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Stepping-up: 'Urban' and 'queer' cultural capital in LGBT and queer communities in Kansai, Japan

Jane Wallace

Abstract

This paper argues that the Bourdieusian concepts of field, habitus, and cultural capital open up theoretical space in which to analyse the hierarchical nature of LGBT and queer communities living in the Kansai region of Japan. Drawing upon data collected during ethnographic fieldwork, this paper will show how ‘urban’ and ‘queer’ forms of LGBT-activist practice acted as a kind of cultural capital (in the form of symbolic capital) within the groups studied. The possession of, and ability to engage in specific ways with these cultural capitals determined the respondents’ positions in the field. However, access is not universal, and is determined by context. Furthermore, the processes involved in a renegotiation of an individual’s position in the field can bring multiple habitus into contact, resulting not only in instances of successful transfer, but also tension and rupture. This paper provides an original and timely contribution to sexuality and gender studies of Japan, by adding a detailed analysis of the ways in which cultural capitals play out in the field using ethnographic data.

Keywords: LGBT, Japan, cultural capital, ethnography, activism

Stepping-up: 'Urban' and 'queer' cultural capital in LGBT and queer communities in Kansai, Japan

Introduction

Using the Bourdieusian concepts of field, habitus, and cultural capital (as a form of symbolic capital) this paper presents an ethnography of the complex web of relations surrounding a group of LGBT-identified individuals in Japan. The paper will identify two specific forms of cultural capital which were important in the negotiation of sexual and identity politics within the LGBT communities studied. It will show that within the field of LGBT-based activism amongst the groups studied, 'urban' and 'queer' forms of practice are privileged above grassroots strategies of necessity. Urban and queer modes of practice become a capital resource, and successful embodiment of these capitals determines the respondents' positions within the field. However, access to these symbolic capitals is not universal, and certain local contexts restrict the extent to which these privileged forms of practice can be embodied and transferred to the localities. Inequality of access to symbolic capital (in the form of knowledge and practice) results in multiple habitus, and complex understandings of privileged practice. When these habitus collide, a struggle over the meanings and methods of LGBT-based activism and community practices ensues.

Previous sociological studies of sexual minorities in Japan have often focussed upon cis-gendered gay men in Shinjuku Ni-chōme, which is home to a high concentration of gay bars and clubs (See for example, Baudinette (2016) and Sunagawa (2015)). Comparatively few scholars of sexuality in Japan have produced sociologies of broad-based sexual minority communities and the power dynamics within these groups. This is not to say that studies of sexual minority groups and communities do not exist, but rather that they are comparatively

few. Two notable examples are Yoshinaka and Hoshino's (2012) study of an LGBT community library, and Ōno's (2015) study of gay and bisexual men's first access to sexual minority communities. The Centre for Gender Studies at International Christian University in Tokyo also continue to work with the non-government organisation (NGO) Nijiuro Diversity to collect quantitative data via annual surveys of LGBT individuals in the workplace (CGS at ICU and Nijiuro Diversity, 2016). This paper intends to add to the existing field by examining communities and groups of LGBT individuals living mainly in the Kansai region of Japan from a qualitative, ethnographic perspective.¹ Data drawn from a study of these groups are salient because they contribute to a gap in the existing literature regarding the negotiation of sexual and identity politics in broad-based LGBT communities, and the ways in which status is negotiated across complex understandings of sexual and gender identity.

Key definitions

The acronym 'LGBT' has only recently come into use in the Japanese mainstream media, largely as a result of what has been dubbed the 'LGBT boom'. The LGBT boom refers to an acute upsurge in discussion of sexual minorities in the mainstream media from 2014 to 2016. The boom was bolstered in 2015 by the passing of the so-called Same-Sex Partnership Ordinance in Shibuya-ward, Tokyo, and is now beginning to taper off.² Use of the acronym 'LGBT' in place of the Japanese *seitekishōsūsha* (sexual minority) is also increasingly common in the academic literature, although use of the acronym does now seem to be declining. A keyword search on the CiNii database of academic articles held in the Japanese national library using the term 'LGBT' shows a dramatic increase in publications from 30 in 2014 to 187 in 2016, with a steep drop off in 2017.

The LGBT boom has not been universally accepted as positive amongst the respondents studied. Many respondents expressed concern over possible backlash, and mental health issues that could be caused by the marketisation of diversity. One respondent expressed a concern that once a person has ‘tasted something sweet’,³ it becomes impossible to accept anything bitter, and the long-term reality of the situation for LGBT individuals in Japan would be much harder to accept after the boom. Use of the term has also emerged in a specific socio-political context where the everyday reality for some LGBT individuals remains difficult. LGBT-specific clauses were not included in the government’s anti-bullying policy until 2017, and same-sex couples do not have access to any legal protections in terms of partnership or inheritance (for a detailed overview of the current legal issues facing LGBT people in Japan see (Yamashita, 2017)). This gap between media coverage and lived reality led some respondents to resist identifying as LGBT as a means of resisting the marketisation of sexuality and gender identity which they saw as complicit in erasing the lived reality of LGBT individuals in Japan. Use of the acronym LGBT, then, is not without its lines of contention. Hence, it is used in this paper as short-hand to refer to individuals who have self-identified along the LGBT spectrum. Similarly, following the work of Suganuma (2011) ‘queer’ is used in this paper as an umbrella term to refer to non-heterosexual, non-cis gendered individuals (including but not limited to questioning, asexual, and pansexual).

The term ‘community’ is used here in the sense of imagined communities, which was first coined by Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* (1983/2006). Anderson (1983/2006) argued that a person’s sense of nation and belonging is formed through the imagination. Since we cannot meet everyone who lives within any given nation face-to-face, we form a sense of belonging through invisible imaginative ties. Although Anderson was discussing nationalism, the concept has been used by other scholars to analyse the ways in which people find belonging

in other social groups. For example, Kanno (2008) used the concept in conjunction with the Bourdieusian theories of social reproduction and cultural capital to describe the inequalities that exist in language education in Japan. The notion of imagined communities is used in a similar way in this paper, in conjunction with Bourdieusian theory to analyse the relationships between respondents living and working within LGBT-based community groups.

Ethnographic approach to the field

Data for the study (of which this paper forms a part) was generated through ethnographic fieldwork conducted mainly in the Kansai region of Japan, from September 2014 to January 2016. The field was established through participant observations at LGBT related events such as self-help groups and mixer events. Based on key themes generated therein, 39 respondents were invited to take part in a total of 43 interviews. Given the dominance of heterocentrism in research culture, it was important to ensure a broad spectrum of respondents were invited to take part (Dodd, 2009). Respondents were considered for participation based on their self-identification as non-heterosexual and/or non-cis-gendered, and having had some sort of involvement in LGBT communities and events during their lifetimes. Respondent identifications were often flexible, regularly changed during the fieldwork, and some individuals identified across multiple categories. This makes neat summary of all of the respondents impossible.

This paper specifically emerged from data collected in May 2015, as a participant observation and subsequent interviews of a group of activists taking part in a demonstration as part of the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT) in the small city of Wakayama, Western Japan. IDAHOT is a global movement that was established in 2004 to mark the declassification of homosexuality as a mental health disorder by the World Health

Organisation in 1990. Wakayama City is located on the Kinokawa river, and is separated from neighbouring Osaka by a chain of mountains, about a one hour drive on the toll road from Osaka City. The demonstration was the first of its kind in Wakayama, and as such provided an opportunity to conduct a participant observation of emergent LGBT grassroots organising in the city. The respondents referred to in this paper are three transgender men, one *x-jendā* (x-gender)⁴ pansexual person, and one lesbian woman. Following the work of Ho (2017), I also refer to opinions exchanged on the social media site Facebook as a valuable resource of secondary data that can reveal part of what discourses are circulating in the communities studied (for a detailed exposition of the ethnographic possibilities of Facebook see Miller (2011) and for a general overview of the use of social media in anthropology see Horst and Miller (2012)).

Given the small number of respondents in this research, it is not possible to generalise the findings to the whole of Japan. Instead, following the work of Emmel and Hughes (2009), the fieldwork aimed to collect deep and textured data of the lived experiences of a small group of individuals from within local LGBT communities. This lived experience was often messy and fluid, with the dynamics between researcher and respondents changing and developing as the major themes of the study emerged. Allowing for the messiness and dynamism of lived-experience enables us to discuss critical intersections of LGBT identities and experiences in Japan.

Conceptualising LGBT communities as fields

The following section will establish the framing of ‘field’ and ‘habitus’ using empirical examples drawn from fieldwork. ‘Field’ is understood in this paper using the work of Bourdieu (1992) who defined field as:

[A] network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.) (97)

In Bourdieu's conceptualisation, the field is situational and positional, and is determined by access to and command of power in the form of capital. During the fieldwork, this dynamic of dominant and subordinate positions, structured by access to cultural capitals in various forms, operated throughout the groups studied. This was illustrated by the way in which my contact at the IDAHOT demonstration, Asataka (a transgender man in his 40s),⁵ talked about activists from outside of his home city of Wakayama. When talking about these activists, Asataka used the formal *katsudōka* instead of the less official *katsudōsha*. *Katsudōka* is a compound noun using the suffix *ka*, which denotes a professional, or someone who is primarily concerned with the activity it suffixes, in this case *katsudō* (activism). *Katsudōsha* in contrast, uses the suffix *sha*, which describes somebody who either simply does the action, or is of the nature of the noun it suffixes. When discussing himself, or his group, Asataka used a colloquial dialect word *jibunra*, which can be translated according to context as 'me', 'we' or 'us'. In choosing to discuss himself and his group in these terms, Asataka positions the *katsudōka* from 'the cities' as dominant, and himself and his group as the subordinate other in the form of *jibunra*.

This structuring of the field based on power and privilege was not confined to Asataka and his group, nor to the more rural areas studied. This became apparent in relation to the category of so-called *kira kira kei* (literally ‘sparkle groups’ or ‘sparkle types’). *Kira kira kei* were defined as groups and/or individuals who were adept at engaging with the mainstream media, and were able to garner large followings on social media. Their role in LGBT-related activism was seen primarily as appearing in public in order to increase LGBT visibility in the mainstream media. They appeared openly as LGBT-identified on TV, in magazines, and at public speaking events. Given the increasing ubiquity of on-line engagement in Japan, an individual or group could become *kira kira kei* whilst living in more remote areas, as long as they maintained a highly visible social-media persona (although there was a greater likelihood of *kira kira kei* originating from metropolitan areas, because this is where much of the media showcasing these personalities were produced).

Many respondents felt uncomfortable about *kira kira kei*, and often used the term pejoratively to express their uneasiness with such groups becoming representative of LGBT community groups as a whole. Nozomi is an *x-jendā* (x-gender) individual who works for an LGBT-related NGO in Osaka. Nozomi discussed how people involved with *kira kira kei* forms of activism can alter the mood of events on the local level, even within the urban area of Osaka. Nozomi said that *kira kira kei* are revered as a kind of celebrity at community events, and felt that when people like this visited LGBT community groups, the atmosphere became ‘really bad’. Nozomi saw a fundamental difference between the practices of *kira kira kei* and other community members living less publicly visible lives.

Tensions such as those related to *kira kira kei* can be attributed in part to moments of contact across two conflicting habitus. Bourdieu (1992) defines habitus, as ‘systems of durable,

transposable dispositions' (53). These dispositions work together to create a 'common-sense world', in which practices are 'immediately intelligible and foreseeable' due to the way in which they are continuously reinforced within the habitus (1977/1995: 80). As such, habitus is 'both a system of schemes of perception and appreciation of practices', such that its products (i.e. practices) express the social position in which they were produced (Bourdieu, 1989: 19). Hence, in order to achieve an important goal (or 'specific profits' in the words of Bourdieu (1992: 97)), individuals must embody and articulate certain cultural capitals. When schemes of perception (i.e. habitus) differ on the salience of these profits, moments of rupture emerge.

These systems of dispositions are numerous, and the common-sense worlds they create can differ depending upon an individual's position in the field. For example, Megumi (a lesbian woman who heads her own LGBT-related NGO) discussed how she believed that the rise of *kira kira kei* had changed the way activism is viewed within LGBT communities for the better. Megumi expressed frustration over a history of not supporting or praising LGBT-based activism in Osaka. She noted that before the advent of *kira kira kei*, publicly visible activism was not highly respected within the community, and was seen as 'disagreeable'. However, she argued that activism is now viewed by some as 'cool' and aspirational, and that it was jealousy that was at the root of the complaints of long-term activists.

Kira kira kei demonstrate how the field in this study was characterised by uneven distribution of privilege, and by complex historical tensions across multiple habitus. Conceptualising the communities studied as fields with multiple habitus in this way will allow this paper to present an empirically based view of the texture, complexity, and ambivalence of sexual politics as it plays out in small community groups. Although Bourdieu's work provides a broad view of general social action, I argue that using these 'open concepts' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:

95) we can critically analyse the specificity of ‘urban’ and ‘queer’ cultural capital within LGBT activist communities.

‘Urban’ cultural capital

‘Cultural capital’ is understood here as distinct from the capital of economy, instead being related to what Skeggs (2003) calls resources, upon which respondents draw in their daily lives. Skeggs (2003) refers to both commodity objects and cultural practices as a cultural resource that individuals can use within a system of exchange. These cultural resources (in the form of cultural capital) are understood here as *embodied cultural capitals*, as ‘long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 17), and as a form of symbolic capital. Bourdieu (1991) described symbolic capital as ‘nothing other than capital, of whatever kind, when it is perceived by an agent endowed with categories of perception’ (239). Thus, respondents’ perceptions of the value of such capital resources is key, and determines the overall structure of the field. This dynamic can be seen in action by looking to the example of Asataka, my contact at the IDAHOT demonstration.

Asataka lives in Wakayama-city, the prefectural capital of Wakayama Prefecture. He is the founder of an LGBT and allies community group in the city that aims to foster links between LGBT identifying individuals and non-sexual minority members of the local community. In 2015, Asataka became embroiled in an on-line debate about a t-shirt which he had designed for the local IDAHOT demonstration. The design of the t-shirt was simple. Along the top of the shirt the acronym LGBT was printed in large letters, and below each part of the acronym was a simplified pictorial representation of the respective identification. For example, below the *L* there were two of the Japanese characters for woman placed together, and below the *T* the shirt showed the character for man with an arrow pointing towards the character for woman.

Showing me the design at the demonstration, Asataka commented that people in Wakayama ‘know absolutely nothing about LGBT’, and another demonstrator interjected that people in Wakayama ‘don’t even know what the word “LGBT” means’. I recognised that the t-shirt relied on over-simplified notions of binary sex and gender, but I also understood it as a localised strategy of visibility, relevant to the aims of Asataka and his group. This is something that Asataka later confirmed to me in interview, saying, ‘it was for people who know nothing about LGBT. We wanted them to look at it and say “What’s that?”’.

A few months after the IDAHOT demonstration, Asataka posted a photo of his t-shirt on the social media website Facebook, and was promptly criticised for its use of the male/female binary framework. Shortly after the public criticism, I asked Asataka to explain the dispute in his own words. It became apparent that Asataka located himself and his group as ‘backwards’ in comparison to activist practice in more concentrated urban areas. He said:

People from the cities, the activism from the cities is more advanced than ours. Well, we do go to parades and whatever here, but Wakayama is a place where people know absolutely nothing, so I think that the way we do activism is different too. If we held a parade here in Wakayama right now people would think that was a bit over the top, you know? I think that what we need to do here is go forward from the absolute basics, telling each person one by one “this is what LGBT means”.

In talking about the activism of ‘people from the cities’ as ‘more advanced’ than his own, Asataka draws boundaries around his own position in Wakayama, and that of his critics, whom he locates in ‘the cities’ and more urban areas. Asataka asserts that people in Wakayama do not have sufficient knowledge to be able to understand and engage with large scale public

actions such as pride parades; they know ‘absolutely nothing’. He contrasts this with his conception of ‘the cities’, where he assumes that the general public would know how to recognise and understand highly visible events such as pride parades. Asataka continued to discuss the differences he saw between his own activism and that of activists in the cities.

I think there are all kinds of ways of doing activism, you know. Places like Tokyo where you can undertake big actions, and places like here where we have to take the time to stop and talk to each person individually. I think that’s a good thing, and if there was some sort of manual that would let us all figure out a way to work together then that would be good, but there is no such manual.

In Asataka’s framing, ‘urban’ activism consists of highly visible ‘big actions’ which pass without question through public spaces. In his reference to urban centres ‘like Tokyo’, Asataka shifts the focus from unspecified ‘cities’ towards his personal mental mapping of Tokyo. This implies that Asataka believes that LGBT activists in Tokyo are able to mobilise deeper understandings of sexuality and gender across local communities into ‘big actions’ such as pride parades. Whilst such a framing may allow him to strategically conceptualise and protect his position in the field, there is little room for the nuance of social inequalities in Tokyo, or indeed for the complexity of lived experience as an LGBT-identified individual in any large city in Japan. For example, some respondents in this study who lived in larger cities talked about the difficulties of sharing home computers, family data plans on their smartphones, and fears of stigma related to buying or borrowing printed information.

Asataka’s framings of the city are complex and often contradictory. His conceptions of the location of urban practices vary from ‘the cities’, to ‘where they live’, to ‘Tokyo’. Furthermore,

despite mentioning a desire for ‘some sort of manual’ and frustration that no such manual exists, Asataka later stated that he was considering inviting urban-based activists to a series of study groups. The study groups were intended to teach his group about LGBT related issues and to learn to deal with critiques such as that directed at the t-shirt design. In his Facebook posts, Asataka also referred to the idea of being able to ‘step-up’ (*suteppu appu*) to the level of activist practice which he perceived to be occurring in urban centres:

This [t-shirt] is such a simple form of activism that it can’t be compared to what everybody does where they live.

This is my way of doing it.

And there’s likely to be a time when this changes.

At that time, we might take a step-up.

- (Asataka’s response to the criticisms of his t-shirt)

Asataka’s aspiration to ‘step-up’ implies that he sees a clear hierarchy in the organisation of the field of LGBT activism, and that by embodying certain cultural capitals in the form of knowledge and practice, his group could improve their position within that field.

Asataka was not an isolated case in terms of seeking knowledge from larger cities. However, some individuals had more successful engagements with these groups, and more success in transferring these practices into their own local contexts. Manabu (a transgender man in his early 20s) lives in a city in Hyōgo Prefecture, about a 30-minute train ride from Osaka. When Manabu first became involved in the LGBT community, he felt restricted by the high cost of travel to and from Osaka. For a teenager on an allowance, the cost of the return journey and entrance fees at most community events was a barrier to participation. Troubled by his feelings

of isolation, and after visiting Rainbow Resource Centre (hereafter RRC: a self-help group based in Osaka)⁶, Manabu decided that he wanted to start a similar group in his home city where people would not need to pay travel expenses, and would only need to contribute a participation fee if they could afford to.

In the beginning, we could only do it in places where it would have been OK if people couldn't pay to participate...That's why I decided to have meetings that anyone could take part in, and that people didn't need to pay. In the beginning, when it came to the process of starting, basically I relied on RRC...I looked at how RRC did it, and thought 'Oh, it's OK for it to be something light like this'. It was just me thinking 'Oh, I can probably do it' [laugh]. RRC are amazing, RRC is an amazing place.

Manabu participated in the events at RRC with an eye to how he could replicate the model in his own context. Manabu aspired to the 'light' form of community practice that he found at RRC, and viewed the group as an 'amazing' place. Through participating in events in Osaka, Manabu decided that group organising was 'probably' something he could do successfully in his own location with a few adaptations. One such adaptation was making the common 500-yen participation fee optional (approximately \$5 USD), and refusing to take participation fees from students who had little to no income. Through this strategy, Manabu was able to transfer some of the practices of RRC into his own context, and widen access for individuals with less financial stability. Although Manabu sought to diminish his role in this important transfer of cultural capital resource by saying "It was *just* me thinking..." (emphasis added), his actions improved conditions for community members from the local area by providing a space in

which they could engage in these privileged practices without needing to find the time or money to travel to Osaka.

As I spent more time with other members of the LGBT community in Wakayama, it became apparent that they were also collectively engaged with similar transfers of embodied cultural capitals in the form of privileged activist practice. Hideki (a transgender man in his 40s), originally ran a support group for transgender individuals in Wakayama City. Attendance at these meetings was poor, so he decided to develop a broader LGBT and allies group known as Waterside.⁷ When we chatted about the early days of Waterside, I asked Hideki if he had received help from other groups:

Not as part of Waterside...But on an individual level I have been to a group in Osaka to take part and see what it was like. Before I started Waterside, somehow, the details, how exactly to do activism, I had absolutely no idea, so I thought I would go and see...That's where I learnt the basic form of everyone giving 500 yen and then sitting around eating snacks.

In an echo of Asataka and Manabu's experiences, Hideki's approach shows the way in which LGBT community groups in Osaka represented an aspirational form of practice. In contrast to Asataka, Hideki framed these urban practices as something easy to emulate: simply 'sitting around eating snacks'. These practices could easily be transferred to his local area, and did not require the broader public acceptance of LGBT individuals that Asataka sought. Whilst Hideki states that Waterside never consulted with other groups, it is clear that his personal consultation with Osaka-based groups, and the transfer of urban cultural capital in the form of forms of privileged practice were instrumental in the development of Waterside. Despite the failure of

his earlier group, Waterside was more successful. The group's success and on-line presence through an active website, as well as Twitter and Facebook accounts, also contributed to them being repeatedly invited to act as experts for the prefectural government. Hideki told me:

In March of this year we were contacted by the prefectural government to talk about LGBT, we went last year as well...but the government staff probably know nothing about LGBT, that was the kind of contact I, well, Waterside, had from the prefectural government, 'talk about LGBT for people who know nothing about LGBT, without telling them a lot about LGBT', maybe, it was better for us to talk as people with experience of LGBT [...]

Here, Hideki's position as someone 'with experience of LGBT' is framed as a valuable resource, and Hideki becomes the expert. The field is dynamic, and an individual's status can be framed differently depending on the perspective used. Whilst Hideki's group may be located outside of what many respondents framed as so-called urban practices, it was still possible for him to revise his position within the field as a result of successful transfer of urban cultural capital in the development of Waterside.

In 2015, Hideki's group decided to form a satellite group in the city of Tanabe, in southern Wakayama Prefecture. Although Tanabe has been designated a city, much of its area is made up of smaller villages that were incorporated into the city in 2005, and it retains a rural atmosphere. The meetings that Waterside set up were open to all, and intended as a safe place where LGBT individuals could meet to chat and eat snacks together. Five people from Tanabe attended the first meeting, which pleased Hideki. However, attendance soon dropped, and members of Waterside quickly outnumbered participants from Tanabe. Despite the sharp fall

in attendance, Waterside have continued to hold the meetings, spacing the frequency out from monthly to bi-annually, gradually using their reserves of cash to travel to and from Tanabe. This suggests that Hideki and his groups' motivation for attempting to transfer privileged urban practices into Tanabe may not be solely a strategic renegotiation of the field, but also related to a genuine concern for individuals living in remote areas of Japan. Hideki often spoke about the way in which information failed to reach areas like Wakayama prefecture:

The information gets from Tokyo to Osaka absolutely fine. But when it comes to getting into Wakayama there is a chain of mountains, and it stops there...Firstly, the TV signal can't get across...Any information that would be on there can't get through...And of course, not everybody has access to the internet...some people don't have easy access to computers or tablets.

Hideki's experiences of attempting to transfer the success of Waterside into the more rural area of Tanabe demonstrates the complexity of the field. Respondents may frame themselves as cut-off from urban cultural capital, but at the same time be actively engaged in attempting to transfer these capitals into other contexts. The field is not characterised by a simple binary struggle between urban and rural, but with possession and transfer of cultural capital resources, and the meanings of activism across these often shifting and ambivalent intersections.

Within this struggle, framings of the city, and what is distinct about activist practice therein varied. For Asataka, urban practice is characterised by complex knowledge of gender and sexuality theory, and easy engagement with the wider general public. For Manabu and Hideki, it is framed as time spent in a supportive space. However, the ways in which these privileged practices could be embodied and transferred from one location to another varied. Asataka

expressed frustration with the lack of knowledge in Wakayama, which he viewed as constraining to his strategy. Hideki, on the other hand, was determined not to become dejected, and was resigned to low attendance and a lack of information. Manabu was able to adapt the urban practices he found at RRC to his own context, and to the needs of his participants with less resistance than either Asataka or Manabu. This difference in outcomes hints at the existence of another factor, namely ‘queer’ cultural capital.

‘Queer’ cultural capital and a politics of the necessary

In an ethnographic study of the organising committee of Christopher Street West Pride, Ward (2003) noted how identity based political movements often begin from necessity (for example, economic necessity or the need for physical safety), and move towards a concern for mainstream acceptance and public image. The study showed how the ability to discuss ‘diversity’ and to prove ‘diversity skills’ became a kind of ‘activist capital’ (Ward, 2003: 51), which worked to marginalise some working-class activists within the groups studied. Bourdieu (1984/2010) noted that, ‘Necessity imposes a taste for necessity which implies a form of adaptation to and consequently acceptance of the necessary, a resignation to the inevitable’ (379). The data in this study suggest that a similar politics of the necessary is in operation for Asataka and his group.

Asataka believes that people in Wakayama know so little that the only way to increase awareness of LGBT lives is by relying on simplified understandings and by stopping to talk to each person individually. Given this, Asataka believes that the first step towards achieving wider public visibility for LGBT people and the issues they face in Wakayama is to first ensure that people know that the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender mean. Asataka’s taste, guided by his habitus, is for ‘the necessary’, in the form of an object that acts as an opening to

dialogue with the wider public, namely his purposefully designed t-shirt. In contrast, in Asataka's understanding, activist practice in often unspecified cities is more closely associated with what Ward (2003) refers to as 'style, manner, representation' (90).

One of the criticisms levelled against Asataka's t-shirt design was its use of the male/female binary framework, which one commentator referred to in a Facebook post as the 'monster of gender-role binarism' against which 'we' (as queer people) must fight. The personification of gender-role binarism is an effective strategy within the critics' habitus of LGBT-related activism in their home context of Osaka and on-line, as is demonstrated by the support the statement received from other users. The critic in question used the collective 'we' assuming that their stance was both acceptable and possible within the context of queer utterances on social media. This assumption is validated by a fellow user who replies with a nostalgic reference to a time when 'we used the more open term "queer"'. This call-back to a utopian past where people were free to identify as they wished legitimises the call to action against the 'monster of gender binarism'.

This collective stance against the use of binary representations of sex and gender on the t-shirt suggests that some activists have access to and are able to mobilise a kind of queer cultural capital. Pennell (2016) conceptualises the ability to aspire to equal marriage rights in the face of structural impediments, and the ability to resist institutional inequality as aspects of 'queer cultural capital' (325). In the context of LGBT activism in Japan, it is possible to see a similar kind of queer cultural capital at work. Whilst the critics of the shirts operate within a habitus that allows access to queerness as a resistance to binarism, and enables aspirations to identify outside of this binary, Asataka's local context disallows this. Even if Asataka resists binarism in his day-to-day life, it is not possible to articulate this in the local context without risking

alienating members of the public, and ultimately damaging his own long-term goal of fostering wider public understanding of LGBT issues.

For Asataka, the strategy of calling upon a binary framework is justified by the hoped-for specific profit of greater local visibility. For critics of his shirt, on the other hand, it is the very means or the *how* of achieving a goal which is at stake. Jarness (2015) found a similar pattern in a study of modes of cultural consumption in Norway. Much like Japan, Norwegian society is often portrayed as homogenous. However, as Jarness notes, it matters in what *way* cultural goods are appreciated, as well as *what* specific cultural goods are appreciated. If we apply this to the case of the rupture between Asataka and the critics of his t-shirt design, we can observe that it is not just the successful embodiment of cultural capital resources that matters, but the ability to articulate this in an acceptable way (to put the knowledge into practice). In this sense, Asataka is involved with a politics of the necessary, which he contrasts with a politics of queerness located in urban centres. Posting an image which articulated this politics of the necessary created a moment of contact between the two habitus, resulting in rupture. It also reveals that ‘queerness’ and a refusal of binarism is a resource or cultural capital to which Asataka does not have access, by virtue of his physical location in Wakayama, isolated from these queer practices.

Calling symbolic struggles into being

This uneven distribution of cultural capital resource does not mean, however, that Asataka and the critics of his t-shirt have differing long-term goals, but rather that they are differently concerned with the means used to achieve these goals. The field has its own rules of engagement, and not all forms of activism are equally validated. As Bourdieu (1984/2010) notes, defining the key means and stakes of a struggle is in fact one of the stakes of the struggle itself. Although

Asataka perceives himself to be in a subordinate position within the field, both he and his critics tacitly agree that the game of activism is worth playing. This acceptance of the validity of the struggle works in dialogue with the struggle itself, creating a Gordian knot of validations and motivations. As Swartz (1997) has suggested, within any conflict the opposing sides are in fact dialectical; one generates the other and vice versa. By creating the t-shirt design in contravention of certain privileged forms of activism (i.e. a refusal of binarism), Asataka unwittingly ruptures the habitus of his critics, bringing forth a struggle over symbolic capital and its distribution within the field. Equally, the critics of Asataka's t-shirt design also work to bring this conflict over symbolic capital into being. In other words, both sides' tacit recognition of the power and value of symbolic capital (in the form of urban and queer cultural capital) create a struggle over the very meaning of LGBT-based activism. In this case, both Asataka and the critics of his shirt tacitly recognise their positions within the field, and that this position is determined by their ability to access and embody urban and queer cultural capital resources.

From Asataka's perspective, the field is understandably frustrating. Faced with a local context which disallows certain forms of practice, and the complications of attempting to transfer these forms of practice into Wakayama City, the ability to maintain a dogged theoretical attachment to a refusal of binarism, and to mobilise this in his activism, is a symbolic capital to which he does not have access. In the symbolic struggle over cultural capital resources, which his very recognition of its existence calls into being, he is isolated from the means to pursue the specific profit of wider visibility in his local community. Bourdieu (1991) discussed the way in which perceptions of one's social world are based on the 'incorporation of the objective structures of the social space' (235). As a result, agents tend to have a sense of what one can or cannot 'allow oneself' (Bourdieu, 1991: 235). In the case of Asataka, he tacitly conceptualises his position as subordinate to that of the city-based activists, and recognises that practice in more concentrated

urban areas is not something which is ‘allowed’ to himself. In his response to critics, and in interview, he articulates his frustration in regards to this isolation from the circulation of knowledge and practices that would ultimately allow him to improve this position. However, he does not seek to challenge the hierarchy itself, but rather defends his design’s use of binarism as the practice that is possible within his local context. Asataka’s resignation to this isolation from urban and queer cultural capitals, and the difficult position this confers upon him within the hierarchy of the field brings us to the core of this analysis. Namely, Asataka and the other respondents are engaged in a struggle over symbolic capital, in the form of embodied urban and queer cultural capitals. The mobilisation of these capitals is fraught with ever-shifting conceptions of the urban and the rural, and struggle within these shifting frameworks forms the very foundation upon which the field is built.

Conclusions and Future Directions

The story of broad-based LGBT and queer activism in Kansai is one of individuals and communities working with and against perceived binaries. In attempting to work through his perceptions of city-based activism as ‘advanced’, Asataka deploys his own binary, and often contradictory, perception of urban and queer versus a politics of the local and the necessary. He understands his place in the field in terms of domination and subordination, across an urban-rural divide which he himself constructs. This paper has used empirical data to outline the ways in which the Bourdieusian concepts of field, habitus, and cultural capital can allow us to understand the ways in which respondents such as Asataka understood these differences and privileges within their own communities. Using these concepts opens theoretical spaces in which to understand the relationships and conflicts between members of these communities as sites of complex intersections of both structure and hierarchy, as well as agency, rupture, and divergence. Approaching the field in a broad and inclusive manner has revealed the tensions

that exist across broad-based LGBT communities in Japan. In short, all forms of activism are valid (within their specific contexts), but some are more privileged than others.

Much work remains to be done in the field of gender and sexuality studies in Japan. Despite a long history of LGBT rights organising and activism in Japan, some respondents in this study maintained a mental map in which Japan was cast as ‘backwards’ in comparison to notions of a universal ‘advanced West’. Although it may be the case that limited legal protections exist for LGBT and queer individuals in Japan, it is wise to question approaches which generalise ‘Western’ experiences and promote them as preferred paths to equality. Just as lived experience of LGBT and queer lives varies widely within Anglophone nations, so too does lived experience in Japan defy neat categorisation. This paper presents an early contribution to the field of broad-based LGBT community studies in Japan, and hopes to stimulate interest in challenging increasing entrenched paradigms that seek to neatly categorise the messiness of everyday experiences for LGBT and queer individuals across the globe.

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Notes

¹The Kansai region of Japan includes Osaka, Kobe, Kyoto, Wakayama, Hyōgo, and Nara.

²Although it is often referred to as the Shibuya Same-Sex Partnership Ordinance, it is in fact one clause of a larger ordinance related to general gender equality which allows for the creation of a Partnership Certificate (for a detailed description of the Ordinance and its history see Esumuraruda and KIRA, 2015). It is important to note that the Partnership Certificate remains controversial amongst LGBT groups, some of whom have concerns over the cost of the notarized documents needed to apply for the certificate, which can cost in the region of \$350 USD (Letibee, 2015).

³ All interview and participant observation data in this paper were collected in Japanese, and translated for functional equivalence by the author.

⁴*X-jendā* is a term of Japanese origin used to describe individuals who identify as neither male, nor female. For a detailed outline of the emergence of the term see Dale (2012).

⁵ All respondents in this study have been assigned pseudonyms by the author.

⁶ Rainbow Resource Centre is a pseudonym used for the purposes of anonymisation. RRC is a small self-help group based in central Osaka.

⁷ Waterside is a pseudonym used for the purposes of anonymisation.

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