



HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

“The Nail That Sticks Out Gets Hammered Down”

LGBT Bullying and Exclusion in Japanese Schools



“The Nail That Sticks Out Gets Hammered Down”

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The comics in this report tell the stories of specific individuals Human Rights Watch interviewed, using their own words to describe their experiences. In a few instances the artist added language to provide necessary context. © 2016 Taiji Utagawa

Why are gays treated as if we don't exist?

Y.N, College student



I was bullied when I was in elementary school. After that, I stopped going to school. However, I decided to go back to school when it was time for me to enter high school. For me, that decision required a lot of courage.

After I started going to school, I was able to get used to it better than I had expected, so I was a bit relieved.

No one imagines that there are gays around them. That's why everyone talks badly about gay people.

I wonder whether there are any gay people in this school

If there is, I will ask for an injunction not to come close to me.

Cheers!

Good morning!

But ever since I realized that I was gay, there was a feeling that dampened my heart.

You forgot your notebook at the Mc Donalds yesterday!

Oops I didn't realize!

Even though I had learned that there is nothing bad about being gay...

You are awesome!
I love you

Stop it, people will think that you are really homos



Everywhere in my high school life, I heard discriminatory comments against gay people.

Gays live just like everyone else – we care about our friends and have dreams for the future.

But no one ever imagine how sad gay people would feel when they hear those comments.

HA HA HA

Hehe,
what you said
is discriminatory

Who cares about
discrimination
I want what I dislike
to disappear

Then a thought came to me –
if everyone realised that
they have a gay classmate,
maybe something would change.

I am shocked already
just by the fact that
you are gay –
don't make more
troubles in school too!

My mother
strongly
opposed.

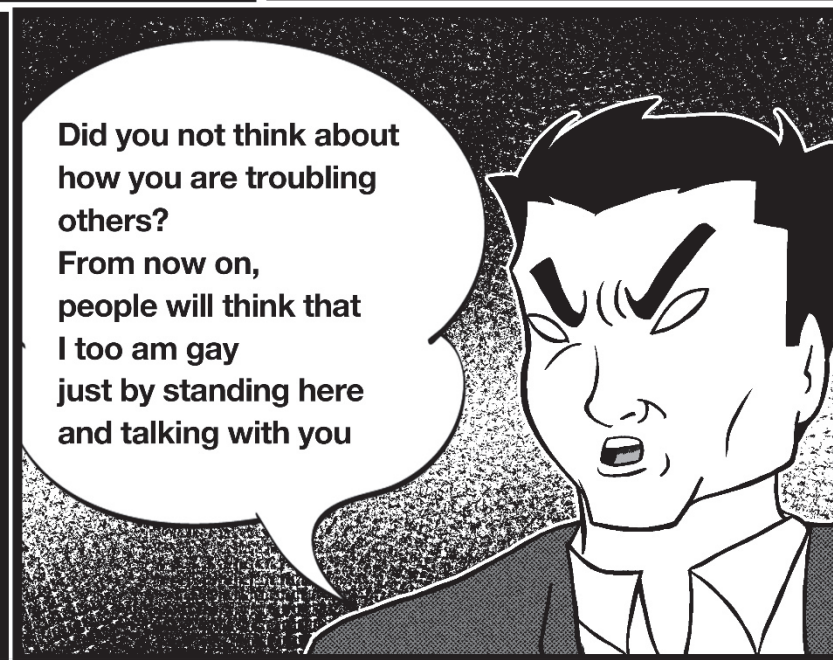
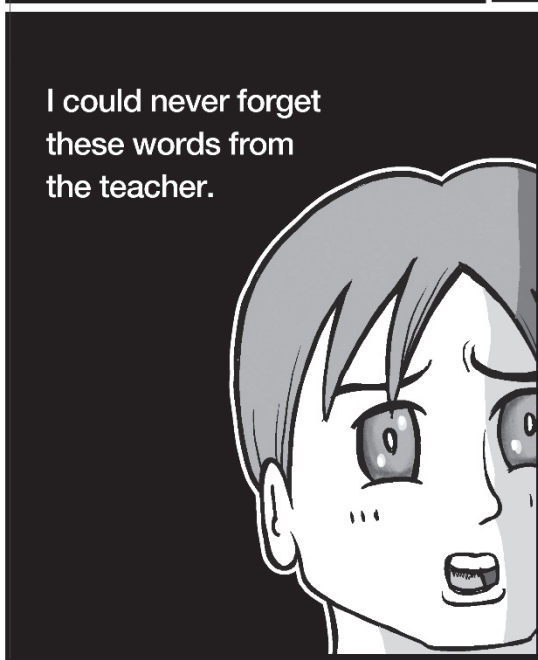
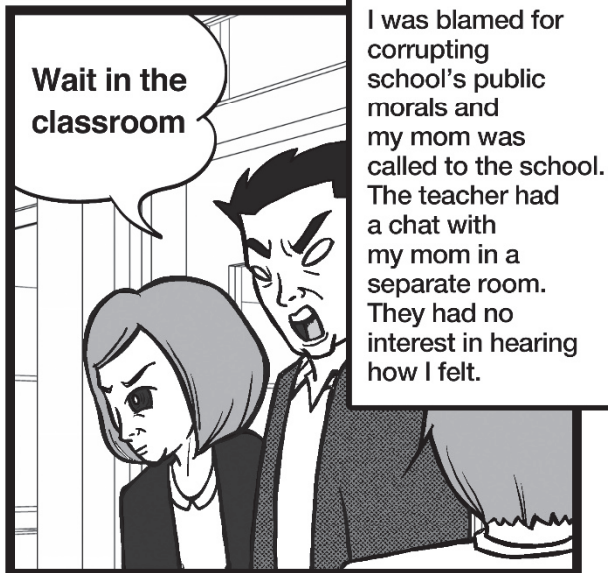
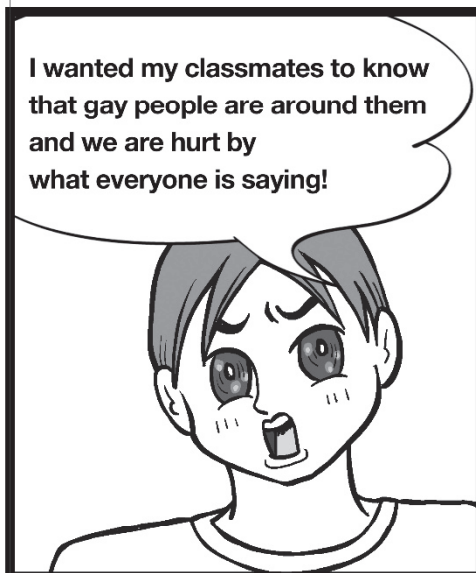
Mom, I...
want to come out
at school

But, I still want
everyone to know –
that there are
gay people
around them.

Isn't it terrible
he is making me
seem like I'm gay

But at school,
not only students
but also teachers
were making discriminatory
comments.
Hearing them every day was
unbearable for me.

It would be horrible
to become gay



Since then,
serious bullying began.
Being ignored and physical violence
happened daily. People began to
frequently talk behind my back.



On social media like
twitter too –
I was bullied with my real name
and photos exposed.

I had to start using
nurse's room
when changing clothes.

Homos are
disgusting,
I want them
to disappear

I became
too scared
to attend
classes



Go change in the
girls' changing
room!

Get out !



“ Pretend that gays don't exist,
and if they exist, kick them out ”...
that's the kind of high school reality I lived in.
At that time, I often did not even realize how hurt I was.
But now, the scars from then have become pains
and continue to torment me today.



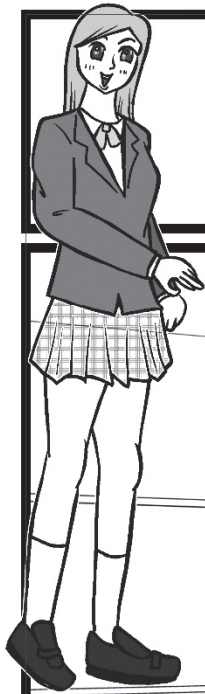
I know nothing about
gays and all that.
It is not bullying –
just friends
fooling around right?

Teacher hardly
ever consulted
with me.

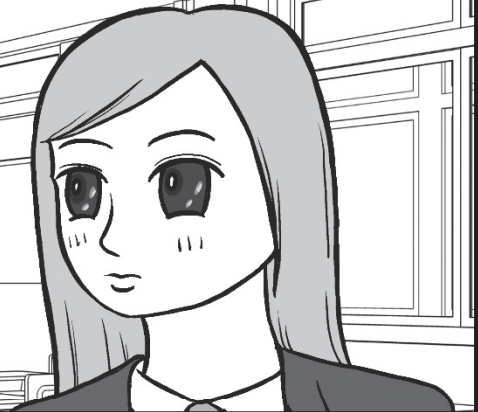
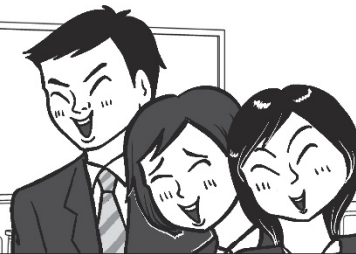


Teachers who know nothing about LGBT

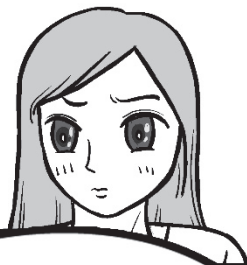
A.K, High school student



I knew that I liked people of the same sex,
but I did not feel like coming out to anyone.



I thought:
I should never say
to anyone that
I am a lesbian.



When I searched about homosexuality
and gay people on the internet,
I could tell that there are many people
who don't feel comfortable
about homosexuality.
I saw rude comments like...

They can live but
I don't want them
to come near me

I will quit
being friends
if I find out
they are
homosexuals

"There are people
who are homosexuals
but they have
an unnatural existence
as human beings, and their
morals are not good
either."

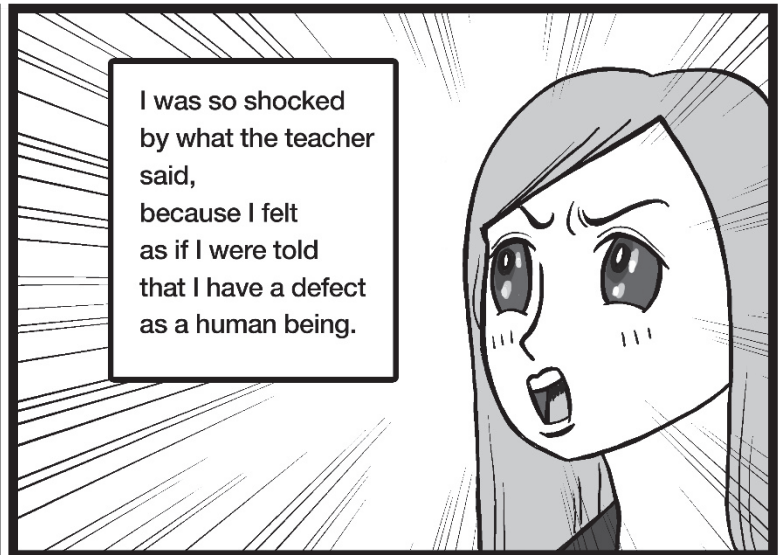
One day in class, the teacher said
"it is natural for a woman
to get married and
have children."





What happened?

I was so upset that I started crying.



I was so shocked by what the teacher said, because I felt as if I were told that I have a defect as a human being.



I felt like I was told that I am a human being unworthy to live

I told the nurse for the first time that I am a lesbian. I told everything to the nurse, including how shocking my teacher's comments were in the class.



I went to the nurse's room...

Tell me what happened

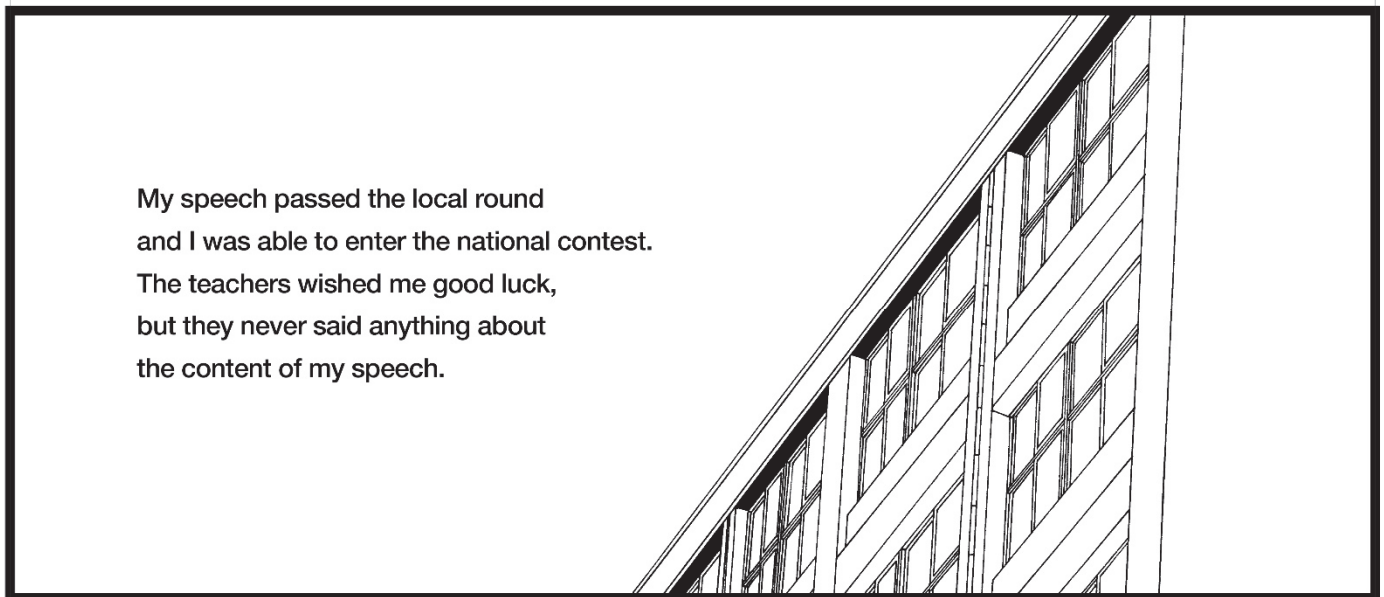
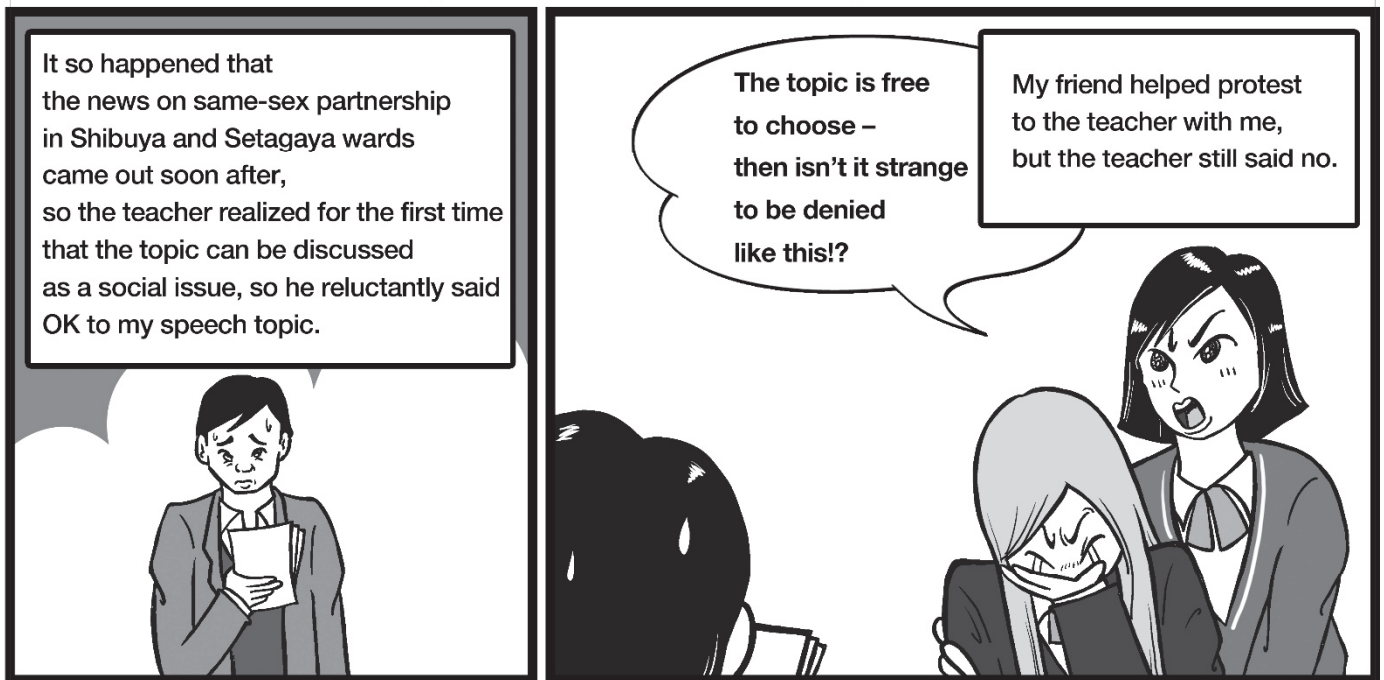


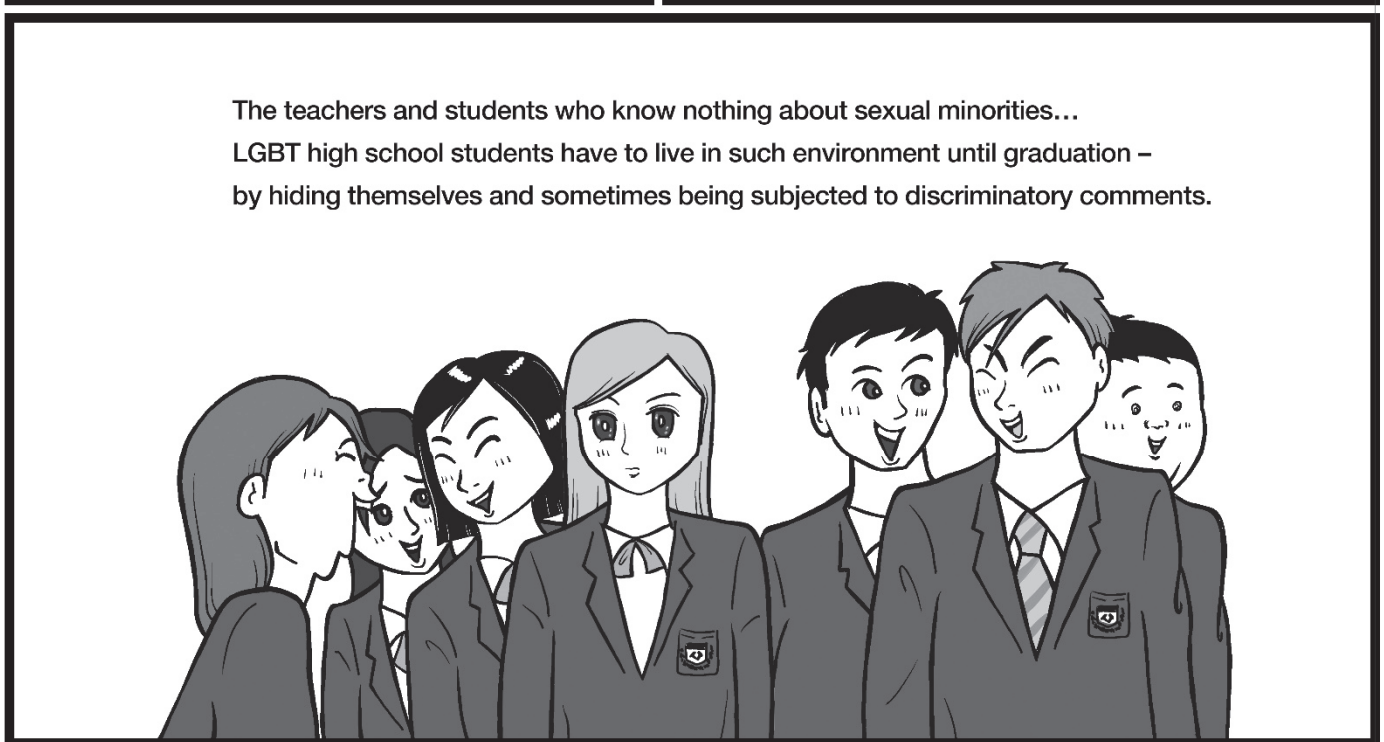
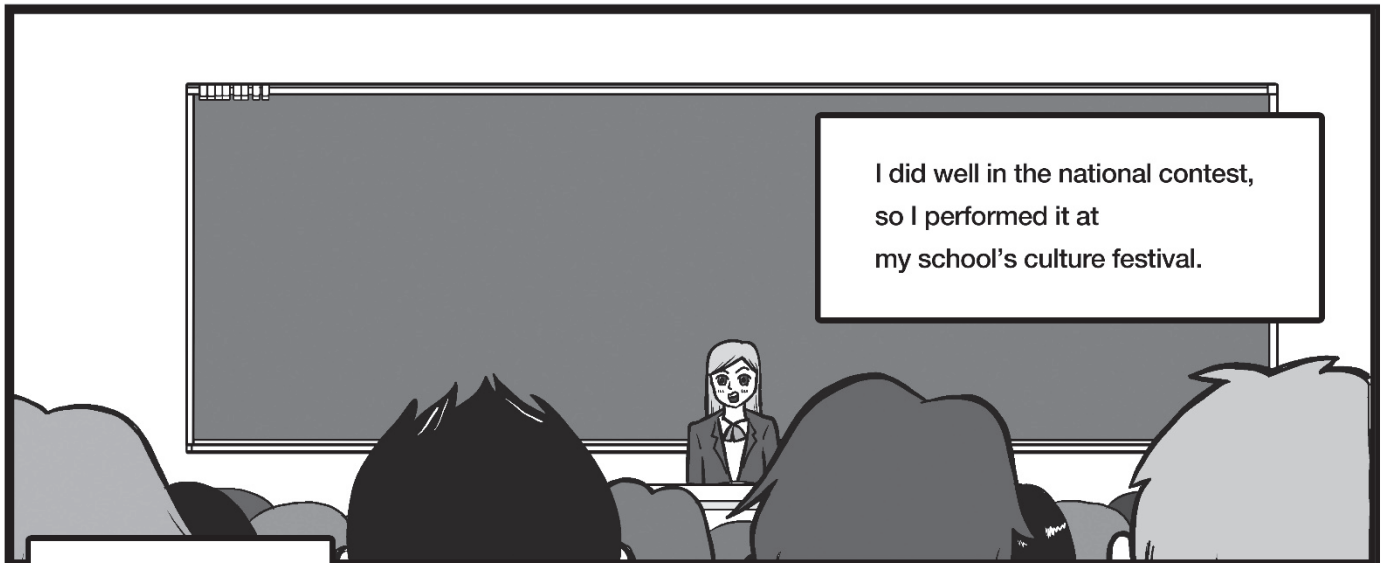
Both teachers and students know nothing about homosexuality. There is no opportunity for learning. They say it is "unnatural" or "not acceptable" while not knowing anything about it... When I thought about that, I couldn't stand it.



The nurse said "I cannot answer you well, because I know nothing about homosexuality. There is no opportunity to learn about it, so I think other teachers have no idea about it either."

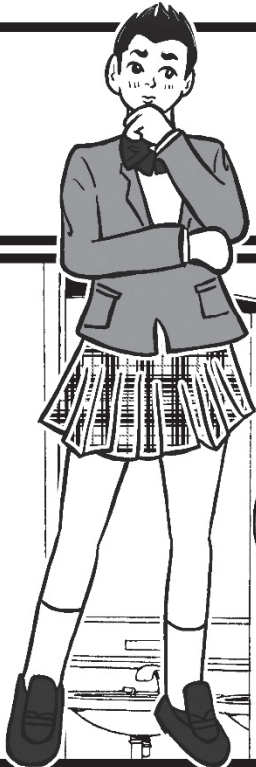
Will you teach me about homosexuality ?





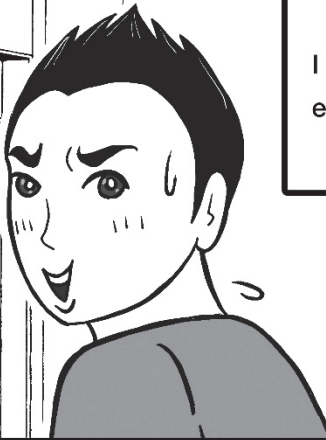
Do minorities have to make an effort to fit into the majority?

H.T, High school student

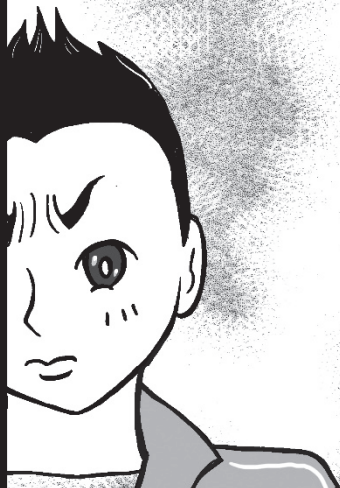


Ok,
no one is
here

I always have to
enter toilets secretly.



Please don't use
female toilets
because
it is disgusting



I feel uncomfortable being a female.
So it is painful to act like a woman.
I cannot make myself look like a woman either.
When I was in junior high,
my classmates often approached me
harshly about it.

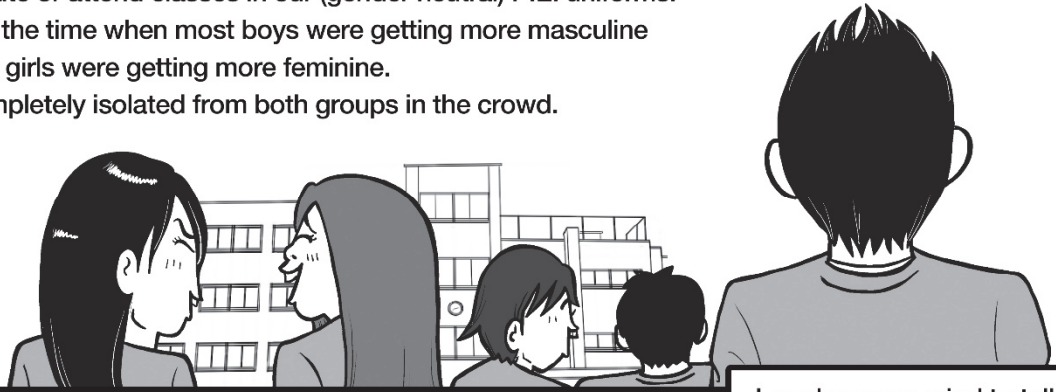
These things kept going,
so there was a time
when I became depressed
and could not go to school.



Perhaps,
you are
a man inside?



I eventually entered high school but that school did not allow students to commute or attend classes in our (gender neutral) P.E. uniforms. That was the time when most boys were getting more masculine and most girls were getting more feminine. I was completely isolated from both groups in the crowd.



And...
if possible...
I want to be
granted permission
to use
the male toilets



Can I at least
take this ribbon
off the uniform
during commutes?



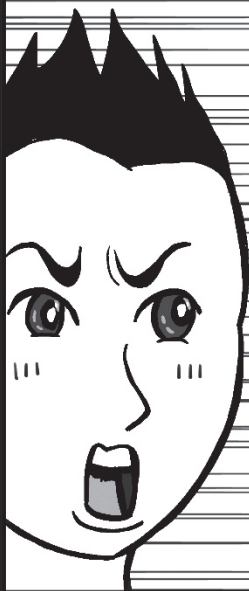
I made up my mind to tell
my teacher
that I felt uncomfortable
about my gender
and made a request
regarding my uniform.

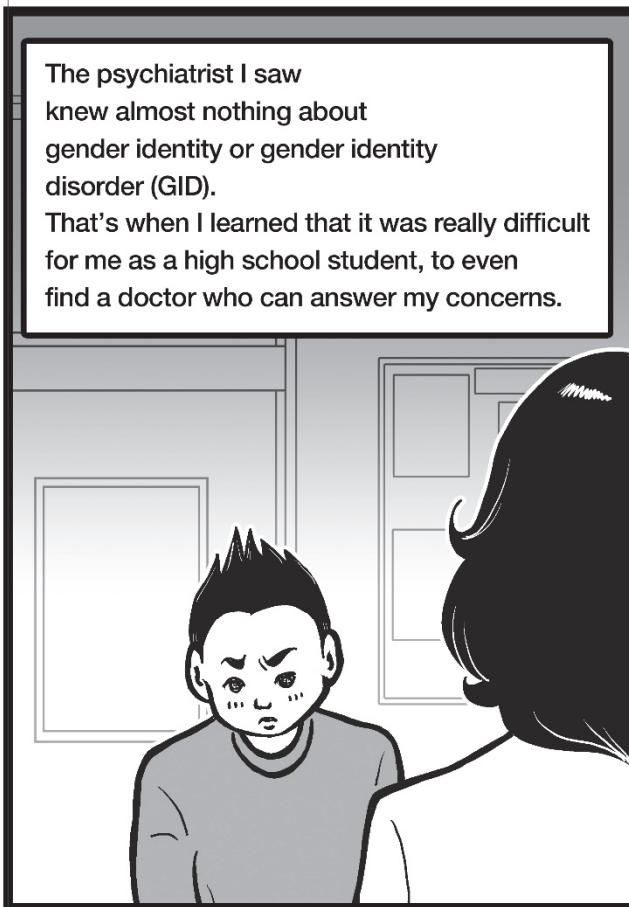
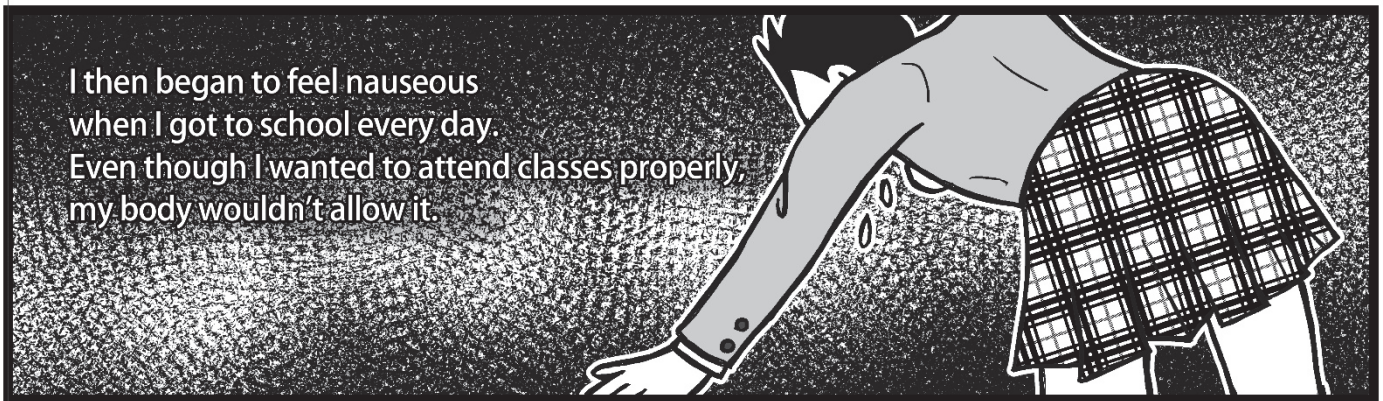
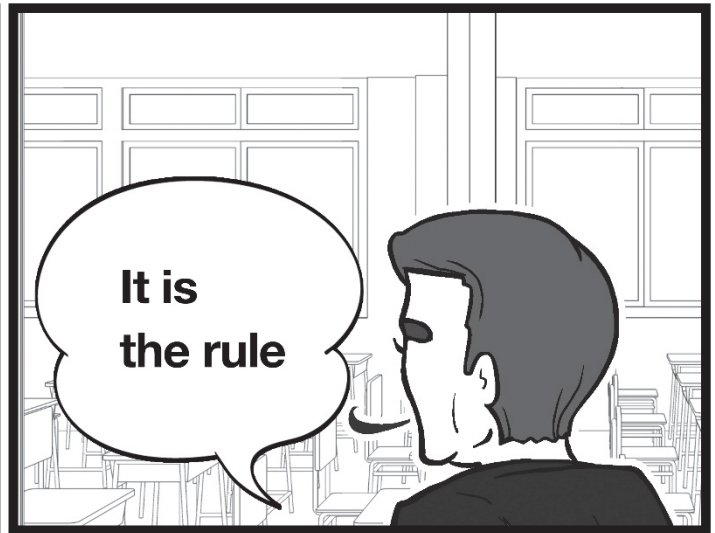
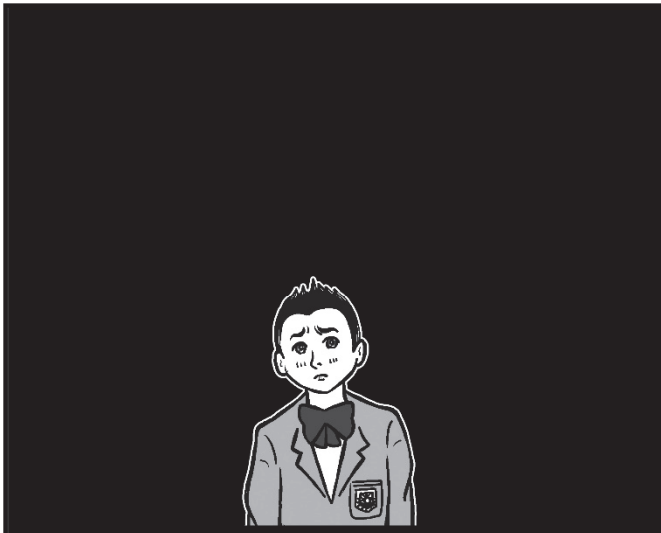


Both of those
cannot be
permitted

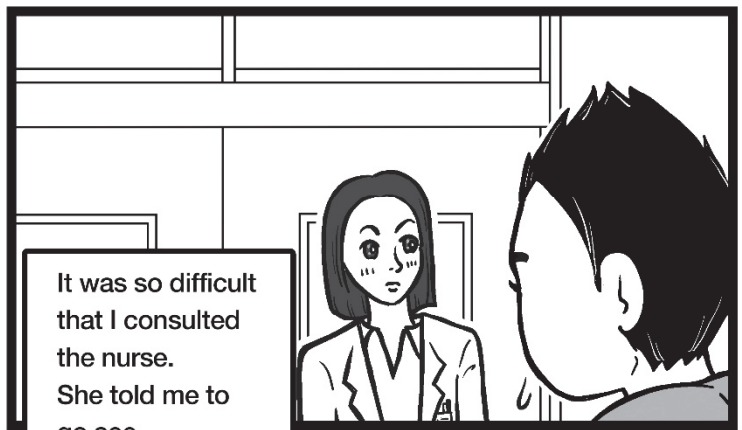


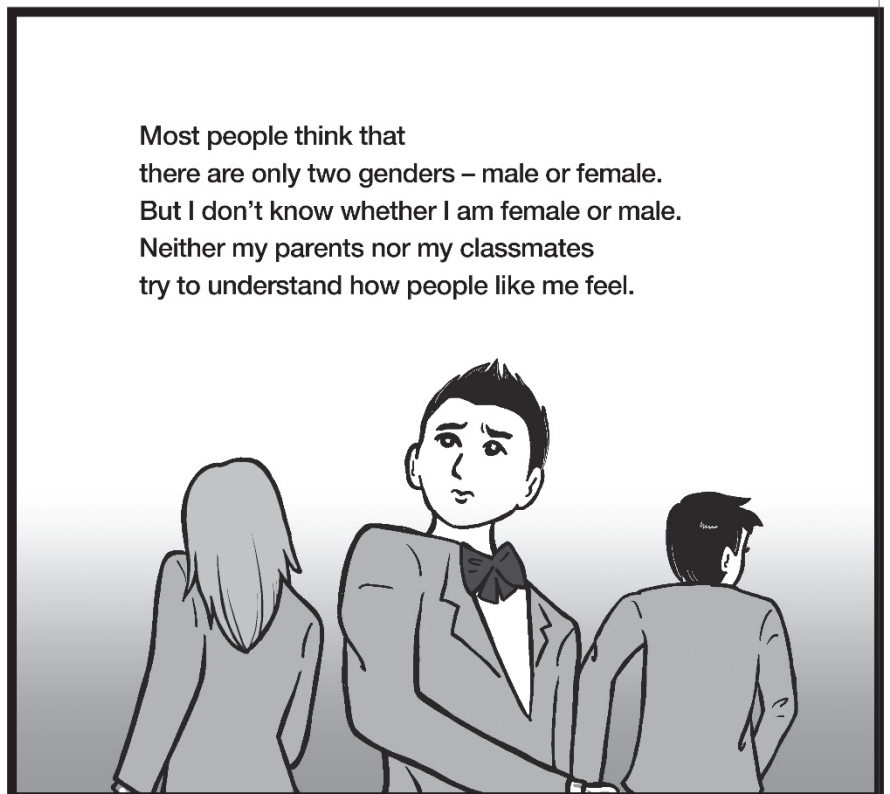
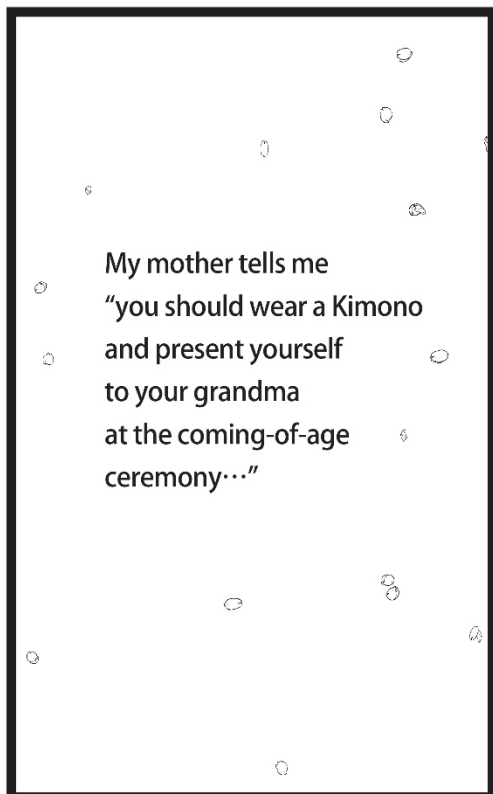
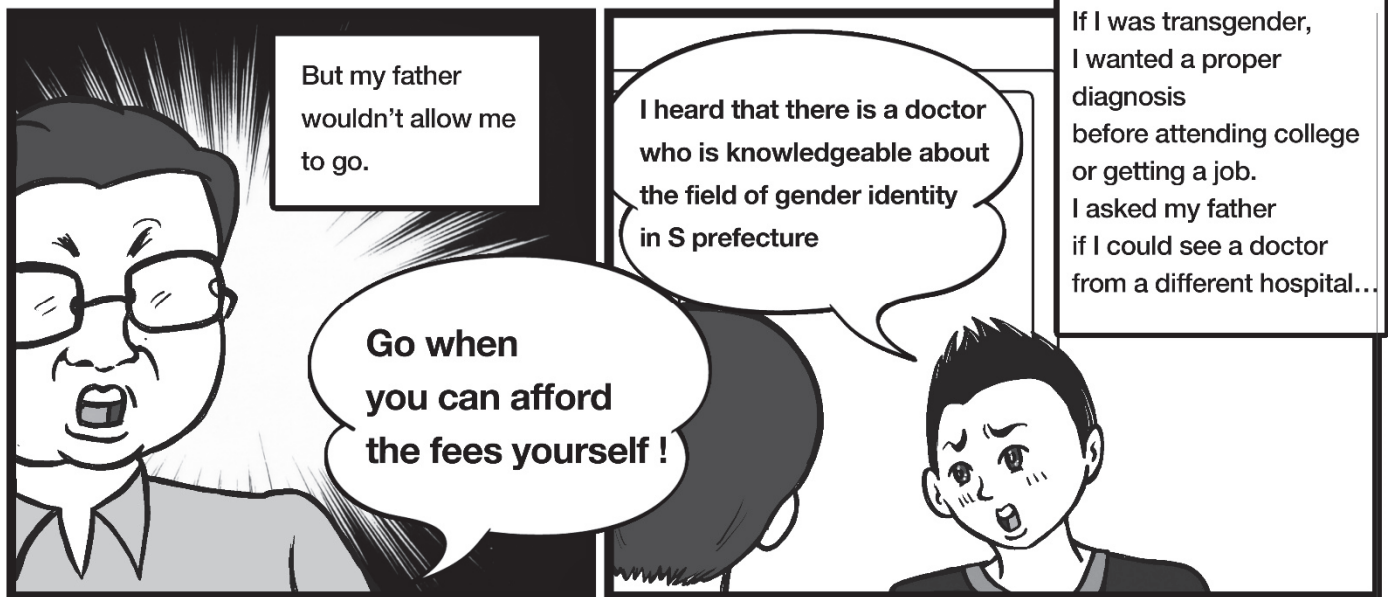
Why?
What kind of importance
does this ribbon carry?





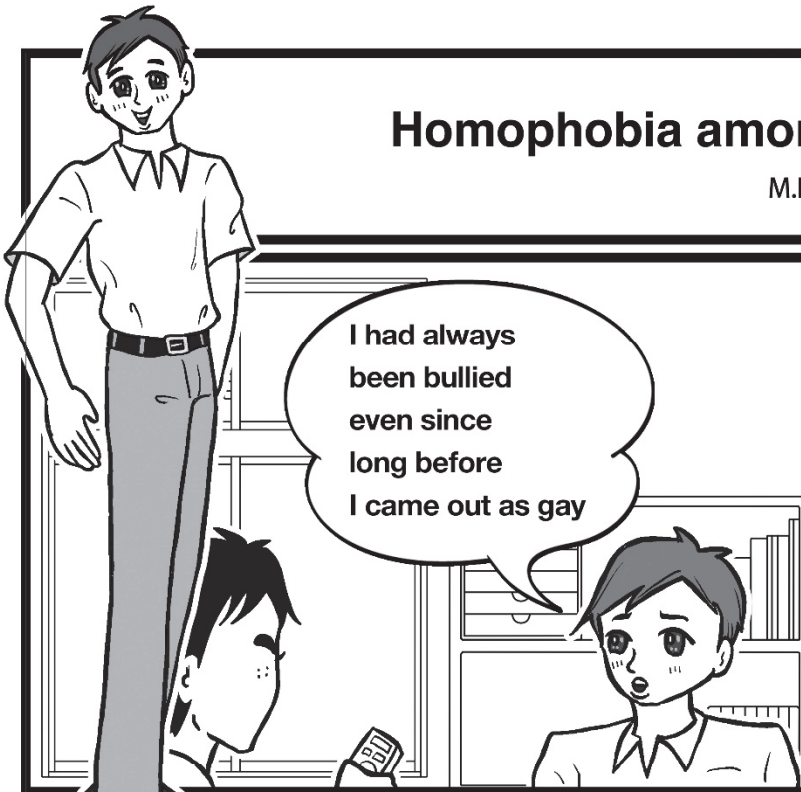
The psychiatrist I saw knew almost nothing about gender identity or gender identity disorder (GID). That's when I learned that it was really difficult for me as a high school student, to even find a doctor who can answer my concerns.



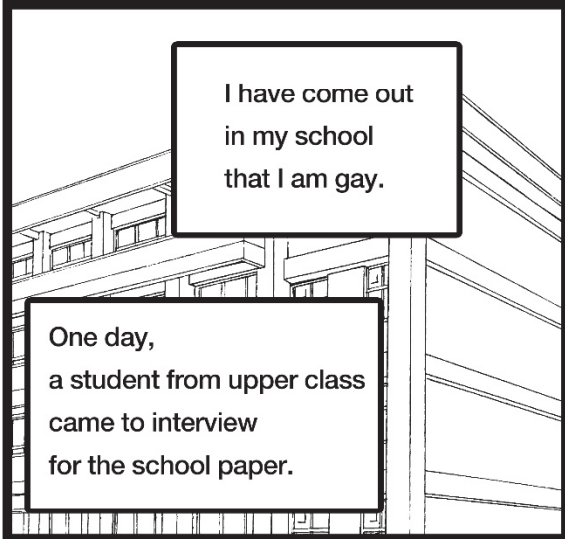


Homophobia among teachers

M.F, High school student



I had always
been bullied
even since
long before
I came out as gay



I have come out
in my school
that I am gay.

One day,
a student from upper class
came to interview
for the school paper.

I always thought:
I should not be who I am
I always have to
pretend as someone else.



I had been subjected to
serious physical violence
since I was little,
because
the way I talked
and acted
was different
from other boys



So that is why
you came out
as gay

Yes



But, it is
extremely hard
to live while
denying and
distorting
myself...

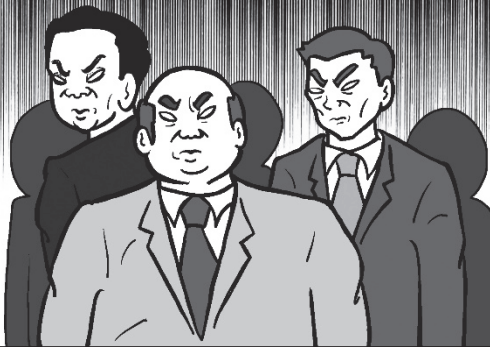
There were scribbles on notebooks I had to turn in... Things I needed to turn in were stolen and trashed... It continued in a way so that there is no place for me in the classroom



I was attacked even more seriously after I came out.



There are also teachers who explicitly show their homophobia

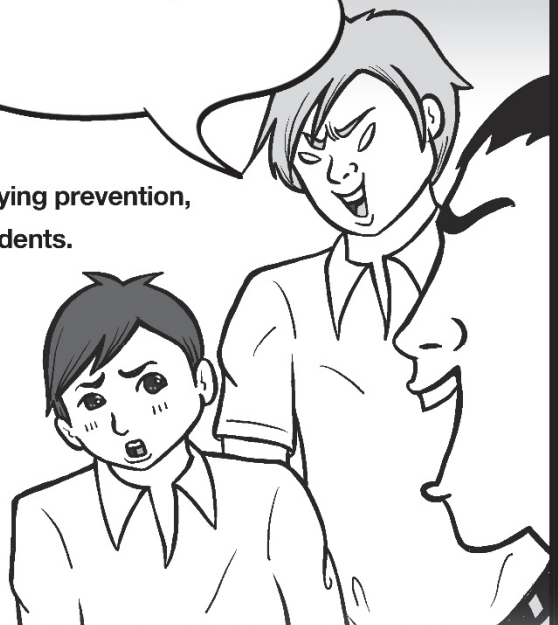


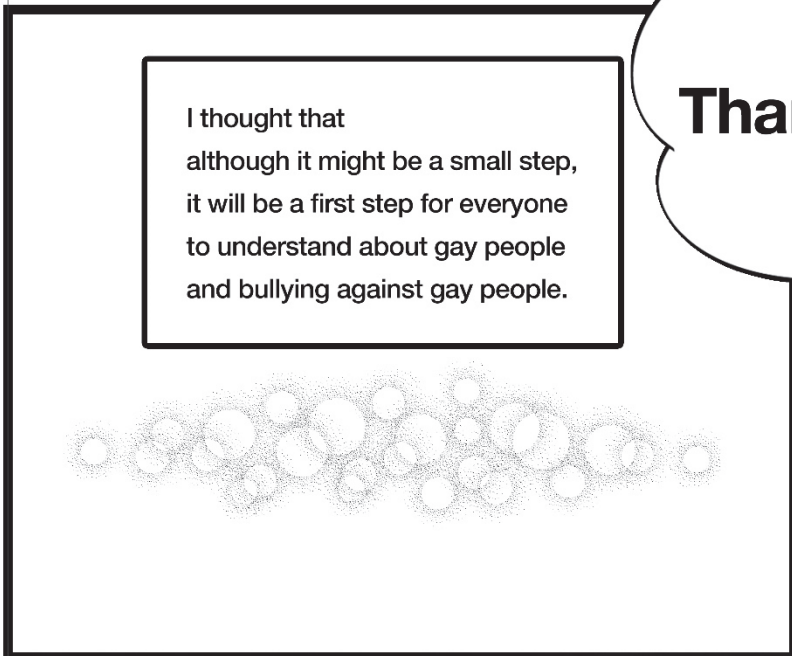
Then I realized something



Homos, die

My school puts efforts into bullying prevention, and teachers always watch students. But they pretend not to see, when bullying takes place because of being gay





No...

The article
with my interview
is nowhere to be seen...

But...

I could not
hide my shock
when I read
the school newspaper.

Don't publish
such a
disgusting
article !

A teacher...
requested to
take away the article
right before
the publication...

I thought that I was making a sincere appeal
about the current situation.
But then one word - "disgusting" - from the teacher
crushed and trashed the story I told from my heart.

What would heterosexuals feel,
if they are treated like that for being heterosexuals?

But I thought that the only way is to keep
making my appeal,
even though I was feeling a lot of frustration.

I am sorry that
it ended up like this
when you
took the courage
to speak out...

“The Nail That Sticks Out Gets Hammered Down”

LGBT Bullying and Exclusion in Japanese Schools

School bullying is a notorious problem in Japan. Students target peers they perceive to be different with harassment, threats, and sometimes violence—including by singling them out based on their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. The Japanese government compounds and even fuels this problem by promoting social conformity and a climate of “harmony” in schools, and by insisting that no student is more vulnerable to bullying than any other. In doing so, it fails to address the vulnerabilities of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students.

Based on more than 100 in-depth interviews with sexual and gender minority youth and Japanese education experts, *“The Nail That Sticks Out Gets Hammered Down”* examines the shortcomings in Japanese policies that expose LGBT students to bullying and inhibit their access to information and self-expression. Lack of comprehensive sex education, silence on LGBT topics in the national curriculum, and inadequate teacher training on sexual orientation and gender identity all contribute to LGBT students’ vulnerabilities. Policies that require transgender people to obtain a diagnosis of gender identity disorder as a first step toward gaining legal recognition are harmfully rigid and discriminatory, and can have a particularly harsh impact on youth.

While Japan’s education ministry has taken positive steps in recent years to recognize, understand, and protect LGBT students, further action is needed to develop specific policies to address bullying. As the public debate on LGBT rights in Japan gains momentum around same-sex marriage and employment non-discrimination, the government has an opportunity to bring its policies in line with its international human rights commitments, including the right to education free from discrimination for all children.



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