

## Commitment Desirability, Loneliness, and Emotional Regulation in Modern Dating

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In changing context of modern dating, influenced by online platforms and transforming social norms, this research investigates the interplay between commitment desirability, loneliness and emotional regulation in young adults. Using a sample of 181 participants aged 17-30, the study employed standardized tools the Commitment Desirability Scale (CDS), UCLA Loneliness scale, and Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), to explore the dynamic interplay of these psychological constructs in modern romantic relationships. Quantitative methods were adopted for this study. Loneliness was negatively correlated with commitment desirability at a significant level, suggesting that higher loneliness was reported by people who had less desire for committed relationships, independent sample t-tests indicated that single participants were significantly lonelier compared to those in committed relationships. In addition, female participants were rated higher on commitment desirability and emotional regulation, implying gender differences in relational and emotional orientation. But two-way ANOVA did not observe any significant gender differences in loneliness consistent with results from previous large-scale studies. The research concludes that loneliness, desire for commitment, and emotional regulation are connected in significant ways during modern dating and are more influenced by relationship status and emotions than by gender. These findings have implications for understanding emotional well-being in digital mediated relationships and suggest future directions, including longitudinal research across diverse gender identities and relationship types. Acknowledging limitations like sample imbalance, lack of mental health controls, and urban bias, the study lays a foundation for further psychological exploration of modern romantic dynamics.

**Keywords:** commitment desirability, emotional regulation, loneliness, modern dating

### Modern Dating

Modern dating pertains to the changing practices and rituals of romantic relationships, which have been greatly shaped by technological innovations and the popular use of dating apps. These online sites have transformed the way people communicate, connect, and navigate courtship expectations and, by extension, transformed societal norms and individual experiences in romance (Lad, n.d.). Especially among emerging adults, contemporary dating is a multifaceted interplay of individual agency and cultural forces, as in Croatian society, changing relationship norms are in sync with

international trends while retaining specific cultural subtleties (Šutiæ et al., 2022). Emotional regulation is also a significant factor in determining relationship dynamics, as poor emotional regulation has been associated with emotionally damaging behaviors in romantic relationships. There is evidence that shows a negative relationship between emotional control and emotional abuse, with such people being more inclined toward having unhealthy patterns in relationships (Rofifah & Widyastuti, 2022). Commitment levels also play an important role in determining partner desirability, with sexual permissive attitudes affecting the way

people assess potential partners for casual and long-term relations. Research indicates that commitment perceptions influence partner choice, an existing convergence of cultural relationship expectations and contemporary dating habits (Oliver & Sedikides, 1992).

### **Commitment Desirability**

Commitment desirability refers to the subjective desire to be involved in a committed romantic relationship, distinct from a general belief that committed relationships are ideal (Slotter et al., 2019). People vary in the extent to which they believe that a committed relationship is desirable for them. Individuals high in commitment desirability were more willing to support their partner's own individual goals especially if they perceived their partners to be highly committed to the relationship. The research suggested that commitment desirability is a meaningful predictor of relationship attitudes and behaviors (Tan et al., 2019).

The foundation of stable romantic relationships ultimately rests in partners' commitment to one another. Much research has shown how commitment to a partner reliably predicts critical outcomes such as relationship stability and maintenance behaviors (Agnew et al., 2010). However, committed relationships also feature times of negativity, conflict, and distress. There are numerous examples in the literature of declines in marital satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1997) and of individuals remaining involved in abusive romantic relationships (Arriaga et al, 1995). Such experiences might influence one's beliefs about the desirability of romantic commitment. In modern romantic contexts, commitment remains a foundational component of relationship success, defined by a person's intent and motivation to maintain a relationship over time (Joel et al., 2010).

### **Loneliness**

Loneliness is a phenomenon that affects health and well-being among different populations. It has become a recognized worldwide public health concern, and nations have begun developing interventions to support social connection and mitigate its negative effects (Morgan & Placa, 2024). Bucher et al. (2025) compared differences in life satisfaction and emotional loneliness between singles, mingles (those in uncommitted intimate relationships,) and partnered adults. Their quantitative research with 764 participants concluded that mingles reported intermediate levels of loneliness to singles and couples, and that relationship commitment was associated with enhanced well-being. The effects of loneliness are especially dire in older adults, as studies show a high correlation between chronic loneliness and a higher risk of death (Nakou et al.,2025).

The explosion of bumble type sites has been associated with attempts at relief of loneliness on the part of those users who end up affected in terms of negative impacts upon their self-image (Dewi & Hatta,2024). Yang et al. (2023) investigated rejection sensitivity among 459 Chinese individuals using online dating apps and concluded that higher exposure to dating apps increased feelings of loneliness. Moreover, dating anxiety worsens loneliness among users, and high correlation exists between two variables, though gender does not seem to moderate the relationship (Rinaldi et al., 2024). Also, loneliness impacts people's communication competence, causing difficulties in selling oneself to a potential partner (Bell & Roloff, 1991).

### **Emotional Regulation**

Emotions are deeply embedded in the social fabric of our lives. In fact, the word emotion itself emerged with a decidedly sociopolitical connotation in fifteenth-century

France (Hochner 2016). Influential definitions of emotion regulation have focused on “the processes by which *individuals* influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions” (Gross 1998, emphasis added). It plays a fundamental role in maintaining psychological well-being and adaptive functioning across various life domains (McRae & Gross, 2020). As emotional challenges increasingly intersect with mental health, social identity, and interpersonal functioning, the study of ER has expanded both in scope and methodological sophistication. Karantzas et al. (2020) examined 200 couples and found that secure attachment was positively associated with both emotion regulation capacity and relational well-being. Their study suggests that individuals with stronger emotion regulation skills are more likely to engage in and maintain committed romantic partnerships. Similarly, Grills et al. (2012), in their research with 144 students, identified that difficulties in emotion regulation correlated with higher perpetration of dating violence, reflecting how emotional dysregulation can hinder healthy commitment and foster relational instability.

Loneliness, another critical variable, has been linked closely to emotion regulation. Eldesouky et al. (2024), in a quantitative study of 187 individuals using daily assessments, found that people experiencing greater loneliness reported more maladaptive regulation strategies, such as suppression and rumination. Eldesouky et al. (2024) demonstrated that feelings of loneliness are associated with distinct emotion regulation patterns in everyday life, emphasizing the role of contextual and interpersonal factors in emotional control. In addition, meta-analytic and neuroscientific approaches have begun to reveal the biological underpinnings of ER. Monachesi et al. (2023) examined neural activity across

multiple studies and found that different regulation strategies engage distinct brain regions, offering a biological basis for individual differences in emotion management.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the study is to explore how commitment desirability, loneliness, and emotional regulation interact in modern dating.

### **Objective**

- 1 To examine the relationship between commitment desirability and loneliness in modern dating.
- 2 To explore the association between loneliness and emotional regulation among individuals in different relationship status.
- 3 To explore gender-related differences in commitment desirability, loneliness and emotional regulation in the context of modern dating.

### **Hypotheses**

- H1: There is a negative correlation between commitment desirability and loneliness.
- H2: Single individuals will report significantly higher loneliness than individuals in a committed relationship.
- H3: Females tend to show greater desirability for commitment and emotional regulation in a relationship than males.
- H4: Females tend to feel lonelier in a relationship than males in modern dating.

### **Method**

#### **Sample**

The sample for this study consists of 181 young adults aged between 17-30.

Purposive and snowball sampling design is employed to make sure that young adults are included who are single or in a committed relationship. Sample is selected from all over India, but mostly participants are from Delhi, NCR region. All the research participants were informed regarding the aim of the study and informed consent was taken.

### Measures

*Commitment desirability scale (CDS)* given by Day et al. (2016), is a 5-item self-report scale that measures one's subjective desire for involvement in a committed romantic partnership. Respondents rate on a 9-point Likert scale from "Do not agree at all" (0) to "Agree completely" (8). The scale showed good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87. Confirmatory factor analysis revealed good model fit, and the scale showed good convergent and discriminant validity against measures of attachment, loneliness, and interpersonal needs.

*Emotion regulation questionnaire (ERQ)* developed by Gross and John in 2003, the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) is a 10-item self-report that was developed to measure two major strategies of emotional regulation: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Participants indicate each item on a 7-point Likert scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree. The scale has good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha scores averaging 0.79 for the Reappraisal subscale and 0.73 for the Suppression subscale. It also has an acceptable test-retest reliability with a 0.69 coefficient on both subscales at a 3-month interval.

*UCLA Loneliness scale:* Constructed by Russell, Peplau, and Ferguson in 1978 and again in 1996, the UCLA Loneliness Scale is a 20-item survey that scores subjective assessments of loneliness and feelings of social isolation. Respondents answer on a 4-point scale: "Often," "Sometimes," "Rarely,"

and "Never." This short form is highly internally consistent, with alpha coefficients from 0.89 to 0.94, and test-retest reliability of 0.73 over a one-year interval. It also shows excellent convergent and construct validity.

### Procedure

The data was collected through an online survey which consisted of basic demographic details. The relationship status and three standardized questionnaires were used. Commitment desirability scale for commitment desirability, Emotion regulation questionnaire for Emotion regulation and UCLA Loneliness scale for Loneliness. For each scale, clear instructions were stated at the beginning. All the participants were ensured of the confidentiality of their response. The form was sent and forwarded to people who live in India. The statistical techniques, viz. Descriptive statistics, Spearman's rho, independent sample T-Test and Two-way Anova were used to interpret the objectives and hypothesis of this study.

### Results

This study aimed to understand the interaction of commitment desirability, loneliness and emotion regulation in modern dating. Dating can be described as individuals spending time together under a romantic context (Tadros et al. 2024).

Table 1 Descriptive Table

	commitment desirability	loneliness	emotional regulation
N	181	181	181
Missing	16	16	16
Mean	28.6	18.8	45.8
Median	31	18	45
Mode	32.0	5.00 <sup>a</sup>	45.0 <sup>a</sup>
Standard deviation	6.57	11.9	8.84
Minimum	0	0	24

Maximum	40	53	70
Skewness	-1.68	0.386	0.231
Std. error skewness	0.181	0.181	0.181
Kurtosis	4.09	-0.441	0.392
Std. error kurtosis	0.359	0.359	0.359
Shapiro-Wilk W	0.840	0.970	0.985
Shapiro-Wilk p	<.001	<.001	0.045

Table 1 shows Descriptive statistics and tests for normality were performed for commitment desirability, loneliness and emotional regulation ( $N=181$ ). Commitment desirability scored a mean of 28.6 ( $SD=6.57$ ), was negatively skewed (skewness = -1.68), and exhibited leptokurtosis (Kurtosis = 4.09). Loneliness scored a mean of 18.8 ( $SD=11.9$ ), with very slight positive skewness (0.386) and platykurtic properties (kurtosis = -0.441). Emotional regulation had a mean of 45.89 ( $SD = 8.84$ ) and was roughly normally distributed (skewness = 0.231, kurtosis = 0.392).

Table 2: Correlation Table

		loneliness	commitment desirability
loneliness	Spearman's rho	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
	N	—	
commitment desirability	Spearman's rho	-0.248***	—
	df	179	—
	p-value	<.001	—
	N	181	—

Note . \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The correlation table 2 shows that Spearman's rank-order correlation was implemented given the non-normal

distribution of commitment desirability scores as suggested by the Shapiro-silk test ( $W=0.840$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The findings indicated a significant negative correlation between the two variables ( $179$ )  $=-0.248$ ,  $p < .001$ . From the findings, we can interpret that with greater loneliness, the desire for commitment in love relationships becomes weaker, but the association between the two according to the results. That is, those who scored themselves lonelier were somewhat less inclined to rate themselves as desiring committed relationships. The reverse quality of this association could be an indicator of a psychological distancing response, with those higher in loneliness possibly avoiding emotional dependence with the prospect of successful relationships. These findings confirm the hypothesis that loneliness is significantly and negatively correlated with commitment desirability.

Table 3 shows independent samples of t-test conducted to compare the hypothesis that would predict single participants would score more highly on loneliness than participants in committed relationships. The test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two groups on the loneliness score,  $t(179) = 197.314$   $tn$  5.26,  $p < .001$ , such that single participants scored higher on loneliness. The difference between means was 9.03 ( $SE=1.72$ ), meaning that singles rated, on average, 9.03 points higher on loneliness than people with committed relationships. Levene's test was significant ( $p < .05$ ), indicating a deviation of the assumption of homogeneity of variances; hence, Welch's t-test was applied. The effect size, Cohen's  $d = 0.812$ , showed a large and significant difference. These results showed a large and significant difference. These findings confirm the hypothesis, showing that being single is associated with significantly higher levels of loneliness.

Table 3: Independent Sample T- Test

	Statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference	Effect Size
loneliness Student's t	5.26 <sup>a</sup>	179	<.001	9.03	1.72	Cohen's d 0.812

Note. H<sub>a</sub>  $\mu_{\text{Single}} > \mu_{\text{Committed}}$

Table 3.1: Independent Sample T- Test

	Statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference	Effect Size
commitment desirability	Student's t	2.04	179	0.043	2.191.08	Cohen's d 0.337
emotional regulation	Student's t	2.32	179	0.022	3.341.44	Cohen's d 0.383

Table 3.1 indicates the results of an independent sample t- test conducted again to test the hypothesis that females would exhibit higher desirability for commitment and emotional control in relationships than males. Gender was labeled so that males were level 1 and females were level 2. For desirability of commitment, findings indicated a statistically significant difference,  $t(179) = 2.04$ ,  $p = .043$ , with females scoring significantly higher than males by an average of 2.19 ( $SE = 1.08$ ), with a small to medium effect size (Cohen's  $d = 0.337$ ). While the

normality test for commitment desirability produced a lower p-value, the high sample size ( $N=181$ ) gives protection to the t-test through central limit theorem. Similarly, for emotional regulation, females scored higher than males,  $t(179) = 2.32$ ,  $p = .022$ , with a difference of 3.34( $SE = 1.44$ ) and a small to medium effect size (Chen's  $d = 0.383$ ). These findings support the hypothesis, indicating that females tend to show significantly higher commitment desirability and emotional regulation in relationships than males.

Table 4: Two-way Anova

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
relationship status	2834.15	1	2834.15	22.6954	<.001
gender	9.80	1	9.80	0.0785	0.780

Table 4 presents the outcome of a two-way ANOVA with relationship status and gender as predictors of loneliness. As it turned out, there was a significant main effect of relationship status,  $F(1, df \text{ error}) = 22.70$ ,  $p < .001$ , which means that loneliness was significantly different among the single and committed relationships. In contrast, there was no significant main effect of gender,  $F(1, df \text{ error}) = 0.08$ ,  $p = .780$ , suggesting that overall levels of loneliness did not significantly differ between males and females. These findings are consistent with

relationship status having a greater impact on loneliness than gender alone, partly supporting the hypothesis.

### Discussion

Modern dating has been present in cultures for many years now. Over time, modern dating apps have changed the way of meeting and interacting with future partners (Castro,A & Barrada, J.R., 2020). It has evolved with technology, cultural attitudes and expectations from relationships has been molded over the years.

### **Commitment desirability and Loneliness**

The findings showed a statistically significant negative correlation between loneliness and commitment desirability. This can be interpreted as those who reported greater loneliness were more likely to indicate lower desirability for committed romantic relationships. This result is consistent with previous research that suggests that lonely individuals might display emotional distancing as a self-protection mechanism, possibly avoiding emotionally vulnerable experiences like committed relationships. (Yamaguchi et al., 2017). The researchers in the previous studies found that loneliness was a predictor of insensitivity to partner commitment cues, suggesting that lonely individuals might be less sensitive to emotionally supportive actions from partners. This psychological distancing might account for why, in the present study, increased loneliness was linked with less commitment desirability. Instead of looking for commitment as a way of emotional satisfaction, lonely people might repress desires for relationships, possibly due to fear of rejection or previous relationship failures.

### **Loneliness and Relationship Status**

The results indicated that singles had significantly higher loneliness scores than their committed individuals in relationships. This is in keeping with previous work by De Jong-Gierveld and Aalverts (1980), who reported that unmarried, divorced and widowed or people living alone who were named as “creative singles” participants had higher loneliness levels than married or people with partners. The significant mean difference of 9.03 for loneliness ratings in our sample supports the notion that relationship status is an important factor in people’s subjective sense of being alone.

Interestingly, while the literature acknowledges that some singles are referred to as “creative singles” may adapt well to

solitude, but most individuals living alone still experience increased loneliness (De Jong-Gierveld & Albert’s, 1980). This aligns with the results of our study and underscored that although some individuals can do well by themselves, the lack of romantic partners often leads to emotional voids.

### **Commitment Desirability and Emotional Regulation**

The findings indicate that females might be more inclined toward emotional investment and stability within romantic relationships than males. Higher desirability of commitment among females can be understood through the lens of commitment-skepticism bias, as proposed by Brown and Olkhov (2015), which states that women are evolutionarily predisposed to seek greater commitment cues before completely investing in a partner. Once these signals are perceived, females tend to value commitment more highly, which may explain their higher scores. Moreover, the higher emotional regulation of women is consistent with earlier work demonstrating that women are consistent with earlier work demonstrating that females employ a larger and more flexible set of strategies to control emotion (Goubet & Chrysiou, 2019). Such emotional flexibility could add to their relational functioning and emotional sensitivity, leading to improved regulation in romantic contexts. Collectively, these gender differences reflect both socialized and possibly evolved tendencies that underlie the ways men and women engage in emotional and relational relationships.

### **Gender, Relationship Status and Loneliness**

The results of the current study indicated that relationship status significantly impacted loneliness, where people in committed relationships scored lower for loneliness than singles, but no significant difference was observed in loneliness between men and

women. This is consistent with Maes et al (2019) large meta-analysis of 751 effect sizes from almost 400,000 participants that determined there to be a negligible gender difference in loneliness ( $g=0.07$ ). These findings oppose long-established stereotypes that women are lonelier than men and speak to the need to move beyond simplistic gender contrasts. (Barreto et al 2025) similarly argues that gender differences in loneliness are often overstated and inconsistent, especially in smaller, less diverse samples and highlights that the dynamics of emotion potentially play a more complex role. whereas men might gain more from romantic relationships because of social cultural dependence on partners for emotional support, women, normally more involved in emotional work, might continue to feel lonely even if their emotional needs are not fulfilled (Barrett et al 2025). The current study results therefore support the emerging research perspective that relationship quality, emotional reciprocity, and sociocultural gender roles rather than gender identity better predict loneliness.

#### **Future Directions**

As the dynamics of modern dating continue to shift, future research should consider several key areas to deepen our understanding of emotional and relational patterns in today's dating landscape.

One key area is the relationship between loneliness and commitment. While this study found that higher loneliness was linked to a lower desire for commitment, it's not yet clear whether one causes the other or if the relationship works in both directions. Long-term studies could help determine whether loneliness leads people to avoid commitment, or if avoiding commitment, perhaps due to past negative experiences leads to greater feelings of isolation over time. Gaining insight into these emotional patterns could help in understanding how both healthy

relationships and long-term loneliness develop.

Another important direction is to broaden the focus beyond binary gender comparisons. While differences in emotional regulation and commitment behavior have often been explored between men and women, less is known about how these patterns show up among non-binary and gender-diverse individuals. Including a wider range of gender identities in future studies could lead to more inclusive and accurate understandings of how people experience emotional connection and relationship goals.

Since emotional regulation appeared relatively consistent in this study, but loneliness varied more widely, future work could look at how certain traits or skills such as emotional intelligence or social coping mechanisms help people manage feelings of loneliness.

Finally, instead of focusing only on whether someone is in a relationship, it could be more meaningful to assess the quality of that relationship. Simply having a partner doesn't always lead to emotional satisfaction. Future studies should explore how factors like emotional support, mutual understanding, and overall relationship quality relate to well-being, potentially offering a more complete picture than relationship status alone.

#### **Limitations**

One of the limitations of the study was that some variables did not meet normality, which led to the use of non-parametric tests in analysis. Further, the sample contained unequal numbers of the committed and single participants, which may have hindered the statistical power of the study. Another limitation was the underrepresentation of males in the research study, as the sample consisted of more females, possibly limiting the generalization of the study. Moreover, the sample constituted a larger urban Indian

population, thus limiting in presenting a wider population. Finally, confounding variables such as mental health status and socioeconomic backgrounds were not fully controlled. Despite these limitations, this study paves a direction for future research aiming to understand relationship psychology.

### Conclusion

Today's dating world is increasingly shaped by personal choice and the accessibility offered by online platforms (Tadros, Jordan, & Sugrue, 2024). The present study examined the interplay between commitment desirability, emotional regulation and loneliness in the context of modern dating. The findings revealed a gender difference among males and females in commitment desirability, showing higher commitment desirability in females along with exhibiting greater emotional regulation than male counterparts. Notably, it is found that individuals showcasing higher levels of loneliness tended to report lower desirability in commitment, suggesting a protective mechanism or emotional distancing. Further, findings revealed that while the relationship status of individuals did significantly affect loneliness, with singles reporting higher levels of loneliness, the gender did not play much difference suggesting more research in traditional gender assumption on loneliness.

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