

# Identity Insights: Phase II 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*

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# ***Project Background***

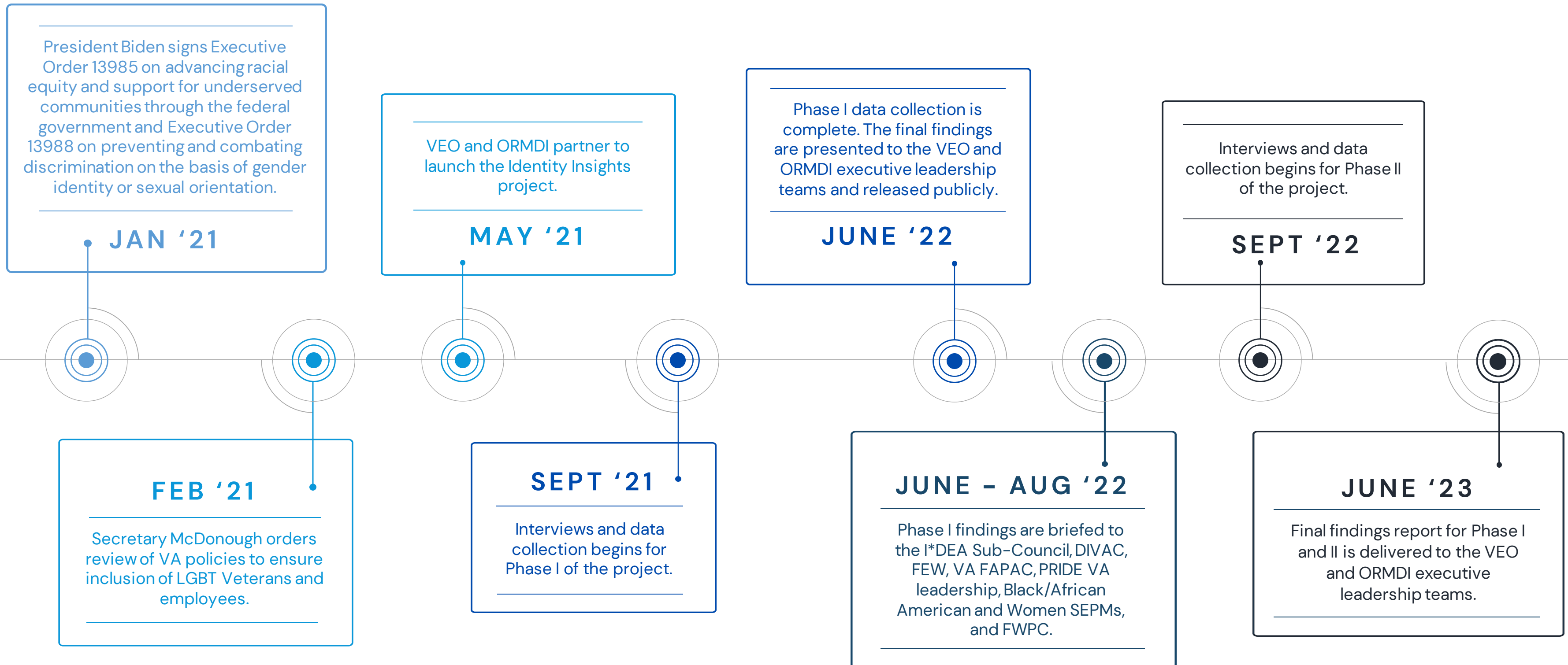
## Background

In 2021, the Veterans Experience Office's (VEO) Employee Experience & Organizational Management Directorate (EXOM) 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 Insights Project Timeline



# Identity Groups in Focus

Phase I and II of the project engaged individuals from 18 identity groups.

## PHASE I

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

## PHASE II

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- Employees Who Are Veterans
- Gender Non-Conforming (GNC) – a deep dive into a segment of the LGBTQ+ identity group
- Generation X (Born Between 1965 and 1980)
- Generation Z (Born Between 1997 and 2005)
- Jewish
- *Middle Eastern and North African (MENA)\**
- Millennial (Born Between 1981 and 1996)
- Non-Religious
- Religious (not including Jewish)
- White

\*The project team was unable to meet the data saturation point for the MENA identity group. Preliminary findings can be found [here](#).

# Selection of Identity Groups

## PHASE I

Phase I engaged seven identity groups (AIAN, AAPI, Black/African American, Hispanic, IWD, LGBTQ+, and Women) that have either been historically underrepresented and/or faced discrimination and bias in the workplace. These seven identity groups directly align with existing Special Emphasis Programs at VA. The eighth group, individuals born between 1946 and 1964 (Baby Boomers), was selected as the first cohort of an EX generational analysis to be expanded upon in Phase II.

## PHASE II

Phase II engaged an additional eight identity groups. Generation X, Millennial, and Generation Z were selected to complete a generational analysis that began with data collection from the Baby Boomer cohort in Phase I. The additional five identity groups (Gender Non-Conforming, MENA, Religion, Veteran, and White) represent protected classes. Additionally, a deep dive into employees who identify as Jewish was selected to align with the White House priority to counter antisemitism.

# Disaggregation of the Data

## DISAGGREGATION OF RELIGIOUS DATA

For the purposes of this report, the data in the Religious/Non-Religious identity group has been disaggregated into three identity groups:

- Non-Religious (atheist, agnostic, no religion, etc.)
- Religious (not including Jewish)
- Jewish

The Religious data is representative of all participants who identified themselves as Religious and encompasses twenty different participant-cited religions inclusive of: Muslim, Indigenous Faith, Hindu, Christian (Catholic, Baptist, Episcopal, etc.), and more.

Individuals who identify as Jewish may identify as ethnically, culturally, and/or religiously Jewish. For example, several participants identified as culturally Jewish and Non-Religious (atheist). For this reason, all data from participants who identify as Jewish is disaggregated from the Religious data.

*Additional context on the definition of Religious, Non-Religious, Jewish, and Gender Non-Conforming can be found [here](#).*

## DISAGGREGATION OF LGBTQ+ DATA

For the purposes of this report, the data in the LGBTQ+ identity group has been disaggregated into two identity groups:

- LGBTQ+ (not including GNC)
- Gender Non-Conforming

The Gender Non-Conforming identity group is inclusive of those who identify as transgender, nonbinary, gender fluid, and more. In order to highlight pain points specific to this identity group that would have otherwise not risen to the top for LGBTQ+ identity group writ large, the data from individuals who identify as Gender Non-Conforming has been disaggregated from the LGBTQ+ data.

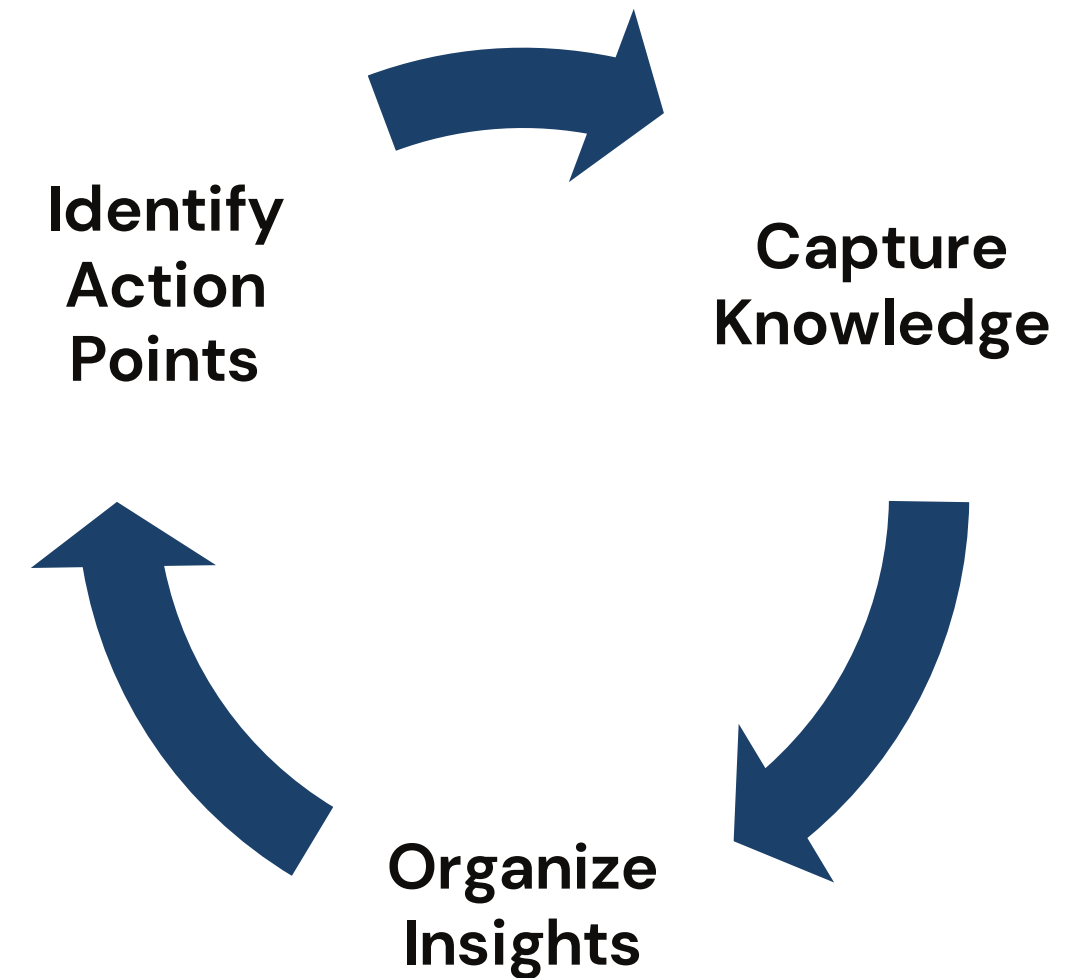


# Data Collection

Through a series of human-centered design (HCD) interviews and focus groups, the project team 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:

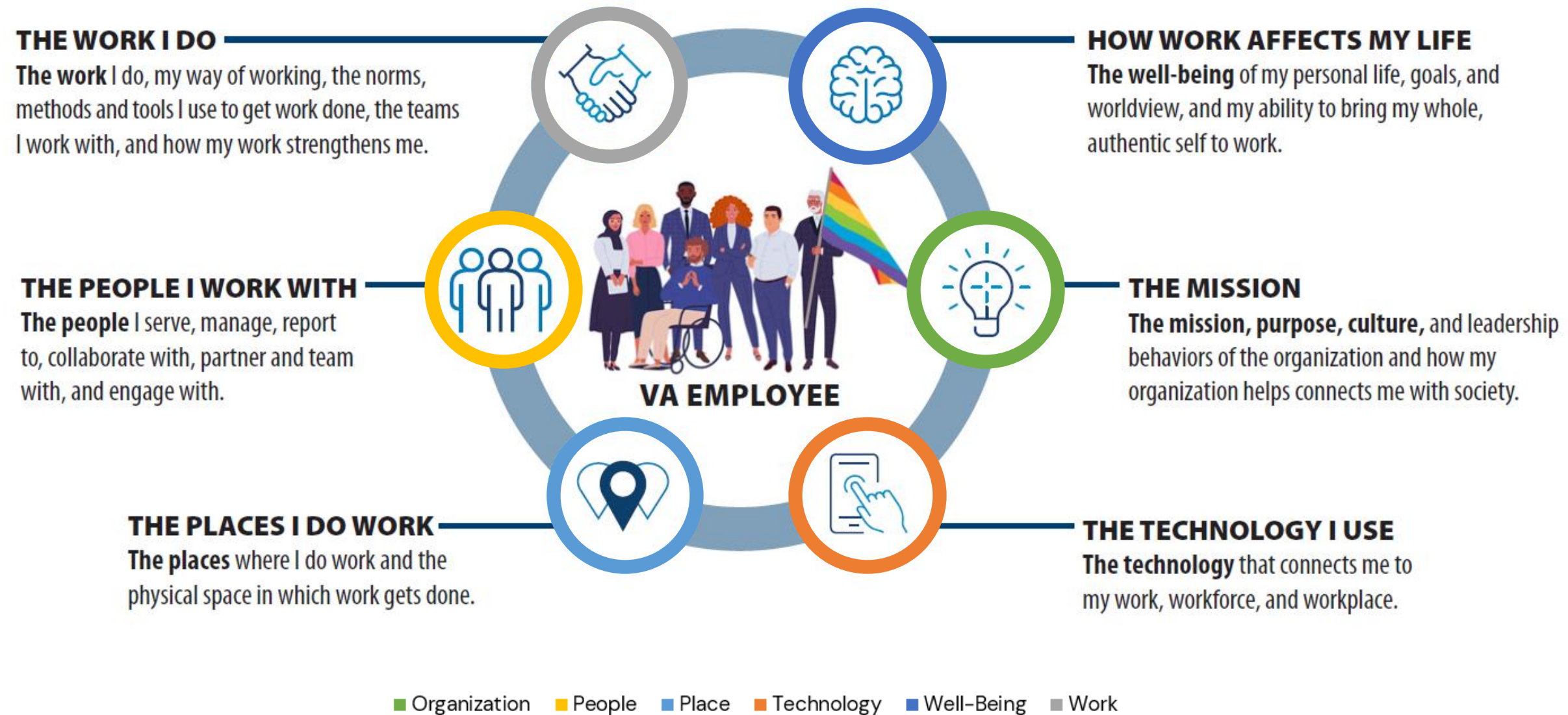
- Recorded in each interview and focus group
- Coded and tabulated according to identity attribution and alignment with the EX Relationship Framework
- Examined through an intersectional lens that built cumulatively throughout the project



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

# EX Relationship 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 its mission, 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 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, **the project methodology is grounded in engagement of a minimum of 16 individuals who identify with each identity group**. Aggregate reporting is conducted on identity groups that reached the data saturation point.

The figures below represent how many individuals in each identity group have been engaged:

## IDENTITY GROUPS

20	AIAN	80	Individuals with Disabilities	86	Veteran
31	AAPI	27	Jewish*	125	White*
82	Black/African American	58	LGBTQ+ (not incl. GNC)	205	Women
38	Hispanic	33	Non-Religious*	7	MENA*^
23	Gender Non-Conforming	81	Religious (not incl. Jewish)*		

## GENERATIONS

17	Gen Z
93	Millennial
131	Gen X
38	Baby Boomer

\*The project team did not actively collect this demographic data from participants in Phase I. As a result, the data noting representation of these identity groups may be underreported.

^The MENA identity group did not reach the data saturation point and is not included in the overview analysis or aggregate findings analysis. More information on the data collected for this identity group can be found [here](#).

# *Overview*

# Identities

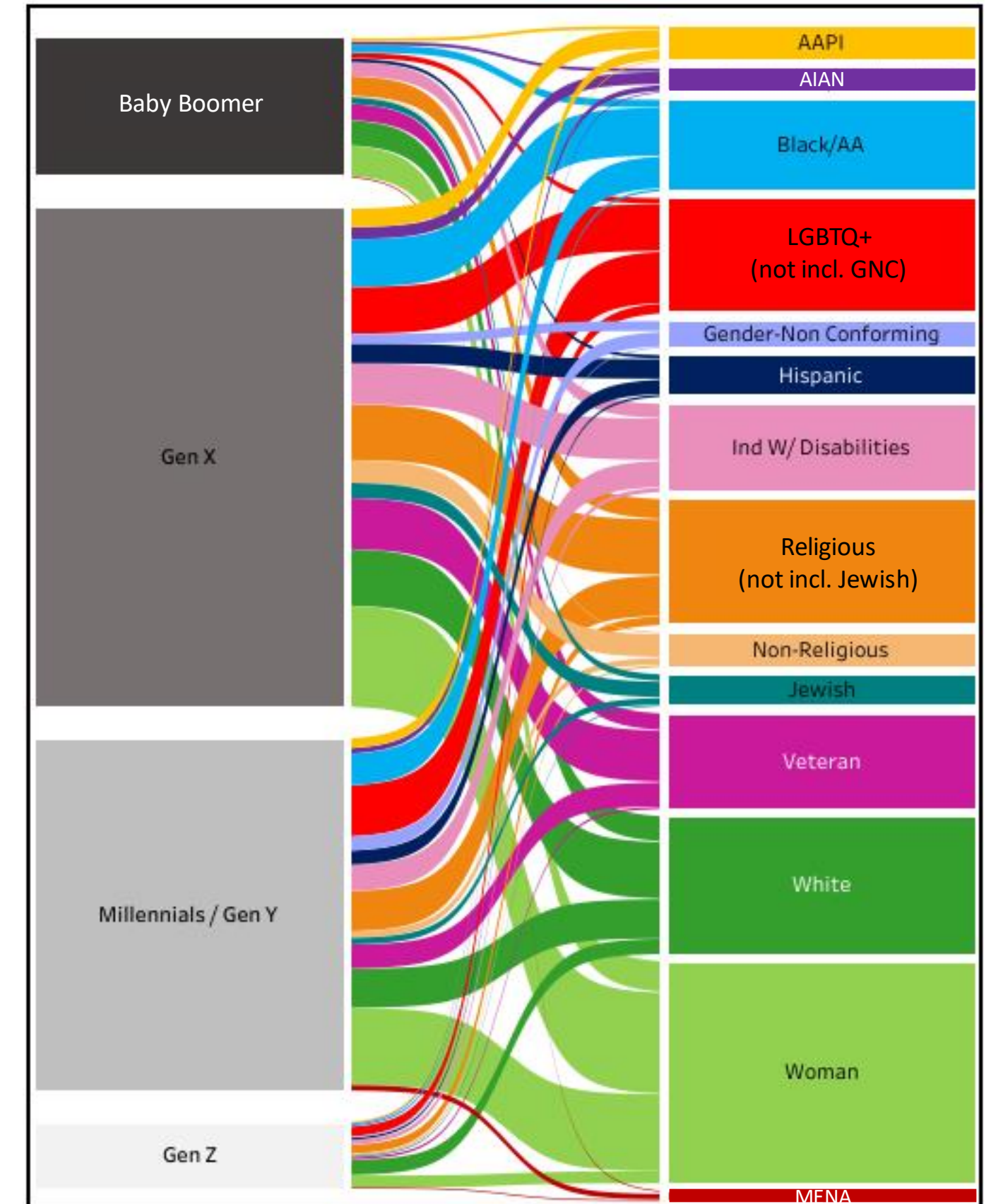
Across Phases I and II, the project team engaged 281 participants representing a total of 896 identities. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of participants self-identified as more than one of the 14\* identity groups in focus.

Of the 281 participants:

- 2% identified as 6 identities
- 11% identified as 5 identities
- 21% identified as 4 identities
- 39% identified as 3 identities
- 24% identified as 2 identities
- 3% identified as 1 identity

*Note: The Religious, Non-Religious, Jewish, MENA, and White identity groups may be underreported herein because Phase I participants were not asked to self-report these identities. Eighty percent (80%) of participants from Phase I reported these additional identities.*

*\*This number excludes the four age identity groups in focus (Gen Z, Millennial, Gen X, and Baby Boomer)*



## Pain Points

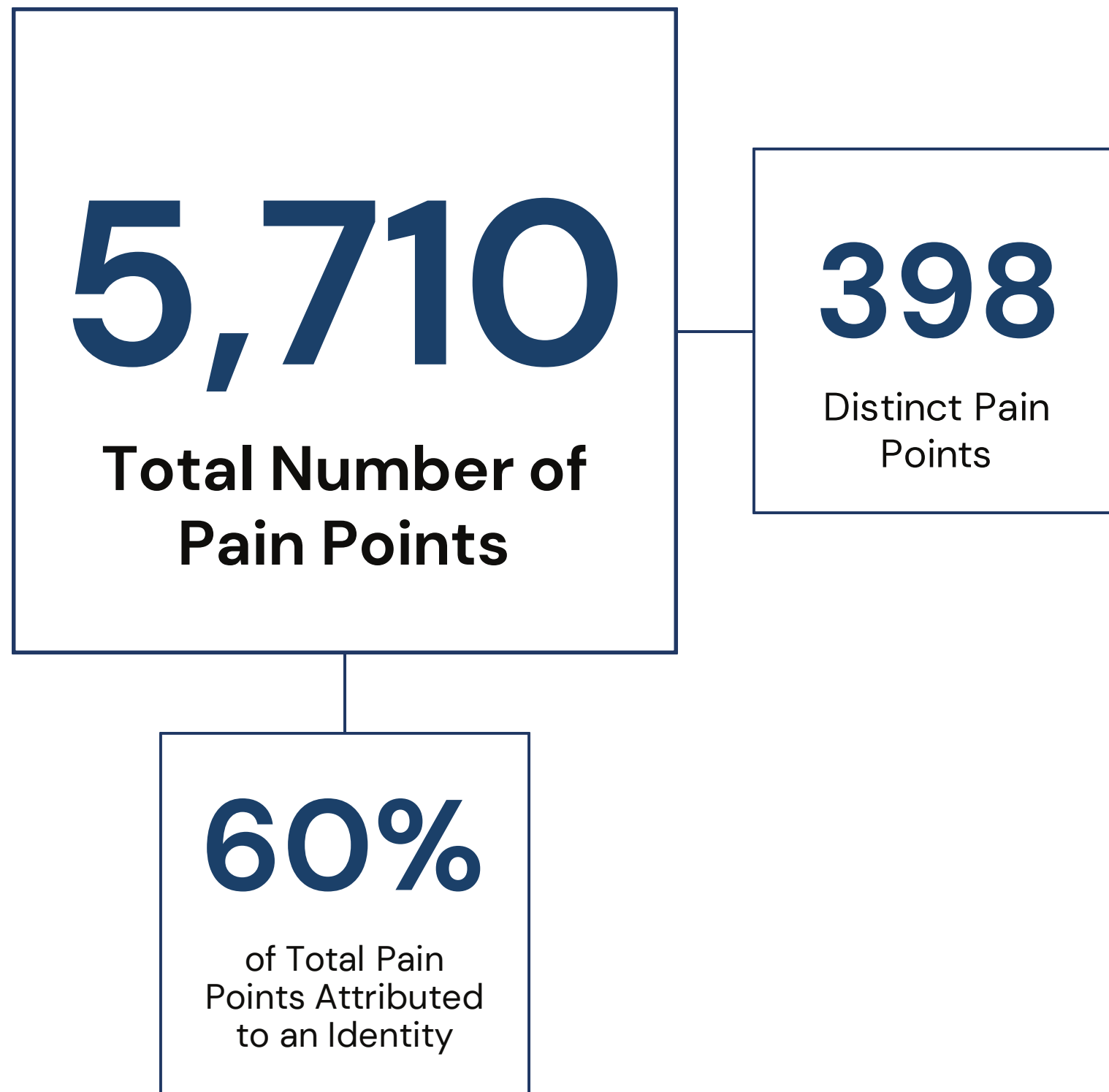
Participants referenced 5,710 total pain points (398 *distinct*\*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 20 pain points experienced per participant.**

**Sixty percent (60%) of pain points cited were attributed\*\* to one or more identities.**

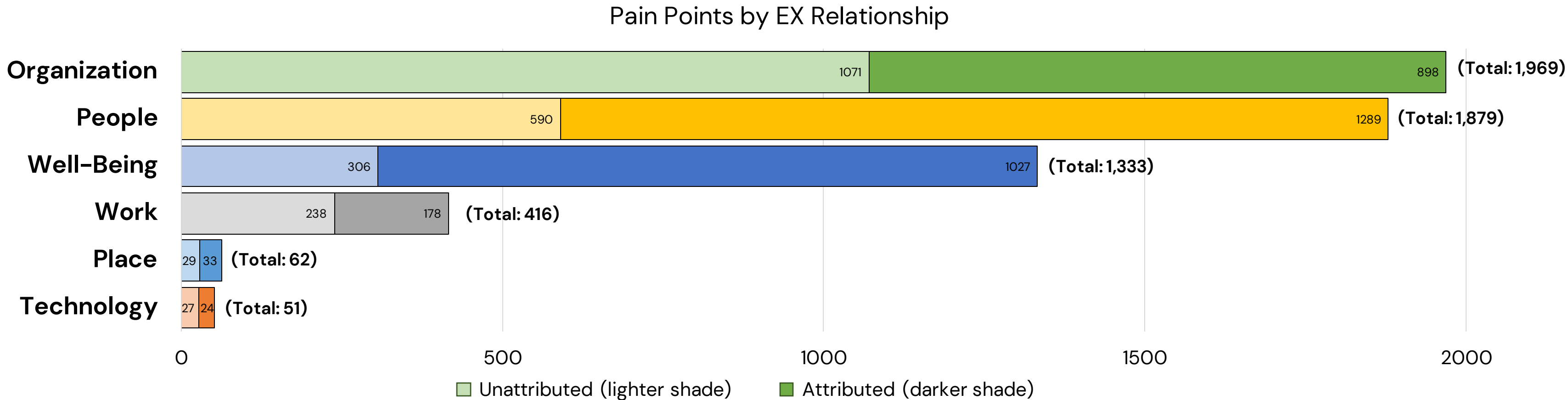
While the project team captured pain points across EX, the primary analysis centered on pain points that employees directly attributed to one or more of the identities that they hold.

\*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 one hundred and one 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.

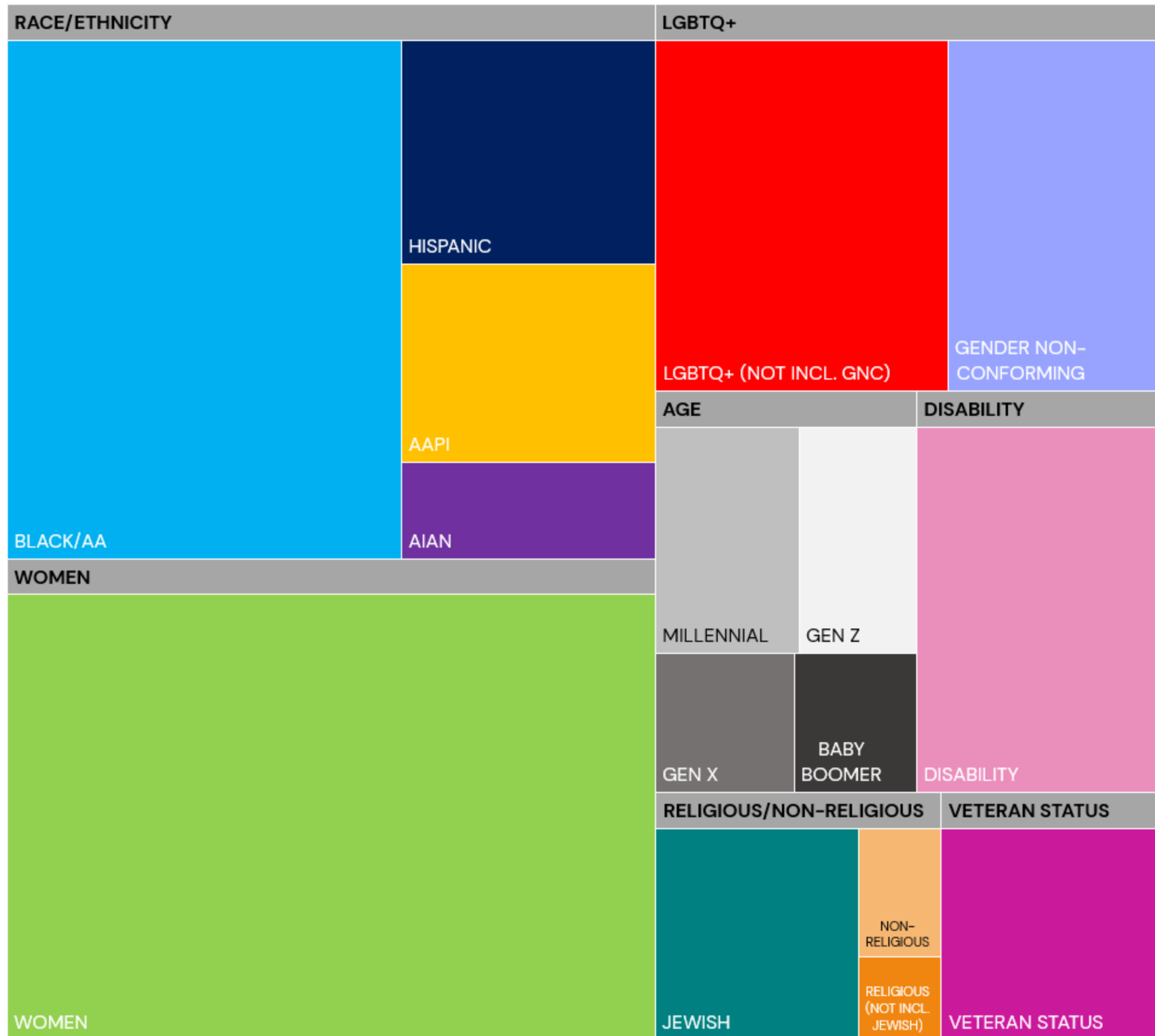


# Pain Points by EX Relationship



The 5,710 total pain points cited by participants fell into two categories: **attributed** (when participants directly tie a pain point experienced to one or more of the identities that they hold) and **unattributed** (when participants note a pain point but do not tie one or more identities to that experience).

Sixty percent (60%) of pain points (3,449) have been attributed. Of these, 67% fall into the People (1,289) and Well-being (1,027) EX Relationships. **Participants were more than twice as likely to attribute a pain point to their identity in the People and Well-being relationships than the other EX relationships.** This point is further underscored on the [Pain Points Heat Map](#) where eight of the 11 areas of overlap fall within these two relationships.



# Attributed Pain Points

Ninety-four percent (94%) of participants attributed one or more pain points to one or more of the identities in focus.

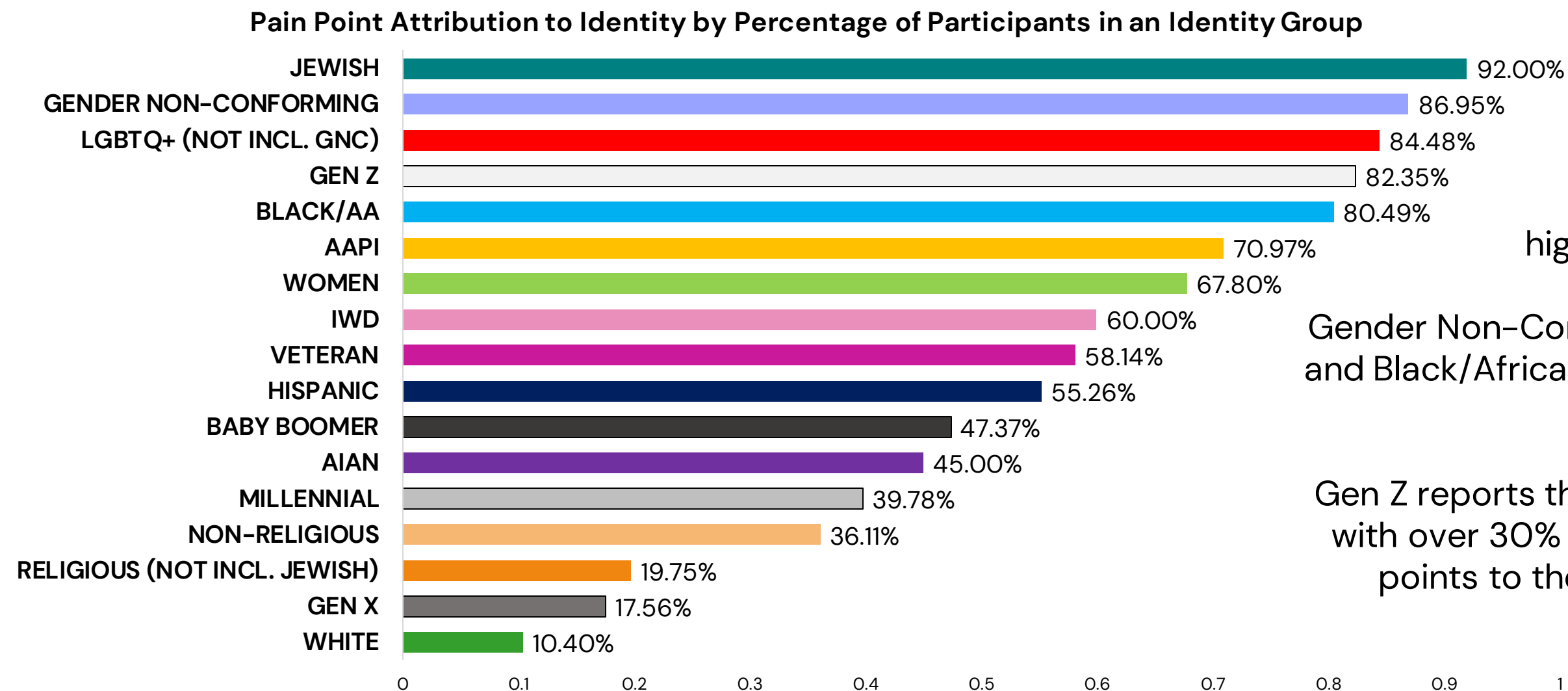
Almost three-quarters (72%) of attributed pain points were attributed to one of three identities: race/ethnicity, gender identity as a Woman, LGBTQ+.

Thirty percent (30%) of these pain points were attributed to participants race/ethnicity – with the largest portion being attributed to their identity as Black/African American.



# Pain Point Attribution

While every participant has cited at least one pain point associated with their journey at VA, not all attribute these experiences to an identity they hold. Below is the percentage of participants in each identity cohort who have attributed one or more pain points to that specific identity. For example, 10.4% of all White participants attributed one or more pain points to their race.



The Jewish identity group reports the highest attribution to identity of all identity groups in focus at 92%. Followed by the Gender Non-Conforming, LGBTQ+ (not incl. GNC), Gen Z, and Black/African American identity group who all report over 80% as well.

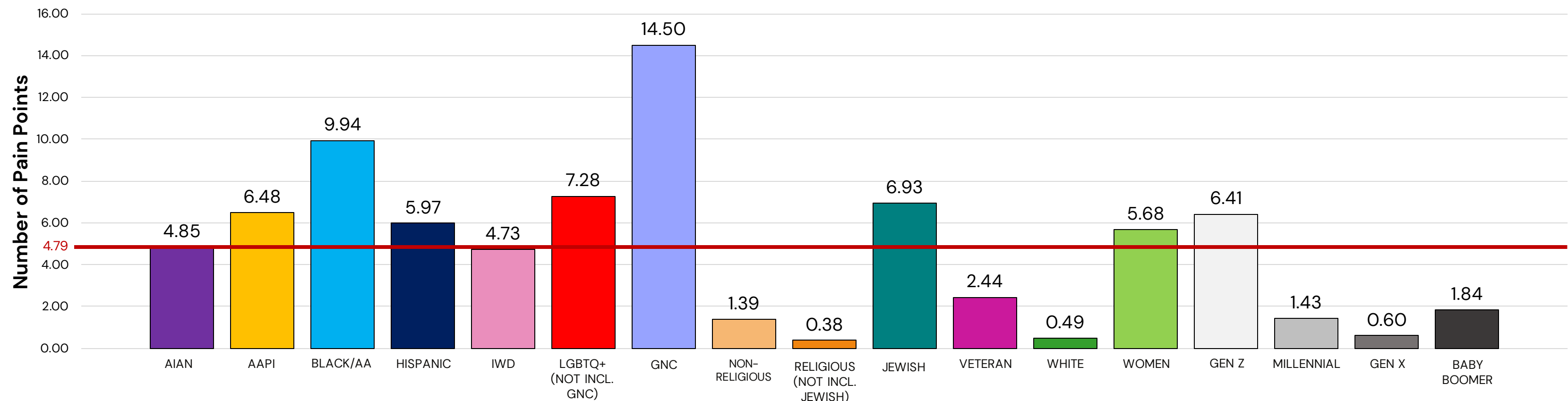
Gen Z reports the highest attribution of the age cohorts, with over 30% more Gen Z participants attributing pain points to their age than the generation with the next highest attribution – Baby Boomers.

# Average Attribution to Identity

The graph below shows the average number of pain points attributed to identity, per participant. The red line represents the average number of attributed pain points, per participant across all identity groups (4.79). For example, AAPI participants attributed an average of 6.48 pain points to their AAPI identity – 1.69 more pain points than average.

Nine identity groups report more pain points per participant than average. Participants in the Gender Non-Conforming (14.95) and Black/African American (9.94) report the highest averages. Of the age cohorts, Gen Z is the only generation to report more pain points than average – 4.5x more than Millennials, 10.6x more than Gen X, and 3.5x more than Baby Boomers, on average per participant.

**Average Number of Attributed Pain Points Per Participant by Identity Group**



# ***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. The top one to five themes will be shown for each identity group.

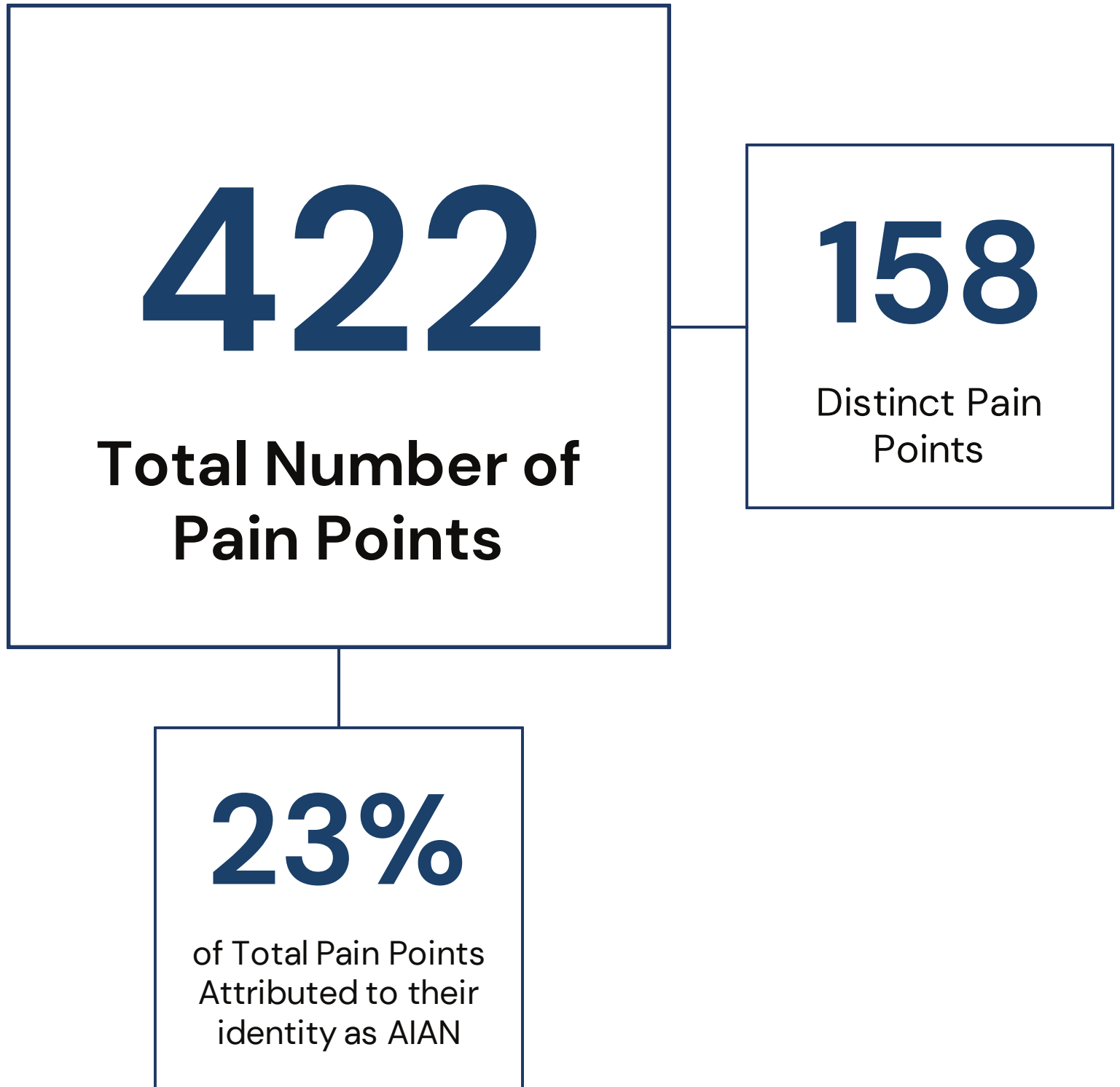
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## Participant Stories

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: Several identity groups did not have a pain point that reached the 20% threshold. As such, the two most frequently experienced pain points are shared for reporting purposes, and this discrepancy is indicated accordingly.

***American Indian and Alaska  
Native (AIAN)***



## Data Overview

The **20 AIAN** participants referenced 422 total pain points (*158 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 21 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed 23% to their identity as AIAN.

## 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. Lacking engagement/actions around Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I\*DEA) 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
<b>Challenges with Colleagues</b>	<b>30%</b> of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their colleagues (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, lack of awareness/empathy associated with identity, refusing to work together, verbal attacks, lack of support from colleagues, etc.).
<b>Comments about Identity</b>	<b>25%</b> 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.).
<b>Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors</b>	<b>25%</b> of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, lack of awareness/empathy associated with identity, lack of support from supervisors, inappropriate comments etc.).





# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

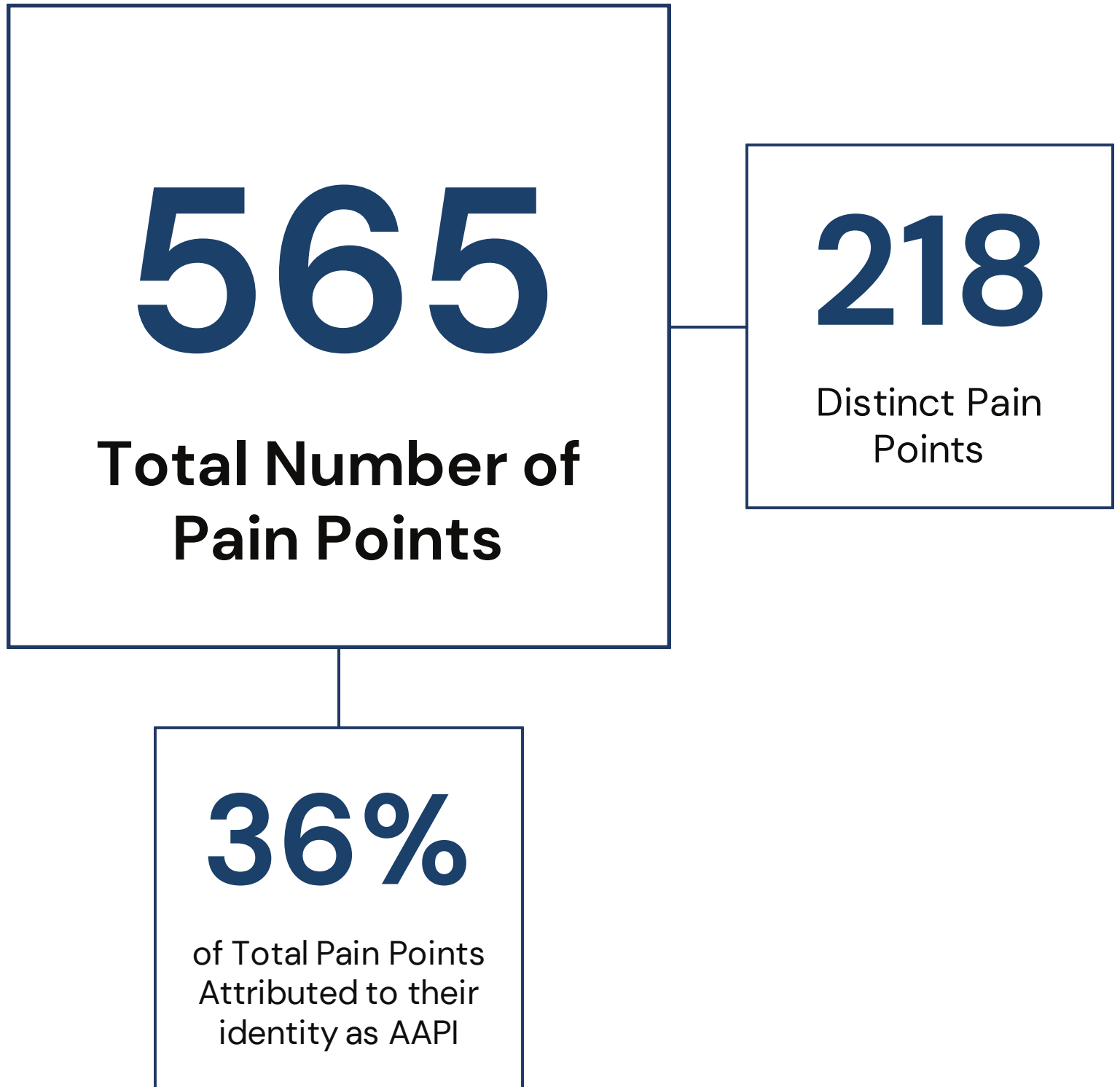
“I attended a . . . panel on Native American Veterans that the Trump Administration had set up for all of the Veteran service organizations. . . And while we were there, a staff person from [redacted] said that they had happened ***to see the director writing a note to [his employee saying] ‘What do you know about this tribal (expletive)?’***”

“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 and Mexican culture into 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 [would 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 assumptions about things as opposed to understanding that diversity looks different for some.”***

***Asian American and Pacific  
Islander (AAPI)***



## Data Overview

The **31 AAPI** participants referenced **565 total pain points** (*218 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 18 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed **36%** to their identity as AAPI.

# Top Pain Points

Seven pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' AAPI identity, by percentage of respondents:

**39%**

1. Feeling like an outsider because of identity

**35%**

2. Lacking diversity/representation on team  
3. Lacking representation in leadership

**32%**

4. Lacking colleagues to talk to who can relate

**26%**

5. Feeling like an outsider because of identity

**23%**

6. Perceiving identity explicitly as an impediment to career advancement  
7. Feeling a lack of credibility due to identity



# Top Themes

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

Theme	Summary
<b>Diversity and Representation</b>	<b>48%</b> of participants referenced one or more pain points about diversity and representation at VA (e.g., lack representation in leadership, lack diversity/representation on team, etc.).
<b>Well-being at Work</b>	<b>38%</b> of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work (e.g., feeling like they cannot speak up/interject, feeling a need to prove themselves more, feeling excluded, and feeling a lack of credibility)
<b>Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors</b>	<b>34%</b> of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, lack of awareness/empathy associated with identity, lack of support from supervisors, inappropriate comments etc.).



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

“It's hard to find . . . 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 [and] experiences are very different [from mine] he didn't have some of the same challenges [that I have, such as] 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 feel that the way I talk [and] 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 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 are always sending based on the comments and how they treated me. . .***

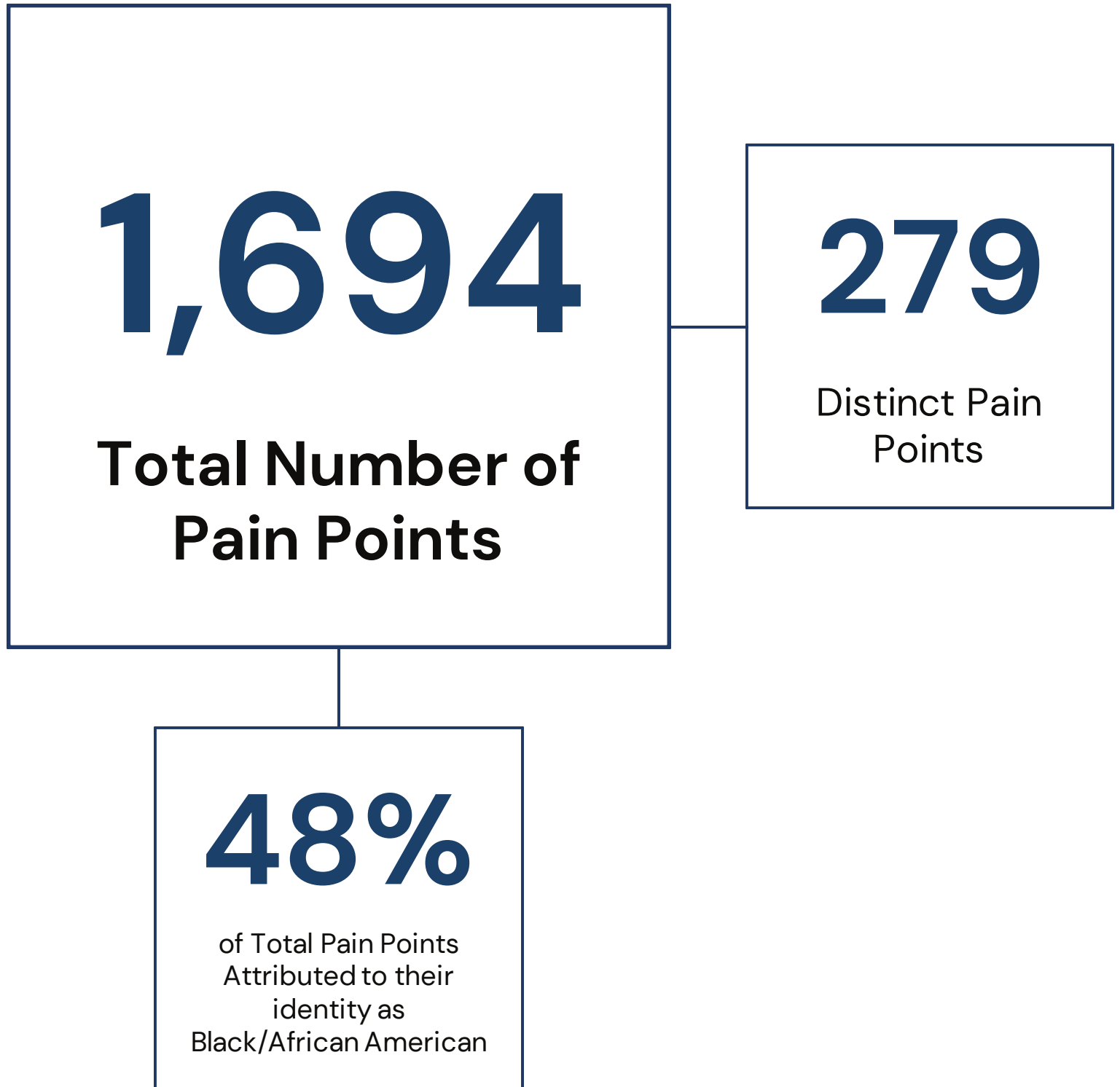
I decided that I can never look White. I cannot speak English just like a native speaker. I'm not going to change myself . . . I'm a nice person, I can tell you how nice I have been . . . [M]y way of being nice is different than what they think is being nice. I don't know how to change my, my way of 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 [but] ***I feel like I have to kick the door down and bring my own chair . . . 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] [and] they see Asian male and think, ‘he must be good at math’ or, ‘English is not [the] primary language he was raised with.’** But I think I overcame that more easily as a lighter-skinned person . . . I have a Black Woman in my organization who is very well-educated – [she] 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

The **82 Black/African American** participants referenced 1,694 total pain points (*279 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 21 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed 48% to their identity as Black/African American.



## Top Pain Points

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

**45%**

1. Lacking representation in leadership

**38%**

2. Lacking diversity/representation on team

**33%**

3. Feeling a lack of credibility due to identity

**30%**

4. Colleague making inappropriate comments/questions about identity

**29%**

5. Perceiving identity explicitly as an impediment to career advancement

# Top Pain Points

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

**26%**

- 6. Superior/Supervisor differential treatment of those of a particular identity
- 7. Superior/Supervisor making inappropriate comments/questions about identity
- 8. Feeling like an outsider because of identity

**24%**

- 9. Feeling different from colleagues because of their speech

**23%**

- 10. Colleague differential treatment of those of a particular identity
- 11. Feeling hyper-aware of identity at work

## Top Pain Points

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

**21%**

- 12. Experiencing stereotyping based on their identity**
- 13. Feeling a need to prove themselves because of identity**

**20%**

- 14. Feeling unable to be their whole authentic self with colleagues**

# Top Themes

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

Theme	Summary
Comments about Identity	<b>55%</b> 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.).
Well-being at Work	<b>54%</b> of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work (e.g., feeling like they cannot speak up/interject, feeling a need to prove themselves more, feeling excluded, and feeling a lack of credibility)
Challenges with Colleagues	<b>51%</b> of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their colleagues (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, lack of awareness/empathy associated with identity, refusing to work together, verbal attacks, lack of support from colleagues, etc.).
Diversity and Representation	<b>51%</b> of participants referenced one or more pain points about diversity and representation at VA (e.g., lack representation in leadership, lack diversity/representation on team, etc.).



# 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 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 [like] ‘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? Where did I go to high school? Who do I live with? Where did I move from? Was I seeing someone? What are my qualifications?’ ***[They were] very inappropriate, unprofessional questions.***

...

***I did answer the questions because I'm extremely intimidated by this person. [She is] 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 for nine or ten years.

...

It made 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.***

“[I] haven’t always had a mentor or a group to interact 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 or mentorship.”

“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. . . He said ‘We’re looking for people of high intellect who tend to be Caucasian.’***”

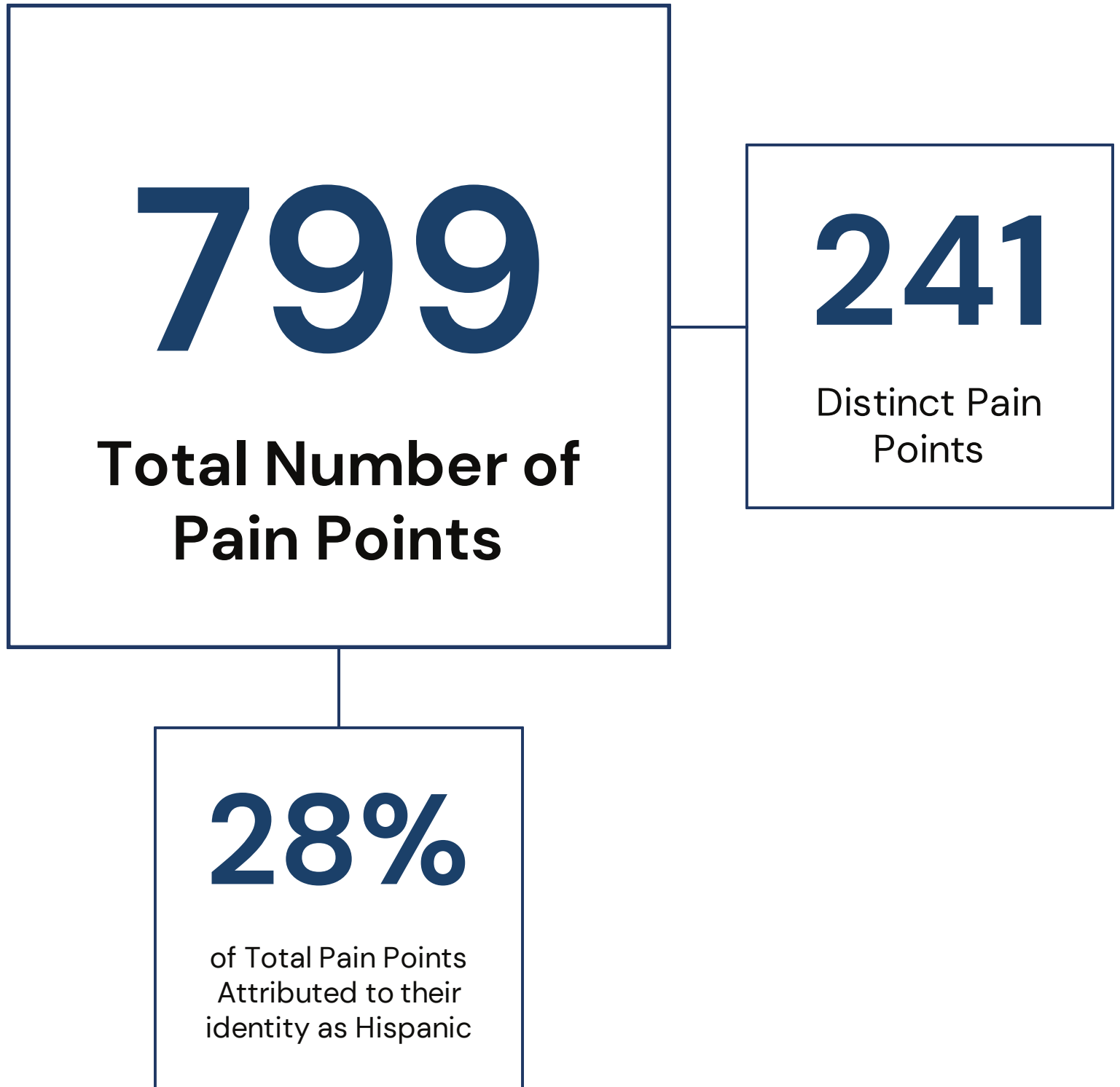


“I do have to think about how I present [myself] whenever I [speak]. ***I have to make sure that my body language doesn't suggest that I am aggressive or trying to be assertive.*** . . . It's tough when you are placed in a position . . . to follow guidelines and regulations, and then you are discounted when you bring things up. So, it is a balancing act of picking your battles. 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 started a project for my unit, a hospitality cart. . . [where] I'd go to every room on the unit. I noticed that anytime I did [this], one of the nurses would harass me. . . He [would laugh] about it [and] 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

The **38 Hispanic** participants referenced 799 total pain points (*241 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 21 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed 28% to their identity as Hispanic.

# Top Pain Points

Six pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' Hispanic identity, by percentage of respondents:

**26%**

1. Customer/vendor making inappropriate comments/questions about identity

**24%**

3. Colleague making inappropriate comments/questions about identity
4. Feeling like an outsider because of identity

**21%**

5. Lacking diversity/representation on team
6. Feeling unable to be their whole authentic self with colleagues

# Top Themes

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

Theme	Summary
<b>Comments about Identity</b>	<b>45%</b> 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.).
<b>Challenges with Colleagues</b>	<b>32%</b> of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their colleagues (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, lack of awareness/empathy associated with identity, refusing to work together, verbal attacks, lack of support from colleagues, etc.).
<b>Well-being at Work</b>	<b>29%</b> of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work (e.g., feeling like they cannot speak up/interject, feeling a need to prove themselves more, feeling excluded, and feeling a lack of credibility)



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

"[One] thing that sticks out [to me 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. [I]t was 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 – if I wasn't Hispanic. So that was really a thing that ***made [me] feel [like] 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. . .**

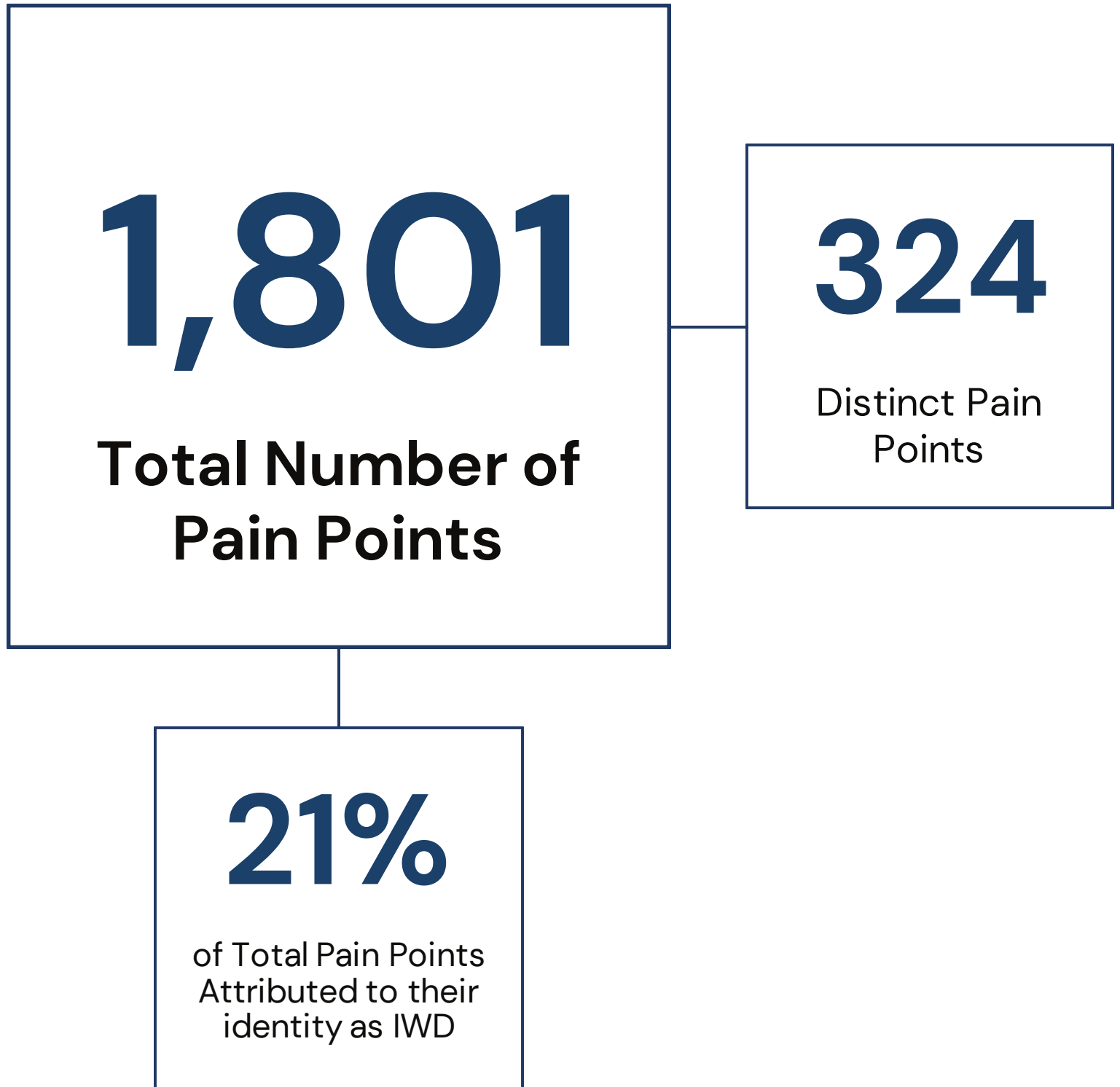
[I]t's been quite interesting because I was looking at some diversity training that I was doing today, and some of the pieces that they were talking about was ***how we tend to hide our own identity, just to blend in. And boy that hit home, because I have worked so hard to try to get rid of my accent.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

***[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 to try to blend in and be less [like] 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] ***say ‘Now that I know you’re Puerto Rican, I’m not gonna talk to you anymore.’***”

***Individuals with Disabilities***  
***(IWD)***



## Data Overview

The **80 IWD** participants referenced 1,801 total pain points (*324 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 23 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed 21% to their identity as IWD.

## Top Pain Points

Two pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' identity as IWD, by percentage of respondents:

**16%**

**1. Superior/Supervisor denying request for reasonable accommodations**

**15%**

**2. Making efforts to conceal identity**

*\*The IWD identity group did not have any pain points that met the 20% reporting threshold. The top two pain points most frequently identified and attributed to participants' identity are reported above.*

# Top Themes

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

Theme	Summary
<b>Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors</b>	<b>35%</b> of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, lack of awareness/empathy associated with identity, lack of support from supervisors, inappropriate comments etc.).
<b>Accommodations</b>	<b>24%</b> of participants experienced issues with securing reasonable accommodations (e.g., being denied a request for accommodations, issues accessing their accommodations, and/or a lack of physical accommodations in a space.)
<b>Comments about Identity</b>	<b>23%</b> 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 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 from home. . . . 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 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 fully understand the scope of my mental disabilities and was giving me pushback. [They] did not want to allow me to have this downtime in a production-oriented workplace.***”

“In terms of my body shape, there are times ***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 one 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. To be able to attend something meant I had to go [searching for] a chair just so that I would have a thing to sit down [on].”

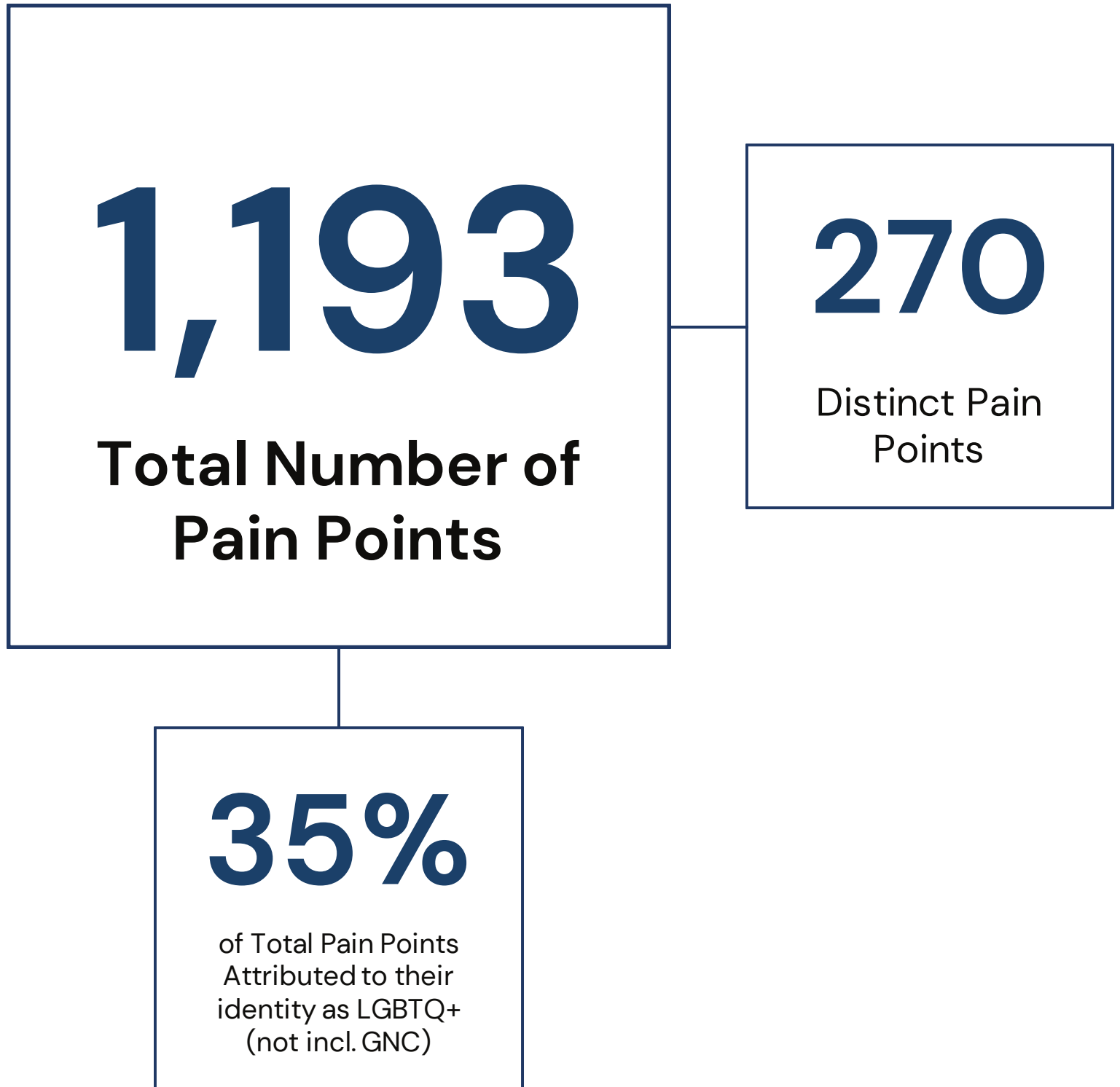
“I have been a reasonable accommodations coordinator for nine years now and I think the biggest challenge I see is the lack of 508 compliance in videos that are shown for training. . . I reached out to [the 508 Compliance Officer] because they had a 508 training that I wanted to attend . . . and their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

“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 [said], ‘Well you’re not going to be making calls right away, 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.***”

“[The response I received] when I raised my hand to ask for a little bit of help [a reasonable accommodation] because I’m a disabled combat Veteran was so disheartening. ***The Department of Veterans Affairs would have saved us some time if they had taken me out back in front of a firing squad, because that was the attitude toward me. And all I did was identify as a disabled combat Veteran and ask for a little bit of help, which would have brought no harm or inconvenience to them.***”

***LGBTQ+***

***LGBTQ+***  
***(not incl. Gender Non-Conforming)***



## Data Overview

The **58 LGBTQ+ (not incl. GNC)** participants referenced 1,193 total pain points (*270 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 21 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed 35% to their identity as LGBTQ+ (not incl. GNC).



## Top Pain Points

Five pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' identity as LGBTQ+ (not incl. GNC), by percentage of respondents.

**43%**

**1. Making efforts to conceal identity**

**38%**

**2. Fearing identity will adversely affect individual's reputation**

**34%**

**3. Colleague making inappropriate comments/questions about identity**

**31%**

**4. Avoiding casual conversation to conceal identity**

**26%**

**5. Feeling unable to be full authentic self with colleagues**

# Top Themes

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

Theme	Summary
Closeting	<b>59%</b> of participants cited one or more pain points referencing closeting their LGBTQ+ identity either through actions or efforts to conceal their identity (e.g., avoiding casual conversation, using gender neutral terms for their spouse, not wearing a Pride lanyard, etc.)
Comments about Identity	<b>57%</b> 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.).
Challenges with Colleagues	<b>48%</b> of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their colleagues (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, lack of awareness/empathy associated with identity, refusing to work together, verbal attacks, lack of support from colleagues, etc.).



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

“One thing that I do and have done with every interview . . . [is] take my picture down. . . 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. ***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 empowered [to]. ***And that's one of the things with this particular identity, 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...

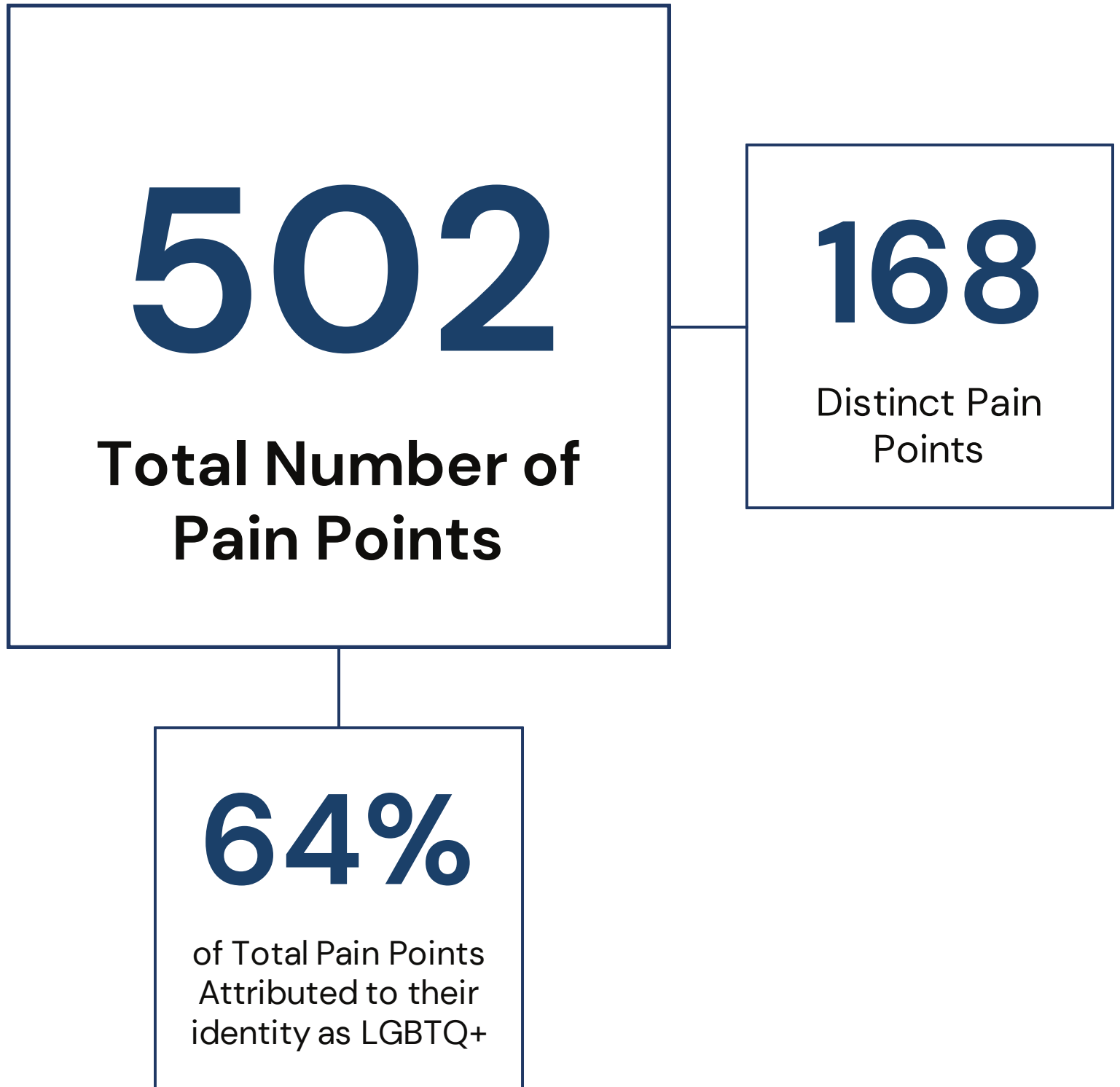
You get asked a lot if you're married in the VA, that seems to be a very common question or if you have a boyfriend or husband. I get that basically every day at work. ***At first, I was pretty open with sharing I don't have a husband I have a have a partner and I received some comments that don't make me feel comfortable [sharing] 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’ve had a lot of discussions around diversity and inclusion, and I don’t think I can say what I want to say. Because as a staff manager, I have to understand and respect people’s religious beliefs that I’m evil, I’m other, I’m awful. And I have to respect that ... I don’t feel safe because I have to be in a world where I have to provide people education and information on how they can opt out of caring for members of my own community. ***I feel like I have to dehumanize myself in order to be a good manager.***”



***LGBTQ+ Deep Dive:  
Gender Non-Conforming***



## Data Overview

The **23 Gender Non-Conforming** participants referenced **502 total pain points** (*168 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 23 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed **64%** to their identity as LGBTQ+.

## Top Pain Points

Twenty-one pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' identity as LGBTQ+. **Nine of the twenty-one are unique to the Gender Non-Conforming identity group and not experienced by any other identity group in focus.**

**52%**

**1. Feeling hyper-aware of identity at work**

**48%**

**2. Fearing identity will adversely affect individual's reputation**

**43%**

**3. Colleague making inappropriate comments/questions about identity**  
**4. Feeling unable to be full authentic self with colleagues**

# Top Pain Points

Twenty-one pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' identity as LGBTQ+. **Nine of the twenty-one are unique to the Gender Non-Conforming identity group and not experienced by any other identity group in focus.**

**35%**

- 5. Witnessing negative customer experience adversely affects employee experience
- 6. Lacking understanding of an identity group negatively affects customer experience
- 7. Making efforts to conceal identity

**30%**

- 8. Witnessing colleague's comments/actions unsupportive of I\*DEA efforts
- 9. Colleague committing a microaggression
- 10. Correcting colleague on name, personal pronouns or prefix
- 11. Feeling like an outsider because of identity
- 12. Feeling unsafe at work

# Top Pain Points

Twenty-one pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' identity as LGBTQ+. **Nine of the twenty-one are unique to the Gender Non-Conforming identity group and not experienced by any other identity group in focus.**

**26%**

- 13. Colleague lacking awareness and/or empathy associated with identity
- 14. Customer/Vendor making inappropriate comments/questions about identity
- 15. Changing name/pronouns in VA system is difficult
- 16. Feeling like they cannot speak up, interject, or assert themselves

**22%**

- 17. Lacking diversity/representation on team
- 18. Lacking leadership participation in and/or advocating for I\*DEA efforts
- 19. Lacking representation in leadership
- 20. Feeling a lack of credibility due to identity
- 21. Feeling societal issues impact life at VA

# Top Themes

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

Theme	Summary
Challenges with Colleagues	<b>77%</b> of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their colleagues (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, lack of awareness/empathy associated with identity, refusing to work together, verbal attacks, lack of support from colleagues, etc.).
Comments about Identity	<b>59%</b> 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.).
I*DEA	<b>59%</b> of participants referenced one or more pain points associated with Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Access (I*DEA) (e.g., lack of engagement/actions around I*DEA matters, lack of I*DEA training, etc.).
Closeting	<b>55%</b> of participants cited one or more pain points referencing closeting their LGBTQ+ identity either through actions or efforts to conceal their identity (e.g., avoiding casual conversation, using gender neutral terms for their spouse, not sharing their pronouns, etc.).



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

“I have seen a lot of staff members struggling with respecting the pronouns of the trans Veterans they were serving. ***So, witnessing them having struggles with Veterans and not knowing how to address me [with my correct pronouns] was quite challenging.***  
I felt like I was constantly put in a role of educating. ***I had to prove that my existence was valid.***”



“When I first joined the team, the whole team would meet four days a week. My manager and another manager were there, and ***the other manager would consistently use incorrect pronouns for me. My pronouns are they/them and they would use she/her.*** I didn’t really know the other manager outside of these meetings, so I didn’t feel comfortable speak to them about it myself.

My manager talked to them about it, but it continued for some weeks later. The problem lasted for months. ***In the meantime, the rest of the team was hearing me consistently be referred to as the wrong pronouns, so other people began getting my pronouns wrong too. I’d have to expend more energy constantly reminding people of my pronouns.***”

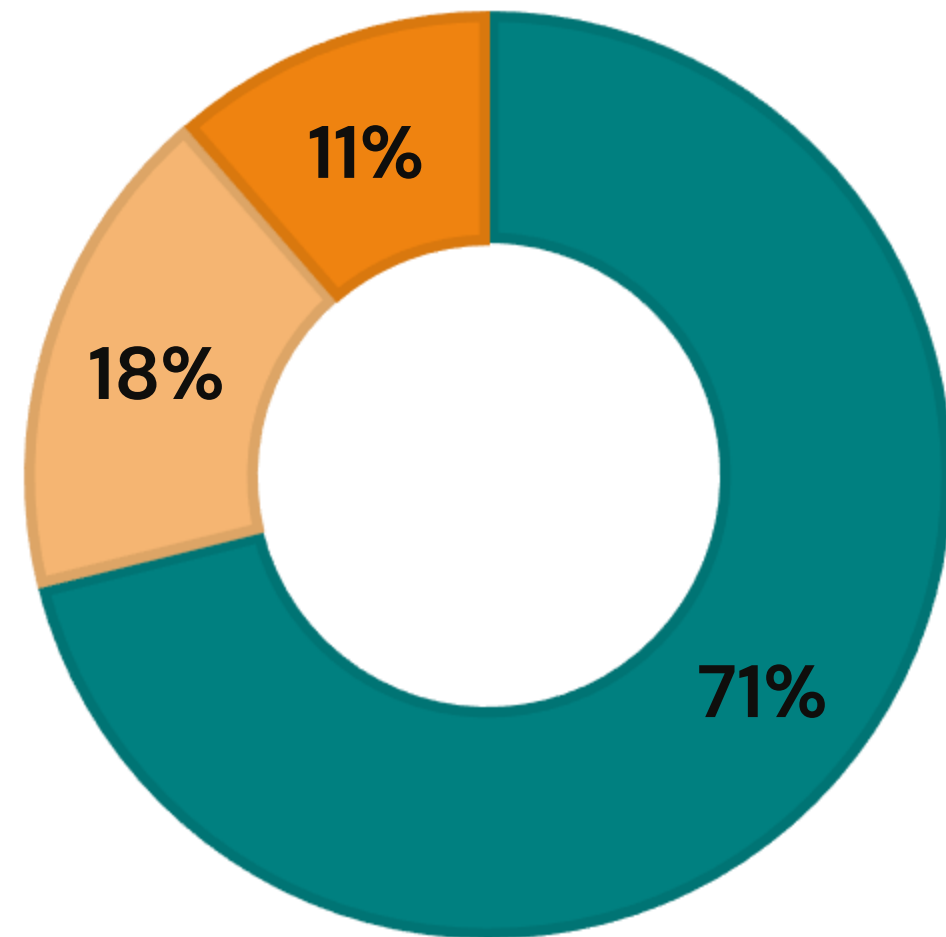
“I changed my name, and I get that the VA systems are complicated so getting everything changed was a bit of a process. It took about a month to change, then a year later the pronouns became available. When I added my pronouns to my account, everything reverted to my dead name. ***I’m not necessarily trying to hide what my sex assigned at birth was, but I would prefer that people didn’t conceptualize me with my dead name. So, it was pretty upsetting to have it revert back to that.***”

“Being a part of the LGBTQ+ community, ***there is always this heightened awareness of safety because some people don't view my life as being the same value as their own.*** So, there is always that heightened sense of safety and thinking, ‘if something were to happen, how do I get myself out of here?’”

“I was asked to train volunteers on language to use when addressing Veterans as they come in the door and the majority of feedback we received on the training was very positive. But I got a call from a provider who told me one of the ***training participants was passing her in the hallway and proceeded to misgender her and someone else. He looked at her and said ‘This is what you guys get for training me. This is what you get.’***”

***Religious / Non-Religious***

# Religious vs. Non-Religious Pain Points

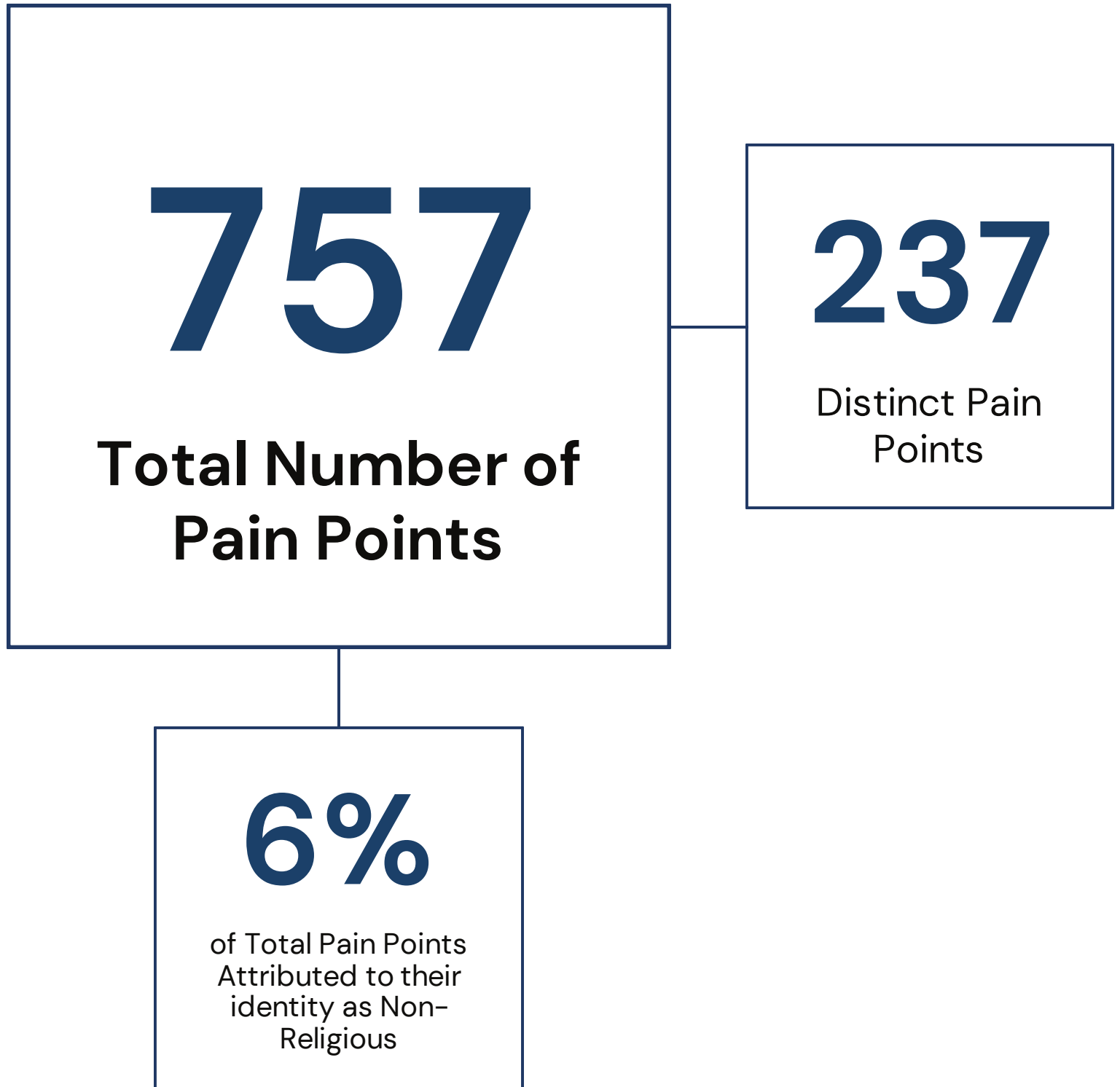


■ JEWISH ■ NON-RELIGIOUS ■ RELIGIOUS (NOT INCL. JEWISH)

Two-hundred and sixty-three (263) pain points were attributed to participant's identity as Jewish, Religious (not incl. Jewish) or Non-Religious.

**Seventy-one percent (71%)** of these pain points were attributed to participants **Jewish identity**.

***Non-Religious***



## Data Overview

The **33 Non-Religious** participants referenced 757 total pain points (*237 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 23 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed 6% to their identity as Non-Religious.



## Top Pain Points

Two pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' Non-Religious identity\*, by percentage of respondents:

**15%**

**1. Feeling like an outsider because of identity**

**12%**

**2. Lacking religious inclusion in policies/practices**

*\*The Non-Religious identity group did not have any pain points that met the 20% reporting threshold. The top two pain points most frequently identified and attributed to participants' identity are reported above. Additionally, no themes arose for this group.*



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

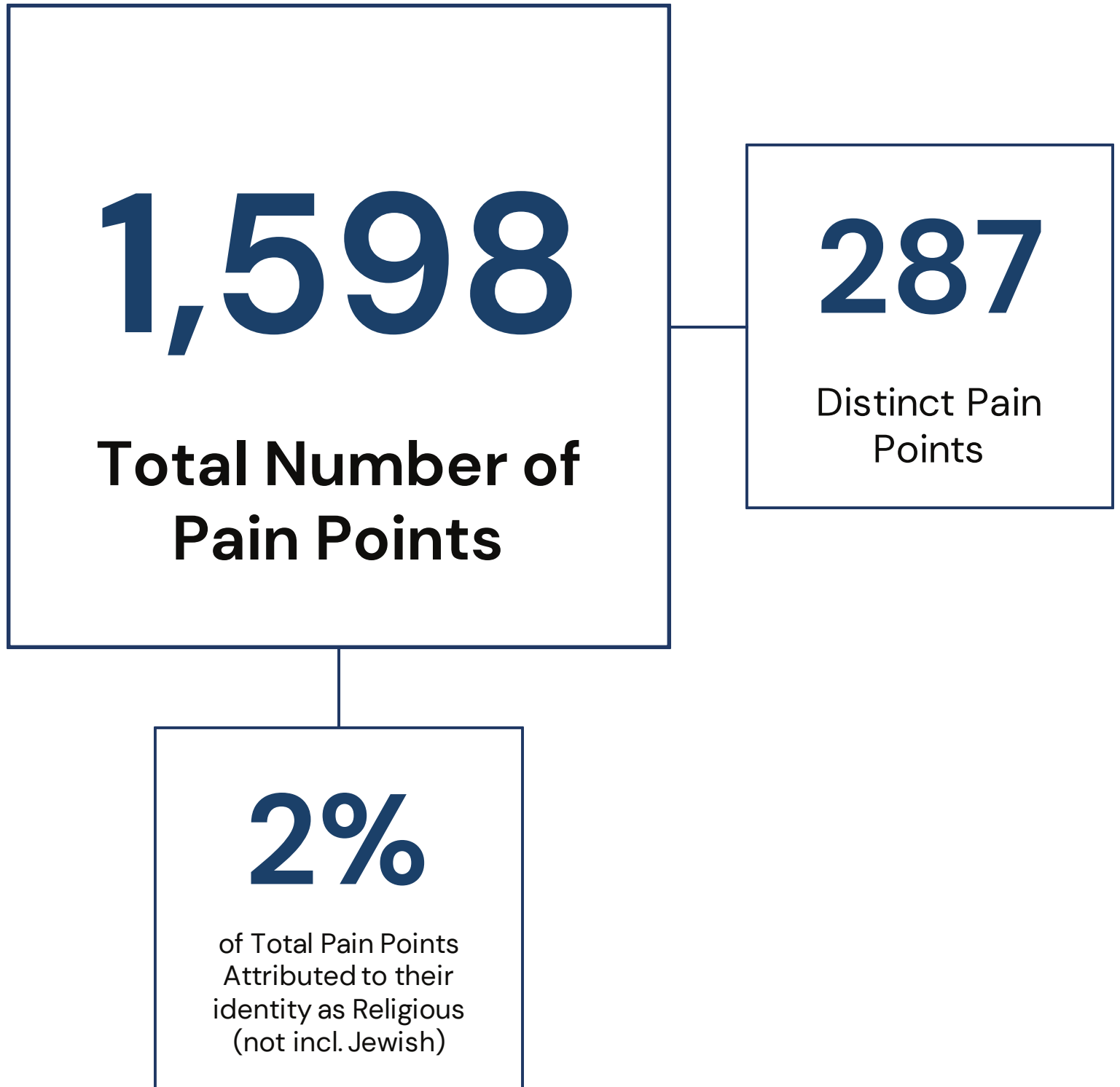
“[A supervisor] was very outgoing in terms of ***trying to get people to get people to attend events and services at her church.***”

“I think there’s always a bit of caution and trepidation being an atheist. Within the federal government there can be a lot of ceremony around religion and prayer, and an ***idea that they’re acknowledging all religion or non-religious identities, but it tends to be very Judeo-Christian.*** . . . It feels very exclusive, like ***I’m very much not a part of whatever is happening.***”

“At VA we have a very big divide between politics and work, and religion and work. . . ***It’s exhausting to have to think about how to say things in the perfect way so you can be heard but not offend people.***”

“A lot of my personal identity stuff I keep to myself. I am culturally Jewish, but spiritually atheist. . . ***I don't share those because I think it would impact my work with patients.*** A lot of them talk about what a good Christian I am and things like that. . . There's just a lot of religious things that go on that I ignore. . . ***That's probably the biggest thing that makes me feel isolated.***”

***Religious (not incl. Jewish)***



## Data Overview

The **81 Religious** participants referenced 1,598 total pain points (*287 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 20 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed 2% to their identity as Religious (not incl. Jewish).



## Top Pain Points

Three pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' Religious identity, by percentage of respondents:

4%

1. Cultural/religious beliefs not aligning with office practices
2. Lacking identity-based celebrations, activities, or recognitions
3. Lacking religious inclusion in policies and practices

*\*The Religious (not incl. Jewish) identity group did not have any pain points that met the 20% reporting threshold. The top three pain points most frequently identified and attributed to participants' identity are reported above. Additionally, no themes arose for this group.*



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

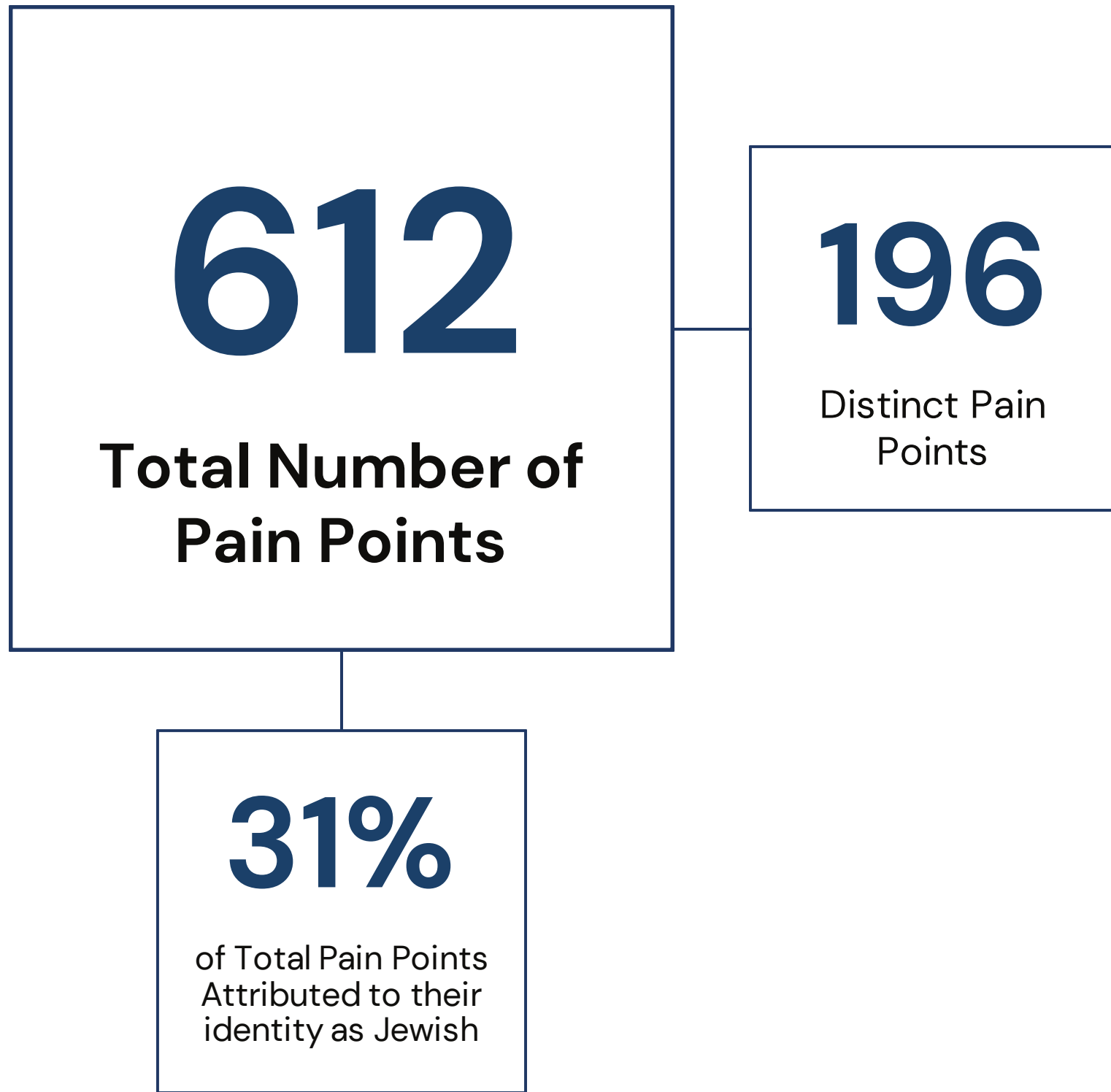
“So, this is the month of Ramadan, a fasting month for Muslims. . .  
And sometimes there may be opportunities where I have to respectfully decline the offer to go to lunch with fellow employees, but [at that type of gathering] it is a chance to talk about the different culture and traditions we are from. . . ***There’s not a lot of opportunities to bring church into our authentic selves because we don’t have a ‘cultural day’ in the VA where we can talk about the traditions we have.***”

“We have a celebration every December and I was on the committee to make it a little less religious and a little more wintery – like evergreen candles kind of stuff. But we had a talent show one year and I guess there was a group of Evangelical Christians who decided for the talent show they were going to read from the bible and nothing else. . . And we all just sat there and listened. ***I was sitting next to a colleague who is Pagan, and we were all very uncomfortable.***”

“I’m a Baptist and there are certain thing that I don’t necessarily agree with. I treat everyone and provide care the same, but . . . I’m not always comfortable speaking my actual views because it may be seen as intolerable. . . ***So, I have some beliefs related to my biblical world view that may not align with what may be happening in our facility.***”

***"I feel this divide amongst religiosity. . .*** For example, in my last VA we would do potlucks for someone's birthday or something, so I asked about that. And he said, 'Oh yeah there's a lot of stress about that [potlucks]. . . Because some people wanted to pray before eating and others said that was a violation of the separation of church and state. So, there was a suggestion that some could pray, and others could have a moment of silence during the prayer but then atheists got upset so we don't have potlucks anymore.'"

***Jewish***



## Data Overview

The **27 Jewish** participants referenced 612 total pain points (*196 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 23 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed 31% to their identity as Jewish.



## Top Pain Points

Five pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' identity as Jewish. **Three of the five are unique to the Jewish identity group and not experienced by any other identity group in focus.**

70%

1. Lacking religious inclusion in practices and policies

41%

2. Feeling like an outsider because of identity

33%

3. Colleague lacking awareness and/or empathy associated with identity

30%

4. Required to take leave to accommodate identity-based need (e.g., religious holiday)

22%

5. Lacking religious inclusion in office holiday decor

# Top Themes

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

Theme	Summary
<b>Challenges with Colleagues</b>	<b>56%</b> of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their colleagues (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, lack of awareness/empathy associated with identity, refusing to work together, verbal attacks, lack of support from colleagues, etc.).
<b>Comments about Identity</b>	<b>44%</b> 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.).
<b>Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors</b>	<b>41%</b> of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, lack of awareness/empathy associated with identity, lack of support from supervisors, inappropriate comments etc.).



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

"I generally feel very included, but there are things that are normal to feel challenged by as far as Christian holiday celebrations and how to deal with those. ***Last year we set up a Menorah for Hanukkah and then someone moved it and put it high on a shelf where no one could see it.***"

“My office really emphasizes the importance of multicultural training and cultural humility and competency, but ***there is a glaring lack of any discussion regarding antisemitism.*** I’ve never felt any purposeful exclusion, but there’s a lot of internal negotiation of ‘do I bring this to the table?’ ... It’s a balancing act because you don’t want to take away the space from someone else to share their experience. ***But there’s a lot of energy that it takes to open that door myself [to share my experiences] especially if I’m the only Jew in the room, which is oftentimes my experience.***”

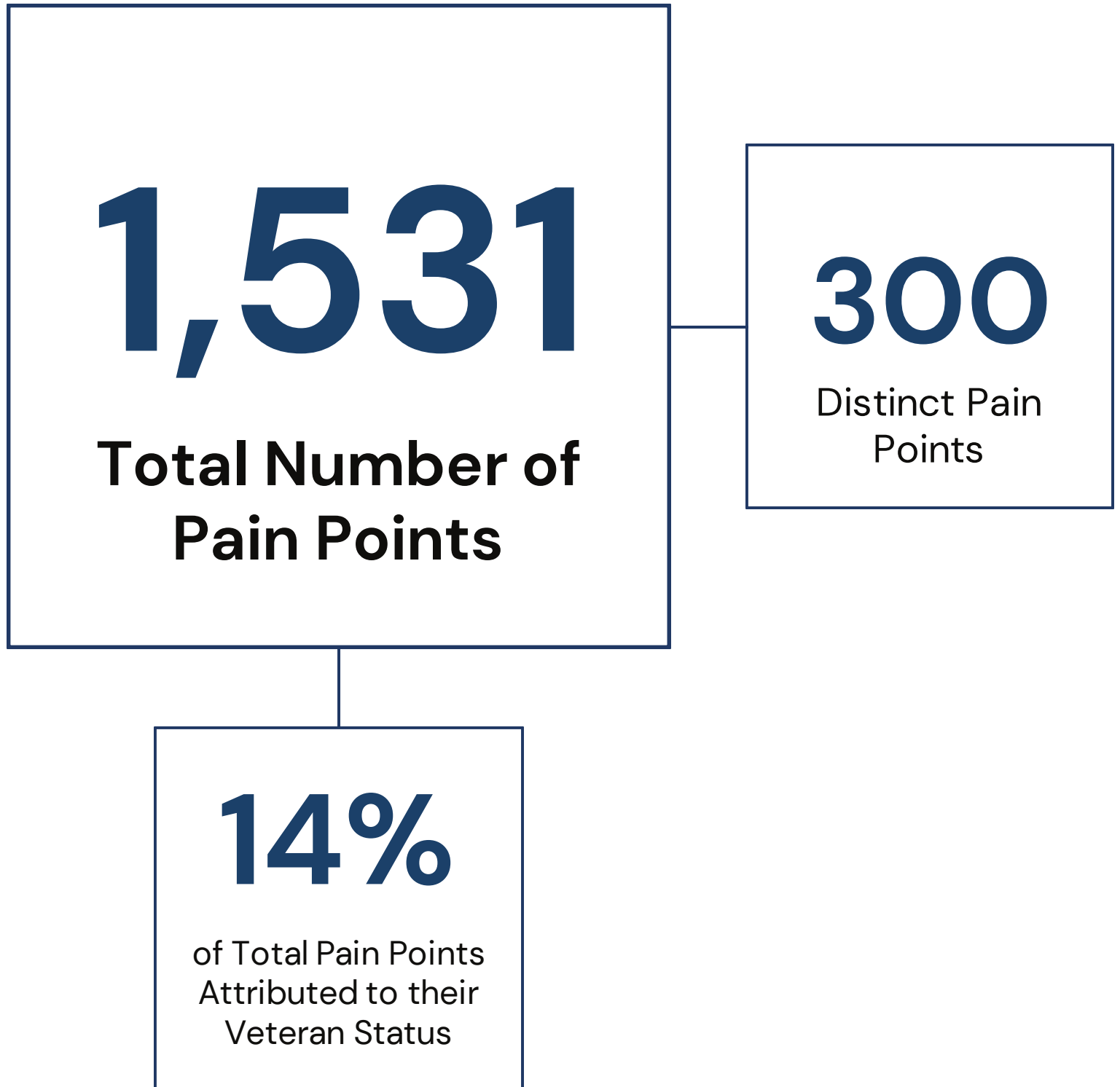
***"I have to take my annual leave for Jewish High Holy Days whereas Christmas is a federal holiday. Like, why do I have to use my leave time for my major holiday? It's a holiday we spend in synagogue praying and fasting. It feels a little punitive to have to use my leave time for that."***

“I attend a meeting the first Wednesday of every month about training students and once a quarter we would talk about I\*DEA. That particular month, the meeting fell on Yom Kippur. I told the organizer, ‘This meeting is on Yom Kippur.’ I didn’t think I had to explain the importance of Yom Kippur, I thought that would stand for itself. . . . ***The response I got from the organizer was ‘We’re going to go ahead with the meeting even though its Yom Kippur, but we’ll push back the I\*DEA stuff until next meeting.’***”

“My VA always has a Christmas tree out . . . but no other religious or holidays things. I tried to see if we had a menorah, but we didn't. . . ***So that sort of thing like I get that Christmas is a federal holiday, but it is a reminder that 'You are the other. If we include you, it is the exception, not the rule.'"***”



***Employees Who Are  
Veterans***



## Data Overview

The **86 Veteran** participants referenced 1,531 total pain points (*300 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 18 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed 14% to their **Veteran Status.**

## Top Pain Points

Two pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' Veteran Status\*, by percentage of respondents:

**17%**

**1. Witnessing negative customer experience adversely affects employee experience**

**10%**

**2. Lacking sufficient military culture in the organization**

*\*The Veteran identity group did not have any pain points that met the 20% reporting threshold. The top two pain points most frequently identified and attributed to participants' identity are reported above. Additionally, no themes arose for this group.*

# Military Culture Tensions

While 10% of Veteran participants noted insufficient military culture at VA, 11% of non-Veterans negatively perceive military influence in VA's culture. Additionally, 12% of non-Veteran participants cited feeling like an outsider due to their lack of military status.

*"I was talking to two fellow colleagues who are also former military, and we were saying, 'Why are there no checklists here? Why are there no standard operating procedures?' . . . In the military you always have to have a back up plan, but it's not like that here."*



*"Here at VA, there is an expectation that things run like the military. I was once told to 'stand down.' I've never been told that before in my corporate life. . . Some of the employees who I work with, that are Veterans, have told me before that they can talk to people however they want because they are a Veteran. They told me, 'It'll be fine for me to say that, but you can't because you're not a Vet.'"*



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

“I witnessed a Veteran crisis unfold into chaos. I definitely felt some relation to that individual because they were a Veteran. ***It troubled me to see that they needed help, and no one could help them because they didn't understand the process to be able to support them.***”

“As a combat Veteran, when I’m interactive in groups of people and we’re seeking input from the whole team, ***I have to filter and check to make sure what I’m about to say is appropriate. It is fairly often that I have to reel it in*** or make it more suitable for the [civilian] audience.”

“I currently have an EEO going on ***where someone illegally accessed my medical records***. . . It turns out the supervisor’s wife is a nurse and has access to the records.”

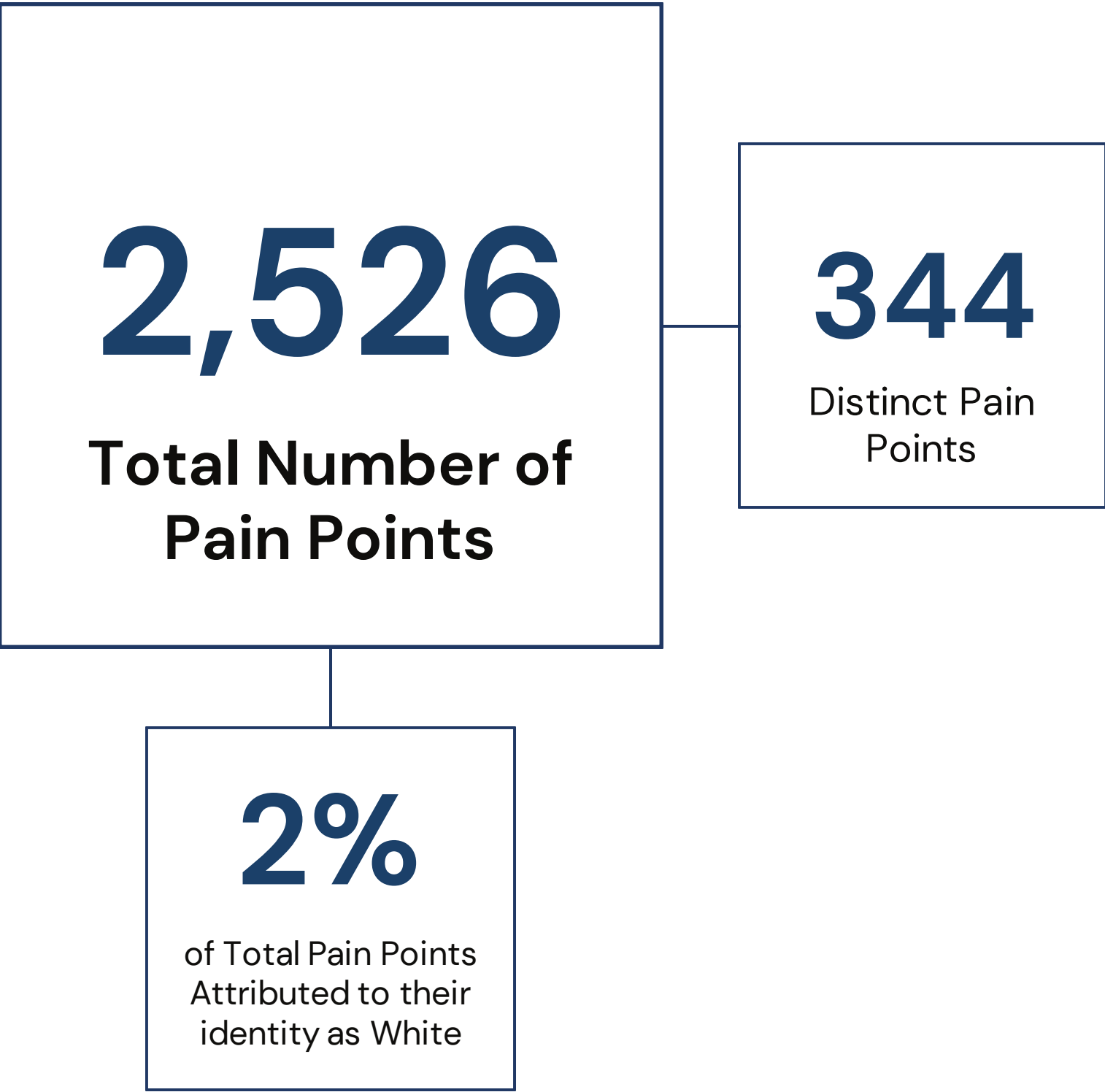


“There’s a camaraderie that you have in the military. We are mission focused and we’re in it together. With VA, I expected a connectivity; I don’t know if that 100% exists. ***It’s a lot more disconnected than I realized. I definitely had a learning curve making sure I’m making the proper impact in my role, whereas I think I felt that more instantaneously in the military.*** So, it made me feel that what I was doing had no connection to what everyone else was doing.”

“For a time, I worked as a [redacted] and I ended up having a conversation with our then Medical Center Director. He was talking about how he doesn’t see value in people who’ve been in the military and leadership experiences in the military for crossing over into VA. . . [I thought] **‘Okay then being a Veteran is not valued in this environment.’** So those experiences are now shut away and I do not speak about them at work.”

***White***

# Data Overview



The **125 White** participants referenced 2,526 total pain points (*344 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 20 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed 2% to their identity as White.

## Top Pain Points

**4%**

- 1. Feeling hyper-aware of identity at work**
- 2. Feeling like they cannot speak up, interject, or assert themselves**

Two pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' White identity\*, by percentage of respondents:

*\*The White identity group did not have any pain points that met the 20% reporting threshold. The top two pain points most frequently identified and attributed to participants' identity are reported above. Additionally, no themes arose for this group.*



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

*“When I see these things [I\*DEA initiatives] come out, they’re always looking to recognize a certain group. . . I’m a middle-aged White guy . . . I feel excluded from all of these groups. . . It’s like we want everybody to be accepted but we segregate everybody into these little groups.”*

“I don’t look at ethnicity or color, that’s not the way I was raised. But when I moved here to [redacted], one thing that I realized after being here for two or three months is that there weren’t very many people like me here. ***Out of 2,000 employees, maybe 45 were Caucasian.***”



“So I’m Caucasian, I was raised on a farm. . . It makes me walk on eggshells a lot because I am acutely aware that I literally speak a different language. For example, 45% of the employees here are African American Women, and I’m not saying it’s a good or a bad thing, but it certainly changes the culture. I don’t speak the language, I’m not up to date on their music, I’m not up to date on what issues they may be facing in their personal lives. So I don’t feel that it’s a negative or a positive, ***but I have to be very careful with certain words because certain words I say may be offensive to them, but to me it’s just a common thing to say.***”

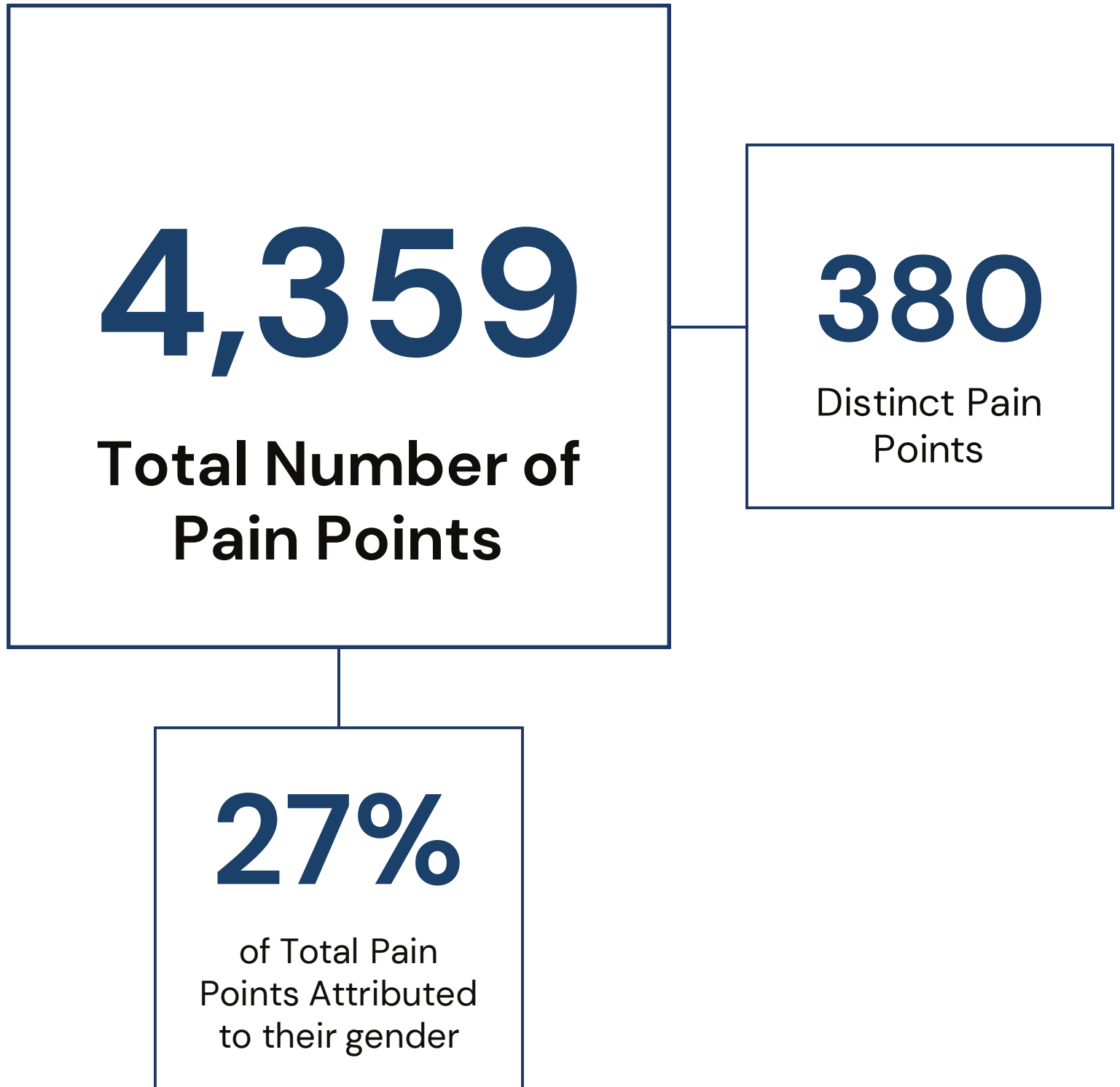
“I appreciate you taking the time to talk to somebody of my identity. When people investigate, explore, or address diversity, the first interest is to look at everybody who is a ‘minority’ or someone who may be disenfranchised. ***A guy like me is not seen as valuable to speak to because, ‘He’s an old White guy. He must be a part of the problem.’***”

***“I can’t hold people accountable because the second I do and they are a different ethnicity than me, I’m racist.*”**

...

It makes it very difficult to be a manager when there’s stuff you can’t say to an employee, or you can’t hold them accountable if they’re of a different race.”

***Women***



## Data Overview

The **205 Woman** participants referenced 4,359 total pain points (*380 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 21 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed 27% to their gender.

## Top Pain Points

Three pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' gender, by percentage of respondents:

**22%**

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

**20%**

3. Lacking representation in leadership

# Top Themes

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

Theme	Summary
Well-being at Work	<b>41%</b> of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work (e.g., 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	<b>37%</b> of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, lack of awareness/empathy associated with identity, lack of support from supervisors, inappropriate comments etc.).
Comments about Identity	<b>32%</b> 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 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.'***"

"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 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."

“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 one, two, or three years. ***Then I got to a 12 and I was being talked out of a 13 by my supervisor. She was like, ‘You need to concentrate on being a mom. There’s more opportunities for you later in life.’”***

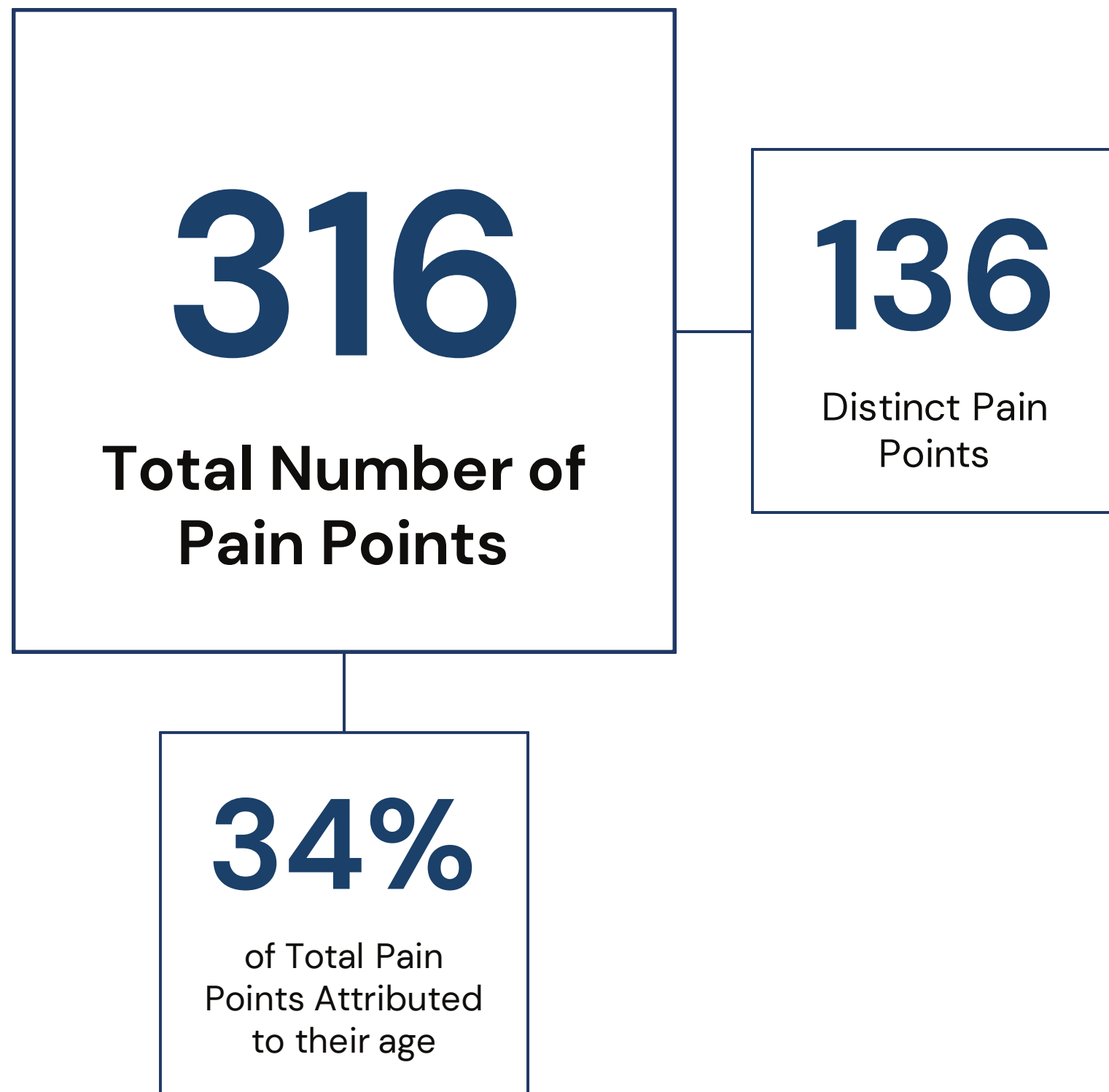
“So originally, there was [space to pump] in one of the break rooms, and some of the males liked to sleep in there for night or in the afternoon. They called it “Sleepy Hollow.” [The men] pretty much complained when Women would go in there [to pump].

...

[A] couple years ago, one of [my colleagues] told me about 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 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 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.***'"

***Generation Z***  
***(Born Between 1997 and 2005)***



## Data Overview

The **17 Gen Z** participants referenced **316 total pain points** (*136 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 19 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed **34%** to their age.

# Top Pain Points

Five pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' age, by percentage of respondents:

**53%**

1. Feeling like they cannot speak up, interject, or assert themselves

**41%**

2. Feeling a lack of credibility due to identity

**35%**

3. Feeling like an outsider because of identity  
4. Experience and knowledge are unrecognized and accepted

**24%**

5. Feeling hyper-aware of identity at work



# Top Themes

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

Theme	Summary
<b>Well-being at Work</b>	<b>71%</b> of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work (e.g., feeling like they cannot speak up/interject, feeling a need to prove themselves more, feeling excluded, and feeling a lack of credibility)
<b>Challenges with Colleagues</b>	<b>47%</b> of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their colleagues (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, refusing to work together, verbal attacks, lack of support from colleagues, etc.).
<b>Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors</b>	<b>24%</b> of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, lack of support from supervisors, inappropriate comments etc.).
<b>Comments about Identity</b>	<b>24%</b> 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 was working on a project to close research cases when I first started. We were having a meeting to update both teams on the project and one higher management official started questioning my work. . . 'Why is he doing this? Why isn't he doing that?' It was very awkward for me because it was in my first few months here and I was really hesitant to say anything. ***It made me feel like my work was being judged because of my age.***"

"When I started as a program support assistant, one of my job duties was the purchase card and there was no training at all besides 'Don't misuse it or you'll go to jail.' ***When I tried to find help regarding these cards everybody would tell me, 'You're young figure it out. Look it up on YouTube.'***"

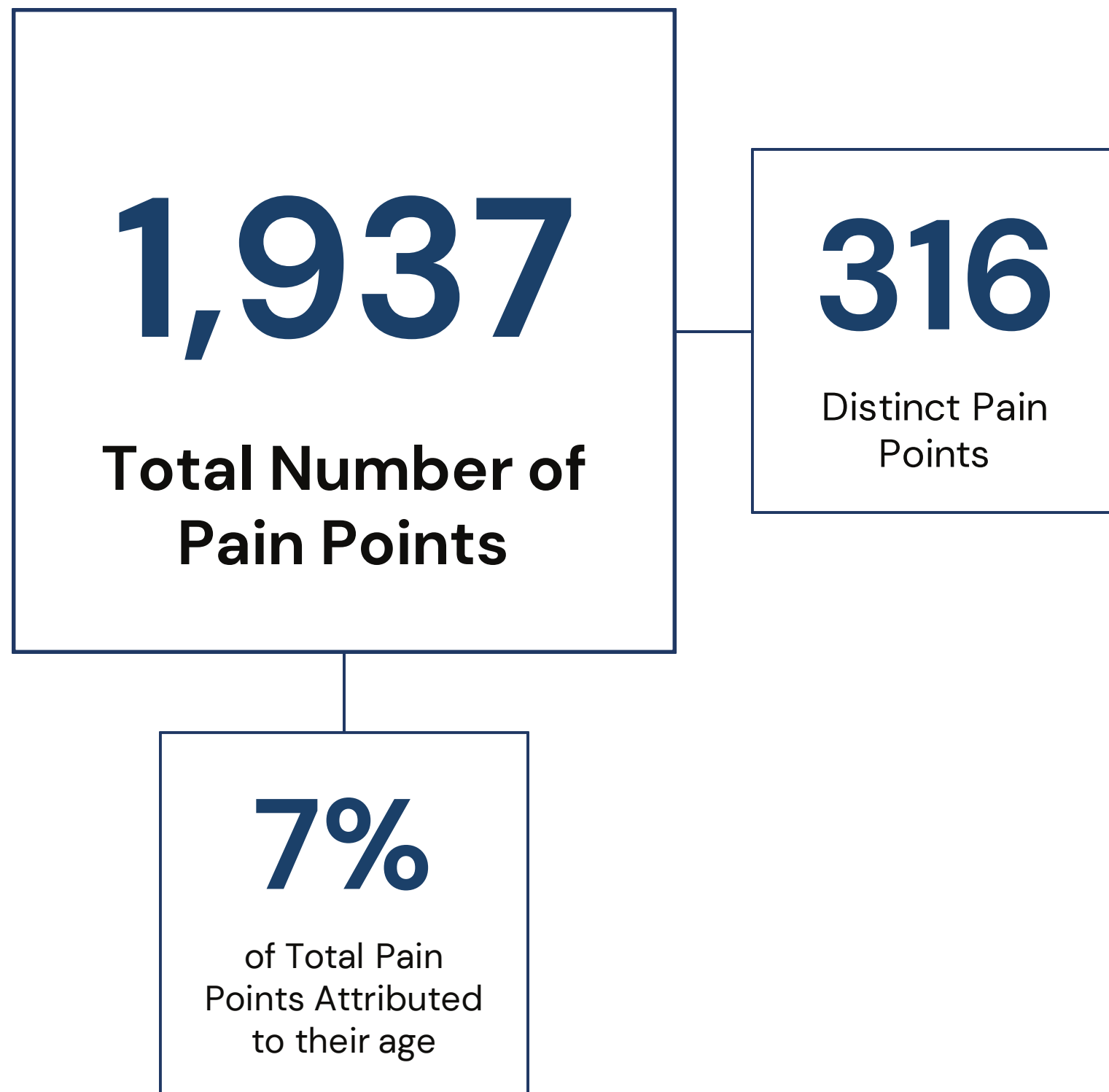
“I have a heightened sense of awareness of my age being so much younger than everyone else. ***I have a hard time having conversations with my colleagues*** because they all have kids or they have houses and I’m just starting to figure it all out. ***It makes it really difficult to have work relationships.***”

“When I first started in my role, I was assigned a lot of menial tasks to complete. When I had more experience, I was supposed to be assigning more meaningful work, but because I look younger, people were more hesitant to do so. ***People would come to ask a question about something and they would always ask my older coworker instead of me, even though I have been here for three years longer.***”

“I had a supervisor that I was talking to about what my long-term goals were and I had mentioned that I wanted to down the SES path. She very quickly was like, ‘You’re young; you’ve only been here a year, that shouldn’t be on your radar. It’s a very long process. There’s a lot you have to learn.’ ***I am now looking at other federal agencies to move to because I don’t see long term success here [at VA] at this point. I don’t want to have to wait 30 years to be deemed worthy of consideration for promotion.***”

***Millennial***  
***(Born Between 1981 and 1996)***





## Data Overview

The **93 Millennial** participants referenced 1,937 total pain points (*316 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 21 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed 7% to their age.

## Top Pain Points

Two pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' age\*, by percentage of respondents:

**17%**

**1. Feeling a lack of credibility due to identity**

**12%**

**2. Feeling a need to prove themselves because of identity**

*\*The Millennial identity group did not have any pain points that met the 20% reporting threshold. The top two pain points most frequently identified and attributed to participants' age are reported above.*

# Top Themes

Based on the pain points **attributed** to participants' age, one major theme arose.

# 23%

## *Well-being at Work*

**of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work (e.g., feeling like they cannot speak up/interject, feeling a need to prove themselves more, feeling excluded, and feeling a lack of credibility)**



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

***“There have been older individuals I’ve spoken with where they point out that they think I’m much younger and I just change the topic and move on. Like, lets get down to brass tacks. What are we actually here to talk about, **because it is not my age.**”***

**“Age is something I’ve always been very aware of. *Any position I’ve gotten in my life I know it’s because I’m qualified, but there’s something about my age – I think because in government, a lot of the individuals are much older – I have to really hold my own.* Most people can’t tell my age by just looking at me . . . But I have really tried to be cautious of it, if it comes into question.”**

“In my previous department, I was told numerous times by people older than me, ‘I have more seniority than you. You don’t get to do that.’ . . . ***I felt like I was being punished for my age, not taking into account that I had more education and experience than some of my older colleagues.***”

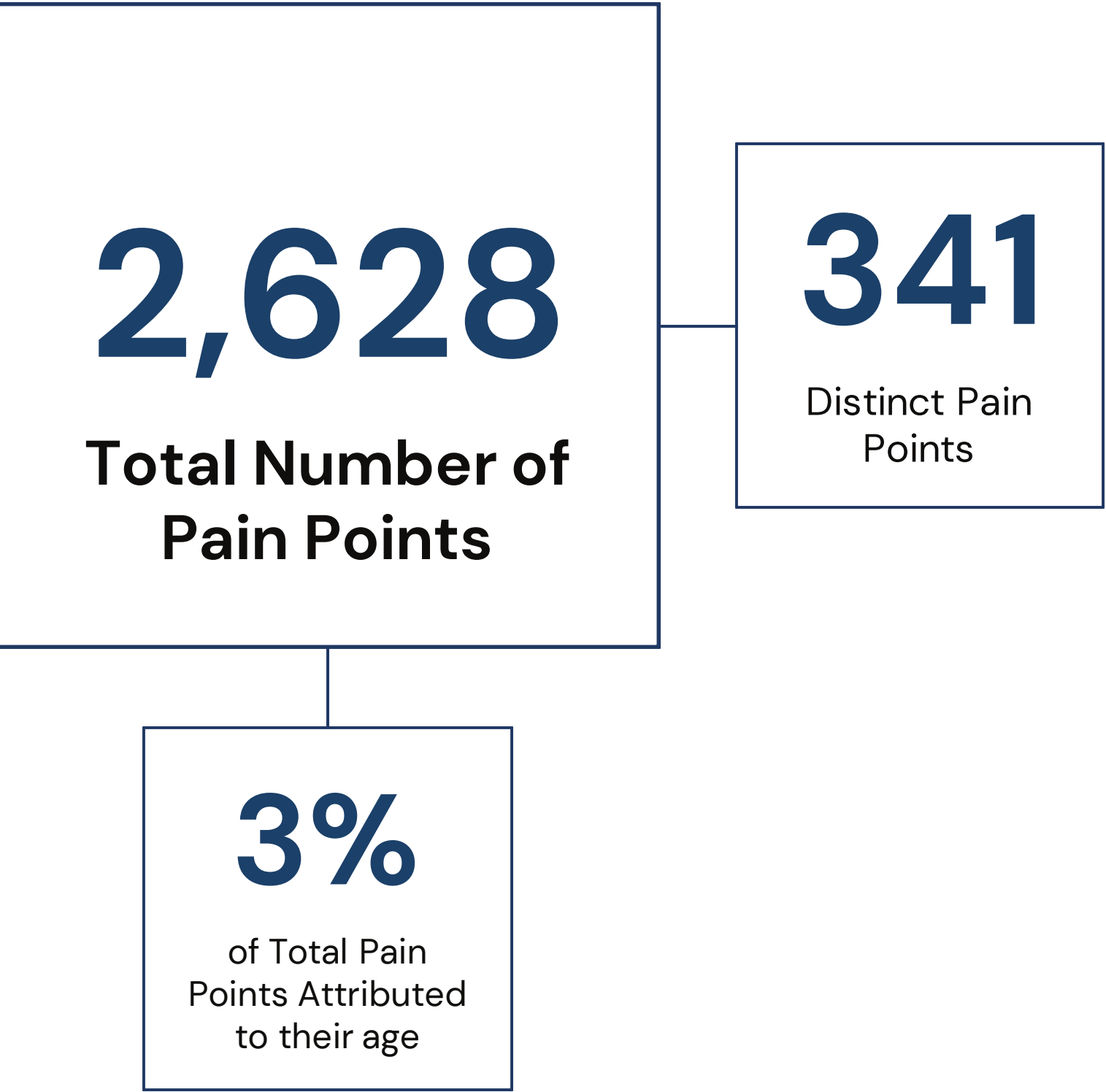
"I reported a HIPAA violation to my supervisor, and they told me 'Oh well, everybody does that.' ***Nobody listened to me because I was younger than them.***"



“Our lead was getting ready to retire and there was this belief that the most senior person would automatically get the position. I said, ‘If that is the case then why do we interview for it? If you’re just going to promote the next senior person.’ ***The next senior person – who had 10 plus years on me in age – turned to me and said, ‘Even if you were to get the job, I’m never going to listen to somebody who’s younger than me.’***”

***Generation X***  
***(Born Between 1965 and 1980)***

# Data Overview



The **131 Gen X** participants referenced 2,628 total pain points (*341 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 20 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed 3% to their age.

## Top Pain Points

Two pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' age\*, by percentage of respondents:

**5%**

**1. Feeling a lack of credibility due to identity**

**4%**

**2. Feeling like an outsider because of identity**

*\*The Gen X identity group did not have any pain points that met the 20% reporting threshold. The top two pain points most frequently identified and attributed to participants' age are reported above. Additionally, no themes arose for this group.*



# Pain Points in Context: Participant Stories

***“I feel like I shouldn’t be at the point where I have to continuously prove myself, my worth, and what I can accomplish. Maybe more so because I’m a Woman of a certain age, I’m 56, I feel like I’m being pushed out.”***

“Being the age that I am, I kind of have to take what they give me at this point. I don’t have my whole career ahead of me anymore. . . ***So, to not get that [particular job] that I spent years training for was really hard. I’m not at an age where I can just divert into [a different career path].***”

“I’m really starting to feel conscious of my age. People have said to me ‘Well, shouldn’t you be getting closer to retirement now?’  
But that’s my business. ***Just because I may be closer to retirement doesn’t mean I’m ready to leave.***”

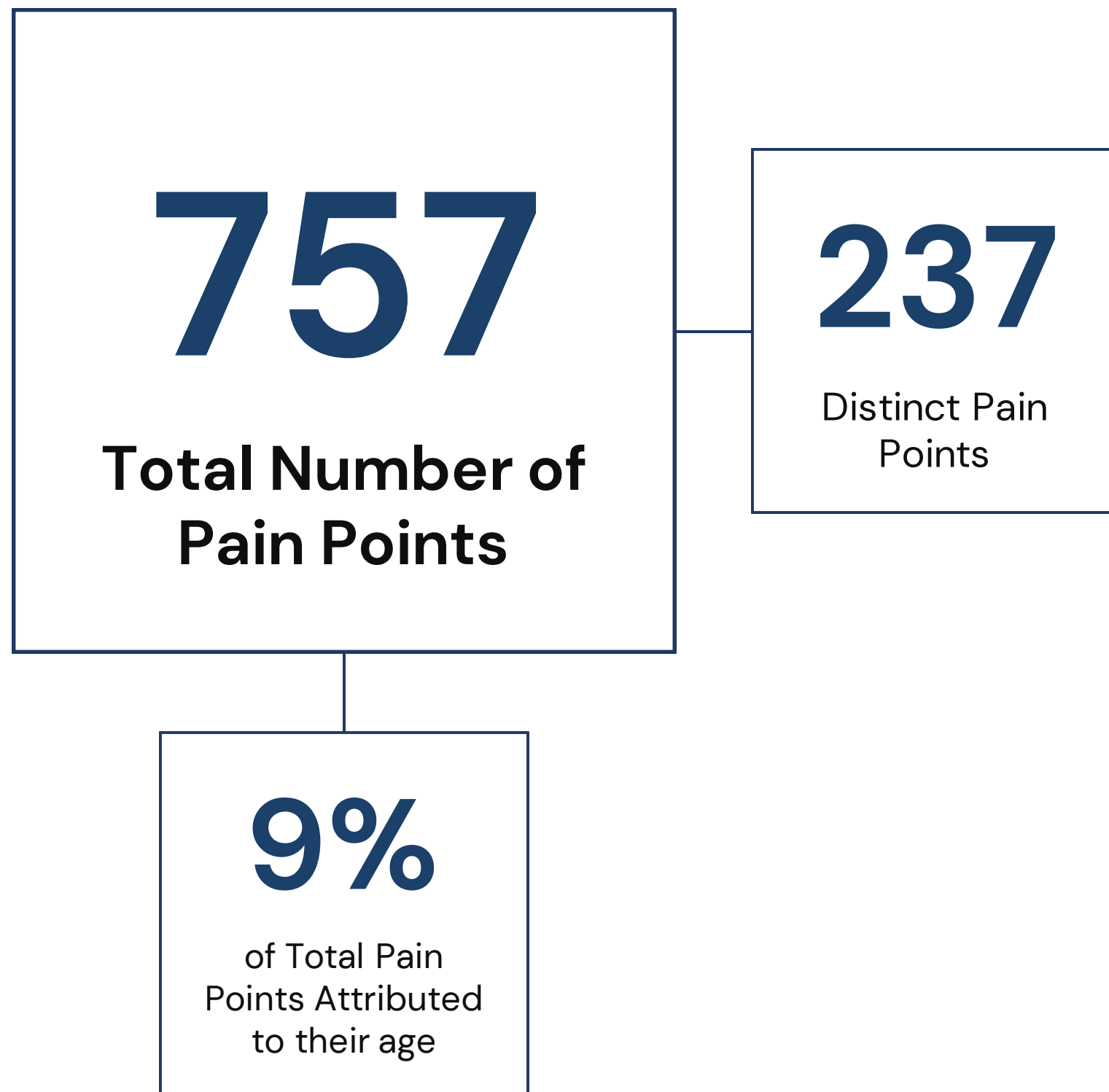


“My supervisor I had for 10 years was just recently encouraged to retire because a lot of the younger people that come into work are Millennial . . . and she was struggling so much with the work ethic being different . . .

***It was definitely painful to watch playout because I'm a lot like her. I took a class about different generations and how they can work together. Had I not taken that class, I would have been right behind her.”***

***“I applied for a job outside VA. *The only thing that led me to stay is the fact that I have 18 years of experience here. I’m 52, so leaving would be starting over somewhere else...* I felt stuck here more than anything.”***

***Baby Boomer***  
***(Born Between 1946 and 1964)***



## Data Overview

The **38 Baby Boomer** participants referenced **757 total pain points** (*237 distinct*) during the interviews and focus groups – an **average of 20 pain points experienced per participant.**

Of all pain points experienced, participants attributed **9%** to their age.

## Top Pain Points

Two pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' age\*, by percentage of respondents:

**13%**

**1. Feeling a lack of credibility due to identity**

**11%**

**2. Explicitly perceiving identity as an impediment to career advancement**

*\*The Baby Boomer identity group did not have any pain points that met the 20% reporting threshold. The top two pain points most frequently identified and attributed to participants' age are reported above.*

# Top Themes

Based on the pain points **attributed** to participants' age, one major theme arose.

# 26%

## *Well-being at Work*

**of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work (e.g., feeling like they cannot speak up/interject, feeling a need to prove themselves more, feeling excluded, and feeling a lack of credibility)**



# 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 to] ***find people assuming I didn’t know anything about IT because I’m older***... You know, don’t insult my intelligence because you think I don’t know anything.”

***Middle Eastern and North  
African (MENA)***

# Recruitment Challenges

While the project team sought to engage employees who identify as Middle Eastern and North African, it experienced significant challenges recruiting participants from this identity group to engage in an interview. Learnings from this project experience serve as key insights for VA going forward.

## Limited Data in HRIT Files

The project team was unable to conduct targeted outreach through HRIT data because employees cannot self-identify as MENA or Southwest Asian in any of their HR files. One participant shared this pain point during their interview.

*“When first getting my PIV card at the VA I was told I could not select my ethnicity as Middle Eastern or Southwest Asian and was forced to choose White. This does not capture my experiences at all. I told the Woman that this was unfair and inaccurate. This made me realize the limitations of the VA right away, and I have met very few Middle Eastern VA providers which is unsurprising.”*

## Lack of Employee Networks

The MENA identity group has neither an Employee Resource Group (ERG) nor a Special Emphasis Program. The project team leveraged these employee networks for recruitment of other identity groups but were unable to do so with MENA employees.

# Findings

Four of the seven MENA participants interviewed attributed pain points to their MENA identity citing a total of forty-two pain points.

## **Seven unique pain points were cited by more than one participant:**

- Lacking diversity/representation on team
- Lacking identity-based celebrations / activities / recognitions
- Lacking representation in leadership
- Colleague lacking responsiveness to pain point raised
- Fearing identity will adversely affect individual's reputation
- Feeling like an outsider because of identity
- Feeling hyper-aware of identity at work

*"Being a [MENA] person who is working at an institution with Veterans who have fought in related wars [in the MENA region] made me nervous when I first started, and I still feel it today. I wonder how I am being perceived by my patients or even certain employees. . . A few months ago, I was doing treatment with a Veteran who said right up front 'I'm racist. I don't know how to be around Arab people.' So that kind of thing gets to me. There's a lot of microaggressions that happen."*

# ***Identity Intersections***



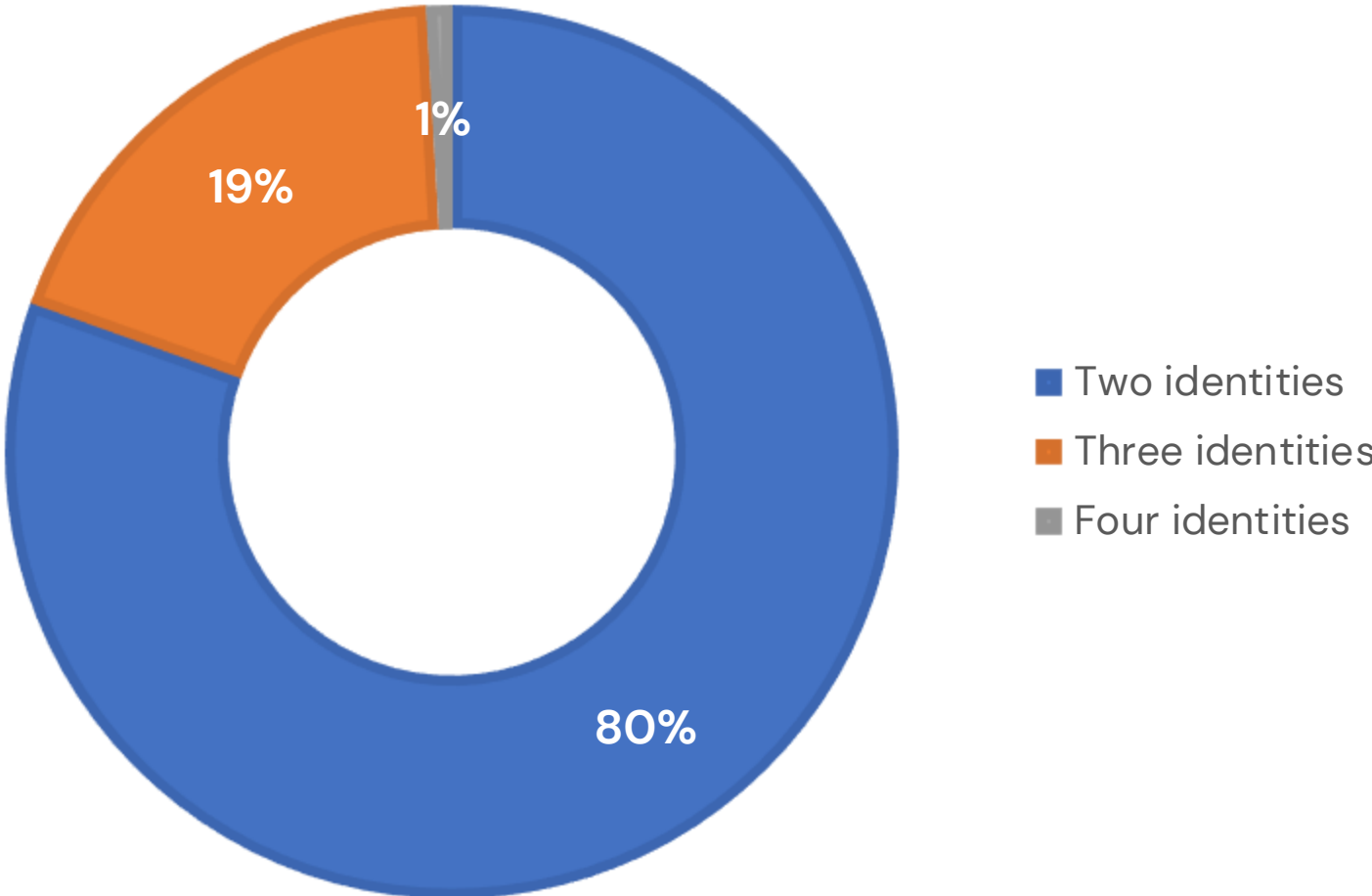
# Pain Point Attribution to Multiple Identities

Fifty-three percent (53%) of participants attributed one or more pain points to more than one identity in focus.

Of the pain points attributed to more than one identity, **80% were attributed to two of the identities in focus.** The identity intersections most frequently cited and attributed to were:

- Black/African American x Woman
- AAPI x Woman
- Hispanic x Woman
- LGBTQ+ (not incl. GNC) x Woman
- LGBTQ+ (not incl. GNC) x IWD
- LGBTQ+ (not incl. GNC) x Veteran
- Woman x Veteran

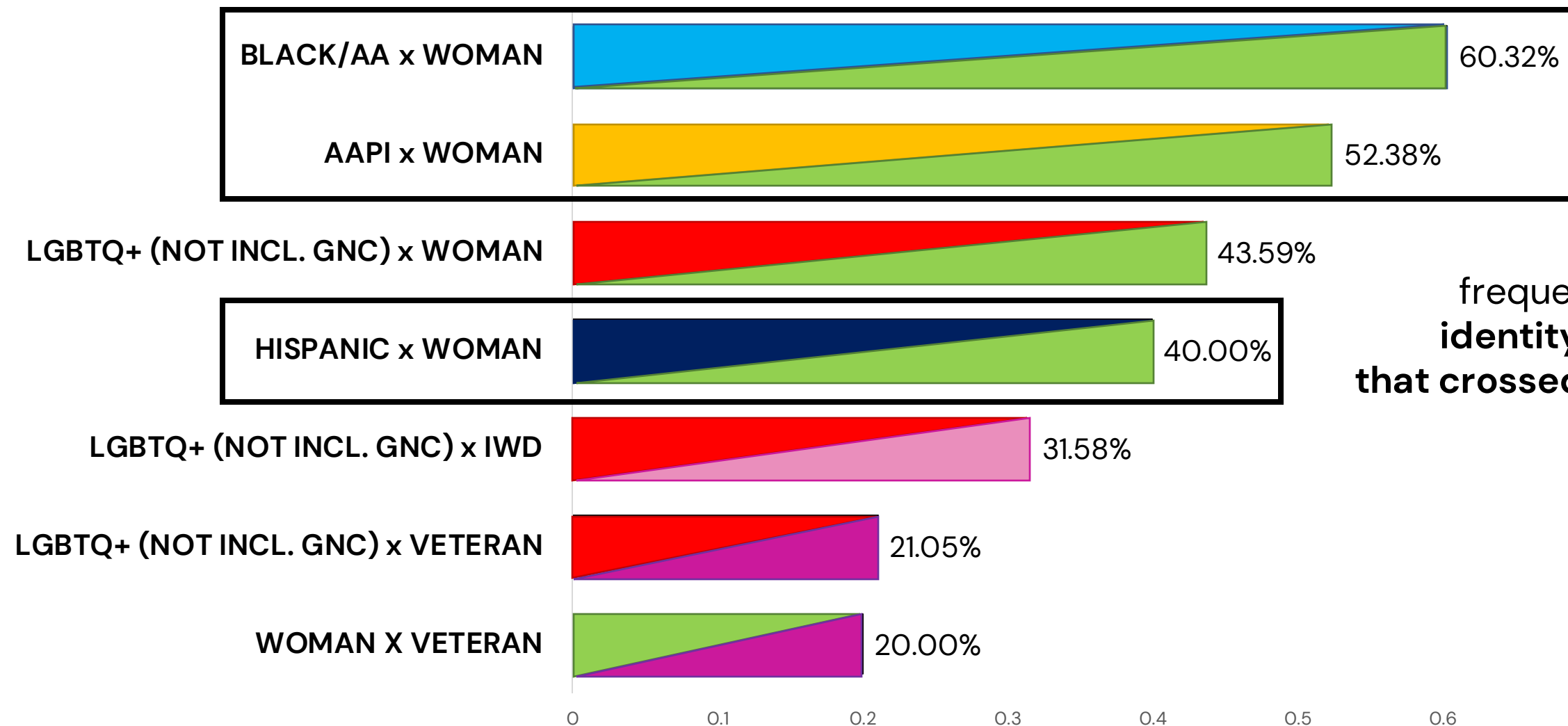
Pain Points Attributed to Multiple Identities



# Attribution by Identity Intersection

Below is the percentage of participants in an identity intersection who have attributed one or more pain points to that specific identity intersection. For example, 60.32% of all Black/African American Women participants attributed one or more pain points to their identities as Black/African American and Women.

Pain Point Attribution to Identities by Percentage of Participants in an Identity Intersection



Seven identity intersections were most frequently cited by participants. However, only **three identity groups reported pain points and/or themes that crossed the 20% threshold: Black/African American Women, Hispanic Women, and AAPI Women.**

***Black/African American x  
Women***

## Top Pain Points

Four pain points were most frequently identified and attributed to participants' Black/African American and Women identities, by percentage of respondents:

**25%**

**1. Lacking representation in leadership**

**24%**

**2. Superior/supervisor differential treatment of those of a particular identity**

**21%**

**3. Lacking diversity/representation on team**  
**4. Feeling different from colleagues because of speech**

# Top Themes

Based on the pain points **attributed** to participants' Black/African American and Women identities, three major themes arose.

Theme	Summary
Well-being at Work	<b>43%</b> of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work (e.g., 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	<b>38%</b> of participants experienced one or more pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, lack of awareness/empathy associated with identity, lack of support from supervisors, inappropriate comments etc.).
Comments about Identity	<b>35%</b> 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.).

***Hispanic x Women***

# Top Themes

Based on the pain points **attributed** to participants' Hispanic and Women identities, three major themes arose.

Theme	Summary
Well-being at Work	<b>23%</b> of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work (e.g., 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	<b>20%</b> of participants referenced one or more pain points about diversity and representation at VA (e.g., lack representation in leadership, lack diversity/representation on team, etc.).
Comments about Identity	<b>20%</b> 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.).

***AAPI x Women***



# Top Themes

Based on the pain points **attributed** to participants' AAPI and Women identities, two major themes arose.

Theme	Summary
<b>Well-being at Work</b>	<b>29%</b> of participants cited negative impacts to their well-being at work (e.g., feeling like they cannot speak up/interject, feeling a need to prove themselves more, feeling excluded, and feeling a lack of credibility)
<b>Diversity and Representation</b>	<b>24%</b> of participants referenced one or more pain points about diversity and representation at VA (e.g., lack representation in leadership, lack diversity/representation on team, etc.).

# ***Aggregate Findings***

***The Interplay Between Employee  
Experience (EX) & Customer  
Experience (CX)***

# EX / CX

During interviews and focus groups, the project team identified several intersections between EX and CX.

Employees who are Veterans cited negative impacts to their own customer experience as a result of their employment at VA.

Employee Experience



Customer Experience

## Employees Who Are Also Customers

Twelve percent (12%) of Veteran participants highlighted one or more pain points pertaining to **their experience as an employee and a customer of VA**. The top three pain points cited were:

### Colleagues are also care providers and/or patients

*"It is very awkward being a patient and a care provider at the same time. Because I work so closely with Women's health. . . one week [my primary care provider] is doing my pap and the next I'm in a meeting with her talking about a patient. That's awkward; that's uncomfortable; that's frustrating, to say the least."*

### Being excluded from Veteran (customer) activities

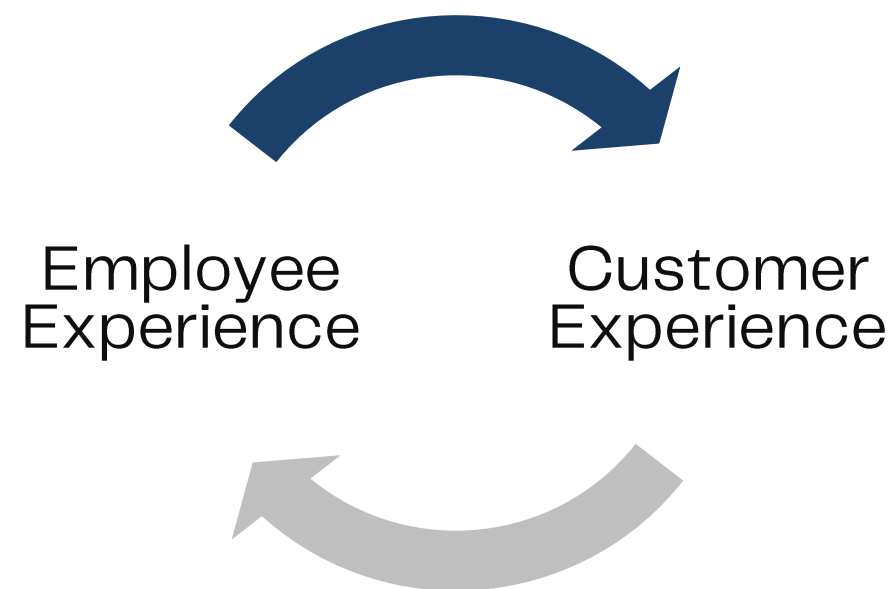
*"If we are having an event or something that is for Veterans, because I'm an employee I'm not allowed to attend certain things or even pick up swag off the table because. . . it would be frowned upon. There have been times when there was [an event] where they explicitly said, 'This is for Veterans but not Veteran employees.'"*

### Feeling uncomfortable getting care at VA

*"I don't use VA health care because I had a really negative experience when I first got out [of the military]. I broke my hand and needed to have my cast taken off and my stitches out. I was sent back and forth between three VA hospitals before some ortho guy overheard me and did it right them and there. It took two days just to get someone to hear me."*

# EX / CX

The following pain points were cited by employees who witnessed negative customer experiences which, in turn, adversely impacted their own EX.



## Employees Negatively Affecting CX

**Twenty-five percent (25%)** of participants highlighted pain points pertaining to witnessing issues with Veteran care. **More than 34% of these pain points directly referenced the LGBTQ+\* Veteran patient experience.**

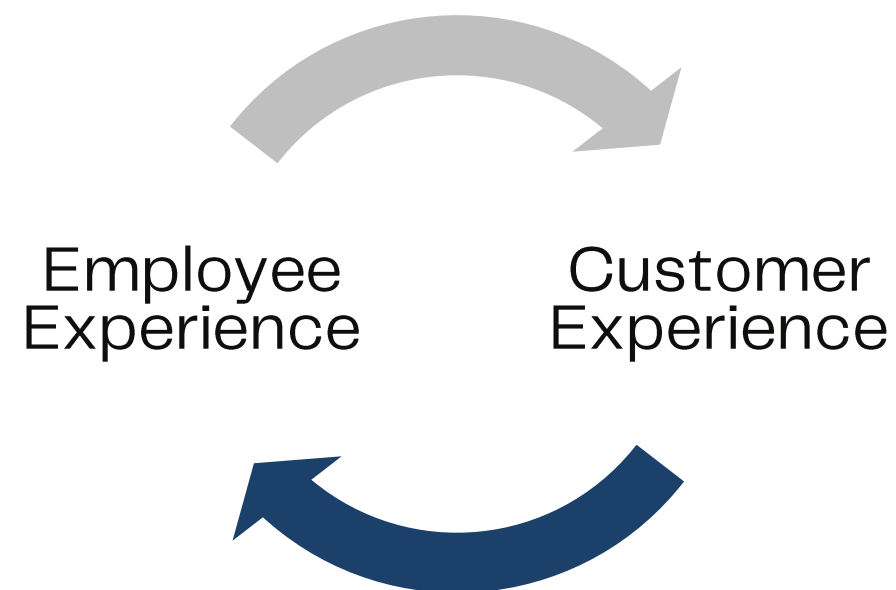
*"[Sometimes] you would catch conversations about not understanding what trans issues [are] or how transitions impact Veterans. . . I did have a patient who has heart disease, and she was transgender. She wanted to get hormones through primary care. Mental health said that it was fine, that she could do it. Cardiology said it was fine. But endocrinology wouldn't write the prescriptions. It was a huge battle that lasted several months just to get clearance to prescribe hormones to someone who wanted to transition."*

*"There's a transgender Veteran [at the hospital, and] one of the nurses [said] 'I don't know if he's a he or a she' . . . So we asked another nurse and they said, 'On his file it says Mr. [redacted].' I told them that there was a way to look for their preferred name and pronouns on their chart, but I was completely dismissed. We go to the patient, and [the nurse] calls them Sir. The patient [said], 'No, I'm transgender, I use all female pronouns.' And the nurse continued to say Sir. It was just so horrific to watch."*

*\*This number includes Gender Non-Conforming Veterans.*

## EX / CX

The following pain points were cited by employees whose encounters with customers that adversely affected their employee experience.



### ***Customers Negatively Affecting EX***

**Twenty-seven percent (27%)** of participants highlighted pain points pertaining to their **interactions with customers**. Of these participants, 91% attributed the experience to one or more of their identities.

Of the pain points cited, **32% were attributed to being BIPOC, 28% to being a Woman, 15% to being Gender Non-Conforming, and 11% to being LGBTQ+ (not incl. GNC).**

Pain points most frequently identified were related to Customers:

- Making an inappropriate comment/question about identity;
- Refusing to be served by employee of a different identity;
- Verbally attacking an employee;
- Treating employees of a particular identity differently; and
- Displaying identity in a manner that made the employee feel uncomfortable

***Pain Points Not Attributed to Identity***

# Unattributed Top Themes

While not attributed to identity, two themes emerged related to institutional issues at VA.

Theme	Summary
<b>Career Development and Advancement</b>	<b>47%</b> of the 281 participants cited pain points referencing career development and advancement (e.g., nepotism in hiring promotion and advancement, lack of professional development opportunities, supervisor/superior denying a request for advancement, etc.). The most frequently cited pain point in this theme was <i>“Lack of advancement opportunities.”</i>
<b>Workplace Culture</b>	<b>24%</b> of the 281 participants referenced one or more pain points about tensions in the workplace culture at VA (e.g., military culture perceived as negative, insufficient military culture, political divide in VA culture, generational divide in VA culture, etc.). The most frequently cited pain point in this theme was <i>“Individual-focused culture.”</i>  <i>“A coworker and I tried to set up an opportunity for people to get together twice a month and have lunch to get people out of their office and interacting, but no one came. It’s worse than pulling teeth trying to get people to interact outside of a work meeting. I feel so isolated because of it.”</i>



***Pain Points Attributed to Identity***

# Top Themes

The project team identified 12 key themes in the data, four of which were cited and attributed by more than 20% of 10 identity groups. Challenges with Colleagues (58%), Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors (54%), Comments about Identity (57%), and Well-being at Work (62%) were cited by and attributed to one or more of the identity groups in focus by over 50% of participants. The top pain points within the Well-being at Work theme were “Feeling a lack of credibility due to identity” and “Feeling unable to speak up, interject, or assert self.”

Identity Group	Challenges with Colleagues	Challenges with Customers/Vendors	Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors	Career Development and Advancement	I*DEA	Diversity and Representation	Closeting	Comments About Identity	Well-being at Work	Accommodations	Self-presentation at Work	Leadership	Total
AIAN	30%	10%	25%	15%	20%	20%	5%	25%	10%	0%	10%	20%	6
AAPI	28%	17%	34%	31%	14%	48%	17%	31%	38%	0%	17%	45%	7
Black/AA	51%	13%	45%	38%	18%	51%	16%	55%	54%	1%	38%	48%	8
Hispanic	32%	26%	26%	13%	18%	26%	16%	45%	29%	0%	26%	21%	8
IWD	21%	1%	35%	16%	9%	8%	16%	23%	19%	24%	18%	11%	4
Gender-Non Conforming	77%	50%	32%	27%	59%	32%	41%	59%	45%	0%	55%	50%	11
LGBTQ+ (Not Incl. GNC)	56%	26%	36%	19%	35%	20%	53%	57%	36%	2%	47%	31%	10
Non-Religious	9%	9%	6%	3%	0%	0%	12%	3%	12%	0%	12%	0%	0
Religious (Not Incl. Jewish)	17%	6%	10%	2%	6%	5%	8%	13%	6%	0%	7%	2%	0
Jewish	56%	19%	41%	7%	22%	19%	26%	44%	22%	0%	19%	7%	6
Veteran	16%	1%	10%	2%	3%	6%	2%	12%	19%	1%	8%	7%	0
White	5%	1%	2%	2%	2%	0%	0%	3%	4%	0%	2%	0%	0
Women	30%	14%	37%	25%	4%	25%	6%	32%	41%	0%	19%	23%	7
Gen Z	47%	12%	24%	18%	0%	6%	0%	24%	71%	0%	6%	12%	4
Millennial	9%	4%	10%	3%	0%	3%	2%	14%	23%	0%	3%	1%	1
Gen X	5%	0%	8%	11%	1%	1%	2%	6%	12%	0%	2%	3%	0
Baby Boomer	3%	0%	16%	16%	0%	3%	0%	0%	26%	0%	3%	8%	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	

Crossed the reporting threshold (20%)

No theme crossed the reporting threshold

More information on each of the themes can be found [here](#).

# 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, 62% of all the Well-being pain points that Black/African American participants cited are attributed to their Black/African American identity.

**Six identity groups report a total severity greater than 30%: AAPI, Black/African American, LGBTQ+ (not incl. GNC), Gender Non-Conforming, Jewish, and Gen Z.**

	AIAN	AAPI	BLACK/AA	HISPANIC	IWD	LGBTQ+ (NOT INCL. GNC)	GENDER NON-CONFORMING	NON-RELIGIOUS	RELIGIOUS (NOT INCL. JEWISH)	JEWISH	VETERAN	WHITE	WOMEN	GEN Z	MILLENNIAL	GEN X	BABY BOOMER
Organization	21%	28%	37%	21%	15%	24%	46%	4%	2%	27%	16%	1%	18%	18%	3%	2%	8%
People	24%	41%	55%	33%	23%	38%	70%	5%	1%	32%	10%	2%	33%	40%	8%	3%	6%
Place	-	-	-	-	52%	-	27%	14%	9%	58%	-	-	9%	-	-	-	-
Technology	-	-	-	-	50%	-	78%	-	9%	-	-	-	-	-	6%	-	27%
Well-being	25%	51%	62%	37%	28%	53%	82%	10%	3%	36%	15%	4%	34%	40%	10%	5%	14%
Work	19%	10%	29%	18%	11%	15%	48%	4%	1%	14%	18%	5%	24%	61%	9%	3%	14%
Total	23%	36%	48%	28%	21%	35%	64%	6%	2%	31%	14%	2%	27%	34%	7%	3%	9%

The Individuals with Disabilities identity group reported the second greatest severity in the second greatest severity in the Place and Technology EX Relationships. The most frequently cited pain points within reference accessibility issues amongst VA technology and workplaces.

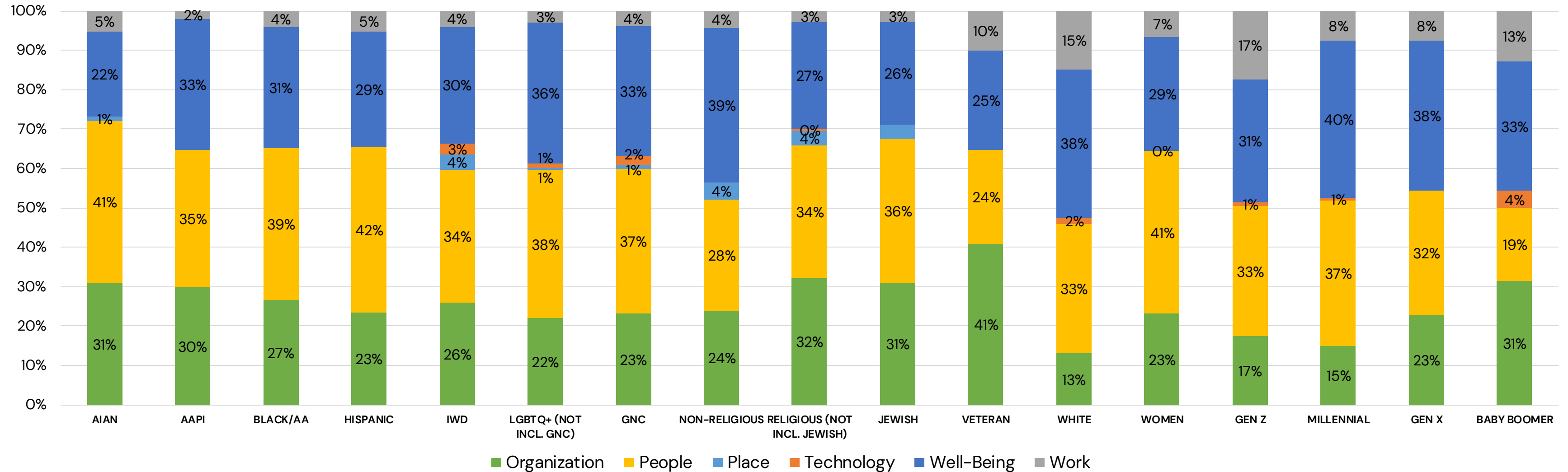
The Gender Non-Conforming identity group reported the greatest severity overall and the greatest severity in four of the six EX Relationships. The EX Relationship with the highest severity is Well-being at 82%. That is the single highest severity reported in any EX Relationship by any identity group. Additionally, the Gender Non-Conforming identity group reported the greatest severity in the Technology relationship. The most frequently cited pain point is: "Difficult to change name in VA system." Additionally, this is the only identity group to report a top pain point in this EX Relationship.

The Jewish identity group reported the highest severity in the Place relationship with the most frequently cited pain point being, "Lacking religious inclusion in office holiday décor." This is the only identity group to have a top pain point in this EX Relationship.

The Gen Z identity group reports the greatest total severity of the generations by over 25%. Additionally, Gen Z reports the highest severity in the Work EX Relationship with 61% of all pain points cited being attributed to their age. The top pain point in this relationship is, "Feeling unable to speak up, interject, or assert themselves."

- An identity must have a minimum of two pain points attributed to their identity in the EX Relationship to be depicted.

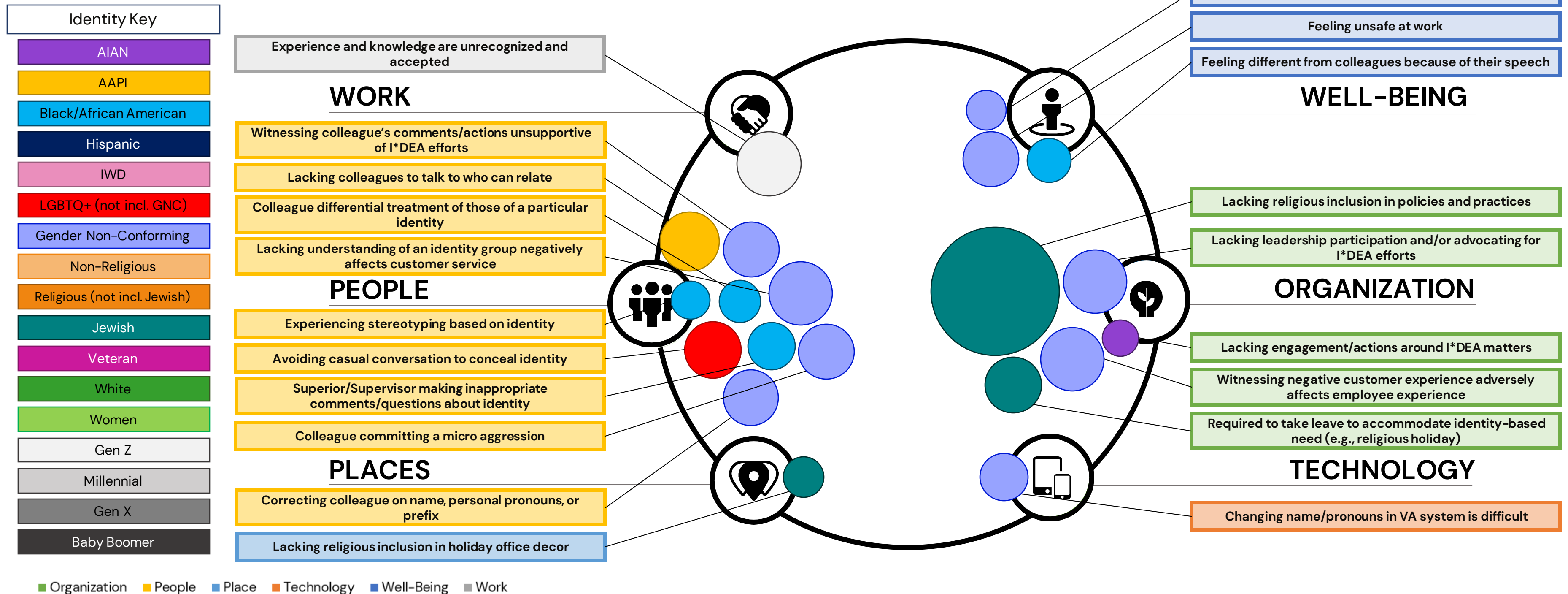
# Attributed Pain Points by EX Relationship



The identity groups with the highest total severity all report the highest portion of pain points within the People EX Relationship (AAPI, Black/African American, LGBTQ+ (not incl. GNC), Gender Non-Conforming, Jewish, and Gen Z). Additionally, all four of the age cohorts report significantly higher proportions of pain points in the Work EX Relationship than the non-age identity groups.

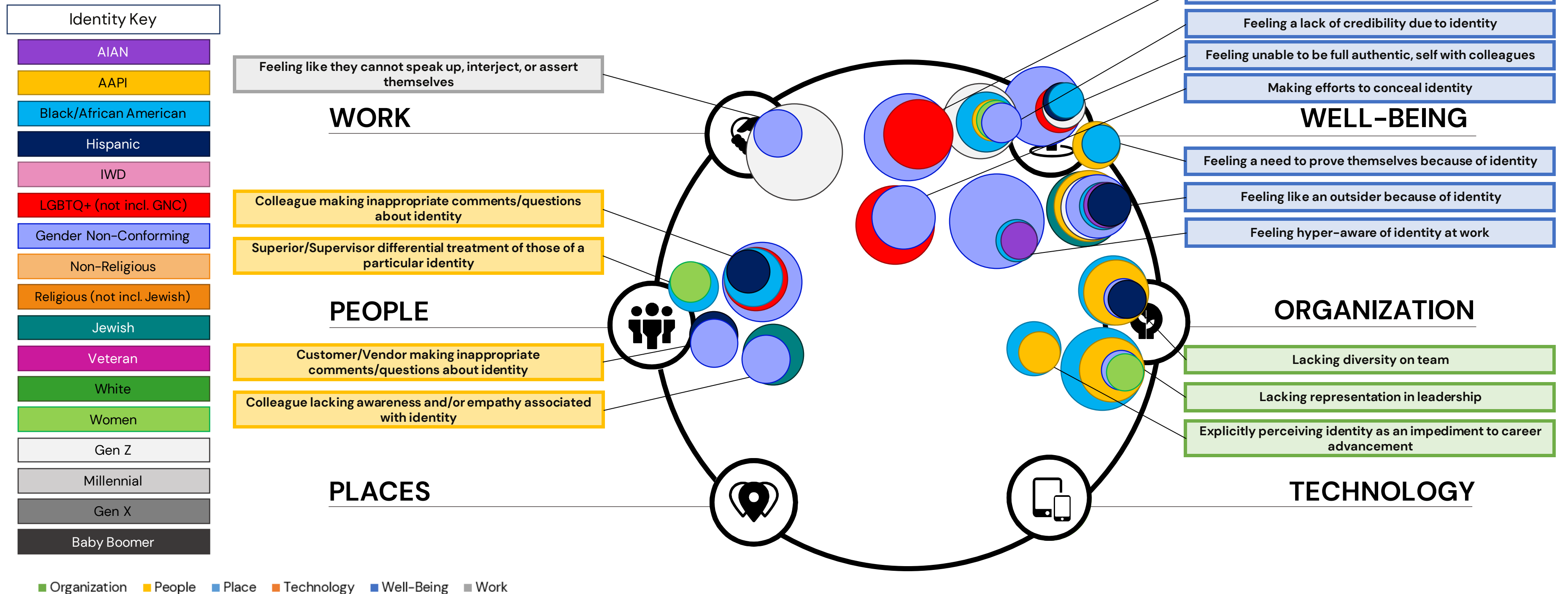
# Unique Top Pain Points

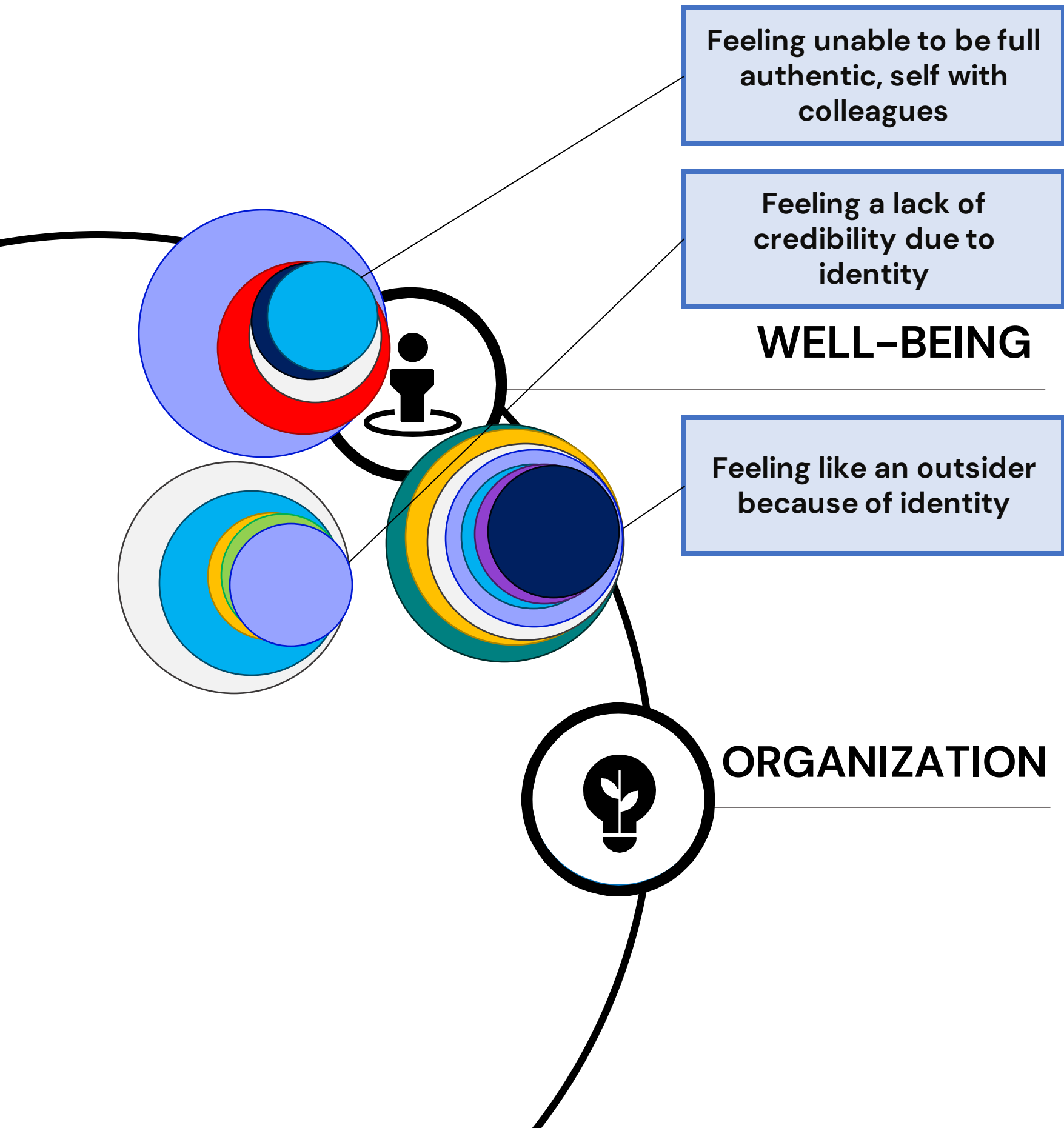
Mapped below are the **unique** top pain points – this means the pain points were **attributed by 20% or more of only one identity group**. The Jewish and Gender Non-Conforming identity groups report the most unique top pain points of all identity groups.



# 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**. Fifteen areas of overlap across the top pain points attributed to identity are depicted.





# Pain Points Heat Map

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

- Feeling unable to be full, authentic self with colleagues
- Feeling a lack of credibility due to identity
- Feeling like an outsider because of identity

Identity Key			
AIAN	LGBTQ+ (not incl. GNC)	Veteran	Gen Z
AAPI	Gender Non-Conforming	White	Millennial
Black/African American	Non-Religious	Women	Gen X
Hispanic	Religious (not incl. Jewish)		Baby Boomer
IWD	Jewish		

# ***Appendix***



# Key Terms

Definitions of key terms used throughout the report.

Term	Definition
<b>BIPOC</b>	Black, Indigenous, and people of color.
<b>Gender Non-Conforming</b>	Describes an individual whose gender identity or gender expression differs from the gender norms associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. <sup>1</sup>
<b>I*DEA</b>	<p>Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility.<sup>2</sup></p> <p><b>PROMOTING INCLUSION:</b> Making everyone who interacts with VA feel safe and welcome. Treating individuals with dignity, integrity, and respect. Providing an environment free of harassment, discrimination, prejudice, and bias. Ensuring every Veteran and employee is recognized, included, and valued.</p> <p><b>INCREASING DIVERSITY:</b> Recognizing and embracing the strengths of our diverse Veterans and employees. Engaging and supporting underserved communities including Women, people of color, persons with disabilities, and individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+).</p> <p><b>FOSTERING EQUITY:</b> Identifying and mitigating barriers to access and opportunity. Providing every individual with the support they need to access health care and benefits and achieve success. Alleviating systemic inequities and institutional obstacles to improve outcomes for Veterans and employees.</p>

<sup>1</sup> [American Psychological Association \(apa.org\)](https://www.apa.org)

<sup>2</sup> [I\\*DEA Action Plan](#)

# Key Terms

Definitions of key terms used throughout the report.

Term	Definition
<b>I*DEA (cont.)</b>	<p>IMPROVING ACCESS: Ensuring availability and access of services, support, and opportunity for all Veterans and employees. Developing institutional pathways and accommodations to promote access and improved outcomes for underserved and historically marginalized communities.</p> <p>VA's Definition of "Underserved and historically marginalized communities:" The term "underserved communities" refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, unique challenges, and geographic communities, who have been systemically and institutionally denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social and civic life. VA recognizes this term includes Black, Hispanic and Latino, or Indigenous and Native American persons; Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; Women; individuals who face discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, including pregnancy status and including LGBTQ+ persons; persons with disabilities; first-generation professionals or first-generation college students; individuals with limited English proficiency; immigrants; persons who may face employment barriers based on older age; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise at-risk of persistent poverty, homelessness or inequality.</p>
<b>Jewish</b>	Includes those who identify as ethnically, culturally and/or religiously Jewish.
<b>Non-Religious</b>	Encompasses all participants who have identified as atheist, agnostic, or no religion as an identity they hold. In the context of pain points, participants may attribute pain points to their lack of religion, religious beliefs, and/or religious affiliations. This is inclusive of, but not limited to: atheist, agnostic, not-religious and no religion.
<b>Religious</b>	Encompasses all participants who have identified a religion or spirituality as an identity they hold. In the context of pain points, participants may attribute pain points to their religion, religious beliefs, and/or religious affiliations.

# Pain Point Themes

Theme	Summary
<b>Challenges with Colleagues</b>	<b>Pain points regarding issues with their colleagues</b> (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, lack of awareness/empathy associated with identity, refusing to work together, verbal attacks, lack of support from colleagues, etc.).
<b>Challenges with Customers/Vendors</b>	<b>Pain points regarding issues with customers/vendors</b> (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, inappropriate comments, verbal attacks, etc.).
<b>Challenges with Superiors/Supervisors</b>	<b>Pain points regarding issues with their superiors/supervisors</b> (e.g., differential treatment because of their identity, lack of awareness/empathy associated with identity, lack of support from supervisors, inappropriate comments etc.).
<b>Career Development and Advancement</b>	<b>Pain points referencing career development and advancement</b> (e.g., lack of professional development opportunities, lack of advancement opportunities, explicitly perceiving their identity as an impediment to career advancement, etc.)
<b>I*DEA</b>	<b>Pain points associated with Inclusion, Diversity, Equity &amp; Access (I*DEA)</b> (e.g., lack of engagement/actions around I*DEA matters, lack of I*DEA training, etc.)
<b>Diversity and Representation</b>	<b>Pain points about diversity and representation at VA</b> (e.g., lack representation in leadership, lack diversity/representation on team, etc.).
<b>Closeting</b>	<b>Pain points referencing closeting their identity either through actions or efforts to conceal their identity</b> (e.g., avoiding casual conversation, dressing differently, not sharing personal information, etc.)
<b>Comments About Identity</b>	<b>Pain points regarding comments about their identity from superiors/supervisors, colleagues, direct reports, customers, and/or vendors</b> (e.g., microaggressions, offensive jokes, etc.).

# Pain Point Themes

Theme	Summary
Well-being at Work	<b>Pain points referencing negative impacts to their well-being at work</b> (e.g., feeling like they cannot speak up/interject, feeling a need to prove themselves more, feeling excluded, and feeling a lack of credibility)
Accommodations	<b>Pain points related to issues with securing reasonable accommodations</b> (e.g., being denied a request for accommodations, issues accessing their accommodations, and/or a lack of physical accommodations in a space.)
EX / CX	<b>Pain points related to the intersection between employee and customer experiences</b> (e.g., witnessing negative customer experience adversely affecting employee experience, lacking understanding of an identity group negatively affecting customer experience, colleagues also being care providers, etc.)
Self-presentation at Work	<b>Pain points associated with employees' manner of presenting themselves and/or engaging with others at work</b> (e.g., feeling different because of and/or conscious of their speech, feeling different because of and/or conscious of their actions and/or attire, etc.)
Leadership	<b>Pain points referencing issues with leadership</b> (e.g., leadership unresponsive to staff concerns, leadership, lack of leadership participation in and/or advocating for I*DEA work, lack of support from leadership, unstable leadership, etc.)