

Research Update on the 2023-2024 Membership Demographic Study

Why are we doing a study and what will be done with it?

We are doing a membership demographic study to better understand the makeup and experiences of our membership so we can advance a more diverse, inclusive and equitable legal profession. The WSBA first did a [membership demographic study in 2012](#) to learn about the profession's composition and retention rates. That study helped inform the [2013 WSBA Diversity and Inclusion Plan](#) which was designed to improve the retention of underrepresented attorneys by increasing their participation and leadership in the Bar.

Fast forward 10 years. We want to learn about our current membership to inform a new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Plan. The membership demographic study will directly inform the new DEI Plan which will provide strategies to address the disparities, experiences of marginalization and inequitable systems.

How is the study being conducted?

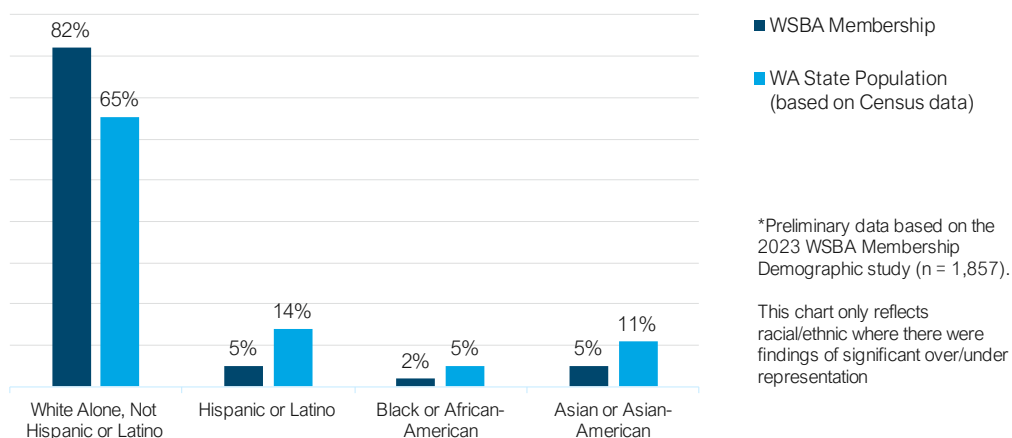
The study is being conducted by KGR+C (aka [Kno-Why](#)), a research consultancy that conducted a similar [study for the Oregon State Bar Association](#), among others. The study will include quantitative survey data and qualitative, discussion-based findings. The quantitative data was collected in a member-wide survey administered last summer/fall. The survey design was informed by many groups including the Minority Bar Associations and Supreme Court Commissions and resulted in over 1,800 completed surveys. Those data have been analyzed, and Kno-Why is currently trying to recruit and conduct a follow-up series of qualitative discussions about the findings through several focus groups.

What are some highlights of what we learned from the survey?

The membership does not reflect our state's population.

One significant finding is the continued racial and ethnic disparities in the composition of our membership. Our profession is overwhelmingly White: White people make up 82% of our profession, but 65% of Washington's population. By contrast, Hispanic/Latino, Black/African American, and Asian/Asian-American people are underrepresented compared to the general population.

RACIAL/ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN WSBA MEMBERSHIP

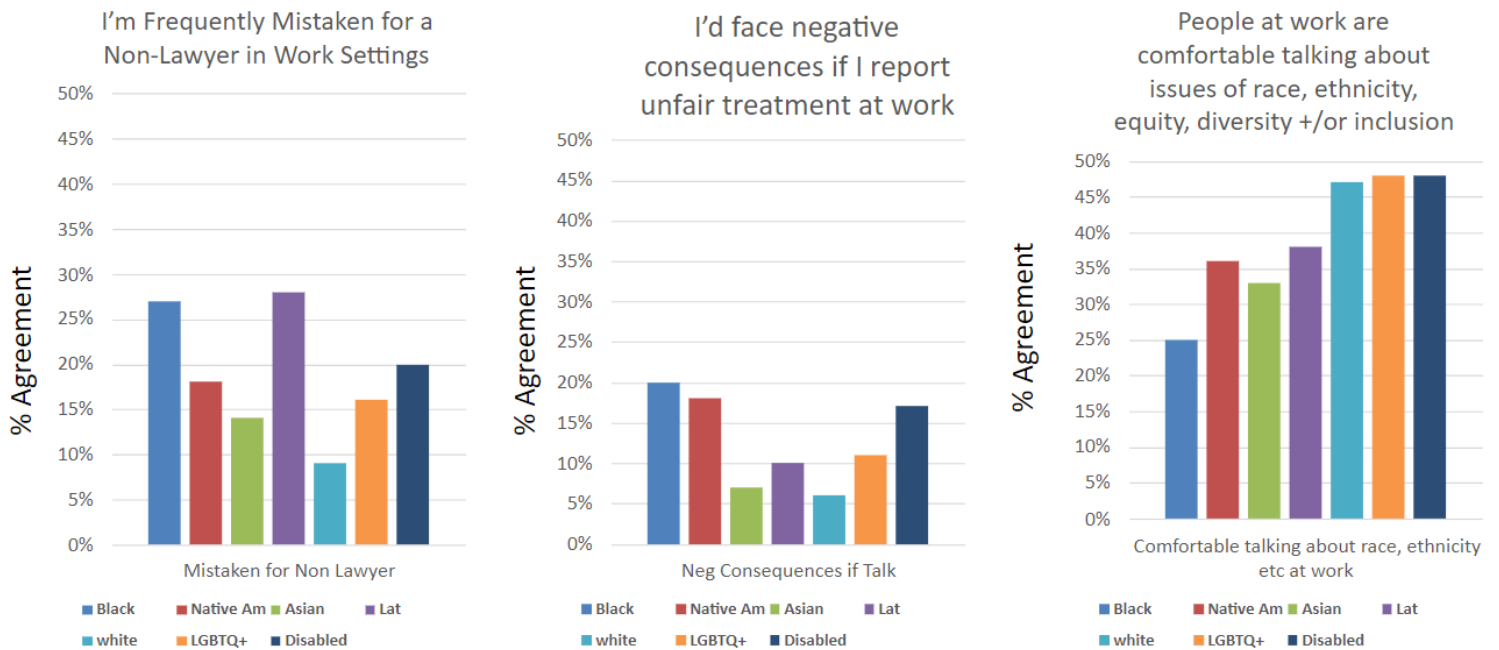


Data clearly show that Group identity and representation play a role in how bar members evaluate the workplace, its “fit” or suitability for them and their future within it.

Race, Gender + Disability Identity are associated with differences in workplace evaluations

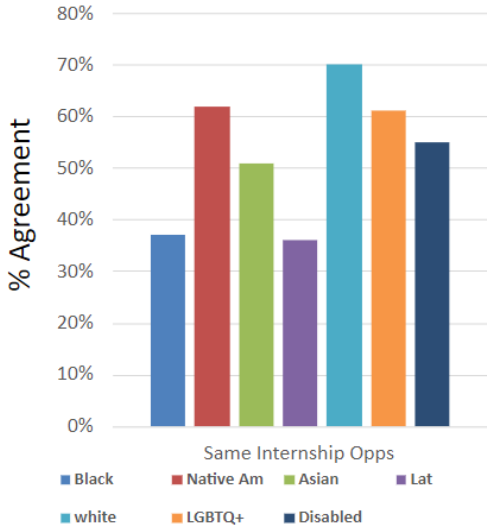


The data also show systemic, experiential biases disproportionately affect some identity groups throughout their careers.

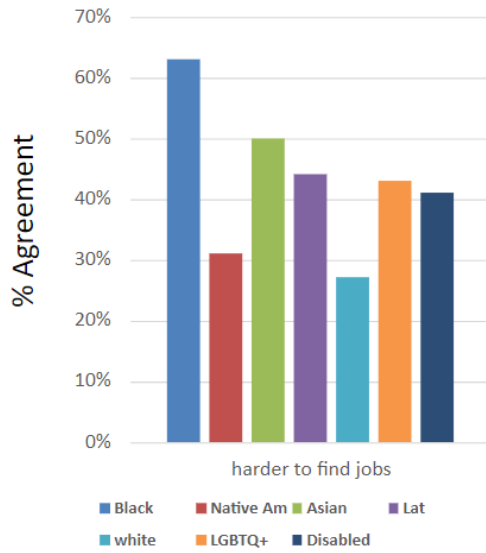


Professional opportunities throughout one's legal career differ depending on one's identity.

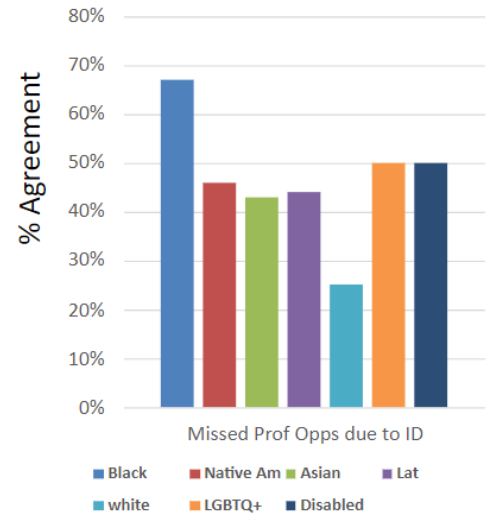
I had the same internship opportunities as everyone else in law school



Harder for me to find a good job than others equally qualified

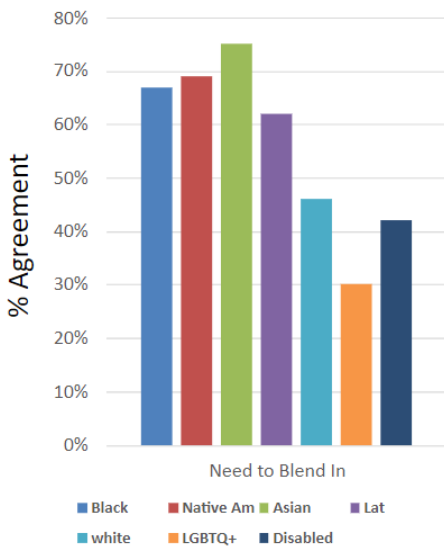


Missed out on professional opportunities due to my race, ethnicity, gender/sex ID or disability

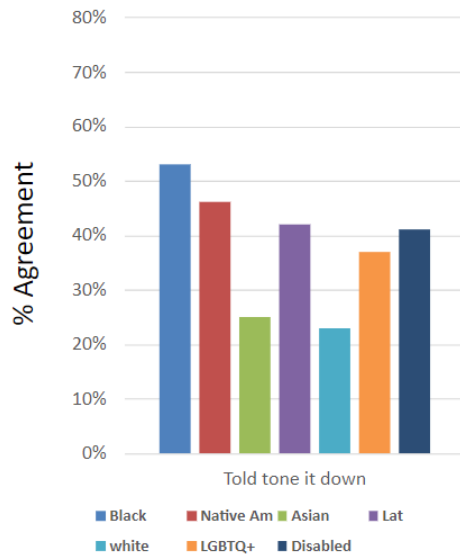


Different groups experience more pressure to fit in, while having access to fewer leaders and mentors who've experienced similar pressures and workplace challenges to help show them how to do so successfully.

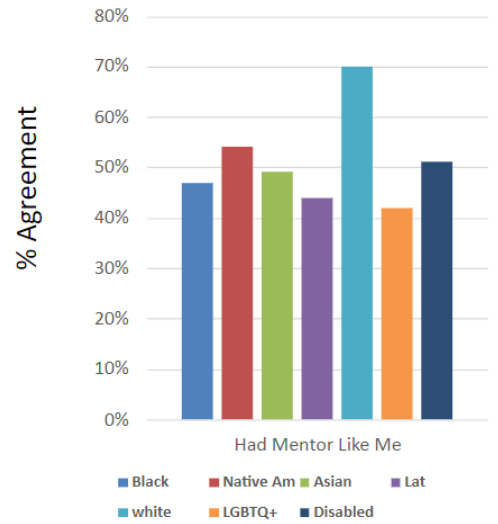
I need to blend in to be successful



I've been told to tone it down in professional settings



Access to mentors w similar ID, background and experiences



Why and how are gathering qualitative data?

Qualitative data helps inform the quantitative data and provides a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of legal professionals. For example, the frequency of microaggressions witnessed and personally experienced by members who identify Black or African American and members with a disability may be similar, but the nature of the microaggressions, their impact, and how they manifest may be different. Focus groups will allow Kno-Why to learn and listen to members' stories, interpretations, and perspectives, which will inform the survey data and provide a more complete picture for the study.

Call for focus group participants

Based on the survey results, members who identified with the following groups, on the whole, experienced a disproportionately higher degree of underrepresentation and/or marginalization in the legal community:

- Asian American/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian
- Black/African American
- Indigenous/First People/First Nation/Native American
- Latino/Latina/Latinx/Latine/Hispanic
- LBGTQIA+2S
- Disabled People/People with a visible or invisible Disability or Disabilities

We are focusing on these groups for the next phase of research to provide context and nuance to the survey findings. We are inviting WSBA members who identify with these groups to join a focus group facilitated by Kno-Why.

Kno-Why will be using professional facilitators who are trained in trauma-informed facilitation and have experience moderating groups focused on issues of identity, race, systemic biases and their impacts within professional settings. Kno-Why will keep the focus group discussions and identities of the participants confidential. The focus groups will be limited to 8-10 people each and will meet virtually for 1.5 hours.

Below are the dates/times each focus group will be meeting:

- Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian Focus Group
 - **Tuesday, June 11th - 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.**
- Black/African American Focus Group
 - **Wednesday, June 12th - 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.**
- Indigenous/First People/First Nation/Native American Focus Group
 - **Tuesday, June 18th - 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.**
- Latino/Latina/Latinx/Latine/Hispanic Focus Group
 - **Tuesday, June 25rd – 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.**
- LBGTQIA2S Focus Group
 - **Thursday, June 13th – 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.**
- People with a Disability or Disabilities Focus Group
 - **Monday, June 10th – 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.**

If you are interested in joining a focus group, please email Ben Kim-Gervey at ben@kno-why.com with your name, what group you identify with and your email address and phone number. The groups will be filled based on a first-come, first-serve basis.

If you have any questions about the study, please email diversity@wsba.org.