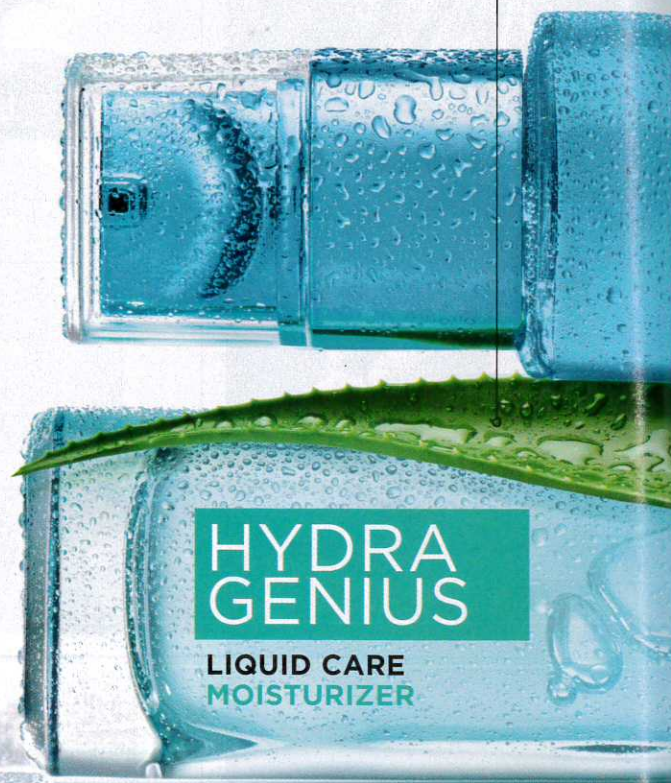


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PARIS



Emily Barbero,  
19, California  
"I believe in  
the power of  
kindness."

# 50 States of Women

In a major cross-country survey, *Glamour* and L'Oréal Paris talked to 2,000 American women about self-esteem and their hopes for the future. Their answers are *not* what you'd expect. By Shaun Dreisbach

In 1984, when *Glamour* published a first-of-its-kind survey exploring women's self-worth, the results were stunning, and not in a good way. Nearly 50 percent of women reported feeling self-conscious about themselves; 41 percent were unhappy with their bodies; and only a third said that they were content with their lives. For decades we've restaged the survey, add-

ing and subtracting topics, but the results have, in some ways, remained frustrating: Women have consistently reported low self-confidence and negative body image.

But what does life feel like for women in 2017? To find out, *Glamour* teamed up with L'Oréal Paris to commission a Harris Poll of 2,000 women in all 50 states. The goal: to take an in-depth look at the

factors that buoy and undermine our confidence—and explore the issues that connect *and* divide us in 2017. We also interviewed 50 women around the country to ask them what they believe in and how they learned to embrace who they are.

The results? They're hopeful. *Really* hopeful. But—like women—it's complicated. Turn the page.

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## Self-confidence Is (Finally!) Soaring

First, the good news. Forget what you've heard (and, uh, might be feeling) about American anxiety: By and large, women are optimistic about their lives and their futures. Three-quarters believe they're making progress toward their life goals, and **67 percent believe they'll be better off in the next five years.** That's a huge jump from *Glamour's* results two years ago, when only 42 percent had that optimistic outlook.

And when it comes to confidence: Ladies, we've turned a corner. The majority of women across all generations, ethnicities, incomes, and zip codes are happy with their overall appearance and are more likely to use positive words like *happy* (58%), *smart* (56%), and *confident* (41%) to describe themselves than negative words.

Two groups in our survey had particularly high confidence levels: African American women (see "The Confidence Gap," page 150), and those ages 18 to 36 of *all* races (see "The Rise of the Super-Positive Millennial," page 156). "Gen Xers' and Boomers' self-esteem has also risen," acknowledges Jean Twenge, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at San Diego State University. But "millennials have the highest self-esteem of any generation."

Some of that confidence may come from the progress millennials have witnessed. They played sports if they wanted; can rattle off a roster of high-profile female role models; had the chance to vote for women of *both* political parties. "I was raised to be a confident person and to believe I could be and do whatever I wanted as long as I worked for it," says Taylor Picard, 21, a college student from Essex, Vermont. "It feels real and achievable when you grow up with so many incredible, diverse examples of what women can accomplish—like the way Ashley Graham broke barriers in the modeling industry by showing us a body a lot of people like me can align with."

Experts even see differences in the way millennials *talk* about themselves. "Happiness and self-esteem tie back to what you see as your personal strengths, and millennials were raised with a deeper and more expansive vocabulary for describing who they are compared with older generations," says Lara Pence, Psy.D., a clinical psychologist in Dallas who works with women and girls on self-esteem and body-image issues. "It's not just traditional words like *smart* ♦♦



Meredith Edlow, 35, Pennsylvania: "I believe people have the right to live their lives the way they want."



Sara Eden Friar, 38, Maryland: "I believe we're born with amazing power, strength, and abilities."



Jess Farran, 24, Georgia: "I believe in loving yourself, and I believe that by doing that you learn to love others."



Leah McKeogh, 44, Arizona: "I believe in myself and my ability to live authentically as a trans woman."



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Rachel Barkley, 27, South Carolina: "I believe in sustainable agriculture and that everyone has the right to fresh produce."



Ellie Gordon, 22, Oregon: "I believe in Magic 8 balls and everyone I've ever loved."



Sammy Lozada, 22, New York: "I believe in educating people about social justice issues to effect change."



Erin Nichols, 25, Vermont: "I believe we're all responsible for our planet."



Liz Forman (far right, with daughters), 44, Michigan: "I believe in speaking out, but I also believe in listening with respect to people with opposing views."



Madeline McCubbins, 21, South Dakota: "I believe in the power of selfies."



Nidhi Poddar, 28, Nebraska: "I believe love is stronger than hate."



Jen Pack, 40, New Mexico: "I believe questioning is the path to understanding."



and beautiful—it's also creative, intuitive, strong, compassionate. Growing up, I was never taught to say 'I am a strong person.' The more positive traits you're able to identify and value in yourself, the better you're going to feel. And that's a big part of the reason things are moving in a better direction."

### Looks Still Really Matter

But here's where the findings get more complicated. Women *do* feel more confident today, but we're still occasionally struggling, and those struggles most often come when we look in the mirror. Not that this is new: Back in 2014, more than half of women said losing weight would make them happiest—and yes, that sad pattern held true for women at *all* weight levels. Today, the results were the same—which is frustrating, considering that society has never been more accepting and downright celebratory of women of all shapes, sizes, and stripes. So why are we still so hung up on the numbers on the scale? "It's much easier for us to be kind to other women than ourselves," says Pence. "We have a habit of lifting up other women—'You look so amazing!'—while tearing ourselves down when they compliment us—'Oh, stop! I feel gross.' And that negative talk makes everyone's body image less stable."

Tori, a 28-year-old nutritionist from Richmond, Virginia, describes it this way: "I embrace other women no matter what they look like, but when it comes to me, I think, You look awful, or, My belly makes me look pregnant. I'm not practicing what I preach."

And the survey shows how wrapped up many of us are in our looks overall: 44 percent of women consider their appearance a key part of their identity, outranking being a mom, or their job, religion, or heritage. That's not necessarily a bad thing—our looks are part of our personal awesomeness, and by the way, **64 percent of us say we're happy with our overall appearance.** But "the danger is when appearance becomes the most important thing that defines you, and I see shades of this in the data," says Pence. Barbara Risman, Ph.D., professor of sociology at the University of Illinois in Chicago, agrees: "What struck me is that the vast majority of women believe that the way they look determines their success in life—even how well they do in the labor force." Indeed, 73 percent of our survey takers say being "beautiful" helps women get ahead at work, and

## The Confidence Gap

African American women feel better about themselves than any other group of females, our survey found. See what's behind all those good thoughts.

**I**N QUESTION AFTER SURVEY QUESTION, a pattern emerged: Black women consistently reported higher self-esteem than white or Hispanic women—among other things, they were far more likely to describe themselves as successful (44 percent said so, compared with 30 percent of white women and 21 percent of Hispanic) and beautiful (59 percent, versus 25 and 32 percent). That's consistent with other studies, says Jean Twenge, Ph.D., who has examined the effect of race on self-confidence. "Research shows black women score higher on self-esteem than women of other races and ethnicities, which may seem surprising, given the long history of prejudice and discrimination they have faced." Jasmine Zapata, 30, a pediatrician from Madison, Wisconsin, understands that phenomenon and says her family helped build her self-confidence. "I was brought up to be resilient and tough and to make it work despite your circumstances," she says. "That definitely [raised] my confidence and optimism."

Black women also think more positively about themselves and their bodies when they look in the mirror: 56 percent say "I am proud of the person I am becoming," and 47 percent say "I am happy the way that I am." (For white women, those figures are just 37 and 34 percent.) "Growing up, black women are taught you're strong, you're beautiful, you're smart, you're *enough*—and that mindset is passed down from generation to generation as a defense mechanism against discrimination," says Twenge. "The more confident you are, the better equipped you'll be to deal with racism." That may also explain why black women celebrated their curves long before body acceptance became a fashionable marketing campaign or empowering hashtag. "In the black community, curves are admired," says Kosolu Ananti, 34, a fitness instructor from Dallas. And Alicia White, a 30-year-old executive director of a nonprofit in New York City, says that in her experience, "no one's judging you based on your weight or anything else. My mother instilled in me that I should feel beautiful and confident and be proud of my features because they were passed down by my ancestors." That *internal* confidence, African American women say, can be a powerful antidote to a culture that sometimes feels hostile. "Based on what we go through as a minority group," Ananti says, "we have insecurities, but we try not to let them damage our overall self-esteem."

# 59%

of black women describe themselves as beautiful, versus just 25% of white women and 32% of Latinas.



84 percent believe it gives them an edge in life in general. That may be true in our appearance-obsessed culture—and it's not exactly a relaxing reality to wake up to every morning.

### Yes, Social Media Messes With Our Self-Esteem

Oh, social media. We love you—and yet you play with our hearts. To be clear, we *do* really love you: **35 percent of women reported checking their social media at least once an hour.** But woman after woman also cited the occasional feel-bad factor: "It's second nature to compare yourself with other women, and when I see posts about things I'm less secure about, I feel worse about myself," says Tori, the nutritionist. "I'm looking for a job right now, so when people talk about their successes on Instagram or Facebook, it affects my mood so much that sometimes it's better for me not to look."

In fact, more than a third of women who have social media accounts admit that seeing other people's posts can make them feel bad about their own lives. And that's in line with what other research shows: "Studies have found that time spent on social media—particularly photo-based platforms—is associated with poorer self-esteem," says Jennifer Webb, Ph.D., an associate professor of psychological science at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, who researches social media's impact on women. One study, aptly named the Facebook Experiment, tracked two groups of people of different ages: one that swore off the little blue *F* for a week, and a control group that went on the site as usual. After seven days the people who took a break from Facebook reported a significant boost in happiness compared with those who'd stayed online. Part of what's stressful about being on? The constant pressure to perfect your feed: 64 percent of women in our survey admit to monitoring their accounts and taking action when a snarky comment appears on a post or an



Lily Fawn White (left, with wife Rhonda Sparks), 35, Alaska: "We believe in the Creator. We believe in our son. We believe we were destined to find each other and journey on this path together."



Jessica R. Metcalfe, 36, North Dakota: "I believe in critiquing what's wrong and standing up for what's right."



Nishelle Clayton, 26, Kentucky: "I believe the bridge between pessimism and optimism is perseverance and work ethic."



Liliana Rivera, 22, Illinois: "I believe in me—a person who happens to be differently abled."



Taylor Carroll, 21, Virginia: "I believe in trusting myself and being empathetic."



Ainsley McWha, 39, Idaho: "I believe in sharing true stories to promote healing, understanding, and change."

OPPOSITE PAGE: WHITE: PROPAGANDA; AK, METCALFE: COURTESY OF SUBJECT; CLAYTON: KATELIN DICKERSON; RIVERA: LINDSEY ROTHROCK; THIS PAGE: CARROLL: JESSIE ALMQUIST; SØRENSEN: MCWHIA, BURNS: COURTESY OF SUBJECT; JOHN-FULLER: AMANDA KEE; HARRADON: KATE STRAIT



Emily Harradon, 39, Maine: "I believe there's a little voice inside our heads screaming to come out, and it's our gift to the world."



Haley Faith Burns, 23, West Virginia: "I believe in God, love, and friends who have great taste in music."



Stephanie Sorensen, 41, Florida: "I believe in conquering your battles to become an inspiration for someone else."



AnnMarie John-Fuller, 41, Colorado: "I believe there's good in everyone."

## How Women Have Changed

For 30 years *Glamour* has reported on women's self-esteem and body image.

# 1984

The magazine mounts the first major survey on body image and self-esteem.

### Of the women we surveyed...

**Only 6%** said they were "very happy" with their body.

**75%** said they felt "too fat."

**71%** said they were most satisfied with their breasts.

**64%** said they were most dissatisfied with their stomachs.

**42%** said that losing weight would make them happier than anything else in life, followed by success at work (22%) and a date with a man they admire (21%).

# 2017

In partnership with L'Oréal Paris, we surveyed 2,000 women, ages 18 to 50, on self-esteem, happiness, and body image. In short? We're evolving.

### Of those women...

**64%** say they're "happy" with their overall appearance—a big improvement.

**71%** say they're "most happy" with their breasts.

**63%** say they're "least happy" with their stomachs.

Major life-priority shift: **70%** say becoming financially secure is their top priority, followed by caring for their family (65%), being healthy/exercising (61%), and having a fulfilling relationship (60%).



unflattering photo is shared.

And plenty of women report a very real fear of backlash for speaking their mind online: **Almost one in five have gotten negative comments for their political views.** Conservative women were most likely to say they've received flak for their religion, while Hispanic women were more likely to have received pushback for their heritage. "I am half Mexican, and last year I celebrated Día de los Muertos at a big event in San Diego," says Emily Torres, a 23-year-old media planner from San Diego. "I posted a picture of myself with a sugar skull-face painting and captioned it that I was honoring my great aunt, who had passed a month or two earlier. I received texts and comments asking when I 'suddenly' became Mexican, accusing me of lying about being Hispanic since I don't speak Spanish and have lighter skin, and saying I was just adopting the ethnicity to be trendy and stand out." That kind of negativity leads many to retreat to their safe bubbles: 41 percent of women have stopped following someone because of their political beliefs.

No one is saying you need to swear off your Instagram; ironically, it can also be good for your self-esteem. Nearly three quarters of survey respondents say social media is a positive influence in their lives, that it inspires and informs them and makes them feel connected to others. "I find social media can be really motivating, once you learn to weed out the braggy stuff that makes you feel bad," says Anita Lavine, 45, a publicist from Seattle. "I'll get vacation or remodel ideas that are realistic."

# 74%

*of women believe social media is a positive force in their lives.*

Experts agree there are two guidelines for healthy social media usage: Watch how long you use it, because the self-esteem research hints that less is better, and don't just *lurk*: Actively posting and commenting makes you feel more positive than just scrolling down a FOMO rabbit hole.

## We Won't Stop Short of Success

Guess what else is important to women's happiness? M-O-N-E-Y. Across most zip codes, women cite "being financially independent" as the number-one thing that makes them feel confident. Millennials were especially money-sensitive—maybe because many came of age during the economic crisis. "I saw the way it affected people's self-esteem, and that sense of unease and uncertainty is something I never want to deal with," says Julianna Eldemire, 28, a publicist from Orlando, Florida. Women in our survey won't leave their futures to chance: **75 percent of women feel like they are making progress toward their life goals.** "Women aren't shy about letting their ambitions be known," says Risman. "For women now, there is no question of 'Will I work or not?' There's a presumption that it's an important and necessary part of your life, whether that work is with children or in the boardroom." Women also have their eyes open to possible roadblocks. In one of our survey's most striking findings, **56 percent believe they're underpaid**, and 66 percent say men get more support and opportunities to ➡

## The Rise of the Super-Positive Millennial

**C**ONFIDENCE MAY BE UP among women in general (and again, yay), but it's rocketing to Mars among millennials. "I feel more confident and optimistic than I did even a year ago," says Tara Bradford, 32, a life coach in New York City.

No, it's not that younger women simply have things easier: Millennials were actually just as likely to feel depressed as their older sisters. It's that despite any of the hurdles they may face, they are optimistic about their future: **73 percent of millennials surveyed say their life will be better off in five years, with the optimism especially pronounced for those under 25.** We found that 46 percent of the younger millennials also say "I'm proud of the person I am becoming," higher than other generations in our survey.

"Millennials feel better about themselves because they're comfortable being who they are, no matter what that looks like," says Pence. "Being able to stand up and say 'This is what makes me unique' is powerful."

## Your Sexual Orientation and Your Self-esteem

There's a connection, research finds.

### Troubling news

Nonhetero women in the survey were twice as likely to describe themselves as "unhappy," and 63 percent had struggled with depression.

### Family factors

"Isolation is an issue, because if your family and friends aren't accepting of your sexual orientation, you feel frightened and cut off," says Kate Gardiner, 31, a marketing executive, who's bisexual.

### Harassment truths

Another challenge: Gay and bi women report that they face more hurdles in the workplace; they're also more than twice as likely as straight women to have received sexually suggestive remarks or negative comments online.

### Smart > beautiful

Many nonhetero women described themselves as "smart" or "confident"; only 29 percent selected "beautiful." But that may just be language: "There's an inherent femininity to the word *beautiful*," notes Gardiner. "Women I know say *striking, studly, sexy, or attractive*."



# The Country Girl Blues

Are women who live in rural areas really less self-assured? Yes and no. Read on.

**T**HE STATS SEEM PRETTY STARK: Women in rural areas in our survey are far less likely than their city sisters to describe themselves as beautiful (only 28 percent did, compared with 43 percent of women in urban areas). They're also more prone to choosing words like *insecure* and *unattractive*—Midwesterners in particular are likely to self-identify with negative words like these. Women in rural settings also report feeling less confident and less successful than women living in nonrural areas...even if they're earning equivalent salaries.

What's happening here? "I grew up in a rural town in the Midwest, and I can say from both a personal and research perspective that self-esteem tends to be lower in these areas—especially the Midwest," says Jean Twenge, Ph.D. "There's an Australian term, *tall poppies*, that means if you get too big, people will try to cut you down, so you should keep your head down and not stand out too much. That really describes the rural mind-set."

Country settings, she explains, are often collectivist cultures—they emphasize the community over the individual. "But that's not always a bad thing," she insists. "It also means you're likely to have better, more solid relationships with people. If anything bad happens, everyone will show up with a casserole and a shoulder to lean on."

Megan Catalano, 41, a professor, grew up in "the sticks" of Pennsylvania—and built her confidence by learning to take credit for her successes even though she hadn't been taught to do so. "For me, getting that first small taste of success in my career—nailing my first full-time job, feeling good at it, being able to pay for my rent and car—made a huge difference," she says. "I started making better choices in the guys I dated, I spoke up more for myself, I got a promotion, and it just kind of builds and builds."

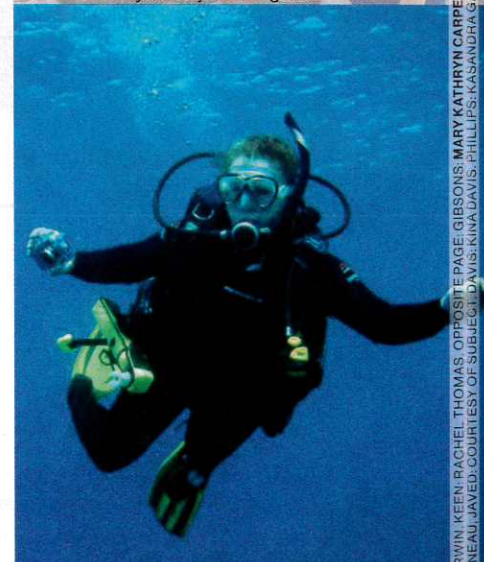
**55%**  
of women in rural areas say they've experienced depression, versus 48% in urban areas.



Ashleigh Pack, 31, Mississippi: "I believe bad experiences mold us into the people we're meant to be."



Sara Heller (center, with friends), 25, Hawaii: "I believe in doing things that scare you so you can grow."



Erin Keen, 30, Washington: "I believe in nature and humanity."

advance professionally than they do. "I see these statistics not as evidence that we're seeing more discrimination than before but that more women see it and are speaking up and saying, 'Hey, that's not right!'" says Risman. "We're now demanding that the workplace has to change." Or, as 31-year-old New York City marketing



Ari and Casi Gibson, 22, Alabama: Casi: "I believe in doing the right thing by everyone." Ari: "I believe in God, family, friends, and freedom."



Faeiza Javed, 25, Utah: "I believe kindness will prevail over all the hate we see these days."

exec Kate Gardiner puts it: "I'm in that first generation of women who never grew up thinking that I would be limited by my gender. The women I know aren't letting anything get in the way of what they want, and they're figuring out how to make their salaries equal by any means necessary—it's like, 'Eff you, pay me! I will not accept



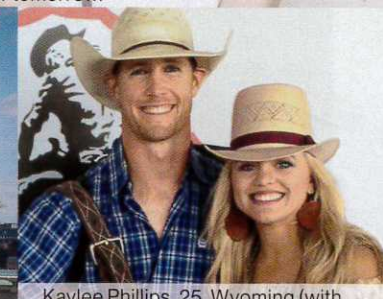
Alex Soto, 19, Texas: "I believe that letting your passion drive you is bulletproof."



Brandi Catoire, 39, Louisiana: "I believe in love and working together to build a better tomorrow."



Bria Davis, 24, Indiana: "I believe that perseverance, passion, and faith will take you beyond what the eye can see."



Kaylee Phillips, 25, Wyoming (with husband Zachariah): "I believe if we did one act of kindness each day our country would be a happy place."

anything less than what I'm worthy of."

Women have that can-do attitude even though many are weathering tough times: Half reported having experienced depression. "We're in a cultural climate where girls really believe they can aspire to anything," notes Pence. That's the upside. The downside is "they're internalizing it

as 'I should do everything.'" And that creates anxiety, she says. "There's a lot more pressure in terms of what they're expected to be, and it's not from other people; it's women themselves. It's the backhanded part of the empowerment movement."

In other words: Things are looking good—but we've got more room ♦♦



to grow. Here, three moves experts repeatedly suggested we *all* start making:  
**Celebrate your body—and mean it.**  
“Your body is the most amazing vehicle for your even more amazing soul, and it holds your unique purpose,” says Pence. “So embrace those curves and dimples because they house something unique only to you. When you look in the mirror, remember there is only one you... only one set of your eyes, your face shape, your hips, your breasts—they are yours,

and the more kindness you show yourself the better. You don’t learn how to love yourself by hating yourself. Own your *you*-ness.”

**Don’t limit yourself to following “perfect people.”** And we don’t just mean celebrities: When people you *know* curate their feeds, it can feel especially demoralizing. “If you see an idealized version of a peer,” says Webb, “the cycle just keeps going, and it becomes this contagion of inauthenticity.” Log off!

**Accept compliments.** “Give yourself permission to allow affirmations into your life,” adds Pence. “Listen with an open mind, and set aside the reflex to shoo them away with a self-deprecating response. Instead, let them land. Nod your head, say thank you. It may feel uncomfortable, but your heart will reap the benefits.”

*Shaun Dreisbach is a writer and editor in Burlington, Vermont.*

## The Five-State Face-off

We asked women from North Carolina, California, New York, Texas, and Ohio some pretty profound questions. Fascinating!

|  | NC  | CA  | NY  | TX   | OH  |
|--|---|---|---|--|---|
| <b>Body</b><br>Percent of women who are happy with their overall appearance... | 41%   | 70%   | 68%   | 62%  | 58%   |
| <b>Beauty</b><br>...and who describe themselves as beautiful                   | 28%   | 35%   | 25%   | 40%  | 38%   |
| <b>Life goals</b><br>The single biggest priority for women is...               | 79%<br>Becoming financially secure              | 69%<br>Being healthy/ exercising                | 61%<br>Caring for my family                     | 68%<br>Being healthy/ exercising                           | 67%<br>Having a fulfilling relationship         |
| <b>Confidence</b><br>The top factor that makes them feel confident...          | 78%<br>Achieving my personal or financial goals | 68%<br>Achieving my personal or financial goals | 61%<br>Achieving my personal or financial goals | 66%<br>Improving my appearance (way to break rank, Texas!) | 66%<br>Achieving my personal or financial goals |
| <b>Self-worth</b><br>...but what gives them the deepest sense of value is...   | 95%<br>Being a mom                              | 91%<br>My intelligence                          | 87%<br>My intelligence                          | 89%<br>My personality                                      | 89%<br>Being a mom                              |