

Stability is the new sexy: 'Singles in America' study reveals major shifts in dating from COVID-19

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The largest annual scientific study on single adults shows that COVID-19 has caused a dramatic shift in people's priorities when it comes to dating,

sex and love. Faculty from the Kinsey Institute at Indiana University say some of the changes could last well beyond the pandemic.

This is the 11th year for Match.com's "Singles in America" study, which Kinsey Institute executive director Justin Garcia and senior research fellow Helen Fisher contribute to as scientific advisers. The research includes a demographically representative sample of 5,000 single adults between the ages of 18 and 98.

Data from the 2021 study shows that 83% of singles want a [partner](#) who's emotionally mature. Only 78% want someone physically attractive, compared to 90% in 2020.

"Singles have grown up, and along with that they are looking for more stable partners," Fisher said. "The so-called bad boys and bad girls are out; emotional maturity is in."

That mindset change is also reflected in a drastic increase in those interested in marriage. The number of singles who want a partner desiring marriage jumped from 58% two years ago to 76% this year—and men and younger adults are leading in this pattern.

With that focus on stability, casual sex has become a lower priority for singles than in the past, with more focusing on emotional connection.

"I don't think that's a temporary blip; I think it's a sea change," Garcia said. "We were in this hook-up era for a while, and we documented fairly widespread openness toward casual sex, but I think people are now focusing more on intentional relationship-building in the present and into the future."

Garcia said he also believes the pandemic changed the way people seek out partners long-term. The [pandemic](#) led one in four singles to turn to

video [dating](#) as a way to get a "vibe check" before meeting a potential romantic partner in real life. The numbers are even higher for young singles, with nearly half of Gen Z and millennials going on a video date as a first step in the dating process.

Fisher said that while there tends to be a lot of focus on how technology can negatively impact relationships, the data shows that it can facilitate meaningful connections.

"When you go on a video chat, sex is off the table," she said. "You don't have to decide if you're going to kiss or not, and you don't have to decide how you're going to spend your money. So it's practical."

"Singles in America" also gauged attitudes on COVID-19 vaccination, finding that vaccination is a higher priority for singles than the rest of the U.S. population. In addition to having a higher vaccination rate themselves compared to the overall population, 65% of singles want their partners to be vaccinated. And those numbers may reflect more than singles' prioritization of health.

"We can take something like vaccination status and use it as a proxy for someone's personality and who they are," Garcia said. "The kind of traits we look for in partners during the early stages of courtship include whether they are empathetic, if they seem smart enough, do they care about well-being? Singles are using vaccination status as a window into those other domains."

"Singles in America" tells researchers a great deal about dating in 2021, but the data also has much wider applications. With the study running for more than a decade the database now includes information about over 55,000 U.S. singles from diverse backgrounds and their attitudes toward [love](#) and sex. Researchers can use the data bank to look at many other trends.

"To have a project that's gone this long I think highlights the benefits of academics working with industry to do big, bold projects," Garcia said.

More information: More information is available at www.singlesinamerica.com/

Provided by Indiana University

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