

Study: 15 percent of US adults have used online dating sites, dating apps

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Nisha Paige isn't shy. Not online, anyway.

Paige, a 33-year-old graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh, is a former Irish dancer who enjoys posing for 1950s-era cheesecake shots that she posts online. Sitting in front of a computer or flipping through a smartphone, she says, she feels at home.

This extends to online dating, where she met her fiancé, Bryan Bowman, also 33.

"I don't feel like I have to put on an act; I have social anxiety and not the best self-esteem," she said. "The Internet makes sense to me."

Indeed, she is hardly alone, according to a new study released Thursday by the Pew Research Center - just in time for Valentine's Day. Revisiting a topic explored in 2013, Pew discovered 15 percent of U.S. adults have used [online dating sites](#) such as Match.com and/or mobile dating apps like Tinder, up from 11 percent two years ago.

The areas of most rapid growth were the youngest adults (ages 18-24) and older Americans in their 50s and 60s. The survey included 2,001 U.S. adults, 18 or older, contacted June 10-July 12, 2015, via land line and cellphones.

"Definitely the most surprising aspect is the huge jump in online dating use by very young adults, specifically people in their late teens and early 20s," said Aaron Smith, Pew associate director of research.

"If you look at all the academic literature, it says this is a group that should not need online dating, because they are surrounded by young, available single people," Smith said.

Users age 18 to 24 say they have increased their clicking and swiping almost threefold since 2013:

from 10 percent to 27 percent. This marks the biggest jump; older survey participants indicate they've doubled their usage of higher-tech ways to meet people.

Beyond the bigger services such as Match.com or eHarmony, there is a dizzying array of apps. Plenty of Fish, Tinder, OKCupid, Happn, MeetMe. Some help make a match, a hookup or just provide an amusing way to spend time browsing.

Looking for gay love? There's Grindr. Bumble is designed to let women make the first move, or just find a friend. With Hinge, would-be daters must have a common friend on social media.

The latter speaks to a concern expressed by women in the Pew survey. Fifty-three percent who have used online dating say it's more dangerous than other ways of meeting people, compared to 38 percent of the men.

After starting out on Craigslist and finding participants "grungy and gross," Paige switched to more reputable services. She came across Bowman's profile twice: first on Plenty of Fish, then OKCupid. "I said, 'I've seen this guy twice now, I should probably reach out.'"

"And the rest is history."

The overall takeaway from Pew's latest survey shows that although the numbers were relatively small for online service/app usage in 2013 - ranging from 3 percent to 17 percent among the different age groups - they are rising by leaps and bounds.

In the 45-54 age group, usage rose from 17 percent to 21 percent, and doubled, from 6 percent to 12 percent, among those 55-64. This could be due to a de-stigmatizing factor; 41 percent of Americans say they know someone who uses online [dating](#) and 29 percent say they know someone who has met a spouse or long-term

partner that way.

"I'm a Tinder man, I admit it," said Dave Mechler, 28, of Jefferson Hills, Pa. "You don't really meet people at work, and the bar scene is tiresome from a guy's point of view, striking up a conversation at a bar is really, really hard. I guess online, you're on the same playing field. She's not laughing at you. There's no expectation other than saying 'I'm not interested.'"

A Point Park University graduate, Mechler has met girlfriends online. He is among an influential group: Pew research backs previous data indicating higher levels of education and income translate into knowing those who use such services.

Although currently single, he is hopeful: "I think there is someone online for everyone."

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