

Roe v. Wade's reversal increases pressure on agencies to act

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The overturning of Roe v. Wade has eliminated a constitutional right to abortion, sending the country on a regressive path and entering an era where, [as the New Yorker points out](#), pregnancy is criminalized and unsafe abortions could become more common.

Businesses and employers now play a crucial role. The US private sector has been handed a mandate to lead on reproductive rights – the same way it has been pressured to act on other major societal issues including climate change, mental health, or racial justice. The ad industry isn't exempt from those pressures, and major ad holding companies have updated health benefits to include funding for employees who may need to travel to get abortions, including IPG, Publicis, WPP, Omnicom and Stagwell.

VaynerX has updated its healthcare policies "to fund travel expenses as it relates to reproductive healthcare around abortion, and continuously expand our range of comprehensive, quality benefits to support the diverse and evolving needs of our employees," [per a statement](#). Wieden + Kennedy said in a memo that it would also cover any abortion-related expenses, adding that it was a "sad day in America."

Behind the scenes, ad execs say that communications and HR people are now trying to figure out the path forward to support their employees and publicly denounce the Supreme Court decision. At the same time, they're also trying to manage expectation from one other, major group of stakeholders: clients. "I'm also cognizant that not all our clients think like us, so it's a bit of a tightrope act over here as well," said one head of agency PR.

Talent war

One thing left to figure out is how ad agencies with presences in states where there is a near or total ban on abortion will manage talent. States with restrictive laws may find it difficult to attract college-educated workers, many of whom are able to easily move locations. This reality has already surfaced in other sectors. "If PA makes abortion illegal, we won't be able to attract talent and we'll have to grow our offices elsewhere," tweeted Luis von Ahn, CEO of Pennsylvania-based Duolingo. [As PBS reports, companies like Dell, headquartered in Texas](#), is already struggling to recruit talent to its headquarter thanks to increasing calls for remote work. They might find it even harder now as Texas becomes more restrictive on reproductive rights.

It's a particularly important issue for agencies, which tend to be staffed by younger, more progressive people, similar to the tech industry. Already, governors of California, New York, Illinois, Connecticut and New Jersey are using their pro-abortion laws as a selling point of sorts. "I'm not sure a CEO will choose a state because it's pro- or anti-choice," Gov. Ned Lamont of Connecticut [said to Marketwatch](#). "But I do know they want to be in a place where they can recruit good workers. And people, especially young people, will gravitate to a place that will protect women."

Perhaps recognizing this reality, Kristen Cavallo, CEO at Richmond, Virginia-based Martin Agency, wrote a note on LinkedIn, over the weekend, addressing it to both current and

prospective employees: “We are one company, made up of hundreds of people with a myriad of faiths and health histories and reasons to prevent, delay, start or expand a family. It is not my place to choose for you. It is my responsibility to offer healthcare support for whatever choice you make. And I believe when and if you become a parent is up to you. Her agency will cover the reimbursable expenses of adoption, foster care and IVF” and it will also expand benefits “to cover the expenses of surrogacy assistance, elective egg and sperm freezing.”

Pride Month is ending. The work remains unfinished.

In a year where almost 200 anti-LGBTQ bills have been submitted in state legislatures, many of which specifically target the trans youth community by preventing access to healthcare or high school sports, LGBTQ creatives are demanding the ad industry step up and do more than just design rainbow branding for clients. There can be a feeling of complacency around LGBTQ inclusivity in the workplace, a sense that since marriage equality is now the law of the land, LGBTQ people are “doing just fine,” particularly in comparison to other marginalized groups (although, as recent developments have shown, the “law of the land” does not necessarily stay that way). But such complacency can obscure the true picture of the LGBTQ workplace experience in the ad industry.

It is difficult to even determine what that true picture looks like, given that many companies do not collect or distribute data on LGBTQ employees, in part because they are not required to do so, as the Human Rights Campaign reports. Beyond data collection efforts, an accurate sense of the prevalence of LGBTQ employees in the ad industry is difficult to obtain because many LGBTQ employees remain closeted at work and in their professional lives. The HRC’s most recent report on the issue, A Workplace Divided, found that almost half of LGBTQ employees are not open about their sexuality or gender identity with their colleagues. As Paul LaFleur, design director for the Hook agency, wrote for Advertising Week, LGBTQ creatives often feel they need to stifle their contributions for fear of judgment from their straight and cisgender peers, a situation with serious implications both for LGBTQ employee retention and overall agency creative output.

Negative workplace experiences for LGBTQ people go beyond the fear of coming out, or an inability to authentically be themselves. Research from Catalyst shows that almost half of LGBTQ employees in the United States and Canada and one in five LGBTQ employees in the EU have experienced some form of workplace discrimination or harassment based on their sexuality/gender identity. And the advertising industry is not immune: in recent years, 13% of LGBTQ ad employees report being denied a promotion because of their sexuality or gender expression, while almost 40% say their colleagues have made homophobic jokes in their presence, according to The Drum.

Outvertising, a British organization promoting LGBTQ inclusivity in marketing and advertising, recently published their Employer Inclusion Guidance, a list of actions advertising and marketing agencies can take to ensure their workspaces are welcoming and equitable for their LGBTQ employees. These actions include supporting gender pronoun usage, using inclusive language in company policy, and upholding zero-tolerance policies towards discrimination.

Omnicom issues inaugural DEI report

For the first time, Omnicom has issued an annual report specifically addressing DEI issues within the company. Responsibility Relentless: Equity for All includes demographic information and statistics on Omnicom’s workforce, along with outlines of the organization’s DEI aspirations and the metrics it will use to accomplish those goals. According to the report, Omnicom has increased representation of Black, Indigenous, LatinX, and Asian American executive or senior-level managers by 25% since 2021, and close to half of its managers identify as women. The company hopes to continue its work of prioritizing members of marginalized groups when making hiring or promotion decisions.

MullenLowe agency launches “momternship” program

The MullenLowe agency has teamed up with HeyMama, a membership community seeking to provide support for professional mothers, to create a “momternship” program intended to

provide support for professional mothers, to create a mentorship program intended to facilitate mothers' re-entry into the workforce after childbirth and maternity leave. The program lasts ten weeks and includes on-the-job training and mentorship components. It is paid, offers remote and flexible working options, and provides crucial child care through another partnership with Urban Sitter. No previous experience in the ad industry is required, and MullenLowe hopes to target a key demographic for employee recruitment: mothers who left their jobs during the pandemic and are now looking to return to work.

Greater Equity is solving the industry's diversity problem, one internship at a time

Efforts to recalibrate the ad industry to become more equitable and diverse are plenty. In 2019, Milwaukee threw its hat in the ring with the launch of Greater Equity 2030, an effort to increase the diversity of creative occupations in Milwaukee by 2030 by adding 1,600 people of diverse backgrounds into the workforce.

One of the key parts of the program focuses on internships. [As we reported earlier](#), the lack of a pipeline for people from underrepresented backgrounds to enter the ad industry is one of the key reasons why advertising remains so woefully homogenous. Greater Equity partners with Milwaukee Public Schools and the City government to organize internships with agencies, which also include holding open houses inside schools and visits from execs to schools to share what their businesses do and hopefully raise interest in advertising. [Read more.](#)

We're also reading:

- A TBWA study finds that **creatives tend to suffer more mental health issues at work than the rest of the working population**, as reported by [The Drum](#).
- Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) **have shifted from being considered primarily social spaces to being crucial components of a company's DEI initiatives**, per [Digiday](#).
- Edelman has released their [2022 Trust Barometer](#), including a special addendum on [Business and Racial Justice in America](#)
- At last week's Cannes Lions festival, Ryan Reynolds announced the creation of a new nonprofit, [Creative Ladder](#), an organization intended to break down barriers to entry in the advertising industry for underrepresented groups.

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