

The influence of dating apps on sexual behavior among female students: a sociocultural analysis

Pengaruh aplikasi kencan terhadap perilaku seksual di kalangan mahasiswi: sebuah analisis sosiokultural

Zakaria Efendi¹, Meysella Al Firdha Hanim¹, Irwan Abdullah¹, Hasse Jubba^{2*}, &
Siti Nurazizah³

¹Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Gadjah Mada University

²Doctoral Program in Islamic Politics-Political Science,
Muhammadiyah University Graduate School

³Department of Media and Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University

Address: ¹Bulaksumur, Caturtunggal, Sleman, Yogyakarta Special Region – 55281, Indonesia

²Brawijaya, Geblagan, Tamantirto, Bantul, Yogyakarta Special Region – 55183, Indonesia

³Laksda Adisucipto, Caturtunggal, Sleman, Yogyakarta Special Region – 55281, Indonesia

E-mail: hasse@umy.ac.id

Article History: Received 8 November 2024; Accepted 29 September 2025; Published Online 20 October 2025

Abstract

Online dating apps have become a means for some female college students in Yogyakarta to find sexual partners. Apps such as Tinder, Bumble, and Tantan indicate people nearby and have anonymity features that make it easier for users to connect with people, allowing for a freer exploration of sexual identity, thus contributing to the formation of promiscuous sexual behavior among female college students. This study aims to analyze the role of dating apps in shaping promiscuous sexual behavior among female college students in Yogyakarta from a sociocultural perspective. Using a qualitative approach and ethnographic method, this study found that dating apps are used as a means of finding partners to fulfill sexual desires without serious commitment. Factors such as ease of access, anonymity, the flexible social environment, and the influence of popular culture play an important role in reducing the social supervision that previously restricted sexual behavior. The findings suggest that dating apps not only facilitate physical encounters but also create new spaces for female college students to adopt more permissive sexual values. The features of anonymity and ease of access create an open space for the free exploration of sexual identity and the adoption of new values related to sexuality, influenced by popular culture and a flexible social environment.

Keywords: female students; free sexual behavior; online dating apps; sociocultural

Abstrak

Aplikasi kencan online telah menjadi sarana bagi beberapa mahasiswi di Yogyakarta untuk menemukan pasangan seksual. Aplikasi seperti Tinder, Bumble, dan Tantan menyediakan fitur *people nearby* dan anonimitas yang memudahkan pengguna terhubung dengan orang di sekitar dan memungkinkan eksplorasi identitas seksual yang lebih bebas, sehingga berkontribusi pada pembentukan perilaku seks bebas di kalangan mahasiswi. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran aplikasi kencan dalam membentuk perilaku seks bebas di kalangan mahasiswi di Yogyakarta dari perspektif sosiokultural. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode etnografi, studi ini menemukan bahwa aplikasi kencan dimanfaatkan sebagai sarana menemukan pasangan untuk pemenuhan hasrat seksual tanpa komitmen serius. Faktor-faktor seperti kemudahan akses, anonimitas, lingkungan pergaulan yang fleksibel, dan pengaruh budaya populer berperan penting dalam mengurangi pengawasan sosial yang sebelumnya membatasi perilaku seksual. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa aplikasi kencan tidak hanya memfasilitasi pertemuan fisik, tetapi juga menciptakan ruang baru bagi mahasiswi untuk mengadopsi nilai-nilai seksual yang lebih permisif. Fitur anonimitas dan kemudahan akses menciptakan ruang terbuka bagi eksplorasi identitas seksual secara bebas dan adopsi nilai-nilai baru terkait seksualitas, yang dipengaruhi oleh budaya populer dan lingkungan sosial yang fleksibel.

Kata kunci: mahasiswi; perilaku seks bebas; aplikasi kencan online; sosiokultural

Introduction

The development of digital technology, particularly online dating apps, has changed social interaction patterns among young people, especially teenagers (Cerniglia 2024). Dating apps offer an easy way to find a partner quickly and efficiently, which has created a new dynamic in romantic social relationships. For some teenagers, these online dating apps are not only used to find long-term partners but also for casual relationships, which ultimately has contributed to the rise of promiscuity among them (Garga et al. 2021). This has become a new phenomenon in the world of urban youth socializing.

Women often make greater use of online dating apps to find sexual partners due to the dynamics of digital sexual agency in a space that offers anonymity, control over the interactions, and temporal and geographical flexibility that is difficult to find in traditional relationships, thereby expanding the women's capacity to explore their sexual preferences safely and independently (Sobieraj & Humphreys 2021, Smith et al. 2025). It also reveals a tendency toward digital sexual objectification and misunderstandings in digital consent communication, where women often have to handle this sexual context more carefully due to false assumptions, including the assumption that a match equates consent from the other party. Making women the subject of this study was intended to explore gendered vulnerability and how women are in a more socially vulnerable position regarding digital sexual harassment or exploitation, as reported. This was also mentioned by Howard et al. (2024), regarding the high incidence of sexual harassment and unsolicited explicit messages experienced by women compared to men. Thus, focusing on women in studies of online dating applications not only reflects the empirical reality of their more intensive use of such apps but also opens up space for a critical analysis of power relations, vulnerability, and the negotiation of sexual identity in the digital age.

Yogyakarta, as a student city and cultural center, provides a flexible environment for teenagers from various social and cultural backgrounds. In addition to being a city steeped in traditional values and Javanese culture, Yogyakarta is also open to modern developments, including digital technology. In this context, the emergence of dating apps has become an alternative way for teenagers to express their freedom, including in the sexual realm (Beauchamp et al. 2017). This ultimately affects the social norms and traditional values that have been embraced by the local community, especially in terms of sexual relations outside of marriage (Caltabiano et al. 2020).

This phenomenon is interesting to examine from a sociocultural perspective, given the tension between traditional values that remain strong in Yogyakarta and the tide of modernization reinforced by technological facilities. The use of dating apps, in addition to being a means for teenagers to fulfill their social and emotional needs, also has the potential to change their perceptions of casual sex (Gao et al. 2024). Therefore, it is important to analyze the social and cultural factors that influence the use of dating apps in shaping promiscuous behavior among teenagers, especially female students, and to see how social norms are negotiated in urban communities.

The basic assumption of this study is that the proliferation of dating apps in the digital age has encouraged a new phenomenon, in which social relationships in the digital world are formed more quickly. Online dating apps also facilitate female students in expressing their sexuality by utilizing app features to build short-term relationships for the fulfillment of temporary sexual desires (Kettrey et al. 2024). This phenomenon has shifted the previously taboo meaning of sexuality to a more relaxed and accepted one, even though sexual communication in this context often begins in the digital space (Dolev-Cohen 2024). The freedom of urban life also encourages female students from outside the area to be more open in expressing their lifestyle, especially in the context of fulfilling their sexual needs with the opposite sex.

Research on the use of dating apps among female college students reveals that online dating platforms play an important role in normalizing casual relationships, which are increasingly being accepted as a form of sexual exploration without commitment. Recent research shows that apps such as Tinder and Bumble are often seen as a means for female college students to express themselves freely, shifting the

traditional boundaries that previously prohibited casual relationships (Erevik et al. 2020). In addition, the influence of popular culture and digital media reinforces positive views of sexual freedom, which female students adopt as part of their modern identity (Sousa et al. 2020). Exposure to Western culture through the media and social media applications has made female students more open to casual sex, thereby reducing their adherence to local norms (Wade 2021).

This study aims to understand and explain the role of dating apps in shaping the promiscuous behavior among female college students from a sociocultural perspective, with a focus on the transformation of sexual norms, the expression of sexual identity through social media, and the sociocultural impact on interpersonal relationships. This study also aims to complement previous studies that have examined the general use of dating apps. This research highlights the experiences of female university students in Yogyakarta, where traditional values meet modernity. A sociocultural approach is used to examine how social norms are negotiated and sexual identities constructed through digital interactions, aspects that have been less explored in previous research. This study provides deep insights into the influence of dating apps on the changes in social norms among female university students within the context of Indonesian urban culture, while also filling a gap in the literature that has previously been more general in nature. The findings are expected to enrich the understanding of sexual and social dynamics among young people in the digital age.

Research Method

This study aims to explore the role of online dating apps in shaping promiscuous behavior among female college students in Yogyakarta. The unit of analysis in this study consisted of nine female college students under the age of 23 from various universities who actively use online dating apps to find partners and social connections, particularly in expressing their sexuality. The subjects were selected based on specific criteria, namely young women from various regions who are continuing their education in Yogyakarta and taking advantage of the freedom of the environment and life away from home to express an excessive lifestyle, particularly in terms of sexuality. The selection of subjects was also related to the informants' willingness to be interviewed and asked questions directly. Each informant was interviewed more than three times and provided the information needed for this study. The three online dating apps used to find informants were Tinder, Bumble, and Tantan (see Figure 1).

The research design used in this study was a qualitative approach using ethnographic methods. An ethnography was chosen because it is able to explore the subjects' life experiences in depth, including how they understand and define sexuality in an ever-changing social and cultural context (McIntosh & Wright 2019). This qualitative research allows researchers to not only collect data but also to analyze and interpret the meaning behind the data (Im et al. 2023).

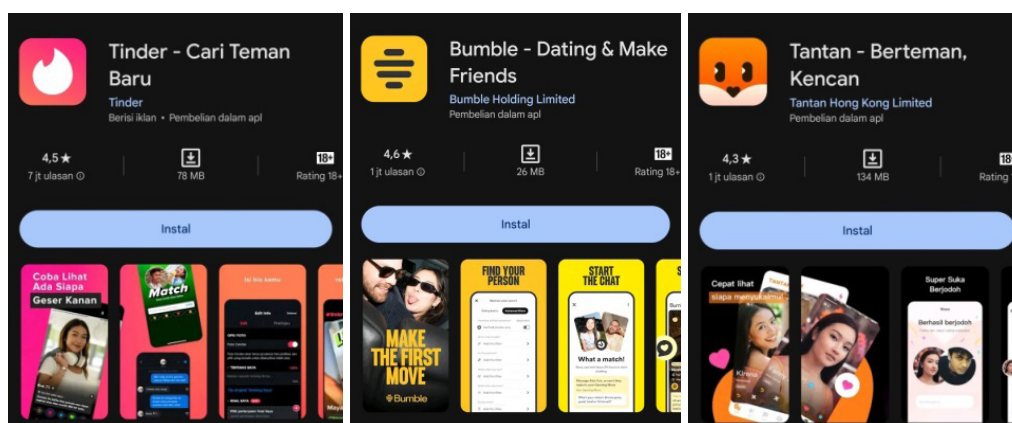


Figure 1.

Online dating applications used in this study

Source: Screenshot of a personal phone by the author

The data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, observations, and case studies. Interviews were conducted intensively with nine female students who met the research criteria to explore their understanding of sexuality and the ways they chose to fulfill their sexual desires. Observations were conducted online through online dating apps and offline during the research period from June 2023 to October 2024. The researcher actively participated on Tinder, Bumble, and Tantan to understand the interactions through these apps, which then facilitated some of the female students in finding sexual partners. After the informants were identified, in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face in an informal setting to make the informants feel comfortable sharing their experiences.

The main source of information for this study was nine female adolescents who were still students at several universities in Yogyakarta, selected based on their behavior of seeking sexual relationships through online dating applications. The following is detailed information about the informants used in this study (see Table 1):

Table 1.
Female students who use dating apps to seek sexual satisfaction

Name	Age	Place of origin	Description
ACS	23	Sulawesi	Frequently
NKW	20	Surabaya	Frequently
OSR	21	Jawa Barat	Frequently
FRW	23	Lampung	Frequently
REH	20	Kalimantan	Frequently
NUJ	22	Jawa Tengah	Frequently
IGT	19	Jawa Tengah	Frequently
NMZ	22	Jawa Tengah	Frequently
INB	22	Jawa Barat	Frequently

Source: Observation results by the author

The data in this study was analyzed in three stages: data reduction, data verification, and data presentation. First, the data from the interviews and observations was reduced to find patterns and the main themes related to the use of online dating apps as a means of finding sexual partners among female college students. Second, data verification was carried out through the triangulation of various sources of information to increase validity and reliability (Fernando et al. 2023). Third, data presentation, where the interview results are presented in verified thematic quotations, allows researchers to understand the meaning of sexuality among female students and the influence of socio-cultural changes on their behavior.

The data analysis involved a process of restatement and reflection on the interview results. This process enables the study to conclude that online dating apps have facilitated promiscuous behavior among female students. This reflects the ease offered by these apps as a means for female students to express their lifestyle, particularly in the context of expressing their sexuality. As a result, there has been a shift in the meaning of sexuality from something sacred to a more pragmatic and individualistic expression of sexual freedom.

Results and Discussion

Social changes and technological developments in the digital age have had a significant impact on how teenagers form relationships, interact, and express their sexual identities. One notable phenomenon is the increasing popularity of online dating apps, which were originally designed as a means of expanding social networks or finding romantic partners. Currently, these apps are also being used as a medium for forming sexual relationships without commitment. This phenomenon reflects a shift in social values and norms related to sexuality, particularly among female college students living in urban environments with higher levels of social openness compared to their hometowns.

Yogyakarta, as a student city with cultural diversity, offers a dynamic and relatively free social interaction space for newcomers, especially female students from outside the region. This situation creates a clash between traditional norms and a more permissive modern lifestyle, giving rise to new patterns of behavior that often conflict with the values brought from their home environments. The ease of access to technology, the anonymity features on dating apps, and the growing narrative of individual freedom encourages some female students to explore their sexuality with greater confidence. This phenomenon not only influences interpersonal relationships but also gives rise to complex sociocultural dynamics, including potential internal conflicts, social pressure, and associated psychosocial risks.

Normative transformation in adolescent sexuality

In the digital age, online dating apps have become one of the main means of social interaction, especially among teenagers (Castro & Barrada 2020). Yogyakarta, with its flexible social atmosphere due to the large number of migrants from outside the region, has encouraged more dynamic and open social interactions among teenagers. The use of online dating apps among female students today is not only used to find new friends or romantic partners but also to find sexual partners (Blanc 2024). This phenomenon reflects a normative transformation in sexuality among female students, in which the traditional norms governing social relations and sexuality are undergoing significant shifts.

Javanese culture in Yogyakarta is a social norm and a guideline for people's social lives, especially when it comes to sexual relationships. With easier access to technology and social media, some female students are starting to feel more confident about exploring their sexual identity. This change is driven by a few things, including globalization, more awareness about gender equality, and the rise of stories about more open sexuality. In line with this context, INB (22 years old) said:

"I actually only use Bumble because I'm bored, and many of my friends use dating apps. To be honest, I use it to find a boyfriend, but I often meet men who want to have sex. Usually, after matching on Bumble, we move to WhatsApp, where we communicate more intensely, including discussing meeting up. A few times I've met guys I met on Bumble, and there have been instances where we ended up having sexual relations. I was invited to join them for drinks, and since I was bored, I went along with it." (Informant INB).

Normative transformations in adolescent sexuality, particularly among female college students, reflect significant changes in the attitudes toward sexual relationships and behavior (Tolman & McClelland 2011). The use of online dating apps has opened up opportunities for them to explore their sexual identity in a more free and safe manner. The use of online dating apps by teenagers is not only for communication but also for sexual transactions, creating a space where traditional social norms can be violated, and teenagers feel freer to explore their sexual identity (Efendi 2021). This phenomenon is growing, with female students not only using apps to find romantic partners but also to find sexual partners. This reflects a significant change in the norms governing sexuality among teenagers.

In this context, online dating apps such as Bumble have become a platform for female students to seek out more flexible relationships. These apps allow them to interact with various potential partners in a more comfortable way online while maintaining their privacy. They can seek sexual relationships without being bound by traditional expectations, explore their sexual identities, and express their preferences (Kassis et al. 2021). This has become an effective means of exploring aspects of their sexual identity that were previously considered taboo. In line with this context, NUJ (22 years old) said:

"Using dating apps is an alternative way to find guys to fill my loneliness in Yogyakarta. I've been single for a long time, and I'm tired of looking for a boyfriend because I'm afraid of getting my heart broken again. I'm traumatized. So now I just look for guys for fun. For entertainment, I usually look for guys on Bumble and Tinder. At first, we just chat normally, and I'm selective about which guys I reply to. If I find someone fun, I'll agree to meet up. Sometimes, if I'm in the mood for sex, I'll go along with it. In Jogja, it's really laid-back, and it's easy to find places for that kind of thing, right? But usually, if I feel comfortable, I'll just go along with wherever he wants to take me." (Informant NUJ).

This normative transformation in sexuality has complex implications. On the one hand, female students experience independence and empowerment when choosing sexual relationships, no longer completely bound by the social norms that often restrict them. They are freer to make decisions based on their personal desires and needs. On the other hand, there are risks that need to be watched out for. The use of online dating apps can give rise to the potential for sexual harassment and unhealthy relationships (Gewirtz-Meydan et al. 2024). Although the social stigma against women who seek sexual partners on apps is decreasing, this challenge remains. In line with this context, NKW (20 years old) said:

“I’m free here, no one cares about me, the only people who know me are my friends at college. I use dating apps to find guys because I’m not confident enough to meet people in person. I want someone to accompany me everywhere, like other people who have boyfriends. I’ve met a few guys I met through the dating app. I use Tantan because a lot of people use it too, so it’s easy to match with new guys. I’ve also met a few times for sex, but it’s okay as long as we’re both safe and respect each other’s privacy.” (Informant NKW).

Interactions through online dating apps tend to be more transactional. Relationships are often based on mutual agreement without strong emotional ties, which can affect how female students view relationships and sexuality in the future (Luz et al. 2022). The availability of nearby people in online dating apps also makes it easier for users to meet someone in their vicinity, so that when a match occurs, the meeting can take place more quickly because it is not limited by distance. Overall, the normative transformation in adolescent sexuality, particularly among female college students, reflects a significant change in the attitudes towards relationships and sexual behavior (Orellana et al. 2022). The use of online dating apps opens up opportunities for them to explore their sexual identity in a more liberated way (Cerniglia 2024).

Currently, some female students are no longer bound by social norms in their environment and tend to ignore religious norms. Being far from their families and living independently in a foreign place is often used by some female students in Yogyakarta to express their lifestyle freely, including in the context of sexuality. The urban environment, with its high level of social freedom, attracts female students to follow the trends developing around them. With this freedom, some female students are free to choose their lifestyle without being bound by either the norms they brought with them previously or the norms governing the environment in which they live.

Easy access and expression of sexual identity

The use of online dating apps among female college students to fulfill their sexual desires reflects a significant transformation in how they access and express their sexual identity. In the digital age, apps like Tinder, Bumble, and Tantan have become increasingly popular as platforms enabling female students to connect with new people outside their social circles. Factors contributing to the ease of access to online dating apps include accessible technology, anonymity features, and a society that is increasingly tolerant of individual freedom (Hatamleh et al. 2023). In this context, dating apps serve not only as a tool for finding a partner but also as a medium for women to discuss their interests, preferences, and boundaries in a sexual context (Castro & Barrada 2020). Interactions in this app lead to the normalization of sexuality, where promiscuous behavior is often seen as normal and acceptable (Erevik et al. 2020).

As a result, this ease of access and expression of sexual identity often encourages promiscuous behavior among female students. The influence of their social environment and the perception that casual relationships are commonplace makes them more open to sexual activity without commitment. In addition, the high level of this expression among teenagers encourages some female students to lack an understanding of the risks and responsibilities that accompany such behavior (Chia 2006). Online dating apps, as part of the development of information technology, allow teenagers to communicate with people they know through the app. Easy access makes dating apps a means of communication to connect with new people, especially in the context of romantic relationships. In line with this context, OSR (22 years old) said:

"Nowadays, it's super easy to meet new people, sis. Just use a dating app—there are so many out there. In Yogyakarta, a lot of people use those apps, so it's easy to make connections. I use Tinder and Bumble. You just swipe right if you like someone's photo, and if they swipe right too, you match and can start messaging each other. Usually, I get a lot of matches, so I just pick who I want to meet. If I'm in the mood for something more, I just pick who I want and start flirting with them. What guy wouldn't want to be asked out like that, right?" (Informant OSR).

Although the ease of access and expression of sexual identity through dating apps gives female students the freedom to explore themselves, they need to be sufficiently aware of the risks and consequences that may arise (Choi et al. 2016). The desire to follow urban youth trends and the euphoria of freedom as a female college student away from home encourages them to ignore the potential problems that may arise from their chosen lifestyle, particularly in terms of sexual expression (Rogers 2022). The ease of connecting with new people and finding sexual partners through online dating apps has encouraged some female students to no longer prioritize healthy relationships with more serious commitments. The tendency to seek instant gratification is one of the reasons for promiscuous behavior among female students.

The use of online dating apps among female college students reflects a significant transformation in how they access and express their sexual identity. In this digital age, online dating apps are becoming increasingly popular, providing a platform that allows female college students to connect with new people outside their social circles. The availability of easily accessible technology such as smartphones and widespread internet access has driven the use of online dating apps (Bonilla-Zorita et al. 2023). In the context of the Indonesian culture, where sexuality is often a taboo subject, the anonymity feature on dating apps offers female students a sense of security to explore and express themselves without fear of social judgment. In line with this context, FRW (23 years old) said:

"Before moving to Yogyakarta, I used to have sex with my ex-boyfriend. Sex was our love language every time we met, but eventually he cheated on me and we broke up. Maybe because of that trauma, now I prefer to be free to have sex with anyone I like. I usually look for guys on the Tantan app." (Informant FRW).

Online dating apps not only serve as a tool for finding a partner but are also a medium for women to discuss their interests, preferences, and boundaries in a sexual context. Through the chat feature, female students can interact more freely than they would in a face-to-face meeting in a more formal setting (Al-Jbouri et al. 2024). Interactions in this way help normalize sexuality, where promiscuous behavior is often seen as normal and acceptable (Budde et al. 2022). Through online dating apps, female students can share experiences, discuss expectations, and explore sexual fantasies that may have been difficult for them to talk about in traditional social contexts (Havey 2021).

This ease of access and expression of sexual identity often encourages promiscuous behavior among female students. A social environment that supports the use of dating apps, coupled with peer influence, creates a new norm where casual relationships are commonplace (Vera Cruz et al. 2024). Female students feel more comfortable engaging in sexual activity without deep emotional attachment, viewing sex as part of enjoyable social interactions. In addition, the availability of various resources and information about sexual health and promiscuous behavior on the internet increases their interest in exploring uncommitted sexual relationships. In line with this context, ACS (23 years old) said:

"Now I want to find a boyfriend easily. I've met a few guys through dating apps, but I'm not very confident in real life. I'm really quiet. I use Tantan and Bumble, but I mostly meet guys who match on Bumble. A few times, I've also had sexual relations with guys I met on dating apps. I did it because I felt like it, as long as the guy was handsome and smelled good." (Informant ACS).

Social stigma against women who engage in casual sex still exists, although in urban communities, this tends to be more accepted and understood (Hatfield et al. 2020). If their sexual behavior is exposed, female students may face negative judgment from society, their family, or friends, which can cause emotional distress and serious psychological effects (Zheng et al. 2024). This situation causes internal conflict, where they feel trapped between the desire to express themselves and concerns about social stigma (Kim et al. 2023). The freedom of urban life creates an atmosphere that encourages female students from outside the area to express their lifestyle more freely and openly. They often ignore the stigma that may surround them, no longer allowing it to restrict them. The low level of social sensitivity in urban environments also encourages female students to feel more confident in seeking the happiness they desire, including expressing their sexual desires with the opposite sex.

Access to online dating apps gives female students the freedom to explore their sexual identity but they need to be aware of the risks and consequences. The desire to follow trends in urban youth culture often influences teenagers to follow what is happening around them. The freedom of their environment and the freedom of being away from their families motivates teenagers to pursue happiness, even if it means violating social and religious norms. The desire to express themselves during adolescence often leads them to overlook more serious matters, such as the long-term impact on their mental and emotional health, as well as the potential for exploitation in unhealthy relationships involving casual sex (Kaufman-Parks et al. 2023).

Dating apps can be understood as a form of normative transformation, namely a shift in perspectives, values, and relational practices that were previously limited by traditional norms towards new patterns of interaction that are more permissive, flexible, and based on individual choice (Wu & Trottier 2022). In the context of female students in Yogyakarta, this shift indicates a growing trend toward sexual autonomy and the courage to negotiate their sexual preferences more openly through digital spaces, despite still facing cultural pressures laden with moral values. In the theory of gender and sexuality as a social construction, this shift shows that sexual identity is no longer considered static but is constantly negotiated according to social dynamics, technology, and popular culture (Colosi et al. 2023). Thus, dating apps have become a medium that brings together modernity and tradition, where female students not only express their sexual preferences but also challenge the previously restrictive social structures, resulting in complex implications for gender relations and social norms in society.

Sociocultural impact on interpersonal relationships

The phenomenon of promiscuity among female students from outside the region, who use online dating apps to find sexual partners, shows the significant impact of sociocultural changes on their interpersonal relationships. Online dating apps offer the freedom to explore sexuality without much supervision but this also leads to a shift in values and communication patterns in intimate relationships (Ha et al. 2024). Female students often face conflicts between the traditional norms they bring from their hometowns and the sexual freedom offered by urban environments (Duncan et al. 2019). As a result, they may feel trapped between the desire to express themselves and concerns about social stigma, especially if their sexual behavior is known by their friends or family. This freedom also has the potential to exacerbate inequalities in their interpersonal relationships, particularly when establishing healthy and honest communication with partners.

The sociocultural impact on interpersonal relationships in the context of online dating apps among female college students is evident in the shift toward more open social and sexual norms. Premarital sexual behavior among female college students shows a shift in the social norms that previously viewed sex outside of marriage as taboo, thus not fully aligning with Javanese values in Yogyakarta and giving rise to youth social dynamics that transcend conventional boundaries. These apps enable sexual exploration with little social control, encouraging casual sex as part of the search for sexual identity (Eleuteri et al. 2024). However, these changes also pose challenges in interpersonal relationships, where clearer communication, understanding, and expectations are needed. The reduction of social stigma in urban environments has provided space for them but it still leaves internal conflicts related to traditional norms that remain ingrained. In line with this context, REH (20 years old) said:

"I am like this because I feel I have no self-esteem, I am traumatized because I cannot form healthy relationships, and I can no longer trust men. I have lived in Yogyakarta for a long time. I am used to behaving freely because the environment here is free, no one cares what I do. The first time I had sex was because I was forced by my friends. I don't know why it happened or why I agreed to do it. As I got older, I became more comfortable getting to know and getting close to men, only to be taken advantage of by them. I never felt afraid to approach men, perhaps because I had been used to it since school, and living far from my parents made me more independent and courageous. When I want to, I just look for someone through a dating app. I use Tantan, and I look for someone through this app just for fun." (Informant REH).

Cultural background is also a reason for female students from outside Yogyakarta to express their lifestyle more openly. The difference between their social life in their hometown and in their new place has shaped the students' perceptions, allowing them to be more confident and courageous in expressing their sexual desires. The phenomenon of casual sex among female students, especially those from outside the region, is influenced by various sociocultural factors related to changes in social and sexual values (Lin et al. 2021). The main cause is the difference between the norms they bring from their hometowns and the more open and tolerant urban environment towards sexual expression. Online dating apps facilitate sexual exploration in a freer and anonymous way, while the lack of social supervision increases this freedom (Lykens et al. 2019). As a result, female students experience a conflict between their desire to express themselves and their concerns about the stigma that still exists. In the context of Yogyakarta, which is known as a student city with cultural diversity, this phenomenon is further exacerbated by the differences between the local culture and the freedom offered by a more modern environment. In line with this context, IGT (19 years old) said:

"I come from a broken home. Since I was little, I often saw my father and mother fighting and arguing, even though it was my father who was often caught cheating. Now they are divorced and I live alone with my mother. Since high school, I have been used to having male friends, and in fact, most of my friends are boys. In Yogyakarta, it's been three semesters now, and here I feel more free. I can do whatever I want without anyone paying attention or caring about me, except my mother. Actually, I want to have a normal, healthy relationship, but I often end up meeting guys who want to have sex." (Informant IGT).

The phenomenon of promiscuity among female university students in Yogyakarta, especially those from outside the region, reflects the tension between traditional social norms and the freedom offered by the urban environment. Online dating apps facilitate the exploration of sexual identity but also have the potential to cause psychological and social impacts, such as stress and an internal conflict between personal desires and concerns about social stigma (Cerniglia 2024). The lack of sex education and social support exacerbates this problem, highlighting the importance of a deeper understanding of the risks and consequences that arise from such freedom (Lameiras-Fernández et al. 2021). Amidst the cultural diversity of Yogyakarta, tensions between more conservative local values and sexual freedom create complex dynamics in the female students' interpersonal relationships.

The phenomenon of promiscuity among female students from outside the region who use online dating apps to find sexual partners reflects the significant impact of sociocultural shifts on interpersonal relationships. On the one hand, dating apps offer greater sexual freedom, allowing them to explore their sexuality without strict supervision, but on the other hand, this freedom has the potential to create deep internal conflicts. In line with this context, NMZ (22 years old) said:

"I've been using dating apps for three months. I've downloaded Tinder, Tantan, Omi, and Bumble, but now I only use Bumble. I just like using these apps because a lot of my friends use them too. I'm single, and I'm just not in the mood to date again. It feels like being tied down, and I prefer to be free. I've met a few guys I knew from dating apps, and even had a few friends with benefits, including having sex. Honestly, I don't want this to continue, and I'm afraid my parents will find out, but I don't know how to stop. I'm scared of being alone." (Informant NMZ).

Female students from regions with conservative social norms often experience confusion and tension when they have to adjust to the sexual freedom that exists in urban areas, which are regions with more open cultures. They may feel trapped between the desire to explore their sexuality and the pressure to adhere to the traditional values they bring with them. This tension can lead to feelings of guilt, confusion, or alienation if they feel their behavior does not align with the expectations of their family or community of origin (Clarke et al. 2020). Female students who engage in casual sex through dating apps tend to experience complex emotional conflicts. On the one hand, they feel free to express themselves but on the other hand, they are pressured by concerns about how others, especially their family or close friends, will judge their behavior (Digennaro & Tescione 2024). This can cause anxiety, stress, or even feelings of inferiority if they feel isolated or negatively judged.

Dating apps often reduce the need for deep communication with sexual partners. More anonymous interactions, often based on physical attraction or momentary desire, hinder the formation of deeper, more meaningful relationships (Langlais et al. 2024). This can lead to unstable or even emotionally damaging relationships. Female students may find it difficult to establish healthy communication about their sexual boundaries, emotional needs, or deeper desires, which are essential in building mutually supportive and understanding relationships (Castro & Barrada 2020).

Yogyakarta, as a student city with diverse cultures and values, introduces female students from outside the region to a more liberal lifestyle. The city offers freedom of expression but also introduces tensions between tradition and modernity. Female students from outside the region who are accustomed to strict norms may feel awkward or even alienated when faced with the freedom offered. This creates a dynamic that exacerbates their internal conflicts between fulfilling the expectations of their cultural background and adapting to the more permissive norms of the city. The phenomenon of casual sex among female students from outside the region who use online dating apps highlights the complex impact of sociocultural change (Yu et al. 2022). Although this freedom provides opportunities for sexual exploration, without a good understanding of boundaries and consequences, as well as a lack of social support and proper education, this phenomenon can have a significant negative impact on their interpersonal relationships and emotional well-being.

The phenomenon experienced by female students from other regions in Yogyakarta reflects the tension between the traditional norms they bring from their hometowns and the more permissive modern values in this city of students. This situation shows that culture is not static but is constantly being negotiated through complex social interactions (Sharma & Liu 2024). The tension between tradition and modernity opens up opportunities for the formation of new identities but, at the same time, creates potential vulnerabilities if not balanced with cultural literacy, social support, and adequate education (Baumert et al. 2024). This dynamic underscores the importance of understanding changes in student behavior as the result of a sociocultural adaptation process influenced by interacting social, cultural, and value contexts.

Conclusion

This study found that normative transformations in the sexuality of female university students in Yogyakarta are one of the tangible impacts of digital technology development, particularly online dating apps. Previously conservative social norms have undergone significant shifts, leading to more permissive and open sexual behavior. Apps such as Tinder, Bumble, and Tantan facilitate the free exploration of sexual identity through ease of access, anonymity features, and cross-social-environment interactions that are difficult to obtain directly in real life. The novelty of this finding lies in the identification of patterns of sexual behavior among female college students who use dating apps as a means of expressing their sexuality, especially in finding sexual partners without commitment. The intersection of traditional values and modern freedom creates a unique form of sexual behavior, where dating apps serve as the primary catalyst in shifting traditional boundaries. This situation demonstrates that digital media is not only a communication tool but also a medium that transforms sexual norms and practices among female college students.

The study results indicate that the sexual freedom offered by dating apps has dual consequences for female students' lives. On the one hand, they feel autonomy and empowerment in determining their sexual choices according to their personal preferences. On the other hand, interpersonal relationships tend to shift from emotional closeness and long-term commitment to physical and momentary interactions. This pattern has the potential to reduce the quality of the emotional connection, which has long been the foundation of healthy relationships, creating internal conflicts between the values gained from global social interactions and the practices being carried out, as well as increasing psychosocial risks such as stress, anxiety, and feelings of guilt. Technology-mediated interactions also tend to reduce the quality of deep communication, limiting opportunities to build mutually understanding and sustainable relationships outside of a sexual context.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that universities and relevant stakeholders develop comprehensive sexuality education that not only emphasizes the biological aspects but also integrates mental health, relationship management skills, and digital awareness. Providing safe discussion spaces on campus, easily accessible counseling services, and digital literacy programs can help female students balance freedom of expression with responsibility in building healthy relationships. These efforts are expected to minimize the risks of casual sexual behavior focused solely on immediate gratification and promote a more mature understanding of the long-term consequences for emotional and social well-being. Thus, sexual exploration in the digital age can occur in a safer, more mindful manner, aligned with values that support positive personal development.

References

- Al-Jbouri E, Volk AA, Spadafora N, & Andrews NCZ (2024) Friends, followers, peers, and posts: adolescents' in-person and online friendship networks and social media use influences on friendship closeness via the importance of technology for social connection. *Frontiers in Developmental Psychology* 2. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fdpys.2024.1419756>.
- Baumert J, Becker M, Jansen M, & Köller O (2024) Cultural identity and the academic, social, and psychological adjustment of adolescents with immigration background. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 53 (2):294-315. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-023-01853-z>.
- Beauchamp AM, Cotton HR, LeClere AT, Reynolds EK, Riordan SJ, & Sullivan KE (2017) Super likes and right swipes: How undergraduate women experience dating apps. *Journal of the Student Personnel Association at Indiana University* 1-16. <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/jiuspa/article/view/23700>.
- Blanc A (2024) Attitudes toward sexual behaviors: relationship with gender and sexual orientation. *Current Psychology* 43 (2):1605-1614. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04398-3>.
- Bonilla-Zorita G, Griffiths MD, & Kuss DJ (2023) Dating app use and wellbeing: an application-based pilot study employing ecological momentary assessment and objective measures of use. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20 (9):5631. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20095631>.
- Budde J, Witz C, & Böhm M (2022) Sexual Boundary Violations via Digital Media Among Students. *Frontiers in Psychology* 12:755752. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.755752>.
- Caltabiano M, Castiglioni M, & De-Rose A (2020) Changes in the sexual behaviour of young people: introduction. *Genus* 76 (1):38. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41118-020-00107-1>.
- Castro Á & Barrada JR (2020) Dating apps and their sociodemographic and psychosocial correlates: A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17 (18):6500. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17186500>.
- Cerniglia L (2024) The Impact of dating applications on adolescent development: a psychological perspective. *Behavioral Sciences* 14 (3):14-16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14030215>.
- Chia SC (2006) How peers mediate media influence on adolescents' sexual attitudes and sexual behavior. *Journal of Communication* 56 (3):585-606. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00302.x>.
- Choi EPH, Wong JYH, Lo HHM, Wong W, Chio JHM, & Fong DYT (2016) The association between smartphone dating applications and college students' casual sex encounters and condom use. *Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare* 9: 38-41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.srhc.2016.07.001>.

- Clarke A, Meredith PJ, & Rose TA (2020) Exploring mentalization, trust, communication quality, and alienation in adolescents. *PLoS ONE* 15 (6):e0234662. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0234662>.
- Colosi R, Cowen N, & Todd M (2023) Sexual and gender identity work on social media. *Sociology Compass* 17 (6):1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.13073>.
- Digennaro S & Tescione A (2024) Scrolls and self-perception, navigating the link between social networks and body dissatisfaction in preadolescents and adolescents: a systematic review. *Frontiers in Education* 9 (April). <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1390583>.
- Dolev-Cohen M (2024) Patterns of sexting by youths: a latent class analysis. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 50 (6):679-690. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2024.2351430>.
- Duncan SG, Aguilar G, Jensen CG, & Magnusson BM (2019) Survey of heteronormative attitudes and tolerance toward gender non-conformity in mountain west undergraduate students. *Frontiers in Psychology* 10: 793. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00793>.
- Efendi Z (2021) Analisis komunikasi pada aplikasi MiChat sebagai sarana media prostitusi online di Pontianak. *Panangkaran: Jurnal Penelitian Agama dan Masyarakat* 4 (2):86-107. <https://doi.org/10.14421/panangkaran.2020.0402-06>.
- Eleuteri S, Girardi M, Spadola R, & Todaro E (2024) Inclusion goals: what sex education for LGBTQIA+ adolescents? *Children* 11 (8). <https://doi.org/10.3390/children11080966>.
- Erevik EK, Kristensen JH, Torsheim T, Vedaa Ø, & Pallesen S (2020) Tinder use and romantic relationship formations: a large-scale longitudinal study. *Frontiers in Psychology* 11: 554302. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01757>.
- Fernando H, Galuh Larasati Y, & Cahyani N (2023) Being #wanitasalihah: Representations of salihah women on TikTok. *IAS Journal of Localities* 1 (1):1-15. <https://doi.org/10.62033/iasjol.v1i1.8>.
- Gao H, Yin H, Zheng Z, & Wang H (2024) Online dating apps and the association with emotional reactions: A survey on the motivations, compulsive use, and subjective online success of Chinese young adults in online dating. *Cyberpsychology* 18 (3). <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2024-3-3>.
- Garga S, Thomas MT, Bhatia A, Sullivan A, John-Leader F, & Pit SW (2021) Motivations, dating app relationships, unintended consequences and change in sexual behaviour in dating app users at an Australian music festival. *Harm Reduction Journal* 18 (1):49. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-021-00493-5>.
- Gewirtz-Meydan A, Volman-Pampanel D, Opuda E, & Tarshish N (2024) Dating apps: a new emerging platform for sexual harassment? A scoping review. *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse* 25 (1):752-763. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380231162969>.
- Ha A, Scott M, Zhang CA, Glover F, Basran S, Del Giudice F, & Eisenberg ML (2024) Factors associated with dating app use for sexual “hookups” in the United States: insights from the National Survey of Family Growth. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* 21 (9):762-769. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsxmed/qdae083>.
- Hatamleh IHM, Safori AO, Habes M, Tahat O, Ahmad AK, Abdallah RAQ, & Aissani R (2023) Trust in social media: enhancing social relationships. *Social Sciences* 12 (7):416. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12070416>.
- Hatfield E, Rapson RL, & Purvis J (2020) 122 The hookup culture: cultural, social, and gender influences on casual sex. In: Hatfield E, Rapson RL, & Purvis J (ed). *What’s Next in Love and Sex: Psychological and Cultural Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190647162.003.0007>.
- Havey N (2021) Untapped potential: Understanding how LGBTQ students use dating applications to explore, develop, and learn about their sexual identities. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education* 14 (3):324-341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26379112.2021.1988625>.
- Howard D, Ryter S, Hu Y, Clancy EM, Klettke B, & Klas A (2024) Unsolicited sexting and help-seeking behaviours among australian adults: a mixed-methods study. *Social Sciences* 13 (6). <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13060289>.
- Im D, Pyo J, Lee H, Jung H, & Ock M (2023) Qualitative research in healthcare: data analysis. *Journal of Preventive Medicine and Public Health* 56 (2):100. <https://doi.org/10.3961/jpmph.22.471>.

- Kassis W, Aksoy D, Favre CA, & Artz STG (2021) Multidimensional and intersectional gender identity and sexual attraction patterns of adolescents for quantitative research. *Frontiers in Psychology* 12:697373. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.697373>.
- Kaufman-Parks AM, Longmore MA, Manning WD, & Giordano PC (2023) The influence of peers, romantic partners, and families on emerging adults' sexual behavior. *Archives of sexual behavior* 52 (4):1561-1573. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-022-02489-z>.
- Kettrey HH, Quinn S, Nwajei M, Leslie M, Paradise E, & Wishon D (2024) "Why are you on Tinder if this isn't what you wanted?" Dating apps as digital brokers of sexual activity in the college hookup sexual market. *New Media & Society* 14614448241308521. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448241308521>.
- Kim A, Jeon S, & Song J (2023) Self-stigma and mental health in divorced single-parent women: mediating effect of self-esteem. *Behavioral Sciences* 13 (9):744. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13090744>.
- Lameiras-Fernández M, Martínez-Román R, Carrera-Fernández MV, & Rodríguez-Castro Y (2021) Sex education in the spotlight: What is working? Systematic review. In *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18052555>.
- Langlais M, Toohey L, & Podberesky A (2024) Dating applications versus meeting face-to-face: what is better for romantic relationship quality? *Social Sciences* 13 (10). <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13100541>.
- Lin CL, Ye Y, Lin P, Lai X, Jin YQ, Wang X, & Su YS (2021) Safe sexual behavior intentions among college students: The construction of an extended theory of planned behavior. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18 (12):6349. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18126349>.
- Luz R, Alvarez MJ, Godinho CA, & Pereira CR (2022) A fertile ground for ambiguities: casual sexual relationships among portuguese emerging adults. *Frontiers in Psychology* 13: 823102. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.823102>.
- Lykens J, Pilloton M, Silva C, Schlamm E, Wilburn K, & Pence E (2019) Google for sexual relationships: Mixed-methods study on digital flirting and online dating among adolescent youth and young adults. *JMIR Public Health and Surveillance* 5 (2):e10695. <https://doi.org/10.2196/10695>.
- McIntosh IAN & Wright S (2019) Exploring what the notion of "lived experience" offers for social policy analysis. *Journal of Social Policy* 48 (3):449-467. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279418000570>.
- Orellana L, Alarcón T, & Schnettler B (2022) Behavior without beliefs: Profiles of heteronormativity and well-being among heterosexual and non-heterosexual university students in Chile. *Frontiers in Psychology* 13: 988054. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.988054>.
- Rogers T (2022) Youth activism through critical arts, transmedia, and multiliteracies. In: *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1783>.
- Sharma S & Liu LA (2024) Culture and communication. In: Gelfand MJ & Erez M (ed). *The Oxford Handbook of Cross-Cultural Organizational Behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhob/9780190085384.013.16>.
- Smith AM, Mucedola AS, La K, Ortiz RR, & Tian Y (2025) Swipe right to consent: How dating app usage by young adults contributes to sexual objectification and sexual consent miscommunication. *Computers in Human Behavior* 167 (February):108621. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2025.108621>.
- Sobieraj S & Humphreys L (2021) Forced empowerment and the paradox of mobile dating apps. *Social Media+ Society* 7 (4):20563051211068130. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211068130>.
- Sousa MA, Oliveira PA, Lima MDO, & Freitas MIF (2020) Influence of social media for sexuality of adolescents. *European Journal of Public Health* 30 (Supplement_5):ckaa166-050. <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckaa166.050>.
- Tolman DL & McClelland SI (2011) Normative sexuality development in adolescence: a decade in review, 2000-2009. *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 21 (1):242-255. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00726.x>.
- Vera Cruz G, Aboujaoude E, Rochat L, Bianchi-Demicheli F, & Khazaal Y (2024) Online dating: predictors of problematic tinder use. *BMC Psychology* 12 (1):106. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-01566-3>.
- Wade L (2021) Doing casual sex: a sexual fields approach to the emotional force of hookup culture. *Social Problems* 68 (1): 185-201. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spz054>.

- Wu S & Trottier D (2022) Dating apps: a literature review. *Annals of the International Communication Association* 46 (2):91-115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2022.2069046>.
- Yu Z, Zhang TT, Wang X, Chang Q, Huang H, Zhang H, Song D, Yu M, Yang J, Liu Y, Li C, Cui Z, & Ma J (2022) Sexual behaviour changes and HIV infection among men who have sex with men: evidence from an open cohort in China. *BMJ Open* 12 (9):e055046. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2021-055046>.
- Zheng H, Cai Y, Liu L, & Peng B (2024) The effect of childhood sexual abuse on depressive symptoms in female college students: a serial mediation model. *Frontiers in Psychology* 15: 1306122. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1306122>.

Author Biographies

Zakaria Efendi is an academic with a Master's degree in Anthropology from Gadjah Mada University. He is a prolific writer with numerous publications in local and internationally renowned journals. His research interests include anthropology, media culture, and communication.

Meysella Al Firdha Hanim is an academic with a Master's degree in Anthropology from Gadjah Mada University. She is known as a prolific writer with publications in various local and internationally renowned journals. Her research interests focus on anthropology, mental health, industrial psychology, and media culture.

Irwan Abdullah is a senior professor in cultural anthropology at Gadjah Mada University. In addition to focusing on teaching cultural theories, he also focuses on teaching research writing and reputable articles.

Hasse Jubba is the Head of the Doctoral Program in Islamic Politics and the Master's Program in International Relations at Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. His research focuses on religion and politics, minority groups, Muslim society, ethnicity, and nationalism.

Siti Nurazizah is a Master's student in Media and Communication at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University. Her research interests focus on cultural traditions, lifestyle, and media representation, particularly on how media shapes and transforms cultural practices in contemporary society.