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Can Japan Aspire to a Gender-Equal Society? Japanese Male and Female Students' Attitudes Regarding Marriage and Gender Roles in Family and Society

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Abstract

The present paper addresses the ongoing issue of gender disparities in Japan. It seeks to gauge the attitudes and aspirations of Japanese college students regarding marriage, children, gender roles and participation in the workforce and in the household. A survey was conducted among male and female college students enrolled at national, public, and private higher education institutions in Tokyo and central Japan. Our results suggest that although marriage and the male breadwinner model continue to be mainstays in Japanese society, both male and female students have positive aspirations regarding marriage and children, and hold more egalitarian views regarding gender roles in the workforce and family.

Keywords: Gender Roles, College Student Attitudes, Japan

1. Introduction

In the 2022 Global Gender Gap Report, Japan was ranked 116th out of 146 countries (World Economic Forum 2023). Although educational attainment parity has been fully achieved, the country's overall gender index (0.650) and its economic participation and opportunity (0.564) situate Japan on one of the lowest positions in East Asia and the Pacific (World Economic Forum 2023). Moreover, with a proportion of women working part-time twice that of men, earning an average income of 57% of men's, Japan is lagging far behind other G7 countries such as France, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, and the United States in terms of gender parity (World Economic Forum 2023). A patriarchal society with a long-standing tradition of ascribing men and women to distinct realms of activity, Japan has placed a heavier burden and fewer freedoms on women compared to their male counterparts (Belarmino and Roberts 2019). However, in recent years, women's access to equal education and their increased involvement in the workforce have helped change the perceptions of gender roles and family values (Iwai 2019).

The present study investigates male and female college students' views of gender roles in

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family and society, their aspirations towards work and marriage, as well as the influence of parental experiences and behaviors upon younger generations' gender ideology. We seek to address a dearth of studies regarding male students' attitudes towards gender roles in Japanese society. Most of the extant literature on tertiary students' perceptions of gender roles is focused on United States or Europe; however, Japan is lagging behind other countries in this respect. Unlike the United States or Western European countries, the traditional gendered division of labor is still strong in Japan (Ishii-Kuntz et al. 2022: 25). Moreover, the rationale behind involving men in the present study is that much of the feminist literature arguing in favor of gender equality in Japan tends to regard men as a rather homogenous body of workers, without considering their needs or aspirations (Macnaughtan 2015).

However, the importance of men's participation in gender reform should not be discounted. Men are perceived as decision makers and leaders in public domains; their actions could influence women's life course and even limit their agency (Fleming et al. 2013). Men's gender role perceptions could depend on their economic status, family situation and context, socialization experiences, ideology, race, and regional contexts (Ciabattari 2011). They could be both supportive and resisting of gender reform at the same time (Flood 2015). For example, although they may welcome the egalitarian efforts of female family members, they also tend to resist any attempts at curtailing the privileges associated with masculinity (Flood 2015). As Japanese men continue to be the gatekeepers of politics, business and the legislative, little progress can be expected for women unless men's views and aspirations are equally acknowledged and addressed (Macnaughtan 2015). By having women participate more actively in the workforce, men could also benefit from a diverse and dynamic perspective in the workplace and a better life-work balance by affording more quality time with families or freedom to pursue interests outside their jobs.

We have tested the following hypotheses:

H_1: There are significant differences between male and female students' attitudes regarding family and gender roles.

H_2: Men and women with married parents are more inclined to marry and have children compared to those whose parents are divorced, separated, or single.

H_3: Men and women with working mothers have more egalitarian attitudes compared to those whose mothers were stay at home housewives.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Parental Influence on Children's Gender Role Perceptions

Social-cognitive and socialization theories credit parental influence for children's attitudes towards genders roles. On the other hand, cohort replacement theories posit that changes in socio-political and economic circumstances could cause changes in gender role perceptions, and that different generations

or cohorts are likely to hold distinct views and perceptions of gender roles in domestic and public domains.

According to the socialization theory (Bandura 1977) and social-cognitive theory (Bussey and Bandura 1999), children learn about gender roles and stereotypes from their parents, peers, media and the society at large by observation, imitation, and modelling. Under their parents' guidance, children develop their own ideas about family and work roles through "modelling, enacting experience, and direct instruction" (Fulcher et al. 2015: 177). Parents transmit gender attitudes to their children and help shaping their future decisions regarding marriage, employment, and gender roles in the household (Bussey and Bandura 1999; Davis and Wills 2010). Although in recent years gender ideologies have undergone a shift from traditional to egalitarian, the "male breadwinner/female caregiver" model remains the norm in many cultures. Children tend to adopt the mainstream values, with family and society playing an important role in perpetuating gender inequalities and stereotypes (Davis and Greenstein 2009).

The contribution of each parent to instilling gender attitudes and beliefs has been widely discussed in the literature. Children learn about sex roles from the daily interactions and household roles of both parents (Weitzman et al. 1972). Chodorow (1978) points out that girls are more likely to retain and enact portions of their relationship with their mothers, whereas boys learn gender appropriate behaviors which help them identify themselves with their fathers. A working mother is likely to transmit a more egalitarian gender ideology to their children than a stay-at-home mother. Likewise, a father who spends more time on household chores and childcare duties is likely to transmit similar attitudes, behaviors and values to his young children. Bolzendahl and Myers (2004) and Bulanda (2004) found that young men tend to display egalitarian attitudes to a lesser extent compared to young women, possibly because they generally spend more time with their fathers and have more opportunity to model traditional views and behaviors.

Daughters raised by a working mother are likely to spend less time on housework and focus more on their careers. They tend to have higher salaries and are more promotion-oriented compared to daughters of stay-at-home mothers (McGinn et al. 2015). Still, the deep-rooted gender division might force women to devote most of their time to household/childcare irrespective of maternal employment status. Although men brought up by working mothers are likely to share the household and childcare responsibilities, women continue to see themselves as the primary care-giving agents (Fulcher et al. 2015). Due to the male-centric corporate culture practices which rely on men's full availability and geographic mobility (Choudhury 2015), women are bound to choose between having a career and having a family. Without support from their partners, working mothers find it difficult to work as long and as hard as men; therefore, many young women will continue to prioritize household and childcare over careers, and might choose to postpone or even avoid marriage and childbirth.

2.2. Generation Gap: GenXers and Millennials — Different Expectations?

Several studies have tackled the attitude differences of younger generations and their parents' generations. Between the 1970s to 1980s, the U.S. witnessed a so-called 'gender revolution' due to the increased presence of women in public domains (Cotter et al. 2011; Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004). However, in the 1990s, a revival of the traditionalist gender roles attitudes brought the gender revolution to a halt, a phenomenon known as the 'stalled gender revolution' (Cotter et al. 2011: 285). Nevertheless, using psychological scales to study college students over a time span of eight decades, Twenge and Campbell (2008) found that millennials (born between 1982–1999) displayed more egalitarian gender attitudes compared to 'GenXers' (born between 1961–1981). Millennial women were found to be more agentic and assertive (Twenge and Campbell 2008).

Traditionalist gender attitudes and expectations have been pervasive in post-WW2 Japan (Piotrowski et al. 2019). Many researchers point out that the conservative gender views are due to the country's Confucian tradition (Cooke 2010; Valutanu 2012; Villa 2019). While this is partly true, the development of Japanese post-war capitalism caused the increase of nuclear families and the advent of the new middle-class of "salary men" (Saito 2014). The modern division of labor assigned men to productive roles and women to reproductive, domestic duties (Saito 2014; Macnaughtan 2015). This was made possible due to the role corporations played in the lives and families of salarymen. The triad "company employee-housewife-corporation" was particularly successful during the years of rapid economic development (Ogasawara 2020). Companies provided lifelong employment, along with generous allowances and benefits for men and their families, expecting in return full loyalty and commitment from the male employees, and support from their (full-time) wives with household and childrearing duties.

Ryder's (1965) theory of cohort replacement suggests that cohorts that grew up and came of age under certain social conditions are replaced by younger cohorts, who display different attitudes compared to their predecessors, due to the different factors involved in their upbringing. Over the past few decades, Japan has witnessed dramatic economic, social, and demographic changes. The economic downturn of the 1990s caused the dissolution of the "happy collusion" of salarymen, housewives and corporations (Amano 2006). Many companies facing bankruptcy were forced to lay off large numbers of male employees (Hamaguchi 2013), as non-regular, poorly paid jobs gradually replaced lifelong employment. The decrease of the average salary since 1997 forced more women to continue working after marriage and childbirth (Ogasawara 2020). However, despite an increasing participation of women in the workforce, the country's gendered division of labor and male breadwinner model remain almost unchanged (Choe et al. 2014; Piotrowski et al. 2019; Belarmino and Roberts 2019; Ogasawara 2020). In their analysis of cohort differences before and after 1960s, Piotrowski and colleagues (2019) found that although cohorts born in Japan before 1960 were more egalitarian towards women's roles in the marriage compared to earlier cohorts, the attitudes of following generations were not substantively

more progressive.

Ciabattari (2001) and Anzo (2004) show that the slower change in men's gender role attitudes and a shift in women's matrimonial expectations have caused a widening of the gender gap. In particular, in recent years, younger generations' attitudes towards marriage have witnessed a significant downturn. According to the Fifteenth Japanese National Fertility Survey (2017) ('IPSS Survey' hereafter), the mean age of women's first marriage is 29, while men's age of first marriage stands at around 31 years old. In addition, it is projected that 20% of women will never marry (Raymo, Uchikoshi and Yoda 2021: 68). Retherford et al. (2001) mention women's increased access to higher education and wider participation to workforce, changes in the marriage market and shifts in the perceptions of marriage and family among the significant factors (Retherford et al. 2001: 65). In particular, Raymo (2003) suggests that better-paid jobs and financial independence might deter college educated women from pursuing marriage. It is worth noting that before the 1990s, women generally expected to marry by the age of 25, when they dropped out of employment to devote themselves to their families as full-time housewives. Some re-entered the workforce in their mid 40s as part-timers (Mirza 2016; Macnaughtan 2015).

Refusal to follow their mothers' example of single-handedly raising children and caring for the family elders is another possible cause of postponing or rejecting marriage (Mirza 2016; Oohashi 1993). In conservative societies with patriarchal values and a gendered division of labor, having children is likely to increase a working mother's burden, as the involvement of the father in household and child care duties remains low (Yu and Kuo 2018). Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office (2020) statistics indicate that in 2016 mothers spent a daily average of 7.34 hours on housework and child care, whereas fathers, only 1.23 hours.

A divided political discourse calling for women's increased participation in the workforce, while urging them to return to traditional family values, could also add to women's dilemma (Mirza 2016). However, inadequate legislative support and discriminating business practices remain major reasons for marriage avoidance or delay (Macnaughtan 2015; Barrett 2004; Nemoto 2013). Although the perception of marriage as social obligation has been declining in recent years (MHLW 2013; Nemoto et al. 2013; Yoshida 2016), young women continue to feel the pressure of choosing between career and family.

2.3. Previous Research on Japanese College Students' Perceptions of Gender Roles

Since the 1990s, a growing body of research in Japan has focused on attitudes regarding gender roles among younger generations (Atoh 1994; Itoh 1997; Ehara 2004). The findings indicate a mismatch in men and women's attitudes regarding traditional gender roles within the marriage and society (Anzo 2004; Ehara 2004), and point to a departure from traditionalist gender ideologies (Atoh 1994; Itoh 1997).

On the other hand, several studies conducted at Japanese institutions of higher education in early 2000s reveal that, whereas college students are increasingly aware of the gender divide in Japanese society, their views regarding gendered labor have yet to undergo substantive changes. In 2007 and 2008 Kazumi et al. (2009) conducted two surveys to identify the characteristics of gender attitudes of over one thousand male and female students enrolled at Miyagi University of Education and several private universities in Sendai. One of their findings indicates that, in spite of Miyagi University of Education students' more liberal gender attitudes, overall half of the respondents continue to believe that mothers should devote themselves to child rearing duties during the children's early years. A similar finding was reported following surveys conducted in 2010 and 2016 at Kinki University. The results suggest that college students continue to approve of the traditional gendered division of labor (Kinki University Institute for Human Rights Studies 2017).

Ishikura (2021) attempted to investigate to what extent mainstream culture and media depictions of men and women influence students' gender perception. A survey among the male and female students enrolled in the author's gender theory class found that the respondents' gender behavior was unconsciously regulated by both mainstream culture and the media. While both men and women respondents aspired to marry, their perceived significance of children were different. Male students perceived children as heirs, whereas female students considered that children were tokens of marital happiness. In addition, although both male and female subjects admired and internalized "masculine" qualities such as leadership, they held different perceptions and actualizations of leadership. For female students, who had few female leadership role models in real life but numerous examples in the popular media, leadership was not well integrated within the female life course. As female respondents expected to fulfil mostly submissive roles in the family and marriage, their views oscillated between the mainstream perception of leadership as a "masculine" quality and the fictional image of female leadership projected in the popular media.

3. Methodology

The present study was conducted between June and December 2018. It consisted of a 24–item questionnaire distributed to undergraduate students aged 18 to 22 years old from public and private universities in central Japan and Tokyo areas. The survey was designed in Japanese and was distributed online using the application Google Forms. The subjects were instructed to answer the questions individually and anonymously and were informed about the confidentiality of their information. The questionnaire consisted of three questions regarding the respondents' gender, year of study and parents' marital status, five multiple answer questions, ten multiple choice questions, and six 5–scale Likert scale questions ranging from 'fully agree' to 'fully disagree'. Cronbach's alphas for the marriage and children subscale, and gender roles in the household and workplace subscale were 0.87

and 0.7, respectively. The questions regarding attitudes towards marriage and children were adapted from Park and Rosén's (2013) marital scales, which consisted of questions regarding intention to marry and general attitudes to marriage, respectively.

We obtained a number of 455 valid responses. Slightly more than half of the participants (50.5%) were male students and 49.5% were female students. Our data analysis consisted mainly of investigating a) the differences in male and female students' family aspirations; b) gauging male and female students' perceptions of gender roles; and c) identifying possible parental influences upon male and female students' views of family and gender roles. To test hypotheses $H_1 - H_3$, two-tail T-tests for two independent means were conducted. We compared the attitudes of male and female respondents across five main areas of interest: marriage and children, woman's role in the household, woman's role in the workforce, man's role in the household, and earnings.

4. Findings

First, regarding marital intentions, 76.23% of the participants were favorable to marriage (males M＝1.77 SD＝0.42; females M＝1.76, SD＝0.43). The responses indicate that most of the participants who hoped to marry (76.26%) intended to have children (males 96.02%, M＝1.95, SD＝0.20; females 97.65%, M＝1.96, SD＝0.15). With respect to the number of children, a significant difference was obtained (t (332)＝4.22, $p < .05$). Thus, more than half of the female students (59.64%) hoped to have two children, and 32.53% wanted three children. On the other hand, 71.76% of the male respondents wanted two children, and only 14.12% hoped to have three children. The difference obtained between the number of children expected by males and females was greater than the differences suggested by

Table 1 Family Aspirations of Male and Female Students

Variables	Male (N＝230) Mean (SD)	Female (N＝225) Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value
Marriage and children				
Parents' Marital Status (married/unmarried)	1.89 (0.30)	1.92 (0.27)	−0.77315	.439836
Marriage intentions (yes/no)	1.77 (0.42)	1.76 (0.43)	0.35044	.726171
Age of marriage	4.16 (0.48)	4.16 (0.51)	0.05944	.952636
Want to have children (yes/no)	1.95 (0.20)	1.96 (0.15)	1.09312	.275103
Number of children (1–4)	2.02 (0.56)	2.29 (0.60)	−4.22844	.00003[*]

Note: [*]p<.05, two-tailed
Source: Authors' calculation.

the results of the IPSS Survey (2017), which indicate that the average number of children desired by the unmarried respondents in the age bracket 18–24 years old was lower for men (1.96) and higher for women (2.07) (IPSS 2017: 67).

Regarding the age of marriage, 96% of the men and women who aspired to marry hoped to do so before the age of 30. Only 21% of the female respondents expected to marry before 25 years old, which indicates a shift from the traditional view that women should be married by the age of 25 or risk being compared with (unsold) 'Christmas cake' (Villa 2019).

Next, we tested the H_2 hypothesis regarding the influence of parents' marital status on the sons and daughters' matrimonial aspirations. We compared the responses of the male and female students with married parents to those of the students whose parents were divorced, separated, single, or widowed. As shown in Table 2 below, the comparison yielded no significant differences between respondents with married parents and those with divorced or separated parents. Our results suggest that Japanese tertiary students perceive marriage as the dominant model of living together irrespective of their parents' marital status.

Table 2 Parents' Marital Status and Male and Female Students' Family Aspirations

Males Parents' marital status	Married (n＝179) Mean (SD)	Divorced, separated, widowed, single (n＝51) Mean (SD)	*t*-value	*p*-value
Intention to marry (n＝177)	0.75 (0.43)	0.82 (0.38)	−1.03527	.30164
Intention to have children (n＝169)	1.48 (0.86)	1.62 (0.74)	−1.10349	.270979
Females Parents' marriage status	Married (n＝176) Mean (SD)	Divorced, separated, widowed, single (n＝49) Mean (SD)	*t*-value	*p*-value
Intention to marry (n＝170)	0.77 (0.42)	0.69 (0.46)	1.1341	.257972
Intention to have children (n＝165)	1.52 (0.84)	1.36 (0.92)	1.15836	.247956

Note: *p<.05, two-tailed
Source: Authors' calculation.

When inquired about the reasons for their marriage expectations, discrepancies were evident with respect to romantic inclinations, social, financial, and emotional respectability (Figure 1). More men than women wished to marry for social respectability and emotional stability, while more women than men aspired to a union based on love and financial stability.

On the other hand, over 4% of the respondents did not expect to marry, and almost 20% were

Figure 1 Reasons for Aspiring to Marry
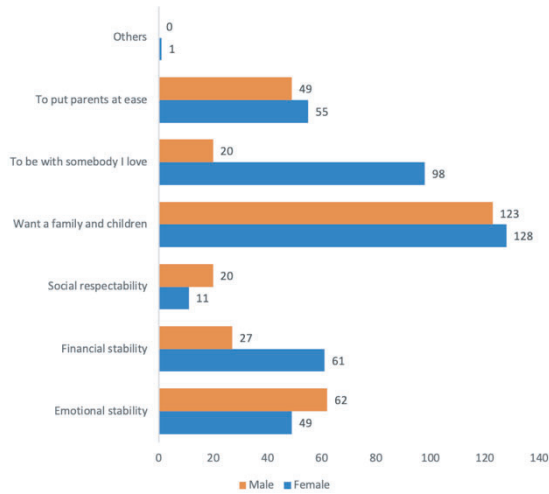
Source: Authors' survey.

undecided (n＝108). The most common reasons were 'I want to be free to do as I please', 'Finding a partner is difficult', 'I'm afraid of getting married, and 'Marriage is a financial burden' (Figure 2). In particular, the respondents' preference for personal freedom confirms the findings of the IPSS Survey (2017: 17), according to which the largest proportion of male and female respondents who opted to remain single prioritized their 'freedom of action and lifestyle" (69.7% men and 75.5% women). Our findings indicate that more women preferred personal freedom over marriage. This is hardly surprising if we consider the young educated women's increasing need for independence and self-actualization and their hesitation to assume the role of primary caregiver we discussed earlier in this paper.

Figure 2 Reasons for Choosing to Remain Single
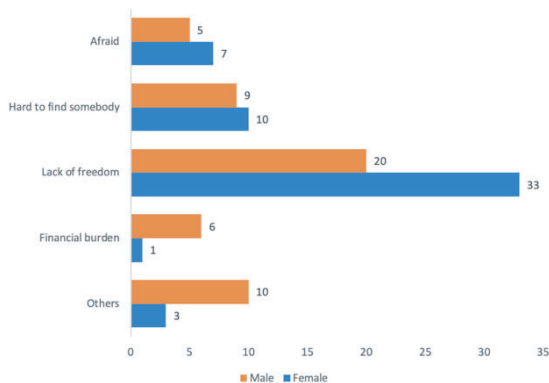
Source: Authors' survey.

In the section concerning attitudes towards woman's role in the household we obtained significant

differences between male and female students' responses regarding women's occupation before and after childbirth, and their perceptions of gender roles.

With respect to the female life course after marriage and/or childbirth, 42.4% of our male and female respondents considered that women should work full-time before and after childbirth, 25% were in favor of working full-time until childbirth and part-time after childbirth, and only 14.2% considered that women should work full-time before childbirth and become full-time housewives after birth. However, the opinions of male and female students diverged significantly, as more females expected women to work full-time after childbirth (t (453)＝4.8, $p<.05$). Our findings align with those of the IPSS

Table 3 Comparison of Male and Female Students' Perceptions Regarding Gender Roles

	Variables	Male (N＝230) Mean (SD)	Female (N＝225) Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value
Woman's role in the household	Maternal employment (full-time/part-time/housewife)	2.05 (0.83)	1.99 (0.85)	0.71357	.475861
	Women's occupation before and after marriage/childbirth (full-time/part-time/housewife)	1.9 (0.85)	2.28 (0.82)	−4.8744	.00001*
	**"A man's place is at work; a woman's – at home"	2.57 (1.01)	2.17 (0.94)	4.41123	.000013*
	**Childcare and housework are a woman's job	2.41 (1.07)	2.31 (1.01)	1.02383	.306471
	**Should women devote themselves to their families after marriage and childbirth?	2.80 (0.92)	2.39 (0.97)	4.59761	.00001*
Woman's role in the workforce	Women should aspire to a career	3.58 (0.93)	3.76 (0.86)	−2.07492	.038563*
	Japan should make better use of women's knowledge and talents	4.14 (0.79)	4.34 (0.65)	−2.99129	.002931*
Man's role in the household	Father helped mother with household and child care (Yes/No, I don't know)	2.1 (0.78)	2.01 (0.84)	1.07655	.282257
	Man's role in the household and child care	2.46 (0.53)	2.50 (0.51)	−0.70987	.478153
	Would you take parental leave if conditions were favorable? (Yes/No, I don't know)	1.83 (0.36)	1.95 (0.21)	3.97994	.00008*
Earnings	Equal share vs. sole breadwinner (Equal/Woman main/Man main/Man sole)	2.14 (1.05)	2.68 (1.07)	−5.37878	.00001*
	**More support for dual income couples is necessary	4.37 (0.86)	4.35 (0.90)	0.27965	.779878

Notes: *$p<.05$, two-tailed
**The responses ranged from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating more traditionalist attitudes.
Source: Authors' calculation.

Survey (2017), which indicate a decrease in the traditional view that women should become full-time housewives after childbirth (from 38% in 1986 to less than 10% in 2015), and a notable increase in the number of men who expect women to balance work and household duties (from 10% in 1986 to 33.9% in 2015) (IPSS 2017: 29).

Although the views in favor of women's participation in the workforce after marriage or childbirth might be a positive sign, items regarding the traditional gendered division of labor elicited diverging opinions. Thus, in connection with the statement 'Man's place is at work, woman's — at home', the proportion of male respondents who agreed was higher than that of female respondents (t (453)＝4.4, p＜.05). In addition, more men expected than women should devote themselves to household and caregiving responsibilities after marriage and childbirth (t (453)＝4.59, p＜.05).

Significant discrepancies were also observed in connection with the role of women outside the household. More female students agreed that women should aspire to a career after graduation (t (453) ＝−2.07, p＜.05), and considered that women's knowledge and talents should be utilized more (t (453) ＝−2.99, p＜.05). Most of our male and female respondents thought that career women projected a positive image, including attributes such as competence, strength, knowledge, and attractiveness ('coolness') (Figure 3). This is a surprising finding as in Japan highly educated, top-earning professional women have been regarded as lacking in femininity, and are rarely considered as potential marriage partners (Nemoto 2008). The positive image of 'cool', strong and competent professional women depicted in TV dramas might have an important influence upon students' favorable perceptions of career women (Ishikura 2021).

Figure 3 Students' Perceptions of Career Women
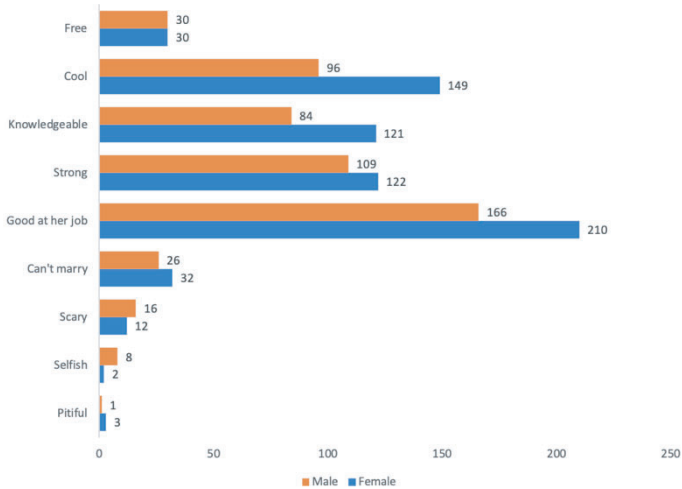
Source: Authors' survey.

Income earning is another important issue we considered in our study. As more female college

graduates aspire to pursue a career and work full-time longer, the question is whether the traditional breadwinner model continues to be a mainstay of the Japanese society or not. Currently, the government tax and pension policies continue to support the sole breadwinner model. Nevertheless, in recent years the number of double-income households surpassed that of single-income ones. In 2021, the number of double-income households was 12.47 million, which is twice the number of single-income households (5.66 million as of 2021) (Matsui et al. 2019; Statista 2022). The responses to our question regarding family earnings indicated that more females expected to contribute equally, while male students inclined towards the traditional model of man as the sole or main breadwinner (t (453)＝ $-5.37, p < .05$).

In connection with the role of men in the household and childcare, the opinions regarding parental leave showed significant discrepancies. Although more women than men expected to take parental leave (t (453)＝3.97, $p < .05$), both genders responded favorably in proportion of over 80%. However, the IPSS Survey (2017: 66) found that Japanese working fathers availed themselves of the right to paternity leave only in proportion of 0.4%, which proves that such expectations are not always brought to fruition in real life.

The issue of parental leave remains one of the causes of gender inequalities in Japanese society. Despite Japan having one of the most generous parental leave policies among developed countries, working fathers have been reluctant to take paternity leave. In fiscal 2019, only 7.48% of men in the private sector availed themselves of this right (Japan Times, Jun. 3, 2021). Societal and corporate pressures to conform to traditional gender roles are the leading causes for the low uptake of parental leave by Japanese fathers (Rocha 2021). Although official data suggest that most of the male employees have a favorable opinion of paternity leave (MHLW 2015), Miyajima and Yamaguchi (2017) found that the participants in their study tended to overestimate the negative attitudes towards paternity leave of other group members and refrained from taking action.

In our study, a small number of respondents were undecided or against taking parental leave (almost 5% of women and 16% of men). Male respondents were concerned about lower earnings, inconveniencing coworkers, and missing on promotion opportunities. However, it is not known if the respondents were aware of the legal provisions for parental leave at the time of completing the present survey.

Finally, in order to test hypothesis H$_3$ regarding the influence of maternal employment upon students' perception of gender roles, we compared the views of the male and female respondents with working mothers (full-time or part-time) to those whose mothers were full-time housewives during the respondents' childhood. With the exception of the views regarding the traditional gendered labor division (t (228)＝ $-2.77, p < .05$), no other significant differences were obtained. (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4 Male Students' Perceptions Regarding Gender Roles According to Maternal Employment

Males Maternal employment	Full- and part-time (n＝155)	Housewife (n＝75)	*t*-value	*p*-value
Women's occupation after marriage/childbirth (job vs housewife)	1.96	1.77	1.57119	.117525
"A man's place is at work; a woman's – at home"	2.45	2.84	−2.77234	.00603 *
Childcare and housework are women's jobs	2.54	2.35	1.24969	.212721
Women should devote themselves to their families after marriage and childbirth	2.72	3.04	−1.81633	.070651
Women should aspire to a career after graduation	3.59	2.96	0.18465	.853671
Japan should make better use of women's knowledge and talents	4.11	4.14	−0.24658	.805576
Father helped mother with household and child care	2.11	2.06	0.44784	.654697
Man's role in the household and child care	2.47	2.46	0.05196	.958605
Earnings: Equal share vs. sole breadwinner	2.15	2.12	0.24152	.809372
Would you take child leave if conditions were favorable?	1.83	1.85	−0.44593	.656078
More support is necessary for dual income couples	4.32	4.5	−1.46986	.142997

Notes: * *p*＜.05, two-tailed
Source: Authors' calculation.

Table 5 Female Students' Perceptions Regarding Gender Roles According to Maternal Employment

Females Maternal employment	Full- and part-time (n＝143)	Housewife (n＝82)	*t*-value	*p*-value
Women's occupation after marriage/childbirth (job vs. housewife)	2.34	2.17	1.56383	.119277
"A man's place is at work; a woman's – at home"	2.13	2.23	−0.70049	.48435
Childcare and housework are women's jobs	2.33	2.27	−0.45265	.651242
Women should devote themselves to their families after marriage and childbirth	2.36	2.43	−0.55912	.576643
Women should aspire to a career after graduation	3.75	3.76	−0.10884	.913429
Japan should tap more into women's potential	4.27	4.42	−1.61036	.108734
Father helped mother with household and child care	2.08	1.90	1.56491	.119028
Man's role in the household and child care	2.53	2.43	1.56491	.119028
Earnings: Equal share vs. sole breadwinner	2.75	2.54	1.39455	.16454
Would you take child leave if conditions were favorable?	1.95	1.93	0.63441	.526463
More support for dual income couples is necessary	4.33	4.39	−0.43448	.664363

Source: Authors' calculation.

5. Discussion

The findings indicate that overall, both male and female students had a positive perception of gender equality compared to previous studies. Nevertheless, female students held relatively more egalitarian views than male students, who tended to incline towards the traditional male breadwinner/female caregiver model in certain respects, such as woman's role in the household, earnings, and parental leave. Our results support the findings of Choe et al. (2014) and Piotrowski et al. (2019) that in Japan cohort replacement does not necessarily result in both genders' more progressive views, and that in developed countries women tend to be more egalitarian than men (Cotter et al. 2011; Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004; Choe et al. 2014). Although the present study targeted college students in Japan, our hypotheses H2 and H3 may be valid for other countries with strong gender ideologies and stereotypes, as suggested by previous studies conducted on American students (Davis and Wills 2010; Fleming et al. 2013; Fulcher et al. 2015; McGinn et al. 2015).

The aspiration towards marriage and children remains a common value of Japanese college students. As early gender socialization models continue to present Japanese women with the expectation that their primary identity will be that of mothers and wives (Dalton 2017: 102), and men — breadwinners and fathers, this is hardly a surprising finding. However, although gender ideologies are harder to change, shifts in parental workforce participation could lead to changes in the following generations' perceptions of the gendered division of labor.

Macnaughtan (2015) points out that progress should be a concerted effort of legislation, business, and society. Supporting dual earning families, encouraging employment continuity and career advancement for working mothers, as well as providing flexible work schedules for working parents and adopting fair employment practices could arguably help Japan extricate itself from the current economic and demographic crisis. Female students' higher career expectations and men's increased awareness of the importance of balancing work and family might help shift some of the current sexist attitudes and practices.

On the other hand, despite younger generations' aspirations, the deeply-rooted male breadwinner/ female homemaker model, although "hugely disconnected from social realities" (Macnaughtan 2015), is perpetuated in business, society and popular culture, and will probably continue to be the mainstream because under the current circumstances "the alternative… is complex" (Macnaughtan 2015). As anthropologist Helen I. Safa pointed out in her book *The Myth of the Male Breadwinner* (1995), women's labor participation might be the solution to gender equality. It could help them out of their financial dependence and raise their class consciousness, but the double burden of work and household duties makes it difficult for women to work as hard as men, "locking them into poorly paid, dead-end jobs" (p. 110). However, we tend to agree with Macnaughtan (2015), who points out that "unless there is progress for women, there will be no progress for men….[The]… renegotiation of gender norms is

the only viable way forward for Japan" (Macnaughtan 2015).

6. Limitations

Our study investigated the attitudes of tertiary students at a rather early stage of their adult lives, when their perceptions of gender roles tend to rely heavily on the models provided by their parents. College students, who are not yet full-fledged members of the labor force, may display more liberal attitudes towards gender roles due to their financial and emotional ties with their parents (Powell and Steelman 1982: 351). Their attitudes and perceptions are likely to change as their experience of work and relationships deepens; therefore, a longitudinal study of their perceptions over a longer time span might provide valuable insights into the distinction between expectations and reality.

The survey relied on the opinions of tertiary students in faculties of humanities, liberal arts and social studies, with relatively balanced proportions of male and female students, who tend to be familiar with the issues of gender equality. A more thorough approach should also take into account opinions of students enrolled in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) faculties, in which male students account for 72 – 84% of the student body (Kakuchi 2020).

Lastly, a distinction of the students according to their place of origin (urban vs. rural) might provide valuable information on the different perceptions of gender roles between students who grew up in rural families with traditional gender ideologies, and urban families, who generally have more liberal views of gendered division of labor.

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