

MUSEUMS AND WELLBEING, PART 1: AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS OF MUSEUM IMPACT

A 2022 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY

For many people, museums are places of education and knowledge. Back in 2018, we asked museum-goers about the impact of museums in their lives, and three-quarters said museums had made them "more knowledgeable" - the top response.

Since 2018, however, our thinking about the role of museums in people's lives has increasingly expanded to consider the emotional, mental, social, and cognitive health needs of the human beings that are our audiences.

Similarly, our audiences seem to be more likely to articulate what they need to live healthy lives. For some, the COVID-19 pandemic crystallized (or laid bare) their need for respite, escape, connection, and mental health.

This leads to some interesting questions:

How do museums engender connections among human beings?

How do we provide respite and challenge people at the same time?

What kinds of museums best support emotional wellbeing?

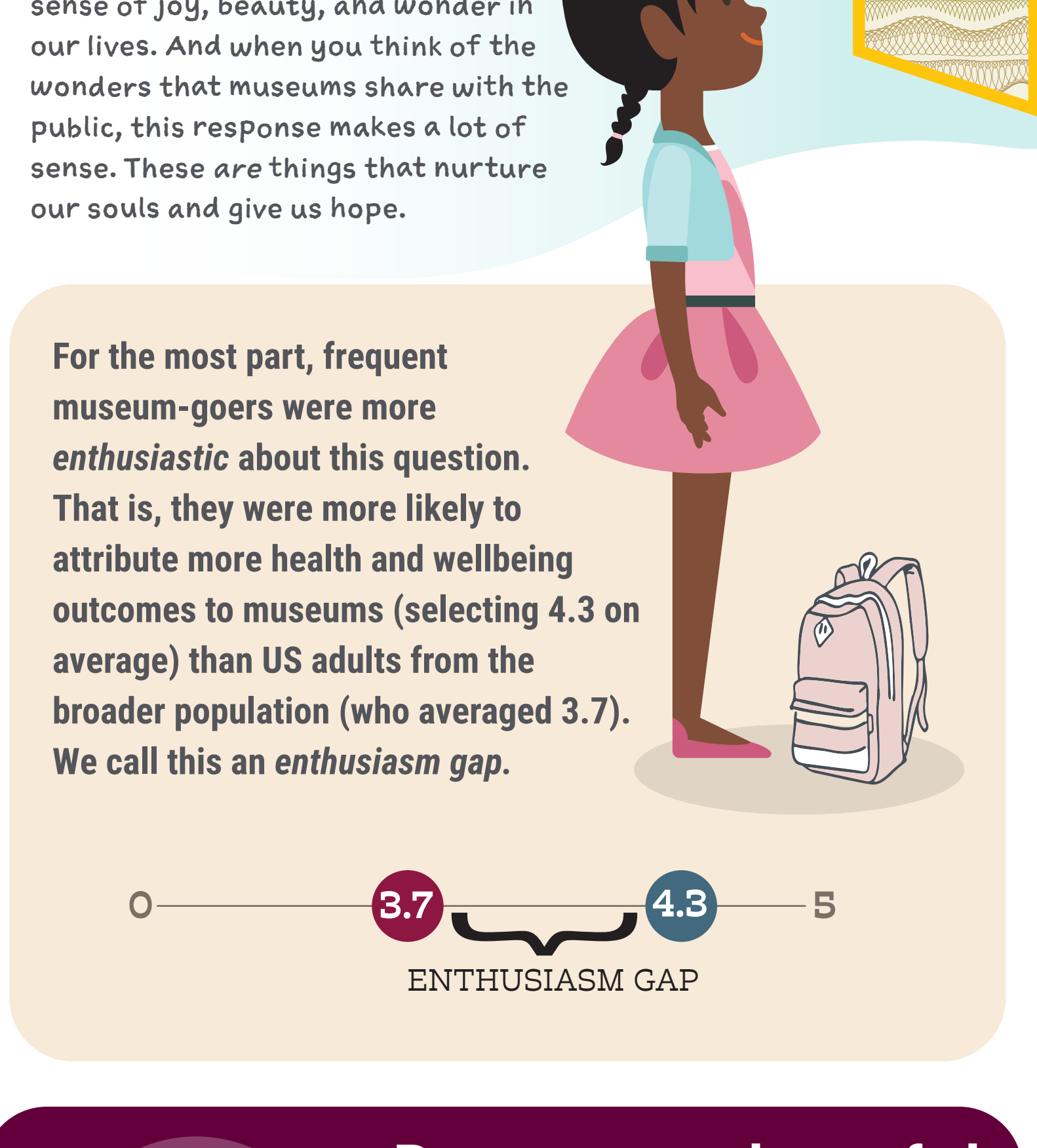
And do people think museums play a role in mental health and wellbeing? (Spoiler alert: yes, they do!)

To find out what audiences think about museums and wellbeing, we asked a series of questions, three of which we'll focus on in this Data Story. These questions went to frequent museum-goers as well as a broader population sample of US adults.

Question 1

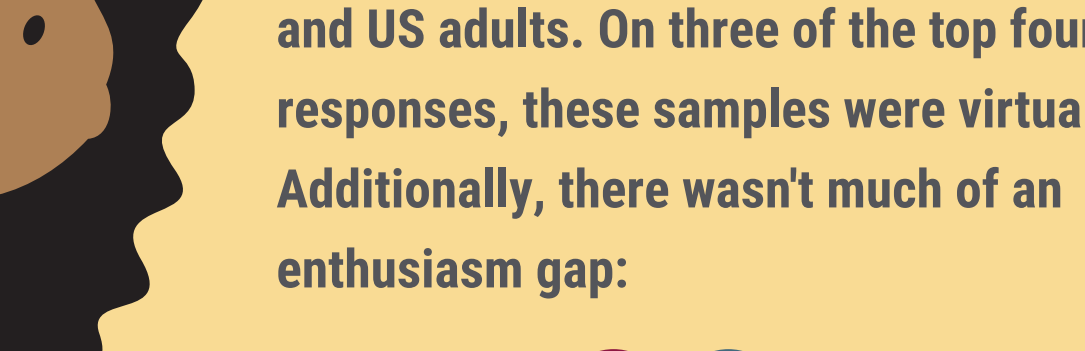
What kinds of health and wellbeing outcomes do you think museums provide to visitors? (Choose all that apply.)

■ FREQUENT MUSEUM-GOERS ■ US ADULTS (BROADER POPULATION)



The top choice for both frequent museum-goers and US adults was a sense of joy, beauty, and wonder in our lives. And when you think of the wonders that museums share with the public, this response makes a lot of sense. These are things that nurture our souls and give us hope.

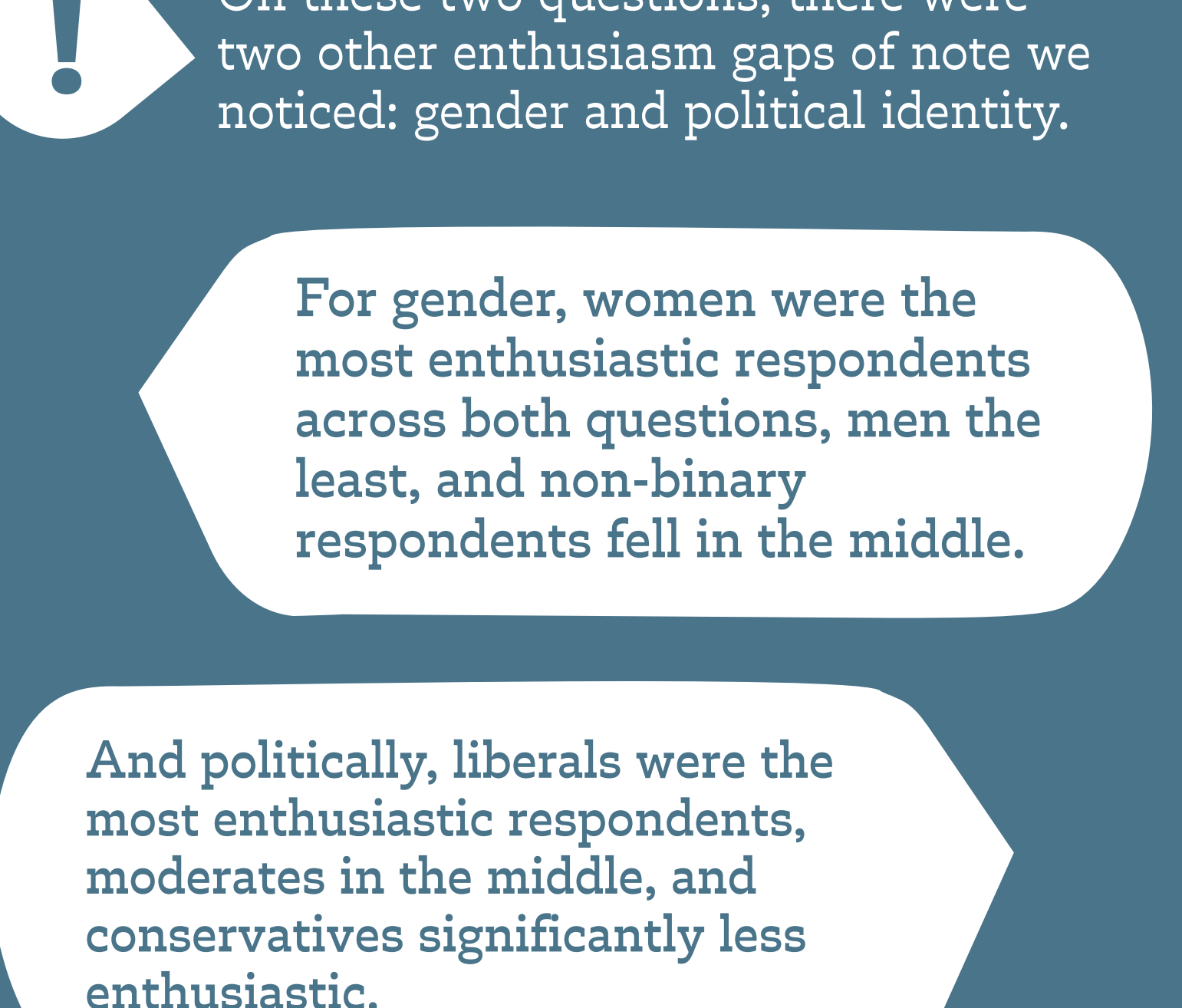
For the most part, frequent museum-goers were more *enthusiastic* about this question. That is, they were more likely to attribute more health and wellbeing outcomes to museums (selecting 4.3 on average) than US adults from the broader population (who averaged 3.7). We call this an *enthusiasm gap*.



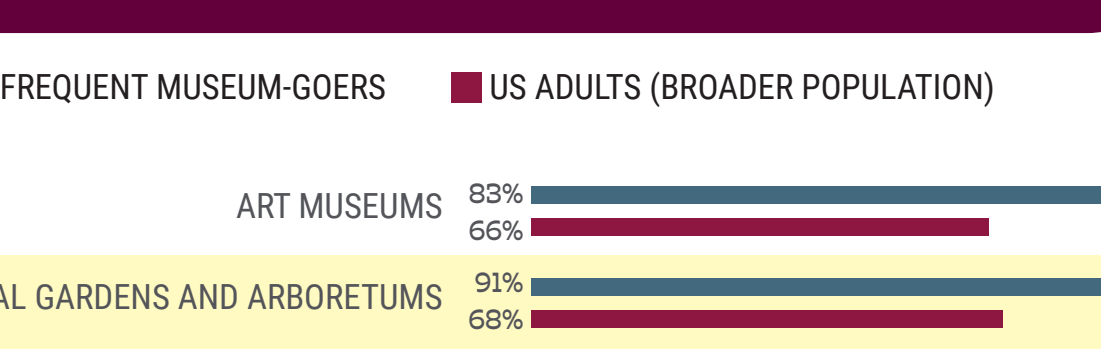
Question 2

Do museums make you feel more connected to others? If so, who do they help you feel more connected to? (Choose all that apply.)

■ FREQUENT MUSEUM-GOERS ■ US ADULTS (BROADER POPULATION)



For connection, the results were more consistent between frequent museum-goers and US adults. On three of the top four responses, these samples were virtually tied. Additionally, there wasn't much of an enthusiasm gap:



AVERAGE FREQUENT MUSEUM-GOERS: 3.2 responses chosen

US ADULTS/BROADER POPULATION: 3.0 responses chosen

On these two questions, there were two other enthusiasm gaps of note we noticed: gender and political identity.

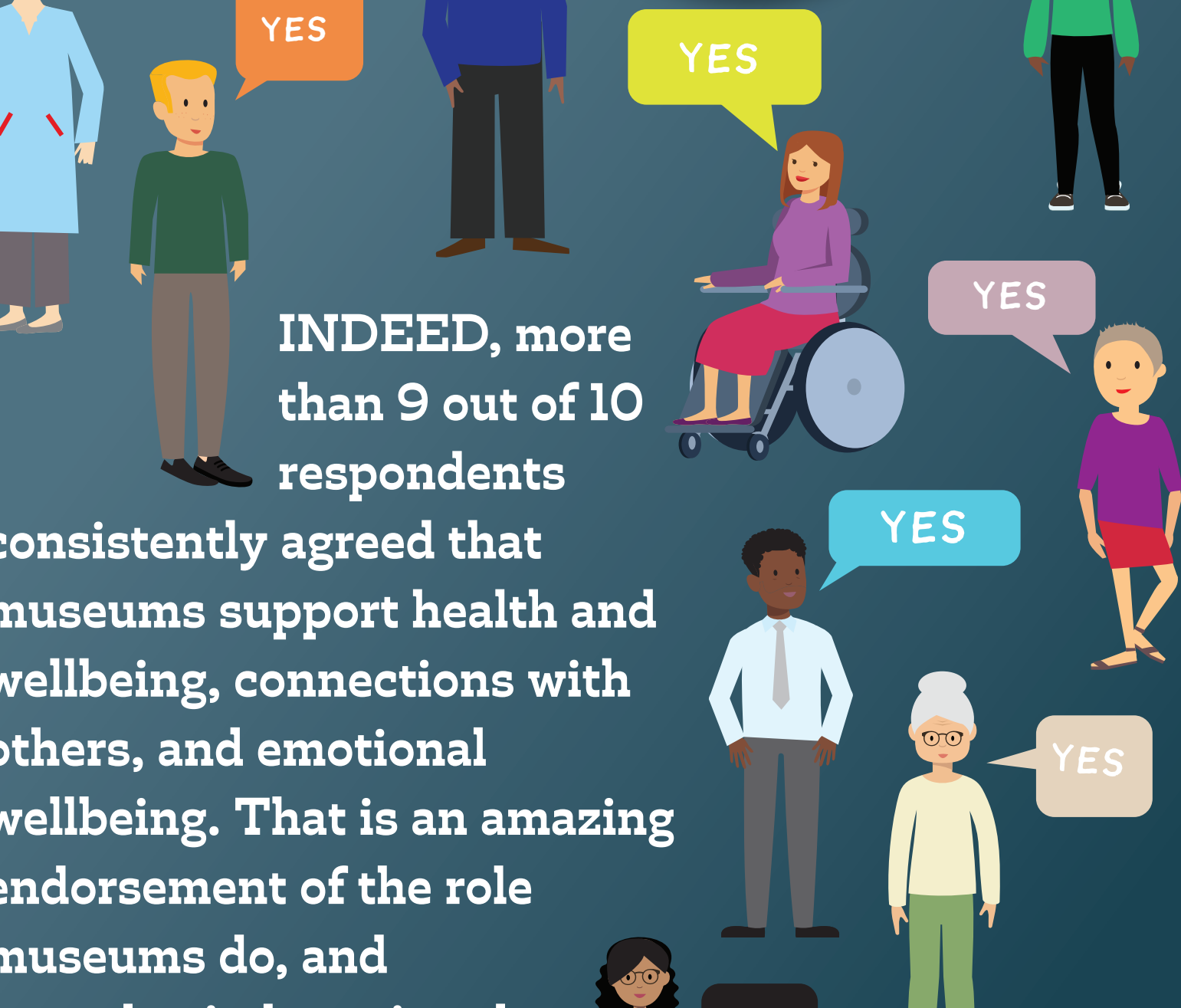
For gender, women were the most enthusiastic respondents across both questions, men the least, and non-binary respondents fell in the middle.

And politically, liberals were the most enthusiastic respondents, moderates in the middle, and conservatives significantly less enthusiastic.

Question 3

What types of museums do you think best support emotional wellbeing? (Choose all that apply.)

■ FREQUENT MUSEUM-GOERS ■ US ADULTS (BROADER POPULATION)



Botanical gardens were the big winner here, with the highest result for both frequent museum-goers and US adults. But art museums and zoos/aquaria were not far behind. Overall, these three types of museums, with their focus on nature and/or beauty (as art is often perceived to be), had an edge over other museum types that focus on science or history.

There is a big takeaway that we haven't yet mentioned, however. And when we say big, we mean **really big.**

Hardly anyone gave flat-out negative responses to these questions.

INDEED, more than 9 out of 10 respondents consistently agreed that museums support health and wellbeing, connections with others, and emotional wellbeing. That is an amazing endorsement of the role museums do, and can, play in boosting the wellbeing of our visitors.

"I love learning about different cultures and I love museums they make me feel love, joy, and alive."

"We're all pretty tired from the demands that come from living through the 5th 'once in a lifetime catastrophic event' ... We could really use some soul-soothing events to distract us from the endlessly draining marathon that has become our daily existence at this point. We know you're tired too. We don't need you to pull out the stops for us. Bingo would be cool. Drinks would be appreciated. Thanks for being great."

"It is my opinion that the world forces us to be less than we are able, while the museums help us garner those connections which can help make us better people. I love museums, because they ensure I do not lose track of the beautiful person in me."

"Museums make an immeasurable positive contribution to the quality of life."

Our next Data Story will continue on this topic, but explore the tension between respite and the challenging content museums often share.

Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Sources include:
 • 2022 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, n = 30,747, 186 museums participating
 • 2022 Broader Population Sampling, n = 1,017
 • 2017 - 2021 Annual Surveys of Museum-Goers

*Data Stories share research about both frequent museum-goers (typically visit multiple museums each year) and the broader population (including casual and non-visitors to museums). See the Purpose and Methodology (Update) Data Story from September 13, 2022 for more information on methodology.

More Data Stories can be found at wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories.

