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The world of dating

A case study on Japanese young adults' attitude toward dating and marriage

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Abstract:

This study aims to gain insight into attitudes toward dating in modern Japan. Apart from regular relationships, casual dating and casual relationships without the intention to marry have become more common. Therefore, this study was conducted to find out the attitude toward dating, casual dating, and the intention to marry. One of the purposes of the study was also to gain knowledge of possible issues in the modern dating world, such as whether dating applications (e.g., Tinder and Omiai) have made a difference in the world of dating.

A case study was conducted by doing three individual semi-structured interviews with three Japanese young adults born between the years 1993-2003 which were then analyzed and compared. The results suggest that casual dating has indeed become more common, but it may have a stigma around it. Common themes such as couples not having enough time together, money and dating apps were discussed as possible issues. Marriage intentions were found to be slightly different among the respondents and age could be one of the factors for that.

Keywords: Japan, dating, casual dating, relationships, marriage
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1. Introduction

Internationally the modern dating world has changed due to the different dating applications and sites available. Japan has struggled with decreasing birth rates for a long time, partly due to an increase in late marriages and people who decide not to marry at all. According to Raymo, Uchikoshi and Yoda (2021), Japanese people getting married less often seems to be a trend. Casual dating also has made more of its way into people’s lives and people no longer date just to get married and reproduce. This study was conducted to gain insight into the modern dating world in Japan by interviewing three Japanese respondents. I wanted to acquire knowledge of their opinions on dating and specific terms (e.g., *kokuhaku*), and whether they have intentions to get married.

Three Japanese informants aged between 22 and 28, two female and one male participated in one semi-structured interview each. This was to gain knowledge of their attitudes towards dating and to understand their life history.

In the background section, the main themes of the study are explained to give a picture of their history and define the terminology. It covers dating apps, statistics on the history of marriage as well as the current situation in Japan and the definitions of what dating and casual dating are. Following previous studies, the methodology section covers how I collected data and why this data collection method was chosen. It also introduces the respondents by giving some background information about them and how they were chosen for the interview. The results section includes summaries of all three respondents’ interviews and after that, the discussion section covers common themes, interpretations, and analysis of the interviews.

The study aims to acquire knowledge of how young Japanese adults view dating and marriage. It also gives insight into what is important for them in relationships and what are common issues for them in the relationship.
2. Background

2.1. Dating applications

In the modern dating world, technology has opened new possibilities for dating. Having access to the internet has made it possible to meet partners outside of family, school and work (Rosenfeld, Thomas, 2012). The use of dating apps that are based on location has increased and nowadays people have multiple applications to choose from. One of the popular apps, Tinder, is used in 190 countries and boasts 55 billion matches (Tinder, 2023). It is a free app that anyone can download, yet it offers the possibility to buy Gold or Platinum subscriptions which offer different possibilities inside the app. This app is for everyone who seeks love as Tinder states:

Tinder doesn’t filter based on height, education, race, or religion because demographics do not define a person. We believe everyone deserves the right to be seen and make the first move no matter how they identify.

Tinder recommends people who are geographically close to your location (unless you have subscribed to an upgraded plan that allows you to freely roam the world locations). From recommended partners, you may decide whether to like or skip the person. A match is born if both mutually like each other and they can start messaging in the app.

Another Japanese dating app called Pairs was mentioned in the interviews of this study, it would have been best to investigate that app but people outside Japan cannot access the site to make it safe so the app could not have been investigated for this study. So instead, I investigated the app called Omiai (which literary means arranged marriage in Japanese). It works similarly to Tinder, where registration is free but as the options are limited. The app recommends subscribing to a monthly plan that gives more options inside the app. It recommends possible partners and one can decide if to ‘like’ the person. Messages will be exchanged in case of both mutually liking each other. The app has a strict privacy policy and asks for verification of the members before they can use the app. Unlike in Tinder, here the love-seekers use initials or nicknames and do not display their actual names.
2.2. Marriage in Japan

Love marriages have become more popular in today’s Japan, compared to arranged marriages that usually are arranged by matchmakers or parents. The number of arranged marriages dropped from 69% to 9.9% between the years 1935 and 2021, while love marriages rose from 13.4% to 87.7% between the years 1935 and 2015. However, the rate of love marriage has gone down to 74.6% between the years 2015 and 2021. The statistics also show that the percentage of those using the internet to find love is 15.2% in 2021 (IPSS, 2022).

2.3. Definition of dating

Dating as a term can be confusing as the idea of dating may differ depending on one’s culture. One could define dating as spending time with someone you have a romantic relationship with before getting married. Therefore, people can be dating without confessing love and becoming exclusive. Traditionally in Japan, the dating period is usually considered to start after kokuhaku (告白) which literally means a confession of one’s feelings. The love confession is usually seen as an important step in taking the relationship to the next level, to be in a romantic relationship (Tomoike, 2021). In Western culture, people may be dating even without any love confession. It may be an unspoken mutual agreement to be dating, while in Japan it is usually one of the two who does the love confession.

In this paper casual dating is used as a general term, defined as two people spending time together without the need of a label or without being in a committed, serious relationship. It can still include romantic encounters with emotional support or plainly sexual encounters depending on their needs but without the pressure of being committed to each other. It may or may not be exclusive. It could be only a one-time thing that could be labeled as a ‘one-night stand’. It could also be a longer period which could be labeled as ‘situationship’. This term is rather new and has been taken into use in the 21st century to describe the in-between situation of being more than friends but lacking commitment as romantic partners (Goh, 2021).
3. Previous studies and a survey

Omori conducted research in 2014 focusing on what love is for young people, how young people define love and marriage, and how they talk about it in the Japanese context. The data is collected by having four group discussions and then semi-structured interviews with heterosexual single men and women who were born between the years 1983 and 1993. Young people’s lack of love is considered a social problem in Japan and the researcher wants to discuss and consider youngsters’ romantic behavior. Apart from open discussion of ‘dating’ (tsukiau, 付き合う), the following topics were also discussed between the interviewer and interviewees. What is ‘romance’ (koi, 恋) and how it is different from ‘love’ (renai, 恋愛) and even eventually marriage? Also, they debated whether sex can be considered separately from romance. There seems to be an idea of dating being necessary for young people to build a romantic relationship. Entering a relationship, ‘to be dating’ is regarded as giving each other the right to mutually have sex exclusively. Conclusions included that sex and relationships did not necessarily have anything to do with romantic feelings.

Another research done by Raymo, Uchikoshi, and Yoda (2021) took a closer look at marriage intentions, desires and pathways to late and less marriage in Japan. They used nationally representative data sources, The Japanese National Fertility Survey and The Japanese Life Course Panel survey, to see a pattern of marriage desires and generated insight into explanations of why people get married less, and why it happens later. The researchers discussed the attitudinal change, children costing more to the family, the comfort of being single and the difficulty of trying to balance work and family as possible reasons.

Japan Today published an article at the end of 2018 about infidelity in relationships. It is based on a survey that Rize Clinic, which is a chain of hair-removal salons, had conducted by collecting 531 responses. The ratio of unfaithfulness was rather even between women and men. 19.2% of men had admitted to having cheated and 20% of women admitted to having cheated. There were differences between occasions and ages when cheating took place. A higher
number of married men cheated compared to married women. While when unmarried, a higher number of women cheated compared to unmarried men.

4. Methodology

4.1. Data material and collection

I used a qualitative approach to conduct three semi-structured interviews about three Japanese young adults’ attitudes toward dating and marriage in Japan. Galletta (2013) states that semi-structured interview provides multiple possibilities to address specific topics related to their field of study. I used this method as I could observe the participant while leaving space for the possibility of gaining in-depth information regarding the current question. Since this study is about personal attitudes and opinions, I also believe that the qualitative approach was the right one as I aimed to understand the respondents’ opinions in detail. I planned that each interview would at least take 30 minutes. Two of the interviews took roughly 35 minutes while one of the interviews took 50 minutes. I conducted the interviews mainly in English, but with a mixture of Japanese in case a respondent did not understand the question or a certain word. I also gave them the possibility to answer in Japanese if they felt like they could provide me with better information regarding their opinions in their native language rather than in English. The reason for using English as the main language was for me to understand the interviewees better and it made it easier for me to get more in-depth discussion with them. I could also explain the question better and give examples in English. I also believe that using English made it easier for me to steer the discussion as my vocabulary is larger in English than in Japanese. However, I understand that the Japanese interviewees may have had the same issue with English and therefore they were given a possibility to answer in Japanese. Every interview was conducted in person as a physical one-on-one interview in a quiet setting.

Below I listed a set of questions for the interview. However, these questions worked more as conversation starters as befits the semi-structured interview whereas my role was more of a listener and guiding the interview.

1. Can you give me a short introduction of yourself? (Name, age, occupation, which city are they from; is it a rural or city area)
2. Are you currently dating anyone or in a relationship?
3. What do you consider ‘dating’? Is it going out on dates or is it the relationship after so-called ‘love confession’ (kokuhaku)
4. What is your attitude towards dating?
   4.1 What is your attitude towards dating casually versus dating to get married?
   4.2 Have you noticed something to change in society regarding this?
5. Have you recently taken any action towards dating (if not in a relationship)?
   5.1. Merits of staying single or being in a relationship?
6. Do you see any issues in the modern dating world? From society for example.
   6.1 Have you faced any problems while dating? Time or careerwise for example
   6.2 What about dating applications and sites, what do you think of those? Have you used one?
7. Are you looking forward to getting married?
8. Do you feel pressure to date or to get married from your family or from the culture itself?

Question 1 was to gain background information on the interviewee and see if any of these could make a difference in the results. The questions 2 and 5 were to obtain information on their current relationship status. Question 3 was to see if the love confession was important to the respondents as it was in Omori’s (2014) research and how they perceived the term ‘dating’. Questions 4, 6, 7 and 8 were to understand their opinions of certain topics and how they picture their future. As this was a semi-structured interview, there were also questions in between these questions to gain more information on certain things the respondent had said. After these questions, I also allowed them to add anything they wanted regarding anything that we had covered in our interview if they still had something to say. After the first interview, I added a question about uwaki (浮気), cheating, to the rest of the
interviews because the first interviewee wanted to talk about it and therefore, I wanted to compare these answers too.

With respondents’ permission, I audio-recorded the interviews on my smartphone to analyze them further by transcribing them. I transcribed everything from the audio records from the interviews, but in this paper, I only used the relevant parts. Recording the interviews also helped me to fully stay present in the interview setting and focus on the respondent’s body language and emotions.

4.2. Respondents

I interviewed one Japanese man and two Japanese women born between the years 1993 and 2003. My research question is based more on the dating aspect and possible future marriage. Because of that, I selected this age group as they are still at the age of possibly dating and not married yet. I based the reason behind this particular age group on research by The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan (2020) where the average age to get married in Japan is 29.4 years old for women and 31 years old for men. I do not exclude the fact that there are also people married before the given average age but as this study focuses more on dating, I decided to exclude married people from my study. To protect respondents’ privacy, the names are changed into pseudonyms. I also do not mention the cities they currently live in to protect the possibility of recognition of a public figure.

The first interviewee Jiro is a 28-year-old Japanese man who plays football professionally. He is originally from Miyazaki, Japan but he has lived in multiple countries in Europe and is now living in Finland. I became acquainted with him through mutual friends, and he is a friend of mine but not too close of a friend. I believe that knowing each other beforehand but not being that close to him helped him to answer my questions truthfully. I interviewed him in English but as it was somewhat difficult for him to understand or speak English, we frequently used Japanese in our interview. To make him feel more comfortable around me, we first made dinner together and had some small talk before diving into the interview.

The second interviewee is Reina, who is a 27-year-old Japanese woman. She is originally from Nagano but lived the previous 7 years in Osaka before moving to Finland in May 2023. She used to be an elementary school teacher in Osaka but quit that job in 2022 and came to Finland as a Japanese culture ambassador volunteer for
a local elementary school. I became acquainted with her through Jiro so I had met
Reina prior to the interview. I believe she responded to me truthfully as we had
talked about my study beforehand, and she had shown strong interest in the topic.
She speaks very good English, so we were able to do most of the interview in English
with a little Japanese now and then. Before the interview, we were looking for a
quiet place to interview in and had some small talk.

The third and last interviewee is Yoriko, who is a 22-year-old Japanese woman.
She is from the city area of Tokyo. Yoriko studies social sciences and is staying in
Finland for two semesters as an exchange student. I became acquainted with her
through a mutual friend, but we had not met prior to the interview. She speaks nearly
fluent English and therefore we were able to do the interview fully in English. After
exchanging greetings, we moved to a quiet location and talked a little about Finland
and how she had become accustomed to Finland. Some small talk before
transitioning into the interview.

4.3. Method of analysis

As I paid attention to the body language and the way the interviewees responded
to certain questions, it showed me what the interviewees were passionate about and
what came up in their minds firsthand. I could also see what they were hesitant to
talk about and what they valued the most. I analyzed every interview as its own and
then compared the three interviews with each other paying attention to the age and
gender.

5. Results

5.1. Summary of Jiro’s interview

I interviewed Jiro first. He plays football professionally, but he is also interested
in doing a master's degree in computer programming in the future. He is currently
not dating anyone, but he mentioned having an interest in getting married and getting
his own family including children but only in the future. When Jiro was asked about
dating and love confession, some explanation was needed for him to understand
what was being asked. Then after understanding, he proceeded to
mention his usual dating pattern. He claims that before he does the confession, *kokuhaku*, they will go on two or three dates. For him, dating means that people can be dating already before the confession, but also mentions that it depends on the country and culture. Jiro also mentioned in his interview that it is possible to go on multiple dates with different people before the confession takes place but that the last date before the confession should be only with the one he is going to confess to.

He would like to have a serious romantic relationship but if he is with someone who does not have fun when they do something together, it does not work. But if it is fun and if there is enough time, he would like to get together with that person. He adds that even if things do not work, if they feel like they want to have sex, that is all right too, as long as they are comfortable.

Jiro finds it difficult to find time to date and even though he has used Tinder in Finland, he says that is hard for him to meet people and gain matches. Which he thinks is a result of him being a foreigner and not able to speak Finnish or English. If he would like to meet someone quickly, a dating app, such as Tinder, is difficult as you need to go through multiple steps before actually securing a date. While he was in Japan, he rarely had time there either because football took most of his time, but Jiro felt, in his words, ‘lucky’ if he had time and met someone and was able to go on a date. In Japan, he did not use dating apps, not Tinder or anything else either. He usually met people through mutual friends or through someone they both know.

The biggest issue in the modern dating world according to Jiro is the couple not having enough time together. They go to different jobs and mostly just have time on weekends. And if you do not live together, many problems might arise, so he has heard.

Jiro is okay with being single but sometimes gets very lonely and wishes to have someone to talk with. The only bad thing he mentions about being in a relationship is that it will be more costly as he uses more money in a relationship. As he hopes to be in a relationship and eventually get married, he does not feel pressured to find a partner. He adds that even people who are over 30, 40, or 50 years old and are single can enjoy themselves. The important thing for him is to get a child. ‘If I get a son or a daughter, I’m so very happy’ he says. His mom does not rush him to get married either and tells him to focus on his football career.
At the end of the interview when I asked if there was anything else he would like to add about anything regarding this dating or marriage, he mentioned *uwaki* (浮気) which means being unfaithful in marriage, to having an affair. He says that it is very common in Japan because people tend to get bored in marriage and want somewhat different stimulation, or so he thinks.

5.2. Summary of Reina’s interview

The second interview was with Reina. In 2022, Reina decided to quit her job in Osaka where she used to be an elementary teacher, teaching mostly 10 to 12-year-old children and come to Finland as an unpaid volunteer. So now, she has been a Japanese culture ambassador in a Finnish elementary school ever since she moved to Finland in May 2023.

Reina is in a relationship with a Japanese man she met in Finland. They had been dating for five months at the time of the interview. They met downtown by coincidence. In Reina’s case as well, some explanation was needed to understand the dating term and casual dating as dating can mean many things in English. After further explanation and examples, she grasps the idea. She thinks that a person may be dating someone already before confession too. So, she feels that dating can be both, before and after the confession. For Reina the confession, *kokuhaku* is very important, especially because European people tend not to do it. She proceeds to explain the difficulty of understanding where the couple stands as she states, ‘Who is he to me?’ if there is no confession done. Also, anniversaries are easier to remember when there has been an official confession.

When she was asked if a person can go on dates with multiple people, she claims that sometimes they do but she has only gone out on dates with one person at a time. Even though Reina is in a relationship she mentions that if she could, she would want to go on a date with non-Japanese, because she thinks that non-Japanese men might be more of a gentleman. However, she still prefers Japanese person as they can talk in their native language, and they get to know each other deeply.

Reina mentions that with the rise of dating apps, meeting new people has become easy and therefore casual dating and casual sex have increased. People might not
have a serious relationship but just have casual sex occasionally to experience having sex. She sees nothing wrong with it, that it is fine to do so but she prefers to have a serious relationship even though she is worried about cheating. She herself does not like dating apps, mentioning that the men on dating apps can be weird. She has not used one but heard from her friends.

After previous bad boyfriends that made Reina often upset, she is happy with her current relationship. She feels comfortable and as she lives alone, she thinks that it is good to have someone to talk with daily and support each other. The year before, when she was still living in Japan, she did not feel the need to have a boyfriend because she was so busy all the time. And even then, if she had a boyfriend, she was so tired and thought about how good living as a single must be. But after that, she immediately added that it depends on the boyfriend. Her previous boyfriend was very selfish, so she is very happy with her current relationship and is looking forward to meeting his parents and vice versa.

About the issues in the modern dating world, Reina exclusively mentions dating apps. As she had mentioned before, it has become easy to date people through applications but most of the men who use them cannot get a girlfriend easily and most likely have problems with communication. She considers that one of the biggest issues for the birthrate decrease is money; everything needs money, especially if one is to raise a child in Japan. The second issue she mentioned is that parents may not have time as they need to work, and the children have hobbies on top of going to school. She remembers from the time when she was still working as a teacher in Japan that it is common for a wealthy person to have a lot of siblings and someone with less money is the only child or just has one sibling.

After Reina’s brother had gotten married, Reina would have been the next in line based on the age among her siblings and relatives. However, Reina explained to her family her interest in going abroad and not wishing to get married yet; and since that, her family has not been asking her about it, so she does not feel pressured. Reina sees on social media that her friends get married and sometimes get jealous; however, she thinks that she still has time. She wants to get married in the future but currently, she does not even know where she will locate next year. It all depends on the job, and even though she would like to return to Japan to work as a teacher, she says that it is all right to stay somewhere else too if she is offered a job. Reina states
that if she were to return to Japan, it would be better for her future children too as her family could help and support them. But before children, there should be marriage first she states. She seemed to be very determined with this opinion, based on how directly and strictly she stated it.

Since the unfaithfulness, *uwaki*, came up in the first interview with Jiro, I wanted to ask about it from Reina if she has noticed it to be an issue. She thinks that maybe in the past it was more common but nowadays people can find out easily if someone is cheating through social media, so she does not see it as that big of an issue anymore.

5.3. **Summary of Yoriko’s interview**

Yoriko was the last one to be interviewed. She arrived in Finland in August 2023. She is in her third year, majoring in social sciences. She mentions that she is not sure if that will be her future career and therefore, she also applied for other courses from different majors for her exchange year. She enjoys staying in Finland as she can relax because Tokyo is very noisy and in Finland, there is nature all around.

Yoriko has been in a relationship with a Japanese man since July 2023. They started dating one month before she traveled to Finland. Yoriko and her boyfriend both play lacrosse in their university team and a mutual friend of theirs introduced Yoriko and her current boyfriend to each other. The next time she will be able to see him is in summer 2024.

For Yoriko, to determine the relationship status, the love confession is necessary. It helps to know whether the relationship is friendly or romantic. She states that in Japan, the love confession is usually the start of dating. It is all right to meet and go on dates with other people before a love confession takes place. She also mentions that maybe it is called dating too when you go on the first or second date but that the actual relationship begins from the confession. As for casual dating, Yoriko shows no interest in such even if she was not in a relationship. She thinks that casual dating has increased lately and is very common in younger generations in Japan today. It is fine with her if other people date casually, but she does not care to do it herself.
In Yoriko’s case, she thinks there are both positive and negative aspects of being in a relationship. Whenever she feels lonely in Finland and wants to talk with somebody, she can talk with her boyfriend. She can share what happened throughout the day and she specifically says that it is good for her mental health. Also, in her case, as she plays the same sport as her boyfriend, she mentions a situation where her boyfriend plays well in a game, which also encourages her to play better. When in a relationship, Yoriko likes the feeling of being special to the partner. She mentions jealousy as one of the negative aspects of being in a relationship. Sometimes, she would like to talk to her friend who is opposite sex one-on-one, but at the same time, she would not want to do it because it would make her boyfriend jealous. Yoriko states that she enjoys being alone. She feels happy that her current boyfriend can respect that part of her. However, she finds it difficult to balance this part of hers sometimes. At the same time, she would like to spend time with her boyfriend but because she plays lacrosse 5 days a week, leaving her 2 days of free time, so at the same time she would also like to be alone. If she were to be single, she could spend all the time by herself. Yoriko also mentions her previous boyfriend who made life very stressful for Yoriko as he wanted to meet with her whenever she had free time. The second thing she mentioned about her previous boyfriend was that he wanted to show public affection with Yoriko while she does not like showing affection in public. She thinks that this is very common in Japan for one to not show affection in public.

When I asked about issues in the modern dating world, the first thing she immediately mentioned was that most people think that being alone is perceived as pitiful and sad. Yoriko sees nothing wrong with being alone as she can enjoy life by herself. ‘I can enjoy my life so why do I need to have a boyfriend?’ she states. Even before her relationship she felt confident in being alone but could not help but feel pressured by people around her.

At first, Yoriko thought that dating applications were not good but after her friends started to use one and got in a relationship with a person from the app, her opinion started to change. The reason why she thought it was bad is that you do not know who is behind the profile, maybe the picture is not real either. It can be dangerous. But after seeing how good her friends’ relationships are, she feels like it is a good opportunity to meet new people, especially ones who share similar interests.
such as hobbies. She has never used a dating application and she does not want to use one, but she understands people who use it. Her friends use Tinder most commonly and Yoriko also knows Pairs by name.

Yoriko states that now, the career and advancing her career is more important to her than getting married. She does not see herself getting married in the future, but she does not exclude the possibility of getting married eventually. Yet she wants children, and she thinks she should get married before having children not to be part of a minority in Japan where people give birth without or before getting married. However, she is adamant about moving forward in her career before thinking about marriage or children.

She has felt pressured before, other people asking her whether she and her boyfriend will get married. Previously Yoriko’s mother also suggested her to find a boyfriend as it would be better than being alone. However, this did not come as pressure but more of a suggestion. Yoriko thinks that she and her mother just happen to have different opinions on dating. Yoriko can enjoy life alone while her mother thinks it is better to have a boyfriend.

I also asked about uwaki from Yoriko. She finds the term difficult to determine as it depends on people and how they see what ‘uwaki’ is. ‘It is different for each person’ she says. She gives an example of the previously talked-about opposite-sex friend. To some people talking one-on-one to a friend of opposite-sex is perceived as being unfaithful while to some people it is not. She did not have an opinion on it as she had not heard much about it, whether it was common or not.

6. Discussion

Figure 1 shows my interpretation of the usual pattern of these Japanese respondents’ thoughts on how dating, relationships and marriage evolve for them. The yellow box, the right to have mutual sex when entering the relationship was not discussed in my interviews and therefore, I wanted to add it to show what Omori’s (2014) study results implied as follows (translated from Japanese by the author):

There seems to be an idea of dating being necessary for young people to build a romantic relationship. Entering a relationship, ‘to be dating’
(tsukiau) is regarded as giving each other the right to have sex exclusively. (p.115)

I interpreted the interviews and I believe that it is in line with what my informants think. I also believe it did not get mentioned in my interviews because it could be a social norm and therefore there is ‘no need’ to mention it.

Figure 1: Dating pattern based on the respondents' interviews

As shown in Figure 1, the basic structure of the relationship evolving is to go on three to four dates where the last date is considered to include the love confession, kokuhaku. This love confession is thought to be an important step to enter the relationship according to Tomoike (2021). For Reina and Yoriko the love confession is important as it determines the status of the relationship. It helps them to understand whether they are more than friends. Reina also mentions the importance of knowing the date of the official relationship start as she states, ‘And then we know, maybe we have a day, like every month “now it has been one month”’. For Jiro instead, it is not as necessary as it is for the two women. I believe that the one reason behind this is because he has lived in many European countries for several years and therefore seemed to have gotten more accustomed to the European style compared to the two women. However, he states that if he were in Japan, he would think it is important to do the love confession but because Europe does not have the phenomenon of confessing love (with the equivalent idea of what it is in Japan) he
does not think it is necessary. I believe that the gender of the interviewees may also affect this result. In Omori’s (2014, p.115) study the results also implied that the *kokuhaku* is to make the relationship ’confirmed’ so that it is clear for both parties that they are in a relationship.

While talking about the usual pattern of dating for Jiro, he mentioned that after committing to the relationship, physical intimacy comes into the picture, but it is not completely unusual to have sex before the important step of confessing love if both parties agree on it and feel comfortable. I believe that in this case, the possibilities of it becoming a casual relationship are bigger than not having an intimate relationship before becoming a couple. Omori (2014, p.118-119) discussed this matter with a group of men and the results implied that on many occasions, if someone wanted to get married, it was better to have a ‘decent’ woman to get married with. The group of men would have a partner they are dating and have the right to have sex with but who is not suitable for marriage. I did not discuss when physical intimacy comes into the picture with Yoriko and Reina.

The term dating needed to be explained in further detail for all three respondents as it can be confusing with multiple different meanings in English. In Japanese, I used the term *tsukiau* (付き合う), which is the closest equivalent in the Japanese language for the term ‘dating’ in this definition, and the same word was used in this context in the study of Omori’s (2014). Jiro, Reina and Yoriko all agree that dating as a term is not dependent on the *kokuhaku*, whether dating before or after it, at least in English. It is called dating if you meet with romantic intentions. In addition, as shown in Figure 1, all three also agreed that it is possible to go on dates with other people before the love confession takes place but after that step, it becomes exclusive.

When casual dating was discussed in the interviews, it also needed to be explained in further detail. What I found interesting is that when Reina and Yoriko were asked about their opinion regarding casual dating, they said that it is acceptable but emphasized almost immediately that they do not do it. I cannot help but interpret this as if there is a social stigma attached to casual dating. Judging by the body language and emotions observed from expressions on their faces, no one of the interviewees seemed uncomfortable talking about sex, which might be part of casual dating. Their posture did not change when sex was mentioned neither did their faces
show signs of change. Reina said, ‘If they don’t have a serious girlfriend or boyfriend, that’s fine because they just asobi (having fun). My friend wanted to do like this because she wanted to have experiences in sex’. One of the interviewees in Omori’s (2014, p.119) study said a similar thing about love before marriage as just for fun (using the same term asobi) after another interviewee had mentioned that love can be just for the experience and that marriage is the culmination of love. In Omori’s study (2014, p. 120) the results also similarly implies that as long as one does not have a boyfriend and is not hurting the sex partners, having sekkusufurendo (セックスフレンド), a ‘sex friend’ is good. They had the same point of view as Reina had: ‘As long as no one gets hurt’.

Jiro is very adamant about getting a family in the future. There were multiple times during the interview when he mentioned getting married and having children. It is clear he very much values family as he also talked about his nephew and showed a picture of him. For that reason, he is not keen on casual relationships but if he finds someone who he enjoys being around and both are on the same page they might just enjoy each other’s company without a committed label of a relationship. Reina and Yoriko think that casual dating has increased in Japan recently. Reina mentioned dating apps as the reason. These apps have made meeting people easier. Yoriko did not mention the reason but expressed that among the young generation, casual dating is very common. I believe that by the young generation, she means people around her age because after she said that, she once again strongly denied ‘But not me’.

Another interesting factor which all respondents mentioned more than once during the interviews was the matter of time. No one had time to date. Jiro has football, Reina’s work took plenty of time and Yoriko plays lacrosse five days a week, leaving only the two days left. Jiro expressed that he felt happy if he had time to go on a date with someone, whom he became acquainted with through his friends or colleagues, but he had no time to seek love by himself. Reina used to be so tired from work that if you added another person into that equation, it would have gotten too tiresome. Yoriko expresses a fairly similar issue. Yoriko seems to be a person who values her alone time highly. As she had those two days of free time, she expressed the need to be alone. Sometimes it had gotten too difficult for her to try to balance the alone time and spending time with her boyfriend. Therefore, when she was single, she could spend that time on herself. She often likes to go to the
coffee shop just by herself. Just as the research done by Raymo, Uchikoshi, and Yoda (2021) implies there is comfort in being single and people find themselves struggling with a balance of work and family. I think this comes up in both Yoriko’s and Reina’s situations. According to the same research, the results also imply that children cost more to the family. As it happens, Reina mentions the same issue in her interview. It takes money to raise a child and send them off to university, not to exclude the hobbies the child may take part in. As she worked in the school environment, she saw situations where the wealthy child had more of siblings while the one with less money had no siblings or just one.

The two women seemed to feel comfortable in their current relationship even though both have been dating their man for less than a year. Reina mentioned her previous boyfriends a couple of times during the interview. It only seemed to strengthen the feeling of having a very good relationship with her current boyfriend. Previous men had made her upset and they have been selfish. I wonder what the stereotypes of non-Japanese men are because she also seems to be under the impression of them being more of a gentleman than Japanese men. I believe this might have also something to do with incidents with her previous Japanese boyfriend.

Being able to talk to someone (a partner) on a deeper level seems to be an important factor in the relationship for Jiro, Reina and Yoriko. They all mention loneliness, which is certainly a familiar feeling for most. In Yoriko’s case, it is assumable that now when she has more time because she does not have lacrosse training, she feels lonely. When one is busy with their work, or hobbies, one does not spend too much time feeling lonely when there are other issues to think about. I also believe that there must be a feeling of loneliness because all the respondents’ family members and friends are in Japan, while they are in a foreign country. Other negative aspects came up such as for Jiro, dating someone is more costly than being single, and for Yoriko, jealousy of opposite-sex friends is an issue for both her and her boyfriend. On a positive aspect, ‘support’ also comes up in the interviews of Reina and Yoriko. Both agree on getting support from their partner. Yoriko states ‘We [Yoriko and her boyfriend] play the same sport, so if he plays well in the game, I think “Oh I should practice more” and play better’. While she talks specifically
about encouragement, none of the others mentioned this, but I do believe it is categorized in the ‘support’ term and they did not give such details as Yoriko did.

The results of a study by Rosenfeld and Thomas (2012) suggest the Internet have made it easier to meet possible partners outside of family, work or school. It is also apparent in IPPS statistics (2022) that in 2021, 15.2% are seeking love through the internet in Japan. My respondents’ opinions on seeking love through dating apps are to some extent similar to each other but also have differences. Jiro has used the dating app Tinder while Reina and Yoriko have not used any dating apps ever. Jiro and Yoriko think that dating apps can be good when you get to know the person better before meeting through talking. Yoriko expressed that it is a great way to find people with similar interests. However, Yoriko did not always think this way. Her first opinion was that they are bad as it can be dangerous when you cannot even be certain that the person behind the profile is real. Her opinion changed after her friends had found relationships with people met through the app. Jiro also expressed ‘henna hito mo irushi’ (変な人もいるし) which means that there are also weird people (in the apps). I believe the ‘weird’ people can be connected to the dangerous part of the app just as Yoriko used to think too. In addition, even Reina indicates that there are ‘weird’ men on dating apps, which is partly a reason she has not used one. The associations between danger (e.g., sexual assault) and the use of dating apps have not been investigated much yet, but it is apparent through the articles on the many news sites that people have exploited the possibilities of dating apps when you just search for ‘sexual assault Tinder’.

What seemed fascinating to me was that Jiro and Reina showed strong interest in getting married while the youngest of the three, Yoriko did not seem enthusiastic at all to get married. I wonder if this is because Jiro and Reina are older than Yoriko and therefore closer to the average marriage age which is 29.4 years for women and 31 for men according to The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan (2020). I do not want to exclude the possibility of this desire to be just a person’s personality trait and what they value the most. It was noticeable that Jiro and Reina talked more about family and children whereas Yoriko talked more about career. Even if Jiro and Reina are close to the average age of getting married, neither of them has felt pressured to get married. Jiro focuses on his career first which is similar to Yoriko’s intentions. Raymo, Uchikoshi, and Yoda (2021) also discussed the
importance of a career as a reason to get married later. In the same study they also discussed the importance of a woman to feel economically independent, which means building a career for herself. I believe Yoriko’s case is connected to this desire to build a career by herself and be economically independent. She mentioned independence often during the interview. She has felt pressured before, not much into marriage (most likely because she is only 22 years old at the moment) but into dating. She expressed herself:

Yeah, like I was confident about me being alone, so it was okay. The bad thing is that my mother said that it’s good to have a boyfriend and that it’s better. So, I felt a little pressure. Me and my mom have a different opinion.

She would also be happy by herself without a relationship which reflects that she does not mind being alone. She strongly states that she can be independent and enjoy life alone too. While Jiro and Reina seemed more attached to their relationship (or wanting to get a relationship in Jiro’s case). Reina mentioned peer pressure to some extent. She said that she did not particularly feel pressured, but what she felt was more of jealousy toward her friends getting married. She is the only one who mentioned getting pressured by friends too, apart from family or culture.

Interestingly, Jiro mentioned Uwaki (unfaithfulness or cheating) as a common thing in relationships and even in marriages. He said that people get bored in their relationships and want something that stimulates them. In contrast, the two women instead had a long pause when they thought about how to approach this topic. Reina expressed that maybe it was more common before but nowadays not that common as social media makes it easier to find out whether someone is cheating. Yoriko also did not have an opinion on whether it is common or not, but she claims that cheating is different for everyone as every couple has their limits. In 2018, Japan Today published an article based on a survey conducted by Rize Clinic about infidelity in relationships where they collected 531 responses. Interestingly, married men cheat with an average of 38.5% compared to married women with an average of 18.1%. In contrast, unmarried women cheat with an average of 21.7% while unmarried men with an average of 12.9%. I assumed it would be more common for men to cheat
and therefore, that could explain the view of Jiro but the survey suggests that women and men cheat evenly but on different occasions so gender should not matter in this situation.

I believe the chosen methodology worked well for this type of study and I believe I could have gotten even more in-depth views if I had more experiences in interviewing. Moreover, there are certain limitations to the study conducted. As I have only three respondents, I cannot make any generalization about how most young Japanese people think but this is more of a peek into the opinions of these interviewees that the Japanese culture and society may have influenced. My criteria for the respondents were that they should not be married to find out about their desire to get married. However, Reina and Yoriko both are dating someone, but I believe that whether they were dating or not did not influence the study as it is based on individual opinions. I did not ask my respondents’ sexuality because I believed that it would not affect the results of the study. Yet after conducting the interviews I wonder if it would have made a difference in opinions in certain aspects. If I had the same number of women and men, I think that would have improved the quality of the results. I believe that because the respondents live in Finland when they most likely have already gotten accustomed to non-Japanese culture to a certain degree, it has shaped their opinions slightly differently compared to those who are living in Japan.

7. Conclusion

This study was conducted to find out about opinions of 20-30-year-olds’ dating life and how they perceived certain themes by interviewing one Japanese man and two Japanese women. I wanted to acquire knowledge regarding what they think about dating, casual dating and marriage. I also wanted to find out if they have noticed issues in the modern dating world. It is evident that every respondent has slightly different opinions around the same theme but shares some of the same opinions.

The results imply that *kokuhaku* is not a necessity, but it is hoped to be done to clarify the status of the relationship. Casual dating may have a minor stigma judging the way the interviewees discussed it, but all agreed that if one does not want to be in a serious labeled relationship, one can have fun and gain experience. Yoriko and
Reina think that casual dating has increased lately especially in the younger generation, mentioning the dating apps as one of the possible reasons for the increase.

The main theme of why to be in a relationship was being able to talk to someone; all three interviewees agreed on this one. Being supported and encouraged by someone was also mentioned by the two women. On negative aspects of being in a relationship, costs and difficulty in balancing between alone time and couple time were the most evident ones. Jealousy and selfishness were discussed also as possible negative aspects.

As for the issues of the modern dating world, the couple not having enough time together was mentioned as one of the issues. On multiple occasions, the matter of time was discussed and it seemed to be one of the biggest issues for the interviewees. Single people could also be seen as pitiful and sad in the society. Also dating apps and money were mentioned as issues. Using dating applications has divided opinions between the interviewees. They are considered good (e.g., one can find someone with similar interests) but the apps also have their downsides (e.g., one cannot be certain if the person behind the profile is real).

Two of the interviewees showed the desire to get married while one currently shows no interest in getting married. But even so, the two agree on the marriage happening later in the future while the third believes there might be a change of opinion in case she wants children. There has been peer pressure to get married and suggestions from families to find a partner but there is no significant pressure expressed.

I had assumed that the opinions would be more different from each other, but the findings suggest that the interviewees share similar opinions on many topics. Doing a study about Uwaki, if it has increased or how it is perceived would be interesting as it was discussed in these interviews too. I also think it would be interesting to do a larger-scale of this study with more informants.
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