

Ever feel exhausted by swiping through dating apps? You might be experiencing burnout

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The dating app Bumble is shown on a smart phone on Wednesday, June 26, 2024, in New York. Plenty of happy couples can trace their meet-cute moment to an online dating app. But many others find the never-ending process of likes, swipes, taps and awkward DMs that go nowhere to be exhausting. Credit: AP Photo/Peter Morgan

While plenty of happy couples can trace their meet-cute moment to an online dating app, many others find the never-ending process of likes, swipes, taps and awkward DMs that go nowhere to be exhausting—leading to a phenomenon known as "dating app burnout."

That was the case for Marilyn Espitia, a 31-year-old freelance photo editor and photographer in California who first ventured into online dating in college, when she met her former partner and now father of her child on OkCupid.

Today she is single, and has been for about three years. While she's still a "hopeless romantic" who plans to keep using these platforms—primarily Hinge—Espitia says she'll get off an app or pause her profile when it becomes a little too much.

"It starts getting overwhelming," Espitia said.

Licensed clinical psychologist Yasmine Saad says that about 3 out of every 4 people she works with use dating apps, and anywhere between 80 to 90% have expressed feeling similar fatigue or burnout as Espitia at some point.

That's due in part because success is never promised with online dating, regardless of whether you're looking for a lifelong partner or casual fling.

"It's a very difficult process for people because you invest a lot, then you receive little," said Saad, founder and CEO of Madison Park Psychological Services in New York. "It triggers a lot of hopelessness and a lot of self-esteem issues."

Kathryn Coduto, an assistant professor of media science at Boston University who has been studying online dating since 2016, says dating

app burnout is probably as old as the apps themselves, noting that people had experienced fatigue with earlier desktop-dominant platforms like eHarmony or Match.com as well.

But these days, burnout may be intensified by the fact there's an app for just about every part of our daily lives, and that constant connectivity can be too much. Pandemic-era "Zoom fatigue" has spilled over into other areas of tech consumption, Coduto said, and online dating isn't immune.

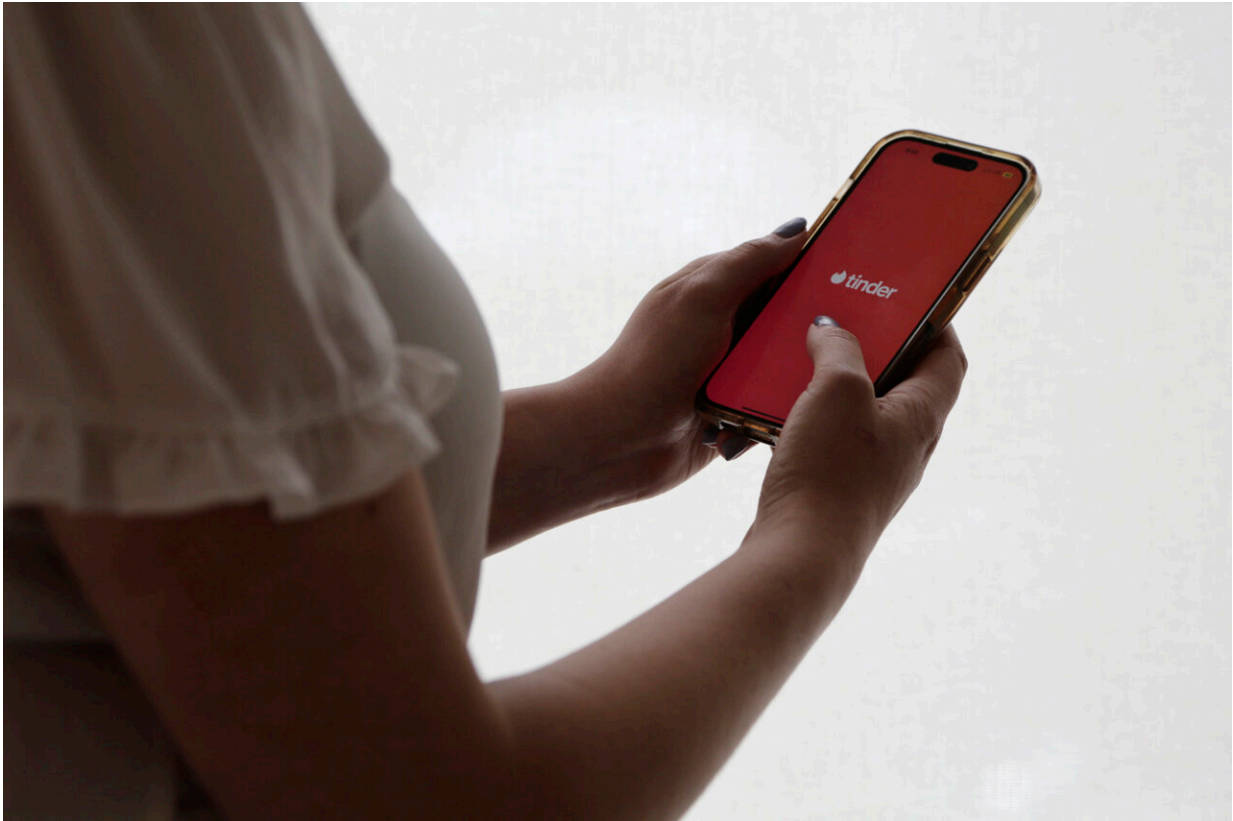
That doesn't mean dating apps are going away anytime soon. Research shows usage has remained relatively stable over recent years.

[Pew Research Center](#) said that 3 out of 10 U.S. adults reported ever using an online dating site or app as of July 2022—identical to the share found in [October 2019](#), months before COVID-19 impacted much of daily life, including dating habits.

While there was some uptick in new user downloads at the start of the pandemic, Coduto's research found more of a spike in usage from those who already had dating apps and were spending more time on them during lockdowns. But those same lockdowns also limited in-person interactions, and the ripple effects are still being felt today.

"The pandemic increased loneliness," Saad said. "But it also boosted the hopelessness ... because even the apps were not meeting the needs of people for socialization."

For Jennifer Stavros, a freelance journalist in Los Angeles, her time in the online dating world has "been a mixed bag." While she's still giving platforms like Tinder, Hinge and OkCupid a try, Stavros notes she's experienced a recent cycle of matches that don't go far.



The dating app Tinder is shown on a smartphone on Wednesday, June 26, 2024, in New York. Plenty of happy couples can trace their meet-cute moment to an online dating app. But many others find the never-ending process of likes, swipes, taps and awkward DMs that go nowhere to be exhausting. Credit: AP Photo/Peter Morgan

"I have a conversation ... and it'll go okay. (But) then it will just drop, or it'll just hit a wall somewhere," Stavros, 42, said. "It's not making me feel super hopeful."

Others add that it can also become easy to forget there are people on the other side of those swipes and likes, making them feel dismissed while looking for connections.

"I think that sense of swiping endlessly absolutely plays into burnout," Coduto said. "You're treating people like a card deck because that's what you're looking at."

Yumei He, an assistant professor of management science at Tulane University's A. B. Freeman School of Business who has also been studying online dating, said that hurtful experiences—such as being ghosted—can cause users to not trust a platform, or assume all future interactions there will end up the same way, leading them to log off and decide that "dating is important, but my security, my self (worth) is more important."

And of course, burnout doesn't look the same for everyone. Experiences can range widely depending on gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity. Researchers have found that women and genderqueer individuals, for example, are more likely to face harassment than men, while racial and ethnic minorities are often fetishized in online dating spaces, or experience other discrimination resulting from sexual racism.

The trauma of experiencing discrimination and other abuse on a dating app can make it very difficult to stay on a platform or trust it again, Coduto said.

Companies are increasingly navigating ways to address all of this. Hinge, for example, in April launched "Hidden Words," which allows its users to filter out words, phrases and emojis in their incoming likes and comments. A Hinge spokesperson says this feature is aimed at helping vulnerable groups—particularly women, people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals—avoid unwanted interactions based on personal preferences.

Gay dating and social networking app Grindr alerts users of potential safety threats in their area, which has been particularly critical for LGBTQ+ people in countries who may face police raids and other

dangers, CEO George Arison said in an interview. Users are also able to "surf the grid" on incognito mode, which is typically a paid feature, for free in some locations, he added.

"All Grindr users are under some form of challenges in their lives," Arison said. "Our job has always been to create a safe environment for people to be who they are."

When asked about dating app burnout overall, Arison said "we've not seen any fatigue of Grindr users" but he noted there's growing hunger for innovation.

That's evidenced by the scores of updates that have recently emerged across various dating apps—from a new prompts option on Bumble, which shifts how the platform historically facilitated its "first move," to Tinder's "Matchmaker" feature allowing friends to recommend profiles for each other and Hinge's tests of "your turn limits" to help fend off ghosting.

A handful of popular platforms, including Grindr and Tinder, say they've started integrating artificial intelligence to help identify potential harmful messages and other safety precautions. Some are also looking at AI possibilities such as using the technology to strengthen matching algorithms or offer users' message prompts and date ideas.

"We are just scratching the tip of the iceberg," said Anindya Ghose, Heinz Riehl Chair Professor of technology and marketing at New York University's Stern School of Business, who believes AI could help alleviate burnout but transparency will be key.

Such innovations may be a way to keep people hooked on dating apps. Espitia is among those who say she'd be open to seeing platforms implement further updates—including the use of AI—if it helps improve

connections with people around her.

"We're in this new age of finding love," she said. "People really are like starved for love—and I think if that (technology) can help, why not?"

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