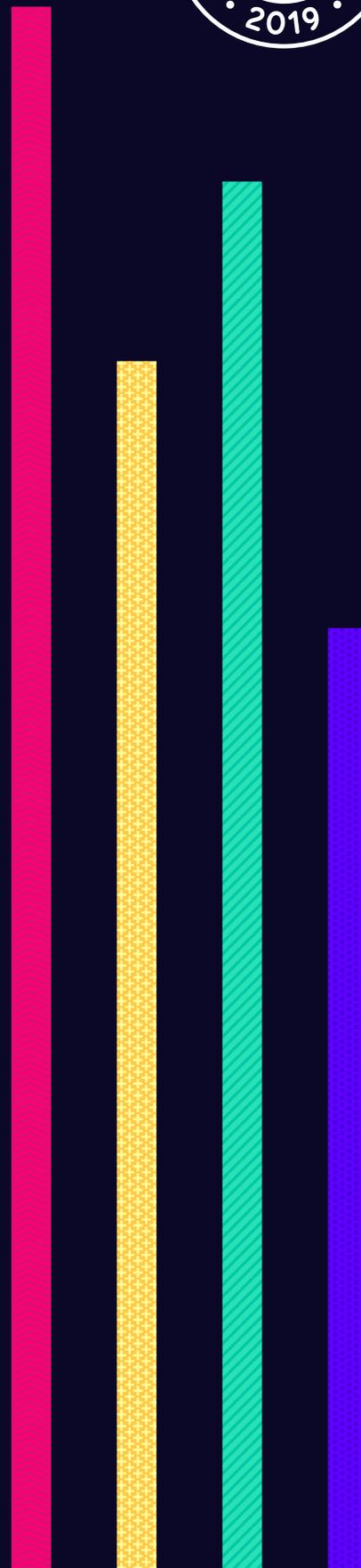




■ Understanding
■ the experience
■ of queer people
■ in design



QUEER DESIGN CLUB

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Out of the closet and into spreadsheets

The Queer Design Count is a first-of-its-kind survey of LGBTQ+ people in design across industries and disciplines. The goal of this project is to deepen understanding of the queer experience in design and broaden the conversation around diversity and inclusion beyond the silos of race and binary gender categories in isolation.

We, the founders of Queer Design Club, were inspired to take this initiative on by the lack of visibility of queer people in the field of design. What are LGBTQ+ people creating today? What past contributions were made to the field by queer people? Is design's reputation as a progressive field warranted?

There were clues in responses to the AIGA (the professional association for design) Design Census. In 2017, their survey of the larger design field began asking about LGBTQ+ identity for the first time. It probably won't shock anyone to read that there are queer people in design, but just how many surprised even us.

In 2017, 11.7% of respondents to AIGA's Design Census identified as LGBTQ+. In 2019, that number was 15%.¹ Compared to the estimated 4.5% of American adults who are LGBTQ+², the field of design appears to be disproportionately queer.

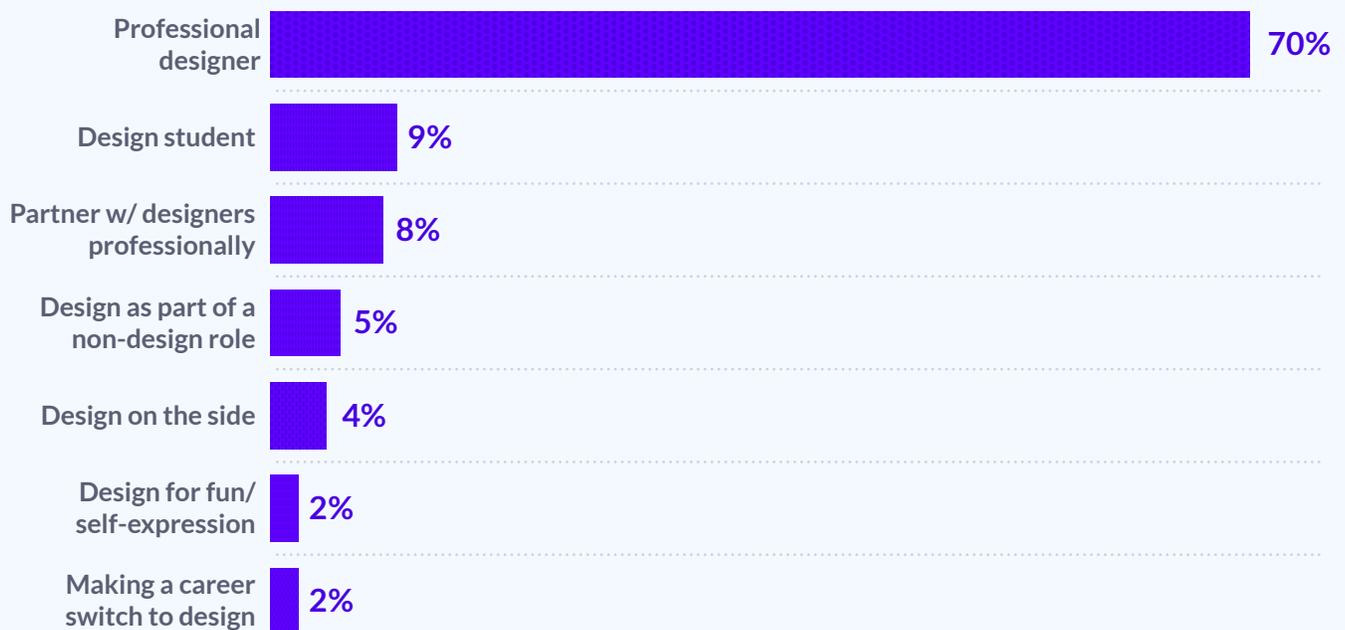
Through the data made available by the AIGA, we were able to find evidence that while LGBTQ+ people are highly represented in the field, their

experiences were not equal. We found disparities in compensation, seniority, job security, and job satisfaction.

But there was nothing in the data to tell us why, and because LGBTQ+ status was collected as single yes or no check box, there was no insight into the range of experiences of queer people in design. This isn't a criticism of the Design Census, which focuses on other important questions about the field, but we felt these questions were worth asking.

So we did.

Participants' relationship to design



About the survey

In the survey, we asked about 40 questions—a mix of single- and multiple-choice and free text responses—about participants' backgrounds, skills, and experiences on the job. The survey ran over six weeks in October and November, 2019. By the end we collected over 1,000 responses from design professionals, students, and hobbyists and people who work with designers.

My mentor once told me, 'design is a tool used to solve problems.' I initially started studying design with the intent to build better support networks for my local LGBTQIA+ community!

—QUEER GENDERFLUID DESIGN RESEARCHER

Of those, 1,000 responses, we are including 956 in this read-out. We excluded mostly empty responses and responses from people who identified as cisgender and heterosexual. The average number of responses per question is 781.

Throughout this report, we compare our results to AIGA's 2019 Design Census, a field-wide survey of all designers. (We are not affiliated with AIGA, but we are thankful they've made this data public.) The comparison isn't perfect. Not all of our questions are identical, and we spoke to different people. Without scale, the differences we see in Queer Design Count respondents and the design community at large as represented by AIGA's data are suggestive, not conclusive.

Because our sample size is small and the total number of LGBTQ+ designers unknown, we are cautious about what we can claim with confidence in this read-out. However, the smallness of a population cannot be used as an excuse for neglect or inequitable treatment. If we wait for marginalized communities to produce perfect data about themselves before we listen to them, we will never achieve the diversity and inclusion we as a field claim to value.

This read-out is the start of a conversation that must be had, and the data contained within suggests some things we really need to talk about.



John Hanawalt & Rebecca Brooker

Co-founders, Queer Design Club

The experience of queer people in design counts

I believe design is a tool to create radical
change and uplift community voices.

—QUEER NONBINARY GRAPHIC DESIGNER

The field of design is incredibly queer. LGBTQ+ people are represented in design in much higher percentages than in the general population. As we read what drew our participants to design, several themes emerged.

Queer designers, like many others, are attracted to design by having a creative outlet, a love of problem-solving, and the career options.

We also heard that design—especially in the tech industry—offered a clear path to financial independence, healthcare, and immigration assistance. For many LGBTQ+ people—who are more likely to have faced family rejection, may need transition or HIV-related healthcare, or may live in areas that are unwelcoming and unsafe to queer people—these benefits can be life-saving.

Others still were drawn to design by the potential to make an impact on the world, some specifically through work related to LGBTQ+ causes and others through broader human-centered design practices.

While these motivations to join the field of design may resonate with

I worked in HIV/AIDS research in my prior career and noticed minimal awareness around locating HIV services, as websites/apps were poorly designed. With this in mind, I pursued UX design in healthcare!

—GAY MAN UX DESIGNER

cisgender, heterosexual peers, we also found several ways in which the experience of queer designers differ.

- 40% of LGBTQ+ designers reported having to point out design decisions that excluded queer people to their colleagues.
- 13% had been asked to work for anti-LGBTQ+ clients.
- 9% looked for another job because their current wasn't queer-friendly.

But, like the LGBTQ+ community itself, our respondents were not a monolith. There are several ways in which experiences differ within the queer design community as well. In our results, we see recurring disparities between participants who are cisgender compared to those who are transgender, as well as gay and lesbian respondents compared to bisexual and pansexual respondents. We also see familiar biases of race and gender playing out within queer communities, with respondents who are white and male often faring better than everyone else.

- 70% of men felt like their jobs were relatively stable while for women that number was 64%. For gender diverse participants it was only 60%.
- 53% of lesbian and gay respondents held senior positions in their current companies, while only 41% of bisexual respondents reported the same.
- 22% of respondents of color reported making less \$25,000 annually compared to 15% of white respondents.

I love art and technology, and I feel that graphic design is an amazing combination of both. Design can change peoples' lives, and this field is always evolving.

—LESBIAN WOMAN GRAPHIC DESIGNER

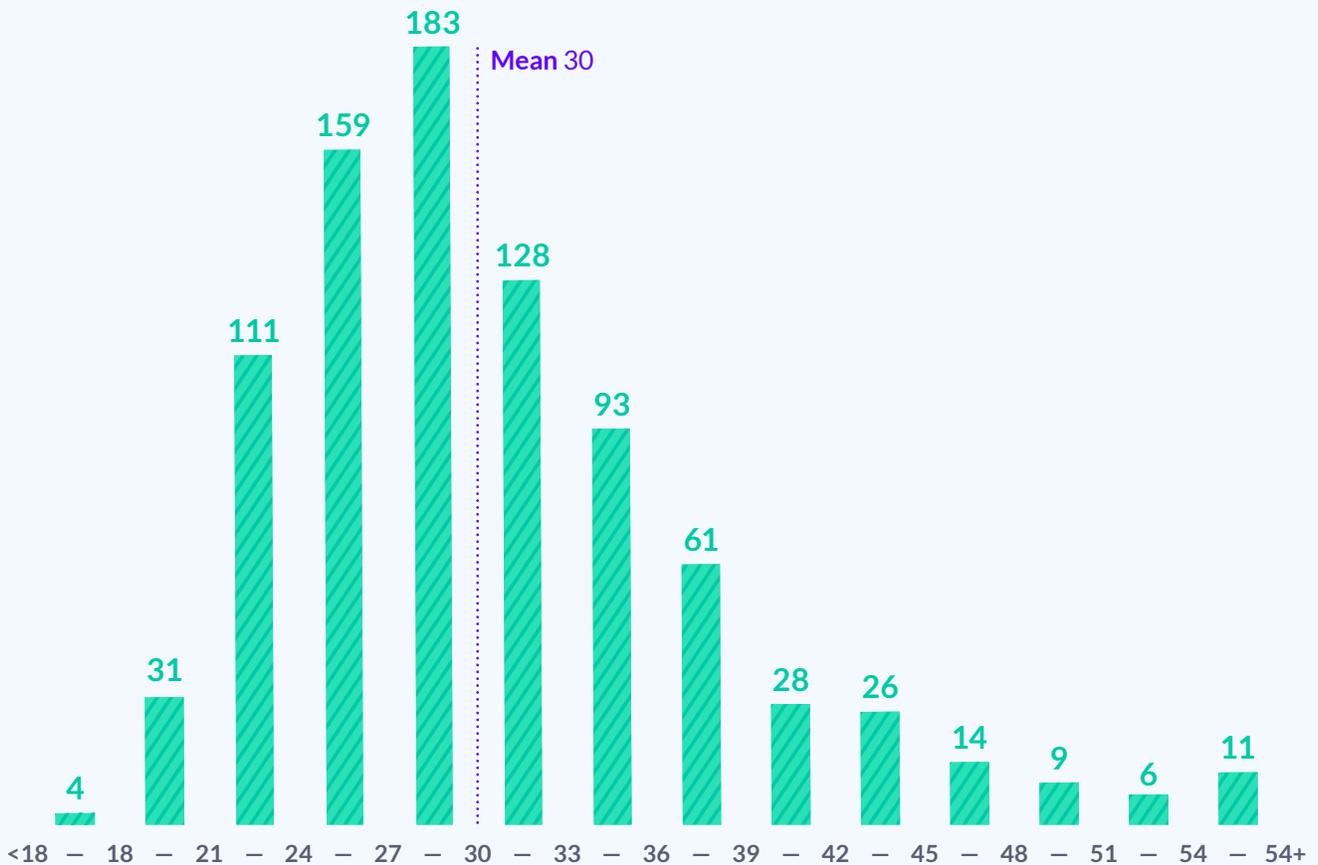
- Trans respondents were 10% more likely to report experiencing anti-LGBTQ+ bias at work or school.

To us, this underscores the importance of a more dimensional approach to diversity and inclusion. No person is one dimensional, and while the intersection of communities we all live at adds richness to our lives, it also adds complexity to how we conceive of an equitable design field. If we think only of race, we leave the harms experienced by women and queer people of color unaddressed. If we think of sexuality in isolation of race and gender, we risk centering members of the queer community whose experience of anti-LGBTQ+ bias is softened by other types of privilege.

This read-out presents a design challenge to us all: how do we craft diversity and inclusion practices in our field that reflect the amazing diversity in our world? And how do we work together as practitioners to spread equity beyond our field through our work?

Age

Number of respondents by age group



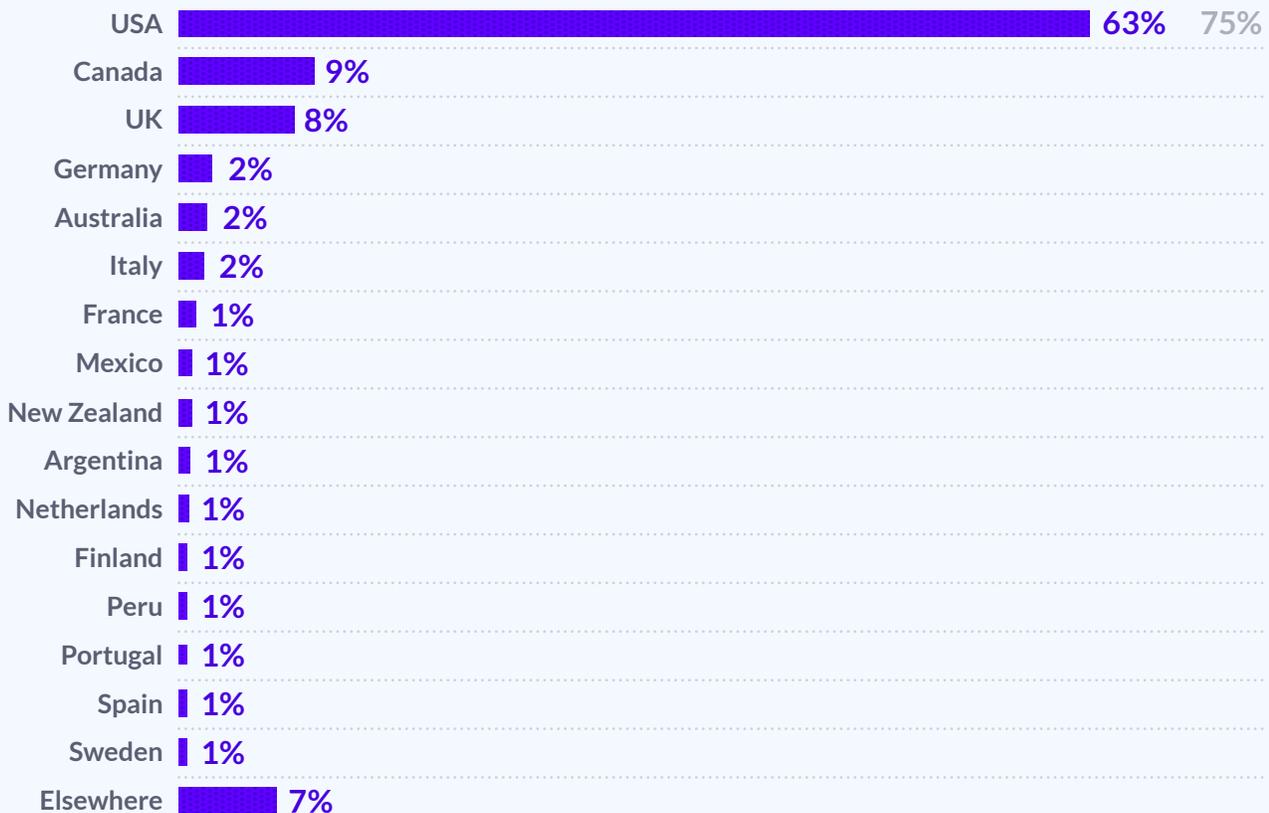
Queer Design Count participants ranged in age from 16 to 66 years old. The median age of our respondents was 30. Our average respondent is five years younger than designers who responded to the AIGA Design Census.

This difference could be a result of queer designers leaving the field of design before reaching the same seniority as their cisgender, heterosexual peers or older designers feeling less comfortable identifying openly as LGBTQ+.

Location

As work becomes more global, with companies that employ designers operating in multiple countries or contracting design labor abroad, it's important to understand the larger context in which LGBTQ+ people in design work. Companies must address the challenges of providing an inclusive environment for workers who may work remotely from locations where it is unsafe or even illegal to be openly queer.

Percentage of respondents by country



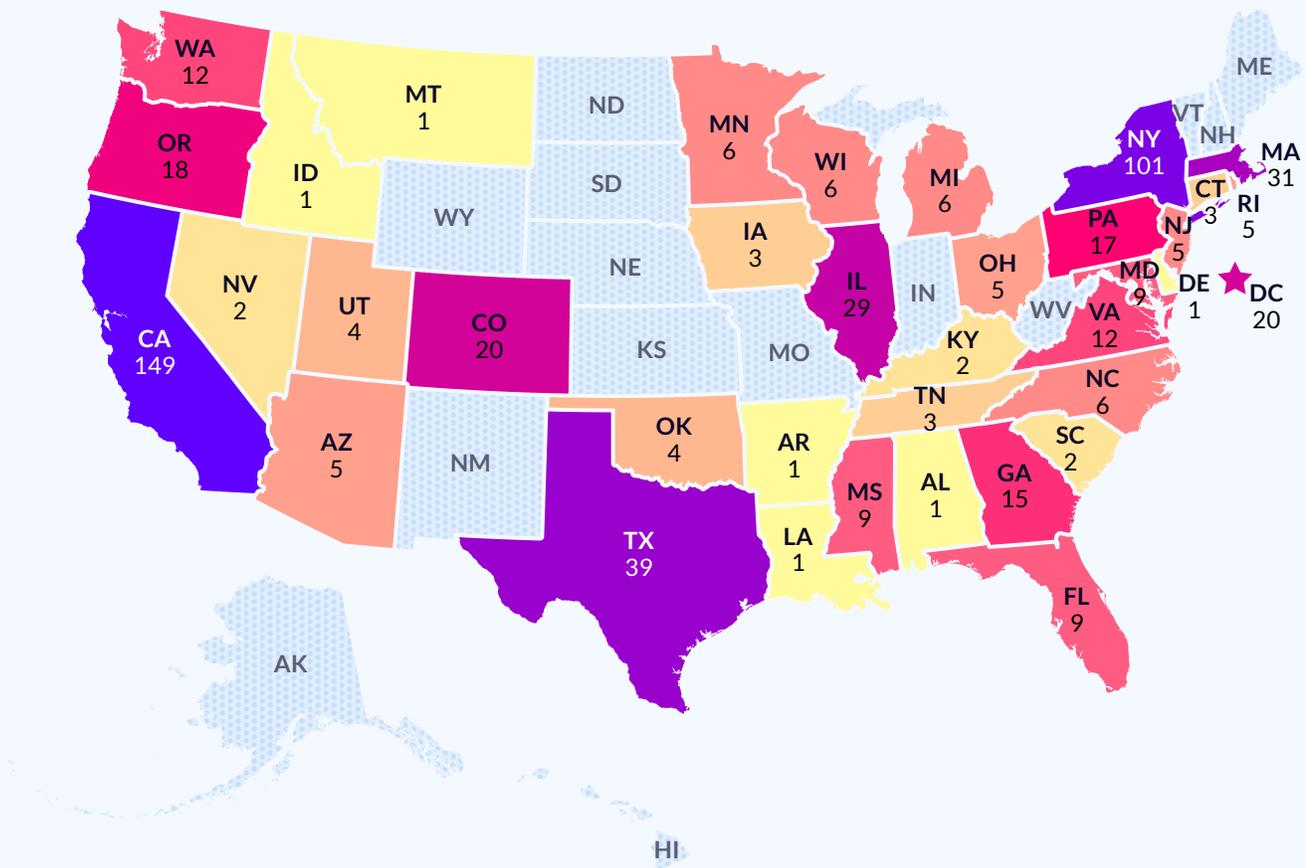
Countries whose responses are less than 1% each

Belgium, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Greece, Hungary, India, Ireland, Japan, Malaysia, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Russia, Scotland, Singapore, Slovenia, South Korea, Switzerland, Taiwan, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Vietnam

I used to be more conservative about my private life but after same sex marriage was legalized in the US, I feel more comfortable talking about my wife.

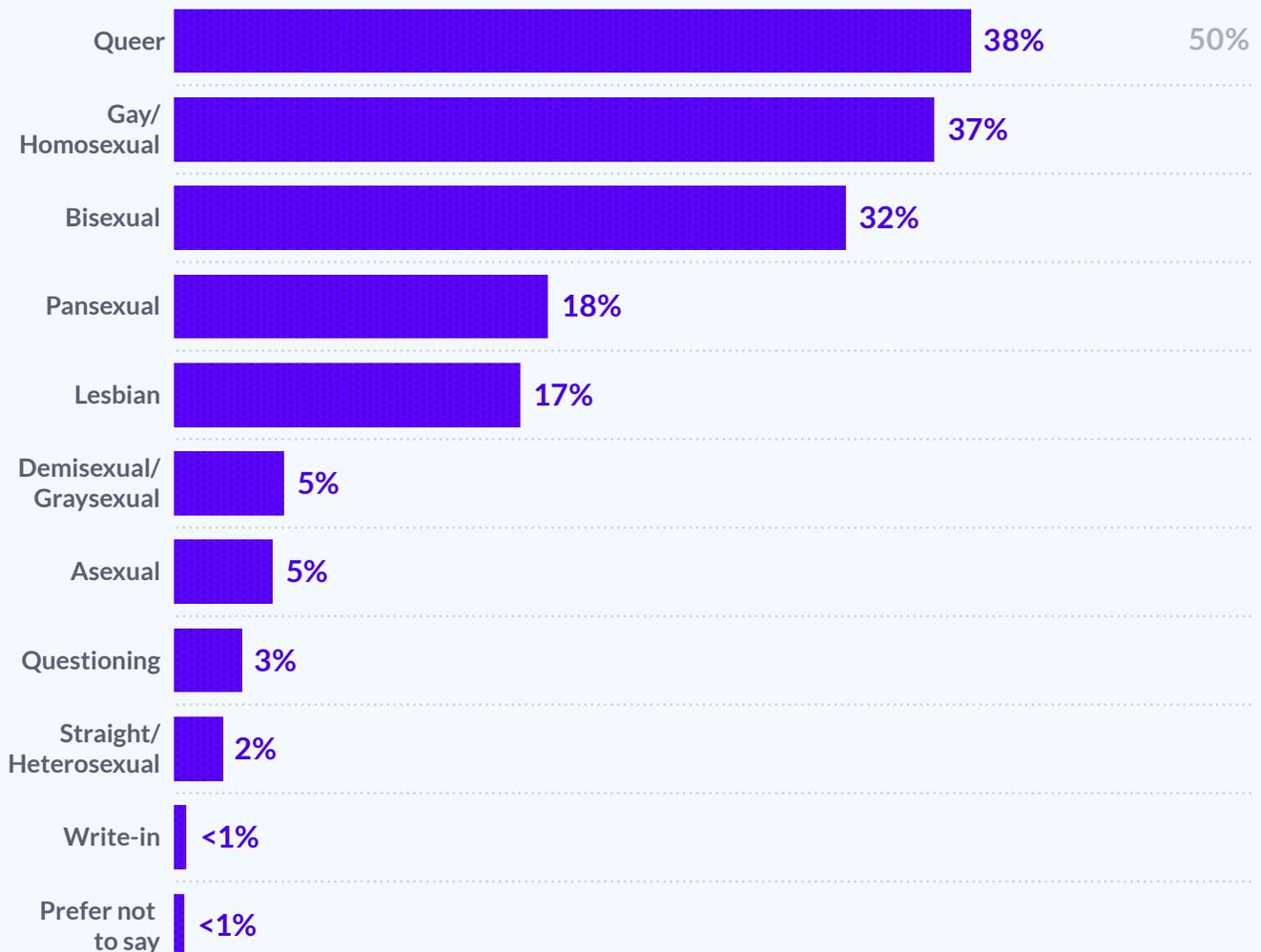
—QUEER WOMAN PRODUCT DESIGNER

Number of U.S. respondents by state



Within the U.S., we see heavy concentrations on the coasts, where many design-dependent industries such as tech and advertising have major hubs. These areas are also more likely to have enshrined state-level legal protections for LGBTQ+ people.³ Until the Supreme Court ruling in June, 2020, about half of LGBTQ+ people in the U.S. lived in states with no protections against discrimination based on sexuality or gender identity.⁴ It is impossible to separate the conversation about LGBTQ+ people working in design from the larger legal context of work.

Sexuality



Designers describe their sexuality with an array of labels. Many identify with more than one descriptor—either concurrently or fluidly over time. And some are, as one respondent described their sexuality, “Confused 24/7.”

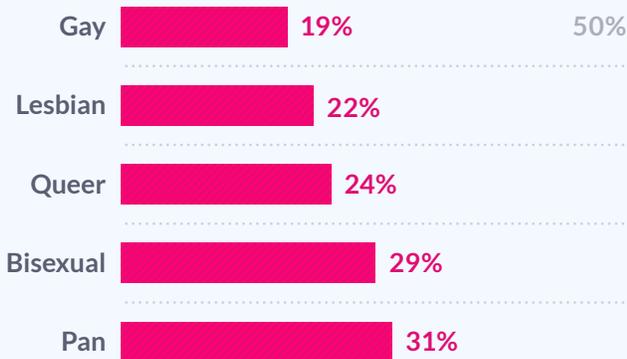
4.5% of respondents who are not totally open about their identity at work or school said it was because they are personally unsure of their identity or how to describe it.

Note: participants could select or provide multiple answers.

I'll often just tell people I'm "bi" because explaining that I identify as pansexual because it's more affirming of my rejection of gender is a little more than I care to go into with most co-workers and casual acquaintances.

—PANSEXUAL AGENDER PRINT AND PACKAGING DESIGNER

Respondents making under \$35k/year



Respondents who reported experiencing anti-LGBTQ+ bias



Where someone fits under the LGBTQ+ umbrella appears to impact their experience in design. Gay and lesbian respondents frequently fared better respondents whose sexuality did not fit neatly into a gay/straight binary.

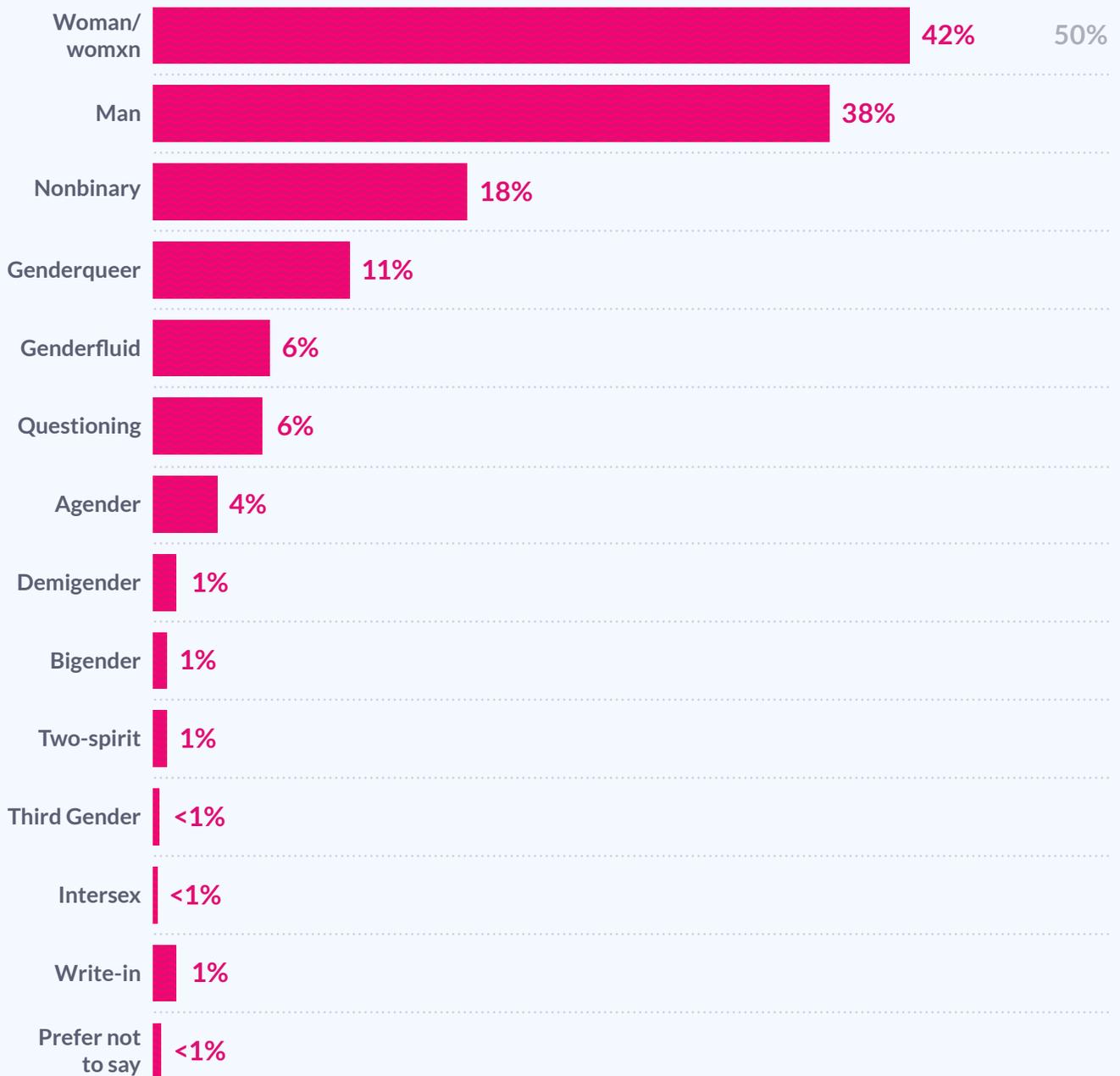
The interplay of sexuality and gender also affects designers' experience in the field. For example, respondents who identify as gay—who are mostly cis men—were less likely to report experiencing anti-LGBTQ+ bias at work or school.

Note: response volumes of sexualities not listed above were too small to meaningfully break into sub-categories such as income brackets.

Gender

How would you describe your gender identity?

Respondents could select multiple answers.



It's hard for me to tell if I have to fight harder because I'm a lesbian or if it's just because I'm female on a male-dominated team.

—LESBIAN WOMAN UI/UX DESIGNER

Employment status by gender

	Man	Woman	Nonbinary	Genderqueer
Full-time	69%	67%	53%	47%
Contract Role	7%	6%	7%	10%
Freelance	5%	7%	9%	20%
Multiple Jobs	4%	4%	3%	0%
Part-time	3%	3%	5%	5%
Self-employed	3%	4%	5%	5%
Student	5%	6%	11%	6%
Not working	4%	4%	6%	6%

There is incredible gender diversity among our respondents, with many identifying with genders outside the man/woman binary that many diversity and inclusion programs are built around.

With overlapping responses—participants could, for example, identify as a nonbinary woman—the effect of gender diversity on one’s experience is hard to quantify. Defying categorization is a queer tradition, after all. But patterns do emerge.

Participants who are men were generally more likely to be employed full-time and felt more secure in their jobs, whereas women and gender diverse participants were overrepresented in lower income brackets and experienced greater bias in the workplace and school.

Trans issues

It's difficult being the only trans woman in my school's design program. Although there is support from other students, the everyday slights add up and take a toll on my health and ability to create designs to the best of my ability.

—BISEXUAL TRANS WOMAN DESIGN STUDENT

Are you transgender?



Anti-LGBTQ+ bias experience by trans identity



Trans women are women, and trans men are men. So we collected data about whether or not someone was trans separately from their gender identity.

What we found is that trans respondents were significantly more likely to experience bias, came into the field with less formal education, and were more than twice as likely than their cisgender counterparts to make under \$35k annually.

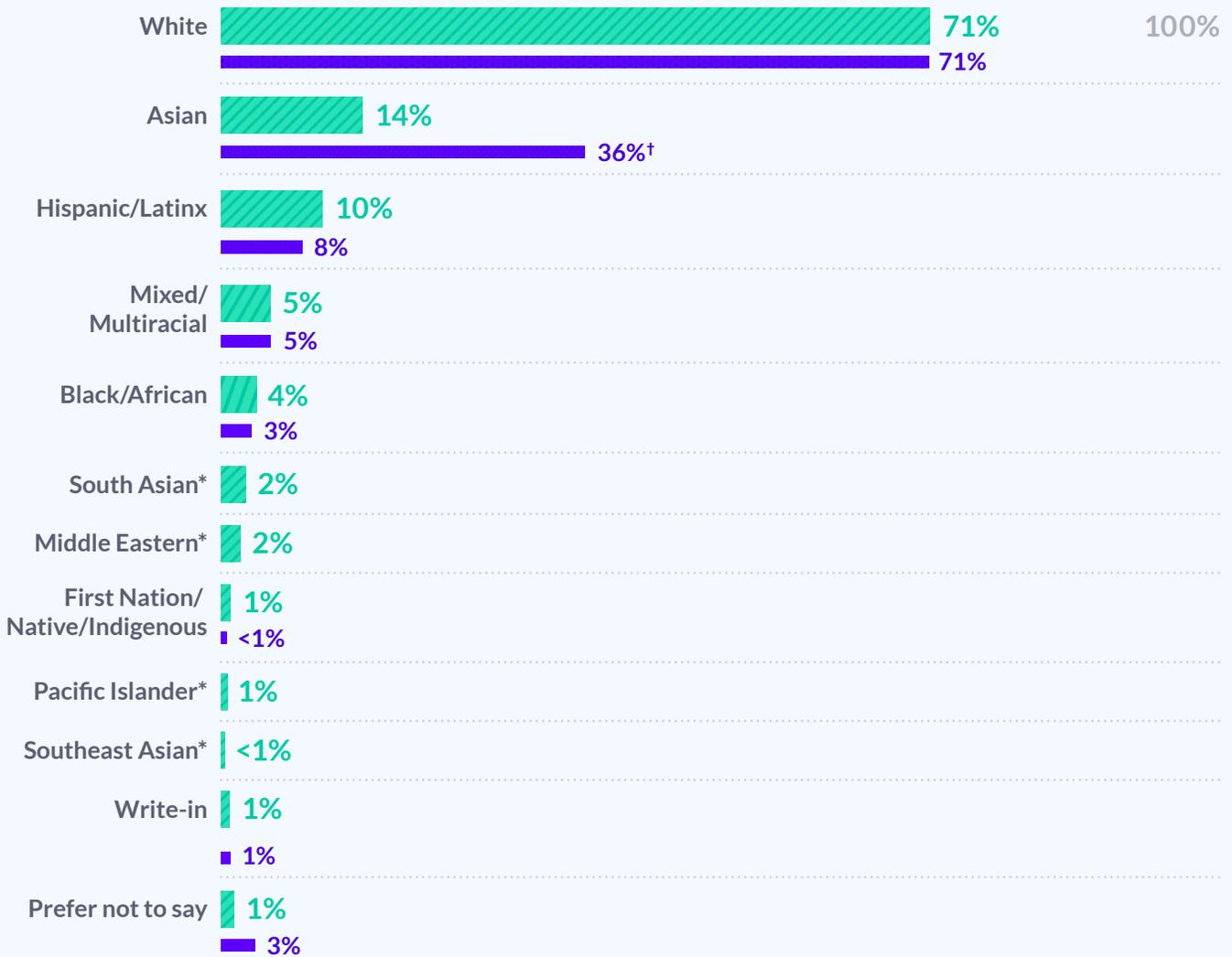
It's clear that trans designers are facing increased obstacles to success in design as they do elsewhere in society. LGBTQ+ inclusion efforts must center trans members of the community or they will be unsuccessful.

Race

How would you describe your race/ethnicity?

Respondents could select multiple answers.

■ Queer Design Count 2019 respondents ■ AIGA Design Census 2019 respondents



† In addition to differences in sample sizes and our inclusion of international responses, this variation is also due in part to our decision to split out identities within the “Asian” umbrella as options.

* Category not included in the AIGA Design Census

As a Black LGBTQ+ designer, I find the industry to be more welcoming to LGBTQ+ individuals than to Black designers.

—GAY MAN UX DESIGNER

Income by race/ethnicity

White respondents Respondents of color



Racial, gender, and LGBTQ+ inclusion are often discussed as separate concerns; but in reality, many people belong to multiple marginalized groups. When they do, it results in increased disparities.

Queer people of color are significantly more likely to experience anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination in the workplace than their white counterparts (32% compared to 13%).⁵

They are also underrepresented in design. Black Americans make up about 14% of the population but only 4% of respondents to the Queer Design Count and 3% of respondents to the AIGA Design Census.

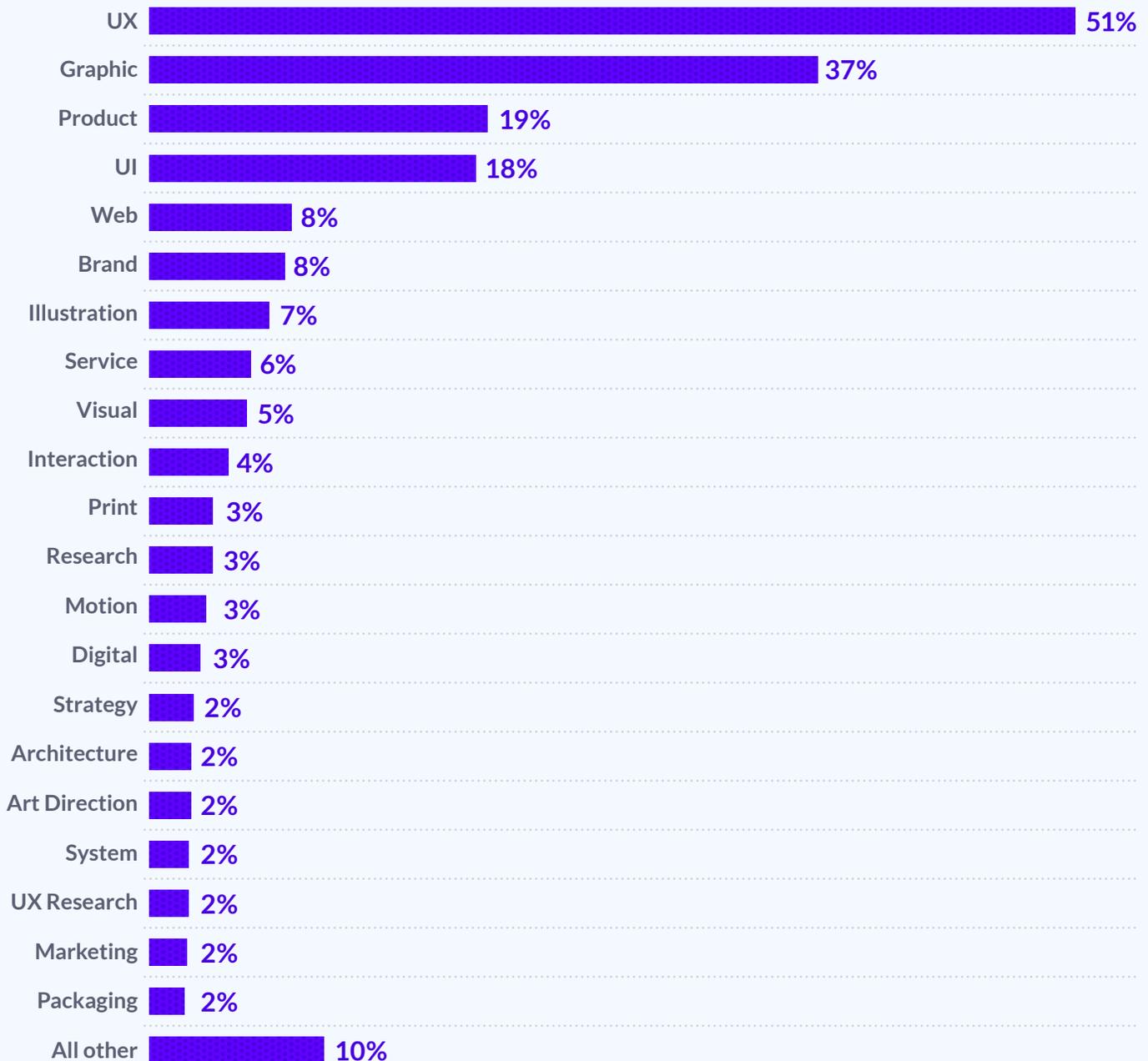
Our respondent pool doesn't allow us insight into the experience of queer designers of color with any more nuance than "white or not white." But we can see that designers of color tend to be newer to the design industry, earn less, and are less happy in their current role.

Design has a lot of work to do to welcome queer people of color and give them what they need to thrive in the field.

Experience

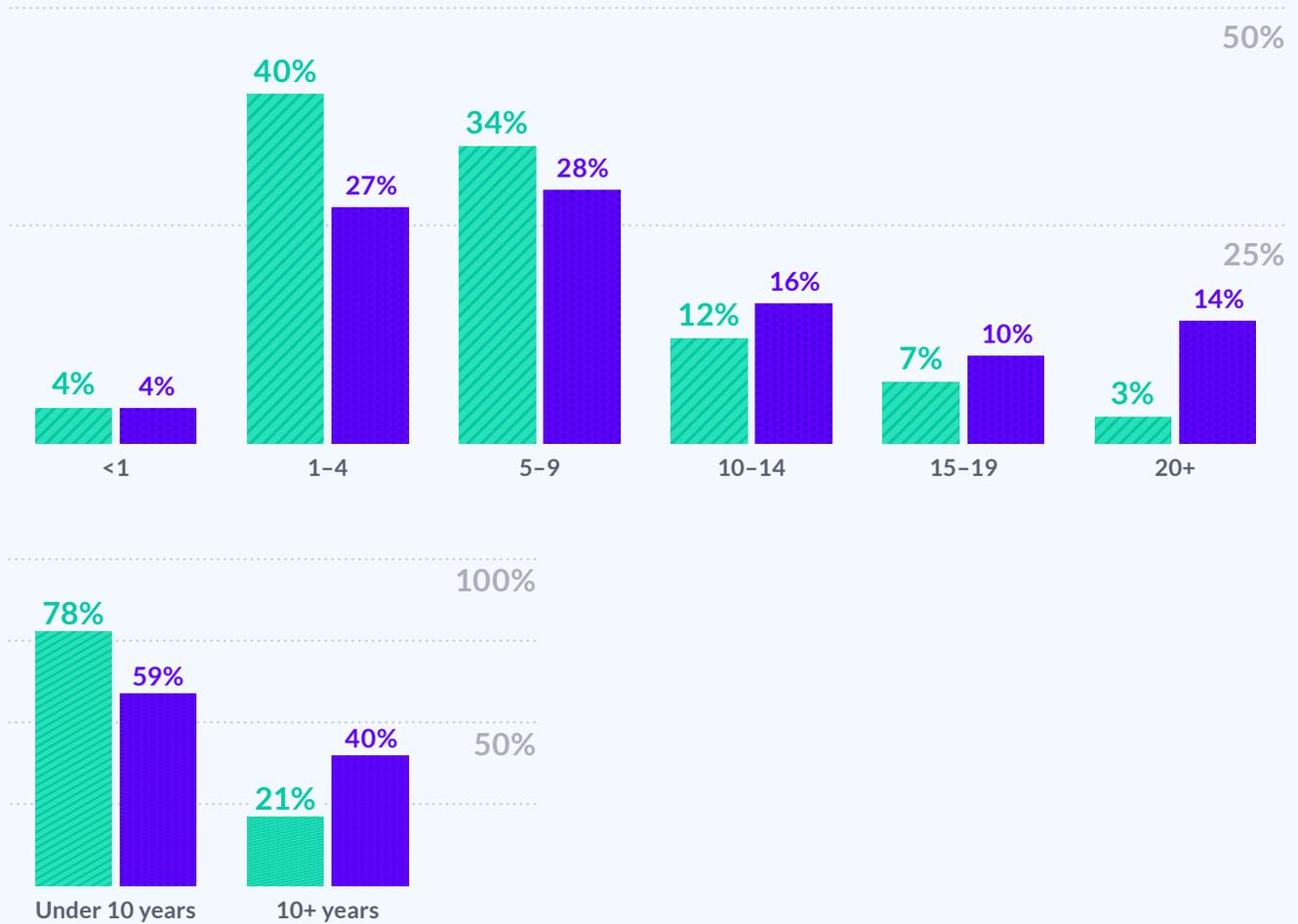
Types of design currently engaged in

Respondents could enter multiple answers.



Years in design

■ Queer Design Count 2019 respondents ■ AIGA Design Census 2019 respondents



Professionally, our participants engage in a variety of design disciplines. The most common area of practice among our participants is user experience design, followed by graphic and product design.

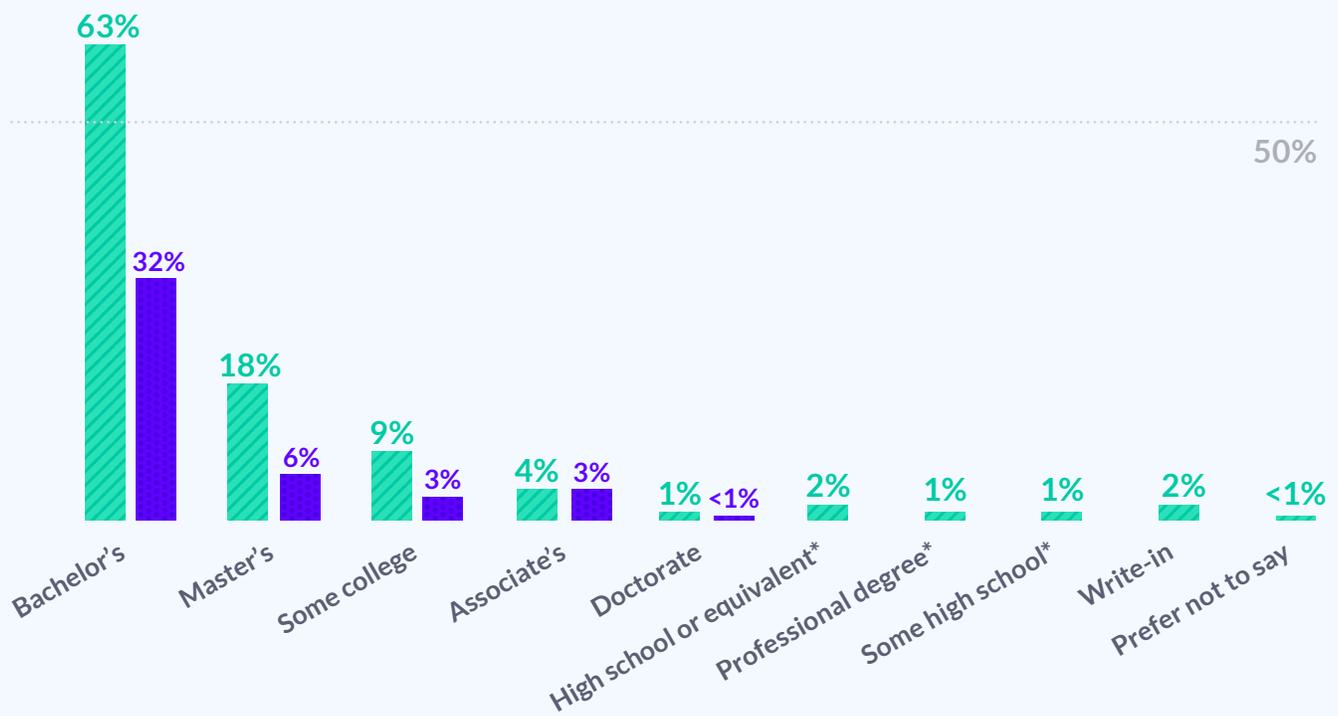
Compared to the AIGA Design Census, our respondents seem to be significantly more likely to be in new media such as digital product and experience design with proportionally fewer graphic designers, illustrators, and art directors.

The starkest difference between our respondents' experience and the Design Census, however, is years in design. Queer Design Count respondents are significantly more likely to have fewer than 10 years of experience (78% to 59%) and significantly underrepresented in the 10+ years categories (21% to 40%).

Education

Highest level of formal education completed

■ Queer Design Count 2019 respondents ■ AIGA Design Census 2019 respondents



* Category not included in the AIGA Design Census

Queer Design Count participants were significantly more likely to report having a formal education compared to both the AIGA Design Census as well as national statistics on education attainment in the United States.

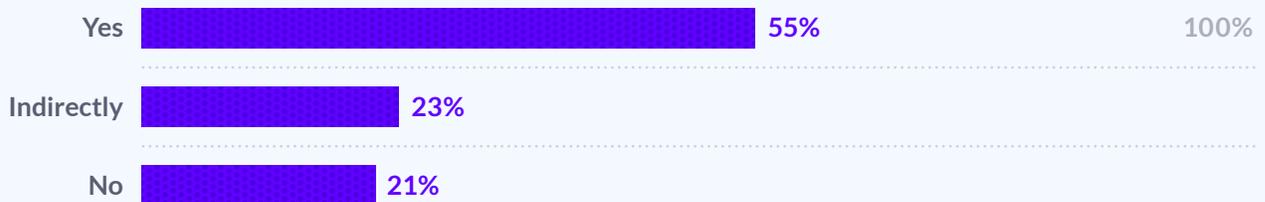
For example, 41% of LGBTQ+ Americans attain a high school diploma or equivalent as their highest level of formal education compared to just 2% of our participants. Nationally, only 17% of LGBTQ+ people have a Bachelor's degree, compared to 63% of respondents.

Within our responses there are disparities as well. Trans respondents were more likely to have a high school diploma or some college as their highest level of formal education and less likely to have received a postgraduate degree.⁶

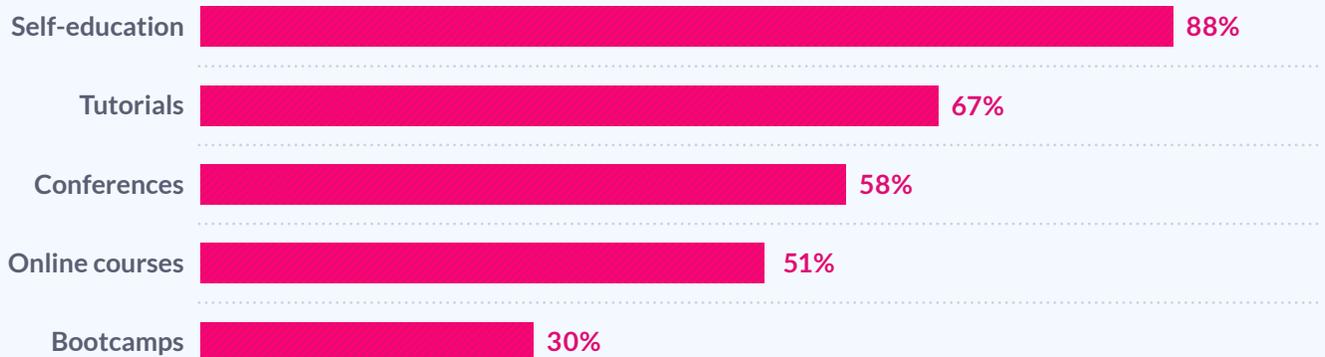
I out myself to my students because visibility is important. I did not have queer female design teachers and I want to normalize queerness to my students.

—QUEER WOMAN DESIGN EDUCATOR

Is your formal education in design?



What other types of education have you completed?

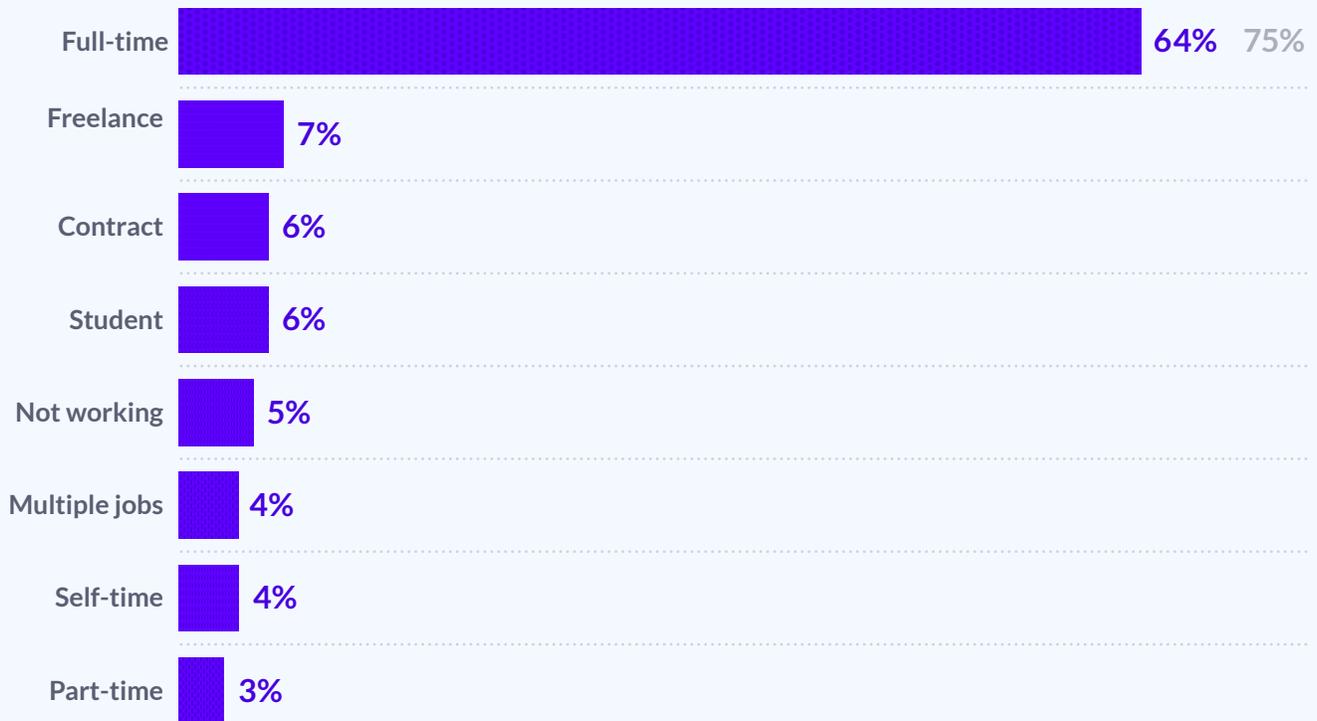


While many of our respondents have attained some form of higher education, only 55% of those respondents' education was design related. Others in the field have indirect or no design-related formal education.

Alternative or supplemental modes of education are common. Most of our respondents engage in some form of self-education, and more than half have used tutorials, online courses, or conferences to expand their skills. While less common than the other forms of education, nearly a third of respondents have used bootcamps to or other in-person instruction.

Employment

Employment status



The majority of our respondents are full-time employees at 64%. Proportionally, Queer Design Count respondents are less likely to be full-time employees than AIGA Design Census respondents, of which 71% are employed full-time.

The Design Census also includes several categories we didn't, such as "Educator" and "Small business owner," which likely increases the discrepancy between their audience and ours.

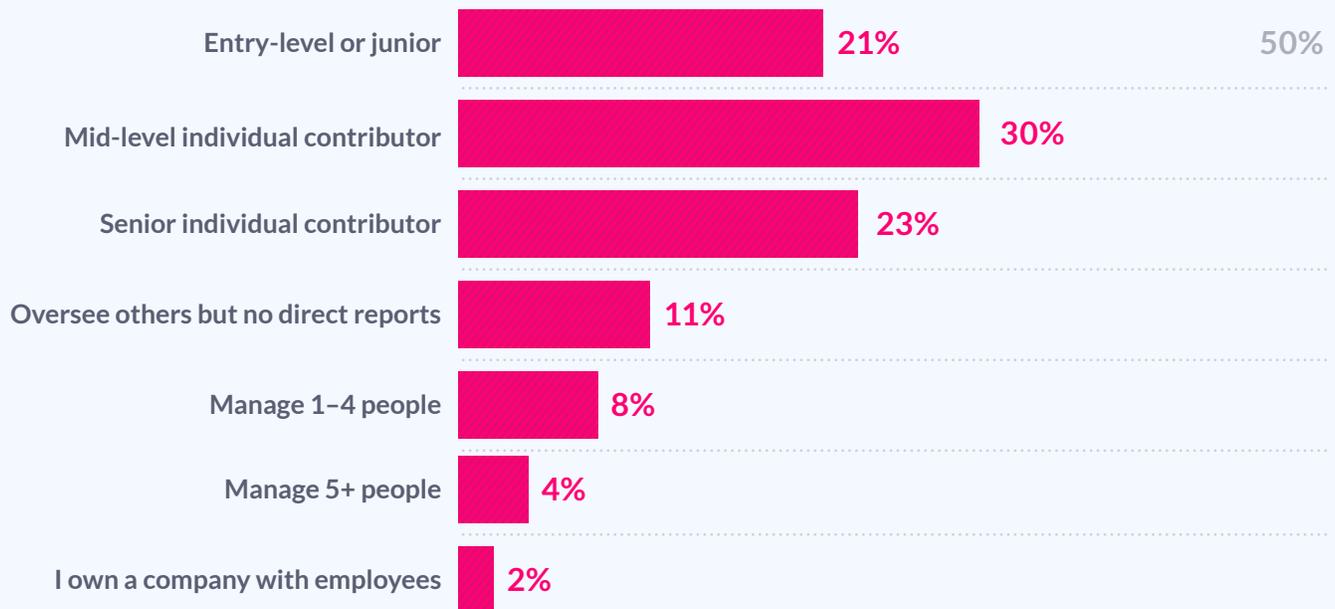
Within our own participant pool, we see further disparities, with men and women more likely to be employed full-time than nonbinary and genderqueer respondents and cis participants more likely to be employed full-time than trans peers.

Additionally, Queer Design Count respondents were more likely to not be working: 5% compared to 1% of AIGA's respondents.

Unconscious bias others have against dykey-looking women has set me back in myriad ways I am unable to combat. I've come to terms with the fact that my glass ceiling is other people's feelings about masculine women.

—GENDERQUEER LESBIAN PRODUCT DESIGNER

Seniority of current position



Over half of Queer Design Count participants are in junior–mid-level roles, and an additional third are in senior roles with no direct reports. Only 14% of participants reported managing people directly. This may relate to the fact that queer people appear more likely to be newer to the field.

Growth is a repeated theme in respondents' reasons for satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their current role, and some said they felt their sexuality or gender expression impeded their professional growth.

Income

Approximate annual income in U.S. dollars

■ LGBTQ+ ■ Non-LGBTQ+



Source: AIGA Design Census 2019

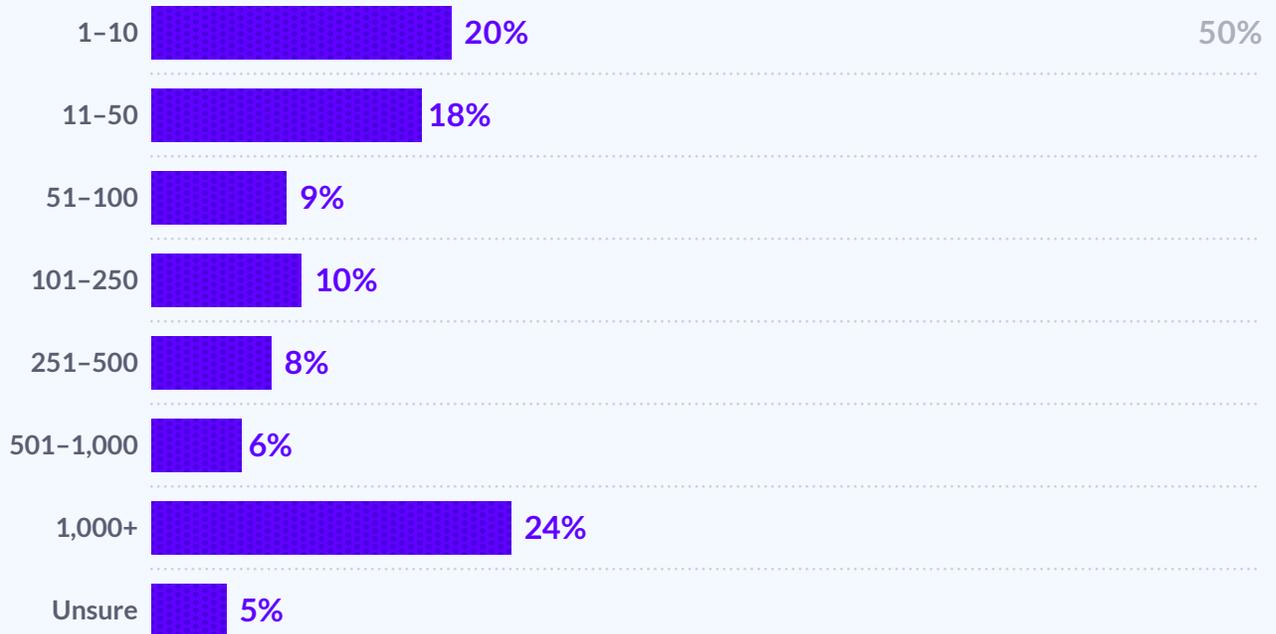
Although we did ask income in our survey, we are using the AIGA's data for a more direct comparison.

Our data closely aligns with LGBTQ+ responses to the AIGA Design Census, which shows LGBTQ+ people disproportionately represented in the lower income brackets and underrepresented in the higher ranges.

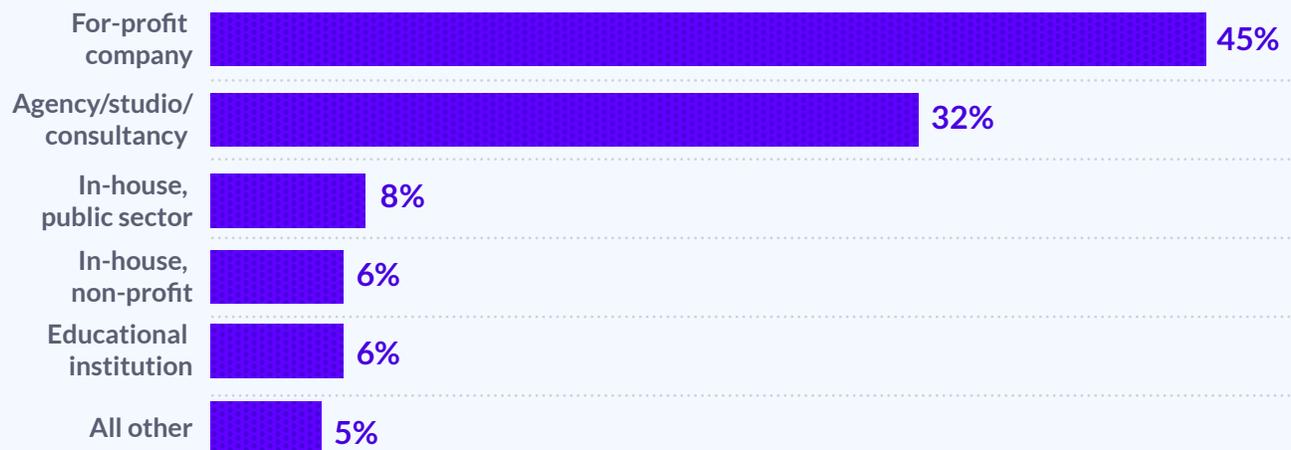
Within our own data, we see the largest disparity in income between cis and trans people in design. Over half of our trans respondents earn less than \$50,000 annually compared to 35% of cis respondents. It's also notable that people who are unsure about their gender identity are also likely to earn less than cis people, although by a smaller margin.

Company

Approximate company size



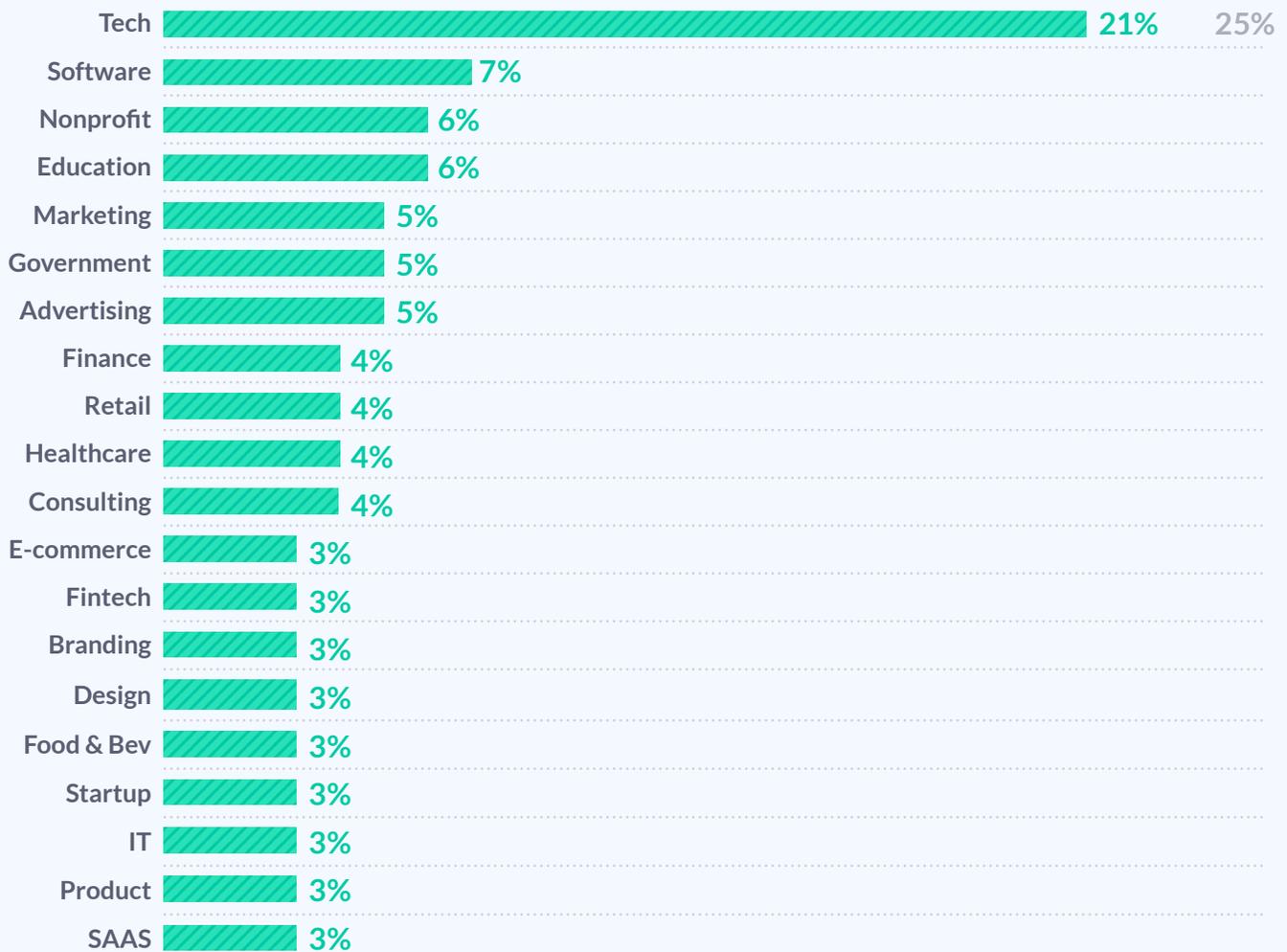
Environment



I think I had assumed there would be more LGBTQ+ voices in the tech design industry and was incredibly shocked by how few I have been able to find during the course of my career.

—GAY MAN UI/UX DESIGNER

Top 20 Industries



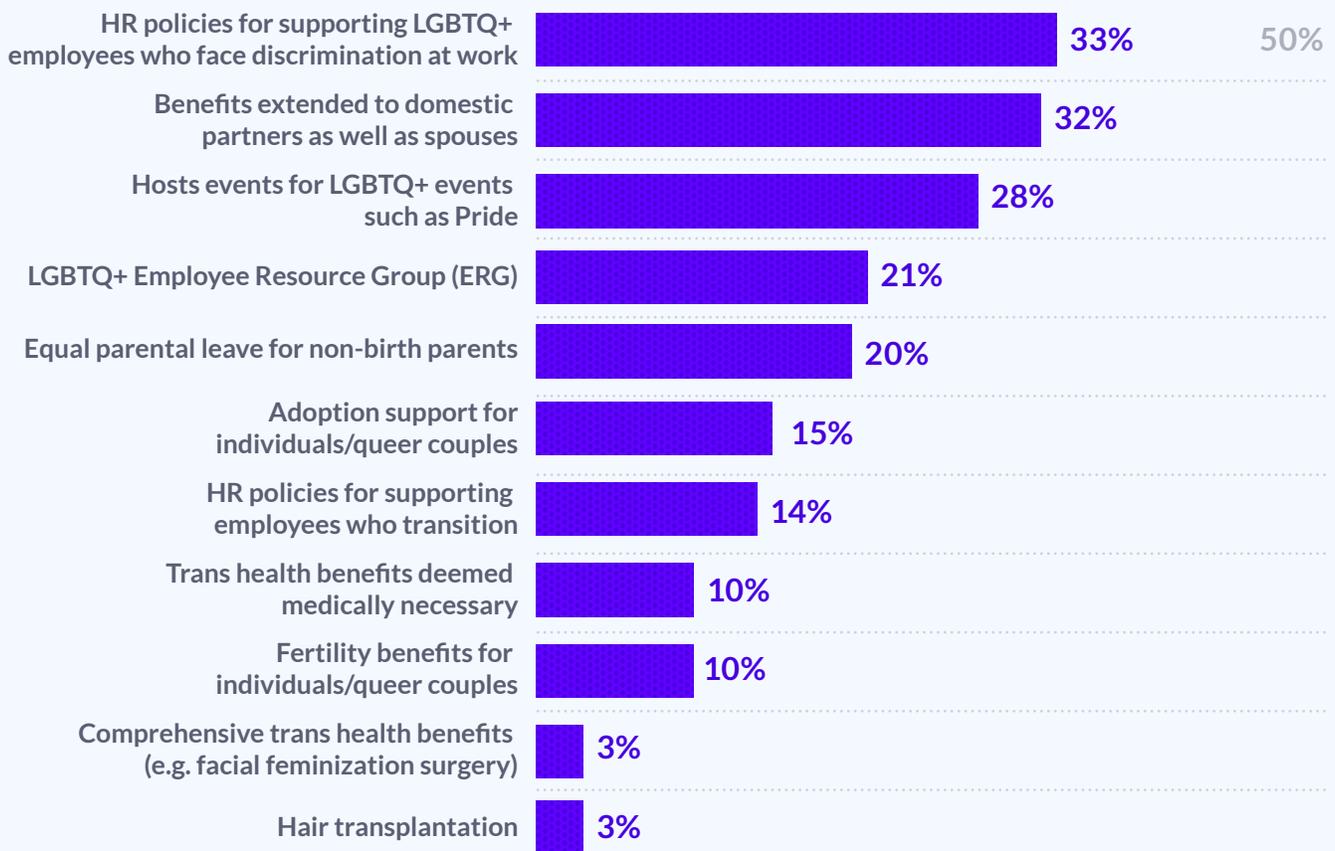
Participants could freely enter whatever they saw as their main industries. Tech is by far the most common sector among our respondents. Tech does not appear as an industry in the AIGA Design Census, but where other industries appear in both surveys, the percent of respondents represented are mostly similar. There are slightly fewer Queer Design Count respondents working in advertising and marketing, which suggests that tech is more appealing or welcoming to LGBTQ+ people than more traditional design-driven fields.

Benefits

A reason I got into design is because of tech companies that offer transition-related benefits.

—PANSEXUAL TRANS UI/UX DESIGNER

Benefits and resources offered by current workplace



13% of respondents reported not having access to any LGBTQ+ related benefits, such as trans-inclusive health plans, equal parental leave for non-birth parents, or employee resource groups.

Many respondents were unsure of what benefits their companies offer. Many benefits and resources, such as HR policies to support employees transitioning or to address anti-LGBTQ+ bias incidents, need to be promoted to be effective.

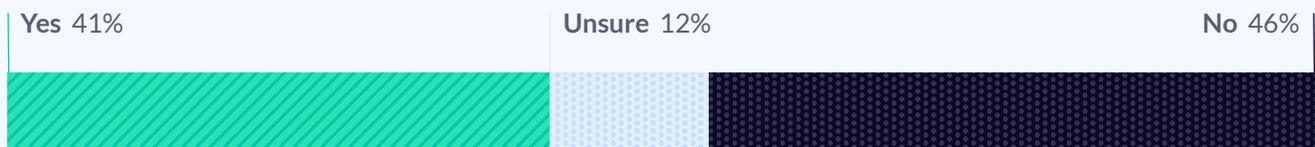
Diversity and inclusion

It can feel deeply lonely to be in an industry that celebrates itself for its empathetic framework yet excludes trans people so easily.

—BISEXUAL WOMAN TYPE DESIGNER

Diversity and inclusion programming

Does your workplace offer Diversity and Inclusion programming, workshops, and/or trainings?



Of that:



Only 41% of LGBTQ+ people in design report working for employers with diversity and inclusion (D&I) programming. D&I programming is often focused on race and cis, binary gender balance.

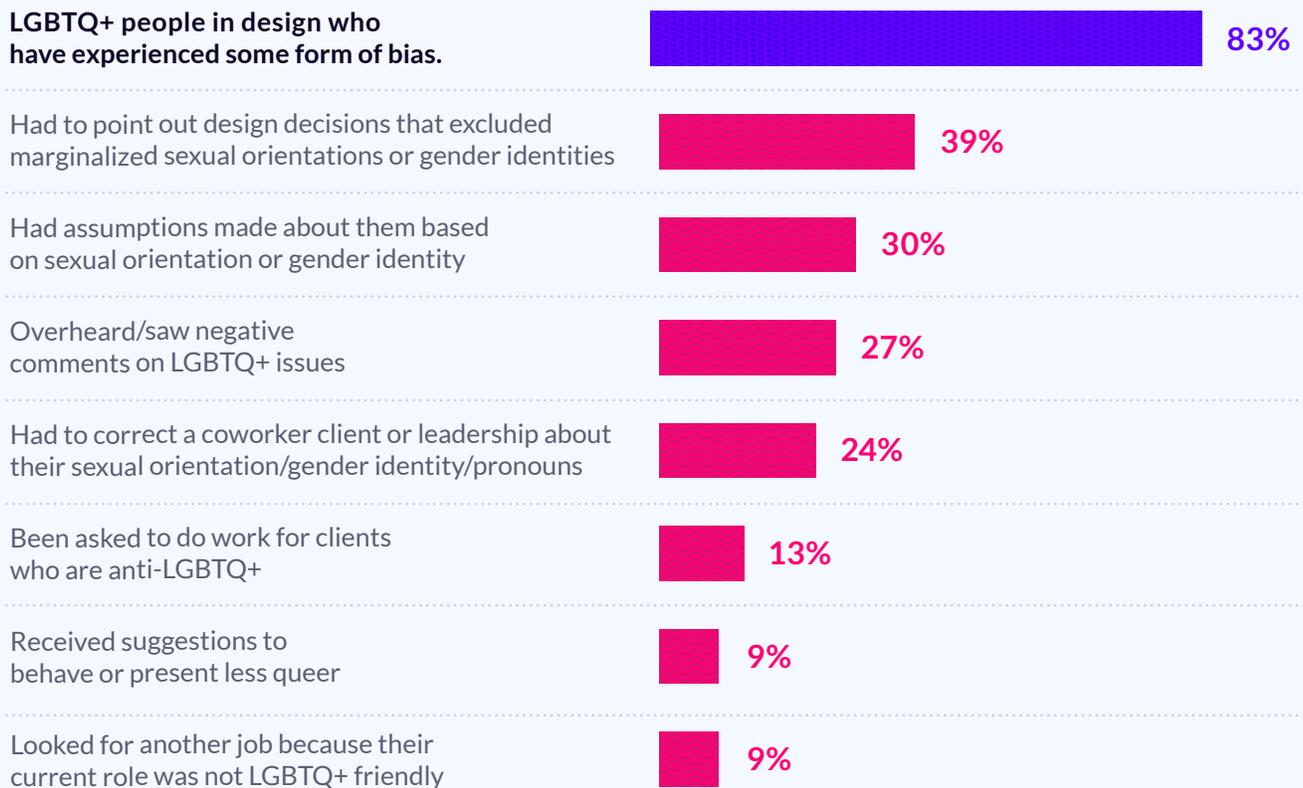
Less than a third of respondents worked for an employer who offered D&I programming that includes sexual orientation, and less than a quarter worked for an employer with D&I programming that includes diverse genders.

Bias experience

I thought this would be a field that is more open, and truthfully I think it is, but the rest of the workplace has catching up to do.

—GAY GENDERQUEER GRAPHIC DESIGNER

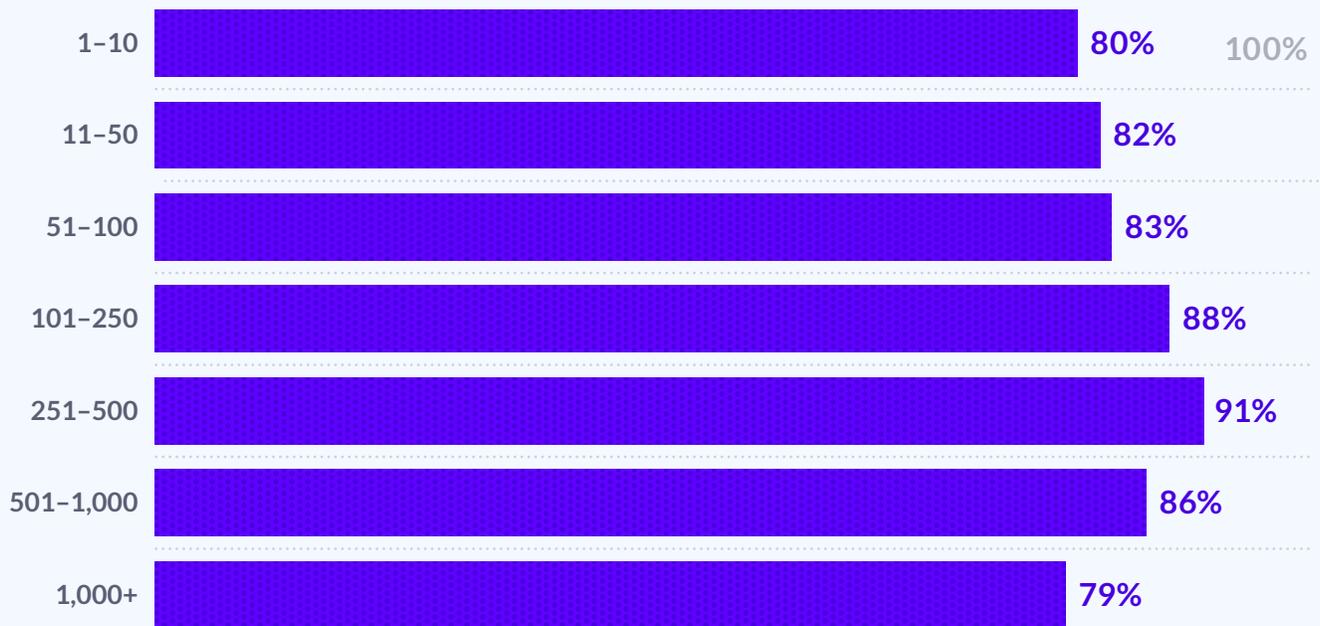
Bias experienced in the workplace or school



There are disparities among LGBTQ+ communities, the most notable being a 16% gap between the percent of cis (80%) and trans (96%) respondents who reported experiencing bias.

A common experience shared by respondents is being assumed to be straight or cis and feeling unable to correct people. This was a recurring issue for people who are in a

Anti-LGBTQ+ bias experience by company size



relationship with someone of the opposite gender, who then have to decide whether it's preferable to spend time educating their peers or to have their queer identity erased.

In open responses to questions about LGBTQ+ benefits, some felt they weren't offered because so few of their colleagues were queer. But unless people are given an opportunity and safe environment to self-identify, that is a harmful assumption.

This may explain in part why respondents in companies with fewer than 50 employees or more than 1,000 report less bias than mid-sized companies. In smaller companies, it's easier to form relationships across the company. Larger companies are more likely to have robust people and culture departments and some form of diversity and inclusion programming.

It's not all bad. In some ways, the field of design has earned its reputation for being more inclusive than others. Queer Design Count respondents were half as likely as respondents to HRC's workplace equality survey to report overhearing anti-LGBTQ+ comments and being told to behave or present less queer.

Still, nearly 10% of respondents have left a job because the environment was not LGBTQ+ friendly. So while better than many fields, design still has work to do.

I was really relieved that my colleagues already knew about gender identity and were prepared to talk to users who were nonbinary. I didn't feel like I had to choose between my identity and being considered professional.

—QUEER WOMAN UX RESEARCHER

Diversity and inclusion's impact on bias

Percentage of respondents who reported some form of anti-LGBTQ+ bias by whether or not their workplace offers diversity and inclusion (D&I) programming.

Does employer offer *any* D&I programming?



Does that D&I programming include diverse sexualities?



Does that D&I programming include diverse genders?



Diversity and inclusion programming does appear to make a meaningful impact on the experience of anti-LGBTQ+ bias in the workplace or school. However, that impact is much less pronounced when D&I programming does not address queer identities specifically.

For diversity and inclusion initiatives to be truly successful, they must include LGBTQ+ communities. When other forms of bias are addressed but anti-LGBTQ+ bias is not, the omission may be seen as tacit approval of queerphobic behavior.

Openness and visibility

It made a world of difference when working with another employee with an LGBTQ+ identity, I felt more at ease and comfortable expressing queerness in front of management and other employees.

—BISEXUAL WOMAN GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Openness about LGBTQ+ identity at work or school

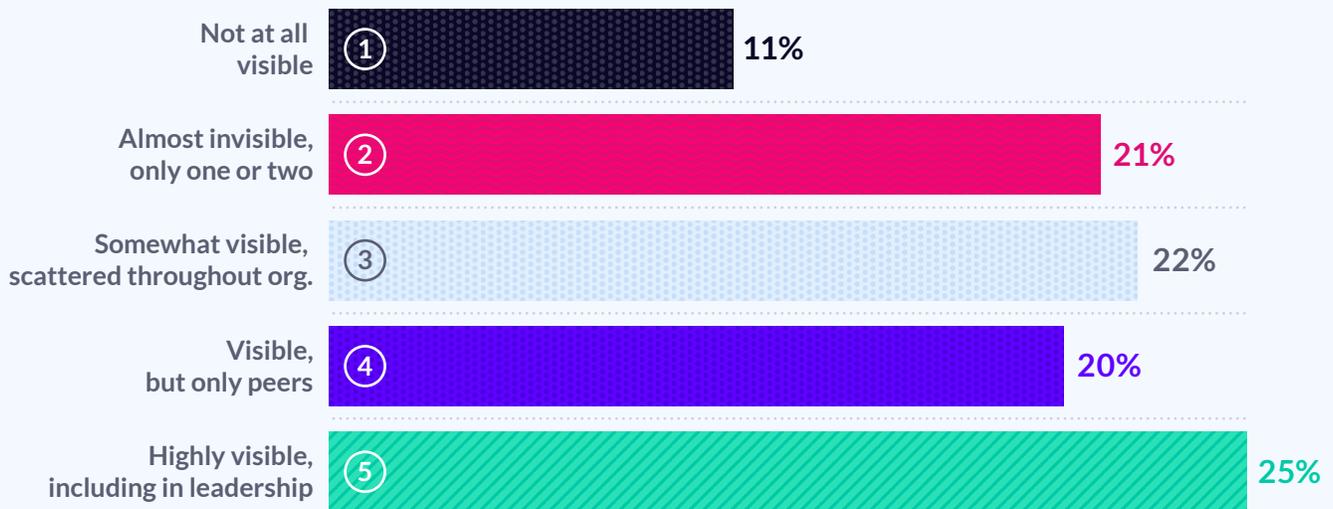


More than half (55%) of our participants are totally open about their LGBTQ+ identity at work or school. This is in line with most industries according to the HRC.

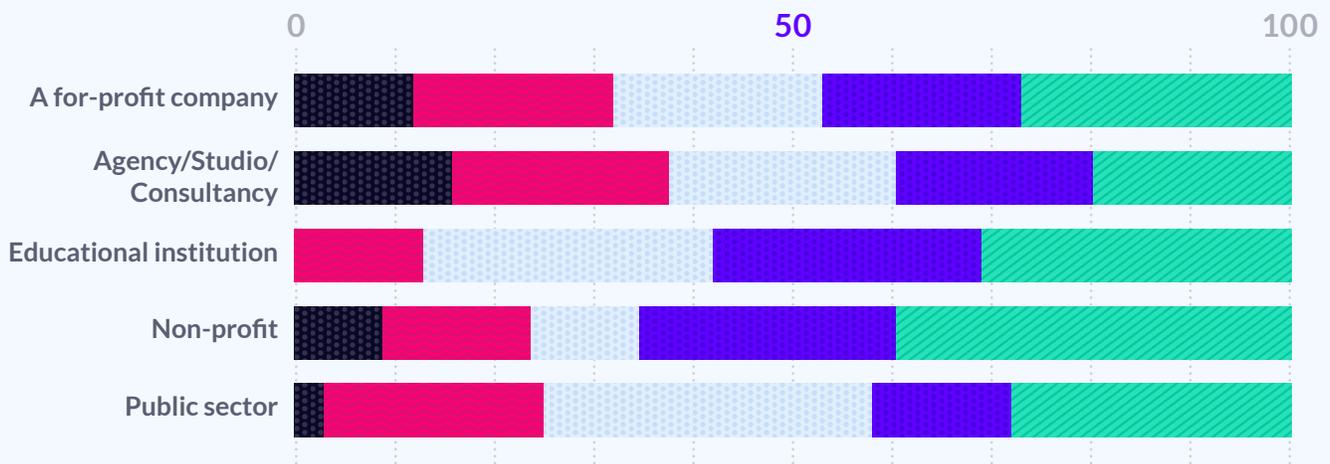
Most respondents who provided a reason for not being totally open about their identity feared how it would impact their career. They are concerned it would change their professional relationships or result in being stereotyped or passed over for opportunities.

16% of respondents said they were not open about their identity because it was an unwelcoming work environment or they had experiences with coworkers or leadership that discouraged them from doing so.

Visibility other LGBTQ+ people at work or school



LGBTQ+ visibility by professional environment



When individuals feel unsafe coming out at work or school, it hurts LGBTQ+ visibility across the organization. 55% of respondents said their current environment had scattered to no other LGBTQ+ people visible.

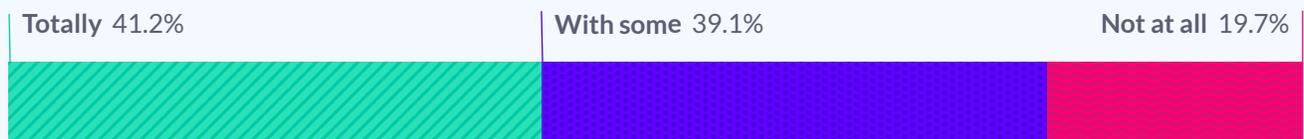
Low LGBTQ+ visibility can be demoralizing, especially to queer people earlier in their career. As Marian Wright Edelman is quoted as saying, “You can’t be what you can’t see.” When workers look around and don’t see other successful LGBTQ+ people in their field, it sends the signal that it is not possible to be openly LGBTQ+ and successful.

I feel lucky to be a part of a team where I can be open and 100% myself while being valued and trusted at the same time. I also feel lucky to have queer teammates and an overall positive and respectful environment.

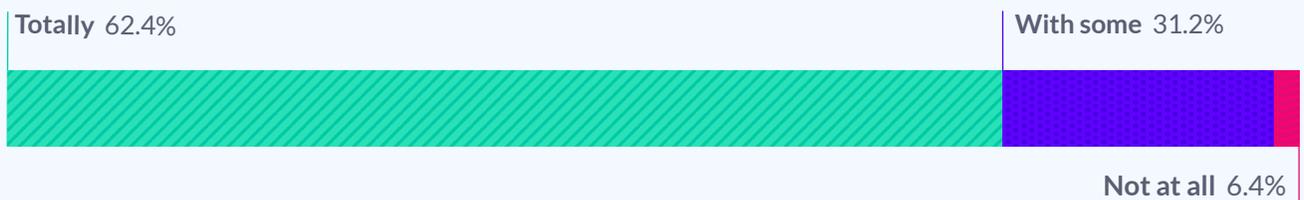
—GENDERQUEER GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Openness about identity by LGBTQ+ visibility

No to scattered visibility



Visible peers and leaders



Among respondents nonprofits and educational institutions had the most LGBTQ+ visibility while agencies, studios, and consultancies had the least.

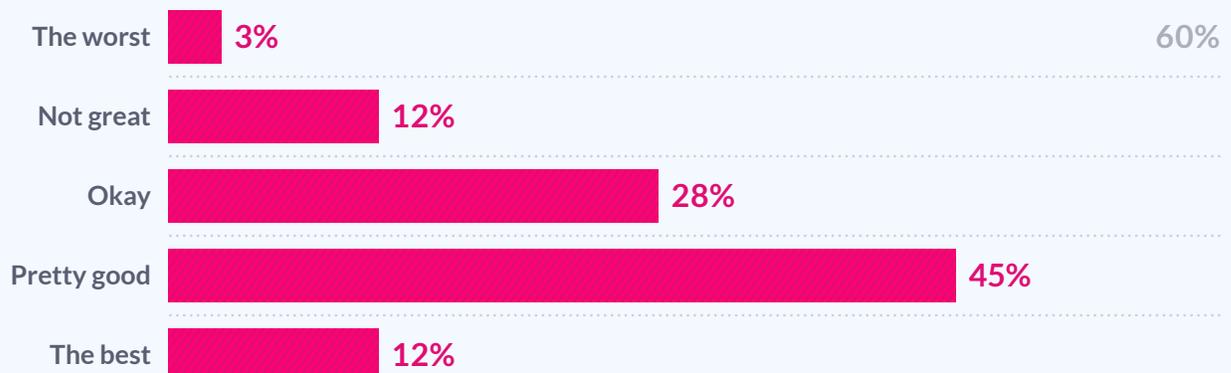
LGBTQ+ visibility, especially in leadership, can have a flywheel effect on workplace culture. Respondents in environments with other visible LGBTQ+ people, including in leadership roles, were significantly less likely to be closeted on the job and much more likely to be totally open about their identities.

Job security and satisfaction

I pass as a cis hetero woman so don't experience homophobia or transphobia directed at myself, but find myself as the only one questioning design decisions that impact queer customers or users.

—BISEXUAL WOMAN SERVICE DESIGNER

How do you feel about your role?



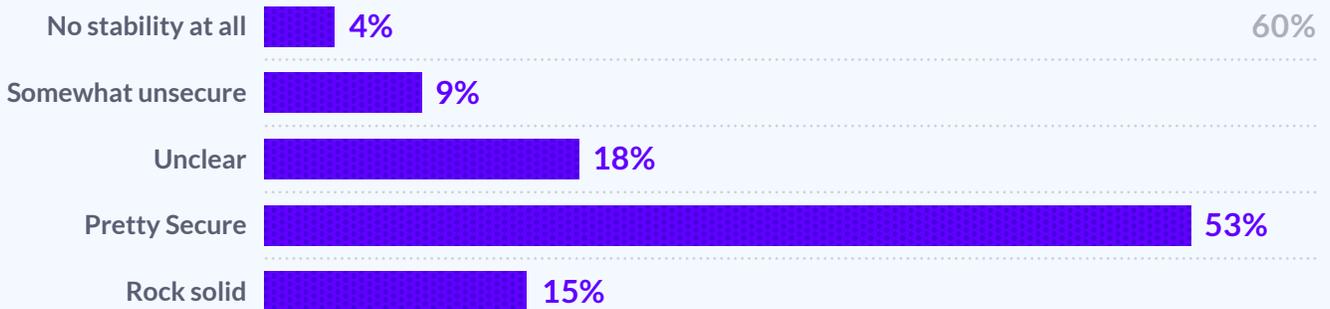
Overall, most of our respondents are satisfied and feel fairly stable in the design field. Many respondents' satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) was for familiar reasons: pay, career mobility, the interestingness of the work...

Others cited LGBTQ+ acceptance, racial and gender diversity and inclusion, and the ethical impact of the work (or lack thereof) as the reason for their ratings.

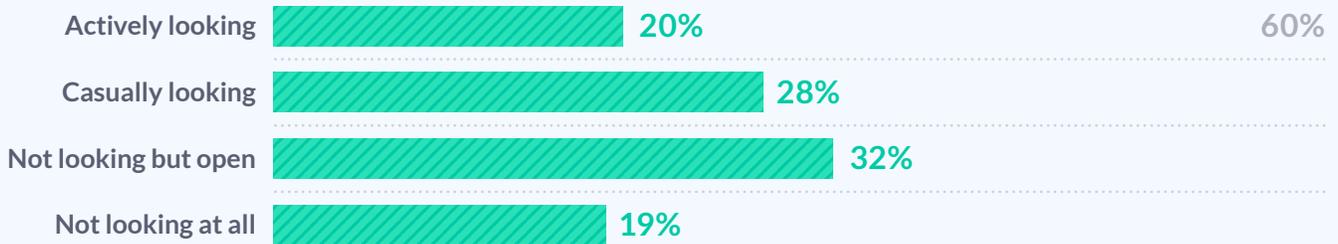
Being able to count my voice towards the group is both nice and is helping me be alert to things that I can push towards, like inclusion at my place of work so that others can follow in my footsteps.

—DEMISEXUAL WOMAN UX DESIGNER

How secure do you feel your role is?



Are you looking for a new role?



However, disparities are visible along recurrent lines. More than 58% of cis respondents reported their job was pretty good or the best whereas for trans respondents that number was 45%. Trans respondents were also more than 3 times likely to rank their current job as “the worst.” Men were significantly more satisfied than everyone else, and white respondents were twice as likely to be extremely satisfied with their job than respondents of color.

Take-aways

Like we said in our introduction, this read-out is the beginning of a conversation about LGBTQ+ inclusion in design that must be had. And like any good conversation, there are still many questions to explore.

For example, in our data we see hints that LGBTQ+ people in design may be more represented in industries like tech than traditional design fields like advertising and studios. Is that a function of how the survey was promoted, or does the queer experience across creative fields contribute to differences in attraction and retention?

We also see that diversity and inclusion efforts can reduce the experience of anti-LGBTQ+ bias in the workplace, but what policies and practices are most effective? Similarly, what benefits are most meaningful to LGBTQ+ workers?

While this read-out sparks many questions, it also offers clear learnings.

First, the LGBTQ+ community is itself incredibly diverse.

While we rightly celebrate this fact, we must also confront some uncomfortable truths about what that means for individuals within our community who belong to additional marginalized groups.

Throughout our data we see disparities along lines of gender (especially among trans people), race, and sexuality. There are also factors we did not ask about this year that need consideration such as immigration status and disability. Queer people outside majority groups often face additional bias,

A lot of companies say they are inclusive but in practice are not. They use the excuse that ‘it just doesn’t sell’ or that ‘minorities aren’t our target audience,’ and expect me to be ok with it.

—ASEXUAL NONBINARY ADVERTISING DESIGNER

barriers to success, and less satisfaction in design.

Queer people of color are still significantly underrepresented, underpaid and subject to more professional bias than white colleagues. To move toward a fully LGBTQ+ inclusive design field, we must center less privileged members of our community—focusing not only on inclusion but also on equity in design.

Second, visibility is key to the queer experience in design.

The clearest signal to queer people in design that they can be openly and authentically themselves and find success is visible queer people who have already done the same.

If you are an LGBTQ+ person in a design leadership role, you can positively impact others simply by being open about who you are.

But the responsibility for representation cannot fall to LGBTQ+ people in design alone. As a field, we need to amplify the voices and accomplishments of LGBTQ+ people in design media.

In our teams and organizations, we can adopt inclusive hiring practices, but we also need to create space for LGBTQ+ people to feel safe being out and visible. As we’ve seen in our data, many LGBTQ+ people choose not to share their identity at work. Organizations waiting to have out LGBTQ+ employees before showing support for the queer community may be giving closeted queer employees further reason to stay closeted.

I love who I am, I love the communities I am a part of, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

—GENDERQUEER LESBIAN WEB DESIGNER

We must proactively provide space for people to be their authentic selves at work. This brings us to our final take-away:

Thoughtful concrete actions are required to reduce bias and promote diversity and inclusion in design.

Design has earned its reputation of being better for queer practitioners than many other fields; but less harmful is still harmful. Until the disparities highlighted in this report are addressed, design can only claim to be less bad than other fields—not more just.

Diversity and inclusion programming is essential to reducing bias, but to be truly effective it must address LGBTQ+ issues specifically. What that D&I programming looks like will differ by context, but even small companies need to think about how they will build an equitable environment for their employees.

Small teams may not need a corporate head of D&I, but everyone can benefit from shared policies that prohibit anti-LGBTQ+ bias and detail how violations will be handled. Even in non-work contexts such as design conferences, these policies can be written into larger codes of conduct.

Protecting LGBTQ+ people in design against future harm must be paired with steps to proactively support them. This means offering LGBTQ+ inclusive benefits. Can same-gender domestic partners join employee healthcare plans? Do those healthcare plans cover comprehensive services trans employees might need? Health insurance companies may talk about these things as add-ons to your plan, but they are essential to providing a fair workplace.

A closing thought

We invite the larger design community to join us in the conversation started here, but we cannot move ahead with talk alone. We have provided some concrete steps here that design organizations can take on the path toward inclusion; but we have a ways to go.

When in doubt about the next step, trust the people who have been held back to chart the way forward. Listen, yes, but also step aside so they can lead.

Thank yous

This readout is dedicated with love and gratitude to the people who have helped turn Queer Design Club from an idea shared by two strangers on the internet into the vibrant space it is now. Thank you for being part of our community and for your input into and support of the Queer Design Count.

Thank you also to our many allies including Shane Zucker, Gearóid O'Rourke, Jared Spool, Erika Hall, and Mike Monteiro who helped refine, launch, and promote the survey that yielded the insights in this read-out.

And thank you to Laurie Voss, who provided the data analysis that helped tease those insights out of the raw responses, for both his labor and his patience as his fiancé—a co-founder of Queer Design Club—pestered him for results.

Finally, thank you to whoever reads and shares this report and carries its learnings with you as we work together to show the field of design a broader spectrum of talent. Keep designing and shining.

Endnotes

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About Queer Design Club

Queer Design Club is an independent community project for LGBTQ+ people in design to celebrate queer contributions to the field of design and larger visual culture, share their work, and connect with each other.

Launched during Pride Month 2019 by John Hanawalt and Rebecca Brooker, Queer Design Club has grown an online directory of nearly 500 queer design professionals and Slack community of nearly 1,000.

Learn more about the project and join our community at queerdesign.club.

How to get in touch with us

If you have questions or feedback about this read-out, are interested in using the data from the Queer Design Count, or would like to talk more about Queer Design Club, please contact us at hello@queerdesign.club.

