CENTRAL OREGON HEALTH COUNCIL

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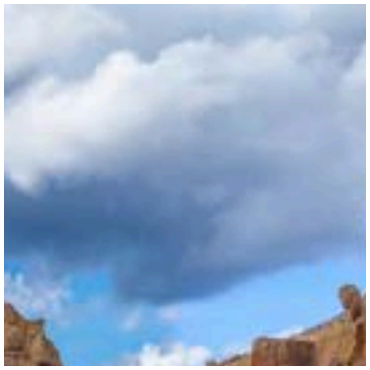
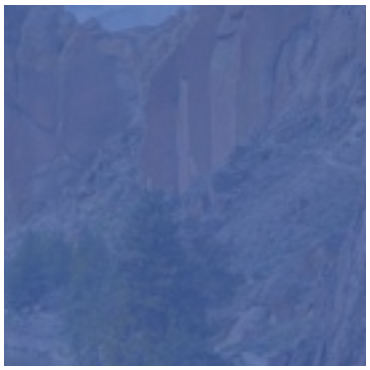
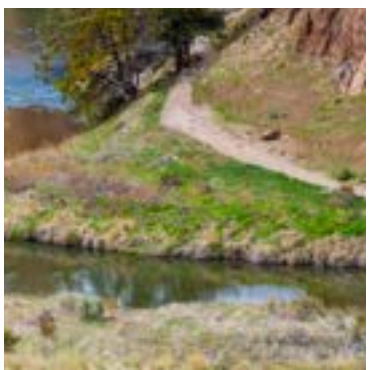
Central Oregon

Community Belonging Measurement Project

The Community Belonging Measurement Project is a collaborative project led by the Oregon Health & Science University and Oregon State University-Cascades. The project was funded by the Central Oregon Health Council and United Way of Central Oregon.







Authors

Camilla Dohlman, MPH
Kaitlin Greene, MPH
Christina Jaderholm, DC
David Ngo
Beth Phelps, MS
Allie Barr

Investigators

Brianne Kothari, PhD
Shannon Lipscomb, PhD
Jackilen Shannon, PhD

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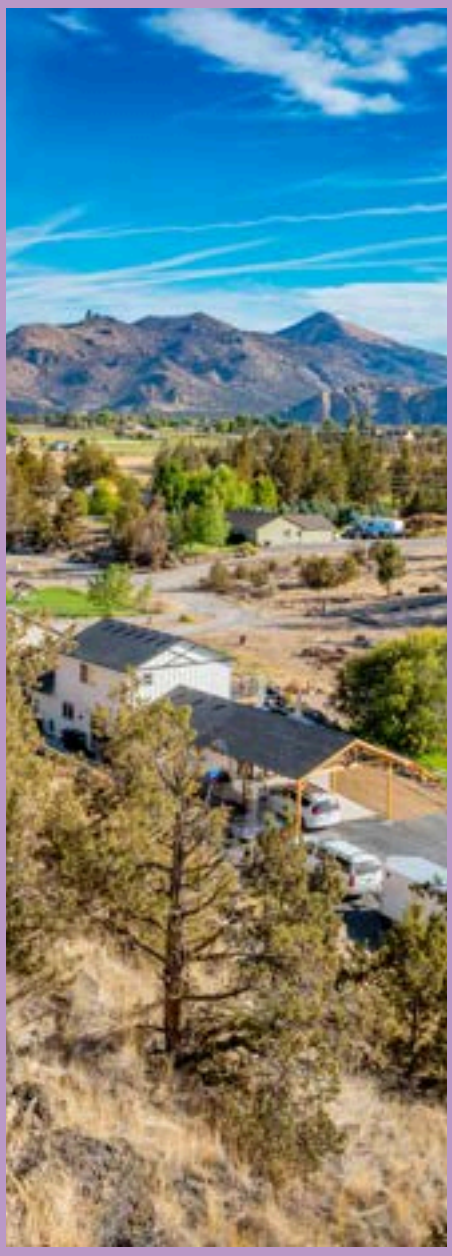


Executive Summary

About this Project

Belonging is fundamental to human experience and is linked to better health and well-being. It's also important to resilience – adapting to and recovering from life's challenges. More broadly, social conditions play an important role in health. According to Vivek Murthy, the U.S. Surgeon General, "Belonging to a group can help reduce stress, repair emotional damage, and promote meaning and purpose."

Definitions

Belonging is the feeling of acceptance and value that comes through sharing experiences or characteristics with others. Some experiences or characteristics are more important than others in making us feel like we belong to a community.

Community can describe places, spaces, or groups of people with whom you share common characteristics or interests.

Community Attachment and Connectedness are conditions that are conducive to belonging.

Resilience is a process of adapting well to challenges. Belonging and resilience are important for physical and mental health and can be strengthened through healthy relationships and community support.

Recognizing the importance of belonging, resilience, and community connections for health, The Central Oregon Health Council (COHC) included these topics in their 2020-2024 Regional Health Improvement Plan and funded the Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) and Oregon State University-Cascades (OSU-C) to develop and implement a strategy for measuring belonging and resilience in Central Oregon. United Way of Central Oregon also provided support for community engagement and outreach activities. This project took place in Central Oregon (defined as Deschutes, Jefferson, Crook, and North Klamath Counties, and the Warm Springs Reservation).

The purpose of the Community Belonging Research Project is to understand belonging –including what factors contribute to present barriers to one's sense of belonging – and how it is connected to resilience, health, and community connections in Central Oregon. We used community-engaged processes to develop and implement a measure of belonging that is specific to Central Oregon and is culturally responsive and appropriate for a diverse community.

Approach Overview

This project took a community-engaged approach from start to finish. During the project planning phase, we held formative conversations with community advisors to incorporate their input and experience into the measurement and data collection strategy. Throughout the project, we also collaborated with community partners to collect, analyze, and share the data. For example, over 25 community organizations assisted with survey dissemination by sharing materials with their networks and inviting the research team to conduct outreach at in-person events throughout the region.

In 2023, we conducted a community-wide survey and focus groups with communities identified as experiencing additional barriers to belonging. We collected survey responses from 1,019 adults and had 42 participants in the focus groups. We recruited using both mail-based outreach and outreach with community partners. The survey was available in both English and Spanish and accessible online and in paper form.

After data collection and initial analysis of survey and focus group data were complete, five community partners collaborated with the research team to lead community data co-interpretation sessions with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning, and Asexual (LGBTQA+) individuals, older adults (aged 65 or older), parents and caregivers, Spanish-language speakers, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in Central Oregon. In all, 52 community members participated in these community data interpretation sessions, sharing their impressions and takeaways from the data with the research team. This helped frame the results within the experiences of community members and shed light on the strengths and challenges identified that were most important to Central Oregonians. Through this process, we also collaborated with the community partners to develop public-facing outreach materials sharing these highlighted findings. Moving forward, their input will be used to shape policy and programs in Central Oregon that will promote belonging and connectedness.

Key Findings

This report examines belonging, community attachment, and resilience among Central Oregonians through survey data, focus groups, and community co-interpretation sessions. This report also specifies concrete strategies for action based on these findings and national recommendations.

- **Belonging is multi-dimensional and rooted in various communities and identity groups**. Family, shared hobbies, and lived experiences are significant sources of belonging for Central Oregonians. Participants expressed a strong desire for warm, supportive interactions, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal connections in fostering a sense of belonging. Engagement in shared activities, volunteering, and participation in community events also contribute to a deeper sense of connection within Central Oregon communities.

- **Belonging is an important determinant of health for Central Oregonians.** Belonging plays a vital role in the health and well-being of Central Oregonians, affecting both physical and mental health. Survey findings highlighted a clear relationship between community attachment and self-rated physical and mental health. Individuals with higher levels of community attachment reported better overall health, while those with lower community attachment and connectedness experienced poorer self-rated physical and mental health.

> "It's one of our human needs to feel like we belong... it creates stress and can affect our health if we don't feel that."
>
> – Focus Group Participant

- **Resilience, like belonging, is closely tied to the well-being of Central Oregonians.** Despite facing challenges, respondents demonstrated resilience through various strategies. For instance, older adults often cited family support and cultural traditions as sources of resilience, while also expressing a desire for better access to mental health resources tailored to their needs. Conversely, LGBTQA+ individuals shared experiences of discrimination and social exclusion, yet highlighted the support found in community networks, such as LGBTQA+ advocacy groups and online forums.

- **Major drivers of belonging include safety, relationships, and reciprocal, active participation.** The findings highlighted that safety is a necessary condition for belonging. Moreover, physical and emotional safety creates a foundation for Central Oregonians to feel secure, accepted, and valued within a group or community. Findings from the focus groups further demonstrated that belonging is nurtured by warm and supportive relationships with family, friends, coworkers, and mentors. Belonging is cultivated by active participation, reciprocity, and shared interests with others (e.g., shared hobbies, recreational interests, religious beliefs, values, and lived experiences).

> "Everybody has a different idea of what community should be and what this community should be... I realize that community takes initiative on my part. I can't expect it to come to me. It's saying hello to someone, introducing myself on the trail, or whatever. I think it's up to us to initiate community. I'm trying to do that, and it works."
>
> -Focus Group Participant

- **Belonging was commonly tied to specific places and spaces.** Belonging among Central Oregonians was often associated with places and spaces integral to their daily lives and social interactions. Workplaces emerged as significant sites of belonging, both for people currently in the workforce and retired adults. Similarly, schools were often cited as places of belonging, for parents, caregivers, and other adults involved in children's lives, such as grandparents. Respondents shared that schools serve as hubs for community engagement, encompassing activities like education, sports, and various events. Additionally, public spaces like libraries and parks, recreational venues, and online groups were consistently identified by respondents as spaces that foster a sense of belonging. These diverse spaces play crucial roles in facilitating social connections and community cohesion among Central Oregonians, emphasizing the importance of creating inclusive and welcoming environments across various domains.

- **Nonetheless, belonging in places and spaces varied by identity.** For example, Spanish-speaking residents highlighted the challenge of feeling excluded in school environments due to language barriers, citing instances where cultural traditions were not adequately recognized or celebrated. Conversely, rural residents expressed a strong attachment to their local communities but voiced concerns about limited access to resources or events.

"Agencies or businesses offering these inclusive activities will not spend the extra dollar to come to a rural town. So, that's why Bend has everything, because Bend has the population to satisfy what they would call a successful event."

-Focus Group Participant

- **Identities, including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age, are strongly associated with belonging among Central Oregonians.** Participants express the importance of shared backgrounds and experiences in fostering a sense of connection within their communities. However, barriers related to identity, such as discrimination and exclusion, present challenges to belonging. Promoting inclusivity and addressing systemic barriers are crucial steps in ensuring that all Central Oregonians feel a sense of belonging in their communities. Additionally, we found substantial generational differences with older adults placing greater importance on age-specific communities (including clubs and activities tailored to their age group, like gardening or book clubs) and shared political beliefs, while young adults leaned toward connections built through school, college, and in the LGBTQA+ communities.

"I fall in a few [marginalized identity] groups and sometimes I feel like because I'm in all the groups that people judge me three times as hard. They assume... well, you're this, then you must be that and then you're also this and you're that. I feel like I'm coming out the gate negative three."

-Focus Group Participant

- **Barriers to belonging include discrimination and economic and political divides.** Discrimination— based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation – creates substantial barriers to individuals feeling accepted and valued within their communities. Participants identifying as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color shared experiences of microaggressions and tokenism in predominantly white spaces, underscoring a lack of genuine inclusion and representation. Moreover, our findings demonstrated that economic disparities can contribute to feelings of exclusion, as financial constraints limit access to resources and opportunities for social engagement. Similarly, political divides deepen social fragmentation, fostering an environment where differing ideologies can be a barrier to interpersonal connections and community cohesion. Addressing these barriers necessitates concerted efforts to prevent discrimination, alleviate economic inequality, and bridge political divides, fostering a more inclusive and cohesive community environment.

- **Our community-engaged approach enabled us to identify context-specific priorities in Central Oregon.** By actively involving community members in the research process, we gained valuable insights into their needs, challenges, and aspirations regarding belonging and connectedness. This collaborative approach ensured that the voices of Central Oregonians were heard and respected throughout the project, allowing for the identification of relevant priorities and the development of tailored solutions. Engaging multiple partners facilitated a comprehensive understanding of community dynamics and fostered collective ownership of the outcomes. Moving forward, we remain committed to continuing this collaborative effort to cultivate belonging, resilience, and connectedness across various sectors throughout Central Oregon.

Strategies for Action Summary

The findings from the Community Belonging Measurement Project point to multiple possible paths forward for individuals, communities, organizations, businesses, and policymakers to promote a culture of belonging in Central Oregon.

The recommendations in Table 1 were developed based on survey responses, focus groups, community data co-interpretation sessions, as well as external resources. Everyone has a role to play. To help provide guidance, the table is organized by role, such as individual, organization, and institution.

	Recommendations *See strategies for Action and Additional Resources for in-depth explanations, tips, and resources*
Individual Relationships, Families, Neighbors, and Friends	**Foster Belonging and Connection:** Actively champion diversity, equity, and inclusion while nurturing trusting relationships with family, friends, and coworkers to create inclusive spaces. **Use Inclusive Language:** Prioritize inclusive language to acknowledge and respect individuals' identities and experiences, fostering a sense of belonging for everyone. **Acknowledge One Another:** Small gestures like smiling or greeting others can make a big difference, making individuals feel seen and valued in their community. **Disrupt "Othering" Behaviors:** Othering behaviors are those that make individuals and communities feel excluded or discriminated against. This can include microaggressions or more overt actions or statements that are oppressive or discriminatory. To combat these behaviors, challenge biases and stereotypes, speaking out against unjust treatment based on identity while prioritizing personal safety.

Table 1. *Summary of Recommended Strategies for Action*

	Recommendations *See strategies for Action and Additional Resources for in-depth explanations, tips, and resources*
Individual Relationships, Families, Neighbors, and Friends	**Invite Community Participation:** Proactively include newcomers in activities to foster inclusivity and break down barriers within neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools. **Explore Mentorship or Volunteering:** Engage in mentorship or volunteering opportunities to build meaningful connections and support networks, enhancing belonging for all involved. **Pursue Lifelong Learning:** Attend community events and workshops to promote belonging and understanding among community members.
Community Groups & Organizations	**Foster Inclusive Spaces:** Create welcoming environments where individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves, utilizing symbols of acceptance such as the pride flag. **Plan Equity-Centric Events:** Prioritize affordability, accessibility, and inclusivity when planning events, considering diverse perspectives to authentically reflect the community. **Develop Culturally Responsive Materials:** Create outreach materials in Spanish and ensure cultural responsiveness to reach a broader audience and promote inclusivity. **Strengthen Schools as Community Hubs:** Transform schools into inclusive spaces for community events, cultural activities, and educational opportunities. **Cultivate Relationship-Centric Workplaces:** Proactively build connections and belonging for all individuals within workplaces, going beyond employment to foster community connections.

	Recommendations *See strategies for Action and Additional Resources for in-depth explanations, tips, and resources*
Policymakers & Institutions	**Prioritize Inclusivity in Urban Planning:** Develop affordable housing and accessible transportation options to promote connectedness and belonging in the community. **Promote Equitable Access to Recreation:** Invest in accessible recreational areas to create shared spaces that foster connection and well-being. **Incentivize Family-Friendly Spaces:** Provide incentives for businesses and organizations to create family-friendly environments, addressing the needs of parents and caregivers. **Incorporate Trauma-Informed Principles:** Develop social policies that prioritize safety and incorporate the lived experiences of community members, working to rectify past traumas. **Support Cultural Exchange and Celebration:** Fund initiatives and events that celebrate the diversity of Central Oregon, promoting a sense of belonging for all residents. **Foster Civic Participation:** Empower community members to engage in decision-making processes, providing resources and training to enhance their capacity for positive change. **Leverage Technology for Inclusivity:** Utilize digital tools to bridge divides and amplify diverse voices, creating more accessible and inclusive spaces for all members of the community.

Introduction

Background

Literature Review

Current research demonstrates the importance of belonging to overall well-being (Allen et al., 2021; Carpiano & Hystad, 2011). A sense of belonging is related to better mental and physical health (Allen et al., 2021; Burnett et al., 2022; Mahar et al., 2013; Shelton et al., 2020). However, belonging is complex and can be positively or negatively impacted by many factors, including life experiences or events and the communities that someone is a part of. For example, people may feel a sense of belonging to their communities, identity groups, and specific places and spaces (Buckingham et al., 2021; Burnett et al., 2022; Schellenberg et al., 2018). Related topics, like safety (e.g., “I feel safe in public spaces in my community”) are also helpful to examine. When developing the approach, the research team looked at various measures of "belonging" and related concepts that either help or hinder people's sense of belonging in their community.

Different strategies exist for measuring belonging (Allen et al., 2021; Mahar et al., 2014; Schellenberg et al., 2018). Some studies ask a single question to measure belonging. For example, some studies ask participants the extent to which the statement “I feel like I belong in my community” applies to them (Michalski et al., 2020; Schellenberg et al., 2018) while other studies (Allen et al., 2021; Arslan & Duru, 2017) look at belonging in specific settings (e.g., school, work, family). Studies on belonging sometimes also include related indicators to understand ways in which belonging may be nurtured or hindered. The team collected validated measures of belonging and related constructs that have commonly been shown to contribute to a sense of belonging such as social capital, connectedness, and attachment to inform the approach. We then shared these proposed metrics with community advisors to develop a measurement strategy that might be useful to Central Oregonians.

Community-Engaged Planning

> "We Measure What We Value."
>
> -Sally Leiderman, President of the Center for Assessment & Policy Development

Community-Academic Researcher Collaboration

Throughout the project, researchers collaborated with community members in the design, implementation, analysis, and interpretation of this research project and its findings. As academic researchers, the research team brought subject matter and data collection and analysis expertise to the process of measuring community belonging, whilethe community advisors shed light on the context-specific meaning and purpose behind belonging and how promoting a sense of belonging for individuals and communities can improve health. This collaborative approach pays particular attention to the context of the community as well as communities that have been harmed by research or may mistrust researchers (Cyril et al., 2015; Wallerstein & Duran 2010). This community-engaged approach allowed us to collaboratively develop and test data collection tools, created buy-in for participation in the project, helped us identify populations that we should prioritize and/or highlight in this project, and establish ways of effectively reaching out to specific communities.

Community Conversations

Informing Survey Design and Outreach Approaches

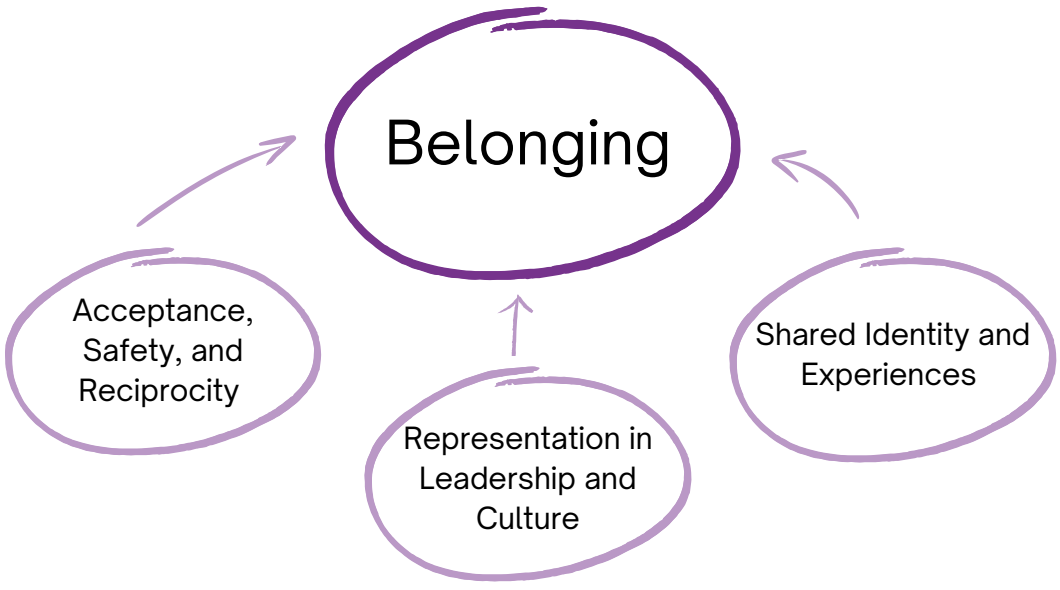
After conducting a preliminary literature review, we conducted community conversations with 17 community advisors to gather input on how to understand and promote community belonging and resilience using a context and community-specific approach, receive feedback on a draft questionnaire, and learn about outreach opportunities in the region. Some details about the community advisors who participated in these conversations are presented in Table 2.

Geographic Regions	Economic Sectors	Priority Groups
• Warm Springs Reservation • Crook County • Deschutes County • Jefferson County • North Klamath County	• Local Government • Education or Youth Programming • Faith-Based Organizations • Healthcare or Social Services • Non-Profit or Community Groups	• Black or African American • Latino/a/e • LGBTQA+ • Military/Veteran • Native/Indigenous • Parents and caregivers • Older adults (65+) or works with older adults • Rural residents

Table 2. *Community Advisors*

Themes from the community conversations informed the development of the community-wide survey. We identified several theses from these conversations that were ultimately incorporated into the measurement and outreach strategy for the Community Belonging Measurement Project. Community advisors highlighted that belonging is multi-faceted, and emphasized the importance of acceptance, safety, and reciprocity. Advisors also shared the importance of representation – both in community leadership and in cultural settings – for fostering a sense of belonging. Additionally, while shared experiences and identities can promote belonging, many community leaders noted that differences in identity and political beliefs are a potent barrier to belonging for minoritized communities.

Themes like acceptance, safety, reciprocity, representation, and shared identities and experiences were integrated into the measurement strategy.



Finally, the initial conversations we had with community advisors guided outreach efforts for the remainder of the project. We were encouraged to continually engage community partners in the research process by frequently sharing progress and being as transparent as possible about the timeline and access to results when collecting data. We extended the project's reach during data collection and interpretation by collaborating with community partners during events and outreach opportunities. Similarly, we were encouraged to be physically present at community events to make connections and answer questions. Through these efforts, we were able to build trust among the community.

Pilot Survey

Following the conversations held with community advisors, we revised the survey and conducted a small pilot test with 50 participants. Pilot survey participants were recruited through community advisors in November-December 2022. Minor adjustments were made to the survey based on the pilot results, including revisions to some of the language, adding some additional response options to multiple choice questions based on write-in responses, and reordering some of the questions to improve the usability and flow of the survey.

Informing Focus Group Facilitation Guides and Next Steps

Additionally, to inform the development of the focus group facilitation guide, we conducted interactive planning sessions with 11 community advisors, four of whom had also participated in the survey development process. In these interactive sessions, we used design thinking principles and virtual whiteboard tools to reflect on questions about identity and belonging. Their input helped the project team finalize the focus group research questions and questions to include in the focus group guide.

The collaborative planning process built and maintained relationships with community organizations across Central Oregon. This increased commitment to and participation in the project from many community organizations and populations. Including community advisors also helped us extend the project's reach and continuously expand interest and engagement in the project to new networks.

Methods

Survey Methods

To understand belonging, resilience, and connectedness at the community level and across demographic groups, we surveyed 1,019 adults in Central Oregon. We had two main approaches for survey distribution. First, we sent out postcards and/or letters to randomly selected households in Central Oregon, stratified by primary household language. Hispanic and Latine/o/a households were oversampled to ensure adequate representation. The postcards and letters invited individuals to complete the online survey and included a link and QR code. We collected 524 (51.4%) responses through mail-based outreach.

Recognizing that some community members may not respond to mail-based outreach, we also leveraged relationships with community partners and advisors to extend the project's reach by equipping them with outreach messages and electronic flyers to share with their networks. We also attended community events to collect survey responses. For example, we worked with community groups that serve unhoused individuals in Central Oregon to ensure that they were able to participate if interested. We also worked with the local universities, the health care system, and other community groups to extend the project's reach. As a result, about half (49.6%) of responses were the result of community outreach activities, including distributing the survey to community organizations and partnering with them for in-person data collection events.

All survey participants received a $10 gift card to Amazon, Walmart, or Shell as a thank-you for their participation. Community advisors who were engaged early in the project timeline informed the outreach approaches and incentive options.

Measures

Belonging in Communities and Identity Groups

Community Belonging. A single-item measure is frequently used to assess community belonging. We utilized the measure “I feel I belong in my community” (Adult Resilience Measure; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011), assessed on a 5-point scale (1= “not at all” to 5= “a lot”).

Belonging in Communities and Identity Groups. A sense of belonging may be influenced by identity or grounded in specific communities. Therefore, we asked respondents to answer, “Which of the following communities or identity groups make you feel like you belong?”

Respondents were able to choose as many options as they liked from a list of 14 community or identity groups that included options such as “your family,” “people you work with,” “people or friends who share your racial or ethnic identity,” “people or friends who share your hobbies or recreational interests,” among others. Respondents could also provide a free response entry for groups not listed. Finally, respondents were also asked, “Of the groups or communities that you selected, please choose up to three that are most important to you.” The development of this measure was informed by Putnam’s (2000) Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey.

Belonging in Places and Spaces

A sense of belonging may also be grounded in specific places or spaces where individuals spend time. A person’s experience in their environment can also contribute to their sense of belonging or a lack thereof. For example, someone might feel like they belong in a given physical place, like their hometown, or a virtual space, like an online community. To capture this aspect of belonging, we asked “In which of the following places or spaces do you feel like you belong?” Response options included the following: Where you live; Where you are from/where you grew up; Your school; Your workplace; Online, gaming, or social media spaces; Prefer to self-describe. The development of this measure was informed by Putnam’s (2000) Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey.

Technology Measures

To understand the connection between the use of the internet and social media, we asked participants " “Overall, would you say that using the internet or social media has an impact on your ability to connect with others who are similar to you?” and “Overall, would you say that using the internet or social media has an impact on your ability to solve problems or achieve change in your local community?” For each question, participants could respond that it had a “Negative impact,” a “positive impact,” “both a positive and negative impact” or “no impact.”

Respondents who indicated either a “positive impact” or “both a positive and negative impact” for each of these questions, respectively, were then asked which websites or social media apps they use for each purpose. Respondents could select multiple options from a list, including platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, as well as options for email and text messaging, which were options suggested during the pilot test of the survey.

Community Attachment & Connectedness

Since one of the project goals was to understand processes that contribute to a sense of belonging at the community level, we also collaborated with community partners on identifying and including additional items in the survey.

For this purpose, we examined belonging-adjacent measures and adapted items from the Perceived Connectedness and Neighborhood Attributes Questionnaire (Dias et al., 2018), the Community Attachment Scale (Lee et al., 2014) and the Awareness of Connectedness Scale (Mohatt et al., 2011) to be specific to Central Oregon. As discussed in the Community Conversations section of the report, we then sought feedback from community advisors to ensure that these items were congruent with their perspectives on belonging and connectedness to their communities. The advisors highlighted the importance of safety, representation, reciprocity, interpersonal, al and community support for one's sense of belonging, which we ensured was incorporated into the scale.

The final scale was a 5-pt scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and included items that captured representation, (e.g., "I feel I have some influence or control over decisions made in my community,") reciprocity, (e.g., "I believe I have a lot to give to my community"), and emotional and physical safety (e.g., "I feel safe in public spaces in my community"). Each item was scored from one to five, and then we calculated a mean "overall" score for each respondent. If respondents completed fewer than 80% of the items in the scale, they were counted as missing; this led to three responses being coded as missing for the summarized community attachment and connectedness scale. The full scale is in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Community Attachment & Connectedness Scale*

Community Attachment and Connectedness Scale (CAC)

(To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?)
1="strongly disagree" to 5="strongly agree"

I know quite a few people who live in my community

Many of my family and friends live in my community

In an emergency, I could raise $2000 within two days from my family and friends

I feel like I have some influence or control over decisions in my community

I feel safe in public spaces in my community

There are people in my community who I can talk to about my problems

I participate in recreational activities in my community

I prefer living in this community over other communities

My community's happiness is part of my happiness

The energy I put into the community comes back to me

Resilience

Resilience is a process of positive adaptation and transformation in the face of adversity and is nurtured through individual-, relational-, and community-level factors (Masten, 2018; Ungar et al., 2021). For this project, resilience was measured through the Adult Resilience Measure (ARM; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011) which is a culturally responsive and validated measure consisting of 12 items rated on a 5-pt scale (1= “not at all” to 5= “a lot”).

This measure was originally selected as part of a collective impact initiative in Central Oregon known as TRACEs (Trauma, Resilience, and Adverse Childhood Experiences). TRACEs is an upstream prevention movement in Central Oregon focused on cultivating resilience to address the root cause of many health challenges in the community. In the early years of TRACEs, the ARM was adopted here in Central Oregon and this measure has been utilized by multiple organizations in Central Oregon to assess resilience factors. The current project examines respondents' responses to the ARM overall and to one specific item about community belonging. The ARM is shown in Figure 2.

Adult Resilience Measure (ARM)

(To what extent do the following statements apply to you?)
1="Not at all" to 5="A lot"

I have people I can respect in my life

Getting and improving qualifications or skills is important to me

My family knows a lot about me

I try to finish what I start

I can solve problems without harming myself or others

I know where to get help in my community

I feel I belong in my community

My family stands by me during difficult times

My friends stand by me during difficult times

I am treated fairly in my community

I have opportunities to show others that I can act responsibly

I enjoy my family’s/partner’s cultural and family traditions

Figure 2. *Adult Resilience Measure*

Health Measures

Participants were also asked to assess their physical and mental health. We used the question, "In general, would you say your [physical/mental] health is:" and response options utilized a five-point Likert scale, with response options including excellent, very good, good, fair, and poor. These measures are frequently used in studies examining the relationship between belonging and health (Michalski et al., 2020; Palis et al., 2020; Shields et al., 2008).

Open-Ended Survey Questions

The survey had 4 open-ended questions where respondents could write their answers to questions on belonging and their perspectives on their community. These questions included:

- Thinking about the places, spaces, and groups of people that you just identified as being important to your sense of belonging, can you share a time in the past year when you felt a sense of belonging?
- Can you share a time when you felt like you didn't belong in a community?
- What do you like most about the community where you live?
- Is there anything you dislike about the community where you live?

Demographic Measures

We additionally collected information on age group, gender identity, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, education, income, geographic location, and household size. All demographic information was collected following the data equity framework, and participants were able to self-describe and/or choose not to answer as appropriate (We All Count, n.d.). Definitions of the populations highlighted in the survey findings are shared below, in Figure 3.

Figure 3. *Population Definitions*

Black, Indigenous, & People of Color (BIPOC). Any respondent who selected that they identify with one or more of the following racial or ethnic groups: Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino/a/e, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and/or Native American.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Pansexual, Transgender, Non-binary or Genderqueer, Queer or Questioning, and/or Asexual (LGBTQA+). Any respondent who identified as transgender; non-binary, genderqueer, agender, or third gender, and/or selected one of the following options for sexual orientation gay or lesbian; bisexual or pansexual; queer; asexual, or not sure.

Older Adults. Any respondent who selected that they are 65 years old or older.

Men. Any respondent who selected that they identify as a man on the gender identity question.

Parents & Caregivers. Any respondent who indicated that they both have primary caregiving responsibilities and have children under 18 in their household.

Rural. Any respondent whose zip code (of their primary residence) is designated as rural by the Oregon Office of Rural Health.

Spanish Speakers. Any respondent who indicated they speak Spanish at home.

Focus Group Methods

To further explore how individuals and groups who live in Central Oregon experience belonging, we conducted 7 focus groups; each group had 4-10 people who identified with one or more of the populations we highlight in this report (i.e., Spanish speakers), and/or groups that were underrepresented in the survey data (i.e., men). These included Parents/Caregivers, Older Adults, Young Adults, LGBTQA+, Spanish Speakers, Men, and residents of rural areas, as defined by the Oregon Office of Rural Health. An overview of the focus groups is in Table 3.

	Number of Participants (n)	Mode
LGBTQA+	4	Virtual
Men	5	Virtual
Older adults	6	Virtual
Parents & caregivers	5	Virtual
Rural	4	Virtual
Spanish speakers	10	In-person
Young adults	7	Virtual

Table 3. *Focus Group Participants*

In the focus groups, we sought to further investigate areas identified in the survey as important to a sense of belonging. To achieve this, we crafted the focus group questions by drawing from the insights gathered through the survey responses and refining them through the community conversations.

In each group, we asked participants questions about **where** and **with whom** they feel they belong and how their identities play a role in their sense of belonging. We also asked about barriers to belonging. Specifically, we focused on:

- **Geographical locations** (such as hiking trails or workplaces)
- **Social contexts** (like involvement in volunteer groups or cultural associations)
- **Personal identities** (such as being a grandparent, student, or immigrant)

We additionally asked participants about the perceived relationship between belonging and being healthy. Finally, we asked for suggestions and ideas on how communities can foster a sense of belonging, along with insights into existing initiatives that may be effective.

Most of the focus groups (six out of seven) were conducted online via a virtual platform to accommodate participants from a wide geographic area. The one exception was a Spanish-language group held in person. This format was selected under the guidance of a community advisor. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes and followed a structured format comprising introductions, conversational prompts, and two activities.

The first activity involved a Google "Jamboard" exercise where participants were encouraged to share brief messages or single words on virtual sticky notes, arranging them on a digital board. The second activity required participants to have pen and paper, imagining themselves at the center of the page and listing various identities they hold (e.g., parent, pet owner, artist, Latina). These activities were designed to be adaptable for both online and in-person settings, with facilitators available to help as needed.

By offering multiple avenues for participants to articulate their experiences – they could speak, draw, or write – we provided several ways for community members to express themselves and sought to accommodate diverse communication styles. We documented the sessions through audiovisual recordings and transcriptions, supplemented by photographs of the activities to enrich the analysis.

Data Analysis

To understand belonging, community attachment, and resilience among Central Oregonians, we analyzed findings from the survey sample and highlighted population groups in both the survey and focus groups and refined the data interpretation through community co-interpretation. In the findings section, we first present overall findings from the survey and then describe survey results, focus group results, and co-interpretation takeaways by each highlighted population. An overview of the data sources is presented in Table 4.

	Surveys	Focus Groups	Co-Interpretation
Setting	Full survey distributed to Central Oregonians >18 years of age, oversampling of highlighted populations	Six focus groups for more in-depth study with highlighted populations including those under-represented in the surveys (n=4-10): older adults, young adults, LGBTQA+, parents/caregivers, men, rural, and Spanish speakers	Five conversations with community groups to interpret data about highlighted populations: older adults, LGBTQA+, parents/caregivers, Spanish speakers, and BIPOC
Time	January-April 2023	June-July 2023	November-January 2024
Number of Participants (n)	1,019	41	52
Data type	Quantitative and Qualitative Data	Qualitative Data	Qualitative Data
Analysis	Descriptive and Inferential Statistics; Thematic Analysis	Thematic Analysis	Thematic Analysis

Table 4. *Data Sources Overview*

To understand survey differences between groups, we used comparison tests (t-tests) to understand how each population we highlighted compared to the rest of the survey sample. How the populations were defined in survey data is described in the methods section. By differentiating the data by each group, we were able to present the findings to those groups for community data co-interpretation.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Our survey analysis focused on summarizing the measures of belonging, resilience, and community attachment and connectedness, distinguishing between higher and lower-scoring items to elucidate strengths and challenges. Furthermore, we explored variations in these across various demographic groups, including geographic location, age group, gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Qualitative Data Analysis (Surveys and Focus Groups)

To analyze the answers to open-ended survey questions, we used the Framework Method (Gale et al., 2013). We first gathered all the answers into one document and read all the responses to each question. Researchers independently organized the answers to each question into agreed-upon categories. We added more categories, when necessary, based on the initial review. Examples of categories are: “Identity that promotes belonging” and “situations when identity presents a barrier to belonging.” The researchers met regularly to reach a consensus on their findings.

We also used the Framework Method to analyze the focus groups. Like the survey’s open-ended responses, we organized focus group responses (including activities) into the same categories used for the survey responses. Additional categories were added as necessary to accommodate new findings. Through iterative discussions, the research team reached a consensus and developed comprehensive memos to summarize key findings for each highlighted population.

Community Data Co-Interpretation

After data collection and initial analyses of survey and focus group data were complete, we engaged in community data co-interpretation to frame the findings within the experiences of community members.

The initial planning and data collection phases of the project were 11 months of community engagement, as described in this report's collaborative planning process section. This approach positioned us well for involving community members in the interpretation of results. Recognizing that data and data collection are not inherently unbiased, we shared preliminary results focused on Spanish-language speakers, BIPOC, LGBTQA+ individuals, parents/caregivers, and older adults with small groups of community members who identified as members of these populations.

Development Process

To prepare, the research team spoke one-on-one with several community advisors involved throughout the initial project stages to identify potential partners for community data co-interpretation.

Community partner capacity ultimately drove their decisions to engage in the process, leading to collaboration with five groups whose staff share lived experiences and close connections to each of the five population groups. We invited these small groups to apply their perspectives to data trends as part of a community data co-interpretation process used to frame the findings within the experiences of the community.

The research team spoke one-on-one with several community advisors involved throughout the initial project stages to identify potential partners for community data co-interpretation. Community partner capacity ultimately drove their decisions to engage in the process, leading to collaboration with five groups whose staff share lived experiences and close connections to each of the five priority populations. Community partners were compensated for their time, as were the session participants. Over five months, we collaborated with these community partners to:

- Co-design visual representations of preliminary data
- Recruit community members to participate
- Co-facilitate a community data co-interpretation session
- Develop dissemination materials (fact sheets, social media products)

Co-interpretation Sessions and Dissemination

During the community data co-interpretation sessions, participants were invited to share their reflections and perspectives on the data, any trends they noticed, and how their experiences were similar or different from those of research participants. Participants wrote their responses to reflection questions on sticky notes and attached these to the displays (both virtually and in-person).

Responses were also captured by a note-taker from the research team. The research team and community co-facilitators used a debrief form to develop consensus on the validation of key ideas and additions to definitions of concepts related to community, belonging, and resilience.

Using the community interpretations of the data, the research team worked with the community co-facilitator to develop two-page fact sheets and social media products that highlight the key findings and recommendations for the highlighted groups. Importantly, community data co-interpretation was a critical step in ensuring the results of the data analysis were reviewed by members of the community and that they had the opportunity to provide input on how the data is interpreted and shared. Insights from co-interpretation are highlighted throughout the findings section.

Limitations

This project has a few limitations that are important to note. First, the project was only conducted in English and Spanish. These languages were selected as the proportion of residents in the target counties who speak English ranges from 97.7% to 99.2%, and Spanish is the second most frequently spoken language in all the counties included in this project (American Community Survey, 2022). Another potential limitation is the cross-sectional nature of this project– this means it is a "snapshot in time" and does not assess change over time. Moreover, while we can look at relationships between variables, we cannot say for sure whether one led to the other (for example, we cannot say that getting older leads one to have a greater sense of belonging or community attachment).

Overall Findings

Survey Results

Survey Demographics

We collected survey data from 1,019 adults in Central Oregon. The sample was broadly representative of Central Oregon across several demographic categories (Table 5), including age, geography, race and ethnicity, and income; however, several discrepancies are important to note. For example, 68.5% of survey respondents identified as women, and the education level was higher than that of the general population, with 52.9% of respondents indicating they have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 33.9% of the Central Oregon population overall (Central Oregon Health Data, 2023).

Gender*	n (%)
Man	294 (28.9%)
Woman	698 (68.5%)
Non-Binary	16 (1.6%)
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	11 (1.1%)
Transgender**	10 (1.0%)
Age	**n (%)**
18-24	81 (8.0%)
25-34	190 (18.7%)
35-44	208 (20.4%)
45-54	159 (15.6%)
55-64	150 (14.7%)
65+	231 (22.7%)

Sexual Orientation	n (%)
Straight	887 (87.1%)
Gay or lesbian	16 (1.6%)
Bisexual or pansexual	59 (5.8%)
Queer	17 (1.7%)
Asexual	<5
Not sure	9 (0.9%)
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	30 (3.0%)

Table 5. *Characteristics of Survey Respondents*

Race & Ethnicity***	n (%)
Non-hispanic white (white only)	782 (76.7%)
Hispanic or Latino/a/e	105 (10.3%)
Native American or Alaska Native	67 (6.6%)
Asian	26 (2.6%)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	12 (1.2%)
Black	7 (0.7%)
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	39 (3.8%)
City or Service Area	**n (%)**
Bend	487 (47.8%)
La Pine	136 (13.4%)
Madras	84 (8.2%)
Prineville	76 (7.5%)
Redmond	172 (16.9%)
Sisters	39 (3.8%)
Warm Springs	25 (2.5%)

Educational Attainment	n (%)
High school degree or less	124 (12.2%)
Some college	197 (19.3%)
2-year degree or technical degree	155 (15.2%)
Bachelor's degree or higher	544 (53.4%)
Prefer to self describe or missing	6 (0.6%)
Income	**n (%)**
Less than $25,000	123 (12.1%)
$25,000-$49,999	172 (16.9%)
$50,000-$74,999	175 (17.2%)
$75,000-$99,999	155 (15.2%)
$100,000 or more	291 (28.6%)
Prefer not to say	101 (10.1%)

Table 5. *Characteristics of Survey Respondents*

**Prefer to self-describe options were categorized, where possible.*
***Participants were asked to indicate the gender they identify with, followed by a question asking if they identify as transgender. Transgender respondents are counted with the gender they indicated in addition to the transgender category.*
****Respondents were able to select more than one option.*

Belonging

Overall, the average score for the single item, **"I feel like I belong in my community,"** fell between "somewhat (3)" and "quite a bit (4)" (Mean=3.6, Standard Deviation=1.1); however, there was wide variability in individuals' reports of belonging, which is depicted in Figure 4 below.

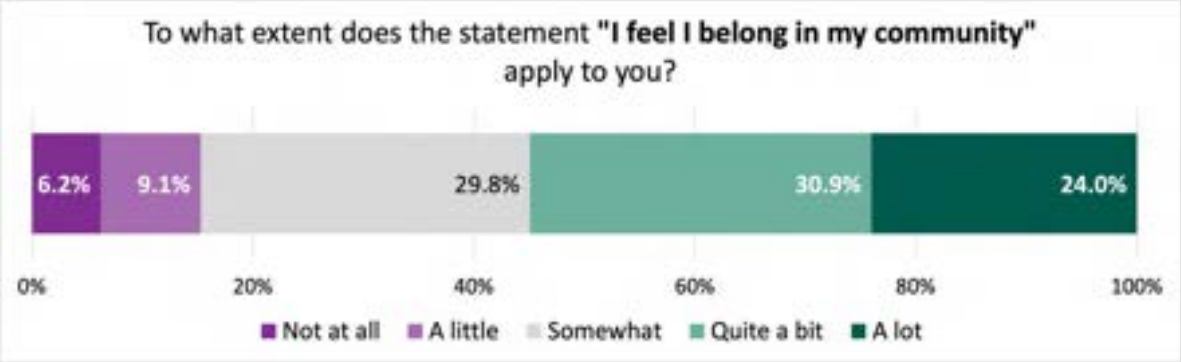


Figure 4. *Responses to the "I feel like I belong in my community" Item (n=1,016)*

Belonging: Communities and Identity Groups

To understand the communities and groups that contribute to Central Oregonians' sense of belonging, survey respondents were asked **"Which of the following communities or identity groups make you feel like you belong?"** Respondents could choose as many options as they liked from a list of 14 community or identity groups. Overall, **family** emerged as a consistent source of belonging, with 87.1% of respondents expressing that their "family" makes them feel like they belong. The other most frequently identified communities or identity groups were "people or friends who share your hobbies or recreational interests" (67.7%) and "people or friends who you share a lived experience with" (53.3%). Findings for the full sample are shared in Figure 5.

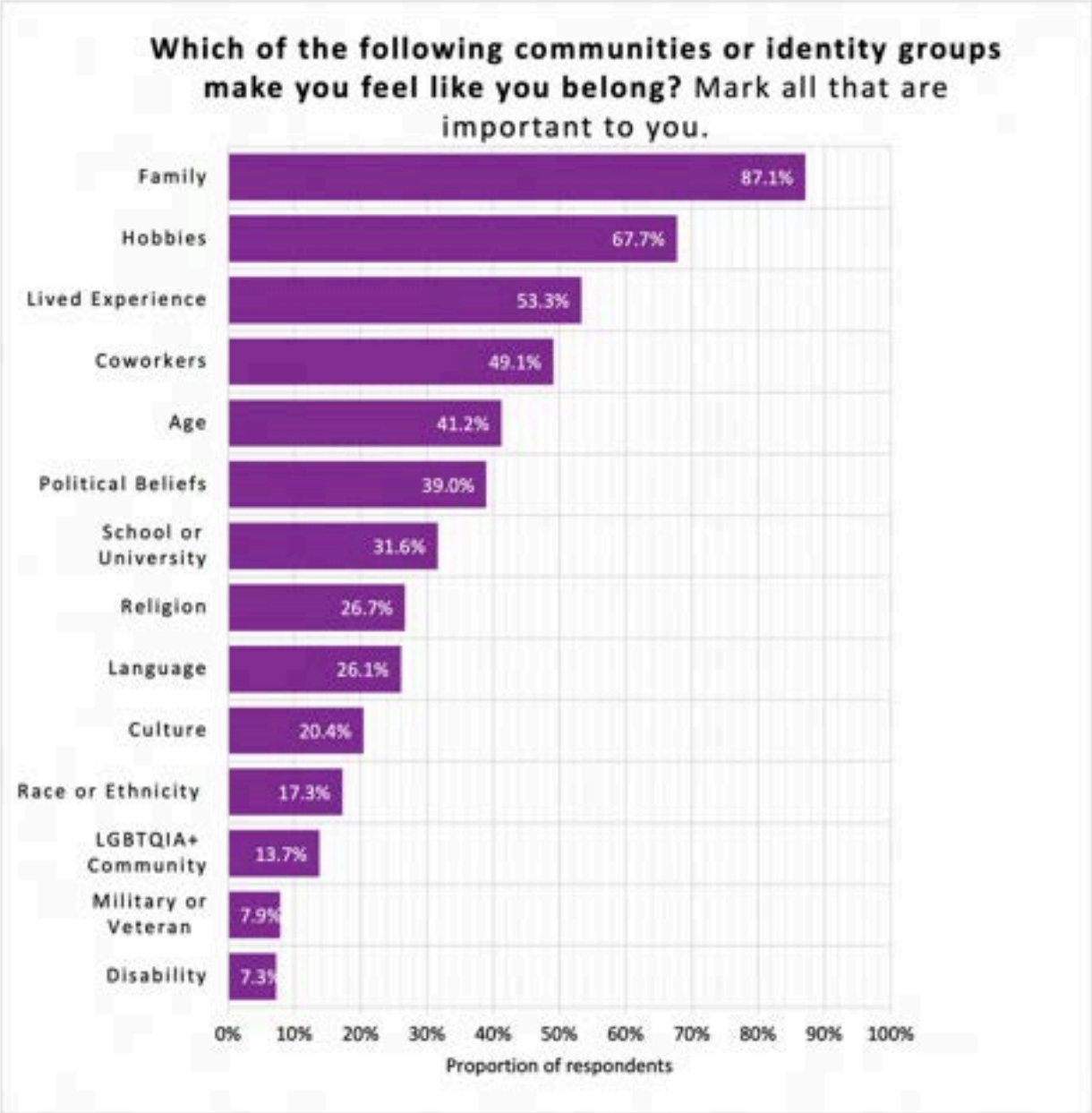


Figure 5. *Belonging in Communities & Identity Groups, overall sample (n=1,019)*

These overarching findings were echoed in survey write-in responses to questions that asked respondents to identify experiences and community groups that made them feel like they belonged; some respondents elaborated that family and/or friends are the people they seek out for **celebration, comfort, safety, and company.**

Across open-ended responses, participants indicated ways in which they were **involved, engaged, or participated in the community.** Some spoke about participating in a club or sport, volunteering for a local organization or community event, or engaging in activities through their workplace. Participants often noted that building a community is not a passive endeavor and that it takes concerted effort and action to do so.

Belonging: Places and Spaces

Physical and virtual **places and spaces** can play a role in one's sense of belonging. To identify places and spaces that contribute to belonging among the overall sample and within highlighted groups, we examined responses to the survey question, "In which of the following places or spaces do you feel like you belong?" Responses from the full sample are displayed in Figure 6, with "where you live" being the most frequent response (86.5%) and the only response that most survey participants endorsed.

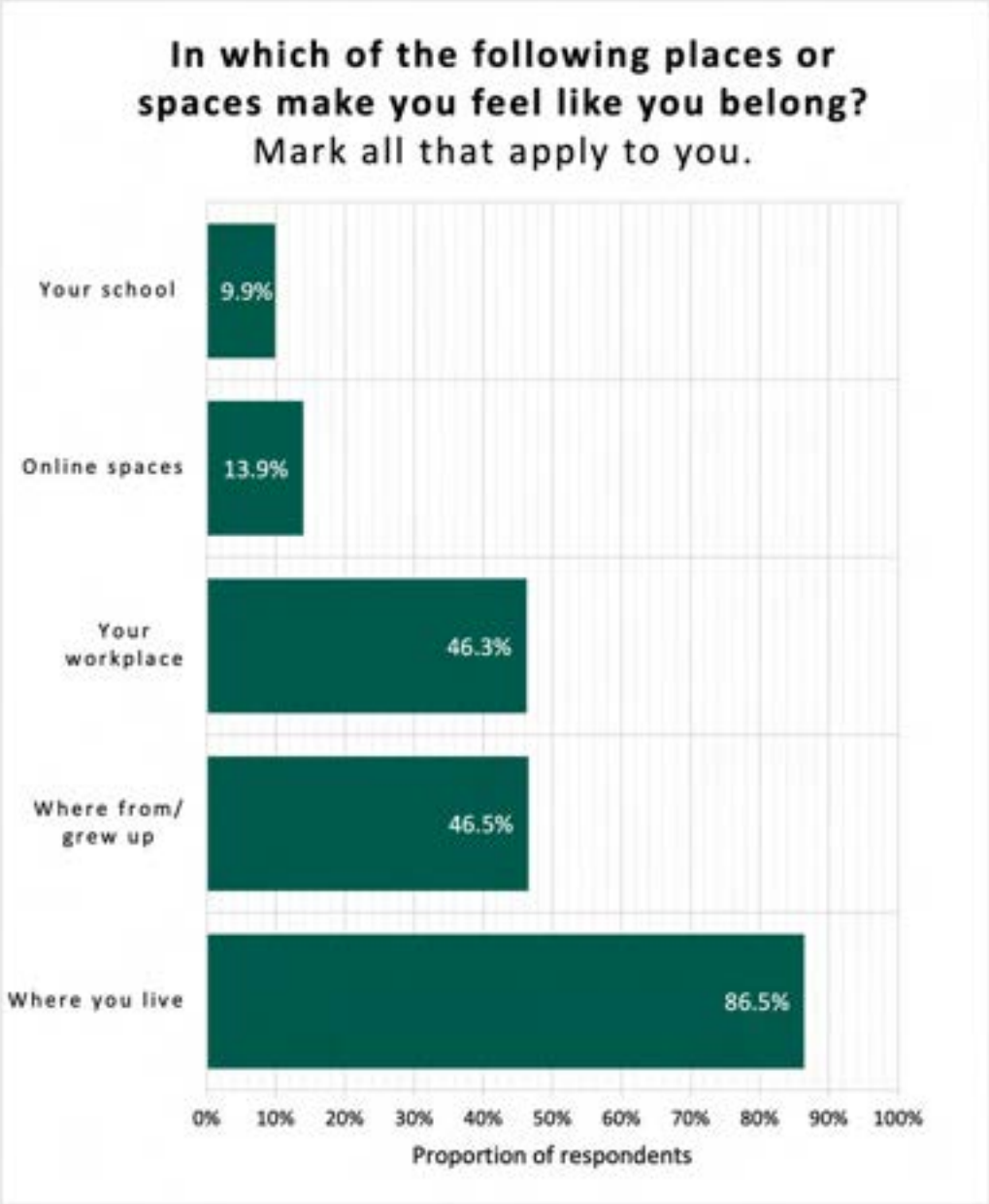


Figure 6. *Belonging in Places & Spaces, overall sample (n=1,019)*

Resilience

The Adult Resilience Measure (ARM) examines resilience-promoting factors at the individual-, relational- and community levels. Overall, the average score across the twelve ARM items was slightly over 4 (Mean=4.2, Standard Deviation=0.6). This score indicates that participants reported "quite a bit" of resilience factors overall. However, participants reported on the full range of responses (from "not at all" to "a lot"). Figure 7 below shows the responses from the full sample to each ARM item.

We found that community-level resilience factors (e.g., **"I am treated fairly in my community," "I know where to get help in my community,"** and **"I feel I belong in my community"**) tended to have lower scores whereas the individual-level resilience factors (e.g., "I can solve problems without hurting myself or others") tended to have the highest scores. These findings demonstrate the need in Central Oregon to cultivate protective factors for community resilience.

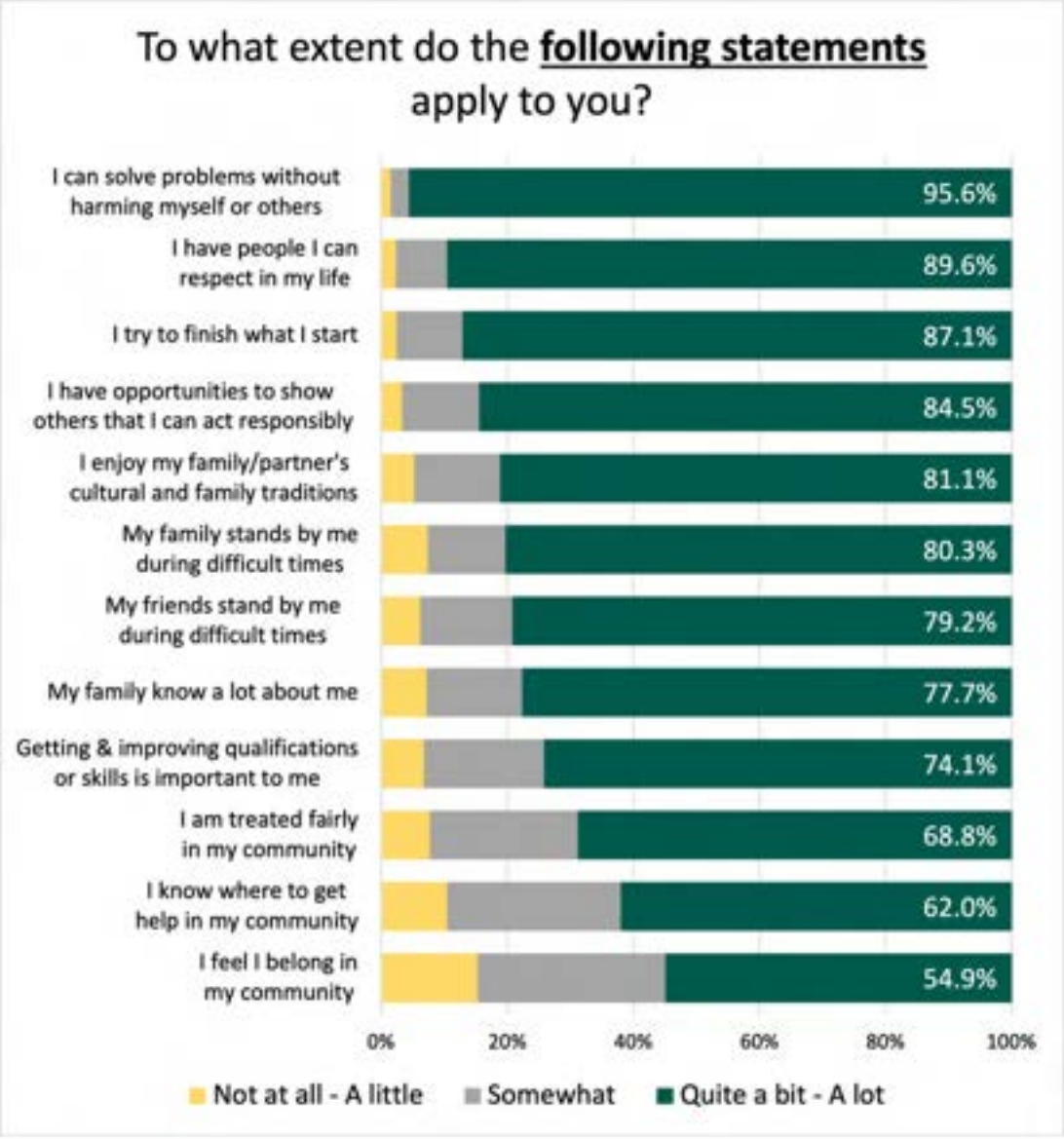


Figure 7. *Adult Resilience Measure, overall sample (n=1,016)*

Community Attachment & Connectedness

Participants also completed the Community Attachment and Connectedness (CAC) measure. Response items on the CAC scale ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” with the mean response the statements falling between “neutral” and “somewhat agree.” Responses to all CAC items are presented in Figure 8.

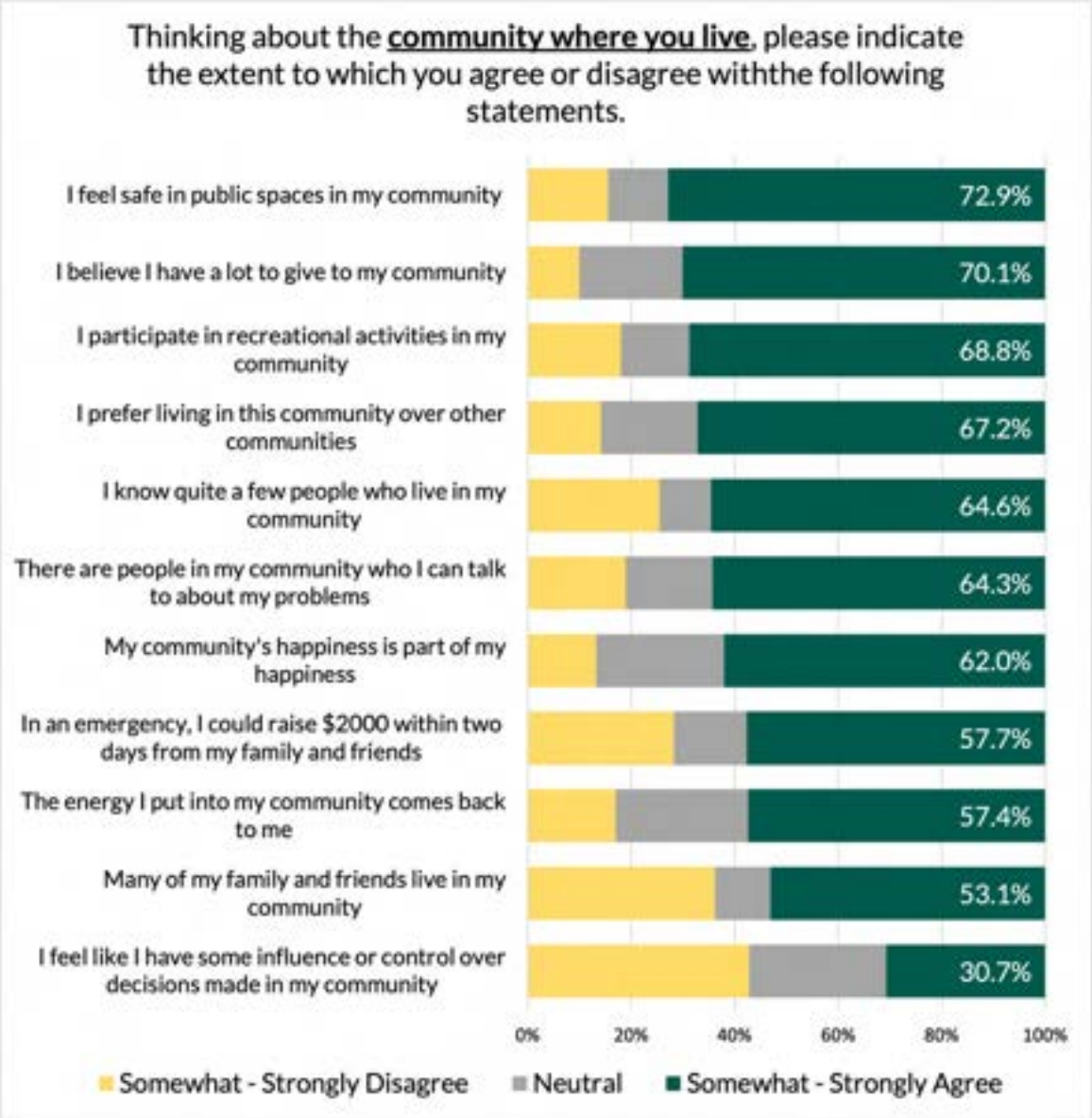


Figure 8. *Community Attachment & Connectedness Scale, overall sample (n=1,016)*

The highest-scoring items on the CAC scale were **"I feel safe in public spaces in my community,"** with 72.9% of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreeing, and **"I believe I have a lot to give to my community,"** with 70.1% of respondents in agreement.

Conversely, the lowest-scoring item was **"I feel like I have influence or control over decisions made in my community,"** which only 30.7% of respondents agreed with. This significant gap between this item and others in the scale is striking; for all other items, most participants (i.e., more than 50%) shared that they agreed with the statement. This disparity suggests that while there is a strong desire among Central Oregonians to contribute to their community, they perceive limited power to do so.

Moreover, when responding to open-ended survey questions about experiences that contributed to their sense of belonging, participants in the survey frequently highlighted how **contributing to a common goal enhanced their sense of belonging.** Many expressed that utilizing their skills and expertise, whether in their professional roles or through volunteer activities, made them feel appreciated within their community.

Conversely, instances where participants felt **unsafe, judged, or discriminated against impeded their sense of belonging.** When prompted to recount moments when they felt disconnected from a community, respondents consistently recalled situations jeopardizing their physical or emotional well-being or instances where they felt undervalued or disrespected. Throughout the survey responses and focus group discussions, participants cited occasions of feeling excluded, not fitting in, or being judged based on various factors such as their choices, actions, language, disabilities, income, or skin color.

Community Attachment, Connectedness and Health

Previous research has demonstrated a strong relationship between belonging and a wide array of health measures, including self-rated physical and mental health, quality and length of life, and disease susceptibility. To understand whether community attachment and connectedness (CAC) are associated with health, we examined differences in CAC scores by self-rated physical and mental health. Respondents were defined as having low CAC if they were in the 25th percentile or below for CAC scores, medium CAC if they fell between the 26th and 75th percentile, and high if they were in the 76th percentile or above.

There was a **clear and compelling relationship between CAC scores and self-rated health,** with a higher proportion of respondents with low CAC scores reporting fair or poor physical health (26.0%) compared to respondents with high CAC scores, of whom only 3.8% of respondents reported having fair or poor physical health (see Figure 9).

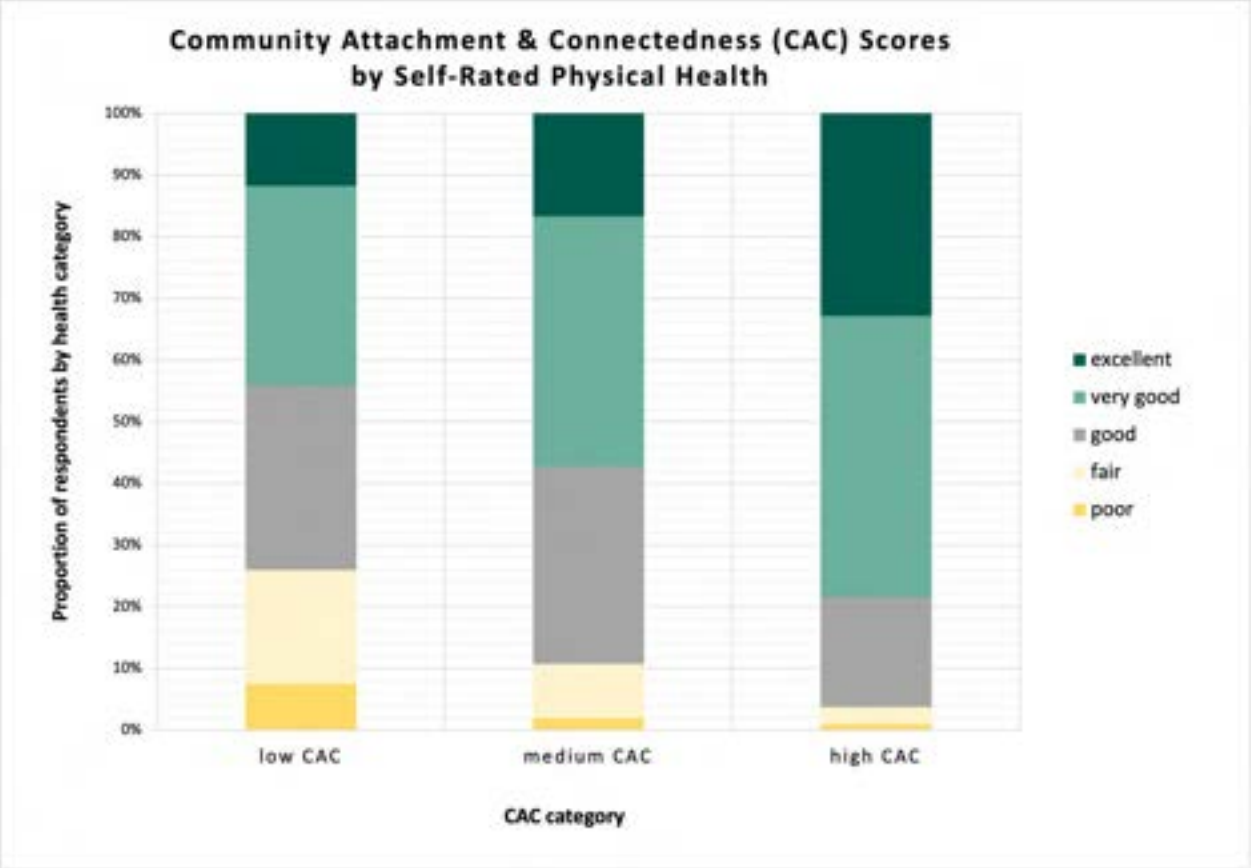


Figure 9. *CAC Scores by Self-Rated Physical Health (n=1,016)*

For mental health (Figure 10), the differences in self-rated health across CAC categories were similarly stark. Nearly a third of respondents with low CAC scores (31.0%) reported having fair or poor mental health, compared to only 3.3% of those with high CAC scores. These findings are consistent with previous research on the relationship between belonging and health (Allen et al., 2021; Burnett et al., 2022; Mahar et al., 2013; Shelton et al., 2020). These inequities further demonstrate that the constructs that underlie belonging – community attachment and connectedness – are key determinants of health and should be addressed in public health programming.

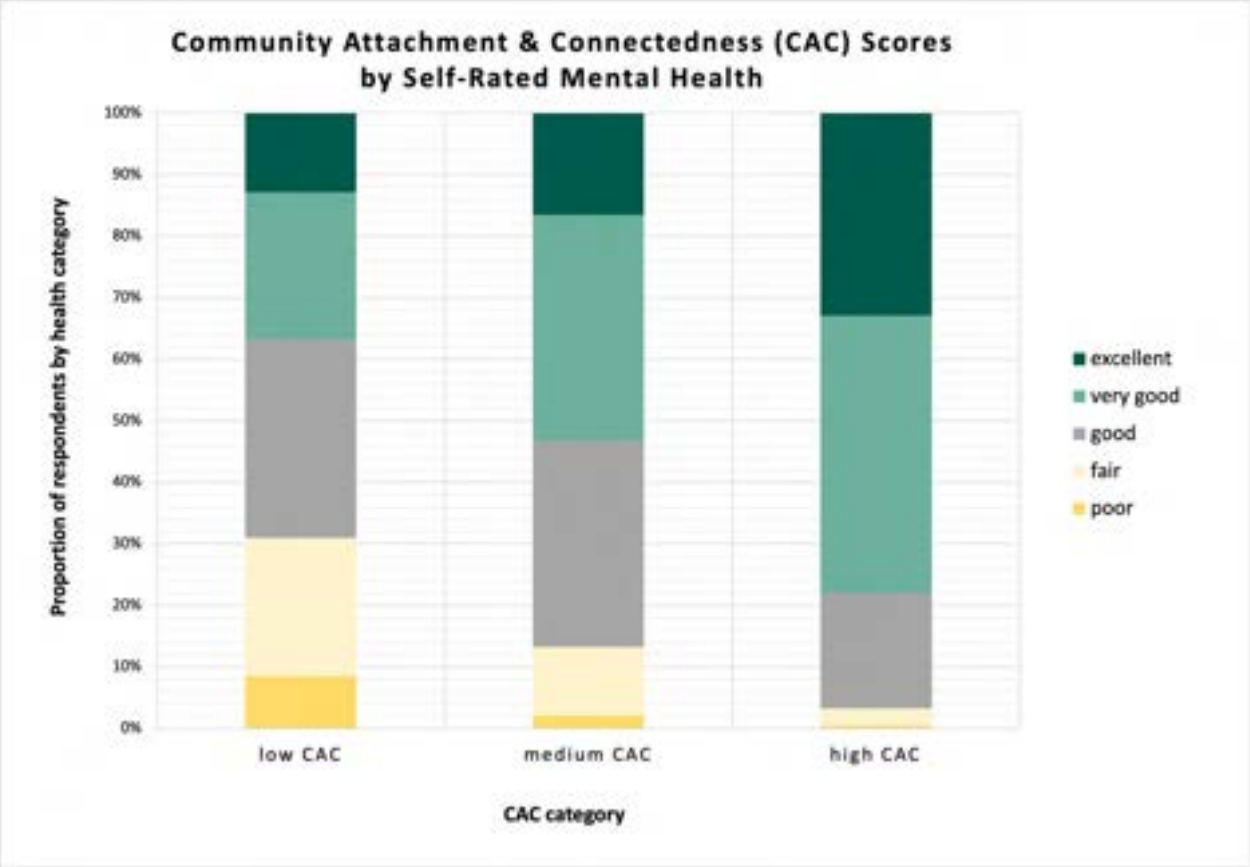


Figure 10. *CAC Scores by Self-Rated Mental Health (n=1,016)*

Use of Technology

Understanding the impact of technology on social connection and community building is necessary for understanding and addressing belonging because technology shapes how individuals interact, communicate, and form relationships. In the digital age, online platforms and social media play a **pivotal role in fostering connections**, yet they can also contribute to **feelings of isolation** (Allen, 2020).

Recognizing that social media and the internet increasingly shape how we engage with others, we asked respondents who self-identified as internet users questions about the use of the internet and social media and the effect it has on their ability to **connect with others** in the community and their **ability to solve problems and achieve change in the community.**

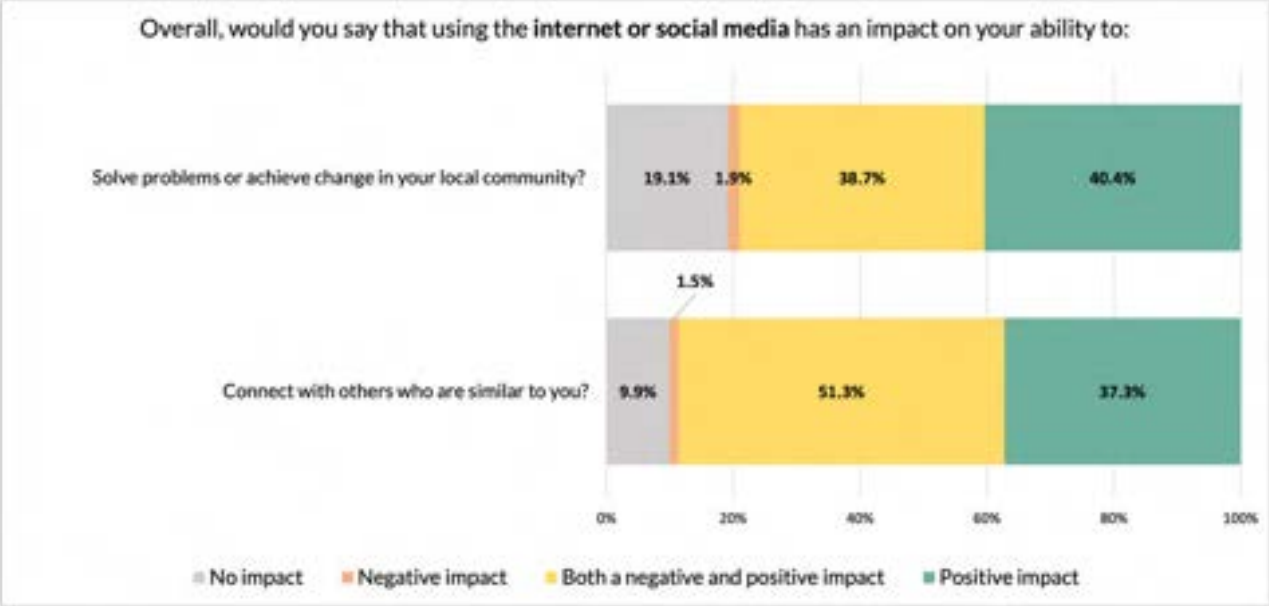


Figure 11. *Impact of Internet and Social Media to Connect with Others and Achieve Change*

As demonstrated in Figure 11, the majority of participants thought social media and the internet either have a positive (40.4%) or mixed impact (38.7%) on their ability to **"solve problems or achieve change in the community,"** while about a fifth of participants (19.1%) thought there was no impact, and very few participants indicated a negative impact only (1.9%). A slightly higher proportion of participants reported that they thought social media and the internet have an impact on their ability to **"connect with others who are similar,"** with a slight majority (51.3%) reporting a mixed impact and more than a third reporting a positive impact (37.3%). Very few participants reported a negative impact only (1.5%). The impact of technology on belonging and social connection is further discussed in the focus group findings sections of the report.

Participants who indicated that using social media or the internet had either a mixed or positive impact were asked which websites or social media sites they used for these purposes. Facebook, text messaging, email, Instagram, and YouTube were the five most frequent responses across both questions, with exact proportions depicted in Figure 12.

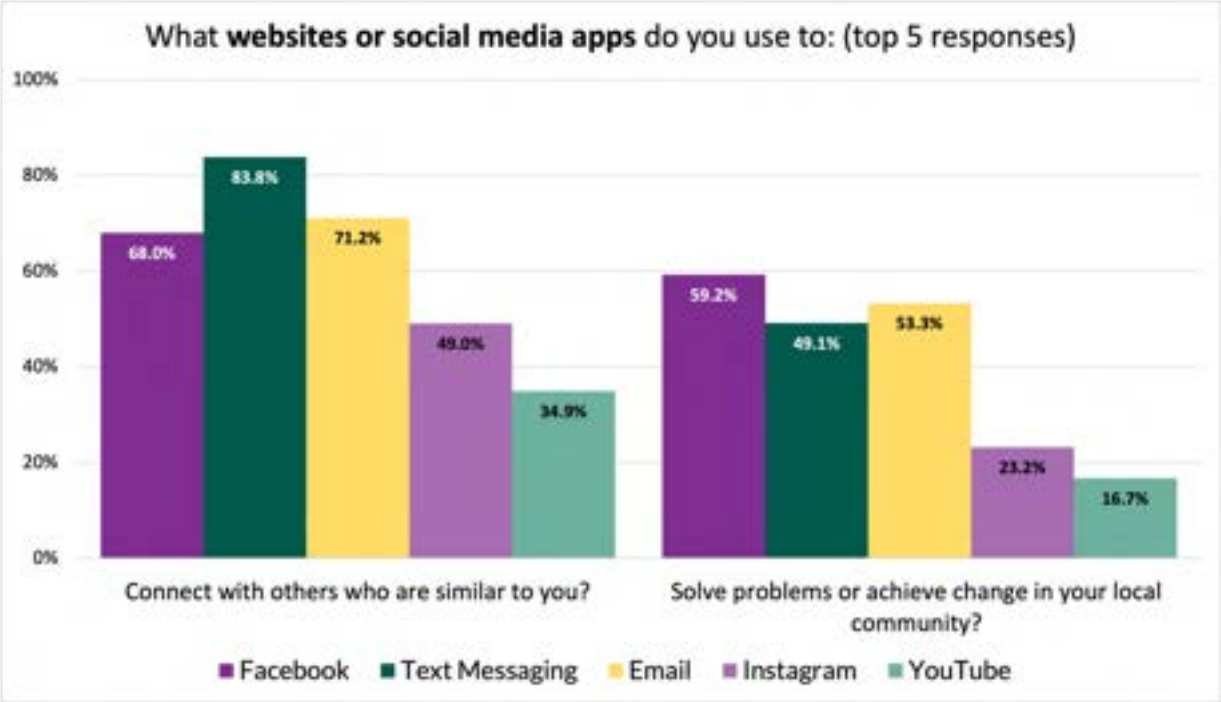


Figure 12. *Common Technologies Used to Connect with Others and Achieve Change*

Qualitative Findings

Overall Qualitative Findings from the Survey and Focus Groups

Importance of Family and Interpersonal Connections

When survey respondents and participants in focus groups were asked to identify communities or identity groups that made them feel like they belong, 'Family,' 'Friends,' and 'Friends and family' materialized as especially important groups.

> "[I feel I belong at] home, and enjoying time hanging out... 'just being together' with my husband and children."
> –Survey Participant

When survey and focus group participants discussed what contributes to their sense of belonging, they emphasized the significance of encountering w**arm, supportive, and accepting individuals**, such as family members, friends, and coworkers. They noted that interpersonal interactions play a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging within their community, irrespective of their identity or age.

Throughout many of the focus groups, participants recounted instances of experiencing kindness and support from others in their community, highlighting how these encounters made them feel included and valued. They also highlighted interactions with friendly strangers who shared common interests or hobbies, which further enhanced their sense of belonging within a particular space or activity.

Moreover, participants reflected on the sense of connection and togetherness they experienced when spending time with family and friends. They consistently emphasized the importance of sharing their values, life experiences, interests, hobbies, and even spiritual or political beliefs with others, underscoring the significance of **shared experiences in deepening their sense of belonging.**

> "[I feel I belong] being in a place full of people who share the same background as me. I am biracial, so that is a key component for me to feel comfortable and welcomed. Sharing those same experiences helps."
> –Survey Participant

Building Community through Shared Hobbies, Interests, and Identities

Many participants shared the importance of doing something they enjoy with other like-minded people. This could be through volunteering and/or enjoying their time at community events and celebrations (including, for example, pow-wows, pride festivals, and music concerts). In both focus groups and community data co-interpretation sessions, participants highlighted the importance of staying connected to other individuals, groups, and systems within the community that matter to them.

Across open-ended responses and focus groups, participants indicated ways in which they were **involved, engaged, or participated** in the community. Some spoke about participating in a club or sport, volunteering for a local organization or community event, or engaging in activities through their workplace. Participants often noted that they needed to be active in their pursuit of community. For some this came easier than for others, however, all agreed that they played an active role in finding community.

Some identified working together towards shared goals, or feeling valued for their contributions, as crucial factors—however, some experienced barriers to a sense of belonging when not having their work valued or feeling disrespected.

Finally, workplaces and schools were consistently identified as places and spaces that offered community and therefore a sense of belonging.

> "When the community accepts me for who I am, values my contribution, and cares for me as a person of the community, I feel a sense of belonging."
>
> –Survey Participant

Barriers to Belonging and Community Divides

Participants across surveys and focus groups also identified barriers to belonging. These included **economic, political, and generational divides**, among others. In focus groups, participants described times when their **political, religious, generational, or cultural views** made them feel like they did not belong or even unwelcome in some spaces.

For example, many people mentioned the **economic divide** in Central Oregon (some even specifically mentioned the East/West divide in Bend). They mentioned how the inflated costs of living and lack of affordable housing contribute to their lack of belonging in various spaces including their kids' schools. Participants stated that being priced out of their neighborhood is directly counter to a sense of belonging.

> "I often feel like I don't belong at pickup at my children's school. The 'in' parents are huddled in a group. If you are not wearing the right clothes, belong to the country club, skiing at Mt Bachelor on the weekends and live in a certain neighborhood, then no one talks to you. It is difficult to fit in."
>
> -Survey Participant

Financial barriers to participation were identified as negatively affecting one's sense of belonging. Many activities and gathering spaces were described by participants as expensive or inaccessible.

Political divides were also identified as a strong barrier to belonging across age, race, and geography. Political conversations were described as uncomfortable, some even referred to them as "toxic." For some participants, signs (e.g., candidate bumper stickers and flags) of political leaning present a safety concern; They explain that they represent oppression and harm to bodies like theirs. For others, symbols of harm went against their values and efforts to make all community members seen and valued.

Political divides are present in many unpolitical spaces, and participants talked about avoiding certain discussions as they would undermine group cohesion. Some participants said they had lost friendships or stopped talking to neighbors due to differing political views.

> "At times I felt like I didn't belong in the community... A lot of people wrap their identities in their religious views, their political views, their race, and so on... If you fall outside any given box, folks either just don't know what to do with you or they hate you"
>
> -Focus Group Participant

Lastly, survey respondents indicate that **inaccessible infrastructure, immobility, and disability** present barriers to belonging for people of all ages. Respondents indicated that the inability to get places without driving, as well as physical or mental disabilities, can bar them from full participation in public life. For some, this is a perceived barrier (e.g., feeling they are a burden, or that going somewhere is "too much work"); while for others, structural barriers in places and spaces prevent access. For families, a lack of safe walking or biking networks for children was an area of concern.

> "Kids being able to safely take themselves to school by walking or biking is so important for development of independence and social skills."
>
> -Survey Participant

In the next section, we proceed to present survey and focus group findings from this project, focusing on the highlighted populations. This approach enables a deeper examination of the strengths and areas for improvement unique to these groups. For each demographic, we outline the primary factors that focus group and/or community data co-interpretation participants identified as either facilitating or hindering their sense of belonging.

Findings by Population

Findings: LGBTQA+ in Central Oregon

Survey Findings

Demographics

Of the 1,019 Central Oregonians who completed the survey, 106 (10.4%) identified as LGBTQA+. LGBTQA+ respondents were typically younger and had lower incomes compared to the general sample.

Gender*	%
Man	10.4%
Woman	73.6%
Non-Binary	14.2%
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	<5 people
Transgender**	10.0%
Age	**%**
18-34	60.4%
35-64	34.0%
65+	5.7%

Race & Ethnicity***	%
Non-Hispanic white (white only)	69.8%
Hispanic or Latino/a/e	17.9%
Native American	5.7%
Asian	<5 people
Black	<5 people
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<5 people
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	<5 people

Table 6. *Characteristics of LGBTQA+ Respondents*

City or Service Area	%
Bend	51.9%
La Pine	6.6%
Madras	10.4%
Prineville	9.4%
Redmond	18.9%
Sisters	<5 people
Warm Springs	<5 people

Educational Attainment*	%
High school degree or less	13.2%
Some college	20.8%
2-year degree or technical degree	17.9%
Bachelor's degree or higher	47.2%
Prefer to self describe or missing	<5 people
Income	**%**
Less than $25,000	19.8%
$25,000-$49,999	18.9%
$50,000-$74,999	20.8%
$75,000-$99,999	14.2%
$100,000 or more	16.0%
Prefer not to say	10.4%

Table 6. *Characteristics of LGBTQA+ Respondents*

**Prefer to self-describe options were categorized, where possible.*
***Participants were asked to indicate the gender they identify with, followed by a question asking if they identify as transgender. Transgender respondents are counted with the gender they indicated in addition to the transgender category.*
****Respondents were able to select more than one option.*

Belonging: Communities & Identity Groups

To understand what communities and identity groups foster a sense of belonging for individuals who identified as LGBTQA+ and how this may be similar or different to the rest of the sample, we compared responses to the question "Which of the following communities or identity groups make you feel like you belong?" This comparison is presented in Figure 13.

- Across both groups, **"family"** and people or friends who share **"hobbies or recreational activities"** were the most frequent responses. 73.6% of LGBTQA+ respondents selected "family" and 71.7% selected "hobbies or recreational activities." While family was the most common response for respondents who identified as LGBTQA+ and those who did not, a significantly smaller proportion of LGBTQA+ respondents selected it, indicating that attachment to family may be less strong for some LGBTQA+ individuals.

- A significantly greater proportion of LGBTQA+ respondents indicated that the **"LGBTQIA+ community"** (selected by 65.1% of LGBTQA+ respondents), people or friends who share their **"lived experience"** (67%), and people or friends with whom they went to **"school or university"** with (41.5%) make them feel like they belong.

- A significantly smaller proportion of LGBTQA+ respondents selected people or friends who share your **"religion"** (10.4%) or the **"military or veteran"** community (8.5%). This disparity suggests that LGBTQA+ individuals might perceive exclusion in these communities, likely influenced by policies that have prevented LGBTQA+ identifying individuals from joining the military as well as anti-LGBTQA+ beliefs in certain religious groups.

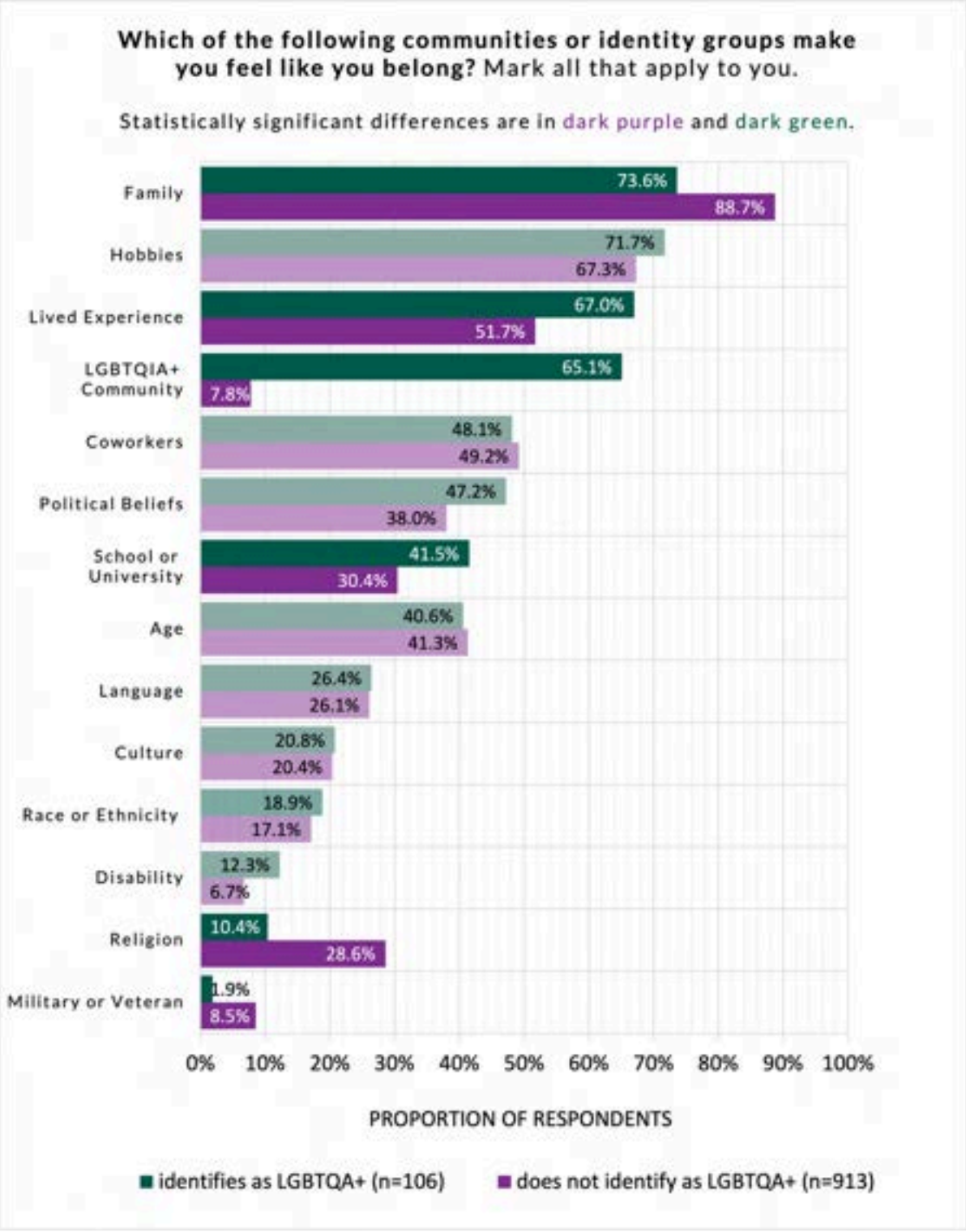


Figure 13. *Belonging in Communities and Identity Groups, LGBTQA+ Respondents*

Belonging: Places and Spaces

Next, we examined places and spaces that may promote belonging for individuals who identified as LGBTQA+ and how this may be similar or different from the rest of the sample. For this, we compared responses to the question "In which of the following places or spaces do you feel like you belong?" This comparison is presented in Figure 14.

- Across both groups, **"where you live"** was the most frequent response (selected by 75.5% of LGBTQA+ respondents); however, a significantly greater proportion of respondents who did not identify as LGBTQA+ selected this option. **"workplace"** was the second most frequent response for LGBTQA+ identifying individuals (47.2%).

- We found that a greater proportion of LGBTQA+ respondents indicated that **"online spaces"** make them feel like they belong, with 31.1% selecting this option.

- A smaller proportion of LGBTQA+ indicated that they feel like they belong **"where they are from or where they grew up,"** with only 32.1% of LGBTQA+ respondents selecting this option.

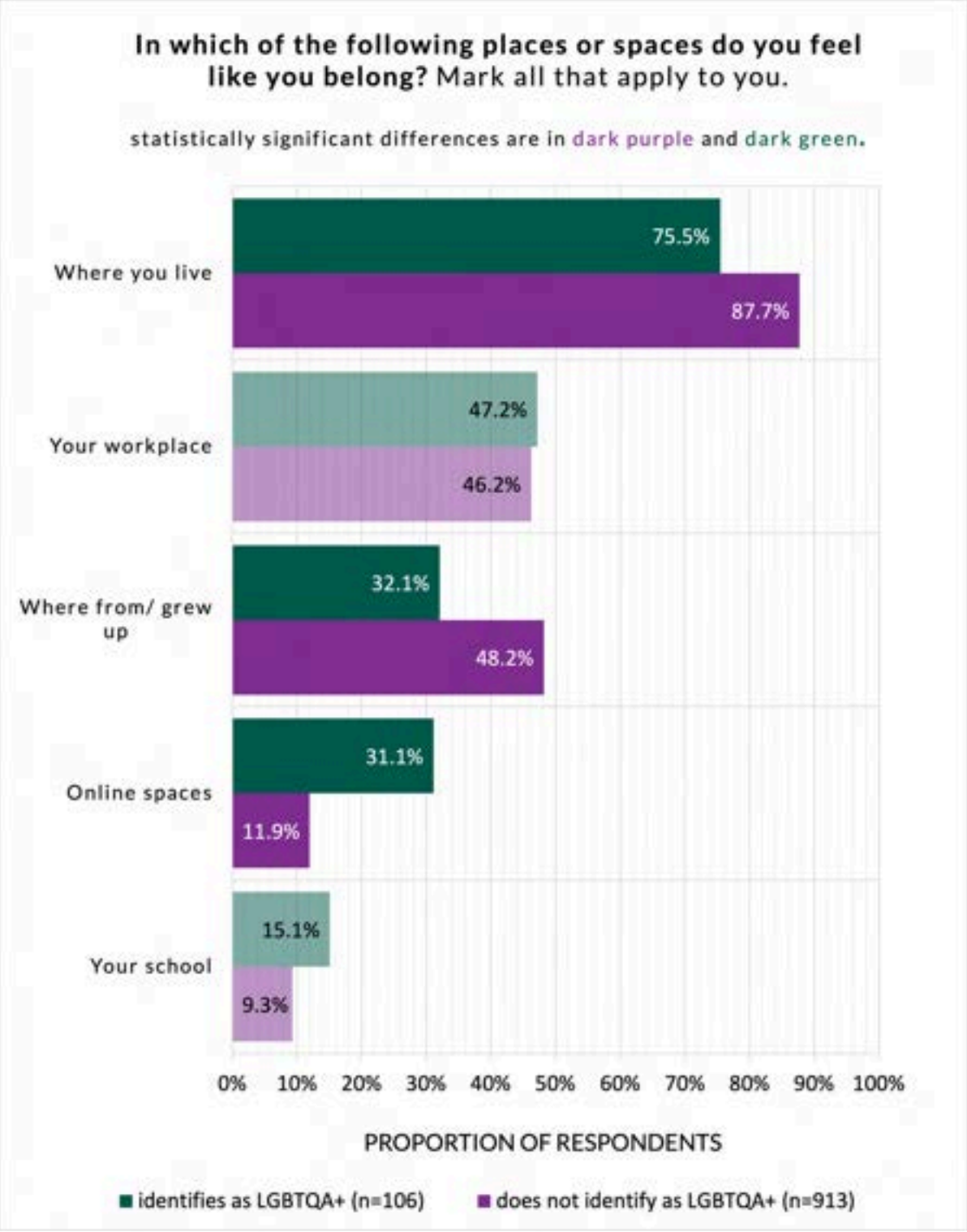


Figure 14. *Belonging in Places and Spaces, LGBTQA+ Respondents*

Resilience

To understand measures of resilience across and between groups, we looked at ARM scores for individuals who identified as LGBTQA+ with those who did not identify as LGBTQA+. Response items on the ARM scale ranged from “not at all” to “a lot” with the proportions of individuals who indicated that the statements apply to them “quite a bit” or “a lot” compared below in Figure 15. Additionally, we used comparison tests (t-tests) to understand statistically significant differences in the scores for each item between the two groups.

- The highest-scoring item across groups was **"I can solve problems without harming myself or others,”** which 90.6% of LGBTQA+ respondents indicated applied to them. Across both groups, **“I feel I belong in my community”** was the lowest-scoring item; only 34.0% of LGBTQA+ respondents endorsed this item “quite a bit” or “a lot.”

- LGBTQA+ respondents overall had lower scores for most ARM items. In particular, scores for the statements **“my family knows a lot about me,” “I feel I belong in my community”** and **“my family stands by me during difficult times”** highlight substantial gaps between Central Oregonians who identified as LGBTQA+ and those who do not identify as LGBTQA+. These differences indicate that LGBTQA+ respondents may experience more disconnection from family and the broader community.

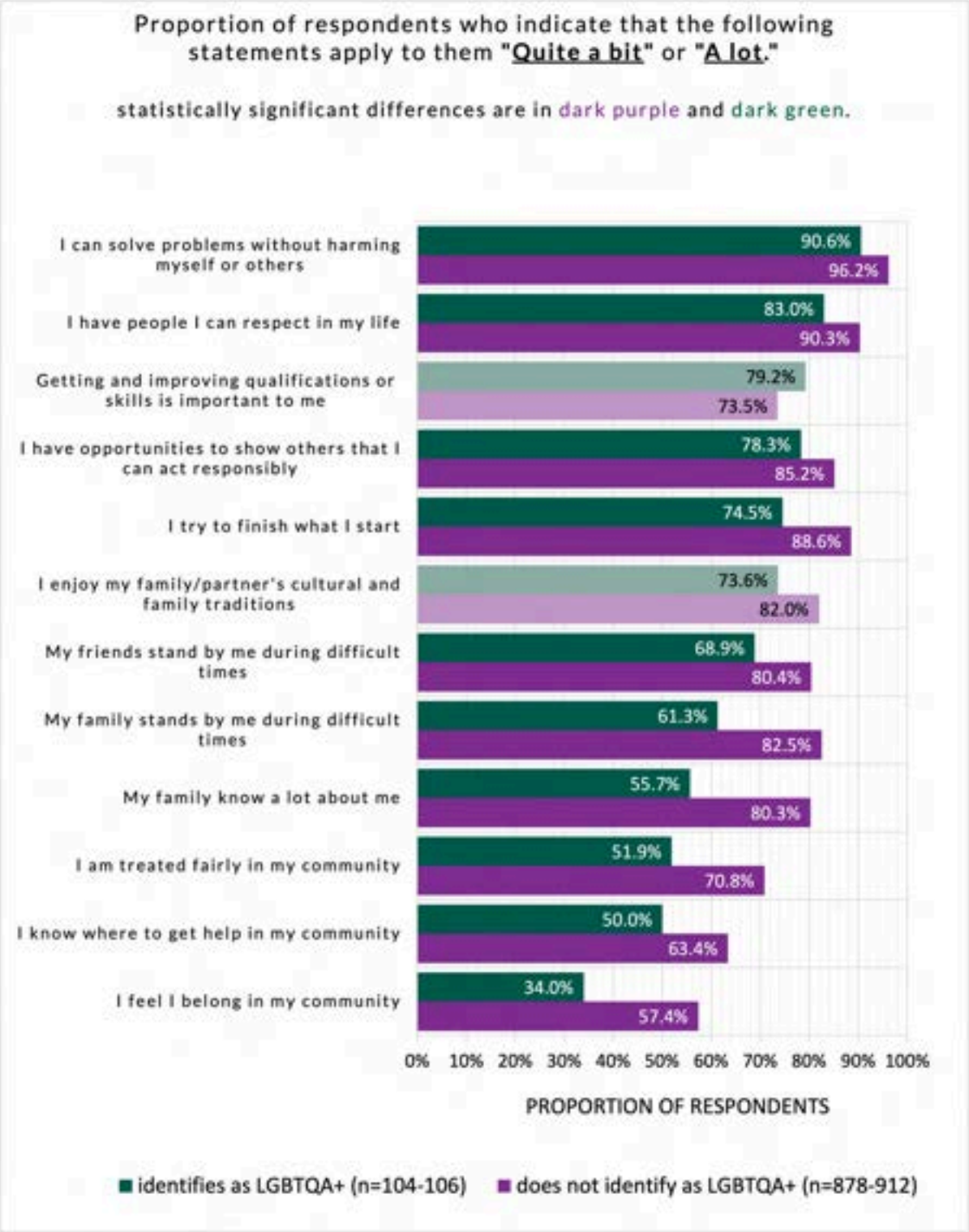


Figure 15. *Adult Resilience Measure, LGBTQA+ Respondents*

Community Attachment and Connectedness

We also analyzed responses to the Community Attachment and Connectedness (CAC) measure, comparing individuals who identified as LGBTQA+ with those who did not. Response items on the CAC scale ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” with the proportions of individuals who indicated that they “somewhat” or “strongly” agree with each statement compared below in Figure 16. Additionally, we used comparison tests (t-tests) to understand statistically significant differences in the scores for each item between the two groups.

- The highest-scoring item for LGBTQA+ respondents was **“I believe I have a lot to give to my community,”** which 70.8% of LGBTQA+ participants agreed with.

- Across both groups, **“I feel like I have some influence or control over decisions in my community”** was the lowest-scoring item; only 27.6% of LGBTQA+ respondents agreed with this statement.

- LGBTQA+ respondents overall had lower scores for many CAC items. For example, only 52.4% of LGBTQA+ survey participants shared that they agree with **“I feel safe in my community,”** while this was the highest-scoring item for the rest of the sample. We observed a similarly large gap for the statement **“I prefer living in this community over other communities;”** only 50.0% of LGBTQA+ respondents agreed with this compared to over two-thirds of the respondents in the rest of the sample.

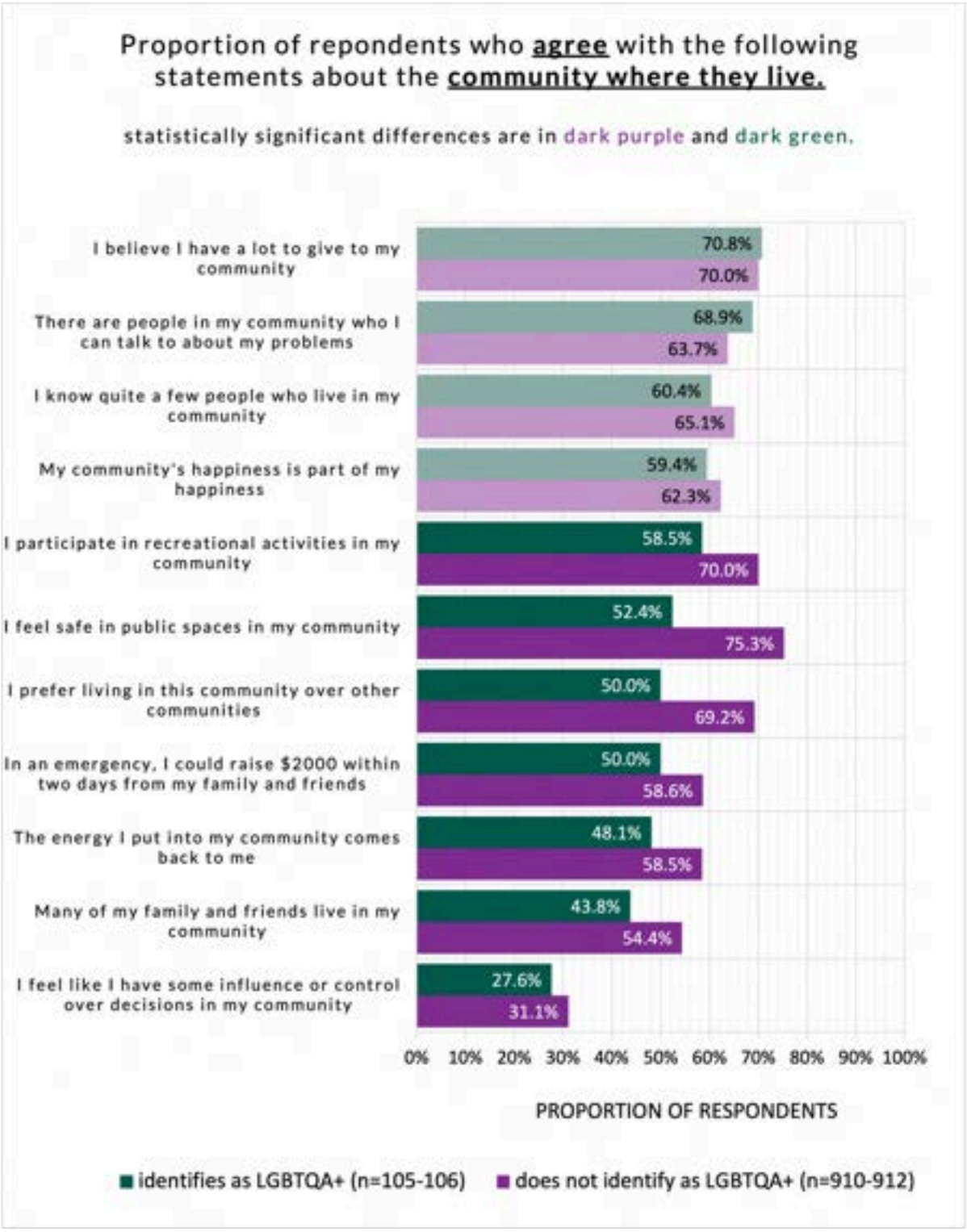


Figure 16. *Community Attachment and Connectedness, LGBTQA+ Respondents*

Focus Group Findings

Inclusion with Family, Friend Groups, and in Public Spaces

During focus groups, LGBTQA+ participants expanded on the survey findings, sharing the role of the **family** in their sense of belonging. They noted that family dynamics could sometimes lead to conflicts arising from differences in cultural or generational values and norms. For instance, LGBTQA+ youth expressed challenges in **reconciling their values regarding gender norms with those prevailing in their family or home, often characterized by more traditional views on gender roles.** Despite these conflicts, participants shared that family still does play a vital role in fostering belonging. However, they also underscored the importance of having a **community outside the family that shares one's identity.**

Moreover, participants discussed the importance of feeling welcomed and included in various settings such as workplaces, schools, and public spaces, describing the conditions and practices that signal inclusion and foster belonging. Participants valued **genuine efforts to create spaces that are respectful and open to everyone.** They particularly appreciated individuals in these spaces who use **inclusive language, address others by their correct names, and ask about pronouns.** Additionally, participants noted the significance of specific symbols, such as rainbow flags, as signals of inclusion. They emphasized that within these "signaled" spaces, there was an expectation for all individuals to be inclusive, especially among minoritized communities.

> "My colleagues are really supportive and I really feel like I belong in that space, and so I feel like I have the ability to interact with the community members and partners that we have in rural communities with enough stores of strength and support around me for when they inevitably never use my pronouns or say something not super thoughtful or progressive and harmful in some ways, and knowing that I have eight people behind me that'll back me up in any kind of fight, so to speak, which I think is rare to experience, especially in a government environment."
>
> -LGBTQA+ Focus Group Participant

LGBTQA+ focus group participants also indicated that **safety is important to their sense of belonging.** They underscored the significance of feeling safe in public spaces, which is core to feeling welcome. One way to foster a sense of safety is through representation. Participants agreed that diversity both in public spaces and within their community made them feel welcome and accepted.

Finally, some participants shared that forming and maintaining a sense of belonging with their community was important in combating loneliness and developing a safe place for support.

> "Loneliness is one of the major emerging crises of our society. I think belonging is a direct antidote to that, just having community and people that you can rely on and feel safe with."
>
> -LGBTQA+ Focus Group Participant

Absence of Representation and Symbols of Hate

LGBTQA+ focus group participants also discussed substantial barriers to belonging. One barrier discussed was the **absence of representation of LGBTQA+ or people of color** in many places. They explained that this could lead to individuals feeling unwelcome or even unsafe in 'white' and heteronormative spaces.

A more extreme expression of feeling unwelcome is the fear of facing **discrimination or judgment.** Participants recounted that hearing hateful comments can make them feel unsafe or unwanted in their communities.

> "I was walking a dog with a friend who does not identify at all as LGBTQAI+, but this jacked-up pickup truck came kind of roaring down the street and some young dude thought it was okay to yell, 'God doesn't love you.'"
>
> -LGBTQA+ Focus Group Participant

Further, participants indicated that **explicit or implicit displays of racist and anti-LGBTQA+ symbols** created barriers to feeling a sense of belonging. Participants articulated that symbols directly or indirectly implicated harm to them or their identity group and made them feel unsafe in certain places. These concerns directly impacted their sense of belonging in their community.

In contrast, and as described earlier, **symbols of inclusion promote a feeling of safety**. However, in focus groups with LGBTQA+ individuals, participants pointed out the importance of intent behind the symbols. Participants describe "virtue signaling" (display of inclusive symbols without intention to be inclusive) as corrosive to their sense of belonging.

Finally, LGBTQA+ focus group participants also mentioned the challenges of **finding community as they age.** Some people described the opportunities for community building to be rooted in nightlife or other spaces that are less welcoming to older individuals.

Co-Interpretation Takeaways

Individuals who shared their perspectives as members of the LGBTQA+ community during community data co-interpretation highlighted **safety, visibility, connectedness, support, and respect as significant drivers of a sense of belonging.** For example, survey data revealed that only 34.0% of the LGBTQA+ respondents feel like they belong in their community. Moreover, among transgender and non-binary respondents, this number dropped to 20.0%.

A key takeaway from community data co-interpretation centered on the **reciprocal relationship between having something to give to one's community and receiving something in return.** Co-interpretation participants called out that LGBTQA+ survey respondents (70.8%) said they believe they have a lot to give to their community, while 48.1% said the energy they put into their community comes back to them, representing a substantial disconnect between what they feel they can give and what they are getting in return.

LGBTQA+ Community Recommendations to Promote Community Belonging:

- Gathering spaces that are safe for trans and LGBTQA+ people
- Free, sober-friendly community events
- Support accessing health care and other basic needs
- More visible community support for LGBTQA+ people
- Community support groups with trained facilitators
- Opportunities to share stories and have their voices heard

Findings: Men in Central Oregon

Survey Findings

Demographics

Of the 1,019 Central Oregonians who completed the survey, one-third (28.7%) of the survey respondents identified as men. Most (44.2%) were between 35 to 64 years of age, White (76.0%), and residing in Bend (53.1%).

Age	%
18-34	23.6%
35-64	44.2%
65+	32.2%
Race & Ethnicity*	**%**
Non-Hispanic white (white only)	76.0%
Hispanic or Latino/a/e	7.9%
Native American	7.2%
Asian	3.4%
Black	<5 people
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<5 people
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	4.8%

City or Service Area	%
Bend	53.1%
La Pine	11.0%
Madras	3.8%
Prineville	7.5%
Redmond	16.1%
Sisters	4.5%
Warm Springs	4.1%

Table 7. *Characteristics of Respondents Who Identified as Men*

Educational Attainment**	%
High school degree or less	10.3%
Some college	18.5%
2-year degree or technical degree	17.1%
Bachelor's degree or higher	52.4%
Prefer to self describe or missing	1.7%
Income	**%**
Less than $25,000	11.6%
$25,000-$49,999	17.1%
$50,000-$74,999	14.0%
$75,000-$99,999	13.0%
$100,000 or more	36.0%
Prefer not to say	8.2%

Table 7. *Characteristics of Respondents Who Identified as Men*

Belonging: Communities & Identity Groups

To explore what communities and identity groups create a sense of belonging for individuals who identified as men and how this may be similar or different from the rest of the sample, we compared responses to the question "Which of the following communities or identity groups make you feel like you belong?" This comparison is depicted in Figure 17.

- **"Family"** and people who share **"hobbies or recreational activities"** were the most frequently selected options by both men and the rest of the sample. These options were selected by 84.2% of men and 67.1% of men, respectively. While family was the most common response for all respondents, comparison tests demonstrated that a significantly smaller proportion of men indicated that family made them feel like they belonged.
- The only group that a greater proportion of men selected was the **"military or veteran"** community; this was chosen by 13.4% of men.
- Additionally, a substantially smaller proportion of men selected people or friends who **"share your lived experience,"** (44.9%) **"who speak your language"** (21.6%), and the **"LGBTQIA+"** community (9.6%).

**Respondents were able to select more than one option.*
***Prefer to self-describe options were categorized, where possible.*

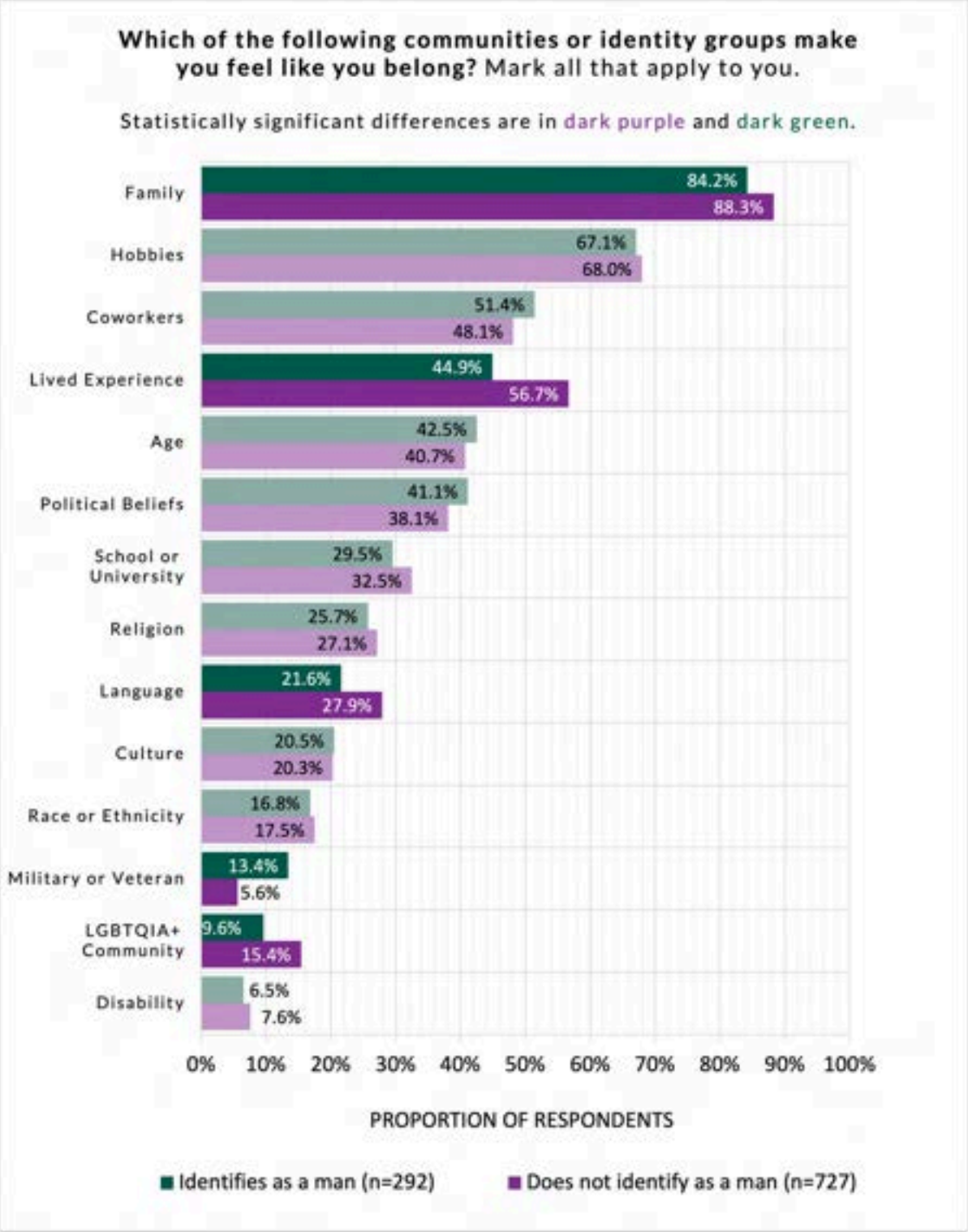


Figure 17. *Belonging in Communities and Identity Groups, Men*

Belonging: Places and Spaces

Additionally, we examined places and spaces that may promote belonging for men. We compared responses to the question "In which of the following places or spaces do you feel like you belong?" between those who identified as men and those who did not. This comparison is presented in Figure 18.

- For both groups, **"where you live"** was the most frequent response (88.7% of men). For men, this was followed by **"your workplace"** which was selected by 47.3% of respondents. There were no significant differences between the places and spaces selected by the two groups, however.

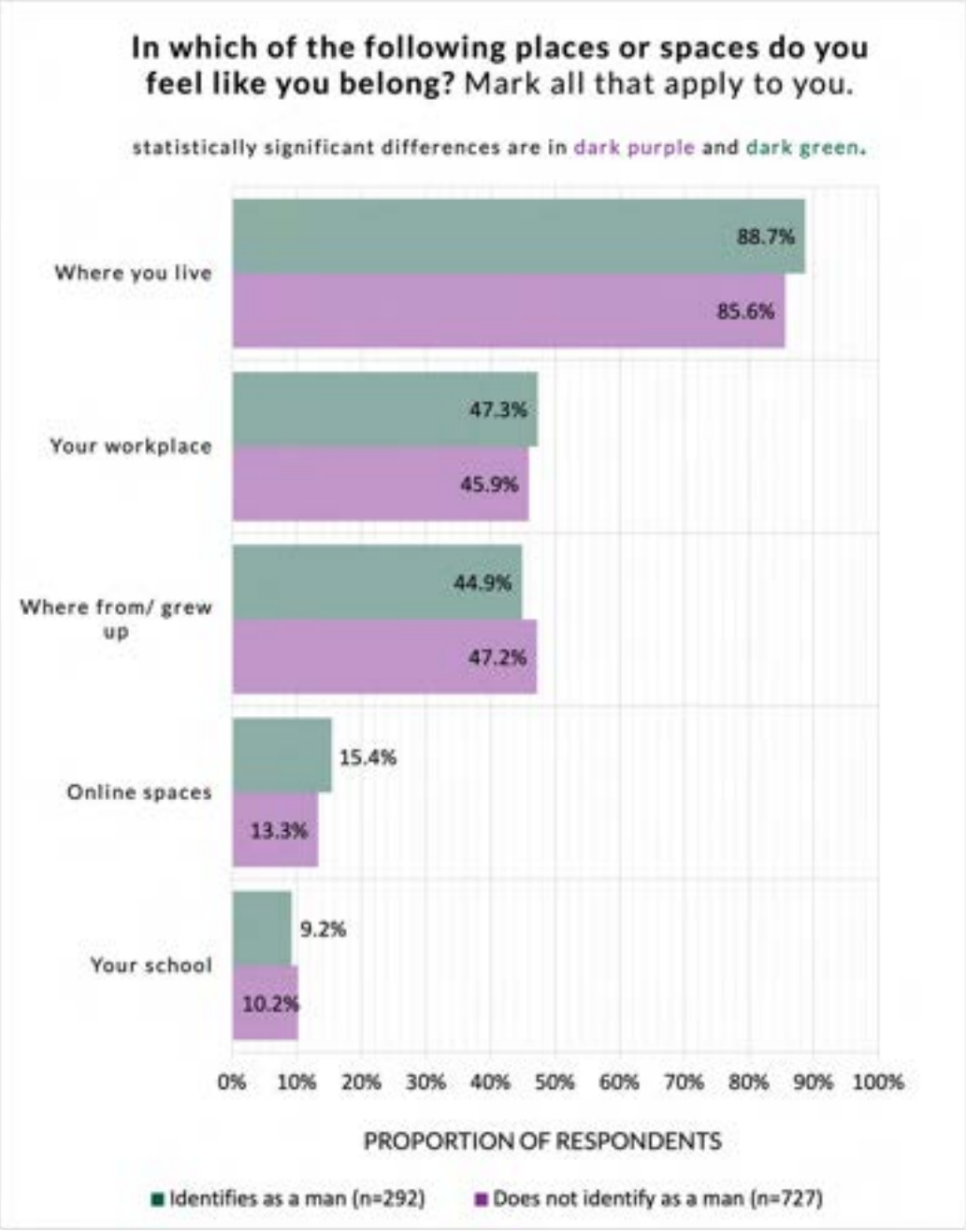


Figure 18. *Belonging in Places and Spaces, Men*

Resilience

To understand measures of resilience across and between groups, we looked at ARM scores for individuals who identified as men and those who did not. Response items on the ARM scale ranged from “not at all” to “a lot” with the proportions of individuals who indicated that the statements apply to them “quite a bit” or “a lot” compared below in Figure 19. Additionally, we used comparison tests to understand statistically significant differences in the scores for each item between the two groups.

- The highest-scoring item across groups was **"I can solve problems without harming myself or others;”** 94.5% of men indicated this applied to them.

- For men, the lowest-scoring item was **“I know where to get help in my community;”** only 55.5% of men indicated that this applied to them. Scores for this item were significantly lower among men compared to the rest of the sample.

- While responses to ARM scores were similar across these groups, men also had significantly higher scores for **“I am treated fairly in my community”** (71.1% of men) and significantly lower scores for **“I enjoy my family/partner’s cultural and family traditions”** (79.4%).

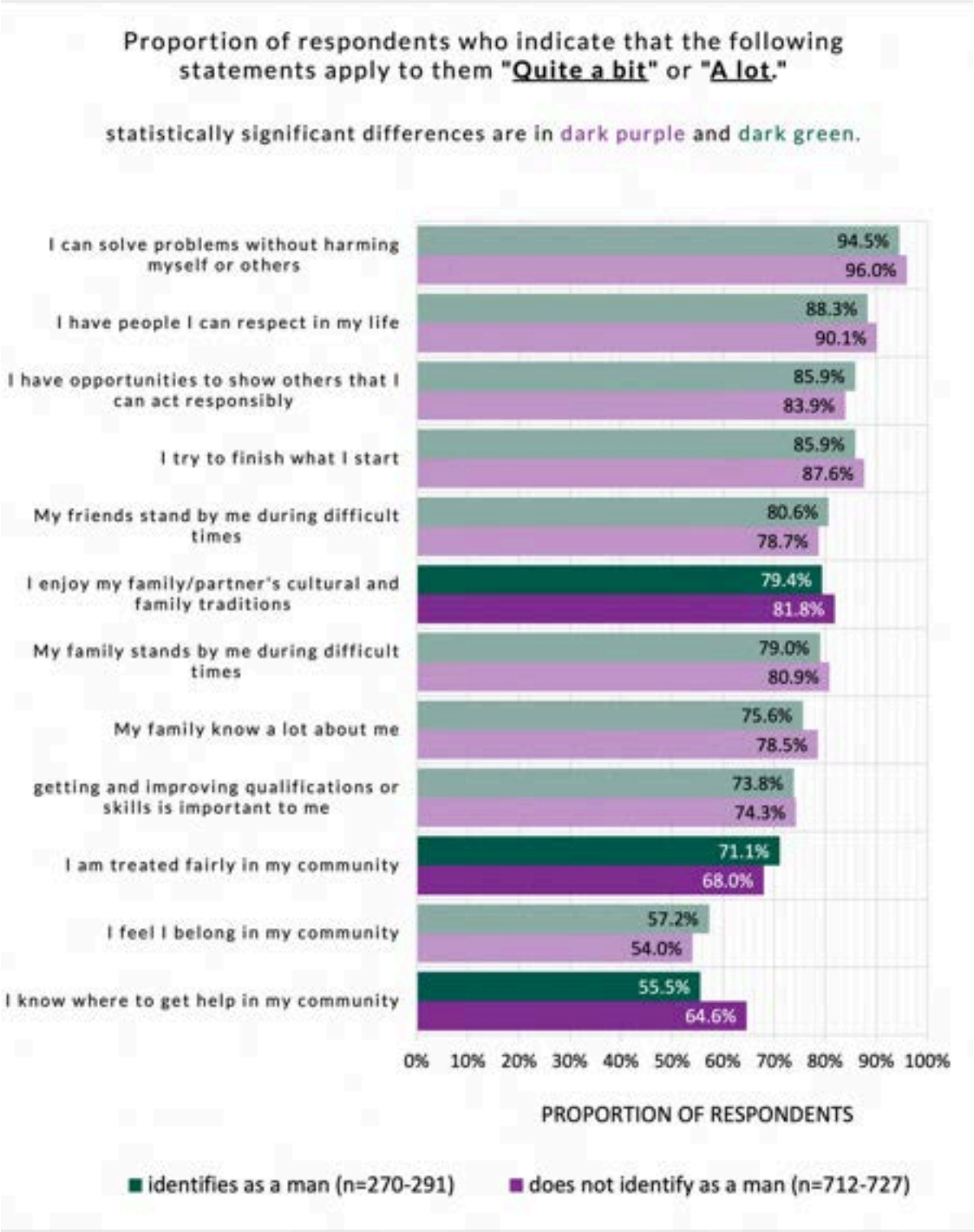


Figure 19. *Adult Resilience Measure, Men*

Community Attachment and Connectedness

We additionally compared responses to the Community Attachment and Connectedness (CAC) measure. Response items on the CAC scale ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with the proportions of men who indicated that they "somewhat" or "strongly" agree with each statement compared with those who did not identify as men in Figure 20. Additionally, we used comparison tests to understand statistically significant differences in the scores for each item between the two groups.

- High-scoring items were similar between men and the rest of the sample, although men had significantly higher scores for the top-scoring items, including **"I participate in recreational activities in my community,"** (76.9% agreed) **"I feel safe in public spaces in my community,"** (75.5% agreed) and **"I prefer living in this community over other communities."** (71.3% agreed).

- While **"I feel like I have some influence or control over decisions in my community"** was the lowest-scoring item for both groups, men had higher scores on this item compared to those who did not identify as men. 36.3% of men agreed with this statement.

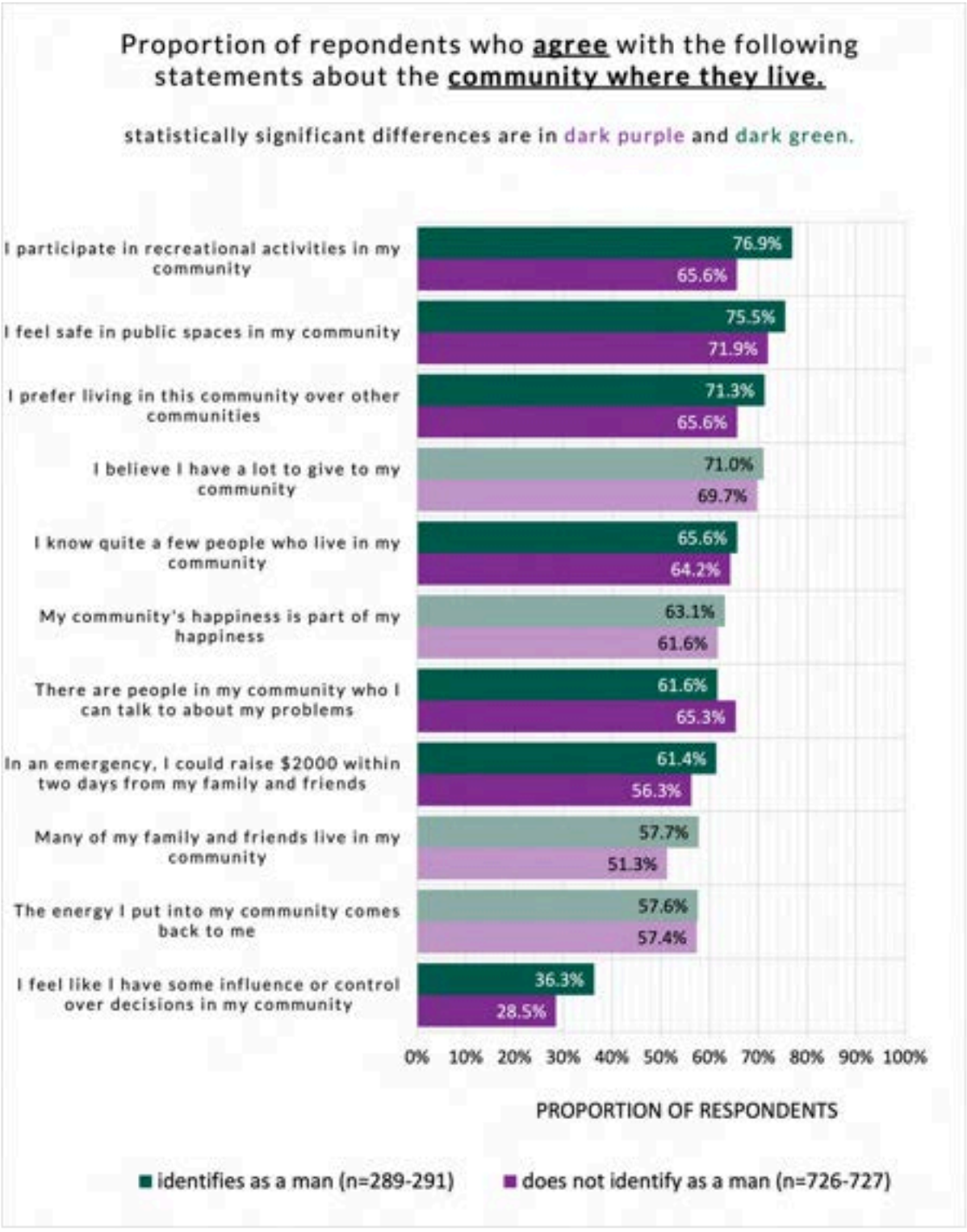


Figure 20. *Community Attachment and Connectedness, Men*

Focus Group Findings

Belonging Through Community

In focus groups with men, **relationships built in the workplace and family emerged as significant sources of belonging and community connection**. Within the workplace, participants expressed a sense of belonging fostered through relationships built with colleagues. Regarding family, men found a sense of belonging by bonding over shared activities and experiences with their family members, whether as parents, husbands, or grandparents. Moreover, participants highlighted that **volunteering and finding ways to stay engaged in the community** after retirement offers a profound sense of purpose and meaning, as well as opportunities to forge new relationships.

Difficulty of Building New Relationships

For some men in the focus groups, moving due to retirement, divorce, or other circumstances led to feeling disconnected from previous identities or roles within the community. Having to build new relationships within a new space was seen as an opportunity, however, participants also expressed concerns about being negatively viewed by other people for being new to a group. Some men said it can be **hard to ask for help or be "the new guy."**

> "If there's a group of guys that know each other and you're kind of the new guy, it can be a little different, like you kind of have to prove yourself, or like a new sports team or something like that."
>
> -Participant in the Focus Group with Men

Findings: Older Adults in Central Oregon

Survey Findings

Demographics

Of the 1,019 Central Oregonians who completed the survey, 22.7% were older adults (65 or older). Older adults, on average, had lower incomes than younger respondents, and older adult respondents more frequently identified as non-Hispanic white compared to the general sample. Some notable demographic characteristics of older adult respondents are below.

Gender*	%
Man	40.7%
Woman	58.0%
Non-binary	<5 people
Transgender**	<5 people
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	76.0%

Race & Ethnicity***	%
Non-Hispanic white (white only)	88.7%
Hispanic or Latino/a/e	<5 people
Native American	3.9%
Asian	<5 people
Black	<5 people
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<5 people
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	4.3%

Table 8. *Characteristics of Older Adult Respondents*

City or Service Area	%
Bend	46.8%
La Pine	13.0%
Madras	4.3%
Prineville	6.9%
Redmond	17.3%
Sisters	10.0%
Warm Springs	<5 people

Educational Attainment*	%
High school degree or less	8.7%
Some college	19.5%
2-year degree or technical degree	12.1%
Bachelor's degree or higher	58.4%
Prefer to self describe or missing	2.6%
Income	**%**
Less than $25,000	14.3%
$25,000-$49,999	19.0%
$50,000-$74,999	14.7%
$75,000-$99,999	16.5%
$100,000 or more	20.8%
Prefer not to say	14.7%

Table 8. *Characteristics of Older Adult Respondents*

**Prefer to self-describe options were categorized, where possible.*
***Participants were asked to indicate the gender they identify with, followed by a question asking if they identify as transgender. Transgender respondents are counted with the gender they indicated in addition to the transgender category.*
****Respondents were able to select more than one option.*

Belonging: Communities & Identity Groups

To understand what communities and identity groups create a sense of belonging for older adults (65 or older) and those aged 18-64, we compared responses to the question "Which of the following communities or identity groups make you feel like you belong?" This comparison is depicted in Figure 21.

- Across both groups, **"family"** and people or friends who share **"hobbies or recreational activities"** were the most frequently selected options, selected by 88.3% and 73.2% of older adults respectively.

- A significantly greater proportion of older adults responded that they feel like they belong in many of the communities and groups compared to their younger counterparts. We observed the most substantial differences for people or friends who are your **"age or generation,"** (61.5% of older adults compared to 35.3% of those 18-64) and those who share **"your political beliefs,"** (52.8% of older adults compared to 34.9% of those 18-64).

- On the other hand, significantly fewer older adults selected **"coworkers"** (only 24.7% of older adults) or people or friends they went to **"school or university"** with (16.9% of older adults) which may be reflective of generational differences. Given this nuance, it may not be an area that merits policy or programmatic intervention. The **"LGBTQIA+ community"** (10.4% of older adults and people who shared their **"race or ethnicity"** (9.1% of older adults) were also less frequently selected by older adults.

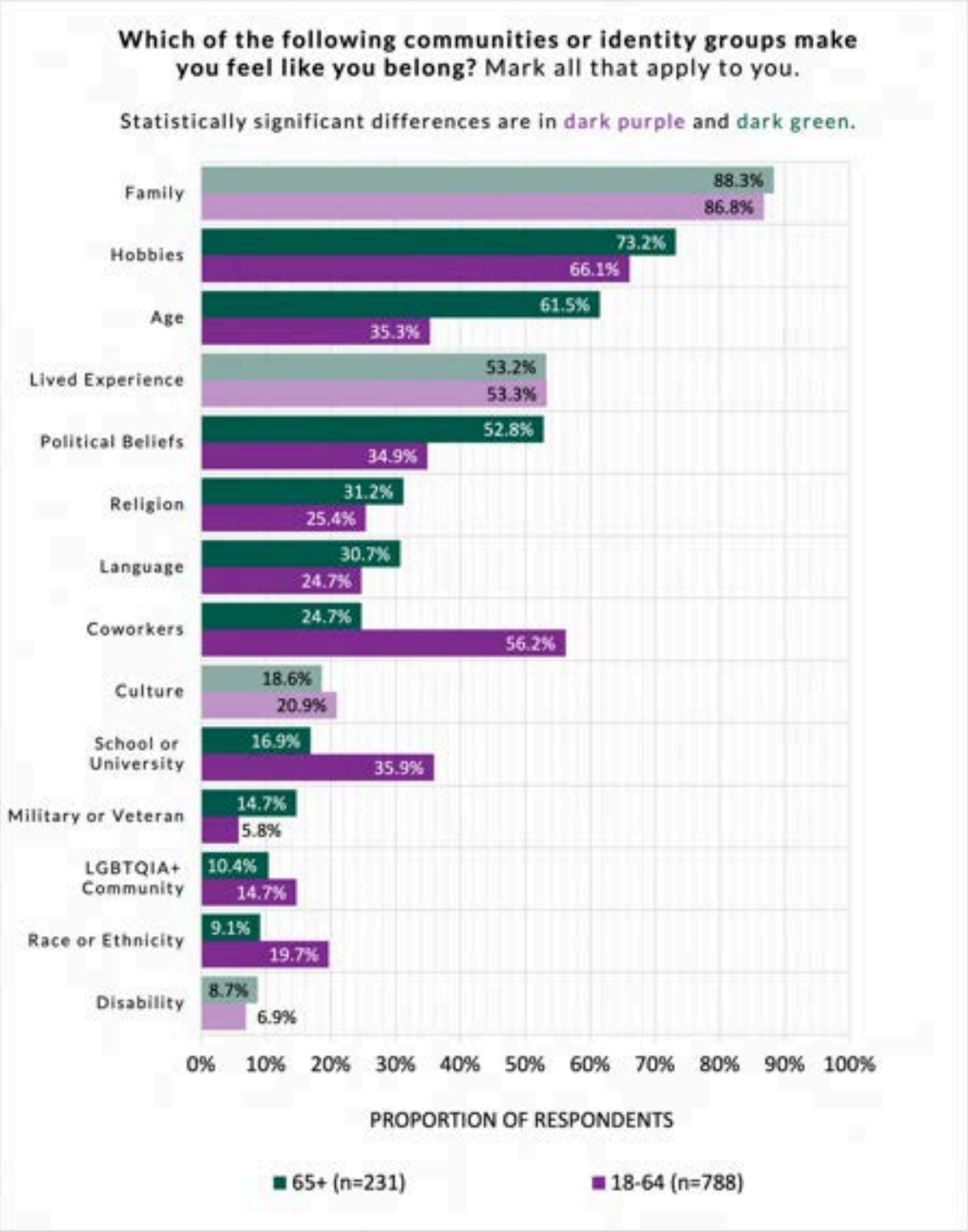


Figure 21. *Belonging in Communities and Identity Groups, Older Adults*

Belonging: Places and Spaces

In an examination of how older adults responded to the question "In which of the following places or spaces do you feel like you belong?", we compared responses among older adults and the rest of the sample. This comparison is presented in Figure 22.

- For both groups, **"where you live"** was the most frequent response. Nonetheless, a significantly greater proportion of older adults selected this option compared to those 18-64 (93.1% compared to 84.5%, respectively). Length of time living in Central Oregon, or conversely, intentionally moving to the region for retirement may be factors that contribute to this difference.

- Older adults were less likely to select **"workplace"** (20.3% of older adults), **"school"** (4.8% of older adults), and **"online spaces"** (4.8%) as places or spaces where they feel that they belong; this reflects differences in generations and life stages.

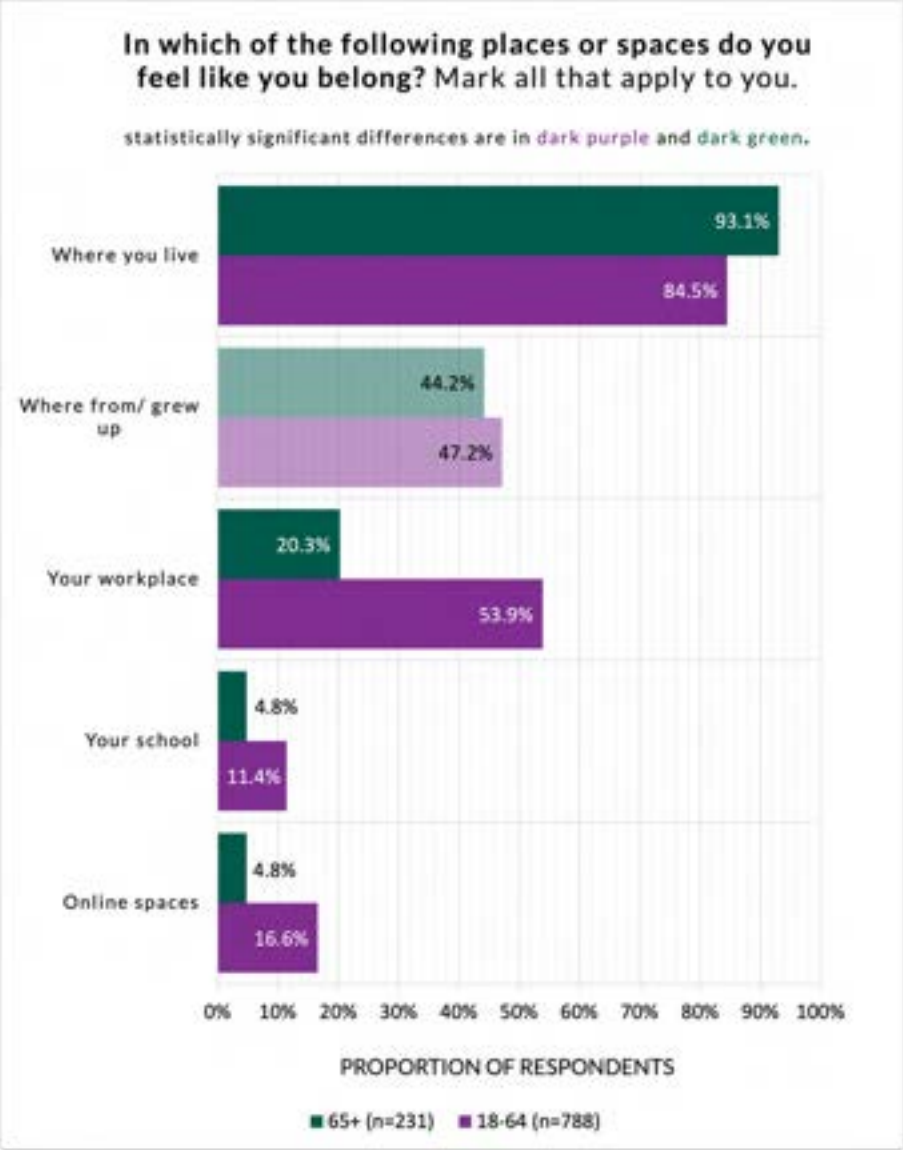


Figure 22. *Belonging in Places and Spaces, Older Adults*

Resilience

To understand measures of resilience for older adults, we compared ARM scores for those aged 65+ and those 18-64. Response items on the ARM scale ranged from “not at all” to “a lot” with the proportions of individuals who indicated that the statements apply to them “quite a bit” or “a lot” compared below in Figure 23. Additionally, we used comparison tests to understand statistically significant differences in the scores for each item between the two groups.

- The highest-scoring item across groups was **"I can solve problems without harming myself or others;”** 97.8% of older adults indicated this applied to them.

- Older adults had significantly higher scores on most ARM items, apart from **“I have opportunities to show others that I can act responsibly”** which had no significant difference, and **“getting and improving qualifications or skills is important to me,”** which was lower among older adults compared to those age 18-64. This was the lowest-scoring item for older adults (only 61.1% of older adults said that this applies to them quite a bit or a lot).

- Notably, the biggest gap between generations was for the item **“I feel I belong in my community”** which was endorsed by 67.2% of older adults but only 51.3% of those aged 18-64.

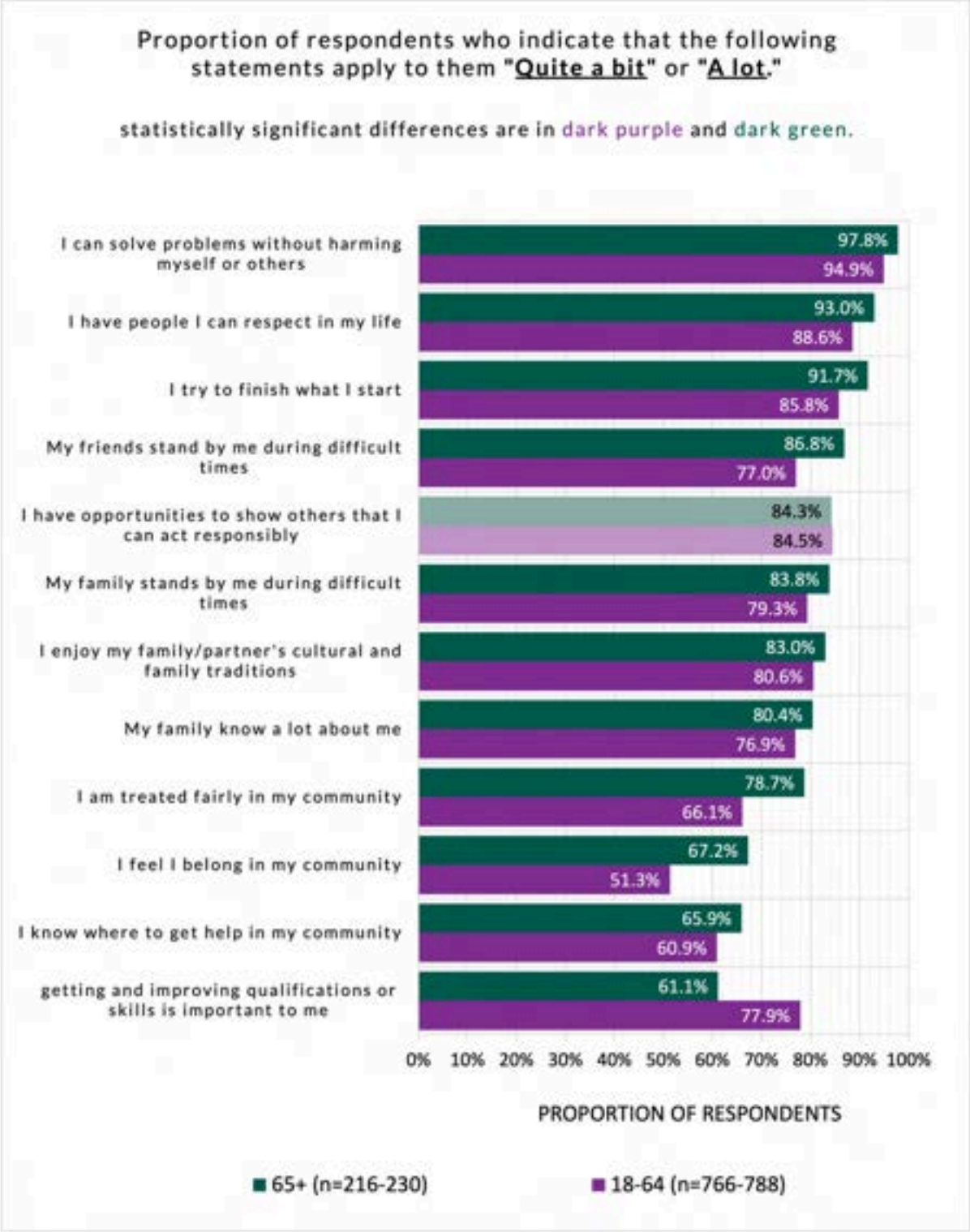


Figure 23. *Adult Resilience Measure, Older Adults*

Community Attachment and Connectedness

We additionally compared responses to the Community Attachment and Connectedness (CAC) measure. Response items on the CAC scale ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with the proportions of older adults who indicated that they "somewhat" or "strongly" agree with each statement compared to the rest of the sample in Figure 24. Additionally, we used comparison tests to understand statistically significant differences in the scores for each item between the two groups.

- High-scoring items were similar across the two groups, although older adults had significantly higher scores for the top-scoring items, including **"I feel safe in public spaces in my community,"** (76.8% of older adults agreed with this statement) **"I prefer living in this community over other communities,"** (73.2% agreed) and **"I participate in recreational activities in my community,"** (72.1% agreed).

- While **"I feel like I have some influence or control over decisions in my community"** was the lowest-scoring item for both groups, older adults had higher scores on this item (38.6% agreed) compared to those aged 18-64.

- **"I believe I have a lot to give to my community"** (64.6% of older adults agreed) was the only item where older adults scored significantly lower compared to young adults.

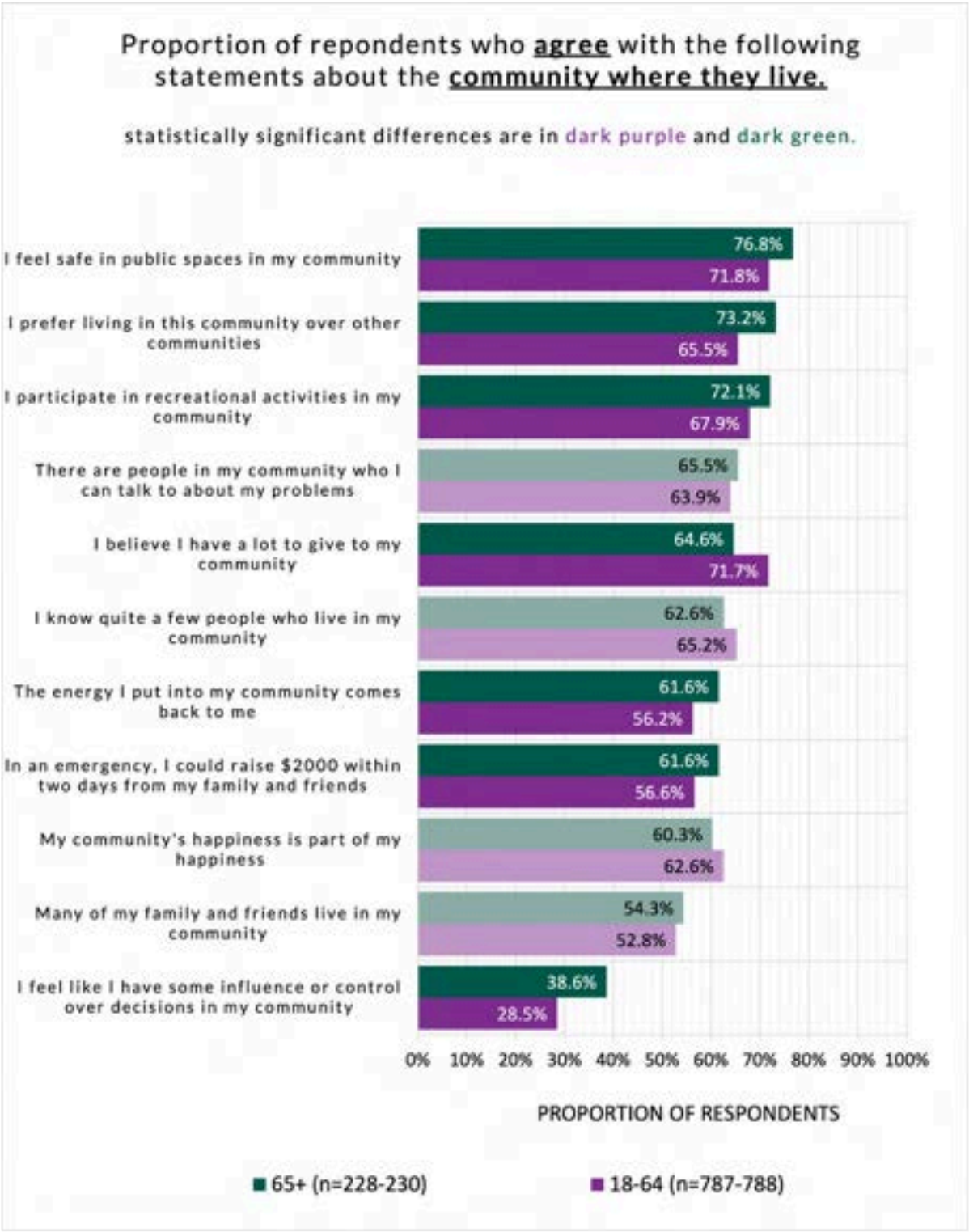


Figure 24. *Community Attachment and Connectedness, Older Adults*

Focus Group Findings

Finding Ways to Continuously Contribute to the Community

In the focus group with older adults, participants underscored the **transition from family-centric activities to pursuits like hobbies, volunteerism, and recreation** to cultivate a sense of belonging. Many found enjoyment in the companionship of peers and discovered new friendships through community service. While family remained significant for some, others indicated that their connection to the community no longer revolved around their adult children or grandchildren.

Older adults described feeling a sense of belonging to the community when they could **apply their past professional skills and experiences** to volunteer work or their participation in activities or interest groups. Additionally, they described feeling a sense of connection with their neighbors and the broader community when they perceived themselves as useful, helpful, and valued contributors.

The internet was also described as a major contributor to belonging for older adults. Some participants described using the **internet to connect with others from previous phases of their lives** or to connect with **others with shared interests.** Nonetheless, older adults also noted that the internet can foster tribalism and division in the community.

> "Facebook for me is reconnecting to children that I grew up with in grade school and graduated from high school together with and went to university and all of those things."
>
> -Older Adult Focus Group Participant

Healthcare and Belonging

Older adults shared that **healthcare settings are central** to their sense of belonging in the community. Older adults said they had higher and more frequent care needs than when they were younger, and having **personal relationships with their providers** gives them a sense of belonging. One participant shared that their health care provider has a robust system for referrals to mental health care providers in-house, including those that take Medicare; this made them feel cared for and valued.

Challenges discussed included **navigating the health care system and difficulty finding mental health care providers** who accept Medicare. Another issue that older adults identified was that providers often move from practice to practice, which makes it difficult to maintain continuity of care and build personal relationships.

"[Doctors moving practices] is getting to be a real concern... you want to have a working relationship over an extended period of time. I view working with doctors as a personal relationship. It's professional as well, but it should be personal... I want to continue to work with the doctors [who] have a history with me."

-Older Adult Focus Group Participant

Barriers to Participation

Barriers to belonging include **barriers to participating in daily life,** including recreational settings, and celebratory and special occasions. These could be physical and social barriers to participation, but also include barriers to receiving help and needed services. In focus groups with older adults, spaces with lots of people could feel intimidating and at times present safety issues.

Aging can also inhibit participation in social settings. In outdoor spaces, some participants felt excluded from activities they used to enjoy based on perceptions of their age and ability. Some also expressed reluctance to try new activities and said it could be hard to enter new spaces.

Moving or relocating in retirement can also create barriers to belonging. Many individuals relocate to Central Oregon to retire, which is a major life shift and can disrupt existing social networks. Additionally, the influx of people moving to the region has created new challenges, including that of defining and building community.

"We're just so mobile. Our sense of community has just absolutely been expanded and redefined. And I think we're still trying to figure it out now, because especially us on the West Coast, we've pushed west. And so it takes a lot of intention to really have community."

-Older Adult Focus Group Participant

Lastly, older adults identified **generational gaps as a hindrance** to their sense of belonging. Some individuals expressed efforts to bridge this divide by assuming a mentorship role as seniors, offering expertise and knowledge to younger adults. However, for others, **differences in beliefs, life experiences, and values** across age groups posed significant obstacles to forming friendships and fostering supportive interactions. This disconnect was palpable not only in family environments but also within social circles and friend groups.

"As an older person, I am reluctant sometimes to join in conversations with younger people. I'm working on that. But to assert myself and say, "Gee, I don't really see it that way, or my life experiences are different than theirs." It's that generational gap. Sometimes it's difficult for me to understand, even with my own family, what some of their norms are."

-Older Adult Focus Group Participant

Co-Interpretation Takeaways

Researchers joined a meal service at the senior center to share findings from the survey with older adults. Participants in this community data co-interpretation session affirmed the significance of place to many older adults. Participants in this community data co-interpretation session revealed that **many older adults deliberately selected Central Oregon as a place to retire.** This intentional choice likely contributes to the larger proportion of older adults feeling a sense of belonging in their community. Another key takeaway from community data co-interpretation was that **interpersonal relationships between family and other community members** – especially in close-knit, rural communities – are important contributors to a sense of belonging. Participants elaborated that caring and being cared about, listening and being listened to, and helping and being helped were ways that older adults build community connections and experience their sense of inclusion within a community.

Recommendations from Older Adults to Promote Community Belonging:

- The lack of belonging in online spaces may be an area for improvement; older adults in the community data co-interpretation session expressed concerns about online scams and challenges navigating online spaces. Provide classes and resources to learn and navigate this changing environment.
- Older adults encounter challenges with basic needs. Transportation options, healthy food and physical activity resources, affordable housing, and companionship are areas of focus.
- Increase opportunities for connection with individuals without family nearby.
- Support activities, events, and resources that provide community gathering spaces for older adults and veterans.

Findings: Parents and Caregivers in Central Oregon

Survey Findings

Demographics

Close to a quarter (23.7%) of the 1,109 survey respondents were parents or primary caregivers of children under 18. While the demographics of this group were similar to the broader sample, more parents and caregivers identified as women.

Gender*	%
Man	17.8%
Woman	80.9%
Non-Binary	<5 people
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	<5 people
Transgender**	<5 people
Age	**%**
18-34	26.1%
35-64	73.0%
65+	<5 people

Race & Ethnicity***	%
Non-Hispanic white (white only)	73.0%
Hispanic or Latino/a/e	15.8%
Native American	4.6%
Asian	2.9%
Black	<5 people
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<5 people
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	<5 people

Table 9. *Characteristics of Parents and Caregivers*

City or Service Area	%
Bend	44.4%
La Pine	12.9%
Madras	11.2%
Prineville	10.8%
Redmond	15.8%
Sisters	2.5%
Warm Springs	2.5%

Educational Attainment*	%
High school degree or less	13.3%
Some college	17.4%
2-year degree or technical degree	16.2%
Bachelor's degree or higher	53.1%
Income	**%**
Less than $25,000	8.3%
$25,000-$49,999	17.4%
$50,000-$74,999	20.3%
$75,000-$99,999	17.0%
$100,000 or more	29.5%
Prefer not to say	7.5%

Table 9. *Characteristics of Parents and Caregivers*

**Prefer to self-describe options were categorized, where possible.*
***Participants were asked to indicate the gender they identify with, followed by a question asking if they identify as transgender. Transgender respondents are counted with the gender they indicated in addition to the transgender category.*
****Respondents were able to select more than one option.*

Belonging: Communities & Identity Groups

To understand what communities and identity groups create a sense of belonging for parents and caregivers compared to the rest of the sample, we compared responses to the question “Which of the following communities or identity groups make you feel like you belong?” This comparison is depicted in Figure 25.

- ·Across both groups, **“family”** (94.6% of parents and caregivers) and people or friends who share **“hobbies or recreational activities”** (63.1% of parents and caregivers) were the most frequently selected options. Nonetheless, in comparison tests, significantly more parents and caregivers selected “family” and fewer selected people or friends who share your “hobbies or recreational activities.”

- A smaller proportion selected those of the same **“age or generation”** (31.5% of parents and caregivers), those who share **“political beliefs”** (29.9% of parents and caregivers), as well as the **“military or veteran”** community (5.0% of parents and caregivers) and the **“disability”** community (4.6% of parents and caregivers), although the last two options were only endorsed by a small fraction of the overall sample.

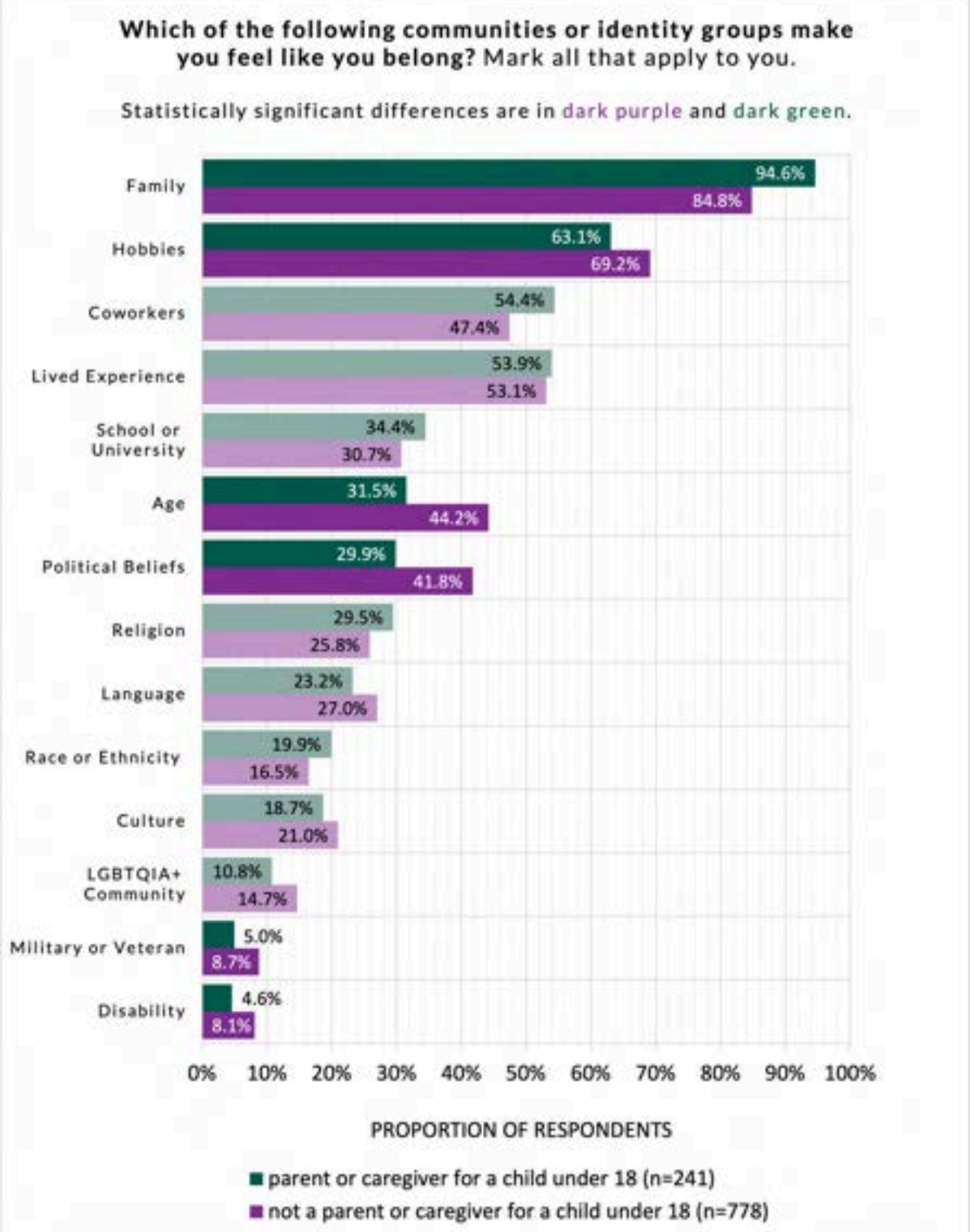


Figure 25. *Belonging in Communities and Identity Groups, Parents and Caregivers*

Belonging: Places and Spaces

In an examination of how parents and caregivers responded to the question "In which of the following places or spaces do you feel like you belong?" we compared responses among parents and caregivers and the rest of the sample. This comparison is presented in Figure 26.

- For both groups, **"where you live"** was the most frequent response, this was selected by 87.6% of parents and caregivers.
- A greater proportion of parents and caregivers selected **"your workplace"** (56.0% of parents and caregivers). This may be reflective of the fact that most parents and caregivers are of working age compared to the overall sample.

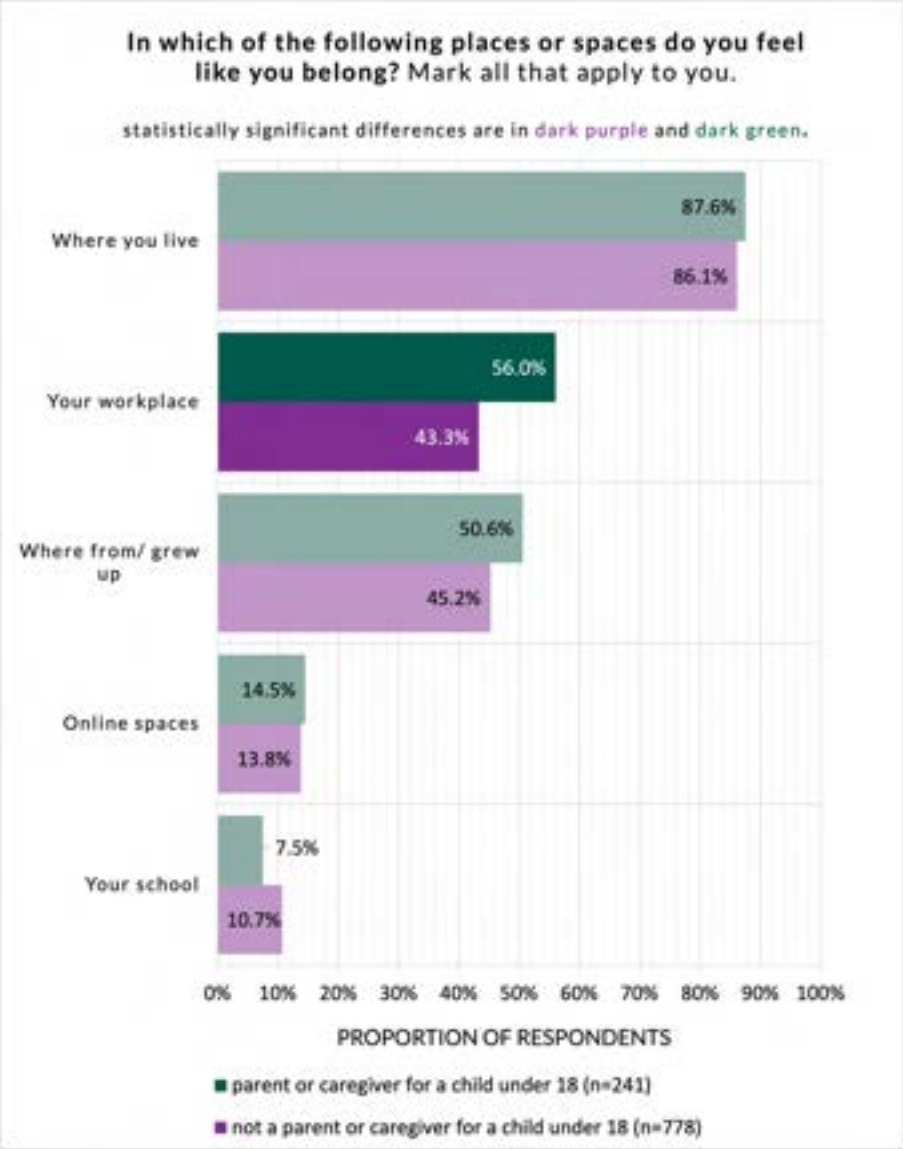


Figure 26. *Belonging in Places and Spaces, Parents and Caregivers*

Resilience

To understand measures of resilience for parents and caregivers, we compared ARM scores for parents and caregivers to the rest of the sample. Response items on the ARM scale ranged from “not at all” to “a lot” with the proportions of individuals who indicated that the statements apply to them “quite a bit” or “a lot” compared below in Figure 27. Additionally, we used comparison tests to understand statistically significant differences in the scores for each item between the two groups.

- Overall, responses to ARM items were similar among parents and the rest of the sample. The highest-scoring item across groups was **"I can solve problems without harming myself or others.”** (95.0% of parents indicated that this statement applied to them).

- Like the rest of the sample, **“I feel I belong in my community”** was the lowest-scoring item for parents and caregivers. (57.5% of parents and caregivers indicated this statement applied to them).

- Parents and caregivers had higher scores for **“I enjoy my family/partner’s cultural and family traditions,” “my family knows a lot about me”** and **“getting and improving qualifications or skills is important to me,”** Nonetheless, the differences between parents and the rest of the sample were relatively small.

- Parents and caregivers had significantly lower scores for the items **“I have people I can respect in my life”** and **“I try to finish what I start.”** However, the differences were not large, and many parents and caregivers indicated that these statements applied to them (88.4% and 85.1% for the items respectively).

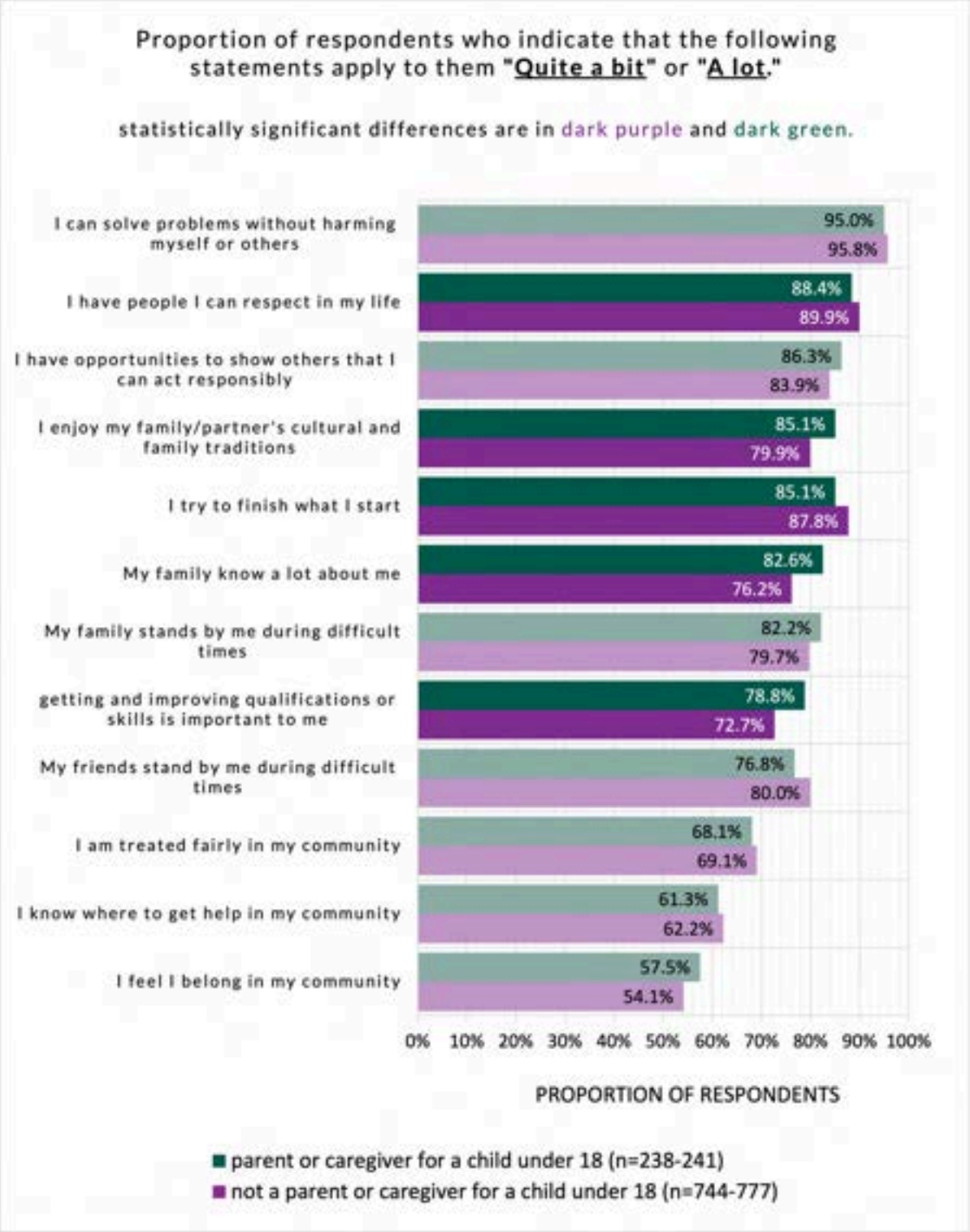


Figure 27. *Adult Resilience Measure, Parents and Caregivers*

Community Attachment and Connectedness

To understand parents' and caregivers' scores on the Community Attachment and Connectedness (CAC) scale, we compared their responses to the rest of the sample. Response items on the CAC scale ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Additionally, we used comparison tests to understand statistically significant differences in the scores for each item between the two groups. The comparison of responses is depicted in Figure 28.

- High-scoring items were similar across the two groups. **"I believe I have a lot to give to my community"** was the highest-scoring item for parents and caregivers; 70.5% of parents and caregivers agreed with this statement.

- **"I feel like I have some influence or control over decisions in my community"** was the lowest-scoring item for both groups, with only 28.2% of parents or caregivers agreeing with this statement.

- **"Many of my family and friends live in this community"**(57.7% of parents and caregivers agreed) was the only item that parents and caregivers scored significantly higher than the rest of the sample.

- Parents and caregivers scored significantly lower on the item **"In an emergency, I could raise $2000 within two days from my family and friends."** Only 51.9% of parents and caregivers agreed with this statement, compared to 59.5% of the rest of the sample.

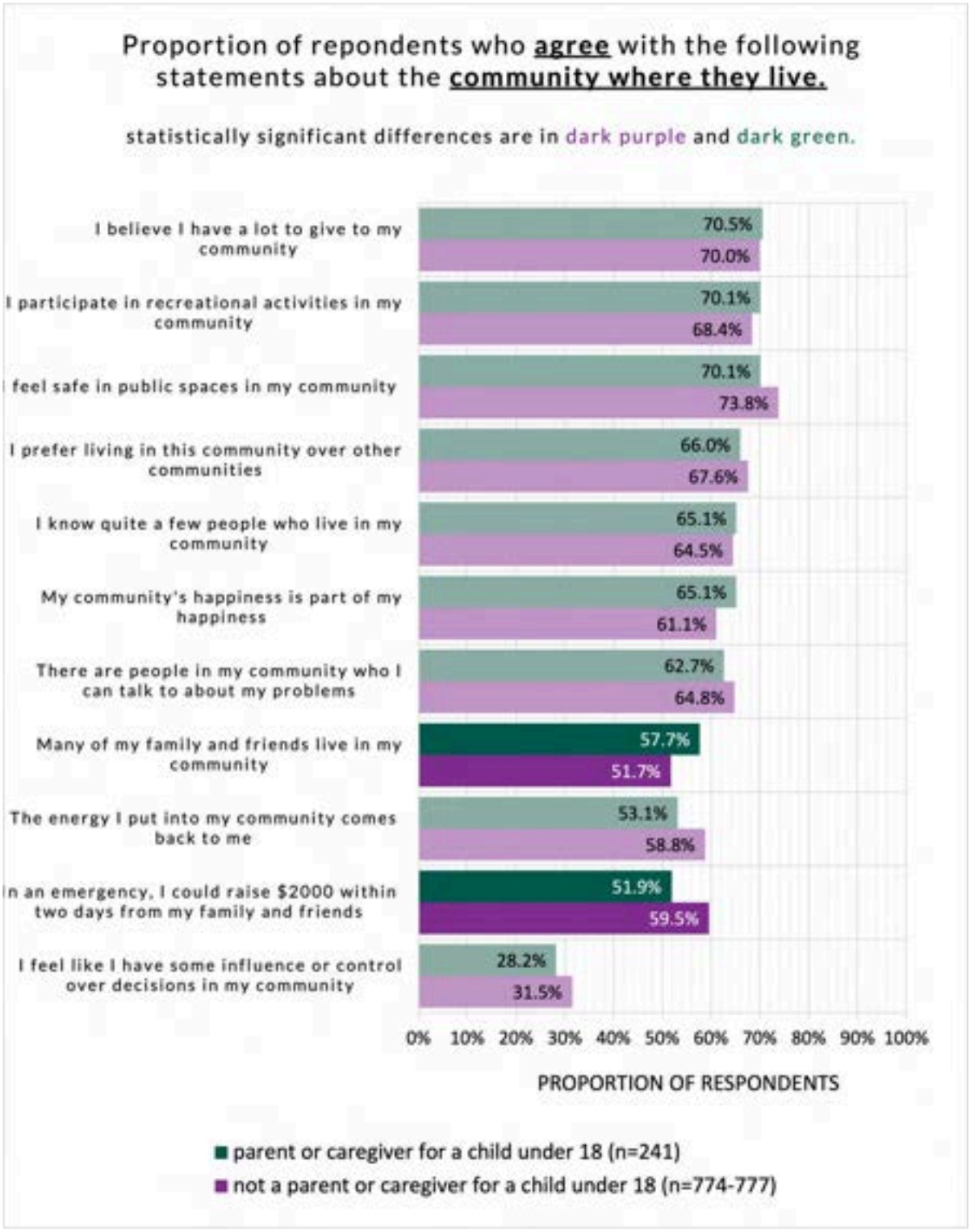


Figure 28. *Community Attachment and Connectedness, Parents and Caregivers*

Focus Group Findings

Family is Paramount

In focus groups with parents and caregivers, participants emphasized that **family serves as a vital link to the community.** This connection can be experienced through children's school and sports involvement, but also in church or other family-oriented activities. Parents of young children often find that their sense of belonging is tied to their role as a parent; it is often through their children that they form community, but it is also important that their community is inclusive of their children's presence and needs.

> "[Belonging] is a sense of safety, being in a place that is accepting of all types of people regardless of differences and knowing that I can be who I am, and my children can be who they are without fear."
>
> -Parent and Caregiver Focus Group Participant

Family-friendly spaces and activities were also noted as crucial for fostering a sense of belonging in the community. This also included activities that parents enjoyed. Participants expressed feeling **more comfortable in kid-friendly spaces** where their children's behaviors and fulfillment of their responsibilities as parents (e.g., nursing, feeding children, etc.) could be done without feeling scrutinized. The overall safety of a public space was also a big concern for parents before deciding whether to go to a given environment.

> "Sometimes, as parents, we feel like we can only go to places that are super kid friendly... What's going to happen if kids don't behave or have a tantrum or we have to leave?"
>
> -Parent and Caregiver Focus Group Participant

Judgement Toward Parents and Caregivers

Experiencing the **judgment of others and feeling unwanted in social spaces** was a concern shared by parents and caregivers, particularly in school settings or when connecting with other parents. **Economic constraints** were also highlighted, both within educational contexts and in recreational settings. For instance, the inability to afford club sports or expensive equipment for themselves or their children was seen as exclusionary, particularly in a community that emphasizes physical activity and outdoor pursuits.

"there's a lot of folks with money and different priorities that I have as someone who is low income and so it's really hard... when trying to connect with other parents at [school] events."
-Parent and Caregiver Group Participant

Co-Interpretation Takeaways

Parents and caregivers of children under 18 who participated in the community data co-interpretation session highlighted the strengths identified in survey responses. Notably, many **parents and caregivers have a lot to give to their community,** and most want to continue to build skills. The number of parents and caregivers who know where to get help in their community was on par with the overall sample, and parents agreed that **resilience is derived from having the tools and resources to undergo and overcome hardship**. This group's desire to acquire new skills, paired with their knowledge of local resources may be leverage points to build resiliency.

Recommendations from Parents and Caregivers to Promote Community Belonging:

- Create activity groups for youth and families to build skills and friendships.
- Community resource hubs such as the public library and 2-1-1 should consider ways to diversify and extend their communications about resources and opportunities.
- Increase access to low-cost recreational and after-school activities that provide enriching experiences for youth.
- Expand the types of venues that are family- and kid-friendly to include indoor spaces for inclement weather, quite spaces appropriate for babies, and developmentally diverse activities.
- Build programs that increase financial security for families.

Findings: Rural Residents in Central Oregon

Survey Findings

Demographics

Slightly over half of survey respondents (56.5%) indicated they live in zip codes defined as rural by the Oregon Office of Rural Health. This includes all zip codes outside of the city of Bend. Rural residents overall reported lower incomes and lower levels of educational attainment compared to their urban counterparts.

Gender*	%
Man	26.0%
Woman	71.0%
Non-Binary	1.7%
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	1.3%
Transgender**	0.9%
Age	**%**
18-34	25.1%
35-64	51.9%
65+	24.5%

Race & Ethnicity***	%
Non-Hispanic white (white only)	74.3%
Hispanic or Latino/a/e	11.5%
Native American	8.2%
Asian	1.2%
Black	<5 people
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.9%
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	4.9%

Table 10. *Characteristics of Rural Residents*

City or Service Area	%
Bend	7.6%
La Pine	23.6%
Madras	14.6%
Prineville	13.2%
Redmond	29.9%
Sisters	6.8%
Warm Springs	4.3%

Educational Attainment*	%
High school degree or less	14.6%
Some college	21.9%
2-year degree or technical degree	18.1%
Bachelor's degree or higher	44.8%
Income	**%**
Less than $25,000	13.5%
$25,000-$49,999	18.9%
$50,000-$74,999	17.9%
$75,000-$99,999	14.1%
$100,000 or more	24.7%
Prefer not to say	10.9%

Table 10. *Characteristics of Rural Residents*

**Prefer to self-describe options were categorized, where possible.*
***Participants were asked to indicate the gender they identify with, followed by a question asking if they identify as transgender. Transgender respondents are counted with the gender they indicated in addition to the transgender category.*
****Respondents were able to select more than one option.*

Belonging: Communities & Identity Groups

To understand what communities and identity groups create a sense of belonging for rural residents compared to urban residents, we compared responses to the question “Which of the following communities or identity groups make you feel like you belong?” This comparison is depicted in Figure 29.

- Across both groups, **“family”** (88.5% of rural residents) and people or friends who share **“hobbies or recreational activities”** (64.6% of rural residents) were the most frequently selected options. Nonetheless, in comparison tests, significantly fewer rural residents selected "hobbies or recreational activities.”

- Significantly fewer rural residents selected people or friends who share a **“lived experience”** (46.7%), those who share **“political beliefs”**(35.9%), from **“school or university”** (26.4%), or those who share the same **“culture”** (18.1%) as groups with whom they feel that they belong.

- On the other hand, significantly more rural residents selected those who share their **“religion”** (29.3%) and the **“military or veteran”** community (10.1%).

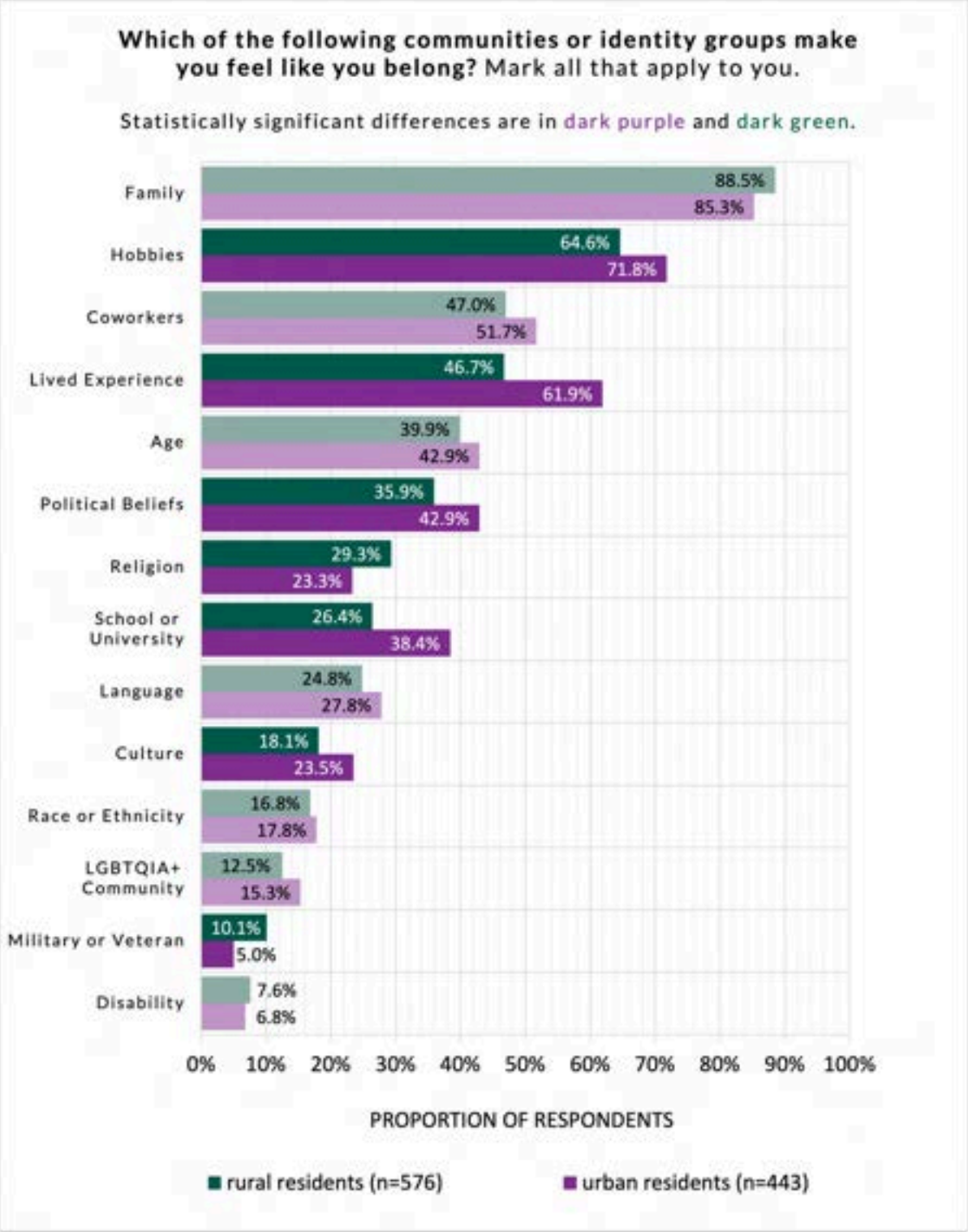


Figure 29. *Belonging in Communities and Identity Groups, Rural Residents*

Belonging: Places and Spaces

To understand how rural residents responded to the question "In which of the following places or spaces do you feel like you belong?" We compared responses among rural residents and the rest of the sample. This comparison is presented in Figure 30.

- For both groups, **"where you live"** was the most frequent response, however, a significantly higher share of rural residents selected this option (88.2%).
- A significantly lower proportion of rural residents selected **"your school"** (7.6%). This may be reflective of fewer higher educational opportunities or institutions in rural areas of Central Oregon.

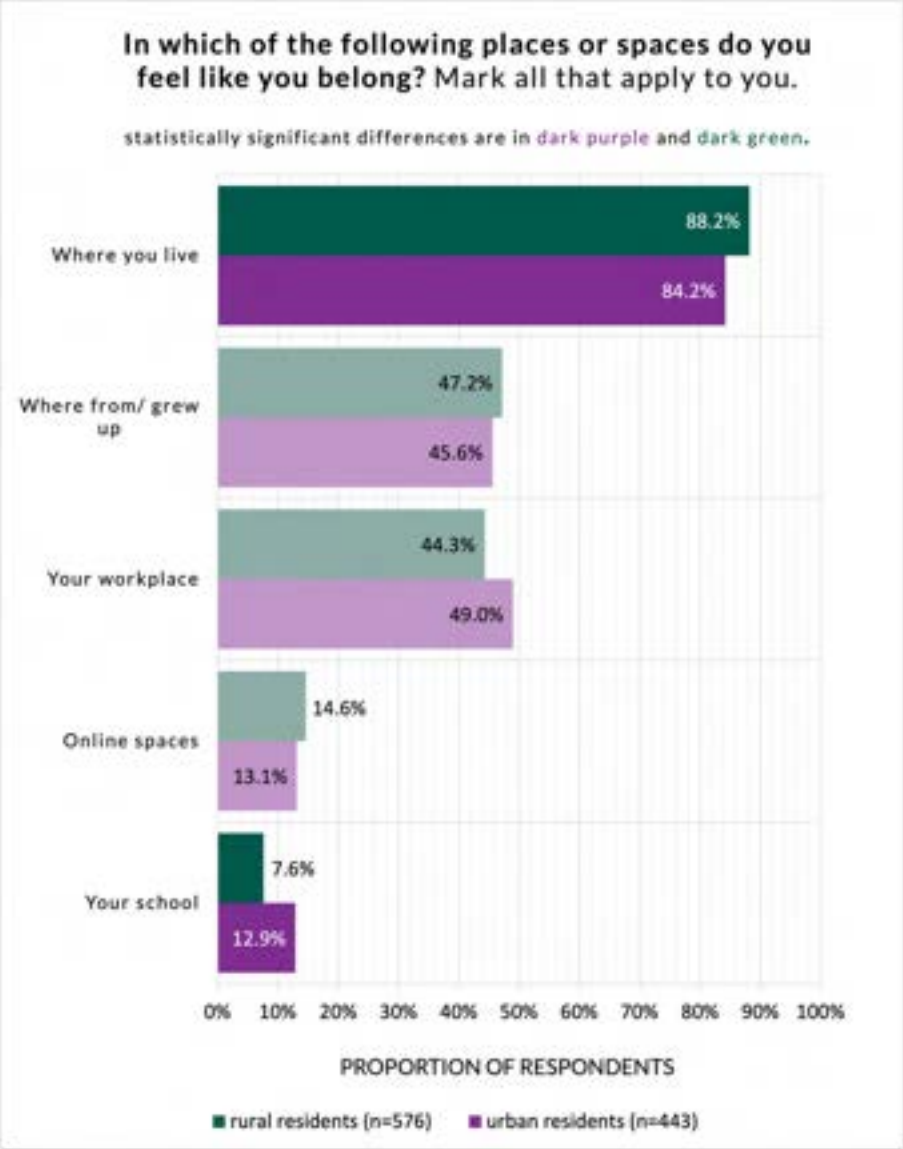


Figure 30. *Belonging in Places and Spaces, Rural Residents*

Resilience

To understand measures of resilience for rural residents, we compared their ARM scores to the rest of the sample. Response items on the ARM scale ranged from “not at all” to “a lot” with the proportions of individuals who indicated that the statements apply to them “quite a bit” or “a lot” compared below in Figure 31. Additionally, we used comparison tests to understand statistically significant differences in the scores for each item between the two groups.

- Overall, responses to ARM items were similar among rural and urban residents. The highest-scoring item across groups was **"I can solve problems without harming myself or others.”** (95.3% of rural residents indicated that this statement applied to them).

- Similar to the rest of the sample, **“I feel I belong in my community”** was the lowest-scoring item for rural residents. (54.1% of rural residents indicated this statement applied to them).

- Rural residents had higher scores for **“I enjoy my family/partner’s cultural and family traditions”** although the differences between rural residents and the rest of the sample were relatively small.

- Rural respondents had significantly lower scores for the items **“I have opportunities to show others that I can act responsibly”** and **“My friends stand by me during difficult times.”** However, about 4 out of 5 rural respondents indicated that these statements did apply to them (82.2% and 77.0% for the items respectively).

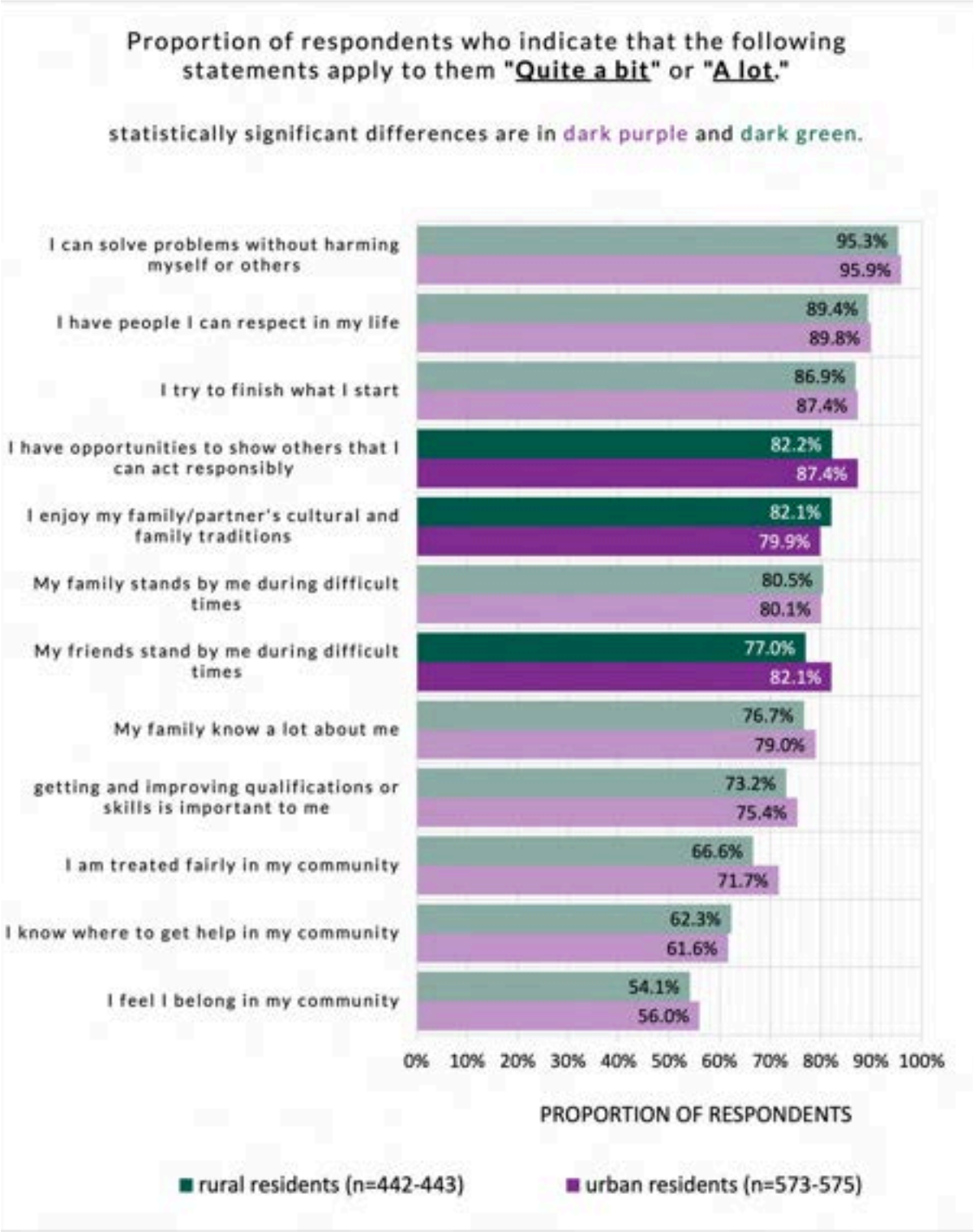


Figure 31. *Adult Resilience Measure, Rural Residents*

Community Attachment and Connectedness

To understand rural respondents' scores on the Community Attachment and Connectedness (CAC) scale, we compared their responses to those of urban residents. Response items on the CAC scale ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree;" these are compared below in Figure 32. Additionally, we used comparison tests to understand statistically significant differences in the scores for each item between the two groups.

- "I feel safe in my community" was the highest-scoring item for rural residents, 72.6% of rural residents agreed with this statement. Conversely, the highest-scoring item for urban residents was "I participate in recreational activities in my community;" scores for rural residents were significantly lower for this item. (76.1% of urban residents agreed, compared to 63.2% of rural residents). This may indicate a need for improved accessibility to recreational opportunities for rural communities, particularly those that are free or low-cost.

- **"I feel like I have some influence or control over decisions in my community"** was the lowest-scoring item for both groups, with only 30.4% of rural respondents agreeing with this statement.

- **"Many of my family and friends live in this community"** (56.3% of rural residents agreed) was the only item where rural residents scored significantly higher than the rest of the sample.

- Rural respondents also scored significantly lower on the items **"In an emergency, I could raise $2000 within two days from my family and friends"** (53.0% of rural residents agreed), **"there are people in my community that I can talk to about my problems,"** (67.5% agreed) and **"my community's happiness is part of my happiness"** (57.8% agreed). While still endorsed by more than half of the rural respondents, these differences may point to a lack of reciprocal emotional and instrumental support for rural residents compared to those living in urban areas.

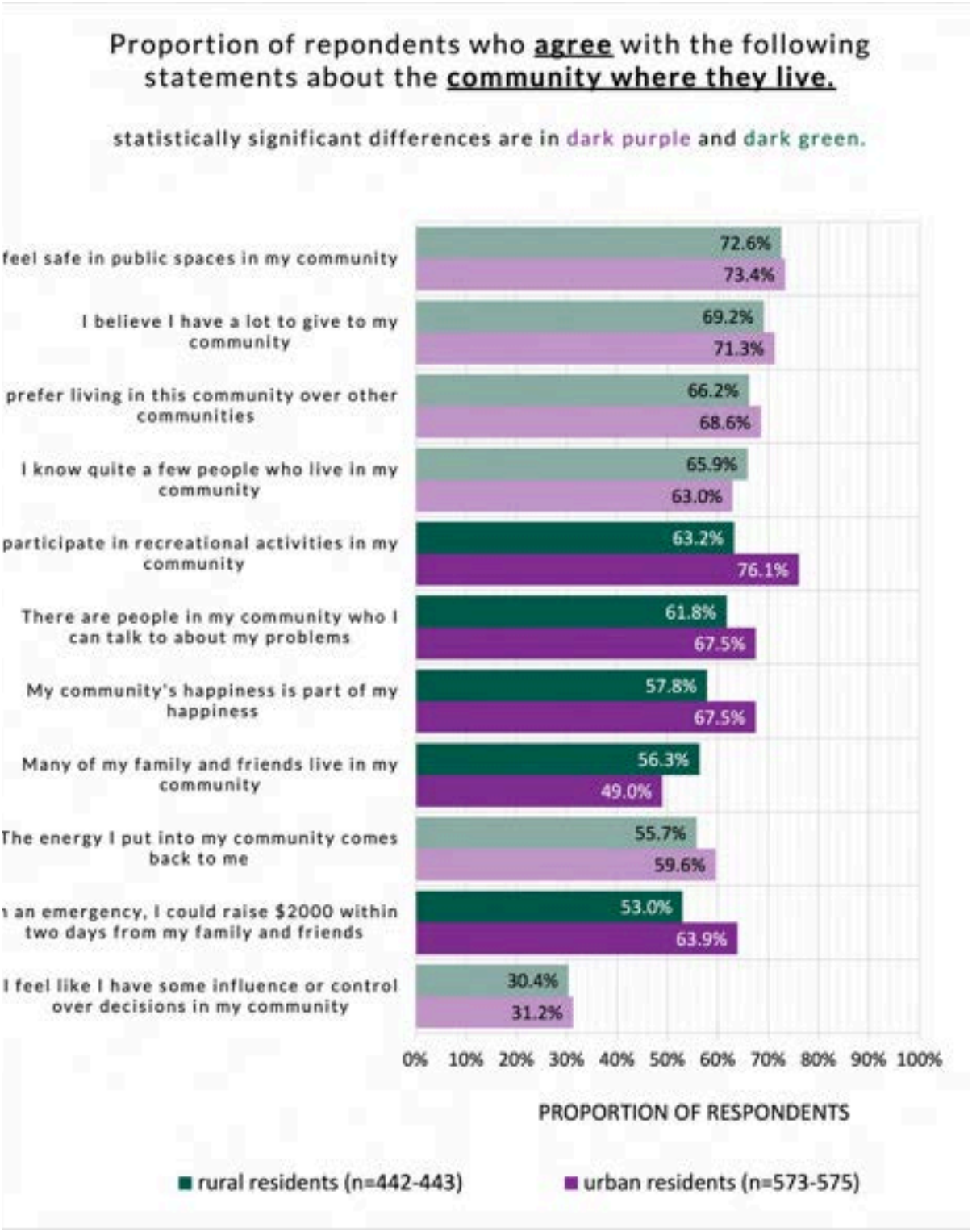


Figure 32. *Community Attachment and Connectedness, Rural Residents*

Focus Group Findings

Rural Living and Connection to the Land

In the focus group with rural residents, the **proximity to nature and connection to the land** emerged as key factors contributing to sense of belonging in their communities. Participants associated being "rural" with appreciating solitude and vast spaces, yet they also highlighted a strong sense of community where mutual support prevails. They discussed various events and festivities that serve to unite people, along with a shared sense of responsibility towards one another.

Nonetheless, **geographical distance can pose challenges** for those living in remote areas or seeking to build connections around specific identities or interests, such as parenting or religious affiliations. The distances required to meet up with others or access particular locations can be daunting, necessitating careful planning and significant travel efforts.

> "We're still struggling with that social connection in our church. It isn't the primary reason we go, but it's one of the places I thought we would connect. And partly, again, it's just the geography of living half an hour away I think."
>
> -Rural Focus Group Participant

Additionally, some activities or services are only available in Bend, which adds even more travel time and exacerbates financial barriers.

> "If we want to participate in things, we travel to Bend or to other places... that takes extra time, extra money, all of those things. And so, it really can create that barrier."
>
> -Rural Focus Group Participant

"Lifelong Oregonian"

Certain participants identified themselves as "lifelong Oregonians" or multi-generational Oregonians, finding a profound sense of belonging through their **deep-rooted ties to community history and the land**. However, these longstanding geographical connections were also acknowledged as potential hurdles for newcomers. New residents often **encounter exclusion or animosity** from established community members, along with assumptions about their origins, often stereotyped as being from California.

"I actually have had people tell me to go back to California... I joke, I literally have never been to California. But the assumption is that anybody who is not from here... is innately trying to make the community worse."

-Rural Focus Group Participant

Working in the City

Some rural residents find that their work and social activities are centered elsewhere, such as in Bend or Portland. They do not spend time in their local community, which can present a challenge for building more inclusive and diverse communities. Participants expressed an appreciation for the space and outdoor connection that rural living provides, demonstrating a **preference for rural living over city life.** However, when families settle in smaller communities but still have their work and social life in Bend or elsewhere, the local sense of community and belonging dwindles.

"We have become more of a bedroom community to Bend. So,the community has exploded in population, but a major part of the population doesn't spend a lot of time [here]. They're busy getting to and from work... getting dinner on the table and [helping] kids with their homework and going to bed."

-Rural Focus Group Participant

Findings: Spanish Speakers in Central Oregon

Survey Findings

Demographics

About one in 10 survey respondents indicated that they speak Spanish at home (10.9%). While most respondents identified as Hispanic or Latine/o/a (61.3%) a substantial proportion also identified as non-Hispanic white. Bend, Madras, and Redmond are the most common locations where Spanish-speaking residents live, and slightly more than half have a bachelor's degree or higher.

Gender*	%
Man	26.1%
Woman	71.2%
Non-Binary	<5 people
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	<5 people
Transgender**	<5 people
Age	**%**
18-34	36.9%
35-64	53.2%
65+	9.9%

Race & Ethnicity***	%
Non-Hispanic white (white only)	23.4%
Hispanic or Latino/a/e	61.3%
Native American	9.9%
Asian	<5 people
Black	<5 people
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<5 people
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	7.2%

Table 11. *Characteristics of Spanish-Speaking Respondents*

City or Service Area	%
Bend	45.0%
La Pine	4.5%
Madras	16.2%
Prineville	10.8%
Redmond	18.0%
Sisters	<5 people
Warm Springs	<5 people

Educational Attainment*	%
High school degree or less	21.6%
Some college	11.7%
2-year degree or technical degree	12.6%
Bachelor's degree or higher	53.2%
Income	**%**
Less than $25,000	12.6%
$25,000-$49,999	18.9%
$50,000-$74,999	19.8%
$75,000-$99,999	15.3%
$100,000 or more	27.5%
Prefer not to say	8.1%

Table 11. *Characteristics of Spanish Speaking Respondents*

**Prefer to self-describe options were categorized, where possible.*
***Participants were asked to indicate the gender they identify with, followed by a question asking if they identify as transgender. Transgender respondents are counted with the gender they indicated in addition to the transgender category.*
****Respondents were able to select more than one option.*

Belonging: Communities & Identity Groups

To understand what communities and identity groups create a sense of belonging for respondents who speak Spanish at home compared to the rest of the sample, we examined responses to the question "Which of the following communities or identity groups make you feel like you belong?" This comparison is depicted in Figure 33.

- Across both groups, **"family"** (91.9% of Spanish-speaking respondents) was the most frequent response, although a significantly greater proportion of Spanish-speaking participants selected this option.

- A greater proportion of Spanish speakers selected people or friends who **"share your culture,"** (53.2% of Spanish speakers) **"speak your language,"** (49.5% of Spanish speakers), and who **"share your race or ethnicity"** (48.6% of Spanish speakers). These differences indicate that Spanish speakers in Central Oregon may be more likely to seek belonging and connection with individuals who share their identities.

- A significantly smaller proportion of Spanish Speakers selected **"people or friends who share your hobbies or recreational activities"** (52.3% of Spanish speakers) They were also less likely to select those who share **"political beliefs"** (30.6% of Spanish speakers).

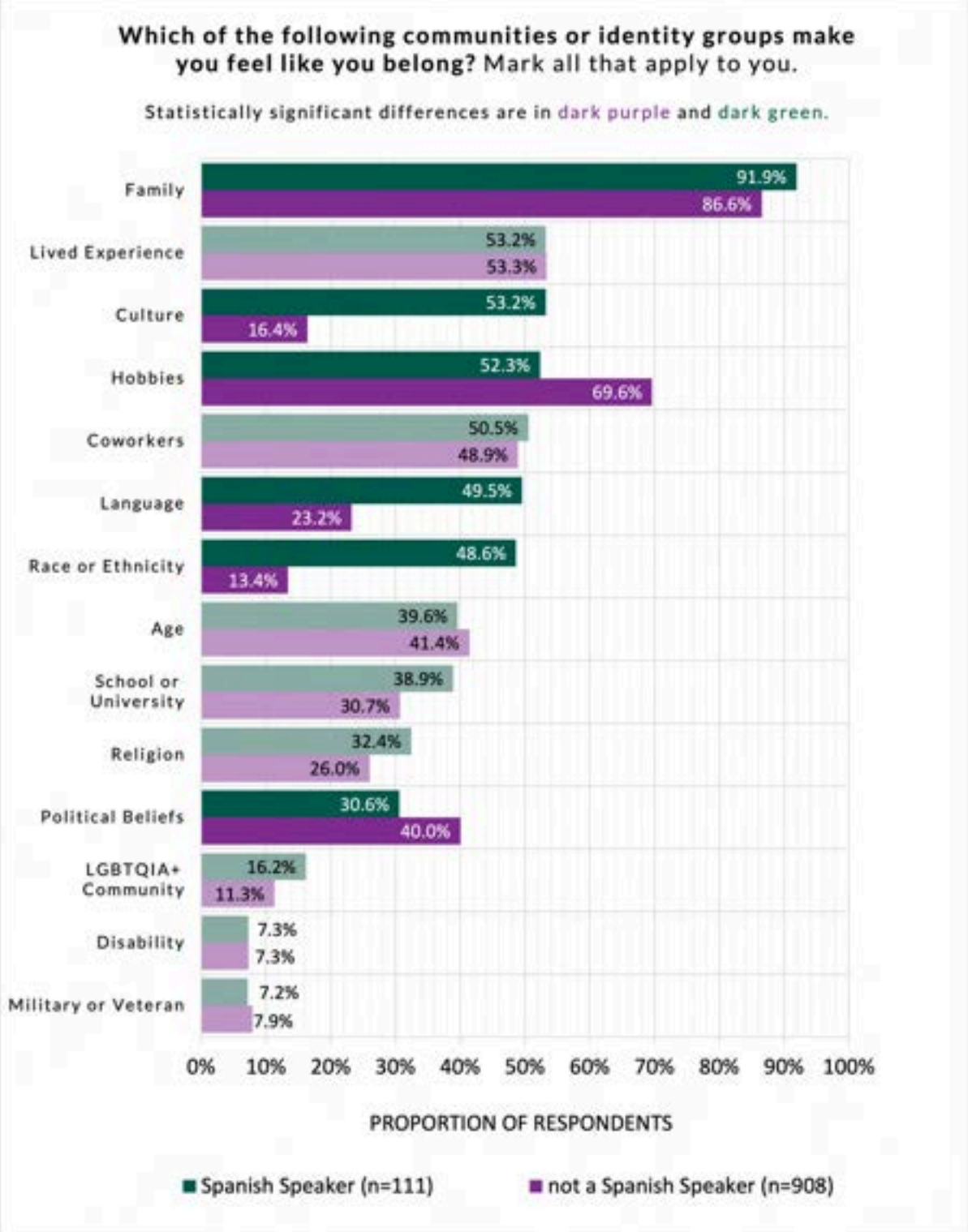


Figure 33. *Belonging in Communities and Identity Groups, Spanish Speakers*

Belonging: Places and Spaces

IIn the analysis of Spanish speakers' responses to the question “In which of the following places or spaces do you feel like you belong?” we compared Spanish speakers and the rest of the sample. This comparison is presented in Figure 34.

- For both groups, **“where you live”** was the most frequent response, this was selected by 82.9% of Spanish-speaking respondents.

- A significantly larger proportion of Spanish-speaking respondents selected **“where you’re from/grew up”** (55.0% of Spanish speakers), which may correspond with individuals who immigrated to Central Oregon and experience a deep connection with where they grew up or moved from. Spanish-speaking respondents also more frequently selected **“your school”** (15.3%), this may be due in part to the fact that the Spanish speakers in the sample were younger than the overall sample population.

- While Spanish-speaking respondents were younger overall, a significantly smaller proportion indicated that they belong in **“online spaces”** (7.2% of Spanish-speaking respondents).

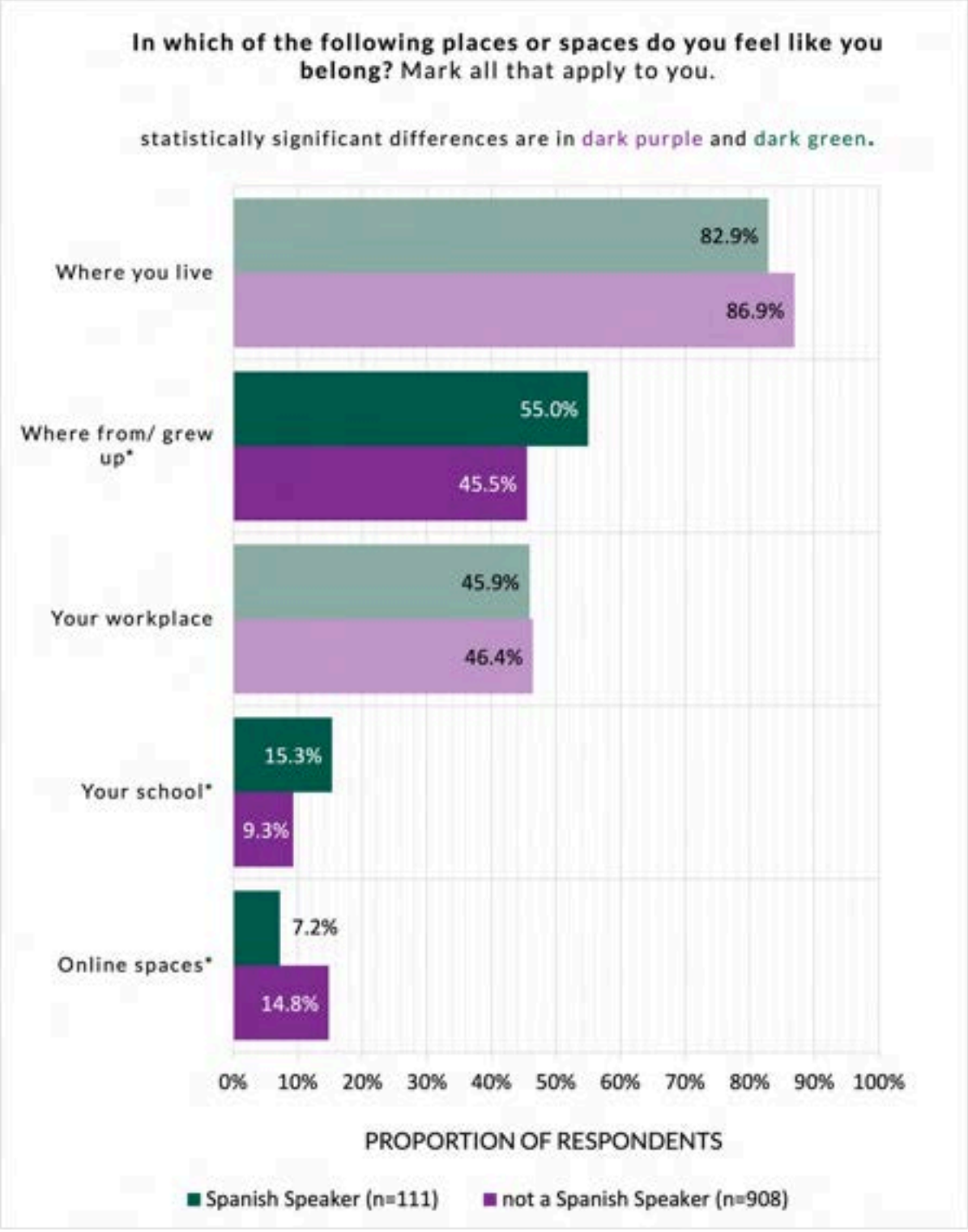


Figure 34. *Belonging in Places and Spaces, Spanish Speakers*

Resilience

To examine measures of resilience for Spanish-speaking respondents, we compared ARM scores for Spanish speakers to the rest of the sample. Response items on the ARM scale ranged from “not at all” to “a lot” with the proportions of individuals who indicated that the statements apply to them “quite a bit” or “a lot” compared below in Figure 35. Additionally, we used comparison tests to understand statistically significant differences in the scores for each item between the two groups.

- Similar to the rest of the sample and other populations we highlight in this report, the highest-scoring item for Spanish-speaking respondents was **"I can solve problems without harming myself or others.”** (92.8% of Spanish-speaking respondents indicated that this statement applied to them).

- Additionally, **“I feel I belong in my community”** was the lowest-scoring item for Spanish speakers, although it was not significantly different from the rest of the sample. (50.9% of Spanish speakers indicated this statement applied to them).

- Spanish speakers had higher scores for **“I enjoy my family/partner’s cultural and family traditions,”** (88.3% indicated that this applied to them) and **“getting and improving qualifications or skills is important to me,”** (84.5% indicated that this applied to them). This further demonstrates that culture and identity are a source of strength and resilience for Spanish speakers in Central Oregon.

- Spanish speakers scored lower on the item **“I am treated fairly in my community;”** only 54.6% of Spanish-speaking respondents indicated that this applied to them compared to 70.6% of the rest of the sample. Additionally, Spanish speakers had lower scores for **“My friends stand by me during difficult times,”** which was endorsed by 70.6% of Spanish-speaking respondents.

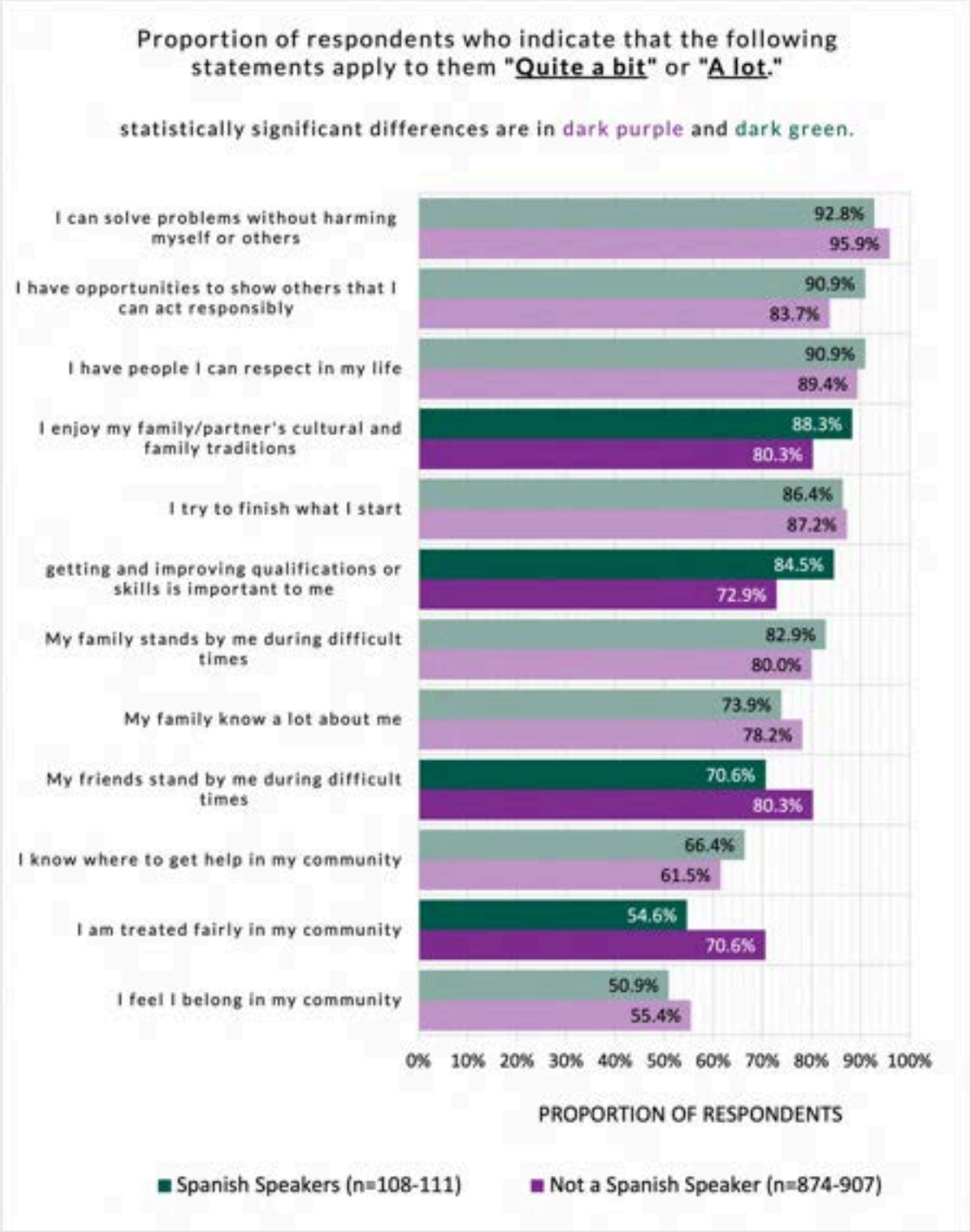


Figure 35. *Adult Resilience Measure, Spanish-Speaking Respondents*

Community Attachment and Connectedness

To examine Spanish-speaking respondents' scores on the Community Attachment and Connectedness (CAC) scale, we compared their responses to the rest of the sample. Response items on the CAC scale ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree;" these comparisons are in Figure 36. Additionally, we used comparison tests to understand statistically significant differences in the scores for each item between the two groups.

- The highest-scoring item for Spanish-speaking respondents was **"I believe I have a lot to give to my community,"** 72.7% of Spanish-speaking respondents agreed with this statement.

- Similar to the rest of the sample **"I feel like I have some influence or control over decisions in my community"** was the lowest-scoring item for Spanish speakers, with only 25.7% agreeing with this statement.

- Spanish speakers scored significantly lower on the items **"I feel safe in public spaces in my community,"** (61.5% of Spanish speakers agreed) **"I participate in recreational activities in my community"** (54.5% of Spanish speakers agreed), and **"there are people in my community who I can talk to about my problems"** (52.7% of Spanish speakers agreed). This indicates a need for improved access to recreational activities and support systems for minoritized communities in Central Oregon.

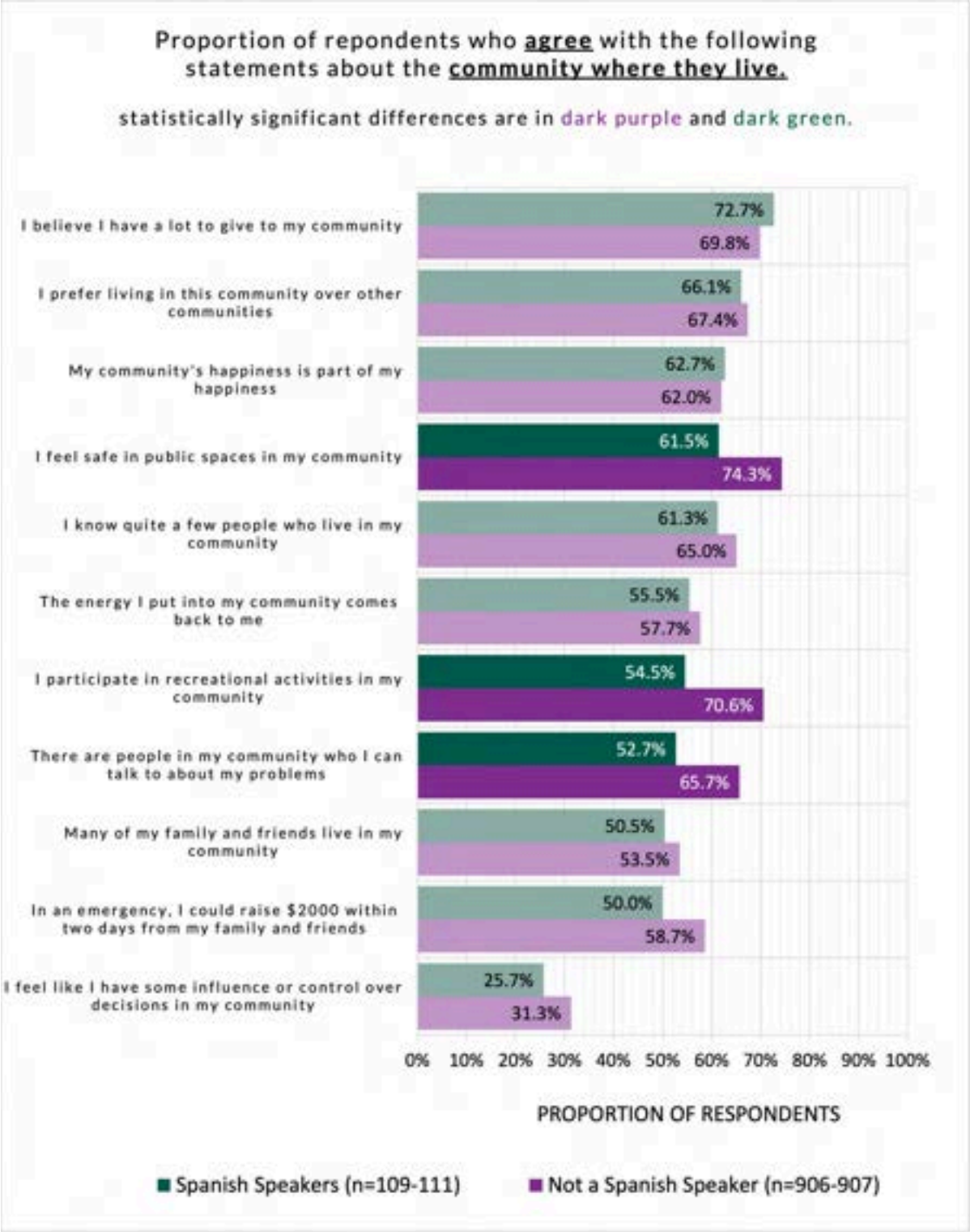


Figure 36. *Community Attachment and Connectedness, Spanish Speakers*

Focus Group Findings

Drivers of Belonging

Participants in the Spanish-speaking focus group described how being around others who are part of the Hispanic and Latino/a/e community offered refuge from the often **uncomfortable and isolating experience of living in a majority-white community.**

Clubs and social groups served as key areas for social connection where individuals had a shared identity. Most groups referenced by focus group participants were specific to Hispanic and Latino/a/e individuals, suggesting that having spaces carved out for people with shared cultural heritage, racial/ethnic identity, and language may be an important way to foster community connectedness.

> "Yo siento que pertenezco cuando se hacen eventos de comunidad hispana o latina. Me hace sentir que soy bienvenida, que pertenecen tanto ellos conmigo como yo con ellos."
>
> *"I feel like I belong at Hispanic or Latino community events. They make me feel like I am welcome, that the people there belong to me as much as I belong with them."*
> -Spanish Speaking Focus Group Participant

Focus group participants also expressed a desire to give back to their community because they were helped in some way. This **reciprocal giving** is a marker of belongingness because when contributions are well-received and valued, it is a signal that one is part of the community.

> "Me gusta ayudar también en la comunidad. Desde que llegué a este país, como no sabía que hay recursos para la comunidad, empiezas a recibir cosas gratuitas que te van ofreciendo. Yo decía, '¿qué puedo hacer para recompensar esta ayuda que estoy recibiendo? ¿Cómo puedo contribuir o retribuir esto que yo estoy recibiendo?"
>
> *"I like to help in the community as well. Since I arrived in this county, as I did not know that there were resources for the community, you started to receive free things that people offered you. I said, 'what can I do to give back this help that I'm getting? How can I contribute to or return that which I am receiving?'"*
> -Spanish Speaking Focus Group Participant

Barriers to Belonging

While shared cultural and racial/ethnic identities were identified as drivers of belonging, focus group participants also noted that their identity as "hispanos" served as a source of exclusion in their communities. Participants shared experiences and fears about facing **discrimination or judgment**, which made them feel unsafe and unwelcome in social places. Spanish-speaking focus group participants echoed the responses to open-ended survey questions from people of color about the effects of systemic racism or concerns of encountering interpersonal racism presented a significant barrier to feeling like they belonged in their community.

For many Spanish-speaking focus group participants, shared language served as a point of connection. As such, focus group participants expressed feeling barred from participation when they were not able to fully communicate due to **language barriers**. The deficiency of translation services further exacerbates communication barriers, particularly for non-native English speakers or those with limited English proficiency. Participants in the Spanish-speaker focus group highlighted the difficulties of these limited services when seeking health-related services and other resources.

> "Es como salud mental. Cómo hablar con consejeros en tu idioma. No tengo el conocimiento si hay aquí cerca, entonces pienso que eso también sería bueno saber de y que existe o que está la disponibilidad de persona consejeras o psicólogos en español. Para igual sentirse uno que puedes expresarte bien, que quieres decir lo que quieres decir y sentirte cómodo platicando o lo que sea con un consejero. Pienso que también eso hace falta aquí."
>
> *"It's like mental health. Like talking with a counselor in your language. I don't know if there are [counselors] here, so I think this would also be good to know if and whether they exist or if they are counselors or psychologists who speak Spanish available. Similarly, to feel like you can express yourself well, that you want to say what you want to say, and feel comfortable talking about whatever that is with a counselor. I think this is something that is also missing here"*
>
> -Spanish Speaking Focus Group Participant

Without adequate and responsive translation support, individuals may feel misunderstood, excluded, and unable to fully contribute or benefit from community life and essential services.

Spanish-speaking focus group participants indicated a **lack of spaces and mechanisms to express, practice, and share their traditions** with the wider community. The school was a place where focus group participants mentioned they and their children often feel unsafe and unwelcome. In this space, language barriers, being one of the only people of color, and socioeconomic differences presented barriers to Spanish-speaking families. With family at the center of many Hispanic and Latino/a/e social networks, creating spaces and facilitating access to build a community around shared language and tradition may break down these barriers to belonging.

Co-Interpretation Takeaways

Among participants in the Spanish-speaking community data co-interpretation session, there was consensus around survey findings that family is a significant source of belonging. ***"La familia viene primero/Family comes first."*** Participants shared that many people move to the United States for a better life for their families. Additionally, the family may be the only or most immediate source of community in Central Oregon. Still, family could be inclusive of ***"familia afectiva/emotional family,"*** which one participant explained are those with which one shares experiences and cultural heritage, and from whom one may seek support.

Participants emphasized that the Hispanic and Latino/a/e community is resilient. While the term "resilience" is not always well-known, the community's actions demonstrate its meaning because Spanish speakers often **face adversity but continue to contribute to the social fabric**. "I believe I have something to give to my community," was a top-scoring item meanwhile, items with the greatest opportunities for improvement were "I feel like I have some control or influence over decisions in my community," "I am treated fairly in my community," and "I feel I belong in my community" Spanish speakers identified racism and racial discrimination as the reasons why this population is 22.5% less likely than their English-speaking counterparts to feel they are treated fairly in their community.

An important opportunity for improvement that participants in community data co-interpretation echoed from the Spanish-speaking focus group is this group's involvement and inclusion in the schoolhouse and their children's education. Few Spanish speakers identified schools as places they feel they belong. Parents in the community data co-interpretation groups spoke to the need to break down social, technological, and language barriers to entry to help families feel connected to the school community. ***"Cuando estoy invulcrado por la escuela y la tarea, me siento que pertenezco en la escuela"/ "When I'm involved in the school and schoolwork, I feel that I belong in the schoolhouse."***

Co-Interpretation Takeaways

Recommendations to promote belonging from the Spanish-speaking community:

- Reduce barriers and increase support for getting involved in school communities.
- Grow and develop a strong and accessible workforce of qualified/certified bilingual interpretation providers.
- Create spaces where the Spanish-speaking community can converse in their native language without feeling judged or excluded. Spanish-language workshops, trainings, movie nights, and other recreational events are examples of how Spanish speakers can feel included where they live without having to navigate or express themselves in their non-native language.
- Create opportunities for non-Spanish speakers to learn about and celebrate Hispanic or Latino/a/e culture and build relationships with the Hispanic or Latino/a/e community.

Findings: Young Adults in Central Oregon

Survey Findings

Demographics

Among survey respondents, 8.0% indicated that they were between 18 and 24 years old. This group was substantially more diverse than other age groups in Central Oregon, with nearly a quarter identifying as Hispanic or Latino/a/e, compared to only 10.4% of the overall sample. Young people overall had lower educational attainment and lower incomes, reflecting the phase of life that they are in.

Gender*	%
Man	28.4%
Woman	63.0%
Non-binary	<5 people
Transgender**	<5 people
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	<5 people

Race & Ethnicity***	%
Non-Hispanic white (white only)	55.6%
Hispanic or Latino/a/e	24.7%
Native American	8.6%
Asian	6.2%
Black	<5 people
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<5 people
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	<5 people

Table 12. *Characteristics of Young Adult Respondents*

City or Service Area	%
Bend	53.1%
La Pine	8.6%
Madras	14.8%
Prineville	7.4%
Redmond	14.8%
Sisters	<5 people
Warm Springs	<5 people

Educational Attainment*	%
High school degree or less	28.4%
Some college	43.2%
2-year degree or technical degree	18.5%
Bachelor's degree or higher	9.9%
Prefer to self describe or missing	<5 people
Income	**%**
Less than $25,000	29.6%
$25,000-$49,999	22.2%
$50,000-$74,999	17.3%
$75,000-$99,999	7.4%
$100,000 or more	8.6%
Prefer not to say	14.8%

Table 12. *Characteristics of Young Adult Respondents*

**Prefer to self-describe options were categorized, where possible.*
***Participants were asked to indicate the gender they identify with, followed by a question asking if they identify as transgender. Transgender respondents are counted with the gender they indicated in addition to the transgender category.*
****Respondents were able to select more than one option.*

Belonging: Communities & Identity Groups

To understand what communities and identity groups promote belonging for young adults, we compared their responses to the question "Which of the following communities or identity groups make you feel like you belong?" to the responses from the rest of the sample. This comparison is depicted in Figure 37.

- Among both groups, **"family"** (88.9% of young adults) and **"hobbies and recreational activities"** (63.0% of young adults) were the most frequently selected options.

- A significantly greater proportion of young adults selected people or friends from **"school or university"** (61.7% of young adults) and the **"LGBTQIA+ community"** (33.3%) as communities or identity groups where they feel that they belong.

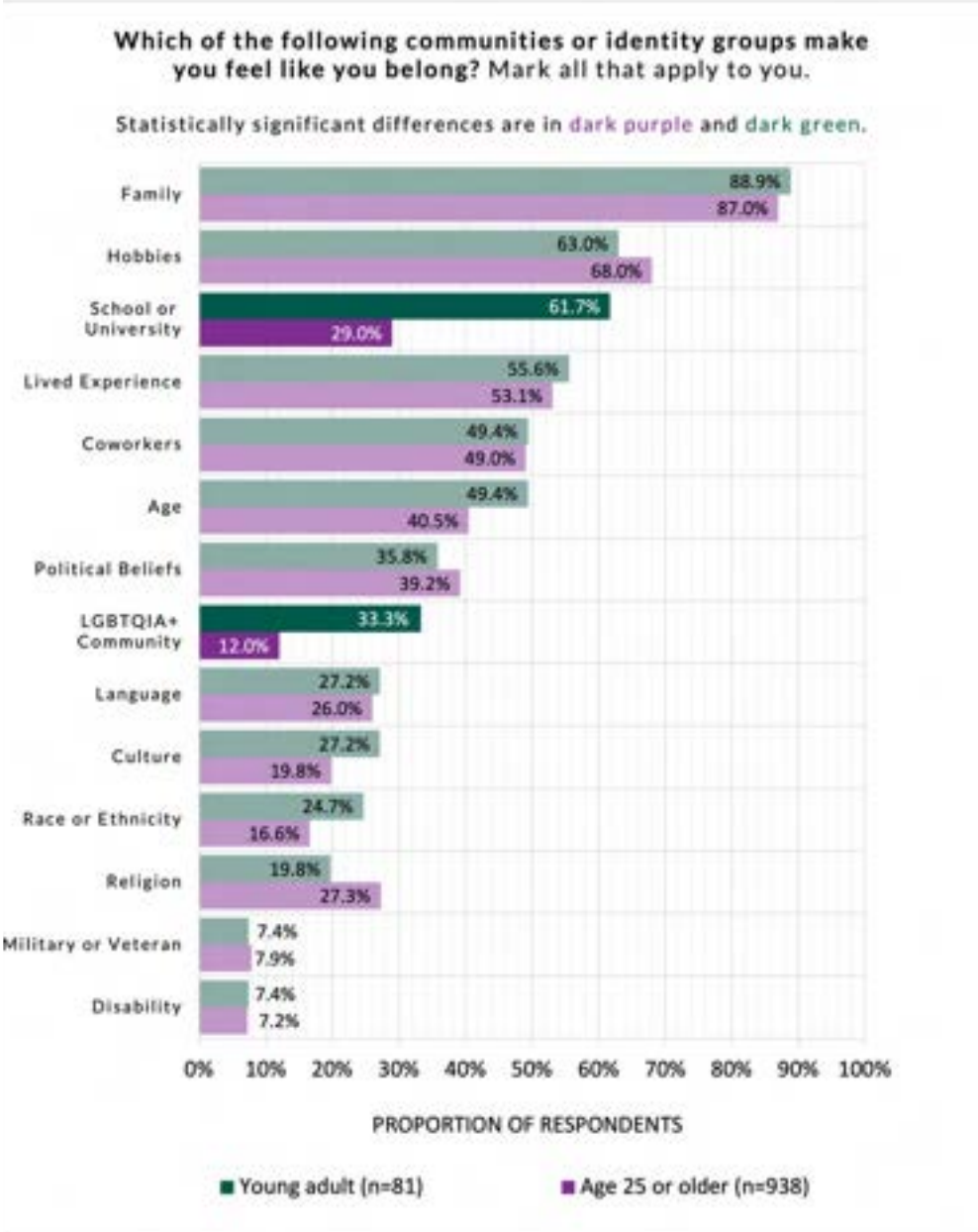


Figure 37. *Belonging in Communities and Identity Groups, Young Adults*

Belonging: Places and Spaces

To understand where young adults feel that they belong, we compared young adults' responses to the question "In which of the following places or spaces do you feel like you belong?" to the responses from the rest of the sample. This comparison is presented in Figure 38.

- For both groups, **"where you live"** was the most common response; this was selected by 85.2% of young adults.

- Young adults more frequently selected **"where you are from/grew up"** (63.0% of young adults), and **"your school"** (28.4%); this may be reflective of the student population in Central Oregon and that young adults often move away from where they live to pursue educational and career opportunities. Young adults were also more likely to select **"online spaces"** (25.9% of young adults), which represents generational differences in building social connections online.

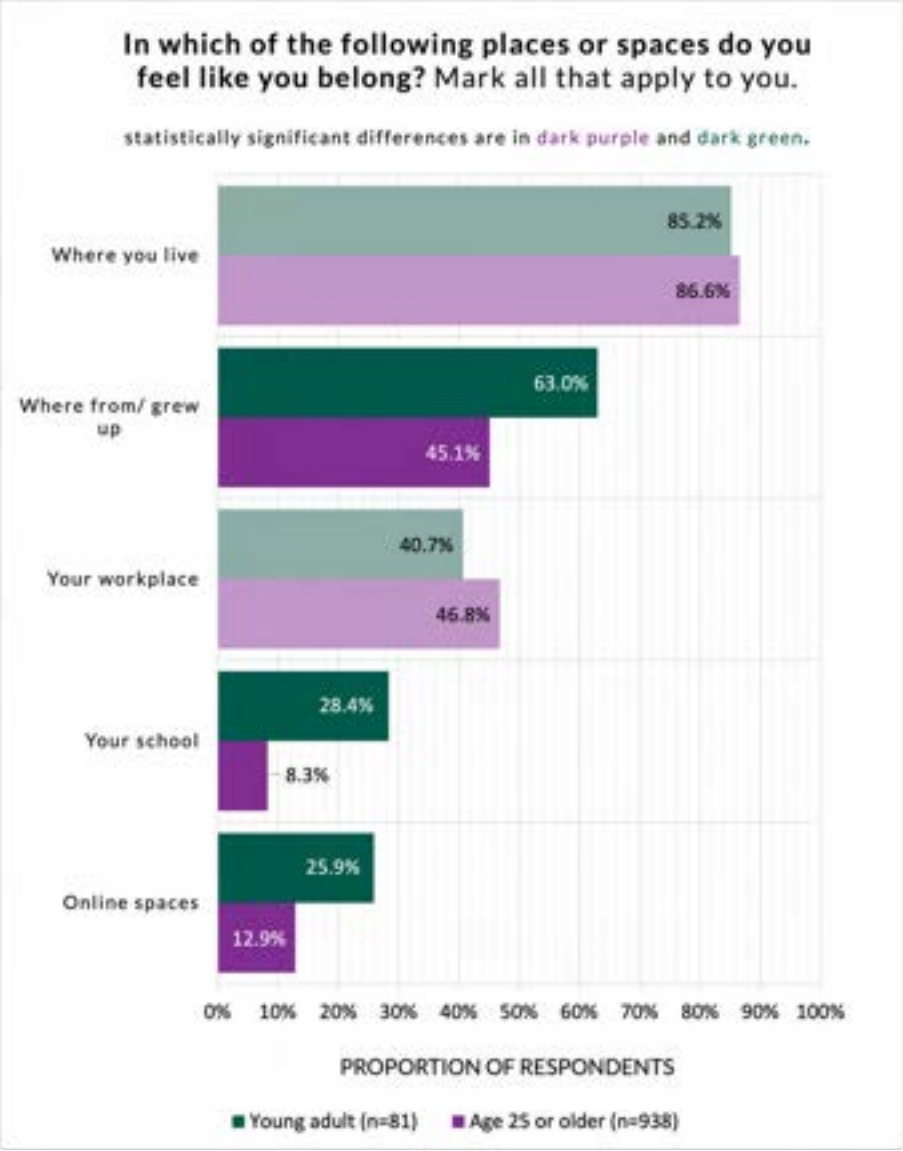


Figure 38. *Belonging in Places and Spaces, Young Adults*

Resilience

To understand measures of resilience for young adults, we compared their ARM scores to the rest of the sample. Response items on the ARM scale ranged from “not at all” to “a lot” with the proportions of individuals who indicated that the statements apply to them “quite a bit” or “a lot” compared below in Figure 39. Additionally, we used comparison tests to understand statistically significant differences in the scores for each item between the two groups.

- Like the rest of the sample and other highlighted populations, the highest-scoring item for young adults was **"I can solve problems without harming myself or others”** (92.6% of young adults). Nonetheless, young adults scored significantly lower on this item compared to those aged 25 or older.

- Consistent with the overall sample **“I feel I belong in my community”** was the lowest-scoring item for young adults, although scores were not significantly different than the rest of the sample. (45.7% of young adults indicated this statement applied to them).

- Young adults had higher scores for **“getting and improving qualifications or skills is important to me,”** (90.1% indicated that this applied to them). Consistent with other findings about young adults, this likely reflects a life stage where education and training are paramount.

- Young adults had lower scores for two family-related items, including **“my family stands by me during difficult times,”** (74.1% of young adults indicated this statement applied to them) and **“my family knows a lot about me”** (71.6% of young adults). This may indicate a life phase where young adults feel more disconnected from their families, although these items were still endorsed by most young adults. Young adults also had lower scores for **“I know where to get help in my community”** (53.1% of young adults).

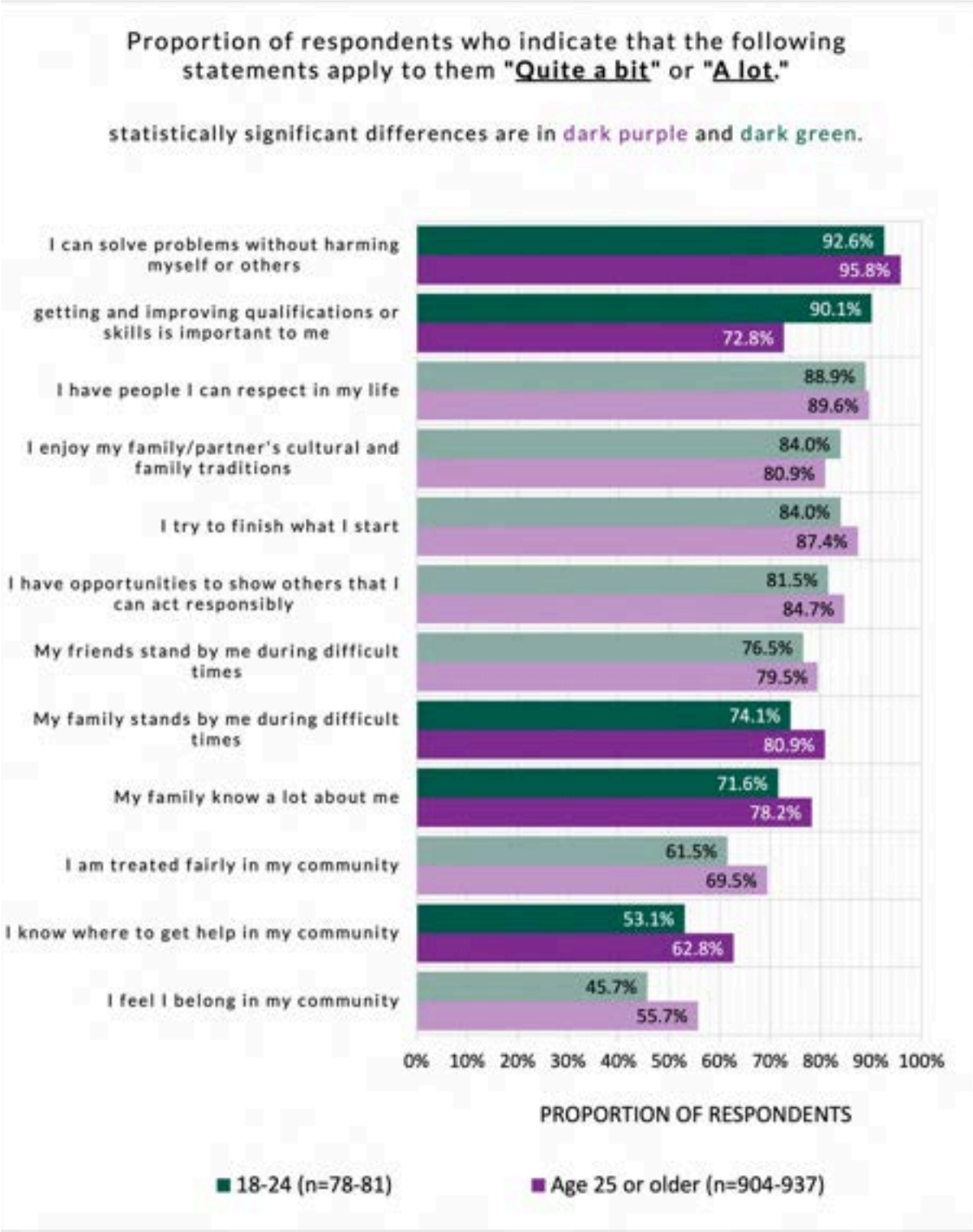


Figure 39. *Adult Resilience Measure, Young Adults*

Community Attachment and Connectedness

To understand young adults' scores on the Community Attachment and Connectedness (CAC) scale, we compared their responses to responses from those aged 25 or older. Response items on the CAC scale ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree;" the comparisons are depicted in Figure 40. Additionally, we used comparison tests to understand statistically significant differences in the scores for each item between the two groups.

- The highest-scoring item for young adults was **"I know quite a few people who live in my community;"** these scores were significantly higher than the rest of the sample. 76.5% of young adults agreed with this statement. Similarly, young adults also had significantly higher scores for **"Many of my family and friends live in my community"**(63.0% of young adults agreed). These differences indicate that young adults in Central Oregon have a substantial number of social connections locally.

- Consistent with the overall sample and other highlighted groups, **"I feel like I have some influence or control over decisions in my community"** was the lowest-scoring item for young adults, with only 33.3% agreeing with this statement.

- Young adults scored significantly lower on the item **"In an emergency, I could raise $2000 within two days from my family and friends."**Only 39.5% of young adults agreed with this statement compared to the majority of respondents 25 or older. This may indicate that young adults are less financially stable.

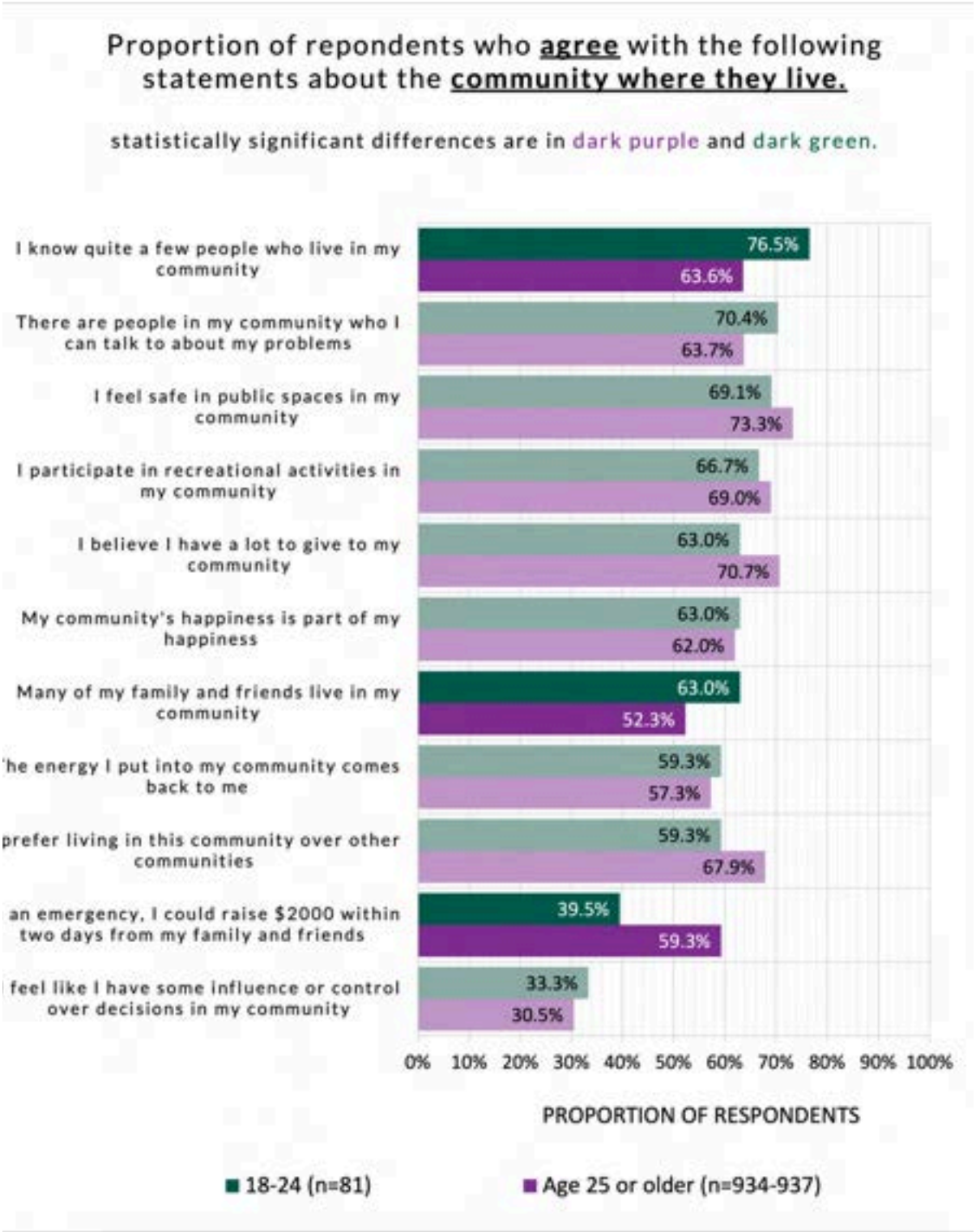


Figure 40. *Community Attachment and Connectedness, Young Adults*

Focus Group Findings

Feeling Connected

Young adults emphasized the importance of finding groups and communities that resonate with them. They expressed appreciation for events such as the Bend Night Market and other festivities, while also highlighting online platforms like Facebook and MeetUp as valuable spaces for connecting with people who share similar interests, such as joining a soccer team. Participants noted the **significance of online communities, particularly in gaming, for fostering inclusion and a sense of belonging**, with some cultivating long-term friendships through gaming platforms. Additionally, social media was recognized as a tool for staying connected with friends and the broader community, enabling individuals to stay updated on events and maintain social ties.

> "It's basically my whole friend group... and I'm able to make new friends in video game lobbies and just basically have this instant connection over a shared hobby that we're already doing together and able to complete together is super nice."
>
> -Young Adult Focus Group Participant

Young adults also expressed that their relationships and support systems are important to their mental and physical health. They collectively acknowledged the **stress and strain associated with feelings of loneliness or being perceived as outsiders.** While some found solace in connections with family and friends, others derived a sense of belonging through engagement in various activities and hobbies.

Hate Creates Barriers to Belonging

Young adults also described barriers to their sense of belonging. Numerous participants recounted experiences of **microaggressions, racism, and discrimination,** experiences that contradict their sense of belonging. For some, instances of interpersonal discrimination have led to feelings of insecurity or unwelcomeness. Additionally, participants described discerning signals, cues, "vibes" or atmospheres that may not be perceived as safe for themselves or other minoritized young people. These insights underscore the complex interplay between inclusion, safety, and belonging among young adults.

"[Political] flags and things like that make me feel unsafe. So, the areas where there's more concentration of those types of subtle racism definitely makes me not feel safe."
-Young Adult Focus Group Participant

All participants agreed that places that signal hate are unwelcoming. Regardless of the participants' identities, places, and spaces that are certain community members pose a barrier for everyone to experience a sense of belonging. This collective understanding highlights the interconnectedness of belongingness and the necessity for inclusive spaces that foster a sense of community for all.

Co-Interpretation with Individuals who are Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC)

We chose not to conduct a focus group with Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) because of the assumption this could make about people from various racial/ethnic backgrounds having the same life experiences and experiencing the same barriers and/or contributing factors toward a sense of belonging in Central Oregon. Recognizing that minoritized groups and individuals are likely to develop and experience community connections in distinct ways from the white majority, we did prioritize data co-interpretation with community members who identified as BIPOC, and from other minoritized groups. As such, we identified a willing community partner to co-design and co-lead a community data co-interpretation session. Of the 1,019 people who completed the survey, 195 (19.1%) self-identified their race/ethnicity as Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino/a/e, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Native American, or two or more race/ethnicity groups.

Survey Findings

Demographics

Gender*	%
Man	27.2%
Woman	67.7%
Non-binary	3.1%
Transgender**	3.1%
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	<5 people
Age	**%**
18-34	43.6%
35-64	49.2%
65+	7.2%

Race & Ethnicity***	%
Non-Hispanic white (white only)	N/A
Hispanic or Latino/a/e	49.2%
Native American	34.4%
Asian	13.3%
Black	3.6%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	6.2%
Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	N/A

Table 13. *Characteristics of BIPOC Respondents*

City or Service Area	%
Bend	41.0%
La Pine	5.6%
Madras	15.4%
Prineville	7.7%
Redmond	15.9%
Sisters	<5 people
Warm Springs	12.8%

Educational Attainment*	%
High school degree or less	11.2%
Some college	24.6%
2-year degree or technical degree	16.4%
Bachelor's degree or higher	43.1%
Prefer to self describe or missing	<5 people
Income	**%**
Less than $25,000	18.5%
$25,000-$49,999	21.0%
$50,000-$74,999	20.0%
$75,000-$99,999	11.8%
$100,000 or more	16.9%
Prefer not to say	11.8%

Table 13. *Characteristics of BIPOC Respondents*

**Prefer to self-describe options were categorized, where possible.*
***Participants were asked to indicate the gender they identify with, followed by a question asking if they identify as transgender. Transgender respondents are counted with the gender they indicated in addition to the transgender category.*
****Respondents were able to select more than one option.*

Belonging: Communities & Identity Groups

To understand what communities and identity groups promote belonging for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) respondents in Central Oregon and to present these results in the co-interpretation session, we compared their responses to the question "Which of the following communities or identity groups make you feel like you belong?" to the responses from the rest of the sample. This comparison is depicted in Figure 41.

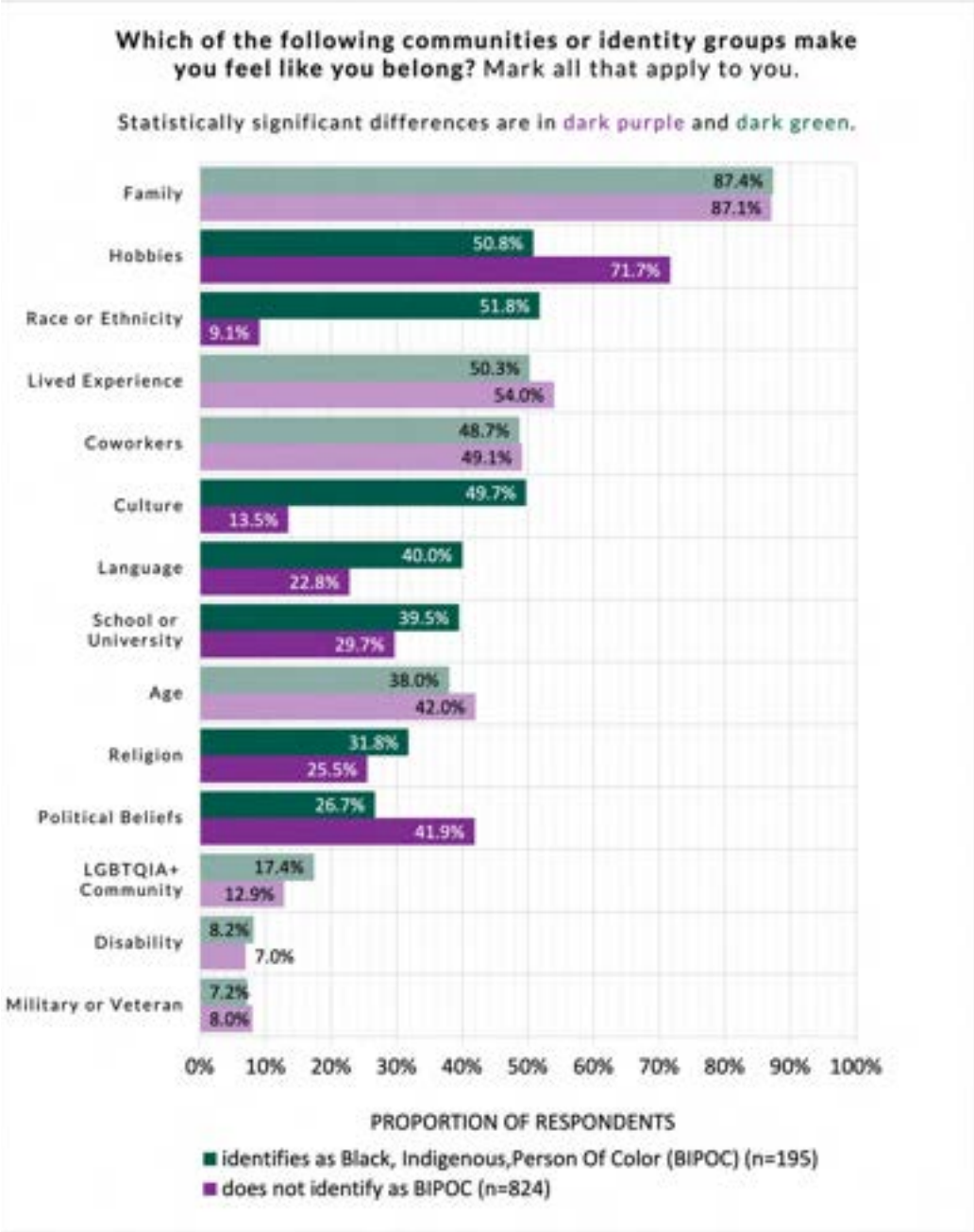


Figure 41. *Belonging in Communities and Identity Groups, BIPOC Respondents*

In co-interpretation, there was consensus from the group that **“language,” “religion,” “family,”** and **“race/ethnicity,”** all can fall under the category of **“culture”** and that the significant differences in the data make sense when comparing responses from people of color to the dominant (white) culture.

Language is a nuanced aspect of human interaction, influencing how individuals are perceived and valued within their culture or society. Factors such as the language spoken or the accent one possesses can significantly impact whether a person feels they can belong. Still, one participant shared, *“Language is central to connecting with others and in feeling a sense of belonging. It makes you feel at home.”* This sentiment underscores the importance of language as a tool to foster connection and community rootedness.

Participants concurred that political beliefs can often divide groups and communities, leading to a loss of authenticity and genuine connection; political discussions can become tribal, and “realness” is lost. That is, the political environment is polarizing. The political landscape is perceived as increasingly polarized, with discussions inevitably becoming misinterpreted and distorted when placed within a political context. One participant expressed the sentiment that while individuals may find common ground – connecting on a “human level” – disagreements arise once politics become involved.

Belonging: Places and Spaces

To understand where BIPOC respondents feel that they belong, we compared their responses to the question “Which of the following communities or identity groups make you feel like you belong?” to the responses from the rest of the sample. This comparison is depicted in Figure 42.

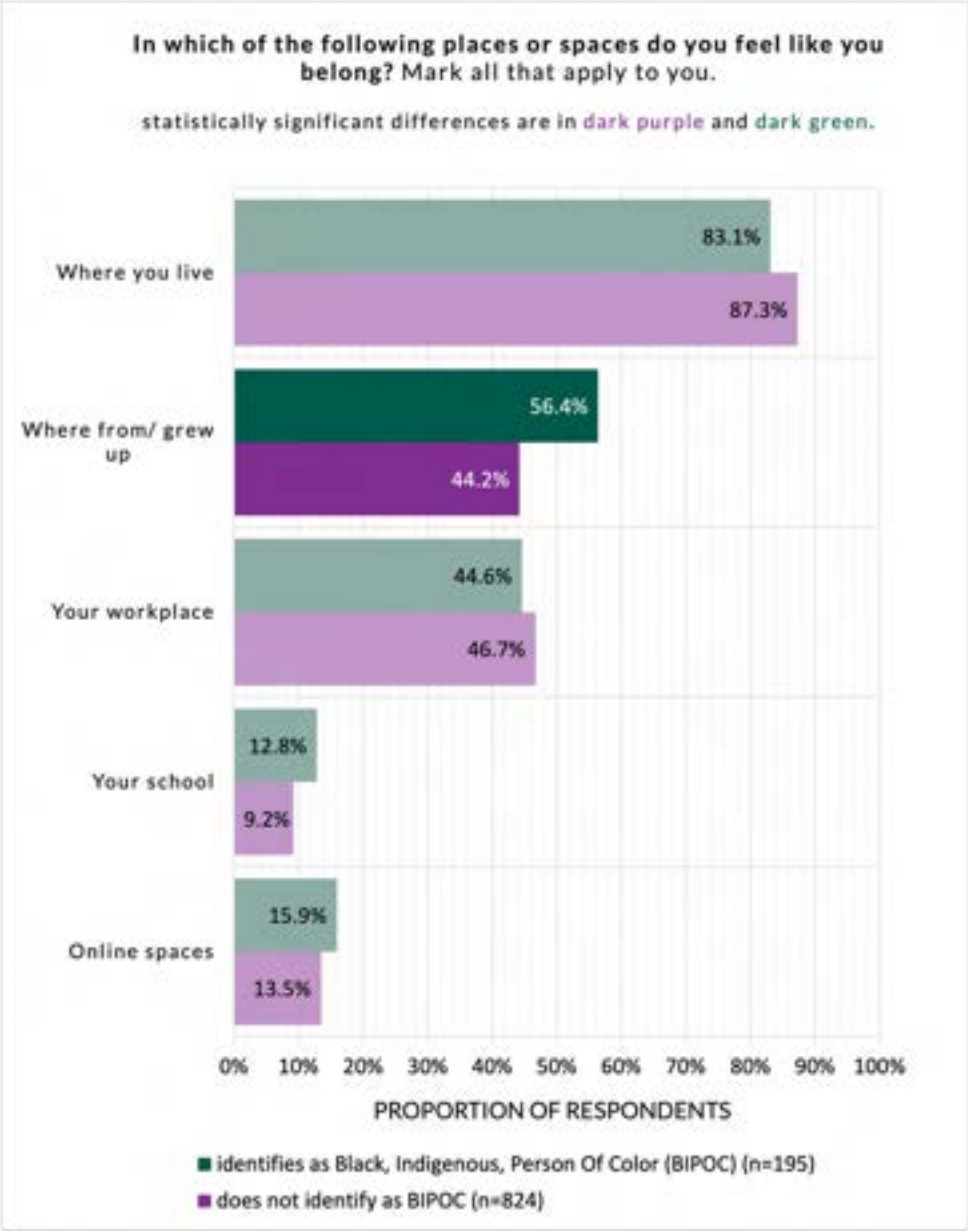


Figure 42. *Belonging in Places and Spaces, BIPOC Respondents*

Experiencing microaggressions and being treated differently in certain spaces because of racial/ethnic identity resonated with the co-interpretation group. Participants agreed that **certain places and spaces are “white” spaces** (i.e. recreational spaces; many gathering are organized from a majority mindset). In this group, sharing stories was a way to connect and to bond. This seemed reflective of a need for more spaces for minoritized groups to connect, gather, and share.

Resilience

To understand measures of resilience for BIPOC respondents, we compared ARM scores with the rest of the sample. Response items on the ARM scale ranged from “not at all” to “a lot” with the proportions of individuals who indicated that the statements apply to them “quite a bit” or “a lot” compared below in Figure 43.

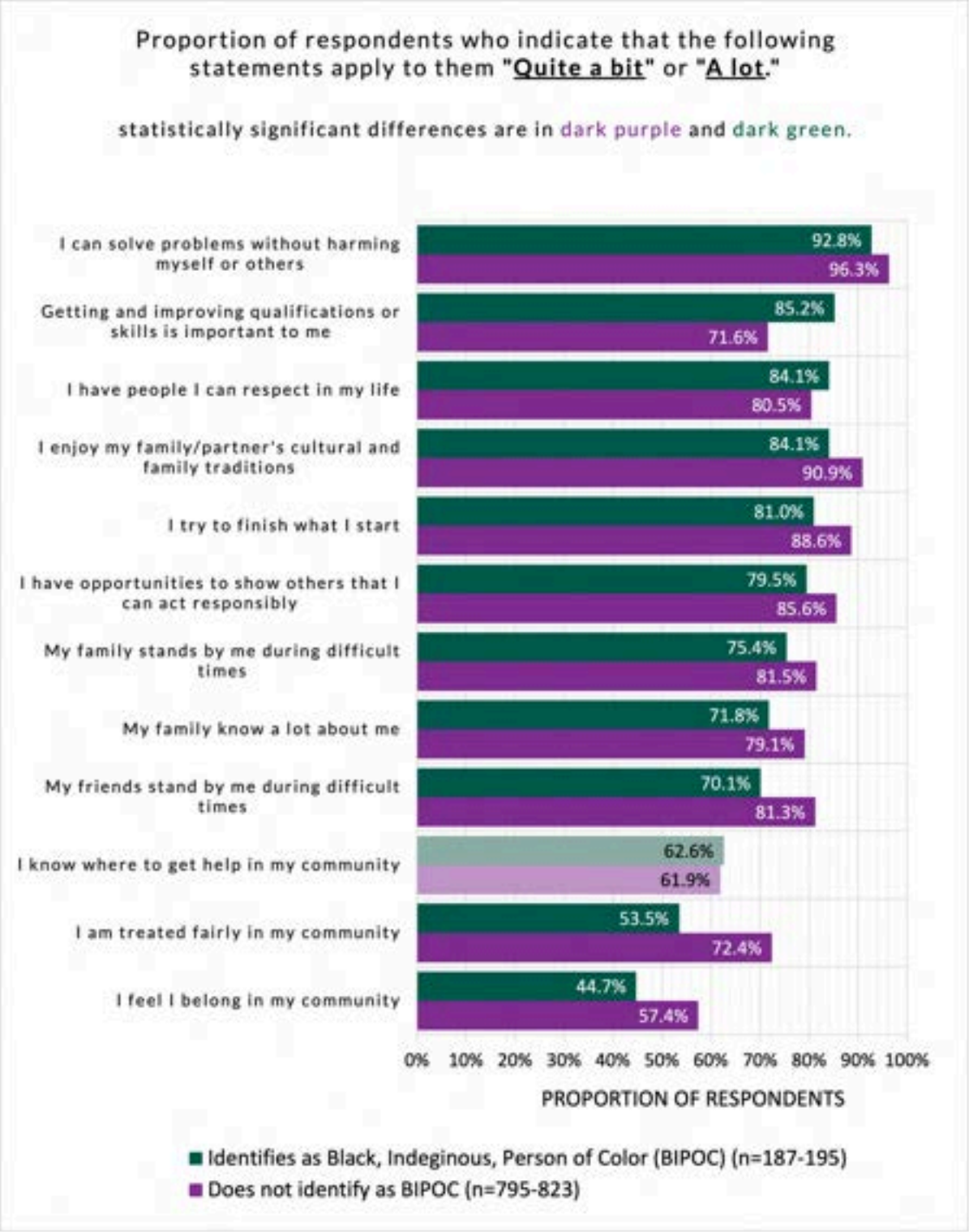


Figure 43. *Adult Resilience Measure, BIPOC Respondents*

During the BIPOC community data co-interpretation session, participants critically examined various components of the Adult Resilience Measure, concluding that these items **did not effectively capture the values and experiences of people of color**. We believe it is crucial to recognize and address these concerns, as they highlight the need for ongoing reflection on how resilience and a sense of belonging are measured. By striving for improvements in measurement methodologies, we can ensure a more **accurate representation of all communities and their unique experiences.**

While 79.5% of BIPOC respondents said the statement **"I have opportunities to show others that I can act responsibly"** applied to them quite a bit or a lot, community data co-interpretation participants were curious about how survey respondents were to interpret what "opportunities to be responsible" are and **who are the arbiters of responsibility.** Participants believed that how this question was interpreted may have influenced the response from survey participants.

Additionally, the statement **"I try to finish what I start"** drew concern from participants in the community data co-interpretation session. Although 81.0% of BIPOC survey respondents said the statement applied to them quite a bit or a lot, **participants contended that completing something that is not worth finishing or is not valued should not be an indicator of resilience.** Participants shared that there can be many reasons that minoritized people would not finish what they start, including not receiving support or recognition for their work, and frequently being told it's not 'the right thing.'

Community Attachment and Connectedness

To analyze differences in the Community Attachment and Connectedness (CAC) scale, we compared BIPOC participants' responses to the rest of the sample. Response items on the CAC scale ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree;" the comparisons are depicted in Figure 44.

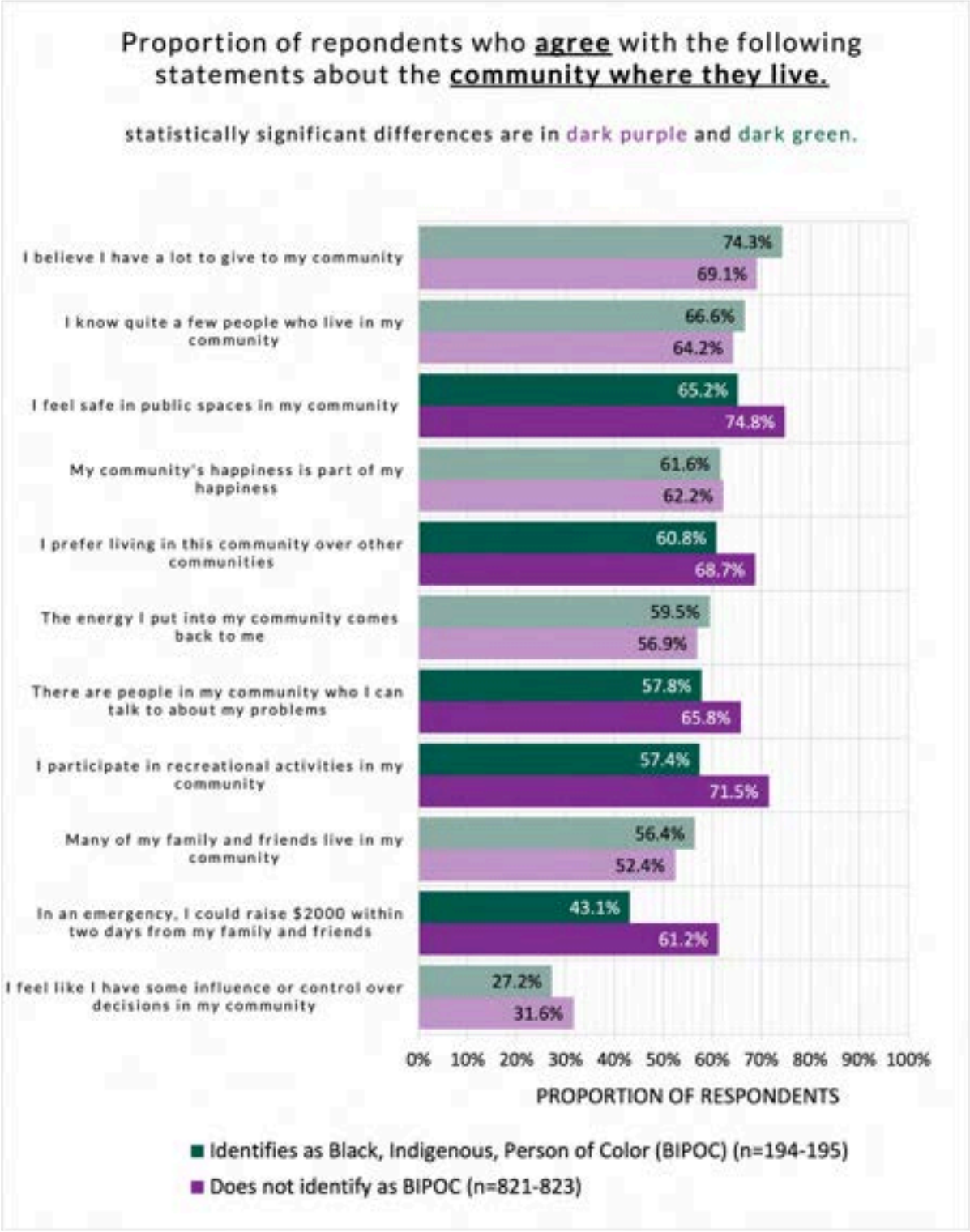


Figure 44. *Community Attachment and Connectedness, BIPOC Respondents*

Participants in the BIPOC community data co-interpretation session reiterated the sentiments expressed by Spanish-speaking participants regarding the **profound impact of systemic racism** and concerns about **encountering interpersonal racism** as a significant barrier to feeling a sense of belonging in their community. Importantly, the session also addressed **tokenism**. While having the opportunity to **share their culture, stories, and lived experiences** was recognized as a vital means of connection, being asked to do so solely on behalf of their community erodes trust, sharing that *"tokenism is the antithesis of belonging."*

There were numerous recommendations from participants in the community data co-interpretation session. Opportunities to promote a sense of belonging must be orchestrated carefully and with a bi-directional benefit. There is a need for curiosity to learn.

Recommendations for Promoting Community Belonging from BIPOC Co-Interpretation Participants:

- Use inclusive language.
- Create connection through storytelling.
- Access to educational tools; school- and college-based resources for fostering a sense of belonging should be replicated in workplaces.
- Create spaces that encourage connection.
- Support people who are confident and willing to share their culture, traditions, and experiences. Take caution to disrupt tokenism. BIPOC and other minoritized individuals are not responsible for teaching or inviting outsiders into their cultural spaces.

Taking Action

Recommendations

We hope that the findings from the Community Belonging Measurement Project can inform both individual actions and the programs and policies led by non-profits, governments, businesses, service providers, and more. We encourage everyone to cultivate intentionally and actively belonging and connectedness in communities and neighborhoods, and for these priority parties to center belonging in their work.

While developing a full action guide, or strategic plan for strengthening belonging in Central Oregon is beyond the scope of this project, findings do shed light on action steps. Thus, we offer a set of general recommendations, organized by role (individual, organizational, institutional). Recommendations emerged from responses to the survey and focus group conversations and were reinforced by community members during community data co-interpretation sessions. They also align with national recommendations to develop socially connected communities and a culture of belonging.

Individual and Interpersonal Recommendations

From everyday interactions in a coffee shop or at the grocery store to quality time spent with friends and family, there are many individual actions that Central Oregonians can take to promote belonging.

- **Cultivate a Culture of Belonging and Connection.** Findings from the Community Belonging Measurement Project demonstrate that inclusive spaces are essential for belonging. Individuals can proactively support and champion diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging; to do this, focus on nurturing relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers that are built on trust. Promote inclusivity in the places and spaces you are engaged in (e.g., work, school, neighborhood, online, etc.)

- **Use Inclusive Language.** Consciously inclusive language is important because it focuses on shared humanity; this was consistently identified in focus groups as important to promoting belonging. It helps everyone feel seen, appreciated, welcomed and encouraged. Using someone's identified pronouns, and person-first language (i.e., "person experiencing homelessness," rather than "the homeless") prioritizes someone's humanity rather than defining them by their experience or identity. When in doubt, it is always best to invite others to share how they prefer to refer to themselves, rather than assume their identity. Mistakes are okay, but changing the way we talk to each other is a small way to make a large positive impact.

- **Disrupt Othering Behaviors.** “Othering" is a way of thinking or behaving that marginalizes someone based on their identity. It often happens when people focus on differences, like race, religion, or appearance, and use those differences to make judgments or exclude others. To disrupt these behaviors, you can start by becoming aware of your own biases and assumptions about others, and then speak out against stereotypes or unfair treatment when you see it happening. It is also important to remember to prioritize your safety. If you are concerned that disrupting or standing up against othering behaviors would put your well-being at risk, it is better to walk away.

- **Invite Community Members to Participate.** Both older adults and young adults expressed a desire for increased community involvement. When someone is new to your neighborhood, workplace, or school, be proactive in counteracting cliquish tendencies by inviting them to join activities, fostering inclusivity, and breaking down unnecessary barriers.

- **Consider Mentorship or Volunteer Opportunities.** Older adults and young adults alike emphasized the importance of meaningful connections and support networks. Engaging in mentoring or volunteering opportunities can provide meaningful connections and support networks, enhancing a sense of belonging for all parties.

- **Practice Continual Learning and Civic Engagement.** Across all populations, participants emphasized a desire for increased influence in community decision-making. There are numerous free or low-cost community events, workshops, and educational opportunities that can promote belonging and civic engagement among community members.

Community and Organizational Recommendations

Community organizations and local businesses have a significant role to play in promoting belonging in the community. Workplaces and schools specifically can play a key role in cultivating belonging and connection. Some actionable suggestions for organizations and businesses are shared below.

- **Foster Inclusive Gathering Spaces.** Promoting belonging involves creating inclusive gathering spaces where individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves and engaging in dialogue, even when conversations are difficult. LGBTQA+ participants shared that utilizing symbols like the pride flag signals an environment of acceptance and support for LGBTQA+ individuals and allies. Parents also emphasized the importance of family-friendly spaces where parents and children alike feel included. Establishing family-friendly or kid-friendly spaces ensures that all members of the community, including parents and children, feel welcome and included.
- **Develop Inclusive Outreach and Marketing Materials.** When creating outreach materials for your organization or business, consider developing materials in Spanish, which is widely spoken in Central Oregon, and ensuring that your materials are culturally responsive. By offering materials that are tailored to the Hispanic and Latine/o/a community, you can effectively reach a wider audience, demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity, and promote belonging.
- **Continue to Strengthen Schools to Serve as Key Community Hubs.** Schools are gathering places for children, parents, relatives, neighbors, and community members (e.g., school events, sporting events, plays, and other community socials), yet many community members shared that they do not feel like they belong in school settings (e.g., if they felt unsafe, due to perceived economic or other divides, language barriers, etc.). Schools and institutions of higher education are places for learning and central community hubs for cultivating belonging and connections for students and the larger community. These places can be reimagined as sites to host inclusive community events, cultural activities, and community-wide educational opportunities.
- **Transform Workplaces to Focus on Relationships, Belonging, and Connection.** In addition to being places of employment, workplaces were identified by many respondents as places to connect and belong with others. This highlights the importance of leaders proactively and intentionally cultivating relationships and connections for all.

Policy and Institutional Recommendations

Numerous institutional and structural factors promote or hinder belonging. Addressing these factors – more so than at the individual or organizational level – has the potential to have the broadest impact on belonging in communities. Local government agencies and policymakers should prioritize community belonging when developing and implementing new policies.

- **Prioritize Inclusivity in Urban Planning, Transportation, and Development Projects.** The high cost of housing in Central Oregon was frequently cited by participants as a barrier to belonging. Policymakers should pursue strategies that ensure all residents can live here, including the development of more affordable housing and high-density housing. Additionally, developing mixed-use spaces that allow residents to walk to the store or walk to recreational activities not only increases accessibility of these services but also promotes a feeling of connectedness to where one lives and a sense of belonging in the community. Investing in comprehensive networks of safe and comfortable routes for people of all ages to walk and bike to desirable destinations can provide more opportunities for natural, daily physical activity, increase social interaction, and offer low-cost transportation options as cities in Central Oregon grow. Alongside active transportation solutions, policymakers should also consider prioritizing funds for public transportation to maintain free fares for regular transit, reduce recreation shuttle fees, and increase service routes so that public transit is a reliable and feasible option for more people.

- **Promote Equitable Access to Recreation and Green Spaces.** These areas serve as gathering places where community members can come together, socialize, and engage in activities that enhance their well-being. However, survey and focus group respondents frequently shared that recreation can be cost-prohibitive in Central Oregon, and free or low-cost opportunities often are very limited. By investing in accessible and well-maintained recreational areas, communities can create shared spaces that promote connection and belonging.

- **Incentivize the Development and Utilization of Family-Friendly Spaces.** Many participants who identified as parents and caregivers expressed that a lack of family-friendly spaces could hinder belonging, particularly when out in public with young children. There are multiple potential policy levers for promoting more family-friendly or welcoming spaces. These include the provision of financial incentives to businesses or organizations that implement family-friendly design principles into their facilities, and/or incentivize having areas for infant feeding, family restrooms, designated stroller parking, and seating areas for caregivers and families. Schools are places that many families frequent, so they might also be utilized in ways that best serve community needs beyond student learning and enrichment.

- **Consider Trauma-Informed Principles in Social Policy Development.** Policymakers should incorporate a trauma-informed perspective when developing social policy, through concentrating attention and resources appropriately. This includes prioritizing safety for minoritized communities, incorporating the lived experience of community members into policy development, and working to rectify past and current policies that are potentially traumatizing.

- **Support and Promote Cultural Exchange and Celebration of the Diversity Present in Central Oregon.** Community cultural events and educational programs can foster increased belonging in Central Oregon. This could include funding for initiatives focused on cross-cultural exchange and local events that celebrate the diversity of Central Oregon.

- **Develop Initiatives that Promote Social Cohesion and Civic Participation.** Very few participants in this project indicated that they had any influence or say over decisions made in their community. Policymakers should consider strategies to better engage community members in decision-making and create buy-ins for their policies. This could include providing resources and training opportunities for community leaders, organizers, and volunteers to enhance their capacity to mobilize resources, build coalitions across political factions, and create positive change within their neighborhoods. Furthermore, providing transparency in decision-making and policy development promotes awareness of and trust in government processes.

- **Leverage Technology to Provide Virtual Spaces for Minoritized or Geographically Dispersed individuals to Participate in Community Activities and Decision-making Processes.** Young people and LGBTQA+ individuals were more likely to indicate that they belong in online spaces. Online venues for community events may also be more accessible for individuals with disabilities and those in rural areas. Implementing digital tools such as mobile applications or online surveys can also enable residents to provide feedback on policies and initiatives, ensuring their voices are heard and valued. By appropriately adopting technology for these purposes, local governments can bridge physical divides, amplify voices, and promote accessibility.

Final Reflections

Looking Forward

Belonging, resilience and community connectedness are essential components of the human experience. To better understand how Central Oregonians experience belonging – including with whom and where they experience it – the research team worked with numerous community advisors and community partners to develop a context-specific measurement strategy for belonging. While we identified many successes, there are additionally many areas for improvement – and substantial disparities in who gets to feel like they belong in Central Oregon. We hope that this report provides a starting point for organizations, policymakers, and community members to recognize the importance of belonging to well-being and to actively work to improve belonging in Central Oregon. We are confident that the strategies we've identified to build belonging can and will work if we dedicate resources toward building a more connected, resilient community.

Additional Resources

Additional resources on strategies to address and promote belonging in communities can be found in the sources below. Many of these organizations' work inspired and influenced the team's efforts to measure belonging in Central Oregon.

- Advisory: The Healing Effects of Social Connection from the US Surgeon General
- The Belonging Barometer from Vision Zero and the American Immigration Council
- The Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness
- Commission on Social Connection at the World Health Organization
- Foundation for Social Connection
- The Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley
- Socially Connected Communities from Health Places by Design

Our strategies for community-engaged, equitable data collection have also been informed by the work of We All Count, the Human Centered Design Toolkit from IDEO, Linda Tuhiwai Smith's foundational book Decolonizing Methodologies, and the Urban Institute's Data Walk process.

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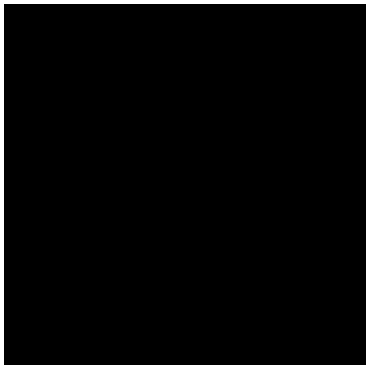

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