ABOUT

People of Color in Publishing and Latinx in Publishing are both grassroots organizations founded with the shared goal of uplifting racially marginalized people in publishing. In July of 2018, we conducted an anonymous survey gauging the extent to which BIPOC book publishing employees experienced racism in the workplace. The survey was open to any professional currently or previously employed by a book publisher in the U.S.

The survey included a range of questions that allowed us to collect information about the breadth and depth of microaggressions and racism that BIPOC experience in the workplace, and the impact this has on our work. Participants were instructed not to disclose names of people or companies. It is not our intention to call out any particular parties, but rather to amplify the dialogue about how the industry needs to take immediate action to become anti-racist.

We received over 200 submissions and more than 50,000 words in written responses from professionals who had worked in various departments at indie presses and the Big 5.

All participants were asked whether they had experienced racism or microaggressions in publishing, but we did not define either of those terms. 16% of participants said they did not feel they had experienced racism or microaggressions in publishing, but when we reviewed their responses to other questions, we found that every single participant shared a specific experience of racism.

Racism is so socially normalized that, in some forms, it is not recognized as racism. Many participants prefaced their statements with a variation of "not sure if this counts" or "not sure if I'm being oversensitive." A word to our participants and fellow BIPOC colleagues: Your words count. You are not being oversensitive. You are not alone.
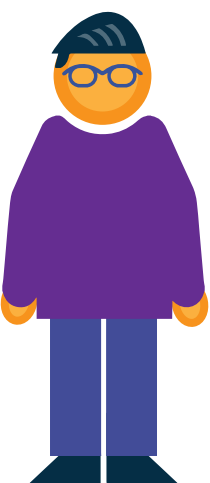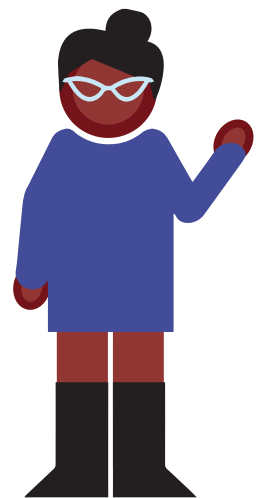
To our white colleagues: read these words attentively and share them widely. We ask that you do not approach any of your BIPOC colleagues to discuss this information, but instead call on your white colleagues. We have included an **Actionable Takeaways** and **Resources** section and recommend creating your own living list as well, as you know your own role and areas of influence best. Dismantling racism in publishing requires continuous self-education and anti-racist attention and action.

This survey focused on workplace culture at publishing companies in the U.S., but we acknowledge that these issues needs to be addressed in other parts of the book industry, including at literary agencies, review journals, bookstores, and libraries, and within the author and illustrator community around the world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Our survey fell into the following major categories:

DEMOGRAPHICS (P3-6)

WORKPLACE CULTURE (P7-24)

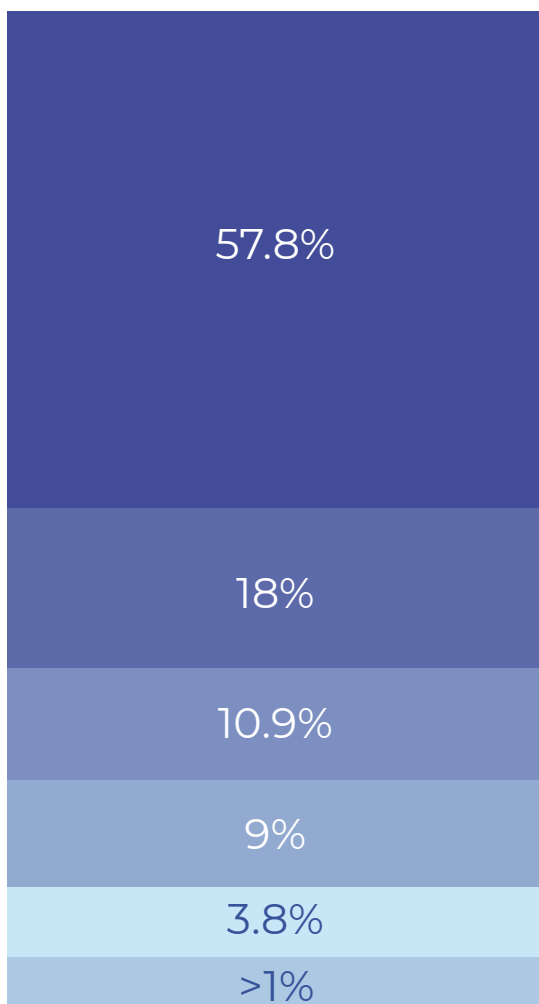## CAREER BUILDING/RETENTION (P25-32)

TAKE ACTION NOW (P33-39)

RESOURCES (P40-42)

DEMOGRAPHICS

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS: 211

In publishing at time of survey (190)

No longer working at a publishing house (21)

90%

10%

57.8%

18%

10.9%

9%

3.8%

>1%
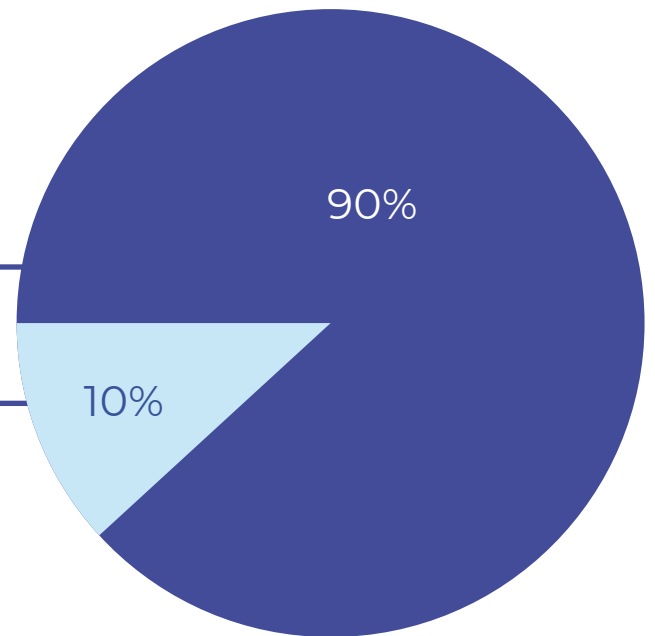
YEARS IN PUBLISHING

0-5 years (122)

6-10 years (38)

11-15 years (23)

16-20 years (19)

over 20 years (8)

would rather not say (1)

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

86.1% ———— Full-time (167)

9.8% ———— Freelancer/Temp (19)

4.6% ———— Part-time (9)

4.6% ———— Intern (9)

SIZE OF PUBLISHER

Large publisher (116) ————

Mid-size publisher (38) ————

Small or independent
press (55) ————

55.5%

18.2%

26.3%

Editorial (103)

Marketing/Publicity (85)

Production/Manufacturing/Operations (31)

Sales (24)

Design (21)

Other (12)

49%

40.4%

14.7%

11.4%

10%

5.7%
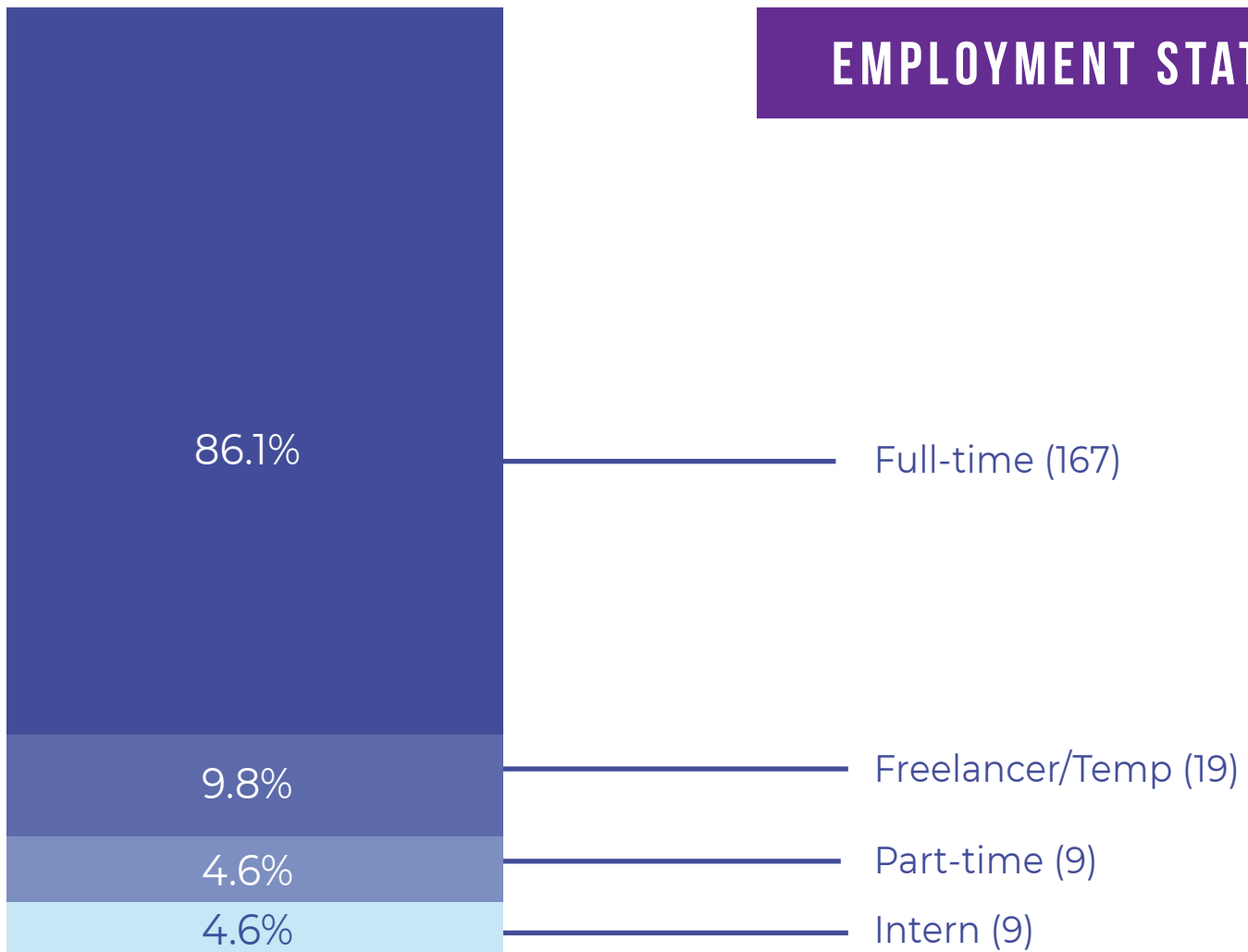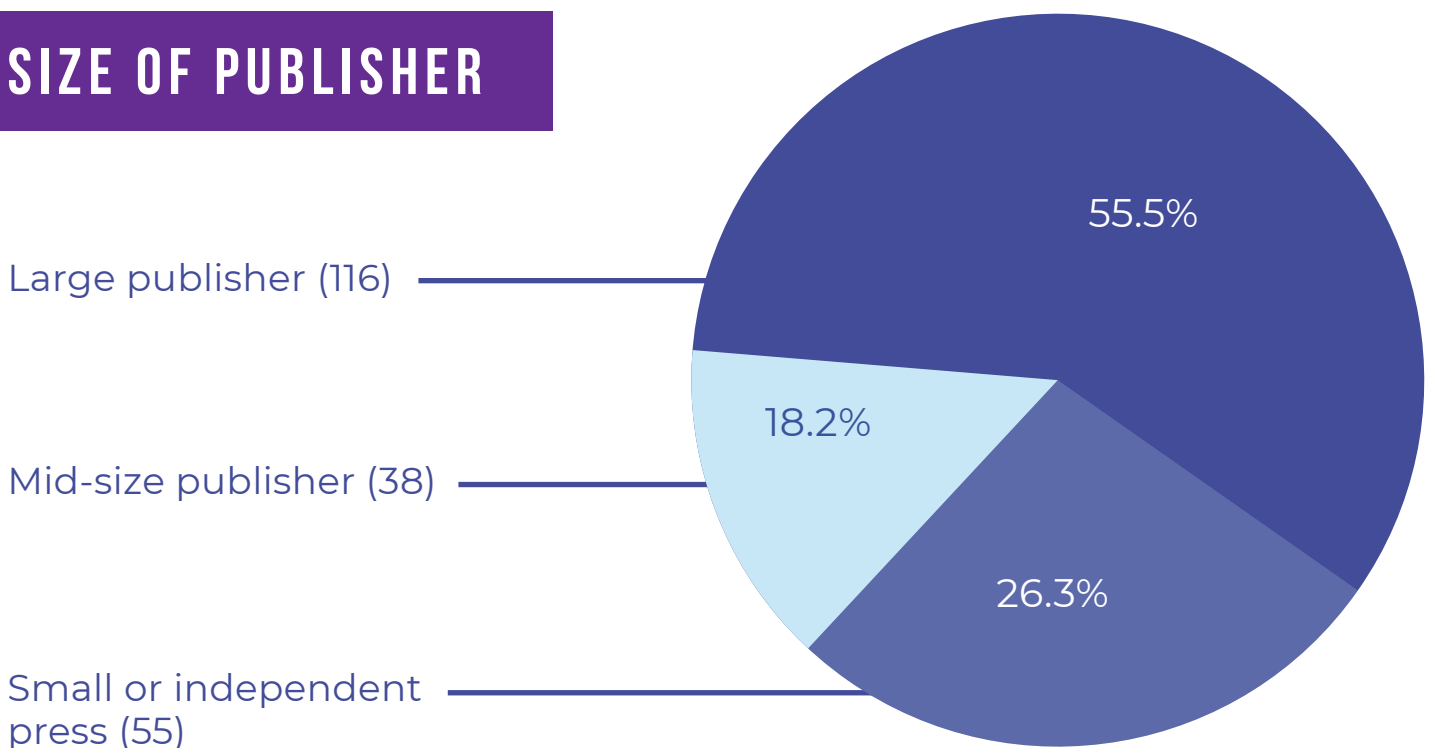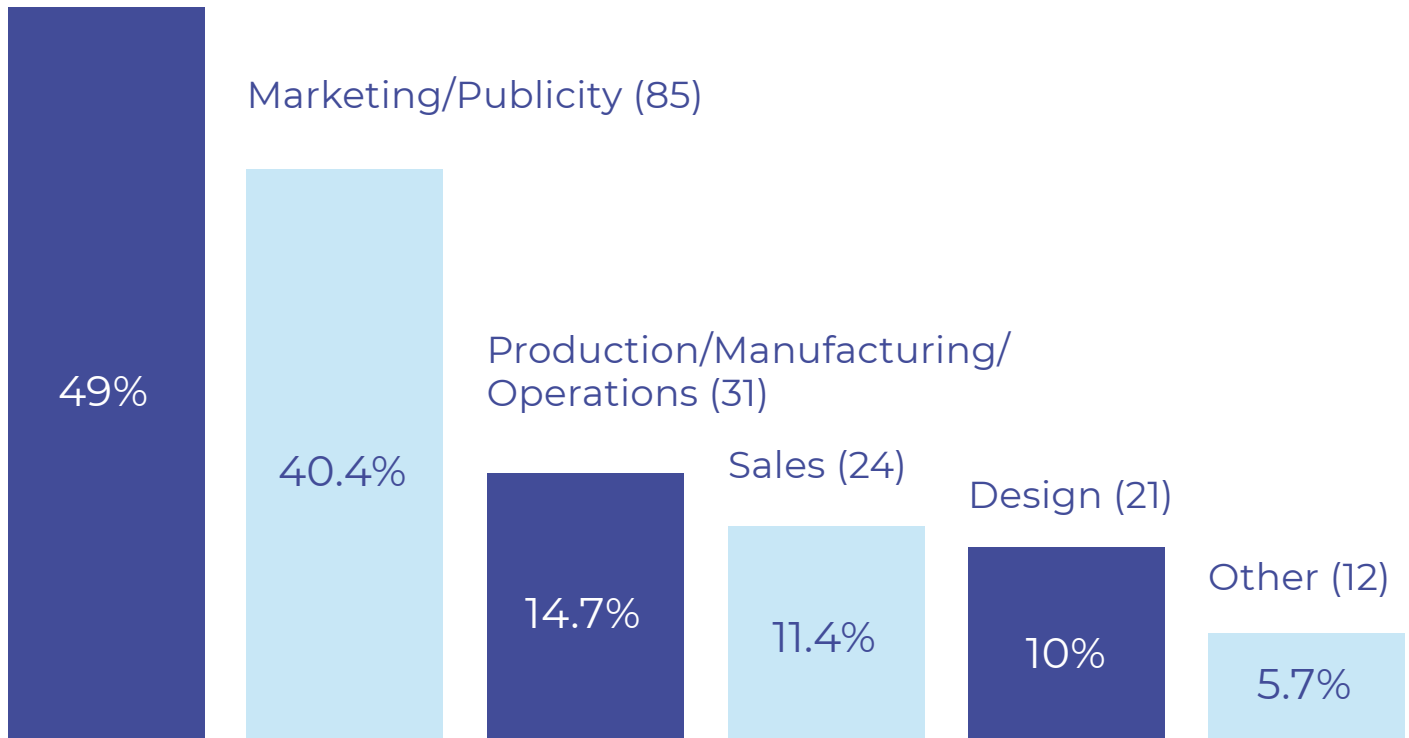
ADULTS VS CHILDREN'S

Adult
47.6%

Both
20%
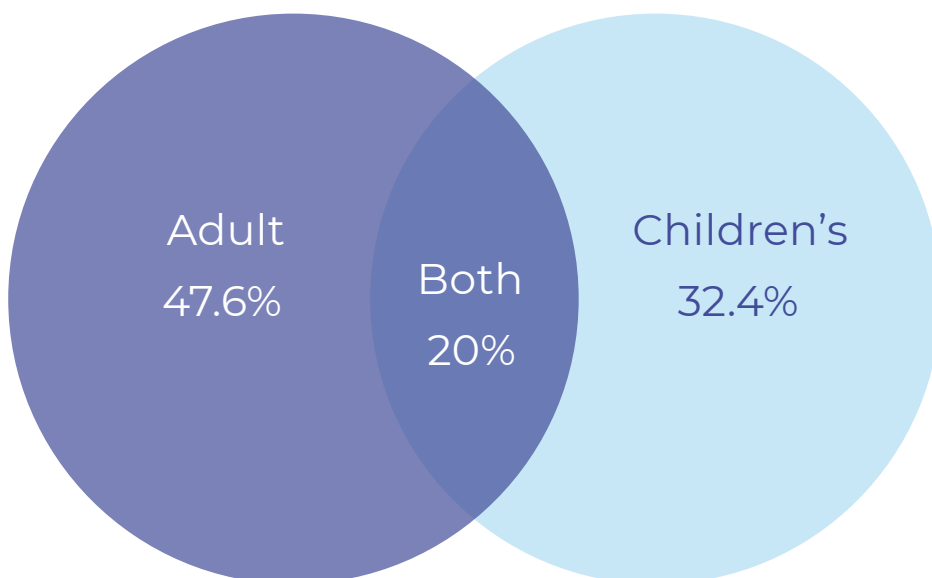
Children's
32.4%

Adult: 100

Children's: 68

Both: 42

35.5% Asian/Asian American (74)

35.% Hispanic/Latinx (73)

30.2% Black/African American (63)

12.9% White (Mixed POC) (27)

6.2% American Indian/Alaska Native (13)

2.8% Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander (6)

1.9% Other (4)

>1% Would rather not say (2)

PRONOUNS

She/Her/Hers (182)

He/Him/His (26)

They/Them/Theirs (11)

86.2%

12.3%

5.2%
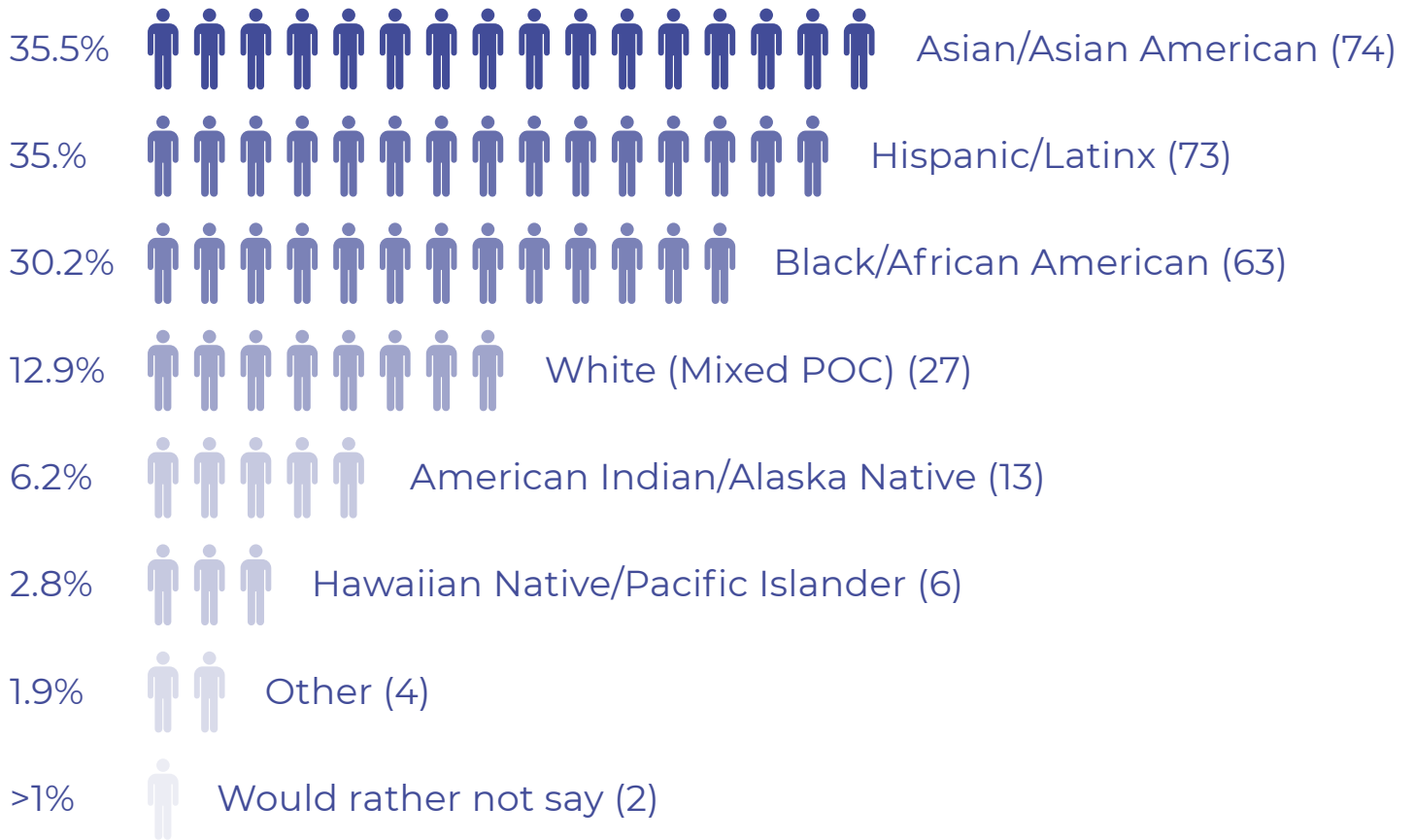
WORKPLACE CULTURE

MODIFYING YOURSELF

There are unwritten (and sometimes written) rules and expectations for navigating the workplace, which includes modifying the way we would normally behave or express ourselves. For BIPOC, there is an additional pressure that comes with navigating a predominantly white workplace culture.

61% of participants said that they modify themselves to fit into the workplace culture.

61%

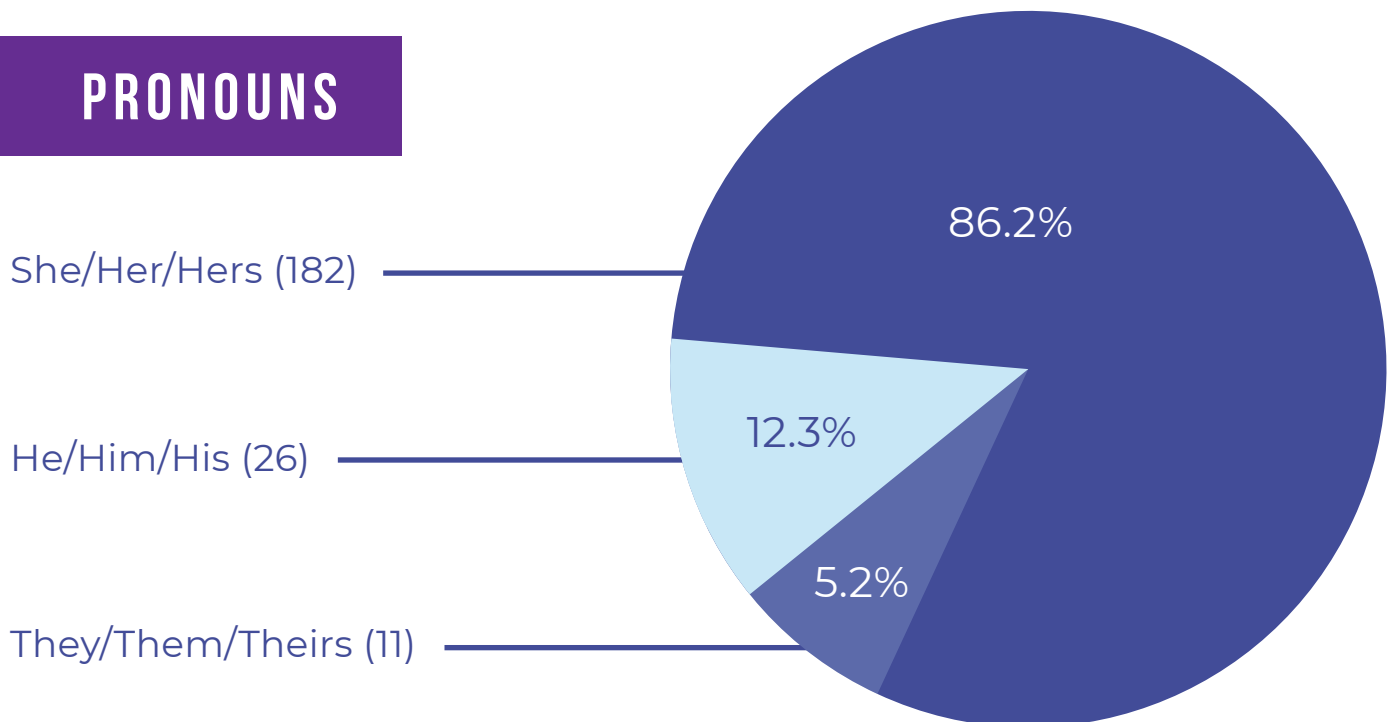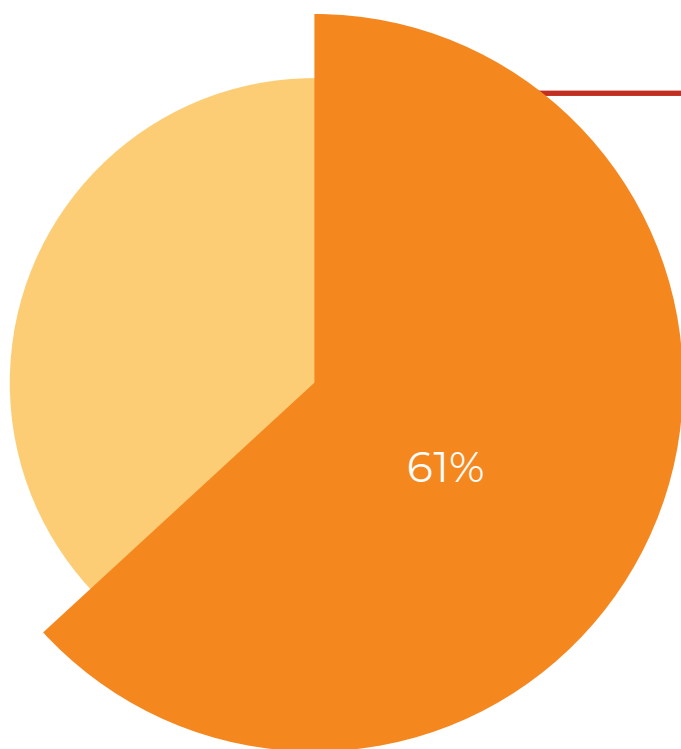"I often have to think twice, sometimes thrice, about how I wear my natural hair, how I pronounce words, how I communicate verbally and physically (hand gestures, etc.), and how I conduct myself socially. What is considered 'normal' and professional within my culture is not parallel to that of my workplace culture. **I constantly have to redefine who I am, not only for a corporate space, but for a predominantly white space too. It's double the work my white peers have to do in order to be considered professional."**

"I would be conscious of the food I would bring for lunch, the small talk I would make about how I spent my time, etc. I felt like I had to tiptoe around my white coworkers because **I felt their comfort took precedence over mine."**

MODIFYING YOURSELF

35% of those participants who said they modify themselves elaborated on how, among other things, they mask their opinions to not appear aggressive and to avoid being negatively marked as the "diversity police." Numerous testimonies explored how participants modify their tone or shared experiences **to make white colleagues feel more comfortable.**

35%

61%
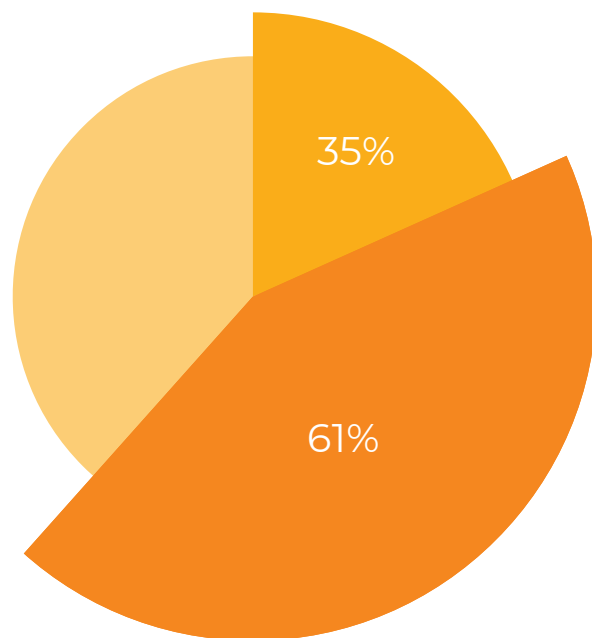
"I was often viewed as the 'diversity police' which caused strain with my editorial colleagues. **I often had to soften my POV or critiques to minimize the tension and diffuse the defensiveness."**

"I had to be excruciatingly aware of how I presented myself in a way that my white colleagues did not. I felt unsafe to joke around with colleagues in the ways that my white colleagues did. This also applied to expressing critical feedback or dissatisfaction with publicity campaigns and various projects."

"Forced social gatherings, like birthday celebrations, were painful and the microaggressions (and aggressions) were off the charts. Was told more than once to 'wink wink, nudge nudge not report us to HR.'"

TAKEAWAYS

In many cases, BIPOC are forced to make a choice between assimilation or exclusion. The responses in this survey reflect a deep-rooted expectation for BIPOC to manage aspects of our identities and change the way we express our cultures in order to adapt to workplace norms. Our ideas and opinions are also modified (or withheld entirely) when they do not align with what is considered "acceptable" for white workplace culture.

The emotional labor of having to change core aspects of who we are for the workplace is not only detrimental to individuals but to the workplace as a whole. By not allowing people to embrace and express all aspects of their identities, the industry itself is unable to grow and benefit from the full value of BIPOC employees.

Additional Resources:
- *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights* by Kenji Yoshino
- *Let Them See You* by Porter Braswell

WHITE FRAGILITY AND BYSTANDER RACISM

Publishing has a white dominant culture, with 76% of employees identifying as white (Lee & Low Diversity Baseline Study published in 2020).

White dominant culture persists through both active and passive exclusion, such as excluding BIPOC from networking or communication, or de-centering race from discussions about the need for systemic change.

92% of respondents to our survey have experienced being the only BIPOC in a meeting.

"In two different departments, I have seen Black women be excluded from after-work hang outs, text message threads, etc., and all of my white colleagues claimed 'race had nothing to do with it. It's just her 'personality.' Except these were two different Black women and two different sets of white teams of employees."

"I've been in multiple meetings, both one-on-one and group meetings, with senior (white, female) management who acknowledge the lack of diversity in our corporation and say that the parent company is overwhelmingly male and white. And that 'they can't even address the issue with gender, much less race' as though race is always a secondary and less important concern than gender."

92%
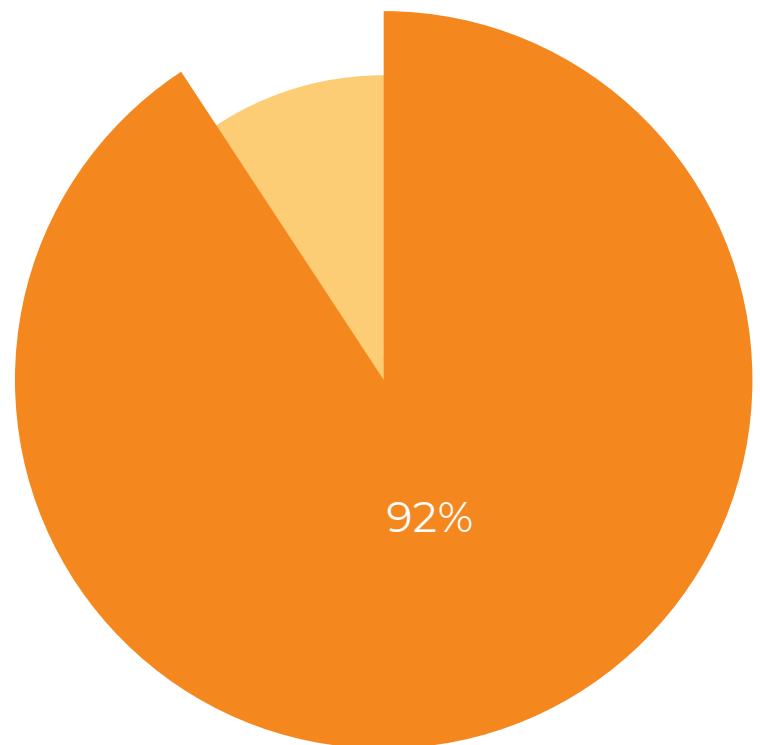
WHITE FRAGILITY AND BYSTANDER RACISM

We didn't mention white fragility in our survey, but it came up numerous times in participant responses. "White fragility" is a term coined by Robin DiAngelo to define the discomfort and defensiveness on the part of a white person, when they are confronted by information about racial inequality and injustice, that halts needed conversations surrounding BIPOC representation and retention.

"I went to a large [writers'] conference and had multiple white attendees stop me to 'ask a quick question' except there was never a clear question and what would follow would be a series of statements about their feelings and insecurities and the good work they wanted to do but how they didn't feel allowed to write outside their experience. **I realized they needed me to both ask the question for them and answer it.**

"It was a ridiculous amount of unnecessary labor. When I would say, 'is the question "how you can be sure to portray characters onthe page in a way that is fully dimensional so that young readers who have seen themselves flattened in harmful ways aren't subjected to that?", OR is it that you are worried that someone might say you've made a mistake and you want to know how you can avoid having to experience that discomfort?', they would get very upset and the reactions would range from tears to trying to explain to me how I didn't understand to implying I was aggressive and they were just trying to learn to do better work.

"This would be even as I walked back to my room late at night after a full day of work and socializing, and people had been drinking and would open with "it might be the wine talking but..." and then would want to have a discussion about race and representation in the time it takes to get to the elevator?!"

WHITE FRAGILITY AND BYSTANDER RACISM

"It has repeatedly happened that if I use the word 'white' to describe white people (as opposed to just letting them be 'people' while people from all other races are racialized and no complaint is lodged!), someone (always white) will stop the conversation to say how 'unfair' that is, or to say 'as a "white woman," I take offense' or something similar. It has happened in the office with my white boss. It has happened with white publishers from other houses when I'm at a conference. It has happened at dinner with white authors. It has happened in social contexts (drinks with publishing colleagues). It happens with men and women. But most often with women, who say they understand oppression because they are women."

TAKEAWAYS

White colleagues need to get comfortable with discomfort. Make a commitment to continuously self-educate. Practice using race modifiers for white people with the same frequency you do for BIPOC (e.g. "white author," "book about a white girl").

Before consulting a BIPOC about your own work, look for articles, literature, and other resources that may answer your question; exhaust all available resources first.

If you ask a BIPOC for opinions or advice and receive feedback that makes you feel defensive, do your best to push this feeling down and examine it later. Remember that you are the one who sought out feedback, and be willing to hear it.

 Additional Resources:
- *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo
- *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo
- "Confronting racism is not about the needs and feelings of white people" by Ijeoma Oluo, *The Guardian*

MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions are defined as brief and commonplace comments, actions, or environmental indignities (whether intentional or unintentional) that subtly communicate a prejudiced attitude toward any marginalized group. The term "microaggression" was coined by psychiatrist and Harvard University professor Chester M. Pierce.
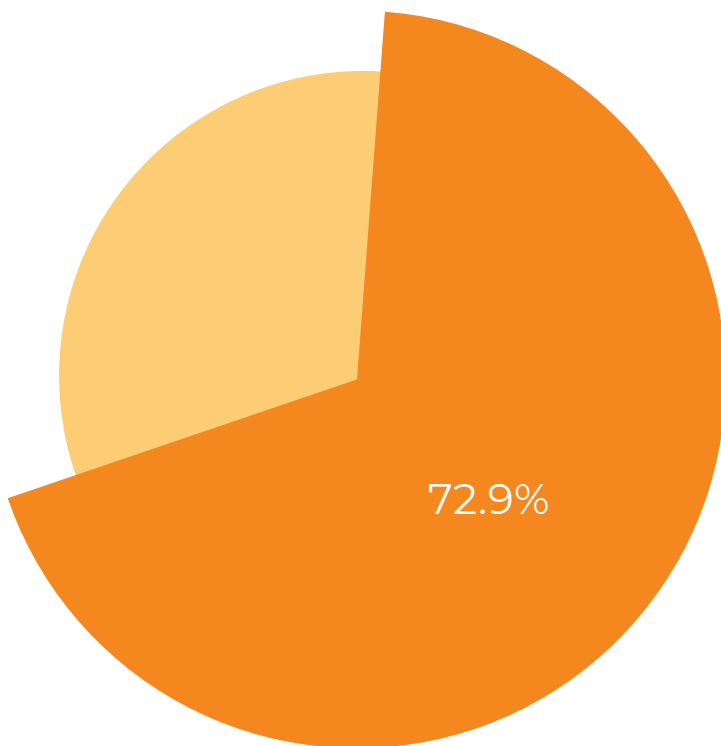
72.9% of participants said they have experienced microaggressions in the workplace.

72.9%

"At my previous employer, older members of senior staff would routinely refer to certain authors of color as 'articulate' in introducing them publicly or discussing them/ their writing. My boss would often use that word to describe me whenever I said anything intelligent. Theimplication by the speaker always seems to be that this is an exceptional quality—for a person of that identity."

"My white supervisor often 'tokenizes' me and other staff members by race and sexual orientation. When authors of color come into the office, they are immediately introduced to all staff members of color, even if they will most likely not be working with them in the future."

MICROAGGRESSIONS

"During an editorial staff meeting (of about 15 editors), a senior-level person (white woman) was talking about how her brother was in town and that he loved Asian women, then turned in my direction and asked if I'd be interested in meeting him. Everyone froze and turned to look at me. I was the only non-white person in the room, and as an assistant, I felt this intense pressure to diffuse the situation, and so I laughed, even though on the inside I was feeling deep discomfort.

"It's been over five years since this happened, but I'll never forget that feeling of alienation, that awful split-second you have to decide between blending in and risking being called 'sensitive' or 'angry.' Most of all, I'll never forget how none of my white colleagues —many of whom I considered friends —spoke up or asked if I was okay after bearing witness to this interaction. When I think about what I look for in an ally, it's not someone to read this story and say, 'Oh my god, that's so awful, I'm so sorry,' then secretly feel satisfied that they're one of the good ones. **I want someone to acknowledge that my story is far from rare and part of a systemic problem we need to address, and that change starts with reaching out to POC colleagues when they experience micro-aggressions, even when it's uncomfortable.**

"For someone to have simply acknowledged the terrible-ness of my situation at the time it occurred would have made a huge difference for me, and might have empowered me to speak up about it to HR or my manager, and perhaps set an example for the next generation of POC assistants to know that they, too, can stand up for themselves. Instead, I stayed quiet, I laughed, and I still regret it."

MICROAGGRESSIONS

"I've definitely witnessed microaggressions in the workplace at large. For example: people of the same race being confused for one another (very often, especially with Black employees), making fun of how hard some foreign names are to pronounce, making blanket statements/generalizations about a cultural/racial group, comments in acquisitions meetings that a book was 'niche' or not 'commercial' if it featured a character of color (although I will say the 'commercial' comment hasn't been made in the last few years, which I think is a sign of progress!)."

TAKEAWAYS

White colleagues need to research microaggressions and familiarize yourself with the most common forms they take. Be attentive to microaggressions in the workplace and use your privilege to address them. You may not always feel you are in a position to do something, but passive observation perpetuates an unjust system and your action is required in order to shift the culture. Many of our participants said they wished someone had spoken up in the moment or checked in with them afterward. **We believe white colleagues must take action of some kind every time they witness a microaggression.** See p33 for further advice on this.

Additional Resources:
- "Examples of Racial Microaggressions" by University of Minnesota, adapted from "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice" (American Psychologist)
- "A Guide to Responding to Microaggressions" by Kevin L. Nadal
- "How Microaggressions Are Like Mosquito Bites" (Video by Fusion Comedy)
- "Names That Are Unfamiliar to You Aren't 'Hard,' They're 'Unpracticed'" by N'Jameh Camara, *Teen Vogue*

EXTRA WORK

Additional, unpaid labor was a common theme among participants, whether that entailed being expected to educate colleagues on diversity, or being asked to do sensitivity reads that weren't related to lived experience or weren't related to their jobs.

88.6% of participants said they've felt that it was their job to educate others about diversity.

88.6%

"It is disheartening when our labors are waved around as flags for change and progress, but on an individual level we receive little support and so many of us are junior to mid-level employees with very little clout to begin with. . . . There is a huge disconnect that, at the end of the day, places a big burden on the POC who continue to show up and care because this affects their lives."

"Everyone shows up with a different level of understanding 'diversity,' so people who may have more experience understanding the concepts may end up taking on a lot of the teaching work, which they are not paid for, most usually WoC."

"I do a lot of labor for the white folks in this office. They're nervous about saying or doing anything that might not be PC, so they defer to me to guide them."

EXTRA WORK

47.4%
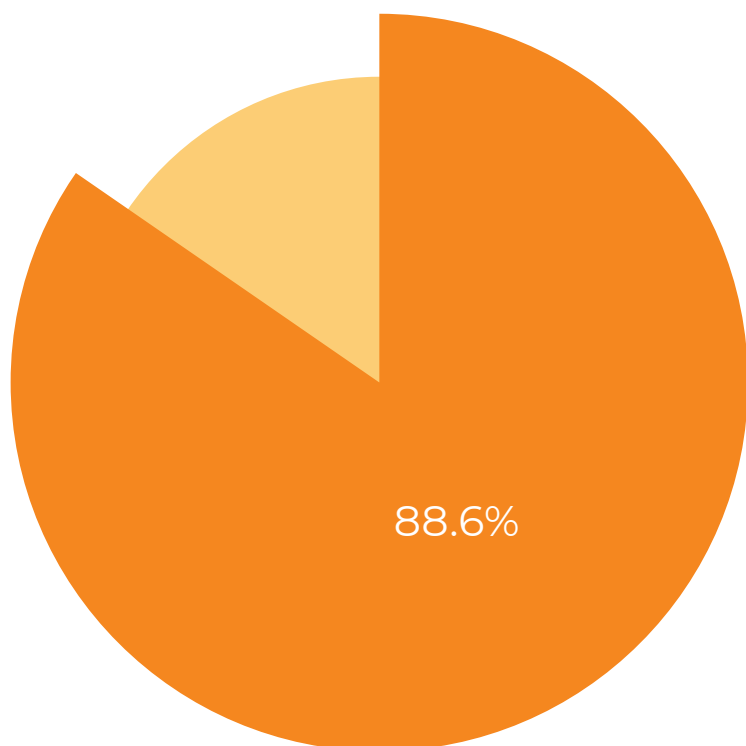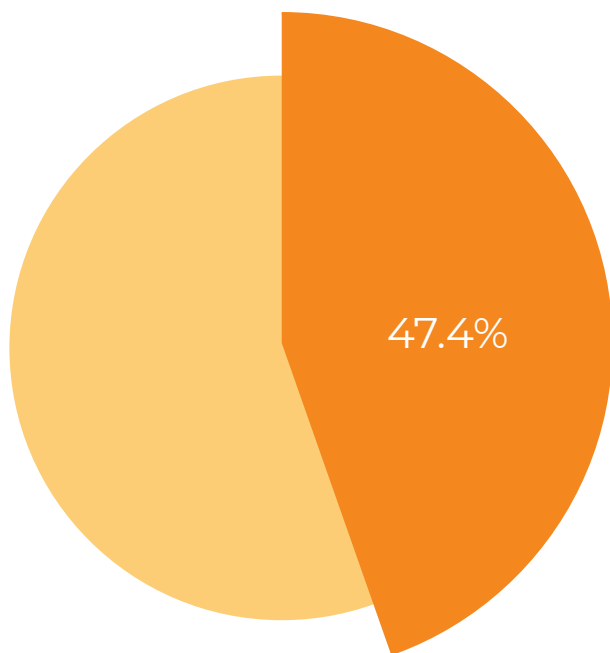
47.4% of participants have been asked to do a sensitivity read or cultural consultation on project not directly related to their job or lived experience.

"I have been asked and expected to provide sensitivity notes on [manuscripts]. With no additional compensation, of course. None of my (white, and queer) colleagues have been ever expected to do that. If I don't provide notes, often no sensitivity reader will be hired at all."

"My supervisor also has a tendency to assume interest based on racial and ethnic identity. For example, even though I've expressed on several different occasions that I am not interested in books about transatlantic slavery, my supervisor insists on making me read proposals or speak about a proposal on the topic in meeting because of my 'personal background' (her words, not mine). By personal background, she means because I am Black."

"I feel like I have to expend most of my creative energy being 'extra alert' for racist & culturally insensitive details that my white coworkers almost always overlook. And even then, I start to wonder if I'm being hypersensitive, and/or if my coworkers know they can be sloppy in that regard because I will catch anything if it's 'really' racist/queerphobic/Islamophobic/in any way discriminatory (whether or not it relates to my lived experience). It's a responsibility that white people in the office are not tasked with."

TAKEAWAYS

The burden on BIPOC to educate white colleagues is an onerous task that contributes to burnout. Many participants emphasized how much time and energy they spend on educating and providing resources to white colleagues. Not only does this unpaid labor take time away from BIPOC employees' own pursuits and career advancement, but it sometimes results in repercussions.

DIVERSITY COMMITTEES

Many publishing companies have created diversity committees in recent years. We wanted to know how many of them were initiated by upper management/HR; how many were grassroots, staff-created initiatives; what, if any, were the differences between the two approaches; and how these committees have been received by BIPOC employees.

STAFF-INITIATED

Work at companies with informal, staff-created diversity committees.

Of those participants, almost half feel these employee-led committees are not very or not at all effective.

51.4%

Did not have a staff-led committee.

30.5%

Were unsure if their company had a staff-led committee.

18.1%

UPPER MANAGEMENT/HR

Work at companies with formal, corporate-led diversity committees.

Of those participants, just over half of them feel these corporate-led diversity committees are not very or not at all effective.

55.8%

Did not have an upper-management or HR-led committee.

29.8%

Were unsure if their company had a upper-management or HR-led committee.

14.4%

STAFF-LED DIVERSITY COMMITTEES

CORPORATE/HR-LED DIVERSITY COMMITTEES

"Entry-level and mid-level employees are always the ones participating. Real change starts at the top and trickles down."

"Some of the Diversity and Inclusion committees are [led] by white people in very high up positions. The POC in the room don't seem comfortable truly expressing themselves with this dynamic, but the white people in the room certainly do."

"I feel like these initiatives only go so far. We can't have serious discussions where we can confront the problematic practices, statements, books, or policies without appearing angry, aggressive, or accusatory."

"At Diversity & Inclusion meetings, white editors declared they didn't want to describe books as 'diverse' because it was offensive; white female editors have told me race is my problem and feminism is [theirs] (although I'm a woman and consider myself an intersectional feminist)."

"We've created resources that have been lauded by corporate as great success towards 'solving' diversity and inclusion issues; however, we never receive individual praise or any real incentive towards continuing our work, even though it benefits the entire company."

"These initiatives sometimes feel sanitized and self congratulatory. There's a focus on all the good we are doing without the hard reflection on what we're not doing that we should, and what we are doing that we shouldn't. Celebrating the victories shouldn't come at the expense of realizing how far we still need to go both as a company and with the books we publish."

"The weight of these [diversity] initiatives fell primarily to marginalized editorial staff members. . . . When we burnt out on having the capacity to support this additional work, the programming basically disappeared."

TAKEAWAYS

Diversity committees, regardless of whether they are informal or formal, initiated by junior staff or upper management, led by BIPOC or white colleagues, all seem to encounter problems. The pattern for informal/staff-led initiatives is that limited engagement from upper management means limited progress; for formal committees led by upper management, white colleagues can sometimes become too congratulatory and silence colleagues of color. We observe that D&I initiatives are often treated as extracurricular and separate from the business, rather than as tools to inform and uplift the business.

- White colleagues need to do the inner work necessary to not perpetuate white supremacy when they are involved in D&I work. Examine and be thoughtful about the power dynamics in any D&I initiative. Some kind of power dynamic, both hierarchically (title, experience) and racially, will always be present in the room. Questions to ask yourself:

    - What does accountability look like?

    - How can you step up and do some heavy lifting without silencing or stepping over your colleagues of color?

- Upper management needs to make the conversations happening in D&I initiatives a part of their regular business and staff meetings. Set an expectation for every employee to be involved in D&I efforts.

- White colleagues at all levels need to understand that addressing racial inequities in the workplace is part of their jobs. The burden should not be placed entirely on BIPOC.

Additional Resources:
- "Accomplices Not Allies" by Indigenous Action, *Indigenous Action*

HUMAN RESOURCES

Common advice in a corporate setting is to take any concerns to HR. We asked participants to share whether they feel this is an option for them, and the majority of participants indicated that they do not consider HR to be a resource.

87%
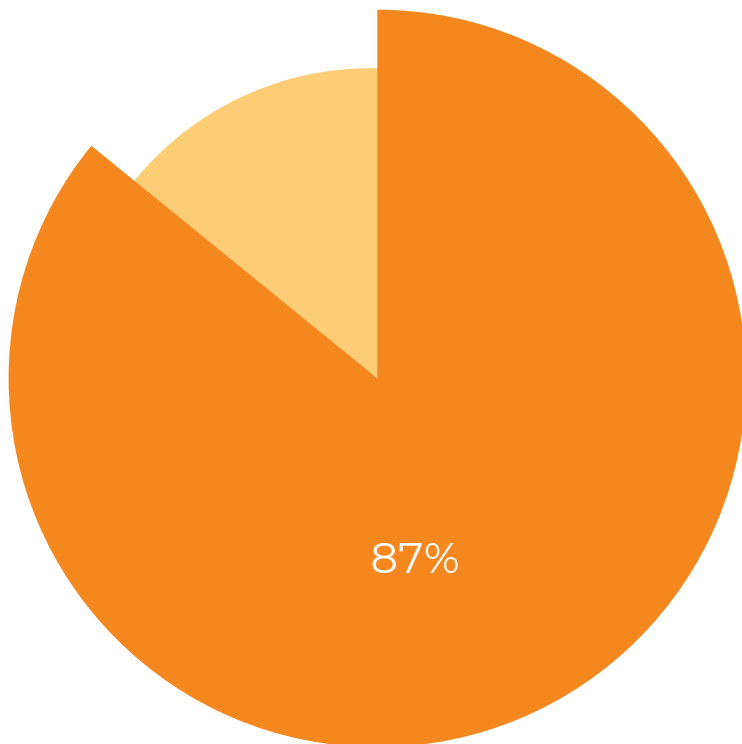
87% of participants who said they have experienced racism or microaggressions in the workplace.

"The way the group operated was toxic, so telling HR would definitely bring some kind of reprisal. What would telling them do anyway? HR is wholly inadequate to deal with these issues."

"It was suggested that I talk to HR by my immediate supervisor, even though she thought I might be 'too angry' to do so. Eventually she was able to understand that WOC who speak up about such issues to HR (especially when HR leadership is overwhelmingly white) see their careers suffer and that it was too much of a professional risk to do so."

HUMAN RESOURCES

We asked the participants who shared experiences of racism and microaggressions whether they reported any of these incidents to HR. Only 24% had, but of those participants, 69% said the results were not very or not at all affective.

76% — Did not report to HR.

"I actually brought the issue to HR and they never responded to my complaint. I didn't even receive a confirmation that they read my complaint letter."

"HR was aware of the issue that had been long standing. However, because this involved executives nothing was ever addressed. This was written about at length."

24% — Reported to HR.

13% — Company does not have an HR department.

TAKEAWAYS

Across the board, participants cited feeling unsupported on a collegial, managerial, and corporate level. White colleagues at all levels in all departments need to hold themselves accountable for upholding systemic racism; it is not wholly the responsibility of HR to address normalized racism in workplace culture. However, companies should have **corporate policies that explicitly account for racial harassment.** Racism is a systemic problem that requires structural changes.

CONTENT/BOOK PUBLISHING

Our survey questions were focused on workplace culture. We did not ask participants to discuss book content, yet the majority of our participants brought this up, which highlights how workplace culture, employee identities, and book content are all intertwined. When companies do not prioritize publishing books by, about, and for BIPOC, and when colleagues make un-challenged racist comments about creators, characters, and the market, this reveals what white employees think about their colleagues of color.

"I have been the only person, after a handful of eyes on a book, to point out an obvious racist generalization."

"In large group meeting **I've frequently heard publishers, marketers, and sales people (usually white and senior management) claim that Black people do not read (in those exact terms) and that it's not worth marketing to these niche audiences.** In working on books about race, I've also seen senior management refer to it as 'the R word' and specifically ask that the topic not be brought up in our advertising and digital marketing materials."

"When discussing a project that was about a Latino legend (by two non-Latinos), my white boss and white editor colleague suggested getting a foreword by a renowned Latino writer. I had to explain that that was effectively trying to set up a human shield where a POC would be employed to protect the reputations of two white creators."

The idea of the "white default"—in other words, the unspoken assumption that any book published will be read by a mostly white audience (and that this perceived white audience is not interested in reading stories outside of the white default)—is one of the problems that keeps the publishing industry from handling books by and about BIPOC responsibly. Many participants wrote about feeling like they are often the only person working on a book who thinks of readers of color as more than a "niche" audience, or who believes that racist generalizations are a major issue and must be avoided not because of potetial PR backlash, but **because they cause harm to readers.**

"I feel that, when **we're making editorial decisions, the assumption about potential readers is always a white middle-class reader;** we don't make editorial decisions that value diversity, and we don't give those books support. Books are considered 'add-ons,' things that make our list more colorful."

"I've had meetings and [debated] books with racist/culturally insensitive material with white people who don't think these details are a 'big deal' or that I/other coworkers are overreacting. I've had my queries about potentially harmful material in books be ignored by managers and directors (whose responsibility it should be to investigate), unless I am willing to do the work of researching/reading the text for racist details myself."

"I can't say I've experienced racism but [I've] certainly been witness to insensitive and ignorant remarks. I worked on a Spanish translation of a book and noticed that one of the pages had been left in English. I pointed out the error and it took some convincing to fix. A colleague asked 'if it really mattered' which made me wonder how much the publishing industry, as a whole, respects readers of color."

CONTENT/BOOK PUBLISHING

"I have been told, after trying to more accurately portray two problematic historical figures, that their contributions outweighed their problems, so their racism shouldn't be a focus."

TAKEAWAYS

The survey responses make clear that many white employees don't take the possible reactions of readers of color into account when they are editing, designing, marketing and selling books, because of an assumption, conscious or not, that anyone who reads the book will be white. Participants shared many stories about how, when confronted about racially insensitive material in a book or problematic packaging, white colleagues saw these issues as "not a big enough deal" to fix, or else put the burden of fixing that problematic content on their colleagues of color.

The idea that BIPOC "don't read," or that white audiences will not read stories about BIPOC as widely continues to be pervasive in the publishing industry sometimes coded in the terms "niche," "institutional, "not universal" or "not commercial." Often publishing employees of color—and we are also, of course, readers of color!—are the only ones on a team to bring up problematic content in a book, or to argue for diverse books to receive more marketing dollars—if we feel secure enough in our jobs to speak up at all, which is often not the case.

Additional Resources:
- *Reading While White*
- *American Indians in Children's Literature*
- *The Brown Bookshelf*
- *The BIPOC Bookshelf*
- *DiverseBookFinder*
- *We Need Diverse Books*

CAREER/RETENTION

LACK OF RECOGNITION

Many participants said they have to work harder than their white colleagues to receive the same recognition and advancement. This kind of situation for BIPOC employees sometimes leads to doubt, devaluing, and questioning whether we were hired to check off a diversity box for our employer.

Have wondered if they were a "diversity hire". — **51%**

Have had it implied by others that they were a "diversity hire". — **25%**
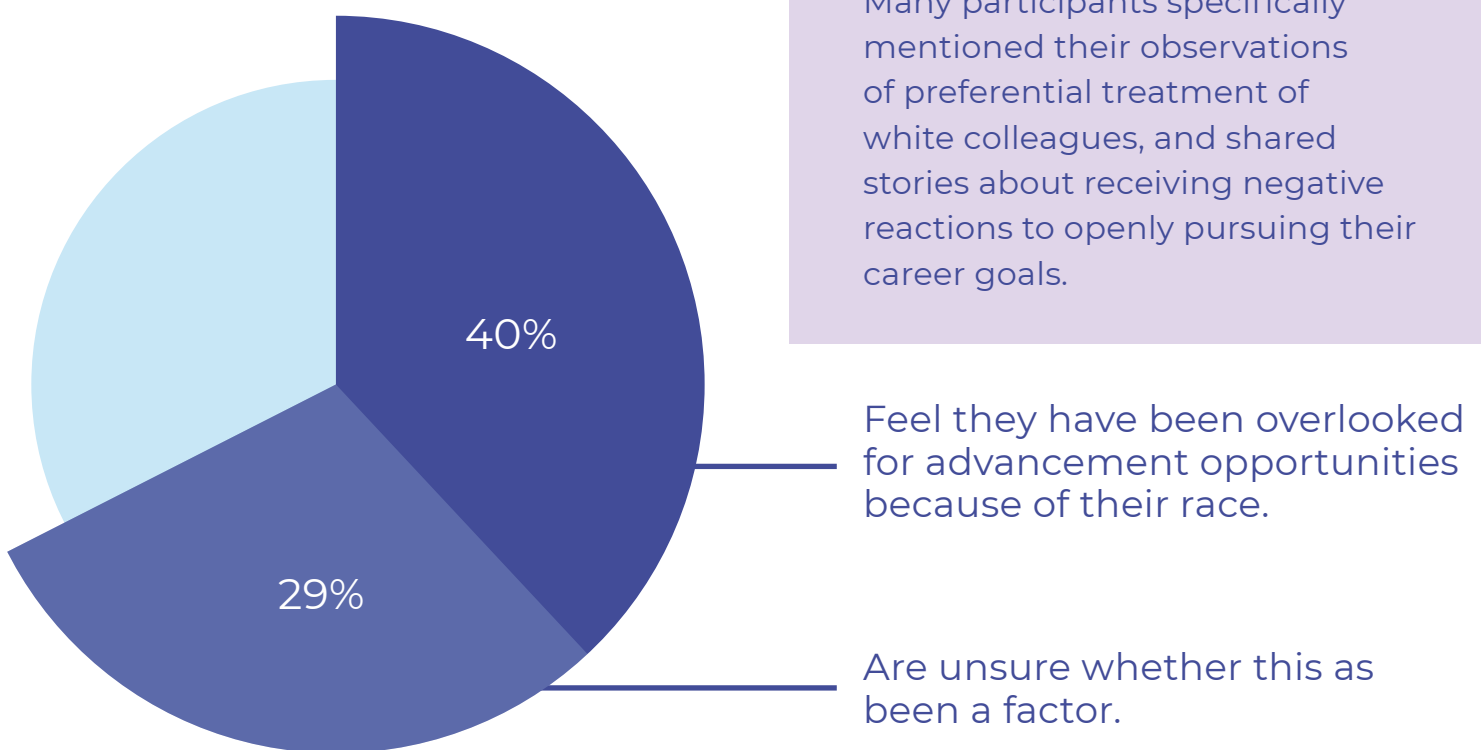
Were explicitly told that they were a diversity hire. — **5%**
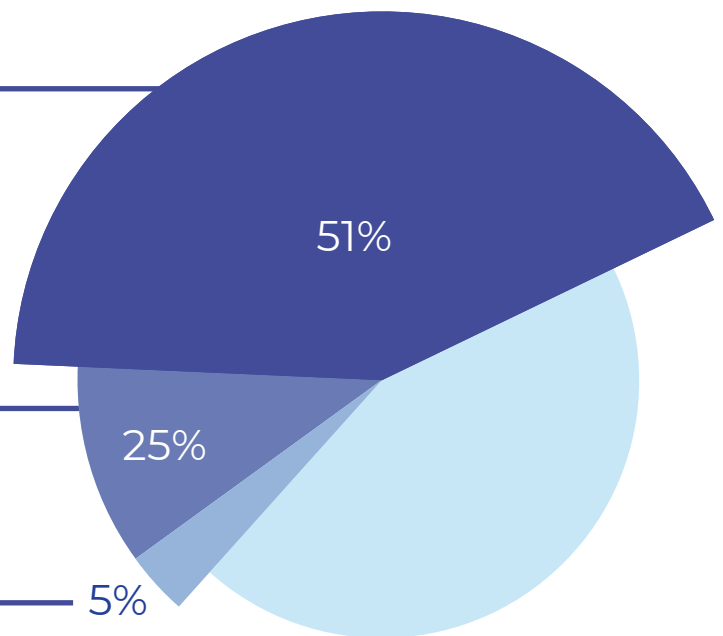
"It's been implied that I was given my position because it would look good for the company because of the 'diversity trend."

LACK OF RECOGNITION

"When I was hiring an assistant at an old job, I let the HR manager, a Black woman, know that I'd love to meet great diverse candidates. She said that it was so great that I was thinking about that, as other hiring managers didn't think about diversity, 'they just wanted the best person for the job,' fully implying that the two things were mutually exclusive. I had to tell her that I did not believe those things to be mutually exclusive and had understood that that was why I had my job. She didn't have a response."

Many participants specifically mentioned their observations of preferential treatment of white colleagues, and shared stories about receiving negative reactions to openly pursuing their career goals.

40% Feel they have been overlooked for advancement opportunities because of their race.

29% Are unsure whether this as been a factor.

"I'm not sure if this is due to racism, but I wish to note that **the white man who was hired the same day as me was promoted much more quickly than I was**, and stopped assisting long before I did. When I left the company, he was an Executive Editor and I was still an Editor. Also, a white woman who was hired after me was a Senior Editor when I left. I was never promoted to Senior Editor. Both these people were given titles by big name authors. I was never just handed a big author. Even when I had already worked with the author in an assistant capacity."

"During instances where I have spoken out about blatant personal mistreatment or ridiculous workload or asked for promotions, defying some stereotypical ideas of demure, petite and expressionless Asian girls I suppose, I've been punished quite harshly."

LACK OF RECOGNITION

We didn't specifically ask participants about pay, but many participants brought up salary as a significant barrier to entry and factor in job satisfaction/retention. According to Glassdoor in 2018 (at the time of the survey), the high end of an entry-level assistant salary at a Big 5 publisher was $39,000. Macmillan announced in September 2020 that they are raising entry-level salaries to $42,000 pre-tax, making them the highest-paying publisher. The MIT Living Wage Calculator estimates $59,000 as a living wage for a single adult with no children in New York in 2020.

"People of color don't usually have the generational wealth or financial support/security that our white peers have. Living in NYC with its high cost of living on a low starting salary isn't easy and makes it almost impossible if you add the burden of student loans and personal debts or have children or other family members to support. We need a living wage that's based on the realities of living in NYC. **POC seek financial security and a salary that low just pushes us to look at other better-paying industries.**"

"My salary, I found out [during a company evaluation], was $20k less than my colleagues hired at the same time for the same position. I was the only female POC in our group at that salary. It was remedied, I'm happy to report, but **I'd been at that unfair wage, qualifying for government assistance for my family while working at a multi-million-dollar publishing house, for over five years by that point.**"

"My pay is less than minimum wage. I can't afford it. I would love to stay, just to acquire more #ownvoices books, but I know that realistically I can't."

LACK OF RECOGNITION

10% of participants at the time of survey had left publishing.

"I feel like I'm yelling into a void whenever this comes up, but it really starts with base pay, or else there's very little hope for people of color and those from lower-income background to get in the door. Adding to that, I've seen people mention on Twitter the need for more remote employment. Moving to NYC is hard, expensive, and sometimes people don't have to uproot their lives. I think these changes, which of course are larger scale, will certainly open the door for more diverse candidates."

"I can't stress the importance of entry-level salaries enough. Even with the improvements we've seen in the last few years, salaries are still too low. Publishing is still a 'luxury' job for people who can afford it because they have support from families or partners (financially, or in the form of housing). We need to reconsider the entire financial models of publishing houses to figure out ways to make it possible for all people who care about books to find work and thrive."

"I moved to a publishing-adjacent industry for better advancement and more pay. Pro tip: Racism and gender-based prejudice happen everywhere, but it's much easier to deal with hegemonic bs when you know you're being paid fairly for your skills and expertise."

TAKEAWAYS

Publishing is notoriously low-paying and considered a "luxury job," which creates a significant barrier to entry. In addition to this, BIPOC employees commonly feel we must work harder to get the same level of recognition, are often expected to provide unpaid additional labor, and have specifically stated that better pay would be an incentive to stay in publishing.
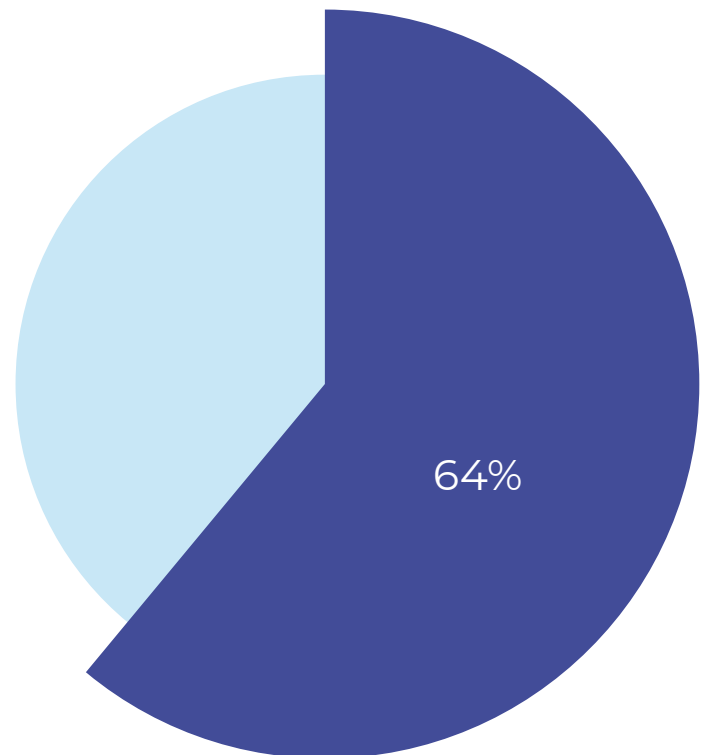
MENTORSHIP

Mentorship is considered a resource to guide career advancement, so we were interested in examining what role mentorship—as both protege and mentor—plays for BIPOC employees.

"One of the first editors I assisted (a white woman) did a great job of giving me room to exercise my agency as a junior employee. She not only allowed me to get more involved with books by diverse authors I was excited about, she also pushed me to develop editorially by assigning me hands-on work that some assistants don't get to do until they become associate editors—and thiswork led directly to my promotion.

"She listened to me when I brought up things I found problematic in manuscripts from her authors, even close to the release date. When she was leaving the company, she took the time to give me blunt, honest, practical feedback about my work and what I needed to do to advance. She kept in touch once she left the company. She checked in with me when I went radio silent.

"It's important to note that the allies I've listed here are not perfect. In some cases, these same people committed microaggressions (or macroaggressions) I've never told them about. But to me, in these particular instances, their actions spoke louder than words. They centered me, my wellbeing, and my development. They saw my value and responded by giving me the opportunity to shine."

64% of participants said they have a mentor, and many cited that active encouragement and support from mentors is a key component of their overall job satisfaction.

64%

MENTORSHIP

"My mentor feels like the only person in a senior position who acknowledges bigotry."

"Being mentored by a wonderful POC in the office made me feel comfortable enough to wear my native dress to work and has allowed me to see ways in which I can approach difficult conversations. I would be so much less comfortable and would be less myself at work had it not been for them."

Of the 64% of participants who said they have a mentor, only half said one or more of their mentors was BIPOC. Some shared that this resulted in not receiving the full benefits of mentorship, while a few said it actually negatively impacted them.

"My [white, female] mentor could not relate to my issues (working two jobs, not feeling heard or represented)."

"I haven't been mentored by a POC in publishing as most of my experience has been at a very white, corporate imprint. It was honestly great to have multiple white women who would come to my aid, but I was very careful about how I presented any issues or questions."

"Some white male publishing mentors I have had felt the need to advertise their mentorship or to take credit for my successes."

MENTORSHIP

While many specifically seek out BIPOC mentorship, the disproportionately low number of BIPOC in senior-level positions leads to extremely high demand.

"The unfortunate truth is that there simply aren't enough senior-level people of color to meet the incredible need for mentoring the young. I have had a very difficult time finding mentors of color because the same few people are simply inundated with requests."

"I formally and informally mentor between one to two dozen POC in publishing. I want them to know that they have someone (a POC in a leadership role) in the business to talk to about navigating personal and professional questions. I rely on them, too, for the honest and insightful conversations about race in the workplace, which is often not possible with senior white colleagues.

"I also am mentored by many colleagues of color and depend on them a great deal, both for strategic guidance and for assistance in managing the stress of doing this work. (And to be clear, the work is often very enjoyable and rewarding, but since we're talking about racism in the industry . . . that part is not enjoyable or rewarding!).

"Both my mentor colleagues and mentees have taught me a great deal, and help me grow in an aspect of my work that is otherwise not supported with programming/teaching in the work spaces I've been in."

TAKEAWAYS

Mentorship, particularly by BIPOC colleagues, was cited as critical to retention for participants. However, due to the disproportionate amount of BIPOC in publishing there are limited mentors and high demand for those who have the time and energy.

We were also struck by the fact that 31% of participants who have been working full-time in publishing for less than five years are already mentors—and half of them do not have a BIPOC mentor themselves. We feel it is important to call out that these BIPOC who have been in publishing less than five years are already drawing on their experiences to support others, despite not having that same support themselves.

Additional Resources:
- Representation Matters
- We Need Diverse Books mentorship program
- Lee & Low Diversity Baseline Study

TAKE ACTION NOW

The goal of publishing this survey, conducted in 2018, was to raise awareness and amplify dialogue about racism in publishing. Many publishers are having these conversations now, and we hope this information will help supplement the conversations and turn them into actionable items. Our recommendations below can be employed by everyone, but we wrote them specifically with our white colleagues in mind. **One of the most frequently recurring comments in our survey was that the additional labor expected of BIPOC employees is not also expected of white employees. That needs to change.**

If you are a white employee in publishing, please review the list below for ways to be an anti-racist accomplice. The recommendations in this list were provided by survey participants as well as members of the POC in Pub and Latinx in Pub planning committees.
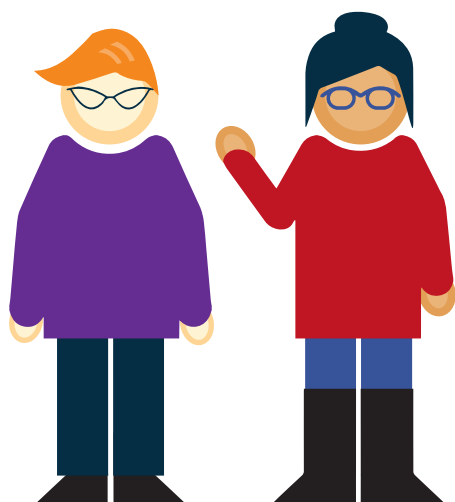
It is crucial to understand that these changes will not happen overnight. Dismantling racism in publishing requires your conscious, active involvement **for the rest of your career.**

Amplify the dialogue:

We cannot progress as an industry if we and our white colleagues are uncomfortable or defensive having conversations about race. One of the most important things that you can do as a white ally is amplify the dialogue.

- **Share this research with your white colleagues.** If you have access to managers, executive-level leadership, or your company's president or CEO, share our survey results, resources, and recommendations with them.

- It's important to note how frequently the power of being seen and heard came up in our survey. We cannot cover every possible scenario in which you will witness microaggressions, but our general rules of thumb are:

  - If you witness a microaggression related to book content, speak up immediately. Use your privilege to call it out in the moment so the burden doesn't fall on your BIPOC colleagues to put themselves in jeopardy. Speaking up also sets a precedent for your fellow colleagues and normalizes addressing racism. BIPOC should not be expected to be the only ones to call out problems, but we should feel safe to do so if/when we want to. (From one of the survey responses: "I have a white male colleague who is aware of his privilege and sway in decision-making, and he makes a point to chime in with his support when I present something that is important to me—whether over email or in person. He is also willing to pick up a difficult conversation if he senses I am losing energy or if he recognizes his words may carry more weight.")

  - If you witness a microaggression against a BIPOC employee, and are unsure how to diffuse the situation in the moment, make sure to reach out to them privately afterwards to check if they are okay, offer to talk with the microaggressor (or to identify the best person to do so), and get their consent to do so. If they do not wish you to do this, listen and validate their concerns.

- Volunteer your time with diversity-focused organizations.

Self-educate:

- Ask your manager if your company can pay for you to take anti-racist training. We recommend the "Undoing Racism" workshop run by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond.

- Read anti-racist literature widely and consistently (see our recommended books, e-newsletters, journals, and podcasts further down).

- Join a diversity-focused book club or article club. If you can't find one, start one.

Work toward structural change within your workplace:

- Join your company's Diversity Committee. If no such committee exists, start one.

- If your company has an HR department, ask what procedures they have in place for dealing with racial harassment. One participant said that companies need to be "able to address these things in ways that preserve the plaintiff's identity. They also need to actually enact consequences for such behavior." Another suggested "HR check-ins with employees who have reported specific conflicts or pervasive discrimination."

- Ask your manager what initiatives your company has in place for diversifying and retaining staff. Ask for details about these initiatives to be given in writing.

Contribute to the hiring and retention of BIPOC employees:

- Offer to be a reference for BIPOC interns and colleagues looking for work.

- Many jobs in publishing are filled through nepotism, a racist system that perpetuates disproportionately hiring white employees. Offer informational interviews to BIPOC interested in breaking into publishing. Put them in touch with colleagues at other houses and offer to be an internal reference should a position open up at your company.

- Volunteer for industry mentorship programs like Representation Matters.

Amplify the dialogue:

Refer to all recommendations listed in previous section, and also . . .

- Create a system for receiving feedback about racism and microaggressions without repercussion to the speaker.

  - As one participant said,"LISTEN to your employees from marginalized backgrounds—even when you haven't asked for their opinion, even when the way they communicate doesn't feel professional or 'articulate,' even when the way they work conflicts with your working style, even when they challenge you to think differently or see things from a different perspective, even if they're getting emotional as they say it, even if you think it's too soon for them to be voicing their opinion or asking for an opportunity, even if they're not talking about diversity, even if they're not talking about their lived experience, even if they're bringing it up more than once/after a decision has been made, even if this is the way it's always been done—and even if you think they're wrong."

- Request spot bonuses for your BIPOC direct reports who have been doing additional unpaid labor, and do not assume your BIPOC colleagues have interest or expertise in content relating to aspect(s) of their identity.

- Many companies now budget for sensitivity reads (also known as authenticity reads, cultural consultations, expert reads, etc.). If your company does not have a database or formal process for this, start one.

- If you receive diversity-related feedback on a project, prioritize responding to that feedback and fixing any issues, and do the work yourself without asking for additional input/labor from BIPOC employees.

  - "When we had the design meeting for the cover of a book by a Black man about a Black male protagonist, the initial art suggestions were pieces by white men. I suggested we keep the art in-community instead, and the white production manager agreed that we should and did research into Black illustrators on her own **without asking me for additional input/labor.**"

- Create a dedicated section in performance reviews to discuss how your direct reports have made commitments to diversity in their hiring practices and daily work.

- Ask your peers and direct reports to write a performance review of your work around anti-racism.

- Lead by example. Your actions toward making your work and your workplace more diverse and inclusive signal to other employees and potential hires that anti-racism is an **expectation of the job.**

  - "While discussing the potential acquisition of a book by a POC, a comment was made that 'we already have X' (X being another author of the same background). A (white) manager stepped in and asked, 'How many books do we have about sad white girls, and how often do we compare them and say there are too many?' I really, really appreciated this, because it's not something I felt like I could say myself (and it made people in the room rethink their comments)."

  - "Considering cultural competency a required job duty and not a 'pleasant bonus' of publishing staff members (especially when they're white) is crucial; and when staff members do not express competency and/or enact harm, they must be held accountable as they would with any other job responsibility not being met. The bar needs to be higher for white people in publishing, and there needs to be real consequences."

  - "A white woman who managed all the social media for a division of a company I used to work for went out of her way, day in and day out, to give a platform to diverse voices."

  - "A non-POC/Native colleague during her own meeting with executive level management brought in business cases for diversity and mapped out infographics explaining the relationship between inclusion and diversity, working really hard to help them understand the relationship and importance in the company, and my experiences."

Contribute to the hiring and retention of BIPOC employees:

- Offer remote positions for jobs and internships.

- When you make an internship offer, let prospective interns know about the We Need Diverse Books internship grant.

- When job positions open up at your company, make sure that BIPOC candidates are being considered --set a measurable goal to interview three BIPOC candidates for every white candidate.

- Eliminate undergraduate degrees as a requirement.

- One participant suggests having "rotating leads on routine department meetings [to] help empower junior and new employees to 'come to the table,' and give them much needed, low-stakes practice at speaking and leading in meetings."

- Share your salary and promotion schedule with your direct reports and proteges (the people you mentor). It is illegal for employers to prohibit this.

- Provide formal mentorship to junior employees.

- Work with your direct reports on laying out a clear and measurable promotion schedule. Consult with managers in similar departments to ensure there is equitable promotion across the board.

Additional suggestions if you work in HR:

- Review exit interviews with BIPOC employees from the past few years, with an eye towards retention of future BIPOC employees.

- Conduct anonymous employee surveys around bias and inclusion.

- Create corporate policies that explicitly account for racial harassment (in the way that there are policies that prohibit sexual harassment) and establish a code of conduct. Make this information easily accessible and regularly shared. Ensure there is a process in place for those who are reporting racist incidents and be clear about the process throughout the company.

Refer to all recommendations listed in previous sections, and also . . .

- Make a public statement declaring your company's commitment to hiring and retaining BIPOC employees and laying out quantifiable action steps you plan to take.

- Implement mandatory and ongoing anti-racist training for all employees. We recommend the "Undoing Racism" workshop run by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond as a starting point.

- Make it mandatory for managers to create a dedicated section in performance reviews to discuss how employees make commitments to diversity in their hiring practices and daily work.

- One of our participants suggested making "diversifying your staff and your books a financial commitment. Give bonuses to people who make model strides in hiring, acquiring, and marketing diversely."

- Make it a priority to hire BIPOC at the top.

- Raise entry-level salaries. We encourage following Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's example and setting the minimum at $52,000 or higher (according to Glassdoor, salaries for a congressional staff assistant ordinarily range from $28,000 to $37,000). As noted earlier MIT Living Wage calculator estimates $59,000 as the living wage for a single adult living in NY in 2020.

RESOURCES

ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS

- People's Institute for Survival and Beyond
- Anti-Racist Alliance (NYC-based offshoot of PISAB)
- Raising Race Conscious Children
- The Human Root workshop
- Teaching Tolerance
- We Need Diverse Books
- The Children's Book Council diversity initiative
- Representation Matters editorial mentorship program
- We Need Diverse Books mentorship program
- We Need Diverse Books internship grant

STATISTICS

- The PW Publishing Industry Salary Survey, 2019
- The PW Publishing Industry Salary Survey, 2018
- Lee and Low Diversity Baseline Study, 2015
- Lee and Low Diversity Baseline Study, 2019

BOOKS

- *How to Be Less Stupid About Race* by Crystal Marie Fleming

- *Let Them See You: The Guide for Leveraging Your Diversity at Work* by Porter Braswell

- *This Book is Anti-Racist* by Tiffany Jewell

- *Me and White Supremacy* by Layla F. Saad

- *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* by Robin DiAngelo

- *How to Be An Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi

- *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* by Beverly Daniel Tatum

- *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo

- *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights* by Kenji Yoshino

VIDEOS

- The Inner Work Dismantling White Supremacy –All the Damn Time (Do the Heart Work)

- Seeing White Fragility (RISE District)

- How Microaggressions are Like Mosquito Bites (Fusion Comedy)

- "Names That Are Unfamiliar to You Aren't 'Hard,' They're 'Unpracticed'" by N'Jameh Camara, Teen Vogue

- "Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex" by Indigenous Action, Indigenous Action

- "Is Staff Diversity Training Worth It?" by Jason Low, Lee & Low blog

- "How 10 Women of Color Actually Feel About Working in Book Publishing" by Wendy Lu, Bustle

- "Examples of Racial Microaggressions" by University of Minnesota, adapted from "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice" (American Psychologist)

- "On Being Excluded: Testimonies by People of Color in Scholarly Publishing" by Scholarly Kitchen, The Scholarly Kitchen

- "On Being Excluded: Testimonies by People of Color in Scholarly Publishing, Part II" by Scholarly Kitchen, The Scholarly Kitchen

- "Nothing to add: A Challenge to White Silence in Racial Discussions" by Robin DiAngelo

- "Confronting racism is not about the needs and feelings of white people" by Ijeoma Oluo, The Guardian

- "A Guide to Responding to Microaggressions" by Kevin L. Nadal

Do you know of a resource or initiative that you would like to add to this list? Send us a request to include it to pocinpub@gmail.com.