

# The Role of Dating Site Design in Gendered Self-Representation and Self-Animation in Online Japan

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## Abstract

In this paper, I discuss self presentation in online dating, specifically, online dating in Japan. I give particular attention to the question of how the design affordances of particular online dating apps help to partially structure how users construct their own profiles. Profile construction depends in part on what sort of fields have been provided for the user to fill in, as well as on which are mandatory, and which are optional. To some extent, norms of what a dating site is, or can be, or should be, structures the kinds of fields that designers add to the app, so that some are universal and inevitable (a name, age), while others are specific to particular sites and apps, and flexibility in filling out these fields varies. Profile construction also depends on what kinds of guidance are given to users when they create their profiles, upload pictures, or write profile text, whether in the form of rules or suggestions.

Guidelines for acceptable pictures or measures of profile completion have an effect on the extent to which users fill out profiles, and what they put in them when they do. We can fruitfully analyze this as a kind of social “animation,” (Silvio 2010), wherein multiple parties collaborate to produce the illusion of a single person or character. Here, users fill out profiles in collaboration with the site and its different constraints, affordances, and display options; the technology mediates and animates the users’ self-presentations.

**Keywords:** *Linguistic Anthropology, Gender, Ideology, China, Online*

## Introduction

Finding partners for marriage and romance in Japan has historically borne little resemblance to Western models of courtship and dating. Aristocrats in the early modern period in Japan used go-betweens to negotiate marriage between appropriately matched individuals, a practice which spread to other social strata such as during the Meiji period (Sakai 2009), particularly in urban areas. In Japanese countryside regions, young men and women negotiated relationships much more casually than in the present day, engaging in premarital sex, ‘illegitimate’ childbearing and divorce, all of which constituted normative practice in Japan—a situation that persisted into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Smith 1983). Dating in Japan, as a specific kind of courtship practice, was arguably introduced into Japan by the soldiers of the Allied Occupation following the end of the Second World War (McLelland 2010). Since this time, the number of arranged marriages has steeply declined, constituting a mere 5.5% of all marriages, as compared with 69% in 1935 (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2016: 12). Although it is a recently imported model, dating is now the main paradigm for how young people expect to find marriage partner.

In this paper, I discuss self-presentation in online dating, specifically, online dating in Japan. I give particular attention to the question of how the design affordances of particular online dating apps, along with documentation such as rules, FAQs, and example profiles, help to partially structure how users construct their own profiles. I argue that profile construction in online dating is predicated on three factors. The first factor is emerging local and global norms of what constitutes a ‘good’ or perhaps a ‘normal’ profile. Evidence from interviews with dating site users suggests that this sense of how a dating site profile should read is constructed in part by viewing other users’ profiles, and in part by the response (or lack of response) to their own profile on the part of other users. A second aspect is the design of the app. Profile construction is predicated in part on what sort of fields have been provided for the user to fill in, as well as on which are mandatory, and which are optional. To some extent, norms of what a dating site is, or can be, or should be, structures the kinds of fields that designers add to the app, so that some are universal and inevitable (a name, age), while others are specific to particular sites and apps, and flexibility in filling out these fields varies. Finally, profile construction also depends on what kinds of guidance are given to users when they create their profiles, upload pictures, or write profile text, whether in the form of rules or suggestions. Guidelines for acceptable pictures or measures of profile completion have an effect on the extent to which users fill out profiles, and what they put in them when they do. In general, it seems that the more structure and support for the user is built into the app or website, the more similar user profiles become, suggesting that users pay close attention to this guidance, rather than having a preconceived idea of what a dating site profile looks like or sounds like, independent of any site in particular. We can fruitfully analyze this as a kind of social ‘animation’ (Silvio 2010), wherein multiple parties collaborate to produce the illusion of a single person or character. Here, users fill out profiles in collaboration with the site and its different constraints, affordances, and display options; the technology mediates and animates the users’ self-presentations.

In the remainder of this paper, I present three websites or apps that I have encountered in the course of my research, suggested to me by friends and interviewees. Each website is designed according to a different model, and generally speaking, aimed at a different population. Consequently, they are structured differently, and they present themselves differently to their audiences. As a result we can see clear patterns—or the lack thereof—in profiles from each of these three sites. The data presented here is based on qualitative analysis of about 30 profiles from men and women from each site<sup>1</sup>. Pictures were described and coded, along with features of the profile text. The data gathered directly from profiles is supplemented by data from my interviews. The first site, Tinder, is an obvious juggernaut that has been the subject of much research, but it's actually rather popular in Japan, and is used by Japanese citizens, resident migrants, and travellers. Tinder has minimal guidance for users and minimal profile architecture. Consequently, I found very little patterning in the profiles that I examined, to the point that attempts to code pictures and text proved largely futile. The second app, Nine Monsters, is a domestically produced app aimed at gay men, and used by Japanese gay men along with resident migrants. This app presents kind of a happy medium in terms of design. There is some guidance on the app, there is some structure built into the profiles, and consequently, there is some degree of patterning in the profiles. Additionally, there also seems to be some emergent structure in terms of users creating their own patterns of profile construction, within the app's clear but lean framework. The third app is Zexy Enmusubi, which is a domestically produced site and app for people who are looking to get married. Unlike the previous two, it's exclusively heterosexual. One thing that distinguishes Zexy Enmusubi from similar sites is that there is extensive guidance and structure in profile creation and consequently, a certain homogeneity to users' profiles.

## Dating in Japan's Online

Japan has generally been slow to adopt *online* dating, as compared with many other countries where it is already established as a respectable means of finding partners for romance or marriage. This is in part influenced by the emergence of strong anonymity and pseudonymity when interacting online in Japan, an act which precludes revealing too much about oneself, or posting pictures of one's face; both of these activities are generally central to online dating in many other countries. Only since around 2012, however, Facebook, with its insistence on the use of real names and pictures, has gained traction as a social network in Japan. Its competition was primarily the domestically developed Mixi, which was enthusiastically pseudonymous (Ghedin 2013). The popularity of the film *The Social Network*, as a depiction of Facebook's founding, in tandem with its usefulness following the Great East Japan Earthquake of March, 2011, and the linguistic allure of an international social network that opened the possibility of communication with foreigners, have all been cited as contributions to the ascent of Facebook (Hamada 2012; Gilhooly 2012). During that same year, the Facebook app 'Omiai' debuted in Japan. This app employed discourse central to practices of arranged marriage, while adopting the word for a traditional arranged first meeting of prospective marriage partners as its name, in order to

signal to its users a certain level of respectability: The app became a patent and immediate success (Miyamoto and Seo 2012).

The term *konkatsu* (a contraction of *kekkon katsudô*, 'marriage activities'), or 'marriage hunting,' was coined in 2008 in the pop-sociological work *The Age of 'Marriage Hunting' ('Konkatsu' Jidai)* (Yamada and Shirakawa 2008). Prior to this, dating sites were branded as *deai-kei saito*, 'meeting sites,' a term that embodies connotation of fleeting sexual encounters. they advertise themselves as being for *konkatsu*, or alternately for *koikatsu*, 'love hunting.' Although some users of dating sites in Japan conclude that ultimately *koikatsu* is still *really* *deai-kei*, there is now a language for describing ways in which these sites mediate socially acceptable practice by users. According to a representative of Diverse, Inc., the company creating the dating site and app YYC, the term such as *koikatsu*, and others, has invented by these companies to respectably rebrand their services ( Personal communication, August 2015).

An apparent correlation emerges between the increased acceptance of real-name internet use and greater acceptance of online dating. In 2010 and possibly afterwards, finding love online constituted a foreign enterprise for Japanese internet users. For example, Mari Yoshihara's *Dot Com Lovers (Dotto Komu Rabâzu, 2008)* recounts the year of 2003, during which the author lived in New York City, where she engaged in online dating. The practice of online dating had already become normative practice in the US. 'Online dating,' rendered from English into Japanese syllables, is defined on the book cover. The book is written with the presumption that readers are unfamiliar with the practice. Terms used now, like *netto koikatsu* ('net' or 'online' love hunting) did not exist prior.

## Methodology

In the summer of 2018, when I conducted a small first set of interviews with eleven past and then current online daters in their 20s and 30s, using the internet to find partners for marriage or more casual romance seemed obvious. For many, it was not their entire or even primary strategy for finding a partner, but it made sense to them to use it at least sometimes. Four of the eleven interviewees were foreign residents in Japan, although one interviewee had lived and dated almost exclusively in Japan as an adult. Recruiting participants was a little challenging. While everyone I spoke to expressed interest in the topic, repeatedly, many around me proclaimed that the people around them did not date online. Online dating is becoming normal, but isn't quite there yet. This study is part of a larger attempt to understand the normalization of online dating in Japanese culture, and what specific forms online dating takes in a Japanese context.

## Affordances and Information

When observing profile creation, relevant become technological options built into profiles, categories of guidance or encouragement that users are given in the profile creation process, and categories of patterns users observe in the profiles produced by site users. Sample profiles can be instructive for coaching users to better conceptualize types of information so as to include in profiles, what topics to address, and what language genre to include. To exemplify the construction of how this might operate, I now describe several dating sites popular in Japan.

Zexy Enmusubi, one of three dating sites popular in Japan: This site provides extensive guidance to users on how to fill in their profile, including sample profile text that will auto-populate the ‘self-introduction’ (*jiko-shôkai*) field on the site. In previous research on this site (Alpert 2017), On this site, 11 of 12 profiles exposed a completely gender-indeterminate way. In Japanese, this means avoiding the use of personal pronouns and most sentence-final particles, as these are some of the most salient gender cues identified in scholarly and popular literature on women’s language (Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith 2008). This is grammatically possible in Japanese, which allows both subjects and objects to be dropped. It’s also pragmatically encouraged in polite language. (Using second-person pronouns is generally either “familiar” or “generic,” and so best avoided; excessive use of first-person pronouns is considered egoistic. However, in studies of publicly available material on five dating sites, Dalton and Dales (2016) have found that gender is ‘baked in’ to the site experience in certain ways, for example, by coaching site users differently when searching for male partners vs. female partners. This is important because of the way it can potentially affect self-presentation online. In the research on Zexy Enmusubi mentioned above, I looked at 60 profiles, half male, and half female. While there were a few notable differences between the profiles in terms subjects that came up in the women’s profiles vs. the men’s, on the whole, most users avoided first- and second-person pronouns and wrote in a polite, gender-neutral style not too dissimilar from that of the sample text (more on these sample texts below). Search options on the site were not gendered, and, generally speaking, neither was site guidance. Gender differences in profile creation seem to be related, therefore, not just to affordances in the app or its surrounding documentation, but also on the amount of guidance and structure that the site provides.

## Tinder

Over the course of 11 interviews, Tinder was the app that came up the most. For migrants to Japan, bicultural, or internationally-minded individuals, Tinder had appeal in terms of name recognition and familiarity. Tinder also provides flexibility for searching for same-sex relationships, making it a popular choice for gay men as well. For all users interviewed, the size of Tinder’s user base made it an appealing choice, and thus, much has been written academically about Tinder, although not, as far as I know, in the Japanese context. As mentioned previously, Tinder’s interface is minimalistic, and somewhat mysterious. As of 2020, Tinder has had no search function, and only displays users nearby—within an adjustable radius of 2–159km—in an algorithmically determined order. When browsing, the

user sees a large picture of a person. At the bottom of the screen are the name and age of the target people. On the first picture, Tinder also displays information about the target person's employment and education, if they have provided any. Otherwise, the design shows general 'about me' profile text—if the user has provided this information. Other than this, no text is displayed, and the button-based interface is somewhat, but not entirely, self-explanatory. If users require more information about the person currently being displayed, they can tab the information button (a little letter 'I' in a circle).

In summary, Tinder primarily presents pictures, and requires users to exert significant effort in order to view writing in the profile. When editing a Tinder profile, users are first exposed to multiple slots for uploading pictures, followed by a general 'About Me' section, and the option to connect social media accounts (most notably, Instagram and Spotify). There is little guidance for the user on the profile creation page—but rather, blank, minimally labelled fields, none of which are mandatory to complete. It is entirely possible, on Tinder, to have a detailed, lengthy profile, with many pictures, personal information, and connected social media accounts besides. It is equally possible to have no picture, no text, and no fields populated other than name and age. (With a paid account, even age can be hidden). Some guidance is buried at the end of the 'settings' tab in the app, but it pertains mostly to dating safely or behavior that will result in account suspension, more so than a guide to content for inclusion in the profile or how to select images to upload. The Tinder app also contains a link to help documentation, but information at this link provides primarily mechanical questions about the app.

The Tinder users interviewed about the app displayed the capability of pointing out a number of clichés, suggesting that there is some patterning in what people post. Ward (2016: 10) cites an interviewee who lists numerous photographic tropes that she perceives as common yet undesirable, as she explains what she very clearly *does not* want: "There are the men with the fish and men posing with cars that aren't theirs and men drinking. No. Swipe swipe swipe." The way this interviewee phrases her response suggests that she expects the interviewer to fully envisage her explanation, such as who "the men with the fish" are. Men holding up fish on Tinder emerges as a fairly common trope in Tinder in North America and Europe, and more than one Tumblr blog is dedicated to documenting the phenomenon<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, my interviewee 'Marie,' was able to point to textual tropes in profiles that signalled danger or an undesirable situation. Half-hidden faces, or phrases such as "okigaru ni issho ni nomeru tomodachi o sagashite imasu"—*I'm just looking for friends I can casually drink with*—she understood as a sign that the user was seeking only sex. 'Mika,' a woman who used Tinder purely for entertainment, nonetheless elaborately analyzed profiles, and had a similar opinion of men looking for friends to drink with. Yet the profiles that I evaluated reveal few concrete typological differences between photographs uploaded by men and those by women, other than the fact that the women seem to generally be better photographers and curators of their images. Japanese Tinder, insofar as I have explored it, does not have men with fish, or its own equivalent. Likewise, patterns in the text do not readily emerge. Both men and women write sparsely at times when they complete their profiles, and both leave their profiles empty at similar rates (9 men vs. 8 women). Profile language, when it was

included, was generally polite. I suggest, in light of the findings above, that the general lack of patterning both within and across sexes seems to reflect a lack of structure within the app itself, and possibly also the newness of the medium. Genres may not be as clearly established for Japanese users of Tinder, and these genres are much more difficult to create—although evidently not impossible—as Tinder profiles can contain almost anything at all, or oppositely very nearly nothing.

## Nine Monsters

Nine Monsters, the domestically-produced app for gay men in Japan, is significantly more complex to use than Tinder. Tinder shows location-based profiles only and enables chat between people who match. Nine Monsters does much the same, but additionally, has a 'howl' function that shows a feed of recent user statuses, which can also be used to start a conversation. It also contains a game element, wherein each user has a monster type, and can 'breed' with other users to level up. Leveling up in the game function of the app renders the user's profile more visible for the dating function of the app—not that these are totally separate. In addition to these multiple pathways for interacting with other users, Nine Monsters also boasts profiles more elaborate than Tinder, with a variety of different fields that can be completed, in addition to the general 'about me' section. Some of these have to do with the game component, but most are supplied by users: name, age, height, weight, place of residence, ethnicity, languages, hobbies, preferred sexual position, etc. On both Tinder and Nine Monsters, users can connect additional social media account. Tinder tends to prioritize images (through Instagram and Snapchat), music (through Spotify), and existing social networks (Facebook). Nine Monsters also supports linking Instagram and Facebook, but listed above these are Twitter and LINE, the preferred messaging app in Japan. According to the Nine Monsters user whom I interviewed, Nine Monsters users have formed a distinct gay Japanese Twitter community.

In addition to these more robust text fields, Nine Monsters often minimizes the salience of images posted in the app. Public pictures are limited to three per user, in comparison to Tinder's six. While NM has a matching interface within the app that appears as a Tinder clone, other options for profile viewing show only small image thumbnails, with profile text clearly visible beneath. Unlike Tinder, Nine Monsters does not require users to provide additional effort to see the text portion of the profile. Nine Monsters also provides somewhat more guidance than Tinder, if only through clearly communicating standards for these profile pictures. The upload screen contains specific guidance as to what pictures absolutely *should* show (the user's face and body), along with guidelines for things that *may not* be shown (mostly: genitalia). There is also a big helpful button immediately below these basic guidelines that takes users to a page with more detailed rules for posting images. Tinder has similar rules, but including them on the upload page doubtless encourages users to more narrowly tailor the images they select to fit within these guidelines. Nine Monsters also makes it easier to find other information. A menu icon appears at the top of most pages. From within this menu, users can access their history, as well of lists of users that they've interacted with in various ways. Scrolling down gives

access to settings, a Frequently Asked Questions page, and a Beginner's Guide. The Beginner's Guide is a tutorial that guides users through the basic functions of the app, while the FAQ answers more detailed functional questions, along with questions about billing, different levels of functionality available for paid users, and how to get one's profile featured through playing the breeding game.

So, how are Nine Monsters' profiles different to Tinder profiles? Generally, Nine Monsters users' profiles have more information. If we compare just the male users of Tinder that I sampled with the (all-male) users of Nine Monsters, there are fewer empty profiles, with no "about me" text (4/30, compared to Tinder's 9/30). Nine Monsters profiles also tend to generally be longer. I measured this in screens' worth of information: how much scrolling do you have to do to read the whole profile? With Tinder, users barely need to scroll, if they even look at the text at all. With Nine Monsters, because of the smaller pictures and different text fields, scrolling through multiple screens is the norm—and users did also tend to write more. The pictures in Nine Monsters are much more consistent, as well: generally, they depict users' faces and bodies, as requested. Whereas on Tinder one finds extraneous pictures of otters or vacation scenery, facial filters or cute hiding, Nine Monsters users show themselves more clearly, precisely as directed. Finally, in Nine Monsters we see some emergent forms of profile writing, where users are developing some of their own frameworks for interaction. I initially noticed this when I saw users using the English word "unlock" (*anrokku*) and putting in their profile that they "have unlocks" (*anrokku arimasu*). Reading through online dating profiles is a crash course in Japanese erotic slang, but this required my interviewee's assistance. His explanation was that "unlock" refers to the ability of users to send additional pictures in messages through the chat functions of the app. So, pictures that were too risqué to be put directly on the profile could be "unlocked" by users through direct interaction. With an intermediate level of structure built into it, the structure and even the restrictions of the Nine Monsters app design serve to create a culture of avid interaction among users, and new terminology for describing those desired interactions.

## Zexy Enmusubi

Finally, there is Zexy Enmusubi. This is a site that's aimed at people specifically looking to get married (*enmusubi* being a somewhat quaint word for marriage). Given that same-sex marriage does not legally exist in Japan, the site and app only facilitate heterosexual relationships. It's generally used only by people who have a strong connection with Japan: Japanese citizens, a small number of foreign residents of Japan, and some Japanese migrants overseas who hope to establish a romance when they return home. Tinder is available in over 30 linguistic varieties, and Nine Monsters comes in Japanese, English, Korean, and Chinese (both simplified and traditional). Zexy Enmusubi can only be used in Japanese, and the app version for iOS is only available in the Japanese app store. Both of these restrictions also say a great deal about its imagined audience. As a result, I deal only with the web version in my discussion here<sup>3</sup>. First of all, on the front page of the website

<https://zexy-enmusubi.net/>

in the top corner, there is an information menu. So any user, registered or not, can find out quickly what Zexy Enmusubi is. It gives users and potential users information about meeting people, using the website safely, and tips for increasing the number of matches they make. There are also help and frequently asked questions pages that are easily findable and readily available.

Next, there is the design of the profiles. Zexy Enmusubi profiles have *many* detailed fields for users to fill out (or not—most of them are not mandatory). In addition to providing basic information about oneself (name, age, sex, etc.), it's possible to populate fields describing the user's current lifestyle, what they are seeking in a marriage partner, what kind of life they imagine after marriage (for example, who works?), and so on. Additionally, unlike both Tinder and Nine Monsters, it's possible to search for other users using all of these fields to narrow down, for example, only the men who are certain they wish to become househusbands, or only other people who want children. On the left is a profile picture (with the option to upload additional pictures). On the right, when looking at one's own profile, it will display how complete the profile is. There are also little tips all over the page, encouraging users to employ site features in particular ways. For example, it reminds the user that if they log in every day, they get five “likes” (*iine*). The site wants users to know that these tools for interacting with other users are available, and that they can and should be used. Moreover, it also shows clearly to what extent other users are interacting with the profile. Users can view the “footprints” (*ashi-ato*) of other users who have visited their profile, and see how many other users have “liked” them in return. (Of course, this comes with an encouragement to return the gesture.)

Most of the options on these potentially lengthy multifaceted profiles are constrained by drop-down menus, although they are very thorough drop-down menus with a wide number of choices. But finally, let's consider what happens when a user goes to edit the one free text field on the site—the self-introduction. The web interface encourages the user to write an introduction while explaining the purpose of it. The site also provides one of twelve sample profile texts, which are by and large gender-neutral, and useable by anyone. For example:

1	はじめまして、プロフィールをご覧くださいありがとうございます。
	Nice to meet you, and thank you for looking at my profile.
2	●●で△△の仕事をしている××歳です。
	I'm ___ years old and I work at ___ as a ___.
3	性格は、●●●●と言われます。
	I'm told I have a ___ personality.
4	数人で集まって食事やホームパーティーをすることが好きです。

	I like to gather a few people together for dinner or small parties at home.
5	根は真面目で、興味や関心のあることに集中して取り組みます。
	At heart I'm a serious person. I try to focus on hobbies and things that catch my interest.
6	最近の関心事は●●なので、それが上手になりたいなと思っています。
	Recently, I'm interested in ____, and I think I want to get really good at it.
7	美味しい料理を食べさせてあげられるよう日々勉強中です！
	I'm studying every day so that I can be able to give everyone delicious food!
8	休みの日は、○○や○○をしたりしてリフレッシュしています。
	On days off, I refresh myself by doing things like ____ and ____.
9	■■を中心とした映画鑑賞などで、ゆったりした時間を過ごすのも好きです。
	I like to spend my time leisurely, doing things like watching movies focused on ____.
10	将来は、お互い信頼し支え合って△△△な関係が理想です。
	In the future, my ideal is a ____ relationship where we trust and support each other.
11	子供に恵まれた明るい家庭を築いていきたいです。
	I want to build a cheerful home blessed with children.
12	まずはメッセージから、よろしくお願いします。
	Let's start with a message, thank you for your kindness.

As discussed above in relation to Zexy Enmusubi and issues of gendered language, this sample profile text is gender-neutral, and very polite, with addressee-honorific endings on all of the verbs (*desu/-masu*), and no pronouns throughout. It sets a clear tone for how to write a profile, and what kinds of information should be included. Users who are still confused after looking at the example text can click on a helpful button to get a different sample, or they can click on another helpful button and it will give them hints for profile writing. What's notable when looking at Zexy Enmusubi is the extent to which it is very tightly structured but users are also supported at every step along the way. Profiles reflect this, with a consistency but also a thoroughness that I didn't find on Tinder or Nine Monsters. Just very briefly, we can see how this works by looking at how these users describe their ideal relationships. Across both men's and women's profiles, and of course most profiles that I looked at, you can clearly see that users are using similar language to talk about who they are, what they like to do, and what they want in life—language that sounds like the sample profiles. For example, take these two representative statements from a woman's profile and a man's profile, about the kinds of relationships that they desire.

Female user: 大好きな人とたくさんの感情や経験を共有して、色々なことを一緒に乗りて、いつも笑顔で過ごせれば良いなと思います。

*I want to share many experiences and emotions with the person I love, get involved in activities together, and I think it's good if we can go through life always smiling.*

Male user: お互いの存在が日々の力になれるような関係が理想です！

*My ideal relationship is one where our life together becomes a source of our everyday strength!*

In addition to the effect of clearer guidance, the stakes for users may be higher for these marriage-oriented sites, leading to more careful profile reading. One friend of mine who, prior to her marriage, had used konkatsu sites like Zexy Enmusubi, commented that she felt pressure to have a profile that didn't stand out, that seemed normal. She also said that she had experienced the same thing when working with a marriage bureau: they didn't necessarily want to present her *accurately*, but rather wanted to present her as someone that would be pleasant and normal to marry. This kind of social pressure around who and what is a marriageable person may thus encourage these kinds of profiles to more clearly exhibit readily noticeable patterns and generic features. However, technical affordances likely reinforce this. For example, because search is possible (unlike Tinder or Nine Monsters), users can limit their searches to profiles with pictures and a self-introduction. This, along with the display of measures of profile completion, may encourage more users to fill their profiles out completely. Here too, the vast amount of help information built into the site plays a role. Filling out a profile is easier to do when provided with a clear example of how to do it. Where Nine Monsters users are creating profile conventions, Recruit Inc., the company behind Zexy Enmusubi, has done it for their users. This, combined with help information that's social (how to get more matches) rather than purely functional (how to use the site), may also help users to interact with the site clearly as designed.

## Conclusion

Japanese online daters are in the process of developing genres of writing for online dating, but have not fully developed them yet. Moreover, they are not developing independently—likely they have not developed independently anywhere. Rather, these genres are developed in conjunction with the design of sites, apps, and user documentation. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, more structure in the app and the user documentation, and more available documentation, produces more patterned profiles that resemble this documentation. This suggests that users are confused, uncertain, or nervous, for the most part, and therefore happy to follow directions and suggestions. Given that online dating is new in Japan and conventions for producing these kinds of self-presentation text objects may not be well established, it is unsurprising that users would find this kind of guidance welcome. When users have less support and guidance within the app, we see substantially more divergent usage. This can be illustrated most clearly by looking at the dichotomy between Tinder and Zexy Enmusubi, which appear to be operating with minimalist and maximalist approaches to both

profile structure and user documentation. Japanese Tinder profiles are chaotic and hard to summarize. So long as they don't break the rules, Tinder profile pictures might be literally anything. By contrast, pictures uploaded to Zexy Enmusubi are inspected before they can be publicly displayed. Tinder profiles may be brief or lengthy—there are almost no required elements to a Tinder profile, although users may draw their own conclusion about the omission or addition of some information. (Mika also told me that if a man lists his school but not his job, he probably has a terrible job.)

Ultimately, there are two theoretical points that we can take away from this concrete example. One is that self-presentation, self-construction, gender performance—all this happens within a framework that structures our communicative possibilities. We can't understand why users present themselves as they do without looking at the technological context of the choices that they make. The Japanese case is a particularly instructive one here, because there isn't as much of a fixed sense of what a profile is even supposed to look like. We can therefore see a diversity of choices and also a diversity of app designs from local and international users, and local and international app creators.

Self-presentation is usually analyzed under the rubric of performance, following Erving Goffman's classic work extending "performance" as a metaphor to understand sociological roles as akin to theatrical roles (1959). Performance studies also tend to focus on the individual performer's artistry and negotiation of their role, rather than looking at external factors structuring that role. However, Manning and Gershon (2013) have usefully suggested, following Silvio (2010), that technological interventions that structure self-presentation, like dating sites, may be usefully analyzed as "animation" rather than "performance." For Silvio, animation is about creating the illusion of life, which is what an online dating profile is meant to do: create an impression of a living, breathing, attractive person that the viewer wants to reach out to. For Manning and Gershon, one of the key things that distinguishes performance from animation is the ratio of performers to roles. In performance, one person plays one character at a time. However, in animation, many artists may collaborate to animate and voice a single character, or alternately, one user online might control many avatars. In the case of online dating, the user's contribution to profile construction is delimited and structured, put together in concert with the app and, implicitly, its designers. App and user thus collaborate to present a single character (the user), and the app collectively animates multiple users in its particular mold, bringing them to life and, hopefully, bringing them to each other. Collectively, the app and its users work together to delineate localized, Japanese sensibilities about what online dating apps should do, and how selves should be animated through them.

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<sup>1</sup> Both Tinder and Zexy Enmusubi only allow "man" or "woman" as gender options. Nine Monsters, being aimed at gay men, has no gender specification option, and regards all its presumptive users as men.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, <https://guysholdingfishontinder.tumblr.com/>

<sup>3</sup> Tinder can also be used on the web, provided one has a laptop with GPS functionality, and it should be noted that its web interface provides easier access to help documentation. Nine Monsters can only be used as an app.