The Heart of the Matter: A Survey About Valentine’s Day and Social Connections

In January 2018, AARP Foundation conducted a survey among adults age 18 and over that explored people’s feelings about Valentine’s Day.

Key Findings

- Although few people feel lonely themselves when they think about this Valentine’s Day (11%), nearly half have worried about a friend or family member feeling lonely on Valentine’s Day (48%).

- Overwhelmingly, people would rather spend Valentine’s Day with someone (82%) than alone. In fact, this sentiment is echoed by consumers’ view of the most meaningful way to celebrate Valentine’s Day: 63% say spending time with a romantic partner or with friends or family is the most meaningful way to celebrate the holiday — far more than say receiving flowers, candy or other gifts either from a romantic partner or from friends or family (13%).

- Among non-married adults, most (75%) of those ages 50 and over are neither dating nor in a romantic relationship. This is nearly twice as many as those under age 50 (40%).

- While over six in ten adults (63%) plan to celebrate this Valentine’s Day with others, nearly four in ten (37%) do not plan to celebrate it or plan to spend it alone.

Methodology

This online survey of 1,165 adults age 18 and over was fielded from January 23-26, 2018 among AARP’s proprietary non-probability panel. Data were weighted by age, gender, household income, marital status, and region to reflect US adults age 18 and over.

https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00213.001
Detailed Findings

Feelings about Valentine’s Day

- A majority of adults have positive feelings about this Valentine’s Day. When thinking about the upcoming holiday, six in ten (63%) say they feel either loved, joyful, excited, fortunate, content, and/or hopeful.
- The emotion most commonly cited is feeling loved, reported by over two-fifths of adults (43%). This feeling is more common among those under age 50 (48%) than among those ages 50 and over (36%). However, when it comes to feeling loved when thinking about this Valentine’s Day, there is a stark difference between adults who are married or in a relationship (57%) and those who are not in a relationship (14%).
- More adults feel neutral than negative when thinking about this Valentine’s Day. One-third (33%) of adults feel neutral, including just over one in five (22%) who feel indifferent and one in ten (13%) who feel nostalgic when thinking about it. About a quarter of adults (23%) have negative feelings about the upcoming holiday, including feeling either lonely, sad, disappointed, annoyed, stressed out, nervous and/or dread.
- Non-married adults who are neither dating or in a romantic relationship are more likely to feel lonely when thinking about Valentine’s Day (26%) than those who are dating (19%) or those in a romantic relationship (6%). Among non-married adults, those ages 50 and over are more likely to describe their relationship status this way (i.e., neither dating nor in a romantic relationship) than younger adults (75% vs. 40%).
- The holiday evokes more feelings (both positive and negative) among adults under age 50 than among adults ages 50 and over.
When you think about Valentine’s Day this year, do you feel…?
(Select all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Under Age 50</th>
<th>Age 50 and Over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>1165</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loved</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyful</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortunate</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopeful</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nostalgic</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappointed</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoyed</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressed out</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dread</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Calculated Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Under Age 50</th>
<th>Age 50 and Over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>1165</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive [NET]</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral [NET]</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative [NET]</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Almost half of adults (48%) have worried about a friend or family member feeling lonely on Valentine’s Day. Adults under age 50 are more likely to have worried than adults age 50 and over (54% vs. 39%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you ever worried about a friend or family member feeling lonely on Valentine’s Day?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social Connections

Just over half (54%) of adults who are not married say they are neither dating nor in a romantic relationships. Adults age 50 and over are almost twice as likely as adults under age 50 to report this (75% vs. 40%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[Base: Not married] Which of the following best describes your current dating status? By dating we mean are you currently looking for a romantic partner regardless of whether you have actually gone on a 'date' or not recently.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither dating nor in a romantic relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a romantic relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Overwhelmingly, people would rather spend Valentine’s Day with someone (82%) than spend it alone (18%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which statement comes closer to your view?</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Under Age 50</th>
<th>Age 50 and Over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>1165</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would rather spend Valentine’s Day with someone</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would rather spend Valentine’s Day alone</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ways to Celebrate**

• The most common way people plan to celebrate Valentine’s Day this year is with a romantic partner (46%). However, just over a quarter (27%) of adults don’t plan to celebrate it at all. The remainder plan either to celebrate it with friends or family (17%) or to spend it alone (10%).
• Adults under age 50 are more likely than older adults to celebrate it with a romantic partner (52% vs. 38%).
• Adults age 50 and over are more likely than younger adults to not celebrate Valentine’s Day this year (37% vs. 20%).
• While one in five adults (21%) who are neither married nor in a relationship plan to celebrate Valentine’s Day with friends or family this year, most of them plan either not to celebrate it (48%) or to spend it alone (23%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you plan to celebrate Valentine’s Day this year?</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Under Age 50</th>
<th>Age 50 and Over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>1165</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I plan to celebrate it with a romantic partner</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't plan to celebrate it</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I plan to celebrate it with friends or family</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I plan to spend it alone</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• A majority of adults (63%) feel the most meaningful way to celebrate Valentine’s Day is by spending time with either a romantic partner or with friends or family. This is a far greater proportion than those who say the most meaningful way to celebrate Valentine’s Day is by receiving flowers, candy or other gifts either from a romantic partner or from friends or family (13%). Spending time together also trumps receiving a card or telephone call from a romantic partner or from friends or family (9%).

• Just over one in ten adults (12%) say the most meaningful way to celebrate Valentine’s Day is by not acknowledging it at all. While others (5%) prefer to treat themselves to something, such as shopping, a spa day, going to the movies, etc. (5%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which of the following is the most meaningful way to celebrate Valentine’s Day?</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Under Age 50</th>
<th>Age 50 and Over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>1165</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending time with a romantic partner</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending time with friends or family</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not acknowledging it at all</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving flowers, candy or other gifts from a romantic partner</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treating yourself to something (shopping, a spa day, going to the movies, etc.)</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving a card or telephone call from friends or family</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving a card or telephone call from a romantic partner</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving flowers, candy or other gifts from friends or family</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>