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Perceptions of Progress: The State of Women's Equality in the US

Advancing Equality for Black, Hispanic & Latinx Women

What's Inside

About the Study

The SeeHer mission is to '*accurately portray all women and girls in marketing, advertising, media and entertainment so they see themselves as they truly are in all their potential.*' To this end, SeeHer is committed to creating thought leadership that can shine a light on how we as an industry can continue to impact gender equality in marketing and media.

As part of its core values, dentsu shares an unwavering commitment to this same mission. Additionally, as a leader in the advertising industry, dentsu is acutely aware of how representation influences reality.

With those shared values in mind, SeeHer and dentsu have collaborated on a proprietary research study, *Perceptions of Progress: The State of Women's Equality in the US*, to understand consumers' attitudes around the importance, progress and barriers to gender equality. This report is the second in a series of three in which we dive into Black, Hispanic and Latinx women's responses to the study. Our previous report explored the different perceptions between men and women. The final and forthcoming report (early 2021) will look at the perspectives of generational cohorts.

Both dentsu and SeeHer are keenly aware of the power of data and insights to impact and inspire lasting change. It is our hope that the findings from this study give some visibility to the unique needs of Black, Hispanic, and Latinx women, a crucial first step towards equality.

An Unprecedented Year

As we near the end of 2020 and try to come to terms with the myriad ways in which our lives were upended and many of our longstanding attitudes and behaviors challenged, we realize that there is great urgency in the mission of achieving gender equality inclusive of all women. This report will emphasis that goal as it relates to women of color.

From the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on women and girls and communities of color to an awakened sense of responsibility to address racial injustice to the country's Black population, current events have shown that we are far from achieving true equality.

In addition, the economic impacts to women will be longstanding. A new McKinsey analysis shows that women's jobs were 1.8 times more vulnerable during the coronavirus pandemic than men's jobs. The study claims that, "If no action is taken to counter the regressive effects, we estimate that global GDP growth could be $1 trillion lower in 2030 than it would be if women's unemployment simply tracked that of men in each sector. Conversely, taking action now to advance gender equality could add $13 trillion to global GDP in 2030, compared with no action."

Against this background, there are signs of progress. In 244 years of US politics, Kamala Harris is the first woman, first Black woman and first Asian woman to be elected to the Vice Presidency.

As we take this historic step forward for all women, now more than ever, it is of vital importance for brands to show up with authentic messaging. There is both a great opportunity and a significant role for marketers and media to play in impacting gender equality.

And this is what consumers expect. In fact, 84% agree that 'media has the power to teach children that girls can do anything that boys can do'. Media plays a key role in not only reflecting culture, but in creating it.

Realistic and respectful portrayals are a critical way of ensuring that girls believe that anything is possible and how they in turn can shape the dreams of generations to come.

Executive Summary

Key Findings:
Hope, Realistic Portrayals & Advocacy

01

Black, Hispanic & Latinx women were more likely to feel hopeful about gender equality; yet need more concrete action given historical inequalities.

Our study found that close to half of Black, Hispanic and Latinx women feel 'very hopeful' (49% and 45%) about the current state of gender equality, compared to 40% of white women. Yet their optimism is matched with a lower sense of confidence that true equality will happen in their lifetimes.

02

There is a clear need for marketers and media to earn the trust of Black women.

Compared to women of other races/ethnicities, Black women are the least likely to consider that initiatives from brands and media will play a key role in advancing women's equality. This perception needs to be addressed to foster greater trust from Black women.

03

Black women want inclusive and textured representations that reflect their reality.

Our study found that Black women are the least satisfied with media representation. Only 18% of Black women feel media accurately portrays women 'all of the time' compared to 31% of Hispanic and Latinx women and 25% of white women. Black women want media and brands to go beyond stereotypical stories of Black women to deliver more empowering, intersectional, and multi-dimensional portrayals of the realities of their lives.

04

Hispanic & Latinx women invite brands to act as advocates and partners for gender equality and are actively looking for role models.

Hispanic and Latinx women were more likely to feel initiatives from media and brands can improve gender equality. In particular, they expect these entities to play key roles in breaking down barriers. On the media side, the key barrier is a lack of female role models (60%). From brands, it is a need for a diversity of talent in ads. Another key barrier they see is society's unwillingness to support women (66%), here again they want brands to step into the gap in a variety of ways, including donating to organizations dedicate to female advancement (50%).

FINDING 01

Hope Tempered by Existing Barriers to Equality

Both Black and Hispanic women are more likely to view gender equality as a very important issue than white women. And they express more hope that progress will be made.

Among respondents, Hispanic and Latinx women (90%) and Black women (82%) are significantly more likely than white women (68%) to say gender equality is a 'very important' issue to them (Figure 1).

Although, the majority of women expressed sentiments of hope (90% for Black women, 83% for white women and 82% for Hispanic women), higher percentages of Black women (49%) and Hispanic and Latinx (45%) women feel 'very

hopeful' about the current state of gender equality compared to 40% of white women (Figure 2).

In addition, Black women were more likely to express confidence in the rise of female leaders in male-dominated arenas over the next decade (Figure 3): 95% and 92% predict as such in business and politics vs. 86% and 88% of white women and 85% and 83% of Hispanic and Latinx women, respectively.

The findings suggest that the intersectional identities of women of color heighten their urgency and hope around gender equality.

Figure 1

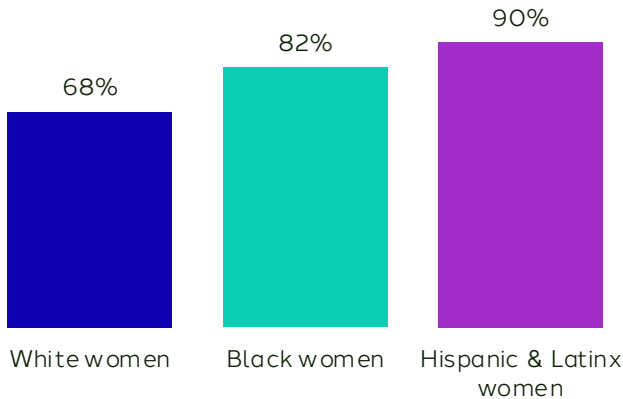**How important is women's equality to you personally? "Very Important"**

Figure 3

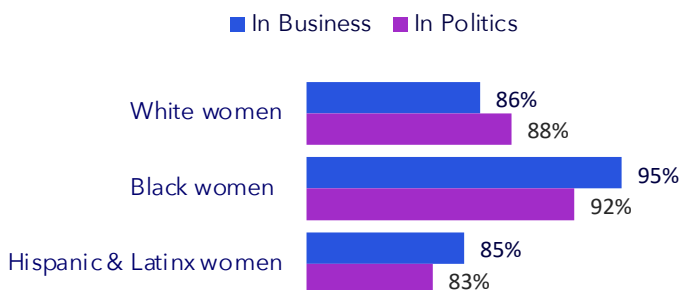**% Agree: I have confidence the next decade will see more female leaders....**
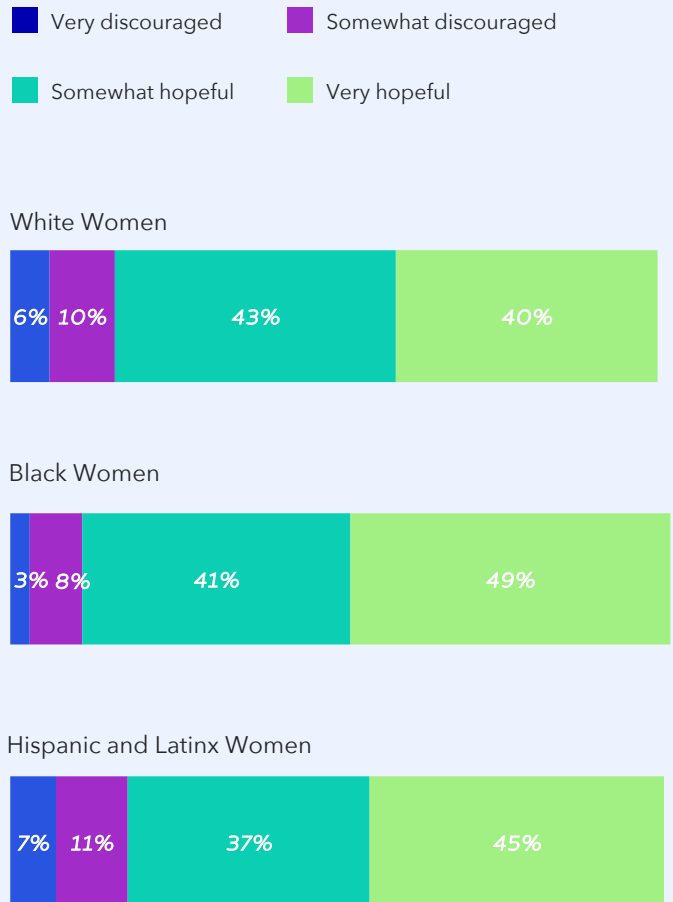

Figure 2

How do you feel about the current state of women's equality in the US?

■ Very discouraged   ■ Somewhat discouraged

■ Somewhat hopeful   ■ Very hopeful

White Women

Black Women

Hispanic and Latinx Women

Despite expressing strong hope, women are less confident that gender equality will be achieved in their lifetimes, with only one-third or less of white, Black and Hispanic and Latinx women feeling this way (Figure 4).

In general, the gap between hope and confidence is larger for Black, Hispanic and Latinx women. There is a 16-point difference for Hispanic and Latinx women and a 13-point difference for Black women versus a 4-point difference for white women (Figure 4). This suggests that Black, Hispanic and Latinx women's optimistic attitude may be tempered by the fact that progress has not manifested quickly.

Much of this gap may be due to the different barriers each group of women feel impact them most significantly (Figure 5). Looking at the top 3 barriers, Black, Hispanic and Latinx women feel more impacted by an unwillingness of society to support them (62% and 66% vs. 51% of white women).

Additionally, Hispanic and Latinx women are more likely to feel urgency around a lack of female role models for their community, while Black women were more likely to feel persisting stereotypes contribute significantly to the inequality they face (Figure 5).

Figure 4

Hopeful vs. Highly Confident

■ '"Very hopeful" about women's equality'

■ '"Strongly agree": I have confidence that gender equality will be achieved in my lifetime.'

White Women

40%
36%
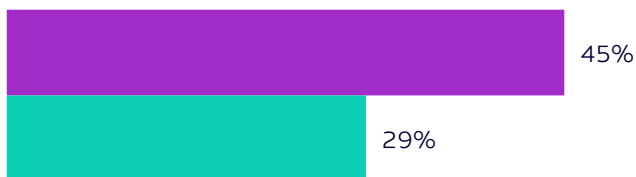
Black Women

49%
36%

Hispanic & Latinx women

45%
29%

Figure 5

Top 5 Barriers to Inequality

	Total	White women	Black women	Hispanic & Latinx women
1	Sexualization/ harassment 58%	Sexualization/ harassment 62%	Sexualization/ harassment 69%	Unwillingness to support women 66%
2	The pay gap 53%	The pay gap 59%	Persisting stereotypes 62%	The pay gap 62%
3	Persisting stereotypes 51%	Different expectations 57%	Unwillingness to support women 62%	Lack of female role models 60%
4	Different expectations 50%	Persisting stereotypes 54%	Different expectations 56%	Persisting stereotypes 58%
5	Unwillingness to support women 49%	Unwillingness to support women 51%	The pay gap 54%	Sexualization/ harassment 57%

Responsibility to Improve Gender Equality?

When asked which entities or groups have responsibility to improve gender equality, two interesting macro-themes emerged.

On one hand, Hispanic and Latinx women expect partnership with institutions to advance the agenda of gender equality (Figure 6). They place a high responsibility on media (53%), brands (52%), the government and employers (48%, respectively).
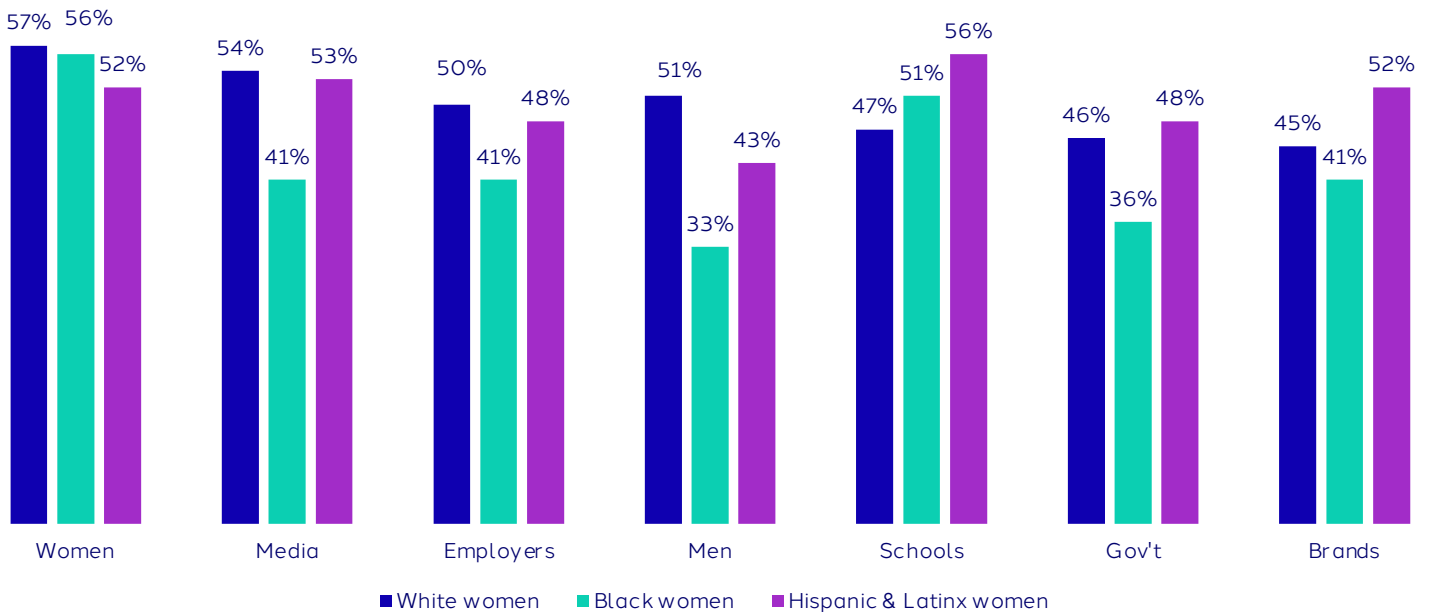
Conversely, it appears that Black women are in wait-and-see mode. Only 41% allocate 'a lot' of responsibility to media, employers and brands, respectively; and just 36% to the government. Additionally, they are least likely to place 'a lot' of responsibility on men (33% vs. 51% of white women and 43% of Hispanic and Latinx women). These lower percentages may not truly reflect how Black women want to see responsibility shared, but instead may speak to a hesitancy to leave responsibility to systems that have historically marginalized them. Reflecting this, Black women are most likely to place responsibility in the hands of themselves and their fellow women (56%).

Interestingly the institution that both Black and Hispanic and Latinx women were more likely to allocate responsibility to is America's educational system. Hispanic and Latinx women are most likely to charge schools with 'a lot' of responsibility (56%); while schools are the entity Black women see as holding the second-highest level of responsibility (51%).

Figure 6

What level of responsibility to improve women's equality do you think each of the following groups or entities has? "A lot of responsibility"

	Women	Media	Employers	Men	Schools	Gov't	Brands
White women	57%	54%	50%	51%	47%	46%	45%
Black women	56%	41%	41%	33%	51%	36%	41%
Hispanic & Latinx women	52%	53%	48%	43%	56%	48%	52%

FINDING 02

Media: A Need for Inclusive & Realistic Narratives

All women see the opportunity for media to improve gender equality: 84% of white women, 82% of Black women and 78% of Hispanic and Latinx women agree that media plays a crucial role in shaping gender roles and norms (Figure 7). This starts from an early age; 86%, 87% and 85%, respectively, agree that media has the power to teach children that girls can do anything that boys can do.

In general, all groups of women agree that the biggest issue with media representation is that women's attractiveness tends to be valued above all else. Nearly three quarters of women (72%, 67% and 73%, respectively), say they more often see portrayals that focus on women's attractiveness at the expense of their accomplishments (Figure 8).

This comes even while strides have been made against other stereotypical representations. For example, over half of all women (55% of white women, 56% of Black women and 58% of Hispanic and Latinx women) say they more often see female characters portrayed as strong rather than dainty. Interestingly Hispanic women are more likely to feel that media has made strides to show women as strong leaders: 48% say they more often see women portrayed as leaders versus caretakers, compared to 39% of white women and 38% of Black women.

Figure 7

% Agree With The Following Statements:

- "Agree": Media plays a crucial role in shaping gender roles and norms
- "Agree": Media has the power to teach children that girls can do anything that boys can do
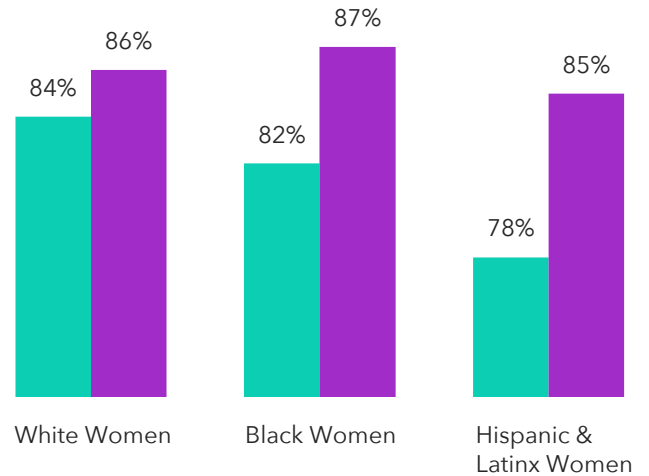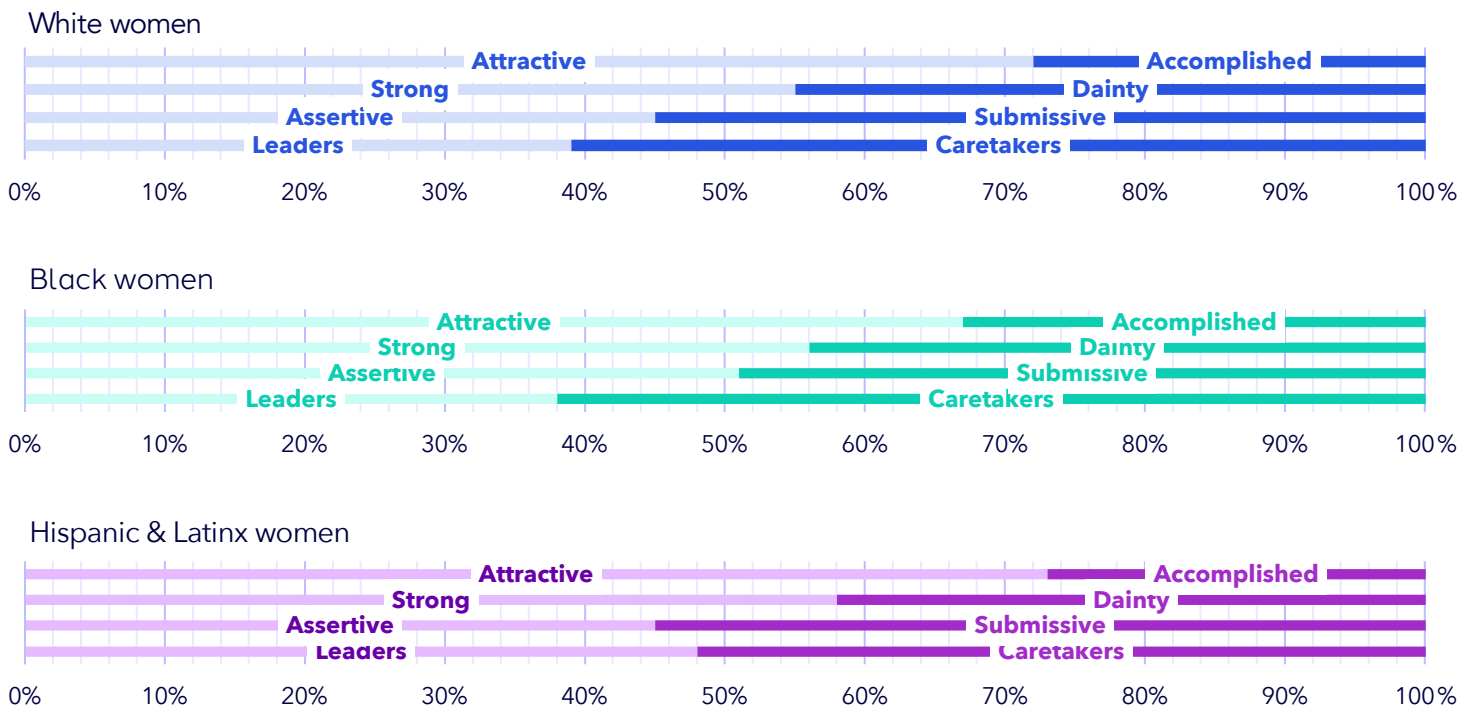

Figure 8

Women are more often portrayed in media as...?

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The majority of women feel media has not made significant progress to better represent them. However, the issue of accurate representation is particularly acute for black women.

Just 23% of Black women feel media has made 'a lot' of progress to better represent women in the past decade compared to 33% of White women and 36% of Hispanic women (Figure 9).

The majority of women also do not feel that media accurately portrays women 'all of the time'. Only 18% of Black women agree with this statement, while 31% of Hispanic and 25% of white women do. Additionally, Black women are also the least likely to feel the media 'typically' respects women (28% vs. 34% of Hispanic and 35% of white women say the same) (Figure 9).

Clearly, all women believe that there is work to do for representation to reflect reality, but Black women in particular feel there is significant work to be done to more truthfully tell their stories. There is an opportunity for marketers and media to create more positive, empowering and realistic narratives for all women, especially Black women.

Figure 9

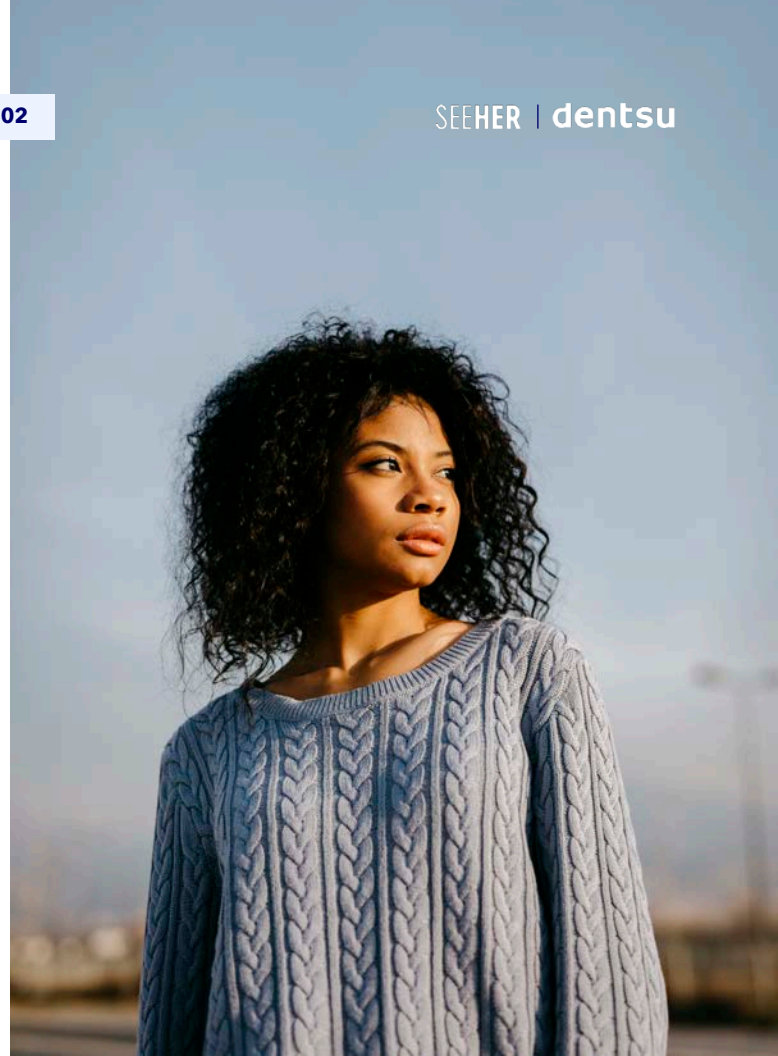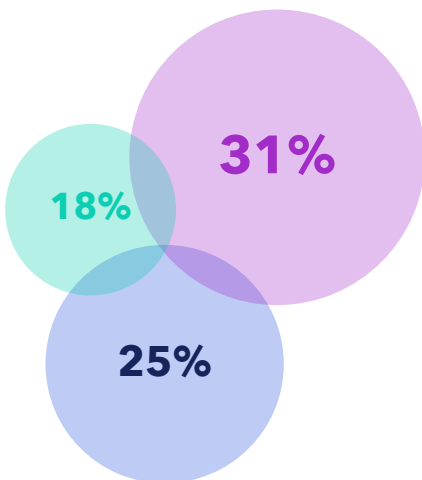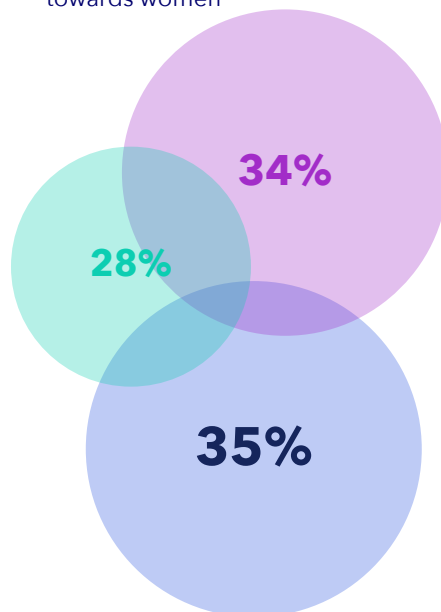## Perceptions of Women's Representation in Media

■ Black Women   ■ White Women   ■ Hispanic & Latinx Women

Media accurately portrays women **'all of the time'**

18% 31% 25%

Media is **'typically'** respectful towards women

34% 28% 35%

Media has made **'a lot'** of progress to better represent women in the past decade

36% 23% 33%
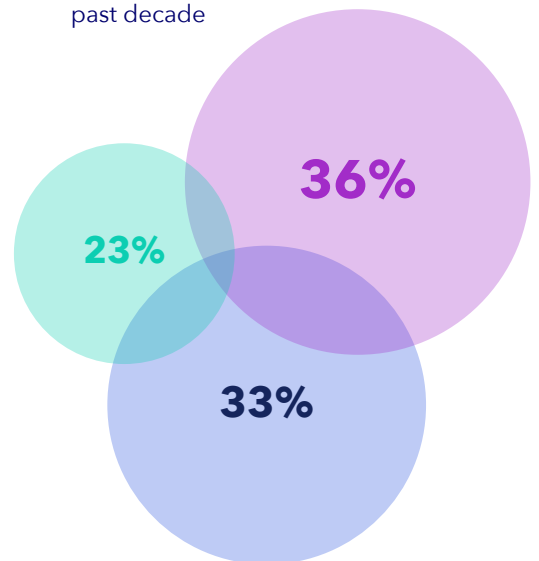
FINDING 03

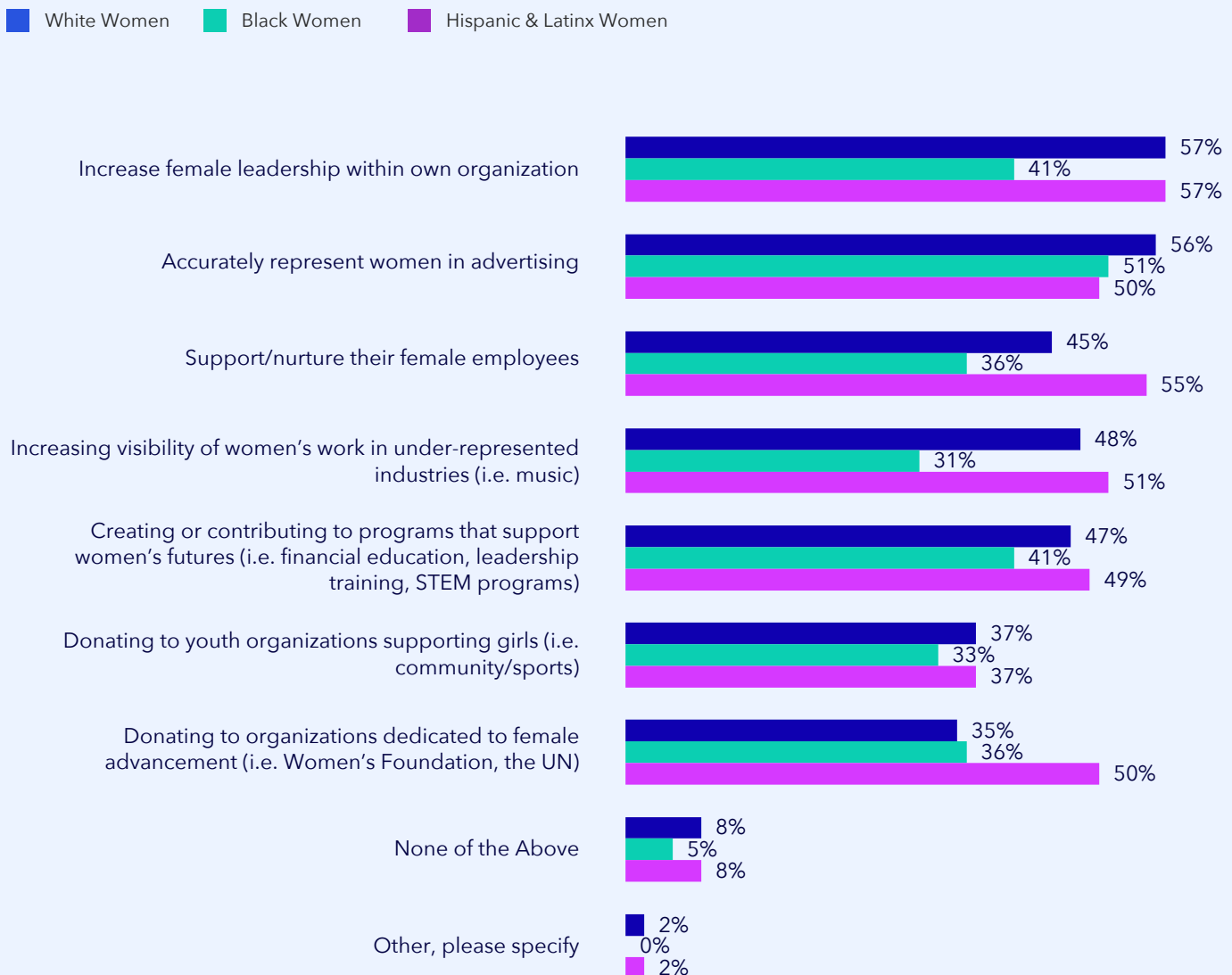# Brands: A Desire for Advocacy & Trust

While women of all backgrounds agree that brands have a role to play, Black, Hispanic and Latinx women expect brands to improve gender equality in different ways, connecting back to the unique barriers each group faces.

As previously covered in this report, Hispanic and Latinx women feel a key barrier to equality is society's unwillingness to support women (Figure 5) and they place a high responsibility on brands to help spark change (Figure 6).

Reflecting this, they are more likely than other cohorts to want brands to donate to organizations dedicated to female advancement (50%), support female employees (55%), champion women's work in underrepresented industries (51%) and contribute to programs that support women's futures (49%) (Figure 10).

Figure 10

What types of initiatives do you most want to see from BRANDS/COMPANIES to help advance the stature and representation of women? Please select all that apply.

■ White Women   ■ Black Women   ■ Hispanic & Latinx Women

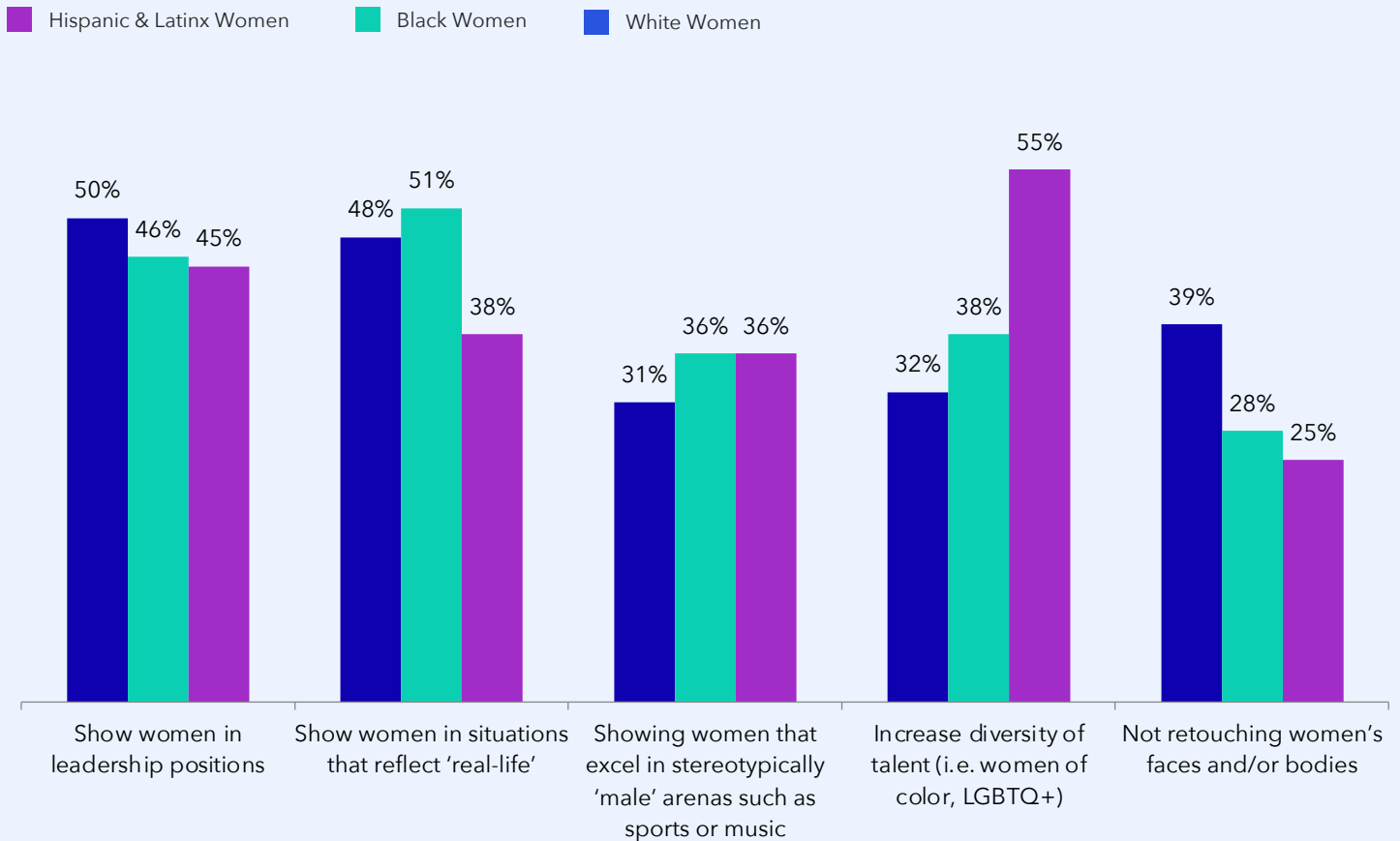| Initiative	White Women	Black Women	Hispanic & Latinx Women
Increase female leadership within own organization	57%	41%	57%
Accurately represent women in advertising	56%	51%	50%
Support/nurture their female employees	45%	36%	55%
Increasing visibility of women's work in under-represented industries (i.e. music)	48%	31%	51%
Creating or contributing to programs that support women's futures (i.e. financial education, leadership training, STEM programs)	47%	41%	49%
Donating to youth organizations supporting girls (i.e. community/sports)	37%	33%	37%
Donating to organizations dedicated to female advancement (i.e. Women's Foundation, the UN)	35%	36%	50%
None of the Above	8%	5%	8%
Other, please specify	2%	0%	2%

In brand advertising, Hispanic and Latinx women are significantly more likely than their counterparts to want to see a diversity of talent represented (55%) (Figure 11). Again, they may be turning to brands to remedy what they see as a key barrier to equality: a lack of female role models (Figure 5).

Black women need more reasons to believe. As we saw previously, in this report Black women under-index in assigning brands 'a lot' of responsibility to improve gender equality (Figure 6). This translates into fewer respondents selecting any type of brand initiative as impactful compared to women of other backgrounds (Figure 10).

They are most likely to want to see women accurately represented within advertising (51%). Black women are also more likely to want brands to create advertising that show women in 'real-life' situations (51%) (Figure 11), indicating that they currently feel that ads do not reflect their reality. This again, underlines the need of Black women to see more nuanced and respectful portrayals. Our findings indicate that marketers should take a particularly sharp lens to how they are speaking to Black women.

Figure 11

Which of the following do you believe are the most impactful ways BRANDS/COMPANIES can help advance the stature and representation of women through their advertising?

Hispanic & Latinx Women   Black Women   White Women

Show women in leadership positions: 50% / 46% / 45%
Show women in situations that reflect 'real-life': 48% / 51% / 38%
Showing women that excel in stereotypically 'male' arenas such as sports or music: 31% / 36% / 36%
Increase diversity of talent (i.e. women of color, LGBTQ+): 32% / 38% / 55%
Not retouching women's faces and/or bodies: 39% / 28% / 25%
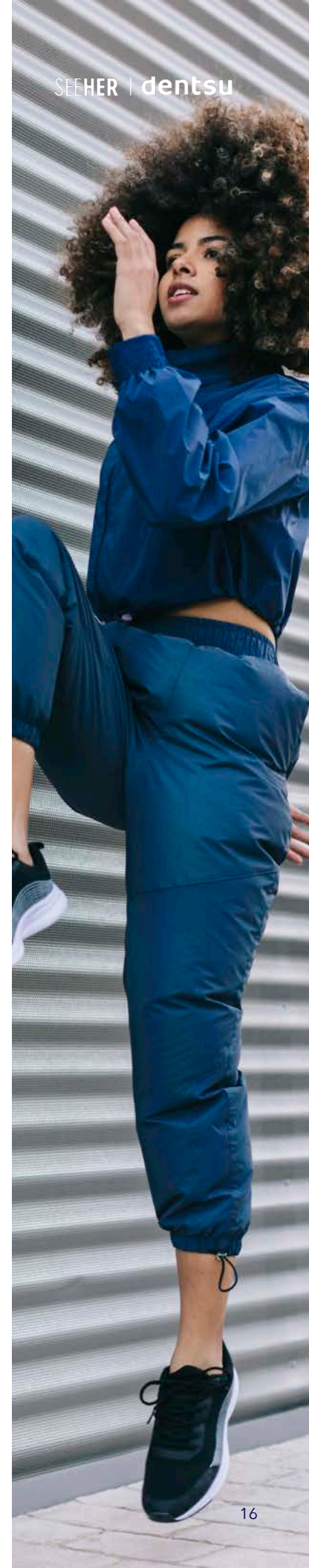
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Strategies
for Change

Build on the strong hope for gender equality. All women are currently hopeful about the potential for progress, and this is especially true of Black and Hispanic women. They also realize the critical role that marketing and media play in shaping gender perceptions. This points to an important and timely opportunity for marketers and media to champion gender equality to impact change.

Earn the trust of Black women. Given that they are the least likely to assign responsibility to brands and media to positively impact gender equality, there is a need for consistent and concrete examples to alter that belief. Storytelling that ensures Black stories are accurately portrayed, prioritized and given prominence can serve to move the needle. In addition, greater diversity behind the camera, writing the script and in meetings and boardrooms sends a powerful message. In short, marketers and media must take a deliberate and dedicated approach to invite Black women into the conversation.

Hispanic women are looking for support and role models. Hispanic and Latinx women are actively inviting brands and media into partnership. There is an opportunity to use marketing and media to elevate the stories of Hispanic and Latinx role models and show these women in leadership roles. Hispanic women have also expressed desire for brands to sponsor programs/resources that enable a pipeline of leaders to create the role models they are actively seeking.

Success is not a solo mission. Consumers feel that a combination of institutions and individuals are responsible for improving gender equality. Brands are a critical piece of the puzzle and could engage in partnerships with schools, media and even individuals to enact real change.

Establishing concrete goals and measuring their progress has a profound impact on accelerating change. Marketers and media companies should actively set goals for delivering accurate portrayals of women and girls. In addition, providing transparency in terms of meeting these goals will help build trust among consumers. Marketers and media executives can leverage SeeHer's GEM® Score and other GEM® related measurement tools. GEM® is currently, the global industry standard for identifying gender and racial bias in ads and programming. With 4 years of trending and over 150K ads tested, GEM® is a proven methodology that has helped leading marketers rethink their ads from a gender and racial bias standpoint. Since GEM® measures the overall portrayal of women, it can serve as an important indicator of how consumers feel women are represented from various aspects including race and ethnicity.

For more information on how to GEM test ads or programming please contact: Latha Sarathy, EVP Analytics, Insights and Measurement at SeeHer: Lsarathy@ana.net

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Conclusion

The findings from *Perceptions of Progress: Advancing Equality for Black, Hispanic and Latinx Women* show that women hold a general consensus that a lot of work lies ahead to achieve gender equality. While certain perceptions and barriers apply across the board – such as women's view that media tends to focus on their appearance rather than their accomplishments – others demonstrate the differing barriers Black, Hispanic and Latinx women face.

The results of our research suggest that Black, Hispanic and Latinx women, while highly hopeful for gender equality, also face unique barriers that are not fully addressed. They desire more accurate, realistic representation, and actions from brands and media that clearly show that they are advocating for them.

However, it is important to understand that 'multicultural' markets are not monoliths. Often times, as marketers or media attempt to portray or tell diverse stories, there is a tendency to structure this as a general market versus a multicultural approach. Approaching 'multicultural' as singular audiences does not recognize the different needs and mindsets of Black, Hispanic and Latinx women. As storytellers of the human experience, marketers have a responsibility to reflect the true diversity of society particularly of Black, Hispanic and Latinx women.

In summary, at a point in time where there is a unique combination of historic change, deep hope for progress and clear recognition of how far we still need to go, marketers have a unique opportunity to become the catalysts for change.

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Survey Methodology

The survey was administered through Toluna, an online research panel, on August 21st, 2020. Conducted by dentsu, this survey was distributed among a random sample of 800 respondents, aged 18-65 years old, residing in the United States. The survey garnered an equal number of male and female respondents and controlled for nationally representative weighting across age and ethnicity (using latest publicly available US Census numbers). The following report focuses on the responses of Black, Hispanic and Latinx women. Given that the survey was nationally weighted, the sample size for Asian American women was not statistically significant.

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We would also like to thank Getty Images for providing the photography used in this report as part of their ongoing partnership with SeeHer.

SeeHer and Getty have teamed up to create an *Inclusive Visual Storytelling Guide* to change the way women are featured in the media. The guide highlights inclusive imagery from Getty's vast library as well as offers tips to consider when developing projects.

http://engage.gettyimages.com/see-her

As part of denstu's steadfast commitment to champion meaningful progress, earlier this year, the company joined SeeHer as the first advertising holding company to become a member at the enterprise-level. Both dentsu and SeeHer are keenly aware of the power of concrete data and actionable insights to impact and inspire lasting change, and this report series is the first collaboration of our partnership.

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