, 2025).

[68] The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique mechanism of the Human Rights Council that calls for each UN Member State to undergo a peer review of its human rights records every 4.5 years. The UPR provides each State the opportunity to regularly: report on the actions it has taken to improve the human rights situation in its country and to overcome challenges to the enjoyment of human rights; and receive recommendations – informed by multi-stakeholder input and pre-session reports – from UN Member States for continuous improvement (United Nations, 2025).

[69]For example, Italy does not have an explicit law against hate crimes, especially if they are committed against sexual orientations. The new government also recently complicated or made it impossible for homosexual couples to legally recognise their children (Amnesty International, 2025).

Even if in private life, freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are their rights are respected, and LGBTQ+ NGOs can operate freely and engage with the government, there remains public hostility from some politicians, religious leaders, and public officials. Same-sex couples are discriminated against in law compared with different-sex ones, and the state dissociates itself from providing solutions to the everyday problems to which this discrimination gives rise (Council for its Universal Periodic Review of Italy, 2025). Even if slowly, as shown in Figure 14, Italy appears to be implementing its regulations, creating a more accepting environment for LGBTQ+ people.

While countries such as Canada and Italy are improving, Japan, the primary focus of this research, appears to be deteriorating. To better understand the reasons for this, it is appropriate to delve into the history of LGBTQ+ people in the country.

LGBTQ+ in Japan

As reported in Equadex, Japan ranks 62nd in the equality ranking for LGBTQ+ rights. In Japan, although homosexuality is legal and there is no censorship of LGBTQ+ themes, many rights are still not guaranteed or are only partially guaranteed. ly guaranteed (Equadex, 2025).

For example, it is still impossible for transgender people to legally change gender on their documents without a gender reaffirming surgery. In fact, as stated in Article 3, Sections 4 and 5 of the Act on Special Measures for the Treatment of Gender Identity Disorder (GID), to ask for a gender change, between other things, the person needs to not have reproductive glands, or they needs to have lost their function; and they need to have body parts which resembles the genital organs of the opposite gender[70] .

Another example is the fact that it is illegal for people who have male-male intercourse to donate blood for 6 months after their last sexual activity[71]to limit the spread of HIV [NATIONAL AJET, 2025].

Another significant discrimination against LGBTQ+ people is the ban on proper marriage, which, even if it was ruled unconstitutional by district courts and high courts all around Japan, is still in place.

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[70] (Rulings of Changes in Recognition of Gender Status)
Article 3(1)A family court may make a ruling of a change in the recognition of the gender status of a person who is a Person with Gender Identity Disorder and who falls under all of the following items, at the request of such person:
(i)is not less than 20 years of age;
(ii)is not currently married;
(iii)currently has no child who is a minor;
(iv)has no reproductive glands or whose reproductive glands have permanently lost function; and
(v)has a body which appears to have parts that resemble the genital organs of those of the Opposite Gender.
(2)A person who makes a request as referred to in the preceding paragraph must submit a medical certificate issued by a physician which contains particulars specified by Ordinance of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, such as the results of the diagnoses referred to in the preceding Article and the progress and results of treatment concerning the Person with Gender Identity Disorder referred to in said paragraph [Japanese Law Translation, 2003].

[71] Between 2005 and the 1st Apr of 2011, the limit was set at 1 year, but with the help of Red Cross Japan, it was reduced to 6 months.

At the base of the ban is Article 24 of the Japanese Constitution, which states:

> Marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes, and it shall be maintained through mutual cooperation with the equal rights of husband and wife as a basis. With regard to choice of spouse, property rights, inheritance, choice of domicile, 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 (The Costitution of Japan, 1946).

To circumvent this ban, more than 200 municipalities across Japan have introduced partnership systems that allow LGBTQ+ couples to register their relationships. Although these partnerships are not legally binding, like marriage, which is a legal act defined in the Civil Code; they do not have validity in the whole country; in fact, they are only valid in the prefecture of application, and do not guarantee the same rights and obligations as marriage, and does not change entries on the family registry or certificate of residence. They are helpful for housing, receiving specific welfare packages, and assistance in the event of disasters or crimes. All the benefits change from prefecture to prefecture and can be found on their websites (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2023).

2.1 Edo Period (1615-1868)

2.1.1 The LGBTQ+ terminology of the period

Before the Edo period, the majority of the literate population was male. Even during the Edo period, when the percentage of alphabetisation rose, only 40% of women could study, while males reached 60% (Nakasendo Way, 2025). Due to this disparity, the first terminology that was created to refer to homosexuality was made from a male point of view.

One of these terms is *nanshoku* (男色 literally “male colours”, sometimes translated as “homosexuality”), used to represent male-male sexual relationships (Kaito Japan Design, 2024). While in modern English, “homosexuality” is often

conceptually paired with "heterosexuality", *nanshoku* is paired with *joshoku* (女色 also pronounced *nyoshoku*), which represents the male-female eroticism (Pflugfelder, 1999, p. 24-25). These two worlds were closely linked with Buddhist thought: the kanji for colour used in *nanshoku* refers in Buddhist philosophy to the world of visually perceptible forms towards which lower beings, including humans, experience desire (more specifically, an erotic one), thus hindering their progress along the path of enlightenment (Pflugfelder, 1999, p. 25). During the Edo period, the term world *nanshoku* was less associated with religious connotations and was used more widely in poetry, songs, dances, dramas, and woodblock prints.

Another term to indicate male-male eroticism is *wakashudō* (若衆道 "way of youths"), or in short *shudō* (若衆), used to indicate an adolescent male, which came into use at the beginning of the period. The "way of youths" did not refer to the concept of being young themselves, but more to the "way of loving youths", a path that saw young men as sexual objects and that was prohibited to women. Just like the case of *nanshoku*, also *shudō* has a paired term: *nyodō* (女道"way of women"), which refers to the research for sexual pleasure with women in a commercial context. These women were mainly courtesans or other kinds of prostitutes.

The construction of *shudō* ran parallel to the articulation of erotic knowledge and pleasure as a "way"[72] on the same level as others (like poetry, martial arts, flower arrangement, and tea ceremony), that will later be known as *shikidō* (色道), the "way of colours" (or eros) (Pflugfelder, 1999, p. 26-29).

The *wakshudō*, though, created a new problem: who can be defined as youth? The beginning was socially considered to be between 12 and 15 years; what about the end? To prolong their earnings, the *wakashudō* prostitutes tried their best to look younger for longer, and only occasionally, well-seasoned "youths" would

[72] The construction of male-male sexuality as a "way" appeared for the first time with the terms *nyakudo* and *mitsudo* ("secret way") in 1482. It was after the beginning of the Edo period that this "way" came to be seen not as elitist but as a field of knowledge open to anyone who could pay the price.

crop up in noncommercial contexts (Pflugfelder, 1999, p. 26-30). If the age range of these "youth" is so vague, how did people understand who was part of them? Primarily[73] through clothing and hairstyles.

Figure 14 Wakushu's hairstyles

Wakashu clothes were similar to those worn by unmarried young women: colourful kimonos with long, flowing sleeves; while they wore their hair in a topknot, with a small, shaved portion at the crown of the head and long forelocks at the sides, as opposed to adult men, who shaved the entire crown of their heads (Bohnke, 2021).

On the other side, the *wakashudō's* lover, the *nenja* (念者), was not bound by age or social status, but it was generally a norm that the lover would be older than the "youth" himself. That does not mean that the *nenja* was expected to be a full-grown adult; the important thing was that he would be on a later stage of "masculine development". For this reason, a *wakushudō* would grow into a *nenja*, but never the other way around.

2.1.2 The legal and religious aspects

In contrast to European countries, like Italy, where homosexuality was illegal due to religious reasons, in Japan, no law criminalised male-male sexual practices per se.

At the beginning of the Edo period, there were three big different religions in Japan, and none of them criminalised homosexuality, or at least not more than it would do with male-female sexual interaction as well.

[73] Hairstyles of wakashū and adults, Edo-period Japan. Top row, left to right: two hairstyles of younger wakashū (adolescent boys), hairstyle of older wakashū with forelocks (maegami) cut into "corners" (*kado*). Bottom row, left to right: hairstyle of a young man (*yaro*), hairstyle of an adult man, hairstyle of a woman. All except the woman have the crown of the head shaved; wakashū (but not adult men) also wear forelocks. Adapted from: Yoshida Hanbei, *Kōshoku kinmōzui* (Illustrated Encyclopedia of Love), circa 1664-1689 [reprinted in: *Kōshokumono sōshi shū* (Collection of Erotic Books), Saikaku Gakkai, 1968] (Hanbei, Between circa 1664 and circa 1689).

For example, Shinto traditionally place more emphasis on the notion of "pollution" than on sin in a Judeo-Christian ethical sense. While people (and in particular men), if they had a male-female sexual intercourse, they had to purify themselves before presenting in front of the gods, the same was not required in the presence of a male-male one. In fact, Shintō canon remains silent on the topic of male-male sexual practices, indicating neither acceptance nor condemnation. At the same time, some *kagemajaya* (陰間茶屋) were located near Shintō's shrines, which, other than bringing more affluence to the shrine in itself, helped the *kagemajaya* enjoy a certain measure of immunity from taxation and administration.

Another vital religion of the period was Buddhism. The popular discourse of the time represented Buddhist monasteries and temples as teeming sites of male-male eroticism, and the clergy as greedy consumers of its commercialised culture. From a theological perspective, everything that could distract the monk from his path to enlightenment was rejected. This, of course, includes sexual relationships, male-female and male-male. Still, there was a difference: male-male erotic relationships were seen as significantly less evil than the male-female ones. This is also enforced by the law, which prescribed harsh, in some cases venial capital, punishments for monks "who formicate with women", but no legal repercussion for male-male sexual intercourse, which made monks less scared of the latter.

During the same period, Confucianism spread in Japan. According to Confucius, there were five basic human relationships: ruler-subject; parent-child; husband-wife; brothers; friends (Confuciuspedia, 2025). Even if the male-male sexual relationships were not condemned, it was hard to contextualise them in the five human relationships. Even if the ruler-subject one could represent the difference in power, especially in the samurai context, and the brothers one could explain the age gap between the two, Confucianists of the time chose to represent it as friendship, but in the Edo period, this came to mean male-male intimacy. The husband-wife relationship was not taken into account because, under Confucian principles, the couple's primary focus is to produce progeny. Therefore, if male-male relationships did not challenge any Confucian principles, they remained ethically legitimate.

Outside the religious world, the Edo period was characterised by numerous changes, some of which were reflected in legislation. These are, in fact, the years of the legal regulation of sexuality, which was more focused on maintaining a balanced status quo than interfering with male-male sexual relationships, privileging values of moderation and decorum. *Shudō* legislation thus spoke more about social status, ethical propriety, and external appearances (Pflugfelder, 1999, p. 97-105).

It is important to remember that every *bakufu*[74] (幕府) had the right to compile their own penal codes, in accordance with the *shōgun*'s (将軍) one, which typically also included a section about sexual offences, which were largely silent or at least neutral on the topic of male-male sexual relationships (Pflugfelder, 1999, p. 124-125).

2.2 Meiji Period (1868-1912)

2.2.1 The historical background

The Meiji period refers to the period in Japanese history from 1868 to 1912 during which the Meiji Emperor reigned. Following the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate in the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan's new leaders embarked on a program of radical reform aimed at strengthening the country to resist the threat of European imperialism.

A new political structure modelled on those in Europe was established, and the country rapidly industrialised. Building a modern army and navy, Japan successfully fought wars against China and Russia in 1894 and 1905, respectively. By the end of the Meiji period, Japan was not only the strongest country in East Asia but was also a world power (World History Encyclopedia, 2022).

[74] Literally translated as "tent government", bakufu were governments which ruled Japan from 1185 until 1868. Also called "shogunate", a bakufu was technically limited in authority to the feudal overlord's domains and the men who owed close allegiance to him. This government did not have authority over the possessions or retainers of lords who were not the shogun's direct vassals (Nakasendoway, 2025).

2.2.2 Meiji sexual legislation

With the abolition of the domains in 1871, Japan became a highly centralised political entity, its fundamental laws emanating from a Tokyo-based bureaucracy and, after the opening of the Imperial Diet in 1890, an elected national legislature. Codes of law established by central authorities bound all Japanese, regardless of region, to a uniform set of legal standards, replacing the patchwork of bakufu, domain, and village legislation that had characterised the Edo period.

Furthermore, with the repudiation of the system of "four estates," distinctions of class came to lose their relevance in determining the legality of sexual behaviour. In adjudicating sexual offences, the nature of the crime, so to speak, became more important than the social status of the person. This does not mean that women and men were equal before the law. For example, in the case of divorce on grounds of adultery (*kantsu* 姦通), the divorce would be guaranteed immediately to men, but to women only if their husband had intercourse with a married woman. He had been brought to court by the aggrieved husband.

Family laws were not the only ones affected by this reform; in 1873, for the first time in Japanese history, the practice of anal intercourse (*keikan* 鶏姦), which was a central act of the *shudō* sexual repertoire, was banned. Even with this new legislation, male prostitution was never considered a threat to female prostitution.

Article 266 of the *Kaitei ritsurei* (改定律令)reads as follows:

> Those engaging in anal intercourse (*keikan*) shall each be sentenced to ninety days of penal servitude (*choeki* 懲役). In the case of the peerage (*kazoku*) and ex-samurai (*shizoku* 士族), this shall be treated as a dishonourable offence. Violated youngsters fifteen years and under shall not be held criminally liable. Those committing [anal] rape (*gōkan* 強姦) shall be sentenced to ten years of penal servitude. For attempted [rape], the penalty shall be reduced by one degree.[75]

[75] Naikaku hirokukyoku, *Hoki bunrui taizen,* pag 303.

Although the term *keikan* was occasionally used to refer to male-female anal intercourse, the phrase "violated youngsters" (*kanseraruru no yodo*), whose lack of a gender marker by default implied a male referent, indicates that the framers of this provision had foremost in their mind sexual relations between males, and assumed an age asymmetry in which older males acted as inserters and younger as insertees.

It could be argued that the Euro-American countries influenced this change in mind, but in reality, it was an internal decision. The legislative process was set in motion by an inquiry (*ukagai* 伺い) submitted to the Justice Ministry (*Shihōshō* 司法省) by authorities in Kumamoto (then known as Shirakawa) prefecture in September 1872, requesting instructions for dealing with cases of keikan in the growing number of schools, both public and private, that had been established in the prefecture since the Restoration. The penal code of the Kumamoto domain had, since 1797, incorporated an explicit precedent for dealing with male-male sexual violence, at least in cases where it resulted in death or injury. The fear among prefectural officials that the "lingering evil custom" (*korai yori no akushu*) of nanshoku was impeding the studies of younger students also echoed periodic complaints by domain bureaucrats in other regions, such as Matsuyama and Aizu. Kumamoto authorities presumably handled such incidents satisfactorily under the domain law during the Edo period. Still, they no longer possessed the legal means to do so after the Kumamoto domain was abolished in 1868, and national codes such as the 1871 Shinritsu koryo, which were silent on the subject, were implemented.

Justice Ministry officials in Tokyo agreed that such behaviour warranted punishment and, by October 1872, had drafted a pair of articles for incorporation into the Kaitei ritsuryo, then in the final stages of preparation. It was only at this point that foreign legislation was consulted. The foreign penal codes that lawmakers specifically examined were those of contemporary China (the Qing dynasty) and France. Overall, the resulting Article 266 bears the imprint of Chinese law more strongly than that of the French, as is true of the *Kaitei ritsurei* as a whole.

It needs to be taken into consideration that the final draft of Article 266 considered male-male sexual intercourse as age-based: an older male penetrating a younger one, often with the use of force. This means that all other categories, such as inverted roles or crossdressers, were not taken into account by the law. This discrepancy was likely due to the influence of writers with samurai experience.

January 1882 was a year of change. The new penal code *Keihō* (刑法, sometimes referred to as *kyukei* 求刑 or "Former Penal Code) legalised consensual alan intercourse between adult males. Now all male-male, female-female, and male-female, besides penetration of the vigina, ended up united in the category of "obscene acts"[76] under the 1880 *Keihō* were illegal, however, only under a limited set of circumstances. Only in cases involving minors or coercion did the state undertake to punish them, while "obscene acts" between consenting adults were, in theory, immune from official interference. In addition, the responsibility for prosecuting obscene acts" no longer fell to the state, as had previously been the case with *keikan*, but to the victim and their household. Article 350 of the 1880 *Keihō* stipulated that only the violated party or immediate relatives (*shinzoku* 親族) had the right to press such charges.

In 1907, the existing *Keihō* was replaced by a thoroughly revised measure of the same name. With respect to male-male, as well as female-female, sexuality, however, the new penal code followed largely along the lines of its French-influenced predecessor. Changes also appeared in the accompanying provisions. Article 178 specified that "obscene acts" committed against a person who was unconscious or otherwise incapable of resisting, whether the offender had caused this state or was merely taking advantage of it, were subject to the same penalties as if they had exercised violence or threat. Under the 1880 code, such a provision had existed only in the case of male-female coitus. Finally, Article 181 of the new code prescribed a sentence of three years to life imprisonment when a criminal committed "obscene acts," either completed or attempted, resulting in the other party's death or injury. These various modifications were not explicitly targeted

[76] A term learned in the European penal codes, but never directly used.

against male-male sexual practices, however, since they applied equally to male-female and to female-female relations.

Except for minor changes made during and after World War II, these articles remain in use today.

2.2.3 The "new morality" in public opinion

In a more alphabetised society, the concept of morality became part of popular discourse as much as it did of official discourse. The theme of sexuality can also be found in journals, fiction, poetry, and even art. As said in the previous paragraph, male-male sexuality in the Meiji period was not as accepted as in the Edo period, and this change of heart is visible in literature where male-male sexual intercourse is now described as "barbarous", "immoral", or simply "unspeakable". The starting point of this "new morality" can be traced back to the changing representation of male-male sexuality in the genre of *senryū*[77] (川柳) verse.

Senryū remained a widely practised form of comic and satiric expression in the Meiji period, being published in periodicals whose circulation increased during this period. Analyse the available *senryū* is essential not only because male-male intercourse is a common topic, but also because their extended production over time makes it possible to analyse the evolution of popular opinion on the topic. From these verses, it is, in fact, likely to see that male-male eroticism, which developed during the Edo period, did not disappear immediately with the Restoration. Taking as an example the *senryū* published in *Maru Maru Chinbun*[78] (團團珍聞), two figures in particular continued to be associated with male-male intercourse: the *bantō* (番頭) and the *detchi* (丁稚), clerk and apprentice, respectively, in a

[77] *Senryū* is a form of Japanese poetry similar to haiku, but rather than focusing on nature, it centres on human nature and everyday life. Senryū poems typically consist of three lines, with a 5-7-5 syllable pattern, just like haiku (Poem Analysis, 2025).

[78] It was a popular satirical newspaper published weekly from 1877 to 1907. It was founded by Nomura Fumio (1836-91), a former official of the Meiji government and journalist, in the style of the British weekly satirical and humorous magazine Punch. Maru maru chinbun satirised the government through editorial articles, comic tanka and haiku, and caricatures, and promoted the Movement for Civil Rights and Freedom in the 1880s (National Library of Australia, 2025).

commercial house. The *bantō* is portrayed as a person who enjoys entertaining themselves with detchi, a younger coworker whose professional advancement is in the *bantō*'s hands. The main reason these figures remain, unlike the kagema's, which disappeared with the Restoration, is the economic vigour of the commercial sector and its traditional apprenticeship system.

Another personification of male-male intercourse in *senryū*'s characters was the Buddhist priest, for whom nanshoku had commonly been deemed a lesser transgression than fornication with the opposite sex. Satire of these figures focused on the incongruity between this form of pleasure and the secular standards of "civilised" sexuality, prompting calls for reform of the whole Buddhist institution. In the early Meiji period, the government tried to "civilise" the Buddhist clergy by not only discouraging male-male erotic practice but also relaxing limits on male-female sexuality. A key component of the latter was the central government's 1872 rescinding of a ban on priestly marriage. Despite such attempts, male-male sexual practice continued among the priesthood. It persisted until the twentieth century, when sexologists began to identify Buddhist temples and monasteries as archetypal sites of "same-sex love".

Although these two are not the only social groups characterised by male-male intercourse, *senryū* on these themes are absent from the pages of the *Maru Maru Chinbun*. This is probably due to the idea diffused at the time that male-male sexuality had to either remain unspoken or be used to diffuse a higher moral perspective.

The erasure of male-male erotic themes from the *Maru Maru Chinbun* combines with the diffusion of the notion of the "obscene" in the legal discourse. This term represents not only the sexual behaviour per se, but also how they get publicly displayed and represented. To control and censor topics considered "obscene", during the late 1870s and the early 1880s, the government published

two codes of laws: the *Shibunshi jōrei*[79] (新聞紙条例 governing periodicals) and the *Shuppan jōrei* (出版条例 for book publishing).

The censorship of male-male sexual content was not limited to publications but also occurred in other media, like the kabuki and prints. To represent these relationships within the boundaries of the new regulations, authors needed to refer to them as an "unspokable" practice or to use them as a tool to indicate what was morally acceptable and what was not. This strategy made it possible for male-male sexual practices to be articulated in discourse even as their ethical validity was expressly denied.

Following the *Maru Maru Chinbun* example, it is possible to determine that the representation of male-male eroticism in the Meiji period followed two phases: the first, til the middle of 1880s, when the *shudō* thems continued to circulate, although their distribution was influenced by the "new morality"; the second, when the male-male sexuality become less accepted to the point that it became an unspeakabily or condemned topic, bring it to the margins of the public discourse.

2.3 From the Meiji Period to contemporaneity

> A young conscript bids an expressionless farewell to his father in front of a gated military base. Clad in the uniform of the Imperial Japanese Army, the young man bows before entering the barracks to begin his mandatory military training. For the next two or three years, he will learn how to kill in a number of different ways and endlessly practice how to move in formation and on command, and he will bathe, sleep, and eat in the continuous company of hundreds if not thousands of young men like him. He will probably struggle to understand his fellow conscripts' dialects, be grateful for the regular and more nutritious meals than those he had been accustomed to from home, and miss his family (Frühstück, 2022, p. 19).

These are the world's Frühstück uses to describe many young men who, after the 1870s, were preparing themselves for soldierhoob from the Sino-Japanese war

[79] Although these documents were superseded by later legislation, their basic topics remained intact till the end of the Pacific War.

in 1894-95 onward. One might think that the idea of the man as a war hero and the woman left in the village to care for the family and pray for her husband's safe return has been surpassed, but not entirely. In fact, post-war politicians, such as Shinzo Abe, still try to impose these concepts on modern politics. However, the figure of the Asia-Pacific War hero remains present only in fictional works, such as anime, manga, and video games.

2.3.1 A new masculinity

With the Conscription Decree, an Imperial edict promulgated on November 28, 1872, the new government laid the first stone in building a modern mass military force charged with the "protection of the nation". To do so, they had to mobilise a large-scale force, but where to find it? The answer is easy. Just a couple of years earlier, the government initiated a census of the entire population, conducted with the assistance of schools and hospitals, to determine how many young men would be eligible to participate. The first nationwide data were published in 1876 and indicated that 18%[80] of the 2.9 million conscripts[81] were classified as having higher fitness for service (Frühstück, 2022, p. 21-22). What about the other 82%? Part of these people were considered unfit for physical or mental defects, a small part for being intersex: possessing both male and female reproductive organs was not only a reason for exclusion, but also a reason for humiliation.

Over the subsequent decades, the increasingly idealised modern manhood became a military manhood, which eventually attained hegemonic status. But for all efforts to that end, the "hegemonic masculinity" could not maintain a fixed type, and instead remained contestable and, at certain times and places, continued to be nervously guarded, challenged, and manipulated. The military man's hegemonic masculinity was reconfirmed by the mechanics of marginalisation– of dominance and subordination between groups of men– and the complicity of men who, though

[80] These boys need a minimum height of 150 cm and a minimum weight of 50kg. Those who did not meet these criteria were classified as noncitizens.

[81] After 1902, there would be conscripts coming from Taiwan, Kaeafuto, Manchukuo and Koria, who would go together in a multi-ethnic military force, whose goal was to expand Japan's territory.

without embodying "hegemonic masculinity," nonetheless gained from its patriarchal dividend (Connell, 1995, p. 76-81).

However, physical strength was not the only requirement for these soldiers. A new, strong psychological standard was created. The expert began to highlight "the problem of weak soldiers" (*jakuhē mondai* 弱兵の問題), specifying the types of "mental conditions" and "mental weaknesses" considered responsible for the disciplinary issues of established soldiers. These strict criteria excluded the majority of candidates. In fact, among the ones that went through starvation or autoinflicted wounds to not be selected, only one in thirty men was selected, which brings us back to the 18% previously mentioned.

This system not only influenced the lives of adult men; it was also extended to children through school medical examinations, which were practised not only in Japan but also throughout the colonies and with the implementation of the School Ordinance (*Gakkōrei* 学校令) in 1887, Mori, a pioneer of modern education, introduced the core goals of the new education system: namely, the creation and cultivation of the spirit to defend the nation– which of course further fed into the hegemonization of military masculinity. This idea spread through multiple channels from urban centres into the regions, first via school textbooks and education, and later through mass culture that targeted an increasingly stratified consumer base, including children, youth, and adults. By the time of the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), even the gender ideology of school textbooks had shifted toward a new tolerance for and encouragement of dangerous play for boys, simply in the hope that such games would further familiarity with and admiration of soldiers and soldiering.

The idealisation of the military man also depended on the promotion of a rigid gender divide that cast men exclusively as combatants, ignoring the range of roles within the military other than in combat, and definitely dismissing the "modern boys" of the 1920s who were believed to seek individual fulfilment in a display of androgyny that horrified government officials and social critics (Rimer, 1990, p. 37-55). Women's roles, on the other hand, were crafted around supporting men, or at least being silent and passive. The Women's National Defence

Association (*Kokubō Fujinkai* 国防婦人会), formed in 1932, promoted the efforts od "women on the home front" (*jūgo no josei* 15 歳の女性), helped nurture and maintain women's virtues, combated "delinquent thought" and pacifism, encouraged the raising children to be of use to the empire, and aimed to obfuscate any doubt or resistance they encountered. However, some women rejected these roles and sought to be as close as possible to the front line by becoming nurses. That is when the concept of the "white-robed injured soldier" with the "white-uniformed field nurse" started, projecting a rigid heteronomative order that bilied the homosocial communities of both soldiers and nurses.

Autobiographies and memoirs of some soldiers, however, described life in military school as laced with "same-sex" love and frequent, harshly punished incidents of "sexual misconduct". For example, Osugi Sakae's sexual advances toward his fellow trainees at the military academy are considered one of the reasons that led to his expulsion over "lack of discipline" (Sakae, 1992, p. 64-80).

Similar occurrences can be found in the memoir of otherwise ordinary field nurse Anzai Sadako. Indeed, in the contemporary idiom of jealousy and love letters, Anzai recounts a romantic relationship between two female nurses that goes awry when one discovers that her lover has reciprocated the affections of a third nurse (Sadako).

In June 1945, the failing Japanese regime implemented the Volunteer Military Service Law, which declared women proper Imperial subjects and thus eligible for the draft; thereafter, they could serve alongside male soldiers at the front. Only women who were ill, pregnant, or essential to the survival of the household were exempt.

2.3.2 Queer people's situation

The situation shifted again when new alliances took shape in the public sphere during the 1950s and 60s. Then, those living "ordinary" homosexual lives were considered at the same level as other sexual and gender non-heteronormative individuals, like unmarried adults, single mothers, and cohabiting, unmarried,

heterosexual couples (Lunsing, 1999). Eventually, gays and lesbians became the subject and object of what Japanese media referred to as a "gay boom," one marked by a new style of same-sex identity. During this era, "gay boys" similar to the kimono-wearing hostess had founded their own meeting places, "gay bars," which they could regularly and safely frequent.

In the 1970s, effeminate male homosexuality again became associated with the entertainment world and was increasingly seen as separate not only from mainstream society but also from ordinary gay and lesbian individuals. During these years, Togo Ken (1932-2012) founded his Miscellaneous People's Association (*Zatsumin no Kai* 雑民の会*, also Zatsumintō* 雑民党), which sponsored the Miscellaneous People's Party, a radical gay political organisation. The association attracted a range of people whose sexual and lifestyle choices placed them outside the mainstream: sexual minorities, including transgender people, lesbians, gay men, and sex workers, as well as divorced individuals, single parents, and people living in unconventional family arrangements. Altogether, the association marked the beginning of a broadly conceived sexual rights movement. Togo, one of the earliest openly gay activists to publicly tackle Japan's heteronomative status quo, dismissed the notion of "obscenity" (*waisetsu*) being associated with same-sex sexuality and pornography, and criticised discrimination against sexual minorities.

During electoral campaigns, he wore a kimono and make-up, spoke in a soft, sing-song voice more typical of female voices, spoke uninhibitedly about the need for sexual liberation in Japan, and reclaimed the previously derogatory term okama ("fag") for people like himself (Frühstück, 2022). In addition to advocating for the abolition of the emperor system, he sexualized the emperor to weaken his authority and remind the public that the emperor is just another human with sexual desires. This deliberate blending of the political 'public' sphere with the personal 'private' sphere of sexuality is most evident in a satirical cartoon by Tōgō published in the August 1984 issue of *Shinzasshi X* (新雑誌 X) magazine. The cartoon depicted the emperor being penetrated by Douglas MacArthur, the Allied Occupation

commander from 1945 to 1951. Its publication sparked an attack by a far-right activist on Tōgō (Oikawa, 2007).

However, Togo did not manage to capture the younger generation's interest, who, on the other hand, tried to avoid a close association between homosexuality and the entertainment industry.

Early lesbian activism took a different path, emphasising community building and engaging critically with Japanese feminism. While Japan's ūman ribu (women's liberation) movement in the late 1960s to mid-1970s addressed sexual liberation and women's social independence, lesbian women and their voices were often marginalised or excluded. *Wakakusa no Kai* (若草の会 Young Grass Club, 1971-1985) was the first organisation to create a space for lesbian women to meet and share experiences.

From 1975 to 1976, the group *Subarashī Onnatachi* (素晴らしき女たち Wonderful Women) highlighted the situation of lesbian women within the women's liberation movement through surveys and roundtable discussions. Some women involved in this initiative later helped establish the lesbian-feminist groups Mainichi Daiku (毎日ダイク, Everyday Carpenter/Dyke) and *Hikari Guruma* (光車 Shining Wheel) during the late 1970s and early 1980s. These groups positioned themselves within the larger movement for women's liberation, fighting against traditional Japanese patriarchal gender norms, while also addressing homophobia both within and outside the *ūman ribu* (ウーマン・リブ) movement (Würrer, 2024, p. 1-2).

In the 1980s, as introduced in the previous chapter, the HIV and AIDS epidemic emerged, bringing homophobia and the stigmatisation of non-normative sexualities to a national level. In Japan, the AIDS crisis was initially caused by the government's failure to implement safety measures for unsterilized blood products from the US, mainly impacting haemophilia patients.

However, it also contributed to rising homophobic attitudes. Gay men were singled out by the Ministry of Health and Welfare—despite its own role in

distributing contaminated blood products—as a primary source of HIV infection, based on their sexual orientation as an identity group rather than on their sexual behaviour. Additionally, sexually transmitted HIV cases were portrayed as the consequence of a questionable lifestyle, contrasted with innocent victims of tainted blood products. This framing increased discrimination and social exclusion against gay men and female sex workers in particular (Würrer, 2024, p. 3-4).

However, Japan's first two reported HIV/AIDS cases spurred significant efforts toward equality and recognition, including the founding of two organisations focused on gay and lesbian rights: the Association for the Lesbian and Gay Movement (OCCUR) and the International Lesbian and Gay Association Japan (ILGA)[82]. In 1997, OCCUR achieved a major victory in a high-profile human rights court case, leading to the lifting of restrictions on gay individuals at Fuchū Seinen no Ie, a youth hostel managed by the Tokyo metropolitan government. Following this landmark case, OCCUR successfully urged the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology to remove "homosexuality" from its diagnostic manual and recognise three key points: that homosexuality is not a perversion, sexual orientation is not a disorder, and homosexuals do not merely "perform the opposite role of one's sex." (Frühstück, 2022, p. 151-153)

2.4 The twenty-first century

2.4.1 Transgenders

The early 2000s marked a significant period for trans communities. In 2003, three years after trans novelist Fujino Chiya received Japan's prestigious Akutagawa Prize, Kamikawa Ayabe became the first trans individual to win a seat in the Tokyo Municipal Council. That year also saw the enactment of the Law for the Handling of Gender in the Special Cases of People with Gender Identity Disorder (制度鬱性障害者の性別の扱いの特例に関する法 *Seidōitsusei Shōgai sha no Seibetsu no Atsukai no Tokurei ni Kansuru Hō*). Since 1997, when gender-

[82] These two associations managed to bring, between 1991 and 1997, the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education to court for discriminating against their gay members at the Fuchu Youth Hostel (Fuchū Seinen no Ie), apubliclyrun conference and recreation facility, inone of the first trialsinJapanese legal history to recognise discrimination basedonsexual orientation.

affirming surgery became legal, trans people's need for legal gender recognition grew, and this law made such changes possible for those who had surgery. Nonetheless, its language, which pathologises gender diversity, and the strict requirements have been criticised for infringing on trans people's human rights (Würrer, 2024).

Since 2004, transgender individuals in Japan seeking to change their legal gender must petition a family court. According to the Gender Identity Disorder Special Cases Act, applicants are required to undergo psychiatric evaluation, be surgically sterilised, and have a physical appearance with genitalia that closely matches an alternative gender. They must also be single, under 18, and have no children. In 2017, Japan committed to revising this law. Both UN experts and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health have called on Japan to remove the law's discriminatory aspects. In 2019, the Supreme Court upheld a lower court's decision, confirming the law did not breach the Constitution. Nevertheless, two justices acknowledged the need for reform, stating, "The suffering that [transgender people] face in terms of gender is also of concern to society that is supposed to embrace diversity in gender identity."

However, on October 25, 2023, an important step was taken for transgender people in Japan. In fact, Japan's Supreme Court ruled that the law mandating sterilisation surgery for anyone seeking legal gender recognition was unconstitutional. The 15 justices ruled unanimously that: "Being forced to undergo sterilisation surgery... constitutes a significant constraint on freedom from invasive procedures" in violation of the Japanese Constitution (Knight, 2025).

2.4.2 Lesbians

In 2005, Osaka Prefectural Assemblymember Otsuji Kanako publicly came out as lesbian in her autobiography, '*Kamingu auto: Jibunrashisa omitsukeru tabi*' (カミングアウト：自分らしさを見つける旅 Coming Out: A Journey of Self-Discovery). She ran for a seat in the National Diet in 2007. Although she was not elected that year, she entered the Diet through a special election in 2013 to fill a vacant seat left by a fellow Democratic Party member. This made her the first

openly lesbian Diet member in Japanese history, following other local politicians such as Kamikawa, as well as openly gay politicians Ishikawa Taiga and Ishizaka Wataru, who were elected to the Toshima Ward and Nakano Ward Assemblies in 2011.

2.4.3 Queers

After 2010, the circumstances for LGBTQ+ individuals in Japan shifted in at least three key ways. First, mainstream Japanese businesses increasingly recognised LGBTQ+ people as a potential market. According to Kazuyoshi Kawasaka, in 2012, both the weekly business magazine *Shūkan Tōyōkeizai* (週刊東洋経済) and Diamond Weekly analysed the domestic "LGBT market," which the latter estimated at around 5.7 trillion yen (Shūkan Daiamondo Henshūbu, 2012).

Additional surveys, such as those conducted by Dentsu's Diversity Lab in 2015, confirmed the market's potential (Dentsu Diversity Lab, 2015). In light of this growing financial interest, Japanese corporations began to view protecting LGBTQ+ rights as a crucial part of their corporate policies and marketing strategies. Since 2011, the organisation Work With Pride has assessed corporate policies relating to LGBTQ+ inclusion and provided workplace consulting. In 2022, over 400 companies participated in their evaluations (Work with Pride, 2025). Many of these companies appeared to follow the example set by the influential *Nihon Keizai Dantai Rengō* (日本経済団体連合会 Japan Business Federation), which in 2017 urged its members to create work environments that support, protect, and promote understanding of LGBTQ+ people to attract diverse talent, enhance productivity, and boost brand value in the global market.

Secondly, LGBTQ+ activism and political recognition have expanded beyond major cities like Tokyo and Osaka. Pride events and LGBTQ+ film festivals now take place throughout all five main islands of Japan, with a focus on local communities. Another aspect of this trend toward inclusivity in local politics is the adoption of ordinances that allow officials to issue partnership certificates to same-sex couples, beginning with the Tokyo wards of Shibuya and Setagaya in 2015.

Third, the focus of LGBTQ+ activism shifted from challenging the heterosexist, cisgender norms of Japanese society to also advocating for legal reforms, particularly the institutionalisation of same-sex marriage and anti-discrimination laws. Same-sex marriage advocates are not only lobbying lawmakers in the Diet but, since 2019, have also filed cases in courts in cities such as Sapporo, Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, and Fukuoka, challenging the lack of legal recognition of same-sex marriages as unconstitutional. As Hiroyuki Taniguchi observes in his paper, while legal scholars have discussed LGBTQ+ rights within the framework of the Japanese Constitution since at least the 2000s, these legal cases have brought the debate into the courts and serve as important precedents for advancing LGBTQ+ human rights in Japan (Würrer, 2024). These legal actions culminated in March 2021, when a district court in Japan considered the ban on same-sex marriage unconstitutional, noting that nothing in the Japanese Constitution directly prohibits it. Ai Nakajima told the BBC: "This is one huge step forward in Japan... We are moving closer to making our dream come true" (BBC, 2021).

In the same year, in June, the national legislature of Japan passed its first LGBTQ+ law, stating that “all citizens, irrespective of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, are to be respected as individuals with inherent and inviolable fundamental human rights” (Doi, 2023).

Parliament has straightforward options. It can enact marriage equality laws, aligning Japan with global human rights standards and regional practices. It could also provide full legal recognition of same-sex partnerships across all contexts, eliminating the existing patchwork of exemptions. Additionally, it might amend the Gender Identity Disorder (GID) Special Cases Act to remove the requirement that applicants be single or have no children under 18 (Crabtree, 2025).

2.5 The new Prime Minister

Since October 2025, the Japanese government has seemed to shift course. During her campaign, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi repeatedly shared her views on LGBTQ+ rights. While affirming that “there should be no prejudice against

sexual orientation or gender identity," she opposes same-sex marriage. She told audiences during her campaign that she was against it, though she considered having a same-sex partner "fine." In 2023, during a government budget committee meeting, she called legalising same-sex marriage an "extremely difficult issue," referencing Article 24 of Japan's Constitution, which states that "marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes." Legalising same-sex marriage would require passing a new law or amending Japan's civil code (Monteil, Japan's First Female Prime Minister: Gays Are "Fine" But No Same-Sex Marriage, 2025).

Will this government change prevent LGBTQ+ communities from acquiring new rights? Only time will tell.

People's voices

As previously mentioned in the introduction, this research examines the personal experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in Fukuoka, Nagasaki, and Oita prefectures. Despite Fukuoka's significant efforts to promote LGBTQ+ rights not only in Kyushu but across all of Japan, there is only one study that has focused on LGBTQ+ people in these areas, at least as this research is being written. On top of that, this study covers only a few male homosexual students at Kyushu University[83], in Fukuoka, as the main topic, leaving many queer groups and geographic areas unstudied.

Even with extensive in-person research, the efforts to identify new sources on LGBTQ+ people in Fukuoka, Nagasaki, and Oita prefectures were unsuccessful. This is why, with the intent of filling, even in a small part, this gap, this research was started.

By participating in various LGBTQ+ events and distributing a personally prepared questionnaire[84], the research aims to finally give LGBTQ+ individuals living in the areas mentioned above a voice on an international stage and to assess whether they feel comfortable expressing and living their gender and/or sexual orientation in their personal and professional lives.

Figure 15 Kyushu Rainbow Pride 2025 Map

The data gathering took place in the span of two years (2024-2025), while participating in Kyushu Rainbow Pride in Fukuoka, both in the 2024 and 2025 editions, as a guest at the Stonewall Japan booth; at Oita Rainbow Pride in 2025 as a participant; and finally at a small Pride Parade held at Nagasaki University in 2024.

[83] It refers to Professor Zhang's "Male homosexuality in Japan from the perspective of the younger generation: a case study of students at a National University" (2019).

[84] The questionnaire was distributed in two languages, English and Japanese, since it was not only directed to Japanese people. All the translations of the answers will be by the author.

Sharing a booth with Stonewall Japan NGO[85], whose Fukuoka chapter[86] is led by Professor Zhang, greatly facilitated the distribution of the questionnaire during the event. The Stonewall Japan NGO is, in fact, a well-established organisation that coordinates events not only in Kyushu but across all of Japan, aiming to help LGBTQ+ people, both Japanese and non-Japanese, to find safe spaces to express themselves without the fear of being judged.

As shown later in more details, most of the responses gathered during the last two years came mainly from people either living in the Fukuoka Prefecture or participating at the Fukuoka Pride, because of two main reasons: on one hand partly because the questionnaire distribution was held twice here; and on the other hand partly because of the higher participation in the Pride event, since Fukuoka is one of the main cities of the Kyushu area.

In fact, in 2025, compared to the previous years, attendance at Kyushu Rainbow Pride increased drastically, prompting a venue shift from Reisen Park in 2024 to Tenjin Central Park. In 2025, the expected attendance at the event was 30,000, well above the previous year's. (Fukuoka Saga KBC News, 2025)

This new site is more central and accessible, with more booths, sponsors, and activities than before, which also helped distribute the questionnaire to a wider audience. Professor Zhang also played a key role in building more connections with various LGBTQ+ NGOs like HACO[87] or Marriage for All Japan[88], which are very active associations in the community.

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[85] The NGO aims to create a safe space where people can express themselves freely without being judged for their sexuality or nationality. To do so, they conduct educational awareness projects, disseminate information, maintain communication on online platforms, and provide opportunities for fellowship, mutual learning, and peer support at the local and national levels. They encourage solidarity, insight, pride, respect, and self-discovery across all our projects and events. Stonewall Japan envisions an international community where compassion, respect, and equity are extended to all individuals (Stonewall Japan, 2025).

[86] The Stonewall Japan NGO is divided into seven blocks across Japan, each led by a different president (Stonewall Japan, 2025).

[87] Haco is a Fukuoka community centre, usually frequented by gay men, that works hard to support its community and to organise safe spaces and events for them. In particular, it raises awareness of HIV and AIDS-related topics (HACO, 2025).

[88] This NGO is active in the fight for equal marriage in Japan and aims to give everyone the right to choose whether to marry, without discrimination (Marriage for All Japan, 2025).

Meanwhile, Oita Rainbow Pride and Nagasaki University Pride were smaller events that attracted fewer people during the research period. The Oita Rainbow Pride- having taken place for the first time in 2024- is, in fact, a new event, and this is why it is still not well known in the area. In contrast, the Nagasaki University Pride was mostly open to students and teachers, resulting in attendance that was drastically and understandably lower than at the Kyushu Rainbow Pride.

By analysing conversations with NGO representatives and the questionnaire results, this study seeks to offer a broader understanding of LGBTQ+ individuals' lives in Fukuoka, Nagasaki, and Oita prefectures, paving the way for more targeted future research.

3.1 The research

The research was conducted during the 2,3 November 2024 and 1,2 November 2025 Kyushu Rainbow Pride events at the Stonewall Japan booth, as well as at Oita Rainbow Pride (29 November 2025) and a smaller Pride Parade at Nagasaki University (30 September 2024). It involved a questionnaire distributed to persons who have lived or are living in Fukuoka, Nagasaki, and Oita prefectures for at least a year, regardless of nationality, age, gender, or sexual orientation. However, a possible limitation of the sample is that most responses were collected during Rainbow Pride events, which may have unconsciously influenced the participants' answers.

It is also important to note that those people openly participating in these events may already have specific views on their sexuality and/or gender identity, showing a more open attitude and more substantial commitment to LGBTQ+ social justice compared to a more diverse and potentially less engaged population sample that may not publicly participate in Pride events. In fact, many respondents reported feeling a sense of liberation in openly sharing their identities and opinions at Pride events, thanks to the welcoming, inclusive and festive atmosphere. Nevertheless, this freedom often contrasts with their everyday experiences, in which they might feel hesitant or constrained about showing their true selves. This disparity warrants thorough exploration and will be examined more closely in the subsequent chapters.

This research examines responses from a total of 102 participants, representing an essential initial step toward more in-depth studies in this field. While the relatively small sample size may not fully capture the diverse experiences and may not be sufficient to represent the perspectives of all the LGBTQ+ individuals in the regions studied, it provides valuable early insights to inform future research.

To interpret the questionnaire results effectively, it is essential to contextualise the sample data. Using visual tools, such as graphs, this thesis will highlight possible trends and patterns in the sample to better explain the research findings, not only overall but also by analysing patterns across the different geographical areas.

3.1.1 The research sample

The questionnaire was distributed physically to participants across various groups during the Rainbow Prides in Fukuoka, Oita and Nagasaki previously citated ensuring representation from people of different nationalities, ages, gender identities, and sexual orientations. This approach was essential for capturing a comprehensive view of those living in or having previously lived in Fukuoka, Nagasaki, and Oita prefectures for at least a year. By reaching as broad an audience as possible, the study aimed to gather diverse insights from individuals with different backgrounds and experiences, thus enriching the overall dataset.

Although respondents' nationality was not the primary focus, it is worth noting that cultural differences, particularly among non-Japanese participants, may have subtly influenced their responses and interpretations. These cultural nuances can significantly shape opinions and attitudes, complicating data analysis. Recognising these differences is crucial to the research, as they may reflect deeper social norms, values, and beliefs that can shape personal experiences and viewpoints. Overall, this inclusive strategy enhances the data quality and promotes a more detailed understanding of the topic.

Although the study covered multiple locations and time periods, recruiting sufficient participants was not an easy task, which resulted in a small sample.

Differences in context and timing probably played a big role in influencing participants' availability and willingness to take the questionnaire, an issue that often arises in such research.

Consequently, despite the valuable insights obtained, the limited sample size may be a limit to the extent to which the findings can be generalised.

3.1.1.1 The geographic provenience

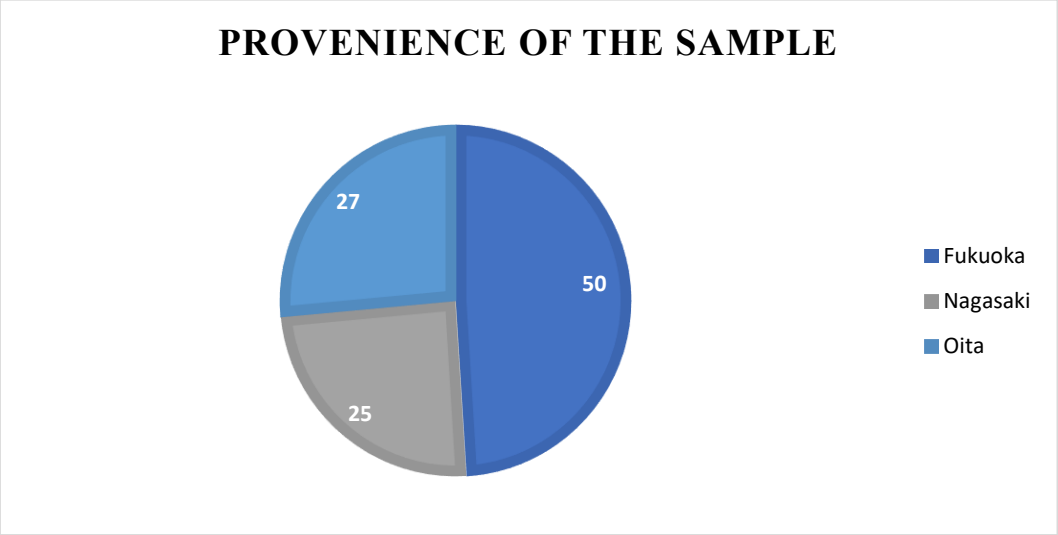

Table 1 Provenience of the interviewed

As mentioned earlier, this study is focused on three Japanese prefectures in Kyushu: Fukuoka, Oita, and Nagasaki. Each prefecture has its own distinct cultural and social environment, which can notably influence community engagement and participation.

The first is Fukuoka, Kyushu's most LGBTQ+-friendly, offering a growing, welcoming, and safe scene, particularly around Nakasu and Oyafuko-dori, thanks to the strong presence of LGBTQ+-friendly bars and associations. The city has held an annual Kyushu Rainbow Pride parade since 2014, and has a municipal, proactive partnership system and LGBTQ+-friendly business registration program[89].

[89] This system aims to deepen public and societal interest and understanding of sexual minorities and to realize a society where diversity is accepted and coexistence is achieved by registering companies that support LGBT and other sexual minorities and widely disseminating information about them in Fukuoka City (Fukuoka City, 2026).

The second main location where data gathering took place is Nagasaki. The LGBTQ+ life in Nagasaki, Japan, is gradually becoming more visible and supported, featuring local queer-friendly bars, university initiatives, and a nascent recognition of same-sex partnerships.

Lastly, like Nagasaki, Oita Prefecture is also increasingly becoming more LGBTQ+-friendly, implementing a prefecture-wide partnership system since April 2024 that allows same-sex couples to access public housing and hospitals and recognises their union for administrative services.

Looking at these differences, it is important to identify and clearly outline the distribution of respondents from these areas within the sample.

Table 1 shows that participant distribution highlights notable trends: 49% are from Fukuoka Prefecture, 26% from Oita, and 25% from Nagasaki. This indicates a clear disparity in regional representation. As already explained in the previous part of the chapter, the main reason for this difference is the prominence of the Kyushu Rainbow Pride event in Fukuoka, which attracts larger, more heterogeneous crowds and raises awareness of LGBTQ+ issues. This event's scale reflects Fukuoka's lively cultural scene and its leadership in fostering inclusivity.

Additionally, data collection took two years in Fukuoka but only one year in Oita and Nagasaki, which likely increased participation in Fukuoka and offered more opportunities for engagement. Conversely, the shorter periods in Oita and Nagasaki may have limited the diversity of responses from these areas.

In summary, differences in participation rates across Fukuoka, Oita, and Nagasaki highlight the unique social dynamics of each prefecture and the varying opportunities for LGBTQ+ people to participate, including events such as the Kyushu Rainbow Pride. Recognising these nuances provides a deeper insight into the data and the factors affecting demographic trends in this study.

3.1.1.2 The age range

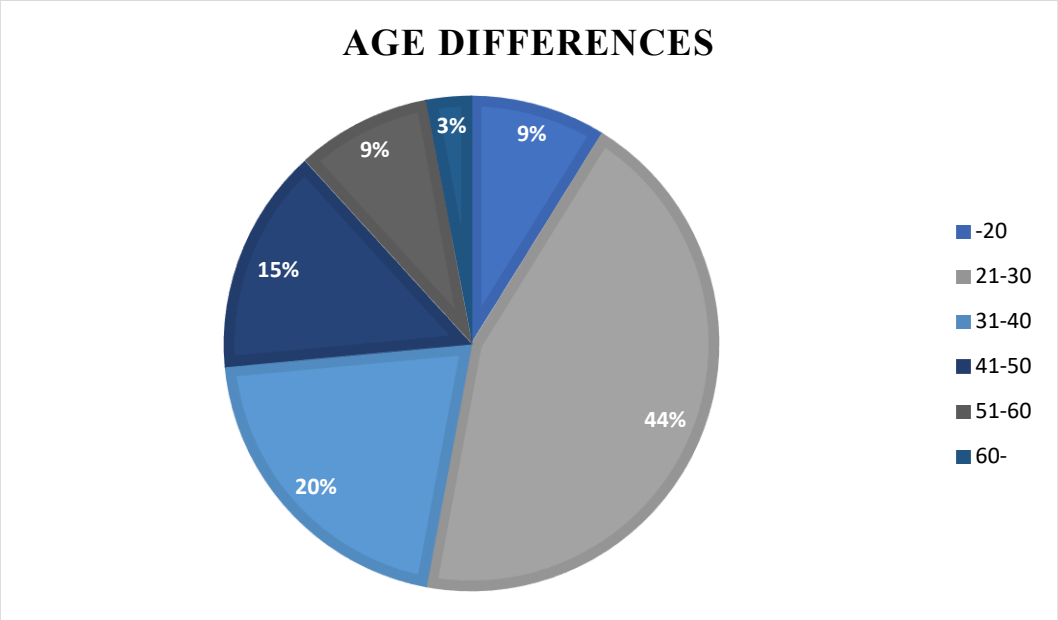

Table 2 Age differences

A key detail is the sample's age range. As shown in Table 2, ages are categorised in 10-year intervals, except for groups under 20 and over 60. These groups were selected based on their likelihood of attending the events where the questionnaire was distributed.

Notably, Table 2 indicates that just 8% of participants were under 20, and only 3% were over 60.

Most of the sample is aged 21-30, making up 44%, with 21% aged 31-40. Fewer are over 40: 15% are in the 41-50 range and 9% in the 51-60 group, just 1% more than those under 20. The majority of both attendees and survey respondents fall between 21 and 40 years old. This trend likely results from higher internet access and greater engagement with LGBTQ+ issues among this group, which promotes more active participation in advocacy for rights and visibility. In contrast, younger individuals may have fewer opportunities or less interest in these topics, which may explain their lower representation.

Furthermore, attitudes towards LGBTQ+ rights differ notably among age groups. For instance, people over 60 tend to hold more conservative perspectives, potentially limiting their involvement in LGBTQ+ activism and efforts to promote social change. These varying interests and approaches to LGBTQ+ issues are also reflected in the responses to the questionnaire presented below.

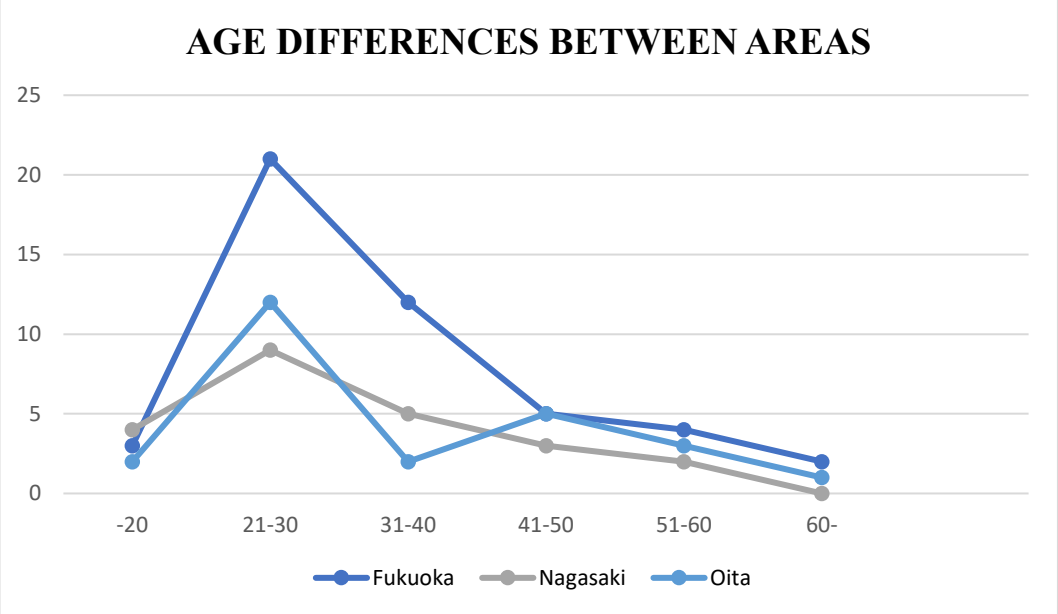

Table 3 Age differences between areas

When examining the LGBTQ+ landscape in Japan, particularly the data collected in Fukuoka, Nagasaki, and Oita, it's essential to look beyond the numbers and consider what the age demographics reveal. By studying how different age groups are represented in each area, it is possible to better understand the subtle differences in LGBTQ+ visibility and experiences across prefectures.

As shown in Table 3, the age distribution of participants varies notably across the three locations. The under-20 group, mainly from Nagasaki Prefecture, suggests that younger people are more actively engaging in LGBTQ+ discussions, possibly influenced by the presence of educational institutions such as Nagasaki University, where the event took place. University environments often promote inclusivity and activism, encouraging younger individuals to explore and share their identities more openly. Specifically, Nagasaki University has been trying to create a safe space for LGBTQ+ students by implementing a "Centre for Diversity and Inclusion" and multiple support contacts, including health support. The university

also integrated courses on LGBTQ+ history[90], such as the one taught at the time by Prof. Zhang, and guidelines on inclusivity for all students. It's interesting to note that there were no participants over 60 in Nagasaki, mainly because the event was held on the university grounds, so the majority of participants were students (Nagasaki University , 2020).

Oita displays different dynamics, with only 2 participants in the 31-40 age group, suggesting potential issues with outreach effectiveness for the Oita Rainbow Pride event. Social media and fliers, while somewhat successful, may not have reached this demographic, resulting in lower participation. Given that individuals aged 31-40 often face career, family, and personal challenges, other obstacles may be hindering their participation in community events intended as safe spaces for self-expression and solidarity.

Fukuoka presents a more complex and diverse picture, as its Rainbow Pride event is the largest of its kind in Kyushu. Demographic data shows a strong presence of people aged 21-40, indicating that the event mainly attracts young adults who often lead social movements. However, the variety of attendees also points to an inclusive environment that probably encourages participation from various age groups. This is especially significant in a cultural context where public LGBTQ+ expressions can still face stigma. The broader age range may reflect Fukuoka's urban and progressive nature, creating a space where people from different backgrounds can come together in support.

Understanding age distributions is crucial for informing the broader conversation about LGBTQ+ communities in Japan. Each prefecture offers a unique perspective, aiding in the analysis of participation rates and social attitudes shaping these demographics. Factors such as local policies, community resources, access to information, and cultural attitudes toward LGBTQ+ rights powerfully shape how people of different ages interact with their communities. By exploring these age-related patterns in greater depth, we can gain a clearer picture of

[90] The course was held for multiple years and not only studied the history of LGBTQ+ people, like Stonwall, but it also concentrated in more recent acheavements, like the new Japanese legislation. It also allowed students to openly discuss and express their opinions, creating a safe space for all.

LGBTQ+ visibility in Japan and identify areas where outreach and support can be improved.

3.1.1.3 The gender identity

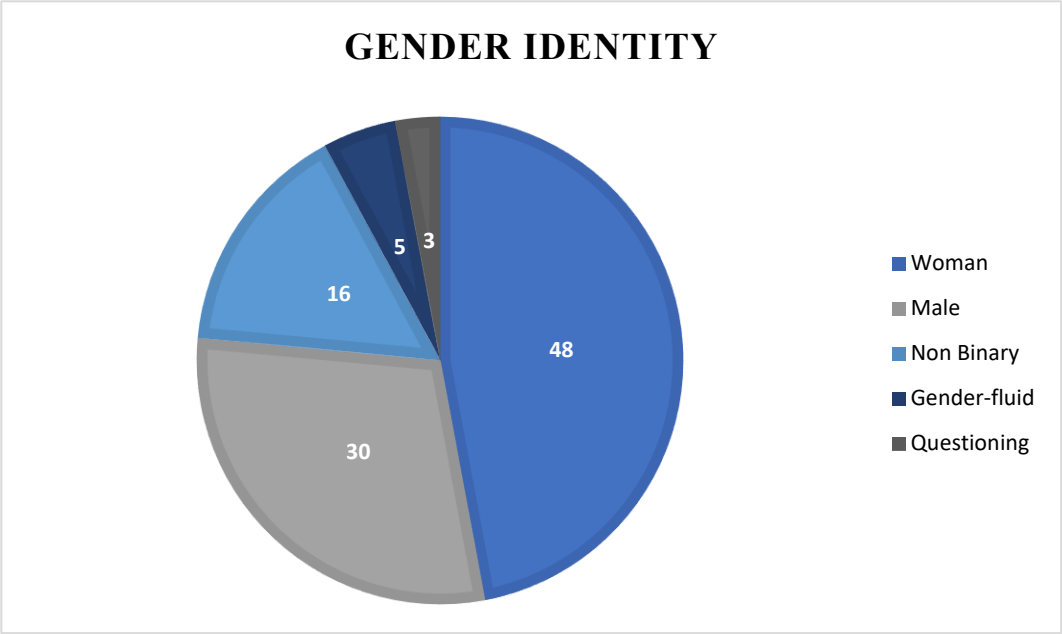

Table 4 Gender identity

Table 4 presents a varied demographic of respondents, with women the largest group at 48%, emphasising the importance of including women's perspectives in the study. Men represent 30% and contribute diverse viewpoints influenced by traditional gender roles. Non-binary individuals make up 16%, highlighting the growing acknowledgement of gender identities beyond the binary. Additionally, 5% identify as gender-fluid, signifying gender experiences that may evolve. About 3% are questioning their gender identity, a common stage in personal development. This data highlights the group's diversity and the need for inclusive environments that accommodate all gender identities.

Once again, the distribution of respondents across prefectures in the study varies widely. This detailed examination emphasises the distinct demographic traits of each region, highlighting the need to interpret findings within specific geographical contexts. When focusing specifically on female respondents, the data reveal notable differences across prefectures. For example, as shown in Table 5, Nagasaki Prefecture is unique in that women are not the majority of interviewees;

men are. This is probably also due to the university's student ratio, which showed a predominance of 61% men compared with 39% women (World University Ranking, 2026).

Additionally, Nagasaki shows no representation of gender-fluid or questioning individuals, raising concerns about the inclusivity and visibility of these groups locally.

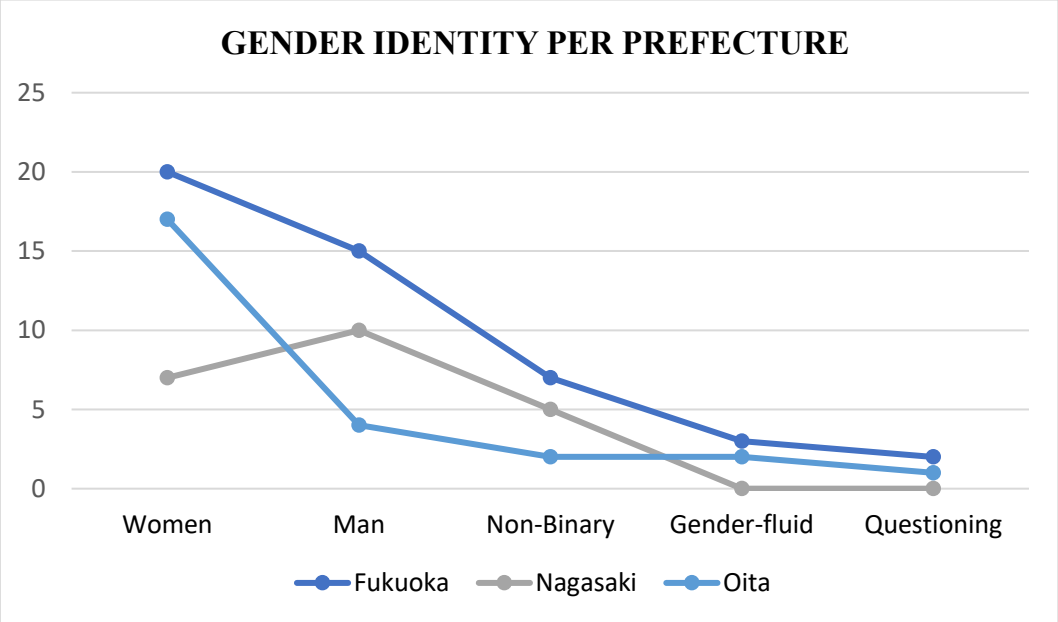

Table 5 Gender identity per prefecture

Oita Prefecture shows notably lower response rates in most categories, except among women, who make up a slightly larger share of the sample. This discrepancy may be due to regional differences in gender representation or variations in survey participation. It could also reflect differing societal attitudes towards gender identities and expressions between rural and urban regions, especially since Oita is less densely populated than Fukuoka.

Interviewees from Fukuoka Prefecture show a broader diversity of gender identities. The data indicate many different responses, despite fewer people identifying as gender-fluid or questioning. This variety may suggest that Fukuoka's environment is more inclusive, enabling the recognition and expression of diverse gender identities. Alternatively, it might be because a larger, more established event attracted a more varied crowd.

Overall, these prefecture-level differences reveal the complex nature of gender representation across Japan, highlighting the importance of developing region-specific strategies to address gender issues. Additionally, the findings raise important questions about identity and representation in modern society, encouraging a deeper examination of how local cultural settings shape personal experiences and individuals' willingness to express them.

3.2 Representation of the LGBTQ+ people in the areas

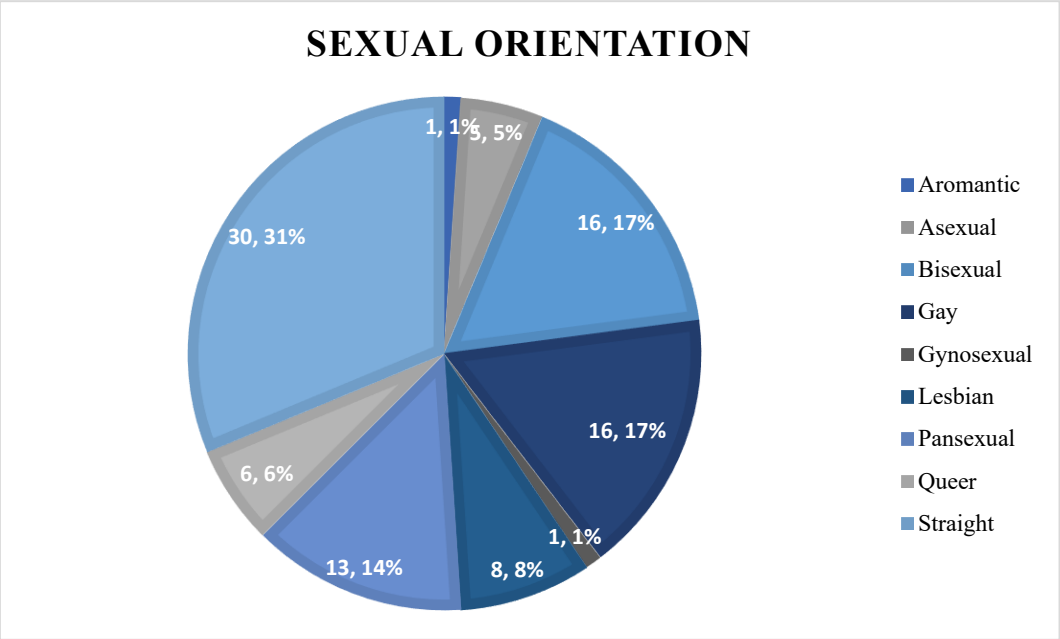

Table 6 Sexual orientation

After gender identity, the key detail to understand about the sample, considering the topic, is sexual orientation. The question provided multiple options, such as lesbian, gay, transgender, and straight. There was also an open-answer choice allowing respondents to specify other orientations, acknowledging the extensive diversity of sexual orientations beyond standard categories.

Table 5 indicates that the majority of respondents identify as straight, with 30 individuals representing approximately 31.31% of the total sample. A notable number also identify as gay and bisexual, each group comprising 16 respondents or 16.17%. This demonstrates a significant presence of non-heteronormative identities in the studied population. Additionally, 13 individuals (13.14%) identify as

pansexual, reflecting an openness to attraction regardless of gender and emphasising the growing recognition of fluid sexual orientations.

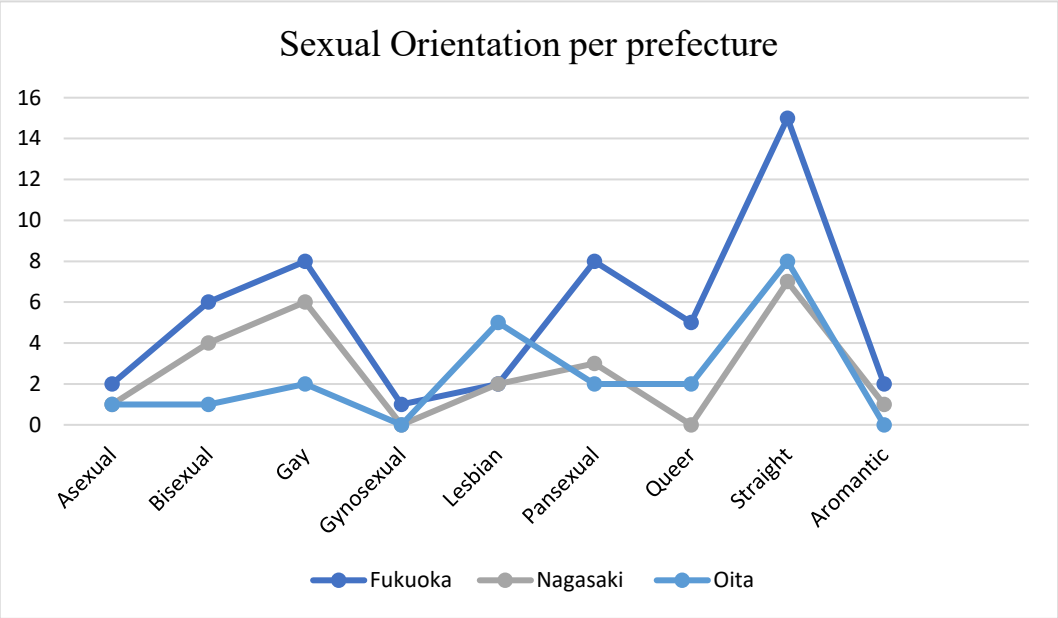

Table 7 Sexual orientation per prefecture

The lesbian community comprises 8 individuals (8.8%), while queer identities include 6 respondents (6.6%), highlighting diversity and acceptance of non-binary orientations. Moreover, 5 respondents (5.5%) identify as asexual, drawing attention to an often overlooked aspect of sexual identity. Aromantic and gynosexual orientations were each reported by 1 individual (1.1%), indicating the presence of even less common identities among participants.

All explanations of these different sexual orientations were primarily provided in the introductory chapter, so they will not be elaborated on here. The data indicate a broad spectrum of sexual identities, reflecting a trend toward greater acceptance and recognition of diverse orientations in modern society. Understanding these patterns is key to fostering inclusivity and comprehension in discussions about sexual identity, as they shape the experiences and perspectives of the individuals in the sample. Additionally, data from Fukuoka, Nagasaki, and Oita reveal a wide range of gender identities and sexual orientations within the sample.

As shown in Table 7, in Fukuoka, most respondents identify as straight, totalling 15, with notable numbers from bisexual (6), gay (8), and pansexual (8) groups. Oita has a distinctive high count of lesbians, reaching 5, alongside diversity in other orientations, especially with straight (8) and gay (2) respondents.

Meanwhile, Nagasaki has fewer respondents overall, particularly in the queer category, where none are reported. However, it still has a substantial number of straight (7), gay (6), and bisexual (4) individuals.

A more detailed analysis shows a clear dominance of each gender identity across the prefectures, with a steady presence of asexual, bisexual, gay, and straight individuals in roughly similar numbers. However, there are notable exceptions: Oita has the highest concentration of lesbians, possibly suggesting a strong community there, while Nagasaki shows no representation of queer individuals at all.

3.3 The first question

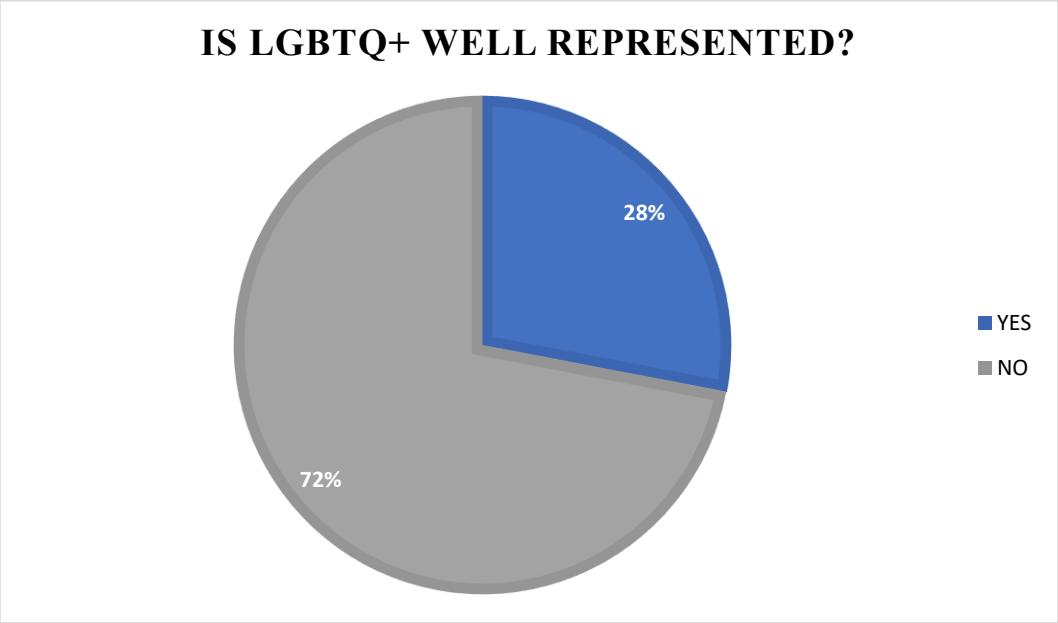

Table 8 Do you think LGBTQ+ is well represented in your prefecture?

The initial question asked of the sample was: "Do you think that the LGBTQ+ community is well represented in your prefecture?" Although simple, this question drew diverse responses that highlighted notable misunderstandings and confusion among participants. In-person respondents could clarify their views via follow-up questions, whereas online participants did not have this chance, potentially influencing their answers.

As indicated in Table 8, 72% of respondents believe that LGBTQ+ representation is lacking in their region. Their comments offer valuable insights into how communities perceive visibility and acceptance across Japan's prefectures.

A non-binary, pansexual person aged 21-30 from Fukuoka shared that while the city provides some support for the LGBTQ+ community, including resources for queer and marginalised groups (QRP), there is still a lack of representation in official services. They observed that employment agencies and local government offices often do not adequately address or recognise LGBTQ+ needs. This view is standard among community members, emphasising that the issue goes beyond just visibility. It also impacts vital services and support systems essential for the inclusion and success of LGBTQ+ individuals in society.

Another participant, a gay man aged 31-40 from Nagasaki, mentioned the misconception that LGBTQ+ people are absent from his region. He described a hostile environment where being different often leads to rejection or hostility. This highlights a major obstacle to acceptance and visibility in smaller prefectures or rural areas, where LGBTQ+ individuals may feel isolated and unsupported.

A non-binary, pansexual respondent aged 21-30 from Oita Prefecture shared a nuanced viewpoint. They explained that Oita hosts several universities that attract diverse students, including many international students. This diversity fosters a more open attitude toward gender and sexuality within academic circles and may support greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ people. Nevertheless, the participant also acknowledged that, despite this progressive environment, societal norms across Japan often discourage visible LGBTQ+ expressions, making it challenging for individuals to be authentic without fear of judgment. A non-binary, pansexual, 21-30, from Fukuoka Prefecture mentioned, 'I don't think there is a lot of intersectionality between different identity groups here.'

This reading shows that, despite efforts by the Japanese government and various prefectures to hold events and raise awareness about LGBTQ+, progress is still viewed as insufficient. There appears to be a gap between different sexual orientation groups. For example, a 51-60-year-old lesbian woman from Nagasaki noted that, although the gay community seems prominent, spaces for lesbians and other groups are still limited and feel unsafe. This underscores the need for better dialogue and support networks that connect different sexual identity groups, especially in environments where shared experiences can build collective strength.

In many LGBTQ+ spaces in Japan, there is often a clear division based on gender, which can create issues for non-binary, gender-nonconforming, or transitioning individuals. The author observed at a bar called “LOL” in Fukuoka that the staff explained this segregation is mainly about maintaining privacy. These venues restrict clientele to promote a more private environment, helping those not yet out to feel safer. However, this setup presents a challenge: while it offers protection for some, it also risks excluding others who do not fit into traditional binary categories.

The remaining 28% of participants who responded "yes" to the initial question cited Pride events, LGBTQ+-friendly bars, and recognition of partnerships as indicators of sufficient representation. Most of these respondents were over 30, including all those over 40. This age-related difference adds complexity; older individuals generally view LGBTQ+ representation as improving over time, while younger respondents tend to desire continuous progress and greater visibility within their communities.

These diverse responses highlight that, although progress has been made in representing LGBTQ+ individuals in Japan, notable gaps and obstacles remain. Participants' perspectives reveal a community that is strong yet longing for greater acceptance, support, and a more inclusive environment, acknowledging various sexual orientations and gender identities. The path to full LGBTQ+ representation in Japan is ongoing, and the voices of people across age groups, identities, and regions will remain crucial in shaping the movement's future.

3.3 The second question

The second key question asked whether the partnerships available in certain prefectures, such as Fukuoka, were sufficient for LGBTQ+ individuals, or whether recognising same-sex marriage would be preferable. Before exploring responses to this, it's essential to understand the differences between partnerships and marriage.

3.3.1 Differences between same-sex partnerships and heterosexual marriage

> Article 24. Marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes, and it shall be maintained through mutual cooperation with the equal rights of husband and wife as a basis. With regard to choice of spouse, property rights, inheritance, choice of domicile, divorce and other matters about marriage and the family, laws shall be enacted from the standpoint of individual dignity and the essential equality of the sexes (Japanese Government, 1946).

Article 24 of Japan's Constitution does not explicitly prohibit same-sex marriage. Nevertheless, references to “consent of both sexes” have prompted courts to declare such marriages unconstitutional through legal interpretation. This ambiguity creates significant obstacles for LGBTQ+ individuals seeking legal recognition. To address this issue, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government launched a same-sex partnership system in 2015, starting in Shibuya Ward. Over time, additional areas across Japan have adopted similar initiatives, reflecting increasing acknowledgement of the rights and needs of sexual minorities. As outlined in the Tokyo Partnership Oath System User Guide, partnerships are defined as:

> a relationship between two individuals, one or both of whom are sexual minorities, who have vowed to respect each other's rights and cooperate continuously in their daily lives as life partners (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2023, p. 2).

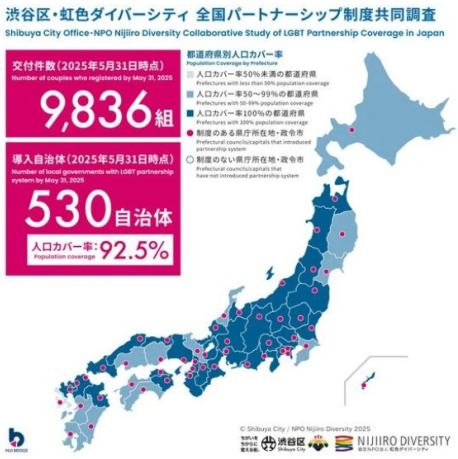

Figure 16 LGBT Partnership Coverage in Japan

[91] To stipulate these partnerships, some requirements are mandatory; for example, the two parties need to be of age (at least over 18 years old), must currently be married [92] to someone else or in another relationship, must not be direct blood relatives, and at least one party needs to be a resident [93] of the prefecture where the partnership is being registered (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2023). While it is noteworthy that, as of 2024, with the introduction of same-sex partnerships in Fukushima Prefecture, all 47 prefectures in Japan have adopted forms of partnership recognition, it is essential to understand that these partnerships lack national recognition. This absence of federal acknowledgement can complicate the lives of same-sex couples, particularly when relocating between prefectures, as they would have to reinitiate the partnership process each time they move (RIKIMARU, 2023).

Moreover, while all 47 prefectures offer some form of recognition for same-sex partnerships, the implementation and accessibility of these rights vary widely across regions. For instance, as illustrated in Figure 18, certain prefectures, such as Nagasaki, recognise fewer than 50% of their population. In contrast, other regions, such as Fukuoka and Oita, boast near-comprehensive coverage, highlighting the disparities that persist in Japan's approach to LGBTQ+ rights.

Same-sex partnerships confer several important protections and benefits for the two spouses, such as coverage under the spousal violence prevention law, eligibility for public housing, visitation rights in hospitals, and consent for medical treatments. In some cases, these partnerships also enable one partner to register the other's biological children as the non-biological parent, offering some legal

[91] Shibuya City Office NPO Nijiiro Diversity collaborative study of LGBT partnership coverage in Japan (IKI, 2025).
[92] In this case, it refers to other partnerships, but also to heterosexual marriages.
[93] This also applies to anyone living in the area for work or study.

acknowledgement of family ties. However, significant gaps remain; same-sex couples lack inheritance rights, forcing spouses to create additional legal arrangements for asset division in case of death. Moreover, they are excluded from spousal tax deductions, joint custody, and the ability to adopt children together—benefits that heterosexual couples enjoy through “de facto marriage.”

When considering the current status of same-sex marriage in Japan, it's essential to recognise that legal recognition can be achieved by amending the Civil Code, without requiring a constitutional change. This would require changing terms like "couple" to "parties to marriage," as proposed in the Marriage Equality Malifaux Bill. Over the past decade, more than 90% of the Japanese population has gained access to same-sex partnerships, prompting questions about whether this expansion is enough for the LGBTQ+ community. Advocates for same-sex marriage expressed concerns about the government's attitude toward LGBTQ+ issues. Notably, Japan's October 21, 2025, election of its first female Prime Minister, Sanae Takaichi, has heightened these concerns.

3.3.2 The research’s results

> Same-sex marriage can be realised through a simple amendment to the Civil Code, without the need for a constitutional amendment. Specifically, this simply requires changing the wording of the Civil Code, such as changing "couple" to "parties to marriage," and the proposed amendment to the Civil Code is the Marriage Equality Malifaux Bill (Marriage for All Japan, 2025).

As mentioned earlier in Figure 18, 9.836 couples had registered their partnership, and 530 local governments recognise them, bringing national coverage over 90%. However, it remains unclear whether Japanese citizens find this level of recognition adequate. Although further research is needed to better understand public opinion, this paper aims to provide a detailed overview of the current situation in Fukuoka, Oita, and Nagasaki prefectures.

To collect data, questionnaires were distributed at major events such as Kyushu Rainbow Pride (2024-2025) and Oita Rainbow Pride (2025), as well as a smaller Pride Parade at Nagasaki University in 2024. Participants answered key

questions about their opinions on same-sex marriage. They were asked if they think the current system of same-sex partnerships is sufficient or if they would prefer for same-sex marriage to be legalised. Additionally, if they believed that same-sex marriage should be legal, respondents were asked whether its recognition should be written into the Japanese Constitution or not.

Analysis of the 102 questionnaires reveals a clear consensus: almost all participants view the partnership system as a positive first step, but not the last. The majority agree that access to same-sex marriage should be granted and recognised under the Japanese Constitution. Notably, only one individual—a straight man from Fukuoka—believed that partnerships alone were sufficient for the LGBTQ+ and that adding same-sex marriage to the Constitution was unnecessary.

Many supporters of recognising same-sex marriages expressed concern about the government's position on this essential issue, especially amid recent political shifts. This discussion is particularly relevant now, given Japan's election of new Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on October 21, 2025. Takaichi holds conservative views on LGBTQ+ rights; she has publicly condemned discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity but considers same-sex marriage an "extremely difficult" issue. She suggested that solving this would require passing new laws or amending Article 24 of the Japanese Constitution (Monteil, Japan's First Female Prime Minister: Gays Are "Fine" But No Same-Sex Marriage, 2025). Her remarks have caused concern among Japanese LGBTQ+ people, many of whom believed a legalisation on the topic was likely to be passed, especially after Judge Kiyofumi Saito's influential ruling the previous year.

In March 2024, the Sapporo High Court found Japan's ban on same-sex marriage unconstitutional, declaring the only such restriction among G7 countries to be invalid. Judge Saito stated that the civil code's limitation of marriage to heterosexual couples violates Articles 14[94] and 24 of the Japanese Constitution,

[94] Article 14. All of the people are equal under the law, and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin.
Peers and peerage shall not be recognised.
No privilege shall accompany any award of honour, decoration or any distinction, nor shall any such award be valid beyond the lifetime of the individual who now holds or hereafter may receive it (Japanese Government, 1946).

which prohibit discrimination and require mutual consent for marriage (Riedel, 2024).

In their responses, other participants elaborated on the legal differences between partnerships and marriage, a topic already analysed in the previous section. However, an important issue that remains underexplored is the situation of mixed or non-Japanese couples within Japan's partnership system. Currently, foreigners married to a Japanese citizen or a permanent resident can qualify for a spousal visa, allowing for long-term residence. Unfortunately, this same benefit is not automatically available to same-sex couples in a partnership, creating significant obstacles for such couples who wish to move or settle long-term in Japan.

Summarising the responses, it's evident that although progress has been made in recognising same-sex partnerships, most people feel that the fight for true equality continues. The push for legalising same-sex marriage remains a significant and urgent issue, highlighting the ongoing effort to achieve full rights and recognition for all LGBTQ+ members in Japan.

3.4 The third question

The third key question of the study aimed to identify the number of participants who have actually "come out" and to whom, in order to highlight how comfortable the sample feels discussing their sexuality with others. This issue is especially pertinent in Japan, where societal norms tend to value conformity and tradition over individual expression, particularly concerning sexual orientation and gender identity.

As shown in Table 6, 30% of the sample are straight individuals who did not need to "come out" about their sexuality, highlighting a key difference in experience compared to LGBTQ+ individuals. The remaining 70% reveal a more complex picture of acceptance and hesitation regarding "coming out." Of this group, 8.5% have not "come out" to anyone, reflecting influences from their personal environment and societal pressures. Conversely, 91.5% have only "come out" to select people, demonstrating a cautious approach to revealing their identities.

Most people who have not “come out" are aged 31-40, with one individual aged 41-50. The latter, a queer aromantic from Fukuoka, shared a meaningful experience: “Even though I came out, my family still insisted I find a wife, so I ran away from home.”

These extreme situations seem to be rare outliers within the larger sample. Most respondents have successfully "come out” to family and close friends, showing a level of acceptance that may not have been as common in earlier generations. Interestingly, two individuals even shared their “coming out” experiences with colleagues, highlighting a gradual increase in societal openness, though it remains selective.

The responses also reveal a common sentiment among some individuals, including a young queer woman in her 20s from Fukuoka prefecture, who expressed the need for reassurance about the other person's potential reaction before discussing their sexuality or gender. This desire for confirmation highlights the emotional labour involved in coming out and the risk of vulnerability it entails. Additionally, she expressed a wish to expand the circle of people she feels comfortable coming out to, reflecting ongoing negotiations of identity and acceptance in both personal and social contexts. These findings suggest not only a generational divide, with younger people being more open about their sexuality and gender identity than older ones, but also a tendency to seek reassurance about the reaction of others before sharing personal details.

These findings show a generational difference, with younger people typically being more open about their sexuality and gender identity than older groups. They also highlight a common tendency to observe the listener’s reaction before revealing personal details. This subtle approach to “coming out” mirrors Japan's societal views on LGBTQ+ issues, where cultural norms often shape the limits of self-expression.

As societal conversations around sexuality and gender identity evolve and younger generations increasingly advocate for their rights and representation, it remains crucial to continue examining these dynamics within Japanese culture. The interplay of tradition and modernity, acceptance and resistance, all contribute to the intricate tapestry of the LGBTQ+ experience in Japan today. Understanding these

factors not only sheds light on individual experiences but also supports the collective journey towards a more inclusive society, where every individual's identity can be acknowledged and celebrated without fear or reservation.

3.5 The last question

In Walter Robert's extensive survey on LGBTQ+ workplace prospects in Japan, published on May 30th, 2024, striking and alarming revelations have emerged regarding the experiences of queer individuals in the workplace. The findings from the survey reveal that 50% of respondents have experienced some workplace discrimination or bias. Among those who faced discrimination, a significant 37% attributed the discrimination to issues surrounding their gender identity, while an even larger subset, 44%, reported bias related to their sexual orientation (Robert Walters, 2024). These statistics illuminate a troubling reality, painting a concerning picture of the workplace landscape for LGBTQ+ individuals in Japan. This leads to a crucial and pressing question that requires our attention: do queer people genuinely feel safe and comfortable when it comes to discussing their sexual orientation or gender identity in their respective workplaces?

To further explore this issue, the final question in the questionnaire distributed to the sample provided valuable insights. As was previously highlighted, it is essential to make a clear distinction between the diverse needs and experiences of the straight sample and their queer counterparts. The straight sample, as a whole, reported encountering little difficulty when discussing their own sexual orientation with colleagues. However, some of these individuals acknowledged feeling a degree of awkwardness, particularly when such conversations involved a superior or someone in a more powerful position. This unease points to the inherent power dynamics that can complicate interpersonal interactions in professional settings.

In stark contrast, the situation for the queer sample is far from straightforward or comfortable. The queer respondents, on the whole, expressed a deep-seated anxiety when it comes to disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity in their workplace. Many indicated that they felt an implicit pressure to remain silent about their identities, believing that revealing their true selves could

have adverse effects on their professional relationships, career advancement, or even job security. One participant, a gay man in his 30s or 40s from Nagasaki prefecture, articulated the anxiety that accompanies the thought of discussing his identity at work, suggesting that fear can significantly hinder open dialogue and acceptance.

Similarly, a queer woman in her 20s from Fukuoka prefecture recounted a disheartening experience when attempting to speak to her boss about her identity. During the conversation, she was met with a dismissive comment that referred to straight individuals as “normal.” This dismissive attitude left her feeling marginalised and underscored the broader societal challenges that LGBTQ+ individuals face when asserting their identities in the workplace. Such comments reflect a pronounced societal tendency to privilege heterosexuality as the default or 'normal' identity, which can instil significant fear and hesitation in queer individuals contemplating coming out in their professional lives.

Adding further depth to the discussion, a pansexual woman in her 40s, also from Fukuoka prefecture, offered another perspective. She noted that while "coming out" in the workplace is not necessarily unsafe, it is certainly not a comfortable experience. The potential for a judgmental atmosphere can create barriers, making it difficult for LGBTQ+ individuals to feel authentic in their professional environments. This discomfort is compounded by the fear of alienation or backlash, perpetuating a culture of silence around sexual orientation and gender identity among queers.

These personal accounts are not isolated incidents but reflect broader systemic issues in Japan's workplaces. The reluctance to discuss LGBTQ+ identities openly speaks volumes about the cultural attitudes and institutional structures that often fail to support and affirm diversity. In a society heavily influenced by traditional views on gender and sexuality, the experiences of queer individuals underscore the importance of fostering more inclusive workplaces where all employees feel valued and safe.

The general sentiment among queer respondents aligns closely with Walter Robert's findings, highlighting a pervasive silence many adopt as a protective measure. By choosing not to disclose their identities, LGBTQ+ individuals often

navigate their workplaces with caution, prioritising job security and interpersonal harmony over self-disclosure. As Japan continues to grapple with its stance on LGBTQ+ rights and acceptance, it is imperative that organisations take proactive steps to cultivate inclusive workplaces where all employees can feel secure being their true selves. This entails not only implementing anti-discrimination policies but also promoting awareness and sensitivity training to foster understanding and acceptance among all staff.

In conclusion, although societal attitudes are slowly evolving, the current landscape for LGBTQ+ individuals in Japanese workplaces still requires sustained advocacy and reform. Only through concerted efforts can the veil of silence be lifted, enabling authentic dialogue and fostering a culture that truly embraces diversity in all its forms.

Conclusions

In conclusion, over the last decade, thanks to the diffusion of the internet and social media, the conditions faced by LGBTQ+ individuals around the world have become a subject of extensive debate and scholarly research. However, it is important to note that this dialogue has largely centred on major urban centres, often overshadowing the experiences and challenges faced by individuals residing in smaller cities and rural areas. In fact, even in a country like Japan, a G7 member often perceived as progressive, the spotlight has been firmly on major metropolitan areas such as Tokyo and Osaka. While LGBTQ+ people living in these areas have been largely studied, the lived experiences and voices of individuals in smaller cities remain largely unexamined and unrepresented.

To fill this knowledge gap, this research initiative was launched, with a primary objective of gaining a deeper understanding of how individuals who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community perceive their sexuality and gender identity within both personal and professional contexts. To gather meaningful insights, a questionnaire was developed to allow participants to express their thoughts, experiences, and concerns anonymously. However, it is important to acknowledge that attracting a diverse participant pool posed considerable challenges, influenced by various factors.

In primis, events like the Fukuoka Kyushu Rainbow Pride, which attract numerous participants every year, offer various booths and activities, making it harder to find people not busy with an activity and to distribute the questionnaire. By contrast, the smaller events in Oita and Nagasaki made it difficult to find participants, as attendance was low. Specifically, Oita Rainbow Pride is still a new event; in fact, the 2025 edition was only the second one, while the Nagasaki University Pride was accessible only to students and university personnel.

In secundis, even in inclusive environments, not all individuals felt comfortable discussing their identities due to fears of potential repercussions in their professional lives. Many participants reported only “coming out” to close friends and family, with few willing to disclose their identities in the workplace

Even with these difficulties, it was possible to receive diverse responses and inputs that provided an idea of the tendencies of Japanese society in the areas under study. As shown in the previous chapter, in fact, it was clear that a significant percentage of the population in the exam would prefer a law for same-sex marriage to be promulgated. However, one participant was contrary to it, showing that the tendency is not unanimous and that there is still space for debate. It must be noted that, although the research conducted by Marriage for All Japan shows that the percentage of people in favour of same-sex marriage is higher than those opposed to it, even the new Prime Minister, Takaichi, has already expressed her opposition to it.

Another important finding was the approach these people took to their "coming out". In fact, the majority of the sample that actually "came out" only did it with close people, like close friends and family, only a couple included coworkers, while others specified that talking about their sexuality or gender identity with their coworkers was out of the picture. The main fear at the base of this choice was the fear of repercussions on their working life, such as missed opportunities or even harassment, which, as shown before, are not so uncommon for LGBTQ+ people.

Ultimately, this research aims to amplify the voices and experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in Fukuoka, Oita, and Nagasaki, highlighting their perspectives and concerns to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment. By shifting the focus toward these understudied regions, this research aspires to contribute to a broader understanding of LGBTQ+ dynamics in Japan, particularly in areas less influenced by external perspectives. Such insights are not only valuable to local communities but also essential for future advocacy efforts to achieve equality and acceptance for all.

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