

# Generation STREAM



UNPACKING  
THE STREAMING  
EXPERIENCE

VOLUME 01

**hulu**



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### Generation Stream



Meet the audience shaping what the world will watch next.



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Streaming experiences are dynamic by design - depending on the moment, the mood, and more.

**Viewing Intensity**

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# GENERATION STREAM



Meet the audience shaping what the world will watch next.



Made up of a mix of those who only stream and those who stream alongside watching traditional TV, Generation Stream crosses all corners of culture, spans generations, and sets the bar (high!) for the evolution of TV and film. However, this entertainment majority is anything but a singular block; their diverse streaming experiences tell a powerful story of how what we watch reflects cultural shifts, life stages, daily patterns, and even our deepest selves.

Remember TGIF, ABC's legendary Friday night line-up of 90s sitcoms like *Full House*, *Family Matters* and *Perfect Strangers*? Thirty years ago, when Gen Xers were teens and millennials weren't yet a thing, TGIF was a programming block that defined how we watched television: all together, at set times, and in tried-and-true formats. We tuned in weekly, watched one season at a time, loathed reruns, and regrouped around watercoolers. Dances (the Urkel, the Carlton, the Elaine, the Super

Bowl Shuffle), commercials (California Raisins, "Where's the Beef?", the Energizer Bunny) and catchphrases ("How rude!", "How YOU Doin'?", "That's what she said") seeped seamlessly into our cultural lexicon. While a certain nostalgia for this time exists—nearly half (49%) of us admit we miss those watercooler convos—few of us have stuck with the old TV program. Instead, digital killed the *TV Guide*, and the diversity and personalization of streaming now reign king. Backing this up, 90% of Americans 13-to-54 have made the shift to streaming (see Generation Stream by the Numbers), a statistic that won't surprise any of us who spent the weekend plowing through *Little Fires Everywhere*, *Unorthodox*, *The Sopranos*, 90s rom-coms or *Teen Titans Go!* (for younger streamers, of course). For most of us, the shift to streaming has been profound. Nick, 30, of San Francisco reflected, "The downtime of television has been removed. You can watch 10 hours

## GENERATION STREAM

of your favorite show and never feel distracted. You can build your own bathroom breaks. You can make space in your brain to binge.” Just take the experience of watching *Friends* now versus then. “In 2001, bingeing *Friends* on TBS was painful,” Nick recalls. “If you could survive, you had a sickly superpower and you should’ve been teaching meditation at Esalen.” While Nick is squarely part of the millennial generation, a generation that remembers analog television, the youngest generation of viewers—aka Gen Z—don’t. For them, linear TV is a tale from the pre-digital days they never knew, similar to those stories of parents who walked uphill to school (both ways, in the snow). The point is Zs never knew a time when content wasn’t limitless and on demand, and the rest of us are happy to leave those awkward years behind.

We’ve dubbed this new generation of content streamers, aptly, “Generation Stream.” Taken together, Generation Stream is more than just a demographic, psychographic, or audience segment—it represents a multi-generational movement that is entirely reinventing how, what, where, and when we watch. While this movement has emerged seemingly overnight (we’d pin it more precisely to 2013, when seasons were dropped in one fell swoop and binge-watching was born), it will shape our entertainment experiences and expectations for decades to come.



“Having the accessibility to old and new shows makes me happy. I can go as fast or as slow as I want when watching a show. I love being able to limit or excessively watch one show or three shows in a few sittings.” —Deb, 25, Dallas, TX

# 91%

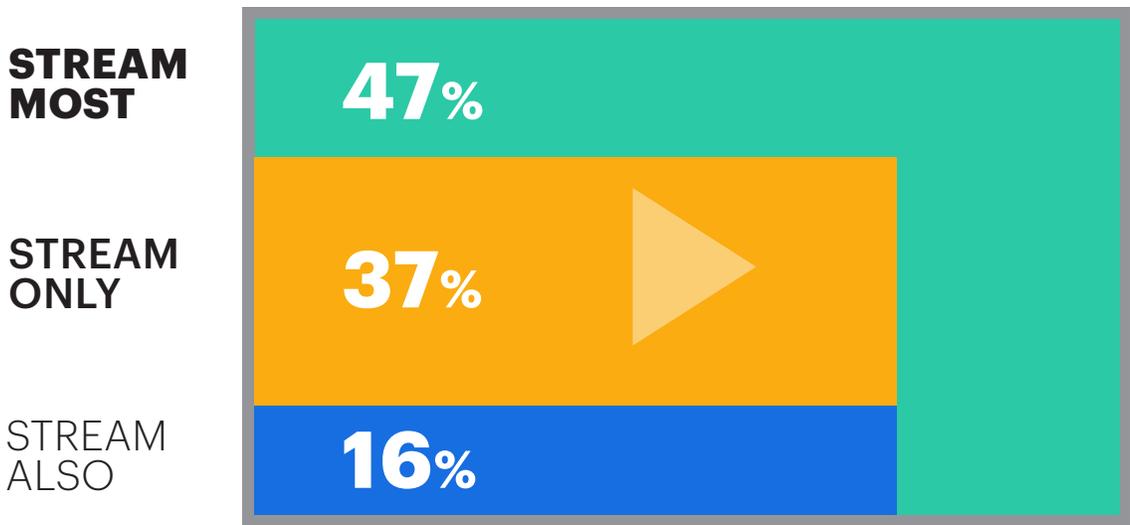
91% of Generation Stream would give up their music streaming service, their social media, their favorite food, favorite fashion item, and favorite brand before they gave up their video streaming service. In fact, the only thing other than video streaming they aren't willing to give up is their hair.

# Generation Stream by the Numbers

Generation Stream is comprised of the 90% of 13-to-54-year-olds in the U.S. who stream video content using one or more streaming services. As the vast majority of Americans, Generation Stream is reflective of the country demographically—it is balanced by generation, age, gender, race, and geography. Generation Stream falls into three types of streamers, defined by how much of a role streaming plays in their TV and movie-viewing experience (see below).

The ripple effect of streaming is as powerful as it is universal: virtually all (95%) of Generation Stream say streaming has changed their viewing experience in at least one way, from being

able to binge content to having more control over their viewing experience to watching niche content. Beyond just shaping Generation Stream’s video experiences—but more on that later—streaming has shifted audiences’ expectations. Untethered from the 24-hour day, primetime slots, Nielsen ratings, or set commercial breaks, content has newfound wiggle room. Audiences are answering to this creative leeway with expectations for more left-of-center shows, more multidimensional characters, more bingeable seasons and, well, just more: over one-third (35%) of Generation Stream says, because of streaming, they watch



**▶ STREAM MOST**  
The most trend-savvy group, these streamers tend to be extroverted entertainment enthusiasts that skew male, multicultural, pop culture-savvy, and Gen Z.

**▶ STREAM ONLY**  
Typically more introverted and open-minded, these streamers are more likely to be female solo-watchers and span multiple generations.

**▶ STREAM ALSO**  
Older, less trend-forward streamers who are more likely to have children, established jobs, and consider themselves brand-loyal.



more content than they did before, making it a top 3 way in which streaming has shifted their viewing behavior (see The Network Effect). This increased demand for content—supported by the streaming platforms like Hulu that serve it up—has deepened the pipeline for diverse, creative talent, both behind the camera and on the screen. Just take *Pen15*. This cringe-worthy comedy follows two 30-somethings playing tween versions of themselves as they navigate middle school in the early 2000’s and give an uncomfortable window into life as a 13-year-old girl—puberty, sexual discovery, AOL Chat Rooms, and all. Backing up this trend towards more creative content, Julie DeTraglia, Head of Research & Insights at Hulu, predicts, “I think there’s going to be a lot more experimentation with the types of content. We’re no longer locked into an hour or a half hour, a comedy or a drama.” Already, 70% of Generation Stream—and three-quarters (73%) of Hulu subscribers—watch at least one show that they say others would find niche or obscure. For the vast majority of us—and particularly Gen Zs, self-described as “commonly uncommon”—creative experimentation is a good thing. ▶

## THE NETWORK EFFECT

65% of Generation Stream agrees that the networks that television and movies come from matter less, and 95% say the rise of streaming services has changed the way they watch content in at least one way. Here are the ways that the demise of traditional TV networks has given rise to new viewing behaviors, trends, audience types, and content expectations.



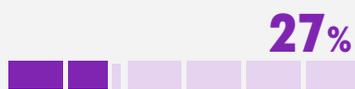
I **binge-watch** TV series, which is something I couldn’t do before.



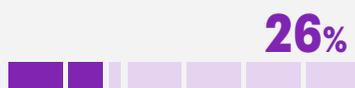
I have **more control** over my TV viewing experience.



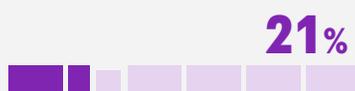
I watch **more content** now than I used to.



I have an **ad-free** viewing experience now.



I watch on my **laptop or phone** rather than on traditional TV.



I watch **more niche content** now.

# THE STREAMING EXPERIENCE



While streaming has become America's entertainment go-to, not all streaming experiences are alike: while the through line is watching what we want, when, where, and how we want it (commercials optional), there's more to streaming than just that. In our conversations with culture-forward streamers across the country, backed by a 2,500-person nationally representative survey, we pinpointed four unique streaming experiences: **Classic Streaming, Therapeutic Streaming, Indulgent Streaming, and Curated Streaming.** Rather than static experiences, linked to certain "types" of viewers, these experiences are dynamic by design, meaning one viewer often dabbles in different experiences depending upon the moment, their mood, their surroundings, and more. Key to these four entertainment experiences are two significant viewing behaviors, or preferences, that operate on a continuum: **the intensity of the viewing experience and the viewing community.**

THE STREAMING EXPERIENCE

# Viewing Intensity and Viewing Community



# STREAMING EXPERIENCE METRICS

Streaming experiences were identified based on two key metrics: intensity and community. Each of these metrics operates on a continuum, but for the purposes of this study and simplicity's sake, we classified Generation Stream's experiences as either one, or the other.

**QUESTION:** For each of the following statement pairs, select the one that best describes how you prefer to watch TV shows and movies.

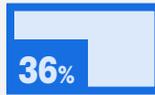


## INTENSITY FACTOR

**Lean Forward:** When I'm watching, I am fully immersed and/or actively thinking about the show I am watching.



**Lean Back:** When I'm watching, I'm chilling out. TV helps me relax and unwind—it's not an intense experience for me.



## COMMUNITY FACTOR

**Social:** For me, TV and movies are a social experience. I like watching shows with others, or talking with others about them afterwards.



**Solo:** For me, TV and movies are personal experiences. I prefer just watching what I like; watching with others or connecting with them about the shows isn't that important to me.

## Viewing Intensity

First, we measured the intensity of the viewing experience on a "lean forward" versus "lean back" metric (see Streaming Experience Metrics). Simply put, how engaged or serious were viewers about what they watched? For example, in talking about her addiction to *NCIS*, Deb, 25, of Dallas, TX, explained, "I watch *NCIS* 5 days a week at least 3 hours a day. I get so involved in solving the cases and characters it's unbelievable. I purposely do not watch some shows when they air to binge-watch them." Like Deb, Drew, 23, of Brooklyn, also gravitates to high-intensity viewing experiences—albeit not of the same binge-variety as Deb. He explains, "Sitting down to watch something is a very important time for me and, if I've decided to watch something, 90% of the time I'm

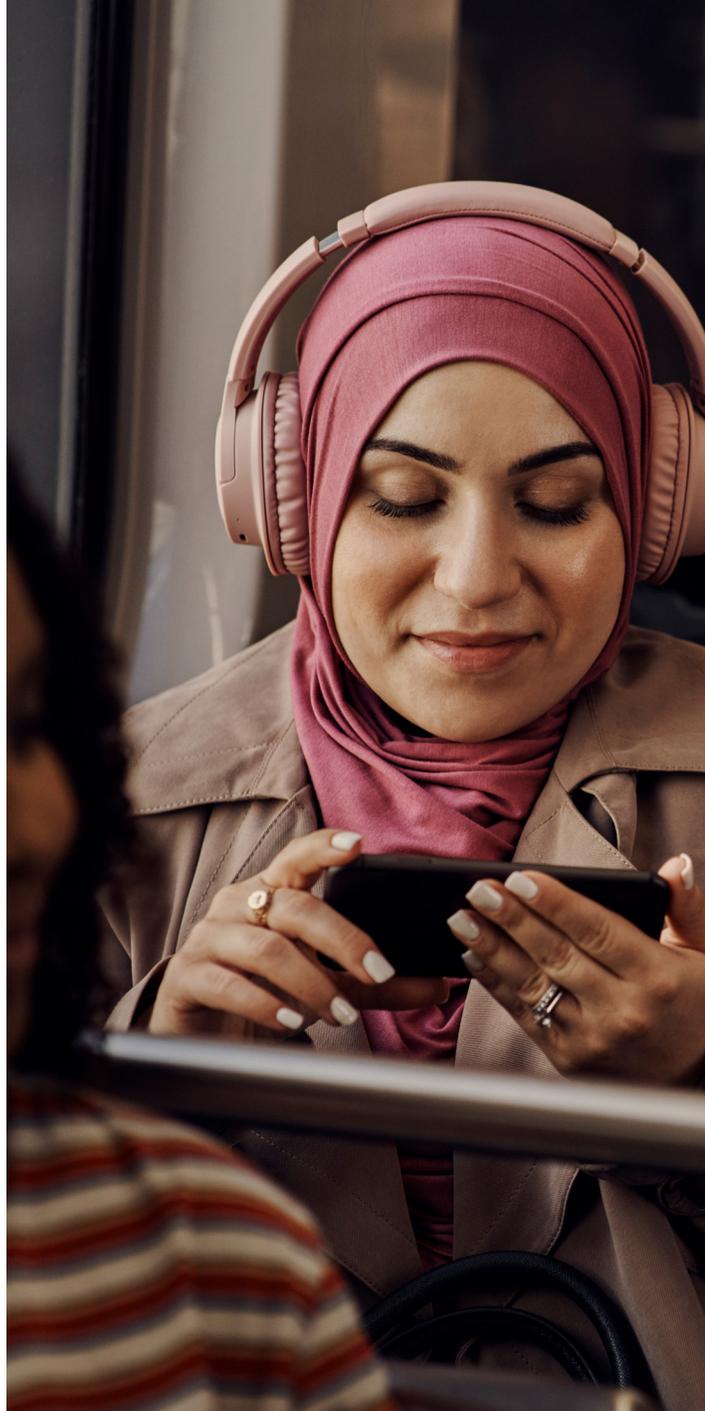
watching for a specific reason e.g. I want to learn about that director, actor, photographer, or writer. I'm rarely just watching something because so and so told me to." This type of 'lean forward' behavior, whether it was more indulgent (Deb) or more intellectual (Drew), fell to the right of our Streaming Experience continuum. On the opposite end of the intensity continuum was 'lean back' viewing, where viewers wanted to relax, chill out and unwind. For example, Tim, 33, a father of two from Seattle, often watches TV as part of his routine—closure to the end of the day and a chance to connect with his wife. "In recent times, watching an episode of a show each night has become very important to me and is a consistent part of mine and my wife's

routine,” he explains. “After putting the children to bed, we make tea, talk for a while and then we watch our show. This is our time to reset after the day. It is our most important time. It is when we are together.” Whereas Tim’s inclination to chill out is linked to his family-centric life stage, Nikol, 30, from Brooklyn, seeks out easy, familiar content as a way to escape from intense moments in her life. In her words, “I keep going back to old staples that are comforting like *Mad Men*, *30 Rock*, and *Schitt’s Creek*. I’ve been experiencing a high level of anxiety and just needed to watch familiar, funny shows.”

## Viewing Community

In addition to intensity, we found that community—i.e. social viewing experiences—was a key differentiator in viewers’ Streaming Experiences. Whether socialization was IRL (i.e. watching the season finale of *The Bachelor* with roommates) or online (dissecting the characters in *The Handmaid’s Tale* on a social media forum post-show), viewers tended to either gravitate to social experiences, or preferred flying solo. The latter is true of Deb on her borderline addiction to *NCIS*. On why she watches the series alone, Deb puts it bluntly: “I watch it alone to save myself the embarrassment [of being so involved in the series].” Nikol, 30, of Brooklyn, on the other hand, watches alone as a form of relaxation. “I usually have *Schitt’s Creek* playing in the background... I’ve watched it so many times it’s extremely comforting and makes me feel happy. It’s like a warm hug!” On the social side of the spectrum, Fiona, 19, a rising junior at George Washington University, prioritizes shows she can watch with her roommates: “I have less time to stream now, so

“I stream with friends to build more social bonds while at school.”—Fiona, 19, Washington DC



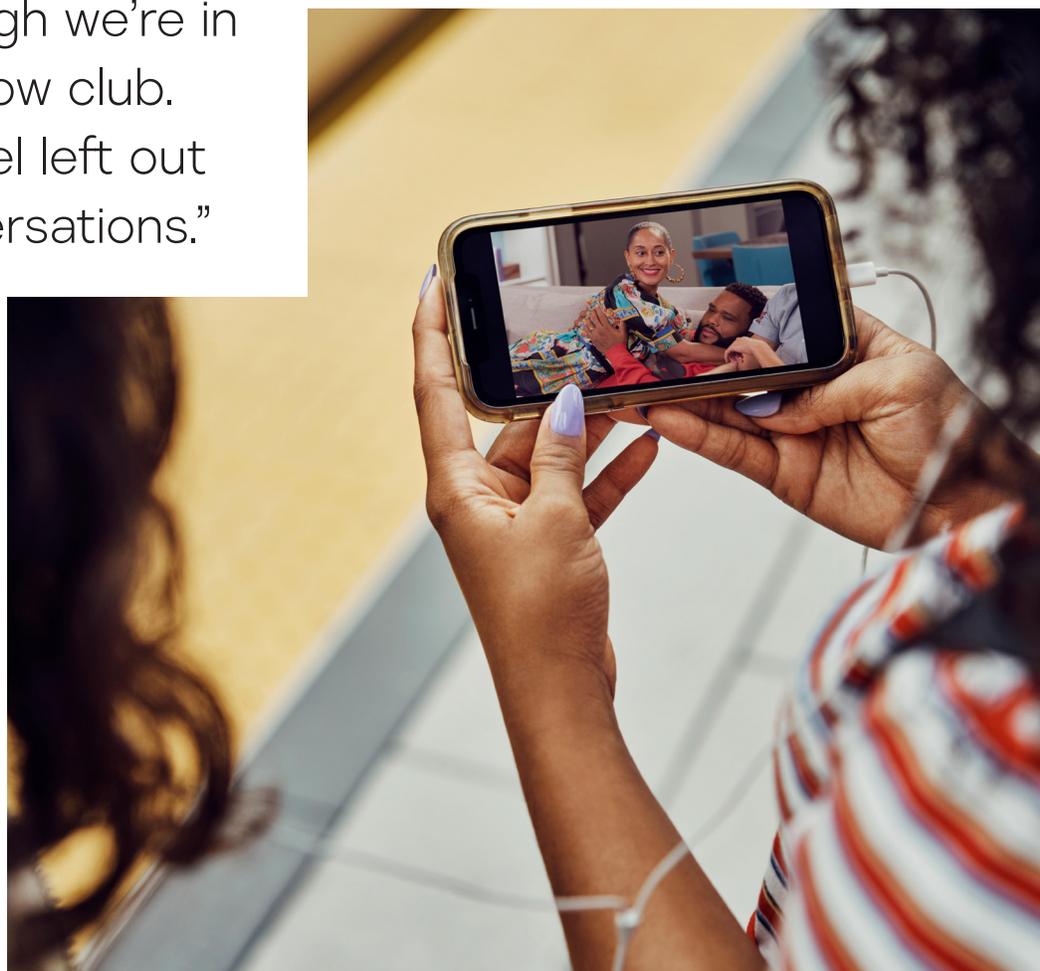
when I do, I want it to be fully worth my time, so I stream with friends to build more social bonds while at school.” Of course, social media also plays a large role in our entertainment experiences and this is something Nick, 30, of Oakland, seeks out. “Most of my streaming choices have a strong social element,” he told us about his digital entertainment community. “I want to discuss it with my friends and hear their thoughts as though we’re in a book club. A show club. I don’t want to feel left out from these conversations.”

Married together, these four metrics created a quadrant of unique Streaming Experiences. It’s important to note that these are *experiences*—not segments of viewers

(though, as pointed out below, certain demographics and psychographics do tend to skew to one experience or another). While Tim, for example, likes unwinding with his wife at night with shows like *Barry* (Classic Streaming) his favorite recent show was HBO’s *Chernobyl*, which falls into the Curated Streaming Experience. And back to Deb: In addition to obsessing over *NCIS* (Indulgent Streaming), she also appreciates less intense, Therapeutic Streaming Experiences. “I will not watch anything scary and I do not like to dive into historical times. I find it to be draining.” The point is, one viewing experience doesn’t fit all...and viewers don’t fit neatly into singular experiences. ▶

“I want to discuss it with my friends and hear their thoughts as though we’re in a book club. A show club. I don’t want to feel left out from these conversations.”

—Nick, 30, Oakland, CA

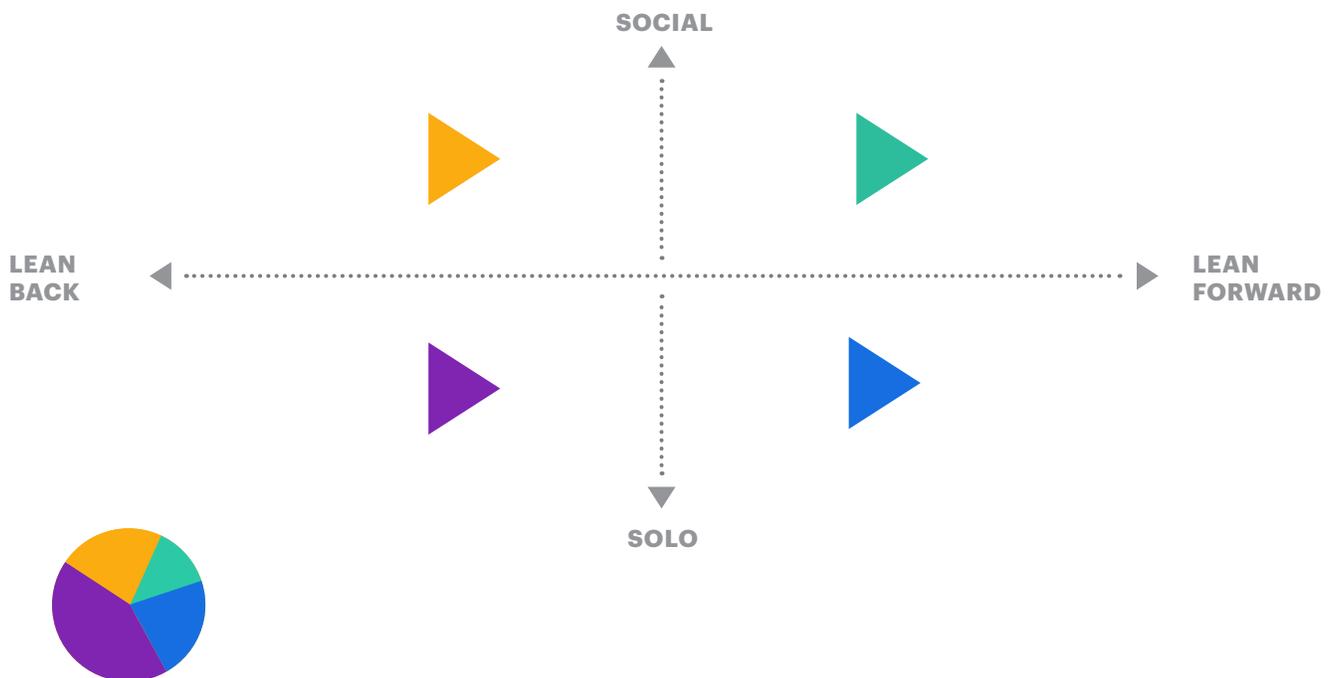


# The Four Streaming Experiences



# Mapping Streaming Behavior

Not all streaming experiences are alike, as different experiences appeal to different demographics, psychographics, and moods of the viewer.



**43%**

**THERAPEUTIC**

STREAMING METRICS:  
LEAN BACK + SOLO

**MOST MAINSTREAM**

Streaming that is meditative and therapeutic, this is the type of streaming that reminds them of childhood or helps them (lightly) reflect.

**23%**

**CLASSIC**

STREAMING METRICS:  
LEAN BACK + SOCIAL

**MOST ROUTINE**

Streaming in much the same way people watch traditional TV—at set times, with family or friends, and as part of a daily routine. The only difference is that they can do it on demand.

**13%**

**CURATED**

STREAMING METRICS:  
LEAN FORWARD + SOCIAL

**MOST TRENDSETTING**

Streaming that centers on carefully selected content that is intelligent, niche, and/or global. More than just entertainment, it's about TV and movies that create cultural conversation with like-minded entertainment enthusiasts.

**21%**

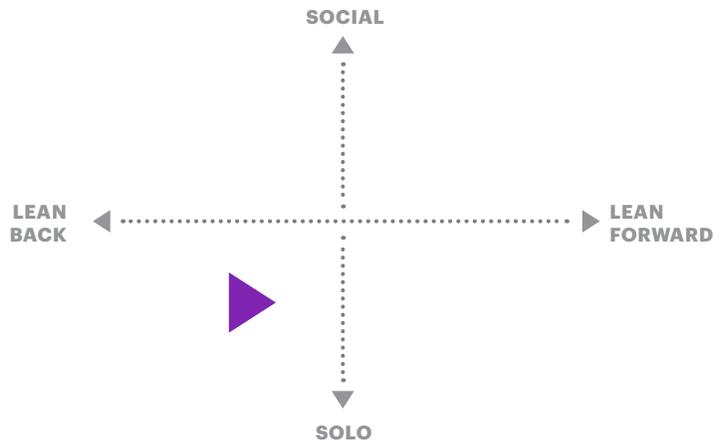
**INDULGENT**

STREAMING METRICS:  
LEAN FORWARD + SOLO

**MOST SPONTANEOUS**

Streaming that is about being fully consumed with shows where viewers have no problem “holing up” for a weekend solo to make it through multiple seasons of their latest obsession. This is the biggest bingeing experience.

# Therapeutic Streaming



**43%**

**STREAMING METRICS:**  
LEAN BACK + SOLO

In these days of unprecedented change, we all need self-care. Enter Therapeutic Streaming, which is meditative, reflective, and just what the doctor ordered in these difficult times when mental health is top of mind, and the urge to slow down and reset is palpable. This is the type of streaming that helps viewers decompress, reminds them of childhood, or helps them (lightly) reflect.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

**Mainstream:** The Streaming Experience most reflective of the national population

**18%**

more likely than all Streamers to consider themselves "Traditional"

## PSYCHOGRAPHICS

**Introverted**

**19%**

more likely than Gen Pop to describe themselves as "Introverted"

**Homebodies**

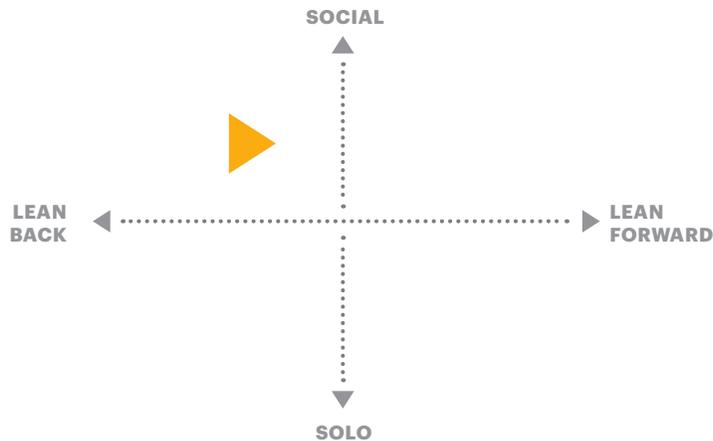
**30%**

more likely than Gen Pop to describe themselves as "Homebodies"



"The amount of streaming video available is sometimes too much to bear ... In these cases, I simply go to a comforting older series or movie I've watched previously." —Seth, 38, New Orleans, LA

# Classic Streaming



**STREAMING METRICS:**  
LEAN BACK + SOCIAL

Some things never change, like chilling out on the couch at night with family or friends to watch the latest episode of [you-fill-in-the-blank], albeit digitally. Classic Streaming is the closest streaming experience to watching TV and movies the “old fashioned way”—at set times, with family, friends or a partner, and as part of a daily routine.

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

**Married:** +20% more likely than Gen Pop to be married  
**Affluent:** Average income of \$68K/year vs. \$62K/year among Gen Pop



more likely than all Streamers to watch TV and movies with family or friends (64% Classic Streamers vs. 57% Gen Pop)

**PSYCHOGRAPHICS**

**Social**



more likely than Gen Pop to describe themselves as “Social”

**Recommenders**



more likely than Gen Pop to say they recommend shows and brands to friends



“Weekly releases allow shows to stay in [my] consciousness over an extended time period, rather than exploding like a supernova and fading out quickly.” —Jason, 44, Renton, WA

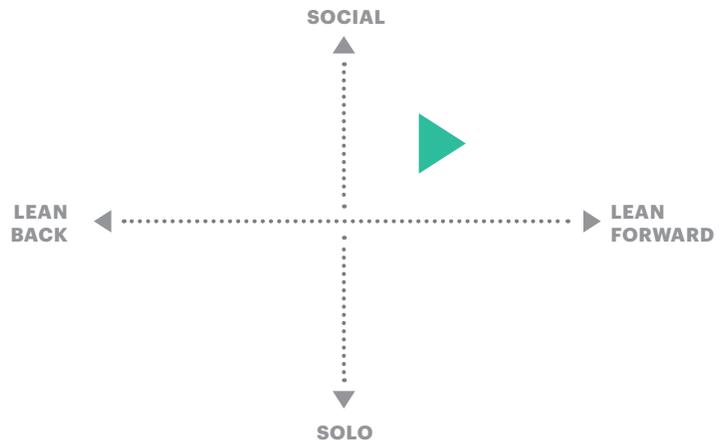
# Curated Streaming

13%



**STREAMING METRICS:**  
LEAN FORWARD + SOCIAL

Pop culture always has its trendsetters to cater to, and streaming is no different. Curated Streaming centers on intelligent, niche, and global content; more than just entertainment, it's about shows and movies that create cultural conversation with like-minded entertainment enthusiasts.



## DEMOGRAPHICS

- Diverse:** +11% more likely to be non-white than the Gen Pop
- Young:** +15% more likely to be part of Gen Z than the gen pop
- Gender-Balanced:** Equally male/female

71%

more likely to seek out a community of fellow fans to discuss shows or movies (53% Curated Streamers vs. 31% Gen Pop)

## PSYCHOGRAPHICS

**Pop Culture Influenced**

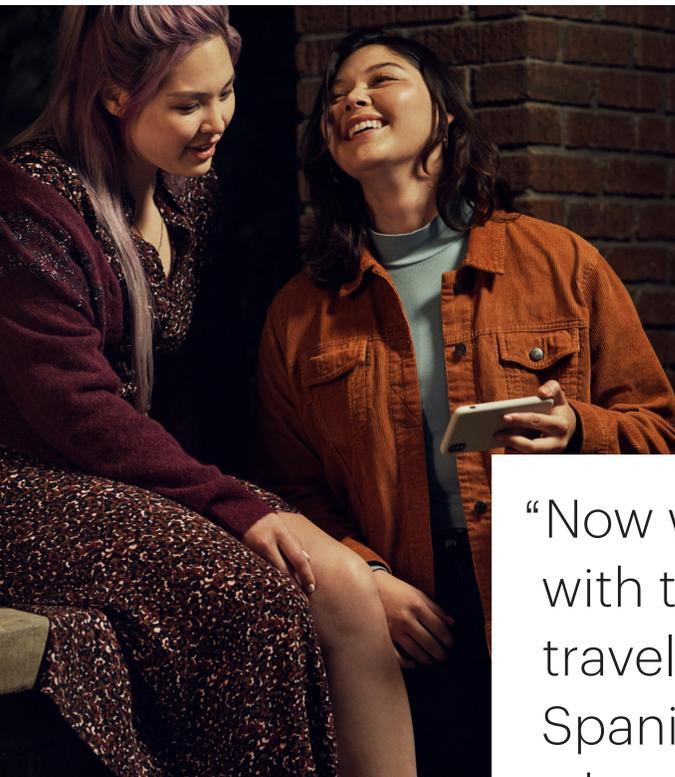
27%

more likely to say they are influenced by pop culture than Gen Pop

**Digitally Influenced**

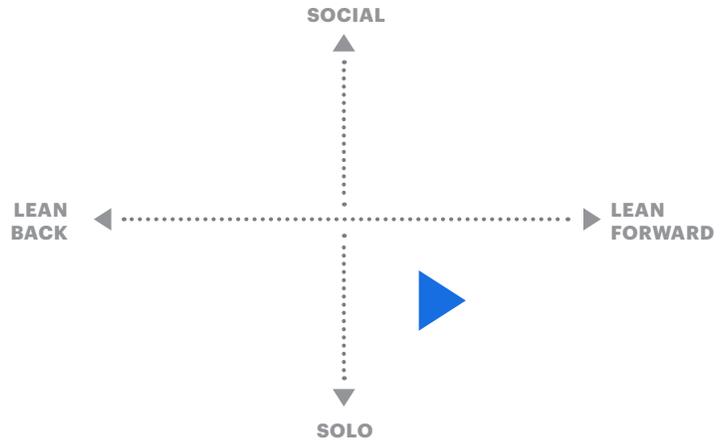
42%

more likely to follow influencers online than Gen Pop



“Now we can be even more connected with the rest of the world. When I was traveling in Argentina, I talked about a Spanish TV show with Argentineans who also watched it because of their access to [streaming].” —Gala, 26, Los Angeles, CA

# Indulgent Streaming



**STREAMING METRICS:**  
LEAN FORWARD + SOLO

Calling all bingers (you know who you are)! Indulgent Streaming is about being fully consumed with shows. Viewers have no problem “holing up” for a weekend solo to make it through multiple seasons of their latest obsession.

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

- Solo-Dweller:** +18% more likely than Gen Pop to live alone
- Older:** +15% more likely than Gen Pop to be part of Generation X



more likely than all Streamers to admit to being “bingeing addicts” (15% vs. 11%)

**PSYCHOGRAPHICS**

**Intellectual**



more likely than Gen Pop to describe themselves as “Intellectual”

**Tech-savvy**



more likely than Gen Pop to describe themselves as “Tech-savvy”



“The most bingeing I’ve done at once is probably 50 hours. And at that point it felt like addiction ... And now that it’s over I’m very wary of anything I watch because that was quite the commitment.” —Ben, 32, Seattle, WA

# METHODOLOGY



To explore Generation Stream, Hulu partnered with Culture Co-op and utilized the following combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches.

**CULTURE CO-OP** 

## **Trend Exploration**

Leveraged Culture Co-op's trend research and Hulu's existing data to understand Generation Stream at a high level.

## **Culturesetter Projects**

In-depth projects on TV and movie streaming preferences and behaviors among 24 diverse "Culturesetters," a handpicked group of individuals at the forefront of culture, ages 16 to 44, who only or mostly stream their video content. Culturesetters reflected 12 U.S. markets including New York/Brooklyn, NY; Washington, DC; Burlington, VT; Denver, CO; Iowa City, IA; Atlanta, GA; New Orleans, LA; Dallas, TX; Albuquerque, NM; Los Angeles, CA; San Francisco/Oakland, CA, and Seattle, WA.

## **Expert Interviews**

Interviews with entertainment, tech and generational insiders on the future of streaming and entertainment.

## **Nationally Representative Study**

A 25-minute online study among 2,500 Gen Zs, millennials and Gen Xers, representative of Americans ages 13-to-54, fielded in April 2020.



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