



THE GEN Z REWRITE: Joy *is* Rebellion

THE DUAL REALITY OF GEN Z GIRLS: UNDER PRESSURE, CHOOSING JOY

SUNNIE

youth under (*constant*) pressure, but new narratives to tell



Gen Z is stressed, overwhelmed, and burned out — and the headlines serve as a constant stream of reminders that the kids are not okay. In fact, in our recent research, we found that 7 in 10 young women say they're just as or more stressed than their peers. Similarly, the most recent Gallup World Poll (2018-2024), shows that life satisfaction and happiness among Americans under 25 has dropped by 6% since the 2008-2012 study — the biggest decline of any age group. That's more than four times the national average, showing just how deeply this generation is feeling the shift.



The pressure is real and coming at them from every direction — social media, global instability, climate change, and the complexities of growing up today.

But with these hard truths, we found another narrative emerging. While Gen Z is under pressure, they're also reclaiming their power in small, intentional ways. They're choosing happiness, creativity and connection on their own terms.



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ACT 01: THE CHARACTERS

The Age of Unexpected Romantics



when life is chaos,
joy is *rebellion*



**OF GEN Z GIRLS BELIEVE
JOY IS A MINDSET YOU
CAN CHOOSE, NO MATTER
YOUR CIRCUMSTANCE**



**BELIEVE THEY HAVE
THE ABILITY TO CREATE
MOMENTS OF JOY IN
THEIR LIVES**

ACT 01

The Rise of Romanticizing the Mundane

Gen Z women are finding joy and whimsy in the everyday — whether it’s whispering affirmations into water and drinking it like a potion, cringey dancing in solo elevator rides, or hand-making birthday cards.

From the love affair with Labubus and Jelly Cats to the viral moment when Lorde told fans to meet her at Washington Square Park for a surprise single drop, young people are embracing the weird, the spontaneous, and the imperfect.

They’re romanticizing the small moments, sharing their “butterfly effect” stories — those seemingly tiny decisions that changed everything — and channeling their inner hostess. They’re picking up grandma hobbies like needlepoint to get out of their heads and into their hands.



@ellavnii



@abigail.bailey0



@energybysam

But this isn't
toxic positivity.

IN FACT, IT'S OK TO NOT FEEL JOY
ALL THE TIME. BECAUSE, AMID
ALL THE PRESSURE THEY FACE,
GEN Z GIRLS ARE INTENTIONAL
ABOUT SEEKING OUT AND FINDING
MOMENTS OF JOY.



88%

**SAY IT'S OK TO NOT
FEEL JOY ALL THE TIME**

For Gen Z girls, their future
selves are here in the now



**SEE THEMSELVES AS
SOMEONE WHO CAN
MAKE A DIFFERENCE
IN THE WORLD**



@livviazhang



@ronelle__

ACT 01

On their own timeline

Despite the pressure and expectations, Gen Z girls are taking control of their own stories. They’re looking ahead with a mix of hope and anxiety — carving out their own paths, even when it means going against the grain.

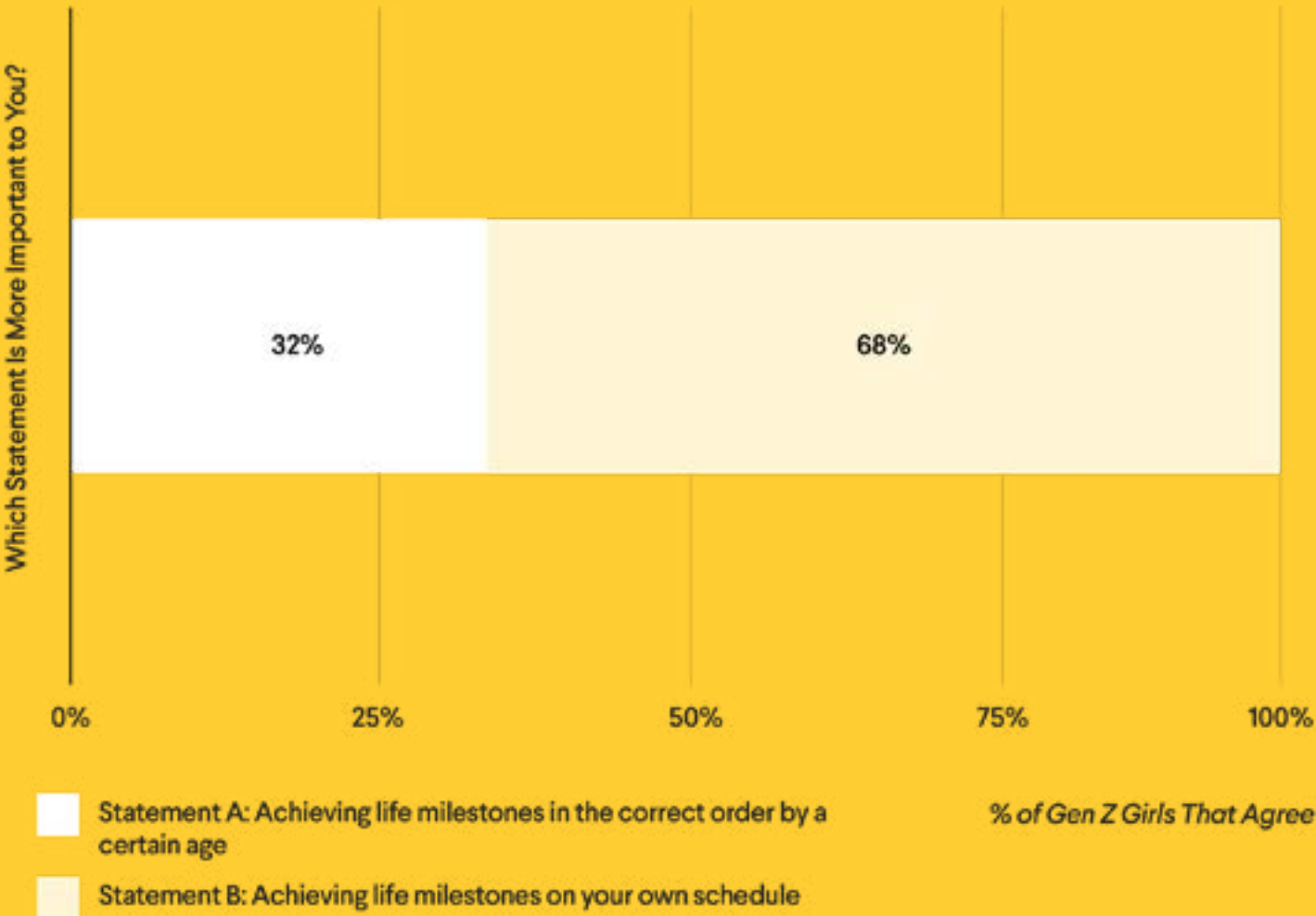
75%

ARE CREATING THEIR OWN PATH, EVEN IF IT DEFIES EXPECTATIONS

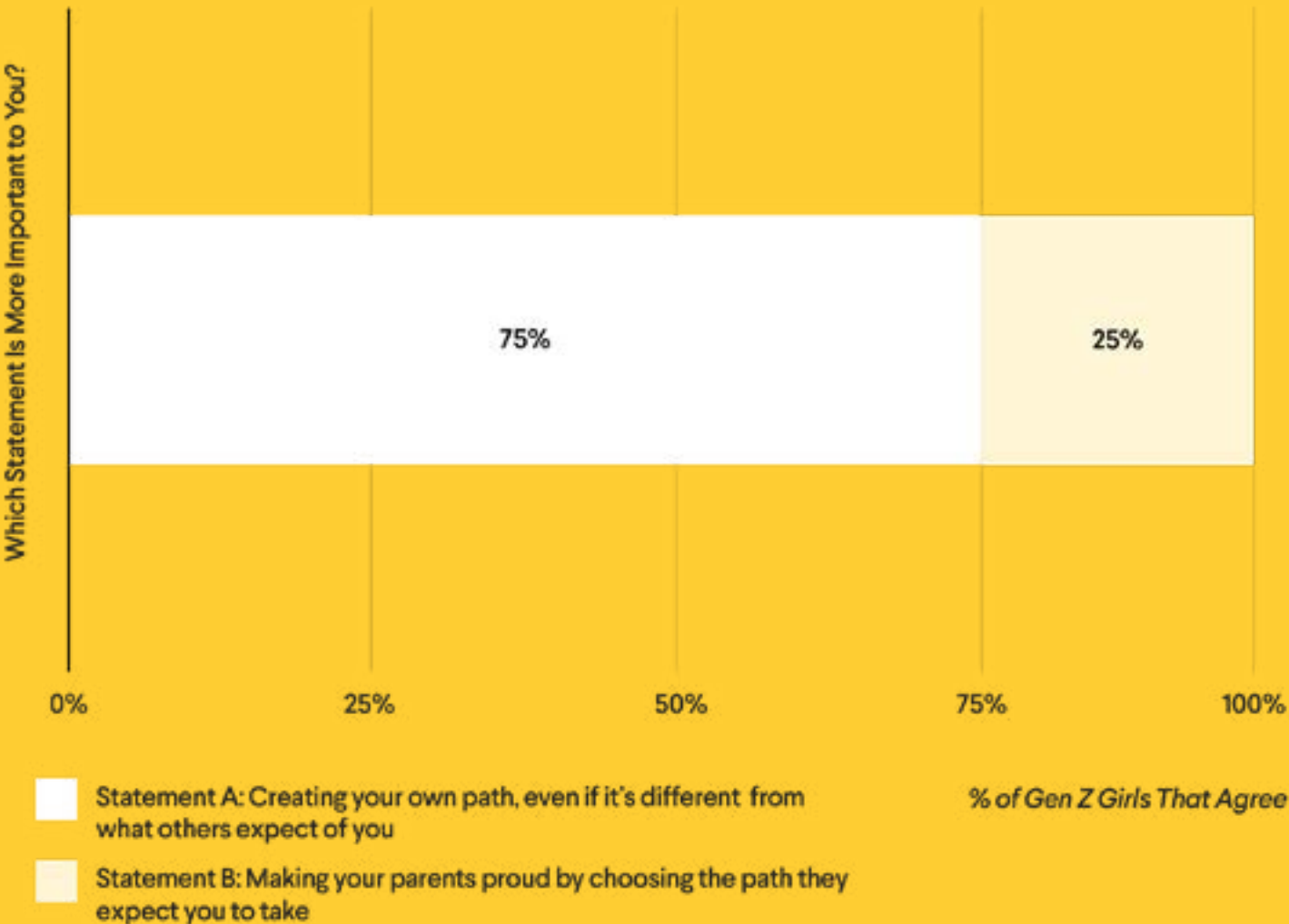
68%

BELIEVE IN HITTING MILESTONES ON THEIR TIMELINE

Gen Z Girls’ Opinion Towards Hitting Milestones



Life Expectations + Gen Z Girls’ Priorities



ACT 02: THE PLOT

Agency is the Superpower





EVERYDAY AGENCY IS THE SUPERPOWER

Gen Z girls are *taking control* of what they can — from their schedules to their screens. They're hyper-aware of what they let in and intentional about what they tune out.



ACT 02

time to protect
my time

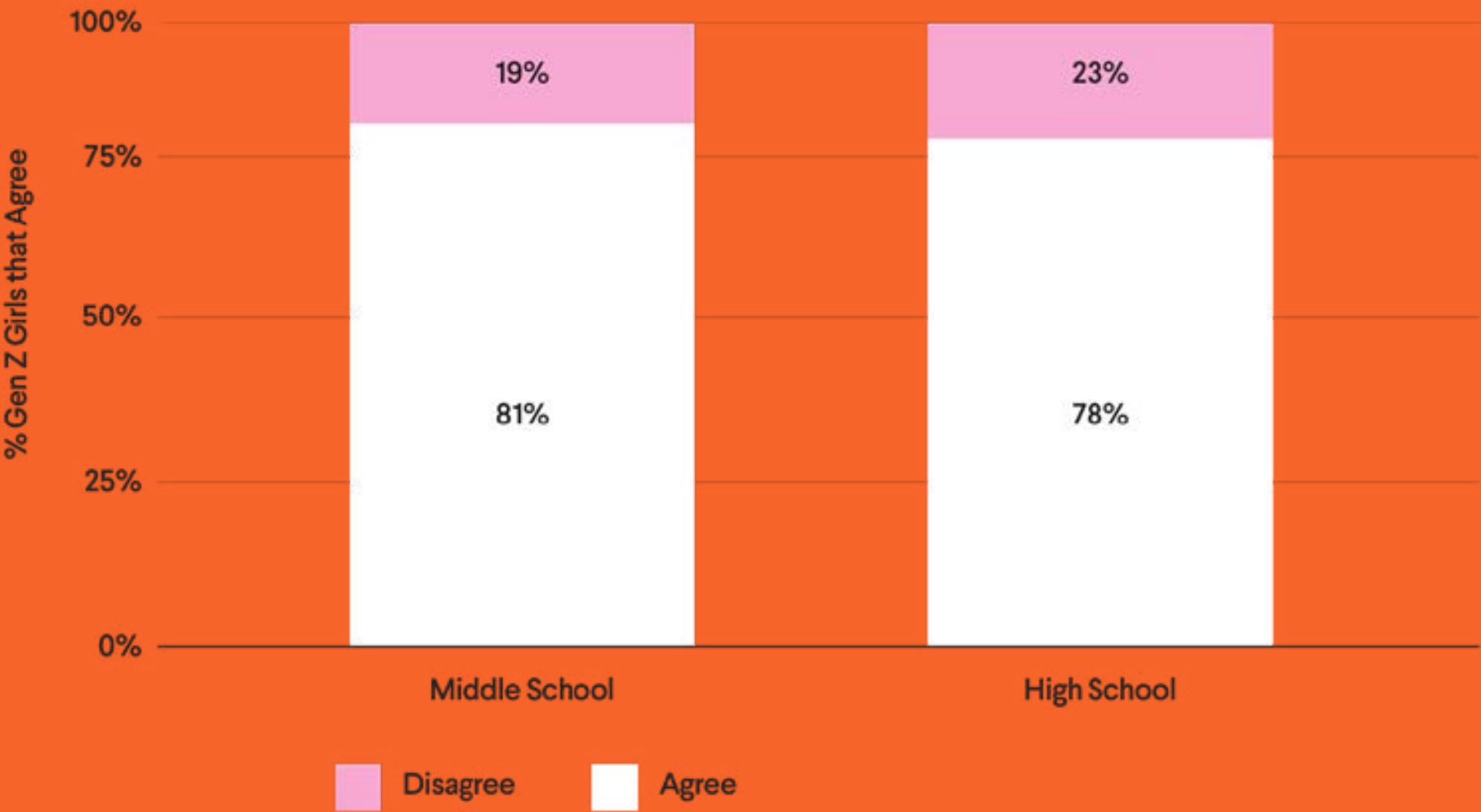


91%

HAVE TAKEN ACTION TO GAIN
MORE CONTROL OF WHAT
THEY SEE ONLINE

Most Gen Z girls are learning to protect their time — 81% of middle schoolers and 78% of high school girls are comfortable saying no to activities or commitments to avoid feeling burnout. But the slight drop among high schoolers suggests boundary-setting becomes harder as demands increase.

I am comfortable saying no to activities or
commitments to avoid feeling burnout



ACT 02

my schedule, my terms

Facing relentless stressors — from social media pressure and academic demands to online bullying and a widespread loss of community — Gen Z girls are carving out joy through agency. They’re protecting their schedules, curating their feeds, and being intentional about their downtime.

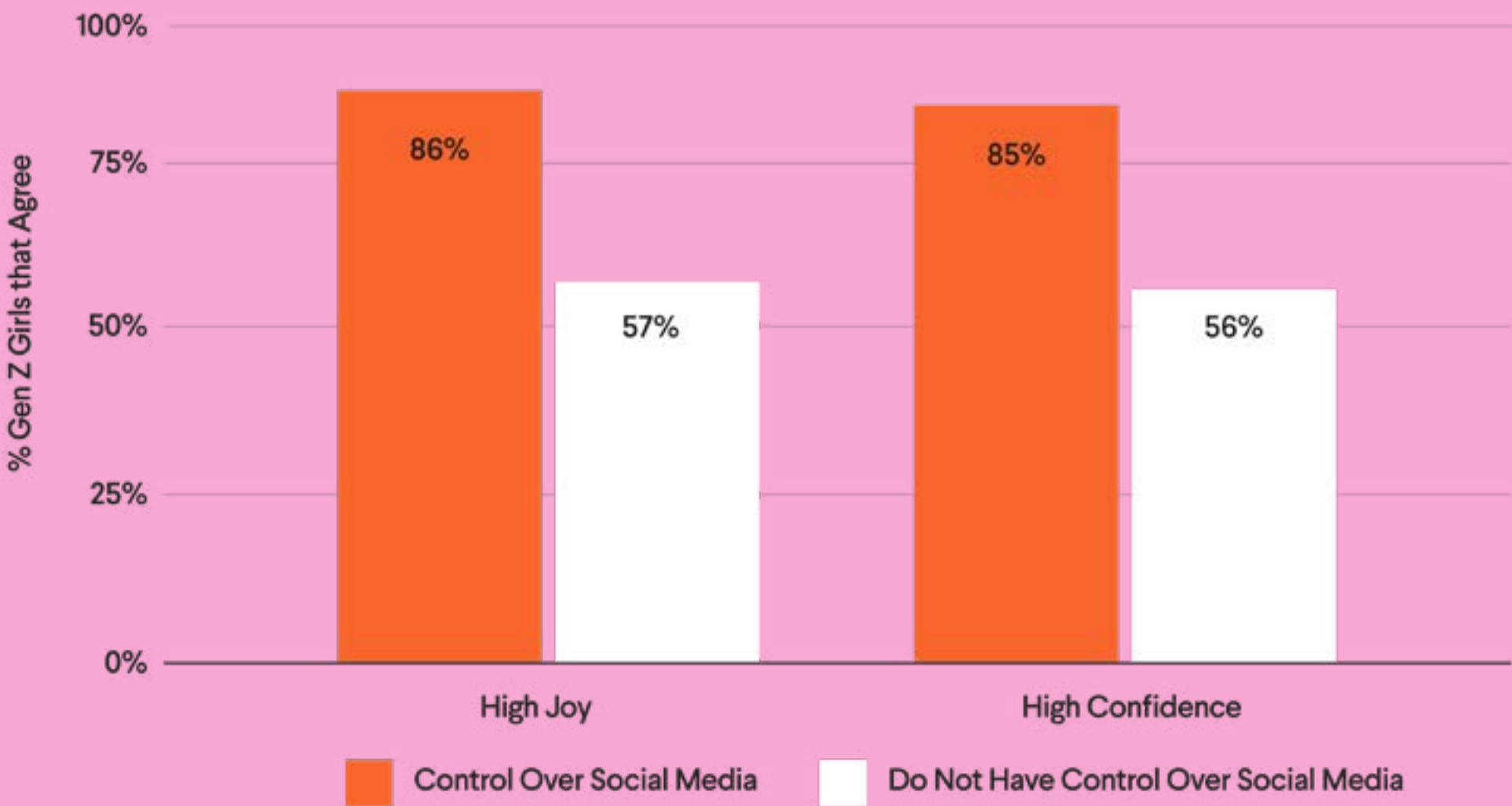
On social, they’re timestamping their routines to show what fills their day — from making the bed and doing laundry to working out. They’re sharing their Monday rituals, Sunday resets, and of course, their “day in the life” moments.

And that agency over time matters: girls who feel in control of their schedules are 32% more likely to experience joy (86% vs. 65%) and 33% more likely to feel confident (85% vs. 63%).

More Control = More Confidence and Joy

Girls who feel in control of what they see on social media report higher levels of joy and confidence. Those rating their control an 8 or above are most likely to feel confident and joyful, while those with little control report the lowest emotional wellbeing, underscoring the impact of digital agency.

Girls who feel in control of what they see on social media report higher levels of joy and confidence.



A momentary scheduled break for *decompression*...



**REGULARLY SCHEDULE
DOWNTIME TO ALLOW
THEMSELVES TIME TO
DECOMPRESS**

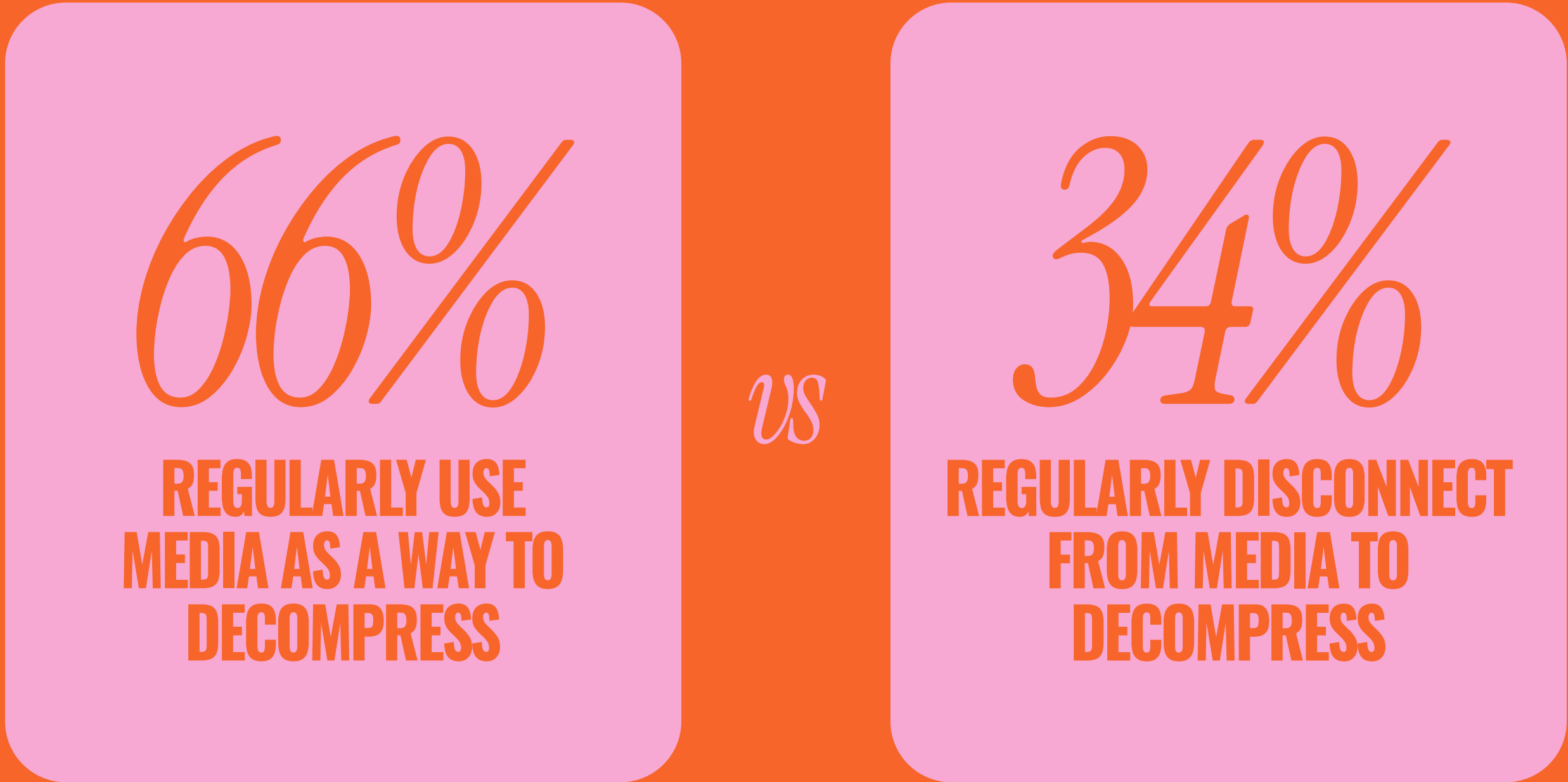
ACT 02

and they are turning to media to fill their downtime

Facing relentless and chronic stressors, from social media pressure and academic demands to online bullying and a universal loss of community — Gen Z girls are creating their own joy through agency to protect their schedules, filter their feeds, and be intentional about their downtime.



From nostalgic classics like Gilmore Girls, Gossip Girl, and Grey’s Anatomy to new favorites like Abbott Elementary, White Lotus, and Love Island, they’re tuning in based on their mood and mode.



Gen Z girls feel the *strongest* connection to media content that...

- Makes them laugh (62%)
- Gives them an escape from their day-to-day life (38%)
- Makes them think (34%)
- Gives them info in an entertaining way (32%)
- Inspires and empowers them (31%)

ongoing edit: the feed is never final

From the rise of underconsumption core to platforms like Bonfire Social, Lapse, and Nospace that reject traditional social media norms, Gen Z girls are embracing a slower, more intentional digital life. They're trying to protect their peace, but the curation never stops — it's a constant conscious practice.



91%

**HAVE TAKEN ACTION TO
GAIN MORE CONTROL OF
WHAT THEY SEE ONLINE**

What action have you taken on social media to gain more control of your feed?

62% have blocked toxic individuals or content

59% have used the privacy settings to control who sees their profiles

56% have unfollowed individuals who don't make them feel good about themselves

39% have reported toxic people or content

ACT 02

innerTeacher Training
Mode: ON

Gen Z is taking control of their life’s curriculum. They’re teaching themselves how to “loud budget,” speed-learn languages on Duolingo before a trip, figure out how to cook rice on TikTok, make their own prom dresses, and even use AI to learn to code. They’re testing, failing, and documenting the journey — learning in public and on their own terms.



@that_holycrochet_gurl



ACT 03: THE SUPPORTING CAST

Finding Your People



but agency
doesn't mean
going at it *alone*



*#1 factor influencing their future success
is support from others.*



**SAY "I WISH I HAD
MORE COMMUNITIES
IN MY LIFE"**

ACT 03

Mentors: The Confidence Multiplier

As girls move through their teen years, confidence and joy take a measurable hit — with a 16% drop in confidence and a 23% drop in everyday joy between ages 13 and 18. But mentorship is a powerful buffer.

Gen Z girls with mentors are not only more confident (87% vs. 69%*), but also more joyful (86% vs. 73%*), more optimistic about their future (90% vs. 78%*), and more comfortable asking for help (92% vs. 57%*). In a time when so many feel pressure to navigate life alone, mentorship offers something deeper: real connection, guidance, and the power of being seen.

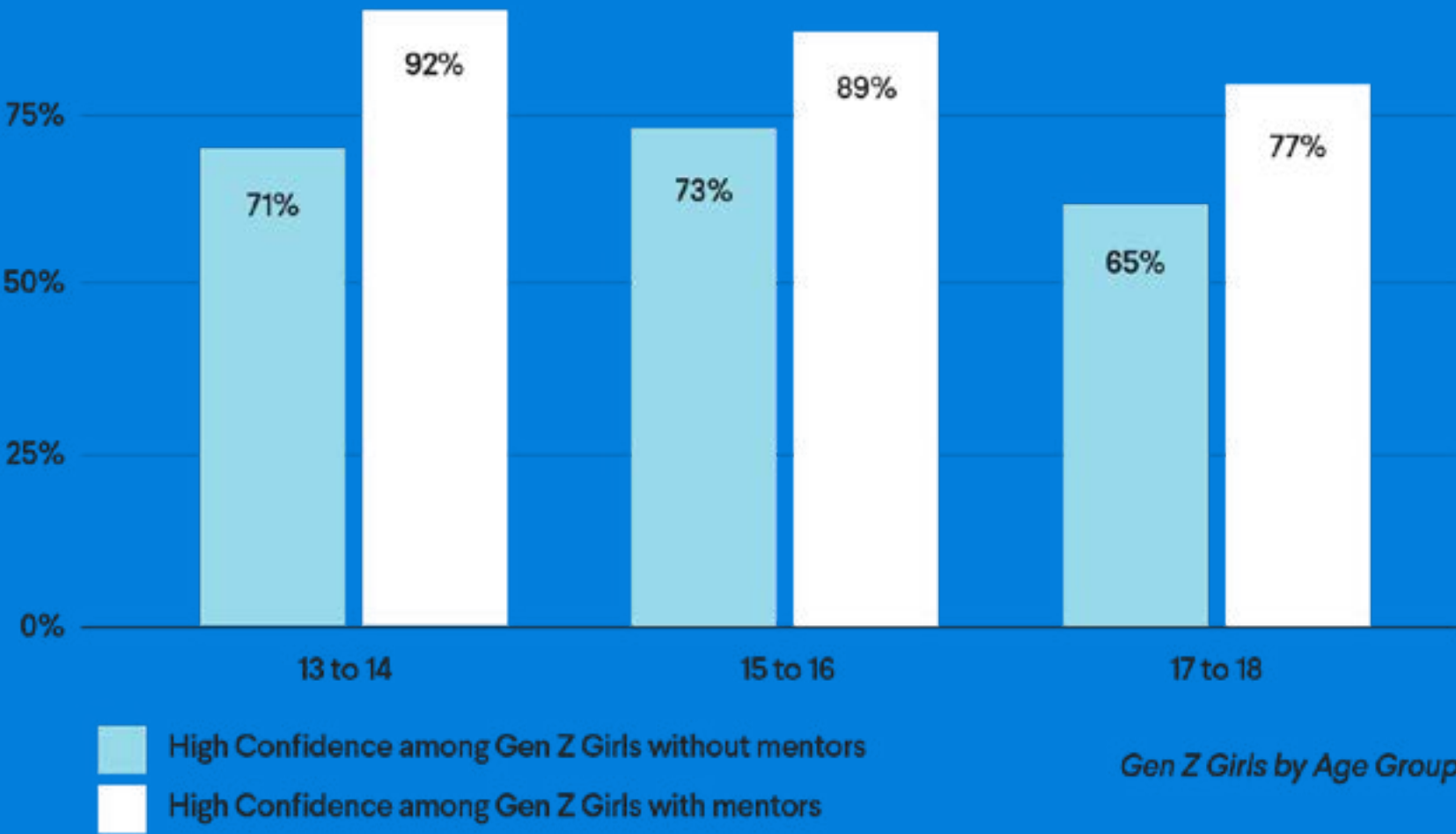
And that connection goes beyond one-on-one support. Gen Z girls with mentors are anchoring their identities in the communities around them. 79% say the communities they’re part of in real life are a big part of who they are — more so than the ones they belong to online (69%).

*Comparisons are with Gen Z girls without mentors.
Hello Sunshine: The Gen Z Rewrite Report, conducted by YPulse in partnership with Etre, June 2025.

92% OF GIRLS TODAY WHO HAVE A MENTOR SAY THEY FEEL MORE CONFIDENT.

Mentors Make a Measurable Difference
Gen Z girls with mentors feel more confident at every age. While confidence naturally dips from 13 to 18, having a mentor helps soften the drop, indicating that a little guidance can go a long way.

Confidence Among Gen-Z Girls Without Mentors

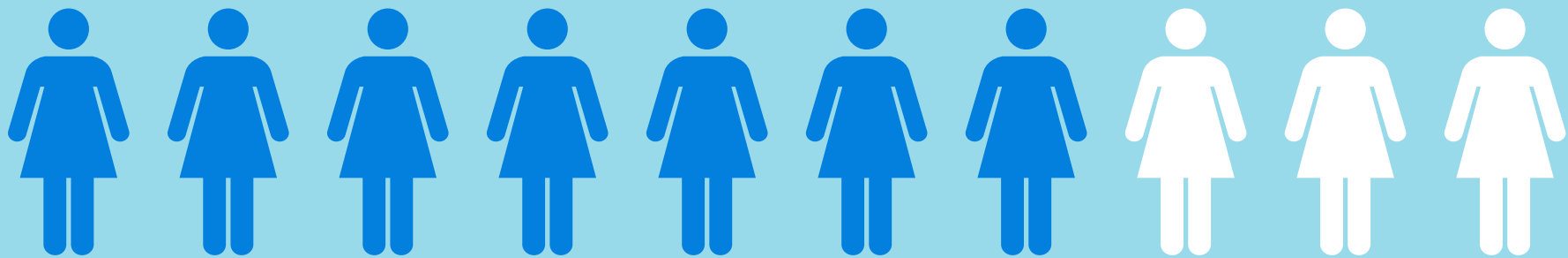


ACT 03

in pursuit of the offline group chat

Teens today are spending less time with friends than any generation before. With fewer dedicated spaces, declining participation in youth sports, and fewer opportunities to meet new people, many are left searching for connection and community.

Some Gen Z girls are taking matters into their own hands — joining walking clubs like City Girls Who Walk NYC, Step Up, Être, and Hype Girl Club, and gathering in welcoming spaces like The Uncommons NYC (a board game café), as low-pressure ways to connect over shared interests offline.



MORE THAN 7 IN 10 ACTIVELY SEEK OPPORTUNITIES / EVENTS TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY

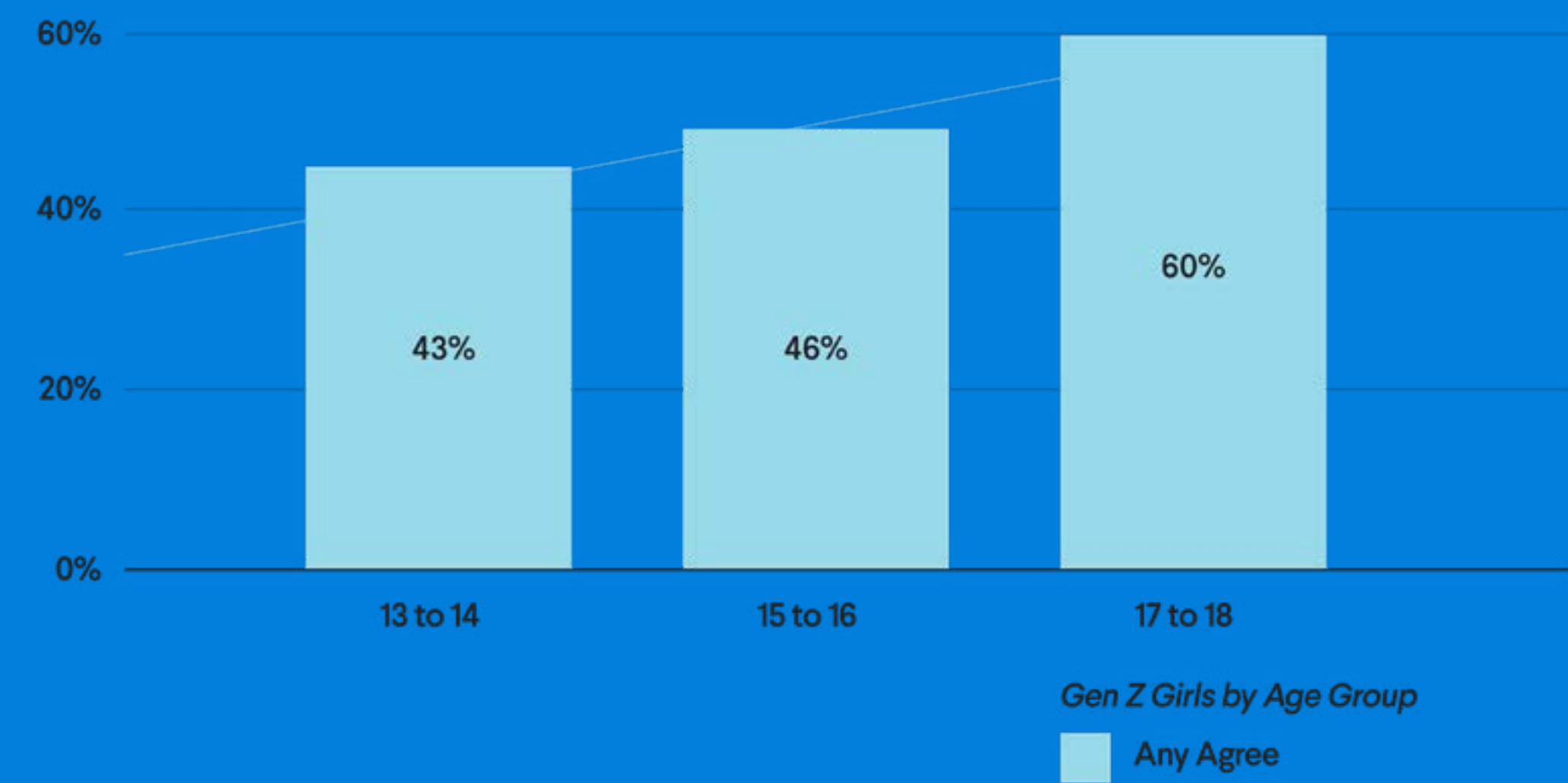
ACT 03

the search for community gets harder with age — but mentorship helps

While younger Gen Z girls (ages 13–16) are more likely to actively seek out connection, the drive declines as they get older. Girls ages 17–18 are 14% less likely to look for community than their younger peers (75% 13-16s, 66% 17-18s) — and 40% more likely to say, “It’s hard for me to find a community I feel connected to.” (45% 13-16s, 60% 17-18s)

But there’s a bright spot: mentorship can help bridge that gap. In total, girls with mentors are 24% less likely to say they struggle to find community.

It’s Hard to Find A Community I Connect With



ACT 04: THE LESSONS

A Playbook for the Bold



but there
is a growing
disconnect:



*Gen z girls don't think brands
really get them.*



**SAY ADVERTISING
RARELY REFLECTS HOW
THEY ACTUALLY TALK,
DRESS, OR ACT**

ACT 04

When it comes to feeling understood, brands are last on the list.

Gen Z girls don’t look to brands to feel understood — even the ones they love.” Only 14% say they turn to a brand to feel understood, compared to 65% who turn to friends and 62% to family. The emotional gap is real — but so is the opportunity for brands to create deeper value and connection.

Brands are the last place they turn to feel understood (even the ones they love).

Where do you turn when you want to feel understood?

A friend	65%
A family member	62%
A teacher / coach / mentor	28%
A peer / classmate / teammate	27%
Media I consume	19%
An online community I’m a part of	19%
A community I’m a part of offline / IRL	17%
A brand I love	14%

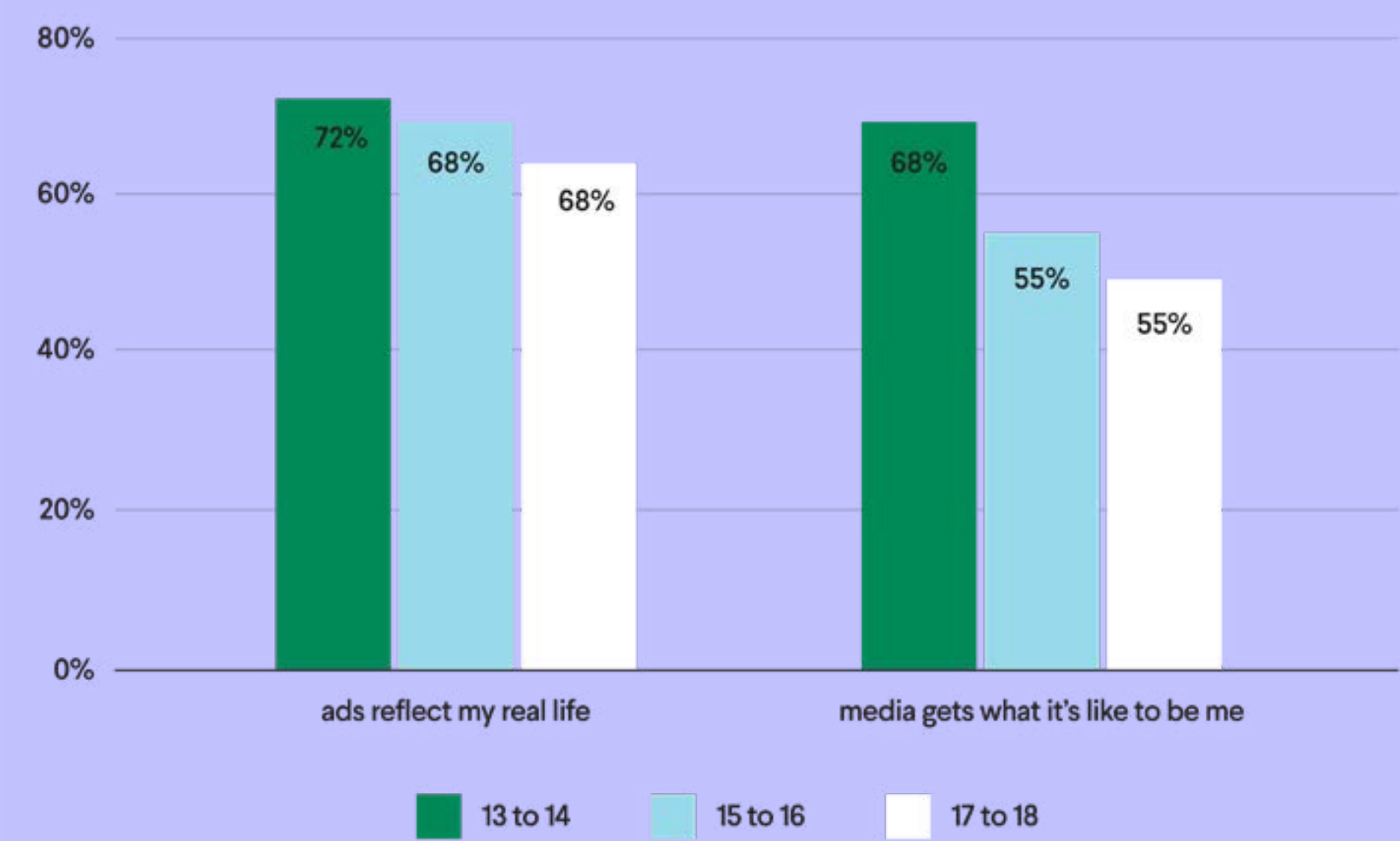
ACT 04

Brands are chasing trends, falling short of real connection

A game of constant catch up, brands are chasing trends to speak Gen Z. But despite this work to keep relevant, they are falling short. In fact, as Gen Z girls get closer to adulthood, they feel increasingly unseen by brands and advertisers. Gen Z girls are calling for brands to go deeper—to reflect their realities, values, and voices in more authentic ways.

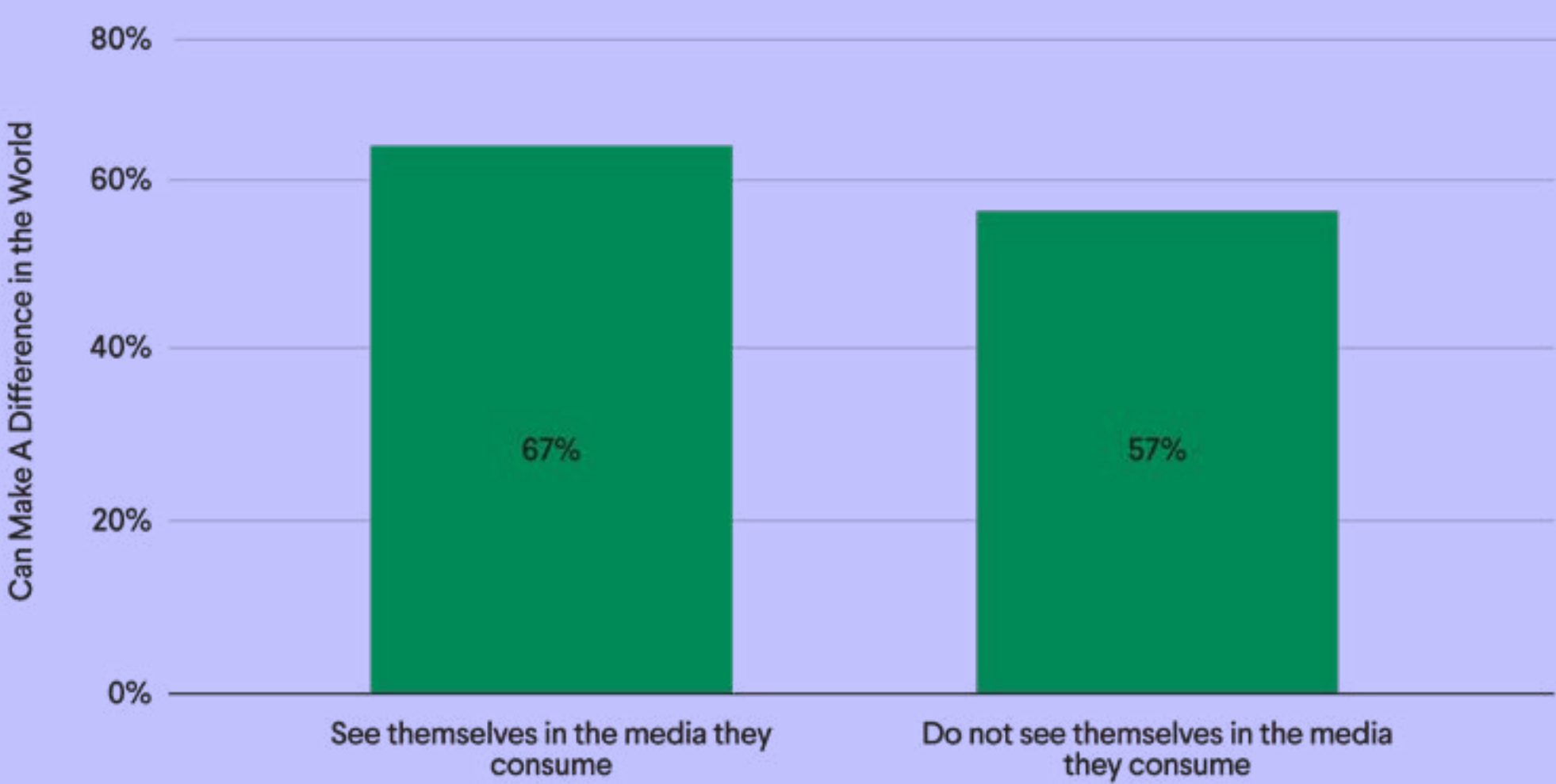
The Older They Get, the Less *Seen* They Feel

Gen Z Girls Feel Less Seen As They Age



The more they feel seen, the more they feel they can make an impact

Those who feel they can make an impact are more likely to feel seen by the world around them



A New Playbook for Brand Love

STEP 01

build the *offline* group chat

Gen Z is craving real-world connection — the kind that feels like the group chat, but IRL. They want spaces that are low-pressure, high-comfort, and full of people who just get it. Brands can lead by creating moments and environments where Gen Z girls can show up, feel seen, and find their people.



WISH COMMUNITY WAS EASIER TO FIND IRL AND...



APPRECIATE BRANDS THAT MAKE REAL-WORLD CONNECTION POSSIBLE

STEP 02

co-create with them

Gen Z doesn't want to be spoken at — they want to be part of the conversation. They're quick to spot when a brand's version of "relatable" misses the mark. To earn trust, brands need to move beyond guessing what Gen Z wants and start building with them. Invite them into the process — from concept to campaign — and let their voices shape the story.



**SAY BRANDS SHOULD
INVOLVE THEM IN THE
CREATIVE PROCESS**



STEP 03



design the toolbox, not the blueprint

Gen Z isn't looking for a step-by-step guide — they want the tools to build a life that's uniquely theirs. They value brands that recognize their power and help amplify it. Instead of showing up with surface-level messaging, show up with resources that empower them to explore, express, and define success on their own terms.

91%

**VALUE BRANDS THAT
SHARE TOOLS AND
RESOURCES TO EXPRESS
INDIVIDUALITY AND...**

92%

**APPRECIATE BRANDS
THAT ENCOURAGE THEM
TO DEFINE SUCCESS IN
THEIR OWN WAY**

final words

The stories we tell ourselves shape who we are — and Gen Z girls are ready to rewrite the narrative. They're looking to brands not to define them, but to help spark new possibilities. Stories that push boundaries, reflect their depth, and help them see the world — and themselves — differently.

This generation isn't here for surface-level messaging. They want brands that get it — that show up with sincerity, co-create with intention, and recognize that no one knows Gen Z girls better than they know themselves.

Support can look like a lot of things: tools, resources, or even just a well-timed laugh. But the throughline is clear — they expect brands to be as multidimensional as they are.

The brands that meet them with real stories, agency, and joy? Those are the bold ones they'll take with them on their journey.



**APPRECIATE WHEN
BRANDS HELP SPARK JOY**

Methodology

For this perspective, we surveyed Gen Z girls across the U.S. to explore to the joy that exists in the lives of teen girls and the ways in which teen girls are demonstrating personal agency and choosing joy, no matter their circumstances. We took a deep dive into topics like mentorship, community, and media consumption.

Partners





Research Design

Quantitative survey, with focus groups from Sunnie x Etre’s Advisory Board

Sample Size

N=1,000 teen girls A13-18; Quotas were set to ensure national representation by race / ethnicity, region, and area.

Fielding Date

April 2025

What's Next?

The Gen Z Rewrite is the first in a series of cultural and behavioral research reports from Hello Sunshine, exploring the micro shifts, macro trends, and all the in betweens — shaping this next generation.

Sunnie, Hello Sunshine's newest platform, was built on the insights uncovered in this research — a space for Gen Z girls to step into their power, slow their scroll, and be the truest version of themselves. Rooted in joy, curiosity, and self-expression, Sunnie is a community brought to life through online and offline experiences.

It's not just what we learned — it's what we're co-creating with the next generation.

For more reach out to:

partnerships@hello-sunshine.com



Until Next Time...