

Visual Analysis of Self-Presentation on Dating Apps: A Comparison Between Taiwanese Heterosexual Female and Male Users

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Abstract

This study explores gendered visual self-presentation on dating applications through a sociolinguistic lens. Using content analysis, 200 Tinder profiles (100 male and 100 female) were examined to identify how users visually construct gendered identities. Six visual variables were coded: sexualization, partial physical features, emoji use, number of uploaded photos, selfie angle, and photo distance. Statistical analysis revealed that female users were significantly more likely to engage in sexualized imagery and preferred close-up, high-angle selfies, suggesting a tendency toward emotional accessibility and visual intimacy. In contrast, male users more often emphasized body parts and used medium-distance or low-angle photos, reflecting traditional masculine ideals such as dominance and height. While the number of photos and emoji use did not differ significantly, female users displayed slightly more expressive visual behaviors. These results suggest that self-presentation on dating apps continues to reflect conventional gender norms. Even within self-curated digital spaces, visual choices are strategically aligned with social expectations. This study contributes to sociolinguistic understandings of gender performance in online contexts and offers insight into the visual discourse strategies individuals employ to attract potential partners.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, identity construction, gender differences, dating applications, content analysis

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Introduction

Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics primarily examines how different social factors influence language use and, conversely, how language impacts society. It explores how social characteristics—such as ethnicity, religion, social class, gender, education level, and age—shape the way people use language, resulting in distinct language patterns across various social groups (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Hudson, 1996).

Sociolinguistics aims to study the reciprocal impact between language use and society, focusing on how social structures and environments influence language, and vice versa. Contemporary theories in sociolinguistics hold that language and society are mutually constitutive, with language carrying social, cultural, and personal meanings (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). Through linguistic markers, speakers symbolically shape both their self-identity and societal roles (Joseph, 2004). In essence, language is not just a medium for conveying information; it is an active force that shapes how we behave and interact as social beings (Mallinson, 2015).

When interacting with people of different religions (Keane, 1997), social classes (Bernstein, 1960), genders (Coates & Pichler, 1998), ages (Pennebaker & Stone, 2003), or education levels (Dollaghan et al., 1999), it's essential to adjust our language use to suit each context (Tannen, 1990). To avoid misunderstandings, we need to understand these differences and use language appropriately.

Sociolinguistics and Gender

Several foundational texts have introduced the sociolinguistic paradigm of language variation and gender identity. Notably, Robin Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place* (1973) sparked global interest in the study of women's speech. However, it was not until the late 1980s that scholars began to examine female speakers more systematically. Since then, research on language and gender has steadily expanded. Coates (2015), in *Women, Men and Language*, notes that early linguistic studies rarely addressed women, as men were historically seen as the societal norm. The rise of the women's movement in the mid-20th century and legislation such as the UK's Equal Pay Act and Sex Discrimination Act in the 1970s helped shift public discourse and academic focus, prompting increased attention to gender-based language variation. Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (1990) further advanced the study of gendered communication by highlighting conversational differences. For instance, men tend to dominate public discourse, while women speak more in private settings and are more inclined toward gossip. Women often avoid conflict, whereas men may use it to assert status (Al-Harashsheh, 2014). Tannen also observed that men interrupt women more frequently. Subsequent studies confirmed such gender-based patterns across various domains, including conversational styles (Nordenstam, 1992; Tannen, 1993), interactional contexts (Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999), and performance differences (Gneezy et al., 2003; Hyde et al., 1990).

Women and men demonstrate different ways of using language in diverse interactional contexts. The following provides a short review of some relevant studies to illustrate the scope of knowledge regarding gendered differences in the field of sociolinguistics. For instance, in marital conversations, men and women tend to handle conflicts differently. Men often adopt a

more assertive or coercive stance, while women are more likely to take on a subordinate role (White, 1989).

Gendered language differences also appear in emotional expression and word choice. Women tend to be more expressive (Brody, 2013), using euphemisms (Li, 2024), interjections (e.g., “oh dear,” “goodness”) (Erickson et al., 1978), and intensifiers like “so” and “very” (Sardabi & Afghari, 2015). In contrast, men favor stronger, more explicit terms such as “hell” and “damn” (Yang, 2014). These patterns are evident across various contexts, yet most research centers on face-to-face interactions, with limited attention to gender identity construction in online environments (Kapidzic & Herring, 2015). As social media platforms emphasizing first impressions and sexual appeal, dating apps offer a distinct context for exploring gendered language variation and self-presentation. The next section elaborates on this rationale.

Dating Apps and Gendered Language

With the rise of mobile technology, dating applications have become increasingly accessible and widely used (Sobieraj & Humphreys, 2022; Sumter & Vandenberg, 2019). Their convenience and ease of use (Li & Bowen, 2022) have encouraged more singles to engage in online dating (Chamourian, 2017; Ward, 2017).

Dating apps, accessible via mobile phones, enable users to present themselves through photos, self-introductions, and personal information. These profiles allow others to assess potential partners or chat companions (Konings et al., 2024). Both textual and visual elements shape users’ impressions, making it relevant to analyze how such content constructs personal and gendered identities (Casañ-Pitarch, 2020; Ellison et al., 2012; Li & Bowen, 2022; Van der Zanden et al., 2022).

While traditional dating websites remain in use, dating apps have become more prominent due to their accessibility anytime and anywhere via mobile phones (Chamourian, 2017). These platforms also offer greater opportunities to connect with strangers through textual and visual self-presentation in personal profiles (Konings et al., 2024). Unlike social media rooted in existing networks, dating apps are defined by shared intentions—primarily romantic pursuits—rather than mutual connections (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Ranzini & Lutz, 2017). As a result, users are expected to carefully curate gendered self-presentations to attract potential partners.

Given the above discussion, this study aims to explore how female and male users build gender-relevant impression in the context of dating apps to make themselves attractive from the perspective of the imagined audience, namely, the other gender. In the process of building personal images, dating app users need to make different choices visually (Goffman, 2023).

Research Gaps and Purposes

Sociolinguistics examine how factors such as gender, ethnicity, and social class influence language use, as well as how language shapes social roles and identities. While many studies have explored gender-based language differences, including conversational styles, emotional expressions, and language habits, most of this research has focused on face-to-face interactions. There has been less attention given to online gender identity construction and self-presentation. Dating apps, as mobile dating platforms, offer a unique and accessible space where individuals can actively construct and display their gender identity through visual content. The shared goal

of seeking romantic relationships on these platforms creates a focused environment in which gender identity construction is both visible and relevant.

In sum, this study aims to investigate gendered differences in language behaviors within the context of dating apps, exploring how male and female users construct and display their gender identities to attract potential romantic partners of the opposite sex. Furthermore, the broader social implications of this study could assist users in creating more accurate profiles to attract the potential partners they are seeking. Furthermore, the inquiries made in this study can further reveal how the explored language and communication patterns could shape and realize gender socialization, gendered social expectations as specific to Taiwan.

Literature Review

Visual Presentation of Gender Identities

Konings et al. (2024) analyzed Tinder and Bumble profiles to examine sexualized visual self-presentation. While men and women assess mate value differently, both genders emphasize sexual attractiveness. Women, however, are more likely to sexualize their images—for example, by showing more skin or posing to highlight their buttocks—consistent with findings by Merlyn et al. (2024) and Hancock & Toma (2009). Additionally, women dissatisfied with their body types often accentuate sexual appeal through facial expressions. This pattern reflects the continued objectification of women and society's enduring focus on female physical beauty.

Chamourian (2017) conducted a survey-based study on Bumble profiles, revealing that men prioritize appearing attractive over showcasing social indicators like income or occupation—reflecting a belief that women value physical appearance in partner selection. However, this contrasts with findings by Abramova et al. (2016), Chamourian (2017), and Whitty (2008), which indicate that financially independent women place less emphasis on male socioeconomic status. In contrast, women tend to upload more photos, pay closer attention to details, and highlight hobbies or interests, aiming for an authentic and visually appealing presentation. Whitty (2008) attributes this to the greater pressure women face to maintain attractiveness, leading to more varied and expressive photo choices.

Casañ-Pitarch (2020), using a Google Form survey, found that men are more likely than women to use and appreciate emojis in dating profiles, possibly believing emojis enhance emotional nuance and appeal to women—reflecting norms that link emotional expressiveness with femininity. However, female users preferred profiles with plain text, contrasting with emoji usage trends seen on broader social media platforms (Bamman et al., 2014).

Sedgewick et al. (2017) analyzed Tinder photos and found that men favor low-angle selfies, while women prefer high angles—echoing findings by Kapidzic and Herring (2015). These choices are strategic: low angles enhance male height and dominance, aligning with female preferences for taller partners (Courtiol et al., 2010), while high angles suggest female shortness, consistent with male preferences shaped by traditional gender norms. Similar trends were observed by Merlyn et al. (2024).

Kapidzic and Herring (2015) analyzed profile photos on a teen chat site and found that boys preferred long-distance shots, often fully clothed or shirtless, reflecting norms of strength and emotional distance. In contrast, girls favored close-ups (Merlyn et al., 2024), frequently

wearing revealing clothing—interpreted as attempts to convey intimacy and align with expectations of submissiveness, seductiveness, and emotional expressiveness.

In conclusion, visual self-presentation on dating apps reveals distinct gendered patterns shaped by societal norms. Male users often highlight physical strength by displaying facial features, arms, or legs—reinforcing masculine ideals and aligning with female visual preferences (Merlyn et al., 2024). Female users include more diverse photos, balancing attractiveness with hobbies and interests, reflecting greater pressure to appear both appealing and expressive (Chamourian, 2017). Linguistically, men use emojis more often to convey emotion, while women tend to avoid them (Casañ-Pitarch, 2020). Women are also more likely to sexualize their images through clothing or poses, reflecting persistent objectification (Konings et al., 2024). Selfie angles differ by gender as well: men favor low angles to convey dominance, while women use high angles to suggest smallness—reinforcing traditional gender and stature norms (Sedgewick et al., 2017).

Based on existing literature, this study examines visual dimensions in self-profiles such as sexual attractiveness, partial physical features, emoji use, number of photos, photo angles, and distance. Accordingly, the following research questions are proposed to extend prior work in these areas.

- RQ 1: To what extent do female and male dating app users differ in sexualizing themselves in profile photos?
- RQ 2: To what extent do female and male dating app users differ in focus on partial physical features in their profile photos?
- RQ 3: To what extent do female and male dating app users differ in their use of emojis in dating app self-presentations?
- RQ 4: To what extent do female and male dating app users differ in the number of photos they upload to their dating profiles?
- RQ 5: To what extent do female and male dating app users differ in their choice of photo angles?
- RQ 6: To what extent do female and male dating app users differ in the photo distances used in their profile pictures?

Methodology

This study investigates how Taiwanese male and female users construct visual content in dating app profiles. To effectively capture the distribution and gender differences in visual self-presentation, a coding-based approach guided by the research questions was adopted. Thus, content analysis was deemed an appropriate method.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a method for examining visual data to identify patterns, themes, and meanings (Krippendorff, 2018). Initially developed in communication and journalism studies to quantify media content (Berelson, 1952), it has since evolved into a cross-disciplinary tool capable of addressing both qualitative and quantitative data (Neuendorf, 2017). Beyond counting word frequencies, it enables interpretation of contextual meanings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), making it well-suited for analyzing user-generated texts such as dating profiles. This includes both manifest content (e.g., emoji use) and latent content (e.g., emotional tone).

Babbie (2012) emphasizes that content analysis involves systematically coding qualitative data into meaningful categories for interpretation or quantification. This approach is particularly valuable in gender and communication research, where linguistic choices, such as stylistic elements like emojis, can reveal underlying gender norms and relational expectations in digital contexts.

Given the study's focus on gendered self-presentation, content analysis was chosen as the most suitable method. It allows for the systematic examination of linguistic and stylistic features in user-generated data. By analyzing Tinder profile photos, the study captures meanings conveyed through visual self-presentation. Widely used in online dating research (e.g., Casañ-Pitarch, 2020; Hitsch et al., 2010; Sritharan et al., 2010), content analysis provides an effective framework for exploring both overt and nuanced gendered cues in dating profiles.

Development of the Coding Tool

The Dimensions for Visual Analysis (RQs 1–6)

Following Konings et al. (2024), RQ1 (To what extent do female and male dating app users differ in sexualizing themselves in profile photos?), the variable “sexualizing”. The operational definition of this variable is defined as below, and if such information is present in the profile samples, a coding value “1” is assigned, otherwise “0.”

Sexualized:

- If the users wear revealing attire, which exposes a significant amount of skin, or tight clothing, such as “swimwear, low-cut tops”
- If the users are posing in a suggestive way, such as, “arching the back, pouting lips”

Following Merlyn et al. (2024), RQ2 (To what extent do female and male dating app users differ in focus on partial physical features in their profile photos?), the variable “partial physical features.” The operational definition of this variable is defined as below, and if such information is present in the profile samples, a coding value “1” is assigned, otherwise “0.”

Partial physical features:

- If the users only display a specific bodily feature, such as, “legs, arms, chest and full face”

As to RQ3 (To what extent do female and male dating app users differ in their use of emojis in dating app self-presentations?), one of the relevant variables examined is “emojis.” The operational definition of this variable is defined as below, and if such information is present in the profile samples, a coding value “1” is assigned, otherwise “0.”

Emoji:

- If the users use emojis in profile presentation, such as “👤, 🍷, 🐱, 😊”

Following Chamourian (2017), the variable “number” as examined in RQ4 (To what extent do female and male dating app users differ in the number of photos they upload to their dating profiles?) is defined as follows. If the exact photo count of the visual count was calculated and assigned as the value of this variable.

Following Sedgewick et al. (2017), RQ5 (To what extent do female and male dating app users differ in their choice of photo angles?), the variable “angles” is defined as follows:

- 1= High angle, the camera is above the subject’s eye level, looking downward.
- 2= Eye-level (neutral) angle, the camera is approximately at the subject’s eye level.
- 3= Low angle, the camera is below the subject’s eye level, looking upward.

Following Kapidzic and Herring (2015), the variable “distances” as examined in RQ6 (To what extent do female and male dating app users differ in the photo distances used in their profile pictures?) is defined as follows:

- 1= Medium shot, the photo shows the subject from the waist up or mid-thigh up.
- 2= Full body, the subject’s entire body, from head to feet, is visible.
- 3= Close shot, the photo frames the subject’s face and shoulders, typically from the chest up, focusing on facial expression.

Data Collection and Sampling

Tinder was chosen as the data source due to its popularity, accessibility, and profile-centered design. As one of the most widely used dating apps globally and in Taiwan, particularly among young adults (Hobbs et al., 2017; LeFebvre, 2018), it offers a diverse user base. Its strong market presence in Taiwan (Statista, 2024) makes it a relevant platform for examining gendered self-presentation in digital contexts.

This study targeted 200 Tinder profiles, focusing on users aged 18–23 within a 161 km radius—the platform’s maximum range. A convenience sampling approach was adopted, beginning with profiles readily accessible to the researcher. To ensure gender balance and reflect heterosexual interactions, two separate Tinder accounts (one male, one female) were created, maximizing exposure to opposite-gender profiles and enabling systematic data collection across genders.

Profile data were collected via screenshots of user bios, which served as the primary source for analysis. Sampling continued until 200 profiles were obtained, ensuring adequate data for gender-based comparisons and content analysis. Efforts were made to maintain gender balance (approximately 100 male and 100 female profiles); in cases of imbalance, statistical adjustments such as weighting or stratified analysis were applied.

All Tinder bios are screenshot for documentation, and any personal identifiers were removed to ensure anonymity in the process of preserving the samples in a word file. Each profile was assigned a unique identification code (for example, “M001” for the first male profile and “F001” for the first female profile) to support systematic data management and coding procedures. The dataset was securely stored on a password-protected and encrypted cloud platform, such as Google Drive, with access restricted to the researcher only.

Tinder

On Tinder, users can upload up to nine profile photos. The profile section is organized into 15 optional categories that allow users to disclose varying aspects of personal information. The only mandatory fields of information disclosure in personal profiles are gender, age, and username (displayed name).

Most of the information categories are optional: “About Me” narratives (self-introduction, written with maximum 500 characters), “Interests,” “Height,” “Relationship Goals” (e.g., long-term, short-term, friendship), “Relationship Type” (monogamous or non-monogamous), “Languages,” “Occupation,” “Company,” “School,” “City of Residence,” “Favorite music,” “Favorite Singer,” and “Sexual Orientation.”

Tinder also includes a “Get to Know Me” section, featuring details such as zodiac sign, education level, family planning, COVID-19 vaccination status, MBTI personality type, preferred communication methods (e.g., phone, video call, text), love expression styles (e.g., gifts, words of affirmation), and blood type. Additionally, the “Lifestyle” section covers information on pets, drinking and smoking habits, fitness activity, dietary preferences, social media use, and sleep patterns (e.g., early bird, night owl).

During the matching process, the user's profile photo is the first item visible. In the bottom-left corner, Tinder displays the user's names, age, and a brief “About Me” description or relationship goals. A small upward arrow icon is shown in the bottom-right corner, which can be tapped to reveal the full user profile.

When scanning various users' profiles, one can determine the liking or not by swiping right on a profile to express interest or swiping left to dismiss the currently navigated profile. A mutual right swipe between two users would be detected by the app and hence marked with a prompt showing “match.” Upon each match, both parties (or just one) may initiate a private conversation using the in-app messaging function.

Because once a profile is dismissed, one can never have access to it. Due to this limitation, to maximize the access to potential samples during data collection, the researcher would create two brand new accounts representing one female and one male user on Tinder.

Data Analysis and Presentation of the Findings

Frequency Analysis

Frequency analysis is used to describe and summarize how often different values of a variable occur in a dataset. It is the most commonly used statistical approach for analyzing categorical data, providing basic information such as counts and percentages for each category. This allows researchers to understand patterns, distributions, and common features within the data (Field, 2024).

In this study, frequency distributions are presented to illustrate the relative occurrences of various visual features. The categorical variables examined include sexuality, emojis, physical features, photo angle and distance (RQs 1–3, 5–6). Frequency counts are used to calculate how often these variables appear among male and female users on dating platforms.

Chi-Square Tests Analysis

The chi-square test of independence is a non-parametric statistical method used to examine whether there is a statistically significant association between two categorical variables. It is commonly employed when both variables are nominal or ordinal and is particularly useful in content analysis and survey research involving binary or grouped data (Field, 2024).

In the present study, chi-square tests of independent would be conducted to examine the association between gender and other nominal variables examined in RQs 1–3, 5–6), sexuality, emojis, physical features, photo angle and distance.

Independent Samples t-Tests

The independent samples t-test is a statistical method used to compare the means of two unrelated groups to determine whether the difference between them is statistically significant. This test is appropriate when the independent variable consists of two distinct categories, such as male and female users, and the dependent variable is measured on an interval or ratio scale (Field, 2024).

In the present study, the continuous variables include the number of photos in profiles (RQ4). The independent samples t-test was used to examine whether there is significant gender-based differences photos are presented for self-presentation (RQ4). The application of this test aligns with the study's objective of exploring gender-based variations in linguistic behavior for self-presentation of online dating profiles.

The above statistical analysis will be conducted using SPSS 22.

Finding

Visual Analysis

Sexuality

A chi-square test was conducted to examine whether sexualized self-presentation differed by gender. As shown in Table 1, there was a statistically significant association between gender and self-sexualization.

Table 1
Sexuality by Gender

		Sexuality		Total
		no	yes	
Gender	male	401(95%)	22 (5%)	423
	female	390 (77%)	119 (23%)	509
Total		791	141	932
Pearson Chi-Square		P = .000		

Table 1 demonstrates a significant gender-based contrast in the use of sexuality-related images on dating app profiles. Among male users (n = 423), only 5% (22 profiles) included images featuring revealing clothing or sexual gestures, while the vast majority (95%) did not. In contrast, female users (n = 509) were considerably more likely to include such imagery, with 23% (119 profiles) displaying sexuality-related content and 77% (390 profiles) not doing so.

This marked disparity indicates that female users are over four times more likely than male users to present sexuality-related images in their profiles. The association between gender and the use of such images is statistically significant, as confirmed by a Pearson Chi-Square test (P = .000), suggesting that gender is strongly related to visual self-presentation strategies involving sexual cues on dating platforms.

Partial Physical Features

A chi-square test was used to evaluate gender differences in the presentation of specific body parts in profile photos. As shown in Table 4.2, there was a statistically significant association between gender and partial physical features.

Table 2

Partial Physical Features by Gender

		Body part focused		Total
		no	yes	
Gender	male	389 (92%)	34 (8%)	423
	female	492 (97%)	17 (3%)	509
Total		881	51	932
Pearson Chi-Square		P = .002		

Table 2 illustrates a statistically significant gender difference in the focus on specific body parts in dating app profile photos. Among male users (n = 423), 8% (34 profiles) included images that emphasized particular body features, whereas 92% (389 profiles) did not. In contrast, only 3% (17 profiles) of female users (n = 509) highlighted body parts in their images, while the remaining 97% (492 profiles) refrained from such visual focus.

This pattern suggests that male users are more than twice as likely as female users to emphasize specific body features in their self-presentations. The association between gender and body-part-focused imagery is statistically significant, as supported by a Pearson Chi-Square test (P = .002), indicating that gender plays a notable role in shaping how users curate visual elements of their dating profiles.

Emojis

A chi-square test was conducted to evaluate differences between genders in emoji use. As shown in Table 3, there was no significant association between gender and Emojis.

Table 3

Emojis Use in Profile

		Emoji		Total
		No present	Present	
Gender	male	80	20	100
	female	77	23	100
Total		157	43	200
Pearson Chi-Square		P = .606		

Table 3 presents the distribution of emoji usage in dating app profile texts across genders. Among male users (n = 100), 20% (20 profiles) included emojis in their profiles, while 80% (80 profiles) did not. Similarly, among female users (n = 100), 23% (23 profiles) used emojis, with the remaining 77% (77 profiles) choosing not to.

This slight variation suggests that female users were marginally more inclined to use emojis than male users. However, the difference was not statistically significant, as indicated by the Pearson Chi-Square test result (P = .606). Therefore, gender does not appear to be a determining

factor in emoji usage on dating app profiles, implying that the use of emojis as a self-presentation strategy is relatively consistent across genders.

Number of Profile Photos

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the number of profile photos uploaded by male and female dating app users. As shown in Table 4.4, there was no significant association between male ($M = 5.80$, $SD = 2.207$) and female ($M = 6.29$, $SD = 2.071$).

Table 4

Numbers of Profile Photos by Gender(t-test)

Gender	Total number of photos	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-Test
Male (N = 100)	423	5.80	2.207	t = -1.619, p = 0.107 > 0.05
Female (N = 100)	509	6.29	2.071	

Table 4 presents the results of an independent samples t-test examining gender differences in the number of profile photos. The analysis indicated no significant difference between male and female users in the total number of photos uploaded ($p = .107$). However, when examining the type of images users selected, a separate analysis revealed a significant gender difference in body-focused photos. Male users displayed a higher number of body-focused images ($M = 5.80$, $SD = 2.207$) compared to female users ($M = 6.29$, $SD = 2.071$). This suggests that although overall photo quantity does not differ by gender, male users are more likely to emphasize their bodies in visual self-presentation.

Angles

To assess whether photo angles differed between genders, a chi-square test was used. As shown in Table 5, there was a statistically significant association between gender and photo angles.

Table 5

Photo Angle Preferences in Profile

		Angle			Total
		High	Eye-level	Low	
Gender	Male	45 (11%)	316(75%)	62(15%)	423
	Female	113(22%)	367(72%)	29(6%)	509
Total		158	683	91	932
Pearson Chi-Square		P = .000			

Table 5 illustrates a significant gender-based distinction in the choice of photo angles used in dating app profiles. Among male users ($n = 423$), the majority (75%) opted for eye-level shots, followed by 15% who used low-angle photos and only 11% who used high-angle shots. In contrast, female users ($n = 509$) showed a different pattern, with a higher proportion using high-angle photos (22%), while 72% chose eye-level angles and just 6% opted for low-angle shots.

These results suggest that female users are twice as likely as male users to present themselves using high-angle photos, a stylistic choice often associated with visual cues of approachability or vulnerability. Meanwhile, male users more frequently employed low-angle shots, which may convey dominance or confidence. The association between gender and angle choice was found to be statistically significant, as indicated by the Pearson Chi-Square test ($P = .000$), supporting

the notion that visual framing strategies on dating platforms are influenced by gendered self-presentation norms.

Distance

A chi-square test was conducted to explore distance framing (close, medium, full body) in profile photos. As shown in Table 6, there was a statistically significant association between gender and distance.

Table 6

Photo Distance Selection in Profile

		Distance			Total
		Medium	Full body	Close	
Gender	Male	217 (51.3%)	73(17.3%)	133 (31.4%)	423
	Female	225 (44.2%)	81(15.9%)	203 (39.9%)	509
Total		442	154	336	932
Pearson Chi-Square		P =.026			

Table 6 reveals a statistically significant difference between male and female users in their preferred photo distances on dating app profiles. Among male users (n = 423), the most common photo type was medium distance (51.3%), followed by close-up shots (31.4%) and full-body images (17.3%). Female users (n = 509), in contrast, displayed a higher tendency toward close-up photos, with 39.9% of their profiles featuring such images. Medium distance was the second most common (44.2%), while full-body photos accounted for 15.9%.

These results suggest that female users are more likely to use close-up photos, which may emphasize facial expressions and emotional accessibility, whereas male users more frequently rely on medium-distance images, possibly to balance self-representation between facial and bodily cues. The association between gender and photo distance was statistically significant (P = .026), indicating that gender influences not only the content but also the framing choices users make in crafting their visual self-presentations on dating platforms.

Discussion and Conclusion

A Summary

This study examined gendered visual self-presentation on dating applications by analyzing 200 Tinder profiles. The results revealed consistent gendered patterns across six visual variables. Female users were more likely to use sexualized images, close-up frames, and high-angle selfies, whereas male users tended to emphasize body parts, adopt medium-distance shots, and favor low-angle photos. These findings echo previous research by Konings et al. (2024), Sedgewick et al. (2017), and Merlyn et al. (2024), all of which suggest that online dating spaces are performative arenas where traditional gender norms are visually enacted. Compared to earlier studies, this research confirms that traditional gender styles still shape how people present themselves—men tend to show dominance, while women focus more on being attractive and emotionally approachable. The lack of significant differences in emoji use and number of photos is also consistent with Casañ-Pitarch (2020), who found that people use symbolic elements like emojis in various and sometimes unpredictable ways in online dating.

Interpreting Gendered Visual Strategies and Communication Behavior

This study finds that gender identity construction on dating apps largely reinforces traditional gender norms. Female users' frequent use of high-angle selfies and close-up shots aligns with conventional ideals of femininity—emotional expressiveness, visual approachability, and petite appearance. In contrast, male users favor low-angle and medium-distance shots, projecting dominance, confidence, and strength—traits associated with hegemonic masculinity. These visual strategies both reflect internalized gender ideologies and serve as deliberate tactics to meet perceived expectations of the opposite sex. As supported by Merlyn et al. (2024) and Kapidzic and Herring (2015), such patterns indicate that users craft profiles based on socially accepted standards of attractiveness.

Gendered visual behaviors reflect broader dynamics in online dating. Female users often signal emotional availability and relational readiness, while male users emphasize independence and strength to assert social value and align with stereotypical female preferences. These asymmetries indicate that dating app interactions remain influenced by offline gender roles, with users performing gender to express identity and attract romantic attention.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research design was limited to content analysis without access to the users' intentions or rationales behind their profile choices. This constraint prevents us from understanding whether these visual strategies are deliberate, habitual, or socially learned. Without follow-up interviews or ethnographic insights, the interpretive depth remains limited. Second, the sample included only 100 male users and 100 female users. Although the numbers were balanced, the sample size may have been insufficient to reveal statistically meaningful differences. Third, the scope focused solely on visual content, textual elements were excluded from this analysis.

Future research could integrate qualitative interviews or surveys to explore users' motivations and perceptions. Including non-heteronormative profiles and cross-platform comparisons would also expand the generalizability of findings. In addition, adopting multimodal analysis across time could reveal how visual gender performances evolve with shifting societal norms.

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