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Authors

Virrueta-Peters, Melissa
Dong, Quennie
Sablo Sutton, Soraya

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21CSLA Project Brief

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Prepared by
Dr. Melissa Virrueta-Peters
Dr. Quennie Dong
Dr. Soraya Sablo Sutton

Validation and Visibility: Affinity Groups as Collective Professional Learning Spaces for Leaders of Color

Executive Summary

Educational leadership in the United States operates within racially stratified systems that continue to reproduce inequities in access, advancement, and sustainability for leaders of color. Spaces that promote shared meaning-making and learning opportunities in a confidential, judgment-free way are essential for leaders, who are often engaged in myriad responsibilities that demand they address chronic, high levels of need across school systems. Affinity groups have emerged as professional learning spaces that can be a source of support for leaders, with the potential to mitigate isolation, provide a pathway to sustainable collective leadership, and foster critical spaces to effectively address the unique needs of leaders of color. In the 21CSLA (21st Century California School Leadership Academy) Bay Area Regional Academy (BARA),[1] affinity groups originated in 2020 as a response to a collective need for support following the murder of George Floyd, persistent racial unrest, and the exacerbated impact of these events on leaders of color during the COVID-19 pandemic. BARA's affinity groups have since expanded to a network serving over 150 leaders during the 2025–2026 academic year. This multi-method study was conducted

[1] https://bse.berkeley.edu/21csla-bay-area-regional-academy

within a research–practice partnership with BARA to explore the perspectives of leaders of color on their experiences of racialization across their professional and organizational roles and of participation in affinity groups as professional learning spaces. Specifically, this study explores how professional learning within affinity spaces is distinct from traditional professional learning and how it serves as a source of validation and visibility for leaders of color. Qualitative interviews and quantitative survey data are used to capture leaders' experiences in their workplaces, as well as their experiences and meaning-making processes within affinity spaces. Survey findings indicate that the majority of leaders experience patterns of workplace discrimination and prejudice across individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels. Conversely, qualitative data indicate that leaders of color report feeling safe, which fosters implicit and explicit experiences of validation and visibility when engaged in professional learning with colleagues who share their racial affinity. The implications of this study include the need for professional learning spaces that attend to racialized dynamics of school leadership and research that further investigates the impact of affinity spaces on leader burnout and sustainability, as well as how leader preparation programs can attend to and address the needs of aspiring leaders of color in a training context.

Background and Context

Despite growing racial and ethnic diversity among students, leadership pipelines remain disproportionately White, with Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), African American, and Latinx leaders consistently underrepresented across school and district leadership roles (Denson & Chang, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], n.d.-a). This disparity reflects structural barriers embedded within educational institutions, such as exclusion from informal professional networks, inequitable recruitment and promotion practices, and leadership norms that privilege White, masculinized models of authority. Leaders of color frequently encounter racialized and gendered barriers including professional isolation, tokenization, and constrained advancement through glass or bamboo ceilings, even in contexts that espouse equity-oriented values (Bristol & Shirrell, 2019; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016).

Operating within these inequitable systems carries a substantial emotional, relational, and professional toll. Leaders of color routinely navigate racism-related stressors, including racial microaggressions, heightened surveillance, and pressure to perform both leadership and representational labor, which can undermine well-being and leadership efficacy over time (Krull & Robicheau, 2020; McGinnis et al., 2023). These experiences often require sustained emotional labor, self-protection, and boundary management, particularly for leaders positioned as "the only one" in their organization (Bristol & Shirrell, 2019). The cumulative impact of these conditions contributes to burnout, diminished sense of belonging, and challenges to long-term leadership sustainability, reinforcing cycles of underrepresentation and attrition (Noonan & Bristol, 2020). Taken together, this structural context underscores that leadership inequity is not solely a matter of representation but of the racialized conditions under which leaders of color are expected to lead, highlighting the need for systemic and relational supports that address both access and sustainability within educational leadership.

Affinity Groups as a Response to Leadership Isolation and a Need for Collective Leadership

Leader isolation has been highlighted as one of the key contributing factors that can lead to burnout and attrition among school and systems-level administrators (Lochmiller, 2014). For leaders of color, the threat of isolation can have an even greater impact given the historical and current barriers encountered by African American, Latinx, and AAPI leaders, including subtle but persistent racial microaggressions, racialized stressors, and overt challenges to their authority (Krull & Robicheau, 2020; McGinnis et al., 2023; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Traditional efforts to support administrators through professional learning may fall short of meeting the complex needs of leaders of color.

Affinity groups remain an understudied phenomenon within the context of leadership and professional learning, specifically with regard to their impact on educators of color. Researchers highlight that affinity groups offer opportunities for leaders to connect with professionals who share ethno-racial and cultural knowledge and backgrounds, and can operate as an antidote to isolation by promoting belonging, healing, and well-being, ultimately supporting leader retention (Filstad et al., 2019; Pour-Khorshid, 2018; Waller, 2020). Unlike traditional professional learning spaces that may ignore the unique, intersectional experiences of leaders of color, affinity groups center the experiences of minoritized leaders, utilize critical cultural ways of knowing and communicating such as testimonios, and offer a space where often silenced voices are amplified (Pour-Khorshid, 2018).

Contrary to the popular narrative that leader longevity requires superhuman, individual resilience, this study aligns with research that calls for building spaces of collective resilience where leaders tap into external resources to develop internal strength (Sablo Sutton & Gong, 2021). Racial affinity groups for school leaders can provide that necessary external resource, rooted in the power of collective, critical resilience (Campa, 2010). The concept of critical resilience extends beyond an individualized notion of sustainability (where only the strongest leaders survive), and shifts the focus to the role of power within institutions that work to maintain systemic obstacles for leaders. This frame also centers the importance of leveraging funds of knowledge and cultural wealth present among minoritized populations.

Attending to the Relational Needs of Leaders

Belonging, validation, and shared-meaning making are essential given the isolation, lack of affirmation, and dual standards that contribute to feelings of stress and burnout experienced by leaders of color (Moore, 2013). There is an urgent need for relational support in collective spaces as an antidote for the diminishing confidence and aspirations experienced by minoritized leaders as a result of microaggressions and limited trust faced in their places of work (Robicheau & Krull, 2016). Collective approaches, including social support and peer networks, are effective ways to promote resilience and well-being, and have been cited as supporting the sustainability, belonging, and efficacy for educators of color (Doyle Fosco et al., 2025). Although much of the research reflecting this is based on teachers or staff of color in education systems more broadly, it can be applied to and serves to inform our understanding of the experiences of leaders of color. Given the deeply emotional, social, and relational demands of the leadership role, an even greater need exists for support that validates experiences and provides a sense of authentic belonging.

Responses to the unique challenges of school leaders of color that are reduced to individual

Leveraging the expertise of school and systems-level leaders, combined with higher education researchers and practitioners, we endeavor to design spaces that can support leaders of color, learn from their experiences in those spaces, and cultivate a model that could be replicated and adapted far beyond the reach of the BARA region.

self-care activities or strategies, while useful, bear limitations, given the systemic nature of racism-related stressors including biases, racial microaggressions, and other forms of identity-based marginalization that they experience. Additionally, while coaching and mentoring are often cited as effective ways to support leader well-being, generic approaches to these supports may be limited given the unique, intersectional experiences and needs of leaders of color (DeMatthews et al., 2021). Effective support for marginalized leaders must affirm practice and create bridges for belonging. The personal and professional toll of leadership in racially stratified systems combined with pervasive underrepresentation requires leadership support that acknowledges the role of racial and ethnic identity in leadership, validates lived experiences, and is culturally resonant (Dong, 2025).

The Bay Area Regional Academy Context

The 21CSLA Bay Area Regional Academy (BARA) serves teacher leaders, site leaders, and systems leaders in six diverse Bay Area counties: Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Solano. Through BARA, professional learning opportunities like racial affinity groups are designed to meet the needs of educators learning to lead for equity. In alignment with the 21CSLA equity statement (21CSLA, n.d.), BARA supports transformation of education systems to improve access and opportunity for staff and students, with particular attention to those who have been systemically marginalized. Affinity groups are one example of high-quality professional learning, in a community of practice model that supports equity-focused leadership.

Origin Story of Affinity Groups in the BARA Region

In 2020, following the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers, the country experienced what many have called a racial reckoning. Protests erupted across the nation, drawing attention to the persistent mistreatment of people of color by law enforcement. At the same time, the country was in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic, and people were longing for a way to connect in the midst of what had become a socially distant reality. The events of 2020 exacerbated pre-existing social inequities, including racialized experiences and leader isolation. Leaders of color who were already suffering from isolation

and experiencing racial microaggressions needed support more than ever. It is within this context that BARA launched its first iteration of racial affinity groups, initially designed to support African American male leaders.

A movement that originated in BARA expanded to include additional affinity groups, including groups for Latinx leaders, Asian American and Pacific Islander leaders, and eventually White anti-racist leaders. Each of these groups was designed to be gender inclusive and to serve teacher leaders, site leaders, and system-level leaders through professional learning. Since 2020, participation in racial affinity groups has grown tremendously across the BARA region. During the 2024–2025 academic year, over 150 leaders registered to attend affinity groups (AAPI Leaders Network: 40; African American Education Leaders Network: 52; Latinx Leaders Network: 47; White Anti-Racist Leaders Network: 19). Attendance remained steady throughout that year, in addition to new participants joining each session as current registrants helped spread the word to their colleagues.

Why Regional Context Matters for Leadership Networks and Opportunity Structures

Despite the growing diversity among the student population across the state of California generally and within the BARA region specifically, most school principals in California are White (64.7%), while leaders of color are underrepresented, with 24.7% identifying as Hispanic, 3.8% Black/African American, 3.5% Asian/Asian American, and 2.3% as two or more races (NCES, n.d.-a). This numeric minority status contributes to the isolation experienced by many leaders of color and underscores the need for support through affinity-based professional learning. Forming supportive professional networks has been highlighted as one strategy that can mitigate work-related stress experienced by school leaders. However, since leaders of color often find themselves as the only leader in their context from their particular cultural background, having access to affinity-based networks can be a challenge. In a geographical region as large and densely populated as BARA's, leaders of color need structured, confidential opportunities to connect with and learn from leaders who share their backgrounds and perspectives. According to a study conducted by the Learning Policy Institute, despite the fact that professional learning is known to be a key ingredient to leader longevity and necessary for school improvement efforts, only 13% of the principals surveyed experienced what they call comprehensive professional learning, including the opportunity to learn alongside peer leaders in a principal network, access to job-embedded coaching, an intentional focus on instructional leadership, collaboration, and how to use data to inform school improvement (Sutcher et al., 2018).

The Promise of Research–Practice Partnerships

Engaging in this research, which allows us to investigate the conditions necessary to create an impactful professional learning experience for school leaders of color, represents a strong example of the power and potential of research–practice partnerships (Farrell et al., 2022). Leveraging the expertise of school and systems-level leaders, combined with higher education researchers and practitioners, we endeavor to design spaces that can support leaders of color, learn from their experiences in those spaces, and cultivate a model that could be replicated and adapted far beyond the reach of the BARA region. Serving the needs of local site and system leaders is certainly a worthwhile goal. Endeavoring

to conceptualize how this partnership could eventually impact the field at large and contribute to leader sustainability makes the work even more critical. Through this work, we hope to confront inequities that exist in traditional research–practice partnerships through an intentional focus on equity-centered approaches that address issues of injustice (Diamond, 2021).

Overview of the Study

This multi-method study explored how educational leaders of color experienced racialization at the intersection of their organizational roles and how affinity spaces serve as relational and structural supports for them. Drawing upon quantitative survey data collected in March 2025 and qualitative interviews conducted between April 2025 and May 2025, this project brief captures both the breadth of leaders' experiences and the depth of meaning-making processes within affinity spaces.

Quantitative survey data provided descriptive insights into leaders' experiences of racialized and occupational stress, while qualitative interviews with affinity group participants offered rich, contextualized accounts of how these spaces are experienced as they unpack these stressors. Participants included educational leaders of color who attended affinity spaces during the 2024–2025 academic year and served in K–12 contexts. Survey participants represented a racially diverse sample, including AAPI, African American, Latinx, and White/Caucasian leaders, with variation across gender identities, leadership roles (e.g., site-based and district-level positions), and years of professional experience (see Figure 1). Qualitative interview participants included 18 leaders of color engaged in affinity spaces, with 6 participants in each of the AAPI-focused, African American–focused, and Latinx-focused groups. In this brief, we discuss the experiences of educational leaders of color.

Survey Analysis

Leaders across affinity networks completed selected items from three validated measures that assessed participants' overall experiences with prejudice and discrimination in the workplace, as well as their intent to stay or leave their professional roles: Workplace Prejudice/Discrimination Inventory (James et al., 1994), Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire–Brief (Brondolo et al., 2005), and Turnover Intention Scale (Bothma & Roodt, 2013). To center actionable insights for leadership development and policy, items were organized at the individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels of experience.

Individual-Level Experiences

Individual items reflect the personal impact of workplace conditions and indicators of leadership sustainability. These items help illuminate how institutional and interpersonal conditions may translate into emotional strain, job dissatisfaction, and potential attrition.

Interpersonal-Level Experiences

Interpersonal items assess day-to-day discriminatory treatment and exclusion in professional interactions. These items capture experiences of bias, stereotyping, and exclusion that occur within daily relational contexts.

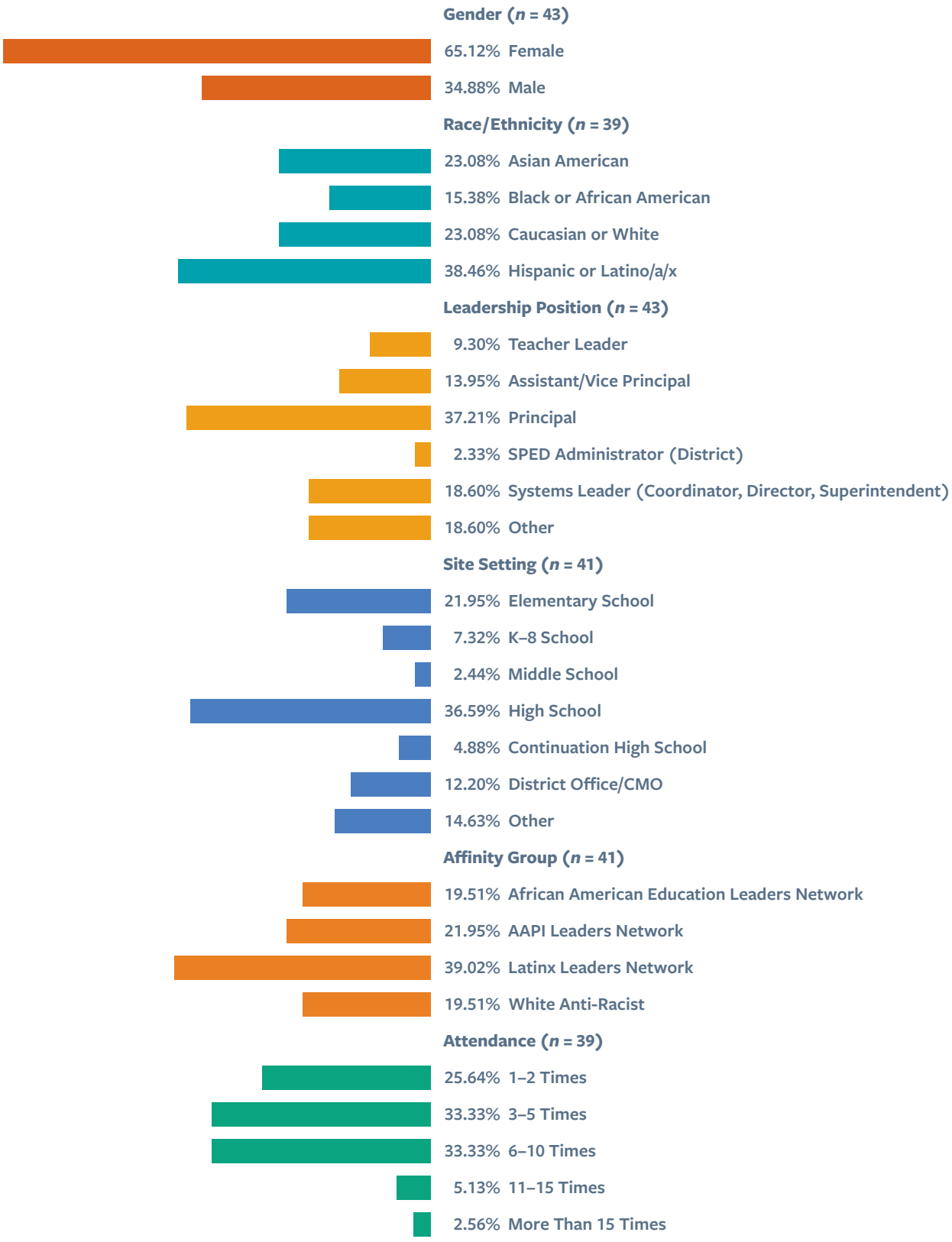
Institutional-Level Experiences

Institutional items capture perceptions of systemic bias, organizational climate, and inequitable access to information within leadership contexts. These items reflect structural and climate-level dynamics that shape leaders' experiences of equitable access, transparency, and inclusion within systems.

Rather than reporting only overall scale averages, this brief presents item-level frequency distributions, showing the percentage of respondents endorsing

Figure 1

Survey Participant Characteristics



each response category. Results are disaggregated by affinity network—African American Education Leaders Network (AAELN), AAPI Leaders Network (AAPILN), and Latinx Leaders Network (LLN)—and presented alongside combined findings. This approach highlights both shared and network-specific patterns, supporting targeted strategies to strengthen leadership retention and equity-centered organizational practice.

Survey Findings: Discrimination and Leadership Sustainability

Individual-Level Experiences

Participants reported varied experiences of social belonging in their workplaces (see Figure 2). Across all leaders of color, 39.3% of participants agreed that they feel socially isolated at work because of their racial or ethnic identity, while 60.7% disagreed. Disaggregated results revealed variation across affinity groups. AAELN participants reported the highest levels of workplace social isolation, with approximately 67% reporting agreement that they feel socially isolated at work due to their racial or ethnic identity. In comparison, 38% of AAPILN participants and 29% of LLN participants reported agreement, indicating that although the majority in these groups did not experience social isolation, a notable minority still felt racially or ethnically isolated in their workplace.

Interpersonal-Level Experiences

At the interpersonal level, participants reported experiencing several forms of racialized treatment within workplace interactions (see Figure 3). Across leaders of color, 56% of participants reported being treated unfairly by teachers, principals, or other staff at least sometimes due to their race or ethnicity, while 44% reported these experiences rarely or never occurred. Experiences of competence-based stereotyping were reported even more frequently, with 64% indicating that others had assumed leaders of color could not perform tasks or handle a job because of their race or ethnicity at least sometimes, compared with 36% who reported these experiences rarely or never occurred. Experiences of linguistic exclusion were less common: 32% reported being made to feel like an outsider due to language differences at least sometimes, while 68% reported these experiences rarely or never occurred.

When examined across affinity groups, LLN participants reported the highest prevalence of interpersonal discrimination, with approximately 71% reporting unfair treatment and 71% reporting competence-based stereotyping at least sometimes. AAPILN participants reported somewhat lower rates, with approximately 38% reporting unfair treatment and 63% reporting stereotyping experiences. AAELN participants reported moderate levels, with approximately 67% reporting unfair treatment and 50% reporting competence-based stereotyping experiences. Linguistic exclusion was reported less frequently across all groups, with approximately 33% of AAELN participants, 25% of AAPILN participants, and 36% of LLN participants reporting these experiences at least sometimes.

Institutional-Level Experiences

Participants also reported notable experiences of prejudice and discrimination in their workplaces (see Figure 4). Across leaders of color, 78.6% of participants agreed that prejudice exists where they work, while 21.4% disagreed. Similarly, 67.9% agreed that discrimination exists in their workplace, compared with 32.1% who disagreed. Experiences related to informational exclusion were more mixed: 50% of participants agreed that colleagues from other racial or ethnic groups sometimes withhold job-related information, while 50% disagreed.

Affinity groups remain an understudied phenomenon within the context of leadership and professional learning, specifically with regard to their impact on educators of color.

Figure 2

Individual-Level Experiences

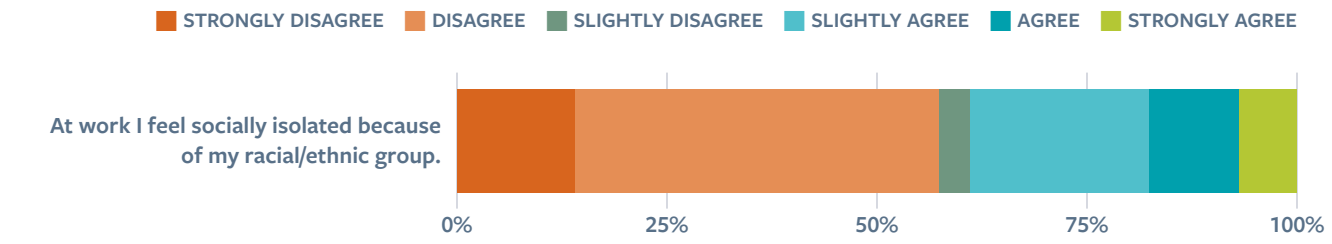


Figure 3

Interpersonal-Level Experiences

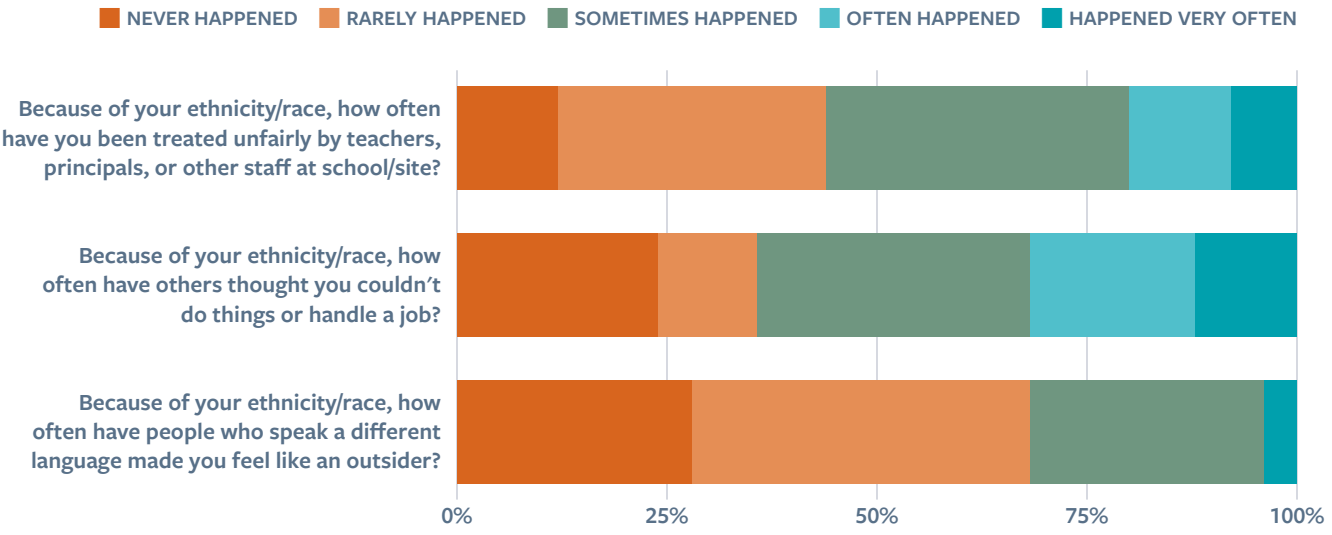


Figure 4

Institutional-Level Experiences

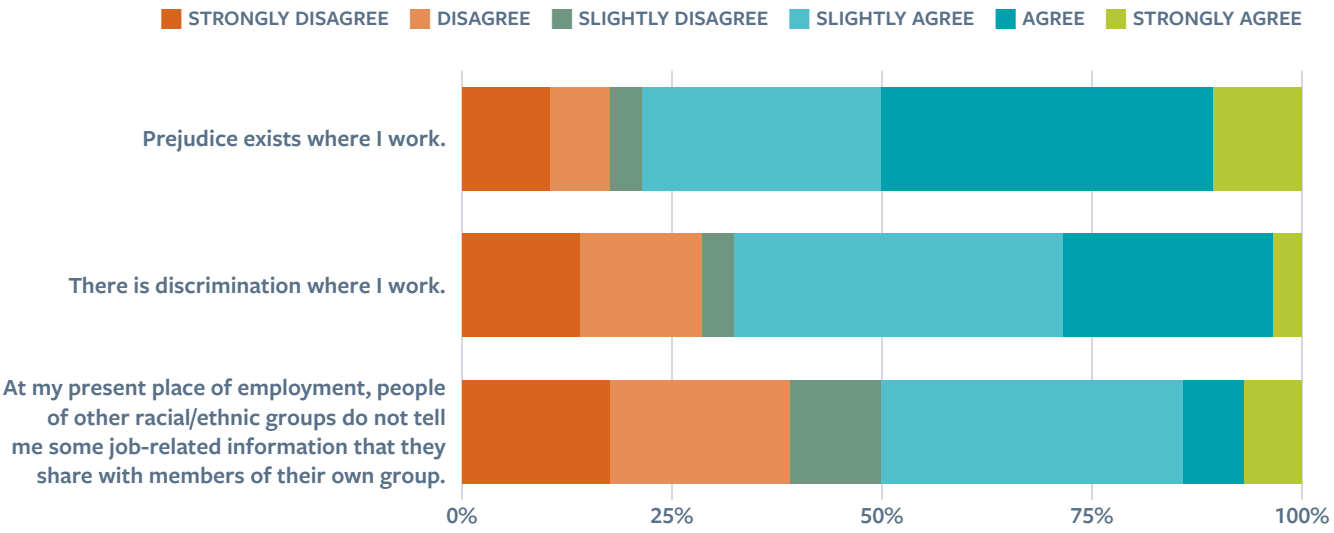
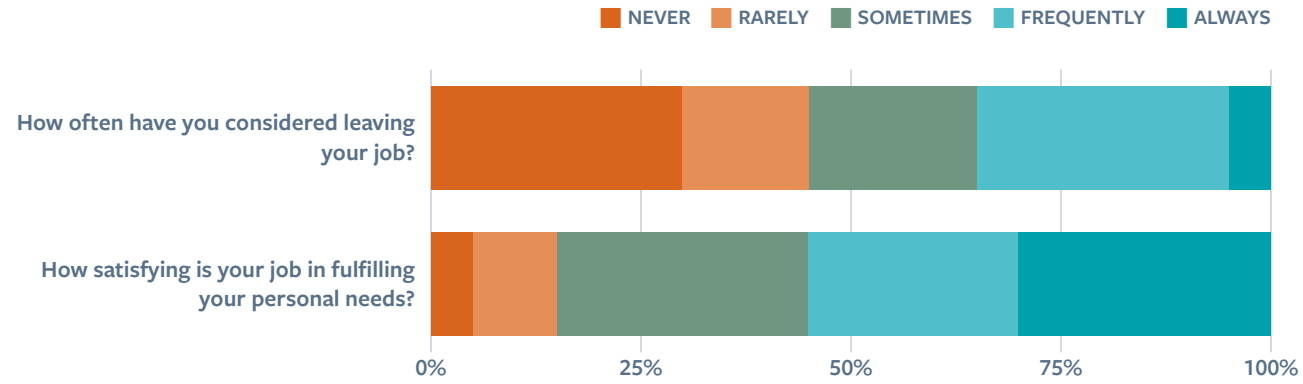


Figure 5

Turnover Intention



Disaggregated results revealed variation across groups. AAELN participants reported the highest levels of perceived workplace prejudice and discrimination, with 100% agreeing that both exist in their workplace. Among LLN participants, a majority also reported agreement: approximately 71% indicated that prejudice exists and 64% reported workplace discrimination. AAPILN participants reported more mixed perceptions, with approximately 63% reporting agreement that prejudice exists and 50% reporting workplace discrimination. For informational exclusion, 33% of AAELN participants reported agreement, compared with 50% of AAPILN participants and approximately 43% of LLN participants, indicating variability in perceptions of informational access across groups.

Turnover Intention

Participants also reported on considering leaving their jobs and on job satisfaction (see Figure 5). Among leaders of color, 55% of participants reported considering leaving their job at least sometimes, while 45% reported rarely or never considering leaving their position. Despite these turnover intentions, most participants reported moderate to high levels of job satisfaction: 55% indicated that their job frequently or always fulfills their personal needs, 30% reported moderate satisfaction, and 15% reported low satisfaction. When examined across affinity groups, turnover intention appeared relatively consistent, though somewhat higher among some groups. Approximately 67% of AAELN participants reported considering leaving their job at least sometimes, compared with 60% of AAPILN participants and 56% of LLN participants. These findings suggest that consideration of leaving one's position is present across affinity groups, even among participants who report moderate levels of job satisfaction.

Interview Themes

Validation and Visibility as a Distinguishing Feature of Affinity Groups

Thematic analysis of qualitative interviews with six participants from each affinity group was conducted, yielding insights into the experiences of leaders of color in affinity groups and how those groups differ from other professional learning settings they have been part of. Qualitative interview findings on validation and visibility provide additional insight into survey results on how leaders of color experience workplace discrimination and their intentions to leave their roles. Leaders of color across AAELN, AAPILN, and LLN groups reported key distinctions between their experiences in racial affinity groups and other professional learning spaces. Notably, facilitation was reported to distinguish racial affinity groups from other professional learning spaces and to connect to what is experienced in the groups and how it is experienced.

Across the AAELN, AAPILN, and LLN groups, key distinctions between affinity spaces and other professional learning spaces emerged related to experiences of validation and visibility. Leader responses suggest both explicit and implicit experiences of validation and visibility. Participants report feeling seen, experiencing validation about their emotions and experiences, and the unique experience of showing up in the space as their full selves. Language use, implicit and explicit validation, and feelings of authenticity punctuate these experiences for participants across affinity groups.

Participant responses indicated that language use in affinity groups differs from that used in traditional professional learning contexts across the three affinity groups. Participants in the AAELN group

remarked that they were able to say what they were thinking and feeling without filtering what they said or how they said it. Beyond this, some participants in the groups reported feeling they could be more emphatic, expressive, and authentic in their language use within affinity groups than in their professional work settings. They described not having to explain themselves to the other AAELN participants when using cultural references, which allowed them to connect and engage more deeply in this space. The absence of work-related connections also contributed to feelings of being able to say what needed to be said. One participant from the AAPILN group noted that being in a space not connected to a supervisor or district made him feel he could say whatever he needed to say. The ability to show up and speak freely was a marked difference for participants that greatly contributed to both visibility and validation:

And so it's beautiful to know that my whole self can come, and I don't have to comb my words as much as I do in every other group, right?… Of course, I'm still going to always speak professionally, and I'm going to be concise and to the point, but when I'm in other groups, I have to take pauses very dramatically so that I never allow something to slip that shouldn't slip, right? And I was being dramatic on purpose, but I have to comb every word. —AAELN participant

This participant's description of the need to censor and comb through their words in other professional learning settings significantly impacts their participation. As they describe, prior to sharing a comment, they must perform the added labor of analyzing their response, considering:

Are they going to be offended by this? Are they going to think that I'm trying to make them feel sorry for me,… I have to work too hard to talk. And so I often find myself not talking. —AAELN participant

Regarding the importance of language use in affinity spaces, one participant in the LLN group stated that being able to speak Spanish evoked positive feelings, in contrast to other professional learning spaces where her second language is often tokenized. What is said, how it is said, and in what language, distinguishes affinity spaces from other professional learning settings. As one LLN participant noted:

Some of the differences are that the ability to speak in other languages has been positive for me. I think often when I know a person understands me in another language, it'll just come out in that language, because that's what I'm feeling in that moment. —LLN participant

Participants also remarked on implicit and explicit ways in which validation and visibility were fostered in affinity groups. Articulated content, including the structure and stated purpose of the groups, was one way that validation and visibility were reinforced. Participants noted that the purpose of the group was different, including how it was enacted as a safe space for learning, where leaders can show up and engage with each other authentically, grounded in a common purpose and shared lived experiences. Implicit dynamics that distinguish affinity spaces from other professional learning spaces, according to participants, were also felt and observed in the

groups. Beyond language, explicit content, and structure, participants noted an intuitive sense of being understood and comforted, and shared experiences that underscored deep affirmation. One AAELN participant remarked on both implicit and explicit ways in which she experienced validation and visibility in community:

It means a lot… because one thing I find Black people say is, "Oh, so I'm not crazy." We all think we're crazy because we're experiencing anti-Blackness, but we're not crazy.… It's a pervasive thing that in isolation, we think we're crazy, but in community, we see a pattern… Without that community to talk about it, you can feel like you're second-guessing yourself, and you know, maybe I'm overreacting. No, we're not overreacting. They're just doing too much. —AAELN participant

The validation and visibility experienced by leaders participating in affinity groups are qualitatively different from other professional learning experiences, leading to a renewed sense of affirmation of their lived experiences and a readiness to engage in learning.

Conclusion and Implications

The survey findings suggest a pattern in which experiences across levels of the workplace environment may be interconnected. At the individual level, a notable proportion of participants reported feelings of social isolation related to their racial or ethnic identity, indicating that workplace belonging is unevenly experienced across participants. These experiences appear to be reflected at the interpersonal level, with many participants reporting unfair treatment and competence-based stereotyping from colleagues, suggesting that day-to-day interactions may shape perceptions of belonging and professional recognition. At the institutional level, the majority of participants perceived broader patterns of prejudice and discrimination in their workplaces, suggesting that these interpersonal experiences may reflect an organizational climate they perceive as inequitable. Taken together, these dynamics may contribute to turnover intentions, as over half of participants reported considering leaving their job at least sometimes, suggesting that experiences across these socioecological levels may collectively shape decisions about remaining in or exiting their positions.

Thematic findings reflect that facilitation in racial affinity groups has a fundamental impact on leaders' experiences of validation and visibility, distinguishing professional learning in these spaces from other professional learning experiences. Within and beyond affinity groups, our findings underscore the essential role of professional learning facilitated in ways that attend to facets of the workplace that are unsafe for leaders of color and that support actionable steps to address them systemically. Further action is needed in professional learning contexts to attend to power dynamics and confidentiality as essential components of effective professional support for leaders of color. Interview data are also illustrative of literature suggesting that models of continuous professional learning are the most powerful, and leaders are best served by approaches that are sustained over time.

Facilitation and safe spaces are an essential foundation for validation and visibility in affinity groups, which differ from other professional learning experiences for leaders of color.

Learning opportunities that support the authenticity and belonging of leaders of color must explicitly attend to racialized dynamics in educational and professional settings and disrupt these through intentionally designed and thoughtfully facilitated processes and spaces.

Professional learning that affirms and validates leaders of color must be embedded in the design, implementation, and process, not just in the content. Participants across the three groups shared in detail the implicit and explicit ways they are silenced, sidelined, or isolated across traditional professional learning experiences and in their professional roles more broadly. Learning opportunities that support the authenticity and belonging of leaders of color must explicitly attend to racialized dynamics in educational and professional settings and disrupt these through intentionally designed and thoughtfully facilitated processes and spaces. In addition, professional learning for leaders must be designed to allow leaders of color to see themselves reflected and to create spaces where leaders who are numerical minorities in their workplaces can gather as a powerful collective that amplifies the impact of transformative learning spaces.

The results of this study also have implications for preparation programs and for the utility of affinity group practices in supporting preservice leaders in affirming their identities in the context of higher education and leadership. In this way, preparation programs can include explicit modeling of how to support leaders of color and contribute to leaders' sustainability, which those leaders can replicate once they complete their preservice training. Additionally, preservice leaders participating in affinity groups can benefit from both being affirmed and expanding their perspectives as they experience the various ways members of their affinity group make sense of leadership dilemmas. Beyond the benefits this may provide in graduate training, it is evident from interviews and data that affinity groups can mitigate isolation, support leaders' resilience, and ultimately impact leader burnout.

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