WHO DO YOU COME OUT TO?
INDIVIDUALS’ STRUGGLE OVER COMING OUT IN JAPAN
AND THE ROLE OF SEXUAL MINORITY GROUPS

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Abstract

Heteronormative society requires non-heterosexuals to “come out” to be recognized, and coming out is often the most challenging experience for sexual minorities. I will discuss how non-heterosexuals deal with the issue of coming out, and how sexual minority groups play a role in relation to individuals’ coming out process in the Japanese context. I conducted interviews with 24 non-heterosexuals, including people who are involved with sexual minority activities and did participant observation at three sexual minority groups. Based on my respondents’ experiences, I will propose the four stages of the coming out process that describes how non-heterosexuals in Japan deal with coming out, which is distinct from the Western model of the coming out process. The study also found that “imaginary social homophobia” influences people’s decisions about coming out. At the same time, continuous activities by sexual minority groups contribute to increase the awareness of non-heterosexuality in Japan.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

“I’m glad I came out… before coming out was like being in the ocean but finally after coming out was like being on the surface where I could breathe… I have had violent experiences after coming out. But I still think I’m glad I came out. The experience of coming out had made me realize how good it feels to be myself… I felt the pleasure of being myself which was my happiness. I felt I was born to feel that happiness. I was happy when I realized I am not abnormal as myself and when I encountered people who accepted me. It was G-chat (the name of a sexual minority community) that helped me think this way. I go there and laugh hard with my friends there and no one rejects me, which made me relieved and gave me confidence of who I am. It’s the hardest if you don’t have confidence in who you are. I finally could think I can exist in this society… G-chat made me think I can live and I can be there. That’s why I think I am glad I came out.” (Murase)

This is the narrative of a 28-year-old woman who hesitantly identifies herself as a lesbian. Her story shows how oppressive it is for a person not to be able to accept themselves and how hard it is to come out. However, at the same time, her narrative demonstrates how a sexual minority community gave her confidence and a place to feel relief, which even made her believe she was glad to come out despite the fact she had a violence experience as a result of coming out.

In a dominantly heterosexual society, people in society are socialized to believe that heterosexuality is the only acceptable sexuality. In this circumstance, disclosing one’s non-heterosexuality is one of the most challenging experiences and it requires
courage for many members of sexual minorities. The book, *Kamingu Auto Reta-zu* (Coming Out Letters), illustrates coming out experiences among parents and children, and students and teachers in Japan. Many people who came out to their family and teachers express how much they struggled before coming out and how hard it was to make the decision to come out, because they believed family members and teachers would not accept them, or they were afraid of disappointing their family members and teachers (RYOJI\(^1\) and Sunagawa 2007). It seems to be a very common narrative about the difficulties of coming out among many sexual minorities, because of the emphasis on heterosexuality and the stigmatization against non-heterosexuality. This is why coming out in heteronormative society is challenging, while it is still required in order to be recognized.

The consequences of coming out could be either positive or negative. The positive consequences of coming out would be that the current relationships people have are not influenced by unveiling one’s sexuality. In addition to this, when a person feels respect from others who understand her/his sexuality and provide support, this can be considered as another positive consequence. On the other hand, hate crimes based on sexual identities and orientation is a typical example of the negative consequence of coming out which is often seen in the U.S. Even though physical violence against sexual minorities is not often depicted in the news in Japan, losing a relationship after coming out is a common scene among sexual minorities in Japan. In other cases, people ignore the coming out as if it did not happen, which continues to make the presence of sexual

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\(^1\) RYOJI is listed as a co-author in the publication under this single, all-caps pen name.
minorities invisible. Coming out in a heteronormative society can produce negative consequences which make many sexual minorities afraid of coming out.

However, as my interviewee Murase stated and the book, *Coming Out Letters* shows, many people feel liveliness and happiness after coming out, which is another side of a coming out, because people find their place to be themselves and encounter supportive people, which reduces their feelings of loneliness. Thus, people realize the presence of people who understand, respect and support them even while there are people who are against non-heterosexuals. This is why people must negotiate whom they come out to and how they deal with the issue of coming out.

In this respect, it seems that non-heterosexuals have to “negotiate” their non-heterosexuality in a heteronormative society, because a heteronormative society restricts their lives. Thus, in order to create better lives for themselves as non-heterosexuals, they have to confront heteronormativity and find ways to accommodate to it. Sexual minorities are often still regulated in heteronormative society legally, culturally and psychologically. However, at the same time, we cannot neglect the fact that there are groups and people who support sexual minorities and help to improve their lives. People meet others who identify themselves as members of sexual minorities that support them. The presence of sexual minority groups provides places for people to meet other sexual minorities. Moreover, sexual minority movements by these groups serve to increase the awareness of the issue of sexual minorities in Japan. Therefore, the presence of sexual minority groups and their activities contribute a great effect in a heteronormative society, which eventually helps to improve the situation of sexual minorities.
The ideal society is one where no one has to “come out” because various sexualities are accepted and can coexist in society. However, regrettably in reality sexual minorities have to “come out” to be recognized in society because heterosexuality is a naturalized belief and many people are still opposed to any non-heterosexuality. Therefore, in this thesis, I will discuss how sexual minorities negotiate with heteronormative society to be recognized, with the help of sexual minority groups that act as collective identity communities and provide support and advocacy on behalf of sexual minorities.

In this thesis, I examine sexual minorities in Japan using a sociological perspective. I focus on how people deal with coming out or disclosing their sexuality to others. I also examine the relationship between individual members of sexual minorities and organized sexual minority groups, and how they connect to each other. In the next chapter I define key terms and review relevant literature to demonstrate the need for a sociological study of the coming out process in Japan. I then present my research question on sexual minorities in Japan and describe the study’s methods. In subsequent chapters I outline the four stages of the coming out process in Japan, introduce the concept of “imaginary social homophobia,” and examine how sexual minority organizations facilitate the coming out process. I demonstrate how and why my model of the coming out process in Japan is different from the western model, and how interaction with sexual minority groups facilitates the process. I hope the study will provide a better understanding of the issue of sexual minorities in Japan.
Chapter 2: Research Foundation

This chapter reviews the relevant social science literature concerning construction of a non-heterosexual identity and the process of coming out, and discusses some shortcomings of the literature based on its western bias as well as its psychological, rather than sociological, orientation. These two limitations can be addressed through an empirical study of the coming out process in Japan that views coming out as embedded in social interactions with both personal associates and organized sexual minority groups. The chapter concludes with a description of the research methods of the study.

Social Science Literature on Acceptance of Non-Heterosexual Identity

Societal Pressures on Sexual Minorities

Sexual minorities have been oppressed worldwide, although some countries and states in the U.S. have provided some legal protections for them. When we talk about oppression, people tend to see this from a Marxist perspective in which oppression is the product of class or economic conditions (Altman and Weeks 1993). However, oppression is also when “those holding authority systematically impose burdens and penalties upon relatively powerless segments of a society.” (Humphreys 1972: 13-14) Being ignored or made invisible is the oppression homosexuals or sexual minorities have suffered and struggled through (Altman and Weeks 1993). In this paper, I will define oppression as having three different meanings that overlap. First, oppression means authority, in which a group in power places pressure on a powerless group (Humphry 1972). This includes the legal oppression against sexual minorities, which restrict their lives. Second, there is cultural oppression because of hegemonic sexuality or a
naturalized belief in heterosexuality in society that excludes sexual minorities. The naturalized belief in heterosexuality is understood as heteronormativity. This is a cultural oppression because social circumstances expect people to be heterosexual, which stigmatizes sexual minorities. Third, there is psychological oppression among people, in which groups of people have negative feelings toward sexual minorities because they are non-heterosexuals; this is also understood as homophobia. In this respect, sexual minorities are oppressed in three different ways.

Thus, even if some countries and states in the U.S. treat sexual minorities as equal by providing same legal rights that heterosexuals enjoy, many more countries withhold rights from homosexuals or sexual minorities, and they remain oppressed today. Also, if the issue of sexual minorities has been ignored by a society, this also results in oppression against sexual minorities. Therefore, “to be a homosexual in our society is to be constantly aware that one bears a stigma.” (Altman and Weeks 1993) Consequently, sexual minorities have struggled with oppression that is rooted in heteronormativity or compulsory heterosexuality and homophobia (Altman and Weeks 1993; Eaklor 2008). Eaklor states that “homophobia and heterosexism are equally effective in enforcing silence and invisibility, which return the favor by maintaining homophobia and heterosexism.” (Eaklor 2008) In the next sections I will define many of the terms which I will use in this paper.

**Some Key Terms: Heteronormativity and Compulsory Heterosexuality**

The two concepts of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality are among the most powerful sources of oppression to sexual minorities. Gagnon and Simon
introduce the idea of sexual behavior “scripts.” They state that “all human sexual behavior is socially scripted behavior.” (Gagnon and Simon 1973: 262) This script applies when human sexual activities and behaviors are socially defined in a situation or society; thus, these actions are organized by the “script” of how to behave (Gagnon and Simon 1973: 262). In this way, people’s decision of what is appropriate or inappropriate is defined by sexual scripts that are socially constructed. Anderson and Cyranowski define a sexual self-schema. Sexual self-schemas are “cognitive generalizations about sexual aspects of oneself that are derived from past experience, manifest in current experience, influential in the processing of sexually relevant social information, and guide sexual behavior.” (Anderson and Cyranowski 1994: 1079) Hence, sexual self-schemas arise when individuals understand the sexual scripts and perceive their sexuality based on the scripts. To borrow these two concepts, it can be said that sexual scripts are based on heterosexual relationships or heterosexism, which is reproduced by ideology, thereby normalizing heterosexuality. This is also understood as “heteronormativity.” (Shaw and Lee 2006: 172) When people are expected to be heterosexuals they describe this as “compulsory heterosexuality.” (Shaw and Lee 2006: 172) The correlation between these two concepts is that heteronormativity exists in societies that force people to portray themselves externally as heterosexual; thus, these people will internalize heteronormativity, which could be understood as compulsory heterosexuality.

**External Homophobia and Internalized Homophobia**

In relation to heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality, homophobia is another powerful source of oppression for sexual minorities. Homophobia is a negative
attitude against homosexuals, and Weinberg points out the sources of homophobia. People fear homosexuality because of its attachment to negative stereotypes of being an illness (Weinberg 1972: 5). He also states that people have a homophobic reaction not only because homosexuality is labeled as a problem, but also “because [heterosexuality] is still a majority point of view.” (Weinberg 1972: 5) To clarify, Weinberg explains that a homophobic reaction is influenced by the “threat to values,” in which people who challenge the norm, heteronormativity, or the majority, heterosexuality, would risk being harassed (Weinberg 1972: 16). There are also phobias against non-homosexuals such as bisexuals or transsexuals that can be called biphobia or transphobia, but in this paper I will use the term homophobia to refer to the phobia against sexual minorities in general.

Here Garfinkel’s argument may help to provide better understanding of the relationship between heteronormativity and homophobia. Garfinkel (1967) is the theorist who introduced ethnomethodology, which is to detect what “commonplace scenes” are, what a “life-as-usual character” is in relation to “the stable social structures of everyday activities.” (Garfinkel 1967: 37) Thus, his breaching experiments unveil the assumptions people have during their interaction or unnaturalize the naturalized. In fact, Garfinkel (1967) reports that people become upset and frustrated when their norms or naturalized beliefs are challenged. Garfinkel’s argument also emphasizes that people interact with each other based on shared common assumptions, not based on shared common rules (Garfinkel 1967: 74). Even though Garfinkel’s argument does not focus on uncovering the histories of how naturalized assumptions have been created, his argument is helpful to explain how homophobia could be produced in society.
As explained above, normalized belief in heterosexuality is a hegemonic ideology which takes place in many societies. In Garfinkel’s model, people in society have a “shared common assumption” about being a heterosexual, which is naturalized in society (1967). Therefore, when people are challenged in their norm by asking questions which overthrow their normative values, they feel uncomfortable or even upset against people. In this respect, if a person is challenged in her or his norm that everyone is heterosexual by the disclosure of another person’s sexuality as non-heterosexual, this may cause the challenged person to be frustrated. This could be how heteronormativity and homophobia reinforce to each other and reproduce the hegemonic ideology which oppresses sexual minorities.

These two powerful sources of stress also influence how people perceive themselves when they began to realize their non-heterosexuality. In addition to social external homophobia, sexual minorities themselves may internalize the homophobia, which is sometimes called internalized homophobia. As Weinberg notes, a homophobic reaction can be seen within homosexuals (Weinberg 1972: 11). He does not necessarily label it as “internalized homophobia,” but Szymanski and Chung cite several clinicians’ definition of “internalized homophobia.” According to them, internalized homophobia, or internalized homonegativity, is when gays and lesbians internalize the negative feeling toward their sexuality unconsciously or consciously (Szymanski and Chung 2001). Szymanski and Chung illustrate several characteristics of internalized homophobia: “isolation,” “fear of discovery,” “deception and passing,” “self-hatred and shame.” These negative feelings stem from elements of a heterosexist society that make gays and lesbians believe they are unworthy or sick as homosexuals, producing “moral and
religious condemnation of homosexuality,” “horizontal oppression which involves negative attitudes about other lesbians [and gays],” and “uneasiness with the idea of children being raised in a lesbian [or gay] home.” (Szymanski and Chung 2001: 38) It can also be said that rejecting one’s own or others’ sexual orientations occurs due to the ideology that sexual orientations can be changed (Jordan and Deluty 1998: 5). The definitions of homophobia and internalized homophobia suggest that other people become homophobic because of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality; thus, sexual minorities will internalize these ideologies and have “self-hatred and shame” (Szymanski and Chung 2001: 38) as non-heterosexuals.

When and how people realize their sexual attraction to others differs depending upon the individuals. Altman explains “because of the fears and ignorance that surround our views of sex, children discover sexual feelings and behavior incompletely, and often with great pangs of guilt” for both homosexual and heterosexual (Altman and Weeks 1993: 23). Altman continues that if this is true even for heterosexuals, “how much greater, then, is the guilt of the teenager who discovers himself attracted to others of [the same sex]?” (Altman and Weeks 1993: 23) In this respect, the confusion and guilt are the source of their struggles that are influenced by the idea of heterosexuality as normal, in other words heteronormativity, which leads to homophobia or in Szymanski and Chung’s concept, internalized homophobia.

**Construction of a Homosexual Identity**

To discuss the issue of non-heterosexuality, it is crucial to define who are non-heterosexual. Here, I will not examine why a person is homosexual because this question
labels homosexuality negatively, by seeking the causes of being a homosexual. Instead, I will discuss the processes of how people establish their non-heterosexual identity.

Several scholars have described the developing stages of homosexual identities in the western context. These scholars do not necessarily name each stage in the same manner; however, the concepts are very similar to each other. The goal of this theory is to demonstrate how individuals establish their non-heterosexual identity as a solid identity, in which people integrate non-heterosexual identity and treat it as a way of life. This theory has been discussed since the 1950s; however, as many scholars have pointed out, these theories “have focused on delineation of types of homosexual identities” and “on identification of the types of problems encountered by homosexuals in managing their homosexual identity.” (Cass 1979: 219) Here, I am introducing one of the popular scholars on this theory whom other scholars also often cite, Vivienne Cass. Cass (1979) illustrates six stages of homosexual identity formation; “Identity Confusion”; “Identity Comparison”; “Identity Tolerance”; “Identity Acceptance”; “Identity Pride”; and “Identity Synthesis.” Cass looks at each stage in relation to person, “P,” perception of self, “S,” person’s behavior, “B,” and person’s perception of what other people think, “O.” Cass discusses the psychological changes during the development of identity stages. This breaks down the process into elementary equations of interaction.

Cass explains that the process of homosexual formation demonstrates the shift of the “intrapersonal matrix,” from non-homosexual to homosexual (1979: 221). She states that individuals go through the six stages in order to fully identify themselves as homosexual; although how much time they take will differ among people (Cass 1979). People in the first stage doubt their own sexuality as a homosexual without knowing what
it means to be a homosexual, which Cass calls “potentially” homosexual (Cass 1979: 223). Thus, they are confused which makes them feel alienated. In order to resolve this confusion and alienation, Cass demonstrates three major strategies which include several small characteristics. The first strategy is to search further information about homosexuality through books or interacting with counselors (Cass 1979). The second strategy is to reject and hide their homosexuality, and pretend to be a heterosexual. The third strategy is to see their behavior as “incorrect and undesirable,” (Cass 1979: 224) in which they deny their attraction to people of the same sex. Cass also notes that people in this stage are less likely to disclose their inner conflict and confusion to others because they tend to believe that it is a personal task to resolve these feelings by themselves.

The second stage is where people have a conflict between the perception of self and their behavior in relation to their perception of how others think of them. People in this stage face social alienation and are more concerned not only about how they perceive themselves, but also how others perceive homosexual behavior. Therefore, people in this stage feel they are different from others and don’t belong to any group. The feeling of an extreme alienation motivates them to make contact with others (Cass 1979). Thus, Cass illustrates four strategies of how to reduce the feelings of alienation. First, people acknowledge their differences as their nature, positive and “exciting.” (Cass 1979: 226) However, people who use this strategy tend to pretend to be a heterosexual as a public image while they start recognizing the differences. The second strategy is that people “[accept] the homosexual meaning of their own behavior but find a homosexual self-image undesirable” (Cass 1979: 227) so they try to reduce the self image of homosexuals as not important. There are also several strategies: for example, people insist their feeling
towards a particular someone is special and they would not be a homosexual because the individual was only a special case; or others perceive themselves as both homosexual and heterosexual, so that they would not feel too isolated because they can share stories with other heterosexuals. The third approach is to perceive their homosexual behavior as undesirable, in which case these people tend to have negative reactions and experiences with their family, friends and church group. The fourth approach to reduce the feelings of alienation is where people devalue their homosexuality and privilege heterosexuality. Hence, people with this approach see themselves as either asexual or heterosexual. Moreover, a person who uses this approach may be likely to commit suicide if the approach fails (Cass 1979). Therefore this stage is about how people deal with external pressure; once this is achieved in a positive way they can move to the third stage.

People in the third stage perceive their sexuality more as homosexual than heterosexual. They are also more aware of how others see them, which leads them to feel alienated. If this feeling increases, people search and try interacting with other homosexuals and “homosexual subculture.” (Cass 1979: 229) In this respect, a person “tolerates rather than accepts a homosexual identity.” (Cass 1979: 229) Cass describes different patterns of how individuals strive to establish their identities with a positive and negative perception of homosexuality. During this stage, people are still struggling with their homosexuality, however they feel less isolated. People in the fourth stage interact with other homosexuals more often than people in the previous stages, which help them to “validate and ‘normalize’ homosexuality as an identity and way of life”; thus, they “[accept] rather than [tolerate] a homosexual self-image.” (Cass 1979: 231) In this stage, people use strategies of “passing, limited contact, and selective disclosure.” (Cass 1979:
Through the passing strategy, people pretend to be heterosexual when they are surrounded by other heterosexuals, which also leads them to have “limited contact” where they tend to communicate less with other heterosexuals. At the same time, they choose to disclose themselves to “significant heterosexual others.” (Cass 1979: 232)

People in the fifth stage are more aware of how society rejects homosexuality, while they accept their own homosexual identity. In this circumstance, people are less concerned about how other heterosexuals see them and more concerned about how other homosexuals see them; thus, they have a “strong sense of pride in being gay.” (Cass 1979: 233) While they have strong sense of pride in their sexuality, they still face “inconsistency between heterosexual and homosexual values,” which also creates “frustration and alienation.” (Cass 1979: 233) Because people have pride in homosexual identity on one hand and frustration on the other hand, some people in this stage become activists in order to reevaluate the positive qualities of homosexuality. Since people are much less concerned about how others perceive them, they gain “the freedom to choose disclosure as a strategy for coping.” (Cass 1979: 234) While disclosing themselves more often, people experience both positive and negative reactions, in which people may face conflict between “the ideal and reality”; hence, “disclosure may be considered a compromise strategy here.” (Cass 1979: 234) Regardless of whether they actually experience positive or negative reactions, their “perceived negative reaction” is a consistent with their “intrapersonal matrix” (Cass 1979: 234) in which they regularly perceive that reactions will turn out to be negative. People who are unable to change their intrapersonal matrix typically decide not to come out. Hence, a “perceived negative reaction” influences their decisions about coming out.
The final stage is “identity synthesis” in which people acknowledge the social complexity in which there are heterosexuals who support homosexuality and those who don’t. Thus, “greater congruency is now possible within the matrix.” (Cass 1979: 234)

In this environment, people in this stage are able to “synthesize” their private identity as a homosexual with their public image as a heterosexual. Thus, their homosexual identity becomes a part of all their identities, even how they present themselves in public, and homosexuality becomes part of one consistent self. As Cass notes, these stages do not apply to all people; however, these stages are broad guideline of how one constructs a homosexual identity.

In relation to Cass’s model on identity formation, Troiden (1989) also illustrates four stages of homosexual identities. Troiden’s model overlaps somewhat with Cass’s six stages. The first stage is the “sensitization” which occurs before puberty. It is characterized by the perception of being different from others, in which people sense differences without defining them as either heterosexuality or homosexuality; instead it is more dependent on “gender-neutral” or “gender-atypical activities.” (Troiden 1989: 52)

The second stage is about “identity confusion” that occurs during adolescence, in which people start personalizing homosexuality (Troiden 1989). Since people can name their differences from others, people in this stage are “confused” about their homosexual identity and “prefer” to be heterosexuals (Troiden 1989). Troiden explains five “stigma-management” techniques: denial; repair; avoidance; redefinition; and acceptance (Troiden 1989).

The third stage is “identity assumption” and people in this stage are still not sure about their homosexuality. However, people in this stage also start accepting themselves
as homosexuals through interacting with homosexual communities or people who identify themselves as homosexuals. Troiden also notes that people start coming out to a few people in this stage. The fourth stage is about “commitment.” People in this stage start “adopting homosexuality as a way of life”; thus, they accept and acknowledge their sexuality as homosexuality and accommodate themselves to the “homosexual identity and role.” (Troiden 1989: 63) As we see from Cass’s and Troiden’s model, these theories are very similar.

Troiden adds a first stage that Cass does not have, in which people sense their differences without naming it as homosexuality. Troiden combines the first and second stages in Cass’s model into a second stage in Troiden’s model in which people are confused with their differences as homosexuals and try to reject their homosexual identity. Moreover, Troiden combines the third and forth stages in Cass’s model into a third stage in which people start accepting their sexuality through interacting with other homosexuals and begin to come out to a few people. This can be combined because the differences between the third and fourth stage in Cass’s model are not very important. The distinction between the third and fourth stage is based on the degree to which people struggle with accepting themselves as homosexuals; thus, in stage three people tolerate homosexuality while in stage four people accept homosexuality (Cass 1979). Troiden’s model is missing the fifth stage in Cass’s model in which people are aware of how society rejects homosexuality but they are less concerned about how others think; thus they are likely to come out to more people. This stage I feel is an essential part of identity construction in order to move to the final stages in which people are fully comfortable with their homosexual identity and adopt their homosexuality as a way of
life, because without the fifth stage in Cass’s model where people come out to more people, it seems more difficult for individuals to be fully comfortable with their identity. The construction of homosexual identity is important; however, I believe analyzing the process of how individuals establish non-heterosexual identity as a construction of a complete self is not sociological enough.

People’s identity is constructed through interaction between people. However, as Cass states, the homosexual identity process illustrates how one’s “intrapersonal matrix” changes and distinguishes homosexual self from heterosexual self. This is how the theory treats identity as an internal, psychological construct. Of course their purpose is different from mine. The identity formation theory still emphasizes how an individual struggles and achieves a psychological homosexual identity, because the goal of the theory is designed to show how individuals fully identify themselves as homosexuals and adopt their homosexual identity as a way of life. Moreover, both Cass and Troiden still emphasize the importance of coming out to other non-heterosexuals or the importance of interactions among non-heterosexuals to become fully comfortable with their non-heterosexual identity. In this respect the theory treats coming out to other non-heterosexuals as a strategy to accomplish the goal, to fully become comfortable with their non-heterosexuality.

However, becoming fully comfortable with their non-heterosexual identity may not be the goal if we want to better understand the issue of sexual minorities from a sociological perspective. Non-heterosexuals have to live and interact with others whose sexuality includes not only non-heterosexuals, but often heterosexuals. Also these heterosexuals may normalize heterosexuality and may have negative feelings toward non-
heterosexuals, such that non-heterosexuals have to negotiate with heteronormative society once they identify themselves as members of a non-heterosexual sexual minority. Moreover, people regardless of their sexuality live in heteronormative society, and this causes non-heterosexuals to struggle over accepting their non-heterosexuality. Thus, analyzing the process of coming out is sociologically important, because disclosing non-heterosexual identity in heteronormative society requires them to negotiate and deal with other people’s reactions.

**Coming Out in a Heteronormative and Homophobic Society**

People have struggled “against the realization of [their] gayness, and coming out is therefore a long and painful process.” (Altman and Weeks 1993: 26) Altman points out that many people have experienced a time when they pretended to be heterosexual (Altman and Weeks 1993). Hence, coming out reflects “the most basic and deep-seated norms of a society that sees itself as based exclusively on the heterosexual family structure.” (Altman and Weeks 1993: 27) If a society emphasizes heterosexuality and socializes people to believe in heteronormativity, then coming out to themselves as well as others will be one of the most challenging realities that many sexual minorities have to go through.

Sexual identity and orientation are not always obvious to be recognized by appearances, unlike ethnicity; thus, “… gayness is not something, like skin color, or sex, or infirmity, immediately apparent to both us and others.” (Altman and Weeks 1993: 21) Therefore, sexual minorities are required to disclose in order to accept their “differences” in a heterosexist society. As I mentioned above, sexual minorities struggle with the
process of coming out to themselves and others and they actually may face violence or negative reactions in society. Even in places where same-sex marriage is included in the law, cases of violence against sexual minorities persist. Violence against sexual minorities in Japan may not be as noticeable as in the U.S. since there have been not as many news articles of these incidents in Japan; however, people actually face discrimination and negative reactions due to their sexuality in daily life. For example, Asahi News and NHK Kansai News reported an incident that a hotel in Japan rejected a reservation for a room with one bed that was made by a gay couple (Kansai Rainbow Parade, October 19, 2006).

As we can see, coming out is another source of stress for many people who identify themselves as members of sexual minorities. However, since coming out is such a stressful experiences for many sexual minorities, many studies treat homosexuality as an illness which can be fixed and sexuality is treated as a individuals’ issue rather than a social issue, therapists are likely to be involved with sexual minority people. Coleman (1982) proposes the process of coming out by stating “the framework remains useful as a way to understand these people and can assist therapists and clients if used in a flexible manner.” (32) Thus, Coleman’s model seems to have more of a therapeutic purpose than a sociological analysis.

The issue of coming out is often discussed in relation to identity formation (Ino 2005). In fact, the concept of the coming out process is heavily based on identity formation theory, but it can and should shift the focus more to interaction and how individuals negotiate their identity in a larger social setting. Coleman (1982) introduces
five stages of coming out; “Pre-coming out”; “Coming out”; “Exploration”; “First Relationships”; and “Integration.” However, Coleman’s model presents how individuals feel comfortable enough with their non-heterosexual identity to seek a long term relationship or to adopt non-heterosexuality as a way of life. Moreover, Coleman strongly emphasizes the importance of interaction with other non-heterosexuals in which he focuses more on non-heterosexual identity and relationship with non-heterosexuals. In this circumstance, even though Coleman calls his model as the process of coming out, it still focuses on coming out to other non-heterosexuals but not come out to heterosexuals or heteronormative society. Thus, Coleman’s model is psychological in which he emphasizes how individuals establish their non-heterosexuality rather than sociological by looking at how non-heterosexuals negotiate and live in society.

In the first stage, “pre-coming out,” people realize their differences from others without naming what it is. However, they notice the differences from their family, friends and social expectations. Therefore, people in this stage feel alienated and alone. In order for them to protect and defend themselves from isolation, they deny and repress their same-sex feelings. Coleman also introduces three resolutions of the inner conflict. One resolution unfortunately is committing suicide. Second, people hide their sexuality and develop low self esteem. Third, which is a healthy resolution; people acknowledge their differences from their family, friends and social expectation. For a person in the second stage, “coming out,” is acknowledging their sexuality. Thus, people start verbalizing their differences as a homosexual. Coleman refers to this stage as similar to Cass’s stage of “Identity confusion.” There are two strategies people use to admit their homosexuality. First, people usually gain acceptance from others. During this process,
people also face negative reactions as well. Hence, as a second strategy, people look for acceptance in other people who identify themselves as homosexuals. With these aids, people can start accepting their homosexual identity. People in the third stage, explore, test or experiment with their new sexuality. In this stage, people interact with others homosexuals which help them to develop a positive self-image as homosexual. As Coleman takes account, his third stage is seen in the beginning of the third stage which leads to the fourth stage in Cass’s model (Coleman 1982). Coleman emphasizes the importance of experiments because people can gain confidence and high self-esteem through exploring themselves, which makes them feel the need for an intimate relationship.

Thus, people in the fourth stage start seeking their first relationship rather than just interacting with other homosexuals, which Coleman says “can be disastrous for many reasons.” (Coleman 1982: 38) First, if a person lacks consolidation of their self identity, the relationship is less likely to work well. Second, if a person has insufficient coming out tasks and enough exploration, their relationship tends not to work. Therefore, people’s first relationships are less likely to work when they did not complete the previous stages. In the fifth stage, “integration,” people are comfortable with their sexuality and start seeking a long-term relationship. Coleman’s definitions of coming out is more dependent on coming out to individuals’ selves and to other homosexuals which in a way to interact with other homosexuals than coming out to society or heterosexuals. Therefore, even though the purpose of Coleman’s model is different, and he calls these stages the coming out process, and these stages overlap with the stages in the homosexual identity construction processes from a more psychoanalytic perspective.
Table 1 shows the comparison among theorists. The diagram is based on Cass’s model and how two other models are similar and different from Cass. Accordingly, both Troiden and Coleman have their own first stage that are similar to each other, but are distinct from Cass’s model. In both Coleman’s first stage and Troiden’s first stage, people realize differences without naming it as homosexuality which makes them struggle as it is shown as shaded. Furthermore, Troiden’s second stage, Cass’s first stage and Coleman’s second stage are similar and are shown by wavy lines: as Coleman points out, his second stage is essentially the same as Cass’s first stage (Coleman 1982) and Troiden’s second stage in which people acknowledge their sexuality could be named homosexuality; however at the same time, they want to reject their homosexual identity. The strategies in the second stage of Coleman’s model can be seen in both Cass’s and Troiden’s model in which gaining acceptance from others and interacting with other homosexuals helps people to establish their homosexual identity. At the same time, as described above, Troiden’s second stage is a combination of the first and second in Cass’s model, which made to be a bold. Moreover, Troiden’s third stage is a combination of the third and fourth stage in Cass’s model, which made to be italicized. As double underlines shows, and Coleman takes account, his third stage is similar to Cass’s third and fourth stage in which people interact with others homosexuals that helps them to develop a positive self-image as homosexual. Coleman’s fourth stage is an extension of the interaction with other homosexuals that makes them desire a relationship. Hence, this is not seen in other two models. Cass’s fifth stage is also independent from other two theories, in which people in this stage people are aware of how society rejects homosexuality but they are less concerned about how others think; thus they are likely to
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<th>Motoyama 23</th>
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**Table 1: Comparison among Theorists**

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<tr>
<th>Troiden</th>
<th>Cass</th>
<th>Coleman</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1st Stage “Sensitization”:</strong> Confused with their differences without naming it as homosexuality</td>
<td><strong>1st Stage “Pre-Coming Out”:</strong> Realization of differences from others without naming neither as homosexual nor heterosexual</td>
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<td><strong>2nd Stage “Identity Confusion”:</strong> “begin to personalize homosexual” in adolescent; thus confused with homosexual identity and prefer to be heterosexuals</td>
<td><strong>1st Stage “Identity Confusion”</strong>: Doubt own sexuality as homosexuals without knowing what it means to be a homosexual = “potentially” homosexual</td>
<td><strong>2nd Stage “Coming Out”:</strong> Acknowledge their differences as homosexuality. 2 ways to accept their homosexuality: 1) gain acceptance from numbers of persons 2) look for acceptance from other homosexuals</td>
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<td><strong>2nd Stage “Identity Comparison”:</strong> Concerned about both how they perceive themselves and how other perceive homosexual behavior $\rightarrow$ feeling of isolation - Pretend to be heterosexual to reduce isolated feelings - Extreme isolation motivate them to contact with others</td>
<td><strong>3rd Stage “Identity Assumption”:</strong> Still not sure about their homosexuality but start accepting themselves through interacting with other homosexuals. Start coming out to few people</td>
<td><strong>3rd Stage “Identity Tolerance”:</strong> Perceive their sexuality as homosexuals than heterosexuals, thus, they are more aware of what other see them which make feel alienated $\rightarrow$ they search and try interacting with other homosexuals or “homosexual subculture”</td>
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<td><strong>3rd Stage “Identity Assumption”:</strong> Still not sure about their homosexuality but start accepting themselves through interacting with other homosexuals. Start coming out to few people</td>
<td><strong>4th Stage “Identity Acceptance”:</strong> Interact with other homosexuals more often, which help them to normalize homosexuality, thus they accept their homosexual self image. People choose where they portrays a homosexual self image in order to avoid risks</td>
<td><strong>3rd Stage “Exploration”:</strong> explore, test or experiment with their new sexuality to gain a positive self image</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4th Stage “Identity Acceptance”:</strong> Interact with other homosexuals more often, which help them to normalize homosexuality, thus they accept their homosexual self image. People choose where they portrays a homosexual self image in order to avoid risks</td>
<td><strong>5th Stage “Identity Synthesis”:</strong> Their homosexual identity becomes a part of all their identities, even how they present themselves in public, and homosexuality becomes a part one consistent self</td>
<td><strong>5th Stage “Integration”:</strong> Comfortable with their sexuality so that they start seeking long-term relationship</td>
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<td><strong>5th Stage “Identity Pride”:</strong> People are much less concerned about how others see them, which give people “the freedom to choose disclosure as a strategy for coping.”</td>
<td><strong>6th Stage “Identity Synthesis”:</strong> Their homosexual identity becomes a part of all their identities, even how they present themselves in public, and homosexuality becomes a part one consistent self</td>
<td><strong>6th Stage “Commitment”:</strong> “adopting homosexuality as a way of life” in which they commit their homosexual identity and role</td>
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come out to more people. The final stage in all the models are very much similar, in which individuals fully identify themselves as homosexuals (Cass 1979) so that they seek a long term relationship (Coleman 1982) by adopting their homosexuality as a way of life (Troiden 1989). These three models are very similar that focus more on identity construction and look from psychological perspective even though Coleman’s model is supposed to be shown the process of coming out.

As I pointed out, the models of these theorists are very similar even though Coleman calls his model the process of coming out. First, the goals of each model are to establish fully comfortable non-heterosexual identity (Cass 1979) so that they can seek a long term relationship with non-heterosexuals (Coleman 1982) by adopting their non-heterosexual identity as a way of life (Troiden 1989). Second, the theories strongly emphasize coming out to other non-heterosexuals but not coming out to heterosexuals. Interactions among non-heterosexuals are obviously important; however, the theories treat this interaction as a strategy to accomplish their goal, to become fully comfortable with their non-heterosexuality, and they rarely discuss coming out to heterosexuals. Even though these theories are an important step to understand the issue of non-heterosexuality, it is sociologically not enough because non-heterosexuals have to live in a heteronormative world and negotiate with other people’s reactions. Thus, how people come out in heteronormative society and how they negotiate with other people’s reaction is neglected in these theories. Therefore, my research will examine how individuals come out in a heteronormative social setting and how they deal with others. Before going in this in more detail, I will explain why these western studies are inadequate for understanding homosexual identity and the coming out process in Japan.
Western Literature and the Case of Japan

Much of the social science literature on non-heterosexuality is from western countries so it is based on western points of view. Of course, these western perspectives’ theories may well be applicable to examine a different country or society. In fact, the concepts of homophobia and heteronormativity as well as terms such as LGBT are now used throughout the world in both academic literature and popular discourse. Scholars in Japan who specialize in the issue of sexual minorities are also aware of the literature in the west. In actuality, heteronormativity and homophobia are two powerful sources for people’s struggles in Japan. However, at the same time, applying literature from western countries does not mean the literature can fully explain the experience of homosexuality in Japan, because each society has different characteristics that shape its culture. Hence, different societies have different values and histories that influence how a society would be constructed. Therefore, as many scholars point out, the western theories do not always fit the local circumstances, even if the issue is the same.

Judith Butler, one of the important theorists in the field of gender and sexuality, introduces how gender is constructed by power and becomes normative in society so that individuals perform accordingly and become gendered persons (Butler 2006). Thus, individual’s behavior and even bodies are shaped by the constructed gender. Butler also explains that sex is constructed by continuous normalization of the social norms, and regulatory practices reproduce its roles and norms (Butler 1993). These individuals’ attitude is a performance. Butler emphasizes the differences between performance as just an action and performance as a “regularized and constrained repetition of norms.” (95) Performance is not the individual’s will, but the repetition of norms shapes the condition
for the individuals to perform. Thus, Butler calls it a “ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production.” (95) However, since the determination of those who to punish is based on laws which are created by those who are in power, those who are outside the power will be punished (Butler 1993). Therefore, individuals who even try to perform based on the social norms are always under the threat of punishment. Butler’s analysis of how norms drive individuals to perform is applicable to discuss how heteronormativity is constructed and will affect people’s decision of coming out under the threat of punishment.

Applying Butler’s argument, heteronormativity is socially constructed and it determines individuals’ performance, because if individuals fail to perform based on norms, they will get punished as they are always under the threat. Non-heterosexuals are outside the power, therefore they are more likely to be punished. Here, punishment can be also understood as stigmatization against non-heterosexuals because they are powerless in heteronormative society so they fail to perform normatively. According to Butler, individuals are concerned about punishment or negative effects on the individual self in which threat of punishment is more personal. She uses the example of symbolic castration which is an example of how punishments for violating social norms target only the self (Butler 1993: 96). In this environment, coming out as non-heterosexual in heteronormative society is difficult for many non-heterosexuals, because it will threaten their personal positioning in society.
There are also micro-level explanations on how the self is constructed and cultural differences are influential. Mead’s discussion on the self is often used as the starting point for discussion of the self. Mead emphasizes that the self is constructed through social interaction, beginning in infancy when the child begins to see him or herself as a reflection of interactions with others, and gradually leading to a fully developed sense of self for the individual that reflects this long process of social interaction (Mead 1967). Accordingly, an individual “has to become an object to [themselves] just as other individuals are objects to [them] or in [their] experiences” (Mead 1967: 138); hence, the individual constructs their own self through the attitudes of others and learns how to behave based on different circumstances and community, which he calls, “‘the generalized other.’” (Mead 1967: 152) Meads also introduces the “I” and the “Me,” which are used interchangeably when they act. The “Me” is “the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes” whereas the “I” is “the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others.” (Mead 1967: 173) In other words, “I” is the self that an individual wants to be whereas “Me” is the self that others want an individual to be.

The concept of the generalized other could be understood as heteronormativity in society, because heteronormativity is a hegemonic social circumstance reflecting what the generalized others expect individuals to be. However, the question is what if the expectations of the generalized others are different, how does it affect individual’s self? Moreover, what if different society prioritizes “I” and “Me” differently, how will this shape people’s interactions? In order to answer these questions, I will now look at how the self in the west and Japan are different.
A Japanese sense of self and related behaviors are distinctively different from the sense of self as understood in western countries (Lebra 2004). As Lebra states, the task of the “… Japanese self is to focus on the multiplicity and shifting of self within the social context” and therefore the Japanese self is more complex than the self in European sociological models (Lebra 2004: 38). Studies of Japanese children emphasize how appropriate behavior is prescribed for each setting by the Japanese cultural norms (Peak 1989). A well-socialized Japanese person is one who interacts with the appropriate social behavior in each different situation, and can suppress any private emotions that might disturb the situation. Instead, the self shifts constantly to fit different social contexts. In this respect, how the non-heterosexual self presents in the Japanese social context would not be the same because they are expected to interact with the appropriate social behavior in different situations.

One aspect of the multifold Japanese self is the “front (omote) zone” and “combines propriety and distance.” (Lebra 2004: 42) When a self is positioned in this zone, the relationships with other selves are interacting in “hierarchical asymmetry” among them (Lebra 2004: 43). Thus, a self’s behavior in the front zone is perceived as polite behavior. An example of politeness is “kizukai (alertness and caring attention to other’s needs or feelings)” to respond to the expectation from others to behave in ways that will make them feel good (Lebra 2004: 44). Kizukai requires a self to “enryo (self-imposed restraint)” to avoid causing people to feel troubled or causing others “meiwaku (… trouble, burden, inconvenience, annoyance, displeasure, discomfort).” (Lebra 2004: 44) People are expected not to assert their individual identity, but rather to behave as
others expect them to in each situation, even if it means stifling their personal feelings inside themselves.

The front zone operates in Japanese society in conjunction with the “interior (uchi) zone” where the self’s behavior is based on “intimacy accompanied by familiarity.” (Lebra 2004: 66) One distinctive example can be how Americans and Japanese view an intimate relationship with their spouse. Americans are more likely to “favor the sexual bond” with the spouse, whereas Japanese highly value and prioritize the “kinship bond of parent and child.” (Lebra 2004: 69) Within the interior zone, this affects how an individual presents facets of the self to intimate others and the nature of the resulting intimacy with family members or close friends.

Lebra also added that the American priority on the sexual bond with the spouse also underlies a clearer distinction in “nonsexual intimate relations, particularly if bodily touch is involved.” (Lebra 2004: 69) In this respect, among Americans “a same-sex pair of friends, if too intimate, may be viewed as homosexual” (Lebra 2004: 69) while it would not always be the case in Japan because their views and values on intimate relationships differ from Americans’.

Thus, cultural differences can produce different consequences on the self and its interactions. Cousins’ study (1989) shows the differences between self-perception among Japanese and Americans. The result of the study was that while individualism is emphasized in the western society, individualism in the U.S. concept is absent in Japan, because Japanese are heavily dependent on situational settings (Cousin 1989). Furthermore, Markus and Kitayama’s research (1991) unveils the clear differences between two societies. Their findings clearly demonstrate that different cultures
influence the construction of the self. The construction of the western self is likely to be more “independent construal” in which individuals are responsible for the social environment and it is determined by the “internal attributes of the self.” (Markus and Kitayama 1991: 226) Individuals’ performances are reflection of their desire, preference, attribute or ability (Markus and Kitayama 1991: 226). These differences will also influence individual attitudes which also differentiate their decision making of how they interact with others. Markus and Kitayama contrast the independent and interdependent self. While the independent self is more likely to “express self” and “be direct” on what is on their mind, the interdependent self is more likely to “occupy one’s proper place” and “be indirect” in which they try to read other people’s mind (Markus and Kitayama 1991: 230). These differences specifically exemplify what individuals prioritize in different social settings.

In corroborating with Mead’s concepts on “Me” and “I,” it could be said that the western self may be stronger in “I” which emphasizes the self rather than others, whereas the Japanese self may be expected to prioritize “Me” in society. If the western social setting tends to be more tolerant of individuals’ expression, the “I” part of the self may be more important. On the other hand, because the Japanese self prioritizes more the “connectedness of human beings to each other,” (Markus and Kitayama 1991: 227) individuals in the Japanese context perceive themselves as a part of others or a large group. This means that individuals’ behavior is determined by what they perceive others see and feel about them, and they are more likely to situate themselves in interdependent relationships. In this respect, “Me” part in the Japanese self may be bigger because they
prioritize others and their behavior is heavily dependent on interaction with others and their reactions and perceptions.

If the Japanese self are more likely to depends on situation or the generalized other, and prioritizes connectedness among others, it can be said that the generalized other will have more power over individuals. In this sense, the generalized other in which everyone is expected to be heterosexual will be reinforced. In this circumstance, heteronormativity will hold more power over individuals which results in oppressing non-heterosexuals. On the other hand, if the western self is focused on the individual, such that the representation of the self is more dependent on their desire, preference and attribute and the self can express itself freely, individuals may be less likely to prioritize the generalized other, even though heteronormativity still takes place in society. In this sense, individuals in western societies may be likely to be able to resist heteronormativity, which results in creating less heteronormative society compared to the Japanese context. Therefore, the amount of control exercised by the generalized other may be different among different societies because the construction of the self and the relationships with others differ.

These examples suffice to point out that the nature of the self and its behavior differ among societies because what each society values and prioritizes varies. In this respect, research needs to be sensitive to cultural context because both theories and the findings of empirical research may be influenced by cultural differences. These differences may suggest that the theories about the development of homosexual identify might apply differently in the west and Japan. If the Japanese sense of self is fundamentally social and situational, then it must be understood and studied through
social interactions. If the front and interior zones are distinct characteristics and the Japanese self prioritizes more on connectedness with others, this may produce differences in the process of coming out in the two different societies. Sexual minorities in a Japanese context may perceive that coming out could trouble other people because sexual orientation is not a front zone issue. Also, if the Japanese self is to “occupy one’s proper place” (Markus and Kitayama 1991: 230) and emphasizes people’s reaction by taking care not to trouble them (Lebra 2004), they may be more hesitant to come out and regard it as their “private” issue. Moreover, sexual minorities in Japanese context may be more hesitant to come out to family or close friends because they are aware of the priority of bonds among them, and they may believe coming out could collapse this important relationship. In addition to this, the degree of heteronormativity may differ among societies because the construction of the self affects the extent to which individuals reinforce heteronormativity.

Heteronormativity determines individuals’ performances, and if they violate heteronormativity, they will be punished (Butler 1993). At the same time, different cultures shape the construction of the self differently, which suggests that individuals’ performances are changed among different societies. It would not necessarily be questioned or confronted in Japanese social situations if people behave appropriately in each social situation. However, if a person decides to come out in Japanese context, it results in giving an impression to others that this person prioritizes connectedness with certain others (Markus and Kitayama 1991) and his or her personal sexual bonds over family and friendship bonds (Lebra 2004), which in itself is a violation of social expectations in the intimate realm. These narratives cannot be seen in the western
literature and this is why the Japanese case challenges for the application of western theories about homosexual identity and coming out, which are based on a rather different concept of the self. The differences between the west and Japan are not only about how people present the self but also how the issue of sexuality is treated in the two social settings. I will discuss sexual minority social movements in the U.S. in the next section which will reveal how the two societies treat the issue of sexual minority differently.

**Sexual Minority Communities and Organizations**

Both the homosexual identity construction process and the process of coming out point to the importance of interaction with other homosexuals or the homosexual subculture. While this may be part of the unstudied context when the research emphasis is more psychological and oriented to individual identity, a sociological study of these processes requires a discussion of sexual minority groups. There is an extensive literature about sexual minority groups in the social movement literature, as well as much empirical research about the role of such groups in transforming attitudes toward sexual minorities in the United States. This literature offers a somewhat different perspective than the literature on homosexual identity, because it focuses on larger-scale group activity and processes and their impact on society as a whole. There is also a literature about “identity movements” that often uses case studies of gay and lesbian communities to examine micro-level group processes that produce social movements. Such studies deal explicitly with the construction of a “collective identity” through group processes.

The theory of collective identity is one of the major theories for social movements. A collective identity is understood as a strategy for social movement organizations to
succeed in their social movement (Bernstein 1997; Taylor and Whittier 1992). This theory was developed through the study of sexual minority movements and is specifically useful to analyze sexual minority movements. A collective identity is “the shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, experiences, and solidarity.” (Taylor and Whittier 1992: 105) Taylor and Whittier (1992) illustrate how the contemporary lesbian feminist movement in the U.S. has constructed collective identity in their social movement. They introduce three characteristics of construction of collective identity in social movements: boundaries, consciousness and negotiation. These elements are analyzed by how “the social and political struggle” creates the identity.

Boundaries refer to the distinction between dominant systems or dominant groups in society and subordinate groups, which bring the group “the sense of ‘we.’” (Taylor and Whittier 1992: 110) In other words, this boundary brings subordinate groups “sameness” or solidarity. The boundaries can be based on different factors such as race, religion, gender, and sexualities. Marking boundaries is the first step for collective identity, yet once a group of people distinguish themselves from dominant groups, having group consciousness is very significant to a collectivity. Through the element of consciousness, the group can “define and realize its interests” (Taylor and Whittier 1992: 111) based on their struggle. Its interests are to oppose the dominant order. The ways to develop consciousness among groups is through writings, speeches and documents about their “subjective experiences, their opportunities, and their shared interests.” (Taylor and Whittier 1992: 114) Since social movement organizations are often stigmatized, negotiation is crucial to accomplish its goals. Negotiation “encompasses the symbols and
everyday actions subordinate groups use to resist and restructure the existing system of domination.” (Taylor and Whittier 1992: 111) Negotiation is where “‘doing’ and ‘being’ overlap,” which means that a person is created by what a person does or how he or she behaves. In this respect, social movement negotiations help a social movement group to detach from the dominant representation or stigmas of its group and recreate the new interpretation of themselves, thereby normalizing their new representation in society.

These three elements are essential to collective identity movements. Since sexual minorities have been oppressed by the majority, they have formed their own communities to feel the sense of “we.” This is how sexual minorities form their social movement organizations to challenge against the dominant groups and gain power by using this strategy.

The theory of collective identity is useful to discuss not only political social movements, but also interactions among non-heterosexuals. Interacting with other non-heterosexuals and becoming involved with sexual minority groups can be understood as creating a sense of “boundary” among them, because it gives feelings of belonging with others who identify in the same way, as members of non-heterosexuals or sexual minorities. In this circumstance, people share and develop “consciousness” among non-heterosexuals through interacting with each other even at bars and clubs. Negotiation is another important phenomenon because interactions only among non-heterosexuals themselves to bond and share consciousness may not be enough to change social norms. Thus, the phenomenon of “negotiation” is an actual activity in society in which people gather with the same motivation and try to pursue their identity by challenging dominant norms. Sexual minority parades are a good example of how individuals “bond” to form a
group by sharing “consciousness” among members and then “negotiate” their identity in society to resist dominant norms. This “negotiation” is also understood as generally coming out to heterosexuals or in heteronormative society, because the coming out will “negotiate” their non-heterosexual identity to challenge heterosexual people who believe in only a dominant sexuality, heterosexuals. Therefore, the theory of collective identity is another important theory to see the issue of coming out.

Homosexuals were unvoiced for a long time in the United States, so most states had laws which prohibited homosexual behavior and activities. Even today, most states still retain some forms of anti-homosexual laws to regulate homosexuals. In this environment, homosexuals gathered and formed their community or “the gayworld.” (Altman and Weeks 1993: 27) As Altman points out “the gayworld” for men and women would be different. Bars, clubs or even parks could be used as “a meeting place” among gays where women would be a “minority in male-oriented” places (Altman and Weeks 1993: 29). Hence, female homosexuals tend to expose themselves to “the gayworld” through “social networks of friends, parties… [and] clubs.” (Altman and Weeks 1993: 29) Altman also explains that “the gayworld” or community to meet other homosexuals would help individuals who seek their identity and try to come out (Altman and Weeks 1993). Even though the communities existed, police regulations against the homosexual community were intense. However, people finally stood up to form social movements.

Social movements occur everywhere in the world to challenge and change social structures and social norms. Many subordinated groups have organized social movements to challenge dominant groups. Gay liberation in the United States formed after World War II, with groups such as the homophile movement, and there were social
movement organizations like the Mattachine Society and the first lesbian organization, the Daughters of Bilitis (Humphreys 1972; Iino 2008; Kawaguchi 2003). Many scholars have pointed out that the Stonewall Riot, which took place in a gay bar in New York City on June 27, 1969, was the historical event that catalyzed the gay rights movement in America (D’emilio 1998; Haider-Markel and Meiter 1996; Humphreys 1972; Kawaguchi 2003; Sullivan 1987; Unno 2005). On June 27, 1969 before midnight, police officers came to raid the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar. There are several different theories about how the Stonewall Riot happened. However, the Stonewall Inn was an inviting target. Because they managed the bar without a liquor license, there were rumors of connections to crime organizations, and they offered nearly naked “go-go boys” for entertainment (D'emilio 1998). Moreover, customers of the Stonewall were likely to be “young and nonwhite” which might have made them an easy target (D'emilio 1998).

Even though homosexuals had been patient about police harassment, people acted differently on this day. People were explosive that night and confronted the police raid. People threw things at police officers and cars. On the next day, an estimated 2,000 people fought against about 400 police officers. People shouted “Gay Power!” and confronted the police (D'emilio 1998: 232; Humphreys 1972: 6). The riot lasted for four more nights (Humphreys 1972). This riot was influential not only for gay men but also for lesbian women (Iino 2008: 35). After this riot, women and men in New York organized the Gay Liberation Front. It spread to different cities and countries and motivated sexual minorities in different places to form gay liberation groups (D'emilio 1998). Sexual minority groups have been dealing with different issues such as the HIV epidemic in the 1980s and the issue of sexual minorities in the military. Because of these
Sexual minorities in the U.S. had succeeded to construct a collective identity in which they had gathered at bars and clubs to establish “boundary” (Taylor and Whittier 1992) to feel the sense of belonging. However, sexual minorities at that time had faced legal, social and cultural oppression and even experienced police violence more often than today. In this circumstance, gathering at bars and clubs not only help establishing “boundary” among them but also share “consciousness” or similar experiences in society as members of sexual minorities (Taylor and Whittier 1992). However, since the Stonewall Riot, members of sexual minorities had started pursuing their minority identity and challenging the dominant ideology of heterosexuality by “negotiation.” (Taylor and Whittier 1992) As we can see from how people had formed their groups to organize social movements more politically, sexual minorities in the U.S. have succeeded to be recognized in society. This eventually leads to the same legal rights in some states today. Therefore, sexual minorities and its groups in the U.S. have constructed the collective identity as a strategy to be more recognized and respected in its society. As a result, the American society has changed its attitude toward sexual minorities in which the society have become less homophobic compared to the past. Thus, sexual minority movements in the U.S. have contributed its society to have a better environment for sexual minorities. This is why the social movements cannot be neglected when speaking about the issue of sexual minorities, because the sexual minority organizations and movements have helped
to enrich the lives of sexual minorities and created social environments in which they can identity and become connected with one another.

We expect, then, that there are sexual minority communities and organizations in Japan. In fact, there are numerous sexual minority groups such as parade organizations. However, the scales of parades are not as big as parades in the U.S. Moreover, the history of sexual minority movements in Japan is relatively shorter than the American case. Since sexual minority movements have not developed as much as in the U.S., people in Japan are less likely to be aware of the issue of sexual minorities compared to the U.S. Of course, there are more sexual minority characters in the media and the issue is becoming a social issue in Japan; however, Japanese society still dominantly and strongly heteronormative. This is another reason why and how the issue of sexual minorities in a Japanese context and the western context are different.

Research Questions

The theories on how a person develops non-heterosexual identity and the processes of coming out are somewhat useful to examine how sexual minorities in Japan deal with these issues. However, as Lebra illustrates, how the “Japanese self” is constructed differs considerably from the western concept of self. Consequently, how non-heterosexual identity in Japan is established may differ from the western theories, and the processes of coming out for non-heterosexuals in Japan and the role of sexual minority groups may be different because of these cultural and social differences.
This study examines how non-heterosexuals in Japan go through the processes of coming out and the role that sexual minority organizations play in this process. Coleman’s model of the process of coming out is psychoanalytic and focuses more on how individuals’ non-heterosexual identity is established through coming out to other non-heterosexuals. I turn this around to look at the coming out process in a more sociological way, asking how people negotiate the coming out process through interactions within their social settings. I also focus on coming out to heterosexuals or in heteronormative society rather than coming out to other non-heterosexuals, because the goal of the process of coming out I will describe is not how individuals fully become comfortable with their non-heterosexuality, but goes beyond that to examine how they negotiate with heteronormative society. In relation to that, I examine directly how sexual minority groups are involved with the coming out process of individuals.

**Research Methods**

The research began with a pilot study in which I analyzed five blogs written by people who identify themselves as members of sexual minorities in Japan, and tell about their life struggles. There are many more blogs that I have identified and studying blogs was a convenient way to begin the research and begin to understand how people think and write about their struggles with their sexuality. However, I needed to go beyond what was written in the blogs so I conducted direct fieldwork in Japan during the summer of 2010. The fieldwork included both interviews with individuals at various stages of the
coming out process, and participant observation of the meetings and activities of three sexual minority groups that are involved in different aspects of the coming out process.

To begin my field research, I contacted three of the five bloggers through the comment function on their blogs, and asked if they would be willing to have an interview with me. Two replied and showed interest in my research, but unfortunately, one person who responded to my e-mail was geographically and economically difficult to reach to conduct the interview; hence, I interviewed her through e-mails. Her partner also participated in my research and responded to my interview questions in the same manner.

Since only two bloggers showed their interests in participating in my research, I asked some friends in sexual minority communities to introduce their friends and I expanded the interview sample through snowballing methods. Another effective way to find participants was through attending events and organizations’ meetings in the LGBT community. LGBT literally stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered/Transsexual; however, I acknowledge that the categorization like LGBT is problematic since it could exclude diverse sexuality such as intersexual and asexual. Yet, in this paper, I would like to refer LGBT as sexual minorities. I would like to also note that I refer to groups, organizations and communities that work on the issue of sexuality, especially when I use “a LGBT group/organization/community.” When I went to meetings in the LGBT groups, I distributed my card to anyone who was appropriate to my research and introduced my research, then asked them to e-mail me if they were interested in participating. Fortunately, most of them e-mailed me and we decided the date, time and place through e-mails. I asked them to designate a place and time that was most convenient and comfortable for them. Some of them wanted us to conduct an
interview in a private room of a karaoke shop and some invited me to come to their office, but most of the interviews were conducted in bars, coffee shops, or other public places. Some of these bars and restaurants were in the areas where sexual minorities gather. I also offered to buy their drink or coffee to show them appreciation, and some took the offer and some did not.

Before interviews, I presented a consent form for participation in the interview and tape recording. Only when participants accepted these conditions, I started interview. 23 out of 24 people allowed me to use a tape recorder and I transcribed the interviews afterwards. I draw on interviews, which I conducted during the summer of 2010 with a total of 24 people who identify themselves as members of sexual minorities, in which 22 people had face to face in-depth interviews and two people were interviewed through e-mails. There were four group interviews. Nine people out of the sample of 22 were the participants of group interviews due to the convenience and timing. Before my field research, I attempted to interview only people whose self identity was lesbian; however, I ended up interacting with members of “sexual minorities.” This does not mean non-heterosexual, because one of my participants identified himself as a female-to-male transgender and is attracted to females, which can be seen as heterosexuality. However, in this thesis I refer to “sexual minorities” as people whose sexual orientation is non-heterosexual, which would exclude people such as transgendered and transsexual people in order to make the study more focused and precise.

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2 I interviewed two additional people who did not meet the study’s criteria.
Appendix I. shows my respondents’ brief backgrounds. The range of the ages was from 20 to 40s. 20 percent of my respondents were students and about 40 percent of them were office workers. There were individuals whose occupations included entrepreneur, freelance worker, elder care, researcher, sanitation worker and sports instructor. Almost 60 percent of my participants have graduated from a four-year university while about 12 percent of them have a two-year college or technical school degree. Only one person has a doctoral degree while two of my respondents were in masters programs and three of them were in undergraduate programs. Nearly two thirds (63 percent) of the participants were in a relationship with a same-sex partner and all but one of the remaining people were not in the relationship with anyone. You may see Seto’s sexuality self-identified as okama, which is a very ambiguous term meaning a pot or vessel. I decided to include Seto because the self-identity is not necessarily that of a transgendered person; instead, it emphasizes bisexuality which is understood as non-heterosexuality. Their hometowns differ; some of them were from urban areas but many of them were originally from rural areas. However, their current living locations were likely to be urban areas such as Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto. Almost 36 percent of the respondents lived in the Kanto area including Tokyo and surrounding areas, 54 percent of them lived in the Kansai area (Osaka and Kyoto) and about 10 percent of them lived in the Kyushu area. More than half of the interviews took place in the Kansai areas and most of the remainder were in the Kanto area. The face to face interviews ranged from 30 minutes to a little more than an hour.

In addition to seeking people to interview, I attended the activities of three different sexual minority groups. At that time, I introduced myself as a student
researcher, and got permission to take notes. The first group is Girls Chat (G-chat). G-chat is community based and is a more private sexual minority group. LGBT Family & Friends (Tsunagu-kai) is the organization that is designed to support family and friends to whom someone came out. For these two groups, I attended meetings as a participant observer. I also had the opportunity to be involved with a third organization as a member, the Kansai Rainbow Parade 2010 (Kanpare 2010). Kanpare is a parade organization in Osaka. I attended Kanpare twice and ended up being an executive member as a translator that allowed me to receive all the e-mails exchanged among members. During the participant observations at Kanpare meetings, I was also able to take notes.

For the protection of individuals’ privacy, I will use pseudonyms to identify my participants except for one person who asked me to use his real name in my data as well as this paper. These pseudonyms are all family names because I wanted to avoid using first names which are more gendered, and also there was a person who identifies as MTX (Man to X, which is usually understood as gender-neutral). I will also use a pseudonym for Girls Chat since this is a more private community which is only known through word of mouth.
Chapter 3: The Four Stages of Coming Out Process

In this chapter, I will introduce four different stages of coming out which are based on my respondents’ experiences on how they come out in a Japanese social setting. A naturalized social belief in heterosexuality and negative feelings toward non-heterosexuals are two major sources for sexual minorities to struggle in society as Altman and Eaklor also state. People in society are expected to be heterosexuals regardless of their sexual orientation, which is a normalized ideology called heteronormativity; thus, sexual minorities often face pressures that they have to be heterosexuals by just being in a heteronormative society. Additionally, heteronormativity makes non-heterosexual behavior deviant, which are often stigmatized. In such a circumstance, people are afraid to disclose their non-heterosexuality because it would challenge the norms which the majority of people believe in. Since people grew up in the society, they have been socialized and believe in heteronormativity. In this environment, people who are non-heterosexual also believe in heterosexuality as a “normal” and “correct” sexuality. Therefore, those who realized their differences in sexual attraction are likely to be confused and experience identity conflicts. In fact, there is actual homophobia which many sexual minorities face; many of my respondents and sexual minorities in the world experience negative reactions in their daily lives which sometimes involve even violence. Therefore, many sexual minorities face difficulties accepting their non-heterosexuality which is often stigmatized, and are scared of coming out in a heteronormative environment.

In such circumstances, establishing non-heterosexual identity is challenging for many people. The previous literature on the homosexual identity construction theories in
the west shows that people have struggled to finally become fully comfortable with their non-heterosexuality. Even the theory of the coming out process, it focuses more on identity construction and relationships. Although understanding the construction of homosexual identity is important, I feel that sexual identity is constructed through coming out while Cass and Troiden integrate coming out as if it is a tool to develop one’s non-heterosexual identity and Coleman’s model of the coming out process also treats coming out as appurtenances of the non-heterosexual identity construction processes. Moreover, Coleman’s coming out process is introduced in a psychoanalytic perspective. Therefore, I will propose my model of the four stages of coming out to explain more about the processes of coming out from a sociological perspective, in which how individuals deal with the issue of coming out in a heteronormative Japanese society.

I will examine the process of coming out in a Japanese social context and how sexual minorities face, struggle and deal with the issue. The Cass’s and Coleman’s model are somewhat useful and applicable to examine how people in Japan deal with coming out; however, the four stages I will describe are based on experiences and patterns of my respondents through a sociological perspective. The first stage, which almost half of my respondents have gone through, is about identity denial or a struggle accepting their own sexuality, which is also understood as coming out to one’s own self. During the process of overcoming the first stage, there are two strategies: to gain information about sexuality and find a sexual minority community for help; and being accepted by their close friends or family before accepting their own selves, which made them believe they are not wrong or strange. The second stage is about the fear of coming out and this is another powerful source of stress for many people. The source of the fear
will differ; however, it is often fear of being rejected by others. Another major reason is people are afraid of losing the current relationships with the people to whom they come out. However, people decide to come out and experience positive and negative reactions, which open up the idea of a society with various opinions. Thus, in the third stage people choose whom they come out to and are more comfortable with their sexuality and aware of the complexities of social settings. People in the fourth stage are completely open about themselves, challenging the normalized belief of heterosexuality in society.

Even though many people go through these stages step by step, there are people who start from stage two or three or even four. Some even skip some stages. Or others may come back to previous stages. For example, Toba is a 23-year-old woman who identifies herself as a pansexual. The definition of pansexual for Toba is that “gender identity does not matter.” Thus, being a pansexual for her is “to be attracted to everyone.” Toba came out at an assembly in front of the whole school where a thousand people including junior high school and senior high school students and all teachers when she was a senior in high school. However, after she entered university and heard one of her closest friends say, “I am not interested in the issue of sexual minorities at all. So I don’t want anyone to come out to me and I don’t want to discuss this particular issue in any class. That’s annoying.” (Toba) Since then, she became scared of coming out because she started feeling that she didn’t “want others to have biases against [her].” (Toba)

What I am trying to illustrate here with the four stages of coming out process is: 1) to provide a better understanding of the possible paths people may follow in enacting the stage: and 2) to emphasize the distinction between the western pattern of the process and the Japanese pattern of the process of coming out. The second purpose of proposing
the coming out process can be clearly shown in my respondents’ narratives about coming out as egoistic, which I will discuss in the latter part of this chapter. Although the distinction between stages is somewhat ambiguous, as it is for all the stage theories in the literature, these are possible processes of dealing with coming out in Japan.

**Stage 1: Denial / Rejecting Own Self**

The first stage is characterized by the fear of accepting their non-heterosexuality and the unwillingness to acknowledge their own sexuality. Thus, people in this stage may be required to come out to themselves as the first challenge they face. They will be confused with their difference from others when people discover their sexuality because they believe heterosexuality is the only correct sexuality. Thus, non-heterosexuality, often the attraction toward people of the same sex, becomes a feeling of being abnormal. Therefore, they try to deny their feelings toward people of the same sex, and at the same time, try to reject their own self and sexuality. Even if people know about various sexualities in society, they only know about non-heterosexuals with a negative connotation. Hence, people do not want to accept the fact that they could also belong to the same group as they have biases against, which is another negative factor in their lives.

How long people deny the feeling toward others and reject their own self will differ between people; however, their feelings toward others and rejection of their own self keep getting stronger, which makes people more confused and stressed. Often they find themselves in a dilemma in which they like someone, but feel strange liking that person. Therefore, people try to justify their feeling toward people of the same sex and
test their sexuality to find out if they are really non-heterosexuals or not. People try to believe that their feelings toward people of the same sex are just temporary, so it will be fixed eventually. Others try to believe their feeling toward a friend is just a friendship and not love. Moreover, people try to date people of the opposite sex in order to test their sexuality and to justify making themselves believe they are interested in people of the opposite sex. At that time, people are likely to believe that dating and experiencing people of the opposite sex will fix their non-heterosexuality. As a result, people tend to pretend to be a heterosexual to feel good about themselves because of their unwillingness to acknowledge their feelings and sexuality. During this process, people face an identity conflict because they create multiple identities in real life or online depending on the situation.

In my interviews, almost half of my respondents have experienced being in this stage. Murase, a 28-year-old lesbian woman whose story I quoted in the introduction, explained very clearly about how she felt about her sexuality and how she had dealt with it in her life. She said, “I had thought the feeling toward other women was just a short-lived enthusiasm in adolescence… Even though I knew I liked women, I had sealed the feeling because I really did not want to accept myself… So I tried to date men. Otherwise I thought I would be left out by girls, but I could not be myself in front of them… While I knew I was more comfortable being with my best friend… One day, I started thinking about what my feeling toward my best friend was, and I discovered myself being attracted to her. But I tried to think it was just a friendship because I did not want to accept the fact that the feeling was love.” (Murase) She continued to explain how she thought about why she had not been able to accept herself for a long time and
said, “I was scared of being different from others. I was scared of being different from the majority. I felt like I was going in a way that I should have never been to… and I was scared of not being able to go back to normal.” (Murase)

Sawada, a 30-year-old woman who identifies herself as a lesbian but has had bisexual experiences in the past, is another person who had struggled to accept herself for a long time. She even acknowledged that she “had a strong phobia” of being a non-heterosexual. Hence, she had denied herself for about ten years and even thought that she would “bear marrying a man.” (Sawada) Therefore, she had practiced her plan called, “The Plan for Becoming a Straight” because she wanted to believe her sexual attraction toward people of the same sex was temporary and will be “fixed” if she dates and experiences men. Sawada is not the only person who tried to date persons of the opposite sex. Iwatani, a 27-year-old lesbian woman, Fuse, a 31-year-old lesbian woman, Murase, the lesbian woman I quoted in the introduction and Yaguchi, a 26-year-old woman who hesitantly identifies herself as a lesbian, have also experienced trying to date people of the opposite sex in order to justify their sexual attraction or try to “pretend to be like a heterosexual.” Iwatani had denied her sexuality for a long time and “tried to endure dating men.” (Iwatani) Yaguchi also explained that she tried to date men. She said dating a man was like a “hope” to be a heterosexual. In fact, she had experiences of being attracted to men and she said “I was relieved and happy when I realized I could like men as well.” (Yaguchi)

Fuse explained that she knew her feelings toward other girls since she was in fifth grade in elementary school; however, she did not completely understand what her feelings were until she became a junior high school student. Girls around that age start
talking about boys, and her friends also did while she completely realized she has liked
girls all the time. Thus, she thought she “should like boys like others.” (Fuse) However,
her feelings toward a girl could no longer be hidden. After that, she could date that girl
which helped her not to struggle for a while. After she broke up with the girl, she started
struggling to accept her own self. She said, “I wanted to believe I dated a girl because it
was her, and that she was a special.” (Fuse) She also did not want to fit herself into the
category of lesbian because she had her own biases against people in that group. She
explained, “I did not like to hear words like ‘lesbian’ or ‘bian’” because “I did not want
to believe I was a lesbian.” She continued, “At that time (when I did not want to accept
myself), the image of lesbian was like a woman that any man wouldn’t care about, so she
has no choice except going to another woman. Or being lesbian meant mentally ill.”
(Fuse) Higuchi, a man who hesitantly identifies himself as a bai, bisexual and in his 30s,
also has similar experiences. He was at first confused and “felt guilty” about being
attracted to anyone sexually because being sexual was “taboo,” “dirty” and
“embarrassing” to him (Higuchi). Yet his attraction toward other boys became so
overwhelming that he could no longer deny his attraction; thus, he tried to justify it to
himself and believe “I would like this boy if I was a girl.” (Higuchi)

After all the tests and experiments, there is the time when people have to
acknowledge their sexuality because the test proves their non-heterosexuality. Whether
people tested themselves or not, they cannot keep denying their feelings toward people of
the same sex because the feelings get too overwhelming to hide. Others also experience
loneliness or isolation because they deny themselves and cannot disclose their concern to
anyone. Therefore, they make a transition for themselves and try to overcome the first
stage. In order to make a transition, there are two strategies, the first pattern is with the aid from the community and the second pattern is with the aid through acceptance from others. People, who use the aid from the community, gain information about sexual minorities and find the minority community; while people who use the aid of through acceptance from others, are accepted by their friends and family before accepting their own selves. These strategies are understood as what Troiden (1989) calls “stigma-management.”

Because people in this stage want to deny their feelings and reject their sexuality, they need courage to make the transition to find their place. People, who use the first technique search for information about the issue of sexuality via books and the Internet, which has became more available and accessible now. In the process of searching for information, people tend to discover the sexual minority community. How they discover the community has shifted over time, because more information and the communities can be accessible and visible once they search, even though at first they would not know which communities are most suitable for them. Through accessing these communities online or face to face, they learn that there are other people or groups like them, which gives them comfort and confidence and make them relieved that they are not alone. The time it takes for people to have enough confidence to overcome the first stage will be different; however, making friends who can share the similar experiences or give them advice will help them to start accepting their feelings and sexuality.

People who use the second technique decide to disclose themselves to their close friends or to people who they think will understand, because they cannot hold their concerns and struggle by themselves anymore, and believe their friends will accept or
acknowledge their sexuality as normal. People with the second technique have thought themselves as abnormal and strange so they have lost their confidence in themselves. However, they decide to confide in their friends or in people they can trust. Then their friends will acknowledge and accept their sexuality even before people in the first stage could accept themselves. Both of these strategies give them the experience of being respected and acknowledged by others, and give them confidence that their sexual orientation is normal and OK. This experience helps them to start accepting themselves. These two patterns are common strategies for my respondents.

Six out of ten respondents used the help of the community and another four received acceptance from others. Taniguchi, Higuchi, Fuse and Matsumoto have similar experiences and used the first strategy. Taniguchi and Matsumoto looked for books about sexual minorities and studied about them compared to themselves. Taniguchi, a 20-year-old woman who identifies herself as a homosexual (“douseiaisha”), had doubt her sexual identity when she noticed she liked other girls because she tried to “fit [her] feelings toward other girls into the heterosexual model.” (Taniguchi) Yet, after she “leaned about the differences between sexual identity and orientation” (Taniguchi) and knew about the existence of various sexualities via books, she started accepting her sexuality. While she taught herself about sexuality, she also started using the Internet, which gave her access to more knowledge about sexual minorities. Both experiences helped her to overcome the first stage. Matsumoto, a 28-year-old woman who identifies herself as a homosexual (“douseiaisha”), felt she “lost all hopes” about being a homosexual especially because she had said “lesbian is disgusting.” (Matsumoto) Once she realized her sexuality, she started reading a book written by a person identifying
herself as a lesbian. At the same time, she used an Internet bulletin to consult with people about her struggles. Then she realized that “there are respectable lesbians in real life” (Matsumoto) because she had had negative images about lesbians. Since then, she started going to sexual minority community events and a parade that helped her overcoming the first stage.

Higuchi and Fuse both “typed the words (lesbian or gay) on the Internet to look for the community very nervously.” (Fuse) Fuse clearly states her struggles with accepting her sexuality were getting less since she made friends via the Internet when she was 18 year old. She had used a bulletin to make friends and she actually met them after. At that time, she said that “everyone was so kind and accepted me and that was the most helpful. Since then, I could start thinking being a lesbian is nothing wrong… I was saved and felt better. I had thought I could not belong anywhere, but I learned there were people who accept me. So I started feeling good about myself and being able to accept myself eventually.” (Fuse) Higuchi still struggles with accepting his sexuality; however, he could start accepting himself since he started to join the community. He explained that he wanted to make friends but he was so scared about going to the events or the community. But he thought that dating another man would help him to accept himself, so he decided to go to the event. Before he entered the building, his “legs were shaking,” but he “is glad he went that event.” (Higuchi) He continued, saying “I could not know myself if I did not go there. Also, I could not have made friends with whom I can talk about sexuality openly if I didn’t go there.” (Higuchi) He also states that the event helped him to accept himself, which also encourages him to come out to more people. As we can see from people’s stories, connecting with the minority community is one of the
common experiences and strategies to overcome the first stage, struggle accepting one’s self and come out to one’s own self.

The acceptance from others is another strategy among my respondents (Miyake, Sawada, Sunagawa and Ueda) in order to make a transition to the second stage. Those respondents, except for Sawada, came out to their friends that helped them to become comfortable with their sexuality. Sunagawa, who identifies himself as a gay activist, had justified his feeling toward other boys as friendship because he had acknowledged heterosexuality as a normal sexual behavior. However, there was a point where he had to acknowledge his sexuality because his feelings toward other men got so overwhelming that he could not deny it anymore. At the same time, he started to come out to his friends. He said, “Continuing to have a conversation with my friend about my love on the phone made me settle and feel comfortable with my sexuality.” (Sunagawa)

Sawada had a little different experience. She identifies herself as a lesbian and participated in an event with the community of sexual minorities. At that time, she met a MTF (Man to Female transsexual person) and started dating her. Her girlfriend, however, told Sawada’s brother about their relationship even though she did not want her brother to know about their relationship that revealed her sexual orientation. One of her brothers also told Sawada that he is gay and their other brothers have known about him. Since then, Sawada found a person who can share experiences, and that made her relieved. Moreover, the feeling of guilt for her parents started becoming smaller and she believed “it’s OK to be who I am now.” (Sawada) The case of Sawada may be different; however, being accepted by others before accepting one’s own self or the use of acceptance from others is another way to help people overcoming the first stage, because people will be
relieved they are not alone and wrong, and they have found a place or people to share their stories.

I have to note here that Higuchi was the only person interviewed who is still in the first stage and struggling. He clearly states, “I have not been able to acknowledge what I am yet. I am still undecided. I have multiple identities depending upon the environment or situations and it’s hard for me not to be able to express my consistent identity everywhere.” (Higuchi) He continued that he is “afraid” of accepting his sexual orientation and scared of even the word “gay” and prefers “homosexual” because the previous one “includes cultural meaning” that has been stigmatized in many societies. Yet, he is also exposing himself to the community; thus, he is trying to make the transition.

This stage might be similar to Cass’s, Troiden’s and Coleman’s stages on how people feel difficult accepting their own non-heterosexuality in a heteronormative society, because this stage accommodates identity conflicts during the construction of non-heterosexual identity. When we look at the two strategies in this stage, they are similar to the strategies the theorists propose. In this respect, it shows that the construction of non-heterosexual identity in a heteronormative society is a stressful experience and people struggle during this process. However, at the same time, the major distinction in my model from other models are that I treat acceptance of one’s own sexuality as coming out to their own self and not focusing on the process of how people establish their non-heterosexual identity, which I will show in the following stages. Furthermore, it is quite obvious that overcoming the first stage does not mean that people are fully comfortable with their sexuality and that it leads to them to adopt non-heterosexual identity as a way
of life, as in the last stages of the various theories. However, as I have emphasized, I am focusing on the coming out process in which people establish their non-heterosexual identity through coming out; thus, in each stage people’s identity is shaped through coming out.

**Stage 2: Fear of Coming Out**

Once people overcome the first stage, coming out to own self, they are likely to face the second stage; fear of coming out. Even if people do not experience the first stage, the second stage is another powerful source of stress for many people. I have to clarify that coming out here means coming out to people who are not categorized as members of sexual minorities. Thus, I am not talking about coming out to the sexual minority groups. The previous literature does not specify who people come out to, and merely treats coming out as a general strategy. A key component here is there is a different challenge to coming out to heteronormative society rather than to the sexual minority groups. Coming out to sexual minority groups is a strategy to move through the steps; however, coming out to heteronormative society is to alleviate the guilt of lying about their sexuality. People in the second stage acknowledge and are more comfortable with their own sexuality, which they already had disclosed to themselves; however, they are afraid of disclosing themselves to other people. The source of fear may be different among people but often is fear of being rejected by others or threatening their current social relationships. Even though people acknowledge their sexuality and accept the existence of diverse sexuality, they know heterosexuality is considered normal in society. In other
words, people are aware of a heteronormative society. Thus, people are likely to believe society is against non-heterosexuals even though people never know in advance the consequences of coming out and how people will react. Another source of fear comes from the commonality of insults against non-heterosexuals from their experiences or in the media. For example, variety shows depict men as effeminate characters as a part of insulting and making fun of homosexuality. Therefore, people are afraid of being seen as such a character if they come out. They imagine that heterosexual society will react negatively because of the homophobia they have observed around them, but they really do not know what the reaction to their own coming out will be.

However, people start feeling guilty about telling lies to their friends and family by hiding an essential part of their identity. Also, talking about relationships and discussions about marriage becomes an increasingly unavoidable topic among family members. People feel an obligation to tell lies about themselves and their girlfriend or boyfriend to close friends and family members. Hence, they tend to have a desire to be understood by others especially because they are now more comfortable with their sexuality. Therefore, they decide to test what would happen if they come out. To whom they come out first will be different; however, people tend to choose friends or family members whom they can trust and believe would understand.

Coming out here is distinct from the aid of acceptance from others which I discussed in the first stage as a strategy to accept one’s own non-heterosexuality, because their motivations for coming out are different. Their motivation in the first stage was based on their overwhelming isolation and confusion about their sexual identity. However, the motivation for coming out in the second stage is based on their desire to be
understood by their close friends or family, after they already had accepted their sexuality to themselves. If they come out to their friends or family in the second stage, by this time their sexual identity has been established with the aid of sexual minority groups.

After coming out, there are two consequences, positive or negative reactions. A positive reaction would mean that their established relationship would not be changed or influenced by revealing their sexuality. People experience that they feel closer to the people to whom they came out, because they can now talk about anything without having to lie about their sexuality. Others are simply relieved because they can be themselves in front of the people to whom they came out. Therefore, after having a positive experience of coming out, the “imaginary social homophobia” does not seem as threatening.

Many of my respondents had experienced positive reactions. Many answered that they became close to people after coming out because they can show all of themselves in front of friends and family (Araki and Matsumoto). Another common experience was that people felt “accepted” and friends and family were “very supportive.” (Nakayama, Seto, Shimizu, Sunagawa and Taniguchi) Some people choose others who could respect their sexuality; however, many of them were surprised and at the same time happy about these reactions because it was not something they really expected. In other words, people believed in being rejected before coming out; however, the result often turned out to be a positive experience.

On the other hand, some people did experience negative reactions. Even though people need courage to disclose themselves to others, they actually experienced people being against non-heterosexuals. Many people experience being rejected by friends that resulted in losing friendships. In the worst cases, the negative reaction may even involve
physical violence. Moreover, the most common negative reaction which people experience is simply from people’s ignorance of sexuality in which they unconsciously hurt the person who comes out. Because people in Japan are less likely to be knowledgeable about the issue of sexual minorities, many think talking about non-heterosexuality is taboo. Thus, they try to behave as naturally as possible which results in giving members of sexual minorities the impression that people do not care about the issue. This is especially discouraging when coming out was such a difficult experience for them. This is a dilemma between kindness and indifference.

Some of my respondents have experienced negative reactions after coming out. Sunagawa, a gay activist, came out to a female friend, but she replied “I would not be able to accept that (you are gay).” (Sunagawa) Many of my respondents experienced rejection because their friends acted as if their coming out did not happen. In other words, their coming out and the issue of sexual minorities were made invisible among friends. Higuchi, a bisexual man, experienced that his male friend stopped contacting him after he came out. Murase, a 28 lesbian woman, had a brutal and violent experience with her friend’s boyfriend, because he felt that Murase threatened their relationship. Murase had a female friend through her part time job, but she did not come out at her work. One day, she came out to that female friend, and the friend told her boyfriend. The boyfriend came to a New Year party at work and started behaving violently against Murase with abusive words such as “You! Fucking lesbian!” Murase recalled her experience as “I could not call the police because I am a homosexual and was afraid of my parents and other people knowing about my sexuality… That experience was a tragedy, but not being able to take legal action against him was another tragedy.” (Murase)
From these stories, we cannot deny the fact that there are, in fact, people who are against non-heterosexuals and displays homophobia which may reinforce people’s mindset of a homophobic society. However, at the same time, if we look at people’s positive experiences, they were surprised about people’s positive reactions because they did not expect to have a positive reaction. In this way, people may visualize an “imaginary homophobic society.” Positive or negative, they now know the various consequences after coming out. Even if people have negative consequences, they are still aware of sexual minority groups or some of their friends which are supportive, which give them hope that they are not alone. Therefore, their better understanding of society and their comfortable situation are likely to motivate them to make a transition to the third stage.

**Stage 3: Coming Out by Choice**

In the third stage, people are more comfortable with their sexuality and are aware of a society which includes various types of people coexisting. In this circumstance, people in the third stage choose whom they come out to. I have to note here that sexual minorities may not have a real choice of coming out in society, because the society generally expects people to be heterosexual, sexual minorities are required to come out to change this assumption. This is different from heterosexuals who are just assumed to be heterosexual by default. People in the third stage are aware of diverse opinions or both sides of society, and they choose whom they come out to. In other words, people in this
stage know about possible risks and disadvantages of coming out and the advantages as well.

Plus, the criterion for being in the third stage is that people do not feel the fear of coming out to others, but they evaluate the risks of coming out in particular situations and choose to avoid them. In this sense, people who believe in the high risk of coming out at their work place because their life depends on their job would be categorized in this stage. Moreover, if people choose not to come out to their parents because they are concerned about their parents’ anxiety, they are also categorized into this stage. Their concerns and beliefs of possible risks may be imaginary, because people never know the consequences of coming out to others until they have actually taken the risk and exposed themselves. While many people believe that coming out to their parents and at work places are more challenging, coming out to friends is least problematic for people in this stage. This is because they can also choose which friends to spend their time with. It means that they could change who they spend time with, so they do not have to interact with their old friends to whom they have not yet come out. Which people they interact with can be influenced by their decisions of whom they choose to come out to; however, coming out to friends could be the least problematic because they can choose their friendships.

Furthermore, when people start participating in activities or social movement as a part of organizations such as LGBT parades, their stage is likely to be the third because they are less afraid of exposing themselves in public.

Many of my respondents agreed that their choice not to come out to a certain group is because it is “meaningless” (Matsumoto, Miyake and Shimizu) and “does not have any advantages.” (Iwatani) They insisted that they do not have to come out to
certain people because their sexuality has nothing to do with those relationships. For example, Matsumoto, a 28 homosexual woman, said, “I don’t have to come out at my work place because no one expects me to be a lesbian, but they expect me to be an independent worker.” (Matsumoto) Miyake, a 27-year-old woman who identifies herself as a lesbian, also explained, “I have no plan of coming out at my work place because I don’t see any advantages of coming out.” (Miyake) Another common reason why people decide not to come out at their work place is that people believe there is a high risk in coming out at their work place because they are afraid of affecting their employment. Hayakawa, a 24-year-old woman who identifies herself as a bai (bisexual) but does not like categorization, explained that coming out “may affect my working condition” so she would not come out even though she also explained that telling lies at her work places is “stressful.” (Hayakawa) Fuse, a 31-year-old lesbian woman, also explained clearly her reasons for not coming out at her work place. She said, “I don’t really worry about my working condition being affected by coming out. I would rather care about a negative rumor being spread about me. If I could come out, I would. But a negative rumor will create biases that may affect my working condition. I don’t think my sexuality matters at my work place. But I also know that not everyone can think separately (between work and sexuality) if I came out.” (Fuse) As we can see from Fuse’s story, she is not afraid of coming out, but she knows or believes in the risks of coming out at her work place.

It is important to note here that peoples’ choice of not coming out at their work place differs by gender. Some of my female respondents expressed their frustration at their work place not only because their sexual orientation, but because of the gender
expectations at their work. They face a “double stigma,” because many of my female respondents expressed that they have to face difficulties as a woman and as a non-heterosexual (Araki, Matsumoto, Miyake, Nakayama, Wada and Yaguchi). This is another reality in which “the wages for a man and a woman are different.” (Matsumoto) Moreover, society still defines happiness based on heterosexual marriages, which neglects sexual minorities with partners who are not allowed under the constitution; thus, women without marriage are “seen as pitiful women or losers” at their work places (Matsumoto and Miyake). Furthermore, “women are still expected to quit their job after marriage; hence, if a woman is working in their thirties, other workers start questioning why she is not married yet.” (Araki, Matsumoto, Miyake, Wada and Yaguchi) This narrative specifically shows many work places are still heteronormatively oriented.

Not only men at work but also women internalize that heterosexual marriage is the most important goal (Ogasawara 1998). In this environment, career women are perceived as losers who cannot get married and quit their job successfully. In addition to the stereotypes against female workers, the stereotypes against non-heterosexuality become another source of stress for female workers. They are concerned about how people perceive them if their reason for not marrying is because they are non-heterosexuals. These respondents are obviously not out at the work place so they may have an imaginary social homophobia concerning their work place; however, the point here is that women and non-heterosexuals have to face double stigmas because of their gender and minority sexuality in society. While men are less likely to be judged in their careers by their marital status, those who work at big companies are still expected to get married. However, this did not arise in my research since I have only few male
respondents and they are not working for big companies. Even though the pressure at the
work place could be different based on their gender, the pressure for marriage from
family is still present regardless of their gender.

Another common narrative among my respondents was the concern about the
negative influences on their parents. My respondents expressed it would be easier for
them if they could come out to their parents; however, they do not want to come out
because they do not want their parents to be worried about their children being non-
heterosexuals. In other words, they believe that their parents are homophobic and expect
the happiness that would be achieved by a heterosexual marriage. Taniguchi, a 20-year-
old homosexual woman, who was going back and forth about coming out to the family
said “I was hesitant because I would not be able to show the happiness that my parents
expect from me, of marrying a man and having children.” (Taniguchi) Endo, a 33-year-
old woman who identifies herself as a rezu (lesbian), explained, “I want to come out to
my mom, otherwise she keeps asking me about marriage. But I don’t want my mother to
blame herself that her way of raising children was wrong because I am a lesbian.” (Endo)
Both respondents expressed how the consequences of coming out to their parents would
be too upsetting and not worth the risk. At the same time, people are socialized to
believe that pursuing a heterosexual marriage means their happiness. This
heteronormativity also influences people to believe that non-heterosexual relationships
can never achieve happiness. Thus, people in this stage choose not to come out to their
parents because they believe that their parents have expectations that they cannot achieve.

As we can see from my respondents, reasons for not coming out to certain groups
differ; however, people in this stage are not afraid of coming out. Instead, they are aware
of possible risks or negative consequences after coming out; therefore, they choose not to come out in particular social settings. At the same time, we can also see that they imagine all the risks and negative consequences. Nakayama is a 22-year-old woman who identifies herself as a pansexual. Pansexual for Nakayama means that people are attracted to anyone regardless of their sexual identity and sexual orientation. Nakayama, experienced a negative consequence after coming out at her work place. The boss at her work place has tried to fire Nakayama. However, she was not afraid of her own self identity, only the pragmatic consequences of coming out; which is a clear distinction from the second stage.

**Stage 4: Completely Open about Themselves**

In the fourth stage, whether people have gone through previous stages or not, they have accepted their own sexuality. They often do not have a fear of coming out, and understand that there are people in society with various opinions, so that they can completely be open about themselves in society. People who identify themselves as activists tend to be categorized in this stage. Hence, people in this stage resist against heteronormativity by being completely open about their non-heterosexuality. However, a person who is not involved in political activities or identified as an activist also can be categorized in this stage, because their openness challenges people’s normalized belief in heterosexuality. Moreover, the value has shifted once people reach the fourth stage where they do not accept heteronormativity and treat their sexuality as normal.
There were four respondents (Nakayama, Ozaki, Seto and Sunagawa) who could be categorized in this stage. Ozaki, a 25-year-old woman who identifies herself as a rezu (lesbian), is not involved with any political activities while the other three are or identify themselves as activists. She clearly said that she does not have any problem coming out to any groups. She is “open about sexuality at the work place and to [her] family;” thus she does not “have any problems or struggles, because being a lesbian is too natural” (Ozaki) for her. Her coworkers talk about her girlfriend and about girls, and she even brought her girlfriend to her work place. Hence, her openness may have naturalized non-heterosexuality at her work place as well as her environment. She stated that everyone should be confident about their non-heterosexuality because it cannot be helped. Thus, she said, “I don’t care about people who reject me. It’s their choice… But I feel sorry for them because their world view is so small.” (Ozaki)

Nakayama is involved with political activities such as the LGBT parade and her radio shows online. Her purpose and the motivation for her activities are to “decrease the suicide rates among non-heterosexual youth.” (Nakayama) She continued, “I know it’s too big. So I want to increase the awareness of the issue of sexual minorities. I want people to know you are not alone, and you are not strange. I started being involved with these activities because one of my friends committed suicide because of [her/his] sexuality.” (Nakayama) Her openness allows her to participate in activities to achieve her goals; thus, she in a way challenges against a society which only allows heterosexual behavior.

Both Seto and Sunagawa identify themselves as activists and are heavily involved with activities that relate to the issue of sexual minorities. Sunagawa, who is a researcher
and identifies himself as a gay activist in Tokyo, clearly explained that “those who cannot come out think negative things will happen after coming out. But I don’t know if it’s true or not. I wonder if these reactions will turn out to be all negative. I guess I cannot share these feelings because I’m too open to society.” (Sunagawa) What Sunagawa said clearly explains what I mean by the imaginary social homophobia. A person like Sunagawa who is in the fourth stage has overcome the imaginary social homophobia, and is likely to be involved with activities to resist heteronormativity.

Seto identifies as an Okama Left Wing Activist or MTX bisexual. Since Seto’s gender identification is MTX (Men to X, which means neither a man nor a woman or a gender-neutral), I would like to avoid either he or she to refer Seto, but use Seto instead. Seto explained that it’s more important how you come out. Seto continued, “If the definition of coming out is coming out as a gay or lesbian, then it’s not that simple. If you are talking about this definition of coming out, I don’t care if people do or not. But more importantly, if you come out to people by expressing things like ‘don’t categorize us into LGBT because we are not that simple!’ then it is necessary.” (Seto) It can be understood that coming out in Seto’s definition will resist not only heteronormativity but also any categorization which exists to restrict people in society.

As we can see from what my respondents said, people in this stage surmount the imaginary social homophobia. At the same time, they are more likely to participate in political activities because people in this stage are likely to be aware of the reality in which people are afraid of the imaginary social homophobia. Even for those who are not involved with any political activities, their openness challenges people’s normalized belief in heterosexuality. This is also understood as the characteristic of “negotiation” in
collective identity (Taylor and Whittier 1992). Those activists in this stage are obvious example of “negotiation” in which their social movement activities challenge against the social norm. However, at the same time, those who are not involved with any social movement activities in this stage also “negotiate” with heteronormative society, because they challenge the norms by completely open about themselves, in which they “negotiate” with heteronormative society.

The four stages I described illustrate how non-heterosexual individuals accommodate and deal with a heteronormative society; although some concepts have similarities, my model is distinctively different from the western models. Since the previous models focus more on how individuals struggle and establish their non-heterosexual identity in a psychological way, comparing my model and their models may be not appropriate. However, looking at the stages side by side helps us better understand how my stage is more focused on the process of coming out while the previous models emphasizes the construction of non-heterosexual identity. Table 2 shows the possible comparison between my model and other models.

Table 2 shows how my models focus more on the coming out process while the previous models emphasize the construction of non-heterosexual identity. As you may notice, my first stage is coming out to one’s own self, which can be also understood as how they accept their non-heterosexuality. In this sense, my first stage combines all the stages in the previous models, because the goal of my first stage is to accept their own non-heterosexual identity. It does not mean that people stop developing their identity as they go through the coming out process. Some people may be less confident about themselves and start thinking about their non-heterosexuality if they experience negative
reactions as results of coming out in second stage. However, the point is that accepting one’s own self or coming out to own self is just a start point in order for individuals to come out to heterosexuals. Thus, individuals who overcame the first stage are assumed that they feel at least comfortable with their sexuality or even accept their non-heterosexual identity, which lead them to start coming out to few people in the next stage.

However, strategies of the construction of non-heterosexual identity are seen in two strategies to overcome my first stage. The previous literature emphasizes coming out to other non-heterosexuals or the importance of interactions among non-heterosexuals in order for individuals to feel fully comfortable with their non-heterosexuality. Also, Coleman points out that gaining acceptance from numbers of other people is another important strategy to accept their non-heterosexual identity (Coleman 1982). These strategies were also used during the transition from the first to the second.

As we can see from the table and comparison between my stages and the theorists’ stages, my first stages are very similar to the previous theory in which the goal is to accept their non-heterosexual identity. However, at the same time, it is noticeable that my model from the second stage is about the process of coming out that can be only started after individuals acknowledge their non-heterosexual identity in the first stage. Thus, the analysis on how individuals establish non-heterosexual identity is an important start to discuss the issue of sexual minorities. However, analyzing only the construction of non-heterosexual identity is not enough to analyze sexual minorities in the Japanese context.

As described in literature, individuals in the Japanese contexts are expected appropriate behaviors by situations in which the Japanese self is not consistent.
Table 2: Comparison between Author’s Model and the Previous Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Author’s 4 Stage of Coming Out</th>
<th>The Previous Theory and its goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>“Denial/Rejecting Own Self”:</td>
<td>Cass’s 1st ~ 6th Stage:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Realize the differences from others</td>
<td>The goal is to fully comfortable with their non-heterosexuality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Deny their feelings toward people of the same sex, and reject their sexuality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- In order to justify their feelings and sexuality, they pretend to be heterosexuals by dating people of the opposite sex</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Their feelings are longer deniable and they can no longer reject their identity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- People decide to make transition and try to accept themselves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cass’s 1st ~ 6th Stage:</td>
<td>Troiden 1st ~ 4th Stage:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The goal is to fully comfortable with their non-heterosexuality</td>
<td>The goal is to fully comfortable with their non-heterosexuality and seek a long-term relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coleman 1st ~ 6th Stage:</td>
<td>Coleman 1st ~ 6th Stage:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The goal is to feel fully comfortable with their non-heterosexuality and adopt their non-heterosexuality as a way of life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition &amp; Strategies</td>
<td>&lt; 2 strategies&gt;</td>
<td>- Interaction with other non-heterosexuals or communities (Cass + Troiden)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1) Gain information about non-heterosexuality</td>
<td>- Explore themselves to “homosexual subculture” (Coleman + Cass)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Gain acceptance from others</td>
<td>- Gain acceptance from others (Coleman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>“Fear of Coming Out”:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- They are at least comfortable with their non-heterosexuality, and even accept their non-heterosexuality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Afraid of what others perceive them if they come out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Thus, they are afraid of coming because they believe others are homophobic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>“Coming out by Choice”:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- They accept their non-heterosexuality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- They are not afraid of coming out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- They choose whom they come out depends on risks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>“Completely Open about Themselves”:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- They accept their non-heterosexuality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- They are not afraid of coming out</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- They are completely open about themselves</td>
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In this circumstance, sexual minorities in the Japanese contexts are more likely to face the issue after they construct their non-heterosexual identity. Sexual minorities in the Japanese contexts are expected to behave appropriately regardless of their sexuality; thus, they have to negotiate themselves in different situations. Hence, my model is needed to focus on the process of coming out. Even if the characteristics of my stages somewhat overlap with the stages in the previous literature, my model is still different from the previous models.

**Coming Out as Egoistic**

The four stages of the coming out process are distinct from the western pattern of the coming out process. There are no narratives in the western literature that present the reasons for why people do not come out as because they do not want to trouble other by their coming out, because a self in the western is more individualism in which a self is allowed to express themselves directly what is on their mind (Markus and Kitayama 1991), and also people in the west treat coming out to other no-heterosexuals as a tool of being a homosexual self and do not too much attention to coming out to heterosexuals and in heteronormative society. In other words, coming out may be perceived as a strategy to establish their non-heterosexual identity which makes them visible in a heteronormative society so they can live as they want. On the other hand, in the Japanese point of view, people have to negotiate with expectations in different situations of how they present themselves. Thus, coming out may be perceived as an optional tool for individuals to negotiate among heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals in order to coexist in
a heteronormative society. This may be why some of my respondents explained that coming out was egoistic.

The narrative on coming out as egoistic behavior reflects much of the previous theory of the “Japanese” characteristic and complex sense of self, which is distinct from the western perceptions of the meaning of coming out. Individuals in the west are also afraid of coming out because of the fear of “punishment” (Butler 1993) which they receive if they violate social norms. However, while individuals in the west are concerned about personal punishment, the concerns to burden others are absent. Thus, those who expressed that coming out as egoistic believe that they force their “personal” stories on others, which will trouble others and this violates the expectations in the Japanese context. Many of my respondents expressed that coming out is a way for themselves to be relieved and to stop the lies to their friends and family members, which in a way was “egoistic.” Iwatani, a 23-year-old lesbian woman, clearly said, “I think coming out is ego (egoistic)… It’s egoistic because after coming out I can openly talk about myself to the people to whom I have already come out. Also, I don’t have to pretend to be a heterosexual because people know me as a lesbian.” (Iwatani) I asked her how it is egoistic, and she answered, “It’s egoistic because it’s my desire that I want people to know about myself.” (Iwatani) Thus, I asked her, “Is it also egoistic for heterosexuals to tell their friends about their boyfriend or girlfriend?” She answered, “Heterosexuality is considered as normal in this society. Of course, there are people who know about homosexuality, but many have biases against homosexuality. If we think about it, it’s hard to come out; however, at the same time, I want them to understand. This is like I’m forcing them to understand.” (Iwatani) The last narrative specifically
clarifies the characteristics of the Japanese self, because Japanese are likely to be more an interdependent self which individual “occupy one’s proper place.” (Markus and Kitayama 1991) In this sense, the “proper place” is a heteronormative society in which individuals are expected to be a heterosexual. In this environment, disclosing non-heterosexuality is a violation of the Japanese self to be attentive to the needs of others and not to burden other with their personal sexuality.

The belief of coming out as egoistic behavior could be understood as an example of “the Japanese self” in Lebra’s argument. Lebra states the complexity of the Japanese self and introduces the “front (omote) zone” of the self in which people are expected to behave politely. An example of politeness is “kizukai (alertness and caring attention to other’s needs or feelings)” to respond to the expectation from others to make them feel good (Lebra 2004: 44). In this circumstance, a self needs to “enryo (self-imposed restraint)” to avoid causing people trouble or causing others “meiwaku (… trouble, burden, inconvenience, annoyance, displeasure, discomfort).” (Lebra 2004: 44)

In this sense, disclosing “private” or “personal” issues could be perceived as a burden to others that causes them trouble, “meiwaku”; thus, people “enryo” or hesitate to let others listen to what their personal issues are. Also, coming out to close friends or family members can be egoistic because they may unconsciously demote family and friendships bonds, which is the interior zone of the Japanese self (Lebra 2004). By disclosing one’s sexuality to close friends and family, they are afraid of losing the relationships and collapsing these bonds. In this respect, it is understandable why coming out is perceived as egoistic for some people. These people may believe that their sexuality is a “personal” or “private” issue that everyone does not have to know; hence,
disclosing their sexuality is seen as too much of a burden or “meiwaku” especially when these individuals want to their friends or family to understand them. It appears confrontational in contexts where conflict is not supposed to be expressed. Therefore, the belief of coming out as egoistic could be expected in a Japanese context.

But the question is whether disclosing one’s sexuality is really a “private” issue. In a heteronormative society, people talk about their sexuality frequently but is never questioned because everyone is normalized in believing in heterosexuality. However, as I questioned Iwatani, isn’t it egoistic for heterosexuals to talk about their relationships? In fact, heterosexuals force their personal issues on others by assuming everyone is also heterosexual. Sunagawa states that sexual orientation is in fact not treated as a private issue, because the discussion about heterosexual orientation takes place on a daily basis (Sunagawa 2007). As it suggests, non-heterosexuals internalize and practice heteronormativity. This is exactly what Butler (1993) defines “performativity” which in this case, heteronormativity and this repetition of norms force individuals to perform. Moreover, it can be said that these people who see coming out as egoistic may accept the hegemonic sexuality, heterosexuality, and compromise about being accepted for their non-heterosexuality by society. This may be another oppression people either feel consciously or unconsciously because heterosexuality is never questioned in society while non-heterosexuality is always questioned. Despite the issue of whether coming out is egoistical or not, what I really want to illustrate by introducing this narrative is to show why the western literature is not always applicable to analyze a different social setting. That being said, the four stages of the coming out process I have proposed are different from the western models.
The four stages I illustrated how individuals negotiate their non-heterosexuality in heteronormative society and deal with other people and their reactions after coming out in a Japanese social context which is distinctively different from the western models. In the first stage, people struggle with accepting their non-heterosexuality by internalizing the external social norms. People are likely to overcome this stage by using two strategies, gain information about sexual minorities and finding the community; and receiving acceptance from others before accepting their own selves. Once people accept and become more comfortable with their sexuality, people in the second stage are afraid of coming out to people who may reject them for their sexuality. However, their feelings of isolation from heteronormative society and guilt about telling lies to family and close friends motivate them to come out to people who they think will understand. People experience both positive and negative reactions through coming out to selected people. They now know the complexity of the social situation where there are groups or people that support them and those who are not supportive. These experiences give them confidence and help them to move to the next stage. People in the third stage “choose” who they come out to, based on how risky they believe it would be to their social relationships. This includes the motion that they should not burden others with personal matters, as well as the fear that there could be real negative consequences from the disclosure. Different people have different groups which would be most difficult to come out to; however, they are less afraid of coming out because they accept their own sexuality and they know people who support them. Their concerns are about violating Japanese social norms for particular situations, which specify when it is not appropriate
to impose one’s personal feelings or preferences on others, and when one should avoid conflict or challenges to social expectations. In the last stage, people are completely open about their sexuality, and consequently they do challenge heteronormativity by being open, because their openness will naturalize non-heterosexuality in a heteronormative society.

It is much clearer now that coming out to other non-heterosexuals to become fully comfortable with their non-heterosexuality is not enough to analyze the issue of sexual minorities in the Japanese contexts. The process of coming out I described explains how sexual minorities negotiate their non-heterosexual identity in a heteronormative society and people. I have already introduced the concept of imaginary social homophobia to describe the situation in which people anticipate that others will react negatively to their coming out, even though they cannot know in advance what the actual reaction will be. In the next chapter I will explore the dynamics of imaginary social homophobia in more detail, as an important aspect of how sexual minorities decide to come out in Japan.
Chapter 4: The Imaginary Social Homophobia

One of the major reasons for fear before coming out is that they are afraid of creating negative consequences such as losing their previous relationships or being rejected. I acknowledge the reality that sexual minorities are still stigmatized and oppressed in many societies. However, my respondents’ experiences of coming out, especially positive ones, also reveal that there is another source of why people are scared of coming out. Many people who overcame the previous stages realized that the consequences of coming out turned out to be not as bad as they thought, which I call imaginary social homophobia. Hence, the “imaginary social homophobia” refers to the mindset that people in society are homophobic or are against non-heterosexuality. This is the concept that much of the literature takes for granted, while Cass mentions people are consistently in fear of a “perceived negative reaction” that influences their decision about coming out (1979: 234). The construction of imaginary social homophobia can be explained by Mead’s concept of “the generalized other.”

According to Mead (1967), individuals’ selves are constructed through interactions in which they reflect back other people’s attitudes into their behavior, and this is what he calls “the generalized other.” In this respect, imaginary social homophobia is an example of the generalized other; in this case, the generalized other would be how people perceive non-heterosexuality. Thus, sexual minorities internalize the generalized other and “imagine” how others will see them if their non-heterosexuality is unveiled. This is often negative because non-heterosexuality is often time treated as an “abnormal” sexuality. Therefore, sexual minorities will decide not to come out based on their perception of the generalized other. As individuals’ behavior is influenced by the
generalized other, imaginary social homophobia also influences sexual minorities and their decision about coming out.

The imaginary social homophobia plays an important role in people’s coming out process and there is a strong reciprocal relationship between the two. As people develop their coming out process, the imaginary social homophobia becomes less powerful. Thus, once people know about another side of a society which may not be as homophobic as they thought, they are able to extend the numbers of people they come out to and extend their coming out process. Imaginary social homophobia may be more powerful than actual social homophobia because imaginary social homophobia is produced and reproduced by heteronormativity. This can be defined by the social atmosphere and reality of how sexual minorities are treated. For example, non-heterosexuals see how society treats them, and automatically believe that others will treat them poorly when they come out. However, the actual social homophobia is based on individual interactions while imaginary social homophobia takes place in people’s mind. Thus, heteronormativity makes sexual minorities believe many people are homophobic.

In this chapter, I will discuss the relationships between each stage of the coming out process and imaginary social homophobia, and how the imaginary social homophobia influences the process of people coming out. People in the first stage feel fear of coming out to one’s own self because they believe society, including themselves, should be heterosexual and other sexualities are “abnormal;” hence they internalize an imaginary social homophobia. The fear of people in the second stage is particularly created by the imaginary social homophobia, because they imagine that society must be homophobic. Even if a person can accept their own sexual orientation, they are aware of how society
perceives non-heterosexuals. This is especially true if the person went through the first stage, in which she/he experienced their own personal biases against non-heterosexual behavior. People in the third stage recognize the imaginary social homophobia through coming out to a few people, who had different reactions to their coming out. In the final stage, people overcome the imaginary social homophobia by being totally open about their sexuality in a heteronormative society. After examining the imaginary social homophobia and its relationships in each stage, I will discuss the actual homophobia that still exists in many societies and how it reinforces the imaginary social homophobia.

Stage 1 and the Imaginary Social Homophobia

People in the first stage internalize an imaginary social homophobia. In other words, they have a strong belief that people in society, including themselves, are expected to be heterosexual. Thus, people who realize their own non-heterosexuality will be confused and try to reject their sexual attraction toward people of the same sex, because they believe they have to be or should be a heterosexual; otherwise they will be abnormal and have the wrong sexual behavior. This belief system originates from a society which only allows heterosexuality or socializes heterosexuality. People who have grown up in such a society internalize how society treats non-heterosexuals. Therefore, they internalize the imaginary social homophobia, which results in rejecting their feelings toward people of the same sex and fearing non-heterosexual behavior. In fact one of my respondents clearly said she cannot hold hands with her girlfriend or be open about her sexuality in public because she is worried about what others may perceive of their
relationship. She also stated that she does not want to be seen as a lesbian (Yaguchi). In other words, people in this stage believe in heterosexuality and that heteronormative society is against non-heterosexuality, which makes them reject their non-heterosexuality and they do not want others to think they are non-heterosexuals. Hence, people in the first stage internalize the imaginary social homophobia.

In order for them to justify their heterosexuality, they will test themselves by insisting they have friendships instead of love with people of the same sex and dating people of the opposite sex. However, after all the tests and experiments, there comes a time when people have to acknowledge their sexuality because the test proves their non-heterosexuality. Hence, they make a transition and face the imaginary social homophobia by using the two different strategies that were described before: 1) the aid from the community: and 2) the aid through acceptance from others. The point is that people who used either the first or second strategies come to realize that there are people who actually have similar experiences such as their feelings of isolation and loneliness. Before making a transition, people feel lonely and isolated because of imaginary social homophobia, believing that everyone else around them is against non-heterosexuals. Imaginary social homophobia influences them to believe that no one will understand their non-heterosexuality. However, the experiences through the first and the second strategies make them realize that they have internalized the imaginary social homophobia. Contrary to their expectations, they found people who understand and respect their non-heterosexuality. Therefore, people start accepting and becoming more comfortable with their sexuality.
Many of my respondents who recall denying their identity said that they were “confused” when they realized their sexuality, but were “relieved” after they could share their experiences with others and that others understood their sexuality, because they felt they were not “wrong” or “strange” about their non-heterosexuality. It means that they are confused because they also believed that non-heterosexual behavior as “abnormal” and that society believed this as well; however, they were relieved when they found people who have similar experiences and respect non-heterosexuality, which give them a way to exist in a heteronormative society. Therefore, people in this stage internalize the imaginary social homophobia but it will decrease as they make the transition and stop internalizing the imaginary social homophobia.

**Stage 2 and the Imaginary Social Homophobia**

People in the second stage have the fear of coming out and that fear is created by the imaginary social homophobia. They are afraid of the effect of coming out on their current relationships with others and how they will respond when their non-heterosexuality is unveiled. Behind this concern, people still believe that society is against non-heterosexuals, as they did when they could not accept their own non-heterosexuality. In other words, they believe “how could others possibly accept them if they could not accept their own non-heterosexuality in the past.” This belief is the imaginary social homophobia in which people visualize society to be homophobic because society defines heterosexuality as the only correct sexuality. The imaginary social homophobia is produced and reproduced by media depictions of characters like
effeminate men insulting and making fun of homosexuality. Therefore, the imaginary social homophobia strongly affects people’s decision about coming out.

However, people start feeling guilty and become anxious about telling lies to their friends and family about themselves. Thus, they are only able to come out to trusted people who would not change their attitude after they have come out. This motivation is also related to the imaginary social homophobia. People in this stage are able to come out only to trusted people or selected people, because they believe those individuals are less likely to share the social homophobia. This could either be because they think the person is more tolerant of sexual diversity, or because they think the person cares enough for them that this emotional bond will supersede whatever general opinions the person might have. There are two reactions, positive and negative, after coming out. Once people experience positive reactions, they gain confidence and realize that coming out to others is not as bad as they thought. In this way, they recognize that their fear of coming out was influenced by the imaginary social homophobia. At the same time, even those who experience negative reactions will realize that there are different opinions about non-heterosexuality and that both positive and negative reactions to coming out are possible. This experience also makes people to judge who they can come out to. Hence, what helps them to overcome the second stage is the realizations of imaginary social homophobia as well as the social reality that people with various opinions coexist.

These experiences can be seen in my respondents’ narratives, which recount how they were afraid of coming out, but were relieved and realized that society or people were not as homophobic as they expected. Other people’s “supportive” (Nakayama, Shimizu and Taniguchi) reactions made them realize they were too concerned about negative
reactions before coming out. In fact, Taniguchi, a 20-year-old homosexual woman, said, “I came out to my dad last because other family members and I believed dad had stereotypes against non-heterosexuality… But after coming out to dad with my mom’s help, he nodded and showed his understanding to my coming out… After I came out, my mom asked my dad ‘she (Taniguchi) is still our cherished child, right?’” and he answered ‘of course.’” (Taniguchi) This particular example shows that Taniguchi and her other family member were afraid of her coming out to her father, because all family members had imagined Taniguchi’s father shared in social homophobia; however, her father understood her coming out, which was a positive reaction for Taniguchi. Thus, the fears Taniguchi had before coming out to her father was not the expected reactions of her imaginary social homophobia.

Fuse, a 31-year-old lesbian woman, was afraid of coming out to anyone. However, after coming out to a few friends, she realized that “friends or people close to you are less likely to reject you because the friendship came first, before your sexuality… Friends will try to help you if they are your friends. It does not matter if you are non-heterosexual because they are friends.” (Fuse) Her realizations are gained through her experiences of coming out to her friends. She had believed they would reject her non-heterosexuality and break off the relationships after she came out to them. In this respect, Fuse’s fear of losing friendships before coming out was influenced by her imaginary social homophobia; however, the result she had realized did not come about.

People in the second stage are afraid of coming out because they believe society is against non-heterosexuality. This becomes the major challenge to coming out, although people realize after coming out that others in society are not always against non-
heterosexuals. They realize their fears were part of an imaginary social homophobia. Therefore, experiencing both positive and negative reactions, they can judge who they can come out to based on a more refined sense of imaginary social homophobia in which they can come out to certain people. This is the transition to the third stage.

**Stage 3 and the Imaginary Social Homophobia**

People in this stage are more aware of the imaginary social homophobia and its limits. They know who they can come out to, because they are more aware of various opinions and of people coexisting in society. People in this stage are less likely to be afraid of coming out because the range of their imaginary social homophobia is smaller compared to people in the second stage, when people tend to believe that every group of people are homophobic. In the third stage, they believe some groups of people are not homophobic. However, their decision on coming out is still dependent on the imaginary social homophobia because they still have the imaginary social homophobia about certain groups. Thus, the determination of whom they will come out to would differ depends on people’s perception of imaginary social homophobia. In other words, how people measure which groups will be more risky than other groups is through their experiences as well as through imaginary social homophobia. While people are aware of the imaginary social homophobia, this pushes them to decide who they will come out to. They still imagine coming out to some groups is more risky than other groups. Of course, people will never know the consequences of coming out unless they actually do it;
however, the more important fact is that the consequences they imagine are influenced by the imaginary social homophobia.

People differ in deciding to whom it is most difficult and risky to come out; hence, coming out to their family is most difficult for some people while coming out at their work place is most difficult and risky for others. Those who feel the most difficulty in coming out to their family, especially their parents, have certain images of the imaginary social homophobia. People assume that their parents would be pleased by the happiness that can be achieved through heterosexual marriage and having children. This imaginary social homophobia is established through the prevalence of talking about heterosexuality in family conversations. Therefore, people believe that their parents also expect a heterosexual family, which makes coming out more difficult.

Again, people in this stage are not necessarily afraid of coming out; however, those who choose not to come out to their parents are concerned about their parents blaming themselves and making the parents feel disappointed. Koyanagi, a 29-year-old woman who identifies herself as a lesbian, said she has no plan of coming out to her parents because she “does not want [her] parents to be worried about [her].” (Koyanagi) She continued, “No parent would be happy for their child to be a homosexual, so I would not tell my parents for their sake.” (Koyanagi) Sawada, a 30-year-old lesbian woman, also said that she believes her parents “would be sad, disappointed and blame themselves” (Sawada) if they know about her sexuality.

Toba, who identifies herself as pansexual and came out at an assembly in front of the whole school, has no plans of coming out to her father. She said, “My dad is so biased and stereotypical… He even told me he wants me to get married and have
children… I don’t think he ever imagined my non-heterosexuality… I am afraid of disappointing my dad because of his expectations.” (Toba) In this case, she is not afraid of coming out, but she is worried about her dad being disappointed. These experiences show us that conversations among family members make people believe in the imaginary social homophobia, and that their family members will be disappointed by their non-heterosexuality. This may be because all parents “know the happiness of their own family and children which are based on heterosexual relationships.” (Kawabata) Because all the participants were children of heterosexual couples, the assumption would be that their children would also be heterosexual.

Those who feel it to be difficult and risky coming out at their work place believe in the imaginary social homophobia in which coming out will threaten their employment. This belief may be produced by the belief of non-heterosexuality as a taboo sexuality or that sexuality should not be spoken about in the work place. In fact, many of my respondents believe coming out will threaten their employment. Kawabata, a 30-year-old woman who identifies herself as a lesbian, clearly expressed her concern that “I’m worried I would not be able to live if something happened at my work place after coming out.” (Kawabata) She continued, “I don’t want to feel small at my work place in which people whisper ‘she is a homo or lesbian’ or some biased rumor behind me.” (Kawabata) Murase, a lesbian woman who have experienced violence after coming out, expressed similar feelings about coming out at her work place. She said, “It may be an exaggeration but it’s like coming out at work place will affect whether you live or die, because my life depends on employment. If I think about these risks, I cannot be thoughtless and come out at my work place.” (Murase) These two narratives show that
they believe in the imaginary social homophobia in which coming out at the workplace is a high risk which may threaten their employment.

As I mentioned before, there was actually one respondent (Nakayama) whose employment had been threatened when the boss knew about her non-heterosexuality. Thus, Hayakawa, a bisexual woman, also expressed that coming out at her workplace has “high risks.” She said, “The workplace is not like family or friends, but it’s an organization… I also know about people who actually have been threatened in their working conditions by coming out. So it’s scary and a high risk (coming out at workplace).” (Hayakawa) Thus, the imaginary social homophobia against the workplace is not always imaginary, and there are people who experience homophobic reactions. However, the point is that it is still the effect of the imaginary social homophobia because people visualize that a workplace must be homophobic; although I also acknowledge that the consequences is unknown unless they come out.

The decision of who people in this stage come out to is still influenced by imaginary social homophobia although they are not afraid of coming out and are less influenced compared to people’s decisions of coming out in the previous stage. It all depends on how long people will take to move into the final stage and there may be even people who choose to stay in this stage because they are not necessarily oppressed by not coming out. However, people in this stage extend the numbers of people to whom they come out and once they reach the point where they overcome the imaginary social homophobia, they are in the final stage.
Stage 4 and the Imaginary Social Homophobia

People in this stage overcome the imaginary social homophobia by being completely open about their sexuality to the public. Hence, the relationship between people and imaginary social homophobia will dramatically shift in this stage. In previous stages, people are affected and controlled by the imaginary social homophobia. In other words, the imaginary social homophobia has dominated their lives. However, people in this stage challenge and resist its power by being completely open about their sexuality to society. This attitude is very similar to people in the final stages in Cass’s, Troiden’s and Coleman’s models, in which they are fully comfortable with their homosexuality (Cass 1979), and adopt non-heterosexuality as a way of life (Troiden 1989).

People in this stage are conceivably more aware of the imaginary social homophobia and actual homophobia in society; nevertheless, they overcome the scale of the imaginary social homophobia. Thus, people in a way normalize their non-heterosexuality in the environment such that the people around them will be also influenced. There are people who are still against non-heterosexuality surrounding the person of at this stage; however, they will not be as concerned about how others see them as much as people in previous stages were.

The imaginary social homophobia and its relationships in the process of coming out has changed as they developing through the stages. The imaginary social homophobia becomes less and less as people develop their coming out process. As I mentioned, not everyone moves from stage to stage because some of them are comfortable with being in a stage and are not motivated to move. I also have to note here
that I am not pushing people to move from a stage to another stage or I am not blaming people for staying in the earlier stages. My point is that the imaginary social homophobia may be bigger than how society will react in reality, because the reality includes both positive and negative reactions. However, the imaginary social homophobia is not the only reason why people are scared of coming out or decide not to come out. There is the actual social homophobia that many non-heterosexuals experience and that threatens them and may enlarge the imaginary social homophobia.

**The Imaginary Social Homophobia and Actual Social Homophobia**

I have discussed the imaginary social homophobia in which people visualize and predict that society is always homophobic, and the experience that these fears are not always realized can motivate them to make the transition to next stage. However, I have to reemphasize here that there is in fact the “actual social homophobia” which people experience on a daily bases. As I explained earlier of this chapter, actual social homophobia is people’s negative experiences after coming out which take place in individual interactions. When people experience negative consequences after coming out, that is actual social homophobia. These experiences may reinforce the imaginary social homophobia in people’s mindset. Again, non-heterosexuality is still stigmatized and oppressed in many societies and Japan is not an exception; although many LGBT organizations and communities confront it by insisting on their presence as well as their rights. There are few rights for non-heterosexuals, while heterosexuals’ have more rights. In this respect, the status of non-heterosexuals and members of sexual minorities are
much less guaranteed in society, which makes their lives are more vulnerable. This social reality may be another cause for people to believe in the imaginary social homophobia.

If people are in the earlier stages of the coming out process, their concerns are more likely to be based on their daily lives. For example, they are concerned about how to meet friends and who to be in a relationship with or how to come out. In fact, many of my respondents in the earlier stage expressed that their concerns and stresses come from discussions of marriage at their work place and conversations among family and friends because they have not disclosed their sexuality. However, the concern for people in the later stages or at least past the first stage and when they reach the marriageable age, they tend to be reflected in concerns about their future as members of sexual minorities. These concerns mainly originate in the situation of sexual minorities in which their rights and life are not guaranteed and protected in society.

My respondents’ concerns about their future clearly illustrate their vulnerability in society. Six of my respondents (Araki, Fuse, Matsumoto, Miyake, Wada and Yaguchi) explained that they are worried about their lives in their old age. Yaguchi, a 26-year-old lesbian woman, clearly said, “I’m concerned about my future so that I will not be alienated and alone when I get old.” (Yaguchi) In relation to the concerns about their lives in their old age, they are also concerned about their family and children because same-sex couples cannot reproduce their own child. Some of my respondents expressed complaints about their inability to have their own child (Endo, Kawabata and Koyanagi). Kawabata, a 30-year-old lesbian woman, seemed to have a deep attachment to reproduction of her biological child. She said, “I feel like I have to pass my blood to next
generation.” (Kawabata) Araki, who identifies herself as a queer, Fuse, Matsumoto and Miyake also told me they want children for a different reason than Kawabata. They are more concerned about their lives in their old age without children who can take care of them (Araki, Fuse, Matsumoto and Miyake).

Because Japan does not allow same-sex marriage or partnership, non-heterosexual couples are not acknowledged as legal couples; thus, many non-heterosexual couples have to give up their dream to have their own family. Disregarding same-sex partners’ presence in the constitution also worries people about the situation when their partners were hospitalized. Hospitals are likely to only allow intimate family members to hear about a patient’s condition; however if a partner does not have a legal right to prove that they are partners, they will be left out. Because of these reasons, many of my respondents are extremely worried about their future as members of sexual minorities because society does not guarantee the lives of non-heterosexuals or sexual minorities. Even though legal rights are not everything and do not protect non-heterosexuals’ lives completely, it is one way to protect their lives and human rights. Thus, not having these rights in society causes non-heterosexuals and sexual minorities to be concerned about their future.

Non-heterosexuals and sexual minorities are not only oppressed legally but also culturally and socially stigmatized. As I introduced earlier, some of my respondents had negative experiences after unveiling their sexuality at their work place, to friends and family and society. Nakayama, a pansexual woman, had her employment threatened because her boss knew about her sexuality and her participation in LGBT activities (Nakayama). Murase, a 28-year-old lesbian woman who I quoted in introduction, had
violent experiences from her friend’s boyfriend because the boyfriend misunderstood Murase, as threatening their relationship because she is a lesbian (Murase). Noguchi, a 23-year-old man who identifies himself as a gay, came out to his parents and their first reaction was “You have to fix that!” (Noguchi) He said, “After that dramatic coming out, I guess my mom took several years to accept who I am. My dad says ‘you shouldn’t worry your mom. You should marry a woman.’ It’s been more than two years since then.” (Noguchi) Sunagawa also experienced oppression and said, “I want to insist that sexual minorities are oppressed in society more often. For example, we had a discussion when one of our friends who was gay passed away. We talked about how we should not go to his funeral because he wasn’t out when he was alive; instead only his closest friend should go. I think not being able to go to a friend’s funeral is a part of social oppression.” (Sunagawa) As we can see from some of my respondents’ narratives, it is enough to say that non-heterosexuals and sexual minorities are still oppressed and they still face homophobic realities.

Furthermore, the public speech made by the Tokyo Governor, Ishihara, is a good example to show that the negative attitudes toward sexual minorities are still acceptable in Japanese society. Ishihara insulted homosexuality when he responded to the PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) organizations in Tokyo that brought a petition to reform a local regulation regarding the healthy upbringing of youth on December 3, 2010. The PTA organizations are particularly concerned about the increase of sexual contexts in comic books; thus, they asked to reinforce the regulation of sexual contexts in comic books. At that time, Ishihara responded, “Not only children, but also homosexuals are on TV without any hesitation. Japan is too unregulated. I will act out of a sense of
responsibility.” (Manomori a 2010) Several days later on December 7, 2010, Ishihara responded to a reporter, who clarified what he meant by his comment that homosexual people are “missing something.” He added, “(Being a homosexual) is because of their genetics, right? I feel sorry for them to be minorities.” (Manomori b 2010) Ishihara recalled his observation at San Francisco and said, “I saw the gay parade, but I felt so sorry for them. Both pairs of men and pairs of women looked like something was missing.” (Manomori b 2010)

These were not Ishihara’s first homophobic speeches and reactions; however, this speech had especially shocked people who identify themselves as members of sexual minorities and the community. Especially, because at this time the Ministry of Justice had started their project of the 62th Human Rights Week from December 4 to December 10 in 2010. During this week, the Ministry of Justice and National Federation of Consultative Assemblies of Civil Liberties Commissioners organized symposiums and events to increase the awareness primarily by using the media. This year, one of the emphasized articles was “to eliminate discrimination based on their sexual orientation” (Ministry of Justice 2010); thus, what Ishihara said was specifically shocking and disappointment. In fact, several of my respondents tweeted in their Mixi page. One said that after hearing the speeches she was on the train but felt every man from Ishihara’s generation looked at her in the same way as Ishihara does. These experiences show that sexual minorities are still stigmatized and face the actual social homophobia in society which makes them feel difficulty in coming out.

However, if we look at sexual minority groups in Japan, they are designed to help improve people’s lives. In fact, when Ishihara made the speech, people from sexual
minority groups stood up and formed a group to be against Ishihara’s speech which sent ripples to the world. People in different prefectures “tweet” on Mixi (a Japanese Social Network Service) and twittered and wrote blog entries and Mixi diaries to express their anger, frustration and sadness. For instance, on the blog of a gay activist in Ehime prefecture, “Geiri-man no Kamingu Out teki Shikou (Gayly Man’s Thoughts on Coming Out)” there were more than one hundred comments against Ishihara’s speech about their willingness to do something (Gay Japan News 2010). People’s tweets and blogs, which expressed their anger and frustration with Ishihara’s speeches served two purposes: to raise awareness of the problem of such speech: and to satisfy their personal frustrations about homophobia in society. To answer these frustrated voices, the “Ishihara Tochiji no Douseiaisha Sabetsu Hatsugen ni Kougi suru Yuushi no kai (Group of Protesting against Ishihara’s Anti-Homosexuals and Discriminatory Speech, hereafter referred to as “Yuushi-kai”),” was established.

The representative of Yuushi-kai referred to as “akaboshi” is a gay activist who writes a blog, “Geiri-man no Kamingu Out teki Shikou (Gayly Man’s Thoughts on Coming Out),” and is an auteur (Yuushi-Kai, February 17, 2011). On January 14, 2011, Yuushi-kai organized the symposium called “Ishihara Tochiji no Douseiaisha Sabetsu Hatsugen, Naniga Mondai ka? (What are the problems of Ishihara’s anti-homosexual and discriminatory speech?)” This event was to “prevent it from fading away”, in order to reveal “what’s missing in reality.” (Goto) According to Yuushi-kai, a total of 357 people joined the symposium which included reporters, guest speakers and other staff such as a sign language interpreter (Goto). Yuushi-kai also reported Ishihara’s speeches to organizations throughout the world. Richard Rosendall, the vice president for Political
Affairs Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance of Washington, D.C., replied and showed their support (Yuushi-Kai, January 10, 11). Moreover, IGLHRC (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission) also “urges the Governor of Tokyo to honor the commitments made by the Government of Japan to uphold the full spectrum of human rights and both retract your statements and issue a public apology.” (IGLHRC; Yuushi-Kai, January 30, 11) Also, in February 1, 2011, Human Rights Watch, a famous International human rights organization, announced a declaration against Ishihara’s speeches (Human Rights Watch).

Ishihara’s speeches have involved and upset sexual minorities as well as its community and organizations. At the same time, it was impressive how fast the sexual minority community responded to Ishihara’s speech, which only took a week. Individuals complained online and expressed their frustration, which led to the creation of Yuushi-kai and people decided to be involved and helped the group to challenge Ishihara. Not only that group, but also there are LGBT groups in Japan that are present to help people’s coming out process as well as improving their lives in a heteronormative society, which I will examine in the next chapter.

Non-heterosexuals are still oppressed in a society which includes lacking the legal protection for them and stigmatization of non-heterosexuals. Moreover, Japanese society tolerates homophobic behaviors like Ishihara’s speech and does not take this incident as a problematic speech, because non-heterosexuality is made to be invisible in a heteronormative society. This environment is a possible trigger of the belief that society must be against non-heterosexuals, which I call the imaginary social homophobia.
Although the actual homophobia exists in society, the imaginary social homophobia influences people on decisions of coming out in a heteronormative society. However, as people develop their stages of coming out, they will have less imaginary social homophobia because they become more aware of another side of society in which everyone is not necessarily homophobic. Thus, this realization is a measurement of who they come out to.

Moreover, LGBT groups play an important role to reduce the imaginary social homophobia. As we see in the Ishihara’s incident and how Yuushi-kai was established, LGBT groups in Japan are designed to help individuals’ coming out process as well as to improve their lives in a heteronormative society in different ways. In the next chapter, I will describe three different LGBT groups in Japan and how these groups are related to each stage.
Chapter 5: LGBT Groups and their Roles

Heteronormative society is still an oppressive society for many sexual minorities. However, we cannot ignore the presence of LGBT groups and their influences on sexual minorities that help individuals in the coming out process as well as improving their lives in a heteronormative society. The literature takes account of interacting with other non-heterosexuals as a strategy in both the processes of identity construction and of coming out. There are numerous LGBT groups in Japan which include organizations, communities and business to support the lives of sexual minorities. The Ishihara incident described in Chapter 4 and how LGBT groups reacted showed their significant roles in a heteronormative society. Moreover, my respondents’ experiences and narratives also showed that LGBT groups play an important role in the coming out process. In this chapter, I will examine how LGBT groups are involved in people’s coming out process, in order to demonstrate their contribution to sexual minorities. I will first describe the three different groups in which I conducted participant observation.

I distinguish between an organization and community in this section. An organization is usually more formally recognized in society through their events and general presence, whereas a community tends to be private and known only through word of mouth. My impression through the field research was that there were more LGBT organizations and communities than I expected. Many I would not have known about until I actually went to the field and interacted with people. Now, I will introduce two organizations, the Kansai Rainbow Parade 2010 and the LGBT no Kazoku to Yuujin wo
Tsunagu Kai (LGBT Friends & Family), and the community, Girls Chat. I will discuss them based on my field notes from their meetings as well as general information from other sources. These groups are mainly based in the Kansai area which may neglect the situation in other areas of Japan. However, respondents who identify themselves as activists and participate in LGBT activities from different areas, as well as the websites of LGBT groups available online, will be also be included to provide a better understanding of LGBT organizations and communities in Japan and how they contribute to the process of coming out and improve awareness of the issue of sexual minority that eventually improve their lives.

**Girls Chat (G-Chat)**

G-chat was created in 2006 by Matsumoto, a 28-year-old homosexual woman, and Miyake, a 27-year-old lesbian woman, who have been dating for four and a half years. Their motivation for creating G-chat was to make friends with other women because even when they went to LGBT events, they only met gay men. The first several years of G-chat was comprised of only lesbian couples. Later, “it got boring so that [they] started asking heterosexuals, gays and trans people to join [them].” (Miyake) Thus, even though the name seems to welcome only women, it actually was inclusive to people regardless of their sexual identity and orientation. G-chat provides a place for people to discuss their struggles because the “concerns homosexuals have is universal. Of course,

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3 This name is a pseudonym of the real group to protect their identity. However, the real group’s name has a similar translation to English.
everyone is in different stages or process, many of them are concerned about coming out to their parents and struggling with not being able to come out at their work place.” (Matsumoto) Thus, they “do not want G-chat to be systematized and bring it to more political activities.” (Matsumoto) They rather “want people who attend G-chat to feel relaxed and free to talk about their concerns.” (Matsumoto) Thus, this is a more private community which can be known only through word of mouth.

I attended the meeting on July 24, 2010 at a center for gender equality in Osaka. I knew this event through Hayakawa, a bisexual woman, whom I first met in another organization meeting. She asked me to join G-chat and introduced me Matsumoto and Miyake. I received an e-mail from Hayakawa as a forwarded e-mail, which was sent to its participants, to inform them of the G-chat meeting on July 24, 2010. Fortunately, I was also invited to the meeting among the main people of G-chat which was before the actual meeting of G-chat. At that time, five members including several of my interviewees were there and discussed G-chat participants. They meet every time before the regular G-chat meeting and discuss how the G-chat should be delivered and about how its participants can support their friends in the G-chat.

The actual meeting of the G-chat started at 6:00 p.m. As informed by e-mail, participants met at the closest train station at 5:30 p.m. and headed to the center together. Before we went to the center, we stopped by a convenience store and bought snacks. Some of them grabbed a couple of cans of beer. The room we used was a Japanese style room and everyone sat on the floor with a zabuton mat and made one big circle. Couples were asked to sit in different places so that everyone can communicate in a way to welcome new comers like me. First, Matsumoto explained about G-chat’s policies and
mottos. She said that G-chat is not only for lesbians but also for members of other sexual minorities. Matsumoto also emphasized that whatever discussion we had in G-chat would stay in G-chat to protect people’s privacy. This is especially important because people who are afraid of accepting their sexuality and coming out participate in the G-chat.

After the introduction of the G-chat by Matsumoto, they started introducing themselves and discussed their concerns and their recent conditions or what they were thinking in everyday life. Those who are working have their concerns at their work place, students also have own issues, while transsexual and transgender people have their own concerns. For example, Okada⁴, a lesbian woman, who had just started working from April 2010, expressed her stress of not being able to be her own self at her work place because she hides her sexuality, which forces her to tell lies to her coworkers (Field Note 2). The age range was late teens to late twenties. Everyone brought their concerns and struggles which they have to face in daily life. Even though some participants were drinking beer, G-chat was created more for serious chat than a drinking party for meeting people to date (although some people actually meet and form a relationship through G-Chat). I also introduced myself as a student researcher and asked them for permission to take notes during the meeting when it was my turn. A total of seventeen people participated and there were gays, lesbians, bisexuals, asexual, transsexual and transgender people and people who are undecided in their sexual identity and orientation.

⁴ All names in field notes are pseudonyms to protect their privacy.
This was actually the first time for me to encounter a person who identified themselves as an asexual. I leaned about asexuality through taking undergraduate classes in which an asexual person is someone who is not interested in sexual behavior or in being in a relationship with someone. However, the person who identified herself as asexual told me that she is interested in being in a relationship with someone she likes (regardless of sexual identity and orientation), but sexual behavior is not as important as just being together. She also added that asexual people have their own definitions of being an asexual. Listening to how she and other people defined their sexuality unveiled that their description of their identities differed even among lesbians, transgender people or bisexuals. Some of the participants insisted they do not like categorization. Some had a particular description of their sexuality.

As participants introduced themselves with their recent concern or situation, everyone listened to them and made brief comments. Since many of participants were interested in the topics of how people have accepted and dealt with their sexuality as well as coming out, the main discussion became this topic. Two participants clearly expressed their struggles of not being able to accept their sexual orientations as non-heterosexuals, and one of them started doubting her sexual identity as a transgender person (Field Note 2). At that time, experienced members listened to them and nodded to show their understanding. These experienced people gave younger ones advice through telling their past experiences when they had struggled with the similar issues.

After everyone introduced themselves around the circle, we had a group discussion in which people were divided into two groups. I was put into one group which included diverse sexualities. Since our group included one international student from
Canada and myself who had lived in the U.S. for five years, the discussion was about how other countries perceive the issue of sexual minorities and the differences from Japan. Many of them were interested in the situation of sexual minorities around the world (Field Note 2) because some of them were concerned about their future life as members of sexual minorities in Japan, which does not guarantee their lives. A person in my discussion group who is a transgender MTF pointed out that G-chat sounds exclusive of others who are not biological females, but it is actually inclusive. I also got the same impression.

The G-chat provides people a place where older and experienced people listen to younger people who brought their struggles and concerns. Thus, this place is in a way a protected place especially for those who are not able to accept themselves as well as those who are afraid of coming out. Also, this community has an atmosphere that made people feel that “they can be here” and “it’s your place where you can be yourself.” In fact, one participant disclosed her experiences of how she finally accepted her non-heterosexual identity through participating in G-chat. She was looking for other sexual minorities to make friends for a long time. When she realized her feelings toward other women, she started working at a bar in which she dressed like a man and served other women. She finally realized she is a lesbian, because she did not want to be a man through working at a bar. However, after realizing her sexual orientation she could not find other sexual minority friends. Thus, she went to a gay town to look for friends, but it failed. Then, she tried to make friends through the Internet but also failed. She said she was depressed and disappointed. She explained that she could not find friends with whom she could just share and chat together, which she really wished for a long time.
She continued that now she has the G-chat and friends in the G-chat, it gives her courage and power to live her life.

Moreover, participating in G-chat made me think how the categorization was inaccurate, how sexuality was not simple but very complex; in a way, everyone has their own interpretation of who they are. In this respect, G-chat welcomed anyone regardless of their sexual identity and orientation, which creates an atmosphere where people can openly talk about their concerns even if they came to the G-chat for the first time. The G-chat ended at 9:00 p.m. and for some people three hours of discussion was not enough. The G-chat may make people feel they want to come to meet friends in G-chat again. After the meeting, some of them went to eat and drink to talk more, which unfortunately I could not join them for. G-chat provides a space for people who are struggling with accepting their sexuality and having difficulties coming out.

In this respect, people in any stage are able to join G-chat through friends’ introduction. However, as we can see from the purpose of establishment of G-chat as well as the way the meeting was led, G-chat mainly helps people in the first and second stage, those who struggle over accepting their sexuality and are afraid of coming out. In fact, participants of G-chat brought their struggle of accepting their own sexuality as well as the confusion between sexual identity and orientation. Nagase came to G-chat for the first time. She is biologically a woman and identifies as a bisexual but wonders if she is a transgender because she prefers a boyish style and feel uncomfortable being treated as a girl. She clearly said that being a sexual minority is hard (Field Note 2). Other people also expressed how hard accepting their own sexuality was; thus, they were also scared of being seen as non-heterosexual by others. Many of them also expressed their fear of
coming out because they were afraid of being rejected and losing their current
relationships with family and friends.

Experienced people were very supportive to those who came to confess their
concerns and worries by saying “this is nothing wrong with you,” “being a sexual
minority is not always bad,” or “don’t worry you can come here to be yourself if you
couldn’t outside.” (Field Note 2) Experienced people did not force their opinion such as
pushing people to come out; instead they listened to people and respected their decision
of what they wanted to do. As I noted, G-chat was a “protected place” and a private
group in which people can openly discuss their concerns and struggle and give advice to
each other.

Because of G-chat’s style, participants can gain confidence through participating
in G-chat. Murase, a 28-year-old lesbian woman, could not find any communities to
share her struggles but met Matsumoto and Miyake, the organizers of G-chat, at an event.
Since then, Murase started joining G-chat. She said, “Going to G-chat and talking with
friends there about my concerns and struggles made me relieved that I can be there.
Since then, I found my place in G-chat and started being confident about who I am… I
was relieved that I could exist in this society after I met people in G-chat.” (Murase)

In addition to G-chat there are numerous websites accessible online in which
people can chat. Moreover, many communities and even organizations advertise their
events online or through their Mixi page to provide meeting places. As I reported earlier,
Fuse’s struggles accepting her sexuality were getting less since she made friends via the
Internet. She said that “everyone was so kind and accepted me and that was most helpful.
Since then, I could start thinking being a lesbian is nothing wrong… I was saved and felt
better. I had thought I could not belong anywhere, but I learned there were people who accept me. So I started feeling good about myself and being able to accept myself eventually.” (Fuse) These communities not only help people in the first stage, but also people in the second stage as well. Some participants said they could come out to friends and family after they started coming to G-chat where they got a lot of advice and encouragement (Field Note 2).

G-chat is also the place where people establish “boundary” from heteronormativity, and share “consciousness.” (Taylor and Whittier 1992) The participants come to G-chat and feel a sense of belonging because they feel it’s a safe place to discuss their concerns. At the same time, they also share “consciousness” among participants because their discussion is based on their concerns, anxiety, struggle and pressure. G-chat and its participants are not necessarily trying to “negotiate” with heteronormative society because they are a private community; however, participants construct “collective identity” through participating in G-chat. Therefore, G-chat or LGBT communities are one type of LGBT groups that are significant and are likely to be designed to help people’s early coming out process.

The Kansai Rainbow Parade 2010 (Kanpare 2010)

The Kansai Rainbow Parade is a much bigger group than communities like G-chat and it organizes an annual parade in Osaka. People call it “Kanpare” which is an abbreviation of Kansai Rainbow Parade. The Kanpare was established in 2006 and has been organized every year since then, and successfully finished the parade in October
2010. The theme of the Kansai Rainbow Parade is “Midousuji wo Nijiiro ni! (Let’s Make Midousuji Street Rainbow-Colored!” which they have used every year. They have their own site on Mixi, a Japanese social network service, in which they can post their information about events on “topic” or “event” pages that any Mixi users can access. They also have their own blog that is used for advertisement, recruitment and uploading events and news.

I attended the meetings twice for the Kanpare 2010 executive committee members which was open to anyone to become a member. The first meeting was held in Osaka on June 6, 2010 and the second meeting was on June 20, 2010. I found about this meeting through their Mixi page. On the first day, a total of 13 people joined including newcomers and experienced members. The meeting started from 1:00 pm at a room in an office building. I arrived there ten minutes before the meeting and nobody was there. Around when the meeting started, Kitano, who is a MTF transsexual person and an experienced member, arrived with her friend. I gave her my card and introduced myself as a student researcher. In the past people had changed their attitude after I introduced myself as a student researcher, so I was very nervous. However, Kitano casually said, “OK, go ahead to see how it goes. Please make yourself at home.” (Field Note 1a) I asked her if she was the chair of the Kanpare but she said that the Kanpare does not have a chair and the Kanpare would be led by executive committee members (Field Note 1a). I first could not understand how an organization without a chair could work; however, it became clear after the meeting actually started and I saw how the meeting was led.

More people started coming after 1:00 p.m., and we pushed the desks together into a circle. We had a white board so that people could write something when they led
the discussion. First, each of us introduced ourselves, and said how long they had been involved with the Kanpare or other LGBT activities and their motivation as a member. Their sexualities included gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals and heterosexuals. At that time, I also introduced myself as a student researcher and asked them for permission to take notes. After a brief introduction of members, they discussed the design of the guide book, the theme color for this event, volunteer recruitment, establishment of the alumni of Kanpare, and the possible event day. Since the meeting I attended was the third meeting of the Kanpare 2010, people seemed to understand what was going on. Members had their own tasks which they were responsible for.

All members consisted of volunteers, and there was no chair. Therefore, as Kitano said, the Kanpare meeting was led by members. Although experienced members mainly led the meeting and explained their previous experiences, the meeting itself was also very casual and anyone could talk regardless of their experiences, age, sexuality and gender. Moreover, people from younger generations were the center of the organization with the support and advice from experienced members. In fact, experienced members said that it was time for a generational change (Field Note 1a).

“The Kansai style” or “the Kanpare style” was words I often heard during meetings (Field Note 1a and 1b). Members said that “our style” is to be open to any groups that “include not only LGBT people but also heterosexuals” in which they respect “diverse sexuality and diverse ways of lives.” (Field Note 1a) When they talked about their web page, fliers and posters, which members create themselves every year, they also emphasized that the images should look “fun” or like a “festival.” (Field Note 1a)
The meeting finished around 4:00 p.m. but people were still talking to each other in a friendly way. Kitano also asked me to join a party at her home where I could meet other people whom I might be able to interview. When I talked to members about my research and said that I was looking for people to participate in my study, everyone was willing to participate. In fact, they e-mailed me to set up the date in which we could meet privately to have the interviews. Even though it was the first time for me to attend the Kanpare meeting, everyone was very nice to me and was welcoming.

I also attended the meeting on June 20, 2010 at the same place which started at 4:00 p.m. At that time, only 6 people joined but everyone brought the progress of their tasks. On this day, an experienced member asked me to be a member, and I became a member for translation. I could only attend two meetings and could not even participate in the parade, but I was able to receive e-mails from members, which helped me understand how the members were moving and working towards the parade.

Kanpare has an open policy, which give people more familiarity with the parade or event they organize. This is one of the reasons why they answered “we don’t try to have a political goal as a group because it would make a hierarchy among participants and organizers” when I asked them if they had a political goal as an organization (Field Note 1b). The reason why they wanted to avoid being specific with their goals and wanted to emphasize a “diverse sexuality” instead of “sexual minorities or LGBT” is because heterosexuality is a part of the diverse sexualities that have to coexist with non-heterosexuals (Field Note 1a and 1b). Even though committee members have changed the purpose of the parade that is described on their website each year, they have had a similar concept: visibility, to increase the awareness of sexual minorities. Moreover,
Kanpare tries to be as inclusive as possible. Kanpare used the term “LGBT” only in 2007, but started using “sexual minority people” and “sexual minorities” in 2008 and 2009. Moreover, it is distinctive that Kanpare emphasizes “diverse sexuality” which includes heterosexuality since 2010. Hence, they treat this parade as a “festival that celebrates diverse sexualities,” (Kansai Rainbow Parade 2010) to appeal not only sexual minorities but also heterosexuals as well.

They had struggled to figure out the purpose of the parade, which they hoped would appeal not only non-heterosexuals but also heterosexuals as well. I also would like to note here that Kanpare members have emphasized that they are just organizers of the event or “pieces for participants of the parade.” (Seto) They emphasized that all the participants are the “leading part” of the parade, and executive committee members are just creators of a “stage” for them (Field Note 1a). Kanpare organizes events and a parade to increase the awareness of the issue of sexual minorities in society and provides places to celebrate a “diverse sexuality.”

Their emphasis on “diverse sexuality” and their inclusiveness is more obvious if we look at the events they organize and how they advertise their events. For example, they started organizing a “tea party: We feel uncomfortable with our gender identity.” (Kansai Rainbow Parade, August 11, 2008) This event shows the respect for diverse sexualities including transgender and transsexual people so that they would not create exclusion among minorities. They stated that “it is definite that there are transgender participants in our parade, who are invisible in the community most of the time… Let us get together in order to understand other transgenders, transsexuals and those who feel uncomfortable with their gender identity.” (Kansai Rainbow Parade, August 11, 2008)
How they have advertised their events and parades as well as recruited volunteers also shows their inclusive policy. The guide books were placed in organizations, cafes, restaurants, universities, and so on all over Japan (specific locations are shown on their web site) (Kansai Rainbow Parade 2010). The places they asked to put their fliers, posters and guidebooks have expanded since 2008, and include more public places that anyone can access regardless of their sexuality.

Their inclusiveness policy is their way to construct collective identity to form the social movement. Before it became so inclusive, Kanpare use to target “LGBT” or “sexual minorities,” in which their “boundary” (Taylor and Whittier 1992) was heterosexuality, because LGBT and sexual minorities do not include heterosexuality. However, the boundary of Kanpare 2010 was distinct from previous years and became only heteronormativity that excludes sexual minorities. The difference is that Kanpare 2010 does not try to distinguish themselves from heterosexuals, but only from anyone who espouses heteronormative ideas. Since they started distinguishing themselves from the dominant ideology of heteronormativity, they started to avoid referring to themselves as LGBT or sexual minority groups as this is a challenge against heteronormativity and its tendency to be exclusive. Thus, their “consciousness” (Taylor and Whittier 1992) has also changed to be more inclusive. With that broad collectivity, Kanpare 2010 “negotiates” with heteronormative society to pursue “diverse sexuality” which coexists in society through the parade and the tea party. Overall, Kanpare’s strategy for collective identity is to use “diverse sexuality” to be inclusive, which may also bring more resources to the organization. Because of the inclusiveness policy, their sponsors and partners have increased and expanded. Appendix II. shows the number of sponsors and
partners every year, and within that I divided them into two groups, “potential beneficiaries” and “conscience constituents,” following the standard social movement distinctions. “Potential beneficiaries” benefit directly from the accomplishment of organizational goals (McCarthy and Zald 1997: 1221) while “conscience constituents” are people or groups that “are direct supporters of an SMO (Social Movement Organization) who do not stand to benefit directly from its success in goal accomplishment.” (McCarthy and Zald 1997: 1222) I categorized gay bars, clubs or online stores as “conscience constituents” because they do not directly benefit from Kanpare’s goal which is to increase the awareness of sexual minorities, even though these stores provide the places for sexual minorities and benefit from them financially. I also categorized HIV support groups as “conscience constituents” because they emphasize HIV awareness which is not necessarily a part of increasing the awareness of sexual minorities. Hence, there are more “conscience constituents” than “potential beneficiaries” every year. However, I have to note here that the nature of “conscience constituents” has changed especially in 2010. While most “conscience constituents” include and target sexual minorities as a group or business, some companies such as a mobile company, a publishing company and a finance company are not necessarily targeting sexual minorities or its issues as companies. Their participation in the parade could be motivated purely to generate business and not necessarily from a desire to help the cause of sexual minorities; however, the Kanpare’s inclusiveness policy has succeeded in their goal of the encouraging the coexistence of diverse sexualities.

Kanpare has only a five year history which could be seen as short compared to parade organizations in the U.S. However, Kanpare has made adjustments to improve
themselves in achieving their goal, to make sexual minorities visible in heteronormative society and coexist with heterosexuals. Their emphasis on “diverse sexuality” is to include, not exclude, any type of sexualities in society including heterosexuality. It also can be said that Kanpare’s open or inclusiveness policy may bring in more conscience constituents. In this way, the open and inclusive policy has greatly achieved their long term goals. Therefore, Kanpare’s inclusiveness policy may be a bridge within society in which sexual minorities are normalized along with heterosexuality.

While Kanpare’s policy of inclusiveness contributes to increase the awareness of the issue of sexual minorities, it may require people to be in certain stages, which clearly distinguishes them from participating in communities like G-chat. Kanpare or other organizations may be more likely to require people to be in the third or fourth stage, because people in these stages are less likely to be afraid of being public while people in the first two stages are afraid of accepting their sexuality and of coming out to public. In fact, several of my respondents expressed their hesitation in participating in a parade or other events in public because they are afraid of being in public. Higuchi, a bisexual man but who is still transitioning between the first and second stage, said that he hesitated about going to a public event such as a parade; hence, he choose to attend more private events because he was “afraid of being in public.” (Higuchi)

Moreover, my respondents who are involved with Kanpare are all comfortable with their sexuality and are not afraid of coming out. In fact, some of my respondents were members of the Kanpare executive committee and their names and faces were displayed in public. Sunagawa, a gay activist, is also the chair of Tokyo Pride which organizes the Tokyo Pride Parade, the biggest parade in Japan. In this respect, people
may need to be in the third or fourth stage in order to be involved with Kanpare or bigger organizations and events, because parades are often held in a public place where their faces are also exposed.

However, this type of organizations still plays an important role in peoples’ coming out process. As I noted before, Kanpare’s purposes of organizing the parade is to promote the visibility of sexual minorities by increasing the awareness of the issue of sexual minorities. Tokyo Pride, which organizes the Tokyo Pride Parade, also has similar concepts. They state that “Tokyo Pride is non-profit organization in which our main objective is to integrate discrimination against sexual minorities; to spread correct information and knowledge about sexual minorities; and to create a society in which sexual minorities have better life.” (Tokyo Pride) We can see from their goals that they present a message to society or the public, which in a way is a form of political activity.

Hence, participating in this type of organizations and being in public will help people in the later stage to extend the number of people to whom they will come out. At the same time, this type of organization helps people in the earlier stages in an indirect way. The imaginary social homophobia may be likely to decrease because these events and parades are designed to increase the awareness of the issue of sexual minorities and the visibility of their presence in heteronormative society. Therefore, Kanpare or similar organizations are another important part of peoples’ process of coming out.

**LGBT Families & Friends (Tsunagu-Kai)**

Tsunagu-kai is distinctly different from the previous two groups because they are almost the only organization in Japan among many communities and organizations that
focuses on caring for sexual minorities which includes caring for the parents of sexual minorities. This is an incorporated nonprofit organization established in 2006. Tsunagu-kai is based on PFLAG (Parents Family & Friends of Lesbians and Gays) in the U.S. which originated in 1972 when “Jeanne Manford marched with her gay son in New York’s Pride Day parade.” (PFLAG a) Their mission is to “[promote] the health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, their families and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights.” (PFLAG b) Thus, the purpose of Tsunagu-kai is to: 1) create a society which eliminates discrimination of LGBT and promotes respect for diverse sexuality; 2) support sexual minorities to be able to accept their sexuality with their friends and families (LGBT no Kazoku to Yuujin wo Tsunagu Kai). Thus, their main goal through activities is “to create a society in which everyone’s own characteristics and human rights are respected by increasing the awareness and correct information in education about the issue of sexual minorities.” (LGBT no Kazoku to Yuujin wo Tsunagu Kai) They have their own website, blog, and Mixi page to advertise events and meetings as well as recruit members.

I attended the meeting on July 25, 2010 at a hall in Hyogo prefecture. Hayakawa, who invited me for G-chat, also introduced me to this meeting. Tsunagu-kai started at 1:30 pm; however, I could not make it on time because I had another interview with a person in different prefecture. When I entered the conference room, there were tables and chairs making a huge square. Almost every chair was occupied and about thirty people were there. The introductions had already started. There were three parents who led the meeting. On the right side of the three parents, about 5 younger people sat who
identified themselves as members of sexual minorities. There were other people who identified themselves as sexual minorities; however, most of participants were parents who had children who had come out to them. There were parents who came to Tsunagu-kai for the first time because they “were confused with their child’s confession so that [they] wanted to share how other parents felt and understand how people like [their] children were thinking.” (Field Note 3) There were some people who came from different organizations, such as a feminist group that focuses on the issue of domestic violence among sexual minority couples and a group that focuses on the issue of students who refuse to attend school (Field Note 3). These people emphasized the meaning of Tsunagu-kai and other LGBT groups that continuing to raise voices towards a change in society, in order to encourage Tsunagu-kai as well as the participants.

When younger people introduced themselves as sexual minorities, they expressed their concerns and reported their recent situations. One said that she succeeded in coming out to her grandparents, who supported her. At that time, parents and others were smiling and said, “Great! We are proud of your courage” or “we are happy for you.” (Field Note 3) Another younger person explained that she was confused in her sexual identity since she was more comfortable wearing men’s clothes than women’s. Regular participants seemed to be aware of “diversity” in which they respect variety ways of living (Field Note 3).

Some of the participants came from different prefectures and “have never seen sexual minorities in their town.” (Field Note 3) The father who came to the meeting for the first time said that he came from a different prefecture because he and his wife have struggled with their son who disclosed to them that he is interested in both men and
women. They said that they are confused with the disclosure and don’t know how to deal with the issue, especially since they haven’t had a chance to talk to the son. The father seemed like he was trying to figure out what he should do. He said he even researched “sexuality” to understand what was happening to his son. He said, “It’s hard (to understand).” (Field Note 3) Through searching about sexuality via the Internet, he found out about Tsunagu-kai. Thus, he decided to come to Tsunagu-kai because he wished to find a place where he would be able to get support. Even though he seemed to be striving to understand his child, he said “it’s hard to accept what’s going on because it’s my child.” (Field Note 3) The mother of that son said she “kinda knew about” the son’s sexuality two years ago. She said she “hopes [her] child to be happy with his own way.” (Field Note 3) She continued, “I now know there are different sexualities as people are different.” (Field Note 3) However, at the same time, she expressed that it is hard to discuss “sexuality” in general; but she said she wants to understand her child (Field Note 3).

There was another mother who came with her own child who was waiting for a diagnosis of whether her child is a FTM or not (I will use “he” to refer this child since “he” did not like to be categorized as a girl). The mother explained that the child became more talkative after he came out to the mother. The child explained that he came out to his friends first and it had spread right away. He said he regretted coming out to friends first rather than his mother, because his peers saw “sexual minorities” as an “illness.” He cried and said he had been struggling with his sexuality, and told about himself to his friend, which ended up in bullying. He continues that it was very hard for him so he became harsh to his mother at home (Field Note 3). At that time, the mother also cried.
The mother also expressed the frustration against the class teacher who did not have any knowledge about sexuality which resulted in the bullying (Field Note 3). At the same time, the mother explained how another male teacher was very helpful and that he brought a list of doctors and hospitals that specialize in sexual minorities. The mother explained that it was a good experience with her child after all, because they are now able to overcome the issue together (Field Note 3).

One impressive scene was when a mother who came for the first time from a rural area told others about her concern. She has three children and the third child just came out as a lesbian via e-mail. The third child told her mother she liked girls when she was a high school student; thus, the mother said with confused and disappointed voice that she felt “the child was a lesbian after all” (Field Note 3). She expressed her confusion with her child’s disclosure because she believed “there were no sexual minorities in the real world” until her child came out (Field Note 3). She also expressed her frustration that she was not able to find information in her home area, which implies that rural areas have less access to LGBT information. The mother had struggled by herself for three months but finally decided to come to Tsunagu-kai.

The mother started talking about one of her primary concerns. Since the child only came out to her mother, the mother was wondering if she should tell other family members especially since her first child was getting married. She said she was afraid the marriage would be canceled if the family knew one of her children was a homosexual. Thus, she clearly said she “has biases against homosexuality, but it would not be allowed to speak only fine words because it’s my child.” (Field Note 3) At that time, the father of a son who came out said, “You should be confident about your child!” Even though the
father’s son had only recently come out to him and he was confused with that confession, they seemed to strive to understand their son which encouraged the mother (Field Note 3).

During this discussion, not only other parents but also younger people who identified themselves as members of sexual minorities made suggestions which could reflect the third child’s point of view. They suggested respecting the third child and letting her decide if she wants to come out to other family members or not. Other parents also encouraged the mother and said that sexual orientation should not influence her first child’s marriage. The mother was taking notes and listened to what young sexual minorities and other parents said, and she seemed to decide that she would respect the third child by listening to what the child wants to do. After the discussion, the mother said she greatly appreciated people who gave her suggestions. She added that she was glad to come here because she could meet young sexual minorities and listen to them (Field Note 3).

Participants who were sexual minorities also gave these parents advice on how they think and feel from their perspectives. When parents brought their concerns or confusion, other parents shared their experiences with their children and gave advice, which seemed to relieve the parents. On the other hand, parents also encouraged young sexual minorities who cannot come out to their parents. Hence, participants of Tsunagu-kai seemed to receive power and encouragement from each other.

Tsunagu-kai is an organization that is open to people at any stage; however at the same time, it brings people together regardless of their sexuality and age, who come to Tsunagu-kai to understand the issue of sexual minorities. Thus, Tsunagu-kai and its participants construct their collective identity. Since the participants of Tsunagu-kai
include sexual minorities and their friends and family, they establish their “boundary” from heteronormative society by sharing their developing “consciousness.” (Taylor and Whittier 1992) Also, organizing conferences and participating in the parade as Tsunagu-kai is their way to “negotiate” with heteronormative society to challenge against the norms. Support for parents of sexual minorities is important; however, Tsunagu-kai also helps members of sexual minorities to face their coming out stages. It is unknown in which stage their children disclosed their sexuality to their parents; however, participants of sexual minorities came from diverse stages. When I attended the meeting, there were sexual minorities whose stages ranged from first to fourth. There was a male who came to Tsunagu-kai to accept himself while there were people who tried to come out to their parents but were scared. Hence, anyone can attend Tsunagu-kai if they are willing to understand the issue of sexual minorities.

However, Tsunagu-kai may not work for some people, especially when they believe that there is no way to come out to their parents and society, because Tsunagu-kai may send a message that “coming out to parents is not so bad.” Because parents who attend meetings are happy about their children or at least willing to understand their children, these parents encourage participants of sexual minorities to give a positive impression of coming out to their parents and family members. In this respect, it may make people who are hesitant in coming out anxious, because their primary concerns are likely to be their coming out to themselves to accept their own sexuality, rather than to come out to their parents and society. Murase, who used to attend Tsunagu-kai regularly especially after she had the violent experiences at her work place, said, “I used to go to Tsunagu-kai and cried every time I went there. But there was a time when I felt I was
forced to come out even though I know nobody did. These parents are more encouraging for us to come out to because they experienced their children’s coming out. It was confusing and hurt at first, but turned out to be a positive experience. However, I am aware of the negative experiences or reactions from others because of coming out. For example, parents disown their child because of children’s non-heterosexuality. I guess I just got that type of impression even though these parents did not mean such things, but going to Tsunagu-kai and receiving this impression made me feel like a weak person because I cannot come out or because I don’t have enough encouragement to face society. I hear many people in the younger generation who are accepted by their parents or their parents even liked comic books of boys love. But I don’t think it (coming out to parents) is that easy. Feeling these gaps were very hard for me, so I stopped going to Tsunagu-kai.”

(Murase)

On the other hand, Tsunagu-kai helps people especially who have desire to come out but are afraid of coming out to their parents. In other words, Tsunagu-kai may help reduce the imaginary social homophobia people have about coming out to their parents and society. Miyake, one of an organizer of G-chat, could start coming out after her participation in Tsunagu-kai and listening to other people’s coming out stories. She said, “I thought I could never come out to my parents. I only came out to my closest friends. But after listening to coming out stories, I felt I might be able to come out to my mom.”

(Miyake) Her courage to come out was gained through participating and meeting supportive parents and people. She continued, “After I listened to people’s experiences and stories, I felt I may come out to my parents because they (parents at Tsunagu-kai) were behind me.” (Miyake) In this respect, Miyake could reduce the imaginary social
homophobia against her parents with the aid of other parents’ advice and the supportive environment of Tsunagu-kai.

Even though Tsunagu-kai might give certain people an impression about the pressure of coming out, Tsunagu-kai plays an important role for parents as well as people in any stage. As I noted about the discussion among parents, parents get together to encourage each other to be proud of their children who are members of sexual minorities. At the same time, Tsunagu-kai helps to reduce or eliminate imaginary social homophobia against coming out to parents by expressing how coming out turned out to be an important and positive experience. In this respect, Tsunagu-kai influences people’s coming out process in which they reduce the imaginary social homophobia about the family, which many people face as a most challenging part of the coming out experience.

I also need to mention that these organizations and communities I introduced are not the only LGBT groups in Japan. Some large cities have a “gay town” where people living in a close area can also meet people and interact with other members of sexual minorities. Also, there are several groups that organize parades. Each group has different goals and motivations; however, the contribution from these groups will either directly or indirectly provide support for people’s coming out process.

As I discussed, LGBT groups such as G-chat, Kanpare and Tsunagu-kai construct collectivities to help individuals struggle and to challenge the social norms. The sexual minority groups’ activities help sexual minorities in different ways which improve the life of sexual minorities as well as help individuals’ coming out process by reducing the imaginary social homophobia. G-chat is a community which provides a place for sexual minorities to be themselves and share their concerns or struggle. Because G-chat is more
community based, participants of G-chat can easily attend meetings without coming out to themselves or coming out to society. Moreover, G-chat or these types of communities will provide a space for interacting with other non-heterosexuals as well as people who respect non-heterosexuality; thus, it helps non-heterosexuals to gain confidence about their sexuality. At the same time, this confidence will help to reduce the imaginary social homophobia.

On the other hand, the Kansai Rainbow Parade (Kanpare) is an organization which acts as a bridge between sexual minorities and heteronormative society by their inclusive policy. Kanpare provides a place to celebrate “diverse sexuality” in public space which will help to increase the awareness of the issue of sexual minorities. Even though participating in Kanpare’s event may require people to be in a more advanced stage, Kanpare’s activities help to improve the lives of sexual minorities. This may eventually help to decrease the actual social homophobia in a heteronormative society while it indirectly reduces the imaginary social homophobia in people’s coming out process. Tsunagu-kai is also another important organization, which contributes support to LGBT people and their friends and family. This group is especially important to reduce people’s concerns about coming out to their parents or an imaginary social homophobia against parents, because many participants are parents whose child came out and they know how parents think about their child being a sexual minority. In this environment, young sexual minority persons will receive a positive image of coming out to their parents, while parents would understand how their children could be suffering through listening to these young people. Hence, Tsunagu-kai is also designed to help reduce the imaginary social homophobia which helps people to move into later stages.
Therefore, their continuous activities help to reduce the imaginary social homophobia regardless of their scale of activities. Although the role of LGBT groups in Japan is similar to LGBT groups in the west, the roles of LGBT groups specifically include the support for people’s coming out process. This is also to reduce the obstacles to coming out, which I address as imaginary social homophobia, by contributing to the development of a heteronormative society that is less homophobic. Overall, while sexual minorities are still stigmatized in many societies, LGBT groups play an important role to improve the lives of sexual minorities as well as the process of coming out. Moreover, the contribution of LGBT groups will directly or indirectly reduce the imaginary social homophobia by challenging against a heteronormative society.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Sexual minorities are oppressed, made to be invisible and still not treated equally in many societies and sexual minorities in Japan are not an exception. In these societies, heterosexuality is perceived as a “normal” sexuality which treats non-heterosexuality as a deviation; hence, heteronormativity would reinforce negative feelings against non-heterosexuality. Those people who are against non-heterosexuals could threaten non-heterosexuals, which involve violence or hurt feelings. As discussed in this thesis, actual homophobia is still present in society. Hate crimes against sexual minorities and high suicide rates among sexual minority youths are often depicted in the world news. However, in Japan this news is not generally known to the public (g-lad xx), which in reality could be even more problematic. Thus, there is still oppression and stigmatization against sexual minorities in Japan.

In this circumstance, sexual minorities are still coerced to disclose their non-heterosexuality to a heteronormative society in order to be recognized, because the naturalized belief in heterosexuality makes non-heterosexuality invisible. Thus, coming out is one of the most stressful experiences for many sexual minorities because they will challenge the norm to de-naturalize the normative sexuality by coming out. I proposed the four stages of coming out that is a distinct model from the western model for several reasons. The western models still emphasizes the establishment of non-heterosexual identity as the goal by coming out to other non-heterosexuals, so that coming out to heterosexuals and in heteronormative society is not taken into account. However, the establishment of non-heterosexual identity cannot be the goal for sexual minorities in the Japanese context because people are expected to behave appropriately depending upon
situations, in which people have to negotiate their non-heterosexual identity in heteronormative society. Thus, analysis of the construction of non-heterosexual identity is just a start point to discuss the issue of sexual minorities in the Japanese context. Moreover, another particularly “Japanese” feature that arose in my research is that some of my respondents perceive coming out as an egoistic attitude. They recognize that they are exposing their “private” side to others in situations where it is not appropriate to do so, and that could collapse the delicate balance of relationships among them. This sort of narrative may not be present within western society in which insistence on individuality is more tolerated and even expected. I am not judging which is good or bad, but rather I would like to emphasize this is why the western model of the coming out process cannot fully explain the case in Japan.

In addition to that, the imaginary social homophobia is clearly a part of the decision making process of who they come out to. While heteronormativity and homophobia are still two powerful sources of decision making, many of my respondents realized that coming out in society was not always as bad as they thought. In other words, as people move to the next stages, they are less likely to be influenced by the imaginary social homophobia; although I am aware of the fact that actual homophobia threatens people and is one factor of the reproduction of the imaginary social homophobia. People in the later stage like the fourth stage or those who are widely coming out are likely to say, “nothing big would happen after coming out.” (Sunagawa 2007: 200) Therefore, coming out in a heteronormative society may not be as bad as people think, although there is actual homophobia to threaten them.
The concept of the imaginary social homophobia is not taken into account in the western literature, although Cass briefly mentions that people believe in a “perceived negative reaction” (1979: 234) that influences their decision making on coming out. Cass did not expand her explanation about its influences on the decision making in coming out because Cass treats coming out as one strategy among many to establish one’s non-heterosexual identity. Neither Cass’s model nor Coleman’s model of the coming out process can explain the process I have observed in Japan. Coleman’s coming out process is especially distinguishable from my model. This difference may be because of how my study was designed, which affected my findings. As Coleman clearly states, his study was designed for a therapeutic purpose which was to “understand these people and … assist therapists and clients.” (1982: 32) On the other hand, my sociological study was designed to study coming out in its social context, by conducting face to face interviews and participant observation with groups and organizations. Hence, I was able to see the patterns among my respondents and how individuals interact with each other. Moreover, as described above, I focus more on coming out to heterosexuals and in heteronormative society while Coleman’s coming out process is more focused on coming out to other non-heterosexuals. Therefore, this difference makes our models different.

Another important point mentioned in the earlier chapter is that the experiences could be different based on my respondents’ gender. While heteronormativity, homophobia and the imaginary social homophobia are sources of struggle and decisions of coming out, how this influences them could be different among people of different gender. Through interviewing women, another fact revealed was that they face a “double stigma,” because many of my female respondents expressed that they have to face
difficulties as a woman and as a non-heterosexual (Araki, Matsumoto, Miyake, Nakayama, Wada and Yaguchi). This is because many work places in Japan are still dominated by heteronormativity. Female workers are likely to be expected to pursue a heterosexual marriage and retire from their job. This assumption neglects sexual minorities with partners who are not allowed in the constitution; thus, women without marriage are “seen as pitiful women or losers.” (Matsumoto and Miyake) People never know what would happen after coming out at their work place; however, the point here is that women and non-heterosexuals have to face double stigmas because of their minority gender and sexuality in society.

Regardless of different experiences by gender, LGBT groups still play an important role by providing information and places for sexual minorities. These sexual minority groups construct collective identities to form their organization and their social movement activities are typically challenging the norms. Moreover, as I examined, LGBT groups support individuals’ coming out process in different ways that are designed to help individuals’ coming out process. LGBT groups are designed to: 1) increase the awareness of the issue of sexual minorities; and 2) provide places in a heteronormative society for sexual minorities to feel relieved and meet friends who are supportive and can share stories. Their continuous contribution will eventually make a society in which people can coexist regardless of their sexuality. In this way, LGBT groups will help reduce the imaginary social homophobia. If an individual lives in a rural area, she/he may have more difficulty in accessing these groups and information compared to those who live in an urban area. Even though sexual minority groups and communities are often more visible in urban areas, information through the Internet and social media has
become more accessible in modern society. Thus, there are numerous LGBT groups and businesses that could help sexual minorities in Japan.

Moreover, because of LGBT groups’ and activists’ social movements or activities, “queer culture” has developed and has been more recognized in society. One example is LGBT parades in several regions in Japan such as in Tokyo, Sapporo and Kansai. The Tokyo Pride Parade (used to be called The Tokyo Lesbian & Gay Parade but changed in 2007) was organized in 1994 as the first parade in Japan. Parades are organized in different prefectures and have gained more support in which Governors and Mayors have actively participated in parades and major companies have become sponsors.

Those who struggle with their sexuality may feel isolated and hopeless living in Japan as members of sexual minorities; however, the social circumstance for sexual minorities have been changing with LGBT groups’ and activists’ efforts. NHK (Nippon Housou Kyoukai) or Japan Broadcasting Corporation is the largest broadcasting corporation in Japan and is a public corporation. The NHK Educational Television has a social welfare program called Haato wo Tsunago (Heart TV) which started in 2006. The Heart TV has depicted different social issues such as handicapped people, domestic violence against children and poverty. Heart TV had a segment on the LGBT issues for the first time on October 2006, which was titled Seidouitsusei Shougai (Gender Identity Disorder) (NHK). Even though this program was good, the title is still problematic because it shows transsexualism as a stigmatized disorder in a heteronormative society which values only “normal” heterosexuality. Since then, NHK has been broadcasting about the issue of LGBT and also published the book which specialized in LGBT issues in 2010. Thus, not only sexual minorities but also people regardless of their sexuality
will have a chance to watch and know about the issue of sexual minorities in Japan through these public broadcasts.

Development of LGBT groups in Japan and media that portray how sexual minorities struggle and live in society and the positive images of sexual minorities are a hope to challenge “norms” and heteronormativity. Even though there are still many people who struggle with the issue of coming out and may be depressed by the social atmosphere against LGBT people, I strongly hope for them to encounter LGBT groups which could support them. At the same time, I hope for LGBT groups to continue to provide their support for individuals as well as their challenge for social change. I close this thesis with my hopes someday for a society which no one has to “come out” about their sexuality.
Appendix I. Interview Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Respondent</th>
<th>Sexual Identity</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Araki</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endo</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Rezu (Lez/Lesbian)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuse</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>Hayakawa</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higuchi</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Bi (sexual)</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Woman</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kawabata</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koyanagi</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matsumoto*</td>
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<td>Douseiaisha (Homosexual)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miyake*</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murase</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nakayama</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noguchi</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ozaki</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Rezu (Lez/Lesbian)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sawada</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seto</td>
<td>MTX / Okama</td>
<td>Bisexual/Okama</td>
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<td>Pansexual</td>
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<td>Sunagawa</td>
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<td>Gay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wada**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yaguchi</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yokota**</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
* and ** are both couples

**Sexual Orientation**: I have to note here that although Sawada identifies herself as a lesbian, she also explained she could be a bisexual in her past experiences. Furthermore, Hayakawa, Murase, Shimizu, Toba and Yaguchi hesitated to name their sexual orientation. Interview Hayakawa, Shimizu and Toba explained they do not like categorization. In addition, Murase and Yaguchi also explained they would rather say “I like another woman.”

**Rezu**: literally means a lesbian; however, a word rezu is often time used in insulting way.

**Okama**: Seto prefers to use a word okama because this word is “very ambiguous”; thus, Seto identifies as okama since Seto also identifies as an activist.

**Sunagawa**: Hideki Sunagawa is a gay activist, who asked me to use his real name.
Appendix II. Sponsors and Partners for Kansai Rainbow Parade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Potential Beneficiaries</th>
<th>Conscience Constituents</th>
<th>Total #s of Sponsors</th>
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</thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Potential Beneficiaries</th>
<th>Conscience Constituents</th>
<th>Total #s of Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>2008</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
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Field Note 1b. The Kansai Rainbow Parade Executive Committee Member Meeting. Osaka, June 20, 2010.


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—. 2010. Interview by author, Tokyo, July 22.


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