# Male Strategic Self-Representation Using Language on Online Dating Sites

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Background

• Online dating has developed into a 1667 million industry with 340 million users. 1 in 3 Americans claims to have met online

• These recent advances fit with old philosophical questions on how humans change self-representation based on situation (Goffman, 1959)

• In online dating, this increasingly takes on the form of a 'Relationshopping' where users market themselves as products in a catalogue who need to be memorable (for the romantic prospect)

• A standard dating profile usually facilitates this through 3 parts- Photos, Self-Summary and the Fixed Responses Section

QUESTION: Are these observable differences in the way men

1. Profile Photo

2. Self-Summary Essay

3. Fixed Form Response
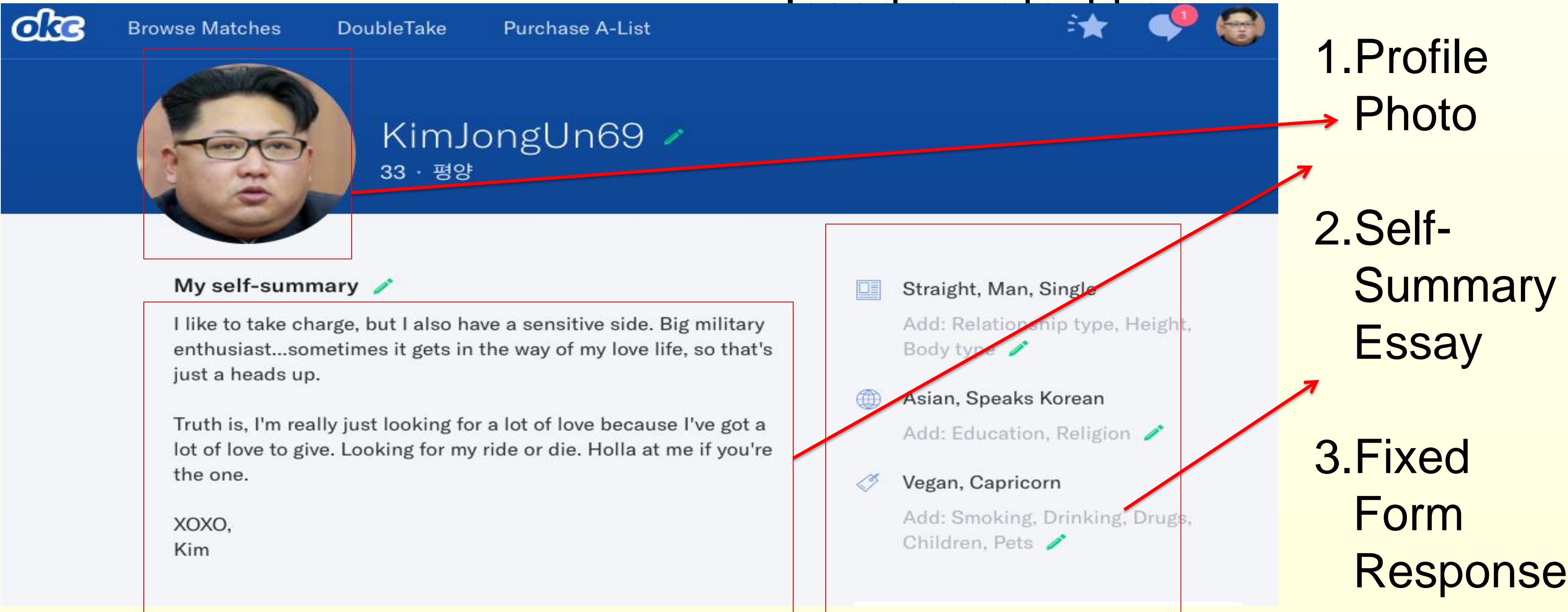
• Profile photos continue to hold highest importance for both sexes

• Studies show female users place more importance on self summary relative to men on women's self-summaries

• Men who may have been at a disadvantage due to aspects of their photos and fixed responses) can strategically 'compensate' in the way they write self-summaries

Data

• Publicly open and anonymized profile data for 59,946 users of OkCupid from the San Francisco region that were extracted with permission. The data set includes "typical user information, lifestyle variables, and text responses to 10 essay questions" (ibid).

• These have been filtered down to 18,830 men with complete profiles for the essay and our four variables of interest- (education, height, weight or race)

## Men's Profiles Are (Usually) Short and Simple

Men's profiles are on average highly skewed on most measures of writing sentence complexity, so we rely on medians

Methods to Dig Deeper

This paper relies on unsupervised machine learning algorithms applied on text data.

Topic Modeling using Nonnegative Matrix Factorization (NMF) generates 25 discernible topics (following identification by Juan Shishido) . For each category of our variable of interest, (in this case, education) we then check for proportions of male users who use that topic

They Talk About the Same Things, Regardless of Education
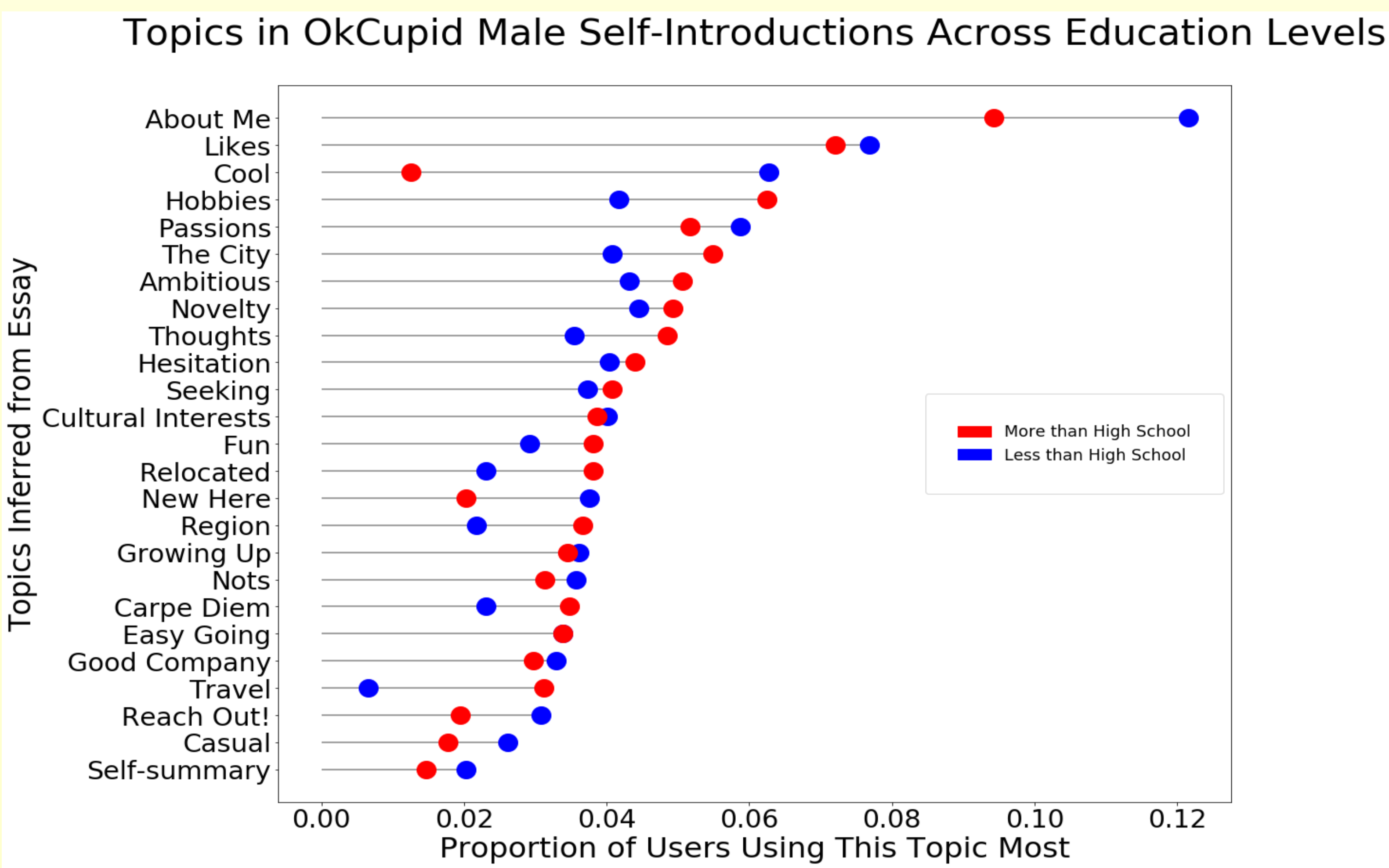
There is no significant difference in the way in which educated men (with more than a high school diploma) use any of the 25 topics. This pattern holds true for other variables like height, fitness level and race.

They Even Talk About These Topics in the Same Way

Conclusion

At the macro-level, there does not appear to be a systematic trend to how male users of the selected demographics include different content in their online profiles than general users.

Limitations

The study relies on only one of the essays, while users may have deliberated allocated different aspects of their self-representation across 9 essays

These data were drawn from 2012, when strategic thinking may not have arisen in full force

There are no details of interactions based on these profiles, so we cannot know which ones 'worked' in initiating conversations with romantic prospects

Due to absence of any follow-up interviews, it is impossible to measure whether the specific choice of words was aimed at authenticity, or matches with an awareness of 'relationshopping'

References

Goffman, Erving. (1959). The presentation of self in everyday life. Garden City, N.Y. :Doubleday,

Heino, R. D., Ellison, N. B., & Gibbs, J. L. (2010). Relationshopping: Investigating the market metaphor in online dating. Journal of Social and Personal relationships, 27(4), 427-447.