

ASHLEY MADISON®

## **The Next Generation of Non-Monogamy**

Is sharing the new currency of love?

# Table of Contents

<b>Background.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Summary of Findings.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Approach.....</b>	<b>6</b>

## Background

As many parts of the world are slowly leaving the COVID-19 pandemic behind, many questions about the state of modern relationships remain. [Divorces surged during lockdown](#), with many people realizing that who they were dating or married to wasn't who they wanted to live through a pandemic with—but is ending things always the only option?

Now more than ever, traditional monogamy is being [called into question](#). Is it as realistic and natural as we've been led to believe? Is it sustainable? Should our romantic standards and expectations rely on one single person's ability to make us happy and entirely fulfilled? And, most importantly, what would the world look like if monogamy wasn't as revered as it is today? Ashley Madison, the world's leading married dating site,<sup>1</sup> set out to find the answers by surveying its global members as well as a segment of the [general American population](#). What the company learned can be categorized into the three main findings presented below, but what these findings ultimately suggest is that a non-monogamous world might not be such a bad thing after all.

## Summary of Findings

### ***Finding #1: Many people agree that society would benefit from a broader shift toward non-monogamy***

Society pushes the idea that every person has their “one” true love with whom they happily spend the rest of their lives—a soulmate. Dr. Ashley Thompson, Associate Professor at the University of Minnesota Duluth, says, “the majority of people report expecting monogamy in their romantic relationships and that this love will last a lifetime. In essence, it is the gold standard of romantic relationships.”

Because of this expectation, which—according to Dr. Thompson—has heightened in recent decades, violations to monogamy are considered disastrous and the “ultimate form of betrayal.” What would it mean, then, if modern relationships weren't held to such a high standard? What if monogamy wasn't the default?

Ashley Madison has found that nearly a quarter of Americans (24%) and more than half of its own members (52%) agree that society can benefit from a shift toward a more open style of monogamy or non-monogamy. The reasons why (according to Ashley Madison members) include the resulting lower divorce rates (60%), a trend toward more open-mindedness (53%), and individuals learning how to ask for what they want in their relationships (52%). Half of members also agree that the acceptance and incorporation of non-monogamous relationships would mean there would be less pressure put on one person to fulfill all the needs of their partner—sexual and otherwise.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the number of signups to Ashley Madison since 2002

These aren't just the feelings of individuals or couples with years of relationship experience. Forty percent of Americans and 50% of Ashley Madison members in the Gen Z and Millennial age groups echo these opinions, adding to the ongoing trend of the younger generations [redefining what it means to be monogamous](#).

In addition to explaining *how* society can benefit from non-monogamous relationships, Ashley Madison members also explain *where* those benefits would be seen most. When it comes to family life and child rearing as well as personal finance and the economy, the top benefit for both is higher relationship satisfaction and therefore the potential for fewer broken homes (58%) and fewer expensive divorces (61%). For mental health, 61% of members say that having various partners satisfying various sexual needs is important to one's overall wellbeing, and 46% say the same for emotional needs. Thirty-eight percent say it would also help people identify and enforce their own personal boundaries.

Individual sexuality and sexual expression would be, according to Ashley Madison members, the area with the most potential to benefit from non-monogamy. Specifically, 60% of members say these relationships would introduce more variety in people's sex lives and helps prevent boredom, 57% say non-monogamy would give people control of their sex lives and their ability to be more forthright with their desires, and 49% say it would decrease shame around desire.

### ***Finding #2: People value the promiscuity and sexual freedom that comes with non-monogamy***

Understandably, Ashley Madison members aren't the biggest fans of monogamy. Their very presence on the site indicates their struggle with the traditional relationship model. In fact, 65% of members don't fully believe in monogamy at all, with 26% saying it does or would make them feel unfulfilled and 23% trapped.

The desire to move away from the rigid monogamy structure is growing, with 26% of Americans and 82% of Ashley Madison members reporting that their ideal relationship type at the current moment is something non-monogamous. For both segments, the top two specific answers were a serious romantic relationship with sexual activity on the outside, and one or more casual partners rather than anything serious.

Non-monogamy is an [umbrella term](#) that encompasses several relationship structures, including those in which people have multiple romantic or emotional partners, but sex seems to be the leading contributing factor in people's desire for more fluidity. According to Dr. Tammy Nelson, author of [Open Monogamy](#), sexual freedom makes things exciting for an emotionally monogamous couple.

"Finding ways to add more eroticism and intensity can bring energy home, into the bedroom, without threatening the primary partnership," she says. "Because it's in the open and both partners agree on the boundaries, it can add to the relationship instead of taking away from it. Many times it's in the sharing of the sexual experience with others that the marriage is strengthened."

### ***Finding #3: Women are the non-monogamy trailblazers***

A lot of what we know—or assume—about women and sex is [incorrect](#). [It's not true that all women have low libidos and are more wired for monogamy than men](#). Women like sex as long as it's *good*, which can be [a lot to ask of a partner](#). If requests go ignored and nothing changes, they'll take the initiative to go out and find it whether their partner is aware of it or not.

Twenty-six percent of women compared to 13% of men on Ashley Madison have some sort of non-monogamous relationship with their partner.<sup>2</sup> In terms of infidelity, 44% of women compared to 36% of men report having more than one affair partner at a time.<sup>3</sup> Sixty-five percent of women do not believe in monogamy and more than half of them (56%) realized this in the past year. The growing trend toward non-monogamy is being led by women, and it's not slowing down.

"I've noticed an increase in non-monogamy among women," says a female Ashley Madison member. "Having more confidence and comfort in oneself allows women (especially) to experiment and live their lives to the fullest."

Understandably, women see a slightly higher benefit to society than men regarding a shift to non-monogamy. Fifty-eight percent compared to 51% of men believe it would help everyone learn to ask for what they want and be more satisfied, and 55% of women compared to 49% of men believe it would result in less pressure on one person to fulfill all of their partner's needs alone.

While all members agree that the area of individual sexuality and sexual expression would see the most benefit from non-monogamy, women rate it a 4.08 on a scale of 1 (low benefit) to 5 (high benefit), with men giving it a slightly lower 3.98 rating. Perhaps this desired freedom and acceptance can allow women to comfortably be open with their desires without fear of being judged or shamed—[even by other women](#).

Whether it's to tend to one's mental health, to effectively raise a family, to stand up against sexism, or simply because the alternative is impractical, non-monogamy has become the choice of many. Society may not be completely caught up yet, but times are changing. As Dr. Nelson says, marriages and committed partnerships grow, develop, and should be subject to change over time.

"If we renew our license to drive a car, why not renew our monogamy?"

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<sup>2</sup> Survey of 2,874 Ashley Madison members from December 23, 2021 to January 4, 2022

<sup>3</sup> Survey of 3,112 Ashley Madison members from October 18, 2021 to October 26, 2021

## Approach

This data is based on two surveys:

- Online survey of 3,897 Ashley Madison members between April 12, 2022 and April 19, 2022
- Online survey conducted by YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,195 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 28th and 31st January 2022. The survey was commissioned by Ashley Madison in consultation with Dr. Zhana Vrangalova. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all US adults (aged 18+).