

Co-authored by **FEELD** and  
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INDIANA UNIVERSITY

# The State of Dating Report

How Gen Z is  
Redefining Sexuality  
and Relationships

# Context

## FEELD

Feeld is a modern dating app for the curious, and for those seeking to express and explore their sexuality outside of established blueprints. Feeld has cultivated a community that recognizes, respects, and celebrates sexual diversity and individuality. As more and more people ask themselves what brings them pleasure and happiness, and question the inherent constraints of age-old constructs, Feeld recognizes that humans are much more fluid and dynamic than previously thought. Though younger generations are shying away from the dating app space, Feeld has experienced an average growth of 30% year-over-year since 2022, a direct reflection of how the platform's unique approach to relationships and growth is resonating with diverse audiences.



The Kinsey Institute at Indiana University has been the world's most-trusted name in sex research for over 75 years, significantly advancing our global understanding of human sexuality, relationships, and wellbeing. The Kinsey Institute provides an unbiased, apolitical, and multidisciplinary approach to studying human sexuality. Its researchers are internationally renowned biologists, psychologists, anthropologists, health scientists, demographers, and other experts across diverse disciplines publishing dozens of scientific and academic articles each year. The Kinsey Institute has shone a light on diverse aspects of sex and sexuality for generations. One of its earliest contributions was the Kinsey Scale, which helped people to understand that sexuality exists on a spectrum—an insight that has never been more timely or relevant. Today, the Institute's research initiatives span everything from consent to condom use to the foundations of healthy relationships. It also holds the world's largest library and research collection of sexuality-related materials accessible to scholars from across the globe.

This report represents a collaboration between Feeld and Dr. Justin Lehmiller, a Kinsey Institute Research Fellow.

Our aim is to understand the state of sex and sexual diversity today through an analysis of brand-new data collected from the Feeld community, coupled with insights gleaned from recent Kinsey Institute research. We will highlight the new sexual paths that young adults in particular are carving out, as well as the unique ways that Feeld Members of different generations are experimenting with and exploring their sexual identities and relationship styles.

# Background

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Gen Z is unwittingly leading the evolution of sexuality and sexual preferences in today's society. It's the constant shift in normalcy over the years that has forged who they are, which we see in how they present themselves and engage with others in everyday life, both off and on Feeld.



Gen Z is the first generation to come of age in a world ruled by technology, the internet, and social media. They also grew up in a world marked by increasing social and political instability. Over the past 27 years, Gen Zers have had to recover time and time again from a series of traumas, from 9/11 to the COVID pandemic, and they are now expected to contribute to society as fully-formed adults. But how are they to know themselves, much less what they should want in their relationships with others?

And yet, Gen Z is unwittingly leading the evolution of sexuality and sexual preferences in today's society. It's

the constant shift in normalcy over the years that has forged who they are, which we see in how they present themselves and engage with others in everyday life, both off and on Feeld. Rather than take their cues from the generations who came before them, they are charting their own path and deciding what does and doesn't work for them with the open-mindedness required for true self-exploration and personal growth.

In this report, we will explore Gen Z's unique approach to sexuality and relationships and how it is similar to or different from Millennial, Gen X, and Boomer adults.

# Survey Rationale and Goals

We sought to contrast the sexual and relationship identities, behaviors, and preferences of some of the youngest and oldest Feeld Members through a collection of proprietary and survey data.

By examining these generational distinctions, we aim to further understand the evolving landscape of sexuality and relationships. This analysis not only highlights the diversity of thought, experience, and preferences within the Feeld community, but also provides valuable insights into how sexual preferences and identities may be influenced by generational factors.

# Methodology

The Feeld team sent out a request to Members to complete a brief survey on their sexual and relationship attitudes and behaviors, as well as their experience on the app. The initial request did not target a specific demographic, but follow-up requests were later sent to targeted demographics in order to increase sample diversity and ensure representation from different age groups.

In total, 3,310 Members completed the survey. Participants came from 71 different countries, including the United States (59.7%), United Kingdom (13%), Canada (7.3%), and the Netherlands (3.5%). Participants represented a diverse group of in terms of their gender (65.3% male identified; 25.7% female identified; 9% non-binary, trans, or other genders), sexual orientation (42% heterosexual; 15% heteroflexible; 15% bisexual; 8% pansexual; 7% queer; 13% other orientations), and age, which ranged from 18-75.

The survey itself inquired about Members' preferred relationship style, the degree to which they have explored their sexuality and gender during their time on Feeld, as well as their kinks and desires.

71

Countries

18-77

Age range

65.3%

Male identified

25.7%

Female identified

9%

Non-binary, trans or other

3,310

Members surveyed

42%

Heterosexual

15%

Heteroflexible

15%

Bisexual

8%

Pansexual

7%

Queer

13%

Other

# Key findings

## Relationship Structure and Style

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Gen Z is nearly twice as likely to say that they have frequent fantasies about monogamy than older generations.

We asked Members to report on their preferred relationship style via 16 different options, ranging from celibacy to complete monogamy to various forms of ethical non-monogamy.

Members of different generations expressed strikingly different relationship style preferences. Among Gen Z, monogamy was actually the single most preferred relationship type (23%). For Millennials and Gen X, it was ethical non-monogamy (24% and 27%, respectively), while for Boomers it was friends with benefits (27%).

This is interesting in light of a flood of popular media reports characterizing Gen Z as the generation of polyamory and non-traditional relationships. While it is certainly true that today's young adults seem more open than ever to deviating from monogamy compared to generations that came before, they are hardly a monolith. Surprisingly, monogamy retains a distinct appeal to many Gen Zers.

Zooming out to consider Kinsey Institute research from a broader sample, in a survey of 4,175 American adults ranging in age from 18-88, Dr. Lehmiller asked participants about the extent to which they fantasize about different relationship structures. What he found aligns with what we're seeing among Field Members:

01

Gen Z was the most likely to report that they have fantasized about monogamy (81%) and to say that they fantasize about this often (44%).

02

Among older generations, there were no meaningful differences between groups in fantasies about monogamy, with 71% saying they have fantasized about it before and 23-27% saying they fantasize about this often.

03

Conversely, Gen Z was the least likely to report that they have fantasized about being in an open relationship (62% said they'd had the fantasy, with 18% fantasizing about it often), saying they fantasize about this often.

04

Among Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers, 75-80% said that they have fantasized about an open relationship, with 31-32% saying they fantasize about it often.

Put another way, Gen Z is nearly twice as likely to say that they have frequent fantasies about monogamy than older generations.

## Relationship Structure and Style

So why is that? Why are young adults the most likely to express a preference for and fantasize about monogamy, while mid-life and older adults have the greatest preference for non-monogamy? There are several possible explanations.

One is that older adults have simply had more practice with monogamy, and some may have found that it is not for them, or they may have just found that after a long period of monogamy, they have a craving for sexual novelty and newness. Humans are hardwired to be titillated by novelty due to the [Coolidge Effect](#), which refers to our tendency to experience diminished arousal in response to the same sexual stimulus over time. So part of what may be driving older adults' interest in non-monogamy is that they've fallen into sexual ruts and routines and they're looking for fresh ways to mix things up.

By contrast, the relationship considerations for Gen Zers are markedly different. It is well documented that Gen Z is having less sex, fewer partners, and fewer relationships than generations that came before. For example, in Dr. Lehmiller's survey of 4,175 Americans mentioned above, the median (50th percentile) number of times Gen Zers reported having sex in the past month was 3, compared to 5 for both Millennials and Gen X. Further, 37% of Gen Z reported no sex in the last

month, compared to 19% of Millennials and 17% of Gen X. Incidentally, Gen Z and Boomers exhibited nearly identical sexual frequencies, suggesting that both the youngest and oldest adults are having the least sex. Also, nearly half of Gen Z reported that they were single, compared to only one-fifth of Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers.



## Relationship Structure and Style

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A current trend among Gen Z is the romanticization of traditional relationships and roles. There is a certain appeal to “how things used to be” in the sense that they just seemed simpler.

In light of the fact that so many Gen Z adults are single and not sexually active, coupled with the fact that many of them have yet to have a serious or committed relationship with one person let alone several at the same time, it becomes easy to see how monogamy might hold a distinct appeal for many younger adults.

At the same time, a current trend among Gen Z is the romanticization of traditional relationships and roles. There is a certain appeal to “how things used to be” in the sense that they just seemed simpler. As dating has moved into the digital world, it has only become more complex. On the one hand, we have more options and opportunities to connect than ever before, which is a positive development. But on the other hand, people

are still figuring out the rules of engagement and many struggle with the inherent ambiguities that arise when conversing and interacting in a virtual context. Traditional courtship practices necessitated clear intentions and grand gestures that made it clear where things stood, so it's no surprise that they're gaining appeal in a time that feels more uncertain and unclear than ever.

However, this isn't to say that Gen Z is espousing more conservative intimate values across the board. While many of them are reverting to more traditional relationship values, Gen Z is breaking the mold by holding the most expansive views on sexuality and gender (possibly ever), while also being the kinkiest generation yet.

# Key findings

## Sexual and Gender Identity Exploration

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Gen Zers are exploring their gender and sexuality at much higher rates than any past or current generation, which can be seen in terms of how they identify.

Gen Zers are exploring their gender and sexuality at much higher rates than any past or current generation, which can be seen in terms of how they identify. Representative surveys conducted at the Kinsey Institute and national polls conducted by [Gallup](#) and [Pew](#) have consistently found that nearly 1 in 5 Gen Z adults identify as LGBTQ, a figure that is several multiples higher than that of older adults.

The numbers are even higher on Feeld. In the Feeld Member survey, 18% of Gen Zers identified as gender diverse, while 71% reported a sexual identity other than heterosexual. However, their identities are not necessarily constant and often evolve as Members use the app.

As evidence of this, we asked survey respondents whether they had ever changed their sexual or gender identity since they started using Feeld. Overall, 5.5% of Members said they had changed their gender identity, while 15.4% had changed their sexual identity since they joined. Of those who reported any change in their identity, 13% changed both their gender and sexuality identity at least once.

However, the numbers varied substantially across generations. For gender identity changes, 10% of Gen Z reported this, compared to 6% of Millennials, 3% of Gen X, and no Boomers. For sexual identity changes, Gen Z led the pack again (18%), closely followed by Millennials (17%), Gen X (14%), and Boomers (3%).

For those who reported a change in their gender, non-binary was the most common current identity reported. More often than not, these changes went in the direction of holding a more expansive gender identity. For those who reported a change in their sexuality, heteroflexible was the most common current identity reported. In most cases, sexual identity changes went in the direction of identifying as queerer or less heterosexual.

What all of this tells us is that Gen Zers on Feeld are exhibiting the most fluidity in both sexual and gender identity, a trend that aligns with what we're seeing more broadly in other research. For example, in a nationally representative US survey of 1,500 adults conducted by Dr. Justin Lehmiller, he found that 38% of Gen Zers and Millennials said they had fantasies in which they explored their gender and/or sexual identity, compared to 25% of Gen X and 10% of Boomers.

# Sexual and Gender Identity Exploration

We've long known that both gender and sexuality are neither static nor easily and neatly categorized. The pioneering research of Dr. Magnus Hirshfeld in the 1920s and 30s and Dr. Alfred Kinsey in the 1940s and 50s first showed us that both exist on a spectrum. Hirshfeld described dozens of different "sexual intermediaries," a term he used to refer to the fact that we are all unique composites of masculine and feminine.

Kinsey developed his famous Kinsey Scale to demonstrate his observation that people weren't just straight or gay, and that many unique sexualities exist. Since then, we have come to understand through the research of Dr. Lisa Diamond and others that both gender and sexuality also have some degree of flexibility over the course of our lives. This isn't to say that LGBTQ+ people are not "born this way," but rather simply that the terms and labels we may use to describe and identify ourselves may shift as we develop a better understanding of who we are at a given point in time and find the words to express it.

To further elucidate this point, we asked Feeld Members who had changed their gender and/or sexuality about what was behind it.

For gender identity changes, the most common reasons endorsed were:

90% AGREE  
"I have developed a deeper understanding of my own gender"

85% AGREE  
"I have developed a more expansive sense of gender"

87% AGREE  
"I wanted people to better understand who I am"

73% AGREE  
"My previous gender identity felt limiting"

73% AGREE  
"I wanted to explore my gender"

## Sexual and Gender Identity Exploration

For sexual identity changes, the reasons endorsed were quite similar:

93%

AGREE

“I have developed a deeper understanding of my own sexuality”

85%

AGREE

“I wanted to explore my sexuality”

82%

AGREE

“I have developed a more expansive sexuality or discovered sexual attractions I did not previously know I had”

77%

AGREE

“I wanted other people to better understand who I am”

69%

AGREE

“My previous sexual identity felt limiting”

In looking at these reasons, it is no surprise why Gen Z is the most likely to report changes in their sexual and gender identities. Gen Z came of age at a time when both gender and sexuality were no longer seen as binary by large swaths of the population. Today, there are more terms to describe your own unique gender and sexuality than ever before. For example, just consider that the terms “non-binary” and “pansexual” were not even part of the cultural lexicon for any previous generation when they were in their teens or twenties. Gen Z may just be starting to discover who they are, but they also simply have more options (and more freedom) to be who they really are.

Furthermore, these identities have taken on greater importance in everyday life. As acceptance of sexual and gender diversity has grown in the last two decades, identities have become an important way for people to navigate daily life, build community, and find meaning. For emerging adults just learning to navigate the world, these identities provide power and purpose in a way that did not exist for generations past, who had neither the freedom nor encouragement to explore their gender and sexuality. They also lacked our modern, culturally-shared language to describe their lived experiences and identities, and they existed in a time when living outside of the gender binary and being anything other than heterosexual was highly stigmatized and, in some cases, against the law.

# Key findings

## Kinks & Desires

Kink is on the rise in general, but especially among younger adults.

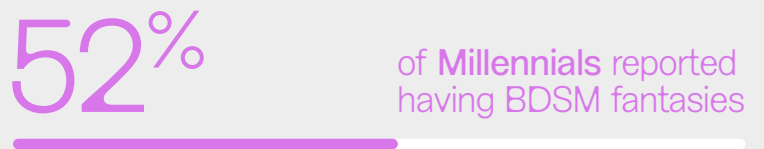
In the Feeld Member survey, we asked participants whether they had discovered any new kinks or desires during their time using the app. Nearly half (47%) answered affirmatively. Again, however, we saw substantial differences across generations.

Gen Z was the most likely to say that they had discovered a new kink since joining Feeld (55%), followed by Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers (49%, 39%, and 33%, respectively).

There are at least two explanations for this. One is simply that older adults have had more time to learn and discover what they enjoy about sex, so they may have already uncovered their kinks.

However, the other is that it also appears to be the case that younger adults today have a greater overall interest in kink than older adults, which may create greater openness to exploring and learning about one's kinks. Returning to Dr. Lehmiller's nationally representative survey of 1,500 Americans, he also asked his participants about the extent to which they had fantasies about kink/BDSM.

Broken down by generation, the results were as follows:



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Young adults who are exploring their sexuality today are doing so in an environment where kinks are discussed more openly than ever and where, for many, they have become an identity unto themselves.

These results align with research conducted by Dr. Debby Herbenick and others showing that rough sex, BDSM, and kink are increasing in the youngest generation. Naturally, many may wonder why.

Intuitively, it is tempting to assume that it is largely (if not exclusively) a result of today's young adults having free and easy access to the largest porn collection ever known to humanity. However, while porn does play some role in this (especially in an era where porn has become the default form of sex education for so many people and rough sex has become a staple of adult content), it's an oversimplification.

Kink has also gone mainstream thanks, in part, to the popularization of BDSM through the Fifty Shades books and films, which opened up conversations about kink and paved the way for more kink portrayals in the popular media. Around the same time this occurred, sadism and masochism were formally declassified as mental illnesses and the term “kink shaming” became part of the vernacular.

Young adults who are exploring their sexuality today are doing so in an environment where kinks are discussed more openly than ever and where, for many, they have become an identity unto themselves. For older adults, kinks and BDSM may carry more baggage. It is simply easier to explore your kinky side when you aren't working against years (or decades) of cultural conditioning telling

you that kink is “abnormal” or “wrong.” Put another way, older adults may hold back from kinks in both fantasy and behavior, in part, because they grew up learning to feel more shame around them. This may create more mental barriers to exploring their sexuality that can be difficult to knock down.

The sexual behaviors of younger generations have always stoked moral panic, and the rise in kink among today's youth is no exception. It is undoubtedly true that we need to do more in society to help young adults understand how to practice and explore their kinks safely and consensually (another topic not typically covered in traditional sex ed), but the general embrace of kink by Gen Z may actually be a sign of healthy sexual adjustment. They feel more empowered to explore their sexuality, uncover what it is that brings them pleasure, and express this to their partners. When practiced in a consensual, risk-aware context, kink has the potential to enhance sexual and relationship satisfaction, as well as intimacy.

Feeld provides a venue for adults of all ages to express their kinks in a judgment-free environment and find their people. Young adults' higher uptake of technology in general affords them greater opportunity to engage with open-minded communities like Feeld where they can hone their communication skills and learn to embrace their sexuality and sexual diversity.

# Conclusions

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As sexuality and relationships progress in terms of both identities and behaviors, it only becomes clearer that people today—and especially Gen Z—feel incredibly limited by the narrow understandings that have long populated the mainstream.

Sex, gender, sexuality, and relationships are constantly evolving and have always changed to some extent with each new generation—and Gen Z is no exception. They are charting a new course from those who came before.

Gen Z is kinkier and more fluid in both their gender and sexuality compared to Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers. And while there has been a wide embrace of ethical non-monogamy among many of today's young adults, we also see that they hold complex views on relationships, given that they are simultaneously the generation that seems most inclined toward monogamy.

What will be fascinating to watch in the years ahead is whether monogamy continues to retain its appeal for Gen Z, or if we will observe a gradual shift away from it as we've seen for older generations. Of course, it will also be interesting to see how the trends we've observed in Gen Z further shift or change when the next generation comes of age. For example, will the future be even kinkier?

In this report, we focused on new data collected from current Feeld Members, and what we're seeing here is a reflection of broader trends in society. Feeld has been supporting safer spaces that allow people to explore their sexuality and relationship style since 2014, at a time when it was still taboo to even talk about these things. However, Feeld had its finger on the pulse of what was next, even if it might have felt uncomfortable to many at

the time. As things continue to evolve, documenting the experiences of Members of the Feeld community may provide an intriguing snapshot of where things stand—and where they're headed next.

As sexuality and relationships progress in terms of both identities and behaviors, it only becomes clearer that people today—and especially Gen Z—feel incredibly limited by the narrow understandings that have long populated the mainstream.

Dr. Kinsey himself highlighted what was long true before (and will continue to be true) when he famously wrote, “The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats, and not all things are black nor all things white. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects.” These prescient words written nearly three-quarters of a century ago are as timely as they've ever been. Despite the longstanding tendency of humans to narrowly categorize sexuality and relationships, they have always existed on a continuum, and that continuum will only evolve and expand further as Gen Z and future generations continue their pursuit of sexual and relational self-discovery. The more that we can understand and embrace this simple fact of human life, the better suited we will all be to pursuing pleasure and happiness.

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