

## Dating App Usage and Fear of Emotional Attachment among Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

This study explored how dating app use relates to young adults' concern about intimacy in relationship. It is highlighted one specific form of unease- fear of exclusion- as a central example. Using purposive sampling a sample of eighty young people (40 male and 40 female) were selected. Fear of missing out scale developed by Andrew K. Przybylski et al. (2013) and Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS), developed by Descutner and Thelen (1991) were used. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and Fear of Intimacy. The results revealed a significant positive correlation, indicating that higher levels of FOMO are associated with higher levels of Fear of Intimacy. Descriptive statistics and ANOVA was conducted to examine whether FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and Fear of Emotional Attachment differ by gender. The results showed no significant differences, meaning that levels of FOMO and Fear of Emotional Attachment were statistically similar across genders. This result concluded that people who worry more about missing out on social experiences are also more likely to feel anxious or uncomfortable about emotional closeness in relationships. Both men and women tend to experience FOMO and Fear of Emotional Attachment at comparable levels, without notable differences between them.

**Keywords:** *Fear of missing out, Fear of Emotional Attachment, gender study, young adults*

More folks now turn to online tools when starting romantic connections. Digital apps let younger users meet lots of possible matches easily. Yet some worry what this might do to feelings forming between two people. Staying tied to these platforms could shape how deeply someone commits. One concern is the nagging sense that something better waits just off screen. That unease got its name back in 2004 from Patrick J. McGinnis. He called it FOMO - fearing you're skipping good moments others enjoy. A tool built later by Andrew K. measures how strong that pull feels. Starting with Przybylski and team in 2013, a tool emerged to gauge how eager someone feels about staying linked to others through dating apps. Because of that pull, people might keep hunting for new matches instead of settling into deeper bonds. This constant lookout often comes from worrying - what if something better exists just off screen? Alongside it sits the hesitation to grow too near,

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emotionally speaking. When closeness looms, some freeze up, held back by inner unease. Robert W. Firestone spent years unpacking why getting close scares so many. Around the same time, Descutner and Thelen built their scale in 1991 to track discomfort around opening up fully in personal partnerships. Anxiety hums beneath the surface, especially when trust demands risk. For those scoring high on such scales, letting someone truly in rarely happens. When people swipe or message, it shapes their habits on dating apps. Because emotions run deep, understanding attachment theory reveals why some connect easily while others keep distance. A person's past often whispers into their present choices. Though unseen, early bonds echo in modern matches. Where trust grows fast for some, hesitation lingers for others. Since connections form differently, patterns emerge over time. What happens behind screens ties back to childhood roots.

From close bonds formed early in life, patterns often carry into later years - Bowlby suggested this back in 1969. Building on his work, Ainsworth noticed people tend to fall into one of three ways of connecting: feeling safe with others, craving closeness yet doubting it, or pulling away when things get personal. Someone who keeps emotional distance might steer clear of deep ties, favoring brief encounters instead - a trait commonly seen among those swiping through dating apps. As digital romance spreads fast, researchers now pay closer attention to what these tools do inside a person's mind. Too many options on dating apps might leave users feeling overwhelmed. When faced with endless profiles, some struggle to feel satisfied or stay committed. This flood of possibilities often triggers worry about missing better matches elsewhere. That unease - commonly called FoMO - can quietly chip away at a person's ability to form deep connections. Researchers wanted to see how using these apps ties into that sense of missing out, and how both relate to hesitations around emotional closeness.

### **METHOD**

The objective of this study was to study dating app usage and fear of missing out among young adults.

#### *Sample*

To meet the objective of this study eighty young adults (forty males and forty females) were participated. All participants were recruited through convenience sampling and all folks qualified as young adults and had applied or used a dating app. Participants provided informed consent before participating in the study, and they all received assurance of their confidentiality. Each participant was provided with information on the purpose of the study and were all informed that their participation was voluntarily.

#### *Instruments*

**Fear of missing out** scale (FOMO), developed by Andrew K. Przybylski et al. (2013), is a 10 item self-scale measure assessing individuals' apprehension about missing out on rewarding experiences. It uses a 5- point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater FOMO. The scale has demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and satisfactory validity.

The **Fear of Intimacy Scale** (FIS), developed by Descutner and Thelen (1991), is a 35- item measure assessing discomfort with emotional closeness and sharing personal feelings. It is rated on a 5- point Likert scale with higher scores reflecting greater fear of intimacy. The scale has shown high internal consistency  $\alpha = .93$  and strong construct validity. Additionally, a brief self- structured questions consisting of 3 items was used to assess dating app usage,

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including number of apps used, time spent and frequency of shifting conversations to other social media platforms.

A homemade survey popped up near the end - just three short questions. One asked which dating platforms someone tapped into daily. Another checked hours glued to swipes and matches every week. A third tracked shifts away from romance chats toward different online spaces. Each reply sketched out habits tied to digital courtship routines.

### *Procedure*

Participants were screened based on inclusion criteria of being young adults and being familiar with dating apps. The participants provided informed consent before participation in the research. Assurance of all participant answers being completed anonymously and confidentially was provided to each participant prior to the collection of data and all participants were informed that their participation was voluntary.

### *Research Design*

The current study uses cross sectional research design to fulfil the objectives.

### *Statistical Analysis*

Descriptive statistics (mean and SD), correlation and one way ANOVA was calculated to fulfil the objectives of the study.

## **RESULT**

The objective of the present study was to study the dating app usage and fear of missing out among young adults. Pearson correlation between FOMO and Fear of Intimacy was calculated which was a significant positive relationship between them ( $r = .302, p = .008$ ). Participants, who have high level of FOMO were likely to also have high level of fear of emotional attachment. The correlation was low, and was significant at the 0.01 level.

Descriptive statistics (Mean and SD) and one- way ANOVA (table 1) was calculated to study the significant difference regarding gender.

**Table 1: Mean, SD and One-Way ANOVA comparing gender differences for FOMO and Fear of Intimacy**

Measures	Male (n=36) Mean $\pm$ SD	Female (n=39) Mean $\pm$ SD	F ratio	P value
Fear of missing out	26.86 $\pm$ 5.7	24.54 $\pm$ 4.51	3.99	0.055
Fear of intimacy	101.20 $\pm$ 9.42	101.00 $\pm$ 10.69	0.01	0.91

Compared to their female counterparts, the male participants displayed an average FOMO score that was slightly above that of females (male  $M = 26.86, SD = 5.76$ ; female  $M = 24.54, SD = 4.51$ ). Male and female participants also shared almost identical average fear of emotional attachment scores (male  $M = 101.20, SD = 9.42$ ; female  $M = 101.00, SD = 10.69$ ), which indicates that there had been no difference observed between males and females when it came to measuring levels of fear of attachment; however, males did report slightly higher levels of FOMO. The ANOVA results indicate that there is no significant difference in FOMO by gender,  $F(1, 73) = 3.7, p = .055$ , as  $p < 0.05$ . There were no significant differences between genders in relation to Fear of Emotional Attachment,  $F(1, 73) = 0.01, p = .914$ .

### DISCUSSION

A low but significant positive correlation between FOMO and Fear of intimacy aligns with previous researches which shows that FOMO is linked to problems in emotional connections, social anxiety and avoidance of close relationships. Wan and Xia (2025) conducted a study and encountered with the same results. They found that FOMO is significantly associated with perceived social disconnections, loneliness and difficulties in forming secure attachments. A study initiated by Karthik, Keerthana and Sathiya (2025) found that emotionally unstable individuals are particularly open to FOMO, whereas those with greater emotional stability and self-discipline appear more resilient. This indirectly supports your finding that FOMO correlates with fear of intimacy.

ANOVA results showed no significant gender difference. Therefore, it appears that there is no meaningful relationship between gender and fear of emotional attachment in young adults. These findings are consistent with the opinion that psychological phenomena surrounding dating applications such as FoMO and fear of intimacy are generally dependent upon individual differences in personality and emotional systems rather than demographic factors like gender. The absence of significant gender differences supports the conclusion that the nature of digital relationships today has the same effects on both male and female genders. The current research supported the hypothesis that personality traits and emotional predispositions explain individual differences related to fear of missing out (FOMO) and fear of emotional attachment much more so than demographic variables such as gender. A finding of no statistical significance between the two genders also adds to the overall conclusion that both genders are equally affected. Research on young adults highlighted that FOMO is a universal phenomenon across genders, driven more by social media exposure and social interaction anxiety than by gender identity.

#### *Limitation*

There are some limitations to the current investigation, such as the use of convenience sampling and small sample size, which restrict the applicability of the findings to the general population. Other age groups were not included in the study therefore, the ability to apply the results to others outside of this age group is limited. Response bias may come into play with the use of self-report measures for all of the variables; and, it is not possible to infer causal relationships between variables due to the nature of the study being cross-sectional.

#### *Further Implications*

This research provides significant insight into how using dating applications affects the mental state of younger generations who are using these apps for the very first time. This research highlights that people who are experiencing FoMO tend to be fearful of forming attachments and that this relationship can be beneficial to counsellors and/or psychologists in their work with clients in relation to intimacy, commitment and anxiety related to relationships. This research further suggests that a better understanding of what constitutes healthy emotional attachment will also strengthen emotional well-being, as well as improve satisfaction within the context of a romantic relationship.

### CONCLUSION

A final conclusion has been reached in regards to the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and an individual's attachment-related anxiety, among young adults. There is a strong positive relationship between FOMO and an individual's fear of becoming emotionally attached; thus, individuals with higher levels of FOMO will have more challenges with establishing close emotional connections. Finally, there were no statistically significant gender differences in

the findings, so there is a great deal of similarity in emotional experience, regardless of gender. Overall, this study demonstrates how dating application use and engagement in electronic-based behaviours is impacting emotional intimacy and relationship dynamics.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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