Identity management strategies employed by LGBQ learners of Japanese as a second language

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A small but growing body of research is beginning to examine the ways in which sexual identities interact with the process of second language learning. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer [LGBQ] students are often silenced by heteronormative educational practices that are often in conflict with their self-concepts and this can have a detrimental effect on learners’ motivation and even lead to withdrawal from language programs (Moore, 2016). If we are to challenge heteronormativity in our classrooms, it is essential that we understand more about the criteria that LGBQ students use to assess how comfortable they feel within language classrooms and how they manage their sexual identities.

This paper will share the findings of a new study examining the experiences of a diverse set of LGBQ learners of Japanese as a Second Language within the language classroom. Using a constructivist grounded theory methodology, the study uses rich qualitative interview data to theorize their experiences. The findings move away from the simplistic “in/out” binary of coming out and identify the identity management strategies utilized by the participants across various learning contexts. I will present a taxonomy of sexual identity management strategies used by the participants and show the dimensions along which these strategies are connected and differ. By examining when, where and why different strategies are employed by LGBQ learners, we can reach a better understanding of how to create learning environments and practices that are more psychologically comfortable for such learners. The paper will conclude with concrete advice relevant to all language teachers on how to create more inclusive classrooms.


Keywords: sexual identity, inclusive education, identity management strategies.