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# Understanding the workplace experiences of LGBT+ individuals in Japan: An intersectional approach

J.F. Oberlin University  
School of International Studies  
Department of International Humanities and Social Sciences

Anderson Joel Daniel

## Abstract

In today's global, hyper-competitive labour market, companies cannot afford to discriminate potential talent based on dimensions of diversity. LGBT+ individuals belong to a demographic that in many parts of the world faces discrimination, oppression, and the systematic denial of pursuing a dignified and authentic life. While there are no laws in Japan persecuting LGBT+ individuals, equally there are no laws protecting them. Lacking government-legislated anti-discrimination laws, corporations operating in Japan have a proactive role in determining the level of inclusion that LGBT+ individuals experience in the workplace. This paper documents the lived experiences of these individuals, in order to understand how they navigate living and working in Japan. Three different LGBT+ cohorts participated in the research across two studies. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and an Internet-based survey. A constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) approach was used to generate and analyse the data. In Study 1, Japanese LGBT+ individuals ( $n = 16$ ) and LGBT+ expatriate individuals ( $n = 10$ ) were interviewed. Themes that emerged from the data informed the development of two conceptual frameworks: one that described the antecedents and outcomes of workplace climates of exclusion for Japanese LGBT+ employees; and another that considered "foreigner" identity as a moderating variable in the relationship between perceived level of safety and the disclosure decision of LGBT+ expatriates in Japan. In Study 2, interviews were conducted and a short-answer survey was administered to LGBT+ expatriate couples ( $n = 26$ ). The challenging-rewarding continuum was subsequently developed, and salient themes were expounded. Additionally, across the two studies, LGBT+ allies, including lawyers, were interviewed ( $n = 7$ ). While numerous examples of progress toward more inclusive workplace environments were documented, overall, company policy was piecemeal at best, and exclusionary at worst with regards to LGBT+ employees. Further, intersectional analysis revealed the ways in which systems of privilege and oppression differentially affected the participants based on their unique mix of social identities, specifically along the axes of age, social gender, nationality, and marital status. This analysis demonstrated that, within the socio-historical context of Japan, LGBT+ people do not form a homogeneous group, and can experience both privilege and oppression as individuals. This has implications for company policy and practice. Now is the time for companies to take leadership, broadcasting workplace climates for inclusion, not just through words but also through concrete actions, to the international community.