



# LIFELONG LEARNING AMONG 45+ ADULTS

MARCH 2022



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Lifelong Learning: Executive summary

## **Lifelong learning is an estimated \$5.6 billion market.**

- 75 million Americans (55%) age 45-plus are currently engaged in lifelong learning. Lifelong learners spend \$75, on average, per year.

## **Learning is driven by a desire for personal growth, self-betterment, and a sense of control.**

- Learning allows older adults to control the narrative of their lifelong journey, often to correct their paths, get back on track, or break out of societal expectations of what their journeys “should” look like.
- In particular, learning provides older adults a sense of control over their well-being (e.g., staying mentally sharp) and a type of symbolic power (capital) that can then be exchanged for economic and/or social benefits.

## **Learning is personally important.**

- 64% of adults 45-plus consider lifelong learning to be personally important.
- 42% identify themselves personally as a lifelong learner.

## **Cognitive health is a key driver of engaging in lifelong learning.**

- 83% agree that it is vitally important to keep your brain active.
- 54% are motivated by staying mentally sharp and/or promoting brain health.

# Lifelong Learning: Executive summary (continued)

## **Cost, lack of time, and ageism are primary barriers to lifelong learning.**

- Cost (26%), a lack of time (17%), and fear of ageism (16%) are top barriers.
- According to experts, ageism is often internalized, resulting in a negative self-view (“I’m getting old”), which impacts attitudes to learning.

## **Self-directed and experiential learning are most desired.**

- 76% learn best by reading on their own.
- The majority (71%) choose to read or gather information by themselves and then find opportunities to apply what they have learned in real life.
- The majority go online (particularly YouTube) to acquire new knowledge (72%), learn a new technology (66%), and develop a new skills (63%).
- The topics of most interest are history, food and drink, mental health, basic technology, and diet and nutrition.

## **Learners show high engagement with learning about technology and passion projects.**

- 24% are currently learning to use new technology, while 24% are pursuing “something I am passionate about.”
- Learning a new technology is the top area of interest for those who are not actively learning something as 32% plan to learn a new technology in the future.









# LIFELONG LEARNING DEFINED

Respondents were asked to focus on lifelong learning relating to **self-betterment**.

“ We’d like to hear from you about your **personal experiences with learning**. For the purpose of this survey, we would like to **focus on learning that is driven by personal gain and self-betterment**. We are not interested in learning specifically or solely for work/career advancement.”

# Lifelong learning is empowering.

- Lifelong learning is a continuous **pursuit of knowledge** and **breaking out of one's comfort zone**.
- It is considered both a **positive** and **essential** part of life.
- Lifelong learning evokes **excitement**, **curiosity** and **accomplishment** (but can be perceived boring)

	<b>Lifelong learning is personally important.</b>	• 64% identify lifelong learning as personally important ( <i>particularly for younger, Hispanic/Latinx and Black/African Americans</i> )		
	<b>What does lifelong learning mean to the adults 45+?</b>	• A continuous process • Seeking knowledge	• Getting out of one's comfort zone • Self-improvement	
	<b>Words/phrases associated with lifelong learning?</b>	• Positive • Essential	• Exciting • Engaging	• Rewarding
	<b>How does lifelong learning make them feel?</b>	✔ Excited ✔ Curious	✔ Inspired ✔ Confident	✘ Bored ✘ Alone ✘ Anxious
	<b>Skills that the adults 45+ want to learn?</b>	• Technology	• Culinary skills	• Mental health
	<b>Which lifelong learning topics are of interest?</b>	• History	• Science	• Art/music

Base: 45+ (n=1516)

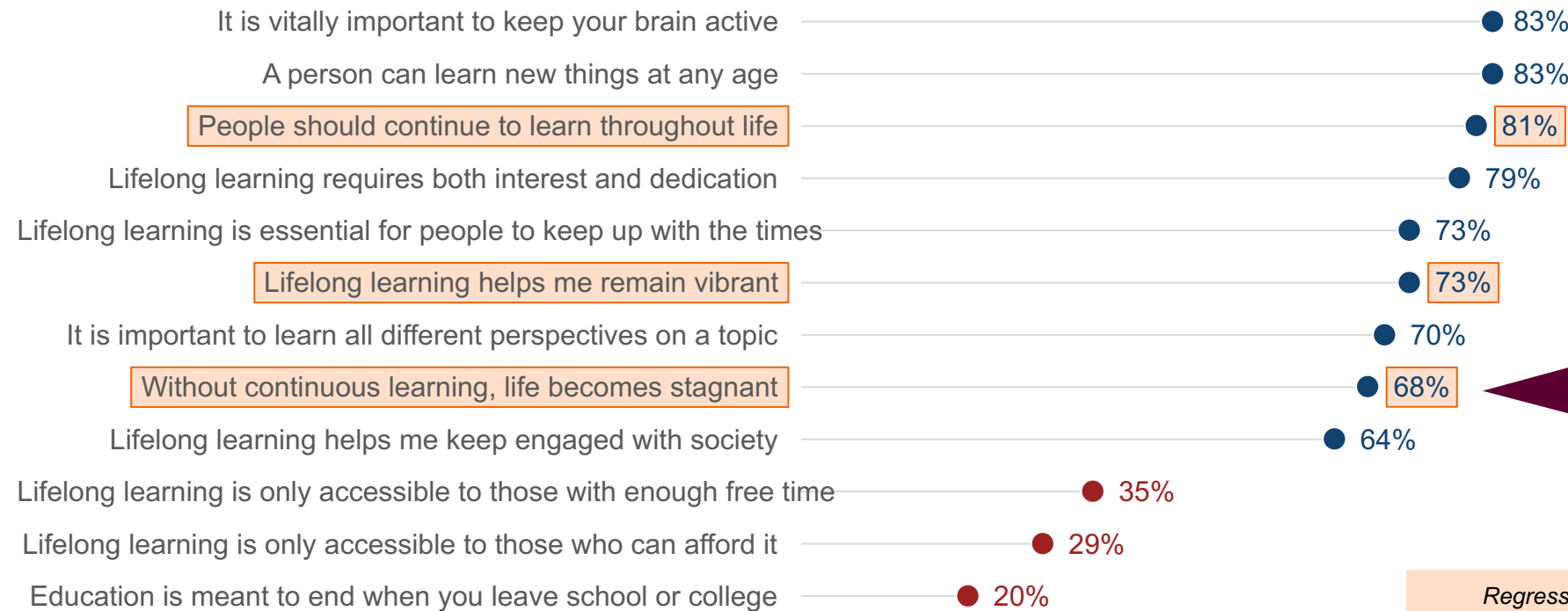
Q11: When you think of lifelong learning, what thoughts or feelings (positive or negative) come to mind?

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# Lifelong learning is a continuous process.

- Adults 45-plus agree that it is important for people to learn throughout their lives and keep their minds active.

Agreement with the following statements about lifelong learning  
Percent who agree and strongly agree



**It's important to learn. You are never too old to become something**  
Female, 45–49, Not a Lifelong Learner

**I think it is important to continually challenge yourself and there is always more to learn**  
Female, 50–59, Not a Lifelong Learner

Regression analysis shows these are the strongest predictors for importance of lifelong learning (Q14)

Base: 45+ (n=1516)

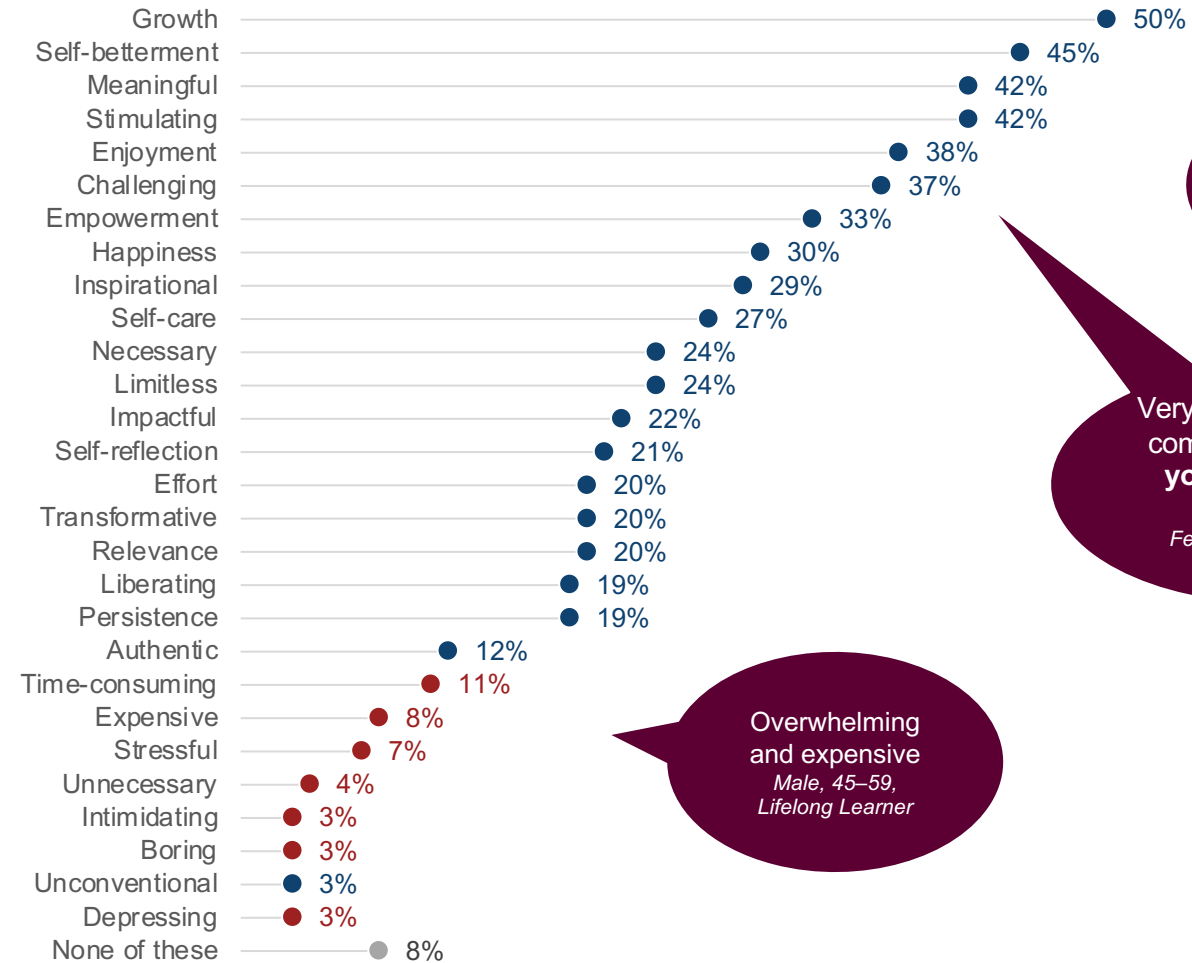
Q17: Please indicate how much you agree OR disagree with the following statements about Lifelong Learning.



# Positive associations with lifelong learning far outweigh the negatives.

- Lifelong learning is also seen as **growth** (50%), **self-betterment** (45%), **meaningful**, and **stimulating** (both 42%).
- The most cited negative issues with lifelong learning are **time-consuming** (11%), **expensive** (8%), and **stressful** (7%).

Words associated with lifelong learning  
*Positive and negative words*



You can **never stop learning and growing** no matter how old you are  
*Male, 45–49, Lifelong Learner*

Very positive feelings come to mind when **you're bettering yourself**  
*Female 50–59, Not a Lifelong Learner*

Overwhelming and expensive  
*Male, 45–59, Lifelong Learner*

Base: 45+ (n=1516)

Q13: From the list below, which words / phrases do you associate with lifelong learning?



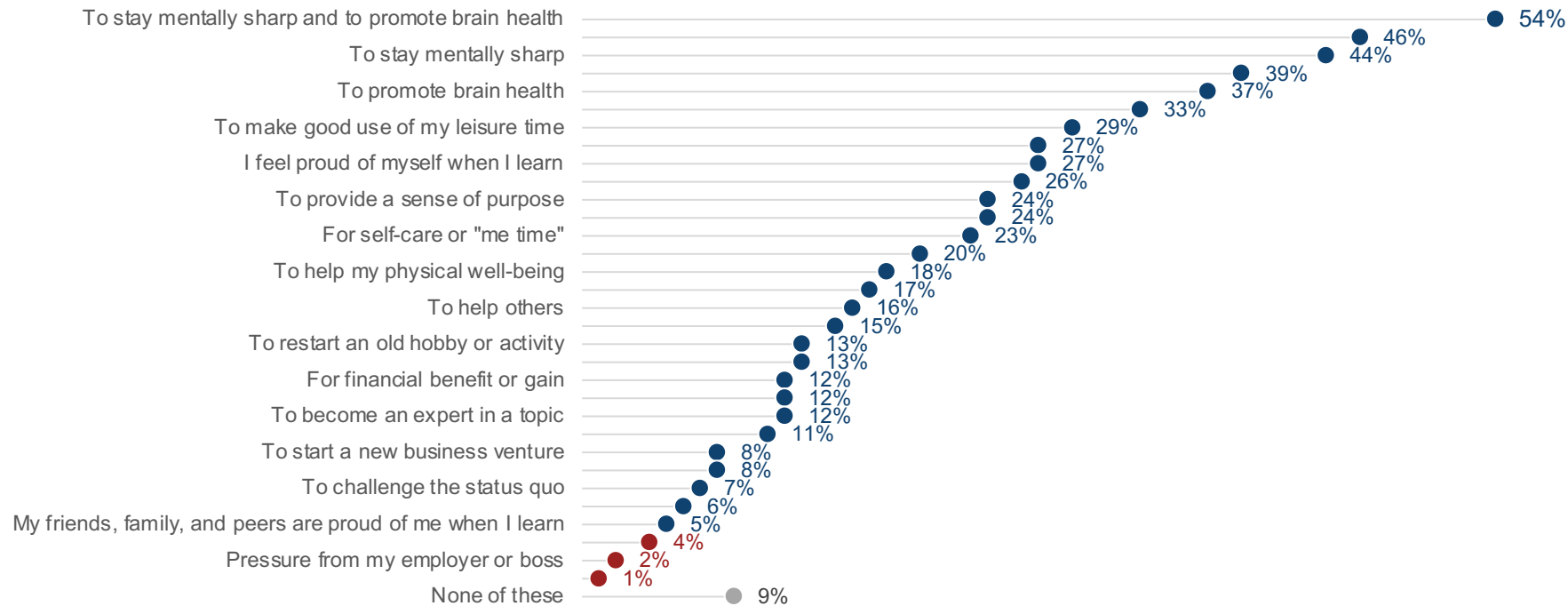
## **LIFELONG LEARNING MOTIVATORS, VIEWS, & BELIEFS**

# Cognitive health is a primary driver of lifelong learning for adults 45+.

- They are focused on gaining **new knowledge** and keeping **mentally sharp** (and less focused on social pressure).

## Reasons to participate in lifelong learning

*Mental health reasons* and *other reasons*



### Internal motivation: 88%

- Health & mental well-being: 66%
- Learning: 57%
- Positive attitude: 55%
- Achievement: 49%
- Creative: 44%

### External Motivation: 46%

- Social: 30%
- Incentive/financial : 25%
- Power/influence: 5%
- Fear: 3%

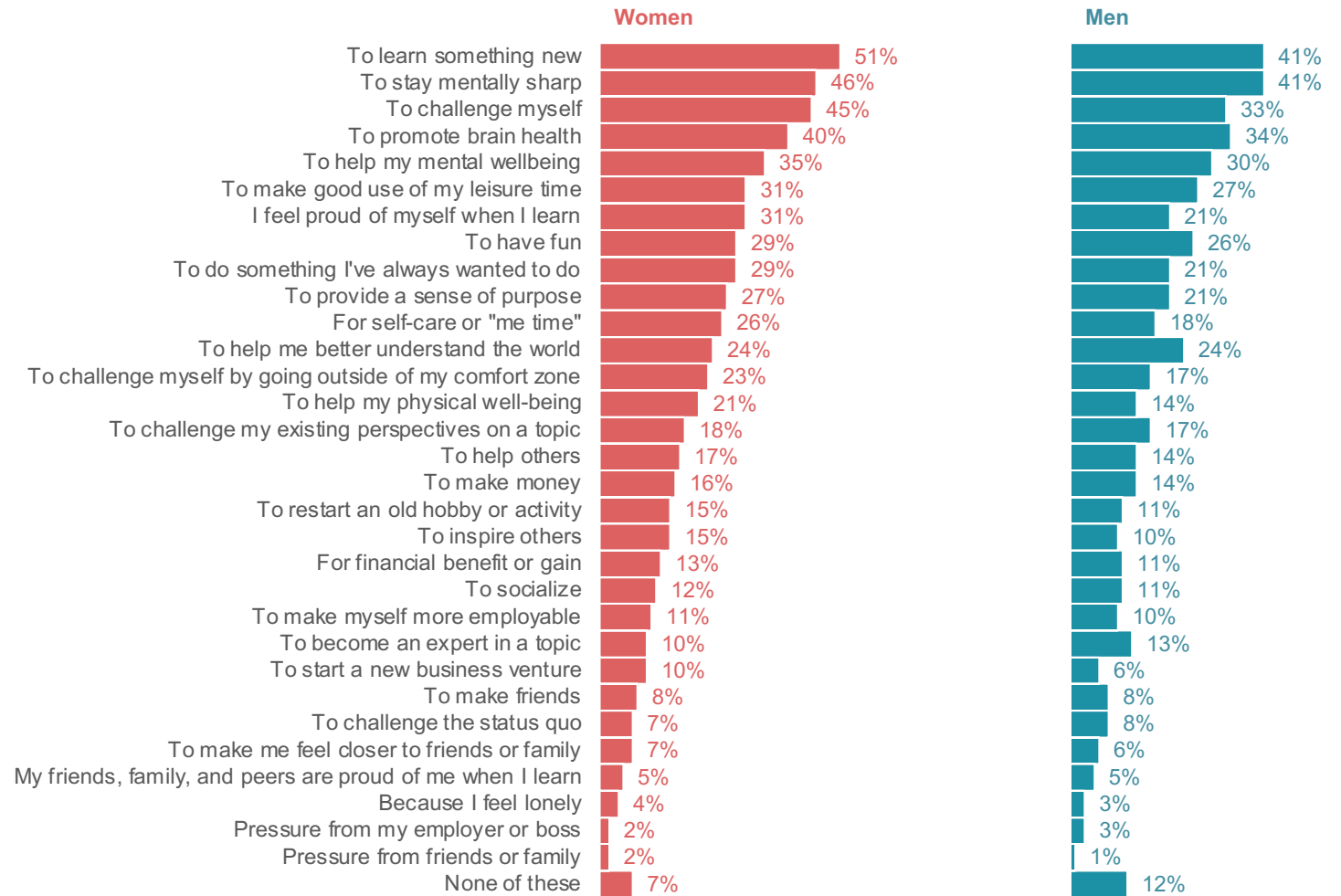
Base: 45+ (n=1516)

Q15: Which of the following, if any, do you consider reasons to participate in lifelong learning? Please select all that apply.

# Gaining new knowledge is a primary driver of lifelong learning for men and women.

- Both men and women 45+ are focused on gaining **new knowledge** and keeping **mentally sharp** (and less focused on social pressure).

Reasons to participate in lifelong learning  
*Women and men*



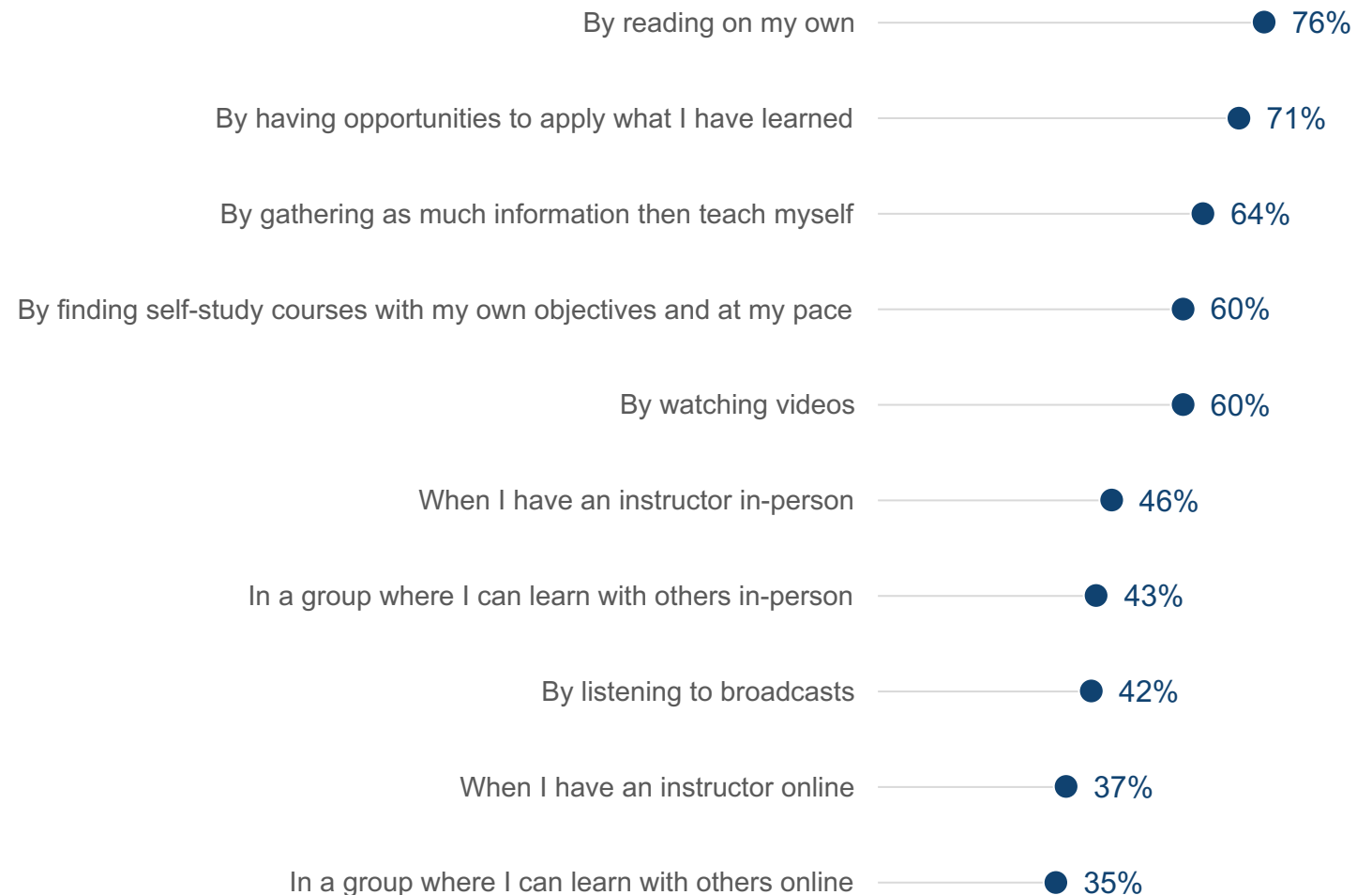
Base: 45+ Male (n=683) Female (n=831)

Q15: Which of the following, if any, do you consider reasons to participate in lifelong learning? Please select all that apply.

# Lifelong learning is often a self-directed, individual activity.

- The majority choose to read or gather information by themselves and then find opportunities to apply what they have learned in real life.

Percent who agree and strongly agree: I learn best...



Base: 45+ (n=1516)

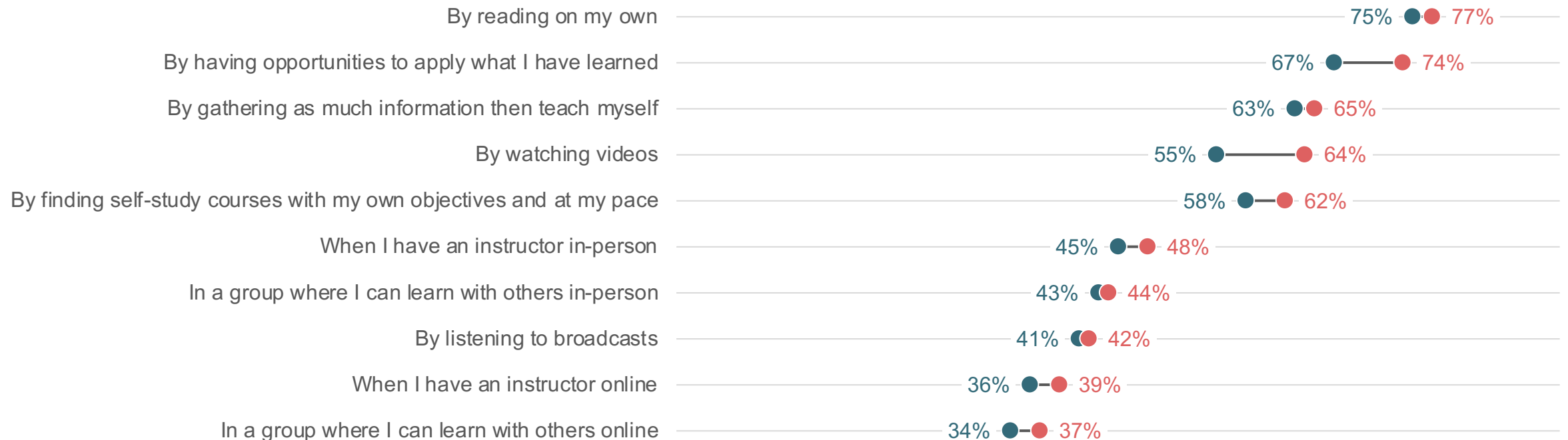
Q20: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? In general, I learn best...

# Lifelong learning is often self-directed and an individual activity.

- Men and women 45-plus prefer to read or gather information independently and apply what they have learned in their everyday life.

Percent who agree and strongly agree: I learn best...

**Men** and **women**



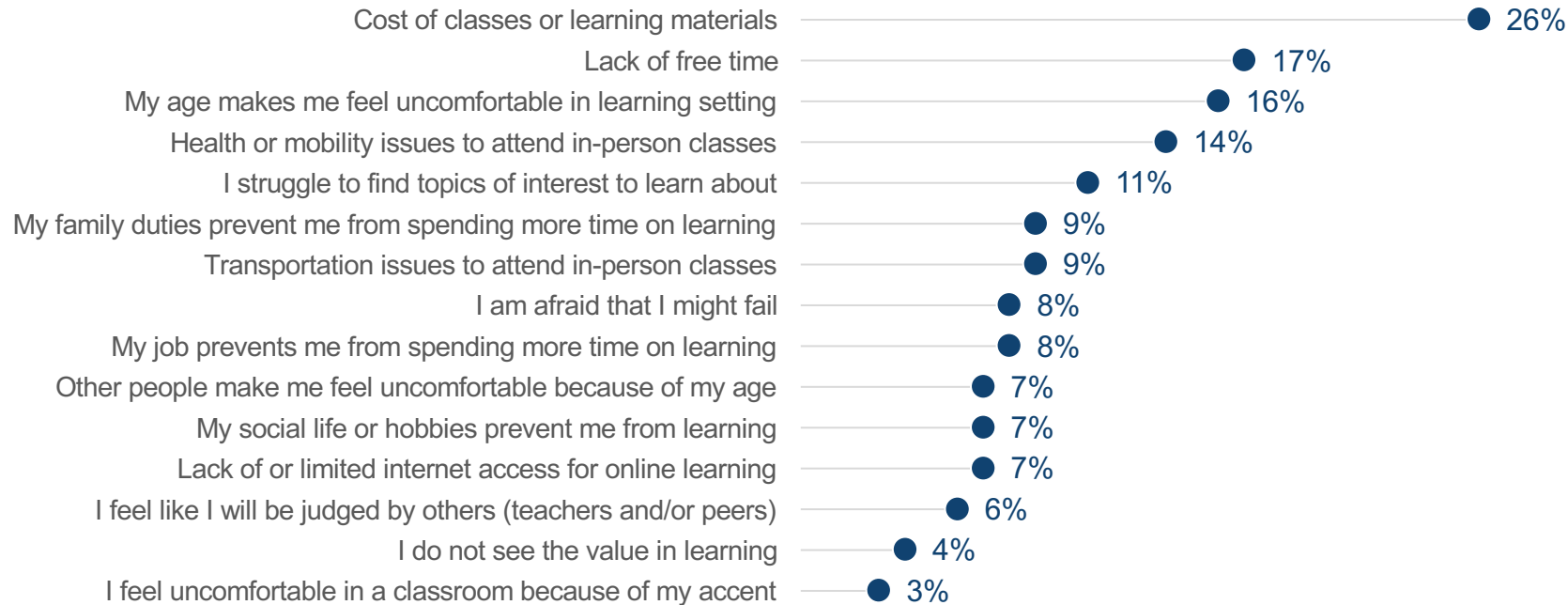
Base: 45+ Male (n=683) Female (n=831)

Q20: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? In general, I learn best...

# Cost and lack of time are the biggest barriers to lifelong learning.

- In addition to **cost** (26%), a **lack of time** (17%), and **fear of ageism** (16%) are also barriers.
  - Lack of free time and family duties are pertinent issues for younger (age 45–49), while fear of ageism is top of mind for those age 60 and older.

## Barriers to lifelong learning



	Age Group		
	45-49	50-59	60+
	%	%	%
<b>Cost</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Lack of free time</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Family duties</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Fear of ageism</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>18</b>

	Learner Status	
	Currently Learning	Not Currently Learning
	%	%
<b>Cost</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Lack of free time</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Family duties</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Fear of ageism</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>

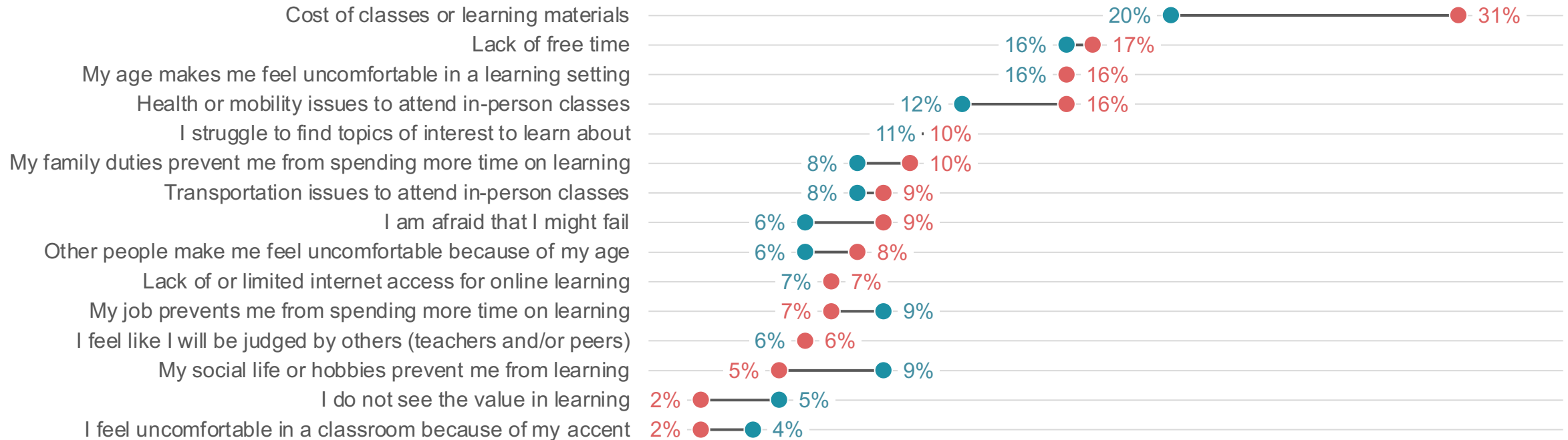
Base: 45+ (n=1516)

Q3: Which of the following, if any, is a barrier for you to participate in these learning activities?

# More women than men feel cost is a significant barrier to learning.

- **Cost** (31% vs. 20%), a **lack of time** (17% vs. 16%) and **fear of ageism** (both 16%) are the barriers for learning for both men and women 45 and older.

## Barriers to lifelong learning Men and Women



Base: 45+ Male (n=683) Female (n=831)

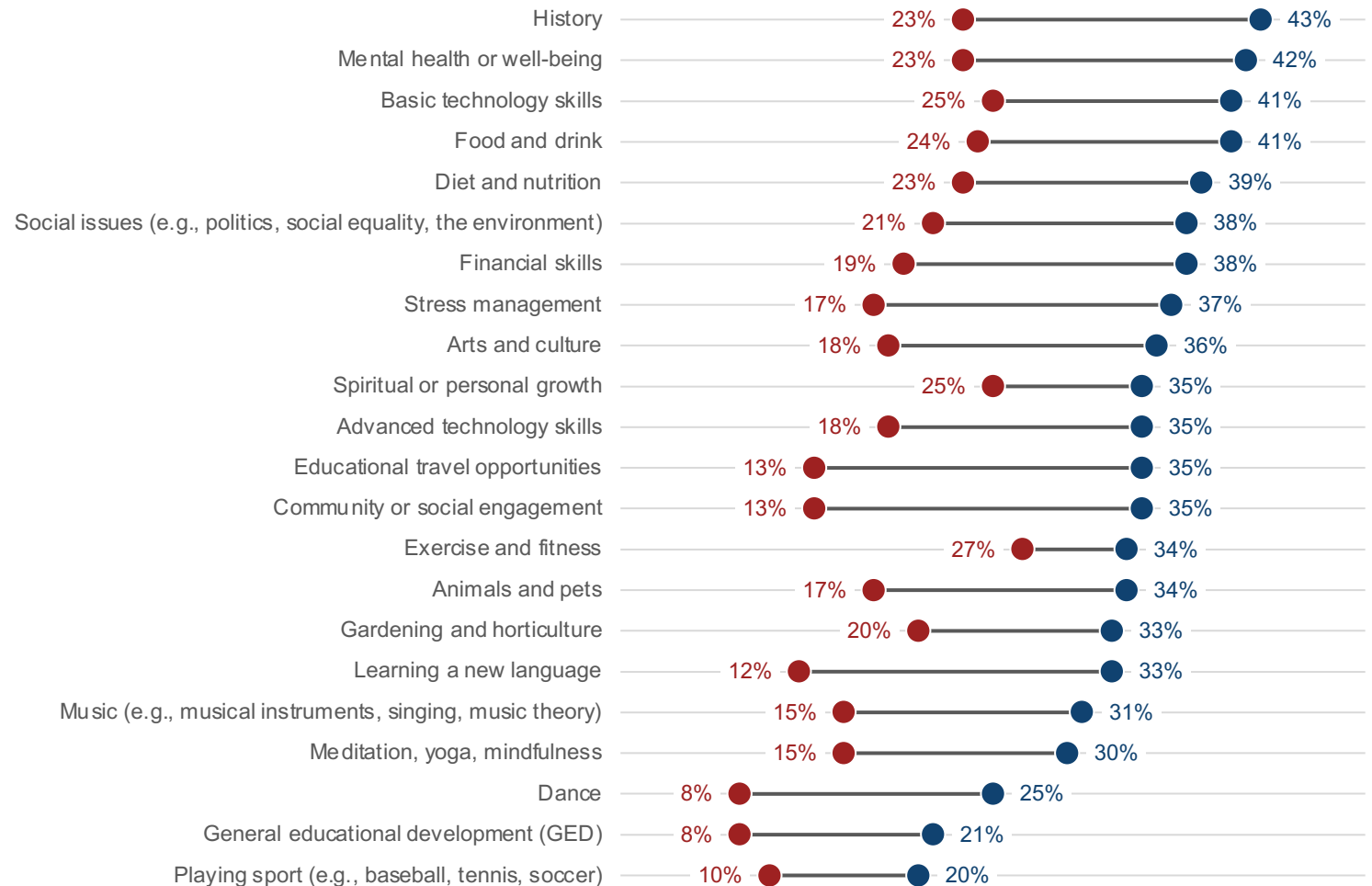
Q3: Which of the following, if any, is a barrier for you to participate in these learning activities?



# History, mental health, and tech are leading interests, although most are currently engaged in physical activity or spiritual growth.

- The 45-plus population are most interested in learning about history, mental health, food and drink, basic technology skills, and diet and nutrition. Sport, GED, and dance have by far the lowest levels of interest.
  - There is a sizable disparity between topics of interest and actual participation.*

Areas of interest for lifelong learning  
*Interested in learning* and *currently engaged*



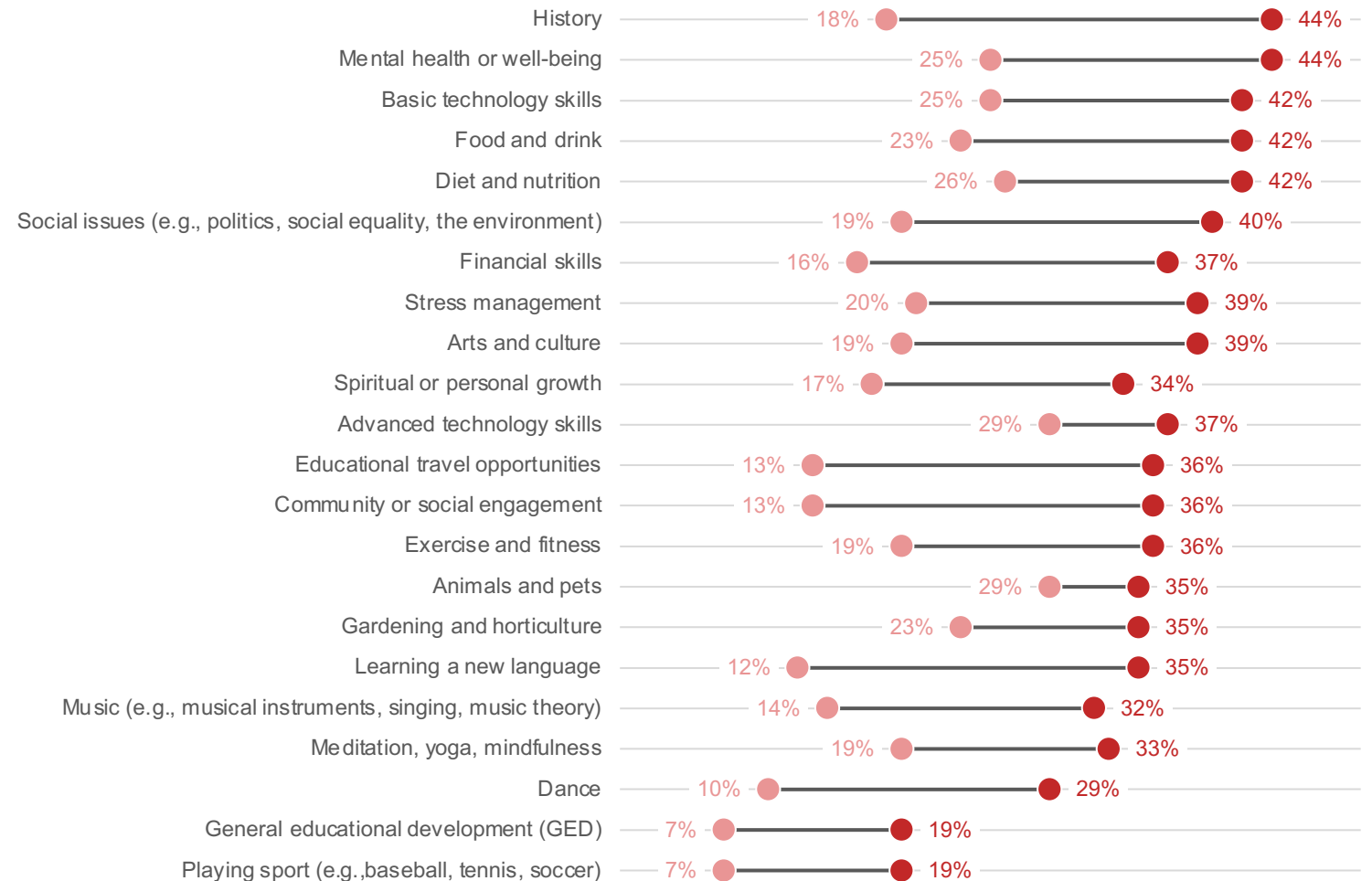
Base: 45+ (n=1516)

Q18: Which of the following topics, if any, are you currently learning about or interested in learning about?

# Interests are diverse among women, although engagement gaps are significant.

- Women age 45 and older are most interested in learning about are history, mental health, basic technology skills, food and drink, and diet and nutrition, but women are actively learning about animals and pets, diet and nutrition, mental health, and basic/advanced technology.

Areas of interest for lifelong learning among women  
*Interested in learning* and *currently engaged*



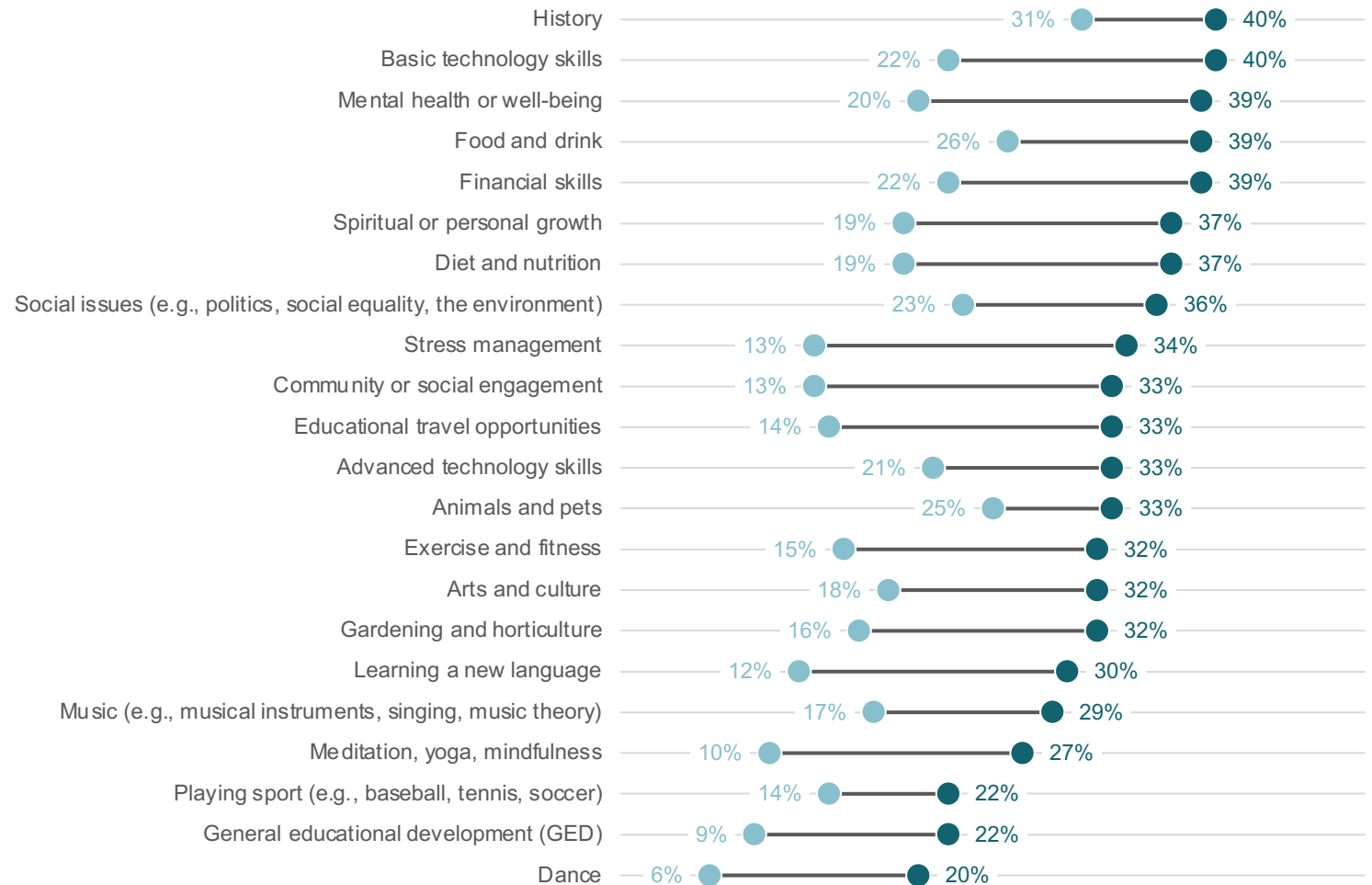
Base: 45+ Male (n=683) Female (n=831)

Q18: Which of the following topics, if any, are you currently learning about or interested in learning about?

# Men are also most interested in learning about history, mental health, and tech.

- Men 45 and older are most interested in learning about history, mental health, basic technology skills, and food and drink. Men are more engaged than women with history, financial skills, and playing sports.

Areas of interest for lifelong learning among men  
*Interested in learning* and *currently engaged*



Base: 45+ Male (n=683) Female (n=831)

Q18: Which of the following topics, if any, are you currently learning about or interested in learning about?



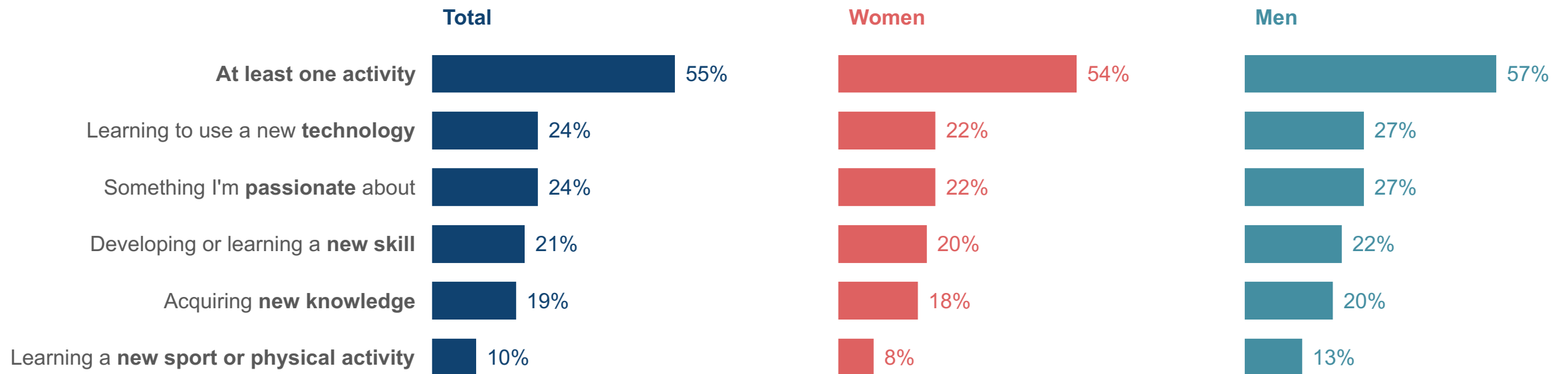
# THE MARKET CASE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

# More than half (55%) of adults 45 and older are currently lifelong learners.

- Slightly more men than woman say they are engaging in a lifelong learning activity. Tech savvy respondents are more likely to be currently engaged (28%) in **learning new technology** than those who are not tech savvy (13%).

Current engagement in the following lifelong learning activities

*Total, Women, and Men*



Base: 45+ (n=1516) Male (n=683) Female (n=831)

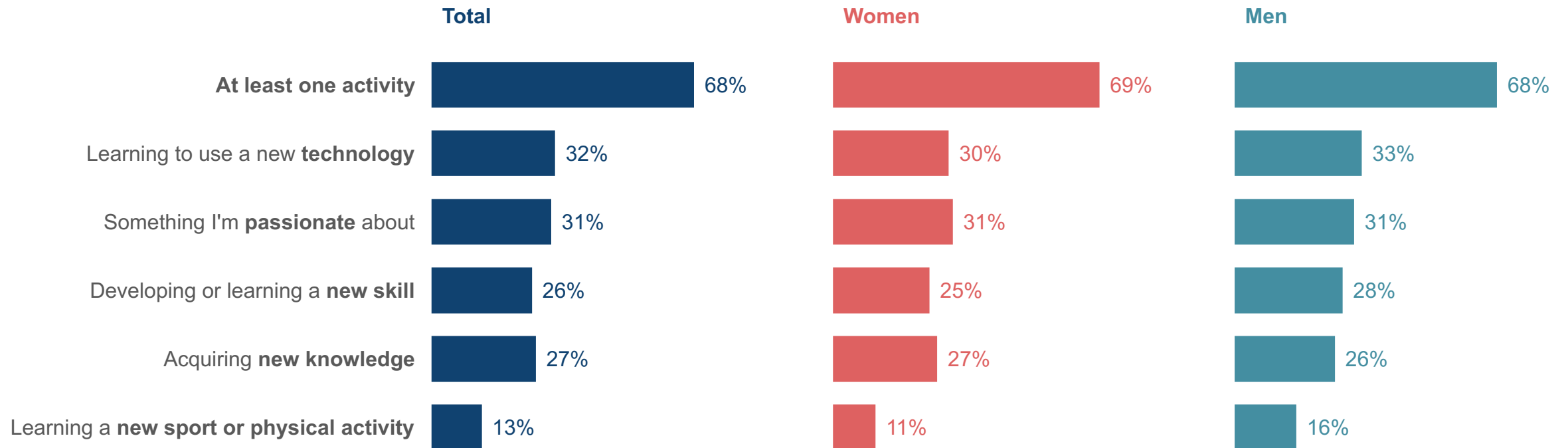
Q1: Which of the following activities, if any, are you currently engaged in?

# Two-thirds (68%) of the adults 45 and older plan to engage in a lifelong learning activity in the future.

- Women and men are equally likely (69% and 68%) to plan to engage in lifelong learning in the future.

Likely to engage in the following lifelong learning activities in the future

**Total**, **Women**, and **Men**



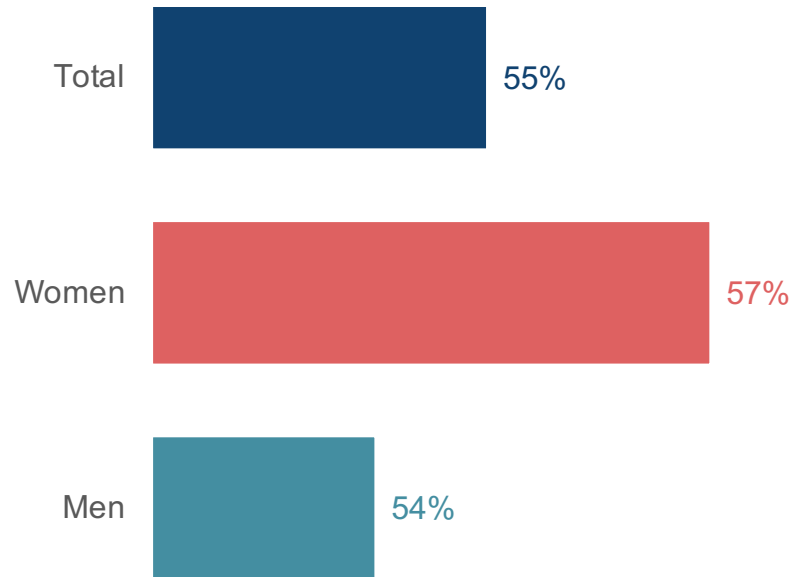
Base: 45+ (n=1516)

Q2: And which of the following activities, if any, are you likely to be engaged with in the future.

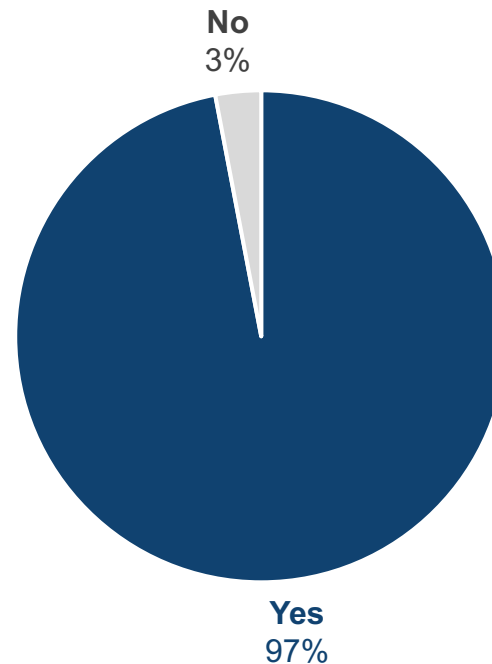
# Current engagement with learning creates momentum to continue learning.

- Among those engaged (55%) in lifelong learning, the vast majority (97%) intend to engage in the future.

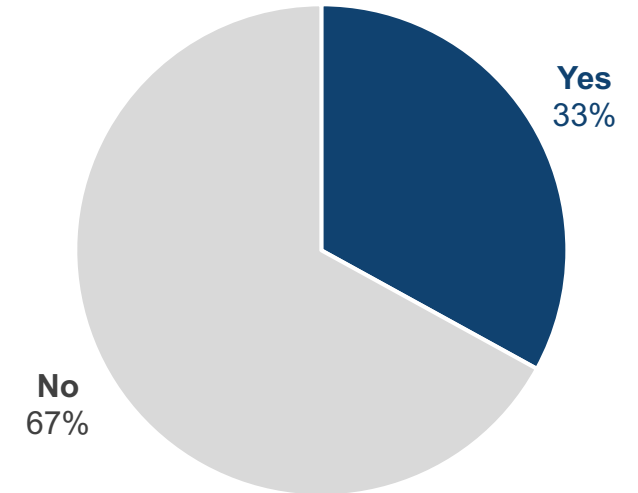
Percent engaging in lifelong learning  
Among U.S. adults ages 45+



Likely future engagement  
Among currently engaged



Likely future engagement  
Among not engaged



Base: 45+ (n=1516), Those currently engaged in lifelong learning (n=801), Those not currently engaged in lifelong learning (n=715)

Q1: Which of the following activities, if any, are you currently engaged in?

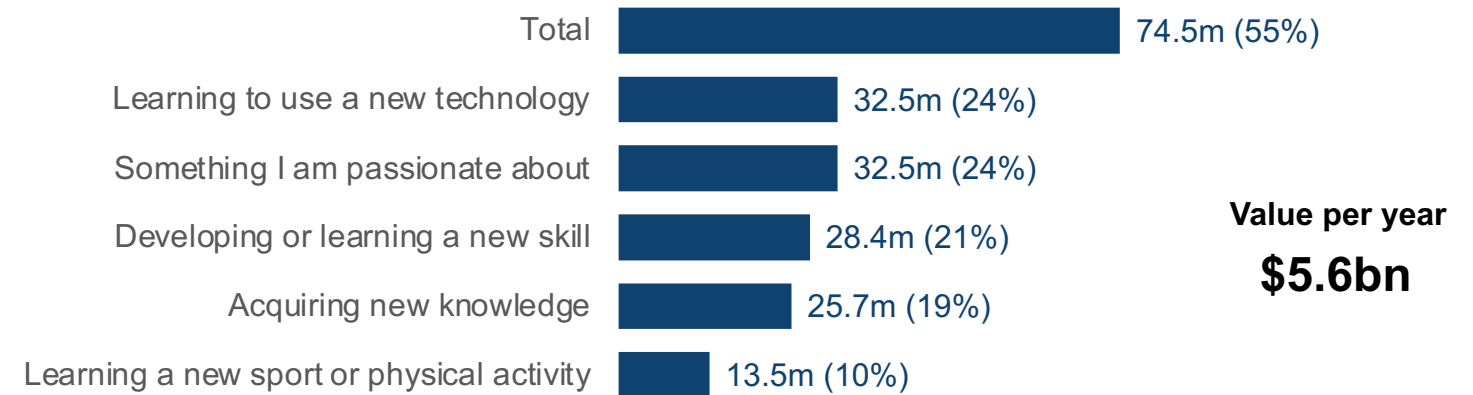
Q2: And which of the following activities, if any, are you likely to be engaged with in the future

# The size of the lifelong learning market is substantial.

- An estimated **74.5 million** Americans ages 45 and older currently engage in lifelong learning at an estimated value of \$5.6 billion a year.
- If all those who indicate they plan to engage in lifelong learning did so, it would create a market of **92 million** people and an estimated spend of \$6.9 billion a year.

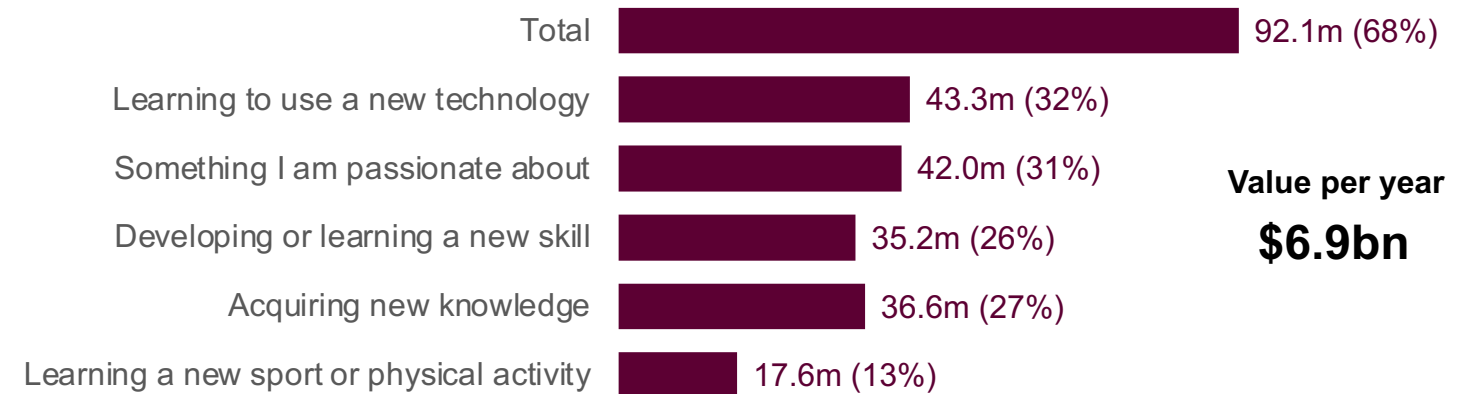
## Current market size: Number engaged in lifelong learning

Percent of U.S. adults age 45+ in parentheses



## Potential market size: Number indicating future engagement

Percent of U.S. adults age 45+ in parentheses



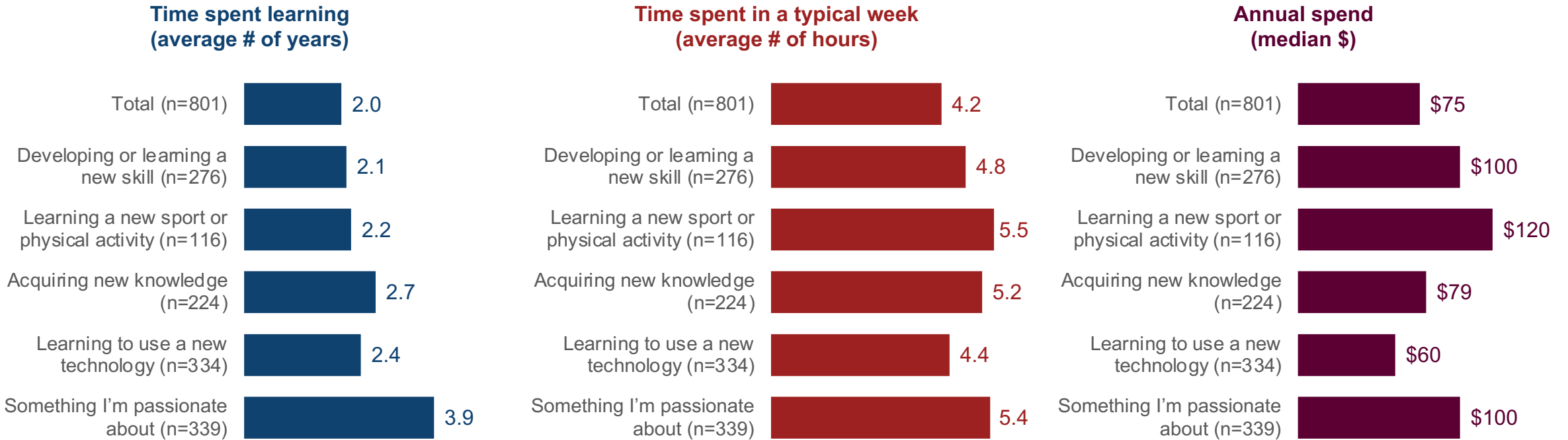
*Source for 45+ US Population data*

*\*Value extrapolated based on average spend (total and per activity) from this study*



# Lifelong learners heavily invest in their pursuits.

- Regardless of activity, lifelong learners dedicate a significant amount of their time and money to learning.



Base: Currently engaged in the following topics; Total (n=801), Developing or learning a new skill (n=276), Learning a new sport or activity (n=116), Acquiring new knowledge (n=224), Learning to use a new technology (n=334), Pursuing something else (n=339)

Q4: How long have you been participating in these activities?

Q6: In a typical week, how many hours do you spend on these activities?

Q7: In the past 12 months, approximately how much have you spent on the following activities?

# Profile: Current lifelong learners vs. those who are not engaging in learning

- Lifelong learners skew younger, suburban and in employment. There is little difference in income levels between learners and non-learners.

		Current Learner (%)	Non-learner (%)
		<i>n=801</i>	<i>n=715</i>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	46	44
	Female	54	56
<b>Age</b>	45–49	26	12
	50–59	39	30
	60+	35	57
<b>Region</b>	Northeast	17	20
	Midwest	21	23
	South	39	35
	West	23	23
<b>Population</b>	Urban	36	22
	Suburban	45	58
	Rural	20	20
<b>Race / Ethnicity</b>	White/Caucasian	70	76
	Black/African American	13	10
	Asian American	6	5
	Hispanic/Latinx	19	10
<b>Education</b>	High school or less	16	23
	College/Professional grad	52	42

		Current Learner (%)	Non-learner (%)
		<i>n=801</i>	<i>n=715</i>
<b>Household Income</b>	Very low ( <i>under \$25,000</i> )	20	21
	Low ( <i>\$25,000 – \$39,999</i> )	16	15
	Medium ( <i>\$40,000 – \$99,999</i> )	39	38
	High ( <i>\$100,000 or more</i> )	24	24
<b>Employment Status</b>	Employed	51	30
	Not employed	43	62
<b>Loneliness / Isolation</b>	Very lonely/isolated	20	7
	Somewhat lonely/isolated	40	40
	Not lonely/isolated	40	53
<b>Technological Savviness</b>	Excellent/Very good	54	29
	Good/Fair	44	65
	Poor	2	6
<b>Health Status</b>	Excellent/Very good	50	39
	Good/Fair	46	58
	Poor	4	3

 Notable positive skew toward Current Lifelong Learners

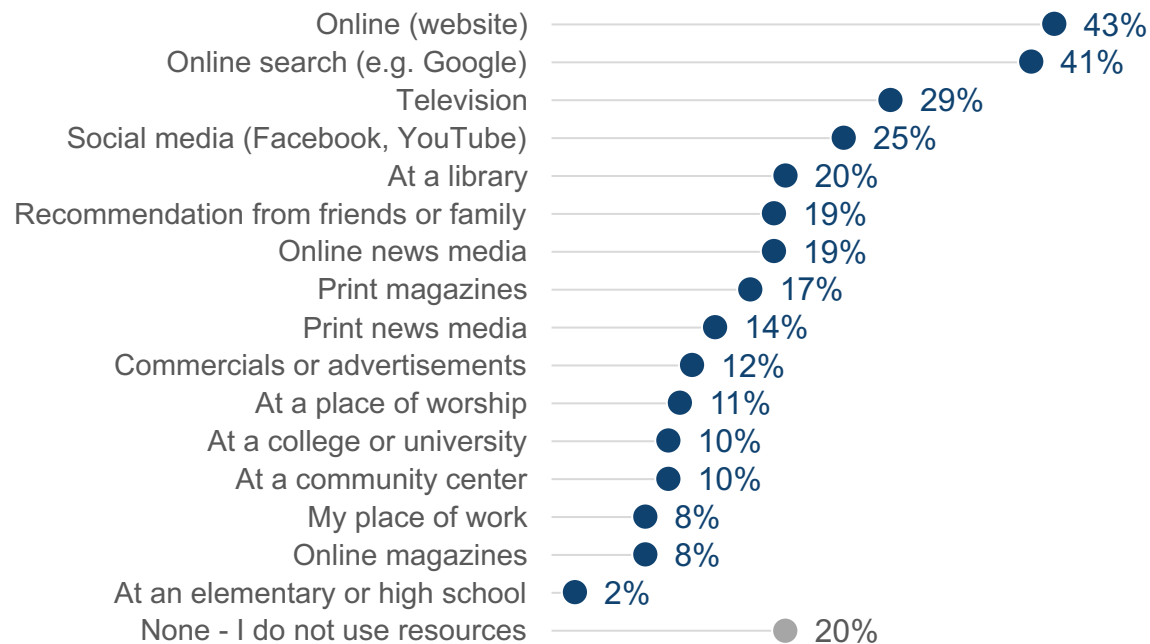


# **METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT FOR LIFELONG LEARNERS**

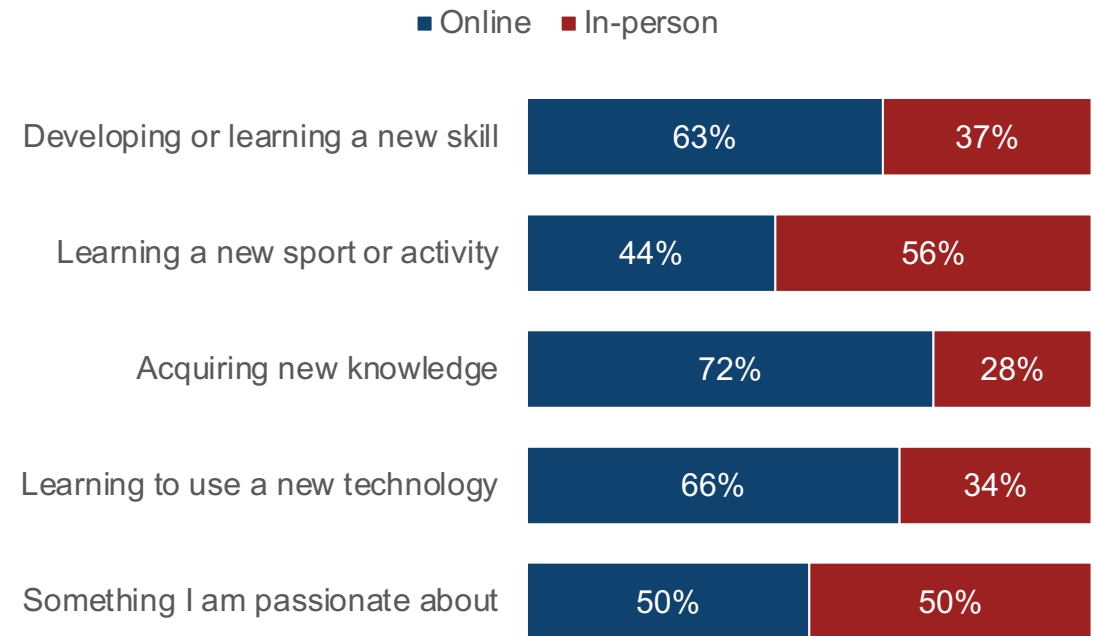
# Lifelong learners use various online channels as sources for learning materials.

- Specific websites and search engines are the most popular sources for the materials needed.

Sources for lifelong learning



Activities: Percent online vs. in-person



Base: Currently engaged in the following topics; Developing or learning a new skill (n=276), Learning a new sport or activity (n=116), Acquiring new knowledge (n=224), Learning to use a new technology (n=334), Pursuing something else (n=339)

Q9: What proportion of your activities are taught online vs. in-person?

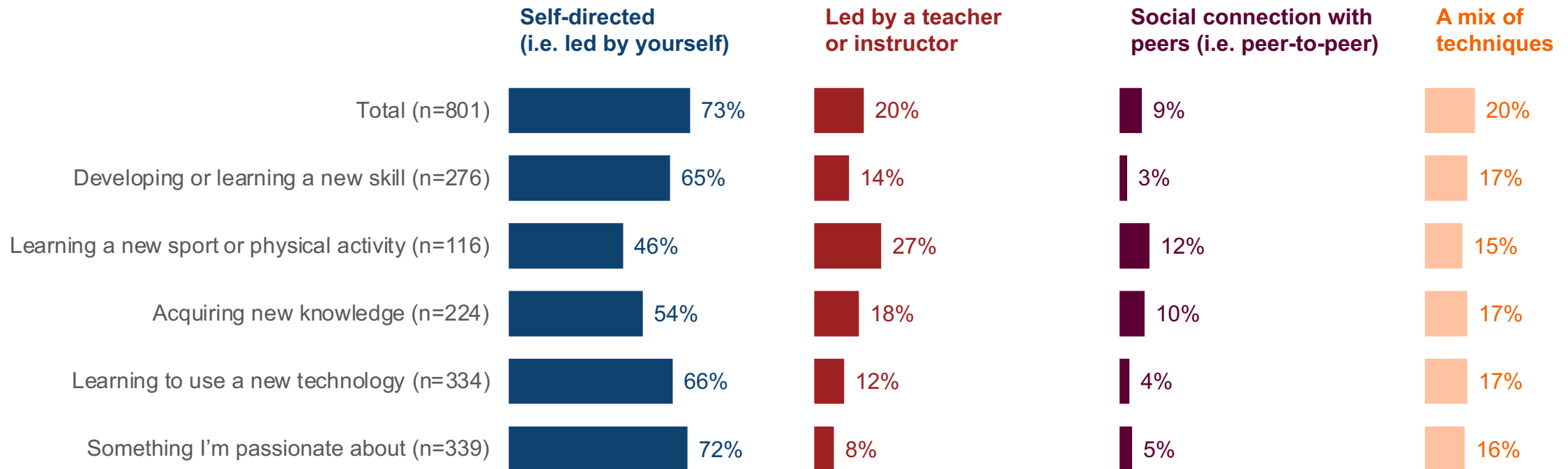
Base: 45+ (n=1516)

Q19: Which of the following, if any, do you use to find out about lifelong learning opportunities such as classes, tutorials and/or materials?

# Most lifelong learners are learning solo.

- Those learning a new sport or activity are more likely to turn to a teacher or instructor.

Method of lifelong learning  
By type of activity

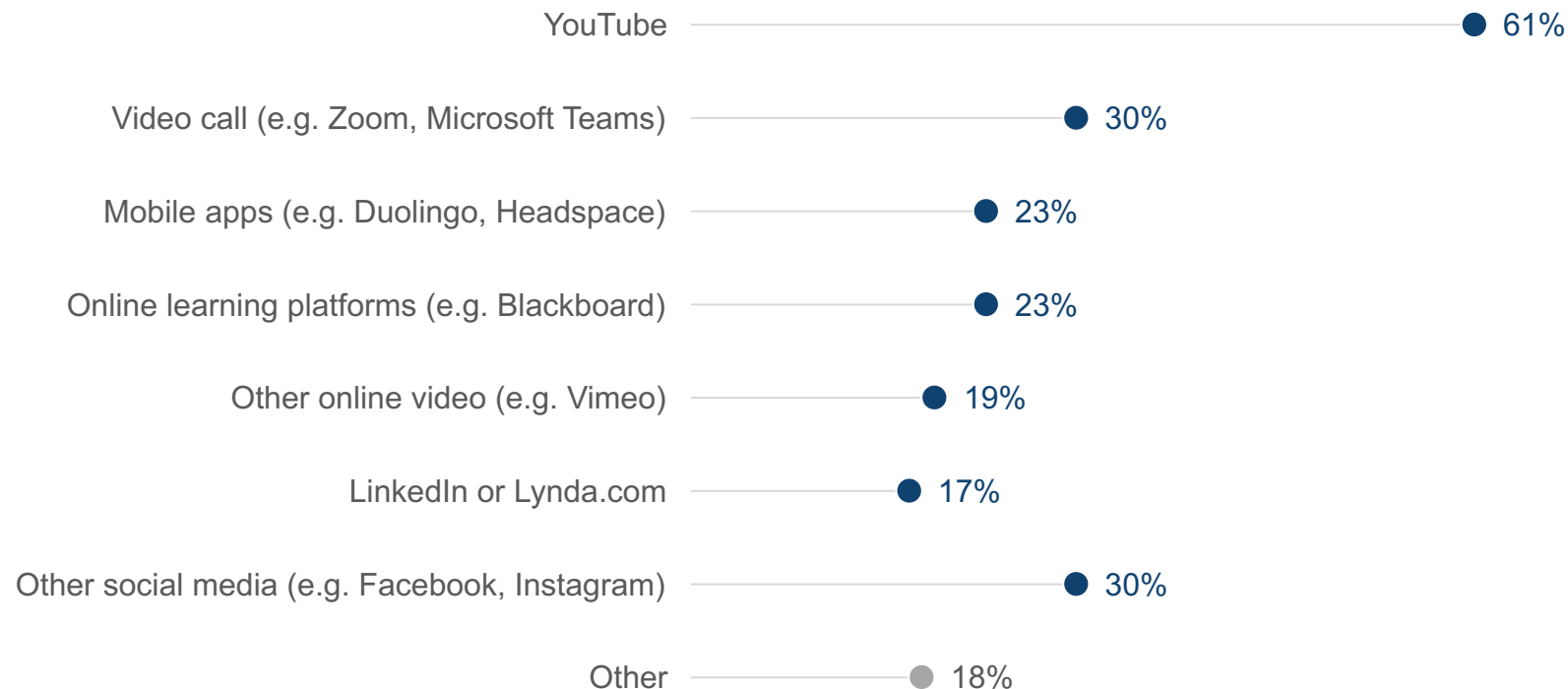


Base: Currently engaged in the following topics; Total (n=801), Developing or learning a new skill (n=276), Learning a new sport or activity (n=116), Acquiring new knowledge (n=224), Learning to use a new technology (n=334), Pursuing something else (n=339)  
Q8: Are your activities self-directed OR led by a teacher or instructor?

# YouTube rules lifelong learning online.

- Used by six in 10 of those actively learning online, YouTube is the **online channel of choice** regardless of activity.

## Online platforms used for lifelong learning



Base: Currently engaged in the following topics **online**; Total (n=673)  
Q10: Which of the following platforms, if any, do you use for your online-taught activities?

**Even prior to the pandemic, YouTube was dominating the learning space.**

- There are **500M views of learning-related content** on YouTube every day.  
(Source: [Think With Google](#), 2017)
- 86% of U.S. viewers** say they often use YouTube to **learn new things**.  
(Source: [Think With Google](#), 2017)
- YouTube is the preferred learning platform among millennials and Gen Z.**  
(Source: [Beyond Millennials: The Next Generation of Learners](#), 2018)



## **DEMOGRAPHICS & METHODOLOGY**

# A demographic overview

Total (%)		Total (%)		Total (%)		Total (%)	
<i>n=1516</i>		<i>n=1516</i>		<i>n=1516</i>		<i>n=1516</i>	
<b>Gender:</b>		<b>Race/Ethnicity:</b>		<b>Employment status:</b>		<b>Caregiver:</b>	
Male	45	White/Caucasian	73	Employed full-time	35	Yes, currently	19
Female	55	Black/African American	12	Employed part-time	7	Yes, within past year	3
<b>Age:</b>		Asian American	6	Unemployed, job seeker	5	No	78
45–49	20	Hispanic/Latinx	15	Retired, no longer working	37	<b>Grandparent status:</b>	
50–59	35	<b>LGBTQ+:</b>		Retired, working full-time	1	Grandparent	43
60+	45	Yes	4	Retired, working part-time	3	Great grandparent	7
<b>Region:</b>		No	96	Homemaker	6	Neither	55
Northeast	18	<b>Household Income:</b>		<b>Marital status:</b>		<b>Health status:</b>	
Midwest	22	Less than \$25,000	21	Married	55	Excellent	15
South	37	\$25,000 to \$39,999	15	Living with partner	4	Very good	31
West	23	\$40,000 to \$49,999	8	Single	16	Good	35
<b>Population:</b>		\$50,000 to \$74,999	17	Widowed	8	Fair	16
Urban	29	\$75,000 to \$99,999	14	Separated	2	Poor	3
Suburban	51	\$100,000 to \$149,999	14	Divorced	15	<b>Political views:</b>	
Rural	20	\$150,000 or more	9			Conservative	38
						Moderate	37
						Liberal	25



# Quantitative Study: Methodology

## Method

An online survey of Americans age 45+ was conducted Sept. 24 – Oct. 4, 2021, by **RESEARCH STRATEGY GROUP**, using the Dynata online panel. The data were weighted by age, region, and ethnicity to reflect U.S. 45+ population. The margin of error associated with a 95% confidence interval is  $\pm 3\%$ .

## Specifications

- **Sample Size:** n=1,516
- **Survey Duration:** 20-minute survey, conducted online
- **Market:** USA (nationally representative)
- **Age:** 45+
- **Language:** English

## Caveats

- **Online:** Research was conducted online; thus, sampling does not represent those with Internet accessibility issues.
- **Acculturated:** Since the survey was conducted in English, the Hispanic/Latino group reflect acculturated only.
- **COVID-19:** This research was been conducted amid the Covid-19 pandemic; thus, findings reflect the recent online behaviors (e.g., remote working/learning, growth of video conferencing/meeting).

# About AARP

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With nearly 38 million members and offices in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, AARP works to strengthen communities and advocate for what matters most to families with a focus on health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. AARP also works for individuals in the marketplace by sparking new solutions and allowing carefully chosen, high-quality products and services to carry the AARP name. As a trusted source for news and information, AARP produces the nation's largest circulation publications, AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. To learn more, visit [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org) or follow @AARP and @AARPadvocates on social media.

# About Research Strategy Group

Research Strategy Group is a full-service insights consultancy helping clients make decisions based on what's going to happen, not what's already taken place. We use the latest techniques to get at unconscious needs and natural behaviors. We provide insights, not numbers. Research Strategy Group serves clients around the world and has offices in Canada (Toronto), USA (Chicago, Las Vegas, Minneapolis, Philadelphia) and U.K. (London). To learn more, visit <https://rsginc.net/> or [www.linkedin.com/company/research-strategy-group-inc-/](http://www.linkedin.com/company/research-strategy-group-inc-/)



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This research was designed and executed by AARP Research.