WHAT’S MISSING? DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE U.S. ADVERTISING & COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION INDUSTRIES

POLICY PAPER
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THE THINKUBATOR
About The Authors
Fatima Hernandez and Charlotte A. Estrella were interns with The Thinkubator. They are both high school students looking to enroll in college next year. Dr. Edward Summers is President and CEO of The Thinkubator. Lessie Branch is the founding director of The Think Tank at The Thinkubator and is Director of Programs Community Relations at Citizens Committee for New York City. She received a Ph.D. from The New School, lbranch@thethinkubator.org. Duleep Deosthale is the founding director of The Higher Education and Nonprofit Consultancy at The Thinkubator and Senior Consultant. He received a Ph.D. from University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), ddeosthale@thethinkubator.org.

About The Thinkubator
The Thinkubator is a Bronx-based innovation and workforce development nonprofit organization. We craft innovative strategies to complex local challenges that have global implications. The Thinkubator approaches our work with a racial and economic equity lens through three major areas: education, research, and community.

About The Think Tank at The Thinkubator
We are a youth-oriented research center focused on understanding The Bronx as a contested, complex urban form, and addressing narratives of marginalized - Black, Brown, Female, and Low-Income communities.

Leadership
Dr. Edward Summers, President and CEO
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What’s Missing? Diversity and Inclusion in the U.S. Advertising & Commercial Production Industries

The Thinkubator
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I. Introduction

In the aftermath of the tragic murder of George Floyd, issues of racial equity and racial justice have come to dominate public discourse in the US and at all levels of civic engagement and the work environment. The public has increasingly demanded greater accountability not just of the policing of its citizens but regarding every aspect of American society. Businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government leaders have announced their denunciation of racism and discrimination and their support for a just and equitable society. Furthermore, much greater attention has been given to issues of workplace equity, discrimination, and inclusion than ever before. Many industries and sectors are uncovering the challenges that exist with the lack of diversity and inclusion at all levels in their own organizations. The entire range of communications, including
advertising, production advertising, and marketing industries are no strangers to this issue either and have begun to acknowledge of the significant lack of diversity that exists within these industries. As a result, it is critically important to understand the barriers to building a diverse workforce and the lived experiences and challenges faced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in the advertising sector and in the process use this information to create work environments, policies, and procedures that are inclusive and designed to eliminate racial and gender stereotyping and discrimination.

**Review of the Literature: Racial and Gender Inequalities in Advertising**

Decades of research document the severe underrepresentation of BIPOC professionals and other long-standing racial inequalities in the advertising industry (e.g., Bendick & Egan 2009; Chambers, 2008; Dávila, 2001; Sego, 1999). Racial inequalities typically involve discriminatory hiring practices at advertising firms that are responsible for the grave under-representation of BIPOC professionals, as well as tokenistic and stereotypical representations of BIPOC people in advertising and media. When BIPOC professionals are represented at major advertising firms, they are less likely to be promoted to senior management positions than their white
colleagues and are under-paid relative to white peers (Bendick & Egan 2009).

Overall, the advertising industry both reflects and perpetuates systemic racism via industry practices that leave the status quo unchanged.

In addition to racial inequalities, gender inequalities are also present in the advertising domain. About 60% of advertising employees are male and 40% female (Swant, 2020). Further, women are over-represented in entry-level positions and clerical support and are under-represented in senior management positions (AIMM, 2018). These systemic issues exacerbate gender pay disparities in the advertising industry.

Previous Research

Boulton’s (2012) fieldwork at three large advertising agencies in New York revealed that white privilege or “invisible white affirmative action” was present in hiring practices, and this conferred significant advantages on affluent white applicants. As a result of closed networking loops that are by nature mainly white and affluent, white people often refer their own white friends and colleagues for positions. This racially exclusive referral phenomenon, in combination with racial biases that manifest as subjective explanations for white hires referencing other

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We intentionally decapitalize “white” and capitalize Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in line to symbolically challenge white supremacy by reducing the power of whiteness, de-centering it, and elevating BIPOC perspectives.
white hires as “a good fit” or “having a great chemistry,” perpetuate the status quo in the advertising industry and leave racial disparities in place (Boulton, 2012).

Further, Boulton (2016) found that Black interns at advertising agencies struggled with code switching and stereotype threat which can hinder their efforts in seeking out Black mentors. Black interns are keenly aware that “sounding Black” and affiliating with other Black colleagues can render them as targets of racist remarks. Thus, Black interns take on the extra work of monitoring themselves to avoid racialized scrutiny. As a result, Black interns working at primarily white advertising agencies have to deal with the cognitive and emotional burden of monitoring themselves to not appear “too Black” in an industry built on white normative standards (Boulton, 2016).

In addition to white privilege and its “sister”, racial discrimination, gender discrimination also exists in the advertising world. Experimental work demonstrates that women and people of color are discriminated against as job candidates for advertising positions (Sego, 1999). Crewe and Wang (2018) assert that women are under-represented among highest ranking advertising executives due to structural and institutional barriers. Overall, hiring and promoting people via social networks using race- and gender-neutral competence measures reinforces the
“good ol’ boys network” which has systematically benefitted white men (Acker, 2006).

The overall lack of diversity in the advertising workforce is partially responsible for advertising content that mainly reflects and caters to white people. For instance, Mastro and Stern (2003) found that out of 2880 prime time commercials, 75% represented white people. Further, when Latinx people were represented, they were used as props to white characters and were hyper-sexualized (Mastro & Stern, 2003). Advertising industry leaders point to stereotypic explanations to explain the lack of diversity in their profession, assuming that Black people are uninterested or are unavailable to work in advertising (Bendick & Egan 2009) and that women lack mentors or have a lack interest in advertising (Crewe & Wang, 2018). In contrast to stereotypic explanations, it is systemic issues such as racism and sexism at the workplace, long work hours, and exclusive social interactions that contribute to few women and BIPOC individuals reaching the upper echelons of the advertising world (Bendick & Egan 2009; Crewe & Wang, 2018).

Other discriminatory issues entail advertising agencies in the U.S. pitching themselves as catering to a broad, general market. In reality, this “broad population” is often envisioned as white, middle-class. Large firms outsource
“niche markets” to smaller firms targeting BIPOC communities (Dávila, 2001; Sender, 2004). This is problematic in many ways: It leaves the larger firms unchanged and relegates advertising associated with people of color to lower-resourced “ethnic shops” or “ethnic markets”. Also, agencies hiring “diverse” employees for the financial benefit of gaining insight into how to reach specific market segments can lead to tokenism that can ironically push BIPOC employees out of the industry (Boulton, 2012).

II. **Problem Statement**

Racial inequality in the advertising sector is multifold: there is under-representation, stereotypical representation, discrimination, occupational segregation, as well as pay disparities. BIPOC people’s lived experiences as well as decades of research demonstrate that racial inequality in the advertising industry is a long-standing problem (e.g., Chambers, 2008; Dávila, 2001; Sego, 1999). For instance, the NAACP released a report showing that all 52 major sports ads aired during the Super Bowl in 2010 had all white directors (Lapchick, 2010). Also, only 5.9% of advertising professionals are Black and only 4.3% of advertising managers are Black (Bendick & Egan, 2009), despite Black people comprising 13.4% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Similarly, a study including 40,000
employees across 165 advertising firms has shown that 71% of employees identified as white (Swant, 2020).

When minority employees enter the advertising workforce, they continue to face discriminatory practices (Bendick & Egan, 2009). For example, sometimes the assumption that Black professionals only have race-relevant expertise (Bendick & Egan, 2009), which then limits them to working at agencies catering to “ethnic markets.” Further Black employees are inequitably represented in certain positions such as those paying over $100,000/year and jobs requiring client contact and creative functions. A Black employee is only 62% as likely as a white peer to work in these positions (Bendick & Egan, 2009). These forms of occupational segregation and discrimination mean that Black employees are offered limited job roles at companies, usually roles with lower earnings and fewer opportunities for career advancement than white employees (Bendick & Egan, 2009).

Further, gender disparities are common. About 60% of employees are male and 40% female (Swant, 2020) and women are over-represented in entry level positions with low pay (AIMM, 2018). Together these findings show that the advertising industry is substantially behind the rest of the labor market (Bendick & Egan, 2009). The current study adds to the literature on racial and gender discrimination in the advertising industry by assessing experiences of
discrimination among advertising professionals as well as their views on crafting policies and strategies to deal with stated challenges.

III. Methodology & Study Design

The Thinkubator interns developed and conducted two online surveys to assess racial and gender discrimination in the advertising industry. The Thinkubator is a Bronx-based innovation and workforce development organization that supports youth talent development. Participants were told that the survey was on accessibility, inclusion, and diversity in the Advertising Production and Commercial Production Industry and were encouraged to provide honest, confidential responses. The survey was approved by The Thinkubator IRB Committee and conformed to ethical human subject research.

Participants for the first survey were recruited via LinkedIn while for the second survey they were recruited via SurveyMonkey. Participants for both surveys were employees in the advertising industry. The first survey yielded 17 responses and the second survey yielded 95 responses.

Survey questions were designed by student interns at The Thinkubator based on the research literature examining racial and gender inequalities in advertising as well as based on conversations with their advisors at The Thinkubator. The
questions aimed to assess critical research questions around diversity, equity, discrimination, and about crafting policies and strategies to deal with stated challenges. Additionally, the interns interviewed some participants who stated in the survey that they would be willing to participate in an interview.

IV. Data Analysis

In this section, we provide select questions to highlight the challenges in the advertising industry. To note, the data set is much richer with additional details but we have selected the most important information to show the challenges and disparities in the industry. Moreover, we have provided direct quotes from survey respondents. These quotes and responses are not edited and are the direct language as used by the interviewees.

A. First Survey Results

What is your sexual orientation/identity?

88.2% Heterosexual/Straight
5.9% Gay
5.9% Rather not say
What is your gender identity? (If you don’t feel comfortable, you can type: rather not say)
17 responses

- Female: 3 (17.6%)
- Heterosexual Male: 5 (29.4%)
- She/her: 2 (11.8%)
- She: 1 (5.9%)
- She/Her: 1 (5.9%)
- Female: 1 (5.9%)
- Male: 1 (5.9%)
- Female: 1 (5.9%)

Have you ever faced discrimination/obstacles in the industry based on your sexual orientation?
17 responses

- Yes: 88.2%
- No: 11.8%
Have you ever faced discrimination/obstacles in the industry based on your gender?
17 responses

- Yes: 64.7%
- No: 35.3%

What is your race/ethnicity?
17 responses

- Indigenous/Native American: 0 (0%)
- Asian: 3 (17.6%)
- Black/African American: 5 (29.4%)
- Hispanic/Latinx: 4 (23.5%)
- Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander: 0 (0%)
- White/Caucasian: 5 (29.4%)
- Rather not say: 0 (0%)
If you answered yes to any of the questions above, briefly elaborate on your experiences.

As a Black man working in account management, I've had clients question my rationale of strategic thinking or completely disregarded. I've been fetishized by white women colleagues. I've been under-paid and not promoted even when I excelled in comparison to my peers. I've been blackballed and undermined by white colleagues to their advantage.

Constantly being told "you don't seem like you are Latina, you are so well spoken and educated." "You don't speak like you are from the South Bronx." "Really, you went to NYU?" Insert eye roll here.
My race has not allowed me entrance to certain circles and decision making

Microaggressions, exclusion, and lack of access to promotions and external opportunities

One of my previous bosses, years ago, didn't think I was educated enough because I am Colombian and I had gone to University in my country. He laughed at my face when I said I had a Master's degree from a school in Colombia. He basically told me I was lucky to have gotten the job I had at that company.

I have faced racism when it comes to Promotions and Raises in the industry.

I once arrived for a freelance graphic production job—through a temp agency—only to be told that I was not the kind of person they'd asked for, because they'd asked for an InDesign specialist. Which I am and was, but they were assuming I wasn't because I'm black. They then ignored me the whole day, and my supervisor left at the end of the day without even telling me he didn't need anything else from me—I had to just get up and leave on my own. It was insane.

As females we have to work twice as hard to get the same respect as our male colleagues. Our characters are painted differently if we were to approach conflict the same as an aggressive male.

I worked as an assistant editor on a movie with another assistant editor who is male. Our boss, a male editor, treated us differently. The male assistant editor was treated more like a buddy and a confidante.

**What was the journey into the Advertising Production/Commercial Production industry like?**

I started out managing music artists and producers. When the music industry wasn't doing well economically, I backed my way into the marketing & advertising world, focused on what was then called Urban/Multicultural Marketing.

Started as a runner thanks to my friends. Quite easy.

Worked my way up from the bottom

I am the first Latina Agent for the General Market in advertising. Answers it all!:)

Took 9 months to get an opportunity

Long game of trying to fit in with the cool kids

It was great, magical, positive, right place right time with making the right choice at the right time. More about this during the interview process.
Good

Joined after graduating with a bachelor's degree

I started off working in the exhibit world at McCormick Place.

I fell into it by chance and stayed this long (about 12 years) thanks to my ability to speak two languages and understand culture from a broader point of view

Very smooth, I had to take a couple of job interviews but it went very well

It was a tough road up. Not only did I face the normal obstacles any other young creative professional faces. I also had to face certain disadvantages based on being a Dominican American immigrant. Part of the very few Black and Brown talents in the major Advertising & Marketing agencies. It made it three times as hard. I was super grateful for the journey and how hard I was forced to work to earn everything I've accomplished. Also to mentor other BIOPIC kids along the way so we could open more doors to more diverse talents.

Easy. I learned the software, took tests with a couple temp agencies, and they sent me out on jobs where I got experience.

Started as a directors assistant who owned a commercial company.

I have only been working in commercial production for just under 4 years, as staff, at the same small, female owned and operated company so feel my experience has been pretty limited and insular. I moved to LA where I had a sister, who was an executive producer at a different commercial production company, but used to work with my company's current managing EP, and this one needed an office manager. Perfect entry level job for someone new to the city and industry. From there, I started coordinating and am still doing that.

Not easy. At the beginning, I often heard "no" and very few were willing to give me a chance because I didn't have the CV or the connections. But eventually they turned into "yes's" because i stuck with it and practiced what I wanted to get hired to do. But as a female cisgender heterosexual, I know that I had it much much easier than many who are BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and/or disabled.
What does your primary occupation in the industry fall under?
17 responses

58.8%
35.3%

- Advertising agency
- Production company
- Post Production
- Film industry

What is your primary role in the industry?
17 responses

23.5%
11.8%

- Creative
- Executive Producer/Producer
- Director
- Head of Production
- Agency Producer
- Print Producer
- Business Affairs
- Runner/PA (Production Assistant)
What/Who inspired you to establish a career in the Advertising Production/Commercial Production industries?

I was inspired primarily by industry leaders such as Jay-Z, Sean Combs, Dr. Dre. and Shawn Gee. Father.

My Mom

Always wanted to work on the business side of a creative industry.

No one
Internship

My first partner in life. Martin Tahse!

College

Career Day in high school

Burrell ran an experiential campaign for Toyota. They were running a competition and I won. I became the national brand ambassador and I won a car.

Fell into it because I spoke Spanish + English and knew how to write.

My father and his love for cinema

Spike Lee & Robert Rodriguez & Hype Williams

I like design

Roman Coppola

My sister

Telling stories that touch viewers emotionally.

Do you think the industry needs improvement or change in terms of equity?

17 responses

100% Yes

100% No

If answered yes, please elaborate.
Absolutely. Black and Brown people contribute to the creative fields in a far greater proportion than what is reflected in the makeup of the people the industries employ. We deserve not only a seat at the table but an actual definitive say.

Stop inequality in access to education. The more unprivileged people with access to education the better chance for equity in the business. Create programs for the most talented.

We need more diverse folks across the spectrum; in our agencies and ideating and making our work.

Too long to answer here. Same fight for too many years. We can discuss tomorrow.

More diversity

More female inclusive opportunities

This is a necessary conversation to have on a lot of levels. Being fair and Impartial is a must when talking about every aspect of the industry. I see this improvement come in the form of actionable conversations followed up with accountability. But this is extends to young directors with sparse reels, less amount of work on the reel.

Women of color are underrepresented

See "State of Inequity" report on wearehue.org

I believe all reassessing and restructuring to ensure fair talent recruiting is necessary.

Yes, a long way to go in the equity department, in particular for women

The industry is white – dominated

We need more early programs to open up awareness, doors, internships, and opportunities for diverse talents.

More efforts need to be made to let BIPOC people know there are high-income opportunities in the field, and reduced-fee training and education should be made available to low-income people across ethnic lines.

Especially amongst the creatives (Director, DP, PD) we need to encourage and promote diverse and traditionally underrepresented voices and stories.

I have been lucky enough to be surrounded by women but have not seen much racial diversity on the production line. Even key crew of color are not well known. I have not been to set much at all but don't hear of people with disabilities or non cisgendered on the crew or even on the line.

The industry must hire more diverse workers and tell more diverse stories (made by diverse voices) to reflect the audience and society. In terms of sex/race/orientation/culture.
What can the people in charge/leading the industry do to create this change?

They can start by taking an honest inventory of how their businesses operate - the hiring practices, the treatment + development of employees - and start creating positive changes within those spaces that they control first. They need to make a serious investment in equity with tangible goals, benchmarks and deadlines to start to make this shift.

Identify, educate, connect. Will elaborate more on the call.

Outline and sign on to initiatives like In for 13%, Change The Lens, Double the Line, Free The Bid
Have an open mind and judge work on it's merit.
Bonus reduction if diversity targets are not met

Change of regime

The Voice is a popular TV Show that allows singers to be judged by the voice only. the judges are not seeing the singer until they hit the buzzer then they turn around. I would like to find a way to adapt that type of search for talent and staff.

Recruit women of color into ad schools

Support wearehue.org

People can change their hearts and minds to receive other better

Stop giving power only to men or thinking that all good creatives have to be men

Give chance to people regardless of their ethnicity / race / gender

Take Action. Less talk more aggressively taking action.

Recommend initiatives relating to what I said above

The conversations are happening with initiatives like Double The Line and Bid Black. But it's not enough to bid the underrepresented, we need to commit to actually award the jobs and give opportunity to someone that may not have the reel - but likely because they haven't had the access.

A lot of how we hire is either working with the same people job after job, director's dream lists (bigger, established, feature crew) or looking at notable competitor's work "who did the production design on that spot/music video?" so if people higher up took more chances on people who haven't had the opportunity to make a name for themselves yet, we could get more diversity in.
Question their hiring tactics and go out of their way to look for diverse stories and storytellers.

Would you be interested in a 15-20 minute follow up interview?
17 responses

- Yes: 47.1%
- No: 52.9%

B. Second Survey Results

What is your sexual orientation/identity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>4.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>4.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>8.42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transgender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intersex</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asexual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pansexual/polysexual</td>
<td>4.21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two Spirit</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual/Straight</td>
<td>67.37%</td>
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<td>Right Not Say</td>
<td>5.26%</td>
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### Household Income

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<tr>
<td>$200,000+</td>
<td>5.43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>3.26%</td>
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### Gender

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<td>Male</td>
<td>45.65%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>54.35%</td>
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Have you ever faced discrimination/obstacles in the industry based on your sexual orientation?

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<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>26.32%</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>71.58%</td>
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<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>2.11%</td>
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<tr>
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Have you ever faced discrimination/obstacles in the industry based on your gender?

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<td>30.53%</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>68.42%</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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### What is your race/ethnicity?

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<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
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<td>Indigenous/Native American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>6.32%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>23.16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latinx</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
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<td>White/Caucasian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>1.05%</td>
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### Have you ever faced discrimination/obstacles in the industry based on your race?

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>RESPONSES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>27.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>71.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>1.05%</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>95</td>
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</table>

### Do you have a disability?

<table>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>14.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>72.63%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rather Not Say</td>
<td>6.32%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>6.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>95</td>
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</table>
What does your primary occupation in the industry fall under?

Answered: 95  Skipped: 0

What is your primary role in the industry?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>14.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Producer/Producer</td>
<td>10.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>10.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Production</td>
<td>6.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency Producer</td>
<td>2.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print Producer</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Affairs</td>
<td>7.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runner/Production Assistant (PA)</td>
<td>2.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company Owner</td>
<td>6.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior VFX</td>
<td>1.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Colorist</td>
<td>2.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor/Assistant Editor</td>
<td>4.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Supervisor</td>
<td>3.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account Director</td>
<td>5.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>24.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you think the industry needs improvement or change in terms of equity?

Yes 27.37%
No 67.37%
Other 5.26%

Region

Answered: 90  Skipped: 5
V. Recommendations and Conclusions

Based on the findings from survey 1, together with some findings in survey 2, participants disclosed that the advertising industry needs to address a diverse set of racial and gender equity gaps. Some participants expressed being on the receiving end of racism and/or sexism and disclosed being targets of microaggressions. Some BIPOC participants also disclosed frustration with being under-paid relative to their white colleagues and some female participants disclosed frustration with under-representation of women in the field. Overall, the results of this study echo other research that gender and racial discrimination in the advertising industry are wide-spread and continue to be prevalent. (e.g., Bendick & Egan 2009; Chambers, 2008; Dávila, 2001; Sego, 1999).
In terms of recommendations for changing the advertising industry, participants disclosed several ideas and themes, such as:

- changing hiring practices,
- changing the treatment of employees, and
- creating benchmarks and deadlines to start making an equity shift.

Some participants recommended:

- hiring more women of color,
- changing the existing work culture to be more inclusive.

The recommendations from this study echo earlier research suggesting some of the following changes to the advertising industry below (AIMM, 2018). One suggestion is expanding the pipeline for BIPOC people seeking advertising positions via scholarships and internships (Bendick & Egan, 2009). Other suggestions involve commitment by top leadership to revamp the advertising sector in terms of diversity and regularly communicating these messages to employees. Furthermore, make a case for how and why inclusion benefits a company and is an effective approach to making a company grow. For instance, underscoring diversity can help companies access previously-untapped pools of talented employees, can lead to enhanced productivity in work teams, or lead to better relationships with customers (Bendick & Egan, 2009).
Moreover, changing employees’ behavior via training and setting zero-tolerance policies for harassment and discrimination are equally important. Also, creating a culture of accountability is key, meaning that bias reduction and diversity training needs to be tied to evaluations of work performance and to promotions and raises. Some other ideas for diversifying the advertising workforce entail raising entry-level salaries to better attract talented working class and/or first-generation college students of color (Boulton, 2016). Agencies could also recognize code switching as a valuable skill for marketing across demographic targets and thus view code switching as an asset (Boulton, 2016).

Finally, agencies can partner with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as well as with Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and make a concerted effort in diversifying their employee application pool. Overall, this study, in alignment with previous work, suggests that it is critical to advocate for advertising agencies to integrate diversity, inclusion, and equity initiatives into how they operate in an effort to eliminate sexist and racist operations, designed to improving the business itself, but also the morale and quality of life of all members of the advertising community.

**Intern Perspectives: Learning and Limitations**
Interns discovered that they learned that research takes a considerable amount of time and effort. To better understand how to conduct the research, the interns reached out to an author who had conducted a similar study, and who shared with them that they took a full year to conduct their study. The interns became aware of one important aspect in conducting such a research, that it can take several weeks to research online resources, to interview people, and to write a well-developed paper. We suggest that in the future, teams should either be assigned or develop a clear division of roles and have realistic timelines to conduct research that include various variables. While the interns agreed that this was their first white paper, they became familiar with it upon reading other such papers and under the guidance of the two academics and professionals on the team.

Interns also recognized the challenges with recruiting participants for a study and therefore underestimated the level of outreach that was needed to reach their desired sample. The interns initially assumed that reaching up to 50 people would suffice, however, they failed to realize that out of those 50 only 25 would answer and out of this only 10 would participate. In the future, it may be helpful to re-evaluate the type of outreach (social media) and where the survey is sent. Using social media has challenges and was not effective because the interns had a limited platform and lacked credibility to convince and engage potential participants.
The interns also realized that maintaining the anonymity of participants could have increased participation. In the future, they plan to separate survey and interview data to allow for maximum participation on what is needed to get maximum engagement in conducting a survey and interviewing participants. The survey asked for personal information, such as, names and contact info and the interns arrived at the realization that not everyone feels comfortable sharing their story especially if it can be shared in a public fora by choice or by default. This has a direct impact on how much information people are willing to give to make the survey and interview that much more credible. As was noticed this did indeed compromise the number of survey responses received. The interns learned that people are less willing to talk about serious, conflictive and sensitive issues if their name is involved, as this can have a direct consequence on their career in terms of advancement, salary raises, changing jobs, getting recommendations and all aspects associated with their professional growth.

References


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