

Generation Z's Thoughts on Dating, Marriage, and Mating

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ENGL 21002 B / Writing for the\

Social Sciences / The City College of New York

December 11, 2023

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank [Leslie Gonzalez, Fabiola silverioventura, Tia Callwood, Anabel Guerrier]for contributing data to this report.

Introduction

The exploration of Generation Z's perspectives on dating, mating, and marriage is of particular significance to the City College of New York (CCNY) community. This discussion was intentionally designed to engage CCNY students and faculty, a substantial portion of whom are part of Generation Z. The aim was to foster a more profound understanding of how this generation, which has grown up in an era characterized by rapid technological advancements and societal shifts, views these fundamental aspects of life.

This exploration transcends the boundaries of academic inquiry. It's about acknowledging and respecting the evolving perspectives of Generation Z, many of whom are integral members of our CCNY community. It's about cultivating a campus environment that not only recognizes these changing perspectives but also actively supports them. It's about ensuring that everyone - students, faculty, and staff - is equipped to adapt to these changes and contribute positively to the campus community.

Understanding Generation Z's ideas on dating, mating, and marriage is crucial for ensuring that CCNY continues to be a place of learning and growth that respects and values the diverse experiences and perspectives of all its members. This understanding can inform the development of our teachings and information, ensuring that it remains relevant and responsive to the changing realities of our students' lives. It can guide the provision of support services, ensuring that they meet the unique needs of this generation. It can also shape our campus policies, ensuring that they reflect the changing dynamics of dating, mating, and marriage.

Moreover, this understanding can serve as a catalyst for broader discussions and initiatives within the CCNY community. It can inspire faculty to incorporate these insights into their teaching, fostering a learning environment that is inclusive and reflective of our students' experiences. It can encourage students to engage in meaningful discussions about these topics, promoting a culture of openness and respect. It can also guide the development of student support services, ensuring that they are tailored to the unique needs and challenges of Generation Z.

Furthermore, this understanding can help shape the future direction of CCNY. By understanding the perspectives of Generation Z, CCNY can position itself as a forward-thinking institution that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of its students. This can enhance CCNY's reputation as a leading institution of higher learning that is attuned to the evolving dynamics of society.

Ultimately, the goal is to create a CCNY community that is inclusive, supportive, and responsive to the needs of all its members, regardless of their generation. A community where everyone feels valued and heard, and where everyone is equipped to navigate the complexities of dating, mating, and marriage in today's rapidly changing world. This is the vision that guides this exploration, and it is the vision that we strive to realize in our ongoing efforts to understand and support Generation Z. This exploration is not just about understanding Generation Z, but about

shaping a future that is inclusive, diverse, and respectful of all perspectives. It's about building a community that is ready for the future, and that starts with understanding the perspectives of those who will shape it.

Methods

Participants

Field Observation Participants

An archived observation was done for a podcast interview with Professor Peter Fraenkel about his recently published book “Last Chance Couple Therapy: Bringing Relationships Back From The Brink.” The interview was by The Science of Psychotherapy through a video conferencing platform and recorded and released to YouTube on February 15th, 2023. There were two hosts: Matthew Dahlitz and Richard Hill. The Science of Psychotherapy is an organization that focuses on 21st-century psychotherapy and interviewing experts from around the world.

Interview Participants

The interviewee was Professor Peter Fraenkel, an associate professor at the City College of New York; a founding institution of the City University of New York, 160 Convent Avenue, New York, NY 10031. The rationale for choosing Professor Fraenkel was based on his research interests and prior publications regarding family and couple therapy. Professor Fraenkel also has his practice as a clinical psychologist specializing in couple, family, and individual therapy.

Survey Participants

A survey was distributed electronically through Google Forms, where participants were able to complete the survey by scanning a QR code or given a direct link to the survey through

Instagram. The survey was accessible between November 22nd, 2023, and December 4th, 2023. A total of 50 participants participated in the survey. Participants were screened to ensure that they were between the ages of 16 to 25 and fit our criteria of members of Gen Z. Convenience sampling and snowball sampling were utilized to get participants and promote the survey.

Materials

The materials used during the interview were written notes to keep track of interviewee responses to the questions provided as well as organize additional thoughts from them, and an audio recorder to record the interviewee's response in case it was not jotted down during the interview. A separate notes sheet was used to organize potential questions for the survey and to categorize them based on question type. Google Forms was used to publish and distribute the questions.

Procedure

Field Observation Procedure

A field observation entitled *Last Chance Couple Therapy with Peter Fraenkel* on YouTube was uploaded on February 15, 2023. This archived interview was found when researching potential interviewee Professor Peter Fraenkel. Due to Fraenkel's research interests in couple therapy, he was a prime candidate for interviewing Gen Z's habits on dating, marriage, and mating, Professor Fraenkel was featured on The Science of Psychotherapy's podcast channel for his recent book release *Last Chance Couple Therapy: Bringing Relationships Back from the Brink* on January 10th, 2023.

Interview Procedure

An interview with Professor Peter Fraenkel was conducted on December 7th, 2023. This was a structured interview conducted face-to-face. Professor Fraenkel was found in the “Faculty” portion of the Psychology Department’s section of The City College of New York’s website. Fraenkel was selected based on our criteria of interviewees, which included solely Psychology professors from CCNY. On the website, there was a small section labeled “Research Interests” which was considered when picking our interviewee. Professor Fraenkel was a strong option for interviewees as his research interests were linked to couple therapy. (Family and couple therapy, family psychology, how couples and families cope with time pressures; work/family balance; the role of technology in couple and family distress; prevention of marital disorder). Dr. Peter Frankel, a distinguished psychologist, holds the position of Associate Professor of Psychology in the Clinical Psychology subprogram at The City College of New York. He also leads the Center for Work and Family at the Ackerman Institute for the Family.

Since Fraenkel’s primary contact information (email and phone number) was listed on the CCNY website, our first attempt to contact him for an interview was through his City College email on November 6th, 2023. There was no initial response from Professor Fraenkel, which led to an additional email sent out using his primary email for his therapy office on November 11th. There was no response from Fraenkel. After calling the City College’s Psychology Department, we obtained his office phone number for his practice and made two attempts at contacting him throughout November. On December 4th 2023, Professor Fraenkel responded to voicemails left regarding the interview and the interview was scheduled for December 7th, 2023.

The interviewee was encouraged to share their professional experiences and observations, particularly those related to Gen Z. The conversation touched on various aspects of Gen Z's life,

including their views on relationships, the impact of technology on their interpersonal connections, and their attitudes towards marriage and having children.

Survey Procedure

Creation of Surveys. A survey was released to the general public on November 22nd, 2023, and was accessible until December 4th, 2023. The survey was created and published through Google Forms and contained 23 questions. There were 13 multiple-choice, 7 rating scales, and 3 open-ended questions. There was 1 screening question to ensure the user was between the ages of 16-25 (What is your age range?) and 2 demographic questions (Which most closely describes your gender? Which of these best describes your current sexual orientation?) The questions were separated into three sections based on the topic: dating, marriage, or mating. Within these three sections, there were questions relating to the respondents' ideal partner, their marriage and parenting intentions, and personal thoughts about Gen Z's romantic habits.

Distribution of Surveys. Due to Gen Z being one of the prime users of social media, the survey was distributed on Instagram and through personal contacts at the time of the survey opening. A flier was made to describe the survey and as an easy method of sharing the survey with its participants. The flier contained a brief description of the survey, its estimated time to complete it, and a QR code that can be scanned using the participant's smartphone to take them to the survey. A direct link was also included in the flier.

Participants were encouraged to share the survey with their personal contacts that fit the criteria of 16-25-year-olds to promote the survey and gain more respondents. Members of the research team also distributed the survey to personal and professional contacts.

Limitations

The methods we used were carried out as initially planned. But we did encounter limitations along the interview journey. One limitation was getting in contact with Peter Fraenkel. Due to the fact that he wasn't responsive to our two emails sent days apart, it delayed our interview. This prolonged the time it took to obtain information that was supposed to be included in the field report. Due to that, it caused us to kind of linger and have to wander doing research until setting an interview date and time. There were also no events hosted during the time of conducting the interview to serve as a wider field of interviewees. So we were limited to what was available and in our reach which applies to the professor we chose on campus.

Results

Field Observation Results

The archived observation was of a recorded interview on February 15, 2023, titled "Last Chance Couples Therapy with Peter Fraenkel" which delved into Professor Fraenkel's most recent publication "Last Chance Couple Therapy: Bringing Relationships Back From The Brink." The two hosts: Matthew Dahlitz and Richard Hill, first asked Fraenkel about his background and reasoning for getting into couples therapy. This portion of the interview lasted for approximately ten minutes.

Next, Frankel was questioned about what practices he does with his clients to which he responded by practicing client responsiveness and the importance of a side-by-side conversation. Client responsiveness was described as giving the clients the ability to set the tone and mood of the sessions. Frankel spoke about a prior client couple he had who described themselves as the "couple from hell" to which Fraenkel responded with "Welcome to Purgatory." Afterward, Fraenkel spoke about the importance for couples to narrate their stories (and problems) as "We" rather than "You" or "Me." He and the two hosts explained that couples that

practice this approach tend to still be together in the future and have fewer problems. Their reasoning behind this was due to America's individualistic perspective which causes people to put emphasis on self rather than as a group, or couple.

This transitioned into Fraenkel's thoughts on navigating troubled circumstances like addiction, substance use, or domestic violence. To Fraenkel, safety is the number one priority and if his clients are not safe, the other underlying issues with their relationship can't be introduced. Fraenkel also pushes the idea of one person being responsible for creating a dangerous environment for the couple. For instance, if someone is using substances while in the relationship, that person must acknowledge their problem and take 100% responsibility. Although the person may use substances because of other underlying personal issues or problems in the relationship, the decision to use substances harms themselves and their significant other. He also introduces some morals he has with clients. For example, he does not work with couples that have an ongoing affair. Also, he does not tell his clients that they should break up. Fraenkel considers this ethically improper for therapists. Instead, if there is a safety concern, he suggests a temporary separation and establishes safety. Frankel emphasizes that the decision to break up must come from the couple themselves, not him. Finally, Frankel discusses the importance of the couples taking initiative to restore their relationship. If the couple is not interested in analyzing their problems and finding ways to change their habits and methods of communication, the relationship will not last.

Overall, "Last Chance Couple Therapy: Bringing Relationships Back From The Brink" hosted by Matthew Dahlitz and Richard Hill featuring Professor Fraenkel delves into the importance of communication and active listening in couples, reflected on America's trend of individualism, and gave insight into the ethics and morals in Couple Therapy. If couples do not

reflect on their problems and issues as a couple (“we”), they are less likely to fix their conflict and may end up breaking up. It is important to Frankel to give the couples the freedom to choose what they need best, but he is willing to give suggestions. However, if a couple is unwilling to change their habits (affairs, substance use, domestic violence, e.g), Fraenkel cannot move forward with his therapy sessions.

Interview Results

The purpose of the interview was to gain a deeper understanding of Gen Z’s perspectives on dating, mating, and marriage. It aimed to explore how various factors such as technology, financial stability, mental health, and societal norms influence their attitudes and decisions in these areas. The interview also sought to highlight the unique challenges that Gen Z faces in navigating these aspects of their lives, providing valuable insights for psychologists, educators, and society at large. The ultimate goal was to foster a better understanding and support for Gen Z as they navigate these significant life stages. The discussion is based on an interview with Professor Peter Fraenkel. With a background in psychology, Dr. Fraenkel has made notable contributions, especially in the realm of family and couples therapy. In the context of this interview, he offered insight into the attitudes of Gen Z towards dating, mating, and marriage. He discussed how technology, financial stability, and mental health shape these attitudes and underscored the challenges Gen Z encounters in navigating these life aspects. His observations offer a perspective on the experiences and concerns of Gen Z in these areas.

FA: So, you’ve been a licensed psychologist since 1990 and an Associate Professor at CCNY since 1998. You’ve worked with families and couples for decades. What do you find fulfilling about this role?

PF: That’s a great first question. I believe that I can save lives. Our emotional and physical health heavily depends on the quality of our relationship. Suppose we can help people get along better

and prevent couples from engaging in destructive conflict. In that case, we can improve family dynamics and help parents relate better to their kids, and vice versa. We can address various mental health issues through a systemic relational approach. We can save lives, and prevent suicide, chronic depression, and even the onset of schizophrenia. Research shows that if we can reach young people who are starting to show signs of psychosis, we can help them avert it by teaching their parents to support their at-risk teenagers. In my book, 'Last Chance Couples Therapy', I often refer to my work as open-heart surgery. I feel like a heart surgeon, opening up communication and helping people treat each other more kindly. My dear mentor and colleague, Kevin Hardy, one of the most prominent family psychologists in the world, and an African-American psychologist, always says that what we do is heal the world in 50-minute segments. I love that. It's true. I've written about this in a 2005 article, which I can email you, and updated it in 2022 on why I became a family psychologist. My undergraduate training was at Boston University, where I double majored in psychology and philosophy. The clinical psychology department at my last university was very psychodynamic at that time. Psychodynamic psychoanalytic work, which started with Freud, has developed in many different ways. One of the key aspects is meeting with one person, hearing about their experience, and helping them develop insight. That's what I learned at my last university. However, I started to feel the limitations of working with a troubled youth without seeing the mother. The rule at the time was to only see the kid and not work with the family. I also had a patient who was schizophrenic and had been hospitalized. Again, the rule was to only see the individual. I was seeing a lot of individuals who had trouble with their marriages or relationships. Again, only seeing the individual didn't make sense.

FA: So, was it more concentrated initially, and then did you expand to cover more areas? What types of changes occurred?

PF: Well, that's exactly what happened. When I went for my pre-doctoral internship, which is a requirement for a PhD in Clinical Psychology, I was at Bellevue Hospital. It was a great internship. That's where I was formally introduced to family therapy. They had a year-long track in family and couple therapy. Linda Carter was my mentor, and she was a fantastic mentor. I stayed on because I finally felt like I had been exposed to a theoretical perspective that made sense. Instead of just seeing one part of a marriage, I was seeing both partners. Instead of just seeing the child, I was seeing the child with the parents. Yes, that made sense. It was more action-oriented, which answered a lot of theoretical questions. Instead of focusing on just one part of a marriage, I believe in involving both partners. Similarly, when it comes to children, I think it's crucial to include the parents. This approach is more action-oriented and answers many theoretical questions about family systems. That's why I'm so devoted to it. I firmly believe that while individual therapy is beneficial for certain issues, when it comes to relationship problems and matters concerning children and teenagers, family therapy is essential. It might be a combination of individual and family therapy. I completed my pre-doctoral internship at

Bellevue and stayed on for a postdoctoral fellowship. I was trained by Salvador Minuchin, one of the pioneers in the field. And here I am today.

FA: That's truly impressive. Your accomplishments speak volumes about your dedication to your work

PF: It's important to recognize the advantages we have in life. Yes, I'm a white male, and I was raised in a lower-middle-class, then middle-class family. I acknowledge that I've had a lot of privilege as a cisgender, heterosexual, and educated individual. I've worked hard, but I also recognize the advantages I've had. I take this privilege very seriously and understand its implications. I have more privileges than you do so, you know, and are you Muslim? Yeah. So, you know, I have more, I mean, a lot of privileges. My perspective is that if you have privilege, you need to use it for the benefit of people who have less. Being a professor in college allows me to be a white ladder and a white stepping stone for my students of color, my first-generation immigrant students, and those in the LGBTQ+ community who have less privilege than I do. This gives my life meaning. You have to have a mission. That's my mission. And I have fun with it. I'm not a super righteous, good white man. I'm just using what I've got.

FA: How and why have thoughts on marriage, dating, and mating changed?

PF: That's a broad topic. I recently had a conversation with a graduate student who identifies as a millennial because she was born in '96, which technically makes her Gen Z. When asked what it means to be Gen Z, the first thing she mentioned was their reliance on communicating via text on their phones. This is the issue we're discussing. One of the problems I see is Gen Z's dependence on text without sound. Before I became a psychologist, I trained to be a professional musician. I started playing drums at age 10 and attended a prestigious Conservatory of Music in Boston. I understand the importance of music and its impact on us. When we talk, we tend to focus on the content and the words, but there's also music being played as we talk. You notice it when I slow down, for example. Our brains process this, and research shows that the music of the voice, the rhythm, the pitch, the timbre, and the volume have a significant effect on meaning and connection. I sense that one reason Gen Z folks have a hard time connecting on a deep level is that they're trying to do it through texting and not through music, through actual voice-to-voice communication. The music, the nonverbal aspects, the sound, and even the gestures are all missing when you're texting. All this meaning-making is stripped away by technology. It's all scriptable and very limited. That's why there's so much confusion, and why we have to use these emojis, which I dislike for many reasons. First of all, they're a corporate product. I use them because if you don't, people feel like I'm not being genuine.

FA: Do you feel like the use of emojis are ingenuine?

PF: Emojis can indeed be genuine, but their interpretation largely depends on how they're used. For instance, you could send a message that might seem upset, but then add a smiley face emoji.

This can lead to confusion. Is the person genuinely upset and trying to lighten the mood, or are they just being sarcastic? It can be quite a task to decipher. Interestingly, technology, which is often touted for its efficiency, may not always be the most efficient when it comes to emotional communication. Research shows that some aspects of communication may be more efficient, while others, like conveying emotions, may not be. For instance, resolving an issue within an organization might be more efficiently done through a meeting rather than through texts. When it comes to relationships, texting or even voice messaging, as my student suggested, might be better. However, what's still missing is the dialogue, the back-and-forth of a conversation. This is more of an interview topic, but if you and I were having a conversation and I was asking you about Ghana, I'd be listening and responding accordingly. That's something that's often missing in our fast-paced, technology-driven communications.

Meeting people nowadays often happens through websites, dating apps, and social media platforms like Instagram. You're swiping right, swiping left, and potentially meeting thousands of people in one night. This is a stark contrast to the old days. For instance, when I met my first wife, who was from Germany, we were set up. This was back in 1988-89, before the advent of social media and smartphones. Back then, it was more organic. I was studying at NYU, Bellevue, and trying to meet women. You used to rely on your social network and meet someone in your world to date and perhaps fall in love with. Now, you're picking potential partners based on the package they present to you. I've worked with a lot of women who end up meeting guys who seem like Prince Charming. These men engage in 'love bombing', showering their dates with gifts, trips to Paris, and other grand gestures, only to disappear soon after. I believe that this is a challenge. It's difficult to meet people this way, and I think it's better to meet people in your world. As a Muslim woman, I would guess that one of the good things about Muslim culture is that it seems to resist some of these modern dating practices. I really appreciate this aspect of the culture. There are so many wonderful things about Islam. Every time I walk by the first floor and see the young men doing their prayer, I find it wonderful. There's something about Islam that is very grounded. People who don't understand that it's a religion of peace are missing out.

FA: You're correct, and I'd like to add that Islam is resistant to many different ideas and ideologies, particularly when it comes to change. There are individuals who convert to Islam and then encounter certain practices or beliefs. This sometimes leads them to think about reformulating the Quran. However, they often don't realize that these practices and beliefs are intended to remain unchanged. They aren't meant to be altered or adjusted according to personal desires.

PF: Indeed, I understand that certain principles remain constant, and people relate to them in different ways. For instance, I have many Turkish colleagues who, while not overly religious, still adhere to certain practices. Personally, I approve of the emphasis on modesty in dress, such as women wearing the hijab. I believe that one of the issues with the non-Muslim world, in general, is the over-sexualization of everything. This has a significant impact on relationships.

Speaking candidly, I've observed the effects of pornography, particularly on men and women. It horrifies me when I hear young women express that they felt compelled to perform oral sex to gain a man's respect. Even girls as young as 12 are engaging in such acts in schools, feeling obligated to do so. It makes me question what has gone wrong.

The pornography industry is a multi-billion dollar business, and young boys, in particular, are learning how to treat women and understand sex through this industry. I know this because of my clients who are in their 20s. They can be nice guys, but then they run into problems with their girlfriends because they want to perform acts they've seen in pornography. The girlfriend might refuse, and the guy doesn't understand why. For example, one of my clients, a graduate student in his late 20s, wanted to perform a pornographic act. His girlfriend refused, and he didn't understand, saying, 'It's the ultimate act of love.' To be honest, I have to express my genuine reaction. Are you kidding? Doing that to your girlfriend? Is that his expression of love? In what world are we living? That's not love. It's disrespecting her. It's not nice. He said, 'Oh, I never thought of it that way.' This is scary to me. There are multiple media influences and industries that affect young men and women. I'm primarily talking about cisgender heterosexual culture because, in some ways, I think gay, lesbian, and trans communities stand apart from the majority culture, which can be quite messed up. I know I've been talking a lot, but that's what you wanted. I'm open to answering your questions. You're actually prompting me to answer some of the questions that I haven't even asked, which is interesting. We've discussed some readings related to dating, meeting, and marriage.

FA: Are there any new studies or findings that you're currently working on?

PF: Well, I'm currently working on a variety of projects. For instance, I recently published a new book titled 'Last Chance Couples Therapy: Bringing Relationships Back from the Brink.' It was released by Norton in January and has been receiving considerable attention. It's even been translated and has inspired related articles.

Did you know that 47% of couples who seek therapy do so because at least one partner is questioning whether to continue the relationship? However, many of the techniques used in couples therapy are not adequate for working with these 'last chance' couples. I won't delve into a full lecture on this right now, but over my 30 years of specializing in this area, I've developed specific methods for setting up the therapeutic contract and more.

This is one area of clinical research that I've been deeply involved with. I'm not conducting hardcore, randomized clinical trials at the moment, but it's important to note that my work extends beyond that. Now, let's circle back to the topic of dating.

Indeed, many researchers echo my sentiments about the negative impact of technology and the shift towards text-only communication. While I can't cite a specific study at the moment, I can mention the work of Sherry Turkle, a psychology professor at MIT. She has written influential books on the impact of technology, such as 'Alone Together: Why We Expect More from

Technology and Less from Each Other.’ Her findings are particularly relevant to this generation. Turkle also wrote ‘Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age.’ In an era where our methods of communication and connection are changing, often not for the better, Turkle offers a voice of caution and reason to help us understand what’s happening. Her work is especially pertinent given how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected our relationships.

As for the divorce rate among Gen Z couples, it’s been between 40 and 50% for decades. However, it’s actually decreased recently, with the millennials’ divorce rate dropping by 30% over the last few years. So, while the divorce rate may not be as high as it once was, this could also be due to a decrease in the marriage rate. In fact, only 7% of Gen Z and single millennials are likely to get married. Another interesting finding is that more than half (59%) of Gen Z are open to polyamorous relationships. Personally, I don’t have an ethical, philosophical, or religious issue with polyamory. I’m Jewish, but not religious, and I’m socially and politically liberal. If you want to try polyamory, I say go for it. However, I believe it’s challenging.

Psychologists often discuss a concept called ‘attachment.’ It starts when we’re infants, attaching to our parents, which is a fundamental part of being a human. In adult attachment, we form deep connections with our loved ones or partners. The problem arises when we’re deeply attached to one person, and then we try to form a relationship with someone else. We may become attached to that person, and then the first person we’re attached to tells us not to get attached. That’s usually what people say, like, ‘Don’t fall in love.’ But we do fall in love.

FA: I just wanted to affirm your point because you’re absolutely right.

PF: Love can indeed be an unexpected and powerful emotion. Sometimes, people don’t necessarily feel that they love each other; it’s merely a physical attraction or a friendship. However, there are instances when people fall in love unintentionally. I believe that people often underestimate the power of their brains. For instance, have you ever taken a neuropsychology course?

FA: Yes I did. The professor’s name is Doctor Patricia Broderick.

PF: Yes, Patricia Broderick is indeed a notable figure in the field of neuroscience. When you delve into this subject, you begin to understand that the part of our brain that contemplates and discusses concepts like polyamory is a thin section of the cortex known as the prefrontal cortex. This is where we do our reasoning and thinking. However, a significant portion of our brain is dedicated to primitive emotions, such as those governed by the limbic system. These parts will react, even when we consciously decide to explore ideas like polyamory. In essence, different parts of our brain are in competition.

Freud was one of the first to discuss this, particularly in relation to our sexual and aggressive drives. He spoke of the superego, which represents our ethics and is associated with the higher cortical functions. Then there's the ego, also cortical, which tries to negotiate between our desires and our ethics. This is still a relevant issue today. You might argue that your ethics are open, and question why we should be limited to one person. That's a valid point. However, based on my experience with clients so far, I would say that it's often a challenge. This might be due to the fact that I usually see people who are struggling. It's another challenge for Gen Z, as we see more of them exploring open or polyamorous relationships.

FA: You also wrote about how technology, as a means of communication, affects our understanding of sex in your book 'The Beeper in the Bedroom.' Yes, you've already discussed this. Yes, indeed, you did.

PF: I would say that I know a bit more than most. In fact, I wrote the first article on the impact of technology on couples before even Sherry Turkle did. It was called 'The Beeper in the Bedroom.' This was before mobile phones were prevalent. I noticed people going to restaurants and sitting there, staring at their phones instead of talking. The same thing happens in the bedroom. People might be lying there, looking at their phones, which interrupts the opportunity for intimacy. The moment they finish having sex, someone picks up their phone, and the other person is left wondering, 'What are you doing? Can't we just relax?'

Then there's the impact of pornography. I can't tell you the number of couples that come to see me where one partner is upset because the other one is watching porn. They question, 'Don't you find me attractive? Why are you looking at that?' They're upset with the type of content that their partner is watching. They say, 'I didn't know you were into that stuff.' So, all these technological influences affect what goes on in the bedroom. Another way technology affects relationships is through the pressures of time. We live in an era where time is always booked, and couples have different rhythms and paces. The pace of life has generally increased. We want to get things done quicker. We're always under pressure, and we're distracted by a million things. We live in an age of distractions, and technology is a part of that. There's too much to pay attention to and too many choices to make. So, people often feel like they don't have time for sex. They've got so many things to do, and they're so distracted by the stuff they see on the internet. So, when I work with couples on sex issues, I always say, 'Put the phones away, especially at dinner or whenever you're trying to have an intimate talk. Just be there in the moment, body to body, not with your phones.' And then, one more question. Yes?

FA: So, this is regarding Gen Z. Nowadays, they seem to feel that having children is not a priority. Where do you see this trend heading? What do you think influenced this shift in their mindset?

PF: I believe that people, especially since the 70s, have become increasingly self-involved. This was a time when several books, such as 'The Culture of Narcissism' by Christopher Lasch, began to highlight this issue. The problem seems to have escalated since then. People are more interested in what they can gain from a relationship. I often write about how people form relationships based on a 'you plus me equals us' template. However, they don't understand that over time, they need to develop a sense of shared connection that affects both individuals. It doesn't eliminate individuality, but it does influence the decisions you make. For instance, if you only think about yourself, you're less likely to want to have a child because having a child means changing your life and going out less. It's a significant life change and one of the major transitions in the family therapy lifecycle.

FA: In class, my group and I discussed why Gen Z, in particular, doesn't want to have kids. We came up with several reasons, and I feel that financial instability is a major factor. A lot of Gen Z individuals prioritize financial stability, and they don't want to have kids until they achieve it.

PF: Indeed, having children isn't as expensive as some people believe. It's a myth that you need to have a lot of money to raise a child. What's crucial is being careful with your finances. For instance, you can opt for public schools if private education is too costly. If money is tight, thrift shops are a great place to find affordable items. You can also exchange clothes with friends. We did that and formed a small network for sharing clothes. So, raising a child doesn't have to be exorbitantly expensive.

Another concern I've noticed is that many people are worried about the state of our planet. They're concerned about global warming and the disruptive climate events we're witnessing. I'm deeply involved with this issue and have explored the impact of global warming and increasing biodiversity disruption on families and couples. I have written a book on the subject of climate change. I've also written an article that discusses how to cope during a pandemic. I can send that to you if you're interested. Currently, I'm working with a student, McCauley, who is pursuing her BA and MA. She's doing her honors thesis with me, conducting a study on college students' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors around climate change. I'm looking forward to gaining some valuable data from this study.

FA: Regarding Gen Z, some of them don't want to have children due to their mental state. They might feel that they're not ready, or they want to prioritize their mental health and wellbeing before deciding to have children.

PF: Indeed, I believe that people across generations have often felt the same way. However, you're correct that Gen Z, in particular, seems to be facing a lot of stressors. While I don't have specific data, my impression is that financial concerns are a significant factor. Many Gen Z individuals are going to college and accumulating student loans. They're looking at the economic situation and wondering if they'll be able to secure a job. These financial worries are legitimate. They're also concerned about the environment and whether they'll have the resources to provide a safe environment for their children. Before having kids, many people, from Baby Boomers to

Millennials to Gen X, often wonder, ‘Am I ready? Do I have enough money? Am I emotionally ready?’ There’s been an increased focus on wellness, which is generally a good thing. However, it can have a downside. It can lead to an overemphasis on personal happiness. The standard for personal happiness, I believe, is set too high.

I’m currently writing a book that challenges many of the ideas that psychology, and broader cultural narratives, have promoted. The first one I’m addressing is the concept of happiness. There are many books and podcasts on how to be happy. But the truth is, life isn’t always happy. I think your generation, in general, tends to believe that they should always be happy, whether it’s at work or school. As a generation, they’re a bit like snowflakes, easily upset by the smallest things and quick to label them as traumas. I deal with real trauma, such as sexual abuse. I’ve written a book about family-based treatment and have worked with victims of political violence and homelessness. These are real traumas. To say that having a bad day at school, or whatever, is a trauma, is not accurate.

In other words, if your standard is ‘I always have to be happy,’ you’re going to be unhappy a lot because you won’t meet that standard. Then you’ll feel like something’s wrong with you because you’re not happy. So the standard itself creates unhappiness. Instead, I think what we need to aspire to is having a meaningful life. That includes sadness, upset, happiness, joy, and love. It’s all meaningful. I think we have to wrap up, but I hope that gives you enough to ponder.

The interview revealed that Gen Z’s approach to dating, mating, and marriage is significantly influenced by various factors. Technology, for instance, has reshaped how they form and maintain relationships. However, it has also introduced challenges, such as the overemphasis on personal happiness and the pressure to always be connected. Financial stability is another major concern for Gen Z. Many are delaying marriage and parenthood until they feel financially secure. Mental health is also a priority, with many Gen Z individuals choosing to focus on their mental wellbeing before considering starting a family. Interestingly, the interviewee noted a shift in societal norms and expectations. The traditional trajectory of dating, marriage, and then children is no longer seen as the only path. More Gen Z individuals are open to non-traditional relationship structures, such as polyamorous relationships. However, the interviewee cautioned that these trends might present new challenges. For instance, the emphasis on personal happiness could lead to unrealistic expectations, and the acceptance of non-traditional relationships could complicate emotional attachments.

Survey Results

The purpose of this survey was to determine Gen Z's personal experience and views on the relationship practices of their generation. Titled "Generation Z's Views on Dating, Marriage, and Mating Survey," this survey included screening and demographic questions along with several questions that fall into 3 distinct categories. Those subtopics included "Dating Preference," "Marriage Intent," and "Parenting Intent". This survey was administered through a Google Form by distributing a URL link. It was opened on November 22, 2023, for a total of nine days, closing on December 4, 2023. By the final day, the survey had a total of 50 responses.

In the "Dating Preference" subtopic, survey participants were asked questions about their preferences when dating. One question asked in this section was "When looking for a potential partner, what qualities or factors are you looking for?" Of the 50 responses, "Effective Communication" was selected 41 times, "Physical Attraction" and "Personal Growth" were both selected 40 times as shown below in Figure 1. Another question participants were asked was "Do you believe online dating has positively or negatively impacted the way we form and maintain our relationships?" In response to this 46.8% of participants answered "Neutral", 40.4% answered "Negatively", and 12.8% answered "Positively". Again, percentages from this question were made up of 47 responses.

Figure 1

Qualities in Potential Partners Survey Question

When looking for a potential partner, what qualities or factors are you looking for? Select all that apply

47 responses

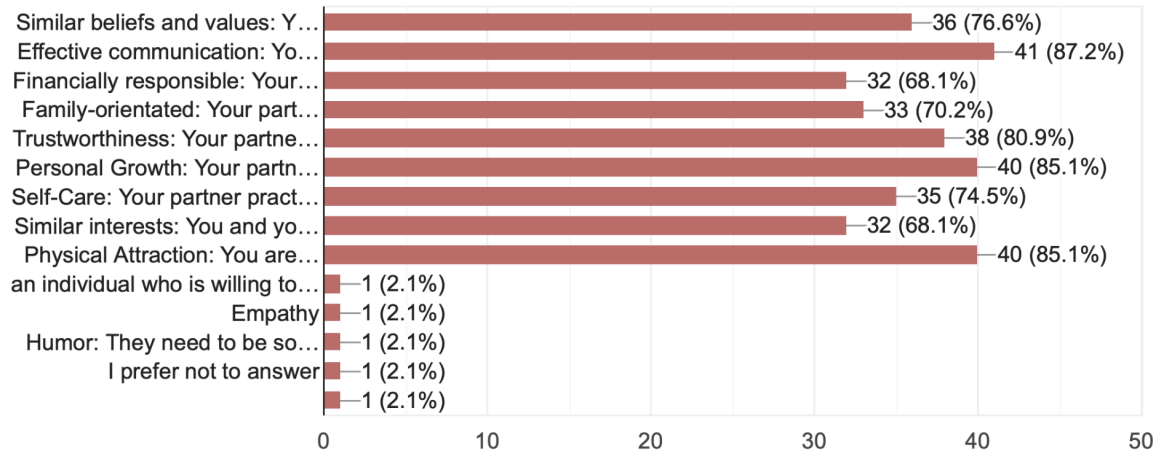
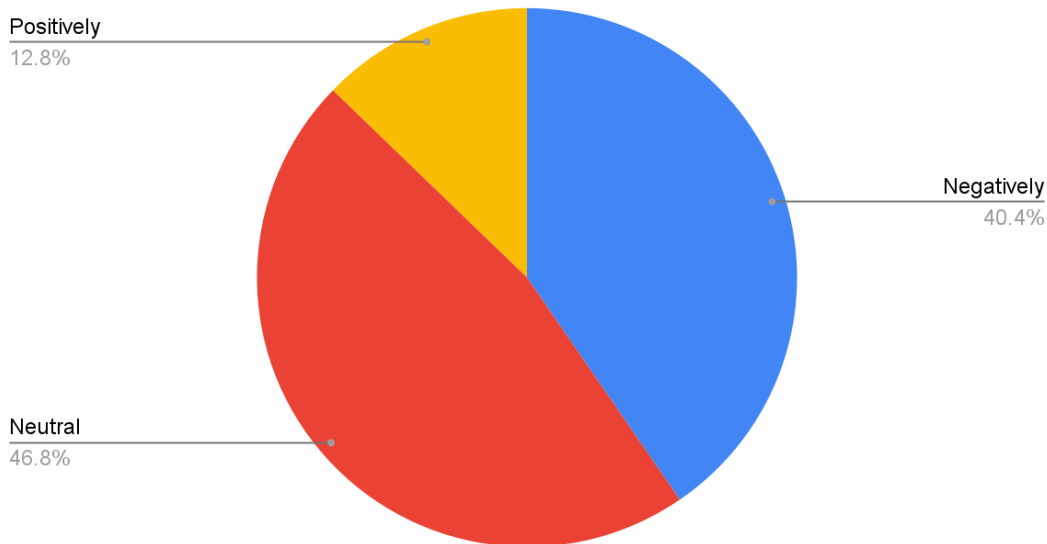


Figure 2

Online Dating Survey Question

Do you believe online dating has positively or negatively impacted the way we form and maintain our relationships?



In the subtopic of participants intending to marry, participants were asked on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Not influenced, 5=Very influenced), “How much do economic factors weigh in their decision to marry?” As well as being asked, “Do you think the marriage rate is decreasing among Generation Z?” where (1 = I do not believe strongly) and (5 I believe strongly). The results of the economic factors, we received 47 responses where 27% were in the middle which was 3, and the other 27% of the participants were very influenced between 4 and 5 very influenced. While the results of how much they think the marriage rate is decreasing in Generation Z, 36.2% strongly believe that it is decreasing and 6.4% responded that they do not believe that the marriage rate is decreasing in Generation Z.

Figure 3

Economy and Marriage

On a scale from 1 to 5, (1=Not Influenced, 5=Very Influenced), how much do economic factors weigh into your decision to get married?

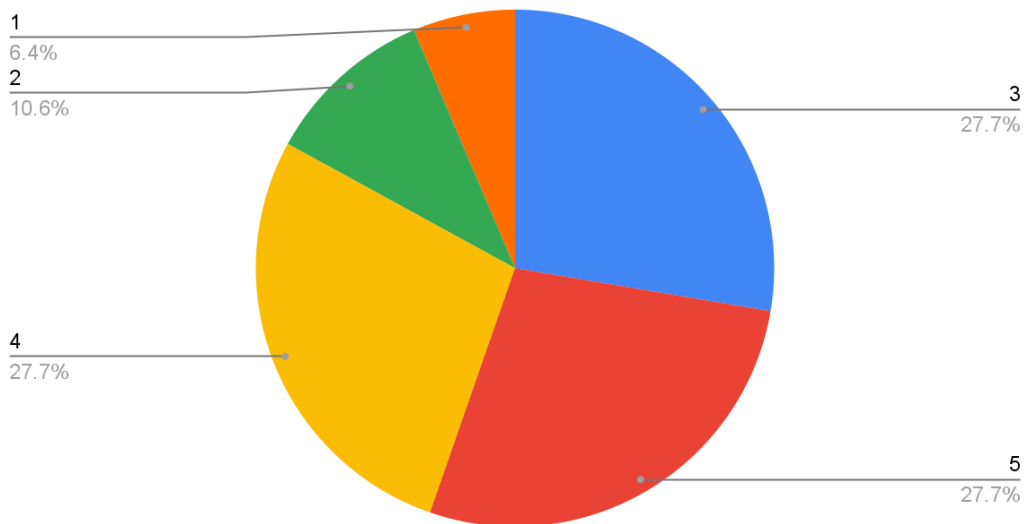
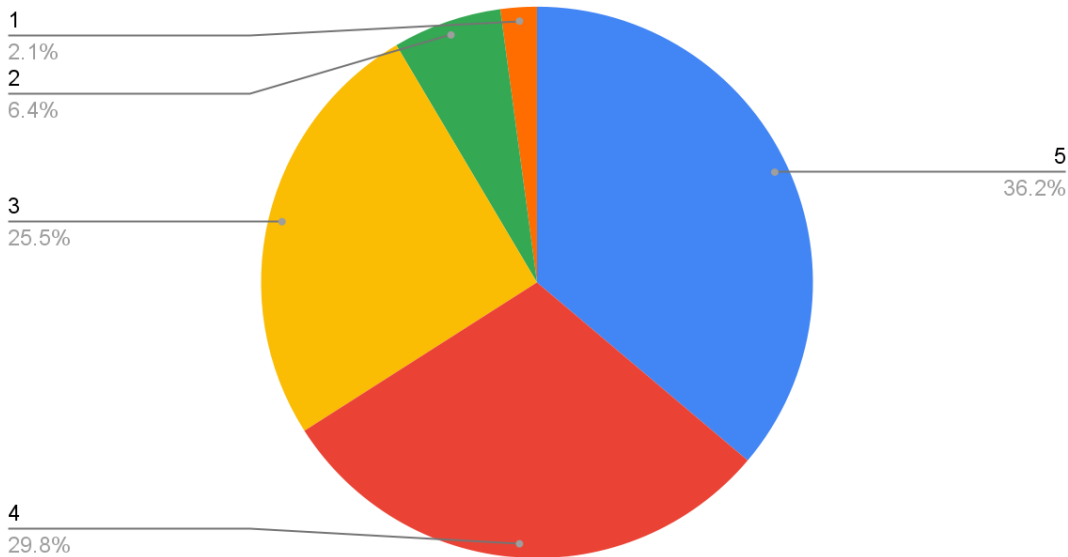


Figure 4

Rate of Marriage among Gen Z

On a scale from 1-5 (1= Strongly disbelieve, 5 = Strongly believe): Do you believe the rate of marriage is declining among Generation Z?



In the subtopic of Parenting Intent, the participants are asked what their ideal home would be and also, with a scale of 1 to 5, how much environmental factors weigh in their decision to have children where 1 was not influenced and 5 was very influenced. We received 47 responses. In the answers to the question about your ideal home, the highest response rate was Dual income with kids at 66%, while 12.8% with dual income with no kids, another 25.5% with dual income, no kids but with a dog/ pets, and lastly 14.9% responded with single income, no kids and with a dog/pets. As for environmental factors in their decision to have children, 29.8% responded that society was very influenced in the decision to have children, 19.1% responded that society is influenced in the decision to have children, and 21.3% were in the middle and 10.6% and 19.1% responded that they were not influenced by society in the decision to have children.

Figure 6

Ideal Household

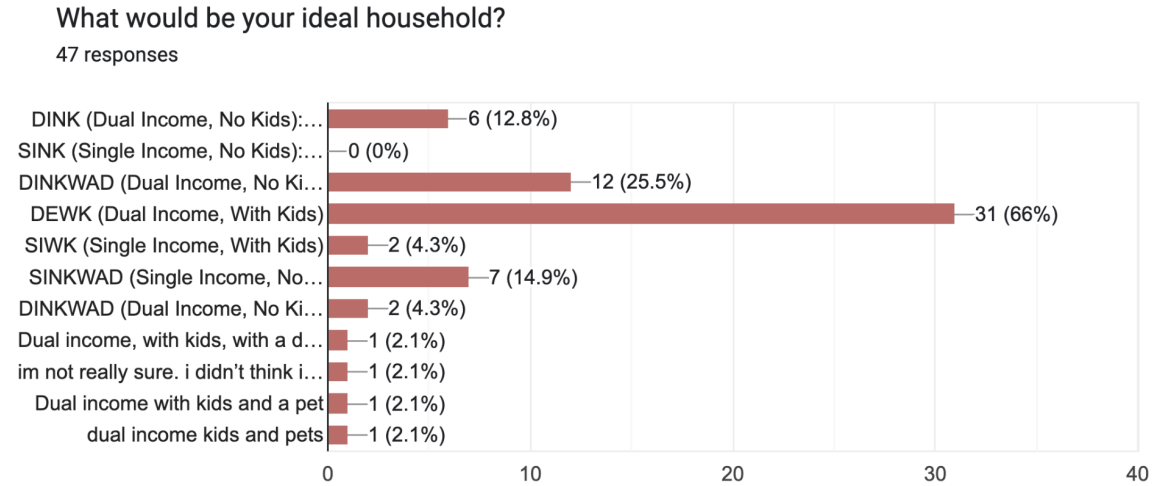
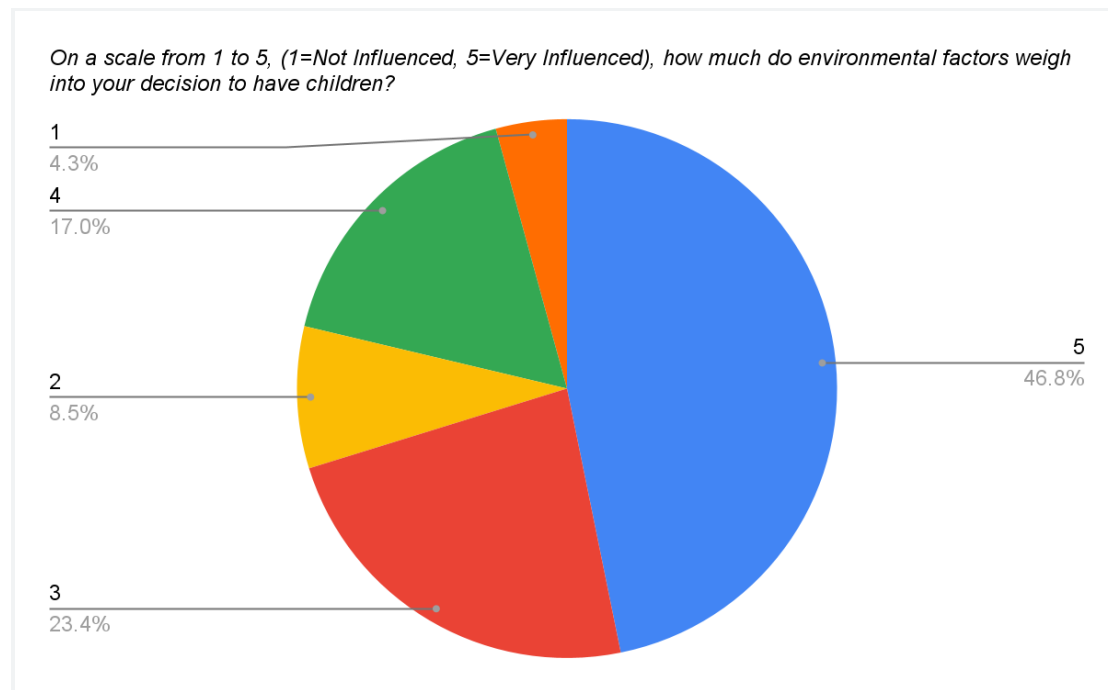


Figure 7

Environmental factors in deciding to have children



The final question of the survey was an optional open-ended question that asked participants to submit any final thoughts or comments. Three of the 11 responses were multi-sentenced. One response said “ ... I wouldn’t wanna have children in a world like this. Why would I want my kid to go through all that[?] Also, prices are too high for everything.” Another response said “For me personally, how much money me and my spouse have heavily relies on our income. If we don’t end up having children I at least want a pet or nephews and nieces.”

Figure 8

Open Response Regarding Children

Thank you for answering our survey! Would you like to add any additional comments regarding your opinions and views on having children?

11 responses

For me personally, how much money me and my spouse have heavily relies on our income. If we don’t end up having children I at least want a pet or nephews and nieces.

I think our society has been creating this “norm” that young kids need to act grown when that’s really not the case. kids are shamed for being kids, and are exposed to thing they shouldn’t be exposed to. i would be afraid to put my children in public school.

For me personally, how much money me and my spouse have heavily relies on our income. If we don’t end up having children I at least want a pet or nephews and nieces.

Discussion [Individual]

The interview revealed that Gen Z's approach to dating, mating, and marriage is significantly influenced by various factors. Technology, for instance, has reshaped how they form and maintain relationships. However, it has also introduced challenges, such as the overemphasis on personal happiness and the pressure to always be connected.

Interestingly, the interviewee noted a shift in societal norms and expectations. The traditional trajectory of dating, marriage, and then children is no longer seen as the only path. More Gen Z individuals are open to non-traditional relationship structures, such as polyamorous relationships.

However, the interviewee cautioned that these trends might present new challenges. For instance, the emphasis on personal happiness could lead to unrealistic expectations, and the acceptance of non-traditional relationships could complicate emotional attachments.

Influence of Technology: Gen Z's approach to dating has been significantly shaped by technology. Dating apps and social media platforms have become the primary means of meeting potential partners. However, this shift has also introduced challenges, such as the overemphasis on personal happiness and the pressure to always be connected.

Financial Stability: Many Gen Z individuals are delaying marriage and parenthood until they feel financially secure. The burden of student loans and concerns about job security are major factors influencing this decision.

Mental Health: Mental health and wellbeing are a priority for Gen Z. Many individuals are choosing to focus on their mental health before considering starting a family.

Non-traditional Relationship Structures: More Gen Z individuals are open to non-traditional relationship structures, such as polyamorous relationships. However, these trends might present new challenges, such as complicated emotional attachments.

Environmental Concerns: Many Gen Z individuals are concerned about the state of the planet, including global warming and disruptive climate events. These concerns influence their decisions about marriage and parenthood.

Changing Societal Norms: The traditional trajectory of dating, marriage, and then children is no longer seen as the only path. Gen Z is redefining these norms based on their unique experiences and perspectives.

Looking ahead, it's likely that Gen Z's perspectives on dating, mating, and marriage will continue to evolve in response to technological, economic, and societal shift, Recommendations include promoting open discussions about these topics, providing resources that Gen z needs, As for a possible solution, i think that it would be best to cater and listen to the needs of Genz and try to fulfill them.

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