

This week in DEI: May 3

May 3, 2022 | By [TOOLKITS](#) | Reading time: 9 minutes

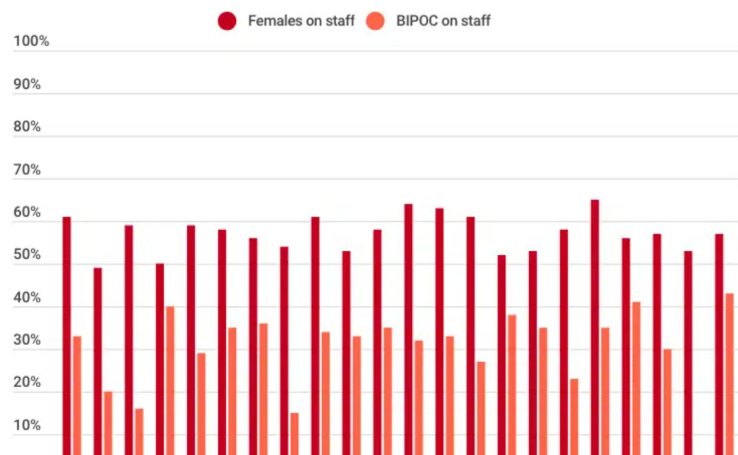
In this issue:

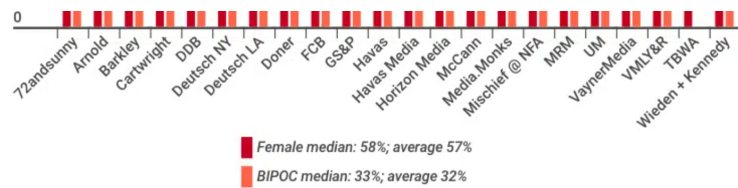
- **New data on staff diversity and churn** at ad agencies shows that while marginalized groups are represented among agency staff, leadership remains largely white.
- **Mental health may be the next frontier** in agency DEI initiatives.
- **How the ad industry can shift its approach toward parenthood.**
- BBDO's chief executive **says there is widespread ageism in the industry.**
- The industry's problem with not giving credit where it is due – **particularly for women of color.**

The diversity picture at ad agencies

Campaign released its Agency Report Cards this week, including [self-reported data](#) on diversity, demographics, leadership, and churn at U.S. ad agencies. Takeaways included:

- **The number of women on staff at agencies outnumbers the number of men.**
- **Women make up 50% of senior leadership positions, while BIPOC employees make up only 23%** (data on employees identifying as both women and BIPOC were not provided).
- **The number of BIPOC employees lags the number of white employees** at almost every agency.
- The Great Resignation is still taking its toll on the ad industry. **The majority of agencies reported losing at least a quarter of their employees** in 2021, while some reported **losing almost half.**





360i, iProspect, BBDO, Carat, Dentsu X, Digitas, Leo Burnett, PHD, Saatchi & Saatchi, Starcom, Wunderman Thompson and Zenith declined to share the diversity and gender makeup of their staff; TBWA declined to provide the diversity makeup of its staff.

campaign^{US}

Courtesy Campaign US

Although agencies are still experiencing high levels of employee churn, the average agency turnover rate was 31%, similar to pre-COVID. This stasis may suggest that the ad industry has been less impacted by the Great Resignation than other industries, although 31% turnover is still higher than any industry besides hospitality, per the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).

The data also show a persistent gap between representation of marginalized groups within an agency's staff and representation of those groups at the top level of agency leadership. This gap exists for both women and BIPOC employees, but it is higher for BIPOC people – meaning that, essentially, companies are approaching parity in leadership representation when it comes to their female employees, but still have a long ways to go toward adequate representation of BIPOC leadership. Ensuring employees of all backgrounds feel welcomed and supported is the surest predictor of employee retention, so agencies may want to consider adjusting their hiring and promotion practices if they want to avoid continuing high turnover rates.

Mental health needs are a DEI issue

As we enter the third year of the pandemic, it's becoming increasingly clear that employee mental health needs are not just a wellness issue, but a DEI issue too. Nabs, a U.K.-based wellbeing charity tailored toward supporting the advertising and marketing industry, reports some year-over-year trends in [The Drum](#):

- Calls from **ad industry employees requesting support for mental health concerns are up 15%** (and up 30% since 2020).
- **A quarter of all calls Nabs receives are now mental health-related**, and the organization has increased its therapy referrals by 50%.
- **More members of marginalized communities are requesting support.** Nabs cites the disparate impact of COVID and resulting increased stress, as well as the rising cost of living, as key factors impacting these groups.

The intersection of mental health and DEI is not a new concept. [HBR](#) ran a piece earlier this year discussing the mental health challenges marginalized employees face, the toll it can take on their work, and the ways managers can support employees, particularly Black employees, through mental health concerns. Examples included understanding how social determinants of health (such as access to health insurance) can negatively impact mental health as well as physical health, training managers on leading through social unrest and crisis, and providing workshops on DEI-related mental health issues, such as racial battle fatigue.

[Digiday](#) also provided a roundup of some steps agencies are already taking to address employee mental health concerns. These steps include providing paid employee subscriptions to meditation and therapy apps, and in-office amenities such as staff counselors, yoga sessions, massage therapy, chiropractic care, and acupuncture. While these efforts will likely make a difference, agencies may wish to engage in thoughtful and intentional dialogue with marginalized employees to ensure mental health initiatives meet their needs as well.

Industry shifts its approach to parenthood

Jessica Henrichs, president of the Minneapolis-based Colle McVoy agency, wrote for [AdAge](#) this

week on how agencies can support working parents, and working mothers in particular. She argues that initiatives such as paid parental leave, adoption assistance, and infertility support have become basic expectations, and to differentiate themselves in recruitment and retention, agencies must do the following:

- **Listen to working parents' needs** through surveys, roundtable discussions, and other feedback opportunities.
- **Handoff schedule control to parents**, providing flexible work schedules that are accommodating of last-minute care-related adjustments.
- **Provide networking opportunities for parents**, including an Employee Resource Group for working parents, learning and development programs, and tailored events.
- **Increase visibility of parenthood**, ensuring working parents are represented among company leadership, and working parents sit in on job interviews to answer questions any prospective employees may have.
- **Reassess parental leave policy** to ensure employees do not feel replaceable, but their transition back to the office is smooth and positive.

If employees, particularly working moms, don't feel supported, they may choose an alternative path within the advertising and marketing industry. Stephanie Nadi Olson started [We Are Rosie](#), a platform for independent marketing professionals, in 2018, in part because she wanted to provide an opportunity for working parents to step away from the long hours and packed work weeks traditionally expected in the industry. Olson states, "I started We Are Rosie to create a home for all those who have been made to feel that they don't belong in corporate America and to show the world, if you allow people to work in a way that fits with their lives outside of work, they will give their best effort, and their work will be more creative and innovative, and the people will be happier." With over 12,000 independent professionals (the vast majority of which are women) now affiliated with the organization, We Are Rosie represents a shift in the mindset of industry employees, one agencies would do well to address.

Kirsten Flanik, CEO of BBDO, on ageism in the industry

BBDO chief executive Kirsten Flanik was interviewed by [AdAge](#) this week, and discussed the detrimental effect of ageism on both employee retention and agency performance. Here are some of Flanik's key points:

- **Systemic cultural norms in the ad industry promote ageism**, such as the belief that only younger employees are willing to work the industry's long hours, and that older employees are unable to adapt to new technology trends such as the metaverse.
- **An erroneous belief about the nature of advertising itself reinforces these stereotypes:** the concept that older adults cannot be swayed by advertising because they have already established brand loyalty promotes the idea that advertising employees should be younger, because younger people are the industry's target audience.
- In actuality, **over two-thirds of 50+ adults feel alienated by advertising's "outdated" depiction of older adults**, and since 56 cents of every dollar is spent by this age group, ad agencies would do well to shift their mindset.
- **Older employees can be beneficial to an organization in many ways.** They are less likely to seek other opportunities, they are usually more concerned with the health of the company than their own career trajectory, and they bring a wealth of experiences and perspectives.
- **Ageism can be particularly detrimental to women.** Flanik mentions the age-old stereotype in which men are judged on their perceived potential, but women are judged on their past performance, so unrealistic expectations for female employees tend to skyrocket the older they become.
- Tactics for reducing ageism in agencies can include "upstream" prevention, such as education around the topic, as well as "downstream" prevention, such as **a cultural shift towards more tolerance of health issues and disability.**

why credit matters

Women, and particularly women of color, often don't receive credit for their contributions in the workplace, either because their work is less directly visible to supervisors, or because a lack of allies inhibits their ability to even bring their ideas to the table. Ruchika Tulshyan, founder of the inclusion strategy practice firm Candour, writes more about this phenomenon in her new book *Inclusion on Purpose: An Intersectional Approach to Creating a Culture of Belonging at Work*. Tulshyan's guidance is applicable to agencies in a few key areas:

- **Agency leaders must reflect on their own role in perpetuating a credit disparity**, including moments when they themselves have been complicit in suppressing female and WOC staffer's contributions.
- The industry needs to shift away from a mindset of "humble culture," the erroneous belief that a job well done is reward enough, and if you keep your head down and do good work, you will eventually be recognized – **a situation that simply never materializes for many women of color**.
- All agency employees, regardless of leadership status or personal identity, need to recognize that **women of color are not responsible for their own subjugation in this instance**. It is not that women aren't asking for meaningful work, or that they are rejecting opportunities due to imposter syndrome (the "lean in" myth).
- **Agency leaders need to intentionally select women and WOC for plum assignments** and give them credit where it is due.

[Continue reading here.](#)

Other notable reads:

- [AdAge's Creativity Awards](#) recognized Lisa Osborne Ross and Kevin Brady as Diversity and Inclusion Champions of the Year.
- During the final week of Ramadan, Siham Saleh argues in [AdWeek](#) that **the industry needs to focus more on Muslim employees and consumers**.
- Inclusion starts from the ground up: [AdWeek](#) covers **how empowering Black creators may cause a shift in the overall media environment**.
- DDB reimagines its Four Freedoms with a greater focus on DEI, reports [More About Advertising](#).

[PURCHASE TOOLKITS](#)

[CONSULTING & WORKSHOPS](#)

[ABOUT](#)

[CONTACT](#)

[MANAGE ACCOUNT](#)

Why credit matters: Agencies must recognize where ideas come from

© 2022 [Toolkits](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Sitemap](#)

