



## Not myself tonight: subjunctive selves and the in-sincerity of service in Japanese queer nightlife

Marcello Francioni

**To cite this article:** Marcello Francioni (2023): Not myself tonight: subjunctive selves and the in-sincerity of service in Japanese queer nightlife, *Asian Anthropology*, DOI: [10.1080/1683478X.2023.2178098](https://doi.org/10.1080/1683478X.2023.2178098)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/1683478X.2023.2178098>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 07 Mar 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 54



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# Not myself tonight: subjunctive selves and the in-sincerity of service in Japanese queer nightlife

Marcello Francioni 

SOAS University of London, United Kingdom

## ABSTRACT

What is the relationship between truth, sense of self and being a professional in Japanese queer nightlife? For service industry professionals' spontaneity is not a fruitful quality to cultivate to establish oneself. Instead, commitment to customers' satisfaction and adaptability to their wants, needs and grudges are considered by customers and providers to be paramount qualities of a service professional. Drawing on my ethnography at Japanese-style gay bars in Shinjuku Ni-chōme (Tokyo) and other Japanese urban centers, and from studies on the Japanese self, religious practice and authenticity, I propose in-sincerity as an analytical tool to describe how service professionals orient their practice. At Japanese-style gay bars, in-sincerity represents a strict approach to work involving withdrawing parts of one's self and concocting subjunctive selves (customized versions of one's self that occupied an illusive 'as if' dimension) for customers' entertainment. The co-creation and reproduction of bar legends at Zenith bar exemplifies the surfacing of these subjunctive selves by inextricably entangling factual information and the imaginary worlds of both service professionals and customers.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 26 August 2022  
Accepted 20 January 2023

## KEYWORDS

Japan; Queer Nightlife;  
Sincerity; Insincerity

When speaking entails telling the truth, how could there not be a kind of fundamental pact imposed on everyone who speaks that they speak the truth because they believe it to be true?

Michel Foucault (2005, 366)

Lie to me and say my booty gettin' bigger even if it ain't/Love me even if it rain/Love me even if it pain you/ ... Open your heart up/Hoping I'll never find out that you're anyone else/ ... You'll never love me but/I believe you when you say it like that

SZA, *Garden (Say it like dat)* (2017)

## Introduction

Four months had passed since I started conducting my fieldwork at Zenith. It was a tiny gay bar, located at the 5th floor of a busy crossroads in Shinjuku Ni-chōme,

**CONTACT** Marcello Francioni  [mf65@soas.ac.uk](mailto:mf65@soas.ac.uk)  SOAS University of London, United Kingdom.

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

Tokyo's biggest queer nightlife area. I felt that I had made steady progress as a bar help (*miseko*).<sup>1</sup> I had learned how to pour and serve drinks correctly, I could remember regular customers' preferred mixers, and had learned enough songs to enjoy karaoke with them. I felt more comfortable behind the counter, and the prospect of a busy night felt exciting rather than worrisome. It thus came as a surprise when Tazu – Zenith's manager, my boss, and my main gatekeeper – while tidying the counter on a quiet Tuesday night, stated, "I meant to tell you, I appreciate your being considerate with the customers (*hairyo*). Holding back is a good quality, but it's no good for business, and I would like you to get rid of that" (*sutete hoshi*).

Consideration in the form of not wishing to impose on others, or polite reluctance (*hairyo*), is considered an integral part of politeness in Japan. It entails that any offer must be first turned down in order to then be accepted. I had come to appreciate this, and eventually made this quality mine, to the delight of the Japanese around me. Tazu's request to throw away that very habit to prioritize Zenith's business, especially when I thought that politeness was a paramount quality in the Japanese service industry, left me confused and suddenly too shy to ask for any further explanation. My experience at Zenith was constellated by several moments like this, where my attempt to understand Ni-chōme's gay bar culture was bombarded by seemingly contradictory and confusing messages from those around me, without necessarily feeling as though the atmosphere or the moment was appropriate for unpacking my doubts.

Tazu's request to throw away my reluctance echoed in my head a few months later, while witnessing the tireless efforts of the two bar helpers who worked a Woosh, a gay bar in Ni-chōme associated with Zenith. We visited the venue after our closing time, and even at 5 a.m. it was busy. The two bar helpers were running from one end to the other of the counter, talking to the customers, singing, shouting catchphrases and drinking. They were trying to increase revenues by playing furious drinking games with customers or downing customers' glasses, forcing them to buy more. Their foreheads were covered in pearls of sweat but their level of energy remained high. In the midst of that, just for a second, I caught a glimpse of one of the bar helpers taking a brief break. He put his hands on the counter, caught a breath and his facial expression collapsed, letting a visible sense of exhaustion take over his face. It was only a flash, and he immediately composed himself. That sight impressed me so much that I had to discuss it with Tazu, whose quick and severe response was, "that's what you're supposed to do!" How did they manage to keep that level of energy, when they were visibly on the brink of exhaustion? Were Woosh's bar helpers simply "faking it," or was their committed act of faking conversely a sign of their sincere motives as service providers?

I conducted my research at Zenith bar for 10 months between 2016 and 2017, working as a bar help (*miseko*) while also visiting as a customer in other gay bars in Shinjuku Ni-chōme and Nakano ward, a residential neighborhood in Western Tokyo, as well as in urban Sapporo, Sendai and Osaka. Most gay bars in Ni-chōme, Zenith included, were described as Japanese-style gay bars (*nihon-shiki geibā*), in that they displayed practices of serving and social drinking considered specifically Japanese. The preferred way of drinking featured the purchase of a bottle of spirits (usually Japanese barley vodka, or *shōchū*) to be stored at the bar and accessed upon every visit at a set

price, instead of ordering each drink separately, as is usual at Western-style bars (see Ishida 2006, for a more detailed review of the economic set-up of Japanese-style gay bars in Ni-chōme). The bars' rigid etiquette required staff members to toast and drink with the customers, for the most part Japanese, male-bodied and gay, and to entertain them across the counter through conversation, karaoke, and drinking games for hours at times. Entertainment by the staff counted as much, if not more, than the drinking at these venues.

I started helping out at Zenith after Tazu asked me to join his staff the first time we were introduced. I represented an interesting addition to the Zenith bar, he maintained, that might prevent him from getting bored with the routine, and keep the customers interested in the bar. Albeit apparently supportive of my endeavor, I often sensed that he did not fully understand why I found gay bars in Tokyo of any interest compared to other, more 'respectable' aspects of Japanese culture. That said, he never failed to introduce me as the researcher from London who was learning about the culture of Ni-chōme, a fact that always generated conversation. My role at Zenith was to help Tazu deliver satisfactory service to the customers two nights a week while I collected data for my doctoral research. I did so through participant observation as a service provider and as a customer. I collected semi-structured informal interviews, but the bulk of my data set originates from what I term "diffused informal interviews": the different conversations I was simultaneously involved in while at work (hence, *diffused*), and that I managed to transcribe after my shifts. All real names and nicknames for my interlocutors at Zenith have been anonymized, as has the bar name itself.

I recognize a strong autoethnographic pull in my research (see Ellis and Bochner [2000]). Presenting my own experience was never the object of my research, but my style of data collection required that I heavily relied on my own recollection of conversations and episodes around me. My experience as a bar help, with all the laughs, drinks, encounters, errors and unease, is the framework I employ to retrace the heuristic process of anthropological knowledge-making. Like other anthropological researchers (Ellis 2004, 33), I felt an urge to document those fieldwork experiences that challenged "the construction of meaning I have put together for myself." I therefore embraced autoethnography's call for a fully involved narration of the ethnographic experience.

This article recounts episodes from my fieldwork to highlight the relationship that service providers entertain with their professional selves and with truth in the context of Japanese queer nightlife. Following the example of Takeyama's (2016) study on Tokyo male hosts, Fanasca's (2019) work on FtM crossdressing escorts in Akihabara, and Koch's research on Japan's sex work industry (2020), my research focuses on the impact that working in nightlife has on nightlife professionals' sense of self. Ethnographies of Japanese nightlife such as Anne Allison's *Nightwork* (1994), along with studies by Moriyama (2012), Shikano (2015) and Sunagawa (2015) on gay nightlife in Shinjuku Ni-chōme and Tokyo at large, have tended to focus more on the effects that gender dynamics, the economic and historical background, and the atmosphere of straight and queer Japanese nightlife have on customers' senses of self and belonging, rather than on those of service providers. Finally, more recent works, such as Baudinette's (2021) research on the Japanese gay media landscape and Yuen's

(2020) ethnography of drinking parties (*ofukai*) by and for FtM trans people in Japan, represent useful counterparts to this account, by illustrating respectively the pressure Japanese gay men face to ascribe to homonormative body and personality types presented in printed and social media, and showcasing other drinking arenas where queer masculinities are socially constructed.

Drawing from anthropological and historical studies of religious practice and of the Japanese self, I propose *in-sincerity*<sup>2</sup> as an analytical tool to explore this relationship. The staff at Zenith and other Japanese-style gay bars in Shinjuku Ni-chōme professed a work ethics that did not necessarily, or directly, celebrate sincerity and frankness, that is, a unity of thought, action and words alongside one's social role (Trilling 1972). Instead, they were able to display in-sincerity and to practice a work ethic of committedly withdrawing parts of themselves and conjuring *subjunctive selves* (Seligman et al. 2008), namely customized versions of themselves that occupied an illusive dimension of "could be" and "as if" for the sake of the customers' entertainment. I was able to retrace the surfacing of these subjunctive selves at Zenith when I witnessed the creation of legends about staff members that blurred the lines between their own lives and their imaginary worlds, as well as their customers' imaginary worlds. Through the conjuring of subjunctive selves, the staff's in-sincerity provided customers with a pleasant and interactive experience tailored to their needs, wishes, expectations, and even grudges, making them, in turn, co-creators of the staff's subjunctive selves.

Any discussion of the construction of self (whether for commercial purposes or not) owes an immense debt to Judith Butler's concept of performativity (1990). It is no mystery that Japanese society heavily relies on individuals embodying their roles through the tireless repetition and accumulation of small acts of self-disciplining, especially when these relate to the molding of gendered, heterosexual and middle-class citizens. Mothers are expected to prepare healthy and visually pleasing *bentō* boxes every day for their pre-school children (Allison 1991), while white-collar workers should wait for their superior to go home before they leave their desks and participate in team-bonding events (Dasgupta 2012). The discussion presented here takes inspiration from Butler's performativity and attempts to open its scope from heteronormativity alone – what Fushimi Noriaki also calls the "hetero system" (1991) – to accommodate broader processes that involve the redefinition of one's sense of self through incremental felicitous acts.

The vast literature on the "Japanese self" presents numerous well-known concepts to illustrate how interactions are shaped in Japan: *tatema* versus *honne* (social façade versus true intentions), *omote* versus *ura* (front versus back), *uchi* versus *soto* (in-group versus out-group), among others.<sup>3</sup> These dyads are often presented as acting in rigid binary opposition, separating an allegedly true, inner self-presented for a selected few, as opposed to an allegedly approximative self-presented for the world. Elsewhere, the quasi-schizophrenic positioning of these elements inside individuals is provided as proof of the lack of any unitary frame of reference altogether (Kondo 1990). I find such configurations limiting when analyzing how service providers harvest their professional selves and work ethic. They were not hiding from customers or incapable of articulating cohesive selves. Rather, they were constantly and consciously fine-tuning how much they needed to share in order to leave room for their counterparts as well to infuse their own expectations and wishes, as a matter of agility or dexterity.

For these reasons, I have chosen to avoid engaging with rigidly contrastive or strictly post-modern conceptualizations of selfhood and social interaction in Japan, and have opted for more dynamic, malleable ones. In particular, Jane Bachnik's (1992) study of *kejime* has informed my approach. There, *kejime* is presented as the ability to navigate social interactions by constantly reassessing power dynamics and one's role based on how seating inside the home was configured to welcome new guests. Additionally, Joy Hendry's (1989, 1994) work on wrapping items and gifts seems to point in the same direction. Social situations and relationships determine how objects (or selves, in this case) are presented for the enjoyment of others, and wrapping communicates that meaning in a symbolic way, without need of uncovering the actual content. Sometimes, wrapping outvalues content. The attention in both authors is not on ascertaining what is presented once and for all (the content of the gift, or one's role in the household), but on the potential to tighten social relationships by displaying an attitude that matches the intended outcome (the 'right' wrapping, the 'right' seating to show respect for the newest guest).

Perhaps the tension between oppositional and interactive modes of interpreting the Japanese self – and the professional selves of Japanese nightlife workers in particular – may point at what Webb Keane describes as the unresolved tension in anthropological praxis and in Western epistemology at large between “intentionalistic” and “effective” modalities of language (2007, 182). In the former, utterances must be either true or false, and must describe something “out there.” In the latter, instead, utterances are used to induce change or actions in the world (183). The obsession with the “transparency of language” and action must be abandoned when the researcher “no longer feel[s] they can intuit whether other people ‘mean what they say’” and is immersed in “talk that must be purchased, that is treated as a burden to be taken on by others ... or that simply seems unbelievable” (202). In other words, when dealing with Japanese queer nightlife – or any fieldwork – it is necessary to adopt a perspective that allows us to go beyond “the presumption of our collapsing the real and the true” (Crapanzano 1980, 23) and accounts for the “infusion of desire into reality” (7).

In-sincerity was deployed when service providers avoided the mandate of truth-telling in their interactions as a form of care toward their customers (Foucault [1989] 2005). Instead of being sincere (communicating the *true*), staff at Zenith summoned ever-shifting subjunctive selves for the entertainment of customers (focusing on the *real*). Practising in-sincerity required strenuous training in order for the individual to better perform and understand their role in the service industry (Mahmood 2001). This quest, in the case of Japanese queer nightlife, was not devoid of cynicism, as both customers and staff members were explicitly seeking after restless commitment and flexibility to engender the most entertaining experience, rather than focusing on the reliability that the ever-shifting selves presented. As Harumi Befu sardonically notes in his *Ethnography of Dinner Entertainment in Japan*:

Both hosts and guests are supposed to say what they do not mean, that they are supposed to know that they are supposed to say what they do not mean, and moreover that they each know what the others really meant to say but did not say without being told. Hosts and guests are thus in collusion, acting out their parts in the everyday drama of Japanese social life (1974, 197).

## Personal legends for subjunctive Selves

Tazu's frustrated response after my reaction to the admirable commitment of Woosh's bar-helpers reminded me of a sentence he uttered during an interview in his usual enigmatic style. "Your problem" he stated, and then paused while attentively inspecting a glass, "is that there's too much of yourself (*jibun ga arisugiru*) in your work" (interview, 6 July 2017). If interacting with customers along the lines of my personality – the only one I knew – was deemed an unfeasible business plan, how else was I to behave? Maybe the polite reluctance (*hairyo*) Tazu asked me to throw aside was precluding me from achieving the kind of committed service that the staff at Woosh so brilliantly displayed. There was no holding back there, bottles were being emptied and replaced at a fast pace, with great enjoyment (mixed with slight bewilderment) of the customers. Reluctance was perfect for polite conversation, but nightlife required a separate set of interpersonal skills, especially for service professionals. To learn how not to pull back but to access different versions of myself to best suit the customer in front of me, I had to shed some of *my self*. We are used to the idea that learning is about accumulating experience and knowledge. Instead, I was being asked to throw away part of that in order to learn. To be successful in nightlife the person you normally are may not be the best fit. I did not deem myself terrible at being a bar help, nor too good to be in nightlife. I realized, nonetheless, that the regular me was not perfectly in tune with my role at Zenith.

Making sure that there is not too much of yourself in your work, that you are sincerely and professionally "faking it," that is, "faking it" for the sake of displaying your availability towards your customers, entails a delicate balancing act of sharing and withholding. In her study of Indianism, or amateur re-enactment of Native American lifeworlds in Europe, Petra Kalshoven states that practitioners remain in a state of constant "moral breakdown" throughout their re-enactments, that is, they "constantly assess the quality of their performance" (2015, 562) to ensure the smoothest and most enjoyable experience for everyone around them. Similarly, Jarrett Zigon (2007), in his study of everyday ethics in urban Russia, states that moral breakdown is a reflexive state that arises when people are asked to choose a course of action that is seen as right in their environment while balancing what is generally expected in a similar situation with what they want to achieve.

Complete spontaneity of action, and the spontaneity of your personality, Tazu was telling me, was not the most fruitful quality to harness because it would not allow the intact maintenance of the delicate fantasy served at Zenith.<sup>4</sup> This withdrawal of the heart, as we may call it, requires instead a constant attention and effort, or emotional labor (Hochschild 2012, 7). The service professionals around me managed to maintain this balance between being in the moment and withdrawing themselves, on the one hand, by making sure there was not too much of themselves in their work, while actively stressing, on the other hand, only those parts that allowed them to create a connection with their customer.

I noticed a tendency among staff members around me to provide customers with a series of anecdotes about themselves, or as I renamed them, legends. Although talking constituted *the* tool for doing business in Japanese nightlife, I initially struggled to attribute the right heuristic value to these legends, as I could not discern which

fragments of conversation belonged to any of the realm of “information (*jōhō*),” “stories pertaining to information (*hanashi*)” or “gossip (*ura-banashi*, or backstage stories)” (Moeran 2006, 6). In time, I noticed that the efficacy of legends resided exactly in blurring those realms altogether.

Tazu was an extremely skillful legend-maker in that sense. The stories of his sex adventures at gay saunas around Tokyo, recollected with vivid and precise detail, never ceased to entertain the customers. Although he had recently announced he was no longer interested in sex, he had consolidated such a reputation as a “perv” (*hentai*) that customers kept asking him to tell legends of his adventures, and he obliged. Customers never contested the truthfulness of his legends, even when they took absurdly grotesque turns.

In order to generate a steady stream of entertainment, Tazu also jumped in on conversations by concocting sex stories about other staff members while they were talking to customers. Whenever I was behind the counter, he and Zenith’s assistant-manager Tatsuki never failed to ask me when I last had sex, and overreact for the customers at any given answer. Another evening, Tazu looked at me and, out of the blue, addressed me in front of the customers. “You have the face of one of those guys in pornos that stand right beside other people when they’re fucking and when the top takes his cock out, he grabs it and sucks on it before putting it right back in the bottom’s hole.” I stood still, confused at the statement, while the customers thoroughly enjoyed that indirect pseudo-confession, laughing and feigning shock. Were customers getting unverifiable information (*jōhō*) regarding my tastes in bed; were they hearing a story (*hanashi*) about Tazu’s (past?) adventures; or were they simply looking for gossip (*urabanashi*: I must have done those things, look at my face)? The line could not be drawn, and Tazu had so masterfully lain his stories that any attempt at clarifying would have only made customers consider the other options more strongly. As Baudinette’s interlocutors commented regarding their experiences as customers at Ni-chōme’s gay bars, “any attempts to control one’s identity could be rejected at the first instance” (2021, 178).

Tatsuki, too, could be rather explicit in his statements. More than once, he confessed to customers that his favorite genre of porn was a series featuring groups of tops taking turns penetrating young bottoms who had just injected drugs and lost consciousness. I could not hide a surprised expression, because of his boy-next-door image and temperament, and asked if he meant it simply as a fantasy. He looked lost for a second, as if the idea of sharing actual details of his sex life with complete strangers seemed simply too outlandish to entertain. He then replied to my question with a reassuring smile, “Just as a fantasy” (*fantaji to shite ne*). Whether that was a service to me, or the truth, I was no longer able to untangle.

I even witnessed the start of a legend about me. I could not pinpoint who initiated it, but only recognize bits of conversations I entertained at the bar, collaged together. Many around me did not quite understand the use of researching Japanese gay bars; therefore, when Tazu one night jokingly stated that I was learning in order to open my own bar, the legend clicked. Customers needed an easy story to justify the presence of a White, six-foot-three foreigner researcher serving them. Now they had one. By the end of my fieldwork, whenever a customer asked about my future plans, I simply recounted the legend.

Conversation with customers, however, rarely moved beyond questions about my being a foreigner, my penis size, and my sex life (see Creighton 1991, 689). When I expressed my frustration with that, Tazu looked at me half-bored, and said, “If I were you, I’d feel lucky to be a foreigner. People only ask you the same questions. You can always talk about how you do things back home, and then ask how Japanese people do things. You wouldn’t have to make any effort to have a conversation.” Quite naively, I saw my being a foreigner in Japan as an obstacle to good service, something customers should see past. I equated the quality of my service to some inner, meta-physical quality in me to exercise and grow like a muscle.

I realized that I was overthinking. I was fixated on the idea that I had to be something *more* – more interesting, more fluent, more knowledgeable – in order to be a better service professional. Tazu was asking me to do the exact opposite: not to *do* less, but to *be* less of myself to allow customers to take the lead in how they wanted me to entertain them. Good service heavily depended on complying with customers’ wants and beliefs regarding anything, including me. Ultimately, customers were not interested in my answer, my truth or my story. They were after an answer, a version of the truth and a story that accommodated their idea of what was happening around them. The question was whether I had a problem with not telling my truth at all costs, whether I was willing to embrace different versions of myself. In all honesty, I did have a thorny and practical problem with that. My presence at Zenith as a fieldwork researcher ethically hinged on my duty to never carry on undercover research. However, I now understand that playing the role of the seemingly clueless foreigner did not constitute a form of deception toward my participants, because they asked me to play that part, and because they knew that it was not necessarily my whole, true story, just as what they told me was not necessarily true. Befu’s ethnography of mutual willful deception shows exactly that. Nevertheless, it took time, to Tazu’s undeniable frustration, for me to overcome my unease and reconcile my approach to working at Zenith with my research ethics on fieldwork.

That does not mean that, sometimes, even the most available service providers never show resistance to customers’ deployment of legends. Shun – an old colleague of Tazu, now a bar manager himself – proved this when he walked in at Zenith on a quiet weeknight. He sat at the counter, and embarked on a four-hour monologue about the old days working with Tazu. The interaction grew extremely tense as Shun started to discuss, uninterrupted, Tazu’s inconsiderate behavior as a young, ambitious bar help, who overstayed by four months his holiday in Thailand and caused endless inconveniences for his colleagues in Japan. Albeit visibly frustrated, Tazu never challenged Shun’s words.

I left Zenith at 2 a.m., while Shun was still talking. I felt sympathy for Tazu yet knew he was accustomed to demanding customers. I equally did not expect him to casually ask me, next time I saw him, if I remembered Shun. Of course I did. “Don’t believe anything that guy said about me. They’re all lies. I came back from Thailand as planned, after two months.” For all I knew, both could have lied. Shun visited Zenith every year, Tazu confessed. There were hours of old-time stories, and at closing time, Shun would try to get Tazu to pay for drinks somewhere else, but last time Tazu excused himself and went home. I did not understand why Tazu put up with such a

dysfunctional relationship and wondered whether he was trying to make amends for his past behavior. Was Shun right after all?

Eventually, I abandoned the idea of scavenging for factual truth in the legends around me. Legends did not deal in facts. If they contained any, no one seemed interested in untangling them from the more entertaining parts of verbal performance. The role of legends was to establish a starting point, a common ground for both staff and customers to know one another enough to build memories together and a sense of camaraderie – or hostility. The focus was not on factual reliability, but on the relentless availability displayed by service professionals like Tazu, Tatsuki, and the staff at Woosh bar, to validate and provide customers with an experience and interaction – a version of themselves – that was tailored to their needs, expectations, and even grudges.

Tazu's biggest complaint about my work was that I did not show enough interest in the customers, and that was what he wished I had learned from the staff at Woosh, and from himself and Tatsuki. I had a hard time building conversations with people I did not immediately resonate with, and the awkwardness was at times palpable. Tazu told me during an interview, "It's natural that you have no interest in customers you meet for the first time. They're strangers" (*tanin da kara*) (interview, 17 July 2017). The way Tazu described probably the hardest part of his job sounded over-simplistic. How could I learn to care? Not just to *take care of*, but to care *about*, the presence of someone I would normally be uninterested in?

It was not a matter of not caring enough, nor of caring too much. I was tackling the issue in the wrong way, thinking that in order to professionally take an interest in strangers (not simply *show* interest), I had to force myself to personally, sincerely like them all. That strategy was neither realistic nor effective. My enabling customers to have a good time was not a product of mutual liking. Quite the contrary: since customers wanted to have a good time, they bypassed the mutual liking by paying a cover charge and expected the staff to ensure that each customer spent a fun and enjoyable evening. Once they entered the door, people ceased to be just people, with their routines, histories, problems, and bills to pay. They became customers, something slightly different, mainly animated by their imaginary world, by their fantasies, desires, and expectations. Past or present events notwithstanding, a customer remained as such: a customer.

Tazu was not asking me to erase my personality altogether. However, I needed to make space for customers' wishes, expectations, and frustrations by getting rid of some of myself, some of my own opinions and wants. That would allow me to bring to the fore, often in exaggerated form, parts of my inner world that could create a pleasant experience for the customer. Zenith bar's legends were a way to bring those versions of one's self to the surface.

Ultimately, Tazu wanted me to learn how to create a *subjunctive self* through each interaction with customers, tailored to their needs, so that "joking, riddles, playing, dreaming, daydreaming, storytelling, lying, mythmaking" (Seligman et al. 2008, 44) between me and them could engender a "subjunctive world" (73), namely a "could be" or "as if" dimension of meaning-making (7). Customers were able to part ways with me *as if* they knew what future awaited me after fieldwork. They were able to

toast to Tatsuki's fantasies *as if* he entertained them, too, and carefully listen *as if* Tazu was still as perverted as they believed him to be. Shun was able to recriminate for hours *as if* Tazu had wronged him in the past. They all came to the bar to see their fantasies come to life, and paid a cover charge to be indulged in them. These fantasies were nothing but "an illusion, but with no attempt to deceive," because "illusions are not lies . . . . Illusion is what can be" (Seligman et al. 2008, 22). The role of service providers was not to lie to customers, but to offer the right kind of fuel for such fantasies, only the parts of their selves that allowed customers' interpretations to become the frame of reference for their interactions. Momentarily discarding the rest did not represent a defeat, but a sign of commitment to one's craft.

## Sincerity

Let us return to Befu's Japanese dinner social drama. His ethnography does not depict a dark game of mirrors where both guest and host are cunningly deceiving one another, but rather a culturally oriented mutual expectation for oneself and one's interlocutor to 'misrepresent' themselves. Service, especially in nightlife, offers a stage, an arena, where customers can experience a version of their lives repackaged in such a way that only the positive parts (or in any case what the customer wants) gain prominence, while the rest temporarily loses significance. Service providers enable such experience by actively and tirelessly sustaining versions of their own selves that best match those advanced by customers and their desires. Instead of professing a unity of intentions, thoughts, words and action in the name of truth-telling and care of one's self (*sincerity*), service providers in Japanese nightlife professionally dissociate their intentions and thoughts from their words and actions in the name of entertainment and the care of others (*in-sincerity*).

To understand in-sincerity as an analytical tool, we need to take a step back and observe how anthropology has conceptualized the practices surrounding its more celebrated counterpart, sincerity. A recurring concept in the anthropology of religion, this "sentiment of being, or sense of selfhood" received its ground definition by literary critic Lionel Trilling (1972, 72). Sincerity Trilling defines as "the avoidance of being false to any man through being true to one's own self" (Trilling 1972: 6). It is obtained through cultivation of "the 'best self'" (1972: 5), a "state of personal existence" whose goal is an inner and outer integrity, "not to be attained without the most arduous effort" (6). This ever-perfectible version of self is distinctively socially conscious in that it is reinforced by "the esteem and fair repute that follow upon the correct fulfilment of a public role" (8).

The arduous effort required of sincere individuals to ever perfect their sincerity resonates in Foucault's ([1989] 2005) discussion of *askesis* (continuous practice) in his analysis of spirituality in ancient Greece and imperial Rome. *Askesis* is "the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth" ([1989] 2005, 15). Whoever undertakes such an ascetic journey needs to become other than themselves, to bring about a radical change in the way they look at the world. From taking care of things and people outside, one's gaze must turn inwards to practice care of one's self (46).

The concept of a strenuous practice to improve one's self is not foreign to Japan, where the idea that individuals have to undergo some degree of spiritual transformation in order to become full-fledged social beings (*shakaijin*) has wide currency. The extenuating apprenticeship methods in the traditional arts involve endless repetition of sequences of acts (*kata*) that eventually become second nature for the practitioners, providing them with an embodied understanding of their work (Singleton 1998). Company retreats for new recruits have often been filled with physical challenges to test new employees' commitment and strengthen their spirit in hopes that they will return as better corporate employees (Rohlen 1973; Kondo 1990). The importance given to moral education through physical training in the curricula of Japanese high-school sports clubs points in that direction as well (Cave 2004).

As Foucault maintained, all these *askeseis* entail unlearning the incorrect ways of relating to the world by emptying the self enough to fill it with new embodied knowledge. By being always in control of one's self, one's story, and actions, truth can be sought after and communicated. In this way, intentions, actions, and words become one under the aegis of sincerity. Using words to do anything different from truth-telling turns one into a "chatterbox" (Foucault [1989] 2005, 342) and a "flatterer" (375) – roles that I, along with my colleagues, regularly performed at Zenith. One may say that we were professionally doing the exact opposite of taking care of ourselves. I allowed customers, along with Tazu, to create a legend about me, and then adopted it myself, just as Tazu did with Shun, even if it shed a negative light on him. I complied with the customers' requests, and forced myself to converse or flirt with someone I had little interest in. These were the expectations Tazu and customers alike harbored for my professional achievements.

Yet, if we follow Befu's explanation, both guest and host *expect* to be deceived, and actively enable such misrepresentation. A staged or subjunctive display of lives, dispositions, and emotions that *could be*, may be seen as an "alternative to life, like life, only better of course, a dream (or a serviceable nightmare), a way out, a recompense, a blueprint, a lesson" (Benjamin 1968, 86). If customers at Japanese-style gay bars expected service providers to sell this dream, this illusion to them, being sincere was clearly not the most effective practice of selfhood for them to succeed in Japanese queer nightlife.

### In-sincerity and the work of service

To become a successful service provider, one needs to abandon the idea of interacting with customers in terms of what is *true* to oneself, and rather embrace the potential of service in creating something *real* through the deployment of a subjunctive self that engenders the perfect experience for the customer. A successful service provider needs to be able to "fake it," as the bar helps at Woosh so selflessly did, professing their commitment to faking the best time of their life for the entertainment of their customers. Here lies the importance of in-sincerity for a discussion of the service industry, in Japan and beyond.

In her study on the production and consumption of fakes in the fashion industry, Magdalena Crăciun (2012) aptly notes that in a world "comprised of constant compromises that only ever partially realize any ideal, then in some ways ... the fake is entirely

truthful to the world” (859) in that it constitutes “a copy that does not hide its true nature” (860). Fakes may not be authentic, but in many contexts they are sincere about their not being authentic. Not only do consumers not expect fakes to “pass” as something they are not; they also seek after them exactly because they are what they are and nothing else – in other words, because of their “bounded authenticity,” as Elizabeth Bernstein would call it (2007, 6). Service providers in Japanese queer nightlife do not profess frankness and sincerity, but approach service at Japanese-style gay bars by means of an active and professionally oriented dissociation of their intentions, thoughts, and experiences from their words and actions for the sake of care for others; that is precisely what customers expect of them. In other words, staff members at Zenith profess in-sincerity.

If *sincerity* is the avoidance of being false to others by being true to one’s self, then nightlife professionals’ *in-sincerity* can be defined as the avoidance of being false to any customer by *not* being true to one’s (full, unconditional) self. In-sincerity is the avoidance of being true to any customer by being true to the *professional* version of one’s self that staff members allow customers to co-create, and wish to be acknowledged for. By not saying what they mean, by not doing what they would rather do, service providers are not being truthful with their counterparts as part of their profession, yet they are still faithful to their role because they are actively attempting to match the expectations of their customers and performing in conformity to a commonly shared professional standard.

Learning the ways to perform one’s role and putting one’s best effort into the task is in itself a search for truth, in that it requires individuals to know themselves, their limits, and their aspirations in order to either dissociate from them or to follow them. It is a spiritual journey, because it entails a constant work on the self to unlearn unsuitable ways and reach one’s professional goals. Learning to be a service professional, making sure that one’s subjunctive self is the best fit for the customer, is an *askesis* in and of itself. Perhaps paradoxically, the idea of service professed by Tazu, and his in-sincere attitude towards work, may be defined as directly emanating from his *magokoro* (true heart) or *makoto* (true speech, inner truth). His volition and his actions were clearly aligned. The truth they are invested in channelling was not necessarily that of his inner emotions and judgments, but that of his role as a service professional and a product of the expectations of his customers. In Lebra’s definition, *magokoro* (true heart, inner truth)

refers to the social capacity to extend one’s interior to another’s. That is, the interior is morally central to Japanese self only if it is socially open, not if it shields itself from social encounters; it must be empathetic, rather than transcendental (2004, 216).

In the in-sincere *askesis*, individuals work on themselves, and build a fulfilling relationship with their professional roles by partially deleting their own selves, rather than wholly embodying those selves. I was only successful as a bar help when I let myself completely follow this path. It allowed me to stay at once focused and relaxed, and I was able to make room in myself to take in customers’ opinions, emotions and expectations while shifts flew by. In fact, close to no memory was left of those nights. The constant state of being fully committed to in-sincere service had taken over my body.

In-sincerity in the service business enables the opposite of the care of the self. The self turns its gaze onto others. Service deals with fantasies that need constant work to

be sustained, and service providers must act *as if* the customers were always right, *as if* their well-being were of utmost priority, *as if* they were always missed and desired. The dark nature of nightlife service, Seligman et al. observe, directly derives from the very “doomed dynamic” of reality. Service creates a subjunctive world which acts merely as a temporary fix to a world that “always returns to its broken state” and therefore constantly needs repairing (2008, 30). This may similarly represent nightlife’s greatest asset and source of profit. It creates an intermediate space between work and home, a “space of evaporation” (*jōhatsu kūkan*, in Saitō [1976, 155]) where customers can de-compress, cease to identify with their daytime occupations as water temporarily disappears when it turns into steam. This is a space where rigid daytime hierarchies may temporarily break down (*bureiko* or “no-barrier party,” in Linhart [1998, 239]).

Keeping those fantasies working means that service providers must constantly practice in-sincerity to “bridge the gap between how one ‘really felt’ and how one was ‘supposed to feel’—thereby making a distinction between simulation and reality rather porous” (Mahmood 2001, 844) and making their ‘faking’ rather “spontaneous” (833). The perfect service provider is not lying to customers, because lying implies the necessity of matching volition and utterance, or an active interest from one party in hearing the other’s truth. Rather, service works to “create an illusion, but with no attempt to deceive. ... Illusion is what can be, as indeed so many different symbolic worlds can” (Seligman et al 2008, 22).

Japanese nightlife, and the business of service at large, is a particular type of illusion, one that allows all participants to maintain a degree of cynical distance. The “collusion” of both guest and host that Befu invokes in his dinner social drama (1974, 197) is in fact a call to the need of being constantly aware of the role-playing nature of the hosting game in order to succeed at it. The feeling of forcing myself whenever I struggled at sustaining hour-long conversations with customers was normal, Tazu assured me. Customers *were*, and *remained* after all, complete strangers. Nevertheless, acknowledging this open secret of service should not cloud one’s dedication to service, because the only sincere dedication and active investment customers wished to witness was not the one from the staff towards their inner truth, but one directed to their own enjoyment. In-sincerity orients the way service is delivered and conceptualized, and customers’ satisfaction decides whether one service provider’s committedly insincere attitude should be considered a sign of dedication to the profession. By acting upon one’s self, by bending it and molding it, a service provider strives to achieve professional success and recognition in Japanese nightlife.

## Conclusion

Truth, care and work are intimately linked in the context of Japanese queer nightlife, and in the service industry at large, but they are absolutely pivotal in the context of nightlife. The livelihood of nightlife businesses hinges on the ability of service providers to make their own selves, sexuality, emotions and play synonymous with service itself. I have attempted to trace, through ethnographic examples, the relationship that service providers at Japanese-style gay bars in Shinjuku Ni-chōme (Tokyo) entertained with customers, with their professional roles and with truth, the very relationship that

I struggled to perfect during my fieldwork. I have highlighted the role of personal legends recounted (yet not necessarily initiated) by staff members in creating *subjunctive selves* for the sake of customers' entertainment (Seligman et al. 2008). Versions of these selves allowed customers to feel "as if" they were friends with the staff, and conversely allowed service providers to behave "as if" the care and entertainment of their customers was their sole preoccupation. These selves were tailored to customers' needs and wishes, and were shaped through a conscious withdrawal of the heart and a constant assessment of the adequacy of one's performance.

In order to be recognized as professionals in nightlife, service providers must learn to selectively presents facets of their personality that best match their customers, while momentarily discarding all else of themselves. This model of service enables them to sustain a customized fantasy for their customers, an illusion of freedom and control at a set price. In concocting their subjunctive selves, staff members at Zenith bar professed a voluntary dissociation of thoughts, words, and actions, and mastered a relationship with the self that I have called *in-sincerity*. If sincerity involves a subject holding themselves accountable for the unity of their thoughts and actions vis-à-vis the world (Trilling 1972), in-sincerity involves non-accountability for one's relationship with truth as long as a regime of strict accountability toward one's professional role is sustained. It represents a form of professionalism centered on a strenuous training of the self (*askesis*, in Foucault [1989] 2005) aimed at making the care of others a spontaneous act of 'faking it' (Mahmood 2001). The commitment to customers' entertainment in this arena becomes the most valued expression of inner truth (*magokoro*), at least professionally.

Rather than a dyadic vision of insincerity, professional self against a true self hidden from customers, in-sincerity as an analytical tool contributes to a stream of research exploring relationships to self, truth, and others in Japan as dynamic and open-ended processes. More than the content of one's words, the intention and the relationship sought after are the pivotal elements (Hendry 1989, 1994), and flexibility in adapting one's self to different people and situations is valued (Bachnik 1992). Not professing a unity of inner volition and outer expression does not constitute lying or deceit, if it is mutually (although perhaps slightly cynically) agreed upon by both parties (Befu 1974). It is an elaborate form of care toward an Other who, in this context, is seeking a fantasy of positive affirmation and dedicated availability.

As the data demonstrate, service is not simply packaged and provided to customers. Rather, it is co-created by service professionals and customers alike. Customers' needs, wishes and whims determine service providers' responses. The satisfaction of such needs, in turn, influences the perception of the service delivered, while also influencing the service provider's image as a committed professional. To take the analysis one step further – and this may be applied to the service industry at large in Japan, and perhaps, even beyond it – in-sincerity as an analytical tool enables us to observe that not only the service provided, but self, too, is co-created in a dynamic process in the context of Japanese queer nightlife. For customers, service is an opportunity to explore fantasies, desires and frustrations in a safe and controlled environment, and the engendering of such versions of their selves hinges on the indulgence of service providers. For service providers, on the other hand, concocting ever-shifting versions of themselves represents an exercise in being accommodating,

and a constant honing of one's profession, but it can only happen in response to the needs of their customers.

## Acknowledgements

This work owes an immense debt of gratitude to the help of my participants, whose patience and availability in taking me under their wing allowed me to learn about the vibrant culture of Japanese-style gay bars in Shinjuku Ni-chōme and the rest of Japan. Without their willingness to start a dialogue with me about their experiences and desires, this article would not exist. Financial support during my doctoral fieldwork came from a variety of sources: I wish to thank the Meiji Jingu Intercultural Research Institute (Meiji Jingu Scholarship), the Ouseley Memorial Fund, the Wenner-Gren Foundation (Wenner-Gren Fieldwork Grant), the Great British Sasakawa Foundation (Sasakawa Postgraduate Studentship), SOAS University of London (SOAS Fieldwork Grant) and the Japan Foundation Endowment Committee (JFEC General Research Grant).

## Notes

1. I translate *miseko* as 'bar help' instead of 'bartender' because *miseko* do more than simply mixing and serving drinks. They actively assist the bar manager in concocting the right atmosphere of merriment at the bar. The phrase chosen reflects the verb used by my participants to describe *miseko*'s role, *tetsudau*, which translates as 'to help out.'
2. The term insincerity commonly carries a negative connotation of deceit. Yet that idea is grounded in a Euro-centric system of knowledge that emphasizes truth-telling, and equates not telling the truth to telling a lie while damaging the self, others and truth itself. This was not the case in Ni-chōme. In that sense, I adopt the spelling *in-sincerity* to signal the different meaning I give to in-sincerity here.
3. See Doi (1971), Lebra (2004, 2007), Nakane (1970), Plath (1980), Rosenberger (1994, 2001), Smith (1983), Matsunaga (2012), to name just a few scholars who have explored this.
4. In Francioni (2022) I describe how Japanese-style gay bars nurture a fantasy of hetero-normative middle-class participation for their white-collar (homosexual) male customers by providing service entailing a clear division of care along the lines of gender, displayed in the staff members' bodily practices, and their physical, linguistic, and sexual availability.

## Notes on contributor

**Marcello Francioni** (he/him, they/them) is a research affiliate at SOAS University of London (United Kingdom) where they obtained their PhD. Their research interests revolves around Japanese nightlife, the service industry, issues of gender, care, sexuality, and the intersection of desire, national identity and race.

## ORCID

Marcello Francioni  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1020-8249>

## References

- Allison, Anne. 1991. "Japanese Mothers and Obentos: The Lunch-Box as Ideological State Apparatus." *Anthropological Quarterly* 64 (4): 195–208. doi:10.2307/3317212.
- Allison, Anne. 1994. *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Bachnik, Jane. 1992. "Kejime: Defining a Shifting Self in Multiple Organizational Modes." In Nancy R. Rosenberger, *Japanese Sense of Self*, 152–172. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Baudinette, Thomas. 2021. *Regimes of Desire: Young Gay Men, Media, and Masculinity in Tokyo*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Befu, Harumi. 1974. "An Ethnography of Dinner Entertainment in Japan." *Arctic Anthropology* 76: 196–203.
- Bernstein, Elizabeth. 2007. *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Cave, Peter. 2004. "Bukatsudō: The Educational Role of Japanese School Clubs." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 30: 383–415.
- Crăciun, Magdalena. 2012. "Rethinking Fakes, Authenticating Selves." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18 (4): 846–863. doi:[10.1111/j.1467-9655.2012.01795.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2012.01795.x).
- Crapanzano, Vincent. 1980. *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Creighton, Millie R. 1991. "Maintaining Cultural Boundaries in Retailing: How Japanese Department Stores Domesticize 'Things Foreign.'" *Modern Asian Studies* 25 (4): 675–709. doi:[10.1017/S0026749X00010805](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00010805).
- Dasgupta, Romit. 2012. *Re-Reading the Salaryman in Japan: Crafting Masculinities*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Doi, Takeo. 1971. *Amae' no kōzō [The Anatomy of Dependence]*. Tokyo: Kōbundō.
- Ellis, Carolyn. 2004. *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.
- Ellis, Carolyn, and Arthur Bochner. 2000. "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject." In *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd Ed.), edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 733–768. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Fanasca, Marta. 2019. "FtM Crossdresser Escorts in Contemporary Japan: An Embodied and Sensorial Ethnography." *Asian Anthropology* 18 (3): 154–169. doi:[10.1080/1683478X.2019.1632543](https://doi.org/10.1080/1683478X.2019.1632543).
- Francioni, Marcello. 2022. "Serving Gender: Performing Gender Roles at a Gay Bar in Tokyo's Shinjuku Ni-Chome." In *The Work of Gender*, edited by Gitte M. Hanses and Fabio Gygi, 31–59. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- Foucault, Michel. (1989) 2005. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège De France 1981–82*, translated by Graham Burchell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hendry, Joy. 1989. "To Wrap or Not to Wrap: Politeness and Penetration in Ethnographic Inquiry." *Man* 24 (4): 620–635. doi:[10.2307/2804291](https://doi.org/10.2307/2804291).
- Hendry, Joy. 1994. "Wrapping and Japanese Presentation: Is This Waste or Care?" *Working Papers in Japanese Studies* 6: 368–382.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russel. 2012. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ishida, Hitoshi. 2006. "Interactive Practices in Shinjuku Ni-Chōme's Male Homosexual Bars." *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context* 12: 1–21.
- Kalshoven, Petra. 2015. "Moving in Time, out of Step: Mimesis as Moral Breakdown in European Re-Enactments of the North American Indian Woodland." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 21 (3): 561–578. doi:[10.1111/1467-9655.12251](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.12251).
- Keane, Webb. 2007. *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Koch, Gabriele. 2020. *Healing Labor: Japanese Sex Work in the Gendered Economy*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Kondo, Dorinne K. 1990. *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Lebra, Takie Sugiyama. 2004. *The Japanese Self in Cultural Logic*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Lebra, Takie Sugiyama. 2007. *Identity, Gender and Status in Japan*. Folkestone: Global Oriental.
- Linhardt, Sepp. 1998. "Sakariba: Zone of 'Evaporation' Between Work and Home?" In *Interpreting Japanese Society: Anthropological Approaches* (2nd ed.), edited by Joy Hendry, 198–210. London & New York: Routledge.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2001. "Rehearsed Spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual: Disciplines of 'Salat'." *American Ethnologist* 28 (4): 827–853. doi:[10.1525/ae.2001.28.4.827](https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2001.28.4.827).
- Matsunaga, Louella. 2012. *The Changing Face of Japanese Retail: Working in a Chain Store*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Moeran, Brian. 2006. *Ethnography at Work*. Oxford: Berg Publishers
- Moriyama, Noritaka. 2012. 'Gei komyuniti' no shakaigaku [Sociology of the 'Gay Community']. Tokyo: Koso Shobo.
- Nakane, Chie. 1970. *Japanese Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Plath, David W. 1980. *Long Engagements: Maturity in Modern Japan*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Rohlen, Thomas P. 1973. "Spiritual Education' in a Japanese Bank." *American Anthropologist* 75 (5): 1542–1562. doi:[10.1525/aa.1973.75.5.02a00220](https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1973.75.5.02a00220).
- Rosenberger, Nancy Ross, 1994. ed *Japanese Sense of Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosenberger, Nancy Ross. 2001. *Gambling with Virtue: Japanese Women and the Search for Self in a Changing Nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Saitō, Seiichirō. 1976. "Goraku to supōtsu [Amusement and Sports]." In *Kōza: hikaku Bunka 4—Nihonjin no seikatsu [Lectures on Comparative Culture 4: The Life of Japanese]*, edited by Shuntarō Itō, 127–156. Tokyo: Kenkyūsha.
- Seligman, Adam B., Robert P. Weller, Simon Bennet, and Micheal J Puett. 2008. *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shikano, Yoshiyuki. 2015. "Geiba\bar wa fuyō nanoka? "waka-sen" geiba\bar ni okeru aratanaru senryaku [Have Gay Bars Become Unnecessary? New Strategies at "Waka-Sen" Gay Bars]." *Japanese Studies Bulletin* 34: 81–96.
- Singleton, John, 1998. ed *Learning in Likely Places: Varieties of Apprenticeship in Japan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sunagawa, Hideki. 2015. *Shinjuku Ni-Chōme no bunka-jinruigaku: gei komyuniti kara toshi wo manazasu [A Cultural Anthropological Approach to Shinjuku Ni-Chōme: Looking at the City from the Point of View of the Gay Community]*. Tokyo: Tarōjirō Editāsu.
- Smith, Robert J. 1983. *Japanese Society: Tradition, Self, and the Social Order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Takeyama, Akiko. 2016. *Staged Seduction: Selling Dreams in a Tokyo Host Club*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Trilling, Lionel. 1972. *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Yuen, Shu Min. 2020. "Unqueer Queers—Drinking Parties and Negotiations of Cultural Citizenship by Female-to-Male Trans People in Japan." *Asian Anthropology* 19 (2): 86–101. doi: [10.1080/1683478X.2020.1756073](https://doi.org/10.1080/1683478X.2020.1756073).
- Zigon, Jarrett. 2007. "Moral Breakdown and the Ethical Demand: A Theoretical Framework for an Anthropology of Moralities." *Anthropological Theory* 7 (2): 131–150. doi:[10.1177/1463499607077295](https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499607077295).