

The Rise of Kidulting Report

The Harris Poll Thought Leadership Practice

October 2026

About this research

This survey was conducted online within the U.S. by The Harris Poll from June 25th-27th, 2026, among a nationally representative sample of 2,158 U.S. adults aged 18 and over.

This research comprises of 346 Gen Z (ages 18-29), 693 Millennials (ages 30-45), 583 Gen X (ages 46-61), and 536 Boomers (ages 62 and older).

For the purposes of this study, “**Kidulting**” refers to adults participating in or purchasing playful products, hobbies, or experiences traditionally associated with childhood, such as collecting toys, building models, buying blind boxes, playing games, or visiting playful/immersive experiences.

2,158 346

American Adults

18+, nationally
representative

Gen Z Adults

18+, nationally
representative

Executive Summary

- 01. For a surprising number of Americans, Kidulting is beating out therapy, drinks, and parties as the preferred way to unwind.**
Half of Americans, and 56% of Gen Z, say they would rather buy blind boxes, build models, or collect toys than talk to a therapist. Roughly the same share would choose kidulting over going out for drinks (49%) or going to a party (47%).
- 02. Gen Z is staying forever young, driving adult play to new heights.**
Roughly eight in 10 young adults report engaging in physical play spaces and themed restaurants and bars – 20 percentage points or higher than the average American.
- 03. Grown-up playtime needs no apology, as adults lean into nostalgia.**
Eighty-three percent of Americans say they are driven to purchase playful products or experiences for their own enjoyment, with relaxation, affordability, and nostalgia named as top motivations. Six in 10 Americans wish for adult-only nights and nostalgic marathons from brands.
- 04. Spending on play is nearly universal, but real dollars skew young.**
Sixty-five percent of Americans spent \$100 or more on at least one category, rising to eight in 10 among Gen Z and Millennials versus under half (48%) of Gen X and Boomers. Building and assembly kits show the widest generational spending gap of any category tracked.
- 05. Play is keeping it in the family while reaching well beyond it.**
Nearly nine in 10 parents engage in play to create family memories (89%), spend quality time with their children (88%), or pass on childhood experiences (87%). Four in 10 Americans also express demand for more adult-directed playful products (42%) and clear adult-design or nostalgia cues (39%).

THE RISE OF
KIDULTING

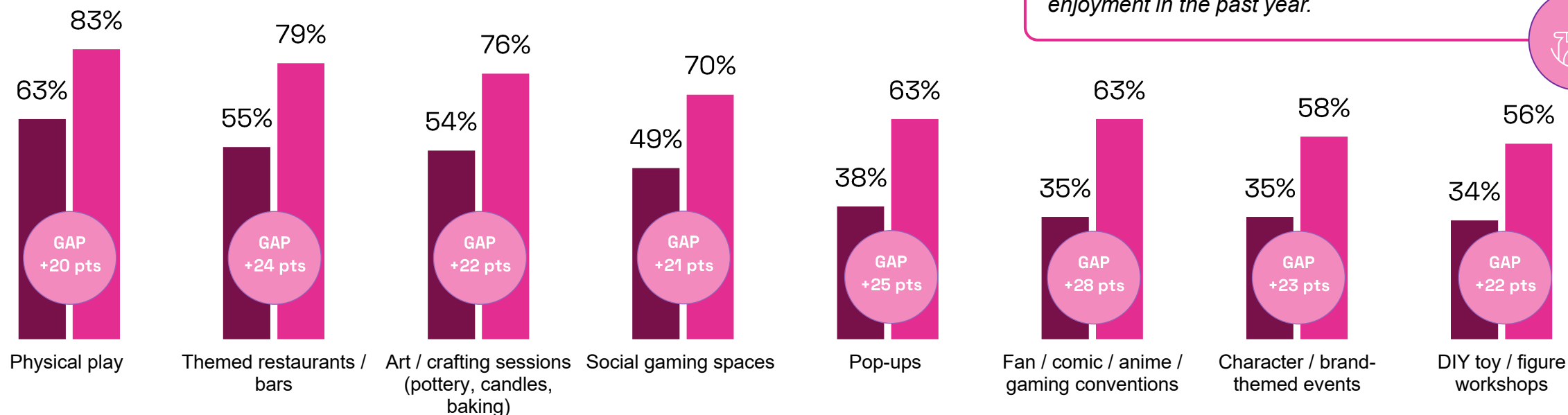
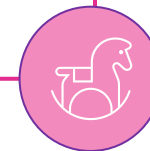
Why Play Is An Everyday Lifestyle

Kidulting has firmly entered the cultural mainstream, with 80% of Americans and 95% of Gen Z engaging in play for self-enjoyment

Have you participated in any of the following playful activities for your own personal enjoyment during the past 12 months?
(% Yes NET)

■ All ■ Gen Z

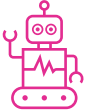
80% of Americans, including 94% of Gen Z participated in playful activities for their own personal enjoyment in the past year.



From board games to blind boxes, purchasing playful products is becoming the norm, especially for Gen Z and Millennials

Have you purchased any types of these playful products for yourself during the past 12 months?

(% Yes NET)

 Board games / puzzles 71% Gen Z & Millennials (vs. 46% Gen X & Boomers) GAP +25 pts	 Building / model kits 66% Gen Z & Millennials (vs. 31% Gen X & Boomers) GAP +35 pts	 Craft kits 65% Gen Z & Millennials (vs. 32% Gen X & Boomers) GAP +33 pts	 Coloring / sticker books 65% Gen Z & Millennials (vs. 30% Gen X & Boomers) GAP +35 pts
 Plushies / dolls 63% Gen Z & Millennials (vs. 20% Gen X & Boomers) GAP +43 pts	 Action figures / models 61% Gen Z & Millennials (vs. 22% Gen X & Boomers) GAP +39 pts	 Trading cards 60% Gen Z & Millennials (vs. 21% Gen X & Boomers) GAP +39 pts	 Blind boxes / mystery boxes 57% Gen Z & Millennials (vs. 16% Gen X & Boomers) GAP +41 pts

When the world feels heavy, Americans are turning to play to cope

83%

Americans



“In uncertain times, small moments of joy **feel more important than ever.**”

90% Rural
88% Asian

75%

Americans



“Playful hobbies help me **stay emotionally resilient.**”

84% Asian
83% Gen Z

74%

Americans

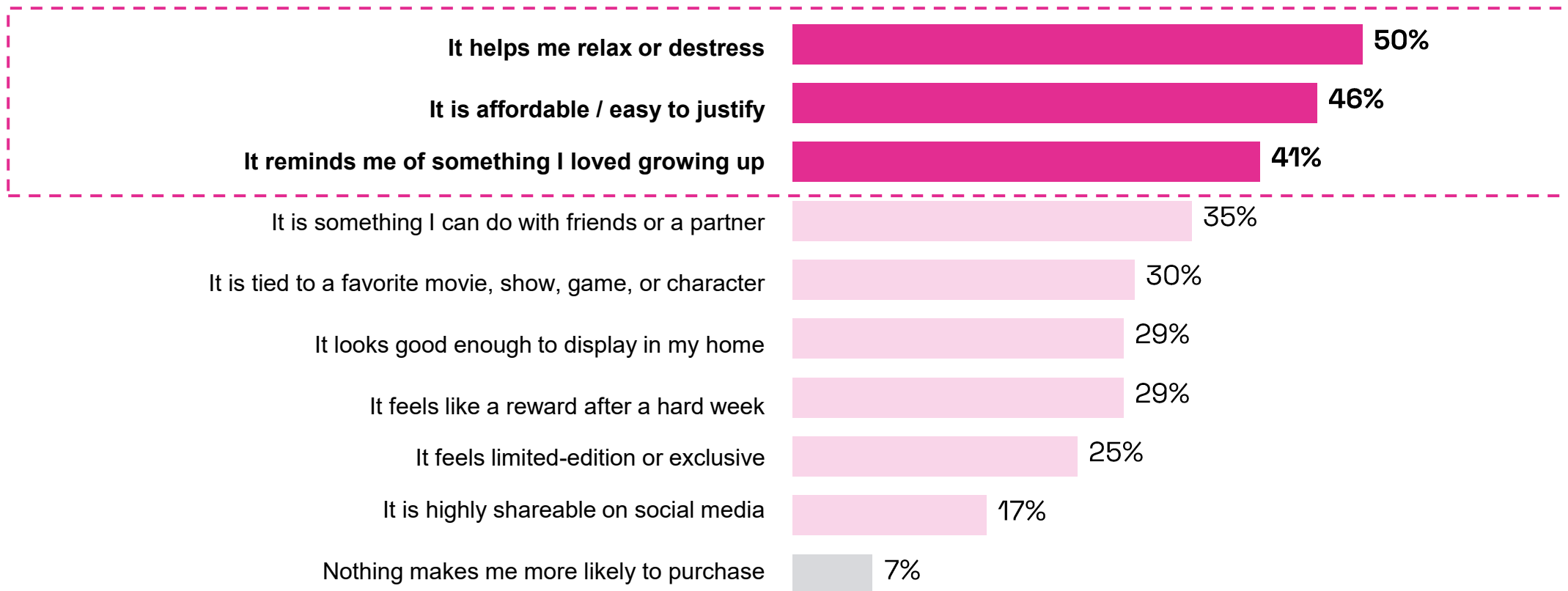


“Play helps me **feel more hopeful** when the world feels heavy.”

87% Asian
82% Black
80% Millennial

Relaxation, affordability, and nostalgia are the biggest reasons Americans buy something playful

Which of the following would make you more likely to purchase a playful product or experience for yourself?
(% Selected)

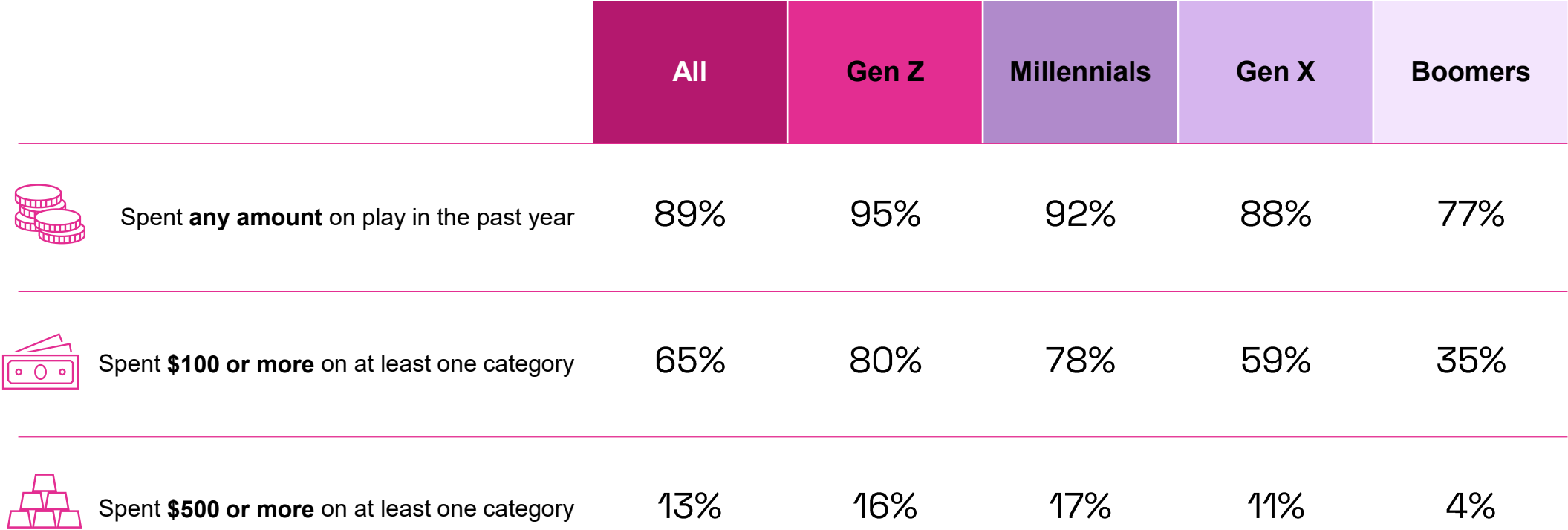


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How Americans Are Spending on Play

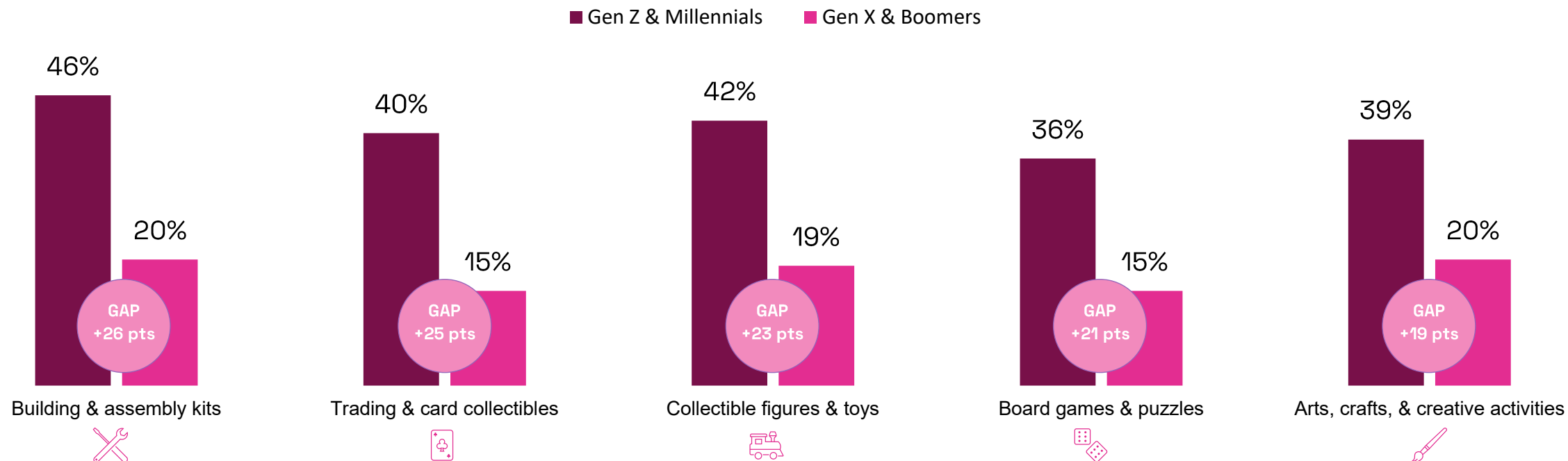
Nearly all Americans spend something on play, with Gen Z and Millennials spending the most

Money spent on playful activities on products for personal enjoyment



Building and assembly kits show the widest generational spending gap of any play category

Approximately how much have you personally spent in the past 12 months on playful activities or products for yourself only?
(Spent \$100+/year)



Play appeals to Americans as a creative outlet and a daily mood boost, not just a throwback

Phrases describing why playful products or experiences are appealing (% Selected)

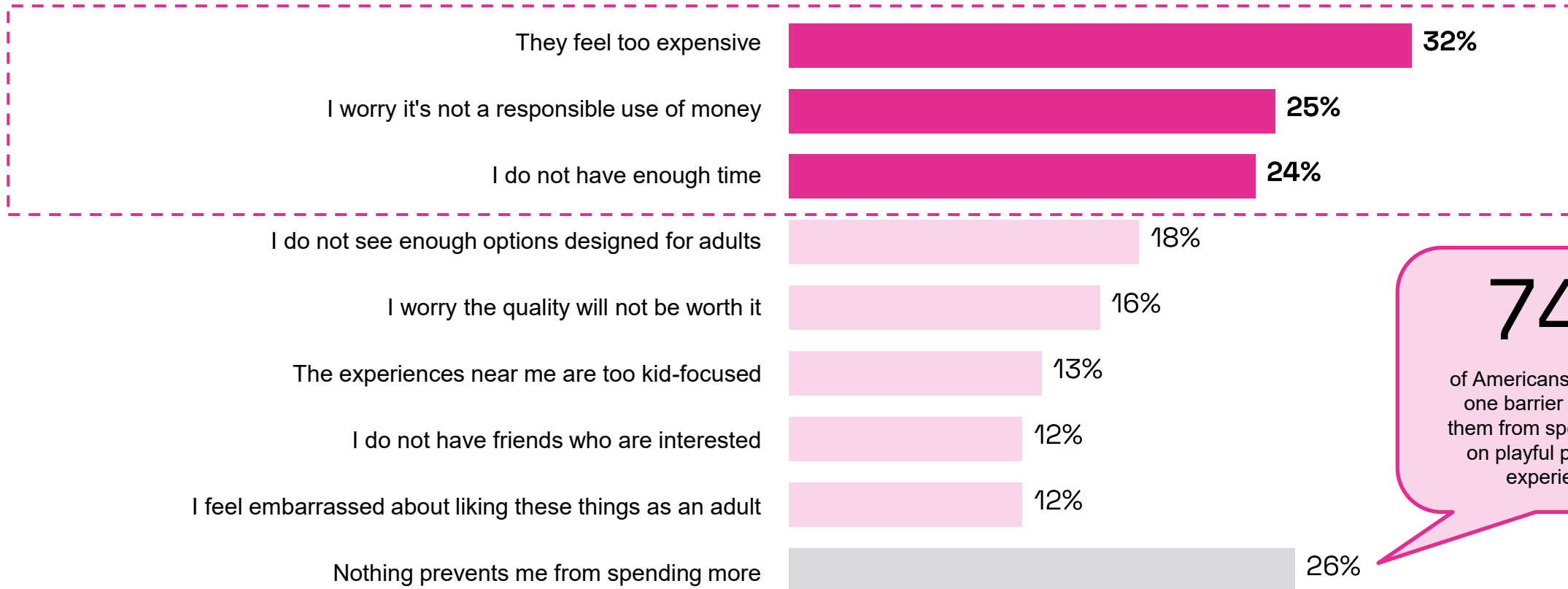
	A creative outlet	(46% Women) 40%
	A way to bring more joy into everyday life	40%
	A reward I give myself	(44% Gen Z) 36%
	A way to revisit things I loved growing up	34%
	A break from adult responsibilities	34%
	A way to feel like a kid again	(37% Millennials) 32%
	A form of self-care	(38% Millennials) 30%
	A way to express who I am	(37% Gen Z) 30%
	A way to connect with others	30%
-	N/A – I don't have a particular reason for why playful products or experiences appeal to me	7%

93%

Americans
Have at least one
factor that makes
playful products or
experiences
appealing.

Money and time hold some Americans back from playing more, embarrassment barely registers

What, if anything, prevents you most from spending more on playful products or experiences?
(% Selected)



74%

of Americans cite at least one barrier preventing them from spending more on playful products or experiences.

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Where Kidulting Hits Hardest and What Adults Want

Play makes Americans feel less alone, and for younger generations, it's becoming real self-care

64%

Americans



“Play helps me feel **less isolated and more connected** to other people.”

73% Parents of Kids <18
71% Gen Z/Millennials
71% Black

62%

Americans



“Sharing my playful interests with others **makes me feel seen and accepted.**”

76% Parents of Kids <18
76% Millennials
75% Gen Z

52%

Americans



“‘Kidulting’ is one of **my main forms of self-care.**”

67% Parents of Kids <18
66% Gen Z/Millennials
62% People of Color

Gen Z and Millennials would rather buy a blind box than go out for drinks or talk to a therapist

“I would rather do ‘kidulting’ things than...”
(% Selected)

	Talk to a therapist	(56% Gen Z)	51%
	Buy designer items		50%
	Go out for drinks	(53% Gen Z/Millennials)	49%
	Go to a party	(53% Gen Z/Millennials)	47%
	Book a spa day or massage		45%
	Save the money instead	(51% Millennials)	45%
	Spend money on a fancy dinner	(51% Gen Z/Millennials)	44%
	Go to a concert or sporting event	(47% Gen Z/Millennials)	42%
	Spend money on something practical for my home	(47% Gen Z)	41%
	Go on a traditional date night	(44% Gen Z/Millennials)	39%
	Take a weekend trip	(43% Gen Z/Millennials)	37%

Adults admit they don't need a kid to justify the blind box

86%

Americans



“Adults without children are **just as entitled to playful products and experiences** as families are.”

90% Boomers

85%

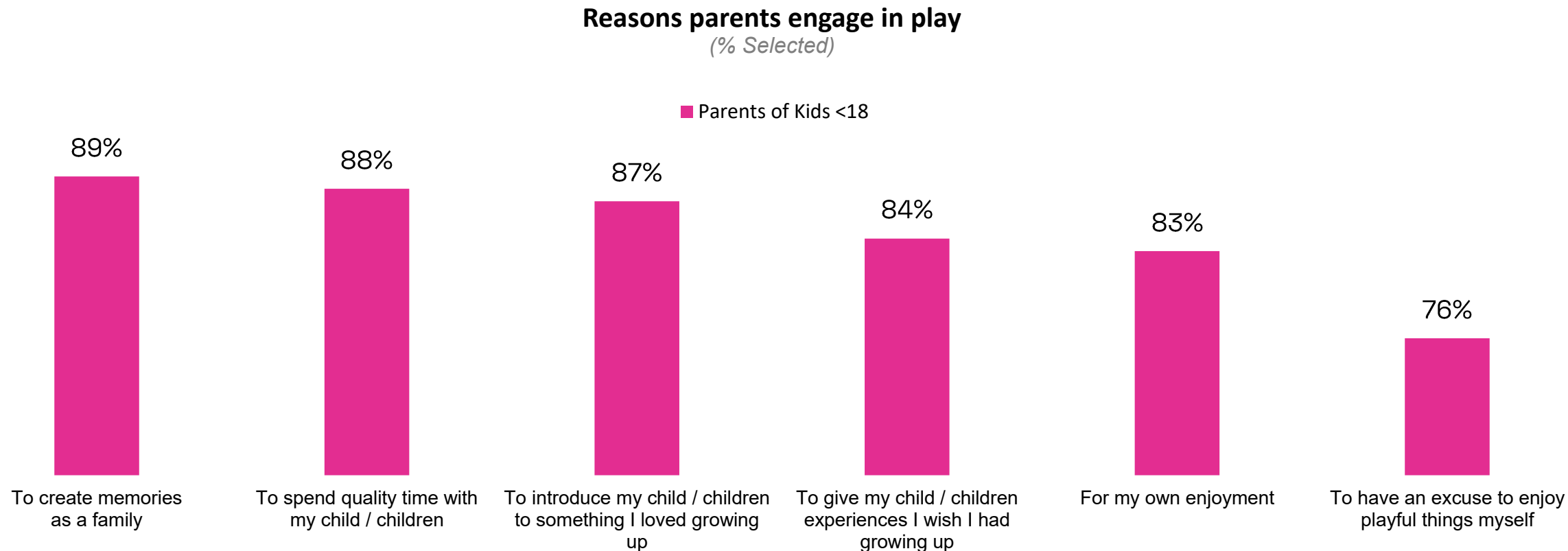
Americans



“Adults should not need children as an excuse to **enjoy playful products or experiences.**”

90% Boomers

Parents play for their kids' sake and quietly admit it's for their own too



Americans are hunting for brands that make life feel lighter, most admitting that brands aren't delivering

77%

Americans



“I feel like most brands **underestimate** how much adults want playful experiences designed for them.”

82% Hispanic
81% Gen Z

73%

Americans



“Brands too often **assume** playful experiences are only for families with children.”

80% Parents of Kids <18
77% Millennials

67%

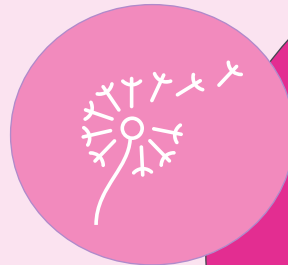
Americans



“I'm **actively looking** for brands, products, and experiences that make everyday life feel lighter.”

79% Millennials
76% Gen Z

Nostalgia is brands' most reliable emotional lever, especially with Millennials



80%

Americans

“When a brand taps into my childhood memories, I **feel more emotionally connected** to it.”

87% Millennials

79%

Americans

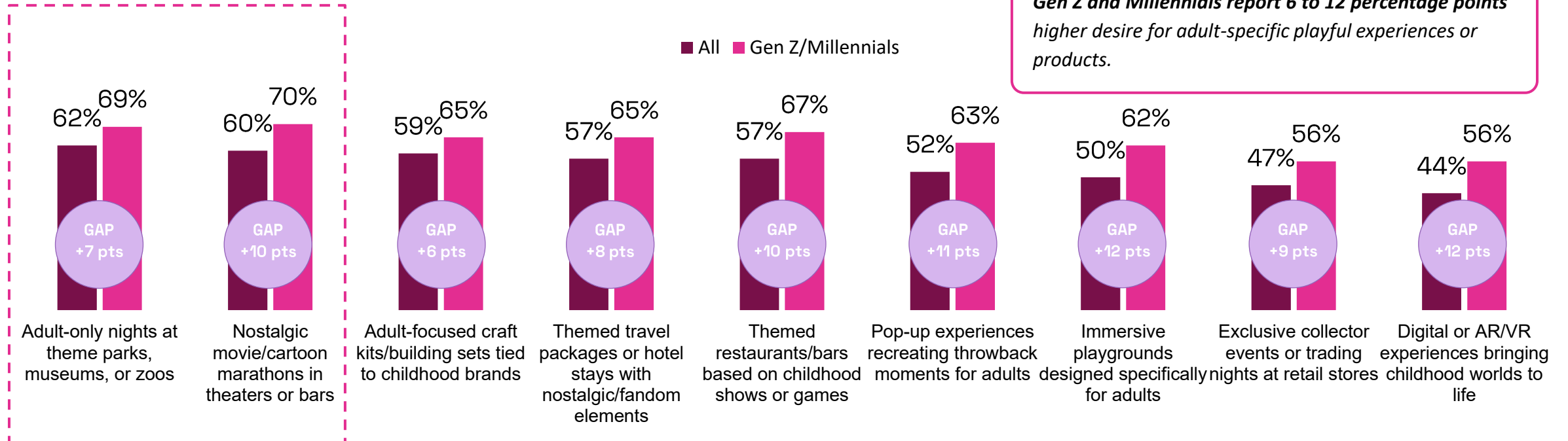
“I appreciate when brands create **adult-focused versions** of things I loved as a kid.”

86% Millennials



Adult-only nights and nostalgic marathons top Americans' wish list for brands

Which of the following kinds of playful experiences or products would you love to see brands offer more of for adults?
(% Yes)



Nearly half of Americans discover playful products on YouTube, not from brands

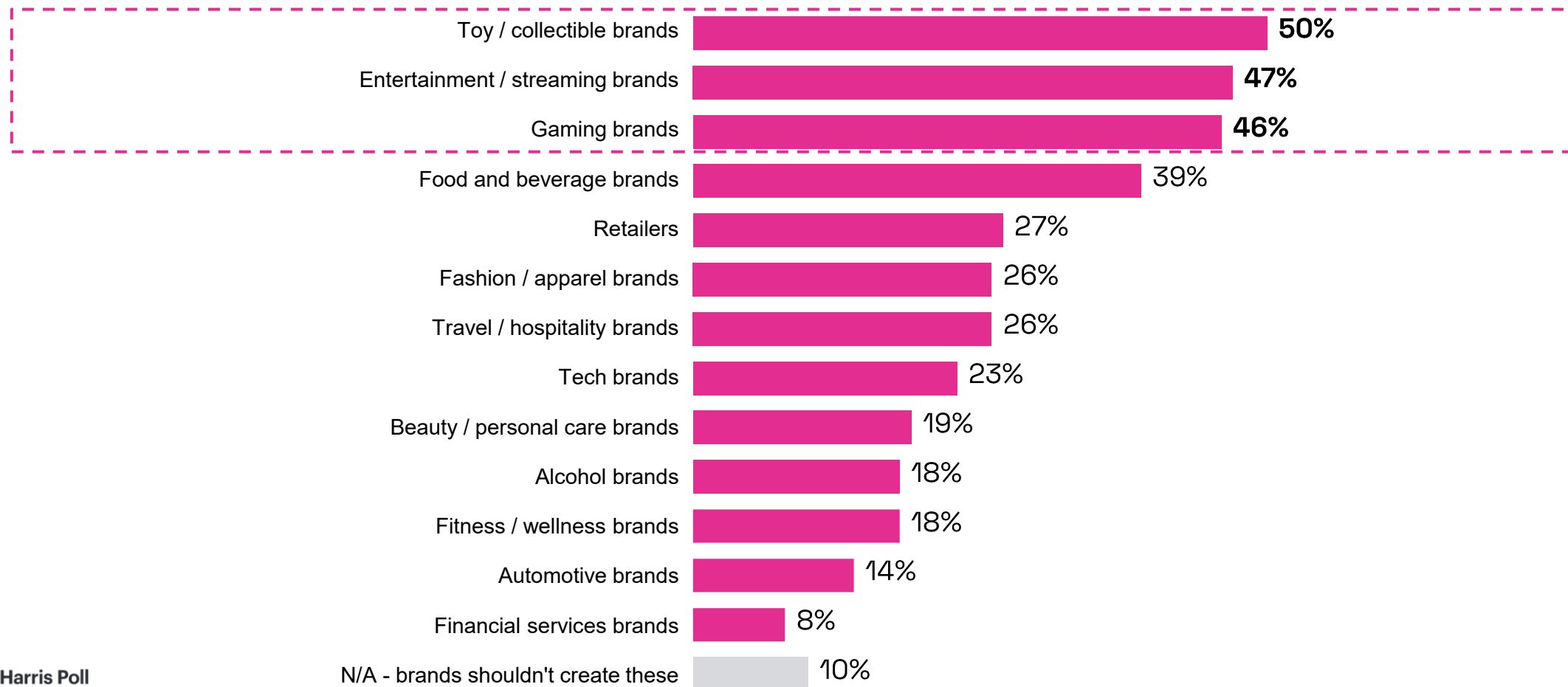
Where do you usually discover playful products, experiences, or events for adults?
(% Selected)

Discovery channel	All	Gen Z	Millennials
YouTube	46%	65%	55%
Friends / family	44%	35%	50%
Retail stores	35%	32%	39%
TikTok	33%	60%	43%
Instagram	31%	48%	40%
Influencers / creators	18%	26%	27%
Brand emails / loyalty programs	14%	15%	16%
Reddit / online communities	14%	19%	21%
Podcasts	11%	12%	16%
None of the above	14%	5%	5%

Toys, entertainment, and gaming brands have the clearest permission to make play for adults

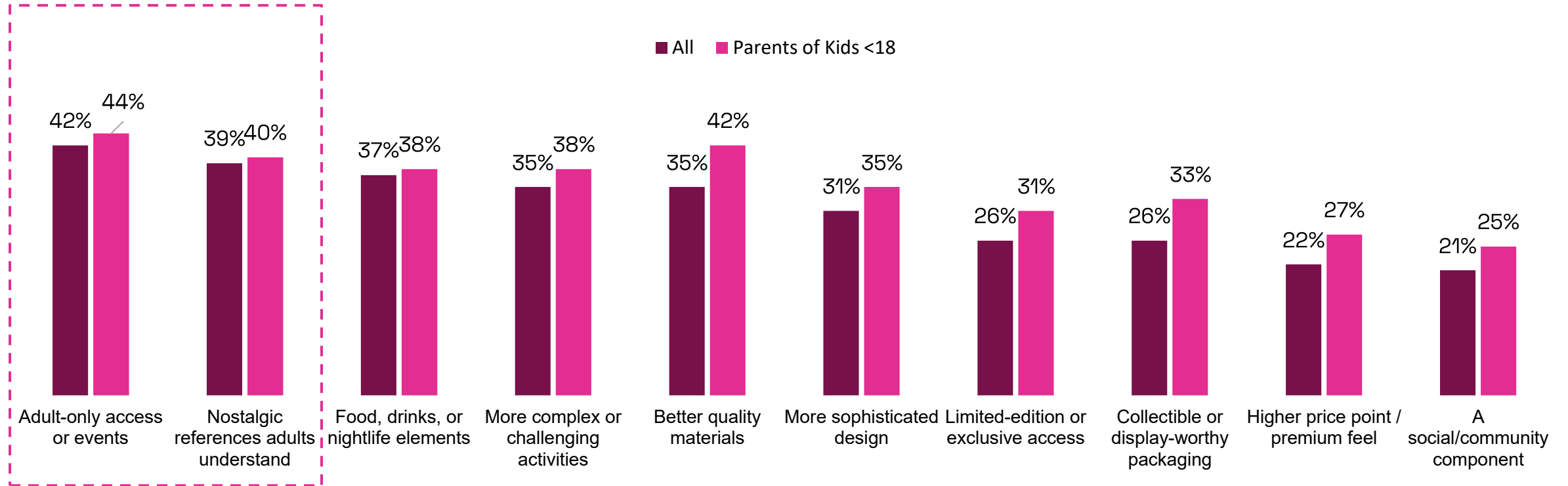
Which types of brands do you think have the most permission to create playful or nostalgic products/experiences for adults?

(% Selected)



Adult-only access and real nostalgia separate a grown-up experience from a kid's one

What makes a playful product or experience feel designed for adults rather than for kids?
(% Selected)



Half of Americans still feel judged for liking "childish" things, but it rarely stops them



62%

Of Americans
Say sharing their playful interests makes them feel **seen and accepted.**

75% Gen Z

49%

Americans
"I sometimes **feel judged** for enjoying things considered childish."

67% Gen Z
60% Millennials



One in 10 Americans (12%) say feeling embarrassed stops them from spending more on playful products or experiences.

Appendix

Given a hard day, most Americans choose calm over almost anything else

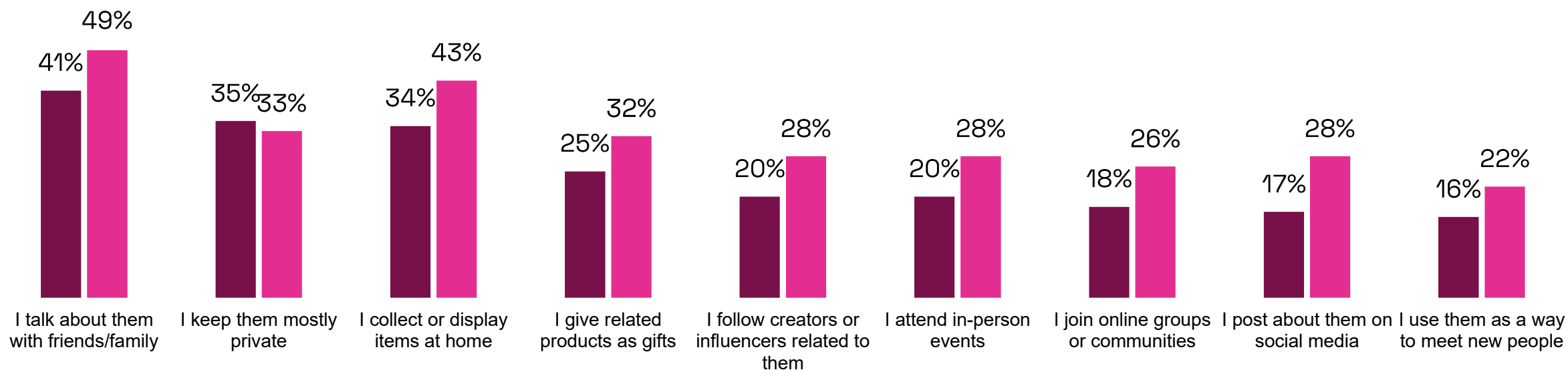
After a stressful day, which of the following “vibes” do you usually seek out?
(% Selected)

	Calm / cozy (warm drink, blanket, quiet time at home)		57%
	Social / connected (time with friends/family)	(45% Gen Z/Millennials)	40%
	Physical / active (exercise, walking)		36%
	Escapist / immersive (binge-watching, gaming)	(40% Gen Z/Millennials)	35%
	Playful / carefree (spontaneous drive, late-night snack)	(44% Gen Z/Millennials)	34%
	Nostalgic / sentimental (childhood movies, retro games)	(37% Gen Z/Millennials)	31%
	Productive / proactive (organizing, cleaning)	(31% Gen Z/Millennials)	25%

Most Americans are open about their playful interests, and parents are the most vocal of all

Ways of engaging with playful interests
(% Selected)

■ All ■ Parents of Kids <18



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