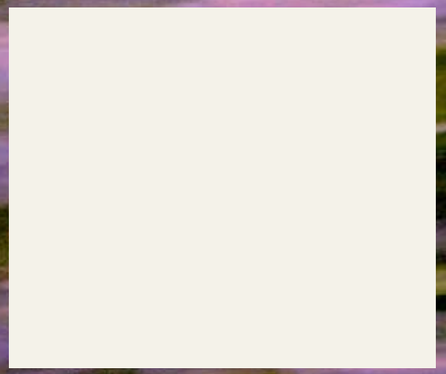




Dating While Dreaming Big

Hinge

2026 Gen Z D.A.T.E. Report
Data. Advice. Trends. Expertise.



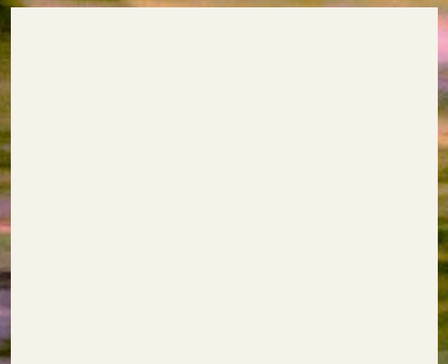
25%

of Gen Z is more likely than Millennials to believe their ideal partner will help them achieve their ideal life.



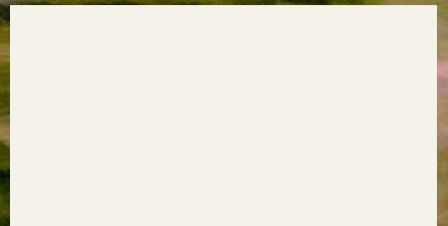
7%

of Gen Z believe they'll achieve their life goals on their own.



76%

of Gen Z imagine the person they want to become alongside their ideal partner.



67%

of Gen Z prefer a partner who makes them feel hopeful and inspired.

For Gen Z, choosing who to date can feel like choosing who they'll become.

After surveying over 13,000 daters, Hinge's research shows that when it comes to relationships, Gen Z aren't only asking "Who do I want?" but also "Who do I want to be?" and "How will I get there?"

There's something hopeful about that. It reflects a strong belief in what love can be: a relationship as somewhere to grow, and a partner as someone who can shape what's possible. Gen Z isn't expecting less from love—they see possibility in what the "right" relationship could unlock.

But dreaming big brings pressure too. At a time when money, housing, steady careers, and the speed of technological change make the future increasingly uncertain, choosing a great partner seems like something you can still control—and something that can set you up for success.

When those are the stakes, being told to "give someone a chance" can seem like being asked to settle. **The question for daters going into 2027 is: How do you keep your standards high while still keeping your possibilities open?**

Pulling from real daters' experience and insights from **Moe Ari Brown, Love and Connection Expert, and Logan Ury, Lead Relationship Scientist**, Hinge's 2026 Gen Z D.A.T.E. Report explores:

- Why choosing a partner feels like choosing a future self for Gen Z
- How to dream big with someone—without putting your whole dream on them
- How to date in the present, when you're still figuring out your future

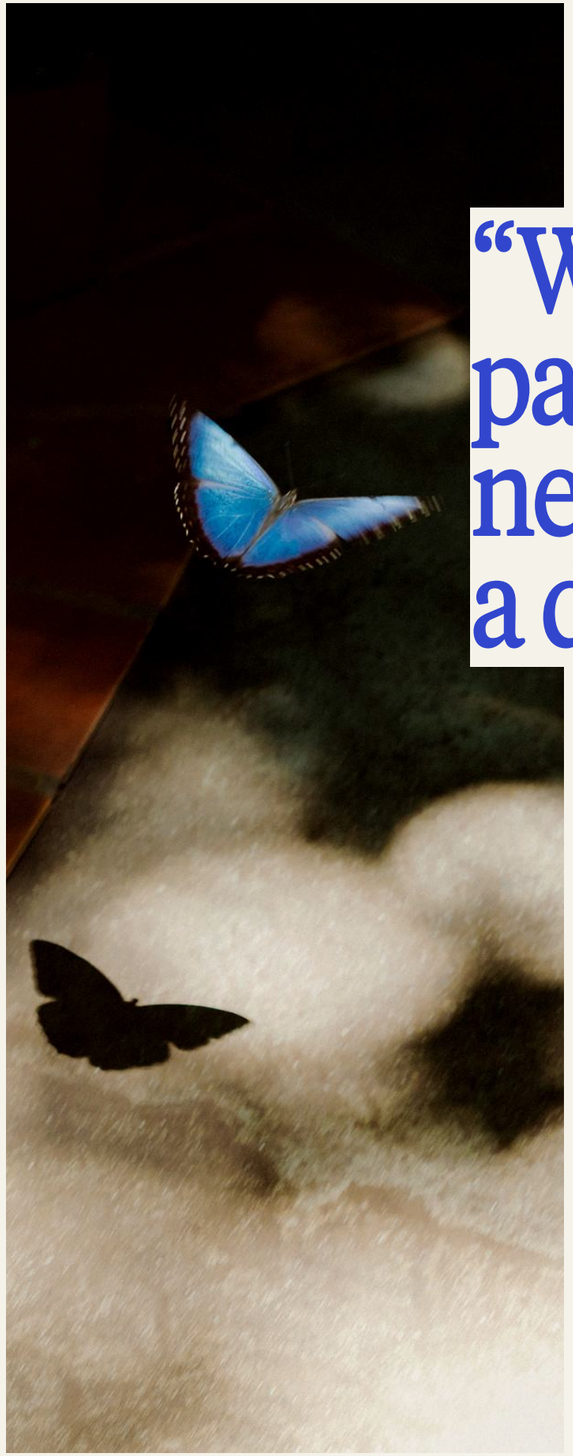




"When I picture the future, I want stability in career and life. To be happy with my job. Some semblance of purpose, financial stability, and flexibility. A partner who is serious about their career and about family. Stability, stability, stability."

—Isaac, 26, he/him, US





"Whoever my partner is, they need to have a direction."



"Whoever my partner is, they need to have a direction. Specific occupation is less important than a drive to be good at something and to achieve something."

—Tallulah, 21, she/her, US

Dream Partners, Dream Lives: Dating for Your Future Self

Gen Z is dating within two competing realities: a culture that tells them to optimize for the life they want and a future that feels more and more uncertain. And that tension is directly showing up in how they date.

More than other generations, Gen Z daters say they see partnership as a way to build an ideal life—often before their careers or other relationships have had a chance to take shape. Hinge's data shows that the younger the dater, the more a partner represents what is—or could be—ahead.

Percentage of daters who say that when they're imagining their ideal romantic partner, they're also imagining the person they want to become:

76% of Gen Z

65% of Millennials

Strongly Agree (By Age Range)

19–22	23–26	27–29	30–45
32%	22%	15%	14%

Percentage of daters who believe that ending up with their ideal partner would make achieving their ideal life more likely:

81% of Gen Z

Strongly Agree (By Age Range)

19–22	23–26	27–29	30–45
42%	31%	27%	25%

LGBTQIA+ Gen Z daters place less weight on a romantic partner as the person who determines where they end up. Our 2026 LGBTQIA+ D.A.T.E. Report found that they hold a broad idea of what a long-term relationship—and a fulfilling life—can look like, which may help explain why:

34%

of LGBTQIA+ Gen Z daters

49%

of heterosexual Gen Z daters

Say a partner will affect where they end up.

72%

of LGBTQIA+ Gen Z daters

84%

of heterosexual Gen Z daters

Believe an ideal partner leads to an ideal life.



Logan Ury
Hinge's Lead
Relationship
Scientist

Love at the top of the Pyramid

Gen Z came of age with a different promise about the future. The middle-class trajectory of previous generations—get a job, buy a house, build a life—no longer feels guaranteed. When my grandparents got engaged after three weeks, they embodied the attitude of the time: "Let's figure it out and see what happens." Nowadays, there's a sense that if you want a good future, you have to plan for it carefully. And that includes who you choose as a partner.

We see this with career-focused students who say, "I need to have my internship locked in by the end of freshman year." In their 20s, those same people think, "I really need to find the right partner to even have a chance at success."

Relationship scientist Eli Finkel has found that over the last few centuries, our expectations of marriage have climbed Maslow's hierarchy of needs. We used to marry for security, then love, and then belonging. Now we increasingly expect our partners to help us reach the top of the pyramid: self-actualization. And that can create sky-high expectations. For Gen Z daters, that means we're not just asking, "Do I love this person?" but also "Will this person help me become who I want to be?"





“When we date someone, they show us ourselves. Our dating patterns reveal what we believe we deserve—and what we believe is possible for us. The risk is that those beliefs become limiting: not just in who we date, but in who we think we can become.”

—Anya, 21, she/her, US



“Above all, I want to feel fulfilled, like I’m dedicating my life to making some sort of tangible difference. I don’t have any specific ideas of how I’d want my partner to fit into that, but what matters most is that we work toward the same goal together.”

—Simi, 22, she/her, US



The New Power Couple: Partnership as Possibility

The dream partner for Gen Z today isn't a match for the life they have; it's someone who can expand it. **Given the choice, 67% of Gen Z want a partner who makes them feel hopeful and inspired over someone who simply fits the life they're already building (33%).**

Even though Gen Z wants someone who will make the future feel expansive, they still have specific ideas about who that person might be. And with a clear idea of what they want, dating someone who doesn't fit makes them feel like they're lowering the bar.

The Possibility Couple *noun*
A relationship where being together makes you feel hopeful about what the future could hold



59%

of Gen Z said dating outside that ideal feels risky.

44% of Gen Z daters say that straying away from it would feel like lowering their standards.



75%

of Gen Z daters believe having a clear idea of what they're looking for in a partner makes dating feel easier.

vs. 68% of millennials.



Moe Ari Brown
Hinge's Love and Connection Expert

Staying Open Without Settling: More Than a Checklist

Gen Z has been trained to optimize, and that's not a flaw—it's a superpower. The invitation is not to optimize how we date but how we think about dating: getting clear on what we actually need from a relationship.

A lot of the time, we're chasing a checklist—height, job, aesthetic—but those things could look totally different from person to person and still add up to a lasting partnership. So they're not always the best way to get to a real connection.

Knowing you want a relationship that feels inspiring is different from deciding in advance exactly who will create that feeling. Leaving room for the person in front of you can reveal possibilities a checklist can't.







“In gay dating, you can convince yourself your type is someone more traditionally ‘masculine,’ and I had to question if that was genuinely what I was attracted to, or what I thought was desirable. I met my boyfriend at a vulnerable point in my life, and it made me realize that feeling safe, understood, and loved by someone matters far more than whether they resemble the person you imagined in your head.”

—Jack, 26, he/him, UK



“When trying to think about the life that I want for myself, the first question is always ‘with who?’ I have a hard time picturing a future because I don’t have ‘my better half’ to picture myself building that future for.”

—Amr, 26, he/him, US



When Possibility Becomes Pressure

When asked, “How much do you think the person you end up with will shape your life outcomes?” **only 7% of Gen Z said they’d largely get there on their own.**

If who we choose is so tied to the life we want, there’s understandable pressure to choose well. That weight can fall on the relationship itself. We hold out for the “right” person, and ask them not just to share our dreams, but to help deliver them too.

How Pressure About the Future Shows Up in Early Dating

1. Your mind is already in the future

Halfway through a date, your brain goes to: Would they move for my job? Do they want kids when I do? Would my mom like them? And those are all fair questions to wonder—just not all tonight. If you leave with all the answers and no real sense of who they are, you might have missed the present moment.

2. Details become dealbreakers

Their job, height, or uncertainty about the future takes them out of the running before you’ve had a chance to see how you actually fit together. It makes sense to want compatibility on the things that matter, but figuring out real potential takes curiosity, and actually understanding their perspective.

3. Your instinct says no

They check every box, but you dread the next date. When it ends, you feel slightly confused or betrayed—and that’s usually a sign that you pushed beyond dread in pursuit of the checklist. Our feelings are some of our sharpest compatibility cues, but only if we stay present enough to feel them.

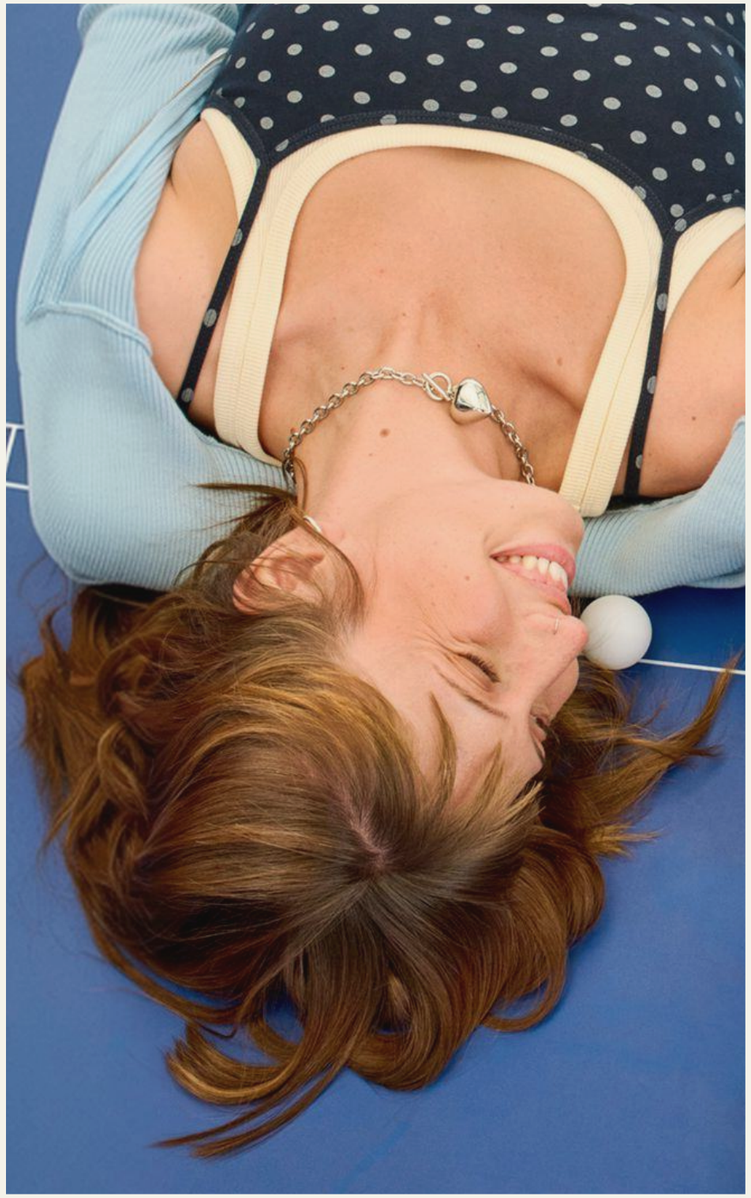
For Gen Z women, having a clear idea of who they're looking for brings a sense of control:





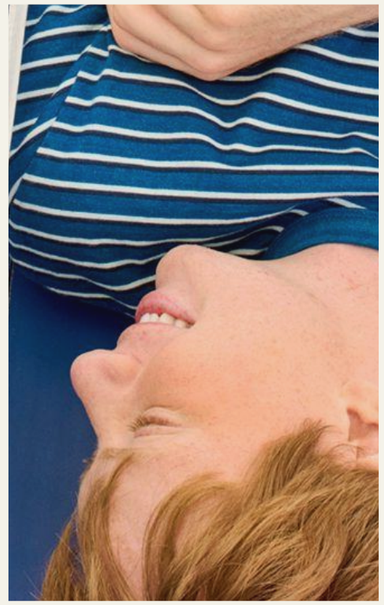
18%

Gen Z women are 18% more likely than Gen Z men to say that they feel pressure to find the "right" person.



2x

Gen Z women are nearly twice as likely as Gen Z men to say that knowing what they're looking for in a romantic connection helps them feel in control.





Logan Ury
Hinge's Lead Relationship Scientist

Introducing the Other Significant Other (OSO)

Relationship scientists use the term Other Significant Other for the people beyond your partner who help meet your emotional needs. And research shows that spreading those needs across a few people, instead of just one or two, is linked to better well-being.

The same idea applies to your ambitions. Think about everything you're asking a future partner to provide: stability, encouragement, someone who opens doors you can't open yourself. Almost none of it has to come from one person.

Your OSO can be the mentor who knows your industry. The friend who's already done what you're trying to do. The family member who has your back. The group chat that shows you another version of your life. You can build a future with all of them.

Your partner doesn't have to be your everything. Dreams are rarely built by two people alone. They're built by an entire community.

Future, in Progress: How Dreams and Desires Evolve

Giving someone a chance means moving past the checklist long enough for attraction, compatibility, and our own desires to reveal themselves—and that takes time. In fact, **Gen Z are 25% less likely than Millennials to say that attraction develops immediately.**

And it's not just attraction that takes time to develop. Who we are—and what we are looking for in a romantic partner—always continues to shift and evolve too.

As Gen Z daters get older, they're more likely to say it's their own growth and confidence that's shifted what they want in a partner.

What makes daters change the kind of people they're attracted to:







Moe Ari Brown
Hinge's Love and Connection Expert

Advice: Co-Creating in Practice

From "What Are We?" to "Who Will We Become Together?"

If we're being honest, who we partner with doesn't just shape who we become—it shapes what we believe is possible in relationships. Gen Z isn't wrong to sense that weight. They're just finally naming an anxiety other generations carried in silence.

The risk is when that future focus turns rigid, you stop co-creating and start asking a partner to perform your expectations. Dr. Alexandra Solomon, Clinical Psychologist and author of *Loving Bravely*, once told me, "Leave room in your vision of the relationship for it to expand with the size of your dreams."

The person across from you won't already know how you take your coffee, or how you like to receive affection. Co-creating is how you figure those things out together. In my work, I see people's plans shift, stretch, and grow when they have someone to build with, but only if they leave room for it.

Get curious before checking out.

If a date says, "I'm moving to another city in five years," ask what's pulling them there. They might want adventure, a slower pace, or distance from something—things you could talk about building toward. You may learn that they're not that attached to the plan, it's just the one they made alone.

Invite them to build with you.

Share your vision for the future, ask about theirs, and look at them side by side. This will tell you much more about how your lives could fit together than looking at them separately.

Remember that different visions don't make you incompatible.

The ideas you formed on your own are just your starting points. Incompatibility shows up when people can't take those separate visions and make something new together. Think of your bond as its own chemical reaction: two unique elements combining together to create something that didn't exist before. That's co-creation.



"I can be open to someone who doesn't fit the picture I had in mind without compromising on what's genuinely important to me. Tastes evolve, and staying curious means giving myself the space to discover that what I thought I wanted isn't necessarily what I end up valuing most."

—Sharidiant, 26, she/her, US



"I don't need someone to make the future possible for me, but I would love a partner who can meet me there. I want a relationship where we complement and support each other while pursuing our own dreams."

—Billy, 23, he/him, AUS

Staying Present While Dreaming Big

Despite uncertainty about what the future holds, Gen Z remains hopeful about love, looking for someone who helps them become who they want to be. The good news: neither the future, nor who we'll be when we get there, has to be decided today.

A relationship means stepping into a life that's already moving—we're dating for who we are now, and who we're becoming. Our ambitions, friendships, interests, and sense of self keep evolving, and so will what we want from love.

Here's the hope for 2027: that daters stay curious about who they're becoming. The future won't be something the "right" person delivers. It's something we get to discover as we go.



Methodology

Hinge's D.A.T.E. Reports are produced by an internal team of PhD researchers and behavioral scientists dedicated to generating evidence-based insights on modern dating. In July 2026, the team surveyed more than 13,000 global respondents, including Gen Z and Millennial daters. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, Hinge Labs studies what leads to successful relationships—and applies those insights to build a more effective dating app.

Contact: press@hinge.co