

SeekHer Shift

2023 REPORT ON BRIDGING THE GAP
IN WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH



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A letter



Can you believe that it's been a full year?

One full year since we released our first annual SeekHer Shift Report on The State of Women's Mental Health; since you trusted us with your experiences, and we worked mightily to put it all into words.

When we first asked for your participation, we asked for your voice and made you a promise: that we'd amplify exactly what you said, and that's just what we did.

We promised you ripples, and we promised change because we knew the power that comes from a collective of vulnerable women.

Are you seeing this, friends?

Brands are listening.

Workplaces are listening.

Culture is listening.

But that same change is happening in our everyday lives, too. From conversations with our partners to conversations in our communities, this language is being used to help us understand our needs and advocate for them.

Your voices did that.

We are in awe of you, and it's with a grateful heart that we present you with our second annual SeekHer Shift Report on Bridging the Gap in Women's Mental Health.

We can't wait to see what comes of it, friends. You are magic, and we are grateful.

to us.

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Introduction

Women are often tasked with caring for their community – we carry the invisible weight of societal expectations while walking a labyrinth of obstacles, without structural support. We are community pillars standing on a foundation that's ill-fitted to our needs. As we struggle to adapt to a world of remote work, quiet quitting, and quiet firing, women continue to face the brunt of systemic inequalities. But it's not only women who suffer, it's our global community; where women thrive, societies thrive, and where they struggle, so does its broader community.

As our world changes, so do the challenges women face. The recent move toward remote work allows many women to flexibly manage their roles as primary caretakers and household managers, yet it also robs them of the time they don't have (1). As microcosms of culture, companies have a unique opportunity to lead the shift toward equality. Our work

has beyond followed us home; office life has crept into our kitchen, living rooms, and bedrooms – pinging and buzzing us on various channels all while we juggle the intersectional challenges of womanhood. Mothers, in particular, are buried under a mountain of roles and tasks that often go unchecked; nearly 70% of mothers reported experiencing feelings of guilt when taking time for themselves (2).

In the workplace, there are unique challenges women face, often tied to gender roles and stereotypes – especially in professional worlds that are traditionally designed for men (3). In one Harvard Business Review survey,

30% of women said they experience burnout often or very often; the percentage was higher for Black women, Latinas, and South Asian women (4).



Beyond personal costs, burnout is bad for business.

Employee burnout leads to decreased productivity and high turnover – especially among top talent. But these outcomes shouldn't be surprising, as over 1 in 3 working women reported they are actively thinking of leaving their current job because of unsupportive environments for work-life balance (2).

This burnout follows women home, where an overburden of unpaid labor (commonly called housework) further taxes their mental, emotional, physical, and social well-being.

In countries around the world, women do more unpaid labor – child and elder care, family management, cooking, and cleaning. That mountain of labor is taking a toll, showing up as

anxiety, depression, retreating from social groups, job exits, and lack of self-care (5).

The importance of structures that support women aren't only important for home and work, but for the broader community as well. According to the United Nations, women's economic empowerment boosts productivity, increases economic diversification, and income equality (6). That empowerment comes not just from pay, but from the structures that guide our daily lives, including urban and office planning to create environments that make women feel safe from bodily and psychological harm (6). Existing systems aren't meeting the needs of women; as a consequence, we aren't fulfilling the potential of society as a whole.

<i>We need time.</i>	Women struggle with having enough time for self-care, often because of the invisible labor they carry that goes unchecked and unrewarded as we attempt to 'do it all'.
<i>We need to define success on our own terms.</i>	The 'superwoman' narrative that dominates hustle culture creates a tension that leads to burnout as we internalize unrealistic expectations to avoid burdening others.
<i>We need to recognize our innate value.</i>	We fear judgment and criticism from others through the internalization of societal pressures. Our well-being is only possible when we recognize these unfair standards, and break the belief we must earn our value.
<i>We need open dialogue.</i>	We must not suffer in silence for fear of burdening others. To truly embrace equity, we have to actively speak up uplift each other and speak up about the necessary changes we must make to truly provide wellness for all.

Figure A. Based on last year's 2022 SeekHer Shift Report, we identified 4 fundamental needs to support women as they internally shift towards better mental health.

In 2022, the SeekHer Foundation launched our first nationwide survey and released our findings in the SeekHer Shift Report on The State of Women's Mental Health (2). Women told us about the little big moments that impacted their well-being – the day-to-day moments that shift their internal worlds. Together, we created a common lexicon on the fundamental needs of what women were voicing: more time for themselves, the freedom to define success on their own terms, support to recognize their innate value, and a safe space to engage in open dialogue with their broader

community ([see Figure A](#)).

Within the scope of womanhood, and the challenges we all face, we highlighted nuances within our various microenvironments – our relationship with motherhood, career, body & beauty standards, and the influence of social media. The inaugural SeekHer Shift Survey allowed us to name the roles of brands, businesses, and communities, and how they can better support the mental health of women in our ecosystems.

Over the past year, we've seen the



impact of SeekHer Shift. Together, our combined stories are changing the way companies think about and act on mental health. As Andrea Ronzani, Vice President of Social Impact for OLLY, told Forbes,

“The SeekHer Shift Report helped us recognize that mental health is something everyone experiences, and to reconsider the way we are talking about mental health as being part of a whole person's health.”

Beyond awareness, the report also provided rich, data-driven insights on the lived experiences of women to drive meaningful change through brand-led social impact campaigns.

As Rachel Moran, Vice President of Purpose for Edelman shared,

“As a consultant for multiple brands on their purpose, I regularly reference the insights from the 2022 SeekHer Shift Report to counsel my clients, and shape their external impact strategy. It's such a gift to have an incredibly rich resource that explores the intersection of complex issues that affect women's mental health in today's world.”

The survey also informed our community-driven work at SeekHer Foundation - inspiring the formation of the #WeHearHer Advocacy Council, a coalition of allies and organizations pledging to advocate for women's

mental health, as well as our community care programs, workshops, and resources supporting women as they navigate competing forces in their work and life so they can redefine success on their own terms (8).

This year, we are looking outwards and seeking to *understand the conversation between our internal and external worlds*. What interactions exist between our personal life, home life, and work life – and how do each influence our mental health and well-being?

Within our survey, we asked *why and how*. Why do so many women turn away from help despite craving support? How does the way we care for ourselves relate to and impact our communities? How can we change the system to better support women? How can we as individuals transform ourselves to work as a collective? How can work cultures better support women to benefit from what women have to offer?

Society often defines and divides us into buckets we did not choose, preventing us from collective action.

As women, we inhabit a multitude of identities – at home, at work, within our communities, and within ourselves.



Likewise, we inhabit intersectional identities born from our backgrounds, both personal and cultural, often outlined by societal measures. The pressure to 'do it all', while looking 'put together' and 'strong' is dysregulating our internal equilibrium. Not only is our mental health negatively affected by gender inequality, but within the intersectionality of womanhood, social and economic inequalities further impact our overall well-being (9).

Our struggle to be the perfect partner, mother, daughter, boss, and employee while juggling the intricacies of our cultural backgrounds and social roles is preventing women and our communities from reaching the next threshold of success. On the other hand, research consistently shows societies that support women benefit from higher levels of productivity and financial stability (10).

With this report, we seek to shift the environments that shape our mental health - our shared struggles, and the nuances that exist within our individuality - while moving towards a communal understanding of what women need.

It's time for a collective redefining of our identity - shared and individual. It's time to move from 'me' to 'we'.

*It's time for a
collective redefining
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*It's time to move
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2

Methodology

Last year's survey was developed with the input of over 100 in-depth interviews with women's mental health & wellness practitioners to qualify recurring themes that impact womanhood. Similar themes segmented our survey design to step women through their reflections across multiple life experiences, including general well-being & self-care, cultural identity and intersectionality, body & beauty ideals, motherhood & partnerships, and career & leadership.

With the goal of unraveling the external environment and cultural factors that influence mental health in mind, this year's SeekHer Shift survey was designed to lean into those themes and *ask why*. Through this process, we formulated the questionnaire to address how women were personally impacted as they interacted within their homes, workplaces, and

communities. The question prompts and survey flow were designed to provide a reflective, inclusive and educational space for women to voice how they were experiencing some of the most pressing issues at the forefront of womanhood today.

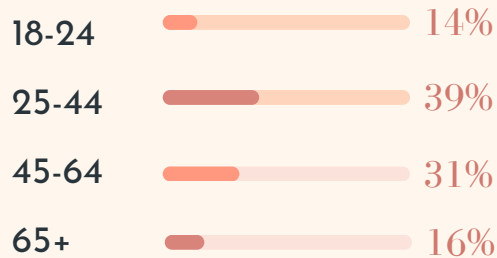
The survey questions were answered through a mixture of single-select, multiple-select, binary, and likert scale responses. Open responses were also made available to women who chose to elaborate on specific experiences, but were not included in the final data analysis. The survey questionnaire was then tested amongst a small group and underwent multiple iterations before it was disseminated through our online community and partner network.

We also partnered with Centiment to conduct a robust online survey of U.S.-based women across all 50 states who

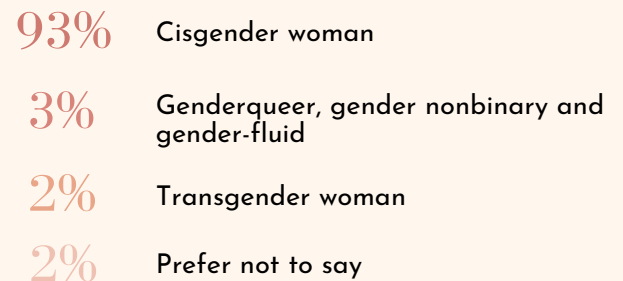
are ages 18 and over. Sampling was performed with a 95% confidence level, with respondents widely represented across a broad range of ages, ethnicities, and current life situations. Additional efforts were made to ensure racial & ethnic representation were

similarly proportional to the current U.S. Census population data. All responses were collected between November 7 to December 9, 2022. After data processing, a total of 1,612 responses were used in our final analysis.

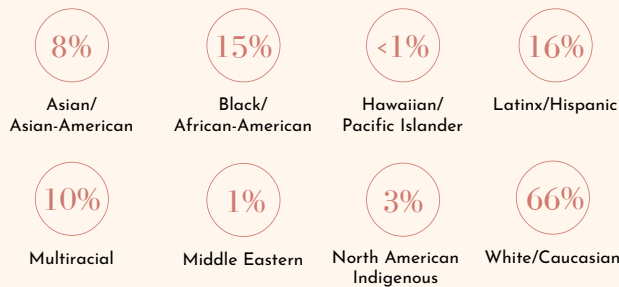
Age



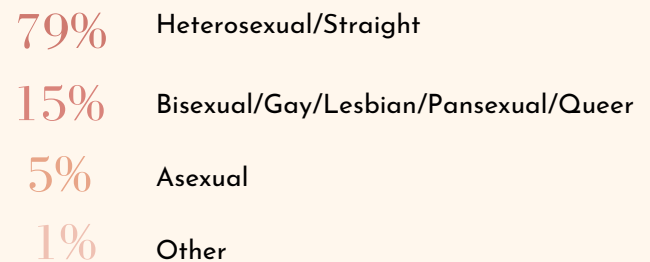
Gender Identity



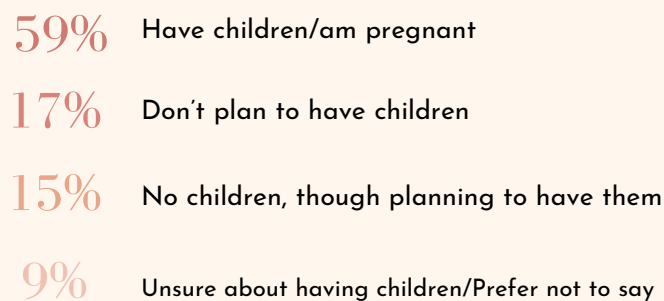
Race & Ethnicity



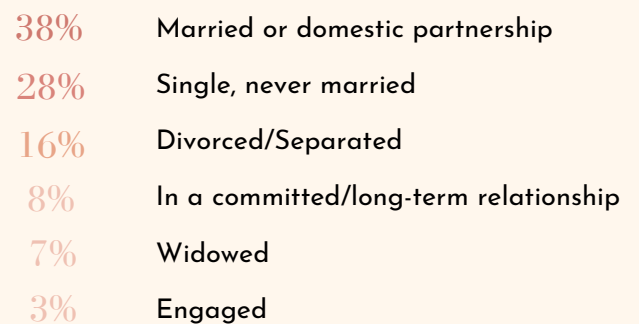
Sexual Orientation



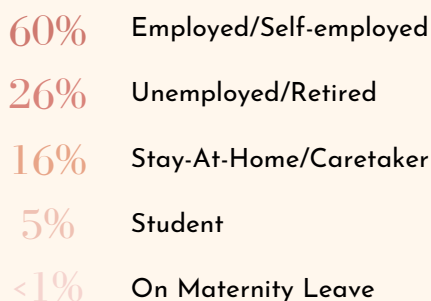
Parental Status



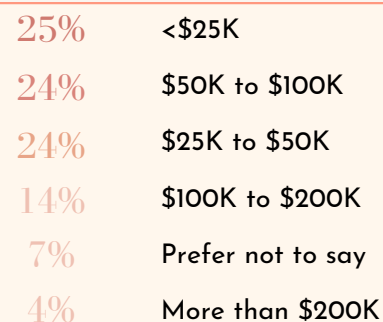
Partner Status



Work Status



Household Income



REVISITING THE *four fundamentals*

In last year's report, we identified 4 fundamental improvements women voiced their inner needs to support their mental health –

More time, open dialogue, recognition of their innate value, and space to redefine success on their terms.

We also found that a predominant theme was loneliness; a feeling women reported throughout their experiences, present in their varied and intersectional roles. For women to feel more valued and supported in their daily lives, they need a bridge between themselves and their communities, coupled with the language to continuously reinstate that support in their many roles.

Our inaugural SeekHer Shift Report helped create a dialogue around these 4

fundamental needs; our path to equity begins when we reclaim what's always and fundamentally been ours. These needs are key to achieving wellness through equity which, while often discussed through financial terms, is likewise tied to the internal values that are central to our belief systems around self-worth and is separate from our net worth.

This year, we took a closer look at the barriers that limit women from self-advocacy to enact on these 4 fundamentals in order to build bridges that create safe, supportive environments.

Before doing so, let's take a closer look at this year's survey responses through the lens of the 4 fundamentals and re-examine the current state of women's mental health.

TIME



Women often struggle with having enough time for self-care, often because of the invisible unpaid labor they carry that goes unchecked and unrewarded in an attempt to 'do it all'. We simply don't have enough time for self-care – women in the U.S. do an average 4.5 hours of unpaid labor while their male counterparts do an

average of 2.8 (9). In last year's inaugural survey, women spoke up to validate this finding; while most recognized the value of self-care, over half said they didn't have time to practice it. Mothers, especially, need time for themselves; yet when they take it, they often struggle with feelings of guilt.

62% of women say they'll wait a week or longer to take time for self-care, with nearly half of them saying they rarely make time for self-care and often forget their own needs.

Last year, women shared their voices on what was happening; while most recognized the value of self-care, over half said they didn't have time to practice it. Mothers, especially, need time for themselves; yet when they take it, they often struggle with feelings of guilt.

In this year's report, women shared that they still have trouble setting boundaries – giving away our time, and along with it, our agency; in fact, 67% of women acknowledge that saying 'no' to doing it all frees them up to saying yes to their own needs.

However, 62% of women say they will wait a week or longer to take time for

self-care, with nearly half of them saying they rarely make time for self-care and often forget their own needs. These findings spotlight the importance of time for women, and their own needs are often deprioritized to juggle competing demands. Women are drowning in the needs of everyone else without addressing their own – and it's not helping anyone.

We're cutting ourselves into pieces and bleeding time; 32% of mothers who feel unsupported report their greatest struggle is never having enough time to care for themselves. When asked what would be most helpful in balancing their priorities and setting boundaries, the top choice for mothers was reclaiming their alone time and practicing self-care.

When we struggle to say 'no', we lose time. When we don't value our own time, we shoulder the mental load and the cost is to our mental health. The time inequity is one that we can actively solve for, reclaiming our agency by prioritizing our most precious resource for ourselves.

What needs to change in order for women to start prioritizing time for their own care and keep their individual needs top of mind?

Data referenced - 3x: How strongly do you feel about this statement: When I say 'no' to carrying the weight of 'doing it all', I can say 'yes' to what I truly want. 3b: How often do you take time to engage in self-care practices that strengthen your emotional and mental well-being? 6e: What have you experienced when realizing you did not have the support you needed in your motherhood journey? 6o: What do you feel would make the biggest difference in rebalancing priorities or setting boundaries in your role as a mother?

OUR INNATE VALUE



Women often tie their value to what they do for others, leading to perfectionism, imposter syndrome, and the illusion of personal flaws based on ideals set forth by social circles, social media, and outdated social norms. In an effort to minimize external judgment and criticism, we condition ourselves to focus on

pleasing those around us. This struggle to recognize our innate value was a common theme in last year's report - nearly half of women struggle to love themselves when they face their flaws and imperfections. We measure our worth and value by our performance across the competing roles we juggle.

46% of women say they believe their productivity and output determine whether they deserve time for self-care.

This year's survey found over half (56%) of women still believe their productivity and 'doing it all' determines their value and worth. Another 46% of women reported believing their productivity and output determine whether they deserve time for self-care.

Women are also still trying to be all for others - and we're doing it alone; 84% of respondents said they minimize their own needs because they don't want to burden others.

Imagine if we carried this weight together, rather than struggling to shoulder the burden of isolated perfectionism alone. How can we value the needs of others, without devaluing our own?

How do we start recognizing these unfair standards and break the belief that we must earn our value, or risk continuing to move through our life starting from a time and energy deficit?

We need support in helping us recognize our own inherent value as human beings, not humans 'doing.'

Data referenced - 3e: I believe my productivity and ability to 'do it all' is a measure of my success and value. 3d: I believe my productivity and output dictate whether I deserve time for self-care. 3c: How often do you minimize or hide your own emotional experiences or keep them to yourself because you don't want to trouble or burden others?





84% of respondents

say they *minimize* their own needs because they don't want to burden others.

SUCCESS ON OUR OWN TERMS



The 'superwoman' narrative that dominates hustle culture creates the misconception that 'doing it all' equals success. In reality, chasing this externally defined image of success prevents us from achieving our own authentic definition of success and well-being.

In last year's survey, women voiced the pressures of meeting unrealistic societal standards related to our appearance, careers, and family roles as a prevalent obstacle in their day-to-day lives. We're expected to do it all - and look good doing it.

The pursuit of perfection within motherhood is a common experience reported by women – nearly 1 in 3 (32%) confirmed that women are setting impossibly high expectations for themselves.

This year's survey indicates we continue to view success through the lens of career, familial roles, and physical appearances; we're balancing the weight of job performance, perfect motherhood, and flawless bodies.

When asked what they believed was most related to their work success and value, women shared their top three factors: *income (44%), receiving praise or positive reviews (34%), and their title or role at work (29%)*. We continue to function in a society that ties individual worth to external constructs of success, as historically defined by capitalist values in a hierarchical system.

The pursuit of perfection within motherhood is a common experience reported by women; 32% set impossibly high expectations for themselves, 28% are fearful of failure and judgment by others, and 28% face self-judgment.

We're in a negative feedback cycle; we fear judgment and criticism of others, which in turn, impacts our own internal expectations and judgment of ourselves.

Regarding body and beauty, women continue to see themselves from the outside in. We're raised under society's gaze, and it shows. 58% of women surveyed described themselves as chronically evaluating their physical appearance – every day or every hour.

When asked what their internalized perceptions of health and beauty are most influenced by, the top responses were family, friends & social circles (50%) and media or social media (39%). It's clear that our social ecosystems and media culture continues to shape and reinforce our beauty ideals and norms.

In all areas, women are highly influenced by the external factors that shape our definition of success, leading to stress & burnout fueled by the internalization of unrealistic expectations in our effort to please the world around us.

How do we start recognizing that our great contribution to our community and future generations comes from our own measure of success - one that is defined by internal drivers rather than external pressures?



Over half (58%)

of women described themselves to *chronically evaluate their physical appearance*, every day or every hour.

OPEN DIALOGUE



To truly embrace equity, we have to acknowledge our inequities while actively uplifting each other and addressing the nuances of struggle within our shared fight. We need open dialogue, but often, we suffer in silence, carrying the weight alone. While many women want to self-advocate and advocate for others, we struggle to begin, unsure of how we

can effectively enter the conversation.

While last year's survey revealed a recognition that breaking the silence around mental health could help challenge and break stigmas, many women remain isolated and suffer alone. Despite allyship being highly regarded and sought, many women were unsure of how to practice it.

71% of women chose emotional support as what they desired the most.

This year's SeekHer Shift survey showed that despite knowing we need support, we still don't ask for it. 1 in 3 (33%) women said the top reason they don't ask for help is because they don't want to burden anyone. When asked what stops them from reaching out to others, the top reason reported (55%) was because it was 'easier to just deal with it myself'.

We continue to feel disconnected within our social environments; when asked if they currently have a supportive social network, over half (58%) of women said they question or struggle to feel connected within their existing social environments, including those who say they have no support at all.

Even as we struggle to ask for support, most of us recognize the importance of an emotional safety net. When asked what helps them feel less alone and better prioritize themselves, 51% say having access to social support systems is most helpful.

When asked what *types of support systems they want more of*, 71% of women chose emotional support as what they desired the most, followed by social support (53%) and structural support (45%).

Our desire for connection is deeper than surface level; our current culture feeds us only on the surface, but we crave deeper emotional connection with people who will hold space for us and allow our authentic selves to have a voice at the table – we desire a higher *quality* of social support.

Augmenting our own voices and creating a safe space for others to do the same is the entry point to sustainable change – it's the language we need to shift the culture to one that supports mental health throughout the community, while recognizing the differences in our lived experiences.

It's clear that women recognize the need to feel seen and heard within their social environments – a social circle alone isn't enough. Being able to emotionally connect with others as our authentic selves is a key element to wellness.

How do we start creating more emotionally-safe spaces where we can all be seen and heard?


Data referenced - 3a: Pick one statement that feels closely related to what prevents you from seeking support. 3f: What stops you from reaching out to others for help or support? 3l: Do you currently have a supportive social environment (e.g. with family, friends, peers)? 3m: What types of support systems do you have access to that help you feel less alone and better able to prioritize yourself? 3n: What types of support systems would you like more of in order to be able to prioritize yourself and your needs?



*"Safety and security don't
just happen, they are the
result of collective consensus
and public investment."*

– NELSON MANDELA

RECOGNIZING THE *barriers*



This year's SeekHer Shift Survey highlighted the role of intersectionality and social constructs in *how* wellness is experienced by individuals: For all of us to be well, environments must be restructured with support systems that meet the intersectional needs of women.

In recognizing that wellness isn't simply a personal endeavor, we are better able to identify the different personal ecosystems that determine each person's unique lived experience and evaluate how each individual interacts with them.

That is, we can move from identifying and judging our internal worlds, and start asking why our experiences happen based on the environments we routinely interact with (*see Figure B*).

Within this, we begin to see why wellness is not one-size fits-all. As we explore the diverse support systems and lived experiences that shape us, the interdependent relationship between our internal and external worlds becomes apparent.

The lack of emotional support in our surrounding environment makes it more difficult to seek help, further contributing to our emotional avoidance and self-isolation.

True equity is acknowledging that we don't all start from the same place, and recognizing that our personal stigma and barriers are often a by-product of our environments and lived experiences.

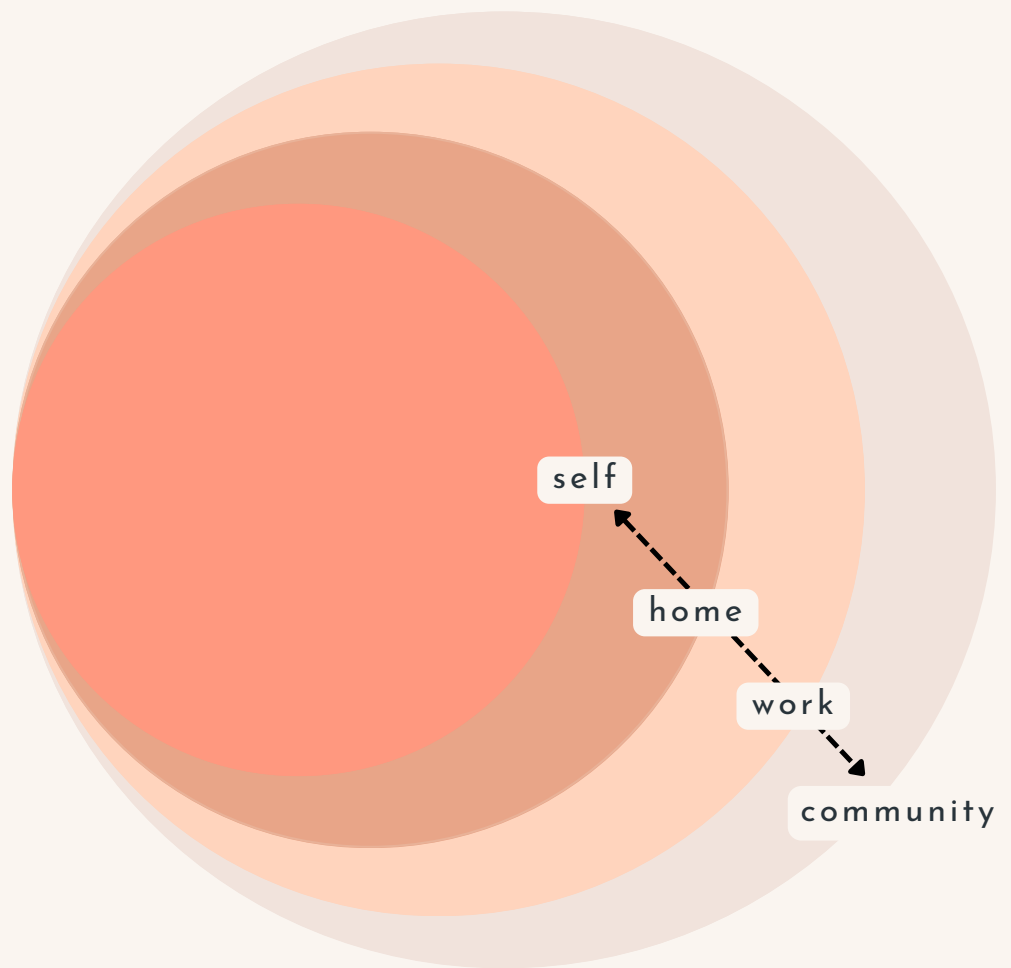


Figure B.

The interplay between each component of our personal ecosystem, as defined by self, home, workplace, and community. They are important to consider as we aim to understand the interconnectedness and influence they have on each other.

This must be part of the conversation in order to achieve wellness for all. Simultaneously, data from our survey identified patterns that emerge across our lived experiences:

Women do not feel safe, struggle to trust, and aren't being seen & heard.

As we challenge the individualistic perception of mental health and well-being and move from 'me' to 'we', we can begin to explore the relationship between agency and self-regulation from an unclouded lens.

This next section of the report aims to help us arrive at a shared language on the barriers impacting our interactions within our personal ecosystem. From this place of communal understanding, we are able to better self-advocate and relate to the world around us. By naming the barriers that limit us from fully thriving in our mental health and well-being, we can better address the inequities limiting us from meeting our four fundamentals, and collectively advocate for *better systems of safety, trust, and belonging for all.*



Before entering into the report's findings on safety, it's important to take a moment to define safety and highlight why it has a profound impact on our well-being.

After all, true safe spaces do not exist - we are never able to fully escape all negative possibilities.

Therefore, safety is not about removing all negative interactions around us; it is about our ability to intentionally respond to our experiences. Safety is encompassed around being in tune with your nervous system, leading each of us to observe, regulate, and comfort, even in the midst of potential fear or uncertainty.

Nearly 1/3 (31.2%) of women self-identify as marginalized based on their identity.

Women's sense of safety is at stake

Only 21% of women report feeling safe - and do not face any experiences that negatively impact their sense of safety, security, and belonging.

54% of women express concern about their physical and psychological safety within their community.

Yet, cultivating safety isn't an individual endeavor; it is a *relational effort* to voice our needs and meaningfully engage with the world around us. It's why self-advocacy plays an essential role *in addition to our self-regulation*.

Safety is clearly needed; only 21% of women report feeling safe - and do not face any negative experiences that impact their sense of safety, security, and belonging. In fact, 54% of women express concern about their physical and psychological safety within their

community. When asked if they identified as someone in a marginalized group, nearly 1/3 (31.2%) of women self-identify as marginalized.

Marginalized populations are defined as "groups and communities that experience discrimination and exclusion because of their social, cultural, economic or political identities". If women identify as marginalized, it indicates they do not feel safe in their skin because of their status or identity.

Data referenced - 5a: Marginalized populations are [defined as groups and communities that experience discrimination and exclusion], because of their social, cultural, economic, or political identities. Do you identify as someone in a marginalized group? 5p: What challenges do you currently face that negatively impact your sense of safety, security, and belonging? 5n: How concerned are you about your sense of physical and psychological safety in your community?

Psychological safety is often the precursor for establishing trust and rapport between team members.

We don't feel safe at work.

Yet nearly $\frac{1}{3}$ (30%) of women report that they have experienced or witnessed biased treatment in the workplace because of their identity.

Within the workplace, psychological safety is often the precursor for establishing trust and rapport between team members, yet we are lacking these characteristics in spades. First defined in 1999 by Harvard Business School Professor Amy Edmonson, psychological safety is described as a group phenomenon: “a climate characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves” (11).

Safety in the workplace is about cultivating an environment where teammates have the ability to meaningfully and authentically engage with others because they feel “safe” enough to be vulnerable, take risks, and be their most authentic selves without fear of negative consequences. Yet, nearly $\frac{1}{3}$ (30%) of women report that they have experienced or witnessed biased treatment in the workplace because of their identity.

Data referenced - 5m: Have you ever experienced or witnessed biased treatment in the workplace because of your identity?

Cultural barriers also present a notable obstacle to one's sense of safety in receiving support even from mental health professionals, which contributes to higher stigmatization within BIPOC (Black, Indigenous & People of Color) communities (12).

Only 14% of mental health professionals identify as BIPOC (13) - a staggering number when we consider that 40% of women say they desire identity-affirming care and prefer to receive support from a mental health professional who shares similar identities, cultural backgrounds, or lived experiences.

The effects of this are clear: according to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, BIPOC communities are less likely to receive a diagnosis, access mental health services, and often receive poorer quality of care. Though it varies across racial groups, BIPOC individuals are 40-70% less likely to receive treatment than their white counterparts (14).

When we take a closer look at the compounding impact of physical and psychological safety, we begin to

shed light on the crisis of loneliness women are facing (15). While women often report feeling overwhelmed and needing help, our experience of safety is a key determinant of how willing we are to ask for and receive support.

Yet, 53% of women's responses indicate they are willing to open up and ask for support without feelings of guilt when they engage with people who make them feel safe.

Existing within a psychologically-safe community frees us of internal guilt and paves the way for positive mental health indicators such as self-compassion and self-regulation.

Transversely, navigating the world from a place of continual concern for our well-being leads us to experience chronic guilt, loneliness, and a belief that our self-worth is dependent on how we carry our mental load alone.

In fact, 63% of women say they feel responsible for carrying 75% to 100% of their challenges on their own. We want to engage with people to feel supported and safe but societally, *we haven't been taught how to support each other, let alone ourselves.*

Data referenced - 5f: Do you prefer to receive support from a mental health professional who shares similar identities, cultural backgrounds, or lived experiences as you? 3u: What would help you to ask for and receive support without guilt? This question is required. 3j: What percentage of your challenges and obstacles do you feel responsible for carrying on your own?



WE STRUGGLE TO *trust*

Community care is instrumental in restoring our sense of safety and repairing the broken, inequitable system we find ourselves in – it's where we'll find healing.

This principle of community care can take various forms, from interpersonal acts of kindness to structured efforts

like neighborhood groups and community-based non-profits (16). As women, self-advocacy is one of our most powerful instruments for community care. In speaking up and voicing our needs, we speak for other women to ensure our collective needs are heard while honoring our nuanced experiences.

By acknowledging that many women do not and cannot have trust in our current systems - ones which have historically not served them - we can start piecing together the gaps in our own self-advocacy and highlight the role that access to resources has in our perception of safety:

We can't feel safe if we don't trust our systems and surroundings.

Among the top reasons that women's safety is threatened include:

feeling isolated when they can't discuss their lived experiences with their social network (33%), fearful of the current state of civil unrest, climate change, and other sociopolitical concerns (31%), lack of trust in existing structural systems such as government, police, schools (24%), feeling unsure of how to discuss their inequitable experiences with others (23%), and experiencing implicit biases that impact their daily life such as pay inequity, job insecurity, and household labor distribution (23%).

What are the top challenges women currently face that negatively impact their sense of safety, security, and belonging?



Social Isolation: I feel isolated when my family, friends, or peers don't know how to effectively engage in discussions about my lived experience.

Fear of Our Future: I am fearful for the future of our community & planet (e.g. civil unrest, climate change, overpopulation)

Lack of Trust In Systems: I don't trust our existing structures and systems (e.g. government, police, community, school).



Can't Discuss Inequities: I am unsure of how to effectively engage in discussions about the inequitable experiences in my life.

Implicit Biases: I experience implicit biases that affect my daily life (e.g. pay inequity, job security, distribution of household/parenting tasks).

Microaggressions: I experience microaggressions from friends, family members, or coworkers.

Data referenced - 5p: What challenges do you currently face that negatively impact your sense of safety, security, and belonging?

Our systems historically have not served women, and highlights the role that access to resources has in our perception of safety.



**We can't
feel safe if
we don't
trust our
surroundings.**

60% of women believe that it's difficult to find resources on health and wellness that are reliable and trustworthy.

Our collective experiences around safety and trust show us why it's important to understand how our social determinants of health impact our well-being (17) - access to care, cultural stigmas, and systemic oppression & prejudices are significant barriers to our overall health and well-

being - all of which cannot be negated even in the presence of our individual efforts to receive mental health support and practice self-care. In fact, *60% of women believe that it's difficult to find resources on health and wellness that are reliable and trustworthy.*

Data referenced - 4f: It is difficult to find resources on health & wellness that are reliable and trustworthy.

44% say that sharing about their experiences with someone they trust is the top contributor of better mental health.

When asked about the top barriers limiting them from accessing reliable resources for their health and well-being, women named financial limitations, (44%), not knowing where to go (37%), being unable to prioritize (30%), feeling intimidated in getting started (29%), and not having enough time (27%).

Access to quality, equitable, compassionate care is not a given for everyone.

Beyond access, however, data does show that women want to build trusting rapport and relationships with others. When women were asked what would improve their self-care and mental health, 44% shared their top choice is wanting to *share their experiences with someone they trust*. Yet, women continue to struggle to find this even within their immediate social circles.

This lack of emotional safety plays into the individualism embedded within our culture (18) and contributes to self-isolation as we lower our expectations for compassion and empathy from our social environments (19). A closer look at the driver of this isolation reveals a necessary discussion.

1/3 (33%) of women's responses indicate *feelings of isolation when their family, friends, or peers don't know how to effectively engage in discussions about their lived experiences*; this was cited as the top barrier that limited women from experiencing safety, security, and belonging.

In an oft-polarizing world, it's clear the systemic structures that are built to separate us further affect our experience with trust. A lack of understanding and acceptance of our diverse lived experiences creates a disproportionate impact that, unless exposed, can't be validated and can't be undone. It is in honoring our humanness that we're able to collectively create safety, trust, and open dialogue, all of which is required to build sustainable communities of care.

Data referenced - 4h: What has limited you from accessing reliable resources for your health & well-being? 3q: What practices do you want to start today that will help you better cultivate self-care? 5p: What challenges do you currently face that negatively impact your sense of safety, security, and belonging?



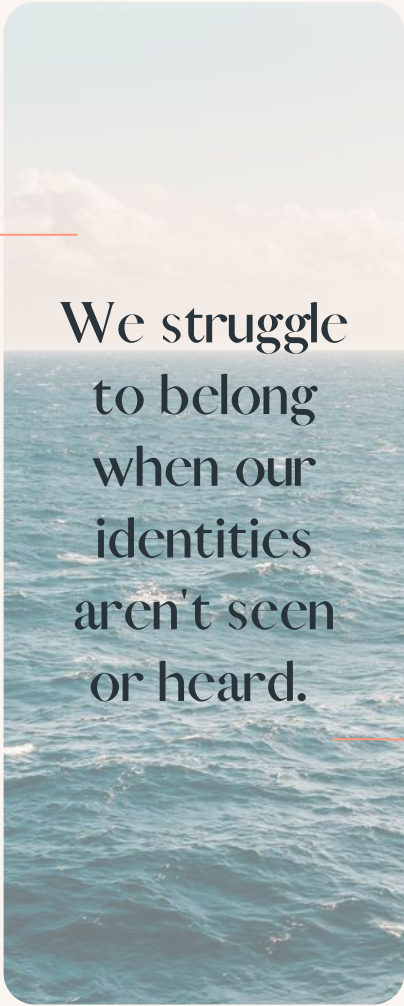
WE AREN'T *seen & heard*

When we dig deeper, we can see that the lack of safety and trust affects us on every level. We don't feel safe in our identities and we don't trust others to understand our struggles. Rather than experiencing the freedom to live authentically, we're boxed in by the labels and roles assigned to us by the external structures we're socialized in.

We conflate our identity with existing societal hierarchies and roles in order to make sense of our experience and whom we are based on the social constructs that exist in our world (20).

We're functioning within the norms and roles that society has defined for us, rather than living as our authentic selves.

Only 21% of women report not struggling with navigating their identities.



**We struggle
to belong
when our
identities
aren't seen
or heard.**

82% of women say they want to live in a world where they can show up as their true selves and feel seen and accepted.

Among the predominant negative experiences that women have faced in regard to their identity, *46% of women's responses show that they don't feel welcomed and 43% say they do not feel seen or heard.*

We do not experience belonging because we are not seen and heard for who we are. Yet our desires for it are palpable: 82% of women said they want to live in a world where they can

show up as their true selves and feel seen and accepted.

Yet this is far from our reality; only 21% of women report *not* struggling with navigating their identities.

The top pressing challenges to our identity are broad, stretching across social class, professional background, familial context, culture, race, religion, and gender, among others.

Data referenced - 5b: Identity development involves a wide range of factors. Which challenges do you most relate to in regard to your identities? 5u: How strongly do you feel about this statement: I want to live in a world where everyone can show up as their real selves and feel truly seen & accepted. 5d: What challenges or struggles have you experienced in regard to your identity?

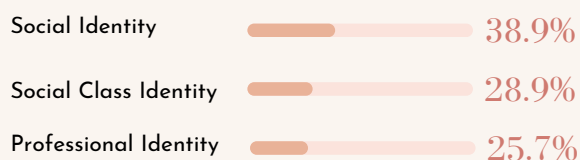
46% of women's responses reflected experiences of judgment and discrimination around their gender, age, or race & ethnicity as a negative factor in their mental health.

The effect of living inauthentically is twofold. Internally, it is a determining factor of our own well-being; 46% of women's responses reflected experiences of judgment and discrimination around their gender, age, or race as a negative factor of their mental health.

Externally, we limit our capacity for connection, despite a deep desire for it. 45% expressed openness to connect with people outside of their community, yet 33% continue to feel isolated even from their own family, friends, and peers. We want to connect but we're unsure how – in our homes, at work, and within our communities.

While we all participate in the shared experience of womanhood, our day-to-day reality is influenced not just by our self-identification, but by society's categorization of us. Our culture, family of origin, and socioeconomic status can all inform how we approach identity and, in turn, how we choose to define ourselves.

What are the top challenges women face in regard to their identities?



Social Identity: I struggle fitting in socially, or feel that my friendships are unstable. I worry about my social circles not accepting of who I truly am.

Social Class Identity: I have negative feelings about my economic status and social position.

Professional Identity: I wonder if the professional path I have chosen aligns with who I really am. I feel that my identity at work is misaligned with my personal identity.



Family Identity: I feel as if my personal values and desires do not match those of my family; I often wonder how to reconcile the two.

Cultural, Ethnic, Racial, or Religious Identity: I face implicit bias due to my cultural, racial ethnic or religious background; I am often presented with challenges to cultivate my sense of identity and belonging.

Gender or Sexual Identity: I face questions about my gender identity and sexual orientation, or am feeling unsure about these aspects of my identity.

Data referenced - 5l: Intersectionality describes the ways in which systems of inequality (based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class, and other forms of discrimination) "intersect" to create unique dynamics and effects. Which of the following experiences has had a negative impact on your mental health? I have experienced discrimination or judgment for my... 5r: What are helpful ways to further explore how your intersectional identities affect how you interact with others? 5p: What challenges do you currently face that negatively impact your sense of safety, security, and belonging?

Nearly 1 in 3 women (32.6%) believe that they must be less of one role in order to fill another role well.

Women, in particular, find themselves feeling pressured to take on various roles at once, with the same intensity and value placed on each one. They carry multiple roles that are demanding of their time and energy – *as a friend (63%), partner or spouse (53%), sibling (53%), and parent (51%)*.

Despite our desire to deeply connect with others, we overextend ourselves in service of fulfilling our multiple roles. Nearly 1 in 3 women (32.6%) believe that they must be less of one role in order to fill another role well. These competing pressures are particularly interesting to note when we consider the common theme of women defining their value in relation to what they do for

others. These compounding external expectations and negation of our nuanced identities can lead us to question our value internally.

In turn, we become defined and validated by the roles we perform and function in.

This bias exists in even the best of intentions. It's worth noting that even in the design of our survey, our team subconsciously excluded 'self' when providing answer options for what roles a woman fills.

Overall, these ideals - that we have to choose which roles to focus on, and that we can't be well trying to do them all - allude to time and sacrifice. They inherently negate our ability to honor our whole selves. We are asked to self-minimize in an effort to "love others"; in reality, we are all robbed of the full potential of loving from a place of wholeness. What we need is to come back to ourselves.



*"Your task is not to seek for love,
but merely to seek and find all
the barriers within yourself that
you have built against it."*

– RUMI

MOVING FROM *me to we*

As we awaken to our interconnectedness as human beings and recognize the relationship between our environment and mental health, we're more equipped to accept this reminder:

We are not broken; our system is broken. And our strength in the midst of it all is worth celebrating.

While we must respect our individual rights and freedom, it's equally important to recognize we're connected in this continuum of life. The quality of that connection is vital as we consider how to move forward synchronously. Our lack of safety, trust, and belonging is perpetuated by internal walls and systemic barriers, and our goal now is to remove them. To do this, we begin by recognizing our actions and how our needs influence each other.

Rather than sustaining the internalization of societal pressures, we must extend and accept invitations to collaborate.

Independence is important, but real change happens within the context of interdependence - one that involves the balance of self and others. We can recognize that we're working to validate and respond to each other's needs in meaningful and actionable ways.

This year's survey focused on measuring our awareness and acknowledging how both our internal and external worlds impact our well-being. By doing so, we can better understand the roles that our intersecting identities play, and reshape the systems that prevent us from personal growth and communal success.

When we lack a sense of safety, trust, and belonging, we struggle in silence and suffer in solitude.

We misguidedly believe that wellness is solely a personal responsibility, when in reality, it's influenced by how our self, home, work, and community environments interact within our personal ecosystem.

If we want to overcome these barriers, we must understand the relationship between the variables that are present throughout an individual's unique experiences, and how they exist within the broader social, cultural, and environmental ecosystems they are in (see Figure C).

By acknowledging that our well-being is not only influenced by our personal choices and actions, we can advocate for better access to resources, social support, and environmental conditions.

Moving from 'me to we' is a necessary shift toward an understanding of the role of safety, trust, and belonging in our mental health, the cultural stigmas impacting how women take action, and the bridges that help us see the humanity in one another.

Here's what women say is needed to rebuild connections within ourselves, and with each other.



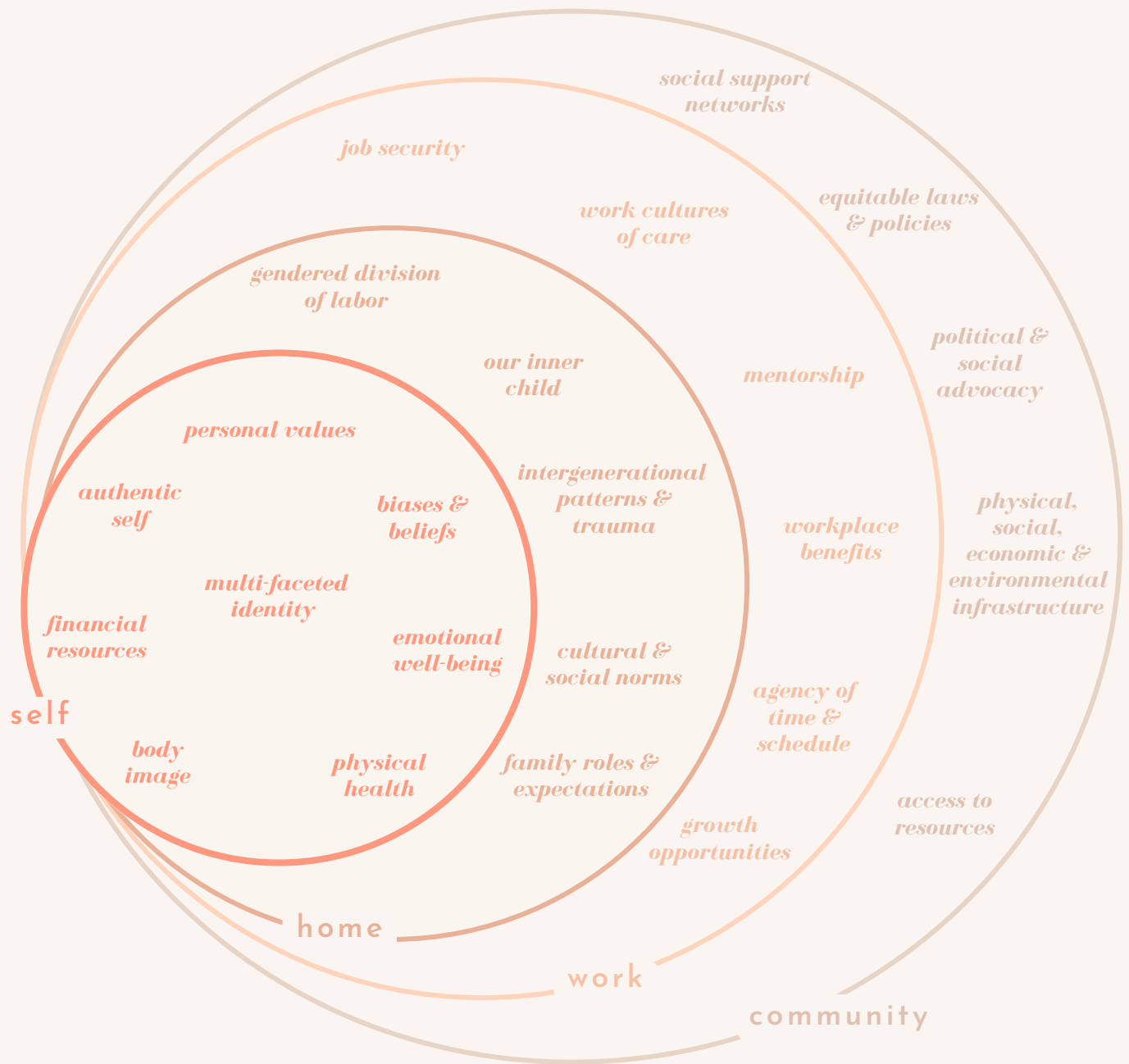


Figure C. Variables that are highly (but not exclusively) present within our personal ecosystem and have an influential impact on our state of mental health and well-being.

seeking WITHIN OURSELVES



Our internal worlds are largely influenced by our external ones; as we work to move from 'me to we', it's vital to understand how society shapes the way women see and value themselves.

Many of our ideals are standards we've learned to internalize. We normalize these ideals as truths when in reality, our environments have

conditioned us to judge ourselves according to these external factors.

We have to start valuing ourselves first because this is what we have agency on. We can't always control circumstances around us, but we can control how we respond to them.

Women can reclaim their power through the following.



We Need To Process Our Internalized Biases & Beliefs.

As society holds women to higher standards, perfectionism is more prevalent in women as a maladaptive response to minimize external judgment and criticism.

Over time, it becomes internalized as a behavior in which the high demands we impose on ourselves are often depleting. We don't feel safe even from ourselves.

When asked what feels difficult regarding taking time to care for themselves when facing a challenge, 33% responded that they have a “hard time loving myself through imperfections”, 30% find it “difficult to be kind or forgiving when facing my flaws”, 26% indicate “all my time and energy goes into caring for others”, and 21% implicate financial or time barriers.

Data referenced - 3g: What feels difficult about taking time to care for yourself when you are facing an obstacle or challenge in life?



While their perceived flaws and imperfections are barriers to caring for themselves, women also recognize it's neither ideal nor sustainable.

How can we change these isolating practices?

44% report that sharing about their experiences with someone they trust can help; speaking positive affirmations (40%) and journaling and writing down their needs (37%) are also supportive

practices that can help women explore and dissect the limiting beliefs that often hold them back.

Emotional processing - whether it be with another person or simply naming and writing down our experience - are clearly powerful first steps towards healing ourselves. Rather than holding it all in, we can cultivate self-care practices that help break the cycles of internalized pain - the ones keeping us in silence and shame.

Data referenced - 3q: What practices do you want to start today that will help you better cultivate self-care?



We Need To Reset Our Expectations With Family.

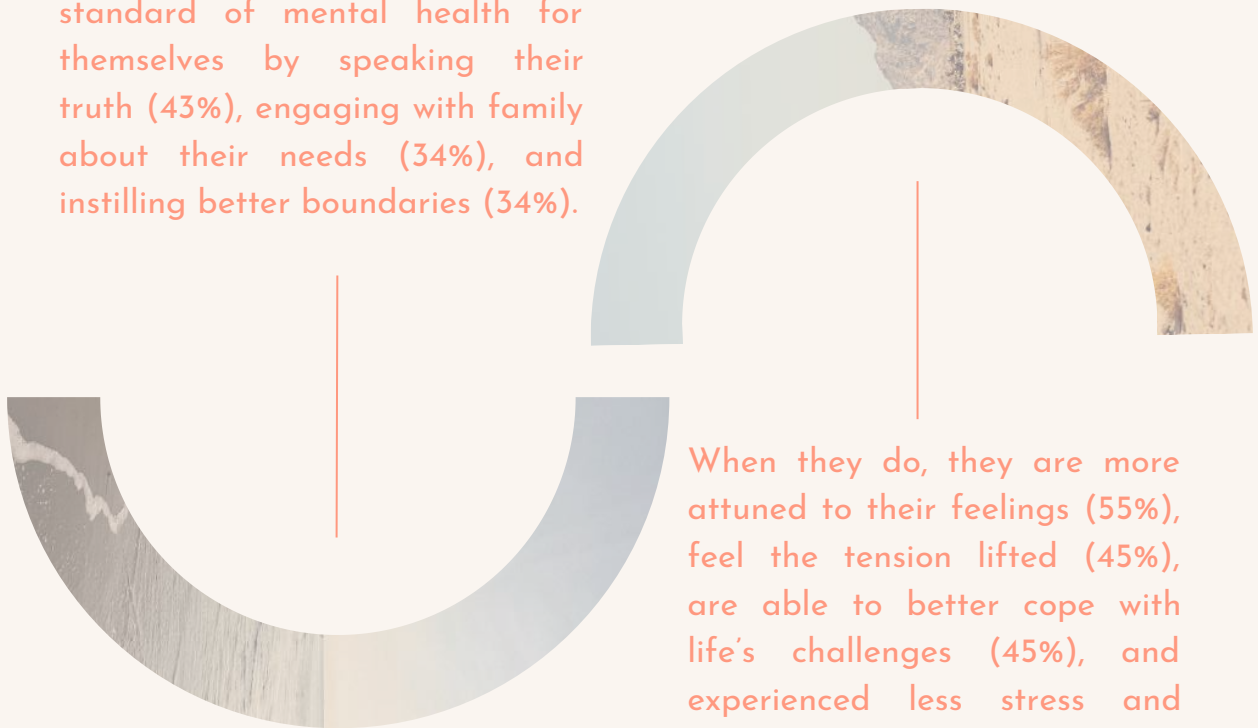
Family pressures and obligations are also obstacles that women face in prioritizing themselves and setting boundaries.

Beyond the personal expectations women place on themselves (45%), the top influential factors keeping women from prioritizing their own needs and setting boundaries include family expectations (43%), fear of disappointing others or negative

consequences (26%), financial anxiety (24%), and feeling guilt or at fault for not meeting the needs of others (22%). Women are experiencing barriers around time, energy and finances, especially when juggling their needs with the needs of others. To bridge the gap within ourselves, we must learn to respect our own boundaries, end the myth of 'doing it all', and reset our beliefs around what makes us valuable and worthy.

Data referenced - 3k: When you try to prioritize your own needs, what has kept you from setting boundaries and saying "no" to other obligations?

Women are ready to reset a new standard of mental health for themselves by speaking their truth (43%), engaging with family about their needs (34%), and instilling better boundaries (34%).



When they do, they are more attuned to their feelings (55%), feel the tension lifted (45%), are able to better cope with life's challenges (45%), and experienced less stress and anger towards themselves and others (39%)

Notably, women recognize the actionable steps that help them reset a new standard of mental health for themselves: *they want to speak their truth (43%), engage with family about their needs (34%), and instill better boundaries (34%).*

Women are also aware that creating healthier boundaries will enhance their mental health and emotional well-being (43%), help them find clarity in what

they want in life (39%), and support their self-esteem (38%).

When they are able to prioritize their emotional and mental health, women are more attuned to their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (55%), feel the tension lifted (45%), are able to better cope with life's challenges (45%), and experience less stress and anger towards themselves and others (39%).

Data referenced - 5g: What do you need right now in order to move forward and set a new standard of mental health for yourself? 3w: Creating healthy boundaries will: 3s: When I prioritize and intentionally take care of my emotional and mental health, I feel...

62% say they found movement — such as walking, exercise & stretching — as their most helpful way to take a moment for themselves.

By recognizing self-care is anything that allows us more time and energy to check in with ourselves, finding wellness becomes more accessible. Among some of the most helpful ways

to take a moment for ourselves is movement such as walking, exercise, or stretching (62%), finding joyful moments such as listening to music or meeting with a friend (51%), and rest & release (e.g. crying, sleep, reading) (50%).

Even in the small moments, when women give back love and time to themselves and value their own care, it extends outwards in how they respond to those around them.

Data referenced - 3r: When we recognize that self-care is anything that allows us more time and energy to check in with ourselves, it starts to feel more accessible. Please select the top 3 options that would help you check in with yourself more.



reclaiming OUR BODIES & BEAUTY



While our physical selves can help tell our stories – they can also be a measure by which society separates us into buckets we’ve not chosen, further isolating us as objects, not subjects within our own lives. If we want to dismantle the harmful messaging of body and beauty, it starts by turning

our focus away from the societal pressures and unrealistic standards that limit women from celebrating their uniqueness.

To get there, the following are important to establish within ourselves and the environments we interact with.



We Need To Be Aware Of Social Pressures.

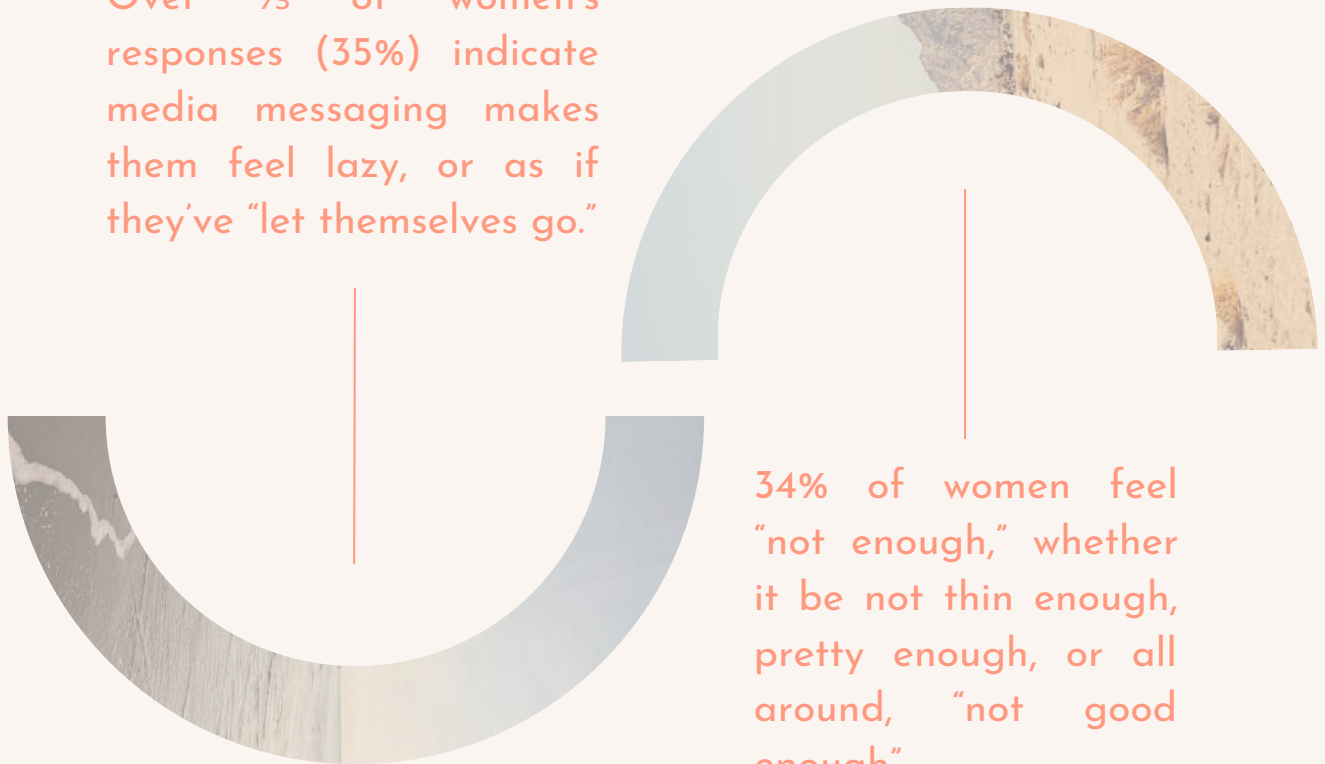
As much as women want to reclaim our identities, we still struggle to overcome generations of body and beauty standards that our broader society has imposed on us. In fact, 58% of women chronically obsess about their physical appearances – such as body size and facial & physical features – every hour or every day. Feeling unsafe in our own skin, we're preoccupied with unrealistic measurements of beauty that take up further time and energy.

Feeling safe within ourselves is not simply an individualistic endeavor: when it comes to our own physical reflections, our closest relationships have the greatest impact; 50% of women say their family, friends, and social network influence their internalized perceptions of health and beauty. This is greater than social media, which 38% of women cited as their 2nd greatest influencer.

When mainstream health & wellness

Data referenced - 4a: How often do you think about or evaluate your physical appearance (e.g. body size, facial & physical features)? 4i: Who or what do you feel most of your internalized perceptions of health and beauty are influenced by? This question is required. * Please select the top 2 options that most resonate with you.

Over $\frac{1}{3}$ of women's responses (35%) indicate media messaging makes them feel lazy, or as if they've "let themselves go."



34% of women feel "not enough," whether it be not thin enough, pretty enough, or all around, "not good enough".

messages negatively influence us, we don't blame the media, we blame ourselves – continuing to internalize societal buckets and definitions of normalized beauty. Over $\frac{1}{3}$ of women's responses (35%) indicate media messaging makes them feel lazy, or as if they've "let themselves go," and 34% of women feel "not enough," whether it be not thin enough, pretty enough, or all around, "not good enough"; society demands perfection and vies for ownership of our bodies.

Society's gender differences in attitudes toward aging also contribute to unrealistic beauty standards and how women experience life as they get older.

While top responses showed mostly positive attitudes around aging – women are embracing aging as a natural part of life (56%), seeing aging as a privilege (41.8%), and embracing their changing physical appearance (40%) – only 14% of responses indicate they are not anxious about aging, citing

Data referenced - 4j: What thoughts and feelings have you experienced as a result of being on social media? 4c: Which of the following statements most describe how you feel towards aging? 4d: I feel anxious about getting older because...

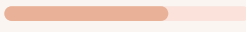
health reasons, finances, and their changing appearance as their top sources of stress. Not only do we fear aging because of insecurities around our appearance, but we lack trust in our systems and infrastructure to care and value us as individuals as we get older.

67% support media and social messaging that affirms women's bodies are deserving of care and respect no matter their size, shape, or capability

In the face of judgment, critique, and biases, women seek empowerment over conformity; 67% say they want media and social messaging to affirm women's bodies deserve care and respect no matter their size, shape, or capability.


By choosing to self-express in a way that's not based on comparison to others (40%), and staying aware of fear tactics and harmful environments of comparison and hierarchy (37%), women are ready to practice healthier self-expression and engagement on social media so they can live more in the present moment.


What messaging do women want to see rewritten on health & well-being?

My body deserves care and respect, no matter what size, shape, or capability.  **66.7%**

Every small change is a step in the right direction.  **65.5%**

Health is multifaceted, it's not all-or-nothing. No one product or solution will make, break, or cure me.  **50.9%**

I want to make health choices driven less by fear & control, and more towards living life fully.  **47.7%**

Health and well-being should be focused on satisfaction, enjoyment and pleasure.  **47.5%**

Control, strict rules, and restrictions limit me from living a healthy life.  **20.6%**

Data referenced - 4d: I feel anxious about getting older because... 4s: What affirming messages can help me rewrite my attitudes on what it means to live a healthy, happy life?



We Need to Address Size Diversity In the Workplace.

With an estimated one-third of our lives spent at work, our workplace environments have an influential impact on our self-image, including how we see and observe our own bodies.

Unfortunately, our bodies are not safe in our workplace environments; 1 in 3 women (33%) report having received inappropriate comments about their body size or appearance in the workplace.

Among the most common experiences of discrimination or objectification at work include feelings of body shame and criticism for their physical appearance (29%) and being objectified by colleagues or managers (e.g. microaggressions, jokes, comments) (28%).

This constant observation on their appearance has a hefty toll, one study found that when in an open-plan office women, but not men, became

Data referenced - 4m: On average, it's been estimated that one-third of our lives is spent at work. As a result, our workplace environments can influence our self-image, including how we see and observe our own bodies. Have you personally experienced receiving inappropriate comments about your body size or appearance in the workplace? 4n: What have you personally experienced at the workplace where you've faced discrimination or objectification of your physical self?

1 in 3 (33%) women report receiving inappropriate comments about their body size or appearance in the workplace.

“hyper-aware of being continuously observed and evaluated.” A lifetime of being judged on our physical appearance affects how we perform at work – why we need more body-inclusive policies and weight-neutral

resources in our workplaces that combat microaggressions, discrimination, and harmful stereotypes that perpetuate judgment and shame (21).

With many larger-bodied employees being subjected to pay discrimination and negative perceptions of their professional capabilities (21), it’s imperative to expand definitions around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and trainings that are inclusive of all body sizes.

Data referenced - 4m: On average, it's been estimated that one-third of our lives is spent at work. As a result, our workplace environments can influence our self-image, including how we see and observe our own bodies. Have you personally experienced receiving inappropriate comments about your body size or appearance in the workplace?





We Need To Address Body Image For Our Youth.

Women also recognize the value of providing support at a young age to shift standards for our next generation. 63% indicated they would want to remind their younger selves that each body is unique and beautiful, and that we're inherently worthy and valuable just as we are.

57% showed a desire to understand and know that our bodies and physical attributes are meant to change over time, and internalize the message that aging and body changes are normal. 55% indicate that providing support in building confidence and working through

Data referenced - 4a: What do you wish your younger self knew that would have made an impact on your self-image as it relates to body & beauty ideals? I wish I knew...

insecurities can help negative body image struggles, while 53% say that reassurance of their inherent value and worth would have been helpful.

This reassurance is particularly important as many school-based nutrition and health education programs are rooted in outdated practices that lead to high rates of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders (22).

Through youth-based resources and school programs that address multiple dimensions of nutrition, physical health,

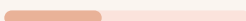
and mental well-being, we can rebuild the next generation's relationship with their bodies and physical self-image. With 73% of women ready to leave behind society's idea of beauty, it's time for *women and girls* to embrace life with more joy and look forward to all that's ahead.

63% indicated they would want to remind their younger selves that each body is unique and beautiful, and that we're inherently worthy and valuable just as we are.

What would have been helpful for women during youth to support their body image?

Support in building my confidence and working through insecurities  55.4%

Reassurance of my inherent value and worth  52.7%

Validation of my fears and insecurities  39.6%

More extensive education in helping me understand what is happening (i.e. why aging and body changes are a natural part of life)  36.6%

Data referenced - 4a: What do you wish your younger self knew that would have made an impact on your self-image as it relates to body & beauty ideals? I wish I knew... 4p: Recall a moment when you were young and you felt that your body was viewed negatively. What would have been helpful for you at that moment? 4t: How strongly do you feel about this statement: I'm ready to leave behind society's idea of beauty, so I can embrace life with more joy and look forward to all that's ahead.

healing OUR HOMES



We are the environments we're born into and raised in, and we continue to recreate them in our present lives. Even when we recognize and acknowledge the boundaries we need, we may not know how to communicate our emotional needs without feelings of shame or guilt – depending on how it was modeled through our familial figures.

Yet when we are able to reexamine our relationship dynamics with our family members – past and present – we are often able to begin the process of healing the root of our deepest fears and insecurities.

To get there, we must take a closer look at the following.



We Need To Heal Our Inner Child.

Home is meant to be a sanctuary, but more than half of women (59%) say they don't often feel supported by their family when discussing their mental health. *63% of women say mental health and well-being were never modeled by their family*, with 59% saying they either do not feel supported or feel supported by only certain family members when speaking about their mental health.

As we continue to struggle with openly discussing our mental health and wellness even with those we're closest with, our family and upbringing often play a significant role.

Among the barriers keeping women from opening up the dialogue with their families?

Data referenced - 5j: Do you currently feel supported in speaking openly about mental health with your family? 5i: Growing up, were topics of mental wellness and self-care modeled or discussed in your family?

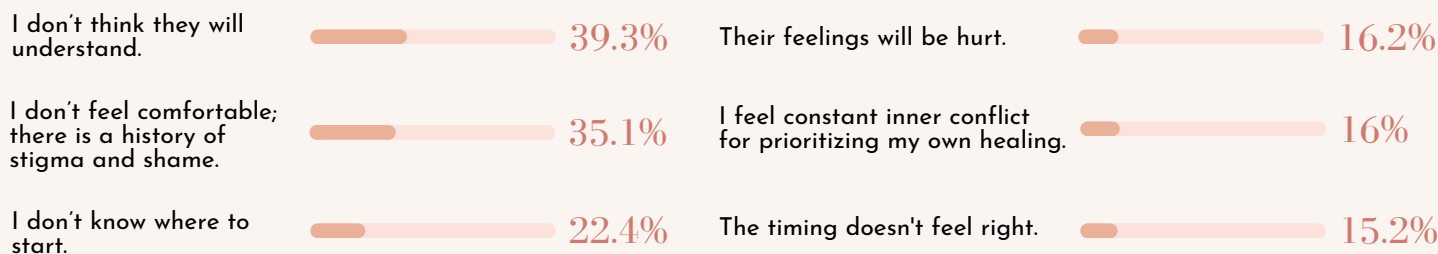
"I don't think they will understand" (39%) and "I don't feel comfortable; there is a history of stigma and shame" (35%) as the top 2 reasons demonstrate a lack of safety and trust in their ability to have productive conversations with loved ones.

While it's clear that our family dynamics in the present can impact our mental health, we must acknowledge the role that our upbringing and intergenerational trauma often play within these interactions. Intergenerational trauma is defined as "trauma that is passed from a trauma survivor to their descendants", which can be the result of abuse as a child or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) as well as forms of oppression, including racial trauma and systemic oppression (23).

It's imperative to seek practices that help us to reparent ourselves and re-establish our inner child needs that weren't met in our upbringing. Healing the inner child creates an opportunity to practice self-compassion to rebuild a safer, more secure inner environment that our younger selves always wanted (24).

These experiences from our upbringing are passed down, modeled, and shared even at work. *Nearly half (49%) of women say cultural background and family history influence how they show up in their careers* - which can show up as a challenged ability to set and maintain boundaries (23%), struggles with speaking up on their own needs and limits (21%), and feelings of inadequacy and like an 'imposter' (20%).

What has prevented women from opening up about mental health with family?



Data referenced - 5k: Which of the following has prevented you from openly engaging in dialogue with your family about mental health? 7f: How has your cultural background or family history affected your professional work performance? 7e: Our work experience & behaviors can be strongly influenced by our upbringing and background. How does the following statement resonate with you: My cultural background and family history impact how I show up in my career and in the workplace...

Nearly half (49%) of women say cultural background and family history influence how they show up in their careers.

Acknowledging that our inner child shows up – whether in or outside of the home – means taking a closer look at how our past informs our current experiences and behaviors and how we can choose to rewrite it.

Ultimately, this can help us recognize how familial constraints and pressures have conditioned us to acquiesce and please others, and start to see that we can redefine our version of success, separate from the expectations of others. These factors can all determine how we show up as our full selves in the workplace without fear of negative consequences and lead from a place of mutual respect, reciprocity, and openness.

Data referenced - 7e: Our work experience & behaviors can be strongly influenced by our upbringing and background. How does the following statement resonate with you: My cultural background and family history impact how I show up in my career and in the workplace...





We Need To Break The Gender Stereotypes of Motherhood & Partnerships.

Measurements of success for women at home also continue to be interlocked with ideas and obligations of motherhood, marriage, and domestic partnerships, and the roles that define those experiences. Women report carrying the majority of domestic work in their homes; nearly half (47%) feel responsible for carrying 75% to 100% of the load with household or domestic labor.

Of those who identify as a parent or domestic partner, *59% say they don't often feel supported in working through their feelings of being overwhelmed in those roles.* This speaks to the fact that parenthood, marriage, and domestic partnerships are deeply gendered in our society; our ideals of gender roles in motherhood and domestic partnerships continue to impact

Data referenced - 6i: What percentage of the household or domestic labor do you feel responsible for carrying on your own? 6j: How often have you felt supported in working through your feelings of overwhelm as a parent and domestic partner?

expectations – both from ourselves and from our partners. 55% of responses indicate family history is the strongest influence on their personal expectations as a parent and partner, highlighting the impact of our upbringing on our belief systems around domestic roles.

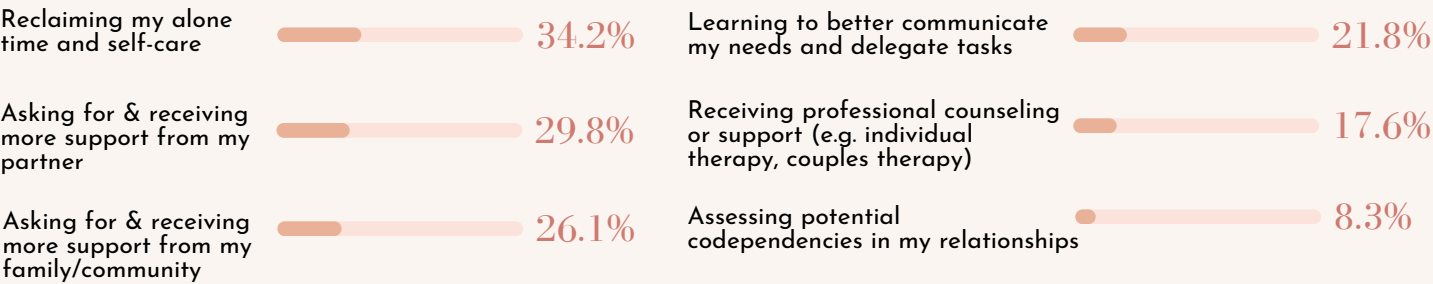
Of their family members, 54% say their mothers and mother figures were the strongest influence on their expectations as a parent and partner.

This points to both an opportunity and responsibility of how we model motherhood and domestic partnerships for the next generation to break unhelpful

cycles that deepen gender inequalities. Together, we can create a new normal – one in which those we’re closest with will benefit alongside us as our home life and families thrive. To get there, mothers in particular need more *boundaries, communication, and connection* to help them nurture their full selves.

While 34% say that reclaiming time is their most desirable change to help them prioritize their boundaries, asking for and receiving support from their partners (30%) was recognized as the second most important factor. When we learn to effectively communicate our need for support with our partners, we strengthen our relationships with them, ourselves and our families.

What makes the biggest difference in helping mothers reprioritize themselves?



Data referenced - 6k: Which do you feel are the strongest influences on your expectations as a parent and domestic partner? 6g: Motherhood is deeply gendered in our society. Which factors have influenced your ideals of gender roles in motherhood & domestic partnerships? 6o: What do you feel would make the biggest difference in rebalancing priorities or setting boundaries in your role as a mother?

Community support remains essential; in particular for mothers, 37% recognize the importance of having support from friends who have children or have a similar motherhood journey, and rate it as more helpful than support from their own partner (32%) and taking time for self-care or checking in with themselves (20%).

As mothers and partners, we don't have the minutes or the hours to 'do it all' –

we must start rebuilding our environment, strengthening our partner communications, and connecting with a community that understands our lived experiences. We don't have to process it all alone, and we can break how we model gender stereotypes for the next generation – gender equity starts in the home.

Data referenced - 7m: As a mother, which of the following has been helpful in your journey?



activating WORK CULTURES OF CARE



While more progress is needed to achieve equal representation within leadership positions (25), one of the most notable roles for women in contemporary society is that of the working professional. Women's participation in the workforce is not only important for our own personal and professional development, but also has significant economic benefits.

Research consistently shows that increasing women's representation in the workforce can lead to higher productivity, innovation, and profitability; closing the gender gap in the workforce could add \$28T to the global GDP (26). However, women continue to carry a disproportionate load of unpaid domestic labor (9) and are tasked with the brunt of caretaking.



Together, these invisible roles increase work-life tensions that negatively impact the well-being of women at the deepest levels. While the mental health struggles that women uniquely carry are often tied to gender-based biases and discrimination, they are a symptom of a problematic system that similarly limits the well-being and success of those whose identities have been marginalized.

To support the mental health of all employees, businesses must recognize that mental health is not solely an individual concern. Rather, the holistic well-being of employees is an organizational responsibility. When employees across all identities feel seen,

heard, and encouraged to be their authentic selves, their performance, and thus the company's performance, improves.

Before diving into this next section, it's important to acknowledge that viewing women as a homogeneous group can overlook both subtle and significant differences (27); the challenges faced by white women in the workplace may not be comparable to those encountered by Black women, Latinas, and South Asian women (among other marginalized identities within the scope of womanhood) who report burnout – along with poor mental and physical health – at higher rates than their white counterparts (4).

While our data doesn't specifically address these differences in detail, it's essential to acknowledge the well-established disparities that exist and are keeping women of color behind in the workplace.

Additionally, it's necessary to acknowledge that not all industries are equal; different industries have varying challenges and considerations when it comes to mental health and well-being in the workplace. For example, industries that require more in-person or hands-on work - such as manufacturing, transportation, and construction vs. white-collar and office-based professional industries - potentially experience more time constrictions and varying access to resources.

In some instances, workers with higher-paying positions or high-status professions may have greater access to comprehensive benefits packages that include resources, accommodations, and support for mental health concerns. Recognizing these differences is important in order to develop targeted approaches and strategies for promoting mental health and well-being across different industries.

Focusing on workplaces and employers also presents a chance to drive positive change from our closer communities, expanding outwards to our larger communities, society, and global world.



According to the 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer report, businesses are now viewed globally by the public as more trustworthy and effective drivers of positive social change than government or media (28).

This signifies the influential role and responsibility that companies have within their sphere of influence, starting with their employees and emphasizes the increasing number of

employees who see employers as societal leaders with whom they can align their values and collaborate with to construct a brighter future for themselves and the world.

To accomplish this shift, we'll need support from the systems and institutions that help define us – as a microcosm of culture, companies have the unique and privileged opportunity to lead the way from 'me to we' and help break down the power structures and capitalistic systems of hierarchy & comparison that divide us.



1. AWARENESS

- Open communication & connection
- Pro-active check-ins
- Purpose & values



3. ACCOUNTABILITY

- Redefine accountability
- Build an inclusive benefits package
- Commit to routine assessments
- Move from performative to normative
- Focus on people first

2. ALIGNMENT

- Rewriting power dynamics
- Evaluating actions & inactions
- Offer flexible time management
- Engage through career growth, peer support, & mentorship opportunities
- Listen and lead with openness
- Cultivate community support

Awareness, Alignment, Accountability.

The pursuit of transformation isn't intended as a linear roadmap, but rather a cyclical process of iteration that allows us to assess situations, identify gaps and misalignments, and hold ourselves accountable for making the necessary adjustments.

Continual introspection, therefore, needs to be a permanent fixture within organizations.

Here are the necessary steps to activate sustainable work cultures of care.



Step 1: We Need To Build Individual & Organizational Awareness.

Our unique lived experiences can manifest in how we show up at work and engage in communication that can contribute to a collaborative work environment. It then becomes crucial to develop awareness of both individual and organizational perceptions of safety, trust, and belonging in order to collaborate effectively with our peers.

To do this, we begin by examining how our internal biases influence our preconceptions, assumptions, limiting beliefs, and restrictive narratives about ourselves and others, across all areas of our lives - including family, community, society, and the world. It also entails examining privilege (and its distribution) to better understand how external biases favor or disadvantage

particular groups based on their identity. Individuals, including managers and employees, must recognize how their intersectional experiences affect their work life and how they are treated in the workplace.

Women are especially aware of and affected by social identity and status which can negatively impact their mental health and well-being. As we aim to fit in socially while juggling familial responsibilities, work obligations, and personal ambitions, we continue to face obstacles to our fundamental rights, such as bodily safety.

Here are 3 focus areas in which workplaces can establish individual and organizational awareness.

Open communication & connection

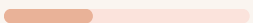
Workplaces can support their teams in feeling safe, seen, and supported by establishing practices that encourage open communication and connection between peers. Notably, though 48% report having a space to connect with peers at work, *62% of working women still indicate their workplaces lack safe spaces where they can routinely open up about juggling their personal and professional lives.*

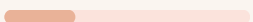
Despite having access to social connections in the workplace, women don't feel comfortable opening up. When asked what types of practices would be most helpful in instilling safety and belonging in workplace cultures, the

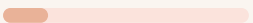
top choices were: an emphasis on a culture of appreciation (36%); valuing learning and mistakes as an opportunity for growth (34%); the creation of a formal review process that separates career management from work management (18%); and mentorship opportunities for growth and development (16%).

When organizations take the time to ensure work efforts are recognized and valued, encourage "failing" as part of growth, and create opportunities to support career advancement, it creates a more inclusive, supportive, and productive workplace that meets the needs of all employees.

What practices are most helpful in instilling safety & belonging at work?

Show Appreciation  36.2%

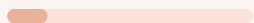
Growth Through Learning  28.9%

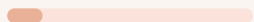
Separate Review Process  18.3%

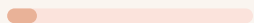
Show Appreciation: Emphasis on a culture of appreciation, where the organization takes time to ensure that people's work and efforts are valued

Growth Through Learning: Values learning & ongoing growth, where "failing well" is encouraged and mistakes offer opportunities for growth

Separate Review Process: The creation of a formal review process that separates my career management from my work management

Mentorship Program  16.4%

Safe Spaces of Connection  14.4%

Work-Life Integration  12.1%

Mentorship Program: The development of an organizational program that provides mentorship opportunities for growth and development

Safe Spaces of Connection: The creation and support of safe spaces that invite mentorship, authenticity, and compassion

Work-Life Integration: Build a culture that welcomes the blending of work and home

Data referenced - 7j: Do you feel like you have safe spaces where you can connect with peers at work? (e.g. ERG or affinity group, mentors, team meetings, team-building activities?) 7k: My current workplace or place of employment creates a safe place to openly discuss juggling both my personal and professional life. 7x: What types of practices would be most helpful in instilling safety and belonging in workplace cultures?

Pro-active check-ins

To bring well-being into the workplace, organizations must not only acknowledge that it's intertwined in our experience of safety, trust, and belonging; they must uphold an environment that values every individual's personal awareness of their lived experience. Organizations can formalize routine check-ins and 'stay interviews' to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their employees' engagement and satisfaction levels, while simultaneously helping employees feel validated and seen.

By taking a proactive approach to measuring employee well-being and using its gained insights to make targeted improvements, leaders can create a significant positive impact on their

workplace culture, employee satisfaction, and business outcomes. Top responses from women indicated a desire for an open-door policy (e.g. employers are open and safe for employee questions, complaints, suggestions, and challenges) (40%), having routine check-in's about their general well-being and life circumstances (31%), and demonstrating compassion and understanding when personal or professional struggles come up (28%). It's time to stop checking our feelings at the door when we show up at work.

Because how we feel at work matters - we are human beings with emotions that inevitably impact all aspects of our lives.

What are ways that a workplace help women feel seen & heard?

Open-door policy 40.1%

Checking in 31.4%

Showing Compassion 28%

Open-door policy: Employers are open and safe for employee questions, complaints, suggestions, and challenges

Checking In: Check-in's about my general well-being and life circumstances

Showing Compassion: Demonstrates compassion and understanding when personal or professional struggles come up

Personalized Feedback 16.9%

Using Correct Pronouns 14.5%

Offers A Safe Space 14%

Personalized Feedback: Specific encouragement around my strengths and gentle transparency around my weaknesses

Using Correct Pronouns: Shows care and respect for one's gender identity so they feel seen and affirmed

Offers A Safe Space: Offers a safe space for me to be true to my authentic values

Purpose & values

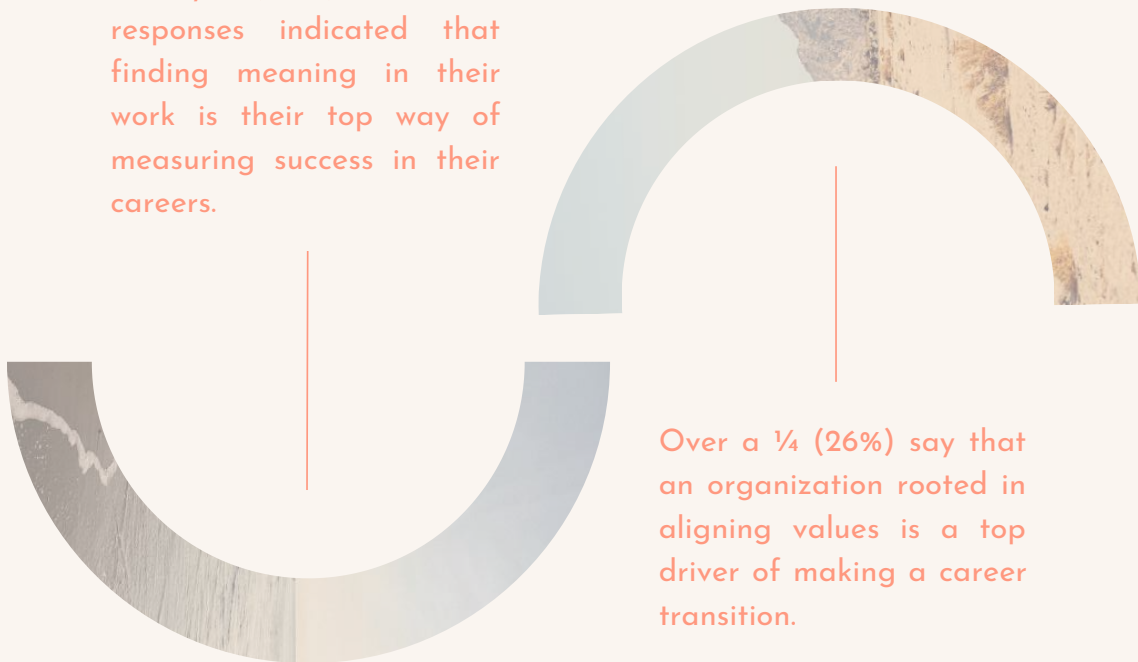
In addition to supporting individual employee's awareness, organizations must also conduct internal evaluations to improve themselves. Culture consists of a set of values and beliefs that shape our behaviors - a way of life that informs how a group of people will interact and take action towards a common goal.

Therefore, it is imperative for organizations to establish a set of fundamental values and transform their cultures by reevaluating how their

organizations are benefiting people, purpose, and profit (29).

Women highly value purpose-driven work; nearly **1/3** (30%) of women's responses indicated that finding meaning in their work is their top way of measuring success in their careers. Aside from better financial compensation (47%) and a culture of compassion and openness (33%), over a 1/4 (26%) say that an organization rooted in aligning values is a top factor in making a career transition.

Nearly 1/3 (30%) of women's responses indicated that finding meaning in their work is their top way of measuring success in their careers.



Data referenced - 7q: In order to define success on our terms in career, we must first do this for our lives. What is one way that you know you are successful? 7r: What is most compelling when making a career transition?

Organizations can make their values count by introspectively revisiting their mission, vision, and values, while acknowledging that such statements “must be owned and actualized by the organization as a community” (30). This recognition of an organization as a “community” allows the company to actively engage and advocate for their people’s actual needs. After all, values are only brought to life through actions, decisions, and behaviors. It begins through an exploration of the shared belief system driving an organization, and making concerted efforts to support its employees through those beliefs (31).

In addition to seeking out diverse perspectives and engaging in difficult conversations, bringing values to life requires a deeper commitment to action. Awareness has to begin at the organizational level, starting with clarity of their values and how they want to contribute to a better society.

They must learn to address, own and instill these shared values to better support people in their sense of safety and belonging – beginning with their own employees.





Step 2: We Need To Bridge the Alignment Gap.

While awareness helps with measuring a baseline for work well-being, highlights organizational strengths, and establishes a starting point of communication, it illuminates the misalignments between the organization and individual that require intentional action-taking.

The alignment gap in workplace culture refers to the differences in values, beliefs, and behaviors between employees and the organization (32).

By taking time to recognize the necessary steps, we can find ways to repair and bridge relationships, whether it's peer-to-peer or a manager with their team. Most importantly, alignment allows individuals and organizations to live into their integrity. It's not a matter of having it perfect to start with (because nothing ever is), it's about making efforts to amend areas in need of support.

In some cases, it requires a deeper effort to repair when we see there is harm – such as the lack of psychological safety or cultural humility – within the workplace environment.

Once the organizational culture is laid out and communicated clearly to all employees, it's important to start by assessing employees' sense of safety and support in their well-being by asking themselves:

- *How do we meet each other where we're at?*
- *Are we effectively making resources accessible and encouraging their use?*
- *Are there opportunities and safe spaces to listen to and acknowledge each other's experiences?*

Here are the steps that organizations can take to answer those questions and realign with women on their teams.

Rewriting power dynamics

Recognizing and comprehending power dynamics and hierarchy between employers and employees are frequently disregarded and undervalued. It's important to distinguish the nuances within the definition of power, and how it can translate to a workplace environment in the form of authority and influence (33).

Acknowledging and examining how identities and lived experiences create inequalities, as well as analyzing power dynamics within leadership, management, and employees is crucial in promoting a thriving culture that's built on trust and empowerment.

Additionally, naming which perspectives come from privilege and bias is an important aspect of promoting equity and inclusion, especially towards those who identify as BIPOC and women who are juggling caregiving with work demands (34). These groups have historically faced systemic barriers and discrimination that

have limited their opportunities and experiences, and therefore have valuable perspectives to offer on diversity and inclusion.

To reinforce trust and empowerment in the workplace, women say that a culture emphasizing the following is desired: welcoming and judgment-free spaces (39%), keeping commitments (28%), getting to know each other personally outside of work (27%), recognizing the humanity in others (25%), redefining success outside of productivity and output (18%), and being called in and invited to share their voice (16%).

All too often, power in the workplace is depicted through a narrow lens centered around dominance, force, and coercion that's primarily motivated through fear and control. Organizations can seek to rewrite the way power is manifested through a lens of trust and empowerment of their employees.

How do women want workplaces to cultivate more trust & empowerment?



Data referenced - 7u: What are helpful ways to cultivate trust and empowerment in the workplace?

Evaluating actions & inactions

In order to bridge the alignment gap, it's important for leadership and management teams to re-examine their biases and beliefs, set aside their egos and personal agendas, and evaluate how their actions impact the psychological safety of women (and those with marginalized identities) based on their unique lived experiences.

Women are often living in a culture of fear when they don't meet the demands of their employers – ranging from career penalties, passive-aggressiveness from colleagues, or disparaging comments (35). Leaders and managers can review their actions by asking questions such as:

- Are we equipping managers with the necessary training to identify and provide **reassurance, empathy, and support** during personal challenges?

- How are holding individuals accountable for **non-inclusive behaviors that create an unsafe environment for others**?
- Do our workplace goals and deadlines result from manufactured urgency, or are we allowing space for **flexibility and collaboration**?
- Are our policies regarding promotions **biased towards specific individuals or actions**?

To foster a culture of safety that encourages safety and authenticity, women recognize the following to be the most helpful: validation and praise of their performance (36%), asking for their feedback (30%), transparency on growth opportunities (25%), and being invited to the table (21%). When women are celebrated for their wins and given opportunities to progress without penalty for leading a life outside of work, organizations win too.

How can workplaces effectively encourage safety and authenticity in women?



Data referenced - 7n: What are ways that my workplace encourages and helps me feel safe as my authentic self?

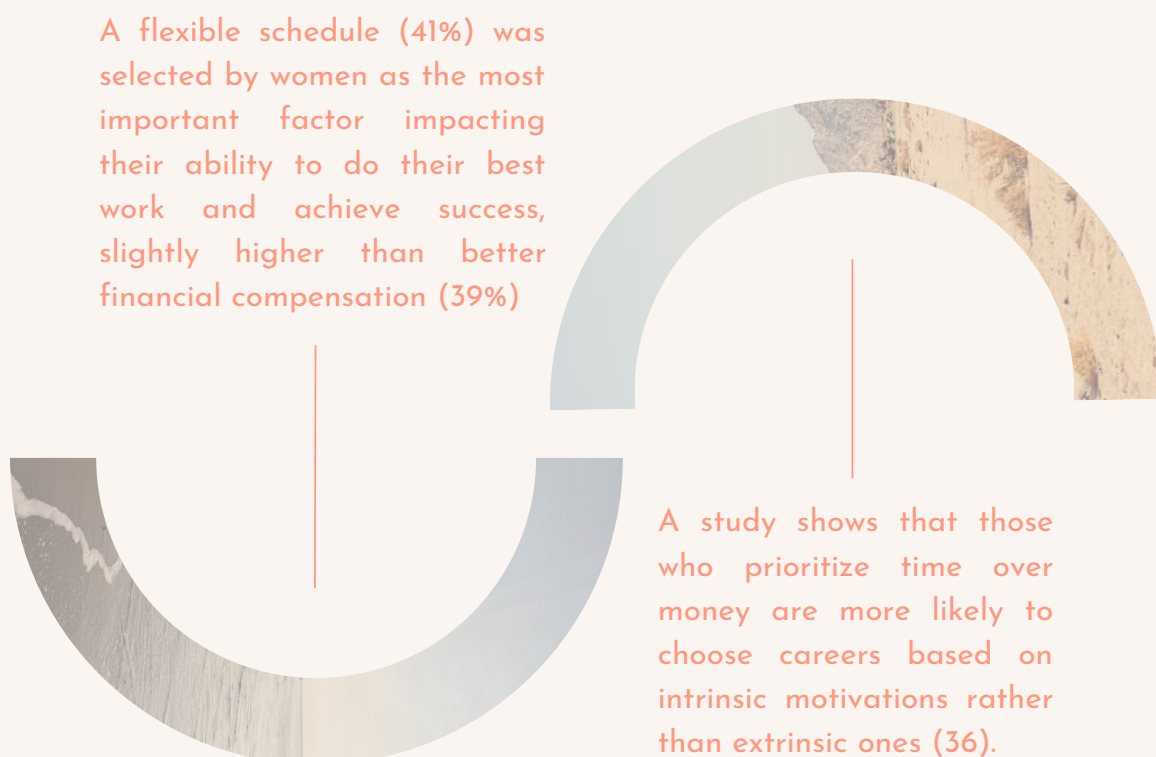
Offer flexible time management

Women are well aware of what they need to thrive, and it's imperative for organizations to listen and give them the autonomy and support they're seeking. A flexible schedule (41%) was indicated as the most important factor that impacts their ability to do their best work and achieve success, slightly higher than better financial compensation (39%). It's noteworthy to mention that one study found that people who prioritize time over money are more likely to choose careers based on intrinsic motivations rather than extrinsic ones (36).

What does flexibility look like? Having agency over one's time can be practiced through remote work options, flexible schedules, as well as managers who know how to recognize and address manufactured urgency with their teams.

Is there freedom in deadlines and goals? Are there alternate routes when working towards a solution?

Though it may not always be practical depending on the industry, flexibility is crucial in creating a more collaborative environment for success.



Engage through career growth, peer support, & mentorship opportunities

When women receive support for career growth and have access to mentorship and peer-based groups, their engagement leads to success that ultimately benefits the organizations they work for. Women feel most connected to their impact and success when they have opportunities to learn and grow their knowledge (47%), feel proficient at problem-solving (34%), provide a supportive ear to their colleagues (33%), and see the positive impact they have on the world through their work (32%).

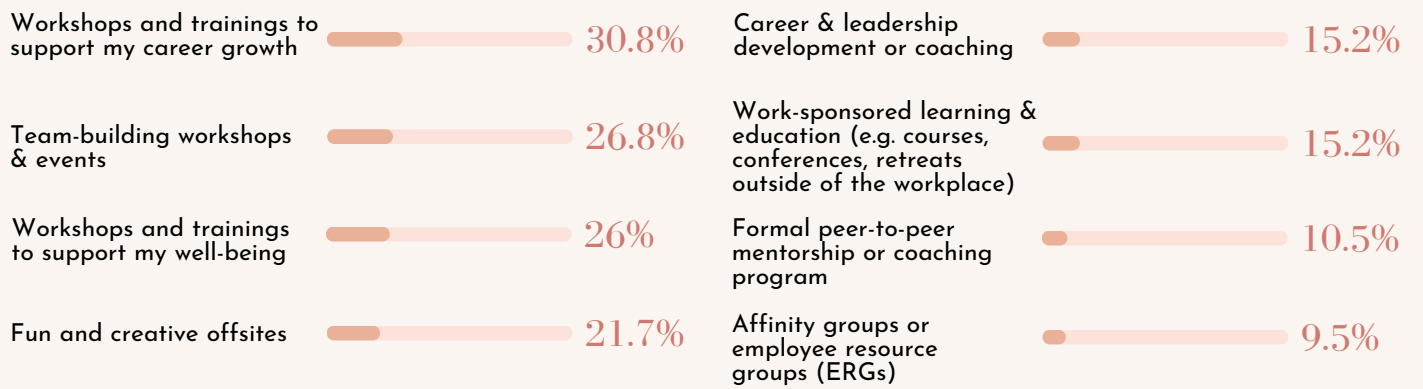
To foster their professional growth, women indicated their top preferences for career development workshops and trainings (31%), team-building workshops & events (27%), and workshops & trainings to support their well-being (26%).

Supporting access to ERGs (employee

resource groups) – as well as compensation of their leaders (37) – can help foster intentional community-building and more effective engagement. While the role of ERGs is evolving, organizations are recognizing their value to connect with other peers about their life experiences, fostering inclusion, addressing the intersectionality of employees’ identities, and increasing engagement with allies to promote equity in the workplace (38).

With only 39% of women saying they have sponsors and mentors who actively uplift them, the value of mentorship from those who have gone through similar professional experiences cannot be overstated. One study measuring mentorship ROI over 14 years showed an increase of retention and salaries for mentees and mentors, and participants were 5X more likely to be promoted (39).

What types of programs help women feel more connected in their current role?



Data referenced - 7v: What type of career development programs or benefits would help you feel more connected to your current role? 7l: I have allies and sponsors in my career who actively uplift me through their leadership and mentorship. 7h: What are alternative ways to view my impact and success at work?

Listen and lead with openness

Leadership that avoids promoting victimizing narratives about team members acknowledges that challenges and obstacles can exist in the work environment.

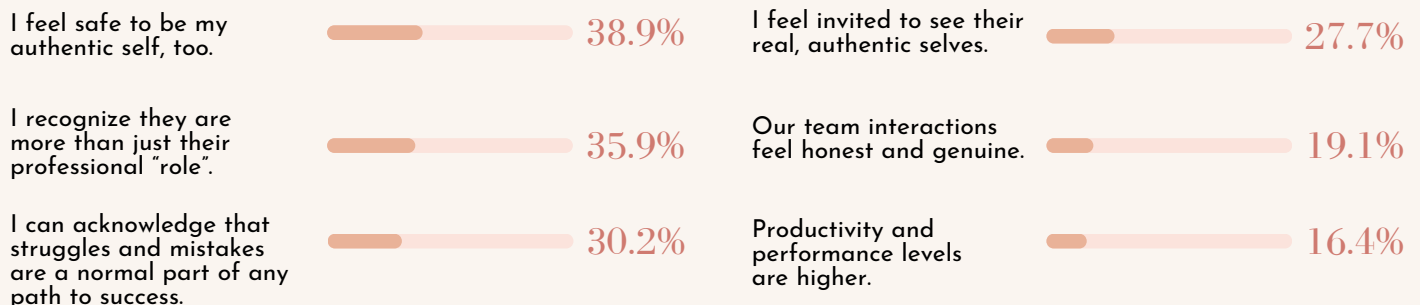
The most effective leaders acknowledge the systemic and environmental factors that contribute to those challenges and take action to address them. Moreover, leadership must acknowledge their own responsibility for creating supportive work environments and hold themselves accountable for achieving that goal.

It starts from the top – when leaders model transparency and vulnerability, it helps women feel safe to be their authentic selves (39%), see leaders as more than just their professional “role” (36%), and acknowledge that struggles and mistakes are a normal part of any path to success (30%). It’s clear that a leadership team’s development of managers plays an influential role in the mental health of the teams they lead.

In a new global study from the Work Institute at UKG, nearly 70% of people reported their managers have a significant impact on their mental health (more than a therapist or doctor), and is equivalent to that of their partner (40). The quality of a worker’s relationship with their managers can significantly affect their level of stress, energy and work performance. Positive relationships can result in increased energy and commitment to work, while negative ones can have adverse effects. Managers who exhibit empathy, compassion, and transparent and vulnerable leadership styles are more likely to foster positive mental health in the workplace (40).

Given that the most appreciated attributes that women are looking for in supportive leaders are being a good listener (66%) and their ability to be honest and candid (48%), it’s evident that the top leadership skills required to create safe spaces at work are the willingness to listen, model authenticity, and lead with integrity.

What is most helpful to women when leaders model transparency & vulnerability?



Data referenced - 7t: What is helpful about leaders who model transparency and vulnerability? 7m: When thinking about supporters or cheerleaders in your life, what attributes are the most important?

Cultivate community support

It's crucial for organizations to hold honest conversations with leaders and managers about their collective role in high turnover rates, stalled goals, low productivity, and low employee engagement, which are often a reflection of the organization's management structure. By offering training opportunities for management and leadership to learn how to hold open, respectful conversations with and between peers, we can build more empathy and tactful communication within teams.

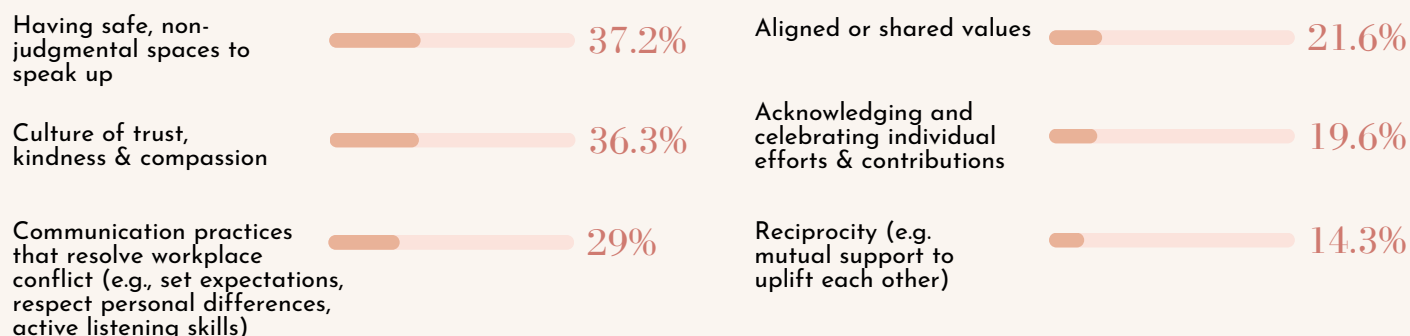
Organizations can activate community support by providing non-judgmental space at work to speak up (37%), building a culture of trust, kindness, and compassion (36%), and supporting communication practices that resolve workplace conflict (29%), all of which can help women feel more connected to their peers and coworkers. Leaders that truly excel are those who have normalized conversations around the complexities of the human

experience as a part of their workplace culture – *one where organizations not only celebrate the achievements of their employees for the good of the company,* but also offer a supportive presence during times of personal transition (such as becoming a new parent or experiencing loss of grief). They take intentional and deliberate measures to foster a psychologically safe environment and lead by example.

By openly discussing their own well-being struggles, taking breaks, seeking therapy, and actively facilitating access to mental health resources for their team members, leaders can effectively shift the perception of seeking care and support from a perceived 'weakness' to a strength.

Such transparency and advocacy speak volumes about the importance of prioritizing mental health and well-being, both personally and professionally.

What is most important for women to feel connected to their co-workers?



Data referenced - 7p: What is most important for you to feel like you can connect and relate with your co-workers and peers?



Step 3: We Need Systems of Accountability For Sustained Change

To achieve sustainable transformation, organizations must establish trust and transparency in their processes and policies, as well as their benefit. The integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and well-being is imperative because they are interconnected. Just as we are now holding organizations responsible for DEI, we must do the same for well-being in recognition that we cannot address one without the other.

The connection between well-being and DEI helps center our differentiated identities and lived experiences while

validating the need for support systems that are inclusive of them (41). It's important to note that women are more than 1.5 times as likely as men at their level to have left a previous job because they wanted to work for a company that was more committed to DEI (42).

Creating systems of accountability involves designing processes that lead to action. When accountability is established through sustainable systems, it can lead to improved engagement, retention, and ROI. Here are a few considerations for organizations to begin the shift.

Redefine accountability

In order to foster a culture of accountability, both organizational leaders and contributors must have an understanding of their co-created system of accountability as well as a willingness to initiate it – it cannot be one-sided.

We traditionally perceive accountability through a negative lens of unbalanced reprimanding and blame-casting. However, *accountability is about managing trust and reciprocity within an organization through open communication*. Achieving accountability involves collaboration in creating systems that hold everyone accountable, regardless of their position in the organizational hierarchy. By establishing trust and transparency in organization processes, companies can concurrently provide opportunities for team members to self-advocate and speak up for

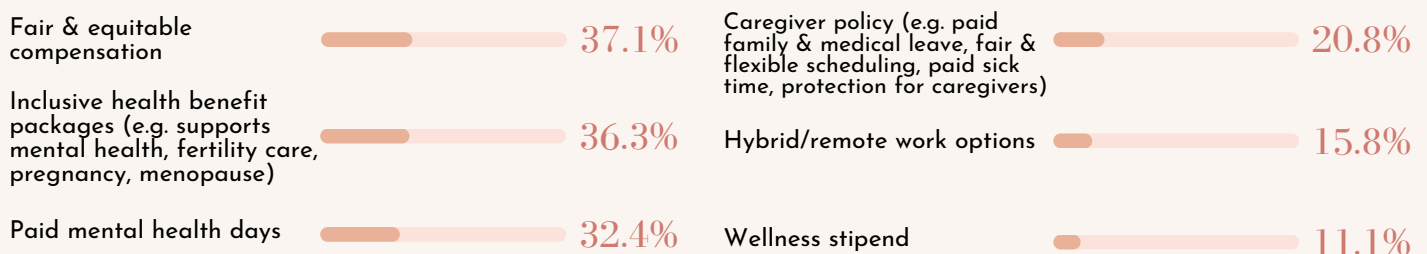
themselves while supporting them as they take responsibility for their own actions.

Build an inclusive benefits package

Re-evaluating employee benefits packages to support well-being is a great starting point to start implementing shifts in structural support and demonstrates their employer values of physical and mental health.

Aside from fair and equitable compensation (37%), women say that the top employee benefits that would support their well-being are inclusive health benefit package (e.g. supports mental health, fertility care, pregnancy, and menopause), paid mental health days (32%), and caregiver policies such as paid family and medical leave, fair & flexible scheduling, paid sick time, protection for caregivers (21%).

What employee benefits would help women feel more supported at work?



Data referenced - 7w: What employee benefits would help your well-being feel more supported at work?

Commit to routine assessments

Accountability starts with a commitment to routine measurement and organization-wide assessments based on company-specific metrics that extend beyond work performance. For instance, these metrics can ask individuals whether they are investing in self-improvement and utilizing available resources, as well as considering factors such as workplace satisfaction, engagement, and a regular cadence of accountability reviews.

We must also broaden our measurement approach beyond hard ROI metrics to include factors such as *mutual care and reciprocity, creativity, and connectedness among employees and teams, accessibility and utilization of benefits, and measures of reliability, dependability, and trustworthiness.*

Move from performative to normative

The concept of well-being accountability ultimately relies on the mutually beneficial and supportive relationship between the organization and employee that's established through a synergistic agreement. However, organizations must prioritize the sustainability and longevity of the support they provide. For example, the occurrence of mass layoffs that undermine important DEI initiatives is a strong indicator of an organization's wavering

commitment to creating a culture of inclusivity and well-being (43).

Moving from performative to normative organizational accountability requires more than ticking off a box for diversity or providing desirable compensation and benefits packages. It involves examining the outcomes and developing sustainable solutions built around meaningful shifts that value our human experience, rather than simply offering a benefit that may or may not be utilized effectively.

For example: offering EAPs (employee assistance programs) or mental health days may be insufficient. Rather, are your managers and leadership encouraging or modeling its use? That will reflect on whether the desired outcomes are achieved and provide a more reliable assessment of workplace culture.

Additionally, a visible commitment to building well-being and mental health into policies, practices, and processes include mental health PTO, training managers to encourage employees to seek mental health, communication training for both employees and leaders, providing unconscious bias training, and having clearly defined roles and goals (3). Seeking ongoing feedback from employees around inclusivity and mindful language are also examples.

Focus on people first

While organizations often look at improved retention, recruitment, and productivity as their motivating drivers to include well-being programs, the benefits of investing extend beyond these outcomes. Ultimately, positive outcomes *are the result* of employees feeling aligned, valued, and respected. When workplaces prioritize listening to their employees, positive results will follow.

Providing a safe, supportive, and validating workplace for women has numerous benefits. Women are more engaged (50%), better able to work as a team (32%), feel less burned out (30%), and are better at ideating and creating (27%). According to a 2021 study from the National Safety Council and NORC from the University of Chicago (45), *companies that invested in mental health programs experienced an average ROI of \$4 for every \$1 spent*. We must start redefining productivity around 'purpose' over simply 'profit'.

This means recognizing the importance of human capital on the same level as material-based capital.

If the desired outcome of well-being is better productivity, then we must seek to establish the intrinsic motivators that speak to the values women hold close. This includes: knowing they are worthy of their current successes and are capable of more (38%), embracing failure or missteps as part of the process (38%), recognizing their productivity output is not a measurement of their value or worth (37%), and remembering there is more to life than work (31%).

Purposeful, values-driven leadership directly relates to the attraction and retention of talent. For instance, when an employer's efforts to create diversity and inclusive cultures are recognized by their employees, the *likelihood of employees staying with the company for a longer period increases by 5X* (44).

What positive outcomes are a result of feeling safe & supported at work?



Data referenced - 7s: What positive outcomes have you experienced when you feel safe, supported, and validated at work? 7y: Which affirmations are most helpful in reminding you that your productivity does not determine your innate value?

Women leaders are especially uniquely positioned to lead through purpose. As one Forbes article highlighted: “When women are in charge, companies achieve diversity targets sooner, provide higher sales growth, and improve earnings-per-share” (46). This underscores why companies benefit from women leaders who create purpose-driven, people-centered business models.

As such, companies that prioritize CSR (corporate social responsibility) and ESG (Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance) goals have a crucial role to play in effecting positive societal and environmental change. Sustainable businesses that adhere to CSR and ESG practices have an opportunity to bring about tangible transformation and change from the inside out, with studies showing there are clear economic benefits of sustainability – both in its financial performance as well as the role they play in creating it (47). Although no organization can achieve perfection, those

that consistently move through this *continuous cycle of awareness, alignment, and accountability* can achieve long-lasting positive effects.

Active participation from all stakeholders is crucial for such processes to be effective. Establishing cultures of care benefits more than just the individual woman or the company's bottom line. Supporting women benefits the socioeconomic health of our broader community (48) – from families to countries. When women are supported and empowered, they thrive in both their personal and professional lives, creating positive ripples within their families and communities.

As we navigate the challenges of the world today, we are seeking stability and a sense of purpose. People are looking for leadership to believe in.

***We are encouraging employers –
Be that for your people.***



rebuilding OUR COMMUNITIES



Community is a living concept, from our ever-evolving definition of nuclear families to our schools, workplaces, cities, countries, and the relationships that weave these separate groups into one interconnected world. When we help women across these various microenvironments, we help societies succeed globally.

Despite knowing the importance of women's advancement for society's benefit, women still face the brunt of social and economic crises, thus making it more difficult for communities to overcome barriers. The following are the most crucial gaps to address, and considerations for how communities can bridge them.



We Need Equity to Achieve Equality.

A McKinsey Global Institute report finds that \$12 trillion could be added to global GDP by 2025 by advancing women's equality (48). To close the equality gap, women's advancement will need to happen in the public, private, and social sectors. This echoes what UNDP sustainability goals have been calling for since its 2016 introduction, calling gender equality a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world (48).

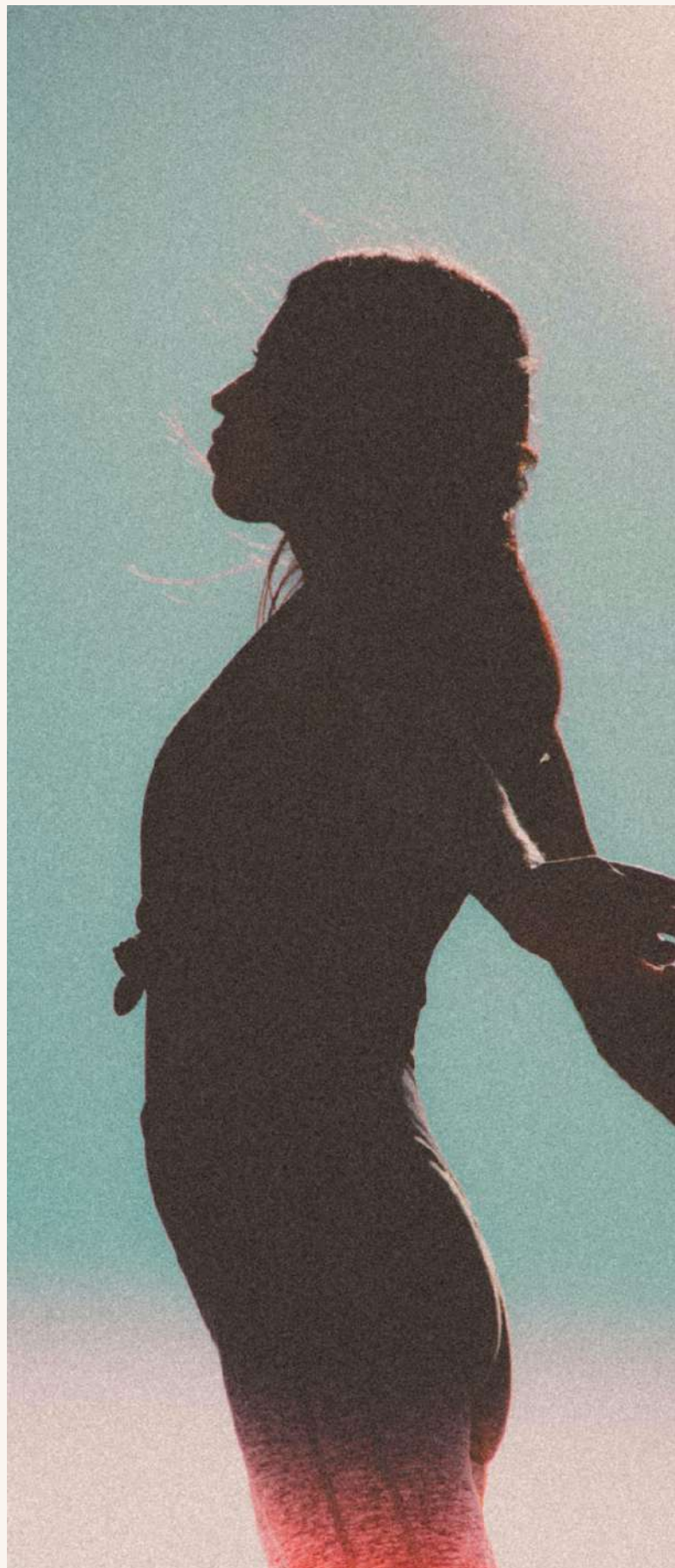
Despite this acknowledgment, our work culture continues to have inadequate structural systems in place to support women in their interconnected roles as caregivers, mothers, partners. The result was a loss of top talents – and an increase in depression and anxiety amongst women employees. In 2019, before the pandemic, women accounted for 39.4% of total employment; however, in 2020, women represented nearly 45% of global employment loss (49).

Notably, 45% of women say that making enough money was their greatest career concern; 47% say they carry 75% to 100% of domestic obligations, and 44% are concerned about their physical and mental safety within their community. This aligns with some of the key areas identified where advancing parity would be most impactful, including blocked economic opportunities, time spent in unpaid care work, fewer legal rights, political underrepresentation, and violence against women (48).

In order to enact positive change within our communities, we must address the inequities that exist and acknowledge that we don't all start from the same place. Equality is simply the outcome we desire; we need equity in order to achieve it. Policy frameworks such as Targeted Universalism introduced by Berkeley professor John A. Powell of the Othering and Belonging Institute are positioned to work towards common universal goals within our social and civic fabric, while also developing targeted strategies to meet the unique needs of particular groups that have been historically neglected (50).

By centering our focus on belonging and bridging instead of structural exclusion and marginalization, we can build a more prosperous, peaceful, and sustainable society that benefits us all.

Data referenced - 7d: What types of challenges have you ever experienced regarding your work and career? 6i: What percentage of the household or domestic labor do you feel responsible for carrying on your own? 5n: How concerned are you about your sense of physical and psychological safety in your community?





We Need To Recognize & Respect All Identities.

We don't all work. We're not all mothers, or wives and partners. But we do all live in a community with one another, and how we embody these roles speaks to our connections within society as a whole.

Our lived experience is a compilation of our different roles, including how society categorizes and assigns them to us within our identities. How the world sees us affects our relationships, opportunities, mental health, and how we show up for others.

Yet when we have the capacity to respect each other's freedom to self-define the roles we inhabit, that's how we can thrive - both individually and as a collective. 47% of responses from women say, "recognizing their different identities and their impact on the world and how they view it" would help them build a stronger, less biased community. It's time to rewrite and restructure those definitions; it's time to toss out labels that divide us, locking us into buckets that prevent our collective efforts toward positive change.

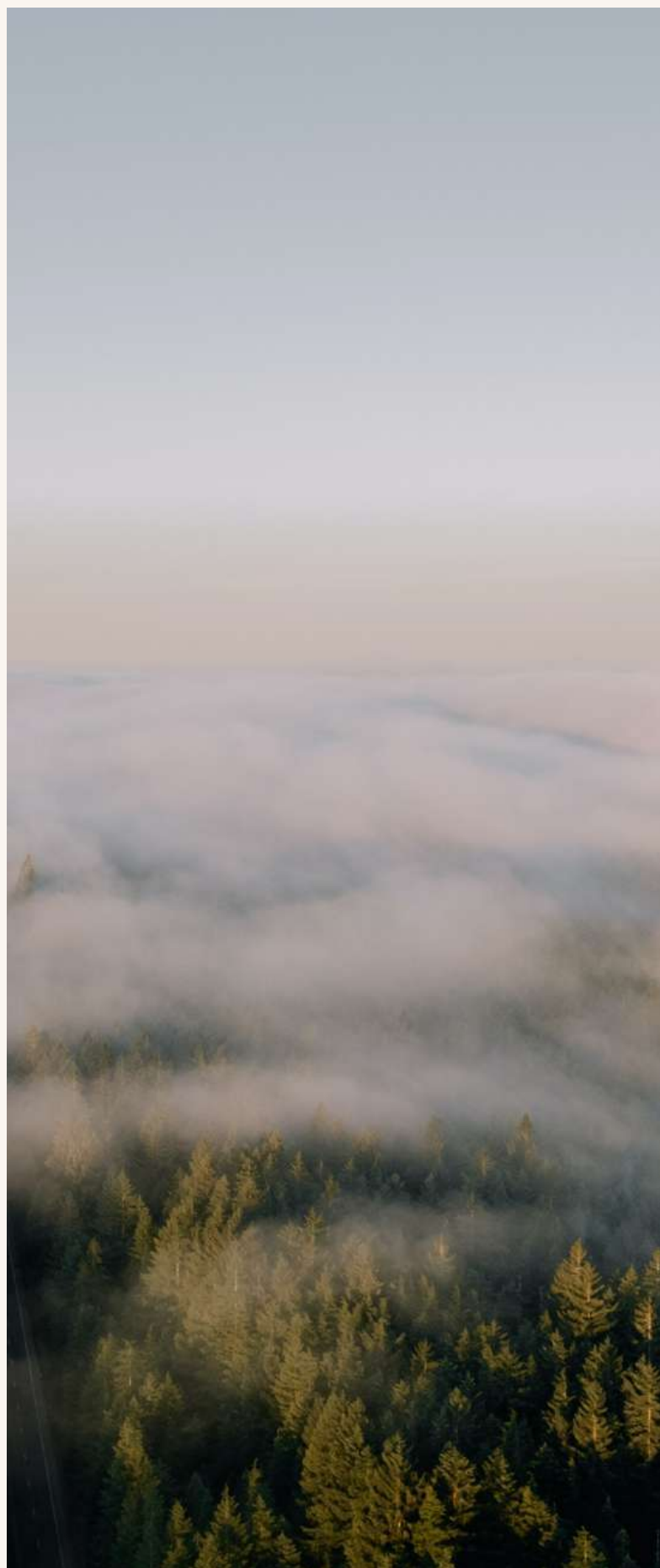
It's encouraging to see all the women who recognize this and want to be better allies - over half (55%) of responses indicate women want to approach people of different identities in an open-minded & inclusive manner, and 1 in 3 (33%) want to discuss how they can better support marginalized groups with friends, family, and peers while acknowledging our own individual lived experiences (46%).

Furthermore, nearly half (49%) of responses indicate women want to ask better questions of themselves to better understand how their biases have shaped and impacted their thoughts and actions. By recognizing that allyship is an ongoing journey of learning and unlearning, nor a perfect or easy process, we can continue to advance towards building a more inclusive world for all.

While we can acknowledge that the lack of safety, trust, and belonging within our environments have created barriers in seeing that we are one community, we also have an opportunity and need to break down the systems that divide us and address the unique inequities that individuals face.

As we move from 'me to we', we will learn to see that our actions affect one another and are all connected in this continuum of life.

Data referenced - 5r: What are helpful ways to further explore how your intersectional identities affect how you interact with others? 5s: What are ways in which you can expand your knowledge in support of those outside of your own identity or in marginalized communities? 5t: Allyship is an ongoing process of learning and unlearning, honesty, vulnerability, and forgiveness. What messages or affirmations would help remind you that allyship isn't meant to be a perfect or easy process?





*“We are here to awaken
from our illusion of
separateness.”*

– THICH NHAT HANH

6

Looking Forward

We are not the labels society inscribes us with. We are not the sum of our successes, nor are we the compilation of our failures. We're not defined by our histories, nor are we separate from them. We are individuals of many identities, living together in our various communities.

Who we are and how we identify are in constant conversation with our lived experiences; we are influenced by and help shape the societies we live in. Together, we can create a culture shift, restructuring societal norms and writing a future that better supports not just women, but extends to all persons - regardless of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and other diverse backgrounds.

Choosing change isn't easy, nor is it an individual act; our homes, workplaces, and communities influence our choices,

which is why we must reshape the overall system.

We're not broken; rather, we're throwing off the broken reins of society that neither supports our individual health nor our collective well-being.

Now is the time for women to be well, together. Along with listening to women, companies can win by creating greater opportunities for meaningful conversation, inclusion, and growth – with safe spaces that are representative of our various cultures and identities.

Women need to be represented in leadership roles within business and organizations so their unique perspectives can shape the futures of our communities and benefit society with increased peace, prosperity and sustainability – as study after study shows.

Beyond talk, we need action. How can we move forward to rebuild the community structure and enter into conversations that move us forward?

We need society to value our time; women's roles within their families and social groups are part of both individual and societal success.

Companies can support women's multiple roles with flexible hours, paid leave, and adjusting the physical office to speak to women – this includes space for privacy, areas for breast-pumping and feeding, family support, counseling and mentoring services that address the ways in which systemic inequality has been internalized to limit our chances for professional advancement.

Societies must place a value on unpaid labor; recognizing caregiving and domestic labor as work is a crucial step to closing the gender gap. It's also time to recognize family leave and flexible hours across gender lines – from a government scope, not just an elective corporate responsibility.

We need fair and equal pay – it's a top goal for UN Women (51).

This message of worth follows women home and extends to the next generation and our broader culture.



Throughout these changes, we must be mindful of the cross-generational influence that families have on our greater community and societal prosperity, and start planting seeds of equity rather than injustice. Children's mental health is influenced by parents' mental health (52), affecting the next generational cycle of self-worth, net worth, and job performance. Our day-to-day life is the intersection of our lived experiences; we can begin changing our future by voicing our need for justice, fairness, and dignity for all.

We need businesses and organizations to hold themselves accountable for the microenvironments they influence. The social dimension of ESG is often considered a barometer for corporate culture and a measure of impact on workers' well-being (53); it's one way

that businesses are establishing strategies and evaluation metrics to measure how they're building social capital with their community of stakeholders – from their investors to employees to their community of consumers. Notably, one analysis showed that social-related shareholder proposals in ESG increased by 37% in 2021 compared to the previous year (54). It's clear that the well-being of people is an essential driver of success for any organization, and ESG provides an accountability framework to move beyond virtue signaling and performative activism (55).

When companies deepen their commitment to making a meaningful impact and positive difference in our world – starting with their employees – we all win.





Lastly, we also need to hold ourselves accountable; we're imperfect and that's okay.

It's time for open dialogue to bridge our understanding with individuals outside our immediate communities – beginning with conversation, we can challenge our own echo chamber.

Together, we can reshape the narrative and restructure the system – building communities of the future.

Our collective action begins from a point of understanding, by recognizing that our behaviors are influenced by socialization, and acknowledging our humanness is full of missteps and

mistakes. It's time to start listening and show allyship through intentional action. It's time to be our authentic selves, and thereby inspire others in their own authenticity.

As we step toward togetherness, we also celebrate our uniqueness. As we acknowledge individuality, we also respect the lived experiences of others. As we create space for others, we initiate healing for ourselves.

***We build a better future.
We move from 'me' to 'we'.***

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SeekHer Foundation is a non-profit organization on a mission to power more women for the greater good. SeekHer is an advocacy project powered by WellSeek, a social impact collective that's reimagining women's wellness in our workplaces and communities.



MONICA MO, PhD

As the founder & Executive Director of SeekHer Foundation, Dr. Mo co-authored the SeekHer Shift Report and spearheaded the project to quantify the experiences impacting women's mental health and rewrite cultural norms to reimagine women's wellness in our workplaces and communities.



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Kate serves as the Research & Impact Lead for the SeekHer Shift Survey and Report. As a critical feminist scholar and DEI practitioner, she co-authored and led the survey design & data analysis that contributed to the Report's key findings.



JENNIFER LUTZ

As the Research & Storytelling Lead for SeekHer Shift, Jennifer co-authored and provided editorial guidance on the SeekHer Shift Report. Her experience as a health & medical journalist lent a rich narrative and context to the quantified data throughout the Report.



MARI MIRANDA

Mari serves as SeekHer's Content & Brand Communications Lead. She co-authored and was the main designer of the Report, and curated the survey experience to ensure that women felt safe, encouraged, and understood as they shared their voices.

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