Writing sexual identity onto the small screen: Seitekishōsū-sha (sexual minorities) in Japan

In decades of Japanese entertainment television Mr. Ladies and Miss Dandies, queers and queens have been represented as a hyper-visible spectacle. Switch on television on a weeknight in 1990s Japan and you might stumble across a variety show such as Mister Lady Deluxe Edition. In the contemporary moment, however, we are experiencing greater coverage of LGBT issues not only through the rubric of variety-style fascination with all things queer, but also in news and current affairs shows where so-called ‘LGBT issues’ are often positioned in relation to partnership rights and ‘LGBT markets’. This is remarkable, considering that as recently as 2012, Doi Kanae of Human Rights Watch lamented the imbalance in media representations of LGBT peoples and issues in the Japanese press. Doi called for greater reporting on LGBT issues, noting that the use of the term onē (queer/queen personality) far outnumbered the use of the term LGBT in Asahi Shimbun, one of the nation’s more progressive newspapers (Doi 2012). Today, a basic search in the Asahi database Kikuzo for the term LGBT as used in articles published in the national edition from January 2012 to December 2015 returns 134 hits. Widening the search to the entire newspaper database
reveals 344 hits—only the first 14 of which appear between 2004 and 2010. We appear to be in the midst of a veritable LGBT boom. And, as television news and current affairs shows have become increasingly layered with captions and populated by flip-cards, digital monitors and in some cases Twitter feeds, the terms LGBT and sexual minority (seitekishōsū-sha) have become highly visible, or, as I will argue below, hyper-visible.

The chapter examines how ‘LGBT’ is inscribed onto the screen in mainstream news and current affairs programming by exploring two forms of language technologies that facilitate this hyper-visibility: captions and flip-cards. Critical examination of these media technologies, I suggest, offers one way to analyze the complex citational practices (Goodman et al. 2014) that shape media representations of sexuality and gender. As I will demonstrate, captions and flip-cards facilitate the textual visibility of LGBT and augment the hyper-visibility of ‘sexual minorities’. In the contemporary media environment in which the term ‘LGBT’ saturates sections of the visual sphere, however, LGBT people are positioned as being heretowith hidden from mainstream society. In this chapter, I will show how contemporary hyper-visibility of ‘LGBT’ in mainstream media pivots on continuous, or continuing, in/visibility in which LGBT rights are never fully brought into historical context. Before examining examples of the
use of captions and flip-cards in broadcasting related to LGBT issues, however, a brief overview of the current status of these issues in Japan is in order.

The background

The current media focus on all things LGBT extends from a history of activism in relation to sexual and gender minorities as well as academic writing in gender studies and queer studies within and about Japan (Curran and Welker 2005, Takemura 2010). This also resonates with the global positioning of LGBT rights and the legalization of same-sex marriage as a marker of a progressive democracy. Same-sex marriage is yet to be legalized in Japan, and there are few overarching laws that protect the rights of alternative families (for an overview in English see Taniguchi 2006, 2013). However, local ordinances such as those recently introduced in the Shibuya and Setagaya wards of Tokyo and in a number of other locales outside the metropolis have garnered much attention. Diversity awareness and training is also making inroads into corporate culture in Japan. As the Nikkei Business Online proclaims, ‘LGBT’ is the ‘ultimate in diversity’ (Nikkei Business Online, August 24, 2015). An online survey into sexual orientation conducted in 2015 by the Dentsu Diversity Lab (DDL), a corporate social
responsibility (CSR) entity within advertising giant Dentsu Group, claims that an estimated 7.6 percent of the population, or approximately one in thirteen people residing in Japan, identify as LGBT (Dentsu Corporate Communication 2015). The same survey estimates the so-called rainbow market to be valued at 5.94 trillion yen, which is less than the 6.6 billion estimate compiled by Pageanta and reported in Nikkei Business in 2007 (Hosoda 2007). Although the accuracy of such online surveys has been questioned (Hiramori 2015), corporate Japan has been urged to ‘wake the slumbering LGBT market’ (nemureru LGBT shijō o kakusei saseyo) (Gotō 2006) and ‘capture it’ (kōryaku se yo) (Shūkan Diamond, July 14, 2012).

Following the inclusion of sexual orientation to the anti-discrimination clause of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Charter,7 a multiparty caucus to examine discrimination against sexual minorities was formed. As Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) politician, Hase Hiroshi explained at a press conference in March 2015, the multiparty caucus aims to deepen understanding of LGBT issues ‘to show that there is no discrimination against LGBT peoples in the run up to the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics’ (NTV News 24 2015).8 An article in the Nikkei newspaper (Kōno 2015) warns, however, that the 2020 games will test corporations’ ability to respond to the IOC Charter and, more generally, Japan’s ability to extend its highly advertised
Japanese-style welcome (omotenashi) to LGBT-identified visitors from overseas.

The turnaround in LDP policies is remarkable, given that in the early 2000s Japan experienced a backlash by conservative LDP politicians and commentators against newly formed gender equality guidelines and, in particular, *jendā furī* (gender-free) education. The queer-phobic undercurrent of backlash discourse is evidenced in parliamentary exchanges from this period where conservatives from both of the major parties voiced concern that education free of overt gender biases would cause the ruin of the family and the breakdown of society (Kazama 2008). At the time of the backlash it seemed inconceivable that the LDP would actively partake in a multiparty caucus and go on to release a statement outlining the party’s ‘foundational thoughts on sexual orientation/ gender identity’ (LDP Special Committee 2016).

The preamble to the LDP report claims that ‘since the Middle Ages (chūsei) our nation (wagakuni) is said to have been tolerant (kanyō)’ of diverse sexual orientations and gender identifications. The LDP’s goal, however, is not to introduce anti-discrimination measures, and Prime Minister Abe has stated in parliament that he does not support same-sex marriage. Instead, the aim is to raise awareness around LGBT people and issues and enact a society in which ‘there is no need to come out’ (*kamuauto suru hitsuyo no nai*) (LDP Special Committee 2016). An editorial in the English-
language newspaper the Japan Times refers to this as ‘LDP’s questionable LGBT policy’ (May 21, 2016). This appeal to a long-standing tolerance through which ‘we each accept each other naturally’ (tagai ni shizen ni ukeirerareru) also obfuscates a long history of both activism and academic writing that highlights the overarching systems of discrimination and heteronormative institutions operating in contemporary Japan.

The current explosion of newspaper and magazine articles, light entertainment and current affairs shows that refer to ‘LGBT’ and the ‘LGBT market’ occurs in a contradictory socio-political environment where a ‘boom’ in media interest makes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender men and women in contemporary Japan hyper-visible. A complex entanglement of ‘tolerance’ and ‘acceptance’ also demands, however, that their diverse needs be noticed, but not necessarily catered for at the policy level. I use the term in/visibility to refer to this complex situation where ‘LGBT’ are in full view of media representation but simultaneously marked as ‘out of sight’. While today’s local socio-political concerns are unique to our contemporary era, this complex juxtaposition is evident in previous articulations of the recurring cycles of media fascination in all things queer.

Tolerance and acceptance/ hyper-visibility and invisibility
A short documentary segment on the Tokyo Broadcasting System’s (TBS) evening news program *N-Sta* (2013), that documents the first same-sex wedding ceremony between two brides dressed in gowns to be held at Tokyo Disney Resort, is one example of the complex entanglement of ‘tolerance’ and ‘acceptance’ within media hyper-visibility that constitutes ongoing in/visibility. The segment raises awareness of issues surrounding the legal recognition of same-sex partnerships in Japan. However, as I have argued elsewhere (Maree 2016), the use of complex citational practices common to contemporary audiovisual media – such as captioning, narration and image repetition – recontextualizes these issues to fit within a discourse of ‘tolerance’. This is particularly noticeable in a segment of the broadcast in which the couple negotiates a request from a now-married wedding guest who asks that her previous relationship with one of the women is kept secret for ‘the sake of her child’. Captioning and visual citation is manipulated to highlight advice given by a trusted mentor to accept this request, and to show forgiveness or tolerance toward the woman making the request.

Here the notion that ‘forgiveness’ on the part of the lesbian couple is overtly stated as being essential to their mutual existence (kyōsei) within the wider society. This message fits seamlessly within the heteronormative ideological parameters that shape the
mainstream early- evening news program. Citational practices manipulate the framing of the discussion of partnership rights such that a claim to recognize the machinations of perceived lesbophobia are hidden by a discourse of ‘tolerance’ and ‘acceptance’ on the part of the lesbian couple. Hyper-visibility again facilitates in/visibility.

In the early 1990s, activist and writer Hiroko Kakefuda problematized the notion that Japanese society is tolerant towards women in lesbian relationships by stating that perceived ‘tolerance’ is facilitated by the practice of ‘pretending not to see’ (*miteminufuri*). Kakefuda noted that a lack of open antagonism toward lesbians in Japan did not signal acceptance and/ or tolerance, but instead was indicative of a lack of acknowledgment of women in same- sex relationships (Kakefuda 1992, pp.104-29). The practice of ‘pretending not to see’, therefore, facilitates in/ visibility. In much the same way, the technologies that visualize speech in the 2013 *N-sta* mini- documentary briefly discussed above facilitate a discourse of tolerance that pivots on in/visibility. As we shall see in the below discussion, this can also be noted in the contemporary media-generated ‘LGBT’ boom.

The LGBT market in the news and current affairs
2015 saw an explosion of news and current affairs programs reporting on ‘LGBT issues’. Earlier in the decade reporting had been somewhat skewed toward news of same-sex marriage legislation in countries other than Japan. However, with the release of new figures from major advertising firm Dentsu’s CSR organization, DDL (Dentsu Corporate Communication 2015), and in response to socio-political concerns in the run-up to the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the acronym LGBT came to feature widely in news and current affairs shows. The term was also repeatedly explained to the public through verbal and textual descriptions, such as captions and flip-card technology that facilitated a layer of textual hyper-visibility.

Impact captions and flip-card technology are key parts of contemporary Japanese television media. Both occupy the visual field and convey information regarding the content of a broadcast. Impact captioning appears simultaneously with the speech heard in a broadcast. Flip-cards are used to reveal additional information relevant to the broadcast. Research into impact captions in variety programs has shown how captions manipulate the meaning of content (Park 2009, O’Hagan 2010, Gerow 2010, Sasamoto 2014). In light entertainment and variety programs, font type, color, animation and orthography, as well as placement and timing, are manipulated too for comedic effect (Park 2009, O’Hagan 2010, Gerow 2010, Sasamoto 2014, Shiota 2001, 2005).
variety shows, impact captions operate to induce laughter in much the same way as canned laughter does (O’Hagan 2010). Little research, however, refers to news and current affairs broadcasting or newer technologies such as digital flip-cards. Let us look at two examples of the use of flip-card technology and impact captioning that frames the discourse of the ‘LGBT’ boom as represented in light news and documentary programming.

Societal understanding toward ‘LGBT and the like’

On June 7, 2015, the weekly news and current affairs program, Shinsō hōdō Bankisha! (NTV), hereafter Bankisha, aired a 15-minute segment on ‘LGBT: Societal understanding, familial understanding’ (LGBT: Shakai no Rikai Kazoku no Rikai). In the opening to the segment, a digital monitor that blends both the quiz format and the informational format of the flip-card is used to introduce and explain the LGBT acronym (Figure 13.1).

Flip-cards have traditionally been a paper-based medium. However, digital technologies are increasingly being used. In an annual report on trends in audiovisual broadcasting, Sudo et al. (2013) point to both the cost-effectiveness and versatility of
digital monitors. Unlike paper-based flip-cards that are disposed of after use, monitors are multifunctional. They can display text and graphics like flip-cards, and can also be used as prompters and retake displays on location (Sudo et al. 2013, p. 406). The change in technology also alters how they are used. Smaller paper-based flip-cards are often hand-held by an announcer or MC who reveals the information contained by removing an adhesive covering layered over the board. Although the look of the adhesive covering is sometimes reproduced in graphics, if the human hand is now used at all, it is to point to or tap the screen to prompt the appearance of text on a screen. The positioning of the newscaster or announcer’s body in relation to the media displayed therefore differs producing a different kinetic relationship to the information being displayed. The resulting configuration mimics that of the positioning of an instructor pointing to relevant sections of text to be learnt and understood. This impacts on the way in which information is presented to viewers, and strengthens the pedagogical stance employed in media representations of the term ‘LGBT’. For example, the digital monitor used in the opening of the ‘LGBT: Societal understanding, familial understanding’ segment in the June 7 Bankisha episode provides the answer to the question Fukuzawa Akira poses directly to the camera/viewer: ‘Actress Jodie Foster, Singer Elton John, Apple CEO Tim Cook, Swimmer Ian Thorpe. So, do you know what
these people all have in common?’

As Fukuzawa speaks, the camera pans large photos of each of the personalities mentioned that have been placed in a diagonal line in the studio. The shot then widens to include Fukuzawa himself standing behind the photos. He continues, ‘all right, the answer is’ and the shot widens again to include the digital monitor on which ‘LGBT’ is displayed in synch with his final words: ‘this, LGBT and the like, sexual minorities’. The diagonal line of photos leads to the yellow screen displayed on the monitor in the center of which the acronym ‘LGBT’ appears in black text. The other ‘main caster’ Natsume Miku\textsuperscript{13} stands next to the monitor. Behind the monitor are panels of portrait photographs from the Out in Japan project.\textsuperscript{14} Two guests are seated to the left of the screen behind Fukuzawa. In this opening sequence, we have visually been drawn into the answer to Fukuzawa’s quiz question in a manner that frames ‘LGBT’ as a hitherto unknown concept that needs to be explained.

Immediately following the staged introduction, the camera shifts to a shot of Natsume who, poised to offer a definition, orients her body to the screen and points to
the LGBT acronym. She carefully annunciates each letter ‘L G B T’ before pausing to add: ‘the meaning of this word is …’. There is another slight pause before the display changes to show the letters running vertically down on the left. Pointing to the blank space on the right of the monitor Natsume provides explanations for each letter as the word for it appears: ‘L is lesbian, women attracted to each other; G is gay, men attracted to each other, and B is bisexual, those who are attracted regardless of whether male or female, T is transgender, which means GID and others whose gender identity and sex are different’ (Figure 13.2). Lesbian (rezubian), gay (gei), bisexual (baisekusharu) and transgender (toransujendā) appear written as transliterations of the English in katakana (the boxed syllabary used to represent loan-words in standardized Japanese writing). An additional term ‘ryōseiai’ appears next to bisexual enclosed in brackets in smaller font. The phrase seidōishitsuseishōgai nado (Gender Identity Disorder and the like) also appears next to transgender. Note that the explanation for transgender contains both the term ‘GID’ (seidōishitsusei- shōgai) and ‘and the like’ (nado). In fact, in his opening Fukuzawa also uses nado (‘and the like/ etc./ and so on’) when he rephrases LGBT as ‘sexual minorities’. This use of ‘and the like’ is repeated throughout the segment, creating a sense that the term LGBT is larger and perhaps more encompassing of the definition that is being offered within the confines of the studio.
The opening stance of the program assumes a lack of familiarity on the viewer’s part with the term ‘LGBT’. The use of a quiz-style opening question followed by a verbal definition, then the use of the digital monitor with accompanying explanation is not only highly repetitive, but also positions the phrase as one which is unknown. The examples of well-known personalities prefaces the educational force of the explanation, which is visually highlighted through both Natsume’s orientation to the monitor and the text displayed therein. Viewers are situated as pupils engaged in a pedagogical endeavor, being schooled in all things LGBT. This pedagogical framework seems at odds with the representation of contemporary Japanese society as progressive in its understanding of ‘LGBT issues’. The program stresses the ‘progress’ being made in the area of same-sex partnership recognition – as evidenced in Shibuya ward’s Same-sex Partnership Ordinance and support being offered by industry and businesses – however, it also seeks to question the feelings and experiences of ‘LGBT people and the like’ (tōjisha-tachi; literally ‘persons concerned’) by emphasizing the hardships faced by
two same-sex couples as they negotiate relationships with their families.

The documentary of the same-sex couples that is embedded in the Bankisha LGBT episode starts with shots from the 2015 Tokyo Rainbow Pride event. Images of booths operated by foreign embassies, global companies and local businesses visually highlight support for the LGBT community. Once again, the phrase ‘LGBT and the like’ appears, this time as part of the caption explaining the event that visually cites the narration (Example 1). And, in the 9-second stretch of narration that describes the Pride event the term ‘LGBT’ is both verbally and visually cited.

Example 1. Bankisha (June 2015)

UL: Bankisha!16

UR: # ‘LGBT’ o meguru rikai # Ōkii na henka no ippō de … Shin// sō [Understanding around ‘LGBT’ in the midst of huge changes … facts]

LM: Tokyo Rainbow Pride // #LGBT# nado e no rikai o fukame // henken o nakusō to iu ibento [Tokyo Rainbow Pride: An event to deepen understanding and eliminate discrimination of LGBT and the like]

Narration: kore wa LGBT, seiteki mainoritī no hitobito e no rikai o fukame henken o nakusō to iu ibento da. [This is an event to deepen understanding about and eliminate prejudice toward LGBT, people of sexual minorities.]
In the text layered on the screen ‘LGBT’ has been highlighted through both color and the use of citation marks and is therefore been made hyper-visible. However, there is already tension inscribed into this visibility via the use of the ellipsis mark (…) in the upper-right caption that orientates viewers toward a story that will undoubtedly tell of continued challenges. Indeed, the documentary goes on to follow the struggles of two same-sex couples to gain acceptance and understanding from their families, even in the midst of a celebrated increase in societal understanding.

When we return to the studio at the end of the documentary section, Fukuzawa and Katayama are now seated. Fukuzawa holds a paper-based flip-card that replicates the contents of the digital monitor used in the opening (Figure 13.1). The program has come full-circle to return again to a visual citation of the program’s definition of LGBT. Fukuzawa asks special guest Sugiyama Fumino – a transgender activist – to identify the greatest issue currently facing LGBT people. ‘There are too many,’ Sugiyama answers. He then explains that although ‘we are thought to not exist’ (ina hito to sareteiru) it is more accurate to say that ‘we can’t speak out’ (ienai) openly. He then points to the panel
of photographs from the Out in Japan project that decorates the studio as an example of making LGBT visible (mieruka). He astutely suggests that although it is usually implied that sexual minorities experience problems, it is equally important to question how the pressures exerted by the ‘majority’ exasperates those problems. This closing echoes Kakefuda’s writings in the ‘gay boom’ era that stress that a notion of tolerance is actually an act of ‘not seeing’ and therefore an issue of in/visibility in the midst of extreme media visibility.

LGBT markets opening up the future

The ‘LGBT x economy: Sexual minorities carve out the future’ episode of NHK’s Sakidori Trends and Business17 (November 15, 2015) follows a narrative similar to the Bankisha news segment – that of progressive awareness of LGBT issues within Japan. This time, however, the focus is on markets and business. The episode opens with footage of the partner registration in Shibuya. Higashi Koyuki and Masuhara Hiroko, the couple who campaigned for permission to wear wedding dresses at their Tokyo Disneyland wedding ceremony, are shown speaking at their news conference upon being the first couple to register and receive a certificate from Shibuya ward. Shots of
the local landmark the iconic Hachi, a statue of a dog that sits in the open area outside Shibuya station, wearing a sash advertising the issuance of same-sex partnership certificates is spliced into this segment. The accompanying narration notes that ‘social recognition of LGBT, so-called sexual minorities, is currently progressing’ in contemporary Japan. The link from partnership registration to business chances is achieved with the next phrase: ‘in the midst of this, businesses targeting them are making moves’. The caption ‘LGBT x economy // sexual minorities carve out the future’ appears on the top right of the screen. The term ‘LGBT’ is rendered in rainbow colors. White font with yellow highlighting is used for ‘economy’. The colors have clearly been selected for their symbolic resonance; the rainbow-color motif is often used to represent LGBT pride and social movements, and the gold-like connotations of yellow suggest wealth. This design continues into the impact captions – subtitle-like captions that appear in synch with the audio track.

Just over 35 seconds into the broadcast, as the narrator turns to companies who are making moves into the LGBT market, a rainbow-colored caption ‘LGBT’ slides from the left and a yellow-hued caption ‘economy’ slides from the right of screen. The ‘x’ oscillates as the animated texts collide at the center of the screen. The ‘x’ diminishes in size and falls. All of this is accompanied by a sparkling sound effect. This kind of
animation is common to variety programming, and is increasingly used in light infotainment-style shows. As the narrator cites the figures from Dentsu’s (2015) estimate of the value of the LGBT market, the caption ‘6-trillion yen market’ replaces the ‘LGBT x economy’ caption. Once again font, size, color and placement are used to highlight specific terms from the narration and frame the program itself. At this point, the title caption is still in place at the right of the screen and there is a visual repetition of the theme ‘LGBT x economy’. The captions fit well within the Sakidori concept that aims to delve into the latest trends and business concerns.

With the size and importance of the LGBT market clearly identified, ‘LGBT’ are marked as ‘trendsetters’. With a whooshing sound effect, the word ‘trendsetter’ (in purple font) is layered over footage of the Tokyo pride parade. Drink packaging, luxury cars and men’s underwear are shown as examples of booms instigated by marketing to LGBT consumers who ‘are not sticklers to existing values’. Impact captions are used to highlight the reactions of anonymous passersby asked to comment on the bright and colorful men’s underwear currently ‘booming’. Next, special guest Leslie Kee – a Singaporean photographer working in Japan – is introduced as a photographer to the stars. Examples of the images he has shot are projected, showing the names of the stars in English. The Out in Japan: 10,000 Portraits project is introduced, and as images of
the photo shoot dominate the screen, the words lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and x-gender are layered onto the screen. Each moves separately, first from left and then from right onto the screen. The Japanese transliteration of these terms (in a white font with a yellow border) is layered with the English (in white with pink-bordered text). Sections of an interview with Kee – where he explains that the talents of LGBT peoples are just waiting to be uncovered – is also layered with impact captions. Finally, at the end of the introduction to the episode, the narrator explains that: ‘today we focus on the financial frontline which has started to connect with LGBT sexual minorities’.

The caption now shown on the bottom of screen reads ‘making a future with LGBT’ and therefore differs to the title caption on the top right of the screen which still reads ‘LGBT x economy // sexual minorities open up a future’.

This brief description of the 3-minute 17-second opening of Sakidori gives an indication of the sheer volume of text that is layered onto the screen. The use of text onscreen has always been a feature of Japanese broadcasting. However, as Shitara’s (2011) research on text in broadcasts from the NHK archives has shown, the amount of text shown in 30 minutes of programming has increased from just over 20 instances per 30 minutes of broadcasting in the 1960s, to just under 120 instances per 30 minutes of broadcasting in the 2000s for variety programming on NHK. In this Sakidori episode,
key terms from the narration are layered as short captions. Selected utterances from the interviews with employees of the marketing company, the passers-by on the street and special guest Leslie Kee are also rendered as impact captions. Each utilizes a different color scheme. Park’s (2009) work on impact captions used in Korean television clearly indicates that this style of captioning not only shapes the interpretation of content, but also influences the social positioning of speakers whose words and/or supposed thoughts have been visualized as text-on-screen. This is achieved through linking visual representations to editorial interpretations of the affective content of the utterances. As with the Bankisha episode analyzed above, ‘LGBT’ is positioned, through the use of color and animation, as a diverse yet somehow clearly identifiable group that exists separately from the viewer. Although removed from the viewer, LGBT is positioned as a key player in strengthening the Japanese economy through as yet untapped markets and trendsetting patterns of consumption.

The viewer has now been exposed to a rich explanation of the contemporary movement around LGBT markets, in which the meaning of the term ‘LGBT’ has been layered onto the screen. However, before the guests – celebrity photographer Leslie Kee and drag-queen performer and essayist Bourbonne – are introduced, the acronym ‘LGBT’ is defined using a paper-based flip-card (Figure 13.2). In a style that resonates
with the example from Bankisha discussed above, the explanation is preaced by a question. Announcer Katayama Chieko asks: ‘So, just what is LGBT? Let’s explain.’ She then points to each letter on the flip-card she holds cradled in her arm, and spells out each term: ‘L Lesbian female homosexual, G Gay male homosexual, B Bisexual, T Transgender, someone who feels dissonance between their heart/ mind and physical sex, Take the first letters, to call LGBT, right.’ After explaining each letter, Katayama then removes an adhesive rainbow flag at the top of the flip-card to reveal the percentage of the population said to be LGBT-identified according to the 2015 Dentsu online survey: ‘and LGBT people make up 7.6% of the population, that means that one in every 13 people is LGBT’ (image 7).

Directly addressing the viewer, co-presenter and radio personality Jon Kabira contextualizes the figure: ‘so, in other words, right, um what size is a primary or junior high school class? According to that percentage there are or were 2 or 3 LGBT people in each class.’ In this very radio-style of presentation, Kabira asks viewers to reflect on the size of our school classes and acknowledge LGBT as ‘considerably familiar or close’ (kanari midika na sonzai, literally ‘a familiar/close being/existence’). This utterance demonstrates the educational stance of the show. As with the Bankisha example above, the viewer is configured as being ignorant as to the meaning of the
acronym LGBT, and to matters of the LGBT market. Similarly, through the use of flipcard technology, textual information is employed to define LGBT. In a highly heteronormative move, this keihatsu (awareness) stance constructs an ignorant majority who must be educated in matters concerning sexual minorities.

Writing sexual identity onto the small screen

As we have seen in this chapter, there has been a dramatic increase in reporting on issues related to sexual minorities in Japan in news and current affairs genres. While reporting in these genres differs significantly to that of entertainment programming, the tabloidization of news has led to an increased use of captions that is coupled with informational tools such as flip-cards, and the volume of text-on-screen has dramatically increased. This textual information visualizes specific segments of a broadcast that have been selected by the production team in the editorial process.

The captions and flip-cards used extensively in mainstream television occupy the visual field and convey information regarding the content of a broadcast. Both are citational, and although they appear simultaneously with speech at the point of broadcast, they represent language and ideas produced prior to that moment. Captions
and flip-cards not only cite previous speech and/or display previously stated ideas, they also form part of the chain of citations that informs public opinions of social groups, issues and events.

In these captions and flip-cards, font, orthography, animation and graphics are manipulated to reflect a specific interpretation of events, people and situations. Although the manipulation of these elements for comedic effect is not evident in the news and current affairs segments analyzed here, what emerges is a practice of defining and inscribing LGBT onto the screen such that the viewer’s ignorance of LGBT communities and issues is facilitated via the act of visual citation itself. This process of entextualization, or text-making (Bauman and Briggs 1990, Briggs and Bautman 1992, Park 2009), and mediatization (Jaffe 2009) regiments understandings of peoples through editorial manipulation of visual semiotics and language ideologies (Irvine and Gal 2000, Johnson and Milani 2010, Schieffelin et al. 1998, Silverstein 1979). In this process, views ‘inconsistent with the ideological scheme’ (Irvine and Gal 2000, p. 38) of the program and the broadcaster are erased.

Text and graphics layered onto audiovisual media in post-production editing act to inscribe a particular editorial reading onto the broadcast package. In reporting on ‘LGBT issues’ and ‘LGBT markets’ in contemporary Japanese media, the ‘official
reading’ (Park 2009) is one of positive social change and the potential for market expansion. However, the citational practices that inscribe this onto the screen also facilitate the hyper-visibility of LGBT peoples and the normalization of heteronormative ignorance.

Tolerance facilitated by in/visibility echoes in the results of a 2015 survey exploring attitudes toward sexual minorities. Forty percent of respondents indicated that they had seen fewer media portrayals of lesbians compared to other ‘minority’ groups (Kamano et al. 2015). The result is remarkable when we consider that women have been at the forefront of calls for recognition of same-sex partnership rights since at least the so-called ‘gay boom’ years of the early 1990s when Kakefuda was writing (Ōtsuka 2009, Sugiura et al. 2007, Tsutsui 2004, Izumo 1993, Ito 1993, Yanase and Ito 1994). In the interim years as well, lesbian-identified activists and personalities have been active in the public sphere. Since the mid-2010s a growing number of books have also been published; many of these discussing same-sex partnership rights in an easily accessible format featuring creatively contemporary titles such as Lesbianish Married Life (Lezubian-teki Kekkon Seikatsu; Higashi and Masuhara 2014) and Bian marriage (Bian-kon; Ichinose 2016). We can only conclude that in the well-documented recycling of queer images in Japanese popular media (Ishida and Murakami 2006, Maree 2014),
lesbian, bisexual and queer women remain in/visible.

The implications of media hyper-visibility are evident elsewhere. Although 80 percent of respondents reported having seen male-to-female transgender people in the media, in the same 2015 survey, a quarter of all respondents indicated resistance to sex reassignment. Furthermore, just fewer than 60 percent of male respondents, and just over 35 percent of female respondents registered ‘disgust’ at the thought of male-to-male sexual relations. The saturation of the media with images of queer/queen personalities does not seemingly result in greater acceptance of either transgender issues or male-to-male sex.

Situating the 2015 survey results alongside media reports that call on industry to ‘capture’ sleeping LGBT markets and foster awareness of LGBT people in the lead-up to the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics highlights the need to engage in critical approaches to media analysis. As we become witness to corporate expansion into so-called rainbow markets and to the proliferation of political discourses pertaining to LGBT rights, we must critically think through the entanglement of discourses of tolerance/acceptance and in/visibility.

Notes
1 This research was supported under Australian Research Council’s Discovery Projects funding scheme (project number DP150102964).

2 The title of an episode of retired comedian Kamioka Ryūtarō’s (1947–) popular variety show Kamioka Ryūtarō ga zubari (Kamioka Ryūtarō cuts to the heart), which aired on TBS 1992–1996. For a discussion of the Fifty gay men episode of the show, see Hall (2000).

3 This chapter follows Japanese conventions for Japanese names where the last name is followed by the first name.

4 This search includes the Asahi Newspaper national and prefectural editions (1985–) as well as the weekly magazine Aera.

5 In this chapter I will use the term LGBT to reflect the current usage in the Japanese language media.

6 The terms ‘flip board’, ‘flip’, and ‘pattern’ are also used. In this chapter I will use the term ‘flip-card’.

7 Section 6 of the Fundamental Principles of Olympism states that ‘The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Olympic Charter shall be secured without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other
status’ (International Olympic Committee 2015).

8 Hase, a former Olympic and professional wrestler, attributes his own growing awareness of LGBT issues to the boycotting of the Sochi Winter Olympics’ opening ceremony by several foreign leaders due to anti-gay legislation in Russia.

9 The data come from an ongoing project into text-on-the-screen funded by ARC DP150102964. Thanks to the research assistants who have assisted with the initial transcription.

10 Shinsō hōdō Bankisha is a live news and current affairs show broadcast weekly on Sunday. The title literally translates as ‘Truthful reporting: On the beat’.

11 Circa 1964, the NHK production standards showed two sizes of flip-cards, A-size; 180mm– 265mm and B-size; 263mm– 365mm (Hirotani 2014, p. 75).

12 Fukuzawa Akira (1963– ) is a freelance announcer and television personality. He is one of two ‘main casters’ on Shinsō hōdō Bankisha.

13 Natsume Miku (1983– ) is a freelance announcer. She is one of two ‘main casters’ on Shinsō hōdō Bankisha.

14 The project aims ‘at shining the spotlight on sexual minorities in Japan – with various acclaimed photographers taking portraits of LGBT-identified individuals from all walks of life – with the goal of showcasing 10,000 portraits in the next five years’.
For more details see the official website: http://outinjapan.com/concept/

15 All translations by author unless otherwise stated.

16 This is the program logo.

17 Sakidori literally means ‘preemption’ or ‘anticipation’.

18 Prior to this Jon Kabira introduces the studio, which is adorned with portraits by Kee as part of the Out in Japan: 10,000 Portraits project. The white floor, too, has been punctuated with large tiles in each of the six colors of the rainbow.

19 Eighty percent of respondents reported have seen male-to-female transgender people, and only 60 percent reported seeing ‘female homosexuals’ (sic) in the media.

20 Bian is an abbreviation of ‘rezubian’, the Japanese transliteration of lesbian. The term was coined in 1990s activism to contest the derogatory term rezu (lez/ lezzie).

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