

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 1 million were from the U.S.) 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.



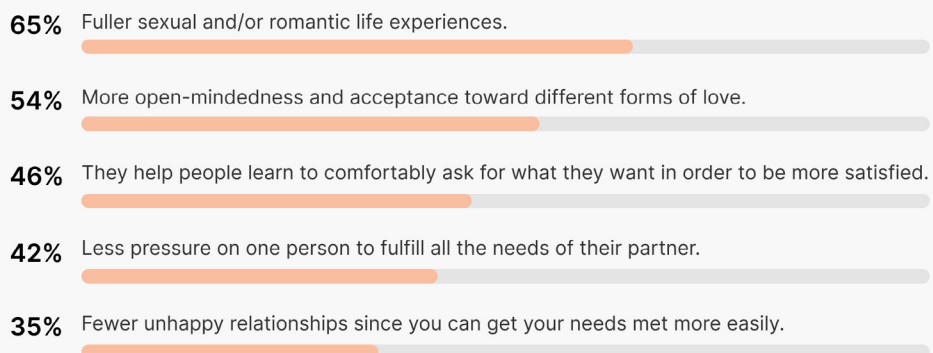
Gen Z, sex, and a new set of rules

When it comes to sex, Gen Z is far more progressive and comfortable with the concept of non-monogamy than previous generations, with the majority of Gen Z Americans from the YouGov survey willing to consider an non-monogamous relationship (57%).

Fifty-nine percent of Gen Z members said they wanted either an open or a polyamorous relationship, attributing to non-monogamy many benefits including fuller sexual and/or romantic life experiences, and more open-mindedness/acceptance toward different forms of love.



BENEFITS OF NON-MONOGRAMY



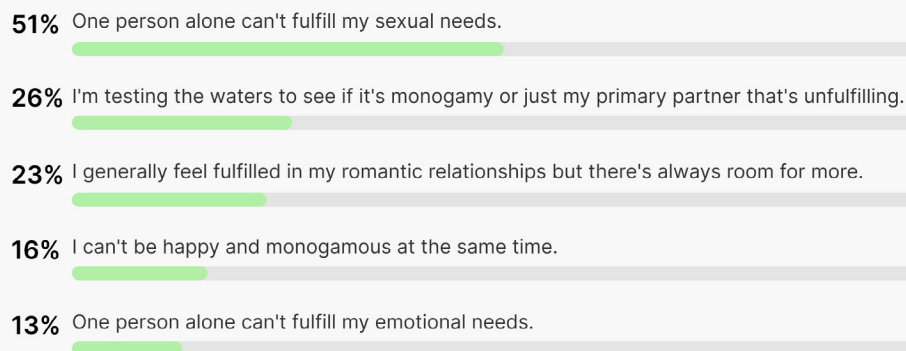
According to Ashley Madison members (ages 18 - 29)

Pragmatic about multiple partners

The 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.

"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 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%).

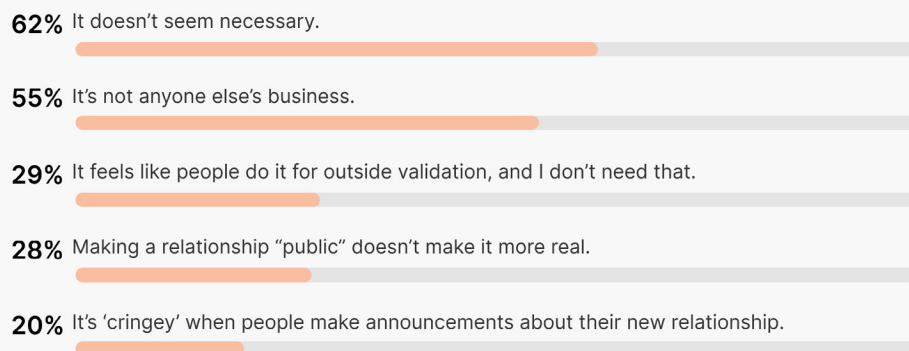


Rewriting relationships

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%).

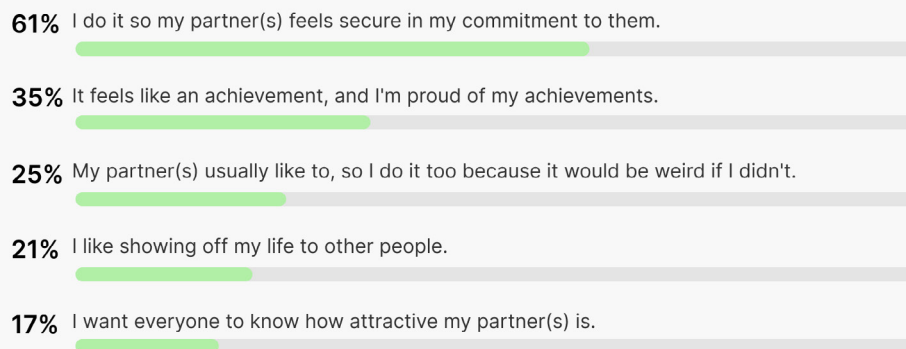
As for what's driving the decision to socialize their new relationships, 61% of Ashley Madison members said that they do so to help their partner feel more secure in their commitment to them. When compared to the 31% of the U.S. general population who said the same, this suggests that Ashley Madison 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 42% and 37% of the U.S. 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 32% of the U.S. 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)

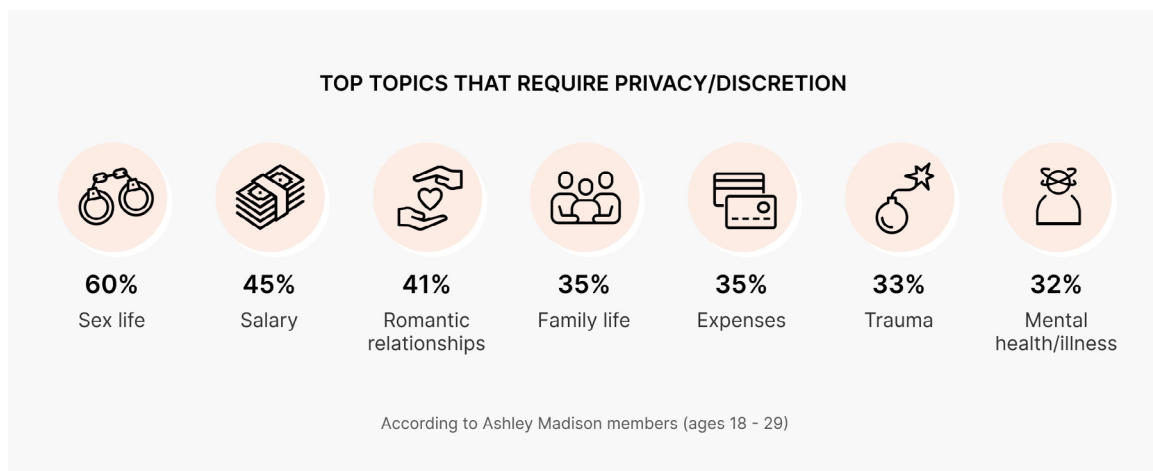
"Women have always paid a higher price than men for having multiple partners. They have been shamed, called names, denigrated for their sexual needs, made to feel guilty and throughout history, women have even lost their marriages and their legal rights. They've lost custody of their children and in some cases been physically abused and even lost their lives. This knowledge of potential retribution has meant that women are more inclined to keep their extra relationships a secret. Women in affairs or multiple partner relationships face harsher consequences than men, who can find clout in the culture for being players, or for having the charm to attract multiple females. As our society shifts to a more open conversation around flexible monogamy agreements, women may finally be able to come out of the closet and express their needs for variety as well."

Dr. Tammy Nelson

Author of Open Monogamy

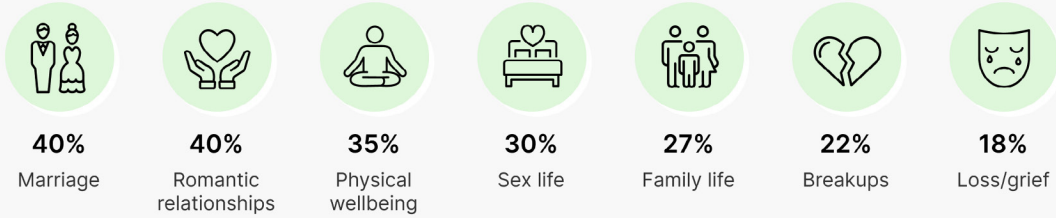
Keeping things discreet... unless they aren't.

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 U.S. 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



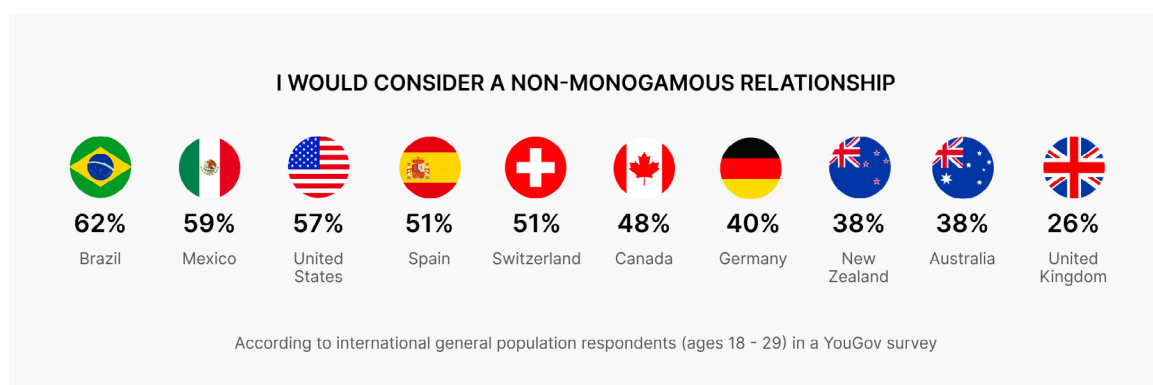
According to Ashley Madison members (ages 18 - 29)

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

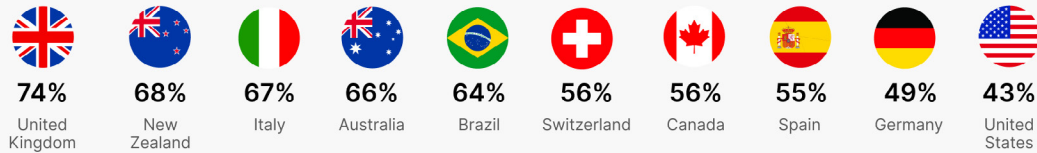
South of the equator, Gen Z (defined here as 18-29 year olds) Brazilians and Mexicans interviewed in the YouGov survey lead the charge in terms of willingness to consider a non-monogamous relationship (62% and 59%, respectively), with the United States close behind (57%). Placing last is the United Kingdom, where only 26% of Gen Z would consider an open relationship.



Sex & Privacy

When it comes to their sex lives, only 45% of Gen Z Americans indicated that it was a topic that warranted discretion/privacy, compared to 74% of Britons, 66% of Australians, and 67% of Mexicans, suggesting that American attitudes towards sex are less conservative than their international counterparts. Interestingly though, while sex was the top choice for U.S. Gen Zs, it had the lowest percentage compared to all other countries surveyed (43% vs. a range of 49%-74%).

I FEEL THAT SEX LIVES WARRANT DISCRETION



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

However, of U.S. Gen Zs who thought at least one listed item didn't warrant privacy, only 7% 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, and perhaps Americans aren't as sexually-transparent as initially believed. Unsurprisingly, Ashley Madison members are more open about their sex lives, and are more than four times as likely than U.S. Gen Zs (30%) to discuss what's going on in their bedrooms.

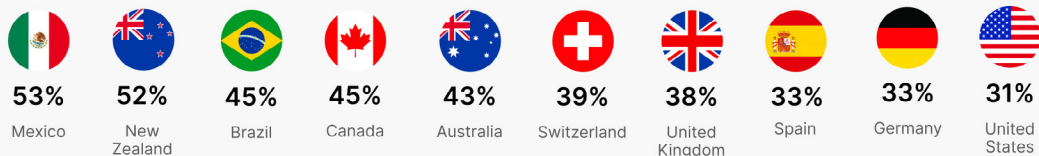
Publicizing relationships

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%).

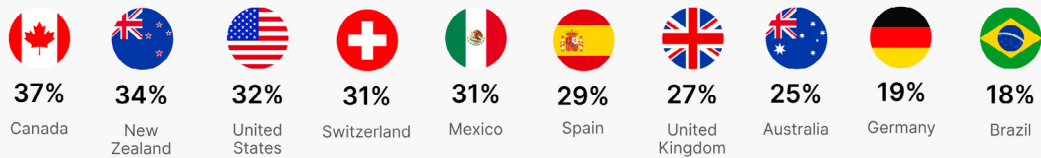
As for those in the YouGov survey who would consider making their relationships public on social media, some reasons they would do so include:

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



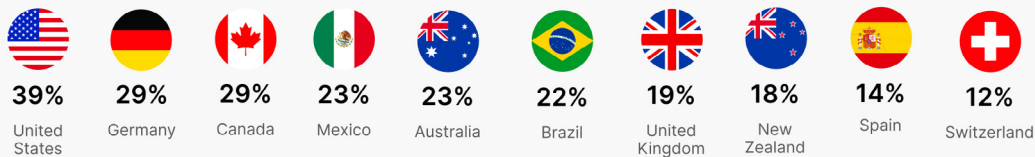
According to international general population respondents (ages 18 - 29) in a YouGov survey

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 most important to U.S. Gen Zs who would not mind making their relationship status public (28%) compared to other countries (United Kingdom 6%, Mexico 15%) and Ashley Madison members (12%).

What's more, the U.S. also has the highest percentage by far of those that make a relationship public for clout (15%) among those who would not mind making their relationship public compared to 3% Ashley Madison members, 3% for Germany, and 7% for Canada.

"Being in an open relationship can be tricky for all partners. Deciding who to share an open relationship status with, whether to tell family or friends, or to post online, should be part of an ongoing conversation with primary partners. For a flexible more open relationship to work couples need to negotiate their monogamy agreement often, and recognize that it is a living, breathing contract, one that grows as all partners develop and grow. With each shift in the milestones of a relationship, the agreement should be updated and reevaluated. The more honest and transparent each partner can be about their needs, the more successful the relationship."

Dr. Tammy Nelson
 Author of Open Monogamy



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 2,118 Ashley Madison Members from July 8 - 12, 2021.
4. Survey of 663 Ashley Madison Gen Z Members (respondents ages 18 – 29), April 4 – July 6, 2023.
5. YouGov survey conducted by YouGov of 17096 adults in ten countries, among whom 3,393 were aged 18-29. Fieldwork was undertaken between 11th - 25th July 2023. The survey was carried out online