

Language, Gender, and Ideology in Japanese Professional Matchmaking

by

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To everyone I have ever loved: this is all your fault.
Thank you for the lessons we learned together,
and thank you for making me ask
critical, theoretical questions
about love and relationships themselves.

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Notes on Names

With the exception of the Nakanishi family, who have given me permission to use their real names, and the name of their organization, the Japan Matchmaker Organization (*Nihon Nakōdo Kyōkai*), all names have been changed. I promised in my interviews to obscure these for privacy's sake, and still wish to, in case my writing has any deleterious effect, however unintended, on the people and organizations that worked with me. However, I have typically given a pseudonymous first name for people whom I knew as such, and a pseudonymous last name for others. Where a full name is given, the name is listed in the Japanese order, with family name first, and personal name second. Exceptions are made for Japanese scholars who routinely publish in English, with their names in the ordinary English order. Thus we have Yamada Yumiko (a quasi-celebrity matchmaker, family name Yamada), but Shigeko Okamoto (a scholar of language and gender in Japanese, family name Okamoto).

The usual form of address in Japanese is a person's family name, for people whom one is not particularly close to. The names of closer acquaintances are followed by any number of suffixes indicating status and social distance (or lack thereof). The most common of these is *-san*, and thus my Japanese friends typically call me Erika-san (with the diminutive suffix *-chan* reserved for a few best friends). Although it is not universal, many matchmakers address each other as *-sensei*, "teacher," a term of respect used not only for teachers, but also for respected professionals in other fields (such as doctors or lawyers). I have opted to use honorific suffixes to distinguish the matchmakers who appear in the following pages from other people, outside the matchmaking industry, who have nonetheless contributed their perspectives to my research. Thus, matchmakers are usually referred to as Surname-sensei, with Name-san denoting friends, acquaintances, and research participants who are not matchmakers.

Notes on Transcription

Japanese is not usually written in the Roman alphabet, save for some signage to prevent foreign tourists from getting lost, but it is presented here in Romanized form for maximum accessibility to all linguistically curious readers. There are a number of systems for transliterating Japanese, none of which I happen to like very well. Some aim to preserve phonemic distinctions made plain by Japanese orthography, but they often do so at the expense of intuitive pronunciation by non-Japanese. “Sy” for the palatalized /s/ sound [ʃ], usually represented “sh” in English orthography, may be logical, but not immediately *readable*. A doubled “oo” for the long vowel /o:/ also makes sense, but invites those accustomed to English orthography to constant misreading. Conversely, those which are most immediately readable often somewhat misrepresent the phonology. I have tended to side with readability for English-speakers in my own Romanization practices, following the conventions below (which outline some of the phonological consequences of my choices).

- ❖ Single consonants have more or less typical English values, except “r,” which conventionally represents the alveolar flap (the “t” in “water,” for American English speakers; the “r” in “very” if you are stereotypically “very very” British). See below for notes on “f.”
- ❖ Doubled consonants (cch, kk, mm, nn, pp, ss, ssh, tt) represent “long” consonants, in which the oral closure is held for a full mora.
- ❖ Consonant + y represents a palatalized consonant, pronounced as a single unit, not as two syllables. (E.g., “Kyoto” is two syllables, not three.)
- ❖ Exceptions have been made for palatalized /s/ and /t/, which for readability’s sake I have chosen to represent with the conventional English digraphs “sh” and “ch.” Palatalized /z/ and /d/ are both pronounced as English “j” and thus, although it may conflate phonological differences in a few cases, I do feel the “j” is much more readable than “zy” or “dy,” and therefore have opted to use it.
- ❖ The alveolar stops /t/ and /d/, when followed by /u/, are always pronounced [tsu] and [zu]. Since /du/ is rarely encountered and /tu/ cannot be confused with any other sound combination, I have opted to Romanize these “tsu” and “du.” This also applies to /hu/, which is pronounced [ɸu] and, as [ɸ] only occurs in this combination, not much is lost with the more readable Romanization “fu.”
- ❖ “N” at the end of a syllable is moraic, that is, one beat in and of itself. Where a moraic “n” precedes a syllable beginning with a vowel, it is offset by an apostrophe. Thus, “jibun,” but “ren’ai.” Syllable-final nasals often assimilate to the following place of articulation, and thus “n” is occasionally Romanized as “m” (e.g., “shimbun”). I do not change the consonant to

reflect this coarticulatory assimilation. In this, I follow Japanese orthography, which represents all syllable-final nasals with a single character (ん).

- ❖ Vowels have roughly the value you might expect in Spanish, Italian, or Latin, although “u” is pronounced with flat, rather than rounded, lips.
- ❖ Long vowels (vowels held for two mora) are represented with a macron. An exception has been made for ē, which has long been conventionally represented in English as “ei” (e.g. “sensei”). This also mirrors Japanese orthography in most cases. Where the Japanese orthography has a doubled “e” instead of “ei,” I have used a macron. Other exceptions include words like “baai” or “kaiin” where the doubled vowels are not pronounced as a single long vowel, and verbs like “sasou” where the “u” is morphologically important as a verb ending. Adjectives ending in “ii,” however, have been rendered with a macron, e.g. “hazukashī.”

This is by no means a strictly discourse analytical work. Representation of pauses and prosody through punctuation is approximate. Sentence-final punctuation, commas, and hyphens represent the approximate intonation curve and length of pause. Longer pauses are represented with [...]. I have made little attempt to transcribe some of the finer features of my interview data or other recorded material (latching, overlap, etc.), although speech in parentheses overlaps with the “main” speech. Where Japanese text is presented at length, it is typically given first as Romanized Japanese above, and then in English translation. In translation, I have attempted to be faithful first to the sense of things, as it is *very* difficult to approximate some of stylistic differences between English and Japanese with anything remotely approaching a good parallel in translation (and at any rate, I am not a literary translator). Where stylistic differences are consequential for interpretation of Japanese materials, they are noted explicitly in the surrounding text.

In some transcripts, where style shifts or grammatical choices are important for understanding voicing phenomena, I have highlighted particular grammatical forms in the transcript. In chapter three, bold text indicates lexical items or morphological forms associated with the Kansai variety of Japanese; in chapter four, it marks lexical items associated with shifts in gender. Underlined text marks addressee-honorific verb endings that simultaneously index the formality of the situation as

well as a more standard speech style. Quotative markers such as *to*, *tte*, *to yū*, *tte yū*, are marked with italic text. Where even more detailed analysis is required, I have made use of three-line glosses, where the first line is in Romanized Japanese, the second is a morpheme-by-morpheme gloss, and the third is “natural” English translation. Abbreviations used include:

- COP: The copula, *daldesu*.
- DES: Desiderative mood.
- HON: Addressee-honorific verb ending
- NOM: Nominalizer (follows verb phrase to create a noun phrase; functions much as a complementizer).
- MASC: Has masculine associations (Japanese does not have grammatical gender).
- NP: Non-past (Japanese has two verb tenses, past, and non-past).
- SUB: The subject marker, *ga*.
- TOP: The topic marker, *wa*.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTIONS

August 2009: Having settled into my new apartment in Kyoto, and after some weeks of getting in touch with old contacts and making new ones, I am preparing to go meet Yasuda-sensei, an affluent and successful matchmaker who lives in the suburbs of Osaka. I have my notebook, my field recorder, and my list of university-approved questions, but somewhat predictably, I get lost in the tangle of streets near her apartment building. Kyoto is a planned city, with broad, named avenues laid out in a grid; Osaka and its surrounds developed more organically, with twisting nameless streets. I wander around somewhat haplessly until I eventually call Yasuda-sensei for help; parasol and mobile phone in hand, she comes out to meet me and leads me into her low-key apartment, out of the heat and humidity of the Japanese summer.

We go through the consent forms and begin the interview, but what happens afterwards is not the question and answer session that I envisioned and prepared for, with my pre-approved forms printed out and tucked into my notebook. Rather, Yasuda-sensei treats me to a speech that seems almost rehearsed, elucidating the social forces that have led to Japan's low birth and marriage rates, and extolling the virtues of matchmaking as a solution. Her authority, experience, and ability to take command are on full display as she redirects the interview to her own almost evangelical purposes and explains that the job of matchmaker is to give reluctant clients a push towards marriage, raising awareness of the importance of family as a support system, and encouraging clients to meet as many people as possible. I leave the meeting a little dazed, with the feeling that I have just attended a very compelling lecture. She has gifted me with a copy of her newest book, and an invitation to join her

and her team on a convenient weekend to watch matchmakers where they really work, in a busy hotel lobby in the bustling Umeda area of Osaka. I have absolutely no doubt in my mind that, under Yasuda-sensei's care, I could easily be married in under a year. She seems like the kind of authoritative person who can almost bend reality around her, and her perspective on marriage and family makes perfect sense, at least while I'm listening to her.

In talking about my research with casual acquaintances, I've found that other Westerners are often shocked that something like matchmaking might still exist in a modern, industrialized nation like Japan. The Land of the Rising Sun is factually in the future, to the extent that the agreed-upon day begins earlier there than in most other populated places in the world, but it is also firmly located in the future in much of our imagination. Whole genres of speculative fiction have been built on Tokyo's neon specter. Surely the citizenry of a country so advanced, so civilized, would not traffic in something so seemingly retrograde as arranged marriages, would they?—or so the line of thinking seems to go. Those that I discuss my research with, outside of anthropology, require some assurance that traditions change with the times, and while the words for “arranged marriage”—*omiai kekkon*—are still in common currency, the actual practices of real, contemporary matchmakers are more akin to a package deal where internet dating also comes with a life coach on retainer. When thusly reframed—and I think this characterization of modern Japanese matchmaking does not wholly miss the mark, as we shall see—having a matchmaker begins to sound a bit more appealing.

Most Japanese are equally surprised to learn that I study marriage and matchmaking, albeit for different reasons. Although in the mid-twentieth century half of all Tokyo marriages could be characterized as “arranged” in some way (Blood 1967), the past has become a foreign country¹, and

¹ I owe a debt for this turn of phrase to L. P. Hartley's 1953 novel called, funnily enough, *The Go-Between*.

so an arranged marriage often sounds about as exotic to Japanese adults in their twenties and thirties as it does to many outside Japan. Most know that arranged marriages used to be “the Japanese way” of doing things, for some period of time, in some not clearly specified past. But, unless they have personal connections of some kind to the marriage industry, few are aware of the extent to which matchmaking has transformed, become a service industry, and as such, continues into the present day—even though the share of marriage it occupies has more or less steadily decreased. What changed? How did matchmaking become an outdated cultural practice? And why would someone still participate in it today?

Appendix 1 % distribution of love marriage and arranged marriage, by year of marriage

Year of marriage	Total (Number of cases)	Love marriage	Arranged marriage	Other/not known
1930~39	100.0 % (583)	13.4 %	69.0	17.7
1940~44	100.0 (556)	14.6	69.1	16.4
1945~49	100.0 (960)	21.4	59.8	18.9
1950~54	100.0 (992)	33.1	53.9	13.0
1955~59	100.0 (1,275)	36.2	54.0	9.9
1960~64	100.0 (1,578)	41.1	49.8	9.1
1965~69	100.0 (1,819)	48.7	44.9	6.4
1970~74	100.0 (2,078)	61.5	33.1	5.5
1975~79	100.0 (1,485)	66.7	30.4	2.9
1980~84	100.0 (1,519)	72.6	24.9	2.5
1985~89	100.0 (1,547)	80.2	17.7	2.1
1990~94	100.0 (1,312)	84.8	12.7	2.6
1995~99	100.0 (1,474)	87.2	7.7	5.1
2000~04	100.0 (1,108)	87.4	6.2	6.4
2005~09	100.0 (1,165)	88.0	5.3	6.7

Note: The figures shown are for first-marriage couples. The results are based on the data of the 7th Survey (for 1930-1939 to 1970-1974), the 8th Survey (for 1975-1979), the 9th Survey (for 1980-1984), the 10th Survey (for 1985-1989), the 11th Survey (for 1990-1994), the 12th Survey (1995-1999), the 13th Survey (2000-2004), and the 14th Survey (for 2005 to 2009).

Figure 1: Data from NIPSSR (2011b: 30).

To some extent, at least, we can point to Western, specifically American, influence and intervention in Japanese law and social structure. The post-war Japanese constitution, written by American Occupation forces, mandated that marriage take place only between two mutually

consenting parties; previously, the head of household had been required to give his consent (Steiner 1950). This legal change gave many Japanese young people, especially young women, a kind of personal freedom unheard of under the early modern civil codes that the constitution reformed². Legal changes were accompanied by cultural changes around courtship and sex. The erotic influence of the American occupying forces made such things as public kissing, casual sex, and Western-style dating seem fun, new, and democratic (McLelland 2010). As described by McLelland, this influence was exerted visually, as American couples held hands in the streets and romantic American movies entered Japanese popular culture. It was however, also experienced viscerally, as Japanese women entered into erotic and marital relationships with American soldiers (see also Nitta 1988; Williams 1991 on relationships between Japanese women and American servicemen). As the twentieth century progressed, love matches became *de rigueur*. Relationship styles and modes of expressing intimacy and affection that were liberatory seventy years ago are now normal, even expected. As can be seen in the data from the National Institution of Population and Social Security Research above in Figure 1, the percentage of “love matches” versus “arranged marriages” has steadily declined since the end of the war. In Japan, as described by Giddens (1992) for Western late capitalist societies, there is an expectation that the marital relationship be romantic and pure, that is, motivated by desire to be with one’s partner rather than by something as base as household economics. One woman that I interviewed, in her mid-forties, was both in the middle of looking for a partner herself, while simultaneously training to become a matchmaker. She commented to me that:

Omiai wo shite oya ni iwareru hito to atte, kekkon shite kodomo wo unde, onna no hito no shiawase datta kedomo, ima wa, sono, unn, jiko-jitsugen wo sugoku suru jidai de, unn, ano

² But not, however, unheard of in rural Japan, with its varying marriage practices that were never fully assimilated to pre-war state norms, including a great deal of premarital promiscuity and divorce (Smith and Wiswell 1982).

kodomo wo umu dake ga, unn, jinsei nan ja nai tte yū kangae ga, kangae ga tatome³ ni hirogatta tte yū koto desu yo ne?

Having an omiai [introductory meeting], meeting who your parents told you to, getting married, having children, that was happiness for women, but now, that, umm, in an age where [people] self-actualize so much, umm, uh just having children, the thinking is, that isn't a life, that thinking has really spread, hasn't it?

Higashi-san's words indicate both that self-actualization is simply more important than fulfilling a set life course, and also that, at present, there seems to be a certain amount of reflection on whether these new possibilities for heterosexual relationships have actually served younger Japanese men and women well. Japan was once a society where marriage was practically universal (Cornell 1984), but this is no longer so. Marriage rates have fallen (Raymo 1998), and Japan's birth rate, at 1.37 children per woman, is incredibly low (Suzuki 2006). Women now make up over forty percent of the Japanese labor force; although this is comparatively low from an international perspective, women's labor force participation is also increasing while men's decreases; the percentages are equalizing. Moreover, there are now more dual-income than single-income households among Japanese married couples (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2009; 2010). These changes carry profound implications for the meaning of adulthood and the definition of gender roles in Japan. It is no longer possible for adulthood to be conflated with marriage and its attendant new responsibilities; neither can manhood nor womanhood be defined by gendered divisions of labor inside and outside the household (Ueno 1987).

In 1990, feminist sociologist Chizuko Ueno described modern Japan as "love sick," writing that the cultural prominence of romantic love (*ren'ai*), and widespread desire for it, are symptoms of late twentieth-century individualism. Love is a luxury good for men and women who have become

³ Consultation with Japanese friends and professional translators suggests that this may be a slip of the tongue.

both domestically and economically self-sufficient, but, she argues, it is only when we have become disconnected from other forms of connectedness that love and sex begin to seem worthwhile in their own right. Romance is therefore the enemy of community (*kyōdōtai*) and family (*kazoku*) (Ueno 1990). Alexy (2011), much more recently, documents similar tensions between romance and individuality on the one hand, and “traditional,” interdependent family relationships in her work on divorce in contemporary Japan. Here, too, discourses of love are changing social practices; Alexy claims that marriages built on older, family-centered models seen as more likely to fall apart than those built on romance. Japanese ideals of relationships have not fully adjusted to the practical changes in how men and women negotiate work, intimate relationships, and family responsibilities (a topic well treated in White 2002). There is a cultural fear that something important from the past has been lost, as changes in both marriage and labor practices run side by side with demographic fears about the viability of *a* future, *any* future, for Japan.

As Nemoto (2008) notes, non-marriage in Japan does not mean what it does in other industrialized countries facing similar population shifts, of which the United States is one. Rates of cohabitation are low in Japan—never higher than 2.5% (Nishioka et al. 2012). Compare this to the US, where the cohabitation rate is double that of Japan, or northern European countries such as Denmark, Finland, and France, where the cohabitation rate is over 10% (OECD 2010). New relationship styles are not filling the gap between “married” and “unmarried” in Japan, as they have elsewhere. “Single” is thus not merely a demographic category for the unmarried, but an actual lifestyle fact, as demonstrated by the emerging new class of *ohitorisama*, “singletons,” who purposefully live alone. Perhaps in part because of the powerful stigma against extra-marital childbearing (Hertog 2009), marriage is still powerfully linked to biological reproduction.

Consequently, rather than have a child outside of wedlock, an unexpected pregnancy will spur otherwise unmotivated couples to matrimony, with estimates that bridal pregnancy accounts for at least one-third of newly married couples (Raymo and Iwasawa 2008)— although what were once called “oops” marriages⁴ have recently been reframed as “child-blessed” marriages⁵. As a result, changes in birth rate are more strongly linked to changes in marriage rates in a way that they are not in, for example, Western and Northern Europe, where marriage and childbearing have become somewhat decoupled (Suzuki 2006).

In this way, questions of love, marriage, family, work, gender roles, and reproductive possibilities are tangled together in the Japanese context, and social concern about any one rebounds on to all of the others. The low birth rate has long been a subject of national concern in Japan, but the decline in marriage became a much more important subject of national popular debate with the start of the 2008 “marriage hunting” boom—more on this in chapter two—that, among other things, renewed the interest of many young Japanese, especially women, in “arranged” marriages, and attempted to normalize the idea that marriage is something that must be actively sought and entered into, rather than something that just happens when you meet the right person in the right circumstance. The idea is popular because, although most young Japanese men and women want and expect to marry someday, many no longer know how to meet someone, and/or how to turn

⁴ Marriages due to bridal pregnancy are frequently called *dekichatta-kon*. *Dekichatta* is an informal contracted combination of *dekiru*, (“to be able to,” or “to accomplish”) and the resultative auxiliary verb *shimau*, which often carries overtones of misfortune, regret, or accident, along with the aspectual meaning, particularly when contracted. *Kon* is a reading of the Chinese character 婚, used in many combinations relating to marriage. It is often rendered into English as “shotgun wedding,” but I feel this translation misses the point.

⁵ My thanks to an anonymous reviewer at the *Journal of Language and Sexuality* for bringing the term *sazukari-kon* (“child-blessed” marriage) to my attention. *Omedeta-kon* (more simply, “blessed marriage”) is another term that has cropped up recently to describe marriages that happen as a result of bridal pregnancy.

more casual dating into a long-term, marital relationship, as demonstrated by Kamano's (2004) focus-group research with single men and women. When Japanese friends and acquaintances ask me about my research, there is often a subtle undertone to it: "tell me more."

The present work will, to some extent, answer that desire for more information, insofar as it lays out a basic overview of how Japan's modern matchmakers do business, and situates it within current Japanese cultural concerns about marriage, fertility, and changing structures of family. More than that, I aim to describe local ideologies underlying modern matchmaking—models of how language, gender, adulthood, family, and good society should and do operate. While there has been a substantial amount of work on language ideologies from a variety of perspectives (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994; Kroskrity 2000), I follow Irvine and Gal in describing ideology as "the ideas with which participants and observers frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them" (2000: 35). I also, along with Irvine, note that these ideologies "incorporate evaluations and are weighted by the speakers' social position and interest" (2001: 24). Matchmakers have a clear idea what talk and computer-mediated communication mean within matchmaking as well as ideas about best communication practices, ideas that are informed by their social and economic investment in marrying off their clients, and their own experiences as analysts in their own right of the behaviors that are most conducive to successful client outcomes.

It is almost impossible to talk about specifically heterosexual marriage, and matching men and women together, without talking in detail about the concurrent cultural construction of Japanese masculinities and femininities—constructions that are, by the performative nature of gender itself, always something of a work in progress. Thus, theoretically, the present work is also

about gender in contemporary Japan, and aims to discover how gender is constructed along the path that clients travel towards marriage, both in interactions between clients and in dialogue with matchmakers. I ask, to some extent, how it is that gender is actually performed in contemporary Japan, but also, and perhaps more centrally to the present study, how matchmakers imagine it is *supposed* to be performed, and how they guide their clients along that path to gender and marriage *both*. I argue that matchmakers prioritize the display of attractive personal qualities, especially politeness and consideration, over stereotypically gendered behavior, and that this tends to push men's and women's gender performances closer together. In describing this process, I hope to paint a picture of gender performances as imbricated in multiparty dialogues that rely on both creative performance and listener uptake, spontaneity and institutional constraint. Gender performances exist within specific contexts that contribute to their ultimate realization, and different contexts may throw gender differences into relief, or blur the edges between them in unexpected ways. Matchmakers' basic understandings of what marriage is about—organizing household labor along gendered divisions, and facilitating childbearing and rearing—are gendered at a very fundamental level. But the linguistic requirements of politeness, and the idea that the qualities one looks for in a spouse are much the same regardless of gender work against sharp gendered divisions at the level of ideologies of interaction.

It is precisely from this perspective on gender construction through interaction that, as a linguistic anthropologist, I first began to construct the study whose results are presented here. However, I initially assumed that matchmakers would encourage a high level of gender dichotomy due to discourses of separate men's and women's languages in Japanese, which is a topic I take up below. In the following section, I address this literature on gender dichotomy in Japanese, situating

it within larger movements in the study of language, gender, and sexuality, in order to address the theoretical concerns that initially led me to formulate my present study. From there, I move on to a discussion of literature on love, kinship, and other social structures, all of which have become linked by concerns with performance and performativity.

A Brief Primer on Language and Gender in Japan

Even beginning students of the language have probably heard that Japanese has different “languages” for women and men. “Languages” is an exaggeration, but it is also true that men’s and women’s speech is routinely portrayed with some distinctive formal differences both in Japanese media (Inoue 2002; Shibamoto Smith 2004) and also in textbooks aimed at second-language learners (Kawasaki and McDougall 2003). Linguistic differences between men and women in Japan, as prescribed and portrayed in these works, are primarily located in two kinds of linguistic structures. One of these is personal pronouns, specifically first- and second-person pronouns. Many European languages have a binary system of second person pronouns, with one second-person pronoun used to be “polite” or “formal,” while the other is for more informal use, with more intimate interlocutors. Unlike these “T/V” systems of second-person pronouns (Brown and Gilman 1960), standard Japanese has a more finely graded selection of second-person pronouns, often ranked not only on a scale of more or less polite but also, correspondingly, more or less masculine or feminine. Gender thus—in theory—lines up nicely with politeness; women are supposed to be self-deprecatory and polite, while men may be self-assertive and have more latitude to be rude. A similar system of first-person pronouns also exists that parallels the distinctions in the second-person. I have summarized these relationships in Figure 2 below, which lists only the most common first- and second-person pronouns.

pronouns index hyper-specific gender presentations, such as *washi*, whose literary use is specifically for older, avuncular male characters. (This is the pronoun used by the elderly, wise, and kindly Albus Dumbledore in the Japanese translation of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* [Rowling 2003]). As Hendry (1992), Sunaoshi (2004) and Inoue (2006) point out, choice of pronouns may also index dialectal, non-standard Japanese, and a rural identity, for not all varieties even *have* the elaborated pronoun system of the Tokyo-based standard that I describe above.

Second-person pronouns present even more of a problem for analysis within a rubric that lines up masculinity and femininity with absence or presence of politeness, for they are, in everyday Japanese, only very rarely used. The more usual pattern is to either use the person's name, or to elide the addressee entirely, letting it be understood from context. Second-person pronouns are a mark of either great intimacy (*anata* is often translated along the lines of "my dear"), or of the generic, nameless second person of advertising. I am not actually certain whether, during five years in Japan, I ever had a reason to use a second-person pronoun. An American friend of mine, Hannah, once told me that she experimented with using the second-person pronoun *kimi* as a term of endearment with a Japanese boyfriend; he responded poorly, claiming that it made him feel lonely, and requested that she use his name instead.

It has been argued that Japanese pronouns can be viewed as indexing first, stance, and second, gender, by means of an ideological linkage between what kinds of speakers ought to be taking what kinds of stances. Thus, forms indexing more self-effacing stances come to indirectly index femininity via an extralinguistic association between femininity and self-effacing behavior (Ochs 1992). Yet, as we can see, this does not account for many forms of first-person reference. A better way to approach them might be from the perspective of the non-standard, "dialectal" pronoun mentioned above.

Pronouns, then, mark first and foremost, the speaker; secondly, as Errington (1998) suggests of Japanese, they index the speaker's social position, insofar as he or she is able to select a pronoun from the range available in different varieties of Japanese and deploy it in a way appropriate to the situation. Gender comes into this somewhat secondarily, insofar as women are generally expected to speak more politely and refinedly than men, and thus to have greater control over honorific registers. Men, however, are perfectly capable of using "feminine" forms like *watashi* when the situation calls for greater formality, and they do not sound "feminine." Likewise, women's pronoun choices may extend into "masculine" choices in casual situations. We can illustrate this relationship through Silverstein's (2003) concept of the indexical order whereby indices come to acquire indexical meanings at different levels. The level at which pronouns index the speaker as a role in talk is the first order; at a second order of indexicality, they index the speaker's character: his or her education, sensibility, and refinement. It is at the third order of indexicality that patterns of what kinds of speakers tend to make which choices in different situations emerge and give particular pronouns the property of indexing gender.

Language, Gender, Desire, Family

The complexities of pronominal usage detailed in the previous section may indicate some of the difficulties in analyzing relationships between form, indexical meaning, and pragmatic effect in Japanese. At its most basic, my project grew out of an initial desire to further explore these linguistic differences and their consequences for gender performance in Japan—a desire shared by many others, for there is a substantial and particular literature on language and gender in Japan, most of which focuses on what is often referred to as *joseigo*, or in English, "Japanese Women's Language." However, in order to more fully understand the literature on Japanese Women's Language, we must

take a step back to address the study of language and gender, sex, and sexuality as a broader field. Queen (2013) documents research on language and gender going back to the 1920s, and notes that quantitative sociolinguistics in the late 1950s and 1960s typically incorporated gender as a variable. However, questions of language and gender were not a significant concern for linguists until Robin Lakoff first published *Language and Women's Place* (1973). What Lakoff and earlier works, such as those of Edward Sapir (1949), have in common are first, a concern with linguistic differentiation along lines of what might be most appropriately called sex, rather than gender, and second, the notion that sex was encoded *grammatically* in language. For example, forms could point to the sex of the speaker or listener in the same way that honorifics encode the hierarchical relationships between speakers and listeners or “mother-in-law” language clearly demarcates the speaker’s taboo relationship to the listener (Dixon 1971). Lakoff and Sapir both presumed languages required male speakers to use different forms than female speakers, by the very nature of their structure.

Lakoff’s work forms the explicit jumping-off point (S. Ide 2004) for research into language and sex/gender in Japan. Sachiko Ide, like Lakoff before her, although pioneering, viewed differences in men and women’s speech as basically grammatical and strictly sex-linked. The questions she asks in her work—for example, “How and Why Do Women Speak More Politely in Japanese?” (1990)—take for granted that Japanese men reliably speak differently than Japanese women and that this difference is one of politeness or perhaps deference to others, as we saw in the above discussion of personal pronouns and sentence-final particles. Janet Shibamoto (1985) introduced more flexibility into the analysis of language and sex in Japanese by using Labovian sociolinguistic techniques (Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog 1968) to analyze the features of Japanese Women's Language. Since Labovian sociolinguistics treats grammatical and phonetic forms as variables whose frequency can be

analyzed, understanding Japanese Women's language in this way necessarily opens the door to the idea that women may not, in fact, speak "women's language" at all times. Moreover, it also prompts us to ask if there is any particular *reason* why women might at times eschew "their" language. Inoue (2003) notes the discipline and vigilance of educators and overhearers required to construct and maintain these represented and idealized differences in women's actual speech, which stands in sharp contrast to the idea that these differences exist in some innate and unconstructed way. In effect, introducing the concept of variability into the question of Japanese Women's Language moved the discussion into the territory of language and gender, rather than sex, and allowed scholars to talk about the simultaneous social construction of gender with and through "women's language."

Meanwhile, a confluence of trends in sociology (Goffman 1959), linguistics (Austin 1975), anthropology (Newton 1979) and later, post-structuralist philosophy (Butler 1990), began to see individual behavior as not only action *in* the world but as also constitutive *of* it—performative being the term of art. Personalities, identities, and social roles are thus not pre-given to members of any society, but actively created and recreated by individuals as they repeatedly perform stylized, recognizable behaviors associated with recognizable social types: "man," "woman," "professional," "good person," and so on. Change and resistance to extant social roles are equally possible within this framework through variations and unexpected combinations of behavior; Goffman cites the figure of the con man, whose convincing portrayal of an identity that doesn't match his "real" background threatens to expose the idea of "authenticity" as yet another con (1959: 18–19). Butler and Newton both cite the drag queen in a similar role, demonstrating that "femininity" is not inherently tied to a female body, but is rather a set of behaviors that can be performed by anyone, including but not limited to "real" women.

This performative approach allowed researchers, by studying individual actions, to address how, when, and what strategic affects and effects, what kind of “self-presentations,” could be produced by the use (or disuse) of the features associated with any particular linguistic style, or a mismatch between the performer and the anticipated performance. In other words, these researches sought to address how gender is articulated (Hall and Bucholtz 1995), or how non-normative sexualities are enacted (Livia and Hall 1997). Thus Hall (1995) could study how phone sex operators combine different speech styles in order to create a repertoire of fantasy characters who seem to belong to eroticized groups (women of color, for example) while also possessing “sexy” personal qualities that match the callers’ desires. Kulick (1993) describes how women in Papua New Guinea routinely perform and reinscribe themselves as women through the performance of angry rants called *kros* that highlight the irrational, emotional sensibility associated with femininity in Taiap culture, while simultaneously contesting negative perceptions of womanhood. In the case of language and gender in Japan, this agent-centered performative approach made it possible to study “naughty” girls who resist the politesse of Japanese Women’s Language (Okamoto 1995; L. Miller 2004), or LGBT communities where both queer men and women subvert and reappropriate “women’s” language and the gendered expectations that go along with it (Abe 2004; Abe 2010; Lunsing and Maree 2004).

On the flip side, this kind of performance-based approach also allows us to ask what women might achieve through speaking more or less as they are expected to. Shigeko Okamoto (1996), in comparing the speech of middle-aged women with that of young college students, notes that young women may reject Japanese Women’s Language in order to express a wider range of emotional stances; they may likewise be rejecting the expectations of Japanese femininity that come along with

the codified style of “Japanese Women’s Language.” Similarly, older women may speak more as they are “expected” to, but there may be different but no less desirable pragmatic payoffs for them in doing so. Japanese Women’s Language connotes prestige and urban sophistication, and allows these women to maintain a certain degree of social distance, stances that a more intimate and personally expressive style would not be conducive to.

In this way, studies of Japanese Women's Language have followed the more general path taken by studies of language and gender that treat gendered language styles as a crystallization of the typical attitudes men and women are expected to take in interaction (O'Barr and Atkins 1980; Ochs 1992). Forms that index (Peirce 1955), or point to, particular relational or affective *stances* (like friendliness, distance, concern, agreement, deference), which are momentary and specific to the immediate context of interactions, can eventually, over repeated patterns of interactions, in dialogue with ideologies about the kind of stances that are *typical* of men and women, ultimately become a performative template that individuals may creatively reiterate in the construction of their own identities. Thus, if “deference” or “politeness” is supposed to be feminine, this is only because “deferential” is a stance that women are routinely expected to take; it does not mean that others cannot be deferential at appropriate times and places.

A similar approach has been taken by other scholars working more broadly on questions of speech style in describing how a particular register or variety (for example, honorific speech or a regional dialect) becomes associated with the personality characteristics and expected interactional stances of an idealized, paradigmatic speaker of that style (Agha 1998). This association is made through “voicing” processes in literary representation or reported speech (Bakhtin 1981; Voloshinov 1986), where the speaker switches to a style that matches the “voice” of the imagined speaker being

quoted. Queen (1997) shows how lesbian comic strips, by imagining how lesbians speak in strip dialogue, create a stereotype of lesbian language that real lesbians can then draw on, while Agha (2005) describes how use of different linguistic registers is associated with speaking in the “voice” of the paradigmatic user of that register. He gives the example of little boys pretending to be sports announcers, noting that they are not fundamentally different from sports announcers speaking in the sports announcer style when actually at work: both are stepping into a particular social role. Studies such as these make it possible to denaturalize the connections between particular linguistic styles, and the social groups with which these styles have become historically associated—to show that indexicality, the process by which a linguistic form points to some presumed quality of a person (social group membership, personality characters, social role), is not a natural process. Rather, it is an ideological one, concerned largely with negotiating boundaries between social groups in interaction by defining who speaks what way (Irvine and Gal 2000).

In the case of Japanese language and gender studies, Miyako Inoue (2006) has elegantly shown how modern Japanese language forms that had become indexically connected with polite, middle-class, educated femininity by the end of the twentieth century took on their indexical properties through particular literary processes of attempting to represent “natural” women’s (usually girls’) speech. Through repeated literary depiction, this style crystallized over the course of a century, becoming first the way writers thought women spoke, then the way women represented themselves as speaking, and subsequently, the way women *should* speak. Inoue’s account stands in sharp contrast to discourses, both scholarly and popular, that had naturalized, even biologized, Japanese Women’s Language (see Horii 1993 for an example of this kind of thinking), or sought to connect Japanese

Women's Language as it exists today with a more or less unbroken tradition of distinctive women's speech (R. Ide and Terada 1998).

This deconstruction of women's language has also prompted some students of language and gender in Japanese to ask, "What about men's language?" For if Japanese Women's Language has been constructed as a distinct style of speech, against what standard, compared to whose speech, is it distinguished? It is precisely this question that underlies SturtzSreetharan's work on *danseigo*, "Men's Language" (2001; 2004a; 2004b; 2006), although apart from her research, men's language has merited rather little study. SturtzSreetharan, like Okamoto, emphasizes that men across Japan, much like women, control a variety of different language styles, from polite to vulgar, and combine these in creative performances that emphasize a number of different affective stances. The performances of the men whose speech she examines evince self-constructions that are masculine, but that are also imbricated in work-related hierarchies that can be just as demanding of politeness as women's (imagined) speech.

In light of the studies on language and gender discussed above—particularly given the lack of data available on men's speech styles—I aimed to construct a study that would simultaneously examine how men and women perform gender in early twenty-first century Japan, with an eye towards the linguistic aspects of these performances. In particular, I wanted to capture how masculinities and femininities are dialogically constructed (Tedlock and Mannheim 1995), which is something that SturtzSreetharan's analysis points at. This dialogue is language-ideological, insofar as it may rely on set styles of speech that are ideologically linked with particular imagined speakers. However it is also performative, immediate, and practical, as men and women negotiate identities and relationships with each other in common conversational endeavors. Although it has been

correctly pointed out that gender is relevant in many contexts apart from those which obviously highlight it (McElhinny 2003a), when constructing a study that would specifically examine the dialogic construction of multiple genders, it seemed useful to look for a situation that did foreground it, and consequently I decided to study how men and women form heterosexual partnerships. As described more in depth in chapter two, methodological concerns about how precisely such processes might become visible to an anthropologist ultimately led to my focus on matchmaking and the project of finding a marriage partner, creating both a new personal relationship and a new kin relationship. Ultimately, however, what I found in many ways parallels McElhinny's (1995, 2003a, 2003b) findings. In her work on male and female police officers, she found that ideas about gender, and who could be a police officer, inflected the creation of different ideologies of policing, with a "crime control" ideology reflecting a more forceful, masculine view of the profession, and a more bureaucratic style reflecting the entry of women into police forces. At the level of the individual, however, ideas about what the profession means to different police officers are more important than gender in determining what individual self-constructions look like. Likewise, ideas about gender are at the root of what matchmakers believe marriage to be about, but ideas about situationally appropriate polite behavior, which are the same for everyone, exert far more influence on how matchmakers counsel their clients.

The matchmaking process entails precisely the kind of dialogical and performative construction of gender described above. Throughout it, matchmakers coach clients through meetings with potential marriage partners, and in so doing, illuminate for their clients (and the watching anthropologist) what behavior—often, but not always, linguistic—indexes desirable personality traits in a spouse, and what behavior might (perhaps unwittingly) index some less

desirable traits. We witness, therefore, not only the construction of masculinity and femininity in tandem, but even more generally, good and bad *people*. In the course of my research, the issue of politeness showed up over and over. The second order of indexicality, in which individuals show their refinement and their sensitivity to the situation through linguistic choices, at both the level of form and the level of discourse, is more important than the third order of indexicality, in which particular sets of choices become codified as a gendered register.

One consequence of the performative turn in language and gender studies has been its focus on the performer. That performers should take center stage (pun intended) in our analyses is of course understandable, but as I discuss further in chapter six, listeners' interpretations of performances, and various director figures who guide performances, also play important roles in the process of the social constitution of persons and their placement within social geographies of identity. In this respect, my work has been strongly influenced by that of Kiesling (2001), who uses stance to show how college fraternity members locate themselves within a hierarchy of masculinities. While he focuses on a single performer, he also attends to the ways that the setting and the audience of interlocutors, however, constrain what stances that performer can take. The audience is not separate from that performer's self-construction, but co-constructs identities along with the speaker, and at times challenging him. Moreover, we also see the main speaker putting his interlocutors into subordinate positions that they might not have chosen for themselves. Here, performance is clearly not a solo event. Building on this, my study treats matchmakers in a sense as director figures. While they are rarely audience members or co-performers, their interpretations of clients' interactional skills affect how they will counsel them, and their beliefs about how clients can display themselves

attractively to other clients has regimenting effects on what kinds of performances have value within the matchmaking world.

The focus on specifically *marital* relationships brings my project into intersection with a number of other significant bodies of work within anthropology. One might reasonably argue that the attempt to describe the relationship of marriage to social organization more generally—who may marry whom, and what social units are formed thereby—forms the very foundation of anthropology as a discipline (Morgan 1871; Freud 1918; Lévi-Strauss 1969). It is also arguable that much of this foundational literature is not useful or generalizable to societies in which if, who, and when to marry are questions primarily left up to individuals. Again, as noted by Ueno (1990) above, individualism leads to romantic love and sexual experimentation in place of other, more structural bonds. Since the 1990s, literature addressing marriage as primarily a social-structural affair has been challenged by the anthropology of feeling, which aims to document the phenomenological experience, question the universality, and address the dis/organizing social structural impacts of love and desire on society (Jankowiak 1995; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006). Love can be a form of resistance to oppressive social structures, as described by Abu-Lughod (1990) in her descriptions of Bedouin love poems and Ahearn (2002), in her depiction of newly literate Nepalese love-letter writers who resist the social monitoring of mating. Or, as Collier (1997) tells us of Andalusian villagers, “desire” can function more subtly as a way of negotiating modern, late capitalist individualism, and, springing precisely from that individualism, a sense of self that also desires ties to a community and its traditions. Constable (2003) describes international marriages between American men and East Asian women, facilitated by partner introduction services and online communication, which open up a new range of partner choices, while also potentially reifying stereotypes of “Western men” and “Asian women.”

Love and technology alike provide liberatory possibilities for both personal satisfaction and freedom from social-structural constraints, even though the choice of one's beloved is ultimately *not* as free of political economic questions as many loving couples might want to believe.

My project hovers between these two conceptions of intimate, domestic relationships. As we shall see, many matchmakers operate with a fairly “old-fashioned” view of marriage and its meaning, a view based on domestic economies, relations among households, and reproduction. Like Yasuda-sensei at the beginning of this chapter, these matchmakers emphasize the difficulty of making a go of life alone, particularly as one ages. Yamada Yumiko, in one of her books, includes a checklist of everything you would need to have arranged economically, socially, and emotionally in order to live comfortably into retirement and old age on your own (2009: 32). The length and detail of her list emphasizes the difficulty of the task. Such matchmakers understand people as interdependent social creatures⁶, who had best do their part to help with the grand weaving of the fabric of society. The profiles that matchmakers, in concert with their clients, create typically include details about family background, highlighting the fact that marriage-hunting men and women are not only choosing a partner, but a family to marry into, in classic structuralist style. When matchmaker friends Kawakami-sensei and Takamiya-sensei were entering me into their database, I filled out a form which requested information on all my family members, including name, year of birth, whether living or dead, their educational levels, fields of employment, and place of residence.

With this in mind, it should come as no surprise that individuals with particularly difficult family circumstances⁷ face notable difficulties in their search for a partner. That reproductive ability

⁶ See Doi (1981) for the thesis that interdependence (*amae*) lies at the heart of Japanese society.

⁷ This may include individuals of both sexes with children from a previous relationship; eldest sons living with and caring for aging parents; or women whose family hopes to adopt her husband as their official heir, to give a few examples from interviews and matchmaking workshops.

and household sustainability are concerns for most participants in matchmaking can also be deduced through looking at who has difficulty finding a match. Men of any age can often find a partner through a matchmaker, if they do not lack material resources. If they *do* lack material resources, they may not be able to sign up with a matchmaker in the first place, whether due to the internal policies of the companies that organize marriage-hunting on a large scale, or the exercise of a concerned matchmaker's individual judgment. It is the policy of the Japan Matchmaker Association (Nihon Nakōdo Kyōkai) that only men who are regular company employees (as opposed to temporary or contract employees) can sign up with a member matchmaker, although entrepreneurs are also allowed. Concerns about fertility may significantly damage the ability of women over 35 to find a partner without making substantial compromises to their ideas about what kind of man might be a "suitable" match; this is especially pressing as it is often women in their 30s and 40s, in a hurry to marry, who use these services. As discussed in chapter five, women in their late 30s and older are often encouraged to seek significantly older partners, who are presumed not have the same desire to start a family as younger men. The criteria that men and women more or less explicitly use to search for or rule out potential partners—and that matchmakers use to guide their search—have a decidedly anthropological bent to them.

On the other hand "arranged" marriage and those who trade in it must compete for business in a marketplace of ideas where, as described above, "love" has already won the majority share. Love is far from a new idea in Japan, nor is the idea of a love match novel. The *Tale of Genji*, well over a thousand years old, is in large part the story of one man's absurd and improbable love match⁸; it is taught to every schoolchild. In early modern Japan, outside of the samurai class, most young

⁸ That said, Genji's love match with Lady Murasaki is neither his first nor his last romance; as a Heian-era nobleman, neither the character nor the author imagines he would have had any inclinations or social incentives towards monogamy.

Japanese had substantial freedom to experiment sexually and choose their own partners, practices that persisted in rural Japan even after official ideologies began to promote family authority, virginity before marriage and monogamy afterwards (Smith and Wiswell 1982). The idea that the traditional way to marry in Japan is through a matchmaker was always-already an “invention” (Hobsbawm 1983; Vlastos 1998) of the modernizing, Westernizing Meiji period⁹, during which “brokered” marriage was popularized (Sakai 2009). The invented tradition of brokered or arranged marriage must now be reinvented in order to seem relevant to a society that now embraces—however awkwardly—the idea that marriage is ultimately a free association between individuals.

In the modern version of matchmaking that I describe in this ethnography, the matchmaker is not a marital dictator. Instead, she serves as a medium for meeting potential new partners safely, and thus as a guide on the path to one’s *unmei no hito*, the person for whom one is destined¹⁰. The matchmaker is there to help clients meet new people and, in subsequent steps, to help the client actively steer budding relationships towards success (*id est*, engagement and marriage). Matchmakers believe that anyone can get married, just as they had done in the past, if only they are willing to follow their matchmaker’s advice about self-presentation, communication, and the best ways to cultivate mutual feeling and express emotions. I here use the word “feeling” instead of “love” for two specific reasons. One of those is simply that the word *kimochi*, usually translated “feeling,” was the most common word used by matchmakers to describe what couples should aim to develop as they

⁹ The Meiji period, lasting from 1868-1912, began about ten years after Japan began trading extensively with the US and Western Europe, with an insurrection against the Shogunate that had ruled for some 200 years previously. Dismantling the Shogunate meant dismantling its laws and feudal system of social organization, a process effected in large part through rapid Westernization and modernization made possible through new trading opportunities.

¹⁰ Although I have initially described “the matchmaker” as female, my best guess is that about one third of matchmakers are men. Throughout this work, I have alternated male and female pronouns where singular phrasing seemed most appropriate.

date and decide whether to marry. It embraces emotions as deep as love, I think, but need not necessarily denote more than sufficient affection to marry—however much or little that may be. This brings me to the second reason, which is that matchmakers disagree about whether love and marriage have anything to do with each other at all. A certain degree of mutual “feeling” is indispensable, and must be cultivated. Love (*ren'ai, aijō*), however, is not.

The intriguing thing about the matchmakers' discourse is that within it, feelings become deliberate practices (Bourdieu 1977; Weber 2002) instead of internal experiences. Alternately, feelings too become performances (as discussed above), rather than static mental states. Despite matchmakers' ambivalence about love, they also frequently claim that couples who marry through *omiai* seem as in love with each other as any other couple at their weddings. According to the decidedly unromantic Nakao-sensei,

Yoku kaiin ga, “Sensei, ja, doko de kekkon kimeru n desu ka?” tte. Iu no ne? “Sore wa ne,” tte. “Issho ni ite ne, iya de nakattara okkē desu. Suki ni naranakute ī n desu yo” tte. “Kekkon shite ne? Kara ne? Yappari issho ni iru koto de, kizuna toka jō toka ga dete kuru kara, sono ne? Daisuki de kekkon nante konna tokoro wa nai wa,” tte.

Clients often ask, “Teacher, um, how do you decide on marriage?” They say that, right? “You know,” I say. “It’s OK if it’s not awful when you’re together.” I tell them, “It’s OK if you don’t fall in love. Once you’re married? You know? After all just being together brings forth bonds, feeling. So that, you know? There’s no place for anything like love in marriage.”

And yet, when it comes down to it:

Kekkon ni mukete iroiro no junbi wo shidasu to, yappari nakayoku natteru shi, yappa kekkon shiki ni wa totemo nanka hontō ni ren'ai shita no ka na to omou yō na kappuru ni natte ikimasu yo ne.

As they turn towards marriage and start different kinds of preparation, of course they grow close, and of course they’re going to become at the wedding like, the kind of couple that makes you think “They really fell in love, didn’t they?”

The practice of being a couple, for Nakao-sensei, is what creates the emotional content necessary for marriage, rather than the other way around. Similarly, Miyamoto-sensei, who I interviewed for my preliminary research, commented that “Purosesu no naka ni ren’ai wa arimasu” [Love is within the process]. In this respect, my research touches not only on the anthropology of emotion, but also recent work in linguistic anthropology on the instantiation of “desire” or “love” through language use (Kulick 2000; Cameron and Kulick 2003). In these accounts, desire is not something that simply happens but rather something that is created performatively, citationally, through the use of familiar tropes. Kulick (2003) describes the word “no” functioning in much the same way, with potentially incendiary consequences across different contexts, with different participants, wherein it might be uttered. This is also true for matchmakers; as we shall see, the “same” advice does not always produce the same behavior across different client subject positions, producing subtle gendered effects even though, on the whole, matchmakers do not differentiate the qualities of ideal spouses by gender¹¹. The sameness of the advice is also interesting due to the fact that some matchmakers seemed to suggest to me that similarity in and of itself is a tool for creating desire; one appeals to the opposite sex by learning to interact on their terms.

Desire is not only created interactionally, but it is also sustained interactionally. Here I draw on more recent, practice- and performance-oriented work on kinship (Carsten 1997; van Vleet 2008). In these accounts, kinship is not something that is automatically conferred by blood relationships or ritual joinings, but rather something that is created through practice and daily routine. In Carsten’s case what is shared is food and thus bodily substance; in van Vleet’s, it is shared narratives that display and construct relationships. In mine, it is time and talk, repeated meetings

¹¹ I am indebted to Alaina Lemon and Robin Queen for their careful attention to my data on this point.

and solicitations, that build up a romantic relationship. One difference between my work and the kinship studies referenced above is the focus on *new* relationships, and the process of introducing strangers who will eventually decide to become kin. Nonetheless, this decision, when made, is the outcome of clients' affective practices, guided by matchmakers' views of gender, personhood, and the meaning of marriage. As I hope to show throughout the present work, matchmakers teach clients to use the semiotic resources at their disposal—clothing, etiquette, and conversation—to both present themselves as desirable partners, and also to create the desire to meet again—perhaps even to marry—in the men and women they meet through *omiai*. In so doing, successful clients are not only instantiating romantic desires and feelings in their partners, but also acting on and realizing their own desires for the kind of lifestyle that they believe marriage has to offer them. According to the Japanese National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, one of the main reasons that Japanese singles want to marry is to have their own children and family (NIPSSR 2011a)¹². Enacting *romantic* desire, in the analysis I propose here, therefore becomes inextricably bound up in the simultaneous construction of the self and the other as desirable partners and people, and as the keys to a desirable life, through the multiparty interaction of clients and their matchmakers, and through the different scenes of *omiai*, dating, and counseling between matchmaker and client.

Chapter Overview

In this first chapter, I have attempted to both describe the cultural context surrounding matchmaking in modern Japan, and also to elucidate the theoretical questions that led to the development of my project. I have also attempted to describe the ways my project intersects with, builds on, and potentially contributes to different bodies of anthropological research. Following on

¹² See also D. Miller (1998) on the semiotics of shopping and its role in imagining and enacting desires for the future.

from these theoretical concerns, in chapter two I turn to the practical, on-the-ground issues that influenced my research. Particular attention is given to the inherent difficulties of studying behavior in romantic contexts and the resultant focus of my work on matchmakers, rather than their clients. I lay out the specific research questions that initially structured my study, and also address the methods I used to gather the information I would need to answer them, to greater and lesser degrees of success. I also discuss how I was perceived by the matchmakers that I studied, and how I gained access to them. Moreover, I address how matchmakers' understandings of myself and my project affected the kinds of questions that I was able to ask, and the kinds of events that I was able to attend. The goal here is to lay out the data that underlie my analysis, and to detail how and under what circumstances it was gathered.

Having established the sources of my data, in chapters three, four, and five, I present ethnographic descriptions of contemporary Japanese matchmakers and their attitudes towards their clients. Chapter three provides a largely descriptive overview of what matchmakers do. Matchmakers do not actually make matches, in the sense of deciding who is an appropriate partner for whom. Rather, by creating an authoritative image and building trusting relationships with their clients and other matchmakers, they provide a means for clients to meet one another, and facilitate communication between them. More concretely, they do this by providing access to a database of single, available people and coaching clients in the skills they need to meet new people, present themselves well, and communicate their feelings if and as they develop. In the process of this counseling, they follow ideologies of gender and a semiotics of personality that they develop both through experience counseling clients and in dialogue with other matchmakers in professional and social encounters.

Chapters four and five delve into the specifics of the problems that clients face on their way to marriage, and the coaching that matchmakers give them. I have separated out the advice that matchmakers give to women and to men, because they perceive the two groups to have somewhat different problems, due to the different kinds of socialization. As a result, men and women have different areas that they need to work on in order to better present themselves as desirable potential spouses. Chapter four discusses matchmakers' findings that many of their male clients suffer from an inability to show interest in women, to take their perspectives, and to make them feel valued and desired through attentive and mutual conversation. Matchmakers must teach men strategies for conversation as well as inculcating chivalrous behavior that demonstrates their interest in and respect for their partners. They must also learn to express their feelings verbally and explicitly, in order to create and maintain good relationships with their partners, and to move their relationships towards marriage. In other words, Japanese men must learn a stereotypically "feminine" interactional skillset in order to make a good impression on female partners.

Chapter five outlines the work that female clients must do to overcome their own internal barriers to marriage. Their main challenge is letting go of their expectations of an ideal partner in material terms; they must realistically assess their value on the marriage market, come to understand what men want, and what they have to offer. They must be willing to meet a variety of potential partners, and let themselves be surprised by the men that they meet, a task that is also asked of men, but which may present special difficulties for women, as elaborated in the chapter. They must also learn to support their male partners as they learn to state their feelings clearly—a skill that women are presumed to already possess. Chapter five also addresses the specifics of how matchmakers

determine marriage market value for both women and men, and what women may have to gain or lose if they choose to marry.

Finally, in chapter six I assess the overall picture of gender in Japan that matchmakers present. What is the current state of masculinity and femininity, and what do matchmakers depict as ideal through the advice they give? What are the larger performative conclusions about gender in early twenty-first century Japan that we can draw from matchmakers and their work? Although matchmakers tend to approach male and female clients differently, do they actually promote gender differences in behavior? One might expect a heterosexual institution such as marriage to be founded on some concept of gender complementarity. The assumption that man and wife will occupy different labor roles within the household is reflected within matchmakers' practices, particularly the insistence on men's ability to bear financial burdens. However, I argue that ultimately, matchmakers encourage a very similar concept of marriageable personhood for both men and women, and that the different strategies they take with male and female clients do not ultimately promote gender differences. Rather, the personal qualities that lead to marriage—assertiveness, emotional clarity, consideration for one's partner, and a cooperative sensibility—are much the same, irrespective of gender.

CHAPTER II: NETWORKS AND ACCESS

Perhaps more than in any other field, research methods in anthropology are contingent things. We come up with research topics and forge initial plans based on our theoretical interests and what we know about our field site going in, but as we begin our studies in earnest and simultaneously become enmeshed in the communities that welcome us, we must always revise, improvise, and adjust. We may not have access to information that we thought would be available. However, we may also make connections that we never expected, and through those relationships, have equally informative, if unanticipated, experiences. The ultimate goals of our research may change—mine certainly did. It is probably impossible not to learn things during the course of fieldwork, but it can be difficult to predict, with much accuracy, just what the lessons will be.

The problems described above are somewhat compounded by the anthropological ideal of entering a community as a “participant-observer,” where the ordinary, normal practices of a community are both the object and method of research. One hazard of thoroughly embracing a new normal is that, if you succeed, it becomes simply “normal.” As anthropologists, we make the boundary between “life” and “research” porous on purpose. This can lead to a kind of malaise in the fieldworker—it certainly did to this researcher. Approximately half the time I was plagued by the sense that I was doing absolutely nothing; the other half of the time, it seemed that absolutely everything was ultimately research, except maybe sleep. My field notes and diaries are full of accounts of interviews, meetings, and both formal and informal observations that I carried out; they

are also full of personal stories and adventures with my friends that both seemed equally informative. My friends fully expect to make at least a few appearances in my dissertation, and may be disappointed if they do not.

As difficult as it may be, at times, to draw the line between “research” and “everything else,” nonetheless my goal in this chapter is to relate my research methods as well as to situate myself in the field, in relation to my research subjects. It would be easier and cleaner to relate my research methods as an organized plan that I brought to Japan with me and subsequently carried out. However, it is more honest to treat you to a narrative. What were my original research aims? How did I narrow my focus to the project at hand? Who did I meet, and what conversations did we have? And, just as importantly, what conversations *couldn't* I have? How was my presence in Japan interpreted, and how did the community I studied understand my research goals? What new puzzles arose, and what questions couldn't I answer? The data set that I will analyze in chapters three, four, and five is ultimately the product of this trajectory through time and different community spaces during my preliminary fieldwork in 2007, the main period of research I undertook between April 2009 and March 2011, as well as follow-up research undertaken during 2012–2013.

Preliminary Research: Making Contacts, Making Plans

In chapter one, I outlined my theoretical interests in language, gender, attractiveness, desire, and relationship formation, as well as the culturally and linguistically specific factors that make Japan a particularly interesting place to study these topics. In this chapter, I address the difficulty of designing a study of how men and women actually do find each other and develop new relationships. I headed to the Kansai area¹ of Japan in the summer of 2007 to make a first attempt to answer this

¹ Kansai is a region of Japan located in the western half of its main island (Honshu). The designation “Kansai” or “Kinki” typically includes Shiga, Mie, Nara, Kyoto, Osaka, Hyōgo, and Wakayama

methodological question, with my eyes peeled wide. Too wide perhaps, as I found myself, at first, grasping at anything and everything that seemed remotely related to dating, sex, and/or marriage in Japan. However, the first things that actually provided a helpful clue were advertisements on the trains. Everywhere, I saw advertisements for companies offering complete wedding packages, as well as ads for large companies offering matchmaking services. I noted down the ads and, like any good researcher in the age of Google, headed straight to the Internet to see what more I could find out



Figure 3: 2012 ad for the marriage information service Partner Agent, found on a Kintestu Kyoto Line train.

about these companies. At first it was tremendously hard to distinguish between companies that helped engaged couples plan their weddings, and companies that helped put the couple together in the first place, just based on the ads. Both used similar imagery of happy couples in wedding garb to promote their businesses—in the case of the matchmaking companies, by making the

wedding in your future seem like a *fait accompli*. This strategy can easily be seen in this 2012

Prefectures. The main population center is the Osaka metropolitan area, which includes the city and prefecture of Osaka, extending north into the city of Kobe in Hyōgo Prefecture and eastwards to the city of Kyoto in Kyoto Prefecture, with numerous suburbs in between. “Kansai” is usually thought of in opposition to “Kantō,” the collection of prefectures in the east that includes the sprawling Tokyo Metropolitan area.

advertisement (again, found on the train) for a matchmaking company called Partner Agent. The sign promises *ichi nen konkatsu*, “one year of marriage hunting,” after which 60% of their clients have married. However, it is the image of the bride and groom, leaning in as if to kiss, that catches the eye and, in much the same way as wedding planning companies, promises you, the target single viewer, your perfect happy day and the perfect happy wedded bliss to follow from your choice to sign up with Partner Agent.

Despite the visual similarities, I did learn to distinguish the wedding planners from the many businesses calling themselves *kekkon-sōdan-sho*, which is literally “marriage advice place” but seems to be more commonly rendered in English as “marriage bureau.” I do not wish, at this point, to delve into the details of the different kinds of marriage bureaus, which are covered in chapter three. Let us leave it for now at the fact that they are many and various, local and national, more or less exclusive, more or less expensive, and at times serving drastically different clientele. What all of them have in common is that they are services that aim to introduce single men and women, with the explicitly stated end goal of marriage in mind. They may, depending on the service and the matchmaker, have a significant online component, such as a database of members that clients can search at their convenience. While the databases are online in both cases, marriage bureaus are distinguished from dating websites² primarily through the inclusion of a human component: a marriage advisory service

² I found out rather early on that most Japanese regard dating sites, or perhaps more accurately “meeting sites” (*deai-kei saito*), with extreme suspicion. *Deai* simply means “meeting” or “encounter,” and while the marriage advisory industry also promises its clients “*deai*,” the word can also have strong sexual and illicit connotations. The Kyoto Prefectural Police have a fascinating webpage warning of the dangers of dating sites. Striking cartoon illustrations of shadowy sexual predators lurk behind an innocent-looking schoolgirl who does not know what dangers await her, as the page lists criminal incidents associated with dating site use (Kyoto Prefectural Police n.d.). Given this, it is understandable that the presence of advisory bodies that mediate contact between strangers should seem desirable and reassuring to single Japanese looking to meet new people they would not otherwise encounter.

must of course provide *marriage advisors*. It is this human component that makes a marriage bureau seem like a safe and structured way to meet someone new. Someone vets all incoming clients, on the one hand. On the other, if clients have questions or insecurities, they also have someone to ask. And, as I was to learn, marriage advisors in many marriage bureaus are also present to smooth over that most difficult of dating moments: rejecting someone their client does not wish to see again (and tactfully conveying that rejection to the other party).

The structured partner introduction undertaken by these businesses held an instant methodological appeal for the kind of research I proposed to undertake. I did not think that I would be able to get the kind of data about interaction and performance that I wanted from subjective interviews with people about their dating and relationship experiences. Instead, I wanted to see the process happen. Under most circumstances, watching couples in the process of meeting and dating would be extremely awkward, if not impossible—at best intrusive, at worst ethically suspect. The involvement of a marriage bureau in the process of meeting, dating, and potentially getting married, however, incorporated third parties into the process from the very beginning in a way that seemed to offer a potential non-intrusive opening for the anthropological gaze to peek in.

Having found marriage bureaus, I continued my 2007 research by investigating different *kekkon-sōdan-sho* to see if they could, in fact, accommodate anthropological observation and participation. I contacted and visited a small number of marriage bureaus in the Kyoto area, and—with greater and lesser degrees of success—conducted preliminary interviews³. I asked the owners and managers of these marriage bureaus general questions about what services they offer their clients

³ Notable failures included the local branch office of a national partner introduction service that could not quite understand why I was there if I wasn't a client (but who were good enough to package up many helpful brochures for me), and a small marriage bureau that I contacted by phone who informed me that I could just read their website if I had any questions.

and about client success at finding marriage through *omiai*, the general term for a formal introduction to and first meeting with a potential marriage partner. Since *sōdan*—“advice” or “advising”—is at the nominal heart of the industry, I also asked a number of questions about what kinds of problems clients typically encounter, what kind of questions clients usually have, and what kinds of advice those clients receive. A few places granted me second interviews and invited me out for social occasions, after our awkward first meetings. In all cases, these were small marriage bureaus run more or less by one or two people. As we will see in chapter three, a marriage bureau need not be large in order to serve its clients well: inter-bureau connections provide a large base of potential introductions even to clients of the newest matchmakers—for “matchmaker,” or “go-between,” is how these small marriage bureau owners often style themselves, using the old word *nakōdo*.

It is worth noting that part of why I initially chose to conduct my research in the Kansai area was because I thought questions of language and gender might play out differently in Kansai, which has its own robust dialect, than they might in the Tokyo area or another region of Japan. The Tokyo area is the source of Standard Japanese, and also the location of most research on the language. Hendry (1992) notes that command over the honorific system of standard Japanese, which is tied to the way that gender is performed through language, is a regional privilege that also has implications for the gender performances of rural women and their uptake. In a similar vein, Sunaoshi (2004) writes about rural farm women who speak a dialect that lacks the elaborated pronoun system discussed in chapter one, and its consequences for their ability to use “women’s language.” Given my findings on language and gender—outlined primarily in chapters four and five—I do not actually believe that regional dialect variation actually plays a significant role in the kinds of semiotic behavior matchmakers encourage. However, throughout the course of my research I have developed

a strong sense that individual matchmakers are far more prevalent in Kansai than they are in other parts of Japan; in the Tokyo area, large corporations seem to dominate. In fact, Miyamoto-sensei, who I interviewed during my preliminary research, maintained that Kansai, more so than Kantō, had an “omiai culture,” with this culture stronger in Kyoto than the rest of Kansai. Thus a choice that I made for linguistic reasons may have been fortuitous in unforeseen ways.

Following this period of initial research, I returned to the US. I worked on improving my Japanese, which was serviceable at the time of my preliminary research, but not as fluent as one might hope. I examined the textual artifacts of marriage bureaus that I had brought back with me: my notes, the websites I had bookmarked, the pile of promotional pamphlets I had received. I read related pop-cultural literature of the type we might call “self-help,” in English, or “self-enlightenment” (*jiko-keihatsu*) in Japanese. These books had titles like *Sixty-Three Rules for Cute Ladies* (Satonaka 2003) or *Criteria for Attractive Men* (Shionagi 2006), and were aimed at men and women wanting to be more popular with their opposite sex. I read them with an eye towards similarities or differences in the kinds of advice given. How was this advice similar to what matchmakers had to say? How, if at all, were men and women counseled differently? While reading, I pored over my interview data and observational notes. It was clear from my preliminary talks with matchmakers that the kinds of problems clients encountered in the matchmaking process were gendered: men and women used different criteria to select and evaluate partners, and consequently were liable to encounter different difficulties as they met potential matches. The questions I asked were largely gender-neutral, aimed at understanding a process and business that I had just encountered for the first time. And yet, from my first conversations with Kawakami-sensei and Takamiya-sensei (more about these two below), it was apparent that men and women were judged

by different standards in at least some respects during *omiaiai*. The qualities discussed as relevant to men—height, appearance, income, education—were not at all the qualities used to evaluate women. In this first analysis, women were cute, kind, good at cooking—skills and personal qualities seemed to matter more than objective measurements.

With this in mind, I began to formulate my initial research questions: What kind of gender performances led to success at *omiaiai*? Would a particular kind of masculinity or femininity be more desirable in this context? I sought to investigate how, in modern Japan, one is judged to be “attractive” as a marriage partner, based on both material economic facts as well as semiotic cues to the person’s inner character: good dress, a polite and considerate manner, and the ability to skillfully carry on a conversation. Moreover, I also needed to know more about the role of the matchmaker in regimenting gender performances and constructing particular kinds of attractiveness. Miyamoto-sensei heavily emphasized the counseling she provided to her clients in these early interviews. I wanted to know how intensively matchmakers groomed their clients, or how receptive clients are to this process—as we shall see later, being *sunao* (“sincere,” with overtones of “obedient”) is a quality that matchmakers look for in their clients, as predictive of their success. Moreover, it was important to learn just how much of a role matchmakers played in these introductory meetings.

Primary Fieldwork: 2009-2011

I returned to Japan in the fall of 2008—to Yokohama, this time, to study Japanese at the Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies⁴. Japan had changed in the year or so I’d been away, and it had changed in ways that highlighted precisely the subject of my research. Earlier in the year, well-known sociologist Yamada Masahiro had teamed up with a journalist to release a best-

⁴ Yokohama, some forty minutes south of central Tokyo, is part of the greater Tokyo metropolitan area and is located in the Kantō region, and thus, in the region most often culturally contrasted with Kansai.

seller that struck a chord of interpersonal malaise and dissatisfaction in Japan's popular culture. The book, entitled *The Age of Marriage Hunting* (M. Yamada and Shirakawa 2008), noted that economic and social systems which had led in the past to most Japanese marrying in a more or less automatic or effortless way had broken down in the same way as systems that had automatically shunted (educated) young Japanese into jobs. "Job hunting" (*shūshoku katsudō*, or *shūkatsu* for short) had become an acknowledged necessity; now, said Yamada and Shirakawa, young Japanese must also acknowledge the necessity of "marriage hunting" (*kekkon katsudō*, or *konkatsu* for short). While it is not clear at this point whether konkatsu will remain a socially defined and important activity, it is certain that *The Age of Marriage Hunting* launched a "konkatsu boom" that would last at least several years⁵. Konkatsu is a broad-reaching term, and I have seen it used to refer to anything that might possibly increase one's chances of getting married—taking cooking classes for women, raising your income for men. Perhaps most memorable was my friend Yuri-chan, who referred to herself as doing "mental konkatsu," imagining her future partner in order to draw him to her. Marriage bureaus were therefore far from alone in taking up the banner of konkatsu, but they were certainly visible in doing so; advertising for marriage services was everywhere that I could see, when I returned to Japan. It had certainly been present on my earlier visits, but now it was ubiquitous in a way that it had not been before. Matchmakers were also beginning to publish their own books promoting their industry. Some published them as advice to the single (Y. Yamada 2008; Y. Yamada 2009); others aimed at curious businesspeople looking to get started in matchmaking (Nakanishi Keiji 2009).

In the spring of 2009, while completing my language studies, I began my fieldwork under the auspices of a 24-month grant from the ITO Foundation for International Education Exchange and

⁵ Nakanishi Keiji-sensei, who will be more properly introduced at the end of this chapter, actually declared the konkatsu boom over at a meeting in July 2012; konkatsu persists, as does the marriage industry, but the media frenzy and publisher interest has certainly died down.

the Institute for Research in Humanities at Kyoto University. I delved back into research by getting in touch with both old acquaintances and some of the matchmakers I had encountered through blogs and books⁶. My plan was first to find and interview individual matchmakers, asking loosely structured questions about the nature and organization of their business, what types of clients sign up with them, what types of clients succeed (which is to say, get married), and what attributes are usually considered “attractive,” by matchmakers and by other clients. That is to say, I hoped to generally continue the trajectory of inquiry that I began in my preliminary research, question a larger base of matchmakers, and conduct follow-up interviews, where possible, that would allow me to pursue any emerging trends in my data. My general goal was to understand the evaluative rubric used by matchmakers when counseling clients. What kind of behavior is desirable in a potential spouse? What is key for making a good first impression? What do clients look to as indices of inner qualities, in order to determine whether this person seems like someone who would make a good marriage partner? How should clients be coached or counseled? How (and in how many different ways) do clients fail during the matchmaking process? Whose responsibility is that failure—the matchmaker’s, or the client’s? I did not separate out questions about clients by gender, hoping that, if there were gendered differences in the attributes or practices of successful clients, these would appear organically in matchmakers’ accounts.

My initial hope was to build on my interviews by observing a subset of my matchmaker contacts at work directly with clients. Most accounts of participant observation are in some way “sited,” which is to say, that the anthropologist has a base of operations from which she conducts her research. In early anthropology this would have been perhaps a single village; in urban anthropology,

⁶ Although I contacted matchmakers whom I learned of through their publishing and promotional efforts, all matchmakers who actually participated in this study have been anonymized with the exceptions of Nakanishi Keiji and Kiyomi, who requested that their real names be used.

it's often through affiliation with some kind of business or institution. Ethnographies of Japan that I had read and admired were sited in businesses, such as Kondo's (1990) account of work and identity, *Crafting Selves*; Ogasawara's (1998) analysis of the gendered power dynamics in Japanese offices; or more recently, Inoue's (2006) account of professional women and their relationship to Japanese Women's Language. Friends doing fieldwork around the same time situated themselves in local hospitals, or centers for adopted youth. I aimed to do the same thing, finding a matchmaker willing to let me use their office as a "site" for my ethnography, in return for which I would of course provide office help, or any other business assistance. My thoughts, at the time, were that being located within a matchmaker's office would allow me to actually see the coaching process, to learn how clients are coached to search for partners, what are they told to correct or improve. I also wanted to see whether clients, in practice, defer to their matchmakers or resist change, and what kind of changes to their performances they might concretely make. If possible, I wanted a chance to view omiai themselves, to see what kinds of strategies clients actually deployed when meeting new partners, and on the other side, what strategies matchmakers employed to manage such events.

In addition to observing matchmakers at work, I also hoped to interview and forge ties with clients as well, and observe both matchmakers and clients outside the matchmaking context, using matchmakers who were part of the study to advertise it to willing clients. Clients would be interviewed about their experiences with konkatsu more generally and omiai more specifically. This interview data was to focus on the same topics as interviews with matchmakers, but of course from the clients' perspective. How have their matchmakers coached them? What difficulties or failures have they encountered? What is the client's rubric for evaluating success or failure at an omiai, and how is it different from or shaped by that of the matchmaker? And, perhaps most critically: do

clients believe that their efforts will succeed, and that they will be able to marry? This observation would also address broader questions such as, how does being a matchmaker or hunting for a marriage partner fit into everyday life? How does the self presented at an omiai differ from the self presented in other contexts? What do these differences say about the semiotic strategies for presentation of self that are particular to the process of a spousal search?

As it turned out, about half of my original research plan turned out to be possible. I was indeed able to meet a greater number of matchmakers, and interview them on precisely the subjects delineated above, meeting with a few for repeat interviews to discuss the finer points of the matchmaking process and clients' behavioral semiotics as I became more and more familiar with the process of omiai. Although I met a few matchmakers through cold contacts, I was introduced to most in "snowball" fashion, or met others at events that I had been invited to by matchmakers. I was also, to some extent, able to observe matchmakers at work. I had wanted to observe matchmakers meeting with and counseling clients, an ambition that turned out to be somewhat impractical. This had little to do with matchmakers' willingness or unwillingness to let me watch them work, but more to do with my mistaken assumption that matchmakers would do some significant portion of their counseling face-to-face. As it happens, I learned that only one or two initial meetings take place in person, to explain the matchmakers' systems to prospective clients. Two of my matchmaker contacts (Kawakami-sensei and Yasuda-sensei) invited me to witness precisely these kinds of meetings. There may be a second meeting to sign contracts, check clients' identification, and to fill out all of the client's profile information, or this may happen at the first meeting, too. (This was how Yasuda-sensei did things.) Once the client has been set up (both contractually and with a profile), most of the counseling that matchmakers do takes place over email, text message and telephone.

Likewise, I was unable to “site” myself in one office, as I had hoped, as few matchmakers even have them. Most matchmakers use online client databases⁷, so the process of searching for people to meet doesn’t require the matchmaker’s help or presence. (Although clients may send an email asking for help if they routinely find that no one accepts their invitations to meet.)

As mentioned above, I wanted to include observations of omiai in my research, but here again I was operating under a faulty assumption. I thought that matchmakers typically sat down with their clients and managed these meetings much more intensively than I was to learn that they actually do. I had imagined sitting down with matchmakers and their clients together, and observing the conversational strategies of the omiai firsthand. While this does happen, it is also not a very typical scenario, and the matchmakers’ involvement in the omiai may be quite brief; in chapter three, I detail some of the logistical reasons why this has become the case, and in chapter five, discuss my personal experience with omiai of this more rare type. I was also easily able to observe many of the more common type omiai during the course of my fieldwork, with more restricted matchmaker involvement. One of my matchmaker contacts—Yasuda-sensei, about whom more below—invited me to meet up with her one weekend to watch omiai in the fall of 2009, and taught me that most such meetings take place in well regarded public spaces such as hotel lobbies. As she showed me, wandering into the right hotel⁸ at the right time of day⁹ on any given weekend¹⁰ gives anyone who

⁷ In 2007 I interviewed the head of one marriage bureau who, for confidentiality, kept all client records on paper and required clients to come in to the office to view them. I did not know, at the time, how unusual this policy was, and I was unable to follow up with her during my main fieldwork. Prior to the widespread use and adoption of the Internet, indeed all databases were analogue, but I am given to understand that clients would be mailed the profiles of new members on a routine basis. And in fact, I did interview another matchmaker who still operates entirely on paper, receives new database entries by mail, and as best I understand, also passes them on to his clients by mail.

⁸ Usually, hotels located near major train stations.

⁹ Typically between 11 in the morning and 3 in the afternoon.

¹⁰ Weekday omiai are certainly possible, but much less common.

knows what they are watching ample opportunity to observe hours and hours worth of omiai. After my initial introduction, I returned to this and other hotels, mostly in Osaka, on most weekends to do precisely that. This kind of observation had the advantage of being public, and open to anyone. I could watch matchmakers chatting to, reassuring, and keeping their clients company as they waited for partners to show up, conduct introductions, and then send clients on their way. However, because the omiai themselves were not quite what I imagined, I did not learn many of the things that I had initially expected to from these observations, such as the actual conversational strategies used by matchmakers and clients during omiai.

While conducting observations of these public omiai, I typically attended to the way matchmakers talked among themselves and traded gossip in between waves of clients arriving and leaving, as well as the way they actually managed the introductions, taking special note of footing and bodily stance, since I often couldn't hear, or couldn't hear much. Sometimes I would overhear the gossip, much of which seemed to center around men who refused to pay for their dates. Sometimes I would run into matchmakers I already knew, and they would update me on their day's work or provide their own perspective on the scene in front of us, pointing out different couples and explaining what they thought might be happening. I also chatted with any number of other matchmakers, explaining what I was doing—many were curious about the girl with the notebook who was always at the hotel on Saturdays and who seemed to know so many of the other people there. These chats turned my observation times into further opportunities to make new connections in the matchmaking community, including some of the most important connections I would make. I came armed with little handouts explaining my research, and gave them to anyone who seemed curious.

As stated above, I wanted to incorporate data from watching omiai into my study was because of the chance to observe clients' behavior directly, to see how well it conformed to the behavioral norms promulgated by matchmakers (which I learned about initially through interviews). I was indeed able to watch clients' behavior in general, as they were introduced to each other; a number of couples wound up in the hotel lobby cafés, which made their subsequent coffee dates similarly public and visible but, critically, at a distance. (After all, I was in the lobby itself, watching the introductions. Even had I gone into the café, I wouldn't have been at the same tables as the various couples there.) To some extent, I was able to see clients' successes and failures, smooth introductions and awkward gaffes, and to line this observational data up with matchmakers' accounts of typical client problems and recommended omiai behavior. There were, however, a number of significant downsides to this kind of observation. When I watched matchmakers in the hotel lobbies, my observations were informed both by my background knowledge of matchmaking practices as well as the opportunity to talk to the matchmakers I was observing, as many of them knew me already. However, my knowledge of clients remained, for the most part, general and unspecific. Matchmakers were there to do business, and in their professional capacity were fair game for research; clients were there for personal reasons, and it would have been inappropriate to question them—assuming they were even game for talking, instead of worrying about how their upcoming omiai would go, and whether today was *the day*. It was consequently impossible for me to track the clients I observed in this fashion in any kind of diachronic way: I could watch them during omiai, but had no way to relate the behavior I was seeing to outcomes.

I am certainly not the only researcher to face this methodological problem. Rather, I suspect it is part and parcel of any kind of research on partner introduction. Stokoe (2010) analyzes speed

dating conversations from an event in the UK, paying attention to conversational segments in which speed daters are called on to account for their single status and presence at the event. I am frankly envious of her data, which consists of recorded conversations from speed dating events. However, these conversations are also anonymous, and as with my data, are wholly unconnected to dating outcomes. Consequently, we don't know what, if any, pragmatic consequences there are for subjects who fail to account for these issues. Yet, it is very difficult to both get actual recorded conversational data like Stokoe's and then link that data to dating outcomes in a way that would not violate clients' expectations of privacy as they make use of services like matchmaking and speed dating. Of course, this leaves many questions about clients' actual adherence to matchmakers' advice. To what extent do they attempt to resist their matchmakers' advice, or simply ignore it? Can clients who do things their own way still wind up successfully marrying through the system matchmakers have set up?

This brings me to my next methodological difficulty, which was that interviewing clients also turned out to be very difficult, and I was only able to interview a very few clients. Signing up with a marriage bureau can be embarrassing to many clients, or if not embarrassing, it is at least something that is felt to be quite private. As Kawakami-sensei explained to me, it's embarrassing when you hear about love match after love match, to then come to a matchmaker. According to Nakao-sensei, "Ren'ai dekinai kara kō iu tokoro kiteru" [*They come to places like this because they can't do love*]. The implication here is that love is the default way to do things, and only having failed at that do clients seek out matchmakers. Even if marriage hunting is a new social necessity, it has not yet been fully normalized in the same way as job hunting. As touched on earlier, there are a variety of activities that can be construed as konkatsu, many of which are informal and more in line with the prevailing ideology of a love match. For example, it is common enough to hear about dinner and drinking

parties of single men and women, put together by friends and coworkers, called *gōkon*, and it is common enough for single men and women to participate in them enthusiastically. (I was even invited to a few.) However, hiring a professional to help you get married goes a step or two farther than attending or organizing *gōkon*, and likely seems to many men and women like an admission of failure at a major part of normal adulthood. Marriage bureaus are keen to reassure potential new recruits that their extant clients are all lovely people, who have simply been too *busy* to date and marry—a step which may be taken to reassure clients about themselves and their own reasons for seeking help, as much as it accomplishes anything else.

In addition to being an attitude that shows up as part of matchmakers' advertising literature, such responses frequently cropped up in interviews when I asked matchmakers what sort of people become their clients. It would be easy and probably facile to view matchmakers' overwhelming positivity about their clients as a marketing strategy. With the exception of a few disciplinary horror stories, I have only rarely heard a matchmaker make negative comments about clients as individuals. Some clients may be less physically attractive than others, or have more complicated life circumstances, but these are not *personal* failings; others may have misguided attitudes or lack the skill to make a good first impression, but this is the sort of thing that can be fixed. As far as I can tell, matchmakers do on the whole believe their clients to be genuinely good people who are as capable as anyone else of finding someone to marry, and happiness in married life.

Despite the positivity of matchmakers about the innocent reasons most clients seek their help, the clients themselves are wary of their privacy, and matchmakers are sensitive to this wariness. Consequently, few matchmakers seemed willing to put clients in touch with me. I left fliers with a few matchmakers that I was close to, but very little came of them. As we will see in chapter three,

matchmaking is an industry that thrives on trust, and I imagine that sending clients my way may have been a risky or delicate move. I once made the grave mistake of asking Fujii-sensei if she might send me some anonymized emails; even this, she felt, would violate the bond of trust between matchmaker and client. Although my access to information about clients' behavior was thus highly circumscribed, this is not to say that my interview data is devoid of client voices. I was able to interview a few clients, as well as some individuals pursuing other kinds of konkatsu outside the matchmaking system. Moreover, many matchmakers have turned to the profession in recent years after their own marriages with the help of marriage bureaus. Their narratives of success at omiai and subsequent professionalization also form part of the data on clients that I was able to gather during the course of my fieldwork.

So, as detailed above, my initial research plan was flawed, in large part because I assumed that I would be able to gain more access to clients than was ultimately possible. However, as mentioned earlier, I also came across some unexpectedly rich sources of data. During my preliminary research, I noticed that I had a very difficult time getting information from large organizations, and had the greatest success with small marriage bureaus. At the start, I extended this assumption to all larger organizations, including both single companies with local branch offices (like the aforementioned Partner Agent), but also including the various co-operatives and associations that link individual matchmakers together, of which there are a number throughout Japan, both regionally and nationwide. However, through the matchmakers I met while watching omiai, as well as through older contacts, I was eventually invited to join the regular meetings of two very different matchmaker organizations. One of these was a small, primarily social, group of matchmakers in Kyoto, Osaka, and Shiga prefectures, who meet periodically over lunch to talk shop and share

profiles of clients who need a little extra promotion, for one reason or another. The other was a large, national organization of matchmakers which manages a shared client database, holds regular monthly meetings for their members to talk shop and clarify policies, organizes large-scale matchmaking events (usually called *omiaī pātī*, or “omiaī parties”), and also offers a variety of training seminars and professionalization opportunities for men and women who want to start their own matchmaking businesses.

Along with conducting interviews and observations of *omiaī*, I also was able to attend regular events with both of these matchmaker organizations. During ordinary meetings, I heard member matchmakers trade stories about clients and about each other, and listened as the heads of these organizations gave us updates about recent scandals, difficulties, and questions, explaining how matchmakers ought to handle conflict with clients and with colleagues, while also providing concrete examples of matchmakers and clients who failed to follow shared standards of behavior, more or less egregiously. In addition to learning about best practices, these stories of conflict also helped to teach me the rules of large matchmaker associations—rules that help to promote trust, goodwill, and cooperation between matchmakers, and rules that the community occasionally needs some reminding about. I watched them trade profiles of clients they thought might need a little extra push—good people having a little trouble who could benefit from another matchmaker recommending them to her own clients, and in so doing, learned something practical about who needs extra help getting married.

In addition to these regular meetings, I also attended professional development seminars through the larger organization and learned how to be a matchmaker myself: how to pitch my business, develop my own persona as a matchmaker, and establish my authority, topics I pick up in

the following chapter. I also learned how to advertise and find clients, and what to do with those clients once I had them, that is to say, how to properly counsel them before they sign up, before omiai, and once they have moved into the dating stage of things. I learned that the things matchmakers told me in interviews were not only the individual results of years of work with clients (which they are), but were also rooted in a community dialogue about who their clients are, what problems they face, and how they can be most effectively counseled through them. I even learned about the technology that mediates communication between matchmakers: internal email systems and shared databases of clients, accessible to matchmakers and clients alike. Even more than data from my interviews, my regular attendance at association meetings provided me with rich data about how matchmakers learn to do their jobs, how they view their work, and how they engage with clients and teach each other by example—good and bad.

During these meetings I primarily attended to stories told by different matchmakers, which often seemed moralistic in their aims. Successful matchmakers told stories of how they got there, often beginning with their entry into the profession, acknowledging senior matchmakers who had helped them in the beginning, and continuing on to describe hardworking and obedient clients who achieved their happy endings. During regular organizational meetings, matchmakers often brought stories of “trouble” (using the English word *toraburu*) to be arbitrated by the group, which included issues that cropped up between clients, between matchmakers, or between matchmaker and client. Who, if anyone, had behaved badly? What kind of reparations should be made? What institutional regulations applied? What regulations might require changing as unanticipated situations arose?

The organizational and instructional information that I took away from my participation in matchmaker associations, along with observational data of omiai and my formal interviews with

members of the marriage industry, forms the great bulk of my official research data¹¹. My lack of access to the client side of the picture forced me to both change my focus and reorient my questions. I had hoped to be able to tell you, at the end of my research, many more concrete things about the interactional strategies that Japanese men and women use to make themselves appear attractive in their profiles, in omiai, and while dating, in order to successfully reach their end goal of a happy engagement and marriage. As a result of the kinds of access to people and situations that I was able to obtain, my focus shifted much more exclusively to the matchmakers. It also shifted towards ideologies of gender and interactional performance, rather than descriptions of the performances themselves, a stance also taken by Lemon (2000) in her description of ideologies around performances at the Moscow Romani Theater. My experience also resembles Lemon's field experience in its reliance on networks and multisitedness, in that it moves between personal, "at home" connections with matchmakers, and formal, institutional meetings and training sessions.)

Although I cannot speak much to the experiences and strategies of clients, I hope to be able to present a clear picture of what I called above matchmakers' "evaluative rubrics," which determine what behavior is helpful to the cause of marriage, and what behavior is harmful—what contributes to a desirable self-presentation, and what is unappealing. I also address how this calculus may differ for men and women of different circumstances. As will become particularly clear in chapter five, these evaluative rubrics determine an individual's overall value on the marriage market, with higher values trading for the ability to be choosier about potential partners. They also determine how any client can *raise* his or her value, through the interactive, evaluative processes that define selves and

¹¹ A smaller set of contrastive data comes from interviews with friends and acquaintances about their experiences with dating, konkatsu, and marriage in Japan, and largely informs my sense of to what extent matchmakers' clients are skewed towards particular kinds of individuals, and whether their observations about their clients can be extended to other segments of Japanese society.

social reputations that Nancy Munn called “intersubjective spacetime” (1986: 10–15).

“Intersubjective spacetime” is the network created between people in interactions and carried on through individual histories. In Munn’s analysis of Trobriand society, acts have value insofar as they enable an individual to expand networks over time and space. Just so, client actions have value insofar as they enable them to expand their own intersubjective spacetimes through connections with other clients, collecting experiences that make them into better dates and partners.

Evaluation is an ideological process, and therefore, this is an account of matchmaker’s “semiotic ideologies.” By this I mean that it is an account of how matchmakers determine what behavior could be interpreted as an index. Indices (Peirce 1955) are perceptually available signs that in some sense “point to” something not perceptually available; the classic example is smoke, the sight of which suggests the presence of unseen fire. Some external behaviors are likewise taken to point to personal qualities, which cannot be perceived directly. Matchmakers’ semiotic ideologies, then, consist of the determination of what behavioral signs point to which personal qualities. Moreover, any index is interpretable at any number of orders, from sociologically macro to micro-contexts (Silverstein 2003) and thus any potentially indexical behavior may not point *predictably* to anything at all; as Ochs (1992) notes, an index may be indirect; use of honorifics may point to “femininity” only through an ideological system linking “femininity,” at a second order of indexicality, with “deference to others,” at the first order. Consequently, it is necessary for matchmakers to regiment and standardize indexical behavior—or at least attempt to do so—so that they can interpret indices across different omiai, or in the context of different couples. In so doing, they assign to indices both an object and a value in a process that resembles that of register formation, insofar as registers too are assigned both objects, insofar as they index particular groups most likely to

use them, and also *evaluations* as “good” or “bad” ways of speaking (Errington 1998; Agha 1998; Agha 2005; Irvine and Gal 2000). Consequently, to the extent that I recount the ways that matchmakers evaluate and regiment behavior, this work is to some extent a manual for how to handle the most troublesome clients, as well as a description of who those most troublesome clients are likely to be.

The Anthropologist In and Out of the “Field”

It is not entirely sufficient to tell you about the contents of my formal research, because of course my study was not informed only by my official research activities, but also by who I am, and how matchmakers interpreted my interest in their profession and my presence at their meetings. As an anthropologist of Japan, I am almost required to say something about *nihonjinron*, “theories of the Japanese people,” which is a shorthand for the widespread belief held by many ordinary Japanese, as well as policymakers and government officials, that the Japanese people are unique, and wonderful in their uniqueness, but difficult for any outsider to truly understand (see Befu 2001 for an anthropological overview). One perhaps positive consequence of this attitude is a general pleasure at the sight of young foreigners working hard to learn about “traditional” (and also, of course, unique and special) Japanese cultural activities and Japanese language studies. An interest in kimono, flower arrangement, Japanese martial arts, or in my case, incense and classical Japanese poetry, is likely to be lauded, praised, and encouraged¹². Although I did not quite expect this reaction to my study of matchmaking, nonetheless, most matchmakers that I talked to were excited that I wanted to learn about this Japanese tradition as well, and share it with an audience overseas. My studies may also

¹² At least, when the foreigners in question come from well regarded Western countries. Due to my own status as a white American expatriate and researcher at a respected local university, it is difficult for me to comment on the experiences of foreigners from other parts of Asia, Africa, or South America, as they were neither part of the circles of matchmakers I studied nor part of the same expatriate communities that were readily accessible to me.

have been helped along by the fact that that I was affiliated with one of the most prestigious local universities. That, and my status as a doctoral student, meant that my research was taken seriously. Matchmakers' eagerness to talk to me may also have something to do with the fact that their profession involves a certain degree of sociability to begin with; they often describe themselves as *sewa-zuki*, enjoying the pleasure derived from taking care of other people. The profession also requires a certain amount of proselytizing in order to convince modern, young(ish) people that they can find happiness through an "arranged" match instead of a "love" match; as we will see in the next chapter, it can also involve an extensive amount of client education. To some extent, explaining the matchmaking system to me must not have been, at first, too different from explaining it to a new potential client, nor must taking care of me have been so very different from the kind of caretaking matchmakers consciously engage in.

Dorinne Kondō writes in *Crafting Selves* that, "Though my status was in some respect high in an education-conscious Japan, I was still young, female, and a student. I was in a socially recognized relationship of dependency vis-à-vis the people I knew. I was not to be feared and obeyed, but protected and helped" (1990: 15). I believe that I experienced some of the same phenomenon when matchmakers took me on in a client-like way. Although I am American and Caucasian, I was also (at the time of my research) in my late twenties, a student, and single, and fluent enough in Japanese for almost every conversation. My client-like position can be seen in the kinds of information or experiences that collaborating matchmakers thought would be helpful. Two matchmaker friends, Kawakami-sensei and Takamiya-sensei, conducted mock omiai over dinner and drinks with me and other male friends of theirs who were present. They also entered me into their client database and, in fact—as I discuss in chapter five—during the course of my research, I could not avoid actually

participating in two omiai as a match, and not as a matchmaker. To some of my collaborators, the most obvious way for me to learn about matchmaking was to participate directly, and in the role to which I was most obviously suited.

Over time, however, my contacts' perceptions of me began to change, particularly as I began to participate in matchmaker professionalization activities. When attending meetings with the small, social matchmaker association, it was always understood that I was a student and that I had come there together with my friends, although I was sometimes sent to attend on my friends' behalf. I was not a matchmaker, but I was nonetheless trusted to be their representative. My attendance at the meetings of the larger matchmaker association was much more ambiguous and anonymous; there were enough participants there to just listen and learn that I was not clearly differentiated from them. My regular attendance at meetings and classes led others to perceive me as a fellow matchmaker. My presence there was not officially explained by the organization until the last meeting that I was able to attend in August of 2013, when I was introduced and thanked, and invited to say a few words. When questioned about my presence, I have always explained that I am researching matchmaking as part of a doctoral program, but it's been suggested to me on quite a few different occasions that I teach Americans about omiai by opening up a marriage bureau in the United States.

Also lurking in the background of my research are my experiences of being young, and single, and socially inhabiting the world of other twenty- and thirty-something singles. During my time in Japan, I have made many female Japanese friends, and a few male friends as well¹³. As I will discuss in chapters four and five, matchmakers have a clear idea of typical problems that Japanese men and women face, and how to fix them. Matchmakers characterize their male clients as too passive, or

¹³ Japan's well known patterns of homosociality certainly seem to have been evident in the course that my friendships have taken.

often inconsiderate and misogynistic. At the same time, my single female friends were writing songs about precisely the same observation, complaining that Japanese boys are “cute” but “weak” and hoping they might become a little stronger. The situation makes them feel like “zombie grrrlz” relentlessly pursuing “delicious boys”; they fall in love with the ghosts of samurai instead of men here in the present (Nism and Ikeda 2009). My married girlfriends complained about their marriages—love matches to college sweethearts—which were nonetheless unsatisfactorily passionless. My single friends fell in and out of love, got engaged, and canceled weddings. All of my friends, single and married alike, are comparatively well educated¹⁴ working women, wondering about the future of their love lives, wondering about children and if and when they would become mothers.

My foreign friends, male and female, married and single alike, provided a particularly interesting point of comparison: in moving to Japan, they encountered ideas about marriage, dating, and gender roles that were foreign to their experiences in Europe, North America and Australia. My female friends complained about the passivity and self-involvement of Japanese boyfriends, as well as the comparatively low priority that they placed on their romantic or personal lives relative to their responsibilities at work. I have watched Caucasian men, who at first feel exotic, socially and sexually desired by Japanese women, later revise their assessment of their happiness when, after marriage, they discover that their children are a greater priority for their Japanese wives than their relationships with their husbands, a pattern that has been noted in intra-ethnic Japanese marriages (Allison 2000). Both male and female expatriate friends have found themselves reassessing the importance of sexual fidelity to their relationships on the grounds that, for their Japanese partners, infidelity is not the marriage-ending disaster that it might be back home. However, I do not wish to suggest that these intercultural relationships always end in disaster, and some may relish the different kinds of freedom

¹⁴ That is to say, with degrees from four-year universities.

that marriage and childbearing, Japanese-style, allow them¹⁵.

My position as a researcher also affected my relationship to my friends, and to their talk about their relationships. Since “Erika’s the expert,” friends felt free, either in groups or privately, to recruit me to talk about love, sex, and marriage; to share any wisdom I’d gleaned from my research on omiai or my knowledge of marriage in Japan in general; to give advice about differences in relationships between North America and Japan; and to give advice about their particular relationship problems. More formally, I was recruited to host a friend’s gōkon, and to give talks on women’s sexuality. Given my position as the *expert* friend, I probably heard a disproportionate number of stories of relationships going well, poorly, or simply interestingly from my friends. These stories, again, do not form part of my research data. Nonetheless, they do form part of the background against which I evaluated matchmakers’ claims about Japanese men and women, or for that matter, claims made by pop-cultural and anthropological literature about Japanese men and women, and their successes and failures in dating, mating, and marrying.

Of course, the difficulties faced by Japanese men and women meeting and marrying through omiai are different than the problems faced by those singles who meet, date, and marry through other means, and different again than the problems faced by couples in “international” relationships or marriages¹⁶. At the same time, the men and women who seek help from matchmakers are not separate from wider society, and one might reasonably expect a number of themes to recur in the different tales of woe I heard from matchmakers talking about their clients, from Japanese friends

¹⁵ To give one example: a close Australian friend who married a Japanese man loved the freedom she felt to be sexual with other people before they were married, and looked forward to having a free hand over the family finances as would any other Japanese housewife.

¹⁶ It would be easy to write an entire book about international relationships in Japan, and indeed, some have, for example Karen Kelsky (2001) on Japanese women and Western men, although she discusses specifically non-marital relationships. There is also substantial literature on foreign brides, particularly those from the Philippines (Piper 2003 provides a nice overview).

complaining about boyfriends and husbands, and in expat friends' confusion in navigating the Japanese romantic/marital/sexual landscape. The position of the anthropologist is unique in how decidedly *local* it is; we cannot claim to speak to society-wide trends, but only to show, through our personal experience and informed analysis, how the people we encounter in the course of our research make sense of their lives (Geertz 1973) and actively reiterate and reinterpret the cultural resources and tropes available to them to craft identities and negotiate relationships (Butler 1990; Kondo 1990; Goodwin 1990). Nonetheless, we find patterns.

A Cast of Characters

The views presented here on both matchmaking and the various “gender troubles” matchmakers encounter in the male and female clients come out of recurring patterns in meetings, interviews and more informal conversations with matchmakers, backed up by recurring patterns in conversations with friends and casual acquaintances. A possibly innumerable number of voices have contributed to the dialogue to which I have listened, and at times contributed to myself, from which these conclusions were drawn. Some matchmakers interviewed for this project were acquaintances whom I only interviewed once or twice; some were not interviewed at all, but rather shared their thoughts and experiences publicly during the many meetings I attended. And of course, with some matchmakers, I have been able to form long-lasting social and professional relationships for which I am intensely grateful, and without whom this book would not be possible. Their voices speak the loudest and perhaps the most frequently in the dialogue; to some extent, as will become clear below, they may also speak the most authoritatively. To that end, I would like to conclude this chapter with some sketches of, and thanks to, some of the key collaborators on this project.

I have already mentioned Kawakami-sensei and her partner, Takamiya-sensei, who were (and

still are) some of the most welcoming matchmakers I met during the course of my preliminary research in 2007, and whose warm friendship I enjoy to this day. At first through interviews, and later over many happy dinners at their apartment-cum-office, with friends from their wide and varied circles (some of whom were more or less adopted clients), I learned more than I can say about matchmaking, and in particular the matchmaker-client relationship. Insofar as it is ever possible to repay the kindnesses that we anthropologists are shown in the field, I have tried my best with offerings of cake and song, for they are both passionately musical people (and everyone likes cake at a dinner party). Had they not so readily adopted me, I am not certain that my research would ever have progressed as far as it did. In addition to their educational treatment of me as a client, they also introduced me to the smaller matchmaker organization and thus, to several other matchmakers who were gracious enough to consent to be interviewed.

My second set of thanks and acknowledgements is due to Yasuda-sensei, Nakanishi Keiji-sensei, and his wife Nakanishi Kiyomi-sensei, all writers, bloggers, and media-active matchmakers, eager to get men and women who are interested in konkatsu to give omiai a try. They were also all instrumental in introducing me to Nihon Nakōdo Kyōkai (Japan Matchmaker Association, hereafter NNK), started and operated by the Nakanishis, who are now helped by their two adult daughters. They graciously guaranteed my (free) entry into all the regular organizational meetings, as well as more than a few training sessions for novice matchmakers. As mentioned earlier, Yasuda-sensei was kind enough to invite me to observe a few introductory meetings with groups of prospective new (female) clients, a major source of information on the problems that female clients face.

As regular speakers and educators, and important figures in the local Kansai matchmaking community (and to some extent the national matchmaking community), their views on both dealing

with clients and handling conflicts with other matchmakers are strongly represented here. In their professional encounters, matchmakers continuously construct the discourse of who their clients are, and how they are best served, but it is ultimately matchmakers like the Nakanishis and Yasuda-sensei whose words are more authoritative. Their authority is also reflected in a personality trait that all three share: extremely business-like plain speaking. Perhaps it is the privilege of position in the community, or perhaps one of age (all are in their late 50s-early 60s). Perhaps it is the stereotype of the Osaka merchant. Either way, their straightforward style of giving advice to matchmakers and clients alike is an antidote to many stereotypes of the Japanese as perpetually indirect, primarily concerned with politeness and saving face. They have also formed, at least for me, a template for the kind of personality that succeeds at matchmaking: verbose, authoritative, and direct. While this may not be true of every matchmaker I have met (certainly not even every matchmaker I interviewed), it does seem to be a strong tendency in the more general matchmaking population.

Through their positions as educators, the Nakanishis and Yasuda-sensei were also able to introduce me to a younger set of matchmakers, some of them just getting started in 2009-2010. Fujii-sensei, a warm and friendly Kyoto matchmaker who married through omiai herself in her early 40s, was only a few years into her matchmaking career, and continues to become more and more successful. Optimistic and adorable Sugawara-sensei, not yet 40 and barely started in her career when we met, has also become increasingly successful over the last few years. Both are solid acquaintances who I know I can rely on for friendly chat and answers to my questions about matchmaking. Other beginning matchmakers whom I interviewed have since left the world of matchmaking, although their answers to my questions about their interest in a matchmaking career and their personal stories of success and failure in relationships have nonetheless contributed to my

understanding of matchmaking as a business and career choice.

In the three chapters that follow, I attempt to describe first, what it is that matchmakers do, and second, who their clients are, what problems they encounter, and how matchmakers try to help them. As I write this volume, I have only recently left Japan, and am thus keenly aware of the instability of the picture I present, both on a small scale, and on a large one. As suggested above, some matchmakers' careers have taken off; others have retired or decided it wasn't for them. Both Nakanishi Keiji-sensei and Kawakami-sensei have brought their children into the fold of what are now family businesses. It was only in the middle of the twentieth century that matchmakers began to professionalize (Vogel 1961); according to Nakanishi-sensei, it is only in the last two decades (that is, since the 1990s), and through the work of organizers like himself, that matchmaking as a career has become trustworthy and respectable. During the time of my research, matchmakers (and to some extent, the general public) began to view their work as *necessary*. It is in this lively, expansive, and nervous context that I studied the modern permutations of omiai.

CHAPTER III: AUTHORITY, BUSINESS, TRUST

Ware-ware wa shinyō de ikite iru.
[We all live off trust.]
—Nakanishi Keiji

Yasuda-sensei, who we met in the introduction, is a self-styled “charisma matchmaker” on a mission to let as many people as possible know how wonderful omiai can be as a way to meet and marry. She blogs and has published books, and like several of the more active matchmakers in the Kansai area, has made her share of appearances on television, spreading the good news of omiai and professional matchmakers to Japanese television audiences. She has even, like many of her colleagues, recently joined Facebook. Like her, more and more matchmakers are making connections of all kinds through social networking. One wonders, however, about the success of their efforts. Most Japanese people do know what omiai are, although they may have widely varying images of them. Some are obviously eager to participate in them, as evidenced by the fact that matchmakers have clients. Some of my friends, like Yuri (the practitioner of “mental” konkatsu), have parents who married through omiai. Looking at her parents’ marriage, Yuri seemed to think fondly enough of the idea, even if she didn’t want the same thing for herself. Some, like my friend Sayo-san, have even participated in omiai set up by their parents, and thus have direct, first-hand, and sometimes unwanted experience of them; it is still common enough for worried parents to set up omiai for their children, or contact matchmakers on their behalf (see Nakanishi Kiyomi 2012 for more details). For still others, omiai seem distant and old-fashioned, like wearing kimono—“Japanese custom” perhaps, but not current Japanese practice. They expect to find a love match without assistance.

In chapter two, I discussed the pop-cultural call to *konkatsu*, or “marriage hunting,” that immediately preceded my fieldwork, but it is difficult to discern just how many people are actually participating in *konkatsu* of some kind. Nakanishi Keiji, director of the Nihon Nakōdo Kyōkai, and a leader and educator in the Kansai-area matchmaking community, estimated in November 2010 that only about three percent of single Japanese men and women use marriage bureaus. Although this number may seem small, there are still literally hundreds if not thousands of marriage services, small and large, all across Japan. Not all of them are willing to disclose their numbers. O-net, a nationwide partner matching service, claimed around 38,000 members in 2012 while IBJ, a federation of individual matchmakers, claimed around 42,000 (O-Net Inc. 2012, IBJ 2012). IBJ even has a ticker on their homepage, tracking how many registered clients they have in real time. The Nihon Nakōdo Kyōkai is somewhat smaller in scope than IBJ, with more small-scale, part-time matchmakers in its ranks and only around 10,000 clients in 2012, although it is increasingly professionalizing and expanding. Omiiai may be a minority practice, but in a country as populous as Japan, the raw numbers of people using matchmakers are still quite large.

The word “omiiai” (お見合い) is an honorific noun that literally means “meeting and seeing,” and that is indeed its humble goal. Omiiai are meetings arranged for the purpose of introducing two people who may be suitable marriage partners for each other, to see how they get on. In times past, parents were much more involved in the omiai process (Vogel 1961; Blood 1967; Hendry 1981), and they may still arrange omiai privately, as mentioned above. I have been frequently asked whether anything like omiai exists in the US; my usual response has been that although there are few matchmakers, parental meddling is universal. The aforementioned Sayo is one such case; as I describe in greater detail in the next chapter, various family considerations led to her parents

insisting that she participate in an omiai arranged by her father. Her case demonstrates that the association of omiai with parental authority and Japanese traditions remains strong. However, in actual practice, any number of mediating individuals or even corporations may stand in the role of “matchmaker,” and the process of arranging and conducting an omiai may involve a variety of different practices, which brings me to the object of this chapter. Here, I aim to provide an overview of matchmaking as a job. Yamada Yumiko (2008: 25-45) explains in detail the many different kinds of businesses operating under the umbrella term *kekkon sōdan gyōkai* (marriage advice business). In the first part of this chapter, I review these different types of businesses, in order to clarify the population that I worked with, as well as where matchmakers are situated within the larger marriage industry in Japan.

Next, having located Japanese matchmakers within the marriage industry, I describe what it is these matchmakers do, and how it is that they learn to do it, with a focus on how matchmakers create authority and manage conflict. This data comes from two primary sources. As described in the previous chapter, the first source from my observations of matchmakers at work: holding meetings for new clients, and conducting omiai. Some data—specifically stories from specific matchmakers about their entry into the profession, or their conflicts with other matchmakers—has been taken from interviews with individual matchmakers, as well as from presentations at association meetings. The second source of data comes from matchmaker organizational meetings, particularly professionalization seminars where novice matchmakers are taught the basics of the job, and monthly meetings where matchmakers can have their questions answered by senior members like the Nakanishis. To this end, I provide transcripts in order to show how, discursively, matchmaking is imagined as a job and matchmakers are provided with examples of “typical” mistakes and client

thought patterns through voicing imagined clients and matchmakers in the midst of conflict or confusing situations (Voloshinov 1986). Nakanishi Keiji-sensei, who often led these discussions at NNK meetings, often speaks as characters other than himself, employing stylistic variation to distinguish the different voices from one another, as well as to perhaps make some judgments about these characters. These voices are explicitly situated within a matrix discourse of how one ought to best discharge one's responsibilities as a matchmaker (compare Hill 1995, where a regime of voices is mobilized to orient the speaker within a network of conflicting moralities and kin loyalties).

A common thread running throughout these discussions is the need to resolve conflict, or better yet, prevent it. Trust is central to matchmakers' ability to establish authority and resolve conflict—trust between matchmaker and client, as well as trust within the professional community of matchmakers. These communities are largely structured by various matchmaker organizations, which keep matchmakers in touch with each other and more or less formally regulate their contact with one another. First, I will discuss institutional and informal means by which matchmakers learn to do their jobs and thus set themselves up as experts who are qualified to advise clients. Then, I discuss client education as a tool for establishing trust not only with clients, but also with other matchmakers; this education is also an important site of matchmakers' *re/gendering* projects. The conclusion of this chapter, therefore, sets the stage for chapters four and five, which more explicitly discuss matchmakers' attitudes to gender within the context of the counseling they give their clients.

The Marriage Advice Business

The most visible members of the marriage advice business are large, national companies such as Nozze (<http://www.nozze.com>), O-net (<http://onet.rakuten.co.jp>), and Zwei (<http://www.zwei.com>). These companies are often called *kekkon jōhō sābisu*, “marriage information

services.” As described in chapter two, advertisements for these large companies are absolutely everywhere: all over the trains, and these days, on the web as well. When I began my preliminary research in 2007, I knew little about the difference between these large companies and other, smaller businesses. At that time, I made a visit to the Kyoto office of Zwei, located in a posh building in the most downtown location possible, at the corner of Shijō and Karasuma Avenues. They did not know quite what to make of an anthropologist asking for an interview, but they did give me many promotional materials. At the time of my research, they, along with other large marriage information services, were enjoying the fruits of much of the konkatsu boom. The information that I cover here is based on promotional materials that I received from different companies, information publicly available on websites, and information learned from interviews (the office of Nozze, in Yokohama, did answer some questions for me in 2009).



Figure 4: A 2012 web advertisement for Zwei, a large marriage information service owned by the larger corporation Aeon. It promotes free, 30-minute explanatory meetings where you can go to find out what the company offers its members.

Generally speaking, marriage information services offer two-year contracts with large up-front fees, in the realm of ¥300,000-¥400,000¹. This fee purchases clients' online access to the national database of pre-vetted members, and in-person access to the counseling staff at the local branch office of the company. Clients usually set up their own omiai, which makes the experience little different from online dating, except that the marriage information service offers a more rigorously

¹ Exchange rates have fluctuated during my stays in Japan, from lows of ¥120 per US dollar in 2006-2007, to highs of ¥75/dollar in mid-2012. Using ¥100/dollar as a midpoint between these two extremes, we can say that this is about 4,000USD.

selected and screened set of potential partners who are at least avowedly interested in marriage, and presently taking concrete action towards finding a partner and getting married. Less expensive are online companies which offer “net omiai.” These are rather like marriage information services, except without the counselors and brick-and-mortar branch offices. The difference between online dating and net omiai is primarily in the fact that the net omiai clients may often submit ID documents to prove that, at least, they are who they say they are². Closer to the more traditional matchmaker-oriented model, there are also *kekkon sōdan-sho*, “marriage bureaus.” According to Yamada, these are run by individuals, but are affiliated with larger marriage information services and have similar pricing schemes (¥100,000-¥200,000 up front for a two-year contract). *Sōdan* means “advice,” and the owners of the marriage bureaus are presumably there to advise their clients about omiai possibilities, and guide them through the process, although again, according to Yamada, they are liable to take a more hands-off approach than an old-fashioned matchmaker.

There is a bit of slippage between the marriage bureau and the individual matchmaker, as, in my experience, many individual matchmakers also call their businesses *kekkon sōdan-sho*. However, in addition to using the word “omiai” to describe what they offer, I found that individual matchmakers frequently make use of the old-fashioned word *nakōdo* (literally “matchmaker” or “go-between”) as their job title. This is in contrast to workers at larger partner introduction services, who are instead likely to be styled “marriage counselors” or “marriage advisors” using English loanwords for “counselor” (*kaunserā*) or “advisor” (*adobaizā*). The matchmakers' lexical anachronism is meant to signal a different and more personal business model, building on imagined Japanese marriage traditions; it is a recursive differentiating technique, such as those described by Irvine and Gal

² It is perhaps worth noting, briefly, that dating sites that do not necessarily situate themselves within the omiai tradition, such as the Japanese version of dating site Match.com, offer similar verification services to offset the perceived dangers of online dating.

(2000). Here, older language is meant to iconically reference an older style of partner matching.

This is not to suggest that there are not genuine differences between matchmakers and other areas of the marriage business. Every matchmaker that I interviewed, for example, was self-employed, although they typically join matchmaker associations (more about these below). Some may also work in teams with other matchmakers, learning from the senior matchmakers and helping to handle client overflow; I met Sugawara-sensei as a member of Yasuda-sensei's team. Another is their pricing scheme. Matchmakers do not charge high introductory fees; theirs are often no more than ¥30,000³, which is less than one-tenth the fee charged by the larger companies to sign up for their service. The NNK limits the amounts that member matchmakers are allowed to charge for introductory fees to this number. These introductory fees are used largely to maintain the clients' records with the matchmaker associations; they support the technological infrastructure of the association's database, and the association staff who maintain it. In other words, matchmakers make no money when they sign up clients. Rather, their main income (in theory) comes from the "successful marriage fee" (*seikonryō*) that they receive when a client gets engaged. Based on contracts I have seen, this fee is usually around ¥100,000-¥300,000⁴. In other words, a matchmaker *can be* as expensive as a large marriage information service, but *only* for those clients who succeed and get married. As a result of this difference in pricing schemata, as well as differences in business organization, the matchmaker is (again, in theory) more motivated to be active on her clients' behalf, preparing them to meet new people, and pushing them forward towards marriage. The logic is not unlike that of professions that pay by commission, such as auto sales or real estate.

³ Around 300 US dollars.

⁴ \$1,000–3,000.

“A Job Where You Can Help Someone Is a Reason to Live”

Who decides to become a matchmaker in the first place? Many matchmakers describe themselves as liking to take care of others, to the point of making a job out of it. This seems to hold true for Aiba-sensei, a successful rural matchmaker who spoke at the October 2012 matchmaker association meeting. She called herself a “volunteer” who was good at matching people. It was only when she realized that she had three weddings to attend in the same month for couples that she had introduced, and couldn’t afford different dresses for each, that she decided she ought to be turning a profit on her natural talent. It is also true of Inasawa-sensei, a former business executive who was often informally asked to make matches in his capacity as, more or less, community elder, a connected and respected older person. When he was laid off, he decided to turn to matchmaking as his primary profession. Others begin stories of their entry into matchmaking with tales of their own happy omiai marriages—which holds true for popular matchmakers and teachers Fujii-sensei and Yasuda-sensei. There are also a few, like Ozeki-sensei, who work as matchmakers in their spare time. Ozeki-sensei, who is by profession a designer, told me that she has her second job in part for supplementary income, in part because she is simply a romantic.

The reasons that matchmakers give explicitly speak to their professional personae; other factors, rarely acknowledged, may also contribute to the desirability of matchmaking as either full- or part-time labor. One such feature is the ease with which interactions with clients and promotional work can be unobtrusively incorporated into daily life, and mixed in with other activities. During the course of my research I was able to spend many pleasant afternoons and evenings with Kawakami-sensei and her partner Takamiya-sensei, a male matchmaker, who operate their marriage bureau out of their cozy apartment in central Kyoto. I have been struck forcefully with the way that modern

technology enables them to merge life and work. Their computer is in their living/dining room, and they can easily take a moment to check and see which of their clients are setting up omiai, or who has emailed. This is, in fact, what they do, periodically turning to the computer during the course of dinner on any given night that I was there. Matchmakers and their professional associations predate the ubiquity of Internet access in Japan, and as I have already mentioned, a couple matchmakers that I encountered kept their records on paper at the time of our interviews. Client databases are increasingly kept online, and matchmakers are more frequently promoting their businesses through websites, blogs, and social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. The NNK has a Facebook page for the public to “like” and in 2012, they put together a group blog for all the matchmakers to contribute to, through the popular Japanese blogging website Ameba (Nihon Nakōdo Kyōkai 2014). Around the same time, they added tutorials on effective blogging and use of social media to some of the monthly meetings. Most interaction with clients takes place through email, text message, and phone calls; many matchmakers get a second phone to manage. Since 2009, the growing number of smartphones, netbooks, and tablets has made it even easier for matchmakers to be constantly in touch with their clients.

The reliance on technologically mediated communication in matchmaking also means that the barriers to entry into the field are quite low—all one needs is a computer, a mobile phone, and a little bit of money to register with a matchmaker association. An office is nice, for those who can afford one, but is not a requirement, and many matchmakers never set up offices at all. (I believe that I only interviewed one matchmaker, Nakao-sensei, in an office.) This means that matchmaking can provide a low-cost, low-risk way to attempt a transition into self-employment. At our first interview, Fujii-sensei gave this as a secondary reason for her entry into matchmaking, and it is a goal

she successfully accomplished. By 2013, she was busy enough to have hired her first assistant. Some of the newer matchmakers I met in 2010 were certainly hoping to reach the same level of success.

Most basically, the job of the matchmaker is to “keep” clients and to introduce them to likely candidates for marriage, both in the sense of helping them find someone appropriate, and actually conducting the meeting where the two prospective marriage candidates meet. As both Yasuda-sensei and Inasawa-sensei explained in my first interviews with them, they both see themselves as operating in an unbroken line with the community elders—the bosses at work and the neighborhood grandmothers⁵ of the past—who would be asked to arrange marriages for young people because of their authority in the community. In this unspecified past, the matchmaker would be able to pair the couple up herself, in part because the populations she was dealing with were considerably smaller, and in part because, having asked the matchmaker for her assistance, it might have been too rude for anyone to have refused her choice. Village elders may be scarce now, but matchmakers are not.

Matchmakers’ central responsibility is conducting introductions between clients, even though this may actually be the least time-consuming of their professional activities, and is but one step in a process that begins when a client signs up with a matchmaker. This basic process was described to me during my preliminary fieldwork by Miyamoto-sensei and Kawakami-sensei, and I have since seen it laid out on websites and elaborated in NNK training seminars in more or less the same form. First, client and matchmaker together create a profile, which the matchmaker enters into databases that are shared by associations of matchmakers working together. Clients, with their matchmakers’ guidance, browse the database looking for people of the opposite sex⁶ that they might wish to meet,

⁵ *Obāsan*, a kinship term (“grandmother”), which is also used as a form of respectful address or as a term of reference for elderly women.

⁶ Same-sex marriage is not legal in Japan. Consequently, the marriage business is exclusively heterosexual.

and can also apply online to meet them. They are also able to receive requests from other clients in the database. Once both parties agree to meet, an omiai is set up, and the time and place decided. From NNK seminars and later, my own omiai, I learned that good form—and in some cases, association rules—dictate that the man should come to meet the woman. Meetings are typically conducted in public spaces like hotel lobbies. So far as I can discern, the rationale seems to be that hotels are public and safe, and moreover, somewhat formal locations, with nice (and often expensive) cafés and restaurants, and impressive marble decor. The restaurants and cafés provide a place to which the couple (and sometimes their matchmakers) can retire, for the “get to know you” conversation that is at the heart of the omiai.

The way matchmakers mediate communication for their clients is the thing that makes an omiai different than other kinds of meeting, and so at least one matchmaker should be present to actually conduct the introduction of the two parties (assuming the man and woman have different matchmakers). Based on the omiai I observed directly, in many cases, both will be present. The matchmakers arrive at the predetermined meeting place well ahead of the scheduled time, armed with the profiles and pictures of the man and woman who are meeting, so that they can identify them. After countless weekends of observing omiai, I learned to spot matchmakers by the folders full of profiles that they were usually holding, as well as one flashy accessory worn as a way for others to recognize them easily. Fujii-sensei’s accessory was a bright orange scarf, and indeed, before I was introduced to her properly, I used “Orange” to identify her in my notes. Another matchmaker that I saw regularly could always be spotted by her purple sequined bag. It was only after attending matchmaker training meetings and learning the details of setting up an omiai did I realize that matchmakers usually explicitly specify this kind of accessory to make finding each other in a

crowded hotel lobby an easier task.

Rather than conducting one omiai at a time, one or both matchmakers may, in fact, have a full dossier of clients to meet, depending on how many omiai they have scheduled for that day. There may be many, since most omiai are scheduled for weekend afternoons, when white-collar workers are most free. When matchmakers arrive at the omiai location, they find their clients, and then, while waiting for the other matchmaker and client to arrive, they entertain their clients, distract them, and provide some last minute coaching; based on my observations, most clients seem fairly nervous while waiting. If their clients have not arrived yet, the matchmaker may chat with other matchmakers that they know, trading stories and shop talk. This is certainly what I overheard, and at times was party to myself, as I got to know many matchmakers better. Moreover, they are likely to run into other matchmakers they know because most omiai are scheduled at the same set of centrally located hotels that are convenient to major train lines. Many hotel lobbies in Osaka, on weekend afternoons, will have a substantial population of matchmakers coming, going, and lingering, as wave after wave of omiai roll through the hotel. The hotel traffic was so heavy, in fact, that the Nihon Nakōdo Kyokai rented out a restaurant near one of the hotels for Sunday afternoons in Osaka.

For all that the actual moment of introducing two people is the central moment of drama and consequence in the story of an omiai marriage, it can be rather underwhelming. Typically, the two matchmakers begin by identifying each other, establishing that both clients are present, and then coming together in two pairs of matchmaker and client. Figures 2 and 3 below are elaborated versions of doodles from my notes, made while watching matchmakers conduct these introduction in hotels, sketching out a typical pattern of footing that I observed (although this is certainly not the only possibility). Footing is both literal, in the sense of where one stands in a conversation, and

figurative, in terms of the role one plays in the organization of talk (Goffman 1981). The lines indicate patterns of gaze and attention: each matchmaker addresses the other, and introduces her own client to the other matchmaker and client. The clients meanwhile, are sizing each other up. They start out, therefore, as two parallel pairs of matchmaker and client.

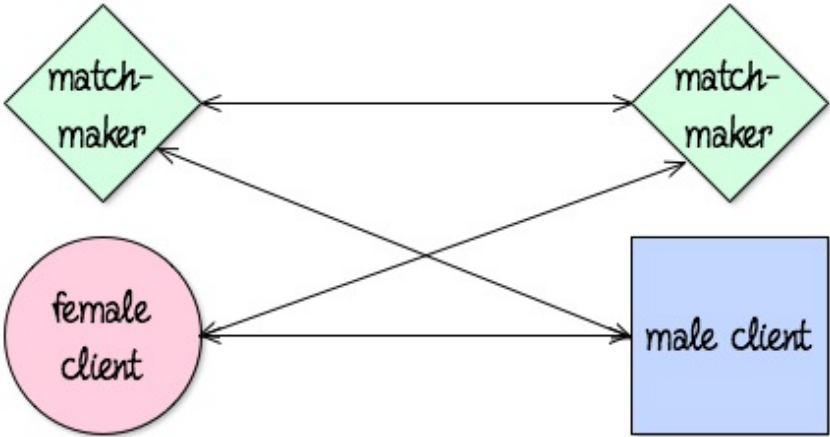


Figure 5: Footing at the start of omiai partner introductions.

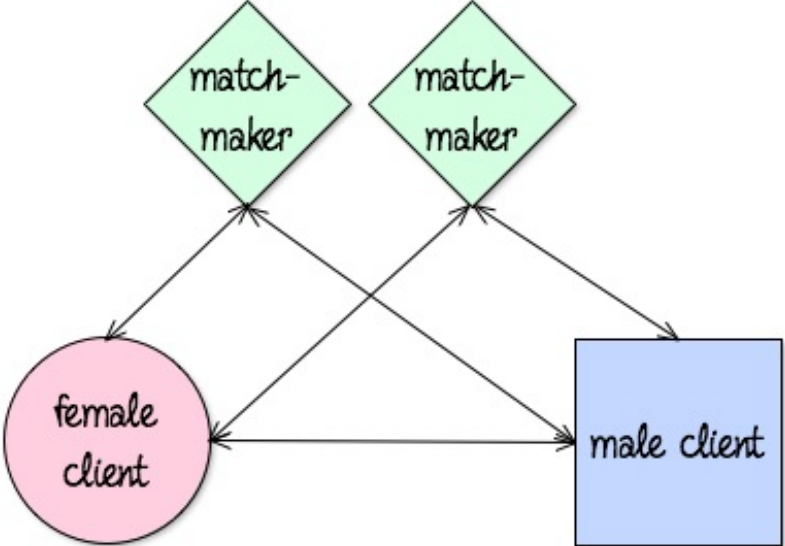


Figure 6: Footing as the matchmakers send the omiai couple on their way.

After meeting up, both matchmakers make their greetings, briefly introduce their clients, and then, with thanks, goodbyes, and well wishes, the clients, now a unit of their own, are sent on their way⁷. During this process, the matchmakers back away from their clients and towards each other, separating themselves from their clients and establishing two new pairs in the conversational footing: the matchmakers and the couple. The new couple, thus established, may simply duck into the hotel lobby café, or they may go someplace else; most of the time, they are left on their own⁸ to chat for an hour or two, and see how well they get on.

On the day following an omiai, matchmakers get in touch with their clients in order to find out their client's verdicts: do they want to see that person again? If either (or both) parties say no, then nothing further happens. The matchmakers will contact each other to compare their clients' responses and then, in their role as communicative mediators, will relay the bad news to their clients. As discussed below, these consultations also provide an opportunity for clients to report any misbehavior on the part of their omiai partners, and for matchmakers to pass on accusations of misbehavior to the partner's matchmaker. However, if both clients want to meet again, then the matchmakers will pass on the happy news, along with their partner's contact information. At this point, the clients officially enter the *kōsai*, or dating, stage. During *kōsai*, the matchmakers take a step back as the couple are now not only permitted, but encouraged, to contact each other directly, see each other as often as possible, and determine whether they can get along well enough to marry. To some extent, this is a process that *should* be easy, as matchmakers describe it. The man and woman in question have already preselected each other on the basis of material and lifestyle issues

⁷ In some cases, matchmakers may sit down with their clients and mediate communication during the omiai itself; the logistical and communicative plusses and minuses of this approach are detailed in the following chapter.

⁸ There are both logistical and interactional reasons for this, which I will cover in greater depth in chapter four.

that matter to them, as detailed on their profiles. The remaining time they spend together, during *kōsai*, can thus focus entirely on figuring out how they feel about each other, and whether those feelings are enough, or the right kind, to sustain a marriage; sex may or may not be a part of this, and some matchmakers are more open to the idea of premarital sex than others. Matchmakers estimate that this should take approximately three months, and often enforce a six-month maximum on the *kōsai* period—a short length of time that reflects the assumed ease of this process.

Although they are differently positioned within the multiparty client-matchmaker relationships, matchmakers work as hard during *kōsai* as they do getting clients ready for *omiai*, if not harder. As will be explained in more detail in chapters four and five, where I take up the issue of matchmakers' different counseling strategies for male and female clients, matchmakers still influence their clients' communication strategies during the dating phase. However, instead of acting as go-betweens who communicate intentions from one party to another, they act exclusively in their role as semiotic coaches and interpreters. During *kōsai*, the matchmakers push their clients to meet up with their new dating partners as frequently as possible (at least once a week over the course of three months is an ideal pace). But they will also continually act to make sure that the clients are communicating their intentions to marry each other, and moreover, that they are understanding each other's attempts to communicate the feelings they are supposed to be developing and the marital intentions that supposedly underlie this brief dating period. Both male and female clients may be under the mistaken assumption that the way they communicate their affections for their partner is readily understandable by others. One of the matchmaker's tasks when counseling clients through the dating phase is to inform them that this is not the case, and to guide communication towards semiotic modes, particularly explicit verbal declarations, that they privilege as being more

clear, more understandable, than other kinds of potentially meaningful actions. If these communications go well, and the clients decide to marry, then the process ends with an engagement, and the new couple is removed from the database. However, if one or both partners decide that they don't wish to marry after all, the matchmakers step in again to end the affair, and the round of going on omiai to meet new prospects will begin again for both clients.

Making Trust and Breaking Trust

The primary criterion for choosing someone to be as a matchmaker and guide through the process described above is trust, a precious commodity that matchmakers may have difficulty obtaining. The marriage advice business has come under some scrutiny due to the high fees that partner introduction services charge, along with the newly recognized need to protect consumers' privacy, and consumer protections have consequently been put into place to ensure that matchmakers, along with other businesses that offer long contracts with substantial sign-up fees, do not defraud clients financially (Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry 2008). For example, such contracts must feature a "cooling off" period, where the client can back out of the contract without penalty, and they also limit penalties for ending the contract early. Matchmakers must also abide by privacy laws that protect clients' private information and set guidelines for when, how, and to whom it may be disclosed (Consumer Affairs Agency n.d.; 2003)⁹. As Yasuda-sensei explained in November 2009 to a room full of about thirty women waiting to sign up for her services, matchmakers are aware that clients and potential clients fear abuse of the personal information gathered by large

⁹ Although the laws protecting consumers' personal information are now a decade old, many veteran matchmakers have been in business for fifteen to twenty years (or longer); discussions of legal issues at matchmaker association meetings indicate that many matchmakers are as yet not fully aware of their legal duties to protect clients' privacy, either because they learned their profession before the present laws were promulgated, or because as new matchmakers they are still learning their profession in the first place.

marriage information services. They are also sensitive to the charge that their clientele may not have been properly screened—that ultimately most (male) clients are not actually interested in marriage, but are in fact looking for mere “play” (*asobi*)¹⁰—for sex instead of love. So not only must a matchmaker inspire trust, but he must specifically be someone that can be relied on to introduce clients to trustworthy partners. How do matchmakers create, cultivate, and demonstrate this trust?

One tool that matchmakers use to establish and maintain trust among themselves, and between themselves and their clients, are the matchmaker associations I have touched on above, but not fully explained. Most individual matchmakers will belong to at least one of these organizations, perhaps more than one. They are the formal, institutionalized result of matchmakers’ informal professional contacts, and they exist to both regulate matchmakers’ interactions with one another, and, just as importantly, to pool clients together into consolidated databases, so that clients of any one matchmaker can search, via the association, the combined population of all associated matchmakers and their clients (as noted above, in the case of IBJ, the number of associated clients can be fairly high). As Applbaum (1995) observes, one consequence of greater social and geographic mobility in modern, urban Japan is that any individual’s immediate social networks offer insufficient opportunities for meeting an “appropriate stranger” to wed, whom Applbaum characterizes as someone of similar social standing and family background. These social network limitations may be as true for matchmakers as they are for individuals: no one matchmaker has enough clients to make matches between all of them, and matchmakers must work together to introduce their clients to each other. Thus the matchmaker association, which may operate on either a regional or national scale.

Matchmaker associations can promote trust between matchmakers and clients in a number of ways, one of which is to serve as a brand and certification authority that can be known and trusted

¹⁰ More so than the English word “play,” “*asobi*” carries powerful sexual overtones.

by clients who have heard of the association. The Nihon Nakōdo Kyōkai offers a certification test for member matchmakers, and consciously discusses branding efforts. They have partnered with numerous businesses offering services such as kimono (for very formal omiai or weddings), photography (for omiai profile pictures), wedding and engagement rings, and event space for weddings themselves. The goal of these projects is in part to offer bargains to the association's clients, but it is also to establish the association as a reputable business entity by virtue of linking the association with other companies whose brands may already be recognized and respected by clients as consumers. There was even, in July 2010, a debate about licensing Hello Kitty as a mascot to tie the matchmaker association to all of the recognizability and positive associations that Kitty-chan immediately conveys. Nakanishi-sensei, addressing organization members at a meeting in December 2011, testified to the certifying power of matchmaker associations in the following segment of talk. Here, he explains the main office's decision to hand out certificates of appreciation to all matchmakers who've matched up at least one couple with another matchmaker from the organization, and uses two forms of evidence. The first is the imagined thoughts of prospective clients; the second is his own experience, which forms the basis of these thoughts.

Episode 1: “Successful Marriage Certificates”

1. De sore ni tomonatte shinnenkai de maitoshi,
Along with that, every year at the New Year's Party
2. eh, hitokumi de mo, kyōkai no nakōdo-san to,
Um, even one couple, with a matchmaker from [this] association
3. iwayuru tōroku kaiin dōshi ga
as we say, both registered clients
4. kekkon ga hitokumi de mo kimatta kata ni wa
to those who've had even just one couple decided,
5. seikon-kansha-jō, to iu no wo honbu kara watashite masu¹¹.

¹¹ As detailed in the front matter, bold text indicates lexical items or morphological forms associated with the Kansai dialect. Underlined text marks addressee-honorific verb endings that simultaneously index the formality of the situation as well as a more standard speech style. Quotative markers such as *to*, *tte*, *to yū*, *tte yū*, are marked with italic text.

- the main office is handing out “Successful Marriage Certificates.”*
6. De, kore wo watasu ni totte atarashī kata ni itte okimasu to,
So, about handing [these out], to let the new people know in advance,
 7. k- kekkon kibōsha ga doko ni nyūkai shiyō ka na to omotta toki ni,
wh- when people who want to marry are wondering, “where should I sign up?”
 8. kaiin-sū ga ōi toka ne, ī kaiin ga iru warui ka dō ka,
if, like, there are many clients, right, there are good clients, whether there are bad clients
 9. ironna koto ga aru n desu kedomo,
there are many things, but
 10. yappari, ichiban, ōki-na, hashira no hitotsu wa,
Of course, the best, one of the biggest supports,
 11. koko de kekkon kimete ru yarō ka.
I wonder if they’re deciding marriages here.
 12. Kono nakōdo-san kekkon kimete ru yarō ka, to iu no wa
I wonder if this matchmaker is deciding marriages, that thought
 13. kekkō kime-te ni naru to omou n desu yo, nyūkai suru ka dō ka.
often becomes the deciding factor, I think, whether they join or not.
 14. Sono toki ni, seikon-kansha-jō wo honbu kara moratteru n desu yo, tte yattara,
At those times, if they can say, “They’ve got a certificate from the head office,
 15. Ah, kekkō kekkon kimete haru n ya na.
ah, they’re deciding a lot of marriages aren’t they.”
 16. Boku ga ne, nijū-hachi nen mae ni kono gyōkai ni haitta toki ni,
Myself, right? Twenty-eight years ago, when I entered this business,
 17. hitokumi, saisho, hantoshi de hitokumi kimeta n desu yo.
My first couple, my first couple decided in six months, I tell you.
 18. De, futakumi kimeta san nen kakatta n desu kedo ne. (pause, looks around the room)
Then, the second couple took three years but you know.
 19. Ma sore wa sō to, ichi nen-me ni kimeta mon ya kara,
Well, that’s true, because the thing is they decided in my first year
 20. kanshajō moratte sore wo zutte hatte ttara,
I got a certificate and I put it up on my wall the whole time
 21. Kuru kata, kuru kata ga, ah, koko wa yō kimete haru n desu ne, kore wa anshin desu wa,
The people who came, “Ah, they’re deciding marriages here aren’t they, this place is safe!”
 22. hairareta keiken ga aru no de,
Because I have the experience of being joined up with,
 23. mina-san ni watashitara ī no ka na, to omotte.
I thought it would be nice to hand them out to everyone,
 24. Anō. irān kata wa irān de kekkō na n desu yo
Um, if you don’t need them that’s fine.
 25. Boku wa irān kara, boku wa tada de watasu.
Since I don’t need them, I’m handing them out for free.

Reported or imagined speech in Japanese is relatively easy to locate, formally; it is more or less

obligatorily followed by the quotative markers *to* or *tte*. Although these markers can stand on their own, they are frequently paired with verbs like *iu*, “say” (frequently realized as [ju:]), or *omou*, “think”; Japanese arguably makes no distinction between direct and indirect quotation (Maier 2009). Consequently, both imagined speech, thoughts, and opinions occupy the same structural status as direct quotation. In the case of Nakanishi-sensei’s narrative, the “quoted” imagined thoughts of prospective clients are also locatable by the switch from a fairly standard and polite speech style, with addressee-honorific verb endings and standard Japanese forms, to forms typical of the Kansai region of which Nakanishi-sensei is a native. Thus they use the local honorific auxiliary verb *haru*, as in lines 15 and 21, in lieu of the standard *irassharu*; and in lines 11, 12, and 15, they use the copula forms *ya* (indicative) and *yarō* (irrealis) instead of standard *da* or *darō*. The voice of the imagined clients serves to illustrate potential client worries to the audience of listening matchmakers, and dramatize how the possession of a successful marriage certificate can help allay those worries.

As a Kansai native, Nakanishi-sensei does not confine Kansai forms strictly to quoted speech; they also surface in lines 19, 24, and 25 (*irān* is a negative of the verb *iru*, “need,” with the negative ending *-an*). However, they notably show up when he is giving an opinion or narrating his own experiences; in all cases except for line 25, Kansai-style speech forms are all embedded in larger explanatory clauses that end with addressee-honorific, standard verbs. This resembles self-quotation, about which Maynard notes, “Although the quotee and the quoter may be in physical terms the same person, they are not identical in terms of the characters represented in the discourse” (1996: 208). The character of Nakanishi-sensei the authoritative matchmaker, with his standard, honorific matrix clauses, is not the same as the embedded character of the young and fumbling matchmaker saved by an official certificate. In this way, the evidence of experience is marshaled towards the

service of a larger institutional project: certifying matchmakers as successful and capable (compare Besnier 1993 on the use of reported speech to create authoritative narratives).

The discursive strategies from the excerpt above also show up in disciplinary discussions of matchmaker misbehavior. Matchmaker associations take on the role of regimenting matchmakers' and clients' behavior through their policies and practices, and engage in conflict resolution when member matchmakers clash. Again, in the Nihon Nakōdo Kyōkai, the leadership makes it clear at almost every meeting that their policies exist specifically to promote trust and conflict resolution between matchmakers. Some part of this regimentation is formal, encoded in the bylaws of the association. These rules stipulate things such as how matchmakers ought to communicate with one another (for example, by phone, fax, or email). They determine what online or paper forms are used to set up and confirm omiai; set policies about omiai locations, cancellation, and scheduling; and set penalties for latecomers. As mentioned above, they also may set limits on fees that member matchmakers may charge, and put forth some basic rules about how clients may or may not communicate with each other (for example, when communication must be mediated through the matchmakers). Violations of these formal policies may result in formal penalties—complaints to the head office of the association, fines, or expulsion of clients or matchmakers from the association, in the worst cases. However, a large portion of the regimentation carried out by matchmakers takes place somewhat more informally.

The matchmaker association's bylaws dictate the minimum requirements of omiai etiquette, but the kinds of behavior clients may or may not actually engage in varies widely. As mentioned earlier, after two clients meet for the first time at an omiai, they must at least report back to their matchmaker to say whether or not they have any interest in seeing the other person again. When

clients give their reason for rejecting someone, they may describe what they view as bad behavior on the part of their partner. What is a matchmaker to do when she hears this news? Report it to the other matchmaker, of course! Nearly all matchmakers have stories of complaining to other matchmakers about their clients, or conversely, being chastised for their own clients' behavior. My friend Kawakami-sensei once told me about an older woman who invited her date out for beer and sushi, apparently too casual or wild a choice for an omiai. The other matchmaker called Kawakami-sensei to scold her for her client's poor behavior, and laid the blame for it not on the client directly, but on Kawakami-sensei, for not having "taught her client right." As suggested above, these conflicts may reach the institutional level. The following two discussions of conflict—both from Nakanishi-sensei—illustrate what happens when matchmakers bring their troubles to the head office. At the end of each monthly meeting, Nakanishi-sensei addresses and answers questions sent to the head office. Since Nakanishi-sensei usually tells stories or reads aloud from emails, it is only through voicing that the conflicts between matchmakers can be dramatized. The segment of talk below is from April 2012:

Episode 2: Two Tokyo Matchmakers

1. Etto soshitara, a::: go:-
Um, moving on, abhh thi-
2. kongetsu ikkagetsu atta koto de,
with things that happened during the last month
3. go-hōkoku toka, mina-san-gata no shitsumon ni
like announcements, questions from everyone,
4. o-kotae shite ikitai to omoimasu. (inhale) (3 sec. pause)
I think I want to go ahead and answer them.
5. A sō sō sengetsu Tōkyō no getsureikai de, e::
Ah, yes, yes, last month at the monthly meeting in Tokyo, ehbb
6. omiai no o-kotowari, omiai wo shita,
turning down and omiai, (people/you) have an omiai,
7. tsugi no hi no go ji made ni iesu ka nō ka no henji wo suru *tte yū* no ga arimasu yo ne?
you have to make a reply by five the next day, saying "yes" or "no," right?
8. Ma, sore demo hayaku wakareba,

- Well, that's (how it is) but if you know earlier,*
9. wakatta hō kara saki, mēru nari fakkusu de,
the person who knows earlier can, by mail or fax,
10. o-kotowari toka kōsai kibō sureba ī, wake desu ne?
send a refusal or like, they want to date, if you do that it's OK, that's the case, right?
11. Demo, hitori, 4477¹² no dansei no kata ga te wo agerarete,
But, one person, a man, number 4477 raised his hand,
12. senjitsu omiai wo shite, sono hi no yūgata ni hayai hō ga ī omotte,
the other day I did an omiai, and that evening thinking earlier was better,
13. okotowari no henji wo ireta, to.
I put in a "no" reply, he said.
14. Mēru ka fakkusu ka docchi ka shirimasen kedo.
I don't know whether he sent an email or a fax but.
15. Soshitara, aite no nakōdo yori, derikashī ga nai **ya nā**,
Anyway, from other matchmaker, "This is tactless, isn't it,
16. mo chotto, sō yū o-kotowari tte yū **na**,
hold on a bit, saying you're refused, you know,
17. jikan wo oite kara suru **mon ya**, tte yū yō **na**:
it's the sort of thing you set a little time aside for, isn't it?
18. henji ga kite, okorareta to. (the audience laughs)
Came the reply, saying they were angry.
19. A:: sō yatte waratte itadaku to ī desu ne, mina-san-gata ga wakatte ru koto **ya** ne?
Ah if you laugh for me like this that's good, it means you understand.
20. Ja:: sō yū koto desu.
Welllll that was that. [Lit, "Things are as I said."]
21. Mō kō yū wake no **wakarān** nakōdo ga
Well this kind of unreasonable matchmaker
22. Go-hyaku sanjū ni mo **oru** hitori futari **oru** n **ya** ne?
There are 530, there will be one or two, won't there?
23. Hitori futari **oru** to minna, shitara **akan** no ka kanchigai sareru n desu yo ne.
If there are one or two, everyone, maybe you shouldn't do it, you'll be misunderstood, won't you.
24. Mō wakattara hayakereba hayai hō ga ī desu yo.
I mean, if you know, the sooner the better, I tell you.

Here, two matchmakers from Tokyo disagreed over the proper way to convey information about the results of an omiai when the news is bad: one of the participants does not want to see the other again.

The first matchmaker felt that replies (good or bad) were to be submitted to the other matchmaker

¹² Within this organization, matchmakers are frequently referred to by membership number as well as name, to prevent confusion in the event that two individuals have the same family name. Here the membership number is anonymized, as a name would have been.

as quickly as possible; the second felt that bad news requires more time and thought in the delivery than the first matchmaker allowed.

It seems, from the text above, that the first matchmaker was present at the meeting in Tokyo, and spoke to Nakanishi-sensei directly; he is thus in a position to report his speech directly. Indeed, unlike the imagined Kansai Japanese style of the prospective clients in Episode 1, or the way Nakanishi-sensei conveys his private opinions (as separate from his official position), the style of the first matchmaker's speech (in lines 12 and 13) has no markers of the Kansai variety in it, and seems fairly standard in style. By contrast, the imagined speech of the second matchmaker (in lines 15-17) is full of Kansai Japanese forms; this makes the style shift particularly noticeable because this other matchmaker is also likely in the Tokyo area, and would likely *not* use Western Japanese forms in his speech.

Kansai Japanese is associated, in the mass media, with humor; it occupies a place in Japanese comedy not dissimilar to that of New York varieties in American stand-up comedy (Palter and Slotsve 1995):70–71. Thus, it makes sense here that it is used to elicit laughter from the audience, and in so doing, to portray the second matchmaker's position as silly, laughable, illegitimate; this is reinforced by the way Nakanishi-sensei thanks the audience for their laughter and their implicit agreement with his assessment of the second matchmaker. It is further bolstered by Nakanishi-sensei's self-quotations in lines 21-23 that describe “wake no wakarān nakōdo,” literally, “matchmakers who don't understand reason.” Finally, as in episode 1, the entire condemnation of the second matchmaker is, again, framed within a standard, addressee-honorific narrative matrix that indexes Nakanishi-sensei's institutional authority and renders his opinion reasonable, the second matchmaker's ridiculous. As Irvine (1993: 113) notes, “Speakers who vilify others risk injuring their

own reputations by injuring someone else’s, unless some means can be found for dissociating the speaker from the act”—in this case, through imagined speech and through self-deprecating self quotation.

The last segment of talk I include below is a long discussion of when matchmakers are or are *not* required to mediate their clients’ communications. In this instance, Nakanishi-sensei more “realistically” animates the voices of the different characters in this narrative, who may sometimes speak with regional forms, sometimes with polite and standard forms, depending on the imagined speaker, imagined addressee and, perhaps most importantly, the imagined emotional state of the speaker; angry speakers are more likely to use Kansai forms in the following narrative. However, as will be shown below, the multiplicity of voices and styles is important for constructing the complexity of the situation and his ultimately flexible answer.

Episode 3: The Breakup

1. (staring down at a piece of paper) (inhale) Ettō, sore kara tsugi wa,
Umm, now we have next
2. a, itsumo dōri mina-san-gata kara ikkagetsu ni,
uh, as always, from all of you this month
3. anō watashi ni taisuru no shitsumon mēru desu ne.
umm are the email questions for me, right?
4. Konkai wa, amari nakatta, futari dake desu ne?
This time, there weren’t very many, it’s just two, right?
5. Hitotsu yomi-agemasu ne:?
I’ll read one for you, OK?
6. (reading quickly from a sheet of paper in front of him) E: jibun no josei kaiin yori sōdan ga ari,
Ahh, I had a question from a female client of mine
7. kōsai-chū no dansei kaiin kara,
from the man she was dating
8. chokusetsu kōsai wo shūryō shitai, to yū mēru ga todoita to no koto deshita.
she received a mail saying directly, “I want to end our dating,” is the issue.
9. (Looking up from the paper, addressing the audience) Wakarimasu? Kōsai shite:: ru aite kara, *Got it? From the partner she was dating*
10. jibun no kaiin ni, chokusetsu kaiin dōshi de, e:: kōsai chūshi,
[this matchmaker’s] own client, directly between the clients, huh stopped the dating

11. chūshi tte yū ka, owari, shūryō tte yū.
I say "stop," maybe I should say "end," "finish."
12. (Looking at the paper again). De, nakōdo-san ga koko ni k- anō kaite, kaitehan no wa,
So, what the matchmaker wr- um wr- writes here,
13. jibun no ninshiki de wa, kōsai no shūryō wa,
As I was aware, as for ending dating,
14. nakōdo wo tsūjite renraku wo suru to omotte ita no de,
I thought you got in touch through the matchmaker, and so
15. Senpō nakōdo ni renraku wo torō to omoi, kaisoku wo kakunin shita no desu ga,
I thought I would contact the other matchmaker, and checked the regulations, but,
16. nakōdo wo tsūjite kōsai shūryō no renraku wo shinakereba naranai to yū kijitsu wo
a rule saying you must end dating with communication through the matchmaker
17. mitsukeraremasen deshita.
I could not find it.
18. Kono baai, o-aite nakōdo kara aratamete,
In this case, from the partner's matchmaker, one more time
19. kōsai shūryō no renraku wo o-negai shite mo ī no ka,
is it ok if I ask for a contact from her ending the dating
20. sore tomo chokusetsu iwareta (pauses briefly to look at laptop screen)
Or alternately since [my client] was told directly,
21. chokusetsu iwareta no dakara shūryō to shinakereba naranai no ka,
since she was told directly must it be ended,
22. wakaranatta no de oshiete kudasai, (looking up) tte yū koto na n desu.
since I didn't know, please tell me, is the issue.
23. Kore wa, anō, kono kata mo koko ni kaite **haru** yō ni,
This, umm, as this this person has already written here
24. nakōdo wo tsūjite renraku wo shinakereba naranai, to wa, kaite nai n desu yo.
that communication must go through the matchmaker, it's not written, I tell you,
25. Kaite nai.
Not written.
26. Anō, omiai:: no, (pause) ano henji? kōsai suru ka okotowari suru ka,
Umm, for omai (pause) um the reply? Whether to date or to refuse,
27. kore wa nakōdo wo tsūjite shinakereba naranai, tte kaite masu ne.
it's written [in the rules] that this has to go through the matchmaker right.
28. Dakara honnin dōshi de kari ni, omiai no toki ni,
Therefore if the two parties themselves, hypothetically, during the omiai,
29. iya, mō ikkai atte kudasai yo:!
uh, please see me again!
30. tte yutta toki ni, a ī desu yo, aimashō, raishū de mo aimashō, tte
when they say that, ah ok, let's meet, next week even, let's meet, they say
31. ikura honnin dōshi ga yatte mo, nakōdo ni, sono ban,
no matter how much the two clients do together, to the matchmaker, that evening,
32. ya, kotowatte kudasai yuttara, sore ga, hontō no, henji ni, naru n desu ne?
Uh, please refuse them, if they say that, that's the real, reply, isn't it?

33. *To yū no wa, mō, yappari, omiai no toki to yū no wa shotaimen ya shi,
That is to say, well, of course, at the time of the omiai it's a first meeting,*
34. anō ammari iya na koto **iwa:n** to
umm if you don't say too many unpleasant things,
35. mata kōsai shite kudasai ne: *tte* wakarimashita *tte*
again please date me okay? They say, of course, they say
36. hodo yoku awashite oitara ī **wa** to, nan de yuttara,
If they make plans together like that it's fine, I say, why I say that,
37. omiai no toki wa, mada, aite no jūsho mo, denwa bangō mo,
at the omiai, they still don't know their partner's address, phone number,
38. nani mo wakatte nai yo ne.
they don't know anything, right?
39. Dakara uso wo yutta kara yutte, nande uso wo yutta n **ya!**
So after they lie, saying, "why did you lie to me!"
40. iya na denwa wo kakaru koto wa nai:: desu yo ne. (pausing, nodding)
there won't be anyyy awful phone calls, right?
41. Dakara nan da *tte*, tekito ni ikawashite oite mo kamawanai n desu yo.
So why you ask, whatever words they irresponsibly trade, I don't mind, I tell you.
42. Tada, ammari sore yaraeru to, ne? Hanashi chotto, zureru n desu kedo,
Just, if you do that too much, right? The conversation will get, a little off track but
43. nakōdo wo tsūjite kotowatte kita toki ni,
when the refusal comes through the matchmaker
44. iya::, ano hito to wa raishū yakusoku shite aru n desu yo!
Nooo, I had a date with that person for next week I tell you!
45. Jikan mo basho mo kimete aru n desu yo!
We had the time and place decided you know!
46. Nakōdo-san no hō de katte ni kotowatte masen ka, mitai na,
if it seems to the matchmaker that you've singlehandedly not refused,
47. nakōdo ni taisuru fushinkan ga waku kanōsei ga aru kara,
there's a chance a feeling of mistrust could bubble up towards the matchmaker, so
48. ammari **ēkagen** na henji **sentotte** kure to wa yutte ru n desu kedo,
I'm always saying please don't give out too many careless replies, but,
49. ma, kaisoku-teki ni yū to, sō yū ikura yutte mo kamawanai,
well, speaking to the rules, that kind of, however much [clients] say I don't mind
50. demo sonna mono wa seishiki na henji **ya** nai desu yo! *tte* yū shori na n desu yo.
but it's managed saying that sort of thing isn't an official response [to the omiai] you know!
51. Omiai no toki wa ne. Tokoro ga, kōsai no toki *tte* yū no wa,
At the omiai, right. However, when we talk about dating
52. aite no jūsho mo denwa bangō mo kaishamei mo subete kojīn jōhō wakatte ru yo ne?
they know their partners address, phone number, workplace, all their private information, right?
53. (swallows) Sō suru to, aru teido no o-tsukiai wo shite te,
If we assume that, to some extent they've been dating and
54. nakōdo ni kotowatte kure *tte* yutte kuru. De nakōdo wa o-kotowari deshita *tte* yū.

- they come saying to the matchmaker please refuse them for me. So the matchmaker says it's a refusal.*
55. De aite no nakōdo wa jibun no kaiin ni aite no nakōdo kara,
So the partner's matchmaker tells their own client that, from their partner's matchmaker
56. kimi-tachi no kōsai kotowatte kita yo! *Tte yū.*
your dating's come to be refused! They say.
57. Sō suru to, kōjin jōhō ga wakatte ru kara, kondake ikkagetsu mo nikagetsu mo
In that case, because they know the private information, this month or two,
58. eiga ittari yūenchi ittari iroiro asobi ni ittari, ne, anō, shōrai no hanashi mo shita no ni,
even though we've been going to movies and amusement parks and different entertainment, right, we even talked about the future
59. nan de sutto nakōdo wo tsūjite futatsu henji de nō **kai**?
Why all of a sudden do I get these two "no" replies?
60. Sore wa chotto tsumetai n **chigau** ka?
Isn't that a little bit cold?
61. *Tte yū::* iwayuru iyagoto no denwa ga hairu kanōsei aru yo ne? Wakarimasu?
that is to say, there's a chance they'll get some kind of complaint phone call, right? Got it?
62. Mēru mo fukumete. Kojin jōhō wakatte ru kara.
Email too. Because they have the private information.
63. Dakara, sō yū baai mo aru kara, boku wa koko wa, kaisoku ni aete kaite nai n desu.
So, because those cases happen, I, here, contrary to expectations didn't write it in the rules.
64. Honnin dōshi de kotowatte mo kamawanai, to omotte ru kara.
Because I think I don't care if the two clients themselves do the refusal.
65. Tada, honnin dōshi de kotowaru to, ke- anō heta na kotowari-kata shite
Just, if they do the refusal themselves, heh, umm, if they do it clumsily,
66. kenka nattari suru koto mo aru kara, ma, umaku nakōdo wo tsūjite, kotowatte moratte,
there could be a fight or something so, well, if you have the refusal go skillfully through the matchmaker,
67. jibun wa jibun de, a- anō nagai aida kōsai shite moratte arigatō gozaimashita no,
for oneself, by oneself, uh- umm thank you very much for seeing me for such a long time
68. imada mēru gurai okuttara ī n **chigau** ka, *tte* boku wa omotte ru n desu ne?
just send an email or so, isn't that ok? That's what I think, OK?
69. De, koko wa hontō ni kēsu bai kēsu na n de,
Well, this is honestly a "case by case" thing so,
70. anō, kaisoku ni wa issai koko: ni wa furete nai n desu.
umm in the rules I don't touch on it even once.
71. Mō, anō, ī yō ni, iwayuru, dan jo honnin dōshi,
Well, umm, in a good way, so to speak, if the man and woman themselves together
72. de sono honnin dōshi no nakōdo dōshi, kono yonin yonsha ga, sono, baibai no,
well and the client's matchmakers together, these four, four people, that "bye bye"
73. ī yō ni shite morattara ī to omotte ru n desu.
if they have it done well then I think it's fine.
74. Toraburu ga okoranai yō ni.
So that there's no trouble.

75. Dakara honnin dōshi de kotowatta hō ga ī to omottara sō shita hō ga ī shi,
So if you think it's best for the two clients together to refuse, then doing that's ok, and
76. koko wa honnin ga yū yori mo nakōdo wa umaku kotowatta hō ga ī to omotta,
then rather than the person themselves saying it, you think the matchmaker can skillfully refuse.
77. sō shita ī shi, anō ryōhō shita hō ga ī to omottara ryōhō shitara ī shi,
then that's ok, and ummm if you think doing both is best if you do both that's ok and
78. mō kēsu bai kēsu de o-makase, *to iu koto.*
well "case by case" I leave it up to you, is the thing.
79. Doryō shite mo ihan ni wa narimasen.
Generosity isn't against the rules.
80. Ihan ni naru no wa tada hitotsu.
There's only one thing that's against the rules.
81. Sore wo kīta jibun no kaiin kara kōsai, o-kotowari wo kīta nakōdo ga,
That's if your client, who's heard the bad news, the matchmaker who heard the refusal
82. aite no nakōdo ja nakute, aite no kaiin no denwa bangō wakatte masu yo ne,
they know not the partner's matchmaker, but the other client's phone number, right?
83. kōsai haittara.
If they started dating [and thus the matchmakers exchanged the clients' contact information]
84. Chokusetsu uchi no kaiin kotowatte kita kara gomen ne? *tte* yattara
I'm sorry my client refused you, if you say that [to the other matchmaker's client],
85. kore wa ihan desu yo. Kore dake wa ihan desu. (pause, looks down)
that's against the rules you know. That's the only thing that's against the rules.
86. *Tte iu fū ni kangaete itadaita kekkō desu.*
So if you do me a favor and think about it this way, that's fine.
87. Dakara, anō aite kara chokusetsu kotowari ga kimashita yo *tte*
Therefore, umm, I got a refusal directly from my partner, they say
88. jibun no kaiin kara denwa ga attara,
if you have a call from your own client
89. aite no nakōdo ni, anō uchi no kaiin kara, aite, a- anata no kaiin kara
To the partner's matchmaker, umm I heard from my client, their partner, from y- your client
90. chokusetsu uchi no kaiin kotowatte kita n de, kakunin no tame ni
directly refused my client, to confirm,
91. mō ichido, hontō ni kotowari na n ka dō ka kīte kudasai,
could you ask again whether it's a real refusal please?
92. *tte yū mēru ka fakkusu wo sureba ī*
sending an email or fax saying that is fine
93. dake no koto desu. De honnin ni kīte moratte, o, machigae naku mo kotowarō omotte,
Just that. So if they ask the client for you, oh, no mistake I meant to refuse,
94. aite ni o-kotowari no, denwa nari mēru nari shimashita *tte yū* koto dattara,
if it's the case that they get get a refuel email or phone call, whatever,
95. sore de o-shimai. Yoroshī desu ka?
That's it. Is that OK?

First, in lines 1–5, Nakanishi-sensei sets up the discourse that follows by explaining that he’s about to read the text of an email sent to him by one of the members. In lines 6–8 he reads out the beginning of the email sent to him, then in lines 9–11, he pauses to clarify the situation for the listening audience. Here he is a bit disfluent, as he explains the somewhat unusual situation of two clients ending their *kōsai*, or dating phase, by directly discussing it with each other, instead of routing the breakup through their matchmakers. In line 12 he returns to the email, where he animates—that is to say, speaks for (Goffman 1981)—the aggrieved matchmaker, continuing both the story of the clients’ irregular breakup, and inquiring as to whether the other matchmaker or client had broken the rules by directly initiating a breakup. In lines 23–25, he provides the answer, speaking as himself: there’s nothing in the rules that mandates how clients must end a dating relationship.

Lines 26–50 contain an elaborate, dramatized explanation of how to handle a refusal to see the other person again after an *omiai*, given that that clients might feel social pressure to make each other promises during an *omiai* to meet again, promises that they do not intend to keep. However, there are no consequences to such promises. This is, first of all, because organizational rules stipulate that the response given by the matchmaker is the *real* response to an *omiai*, rather than anything a client might say during. Secondly, before dating (*kōsai*), no personal information has been exchanged between clients, other than their real names. Therefore, as injured as a client who has been deceived at an *omiai* might feel, there is nowhere for such clients to direct their anger, although it might cause distrust between client and matchmaker.

Line 51 begins an explanation of why refusals during *kōsai* are different, contrasting the voice of an imagined aggrieved client who has been deceived at an *omiai* in lines 39 and 44–45 with the

voice of an imagined aggrieved client who's been refused in the middle of *kōsai* in lines 57–60. (Note that in both cases, strong emotion correlates with use of Kansai features.) This second imagined client is aggrieved not because a meaningful relationship has ended *per se*, but because it has been ended in such a cold (*tsumetai*) fashion. After a month or two of dating, clients have invested time and feeling in one another; they also have each other's contact information. Thus, not only are there potential consequences to a poorly handled breakup, but also, the breakup itself is a more delicate affair. Lines 63–73 emphasize the need for this delicacy, and “case by case” treatment of breakups. The rules in this case, “contrary to expectations,” do not stipulate how communication must occur, but leave it to the judgment of the four people concerned—the two clients and their respective matchmakers—how best to convey the bad news, in order to prevent any “trouble” (again, an English loan). Throughout this discussion, as always, Nakanishi-sensei's opinions are framed within matrix clauses that end formally, giving his opinion institutional force. This culminates in lines 86 and 95, which incorporate referent honorifics for the audience, in addition to the typical standard polite *desu/-masu* addressee honorifics that usually characterize the matrix clauses (they are specifically: *-te itadaku*, to humbly receive the favor of the preceding verb from its agent, and *yoroshī*, the referent-honorific alternate of the adjective *ī*, “good, OK, fine”). This level of hyper-formality solemnizes and finalizes Nakanishi-sensei's exegesis of his own imagined drama: *Sore de o-shimai. Yoroshī desu ka?* [“That's the end. OK?”]

Through discourse like that analyzed above, the Nihon Nakōdo Kyōkai, as an institution, often through the person of Nakanishi-sensei, enforces good behavior and smoothes over miscommunications and conflicts between matchmakers. One more tool for enforcing good behavior and informal matchmaker education is gossip, which basically functions as the kind of

storytelling exhibited by Nakanishi-sensei above on a smaller, and less institutionalized scale. I realize that I may be in danger of painting matchmakers as stereotypical gossipy old women, which is an oversimplification (and an exclusion of the many male matchmakers, who I would estimate make up about one-third of organization membership). Like any professionals, matchmakers frequently turn to shop talk when gathered together. After matchmaker association meetings, or between omiai at hotels, the matchmakers who already know each other turn to one another, gather in clusters, and very soon begin to tell stories of this client or that client, this omiai or that omiai, this couple or that couple, who broke up, or that other couple, who are now engaged—to their own happiness, and the matchmakers' benefit. In addition to the many stories of clients that matchmakers told me during their interviews, I also watched and overheard matchmakers gossiping every time I went to observe omiai. Due to this overheard quality, I do not have any transcribed, although I do have references to topics of gossip in my notes.

Matchmakers' gossip is, in some sense, small talk: unimportant chatter to pass the time between more significant events like actually introducing clients. However, this belies its regulatory functions. Clients' bad manners are a frequent topic of conversation—a man too cheap to pay for coffee, for example, or treat his date to cake. Clients who fail to meet matchmakers' behavioral standards become the topic of gossip and small talk, minor dramas to pass the time in the hotel lobby. It is gossip about clients, and the judgments that matchmakers issue upon them, that not only reflects what the behavioral standards are, but also works to establish what kind of external behavior can be taken as a sign of desirable personal, interior qualities. In between the formal regimentation of matchmaker association bylaws, and matchmakers' informal self-regimentation through gossip and complaint, matchmakers ultimately wind up positioning themselves as authorities on good manners,

appropriate behavior, and common sense.

Trust and Expertise: Building the Matchmaker/Client Relationship

Matchmakers exercise their status as experts on the appropriate and the expected through client education; this also serves the purpose of preventing troubles, such as the examples given in this chapter so far. After all, in order to participate actively and effectively in the community of matchmakers, matchmakers must demonstrate that they are trustworthy and cooperative; a major sign that a matchmaker may be untrustworthy is when his clients repeatedly misbehave. Client education begins with a first, in-person meeting between matchmaker and potential client, before the client decides whether to sign a contract with that matchmaker. During this meeting, the matchmaker explains the contract that the clients will sign. This contract primarily stipulates the fees that are due to the matchmaker, which may include a sign-up fee (*nyūkaihi*), a monthly membership fee (*tsukikaihi*), a fee for each omiai (*omiairyō*), and, in the event of an engagement, the successful marriage fee (*seikonryō*). As described above, this last is substantially larger than all the others, and is the reward for the matchmaker's work on the client's behalf. The contract also may stipulate the clients' responsibilities for an omiai, for example, showing up in a timely fashion, and not canceling or rescheduling except within certain limits. The contract is educational insofar as it dictates the minimum terms of acceptable behavior for clients, and the minimum obligations of the client to the matchmaker, and vice versa—for example, it may outline penalties for violating some of the rules of appropriate, polite, and decent behavior described above, such as fees to be assessed for lateness or cancellation.

During this initial meeting, the matchmaker may also begin the process of educating clients on their relative value on the marriage market, before allowing them to sign up. Within the system of

value created by the matchmakers, which places a high premium on finding individuals who can lead a comfortable, stable married life, not all clients are equally desirable. Some would-be clients, due to age, looks, body type, income, family circumstances, illness, or some combination of the above, will be treated by matchmakers, and potentially by other clients, as having a lower market value, or a decreased likelihood of getting married. A good personality may mitigate some of this, but certainly not all. Women have a tendency to choose men with elite educational backgrounds and high incomes, with a strong preference towards professionals such as doctors and lawyers; men tend to choose based on youth and beauty¹³. My experience is that matchmakers present these valuations straightforwardly when exchanging profiles or educating new matchmakers. Some clients receive a disproportionate number of requests for omiai, while others—for example, highly educated women, or men with low incomes or educational achievement—may be comparatively difficult to marry off, although client education and encouragement towards known successful strategies can mitigate some of these difficulties. At the first training session for new matchmakers that I attended, led by Nakanishi-sensei, he cautioned his students against the temptation to flatter potential clients rather than educate them about the above disadvantages. Flattery is ultimately bad business, and may result in disappointed, disillusioned, and dissatisfied clients. The matchmaker's job is to build trust and educate clients from very beginning by speaking the truth about their realistic chances to marry, even when the truth is harsh.

Once a client has decided to sign up, further education, particularly education about self-presentation, may begin as clients put together their profiles and are introduced to the database where they can begin searching for members of the opposite sex to meet. It begins with selecting a photograph for the client's profile (if possible, professionally taken), and filling in basic information:

¹³ These claims are treated in greater detail in chapter five.

age, location, employment, yearly income (for men only), educational background, height, weight, previous marital history, children (if any) and family background. There may also be some delicate tweaking of the few areas of the profile that are freely filled in by the client, in particular, the section on hobbies or interests. In early 2013, I attended a workshop held by Nakanishi Kiyomi on the art of profile writing. Since the only sections of the profile that are really written are the section on hobbies, and the section that the NNK calls “remarks” (*bikō-ran*), the workshop focused almost entirely on these. Hobbies on men’s profiles that seem excessively solitary (fishing, video games), or for women, hobbies that seem potentially expensive (shopping, foreign travel) may scare off potential mates. The ultimate goal is to create the profile of someone who appears cooperative and other-oriented, rather than that of someone solitary or selfish. Through setting up an appealing profile, matchmakers have their first opportunity to encourage clients to lean on them, to follow their advice. Even more than the possibility of meeting new people, advice on attitude and self-presentation is really what clients are paying their matchmakers for¹⁴.

The question of trust is, however, a somewhat circular one. Client education establishes trust between matchmaker and client, and between matchmaker and matchmaker, but client education cannot succeed unless the client trusts the matchmaker enough to try her advice. Above and beyond trying a matchmaker’s advice and seeing that it works, what underlies the matchmaker’s authority? Why follow her advice in the first place? Successful and experienced matchmakers have a clear record of success that they can point to, as demonstrated by Nakanishi-sensei’s offer of credentialing certificates to new matchmakers. Such successful matchmakers may also post pictures of happy couples that they have matched in their offices, or blog happy emails received from newly engaged

¹⁴ This may be another practical reason for matchmakers to charge their clients a monthly membership fee instead of a one-time omiai fee. The monthly fee may create the effect that the client keeps his marriage advisor on retainer, to provide advice whenever he might have need of it.

clients. This serves to some extent as advertising—look what happiness can be yours! At the same time, every smiling face and word of praise reinforces the matchmaker’s position as an expert.

That said, every successful and experienced matchmaker had to begin somewhere. Amassing clients, and trust, is the new matchmaker’s most difficult task, as I learned from talking with new matchmakers like Nakata or Sugawara-sensei. Membership in a matchmaker association can help, as well as going through formal training courses (where they are available). Fujii-sensei, in her training lectures, advises new matchmakers that they sort of have to create a character that incorporates their existing expertise—something that is certainly true in the case of volunteer matchmakers turned pro, or matchmakers who married through the omiai process, and thus are qualified to guide others past the same hurdles that they have already cleared themselves. As mentioned earlier, new matchmakers may also be able to sign on with more experienced matchmakers and work as assistants, taking on an overflow of clients. In this way, they can gain their own experience while working under a name that already inspires trust. Finally, at a workshop for inexperienced matchmakers in July 2012, the instructor encouraged new matchmakers to leverage their past careers as well as personal and professional connections, both for the purpose of attracting new clients, and also for establishing their expertise. For example, doctors or lawyers are already trusted professionals who could easily offer matchmaking services from their extant offices. Likewise, for those already employed in some other aspect of the marriage industry, or in related industries (for example, jewelers), there is a natural logic to expanding into matchmaking, as well as a certain amount of expertise that carries over. Housewives, although they lack business connections, can leverage their own happy marriages to establish their authority as new matchmakers.

There is some disagreement between matchmakers on precisely how pushy their job requires

them to be. Nakanishi-sensei believes the matchmaker to be in large part a go-between, as the Chinese characters for *nakōdo*, “matchmaker,” suggest: 仲人, “relationship person.” For better or worse, however, the sort of person who tends to become a matchmaker also tends to be a social, talkative, and opinionated kind of person (and Nakanishi-sensei is no exception). There is a trade term for their opinionated and at times untrustworthy, “careless” speech: *nakōdo-guchi*, or “matchmaker mouth”; the NNK published several email newsletters on the danger of matchmaker mouth. Nakanishi-sensei teaches new matchmakers that, ultimately, it is only clients themselves who can decide whether or not they really want to meet and have an omiai with any particular person. A matchmaker’s responsibility is to honestly transmit information between two clients, without his own matchmaker mouth getting in the way of his clients’ freedom to make choices for themselves. By contrast, there is Yasuda-sensei, who claimed that what clients need is a little bit of “back pushing,” so that they move forward. The problem she identifies in her clients, which I will take up at much greater length in chapter five, is that of indecision. The matchmaker’s job is to give her clients a sense of direction, to push them forward, and to get them to give chances to people whom they might not have ordinarily considered. An authoritative third party with strong opinions of her own can also make it easier for clients to make decisions. At a meeting for potential new clients, she told the story of a girl who was put off by a man’s baldness when she met him at their omiai—he had hair in his profile picture. But Yasuda-sensei pushed her to keep seeing him, to try touching him and getting physically comfortable with him, and ultimately, they wound up together.

Matchmakers tend to believe that clients who are capable of doing things the matchmaker’s way can expect to be married within a year or two of signing up. Again, as discussed in greater detail in chapter five, “obedience” is one of the first traits matchmakers identify as indicative of success.

Clients who do *not* use their matchmakers as the resource they should be are less likely to succeed, and likely to take a longer time to find someone, even when they do succeed. Given the 2011 figures released by the Nihon Nakōdo Kyōkai, a little over 10% of the people registered with member matchmakers got engaged as a result of their marriage activities (and this 10% is drawn from the 3% of Japanese singles currently engaged with matchmakers). This figure may seem surprisingly low; it often does to matchmakers. It may also be low objectively, in terms of the percentage of the population participating in some kind of mediated meeting. In US contexts, “by 2005, 37% of single Internet users were dating online (a percentage that is almost certainly much higher today), and, by 2007–2009, more new romantic relationships had begun online than through any means other than meeting through friends” (Finkel et al. 2012: 13)¹⁵. If matchmakers identify some degree of obedience and reliance on them to be primary indicators of success, it may be the case that few single Japanese men and women in contemporary Japan possess these traits.

The Implications of Education

One might assume that getting married is a matter of meeting the right person; matchmakers would then assist in this process by providing introductions to potentially “right” people. However, during the brief account of matchmakers and their work that I have sketched above, I hope I have begun to suggest that Japan’s professional matchmakers do much more than conduct introductions. Matchmakers recognize that the effort of making introductions is fruitless if no conversation can continue afterwards. Thus, I argue that the work of matchmaking is work that creates the possibility of sustained conversation and interaction between clients, without which no marriage can happen. In its most basic sense, they do this by arranging a meeting. Much more literally, though, through

¹⁵ Although we do know that dating is happening on a broad social scale through dating sites, what we do *not* know is the success rate of those relationships, if “marriage” is our measure of “success.”

their continuing process of client education, conversational mediation, and interpretive assistance, they provide their clients with conversational skills, interactional expectations, and hermeneutic rubrics for encounters with potential spouses that help them to determine compatibility.

Of course, the work that matchmakers do does not happen in a vacuum. What is attractive and unattractive depends in part on the sex of the client, although many of the personality traits that matchmakers hope to encourage in their clients are not actually strongly gendered. Matchmakers also understand women and men as coming from different starting points, with differently socialized bad habits. Consequently, client education tends to vary depending on client sex. Matchmakers, in the course of counseling perhaps countless clients throughout their careers, are also in a unique position to notice patterns. Some of these I have hinted at above—which clients, for example, are more difficult to marry off, often for very material reasons. Matchmakers are able to notice patterns of attraction, patterns of successful behavior, and also patterns of client deficiency—unsuccessful behavior or knowledge gaps that require correction in order to help a client make a good impression and forge new relationships through the matchmaking process.

It is perhaps the views of client deficiency that say the most about matchmakers' views of gender and marriage in Japan, for descriptions of client deficits are very commonly talked about in sex-specific terms. Descriptions of men's failings tell a story about how men in Japan are, at present, and also, to some extent, say something about the social forces that led them to be that way. Likewise, the reparative work that comprises the client education aimed at men tells the story of matchmakers' ideologies of masculinity, of what they feel *ought* to be the norm in masculine behavior, and yet somehow is not. The same is equally true of the women they counsel, who hold beliefs and behave in ways that do not, from a matchmaking perspective, serve them well, that are

counter to their happiness, and close them off from marital possibilities. Stories of client education aimed at women reveal a clear prescription for what Japanese women need in order to form new family ties. Matchmakers' assessment of the state of gender trouble in Japan, as well as their policy recommendations for fixing it, form the topic of the following two chapters.

CHAPTER IV: REFIGURING AND CONFIGURING MASCULINITY

“Yappari, hanashi-beta na hito ga ōi ja nai desu ka?”
[Well, aren't there so many people who are bad at talking?]

–Nakanishi Kiyomi

One thing is clear both from my own interview data and contemporary media commentary on the state of sexual politics in Japan: there is a pervasive sense that something is amiss with Japanese men. For one reason or another, young men seem to be abandoning the company of women as sexual and household partners, leading in part to the present panic around marriage. Why should this be, and what can be done about it? In this chapter, I provide an overview of current transformations in masculinity and the social anxieties surrounding some of these changes. Why do men apparently have such difficulties finding partners? What motivates them to participate in matchmaking? Below, I identify two commonly cited causes for the difficulties men experience finding partners: one of them old, and the other purportedly new. The first of these is misogyny, rooted in Confucian thought; the second is shifts in the dominant mode of masculinity, away from the achievement-oriented “salaryman doxa” (Roberson and Suzuki 2002) that dominated masculine imagery after WWII (Dasgupta 2000) and towards an ostensibly new, less competitive mode of masculinity. Then, I outline matchmakers’ reactions to these forms of masculinity, and depict the strategies they deploy to engage these men in heterosexual, marital relationships.

Although these two modes of masculinity are very different from one another, they frequently manifest the same symptom in matchmakers’ accounts of male client difficulties, namely, an inability to converse equitably or “normally” with women. A goal of this chapter is to describe the

actual content of an omiai in more detail, with attention to the importance of conversation, and the gendered nature of conversational difficulties. Why are conversational difficulties one of Japanese men's most pressing problems? In analyzing the role that conversation plays in matchmaking, I rely on the work of semiotician C. S. Peirce as well as Roman Jakobson's model of language functions within a "speech event." Jakobson (1990) understood the transmission of information to be but one function of speech (the referential function). Here, I argue that matchmakers see conversation as fulfilling an entirely different function, namely, the conative function. This is the function of language that allows it to affect or compel the listener in some way. Here, conversation in matchmaking encounters is supposed to create feelings of affection and connection between the clients. Clients can accomplish this conversationally through equitable turn-taking. The ability to let one's partner speak, and then expand on their comments to continue the conversation, is the primary means of conative appeal; engaging in this manner is a signal of interest in and respect for one's interlocutor and omiai partner.

Matchmakers also see conversational ability as a Peircian index (Peirce 1955), as described in chapter two. A handout from the NNK, "Omiai no Kokoro-e" ("Omiai Knowledge"), states in its section on "Conversation and Attitude" (*kaiwa to taido*):

Akaruku haki-haki to shūshi ni koyaka ni, gaiken dake de naku nakami ni jūten wo oite, yoi men wo mitsukeru yō ni shimashō. Shitsumon ni dake kotaete, damari-kondari, shisei ga waruku tsune ni hoka wo muite iru nado, tonde mo nai koto desu. O-aite ga tatoe ki ni iranakute mo, taido ni dasu yō na shitsurei na koto shinai de kudasai. Tsune ni tanoshī wadai wo kokoro-gakeru yō ni shimashō.

From beginning to end, let's be bright and clear and smiling. Let's emphasize the inner self as much as outward appearances, and try to find a good side to things. Just answering questions, falling silent, sitting with bad posture and constantly looking at others, things like that are ridiculous. Even if your partner isn't someone you like, please don't do anything rude that shows in your attitude. Let's always keep enjoyable [conversation] topics in mind.

As can be seen from this advice, matchmakers take conversation and conversational ability to be “indexical” in the sense that they are understood to be perceptually available signs of something less clearly visible—the inner self. Moreover, consideration for one’s partner and a focus on politeness and mutual enjoyment is key to behaving well at an omiai, and demonstrates the qualities of a desirable spouse. The ability to be cooperative in the joint work of talk, considerate in one’s demonstration of polite conversational habits and use of polite verbiage, and clear in the communication of one’s intentions and desires are all key ingredients to success in matchmaking, and signs of a cooperative, considerate, and purposeful nature that extends to other domains. Matchmakers must thus encourage good conversational skills in their clients that they might index their desirability as partners.

In the conclusion, I discuss some of the broader consequences of matchmakers’ teachings, with a focus on global, racialized masculinities and the flexibility that matchmakers’ language ideologies accord men in terms of gender roles within the confines of a fairly compulsory heterosexuality. Matchmakers seek to bolster the heterosexual institution of marriage and bring more people into it, an end goal that is more important than adhering to established masculine paradigms. I argue that matchmakers ultimately promote gender-neutral traits in place of problematically “masculine” ones, drawing on new ideas about gender circulating in Japan, as well as romantic foreign imagery, to reform the behavior of their male clients.

New Economies, New Men?

Yamada and Shirakawa (2008) quite rightly point out, in their call for young Japanese to participate in konkatsu, that there is an economic component to the decline of marriage in Japan. The lifetime employment system that once secured jobs and steady pay rises in the post-war, high-

growth economy for white-collar workers has weakened. Consequently, young workers no longer feel that they have enough income, job security, or other resources to properly establish a household, even though they often still expect to do so—eventually—according to a post-WWII, nuclear family model (E. Vogel 1963). The expectations of Japanese firms often do not make it easy to follow any other model, with flexible, “family friendly” policies viewed as a luxury that few firms can afford to allow their workers (Roberts 2005). Thus, marriage (and childbearing) and employment can seem like either/or possibilities, even though one partner’s income is no longer enough; for men, the lack of sufficient income to support a family may also pose a barrier to marriage. Allison (2012) focuses on some of the most dire effects of this economic shift, but similarly notes that economic precarity has inhibiting effects on intimacy. My friend Akiko’s pregnancy dramatized this state of affairs while I was writing up the results of my research. Before her pregnancy, her income combined with her husband’s enabled the couple to live a comfortable, middle-class life. When pregnant, she felt she had to quit her job in retail management, even though her husband’s salary as a chef was really only enough for one person to live comfortably, let alone three. They would have to move, leaving their apartment in upscale north-central Kyoto, and look into public housing options instead, as well as other assistance programs.

These economic explanations are certainly compelling, but other research suggests that something other than the increasingly stingy invisible hand is at work. In “*Konkatsu*” *Jidai* [*The Age of “Marriage Hunting”*], Yamada and Shirakawa (2008) describe a twentieth-century system for sorting out life and marriage that was centered on the white-collar office. Office employment introduced men to women through women’s temporary passage through the office as clerical workers. Meanwhile, the Japanese corporate practice of hiring workers out of college and

subsequently employing them until death or retirement ensured the stability of men's jobs. Women, once married, could then leave the workforce. In the twenty-first century, this system is failing. Precarious employment is increasing in Japan as it is in the rest of the world, and social isolation of many kinds, including non-marriage, is one of its many known consequences (see S. Vogel 2012 for a more psychological perspective on these same issues). Thus, argue Yamada and Shirakawa, present-day singles who wish to marry must take extraordinary measures to meet and court new people, as they can no longer expect the kind of employment that will build introductions to eligible members of the opposite sex into their daily routines, or the kind of salaries that would make a single-earner household sustainable. Thus: the decline in marriage rates, and the need for "marriage hunting" practices like *omiai*.

However, the system described by Yamada and Shirakawa is notably limited by its focus on the white-collar offices of large-sized companies. Thus, we must ask how many people this system actually worked for¹. Since Japan's post-war economic expansion, it has displayed an almost American attachment to the idea that everyone is middle class, and although their numbers are growing rapidly, Japan has always had blue-collar workers, temporary workers, and workers at small companies that would not have provided the same courtship opportunities or job stability as employment in a large corporation (Slater 2010 provides an excellent overview of class reproduction in Japan). Given the almost complete percentage of the adult population in Japan that was married during earlier periods, however, I do not believe it is possible to explain the transformations in marriage solely through lack of material resources for family formation or opportunities to meet partners at work—in the past, the working class and poor married too. I argue instead that, as

¹ I am endlessly grateful to my colleague Junko Teruyama for several thoughtful conversations on the subject of Yamada and Shirakawa's work and its class assumptions, which form the basis of this critique.

Japan's social organization has changed, so too have Japanese ideas about gender, particularly masculinity, changing in ways that are less conducive to marriage.

Contemporary Japanese culture does not lack groups to serve as focal points for social anxieties about transformations in masculinity, especially where they seem to border on perversion or antisocial tendencies. Extreme examples include the *otaku* ("nerds," more or less) who primarily experience pseudo-sexual feelings of *moe* (burning or budding) over idealized, often two-dimensional female characters in animation or video games. According to psychoanalyst Tamaki Saitō, "The *moe* of male *otaku* is mainly a fetishistic desire 'to have.' It is a desire not for reality itself but for reality's shroud or mantle" (2007: 36). Thus, a turn away from 3D women, and towards fictional 2D models. There are also the *hikikomori* (quite literally, "shut-ins," a term also coined by Saitō), the majority of them male, who take to their rooms and abandon the world of human intercourse almost as completely as possible (Saitō Tamaki 1998). In a seminar on how to create an appealing profile for clients in February 2013, Nakanishi Kiyomi-sensei warned against listing any hobbies that might make a man seem too solitary, or raise the specter of the *otaku*, such as video games; not only are these groups noted for their social withdrawal, but in their withdrawal they have become undesirable, unthinkable as partners.

There is, however, a less extreme and far more commonly cited new social category of men who have withdrawn from the company of women—to an extent, anyway. These are the so-called "herbivore men," the *sōshoku-kei danshi*. The term was coined by marketers and heavily popularized by marketing researcher Megumi Ushikubo (2008), who had identified a changing demographic of Japanese men who were more interested in domesticity and fashion than traditionally masculine pursuits such as advancement in the office and achievement in the sexual arena (compare Allison

1994 on sexual achievement; Roberson and Suzuki 2002 on workplace achievement). “Sōshoku-kei” literally means “plant-eating-type,” and the term summons up images of gentle, passive, grass-eating, domestic(ated) animals. Likewise, sōshoku-kei danshi are more concerned with a pleasant life at home than they are with achievement outside it; they want their work life to be conducive to a happy home life, and are unconcerned with flashy promotions that may send them to positions overseas (Ushikubo 2008: 6–7). It is also worth noting that Ushikubo uses “sōshoku-kei danshi” interchangeably with another word, “ojō-man” (ladyman), which implies not only passivity and domestication, but also a degree of feminization. In her interpretation, these feminized men do not exhibit a “normal” masculine sexual aggressiveness towards women, and are fully capable of spending close and intimate time with them—sharing rooms in love hotels, living together as roommates—without making any kind of sexual approach. Ushikubo further observes that condom sales are falling as male masturbation devices increase in popularity to meet the more solitary sexual needs of the primarily herbivorous 20-34 demographic (2008: 56–70).

For all that “sōshoku-kei danshi” is not exactly a compliment, since the start of my research in 2009 it has become an almost universally known pop-cultural social taxon, as well as a kind of gender identity perhaps analogous in some ways to “metrosexual” in the Anglophone world (a key difference being that maintaining heterosexual desire for women is integral to the concept of metrosexuality). News stories about this new breed of man began to appear almost relentlessly in Japanese-language news media as well as English-language media aimed at the expatriate community such as the Japan Times. Some stories even made their way to major American news outlets, thus filling the yearly quota of “wacky Japan” news (see Otake 2009, Saitō Tamotsu 2009 for examples). Women readily began to recognize and label men of their acquaintance “sōshoku-kei”; younger

Japanese men saw themselves in the mirror of marketing and took up the label of *sōshoku-kei danshi* for themselves. One night in May 2010, an American girlfriend dragged me along as a resident expert to talk to a filmmaker friend of hers for a documentary on love and marriage in Japan, particularly among foreign women and Japanese men. The four men present, all Japanese, readily identified themselves as “*sōshoku-kei*” to varying degrees, and they generally expressed pleasure at the idea of women taking the initiative in their relationships—it saved them work, for one, and it also made them feel happy and appreciated to be pursued. This is but a small example, but I do think it illustrates the way that a meaningful, if numerically indeterminate, population of younger Japanese men (35 years old and younger, by Ushikubo's estimates) have more or less embraced being “herbivores.”

Sōshoku-kei danshi do not necessarily avoid the company of women; as noted above, they can be quite close to them. It is rather that they are close to them in what, to Ushikubo, is a perplexingly sexless way. That said, herbivore men are not sexless, and in fact, the other major publication that popularized the term was a self-help guide to romance: *Sōshoku-kei Danshi no Ren'ai-gaku [Love-ology for Herbivore Men]* (Morioka 2008). Its author, sociologist Morioka Masahiro—a self-identified herbivore—argues that rather than feminization or desexualization, the distinguishing feature of the herbivore man is his tender-hearted nature that rejects the idea of sex as conquest and desires communication before intimacy. He notes that, “[i]n male culture prior to the present, there was a concept that the manly way to do things was precisely to doggedly advance on women, even if they resisted a bit. The idea was that the women might dislike it at first but that was a mere pose; eventually, they would accept the man. Herbivore men sensitively reject this kind of ‘masculinity’” (Morioka 2011).

Popular culture has thus identified herbivore men as one reason for the lack of coupling in early 21st century Japan; it takes two to tango, and a significant chunk of the single population is too shy to dance. Matchmakers additionally point to a different, and perhaps more insidious reason why Japanese men may not know how to properly entice women into intimate or marital relationships: straight-up misogyny. They believe that many of their male clients are not interested in women, or not capable of skillfully expressing interest in or respect towards women, because Japanese society has taught them that women are generally not worthy of much interest. They point to the principle of *dan son jo hi* (男尊女卑), four Chinese characters literally meaning “honor man, scorn woman,” and usually rendered in English as “male chauvinism.” Unlike Western-style sexism, which exalts a few virtuous ladies at the expense of lesser women, the Japanese style tends to disregard or ignore them all entirely, at least according to the matchmakers I spoke to who used this term. Sugawara-sensei provided one example of this kind of sociological perspective from the matchmakers I worked with, in an interview conducted in May 2010:

- 1 Suwaru toki ni, redi fāsuto. Kanojo wo oku ni suwaraseru.
When you sit down [at an omiai], lady first! Let her sit in the back.
- 2 Sore wa daiji da kedo sore ga dekinai dansei ga ōi. [...] Dekinai hito ōi. [...]
That’s important, but a lot of men can’t do that. [...] A lot can’t. [...]
- 3 Amerikajin wa redi fāsuto wa atarimae da kedo [...]
For Americans, lady first is obvious, but [...]
- 4 nihonjin no otoko no hito wa, jibun ga ichiban ga ōi kara,
Japanese men, because so many think they come first,
- 5 jibun ga sassato hairu oku ni patto suwaru hō ga ōi.
a lot will go quickly in and plunk themselves down in the back.
- 6 Ima wa chotto chigatte kiteru kedo, mukashi no nihon no katei wa,
Now it’s changing a little bit, but, in old Japanese households,
- 7 otōsan nambā wan. Okāsan niban.
Father was number one. Mother was in second place.
- 8 Ima no katei okāsan nambā wan. Otōsan niban.
In homes now, Mother’s number one. Father’s in second place.
- 9 Niban ichiban shita! [...]
Number two made herself number one! [...]

- 10 Dansei wa sō, unnn,
But men are that way, ummm,
- 11 yappari kikubari de dekiru dansei wa mada mada sukunai.
after all, still, still, there aren't many men who can pay attention to others.

As we can see from these comments, the belief that their comforts, needs, and interests are more important than anyone else's leads Japanese men to be ignorant or neglectful of women's comfort, needs, and interests, even at the times when they should be putting the most effort into making a good impression, such as an omiai. Women are presumably unimpressed by, and not attracted to, the chauvinistic behavior of the Japanese men around them (more on this below); the men are not making advances on the women, so much as expecting them to simply keep up with them. Another common behavior cited as "chauvinistic" by matchmakers in my interviews is men's failure to properly "escort" (esukōto) women. By escort they primarily mean "walk alongside, together with;" Nakanishi Kiyomi-sensei advises men to be conscious of their partners while walking, at the very least, doing their best to look behind them to check to see that their female companions are following them. Although walking together with someone you are on a date with may seem like common sense to the matchmakers, Nakanishi-sensei and other matchmakers report that there exist, nonetheless, a number of Japanese men who tend to walk in their preferred direction and at their preferred speed, assuming that their companions will somehow manage to keep up and stick with them. However, to the extent that behavior during an omiai is treated as an index of internal personal qualities, the man who dashes off and expects the woman to keep up with him seems to be exhibiting the same lack of ability to attend to women's needs described above. Misogyny, like herbivorous tendencies, thus leads to poor interactional and communication skills, especially when interacting with women. Although the causes are different—oversensitivity on the one hand, and insensitivity on the other—somewhat paradoxically, the result is the same.

Japan's growing number of late-marrying and non-marrying men exist within this nexus of economic insecurity, passivity, misogyny, and more general social avoidance. They may come into contact with matchmakers either through their own interest in changing their circumstances, or, often enough, through parental interference and insistence (Nakanishi Kiyomi 2012). Once they have signed up with a matchmaker, they will then be subject to their matchmaker's program of education for her clients, as outlined in chapter three. In order to coach her clients towards marriage, she must help them learn how to make a good impression and seem appealing to their partners. Matchmakers—in theory—use their roles as teachers and “marriage advisors” to give their clients advice and interactional coping strategies that reshape their clients' problematic gender performances into something compatible with their beliefs about marital readiness and its attendant sexuality. They must reform their male clients' attitudes both towards women and towards their own self-presentation, a term that I use in Goffman's (1959) sense of the everyday behavior that both selves and others may take as representations of both personality and social background. In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine what, exactly, male clients' learning process entails. What specific behaviors do men need to learn in order to successfully make it through the omiai process, and present themselves as desirable marriage partners?

The Semiotically Impaired Male Client

The first job of the matchmaker, irrespective of the client's gender, is to encourage a forward-looking, assertive approach to life. Like God, matchmakers help only those who help themselves. Clients must work to put forward a good impression, and also to communicate their good personality traits effectively. However, given the discussion above, this is precisely the thing that most male clients find most difficult. Matchmakers must focus a substantial amount of their

effort on preparing what I am tempted to call the “semiotically impaired” to make an attractive first impression on their partners, and the majority of the semiotically impaired would seem to be men—perfectly nice men, in fact, who simply suffer from difficulties representing their inner good qualities through recognizable signs. What does this “semiotic impairment” look like? Many cannot even make eye contact with an omiai partner, and some simply don’t even know how to have a conversation at all. In May 2010, I conducted a joint interview with Yasuda-sensei, Sugawara-sensei, and third matchmaker friend of theirs whom I did not know well; they were all in Kyoto to try out a new photo studio, and invited me to dine and talk with them. During the interview, Yasuda-sensei noted that you can tell an omiai is going badly when the participants fail to make eye contact and have expressionless faces; Sugawara-sensei had earlier commented that there were many men with difficulty looking at their partners. She also recounted that once, while in a hotel lobby, “I looked around and there were two people who didn’t talk the whole time. I got worried too! I noticed them and couldn’t stop looking at them the whole time.”

How does one get to the point of simply not talking? Through my friend Kawakami-sensei, I was introduced to two male clients, both of whom I was able to interview, and both of whom had been with Kawakami-sensei some time—in both cases, I believe, around 10 years, without marrying. (Given that matchmakers’ usual contracts are for two years, ten years is an order of magnitude more time than matchmakers typically expect a client to require.) The first, Hayashi-san, was a close friend of Kawakami-sensei, and often joined her and Takamiya-sensei at their apartment for dinner, or went out with them to social events. As I was often invited along for such events as well, I was able to interact with him socially on many occasions, in addition to our interview. When I interviewed Hayashi-san, he was able to talk easily enough. I suspect having a clear framework of what to talk

about helped him; a straight-up question and answer session went fairly well. Outside of that context, however, I always had a difficult time talking to him. Hayashi-san seemed aware of the fact that he had difficulties with conversation, for he also had a clear coping strategy: he memorized trivia. Typical conversations with him would often start out with, “Did you know?” followed by various facts, for example, the top-ranked universities in the US or, in the wake of his death, a number of facts about Michael Jackson and his music. While he was clearly doing his best, nonetheless, his conversations failed to move from topic to topic naturally, in a smooth flow; neither was it possible, it seemed, for an interlocutor to make comments beyond, “that’s interesting,” or “wow, I didn’t know that.” In other words, his attempts at conversation usually failed on Gricean terms, violating the principle that conversational turns should be relevant to each other (Grice 1975).

The other client that I interviewed, Nishimura-san, was quite honestly, a frustration. He insisted on doing our interview in English, taking the free practice as compensation for allowing me to ask my questions. While I was happy to oblige, conducting the interview in English meant that I had to frequently wait on him to finish thoughts, or help him phrase things in English. He also did not allow me to record the interview, but the English-instruction aspect of the meeting made it very difficult for me to take notes. On the one hand, Nishimura-san’s interview may be taken as a case of ethnographic refusal, and I sensed that he had meaningful privacy concerns. On the other hand, after a lengthy and difficult meeting where the terms were firmly, and entirely, set by Nishimura-san, I wondered if he treated other interactions in a similar fashion, and if this had anything to do with lack of success at *omiai*. By contrast, Hayashi-san much more passively chalked his failures up to “*en ga nakatta*” [it wasn’t meant to be].

Other examples of clients' poor conversational ability were provided during an interview with Chieko-san, a middle-aged woman who was employed for two years as a practice omiai partner. I was introduced to Chieko-san through her sister Mariko, whom I met while living in the Yokohama area for English conversation practice; Mariko arranged a dinner out where I would be able to interview her sister, when she learned about my research. Chieko's job was as follows: once or twice a month, she would go to meet up with the clients of the marriage bureau where she worked to evaluate their self-presentation and conversational skills through practice omiai. These practice sessions were offered only to male clients, as the female clients had no apparent difficulty being *sekkyokuteki*, that is, aggressive, assertive, or forward, in an omiai setting. During our conversation, we discussed the details of the simulated omiai. Since we were sitting in a restaurant booth, Chieko often made reference to the size of the booth and the table to explain the mock-omiai setup used at the marriage bureau where she worked.

- Mariko: 1. Sono honmono ni chikai katachi de,
The way a real one is,
- (Chieko: 2. sososososo)
(*Yesyesyesyesyes*)
- Mariko: 3. Settei suru tte koto ne?
it's set up like that, right?
- (Chieko: 4. sōsōsōsō)
- (Chieko: *Yes yes yes yes yes*)
- Chieko: 5. De soko no kaīn-san ni, heya ga ikutsu mo atte,
So, there were however many rooms for the clients,
6. heya ga ikutsu mo, koshitsu ni nattete,
however many rooms, individual rooms,
7. kō iu kanji no, sore de, anōō,
like this, and so, ummmm,
8. honmono—, hontō no toki to sokkuri ni, yaru wake.
the idea was to do it completely like the real thing, like the real event.
9. Sore de, chanto doa ga atte, hontō ni heya ni nattete,
So, there was a proper door, it really was a room,
10. de sono— [unclear portion of recording]
and that—

11. Ma watashi demo iretara otoko no hito ga, saisho ni suwattete,
Well even if I was there, the man would first sit down,
12. de ato kara sono tantō no hito to iu ka ni
and after the person in charge? if you could call them that,
13. tsurerarete, de haitte iku wake.
would bring me along, and I'd go in, was the idea.
14. De, “Dōzo” tte itte, suwatte,
Then [he'd] say “please [have a seat]” and I'd sit,
15. kono kanji ni, kono gurai no kyori de, suwatte,
like this, about this distance, sitting,
16. de soko kara anōō, omoshiroi koto ni sa,
and then from there ummmm, the interesting thing is
17. nomimono ga ichiō ne?
drinks are first, right?
- Erika: 18. Hai
Right
- Chieko: 19. Demo nani mo nai,
But there wasn't anything,
20. nande ka watashi, de sono hito ga
why, I, well that person would go
21. nomimono—, kōhī ka kōcha ka,
drinks—, would you like coffee, or black tea,
22. a kōhī ka, ja, nan desu kedo,
ah, coffee? Well, whatever but
23. dō, watashimasu kedo,
That person would hand them out but
24. dochira ga ī desu ka toka tatoeba iu ja nai, sono hito ga.
but for example that person will ask “which would you like?” right?
25. Soshitara, watashi wa kōhī wo tanomu toshite mo,
So then, say even if I order coffee,
26. mō, sore jiten ga hajimatte iru wake dakara, omiai wa.
because already the whole thing's started, the omiai.
27. Dakara sono, sono toki ni, jibun dake tanonjatte,
Therefore that— at that time, only I've ordered,
28. tatoeba otoko no hito ka ga, ryōhito toka,
say, the man, when only I've ordered, both of us maybe,
29. anō “dōzo” tte
ummmm, he'd say “please [go ahead]”
30. “nani suru n desu ka” tte iwareru wake yo,
or I'd be asked, “What would you like to order?”
31. de iwarete, a, atashi wa, “a kōhī wo”
So when asked, ah, I say, “Ah, coffee please”
32. de wa “**boku** mo kōhī wo” toka ichiō onegai shimasu.
and then he says “Coffee for me too,” or something, first of all you ask.

33. So, sono hen kara mō, nante iu, rīdo suru *toka* naru wake.
Fr- From that point already, how should I say, he takes the lead, is the idea.
34. De, sono kata, kaiwa ga sa, anōō,
So, those people, their conversation! Ummmm,
35. kaiwa ga hajimaru wake na n da kedo
The idea is that the conversation starts but
36. sono toki ni, nanka, tatoeba, ano
then, uh, for example, um,
37. “Ima hi atsukatta desu nē” *toka* futsū dattara,
“The sun’s hot right now isn’t it?” if it’s [a] normal [conversation],
38. “kyō koko made nan de kita n desu ka” *toka*
“How did you get here today?” or something like that
39. sono hanashi wo shite kara, dan-dan, anō,
or whatever, from that kind of talk, you go on, umm,
40. “Go-kazoku wa nan nin na n desu ka” *toka* sa,
“How many are in your family?” or something!
41. anō, mā, kazoku wa shitte iru toshite mo, anō,
Ummmm, wellll, even if they know about your family, umm,
42. sō iu hanashi ni haitte iku no ni, futsū dattara,
even if you get into that talk, if it’s normal,
43. futsū no comyunikēshon toshite, suwatte totan ni,
normal communication, as soon as they sit down,
44. nanka, ikinari honrai ni sa, tatoeba ne,
uhh, suddenly from the beginning, let’s say,
45. warui rei toshite, “Anō **boku** wa kodomo san nin hoshī”
as a bad example, “Um, I want three kids!”
46. ikinari suwatte ru iwanai jan!
You don’t just sit down and suddenly say that!
- Erika: 47. (laughter)
- Chieko: 48. Tatoeba futsū dattara
For example, if it’s normal [conversation]
49. kodomo nanka de iwanai kedo,
you don’t talk about things like kids,
50. soko made ikanai kedo,
you don’t go that far but,
51. tatoeba suwatta totan,
for example, as soon as he sits down,
52. “Dōkyo, dōkyo ga, **boku** wa dōkyo shitai n desu kedo”
“I want, I want us to live with my parents!”
53. *tte* iwaretara soko de mo, “
If you’re told something like that, even there,
54. Hēē!” *tte* icchattari suru desho.
you can’t help saying, “WHAT!” can you.

55. De sono hanashi no, motte ikikata *toka* ga sa,
So that talk, the way you bring it with you for example, well!
56. fu- fushizen da *toka* shizen da *toka*,
un- unnatural or natural,
57. mō sokkara mo nanka
already from that point, um,
58. shaberu ki naku nachatta *toka*,
you totally lose your will to talk, or something,
59. aru n ja nai?
doesn't that sort of thing happen?
60. De sō iu no ga zenbu,
And all the stuff like that,
61. atashi no motte ru,
that I have,
62. sono owatta toki no hyōkahyō mitai ni nattete,
like an evaluation sheet that I have to fill in,
63. chekku suru kami ga aru n desu yo.
I have a checklist.

Bakhtin (1981) noted that the art of a novel is in orchestrating the different socially inflected speech types of a multitude of characters. This “heteroglossia” characterizes not only the novel, but also languages itself, and multiple character voices are to be found not only in novels, but in discourse as well. In this portion of the interview, Chieko uses this heteroglossia to “voice” (Voloshinov 1986) both “normal” and by implication, “abnormal” get-to-know-you small talk, cueing the listener to the switches in voice with changes in first-person pronoun. For herself, Chieko uses “feminine” *watashi* or *atashi* (as in lines 11, 20, 25, and 31). However, she switches to the typically “masculine” *boku* for her imagined male partner (as in line 32), or marks his imagined speech with quotative particles such as *tte*, *to*, and *toka*. In the transcript above, I have marked the quotative particles with italics, and bolded first-person reference choices that are understood as “masculine².”

The “normal” small talk is explicitly labeled as such by Chieko, using the adjective *futsū*

² For a longer discussion of gender in first-person reference, see (Shibamoto Smith 2004) or the introductory chapter of this work.

(“normal,” “ordinary”) as in lines 37, 42, 43, and 48. She also gives concrete examples of “normal” in lines 37–43, suggesting safe and impersonal topics like the weather, or transportation, perhaps eventually turning towards light discussion of one’s family. Nakanishi Kiyomi-sensei, at the end of an interview segment transcribed below, also delves into the set of predetermined, acceptable omiai conversation topics, with suggestions like, “What do you do on your days off?” She also, in lines 48–50, sets some bounds for acceptable conversation: “You don’t talk about things like kids.” The NNK handout mentioned above also suggests some boundaries for omiai conversation, with a list of “kaiwa no tabū no iro-iro” [various conversational taboos]. They include discussions of payment to matchmakers; discussions of previous omiai; and statements like “Oya ni iwarete kita dake desu” [I only came because my parents told me to] or “Mada kekkon suru ki ga nai n desu” [I still don’t have any desire to marry]. However, also discouraged are topics that might be too personal: requests for phone numbers or addresses, or talk of relationships past.

With acceptable small talk thus delimited, we can see that the “abnormal” small talk examples given by Chieko-san fail in two primary respects. The first is that they do not respect the norms of what Erving Goffman called “interaction rituals,” “the countless patterns and natural sequences of behavior occurring whenever persons come into another’s immediate presence” (Goffman 1967: 2). There is an order in which certain topics of discussion ought to be broached, as Chieko suggests, and the bad examples violate that order. The bad examples in lines 45 and 52—“I want three kids” and “I want us to live together with my parents”—jump to topics slated for much later in the conversational game, if they come up in a first meeting at all. Lest one think that perhaps these are exaggerations, the introduction to the following chapter contains my own account of a personal client with precisely this sort of suitor.

The second failure of Chieko-san's bad examples is that they're almost overwhelmingly selfish—both notably feature desiderative predicates that foreground the speaker's own desires:

Anō boku wa kodomo san nin hoshi-i
Ummm I-MASC TOP child three person.counter want-NP
“Ummm, I want three children” (line

Dōkyo, dōkyo ga, boku wa dōkyo shita-i n desu kedo
Coresidence, coresidence SUB, I-MASC TOP coresidence do-DES-NP NOM COP-
HON but
“I want to live together [with my parents], but”

This semi-imaginary, half-remembered, metapragmatic construction of a bad partner not only evinces a chauvinistic disregard his partner's needs and wants (by not properly asking her what she would like to drink; by not taking the time to get to know her, by disregarding ordinary patterns of interaction more generally), but leaps immediately into his own, without prelude, jumping rather presumptuously far into a relationship that has barely begun. As Chieko remarks in lines 48–50, “For example, if it's normal, you don't talk about things like kids, you don't go that far.” This “bad example” is formally, situationally awkward, and yet content-wise, self-assertive to the point of overbearing³.

We have little idea what this constructed male figure may really be like, other than simply bad at conversation. He seems, in fact, to have some rather admirable, family-oriented qualities that might make him a good spouse: he desires children, and wants to take care of his parents. However, in order to see these positive qualities, one would have to be able to get past the initial shock of such “unnatural” (*fushizen*, line 56) conversation, which may be asking too much. As Chieko says, “You totally lose your will to talk,” (line 58) and the poor man doesn't have much of a chance at surviving the omiai after the kind of initial mistakes that Chieko describes. Of course, Chieko, our poor

³ I am indebted to Alaina Lemon and Robin Queen for these observations.

guinea pig, could not end the practice omiai even after losing her will to talk. In addition to other bad conversation starters that she mentioned (such as “I’m divorced and I have a child!”), Chieko also noted the frequent failure of her practice omiai to adhere to a conversational ideal that she described as like “playing catch” or as “bouncing.” The conversation would fail to “spread out,” as conversation should, moving from topic to topic. In other words, like Hayashi-san’s conversation, her partners failed to adhere to the Maxim of Relevance. She then went on to describe men who would talk constantly to the point of ignoring their food and drink (and probably also the looks of boredom on his partner’s face). This is a classically male chauvinist move. Others she encountered tended to conduct question and answer sessions in lieu of more normal conversation, an observation that again mirrors my encounters with Hayashi-san. Mention of these latter pseudo-conversational techniques also crop up in interviews with matchmakers, as examples of common male client failures (along with the failure to talk at all, or even make an expected amount of eye contact). As Chieko astutely noted near the end of our talk:

- Chieko: 64. Kekkyoku sō iu koto mo, omiai no baai wa,
Ultimately all the things I’ve talked about, in the case of an omiai,
 65. nanka saisho ni, kono hito ī na toka
um when you meet someone and think “this person is great”
 66. suki dattara, ki ni naranai koto demo,
and like them, even if it’s something that wouldn’t bother you,
 67. omiai tte iu no wa,
when it’s an omiai, there are things about it like,
 68. ara-sagashi mitai na tokoro.
you’re looking to find something wrong sometimes.
- Mariko: 69. Kowai mo, kore wa muri toka iu.
Scary, too, to say something like, “This is pointless.”
- Chieko: 70. Ara-sagashi toka, koko ga ī ka,
Fault-finding, for example, saying this here is OK?
 71. kō dame ka toka kō iu no wo don don don don
But this is just bad, and on and on and on and on,
 72. onna no hito mo otoko no hito mo
women and men alike

(Mariko: 73. Hē)
 (Hey, really?)
 Chieko: 74. handan, zen'in wa handan suru, sareru kara,
Judge. Everyone judges and is judged, so
 75. sukoshi demo ochikomanai hō ga ī n ja nai, tabun.
I think it's better to be a little less depressed about it, maybe.

In other words, it's easy to be relaxed about others' imperfections when you hit it off with them right away, but an omiai is a fairly high-stress situation that is almost designed to make one notice every little potential flaw in your partners.

What Chieko described sounds extreme, perhaps, but it is also in line with research on “male dominance” in Japanese conversation. Itakura and Tsui (2004) found, based on both quantitative and qualitative discourse analysis, that male Japanese speakers have a “self-oriented” conversational style when paired with female conversation partners, who maintain an “other-oriented” conversational style; they define dominance as “the interactional effect of controlling action during conversation, rather than speaker intent” (226). They found that although female speakers quantitatively appeared to control the conversation more often, the female speakers' turns are used to shore up and support topics that their male conversational partners are interested in, with the male speakers making no such corresponding effort towards their female conversation partners. In contrast, they used their turns to tell stories, set themselves up as experts, agree with female partners' self-abnegating statements, and keep the conversation geared towards their preferred topics (243–244)⁴. It is up to matchmakers, as far as they are able, to help their clients learn to participate in conversation not only at all, but also, equitably, demonstrating the same kind of interest in their partners that their partners show to them by taking turns, and teaching them how to generate

⁴ Itakura and Tsui provide a comprehensive bibliography of research on this topic in Anglophone contexts; of particular relevance may be Fishman's classic (1978) study of “the work women do” to keep conversation going, often at the expense of their own conversational interests.

appropriate topics of conversation. The sōshoku-kei danshi are routinely criticized for being effeminate, and yet, part of what matchmakers' clients need to learn, whether they are herbivores or misogynists, is precisely more “feminine” social skills for making interactions go more smoothly. Whatever the deficiencies of Japanese women, they are generally presumed to know how to have a good conversation and dress nicely in ways that show off their best features. (The deficiencies of women will be covered in chapter five.)

Learning the Fine Art of Conversation

So, how do matchmakers actually teach clients to be better communicative partners? The first thing one learns when contemplating becoming either a client of a matchmaker, or a matchmaker oneself, is the flow of the process towards marriage, as described in chapter three. Matchmakers encourage clients to specify their intentions very precisely through all the steps that precede engagement and marriage, so that no one is at any point confused. Clients' progression through the process models, from the beginning, the kind of explicit and clear communication they will need to learn. Clients apply to meet one another at an omiai, which requires an explicit yes or no response from the other person. From the omiai onwards, conversation becomes critical. The omiai itself, as described in chapter three, is an affair conducted almost entirely in the realm of conversation. The participants in an omiai, as they talk to each other, are also asking themselves: Does this person sitting here with me seem warm and friendly? Does he or she make me feel good? Perhaps—is this someone I could be intimate with? In other words, is my partner taking turns, talking about things interesting to both of us, and showing interest in what I have to say? After the omiai, in order to advance to the dating stage, both the man and the woman must explicitly tell their matchmakers, “Yes, I want to see this person again.”

Prior to dating (*kōsai*), matchmakers mediate most client communication, with the exception of the *omia*i conversation itself (more on this below). During dating, matchmakers mediate communication between clients less directly, but nonetheless, they may be present in the background as advisors, guiding clients in what to say or how to express themselves. In the terms of Erving Goffman (1981), who divided up the role of “speaker” even further into “author” (the person who composes the words), “principle” (the person responsible for the words) and “animator” (the person who actually speaks), matchmakers may at times serve as the authors or animators of their clients’ communications. It is also true that matchmakers have a clear idea of what constitutes best communicative practices. Yasuda-sensei, when inducting new clients, underlined the importance of confirming one’s intentions verbally with phrases like, “*Kekkon wo mae-muki ni kōsai shimasu*” [I’ll date you with a forward outlook towards marriage]. Fujii-sensei, in her lectures to new matchmakers, repeatedly stressed women’s preference for verbalizing feelings as opposed to showing it with other kinds of behavior, and thus, the need to make feelings clear between clients (that is, expressed through language). Although matchmakers give a certain amount of advice to men and women alike about non-verbal semiotics, generally speaking, matchmakers favor explicit declarations of love, affection, and intentions. Unsurprisingly, matchmakers also encourage dramatic, Western-style proposals. In fact, while I was completing follow-up fieldwork in 2013, the bridal arm of the NNK, headed by the Nakanishis’ younger daughter Yumi, had put together a pre-scripted, dramatic proposal package for NNK clients, including flowers, a ring, and a romantic dinner at the Westin Hotel in Osaka, which would be interrupted by a detour into the hotel’s wedding space for a proposal. The advertisement for this package also included guidance on the best phrases to use for proposing marriage (Bridalnavi 2012).

Learning to have the kind of small talk that gets clients through the omiai stage, and later, the kind of explicit conversation that gets them from dating to marriage, is by no means easy. Nakanishi Kiyomi-sensei commented during one of our interviews that talking at length with someone you don't know is difficult even for those who are very used to it, and this is true for men and women alike; this is expanded on later in this chapter, in a portion of our interview reproduced for analysis. Yet, the burden of learning these skills seems to fall disproportionately on men, for the reasons discussed above. During an instructional seminar for new matchmakers that I attended in 2010, the instructor, Fujii-sensei, a Kyoto-based matchmaker in her early 40s, told the crowd of matchmakers-in-training that she spends 90% of her working time as a matchmaker helping dating couples with communication issues. The difficulties that her clients perceive fall out along gender lines. As mentioned above, women always want explicit verbal declarations from their partners; they call her to ask how they can tell how their boyfriends feel about them. (Her advice? Ask him! Communication, after all, goes both ways.) Men, however, call her to ask for concrete advice: what restaurants are best for dates, what to wear, what to bring when meeting a girlfriend's parents. According to Fujii-sensei, they assume, mistakenly, that the kind of care they take in matters of material semiotics will be legible by female partners as signs of affection, although outside the realm of face-to-face interaction (such as the expectation to escort their partners), such signals often go unrecognized. They will need to learn to signify their feelings and intentions in ways that women understand, and matchmakers will need to teach them.

The first thing that matchmakers do to both educate and assist their clients in communication with each other is to insert themselves, when prudent, into the dialogue between the prospective couple. Matchmakers do not imperiously make matches to their own satisfaction, but

rather help to create new relationships between two people (or originally, two families) through their work as mediators of communication. Although the work of a matchmaker and the nature of omiai have changed substantially throughout the last 150 years, what still distinguishes marriage by omiai from other kinds of relationship formation is that communication between the couple never begins directly, but always starts through a third party (parents, volunteer matchmakers, professional matchmakers, etc.). As Fujii-sensei told me during our interviews, and also emphasized in her lectures, this is one of the advantages of omiai. Two people who don't know each other well can have more substantial difficulties communicating. Matchmakers can step in to handle the communication smoothly at points that might be the most awkward, from setting up an omiai to delicately handling a breakup (see also chapter three). This does not, of course, actually equip clients with better communicative skills. However, by ensuring that the communicative burden placed on the client is lower and lower-stress, and also by making clients feel comfortable with the person they will meet, matchmakers create an environment where—hopefully—clients feel more safe and thus more able to talk.

How much mediation matchmakers can and should offer their clients is a subject on which they do not always agree. Some matchmakers opt, where they can, to mediate conversation during the omiai itself, by sitting down with their clients, an event I witnessed countless times while watching matchmakers and clients interact in the lobbies of Osaka's hotels, and as discussed in the next chapter, experienced myself as a participant in omiai. My own matchmaker, Takamiya-sensei, sat in on the beginnings of my omiai to reassure me and get the conversation started, although he opted not to linger. This is the older pattern of conducting omiai; even into the second half of the twentieth century, omiai were typically group affairs, with the prospective couple, parents, and

matchmakers all present over a meal (E. Vogel 1961). These days, however, parents are almost never present, and the matchmakers' direct role is more often than not considerably abridged, with Fujii-sensei telling new matchmakers in a lecture on omiai (the first one I attended, in March 2010) that increasingly, matchmakers choose not to sit down with clients, and instead leave things at conducting an official introduction, after which the clients are on their own for coffee or tea.

Whether matchmakers sit down with their clients or not is often a choice made for them, by logistics. Only a few times during the week are actually convenient for working adults to meet someone new; as a result, an overwhelming number of omiai happen on Saturday and Sunday between 11 am and 3 pm and then, most of these take place at the same few hotels located near major transit hubs such as Kyoto Station, in Kyoto, and Umeda, in Osaka. For NNK matchmakers, this is set down in the association bylaws (helpfully reviewed by Fujii-sensei in the same lecture), which require a meeting no more than five minutes' walk from a major transit hub. Matchmakers with moderately large client bases, therefore, are likely enough to have two clients who will require their attention at the same popular times and places. A brief introduction may be all there is time for, before moving on to the next couple. I would routinely encounter Yasuda-sensei and her assistant matchmakers, for example, when watching omiai on the weekends. Whoever was in charge for her group that day had a list of the couples meeting on any Saturday or Sunday, with a few couples scheduled to meet every half-hour. In mid-2013, Fujii-sensei took on her first assistant, having herself reached an unmanageable number of clients. For such matchmakers, sitting down with every couple under their care is simply not feasible, even if they thought it would be helpful.

That said, depending on both the style of the individual matchmaker, his current level of busyness, and his assessment of his client and her potential match, he may still choose to sit down

with the couple for at least part of the omiai—this is something that is left up to the individual matchmaker’s ability and preference. Okada-sensei, a semi-professional matchmaker that I interviewed who learned the trade from her mother and grandmother, explained to me that the role of a matchmaker is to liven things up (*moriageru*), to supply topics during lulls in conversation, and, according to some matchmakers of her acquaintance, to talk up one’s client and point out his or her finer qualities. That she might take a more traditional approach is unsurprising, given her entrée into the field. The matchmaker’s role during the omiai itself has also been a recurring topic of conversation with my old friend Takamiya-sensei, a boisterous matchmaker now in his early 60s who has a romantic sensibility, a jovial way with words, and generally good, flirtatious rapport with women. He and his partner Kawakami-sensei told me one evening while socializing with them that a skilled matchmaker who participates in the omiai may help the clients to get comfortable and start opening up to each other as he facilitates the conversation. However, they also emphasized the danger that the matchmaker may inadvertently sabotage the omiai by participating. Kawakami-sensei noted that Takamiya-sensei runs this risk, especially with older male clients who might not compare favorably with his outgoing and easy manner. Once, she told me, after he left a couple to themselves, the woman only stayed an additional ten minutes, then excused herself and left. This was also—with joking hand gestures mimicking the size of my breasts—proffered as a reason why I could not accompany them to omiai for research purposes. An attractive matchmaker risks showing up a same-sex client. (In their estimation, I was presumably too attractive, or at least too distractingly busy, to stand in the role of matchmaker myself.)

Thus it is that direct intervention by matchmakers in conversation and other kinds of communication between clients, even where it is possible, can only go so far in the service of

mitigating client communicative difficulties. Clients must learn to communicate with partners successfully on their own, too. One strategy for doing so is advance preparation and self-education, so that clients will always have conversation topics to hand. During our interview⁵, Okada-sensei spoke of her male clients as being what we might almost want to call *sōshoku-kei*: “humble” (*kenson*, line 13 below), “introverted” (*uchiki*, line 1) and “rather inexperienced” (*keiken ga amari sukunai*) and therefore “they have little to talk about” (*wadai ga sukunai*, line 2). However, this is a problem that can be fixed.

- Okada: 1. Dansei no baai wa, uchiki-na hito ga ōi n de,
In the case of men, since many are introverted,
2. anō wadai ga sukunai no ne.
umm they don't have much to say.
3. Topikku wo mazu motanai to ikenai hanashi dekinai kara,
First of all, you have to have a topic, if you don't you can't talk, so,
4. anō, zasshi wo ne? Yomu yō ni susume wo shita.
Umm. Magazines, right? I recommended reading them.
- Erika: 5. A sō desu ka?
Oh, really?
- Okada: 6. Kansai Uōkā toka de, ironna, anō,
For example something like Kansai Walker, various, umm,
7. ima hayari no ongaku toka eiga toka, ato sō desu ne,
music that's trendy right now, for example, movies, and also, yes, of course,
8. anō oishī kafe toka,
umm interesting cafés and so on,
9. sō iu jōhō ga notteiru no de,
since they publish information about things like that,
10. sore wo katte yomenasai to imashita.
I just told them to read it.
11. Sō sureba, anō wakai josei ga kyōmi motteiru koto ni,
If they do that, umm, things that young women are interested in,
12. topikku ga, wadai ga tsuite ikeru yō ni naru yo ne.
they'll be able to bring conversation topics along with them.
13. Sore- Sono hito ga kenson datta no ne.
That—those people were humble, you know?
14. Anō, doryoku sarete,
Ummm, So they put some effort in,

⁵ Unfortunately, I was only able to interview Okada-sensei once, and I did not know her well; a friend of a friend put me in touch with her.

15. iroiro eiga mitari sono besuto serā no hon yondari,
watch different movies, read those best-selling books,
16. sore mo shita.
they did that too.
- Erika: 17. A sō desu ka
Ah, is that so?
- Okada: 18. Anō, sore de dēto ni sasou toki mo, [laughter]
Umm, and when they ask [girls] out on dates [laughter],
19. sō iu tokoro wo shirabete,
they look all that up,
- Erika: 20. Mmmmmmm, sō desu ka
Mmmmmmm, I see.
- Okada: 21. ibento toka desu ne,
Events and things like that, you know?
22. shirabete ikareru yō ni naru koto desu ne.
They look them up and then they're able to go to them, right?

For Okada-sensei, conversational proficiency lies in “bringing topics along with them” (line 12), that is, having something to say—particularly things that young women will be interested in (line 11). However, conversation topics do not necessarily have to be external to the omiai, something that you “bring with you” to the conversation. Another strategy for creating topics of conversation, as per Nakanishi Kiyomi-sensei, is to have more creative dates that in and of themselves create opportunities for conversation. An omiai is many things, but it is not usually a creative endeavor. Rather, it is an extended small talk ritual almost always conducted in a café. As a result, conversation is the primary activity of the omiai, which makes the whole affair considerably more of a hurdle for the semiotically impaired. One way out of this bind is to rethink the structure of the omiai itself.

- Erika: 1. Anō, soshite anō omiai de no kaiwa wa, dō desu ka?
Umm, and conversation at an omiai, how is it?
2. Dō sureba ī deshō ka?
How should you do it?
- Nakanishi: 3. Kaiwa ne. Anō kore wa hontō ni muzukashī to omoimasu.
Conversation, right. Ummmmmm I think it's really difficult.
4. Anō, dare mo zenzen shiranai hito ni patto atte,

- For anyone, when you just up and meet someone you don't know at all*
5. ohanashi suru to iu no wa, yoppodo nareta hito de mo,
having a conversation, even if it's a person who's really used [to that],
6. sugoku muzukashī koto da to omou n desu yo.
I think it's an amazingly difficult thing.
7. Dakara atashi wa, anō, futari de kō yatte, to,
So I, um, if two people doing it like this [seated across from each other as we were at the café where the interview took place],
8. yappa chinmoku ga kō arawareru, dakara, amari ne?
of course silence shows up this way, so, it's too much right?
9. Futari de kissaten haitte zutto shaberanai de,
If the two go into a café and just don't talk the whole time, then,
10. yappa nijuppun gurai kō shabette, soto e dete, de,
of course, they talk like this for about 20 minutes, then go outside, then,
11. anō, otoko no hito ni wa, anō,
um, the man, um, [says]
12. **boku** ne, anō shatsu kaitai to omou n desu yo.
"I was thinking about buying a shirt!"
13. Chotto adobaisu shite moraemasen ka?
Could I get some advice from you?"
14. De, depāto e ittari,
Then, they could go to a department store or something,
15. ironna toko iku n desu yo.
go to all different places!
- Erika: 16. A sō desu ka!
Ah, really?!
- Nakanishi: 17. Un. Sō suru to, kaiwa mo togirenai deshō.
Uh huh. If you do that, the conversation will keep going.
[Unintelligible portion of recording]
18. Nanka, mafurā erande moraemasen ka? toka.
Like, "won't you pick out a scarf for me?" Or something.
19. Futari de shoppingu mitai na kanji de ikeba ī n chigau ka na?
If the couple does something like shopping, isn't that OK, I wonder.
20. [...] Yappari ne sugoi hazukashī. Unnn. Unnn.
[...] Of course, you know, it's incredibly embarrassing. Mmmhmm. Mmm.
21. Yoppodo nareta hito de mo,
Even for someone really used to it,
22. ichi jikan shaberi tsuzukeru to taihen yo nē.
it's hard to talk continuously for an hour.
23. Intābyū nara no koto made.
It's almost as if it's an interview.
- Erika: 24. Sō, sō desu ne.
Yes, yes, isn't that right?

25. Intābyū dattara, wadai mō kimattemasu kara.
If it's an interview, the topic [of conversation] is already set.
- Nakanishi: 26. Yappari kiku kōmoku wa kimatteru ja nai?
Of course aren't the items you ask about set [at an omiai too]?
27. Kyūjitsu ni donna koto sarete iru n desu ka *toka*, oshigoto wa? Ne.
Like, what do you do on your day off? What about your job? Right?

As in the interview with Chieko-san, here Nakanishi-sensei both describes and voices different conversational possibilities enabled by different kinds of interaction: seated face-to-face conversation layered over a minimal activity, like drinking coffee or tea, versus conversation intertwined with more active non-verbal time together. The café omiai is a challenge even for the very socially skilled, despite the fact that acceptable small-talk topics of conversation are more or less decided in advance (lines 26–27, and see also the discussion of Chieko-san's work experience). If the café omiai leads only to stultifying silence, then it might be best for the couple to try something else like shopping together or (as suggested later in the interview) going out to a buffet, where the array and selection of food can also provide a source of things to talk about. In a similar vein, the NNK began to sponsor “omiai parties” for singles based around concrete activities that the participants might share: food, wine-tasting, and sports. The idea is that the shared activity provides a reason to talk, and a thing to talk about, something that the café omiai does not. Nakanishi-sensei does not explicitly discuss conversational inability as a gendered phenomenon. In fact, she disavows it as such in lines 4–5. At the same time, she uses a male voice—with, again, the masculine first-person pronoun *boku* and explicit framing of the voice as a man's in lines 11 and 12—to suggest the change in locations and activities. Moreover, this imagined man speaks to his female partner in a way that is meant to flatter her, take her opinion into account, and engage her in a shared endeavor—“Won't you pick out a scarf for me?” (line 18). This suggests that the direction of the omiai is determined by male agency, but perhaps also by male need to change the location to something more conducive conversation.

Being able to generate topics of conversation is not, by itself, enough. The conversation must also, to be really successful, anticipate and respond to the emotional needs and interests of one's conversation partner. One of the few male matchmakers I got to know somewhat well, Inasawa-sensei, asserted during my interviews with him that there must be a balance in training men to be more assertive and willing to talk to women, while also ensuring they speak in a polite, attentive, and fairly gender-neutral style that shows the attractive quality of *omoiyari*, "consideration," or perhaps, "empathy." He demonstrated this concretely through telling me about his own life and experiences, as one of the older breed of sexually and economically aggressive men. He started out as a successful businessman who decided to use his social capital to become a matchmaker after being laid off; as an older man in a position of authority, he had already been asked informally on a number of occasions to make matches. He told me the story of how his older colleagues taught him to pick up women: by learning to anticipate what they wanted. "Women," he said, "are always living in a dream." Men can achieve romantic success with women by understanding this point of view, and actively working to give women the feeling that they have entered a romantic dream.

Without commenting on whether or not Inasawa-sensei's formulation is an accurate generalization of Japanese women's subjectivity, the key point here is his assertion that connections with women hinge on men's ability to imagine a feminine subject position and from there, to anticipate her desires and satisfy them. Both Inasawa and Nakanishi-sensei's points of view demonstrate that, as discussed in the introduction, the goal of *omiai* conversation is conative rather than referential (Jakobson 1990), and an *omiai* that goes well is not one wherein facts about each other are successfully exchanged, but rather one that successfully evokes an affectionate emotional response in one's interlocutor. Nagata-sensei, a freshly minted matchmaker in his forties at the time I

met him—divorced, but with a more successful romantic history than most of his male friends—echoed similar sentiments when we spoke about his view of matchmaking, ensconced in a café on Shijō Avenue in downtown Kyoto in March 2010. He compared a relationship to a puzzle. With a love match, one starts by assembling the middle of the puzzle—that is, sexual/romantic affection. From there, the couple works outward to the edge pieces of the puzzle, to the kind of concrete information about who each other is—their jobs, families, plans for the future—that determine whether the relationship can last and move towards marriage. An omiai match, however, is the exact opposite. Any client's profile will have all of the most relevant facts about a person's social status and economic situation (educational background, employment, family circumstances, etc.). Any two people considering an omiai marriage will therefore have all the edge pieces of the puzzle from the very beginning. The only remaining task is to determine whether the middle of the puzzle, the emotional content, can be put together. The goal of omiai conversation, then, may well be regarded as almost entirely affective, and male clients must learn therefore not only to be verbose but emotionally engaging.

Ultimately, the best way to train clients to handle the conversational hurdle of the omiai is to push them to participate in as many omiai as possible—practice makes perfect. Matchmakers can encourage this in part through their pricing schemes. As touched on in chapter three, some matchmakers adhere to older systems of payment whereby clients pay a one-time fee for each omiai that their matchmaker arranges for them (at the time of both my fieldwork and this writing, this fee was usually around ¥10,000); others, however, have moved to a set monthly fee, which is often lower than the omiai fee. Yasuda-sensei explicitly stated that she uses this pricing system to push her clients to have as many omiai as possible—to apply to meet as many as five people a week, one for

every work day. This has not only the salutary effect of increasing the chances that her clients will meet someone they are compatible with, but also helps clients become more comfortable with the process of the omiai itself; in both interviews with me and introductory meetings with clients, she cited her own experience as someone who married through omiai. This “all you can meet” (*omiai hōdai*) pricing scheme is becoming increasingly popular among the matchmakers in Yasuda-sensei’s circle. The “omiai party,” as mentioned briefly above, may also be a particularly good venue for clients to get in conversational practice. At the October 2012 NNK monthly meeting, Aiba-sensei, a successful rural matchmaker, told that month’s assembly that she does much of her matchmaking not by holding formal omiai, but by coordinating relaxed drinking parties for her clients. In many cases, even if the party attendees don’t meet anyone that they want to see again one on one, many of the male clients may still be satisfied because they had the chance to practice talking to women.

Finally, matchmakers are not the only parties capable of teaching male clients better communicative skills; female clients can aid this process by fostering an open and accepting environment that encourages comfortable and relaxed communication. This is something they are arguably already prepared to do, as pointed out by Itakura and Tsui, cited above. In our second interview, where we talked at length about the fine details of omiai etiquette, Fujii-sensei told me that she encourages all her clients to give the person they meet at an omiai a fair chance, discouraging them from leaving early or tuning out even if from the very beginning the client feels that she won’t ever want to see her match again. Instead, she should stick with it and participate, as long as her partner doesn’t say anything really awful. She gave the following analogy: seeing someone’s profile is like seeing the poster for a movie. It might pique your interest, but even so, you have no idea if it will be an interesting movie or a boring one. An omiai is like the trailer for the

movie. But the only way to know if the movie is really interesting or not is to actually date the person and get to know them. So, since the omiai is just a preliminary to a real, interesting connection, it's important to give everyone as much of a chance as possible. Of course, awkward things happen, but if you can be understanding, and sympathetic, and stick it out, that's the better course.

During the course of my fieldwork, I was able to attend two group meetings for potential new clients held by Yasuda-sensei. In keeping with her character as a go-getter, she encouraged her female clients at both of these meetings to always be vocal about their feelings with their partners. The explicit goal of this is to keep the men they are seeing encouraged. She told the women to express their positive feelings at least twice after a date, and with a proper phone call (as opposed to a text message). One ought to say, "Today was fun! Please invite me out again, OK?" (*Kyō wa tanoshikatta desu. Mō ichido sasotte kudasai ne?*) This is important because men may be worried that the next phone call they receive will be from their matchmaker, telling them their new girlfriend doesn't want to see them again, and what they *believed* was a positive feedback was mere politeness. Continual positive feedback from women will let them know that they are behaving well and are on the right track.

It also is important for women to give this kind of continual positive feedback because, past the omiai stage, initiating conversation and dates is generally regarded as the man's responsibility (or even at the omiai stage, as Chieko asserts). After both clients agree to see each other again and date, their matchmakers will exchange their clients' contact information. Nonetheless, it may be considered poor form if it is the woman who makes first contact, or if the man takes his time getting in touch. He may seem as if he is not interested, or as if he is shirking his conversational

responsibilities. His matchmaker must push him to do so, if he does not. Matchmakers regard this as basic information; as Fujii-sensei put it in her lecture on omiai, in the matchmaking world, one can't reject someone in omiai by simply not calling. There is also the matter of the proposal, as touched on earlier; this is also a decidedly male responsibility, as evidenced by the Bridalnavi package, which is wholly focused on guiding clueless men to a successful proposal through arranging all the necessary goods and services and guiding men in how to craft a dramatic, romantic moment. Prior to that, the matchmakers can confer with their clients and each other beforehand to make sure that a proposal will be well received. However, positive feminine feedback and the progressive buildup of both desire⁶ and conversational competence are also required in order to coach the client to the point of successfully assaying a proposal of marriage.

There is something of a paradox here, in that men need to learn to “lead” the conversation, yet women need to be equally assertive, declaring their feelings, asking their male partners about their feelings directly, and being supportive during the omiai, suggestions which belie the idea that “leading” the conversation is entirely a male responsibility. There is also the report of the very egalitarian-minded Ozeki-sensei, during our interview, that “reverse proposals” initiated by women are on the rise, and that herbivore men do not pose a problem, because as men have become more passive, women have become more assertive. At the same time, as noted above, for the most part matchmakers give women little conversational coaching; conversation is a subtly feminine-coded skill that men must learn to acquire, and the purportedly feminine preference for explicit emotional dialogue lines up with matchmakers ideologies of explicit verbal communication of feelings.

⁶ Although some measure of mutual desire to be together must be present for the couple to decide on marrying, the role of sex in matchmaking is unclear. Matchmakers rarely talk explicitly about sex. Kawakami-sensei, who is in some ways very conservative in her matchmaking style, once told me premarital sex was cause for expelling a client. Nakanishi Keiji-sensei, however, maintains that NNK policy is for sex to be something clients decide for themselves.

Therefore, although arguably some “masculine” leadership expectations are placed upon the men as they acquire these new conversational skills, we should be mindful that women are being encouraged to be more assertive at the same time that men are being asked to adhere to “feminine” language ideologies. As will be discussed further in the conclusion below, the conversational training that matchmakers provide to their clients works to push men and women towards similar behaviors and communicative standards.

New Possibilities for Japanese Masculinity

In summation, matchmakers seem to have a fairly negative view of the men they encounter—although to be fair, as Nagata-sensei once proposed as a counter to theories of male passivity that I presented, matchmakers also encounter a skewed sample of men. Nonetheless, matchmakers perceive Japanese men—at their worst—to be taciturn, withdrawn, anti-social, self-absorbed, and disrespectful of women, as a result of social forces both new and old. The masculine ideal that they encourage is, in fact, composed of fairly gender-neutral qualities. It promotes active attention to one’s partner (as demonstrated by the encouragement towards chivalry), leadership and proactivity (as in the injunction to speak clearly about feelings and initiate conversation), but also sociability, verbal proficiency, consideration for others, and deference to their sensibilities. This relatively non-gendered behavioral ideal that matchmakers advocate for their male clients is certainly a departure from past ideals of Japanese masculinity, especially the salaryman ideal of the recent past, as noted by Morioka above.

To some degree—the degree to which men who work with matchmakers are taught to be chivalrous and deferential to women—it is a departure that is arguably a Westernization, with roots in global ideas about race, culture, and masculinity, and anxieties about how Japanese men compare

to their counterparts elsewhere. For, in fact, Western (white) men may be perceived as more desirable than Japanese men because they are presumably more concerned with women as people, by virtue of the “lady first” cultural training they are supposed to have received. As noted by Sugawara-sensei above, chivalry is imagined to be *atarimae* for Americans, “obvious,” while Japanese men have difficulty with *kikubari*, which we might translate as “care for others’ feelings,” “sensitivity,” or “tact.” Karen Kelsky writes eloquently of the possibilities of personal and sexual self-expression that Western men represent for upwardly mobile Japanese women, precisely because of Western men’s perceived chivalry and attentiveness: “Time spent overseas or in the (intimate) company of foreigners provides women with a foreign-inflected vocabulary for a sustained critique of Japan’s gender relations, as well as the means to circumvent or reject them” (Kelsky 2001: 2). In other words, why spend time with men who are tactless, insensitive, and treat women as second best when, for women have the linguistic, social, and financial capital to meet them, there are foreign men out there who will be more than happy to treat them with respect and consideration?

Of course, from the perspective of an American feminist (*id est*, my own perspective), this is rather laughable. It was perhaps inevitable that, as a single American woman undertaking research with matchmakers, my own romantic life and potentially privileged experiences with American men would frequently become a topic of my collaborators’ curiosity and analysis; Ozeki-sensei, for example, expressed a certain amount of envy for me and my access to chivalrous American men who freely say “I love you,” and was a little surprised by the stories that I told her of my own relationships, which being real, do not hold up well to romantic ideals. It was also difficult for me to discuss the topic of chivalry without discussing my own culturally situated kneejerk reactions against the high value that matchmakers place on it. For, in fact, it is not necessarily the case that Western

men do a necessarily better job of treating women as people or expressing their feelings verbally, and indeed many Western women (myself included) object to “lady first” behavior on the grounds that it marks women as weaker than men and in need of help. As a result, it can make us feel unequal and devalued rather than like fully considered and valued partners. And indeed, Japanese women who pursue their desire for the foreign can become frustrated and disillusioned with it. Piller and Takahashi’s (2006) study of Japanese women living in Australia found that women pursued English study initially as a way to pursue foreign men. However, their experiences of foreign boyfriends were often disillusioning in their failure to live up to the romanticized views they had for them, with their partners then becoming tools for better English acquisition rather than objects of desire in and of themselves.



Figure 7: Charisma Man #1, The Alien, February 1998.

The character of “Charisma Man,” invented by Canadian expatriate Larry Rodney, shows both effectively and comically the difference in how white women and Japanese women perceive

Western men⁷. While Charisma Man is automatically fawned over by Japanese women (much to the benefit of his ego), his arch-nemesis is Western Woman—she who is equipped to evaluate him on his own cultural terms (Charisma Man Press 2013). Further comics in the series make it clear that Charisma Man has absolutely no intention of treating the Japanese women who flock to his side as the free and fully realized individuals they may long to be. He is, in his own way, like the self-absorbed Japanese men the matchmakers criticize: concerned first with his own self-gratification.

It took me some time to understand that although Western men may not actually have a more egalitarian or respectful view of women, the idea of chivalry, from a Japanese perspective, challenges male chauvinism as Japanese women have experienced and understood it. In spite of the complexities presented by cross-cultural transmission and uptake of the concept of “lady first” behavior, the romantic image presented by the chivalrous Western man is a strong and compelling one from the perspective of both Japanese women and the matchmakers who work to guide men towards more attractive or appealing behavior, with their focus on verbal expression of feelings, and chivalrous attention to women. The matchmakers who have generously collaborated with me on this project do not usually deal with international marriages⁸, which means that most men and women

⁷ I am indebted to Mark McLelland for introducing me to Charisma Man (see McLelland 2003).

⁸ Japan does have international matchmaking services, but these are specialty businesses whose focus is almost universally on bringing women from poorer or less developed Asian countries, often China, to men who are considered less desirable on the Japanese marriage market—rural men, low-income men. I have yet to see a matchmaking agency aimed at matching Westerners with Japanese, which may be in part because Japanese women and Western men seem to do well enough at matching up with each other without professional help. I have, however, seen exceptions made in a few cases for foreign permanent residents of Japan. In the summer of 2013, the NNK decided to make registration available to interested foreign clients, although without the intent of specifically bringing partners to Japan.

who engage the services of a matchmaker are, for whatever reason, looking for a Japanese partner⁹. However, the men who are the most appealing as partners are the ones who have learned to be chivalrous, who have learned, to some degree, a more Western mode of behavior towards women. Unlike the conclusion reached by Kelsky's "internationalist Japanese women,"—namely, that Japanese men are terminally retrograde in their approach to gender relations—I hope I have shown thus far that matchmakers are optimistic. They are inclined to think the best of people, and believe that anyone who seriously follows their teachings can get married, that Japanese men *can* reform their views on gender relations. They just require some guidance, which of course matchmakers are prepared to provide. It is worth asking how successful they are in this; certainly, among the 10% or so of clients who successfully marry, there must be some, perhaps even most, who have taken their matchmakers' advice to heart; perhaps even some who wind up marrying through other means still benefit from their matchmakers' instruction.

However, matchmakers' regendering projects for men cannot simply be summed up as "Westernization." The contents of "masculinity" in Japan are undergoing a more complicated state of flux than a simple shift from an Eastern to a Western ideal. This can be seen clearly by returning to the case of the *sōshoku-kei danshi* whose femininity seems, at first glance, to be the site of his "gender trouble." I would argue otherwise. The problem with the *sōshoku-kei danshi*—if they can be said to have one—is not their feminine concerns with fashion and domesticity. Indeed, to the extent that men ought to take care in their appearance in order to make a good first impression at an *omiai*, these traits would serve *sōshoku-kei danshi* well in the heterosexual marriage market. Many matchmakers might even wish that their clients were both stylish and focused on domestic concerns!

⁹ Kelsky notes as well that even women with a strong preference for foreign men will often still choose to marry Japanese men. Foreigners are for play and self-discovery, but forming a household and bearing children are domestic affairs in multiple senses.

Moreover, as mentioned above, men must be “feminine” at least to the extent that they can imagine a feminine perspective in order to properly show sensitivity to their partner’s needs and desires. The problem of the *sōshoku-kei danshi* is, rather, their sexual passivity to the point of asexuality. What I would suggest is that in modern Japan, romantic and sexual assertiveness have become decoupled from gender. Almost immediately after “*sōshoku-kei danshi*” came into contemporary parlance, the sexually and romantically assertive “*nikushoku-kei joshi*” (“carnivore woman”) joined him, along with the implied existence of *nikushoku-kei danshi* (“carnivore men”) who had existed in the past—since after all, the herbivores were depicted as a new breed (Shoji 2009). Recent Japanese slang has decoupled “carnivore” and “herbivore” from “woman” and “man,” and now anyone may proclaim themselves sexually aggressive or passive (see also Schreiber 2011, Japan Today 2012).

As described both in this chapter and in more detail in the next, matchmakers encourage *all* their clients to aggressively pursue marriage—apply to meet as many people as possible, be an open and engaging conversational partner, and be proactive about proclaiming your desires and intentions to marry to your partner. Nakanishi Kiyomi, in opening the May 2010 NNK Osaka meeting, related the happy news of one of her clients, who had just gotten engaged. The woman was a model of a successful client, to her, because she applied to meet a large number of people, and was willing to meet everyone who applied to meet her, thus demonstrating the important qualities of both assertiveness and cooperation. These are instructions given to men and women alike, and Nakanishi-sensei concluded her introduction by urging the attendant matchmakers to encourage their own clients to follow this successful woman’s example and be more proactive. In the world of matchmaking, everyone should be a carnivore—a well-dressed, considerate carnivore. There is no need for the *sōshoku-kei danshi* to be less feminine, and indeed, “too feminine” is a criticism of men

in the omiai system that I have never heard. What matchmakers aim to do with their passive male clients is not to make them either more or less masculine, but rather, to bring them fully into the heterosexual fold by teaching them to be romantically attentive to women through chivalrous behavior and improved conversational skills. By learning to converse equitably and relevantly, men can master the kind of conative language that will help them appeal to partners on an affective level, and fill in the emotional pieces of the relationship puzzle described by Nagata-sensei above.

Finally, the incorporation of Western elements into a new ideal of Japanese masculinity, and the relative absence of gender associations with the qualities that make for ideal partners, also exists inside the quasi-traditional Japanese institution of arranged marriage. Matchmakers believe that traditional institutions like marriage, and associated practices like omiai, must change with the times in order to continue to be useful and relevant. The fact that these practices change, however, does not make them less Japanese: many matchmakers are proud of their role in maintaining Japanese tradition even while transforming it, and bringing happiness to individual men and women in their care through helping them find each other. Likewise, changing roles for Japanese men and women do not necessarily make these men and women less Japanese.

CHAPTER V: GREAT EXPECTATIONS, BITTER REALITY

How do I begin to write about matchmakers' conception of femininity, and about Japanese women's attitudes to marriage? For better or worse, some of the experiences that clarified these issues for me most forcefully were personal ones. It was probably impossible to think that, as a single woman studying matchmaking, I could avoid attempts by my friends and collaborators to find me a husband, that this would somehow not be part of how my presence in the matchmaking world would play out. Some of my friends, like Sugawara-sensei, worked on me actively, by asking after my love life openly and chiding me for not tracking down new romantic possibilities on Facebook—in other words, for not behaving as a client should, and taking my destiny into my own hands. Others worked on me only somewhat more passively by entering me into their client database to see if anyone would apply to meet me, so I could experience omiai for myself (and maybe also meet that special someone).

While my profile was active in the database, I did periodically receive emails notifying me that someone wanted to meet me. However, it seemed inappropriate and rude to go on a date that held only academic interest for me, and so I mostly declined the requests. Perhaps more to the point of this chapter, though, most of the men who applied to meet me did not actually seem at all well suited to me. For example, I received multiple requests from men in their forties, when I was in my late twenties. I knew that matchmakers encouraged their clients to be realistically aware of their value on the marriage market, and to be willing to meet people and let them surprise you, but the combination of my ethical situation as a researcher and my personal situation as an American

woman with very different ideas about marriage gave me little motivation to put what they were teaching me into practice.

In spite of my personal and ethical objections, over the course of my fieldwork I was still persuaded to participate in two omiai. I hesitate to write about them here: they were intimately entwined with my studies, but nonetheless not properly conducted under the auspices of my research. Yet, they connect with some of the points I wished to make in chapter four, as well as some of the points relevant to my discussion of women and omiai in the data and analysis that follow in this chapter. And, if nothing else, as things that happened to me directly, they are also my own stories to tell. And thus: I participated in the first omiai in the fall of 2009 in part out of growing curiosity about the sort of man who would be interested in meeting the only white girl in the database (or so, at least, I assumed I was). I also worried that my relationship with my matchmaker friends, Kawakami and Takamiya-sensei, might suffer if I neglected their generous offer to let me have my own omiai at half-price, after registering me for free. They had gone out of their way to be helpful to me and support my research, albeit somewhat misguidedly¹, and I did not want to seem ungrateful or disinterested. The man I decided to see, one Noriaki-san, seemed to have good reasons for wanting to meet me. He was older than I might have chosen for myself (about eight years my senior), and looks-wise, not really my type. However, his profile did say that he was interested in healthy cooking, contact with other cultures, and travel abroad. Perhaps he really would turn out to be someone that an odd American vegetarian graduate student could get along with.

So I agreed to the omiai, the date was set, and when it came, I waited at a hotel near Kyoto Station, with my matchmaker Takamiya-sensei, suffering from a terrible case of stage fright. What if

¹ “Misguided” is perhaps not the right word; as I discuss in chapter two, many matchmakers initially felt it most appropriate to treat a young woman wanting to learn about omiai as a client.

it was horrible? Or perhaps more frightening: what if we got on very well? Takamiya-sensei eased my worries by promising to size up the situation and sit together with us in the event that my mysterious date didn't seem like someone who could hold his own in conversation. As it turned out, Noriaki-san proclaimed himself rather accurately to be *nikushoku-kei* ("carnivorous," that is, romantically and sexually aggressive), and so Takamiya-sensei rather quickly took his leave of us, deciding that we two could get on just fine by ourselves. The rest of the omiai was an awkward nightmare not unlike the practice omiai that Chieko described in chapter four. Noriaki-san was indeed adept at talking, but not exactly skilled at taking a partner's feelings and reactions into account. He complimented me to no end, but as it turned out, was specifically interested in foreign women because he believed mixed-race children to be both hardier and prettier. He was avowedly eager to find a young bride and bring her back to the Kansai countryside where he lived, so the two of them could begin to make beautiful, mixed-race babies as soon as possible. I smiled and tried as hard as I could to make pleasant conversation. After all the interviews and observation I had already conducted with matchmakers, I already knew much of the pre-omiai advice they give to their clients by heart, and determined to keep smiling my way through the conversation. Nonetheless, I couldn't wait to get out of there: I had little desire to be valued solely for my exotic womb. The irony of this story is that, when it came time to report back to our matchmakers on whether we might want to see each other again, *he* turned *me* down. Perhaps, in spite of my best attempts to be agreeable, he could tell that I wasn't really interested in the life he envisioned for the two of us.

After this experience, I thought that the issue of my own omiai would be laid to rest, having given one an honest try. Then, in the summer of 2010, a doctor from a rural area across the country applied to meet me, and Kawakami-sensei and Takamiya-sensei simply would not let me say no. I

tried to decline on the grounds that at the time I was dating someone else, which they knew—they had even met him, and very much approved. Despite that, they insisted that I consider the omiai, answering all my objections with “But he’s a doctor!” It was unthinkable to them that I would choose not to consider an offer from the kind of man that most practically-minded Japanese women would fall over themselves to accept; doctors and other professional men are some of the most highly sought-after male clients. I ultimately did wind up meeting the doctor, with my sympathetic boyfriend’s approval. I even enjoyed talking to him—he was smart, respectful, and had interesting things to say. Kawakami-sensei called with the good news that he wanted to see me again (and thus enter kōsai with me), but I ultimately turned him down. Having at least given him a try, Kawakami-sensei and Takamiya-sensei were willing to understand that I wasn’t interested in being a country doctor’s wife—much as they understood before that having adorable mixed-race babies was on my to-do list sometime after finishing my dissertation.

Naturally, my experiences with omiai were inflected by my own unique situation as both a foreigner and a researcher. In many ways, however, the reasons that my first omiai was a failure were very similar to the reasons that many Japanese women my age and older remain unmarried. Rather than accept an older partner, I wanted to be with someone more or less my own age. I wanted a partner who shared my interests, and I wanted to share my life with an intellectual and career equal. After so much time considering the potential benefits of matchmaking, my view of marriage is doubtless more pragmatic than that of many of my American peers. Nonetheless, I fully expect that the right person for me will come along in due time, and believe that trying to force the issue does no good. Although there are a great many differences in what we expect from romantic partners, and perhaps even greater differences in the kinds of satisfaction we hope to find in married life, Japanese

women, particularly educated Japanese women, apply many of the same criteria that I did when they imagine what kind of partner they want to spend their lives with, and decide who falls too short of the mark to be considered. As discussed below, career women will have particular difficulties negotiating the omiai system with regard to the compromises that marriage is likely to require of them.

The reason my second omiai was a failure is rather the opposite. In this case, I surprised my matchmakers, and perhaps my partner, by failing to display the kind of status-consciousness that matchmakers consider to be typical of many Japanese women. The country doctor might have been my intellectual and career equal, but he also didn't seem able to offer me the kind of lifestyle that I wanted. For many women, as we shall see, the lifestyle a husband can offer them is to some degree quantifiable in terms of income and job security; I rejected that system of evaluation. In this chapter, I take up the issues of attitude and evaluation that matchmakers cite as the primary barriers between women and marriage. How do Japanese women evaluate themselves? How do they evaluate potential partners? How do their processes of evaluation pose problems for successfully finding a marriage partner through omiai? And, how it is that matchmakers aim to adjust women's attitudes? I also discuss the comparatively smaller role played by the pragmatics of conversation in matchmakers' advice to women, and discuss why conversation is a greater challenge for men.

Mitame wa Shōbu: It's All Down to Looks

At the November 2012 NNK meeting in Osaka, we are presented with an update on some of the parties and other more elaborate matchmaking endeavors put together by the association—a typical component of these sorts of meetings. This month, however, we are also treated to video of Nakanishi Kiyomi-sensei advising a tour bus full of women on their way to meet eligible rural

bachelors in the next prefecture over. She coaches them in smiling, having them practice saying the word whiskey (*uisukī*, when rephonologized in Japanese), using the articulation of the high final vowel to exercise their faces for smiling. She also coaches them in how to say encouraging backchanneling phrases in high-pitched, “cute” sounding voices, with exaggeratedly long vowels on the sentence-final particle *ne*, which marks tag questions. (See Miller 2004a for more on “cute” feminine talk in Japanese). *Sugoi!* (“Amazing!”) *Hontō desu nē!* (“That’s true!”) *Sasuga desu nē!* (“Of course!”) While on the bus, the women also get makeovers. Nakanishi-sensei comments that most of them are wearing “thin,” “light” (*usui*) makeup and admonishes them: “This day is the most important day of your life, after your wedding day: do your makeup like it!” In addition to needing *more* makeup, the women are also advised to stay away from adult, staid, beige tones and to adopt a softer (*purupuru*), pink look.

In the last chapter, I addressed how the pragmatics of speaking plays a substantial role in the way matchmakers counsel male clients. However, it is far less central in counseling female clients. This does not mean that it is not important, as demonstrated by the example above, but it is somewhat differently important. The women who sign up with matchmakers are often in different circumstances than their male counterparts. As described in detail in the previous chapter, matchmakers tend to assume that men need to be taught to how to interact with women. Their lack of similar advice to women seems to rest on an assumption that women are already more properly socialized, and therefore, that they need no special preparation for making polite and cheerful conversation with men, or minding their manners. For example, when jointly interviewing Yasuda-sensei and Sugawara-sensei on the finer points of omiai behavior, I asked about table manners. When I asked what mistakes (*misu*) women make, Sugawara-sensei answered, “Onna no ko no misu

nai yarō!” [But of course women don’t make mistakes!] The tone was joking, but I think there is some real belief underlying it, and it stands in sharp contrast to the assumption that men *don’t* usually know basic manners.

Why don’t women make mistakes? It may be that they are in fact better educated, or perhaps we should say, that they come under more routine semiotic scrutiny, as suggested by the pressure to live up to the ideal of “Japanese Women’s Language,” discussed in chapter one. Insufficiently feminine language use brands girls as deviant, as Laura Miller (2004b) discusses in regard to “naughty” high school girls. And, unlike their male counterparts, who are often branded as passive and inexperienced, Japanese women do not seem to suffer from the same kind of lack of will or way to craft emotionally significant heterosexual relationships. Japanese women may be more knowledgeable about how to flirt with and attract men outside of the matchmaking setting, if the advice of my friends, single and married alike, is any indication. Over a dinner with friends in November 2009, one girl, Kaori, worried that, in five years at her current job, she had not yet met anyone. Our friend Yuri, a little wiser and older, advised making eye contact with men she passed in the hall—specifically holding the contact for longer than three seconds—or making a point to sit next to someone in the cafeteria. Chatting with my friend Akiko at work, we would often turn to subject of romance: although we were about the same age, she had married already, whereas I was still single and navigating my personal life on unfamiliar territory. She once told me that Japanese women try to “naturally” get next to a man, at parties or events, and eventually, make their desire plain by taking his hand and saying something like, “zutto sawaritakatta” [“I’ve wanted to touch you all this time”]. Such conversation indicates that the women I knew as friends, at least, were well aware of how to use eye contact, spatial proximity, shifts in footing, small but significant touches, and well

placed verbal expressions of affection to incite and enact desire, and initiate romantic relationships. Many of my female friends, matchmakers included, view Japanese women as “strong” (*tsuyoi*) and “proactive” (*sekkyokuteki*) in their pursuit of men who interest them.

These are little examples drawn from everyday conversation; based on them, it seems safe to say that the women that I knew as friends, with whom I could have these kinds of casual conversations, were all keenly aware of how to demonstrate romantic interest in others through both linguistic and material signs. This also seems to be true of clients. When Sugawara-sensei, in our first interview, described the reasons that women joins as clients, she said that they usually joined up in the wake of a failed relationship; the “shock” of being dumped led them to *konkatsu*, in hopes of forgetting their past boyfriends, or as an alternative to feeling depressed about the situation. As a result, I would posit the barriers between women and marriage cannot be characterized as semiotic or interactional in the same way as men’s difficulties. Women have both interactional skills and romantic histories; the issue is that their intimate relationships do not then lead to marriage.

That said, women do receive a modicum of semiotic training from matchmakers, and it comes in two different flavors. Women do not receive the same extent of coaching that men do on appropriate clothing choices, first impressions, or basic social behavior (smile, be polite, pay attention to your partner). However, they may receive some highly detailed style tips, and be reminded to smile under pressure. What definitely merits time and expense is a woman’s profile picture, to be displayed in the matchmaker association’s database. The profile picture is a delicate thing. Most of a customer’s profile (*tsurisho*, an older word, or *purofiru*, a more recent loan word) is dry fact. Name. Age. Height. Weight. Occupation. Location. Educational background. Family situation (parents, siblings, children from previous marriages if any, and who lives with whom).

Yearly income, if the profile belongs to a man. The one point of color in this parade of black and white is the profile picture. Additionally, most matchmakers have told me over the years that men are usually looking for as much youth and beauty as their own circumstances can net them (and more about this below). Thus it is that the woman, in effect, makes her first impression in her profile picture; the man makes his first impression in person, after being selected on the basis of more vital information than his photo². Nakanishi Keiji-sensei, who met his wife through omiai, often speaks of that “one miraculous picture” that will be enough to entrance a man so that he feels he absolutely must meet her, the thing he gives ultimate credit to for his lasting personal and professional relationship with his wife. At the same time, a common complaint from male clients is that women’s profile pictures alter her natural appearance to the point of being unrecognizable. In fact, Noriaki-san, during our omiai, gave the over-doctoring of photos as one reason that he was unwilling to consider a Japanese partner; he did seem to really feel that this practice was deceptive.

A balance must be struck then, between making a woman appear her best, while also taking care that she looks *her* best. One solution for this is to refer clients, whenever possible, to professional photographers. Indeed, the Nihon Nakōdo Kyōkai has connections to several local photo studios that allow them to give discount coupons to their customers. The matchmakers then receive kickbacks from the studios for referring business their way; for busy matchmakers, this arrangement can yield monthly returns of hundreds or even thousands of dollars. It is easy to be cynical about this kind of financial arrangement, even if it is also true that a photo studio that specializes in individual portraiture is probably best equipped to produce a well lit, selectively touched-up photograph that shows a client to what really is her (or his) best advantage. One of the

² Sugawara-sensei informed me that women tend to ask men, at omiai, “Why did you pick me?” (*Dōshite watashi wo erande kureta?*) This is an awkward question, because there isn’t a good answer; he picked her because his matchmaker showed him her picture.

photo studios even offers to do hair and makeup for the day of the omiai, presumably to avoid some of the problems of photo/life mismatch.



Figure 5.1. The author's (amateur) profile picture.

Ah, but what happens in the absence of a professional photographer? Matchmakers can certainly do their best to take more skillful portraits of their clients than a client might take herself. At a large meeting for some of Yasuda-sensei's prospective clients in November 2009, I watched as her assistants took pictures of fourteen women—about half of those who were signing up that day. For each woman, the goal was the same: get her to smile, and make her look as fancy, as typically feminine, as possible. However, femininity was the easy part. Nearly all of the women attended in clothing that would already have been suitable for an omiai—attractive dresses or blouses paired with skirts, with some tasteful jewelry as well. For those who did not appear to be quite done up enough, the matchmakers had brought a few additional necklaces along with them (some conservative pearls on the one hand, and some bright chunky beads on the other). The one woman who had shown up in a tracksuit was chastised for dressing improperly, and instructed on how to dress for omiai in

future. Getting the women to project a confident, attractive persona was considerably more difficult, and here is where the semiotic aspect of the photograph really comes into play. It is not about simply showing a beautiful face, but about showing the viewer a person who projects desirable personality characteristics (friendliness, confidence, approachability, femininity) through indexical facial expressions, body posture, and clothing/accessory style choices. The photographer was relaxed and laughing herself, which no doubt helped, but still, many women slouched, smiled grimly, and needed to be coached into sitting up and making more bright, friendly, *choosable* faces. In her April 2009 lecture on counseling new clients, Fujii-sensei handed out sample amateur and professional photos of the same person, stressing the importance of clients having an *erabareyasui* (literally, “easy to be chosen”) picture. The “easy to be chosen” pictures, being professionally taken, have better lighting and posing, but are also taken from a closer angle, giving a good view of the face, and the subjects all have broader smiles.

Of course, a woman should strive to look nice at an omiai as well, and to be attentive to the details of her appearance there, as Nakanishi Kiyomi-sensei teaches us above. Makeup is important, and dressing well is important—it shows how seriously clients take the business of an omiai. Shiga-based Nakao-sensei, a stylish older woman who referred to her office as a “salon,” offered pre-omiai hair and makeup styling to her clients at the time of our interview, again to prevent a gap between profile picture and reality; she was also considering offering up inexpensive rental clothes to clients. My observations of omiai show that women do tend to follow their matchmakers’ advice on this point quite closely; I can find perhaps but one instance or two in my notes from omiai observations of a woman who seemed radically underdressed for the occasion. However, having reached the omiai stage in the first place, her looks are presumably not the only factor that determines whether she and

her companion decide to keep seeing each other after their initial meeting.

The other major time when matchmakers offer semiotic coaching for women comes during the dating stage after the omiai, when they are dating a man to see if they would like to marry him. Women in *kōsai* are encouraged to make their feelings verbally explicit to their male partners, so that he knows that he is on the right track with his attentions to her, and also so that he will know if a proposal of marriage is likely to be well received. Unlike men, they are not reminded to be polite, take turns in conversation, and listen well. Rather, the scant amount of communicative guidance given to women is aimed not at helping the women directly, but at helping men learn to better communicate verbally, as discussed in the previous chapter. Also as discussed in that chapter, women complain to their matchmakers that men don't put their feelings into words. Fujii-sensei, in an April 2010 seminar for new matchmakers, told us that she encourages her female clients to lead men to verbal expression through the simple strategy of just asking when they are uncertain of their partner's feelings. As per chapter four, men may be primarily responsible for taking the initiative to ask women out or for proposing marriage, but it is women who determine whether these performatives will be successful, and who must support their male partners by creating felicitous circumstances (Austin 1975) through accepting proposals and dates. Or, as Nagata-sensei put it, when I interviewed him around the same time: "Kōdō wo okosu no wa dansei desu ga, josei ga sono kikkake wo tsukuru" [Men make the moves, but women make the opportunities].

I have few direct stories from female clients, but I did interview my friend Sayo about the omiai her parents arranged with her. A son of a friend of a friend of her father's wanted to meet any of his daughters, and Sayo was the one who couldn't get out of the obligation, even though, like me, she had a boyfriend at the time. Also like me, she argued that it would be rude for her to go when he

was serious, and she was certain she would refuse him, but her mother insisted she do it anyway, “for the experience.” In preparation for the omiai, her mother took her to the hotel where it would take place the day before, for a rehearsal dinner with table manner practice so that Sayo could practice things like tilting her head at the most attractive angle when eating. The next day, for the omiai itself, she wore clothes that her mother had picked out, and went to a salon to have her hair styled. During the actual omiai, Sayo was nervous—not about impressing the man she was meeting, as she had already made up her mind to refuse him, but about disappointing her mother. Although the omiai was never going to be a success because of circumstances entirely external to it, nonetheless this incident illustrates the kind of preparation that women are presumed to need during an omiai. Sayo had a successful romantic history, with several long-term boyfriends (and one she was contemplating marrying when I interviewed her in late 2009, although they subsequently parted). Her coaching and preparation focused primarily on appearances, on looking as attractive as possible. (Notably, she was given a white suit and white pearl earrings to wear, which Sayo thought an amusing attempt to make her appear far more virginal than she was.) Also, as will be important in the next section, she was encouraged to give her suitor a chance, even if just “for the experience.”

“Too Many Expectations”

Rather than focus on women’s contributions to the omiai as an activity, matchmakers find that the greater difficulty is getting them to the omiai in the first place, because of the problems they have selecting partners. They may be too quick to reject requests to meet, or waste their time, energy, and hopes applying to meet men who are more likely than not to reject their requests. Matchmakers claim that many women assume they have a greater value on the marriage market than they may actually have, and that the work they must do to be ready for marriage involves, to some extent,

revising the futures they have come to expect for themselves. “Expect”: This very word seems to be the root of women’s problems. Chieko-san, the former practice omiai partner that we met in chapter four, told me that while there are lots of men who have no confidence, women don’t know themselves and have too many expectations.

Yasuda-sensei has a more or less fully developed sociological theory about why Japanese women have such difficulty marrying, and come to it so late, a theory that she elaborated for me the first time I met her. Whether they are *obitori-sama* (people living alone) or “parasite singles” (M. Yamada 1999) who continue to live with their parents well into their twenties, young Japanese women in particular don’t seem to understand marriage as a necessary step to secure their own futures. Everyone will ultimately need someone to look after them, if not now, then certainly in old age; building family relationships is the best way to ensure that these needs will be met. However, in the present, most young Japanese still have relatively young and healthy parents, they are themselves young and healthy, and being young and healthy as they are, have not yet imagined the time when they might not be. In another (imagined past) time and place, parents and matchmakers would have ensured that young men and women were married and that systems of social continuity and insurance were secured long before they were needed—a fact attested to by the historical lack of “spinsters” in Japan (Cornell 1984). In Cornell’s account, the community made sure, somehow or other, that just about everyone had someone, even if not all matches were ideal.

In the present day, however, women spend too much time “polishing themselves” for marriage, and having done so, are choosy about their potential partners and expect a love match³, expect someone who matches their accomplishments. The tragic paradox is that their advancing age

³ Men spend too much time polishing themselves too, says Yasuda-sensei, a fact that means that they never learn how to approach women (who as they themselves become more “polished,” become decreasingly approachable).

diminishes their prospects for precisely the kind of match they dream of. As Yasuda-sensei tells it, most women don't realize how important marriage is to a secure and happy future until they are around thirty years old, or until unfortunate circumstance teaches them that their parents will not be around forever, and self-reliance is impractical. For example:

[Yasuda-sensei] gave an example of a woman client whose brother married, and her brother being the oldest son, moved his wife into the [family] house and they lived together with his parents. Meanwhile, she started living alone. But then she was laid off from her job... but having moved out couldn't go back. (I suppose, no room for her in the old house! physically!) So she began to think about marriage. She hadn't imagined prior to that that she might need the kind of financial security that tying yourself to another person can provide. At the same time you also begin to think about how you're going to care for your parents when they're older. (Fieldnotes, August 12, 2009)

And this is not the only problem that may be caused by waiting to marry. Yasuda-sensei has, in fact, a rather impressive list. Women who marry and have children early, in their 20s, have their young and healthy parents to not only take care of them, but to help them with childcare. In fact, women are more likely to rely on their own or their husband's parents for assistance with childcare than on their husbands, who tend to only assume childcare duties in an emergency (Nishioka et al. 2012). Women who wait, on the other hand, may have to face the dual burden of childcare and elder care. There are economic incentives to wait to marry, and it is telling that some men may regard activities aimed at raising their income to be a kind of *konkatsu* (Shibuya 2009: 39–42); employed men see more benefits to marriage (NIPSSR 2011a). Couples who have fewer children than they regard as ideal cite the cost of raising them as a major reason for smaller family sizes (NIPSSR 2011b). Yasuda-sensei's argument implicitly dismisses these concerns on the grounds that couples could save money if only they married young and had their families to use as a resource. If the economic arguments for waiting to marry are misguided, as Yasuda-sensei says, then the only thing holding women back is themselves. Women find themselves stuck passively waiting for the right person to

just sort of come along. This is a mistake, in her view, because there is no one “right person” who “comes along”—there are people you can get along with, whom you can go out and find. It is also a mistake because marriage is an important decision that is about much more than romance. Yasuda-sensei thinks that most of these women can be aided by having someone to push them towards marriage: someone to explain to them clearly why marriage is important and what to expect from it, and to clarify what they need, want, and can get in a partner.

The first step of any woman who is serious about marriage is to re-evaluate what she is worth on the market. I was told early on by Kawakami-sensei that for matchmakers, there is simply no matching an older woman with a younger man—maybe outside the world of matchmaking, but not here. The first training seminar I went to, in January 2010, was led by Nakanishi Keiji-sensei, and one of the first things he explained was that younger women will marry older men if they are particularly enticing sorts like doctors or lawyers; in general, their higher value on the marriage market means that, if they sign up with a matchmaker, many more people will want to meet them. This leaves fewer options for older women. Another problem is that men want a woman who can give them children; women over the age of 35-36 may find themselves faced with the bitter reality that their decreasing fertility has decreased their choices in more than one area of life. As Yasuda-sensei told me in August 2009:

Kodomo ga yappari sanjūgosai de ima kōnenrei shussan ya kara, Nihon wa. Un, dakara, sono hen de hayaku umanai to, un, anō, Nihon no dansei wa yappari kekkon shite kodomo hoshī to omottara, sanjūgosai ika no josei wo erabu nen, na? Se ya kara sono hen wo hayaku, josei wa, mo, don don kekkon ne? Aite sagasana akan de ne? Demo, Nihon no josei wa puraido takai. (laughter) Na? Jibun no ne? Yappari gakureki no ne? Jibun yori sugoku nakattara akan. Ano shigoto mo ne? Nenshū mo, sugoku nakattara akan tte itte.

Children, after all, at 35 years old, since we give birth at older ages in Japan. Right, so, if [women] don't give birth soon, right, um, well Japanese men think “I want children when I get married,” so they choose women under 35, don't they. Since that's the case, in that area, women quickly, steadily,

have to look for a partner or else, right? But Japanese women are very proud. (laughter) Aren't they? Their, you know? Of course, [a partner's] educational background, right? It has to be way higher than their own. And jobs too, you know? Income too, if it's not amazing, it's not OK, they tell me.

This also brings me to my next point, which is that dissatisfied older women who cannot find a partner are not hindered by a lack of possible partners. Rather, they suffer from an unwillingness to face the economic and socio-biological constraints that deflect the choice of marriage partner and the way they imagine life after marriage—or so matchmakers claim, based on their cumulative experience of female clients, or perhaps their experience as clients themselves. They are proud, and even if the inevitable constraints of time force them to hurry, they are still not willing to make any compromises in what they want as a partner. This is something they must move beyond, in order to be successful, and one of the best strategies may be to choose an older partner. A newly minted matchmaker, speaking at a meeting in November 2012, stated that she started aggressively pursuing marriage at the age of 38 and assumed that simply signing up with a marriage bureau would be enough to move her along the path to marriage quickly. It didn't. It wasn't until over a year later, when she went to an informational meeting at a different and fairly large marriage bureau, staffed by a number of matchmakers, that she saw how many attractive women, younger than her, were competing against her for the same partners. Yasuda-sensei was her matchmaker, and her tough, realistic attitude forced her to reassess what kind of partners were most suitable for her, and thus forced her to rethink the desirability of an older partner. She had recently celebrated the first anniversary of her marriage to a man of around fifty, having been pleasantly surprised, in the end, by his maturity.

Thus far, I have talked vaguely of market value. In the case of women, age really is value, insofar as some matchmakers have determined specific exchange rates of men's money, and women's youth.

★For the Ladies...

In your twenties, aim for the same age–10 years older

In your thirties, aim for 2–12 years older

✂At this point, if your partner is 5 years older, choosing [someone] older gets the salary you want.

When you turn 38, 5–15 years older

When you turn 45, 5–20 years older

✂At this point, if your partner is at least 10 years older, [someone] older will have a salary with wiggle room.

★As for the guys... I wrote about men's salaries on June 6th, but this time it's what men choose.

Just as women around 40 hurt when they're told that it's pointless to go for someone the same age, the age of women [you can apply to meet] changes with a guy's salary.

Guys

If you're in the range of 3 million yen, someone your own age.

Around 5 million yen, 3–5 years younger.

Around 8 million yen, 5–8 years younger.

If you've got 10 million yen, I think it'll be easy to get an OK from women 8–15 years younger.

Also.. if you work someplace really famous, or you're amazingly good-looking, or you have a staggering educational background, you can aim 2–3 years younger, maybe~♪

Well, anyway, it's OK to apply!

(Yamada Yumiko 2012; author's translation)

There are a number of assumptions we can unpack here. One is the assumption that women are more or less consciously and explicitly looking for a man with a certain amount of income; Nakao-sensei suggested in our interview that women may intentionally use omiai, rather than other methods, to meet someone of a slightly higher socioeconomic "rank" than she might otherwise come

in contact with⁴. However, the older a woman gets, the older she has to reach in order to find a man who both has the earning power that she wants, and who will also accept her as she is. There may also be emotional advantages to being willing to accept a significantly older partner. Yasuda-sensei asked women looking to sign up with her, “Do you want your husband to think of you as his cute young bride (*wakayome*), or his old lady (*uchi no obāchan*)? The first, of course!” Yamada, in the blog post cited above, acknowledges that it may hurt women in their thirties or forties to realize that they are no longer as appealing to their peers as they were when they were young. But during an interview with Nakanishi Kiyomi-sensei, I learned that the matchmaking process for women, on the whole, is supposed to teach them common sense, and also a sense of brutal realism; to put aside dreams of a perfect partner, and focus on a reality that requires marriage for childbearing and a secure old age.

The process described above may be quite disappointing and difficult for women who had come to expect a love match, and understandably so. Some matchmakers, like the romantically-minded Ozeki-sensei, hold that there is little difference, in the end, between an omiai marriage and a love marriage. Omiai is the engine that allows you to meet a suitable partner safely and quickly, so that you can develop your feelings as soon as possible, but ultimately, it is still a way to fall in love. Nakao-sensei, however, disagreed, telling me that “marriage” (*kekkon*) and “love” (*ren'ai*, romantic/sexual love) are fundamentally different, and the latter is not necessary for the former. The only thing one needs, in order to marry, is someone that one can be around comfortably for a long

⁴ As pragmatic as matchmakers might be about this reality, they also know that it is important for women to not explicitly display it in their interactions with men. Women who list expensive hobbies on their profiles (like “shopping” or “foreign travel”) make themselves less appealing to potential partners—even though men are required to list their incomes on their profiles. The precise role that men’s incomes play in determining their attractiveness to women is perhaps an open secret that no one really likes to talk about more than they have to.

period of time⁵. This may actually be a rather high bar to clear, but it is still a lower bar than true love; the bonds (*kizuna*) of family that you develop over time will hold your relationship together just as effectively.

Some women have more at stake than romance, and for these women, there may be no easy solution. Matchmakers generally seem to agree that some of the hardest clients to help are oldest sons with the continued responsibility to live with and care for their parents, and elite, highly educated women. Indeed, Nakanishi Keiji-sensei told new matchmakers straight off, in the January 2010 Matchmaker Training Lectures that he gave along with his wife and other matchmakers, that elite women were the hardest clients to manage. In the former, the trouble is obvious—few women want to marry into the certain responsibility of caring for her husband’s parents. But what is the trouble for the educated woman? Demographic research backs up matchmakers’ intuitions: highly educated Japanese women take longer to marry, and are less likely to marry at all, compared to other women (Raymo 2003)⁶. At the same time, because of continuing inequalities in the household division of labor in Japan, an educated woman with her own career potentially has the most to lose if she marries. Women do at least 80% of the housework in well over 70% of married couples across all age groups, regardless of employment status; 20% of husbands do no housework at all (Nishioka et al. 2012). For an educated women, lowering her standards may mean accepting a man who will not treat her as a peer, or share labor with her equitably inside and outside the home, as is suggested by some of the women interviewed by Nemoto (2008). She will likely be expected to give up her career for at least a few years while her children are small (Nishioka et al. 2012), and if she re-enters the workforce, it may be impossible for her to do so full-time, given the demanding structure of full-

⁵ Literally, *issho ni ite iya de nakatta okkē desu*. “If it’s not awful when you’re together, it’s OK.”

⁶ Raymo defines “highly educated” as having at least a four-year post-secondary degree.

time employment in Japan, that makes few compromises for non-work responsibilities (Yu 2002)⁷.

Maintaining her high standards and holding out for a man who will support her career and share the housework—and based on the above statistics, such men are few and far between—may mean that she does not lose as much if she marries, but that the likelihood of her finding a partner plummets. As we saw from Yamada's calculations of who should apply to meet whom, the assumption is that most woman will want to marry a man with as high a status (measured in terms of money and profession) as she can get—an assumption that may continue to be true even for a career woman, who may not want to marry beneath her. And as implied by Yasuda-sensei above, highly educated women face an even more substantial partner shortage if they insist on marrying someone of similar or greater educational or career attainment (see Raymo and Iwasawa 2005 for a statistical investigation of this hypothesis). When laid out thus, neither of the options available to highly educated women must seem particularly appealing to them; Nemoto describes her interviewees as more or less waiting for a miracle in the absence of reformed social institutions (of labor, or marriage) that are prepared to meet their needs. Women who sign up with matchmakers are clearly behaving more assertively, and actively looking for new ways to negotiate their futures, but even so, their chances for marrying are still lower than those of other female clients that their matchmakers take on.

Balancing Cooperation, Self-Assertion, and Expectations

When speaking of the success rate of omiai, and who is more likely to succeed or fail, it is worthwhile to ask about the success rate more generally. According to Ozeki-sensei, the success rate of omiai across all clients is not high at all—she estimated a 5% success rate for the large omiai

⁷ This, in spite of the fact that most current Japanese singles, male and female alike, want women to continue working after marriage (NIPSSR 2011a), although part-time or temporary employment might be precisely what both men and women envision.

companies in our interview, and similarly, Nakanishi Keiji estimated a 5-6% success rate in January 2010. In chapter three I briefly discussed the statistics for matchmakers, which are similarly low; perhaps 10% of clients, at best, get married. What qualities, then do the successful 5-10% possess? If choosiness is a barrier to marriage, then what attitude should a woman adopt in order to better her chances of marrying? Ozeki-sensei recommends that women be *sunao*—a difficult-to-translate word with overtones of “honest,” “flexible,” and “compliant.” A *sunao* woman, rather than finding fault with potential matches, will try to find one good thing about everybody. According to Ishiguchi-sensei, a male matchmaker who was part of Kawakami-sensei’s circle, “Nan-nin-me ni kekkon dekiru ka toka, arui wa nan, anō, nan nen de yattara kekkon dekiru ka to iu no wa, fumei. Wakkannai. Ma, da kedo mite itara sono hitogara ne? Sono hito ga, sunao de kocchi no itta koto chanto kīte kureru hito ga hayai” [It’s not clear that (clients) can marry when they meet the Nth person, or after however many years, doing this, they can get married. You just don’t know. But, well, if you look at it, their personality, right? Those people, who sincerely listen to what I have to say, (marry) faster”].

Ishiguchi-sensei’s words of caution are not explicitly gendered, but given the sex more commonly described as choosy, it would seem that it is women who have the most to gain from following their matchmakers’ advice. Likewise, Sugawara-sensei, whose clientele at the time of our interviews was primarily female, describes her clients worrying over precisely the kinds of social status criteria discussed above, and finding themselves unable to decide precisely whom to apply to meet. In frustration, some of them eventually leave the choice up to her. In other words, these clients were able to make the necessary emotional transition from choosy and frustrated to willing to trust their matchmaker’s advice: they became *sunao*. Given this, we can view Yamada Yumiko’s formula above, which looks a bit callous when laid out directly, as in fact a practical, ready-made response to

repeated instances of being asked to choose on the client's behalf.

Nakao-sensei also offered “sunao” as the first (not explicitly gendered) trait of clients who successfully marry. The matchmaker is the pro; the client who can accept her advice will do well. This also entails the ability to handle rejection and criticism with equanimity; omiai are not for the easily wounded. Sugawara-sensei offered “doesn't give up” (*akiramenai*) as the first trait of a successful client, and noted that many clients will start out excited but, after a few applications for omiai, and a few rejections, become discouraged and assume they are *dame*: “no good,” somehow inadequate, or at fault. The important thing for clients to remember, when rejected at any stage in the process, is that rejection doesn't mean that either client is bad in some objective way, merely that the pair were not suited to each other, a point that Nakao-sensei also made when we talked. It is important to be able to bounce back from rejection, always ready to try meeting someone new. A woman—anyone—who can keep applying to meet people, and keep meeting them, without giving up, even in the face of rejection, is likely to be successful. But precisely because women are more likely to be choosy in the first place, and to compound this by overestimating their worth (in a market sense), they may have more difficulty than men applying this advice.

Relatedly, another quality that leads to success is the ability to *ganbaru* (persevere), to keep applying to meet people, to keep participating in many omiai, and date a lot of people, no matter how many times one is rejected, until success is achieved. Again, this is true of men and women alike. Fujii-sensei described one of the services she offers to her clients as inspiring in them the urge to *issho ni ganbarō*, keep at it together, until the client is successfully married. Women arguably start out at an advantage, since their awareness of and participation in konkatsu activities is high, according to

Ozeki-sensei, and the number of “carnivore women⁸” who intently pursue men seems to be on the rise. However, in order to meet a truly significant number of potential partners, it is critical for women to overcome the desire to rule out potential partners instead of ruling them in⁹. Sugawara-sensei applies this to her post-omiai counseling, encouraging women to meet any omiai partner at least one more time, as long as the omiai “wasn’t awful” (*iya de nakattara*). Stick it out, and maybe you’ll discover you really like someone, even though you didn’t expect to. In our interview, Nakao-sensei discussed the example of a man in Tokyo who succeeded for many reasons, but in part because he kept applying relentlessly to meet new women. Although she does most of her counseling over email and text message, she also said that she calls clients who aren’t applying to meet new people into her office to suggest potential matches directly, which usually results in at least one or two omiai—progress. The more people their clients meet, as a matter of sheer mathematics, the more likely they are to meet someone that suits them. Yasuda-sensei and Fujii-sensei both divulged specific numbers; the former participated in over eighty omiai before meeting her husband, and the latter, fifty-one. Underlying the ability to persevere is a certain kind of solid, constant self-assertion and proactiveness. If one desires to marry, one must actively seek marriage. It is not enough to want something; the desire must be a spur to continuous action in order to effect any kind of meaningful change.

As can be seen from the discussion up until this point, the majority of a woman’s typical difficulties come long before they are faced with carrying out an omiai—creating the representative-yet-striking profile picture that will attract requests to meet, developing the realistic, cooperative sensibility that will incline them to meet those who actually ask, acting assertively to determine

⁸ As described in chapter four, the “carnivore woman” is the opposite of the “herbivore man.”

⁹ The critical hurdle for men to overcome may be shyness.

which men will be most responsive to their profiles, and applying themselves to meet as many people as possible. We have also touched on what a woman should do during *kōsai*: create a supportive environment for the verbal expression of emotion and for men to performatively move the relationship towards marriage. But, what should they do during the *omiai* itself, when first meeting a new partner? Mostly, according to Fujii-sensei, give the guy a chance. Men should focus on helping their partners have a good time; women should think about relaxing and having fun instead of intently analyzing (*minuku*) their partners. The following two excerpts are from an interview with Fujii-sensei where we were talking generally about how clients should approach *omiai*, but the advice here, in light of her above statement, may be particularly applicable to women¹⁰:

- Fujii: Josei wa ne, toku ni kao ni de-yasui kara
Women, you know, are especially prone to showing [their feelings] on their faces
- Erika: (laughter)
- Fujii: Kinchō shite itara, okotta kao ni miechau no de
If you're nervous, it can look like you're angry, so
- Erika: Ah! Nerves and anger can look the same way, can't they.
- Fujii: Dakara kaiin-tachi ni wa, ōgesa na gurai, nikoniko shiyō to, shimasu kedo ne.
So, to the point of exaggeration, I tell all my clients "let's smile!" you know?
Sonna, otona de majime desu kara, daitai no kimochi wo tsukai-nagara ne,
That kind of—you're adults, and serious, so while being sensitive, right,
omoshiroi hanashi wo shiyō to shimasu kedo ne.
let's have interesting, fun conversations, I tell them, you know.
Tama ni chotto kawatta hito ga (laughter) ite
Sometimes there's someone a little (laughter) different,
jibun no konomi no taipu ja nakattara
if they're not you're preferred type
- Erika: Hai
Yes
- Fujii: Nanka ma, hāhā to iu kao shite
Um, well, they make a kind of "uh huh, whatever" face
- Erika: Sō desu ne
Ah yes

¹⁰ We may also take the fact that this segment starts with Fujii-sensei's particular caution about women and emotional control as an indication that this advice may be a bit gendered, even though her advice to smile is addressed to all her *kaiin-tachi*, "clients."

Fujii: Dekiru dake omiai no jikan wo mijikaku saseru, mitai na koto wo suru hito wa iru kedo
There are some people who do things like make the omiai as short as they can, demo sore de nani mo umarenai shi nē. but, well then nothing can come from [the omiai], can it?

Erika: (laughter)

Fujii: Sekkaku go-en ga atte, deatta n da kara,
Since you made this connection and went to so much trouble to meet, kekkon aite ni naranakatta toshite mo, even supposing this person doesn't become your marriage partner, ironna tanoshī hanashi wa dekiru you can still have lots of enjoyable conversations.

Erika: Hai
Yes.

Fujii: Onaji dakara, ne?
It's the same then, right?

Erika: Sono hō wa teinei desu ne?
That way is more polite, isn't it?

Fujii: Soko wa mō otona no [indecipherable] ja nai kedo, nante iu no,
That's not [indecipherable] already an adult, but, how to say it, sekkaku da kara, ī, omoshiroi hanashi shimashō. since you went to so much trouble, let's have good, interesting conversation.

Erika: Dōshitemo, tanoshiku, jikan wo sugosenakattara,
If you can't have a fun time no matter what, jikan wo mijikaku suru no mo daijōbu desu ka? is it OK to make the time shorter?

Fujii: Unnn, kore wa nakōdo ni yotte kangae-kata ga chigau n desu ne.
Hmmm, each matchmaker has a different way of thinking about this.

Erika: Hai
Yes

Fujii: Anō, totemo gōriteki-na nakōdo-san nara, shotaimen de iya dattara,
Ummm, if it's a very logical matchmaker, if it's awful when you first meet, go fun de kaette mo ī ja nai n de? To iu. they'll say it's OK to leave after five minutes.

Erika: Sō desu ne!
That's true!

Fujii: (laughter) To omou no de,
(laughter) Well they think that so, saisho to yappa chigau ka na! to omotte mo, even if you think, "this person is really different from [what I thought] at first!" ichi jikan han ni jikan gurai wa, ohanashi shite mitara tte, if you try talking to them for around an hour and a half, two hours, I tell them,

- de dōshite mo akankattara (laughter)
then if it's just really bad no matter what (laughter)
- Erika: (laughter) Sō desu ne.
(laughter) That's right.
- Fujii: Chotto, shitsurei shimasu tte kaette mo ī kedo
It's OK to say, "um, excuse me" and go home, but.
- Erika: Hai. Ma, aru teido, aite no jikan wo muda ni shita hō ga shitsurei desu ga,
Yes. Well, to some extent, it's rude to waste your partner's time but,
 unnnn, aite ni, ma, tekitō ni, a, tekitō ni sono aite no hanashi wo kikanai koto mo
umm, since not, well, properly, uh, properly listening to what that partner has to say,
 shitsurei desu kara.
that's rude too.

What Fujii-sensei recommends here can be seen as an extension of the cooperative stance, detailed above, that women should take when assessing client profiles to find potential omiai partners: try to find something good about them, treat them with respect, and give them a chance. An hour or two of coffee with a stranger is always awkward, even more when one is quite certain, from the start, that this is person is not a good match. Nonetheless, the best thing to do is not dismiss the person, but take an optimistic stance on what good things can potentially come from this meeting.

A successful result of the omiai, according to Fujii-sensei, is creating the desire in the other person to see you again (and thus, talking for hours and hours isn't necessarily a good omiai strategy either—best to leave the other person wanting more¹¹). Thus, as per my conclusions regarding men's conversation strategies in the previous chapter, for women too, I maintain that the conversational task of the omiai is primarily a conative endeavor. Men are tasked with cooperativeness in learning to have a mutual, back-and-forth conversation, which demonstrates to his female partner that he is interested in her and values her (and may thus lead her to want to see him again). Women are tasked with cooperativeness in the form of always trying to have fun and allowing for the possibility of

¹¹ Intriguingly, putting time limits on interaction to simultaneously make interacting with a new person feel safe while piquing the other person's curiosity about further interaction is a tactic often found among male pick-up artists in North America (Strauss 2005).

pleasant surprises; their enjoyment and cooperativeness, and the resulting fun conversation, can again inspire in her male partner the desire to see more of her. Relatedly, while talking to Sugawara-sensei and Yasuda-sensei, they suggested that one of the mistakes women do make is to look around the room too much, suggesting that their attention is not on their partner, and producing the opposite emotional effect.

Sugawara-sensei also described women's participation in omiai conversation as a primarily evaluative endeavor, which is additionally suggested by chapter four's discussion of why it is important for men to address their conversational difficulties. She recommends that clients use the omiai to see if they feel comfortable (*raku*) around this new person, to use the conversation to gauge whether this other person is sufficiently similar to themselves. This is not, I think, meant to mean scrutiny of one's partner (which is after all to be avoided), but rather an assessment of one's own reaction to the other person, and whether it produces comfortable feelings or "icky" (*iya*) ones, with "icky" being the criterion for ruling someone out. Moreover, Sugawara-sensei maintains that happiness in marriage depends on finding someone who shares the same values and lifestyle. This can be as simple as two people making sure that they both have the same views on breakfast, but whatever the subject, it's important to make sure that their views match well enough to live and share a life together—something they can learn through both the referential content of conversation at the omiai, and also, through the production of a sense of compatibility produced by mutually supportive and engaging conversation.

Of course, the process of determining compatibility may take some time—three months, according to virtually every matchmaker I talked to. Most matchmakers I interviewed agreed with

Sugawara-sensei that, as long as the thought of seeing someone again isn't actively unpleasant¹², it's worth giving that person a chance to demonstrate their compatibility over multiple meetings. This is, of course, a process that is considerably more lengthy than the initial evaluations that men give women; presumably, the onus is on women to be more tolerant, as they are more quick to give up, and more quick to rule partners out, and they are dealing with men who may not be good at interaction in the first place. At the same time, one might want to ask to what extent this division of interactional labor reinforces the kinds of gender inequalities discussed in chapter four, wherein men set the pace, and women are supposed to adjust accordingly¹³. It is also worth asking to what extent men might feel entitled to this kind of consideration; the dénouement of Sayo's ill-fated omiai was that, after she refused him, he emailed her to request that she meet him again, arguing that an hour alone was hardly enough time to really get to know and assess each other. Regardless of the reasons for her refusal, he seemed to feel that she owed him a more lengthy evaluation.

Responsibility and Femininity

When I began my research, I assumed that the omiai was the main ordeal in the process of arranged marriage. This was understandable; although the omiai is only one small event in a long process leading up to it, and proceeding from it, it nonetheless holds a central place in discourses about matchmaking. Yet, in interviews with matchmakers, it became clear that the omiai is not by any means the most fraught moment in the process, and neither is it the moment to which they devote most of their counseling and work. This is nowhere more evident than in discussions of female clients, for whom the omiai itself represents little assumed interactional difficulty. The

¹² Again, the operative word here is *iyā*, another difficult-to-translate word meaning “unpleasant,” “gross,” “icky,” “awful,” and sometimes “nasty,” with much of the polysemy of that latter word intact. If interacting with someone is *iyā*, you're off the hook, but otherwise, give him a second chance.

¹³ Thanks are again due to Alaina Lemon for suggesting this interpretation.

problem with women is that they are too quick to judge, and while this *can* interfere with omiai (as when a client decides early on that the person is a bad match, and disinvests herself from the interaction), more frequently it prevents women from getting to the omiai stage in the first place. If omiai is presented as a way to meet people, then female clients, despite their heightened awareness of the need for activity towards marriage, pose the greatest danger to themselves with self-sabotaging attitudes. Matchmakers have a responsibility to make sure that their clients are serious about marriage—as discussed in chapter three, making sure that clients are there for this stated purpose, that *marriage* is what they want, is part of how they establish the relationships of trust with their own clients and other matchmakers that allow their businesses to function. However, some of the earliest educational work that matchmakers and clients engage in involves aligning their clients' ideas of marriage with their own, and making sure that clients know what it is that they are pursuing on the matchmaker's terms—an affectionate, but ultimately economic domestic arrangement. Clients must be scrubbed free of excessive romanticism.

In this chapter, I have perhaps painted a somewhat unflattering view of Japanese women, and possibly also an unflattering view of what their matchmakers expect from them. As described by matchmakers, their female clients are unrealistic, uncompromising, and greedy, potentially more concerned with how their potential husband looks on paper than with finding someone they have a genuine rapport with¹⁴. They are also self-involved, concerned with enjoying their own lives, and not really thinking about their families or the future—about elder care for their parents, or elder care for themselves, should they never marry and lack the social support of family in old age. In addition to setting aside romantic dreams and focusing on the practical needs that marriage meets, matchmakers

¹⁴ Obviously, the ideal outcome would be to find both. However, few women are in a position to be that choosy.

also aim to awaken their female clients from overly individualistic dreams to a sense of place in the social scheme of things, and the responsibilities they have to themselves and others—responsibilities that will be much easier to fulfill if they marry and bear children.

At the same time, these same female clients are expected to give up rather a lot in order to realize marriage as envisioned by matchmakers, and as actually practiced by most couples in contemporary Japan. This is especially true of women who want children. Employers, although encouraged by the government to implement “family friendly” policies, have difficulty doing so against the current culture of labor, where long hours and few vacations, particularly in corporate Japan, are considered perfectly normal. Expectations for full-time laborers, even as women have increasingly joined their ranks, are still based around the assumption that the paradigmatic white-collar worker is a married man able to fully commit to his job, and leave family concerns to his wife (Roberts 2005). Certainly, things are changing. Women want lives outside the home, and men *also* want this for the women in their lives. However, they are not changing rapidly enough to spare contemporary women the choice between family and career. If many Japanese women find it difficult to let go of the ideals, education, and career they have invested in, surely we cannot fail to be sympathetic.

Having summarized many of the main points of this chapter, I wish to note here that one interesting aspect of the conflicts between matchmakers’ deeply practical marital expectations and their clients’ often more romantic, egalitarian desires, is that this is not framed as a problem of femininity. As we saw in chapter four, male clients may often need to reform their views of what it means to be “masculine,” as they root out misogynistic tendencies and learn to be more cooperative, attentive, and sociable. In contrast, women who want to work and live alone, women who haven’t

quite understood why they ought to get married, may be viewed by matchmakers as derelict in their responsibilities to their families, perhaps even derelict in their responsibilities to their future selves. Just because they are irresponsible, however, does not mean they are perceived as more or less feminine than their more readily domestic sisters—or, at least, not by matchmakers, and not at this point in time. The advice that matchmakers give female clients, at least as far as their attitude to *omia* goes, is not, for the most part, in any way *specific* to female clients. Men, too, must be *sunao* and follow their matchmakers' instructions, be open-minded when meeting new partners, and never give up. It is just that, because of changes that primarily affect women's roles and life courses, it is women that have developed unrealistic, unrealizable expectations about what marriage could mean for them, and what kind of partner they think they need to have.

None of this is to say that women's femininity is not at stake. Although it may seem, from the discussion of semiotics above, that women are relegated to a supporting role in conversation, this is not really the case, given the emphasis on men's need to learn to adapt to women's conversational norms (and more about this momentarily, in the next chapter). Where matchmakers place a heavy emphasis on femininity is in the realm of the visual. Femininity is not about how you act, or what role you fill in society. Femininity is not about a set of personality characteristics, because, after all, it is more or less the same set of personality characteristics that lead men and women to marriage. Femininity is a visual appeal, and it is capable of being deliberately constructed by clients in concert with matchmakers, photographers, and makeup artists. This means that, in some ways, femininity is the easy part, attainable by anyone with as little as a shopping trip and some makeup tips. The much harder work ahead of female clients is the psychological task of reorienting their attitudes to their lives, and claiming power over their futures in a family-oriented, interdependent way.

CHAPTER VI: AN IDEAL PARTNER?

In the previous two chapters, I outlined the problems that men and women face during their search for a marriage partner, aided by their matchmakers, who push them along the path to couplehood and new family. As we saw in chapters four and five, the discourse of the matchmaking industry imagines the average male client and the average female client somewhat differently in terms of the psychological, material, and interactional barriers that they must supersede in order to maximize their chances of finding a partner. Consequently, to some extent, they receive different counseling. However, the troubles that men and women face are not imagined to be gender exclusive. As Nakanishi Kiyomi-sensei noted, anyone—everyone—has a hard time spending an hour or two talking one-on-one with a stranger. There may be more men who have trouble with it, but it is also an inherently troublesome task. Likewise, both men and women may be overly tempted by partners who are not in their “league” (to use a colloquialism), and thus set up a psychological barrier to meeting new people who are less than perfect, but may be more well suited to them in both a market sense of having a similar value, or the personal sense of getting along well enough to marry. It is simply that *more* women are debilitated by this problem. This is true even for material factors such as age or attractiveness that can seem even more firmly gendered than personality traits. Women are perhaps more at the mercy of the passing years than men are, and yet, women’s implicit preference for partners close to their own age, made explicit by the fact that they must be encouraged to apply to meet men significantly older, may in fact mean that older men will have a somewhat harder time finding a partner. Men may also be judged more on their material assets than their looks, but

physically attractive men do nonetheless have more options than a less good-looking man in similar circumstances¹.

Given that men and women face more or less the same set of problems, with the main difference being their degree and proportion, it is worthwhile to ask whether the ideal man and woman that matchmakers imagine, the templates into which they are trying to fit their clients through the advice, coaching, and counseling that are their stock-in-trade, are actually highly gender-differentiated in terms of sought-after personality characteristics and the behaviors that index these characteristics. Points of gender overlap in matchmakers' approach to counseling, or at times, a lack of gender specification, have already appeared. In this chapter, I will argue that matchmakers' views of the ideal client are actually more or less gender neutral, and that the advice given to men and women is designed not to encourage gender differentiation, but rather to bolster the same kinds of personality traits—which is to say, behavior that demonstrates those traits—in both men and women. Finally, I will discuss the theoretical significance of these findings for our understandings of gender performance and the dialogic construction of gender roles, as well as various processes of self-construction and self-fashioning.

The Role of “Traditional” Gender Roles

The overall argument of this chapter—and one of the overall arguments of this study—is that personal qualities like “attractive,” “considerate,” or even “desirable,” which are so important in choosing a spouse, may actually have very little to do with gender at all, even in heterosexual couplings where sex and gender difference are so often assumed to be at the heart of the union.

However, it would be absolutely foolish to argue that matchmakers do not envision different roles

¹ The one material factor that really *does* seem to operate completely differently by sex is income/educational background. Professional men with high incomes will almost always have an advantage, whereas professional women are almost always at a *disadvantage*.

for men and women after marriage, or that matchmakers do not envision themselves as playing a fairly traditional role in Japanese family formation. Throughout his instructional lectures, Nakanishi-sensei periodically made reference to Edo- and Kamakura-period Japanese history, in establishing the origins of matchmaking as a profession; Inasawa-sensei also made reference to similar histories in a little speech he gave at the start of our first interview. During my preliminary research in 2007, matchmakers at one marriage bureau I stopped by in central Kyoto told me that their work was necessary “because there are no grandmothers,” who would have traditionally made sure that marriages happened in a timely fashion for the young people in their social circles. This sentiment was directly echoed by Yasuda-sensei when I first met and interviewed her two years later, in the summer of 2009, and seems to pervade matchmaker thought about why their work is necessary. It is no accident, I think, that there are many other “traditional” components to their work. In the section below, I outline historical models of family formation and organization in Japan, and discuss to what extent they influence the work and value system of matchmakers.

Historians and anthropologists studying Japanese family and kin groups have argued that, from the middle ages through the early modern Tokugawa period (ending in 1868), Japanese kinship and labor organization was based on units referred to as *ie*. The word literally means “house,” but as a synecdoche, it referred to everything “inside” it, including its occupants (family and servants alike). A hierarchy among household members served to organize labor inside and outside the household, with the male household head (*shujin*) and his wife (*shufu*) sharing ultimate household authority over their spheres of responsibility; the only person to whom the female household head might be expected to defer was her husband. Wakita writes, “While it is true that the husband took a patriarchal position as head of household, the official wife was guaranteed social status and rights in a

secure position. She held the second highest status in the household, after the husband, and vassals and servants belonging to the household also considered her to be their master. In contrast to the modern period, where there are relatively few class distinctions, in the medieval period differences in status due to gender become obvious only when men and women of the same class are compared” (1993: 87). Although the *ie* was largely organized along principles of patrilineal descent, preserving its integrity was ultimately a more important principle, and thus while most marriages were virilocal and inheritance patrilineal, families without a male heir might adopt their daughter’s husband as a son (Befu 1963; Kitaoji 1971). Moreover, the *ie* also had expansive, corporate properties; “excess” children might leave the main house and establish branch houses in the same area, forming organized kin groups of related *ie* called *dōzoku* (Brown 1966).

During the following Meiji period (1868–1912), the strict class distinctions that characterized the Tokugawa period were abolished, and the modern, European-inspired Meiji civil code created the *koseki* system of family registry (Epp 1967). The *koseki* served to both flatten class distinctions by making all *ie* equal, at least in theory, and giving everyone a surname, a privilege previously restricted to nobility and the warrior class (Bryant 1991). It also bureaucratized and formalized previously more flexible and local *ie* customs. Over time the *koseki* system, which persists to this day, has preserved the *ie*, but on a nuclear scale: one registry for each household and its children². The *ie* still plays a role in Japanese kinship and social organization; numerous twentieth-century studies of rural Japan have documented persistent *ie*-based patterns of kinship and household organization (Hendry 1981; Embree 1995). Urban life was another matter. Urban households were increasingly nuclear and by the middle of the Meiji period, the household ideal was

² Presumably, new registries would be created for new households, although thus far I have been unable to find specific details of how this worked in the Meiji period; at present, a new registry is created for each new married couple (Bryant 1991).

centered around mother and child, in fashion not dissimilar from Victorian Europe (Muta 1996), and rather *unlike* the multi-generational rural *ie* which might contain several married couples and their children under their auspices and roofs. Although the urbanization and nuclearization of many Japanese families meant that more women could claim the title *shufu*, the power of the role was profoundly diluted (Ueno 1987); in modern Japanese, the word simply means “housewife,” with but a fraction of the social authority it used to convey.

From the Meiji period through the end of the Second World War, the Japanese government promoted women’s roles within the household as “good wives and wise mothers” (*ryōsai kenbo*) and enacted policies (such as those prohibiting women from political activity) to ensure that they remained as such; men, of course, were workers in newly industrializing Japan or later, soldiers. Although the government officially discarded the discourse of “good wives and wise mothers” after the end of World War II, nonetheless it has continued to influence both how the government approaches women, and how women approach the state (Uno 1993). Matchmakers’ practices may also be seen as a reflection of this ideology that women get married so that they may become mothers and wives; men marry as workers, and become breadwinners, and implicit household heads. Male clients must demonstrate that they have stable employment as regular employees³ of a company or the government, or that they otherwise have a profession and an income, as in the case of doctors and lawyers. As already discussed, their yearly income is displayed on their profiles, viewable by the other matchmakers and clients, and forms a major reason why they may be chosen (or refused) as *omiai* partners; the literal value of their salary plays no small role in their evaluation as a potential spouse. Their future role as household heads may also be seen in the extent to which the

³ As opposed to temporary work, contract work, or dispatch work, none of which is stable enough to qualify a man for husbandry; NNK matchmakers must reject any man with such employment, regardless of his income.

performative, decision-making aspects of dating—asking the woman out, deciding where to go, and finally, proposing marriage—are treated as male terrain. Although either half of a couple may decide to *end* a relationship during *kōsai*, the ultimate decision on whether the relationship leads to marriage is the man's⁴.

As chapter five shows, the matchmakers in my study portrayed men as primarily interested in the youth and beauty of their partners. Women too are consciously assumed to be trading on their age and looks for a husband who will be able to support them. Unlike male clients, female clients do not have to provide any proof of income at all; if a woman is employed, her job will be listed on her profile, but her income will not be. (This seems to be true across different matchmaking organizations, as my own profile was listed in a different database that wasn't part of the NNK, but did not include my income.) As also discussed in chapter five, too much education, or too strong a focus on a career, may prove disadvantageous to women on the marriage market—it may lower their value. However, this schema for assigning women a value on the marriage market (where, again, one's value is tradable for the ability to be more selective about potential matches) makes sense only if one assumes that women's primary plan, after marriage, is to be mothers and housekeepers, and, moreover, that household management is what a man seeks in a wife. Although there are signs that Japanese men and women in their 20s and early 30s are developing more flexible ideas about gender roles and household labor (NIPSSR 2011a: 15), it is also overwhelmingly the case that most Japanese households at the time of this writing leave housework and childcare almost entirely in the

⁴ That said, matchmakers collude with their clients in this decision: they are supposed to check in with their clients and their partners' matchmakers when a relationship reaches the crucial three-month decision point to see how everyone feels, determine whether the male client's proposal would be well received by the female client, and give them a final push to make a decision.

hands of mothers, regardless of mothers' other occupations. Rather than splitting childcare labor with husbands, it is grandparents who do the most assistance (Nishioka et al. 2012: 6).

To the extent that matchmakers encourage a healthy sense of realism in their clients, their emphasis on these roles may primarily reflect (while also reifying) the extant pattern of marriage and household divisions of labor in Japan. That is to say, matchmakers *may* be agnostic about whether this division of labor is the *best* way to go about organizing marital relationships, but are certainly aware of the fact that this is how it *is* done, and their concern is to get people married in the here and now. After all, most matchmakers are themselves married—it is one of the experiential sources of their authority that they draw on in dealing with their clients, as discussed in chapter three. Moreover, a large number of matchmakers are women: powerful women, giving the orders, and running their own businesses. It may be that, as gender roles and household arrangements undergo further changes—for example, if two-income households become increasingly the norm (which as per the introduction, they are in fact becoming)—matchmakers' attitudes about the relative importance of a man's income or a woman's education may also change. After all, the *omiai* itself has changed.

In addition to building in neo-traditional concepts of men's and women's household division of labor, matchmaking also, to some extent, evinces a certain awareness of lingering *ie* practices, although its attitude towards them is often ambivalent. As has been discussed, clients list information about their family members on their profiles, indicating basic information about parents' and siblings' age, educational attainment, and occupation (as well as whether these relatives are still alive and/or co-resident with the client). The client is never depicted separately from his or her family; there is a conscious awareness that when you marry someone, to some extent, you marry their family

too. That said, clients who have too much of a desire for an *ie*-like household arrangement often find themselves at a disadvantage in the *omiai* process. Eldest sons may often still have greater household responsibilities, especially towards their parents in their old age. It may once have been advantageous to be the wife of a household successor, but now, it really only means extra labor. Similarly, a woman who wants her husband to be adopted by her parents—and there is a standard ticky-box for this preference on matchmakers’ profiles—will likely find fewer men interested in marrying her and inheriting the responsibilities of *her* household⁵. In November 2012, a member matchmaker told the story of her first match, involving an eldest son, her client, who was dating a girl who wanted her husband to marry into her household. When the man learned this, he didn’t think he could go through with marrying her, but he was able to come to an understanding with her father, and they married after all. Had this been on her profile, she maintained, the couple would have never married at all, an assertion that supported Nakanishi Keiji-sensei’s admonishment earlier in the meeting to never write more than strictly necessary on a profile, as every new piece of information can be a cause for ruling someone out as a potential partner. On another occasion, Nakanishi-sensei cautioned matchmakers against using traditional birth order terms like *chōnan* (eldest son) or *jinan* (second son), or their feminine counterparts *chōjo* (eldest daughter) or *jjjo* (second daughter), as they can lead other clients to discriminate against them. In our interview, Ozeki-sensei maintained that it is primarily wealthy families who explicitly invoke the discourse of *ie* when approving or rejecting a child’s match. That said, as she described things, talk of the “*ie*” mostly seems to mean concern that the prospective partner comes from a family that is “good enough” for their son or daughter, rather than a preoccupation with the continuation of the household. Much as in matchmaking itself, the

⁵ I write this with the caveat that for every niche, there is a market; there is at least one matchmaking service dedicated to matching up heiresses with men interested in taking over a family business (Oi 2012), although no one I interviewed specialized in this service.

invocation of concepts like *ie* and *omia* does not actually refer to practices that align with the historical meanings of these terms.

As can be seen from the above discussion, matchmaking does place a decided emphasis, at least economically and logistically, on adherence to “traditional” gender roles that may be decreasingly applicable in the early twenty-first century. At the same time, it is critical to note that gender roles here are primarily conceived of as social duties and responsibilities: positions, not personalities. What does not seem to be important to matchmakers is a concept of masculinity or femininity as overarching organizations of personality traits, of “men” and “women” as fundamentally different and complementary categories of people. If men and women behave differently, it is because they have been taught to fulfill a particular set of duties, not because they are endowed, *a priori*, with different minds, subjectivities, emotional needs, or cognitive styles. We can see this through their approach to femininity as primarily visual, rather than behavioral, and in their advice to men that seeks to move them towards more ostensibly feminine behavioral norms, particularly where language is concerned. Writing on women and personal fulfillment within Confucian-inflected Japanese family systems, Takie Lebra notes that

The main characteristic of Confucian gender ideology in my view is its *structural* emphasis on the roles and statuses of men and women as an integral part of the overall social order, which in turn is embedded in the law of the universe. Man and woman are supposed to relate to each other through the complementary rights and obligations attached to their structurally assigned roles and statuses. [...] Confucian *structure* may be thus placed at the opposite pole from *personhood*, or to put it another way, personhood in Confucianism characteristically involves discipline or role discipline, not the entirety of a person including his or her emotions and impulses. (Lebra 1998: 210)

In other words, matchmakers’ disjunction between roles and personalities is nothing new. From a traditional perspective, there is nothing contradictory about the simultaneous belief that men and women have different roles, and yet, that there is also nothing really different between men and

women apart from their location in the social structure. This attitude was brought home to me during the NNK's New Year's Party in January 2013. While we sat, ate, and drank, Fujii-sensei was asking me about my research findings, hoping to use them in a blog post; as a university lecturer and long-time meeting attendee, I myself had become "Erika-sensei," having transitioned out of a client role into that of expert and teacher in my own right. I presented her with the hypothesis above, with which she generally agreed, and we talked for a while about proposals. She averred that Japanese men take the lead because they feel it is their duty; I explained that while American men also typically take the lead, it's because they're supposed to *want* to, naturally. For Americans, differences in gender roles are supposed to be the result of differences in personality that predispose men and women to desire different things; for Japanese, gender roles are a part of the social order, with no necessary bearing on what an individual might want or desire internally.

The difference between American and Japanese senses of gender roles is also illustrated by American partner matching services like eHarmony.com, which claimed that its compatibility algorithms are designed specifically to take the differences between men and women *as categories of people* into account, making it impossible for them to match same-sex couples, who would require a wholly different set of algorithms that they had not researched (Cloud 2007). Matchmakers' less formal algorithms for determining potential compatibility do regard men and women as materially different in the contributions they are expected to bring to the household, and likely they too would need to reformulate some of their algorithms if they were to deal with same-sex couples (which they do not). However, when it comes to advice about personality, self-presentation, and communication, the different advice that matchmakers give their male and female clients may actually be aimed at bringing men and women closer together in terms of how they interact and connect with others,

based on a single standard of behavior that defines a desirable partner and spouse. Based on the evidence presented in chapters three, four, and five, I argue that a desirable spouse, a marriageable person, possesses the following qualities:

- Assertiveness
- Realism
- Consideration
- Cooperation

and

- Verbal Facility

In the section that follows, I will take up each of these traits and show how the advice given to men and women is designed to promote this quality across the whole of a matchmaker's clientele, irrespective of client gender. The advice given to men and women in order to help them demonstrate these traits may be different, at times, because, as discussed in chapters four and five, matchmakers are aware that men and women have been socialized differently. They must thus come from different points, and correct different behaviors, in order to meet in the middle, at a similar and neutral ideal.

Assertiveness

In our interview, Ozeki-sensei commented that the ratio of male to female clients is skewed, not because men aren't interested in marriage, but because women are particularly conscious of the need for konkatsu, and thus have become particularly active in matchmaking; in May 2012, Nakanishi Keiji estimated that there were 1.5 times as many women as men registered with the NNK in the Kansai region. Matchmakers, naturally, approve of those who take up marriage hunting, not simply for selfish reasons of personal gain, but because an assertive, proactive attitude towards the future is a necessary ingredient for creating a happy, married future. As described in chapter five,

both men and women need to actively apply to meet as many people as possible, and then go meet them, rather than simply waiting for the right person to come along. However, despite women's awareness of the need for konkatsu, they may have an unrealistic view of their chances of success. They may mistakenly assume that their education and earning power are plusses, or assume that the men they apply to meet will want the same things they do, such as a partner of a similar age or educational background. These mistaken assumptions can hamstring their otherwise go-get-'em spirit, and is a psychological obstacle that matchmakers must coach and push women to overcome in order to keep them active and looking for partners.

Men, too, may need to overcome a certain degree of pickiness, but this does not dominate matchmakers' discussions of male client problems. Fujii-sensei, however did touch on it in a September 2012 talk on how to handle male clients; primarily, she described men as excessively concerned with age, and only applying to women in their twenties, regardless of their own age. More prominently, men need to overcome shyness and difficulties interacting with women, in order to proactively participate in as many omiai as possible. Men's difficulties with conversation also mean that they need to find a balance between assertively participating in conversation and boorishly overwhelming it—in other words, to be assertive while also being cooperative and considerate, and keeping the conversation mutual. Rather than overcoming this psychologically, matchmakers emphasize learning to interact through preparedness (e.g., cultivation of things to talk about) and practice (going to parties, going to as many omiai as possible). Here the assertive practice of trying to meet as many people as possible can also serve to build up men's (and women's) confidence in handling the unfamiliar omiai situation, and help them to practice the interaction rituals, the small talk, that make an omiai go smoothly and contribute to a good first impression.

Assertive clients are also clear about their emotions and make decisions easily. They proactively declare their intention to seek a marriage partner, and rather than expecting love—a person, a feeling—to come find them, during *kōsai* they actively work to create new emotions with their partner. As mentioned earlier, they meet as often as possible and stay in regular communication to see if they can build the kind of emotional connection that will sustain a marriage; Okada-sensei told me that she advises female clients to email or text dating partners every day. In order to keep up with this level of communication, they must also be actively assessing their own feelings, and be prepared to call a halt to a relationship that does not seem to be progressing satisfactorily, which is ultimately the more considerate action for both oneself and one's partner. The burden of learning how to be assertive in this respect may also fall more heavily on women, who may be too caught up in appearances to take stock of who they actually connect with (or to relax enough to allow real connections to happen).

Realism

It is part of a matchmaker's job to vouch that her clients' intentions towards marriage are serious. Serious intentions, however, are not sufficient for a positive outcome. Clients need to understand *why* marriage is important, above and beyond the romantic expectations that have been built around it for the better part of a century. Men and women alike need to understand that marriage is a practical arrangement for pooling resources and ensuring a stable future for oneself and one's spouse. Although companionship certainly plays a non-negligible role, the economic guarantees of stable income, a stable domestic life during one's productive years and subsequently, a stable retirement, ensured both by pensions and by supportive children, are the real reasons to marry, at least according to Yasuda-sensei.

Accordingly, men and women alike need to understand that spouses will be chosen, to some extent, for practical considerations—to the extent that they can contribute to a stable domestic life⁶. Unlike a love match, which may be entered into impractically, even hastily (especially in cases where couples marry because of pregnancy), an omiai match is one where partners' material circumstances are on the table for consideration from the very beginning. After all, this is the main substance of a client's profile. Ergo, men's income matters; far more so than women, who may be confined to more tenuous kinds of employment, men are more likely to have access to the kinds of stable, permanent employment that will enable them to support a family. Likewise, women's fertility matters. Part of genuinely understanding the facts of life, of marriage, is the ability of each client to realistically assess what they have to offer a partner materially, and keeping in mind, without taking offense, how one's personal circumstances may put some limits on choice of partner. Rather than insisting on only meeting people who seem materially ideal—physically, or in terms of their background—clients need to be willing to meet people with roughly the same amount to offer. Otherwise, they risk suffering perpetual rejection and disappointment, rather than finding and meeting potential spouses.

On a more human level, realism means understanding that no one is perfect. Sugawara -sensei, on the subject of realism, notes the following:

Risō takaku motteru, motte haitte kuru n desu ne, minna. Ōji-sama ga arawareru ka, hon ni. Demo, ningen, watashi mo sō da shi minna mo sō da to omou n desu kedo, hyaku pāsento kanpeki na hito tte inai. Jibun mo sō da shi, dansei no, jibun no risō no hyaku pāsento no hito nante zettai inai kara, soko wo doko made, yuruseru ka, tte iu ka. Doko made yuruseru ka tte no wo wakattete, rikai shite, aite no koto wo sugoku wakatte ageyō to doryoku wo suru ko ga, seikon shite iku.

Everyone comes in with, holding onto, these high ideals. Like really, a prince is going to appear. But, humans, of course I think this applies to me, this applies to everybody but, there's no such

⁶ This is foregrounded in matchmakers' worries about taking on a client with a chronic illness: whether that illness will impact the client's ability to live a *futsū no kekkon seikatsu*, "ordinary married life."

thing as a person who's one-hundred percent perfect. I'm the same way, there's absolutely no man out there who's one hundred percent my ideal person, so, how much are you willing to forgive? You might say. The ones who know how much they're willing to forgive, allow in a partner, who understand that, and really make an effort, for their partners, to understand the other person, they'll successfully marry.

Consideration

What do considerate partners look like, when you first meet them? For one thing, considerate partners are dressed appropriately. They show that they value the seriousness of the omiai, and the other person's time and effort in coming to meet them, by dressing in what I am tempted to call, in American terms, one's "Sunday best." The man's suit, the woman's dress, index simultaneously a respect for each other and for the gravity of an omiai. Of course, they also serve the dual function of making both partners look visually pleasing. Considerate partners will also show up promptly to the omiai (or better yet, early): they don't waste their matchmakers' or partners' time. They also get in touch with their matchmakers promptly afterwards, to report their decision on whether they want to see the other person again.

Likewise, if they decide to date someone, considerate partners get in touch with their date in a timely fashion to set up a second meeting. Both dating partners need to make time for each other, to see if they can get along as husband and wife, and to see if they can build up the affectionate feelings they will need to embark on married life together. This means they need to date regularly—at least once a week or so—and stay in contact on a more or less daily basis. Moreover, if they *cannot* build up those affectionate feelings, if ultimately they decide not to marry the person they are dating, considerate partners end relationships quickly, allowing the other person to move on. This can be seen in the insistence from some matchmakers that couples who date longer than three months without making a decision are simply dithering, and the relationship is doomed to fail. Successful

couples make their decisions quickly. As Ishiguschi-sensei told me in our interview, one of the main problems that couples face is letting the dating period go on longer than three months, after which “dame ni naru kēsu ga ōi n desu yo” [in a lot of cases, it all goes to hell]. Since after all, the only people involved in matchmaking are people who want to get married, there isn’t very much that clients need to ascertain in the dating phase, except whether or not it can work with this person.

This timeliness is a reflection of the more general fact that a considerate partner thinks about the other person, and tries to imagine what he or she might want, as suggested by Inasawa-sensei, discussion in the previous chapter. Because of present gender inequities, as perceived by matchmakers, most of the advice on being considerate is skewed towards men. (Inasawa-sensei gave me a rather long speech, in our first interview, about the importance of men showing consideration for everyone, without which he will be incapable of attracting women.) As we saw in the introductory discussion of ideologies surrounding Japanese Women’s Language, most women will have already been exposed to the idea that the correct conversational stances for them are considerate, self-deprecatory, and polite ones; in chapter five, we saw that matchmakers presume that women do possess this knowledge. Men need to learn to do something of the same thing. Men need to learn to pay attention to women and demonstrate that they value them, which they can do both through learning to be more considerate conversation partners, who take turns and share the floor, and through being aware of their physical relationships to women, remembering to be attentive and *with* the other person at all times.

This is not to say that there is nothing women must do to be considerate. While men are learning to be more verbally and conversationally astute and skillful, women are tasked with understanding men’s learning curve, supporting them conversationally, and also developing an

understanding of the different behavioral modes through which men might intend to signal affection and care. This kind of behavior might be taken to be iconic, rather than indexical; the traits that a person demonstrates in conversation—mutuality, reciprocity, and empathy—are traits that they can be expected to demonstrate in other areas too, such as a marriage. Arguably, this expectation of women is sexist—in Anglophone contexts, it has long been argued that women are expected to do more work to keep the conversation going (Fishman 1978), and this may be a Japanese example of this kind of behavior. However, because it is overwhelmingly men who receive conversational training, I do not believe this to be the case. It is not so much that women are tasked, here, with keeping the conversation going, as they are with the patience to continue interacting with someone who may be learning new ways of interaction.

Cooperation

An omiai marriage is not fundamentally intended to be a love match, even where love develops. The goal is simply to find someone that you can live with and work with—cooperate with—in the shared economy of the household. To this end, both men and women need to be open to a variety of partners, and give people a chance in order to see what they are really like. Yasuda-sensei emphasizes that goal of an omiai is to choose someone else *and be chosen in return*, and this means approaching omiai with an open mind and a friendly cooperative spirit, the kind that attracts others and makes them feel comfortable around you. All clients are encouraged to keep smiling during an omiai, in part because it's attractive, but also as a sign of this friendly, cooperative spirit. Even during an awkward omiai, they should practice being the kind of cooperative and friendly person who others will want to marry, bearing in mind that first impressions are not always accurate, that people have the capacity to surprise us, and that someone's attractive personal qualities might

not be immediately apparent, readily and recognizably signaled. As discussed previously, openness and cooperation are just as important after the omiai, with many matchmakers recommending that clients say yes to further dates after an omiai if they have any uncertainty about the other person. The only people clients should reject are the ones they are certain that they never want to see again.

Above and beyond simply keeping an open mind, clients need to actively cooperate with each other. This is, again, a burden that falls particularly on men, who may not know how to interact cooperatively, particularly not with women. Male clients face the challenge of learning how to speak sensitively and engage in conversation as a mutual, back-and-forth endeavor, and to imagine their partners' perspectives. Women, in turn, need to relax and try to appreciate their partners as they are. Sugawara-sensei,^k in our first interview, told me both men and women need to work together. To illustrate this principle, she told me the story of a couple that broke up because the man wanted to introduce her client to his parents before she felt they were close enough, and speculated that if only he had thought more about what she said, that it might have gone well, but ultimately concludes that most people think only of themselves. This is the very opposite of ideal, cooperative behavior.

Verbal Facility

Clients need to have a certain level of skill with words, in order to demonstrate interest and worthiness as a partner, make their intentions and feelings for their partner clear, and move the relationship forward. Conversation, as discussed in chapter four, is the main substance of the omiai; good, “bouncing,” easy conversation—and also importantly, *normal* conversation, with no unsettling personal outbursts or inappropriate topics of conversation—is how clients determine their comfort level and chemistry with their potential match, and consequently, whether or not they want to see

their omiai partner again. Verbal facility is also part of how clients express their emotions and intentions to each other. As noted when discussing “assertiveness” above, clients are supposed to make it clear to each other that they are dating with a forward outlook towards marriage, and, as much as possible, to state their feelings clearly, in words. Words are also the substance of most of their regular communication—phone calls and text messages—and, of course, they must also ask each other out, and go out. Again, this is in order to build up mutual feeling, culminating in the verbal act of the proposal. The ability to enjoy and sustain conversation is thus a necessary component of creating a new relationship. As with many of these personality traits, the burden of learning new habits to display them falls particularly heavily on men; women tend to have psychological obstacles rather than behavioral obstacles to conquer. As discussed above (and at length in chapter four), many men may not be comfortable or confident interacting with women, leading to numerous difficulties. When it comes to dating, these same men may be more used to expressing care through thoughtful actions, rather than expressing emotions through words, which is what women desire.

Why should women’s communicative habits be privileged in this instance? This is in part because of the sit down, get to know you, conversational nature of the omiai itself, at least in the first instance, which foregrounds verbal communication. This may also be because a lack of explicit statement of feelings and intentions would allow clients to be inconsiderate, to hedge their bets, and to perhaps pursue something *other* than marriage; explicitly stating that marriage is the goal holds clients accountable to the rules and goals of the omiai process. After all, as discussed in chapter three, one of the major reasons why trust is important both between matchmakers, and between matchmakers and their clients, is to make sure that no one with suspicious goals, like playing around,

makes it into matchmakers' registries. It also makes sure that clients mutually understand each other, with no room for confusion (although this in and of itself is dependent on ideologies of language and clarity; see Lempert 2012 for a comparison case of ideologies of clarity in language). Finally, the practice of explicit declaration of feelings through the entire process may prepare the couple for the culmination of their courtship in a verbal proposal of marriage, and matchmakers may explicitly coach their clients in the details of a proper proposal as well.

Masculinity, Femininity, Neutrality, and the Limits of Agency

In the previous section, I summarized briefly the traits that a desirable spouse, either male or female, is supposed to possess, although because men and women start from different social positions, the way they enact these traits is not always the same. Now, I would like to address some of the theoretical implications of these findings, particularly as they apply to linguistic anthropology and our understanding of the processes by which selves are simultaneously fashioned and performed. First, and perhaps most important, is the challenge it presents to our tendency to think of gender in oppositional terms, with masculinity as "standard" or "unmarked" (Jakobson and Pomorska 1990) and femininity as "marked," "other." Femininity is supposed to be masculinity's opposite, the object to masculinity's subject (de Beauvoir 1989). Jennifer Robertson, in her treatise on theatrical gender performance in Japan (Robertson 1998), described how members of the all-female Takarazuka Revue learned to perform masculinity and femininity in diametrically opposed ways, a tendency perhaps strengthened because all of the performers shared a physical sex. Studies of languages and gender, too, have a tendency to conceptualize masculine and feminine ways of speaking in opposition. Recent work, such as that by Barrett (in press) on gay male subcultures, emphasizes that all speech styles are resources that may potentially be deployed by anyone, regardless of which groups

they are associated with. However, earlier researchers often believed styles to be more firmly attached to particular social groups. Tannen (1998), whose work may be one of the most extreme examples of this attitude within the field of language and gender, went so far as to claim that all communication between men and women was essentially a case of intercultural communication. Men's and women's languages thus also require each other for definition. SturtzSreetharan (2001; 2004a) justifies the study of *danseigo* (men's language) precisely on the grounds that we cannot fully understand "Japanese women's language" without studying the "men's language" that is its implicit point of comparison, although she is also careful to note that "men's" and "women's" "languages" are not as distinct in practice as they are in ideology.

These gender-dichotomous language forms are often understood to derive from conventionalized stances and tropes associated with different genders, in conjunction with differences in power, differences in affect, and differences in social positioning that go along with gender roles. For example, women are expected to speak more politely because they are often presumed to be more powerless (and which then, paradoxically, confirms women's powerlessness).

According to Lakoff,

It will be found that the overall effect of "women's language"—meaning both language restricted to women and language descriptive of women alone—is this: it submerges a woman's personal identity, by denying her the means of expressing herself strongly.... The ultimate effect of these discrepancies is that women are systematically denied access to power, on the grounds that they are not capable of holding it as demonstrated by their linguistic behavior along with other aspects of their behavior.... (1973: 48)

Or alternately, as Ochs would have it, the conventional assumptions about women and their roles (mother, for example) may thus compel them to routinely take less forceful affective or self-assertive stances in conversation (Ochs 1992). Of course, which stances are associated with which genders can vary significantly depending on local understandings. For example, as Don Kulick (1993) describes

gender among the Taiap, women are supposed to be emotional, volatile, forceful, and profane, stances that they routinely enact through the gendered speech genre of *kros*. Nonetheless, the *process* is the same. Of course, we know that gender is not actually dichotomous, from any number of perspectives. As discussed in the introduction, once a gender-specific style like “Women’s Language” has come into being, speakers may then align or distance themselves from these styles to create any number of different gendered effects: “wealthy housewife,” “bad girl,” “gay man.” We also know that genders are multiple. Just as there are different femininities (which I touch on in the introduction), there are also numerous different masculinities, both across cultures and within the same culture. Connell (1995) tells us that masculinity is multiple and hierarchical, with not all masculinities equally socially valued. Nancy Chodorow (1994) focuses on the incredible individuality and specificity of gender and of desire, as it develops psychologically, which applies to masculinity and femininity alike.

We also know that gender performances are situational, and that the way one performs gender in the workplace, or other public spaces, may not be the way one performs it with family, or with an intimate partner. McElhinny (2003b) discusses the role of profession in shaping gendered performances, noting that ideologies about how to be a police officer are not determined by gender, and conceptualizing the profession in a masculine, “crime control” fashion leads women towards androgynizing professional self-constructions. Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994), in their collection of ethnographies of “dislocated” masculinities, show how masculinity varies within individuals and across contexts. Moreover, it would not be possible to arrange these different genders on a continuum from “most masculine” at one end to “most feminine” at the other. We have not adequately measured the space in which we imagine gender; we do not know how many dimensions

it has⁷. Contexts can be inflected by gender, but context also inflects gender, and may also mute it. Certainly, gender is a prism through which matchmakers' advice is filtered, refracting it in some different directions. But this does not change the fact that the advice for success is by and large the same, regardless of who the client may be.

Above and beyond the well-documented existence of different masculinities and femininities, numerous studies have been devoted to transgender or third gender performances that more fully transgress our expectations of how bodies align with the signs of "man" or "woman" (Newton 1979; Gaudio 1997; Kulick 1998; Robertson 1998; Barrett 1999; Hall 1997; Hall 2005; see also Zimman and Hall 2010 for a nice overview of the concept and present usefulness of the idea of a third sex). What I argue that we have not adequately considered is *androgyny*⁸. I here use the word "androgyny" deliberately because it seems to me that men are absolutely being encouraged to incorporate "feminine" attitudes to communication and conversation into their repertoires, much as in the "cool bureaucrat" masculinity of modern police officers (McElhinny 1995). Likewise, women are supposed to be romantically and verbally assertive, actively looking to meet men and engage with them, instead of passively waiting for men to make all the moves—with the exception of those few that are reserved for them, such as the proposal. We perhaps even take it for granted that men and women will differentiate their performances in some way, that gender differences are sufficient to produce language differences across all situations. We rarely ask what would happen if they were somehow encouraged *not* to differentiate themselves.

Matchmakers do not encourage androgyny in its more typical sense of an androgynous appearance (the opposite, in fact), but do encourage an androgynization of behavior, insofar as

⁷ I am very much indebted to Rusty Barrett (in press) for some of these insights.

⁸ Although Jennifer Robertson (1998) touches on it in discussing the appeal of the *dansō no reijin*, the female beauty in man's clothes.

clients are asked to acquire traits associated with the “opposite” sex in order to appeal to them. This is most obviously the case with regard to conversational norms, where women’s understandings about the function of conversation in intimate relationships are privileged, and taught to men. In many other instances, some of which are highlighted in this work, matchmakers do not assign a gender to the personal qualities that are conducive to marriage. The single standard of appropriate behavior for their clients draws from masculine traits as well as feminine traits. Matchmakers do not often distinguish between what *men* should do and *women* should do; rather, they tend to talk about what “people” (*hito*) should do. Where their advice becomes gender-specific, it tends to be aimed at filling in the gaps of sexually differentiated social training. Thus, their promotion of chivalry—which may look like a significant promotion of something particularly masculine—actually seems to be aimed at getting men to treat female companions with a level of attentiveness and consideration comparable to what women are already expected to give men. The assertiveness of, for example, simply asking partners how they feel, instead of leaving declarations of feeling up to the man, similarly pushes women to do something “masculine.”

One of the great mysteries of my fieldwork was the near-complete absence of talk about gendered language, despite the fair mountain of literature on the subject of “Japanese Women’s Language” and its well-established existence as a discrete and metapragmatically salient category of speech. As a result, I have little to say about the use of specific grammatical forms that index dichotomous gender, which is a departure from nearly all previous work on language and gender in Japan. Part of this is due to my lack of access to the client side of matchmaking, and consequently a lack of recorded interactions that would allow me to produce extensive transcripts and tally up which people are using what forms—that would be interesting, but it would also be another project.

However, based on my argument here, I would predict that there would be little formal gendered difference in the speech of male and female clients during omiai. We certainly already know that omiai are polite interactions and that the need to be polite, in Japanese, also has the effect of reducing differences in gendered speech. Nakamura (2007) in fact argues that gender differences *only* exist in casual registers of Japanese, with polite language being gender-neutral. Certainly, adhering to the rough, self-assertive stereotypes of “men’s language” would be a poor move in an omiai, which is precisely how Inasawa-sensei told me he counsels his male clients.

Although matchmakers are not very explicitly metapragmatic when it comes to the discussion of grammatical forms, they *are* very clear about conversational norms. After all, an omiai is a first impression mediated through conversation. Its subsequent step, kōsai, is dating mediated by routine (tele)communication, punctuated by the verbal expression of emotions, and culminating in a verbal proposal. We can say that conversation is at the center of matchmaking, and thus conversational norms, more than gendered language, are at the heart of matchmakers’ language ideologies. It is very clear that matchmakers’ idea of good conversation is talk that is mutually supportive and mutually engaging, with both partners more or less contributing equally to the work of keeping the conversation going and making the other person feel listened to, valued, and thereby desired. They may do so in different ways, but this is at least in part because they face different interactional handicaps, although I do not discount the possibility that subtle gendered difference may also play a role. To this end, more than any particular speech style, in an omiai that is going well, we should expect to see “bouncing” at the level of discourse: regular back and forth turn-taking, few pauses or lapses in conversation, and cooperative features such as latching. These cooperative discursive techniques have been in the past characterized as typical of feminine interactional patterns

(Maltz and Borker 1982; Cameron and Coates 1998), and so even at supra-stylistic levels, we might expect to see a lack of gender differentiation. Wetzel (1988) argues that due to the Japanese emphasis on taking others' feelings into consideration, typically "Japanese" communication strategies may seem "feminine" by Western standards. Nonetheless, matchmakers' accounts of Japanese men's conversational problems would seem to indicate that the moves toward more collaborative conversational techniques are indeed "feminine" even within a Japanese context.

The move towards a lack of gender differentiation is even more striking considering matchmakers' attachments to the gendered status quo around divisions of labor, and the different kinds of value that women and men potentially bring to a relationship (youth and beauty on the one hand, and money, on the other). I would like to suggest here that matchmakers may in fact discard gender as important in and of itself to the matchmaking process, apart from its blindingly obvious significance. This obvious significance may in fact be the only significance of gender difference⁹. Matchmakers are very far from being gender radicals, so if in fact I am correct, it hints at the possibility that gender is far more fluid and situational than is usually imagined even in highly conservative settings. To truly know would require more research that studies men and women in tandem, as well as studies that capture talk itself along with the ideologies around it.

So how does this androgynized self, the "good partner," come into being? Through performance, or perhaps we may want to say, through rehearsal. Some clients may come to the matchmaking process already better equipped for easy conversation with strangers, but the rest have to practice, practice, practice being a good, giving, and game conversational partner, through attending as many omiai and parties as possible. One reason that it is important to meet people in quantity is because it increases the chances that clients will meet someone that they are compatible

⁹ Credit must go where credit is due; I thank Erica Pelta Feldman for pushing me on this point.

with. Moreover, it is also the case that with every omiai, one becomes more comfortable with the conversational task at hand, and more and more able to be the kind of relaxed, engaging, and open kind of partner that others will want to spend more time around. That said, matchmakers' emphasis on counseling and performative rehearsal evinces an awareness that indexicality and iconicity are manufactured, that perceived resemblances and connections between the list of personality traits above and the behaviors that are supposed to demonstrate them are not natural, and thus not always present in persons who may in fact possess the requisite qualities. (One may well wonder how it is that matchmakers recognize these qualities, what unconventional indices they use, if the conventional indices are absent.) As noted in chapter two, matchmakers tend to believe in the inner goodness of their clients, or else they would not have accepted them as such! That said, they also believe that they haven't learned how to display it yet. Nakao-sensei commented of her male clients, in our interview: "Jibun no yosa wo wakatte morawanai to ikenai n ja nai desu ka. Mazu. Sore wo nani mo doryoku shinai" [They have to have their own goodness understood, don't they. First of all. But they don't make any effort to do so].

Matchmakers' recognition of the fact that a person can be a good potential marriage partner, with a lot to offer the right person, and yet *not be able to show it* points to the very fact that we must necessarily *learn* how to perform any and all signs of the self. Matchmakers are thus, to some extent, in the business of conducting remedial interactional semiotics lessons; what they offer clients is the possibility of becoming semiotically savvy enough to begin to display this inner goodness even to a total stranger. Matchmakers' counseling strategies are thus theoretically valuable, insofar as the process by which we teach everyday kinds of semiotic display to others—especially adults—is rarely so neatly codified, systematized and taught to others. (And what does it say that beginning

matchmakers, too, must learn the collective wisdom of those that have gone before them, in order to pass it on to clients?) This idea that some kinds of semiosis are unnatural but learnable offers a challenge to common ways that we conceptualize indexicality, iconicity and uptake, as well as the role of speaker agency. On the one hand, there is a tendency to think of people as at the mercy of semiotic processes, socially constructed by listeners somewhat against their will, according to a system of signs that is out of their control. This view is at the heart of work exposing language ideologies that are harmful to, for example, speakers of non-standard dialects. Perhaps the most notable of these is William Labov's famous work on "Black English Vernacular," which sought to establish that African-American varieties of English are just linguistically valid and as sophisticated as standard English, and in so doing, smash the notion that because it lacks grammatical categories present in more prestigious varieties of American English, African-American speech is deficient. This is important precisely because this deficiency is taken as an icon of other intellectual deficiencies in its speaking population (Labov 1972). This is also true of Lippi-Green's work on the discrimination faced by speakers of "English with an Accent," (1997), and of course, as previously discussed, Miyako Inoue's (2004) study of the origins of modern Japanese women's language in the particular linguistic forms that once constituted "ear-splitting" (*mimigurushi*) "schoolgirl speech." The forms comprising "schoolgirl speech" were documented by educated male over-hearers who denigrated the variety as vulgar but still incorporated it into their novels as "realistic."

In all of these cases, the authors point out that it is *ideology*, not linguistic fact, which causes us to perceive these language forms as inadequate, as linguistically lacking (and by iconic mapping, their speakers as inadequate and lacking). Consequently, such work focuses on the agency of *listeners*, rather than speakers, who are tasked with reassessing their uptake of given languages and speech

styles. Of course, given the political context of much of this research, and the very real racial and class-based discriminatory consequences for speakers of stigmatized language varieties, it is perfectly appropriate that the responsibility should be placed on the listener to stop being a bigot, rather than on the speaker to abandon modes of communication with rich subcultural and personal significance, and in so doing, merely serve to reify the semiotic regimes that discriminate against them. This is certainly the case for Labov's African-American English speakers and Lippi-Green's accented speakers. At the same time, however, we must recognize that such analyses *do* erase the agency and creativity of speakers, and neglect the ability of speakers to command not just one style of English, but in fact a whole repertoire—a skill common to any speaker of any language.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are some of the studies of language and gender presented earlier, which tend to be heavily focused on speakers as creative agents of performative *bricolage* (Lévi-Strauss 1966; Eckert 2008), fashioning new possibilities for selfhood and self-presentation out of clever juxtapositions of existing linguistic tropes and styles, creating new possibilities for selves by “iterating with a difference,” to echo Derrida (1988) through Butler (1990). This approach is particularly prevalent in studies of genders that are somehow transgressive or queer, that are performed through novel combinations of extant speech styles to create new identities. One problem with these studies is that they often give insufficient attention to uptake, or dismiss uptake as narrow-minded and uncharitable—e.g., those who dismiss young women who eschew Japanese Women's Language as “bad girls” are censorious prudes who are unwilling to understand the resistance, emotional range, and linguistic creativity in these young women's speech patterns, and “censure” is the worst fate they seem to face. In other cases (such as those of Kira Hall's [2005] transgender populations in India), the context of discrimination is presumed and thus shoved into

the background; the creativity of speakers *within* their subaltern context is foregrounded and celebrated.

It bears asking, to what extent are these creative performances heard and understood as such by listeners? What are the consequences of this creativity? Do these performances ultimately have any transformational effect on gender roles? What happens before and after the performances? A few studies do address this. Jennifer Robertson (1998) discusses the specter of lesbianism that haunts the all-female Takarazuka Revue and its overly passionate fandom, a specter that the Hankyū corporation (which owns the Revue) absolutely did not want discussed. Although this aspect of her studies ultimately hampered her access to research materials, by discussing both fan and official interpretations, Robertson effectively discusses the multiple possible uptakes of the gender-crossing performances in the Takarazuka Revue, along with attempts on the part of the Revue itself to regiment viewer uptake. Of course, the failure of those attempts is perhaps inevitable, as Robertson touches on when discussing the role of cross-dressed, male-performing Revue actresses (*otokoyaku*) in establishing a particular kind of lesbian style. Likewise, Judith Butler (1990) acknowledges how more or less “normal” gender performances are coerced by virtue of the potential consequences of flouting the norms; drag queens redefine our understanding of the relationship between bodies and gender through their transgressive performances, but the very real threat of violence against them works to regiment performances and to generally keep people within certain naturalized bounds. Thus, as Foucault (1978) reminds us, where there is resistance, it is always counterbalanced by the exercise of power, and vice versa.

What we don't often imagine of individuals' everyday performances—of the self, or any sub-aspect of it—is the full set of interactions, and processes of socialization, education, individual

creativity, uptake, and response that create these performances, police the boundaries of performative possibility, determine their consequences, and imbricate them in a dialogue that also helps to shape *other* performances. Judith Irvine's (1989) examination of Wolof nobles' use of professional performers (*griots*) to sing their praises is one such study that covers most of these bases; the limits of griot performances are determined both by the individual performer's creativity, but also by the job requirements and expectations of the nobles, their employers. The consequences of their performances are their incomes, as well as the nobles' reputations, and the effectiveness of their praise, all of which is dependent on both the griots' skill and the audience's uptake of griot performances. Finally, griot performances (and nobles' decisions to commission them) are imbricated in the larger dialogue of nobles' struggle for power and reputation. Likewise, Lemon (2008), in a more explicitly theatrical setting, discusses literal rehearsals among students at the Russian Theatrical Academy. These rehearsals serve as a means of socializing and educating the drama students for performance, and the instructor's uptake of their performances, informed by particular theatrical ideologies of what behavioral qualia index inner emotional states, has consequences for students' progression.

A key difference between the above studies and mine is their treatment of performance strictly within the realm of artistic performance by trained professionals. My study, on the other hand, deals with the complex but mundane and amateur development and staging of performances of the self, through behavioral and communicative strategies that demonstrate that a client has the personality characteristics of an ideal mate. However, it should not surprise us if there is an element of theater in it anyway: "Scripts even in the hands of unpracticed players can come to life because life itself is a dramatically enacted thing. All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in

which it isn't are not easy to specify" (Goffman 1959: 72). Everyday life has a staged quality, and in detailing matchmakers' language ideologies, one thing I hope to accomplish is describing some of what happens backstage, before the curtains open and the players start the scene.

Moreover, what I have attempted to do within the pages of this dissertation is to not only describe the fullness of the preparation for performance that happens between matchmaker and client, albeit from the singular perspective of the matchmaker, but also to follow this performance through to its uptake (by matchmakers, by potential partners), and its potential consequences—marriage, or not. The process begins with the gaps in socialization and social networks that bring clients to matchmakers in the first place, and continues with education and coaching from matchmakers that inform (but do not determine) clients' ultimate performances, and in so doing, act to minimize gender differences. Likewise, it addresses uptake and its potential consequences—"successful" performances over time lead to successful omiai that in turn lead to dating and marriage; unsuccessful self-(re)construction leads to rejection, and possibly scolding and "trouble," when clients lead matchmakers into conflict with each other. And finally, it shows how each omiai and successful marriage are part of the larger conversation of matchmaking: each failure and success becomes another potential story or piece of gossip, another part of matchmakers' educational dialogue.

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