

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 have 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 has never been married. In 2022 alone, more than 1.8 million Gen Z joined (of which more than 85,000 were from the UK) 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.

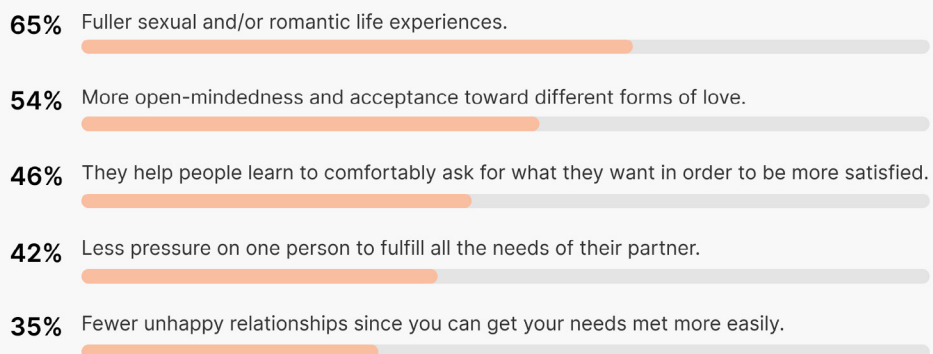


Gen Z, sex, and a new set of rules

When it comes to sex, Gen Z in the 10 countries surveyed is far more progressive and comfortable with the concept of non-monogamy than previous generations. 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-MONOGAMY



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%).



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.

"For some open monogamy relationships, staying emotionally monogamous while having a flexible or fluid sexual agreement can add variety and excitement and can heighten erotic energy. Both partners should communicate openly and agree on their primary values, discuss boundaries, and use 'what if' conversations to talk about potential experiences. Ashley Madison, with a large number of its members interested in being in an open relationship, provides a platform where both individuals and couples can meet who want similar types of relationships."

Dr. Tammy Nelson

Author of Open Monogamy

A generation of sexually adventurous females

The 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%).

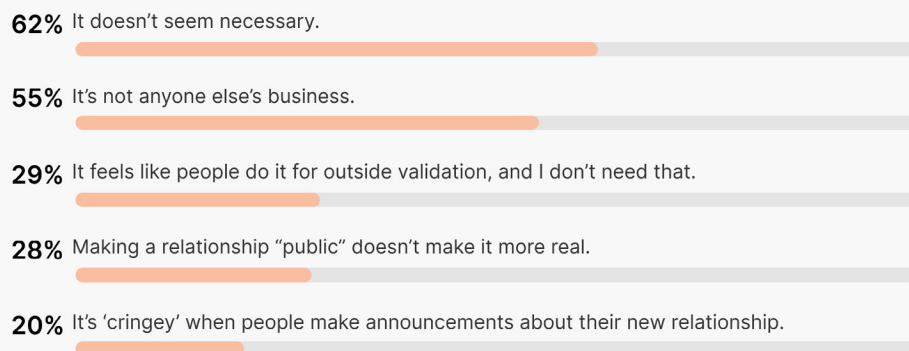


Rewriting relationships

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%).

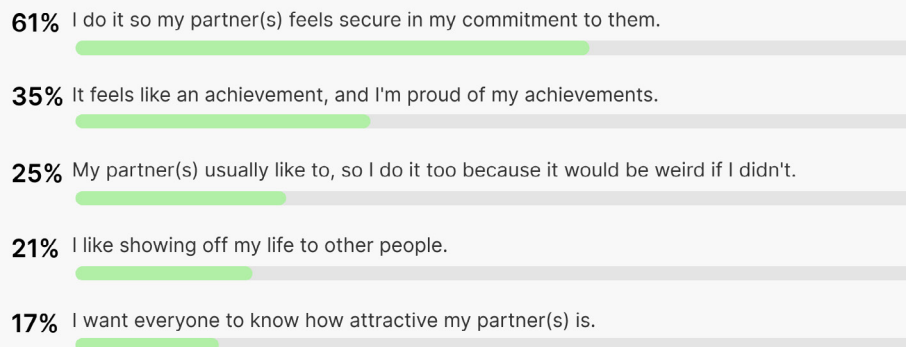
As for what's driving the decision to socialize their new relationships, 61% of Ashley Madison members said that they do so to help their partner feel more secure in their commitment to them. When compared to the 38% of the UK Gen Z general population who said the same, this suggests that Ashley Madison 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 41% and 36% of the UK Gen Z 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, consistent with the 27% of the UK Gen Z general population who feel similarly. Interestingly, 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)

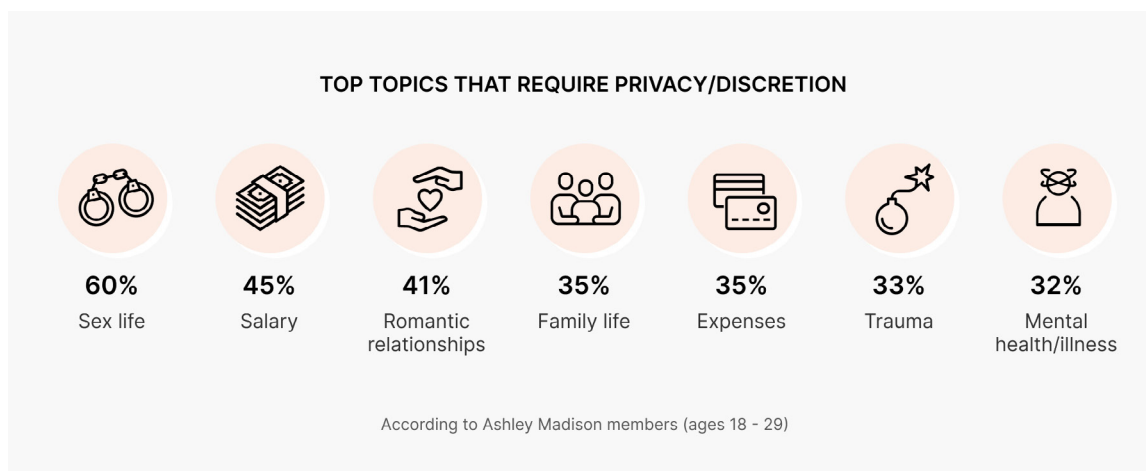
"For a generation raised online, and with the acceleration of female empowerment since they were born, it is not surprising that Gen Z women are blazing the trail around sexual and relationship fulfilment. Their ease with 'hard launching' their relationships compared to men, and their willingness to experiment with different genders and multiple partners, highlights how the twin phenomena of social media and women's rights dovetail beautifully to enrich a woman's emotional life. And for a generation expected to live possibly to the age of 110, it is perhaps understandable that nearly three times as many women than men talk about how they don't expect just one person to meet their emotional needs."

Lucy Beresford

Psychotherapist and Relationship Expert

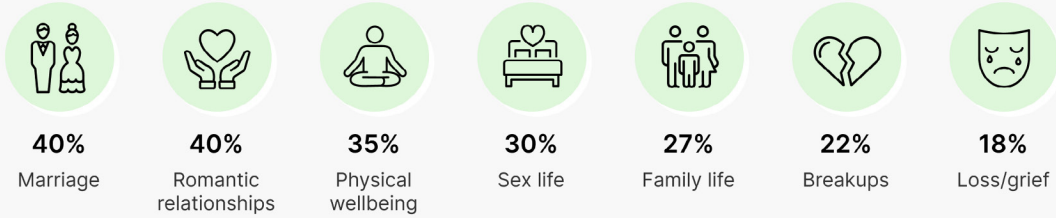
Keeping things discreet... unless they aren't.

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 5% of the UK Gen Z 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.

TOP TOPICS YOU DON'T MIND MAKING PUBLIC



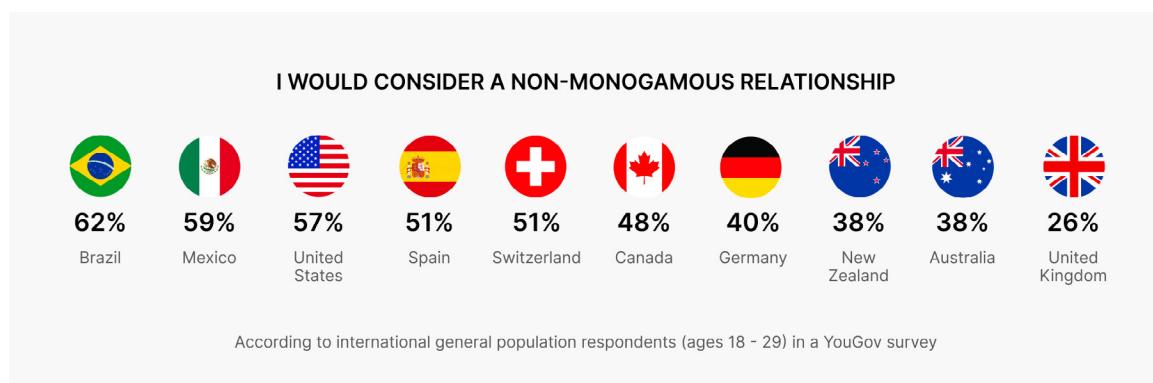
According to Ashley Madison members (ages 18 - 29)

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%).



Gen Z around the world

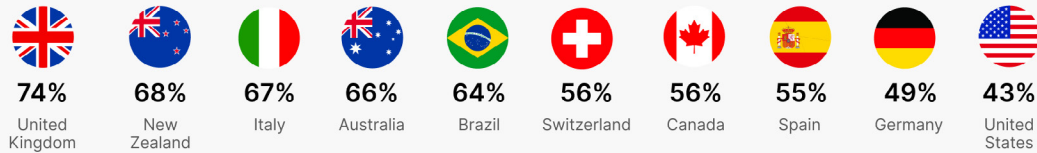
South of the equator, the Brazilian and Mexican Gen Z (defined here as 18-29 year olds) general populations interviewed by YouGov lead the charge in terms of willingness to consider a non-monogamous relationship (62% and 59%, respectively). By far placing last is the UK, where only 26% of Gen Z would consider an open relationship.



Sex & Privacy

When it comes to their sex lives, the proverbial “stiff upper lip” still seems very much a reality. An overwhelming majority of Gen Z Brits (74%) indicated that their sex lives were a topic that warranted discretion/privacy— more than in any other country surveyed. Interestingly, the U.S. respondents had the lowest percentage (43%), suggesting that Gen Z American attitudes towards sex are less conservative than their international counterparts.

I FEEL THAT SEX LIVES WARRANT DISCRETION



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

Of Gen Z UK respondents, only 5% of those who thought at least one listed item didn't warrant privacy specified that they don't mind making their sex lives public, earning the penultimate spot in the ranking by a mere decimal percentage ahead of Brazil. Contrast that with the nearly one in five respondents in Spain (19%) that don't have a problem with it. Unsurprisingly, Ashley Madison members (30%) are more open about their sex lives, and are about six times as likely than Brits from the YouGov survey to discuss what's going on in their bedrooms.

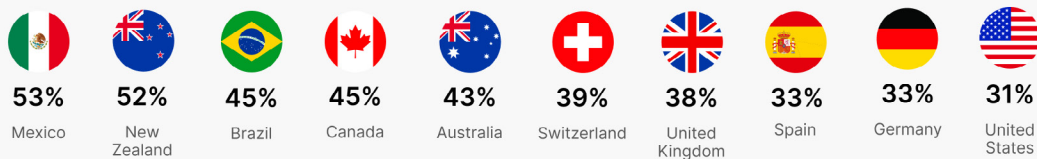
Publicizing relationships

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%).

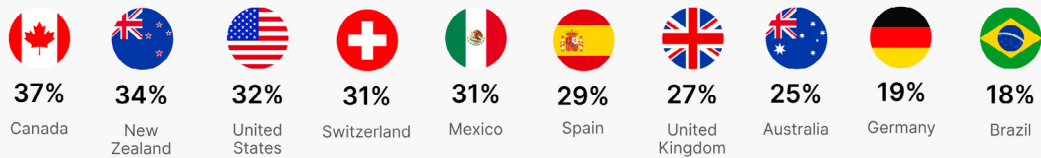
As for those in the YouGov survey who would consider making their relationships public on social media, some reasons they would do so include...

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



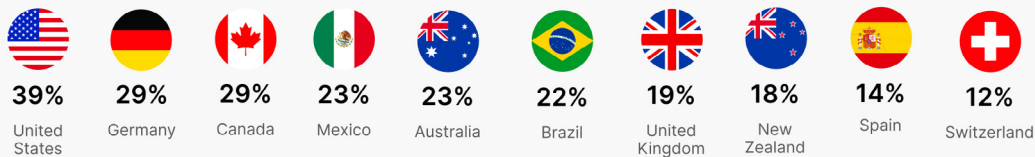
According to international general population respondents (ages 18 - 29) in a YouGov survey

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, seems the least important to Gen Z Brits who would not mind making their relationship status public (6%) in comparison to any other country surveyed. It is, however, important to U.S. Gen Zs and their Brazilian counterparts (28% and 23% respectively), as well as Ashley Madison members (12%).

What's more, social climbing seems positively converse to the British psyche as just 1% of Gen Z Brits who are willing to make their relationship status public would choose to do so for clout. Quite the opposite to the 15% of U.S. or 6% of Swiss Gen Zs who do so.

"For a majority of Brits, a private life is still clearly 'private' for a reason! But that reason is clearly changing with Gen Z. It might be thought that it could be about the infamous 'stiff upper lip', and maybe for older generations it was - but if that was the case, young Brits wouldn't be prioritising sexual fulfilment in quite the numbers that they clearly are. Instead, the Gen Z Brits are clearly sufficiently comfortable in their own skin not to need the 'clout' or external validation that other nationalities seem to crave when making their relationships public. Which given how rapidly society has changed (and is still changing) during the years Gen Z-ers have been alive, is a testament perhaps to their solid sense of self."

Lucy Beresford

Psychotherapist and Relationship Expert



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.