

BREAKING THROUGH:

# Overcoming Structural Barriers for Journalists of Color

# Acknowledgements

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## About Rapid Research Evaluation (RPDRE)

Rapid Research Evaluation (RPDRE) was founded by Cambodian American, Dr. Peter T. Keo. RPDRE is the first minority-owned rapid evaluation firm in the US. RPDRE is a nationally recognized, award-winning national research and external evaluation firm that works with clients across industries. We employ the most rigorous research methods (advanced statistics, predictive analytics, artificial intelligence, data science, qualitative methods) to improve human lives. We also conduct in-person and virtual market research, surveys, and focus groups. Our passion is to help high-performing leaders, companies, and organizations better utilize data and evidence to rapidly, affordably, and efficiently meet goals and achieve results. We specialize in conducting evidence-based impact evaluations for public, private, philanthropic, and nonprofit partners. RPDRE deploys 30+ years of experience to tailor solutions to meet the needs of our clients. We care deeply about making the planet a better place for generations to come.

# The RPDRE Team

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Dr. Peter T. Keo is the Founder and CEO of Rapid Research Evaluation (RPDRE), an 8x award-winning research firm. He is the proud son of Cambodian genocide survivors. His parents survived the genocide but it took every member of their immediate family. This massive loss inspires Dr. Keo to invest in compassion, kindness, social impact, and historically disadvantaged communities. Dr. Keo has held executive, leadership, research, and academic appointments for Stanford University School of Medicine, The University of Pennsylvania, Harvard University, Columbia University, New York University, The University of Cambodia, and other notable institutions.

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# Introduction

The newsroom industry is historically known to be a male-dominated field (Grieco, 2018; Steiner, 2019). Additionally, women and journalists of color remain marginalized in the news industry, especially in relation to pay inequity and leadership roles such as editorial decision-making (Bourgault, 2023; Adams et al., 2023; Shor et al., 2019; Steiner, 2019). As a result of the racial and gender disparities in the newsrooms, it is imperative to learn more about the experiences of these journalists to address diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in the newsroom.

This study explores the experiences and systemic challenges faced by journalists of color within newsrooms across the U.S. Through a mixed-method approach, we organize our findings into three primary themes, each containing a set of nuanced subthemes: (1) Workplace Climate (interactions with colleagues and managers), (2) Career Advancement (barriers to entry; pay equity; career mobility; mentorship, sponsorship and professional networks; solidarity; compositional diversity vs. structural diversity, and retention), and (3) the impact of the external environment (identity and work assignments and the current state of journalism in America). We conclude with data-driven solutions aimed at advancing equity in the newsroom, and improving the workplace experiences for marginalized populations.

# Methodology

## NATIONAL SURVEY DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

From January 2024 to February 2024, we deployed a web-based survey using a criterion sampling approach to reach 549 survey participants, all of whom identified as a working professional in journalism, with a vast majority (over 90%) self-identifying as a journalist of color. Criterion variables included job level, role in the newsroom, age, race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, educational background, employment status, income range, years of industry experience, and areas of coverage. The aggregated sample size of the survey had a margin of error of  $\pm .167$  at the 95 percent confidence interval. The standard of error of 0.084, being relatively small, gives us an indication that our sample mean is relatively close to the true mean of our overall population. The margin of error (at 95% confidence) for our mean (3.47) indicates that the true population mean is most likely between 3.30 and 3.64.

**549**

survey participants

**90%+**

of survey participants  
identify themselves as a  
journalist of color



Rapid Research Evaluation (RPDRE) created the survey and shared the link with the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA). AAJA distributed the survey via email to their list of 1,224 newsroom leaders from the top 20 Designated Market Areas across the country, their 12,031 newsletter subscribers, and across their social media following. AAJA also enlisted the assistance of journalism diversity associations to distribute the survey link to their memberships. (AAJA reached out directly to journalists after so few publishers agreed to share diversity data that the News Leaders Association abandoned its diversity report.) The final survey consisted of 25 survey questions that aligned with our primary themes (Workplace Climate, Career Advancement, and the Impact of the External Environment).

We developed an original web-based survey (see Appendix A). We ran two rounds of analysis for the survey data. The first round consisted of a general cleaning of the data and a descriptive analysis. We removed participants with significant missing data and created bar graphs and charts to visually describe the data. During the second round, we disaggregated the data by race/ethnicity, gender, age, and other key variables relevant to the study.

STUDY SAMPLE

Survey results capture a wide range of demographic and professional information (see Appendix C for survey graphs). We disaggregated the respondents’ demographic data to run cross-tabulation analyses for numerous variables, including job level, role in the newsroom, age, race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, educational background, employment status, income range, years of industry experience, and areas of coverage. The demographics for the total sample of respondents are the following:

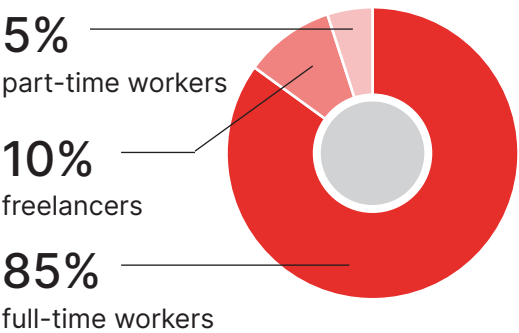
Job Level, Role, and Employment Status

When disaggregating sample data by job level, 26% of respondents listed Individual Contributor, followed by 23% Senior Individual Contributor/Subject-matter Expert, 19% Mid-management, 13% Senior Management, 12% Entry-level, 5% Executive/C-Suite, and 1% Owner/Publisher.

Editors and Reporters comprised the majority of our sample at 29.1% and 27.9%, respectively. Our sample also included Producers (10.6%), Executive/C-Suite professionals (7.8%), Anchors (6.2%),

29.1%  
of the sample are  
editors  
  
27.9%  
of the sample are  
reporters

the majority

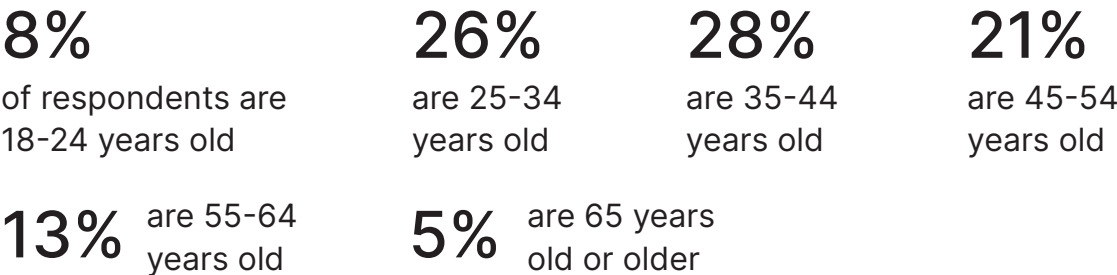


Supervisors (4.6%), Writers (3.6%), Video Journalists (2.4%), Photojournalists (2%), Interns/Fellows (1.8%), Columnists (1.2%), Hosts (1.2%), Bloggers (0.6%), Commenters (0.4%), and Data Visualization Journalists (0.4%).

The majority of respondents are working full-time (85%), and 10% are freelancers and 5% are part-time employees.

Age

The survey presents a broad age range, where




### Race/Ethnicity


This report represents a range of diverse perspectives as it pertains to racial and ethnic identity. More specifically, our sample was 39.9% Asian American/Asian, 20.7% African American/Black, 11.3% two or more races, 9.3% South Asian/Desi American, 6.6% White, 5.3% Southeast Asian American/Southeast Asian, and 4.9% Hispanic/Latino/a. Middle Eastern/North African, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, Native American/Alaskan Native/Indigenous, and Arab or Arab American were each less than 1% of the sample.

**39.9%**  
of the sample are  
Asian American/Asian

### Gender Identity & Sexual Orientation

Our sample is 65.8% women and 31.9% men, followed by 2.2% of respondents who identify as gender non-conforming and 0.2% as transgender. The majority of our sample identify as heterosexual (76.5%), and 7.7% identify as gay/lesbian, 6% as bisexual, 2.6% as queer, 1.3% as pansexual, 1.1% as questioning, 0.7% as asexual, and 4.2% of respondents chose not to identify.

 **65.8%**

 **31.9%**

**76.5%**  
of our sample identify  
as heterosexual

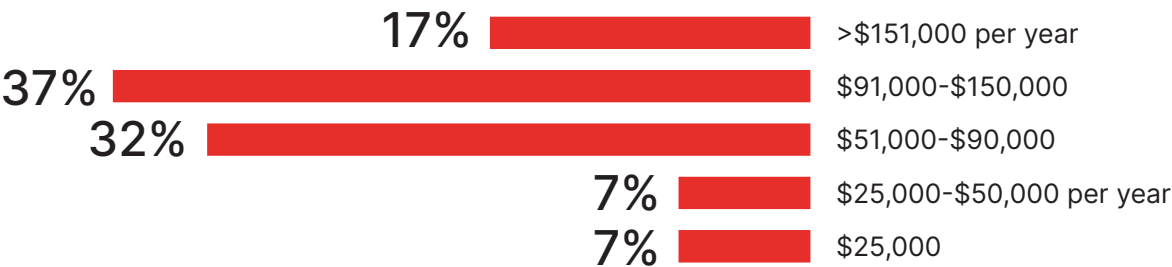
### Education Level

**59.6%**  
of our sample  
have a four-year  
college degree

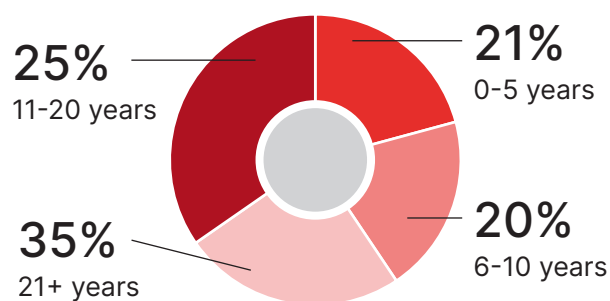
The majority of our sample have a four-year college degree (59.6%), while 28.7% hold a Master's degree in the Arts and Sciences, 6.4% have a professional Master's degree, 2.9% have a high school diploma or GED, and 1.3% have a two-year college degree. Those with law degrees and doctoral degrees were less than 1% of our total sample, respectively.

### Income and Salary Range

We find that our survey sample consisted of professionals within relatively higher income brackets, with



## Industry Experience



We asked respondents to report the number of years they have worked in the industry, and find that those with 0-5 years of experience account for 21%, followed by 20% with 6-10 years of experience, 25% with 11-20 years of experience, and 35% with over 21 years of experience.

## Journalistic Areas

Finally, our survey sample consisted of a wide range of journalistic expertise, with



**18.1%**

in Politics/Policy



**13.4%**

in Arts/Culture/  
Food/Style



**12.3%**

in Education



**12.2%**

in Health



**11.2%**

in Crime



**11.1%**

in Business



**7.8%**

in Law



**7.7%**

in Technology



**6.3%**

in Sports



# Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis



Through our qualitative methods, we reached 37 total participants through a series of semi-structured focus group and individual interviews (see Appendix B for the interview protocol). Out of the total sample, 27 identify as women, 9 identify as men, and 1 identifies as non-binary. Four of the participants are between 18-24 years old, 5 are between 25-34 years old, 9 are between 35-44, 11 are between 45-54, 3 participants are over 55 years old, and 5 participants chose not to provide their age. The racial/ethnic breakdown of our sample is the following: 5 African American/Black, 16 Asian American/Asian, 4 South Asian/Desi American, 3

Southeast Asian, 2 Hispanic/Latino/a, 1 White, 3 participants who selected “Two or more races,” and 3 participants who chose not to provide their race/ethnicity. All participants received a \$10 gift card for their participation.

Participants were asked a series of semi-structured questions related to each of our three primary themes, including questions related to their perceptions of organizational commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging; intersectional identities; experiences with microaggressions and stereotypes; career advancement opportunities; pay equity; mentorship, sponsorship, and professional networks; hiring, recruitment, and retention; and various external factors that influence workplace experiences (i.e., political crises, financial climate, legislation, etc.).

Qualitative data analysis procedures consisted of several methods prescribed by Corbin and Strauss (1998) and Saldaña (2016). We utilized Strauss and Corbin’s four-phase data analysis process which consists of pre-coding, open-coding, axial-coding, and selective coding. Each interview transcript was analyzed through a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS)-NVivo. We ran several correlation matrices to identify the most prominent themes derived from the data. After the four phases were completed, we triangulated the qualitative data with the results from our survey instrument.

# Findings

We organize our findings into three primary themes, each containing a set of nuanced subthemes:

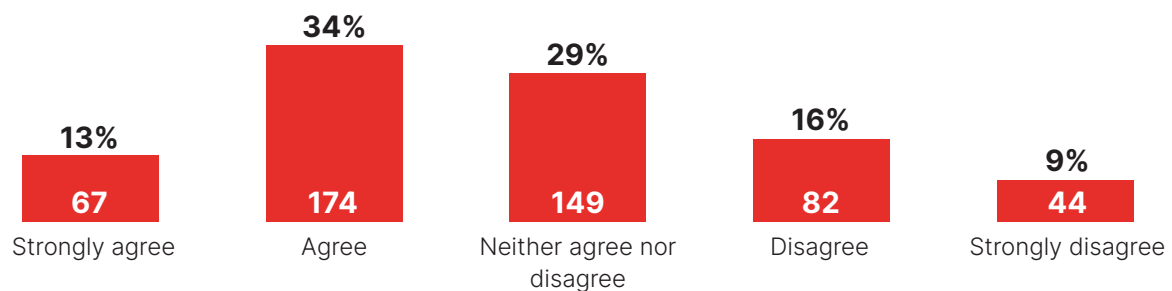
- 1 Workplace Climate** (interactions with colleagues and managers),
- 2 Career Advancement** (barriers to entry; pay equity; career mobility; mentorship, sponsorship and professional networks; solidarity; compositional diversity vs. structural diversity, and retention), and
- 3 the impact of the external environment** (identity and work assignments and the current state of journalism in America).

## WORKPLACE CLIMATE

The survey results regarding the active development of equitable and inclusive spaces for people of color in news organizations yield a moderate outlook. While 47% of respondents feel their organizations are actively working towards inclusivity, a considerable 25% express disagreement or strong disagreement, signaling a pressing need for more impactful and consistent inclusivity initiatives.

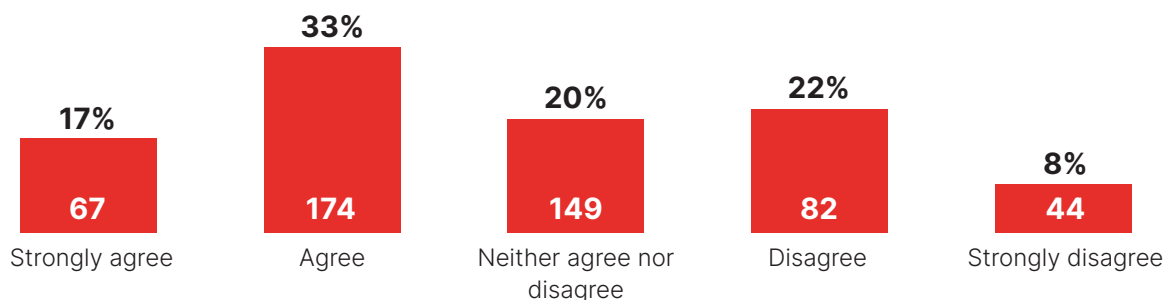
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*My organization is actively becoming a more equitable and inclusive place for people of color to work*



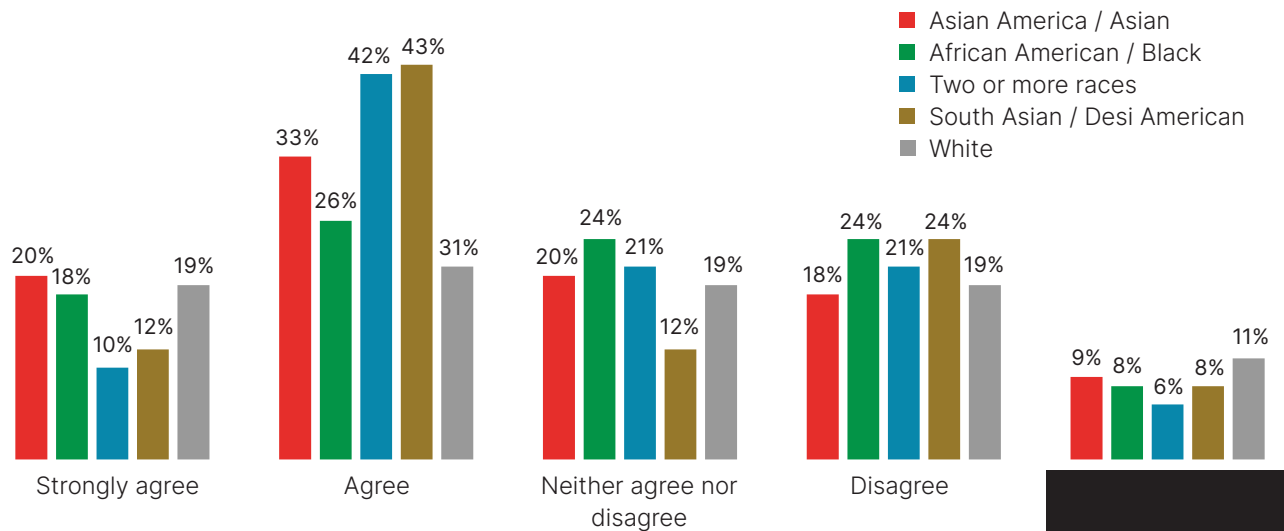
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*Q14. The news organization I work at treats employees fairly regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, and abilities.*



In the survey assessing fairness in the workplace, 17% of the respondents strongly agree that their organization treats employees equitably across age, gender, race, ethnicity, and abilities. A further 33% agree with this statement. A fifth of the respondents, or 20%, are neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Meanwhile, 22% disagree, and 8% strongly disagree with the notion of fair treatment being provided by their news organizations.

**Q14. The news organization I work at treats employees fairly regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, and abilities.**

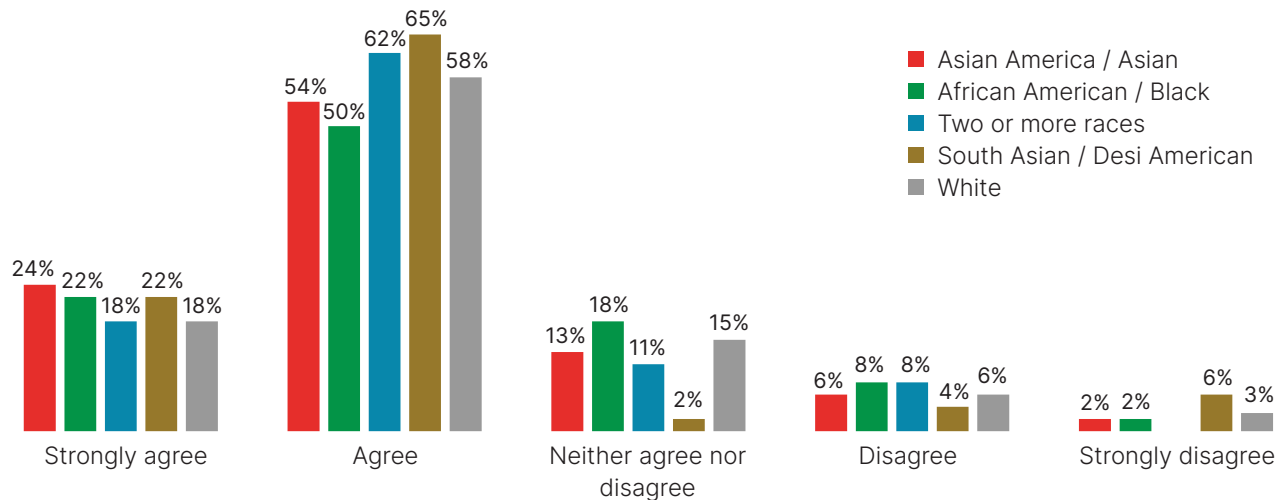


FEEDBACK STATEMENTS	Asian American/ Asian	African American/ Black	Two or more races	South Asian/Desi American	White	Grand Total
Strongly agree	42	19	6	6	7	80
Agree	69	28	26	21	11	155
Neither agree nor disagree	42	26	13	6	7	94
Disagree	39	26	13	12	7	97
Strongly disagree	19	9	4	4	4	40
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>466</b>

In the survey regarding perceptions of fairness at work, responses varied notably among different racial/ethnic groups. For Asian American/Asian respondents, 20% strongly agree, while 33% agree that their organization treats employees fairly. However, 18% disagree, and 9% strongly disagree with this sentiment. For African American/Black respondents, 18% strongly agree and 26% agree on fair treatment. Yet, disagreement is notably higher in this group, with 24% disagreeing and 8% strongly disagreeing. Those identifying with two or more races show 10% in strong agreement and 42% in agreement regarding fair treatment. Disagreement stands at 21%, with 6% in strong disagreement.

South Asian/Desi American participants have 12% strongly agreeing and a more significant portion, 43%, agreeing with fair treatment. Disagreement is also marked at 24%, and strong disagreement at 8%. White respondents have 19% who strongly agree and 31% who agree with the statement on fair treatment. Both disagreement and strong disagreement are present, at 19% and 11%, respectively.

*Q18. I am treated with respect.*



FEEDBACK STATEMENTS	Asian American/ Asian	African American/ Black	Two or more races	South Asian/Desi American	White	Grand Total
Strongly agree	50	23	11	11	6	101
Agree	112	53	38	32	19	254
Neither agree nor disagree	28	19	7	1	5	60
Disagree	13	9	5	2	2	31
Strongly disagree	5	2	0	3	1	11
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>457</b>

Finally, in the survey items focusing on respect in the workplace, Asian American/Asian respondents indicated a high degree of respect, with 24% strongly agreeing and 54% agreeing. A smaller group, 13%, remained neutral, while 6% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed.

For African American/Black participants, 22% strongly agreed with feeling respected, and half agreed. A notable 18% were neutral, 8% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed.

Individuals identifying with two or more races showed 18% strongly agreeing and a significant 62% agreeing, implying a strong sense of respect. Neutrality was expressed by 11%, with 8% disagreeing.

In the survey assessing fairness in the workplace, 17% of the respondents strongly agree that their organization treats employees equitably across age, gender, race, ethnicity, and abilities. A further 33% agree with this statement. A fifth of the respondents, or 20%, are neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Meanwhile, 22% disagree, and 8% strongly disagree with the notion of fair treatment being provided by their news organizations.

**There's more sensitivity now, but at the same time, I feel like there's more superficiality about it, and that's frustrating. I feel like there's an emphasis on using the right terminology, sort of saying the right things. It's almost as if they've been taught by [Human Resources] what they should say or shouldn't say.**

A Black woman who is an Editor and Host at a legacy television network explained how commitments to DEI can be perceived as performative because it is not structurally embedded within the organizational infrastructure:

**I think that the news organizations have been forced to do more DEI, but I feel like it's been a forced effort and it's just for optics. Maybe there was some extra funding they got because they announced an initiative to bring in more diversity, but that was a one-and-done. You don't see it again. It's just very disheartening and a little disillusioning. Culturally, I don't think we've really made much progress at all in terms of advancing DEI. It's clear that it's not part of their DNA.**



Researchers across several industries have highlighted the disingenuous motivations of many DEI initiatives. For example, Harris, Barone and Davis (2015) situate this dilemma within the context of higher education, claiming that these initiatives can be more accurately described as “token incrementalism,” or, the notion that “an incremental approach to inclusion without simultaneously challenging institutional hegemony will have, at best, a null or, at worst, a negative impact toward a vision for equity” (p. 33). As we explore further in our section on career advancement, incremental strategies in the absence of structural interventions will merely maintain the status quo without challenging institutional hegemony.

Only a few years removed from the Summer of 2020, we are already witnessing a large-scale divestment from DEI commitments across nearly every industry. An Asian man who serves as the technical lead of a media production company in Minneapolis provided additional context for how companies have started rolling back their DEI initiatives and strategic plans that were established after the tragic murder of George Floyd:

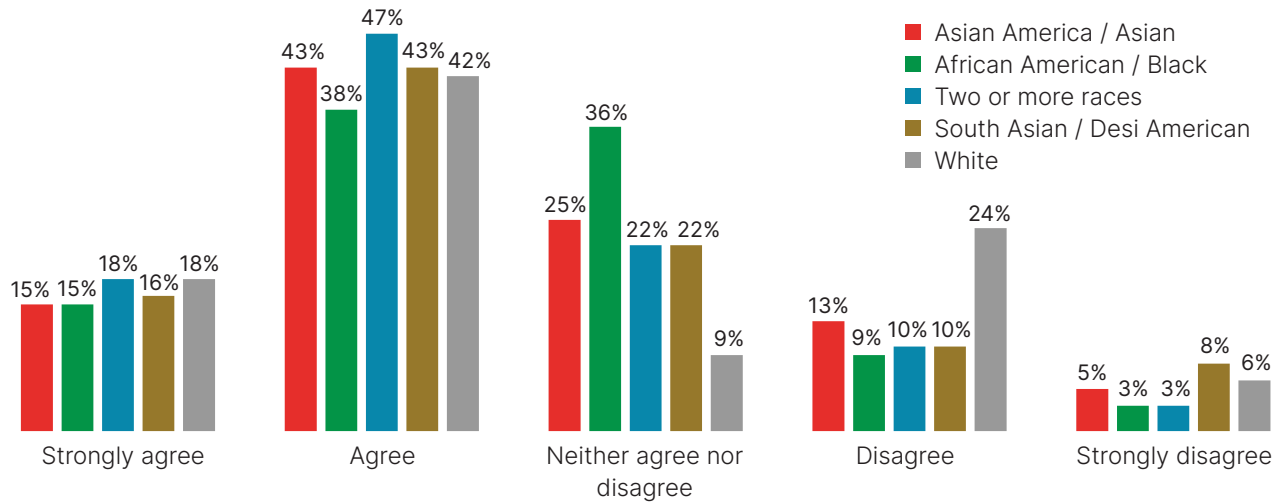
**I think I would describe our DEI efforts as stalled perhaps, or even kind of in retrenchment. I'm at a legacy organization and there was a lot of disruption, good disruption, post-George Floyd, where a lot of senior leaders were brought in and incentivized for the first time, monetarily, to make inclusion, equity, and diversity part of their goals. We created Culture Committees across [the company] that asked for input from BIPOC sectors. There was a lot of emphasis, energy, budget placed towards funding excursions, funding story initiatives, funding all sorts of DEI measures. Those efforts are somewhat stalled. Some of those budgets have dried up, some of the enthusiasm has diminished. The Culture Committees have been disbanded. I would also add the word *fatigued* because a lot of the work was done on the backs of people like myself who did their full-time job and then their side hustle was diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.**

As DEI-centered committees are disbanded, large-scale initiatives ended, and career incentives no longer available, journalists of color across the industry have several justifiable reasons to question the validity and legitimacy of institutional commitments to DEI. What is more, journalists of color are once again being tasked with the responsibility to maintain these efforts with limited resources, and within a sociopolitical context that is growing increasingly resistant to progressive change.



## GENDER & RACIAL CLIMATE

*Q20. My organization is actively becoming a more equitable and inclusive place to work, regardless of my sexual orientation and gender identity.*



FEEDBACK STATEMENTS	Asian American/ Asian	African American/ Black	Two or more races	South Asian/Desi American	White	Grand Total
Strongly agree	30	15	11	8	6	70
Agree	88	39	28	21	14	190
Neither agree nor disagree	51	37	13	11	3	115
Disagree	26	9	6	5	8	54
Strongly disagree	10	3	2	4	2	21
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>450</b>

Asian American/Asian respondents indicated that 15% strongly agree and 43% agree with the progress towards inclusivity, while 25% remained neutral. A smaller portion, 13%, disagreed, and 5% strongly disagreed.

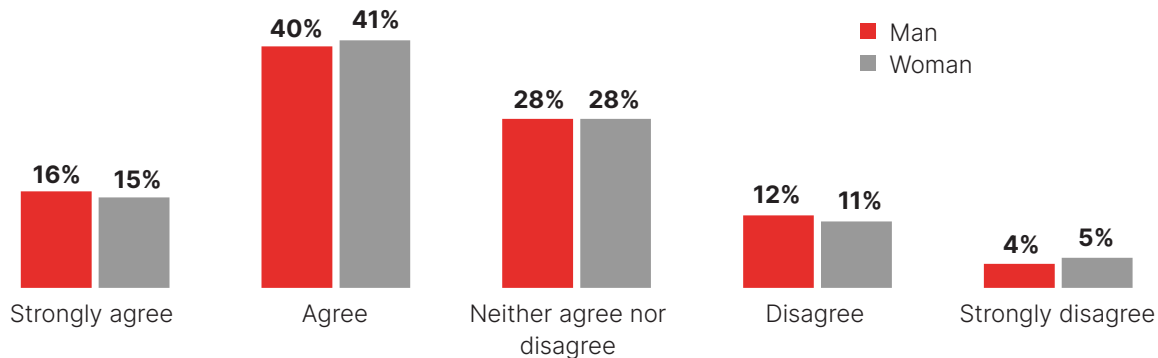
African American/Black journalists showed similar levels of strong agreement (15%) and lower agreement (38%), with a notably higher neutrality at 36%. Disagreement stood at 9%, and strong disagreement at 3%.

Journalists identifying with two or more races felt more positive, with 18% strongly agreeing and 47% agreeing. Neutrality was expressed by 22%, with 10% disagreeing and 3% strongly disagreeing.

South Asian/Desi American journalists' responses were closely aligned, with 16% strongly agreeing, 43% agreeing, 22% neutral, 10% disagreeing, and 8% strongly disagreeing.

White journalists reported the highest strong agreement at 18% and agreement at 42%. However, they showed the highest disagreement rate at 24% and strong disagreement at 6%, with only 9% remaining neutral.

*Q20. My organization is actively becoming a more equitable and inclusive place to work, regardless of my sexual orientation and gender identity.*



FEEDBACK STATEMENTS	Man	Woman	Grand Total
Strongly agree	27	49	76
Agree	67	139	206
Neither agree nor disagree	46	93	139
Disagree	20	37	57
Strongly disagree	7	18	25
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>503</b>

When disaggregating our data to examine how survey respondents perceived diversity efforts as it relates to gender specifically, men in the survey reported that 16% strongly agree and 40% agree with the statement, indicating a positive outlook on inclusivity efforts. About 28% remained neutral, while a smaller percentage expressed disagreement (12%) and strong disagreement (4%).

Women's responses were closely aligned, with 15% strongly agreeing and 41% agreeing that their organizations are

actively becoming more inclusive. Neutrality was also observed at 28%, with slight differences in disagreement (11%) and strong disagreement (5%).

It could be argued that our survey data reflects signs of progress. However, several focus group participants shared stories of how the climate for women in the workplace can still be a hostile and degrading environment. A multiracial woman in talent development in the sports industry described the toxic workplace environment at her company:

**It was a frat house in our company. Consistent drinking. The guys would go out and play basketball, and the women would be left doing the work: the copy work, the publishing, everything.**

These examples of workplace misconduct were shared amongst numerous women journalists we interviewed, many of whom also feared reporting their perpetrators for various reasons. A Latina woman who is on the Editorial Board at a legacy newsroom also explained:

**I've had a news director at a conference—a big news director in a big market—trying to get me to sit on his lap in a taxi to go to part of the conference... In the beginning, you're afraid to go to HR. You don't want to jeopardize your position. You just put up with it, or just tell a friend or somebody that's not in the business to vent and get it out.**

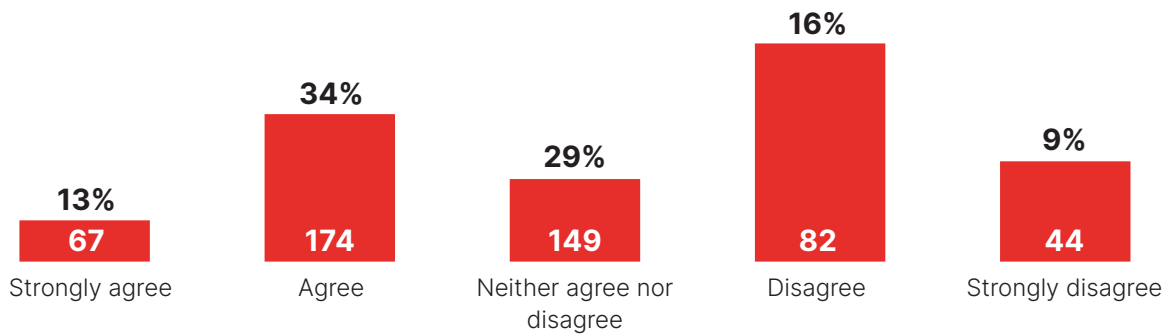
A culture of misogyny still casts a shadow over the experiences of women journalists despite the progress that has been made over the last several decades. For women of color in particular, there is a double bind of discrimination they are forced to contend with that ultimately impacts their work assignments, career pipeline, and leadership opportunities. As an Asian American woman news anchor at a legacy newsroom explains:

**Throughout the span of my career, I've faced much more sexism than I have racism, but obviously intersectionality comes into play over time. I was often assigned stories, we used to call it “the vag stories,” the women related stories, and we were tokenized in that way. As far as I'm concerned, 40 years of discussions about creating a pipeline of opportunities for people of color and women, it just never resulted in any moving of the needle that was meaningful. It was glacial.**



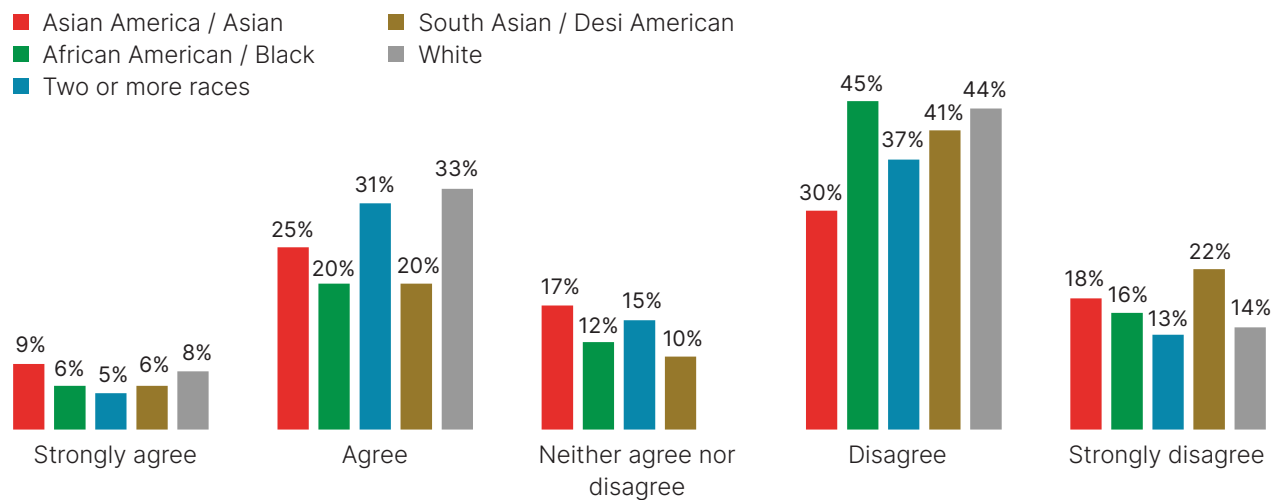
Throughout this report, we critically interrogate the various elements of this participants' response, including how the inequitable career pipeline and tokenizing work assignments impact journalists of color in intersectional ways. However, first we draw attention to the survey responses regarding racial diversity specifically.

### Q13. The news organization I work at achieves sufficient racial diversity



The survey responses regarding racial diversity in news organizations reveal a pressing need for improvement. A significant 54% of participants either disagree or strongly disagree that their workplaces achieve sufficient racial diversity. Fourteen percent (14%) neither agree nor disagree. Only 32% of those sampled either strongly agree or agree that the news organization they work at achieves sufficient racial diversity.

### Racial Diversity Achievements Viewed by Race/Ethnicity



FEEDBACK STATEMENTS	Asian American/ Asian	African American/ Black	Two or more races	South Asian/Desi American	White	Grand Total
Strongly agree	19	7	3	3	3	35
Agree	53	22	19	10	12	116
Neither agree nor disagree	36	13	9	5	0	63
Disagree	64	49	23	20	16	172
Strongly disagree	39	17	8	11	5	80
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>466</b>

We disaggregated Q13 by race and ethnicity. Asian American/Asian respondents indicated a notable skepticism towards diversity achievements, with 30% disagreeing and 18% strongly disagreeing that their organization achieves sufficient racial diversity. Only 9% strongly agreed, and 25% agreed with the statement.

African American/Black journalists expressed even stronger concerns, with 45% disagreeing and 16% strongly disagreeing. A smaller fraction, 6% strongly agreed, and 20% agreed on the achievement of racial diversity.

Journalists identifying with two or more races showed similar trends, with 37% disagreeing and 13% strongly disagreeing.

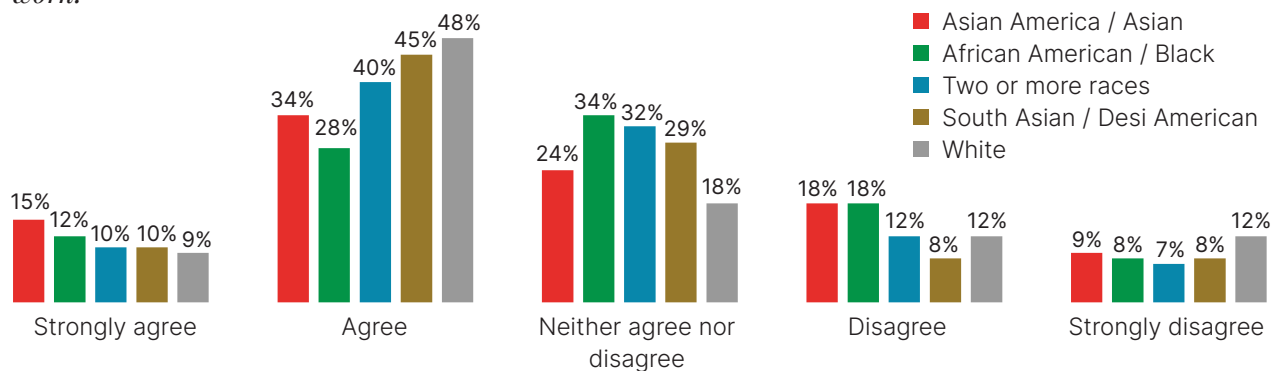
Agreement was slightly higher, with 5% strongly agreeing and 31% agreeing.

South Asian/Desi American participants reflected the highest level of strong disagreement at 22%, with 41% disagreeing. Only 6% strongly agreed, and 20% agreed on their organization's diversity efforts.

White journalists reported 44% disagreement and 14% strong disagreement on the sufficiency of racial diversity, with 8% strongly agreeing and 33% agreeing.

Overall, our data reveals a pressing need for improvement, as 54% of participants either disagree or strongly disagree that their workplaces achieve sufficient racial diversity.

*Q21. My organization is actively becoming a more equitable and inclusive place for people of color to work.*



FEEDBACK STATEMENTS	Asian American/Asian	African American/Black	Two or more races	South Asian/Desi American	White	Grand Total
Strongly agree	30	12	6	5	3	56
Agree	70	29	24	22	16	161
Neither agree nor disagree	50	35	19	14	6	124
Disagree	36	19	7	4	4	70
Strongly disagree	19	8	4	4	4	39
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>450</b>

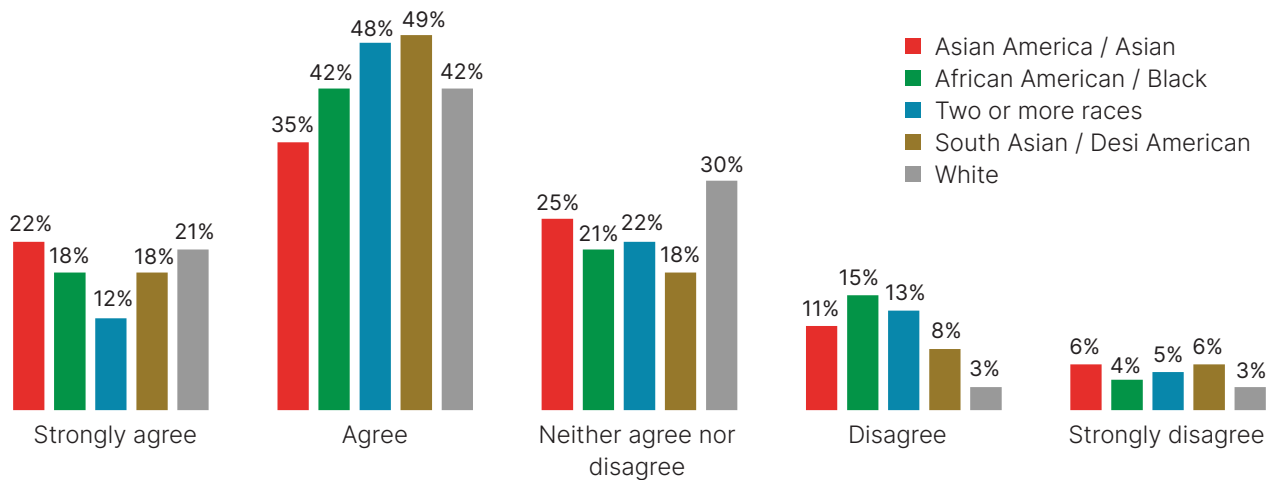
Amongst racial groups, Asian American/Asian participants indicated a mixed response, with 15% strongly agreeing and 34% agreeing with the progress toward inclusivity. About 24% were neutral, while 18% disagreed, and 9% strongly disagreed.

African American/Black respondents showed 12% strong agreement and 28% agreement, with a significant portion, 34%, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Disagreement was noted by 18%, and strong disagreement by 8%.

For journalists identifying with two or more races, 10% strongly agree and 40% agree. Neutrality was high at 32%, with 12% disagreeing and 7% strongly disagreeing. South Asian/Desi American responses were more positive, with 10% strongly agreeing and 45% agreeing, 29% neutral, 8% disagreeing, and 8% strongly disagreeing.

For White journalists, 9% strongly agree and had the highest agreement rate at 48%. Neutrality was at 18%, with 12% disagreeing and a notable 12% strongly disagreeing.

## Q22. I belong at my company.



FEEDBACK STATEMENTS	Asian American/Asian	African American/Black	Two or more races	South Asian/Desi American	White	Grand Total
Strongly agree	46	19	7	9	7	88
Agree	72	43	29	24	14	182
Neither agree nor disagree	52	22	13	9	10	106
Disagree	22	15	8	4	1	50
Strongly disagree	13	4	3	3	1	24
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>450</b>

Racial climate can also influence a sense of belonging in the workplace. Asian American/Asian journalists reported a relatively strong sense of belonging, with 22% strongly agreeing and 35% agreeing. However, a quarter remained neutral, and a minority disagreed (11%) or strongly disagreed (6%).

African American/Black respondents felt a sense of belonging as well, with 18% strongly agreeing and 42% agreeing, though a smaller portion experienced neutrality (21%) and disagreement (15%) or strong disagreement (4%).

For those identifying with two or more races, 12% strongly agreed and a notable 48% agreed with feeling a sense of belonging, with 22% neutral. Disagreement was expressed by 13%, and strong disagreement by 5%.

South Asian/Desi American participants showed similar feelings, with 18% strongly agreeing and 49% agreeing, less neutrality at 18%, and lower disagreement rates (8% disagree, 6% strongly disagree).

White journalists had 21% strongly agreeing and 42% agreeing with feeling of belonging, and the highest neutrality rate at 30%. Disagreement and strong disagreement were the lowest among the groups, at 3% each.

An absence of diversity can lead to the hypervisibility of marginalized journalists who work within predominantly White newsrooms. For example, an Asian American woman who served as a managing editor of a daily newspaper shared how she was constantly belittled throughout her career by her colleagues:

**I did work in the industry for 24 years. I was hired in the '80s. There were always people reminding me that I was an "affirmative action hire" no matter how long I worked there. I felt like when I was in a room, and I was the only person of color, sometimes the only woman, that the eyes were trained on me like, "Who is she? What's she doing here? Is she worth our time?" I could feel it, and it doesn't go away.**

Another common theme within our focus group data was the frequency of stereotypes ascribed to journalists of color. A Latina woman who is an Editorial Director at a newspaper in Chicago explained how racism often manifests in subtle ways:

**They know they're not allowed to say, 'This young Black woman is so angry,' but they will say instead, "It can be a challenge to communicate with her and understand her frustrations and it's off-putting for her colleagues."**

Furthermore, when journalists of color decide to challenge or report these frequent occurrences, their experiences are often downplayed or dismissed by their colleagues and managers. As an Asian American man in senior leadership describes:

**I think when I pose the question of racism or bias in certain scenarios, there is pushback and I'm questioned as to whether it really happened. There's a level of gaslighting that occurs that I feel like I've had to contend with throughout my career, and it causes me to also question myself as to whether I maybe acted too quickly or spoke up too soon."**

An Asian American woman, who is an award-winning author and journalist, described how her success does not mean she was exempt from experiencing these frequent microaggressions and stereotypes in the various places she has worked:

**You won't have someone standing up in the newsroom and saying, "You know, I really don't like Asian people." So how does it manifest in other ways? Were you denied a raise, a promotion? Were you the first to get dinged on your team or get laid off? In terms of raises and evaluations, people don't talk about that. At my former job, a big newsroom, I bet if you looked at the patterns of who got the short end of the stick in terms of evaluations, there is a good likelihood that they are racial minorities. That is my theory with a lot of informed experience about this, and sometimes people don't realize it's happening to them."**

This participant's response alludes to the inextricable link between relationships in the workplace and opportunities for career advancement. In the next section, we highlight how these experiences are not merely interpersonal, but rather can have systemic ramifications for one's career trajectory.



# **“This is why we blame China for everything”: Racism in the Newsroom**

*Towards the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was producing a TV newscast. We have TV monitors all throughout the newsroom, and there was a news story on one of the TV screens about Wuhan, China, being investigated for being the “origin of COVID.” And one of the directors was in the newsroom at the same time, and he was like, “This is why we blame China for everything. This is why it’s called the China Virus.” I’m not Chinese, but I was the only Asian person in the room. I was extremely uncomfortable. Everybody in the newsroom laughed it off and it weighed on me really heavily for the rest of the day until I reached out to HR and sent them a very long email detailing what I heard. Long story short, they did an investigation and found no wrongdoing.*

*There was another time when Black Lives Matter, as a movement, was really taking off. And I heard that same director call local Black Lives Matter activists “terrorists.” I also reported that incident to HR. Nothing happened. That director was allowed to stay on the newsroom, and I continued working for him until he eventually left to pursue another job.*

*– Southeast Asian woman, Small Business Reporter, California*

## CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN THE NEWSROOM

Career advancement in the newsroom industry, particularly in relation to rates of retention, promotion, and recruitment, are relatively low among journalists of color. In addition to being underrepresented in their profession, journalists of color experience inhospitable work environments and racial discrimination in the newsroom (Crittenden, 2019). Additionally, they are not perceived as leaders by white executives and are not adequately supported to exercise their leadership potential (Grofum, 2021). Consequently, factors that contribute to low retention rates and difficulty in the recruitment of journalists of color include but are not limited to lack of career development opportunities, decreased job satisfaction from negative experiences in the newsroom, and discrimination in the workplace.

Our focus group and survey data reinforce this external research. In this section, we critically interrogate the career pipeline for journalists of color by examining

- 1 the barriers to entry;**
- 2 pay equity;**
- 3 career mobility;**
- 4 mentorship, sponsorship, and professional networks;**
- 5 racial solidarity;**
- 6 compositional vs. structural diversity; and**
- 7 retention.**

### A STARVING ARTIST'S LIFE: BARRIERS TO ENTRY IN THE JOURNALISM INDUSTRY

”

*Journalism, to an extent, has always been a starving artist's life. But now it really is at a breaking point, and there aren't that many places to go.”*

– Asian American, News Director, Seattle, WA



While journalism is meant to tell everyone's story, there are numerous challenges to becoming the storyteller. Specifically, our qualitative findings suggest that the field of journalism has barriers to entry that can exclude those from underrepresented and under-resourced backgrounds, which often disproportionately impact journalists of color. Several of those we interviewed discussed inhibitors to success as a journalist, and one Asian-American man working as a producer for a national media outlet shared:

**There are a lot of barriers to entry for this profession. Certainly one of the most significant is socioeconomic and financial.**

Participants elaborated further on the various types of socioeconomic and financial barriers faced by those entering the profession.

One sentiment that emerged in our focus groups was that the reliance of media employers on certain requisite experiences has created an exclusive environment that many struggle to break into. In fact, multiple participants named internships, specifically, as an unfairly inaccessible requirement for gaining opportunities in journalism while simultaneously acknowledging the necessity for these experiences in their career success. For example, a Southeast Asian woman early in her career noted:

**I accepted an internship during... it was the summer between my first and second years of college, for the local NBC affiliates in San Luis Obispo, California. So I was working there as a producer on the weekends while I was a full-time student. And I was getting paid... it was roughly like 15 or \$16 an hour, which of course, for California, is not very good. And this was when I was a producer. But before I accepted the producer position, I was an unpaid intern. So I honestly felt like it was a necessary step in order to gain a foothold in the industry.**

While internships are undoubtedly instrumental in career success, many described the role of privilege in accessing these opportunities. Respondents who were able to participate in internship programs noted that reduced fiscal responsibility in other areas, like not having the burden of student debt, was a contributing factor in how they were able to make it work financially. A Hispanic woman working as a senior manager shared:

I have a similar experience as number two of being lucky to graduate from college without student loan debt. In my case, it's because my father was in the military and had served in the Iraq War, so I got to use his GI Bill for a very prestigious journalism program, which was a huge boon. And it's not right, but it's a large part of the reason why I've gotten most of the jobs that I've gotten, and people will tell you that in hiring, even though I don't think that I'm particularly... I got a good education, but you can get a good education in journalism a lot of ways, even without school. It's a profession where you learn by doing. But I mentioned that just to say that I have had the freedom to not take a lot of jobs or to leave jobs that I was facing issues because of my race or my sexuality or my gender because I didn't have that student loan debt to worry about.

And I've been able to reach a place of financial stability pretty quickly... much more quickly than I anticipated. And that's a big part of it.

Research from across numerous fields of study cast internships as potentially inequitable based on barriers to participation for students who are “socially and institutionally minoritized by race, gender, and other contextual factors, including finances, work responsibilities, travel, and gendered familial obligations” and that “these factors intersect with systems of power and privilege to amplify challenges” according to Wolfgram, Vivona, and Akram (2021). We see this present in hearing, again, from the Southeast Asian woman early in her career who continued to share:

Especially for a lot of people like me who didn't really have family members in this industry or maybe grew up with a lot of student loan debt... It's not like I can easily move across the country for a job opportunity. I wish I could. I was offered an internship opportunity in New York City after I graduated from college, but I just could not accept it because of the cost of living and the pay that they were giving me, or offering me was... it was not feasible for me. Plus, combined with all the student loan debt that I had, I just felt like it wasn't a good financial decision. So I think, again, access to opportunities really depends on your socioeconomic status, and if there's a senior leadership or senior position for a newsroom across the country, I don't know if I'm willing to go further into debt to pursue that, and I think that's a big barrier.

Some we interviewed also felt that these preferred experiences were additional ways those in positions of power were intentionally gatekeeping access to the industry, creating an environment where people of color who were able to get in still found themselves being underpaid and undervalued. To them, these barriers played into larger systems of discrimination explicitly designed to advantage those from dominant groups with more resources. One example comes from a woman working for a large national media company who shared:



**They use these fellowships or internships as on-ramps for people of color, and then they underpay them. And in fact, it gets worse than that because I got hired on with a full-time job. They've been keeping a lot of the folks on contract. I was one of two people who had not gone to a private college or university, and I worked for an organization that really seemed to favor graduates of Ivy League institutions. And to speak to something number three said, which is that it's not just about the opportunities that people of color aren't getting, it's about all the opportunities and all of the on-ramps that white people are getting, often because it's sort of the idea of looking presidential. They look like editors, they look like investigative reporters. I've heard editors at other organizations, but I think that this carries throughout the industry and throughout many industries, they say things like, "Oh, he looks like he could be my son," or, "he's like my son," and I can never be anybody's son because first of all, I'm a woman and second of all, I'm mixed race Asian and white, so I don't look like anybody's... you know, people don't look at me and they're like, "Oh, you look like you could be my child," or something. And it's just hugely frustrating, and it also feels really crummy to hate on somebody else's success, but when you see white people getting all of these extraordinary opportunities that you're not getting, even though you've been there longer and worked harder.**

Participants also listed generally low entry-level pay as an economic barrier to success in this field and acknowledged the ways this excludes certain populations from accessing these types of early-career opportunities that could enhance their long-term success. An award-winning South Asian sports writer shares:

**The survivability of the industry right now is in a brutal place. Again, I'm lucky I come from a more privileged background which allowed me to overcome some of that and withstand some of that. But I think that when we talk about people of color, minorities, women not being able to make it long-term in the industry, a lot of it is not being able to withstand that short-term where maybe they're making \$25K, but have to live in a major market, and move away from their families, and maybe have student debt. It is an existential issue, I think, that specifically impacts people of color and minority journalists in a unique way. I think that more than anything, we're pushing people out of the industry who are very capable and talented because just economically, they can't make it work.**

Another participant, the Asian-American man working as a producer for a national media outlet, continued to share:

**Fortunately for me, my parents had also saved up some money to help send me to college. So I received a four-year degree. And there were two job opportunities that were presented to me after applying for jobs when I was done with college, one of which was local television, which paid \$16 an hour in Santa Barbara at California, which was deeply unlivable. And the other job opportunity was \$16 an hour in New York City, which was also deeply unlivable, but it was at a national news organization, and I'm outing myself, it was at MSNBC. So I made \$36,000 a year at MSNBC, and I was eating into a lot of savings when I was doing that. I think that rate has since gone up. This was back in 2016. If I had graduated with student debt, if my parents hadn't saved up dramatically for my college, if I hadn't worked in those years for college, I don't think I would've been able to succeed in any kind of career because I ended up burning a couple grand in that first year or two just trying to keep it... living in New York. My net worth went down while being gainfully employed. I'm not rich, but that's just something that played a big factor into it. And I think that one of the challenges in this industry is that there's just not enough pay going around, especially at the early career stages.**

These experiences speak to the ways the industry's structure can perpetuate existing economic inequities and make employment inaccessible to those from historically under resourced communities. Lower pay has also limited available pipelines of potential talent who are finding employment in more lucrative fields. The producer shared further:

**The pool of interested people who will want to go into journalism is shrinking as the industry contracts. The well-meaning do-gooders of the world, who are strong writers and things like that, are not going to be journalists because there are other nonprofits and do-gooding that might even pay more than that. And so that's the thing that we have to concern ourselves with. As long as these nonprofits, though, remain successful and grow, there might be a path forward.**

Overall, participants believe the field of journalism would benefit from expanding access to those not typically considered. A national college sports writer shared:

**I think that it's one of those things where it's like the organization either has to make a choice that we are going to not just trust the same pipeline that we've hired from historically which, by the way, is one of the ways that I ended up there was that I came from a slightly more non-traditional background, or you have to... I mean, again, you just have to go outside of your established norms when you're making hires whether it is... not just looking for the next big beat writer or not just looking for people who have come up in a very traditional way from the best schools and the biggest schools through the industry. I think that ultimately... I mean, the efforts, I think, have been pretty ineffective when you look at the totality of hires that have been made over my entire time with the organization.**

These respondents' sentiments reflect a need to diversify the newsroom by first examining the practices and norms that lead to exclusion, reimagining who is qualified to report on and share important stories, and moving toward hiring and compensation practices that appropriately value those diverse individuals.

# The Ultimatum

*I worked my butt off. I was working twice the amount of hours that I was assigned as an intern just so that I could stand out. There was a very urgent family emergency and I asked for a few days off, and the executive producer at the station gave me an ultimatum. She said, "You need to choose between your family or working here consistently as a full-timer, because right now I can't offer you a job if you're going to be inconsistent with scheduling." I left that meeting. I was crying because I was like, "Why is she making me choose between my family and a job after college?" And since then, I've left broadcast.*

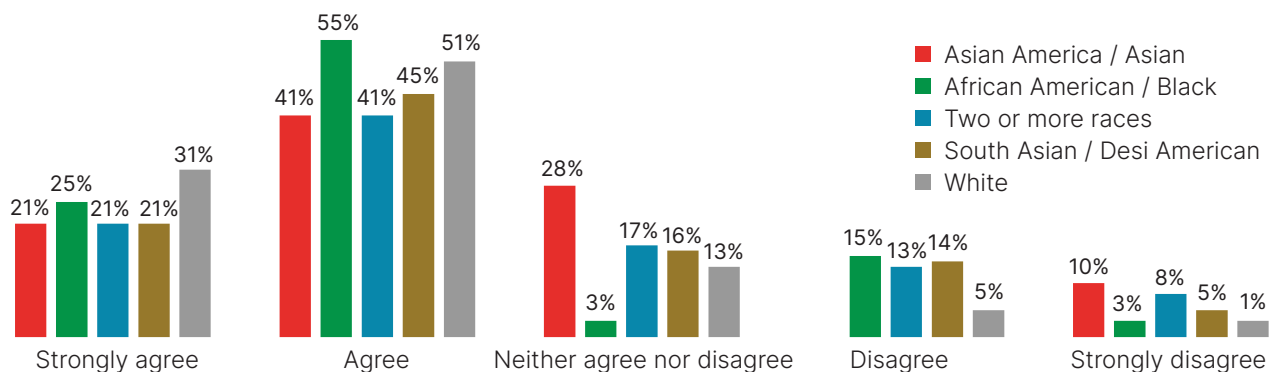
– Anonymous

## PAY EQUITY

Research suggests that the growing unionization of newsrooms is bringing into focus widely-experienced race- and gender-based pay inequities, a general lack of transparency around salaries, and a demand for more equitable compensation. According to the News Guild (2022), a study conducted in 2018 by the Los Angeles Times Guild found that “women and people of color in the newsroom made less than white men. On average, women earned approximately 86% of what men earned; people of color earned roughly 86% of what white people earned, and women of color made less than 70 percent of what white men earned.” Additionally, NewsGuild-CWA’s 2021 Study of Pay Equity in 14 Gannett Newsrooms “showed that women and people of color make much less than the white men in their newsrooms” (Slattery, 2022). Our study reflects similar trends around race- and gender-based pay disparities and the associated sense of being undervalued resulting from unfair pay.

For example, when examining whether participants felt valued in the workplace, the most notable differences were found at the intersection of income range. Those earning \$151,000+ feeling most valued, followed by the \$26,000-\$50,000 bracket. Lower income brackets tend to feel less valued, indicating a potential link between compensation and perceived individual value.

*Feeling valued: Income/salary range breakdown*



FEEDBACK STATEMENTS	Asian American/ Asian	African American/ Black	Two or more races	South Asian/Desi American	White	Grand Total
Strongly agree	6	10	36	41	27	120
Agree	12	22	69	90	44	237
Neither agree nor disagree	8	1	28	32	11	80
Disagree	0	6	22	27	4	59
Strongly disagree	3	1	13	10	1	28
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>524</b>

For those earning \$0-\$25,000, 21% strongly agreed and 41% agreed they felt valued, with 28% neutral. There were no disagreements, but 10% strongly disagreed. Individuals in the \$26,000-\$50,000 bracket showed higher agreement levels, with 25% strongly agreeing and 55% agreeing. A small percentage were neutral (3%), 15% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed.

Respondents with salaries ranging from \$51,000-\$90,000 reported 21% strong agreement and 41% agreement, 17% neutrality, 13% disagreement, and 8% strong disagreement. For those earning \$91,000-\$150,000, the figures

were closely matched, with 21% strongly agreeing, 45% agreeing, 16% neutral, 14% disagreeing, and 5% strongly disagreeing.

The highest sentiment of being valued was among those earning over \$151,000, where 31% strongly agreed and 51% agreed, 13% were neutral, 5% disagreed, and only 1% strongly disagreed.

This same sentiment was reflected in our qualitative data. Journalists of color felt their racial identity and gender often led to greater pay disparities and they expressed feeling less valued, in general, as a result. For example, a Filipinx reporter shared:

**One thing that really bothered me was that they made a lot of, I wouldn't call them cosmetic, but they weren't doing enough to get at the systemic root of the problem. For example, I kept talking about the need for better pay equity and the need for them to address that proactively and not force women and people of color to approach them for pay reviews, which is what had happened before. And we didn't seem to make any progress on that front, and to me that's the first and most urgent thing to address. But they did do things like create positions to cover race. They gave us Juneteenth off, and so they were investing money but not in pay equity.**

She noted the performative nature of the DEI efforts she experienced and reflected on the lack of true investment in the women and people of color in the industry. She continued to recount her personal experience with learning how much she was making compared to her peers:

**I saw just how little I was making compared to my colleagues, I was so upset I took the day off. And I'm not the only person who literally had to take a mental health day about how just the sense of unfairness and also, well, you're not really paying me what I'm worth, so why should I? It was just a huge, huge blow to my morale.**



She continued to reflect on the insidiousness of these pay gaps and their racialized stratification.

**I don't understand why organizations are not more deeply embarrassed when it comes out that there's these massive pay disparities because there's no other explanation for them. Like it's not about skill. It's not about production. We know it's not about awards. They just pay people of color less, and they get away with it.**

Another focus group participant, an Asian American woman working as a video journalist, shared her challenges with trying to achieve equal pay by working harder than her counterparts as well as the impact this had on the extent to which she felt valued:

**I feel like I've taken on roles and responsibilities, different responsibilities that other people don't take on, and yet my pay is still lagging behind others. And you might be able to point to certain types of expertise or experience that perhaps others have, and yet at the same time, you can also say, well, I also do these things that they don't do, and yet I'm still paid less.**

An award-winning finance reporter and Asian American woman also expressed feeling less valued based on inequitable compensation and described how racial pay gaps have been exasperated by larger job cuts and financial concerns across the news industry.

I'm still early in my career, but definitely when it comes to not being fairly compensated compared with peers who have different backgrounds than me. I think the compensation issue is probably the main thing that's been like, "Okay, well, why am I even working so hard if you can't value my contributions?" But also generally, it's just been a really bad time for the news industry. There's a lot of job cuts, and it's tough to witness that and feel a little bit hopeless about the whole industry overall, whether that's related to my identity or not. I think it's moreso from that standpoint that makes it feel difficult to keep going, and it doesn't help when you already feel not valued and whatnot, but I think why I haven't is because I really like the work, and also because a lot of these experiences are not specific to newsrooms, even though some of them are amplified in a newsroom setting, but a lot of these experiences you would face anywhere, so I'm like, "Well, if it's going to be bad anywhere, might as well do what I like to do."

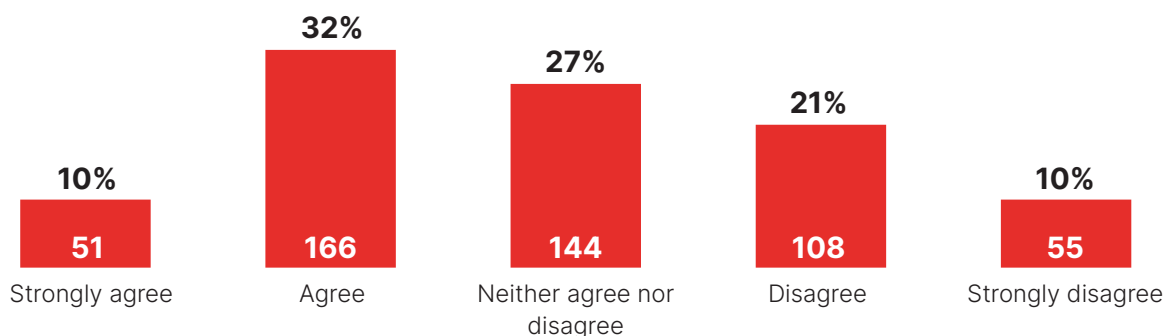
These sentiments reflect previous findings that suggest generally lower pay based on industry-wide financial constraints disproportionately impact women and journalists of color and highlight the ways economic pressure amplifies existing inequities.



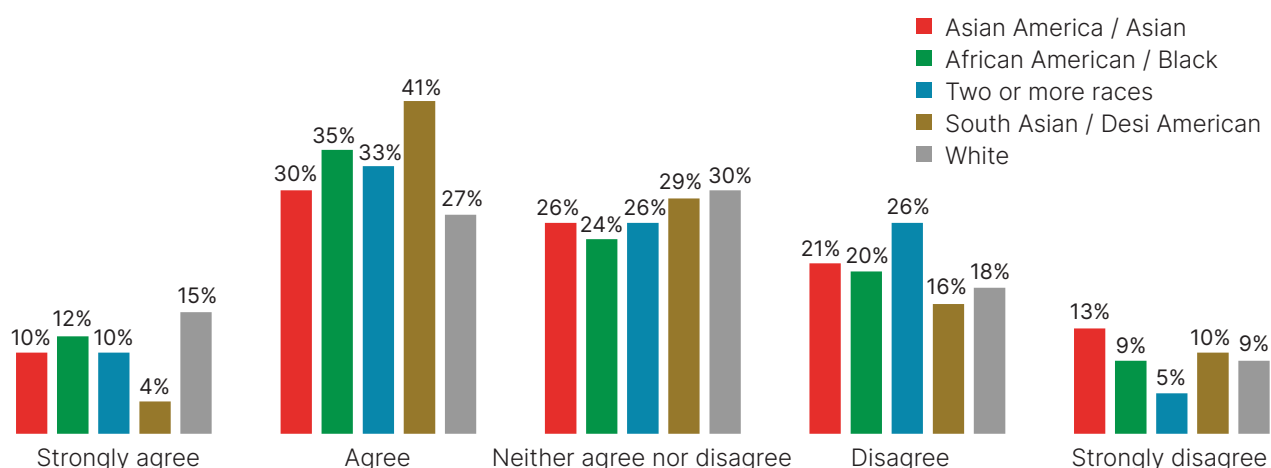
## OVERQUALIFIED AND UNDERAPPRECIATED: CAREER MOBILITY

In our survey data, we find that while 42% of total respondents agree or strongly agree with having access to upward mobility in their careers, a notable 31% disagree or strongly disagree, highlighting a significant perception gap in career advancement prospects within the industry.

*Q19. I have access to opportunities for upward mobility.*



*Opportunities for Upward/Mobility Amongst Racial/Ethnic Groups*



FEEDBACK STATEMENTS	Asian American/Asian	African American/Black	Two or more races	South Asian/Desi American	White	Grand Total
Strongly agree	20	13	6	2	5	46
Agree	63	37	20	20	9	149
Neither agree nor disagree	55	25	16	14	10	120
Disagree	44	21	16	8	6	95
Strongly disagree	26	10	3	5	3	47
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>457</b>

When disaggregated by race and ethnicity, among Asian American/Asian journalists, 10% strongly agreed and 30% agreed that they have access to opportunities for upward mobility, while 26% remained neutral. Disagreement was noted by 21%, with 13% strongly disagreeing.

African American/Black respondents showed slightly more optimism, with 12% strongly agreeing and 35% agreeing. About 24% were neutral, 20% disagreed, and 9% strongly disagreed.

For journalists identifying with two or more races, 10% strongly agreed, and 33% agreed about having access to opportunities, whereas 26% neither agreed nor disagreed, and another 26% disagreed. Only 5% strongly disagreed. South Asian/Desi American participants reflected 4% strong agreement and 41% agreement, with 29% neutral, 16% disagreement, and 10% strong disagreement.

White journalists reported the highest percentage of strong agreement at 15%, with 27% agreeing and 30% neutral. Disagreement was expressed by 18%, and strong disagreement by 9%.



While respondents may express a measured degree of optimism about prospects for upward mobility, it is important to engage with ways journalists of color perceive and experience opportunities in the industry. Participants in our focus groups noted how pathways into senior level and managerial roles were inequitable and often laden with difficulty. As journalists of color in particular, career mobility was often associated with being overqualified for the roles afforded to them, or taking on additional labor with the unsure hope of promotion or compensation as a reward.

One participant, a Black woman who has many years of journalistic experience, elaborated on patterns of inequitable opportunities. Her framing about journalists of color having to be overqualified for upwardly mobile roles sheds light on why a sizable number of respondents feel they do not have access to career advancing experiences. She shared:

I am the first Black editor where I work, and I think it is very telling that I am overqualified for this role, that it took someone having 25 years of experience being in jobs that are much bigger than the one that I have now. It took all of that for them to hire a Black woman into the organization and also, like I said, to have admitted to me like, ‘You were overqualified for this role.’ I do think it’s a pattern that we know both in journalism and in every industry that Black people, Black women, people of color, we all have to be so much more qualified, so much more educated, so much more everything in order to get these positions. I think what it says about my organization is that they weren’t ready until... I just think it’s telling in the sense that you can’t tell me that before I got here two years into them existing that there hadn’t been other well-qualified Black editors out there, and the editors that were hired before me, none of them were Black. I think that’s the telling part like, “Why did it take you so long, and why did the person you hired have to have all of this experience to get in the door?”

And despite the range of skills and qualifications they possess, and the extra work they perform, some observe that these things do not readily translate into career advancement. One participant, an Asian American woman, shared as much in our focus groups. Noting this in comparison to the performance expectations of her colleague she elaborated:

I can shoot video, I can edit video, I can set up equipment, I can set up lights, I can book and research guests, I can write the script, I can report the script on camera. I can do all of these things and deliver you the full package, and yet somehow I’m still getting paid \$20,000 less than somebody else, another reporter who only goes out to produce the story and reports it and writes a script but doesn’t shoot it, doesn’t edit it. She or he needs to go out with a separate camera person. She or he needs also to work with a separate video editor. So it’s a prime example of taking on additional responsibilities as compared to your colleagues, but not seeing those responsibilities paid for in raising salary or career advancement.



## MENTORSHIP, SPONSORSHIP, AND PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS

Research across a range of disciplines has shown that access to mentorship, sponsorship, and professional networks is critical for career advancement. Scholars Somani and Tyree (2021) find that three types of mentoring support are especially important for journalists of color in newsrooms: psychological, vocational, and support as a role model. The research is also critical to understanding what makes some mentoring experiences better than others. Mentoring literature, such as Malin and Hackman's (2018) work, suggests that effective mentor traits and practices include approachability, accessibility, demonstrations of humility and authentic care for others, and making the mentoring experience bespoke to the individualized needs of the mentee. The research has also shown how high-quality mentors and access to supportive work relationships and networks can act as buffers to racial discrimination, as discussed in Ragins, Ehrhardt, Lyness, Murphy, and Capman's (2017) article.

Findings from our focus groups highlight the importance of mentorship, sponsorship, and professional networks on work experiences, career success, and trajectories of journalists in the industry. We observe that mentors add value to participants' work lives in numerous ways. This is especially true for journalists of color, who are empowered by mentors sharing similar characteristics as them. This is the concept of representation, as one Asian American woman participant noted:

**Just seeing someone that looks like me being able to succeed in a newsroom and do well and ask them questions of what they're doing. I think being able to see someone who looks like you be able to do things that you wish you could do just makes you believe in yourself more.**

Other participants suggested that sharing the same identity as their mentor was important as well. It seemed this was useful in remediating the need for minoritized participants' to over articulate their perspectives. In addition, mentors were also able to more readily understand the complexity of participants' experiences and therefore able to provide more helpful insights. An Asian American women explained:

**I think it's helpful to not really have to explain yourself in these spaces, and just know that they probably have similar experiences as you, so it just alleviates some of that burden. Sometimes I've asked for advice from other mentors who don't have the same identity as me, and sometimes it can be really helpful, but also other times, they don't really quite get the nuance of what I'm experiencing. It's just really helpful to have someone who understands.**

As participants discussed mentors, one sentiment that emerged was the ability to talk with them about anything. In doing this, participants knew they would receive cogent advice that could assist them in navigating difficult career challenges. A biracial woman who holds a senior management role shared:

**I've been very fortunate to have mentors in my career, who I've been able to talk to about what's going on at work, losing a job, getting a job, recommendations. I'm struggling with something in a job, and I need help, and so how do I physically build this thing? And so, whenever there's a question about thinking about mentorship, it hasn't necessarily been, for me, inside of my company, but there have been people in my career who I've come across, either by working with them or whatever, that I can now lean on, and I have a small group of folks who I will call for that. Now that I'm in a management position, I find that to be one of my biggest responsibilities. If somebody sends me a note, I will have a conversation with them. I try to have two to three conversations a week with somebody in the industry who is coming up or questions. I really gear toward recent graduates and entry level career folks, because I feel like that's what I needed the most in my career. I try to be the person who I did not have in my career when I was in my early 20s. And so, how do I talk about negotiations? I am feeling stuck at work? How do I deal with this? Am I crazy? Whatever. I, specifically, make time in my calendar for not just coaching of folks from a recruiting standpoint and resumes, but also just professional career.**

And reiterating the trajectory-advancing insights that mentors dispense despite the toxicity of the industry, a Latina manager shared:

**I know people are busy. We're always cutthroat, but it seems like, when you do talk to somebody younger, just by sharing your experiences or trying to tell them what worked right for you and what didn't, you can really change the trajectory of somebody's career and give them the confidence that they're missing sometimes, because nobody takes the time to offer that.**

Other participants spoke to how mentorship could have impacted them in earlier seasons of their career. One such way is by instilling confidence in them. One Asian American woman mid manager said:

**Now that I'm in leadership, when it comes to hiring, I do seek out people who are people of color who might not have the opportunities as I did throughout my career, because I want to be able to give them those opportunities; but I wish I had that during my career, someone that could take me under their wing and really believe in me, because I did feel like, for a long time, I was the only person who believed in myself.**

Participants also remarked on formal mentoring programs within the industry and the variable nature of mentoring, which leads to uneven experiences. One woman, a Black mid-manager, recalled:

**We don't have a formal mentorship structure, and it really depends on who your manager is. I think some people are really committed to mentoring, and to professional development, and to helping people get to where they want to be in their careers, but not everyone is like that. We still don't really even have professional development paths, so I don't think it's equitable in the sense that not everybody has access to the same opportunities because, like I said, it is so dependent on who your manager is.**

They also shared how mentorship opportunities were not available within news organizations for which they worked. They often had to go outside their immediate employment contexts to seek out vital, isolation-reducing mentors. One South Asian subject matter expert who is a man noted:

**I think that if you talk about the role of mentorship and guidance in my career, it's been very important. It's just I've always had to seek it out outside of it, whether it's from people that I've just met in the industry, whether it's from racial affinity groups. I'm a member of the Asian American Journal Association, things like that, but it... I mean, you are really inside the building. You're left alone. Again, I've been with my group for three years. I think that between writers and editors, there's 12 people on my team total, and I think I've met three of them total over the course of three years, and we worked together all the time, and I've probably had individual conversations only with six of them. Again, you are just really left on your own.**

Another participant, an Asian American man, touted the value of external mentoring opportunities:

**I've found, historically, that the best sponsorship and mentorship opportunities come from outside of the news organization, where people are willing to speak about my prowess or abilities in an external setting, at different news organizations, in different contexts than internally.**

Commenting on how connections and mentors work to facilitate career advancement and opportunities in the industry, one South Asian subject matter expert remarked:

**Yeah. I would say it's very, very difficult to exist in this industry without some level of... whether it's mentorship or just connection or network. All of my jobs, to one extent or another, have been aided by knowing somebody who's at least affiliated or has knowledge of an organization because I think that's ultimately... When you talk about these jobs, there's 200 people applying for one job or more, right? That's just how it is with every single job in this industry right now, and so to stand apart, you can have a beautiful resume, write a good cover letter, but that's not really doing a whole lot. Ultimately, you need to know somebody in the room.**

And while many praised mentorship, others participants noted its limitations. One woman in our focus groups explained:

**I think what hinders it is not belonging to the club. I think it's kind of natural to promote and take an interest in people who kind of remind you of themselves when they were younger. And I guess I'm somewhat skeptical of some of these mentoring programs, because if you don't have somebody in a top position who really cares about this issue or who identifies with you, I don't know what the net gain will be ultimately.**

Sponsorship is related to mentorship but different in that it is focused on the sponsor's ability to leverage their influence on behalf of their protege in tangible, productive, and career advancing ways. Sponsors often sagaciously introduce mentees and proteges to networks, talk to important people on their behalf, and make known their skills to significant stakeholders. This is done to accelerate their careers. While mentors advise, sponsors activate opportunities. One woman in our focus group noted this difference, sharing:



**We always talk about mentorships. Absolutely, 100%. It is important to have a group of mentors around you and throughout your career. What has really accelerated my career to where I got is having sponsors, and there's been books about this, and I would a hundred percent absolutely agree. I've had at least two or three of these. And they just come up very organically. And I think because I know if I'm going to work at someplace, you're going to get 100% if not more from me. And that alone, I think organically, you know what I mean? People see that. I've been lucky in the sense that I've had at least two or three of these people, and these are the ones that are the ones talking about you in meetings that you're not in. A mentor can do only so much. But being able to latch onto a sponsor that will advocate for you, and not only that, advocate for yourself, I think has been absolutely key to how I've been able to climb up the ranks of where I am now and being able to manage teams and whatnot.**

Another participant, an Asian American senior manager, also observed this distinction:

**I will say that at different times in my career I have experienced both mentorship and sponsorship, and I view them very differently. Mentorship is when someone has helped guide me, helped answer my question. Sponsorship is when someone has actively recommended me for say a training program or a job and has actively put themselves forward to put me in a position where I could be lifted up. Both of those cases I have experienced in previous jobs. I've also done the same for other people and continue to do the same in this current job.**

And while both are vital to career success, it seems that sponsors are more proactive in finding opportunities for their proteges. One Black mid manager who is a women recalled:

**I would say mentors/sponsors have been vital to my career. Having contacts within... I'm also part of NLGJA. So having somebody there who worked for an organization that I was applying to be able to hand my resume directly to the diversity hiring director who then walked my resume around headquarters was huge to me getting an internship that led to other things. The last role I had was a big role in the city where I'm from, and I got that role because someone I worked for 20 years prior, who we became friends and kept in touch, came to me and said, "Do you like what you're doing now? Do you want to try something else?" I think about all the opportunities I've had that have come from people going to bat for me and advocating for me. It played a huge role in my career, and I also try to pay that back by being that person for other people.**



Participants also discussed the relational aspect of career advancement, again speaking to the uneven distribution of opportunities. It seems they knew networks and connections play a role in the industry, but that access to some carry more weight than others. One participant remarked:

**It really is based on connections. How you get your next job, how you get promoted, what kind of assignments you get, it really depends on the kind of relationships, the kind of personal relationship you might have with somebody. It is in a strange way, one of the least... It's not a meritocracy at all when I compare it to some other fields like finance or law, sort of the business sectors I've covered. There, it's much more... in a strange way, it's... your performance really matters more in how far you get ahead.**

Participants also highlighted the utility of ethnic professional networks in increasing their sense of belonging and community. Participation in these groups seemed to reduce feelings of isolation, increase retention, and connect them with important stakeholders. A senior subject matter expert, A Filipinix woman, noted:

**And then the first time I went to a AAJA, I was like, yes, Asians everywhere. It was really exciting. And honestly, it saved my journalism career. My last couple of years have been really hard, but the first six years of my journalism career, I would be pretty much on the verge of quitting and then I would go to the convention and go see amazing work that other people were doing, get really validated, get validation from recruiters and from mentors being like, "This is incredible work. Keep going. Try this story, try that story." And then I would be reenergized and then keep going. But yeah, I might have quit if it weren't for AAJA. So for better or for worse, they've kept me in this industry. And then, I mean in the end too, they were the ones that connected me with my current employer who does recognize my skills, does recognize what I bring to the table and wants more of that, so I don't have to fight to do that.**

An Asian American woman, a senior manager, expressed similar thoughts about the ethnic identity-based professional network, the Asian American Journalist Association:

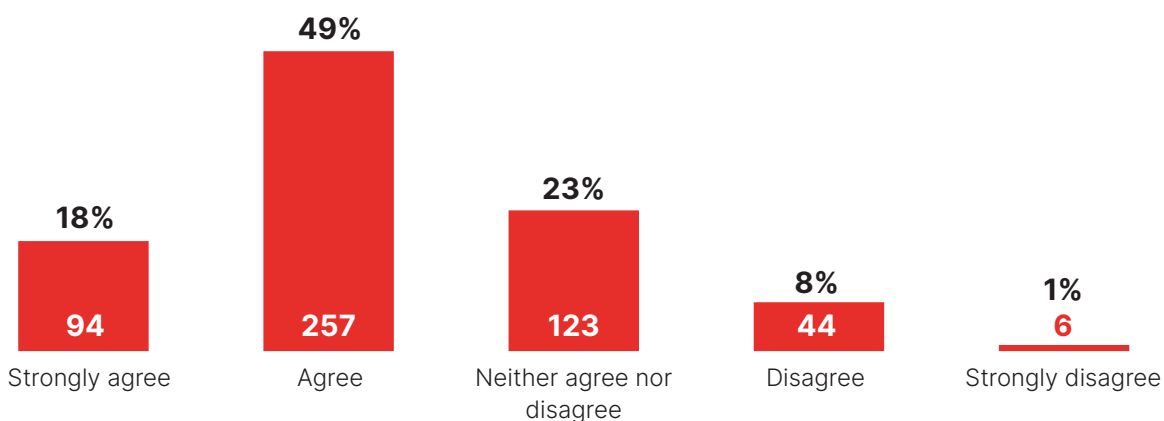
**I have been active in the Asian American Journalist Association since I was a college student, and that organization gave me a sense of community, a network, a place of support. And I drew on that for years as I was coming up in the business. And then I dropped out of the organization for a little bit and then when I got into a leadership position, I reactivated myself in AAJA and other organizations so that I would have a more formal way to lift others up.**



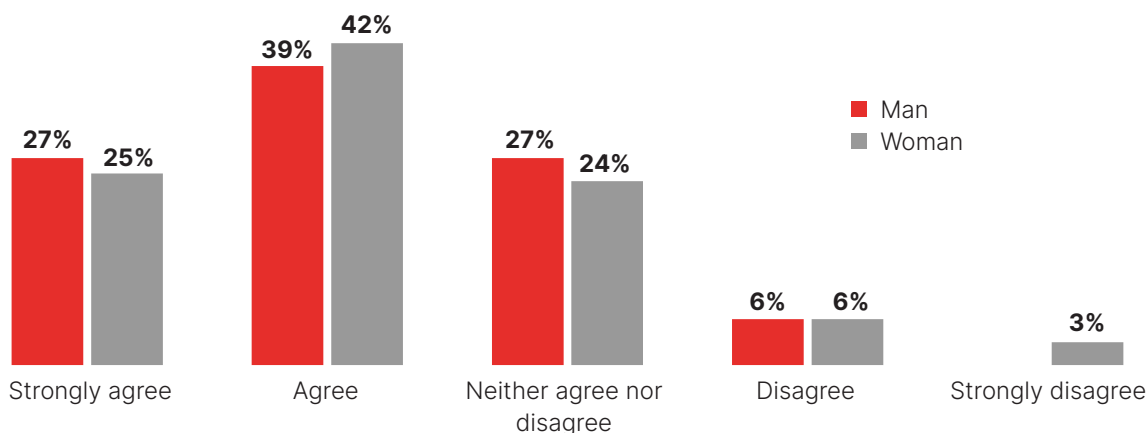
## “NOT ALL SKINFOLK ARE KINFOLK”: RACIAL SOLIDARITY IN THE NEWSROOM

The survey sheds light on the perception of cross-racial support within newsrooms. A majority (67%) of respondents either agree or strongly agree they receive support from members of other racial groups, reflecting a collaborative and inclusive work environment. However, a small fraction (9%) disagrees or strongly disagrees, indicating areas where cross-racial solidarity can be further strengthened.

*Q17. I am supported by members of other racial groups*



*Q16. I am supported by members of my own racial group*



FEEDBACK STATEMENTS	Man	Woman	Grand Total
Strongly agree	46	85	131
Agree	67	143	210
Neither agree nor disagree	46	82	128
Disagree	11	20	31
Strongly disagree	0	11	11
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>511</b>

As it pertains to intraracial solidarity (i.e., support from members of their own racial group), men reported that 27% strongly agree they feel supported. A further 39% agree with this sentiment, and 27% neither agree nor disagree. A minority of 6% disagree, and none strongly disagree. For women, 25% strongly agree they receive support from their racial group, 42% agree, 24% are neutral, 6% disagree, and 3% strongly disagree.

While some focus group participants experienced a positive sense of intraracial solidarity, our qualitative data more strongly reflect challenges with finding community within one's own racial group. One focus group participant, a South Asian sports writer who has generally had positive experiences with colleagues from similar racial backgrounds, shared:

**I'm a member of the Asian American Journalists Association, and we have a sports chapter specifically, and so we're able to... Even things as simply as have solidarity with each other, and vent with each other, and understand what each other is going through in a different and unique way. I think that even just having those little pieces, whether it's an official mentor who's above you or even just other people in the industry, I think it just helps the industry feel a little less intimidating, especially for somebody like me who not only is from outside of the industry, but no one that I ever knew growing up even knew the first thing about.**

While some benefited from structured identity-based communities, others shared starkly different experiences where a person of color or woman in leadership was the perpetrator of harm highlighting the reality that people from minoritized backgrounds can still reinforce systemic inequities. One of our focus group participants who is an award-winning journalist and Asian woman elaborated:

**I will definitely say, from my personal experience, having an Asian woman manager, I mean, she was highly abusive and toxic, so it doesn't really solve the problem here. In fact, as I mentioned, it's almost worse because then the problem is hidden, and then the company can say, "Oh, we're doing great because we have an Asian woman." She's specifically Asian, not Asian American, and specifically, she was from India, but she let other people below her do other dirty work as well, and that was a woman. So, again, I'm just pointing out this problem. Yeah. They were doing a lot to put women in management positions, but sometimes the women were worse, and that was acknowledged. We had women reporters who were saying things like, "I hope I don't have a woman manager," which is a horrible thing. So I do want to emphasize that it's not just the numbers and ticking the box, but how people are comporting themselves and treating other people in the newsroom. That's where you're really going to see whether or not these efforts are making progress.**

These sentiments speak to the importance of moving beyond surface-level diversity to ensuring all employees embody values of inclusion. She continued to share:

**Here's an emphasis when we're talking about diversity and representation. It's like, "How many people of color do we have working? How many people in management?" So you can have all the numbers you want. If that person, even if he or she is a person of color, if they're still behaving in an abusive way, they're still abusive and toxic. You can have these numbers for show and tick the box like, "Oh, we're improving on diversity because we have more 'diverse people.'" But if they are still acting in a way that's abusive and toxic in general and particularly to people of color, then you still have the same problem, and it's worse because it's masked and hidden.**

This experience directly reflects the ways organizational challenges become masked when diverse individuals are brought into a workplace that has not yet established an inclusive culture or corrected persisting climate issues. She went on to reflect hearing about similar experiences from her Black colleagues:

**Yeah, I will echo that from my huge newsroom where there was a very senior Black woman manager, and she was constantly in the diversity videos and on stage at the conferences. The Black journalists that I spoke to said she did not help them at all, and she was not seen as someone who was helpful or even on their wavelength. So, again, would not assume that all skinfofolk are kinfofolk, which is a great phrase. Fortunately, true in that circumstance too.**

A Black woman working as an editor shared her direct experience with lack of intraracial solidarity from those who do not use their position to advocate for others from their same racial group:

**Not all skinfofolk are kinfofolk that that person is there, but they're not necessarily advocating for other Black staff. They don't necessarily see their... They're not holding the door open. Right? They have a seat at the table, and they're good. I don't really see them taking on the responsibility of, like I said, advocating for other staff.**

While compositional diversity is a small step in the right direction, our participants name the lack of cultural competency and reluctance to advocate for equity from leaders across racial backgrounds as a continuous challenge to true inclusion in the newsroom. One participant, an award-winning professor of journalism and Hispanic woman further added:

**Just because you see somebody of color in a leadership position, which is rare, does not mean that they have a cultural understanding that's different or better. I've worked for white men who have more concern about diversity and covering issues in communities of color than I have worked for some, I guess, blood people of color that are out of tune, out of touch, are not bilingual, are not bi-cultural, even though they might have a Latino surname. So it's not always the case, but I have witnessed it myself.**

These experiences reflect a need to challenge shallow attempts to diversify through simply assimilating people of color into harmful systems to perpetuate toxic ways of being and suggest the importance of developing leaders across racial backgrounds who embody the principles of equity and inclusion.

## CRACKS IN THE PIPELINE: COMPOSITIONAL VS. STRUCTURAL DIVERSITY

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*We definitely need more people of color in leadership roles, and we need a critical mass of them so they can change the entire culture that ends up leading to the marginalization of people of color within newsrooms.”*

– Filipinx, Education Reporter, Washington, DC



To perform a critical examination of DEI as it pertains to representation, it is crucial to distinguish between “compositional diversity” and “structural diversity.” As Miley, Chang and Antonio (2005) explain, compositional diversity is defined as the numerical and proportional representation of various racial and ethnic groups, whereas structural diversity refers to the infrastructure, policies, and procedures that determine the numerical representation of these groups. While there may be sufficient compositional diversity within an organization (i.e., the total number of journalists of color employed at a company), it is through the maintenance of inequitable structures that lead to a lack of diversity at the highest levels (i.e., the lack of senior executives/C-Suite leaders of color). Several focus group participants alluded to this important distinction, including one senior-level manager who explained,

**We’ve been recruiting interns from HBCUs [Historically Black Colleges and Universities] for 30 years, but they don’t stay and they don’t feel a sense of belonging or feel valued. We’ve recruited interns of color and paid a lot of service to opening the pipeline. But if the pipeline is broken midstream, we’re not going to have senior leaders. The pipeline is still in need of fortification and repair. There are cracks in the pipeline.**

An Asian American woman, who is now a reporter after completing an internship with a legacy news company, also drew attention to the dilution of diversity across ranks:

**The intern classes are always so diverse, but it's so rare to see young people of color really be promoted and rewarded for the work that they're doing and have their perspectives listened to. Few people even make it to the stage of having decision-making power and influence that there really isn't a lot of change in terms of diversity. I think a small step would be to retain the folks who are already in the newsroom and really listen to their perspectives. The larger step is changing the hierarchical nature of the newsroom, and doing better at recruiting leaders of color when they hire for management roles. There's really a lot that needs to change.**

Cracks in the career pipeline manifest in several forms, but the ways in which they are created and maintained can often be intentional. A South Asian senior-level manager at a legacy sports company explained how some of the managers at his previous company felt emboldened enough—in both subtle and overt ways—to employ a racially exclusionary quota throughout their promotions discussions:

**I've been in organizations and newsrooms, and they have tacitly admitted, "Well, we've got our Asian. We don't need another one, right?" There was a time at my previous organization, and there were essentially three jobs that were on this level, and I was one of them. It wasn't said explicitly that we're not going to hire this other extremely qualified Asian man that I recommended, but it was hinted at. It was a very qualified candidate who would've been interested in the job, and they just didn't reach out to him. They ended up hiring a White guy, a less qualified White guy.**

Unfortunately, this exclusionary culture has led to a perceived stall, where journalists of color are seemingly having the same conversations about representation throughout the last several decades. An Asian American Senior Director described her observations over her 20-year career:

**In 2024, if we are still talking about the first Black woman to lead a news organization, or the first anything. That in and of itself tells you both how far we've come in this business and how far we haven't. Because these same conversations could have been had 10 years ago, 20 years ago, even 30 years ago.**

## RETENTION

Researchers find that some journalists leave the industry because they feel powerless or otherwise stuck in what they thought would be their “dream job” (Mathews, Bélair-Gagnon, and Carlson, 2023). Flores’s (2019) research points to dissatisfaction with current place of employment to indicate that long term retention in news organizations is not working for some journalists of color. Other scholars note that the impression employees have of the workplace (e.g., the workplace climate) determines their level of engagement and retention in their places of employment (Nwoga, 2023). Nwoga (2023) also suggests that Black employees (and presumably other employees of color) are more likely to stay with an organization if they feel respected and valued, concluding that retention is increased in environments where authenticity versus conformity is valued more.



One participant, a Filipinix woman, noted how being undervalued led her and others to look elsewhere for new opportunities. Highlighting the organization’s role in employee attrition, she explained:

**They could have done a better job hiring people of color and keeping people of color from leaving. A lot of us have very similar stories about feeling really undervalued, being underpaid and knowing it, and being overlooked and really not being able to make any kind of upward movement in the organization. And so a lot of us left and went elsewhere. So while they go to conferences and while they do make big hires of people of color, there’s still a pervasive sense among a lot of the journalists of color in that particular newsroom that there’s no path forward for them.**

In terms of retention in the industry, participants pointed out how that such issues persists at all levels of the talent pipeline, even senior level roles. One Asian American man explained:

**I think there have been some wins. I think there has been some definitely areas and metrics that you can point to that I would characterize as progress, real progress. But one of the biggest issues was a pipeline issue or a retention issue, and I'm not sure how effective those programs have been because we still have people leaving who are high level people of color who don't see a future**

The Glass Cliff is an organizational phenomenon where women and/or minorities are promoted to leadership positions, often during times of crisis, where the risk of failure is high, and they are expected to unreasonably produce results in a short period of time. Glass and Cook (2020) note there is evidence for this phenomenon across a range of arenas including law, education, politics, governmental agencies, corporations, and sports. One woman, an Asian American C-Suite Executive, described how she experienced this issue, noting:



**I feel like I was given a fair shot at opportunities that I wanted. As I started to move into leadership, it became very clear that I was getting promoted very quickly. And something that I have discussed with other people, especially women in similar situations is that I think at certain large media companies, women of color or women overall have been promoted extremely quickly because of the organization's efforts to prove that they are diversifying in some way, but often potentially not to the benefit of the people being promoted. Meaning to me, so I thought a lot about what is good management? What is good leadership? How do you learn skills at each part of the way to become a better leader of people directly, a leader of people who, a manager of managers themselves, and how do you do each step? And there were moments in a previous job in which I would get promoted after a year and a half of doing a new job and then I would get promoted again. And I did some studying on, does that make sense? Is that enough time? In fact? And I found out that the New York Times had**

a similar problem where they were promoting women at a rate that was essentially a year. After doing a job for a year, they would get promoted again. And then what happened is at the very end, at a certain job, it's like you were getting incrementally pushed off a glass cliff. You would get promoted to a certain job and then people would start to fail at that role. And when you look at their promotion track record, it was a good amount of time in whatever role and then a series of jumps that were very short. And so I actually purposely stopped moving up in that way for a while because I felt like it was not healthy. I felt like the organization was trying to take advantage of what I could do for it without giving me time to actually be able to take care of my own career.

Another participant described how the Glass Cliff leads to burnout and then organizational departure for journalists of color. As a Latina senior manager, she observed:

I'll say a phenomenon I have noticed among my peers across the industry of journalists of color is, people of color being hired into leadership roles, set up to fail, failing, and then being blamed for the failure. And so they burn out and they leave and then it's all white dudes again. Or they go and they start a newsroom like the one where one works, which is great. It's a newsroom led by people of color, women of color, but those organizations are really scrappy. They can't necessarily afford to pay people what they need to pay. And once you reach leadership level, oftentimes you have a family to support, you have elderly parents who need care, you need certain amount of healthcare. So it can be hard to have longevity as a leader of color in journalism, because if you don't have all these other factors lining up perfectly to support you, you have to put up with a lot and then just burn out. And I don't blame anybody who's left the industry or gone to start their own thing that they feel a little bit more in control of. But even doing that... I have several friends that started their own websites, started their own newsroom, and after a couple of years it's gone because that's really, really hard to do, especially when you don't have the credibility to get the financial backing that other organizations do.

Other participants reflected on the state of the industry and how that affects retention prospects for journalists of color. One participant, an Asian American man, foresees a reliance on networks and connections, thereby elevating or reifying already not so great ideas:

**As the industry continues to shrink and shrink and the margins become thinner and thinner, what's going to happen is that people who already have connections in this industry are going to be elevated for the few jobs that are remaining. And on top of that, the ideas that are being bought into become progressively worse and worse, and it's leaving less and less opportunities for journalists of color to succeed because that's just how it is.**

## **Stories from the Glass Cliff**

*I started putting the threads together. I saw some women that I had looked up to sort of reach that end point. They had an incredible job, and then within a year they would just quit. It felt really weird to me— why would you make that decision? You're in this amazing job, you're making all this change, this organization is finally putting a woman of color in that role. But just looking at my own industry, women of color who make it to those jobs suddenly quit. They don't even have the next job lined up. They say, "I'm burned out. This is the end of the road. I'm going to go take care of myself for a while." They eventually got hired into more junior roles than the one they had left previously, and without much fanfare or PR around it.*

*Then it happened to me, too. It ultimately got to a point where I did leave a job for a much lower paying job at another place. I felt like the culture there was more about supporting me and my values than only trying to produce journalism at whatever pace we could. At the time, a lot of people didn't understand why I did it. But that was very rejuvenating for me.*

*— Asian American woman, Editor-in-Chief, New York, NY*

## ADDRESSING CRISES: THE IMPACT OF THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

During the past five years, the newsroom environment altered due to various events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the increase of anti-Asian hate crimes, and the 2020 national uprising as a result of George Floyd's murder. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the ways in creation, distribution, and consumption of news media due to the transition from in-person reports to teleworking from home, reduction in newsroom employment, and urgency in mitigating the spread of misinformation (García-Avilés et al., 2024). Given that Asian American journalists were affected by the pandemic and experiences of Asian American discrimination, they altered how they covered stories, what types of topics to report, and their mannerisms in the newsroom (Walker & Daniel Anders, 2022). In addition to the pandemic and as a result of being heavily impacted by George Floyd's death, Black journalists navigated and coped with trauma while covering such news, practiced "movement journalism" to amplify the voices of those who were oppressed, and fostered a community of support among Black and non-Black audience members (Williams & Richardson, 2023).

In February 2022, Christina Yuna Lee was fatally stabbed in Manhattan's Chinatown, becoming another victim in a string of vicious attacks against Asian and Asian Americans (Fondren & Southall, 2022).

In other high-profile cases, a Deloitte employee, Michelle Alyssa Go, was killed when she was shoved in front of an oncoming train in New York (Tulley & Southall, 2022); six Asian women were killed in a series of deadly shootings at three Atlanta spas (The New York Times, 2021); and a Japanese jazz pianist, Tadataka Unno, was brutally beaten while the assailants yelled racial epithets (Leland, 2020). As anti-Asian violence gained more visibility across social media and traditional news outlets, the coverage was often misguided.

In response to the news coverage on anti-AAPI violence across the nation, the Asian American Journalists Association released an article aimed at providing guidance for how newsrooms can equitably, accurately, and respectfully engage these difficult topics (Xiao, 2021). Some of the recommendations included (1) using intentional and specific language when referring to instances of violence and harassment, (2) diversifying sources, (3) taking into consideration the historical context of racial violence in the U.S., (4) remaining cautious and diligent about avoiding the future hypersexualization of Asian women (and the perpetuation of other harmful stereotypes), and (5) double-checking names, pronunciations, and faces (Xiao, 2021).

## MORE THAN A STAGE PROP: IDENTITY-BASED WORK ASSIGNMENTS

These incidents often situate journalists of color in difficult positions within the newsroom. Some focus group participants explained that they were pigeonholed into only reporting on topics related to their racial identity and community, while others explained how they were denied the opportunity to receive these assignments by their supervisors. An Asian American reporter in Washington described the former as “political theater”:

**When we think of political theater, I think tokenization is really just about turning somebody into a stage prop to reaffirm the theater production’s political arguments. Unfortunately, that’s why a lot of people of color, certainly Asian Americans among them, are reluctant to ever be in the news because they don’t want to ever be held accountable for saying something awkward or misleading that misrepresents a ton of people they were never elected to represent.**

This participant is essentially highlighting how representation can also be exploited as tokenization if the underlying motivations are disingenuous. As a Queer Latina editorial director explains,

**I feel like there is a very common experience of being pigeonholed or treated as though your opinions, beliefs, or even just your journalistic skills of covering communities that you have personal experience with is under suspicion or doubted because you’re biased because it’s your community. Whereas if you see a White man covering queer communities of color, it’s sort of assumed that they’re operating from this unbiased, neutral perspective, which I think any good journalist knows does not actually exist.**

An Asian American producer at a legacy newsroom expanded upon this notion, explaining how Asian American reporters were prevented from reporting on anti-Asian violence in fear that they would be too “emotional”:

**We have had instances where members of our organization were not allowed to cover Asian-American stories specifically regarding hate crimes and attacks because of their identity. They were labeled as too close to the story. There are still news organizations that say, “Actually,**

**you can't cover this because you're too 'distraught' or 'emotional.'" We have had this happen to a number of broadcasts and on-air members, where the perception is that you're going to cry on camera or something of the sort. This was a big source of contention. People were being rejected from covering an assignment because of their race.**

These perspectives are important to consider, especially since covering stories that involve one's personal identity can be seen as an opportunity to protect, represent, and care for their communities. For example, one participant described an experience with one of her Asian colleagues during a recent tragedy:

**There was a hate crime shooting last year, and I said, "We have to cover this." We sent multiple reporters there, but my fellow colleague, who is also Asian, wanted to lead the story and she wanted to be there. She basically worked 24/7, but our boss was like, "Hey, we have other people that can cover this," but our boss understood, because this was something that happened within the Asian community, that she needed to allow that reporter to continue to work. Even though she knew that she was tired, it was just so important to us.**

This is an example of how one's identity can be the most valuable asset to a reporter. A Latina executive even attributed her upbringing and personal identity as a primary reason for her career success:

**I grew up in Chicago, inner city, very urban. That really did help me throughout my career. I'm also Mexican-American, and ended up working along the U.S.-Mexico border in two states in Arizona and California, and my news directors always hired me for that because they knew I was bilingual. They knew they were going to be sending me, not only near the border, but across the border. Other people couldn't do that, but I never got paid more for it. I think that my experience provided me insight into the difference between being Mexican-American and Mexican nationals from Mexico. I think a lot of managers don't realize that there's a big difference, and what is appealing to Spanish language audiences is not necessarily the exact same as it would play out to an English language mainstream audience. I think my personal experience—the urbanist, my Latinaness, being bi-cultural, bilingual, and a mother—I use that in my work all the time.**

# **“You can’t take the humanity of a journalist”: Representation in Reporting**

*You can't take the humanity out of a journalist. I think we all know as journalists that we are our lived experience. There is an understanding of how communications, behaviors, and institutions play out in how we experience things differently than the dominant culture. That affects how I work a story for sure, and I think that is the importance of having a different lived experience. That's why we need more people who have different lived experiences, who are asking the questions, and who are writing things so that there can be more complexity in the different kinds of stories that are coming out. That's critical. It totally affects and influences how I look at a story, how I work a story, and also just the way I look. The person who is talking with me is going to be responding to a woman of color who is of Asian descent. They're going to be speaking to me differently than they would to any other kind of person.*

*– Asian American, News Director, Seattle, WA*

# **“There is courage in numbers”: The Power of the Voice**

*I think the real culmination was when AAPI hate hit the fan. In the wake of George Floyd's murder, I watched my African American colleagues bring their lived experience of being African American into the conversations they were having on air, trying to break down for our audiences why the African-American community was reacting in the ways that they were amidst all of these racial tensions. I don't think it diminished in any way their journalistic credibility, and we began to have conversations about this in the newsroom. So, when there were all these attacks on the AAPI community, I felt emboldened to talk about my identity as an Asian American, and the experiences that I've had that I never talked about before in the newsroom.*

*There's a lot of tokenism around Asian Americans. And the truth is, we need more than one. There is courage in numbers. Another Asian-American woman spoke up on our daily editorial call and talked about why it was so upsetting to Asian Americans the day after this mass shooting. She got upset and angry and emotional. And it could have ended there, but when she stopped talking, I jumped in and I added my voice. I'm one of the higher ranking people at [my company], so I added my voice, I added my identity, I added my lived experience, my heat, anger, revulsion and what I was seeing in my community. It was that conversation and our ability to bring our identity into work that greenlit a network special. Within 24 hours, I was flying to Atlanta to anchor a primetime hour news show Friday night of the week of that shooting. So it was a very crisp example of how bringing our identity into the office allowed us to tell that story and connect with our audience.*

*We were able to book victims' families who were reluctant to talk because I, too, am Korean, and I speak some Korean, and I understood their shame around this industry that the mothers were working in, and the added shame for those who were working in the industry who were sex workers and those who weren't, and that conflation on the part of the shooter was part of the racialized nature and the sexualized nature of the violence against our community. And so those are very nuanced ideas and thoughts, and a lot that was made possible because my colleagues spoke up, and then I spoke up, and we were able to get it done.*

*– Korean American, Senior Vice President, Minneapolis, MN*

## THE CURRENT STATE OF JOURNALISM IN AMERICA



Industry research suggests that increased financial insolvency from the pandemic, resultant wide-spread layoffs, difficulty with implementing effective DEI initiatives, and pressure from mass unionization all contribute to the current challenging state of journalism. A 2021 report from “the Tow Center for Digital Journalism has mapped cutbacks across the US, reporting sixty-five permanent closures and thousands of journalists experiencing pay cuts, furloughs, or lost jobs” as a result of the pandemic, according to Harris (2021). Furthermore, the inequities highlighted by these economic constraints have led to more and more journalists unionizing as a means to overcome system barriers to equity and inclusion. In addition to increased salaries and improved working conditions, “unions have also pushed to increase diversity in newsrooms and eliminate pay gaps hurting women and minority journalists” (Greenhouse, 2021). We see these same trends in our qualitative data, and those we interviewed elaborated on the impact of industry-wide financial challenges, layoffs, and the state of DEI in the media industry.

One participant, a multiracial man, shared about his career experience, the shifting economic landscape of journalism, and how he navigated these challenges:

**My last three media jobs have all ended either with layoffs or buyouts, and I actually just got laid off two weeks ago today from my most recent organization. After that happened, I had been wanting to leave for a little bit, and even before I accepted that job, I was looking into pivoting to a different industry, and kind of like Four said, the company that I last worked for gave me an offer that was just too good to pass up, and so I took it, but now I’m looking for jobs, but I’m very actively not applying it to any kind of news or media organization, just because the state of the industry is so dire. It just feels like every day, you’re hearing about some kind of layoffs, buyouts, or some kind of billionaire taking over, and it’s pretty depressing, so I’m looking to leave.**

This is an example of how layoffs can disproportionately impact journalists of color who already face barriers to advancing in the industry. One editor in chief and woman of color we interviewed shared the instability she experienced caused by this economic volatility as well, stating:

**I've also thought about leaving the industry because it's so unstable right now. Journalism has gone through its ups and downs. I have been fortunate, and it's quite rare I think, but I've been fortunate enough that I've never had to deal with a company layoff or closing. But in the last, since 2020, but especially in the last year, the pure volume of journalism organizations going under or cutting huge amounts of staff is I think unprecedented. Unprecedented right now. And so I have thought about, "What if I go work at a different industry just for more stability in my life?" I haven't made that decision yet, but the thought has occurred to me.**

Another focus group participant and media consultant summed it up by sharing:

**Certainly the financial situation in the industry is probably at the worst it's been in my career. This feels different.**

The financial crisis in journalism continues to amplify existing disparities between racial groups, and current DEI practices are seen as being ineffective in leading to the types of systemic changes needed to remedy these inequities. A Filipinx early education writer reflected on the toll this has taken on her and shared:

**The mainstream media is ethnic media for white people. It's like we have our black newspapers, we have our AAPI newspapers, we have our newspapers in Spanish, and the mainstream media has functioned as the ethnic media for white people in some ways. And so I've always felt like an outsider that in these legacy institutions, and trying to push change has always been really hard and has required a lot of emotional energy. And it was emotional energy. It was just energy I didn't have at the end to fight anymore. I think a lot of us, I guess it's sort of cliché to say, but we're just really tired. So yeah, they were not effective. I think the part of the problem, too, is the marginalization of people of color within that newsroom stems from something way deeper that can only be fixed when you have people of color in charge, able to make the decisions that are good for the organization.**

Focus group participants also reflected on the lack of understanding around true integrated DEI and how this has slowed progress toward inclusion in media representation. One Asian American news director we spoke with explained how the framing of people of colors' experiences as DEI stories undermines the goal of normalizing inclusive content rather than tokenizing it. She shared:

**DEI doesn't make a lot of sense because it is really about DEI. I feel like to me it is everything, right? It is part of everything. And so parsing it out as a DEI story just really makes me want to throw up because it's about like, "Oh, here's a race story." When actually in the lived experience of people of color, it's in everything. To me, doing this story about some race, particular race thing and shoving it into a DEI box is very frustrating to me because it minimizes or it compartmentalizes the experience when it is actually... It is institutional.**

She went on to explain what genuine diversity in media coverage looks like and noted:

**We don't really treat our work with any kind of arbitrary pseudo scientific metrics about how diverse or inclusive our stories are. We do happen to cover love stories about labor that haven't involved people of color, but we do not set out with some pre-written agenda about what we want to actually hear or from people. We just try to report things that they are. And by that nature, especially covering low income communities, you just end up with a lot of DEI subject matter anyway. If you just let people actually tell their stories rather than actually try to go to people and actually telling things that you want to hear from them.**

While many journalists of color we interviewed expressed the need for equal pay, fair treatment, and inclusive content, they were also disheartened by the pervasive nature of these industry-wide challenges and unsure if current efforts are tenable. These qualitative data demonstrate the impact of both external and internal environments on the state of journalism and the resultant inequitable treatment of journalists of color.

# Solutions

## Evidence-based strategies for improving diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in journalism

Based on the report's findings, several actionable steps are recommended for news organizations to address the challenges and harness the opportunities in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) for minority leaders in journalism. The following strategies are devised to aid a more inclusive and equitable media landscape, drawing from the insights of the study:

**1**

### **Intensify Racial Diversity Initiatives**

- Implement targeted recruitment strategies to attract a diverse talent pool.
- Establish mentorship and sponsorship programs that support the career progression of journalists of color.
- Create platforms for minority voices to be heard and valued in editorial decision-making.

**2**

### **Enhance Gender Diversity Measures**

- Conduct gender diversity training for all employees.
- Ensure equal opportunities for leadership roles and challenging gender biases in promotion and hiring processes.
- Regularly review gender pay equity and make necessary adjustments.

**3**

### **Promote Fair Treatment and Individual Recognition**

- Create a culture of recognition where achievements are acknowledged and celebrated, irrespective of the journalist's background.
- Implement transparent policies and procedures that ensure fair treatment in all aspects of employment, including workload distribution, conflict resolution, and performance evaluation.

**4**

### **Nurture Inter- and Intra-Racial Support and Respect**

- Organize intercultural communication and sensitivity training sessions.
- Encourage collaborative projects that involve diverse teams to enhance mutual understanding and respect.
- Set up forums for open dialogue on race-related issues and concerns.

**5****Bridge the Gap in Upward Mobility**

- Establish clear career pathways and professional development opportunities for all, especially for journalists of color.
- Regularly review and revise promotion criteria to ensure they are inclusive and transparent.
- Provide leadership training to prepare minority journalists for senior roles.

**6****Advance Inclusivity for All Identities**

- Implement comprehensive DEIB training that includes modules on LGBTQ+ inclusivity, unconscious bias, and cultural competence.
- Review and update policies to ensure they protect the rights and dignity of all employees, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or racial background.
- Celebrate diversity through events and initiatives that acknowledge and respect the varied identities within the organization.

**7****Cultivate a Stronger Sense of Belonging**

- Create more inclusive spaces and resource groups where employees can share their experiences and support each other.
- Ensure that all voices are heard and valued in decision-making processes, creating a culture of inclusivity and belonging.
- Regularly gather feedback on workplace culture and taking concrete steps to address any concerns.

**8****Provide Mentorship and Sponsorship Opportunities**

- Establish structured mentorship programs pairing employees from underrepresented groups with experienced professionals who can provide guidance, support, and career advice.
- Encourage senior leaders to actively sponsor promising talent from diverse backgrounds, advocating for their advancement, providing visibility, and opening doors to opportunities.
- Encourage cross-cultural mentorship relationships to foster understanding, empathy, and allyship across different demographic groups within the organization, facilitating mutual learning and growth.

# Resource List

Based on responses from focus group/1:1 interviews, we include a “resource list” of the organizations that the participants highlighted as positive examples. We have included hyperlinks for each organization/outlet in alphabetical order. A short description is provided underneath each link.

## The 19th News



The 19th is an independent nonprofit newsroom reporting at the intersection of gender, politics and policy. The 19th aims to be a source of news and information for those who have been underserved by and underrepresented in American media, and a vessel for which to empower women, people of color and the LGBTQ+ community with the information, community and tools they need to be equal participants in our democracy.

## The Baltimore Banner



Established by *The Venetoulis Institute for Local Journalism*, The Baltimore Banner is a self-governing nonprofit news outlet for its local community, Baltimore. The Baltimore Banner aims to empower and uplift its people through various ways such as delivery of diverse stories that reflect the community, sharing community-based news that are favorable to audience members, and enforcing leadership responsibility.

## Baltimore Beat



Baltimore Beat, a Black-led nonprofit newspaper and media organization in Baltimore, upholds the legacy of the Black press and alternative weekly journalism by prioritizing community-centered reporting. With the goal to serve everyone in the city, Baltimore Beat strives for equitable and accountable journalism that amplifies marginalized and diverse voices as well as addresses systemic injustices.

## Capital B News



Capital B News is a community-based and national nonprofit news platform that believes in providing accurate information and high-quality news to its audience. Centering important topics to Black people throughout the country, Capital B News reports on issues such as politics and health. Informed by Black residents, Capital B News provides critical must-know information to the local community.



### City Bureau

City Bureau, a Chicago-based journalism organization, believes in systemic change centering equity and inclusion. City Bureau aims to provide communities with the necessary equipment to combat information inequity to advance social justice. Being part of the *Just Action Racial Equity Collaborative*, City Bureau is dedicated to eliminating racist means of oppression and establishing equitable systems.



### Converge Media

Converge Media, an Emmy Award-winning producer based in Seattle and the Pacific Northwest, serves as a platform for independent African-American creators. Converge Media specializes in curating culturally tailored content for an urban audience, and prioritizes authentic representation and addressing issues in the Black community through amplifying their voices, reshaping narratives, and fostering inclusivity.



### Crosscut (The Cascade PBS newsroom)

Previously known as Crosscut, the Cascade PBS newsroom is an independent nonprofit news platform serving the Pacific Northwest. The Cascade PBS newsroom believes that a well-informed community is vital in addressing present-day issues to promote justice. The organization aims to provide its audience with crucial information, so that they can make informed decisions and actively participate in civic engagements.



### Documented

Documented is a nonprofit news organization committed to centering New York City's immigrant narratives and the policies that impact them. Given this, Documented's work is well-informed by New York's immigrant community and their needs, as it reports legal changes on both a local and federal level that impact the immigrant community.



### Ida B. Wells Society

Ida B. Wells Society for Investigative Reporting is a news trade organization committed to advancing diversity in investigative journalism by increasing and retaining journalists of color. Led by seasoned journalists, the Ida B. Wells Society advocates for inclusive newsrooms to elevate the impact and visibility of investigative reporting, especially on Black experiences and underrepresented communities.

## International Examiner

*International Examiner*

International Examiner is the Northwest's oldest and largest nonprofit pan-Asian Pacific American publication. International Examiner aims to cultivate a connected and socially conscious Asian Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander American community by providing reliable and accurate information, culturally sensitive news coverage, and acknowledgements to journalistic excellence based on the shared content.

## InvestigateWest

INVESTIGATEWEST

InvestigateWest, a Seattle-based nonprofit investigative journalism platform, covers important topics affecting the Pacific Northwest and Cascadia, centering issues related to the environment, public health, and government. By providing impactful investigative stories, InvestigateWest aims to foster a well-informed and community-engaged community committed to advocating for social justice and creating an equitable society

## MLK50: Justice Through Journalism

MLK50  
JUSTICE THROUGH JOURNALISM

Inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King's vision, MLK50: Justice Through Journalism is a Memphis-based nonprofit newsroom committed to addressing racial injustice and socioeconomic disparities, thereby reporting on the complexities of poverty, authority, and public policy. MLK50: Justice Through Journalism strives for economic justice through intentional reporting and equitable employment practices.

## The NewsGuild

The NewsGuild-CWA champions workplace justice for journalists and other communication professionals amidst the challenges of modern media including promoting diversity and equity in the newsroom. The NewsGuild represents and amplifies the voices of a diverse range of media employees through advocacy efforts for fair treatment, equitable pay, press freedom.



## Oregon Public Broadcasting



Oregon Public Broadcasting aims to foster community by means of a collective narrative throughout Oregon and Cascadia. Oregon Public Broadcasting aspires to improve lives and empower communities by providing accessible and trustworthy journalism.



### **Outlier Media**

Outlier Media, a Detroit-based pioneering nonprofit news outlet, is dedicated to centering the concerns and needs of its local community in local news by bridging informational gaps and providing accurate information through innovative methods like the **TXT OUTLIER** service. Outlier Media strives to create a liberated city by democratizing information and empowering its residents to hold systems accountable.



### **Prism**

Prism is an independent and nonprofit newsroom spearheaded by journalists of color. Prism envisions justice and equity for historically marginalized communities, and thereby was founded to advance collective liberation, highlight injustice, and serve as a platform for people of color to share their narratives.



### **RANGE Media**

RANGE Media, an organization committed to serving and improving the Inland Northwest, fosters an anti-racist and equity-focused newsroom through honest reporting and highlighting marginalized voices. RANGE Media aims to bridge information gaps and foster civically-engaged communities through meaningful conversations, addressing community needs, and advocacy efforts for a more just environment.



### **Resolve Philly**

Championing a more just and community-based journalism industry, Resolve Philly is a journalism organization created to revolutionize the newsroom industry, both locally in Philadelphia and globally. Resolve Philly centers accurately portraying media representation of marginalized communities, particularly in how journalists are reporting.



### **South Seattle Emerald**

South Seattle Emerald is a platform for local voices in South Seattle. South Seattle Emerald aims to elevate the stories of its people, a community that has been overlooked and underrepresented in mainstream media. With a commitment to racial justice and in prioritizing accountability, South Seattle Emerald ensures equitable access to accurate information to cultivate a well-informed and engaged community.

# Conclusion

In this study, the experiences and systemic challenges faced by journalists of color within newsrooms across the U.S. were explored. Through a mixed-method approach, findings were organized into three primary themes, each containing a set of nuanced subthemes:

- 1 Workplace Climate (interactions with colleagues and managers),
- 2 Career Advancement (barriers to entry; pay equity; career mobility; mentorship, sponsorship, and professional networks; solidarity; compositional diversity vs. structural diversity, and retention), and
- 3 the impact of the external environment (identity and work assignments and the current state of journalism in America).

The conclusion was drawn with data-driven solutions aimed at advancing equity in the newsroom and improving the workplace experiences for marginalized populations.

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# Appendices

## APPENDIX A: SURVEY

### Baseline Media Survey - Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA)

**Rapid Research Evaluation (RPDRE)**, an independent, award-winning research firm, is conducting a survey for the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA). AAJA is interested in learning about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in the media.

The survey should take 3-5 minutes to complete. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.

\* Do we have your permission to collect survey data?

☐ Yes

☐ No (please exit the survey)

#### DEMOGRAPHICS

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\* Which of the following best describes your current job level?

\* What is your role in the newsroom? (Choose the best option)

\* What is your age?

\* Which race/ethnicity do you most identify with?

\* What is your gender/gender identity?

\* What is your sexual orientation?

\* What is the highest degree you have earned?

\* What is your employment status?

- ☐ Full-time
- ☐ Part-time (less than 40 hours per week)
- ☐ Freelancer

\* What is your income/salary range (in the past 12 months)?

- ☐ 0-\$25,000
- ☐ \$26,000-\$50,000
- ☐ \$51,000-\$90,000
- ☐ \$91,000-\$150,000
- ☐ \$151,000+

\* How many years have you worked in the industry?

- ☐ 0-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-20 years
- ☐ 21+ years

\* What topic areas do you usually cover? (Choose all that apply.)

- ☐ Health Education Politics/Policy
- ☐ Business Law Crime
- ☐ Technology Sports
- ☐ Arts/Culture/Food/Style
- ☐ Preferred response not listed (please specify)

## PERCEPTION

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\* The news organization I work at achieves sufficient gender diversity.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

\* The news organization I work at achieves sufficient racial diversity.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

\* The news organization I work at treats employees fairly regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, and abilities.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

## VALUE, SUPPORT, AND PURPOSE

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\* I am valued as an individual at my organization.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

\* I am supported by members of my own racial group

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

\* I am supported by members of other racial groups

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

\* I am treated with respect

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

\* I have access to opportunities for upward mobility

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING

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\* My organization is actively becoming a more equitable and inclusive place to work, regardless of my sexual orientation and gender identity.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

\* My organization is actively becoming a more equitable and inclusive place for people of color to work.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

\* I belong at my company.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

## FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION

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\* We are conducting focus groups to learn about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in the media. **Are you interested in participating in one virtual 60-90 minute focus group? Your participation is voluntary.**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (please exit the survey)
- ☐ Maybe (I'd like to learn more about the focus group)

\* If you selected "Yes or Maybe," please provide your contact information.

First and Last Name

Email address

Phone number

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Asian American Journalists Association Focus Group Interview Protocol

#### SECTION 0: INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT

*Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am a part of the research team at Rapid Research Evaluation. RPDRE—founded by Dr. Peter T. Keo—is the first-minority owned rapid evaluation firm in the US. We are currently conducting research that aims to better understand the current state of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in journalism/the newsroom.*

*I want to take a moment to acknowledge that some of the topics we will be covering today may be sensitive. We can stop or pause the interview at any time, and you have the right to skip any question you do not feel comfortable answering.*

*While we may use quotes from this interview in our report, we will not reference your name, company, or any other identifying factors that can be traced back to you. Confidentiality is of utmost importance to us, and we will ensure that all of your responses will remain entirely anonymous. Before we begin the focus group, I need to take a few minutes to go through some standard privacy and consent language.*

**Do you agree to be recorded and to the sharing of your personal data? Please state “yes” or “no.”**

*Any data you provide us during this interview will only be collected and processed following your consent, and your consent can be withdrawn at any time. We retain your personally identifiable information for no longer than necessary to fulfill the purposes for which it was collected. You have the right at any time to refuse to answer a given question and have the right at any time to contact us to have your data deleted. If you have questions about your data, please contact us at [keo@rpdre.com](mailto:keo@rpdre.com).*

#### SECTION I: MICRO—IDENTITY & WORK EXPERIENCES

1. How would you describe your organization's current efforts toward advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging?
2. Do you believe these efforts are effective? Why or why not?
3. Are there aspects of your identity, e.g. race/ethnicity, age, disability status or socioeconomic status that you believe have influenced your work experiences? And, if so, how?

4. What stereotypes, biases and microaggressions have you had to contend with throughout your career? (PROMPT: *Who or what was useful in navigating such challenges throughout your career?*)
5. How do your work experiences differ from other racial identity groups?
6. How do your work experiences differ from other gender identity groups?

## SECTION II: MESO—CAREER ADVANCEMENT AND RELATIONSHIP CAPITAL

1. Do you feel as though you are not afforded certain leadership opportunities/ key assignments because of your identity? If so, can you provide an example?
2. What does mentorship/sponsorship look like at your company? Are these opportunities equitable? Why or why not?
3. Has having a mentor or sponsor been helpful to you in your career? Why or why not?
4. Are there senior leaders who you share an identity with at your company? If not, what barriers do you think are hindering representation in senior-level roles?
5. What professional networking opportunities/resources do you utilize within or outside of your company? How have these been helpful?
6. Have you ever considered leaving your job and/or the profession? If so, what were the most salient reasons?
  - If you considered leaving the profession but decided to stay, what were the most salient reasons for staying?

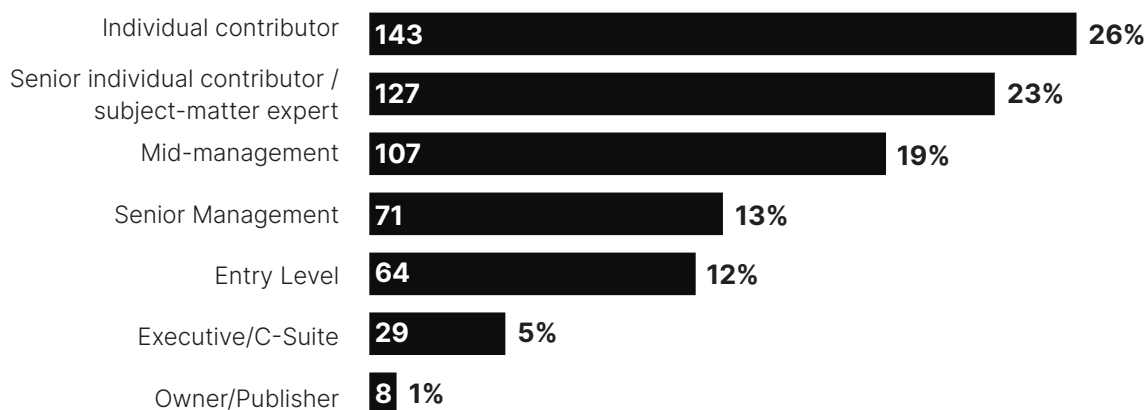
## SECTION III: MACRO—SYSTEMIC/STRUCTURAL OBSERVATIONS

1. Do you know of any examples of news/journalism organizations that have been particularly effective at hiring, retaining and promoting journalists of color? If so, what are the examples and what do you think has made them effective?
2. What would you say have been the biggest gains for people of color in your industry (or field)? The biggest setbacks?
  - What should be done to sustain those gains? What would you advise to remedy those setbacks?

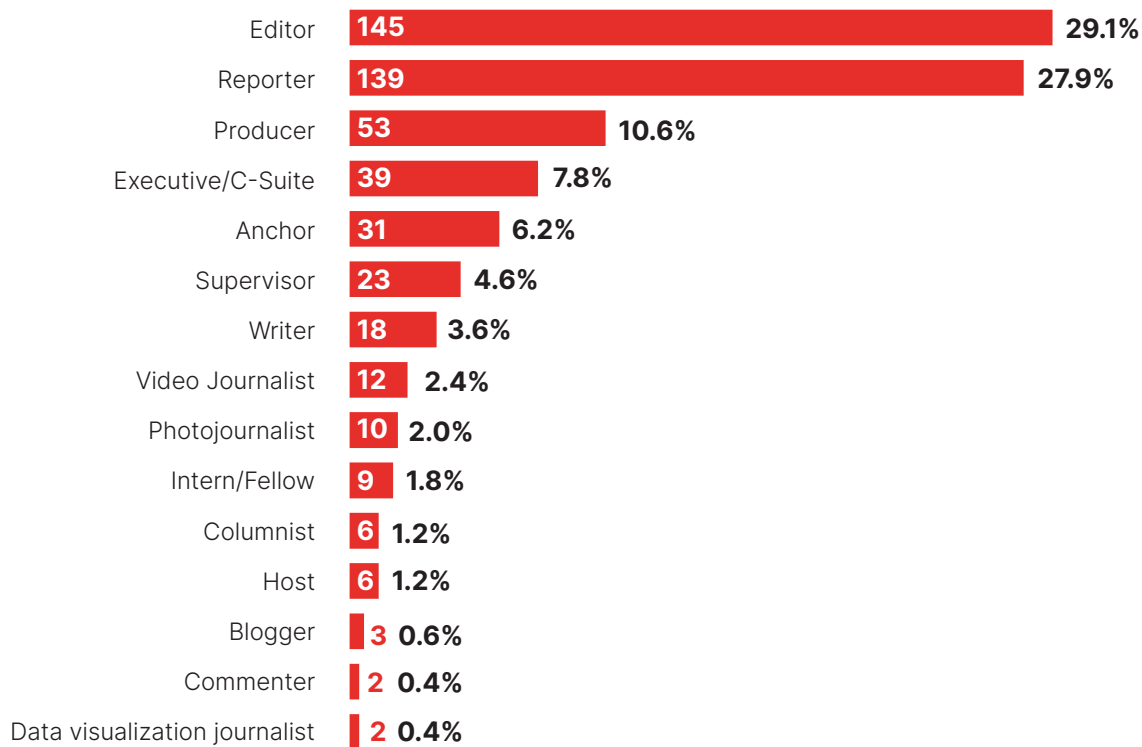
## APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC AND PROFESSIONAL SURVEY RESULTS

### Job Level, Role, and Employment Status

*Q1. Which of the following best describes your current job level?*

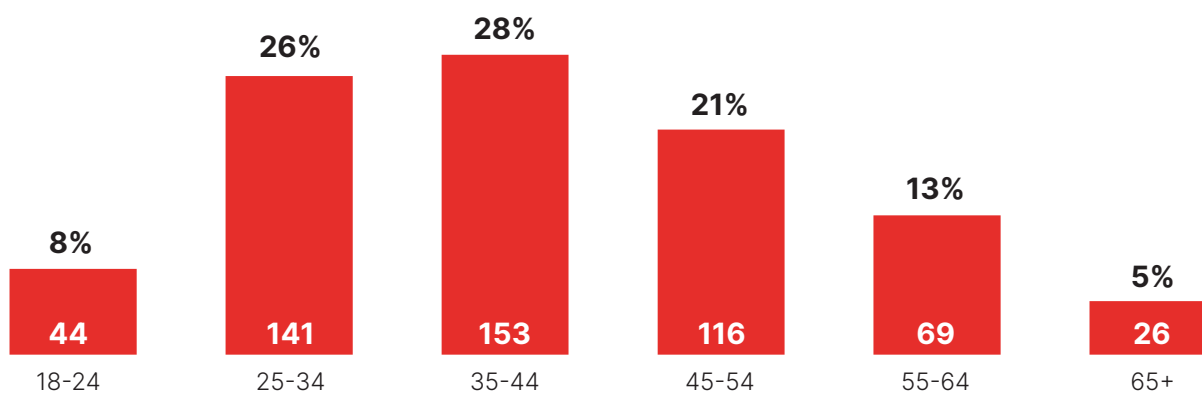


*Q2. What is your role in the newsroom?*



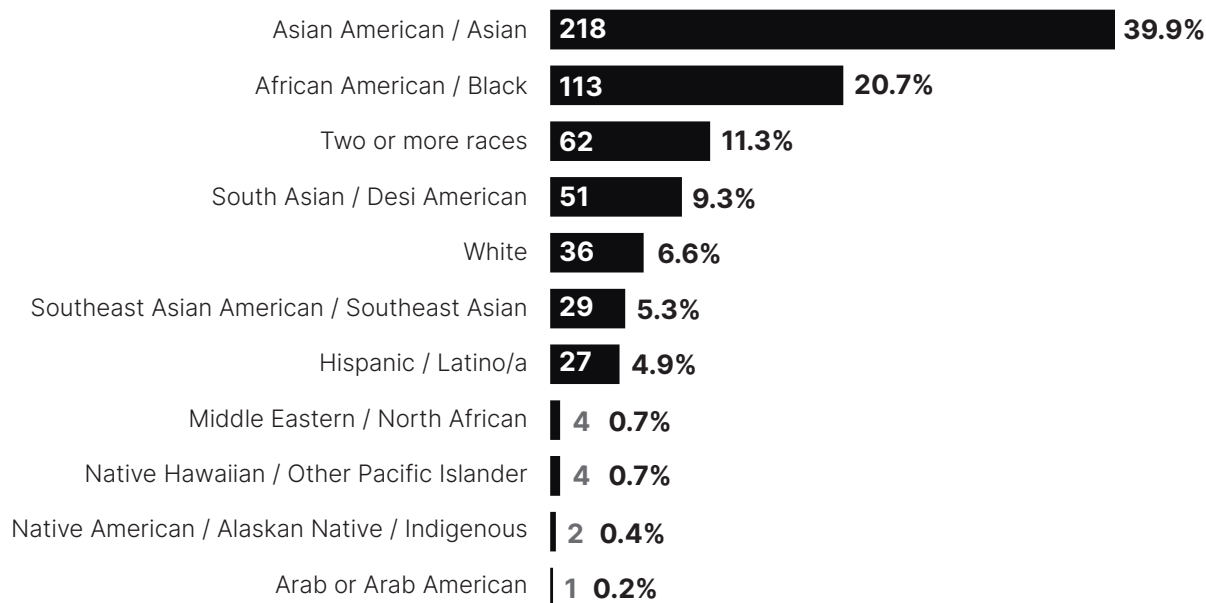
## Age

Q3. What is your age?



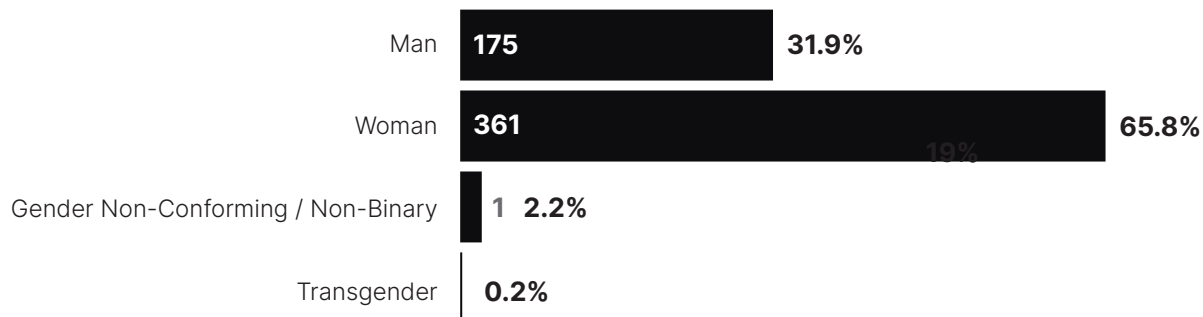
## Race/Ethnicity

Q4. Which race/ethnicity do you most identify with?

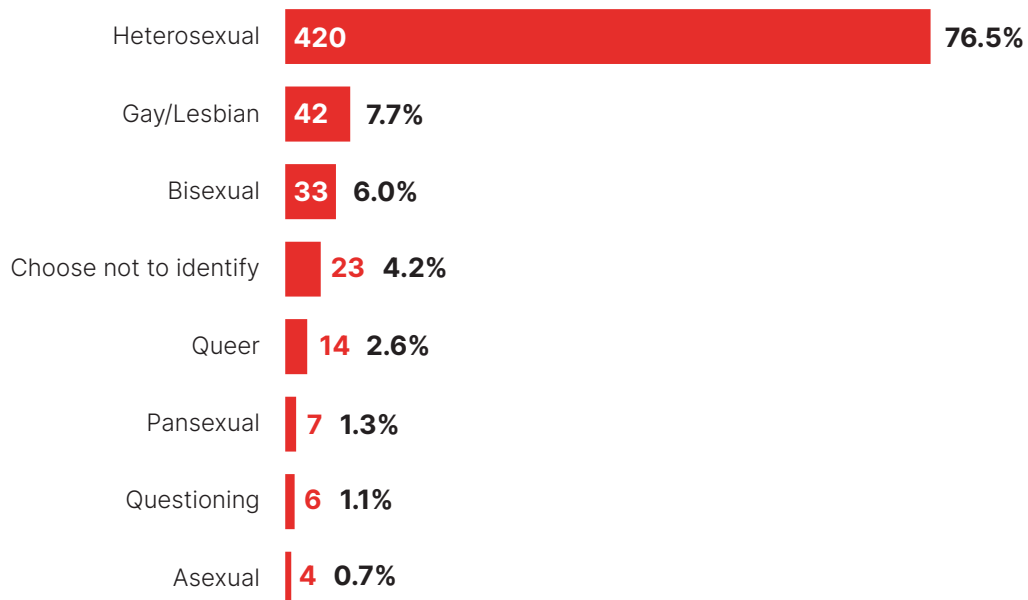


## Gender Identity & Sexual Orientation

*Q5. What is your gender / gender identity?*

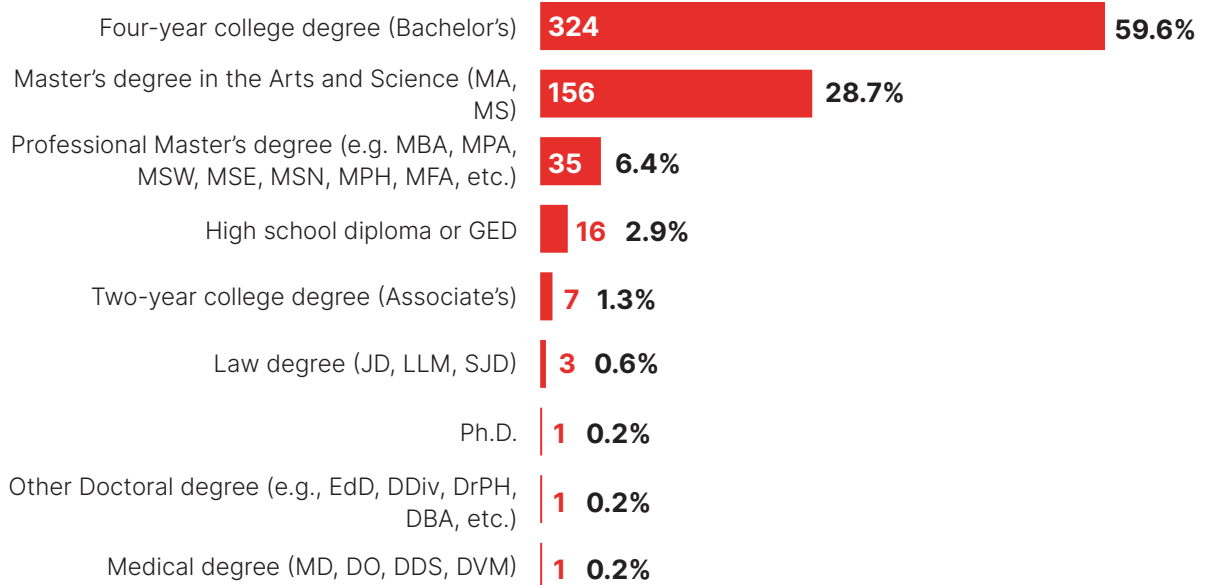


*Q6. What is your sexual orientation?*



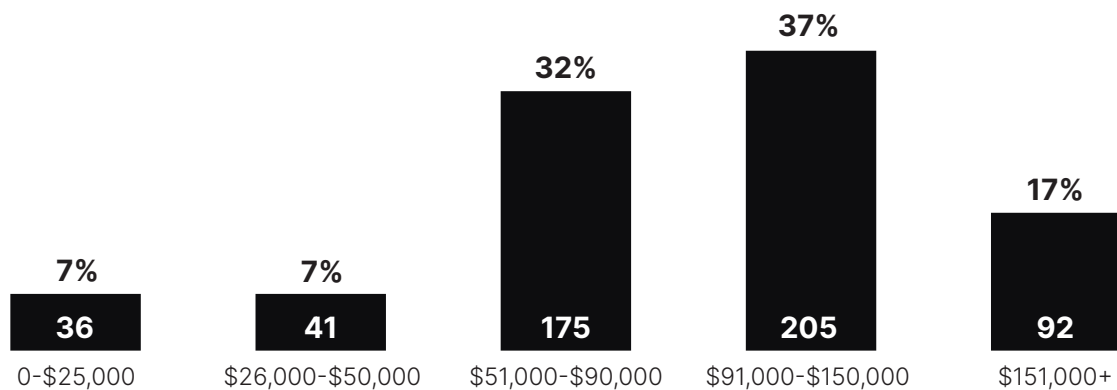
## Education Level

Q7. What is the highest degree you have earned?



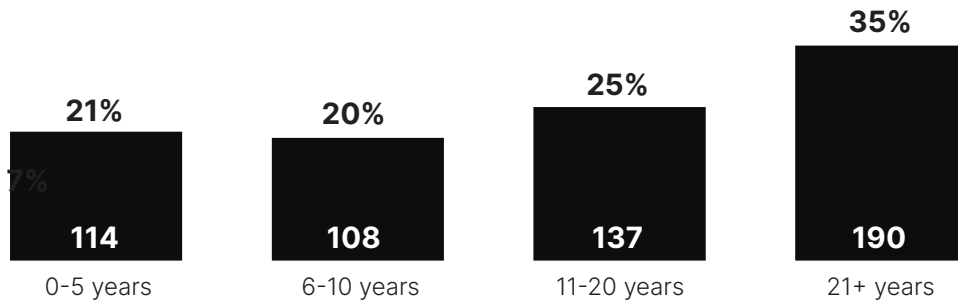
## Income and Salary Range

Q9. What is your income /salary range (in the past 12 months)?



## Industry Experience

*Q10. How many years have you worked in the industry?*



## Journalistic Areas

*Q11. What topic areas do you usually cover?*

