

## **College Student's Perceptions of Contemporary Women's Movements in Japan: Their Objectives and Impact on Society**

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### **Abstract**

The recent women's movements have gained media attention worldwide and despite their various locations, their many goals are similar and all began due to common issues. The usage of social media by younger generations has introduced women's movements to their daily lives and perceptions of gender roles are beginning to change in society as a whole. Women's movements in Japan that will be the focus of this study are the #Metoo movement, the #Kutoo movement, the Flower Demonstration, and the Women's March. These movements' goals can have differing impacts on members of society. We conducted a survey of 86 Japanese college students in order to find out how recent women's movements have impacted students' civic engagement, how perceptions of gender roles of students changed, and whether or not students' behaviors have changed and why.

We found that a majority of students support women's movements even though they do not physically participate in them or know much about the movements. While some gendered ideals are still believed by students, there is also a large number of students who do not believe in gendered labor or gendered dress codes and feel that no one influences their opinions. Furthermore, the data shows that male college students are more aware of women's movements and these movements have influenced men's opinions to change in support of women's rights issues. Japanese women's movements are becoming increasingly important in the lives of college students and are influencing how they perceive gender issues.

### **Introduction**

In this study we examined the perceptions and awareness of Japanese college students about the Japanese women's movement. The study focuses on #Metoo movement, #Kutoo movement, Flower Demonstration, and the Women's March. We will examine; how women's movements in recent years influence students' participation in civic action, students' perceptions of gender roles, and possible changes to students behavior and opinions. As a result of our survey, it was found that Japanese women's movements are becoming increasingly more important in the lives of college students, and is influencing their view of gender issues.

## **1. Significance of Study**

In recent years, women's movement's have become popular all over the world. Recently, we have learned about contemporary women's movements on social media. We wanted to understand how Japanese college students think about women's movements and how it affects the lives of Japanese college students. There has been some interest in how contemporary women's movement affects men's attitudes towards women. Through this capstone project, we would like to gain a broader understanding of the issues faced by women working in Japan in comparison to the United States and to consider the importance of women's movements and women's rights.

## **2. Research Questions**

- 1.) How do recent women's movements in Japan influence civic engagement by college students?
- 2.) How do college students perceive changes to gender roles in contemporary society and what has influenced these opinions?
- 3.) How have women's movements impacted college students and what behavioral changes may have occurred?

## **3. Literature Review**

The following research is on women's movements in Japan and their impacts on society as a whole. First, a definition of what a "Women's movement" is will be given to set up the framework for the overall discussion of this topic. After determining the status of what a women's movement is, a brief historical analysis of women's movements in Japan will be discussed. Japan's women's movement from 1868 to the present day or from the late Meiji period

to the present day will be used as a backdrop to discuss the women's movements that are the focus of this research. The efforts of the contemporary Japanese government to address women's issues will be examined as well, such as womenomics and women-only train cars. Then, an overview of the history and goals of the modern women's movement will be discussed along with their differing modes of participation such as demonstrations on the streets, and usage of social media as a platform. Finally, we will introduce participation in the modern women's movement.

### 3.1 What is a "Women's Movement"

According to Eto (2005), a women's movement is "Japanese women's movements represent various ideologies, organizational scales and activity styles." Women's movements are primarily run by women and are intended to have a positive impact on a woman's life. This effect can be described as economic, political, or rights-related (Eto, 2005; Enloe, 2014).

### 3.2 Japanese Women's Movement History

The Meiji period is from 1868 to 1912 and was a time of change in Japan as the country began efforts to modernize. Though this modernization did not have overall positive impacts in women's lives. In 1890, women were officially banned from attending any political gatherings. Despite the ban on political gatherings, women wrote articles and petitions and participated in politics, they did so through petitions and writing politically motivated articles. One manner in which they did so was through a feminist journal called "Bluestockings", this journal discussed many women's issues and gave a voice for women who wanted to be politically active. In 1870, a law condemning abortion was enacted and female writers chose to protest this new law in magazines (Mackie, 2013).

Another issue that women during this period faced was equality in education. Both primary and secondary education was obligatory, but in higher education women had more difficulty getting into a school with rigorous courses. Most colleges' emphasis was placed on maternal education as well as women's ability to maintain a home (Patessio, 2013). Following World War II women's movements in Japan began to shift their focus to other issues. Under the American occupation in 1947, women gained the right to vote and played a major role in the peace movement and demilitarization of Japan. Women's groups had also expanded their focus to include lobbying for cheaper food as it was often difficult to buy what was needed to care for a family in the period after the war. This period also showed a shift in the roles that women were expected to play, as more women were needed in the workforce and issues of pay and childcare began to become a focus for many women. At this point in history most of these movements focused on the role of women as mothers and used the maternal image that they portrayed as a tool for social change (Eto, 2008).

When discussing contemporary women's movement in Japan the time period given is often from 1990 to the present. According to Eto (2008), there are five main objectives of contemporary women's movements. The first is a battle with the employer regarding the dress code and other unequal practices in the workplace. Second, is a desire to bring attention to sexual harassment at work and on commuter trains, which deeply impacts the daily lives of women. Third is the revision of laws regarding rape and assault on women, as the previous issue is often impossible to address without severe changes to the current climate on reporting these instances. The fourth is efforts to tackle demilitarization by women's groups that is often centered on the

removal of U.S. bases. The fifth is comfort women's reparations issues and acknowledgement of the crimes committed during World War II.

### 3.3 Government Approaches

One of the most famous approaches by the Japanese government to address gender inequality is womenomics. Under the administration of Shinzo Abe, this policy was established in 2013, its purpose was to make it easier for women to work and contribute to economic growth in the country. This plan is often described as a way to close the unequal working and wage gap in Japan though it is primarily an economic approach and does very little for women. More women are working, but they are in highly unstable positions. Often these women are working in part time jobs where they are easily let go without benefits or in positions that do not allow for them to ever be promoted. There is only one female minister in the current Prime Minister Abe's Cabinet, despite his claims that having more women in higher positions is a goal of womenomics, he seems to be unwilling of having more women in his own cabinet. The Abe administration also has done a great deal to promote women to have more children in order to increase the country's birth rate but they are given no resources to be a working mother. Daycare services are difficult to find and working conditions in Japan prevent many mothers from getting a job at all (Schieder, 2017).

Women only train cars is another approach that has been attempted, though mostly by companies, in order to address the issue of harassment on trains. Made to give women and children a safe space on a crowded train, as many times during peak travel times when trains are the most crowded assaults have taken place. Commissioning started in 2000 and started in 2001. There are both negative and positive views on women-only cars. Most women-only cars are only

valid at certain times and these are rarely the times that the women and children need to avoid harassment. From a legal point of view, compliance is not necessary and there is little recourse for women who report men on the women-only train cars (Horii, 2012). The inability to legally report those who violate the rules shows a discrepancy in the laws of Japan and the rights of women.

The judicial system in Japan is a point of contention for women's movements. There are 264,000 police officers in Japan, and about 9% of the 23,400 are female police officers. In addition, there are 28,400 police officers. About 46% of them, 13,000 are female employees, who are not able to make affidavits (National Police Agency, 2018). The lack of female officers who can take reports means that when women come forward with reports of rape or sexual assaults they must speak to a male police officer which is a deterrent to reporting. In 2018, female lawyers accounted for only 19% of the total. This number has been declining over the last five years 3.4 The objective of the modern women's movement (Japan Federation of Bar Associations, 2018). This shows that few women have a say in Japan's judicial system and this lack of representation is a main factor in the stagnation of Japanese sexual assault laws and the number of convictions for the few cases that do make it to court.

### 3.4 Contemporary Women's Movements

The most common and understandable form of protest in a street demonstration. Two of the women's movements in this paper use this method of protest as their main form of organization. The Tokyo Flower Demonstration had a demonstration against the laws of rape and sexual assault in Japan (Flower Demo, 2019). It all started with a man who had repeatedly raped his daughter. However, the man was acquitted because there was no proof that the daughter

refused at the first instance and she had no record of running away. The first demonstration happened spontaneously following the verdict in this case. This decision was overturned in the second trial and a second trial had been petitioned for by the protestors. The demonstrators also have worked for more lawful protection for women who have experienced sexual assault and revised procedures for the police and their manner of inspection (Takiguchi, Ueno, 2019; The Japan Times, 2020). Protests are expanding beyond Tokyo and now occur in many of Japan's large cities (Flower Demo, 2019). The most famous example of a women's movement using physical protests is the Women's March. The Women's march is a march for women's rights and gender equality. It is a protest against gender disparity in the workplace and in companies as well as the ability to have power over one's body. Insisting on women's wider political involvement, the first march was planned online by women around the world and is now being practiced in most countries on "International Women's Day" (Women's March, 2019).

A newer form of participation is the usage of social media to spread women's issues. One of these movements is the #Kuttoo movement. The meaning of Kuttoo comes from "*kutsu*" meaning shoe and "*kuutsu*" meaning pain. It started as a response to the workplace dress code and its gender discrimination, it attracted attention on social media platforms and was most commonly used by everyday working women (Ishikawa, 2019). The #Metoo movement is a response to sexual harassment and sexual violence, and it initially attracted attention on social media by mainly being used by famous women, though its use quickly spread to all women (Me Too Movement, 2019).

The contemporary women's movement #Metoo, started differently in Japan than it did in the U.S. Journalist Shiori Ito claimed to have been sexually assaulted by broadcast reporter

Noriyuki Yamaguchi. She was not a famous journalist yet and was hoping to work for him as he was very popular in Japan. She tried to file a report with the police the night the incident occurred, but the police made doing so difficult and tried to disway her. Despite her attempts to pursue the matter, the charges were dropped. She then appealed to the media but faced extreme backlash and ended up leaving Japan as a result of it. She started discussing what had happened to her as a way to draw attention to the amendment of the law on sexual assault in Japan and bad procedures that the police follow that often make reporting difficult (Ito, 2017). She eventually wrote a book called "Black Box" as a way to spread this information world wide. In her book she describes the struggles and personal experiences she faced as a result of not only the rape but the manner in which she was treated by law enforcemnet and the media. The book is her testimony and an attempt to prevent other women from experiencing a similar fate (Ito, 2017).

### 3.5 Participation in Contemporary Women's Movements

Finally, about 300 men and women participated in the first Tokyo Flower Demonstration (Takiguchi, Ueno, 2019). Though this number is small the fact that this was a spontaneous demonstration shows that outrage surrounding the case played a large factor in the number of people who gathered. In addition, the first Women's March in Japan, 450 people marched in various parts of Tokyo (Goto, 2019). Though this was an international demonstration Japanese people still participated and showed interest in supporting changes to the societal structure that limits women's rights. International and domestic attention was paid to women's issues both in the Tokyo Flower Demonstration and in the Women's March (Flower Demo, 2019).

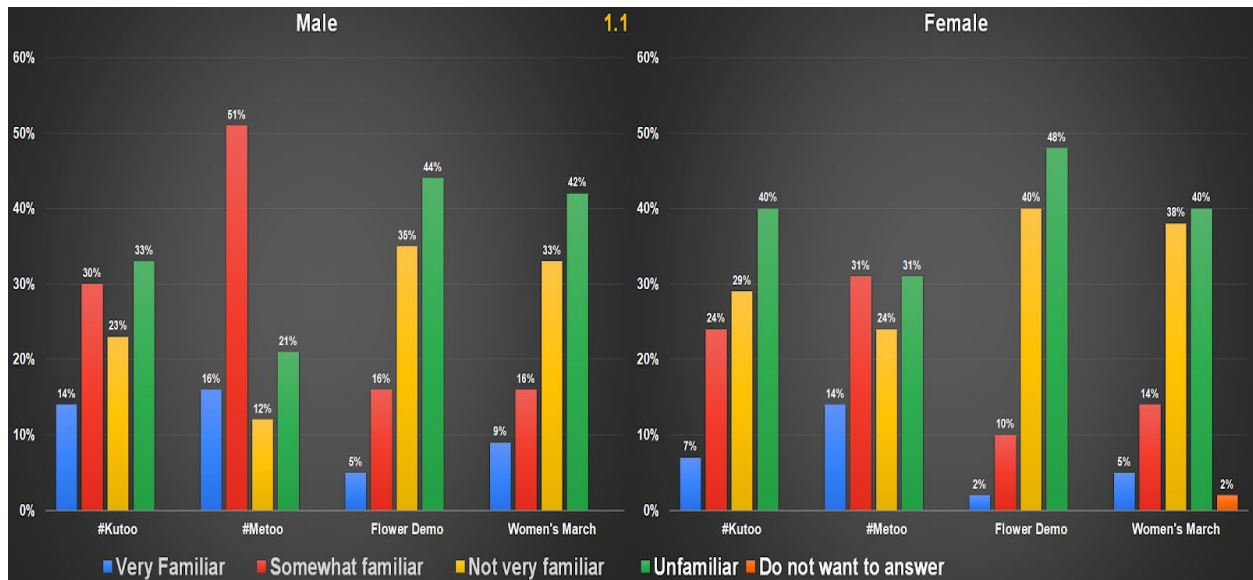
## 4. Research Method



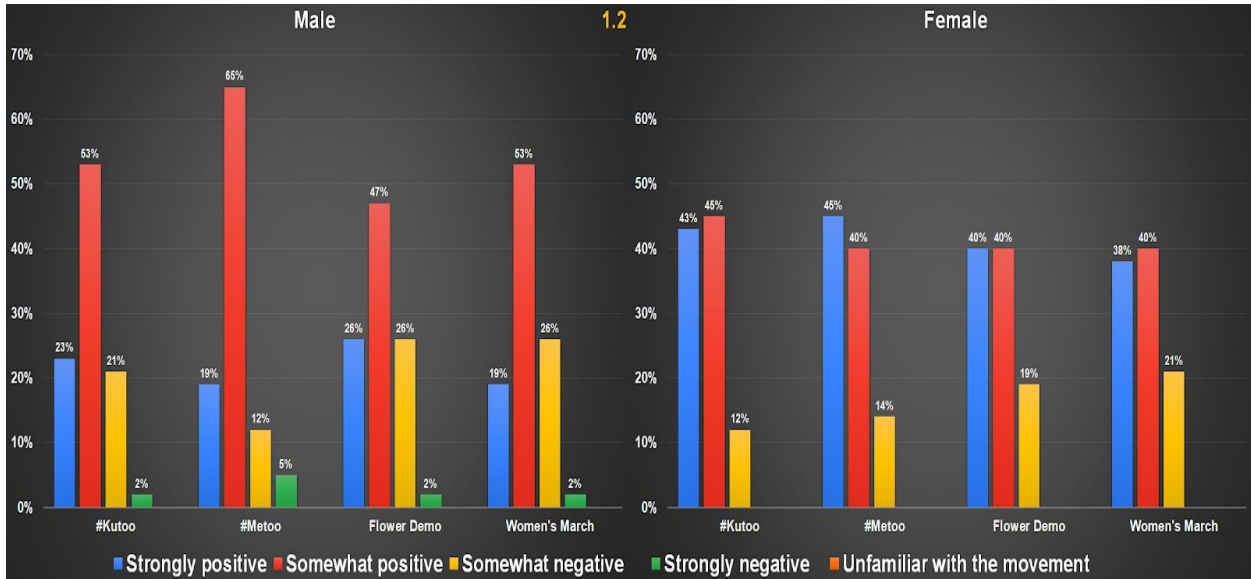
We conducted a survey of 86 Japanese college students using Google Forms. The survey included 43 male students, 42 female students and one gender fluid student. Due to only having one gender fluid respondent, their answers were not included in our results below.

## 5. Survey Results

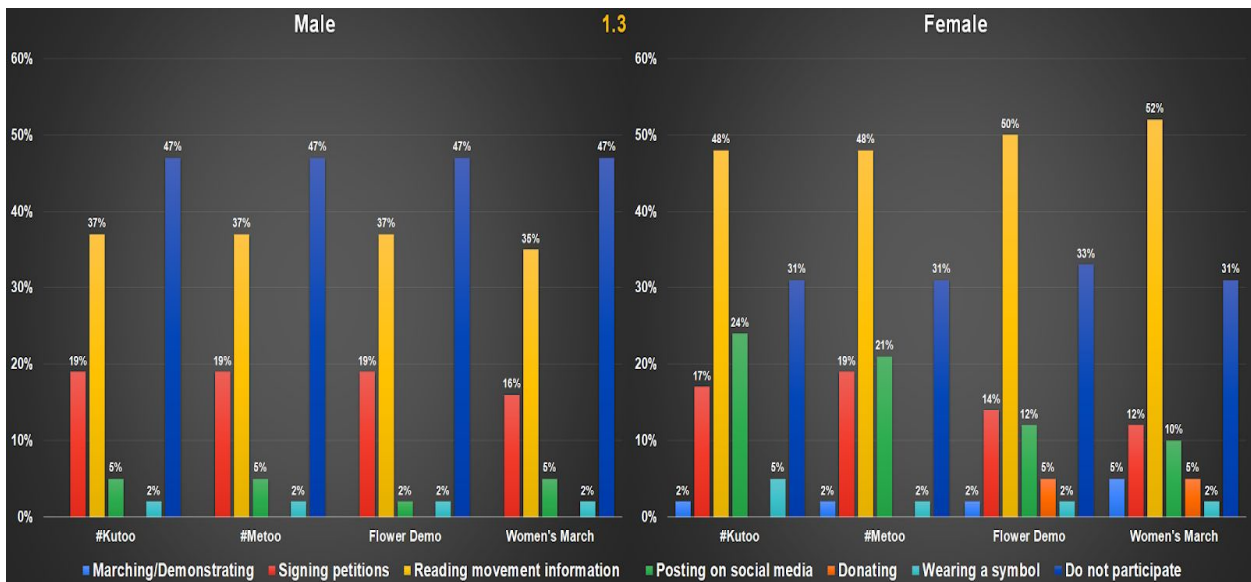
5.1 Research Question 1: How do recent women’s movements in Japan influence civic engagement by college students?



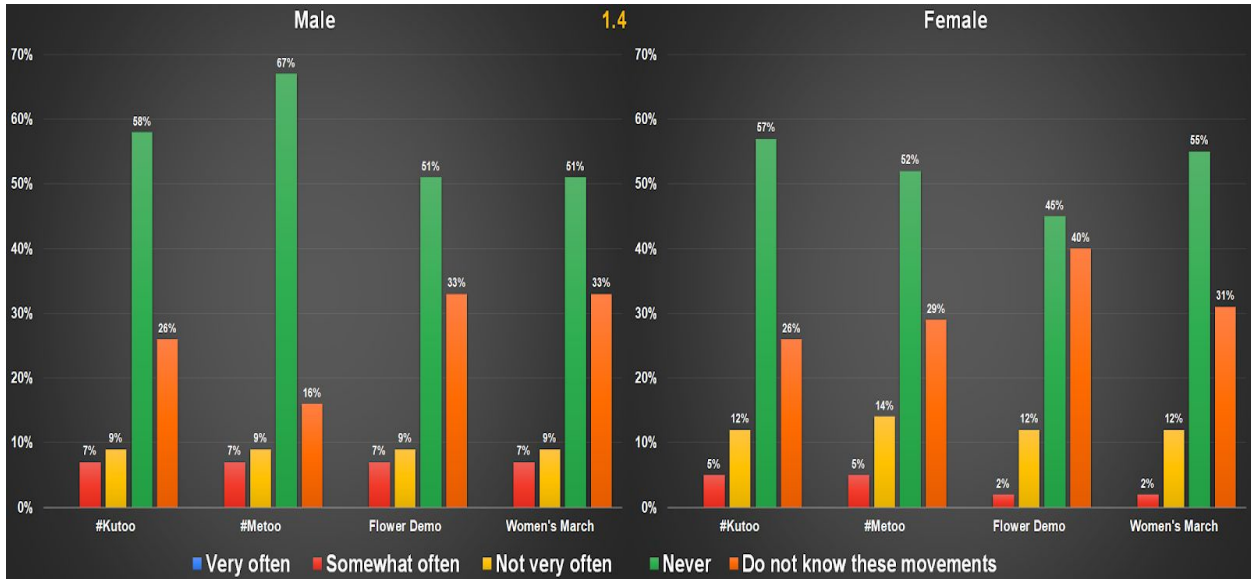
67% of male and 45% of female students were familiar with #Metoo. The #Kutoo, Flower Demo, and Women’s March were unfamiliar to respondents. (See Figure 1.1)



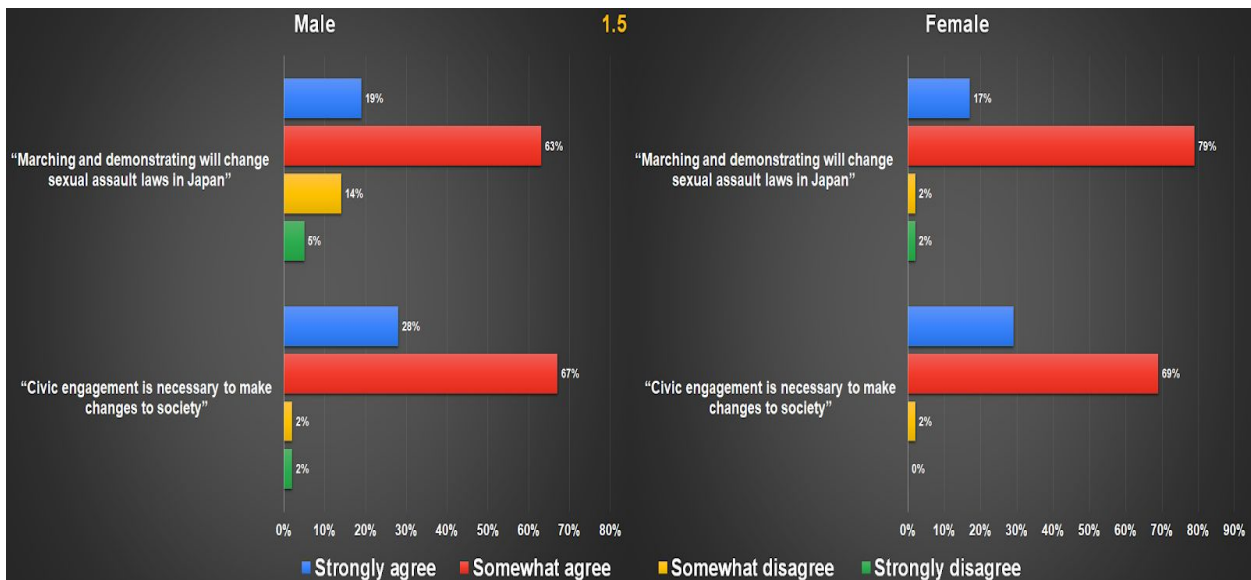
Approximately 40% of female and 20% of male students had strongly positive feelings towards women's movements. (See Figure 1.2)



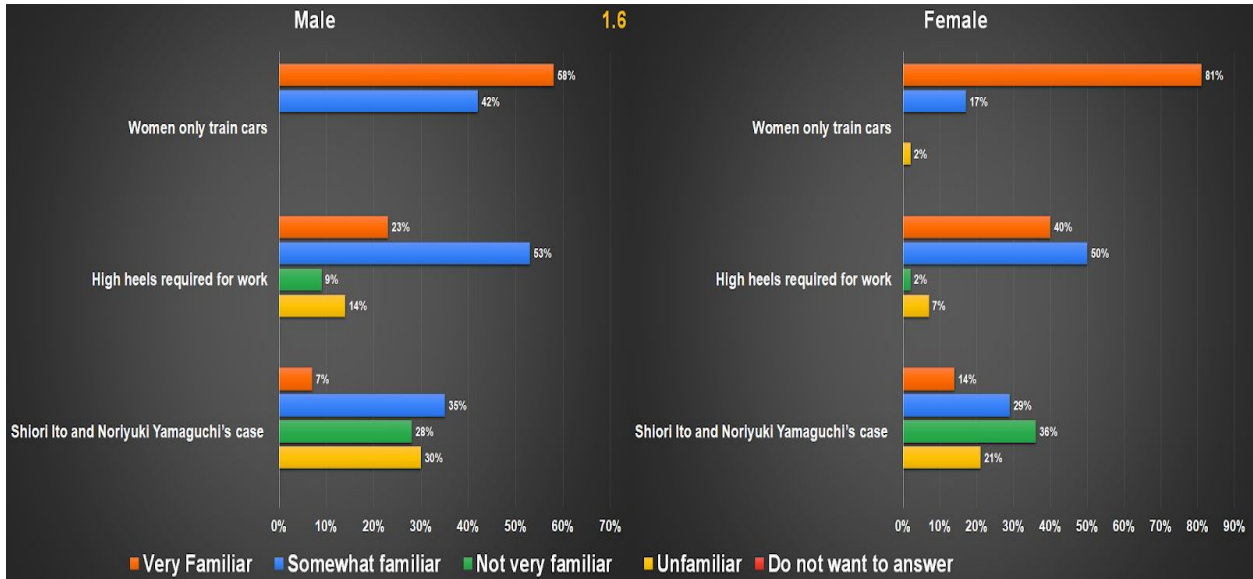
Roughly 47% of male and 31% of female students do not participate and 37% of male and 48% of female students read information only. (See Figure 1.3)



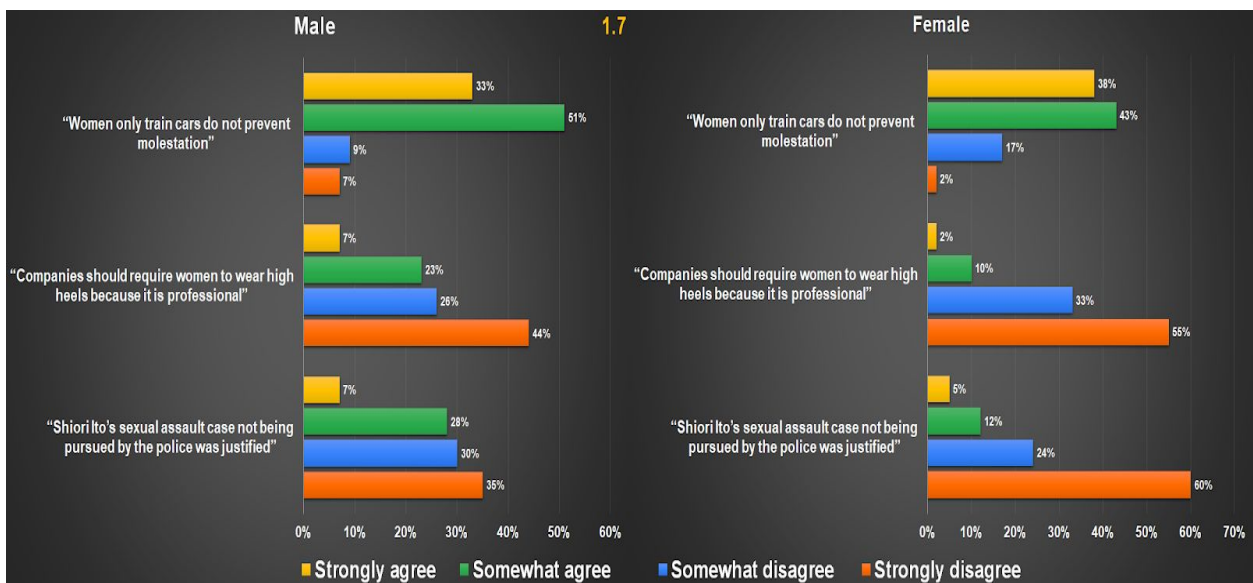
The majority of female and male students feel that they do not participate in the #Kutoo, #MeToo, Flower Demo, and the Women’s March. (See Figure 1.4)



Approximately 90% of female and male students agree that civic engagement is necessary to make changes to society. (See Figure 1.5)



The majority of students were unfamiliar with Shiori Ito’s rape case but almost all were familiar with women only train cars. 76% of males and 90% of females were familiar with high heeled dress code. (See Figure 1.6)

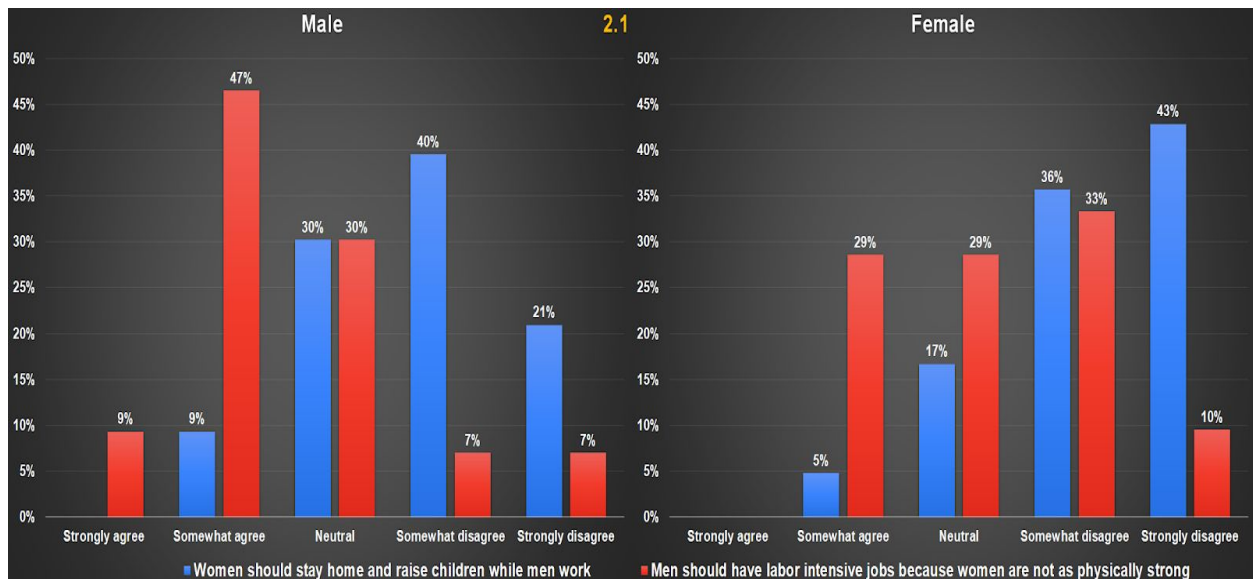


65% of male and 84% of female students disagree with Shiori Ito’s rape not being prosecuted, 70% of male and 88% of females disagree with high heeled dress code. Roughly 80% agree that women only train cars prevent molestation. (See Figure 1.7)

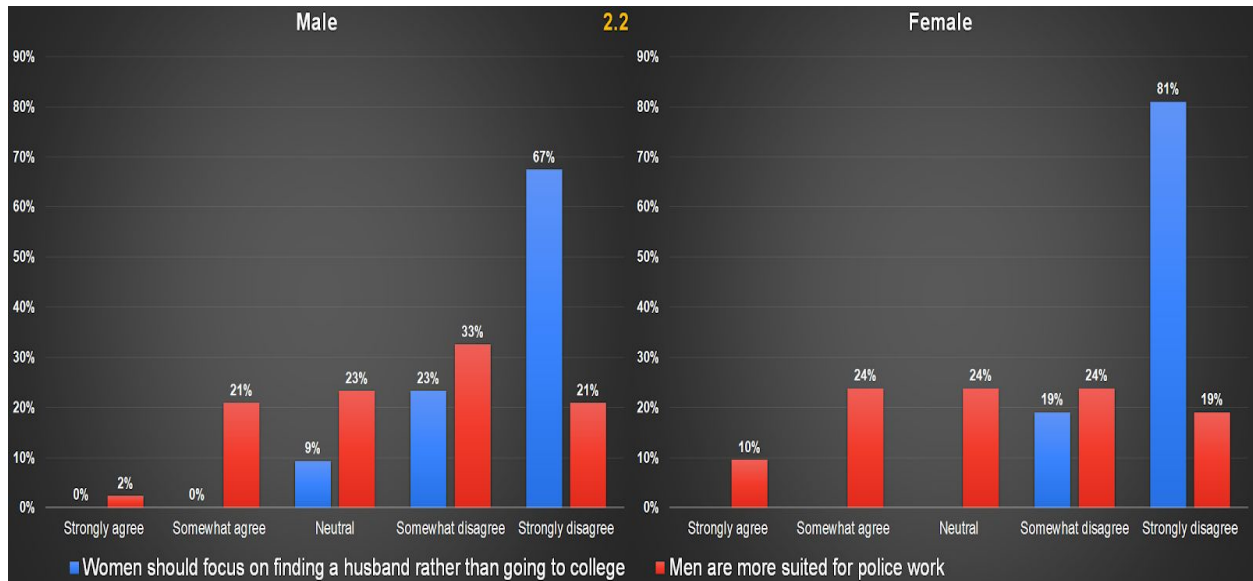
### 5.2 Research Question 1 Summary

The summary of the results of Research Question 1 show a trend in women’s movements in Japanese college students' lives. Male college students are more familiar with women’s movements than female college students, but female students have a stronger positive feeling for these movements. Knowledge about women's movements and their goals can be said to be greatly influenced by social media. Almost all male and female college students feel that social change requires civic engagement. The majority of male and female college students do not physically participate in the women's movement, but there seems to be a growing desire to be aware of these movements and gain knowledge about their goals.

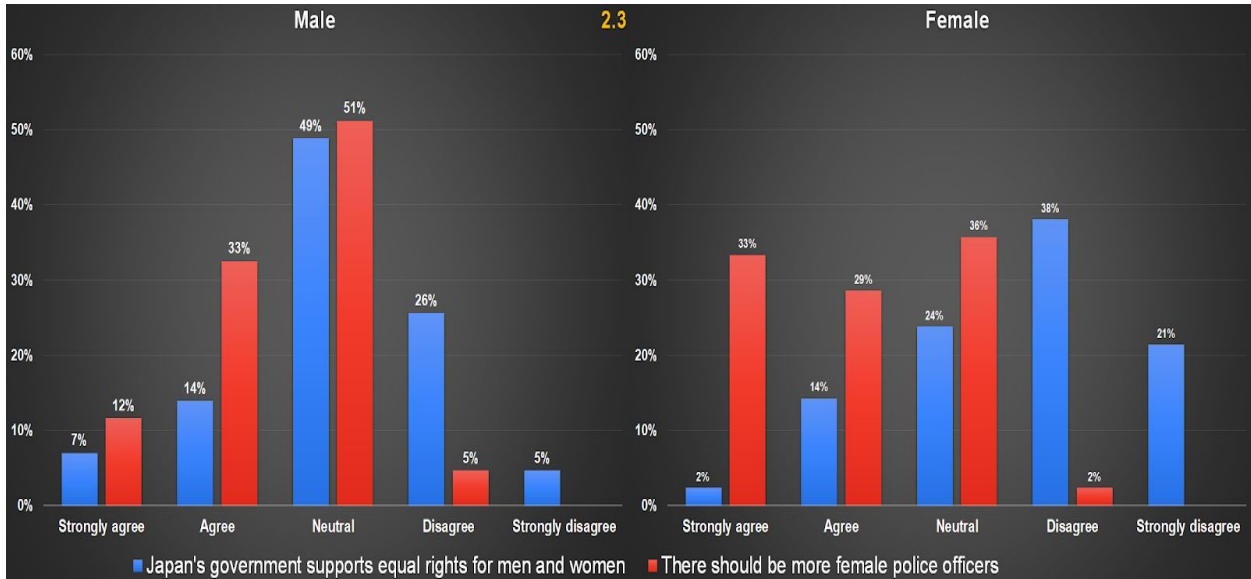
### 5.3 Research Question 2: How do college students perceive changes to gender roles in contemporary society and what has influenced these opinions?



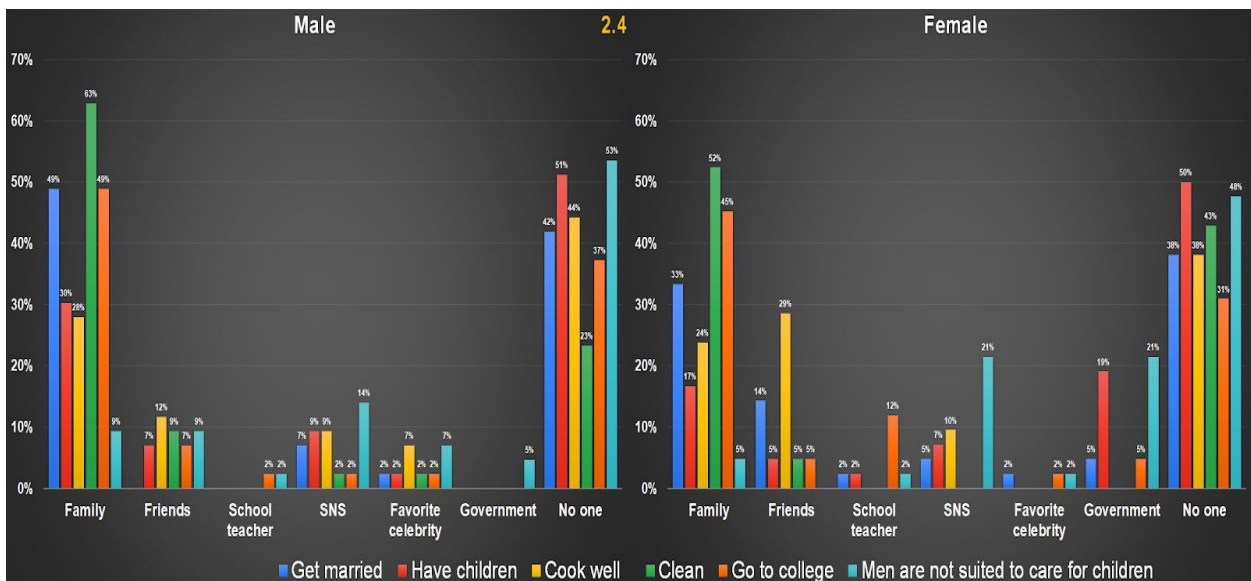
First we asked the students what their opinions were of women’s role in the home and men’s role in the workplace. According to chart 2.1, 61% of male students and 79% of female students do not agree with women’s role in the home is to raise children and take care of the house, but a little over 50% of male students and about 30% of female students agree that men should have more labor intensive jobs because of being more physically strong.



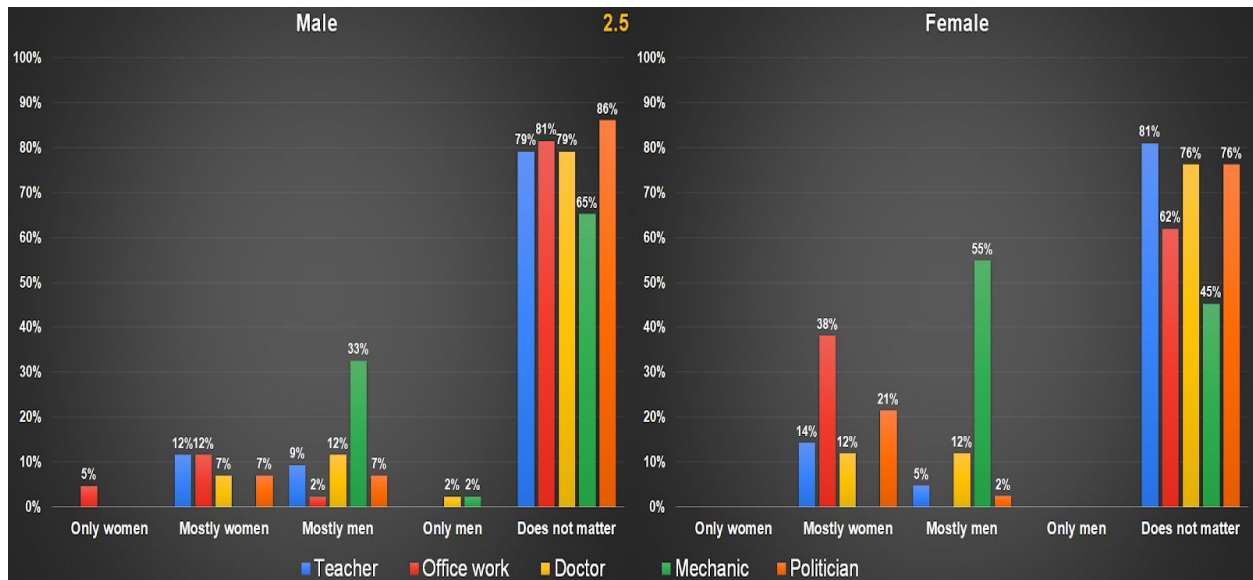
Next we asked the students about their opinion of women in college and men in law enforcement. Nearly all the students disagree that women should focus on finding a husband over going to college. While there were mixed feelings on men being more suited for police work, more female students than male students agreed that men were more suited to police work than women(See Figure 2.2).



We then asked the students about their opinions regarding Japan’s government’s support of equal rights and women in the police force. According to figure 2.3 Most male students were neutral regarding both statements, though 45% of male students did agree there need to be more female police officers. About 60% of female students didn’t believe that Japan’s government supports equal rights for men and women and about 60% also believed there need to be more female police officers.



We then showed the students a list of various gendered ideals and asked who in their life influenced them most to meet each of these ideals. While most students answered that no one influences them to meet any of these standards, there appeared to be a lot of influence from family to meet these ideals for some of the students(See Figure 2.4).



Finally we showed the students a short list of various jobs and asked them if they believed men or women were more suited for each job. According to figure 2.5 most students believed that gender did not matter in regards to the jobs we listed. However, 33% of male students and 55% of female students believed that mechanics should be mostly men, while 38% of female students believed that office workers should be mostly women.

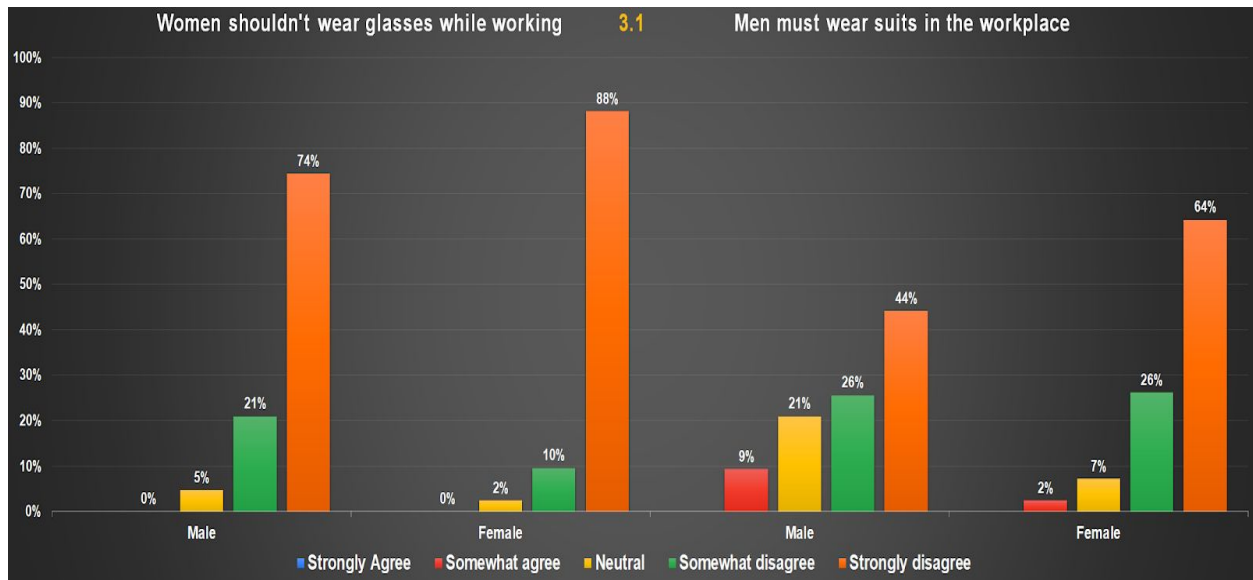
#### 5.4 Research Question 2 Summary

Based on our data, a majority of the students did not carry beliefs of stereotypical gender roles, however, female students seemed to carry more gender biased beliefs of certain occupations. Most of the students agree that both men and women deserve to have equal



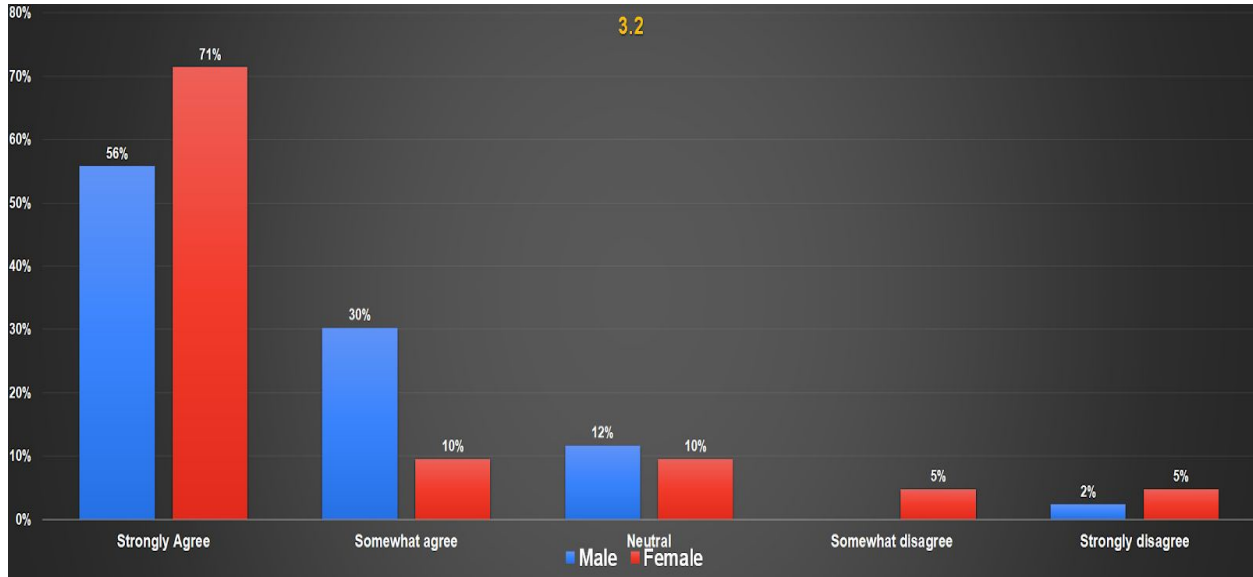
opportunities. The majority of students did not have pressure from others in regard to gender stereotypes and seem to be basing their answers on personal experience.

5.5 Research Question 3: How have women’s movements impacted college students and what behavioral changes may have occurred?

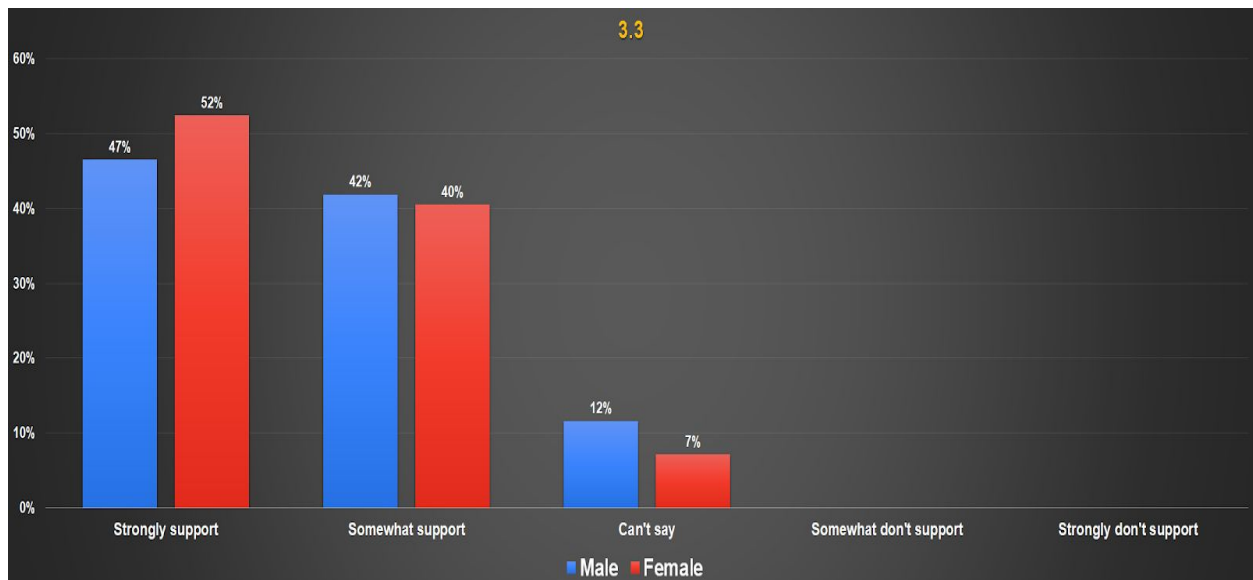


First we asked students whether they agreed or disagreed with the gendered dress codes:

“Women shouldn’t wear glasses while working” and “Men must wear suits in the workplace”. A large majority of students disagreed with both ideals, but about 10% of male students agreed that men should wear a suit in the workplace(See Figure 3.1).

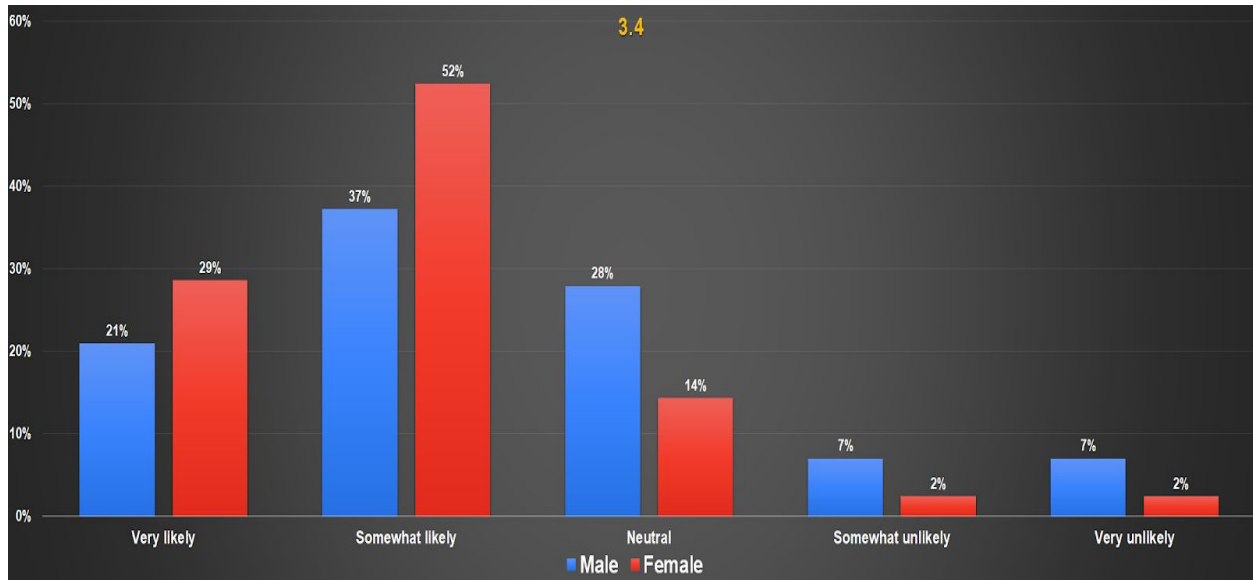


Next we asked the students if they would agree or disagree with companies eliminating gendered dress codes from their policies. According to figure 3.2 almost all students agreed with companies eliminating gendered dress requirements.

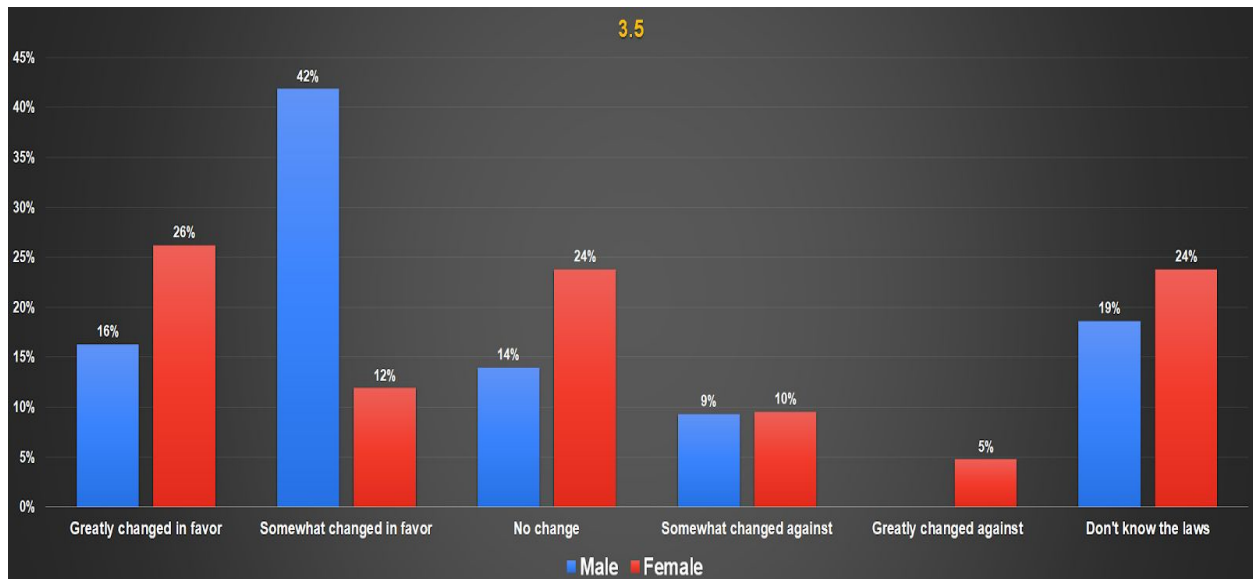


We then asked students how likely they were to support a person who has come forward about having been sexually assaulted. According to the information in figure 3.3, Nearly all students

would support someone that has come forward about experiencing sexual assault and no student said they would not support someone who has come forward.



Next we asked if the students would be more likely to follow news about women’s movements now that they are becoming more public. 58% of male students said they would be more likely to follow news about women’s movements, compared with 81% of female students saying they were more likely to follow the news about women’s movements(See Figure 3.4).



Our last question to the students was whether their opinion regarding Japan's laws regarding sexual assault have changed to support women's rights because of the #Metoo movement and the Flower Demonstration. According to figure 3.5, 58% of male students and 38% of female students said their opinions have changed in favor of supporting women's rights because of the #Metoo movement and Flower Demonstration.

### 5.6 Research Question 3 Summary

Most of the students were against gendered dress codes as a whole and would support companies removing gendered dress codes from their policies. The growing popularity of women's movements in Japan seems to be a strong factor in their likeness in following them. While about 90% of students said they would be supportive of those that have come forward about having been sexually assaulted, about 1 in 4 of the students were not familiar with the sexual assault laws of Japan. Overall men have had a positive change in opinion towards the support of women's rights in Japan due to the efforts of recent women's movements.

## 6. Conclusion

According to the results of the survey, male college students in Japan may be familiar with women's movements because they have begun to seek information about these movements and their goals due to changes in gender roles. Female college students, through their experience, strongly support these women's movements, although they do not participate in them and are not very familiar with them. Japanese college students are interested in the women's movement and are actively participating in making a difference in society. Japanese college students participate through social media, but they do not physically participate in the women's movement. This behavior means "participation" by the new generation, and we believe that our survey interprets

participation on social media as a concrete example of participation by Japanese college students. The fact that college students read and discuss problems shows a desire to participate in social change.

Although some college students still have gender-based ideals, many male and female college students did not support labor and dress code by gender and felt that no one influenced their opinions. In other words, students' views based on gender are made from their own experience and social media. The women's movement featured in the news and social media is a major factor for Japanese college students desire to know more about the goals of the movements for both men and women and to support women's rights. It can be said that the Japanese women's movement has become an opportunity to learn about important issues in the lives of college students regardless of gender, and that they are changing the attitude of male college students towards women's rights issues.

## **7. Limitations of the Study and Future Study**

Finally, we will discuss the limitations of this study and possible future studies of this topic. Due to the limited knowledge of women's movement in both male and female college students surveyed, it was difficult to fully understand their views. We may have gained more information about gender ideals by asking why they agreed or disagreed, not just whether they agreed or not. In the future, we plan to ask if a person is working and has a dress code and their views on that rule, especially in relation to the recognition of dress code in gender discrimination.

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