

The Perception of Nerds and Otaku in America and Japan

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Significance of the Study

- I have been called a **nerd** my entire life.
- I believed that I would be seen as an *otaku* in **Japan**.
However, when I told people I was an *otaku* in Japan, they told me that I **was not an *otaku***
- I wanted to see the **differences** and **similarities** of the two terms since the words seem to have lost their original meaning through translation and usage.

Research Questions

1. How are Nerds/Otaku perceived in America and Japan?
2. What influences the perception of Otaku and Nerds in Japan and America?

Research Background Outline

1. Nerds and Otaku Stereotypes
2. The Definition of Nerds and Otaku
3. History of Nerds and Otaku
4. Media Representation
5. The Relationship between the Economy and Nerds and Otaku
6. Bullying & Isolation



Definitions

Nerd

1. “A person considered to be **socially awkward**, boring, unstylish, etc.”
2. “An **intelligent** but single-minded person obsessed with a nonsocial hobby or pursuit.”

Otaku

1. “An avid collector or enthusiast, esp. one who is **obsessed with anime**, video games, or computer and **rarely leaves home**”

(Merriam-webster.com, 2016)

Nerd Stereotypes

Nerd

Known to:

- Love academia
- Love technology
- Wear glasses



(Paulgraham.com.2003)

Otaku Stereotypes



Otaku

Known to be:

- Obsessed
- Sexually perverted
- Sickly pale complexion
- Shut-ins

Similarities



Nerd

- Unfashionable
- Enjoys collecting comics & manga merchandise and video games
- Socially awkward

Otaku

History of Nerd and Otaku

First usage of word "Nerd" in Dr. Seuss' If I Ran the Zoo

1950

First usage of word "Otaku" in Nakamori Akio's journal

1983/84

"Otaku Murderer" was obsessed with anime and kidnapped children

Movie "Revenge of the Nerds" forms stereotype of nerds.

1988/89

Famous "Nerd," Bill Gates, makes his first billion

1996

"Triumph of the Nerds" is produced (a documentary about the Nerds" who created PCs)

(Pbs.org., 1996)

Media Representation of Nerds and Otaku

	Nerds	Otaku
Media Example	<p>“She’s All That” (1999) portrays a bad image of Nerds. In order for Nerds to be happy and popular they must hide the nerdiness</p> <p>(IMDB.com, 2016)</p>	<p>“Watamote” anime (2013) portrays the everyday life of an Otaku. The main character has problems speaking to others and has a hard time fitting in.</p> <p>(animenewsnetwork.com, 2014)</p>

Nerds/ Otaku and the Economy

- Nerds create **positive economic benefits** in billion dollar technology corporations
- Otaku buying habits have **contributed** to the **growth of the anime and manga industry** which is now a 2 Trillion Yen industry (18 billion USD)

Bullying and Isolation

- A **negative connotation** comes with the terms Nerd and Otaku
- Sources have said that because Nerds are seen as being **serious and unpopular**
- As Otaku tend to **obsess over their hobbies**, they are **isolated** from their surroundings

(Neojaponisme.com 2008)

Research Method

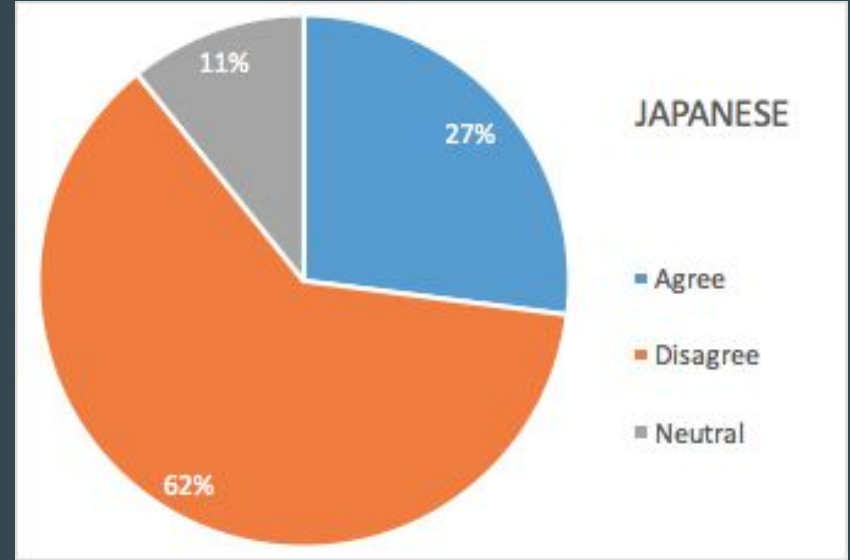
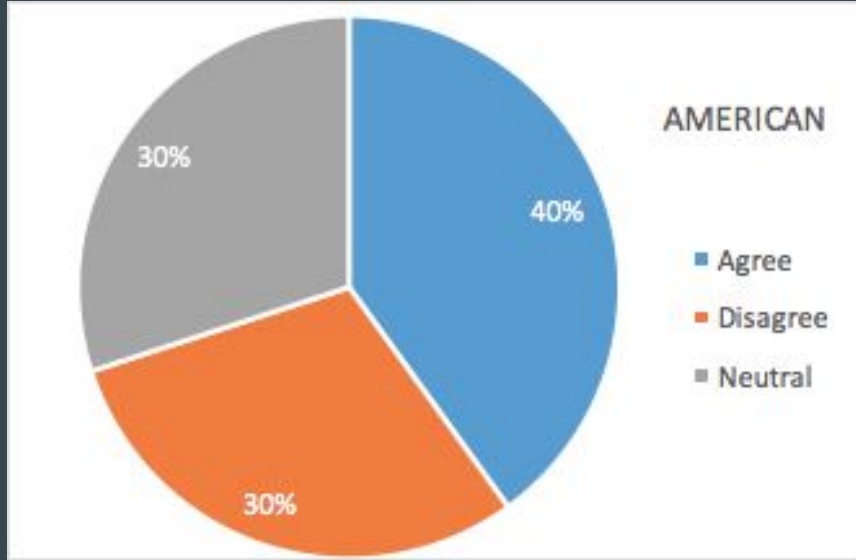
Participants:

- ❖ 62 University Students
 - 32 Japanese University Students
 - 15 Male 17 Female
 - 30 American University Students
 - 16 Male 14 Female

Research Tools:

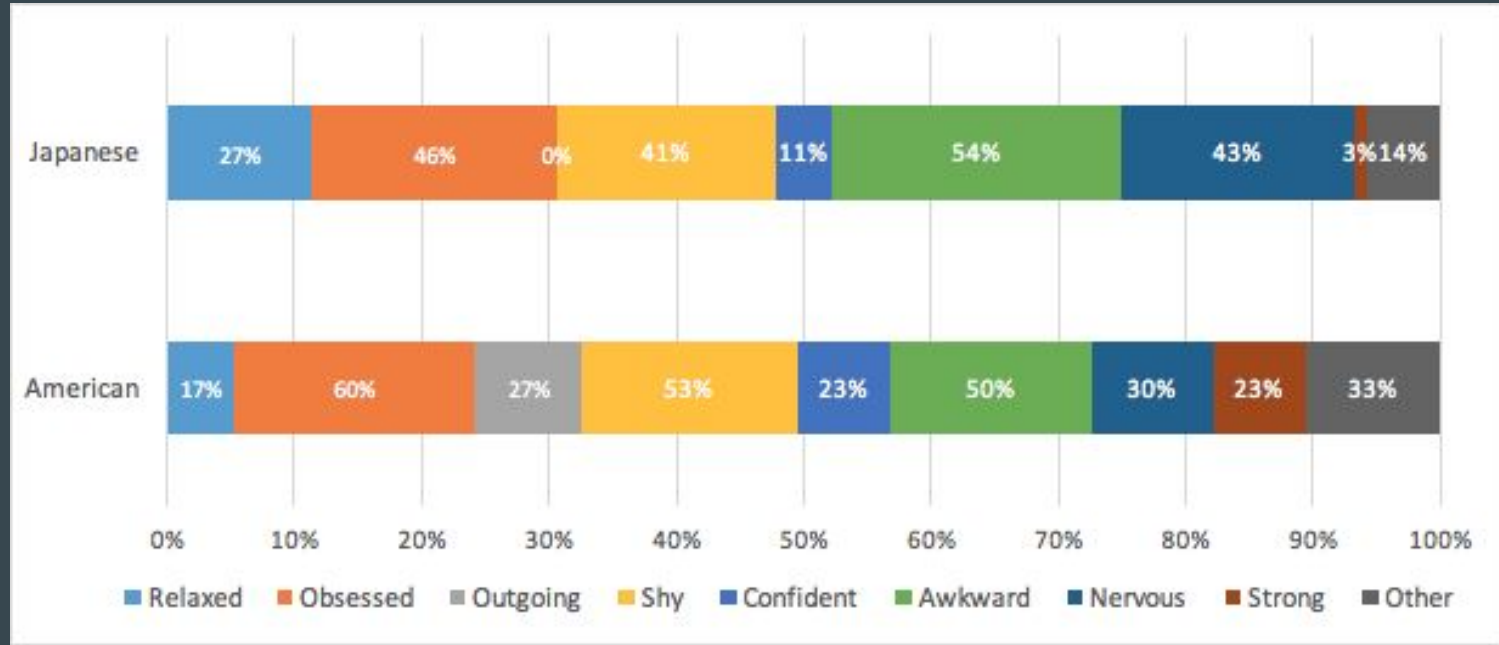
- ❖ Online Survey with google forms
 - Both in Japanese & English

3. Do you consider yourself a Nerd or a Otaku?



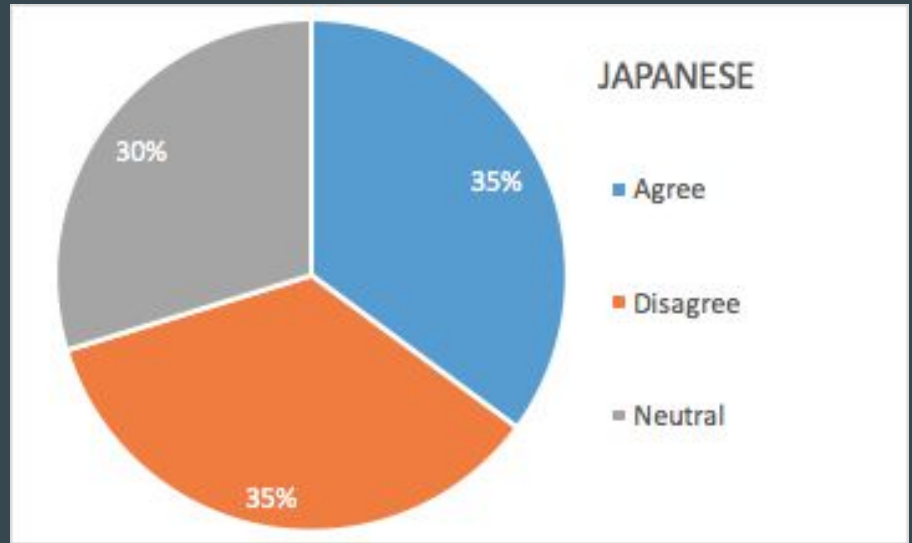
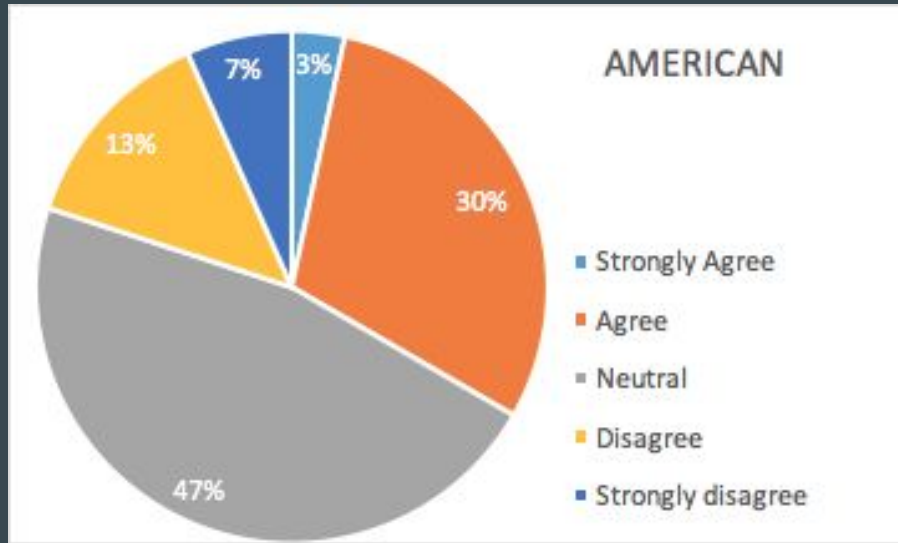
Most of the **American** students **considered themselves** to be **Nerds** but most of the **Japanese** students considered themselves **not to be Otaku**.

4. What characteristics do you believe classify someone as a Nerd or Otaku



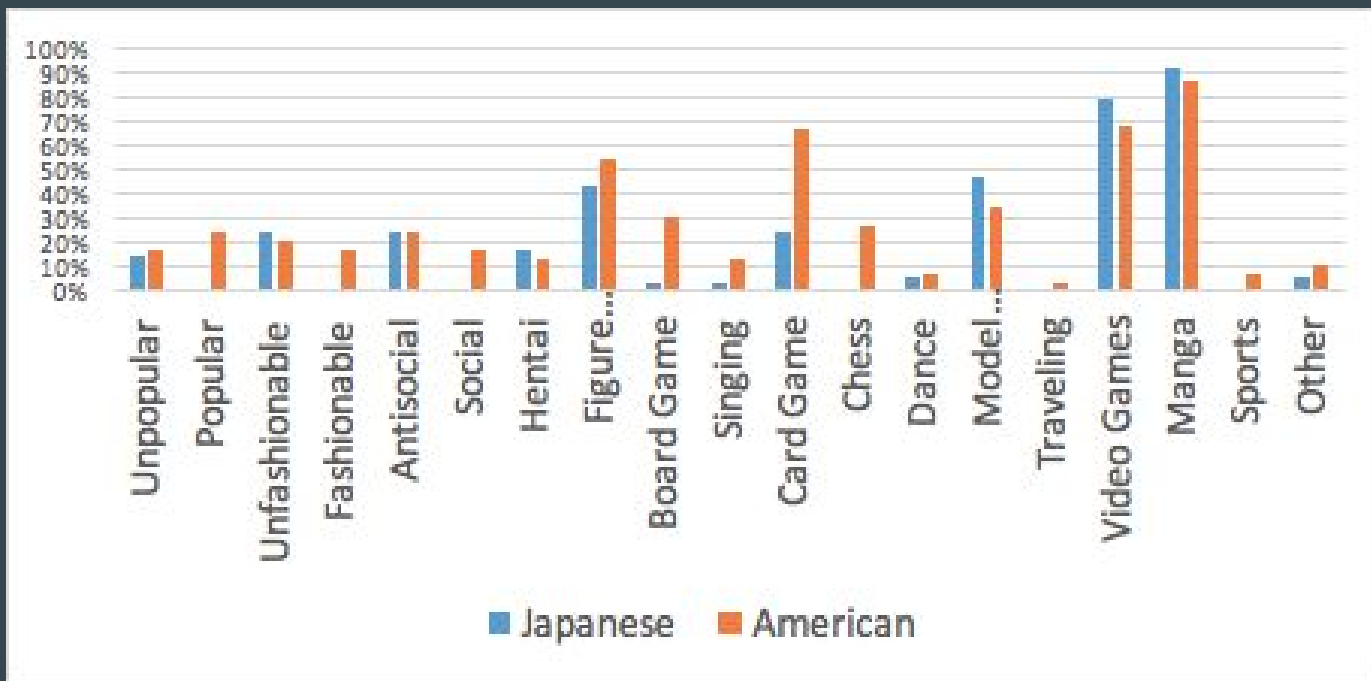
The **Japanese** participants' primary choice was **Awkward** (54%), followed by **Obsessed** (46%) and then Nervous (43%). The **American** participants' main choices were **Obsessed** (60%), **Shy** (53%) and Awkward (50%).

5. Do you believe that the terms Nerd, Geek or Otaku can be harmful?



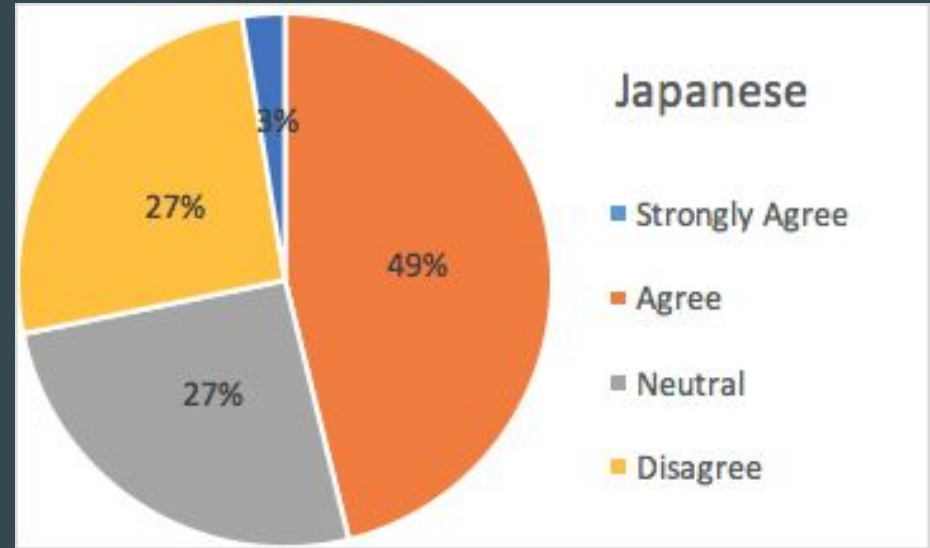
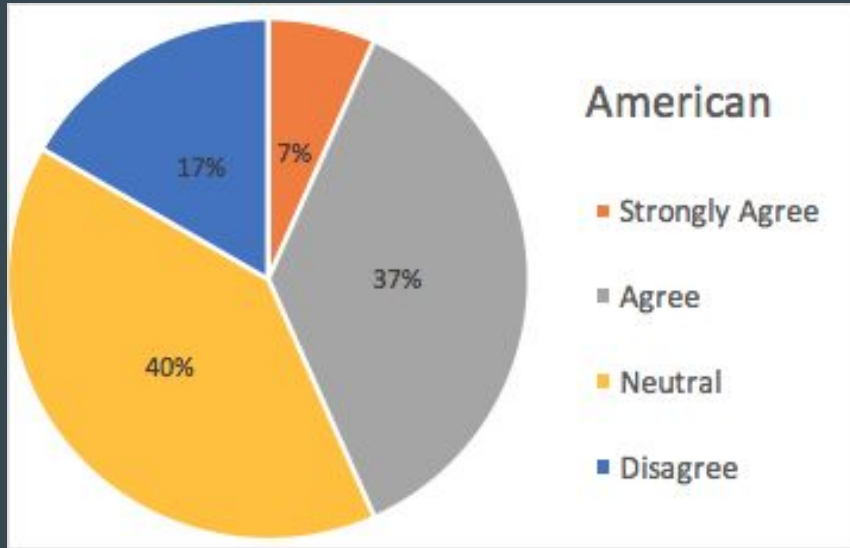
About $\frac{1}{3}$ of **Japanese** and **American** students agreed that these terms can be **harmful** and carry a **negative image**

6. Which hobbies and traits do Nerd or Otaku have?



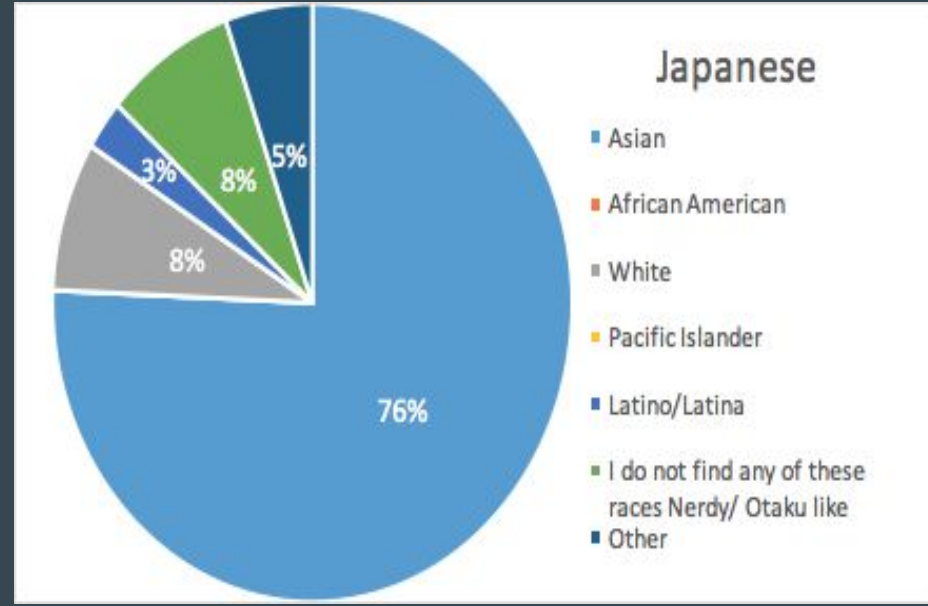
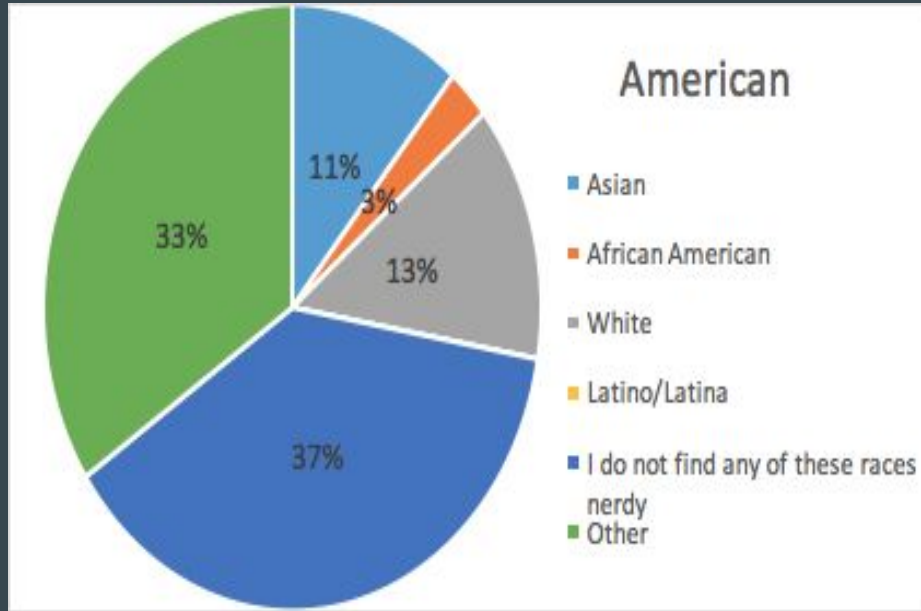
The two most popular answers for both American and Japanese students are **Comic Books** and **Video Games**. The third choice changed with **Japanese** choosing **Models** and **Americans** choosing **Card Games**

7. Do you think Nerds/Otaku enjoy being social or being at social events?



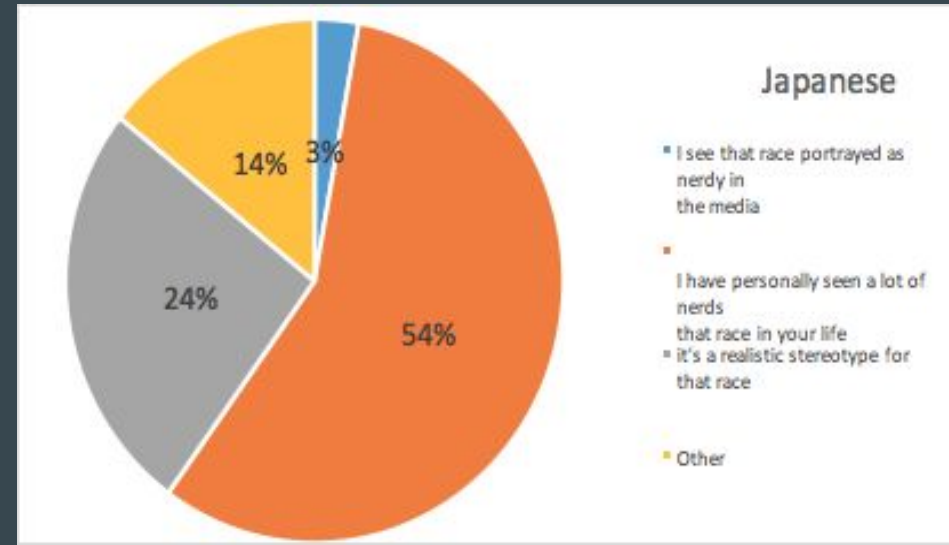
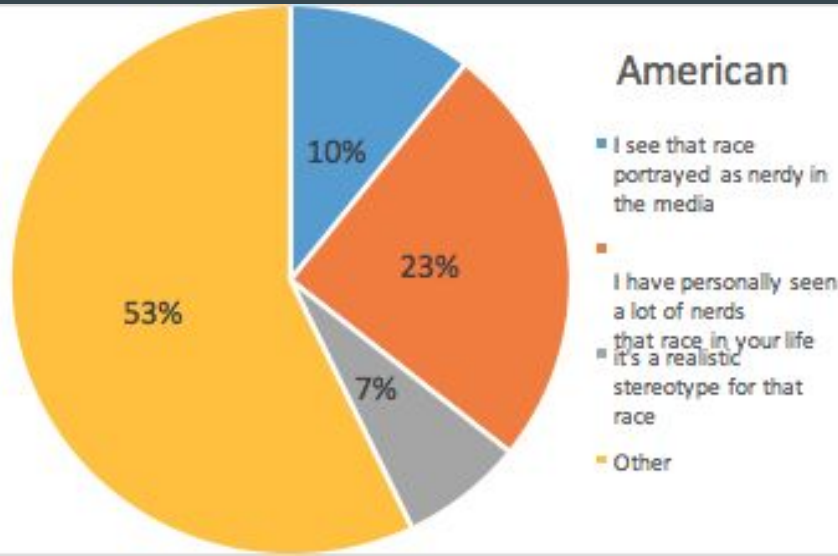
About 50 % of both **Japanese** and **American** students believe that Otaku and Nerds **enjoy being social** which **contradicts** the stereotype that Otaku/ Nerds dislike socialising

8. Are there any races likely to be Nerds or Otaku ?



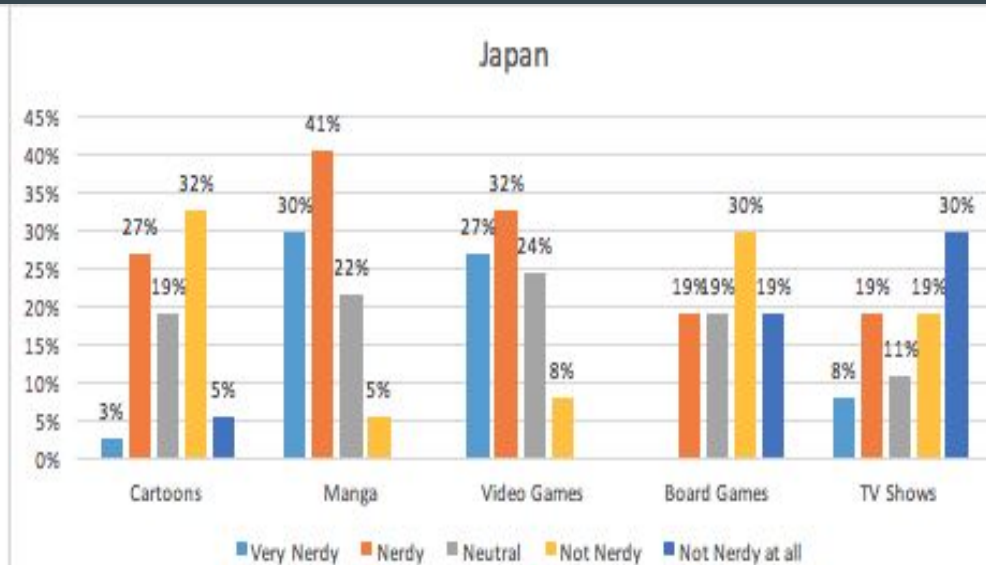
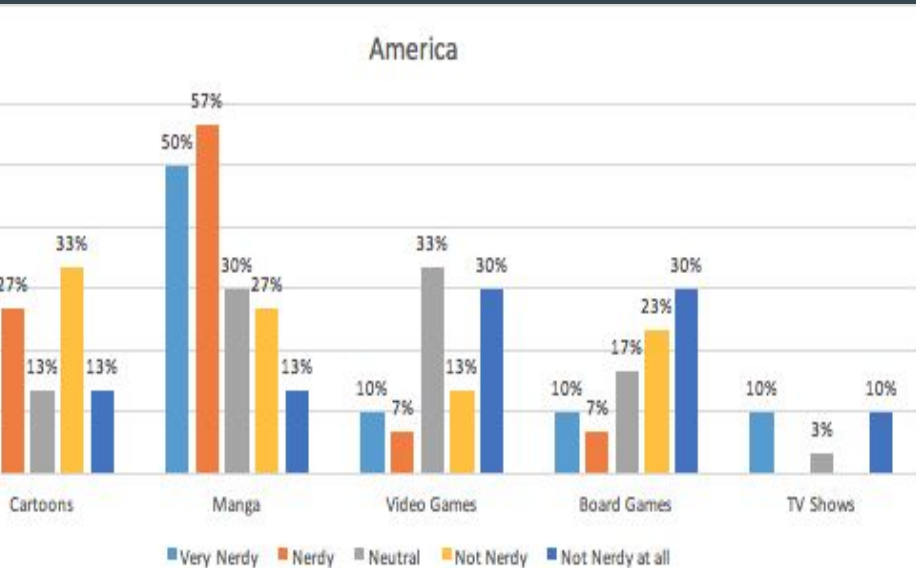
70% of **American** students either found **none** of the races to be nerdy or found the question **offensive**. 76% of **Japanese** students chose **Asians** as being the most likely to be Otaku

9. Why did you pick the race that you chose?



53% of **American** students chose 'Other' and explained why they found it **wrong** to **label any race Nerdy**. 54% of **Japanese** students responded that they saw **Otaku** as **Asian** in their own lives

10. How nerdy would you consider the following?

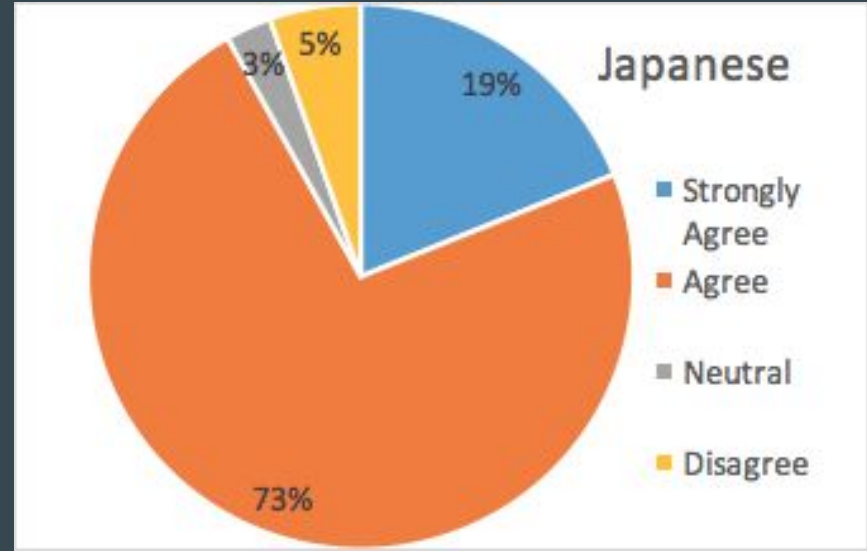
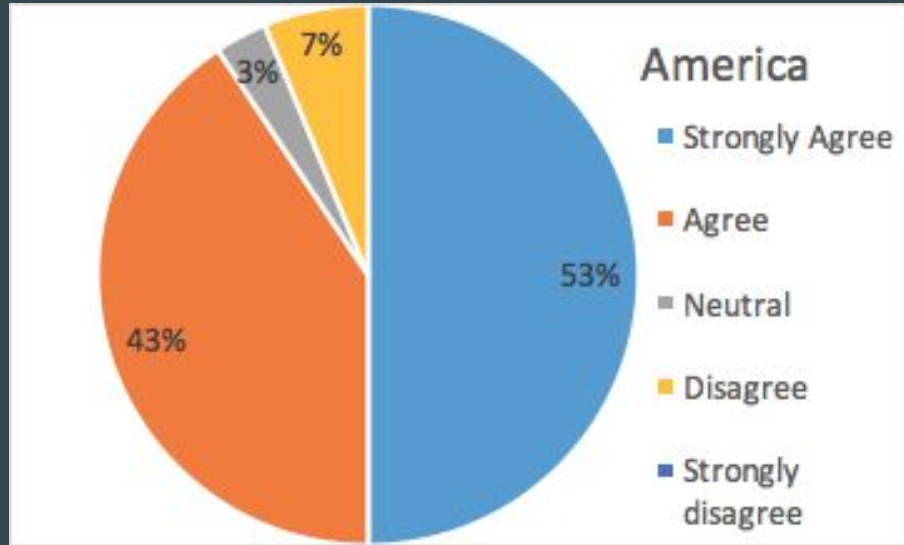


Both **American** and **Japanese** students considered **Manga** to be the **most Nerdy** activity while not considering Board Games and TV shows to be Nerdy at all.

Summary of Findings: Research Question 1

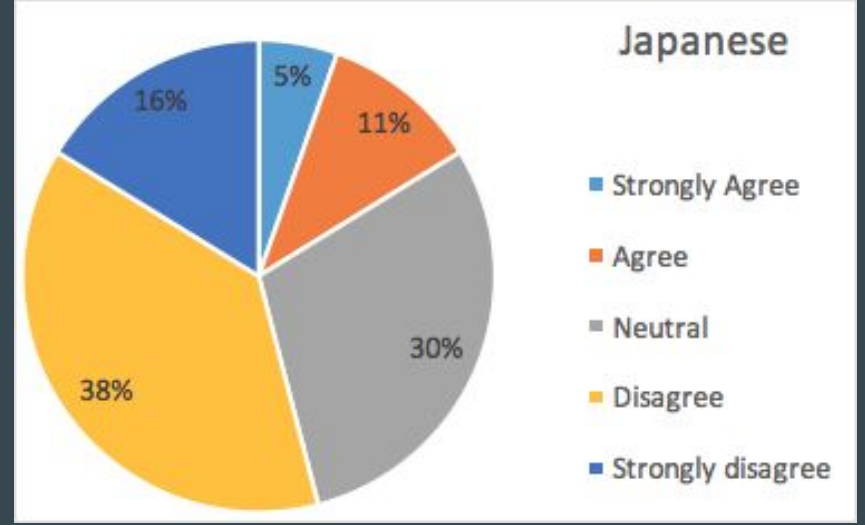
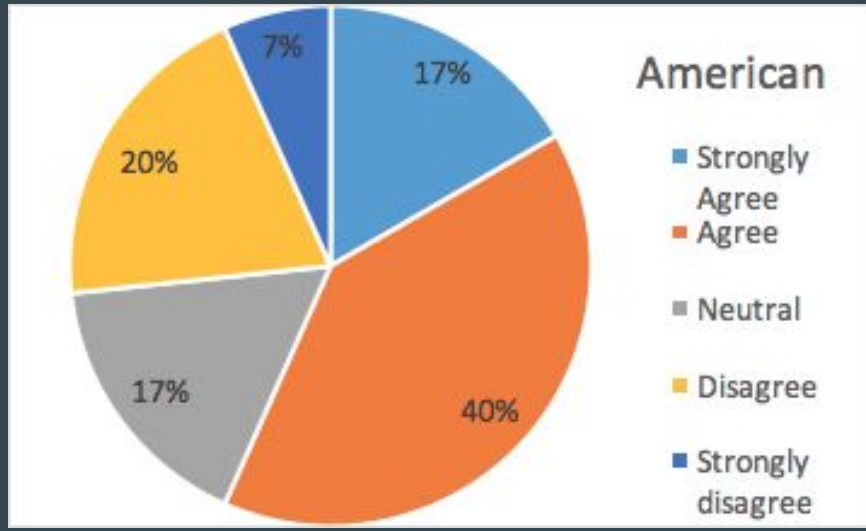
- According to the American and Japanese students, the most common characteristics of nerds are being **Shy, Awkward and Obsessed**
- In spite of this, both groups **believed** that Nerds/Otaku **enjoy socialising**
- **Japanese** students think that many Otaku are **Asian** whilst **American** students think nerdiness is **not race connected**
- Both Otaku and Nerds are perceived as people who **enjoy reading manga or comic books**

12. Do you believe that social environment, stereotypes and popular opinion influence how Otaku/ Nerds are seen?



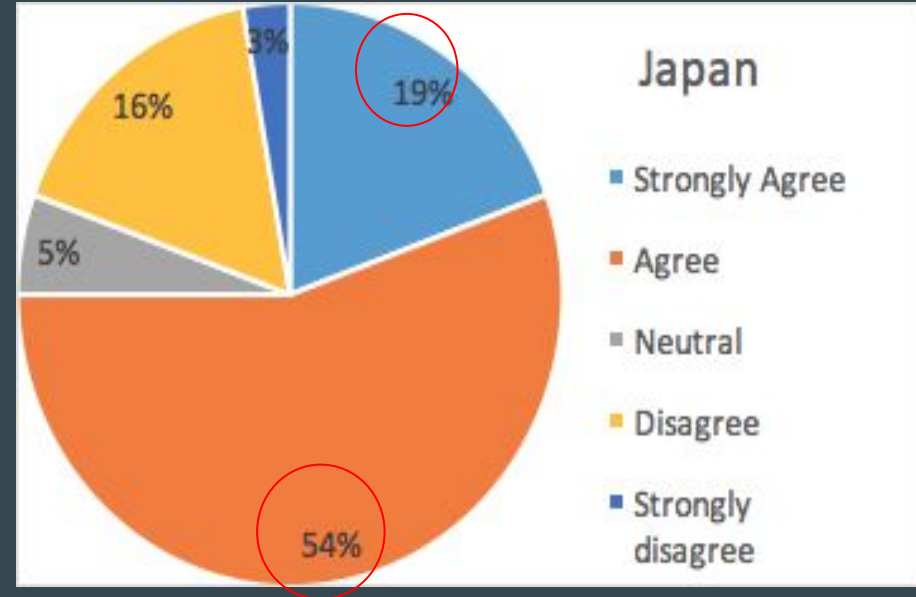
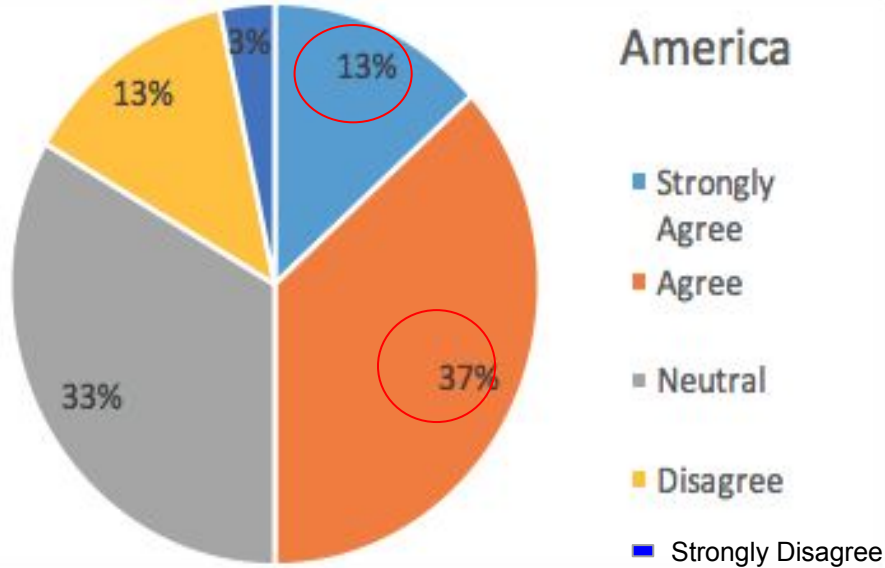
Almost **100%** of both **American** and **Japanese** Students believe that **societal** opinions and **stereotypes** of Nerds/Otaku has a **strong influence** on how people perceive them

13. Would you consider watching Comic book/Anime movie adaptations as a Nerd/Otaku-like activity?



More than 50% of **American** students see this as a Nerdy activity and about the same amount of **Japanese** students **do not see think this is Nerdy**

14. To what degree do you think Celebrities Influence how Nerds/ Otaku are seen?



73% of Japanese participants agree and 50% of American participants agree. Many Americans also chose neutral.

15. Which famous person do you identify as a Nerd or as an Otaku ?

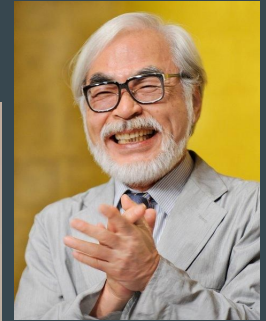
Shoko
Nakagawa



Urkel



Hayao Miyazaki



Bill Gates



According to Japanese students, Shoko Nakagawa is the most Otaku-like famous person.

American students' answers varied. I found it interesting that American students chose famous Nerdy fictional characters.

Summary of Findings: Research Question 2

- More **American** students who took the survey **labeled themselves** as a **Nerd** which may have created a bias
- Majority of responses from both **American** and **Japanese** Students agree that **media, stereotypes and Celebrities influence** how they perceive the image of Nerd and Otaku
- The **American** students had **various responses** when choosing a famous Nerd
- **Japanese** students mainly chose **Nakagawa Shoko**

Conclusion

- From this research, I found that the **American 'Nerd'** and **Japanese 'Otaku'** have both **similar** points and **varying** points as well.
- **Both** Nerds and Otaku are considered **Obsessed** and enjoy **manga** and **anime**
- The **American** and **Japanese** students also exhibited some differences in ideas
 - **Americans** were more **sensitive** regarding the idea of **stereotypes** and **race** while **Japanese** were not

Limitations of the study:

- Questions that explore the differences between Nerd and Otaku culture more thoroughly
- Small number of participants
- Most of the participants are students in California

Future study:

- Survey a larger number of people and different types of groups, not just students

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Any Questions?

