

# ELEPHANT ON MAD AVE.



# ARE GENDER BIAS AND SEXISM A THING OF THE PAST IN ADLAND?

Given recent news and bad behavior coming from agencies and holding companies, widespread debate has ensued whether these are “one-off” occurrences or evidence of pervasive bias. The 3% Movement invited our community to share their experiences and stories via our “Elephant on Madison Avenue”\* survey. Nearly 600 women told us in excruciating detail what it is like to be a woman in advertising.

**The results speak for themselves.**

**\*This survey was inspired by the [Elephantinthevalley.com](http://Elephantinthevalley.com), a study conducted in 2015 to highlight gender bias in Silicon Valley. We'd like to thank the authors of that report for sharing their survey instrument and results.**

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# THE DAYS OF MAD MEN ARE ALIVE AND WELL

Our research revealed numerous ways in which ad women were told a powerful message: **You Are Other.**

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## “BOYS WILL BE BOYS”

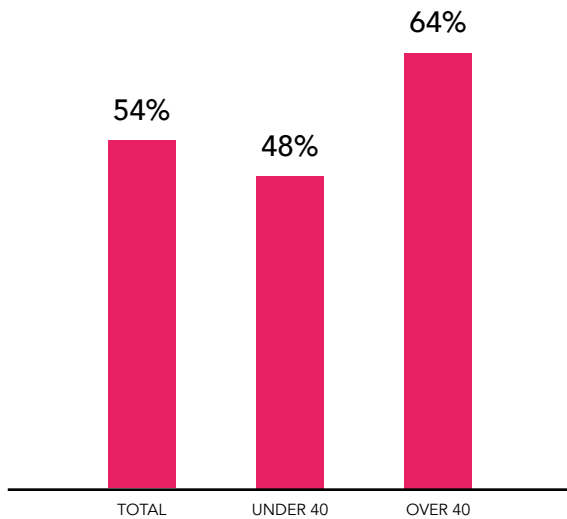
For years we have dismissed inappropriate sexist behavior in our industry as “boys will be boys,” but in truth the implications for women are profound. A majority of respondents to our survey had experienced unwanted sexual advances in their career that have impeded their feelings of safety and blurred appropriate boundaries with co-workers and clients.



**54%**

**have been subjected  
to unwanted sexual  
advances in the  
course of their career**

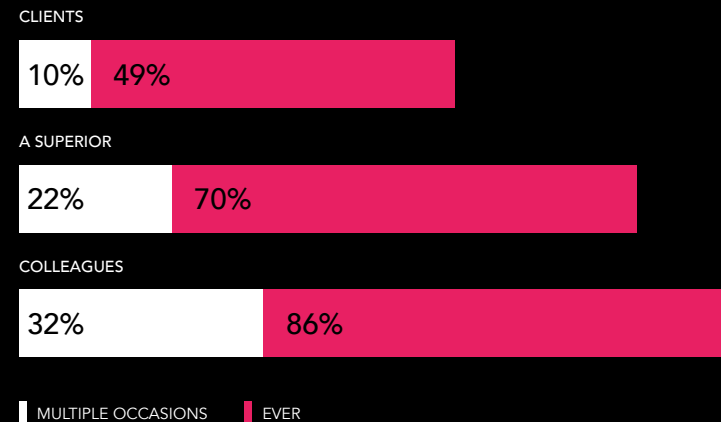
54% of our respondents have been subjected to an unwanted sexual advance during the course of their career. Among women who are 40 or older, 64% reported they had been subjected to unwanted sexual advances vs. 48% of those under 40. We are not sure whether those over 40 have just had more opportunities to be exposed to men behaving badly given their years in the industry, or if we are seeing a genuine improvement in the industry. Regardless, the numbers are still high, but we now have a benchmark with which to compare over time.



Percentage of ad women who have been subjected to an unwanted sexual advance

For those who had experienced unwanted sexual advances, the perpetrators were coworkers and these were not necessarily one-off incidents.

86% received an unwanted advance from a colleague (with 1 in 3 receiving multiple advances), 70% from a superior (1 in 5 multiple times) and 49% from a client (1 in 10 multiple times). Although many agencies claim to have a zero tolerance policy for sexual harassment, most survey respondents who experienced harassment shared that it happened multiple times. Either the policies are not being enforced, or, as we see below, women are not reporting these incidents to their human resources departments.



Frequency of sexual advances by perpetrator (among those who had been subjected to an unwanted advance)



“

I've been sexually harassed at four LA agencies and was fired at one prominent agency for not complying to the advances of the CD and Account Services Director.

”

“

A global CCO grabbed my ass after an event. When I told him to get his hands off me he told me I was asking for it by wearing leather pants.

”

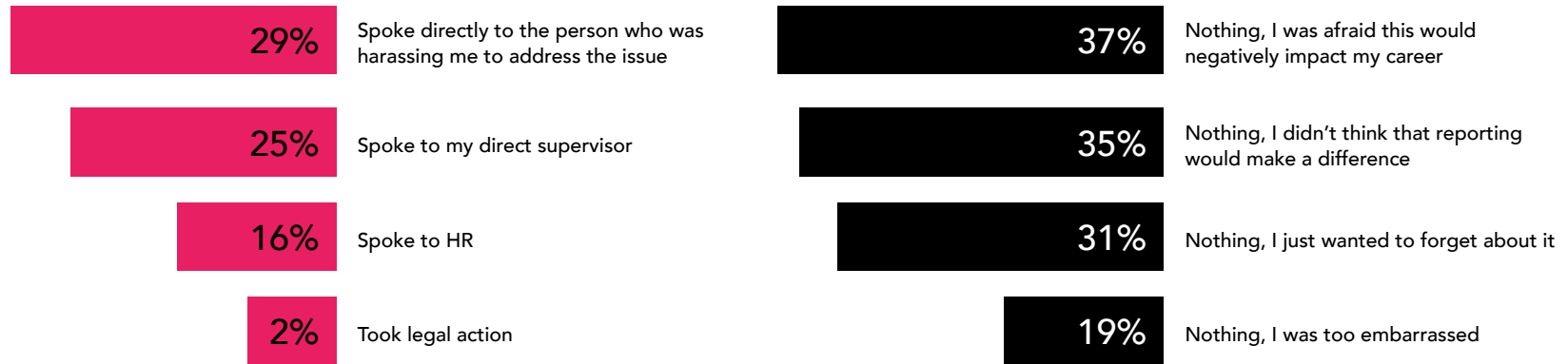
“

I was propositioned not once but twice to go to bed with the CMO of a major Fortune 500 company. After I said no twice, we lost the business the following month.

”

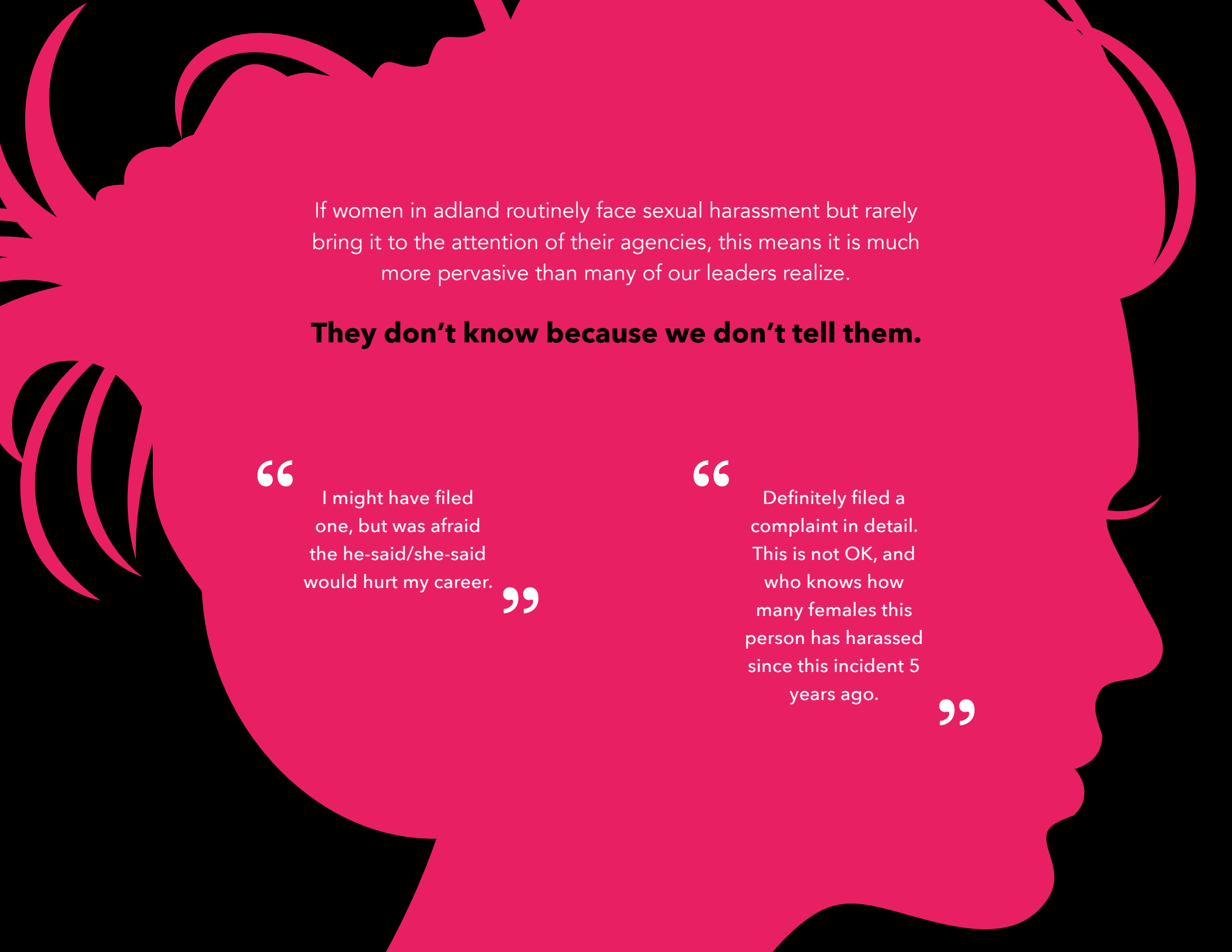
Among those women who had been subjected to an unwanted advance, the majority did not take action.

### Actions taken after experiencing unwanted advance



In general women who had received unwanted advances were not happy with the course of action that they took. **51% were not satisfied with their own course of action.** Only a fraction of women spoke to someone within their company. **Among those who did speak up, 2 in 3 were not satisfied with the course of action the company took.**

The most cited reasons for not taking actions were concerns about that it would impact their career, concerns that it would not make a difference, wanting to forget about the incident(ces), or being embarrassed by the experience. Among those who did take action, the most common behaviors were confronting the person who was making the unwanted advance and speaking to a direct supervisor. Only 16% spoke to HR and 2% (1 in 50!) took legal action. Worst of all, 1 in 5 (21%) ad women have been afraid for their personal safety based on a work-related circumstance.



If women in adland routinely face sexual harassment but rarely bring it to the attention of their agencies, this means it is much more pervasive than many of our leaders realize.

**They don't know because we don't tell them.**

“

I might have filed one, but was afraid the he-said/she-said would hurt my career.

”

“

Definitely filed a complaint in detail. This is not OK, and who knows how many females this person has harassed since this incident 5 years ago.

”



# HOW CAN WE SOLVE THIS TOGETHER?

## Agency Microaction

Establish an anonymous grievance system so women can report sexual harassment without the fear that they will be professionally penalized.

## Personal Microaction

Keep a record of the unwanted behavior and enlist the support of others to help you stop it.

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## TOXIC CULTURE

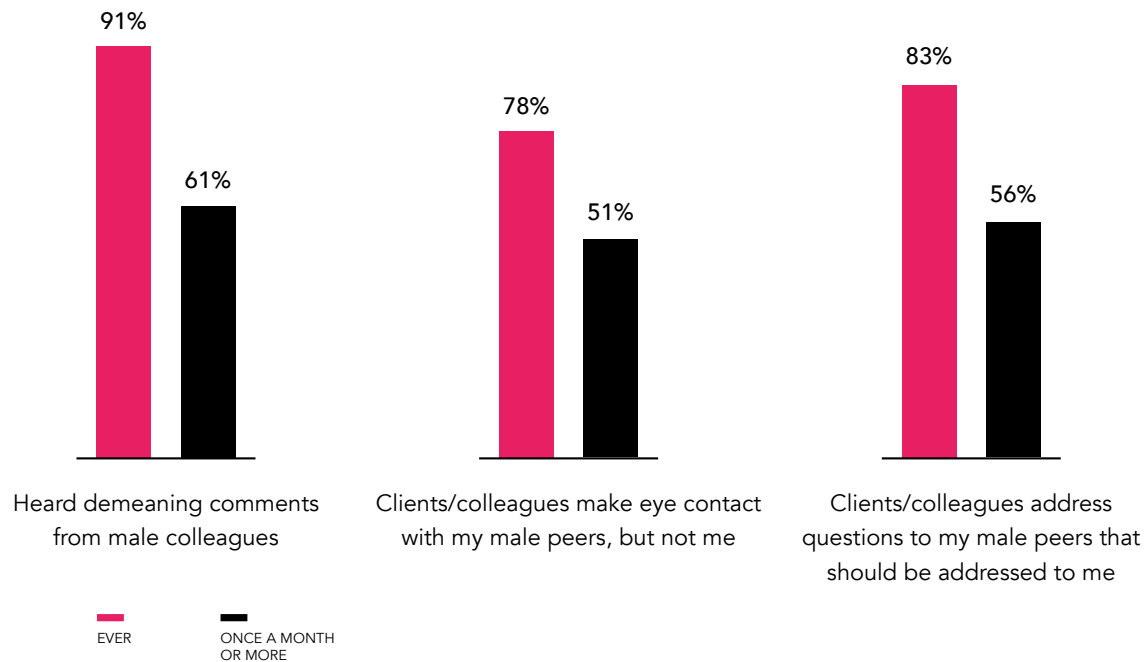
In addition to overt harassment and inappropriate behavior, the majority of ad women also reported dealing with subtle conscious and unconscious bias on a regular basis.

9 in 10 women in advertising have heard demeaning comments from male colleagues, with 6 in 10 hearing them monthly.



While some of this behavior may be conscious attempts to undermine women, in most cases it is the ongoing pervasive unconscious bias that can make it so difficult to be a woman in advertising. For example, half of respondents told us they had clients or colleagues who avoided eye contact and/or asked questions of their male peers rather than them.

### Percentage of ad women experiencing these biases



“

If by demeaning you mean hearing male colleagues talk about my breasts or how they would like to do me when they think I am out of earshot? Yes, a few times a month.

”

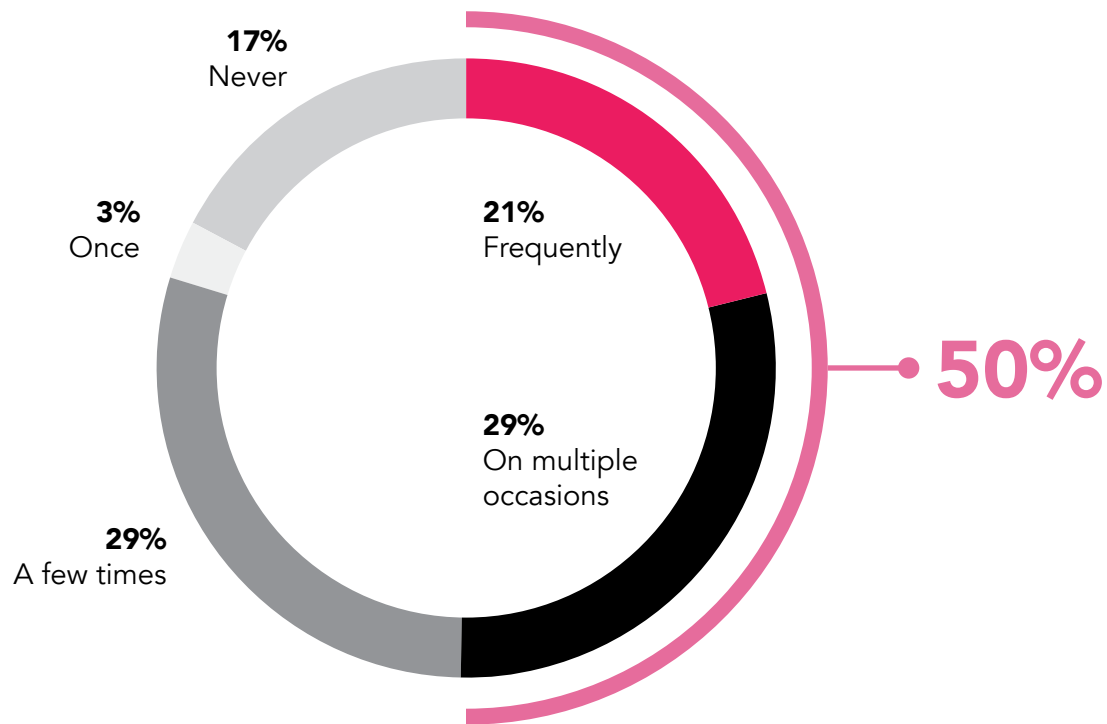
“

There are tons of demeaning comments, but not just directed at women. We are all inappropriate most of the time.

”

## AND IT'S NOT JUST THE WORKPLACE ITSELF.

83% of women in advertising have witnessed sexist behavior at off-sites or conferences, with half (50%) witnessing this on multiple occasions.



Frequency of witnessing sexist behavior at company off-sites or industry conferences

**Life in adland can be raucous and fast-paced and that means the dialogue can get pretty raunchy. As one respondent said, "We are all inappropriate sometimes." But, good fun is different than a culture infused with sexism. It's on all of us to know the difference.**

“

You get a group of advertising execs together, you get a boys' club. And dumb boy's club behavior follows.

”

“

You know the usual 'important business events' such as Golf and Strip Clubs, none of which I was ever invited to.

”

“

They think I'm the chill girl who gets it. No, I'm the normal girl who buries it.

”

# HOW CAN WE SOLVE THIS TOGETHER?

## Agency Microaction

Survey your talent and find out how pervasive the problem is; host an unconscious bias workshop; banish strip clubs, poker nights, and other “team building” events and celebrations that exclude women.

## Personal Microaction

Read up on implicit bias and stereotype threat.  
Talk with your team about key takeaways.  
Suggest an event that doesn't exclude any genders. Be willing to tell your colleagues when they've stepped over the line.

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## NO SEAT AT THE TABLE

In an era when every woman is being encouraged to “Lean In,” most are finding they aren’t even invited into the room. The majority of women in advertising feel excluded from important business events and networking opportunities. It’s tough to climb the ladder if you are not being given the same opportunities as men.



## Percentage of ad women experiencing exclusion

I have felt excluded from key social networking opportunities because of my gender



I have felt excluded from important business events because of my gender



STRONGLY AGREE    SOMEWHAT AGREE    NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE    SOMEWHAT DISAGREE    STRONGLY DISAGREE

“

I've been in many situations where I knew the male leaders were having an off-site without the female members of the leadership team. I would hear about parties, golf outings, poker nights, none of which I was ever invited to.

”

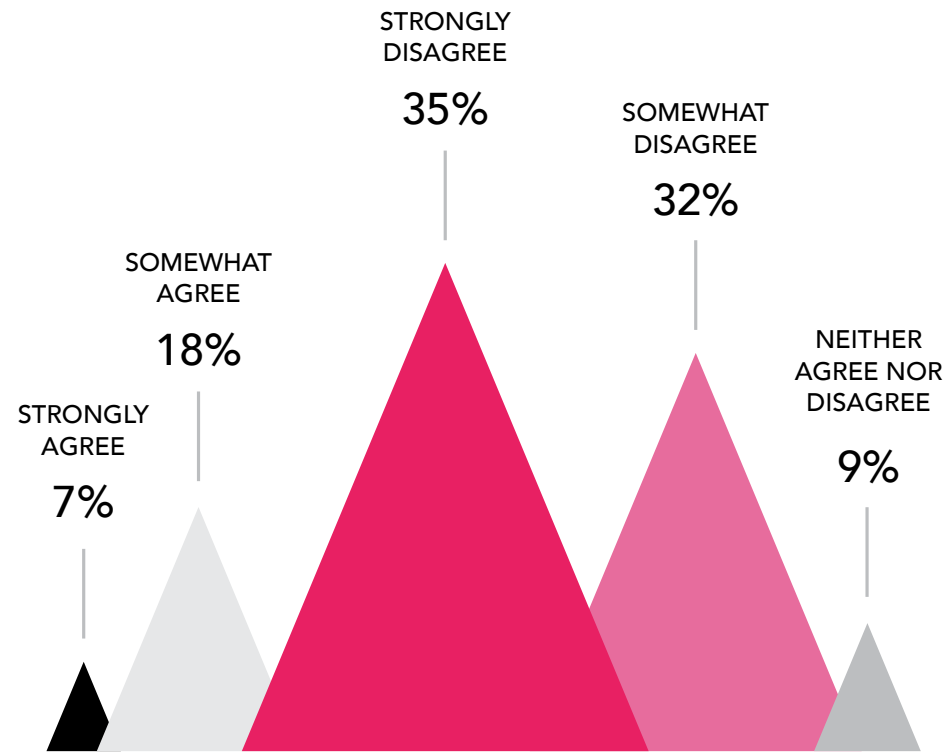
“

It seems that when it comes to new business pitches, the majority of our team that attends is male.

”



**Only 1 in 4 women in advertising feel they have had the same opportunities as men in their profession.**



Percentage agree "I have had all the same opportunities as men in my profession"

And Half agree, "I have been passed up for promotions/new opportunities because of my gender." Depressingly, 7 in 10 agree "I have had my professional influence and credibility undermined by colleagues." It's clear that there is institutional bias in terms of how women in advertising are treated.

### Percentage of ad women experiencing conscious biases

I have had my professional influence and credibility undermined by colleagues



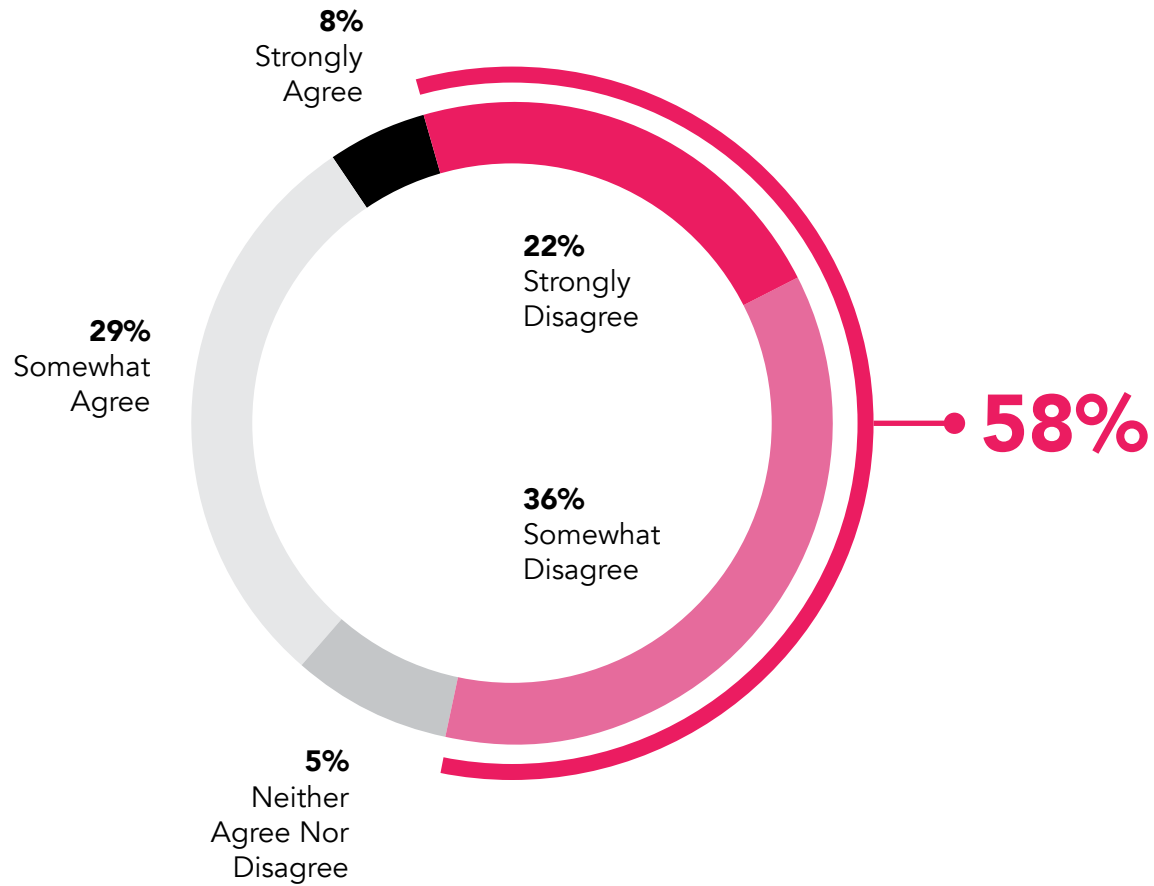
I have been passed up for promotions/new opportunities because of my gender



Legend:  
STRONGLY AGREE (dark pink)  
SOMEWHAT AGREE (light pink)  
NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE (white)  
SOMEWHAT DISAGREE (light grey)  
STRONGLY DISAGREE (dark grey)

## Two in three women in advertising don't feel like they are on equal footing with their male colleagues

Percentage agree "I am on an equal footing with my male colleagues"



# HOW CAN WE SOLVE THIS TOGETHER?

## Agency Microaction

Assess your staffing. Are there ratio imbalances? Do assessments to determine why. Establish benchmarks and be clear about your goals for gender equality at your agency. Become 3% Certified so talent and clients know you are walking the talk when it comes to creating a female-friendly workplace.

## Personal Microaction

Amplify the ideas of your female colleagues in meetings. Be sure to invite all members of the team to key events and pull more chairs up to the table. Mentor other women so they know someone has their back.

## ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

No matter how they carry themselves, ad women are told they have to change. The majority of women we surveyed got dinged for being too aggressive, too quiet and too emotional. And these are not "one off" criticisms. Many have received this feedback on multiple occasions.

On average, women 40+ were more likely to be told they were too aggressive (72% vs. 63% women under 40) and too bossy (67% vs. 54%).

Women under 40, on the other hand, were more likely to be told they were too quiet (65% vs. 48% women 40+).



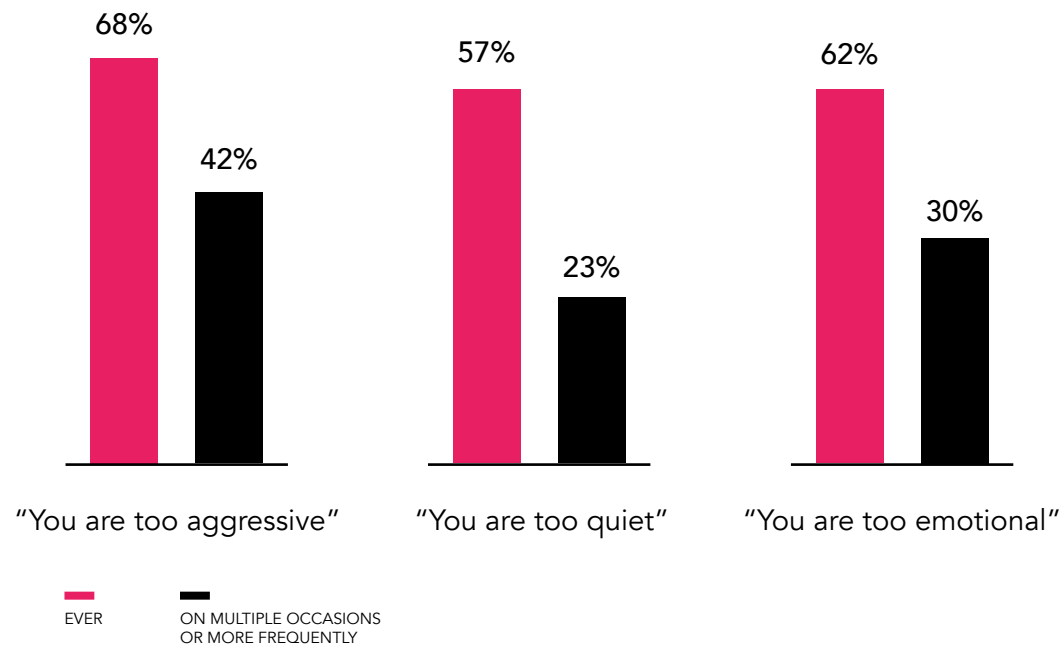
**68%**

report they have  
been told they are  
"too aggressive"

**64%**

have been  
told they are  
"too emotional"

## Percentage of ad women who have received the following feedback:



“ I was told early in my career that I was too aggressive, so I’ve overcompensated being nice for the past ten years. ”

“ I get glowing feedback from my peers, but I’ve had supervisors tell me I’m ‘too emotional’, ‘too passionate’ and ‘hard to work with.’ ”

“ The comment I get in my performance reviews is that I do not suffer fools. And why the hell would I? ”

# HOW CAN WE SOLVE THIS TOGETHER?

## Agency Microaction

Assess your review processes. Is there unconscious bias inherent in the reviews of women? Consider using linguistic software tools that uncover discrepancies that disfavor women in review processes. Train your managers to look at their own biases and help them offer feedback that is less gendered and more specific to the skills needed to succeed.

## Personal Microaction

Read up on biased feedback for women in the workplace. Keep a record of the gendered language you receive during feedback sessions. Show it to your boss and help him/her see how they are communicating. Ask for specific skill development rather than opinion about your behavior.

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## THE WORK WIFE

Need someone to take notes,  
plan the company party,  
order food?

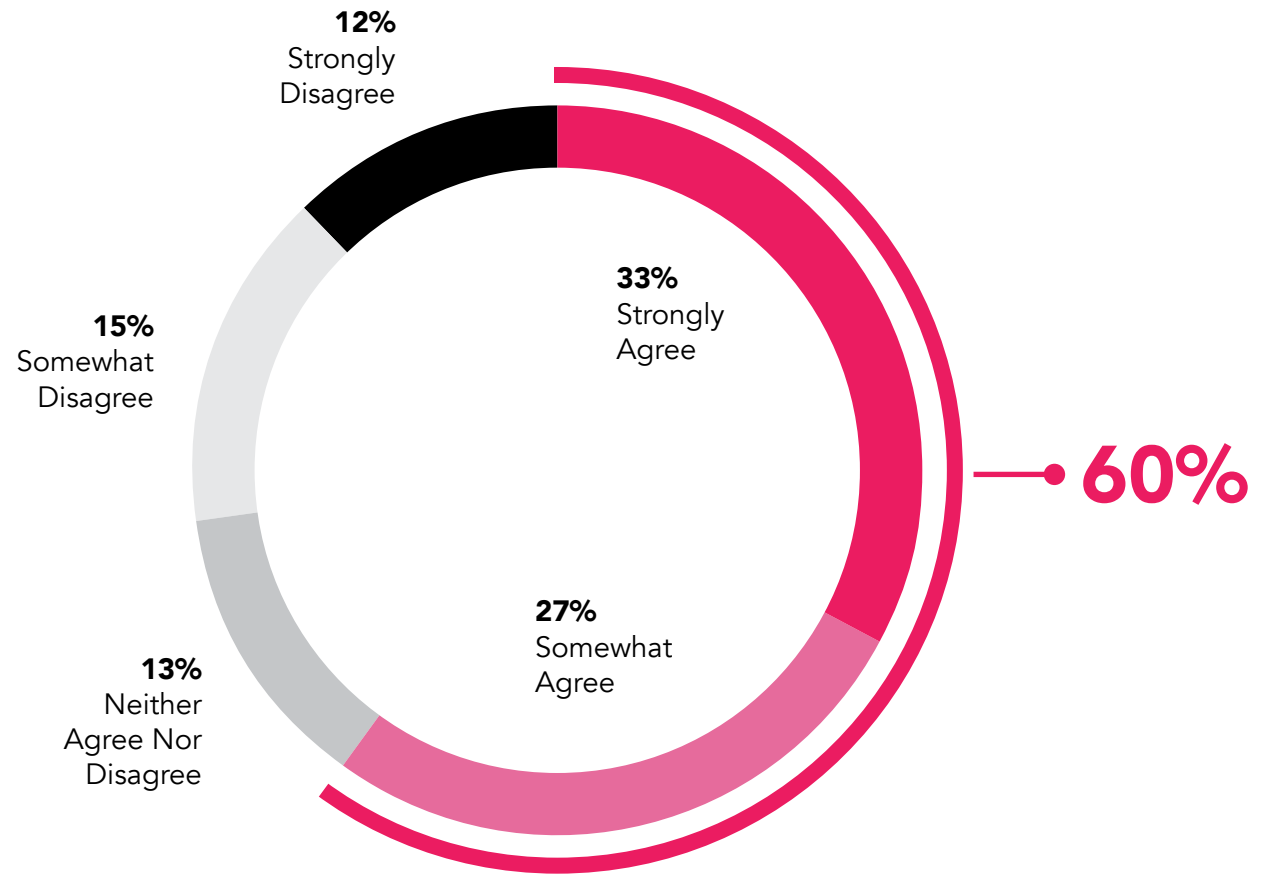
Just ask an ad woman.

**60%**

**of women have  
been asked to perform  
lower level tasks that  
their males peers are  
not asked to do**



Another challenge ad women face revolves around roles and responsibilities within the organization. The majority of women in advertising agree that they have been asked to do lower level tasks that their male colleagues are spared.



I have been asked to do lower level tasks that my male colleagues are not asked to do (e.g., ordering food, taking notes, etc.)

“

I am very careful to never clean up after people or take notes except for my own purposes. In my last agency, communal food would sit out for days because no one would break down and put it away.

”

“

Ordering food and scheduling meetings.  
Men are never asked to do it!

”

“

Yes - have been asked to get coffee. Have been asked to book meetings. Have been called 'Darling' in the office. Once the shock wears off - I tell them to fucking do it themselves.

”

# HOW CAN WE SOLVE THIS TOGETHER?

## Agency Microaction

Set a clear policy that note taking, food ordering, party planning and the like must be rotated within the teams. Have the managers keep a record of who is doing what tasks to spread the responsibility and to ensure fairness over time.

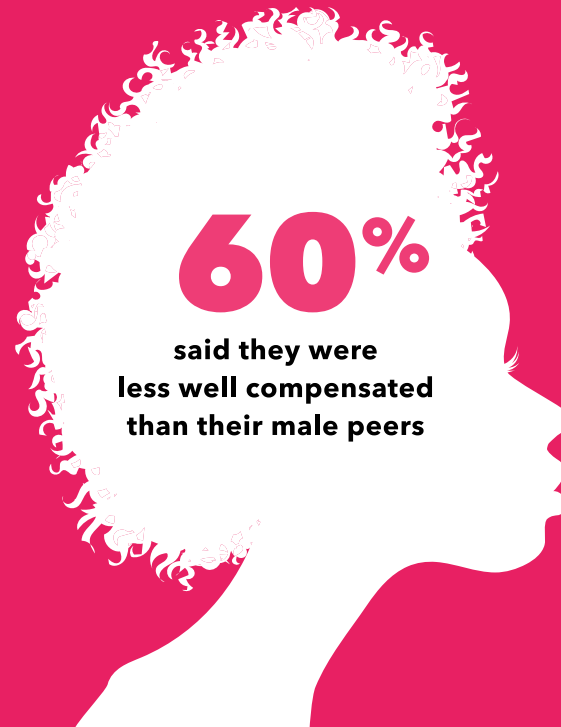
## Personal Microaction

Keep a record of when and who is asked to do “work wife” duties. Share it with your team leader. Suggest a rotating note taker. Or, don’t bring a pen and pad to your next meeting. You can’t take notes if you don’t have the tools.

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## (UN)FAIR PAY

The majority of ad women believe they are not paid fairly. 60% believe they are less well compensated than their male peers (and many had proof of this). Interestingly, some women heard feedback that their male peers were more handsomely paid because they had stay-at-home wives to support. Yet, nearly half of respondents with partners (44%) told us they were primary breadwinners in their family.



**60%**

I am less well compensated than my male peers

**23%**

Non-applicable / I don't know

**15%**

I am compensated the same as my male peers

**2%**

I am more favorably compensated than my male peers

“

My last partner drunkenly disclosed his salary to me. Even though we had the same amount of experience, he was paid \$20,000 more per year.

”

“

As a HR/Talent lead, I saw massive inconsistencies between performance and reward for males and females in the ad agency business. I was silenced not only by men, but my female boss when stating the issues.

”

# HOW CAN WE SOLVE THIS TOGETHER?

## Agency Microaction

Regularly conduct an agency wage audit. Publicize both internally and externally the results. Make changes accordingly.

## Personal Microaction

Conduct your own wage audit. Create an anonymous poll and ask your colleagues to fill it out. Get informed about what the industry generally pays for your position. Ask your boss if you are at the top, middle, or bottom of the wage range for your job. Negotiate for more if you are not at the top of the range.

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## MOMS GO HOME

Many women leave agency life when they hit their prime childbearing and rearing years. Those moms who do stay found it a challenge. Only 39% of our overall respondents are mothers (although mothers represent 65% of our respondents 40+). Based on analysis of US Census Data from the Pew Research Center, 76% of US college educated women have a child by the time they are 40-44. The fact that women in advertising are less likely to have children either means that they are opting out of the workforce once they have children or purposefully prioritizing their career over motherhood.



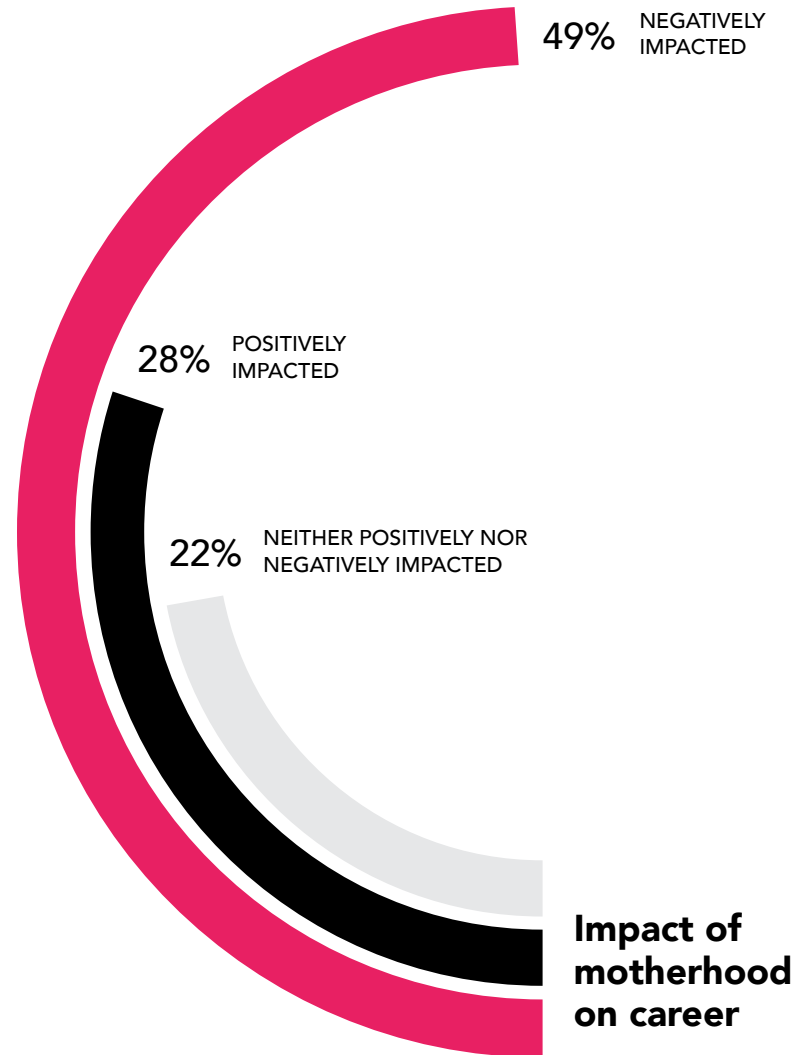
**49%**

of moms told us  
being a parent  
negatively impacted  
their career

**28%**

said it positively  
impacted their career

49% of moms told us being a parent negatively impacted their career (good news flash: 28% said it positively impacted their career).





**45%**

I was not considered  
for certain  
assignments

**33%**

I was excluded from  
specific meetings/events  
so as not to interfere  
with "family time"

**21%**

I was passed over  
for a promotion

Among those moms who took maternity leave while working in advertising, 28% took shorter maternity leaves than they were entitled to because they thought it would negatively impact their career.

**Ways motherhood has impacted my career**

“

I was asked: 'Will being a new Mom hold you back from giving the job 100%?' I had to ensure my potential bosses that I would outsource my child's care to a full time nanny to keep my job.

”

“

I was offered a CD job at a local agency a few months after I freelanced there. When I told the president that I was 5 months pregnant, he immediately rescinded the offer.

”

“

Most people do not even know that I do have a family. Only when they really get to know me do I say anything at all.

”

# HOW CAN WE SOLVE THIS TOGETHER?

## Agency Microaction

Conduct a parent assessment at your agency. Are most of the senior women childless? Start grooming role models for the next generation by hiring and promoting women who are mothers. Provide paid parental leave to both women and men. Check out our 20 Things You Can Do to Retain Moms. Create a returnship program for women who paused their careers to care for family. Don't assume you know what a mother in the workplace needs. The key is to ask, let her make the choice, and revisit the conversation regularly.

## Personal Microaction

Take your full maternity leave. If you are a new father, take paternity leave. If you are in leadership, talk publicly about your children and about family-centric events you're attending that may conflict with work hours. Decide what on-ramping support you need after you become a new mother. Be out and proud about your role as mother and professional. Support mothers in the workplace even if you are not one yourself. We cannot support all women if we divide camps into mothers and non-mothers.

8

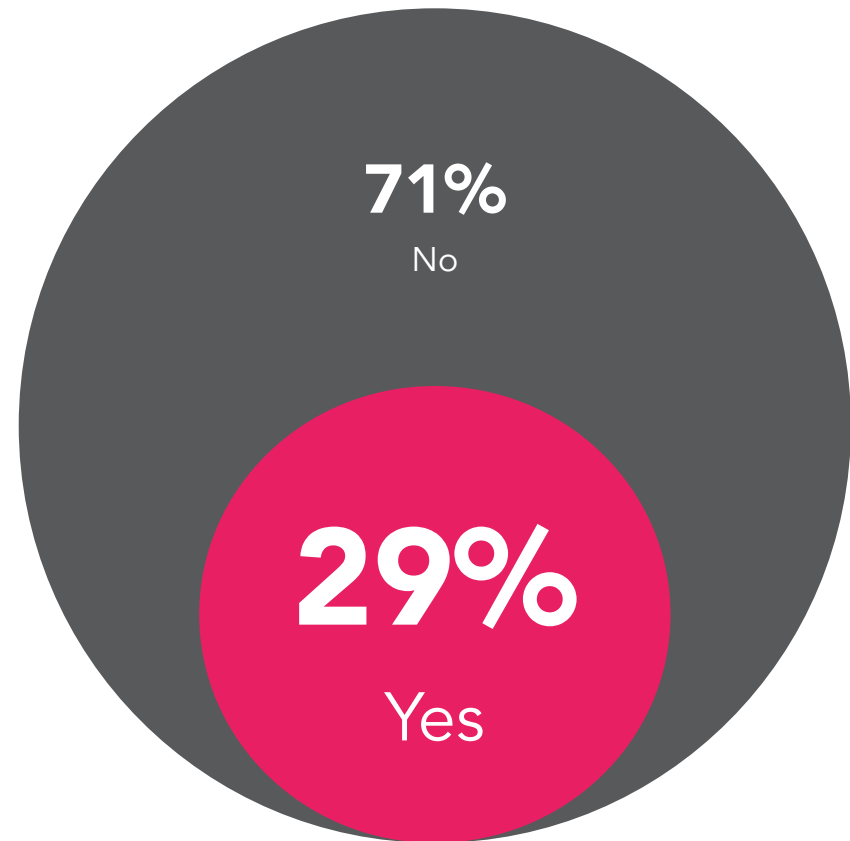
## THE OTHER OTHERS

Life in adland is tough for all women, but it can be particularly tough for women of color, lesbians, and those who don't fit limiting beauty standards.

**29%**

**believe race, sexual orientation, age, weight and/or appearance have also impacted their careers**

**29% of our respondents believe there are other factors which have impacted their careers.** These most commonly include race, sexual orientation, age, weight and/or appearance. We plan future research to focus more fully on how this sense of otherness plays in to many women's experiences.



**Do you feel that any other personal characteristics have impacted your professional career?**

(e.g., country of origin, race, sexual orientation, etc.?)

“

Level of attractiveness. I notice that all the women in advertising, at my company are considered 'good looking'. It feels like a prerequisite.

”

“

I have been ignored or passed over by male CDs because of my weight.

”

“

I'm Black and that has absolutely affected my career. After I tried very hard to get on new projects in the Creative Department when it was slow and the chauvinist CD only picked men for the best projects I ultimately left that agency. I later heard that the CEO accused me of leaving saying: '...thinks she can jump from agency to agency just because she's Black.'

”

“

Race and age. I am an AA female over 50. I was going to say over 40, but I will own my truth unapologetically.

”

# **A FINAL WORD**

An elephant in the room is a metaphor for an obvious truth that goes unaddressed. The ad industry doesn't have time for unaddressed truths any longer. Yet (some) folks in power claim gender bias and sexism are a thing of the past. The stampede of stories from the "Elephant on Mad. Avenue" survey settles any doubt. Sexism and gender bias are alive and well in adland 2016. Now that we've got definitive proof to silence any naysayers, let's get on with the important business of changing the ratio.

**It's time.**





**Diversity = Creativity = Profitability**

At the 3% Movement, we believe great ideas can come from anywhere.

We believe great creative comes from truly inclusive cultures.

And, we believe the best agencies understand this.

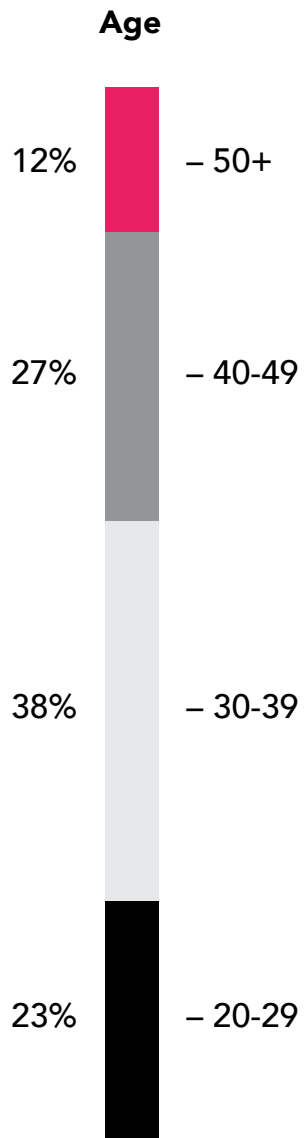
But understanding is not enough. It is time for agencies to move beyond awareness to activation.

Through our 3% Consulting services and 3% Certification program, we partner with agencies to build stronger, more robust cultures that ensure all voices contribute to deliver the best work possible.

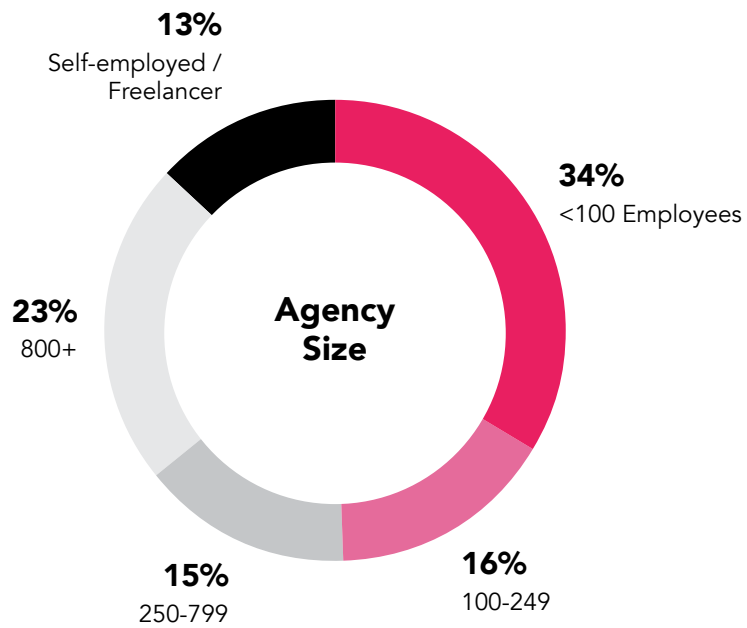
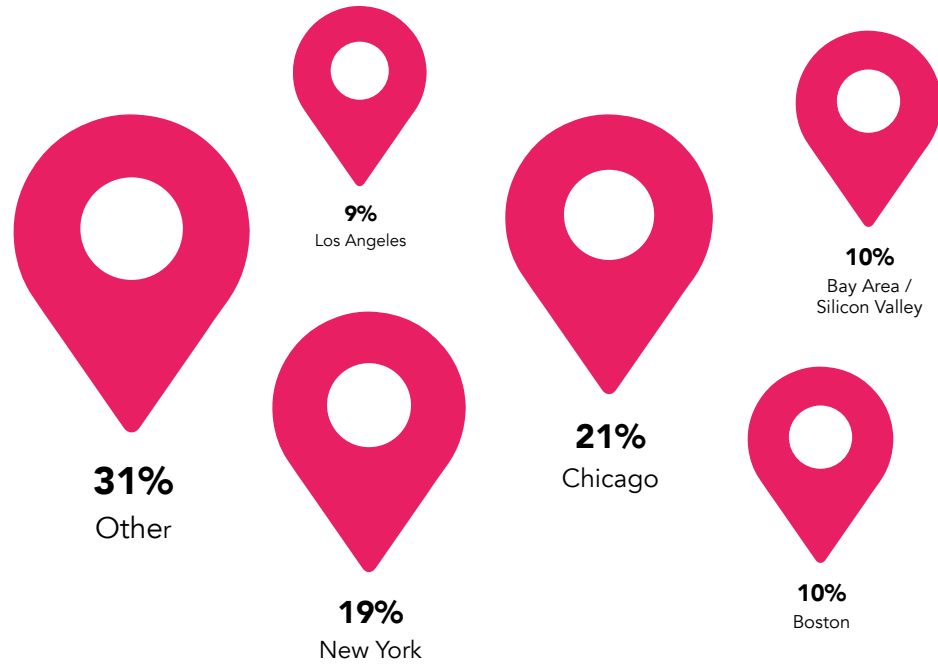
For further information about our solutions, contact Lisen Stromberg, COO of The 3% Movement:

[lisenstromberg@3percentconf.com](mailto:lisenstromberg@3percentconf.com)

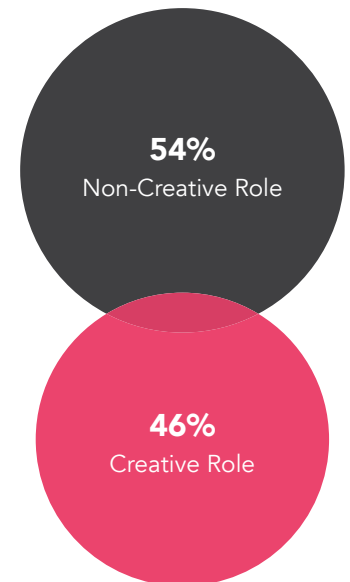
# PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS



### Location



### Role



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