

ASHLEY MADISON®

Decoding Gen Z:

A global report on *non-monogamy*,
sex, and the desire for discretion



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Overview

Much has been said of Generation Z (or Gen Z), the post-millennial generation born between the mid-to-late 1990s and early 2010s: They're entitled, but also driven and ambitious. They're the "loneliest generation," but more connected than ever before. They're shrewd consumers, but racking up more credit card debt than previous generations. They're snowflakes, but highly pragmatic. They want it all but they're struggling. Simply put, they're a generation of contradictions.

And with respect to sex, the contradictions only compound: Gen Z's been called puriteens and sex negative, but also sex positive and the kinkiest generation yet. It's been suggested that they're gettin' busy less often than their millennial counterparts (and even choosing celibacy in some cases), while simultaneously being heralded as the most sexually progressive generation to ever exist, thanks to growing up in a more accepting environment, able to be open about their sexuality. Born into a time of unprecedented change, technology, and access to information, Gen Z is unlike any generation that came before it.

Another seeming contradiction is that in recent years Ashley Madison, the world's leading married dating site, has registered Gen Z to be the top age group to sign up to the site, even though the large majority of them have never been married. In 2022 alone more than 1.8 million Gen Z joined (of which more than 93,000 were from Canada) representing 40% of all signups.

To better understand this fascinating cohort, Ashley Madison surveyed both Gen Z (defined here as 18-29 year olds) at the general population level in 10 countries via YouGov, as well as our Gen Z members on their attitudes toward privacy, discretion, and non-monogamy — and their answers may surprise you.

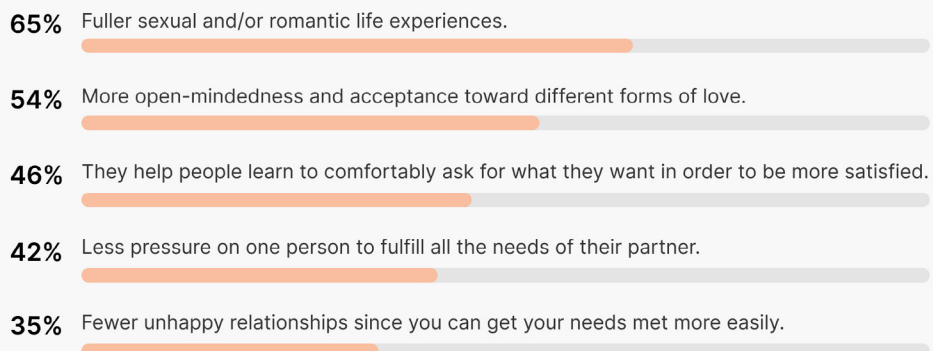


Gen Z, sex, and a new set of rules

When it comes to sex, Gen Z is far more progressive and comfortable with the concept of non-monogamy than previous generations, with almost half (48%) of Canadian general population respondents willing to consider a non-monogamous relationship. Fifty-nine percent of Gen Z members said they wanted either an open or a polyamorous relationship, attributing to them many benefits including fuller sexual and/or romantic life experiences, and more open-mindedness/acceptance toward different forms of love.



BENEFITS OF NON-MONOAMY



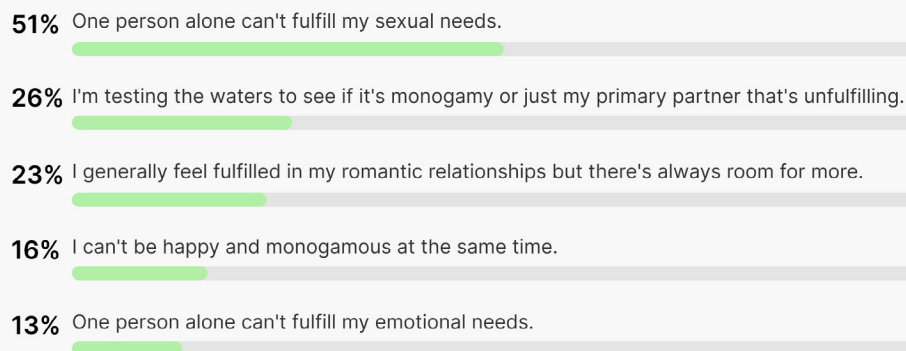
According to Ashley Madison members (ages 18 - 29)

Pragmatic about multiple partners

The member survey further confirmed Gen Z's pragmatism towards open relationships, with many establishing disclosed non-monogamy agreements with their partners. It seems that for Gen Z, non-monogamy is just a part of who they are, and not necessarily a reflection of their partner or relationship. In fact, for Ashley Madison members, the number one reason for seeking outside/multiple partners is because one person alone can't fulfill their sexual needs (51%).



I SEEK OUTSIDE PARTNERS BECAUSE...



According to Ashley Madison members (ages 18 - 29)

With respect to women, 29% of Ashley Madison members are in search of outside/multiple partners because they don't believe that one person alone can fulfill their emotional needs, compared to 9% of male members. What's more, perhaps surprisingly, 21% of female members don't believe that they can be happy and monogamous at the same time, whereas only 15% of men feel that way.

WHY GEN Z MEMBERS WANT MULTIPLE PARTNERS

Women

- 50%** One person alone can't fulfill my sexual needs.
- 29%** One person alone can't fulfill my emotional needs.
- 21%** I can't be happy and monogamous at the same time.
- 18%** I've always been non-monogamous and it's just the norm for me.
- 18%** I generally feel fulfilled in my romantic relationships but there's always room for more.

Men

- 50%** One person alone can't fulfill my sexual needs.
- 29%** I'm testing the waters to see if it's monogamy or just my primary partner that's unfulfilling.
- 25%** I generally feel fulfilled in my romantic relationships but there's always room for more.
- 15%** I can't be happy and monogamous at the same time.
- 12%** I would have left my primary partner if I didn't find a way to outsource my needs.

According to Ashley Madison members (ages 18 - 29)

Interestingly, female members are three times more likely than male members to have always been non-monogamous (18% vs 5%) suggesting that women have been embracing the concept longer than their male counterparts.

"It's a common preconception that it's men that want sexual adventure, and that's true, but not as much as women in my experience. When I ask people about the best sex of their lives, men tell me it was when they performed well (or had multiple partners), women describe unusual places, taboo, or risky as their favourite and most memorable sex. Women also reference early sexual experiences where they kissed for hours and had the newness of first-time experiences."

Sue McGarvie
Clinical Therapist

A generation of sexually adventurous females

The member survey further illustrated that albeit a minority, female members tend to be more sexually adventurous than men, despite also needing more than one person emotionally. Female members are three times more likely than male members to have hooked up with one or multiple people of the same sex (15% vs 5%), four times more likely to have had one or multiple same-sex relationships via Ashley Madison (8% vs 2%), and twice as likely to have had threesomes/group sex with people of various genders/identities (7% vs 3%).



Rewriting relationships

For a generation accused of excessive oversharing, it may be surprising to learn that the majority of Ashley Madison members surveyed don't feel the need to publicize their romantic relationships, with 68% of women and 65% of men indicating they wouldn't generally make their relationships public.



TOP REASONS I DON'T PUBLICIZE MY RELATIONSHIPS



According to Ashley Madison members (ages 18 - 29)

Of those choosing to make their relationships official online, 81% of Ashley Madison members prefer to 'soft launch' their new relationship by slowly and subtly releasing content that features their partner, while 19% prefer a 'hard launch' approach and debut their relationship to followers with a dedicated update. Interestingly, male members are more likely than women to prefer soft-launching their new relationships (82% vs 76%), with women slightly preferring to hard-launching over men (24% vs 18%).

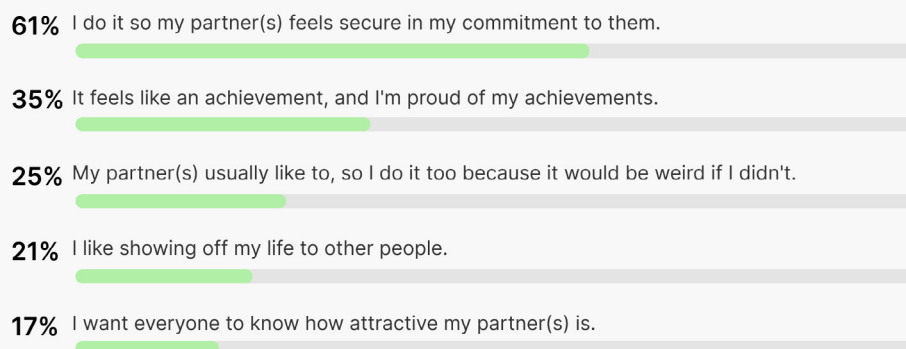
As for what's driving the decision to socialize their new relationships, 61% of Ashley Madison members said that they do so to help their partner feel more secure in their commitment to them. When compared to the 45% of the Canadian general population who said the same, this suggests that Ashley Madison members are more in tune with their partners' needs than average.

Twenty-nine percent of Ashley Madison members feel that people only publicize relationships for outside validation, and 20% of members find relationship announcements cringey compared to 48% (the highest percentage of any country surveyed) and 37% of the Canadian general population, respectively. This suggests that Ashley Madison members are perhaps less cynical and open minded about new relationships and motivations behind going public with them.

Thirty-five percent of members feel like relationships are an achievement, and make them public because they are proud of them, which is consistent with the 37% of the Canadian general population who feel similarly – again the highest percentage on an international level. It appears that the Gen Z general population is very much divided between those that thrive on exhibiting their private lives and those that reject such behavior. Interestingly, there similarly exists a gender split as female members are more likely to view relationships as an achievement compared to men (43% vs 34%), as well as to enjoy showing off their lives to others more (33% vs 19%).



TOP REASONS FOR MAKING A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP PUBLIC



According to Ashley Madison members (ages 18 - 29)

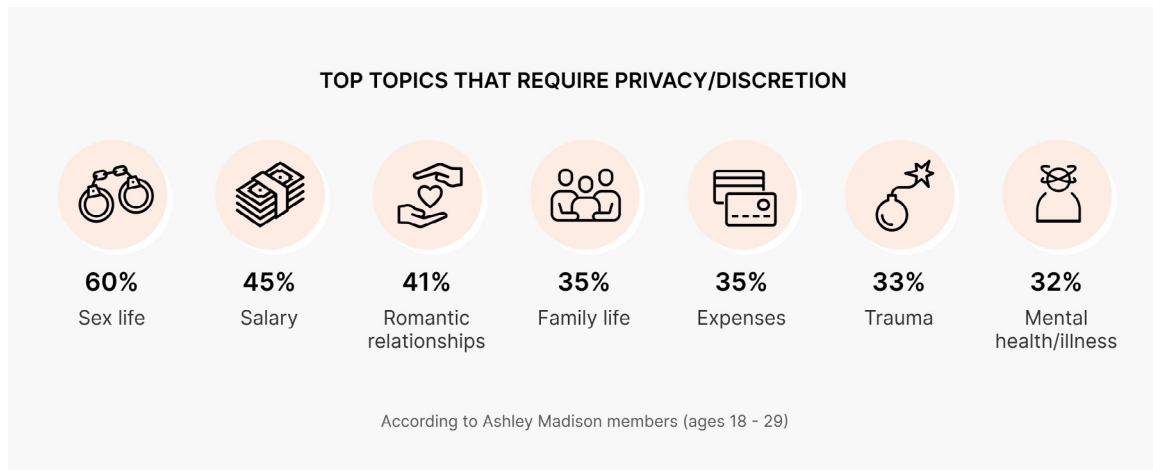
"Those who want discretion really desire privacy due to work, family or personal reasons, but Gen Z are fearless compared to older generations. It summarizes the contradictions of Gen Z's. It's either "Look at me", and/or "I care less about what you think" when talking about sharing their personal relationships."

Sue McGarvie

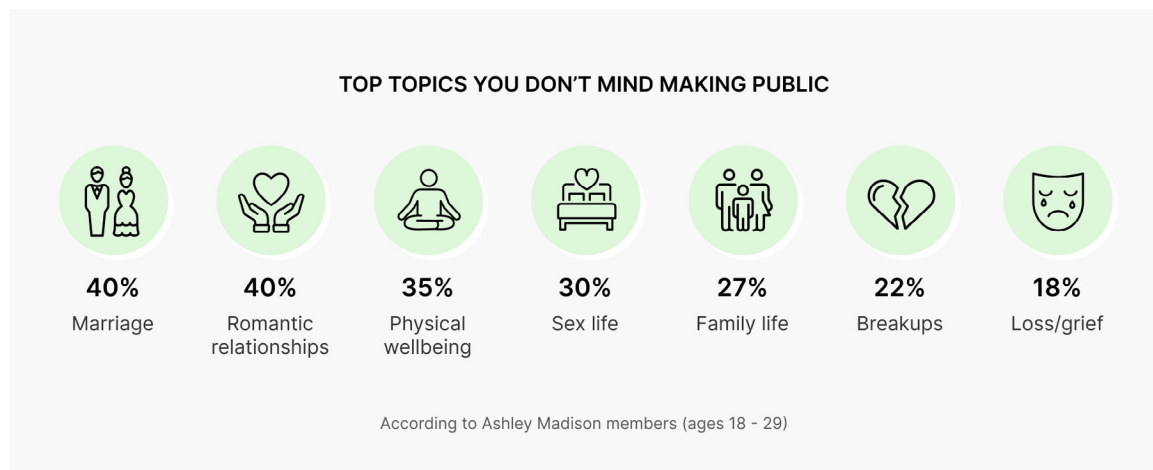
Clinical Therapist

Keeping things discreet... unless they aren't.

As for topics that warrant privacy, unanimity across all members of Ashley Madison is that sex life requires the most discretion, followed by salary, romantic relationships, and family life. Interestingly, while female Ashley Madison members are more inclined than males to feel that sex lives should be kept discreet (68% vs 59%), 24% of female and 31% of male members don't mind making it public, compared to just 8% of the Canadian general population.



What's more is that, while family life and romantic relationships are the no. 3 and no. 4 topics to warrant privacy, they are also concurrently the topics that Ashley Madison members don't mind making public, presenting more contradiction in terms of privacy expectations.



When it comes to Gen Z on Ashley Madison, 44% of female members and 34% of male members find the discretion the platform offers appealing and useful, with 53% of female members and 39% of male members liking the ability to disguise or hide their face on Ashley Madison until they're ready to reveal themselves. Interestingly, female members are almost twice as likely than male members to use the site for openly non-monogamous relationships/hook-ups (22% vs 12%).

"Someone asked what I thought had changed in sexuality in the last few years, and I said it was the fearlessness of younger women. Feeling confident to unapologetically dictate how they wanted their sex lives to evolve – that celibacy is a choice, and so is polyamory. The attitude that poly relationships are not just inconsequential sex. That one person may not meet emotional or physical needs. They are texting two or more different people every day saying that they love them, or at least staying engaged."

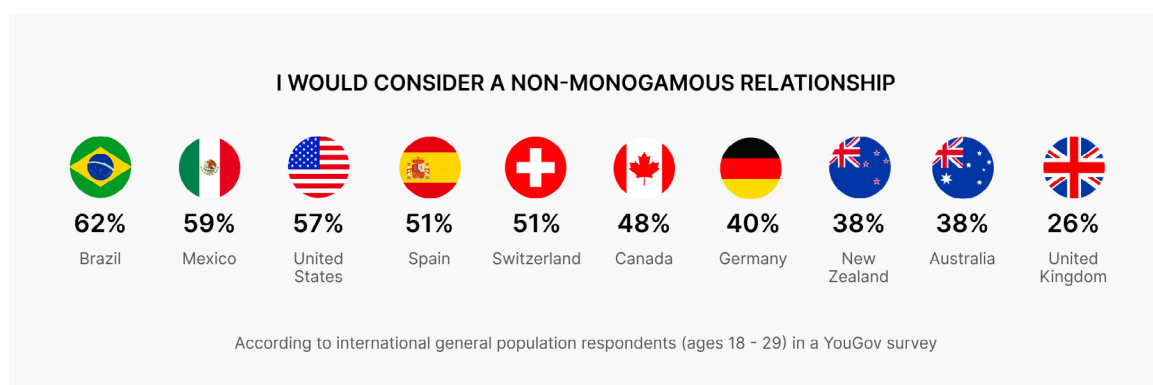
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Gen Z around the world

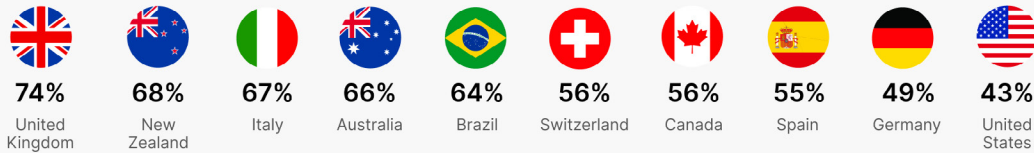
South of the equator, the Brazilian and Mexican Gen Z (defined here as ages 18-29) general populations lead the charge in terms of willingness to consider a non-monogamous relationship (62% and 59%, respectively), with Canada ranking in the middle field (48%) according to a survey by YouGov. Placing last is the United Kingdom, where only 26% of Gen Z would consider an open relationship.



Sex & Privacy

When it comes to their sex lives, close to two-thirds (56%) of Canadian Gen Zs indicated that it was a topic that warranted discretion/privacy, compared to 74% of their UK counterparts, 66% of Australians, and 67% of those in Mexico. While sex was the top choice from the provided list of things Gen Zers felt warranted discretion in the U.S., it had the lowest percentage compared to all other countries surveyed (49% vs. a range of 59%-84%).

I FEEL THAT SEX LIVES WARRANT DISCRETION



According to international general population respondents (ages 18 - 29) in a YouGov survey

However, of Gen Z Canadians who thought at least one listed item didn't warrant privacy, only 8% specified that they don't mind making their sex lives public. Contrast that with the nearly one in five in Spain (19%) that don't have a problem with it. Unsurprisingly, Ashley Madison members are more open about their sex lives (30%), and are more than three times as likely than Canadian Gen Zers in the YouGov survey to discuss what's going on in their bedrooms.

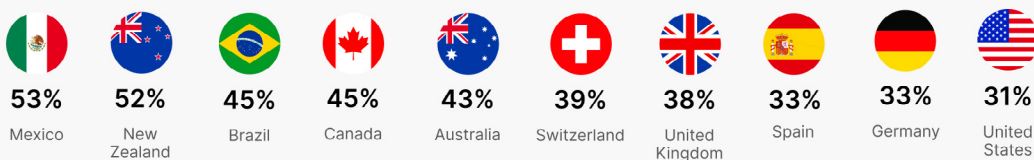
Publicizing relationships

As for romantic relationships, the majority of Ashley Madison members don't feel it necessary to make their relationships public (62%), or believe their personal relationships aren't anyone else's business (55%). Interestingly though, 35% of members want to publicize their relationships because they feel like achievements and are proud of them – further reinforcing the notion of contradiction.

Those who do/would make their relationships public, however, do so primarily so their partner(s) feel secure in their commitment to them (61%).

As for those in the YouGov survey who would consider making their relationships public on social media, some reasons they would do so include...

I MAKE MY RELATIONSHIPS PUBLIC... ... SO MY PARTNERS FEEL SECURE IN MY COMMITMENT TO THEM



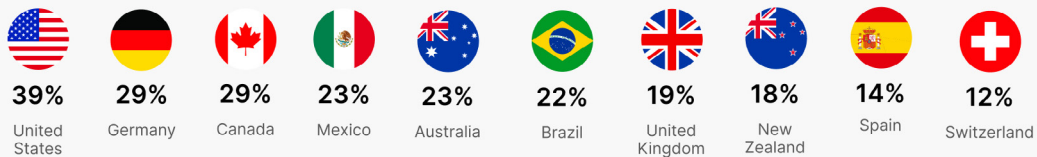
According to international general population respondents (ages 18 - 29) in a YouGov survey

I MAKE MY RELATIONSHIPS PUBLIC...
... BECAUSE IT FEELS LIKE AN ACHIEVEMENT, AND I'M PROUD OF MY ACHIEVEMENTS



According to international general population respondents (ages 18 - 29) in a YouGov survey

I MAKE MY RELATIONSHIPS PUBLIC...
... BECAUSE MY PARTNER(S) USUALLY LIKE TO, SO I DO IT TOO
BECAUSE IT WOULD BE WEIRD IF I DIDN'T



According to international general population respondents (ages 18 - 29) in a YouGov survey

Further, according to the YouGov study, showing off how successful and established one's partner is, is more important to these Canadian Gen Zers (19%) compared to other countries (United Kingdom 6%, Mexico 15%) and Ashley Madison members (12%).

What's more, Canada also has the second highest percentage of those that make a relationship public for clout (7%) among people who would make their relationship status public compared to 3% Ashley Madison members and 3% for Germany. Only the U.S. has a higher percentage with 15%.



Final thoughts

Typically, people love to make sweeping statements about entire generations, but our data suggests that Gen Z is a fascinating, contradictory cohort unlike any that came before it. While these contradictions may seem confusing, they're an output of the turbulent, rapidly changing environment Gen Z is currently experiencing as they grow into the people they will become. They have a sense of who they'd like to be, but they just aren't there yet. They straddle the line between youth and adulthood while they determine where they fit into this chaotic world. Because of this, Gen Z exists in a space where two opposing ideas can both be true – and the truth is full of contradictions.

Sources

1. Based on the number of signups to Ashley Madison since 2002.
2. Based on the number of global signups to Ashley Madison from January 1 to December 31, 2022.
3. Survey of 663 Ashley Madison Gen Z Members (respondents ages 18 – 29), April 4 – July 6, 2023.
4. YouGov survey conducted by YouGov of 17096 adults in ten countries, among whom 3,393 were aged 18-29; sample sizes for Canada were 2,016 and 389, respectively. Fieldwork was undertaken between 11th – 25th July 2023. The survey was carried out online.