



**SELF-ESTEEM AMONG
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
JAPAN AND AMERICA**

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OUTLINE

- Significance of the Study
- Research Questions
- Research Background
- Research Method
- Research Findings
- Conclusion
- Limitations of the Study
- References
- Acknowledgments



SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- There is the belief that Americans are overly confident and Japanese are modest.
- During my study abroad in Japan, I read a thesis that suggested this stereotype was false, and people only behave confidently or modestly in order to follow the cultural expectations of their country.
- This theory was intriguing to me, and I became interested in studying self-esteem among the two countries, and how it is related with one's confidence and modesty.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do the levels of self-esteem differ between Japanese and American university students? How do the two express their self-esteem?
2. What factors have the most influence on self-esteem in each country?



RESEARCH BACKGROUND

- Definition and Related Terms
 - Definitions of Self-Esteem
 - Self-Enhancement vs. Self criticism
 - Sociometer Theory
- Perceptions of the Self & Beliefs about Self-Esteem
 - America
 - Japan
- Comparative Studies on Self-Esteem
 - Ishikawa (1992)
 - Yamagishi (2012)



DEFINITIONS OF SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem:

1. “the extent to which one prizes, values, approves, or likes oneself” (Brown, 2008)
2. “the extent to which an individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy” (Coopersmith, 1967)
3. “a positive or negative attitude toward the self” (Rosenberg, 1965)



SELF-ENHANCEMENT VS. SELF-CRITICISM

Self-enhancement:

- “a general sensitivity to positive self-relevant information”
- Americans tend to be more self-enhancing
- Often attribute their success to their abilities, while blaming failure on others

Self-Criticism:

- “sensitivity to negative self-relevant information”
- Japanese tend to be more self-criticizing
- Success is because of luck, while failure is due to lack of ability

(Kitayama, 1997)

SOCIOMETER THEORY

- “Sense of acceptance from others is related to one’s self esteem”
- If feeling of acceptance is high, self-esteem will also be high
- If feeling of acceptance is low, self-esteem will also be low




(Yamamoto, 2009)

PERCEPTIONS OF THE “SELF”

America

- “Construe the self as an **independent** entity” (Yamagishi, 2012)
- “Think of themselves in ways that **distinguish them from others**” (Kobayashi, 2003)
- “Promote the independence and **autonomy** of a self that is separate from other similar selves” (Kitayama, 1997)

Japan

- “Share an **interdependent** construal of the self” (Yamagishi, 2012)
 - “Think of themselves in ways that emphasize their **connectedness with others**” (Kobayashi, 2003)
 - “Do not highlight the explicit separation of each individual” (Kitayama, 1997)
- 

BELIEFS ABOUT SELF-ESTEEM

America

- “Self-esteem is **socially desirable** in North America”
- “Wanting to feel good about oneself is a **‘fundamental** human motivation’
- Americans express consistent beliefs about the **importance** of self-esteem

Japan

- Correlates high self-esteem with **self-centeredness, arrogance, etc.**
- High SE is viewed **negatively** in Japan
- This leads to “low self-esteem” in order to avoid disapproval from others

(Brown, 2008)



ISHIKAWA'S STUDY ON COMMUNICATION STYLE OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Study: Participants were asked to circle traits they have confidence in. Traits included nice personality, fashion sense, humor, etc (**20 total**)

America

- Average: **14.1**
- Some participants circled all traits in one circle

Japan

- Average: **4.2**
- Significantly lower scores than America

Summary: Japanese students scored much lower than American students. Ishikawa states this is because people conform to the expected communication styles of their culture.



YAMAGISHI'S STUDY ON MODESTY IN SELF-PRESENTATION

Study:

- Participants were asked take a cognitive-skill test and rate their performance afterwards (**controlled condition**).
- 8 months later, they were asked to recall their performance and rate themselves again, this time receiving monetary reward for honest evaluation (**bonus condition**).



YAMAGISHI'S STUDY ON MODESTY IN SELF-PRESENTATION CONT.

America

- **52%** rated themselves above average in **controlled condition**
- **66%** rated themselves above average in **bonus condition**

Japan

- **28%** rated themselves above average in **controlled condition**
- **69%** rated themselves above average in **bonus condition**

Summary: For Japanese, very few participants rated themselves above average in the controlled condition, whereas that number rose in the bonus condition. Yamagishi concluded that this tendency to be modest is a “**default strategy**”, or a safety measure used when one is unsure if being honest is acceptable. When reason for honest evaluation is given, the default strategy disappears.

THE STUDY

Research Questions:

1. How do the levels of self-esteem differ between Japanese and American university students? How do the two express their self-esteem?
2. What factors have the most influence on self-esteem in each country?



RESEARCH METHOD

- Study Participants
 - 61 University Students
 - ❖ 31 Japanese
 - 14 Male, 17 Female
 - ❖ 30 American
 - 17 Male, 13 Female
- Research Instrument
 - Online Survey
 - ❖ English Survey (PDF)
 - ❖ Japanese Survey (PDF)



RESEARCH QUESTION 1

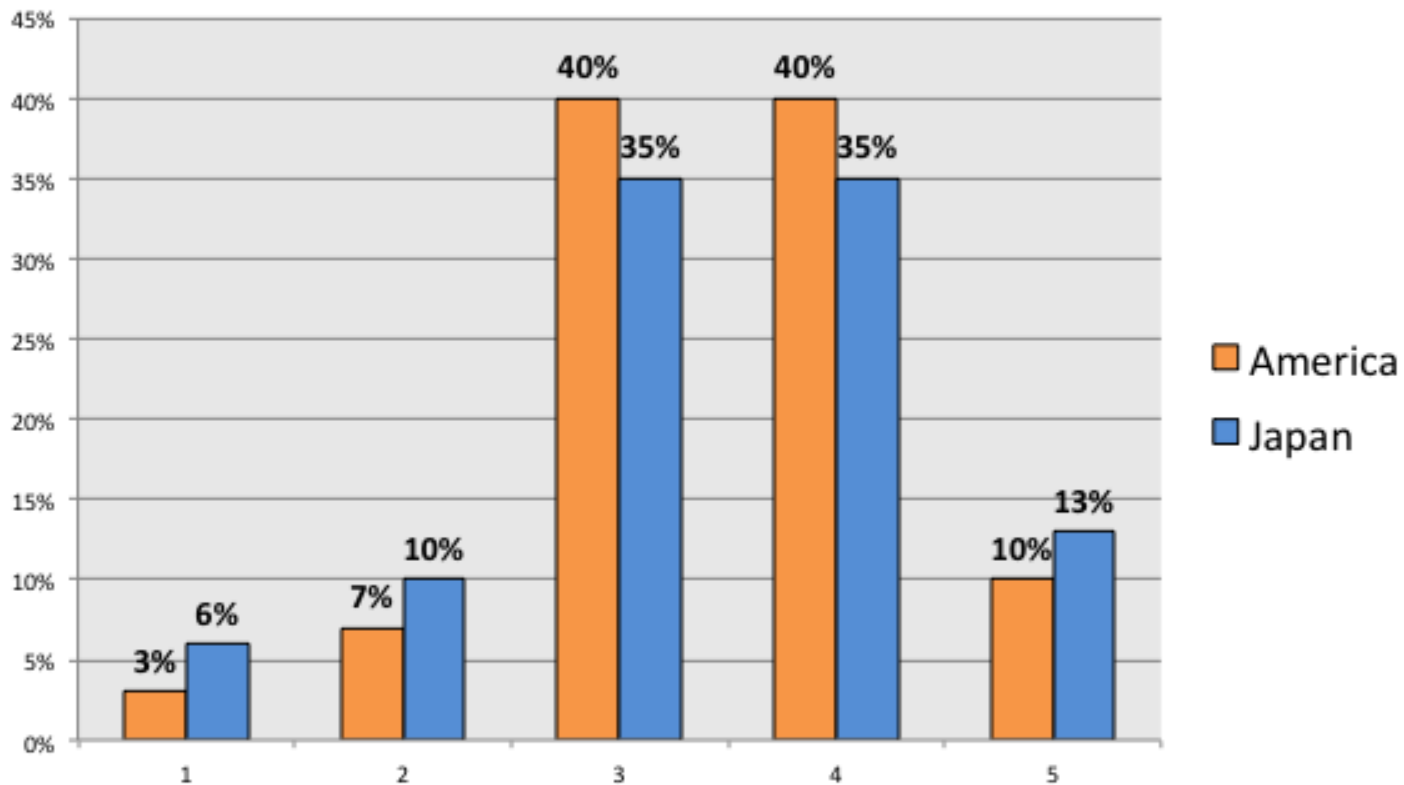
How do the levels of self-esteem differ between Japanese and American university students? How do the two express their self-esteem?



SELF-ESTEEM LEVELS

Question: Use the following scale to rate your self-esteem:

(Very Low) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very High)

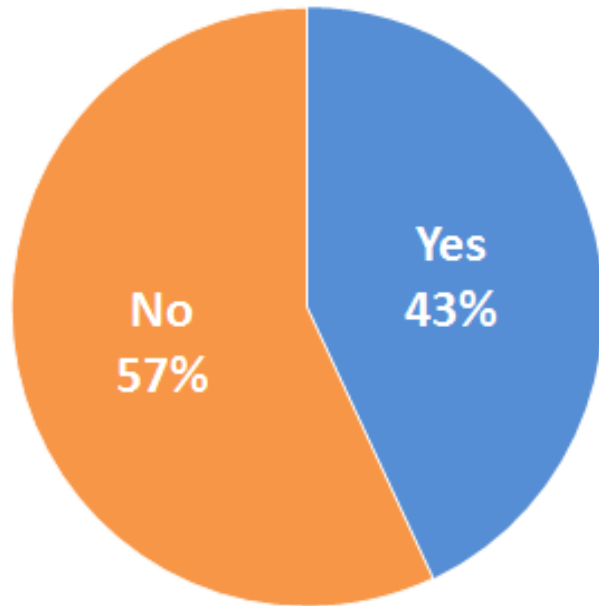


Both Japanese and American students showed high levels of self-esteem

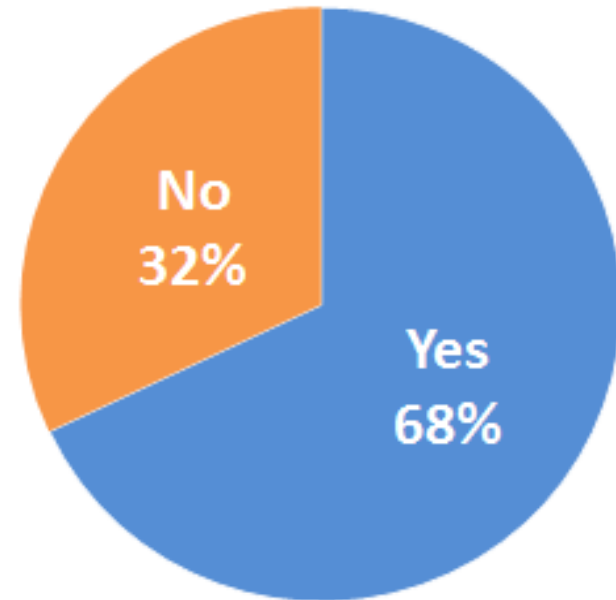
MODESTY

Question: Do you sometimes pretend to be modest around others?

America



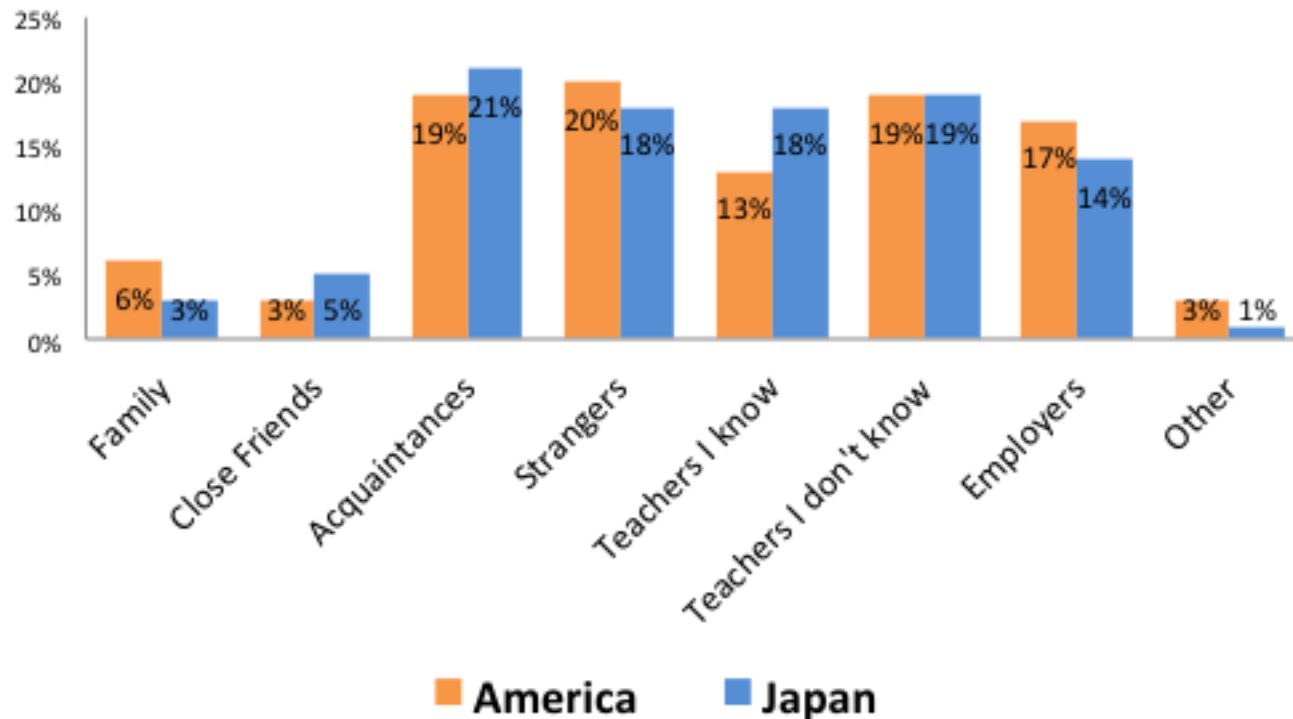
Japan



Japanese students tend to act modest more often than American students

MODESTY AROUND OTHERS

Question: With whom do you act modest?



Both groups answered mostly with unfamiliar people and people of higher status

REASONS FOR SHOWING MODESTY

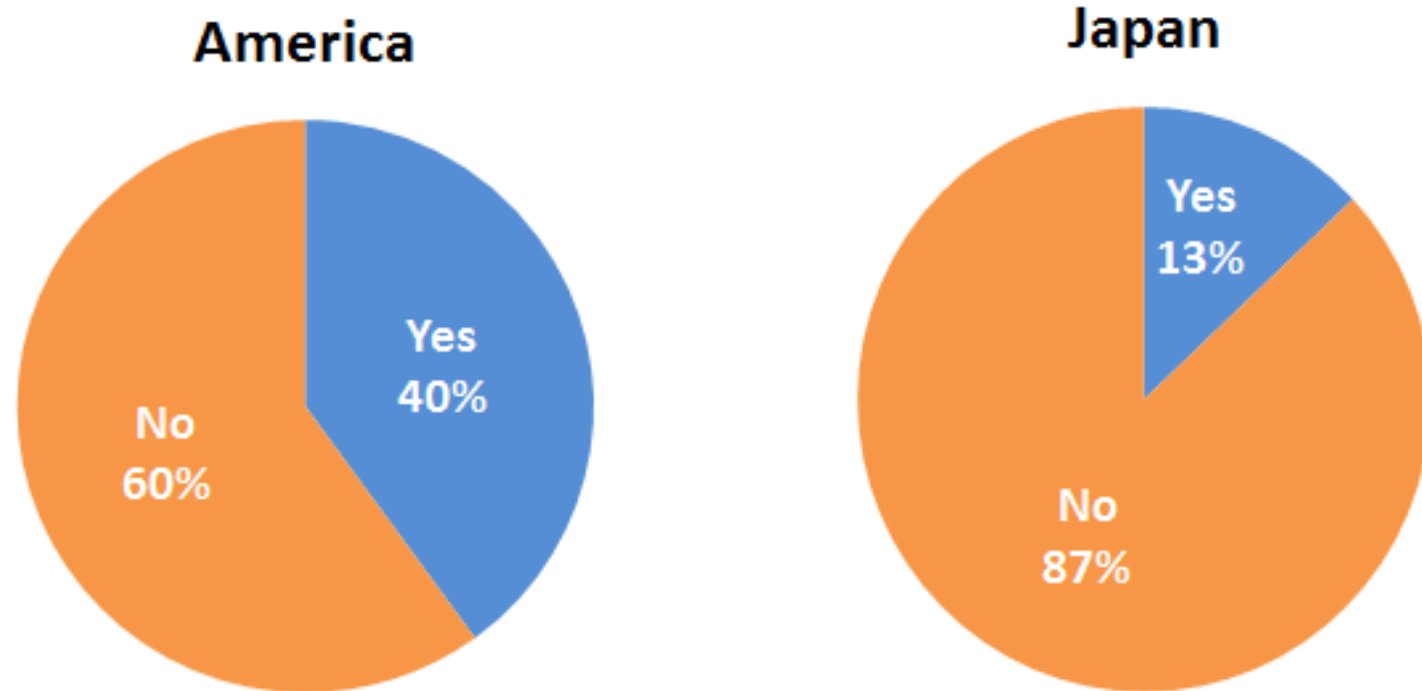
What is your reason?

America	Japan
“Don’t want to make it seem as if I’m bragging”	“Behaving modestly is seen as good in Japan”
“Don’t want to seem stuck up ”	“To pay respect to/be considerate towards others”
“Don’t want to seem cocky or overly sure of myself”	“High self-esteem is rude/doesn’t give a good impression to others”
“ Not comfortable enough to show complete personality”	“Self-esteem means to have confidence in oneself/ I don’t have confidence”

- American students were more concerned of “the self”
- Japanese students were more considerate of “the other”

CONFIDENCE

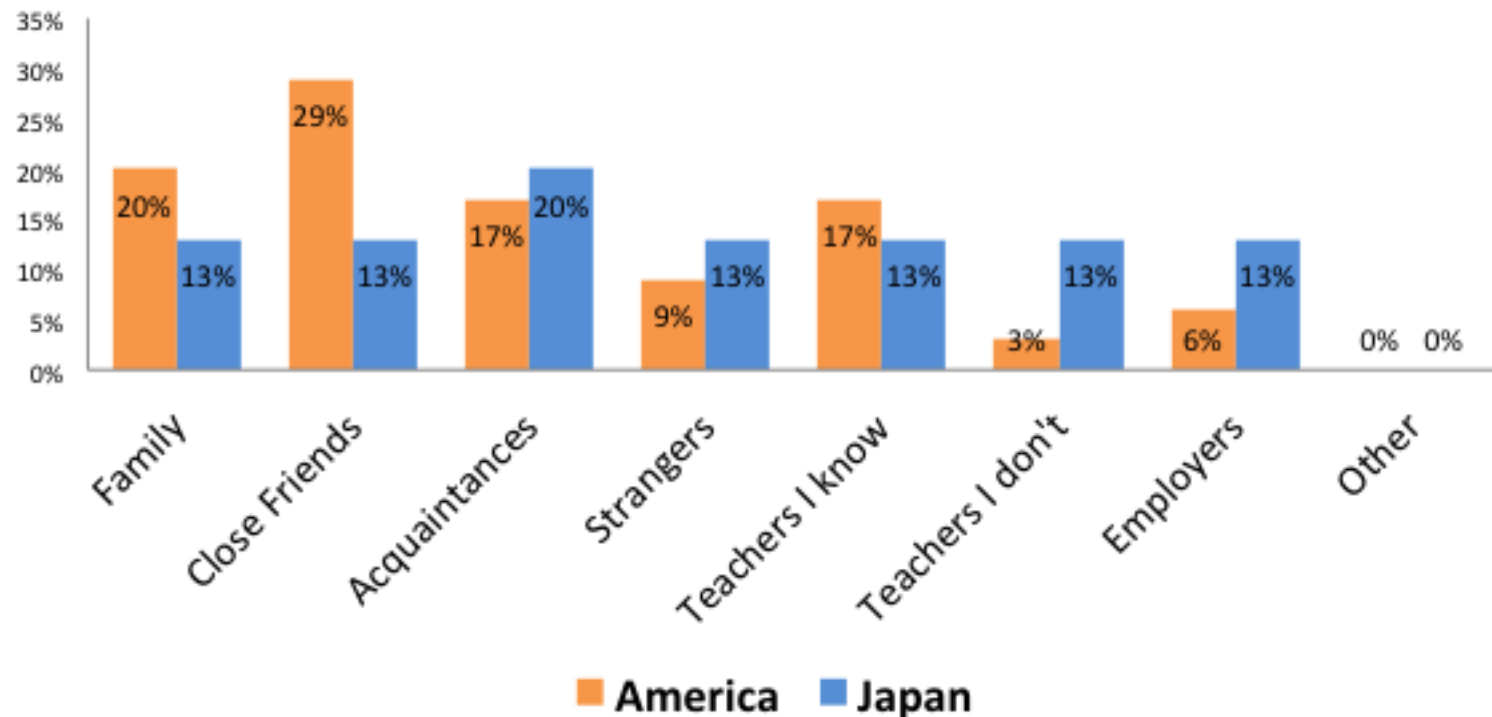
Question: Do you sometimes pretend to be confident around others?



Number of students who answered “Yes” were low in both countries, but greater in America than Japan

CONFIDENCE AROUND OTHERS

Question: With whom do you act confident?



Answered mostly with familiar people/people they are comfortable with

REASONS FOR SHOWING CONFIDENCE

What is your reason?

America	Japan
“Better to be confident than insecure/ Confidence is more liked ”	“People without confidence seem unreliable ”
“To not give an air of weakness”	“People who are confident are more reliable and appealing”
“ Feel comfortable around friends so I feel safe to express confidence”	“Confidence is necessary depending on the situation”

In both situations, comfortability with others had an effect on **ability** to express confidence

EXPRESSIONS OF SELF-ESTEEM

- Split into **four areas**:
 - Classroom, Interactions with Others, Workplace, and Image
- Each area consisted of **6-7 situational statements**
 - Participants were asked to state their agreement
- *Classroom* and *Interactions with Others* are written in a reserved tone
 - Agreement to these statements suggests **shyness** in these areas
- *Workplace* and *Image* are written in an assertive tone
 - Agreement to these statements suggest **confidence** in these areas

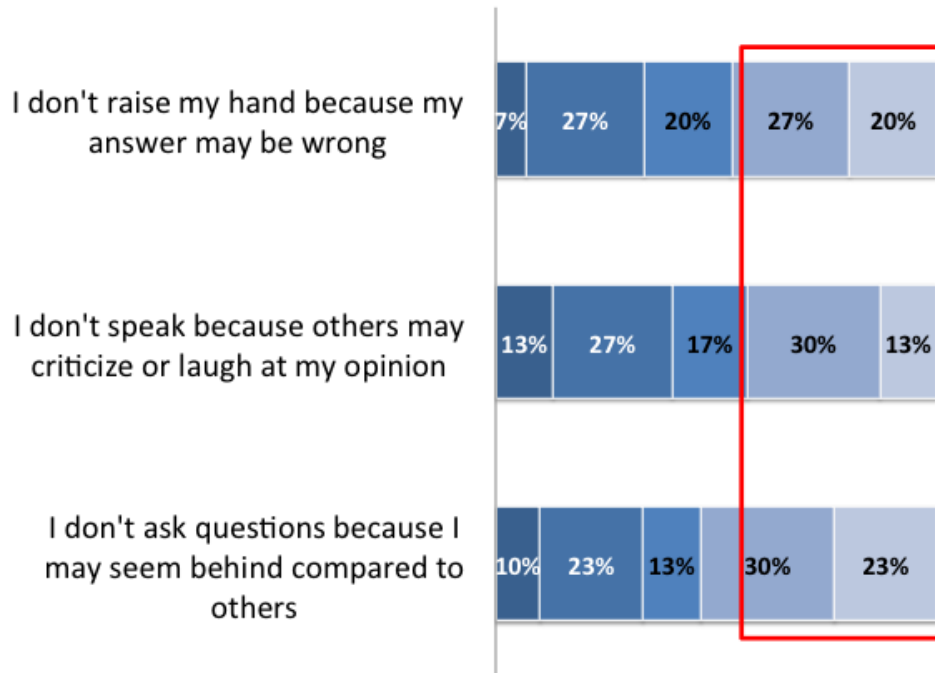


SELF-ESTEEM IN THE CLASSROOM

“I feel shy to speak in class or ask questions because...”

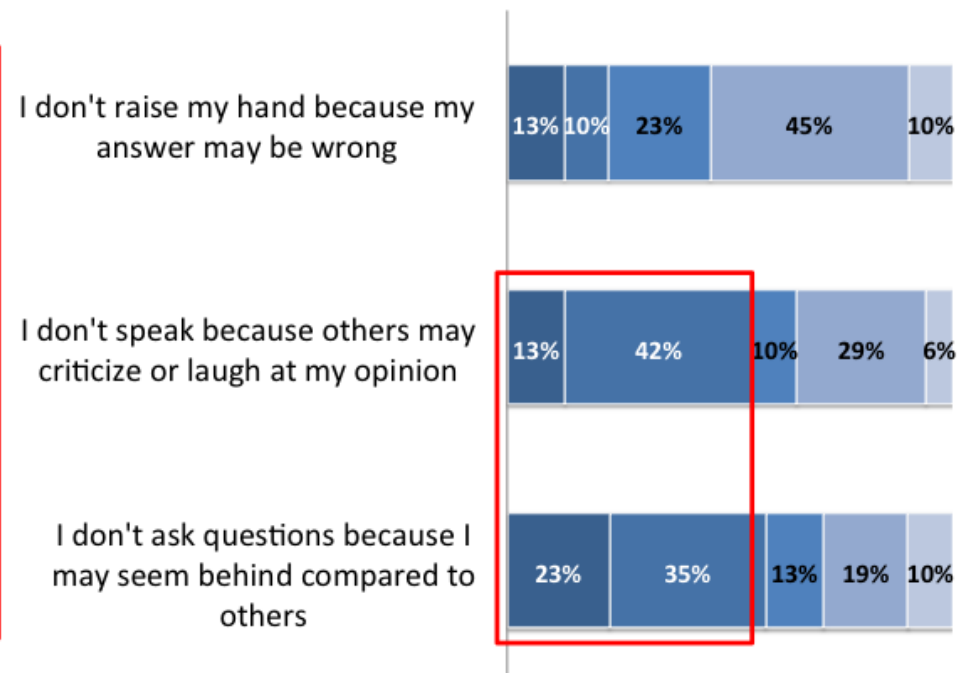
America

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree



Japan

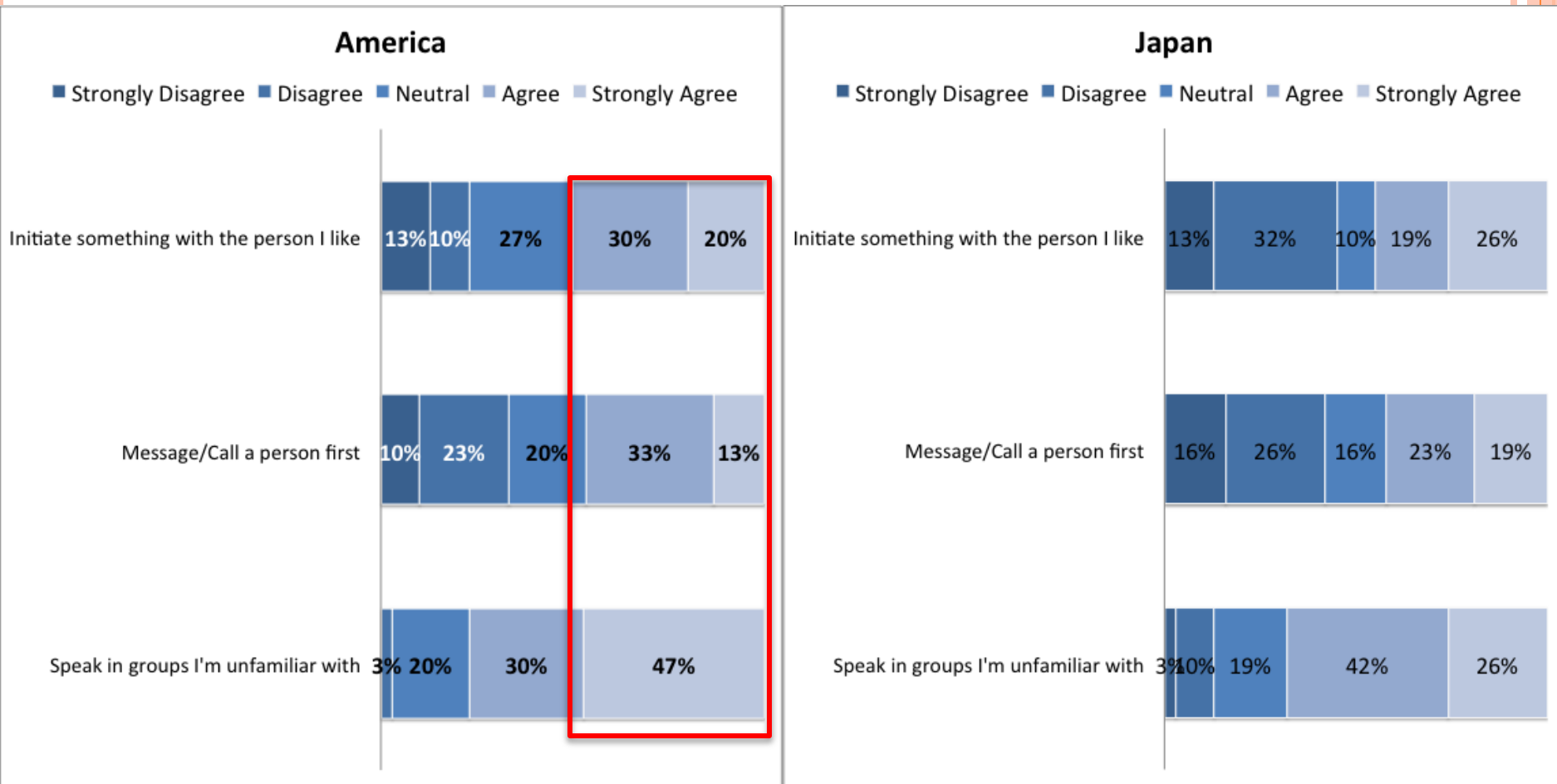
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree



In general, more Japanese disagreed about feeling shy in the classroom than American students

INTERACTING WITH OTHERS

“I feel shy to...”



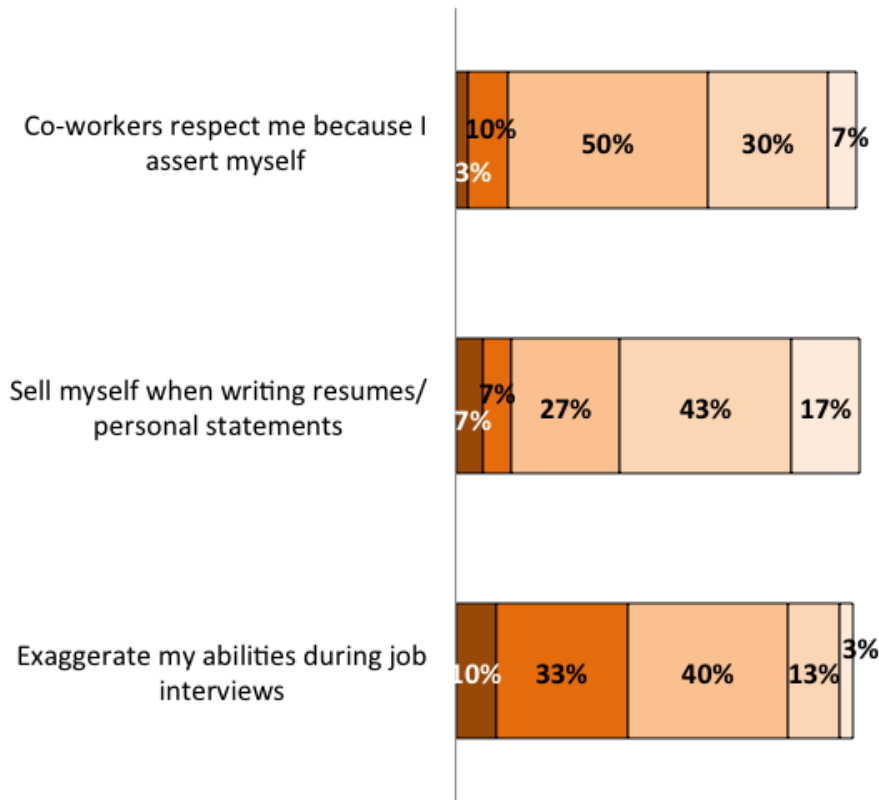
More American students agreed to feeling shy about interacting with others

SELF-ESTEEM IN THE WORKPLACE

Do you agree with the following statements?

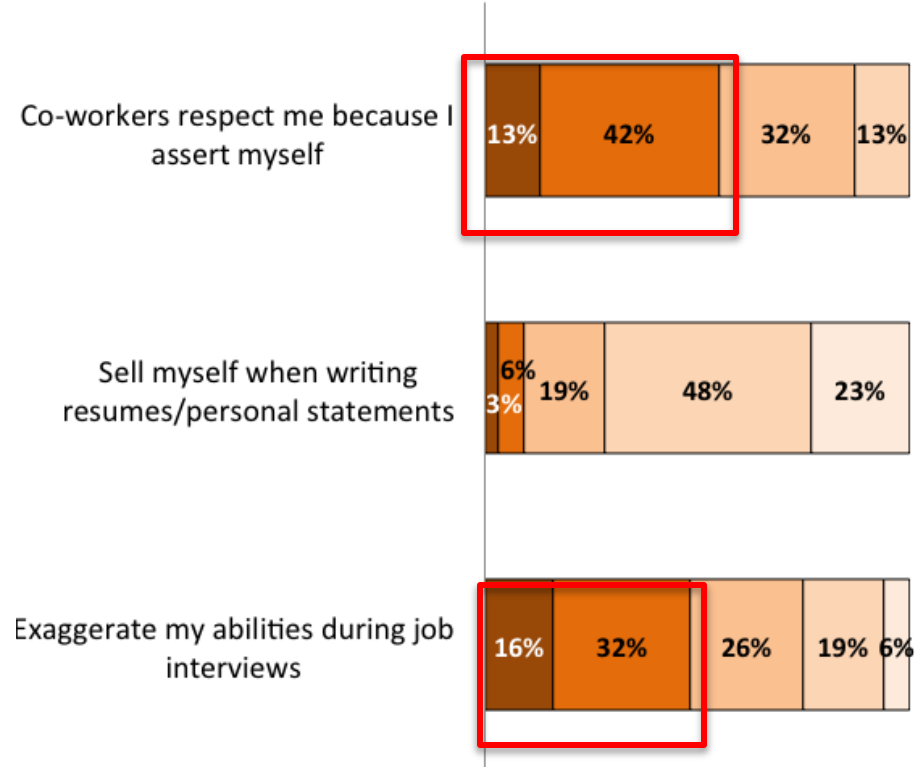
America

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree



Japan

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree



Both groups had similar levels of agreement. However, more Japanese students disagreed about asserting themselves at work

IMAGE

Do you agree with the following statements?

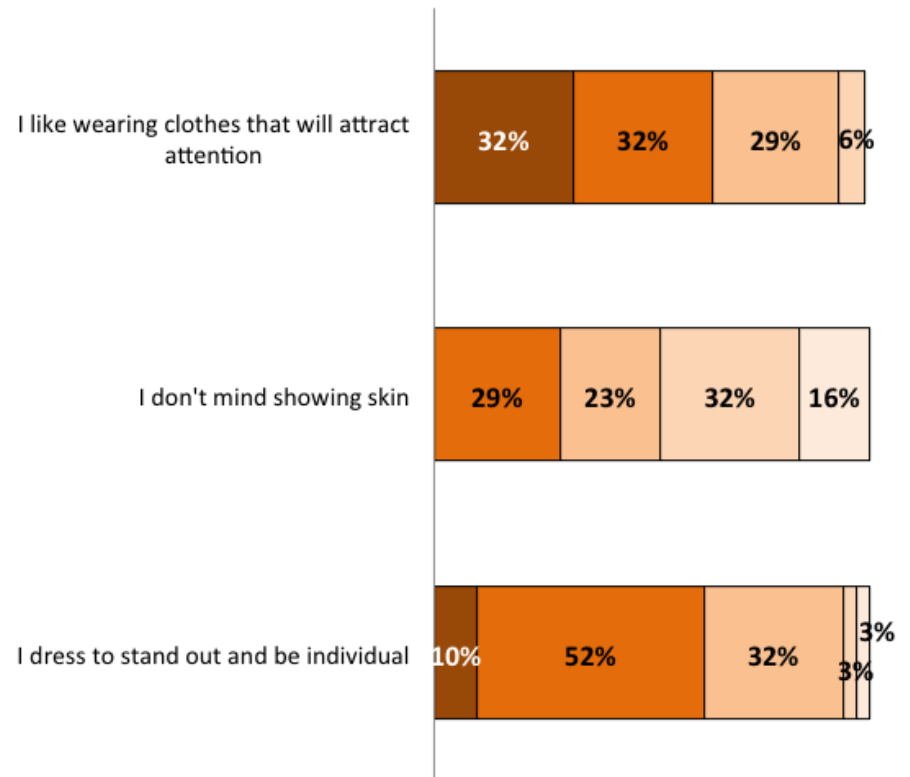
America

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree



Japan

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree



American students agreed more about “dressing to stand out/be individual” compared to Japanese students

RESEARCH QUESTION 1 FINDINGS SUMMARY

- American and Japanese students had similar levels of self-esteem
- Although similar, Japanese pretend to be modest more often than Americans
 - American students act modest so they don't look bad
 - Japanese do so to be considerate towards others
- Japanese students showed more confidence in the Classroom and Socializing settings
 - Were less shy to speak in class
 - Less shy to approach others
- American students showed more confidence in their Image and Work setting
 - Were more assertive in regards to work
 - Dress to stand out



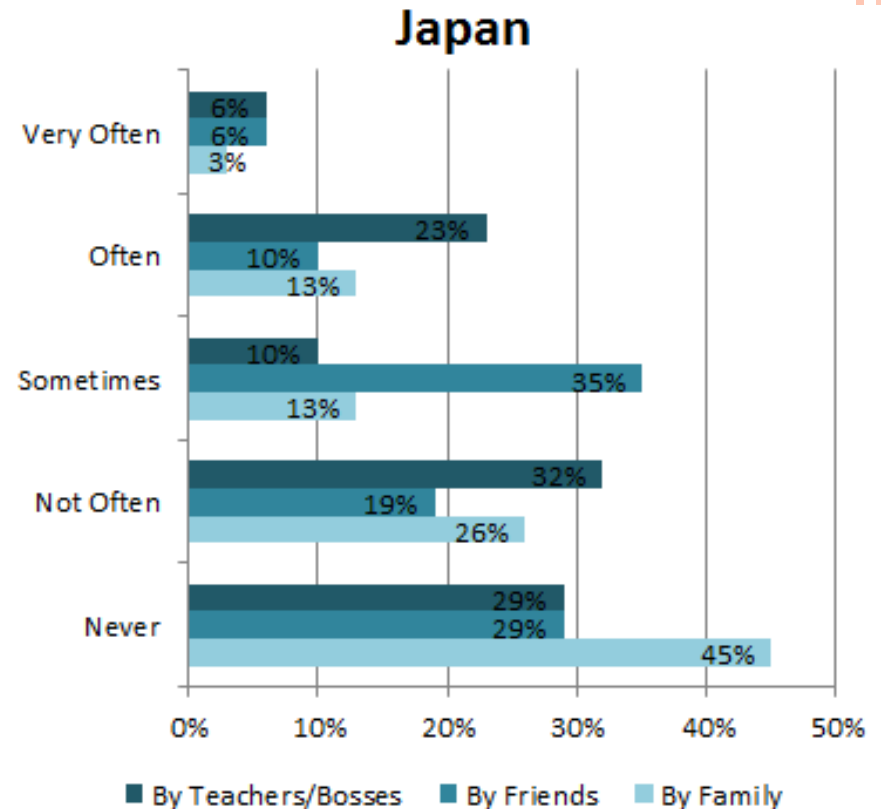
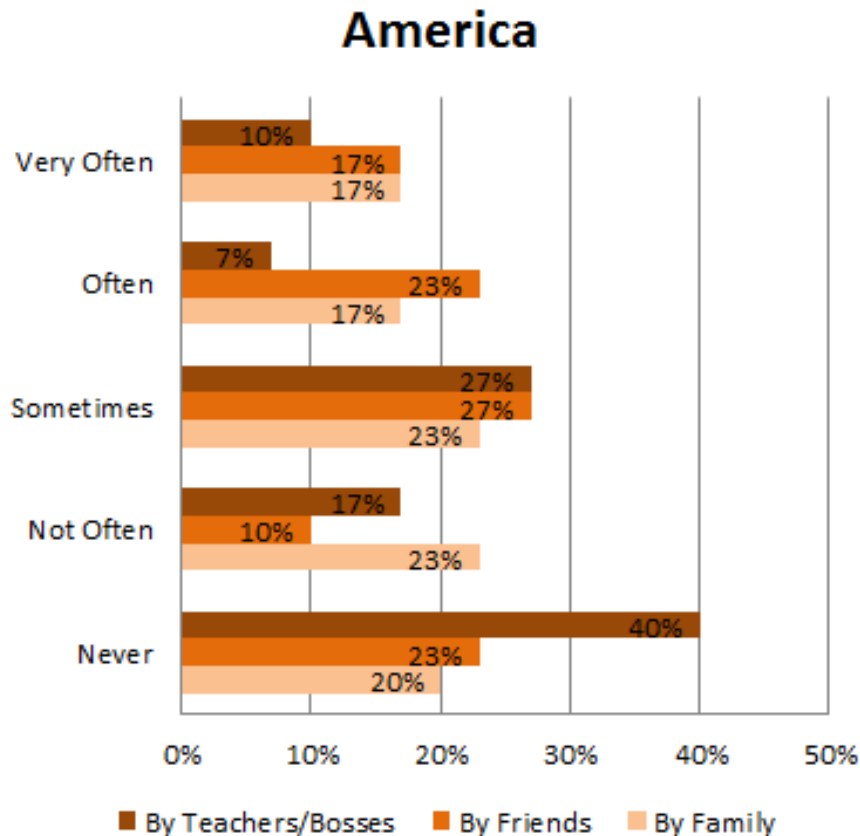
RESEARCH QUESTION 2

What factors have the most influence on self-esteem in each country?



INFLUENCE OF OTHERS

How often are you told to be more confident?

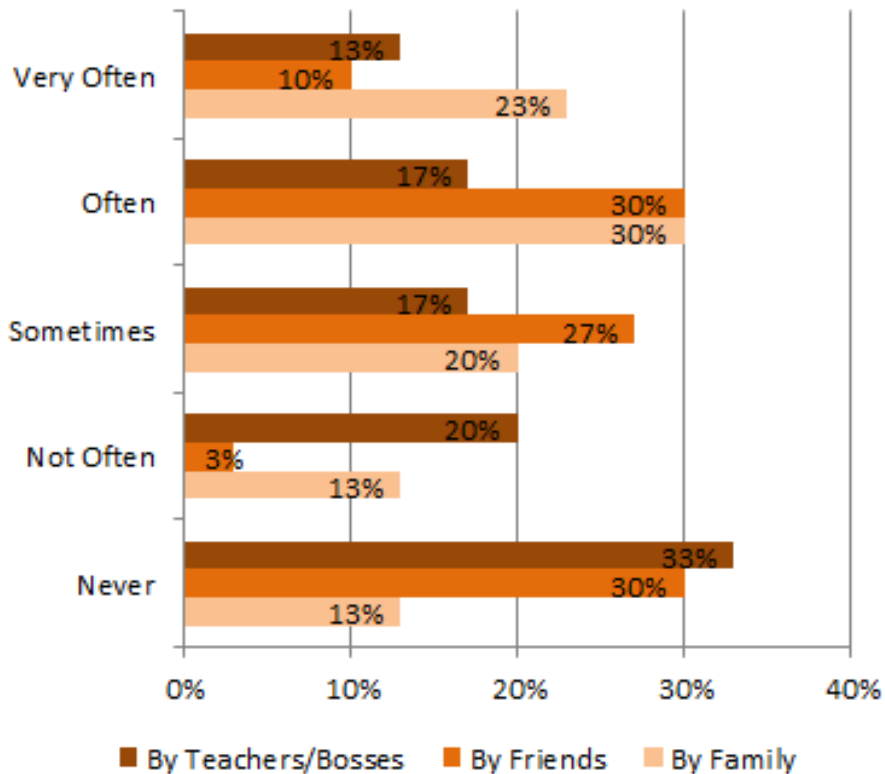


Japanese are told less often than Americans to be confident.
Americans are often told by family and friends.

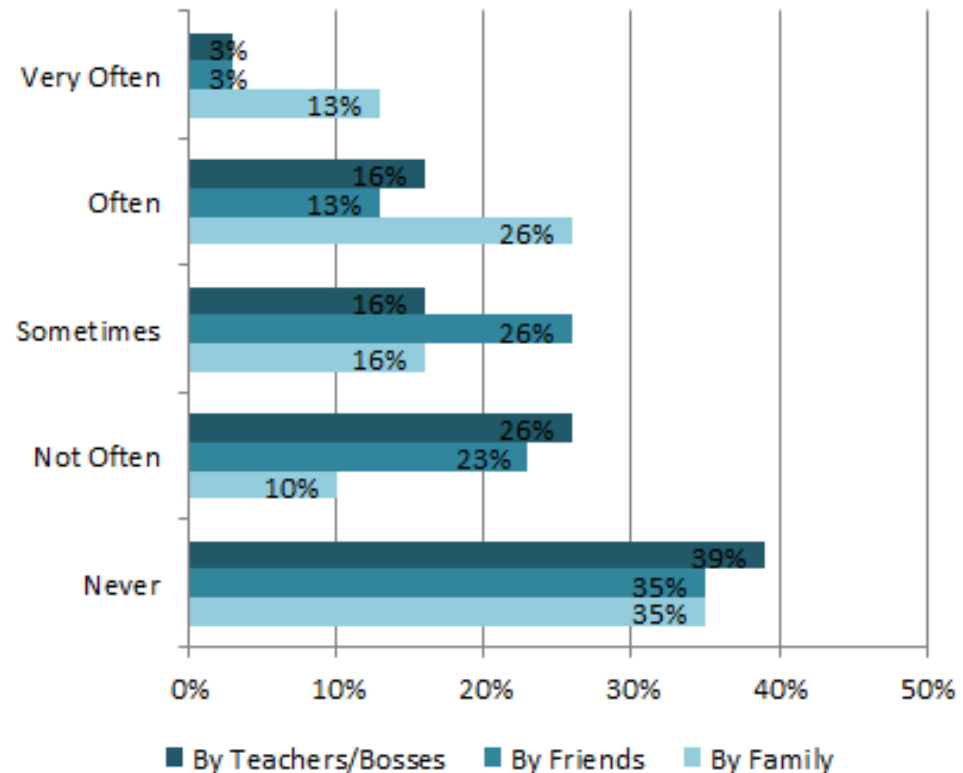
INFLUENCE OF OTHERS

How often are you told to assert yourself?

America



Japan

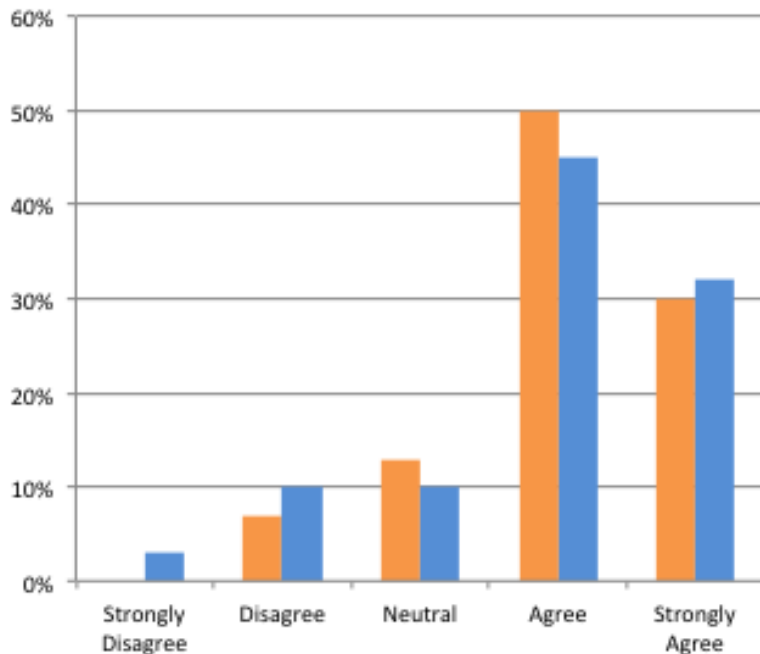


Americans are told more often than Japanese to assert themselves

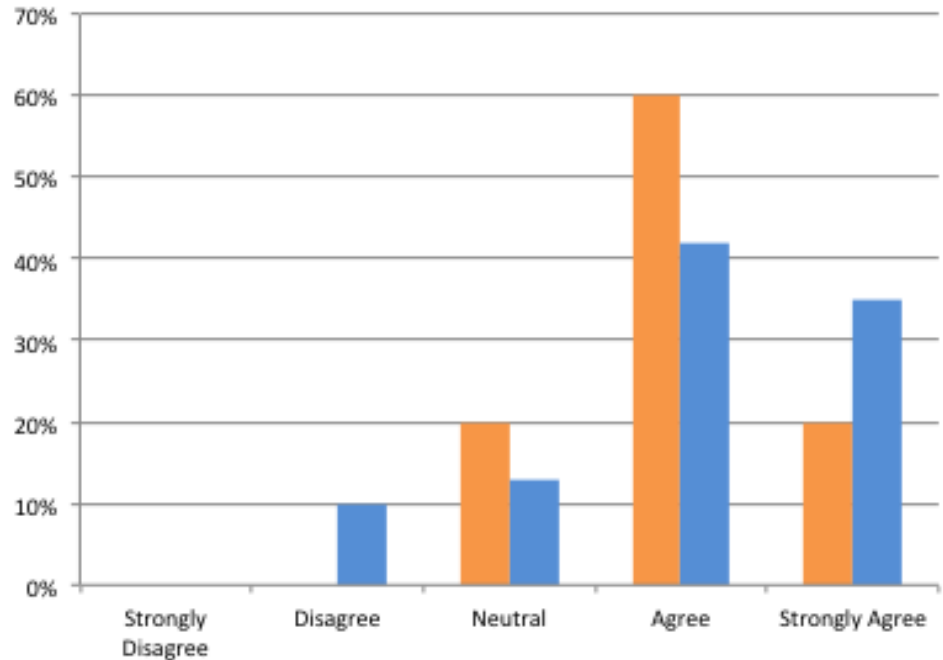
EFFECTS OF CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS

Do you agree with the following beliefs?

Westerners are expected to be independent and unique



Japanese people are expected to think of the group



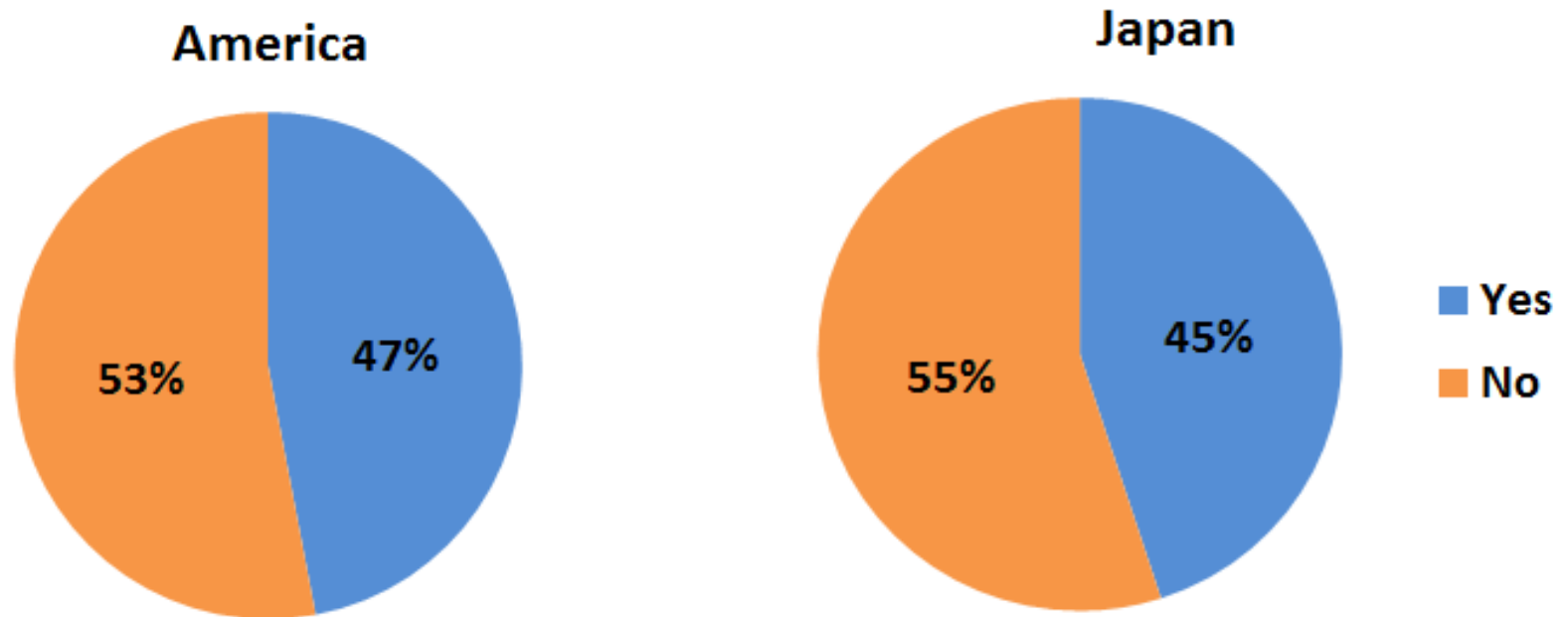
■ America

■ Japan

Many students believed in the Cultural Expectations in both Japan and America

INFLUENCE OF MEDIA

Do you think media in your society has influenced your self-esteem?



Many students thought media had an effect on their self-esteem in both groups

INFLUENCE OF MEDIA: REASONS

If so, why?

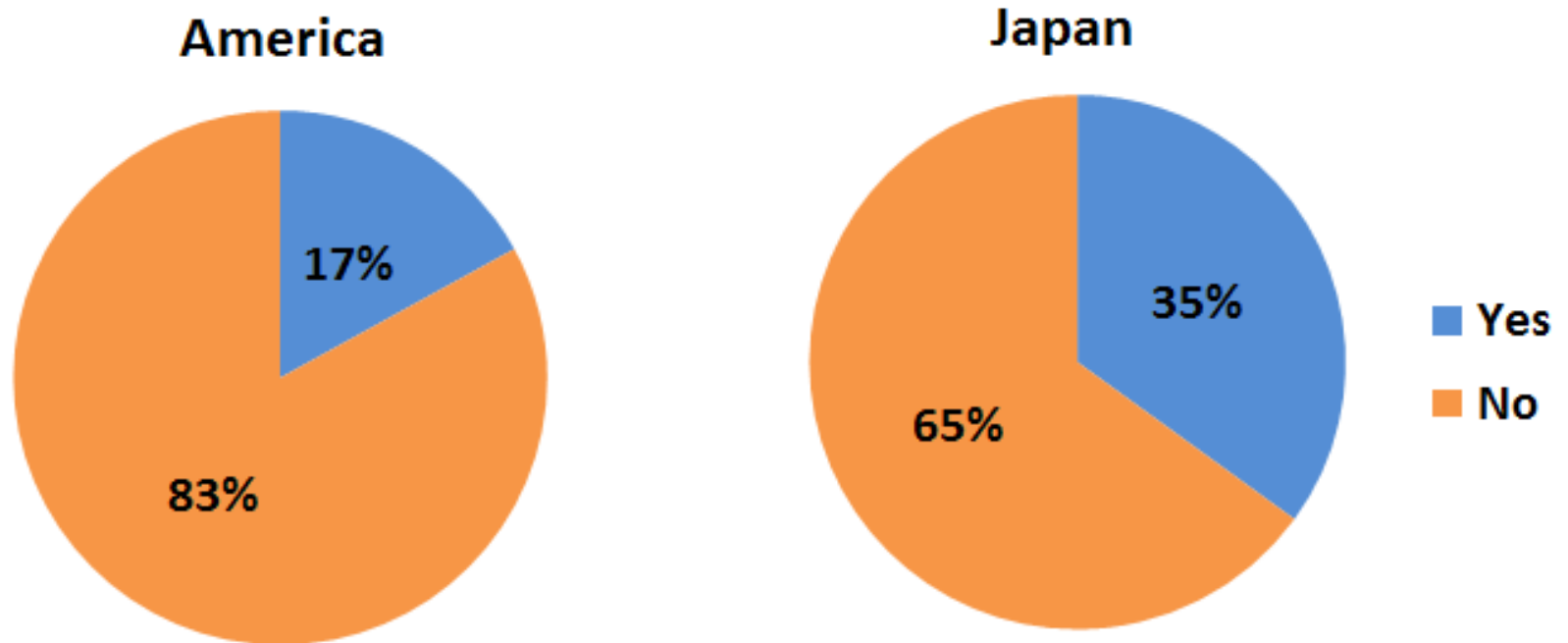
America	Japan
“Projects image of ‘perfection’/ unrealistic body types”	“Japanese people are easily influenced by the media”
“Models often lower self-esteem due to body image”	“Lose confidence because I’m not ‘cute’ like the models and idols”
“Makes me feel self-conscious of my body”	“Feel like doing my best when I see dramas or hear a good song”
“When I stopped watching TV my confidence rose”	“Reading a newspaper article about Japanese exchange students made me proud to be one”

Many people in both countries said their self-esteem lowered because of media.

*Note: Blue font indicates positive reasons.

INFLUENCE OF RELIGION

Do you think religion in your society has influenced your self-esteem?



Religion has more of an effect on self-esteem in Japan than in America

INFLUENCE OF RELIGION: REASONS

If so, why?

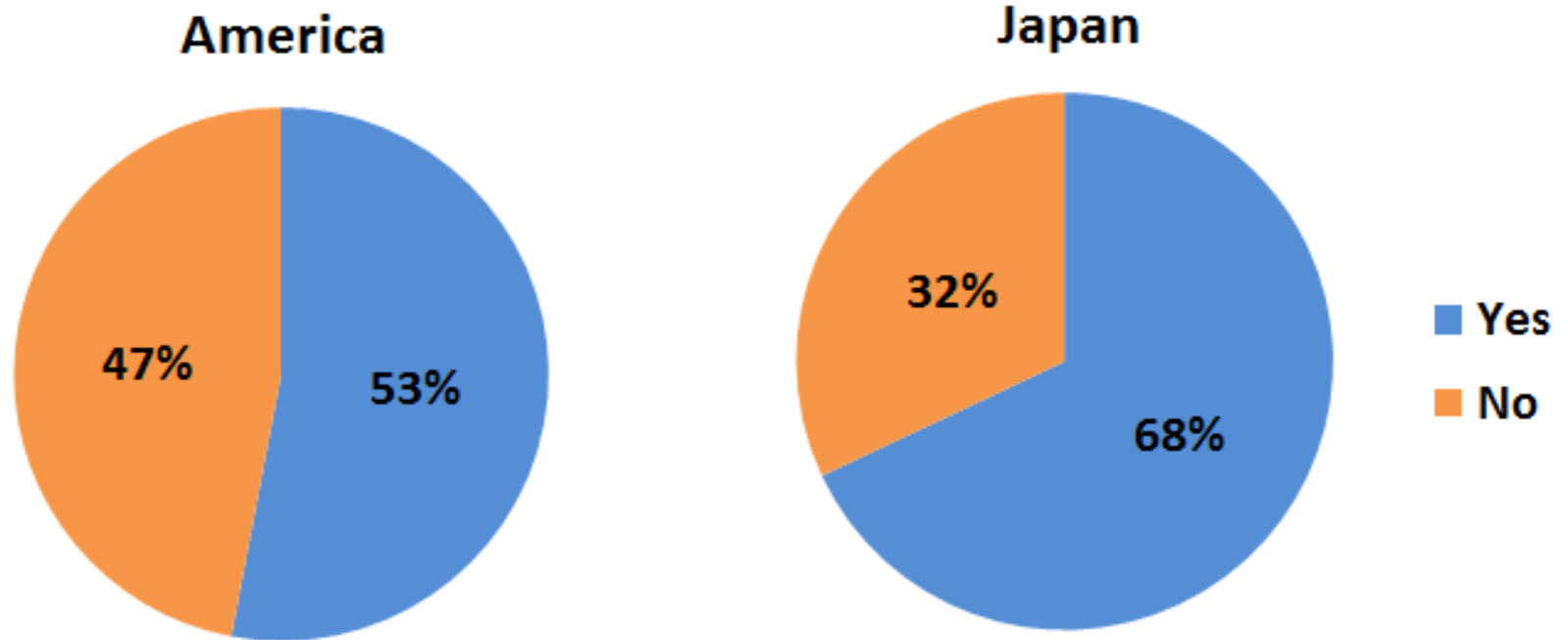
America	Japan
“The message that I wasn’t good enough or had to be saved was ingrained in me”	“Japan has a modest culture because the idea ‘respect the true beauty God gave you’ isn’t taught”
“I became much more confident being non-religious”	“Buddhism and Confucianism say to be modest and think of others”

In Japan, religion is related to self-esteem because
Buddhism teaches modesty



INFLUENCE OF EDUCATION

Do you think the education system in your society has influenced your self-esteem?



Number of students who answered “Yes” were extremely high in both countries

INFLUENCE OF EDUCATION: REASONS

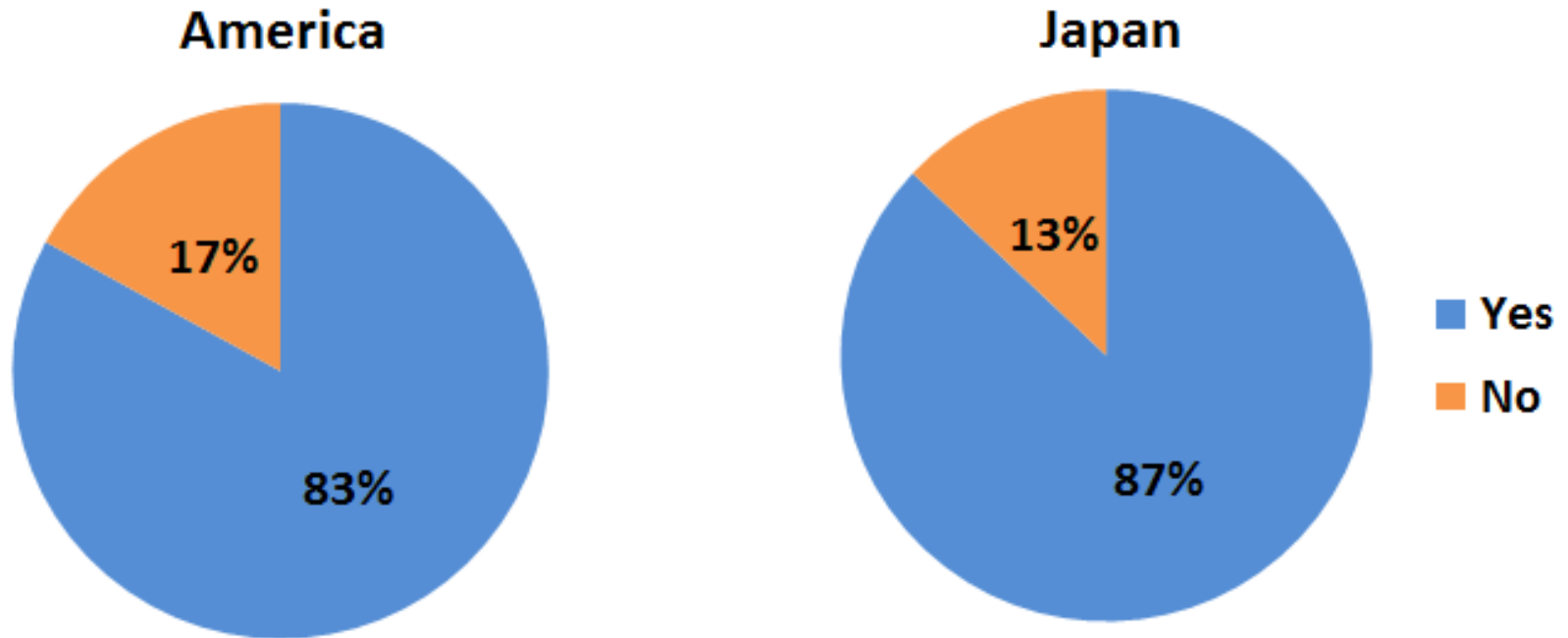
If so, why?

America	Japan
“Good grades make me feel more confident”	“In school, people are expected to have good grades and skills”
“I was good at school, so it boosted my self esteem”	“Teachers’ words have a big influence on students when they’re young”
“Providing me with teachers and courses that help me perform well”	“Students are influenced by their teacher’s self-esteem”
“Made me feel like an outcast”	“No individuality in Japan/ no confidence because I was compared to everyone”
“Those who are more or less intelligent are placed in separate classes”	“Wishes for everyone to be the same”

In America, many people said their self-esteem rose because of good grades. In Japan, self-esteem lowered because of no individuality

SENSE OF ACCEPTANCE FROM OTHERS

Does being accepted by others have an effect on your self-esteem?



Many students answered “yes” in both countries. This supports the “Sociometer Theory”

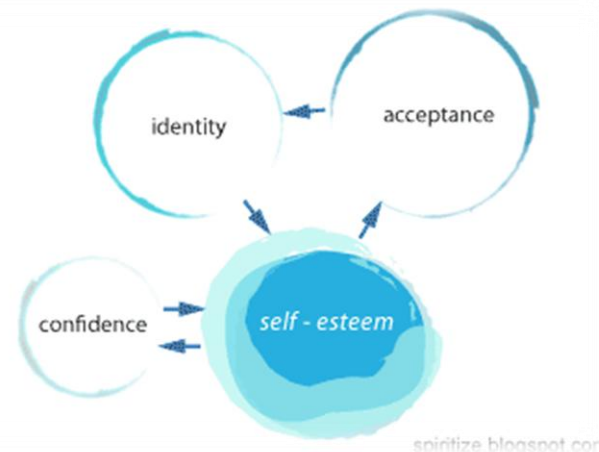
RESEARCH QUESTION 2 FINDINGS SUMMARY

- American students are told more often to be confident and assert themselves
 - American students are more often told by friends/family
 - Japanese students are more often told by teachers/bosses
- Both groups strongly believed in the “cultural expectations” of their countries
- Media has a big effect in both societies
 - Mostly negative for America due to body image
- Religion has more of an effect in Japan due to Buddhism’s idea of modesty
- Education was the most influential
 - Good grades boost self-esteem in America
 - Lack of individuality hinders self-esteem in Japan
- Both groups believe acceptance from others affects their self-esteem, supporting the sociometer theory



CONCLUSION

- Though Japanese are said to have low self-esteem, most participants ranked themselves from Neutral-Very High
- This shows that being modest doesn't mean having low self-esteem
- Though Americans have generally high self-esteem, there are areas they lack confidence in
- Self-esteem and confidence are related, but having one doesn't necessarily mean having the other



CONCLUSION

- The group dynamic is still present in Japan, thus influencing considerate behavior towards others
- Many factors contribute to levels and expression of self-esteem, such as: education, media, comfortability around others, and sense of acceptance



DISCUSSION

Limitations of the Study

- Surveyed only university students (can't generalize for all Japanese/Americans)

Future Study

- Survey self-esteem of different age groups
- Survey gender differences in self-esteem



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MEDIA RESOURCES

- <http://tothewire.files.wordpress.com/2008/12/success1.jpg>
- <http://wolfandlooper.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Fitting-In.png>
- <http://addictionblog.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Addiction-and-low-self-esteem2.jpg>
- <http://mountcope.files.wordpress.com/2008/10/self-esteem-1.gif>
- <http://www.postgrad.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/optimism-1.jpg>



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