

Whether it's a bar in Shinjuku or over a dating app with someone in Osaka, words matter when talking about LGBT topics

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Coming out: People take part in a Tokyo Rainbow Pride parade in 2016. Language is constantly evolving, particularly in the LGBT community. | REUTERS

A recent survey by advertising giant Dentsu revealed that roughly 1 out of 11 people in Japan identify as レズビアン, ゲイ, バイセクシュアル, トランスジェンダー (*rezubian, gei, baisekushuaru, toransujendā*, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender), and the survey comes on the heels of some

positive developments for the LGBT community in this country.

In 2015, Tokyo's Shibuya and Setagaya wards started issuing パートナーシップ証明書 (*pātonāshippu shōmeisho*, partnership certificates), which recognize same-sex couples in relationships. The certificate insists — but doesn't require — that hospitals and companies such as real-estate firms treat these couples the same as married ones. Several major cities in Japan, including Osaka and Fukuoka, have followed suit by offering their own certificates.

Japanese media has been tracking the new laws that benefit 同性カップル (*dōsei kappuru*, same-sex couples). Headlines often bounce between the phrases “LGBT” and “性的少数者” (*seiteki shōsūsha*, sexual minorities). Readers might also spot the katakana “セクシュアルマイノリティー” (*sekushuaru mainoritii*, sexual minority), which, though technically an English phrase, is rarely used in overseas media.

In any case, “LGBT” has become so widely understood in Japan that it has even been added to Kojien, the most respected Japanese dictionary in the country. The publisher was criticized, however, when it lumped all four categories under one definition and inadvertently defined being transgender as someone having a different 性的指向 (*seiteki shikō*, sexual orientation) than most people. The entry was later corrected to explain that transgender is based on 性自認 (*seijinjin*, sexual recognition) instead of orientation.

Despite being defined in the dictionary, some Japanese are still trying to fully understand the terms. It's not uncommon to hear people refer to transgender individuals as ニューハーフ (*nyūhāfu*, new half), a word that is slowly becoming outdated as it is starting to dip in popularity, according to Google Trends, while “*toransujendā*” becomes more common.

Japan's familiarity with LGBT words may be due to more people feeling comfortable with カミングアウト (*kamingu auto*, coming out). Searching

the term on YouTube reveals hundreds of videos of people telling their stories of coming out as LGBT to their families, friends or coworkers, sometimes ending with rejection and other times acceptance.

A place where the LGBT community is always welcome, though, is 二丁目 (*Ni-chōme*), the anointed gay district that is located in Tokyo's Shinjuku Ward. The area has hundreds of bars that cater to queer clientele and overseas travelers.

But those who wish to visit them should do some research ahead of time as certain bars may restrict who can get in depending on the night. The famous Bar Gold Finger declares on its website that it is a place where レズビアン & バイ女性が安心して楽しめる (*rezubian ando bai josei ga anshin shite tanoshimeru*, lesbians and bi women can relax and have fun). Many places advertise themselves as ミックスバー (*mikkusu bā*, mixed bars) where anyone can enter and join in on the fun. Some places may be a little more exclusive with notices that they are メンズオンリー (*menzu onrii*, men only).

The website 2choco is full of pointers for 初心者 (*shoshinsha*, beginners) who are intimidated about their first trip to *Ni-chōme* and for ノンケ (*nonke*, straight people) who just want to see what all the fuss is about. Mind you, the website also uses the word ノーマル (*nōmaru*, normal) to describe heterosexual, cisgender customers, which is a pretty abnormal use of the word.

2choco's main tips are to relax, have fun, be respectful, and let go of any 偏見 (*henken*, prejudices) or 固定概念 (*kotei gainen*, preconceived notions) one might have about the LGBT community. The site stresses visitors to understand that even though some people might have a different セクシュアリティ (*sekushuaritii*, sexuality) than you, we all share the same 恋愛観 (*renaikan*, view on love).

Ni-chōme is a lot of fun, but people no longer need to physically be there in

order to find friends or somebody to love thanks to the emergence of dating apps and websites. Like their English counterparts, these apps have given rise to a whole new vocabulary that newcomers might find unfamiliar.

Most profiles will include the phrase 募集中 (*boshūchū*, currently recruiting) to describe what they are looking for, including 彼女/彼氏募集中 (*kanojo/kareshi boshūchū*, looking for a girlfriend/boyfriend), パートナー募集中 (*pātonā boshūchū*, looking for a partner) and なんでも募集中 (*nandemo boshūchū*, looking for whatever). Businesses often advertise job openings with バイト募集中 (*baito boshūchū*, hiring part-timers), so scrolling through dating profiles can feel like reading the want ads.

Users also often characterize their appearance with phrases such as 男らしい (*otokorashii*, manly) or ノンケっぽい (*nonke-ppoi*, straight acting). Some might be blunt with their preferences, writing things such as 女っぽい人はすみません (*onna-ppoi hito wa sumimasen*, people who are feminine, sorry...).

As the vocabulary for discussing LGBT topics grows, more people benefit by being represented. Whether you're chatting to someone at a bar in Shinjuku or over a dating app with someone in Osaka, words matter.

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