

University Student's Perceptions of Transgender Identities in Japan and America

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Abstract

Transgender identities are becoming more prevalent in today's society with each passing day. However, there is much misinformation and stereotyping regarding these varying identities as presented through religious ideologies, scholastic education or lack thereof, and presentation in popular media. In this capstone we conducted a survey of Japanese and American college students in order to answer the following research questions: "What are college students' perceptions about transgender identities?" and "What influences these perceptions about transgender identities?" Through our findings we discovered that Americans are more likely to have someone close (a friend) that is transgender in comparison with Japan. We also found that religion does not seem to play a major part in young people's influence as the Americans we surveyed do not follow their religions strictly and Japanese students responded that they do not follow a religion at all. Americans were also more likely to self-study and educate themselves on the topic whereas Japanese students learned from what they saw on TV/documentaries. In America, social media and TV shows have strong influential factors with positives views on transgenderism in contrast with Japan where respondents answered that they were shown more in a neutral light.

Introduction

Transgenderism is an ongoing issue that is a large part of America and is starting to come into light in Japan. We wanted to explore how transgenderism is viewed in both countries and what plays major roles in affecting these culture's opinions. We asked questions about students' personal opinions regarding given scenarios and three major modern day influences: religion, education, and media, through surveys aimed at both Japanese and American students. The following paper is the result of research and survey gatherings from the perspective of these major influences as seen in Japan and America.

1. Significance of the Study

Alex's interest in this study has very personal significance as they identify as transgender, more specifically transmasculine agender. Along with their interest in the varying transgender

identities that are surfacing with each passing day, they held a strong desire to learn where misinformation and stereotypes about people who identify as transgender originate from by mainly focusing on religion, education, and popular media in the U.S. and Japan.

Marquie's interest in this project stems from a personal observation of transgender issues becoming more important in modern society but feels that they are often overlooked. Along with this, he has a friend that has wanted to transition to female for years but cannot due to her family's religious ideology.

2. Research Questions

The following are our research questions:

1. What are college students' perceptions about transgender identities?
2. What influences these perceptions about transgender identities?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Transgender Definition

Transgender is an umbrella term for many different identities. Those who identify as transgender have a gender identity, sex, and/or gender expression that does not line up with the sex they were labeled with at birth. Examples of such terms include gender neutral, bigender, intersex, male to female (MTF), and female to male (FTM). Gender neutral individuals identify as neither gender or an entirely different gender altogether. Bigender individuals identify as both men and women or somewhere in between. Intersex is a more biologically appropriate and less stigmatizing term for individuals who have been historically referred to as "hermaphrodites". MTF individuals are those assigned male at birth who transitioned to live as a female and visa versa for FMT individuals (Teich, 2012).

3.2 Japanese Transgender Terms

Folk Categories are terms native to Japan that describe identities outside of the strict gender binary that is enforced by modern, Western medicine. Examples of these terms include *dansho*, *gay boy*, and *blue boy*, all of which have connections to some form of entertainment. Further examples are *New Half* and *Mr. Lady*, transgender male entertainers who have

undergone varying degrees of sexual reassignment surgery, drawing upon both male and female gender identities (McLelland, 2004).

3.3 Transgender Statistics in Japan and the U.S.

According to a 2016 study by the Williams Institute, there are an estimated 1.4 million transgender adults in the U.S. This accounts for 0.6% of America's adult population and 0.76% of California's population. According to a 2012 internet survey by Dentsu Inc. there is an estimated 7,000-10,000 transgender people in Japan. This accounts for 5.2% of the population, or 1 in 20 people. Though the number of transgender individuals is higher in the U.S. the percentage is higher in Japan most likely due to population density.

3.4 Transgenderism and Religion in U.S.

Narrowing down which religions to research about was a difficult process, but in the end we decided to focus on two main religions from Japan and the U.S. In terms of American religions we focused on Judaism and Christianity as both of them account for the majority of religious followers in the country.

Judaism follows the Old Testament of the Bible as God's ultimate word and within the books of the Old Testament, many different scriptures pertaining to transgenderism can be found. Genesis 1 enforces the idea of the gender binary in stating that man was created "male and female" in God's image. Leviticus 21 and Deuteronomy 23 delves into the subject of castration stating that "those with damaged testis or whose penis is cut off" are not allowed in the house of the Lord. Deuteronomy 22 forbids wearing clothes of the opposite sex.

All of these verses are significantly tied to beliefs that condemn transgenderism. The first chapter of Genesis not only enforces the gender binary, but in doing so condemns those who identify outside of the binary or outside of their genitalia, not to mention it disregards the existence of intersex people who were born with tissue from both sexual organs or extra chromosomes. Leviticus 21 and Deuteronomy 23 condemn those with "mutilated" sex organs, labelling sex reassignment surgery, an often necessary procedure for those with extreme gender dysphoria, as an act against God. The same can be said for crossdressing.

In the New Testament, Jesus essentially overrides these beliefs. In the verses within Matthew 6 and Luke 12, Jesus teaches us not to worry about our bodies or what we will wear as our lives are much more important than the material world. In Matthew 19, Jesus teaches that eunuchs have always existed and always will as there are people born without genitalia and those who have been castrated in the name of God. They are not inhuman or abhorrent in the eyes of God as Jesus taught us that God loves everyone no matter the physical ailments. Even more interesting is the story of the Ethiopian eunuch from Acts 8 in which Philip, an Apostle of Jesus, is ordered by God to baptize a eunuch in a nearby river. This is significant as eunuchs are considered to be the first transgender people, due to their altered or damaged genitalia (Stuart, 1997). Eunuchs are therefore accepted as candidates for baptism and evangelism.

Though Judaism mostly strictly follows the Old Testament, there are sects that allow LGBT followers, such as Reconstructionist and Reform Judaism. And on the other hand, while the majority of Christians believe in and follow the teachings of Jesus, most followers do not practice His words of loving your neighbor as yourself or “doing unto others as you would have them do unto you” and often quote Old Testament verses condemning homosexuality and transgenderism, a contradictory practice.

3.5 Transgenderism and Religion in Japan

Major religions in Japan include Buddhism and Shintoism. Shinto teachings do not clearly state anything against transgender people and interestingly some Kami have even crossed genders, including Inari Kami (fox spirit) that have human manifestations of either a young woman or an elderly man. Also in older times, during Shinto rituals, males dressed in female’s clothing. Often times it was only associated with their job, however some chose to crossdress freely outside of rituals and were socialized as females.

When taking a look at Buddhism, its original teachings did not include any stigma against transgender people. However, in modern day teachings transgenderism is believed to be a result of Karma. Buddhism in Japan specifically stems from Mahayana Buddhism which also teaches about equality for all genders. However, the teachings have changed overtime and the views are divided according to the schools. Interestingly, there is the Bodhisattvas Guan Yin, known as Kannon in Japan, who has appeared as both male and female and is believed to have reached a

physical state that transcends gender (Bolich, 2009).

3.6 Transgenderism and Education in U.S.

Within the U.S. only 24 states mandate sex education (see figure 1). Of those 24 states, only 13 require discussion of sexual orientation, represented by the blue highlighted states in figure 2. Yet of those 13 states that require discussion of sexual orientation, there are 4 states that require only negative information on the subject, represented by the red highlighted states (see figure 2). Those states include Utah, Texas, Alabama, and South Carolina. As of yet no states require the discussion of gender identity (Guttmacher Institute, 2017).

Figure 1

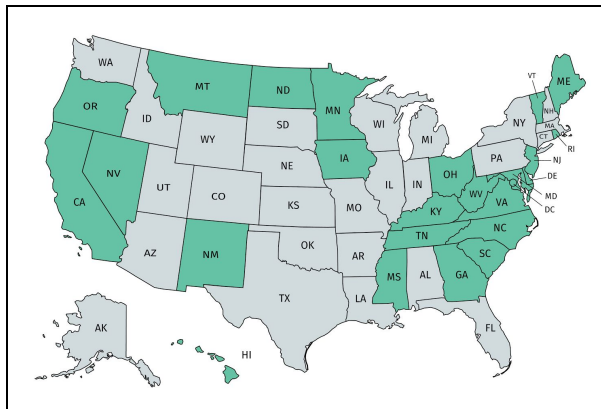
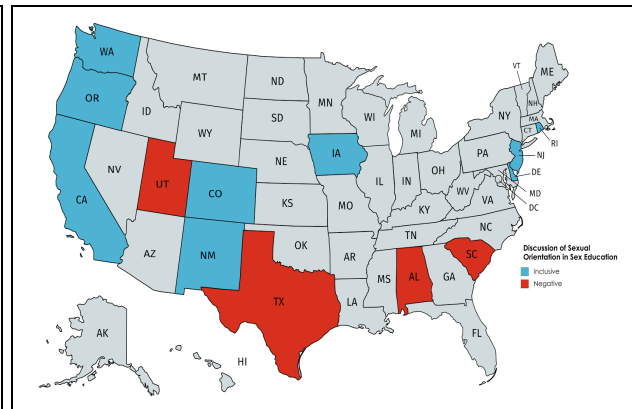


Figure 2



In 2016, the U.S. Department of Education and Justice released a letter protecting transgender students in public schools that prohibits sex discrimination in educational programs and activities operated by recipients of Federal financial assistance. This includes gender identity and transgender status. Under this act a transgender individual's name, pronouns, use of athletic facilities, housing, and inclusion in single-sex classrooms is protected. Inclusion in single-sex schools and fraternities or sororities is, however, not protected. It is likely though that this act was undone under the Trump administration as the act has been archived on the Department of Education's website (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

3.7 Transgenderism and Education in Japan

In early 2017, Japan's national bullying law extended its protection to transgender students as awareness of the issue has steadily increased over the years (Human Rights Watch, 2017). The Japanese Education Ministry recently began urging schools to allow students use locker rooms and uniforms that correlate with the gender they identify as. This, however, leaves open room for schools to refuse, as it has not become an official law (Murai, 2015). One major problem is the lack of understanding by teachers, which allows bullying to take place. LGBT issues are not widely discussed openly, leading many teachers unaware of how to approach the issue with proper care. A 2011 poll by Takarazuka University School of Nursing recently showed that only 14% of teachers nationwide include LGBT in their curriculum. Moreover, Japan has a collective society which pressures individuals to become part of a group. This leads to blurred line between bullying and discipline, where teachers may believe they are disciplining a student to conform, however, from the student's point of view they are being bullied to change who they are.

There are some areas that are trying to properly educate both faculty and students about LGBT issues. As of 2013, Fukuoka Prefecture and Kumamoto Prefecture have begun to hold workshops using short stories to introduce LGBT characters to younger students while also introducing the topic to elementary and junior high school teachers (West Japan Newspaper, 2013).

3.8 Transgenderism and Media in U.S.

Transgender representation in American media has become very relevant in recent times. Not only this, positive representation is becoming more commonplace especially within programs featured on streaming sites such as Netflix and Hulu. The nonprofit organization GLAAD has annually released reports documenting LGBTQ representation in American television shows, major motion film releases, and streaming sites. Since 1995 GLAAD has released a report entitled, "Where We Are on TV" that analyses the overall diversity of primetime scripted series regulars on broadcast networks and the number of LGBTQ characters on cable networks and streaming sites. From the years 2010-17, broadcast networks have included an overall total of 3 transfemale characters and 0 transmale characters. In the same

amount of time cable television has featured an overall total of 2 transfemales and 4 transmales. Streaming sites, on the other hand, surpassed broadcast networks and cable programs combined with a total of 7 transfemale characters and in only a 2 year span, from 2015-2017; transmen, unfortunately, were represented by a single trans character.

In terms of Major Motion Films, GLAAD has released an annual report entitled “Studio Responsibility Index” since 2013 that reports the quantity, quality, and diversity of LGBT characters in films released by 7 major motion picture studios. These studios include 20th Century Fox, Lionsgate Entertainment, Paramount Pictures, Sony Columbia, Universal Pictures, Walt Disney Studios, and Warner Brothers. The way these characters are judged is through a method entitled the “Vito Russo Test” which judges an LGBTQ character’s representation through 3 criteria. These criteria are that the film contains a character that is identifiably lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender; that character must not be solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity; and the LGBT character must be tied into the plot in such a way that their removal would have a significant effect, they are not there to set up a punchline. With these criterias in mind, of the 126 films released in 2015, only one film was trans-inclusive. The studios Paramount Pictures, Disney Studios, and Warner Bros. received an overall failing grade. The studios Lionsgate, Sony Columbia Pictures, and Universal Pictures received an overall adequate grade, that is to say not passing and not failing (GLAAD, 2016).

In summary, regular and recurring transgender characters have more than doubled from 2015 across all television platforms adding up to 16 total trans characters, while streaming sites have pioneered in positive transgender character representation. All 7 major motion film studios have averaged adequate - failing gradings with the single trans-inclusive film from 2015 presenting the transwoman as a joke upon revealing her identity. This reveals how defamatory stereotypes are largely presented regarding, not only transpeople, but the LGBT community as a whole in major motion films.

3.9 Transgenderism and Media in Japan

Historically, and continuing today, transgenderism has been associated with the entertainment industry. The roles associated with transgender people have led to the issue not being taken seriously as they are viewed as a performance and not a person’s identity causing

both confusion and misunderstanding for the audience. For example, the term “Onee,” has been coined to collectively describe crossdressers, gay men, and transgender TV personalities. This grouping collects everyone’s identities and categorizes them under one term, though they may all personally identify differently or feel that this singular is not accurate in describing how their identity. Kamikawa Aya, Japan’s first transgender politician, has spoken out about the issue, expressing that TV programs do not promote proper understanding of the issues. According to her, “There is a huge gap between what people see in the media and what they hear from actual people...I don’t think those programs help to promote understandings of the diversity of sexuality.” She herself even fell victim to societal expectations and media stereotypes, believing the only job she could hold was as a hostess (Hoffart, 2011).

4. Research Method

In this study, we had 63 university students participants. The breakdown consisted of 31 American students, 15 male and 16 female, and 32 Japanese students, 15 male and 17 female, students. Data was collected through online surveys in English and Japanese using Google Forms.

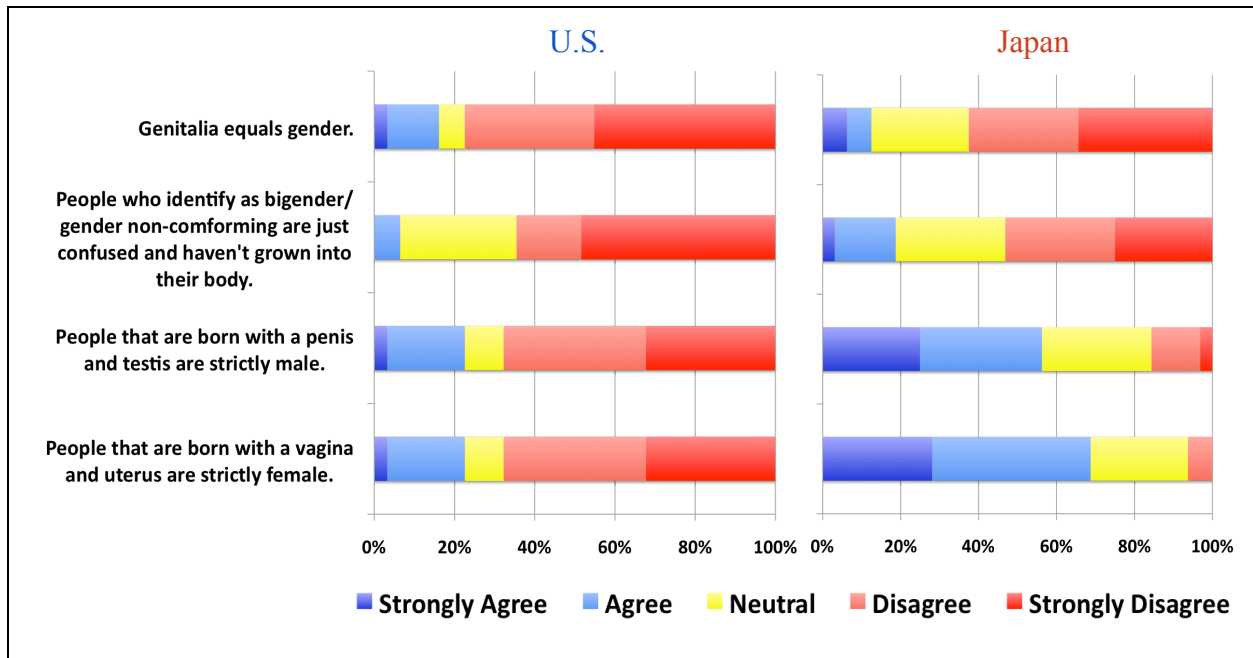
5. Research Findings

5.1 Research Question 1

What are college students' perceptions about transgender identities?

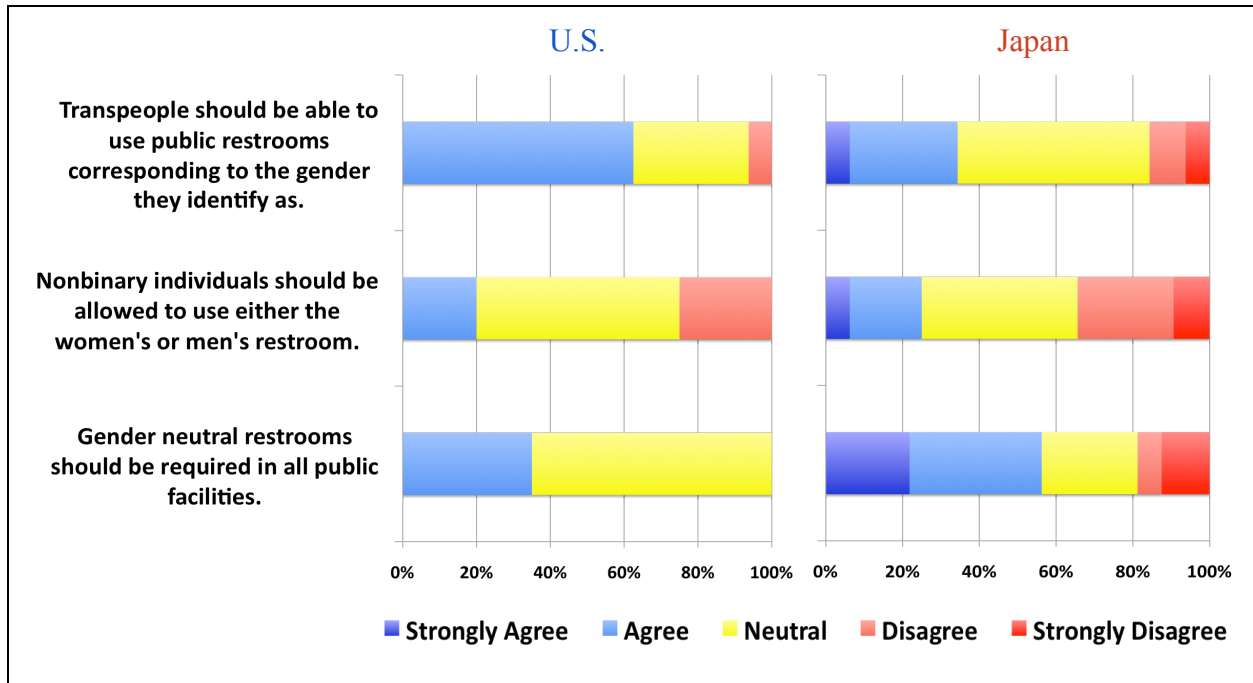
Regarding our Biological Statements, we found that U.S. students are more likely to strongly disagree that a person’s genitalia directly correlates to gender, as indicated by the red bars in each statement, while Japanese students agree genitalia equals an assigned sex, as indicated by the blue bars on the bottom two statement (figure 3). Though on Japan’s graph the top bar indicates that students strongly disagreed with the statement “genitalia equals gender”, we believe this to be a translation error on our part. The Japanese statement is closer to “one should accept the sex that they are born as” than “genitalia equals gender”.

Figure 3: Biological Statements



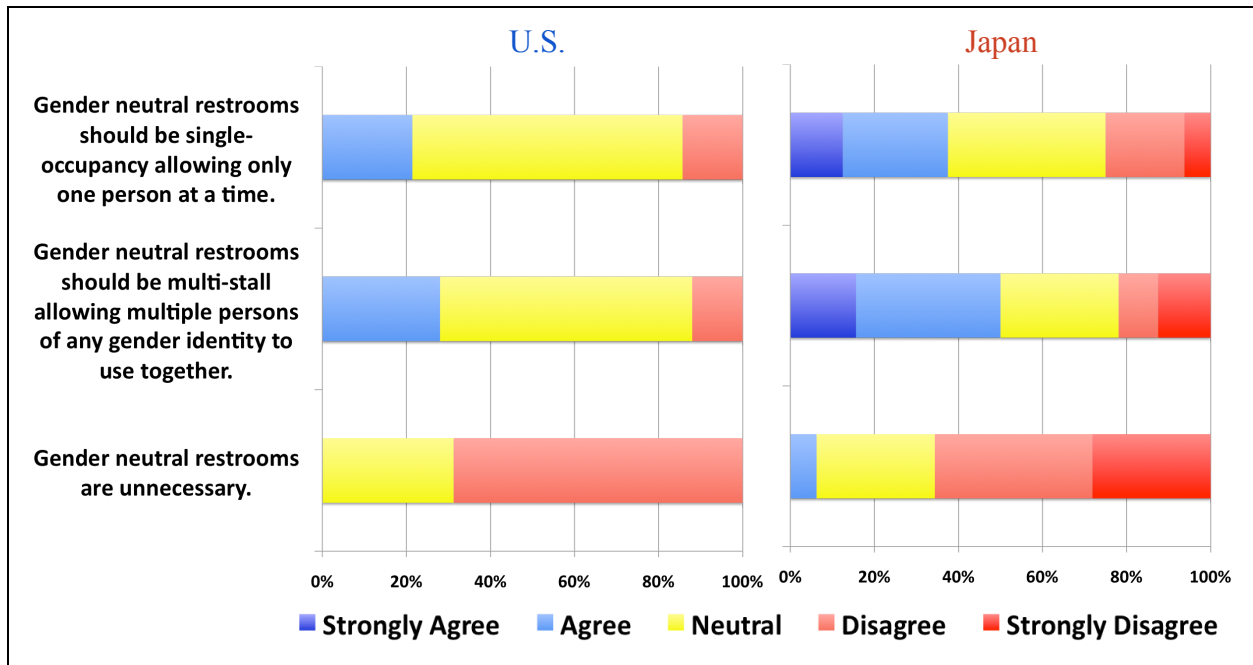
Regarding restroom usage, U.S. students mostly agree that transpeople should be able to use restrooms according to their gender, as indicated by the blue bar in the first statement, yet remain neutral about non-binary individuals, as indicated by the yellow bar in the second statement, while Japanese students prefer to remain neutral altogether, as indicated by the yellow bars in Japan's graph (see figure 4).

Figure 4: Restroom Statements



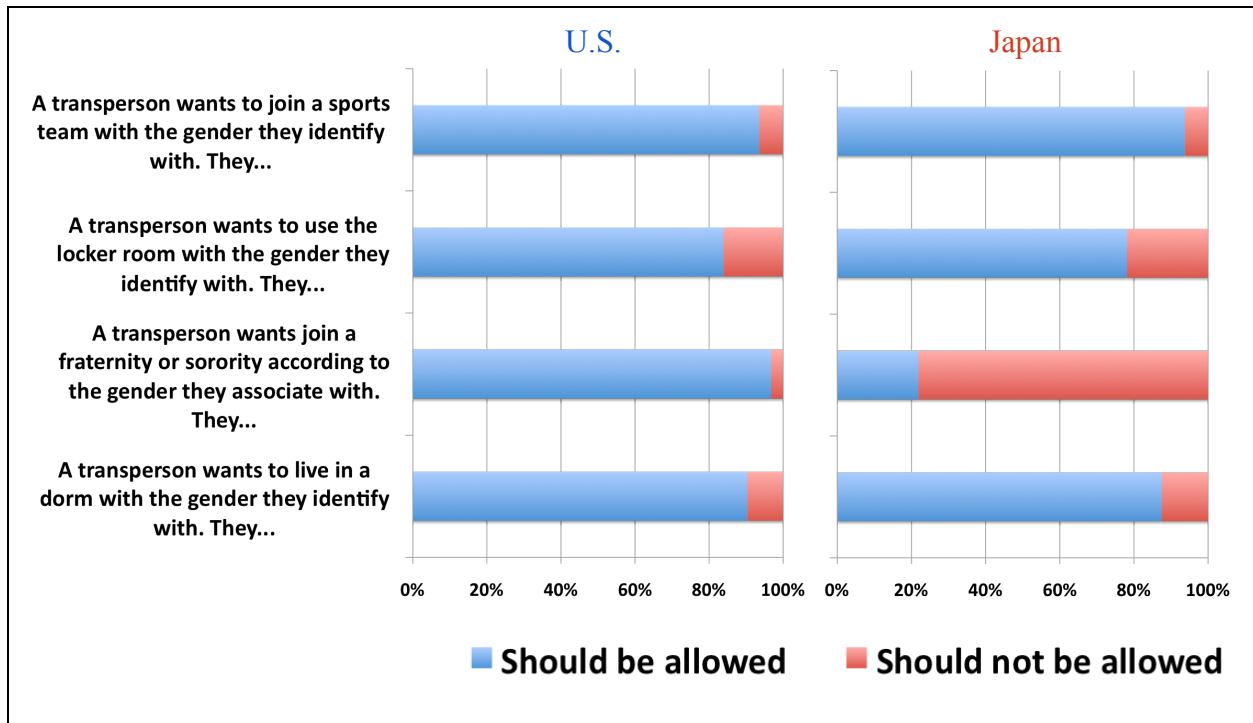
Continuing with our Restroom Statements, U.S. and Japanese students remain neutral on gender neutral restroom usage, as indicated by the yellow in both graphs top two statements, yet agree they are necessary, as indicated by the red bars on the bottom statements of both graphs (see figure 5).

Figure 5: Gender Neutral Restroom Statements



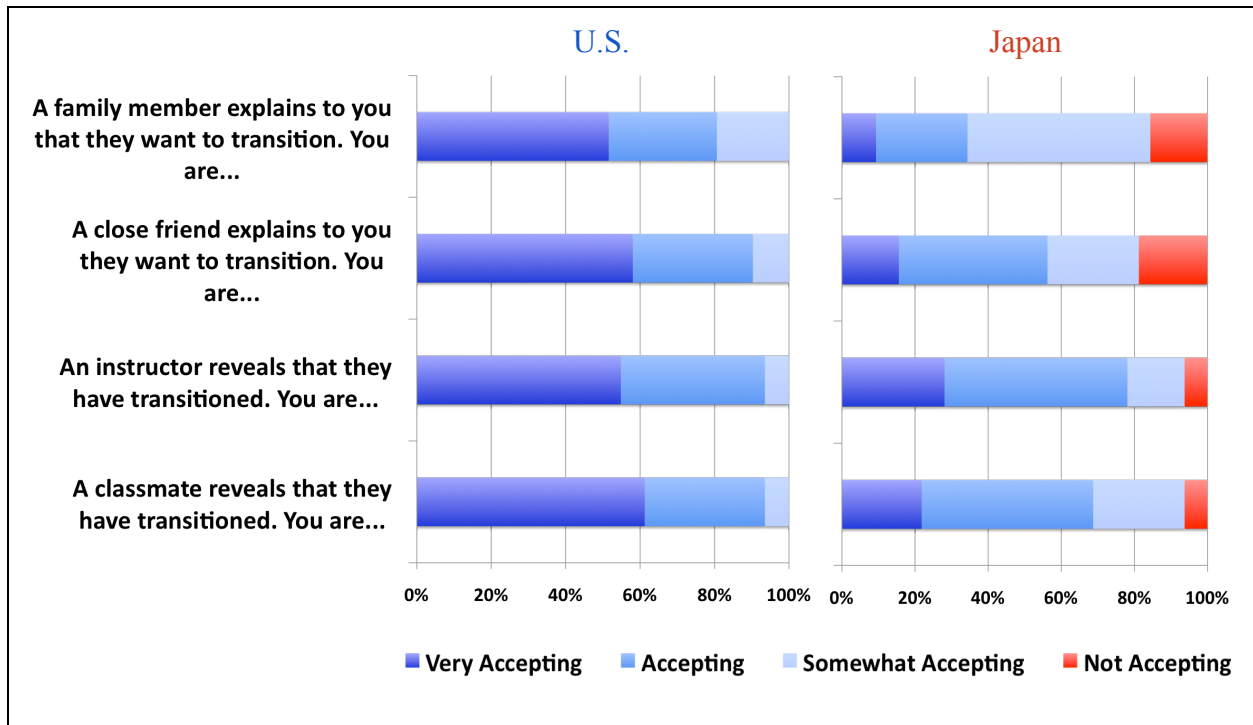
In our University scenarios, U.S. and Japanese students agree that transpeople should be allowed to join clubs or activities corresponding to their gender identity, indicated by the blue bars in each graph (see figure 6). The large red bar in the third statement in Japan's graph regarding inclusion in sororities and fraternities in Japan is believed by us to be another translation difference. As explained by our Japanese teachers, the sororities and fraternities do not exist in Japanese colleges. They instead have after school sports and academic clubs so from this information we can assume that Japanese students do not think transpeople should be able to join clubs that are gender specific. For example, they do not think a transmale should be able to join male sports teams. This could be connected to the answers in figure 1 in which the majority of students answered that those with specific sex organs are tied to a specific gender.

Figure 6: University Scenarios



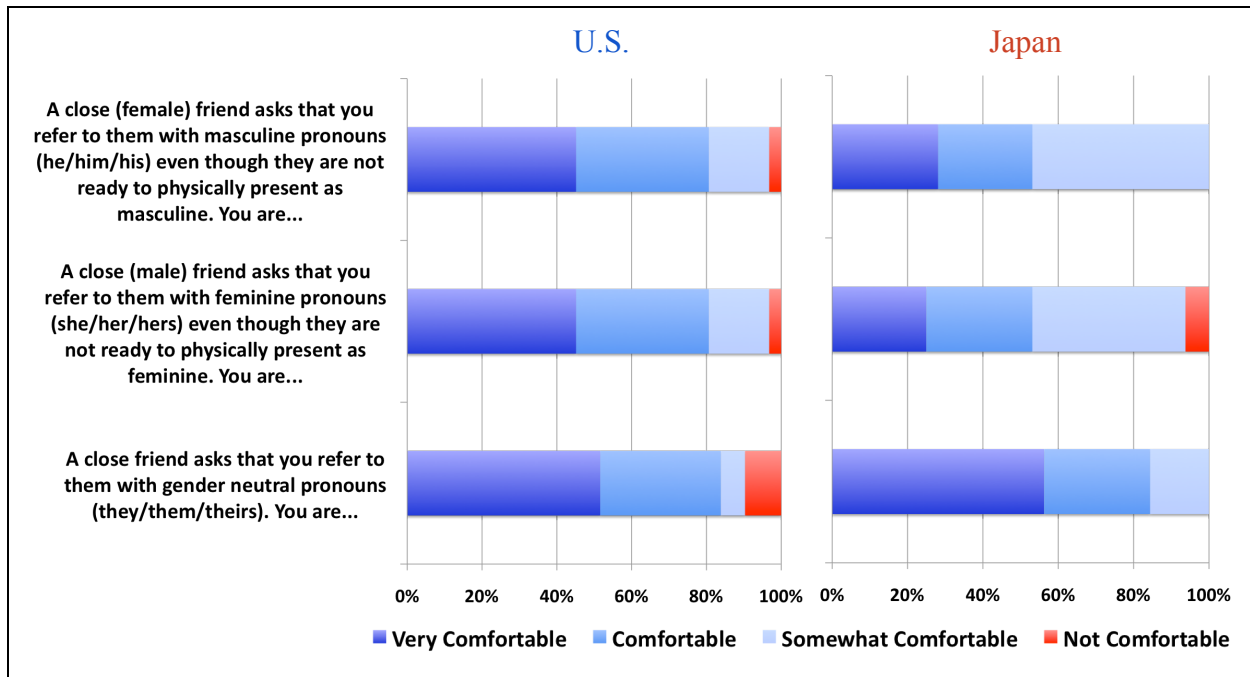
In our Personal Life Scenarios, we found that U.S. students are more likely to be very accepting of people they know who have transitioned, represented by the blue bars in each statement, yet Japanese students find it hard to be open to the idea of a friend or family member wanting to transition, as seen by the red bars in the first two statements (see figure 7). We believe this is tied into the fact that transgenderism is still labeled as a mental illness. Therefore, Japanese students would not be bothered by an instructor or fellow classmate who has transitioned because they are not a close friend or member of their family. If the students are directly affected by someone close to them wanting to transition then they seem to find it difficult to accept, again, most likely due to it being seen as a mental illness, therefore affecting their social status as those who stand outside of their conforming society are more likely to be judged by others negatively.

Figure 7: Personal Life Scenarios



Regarding Pronoun Scenarios, U.S. students are more likely to be very comfortable when asked to use pronouns opposite of a close friend's physical presentation. Japanese students are much more comfortable using gender neutral pronouns (see figure 8). Another translation difficulty we faced was trying to express the idea of gender neutral pronouns. Though the idea of gender neutral identities was indeed translatable, known as "nongender" in Japan, gender neutral pronouns, such as they/them, was not translatable. Whatever gender neutral pronouns the students had in mind when answering "very comfortable" to the last statement will remain uncertain to us, but it is interesting to see that these students seem so open to the idea of supporting gender neutral individuals.

Figure 8: Pronoun Scenarios



5.2 Research Question 1 Findings Summary

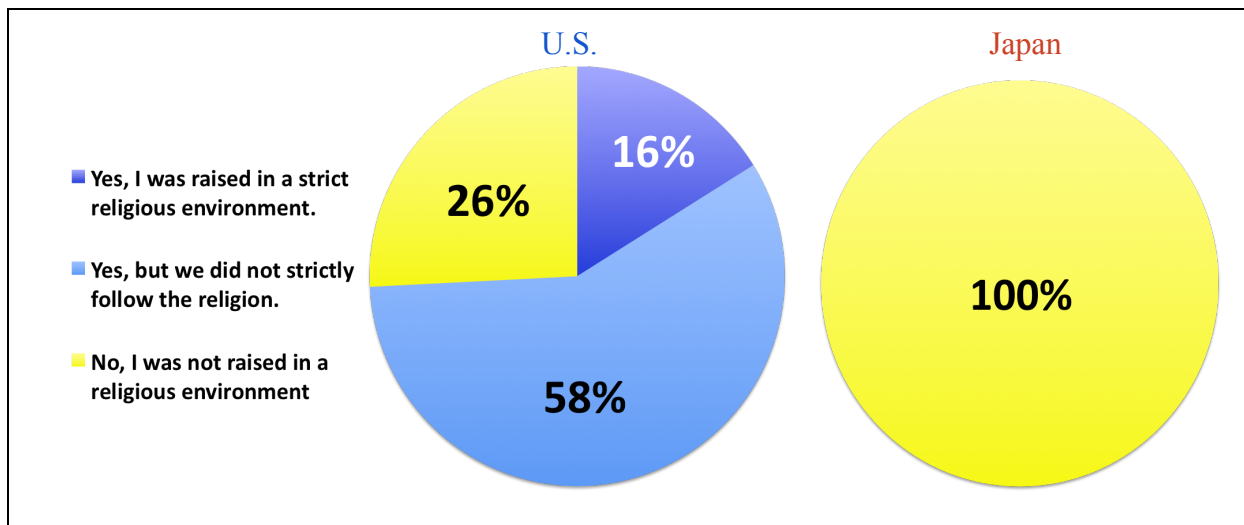
We found that, overall, American students are more accepting of gender diversity, as seen through our biological statements, while Japanese students seem to believe genitalia directly ties one to an assigned sex. American students are more likely to be accepting, comfortable, and open to transgender identities, relations, and public inclusion whereas Japanese students seem to feel more open to gender neutral identities and public facilities, as seen in our restroom and pronoun scenarios. In terms of personal life scenarios, both American and Japanese students seem accepting of someone they know who have transitioned, however Japanese students find it harder to accept the idea of a friend or family member wanting to transition, most likely due to transgenderism still being labeled as an illness.

5.3 Research Question 2

What influences these perceptions about transgender identities?

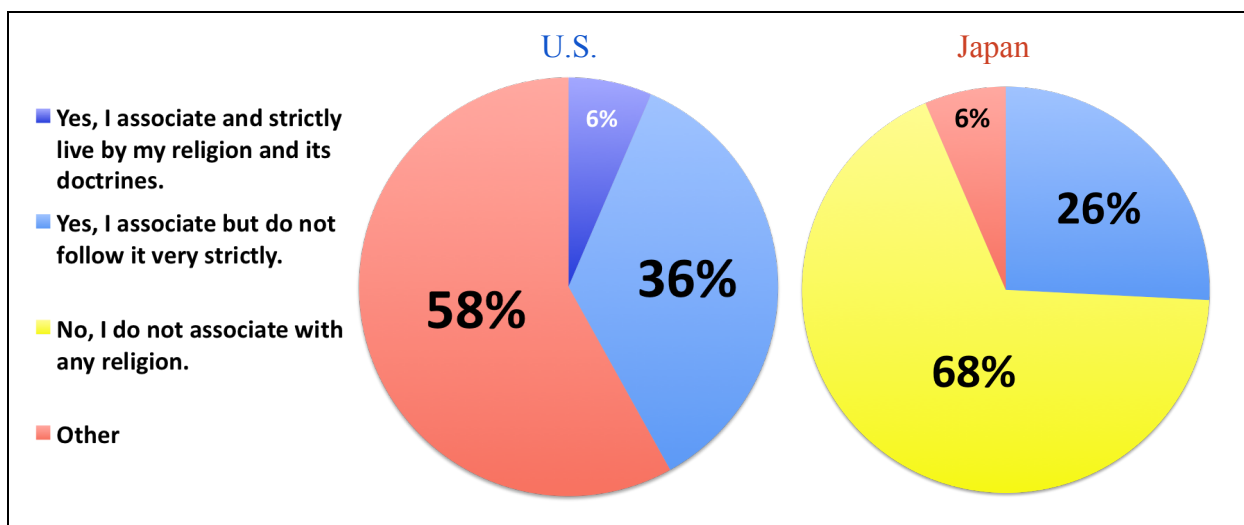
When asked, “Were you raised in a religious environment?” U.S. students reported they are more likely to have been raised in a religious environment, yet did not strictly follow their religion, while all Japanese students claim they were not raised religiously at all (see figure 9).

Figure 9: Religious Environment



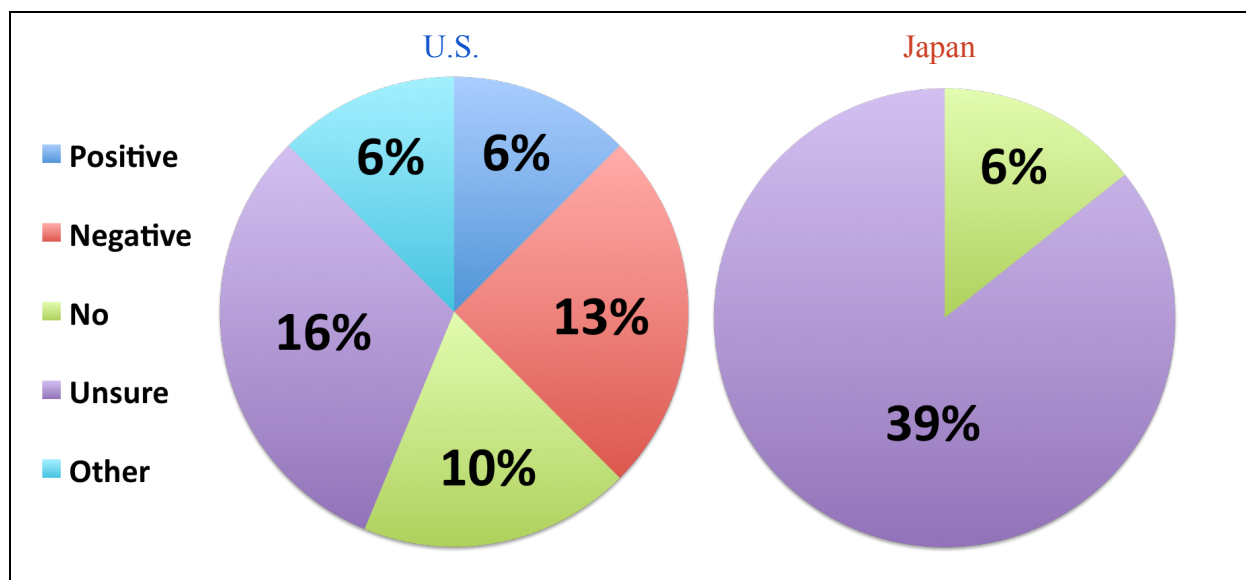
Continuing on we asked, “Do you currently associate with a religion?” to which U.S. students responded that they are more likely to associate with a religion but do not follow it very strictly, while the majority of Japanese students do not associate with a religion (see figure 10).

Figure 10: Religious Association



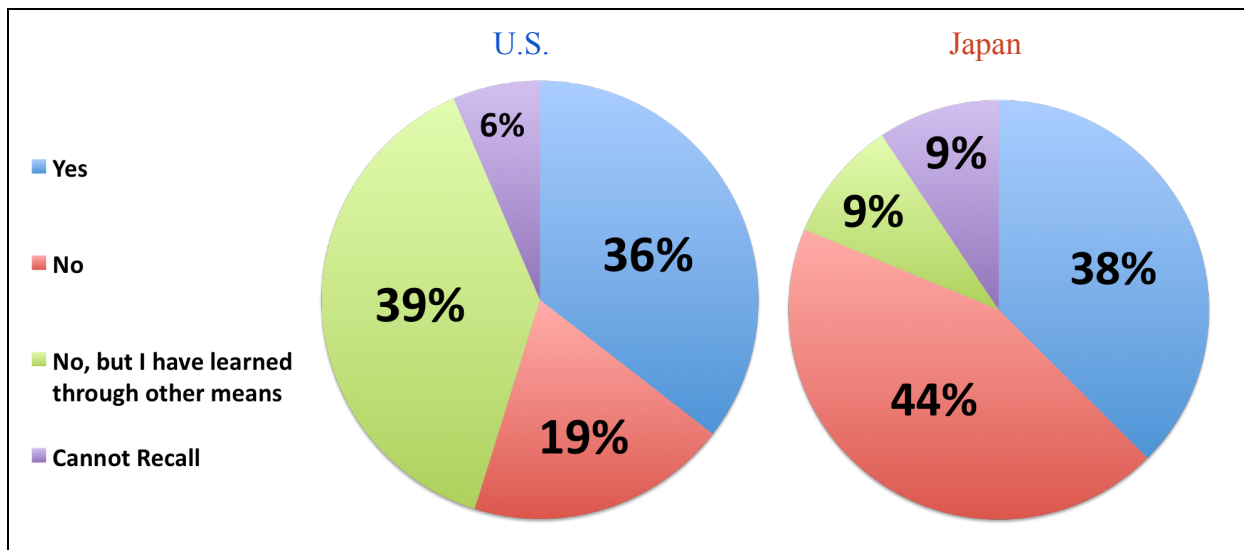
Of those who who answered yes to the previous question we asked, “Does the religion you associate with have positive or negative doctrines regarding transpeople?” to which both U.S. and Japanese students are mostly unsure of religious doctrines regarding transpeople. However, as you can see in the graph there is a high number of people who reported there are negative doctrines in the U.S. (see figure 11).

Figure 11: Religious Doctrines



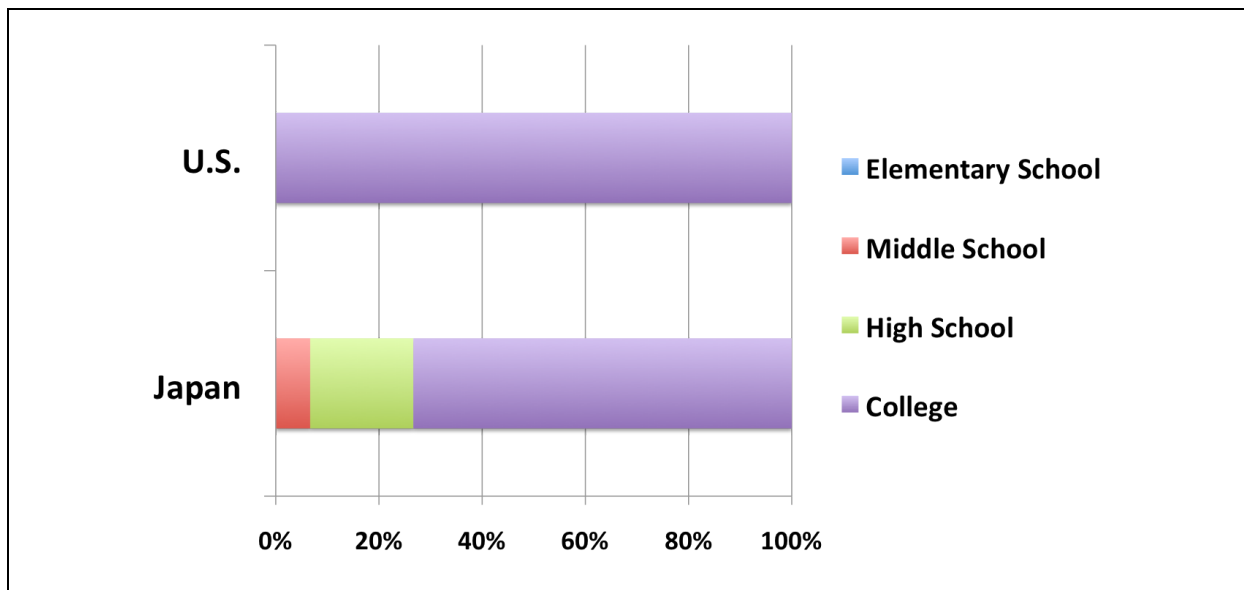
Moving on to education we asked, “Have you attended a class that included learning about transgenderism in its curriculum?” with the majority of U.S. students having learned about transgenderism outside of the educational system, while Japanese students are closely divided between having taken and having not taken a class (see figure 12).

Figure 12: Class Attendance



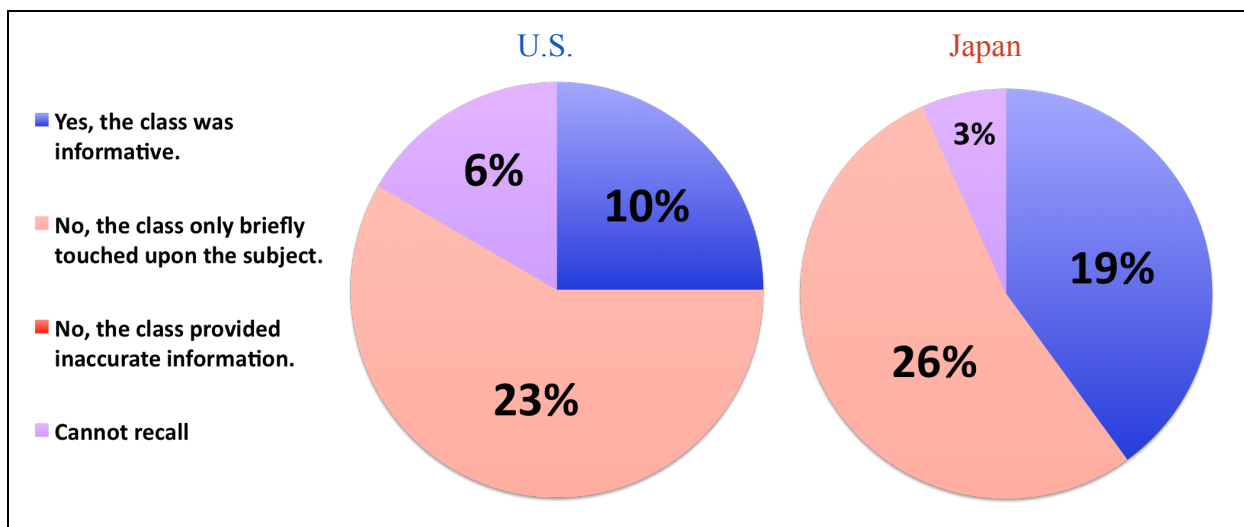
Of those who answered yes to the previous question we asked, “When did you attend this class?” with the majority of both U.S. and Japanese students having taken it in college (see figure 13).

Figure 13: Class Attendance Level



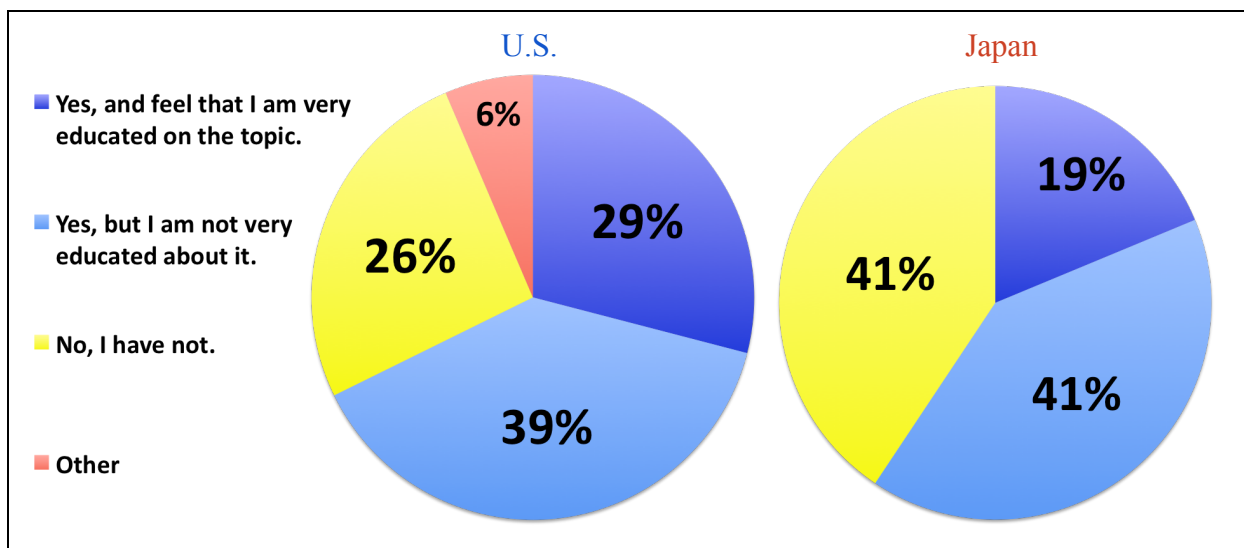
Furthermore, we asked, “Do you feel the class helped to clearly educate you about transgenderism?” with both U.S. and Japanese students reporting that the class only briefly touched upon the subject (see figure 14).

Figure 14: Class Education



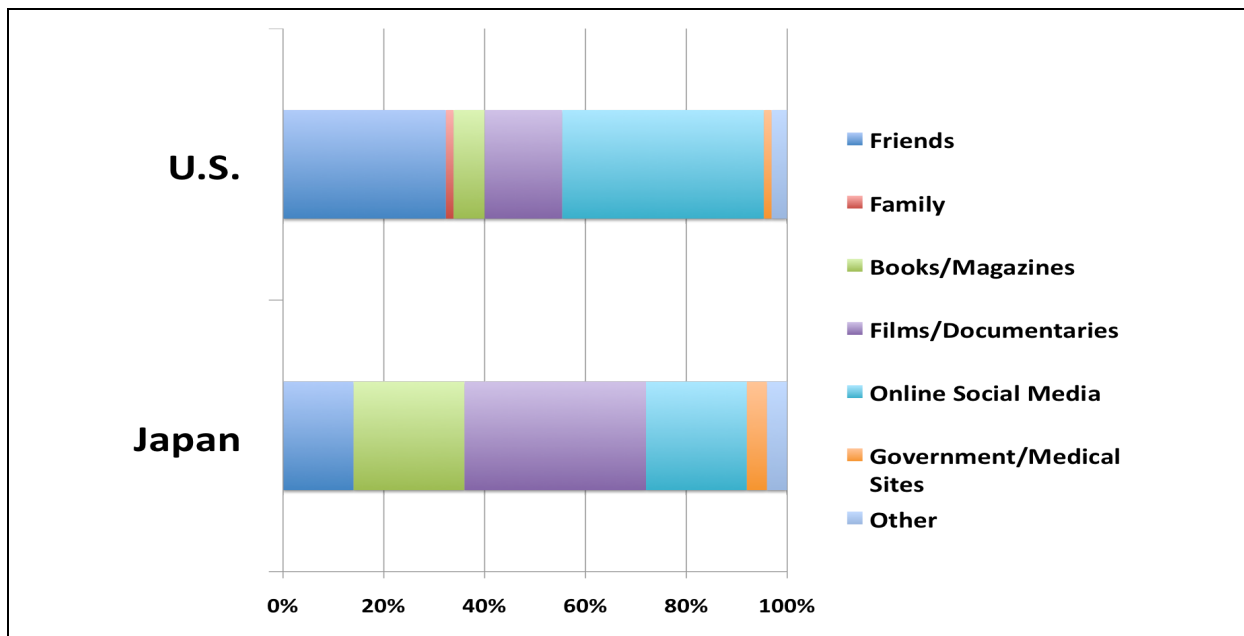
When asked, “Have you ever taken time on your own to research/learn more about transgenderism?” both U.S. and Japanese students mostly report to doing research on their own but feel they are not very educated about transgenderism (see figure 15).

Figure 15: Separate Research



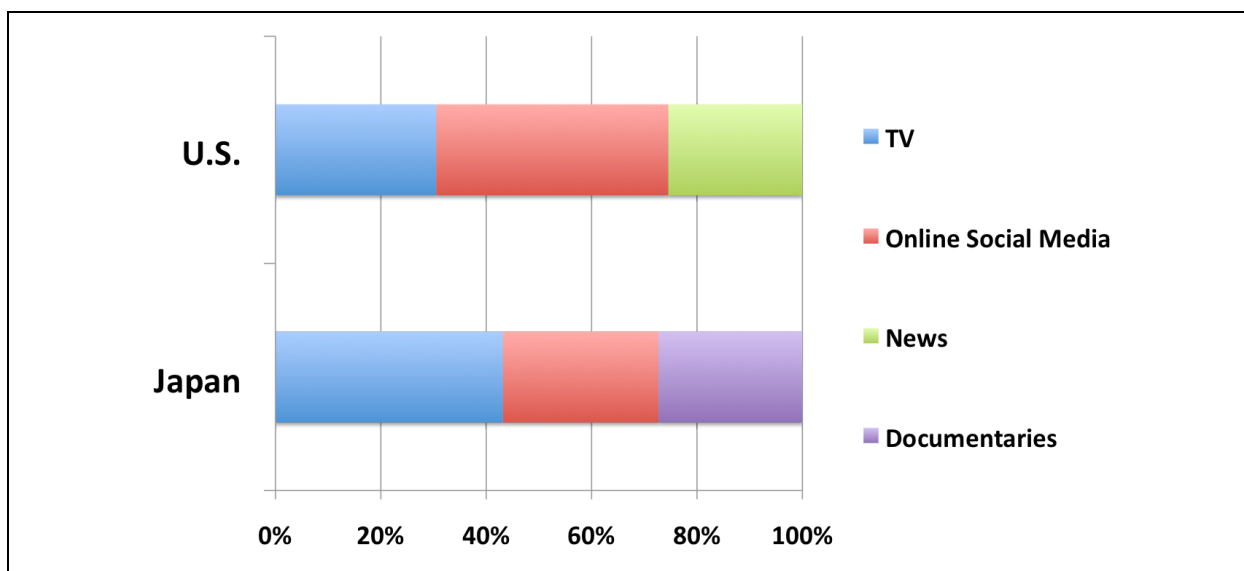
Narrowing it down to those who answered yes to the previous question we asked, “How did you research/learn more about transgenderism?” to which U.S. students reported having mainly learned through online social media and friends, while Japanese students have mainly learned through books and films (see figure 16).

Figure 16: Separate Research Methods



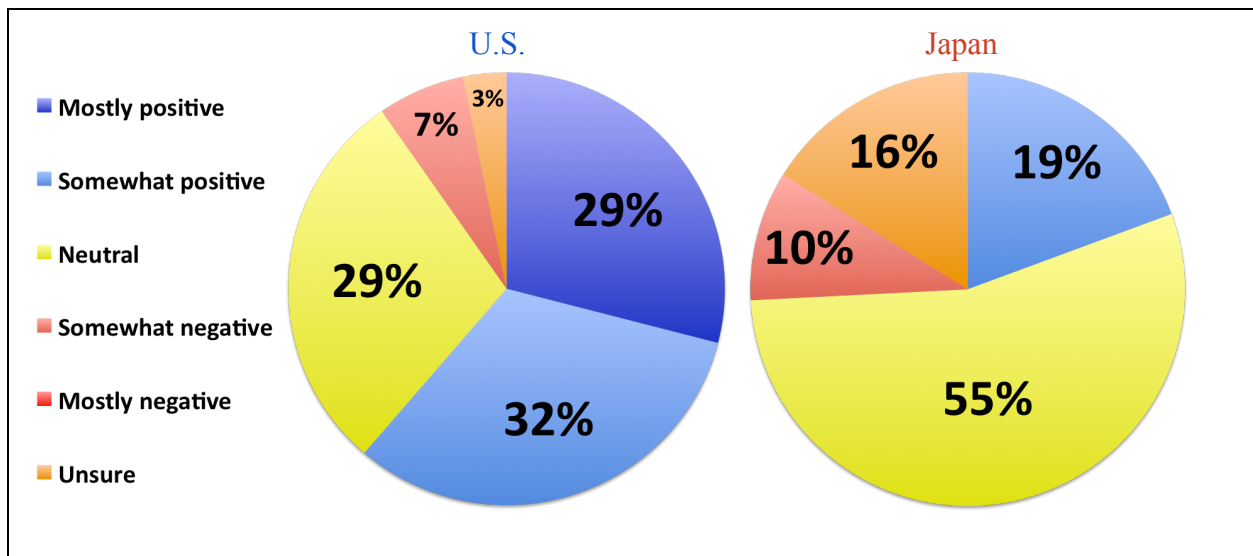
For the last section, in regards to media we asked students, “Which of the following top 3 forms of media do you most engage with that discusses transgenderism?” U.S. students report mostly engaging with transgenderism through online social media, television, and the news. Japanese students mostly engage with it through television, online social media, and documentaries (see figure 17).

Figure 17: Top 3 Forms of Media That Discusses Transgenderism



Of the forms students most engage with we asked, “Do these forms of media portray transgenderism in a positive or negative way?” to which U.S. students reported that the forms of media they most engage with present transgenderism in a somewhat positive way whereas Japanese students reported that they are presented in a neutral way (see figure 18).

Figure 18: Media Portrayal



5.4 Research Question 2 Findings Summary

Through our research we have discovered that religion plays a much stronger part in the lives of Americans as a large number of students reported their religion contains negative doctrines. Yet in contrast to this, they reported that they do not strictly follow their religion’s teachings. Even more interestingly Japanese students reported that they do not live strict religious lives in any sense and are mostly unaware of their religion’s doctrine’s positions regarding transgenderism. Regarding education, Japanese students felt that their classes are more inclusive and available with LGBT information with some even reporting that these took courses were available in high school and middle school. American students, on the other hand, are more likely to learn outside of school largely through online social media. Finally, media in Japan is reported to portrays identities in a neutral light especially as portrayed through television

programs, while American students believe positive representation of transgender people is largely portrayed in the media.

6. Conclusion

American students are overall more accepting of gender diversity most likely due to organized rights for the LGBT community having had a larger history. Individualism culture and freedom of expression also play in as important factors in connection with the vast amount of gender identities and sexualities that have recently come into light with equality in America is working towards inclusion of these multitudes of identities. Relating to the survey responses supports our literature review as American students mostly responded with being open and agreeing for the need of acceptance and inclusion. On the other hand, Japanese students seem to prefer neutrality unless it affects them directly most likely due to the cultural custom of avoiding confrontational situations, transgenderism still being considered a mental disorder, and collectivism culture putting the needs of the group above individuals. This can be related to why Japanese students prefer to remain neutral on a lot of the issues; either the issue is not openly talked about and/or is something that they have never had deep consideration about.

7. Limitations and Future Studies

While conducting this research, we faced a few different limitations. For example, most of the survey respondents were from California making our responses reflect a limited view and not the United States as a whole. Gathering responses from other parts of the country could give us much different responses. In addition, the majority of the Japanese respondents were students who are currently or had studied abroad in America. This could be the reason why so many Japanese students responded that they took a course that included discussion of transgender identities as it could have been taking during their time studying abroad. Another factor is that the direct translations of specific terms was not always possible as some of the words in English do not have any Japanese equivalents as of yet. Hopefully, as Japan grows more aware of transgenderism and the issues surrounding it in their current society, open discussion and understanding will become more commonplace.

To continue this study in the future we would like interview a larger and wider range of students from both countries, including students who have never studied abroad and from different parts of the United States. Also, we would like to include more in depth questions while removing the “neutral” option, in order to receive more honest opinions and in turn cause our survey respondents to think more deeply about how they feel about these issues. Furthermore, we would like strengthen our research by studying a wider variety of religions and their doctrines from both countries.

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