



## Swiping for Love: How Mobile Apps are Shaping Dating Culture Among South Asian Americans

Picture this: You've just graduated from college and arrived in a new city, hopeful at the prospect of finding success, happiness, and yes, love. You throw yourself into the city's social scene; you try out new bars in every neighborhood, join your office's trivia team, and even (albeit begrudgingly) attend every available professional networking event in the hopes of finding a connection. After months of frustration at the seemingly hopeless possibility of *ever* finding someone, you notice one common thread uniting all of your potential soul mates: they're looking at their phones.

For many young people, this imaginary scenario is actually everyday reality. Screen-to-screen dating is more common than face-to-face dating in this era of swiping and Netflix-and-chilling. Gone are the days of meeting people in bars and at work and, well, anywhere in person. Millennials and Gen Z-ers are dependent on dating apps for finding love. And while apps have opened the doors to meeting people that may have never been possible previously, the apps have also sparked some unintended consequences.

The unspoken dating rules have changed; dates are less formal, hooking-up without commitment is the norm, and dating apps are no longer taboo. In fact, it's difficult to find single Millennials who aren't currently using or have used dating apps. With that said, just as the number of people open to finding potential mates through mobile devices has increased, so have the number of applications. Tinder, Bumble, Hinge, JSwipe, Coffee Meets Bagel, The League... the list goes on. Each dating app tries to differentiate itself from the biggest player on the market, Tinder, by taking a unique approach or targeting a specific demographic. Bumble, for instance, only allows women to "make the first move" via text on the app, and JSwipe is marketed toward the Jewish community. The question is no longer, "Are you using dating apps?" but rather, "Which dating apps do you use?"

Millennials have essentially redefined what it means to date. They're not going to bars and parties to approach someone in real life — that would be too vulnerable and intimidating. Instead, they rely on social media to break the ice for them. The truth of the matter is: [it's difficult to date without apps](#). People are less forthcoming in real life encounters than they are when they have the security of a screen between them and a potential significant other. It's also difficult to assess people's relationship statuses and interest levels in in-person encounters. At bars, parties, and even at the office, it's not always clear who is single and who is looking; but apps provide a defined pool.

While there's more choice than ever before, and more opportunities to find modern love, the [Dil Mil](#) team noticed one distinct demographic that was being overlooked by the industry at large: South Asian Americans. Sure, South Asian Americans can sign up for any dating application they'd like, but a network intended to allow South Asian Americans looking to meet potential S.O.'s who share their heritage simply did not exist... until now. Taking one quick look at Dil Mil's blog, [Dil Mil Diaries](#), it's evident that young South Asian American singles are eager to find connections. But it's not always easy, especially among a pool of potential S.O.'s who, frankly, aren't that interested in anything serious.

## **Dating in Real Life (IRL)... Or Not**

Social media has altered almost every aspect of modern life, including dating. People live their lives moving from one screen to the next, sometimes more engrossed by what they are viewing on their devices than the world around them. This widely-demonstrated attachment to smartphones has produced a filter on modern life. Today, there are two sides to every person: the curated, online version and the IRL version. Many attribute younger generation's aversion to traditional meet-ups and dating as a result of the social media culture they came of age in. Social media is a double-edged sword, especially when it comes to its impact on relationships. Whether you view it as a blessing or a curse, there are some undeniable effects it has prompted among younger generations looking for love on their smartphones.

1. **There's Safety in Numbers** — Millennials are less likely to instigate one-on-one dates. Gone are the days when a brief chance meeting results in a follow-up invitation. Younger generations are surprisingly more cautious and guarded than older groups. Today, meeting new people generally stems from — and results in — group hangouts; there's safety in numbers and [conventional courtship is a thing of the past](#). But this trend also makes it difficult to really forge strong one-on-one connections.
2. **Commitment is For Adults** — Young professionals in their twenties and early thirties are less concerned with tackling adulthood responsibilities, like buying homes and settling down in a relationship. They are hyper-focused on finding purpose in their lives and careers, and as a result, committing to a serious relationship is often pushed to the back burner. And although the inclination to settle down later is valid, it is also a generalization. Not every young person is just looking for a momentary fling; but it can be difficult to distinguish people's intentions in real life or within mobile networks that are vast and impersonal.
3. **There's More Fish in the Sea** — One of the surprising trends to emerge from the dating app revolution is the casual, almost gamified, attitude toward surveying potential S.O.'s. There's a tendency among users to swipe through suitors for the sake of swiping through suitors. Although this behavior could be related to an emerging indifference toward formal dating, it's also an indication of an overwhelming number of choices. On apps like Tinder that are unspecified and untargeted (except for location), there's no real sense of urgency; swiping left or right has no real consequence. Furthermore, many individuals don't take generic dating apps seriously. Either they've been [ghosted](#) too many times or had trouble finding connections, but the idea that no one is really using certain dating apps for serious relationships has definitely become common thought. And unfortunately, this mindset elicits a domino effect: the more people believe no one else on the network cares, the less likely they'll be to make any real effort. It's a vicious cycle. The only antidote to this is smaller, niche-networks that cater to specific interests and commonalities.

## Meeting the Family

Today's dating landscape is dynamic. Relationships come and go with the swipe of a screen. And while this may support the laissez-faire attitudes of an American generation at large, it doesn't always fall in line with distinct family values and cultural beliefs. South Asian Americans aren't just feeling self-induced pressure, [they're also receiving pressure from their families to settle down](#).

Culturally speaking, older generations don't necessarily understand the wavering commitment levels and the casual attitude. Many of the parents and grandparents of Millennial South Asian Americans (most likely) did not have years of serial dating before settling down and starting a family. Furthermore, many first generation South Asian Americans sacrificed everything to create new futures for their children and grandchildren. Generally, these generations value family and hard work; they still see life linearly: work hard to get an education, graduate, choose a spouse, start a family, etc. They expect their children and grandchildren to follow a similar route, but South Asian Americans share many of the same Millennial characteristics as anyone else from their generations. [They're still trying to find purpose and happiness](#) for themselves, which is made all the more difficult when juxtaposed by the paths their parents took and expect them to continue. Older South Asian Americans often carry Indian attitudes toward dating, which are vastly different than American attitudes. Many parents and grandparents had arranged marriages or married one of the first men or women they ever dated; the Indian culture values commitment — it is an expectation, not a choice.

Americans tend to have a more romanticized viewpoint of commitment; committing to someone is something that comes after searching and finding the right one — it is not a given. Essentially, they have to find ways to balance traditional expectations with a modern dating scene. These familial standards are not universal; American Millennials whose parents are of European or Latin American heritage are not battling the same presumptions about life and relationships from their parents.

There's comfort in dating other individuals who understand the challenges and, sometimes, frustrations, of meeting cultural expectations. These expectations tend to pervade the culture, which is why it is often easier to date someone who

is having the same conversations with his/her parents at home. There's an innate commonality and familiarity that exists among young people who share cultural traditions and pressures. Young South Asian Americans were brought up in households that, largely, demonstrated conservative views on sex and dating. It is more difficult for someone who was brought up in a progressive household to relate to the viewpoints and foundational beliefs of someone who grew up in a household that operated under the [don't ask, don't tell rule](#).

Regardless of the ways in which the dating landscape has changed due to social media and dating apps, pressure to settle down and start a family for American-born South Asians still exists. Tapping into an online community of individuals (under the same pressure) and being eager to meet other individuals is the best way to balance both cultural pressures and the shifting attitudes of your generation.

The [Dil Mil app](#) offers a space where young South Asian Americans can balance their past with their future, and their familial culture with their generational culture. By curating a niche space for individuals with similar backgrounds and shared experiences to meet and connect, Dil Mil is reversing some of the widespread cynicism that has started to emerge from the entire mobile dating landscape. Unlike other generalized apps where the only commonality is geography, Dil Mil's community is comprised of individuals eager to make new connections and striving to begin serious and long-term relationships. The intentions and attitudes toward dating, sex, and marriage are tangible, which makes it easier for individuals to find their future significant others.

*Dil Mil is available for [iOS](#) and [Android](#).*