論　　文

Unconscious Biases and Attitudes of Young Japanese People Toward Visibly Different Immigrant Women in Japan

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Abstract

In 2020, research was carried out to understand the unconscious biases of young Japanese people towards visibly different non-Japanese immigrant women in Japan. A qualitative survey was conducted with students at two universities to discover young people's attitudes towards visibly different women and their experiences of discrimination. The study focused on answering the questions: *What unconscious biases do Japanese young people have?* and *What reactions do Japanese young people have to visibly different immigrant women's experiences of discrimination?* Results showed that young participants were most uncomfortable with imagining interacting with people they did not know about from media or previous experiences. They often gave reasons for feeling uncomfortable because of unfamiliarity with the visible differences of women shown in pictures in the survey.

Upon reading about real-life traumatic experiences of non-Japanese women residents during interactions with Japanese people, many study participants were sympathetic. Several participants' comments showed awareness of diversity issues and criticized the discrimination experienced by the non-Japanese storyteller. However, there were also comments that simply ignored the women's experience or discounted them. This study was limited in scope. Broader in-depth research to understand discrimination caused by unconscious appearance-biases is necessary.

Introduction

R. J. Palacio's novel *Wonder* (2012) tells the story of a fictional character Augie Pullman who was born with a facial deformity. The story shows how despite feeling like a normal 10-year-old boy, adults and other children always stared at him and avoided touching him as if he had a disease making him feel anything but typical. It highlights both the experiences of prejudice for being visibly different as well as how people perceive visibly different humans as inferior and to be kept at a distance. Rumsey and Harcourt (2005) summarize the history of appearance research. They explain how humans have always been interested in their appearance, and numerous legends, myths, and children's stories describe evil characters as "ugly" and heroes as "beautiful" or "handsome." They explain that appearance is a necessary element of identity and recognition by others (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005). The combination of stories and media influencing the way people should look and the vital role appearance plays in self-identity, identity, and the way people perceive individuals based on appearance highlight the importance of research on visibly different people in a sociological context.

This paper is a report on research conducted on unconscious biases in Japanese society and their influences on interactions with visibly different immigrant women. One goal of the research was to understand better the gendered experience of visibly different non-Japanese. A second goal was to examine scientifically the unconscious biases of Japanese young people and their influences on the acceptance of diversity in a globalizing Japanese society. Our study focused on addressing the following questions: 1) What unconscious biases do Japanese young people have? and 2) What reactions do Japanese young people have to visibly different immigrant women's experiences of discrimination?

Literature Review

Foreign Residents in Japan

In 2017 a record 2.56 million legal long-term foreign residents were living in Japan. Immigrants are necessary in aging societies such as Japan and many countries in Europe. However, the most serious barrier is the reluctance of local communities to accept them. Human interactions can cause a significant amount of stress when a single incident or negative comment breaks down a person's self-esteem and negatively affects their social functioning (Clarke, 1998; Cho, et al., 2018). In the case of Japan, it can also cause non-Japanese residents to think negatively of Japanese people. Ross (2014) explains that everyone has unconscious biases. Often, Japanese people do not intend to cause harm with their comments and actions: they are just acting on what they have learned from society.

Bohnet (2016) explains how trauma resulting from unconscious biases and multiple oppressions are significant barriers to women enjoying their lives. Purtill (2020) points out that social messages influence people to think

women must have a certain skin color, body shape, and hair style to be considered attractive and competent workers. Women in Japan and other countries are socialized to believe they are inferior if they do not fit the stereotypical visible image. As a result, visibly different non-Japanese women have often experienced lower self-esteem and discrimination since coming to Japan (Kittaka, 2016).

Mental health issues were pushed into the spotlight by athletes such as Naomi Osaka and Simone Biles showing how stress due to pressures of expectations and stereotypes can negatively affect anyone. Appearance-bias, also known as lookism, is a growing area of concern for many researchers. Furthermore, it is difficult to distinguish from other forms of discrimination (Cavico et al., 2012; Lee, et al, 2017, Desir, 2010). Biases and discrimination based on appearances can cause stress and trauma. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have witnessed countless incidents of violence against visibly different people globally, including Black people and Asian-looking people. A study by the PEW Research organization found that over 58% of Asians in the US had experienced racist attacks and felt unsafe after the COVID-19 pandemic began simply for "looking Asian" and suffered from stereotypes associated with the belief that China created the coronavirus (Ruiz et al., 2020). According to Desir (2010), lookism is as common and serious as racism and sexism. Lee, Son, Yun and Kim (2017) report that perceived appearance discrimination has negatively

impacted the health of Korean youth. It affected their self-esteem as well as interactions with others. Whether intentional or not, small stresses caused by discrimination can lead to a kind of battle fatigue, which Martin (2015) defines as physical and mental stress caused by experiencing everyday discrimination. Stereotypes regarding such traits as skin color, body size, and gender can lead to individuals feeling isolated, as if there is something wrong with them (Ross, 2014; Schafer & Ferraro, 2011). It has been shown that men and women experience different unconscious biases, and women tend to experience multiple discriminations based on gender and other factors (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). For instance, there is evidence that overweight women experience more bias because they are women and because of body size (Parker-Pope, 2008).

Unconscious Bias

Unconscious biases are often revealed when people become aware of stereotypes associated with such traits as skin color, hair texture, and gender (Perception Institute, n.d.; Ross 2014). Unconscious bias has been identified by diversity and social justice researchers as a major reason people feel stress and isolation from the communities in which they live. Results from researchers such as Ross (2014) and Banaji and Greenwald (2013) show the significant role unconscious biases play in preventing women from being seen favorably and facing discrimination in the workplace, politics, and society. Understanding unreasonable fears towards visibly different women is

necessary to provide more welcoming and caring spaces in communities and workplaces. Appearance-based discrimination is as common and serious as racism and sexism, and yet it is accepted as normal in most societies (Desir, 2010). It has been shown to have serious economic and psychological implications for individuals (Lee, et al, 2017). Desir (2010) and others document how attractive-looking individuals find it easier to get well-paying jobs and find more success in many societies, while those who are considered unattractive are viewed with suspicion, and perceived as weak or less-capable. A report by the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (Bessendorf, 2015) found that personal care products for adult women averaged 13% higher in price than those for men. This contributes greatly to significant financial burdens over a lifetime as average salaries for women are lower and looking attractive is necessary to obtain higher-paying jobs. Appearance-bias is a very common and serious socioeconomic problem, and yet not illegal, and it is difficult to distinguish from other forms of discrimination since they often work in tangent with other oppressions such as gender (Cavico et al., 2012, Desir, 2010).

There are few studies outside the US and the UK that have included experiences of discrimination experienced by visibly different women, and even fewer in Japan (Thompson, 2012). However, widespread social movements such as Black Lives Matter and International Women's Day marches show the importance of studying unconscious biases towards visibly different people.

Research on discrimination and unconscious bias has become a common phrase among researchers studying diversity and social justice in North America. Recently, researchers have started focusing on unconscious biases related to gender because of the lack of women in leadership positions. Discussions of the role of unconscious biases in preventing minorities from being seen favorably and facing discrimination in society have become the norm. However, appearance-bias is a growing area of concern and not adequately considered. Therefore, this study investigates answers to the following two research questions and three support questions.

(RQ1) What unconscious biases do Japanese young people have?
- Support question 1: Does visible difference affect the prejudices Japanese people have?
- Support question 2: What kind of physical and behavioral characteristics do Japanese young people perceive as differences?

(RQ2) What reactions do Japanese young people have to visibly different immigrant women's experiences of discrimination?
- Support question 3: What kind of meaning do Japanese young people attach to stories of discrimination and prejudice?

Method

The researchers undertook a mixed-methods research approach to gain both

objective and subjective knowledge, as well as to facilitate an approach toward the research process from the beginning to the end from various aspects (Morgan, 2007; Mertens, 2009). The researchers collected qualitative survey data by convenience sampling at their respective tertiary educational institutions, a women's college of liberal arts and a coeducational university; both establishments are part of the same privately-owned educational foundation. Participants' ages ranged from late teens to early 20s, and all were undergraduates.

Interest in taking part in the project was stimulated by invitations that were distributed via the universities' emailing systems. The invitations directed participants to the online survey, accessible through Survey Monkey. All questions were bilingual, Japanese-English, and students taking part in the project were initially directed towards a consent agreement that guaranteed confidentiality. Participants were advised that the survey would take 20-30 minutes to complete, and that they could withdraw from the survey at any point without prejudice and that their data would be discarded.

There were 29 questions in the survey; initial questions (1-8) asked for information to establish biographical data. Part 1 then asked participants to examine photographs of diverse women and to reflect on and imagine their reactions if they were to meet the women in these photos (questions 9-20). Part 2 (questions 21-24) asked participants to inform us which different characteristics usually caught their attention; a 5-point

Likert scale was employed to elicit responses but some questions requested additional comments. Part 3 (questions 25-29) featured short autobiographical stories of incidents that had occurred to immigrant women in Japan; participants were then asked to describe/explain their reactions to these stories. Question 29 was open-ended and asked participants for any other comments about "people who are different in Japan".

Finally, the results of the data collection were analyzed by descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and pairwise comparisons), uncorrelated t-test, one-factor within-subjects analysis of variance. Text mining, using Word Cloud methodology, was used to examine participants' reactions to the photographs in Part 1 of the survey. Text mining, or text analytics, is a method to explore data for meaningful patterns (Udgave & Kulkarni, 2020). It aids in providing insight into emotions in structured data using artificial intelligence and natural language processing (Carter, 2021). For questions 25-29 we focused on narrative analysis in order to explore the range of opinions of students to the short autobiographical accounts of immigrant women's lives in Japan.

Findings and Discussion

The results of the survey were cross analyzed using descriptive statistics (using SPSS version 27), AI text mining (User Local, Inc.), and narrative analysis. A total of 48 participants (10 male, 37 female) logged in to the survey, although two respondents did not complete the questionnaire and their data was

discarded. Two participants gave their national identity as Korean and 45 described themselves as Japanese.

Results 1: Pictures of Visibly Different Women

We sought to determine whether participants' prejudices (feelings of discomfort) differed by their responses to different races. We examined Part 1 questions asking participants about pictures of visibly different women.

A one-way analysis of variance (within subject) (n＝44) showed that there was significant difference in race ($F(5,215)$ ＝8.87, $p<.001$). Significant differences were found in the following combinations: P1＞P2, P1＞P3, P1＞P6, P2＜P4, P2＜P5, and P2＜P6 ($p<.05$). In other words, P1 (a woman pictured wearing a black hijab and niqab) was more likely to cause discomfort than other races, and P2 (a photo of a smiling White woman of larger body size) was less likely to cause discomfort than other races. There were no significant differences in the other photographs. We can surmise that extremely limited exposure in Japan to female immigrants wearing full hijab and niqab may have impacted this response.

The mean and standard deviation of discomfort feeling towards each picture are shown in Table 1.

Results 2: Results of the Open-ended Questions

We used text mining to examine Part 1 questions and Part 2 questions about emotions research participants showed towards visibly different women. Figure 1 shows the results for AI text mining of responses to Picture 1, a woman wearing a black hijab and niqab. Words with high frequency relating to certain emotions are shown larger in scale, and words related to less frequently-used terms shown in smaller sizes. The results of the analysis showed the following emotions: Joy 24.7%, Like 27.1%, Sadness 69.2%, Fear 59.8%, Anger 69.2%. These emotions were shown by participants related to the following words: Islamic religion, religion, and difference. They showed relations to the emotions of sadness, fear, and anger. On the other hand, words participants used to describe feelings of a smiling White woman of larger body size in picture 2 were usually, care, discomfort, customers, and physique. Fewer words related to

Table 1　Mean and standard deviation of discomfort feeling for each picture for questions in Part 1.

	Picture	Mean value	Standard deviation
P1	a woman wearing a black hijab and niqab	1.75	.58
P2	a smiling White woman of larger body size	1.18	.39
P3	a smiling Black woman wearing glasses	1.39	.54
P4	an elderly woman wearing glasses and scarf	1.61	.62
P5	a large-bodied woman with short hair	1.52	.59
P6	a smiling young woman wearing a hijab	1.48	.55

Figure 1 The results of word cloud analysis of P1 (Created by User Local, Inc.)

emotions of sadness, fear, and anger were used.

Considering Results 1 and 2, it would be helpful in the future to consider why participants felt uncomfortable if they were asked for help by the woman in Picture 1 (the hijab and niqab-wearing woman), while they were less likely to feel uncomfortable if requested to assist the woman in Picture 2 (the White woman with a larger body size). Since Japan is considered a non-religious/polytheistic country, the presence of the hijab, which is reminiscent of Islam, may have increased the sense of discomfort. They may also be a result of stereotypes associated with people wearing the hijab. These results reinforce our assumption that participants are unfamiliar with the sight of women wearing Islamic garb; hence it may have lead them to experience negative emotions (sadness, fear, anger) in response to such visual

stimulus. On the other hand, people with a large body size are often seen in TV programs, and since they have nothing to do with religion, the sense of discomfort may not have been as great.

Next, we checked whether there was a difference in the value of prejudice according to the gender of the respondents (male and female). Results showed that there was no significant difference between males and females, although there was a gap when only looking at the mean values.

Part 2 Results: Questions about Noticing Appearance

We compared the results of each part of the survey to see which parts of the survey participants judged to be different from others. This is reflected in Part 2: *To what degree do you notice the following characteristics about other people?* Importance (0−don't notice, 5−always

notice). Using descriptive statistics, a one-factor within-subjects analysis of variance showed that there was a main effect of the parts ($F(10,440)=11.89$, $p<.001$). The results are shown in Table 2.

As for gender, hair color, and skin color, the scores were low, in the 1-point range, indicating that they were close to "don't care". Looking at the areas where there were significant differences, such as clothing & fashion, gender, hair color, skin color, hair color, language, accent when speaking, and behavior, results suggest that participants judge differences based on the behavior of the other person rather than the other person's gender, hair color, or skin color (Gender<C1, C2, C5, C6, C7, C9, Haircolor<C1, C2, C5, C6, C7, C8, C9, Skin color<C1, C2, C5, C6, C7, C9, C10). It should be noted that with regard to gender, LGBTQ + discussions are topical in Japan, and through educational settings participants are likely to have been exposed to the discourse that they should not discriminate based on skin color or hair color, so it is likely that many students were aware that they did not/should not care.

However, participants scored highly in noticing differences in facial features, above and beyond noting differences in skin color and hair color. Although the scores for facial features were lower than those for behavior, it is possible that facial features are also a major factor in observing differences. In other words, since facial features are strongly influenced by race, there is a possibility that discrimination and distinction may be made due to facial differences. Otherwise, noticing age scored significantly higher than paying attention to hair color or body size. Age may also be a factor in distinguishing differences, since in Japanese culture, where age consciousness is strong, it is normal to respond differently to other people depending on age.

Table 2　Table showing analysis of descriptive characteristics

	Characteristics	Mean value	Standard deviation
1	Clothing & fashion	2.33	1.55
2	Facial features	2.24	1.45
3	Gender	1.42	1.52
4	Hair color	1.33	1.37
5	Language	2.98	1.63
6	Opinions & ideas	2.62	1.67
7	Accent when speaking	2.60	1.50
8	Age	2.24	1.62
9	Behavior	3.07	1.21
10	Body size or shape	2.02	1.64
11	Skin color	1.33	1.48

Part 3 Results: Reactions to Visibly Different Non-Japanese Women's Stories

In part 3, participants were given real-life incidents when visibly different non-Japanese women residents experienced discrimination and had memories of trauma even years afterward. The open-ended responses to short autobiographical experiences of immigrant women were not analyzed using text mining or statistics; a content analysis of the narratives was carried out in order to better summarize the range of opinions of the participants.

Students empathized somewhat with the women's stories in questions 25 and 16. Regarding Q25, the account of the Afro-Caribbean mother who experienced a racial remark on taking her son to the doctor, participants all uniformly expressed dismay, shock, and disgust in their responses, finding the doctor's comment "inappropriate" "ignorant" and "dated"; many felt the doctor should have apologized. This supports the fact that students today are educated not to respond to visible difference of race in a discriminatory way.

Participants were equally perceptive in their responses to Q26, the account of an Indian teacher of English who was rejected at an in-person interview because the interviewer was surprised that the teacher was not Caucasian. Many referred to the fact that once upon a time, this was the image of the foreign teacher. "It is true that some Japanese people think that English equals Caucasian," observed a respondent. "I think it is a shame that there is still a false stereotype that fluent English speakers are 'Caucasians', even though they are perfectly qualified to teach English," was a common response. "This is also due to old-fashioned discrimination," wrote one respondent. "I was amazed that there are still Japanese who have the image that foreigners are White," exclaimed another. "Even in English-speaking countries, Japanese people tend to ignore people from [formerly] colonized countries (such as India in the text)," wrote one respondent. Quite a few participants commented that in Japan, advertising for language schools still only features Caucasian teachers, thus perpetuating the image that English teachers are White. Yet children are not necessarily conscious of such differences: "What children want is not the color of the teacher's skin, but a teacher who enjoys teaching," commented another participant. "I have had ALT teachers who were not Caucasian, but I did not feel uncomfortable with them," wrote another respondent. "When I was an elementary school student, my English teacher (woman) from the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago was not 'white'. No one said anything about it, and I liked her very much. I really hope prejudice will disappear."

The story in question 27, the account of the larger White woman who was body-shamed by a Japanese realtor, provoked a critical response, by and large, although one participant wrote, "I think it's funny to laugh at being big. There are thin people and big people all over the world." The gender aspect of this story was also noted by some participants, such as a respondent who

opined, "In Japan, somehow people think talking about appearance, especially body shape, is not so rude. I experienced this, too. Many women are suffering."

The off-color 'joke' in Q28 when a headscarf-wearing Iranian Muslim woman and her colleagues were introduced by a Japanese colleague to others at an academic conference as "not terrorists" was deemed distinctly unfunny and inappropriate by respondents. Wrote one respondent, "In Japan, there are still a lot of people misunderstanding Islam". The media was responsible for a great deal of misinformation on the topic, noted several participants: "A lot of people have been influenced by media. Biased images about Muslims have been spread in Japan as well as around the world," "The fact that Japan only has an image of terrorism towards Iran and Islam shows the indifference of Japanese people towards religion and other countries."

In the final "free comments" section, participants' views once again reinforced the sense of positive generational change in Japan towards difference. Participants were by and large optimistic of progressive attitudes: "Education (at school) about foreign people, culture or religion have [sic] became popular only recently. Young people tend to have knowledge about these things. As the number of people who have knowledge and interest in overseas circumstances increases, I think that the above-mentioned discrimination and prejudice will gradually disappear." One participant sounded a note of realism, however, reminding us that

"Since Japan is not an immigrant nation and Japanese is the most common race in Japan, foreigners might look different. Therefore, there are still many people who behave [in a] discriminatory [way] like stories above. Also, Japan is going way behind in realizing women's rights. Foreign females may want to know about this fact."

Comments of the students who participated in the study show some compassion towards the experiences of the non-Japanese women residents in Part 3. Some even showed understanding and commented that they had similar experiences. However, there was still a comment that people who are different in Japan should expect to be seen and treated differently. It is an inevitable part of Japanese society, even though they think it should be changed in the future, though none suggested ways that change should come about. Part 2 results showed that participants did not tend to notice differences in appearances to a large degree. However, appearance is so ingrained in everyday life that people are unaware they are using it as an identifier (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005). Therefore, responses to Part 2 questions make it unclear as to whether students actually did not tend to notice visible features, or if it is simply something they do not focus on compared to other things when interacting with people. However, responses in Part 1 showed that they did notice and that some had strong feelings in response to visible differences. The most obvious example was the hijab and niqab worn by the Muslim women in

Picture 1. While the results reveal biases of young people in Japan, the study was too limited to make any conclusive statements. It is also questionable how unconscious these biases are since our questions asked students to do self-reflections. Additional research methods, such as in-depth interviews in a larger-scale future study, would be helpful.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand unconscious biases young Japanese people have towards visibly different non-Japanese immigrant women in Japan. It showed that young participants were most uncomfortable with imagining interactions with people they did not know about from media or previous experiences. They often gave reasons for feeling uncomfortable because of unfamiliarity with the visible differences of the women in the survey pictures. This study was limited in scope and does not uncover detailed explanations of the reasons, only the feelings of these young respondents. Further in-depth research to understand how much of their unconscious biases result from stereotypes and to what degree biases related to appearance influence their responses is necessary. Young respondents commented that they would not feel uncomfortable interacting with someone with a large body size. However, numerous research projects indicate that unconscious biases related to body size, in particular body size and gender, cause everyday stress and fatigue (Perception Institute, n.d.; Ross 2014).

The personal stories of non-Japanese women residents show real-life traumatic experiences during interactions with Japanese people. Several participants' comments showed awareness of diversity issues and criticized the discrimination experienced by the non-Japanese storyteller. Some commented that they empathized with the visibly different woman and indicated they wanted to be an ally. However, there were comments that simply ignored the women's experience or discounted it. One survey participant commented that this experience would not occur in current Japanese society. Others commented simply that things should be changed. Negative interactions that cause psychological stress influenced by unconscious biases result in profound effects on the health of those who experience unconscious biases due to their visible differences (Desir, 2010; Lee et al, 2017). Unconscious biases and multiple oppressions prevent women from living more fulfilling lives (Bohnet, 2016; Cavico et al., 2012). Further research can lead to a deeper understanding of appearance-bias experienced by visibly different women in Japan, as well as add to the body of literature available outside the US and the UK. Moreover, it could raise awareness of trauma experienced by non-Japanese women residents in Japan.

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