

A Cross-Cultural Comparison: Perceptions of Male Attractiveness between the USA and Japan

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Abstract

The concept of attractiveness varies between cultures and has changed many times over the years. Physical appearance, personality, emotional maturity, and socio-economic background all play a factor in how attractive a man appears to a woman. In this study, I asked men from Japan and America to determine which traits they felt to be most important when trying to attract women and then asked women from Japan and America to choose which traits they felt to be most attractive in men. I determined how the men's perceptions matched up against the women's, and then compared the responses from the Americans and Japanese. Through this study I have found that Japanese perceptions are grouped closely together, while American perceptions are more spread out. Moreover, I discovered that Japanese women place more importance on men coming from a higher income background than do their American counterparts.

1. Introduction

In America, images of strong, large, muscular men are portrayed throughout the media, from magazines to advertisements, as being the ideal, attractive man. On the other hand, in Japan, thin, neat men with stylish clothing and hairstyles tend to appear more across the media. But, are these the types of men women are really attracted to in their respective countries? Through this survey I hope to find out just what kind of man women in Japan and America are attracted to and if those perceptions bridge the culture gap.

2. Significance of the Study

During my stay in Japan, I noticed that men dress and present themselves in very different ways than the men do in America. I believe that these differences show a difference in the perceptions of attractiveness between each country. I want to identify which factors, be they physical, mental or superficial like clothing and make-up, play the most important roles when looking for and attracting a potential mate in both countries and why.

3. Research Questions

1. What areas do men feel they need to improve in themselves the most when attracting a mate in Japan and America?

2. What are the areas in men that are most attractive to women who are looking for a mate in Japan and America?
3. How do men's perceptions meet the woman's perceptions, and how do each country's perceptions match up against each other?

4. Research Background

The face is more important than the body in determining attractiveness (Currie, 2009). There are many evolutionary theories of attraction but two stuck out in particular (Gangestad, 2005). A big shoulder to waist ratio is more attractive to women because it signifies a physically strong and healthy mate. Men with more money/higher social status can provide for children and therefore attractive

The general human trend to view oneself in a positive light is not universal (Yamagishi, 2012). Japanese view themselves as interdependent which motivates them in relation to the needs of others. Japanese men tend to be modest in order to avoid insulting others. However, Americans tend to view themselves as independent which motivates them to act independently of others and see themselves in a positive light. American men also tend to be self-enhancing during self-evaluations.

In regard to male attractiveness in the context of Japanese culture, typical stereotypes of the attractive male include: Tall, muscular body, symmetrical face, big shoulders and small waist, confident personality, etc... Many of these features would describe what is known as the "Nikushoku Kei" or carnivorous man in Japan. A new phenomenon has emerged in Japan known as "Soushoku Kei" or the herbivorous man (Engelhart, 2009) The term was coined by writer Maki Fukasawa in 2007 and describes the more "lady-like" men that have been growing in numbers recently. A recent study shows that 60% of Japanese men age 20-34 somewhat fall into this category. Nikushoku Kei are characterized by having dark skin, a muscular body, spikey and light-colored hair, being sexually active and competitive, and wearing suits or weather clothing. On the other hand, Soushoku Kei are characterized by having light skin, a thin body, dark and natural hair, not really interested in relationships or sex, having a close relationship with mother, and wearing tight-fitting and cloth clothing.

Japan is often described as a Collectivist Culture (Trandis) Personal goals are often seen as less important than those of society. Japanese men in their 20s and 30s have been influenced

by the term “ikemen” or “good-looking man”(Kyodo, 2012) “If I look unkempt, it would be embarrassing for my friends when they hang out with me. I also want to make a good impression on my customers,” says 34-year-old Osaka patissier. Men using beauty care products is on the rise especially nail, skin and hair care. In a 2011 study, Japanese men in Tokyo spent an average of 11,000 yen or \$110 on beauty care products.(Kyodo, 2012)

5. Research Method

For this study, I surveyed 19 Japanese men and 31 Japanese women, 50 Japanese people in total. Next, I surveyed 20 American men and 34 American woman, 54 American people in total. I surveyed 104 people in total. I conducted the survey in English and Japanese online using Google Forms.

6. Demographics

For demographics, I surveyed the Japanese and American’s income level, ethnicity, TV watched per day, and whether or not they read magazines. About half of Americans answered middle income, a third answered low income and about a sixth answered high income, whereas, almost all Japanese answered middle income with 16% coming in at lower income. None of the Japanese participants answered high income. Americans were about 60% Caucasian with Asian, Hispanic, and African American participants as well. Japanese participants identified 98% as Asian with 2% other. Japanese and American TV watching habit were very similar with more Japanese answering 3-4 hours per week than Americans. Japanese also tend to read magazines more than Americans do.

7. Survey Results

Please Note: Graphs and charts of the below stated statistical data can be found in my English PPT

7.1. Research Question 1 Results

When asked the question “how often do you exercise?”, as seen in graphs 9 and 10, American men exercise more than Japanese men. Overall, American men and Japanese men have similar reasons for exercising. Japanese men exercise more than American men for enjoyment. American men exercise more to maintain or lose weight (graph 11). Graph 12 shows

that American and Japanese men visit the salon with similar frequency, but graph 13 shows that Japanese men tend to spend more money per haircut. For personal hygiene, graphs 14 and 15 show that American men spend more money on Fragrances and Shaving/Facial products, while Japanese men spend more money on hair care products.

For the questions “how often do you go clothing shopping?” and “How much money do you spend on clothing per month?”, the results showed that Japanese men go clothes shopping more frequently and spend more money on clothes than American men do (graph 16, 17). Graphs 18 and 19 show that Japanese men tend to shop at smaller boutiques and feel that price and style are most important, whereas, American men tend to shop at less expensive department stores and thrift shops and feel that comfort and style are most important.

When asked to agree or disagree with a variety of statements in regard to being attractive to women, both American and Japanese men agreed that having a good sense of humor, being confident, being physically strong, and being attractive physically is attractive to women. American men believe more than Japanese men believe that being honest, having an assertive personality, and having passion in what you do is attractive. On average, Japanese men feel, about 20% more than American Men, that being Powerful, Tall, Clear Skinned, and Muscular is important and very important when trying to attract a mate (graph 20, 21).

American and Japanese men both believe that having a Healthy Diet, Playing Sports, being able to Cook and do Household Chores are attractive to women. Both are also in agreement that Playing a Musical Instrument and Wearing Cologne are not very important. However, Japanese men view traits related to appearance, like Styled Hair and Stylish Clothing, as being more important than American men (graph 21, 22).

Overall, both Japanese and Americans had a similar ranking order of results when ranking personality traits (graph 23, 24). American men chose “very important” much more than Japanese men did. Japanese men ranked Good Relationship with Family higher than American men did. American men ranked Honest Higher than Japanese men did.

7.2. Research Question 2 Results

According to graphs 30 and 31, American women believe that Having a good sense of humor and Having passion in what you do is attractive, whereas, Japanese women believed that being honest, being good with children, and being able to do house hold chores is attractive in

men. The least attractive trait for American women was having lots of muscle, and the least attractive trait for Japanese women was having a thin body. American women viewed having an assertive personality much more positively than Japanese women. Finally, American women viewed having a thin body neutrally, while Japanese women viewed having lots of muscle with relative neutrality.

American woman had a neutral or unimportant perception of physical traits. Japanese women clearly viewed being Tall, Powerful, Muscular, and Clear Skinned as being attractive. Both cultures saw piercings and tattoos as unimportant (graphs 32, 33).

In regard to lifestyle traits, both cultures saw having a healthy diet, being able to cook and doing household chores as attractive. Japanese women, more than American women, found playing sports, wearing stylish clothing, and having styled hair as being attractive (graphs 34, 35).

Both Cultures' women found personality to be very important in determining attractiveness of males. American women found having a Sense of Humor to be more important than Japanese women. Japanese women found having a Good Relationship with Family to be more important than American Women (graphs 36, 37).

Excepting being Highly Educated, background was unimportant in determining attractiveness for American women. Japanese women saw one's Income, Social Status, and Education backgrounds as being important (graphs 38, 39).

8. Research Findings

8.1. Research Question 1 Findings

According to the results of my survey, American men found Personality traits more important in determining male attractiveness than Japanese men did. Furthermore, Japanese men found Physical, Lifestyle, and Background traits to be more important in determining male attractiveness than American men did. Although American men found Physical traits to be less important than Japanese men did, they tend to go to exercise more often. Finally, Japanese men tend to be more influenced by peers and family while American men are more influenced by the media.

According to chart 1, in general, American men's and women's perceptions aligned, but men considered being muscular as attractive while women found having a beard as attractive.

Also, for lifestyle traits, American men found sports to be important, whereas, American women did not.

According to chart two, Japanese men found that having a beard should be attractive to women, whereas, the women ranked being thin more than the men did. For personality traits, Japanese men ranked having a sense of humor and confidence higher than their female counterparts did. Japanese women on the other hand, ranked being honest and liking children higher than their male counterparts.

8.2. Research Question 2 Findings

According to the results from Japanese and American women, American women find Personality to be more important in a potential mate, while Japanese women find Physical, Lifestyle, and Socio/Economic background traits to be more important. Moreover, Japanese women want men to have good family skills, while American women want men to have strong individual personalities.

8.3. Research Question 3 Findings

Greater differences in perception of attraction were found between countries rather than between sexes of the same culture. American men and women tended to have a similar ranking of traits than their Japanese Counterparts; however, there was a great amount of variation within each sex. Japanese men and women differed in perceptions of attraction more than their American counterparts; however, there was much less variation within each sex.

9. Conclusion

Although men are more often portrayed as being very muscular in American media than Japanese media, American women do not find muscularity to be as important as Japanese women do. Overall, Japanese men and women believe physical appearance and socio/economic background to be more important in determining male attractiveness than their American counterparts, whereas American men and women believe personality to be most important. Although *Soushoku kei* or “herbivore” men are increasing in Japan, Japanese women are more attracted to the masculine, *Nikushoku kei* type men. I found the results of this survey to be quite

surprising. I realized once again that stereotypes are usually inaccurate, and one should get to know people before making judgments

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