

## Perceptions of “Multi-Race Children” in Japan and the United States

Taylor-Ann Miyoko Moore

California State University – Monterey Bay

### Abstract

The United States is home to an array of people of different ethnicities, races, and cultures, whereas the island of Japan is a historically rooted homogeneous country. In recent years, as globalization is quickly spreading, Japan has had an influx of multi-racial people. This project explores what types of issues people with multiple racial and ethnic identities face and why they face these issues. In addition, where do the issues come from? Through online surveys shared with 48 Americans and 58 Japanese, it was found that some of the most prominent issues that people of mixed-race face are discrimination, stereotyping, and identity issues within themselves. The data showed that there was a wide array of different perceptions of multiculturalism based on whether or not they identified as multi-raced themselves. Although the people who were not mixed-race try to understand the issues that the mixed-race people encountered, they didn't fully understand. Factors like parents, friends, and media contributed to the survey takers' perceptions of race and ethnicity.

### Introduction

This paper will examine the differences in perceptions of people in the United States and Japan in regards to multiculturalism. The United States has always been a country with multiple ethnicities and races, so the fact that many were open towards it was not a surprise. However, it is uncovered that although Japan has been, for the most part, homogenous the survey takers showed open mindedness towards multiculturalism. It is clear, especially through this research, that Japan's ideas and way of thinking about other cultures and races is surely changing.

### Significance of the Study

The main reason why I picked this topic was because I am a half Japanese and half American person. Another reason being that when I was studying abroad last year at Okayama University, I became more aware of the fact that I identified as Japanese-American and moreover, half-Japanese. This awareness came from the fact that many Japanese people, as well as others, have the opinion that Japan is a mostly homogenous country. Moreover, because I had grown up in a very liberal city in California, I have always seen multiculturalism, whereas in Japan I didn't.

However, in the modern age of Japan, this is changing and more people are beginning to have different opinions of people who are a half, quarter, or just in general a mixture of different races or ethnicities.

## 2. Research Questions

1. What kind of issues do mixed-raced people encounter?
2. What are the perceptions of multi-raced people and what factors affect them?

## 3. Research Background

### 3.1 Ethnicity and Race Definitions

The reason why having a definition of ethnicity and race is because for many people, there is no difference between the two terms. In reality, ethnicity can be defined as a group of people who identify with each other due to similar traits. These traits can be real or presumed by genealogy or ancestry. Some ethnicities share common linguistic or religious backgrounds, however, this is not always the case (James, 2008). Race, on the other hand, is defined as a group that shares a common biological trait or gene. Therefore, this trait is inherited from generation to generation. Things that can be seen as racially inherited are bone structure, skin color, eye shape, as well as others (James, 2008).

### 3.2 Multiculturalism in Japan and America

Japan's national census does not ask for one's ethnicity, however, what it does ask for is nationality. Even for returnee Japanese, people who are not ethnically Japanese - but were born in Japan, and those who are multiethnic, the Japanese national census deems them to be ethnically Japanese (Ministry of Justice Immigration Bureau, 2009). Therefore, the census has a very small amount of people who are not "ethnically Japanese" because of the people who are not Japanese national citizens (cia.gov, 2004). America, on the other hand, asks for ethnicity so the census data is a little broader. However, there is no listing for Hispanic because "separate listing for Hispanic is not included because the US Census Bureau considers Hispanic to mean ... any race or ethnic group (white, black, Asian, etc.); about 15.1% of the total US population is Hispanic," (cia.gov, 2004).

### 3.3 World War II and the Social Stigma

Terms like “Japanaphobia,” “Nipponophobia,” and “Han-Nichi,” were coined around 1950 after WWII (Emmott, 1933). Anti-Japan and Anti-Japanese propaganda was created, which showed images degrading and dehumanizing the Japanese people (Art: The Tokio Kid. Time Magazine, 1942). Moreover, this propaganda was made to make the Japanese natives and the Japanese-Americans who were living in America to lose faith in their country and hurt their pride. On top of the dehumanizing propaganda, a writer by the name of Navarro writes that “Japan was evolutionarily inferior,” (Navarro, 2000).

### 3.4 Problems that Mixed-Race Children and Half-Japanese People Encounter

First of all, the term “Japanese-American” now means “Any person with Japanese Descent” (Nagayoshi, 2011). In America, the Japanese-Americans are encountering many problems when it comes to ethnically and racially identifying themselves. Recently, the Japanese-American communities have become so complex that it’s hard to find one’s identity within it. There has also been a trend of the first, second, and third generation Japanese – those who are not mixed-race – against those who are mixed race (Kikumura Yano, 2008).

Next, according to Nakashima’s “One Drop Rule,” anyone who has “one drop” of a minority in their ethnic mix should be considered a minority (Nakashima, 2001). From this theory, a lot of ijime and bullying can happen. Ijime is the Japanese word for bullying; however it tends to have much darker intentions (Taki, 2003). In most cases, ijime comes in the form of physical, oral, psychological, or social punishment (Kawagoe, n.d.). Moreover, in Japan the terms “half,” “double,” “ai no ko (child in the middle)” have been coined and show a very discriminative and stereotypical tone (Nakashima, 2001). Not only does Japan have discriminatory words for people of mixed race, but America as well. One word is “happa” which comes from the Hawaiian term: fragment (Fullbeck, n.d.). Happa, although used as a friendly term among many who identify as such, can most definitely be seen as a negative term once one knows what the true meaning is. However, “half” and “ai no ko” are often seen as very negative things as it makes one seem less than whole because they are more than one ethnicity. Although, because of the negative feelings towards the word “half,” “double” has been used more often to show that one is more than whole by their ethnicity (マーフィ重松, 2002).

When it comes to racially or ethnically stereotyping, there are positive and negative connotations towards each. First, the negative types of stereotyping; for people who identify as half, it has become harder for them to find a place in society where they fit in. It has become popular in Japan to idolize people who are half, but only if they are particularly good looking or talented. In her book, Haefelin states that “[people] think that all half people are ‘cute,’ ‘bilingual,’ or ‘rich,’” (Haefelin, 2012). She says this in such a tone to mean that it is incorrect and that the stereotyping that is happening to the modern half-Japanese person is wrong. Half-Japanese people often look at this type of stereotyping in a negative light.

Using a search for stereotypes on both Japanese and American people, a site where the top ten most used phrases to describe them came up. For Japanese people, the phrases could all be seen in a positive way. Things like “hard working,” “always on time,” and “kind” were the first to make the list (Gerhold, 2013). However, although these terms may seem good, in reality, they can cause a lot of damage to a person’s psyche. For instance, saying that a Japanese person is always studious and smart could actually very much harm the individual. Say if a student is not as smart as they feel everyone thinks they are. Indeed, they would begin to feel that if they don’t try hard – harder than everyone else – that they would fall behind. This surely leads to the phrase “death by overwork” to these people, as they feel as though they must fit into society’s picture of them (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, Japan, 2010). In the list provided for Americans, the top ten most used phrases were a mixture of good and bad. For example, “kind” and “thoughtful” were two of the top used expressions. However, very soon after them things like “overly religious,” “uninterested in other cultures,” and “annoying/loud” were used to describe American people (Murray, 2010).

### 3.5 Multiculturalism in the Media

Although media has a huge impact on the way people ethnically or racially identify themselves, people had the biggest influence. Media creates symbols, which shape the way society thinks ethnicities look and act, which then affects the people watching it. Some examples of people who are mixed-race and half-Japanese in the media are Yu Darvish, a famous baseball player who is half Iranian and half Japanese and Anna Tsuchiya, an actress/singer/model who is half Polish and half Japanese. These two people have a hand in shaping how people see multiculturalism through their success.

However, recently in Japan a half African American and half Japanese woman has been selected as Japan’s “Miss Universe.” There are many Japanese people, who consider this to be an issue, as she is not “Japanese enough,” however, just the fact that she was chosen as the symbol of Japan is a huge step forward for the Japanese society.

**4. Research**

4.1 Subjects of Study

58 Japanese and 48 American anonymous survey takers produced the survey results, 106 in total.

4.2 Research Method

The research was produced by online surveys in both English and Japanese.

**5. Results**

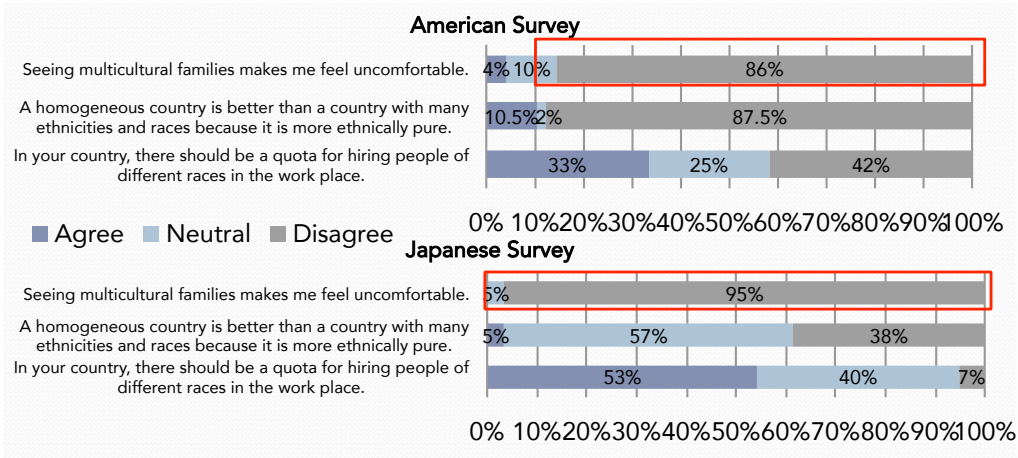
5.1 What types of issues do mixed race children encounter in Japan and America?

5.2 Discrimination

**Graph 1: “Seeing multicultural families makes me feel uncomfortable”**

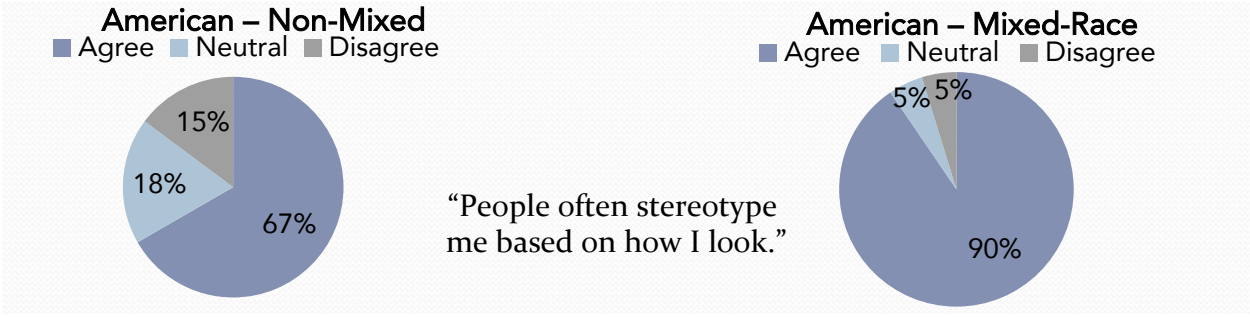
**“A homogenous country is better than a country with many ethnicities and races because it is more ethnically pure”**

**“In your country, there should be a quota for hiring people of different races in the work place”**



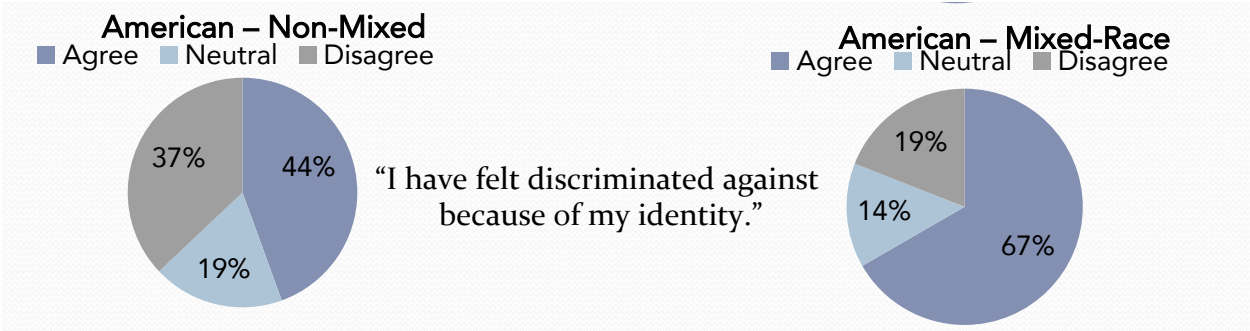
In both surveys, Japanese and American people had an open mind towards families with mixed race children or couplings. This result was surprising because many Japanese people are not accustomed to seeing such a family structure. The Japanese survey also gave a lot of neutral answers towards the homogenous country question, perhaps because they already live in one.

**Graph 2: “People often stereotype me based on how I look” (American)**



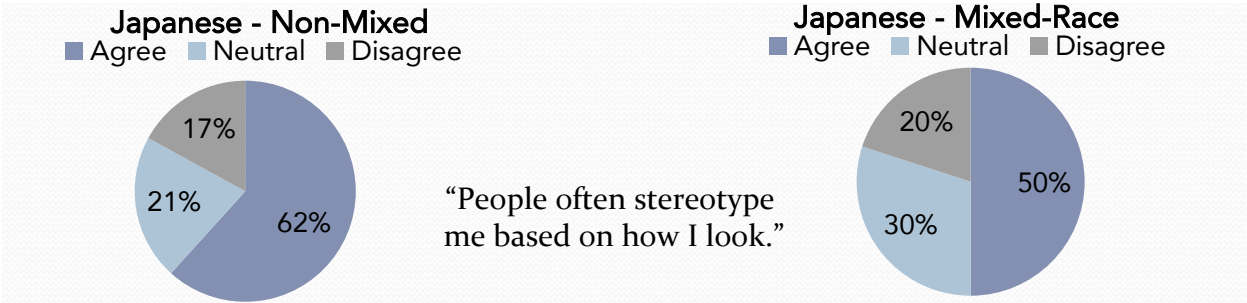
Both mixed and non-mixed race American survey takers agreed that they are often stereotyped based on how they look with the mixed-race Americans feeling the most stereotyped.

**Graph 3: “I have felt discriminated against because of my identity” (American)**

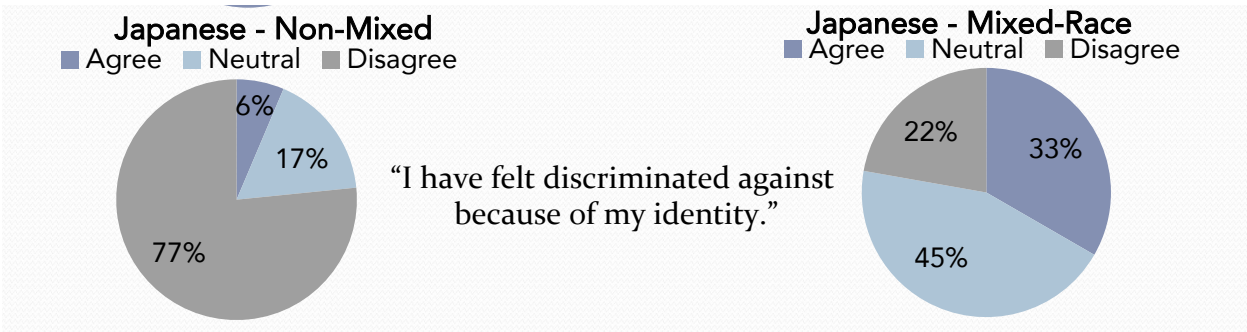


In both questions, mixed-raced Americans felt more stereotyped and discriminated against than their mono-race counterpart. However, both parties still felt that they had been stereotyped or discriminated against due to their ethnicity. Nevertheless, the non-mixed Americans had the largest percentage of disagrees when it came to being discriminated against.

**Graph 4: “People often stereotype me based on how I look” (Japanese)**

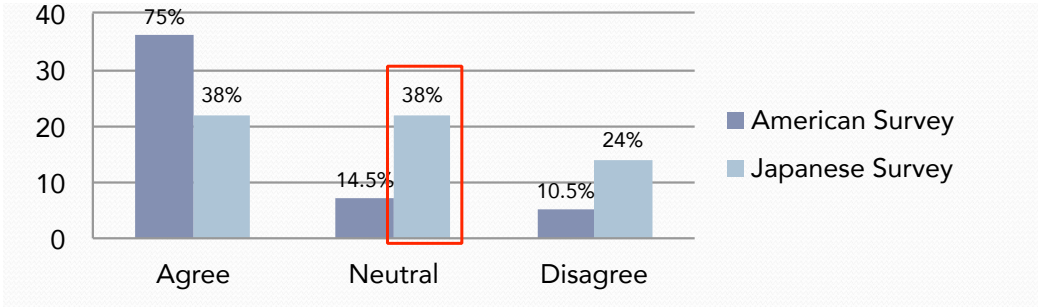


**Graph 5: “I have felt discriminated against because of my identity” (Japanese)**



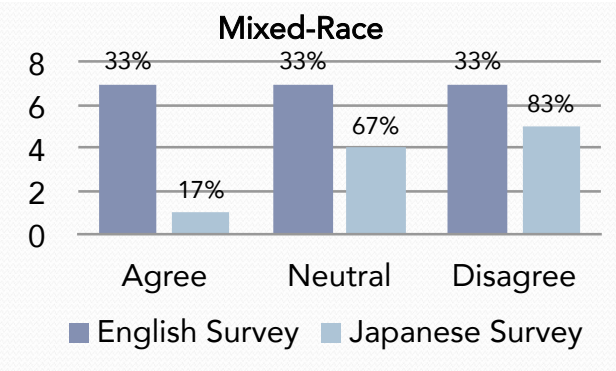
Although both parties felt as though they were stereotyped against, the mono-race Japanese survey takers did not agree that they had felt discriminated against because of their identity. This could come from the fact that Japan is a majority Japanese. So those that have not traveled out of the country would not have felt the stereotyping that can happen when you look different than those around you ethnically or racially. The mixed race Japanese also didn't feel very much discrimination, or were neutral to the idea. This can come from the fact that many mixed race Japanese people are mixed with other Asian ethnicities and races. Therefore, they may be mixed, but no one can truly tell the difference. It is when one is mixed with an outlier group when the problems arise.

**Graph 6: “People who are mixed race are more likely to experience bullying”**



38% of the Japanese survey takers were neutral to this question. This can do largely to the fact that the vast majority of the Japanese survey takers were mono-racial. Therefore, they cannot really put themselves in a situation where they can think of being mixed-race. Another thing is that most Japanese students go to school where there are no other ethnicities around them; therefore they have never seen a child who is mixed race experience bullying.

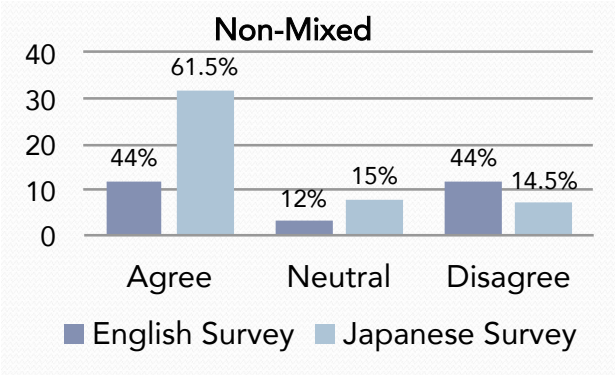
**Graph 7: “I feel I have to choose one identity”**



This question was only asked to the people who identified as mixed race, as it has to do with choosing between one’s ethnic identities. The American survey results could go either way, as 33% were neutral. The Japanese survey takers disagreed that they had to choose one identity, but this could be partially do to the fact that when one is born and raised in Japan, many people just consider them ethnically Japanese and they aren’t given a choice.

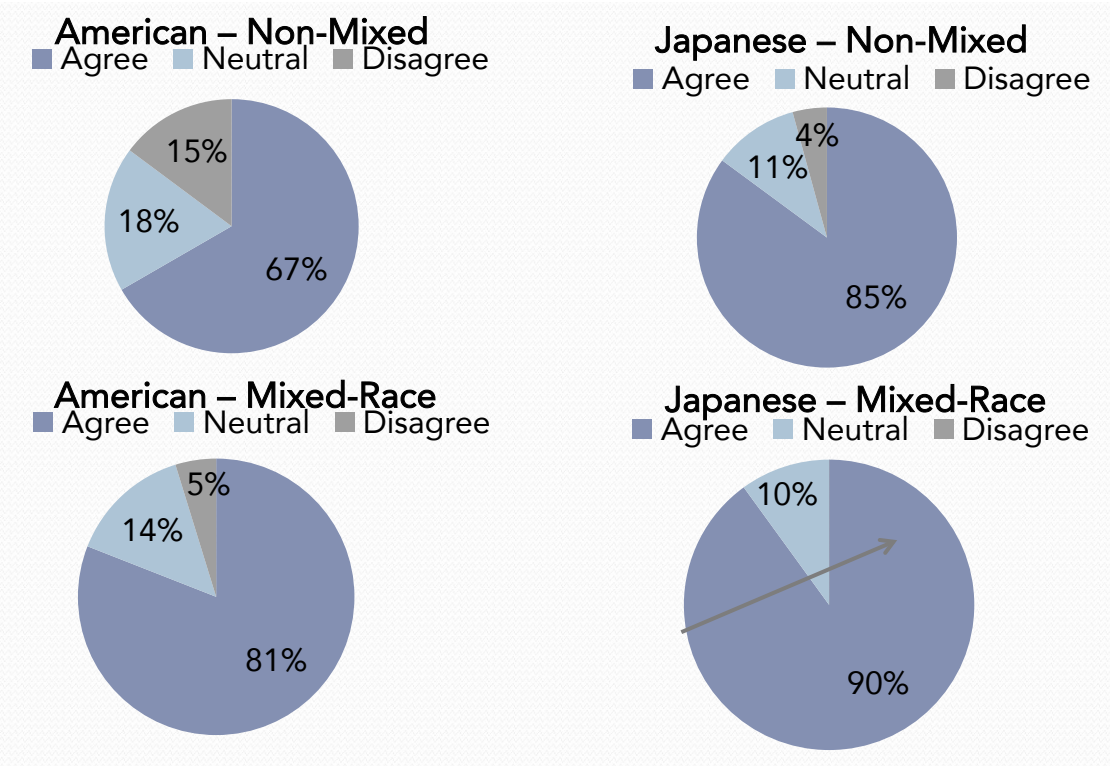


**Graph 8: “I don’t relate to issues regarding identity”**



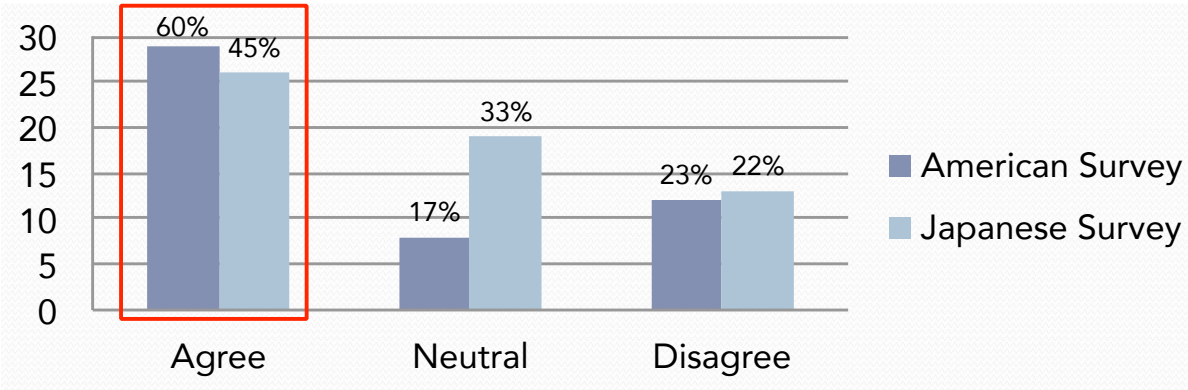
Neither group was overly affected by identity issues, especially the Japanese survey takers, who disagreed to the first question (only the mixed race people) and agreed to the second question. The two questions were made to mirror each other in the survey so that the results could be conclusive and equal for both mixed and non-mixed people.

**Graph 9: “I feel that it is important to be proud of who I am in terms of ethnicity/race”**



The majority of survey takers, in either language, felt that it was important to be proud of ones self in terms of ethnicity and race. Moreover, in the Japanese mixed-race survey, surprisingly not a single person said that it was not important to be proud.

**Graph 10: “My feelings towards my identity have changed since I was a child”**

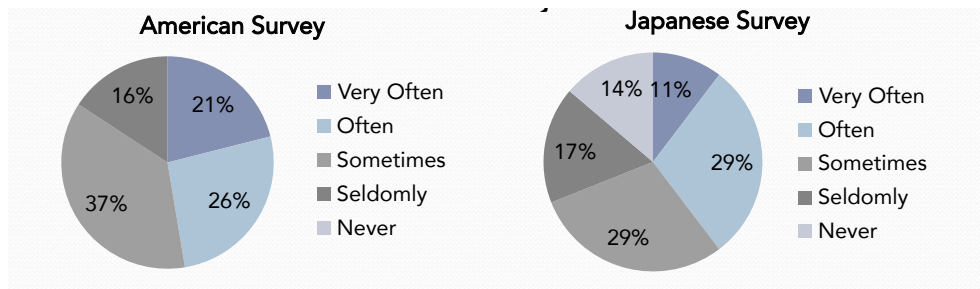


**Graph 11: Graph 10’s personally written answers**

American Survey	Japanese Survey
<p><b>“I have become less proud of my identity as an Asian person though out college. I'm just tired of the stereotypes, I just want to fit in.”</b></p>	<p>“I had a terrible inferiority complex, but though myself and my friends, also in the eyes of others, I’ve come to recognize that everyone has their own way of living.”</p>
<p>“I was always proud as well as tired of having to explain my background. This has always been the case, but now, I feel like my understanding of race as well as the emotional understanding of myself has helped to shape a more solid sense of self.”</p>	<p>“I was ashamed and hated being Japanese until I got to Grad school where I met a Hawaiian born Japanese. I'm not sure if it was her influence or just growing up but it wasn't so bad looking into a mirror anymore”</p>

When it came to this question, there were both positive and negative reviews towards it. Typically, it seemed as though the American survey takers had more of a change when it came to their identification. This is likely due in part to the way that America already is. There is much room to change oneself and to take time to understand oneself more so than Japan, where for many, the main goal is assimilation.

**Graph 12: “Prior to this survey, have you ever thought deeply about your own ethnic or racial identity?”**



Identity issues within oneself could arise from a lack of previous awareness. The majority of people in either survey answered neutrally with “sometimes.” However, it is clear that the American survey takers had spent more time previously thinking about their ethnic or racial identities, especially because a portion “never” is not clicked at all.

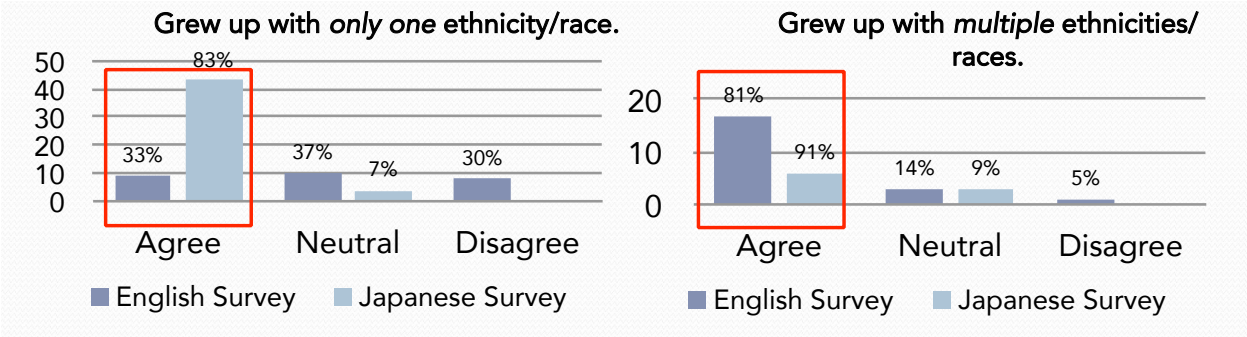
#### 5.4 Research Question 1 Findings

Japanese people were often more neutral than anything when it came to issues regarding discrimination. This is due to the fact that many Japanese who took the survey were only ethnically Japanese or were Japanese and another Asian mix. Therefore, there has been little room for discrimination, especially if they had never been abroad. Most people believed that it was important to be proud of who they were in regard to their ethnicity and race. However, this also led some to feel discriminated against. The majority of survey takers agreed that their feelings towards their own ethnic or racial identities had changed since childhood. However, the Americans seemed to have an easier time expressing the change than the Japanese. More Americans than Japanese had previously thought about their identity prior to the survey, likely due to the already present multiculturalism in America.

5.5 Research Question Two: What are the perceptions of multi-raced people and what factors affect them?

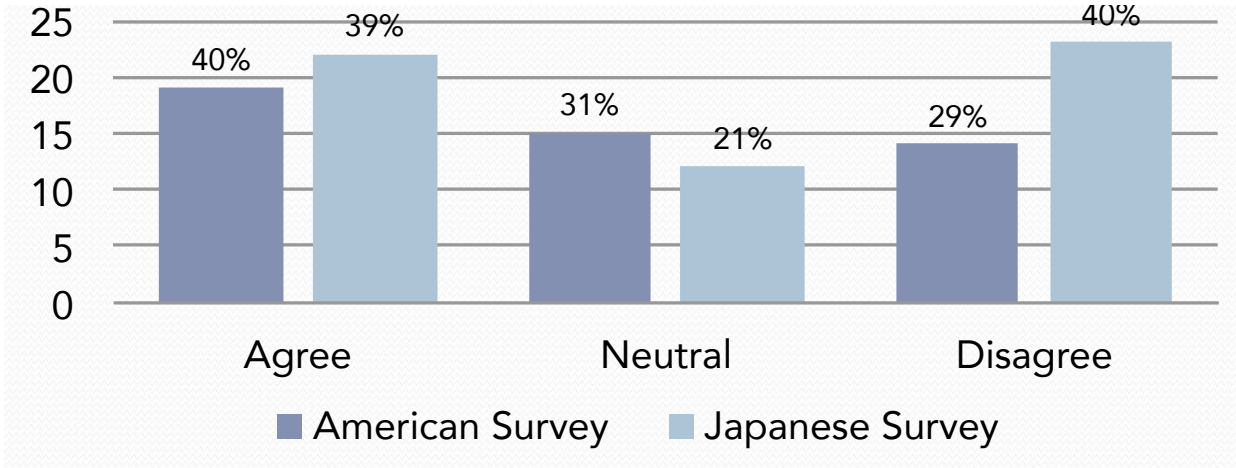
#### 5.6 People’s Perceptions

**Graph 13: “One’s perception on people of mixed-race has been affected positively based on how they identify themselves.”**



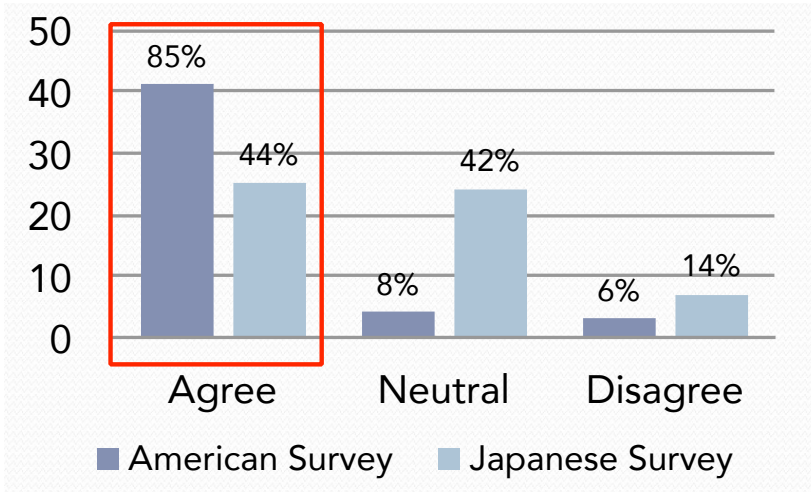
Both mono and mixed-race people felt as though their perception on people of mixed-race had been affected positively by their own ethnicity or race growing up. However, in the American survey, more people who were mono-ethnic felt neutral towards the idea.

**Graph 14: “One is considered a minority if they are mixed-race”**

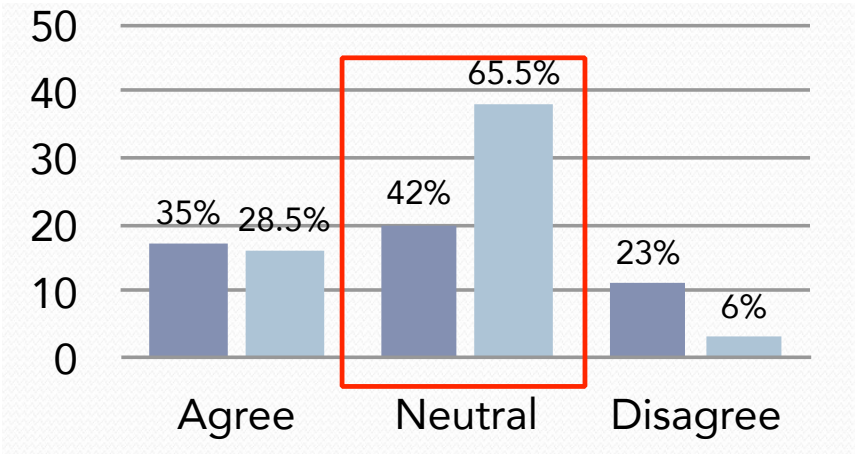


Although the “One Drop Rule” exists, many survey takers did not agree with it. They felt that just because one is mixed-race that they should not feel the need to be considered or have to identify as mixed-race.

**Graph 15: “It is important to see mixed-race people in the media”**

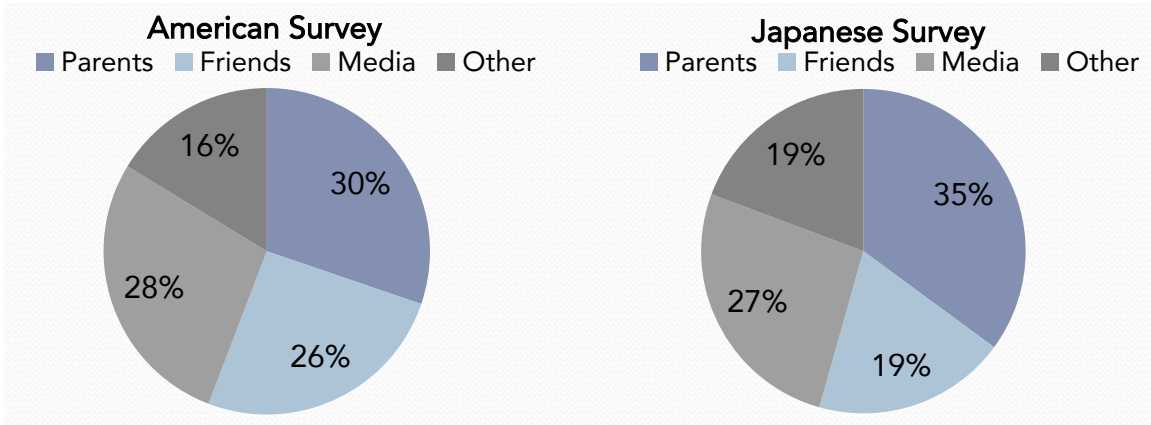


**Graph 16: “I look up to people who share similar ethnic or racial traits as myself”**



Although the majority of the survey takers agreed that it was important to see multiculturalism in the media and a variety of representations, most also answered neutral when it came to actually looking up to people who share similar ethnic or racial traits as themselves. This is something that I found interesting – perhaps the image is more important than seeing someone who is similar to yourself in the media.

**Graph 17: “Where did your opinions on race and ethnicity stem from?”**



According to the background research, the highest answer should logically be media. However, after taking the survey I realized there were so many different factors. Many people answered this question with an “all of the above” type of response. However, others gave me personal responses such as “my own research,” “studying abroad,” and “books.”

**Graph 18: “Please describe the time that stuck out to you the most when your race or ethnicity was represented by the media”**

American	Japanese
“Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee always made Chinese people look ‘cool’ but then people thought I could do kung fu,” (Female, 52, Chinese).	“I was extremely happy once to see ha-fu represented in a show as a journalist, and not as a model. It confirmed to me that ha-fu are not there just as models!” (Female, 28, Eurasian).
“I don’t feel as if my race/ethnicity is portrayed much in the media, besides when natural disasters occur there,” (Female, 19, Pacific Islander).	“When I see Turkish things in the media, I feel nostalgic... I am often considered empathetic towards Japan,” (Female, 20, Japanese).
“‘black twitter’ regularly portrays white people as being likely to shoot up a school if made fun of or teased. I never thought about harming others despite being mocked on a very regular basis,” (Male, 22, Caucasian).	“In Ghibili’s ‘The Wind Rises,’ seeing suicide soldiers ride side by side made various emotions arise such as sadness, pride, and courage,” (Male, 23, Japanese).
“I enjoy the actor Benicio Del Toro who is also Hispanic who is a well known actor and has won many awards. This makes me feel that everyone can be successful despite their ethnic background,” (Male, 55, Hispanic).	“In TV programs about Japanese people, foreigners often talk about the nature of the Japanese. As a feature they say, humility, athletic, and a little reluctant,” (Male, 26, Japanese).

This was another area where people could write their own opinions on the question. For many, there were no times that stuck out to them, this could be either because they were not looking for it in the media or that there were just no examples.

5.7 Research Question 2 Findings

Both Japanese and American people believed that their perceptions of multiculturalism and mixed-race people had been positively affected by the ethnic identity that they held. In general, the people have a positive perspective on multiculturalism in this day and age. One of the main factors of this was media, however the biggest factor was personal relationships such as family or friends.

## 6. Conclusion

Although I expected Japanese people to be less open-minded about multiculturalism, they were fairly open. Sometimes their opinions were more open than Americans. No matter if the person taking the survey identified as mixed-race or not, they still felt stereotyped and discriminated against because of their racial or ethnic identity. Factors like media certainly aided in one's identity, but the biggest factors were human connections.

## 7. Limitations of the Study and Future Studies

The biggest issue I faced was that the majority of the Japanese survey takers were not mixed-race. Therefore, they had trouble answering any of the questions that had to do directly with multiculturalism. Another thing is that Japan is already known as a homogenous country, so the questions regarding multiculturalism were also difficult to answer. For future studies, I would like to have in-depth interviews with people who are mixed-race.

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