If you were to find out that someone you've known for many years is a member of the LGBTQ community, would that fact change your attitude towards them? In my case, I can absolutely say it wouldn't. Why can I say that with certainty? Because this situation isn't a hypothetical for me, but actually a reality.

I recently discovered from a newspaper article in Miyazaki City that my English conversation teacher, who had been teaching me since fifth grade, is a lesbian. The article featured a photo of my teacher and her partner both dressed in traditional kimonos, standing in front of the torii gate at Aoshima Shrine flashing a radiant smile and looking happier than I'd ever seen her. My initial reaction to this? Honestly, I was quite taken aback and shocked. However, because my teacher and I had spent so many wonderful classes together, this genuine surprise quickly transformed into joy for them. Those two individuals in the photograph looked incredibly happy, and I couldn't find any reason why people would want to discriminate against LGBTQ people.

I thought about why my perception of and my approach to my teacher hadn't changed. What I realized was that I respect her deeply as an individual. That insight struck me as more "normal" than anything else. Regardless of her sexual orientation, I had never witnessed her display any negative behavior towards others, nor was her ability to teach English lacking in any capacity. In fact, it was quite the opposite. When you hear someone say, "I'm a lesbian" or "I'm gay", do you notice an unconscious change in your perception of that person?

Up until now, I hadn't had any direct interactions with LGBTQ individuals in my life, or so I thought. But after finding out a member of that community already existed in my life, I realized that there was nothing different between us; we were both human beings with our own unique perspectives and ideas. Their character is not defined by who they love, yet we the majority often cast judgment upon LGBTQ minorities for no reason other than they don't fit our pre established conception of "normal." Despite this deep-rooted societal definition of "normal", I don't believe that this is the standard that we as people should follow.

In Japan today, the legal code says "All citizens shall be equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic, or social relations on account of race, creed, sex, social status, or family origin." Therefore, it is generally considered that being LGBTQ is not prohibited, and discrimination of this kind violates the constitution. However, It isn't easy to change how people think. One reason why these problems have persisted is because people judge each other and want everyone to be the same. I believe this problematic way of thinking has existed for some time in Japan, which has made it difficult to overcome. In my opinion, there is no "normal." In fact, I think the idea of "normal" is flawed.

We can't always change the deeply ingrained uncomfortable feelings some people have about LGBTQ issues. However, if people around the world show willingness to understand individuals with different perspectives in their daily lives, I believe many of these problems can be solved, creating a bright future where everyone can feel safe to be who they are. Just trying to understand one another, we can care for and respect each other. This might seem quite obvious, but in reality, it's often forgotten. It's not just up to the governments of the world; it's a daily decision we make on how we want to treat others. We don't need to create an entirely new world to achieve this; we as a society simply need to be kinder.

大園　明
宮崎市立赤江中学校
A Heart Unchanged: Respect Beyond "Norms"