



The Human Connection Study

How Gen Z's Pursuit of Personal Growth Is Redefining Romance

Despite what some recent headlines say, young singles are not rejecting romance.

They want love and yearn for connection.

But they're redefining what it means to be relationship-ready.

Eighty percent of Gen Z (18-29 year old) singles believe they'll find true love — that's far more than any generation before them (compared to just 57% of all U.S. singles). Yet only 55% feel like they're actually ready for partnership. A new survey by The Harris Poll, commissioned by Match Group and the Kinsey Institute, found that members of Gen Z believe they must first set healthy boundaries (42%), be comfortable being alone (41%), feel happy and fulfilled (41%), invest in personal growth (37%), and have strong established friendships (36%) before committing to a romantic relationship.

Gen Z Readiness Checklist

SET HEALTHY BOUNDARIES	42%
BE COMFORTABLE BEING ALONE	41%
FEEL HAPPY AND FULFILLED	41%
INVEST IN PERSONAL GROWTH	37%
HAVE STRONG ESTABLISHED FRIENDSHIPS	36%

As readiness becomes an increasingly distant target, Gen Z is still seeking out connections online and offline. But they're looking for lower-pressure interactions that could lead not only to new partners but also to friends, acquaintances — or something in between.



1 The Gender Gap: The Pressure to Have Life Figured Out

Many young singles today believe that finding themselves should be a prerequisite for partnership, but it's young women who feel the most pressure to do so.

While 58% of Gen Z say therapy is essential to relationship success, Gen Z women are 14% more likely (65% vs 51%) to agree with this than their male counterparts. Gen Z women (34%) also feel more strongly than men (23%) that working through issues from a past relationship indicates readiness for a romantic connection. On the flip side, single men are more likely than single women (38% vs. 46%) to feel that dating is an important component of their overall social life.

Young women also believe that setting and respecting healthy boundaries is a prime indication of being ready for a romantic relationship (47% for Gen Z women vs. 37% for Gen Z men). As a result, they may be more likely to delay dating.

Across genders, Gen Z singles are 56% more likely to believe that investing in their personal growth, (e.g., therapy, self reflection, etc.) makes them “ready” for a romantic relationship compared to other generations (Millennials + Gen X + Boomers). They believe that when they work on themselves, their relationships become stronger. And they are more likely to wait until they can put their best selves forward to give themselves the highest chance of relationship success.

As a result: Almost half (45%) of Gen Z say they're not ready for relationships right now, and 75% are not in a hurry to find a partner.



Gen Z Relationship Readiness

45%

say they're not ready
for a relationship

75%

are not in a hurry
to find a partner

2 The Readiness Paradox: Compounding Loneliness

Waiting to feel ready for a relationship has some complex trade-offs. More than half of Gen Z feel lonely despite online connections.²

Compared to previous generations, Gen Z is less comfortable being alone. Rather than seeking connections with the goal of finding love, emotional support, or intimacy, 51% of Gen Z reports seeking connections to avoid loneliness, compared to just 26% for older generations.

Women feel additional pressure to enter a relationship for “the right reason,” rather than solely to avoid loneliness. Adding to this complexity, 48% of Gen Z women believe a significant indicator of being ready for a relationship is actually being comfortable alone.

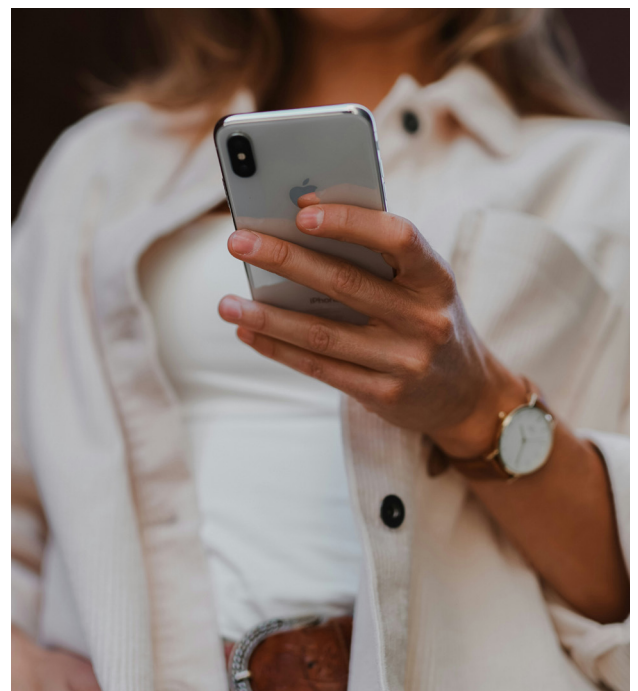
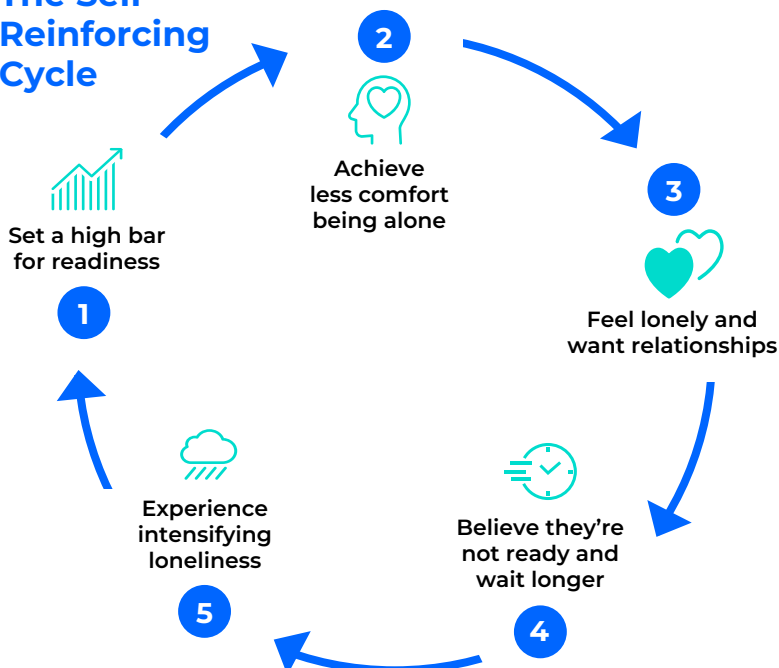
This sets off a self-reinforcing cycle: set a high bar for readiness, feel anxious about being alone, crave new relationships, believe they’re not ready and wait longer, experience intensifying loneliness, and repeat. The focus on self-actualization introduced so much pressure that in some cases, it’s creating the loneliness it was meant to prevent.

Yet, as Dr. Justin Garcia from the Kinsey Institute observes:

“Young people want their relationships to be rooted in desire rather than practical needs.

If you’re financially independent, can pay for your own bills, get your own groceries, manage your own laundry and house projects, you convince yourself that you don’t need a partner except for the pleasures of hanging out and going to the movies with them so you’re not lonely. But when we set up this false dichotomy of needs and wants, you’re robbing yourself and your potential partner of ways to show up for each other, to learn and expand together, and the pleasures of supporting one another. ”

The Self-Reinforcing Cycle



3 The Bridge: Seeking Low-Pressure Connections

Gen Z is caught in a triple bind:



Like previous generations, they face the **traditional milestone pressures** like marriage, children, and buying a house.



But they also face **self-imposed pressure** to avoid relationship mistakes they've seen. Only 37% describe their parents' relationship as "happy," compared to 52% of Boomers¹ who reported "happy" parental relationship examples. Three-quarters of Gen Z singles want to avoid divorce at all costs. Therefore, they are deciding to wait until perfectly ready.

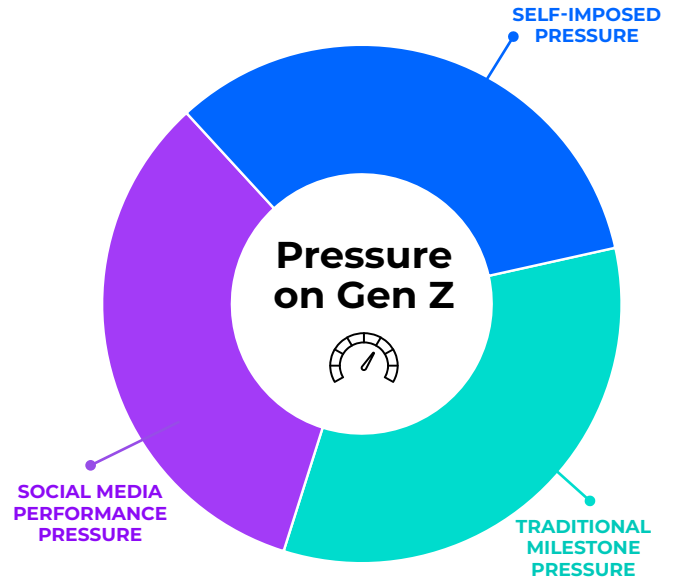


Most uniquely, this generation faces **social media performance pressure**—46% of Gen Z soft launch relationships on social media versus 27% overall. And among Gen Z singles who have hard launched a relationship, 81% believe that posting indicates commitment, which forces many to wait until everything is perfect rather than risk public failure.

This is why Gen Z is taking a more open-ended approach to relationships; they're seeking out connections that could lead to partners, friends, or just an acquaintance in real life.

Sixty-six percent are looking for belonging, not just social interaction, and 64% are actively looking to make platonic friends.²

Underneath it all, they still believe in lasting love: 80% of Gen Z singles believe they'll find true love, compared with just 57% of all US singles. Eighty-six percent want to find a committed romantic relationship. But the path to get there feels like much less pressure if they take a flexible path that could also lead to new friends and acquaintances.



Social Media Performance Pressure

46% of Gen Z

soft launch relationships on social media (versus 27% overall)

Among Gen Z singles who have hard launched a relationship

81% believe the act indicates commitment

Gen Z's persistent search for connection is why the self-actualization barrier presents such a tricky bind. Believing you must be "ready" to deserve connection delays romantic partnerships that create mutual support. As a result, Gen Z is increasingly looking to technology to address loneliness across all types of relationships.

4 The Path Forward

While older generations learned *through* partnership, Gen Z is focused on learning *before* partnership.

As Researcher and MSc, Oxford Internet Institute Amelia Miller puts it,

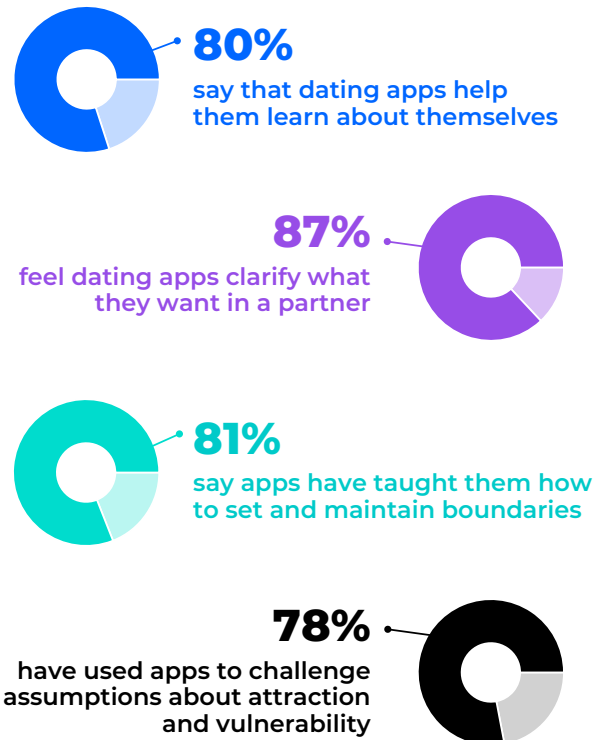
“Social media and AI companions are teaching Gen Z that the messiness of human relationships is something to be tamed, not embraced, but vulnerability and friction are essential ingredients of intimacy. The self-actualization that Gen Z is seeking out solo is actually unlocked through relationships with others.”

Of course, just as Gen Z can learn from the wisdom of older generations, Boomer and Gen X singles can learn from how Gen Z has adapted its use of online spaces. While older singles continue to use dating apps predominantly as a tool to identify romantic partners, Gen Z and Millennials are using these platforms to help work toward their own self actualization and relationship readiness.

Gen Z and Millennial dating app users say that dating apps help them learn about themselves (80%). They feel dating apps clarify what they want in a partner (87%), have taught them how to set and maintain boundaries (81%), and have used them to challenge assumptions about attraction and compatibility (78%), all clear steps on the way to most traditional pursuits of love.

Many experts say Gen Z's pursuit of low-pressure connections shows they're discovering that you can value independence and still need connection. These aren't contradictory—they're complementary.

Gen Z & Millennial Dating App Users



Rather than treating self-actualization as a prerequisite, young singles can shift their mindset to recognize that self-actualization can evolve from connection with others via the vulnerability of putting yourself out there, and showing up for someone else while they show up for you.

The question is whether young singles will stop waiting for perfect readiness long enough to find it. Growth happens in partnership, not before it, and showing up imperfectly is a better way to connect with others than waiting for perfection that doesn't exist.

METHODOLOGY

This survey was undertaken by The Harris Poll and ran from September 26th to October 5th, 2025, with 2,500 randomly selected US adult singles who are online panelists. Generationally, the survey included 1,000 Gen Z respondents and 500 respondents each from Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers. Gen Z is defined as ages 18–29; Millennials as 30–44; Gen X as 45–60; and Boomers as 61–79. For the purposes of this report, ‘older generations’ refers to Gen X and Boomers.

The results have been weighted by age, gender, region, race and household income within each generation group to match the population, according to Census data. This is to ensure the sample is representative of the entire adult single population in the US overall and by generation.

For comparison purposes, a probability sample of 2,500 has an estimated margin of error (which measures sampling variability) of $\pm 2.0\%$, 19 times out of 20. At 1,000 the margin of error is 3.1% and at 500 at 4.4%. Discrepancies in or between totals when compared to the data tables are due to rounding.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

¹[Singles in America](#) © 2025 Match Group Americas, LLC. Funded by Match and conducted in association with The Kinsey Institute, with data collected by Dynata, the 14th annual Singles in America study surveyed a demographically representative sample of 5,001 U.S. singles between the ages of 18 and 98. It remains the most robust scientific study of single Americans, with generational breakouts for Gen Z (18–27), Millennials (28–43), Gen X (44–59), and Boomers (60+).

²Third-party research funded by Match Group Americas LLC, conducted in association with Current Forward, with data collection by Rep Data, Inc. This survey was conducted online in the United States from May 23, 2025 to June 11, 2025 among a nationally representative sample of 2,030 single adults ages 18–49. Gen Z is defined as 18–29.