

**Adding Color to your Campaign: An Exploration of the Lack of Racial Diversity in U.S.**

**Advertising Agencies**

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### About the Author



Elizabeth Allen is a graduate student from the Strategic Communication Masters of Arts Program, at the University of Minnesota. In a professional setting, Liz is a Marketing Analyst at Allianz Life Insurance Company, where she has been employed for last 10 years since graduating with her undergrad in Communication studies from the University of Minnesota in 2007. She has always possessed a passion for creative communication with her focus for the last two years, being on communicating to diverse audiences. As a product of a first-generation immigrant from Africa (mother) and a Caucasian father, she is able to offer a unique perspective from the very essence of the ethnicity—“African-American.”

As a lover of all things creative, Liz also does marketing contract work for the City of Columbia Heights, creating their marketing materials, as well as, practicing professional photography. All of her perseverance in the creative realm is to one day become a Creative Director to offer her unique vision and give a new, refreshing voice, to consumers everywhere.

### Executive Summary

The objective of this study is to explore the lack of racial diversity within the advertising industry, more specifically, within advertising agencies that create messaging and campaigns for brands, and how that lack of diversity affects the creation of messaging and campaigns targeting African Americans. *Expert interviews* were conducted with ten different advertising professionals, from Chicago and the Minneapolis/St Paul region, eight of color and two Caucasian via email and phone, over the span of two months, from April 1, 2017 to June 1, 2017, to uncover their personal experiences with racial diversity in agencies and their thoughts on how it affects the creation of messaging and campaigns geared towards African Americans. The findings indicate there are various barriers that hinder African American professionals from entering and staying in the industry like: a general lack of awareness of the industry, portfolio school and internships not being financially feasible, and an overall lack of advocacy and inclusion from the industry. These barriers limit their participation in the creative process causing a chasm in the messages that are created for diverse audiences. The findings present some ways in which African Americans can benefit the messaging and campaign creation process within agencies by; increasing creativity and innovation, adding authenticity, enhancing cultural sensitivity, and creating a differentiation tool for that agencies that do employ a diverse creative team for their abilities to reach a variety of audiences. This study ends with recommendations that advertising agencies (and other agencies related to the advertising industry) can use to attract and employ more African Americans to their agencies.

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The African American culture and history is one that is rich in artistic and creative expression. From the first African American musicians out of New Orleans giving way to the birth of jazz, to the producers, playwrights, and poets that inspired the Harlem Renaissance, a part of what we know today as American culture, was shaped by African Americans (Fouché, 2006). Yet their presence in an industry whose existence revolves around creativity, imagination, curiosity and passion (Drumwright and Murphy, 2009), is grossly underrepresented.

In 2006, the New York City Commission on Human Rights, reached an agreement with leading advertising agencies, to set quotas for African American hires (Drumwright and Murphy, 2009). Two years later, in January of 2008, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported, a mere 5 percent African Americans, 3 percent Asians, and 8 percent Hispanic or Latinos that were employed in the industry (Newman, 2008). And sadly, over a decade later, not much has changed. According to new statistics from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, only 93 black female executives are in advertising, PR and related agencies with more than 100 people, out of 8,734 total executives. Additionally, of the 8,734 executives, 7,651 are white and 3,037 are white women (Ad Age 2017). The racial makeup of the advertising industry is not indicative of the U.S. population.

And while other types of diversity like gender, LGBT, disability, and age, are also areas of concern for the advertising industry, the hiring and promotion of African American creatives, has been an issue, since they were allowed to first step foot in agencies decades ago. How is this lack of diversity affecting the way we speak to our consumers, especially those of color?

Research shows that people give meaning to things in accordance with the norms, traditions, and values of their own distinct culture (Berger, 2004). So, it is no wonder there are significant differences in how people relate, perceive, and interpret advertising and communication messages in different cultures (Berger, 2004). Seventy percent of black millennials say they would rather buy from brands that take a stance on race-related issues (Think with Google, 2017). Brands that can speak the language of their consumers, are the ones who will persevere in today's day in age.

The purpose of this study is to explore the “diversity problem” within the advertising industry and its effects on the creation of messaging and campaigns targeting African Americans. This exploration includes the examination of industry research, publications, articles, and conferences, as well as, the conducting of my own research in the form of expert interviews with professionals of color, to uncover their firsthand experience with the lack of diversity, and their thoughts on why it exists, its effects, and how it can be solved. This study will conclude with a discussion of the results, and conclude with recommendations for advertising agencies on how to employ more African Americans that can help create more effective messaging and campaigns.

### **Literature Review**

The advertising industry, has been and continues to be, an industry in the midst of a radical transformation. It has experienced a host of organizational, geographical, and technological changes (Drumwright and Murphy, 2009). Much of the existing research that has been conducted in conjunction with the issue of diversity in the advertising industry, has used a method of expert interviews from academics, industry leaders and professionals, and industry supporters and critics. The work of Minette E. Drumwright and Patrick E. Murphy deserves

special attention. Their research titled, *The Current State of Advertising Ethics* (2009), includes a detailed analysis of the advertising industry through examination of ad agency web sites, advertising textbooks, and surveillance of the academic literature. Their work also included interviews with industry and academic leaders to seek their perspectives on the current state of advertising ethics. Their work captures a lot of the thematic views and attitudes of industry leaders echoed in other literature and prior research. For these reasons, their work was cited consistently throughout this paper.

### **Agency Diversity (or the Lack Thereof)**

The advertising field is defined as advertising, PR agencies, as well as, media, direct mail and other operations, exclusively devoted to creating and delivering ads (Newman, 2008). The focus of this study will be exclusively on advertising agencies, however, the results and findings can also be applied to other agencies or organizations related to the advertising field as outlined above.

The definition of diversity has evolved from a focus on legally protected attributes such as race, gender, and age, to a much broader definition that includes the entire spectrum of human differences. Which presents two different classifications of diversity. There is *surface level diversity*, which speaks in terms of race, gender, appearance, age, and physical disability. The other classification is *deep level diversity* which speaks in terms of attitudes, beliefs, and values (Jayne and Dipboye, 2004). In terms of this study, I have chosen to focus on *surface level diversity*, or racial diversity within the industry. As a note, I use African Americans, minorities, people of color, and racial diversity, interchangeably, throughout this paper. When referencing people of color, minorities or racial diversity, this could include African Americans, Asians, Hispanics or Latinos, or any non-white persons (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). However, when

specifically referencing African Americans, I will address them as such. Their absence from the advertising industry is of specific concern to me and in this study, given the industry's creative foundation and African Americans' history and close relationship with the creative arts.

Brands have established their own criteria for what they consider a "diverse agency." After an account review in late 2016, General Mills moved a \$700 million-dollar account to creative units within agencies that staffed "at least 50 percent women and 20 percent people of color" (Advertising Age, 2016). Shortly after, other brands like HP, Verizon, and AirBnB, also spoke out about their plans to work with more diverse agencies and employ a more diverse workforce in their own creative departments. HP's chief marketing officer, Antonio Lucio requested in 2016, that all of the brand's creative and communication accounts simply hire more women and minorities, and gave their five partner agencies 30 days to respond with their plans to increase diversity (Wall Street Journal, 2016). Verizon's Executive Vice President (EVP) and Chief Marketing Officer (CMO), Diego Scotti, sent a similar letter to 11 of the agencies they work with requesting more diversity within their agencies. The Verizon EVP/CMO went on to share their diversity numbers:

"At Verizon, we take great pride in having a workforce that's 59% diverse (people of color and women). Worldwide women make up 35.7% of the workforce and in the U.S. people of color represent 40%" (Adweek, 2016).

AirBnB, among the more recent brands that are demanding diversity in the agencies they work with, called out for a more general request that agencies should be hiring and promoting women and people of color, especially into leadership roles (Wall Street Journal, 2017).

While each brand has slightly different qualifications for diversity, this new and increasing demand from brands, together with the changing makeup of America, are putting

extreme pressure on the advertising industry to adhere (Barney, 1991). To address these new demands, it is imperative that the people working on the messaging and campaigns are representative of the people from different races.

### **Messaging and Advertising Campaigns Geared Towards African Americans**

An advertising campaign is defined as a large set of communication messages that will go out to targeted consumers via different channels over a predetermined amount of time.

Additionally, the advertising creation and production, as a form of commercialized communication, is aimed toward the generation of symbolic messages which are not valued in and of themselves, but rather for their effectiveness in furthering the aims of the client (Hirschman, 1989). Generally, these aims include positively influencing product sales and consumer attitudes (Hirschman, 1989). A study conducted by Hirschman (1989) interviewed 7 advertising professionals working in the business for at least five years, and holding different positions within agencies, asked the professionals who all is involved in creating a campaign. As reported by the respondents, this creation process is collaborative and often includes, but not limited to a(n):

- **Brand/Product Manager** from the client's (or brand's) organization, who contributes their marketing objectives.
- **Research Team or Account Planner** is responsible for the interpretation of the qualitative and quantitative research to assist in developing the marketing strategy
- **Account Executive** who helps manage the relationship with the client and agency, as well as, sell the creative work of the agency to the client.
- **Copywriter and Art Director** who are brought in to further the verbal and visual creative strategy, respectively.

- **Creative Director and Account Supervisor** review the creative concepts put together by the Copywriter and Art Director to make sure they align with the creative strategy.

For this study, I am proposing that African Americans would add value as copywriters, art directors, creative directors and account supervisors; roles in which they are able to craft messaging and have overall steering of the campaign.

Previous research proposes that, to be successful in messaging and campaign creation, cultural values must be reflected within advertisements, and advertisers need to adapt their advertising messages, for their target audiences (Mueller, 1987), as it has been shown, that messaging within advertising campaigns, can have unintended social and cultural consequences. A study conducted by Taylor, Lee, and Stern (1995), through a content analysis of major magazines at that time and focus groups with minorities, found that negative depictions of minorities, or their exclusions from advertisements, had harmful social effects. Expectancy theory (Jussim, 1990), is the theoretical framework that describes the influence of negative expectations in advertising portrayals as building or reinforcing such expectancies, that they influence social reality. In advertising, in the 1930s through much of the 1990s, African Americans, were mostly depicted as supporting or inferior roles, like servers or entertainers to their white counterparts.

While racial depictions in advertisements have surely gotten better since Taylor, Lee and Stern's (1995) study, these previous depictions have contributed to a more socially aware audience that sits in judgement more readily than ever before (Drumwright and Murphy, 2009). New media allows for consumers to check brands on their messaging and advertising campaigns,

especially those that communicate unethically or portray racial stereotypes. An example of this, is Pepsi’s 2017 ad campaign with Kendall Jenner (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1.

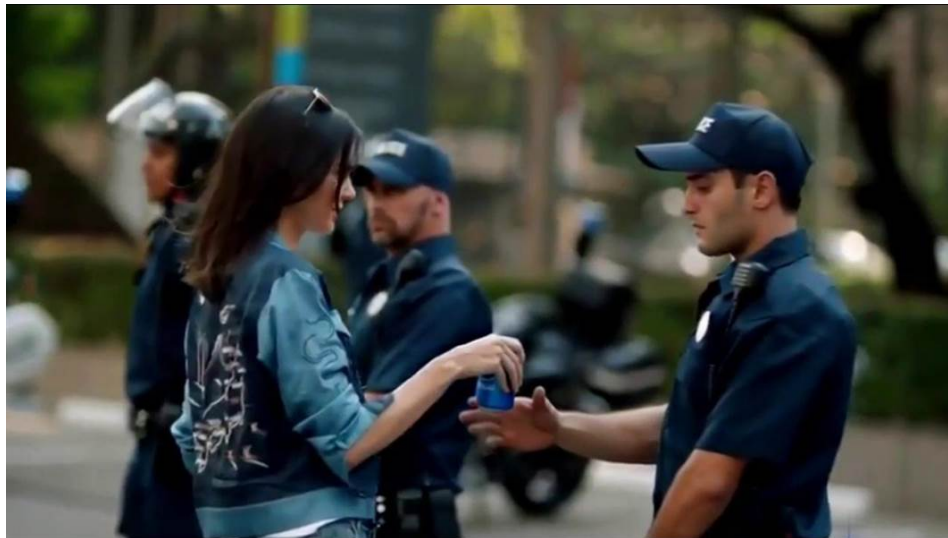


IMAGE SOURCE: NBC NEWS

Their attempt to make light of African Americans protesting for the lost lives of other African Americans from police officer killings was a complete misfire and had costly implications for the brand. Consumers were outraged at Pepsi’s playful and lighthearted messaging in the campaign and spoke out about it immediately. Elle Hearn, the executive director of the Marsha P. Johnson Institute and formerly an organizer for *Black Lives Matter*, said the ad “plays down the sacrifices people have historically taken in utilizing protests.” “No one is finding joy from Pepsi at a protest,” she said. “That’s just not the reality of our lives” (NY Times, 2017). This backfire alone, caused Pepsi to pull the campaign and lose out on millions of dollars, as well as, take a hit to their reputation. This something from which not all brands can bounce back.

After doing a thorough review of much of the existing research on agency diversity and its effects on the creation of messaging and campaigns targeting African Americans, I found the following themes emerging as predominant, in much of the literature.

**The Advertising Industry: “A Poster Child for a Dearth of Diversity”**

In 2008, USA Today, dubbed the advertising industry as “a poster child for a dearth of diversity” (Newman, 2008). And this lack of diversity in the advertising industry, has been raised by brands, industry leaders and professionals, academics and outside organizations alike. In fact, the diversity problem within the advertising industry has drawn attention from legal professionals. Cyrus Mehri, founding partner of Mehri & Skalet, PLLC, litigates cases involving discrimination, civil and consumer rights, and corporate fraud. He has led and co-led some of the largest and most significant race and gender cases in U.S. history (Mehri & Skalet, 2017). Mehri speaks out on the lack of diversity in the advertising industry on the phone from his Washington Law firm:

“I’ve yet to see an industry that has such a consistent record of indifference to minority involvement. It has a history of purposeful discrimination. They’ve been on notice a long time, but they just go through the motions and allow a discriminatory climate to continue. They’re real laggards, and it’s hard to understand why.”

Mehri goes on to specifically address the issue of African Americans being kept out of the industry:

"Madison Avenue has been about supporting, subsidizing and propagating a value system that marginalizes blacks, black media institutions, black creativity and black culture. And advertising, he says, requires neither special degrees nor a particularly keen intellect: Madison Avenue is one of the last places where undereducated whites can still make big money." (Newman, 2008)

**Industry Leaders and Academics Continue to Talk About it.** The topic has also continued to be discussed in industry conferences across the country. Kat Gordon, from the 3 Percent Foundation, a movement started to increase diversity (primarily among females) in Creative Director roles across the country, speaks out at the 2016 conference on the topic.

“There’s also the issue of our industry’s lack of black and minority ethnic employees. If our agencies are dominated by white, middle class men, is it so surprising that advertisers and brands rarely deviate from white faces to champion and front their products and services?” (The Guardian, 2016)

From Drumwright and Murphy’s (2009) in-depth interviews, one industry leader contended:

“One of the most compelling ethical issues is diversity, and we’re not making enough progress there. If anything, we’re regressing...our industry is not accurately representing the makeup of the U.S population. We’re not creating enough opportunities for minorities” (p.90).

Lowell Thompson, an advertising professional of color, was featured in an article published by Ad Age in 1992 called, *The Ad Industry’s Dirty Little Secret*, which highlighted the industry’s horrible record of hiring and promoting African American creatives. In 1992, when there was even more stifling low numbers of African Americans in the industry (fewer than 1%), industry professionals, especially those of color, hoped to at least see numbers in the teens representing African Americans in the industry within the next decade. Thompson, who had more than 22 years in the ad business in Chicago, investigated the progress of the diversity problem in the industry in 2000. Not to his surprise, there wasn’t much progress, but he was hoping by 2005, the industry would hit at least hit 15% of African Americans working in

agencies--a number still yet to be hit today in 2017. During the late 90s and early 2000s, the industry cited barriers that once the economic climate returned to satisfactory, they would be able to hire more African Americans. Other barriers (or excuses) were that there were no qualified blacks, and if there were, they weren't able to see their work, and that the work that they did see, was below par, or only for special markets. Some of these same barriers are still cited today.

It's hard to understand why an industry that prides themselves on solving "problems" for their clients, has yet to be able to solve the diversity problem within the industry and agencies. Prior research reveals, some of the main reasons why the industry hasn't been able to crack the code on the diversity.

### **Barriers to Change**

According to the existing literature, there are various reasons and explanations, why a lack of diversity has continued to plague the advertising industry.

**Attractiveness of advertising.** The advertising field's attractiveness to disadvantaged people of color can serve as a barrier or deterrent alone. An industry professional speaks on this: "If young creatives have to work for free for an average of 18 months before they get their first proper job, then the industry is limiting its catchment area" (Campaign US, 2015). This only leaves opportunities for the advantaged and well off white kids that can afford to work for free.

In addition, the advertising industry's attractiveness is especially gloomy in geographic locations that don't already have high numbers of racial diversity within them. The Minneapolis and St Paul area is an example of this. A survey conducted by Greater MSP, an economic development agency in St. Paul, Minnesota, partnering with the Bush Foundation and the St Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, polled about 1,200 professionals of color in September of 2016.

The objective of the survey was to find out why so many minorities were fleeing the Minneapolis/St Paul area. Of the 1,200 surveyed, 16 percent reported that they were likely to leave the area within 5 years, and cited the number one reason, as “the lack of diversity or cultural awareness in the area” (Star Tribune, 2017).

Among the industry acting as its own deterrent to many African Americans, the literature suggests the following to be among the top reasons why the ad industry as a whole, remains a mostly white dominated industry.

**Pipeline problem.** It’s obvious there would be an issue with hiring African Americans in ad agencies, if they are not applying for jobs. Industry professionals reported a minimal amount of people of color in the applicant pool, or “pipeline,” as the reason for not being able to hire and retain more African Americans in their agencies (Bush, 2011; e-marketer, 2016; Drumwright and Murphy, 2009). An academic from the Minette E. Drumwright and Patrick E. Murphy (2009) study, identified and elaborated on the pipeline problem:

“We've got to get enough people in the pipeline who are interested in advertising. Traditionally, minorities have not gravitated toward advertising as a field.... When you look at the agencies, their record is abysmal. You might fault them for not including diverse talent, but on the other hand, when you look at people coming out of school with degrees, the pickings are fairly slim.... We have to go down to the high schools and start generating interest and identifying advertising as a potential field of study for minority groups” (p.90).

This is not to say there hasn’t been attempts to rectify the pipeline problem. An industry professional spoke out in 2000, on a proposed solution:

“Eight years ago, I proposed a simple way to answer the "we can't find any qualified blacks" conundrum: The Minority Talent Hotline. Ad Age Editor in Chief Rance Crain graciously donated a page ad, to announce it. But within two months, three of the four Chicago agencies that pledged to support it pulled out. Only Foote, Cone & Belding held up its end of the bargain for a year” (Ad Age, 2000). The hotline was an initiative to showcase the talents and work of African American creatives—directly addressing the rationale for white ad executives not hiring more people of color (Ad Age, 2000).

In order for the pipeline problem to be solved, the advertising industry needs to truly understand the benefits of having more diversity within the industry. The agencies’ clients or the brands hiring the agencies seem to be the only voice of reason for the industry.

**Clients over employees.** Like with most businesses, the advertising industry requires customers or clients to run their businesses. A major difference between the advertising industry and businesses in other industries is, if a business selling mobile phones loses a customer they continue on, business as usual. The implications are greater for advertising agencies when they lose a client or an account. Although an advertiser doesn’t take authorship of an advertising campaign, they provide the financial means to create it. Without them, there is no advertisement (Hirschman, 1989). Due to this large dependency on clients, they remain a primary focus for agencies. Drumwright and Murphy (2009) also found that industry leaders were reporting a sense of obligation to conform to the clients’ ethical standards. If they don’t do what the client wants, then they could lose their business to a competitor who will. An industry leader commented on the client dependency problem:

“Advertising agencies put more emphasis on clients than on the people working on the client's account. This client obsession results in not enough emphasis on the people and culture” (p.99).

This barrier may not hold up as much as it did in the past now that brands are starting to demand diversity within agencies. However, there are still more barriers that exist for African Americans staying in the industry.

**Inertia; comfortable with the familiar.** Research conducted by Ennew and Hartley (1996), found that many industry professionals who recognize the need for diversity within agencies, may simply resist it due to inertia. DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) Institutional theory provides a theoretical framework to describe this state of being and proposes that organizations sharing the same environment, employ similar practices, which are deeply embedded in their day-to-day functioning, result in being difficult to change. The processes that advertisers use in selecting ad agencies and media outlets subject these agencies to comparable environmental forces, which then encourage the development of similar structures and practices within these agencies. Even in the cases where specialized, more diverse agencies, may be suited for an account, the clients may prefer to use the agencies with which they have existing relationships (Ambwani, Heslop and Dyke, 2011). Research conducted by Ambwani, Heslop and Dyke (2011), suggests that inertia also occurs due to agency switching costs being high and management of multiple agencies for a portfolio of accounts is also very expensive. In addition, since mainstream agencies are also frequently involved in developing their clients' marketing plans, this further reduces the likelihood of employing specialized minority agencies or outlets. Their results indicate that bigger agencies equate to quality and resources, and established relationships. So not only are agencies not hiring more African Americans, but the work of

Ambwani, Heslop and Dyke (2011) suggests that clients are also avoiding working with the very few minority agencies that do exist.

“It has been said that familiarity breeds contempt, but, in advertising and corporate America at large, familiarity inspires comfort, confidence and camaraderie. Not creativity.” (Ad Age, 2016)

**Diversity Defiers.** Limited in the literature, but notable, few industry leaders and academics don’t believe diversity is actually needed. In an article for the *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, “Who do you hire when the advertising audience isn’t you?” (2003), written by a marketing professor from Auburn University, Herbert Jack Rotfeld, noted that:

“well-paid executives design campaigns targeting poor consumers and men design campaigns for women. If neither of these approaches is problematic, then why raise the issue with minority targets?”

In an article that Chairman and CEO of Muse Communications out of Los Angeles, John Muse, wrote, he additionally noted:

“hiring someone to do the job just because they are the ‘right color’ may be one of the biggest mistakes that marketers and advertisers make. Second generation immigrants may, in some cases, provide the ‘right color’ but may be acculturated to the majority culture to the extent that these individuals may not even speak the minority language or have any cultural expertise.” (Marketing News, 2006)

While these arguments against diversity came up only a handful of times in the literature, these attitudes could very well be latent in many industry leaders’ mind, especially those who have worked in the industry a long time, and might feel the diversity push, may discredit their

own abilities to do great work. Previous research conducted, has explored the attitudes of naysayers and non-adopters to diversity. The BrandLab (TBL), out of Minneapolis, Minnesota, commissioned the 2016 *Fearless Study* together with Orman Guidance, Inc. (OGI), to answer questions surrounding the issue of diversity in the marketing and advertising industry. Over a span of 8 months, OGI used a mixed-method approach that included interviews, focus groups, and survey polls to understand customers, clients and partners of BrandLabs' feelings towards diversity. From the research, TBL and OGI, were able to create the following four segments by characterizing a range of attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and practices towards diversity: *Productive, Progressive, Pacifist, Perpetuator*. While the *productive* and *progressive* segments are committed to, and support diversity initiatives, respectively, along with the *pacifist* who even recognizes the need of diversity but does not make an effort to address it, the *perpetuator* segment "willfully and unwittingly perpetuates low diversity". The key decision makers and influencers don't believe there is enough time to devote to the issue and further disagree with the need for it in the workplace (BrandLab, 2016).

While it is evident there are many deeply rooted issues preventing the increase of diversity within the advertising industry, it's not to say the problem cannot be solved. In fact, it is in agencies and brands best interest to solve the diversity problem.

### **Diversity is Good (for) Business**

There is an agreement among the majority of the literature, that diversity is not just good business but it's proven to be good *for* business. One industry leader commented, "instead we must reflect the population as it is, not only for society's good, but for the good of our businesses" (Blair, 2016). Another industry leader agrees that diversity should not be a quota, a checklist, or the politically correct thing to do. That instead, "Diversity should be an integral

component of a vision, a key element of the DNA of a campaign" (Ad Age, 2016). Nancy Hill, president and CEO of American Association of Advertising Agencies (4As) states, "Diversity has been proven again and again to be good for business."

The impact of diversity within agencies is significant, especially in the creation of messaging and campaign development for diverse audiences. The existing literature explains why.

**Breeds cultural sensitivity.** Richard (2000) found a positive relationship between racial diversity and firm performance when they are pursuing a growth strategy for the added insight and cultural sensitivity that women and minorities can provide. Previous research suggests that mistakes in international communications occur because marketers fail to understand foreign cultures and adapt accordingly (Kanso, 1992; Li and Shooshtari, 2006). As more and more advertisers become familiar with the business case for targeting minorities and gain more experience with minority targeting, they will be more likely to adopt the changes necessary to overcome the barriers which have developed. Advertising personality Simon Anholt pointed out that manufacturers of successful twenty-first century products (brands) are the ones who will listen first with sensitivity to the culture of the market they work in (Kaynak and Kara, 2013).

Among being able to craft messaging and create campaigns that elicit cultural sensitivity, more diversity in the creative process means just that; more creativity.

**Promotes creativity and innovation.** Existing literature and research support that diversity promotes creativity and innovation. Polzer, Milton, Swann (2002) found that in groups with high levels of interpersonal congruence, demographic diversity enhanced creative task performance. Kat Gordon, 3 percent Conference, also added "those paying the bill--clients-- know what their customers look like and see the value of having diversity within their agency

partners” and went on to say “I’m excited to see the way messaging and consumer engagement will shift thanks to the involvement of more diverse perspectives” (US Campaign, 2016). Jayne and Dipboye (2004) found that demographic diversity unleashes creativity, innovation, and improves group problem solving, all of which enhances the competitiveness of an organization, creating a differentiation tool for agencies that do actual employ more diverse creative talent.

**A differentiation tool.** Ambwani, Heslop and Dyke (2011) found through their research, that advertising agencies can utilize diversity, to differentiate themselves based on their ability to develop campaigns specifically targeted to ethnic and racial minority populations.

Another industry leader suggested:

“Advertising to minorities must be implemented with care. Minorities want to be represented respectfully in advertising and the media, and sold goods and services without being stereotyped. Direct marketers can lead the advertising industry in targeting minority markets with precision and sensitivity. If they do, they could get a lead on profit” (Barney, 1991).

This means that to succeed in today’s globalized markets; firms of all sizes coming from a variety of industries must focus on customer equity rather than brand equity (Rust, Zeithaml, & Lemon, 2004). In order to focus on your customer equity, you must understand your customer. The lack of representation of minorities in advertising represents an unexploited opportunity for business organizations, especially since research shows that minorities prefer to be “spoken to” through messages that are culturally congruent (Lee et al. 2002; Burgos, 2008; Noriega and Blair, 2008; Butt and de Run, 2010). The brands and the advertising agencies they work with, will continue to see this shift in today’s consumer, and if they don’t adapt to these changes and

start employing more people of color to work on their campaigns, they will continue to lose business to agencies who will.

### **Limitations of Past Research**

A majority of the existing research surrounding diversity in advertising includes content analyses and focus groups with minority consumers and their appearance in ads, measuring their attitudes towards the advertisements, as well as, any lingering effects beyond interacting with the advertisements. While much of the literature supports that diversity enhances cultural sensitivity, increases creativity and innovation, and creates differentiation from competitors, there is little, if no, research that explores how African Americans, specifically, can impact the creation of messaging and campaigns targeting African Americans. This gap in the literature confirms the need for this study.

Previous research suggests that diversity and diversity of opinion, fosters message resonance with diverse audiences ((Lee et al., 2002; Burgos, 2008; Noriega and Blair, 2008; Butt and de Run, 2010). After examining the existing literature and research, I believe the presence of African Americans within creative teams can help better define African American consumers for brands and propose the following hypotheses:

*H1. A lack of diversity in ad agencies negatively impacts the creation of messaging and campaigns geared towards African Americans.*

*H2. Greater diversity in creative teams leads to a more successful creation of ad campaigns geared towards diverse audiences*

## Method

After exploring many ways to measure how agency diversity relates to, or affects, messaging and campaign creation for African Americans, it was evident that employing feedback from people of color that currently work in advertising agencies, could provide their direct experiences, as well as, elicit some very valuable insight. For those reasons, my research was conducted through expert interviews with industry professionals of color, that have worked, or are currently working in the advertising industry, for at least five years. It was also important that the perspective within the expert interviews be opened up to at least one or two individuals that are not of color, in an attempt to round out the research results, and also so it would not come off as an attack on the industry or the majority race that comprises it.

In preparation for the interviews, an interview guide was created to initiate, but not limit, conversations surrounding the topic of racial diversity within advertising agencies and its effects. The questions only served as prompts to elicit feelings from the professionals. The questions were designed to be fairly open and general, so there was no guiding on behalf of myself, as the researcher, to produce desired results. See *Table 1*. at the end of this report, for the list of questions that were prepared for the expert interviews.

To recruit individuals, I started by using my resources within the University of Minnesota network. From there I was able to get the names of four different industry professionals. I also was able to utilize resources from my current employer, who also lined me up with two more professionals of color. Prior to the end of the questioning of each interview, I asked the respondents if they knew anyone else that would be able to provide some insight surrounding the topic. This approach allowed me to reach my goal of at least 10 different industry professionals,

8 of color and 2 not of color. The initial contact for the experts were done via email. Due to time constraints and conflicting schedules, I gave respondents the options to answer the questions via email. The remaining interviews were conducted via phone.

### **Findings**

There was a general agreement among the experts surrounding the lack of racial diversity in agencies, its causes and effects, and some proposed solutions. The responses from the various industry professionals have been sorted into categories based upon their relevance. Their names and organizations have been removed to ensure confidentiality and full disclosure on their behalves.

**Lack of racial diversity in agencies.** You don't need to conduct an elaborate research study or formulate an extensive survey to confirm that there is a lack of racial diversity in ad agencies across the U.S. Although, an executive director (not of color), from the Minneapolis/St Paul area, was able to provide the stats for the Twin Cities area. When asked if she believed there was a lack of diversity in the advertising industry across the U.S., she responded that there are only 7.4% people of color, in the industry, in the Twin Cities. An executive creative director from Chicago shares how this verification is as easy as walking into an advertising agency or production company and taking one look around. Another creative director of color in a Minneapolis agency, states she has only worked with one black creative in her 10 years in the industry.

Unfortunately, this is not a new problem nor is it a surprise. The reasons why this lack of diversity exists as reported by the respondents, is due to the industry's poor ability to advertise itself as a viable path for people of color.

**Barriers noted by industry experts.**

*The advertising industry is risky and unattractive.* One young professional of color spoke on the riskiness of the advertising industry, compared to other industries like the medical field or the financial services industries.

“I think the children of immigrants often have a heightened sense of making sure their career is very practical and financially secure. When your parents had to fight, and work tirelessly to get to the US and ensure you have opportunities—it is hard to take risks. I think in many immigrant parent’s eyes, advertising seems like a risky career. It often doesn’t pay well, especially in the beginning, and you are not guaranteed to be successful. I think in general, many South Asian kids are not encouraged to pursue more creative fields because they seem riskier—which stifles how many of them go into advertising or marketing.”

*“Advertising needs to advertise itself.”* Two of the experts interviewed, stated similar issues, that advertising hasn’t done a good job advertising itself as an employment opportunity. Starting at a young age, people of color are not made aware of the career path into advertising. While schools teach students about history, mathematics, and language arts, advertising is not a subject that you will find on a student’s schedule. And while the impact advertising and media can have on society could be its own topic of study, advertising isn’t thought of as an important subject in school. When it comes time for a student of color to decide where to attend post-secondary education, if at all, advertising, like before, doesn’t come to mind because it hasn’t been taught or spoken of.

*Socio-economic status.* To those that are made aware of advertising, portfolio school is the next step in the path of entering the advertising industry. Most advertising agencies require a portfolio that showcases the work you have done and a portfolio school is where you create it. One expert explains how portfolio school is extremely expensive and you don’t walk away with a four-year degree. To many people of color who are first year attendees of college, portfolio

school does not seem economically feasible. In addition to portfolio school being expensive, one industry professional talks about the internships offered by ad agencies and how they can also act as a barrier for people of color.

He explains:

“There are cases where some people don’t even apply for internships because they can’t afford to live in NYC for a summer working for free.”

So, in turn, those internships go to well off kids that can afford to take a job for free or close to it.

Another industry professional of color states:

“Honestly, if I met a group of young disadvantaged black youths and conducted a discussion about what careers they should look at, I’m pretty sure I would NOT recommend advertising, even though I work in it.”

She went on to explain how agencies depend on clients to keep their lights on and when they lose an account, they cut people. The industry is very unstable in that respect.

This speaks to the “pipeline problem” that came up in previous research. When the advertising field is unattractive or unknown to people of color, you won’t see them applying for positions.

***The hiring gauntlet.*** To the extreme few who are made aware of the industry and the opportunities within it, and have attended portfolio school, their next hoop to jump through is the “hiring gauntlet” as stated by one executive creative director of color.

“One other issue is the gauntlet agencies use to vet candidates. It usually involves interviews with a number of people from different disciplines at different levels. Each one of them with their own agendas and hang-ups. Some of them have biases, while some of them have friends and family in the running for the job. And each of them essentially have the power to throw a wrench in the process.”

Additionally, he added:

“Among this exhaustive hiring process, is the overarching idea that the advertising business is a tough business to get into for anyone and when you add issues like racial discrimination, socioeconomic disadvantages, and the lack of inside advocates, the wall starts to feel like it’s impossible to climb.”

**Social exclusion.** If any person of color *does* survive the hiring gauntlet, they are then left to deal with the tokenism of agency life. This could be described as a feeling that they may have been a quota to be filled or a number to be met from a request from a client. In addition to these feelings, once inside an agency, a person of color must then deal with a lack of belonging.

An executive creative director speaks on this barrier that is presented once inside an agency:

“...I do believe one or two people within a large organization have the power to create barriers or create a less than desirable and even hostile atmosphere for candidates of color. It simply takes a few vigilant individuals fighting against diversity and a large group of people who are not willing to speak out against their actions. If they feel like they are not welcomed and they are not being given opportunities and they are not being rewarded they are going to take their talents elsewhere.”

He went on to speak about how it’s time agencies start allowing the people who will work directly with job candidates, to make the decision on who to hire and stop using the excuse that they need to put candidates through so many paces to make sure candidates fit the culture. He explains that, “many agencies don’t have a culture, they just have a mantra on the wall and a lot of loosely knitted factions within their walls.”

**The “I” in the creative team.** On top of the many barriers that already exist for people of color entering the industry and working in agencies, two industry professionals talked about the arrogance that fills the offices of many agencies. They resist the idea that they need someone to

help provide a new perspective as if it discounts the type of work they are able to do on their own. One creative director comments:

“I think some people are really having a hard time dealing with that kind of shift in power. So, they balk at the idea that they need people who have different perspectives. They are convinced that their talent can make up for their lack of connection to the targets that are driving growth in the market. So, they scoff at the idea that they need diversity inside their walls to match the diversity of the world around them.”

While the advertising industry could surely be more reflective of the changing demographics of the U.S., the arguments for more diversity within creative teams, specifically, are much more substantial.

**African Americans in the creation of messaging and campaigns.** While the number of barriers for African Americans entering, and staying in the industry seems overwhelming, the benefits of adding more diversity to the creation of messaging and campaigns are endless, and especially vital, today. Advertising, like other mass communication outlets, carry a large responsibility. As previous research has shown, they have the ability to affect how people view themselves and others around them.

***Social responsibility.*** One industry professional talks about the implications advertising messaging and campaigns can have on society as whole:

“Agencies, along with the media in general, have the power to affect how people see themselves.”

Another industry professionals talks about how “advertising has the ability to shape our views and perceptions of ourselves” and while people might not view advertisements as facts, they probably tune in to advertisements much more than they do to a news article. For this reason, we as advertisers and mass communicators need to take particular care, and make sure our

messaging and campaigns geared toward African Americans are done right. The industry professional goes on to say that African Americans are more likely to come up with more effective ads and create messaging that resonates with African American audiences.

Another industry professional added:

Advertising is how brands speak to their consumers. Consumers aren't just one color, one sexuality, one religion etc. So the more diverse the agency, the more diverse the ideas that will come out of that agency and the broader the net they can cast.

*Authenticity.* When asked how a diverse agency is more beneficial, there seemed to be a general agreement among the industry professionals that more African Americans in the creation of messaging and campaigns will create a more authentic product. An industry professional talked about how diverse teams everywhere are more innovative because they bring diversity of opinion, but in creative teams especially, they have the opportunity to bring authenticity to the story.

An executive creative director expands on the concept of authenticity:

As the logic goes and research has proven, groups of people from diverse backgrounds come up with better ideas. In laymen's terms people who have had different experiences, see things differently. They have; different tastes, different attitudes, different opinions. So on a macro level, groups of people with diverse backgrounds are simply better problem solvers. So you get better solutions from groups of people with diverse views.

Other industry professionals add to the idea of authenticity:

"First because the very essence of creativity and originality of thought and approach involves variety of perspectives and backgrounds, particularly in today's fast moving and fast changing world."

"Lessens the likelihood of groupthink. Boosts ideation and the creation of authentic, better ideas. Creates a workplace reflective of society's changing demographics."

“The best ideas come from building upon difference- breaking apart a problem and trying to solve with folks who are from the same background often leads to the same solutions.”

“..there’s another important byproduct from having a diverse staff and that quite simply is the energy and creative experience that people of diverse backgrounds bring to the workplace, especially to a creative workplace where new ideas and yes, styles are valued.”

*Curates cultural sensitivity.* What’s the byproduct of today’s non-diverse agencies? Well *Pepsi* can attest to this, but industry professionals also agree that more diversity in the creative room helps create cultural sensitivity. An industry professional speaks out on this increased sensitivity:

“Diversity also keeps an agency from being offensive or insensitive – something that happens all the time, because there was no minority there to speak up and say “hey... that’s not ok because of \_\_\_\_”. Such transgressions happen not because of ill intentions, but lack of awareness or insensitivity.”

Another industry professional speaks out on how a lack of diversity limits the reach to diverse consumers and notes:

“And if you have a totally white bread creative account staff and media buying staff how the heck can you be expected to package and promote new products, services or concepts directed at say an African American or Hispanic buying segment?”

In order to reach consumers today, it’s crucial that brands and agencies can speak with authenticity and cultural sensitivity. Brands are now starting to grasp the needs of this new wave of consumers. If agencies don’t start acting now to increase diversity within their creative teams, they will not survive. One ad executive speaks on this new environment:

“The mass population of America has changed drastically over the last 20 years. Not just in demographics, but also in attitudes. America is simply a more diverse country. Yet the

demographics of the talent found in the advertising industry has not kept pace with the changing face of America. This has created a chasm between the messages. Ultimately, brands are the ones at risk and so brands are going to have to take the lead. And that's why you are now starting to see clients publicly stating that something has to change. Other brands are still waiting on agencies to get their act together. I predict that some brands are going to die on the vine waiting. Brands need to demand that their agencies reflect the new America and provide rewards/bonuses for those that do and pink slips for those that don't."

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

This study identifies the barriers that are preventing more African Americans from entering and staying in the advertising industry, how these barriers can be addressed, and what benefits it will provide to brands and agencies targeting African Americans--which in this day in age, should be all agencies and brands. And while African American representation within advertising agencies has surely improved since the civil rights movement, the amount in which it has improved, is somewhat shameful. While hiring someone based on the color of their skin is hardly "one of the biggest mistakes that marketers and advertisers make" (Marketing News, 2006), I do agree to solve the diversity problem, it's about more than just hiring African Americans based their racial makeup. It's also about hiring them for their creative capabilities, and their cultural understanding and ability to speak to other people of color. As a second-generation immigrant myself, while I may not literally speak the language of my mother's home culture, being a person of color in a predominantly white world, is an experience of its own. An experience that only another person of color can relate to. It goes beyond the minds of Muse and other diversity defiers who find themselves in the majority race, to understand this concept, which may be why we still find ourselves dealing with this diversity problem in the advertising industry, and racism in the world as a whole.

Consequently, this lack of diversity has affected and is continuing to affect the success of campaigns geared toward African American audiences. Previous research shows that diversity fosters creativity and innovation and can now act as a differentiation tool for agencies that do employ a more diverse workforce. The research I conducted suggests, that the more African Americans involved in the creation of messaging and campaigns geared towards diverse audiences, creates authenticity and cultural sensitivity--two things that are lacking in today non-diverse agencies.

Based on a culmination of the existing literature and research examination, as well as the insights from the research I conducted, I have formed some strategic recommendations for solving the diversity problem in the advertising industry.

### **Strategic Recommendations**

While there are a number of barriers preventing African Americans from entering and staying in the advertising industry, there are just as many solutions. Everyone has a role in solving the diversity problem, from the people of color trying to enter the industry to the brands that are trying to advertise to them. Take responsibility for your role in solving the diversity problem.

**Creatives of color.** Be the captain of your ship. Look for ways to polish your creative skills. Take online courses creating copy and learn how to use the industry standard tools like the Adobe Suite (i.e. InDesign, Photoshop, Illustrator). Take advantage of free or inexpensive resources to create a portfolio that will showcase your work.

**Brands/advertisers.** Start demanding your agencies have more diversity. Brands like General Mills are demanding at least 20 percent people of color (Advertising Age, 2016). Additionally, make it the criterion for winning the account. "The more diversity, the better."

**For non-profits.** Non-profit organizations in support of people of colors' professional development can create resources for minorities to create portfolios and showcase their work. They can obtain support from local agencies and brands. Participating agencies and brands could receive earned media and also be a part of an initiative to create more opportunities for people of color.

The lack of diversity is a deeply rooted and systemic issue within the advertising industry. In order to create real change, advertising agencies have the most work to do.

**Advertising agencies.**

*Awareness Barrier: start industry awareness young.* It's a fairly simple concept, if people of color are unaware of the industry and the job opportunities, they will not pursue a career in the industry. To increase diversity in the industry starts with increasing awareness at a youth level to people of color. Research shows there is a lack of advertising education in high schools, as well as, traditional four year universities. Adding advertising to curriculum, especially in schools with high diversity, will help increase awareness in people of color early on, so that they may pursue additional education and opportunities to fine-tune their skills. The BrandLab, out of Minneapolis, Minnesota, leads The BrandLab Classroom Program. During the past school year, 214 volunteers spent time volunteering in the classroom and hosting field trips. Volunteers from the industry were able to inspire young people of color to recognize that the advertising industry may be a viable career path for them. All of participating teachers responded that The BrandLab class had a positive effect on their students, and once the class was complete, 88% of students believed that a career in the creative industry is a real and exciting possibility for them. (The BrandLab, 2017)

*Recommendation:* Agencies can support programs like the *BrandLab Classroom Program* (<http://www.thebrandlab.org/>) and *ThreeSixty Journalism* (<http://threesixtyjournalism.org/>), increase presence at job fairs at the high school and college level, reach out to high school guidance counselors in schools with high diversity and educate them on opportunities.

***Socio-Economic Barrier: test for creativity and contract-to-hire programs.***

The ad industry is one of the few industries that require a \$60K plus certificate for an entry level position. Portfolio school is expensive and just because someone has a portfolio and another applicant does not, they should not be overlooked. Portfolio school along with low paying (or not paying anything at all) internships are not financially feasible for disadvantaged people of color. These were identified earlier in my research as entrance barriers for people of color and speak to a broken process all together. Creativity has been shown to be innate and not something that is taught. You either have it or you don't. You shouldn't need to attend portfolio school to showcase that you are creative and are capable for an entry level job. Instead, one recommendation to open up the hiring process to people who can demonstrate creativity without a portfolio, is to test for creativity. This test could be offered to the top 3 or 5 candidates, and they are given a creative assignment to complete within a couple of days. The hiring creative director could review the assignments and decide on the best candidate based on the creativity displayed in the assignment and also not overlooking the needs within the agency—my guess would be one of those “needs,” is more diversity.

In addition to testing for creativity, agencies could implement contract-to-hire programs designed specifically for people of color without portfolio or with minimal examples of work. These contract-to-hire programs would give people of color that chance to start working within

an agency on actual creative work, earn a paycheck and prove they can make an impact in messaging and campaign creation. This helps open up the process to many other potentially qualified candidates and doesn't require thousands of dollars to prove that you can be creative.

*Recommendation:* Utilize creative assignments for those applicants that don't have a portfolio to showcase (ex. Have them write 5 headlines or copy describing the benefits of a new shampoo), and implement contract-to-hire programs to allow potentials of color to earn money while proving they are able to harness their creativity on real projects.

***Social Exclusion Barrier: start or enhance diversity and inclusion initiatives within agencies.*** Duchesne Drew, the Bush Foundation's community network vice president, stated the following in regards to the lack of diversity within the Minneapolis/St Paul area causing professionals of color to flee the area:

“Diversity in and of itself is not enough. Diversity gets people of color in the room.

Inclusion is what makes people really part of the room and makes people want to stay.”

(Star Tribune, 2017)

There's work for the advertising agency to do in regards to retaining of the African American talent they do have, and as more enter the industry. As the findings of my research indicated, it only takes a “few vigilant individuals” to be against diversity to push those diverse individuals out. At the end of the day, like with most people, if you don't feel welcome or valued somewhere, you will leave and take your talents elsewhere. The same applies in the case of only having one or two African Americans within an agency. Research shows establishing diversity and inclusion programs have been proven to increase feelings of involvement within organizations industry wide.

Additionally, it's not enough to just hire employees based on demographical diversity and expect it to increase business results (Dipboye, 2004). It involves careful maintenance and care.

*Recommendations:*

- *Create a resource group.* Create a space for other professionals of color to talk about their experiences and the barriers they face, and act as resources for one another.
- *Assign mentors to employees of color.* These mentors should be senior or executive leadership that support diversity and understand the benefits it has for business.
- *Outline career paths.* Like with most employees, we want to know that there is space for us to grow within an organization. Research shows setting up challenging, yet attainable goals, increases work ethic and promotes loyalty to the company.
- *Require staff to take bias training.* We all have implicit biases that are subconscious. Bias training has been shown to make people aware of their own biases and often take action on reducing biases they have towards other.

As stated earlier, these only act as a starting point and should be applied to each organization within structure parameters.

## **Future Research**

True to form, the gaps that arise after conducting a review of the existing literature and research, presents an opportunity for future research. There seems to be a gap in the literature and research that tests specifically African American consumers' reactions and attitudes towards

current advertising aims--something that my own research did not account for. This is a great route for future research. To test African American consumer's attitudes towards advertisements, focus groups could be conducted with consumers of color. In each focus group, a collection of advertisements could be shown from an agency that doesn't meet predetermined diversity standards, but is targeting a racially diverse consumer segment. In contrast, a collection of advertisements created by an agency that does meet diversity standards could then be shown to each focus group. Positive attitudes towards the advertisements could be indications of message resonance and negative attitudes towards the advertisements could be indications that this will affect consumers' behaviors towards the brands shown in a negative way. Past research suggests that message resonance leads to things like brand preference, brand loyalty, purchase intent and actual purchase behavior (McAlister et al, 2016).

### **Closing Thoughts**

The advertising industry solicits risky ideas to create change for the brands they represent. They have the ability to transform old stale brands to exciting, turn-of-the-century advertisers. Yet, somehow, they haven't been able to create their own transformation within the industry for more diversity even though research shows the benefits are plentiful. Furthermore, consumers are demanding more from brands and advertisers. Today's consumers are no longer single race, heterosexual couples with two kids and a white picket fence. They want brands and their advertisements to reflect real people. Consumers want brands to demonstrate inclusion and will support them in return (Think with Google, 2017).

A push for diversity in advertising agencies, and the industry at large, should be about more than filing quotas or simply because it's the right thing to do. For advertisers of the 21st

century, adding more diversity on your creative teams not only promotes greater creativity, innovation, and group problem solving abilities, but also acts as a differentiation tool by allowing for a more authentic and culturally sensitive messaging and campaign creation that will ensure better resonance with today's ever changing diverse consumers. Attracting and keeping people of color in the industry will be a win for agencies, brands, and consumers alike.

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Appendix A

Table 1.

Interview Guide

<b>1. DO YOU BELIEVE THERE IS A LACK OF DIVERSITY IN THE ADVERTISING INDUSTRY (LOCALLY AND NATIONALLY)?</b>
<b>2. IF YES, WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON WHY THAT IS?</b>
<b>3. IN WHAT WAYS IS A MORE DIVERSE AGENCY MORE BENEFICIAL?</b>
<b>4. WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR THOUGHTS ON HOW THE DIVERSITY PROBLEM CAN BE SOLVED?</b>

Appendix B

Research Method: Expert Interviews

Transcripts of Interview Notes

**1. DO YOU BELIEVE THERE IS LACK OF RACIAL DIVERSITY IN THE ADVERTISING INDUSTRY?**

**RESPONDENT #1**

ASSOCIATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR, MINNEAPOLIS  
10 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY

Absolutely! I've been working in advertising agencies in Minneapolis for the last 10 years and in that entire time I've only worked with ONE other black creative. If you count the internship I did in Chicago, that number goes up to two. If you consider, all non-white creatives, then I've worked with one Indian woman in Minneapolis and an Indian woman, a Thai woman and a Filipino man in Chicago (all of whom were also interns and left after a few months).

**RESPONDENT #2**

EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR, CHICAGO  
20 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY

Absolutely. All you have to do is go to an agency or vendor or even a production company or edit house and look around. Some entities are doing a good job adding diversity to their staff, but many look like they are 20-30 years behind, in relation to what the real world looks like. But that's just one man's opinion. If you want to talk facts, there has been some resistance to share numbers, but there are statistics out there. Plus there are lots of articles on the subject that make guesstimates. In fact there are articles on the subject that date back 20-25 years. It feels like Ad Age has a feature story on the subject every year.

**RESPONDENT #3** (PHONE INTERVIEW—PARAPHRASED)

COMMUNICATIONS LEADER, ST PAUL  
20 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY

There is a lack of diversity in media production as a whole (news, movies, etc.)

**RESPONDENT #4**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MINNEAPOLIS  
15 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY

Yes. Only 7.4 % here in the TC .

**RESPONDENT #5**

**INTERNSHIP DIRECTOR, MINNEAPOLIS  
10 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

Yes. It's evident in the way brands try to authentically portray cultures in advertisements. Locally in MN, one report on participating advertising agencies noted roughly 6% of employees are people of color. This aligns with national statistics. The numbers are far less when it comes to creative directors of color in advertising, which tend to be the face of how content gets advertised.

**RESPONDENT #6**

**MARKET RESEARCH COORDINATOR & ANALYST  
5+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

Absolutely. I think that is clear, especially here in Minnesota, which is why I think programs like THE BRANDLAB exist and why I think BIG NAMES AND COMPANIES are in support of the organization's INITIATIVE.

**RESPONDENT #7**

**MARKETING PROFESSIONAL  
5+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

Yes, certainly—particularly here in the Midwest. I work in Marketing, and I have been to countless meetings where I am the only person of color. I am the only person with Asian heritage on my entire floor. It can be astounding how homogenous our marketing department and related areas of the company can be. I believe nationally there is more diversity in advertising in big cities on the coasts—like New York or LA. However, even there, it is less diverse than you might expect.

**RESPONDENT #8 (PHONE INTERVIEW – PARAPHRASED)**

**VARIOUS ROLES IN ADVERTISING  
10 YEARS IN INDUSTRY**

Absolutely. Below 10% in Minnesota for sure. Other areas with higher diversity in their population may have hit 10% but AAs are still majorly underrepresented in the industry

**RESPONDENT #9**  
**COMMUNICATIONS LEADER**  
**50+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

Very definitely. In fact I’ve labored in the broader communications industry for over 50 years (which encompasses advertising and ad agencies) and as a person who has been involved in civil rights, it has always concerned me. Consider for example that I have worked for two respected ad agencies and have seldom had an African American, a Native American or Hispanic one. Have had at least two East Indian interns over those years but even they were temporary.

**RESPONDENT #10**  
**BRAND STRATEGY**  
**5+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

You see feature articles on the topic all the time and it interesting given that African Americans have a natural inclination in the creative arts.

**2. IF YES, WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?**

**RESPONDENT #1**  
**ASSOCIATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR, MINNEAPOLIS**  
**10 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

There are a couple of reasons. Most minorities I know don’t really know about advertising or consider it as a career path. Advertising hasn’t done a good job advertising itself as an employment opportunity.

For the most part, to break into advertising as a Creative you have to go to a portfolio school. And portfolio school is *extremely* expensive. And most minorities I know just don’t have the money for that. Especially when you don’t even leave with a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree (there are a couple of exceptions to this). When I went to a 4-year college (not for advertising) there was plenty of state funding available and scholarship opportunities. Most portfolio schools don’t seem to have the financial support that a 4-year college would have.

Furthermore, advertising isn’t the most stable career. If an agency loses an account, they cut people. And then you’re out on the street looking for work. And that can happen multiple times in your career. A lot of minorities I know, especially children of immigrants, are looking for stable jobs with good salaries. Their parents have worked extremely hard to make a life for them in this country and they want to see their children succeed. They look at fields like engineering, medicine and law because they’re dependable.

Honestly, if I met a group of young disadvantaged black youths and conducted a discussion about what careers they should look at, I'm pretty sure I would NOT recommend advertising, even though I work in it. For people who are: 1) coming from financially shaky backgrounds 2) going to be the first in their families to graduate from college and 3) will probably have financial obligations that extend beyond themselves (like loaning/giving money to other family members) I'd suggest a much more stable career—something like accounting, healthcare or engineering.

**RESPONDENT #2**

**EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR, CHICAGO**

**20 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

There's a lot of chatter around the lack of diversity in the industry so I'll try to touch on issues outside the normal course of conversation in the media as well as the halls of ad agencies and the C-suites of corporate America.

First of all, the advertising agency model is broken in a couple of places, another story that has been highly publicized, and that's part of the problem. As agencies deal with other pressing issues---shrinking revenue, consultants treading on their territory, etc, the issue of diversity takes a back seat.

The biggest problem is the hiring process. The first thing we have to do is admit that this is a tough business to get into. And that's for anybody. So the wall is already pretty high. Pile on issues like racial discrimination, socio-economic disadvantages and the lack of inside advocates and the wall starts to feel like it's impossible to climb. I think that makes talented people shy away from the industry, which might be to blame for the lack of candidates of color in the talent pool. It's kind of like a "freakonomics" theory. If agencies don't hire and promote candidates, candidates won't choose advertising. So not hiring people becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The way to increase diversity is to hire people of color. Lots of people of color. It's that simple.

It's easy to blame racial discrimination. That said, by no means, do I think that advertising is filled with people who discriminate based on the race of job candidates. I do however believe that there are a few people here and there who weigh in with a focus on what a candidate might be lacking, versus concentrating on what the candidate brings to the table. Technically, a diverse background and the knowledge and insight that comes with a candidates unique personal experiences, should be considered a skillset. That said I do believe one or two people within a large organization have the power to create barriers or create a less than desirable and even hostile atmosphere for candidates of color. I say that to make the point that it doesn't take a large number of people to create a conspiracy. It simply takes a few vigilant individuals fighting against diversity and a large group of people who are not willing to speak out against their actions.

Another barrier is socio-economics. A lot of people of color are not exposed to the notion of the advertising industry. Also the price of ad schools tends to be a barrier. On top of all of that sometimes internships are unpaid. There are cases where some people don't even apply for internships because they can't afford to live in NYC for a summer working for free. Again, these are barriers that can be addressed, but agencies have to see diversity as a high enough priority, to invest in solving the problem.

One other issue is the gauntlet agencies use to vet candidates. It usually involves interviews with a number of people from different disciplines at different levels. Each one of them with their own agendas and hang-ups. Some of them have biases, while some of them have friends and family in the running for the job. And each of them essentially have the power to throw a wrench in the process. It's time agencies

start allowing the people who will work directly with job candidates, make the decision on who to hire and stop using the excuse that they need to put candidates through so many paces to make sure candidates fit the culture. Many agencies don't have a culture, they just have a mantra on the wall and a lot of loosely knitted factions within their walls.

Also some agencies have a ridiculously high bar for candidate, as if they only have the most talented people in the business working within their walls. Just like any other business, team or group, some of the members are not superstars. Instead, they are hard working, dedicated members of the team, some of which rise to the level of superstars with training and experience. But most agencies go into every hiring process looking for a superstar. And they use that as an excuse for not hiring people of color. They don't meet the criteria, they will say. Yet somehow a whole crop of mediocre talent manages to get inside the building. When a candidate of color comes through their doors the executive making the decision should be asking themselves what are this person's strengths. Many candidates have told me that sometimes they feel like people in the interview process are probing for weaknesses.

Another issue is inclusion. Its not just about increasing the number of people of color its about increased participation, especially at the executive/decision making levels. Doesn't matter if you hire people but you're not teaching them and you're not learning from them. People want to be challenged. Especially talented people. If they feel like they are not welcomed and they are not being given opportunities and they are not being rewarded they are going to take their talents elsewhere. Anybody of intelligence is not going to see themselves ever holding an executive position, if there's no executives that look like them.

The last issue I'll touch on is arrogance. The idea that I need someone else, comes easy to me, because I grew up playing sports. For the super talented people in this business, and they are super talented, it's hard for them to accept the fact that a client is saying, as amazing as you are, at this particular time in history, your awesomeness is being curated by someone other than yourself. I think some people in the business are having a hard time accepting the idea that their taste, opinions and attitudes are no longer the standard. That their brand of humor, or their sense of worth, or their outlook on life isn't shared by everybody and that sometimes they are gonna have to let somebody else's idea of what's interesting or funny or touching override their tastes and opinions. I think some people are really having a hard time dealing with that kind of shift in power. So they balk at the idea that they need people who have different perspectives. They are convinced that their talent can make up for their lack of connection to the targets that are driving growth in the market. So they scoff at the idea that they need diversity inside their walls to match the diversity of the world around them.

Lastly, there's an old adage that says the best way to get into the ad game is to have an uncle who owns an agency. People of color are simply not represented in large numbers in the business, so they don't have advocates within the agency.

So as you can see there are a lot of small issues that add up to big barriers. But at some point the industry has to stop making excuses, roll up their sleeves and make the hard choices. It's going to require some experimentation with solutions. And there will be some pain points. My greatest fear is they won't. And the business I love will die. and start to understand that ad agencies are going to die, if they don't change. Consultancies are already treading on their turf. Agencies will change or the world is going to get rid of them. Adapt or die.

**RESPONDENT #3**(PHONE INTERVIEW—PARAPHRASED)  
 COMMUNICATIONS LEADER, ST PAUL

**20 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

Racism and history. Its easier to hire people that look like us and we like perspectives that are similar to our own. Those in the majority race are are encouraged to pursue opportunities and get promoted.

**RESPONDENT #4**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MINNEAPOLIS**

**15 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

Systemic Racism is a part of this. - There are networks that have perpetuated the problem. Hiring friends, looking always at the same colleges, not hiring folks who you can't get a trusted (previous relationship) referral from, giving unpaid internships, offering clients children internships, not creating social inclusion for people of color.

**RESPONDENT #5**

**INTERNSHIP DIRECTOR, MINNEAPOLIS**

**10 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

See above ...To add, hiring departments and internal predominantly white teams come with their biases about what they consider a strong candidate. Agencies are representative of who you know and who you're comfortable with. They're also rooted in racist practices in hiring and depicting people of color, so resistance to inclusion is evident.

**RESPONDENT #6**

**MARKET RESEARCH COORDINATOR & ANALYST**

**5+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

Historically, black people (and other racial and ethnic groups) were actively excluded from this industry as they were in other industries--no surprise there. Author, [TANNER COLBY](#), outlines the "Why" in [PART THREE](#) of his 2014 essay series, "The Massive Liberal Failure on Race:"

"In 1969, when the Nixon administration launched its flotilla of affirmative-action programs, one of the president's signature efforts was the Office of Minority Business Enterprise, which made small-business loans available to black- and Hispanic-owned businesses, created vehicles for private equity groups to invest in those businesses, and carved out quotas and set-asides in federal procurement contracts to support them. White-owned companies that bid on government projects—for an ad campaign for military recruiting, for example—were now required to subcontract a certain percentage of their business to black-owned companies, in the interest of sharing the pie. Thanks to the efforts of Reverend Jesse Jackson and Operation PUSH, this practice soon evolved beyond mere legal obligation to become a standard tactic for good racial PR. Black-owned Ford dealerships, black-owned McDonald's franchises, black-owned Coke distributors, all followed from the drive to bolster black ownership and entrepreneurship. During the '70s and '80s, this policy allowed black-owned ad agencies not only to survive but to create a parallel industry of their own, earning hundreds of millions of dollars and bolstering the black media landscape of *Ebony*, BET, and urban radio."

Fast forward a little bit, and...

"The result of these set-asides was two forms of affirmative action working against each other. Here's how it played out in advertising: Under government and public duress to integrate their workforces, white agencies (or "general market" agencies, as they're often called) launched a wave of minority hiring that had an immediate impact, taking the rate of black employment in the industry from a rate of practically zero in 1965 to 3.5 percent in 1970. However, since those same white agencies were now required to subcontract projects out the door to minority agencies, their incentive to bring black hires in was significantly diminished. The rationale that black agencies used to justify their business model was that they were more qualified to speak to black consumers, which in turn cemented the stereotype that white people were more qualified to speak to white consumers. Culturally, legally, and economically, the industry settled into a pattern which ensured that "white" advertising happened over here and "black" advertising happened over there. White agencies did little more than token hiring and recruiting."

Fast forward a little bit more, and...

"The few black hires who *did* make it in the door at white agencies now had a very strong incentive to turn around and walk back out to a black agency, because that's where the short-term benefits were. Life at a black agency offered decent money, a likelier shot at promotion, and a chance to join in the Black Pride movement that was taking hold in the 1970s. By the mid-1980s, black employment at general market agencies fell from 3.5 percent back to 1.7 percent, with high-profile black defectors frequently leaving white firms to hang out their own shingles on the other side of the color line. Which might have been an acceptable outcome had the black agencies flourished and become a thriving industry of their own. They didn't. In 2000, the top 20 black-owned ad agencies *combined* accounted for 0.5 percent of total industry revenues. Integration on Madison Avenue failed. Black solidarity and empowerment failed as well. In trying to split the difference between the two, we wound up with neither."

**RESPONDENT #7**

**MARKETING PROFESSIONAL  
5+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

Nationwide, I think there are a few factors. I can only really speak for Asian Americans, based on my personal experience/those of friends. I think the children of immigrants often have a heightened sense of making sure their career is very practical and financially secure. When your parents had to fight and work tirelessly to get to the US and ensure you have opportunities—it is hard to take risks. I think in many immigrant parent's eyes, advertising seems like a risky career. It often doesn't pay well, especially in the beginning, and you are not guaranteed to be successful. I think in general, many South Asian kids are not encouraged to pursue more creative fields because they seem riskier—which stifles how many of them go into advertising or marketing.

Locally, there are additional barriers to people of color coming into or staying in marketing roles in the Midwest. Minnesota, while it does have ethnic minorities, can be very racially stratified and therefore feel very homogenous. Most of the people who work for big companies in the Twin Cities are from Minnesota, and almost all of them are white. Most of the "diverse" people in Marketing—and they are few and far between—are from out of state. For them (and for me) it is incredibly hard to come to work

knowing you are the one different person. While everyone else shares a very similar background, you had different experiences growing up, you eat different things, have different habits, celebrate different holidays. You feel like an outsider. It is especially hard when you have come from a place that was more diverse, and where there were people who looked different from each other. Therefore it is tempting to move away to somewhere there will be a greater variety of people from different walks of life. Minorities then move away, and Minnesota’s companies remains as “white” as before. It’s very cyclical.

I will note that there are a lot of other Indian people in my company—but they almost all work in tech. They do not play a role in Marketing, and therefore while technically the company might be diverse, the marketing department is not. To me, diversity in a company would mean the whole company would have diversity, not X minority concentrated in one department.

**RESPONDENT #8** (PHONE INTERVIEW – PARAPHRASED)

**VARIOUS ROLES IN ADVERTISING**

**10 YEARS IN INDUSTRY**

The causes for the underrepresentation go all the way back to the institution of slavery. There was a story of a slave who created the double cotton scraper. His master tried to take claim of his invention. During the patent battle, the white attorney for the plantation owner stated how the slave was lazy and that was why he created this machine, to get out of doing manual work. Think about the implications there. If person of color was what anyone else would be referred to as “inventive,” instead, they were labeled as lazy and trying to get out of work. I’ve heard so many people in the industry say they haven’t seen any “great” work from people of color. I’ve seen some real shitty work from people who are in the industry and who have raised to ranks. It’s systemic. We need some real change here.

**RESPONDENT #9**

**COMMUNICATIONS LEADER**

**50+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

Is racism involved? Sure. But the real definition of racism that I learned years ago is that it by definition involves an unwillingness to change the status quo. And I think that definitely applies in this case. I’ve always wondered why a group of people known for their creativity in such fields as music, the arts and sports should not be both attracted to and desired by advertisers and ad agencies and the ad side of paid media.

There are some emerging trends where clients (especially consumer products) are insisting on a diverse account team, and, in competitive pitches, discard agencies without that commitment.

To correct this shortcoming means that both agencies and clients must initiate programs such as internships, scholarships and work study programs. It’s also analogous to hunting: you have to know where to find your quarry and their habits. Do you speak at diverse schools (beginning at the high school level)? Do you hold regular monthly recruiting/explanatory breakfast or lunch sessions at your office where you host journalism or advertising/liberal arts students working in concert with the universities or colleges they attend? At these sessions, the firms should not just conduct tours and answer questions, they should obviously collect resumes as well.

Finally, some college or university journalism or communications departments have also worked with agencies or advertisers to offer a group of students (such as a Sigma Delta Chi chapters) to tackle an actual or created assignment – even going so far as to make it competitive. And, of course, it’s incumbent on university and college instructors to keep in touch with agency and advertiser hiring personnel.

**RESPONDENT #10**

**BRAND STRATEGY**

**5+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

I think the advertising field in general is very competitive and when they say it’s all about who you know, it really is. If there are no people of color at agencies advocating for other people of color, how do we find our way in?

**3. IN WHAT WAYS MIGHT A DIVERSE AGENCY BE MORE BENEFICIAL?**

**RESPONDENT #1**

**ASSOCIATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR, MINNEAPOLIS**

**10 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

Advertising is how brands speak to their consumers. Consumers aren’t just one color, one sexuality, one religion etc. So the more diverse the agency, the more diverse the ideas that will come out of that agency and the broader the net they can cast.

Agencies, along with the media in general, have the power to affect how people see themselves. For example, when a dark-skinned African woman works at an agency and casts a dark-skinned African model as the face of Loreal or another beauty product, she’s telling thousands of dark-skinned women and little girls that they’re beautiful. This accomplishes the primary goal, increasing the number of people that buy that product. It also brands that company as “accepting of all”, which is important in this day and age where consumers want to purchase from brands that have a social conscience. As a socially-aware brand, they’re showing the world that they know that the images they put forth have the power to fortify or destroy self-esteem. As time goes on, hopefully, diverse agencies will be the only ones that are relevant in an increasingly diverse and global landscape.

**RESPONDENT #2**

**EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR, CHICAGO**

**20 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

As the logic goes and research has proven, groups of people from diverse backgrounds come up with better ideas. In laymen’s terms people who have had different experiences, see things differently. They have; different tastes, different attitudes, different opinions. So on a macro level, groups of people with

diverse backgrounds are simply better problem solvers. So you get better solutions from groups of people with diverse views. On a micro-level the advertising industry is charged with targeting messages to the masses. The mass population of America has changed drastically over the last 20 years. Not just in demographics, but also in attitudes. America is simply a more diverse country. Yet the demographics of the talent found in the advertising industry has not kept pace with the changing face of America. This has created a chasm between the messages. I believe the problem is being understated, especially as many brands are finding out through research that their whole industry is being driven by segments of the population that have traditionally been ignored by the leading brands in the industry. That's why you're seeing brands publicly stating that Ad agencies must become more diverse.

**RESPONDENT #3** (PHONE INTERVIEW—PARAPHRASED)  
 COMMUNICATIONS LEADER, ST PAUL  
 20 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY

Diverse teams everywhere (outside ad industry) are more innovative because they bring diversity of opinion, but in creative teams especially they have the opportunity to bring authenticity to the story. Advertising has the ability to shape our views and perceptions of ourselves, while people might not view advertisements as facts, they probably tune in to advertisements much more than they do to a news article. African Americans are more likely to come up with more effective ads and create messaging that resonates with African American audiences.

**RESPONDENT #4**  
 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MINNEAPOLIS  
 15 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY

The best ideas come from building upon difference- breaking apart a problem and trying to solve with folks who are from the same background often leads to the same solutions.

**RESPONDENT #5**  
 INTERNSHIP DIRECTOR, MINNEAPOLIS  
 10 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY

Lessens the likelihood of group think. Boosts ideation and the creation of authentic, better ideas. Creates a workplace reflective of societies changing demographics.

**RESPONDENT #6**  
 MARKET RESEARCH COORDINATOR & ANALYST  
 5+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY

I believe the politically correct answer to this question would be that diversity (in terms of race and ethnicity) helps to create a more inclusive environment where all employees have an equal opportunity to thrive professionally and better address the GROWTH of "multicultural" markets as well as the "general" market, which many industry professionals would like to refer to as the practice of "Total Market Strategy."

Speaker, PEPPER MILLER, addresses the concept of Total Market in a 2016 FORBES ARTICLE stating: "Total Market strategy is defined by the Association of Hispanic Advertising Agencies as 'a marketing approach followed by corporations with their trusted internal and external partners which proactively integrates diverse segment considerations. This is done from inception, through the entire strategic process and execution, with the goal of enhancing value and growth effectiveness. In marketing communications this could lead to either one fully integrated cross-cultural approach, individual segment

approaches, or both in many cases, but always aligned under one overarching strategy."

However, my honest answer is that diversity in the workplace can only be beneficial if it is accepted, a word defined as "generally believed or recognized to be valid or correct." I do not believe that the advertising industry, whether locally or nationally, accepts racial and ethnic diversity or inclusion in the workplace. This has been reflected in my experiences of zero HR support for recruitment and retention of "diverse" employees, minimal if any representation of "diversity" in leadership positions and amongst external partners, and a lack of inclusive practices that support "diverse" employees in their roles. (I use quotations around diversity because I think the advertising industry and our broader society is more inclined to accept diversity outside of the parameters of race and ethnicity. To be clear, I am speaking to racial and ethnic diversity.)

**RESPONDENT #7**  
**MARKETING PROFESSIONAL**  
**5+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

It allows your marketing to be more inclusive and speak to a greater variety of people. If the people creating the ads all have a similar perspective, they will never be able to think like people with different perspectives. Diversity also keeps an agency from being offensive or insensitive – something that happens all the time, because there was no minority there to speak up and say “hey... that’s not ok because of \_\_\_\_\_”. Such transgressions happen not because of ill intentions, but lack of awareness or insensitivity. Cultural nuance is so important—and when nuance is understood and spoken to, people react very well. The US isn’t all-white, so our advertising shouldn’t be.

**RESPONDENT #8**(PHONE INTERVIEW – PARAPHRASED)  
**VARIOUS ROLES IN ADVERTISING**  
**10 YEARS IN INDUSTRY**

More diversity and black people in general in the creative room helps tell a more authentic story. There’s something to having ongoing experience being a black person in this world and only another person of color is able to truly and accurately depict what that looks like.

**RESPONDENT #9**  
**COMMUNICATIONS LEADER**  
**50+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

First because the very essence of creativity and originality of thought and approach involves variety of perspectives and backgrounds, particularly in today’s fast moving and fast changing world (Donald Trump as president anyone?) Consider, for example, the short life span of new consumer products or services in any industry, or the limited attention span of TV viewers for both existing and new programing. And if you have a totally white bread creative, account staff and media buying staff how the heck can you be expected to package and promote new products, services or concepts directed at say an African American or Hispanic buying segment? Finally, there’s another important byproduct from having a diverse staff and that quite simply is the energy and creative experience that people of diverse backgrounds bring to the workplace, especially to a creative workplace where new ideas and yes, styles are valued.

**RESPONDENT #10**

**BRAND STRATEGY**

**5+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

I think there’s a lot of benefits to having more diversity in agencies, especially on creative teams who create messaging for campaigns. If you think about all the brands who have attempted to reach diverse segments and failed, as of late Pepsi is a prime example, consider what impact a person of color involved in the creation could have had, were talking about the difference between losing out on millions of dollars to creating an award-winning campaign that reaches people of color and increases brand loyalty, purchase intention, sales, etc.—all those things I’m sure Pepsi was aiming for.

**4. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON HOW THE DIVERSITY PROBLEM CAN BE SOLVED?**

**RESPONDENT #1**

**ASSOCIATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR, MINNEAPOLIS**

**10 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

- 1) quality Portfolio Programs need to be widely offered at 4-year universities. Most schools offer Biology, English, and Business majors. Why not, advertising?
- 2) “Advertising needs to advertise itself.” I went to a lot of job fairs when I was in college and not once did I see a booth for an advertising agency. I saw booths for companies like 3M, General Mills or big engineering firms but that was it. And that’s just job fairs. Organizations could reach out to high school guidance counselors and educate them on the opportunities.
- 3) Create scholarships/grants for minority students to go into advertising. I wish I had one. Ad school cost me \$60K!!!
- 4) Create more programs to recruit minority students into advertising. I think there are a few right now, like BrandLab. But there could be so many more.
- 5) Create programs within advertising to support minorities. I’ve only worked with one other black creative my entire advertising career. That’s it. If a racial issue were to arise I wouldn’t have anyone who looked like me to turn to.

**RESPONDENT #2**

**EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR, CHICAGO**

**20 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

Isn’t it ironic that advertising agencies are supposed to be problem solvers but for some reason they

haven't been able to crack the nut on this one in 20 years.

It's not an easy problem to solve the problem. But it is necessary to solve the problem.

The fact is, at this particular point in time, the level of interest and sense of urgency does not match the gravity of the issue. If it did, even a mediocre creative director like myself, would have 20 offers a week.

Ultimately, brands are the ones at risk and so brands are going to have to take the lead. And that's why you are now starting to see clients publicly stating that something has to change. Other brands are still waiting on agencies to get their act together. I predict that some brands are going to die on the vine waiting. Brands need to demand that their agencies reflect the new America and provide rewards/bonuses for those that do and pink slips for those that don't.

Lastly, the industry should allow supply and demand to take its natural course. In my opinion brands and agencies should pay a premium for talent of color. It's valuable and it's rare. It should cost more.

**RESPONDENT #3** (PHONE INTERVIEW—PARAPHRASED)  
 COMMUNICATIONS LEADER, ST PAUL  
 20 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY

Diverse teams everywhere (outside ad industry) are more innovative because they bring diversity of opinion, but in creative teams especially they have the opportunity to bring authenticity to the story. Advertising has the ability to shape our views and perceptions of ourselves, while people might not view advertisements as facts, they probably tune in to advertisements much more than they do to a news article. African Americans are more likely to come up with more effective ads and create messaging that resonates with African American audiences.

**RESPONDENT #4**  
 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MINNEAPOLIS  
 15 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY

So many solutions. Stop hiring friends of friends. Recruit from colleges that are known to be more diverse. Require the Rooney Rule for all entry level hires. Require leadership to "Sponsor" a person from a diverse background. Require all staff to take bias training.

**RESPONDENT #5**  
 INTERNSHIP DIRECTOR, MINNEAPOLIS  
 10 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY

People at the top have to value, invest, and commit to the change. Short term fixes like hiring for diversity don't promote retention. Also when people of color are hired, it's important they feel their insights and whole self are welcomed in the work environment. A long term inclusion strategy focused on promotion, benefits, and engagement can lead to better retention.

**RESPONDENT #6**  
 MARKET RESEARCH COORDINATOR & ANALYST  
 5+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY

Similar to my thoughts that are outlined in my previous answer, this problem can only be solved when there is a basic level of acceptance for diversity and inclusion in the workplace at all levels. However, since the ad industry is just a microcosm of our broader society, I would argue that our society would

have to change first.

**RESPONDENT #7**  
**MARKETING PROFESSIONAL**  
**5+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

I think companies have to be more active about recruiting diverse candidates. While this is obviously a touch subject, at the end of the day, a company or agency benefits from a variety of perspectives. I'll note that this is also about a diversity of locations and backgrounds, not just race. I think in terms of retaining people (which is a huge challenge in the Midwest in particular), they need to not only have leadership-lead efforts to be more inclusive, but that has to seep into the actions and mindsets of employees at each level. People need to be more comfortable talking about other cultures, ask for other perspectives, while not making assumptions about people based on their race. I think in the Midwest, it is hard to integrate into the local population when you are not white, or when you are not from here. When people are warm and inviting and bring you into their community even outside of work—it is a lot easier to feel connected and comfortable. I also think that if someone who isn't part of the majority brings up a hardship that they face, people need to not take it as a personal attack, but be empathetic and try to understand rather than shut it down.

**RESPONDENT #8**(PHONE INTERVIEW – PARAPHRASED)  
**VARIOUS ROLES IN ADVERTISING**  
**10 YEARS IN INDUSTRY**

The industry and its leaders have to recognize the need for diversity otherwise we will get nowhere. Now that brands are starting to speak out about it, we may be able to make some strides. We need brands to continue to demand it, in turn, agencies need to develop initiatives to bring more people of color in. They can look at who does diversity and inclusion well and take some notes from their playbook.

**RESPONDENT #9**  
**COMMUNICATIONS LEADER**  
**50+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

I've already posed some solutions in my answer to question #2. But let me explore a few other potential solutions. First of all, the college or University departments have a role to play in bringing diverse agencies about. When they have a solid minority student in their program(s) they should pay some special interest to that student, checking in with him/her to see how he/she is doing and where his/her interests lie. If they show any interest at all, they should explain the kind of options specific agencies offer and offer to make a personal recommendation to the potential employer on their behalf. Better yet offer to participate in an introductory lunch or breakfast with the agency person and you. Can that open doors? It did over 20 years ago when I arranged a lunch with a client, a University journalism department head and a student from Fargo, North Dakota. Today, that young woman is CEO of one of the largest and most respected PR firms in the U.S.

So the University department does have a responsible role to play in educating students about the marketplace but also in keeping potential employers/agencies aware of some of the outstanding (or even semi outstanding majors) they have. After all, some students are late bloomers.

But above all, let me emphasize that some of the best avenues for “solving this problem” are by making sure that potential agencies/employers on the client or media side, become familiar with stellar organizations such as 360 Journalism and Brand Lab – both locally based. 360 Journalism is an ongoing program located at the University of Saint Thomas in St. Paul that teaches journalism/communications skills including reporting and writing, graphic layout, photography, video and social media skills via workshops, classes, a summer camp and ongoing news/feature magazine publication. I’m not involved in Brand Lab, but it also trains students in virtually all aspects of advertising and creativity. And I’d be happy to direct you to someone who can provide more information on the group to you.

**RESPONDENT #10**

**BRAND STRATEGY**

**5+ YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY**

First-and-foremost the industry needs to do better at reaching minorities early. If I would have known about copywriting when I was in high school, I would have followed the exact path to that instead of taking the roundabout way and wasting a lot time and money trying to figure out what I wanted to do. I didn’t know that copywriting was a thing! Anytime I would take a personality/job test it would link me to interior or fashion design, yes, I like both of those things but definitely didn’t want a career in it. Ad school is very expensive also so if quality advertising programs were offered at universities, a lot more people of color would have the opportunity to get into the industry.