



# **THE GENDER WEALTH FRAMEWORK: EXPANDING HOW WE DEFINE, MEASURE, AND BUILD WEALTH**

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***“definitions are vital starting points for the imagination. What we cannot imagine cannot come into being. A good definition marks our starting point and lets us know where we want to end up.”***  
***- bell hooks***

# WHY DO WE NEED A GENDER WEALTH FRAMEWORK?



In October 2017, WOMEN'S WAY launched the Women's Economic Security Initiative (WESI) as a systems-level collaborative to tackle the complex deep-rooted issue of women's economic security. We convened government, nonprofits, philanthropy, businesses, and women with the lived experience of economic insecurity around a shared vision, common agenda, and aligned activities. Over four years of working with more than 100 partners, we expanded our focus from women's economic security to the **gender wealth gap**. From the insights of our partners, we came to understand wealth as a more holistic measure of economic security. Practically, wealth considers financial building blocks such as income, but also components such as investments, emergency savings, debt, and inheritances — all of which are huge contributors to a person's long-term financial stability and power.

We also learned that the gender wealth gap is larger than the gender pay gap and continues to grow. For every dollar a white man owns in material wealth, women overall own just 32 cents. When considering the racial demographics of this same statistic, Black and Latina women own just one penny. The gender wealth gap is a stronger indicator of economic insecurity than the pay gap, as it influences the ability to weather current financial challenges as well as save and invest for the future. It takes money to make money, as they say. And it's expensive to be poor.

With this new understanding, WOMEN'S WAY transitioned WESI to the Gender Wealth Institute (GWI) whose mission is to close the gender wealth gap in the Greater Philadelphia region by advancing research and practical solutions that build wealth for women who are economically insecure. Like racial injustice, climate change, and world hunger, the gender wealth gap is a *systemic* issue, and it will require systemic answers. This means closing the gender wealth gap will require a deep understanding of the root causes of the issues, as well as how women define and experience wealth. And yet, unlike the racial wealth gap, there is very little data that has examined the wealth experiences of women.



In 2021, WOMEN'S WAY developed an ambitious research agenda, focused on defining wealth for women and other marginalized genders. As a convener, our focus reflected our best understanding of what was important to women, and that was having the ability to navigate financial shifts and invest in the futures of their loved ones.

However, as we stayed in dialogue with women most impacted by economic insecurity as well as our community partners, it became clear that the more common definition of wealth was not totally resonant with our network. More compellingly, our community pointed us to a broader sense of abundance— in resources, surely, but also in qualities and experiences that could connect them to a sense of dignity, well-being, and expansiveness for themselves, their loved ones, and their communities. From this, we shifted to more deeply understand the experience of **wealth** for women.

Wealth or net worth is traditionally defined as assets minus liabilities. However, this definition of wealth is focused on *individual* accumulation and *individual* metrics of success. This definition is based in a history that has focused on profit, personal property, and possessions over people. People, especially women, are being underserved by this narrow definition of success. WOMEN'S WAY has adopted The [Maven Collaborative's](#) definition of wealth which is:

*"When wealth is accumulated, it allows us to live and retire with **greater dignity, freedom, and peace of mind** and for our communities to be prosperous, resilient, and vibrant. Wealth allows us to provide future generations with the **freedom to dream big** and become all they truly can be. It also means being healthy, and knowing that your family, networks, and communities **are healthy, spiritually whole, and contributing.**"*

This definition offers richer framing and deeper outcomes that are in direct resistance to the more traditional definition of wealth. Collectivism, interdependence, and self-determination are woven throughout this conception of wealth. This points us not only to the benefits of wealth that are most meaningful to women, but also suggests a reorientation to the design of systems that could generate these particular outcomes.

In order to start to shift these systems towards more equitable and liberatory structures, it is necessary to name the ideas, concepts, and theories that prop up current systems and examine the nuances in how women and other marginalized genders experience these systems.

# THE ROLE OF NARRATIVES



Narratives are the stories we tell and the mindsets, beliefs, and ideas we hold that help us organize our thinking and explain how the world works. When it comes to the gender wealth gap, we often find harmful narratives that prop up oppressive power structures and enable inequitable outcomes. As noted, The Maven Collaborative's definition of wealth expands beyond material assets, highlighting the importance of collective well-being, community resilience, and intergenerational prosperity. This contrasts sharply with popular dominant narratives that frame the gender wealth gap as a result of personal failures.

While wealth, as described by The Maven Collaborative, is about creating opportunities for all to thrive and contribute, common societal narratives reinforce systems designed to control and blame individuals in poverty, perpetuating cycles of inequality. These narratives undermine true wealth by prioritizing the privileged while deepening the disempowerment and shame experienced by marginalized communities.

Dominant narratives that perpetuate our harmful and inadequate response to wealth inequity include toxic individualism, bootstrapping, and anti-Blackness. These pervasive narratives create misguided beliefs that anyone can succeed despite their circumstances and demonize certain people based on their proximity to perceived "otherness."

## **DOMINANT NARRATIVE EXAMPLES**

### **Bootstrapping**

Bootstrapping ignores the complexity of systemic barriers and suggests that individual ability is a primary predictor of success. It over-exaggerates individual characteristics and glamorizes the unsustainable and relentless pursuit of success. As it relates to the gender wealth gap, the intense pressure of the bootstrapping myth shifts the burden of survival to the individual; for marginalized genders, this often means the survival of their networks and communities is also dependent on the will of the individual.

### **Toxic Individualism**

As it relates to the gender wealth gap, toxic individualism is a hyper-focus on personal achievement and individual responsibility. It negates the government's role in creating and enabling conditions that allow for the creation and protection of wealth. Toxic individualism creates a sense of shame in folks who grapple with the negative outcomes of a gender wealth gap, rather than appropriately analyzing widespread and pervasive patterns and the systems that enable it. Toxic individualism downplays the role of social safety nets in creating economic prosperity and reinforces assumptions that resources, opportunities, and advantages are easily and evenly distributed across genders.

### **Anti-Blackness**

Anti-Blackness refers to the attitudes, practices, and behaviors that devalue, minimize, and marginalize the humanity of Black people of African descent. This also shows up as colorism in other minority communities, resulting in unequal treatment and discrimination of folks with darker skin tones. In all instances of Anti-Blackness, whiteness is valorized as the standard and ideal aspiration. As it relates to the gender wealth gap, White Supremacy justifies tactics of extraction and exploitation, leading to racialized hierarchies amongst genders that are already marginalized.

When it comes to the gender wealth gap, it is important to examine the design of systems that consistently produce this outcome. Systems are not natural or inevitable; they are constructed by decisions and choices. The process by which we arrive at decisions and choices are strongly influenced by narratives. Rooted in harmful narratives such as the ones listed above, systems are designed that embed heteropatriarchy, wealth supremacy, and racialized capitalism into their very function—leading to a gender wealth gap.

It is important to pause to examine these theoretical frameworks, as they help explain how and why marginalized genders have inadequate access to and limited experience of wealth. They also impact our economic, cultural, and overall societal focus and our approach to well-being in various systems.

## ***THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS***

**1. Racialized Capitalism** is capitalism, at its core, and is focused on private ownership of property where one class of people control and profit from the labor of the subordinate class. The social and economic structure of capitalism reflects a system of relationships of domination among categories of people. In the United States, that domination is often racialized.

In fact, the American economic system was born out of chattel slavery, where Black bodies were commodified for the economic gains of white families. Thus, capitalism in the US originated on a racial caste system that privileged whiteness. From that blueprint, racialization became critical to the maintenance and sustainability of labor exploitation that is inherent in capitalism.

**2. Wealth Supremacy** is an economic system that believes wealthy people matter more than others. It is cultural and political processes and attitudes by which wealthy people accumulate and maintain prestige, power, and privilege. Our economic system protects the extreme hoarding of the “privileged class” by supporting and enabling strategies of extraction and exploitation.

**3. Heteropatriarchy** is a logic that justifies the subordination of all those who are not heterosexual cisgender men. Anything outside of this constructed norm is seen as deviant and unworthy, and therefore dehumanization and oppression of other genders becomes justified. In an economic system, disinvestment from “others” is explained as a result of their alleged deviance, rather than deliberate choices to structure advantages for the “norm.”



# THE GENDER WEALTH FRAMEWORK

The **Gender Wealth Framework** is a way to challenge these deeply embedded frameworks and expand how we think about and measure success.

## GENDER WEALTH FRAMEWORK

*When wealth is accumulated, it allows us to live and retire with greater **dignity, freedom, and peace of mind** and for our communities to be **prosperous, resilient, and vibrant**. Wealth allows us to provide future generations with the freedom to dream big and become all they truly can be. It also means being **healthy**, and knowing that your family, networks and communities are **healthy, spiritually whole, and contributing**.*

— The Maven Collaborative —

### Material Well-being

### Lived Experience

### System Conditions/Context



**Health and Healing**



**Stability and Opportunity**



**Freedom, Joy, and Belonging**



**Family and Community Care**



**Resource Navigation and Support**

- Care includes healing spaces and practices that represent various cultural frameworks/traditions and are gender affirming, inclusive and accessible.
- Institutions strive to create a safe, trusting relationship with their communities.
- Women have access to clean, green healing spaces in their own community.
- Women have access to the full complement of health services (physical, dental, mental) that span the continuum of care/life span.
- Women have time to rest and restore without expectations of labor or productivity.

- Women access quality jobs or self-employment that provide a family-thriving wage and benefits that allow them to live with dignity and ease.
- Women get to do work they love without being undervalued in the market and can advance in any field free of dismantling structural biases.
- Women have access to a social safety net that provides basic rights (healthcare, food, shelter, etc.) by virtue of their humanity.
- Women are free from extractive debt policies and practices and have access to affordable assets that build wealth.

- Women feel free to pursue joy and leisure and can find wellness communities free from structural biases.
- Women feel treated with dignity and respect, and their lived experiences are honored, valued, and validated by people and institutions.
- Women are free to make choices and exercise self-determination.
- Women feel connected to their communities and contribute to shaping their communities.

- Women can care for their children, families, and community without fear of losing a job or their economic security.
- Women have high-quality caregiving options due to a robust care infrastructure.
- Women have access to networks of care and mutual aid across their lifespan.
- Women are free from gender-based violence in their families and communities.

- Women have places and spaces to go and be supported and heard without shame, judgment, or guilt.
- Women receive support that considers historical and structural inequities as much as individual choices.
- Women can easily find and access available resources.
- Resources and supports meet the needs and goals of women and are designed by and with women.



The framework encompasses three components as defined below:



<p><b>Material Well-being</b></p>	<p>Measures traditional notions of economic stability and provides point in time assessment to someone’s financial portfolio. Measurements focus on access and affordability of resources.</p>
<p><b>Lived Experience</b></p>	<p>Measures of the experience of wealth in community and institutions.</p>
<p><b>Systemic conditions/context</b></p>	<p>Acknowledges and highlights the historical and current structural specificities of wealth inequality and injustice by examining the conditions that are keeping us from making progress towards more liberatory futures - such as mindsets, power dynamics, policies, and resource flows.</p>

We know that material well-being will be important to any definition of wealth, as this concept provides a snapshot of one’s economic stability at a point in time. It is crucial to collect data that provides information on women’s financial interdependence, income, intergenerational wealth transfers, housing/land ownership, and debt. We also know that financial indicators alone do not tell us the full picture when measuring the sense of well-being, freedom, and dignity that are central to the experience of wealth. For this, we turn to lived experience measures. These questions allow us to better understand women’s experiences in systems such as the labor market, social services, healthcare, etc. Often, the relationships and dynamics in these systems mirror extraction and exploitation, which not only challenge the lived experience of wealth but also impact access to material well-being.

Finally, we include systemic conditions and context process measures, as an acknowledgment of how systems design impacts material well-being and lived experience. Systemic context points us to the “why” and “how” of wealth— how political and social contexts influence wealth for marginalized genders.

In this component of the Gender Wealth Framework, we advocate for an intentional process to embed Gender Economic Equity Design into systems through organizations. By developing mental model agility, upending power relations, and centering the frameworks, expertise, and narratives of those most impacted by the gender wealth gap, organizations are better equipped to design systems to produce liberatory outcomes and shared prosperity. Gender economic equity design focuses on creating infrastructure in organizations that center peace, joy, dignity, choice, belonging, and autonomy to folks who are purposefully excluded from these experiences.

To support this transformative systems change, we must impact mental models, relationships and connections, and power dynamics within organizations and society at large. In the short term, we believe these dimensions will be a guide to help funders and practitioners to shift mindsets and priorities in service to gender equity.





# A FRAMEWORK FOR PRESERVING AND GROWING WOMEN'S WEALTH

The Gender Wealth Framework is designed to be a guide for 1) practitioners to design and evaluate programs that advance gender equity, 2) funders to strategically invest in programs and strategies that advance gender equity and 3) policymakers to design and evaluate policies that are aligned to closing the gender wealth gap.

One of the main goals of the framework is to thoughtfully consider systems design in addressing the gender wealth gap and thoughtfully consider the experiences women have in systems connected to their well-being. While we work to close the gender wealth gap, we believe focusing on a wider definition of wealth as well as interactions/experiences with systems is important to capture, so we can create more empathetic, loving, joyful, and human-centered systems in the future.

The Gender Wealth Framework is organized around 3 components, and further refined to focus on wealth in five dimensions. Each dimension includes indicators for success. The 5 dimensions of the Gender Wealth Framework are 1) Health and Healing, 2) Stability and Opportunity, 3) Freedom, Joy, and Belonging, 4) Family and Community Care, and 5) Resource Navigation and Support. These dimensions are interrelated and in some ways interdependent.



## Health and Healing

- Care includes healing spaces and practices that represent various cultural frameworks/traditions and are inclusive, gender-affirming, and accessible.
- Institutions strive to create a safe, trusting relationship with their communities.
- Women have access to clean, green healing spaces in their own community.
- Women have access to the full complement of health services (physical, dental, mental) that span the continuum of care/life span.
- Women have time to rest and restore without expectations of labor or productivity.



## Stability and Opportunity

- Women are able to access quality jobs, which include a family thriving wage (for a working mother with two children, and a non-working partner is defined as \$39 per hour in Philadelphia) and benefits (paid leave, paid time off, retirement support, parental, etc.) through employment and self-employment that will allow them to live with dignity and ease.
- Women get to do work they love without being undervalued in the market and can advance in any field. Occupations will be free of structural biases.
- Women have access to a social safety net that provides access to basic needs (such as food, shelter, healthcare, etc.) by virtue of their humanity.
- Women are free from extractive debt policies and practices and have access to affordable assets that build wealth.

## Freedom, Joy, and Belonging

- Women feel free to pursue joy and leisure and can find wellness communities free from structural biases.
- Women feel treated with dignity and respect, and their lived experiences are honored, valued, and validated by people and institutions.
- Women are free to make choices and exercise self-determination.
- Women feel connected to their communities and contribute to shaping their communities.

## Family and Community Care

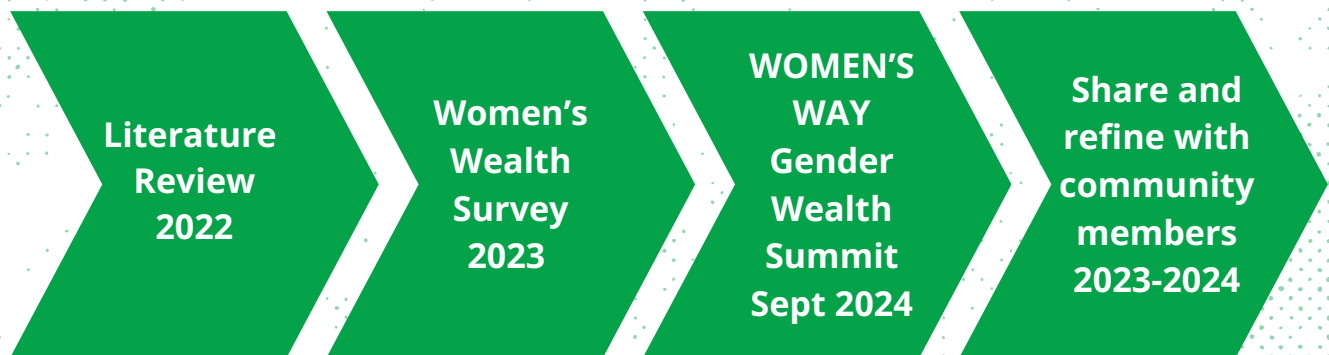
- Women can care for their children, families, and community without fear of losing a job or their economic security.
- Women have high-quality caregiving options due to a robust care infrastructure.
- Women have access to networks of care and mutual aid across their lifespan.
- Women are free from gender-based violence in their families and communities.

## Resource Navigation and Support

- Women have places and spaces to go and be supported and heard without shame, judgment, or guilt.
- Women receive support that considers historical and structural inequities as much as individual choices.
- Women can easily find and access available resources.
- Resources and supports meet the needs and goals of women and are designed by and with women.

WOMEN'S WAY used a multi-phase process to determine the five dimensions as shown below. The first iteration of the dimensions were drafted based on a literature review and primary research completed in 2022-2023.

In the Fall of 2023, 90 community members, practitioners, funders, and researchers gathered at the WOMEN'S WAY Gender Wealth Summit to discuss the findings and refine each dimension. These dimensions will continue to be refined with the community over the next few years to ensure they continue to honor and reflect the realities of our economy and people's well-being.



## HOW TO USE THE GENDER WEALTH FRAMEWORK

The Gender Wealth Framework is built on the feedback that a more holistic, expansive approach to wealth is needed—in particular, one that values participants' experiences and incorporates a thorough systems analysis. It allows us to consider changes in experiences over time, allowing for a fuller understanding of wealth. Point-in-time measures can provide a snapshot of economic well-being, but the kind of wealth that impacts individuals, networks, and communities also needs measures to reflect interconnectedness and a reflection of how systems recognize these relationships. The Gender Wealth Framework seeks to disrupt and reframe the typical metrics of evaluation, which tend to focus on outputs, such as the number of people who attend a training or the amount of money saved.

Instead of measuring success by predefined criteria, the framework serves as a tool that shifts the focus from rigid, top-down performance metrics to participant-centered growth and systems accountability. Such an approach acknowledges both the complexity of individual journeys and the impact of systemic context, creating a more inclusive and responsive framework for personal and communal success.

For **practitioners**, the tools of the Gender Wealth Framework can provide real-time feedback that helps tailor programs to fit the evolving needs of participants, validating their experiences as integral to success.

For **funders**, the Gender Wealth Framework can inform them how to strategically invest dollars and other resources into programs and models that center gender equity and lead to transformational social and economic change. In addition, funders can use the Framework to shift their mindsets on what success is and how to measure success.

By shifting how practitioners, funders, and policymakers view success, the framework pushes policies, resource flows, and programs to better align with how women view success.

Funders, policymakers, program administrators, evaluators, and managers can utilize this framework to assess their current portfolios by reflecting on where this vision of success is being honored and where it may need recalibration. By embracing a holistic approach that values participants' lived experiences, these stakeholders can identify programs that authentically engage communities and contribute to meaningful, participant-defined success. Furthermore, the systemic conditions reflection questions can help us better right-size how we expect certain programs and investments to interact with systemic challenges.

Ideally, we must be able to name where systemic harms like the gender wealth gap may be happening, such as when interventions or traditional measures of success mask deeper issues or perpetuate inequities. The framework encourages reflection on how resources are allocated, the power dynamics in decision-making, and how feedback loops can be adjusted to better respond to the needs of participants. By doing so, stakeholders can actively foster growth in areas where these values are honored, while making necessary shifts in spaces that unintentionally cause harm or fail to center the participant experience.





# CASE STUDY: WHY NOT JUST GET WOMEN INTO BETTER JOBS?

The workforce system in the United States is focused on getting people any paid work, instead of ensuring that they are entering a quality job that provides financial security, mobility, dignity, belonging, and safety. Due to this narrow definition of success we see:

1. A pipeline of workers into low-quality jobs that don't offer long or even sometimes short-term stability.
2. Women and people of color are crowded into low-quality, undervalued occupations like child care and health care.
3. Occupational segregation, dangerously low-minimum wages, and other systemic trends continue to be unaddressed as we focus on individual solutions.

What if we didn't measure success just by the mere presence of a job (and therefore income), but rather we asked about the nature of that job? And more importantly, contextualize the data with important systemic inquiries and considerations. The Women's Wealth Framework helps us broaden our focus and redefine what success might be for workforce development programs.

For example, the Gender Wealth Framework may inspire us to ask questions such as:

Material Wealth Questions	Experience Wealth Questions	Systemic Conditions & Considerations
<p>Does the job pay a thriving wage based on your household size and location? (based on MIT's Living Wage calculator)</p> <p>What benefits does your job offer that offers support to your short and long-term well-being?</p>	<p>I can support myself and my loved ones doing what I love.</p> <p>I feel valued for the work I do.</p> <p>I feel safe at work. I feel like I'm treated with dignity and respect by my colleagues and supervisors.</p> <p>I can take time off of work to care for my family or myself, without fear of losing my job.</p>	<p>What is the minimum wage in your region?</p> <p>What are the lowest paid jobs in your region?</p> <p>Are women and/or people of color overrepresented in those jobs?</p> <p>How are employees engaged in defining the resources needed to do their jobs, with power dynamics in and outside of the workplace, with decision making power?</p> <p>How is your workplace redistributing power?</p> <p>How does the community most impacted by the problem we are looking to solve define and assess our impact?</p>

# GENDER WEALTH FRAMEWORK TOOLS

WOMEN'S WAY has three tools in development that can be used to design and evaluate programs aimed at supporting women's wealth and well-being— considering financial, social, emotional, and physical well-being. The Tools include:

1. Financial Health/Well-Being Pulse Survey - *measure material wealth*
2. Women's Wealth Experience Survey - *measure lived experience*
3. Gender Equity Designer Program - *learn how to design and evaluate effective equity strategies that center individuals and communities historically impacted by gender and racial inequities by adopting an equity mindset*

## WHAT'S NEXT: LEARNING FORWARD

The next steps for advancing this framework involve fostering a design-minded, emergent approach that embraces a cycle of ongoing learning. This means continuously refining the framework and how it can be used to improve the status quo and build more liberatory futures through practical use, reflection, and adaptation.

A critical part of this process will be establishing a Community of Practice, where stakeholders can use the tools collaboratively, exchange insights, and share lessons learned. Engaging with the materials through workshops, peer learning, and case studies will help embed the framework into real-world practices.

WOMEN'S WAY will continue to convene and update the ecosystem to support collective growth. Additionally, we plan to create a website for our network to engage with the Gender Wealth Framework and pilot-test the tools we have developed. We remain in an iterative state, confident that our ongoing relationships with our partners will allow us to refine the usage and impact of this important work.

We encourage ongoing participation and feedback—follow us for resources and future events as we continue to build and evolve together!

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