

# Identity Insights: Phase One Cumulative Report

**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Experience Office

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Human Resources and Administration  
Operations, Security and Preparedness

*Office of Resolution Management, Diversity & Inclusion*

**“[T]hank you for the opportunity. I’ve been with VA for quite some time and I’ve never had the opportunity to speak on my experience, nevertheless felt like anyone cared . . . So, thank you.”**

## Background

In 2021, the Veterans Experience Office's (VEO) Employee Experience Directorate (EXD) and the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity & Inclusion (ORMDI) partnered to launch **Identity Insights**, an **intersectional approach to improve employee experience (EX)**.

Objectives:

- Identify pain points that employees attribute to one or more of the identities that they hold
- Gain insight into focus areas – thematic and intersectional – for VA to conduct further exploration and service design to improve EX

# Identity Groups in Focus

Phase One of the project engaged individuals from **eight identity groups** that have either been **historically underrepresented and/or faced discrimination and bias in the workplace**:

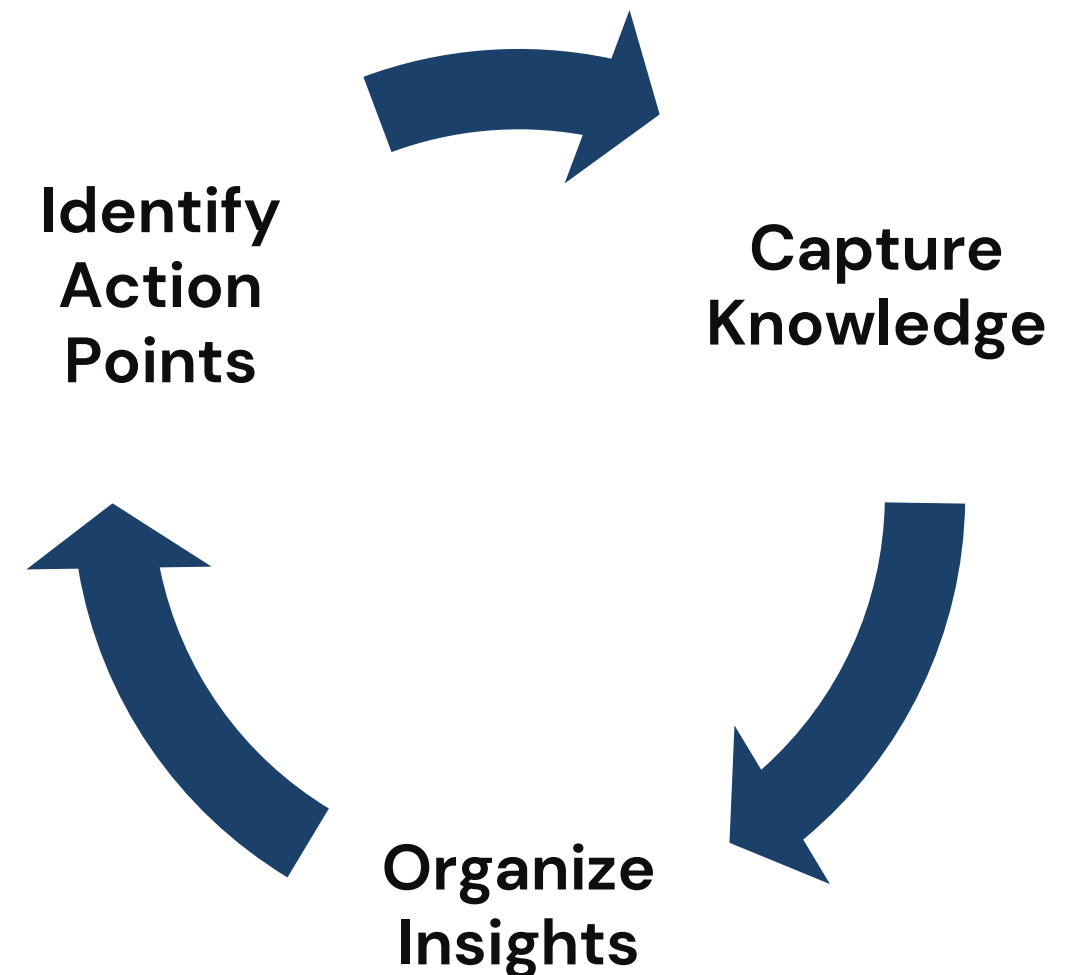
- American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN)
- Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)
- Black/African American
- Hispanic
- Individuals Born between 1946 and 1964 (Baby Boomers)
- Individuals with Disabilities (IWD)
- LGBTQ+
- Women

# Project Overview

Through **16 two-week sprints** of human-centered design (HCD) interviews and focus groups, VEO EXD and ORMDI engaged VA employees to **identify pain points, needs, and opportunities for VA to address impediments to belonging and improve EX at VA.\***

Pain points were:

- Recorded in each interview and focus group
- Coded and tabulated according to identity attribution and alignment with the EX Framework
- Examined through an intersectional lens that built cumulatively throughout the project



*\*Sign-up and participation in the project was completely voluntary. All participants gave consent to participate, understanding that the findings would be anonymous (ensuring the removal of all identifying information) but not confidential (enabling stories to be shared in the reporting process.)*

# EX Framework

Employee Experience is holistic and cross-functional, and is impacted by six core relational attributes: one's relationships to the **work** they do, the **people** they work with, the **places** they work, the **technology** they use, the **organization** they work for, and their personal **well-being**.



Throughout this report, each pain point and participant story is color-coded to align with the corresponding primary EX relationship.



# The Data Saturation Point

Human-centered design (HCD) standard practice and peer-reviewed studies on qualitative research cite a minimum of six interviews as sufficient to achieve data saturation – the point at which new incoming data produces little-to-no new information to address the research question. Given the intersectional nature of Identity Insights participants – who hold an average of 2.3 identities in focus – the project methodology is grounded in engagement of a minimum of 16 individuals who identify with each identity group.

AI AN  
20

AAPI  
25

BABY BOOMER  
29

BLACK/AA  
55

HISPANIC  
30

LGBTQ+  
37

WOMEN  
119

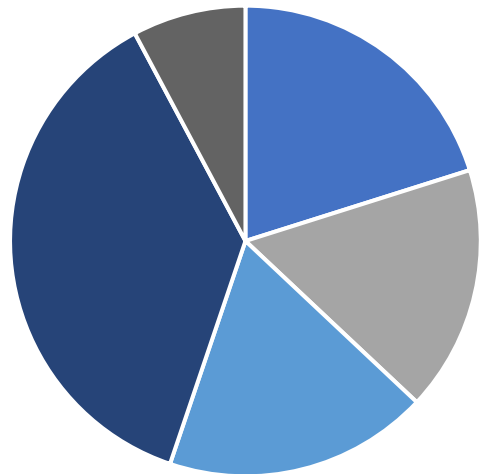
IWD  
43

# *Overview*



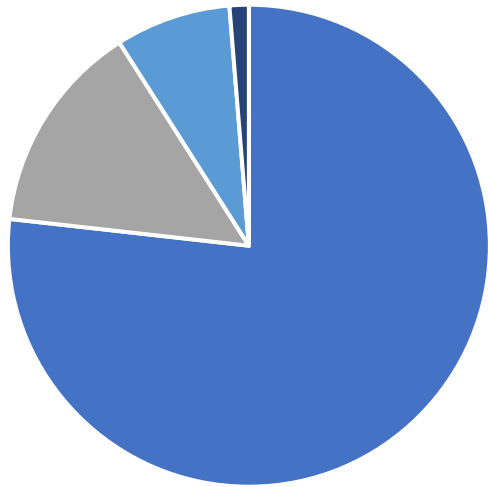
# Demographics

Across the 16 sprints, the project team engaged 156 employees who identify as one or more of the eight identities in focus. Below is a breakdown of the participants' tenure with VA, Administration, Veteran status, and birth year.



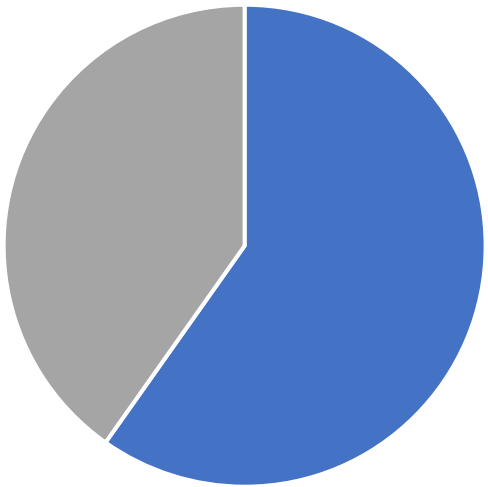
■ 0-2 YEARS   ■ 3-5 YEARS   ■ 6-10 YEARS  
■ 11-20 YEARS   ■ 21+ YEARS

Years with VA



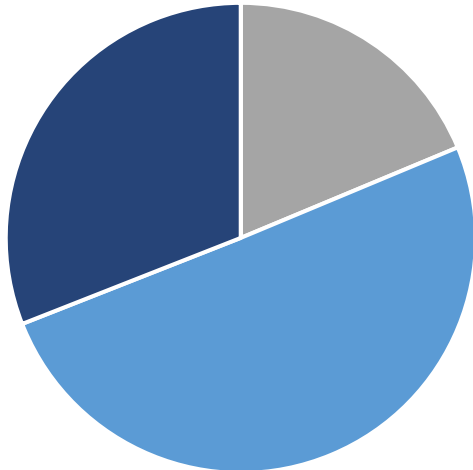
■ VHA   ■ VACO   ■ VBA   ■ NCA

Administration



■ NON-VETERAN   ■ VETERAN

Veteran Status



■ 1925-1945   ■ 1946-1964   ■ 1965-1980  
■ 1981-2000   ■ 2001-2020

Birth Year

# Identities

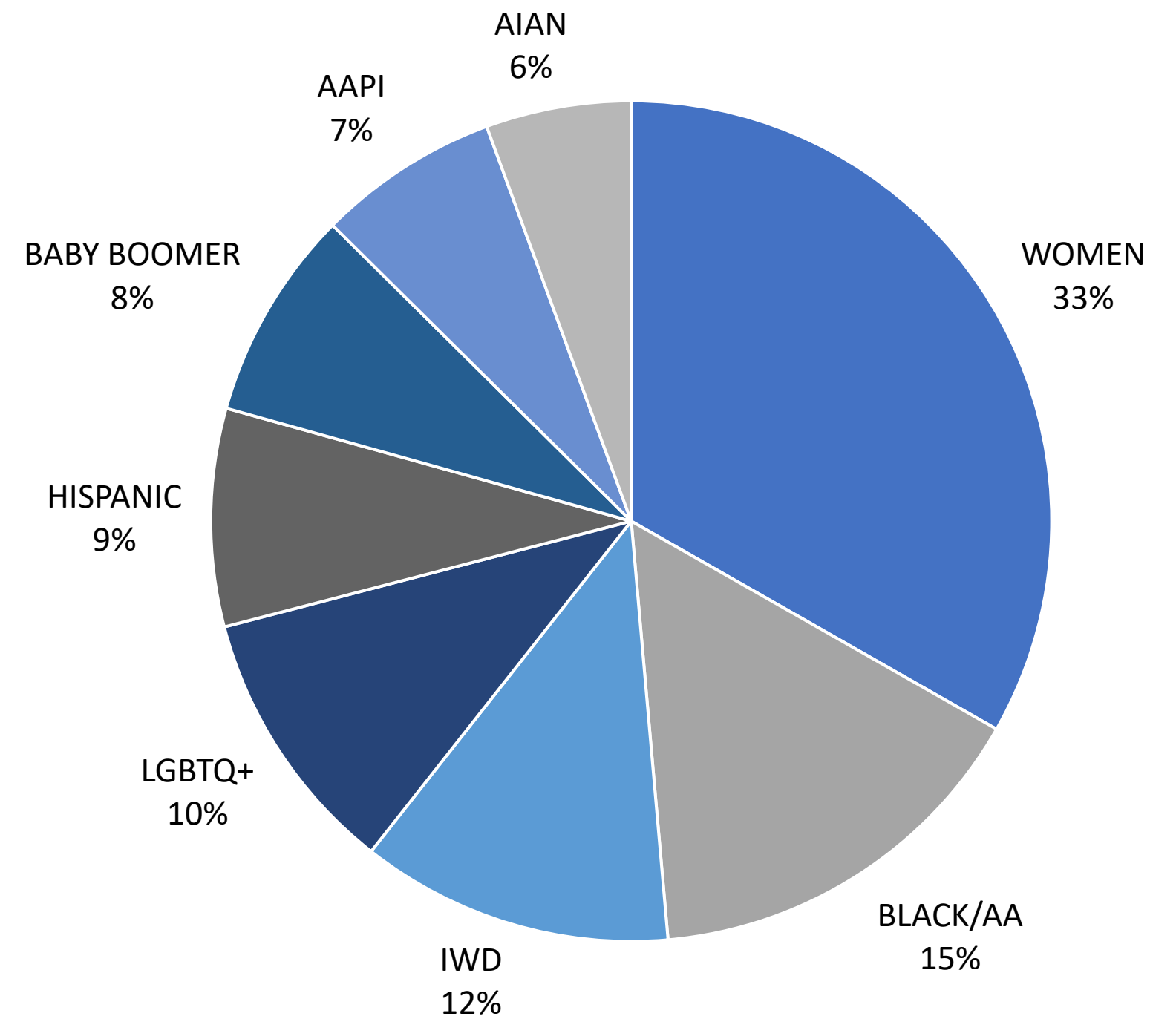
Individuals have multiple identities. The 156 participants represent 358 total identities, with eighty-six (86%) of participants self-identifying as more than one of the eight identity groups in focus for Phase One.

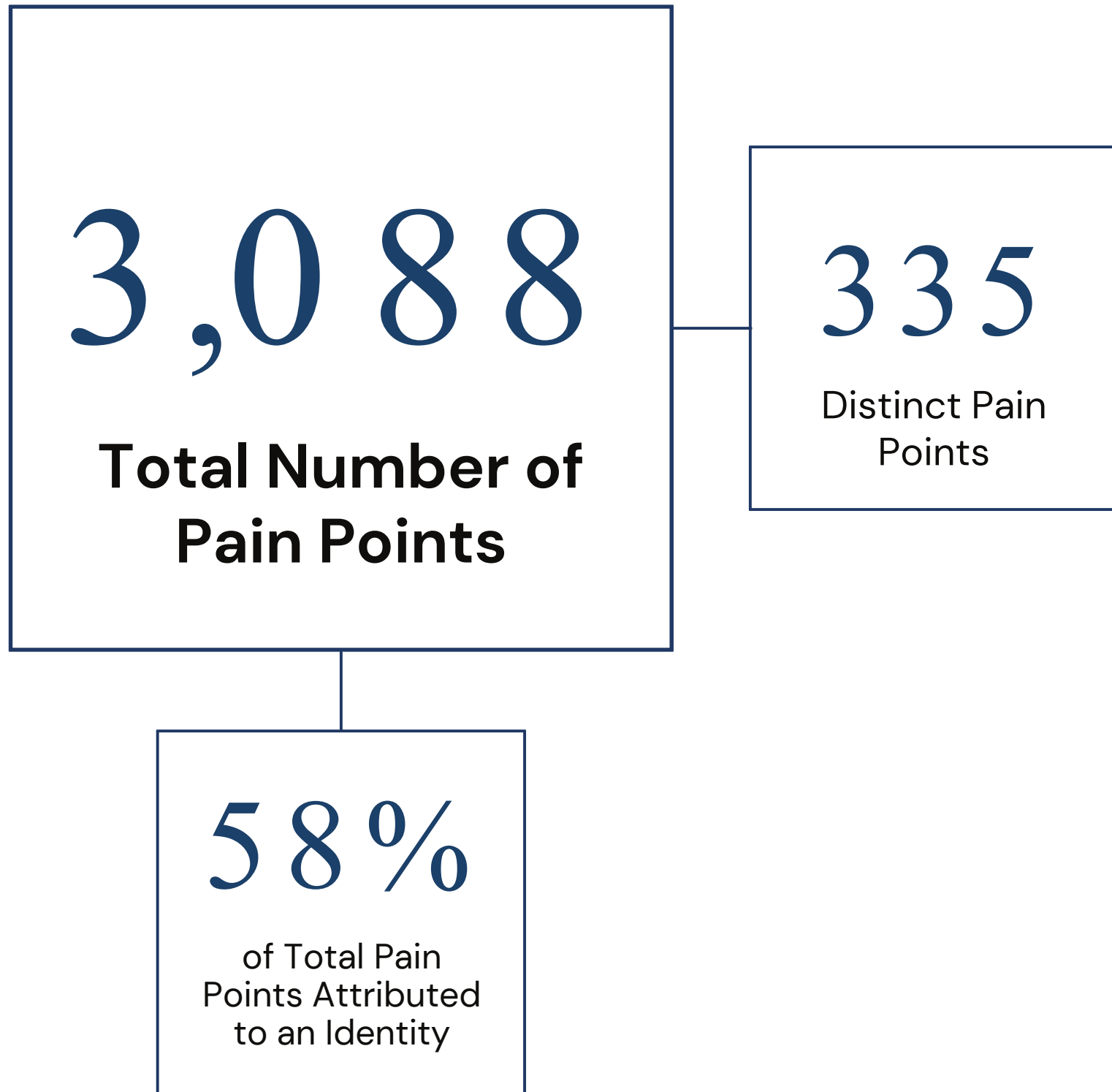
Of the 156 participants:

- **2% identified as 5 identities**
- **8% identified as 4 identities**
- **22% identified as 3 identities**
- **54% identified as 2 identities**
- **14% identified as 1 identity**

Furthermore, participants regularly highlighted identities beyond those in focus, citing the following most frequently: age ("Generation X" or "Millennial"), Veteran status, mother/caregiver status, and person of religion/faith.

**% of Total Identities Represented**





# Pain Points

Participants referenced 3,088 total pain points (335 *distinct\**) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 20 pain points experienced per participant.**

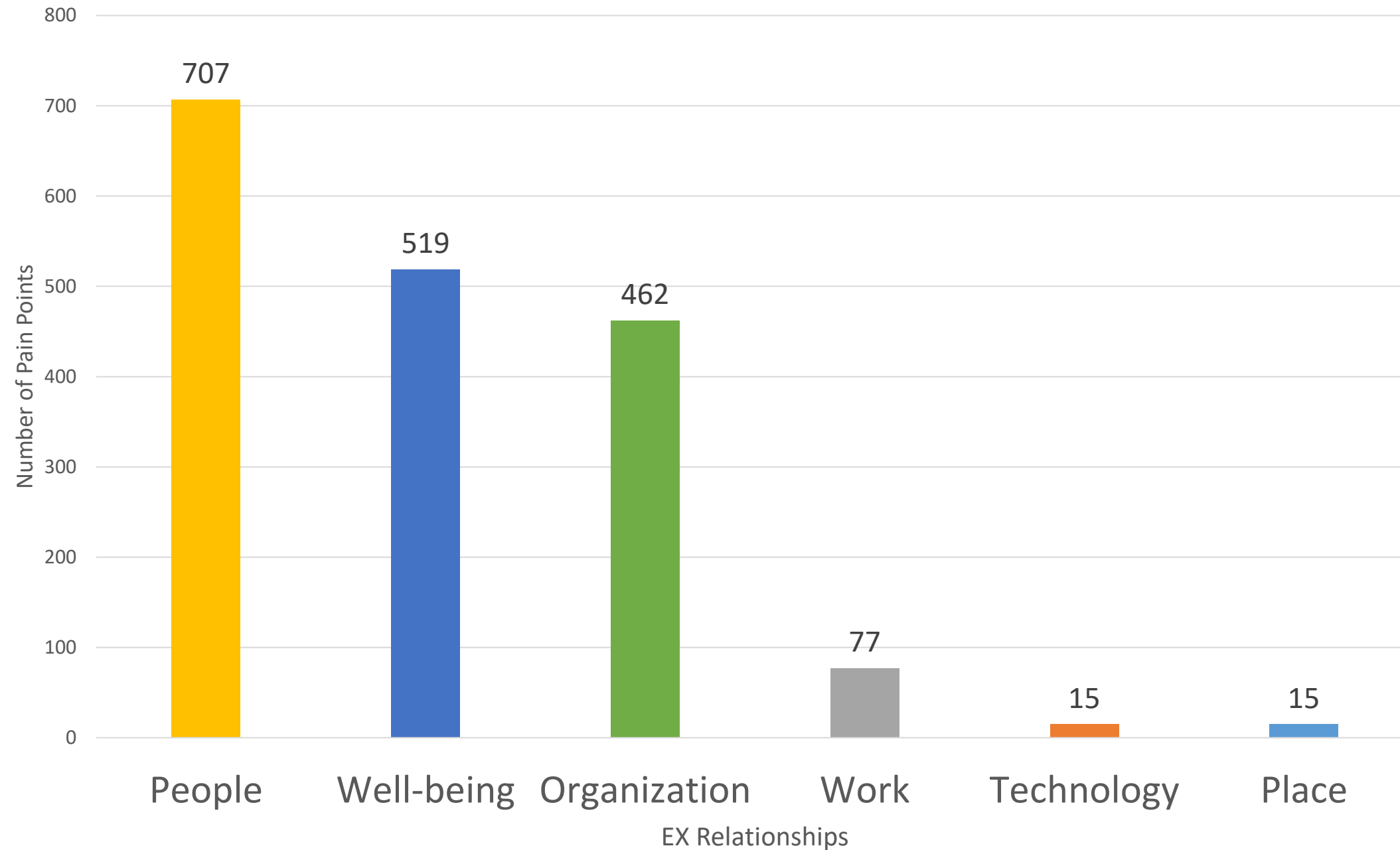
**Fifty-eight percent (58%) of pain points cited were attributed\*\* to one or more identities.**

While the project team captured pain points across EX, the primary analysis centered on pain points that employees directly attributed to one or more of the identities that they hold.

*\*A distinct pain point represents a defined negative experience that has been cited by at least one participant. For example, one distinct pain point is "Colleague making an inappropriate comment" and has been cited by fifty-six different participants.*

*\*\*Attribution is documented when participants directly and explicitly tie a pain point experienced to one or more of the identities that they hold.*

# Pain Point Attribution



Participants **directly attributed 1,795 pain points** to one or more of the eight identities.

More than 94% of these pain points fall within three EX relationships:

- People 39%
- Well-being 29%
- Organization 26%

*Findings By Identity  
Group*

# Reporting

Each identity-specific findings report includes an overview of the data, pain points, themes, and participant stories captured.

## Top Pain Points

These pain points were most frequently experienced by individuals of an identity group and were **attributed** to said identity **by a minimum of 20%** of respondents.\*

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## Top Themes

These groupings of pain points by category were most frequently experienced by individuals of an identity group and were **attributed** to said identity **by a minimum of 20%** of respondents.

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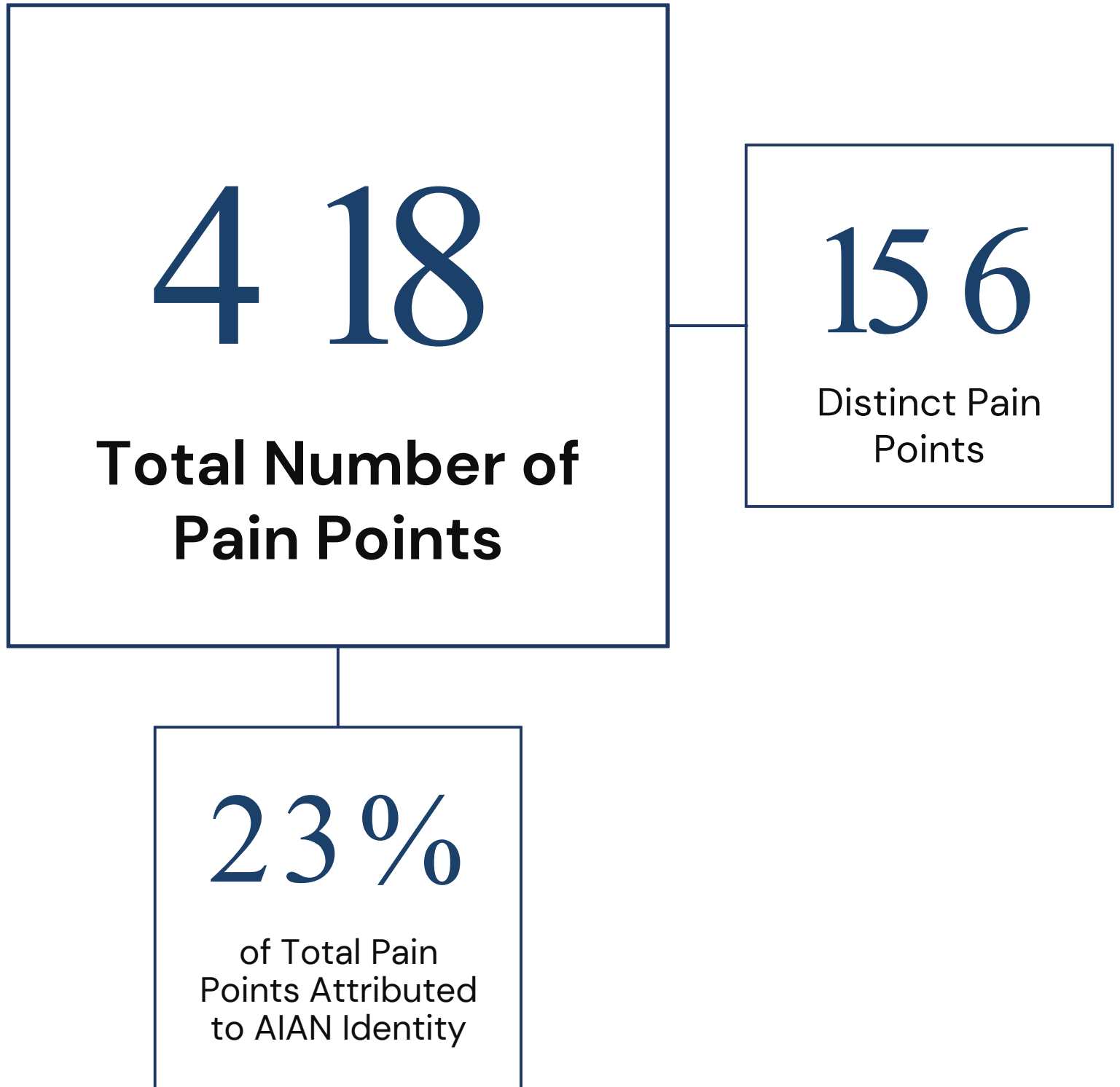
## Participant Stories

The voices of employees are elevated through quotes from interviews and focus group transcripts. Each story presents a VA employee's lived experience that aligns with a top pain point or theme.

\* Note: None of the pain points identified by those in the Baby Boomer cohort reached the 20% threshold. As such, the two most frequently experienced pain points are shared for reporting purposes, but this discrepancy is indicated accordingly.

*American Indian and  
Alaska Native (AIAN)*





## Data Overview

Participants referenced 418 total pain points (*156 distinct*) during the interviews and focus group – **an average of 21 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of these pain points, participants attributed 23% to their AIAN identity.

# Top Pain Points

Three pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' AIAN identity (by percentage of respondents):

25%

1. Feeling like an outsider because of identity

20%

2. Lack of engagement/actions around DEI matters from the organization
3. Feeling hyper-aware of identity at work

# Top Themes

Based on the pain points **attributed** to participants' AIAN identity, three major themes arose.

Theme	Summary
Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors	Thirty percent (30%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, lack of responsiveness to complaints, microaggressions, verbal attacks, etc.)
Challenges with Colleagues	Twenty-five percent (25%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their colleagues (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, microaggressions, refusing to work together, etc.)
Comments about Identity	Twenty-five percent (25%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding comments about their identity from superiors/supervisors, colleagues, direct reports, customers, and/or vendors (e.g., microaggressions, offensive jokes, etc.)



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

“I attended a . . . panel on Native American Veterans that the Trump Administration had set up for all of the Veteran service organizations...And while we were there, a staff person from [redacted] said that they had happened *to see the director writing a note to the [redacted]* , who is his employee, about *‘What do you know about this tribal sh\*t?’* ”

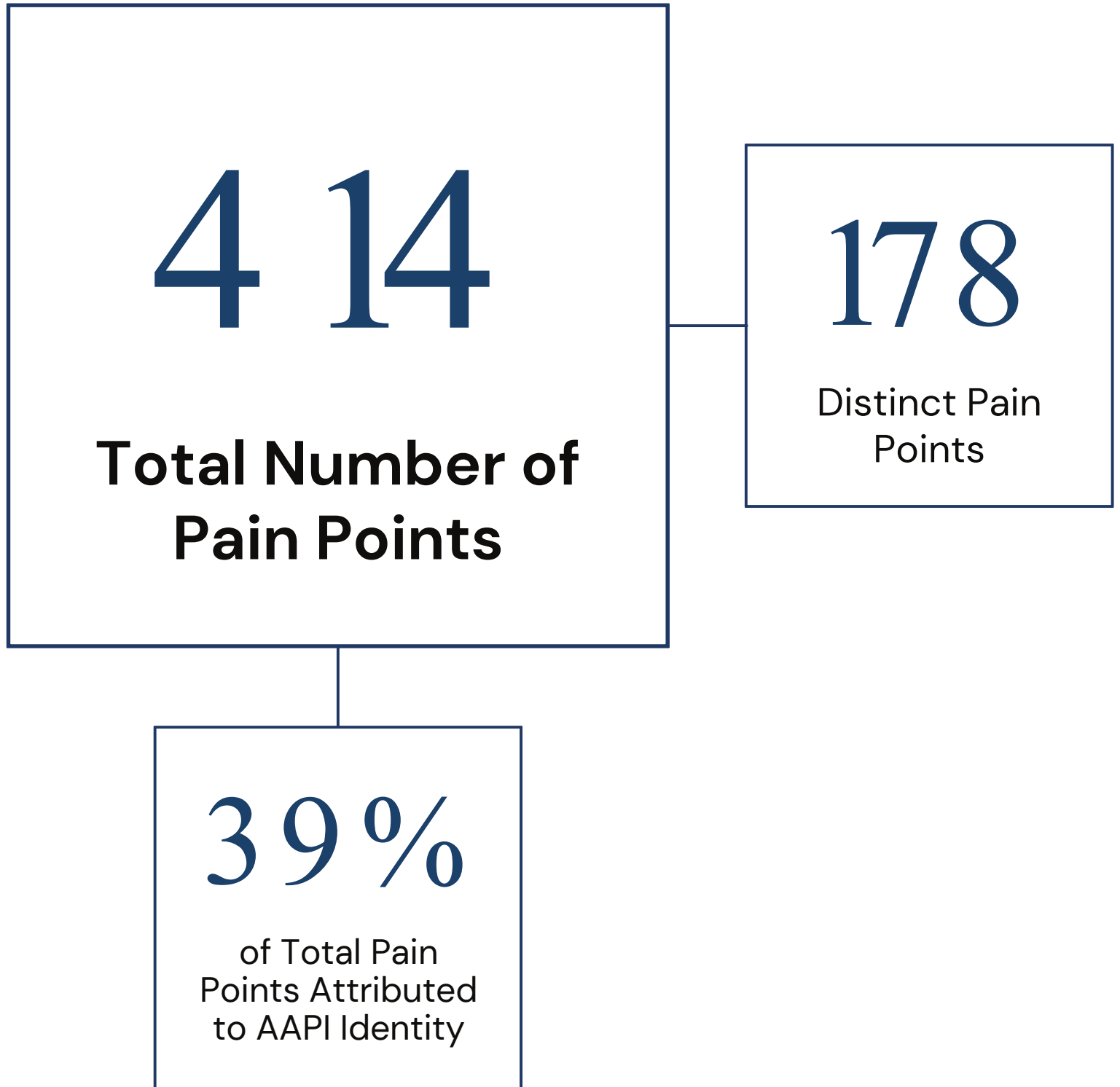
“I felt like I had to [dress the same as everyone] to be a part of the team. . . . *After a while, I brought more elements of my Indian culture and Mexican culture in my [attire] at work, but it wasn't readily accepted.* . . . My immediate supervisor and secondary supervisor would come into my office and give me a hard time if I wasn't wearing a polo and khakis or [make comments] about my Indian knit skirt . . . And it started weighing on me.”

*“We don’t have a diversity and inclusion committee in our regional office any longer . We just have the special emphasis program managers for diversity and inclusion. So it’s more of a leadership responsibility for having any kind of conversation when it comes to diversity . Because I’m not in a leadership role, my ability to speak up is very limited.”*



*“I can easily pass for white and sometimes I feel self-conscious when I’m in a group of individuals and hear somebody say, “You know, we’re all white people here,” and I usually don’t feel comfortable speaking up . . . I feel like people are making sort of an assumption about things as opposed to understanding that diversity looks different for some.”*

*Asian American and  
Pacific Islander (AAPI)*



## Data Overview

Participants referenced 414 total pain points (*178 distinct*) during the interviews and focus group – **an average of 17 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of these pain points, participants attributed 39% to their AAPI identity.

# Top Pain Points

Four pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' AAPI identity (by percentage of respondents):

44%

1. Feeling like an outsider because of identity

32%

2. Lacking colleagues to talk to who can relate

28%

3. Feeling a lack of credibility due to identity

24%

4. Superior/Supervisor making inappropriate comments/questions about identity

# Top Themes

Based on the top pain points **attributed** to participants' AAPI identity, four major themes arose.

Theme	Summary
Diversity and Representation	Forty-eight percent (48%) of participants referenced one or more pain points about the lack of diversity and representation on their team or in leadership.
Well-being at Work	Thirty-six percent (36%) of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work because of their AAPI identity including feeling like they cannot speak up/interject, feeling a need to prove themselves more, feeling excluded, and feeling a lack of credibility.
Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors	Thirty-six percent (36%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g. differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, lack of responsiveness to complaints, microaggressions, verbal attacks, etc.)
Career Development and Advancement	Thirty-two percent (32%) of participants cited pain points referencing impediments to career development, professional development, and advancement opportunities (e.g., lack of opportunities, explicitly perceiving their identity as an impediment to career advancement, etc.)



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

“It's hard to find mentors, identify mentors, who actually understand the challenges of not being in the majority...[F]or example, I was part of a small mentorship program... *[My mentor's] background, his own experiences are very different . . . so he didn't have some of the same challenges of always establishing credibility or working hard coming from a first -generation family . . .*”



“I don't socialize with anybody anymore. . . because I have been excluded . . .

[P]eople get really upset with me because they, they feel that the way I talk, that my tone of communication, they felt that I was angry, which I'm not. And I find it very insulting. ***My supervisor told me that I should sound nicer. I just felt that the message they sent to me is that you talk funny. You sound funny. You look funny. And why don't you behave just like us. This is the message they always sending based on the comments and how they treated me. . .***

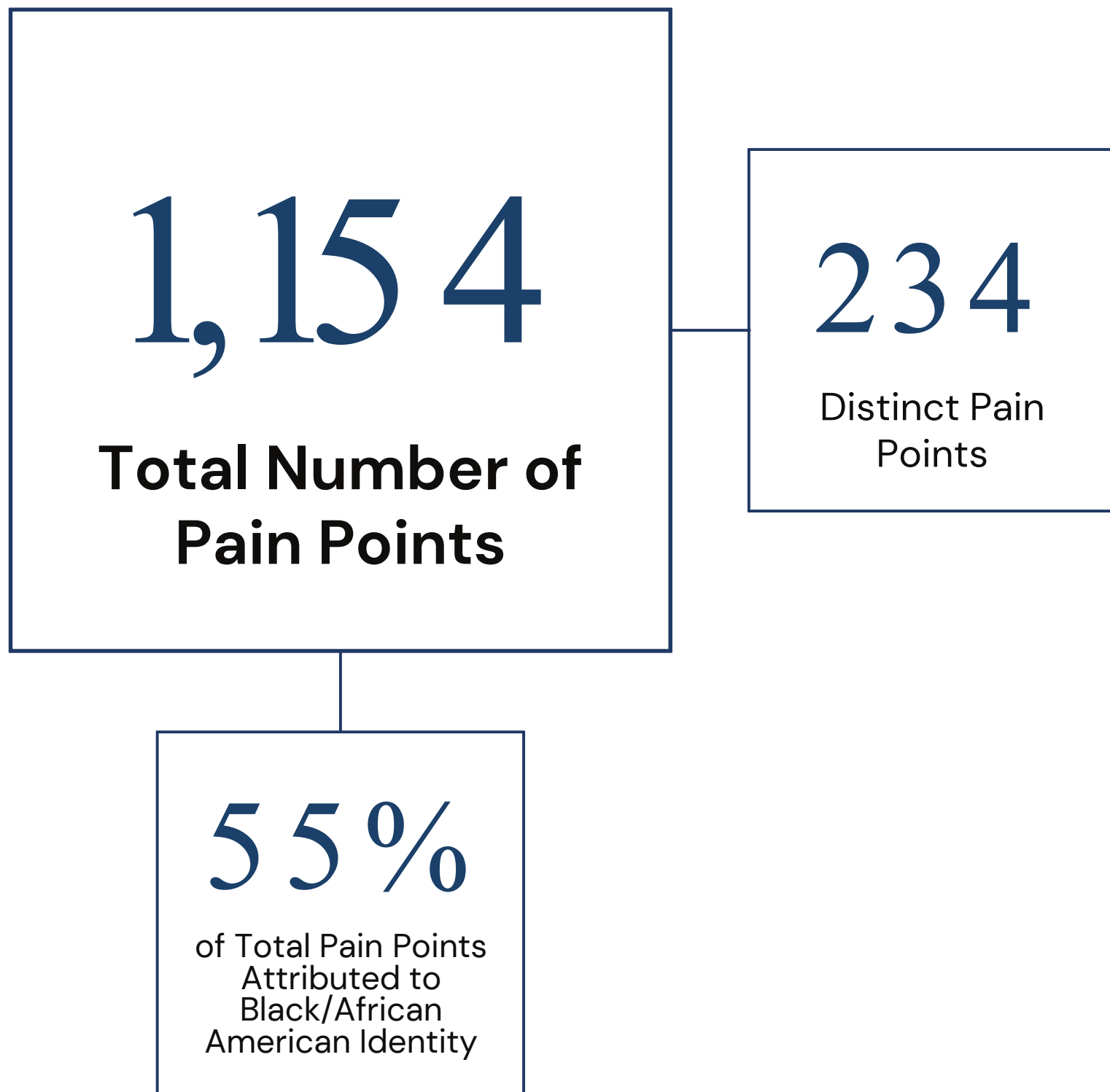
I decided that, wait a minute, I can never look white. I cannot speak English just like a native speaker. I'm not going to change myself . . . I'm a nice person, I can tell you how nice I have been . . . [M]y way of being nice is different than what they think is being nice. I don't know how to change my, my way of talking. I'm sorry. If you want me to change who I am in order to socialize with you, please, exclude me, I'm fine with that. I can't change, it's who I am.

***I would rather not socialize with you because if you don't value you who I am, I don't. I don't need to spend the time with you . . .”***

“I feel like I work twice as hard as everyone else, just to prove that I deserve to be there. I deserve my seat at the table. *I do feel like I have to kick the door down and bring my own chair though in order to get a seat at the table* .”

“Being an Asian male in any large organization sits at about three to six percent of the population, and preconceived notions are already there. *People see the last name [redacted], they see Asian male and think, ‘he must be good at math’ or, ‘English is not his primary language he was raised with.’* But I think I overcome that more easily as a lighter skinned person . . . I have a Black woman in my organization who is very well educated – has a Masters Degree – *but the critique of her work gets a much closer eye than a previous employee [who was white].”*

*Black/African American*



# Data Overview

Participants referenced 1,154 total pain points (*234 distinct*) during the interviews and focus group – an **average of 21 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of these pain points, participants attributed 55% to their Black/African American identity.

***This is the highest attribution rate of the eight identity groups.***

# Top Pain Points

Eighteen pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' Black/African American identity (by percentage of respondents):

55%

1. Lacking representation in leadership

44%

2. Feeling a lack of credibility due to identity

42%

3. Lacking diversity on team

38%

4. Colleague making inappropriate comments/questions about identity

36%

5. Identity is explicitly perceived as an impediment to career advancement

# Top Pain Points

Eighteen pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' Black/African American identity (by percentage of respondents):

31%

6. Superior/Supervisor making inappropriate comments/questions about identity

31%

7. Superior/Supervisor differential treatment of those of a particular identity  
8. Feeling like an outsider because of Identity

25%

9. Feeling need to prove self because of identity

24%

10. Lacking colleagues to talk to who can relate  
11. Feeling different from colleagues because of speech



# Top Pain Points

Eighteen pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' Black/African American identity (by percentage of respondents):

22%

- 12. Colleague differential treatment of those of a particular identity
- 13. Experienced stereotyping based on identity
- 14. Feeling different from colleagues because of actions
- 15. Feeling undervalued in their position
- 16. Hyper-awareness of identity at work
- 17. Feeling unable to be full authentic self with colleagues

20%

- 18. Feeling like they cannot speak up/interject/assert themselves

# Top Themes

Based on the pain points **attributed** to participants' Black/African American identity, six major themes arose.

Theme	Summary
Comments About Identity	Sixty-two percent (62%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding comments about their identity from superiors/supervisors, colleagues, direct reports and/or customers/vendors (e.g., inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, microaggressions, offensive jokes, comments about hair etc.)
Well-being at Work	Fifty-six percent (56%) of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work because of their Black/African American identity including feeling like they cannot speak up/interject, feeling a need to prove themselves more, feeling excluded, and feeling a lack of credibility.
Diversity and Representation	Fifty-six percent (56%) of participants referenced one or more pain points about the lack of diversity and representation on their team or in leadership.

# Top Themes

Based on the pain points **attributed** to participants' Black/African American identity, six major themes arose.

Theme	Summary
Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors	Fifty-six percent (56%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g. differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, lack of responsiveness to complaints, microaggressions, verbal attacks, etc.)
Challenges with Colleagues	Fifty-six percent (56%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their colleagues (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, microaggressions, refusing to work together, etc.)
Hair/Speech/Actions	Forty percent (40%) of participants identified pain points pertaining to feeling different because of their hair, speech, and/or manner of presenting and engaging. This theme was only prevalent for the Black/African American identity group.



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

“It was probably my second day. I was in my office, working on some things that my supervisor had given me, and my chief of staff came into my office – she didn't knock or anything, she just came in. She essentially walked around and kind of like, touched things on my desk and asked what I was working on. I told her what I was working on, and then from there, she started to ask me a lot of questions. [It] felt like another interview. She asked questions about ‘How long does it take me to get to work? Who watches my son while I'm at work? Why did I go to school? What did I go to high school? Who do I live with? Where did I move from? Was I seeing someone? What are my qualifications?’ **very inappropriate, unprofessional questions.**

. . .

***I did answer the questions because I'm extremely intimidated by this person, [they are] the chief of my department . . . I kind of felt uneasy about it. I felt very uncomfortable. I wasn't really sure who I could tell about it*** because my supervisor and my chief, had known each other nine or ten years.

. . .

It makes me extremely upset because I work very hard to get to where I am I'm the first person in my family to even graduate high school, let alone go to college, get a master's degree. I was a foster kid, ***I overcame a lot of challenges in my life, to make a life for myself from nothing. So, to have someone essentially minimize that for me was very hurtful .”***

“[When I transferred here], *it's only like 12% Black* . Of course that should not matter, but *it affects how people will relate to you and it affects you* .”

“I do have to think about how I present [myself] whenever I [speak]. *I have to make sure that my body language doesn't suggest that I am aggressive or trying to be assertive. . .* It's tough when you are placed in a position . . . to follow guidelines and regulations and then you are discounted when you bring things up. So, it is a balancing act of picking your battles. So it is all of these dynamics going on in my head that makes for mental exhaustion. . . I just have to put my best foot forward. *You know the truth of the matter is that no matter what your position, race still plays a factor* .”

“[I] haven’t always had a mentor or a group to interact with with throughout my career. . . . Part of this was my choice because I didn’t always think I could be open with the leaders that were in certain positions... ***[A] lot of times it was not necessarily seeing mentors or potential mentors who looked like me*** and then if I did, not really understanding what the perception would be if I did approach them for advice, mentorship and so forth.”

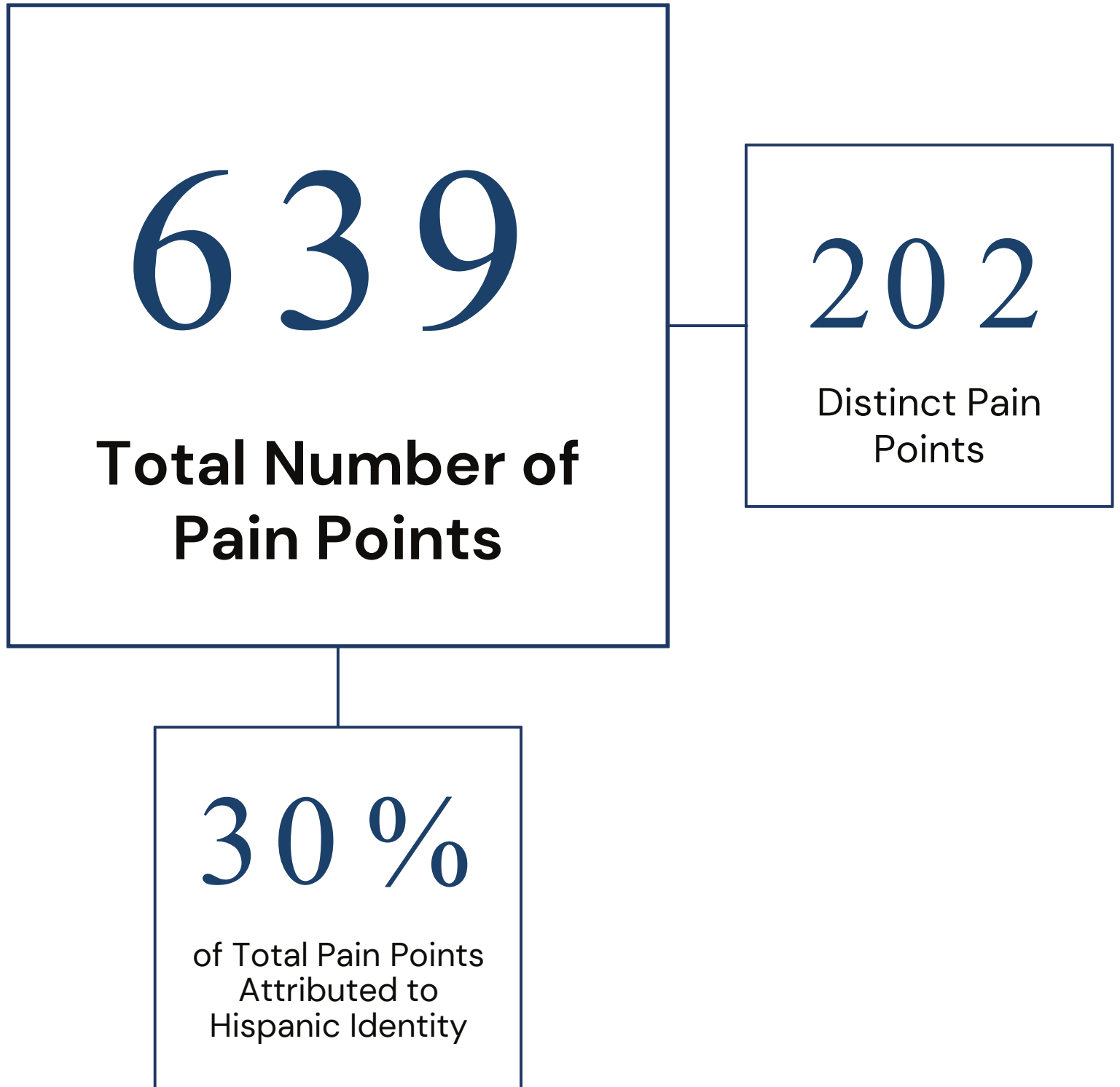
“I went to apply for the position and the person came flat out and told me they were looking for people that look like him not people that look like me, ***because people that look like me tend to be more aggressive and hostile*** . . . ‘We’re looking for people of high intellect who tend to be Caucasian.’”

“I started a project for my unit, a hospitality cart. . . and I'd go to every room on the unit. And then I noticed that anytime I did that, one of the nurses, he would harass me. . . He was just laughing about it. He would say, "Oh you're like a maid." . .

***I felt like if I wasn't Black, he wouldn't have said that. . . It's just the way they do and say things here .***”



*Hispanic*



## Data Overview

Participants referenced 639 total pain points (*202 distinct*) during the interviews and focus group – **an average of 21 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of these pain points, participants attributed 30% to their Hispanic identity.

# Top Pain Points

Seven pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' Hispanic identity (by percentage of respondents):

27%

1. Colleague making inappropriate comments/questions about identity
2. Customer/Vendor making inappropriate comments/questions about identity

23%

3. Lacking diversity on team
4. Lacking colleagues to talk to who can relate
5. Feeling like an outsider because of identity
6. Feeling unable to be full authentic self with colleagues

20%

7. Lacking representation in leadership

# Top Themes

Based on the pain points **attributed** to participants' Hispanic identity, five major themes arose.

Theme	Summary
Comments About Identity	Forty-seven percent (47%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding comments about their identity from superiors/supervisors, colleagues, direct reports and/or customers/vendors (e.g., inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, microaggressions, offensive jokes, comments about hair etc.)
Challenges with Colleagues	Thirty-seven percent (37%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their colleagues (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, microaggressions, refusing to work together, etc.)
Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors	Thirty percent (30%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g. differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, lack of responsiveness to complaints, microaggressions, verbal attacks, etc.)

# Top Themes

Based on the pain points **attributed** to participants' Hispanic identity, five major themes arose.

## Theme

## Summary

Well-being at Work

Thirty percent (30%) of participants perceived adverse effects to their career because of their Hispanic identity including feeling like they cannot speak up/interject, feeling a need to prove themselves more, feeling excluded, and feeling a lack of credibility.

Challenges with Customers/Vendors

Twenty-seven percent (27%) of participants identified one or more pain points pertaining to their interactions with customers including inappropriate comments, questions or behaviors because of one or more of their identities. This is almost 10% higher than any other identity group.



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

"[One] thing that sticks out is *being called a token* . . . We all know what that term means. It was in reference to when [my colleagues] talked about me getting the job, because it was kind of, it hinted that I only got the job because of how I identify and that I'm a token in that sense that I wouldn't be here if I didn't identify the way that I do and if I wasn't Hispanic. So that was really a thing that *made you feel where I wasn't equal* ."

“Somebody said this to my face, *“If I were just to look at you, I wouldn't think that you're Hispanic, but as soon as you open your mouth, then I know. . . then I can tell.”* So, I have asked people ‘What does that mean?’ and then the whole accent piece comes into play. . .

[I]t's been quite interesting because I was kind of looking at some diversity training that I was doing today, and in some of the pieces that they were talking about was kind of *how we tend to kind of hide our own identity, just to kind of blend in. And boy that kind of hit home, because I have worked so hard to try to get rid of my accent. . .*

*[I faced] lots of criticisms. . . with my pronunciation, or sometimes with writing.*

*That's part of the reason why I went back to school and got a graduate degree. . .*

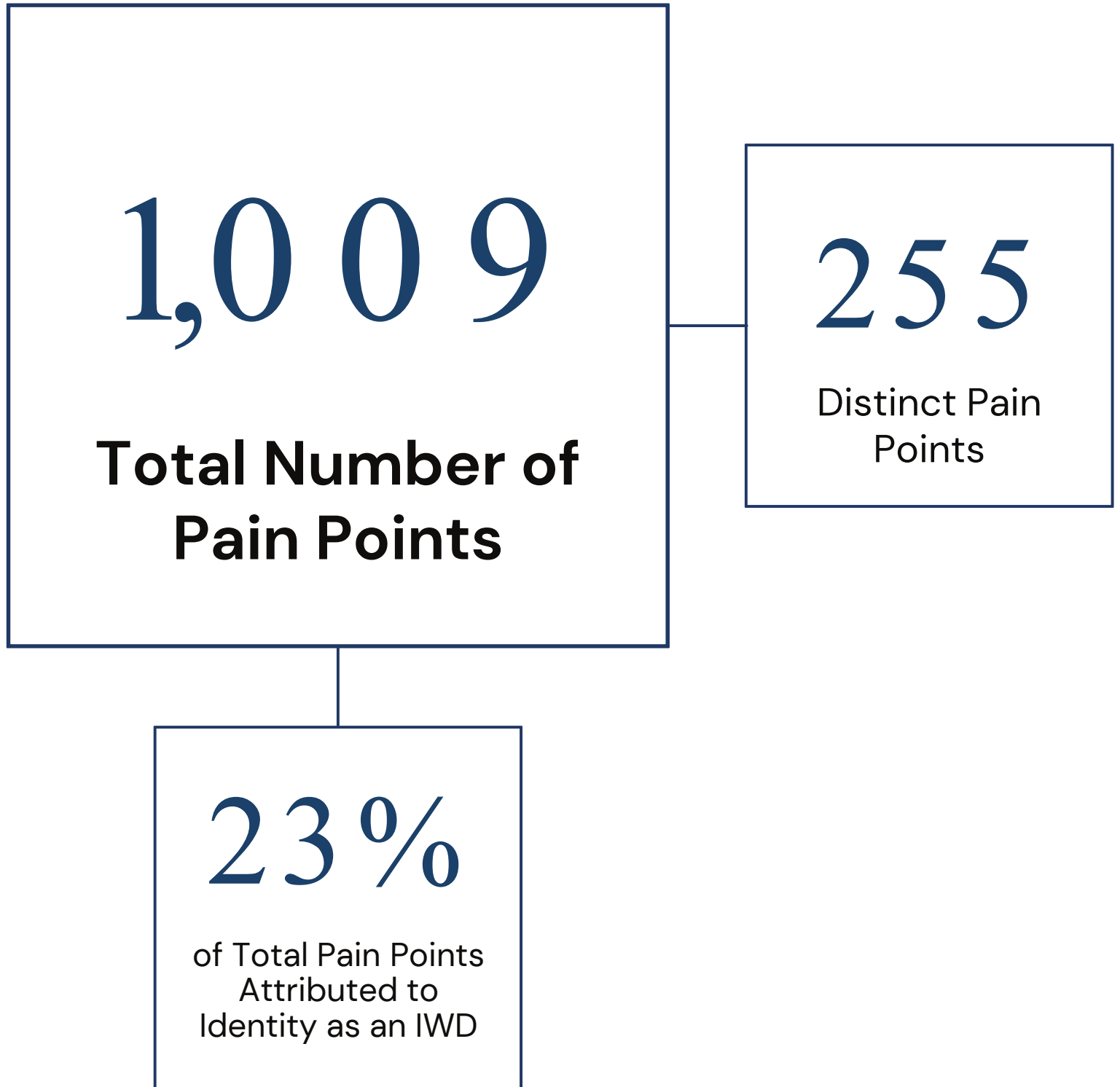
[T]here's been a lot of things that I have done, I guess in a way to try to blend in and be less me and more like them. So I wouldn't feel the way I was feeling. But even after doing all those things. The feeling is still there.”



*“I think my identity of being a person of color identifying as Hispanic stands out to me in my leadership role with VA because I haven’t seen other leaders of color in my **space**, and I think that translates to the larger community as well. I don’t see very many women of color in leadership in the field of [redacted] really either.”*

“Veterans will ask me where my accent is from and I will say ‘Puerto Rico.’ They’ll say nothing. Just turn around and not talk to me anymore...[or] *saying ‘Now that I know you’re Puerto Rican, I’m not gonna talk to you anymore .’*”

*Individuals with  
Disabilities (IWD)*



## Data Overview

Participants referenced 1,009 total pain points (*255 distinct*) during the interviews and focus group – **an average of 24 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of these pain points, participants attributed 23% to their identity as an individual with disabilities.

# Top Pain Points

Two pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' identity as an Individual with Disabilities (by percentage of respondents):

21%

1. Superior/Supervisor denied request for reasonable accommodations
2. Feeling unable to be full authentic self with colleagues

# Top Themes

Based on the pain points **attributed** to participants' identity as an Individual with Disabilities, three major themes arose.

Theme	Summary
Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors	Forty-four percent (44%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g. differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, microaggressions, verbal attacks, denying use of FMLA, denying request for reasonable accommodations, etc.)
Reasonable Accommodations	Thirty percent (30%) of participants experienced issues with securing reasonable accommodations including being denied a request for accommodations, issues accessing their accommodations, and/or a lack of physical accommodations in a space.
Comments About Identity	Twenty-one percent (21%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding comments about their identity from superiors/supervisors, colleagues, direct reports and/or customers/vendors (e.g., inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, microaggressions, offensive jokes, etc.)



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

”One of my first clients was somebody whose [mental illness] background was actually very similar to mine. And I sat down with the treatment team to report on her vocational assessment and then I told the treatment team, ‘She wants to go to school to get her Bachelor's in social work.’ ***Everybody on the team laughed, as if to say anybody who would manage this kind of illness could never even get a Bachelor's in social work. While somebody with a more severe history was sitting at that table who had a PhD in psychology .***”



“In terms of my body shape, there are sometimes *I won't go to gatherings or meetings because I don't know if all the chairs in the room – or if there's even a chair in the room that – will fit my body* . . . I worked in the hospital and there were rooms that had chairs that just wouldn't work for me. And so to be able to attend something meant I had to go search down a chair just so that I would have a thing to sit down [on].”

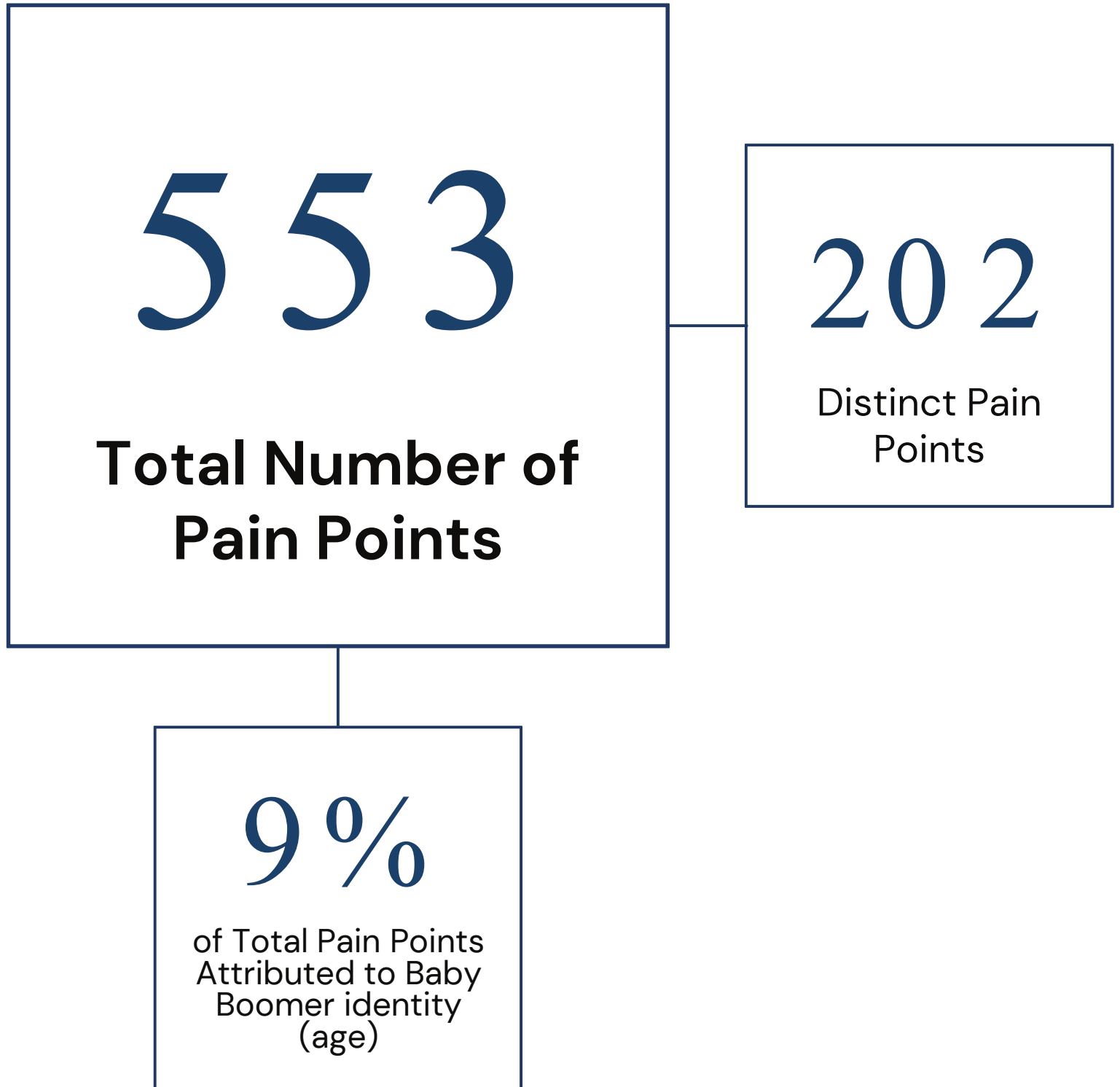
“Salesforce has those small and gray fonts and lack customizability of the screens and *that is really a problem for anyone with a visual disability* .”

“When I first got offered a job at VA, I told them I would need a captioning telephone to be able to do my job. They said I was gonna have to wait until they got the phone to start. Fortunately, the hiring manager was like, ‘Well you’re not going to be making calls right anyway, you’ll be training so let’s bring you on now.’ . . . *It ended up taking VA three months to get me my captioning telephone. And to think I would have been unemployed for three months waiting for VA to get me my accommodation* .”

“I have been a reasonable accommodations coordinator for nine years now and I think the biggest challenge I see is the lack of 508 compliance in videos that are shown for training...I reached out to them [the 508 Compliance Officer] because they had a 508 training that I wanted to attend to learn how to make things 508 compliant and their own training didn't have captioning. ***Like your own 508 compliance trainings are not even 508 compliant .***”

“I was in a car crash in 2020 and I had to take a month off of work because of my short - term memory loss [due to] the physical and mental distress that I experienced from that event. The physical disability wasn't really an issue in the office because it happened during COVID, so I was already working home 100% at that time. But for the cognitive issue, I had some issues at work where I really needed to advocate for myself. [I talked] to HR to get a reasonable work accommodation put in place for me to be able to have more time to process my claims [and] asked for help doing one-on-one retraining because my short-term memory had kind of impacted my ability to remember how to process some types of claims. ***So, I couldn't really be my authentic self in the office because my manager at the time, did not really fully understand the scope of my mental disabilities and was giving me pushback and did not want to allow me to have this downtime in a production - oriented workplace .***”

*Individuals Born between  
1946 and 1964  
(Baby Boomers)*



## Data Overview

Participants referenced 553 total pain points (*202 distinct*) during the interviews and focus group – **an average of 19 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of these pain points, participants attributed 9% to their age.

# Top Pain Points

Two pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' age (born between 1946 and 1964)\*, by percentage of respondents:

17%

1. Feeling a lack of credibility due to their identity

14%

2. Feeling like an outsider because of identity

*\*The Baby Boomer identity group did not have any pain points that met the 20% reporting threshold (as noted on slide 13). The top two pain points most frequently identified and attributed to participants' age (born between 1946 and 1964) are reported above.*

# Top Themes

Based on the top pain points attributed to participants' age (born between 1946 and 1964), two major themes arose.

## Theme

## Summary

Well-being at Work

Twenty-eight percent (28%) of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work because of their age including feeling like they cannot speak up/interject, feeling a need to prove themselves more, feeling excluded, and feeling a lack of credibility.

Challenges with  
Superiors/Supervisors

Twenty-one percent (21%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, lack of responsiveness to complaints, microaggressions, verbal attacks, etc.)





# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

“I definitely feel [conscious about] being on the older side of things. A lot of my colleagues are young and *you don't want to be the Boomer that everyone is [talking about] like, 'Oh my god they're so old fashioned. They only want to do things this way.'*”

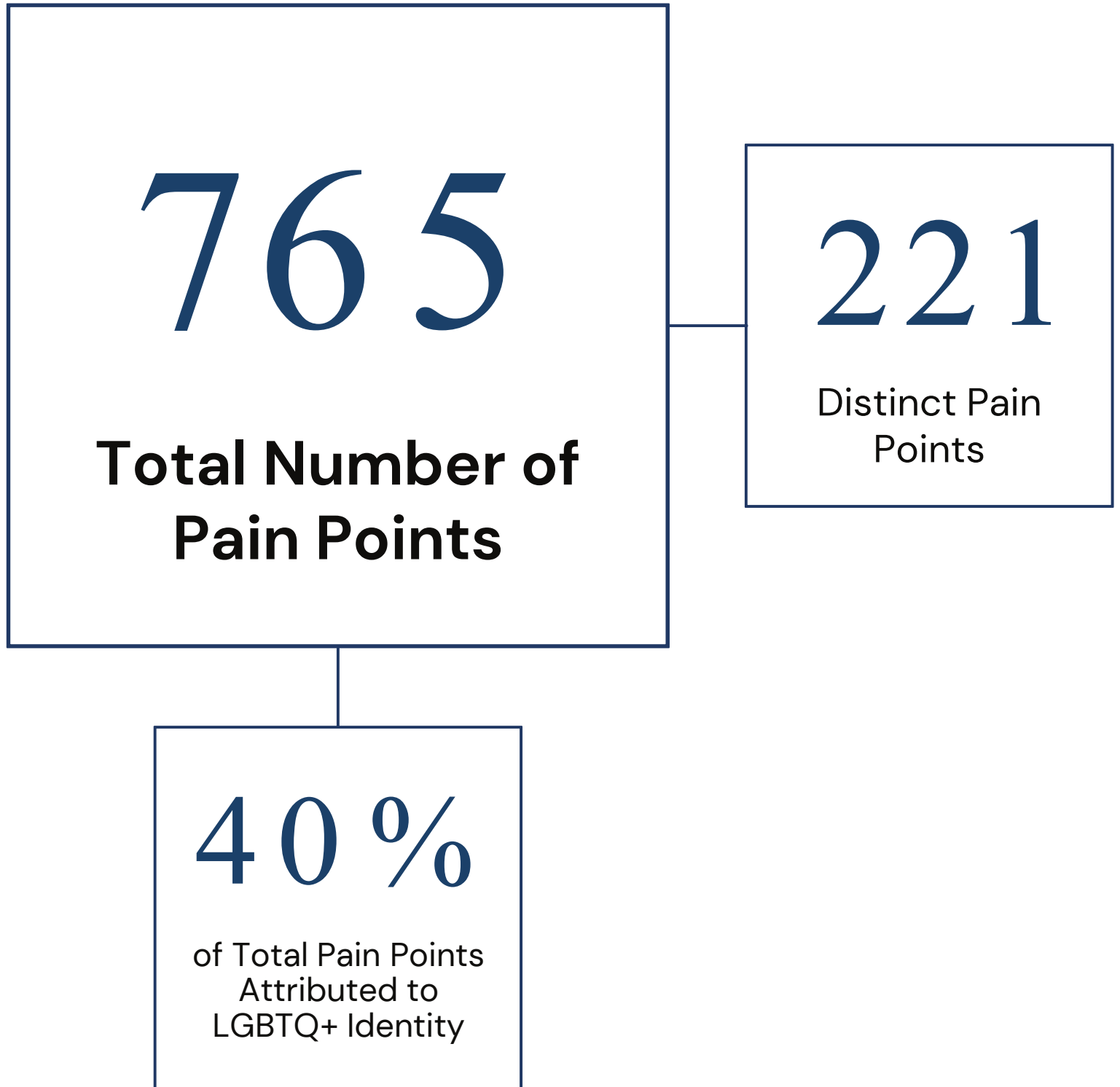
“I think as you start to get older, *you start to feel like when you volunteer for things, they would rather take the younger people* .”

“I feel like they put you on a shelf once you hit a certain age. *It feels like I’ve been denied opportunities to be a team lead [and] develop professionally. . . because I might retire* . . . I guess when you get older, they think you may not be as modern in your thinking to be a part of their up and coming processes.”

“I have always been in a leadership role [until now]. So, I worried a little bit about struggling with seeing things that I would have possibly been able to influence [if I were in the leadership role]. ***That’s when I feel a heightened sense of my age . . . because I’m not in a leadership role here .***”

“I’ve been an IT person for a very long time now. . . So when I got to VA, [I was surprised that] *I found people assuming I didn’t know anything about IT, I think because I’m older* . . . You know, don’t insult my intelligence because you think I don’t know anything.”

*LGBTQ+*



## Data Overview

Participants referenced 765 total pain points (*221 distinct*) during the interviews and focus group – **an average of 21 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of these pain points, participants attributed 40% to their LGBTQ+ identity.

# Top Pain Points

Nine pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' LGBTQ+ identity (by percentage of respondents):

38%

1. Avoiding casual conversation to conceal identity
2. Fearing identity will adversely affect individual's reputation

35%

3. Making efforts to conceal identity

32%

4. Feeling unable to be full authentic self with colleagues



# Top Pain Points

Nine pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' LGBTQ+ identity (by percentage of respondents):

30%

- 5. Lacking representation in leadership
- 6. Superior/Supervisor making inappropriate comments/questions about identity
- 7. Feeling like an outsider because of identity

27%

- 8. Colleague making inappropriate comments/questions about identity

22%

- 9. Lacking colleagues to talk to who can relate

# Top Themes

Based on the top pain points attributed to participants' LGBTQ+ identity, four major themes arose.

Theme	Summary
Closeting	Fifty-four percent (54%) of participants cited one or more pain points referencing closeting their LGBTQ+ identity either through actions or efforts to conceal their identity (e.g., dressing differently, turning their camera off, avoiding casual conversation, etc.)
Comments About Identity	Fifty-four percent (54%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding comments about their identity from superiors/supervisors, colleagues, direct reports and/or customers/vendors (e.g., inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, microaggressions, offensive jokes, etc.)
Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors	Forty-nine percent (49%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, correcting them on their pronouns, microaggressions, verbal attacks, etc.)
Challenges with Colleagues	Forty-one percent (41%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their colleagues (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, microaggressions, refusing to work together, correcting them on their pronouns, etc.)



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

“[Years after my transition], I was really reliably passing. I was not getting misgendered by anybody in my life...and I also wear like, a pin on my lanyard that says ‘he’ for my pronouns, I’ve done that ever since I transitioned here...And I came to hear from some of my colleagues *that when I wasn’t around, the director was misgendering me, which was just really odd because she had never known me under any other name. . . she had never known me to use other pronouns besides he/him/his* .”

“One thing that I do and have done with every interview . . . I take my picture down because I get nervous that if people see what I look like they will not want to hire me. I know that may seem silly, but it makes me a bit uncomfortable. Like, *I feel like my odds are better if they don't know that I'm a lesbian* .”

"I was in a conversation with a group of three other gentlemen. *I don't remember what we were talking about – some random topic – and one of them just starts randomly making gay jokes. . .* Obviously he had no idea I was gay. But I'm always at a loss in those situations. I didn't say anything. I don't feel, I don't feel empowered. I certainly then did not feel empowered to say anything. *And that's one of the things with this particular identity is oftentimes we're incognito. So that sort of thing has happened many times before. . . But that particular incident was of note because this individual. . .* was in leadership of the organization at the time."

“[Where I work], it's a very conservative white state and *that definitely hinders my ability to like feel comfortable sharing my personal life. And there's definitely that lack of representation at the VA that I work at* . . . I identify as a lesbian, and I have a significant other. . . You get asked a lot if you're married in the VA, that seems to be a very common question or if you have a boyfriend or husband. I get that basically every day at work. *At first, I was pretty open with sharing I don't have a husband I have a have a partner and I received some comments that don't make me feel comfortable anymore .*”

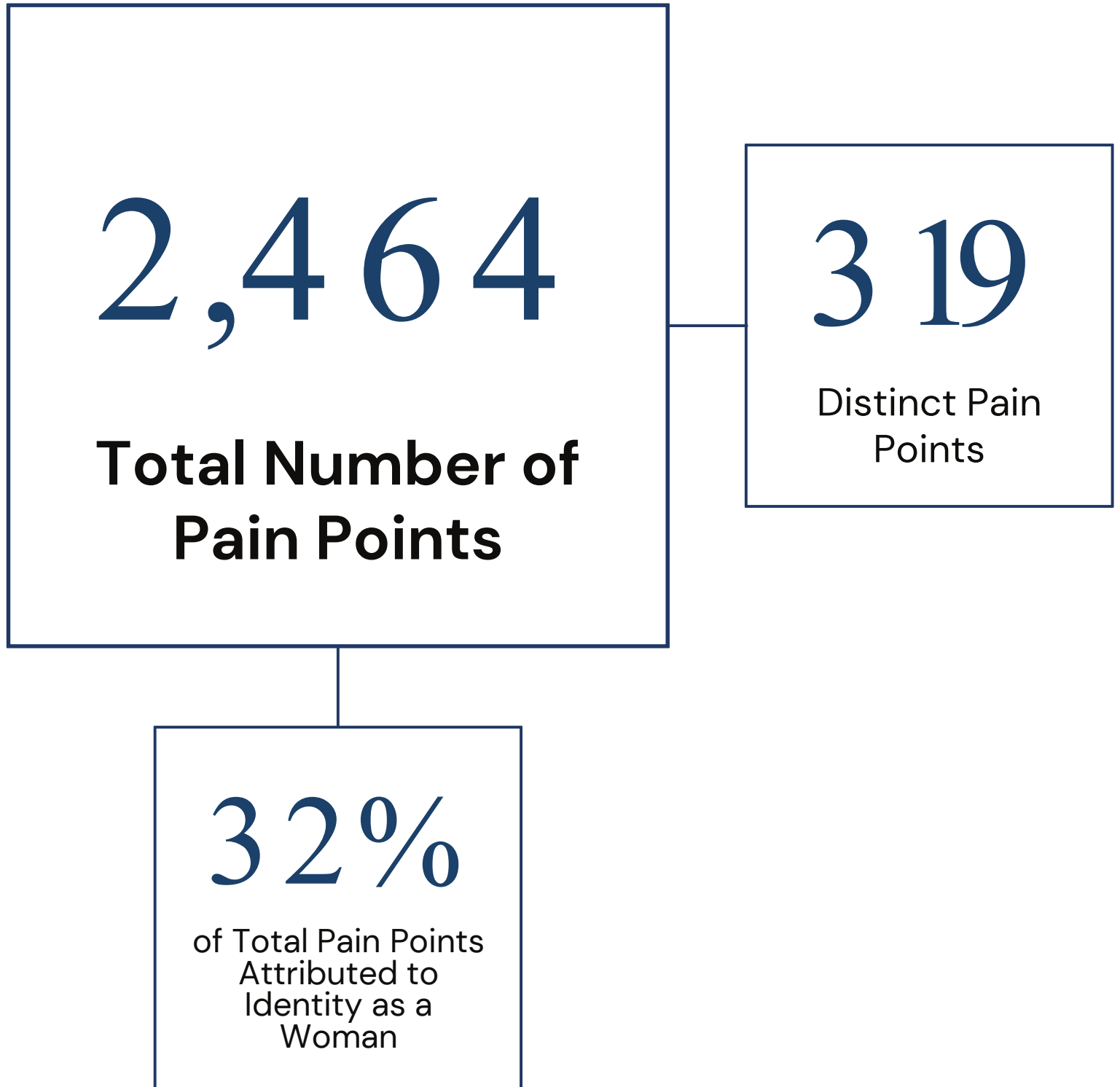
“I was in [my supervisor’s] office and we called [his supervisor] to give him an update. . .

And after addressing the issue at hand, we're just having a casual conversation and we asked him how he was doing. And at some point, he mentioned '*You know, the only thing down here are fruits and nuts*'. . . Maybe it was an offhand comment. . . *but you know, it made me question. . . Maybe he’s not cool with the gays.*”

"We rely on a lot of volunteer service organizations. . . I don't necessarily want them to know I'm gay because, as, as their superior. . . I need them to do as I tell them to do that respect my position, and I don't want me being gay to interfere with that communication. So I have to always stay on, on topic. . . I feel as though *I can't have small talk, or just like casual conversations with vendors or volunteers or something like that because you know, I may mention something that kind of gives me away.*”



*Women*



## Data Overview

Participants referenced 2,464 total pain points (*319 distinct*) during the interviews and focus group – an **average of 21 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of these pain points, participants attributed 32% to their gender.

# Top Pain Points

Three pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' identity as a Woman (by percentage of respondents):

27%

1. Superior/Supervisor differential treatment of those of a particular identity
2. Feeling a lack of credibility due to identity

23%

3. Lacking representation in leadership

# Top Themes

Based on the top pain points attributed to participants' identity as a Woman, three major themes arose.

Theme	Summary
Well-being at Work	Forty-five percent (45%) of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work because of their gender identity including feeling like they cannot speak up/interject, feeling a need to prove themselves more, feeling excluded, and feeling a lack of credibility.
Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors	Forty-five percent (45%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g. differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, lack of responsiveness to complaints, microaggressions, verbal attacks, sexism/misogyny, etc.)
Comments About Identity	Thirty-three percent (33%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their colleagues (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, microaggressions, refusing to work together, sexism/misogyny, etc.)

TW: Sexual Harassment, Mention of Rape/Sexual Assault



## Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

“It was a struggle to go from a GS11 to a GS12. Even when I’d done my best interviews, someone would get it that’s less qualified...It took me seven years to get to a 12, where counterparts can take 1,2, or 3 years. ***Then I got to a 12 and I was being talked out of a 13 by my supervisor. She was like, ‘There’s more opportunities. You need to concentrate on being a mom. There’s more opportunities for you later in life.’***”

“So originally, there was [space to pump] in one of the break rooms, and some of the males liked to sleep in there for night or in the afternoon. They called it “Sleepy Hollow.” [The men] pretty much complained when women would go in there and have a sign up [to pump].

...

[A] couple years ago, one of [my colleagues] told me an incident where she was in Sleepy Hollow pumping and *had a sign up that said, “Please do not come in. Pumping in progress,” and a gentleman just decided to come in there anyways.* She just, you know, was mortified because she's pumping and here's this guy that just walks in. *He got upset at her because she was taking away his space for him to take a nap. So, then the women had to move to the bathroom, and pump in the bathroom because there was a chair in the bathroom, and you can lock the door .”*

“There was a white male colleague of mine who[se] . . . opinions were basically the opposite of mine, but I didn’t want to express my opinions because I felt that this is the workplace, and we shouldn’t discuss such things... He started talking about how women deserve to be sexually harassed and assaulted, and [said] if you’re raped it is your fault because you’re asking for it. I was just dumbfounded that he would bring this up to me, being the only woman there. And he continued going on about this and I tried to get him to stop... I just started crying. It was too much for... ***Then he told me that I needed to watch out for it to happen to me.***

. . .

***[I reported it to my supervisor and] there has been no consequence for this colleague. He continues to harass other people. . . It made me feel very unsafe and not want to be around him [and upset] knowing that the VA hasn't really done any steps to protect the women here that he's harass because I'm not the only one.”***



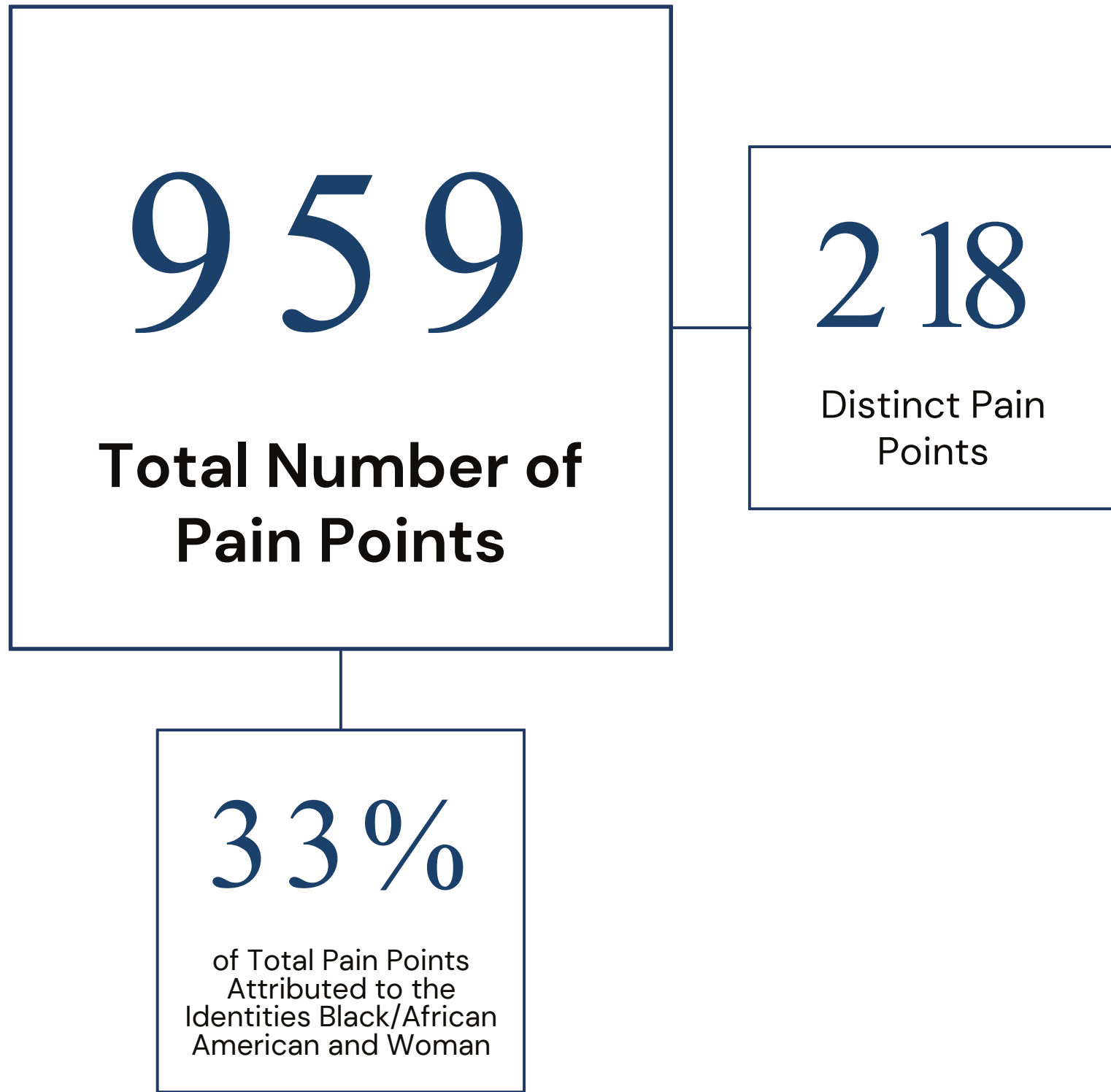
"I think as a woman and somebody that has pushed hard for advancement throughout my career, *I've definitely felt not always welcome at the table. . . . I think our leadership at our [office] is very male dominated . . .* I've had some occasions where I've felt that the perception of my work product, or the way *I've presented or something. . . is sometimes looked at differently, being delivered by a woman. . . I've gotten feedback. 'Well, you know, that's an emotional perspective or way of looking at something rather than a pragmatic way of looking at things.'* [T]hat has happened any number of times in my career."

"Being a woman when you are in what appears to be in a male dominated management structure. . . [it] oftentimes *makes me feel like I'm out of place and that I have to prove with every decision that I belong and I deserve to be here .*"

"I brought forward concern. And in bringing forward the concern, I cried because the concern felt big to me. The concern was well received, and I think appropriately addressed from what I understood... The concern was conveyed to the person that I was reporting the concern about, which I think is appropriate... ***[But] afterwards, the person that I reported about came to me and the first thing that they said was, 'I heard you cried .'***"

"There was an older gentleman. He just had a thing for women's supervisors – it was known in the facility. So the [EEO] officer came down and spoke with me...and said 'Look, you're gonna have a hard time with this employee. But you can be successful. ***However, don't be too authoritative. He just doesn't do well with females .'***"

*Identity Intersection:  
Black/African American  
Women*



## Data Overview

When analyzing the data from an intersectional lens, individuals who identify as **Black/African American and Women** were the only identity that both reached the data saturation point and had pain points exceed the 20% reporting threshold.

Participants referenced 959 total pain points (*218 distinct*) during the interviews and focus group – an **average of 22 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of these pain points, participants attributed 33% to the identities Black/African American and Woman.

# Top Pain Points

Five pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' Black/African American and Woman identities (by percentage of respondents):

33%

1. Lacking representation in leadership

26%

2. Identity is explicitly perceived as an impediment to career advancement  
3. Superior/Supervisor differential treatment of those of a particular identity

23%

4. Feeling a lack of credibility due to identity

21%

5. Superior/Supervisor making inappropriate comments/questions about identity

# Top Themes

Based on the top pain points attributed to participants' identities as a Black/African American and Woman, three major themes arose.

Theme	Summary
Well-being at Work	Forty-five percent (42%) of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work because of their race and gender identity including feeling like they cannot speak up/interject, feeling a need to prove themselves more, feeling excluded, and feeling a lack of credibility.
Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors	Thirty-five percent (35%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g. differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, lack of responsiveness to complaints, microaggressions, verbal attacks, sexism/misogyny, etc.)
Comments About Identity	Thirty-three percent (33%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their colleagues (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, microaggressions, refusing to work together, comments about hair, sexism/misogyny, etc.)



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

“Why am I participating in these leadership programs to become an SES if there isn’t anyone there that looks like me... *Women are mostly not SES’s and especially not people of color and I’m both* .”



“I am not my authentic self here. . . I feel as though I am not allowed to be myself. I feel as though if I have concerns about something, I get things like, *‘Your tone seems angry. I can hear disdain in your voice .’* . . . It just made me realize, *‘Am I being stereotyped as an ‘angry Black woman’ just because I bring a patient safety concern to your attention?’* ”

“I've had to act as if I was a 'part of the club' because folks didn't see me as the type of person who could be doing [redacted] job even though I was doing it very well. And so I did have to change... *I had to be totally different. I couldn't wear my hair the way that I wanted to. I had to talk differently, speak differently, act differently, be more subdued versus being my true self* . That was difficult for me. . . .”

# *Aggregate Findings*

# Top Attributed Themes

Based on the top pain points attributed to one or more of the eight identities in focus, three top themes emerged.

## Theme

## Summary

Challenges with  
Superiors/Supervisors

Sixty-three percent (63%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g. differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments or questions about their identity, lack of responsiveness to complaints, microaggressions, verbal attacks, sexism/misogyny, etc.)

Well-being at Work

Fifty-six percent (56%) of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work because of their identity including feeling like they cannot speak up/interject, feeling a need to prove themselves more, feeling excluded, and feeling a lack of credibility.

Comments About  
Identity

Fifty-four percent (54%) of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding comments about their identity from superiors/supervisors, colleagues, direct reports and/or customers/vendors (e.g., microaggressions, offensive jokes, etc.)

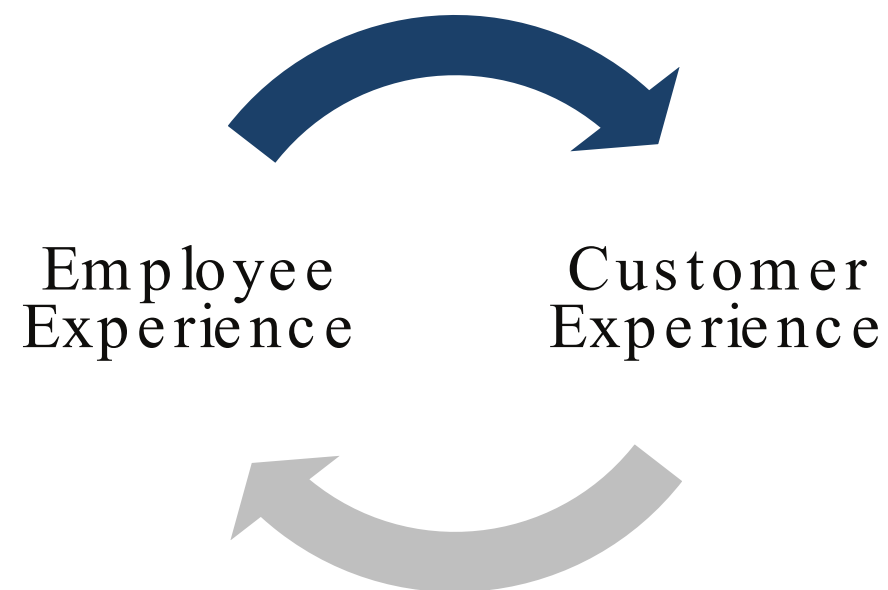
# Group - specific Themes Unattributed to Identity

There were 7 instances where at least 60% of participants in an identity group cited one or more pain points in a theme, but fewer than 20% of these participants attributed the pain points to the specific identity noted below. Given the intersectional nature of identities, some of these pain points were attributed to other identities in focus.

Identities	Themes & Summary
American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN)	<p><u>Career Development and Advancement</u>: 65% of AIAN-identifying participants experienced one or more pain points in this theme, but only 15% attributed it to their AIAN identity.</p> <p><u>Well-being at Work</u>: 70% of AIAN-identifying participants experienced one or more pain points in this theme, but only 10% attributed it to their AIAN identity.</p>
Baby Boomer	<p><u>Career Development and Advancement</u>: 69% of Baby Boomer participants experienced one or more pain points in this theme, but only 14% attributed it to their age.</p> <p><u>Challenges with Colleagues</u>: 62% of Baby Boomer participants experienced one or more pain points in this theme, but only 3% attributed it to their age.</p>
Individuals with Disabilities	<p><u>Career Development and Advancement</u>: 74% of IWD participants experienced one or more pain points in this theme, but only 19% attributed it to their identity as an individual with disabilities.</p> <p><u>Well-being at Work</u>: 70% of IWD participants experienced one or more pain points in this theme, but only 16% attributed it to their identity as an individual with disabilities.</p> <p><u>Challenges with Colleagues</u>: 70% of IWD participants experienced one or more pain points in this theme, but only 16% attributed it to their identity as an individual with disabilities.</p>

# EX / CX

During the interviews and focus groups, the project team noticed several intersections between employee experience (EX) and customer experience (CX).



## *Employees Negatively Affecting Customer Experience*

Nineteen participants (12%) highlighted pain points pertaining to how employees affect the experience of customers. The top two pain points cited were:

### ***Lack of understanding about issues of identity group negatively affect customer service***

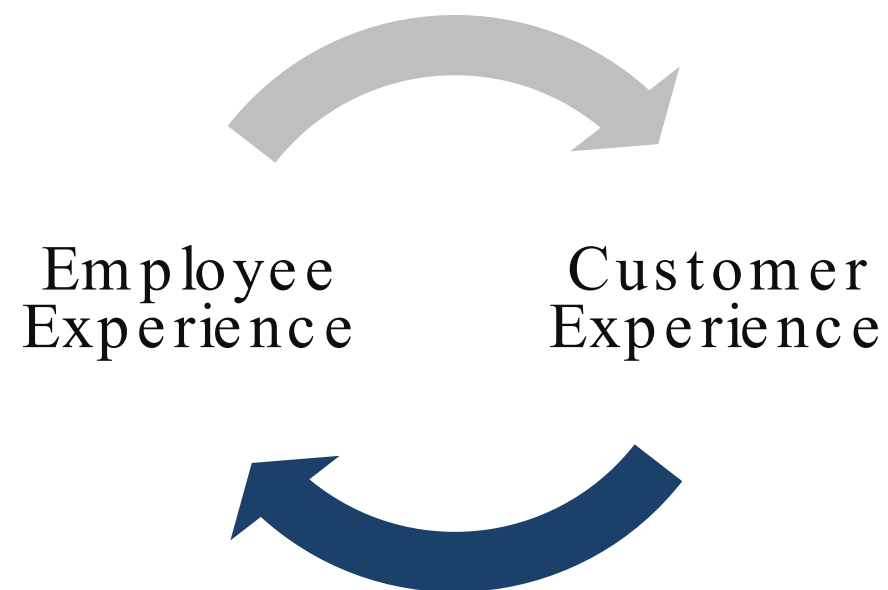
Eleven participants highlighted pain points pertaining to witnessing issues with Veteran care. Of these, more than half (53%) of the pain points directly referenced the **transgender Veteran patient experience**.

### ***Lack of representation in providers negatively affects customer experience***

Six participants highlighted the lack of representation in providers and the negative impact it has on Veterans. Of these, all but one specifically referenced BIPOC Veterans not being able to access a BIPOC provider.

# EX / CX

During the interviews and focus groups, the project team noticed several intersections between employee experience (EX) and customer experience (CX).



## *Customers Negatively Affecting Employee Experience*

Twenty-one percent (21%) of participants highlighted pain points pertaining to their interactions with customers, including inappropriate comments, questions, or behaviors because of one or more of their identities.

A total of 44 pain points were identified, of these 73% were experienced by individuals that identify as BIPOC and 57% were attributed to being BIPOC.

*"When I first started, there w[ere] only three Hispanics in this facility. So anytime that we had an opportunity to get together, we would. And then of course we would speak Spanish, and it wouldn't matter whether it was another co-worker, or a Veteran who would hear us speaking. The comment was always 'Speak English, you're in America.'"*

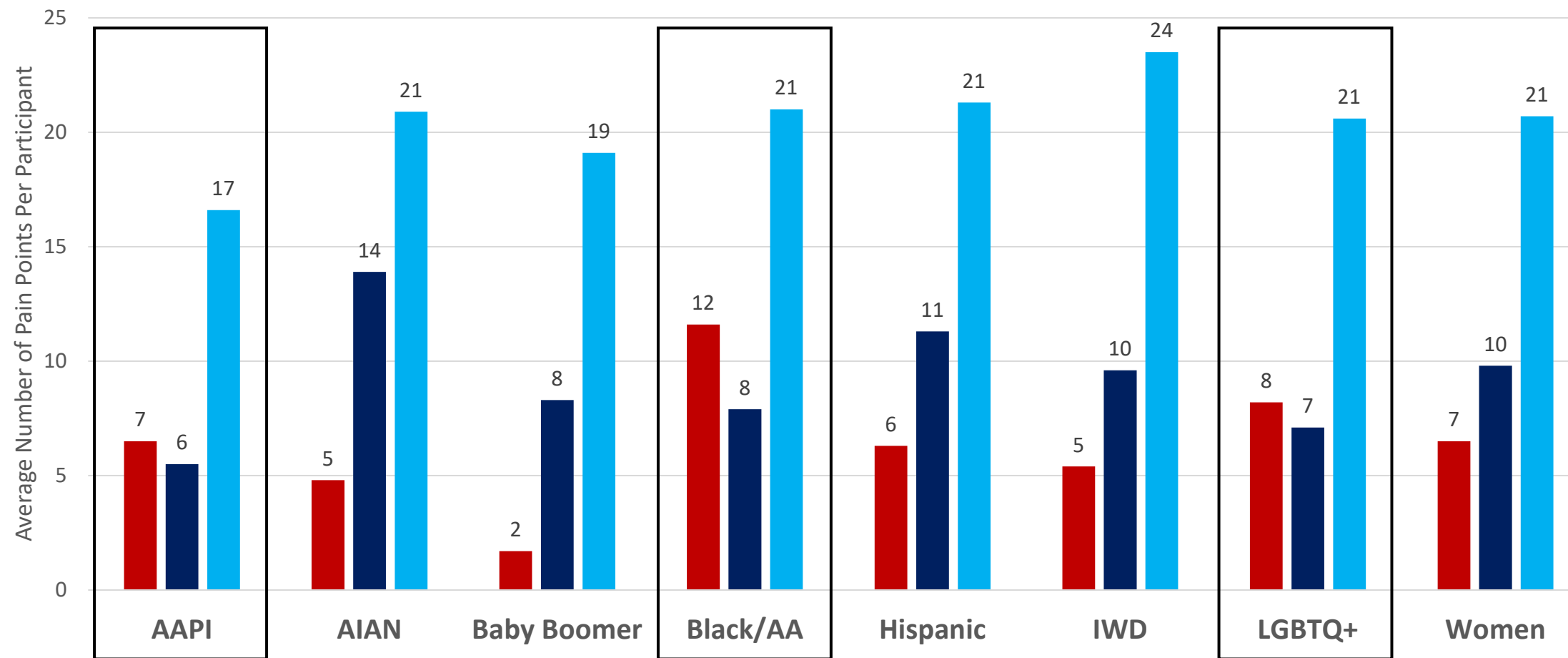
*"[O]ne of my employees who is [also] Native American said she had a Veteran that she worked with that said he didn't want to work with her anymore, 'I don't want to work with that wagon burner anymore.'"*



# Average Pain Points by Identity

Depicted is the average number of pain points attributed to each identity, compared to the average number of pain points attributed to one of the other seven identities and the average total number of pain points experienced.

Average Pain Points by Identity



**Three** identities reported a higher average attribution to their identity, than to one or more of the other seven identities: **AAPI, Black/African American, and LGBTQ+** (boxed identities).

**Participants that identified as Individuals with Disabilities** reported the highest average total pain points.

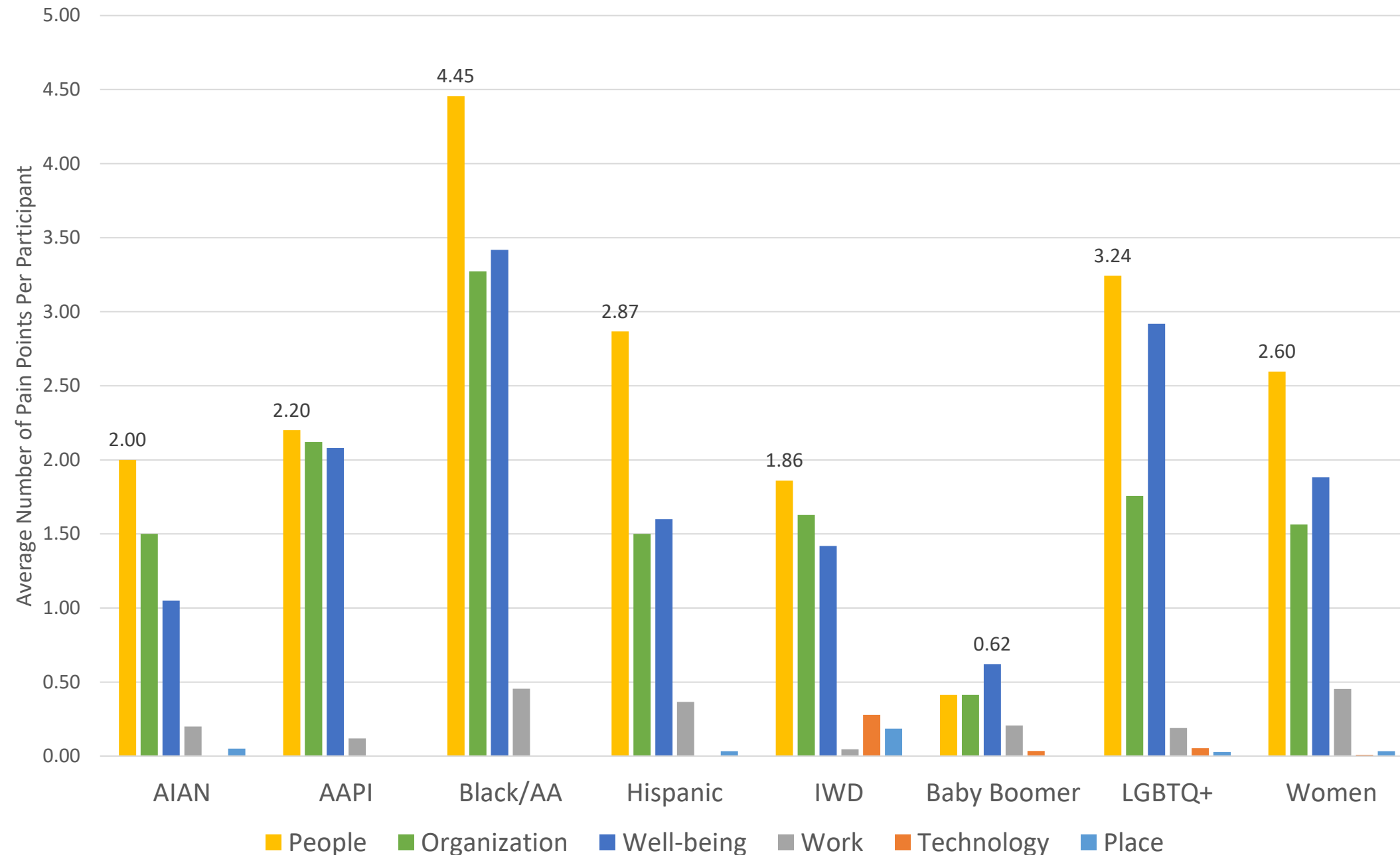
**Black/African American-identifying participants** reported the highest average attribution to this identity (12 pain points), followed by LGBTQ+-identifying individuals (8 pain points).

■ Attributed to this Identity   ■ Attributed to Other Identity   ■ Total Average Pain Points

\*Averages are weighted based on sample size of participants within in each identity group.



# Average Attributed Pain Points by EX Relationship



For seven of the eight identity groups, the highest average number of attributed pain points fell in the People EX relationship.

The Baby Boomer identity, in contrast, yielded the highest average number of attributed pain points in the Well-being EX relationship.

# Severity Heat Map

The Severity Heat Map indicates the extent to which pain points categorized within an EX relationship (rows) are attributed to a given identity (column).\* For example, 71% of all the Well-being pain points that individuals who are Black/African American cite are attributed to their Black/African American identity.

	AIAN	AAPI	BLACK	HISP	IWD	BOOMER	LGBTQ	WOMEN
<b>Organization</b>	21%	33%	46%	22%	18%	6%	28%	22%
<b>People</b>	24%	43%	59%	35%	23%	7%	42%	35%
<b>Place</b>					53%			13%
<b>Technology</b>					63%			
<b>Well-being</b>	25%	53%	71%	35%	31%	16%	59%	42%
<b>Work</b>	17%	14%	33%	25%	3%	14%	18%	34%
<b>Grand Total</b>	23%	39%	55%	30%	23%	9%	40%	32%

Black/African American-identifying individuals reported the highest severity overall, attributing 55% of their pain points to their Black/African American identity. Furthermore, they also reported the highest attribution rate in a single EX relationship across all eight identity groups with 71% of their Well-being pain points being attributed to their Black/African American identity.

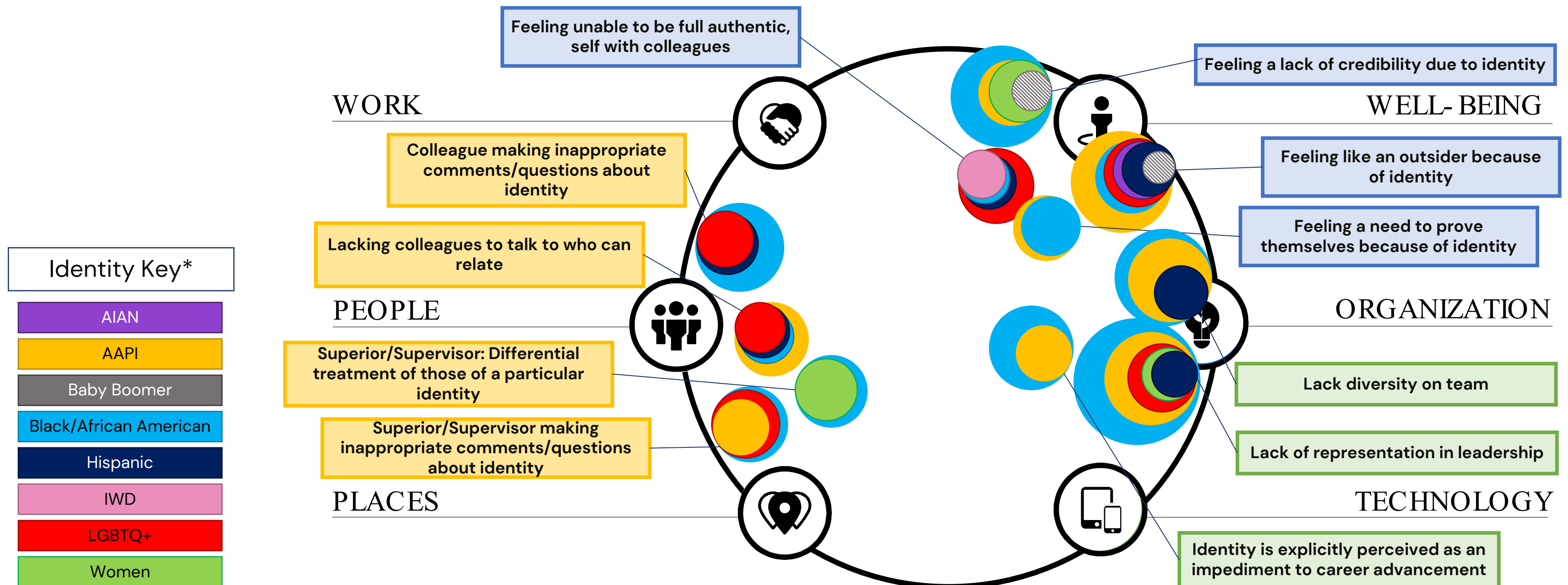
Individuals with Disabilities reported the highest attribution in the Place and Technology relationships. The top pain points for Individuals with Disabilities in these relationships are: lack of physical accommodations, failure to issue proper technology to employee, and lack of specialized IT equipment/software needed to complete work.

Women report the highest severity in the Work relationship. The top pain points for Women in this relationship are: feeling like they can't speak up or interject and experience/knowledge are unrecognized and/or accepted when assignments are given.

\*An identity must have a minimum of two pain points attributed to their identity in the EX relationship to be depicted.

# Pain Points Heat Map

Mapped below are the overlapping most frequently cited pain points. This means the pain points were **attributed by 20% or more of two or more identity groups**. Eleven areas of overlap across the top pain points attributed to identity are depicted.



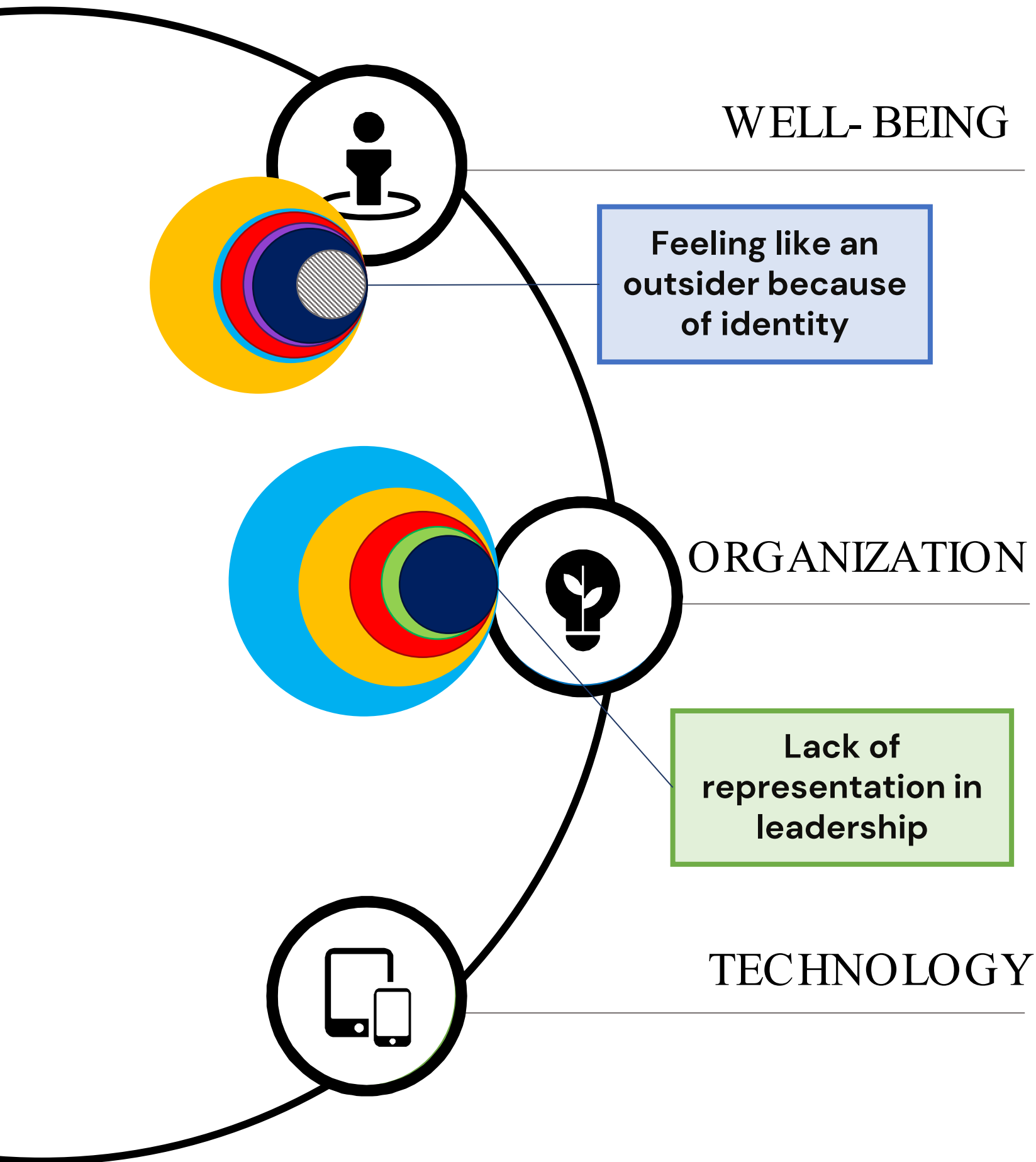
\*Stripes indicate the pain points did not meet the threshold of 20% of participants.

# Pain Points Heat Map

Two pain points were cited by five or more identities as a top pain point attributed to that identity

- Feeling like an outsider due to identity
- Lack of representation in leadership

These pain points directly correlate to two of the top changes that participants highlighted wanting to see at VA.



## Identity Key\*

AIAN	Hispanic
AAPI	IWD
Baby Boomer	LGBTQ+
Black/African American	Women

\*Stripes indicate the pain points did not meet the threshold of 20% of participants.

*Employee - Cited  
Solutions*

# Changes

During interviews and focus groups, each participant was asked to (1) describe a future state of VA in which they felt a full sense of belonging, and (2) share the top change that they would make at VA if they had the power to change anything. The three most frequently cited themes are as follows:

## *Employee Well -being*

The most frequently cited theme centered on employee well-being, with a specific focus on feeling valued, experiencing psychological safety, and being able to bring their whole authentic self to work:

*"To feel valued from the time you turn on your computer to the time you turn it off, I think would truly contribute to overall VA mission. . . But everyone feels valued differently. Some people can feel valued from the peer recognition. Some people feel valued by contributing to a solution. And some people feel valued by feeling heard in a discussion. So, it's having leaders that understand how each and every individual feels, and then keying in on that from the start of their day to the end of the day. On a regular basis, that would improve the overall culture of the VA improving employee experience."*

*"I would just really feel like I could be my whole self if there was a consistent message, from everyone, that my thoughts and opinions mattered, or feelings mattered. [To] could create a safer environment where I felt like I could really bring my whole self to work, then that would be what I would want – just to feel comfortable talking about things that may be uncomfortable, but not fearing some level of change or retaliation."*



# Changes

## *Hiring*

The second most frequently cited theme centered on hiring, with a specific focus on hiring a more diverse workforce at VA, inclusive of gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and age.

*"I think the barriers are a lack of representation within leadership in overall VA that look like me, whether it be Black, whether it be a woman, whether it be part of the LGBTQ+ [community]. It's just a lack of diversity under those three categories. And without any of those people in those spaces, how do needs get met? There is a lack of enough of us [BIPOC individuals, LGBTQ+ individuals, women] in spaces to produce change, to be heard. Although advocacy is appreciated, to have actual people who are experiencing these things represent change seems a little bit more effective."*

*"I would have representation within our executive team. I think it's a real shame that all of our nurse managers are white except for one and all of our nurse managers are female, except for one. I would wave my wand and we would see all kinds of people represented within that executive team who are skilled, but who represent the diversity within our community as well as diversity within the VA."*

# Changes

## *Training*

The third most frequently cited theme centered on training, with a specific focus on the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training for employees at all levels.

*"I would educate [leadership]. I feel like educating leaders on some of the stereotypes (e.g. implicit bias) that are out there about transgender individuals, Black individuals, or whatever identity. We have a lot of stereotypes out there and I feel like people need to deal with their stereotypes. It comes down to an individual level, but when you have leaders who have not done that introspection and dealt with stereotypes that they have, and they bring that to the workplace, there will be a problem because people are not going to be treated equitably. They're going to be treated based on that individual leader's stereotypes of the group."*

*"I am often shocked by how infrequently we're trained on these matters. My husband works for another federal agency, and they have a very large diversity training program. And he's very quick to point out that it's all voluntary. They offer classes on what's the Asian American experience, what's the LGBT experience, folks with disabilities experience. They have classes on these things that you're not required to attend, but they're always available. And they emphasize that, 'hey, we'd really like you to attend these things and understand what the experiences of other people are.' We don't have anything like that."*



*Considerations for  
Next - Step Actions*

# Themes for Consideration

While Identity Insights is intended to be a research rather than solutioning project, the findings nonetheless provide directionality in terms of where VA may wish to deploy resources to conduct further exploration and co-design of services and supports to improve EX. The top pain points and themes across identity groups and in aggregate indicate three focus areas that warrant immediate, initial consideration:

- **Hiring, advancement, and promotion** with attention to **increased diversity and representation** (e.g., Anonymous Job Application)
- **Culture and behavior change** to address challenges that employees experience with colleagues and superiors/supervisors, with particular attention to the **power of interpersonal communications and actions** (e.g., campaign to educate using the power of storytelling)
- **Psychological safety** wherein employees feel comfortable **bringing their whole, authentic selves to and fully engaging in work** (e.g., training for managers on establishing a culture of inclusion and trust)