

U.S. Audiences Crave Authentic and Aspirational Stories about People Managing Work, Family, and Care

Key Findings from MarketCast's Survey of Adult Streaming Viewers in the United States and Analysis of Real-Time Social Media Analytics

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The majority of adults in the U.S. have faced, are facing, or expect to face work-family and caregiving circumstances – and most viewers, regardless of personal circumstance, want to see authentic and aspirational depictions on-screen.

This is the key takeaway of a study of adult streaming subscribers, who watch 5 or more hours of TV or movies per week, conducted by the media research firm MarketCast in December 2023. Moreover, audiences respond more actively on social media to work-family content than to other types of stories – sharing their personal reflections and encouraging others to watch, according to MarketCast's real-time analytics of social media content.

Findings of this research, conducted for New America's Better Life Lab's Entertainment-Focused Narrative and Culture Change Initiative, include:

- **Most engaged streaming viewers (55%) have experienced or are currently experiencing work, family, and caregiving challenges personally or in their households.** Most experiences are personal and most are recent, within the last one or five years, or are ongoing. A plurality expects to experience such challenges in the next five years (43%).
- **Just 42% of engaged audiences say that the content they see now depicts work, family, and caregiving extremely or very well.** Only half (50%) of audiences say they see work-family and caregiving stories on screen often.
- **Half (50%) of all streaming-engaged viewers surveyed say they are extremely or very interested in seeing more content showing realistic portrayals of gender, work, family and care on screen – and another 34% express some interest.** Larger shares of Black viewers (54%), Latine viewers (57%), parents of all genders (61%), Millennial viewers (56%), and “sandwich generation” caregivers to children and adults (74%) express strong interest in seeing realistic content on gender, work, family and care.
- **Six-in-ten engaged viewers – translating to roughly 47 to 49 million people – wish there were more content showing how people can manage work, family, and caregiving with support and gender equity.** Specifically, viewers agree that they want to see more storylines and characters that depict: **women succeeding at work**, while being loving, positive parents at home; **men providing hands-on care** to children and loved ones; expressions of **pride versus apology** in parenting and caregiving; illustrations of **supportive bosses and co-workers** through actions and policies to support parents and caregivers; storylines or characters focused on **policies to help support parents and caregivers, like paid leave, child, and elder or disability care**; characters **supporting each other** through work and family challenges; and storylines **showing how work, family, and caregiving can be integrated.**

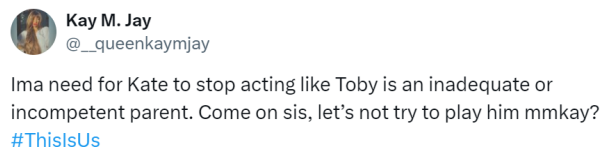
- An estimated 22 to 24 million viewers strongly agree that they wish more programming would include these story elements. Larger shares of younger adults, Millennial and Gen Z women, parents, “sandwich generation” caregivers, and Latine viewers strongly agree that they wish there were more gender-equitable, aspirational, and solutions-oriented content.
- TV shows with work, family, and caregiving themes generate greater than average online engagement. 63% of a selected sample of 32 TV series that grappled with work, family, parenting, and caregiving generated above-average online engagement, with viewers sharing of personal reflections on the connection between programming and their own lives and advocating to others to watch these shows, according to a MarketCast analysis of social media discussions. Authenticity and realism, strength, emotional salience, and depictions of relationships drive audience engagement and commentary.

Methodology Note:

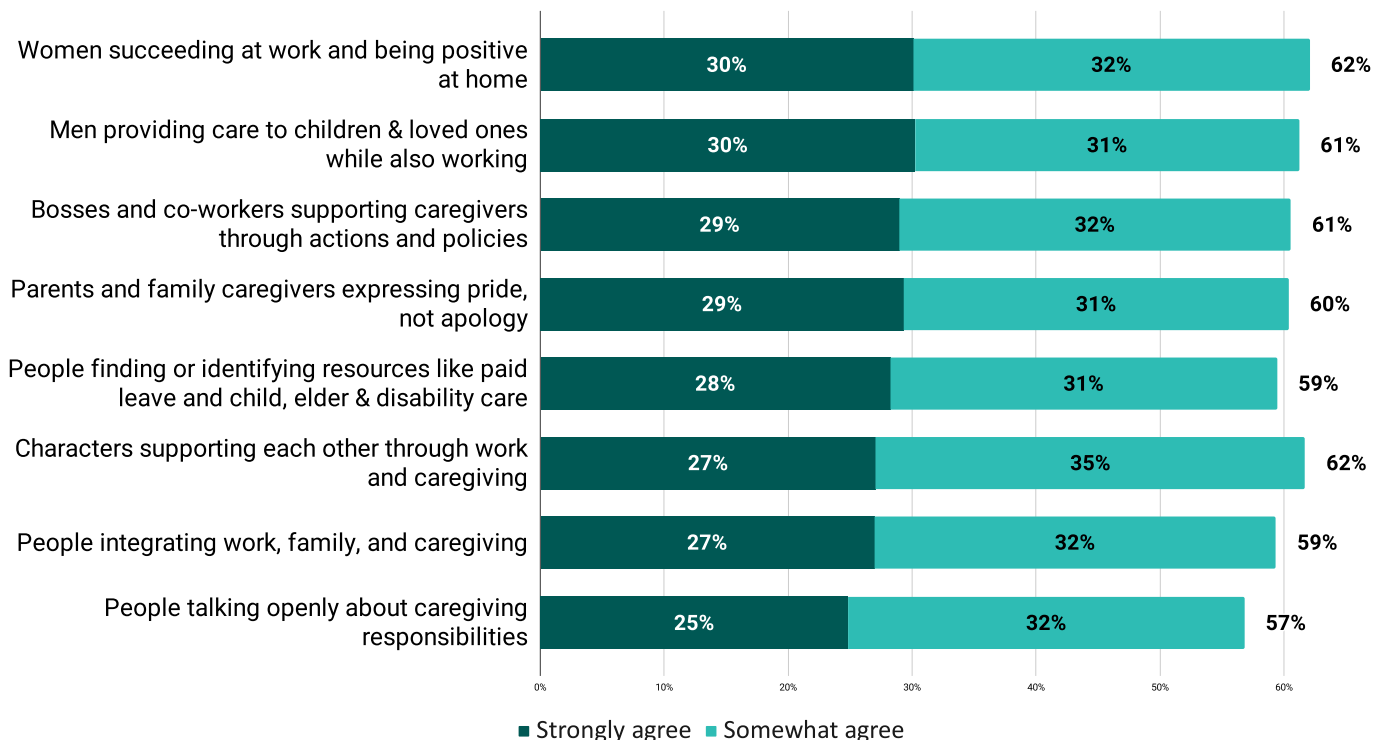
Survey findings are drawn from adult respondents (ages 18-59) in the United States interviewed as part of MarketCast’s weekly tracking study of 13-59 year-olds who use a streaming service, and who have watched at least one episode of a streaming program or movie within the last year, and say they watch TV and film content for at least 5 hours per week. A total of 2000 respondents were surveyed in the weekly tracker, with quotas by age and gender, of which there were 1720 completed surveys among adults. Data were collected from December 12-24, 2023. The margin of error for adults is +/- 2.5 percentage points; the data were weighted to reflect the U.S. population of adults, 18-59 years, to obtain the representative demographic characteristics of this addressable market.

Social media insights are drawn from MarketCast Real-Time Analytics data, which evaluates audience engagement with storytelling content. The findings in this memo are drawn from Twitter/X conversation based on 32 TV series that depict authentic stories surrounding caregiving, balancing work/family issues, etc. on screen over the last several years and measured “urgency,” which is defined as the portion of social conversation coming from audiences sharing both intent to watch and advocating for others to also watch.

For more information or a deeper data dive, please contact Vicki Shabo, Senior Fellow at New America’s Better Life Lab, at shabo@newamerica.org.



U.S. Streaming Audiences Want to See More Characters and Storylines Featuring...



DETAILED FINDINGS

#1 The Majority of Engaged Viewers Have Personal or Household Experience Managing Work, Family, and Care – Resulting in Financial and Workplace Challenges for Many.

Personal or household experience with work, family, and care challenges are commonplace for streaming-engaged audiences – and many expect that work, family, and care challenges will arise in the near future.

55% OF THE ENGAGED STREAMING AUDIENCE – 43.6 MILLION PEOPLE – HAS EXPERIENCE NAVIGATING WORK, FAMILY, AND CAREGIVING CHALLENGES.

47% OF PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS – ESPECIALLY WOMEN – HAVE EXPERIENCED FINANCIAL HARDSHIP DUE TO THESE CHALLENGES.

41% OF AUDIENCE MEMBERS WHO HAVE FACED THESE CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED ADVERSE SITUATIONS AT WORK.

Most audience members (55%) – translating to an estimated 43.6 million people – say they have personally experienced, or live with someone who has experienced, disruptions to work and other challenges managing work, family, and care for themselves, an older or disabled loved one, or a new child. Most of the reported experiences were personal, and are recent (within the last year or last five years), or ongoing.

- More than half of both women (57%) and men (53%) report one or more experiences with work, family and care.
- 59% of Gen Z adults, 55% of Millennials and 56% of Gen X women say they have experienced these life events with work, family, and care. Gen X women are significantly more likely than their male counterparts to have hands-on experience with leaving a job for caregiving, taking a workplace leave for caregiving, or being a

caregiver to an older family member.

- A full 25% of “sandwich generation” audience members who are currently living with a minor child and are acting or have acted as a main caregiver for an older adult, ill, or disabled loved one have left a job to provide care.

More than four-in-ten viewers (43%) – including half (51%) of viewers aged 18-34 – believe they will face a work, family and care challenge in the next five years, as do 71% of those currently in the “sandwich” of caring for both a child and another older, ill, or disabled loved one.

Nearly half (47%) of audience members who have experience with caregiving – including providing care or finding care for loved ones, or facing work interruptions because of caregiving or their personal health – report experiencing financial challenges, such as falling behind on monthly payments, using savings or not saving at all, or borrowing from family or friends.

- Women (54%) – especially Millennial women (63%) and mothers (63%) – are more likely than others to report having financial difficulties.

Four-in-ten (41%) of audience members who have experience with a workplace leave, managing work and child or elder care, finding adequate care, or leaving a job, report experiencing a resulting workplace challenge, including the inability to take paid or unpaid time off, hostility from bosses or coworkers, lost opportunities for a promotion or a raise, experiences with discrimination or stigma.

- Millennial women (53%), mothers (52%), people who are caring for both children, older, or other loved ones (47%), and Latine people (49%) are significantly more likely than other audiences to reporting experiencing a workplace challenge.

#2 Audiences Are Interested in Onscreen Depictions of Work, Family and Care – and Related Gender Equity Issues – that Are Realistic as well as Aspirational and Solutions-Oriented

Half of viewers (50%) perceive seeing work, family and care content in films and on TV “very often” or “pretty often” – and people who have experienced these life challenges are more likely to say they see this content frequently. Parents of children under age 12, and “sandwich generation” viewers who are currently parenting and are caring or have cared for an older, ill or disabled loved one are much more likely to perceive seeing related content on television than viewers without these caregiving responsibilities.

Viewers familiar with certain network and cable/streaming shows give above-average marks to certain shows’ depictions of work, family, and caregiving issues. On network TV, the shows that at least 40% of viewers say do a good job are: *911*, *911-Lone Star*, *Abbott Elementary*, *A Million Little Things*, *Black-ish*, *The Conners*, *Fresh Off the Boat*, *The Good Doctor*, *Grey’s Anatomy*, *Lopez vs. Lopez*, *Modern Family*, *Parenthood*, and *This is Us*. Among cable and streaming shows, viewers familiar with *Ginny and Georgia*, *Insecure*, *Maid*, *P-Valley*, *The Upshaws*, and *Virgin River* are recognized for their depictions of work, family, and care by 40% or more. Responses for some network shows and all cable/streaming shows should be considered directional and qualitative due to small sample sizes.

Authentic representation has room to grow, especially in the eyes of women who have been most affected by work, family, and care challenges. Only a plurality of viewers (42%) feel that film and TV programming reflects work, family, and care experiences extremely or very well. Another 39% say they “do a pretty good job” – suggesting creators and studios are on the right track but that there is room for improvement.

- There’s particular room to grow with a key audience segment who has experience with work, family, and care challenges: **Millennial women, only 40% of whom say programming reflects experiences extremely or very well** – but who, as noted below, are enthusiastic about seeing more programming with realistic portrayals of work, family, and care challenges.

50% OF VIEWERS PERCEIVE SEEING WORK, FAMILY, AND CARE CONTENT OFTEN

84% OF VIEWERS ARE INTERESTED IN SEEING MORE DEPICTIONS OF REALISTIC PORTRAYALS

Half of viewers (50%) say that they are “extremely” or “very” interested in seeing more programming with “realistic portrayals of these kinds of work, family, and caregiving situations.” Another 34% say they are “somewhat interested” in seeing more of this content. Just 16% express little or no interest.

- **People who are dealing with, or more likely to soon be dealing with work, family, and care challenges, are even more enthusiastic.** Both dads and moms (61%), Gen Z women and men (53%), Millennial women and men (57% and 54% respectively), and “sandwich generation” caregivers (74%) say they are extremely or very interested in realistic work, family, and care portrayals.
- **Latine (57%) and Black (54%) audiences also express heightened interest in seeing realistic portrayals of work, family, and caregiving issues,** perhaps because they are more likely to be caregivers, may face more barriers in the health care system, and may face greater financial and work challenges, according to other research.

Six-in-ten viewers – translating to roughly 47 and 49 million people – say they are interested in a range of on-screen depictions that model aspirations for gender equity, pride in caregiving and parenting, and resources that provide systemic supports. An estimated 22 to 24 million people are intensely interested in these stories.

When asked about particular story components that they “wished more programs and movies included portrayals of,” the vast majority of viewers responded enthusiastically to stories that show a more equal, supported future, including:

- Storylines showing **women finding success and work and still being loving, positive parents** at home (30% strongly agree, 62% overall agree).
- Storylines showing **men providing hands-on care to children and family members while still being successful at work** (30% strongly agree, 61% overall agree).
- Characters’ **bosses or coworkers showing support through actions and workplace policies** that support parents and caregivers (29% strongly, 61% overall).

- Characters who **speak proudly about being parents or caregivers rather than apologizing** for family responsibilities (29% strongly agree, 60% overall agree).
- Characters or storylines that show how people are able to **find or identify resources such as paid family and medical leave or affordable child, elder, or disability care** (28% strongly, 59% overall).
- Characters **supporting each other through work and family challenges** (27% strongly agree, 62% overall agree).
- Storylines showing **how work, family and caregiving can be integrated** (27% strongly agree, 59% overall agree).

Audiences are more interested in specific depictions than in general talk: They express less intensity and overall interest in “characters talking openly about their caregiving responsibilities (25% strongly agree, 57% overall).

One or more story themes are particularly resonant for key audiences by demographic, including Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X women, parents of kids under 18 at home, viewers in households with below-average income, and Latine audiences.

Story elements that are especially resonant for key audiences, based on % agreeing overall or % strongly agreeing that they would like to see more of:	Gen Z overall	Gen Z women	Millennials	Gen X Women	Parents of kids under 18	Latine viewers	Households with income < \$80K
Women finding success at work and still being loving, positive parents at home	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Men proving hands-on care while succeeding at work	X	X	X		X	X	X
Characters speaking proudly about being caregivers rather than apologizing	X	X	X		X	X	X
Depictions of people finding resources such as paid family and medical leave or affordable child, elder, or disability care	X	X			X	X	
Characters’ bosses and coworkers showing support through actions and workplace policies		X			X		X
Characters supporting each other through work and family challenges		X			X	X	
Storylines showing how work, family and caregiving can be integrated		X			X		

In addition, lived experiences and the anticipation of these experiences are associated with heightened interest among other key groups:

- **People who have experienced work, family, and care challenges** including being caregivers, taking workplace leaves, and struggling to find care are more likely to strongly agree that they want to see more stories about: men providing hands-on caregiving, women being successful at work; people speaking with pride about family caregiving and parenting; stories showing resources like paid leave, child care and elder care; and bosses and co-workers being supportive.
- **People who expect to become parents in the next five years** are more intensely interested in everything.
- **Sandwich generation caregivers** to a child and an older, ill, or disabled family member are more intensely interested in everything, and are especially interested in depictions of men providing hands-on care and women succeeding at work.

#3 Television shows incorporating work, family, and caregiving content generates higher-than-average online engagement and discussion.

MarketCast's Real-Time Analytics data examining social media discussions suggests that audiences are, on average, more invested in authentic depictions of work, family, and caregiving narratives than in other stories on screen – leading to visibility of their own challenges and a greater understanding of others. Among 32 TV series identified as including work, family, and caregiving content, 63% achieved above-average urgency on social media, as audiences shared their intent to watch the show (“intent”) or recommended that others do so (“advocacy”).

Storytelling elements that viewers responded to with greater than average urgency include:

- **Authentic and relatable stories** that tackled subjects including work/family balance, caregiving, grief, divorce, and parenting, as well as domestic violence, emotional/psychological

abuse, and mental health. Social media commenters drew comparisons with their own lives.

Example: *Maid*, a limited series drama adapted from a book, which showcased a white working-class woman seeking to care for her child and hold a job while also fleeing domestic violence and abuse. It is a rare example of “working class people with working class problems,” in the words of one commenter.



Janete Pires
@JanetePires4

...

#MAIDNetflix one of the most teaching and powerful series I've watched in time

From emotional and physical abuse to ups and downs of life.. survival game, a mother's struggle, addiction and mental health. Definitely a must watch 🌟

5:44 AM · Oct 16, 2021

Maid had +117% above the drama average for online engagement.

- **Strong characters – especially women – that rose above adversity**, struggled with mental health, and were courageous or practiced accountability when faced with challenges with work and family.

Example: *Ginny and Georgia*, a far-fetched comedy-drama series, which follows a white single mom who flees abuse and is also engaged in her own nefarious crimes in the name of notoriety and success, all the while parenting two children with their non-resident Black father.

Ginny and Georgia rated +18% above the drama average for urgency.



Nelks
@nelkynelks

...

I love Georgia she's such a strong woman and yeah she doesn't understand Ginny's resentment because Ginny has everything Georgia never did. #ginnyandgeorgia

12:42 PM · Jan 12, 2023 · 84 Views



Brendon Smith 🇺🇸
@bigdogXVI

...

#GinnyandGeorgia Have to say, the show is really tackling mental health, domestic abuse, and other topics very well. I'm very much looking forward to another season if there's a renewal


- Emotionally salient scenes that ensnared audiences in a wide range of ways, ranging from tears to frustration or joy in reaction to authentic depictions of family relationships and difficulties of managing family and work.

Example: *Insecure*, a comedy-drama series prompted audiences to encourage others to view it, in part due to the raw, emotional responses that the show – which followed a group of friends through work, family, dating, and caregiving relationships – made the series relatable. Audiences felt that the portrays of Black people succeeding with work and relationships at the series’ end was powerful and meaningful.

 **Rae**
@ThisIsRaee ...

Insecure is so relatable in so many ways, that's why we gone cry in the car when it ends. #InsecureHBO

11:36 PM · Oct 24, 2021

 **Beauty Lee**
@beautytheicon_ ...

Black women being happy, Black women being successful, black women being loved, black women having joy, black women supporting each other, black women having supportive partners, black women having the life they deserve, that is #Insecure ending. #Insecurehbo




11:05 PM · Dec 26, 2021

Insecure rated +269% higher than other shows in advocacy.

- Relationships between parents, children, and partners led audiences to weigh in on sacrificing for the good of a child, negotiating work and parenting, parenting children with disabilities, and navigating difficult family dynamics.

Example: *Fleishman is in Trouble*, a limited drama series adapted from a book, resonated with audiences by illustrating divorce and its effects on children; it also included a single father seeking to manage work and care.

 **rebekah.**
@rbkh_remarkable ...

It's incredible I've never been divorced or had kids or been in a long term relationship but still find myself relating to and deeply understanding to the characters in Fleishman Is In Trouble. Definitely recommend

12:45 AM · Jan 7, 2023 · 262 Views


Fleishman is in Trouble had +105% above average advocacy, compared to the average for dramas.

Example: *This is Us*, a network drama following multiple generations and branches of a family, depicted three different examples of parenting arrangements in which the shows’ main characters and their partners/co-parents are navigating care for young children, often when also managing their own workplace and professional needs; the show also depicted caregiving for an adult with dementia, as well as adult mental health issues.

 **Just here to watch tv**
@Justher64910726 ...

Madison needs to realize Kevin wants to co-parent. She's trying to replace him like he's an absentee dad. #ThisIsUs

9:26 PM · Feb 22, 2022

 **Syd-n-ey** 🌱🌱
@sydsyddy ...

If my man doesn't love me the way Beth loves Randall it's not gonna work. And if you watch This is Us you know. Randall isn't perfect and we all know this, but he's supportive and he tries. He's so sweet. ❤️

5:14 PM · Feb 23, 2022

This Is Us had +95% urgency above average compared to other dramas.

For more information or a deeper data dive, please contact Vicki Shabo, Senior Fellow at New America's Better Life Lab, at shabo@newamerica.org.