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## Dating in Japan never used to be this difficult — or creepy

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[ARTICLE HISTORY](#) | MAY 4, 2015

I know, I know (わかってるって, *wakatterutte*). It's spring, which follows that this is the *ren'ai no kisetsu* (恋愛の季節, season of love) all over the archipelago.

It's actually one of the few times in the year when it's OK to think about love, sex and all the garnishings. We've been given the green light, not just from the *hanami* (花見, cherry blossom-viewing party) festivities but the way the *nakazuri kōkoku* (中塗り広告, subway and train advertisements) are beseeching the women of Japan to lose all body hair, immediately.

Some of these ads are breathtakingly straightforward: the single word *waki* (ワキ, armpits) or *ninoude* (二の腕, upper arms) printed smack in the middle of the ad. Others are even more audacious, exhorting women to clear their *bui zōn* (Vゾーン, V-zones) before bikini season comes around, or else. So much for the Japanese feminine mystique.

Maybe it's just me, but you get the feeling that unless you have pore-less, hairless *akachan no yōna hada* (赤ちゃんのような肌, baby-like skin), you won't even be allowed on the beach, much less be able to snag a *kareshi* (彼氏, boyfriend). Shouldn't the women *getto suru* (ゲットする, get) some eligible *ikemen* (イケメン, good-looking guy) before hot-footing it to the nearest *esute* (エステ, beauty salon) for the *datsumō* (脱毛, hair-removal) treatment course and facial massage?

My younger friend Izumi sighed, gave me a long, pitying look and said: "*Imadoki, deai nante nain dakara. Esute itte konkatsu pātii ikanai to ren'ai mo dekinai jidai nanoyo!*" (今どき、出会いなんてないんだから。エステ行って婚活パーティーいかないと、恋愛もできない時代なのよ! "These days, it's impossible to just meet someone. In order to have a relationship, I have to go to the beauty salon, and then I have to go to matchmaking parties, otherwise I'll never cut it!")

Izumi is 33, smart, pretty — and sexy to boot. But she hasn't had a relationship in four years, and knows that once she hits 35, the odds of finding a serious boyfriend will be worse than on a bad day at *Ōi Keibajō* (大井競馬場, Ohi Race Track).

Just so you know, singlehood has hit an all-time high in Japan, especially among men. According to a survey conducted by the News Post Seven website, over 70 percent of Japanese males in their 20s don't have girlfriends. Recruit Inc.'s Bridal Research Institute says that 35 percent of men in their 20s and 30s have never once had a relationship. Nearly 30 percent of men in their early 30s are virgins. The numbers are slightly better for women, but it's a bad, bad time to be out there in the dating scene.

Twenty years ago it was easy: You put on makeup, you went to one of the *kurabu* (クラブ, clubs), you wound up in the morning with a stranger in your bed. Rinse and repeat. Now, says Izumi, one-night stands are a criminal waste of time and precious estrogen supplies. Dating should *always* begin with an elaborately polite process that includes exchanging *meishi* (名刺, business cards) and a full stating of the man's intentions. Says Izumi: "*Mazu, aite ni kekkonganbō ga aru ka shiraberu. Sono tsugi wa, aite ga uwakisō ka, mikiwameru.*" (まず、相手に結婚願望があるか調べる。その次は、相手が浮気性か、見極める。"First, find out whether the guy is marriage-minded. Next, decide if he's the type to cheat.")

Which brings the discussion to the latest trend in the ever-fascinating world of Japanese womanhood: *oitsume joshi* (追い詰め女子). Roughly translated, it means a woman who's always keeping tabs on her man. Another word for these women are *kanshikamera joshi* (監視カメラ女子, surveillance-camera women).

Apparently, these ladies have a built-in panic button that activates whenever they sense an incident of *uwaki* (浮気, cheating), and they will go to the ends of the Earth to confirm the hard facts and confront the men — in the manner of a cop interrogating a suspect under the glare of a hot lamp.

Armed with their *sumaho* (スマホ, smartphones) and relying on their *onna no kan* (女の勘, female instinct), these women will send dozens of messages in the space of a couple of hours, all of which are along the lines of "*Ima, doko ni iru no?*" (今どこにいるの? "Where are you now?") and "*Dare to nani o shiteiru no?*" (誰と何をしているの? "Who are you with and what are you doing?"). If he hasn't replied at this point, the man had better be injured, unconscious or dead.

Contrary to what you might think, many Japanese men are completely into the surveillance thing. My young cousin Naoki says: "*Oitsumerareru to ore no koto aishiterundanatte wakaru.*" (追い詰められると俺のこと愛してるんだなってわかる, "I know I'm loved when she keeps tabs on my whereabouts.")

Thank God I'm out of this game, because I wouldn't last a single day. *Muri, muri* (無理、無理, "Can't do it, no way").

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