

## Finding Love in University: A Comparative Study of Japan and the United States

Addie Gingold

Lizet Martinez

California State University Monterey Bay

### **Abstract**

Romantic relationships are an important part of every culture, especially for younger generations transitioning into adulthood. Although depending on the culture, just how people go about finding and keeping these relationships can vary. In our capstone, we explored how students in university find and maintain romantic relationships, with an emphasis on what influences students to start a relationship and what factors contribute to the type of relationship that develops. We examined the differences and similarities between Japanese and American university student dating customs and practices. From there, we explored how societal views affected these customs. As it turned out, Japanese and American students have different objectives when starting a relationship. In particular we observed that, while Americans focused on finding a partner, Japanese students focused more on having long-term relationships. Interestingly, we noted that both countries seem to be moving away from common dating stereotypes. Although in both countries both students prioritise their studies over romance, compared to Americans, Japanese students gave romance a higher priority than work. We realized that Japanese students have a tendency to interact with their partners less frequently than their American counterparts. We conclude that there may be a correlation between the kind relationship that students seek, such as a casual or long term, and the frequency at which they contact their partner.

### **Introduction**

In this study, we compared how Japanese and American university students find romantic companions and how they maintain such relationships. We also clarified how personal and societal values influence how students begin romantic relationships. Furthermore, we asked if there is a correlation between how one finds a partner and what type of relationship develops as a result. In this study, we will also introduce love-related concepts found in Japan and the United States, as well as examine how society influences these concepts. Regarding our research, we wish to compare the stereotypes facing university students and romance from both countries, as well as their realities.

### **1. Significance of the Study**

1.1. Martinez chose this topic because, in a class she took when she was studying abroad, she learned about the roles of Japanese women in society and came across the term *goukon* or group date. From that point, she became aware of the differences in the perception of finding love

between Japan and the United States, and wished to gain a deeper understanding of unique dating practices found in each country.

1.2. Gingold chose this topic because, due to being in an intercultural relationship, she was often asked about how cultural differences affected her relationship, and wanted to deepen her knowledge of such differences. Likewise, in order to avoid culture-related mishaps or “friction” while in a relationship, she decided to learn more of the culture behind finding love in Japan and the United States.

## **2. Research Questions**

1. What are students’ perceptions on college dating in Japan and America, and how does this affect how they find a partner?
2. How do dating practices differ between Japanese and American students as they balance dating and their studies?
3. What factors contribute to a student's desire to continue a relationship?

## **3. Research Background**

### **3.1. Romantic Values**

There are various ways of perceiving both extrinsic and intrinsic values. Specifically, extrinsic values refer to permitted behavior and unpermitted behavior, as well as the practical application of those values. For example, a woman who is sexually assertive is seen negatively. Intrinsic values refer to a person’s own experiences and everyday behavior. For example, a woman who does not express an interest in sex has a tendency to be viewed negatively and seen as prudish.

### **3.2. 6 Types of Love**

There are three prominent viewpoints regarding romance, including the emotions and desires for one's partner, mutual hopes and expectations, and whether the romantic relationship is long-term or short-term. From there, romance can be separated into six parts, starting from the following primary types: Eros (passionate love), Storge (fraternal love), and Ludus (playful love). Furthermore, if Eros and Ludus are combined, it becomes a fanatic love Mania, if Eros and Storge merge, they become a benevolent, altruistic love Agape, and if Ludus and Storge come together, a sincere, composite type of love Pragma is born.

### 3.3. How Relationships Begin

Our research suggests that there is a difference between the United States in Japan regarding how romantic relationships begin. We explore two main starting concepts from each culture. In the case of Japan, we have 合コン (Gōkon), a matchmaking party. The purpose of a matchmaking party is to take even numbers of men and women that may not run in the same social circles and relax in an environment where the goal is to make a connection with another person. From there we have 告白 (Kokuhaku), a romantic confession. A practice of stating your feelings for another person directly, often before the initial dating begins.

In the United States, relations seem to begin by means of casual dating; going out on dates with multiple people around the same time without deep emotional ties. Also on the American side are hook-ups, physical intimacy without emotional attachment.

### 3.4. Development of Relationships

Both countries reflected an understanding that the following customs were an essential part of relationships becoming more serious, although the extent of that seriousness varies between countries. First, 紹介 (*shoukai*): the introduction of a potential serious partner to one's family and friends. Second, the establishment of a committed relationship: an understanding by both parties that the relationship has become emotionally invested. Finally, cohabitation: sharing a space with your significant other while not yet married.

Between Japan and America, there's a difference in how "like" and "love" are used. While Japan tends to reserve love, "愛している" (*aishiteiru*), exclusively for extremely serious relationships Americans are more liberal with its use. The American "I love you" has become a bit casual and reflects more closely the Japanese word for like 好き (*suki*). For example, saying "I love you" very exuberantly to a platonic school friend is normal in English, whereas in Japanese this may merit some strange looks.

### 3.5. Social Influences

There are many concepts that influence social views on dating, in this study we focus on two main concepts per country. For Japan, there is the concept of 内と外 *Uchi* and *Soto*: the concept of dividing people into "inner" and "outer" groups in relation to one's self. The

limitations of “inner” and “outer” depend on individual background circumstances. There is also the concept of 甘え *amae*: to be liked by those around you, the feeling of being able to depend on others, to count on the goodwill of people.

Social influences for America include the concept of “No Strings Attached”: indifferent relationship ending without complicated/annoyed feelings, lingering affection, or remorse. In addition, the long withstanding notion of “The American Dream”: many Americans base a success on the attainment of three key factors; a partner, a home and children.

### 3.6. School and Love

Through our research we have come to find that there is indeed a difference in the perceptions and realities facing students in the midst of dating culture in university. In regards to Japanese students Aziz Ansari writes “...46 percent of women between the ages of 16 to 24 despise sexual contact. And 25 percent of the guys in that same age... (feel the same)”. This statement highlights the general stigma surrounding Japanese culture. That being said the reality is that, 60.8 percent of those surveyed claim that they are interested in romantic relationships. 86.3 percent of males surveyed and 89.4 percent of women believe that they will in fact be married someday.

While in the United States, according to Heather Fishel, “college students prefer short-term, casual relationships over long-term relationships because it allows them to focus on their academic and career goals.” (2010). Although true to an extent this implies that other relationships are uncommon, when in reality 32.5% of college relationships are long-distance (Statistic Brain). In addition, 25% of college seniors are virgins (USA Today), and according to the Independent Women's Forum, one third of college seniors have been on fewer than two dates.

## 4 . Research

### 4.1 Study Participants

For the purpose of this study, 160 Students were surveyed. Responses from an even number of 80 Japanese students and 80 Americans were recorded, with a breakdown of 30 male and 50 female participants from each country.

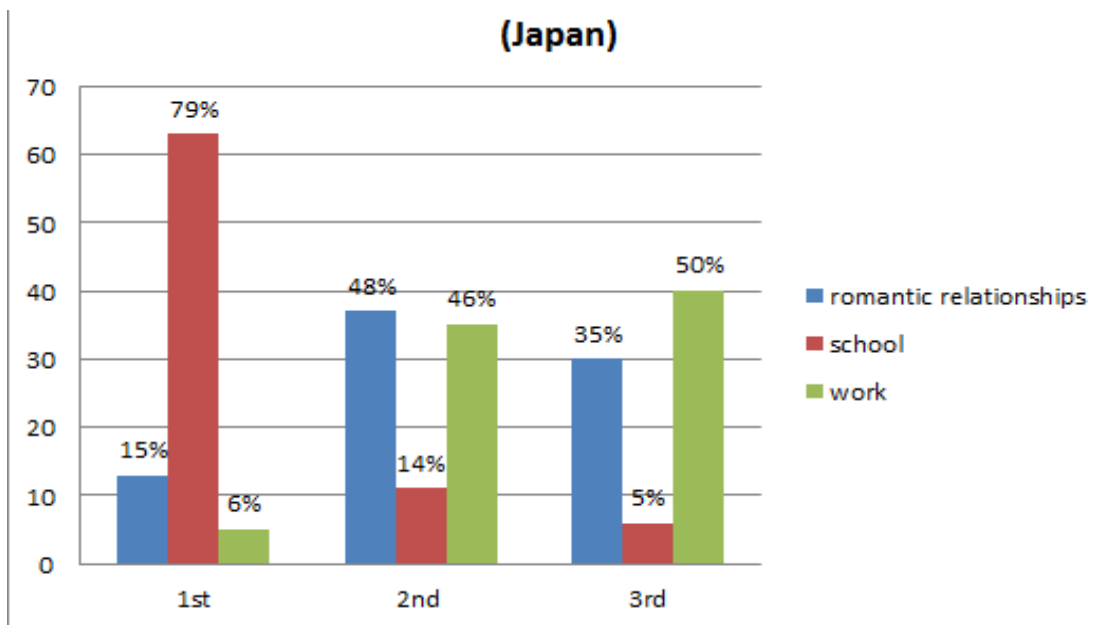
## 4.2 Research Method

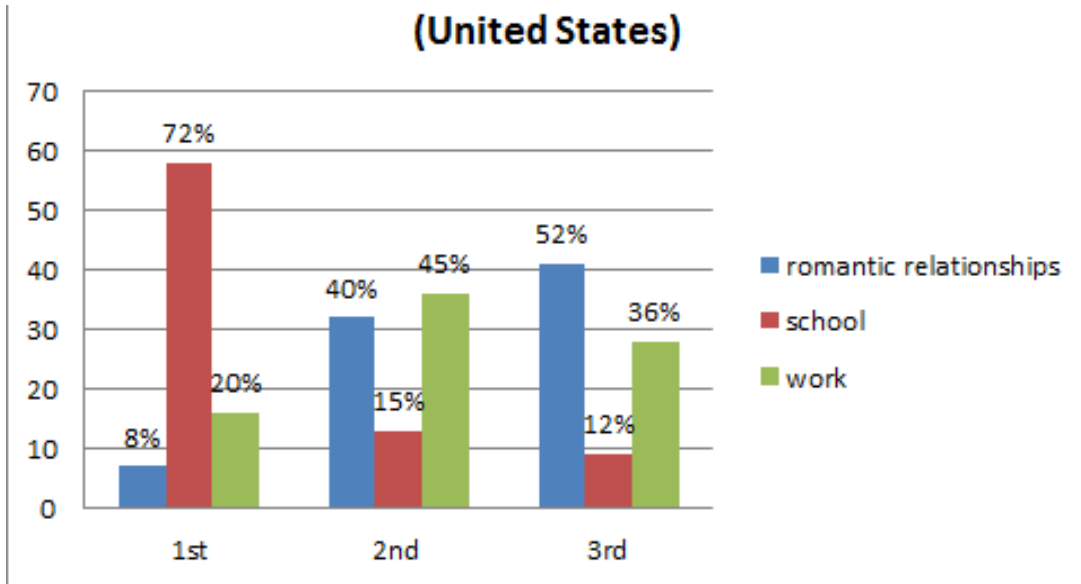
We created an online questionnaire form in both Japanese and English via Google forms, from there, we collected and analyzed data using both Google sheets and Excel.

## 5 . Results

5.1 Research question 1 : What are students perceptions on college dating in Japan and America, and how does this affect how they find a partner?

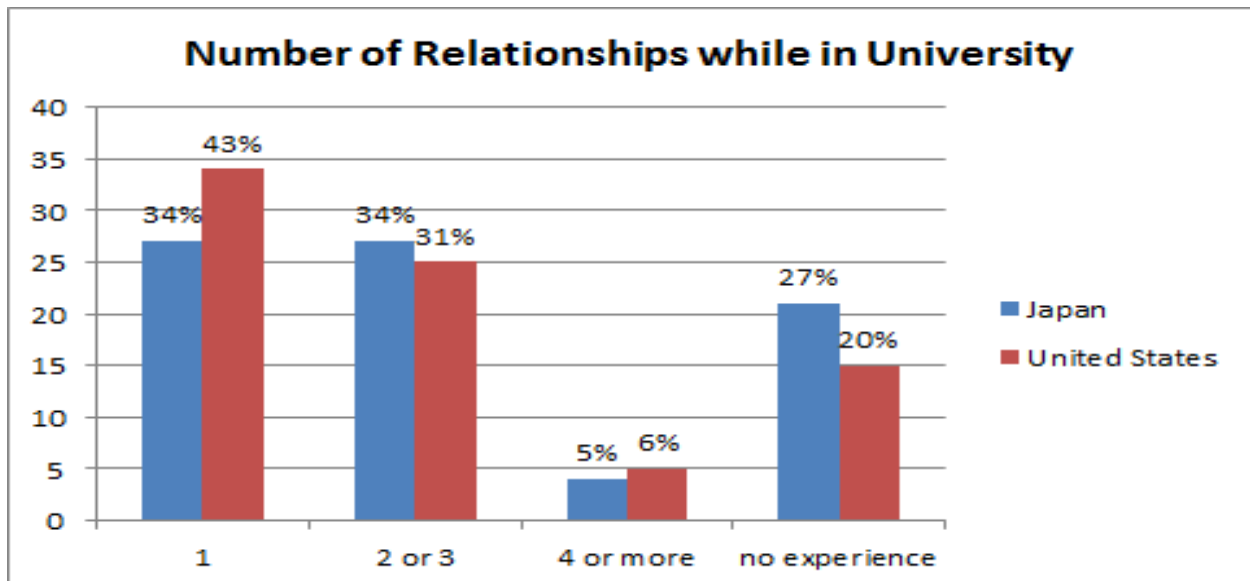
**Figure 1 : Importance of School, Love, and Work**





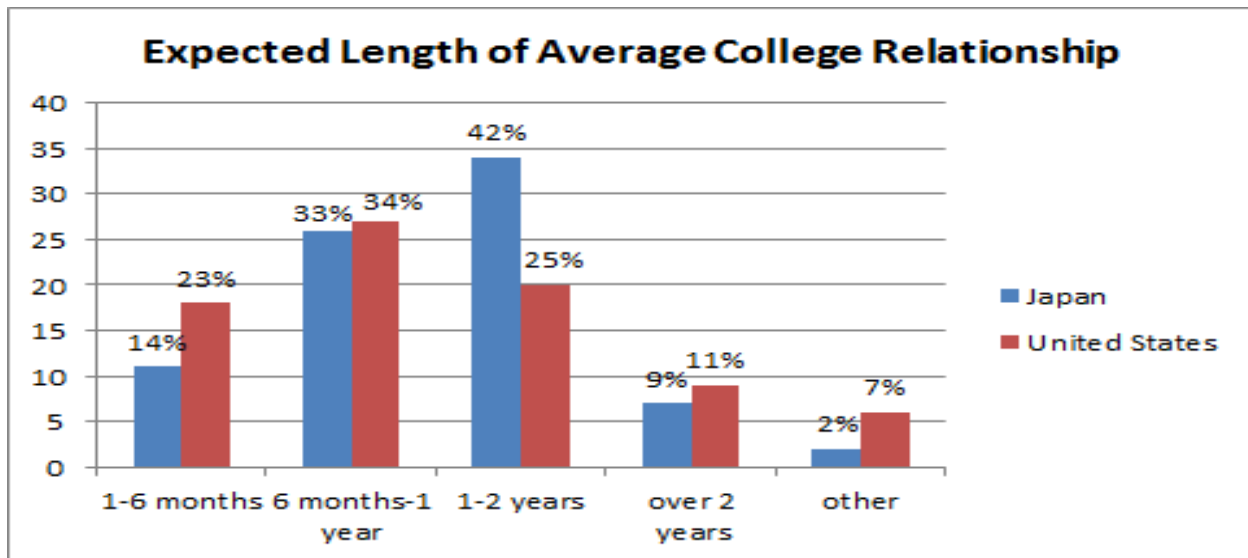
As seen in the figure above, both groups of students prioritize their schoolwork over all else, but Japanese students prioritize love before work, while Americans still prioritize work before romantic relationships.

**Figure 2 : Number of Relationships While in University**

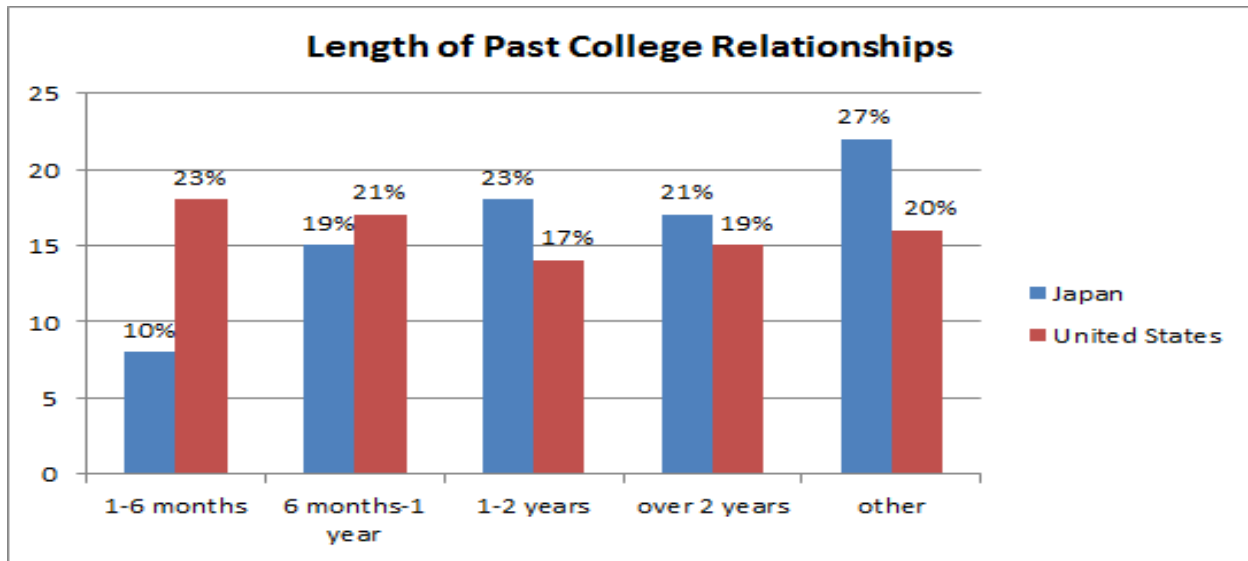


Although there is no major difference between Japanese and American students regarding past relationships while in university, more Japanese students have no prior dating experience as seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 3 : Expected Length of an Average College Relationship**



Japanese students were more likely to have and or expect to have longer relationships lasting from one to two years, whereas Americans preferred shorter relationships, six months to one year (see Fig. 3).

**Figure 4 : Length of Participants' Past Relationships While in University**

As mentioned, compared to Japanese students Americans expected shorter relations but overall have had experience with both sort and more long term relations much like their Japanese counterparts (see Fig. 4).

## 5.2 Research question 1: Summary of findings

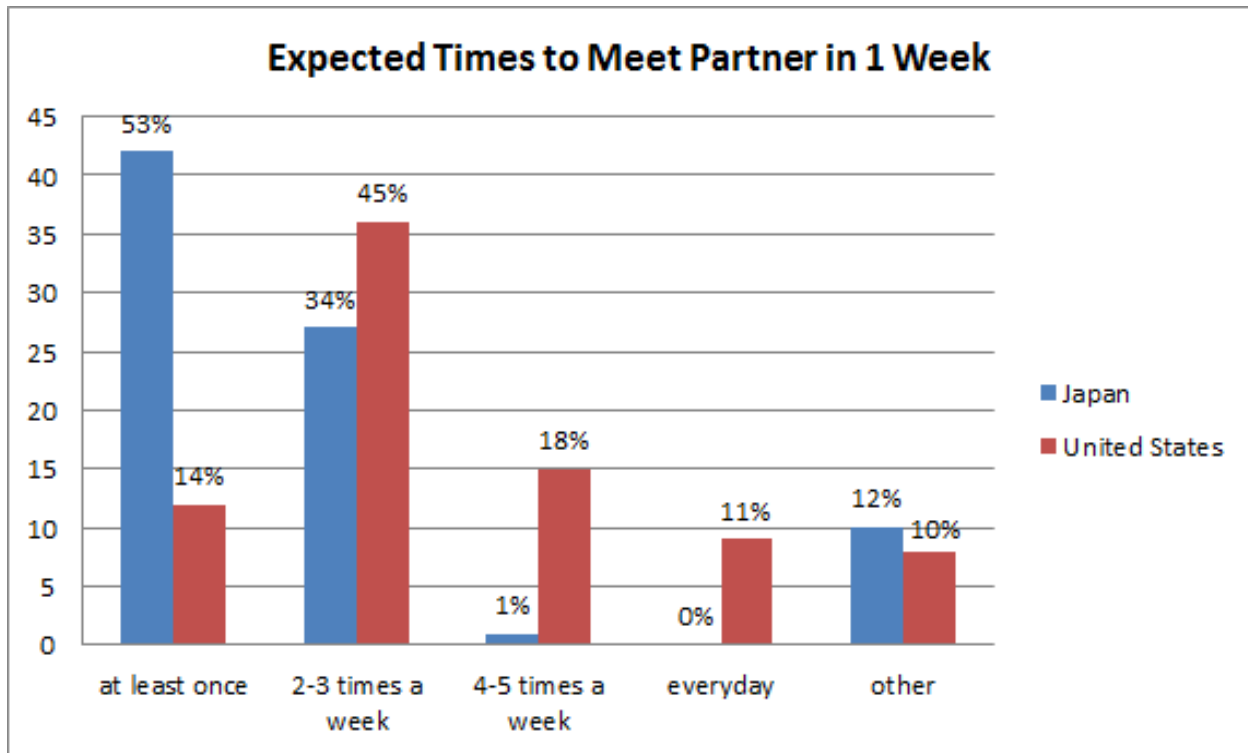
Although both groups of students prioritize their schoolwork over romantic relationships American students prioritize love less than Japanese students Americans expected to have and therefore experienced shorter relationships, whereas Japanese expected and did in fact experience longer relationships.

Despite the fact that nearly one third of Japanese students have never been in a relationship, there were not any major differences from Americans students, as Americans with no dating experience trailed behind the Japanese by less than 10%.

## 5.3 Research question 2 : How do dating practices differ between Japanese and American students as they balance dating and their studies?

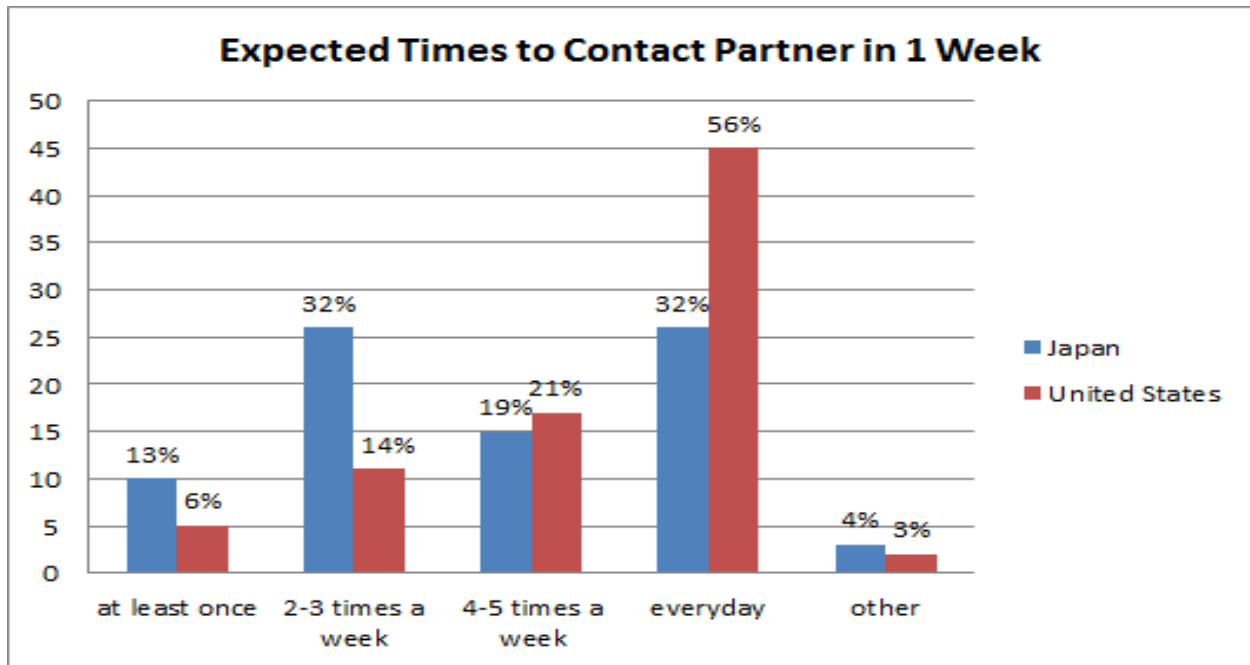


**Figure 5 : Expected Times to Meet Partner in One Week**



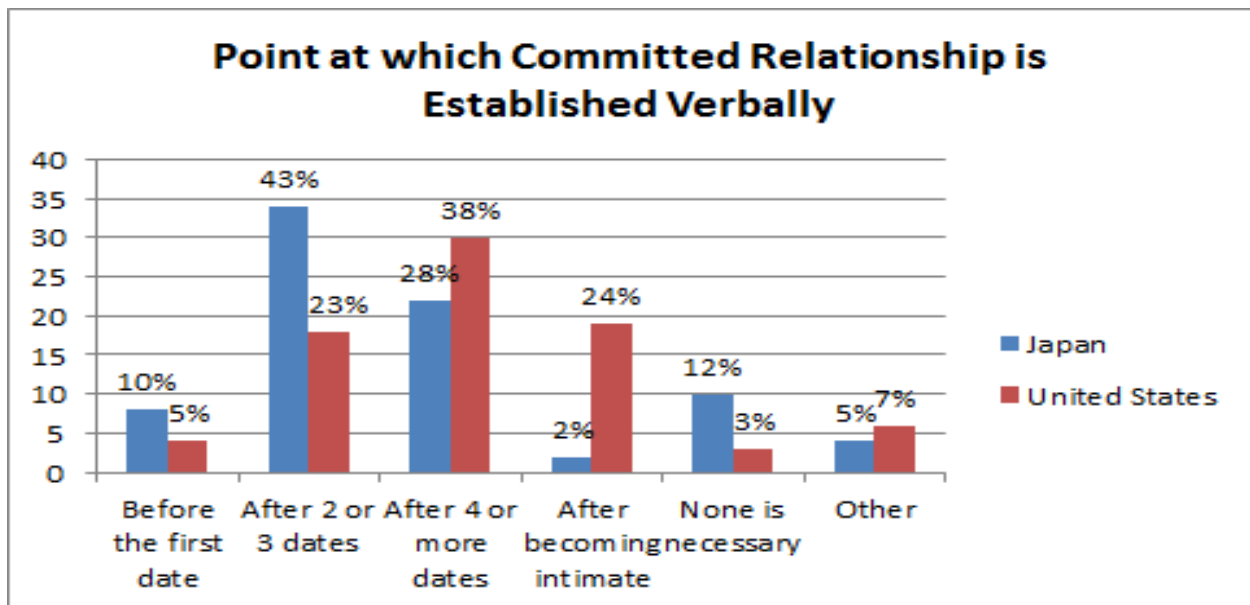
As seen in Figure 5, compared to about half of Japanese students answering “at least once”, nearly half of Americans answered “2~3 times”, meaning Americans prefer to meet their partners more often.

**Figure 6 : Expected Number of Times to Contact Partner in One Week**



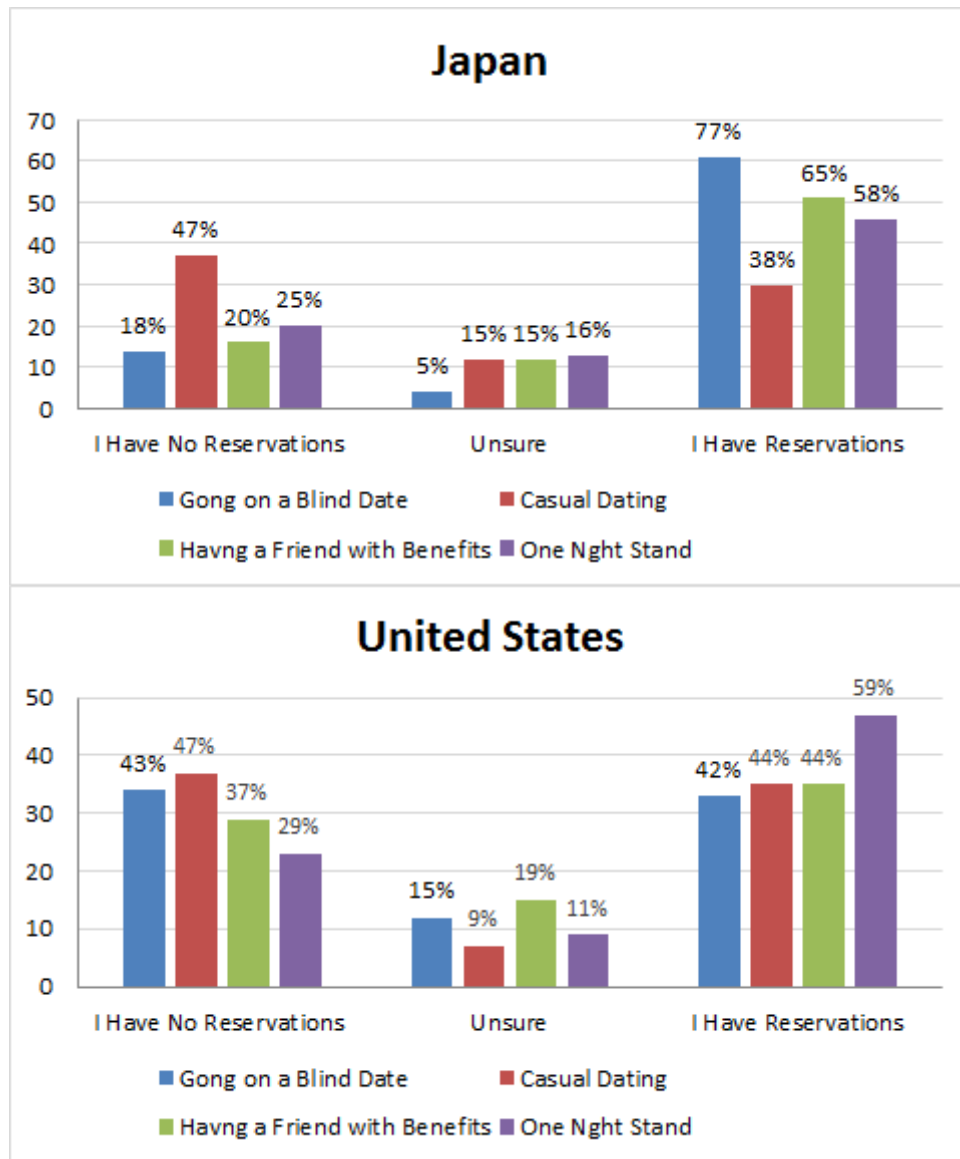
Compared to 32% of Japanese students, 56% of American students said that they expect to contact their partner everyday (see Fig. 6).

**Table 7 : Point at which Committed Relationship is Verbally Established**



As seen in figure 7, Japanese students preferred verbally establishing a committed relationship earlier in the relationship, after 2 to 3 dates.

**Table 8 : How much discomfort do you have regarding the following types of dates?**



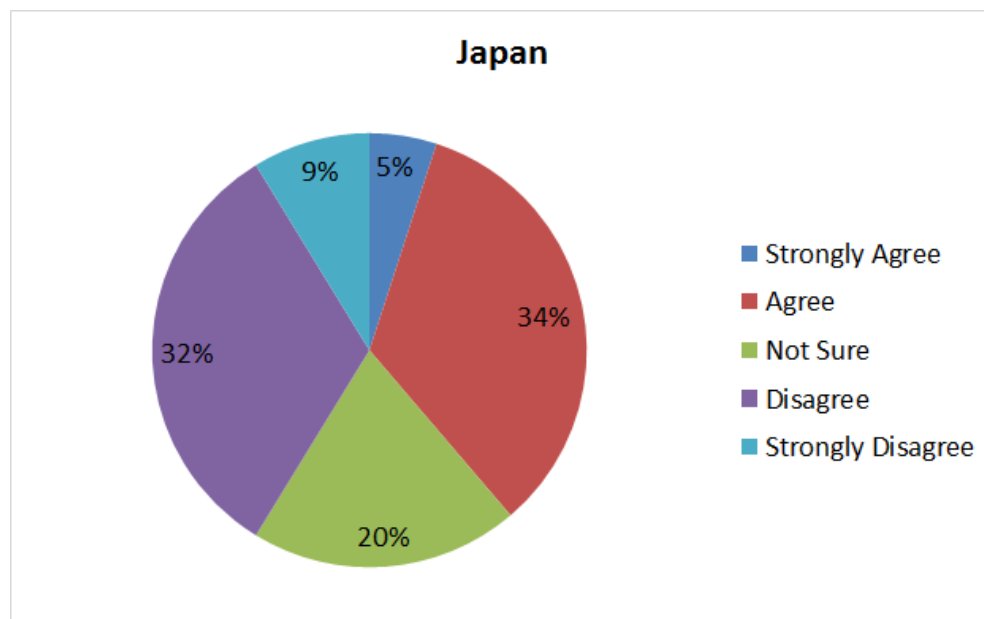
Compared to Japanese, more Americans answered that they do not feel any discomfort regarding these concepts.

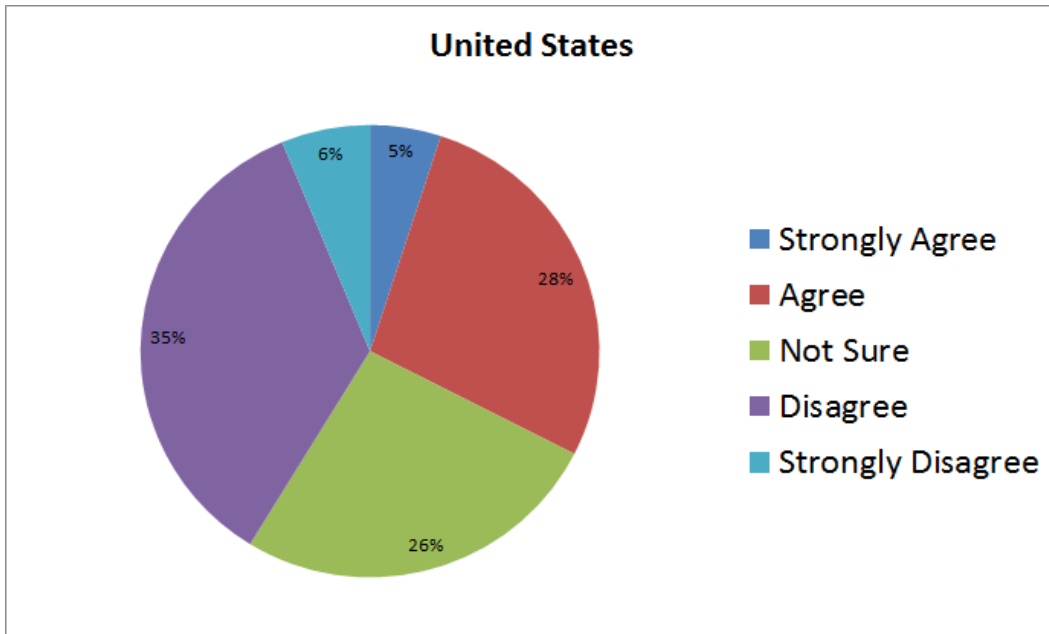
#### 5.4 Research question 2: Summary of findings

American students answered that they need to meet with their romantic partners more frequently, moreover American students had a tendency to contact their partners more often. When comparing Japanese to American participants, while Japanese students prefer to verbally establish their relationships earlier, we learned that they still did so later than our literature review suggested. Although *kokuhaku* (a confession of one's true romantic feeling) is a Japanese value and concept, many more Japanese students answered that there is no need for *kokuhaku*.

#### 5.5 Research Question 3: What factors contribute to a student's desire to continue a relationship?

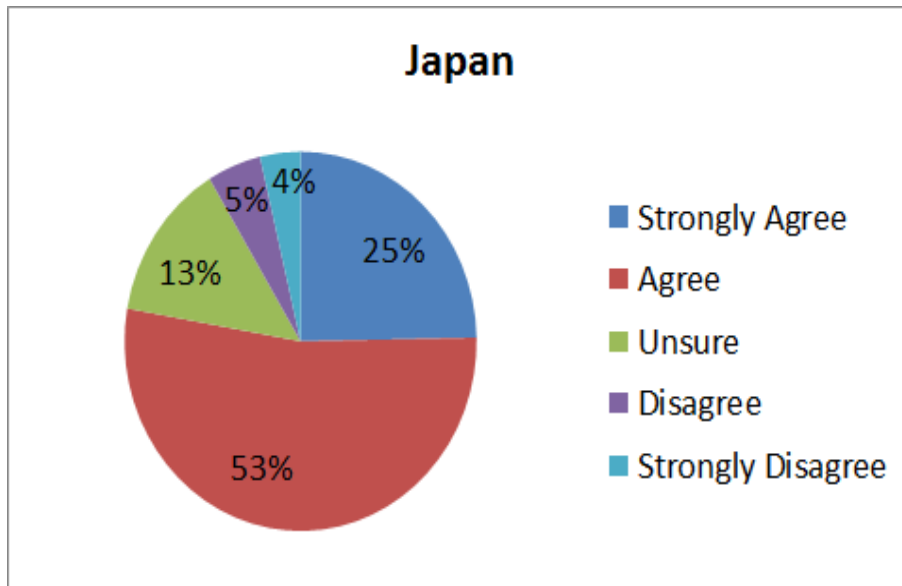
**Figure 9: “I will not continue a relationship with someone whom my friends do not approve of.”**

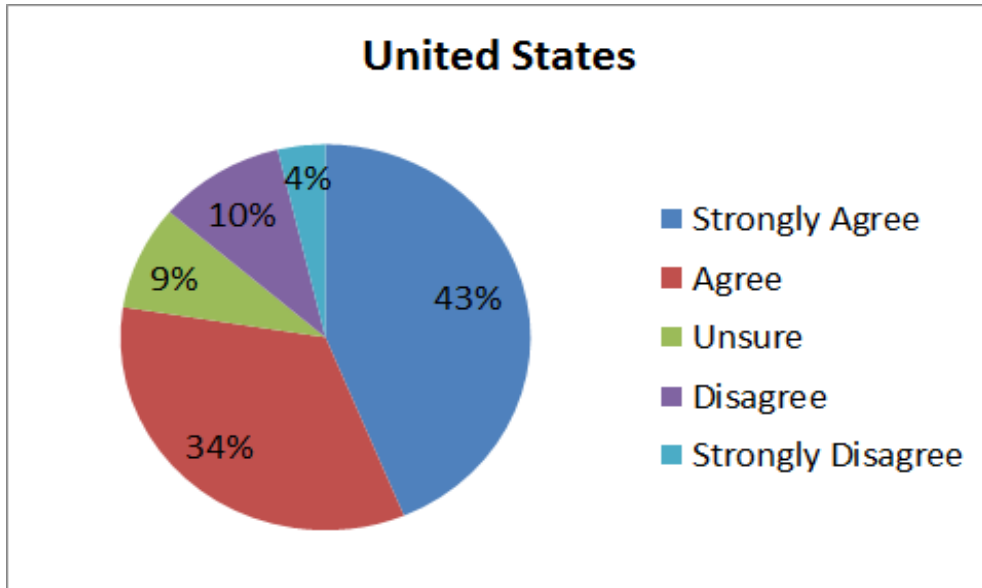




Although both Japanese and American students reflect similar responses, Japanese students show a slightly higher regard for their friends opinion. (See Fig. 9.)

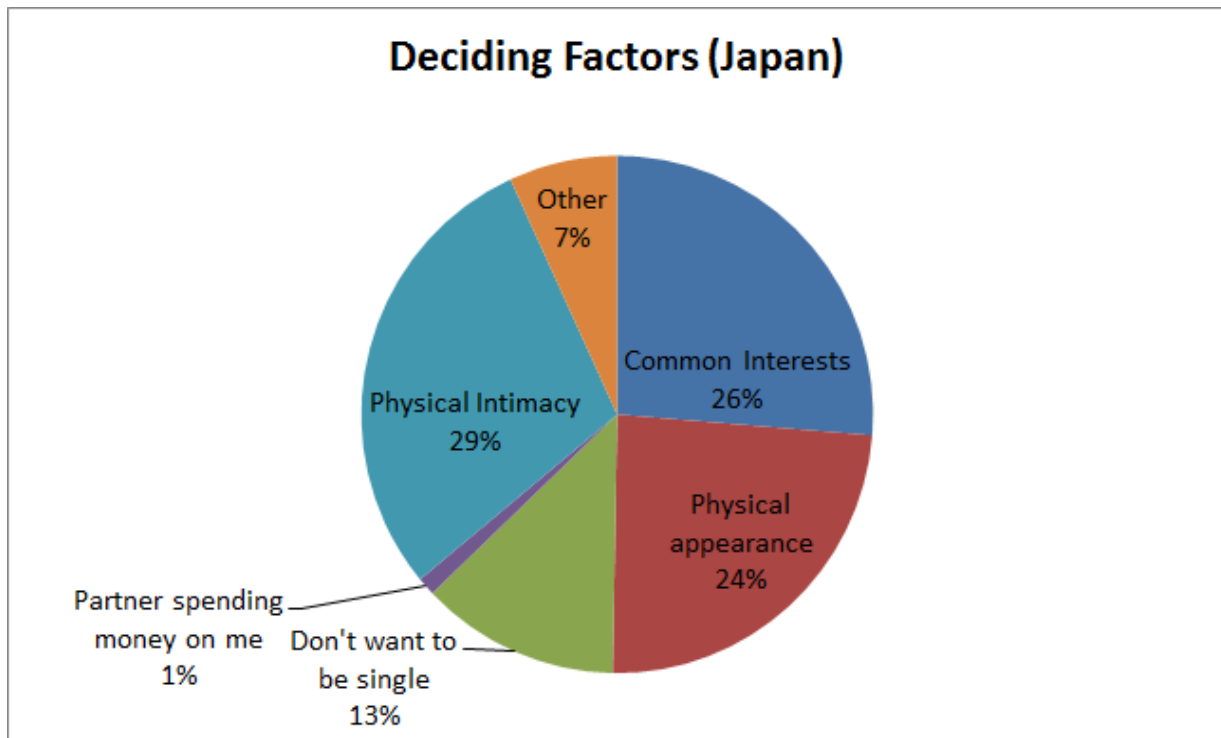
**Figure 10: “I believe that going out on dates after you become exclusive with your partner is important to maintain a romantic relationship.”**

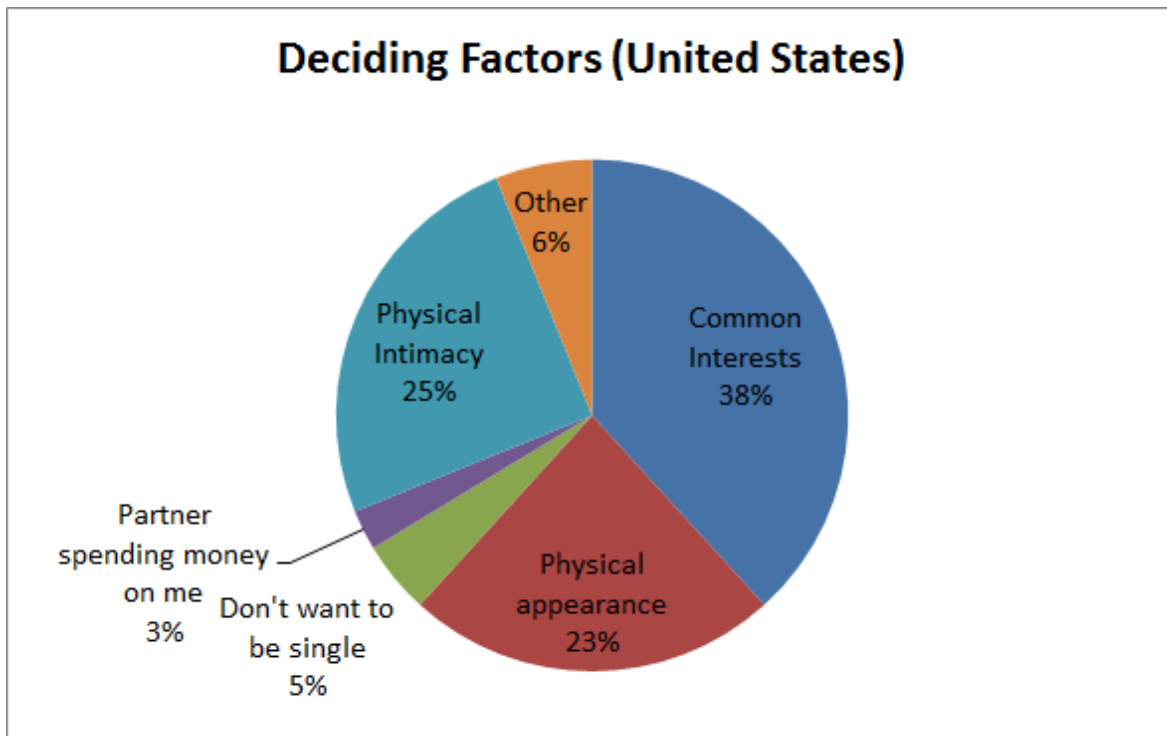




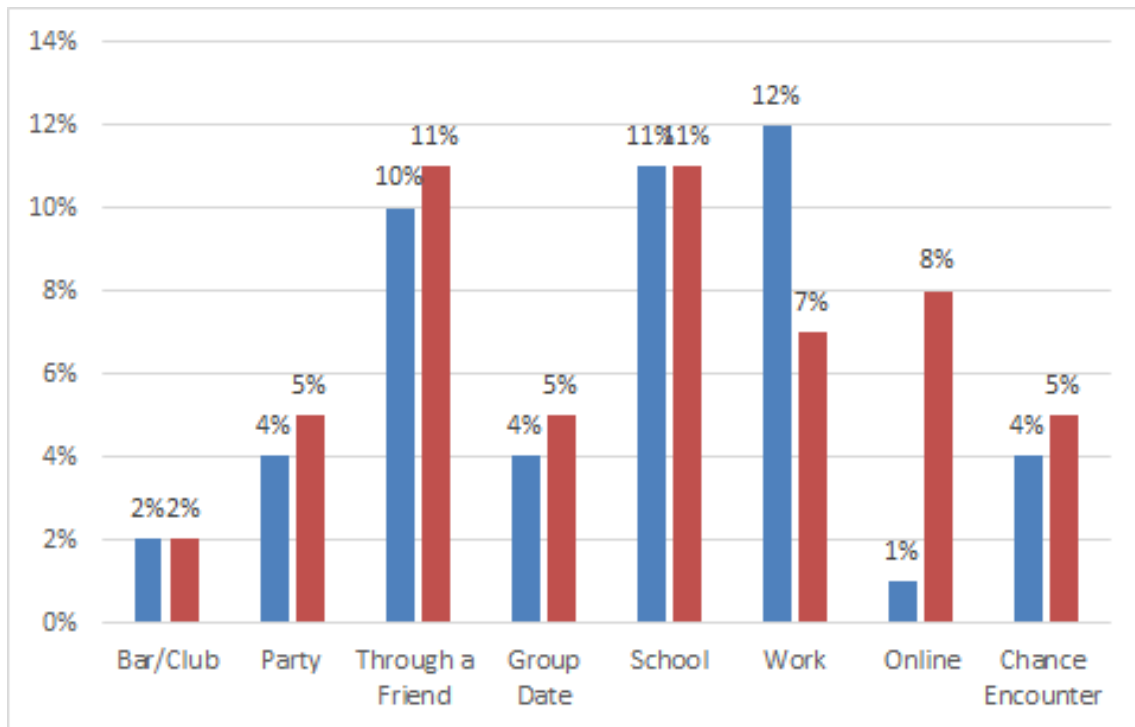
Although Americans felt more strongly, both groups believe that going out on dates—as opposed to just spending time together—is important for a healthy relationship.

**Figure 11: Primary Factors to Maintain a Romantic Relationship**





According to Figure 11, contrary to popular belief, a majority of Japanese students answered “physical relationship”, while American students answered “common/shared interests” when asked what is important when continuing a serious relationship.

**Figure 12: Places to Find a Serious Partner**

Next, respondents answered where they could meet a serious romantic partner. American students answered that there is a possibility of beginning a relationship at a wide variety of places, but Japanese students thought that there are particularly high chances either at work or at school. However, Japanese students felt very negatively regarding meeting a partner online (See Fig. 12).

### 5.6 Research Question 3: Summary of Findings

While both groups of students thought that common interests, physical appearance, and physical intimacy are the most important things to consider when maintaining a relationship, Japanese students prioritized physical appearance and intimacy more than Americans. Nearly all students preferred meeting serious partners at school or through a friend, but Japanese students believed that they had the highest possibility of meeting someone at work. Furthermore, Japanese students expressed a level of discomfort regarding online dating or blind dates, while Americans answered that they typically didn't wish to date a coworker.



## **6 . Conclusion & Discussion**

From our research we can conclude that there is a difference in goals when starting a relationship Between Japan and America. In America, the goal is to find a partner, while in Japan, the goal is to obtain and maintain a long-term relationship. In terms of relationships, Japanese students can be seen as more traditional. Our Japanese survey responses reflect a hesitation to online dating and casual dating when compared to American students. In addition, compared to Americans, verbally establishing a committed relationship early is more important to Japanese students.

Furthermore, Japanese students see physical intimacy as an important aspect of maintaining a committed relationship. In this instance physical intimacy may be an indication of long term commitment.

## **7 . Limitations and Future Research**

For this research a lack of corresponding words in either language has proved to be a possible area of discrepancy. The translation of specific culturally well-known concepts has proven difficult and often left a gap within the degree of severity. For example, like versus love, committed relationship versus a relationship that is ready for marriage. In addition, the geographic location of our participants may affect how they answer our survey. For this survey, the majority of Americans are in California, whereas Japanese came from a wider variety of regions. Americans from other parts of the country may have entirely different outlooks on love and relationships while in university. As for our Japanese respondents, many participants had experience abroad, which may have also influenced their view on this topic depending on where they have or are studying.

For the purpose of furthering this study we would separate our research in two parts. We would further research how study abroad affects students' views on dating in a study titled "Finding love amongst university students who have studied abroad". Living in foreign country could change a person's approach to dating more directly than observing foreign media embedded with cultural stereotypes. Our second study would focus on relationships with a common goal of marriage. If Japanese and American relationships share a mutual goal of marriage, we can more easily compare the practices and attitudes of our participants.

### References

- Bogle, K. (2008). *Hooking up sex, dating, and relationships on campus*. New York: New York University Press.
- Turner, J. (2003). *Dating and Sexuality in America : A Reference Handbook*. Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO.
- Hatfield, E. , & Rapson, R. (1996). *Love and Sex : Cross-cultural Perspectives*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. "Courtship, Japanese-Style | Monterey Bay." Accessed October 14, 2015.
- "Cross-Cultural Reliability and Validity of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales: A Study of University Student Dating Couples in 17 Nations | Monterey Bay." Accessed October 14, 2015.
- "Dating and Sexuality in America : A Reference Handbook | Monterey Bay." Accessed October 14, 2015.
- "Dating, Mating, and Marriage | Monterey Bay." Accessed October 14, 2015.
- "Hooking Up : Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus | Monterey Bay." Accessed October 14, 2015.
- Ishida, Hiroshi. "The Transition to Adulthood among Japanese Youths: Understanding Courtship in Japan." *Annals of the American Academy of Political & Social Science* 646, no. 1 (March 2013): 86–106. doi:10.1177/0002716212465589.
- Kito, Mie. "Self-Disclosure in Romantic Relationships and Friendships Among American and Japanese College Students." *The Journal of Social Psychology* 145, no. 2 (April 1, 2005): 127–40. doi:10.3200/SOCP.145.2.127-140.
- Lesure-Lester, G. Evelyn. "Dating Competence, Social Assertion and Social Anxiety among College Students." *College Student Journal* 35, no. 2 (June 1, 2001): 317.
- Letcher, Amber1 amber.letcher@sdsstate.edu, and Jasmin2 Carmona. "Friends with Benefits: Dating Practices of Rural High School and College Students." *Journal of Community Health* 40, no. 3 (June 2015): 522–29. doi:10.1007/s10900-014-9966-z.
- "You Are Cordially Invited to Weddings : Dating & Love Customs of Cultures Worldwide, Including Royalty | Monterey Bay." Accessed October 14, 2015.  
<http://xerxes.calstate.edu/monterey/books/record?id=49303>.