

# The Independent Author Income Survey

Conducted for ALLi, the Alliance of Independent Authors



March 27, 2023

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## Management Summary

- ALLi, the Alliance of Independent Authors, together with consultants The Future of Publishing and SKS Advisors, conducted an online survey of self-published authors in February/March of 2023.
- The survey focused on gaining an improved understanding of self-published authors' incomes and income-related strategies. Self-published authors were defined as individuals who had self-published at least one book and who spent at least 50% of their working time on writing and publishing activities.
- 41% of self-publisher respondents had earned more than \$20,000 as authors during the past two years.
- The median writing and self-publishing-related income in 2022 of all self-publishers responding was \$12,749, a 53% increase over the previous year. Average (mean) incomes skewed much higher: \$82,600 in 2022, a 34% increase. Removing from the analysis the respondents with no income and those with over \$1 million in income resulted in a lower average income of \$65,482.
- Romance, fantasy/scifi/speculative, and crime/thriller/detective were by far the most prevalent genres in which self-publishers primarily were engaged, representing a combined 57% of respondents.

## Management Summary (continued)

- Self-published authors derived income from a variety of products and formats, though books in mainstream formats comprised the main sources.
- Although most respondents derived no income from publishing-related services, between 8% and 13% reported income from services such as editing, speaking, teaching, and other freelance work. Few were deriving income from licensing their works.
- 60% of self-published authors had published their first books within the past 8 years, and 25% since 2020, indicating the ongoing vitality of this community.
- Over half of the respondents had published more than 10 books, and 20% had published over 30.
- Among demographic characteristics of self-published authors:
  - Two-thirds of respondents identified as cisgender females;
  - More than 90% identified themselves as 35 years of age or older;
  - 80% held an undergraduate or postgraduate college degree;
  - 11% considered themselves to be disabled; 86% were Caucasian/white;
  - Just over 10% identified as LGBTQIA+.

This project's primary objective was to gain an improved understanding of the incomes and income-related strategies of self-published authors

### Background

- ALLi, the Alliance of Independent Authors, is a not-for profit organization whose mission is to foster ethics and excellence in self-publishing. ALLi empowers authors through member advice and community, surveillance of the self-publishing sector, and advocacy for independent authors. [www.allianceindependentauthors.org](http://www.allianceindependentauthors.org)
- ALLi identified a need to develop a better statistical portrait of the incomes and related activities of self-published authors writing in English – defined as those who spend 50% or more of their working time in writing and publishing activities.
- Such a statistical portrait can enable relevant comparisons with data from other, more “traditional” author surveys.

### Objectives

- The principal objectives of the survey included achieving a better understanding of self-published authors':
  - Incomes and income trends
  - Publishing experience and output
  - Primary and secondary genres in which they write and publish
  - Business models and income streams
  - Demographic characteristics

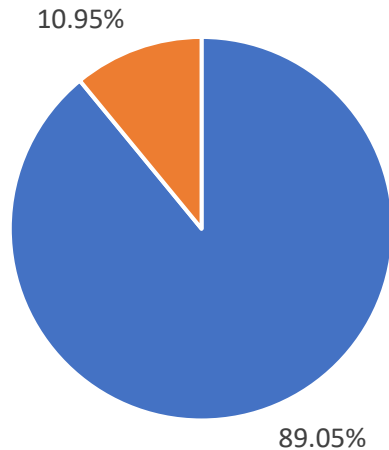
ALLi worked with two consultancies, The Future of Publishing and SKS Advisors, to develop, field, and analyze the findings of a quantitative survey of self-published authors writing in English

- Extensive briefings and discussions were held to outline key project objectives and the best approaches for accomplishing them.
- The ALLi/consultant team developed the online survey questionnaire.
- ALLi drew upon its own resources and those of partner organizations to develop email lists and post the survey link on social media.
- The online survey was fielded from February 26 to March 10, 2023. No financial or other incentives were offered to potential respondents.
- The survey garnered a total of 2,539 respondents, of whom 2,261 (89%) met the qualification criteria. Of these, 1,843 (82%) completed the full survey questionnaire.
- The consultants have produced the analysis and findings presented in this document.

## Introduction: Overview of the Respondents

Almost 90% of the initial respondents to the survey met the qualifications to complete it; of those, 41% reported earning \$20,000 per year or more from their writing and publishing over the past two years

Q. I have self-published at least one book and I spend at least 50% of my working time on writing and publishing activities

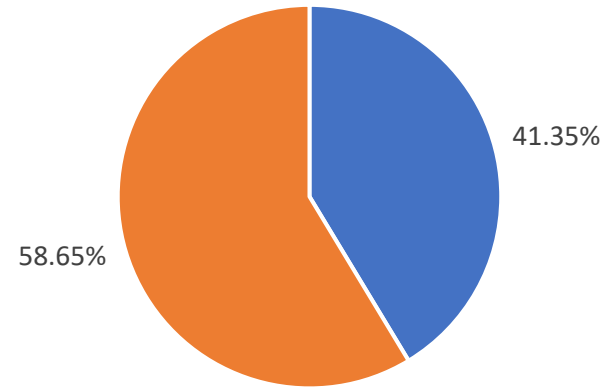


■ Yes ■ No

N = 2,539

(All respondents)

Q. I earned \$20K+ a year, in the past two years



■ Yes ■ No

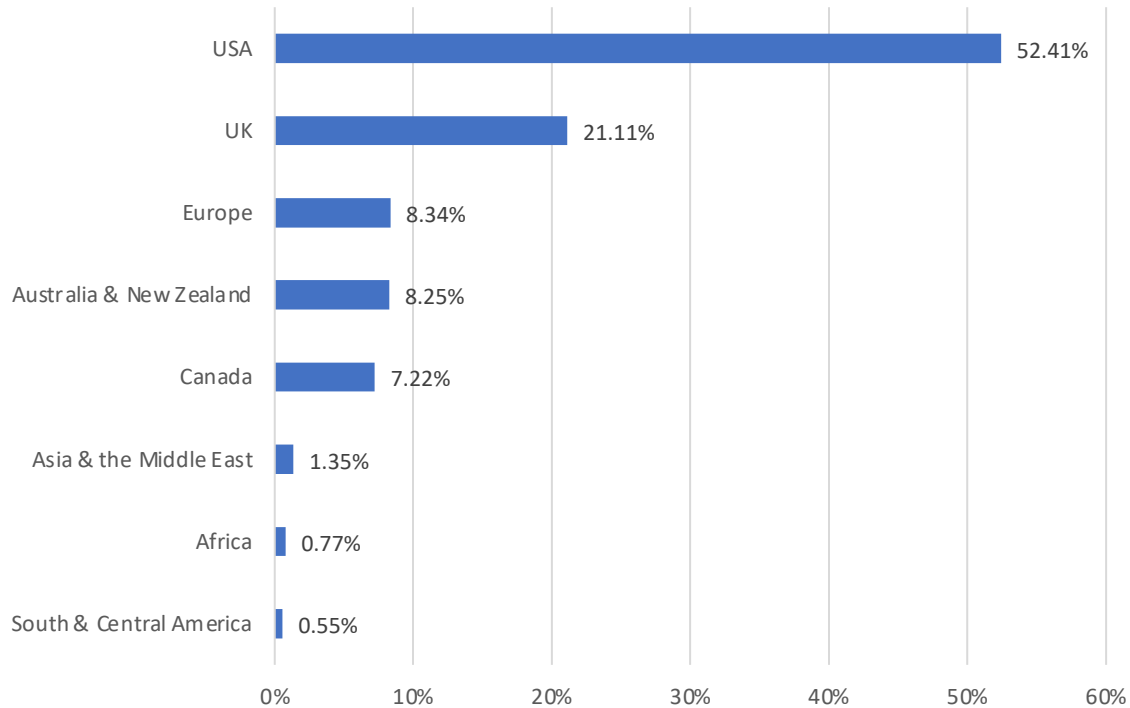
N = 2,259

(Self-publishers)

## Introduction: Overview of the Respondents

60% of the respondents were located in North America and 21% in the United Kingdom, followed by Australia/New Zealand and Europe each representing about 8%

Q. My primary location of residence is:



*Although the survey was of English-language authors, over 10% of the respondents were from non-English-first countries.*

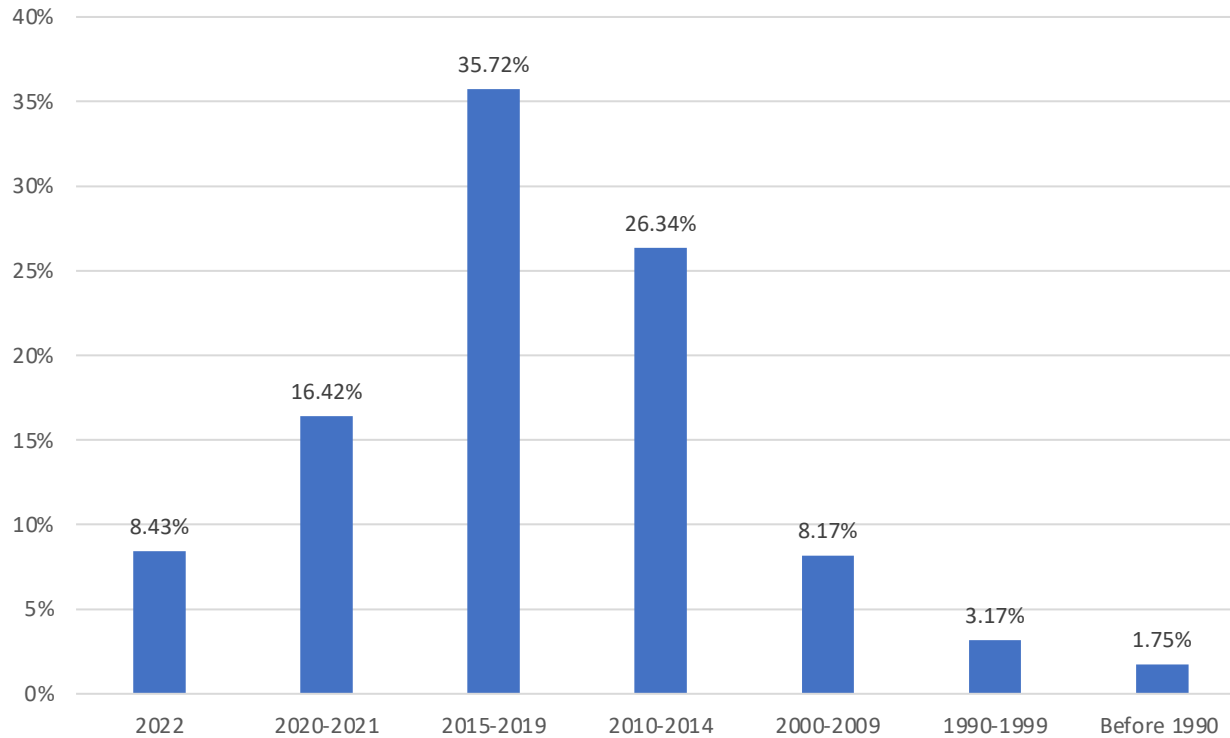
N = 2,218



## Publishing Experience & Output: First Publication

60% of the self-published author respondents had published for the first time during the past eight years (2015-2022), and a full 25% since 2020 – indicating the ongoing vitality of the self-publishing community

Q. In what year did you publish for the first time?

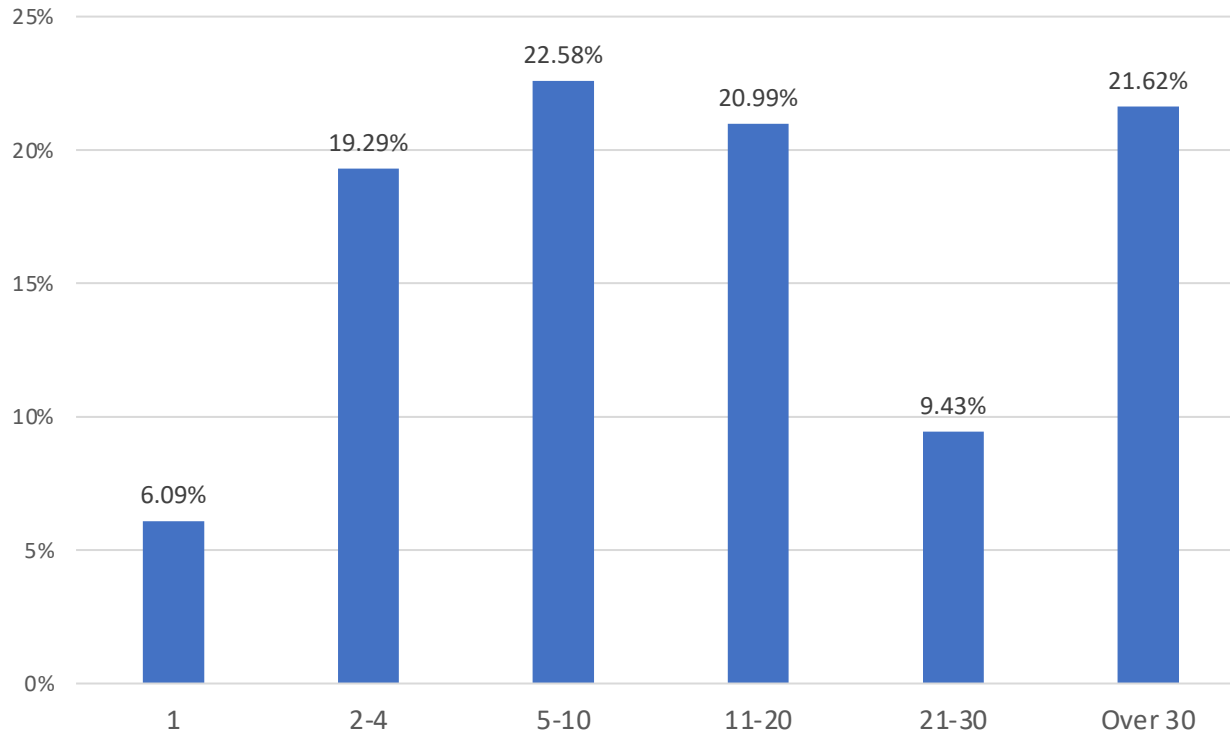


N = 2,218

## Publishing Experience & Output: Number of Books Published

Over half of the self-published authors had published more than 10 books, and 20% had published more than 30

Q. How many books have you published?\*



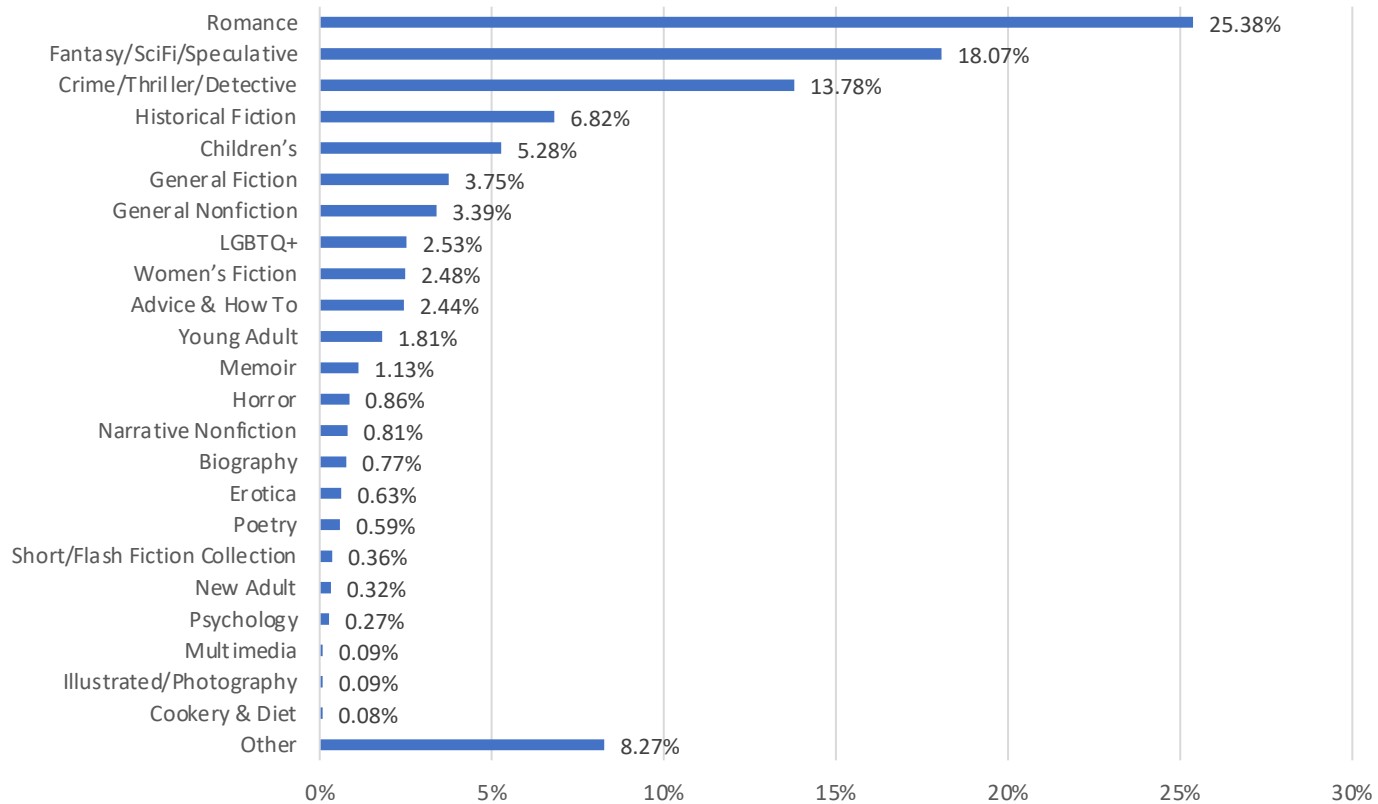
\*Note: Respondents were instructed that one book title in three formats should be counted as one title.

N = 1,887

## Most Prevalent Genres: Primary Genre

Romance, fantasy/scifi/speculative, and crime/thriller/detective were by far the most prevalent genres in which self-publishers primarily were engaged, representing a combined 57% of all respondents

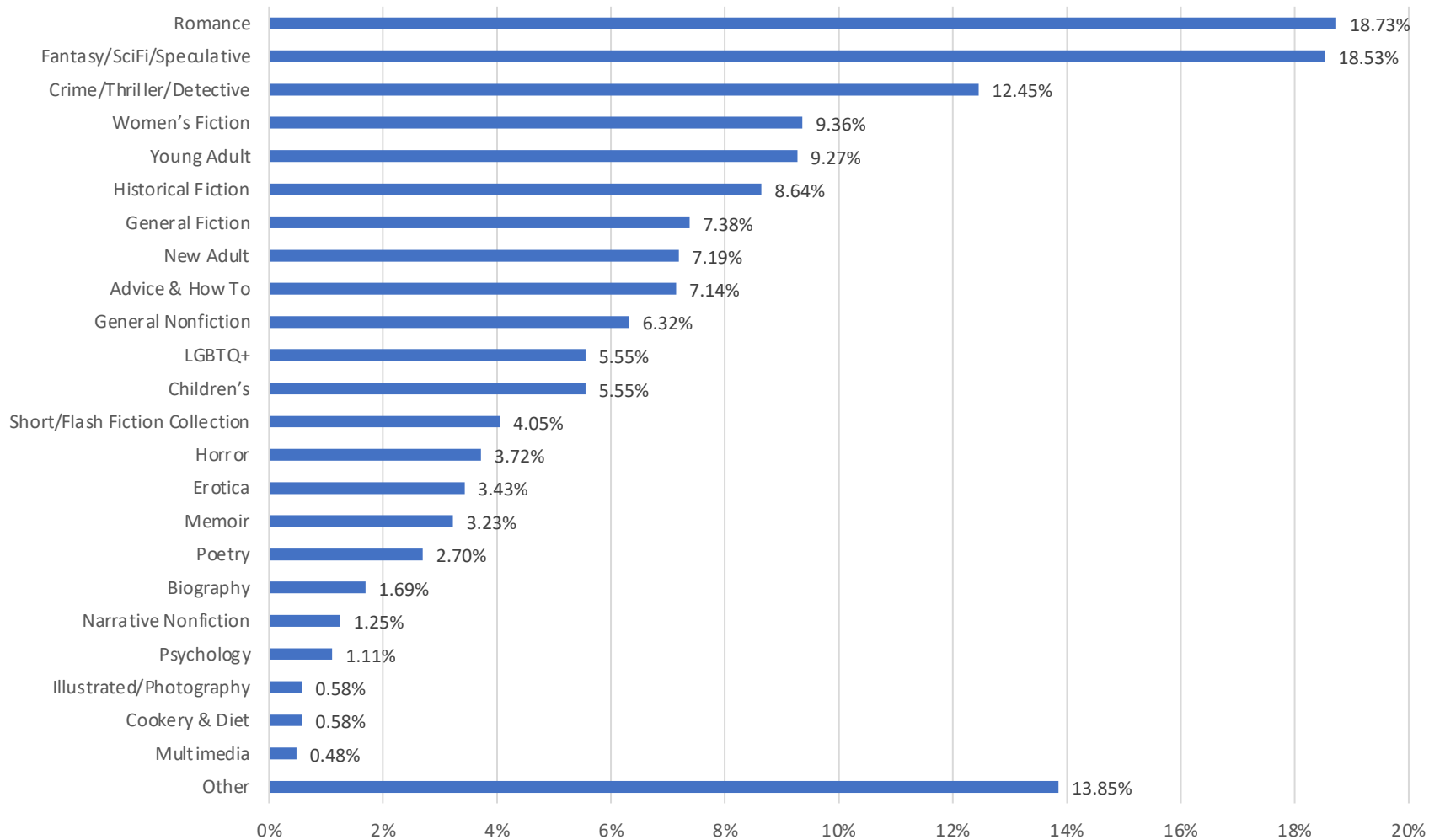
Q. What is the primary genre in which you write?



## Most Prevalent Genres: Secondary Genres

The same three categories – romance, fantasy, and crime – were also other self-published authors' most cited secondary genres

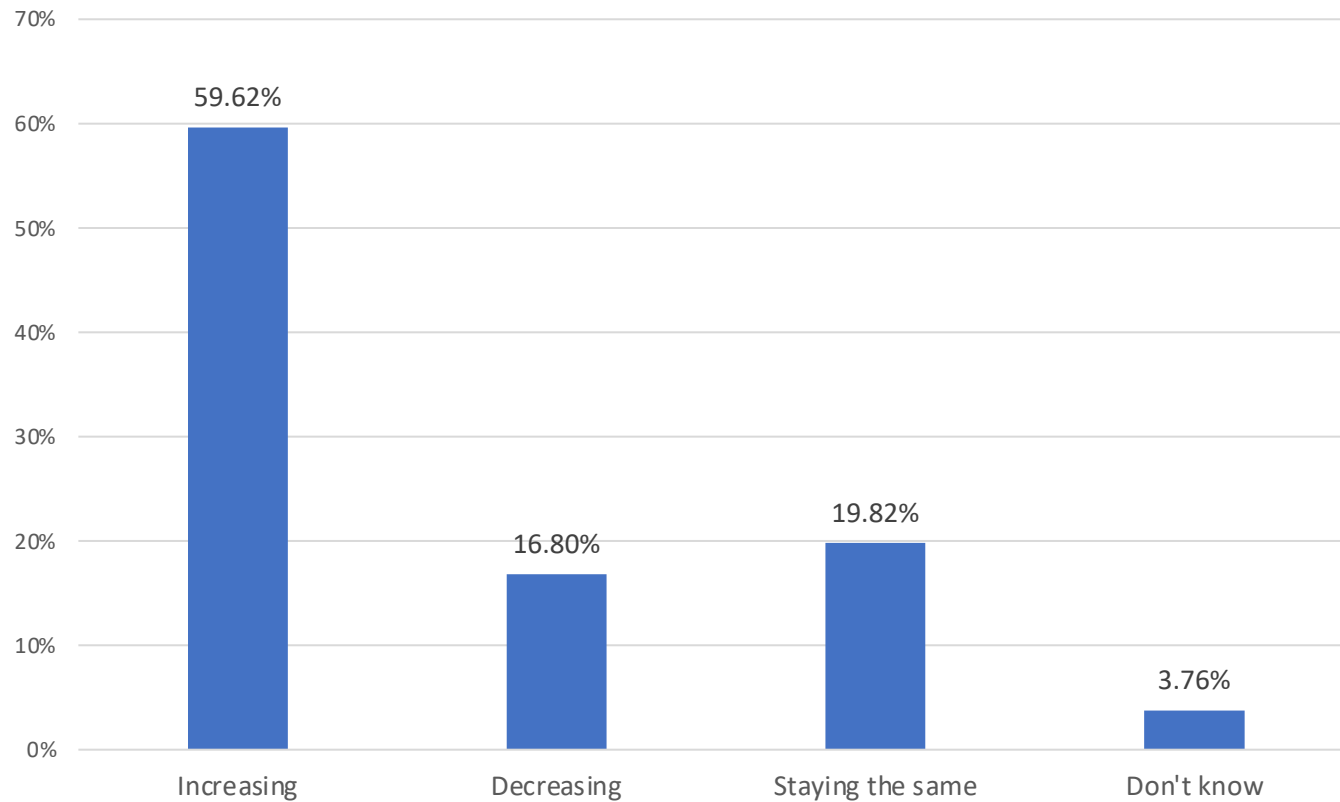
Q. In what secondary genres do you write?



N = 2,073

60% of respondents indicated that their self-publishing income had increased in the past year, and only 17% reported a decrease

Q. Is your self-publishing income increasing or decreasing year on year?



N = 1,887

## Income: Past Two Years' Average Incomes

Median self-publishing income in 2022 was \$12,749, a 53% increase over the prior year; the success reported by some authors raised the mean average income to \$82,600 in 2022 – a 34% increase over the previous year

Q. What was the gross revenue (before costs) brought in by your total writing and self-publishing business in your last financial year and the year before that?

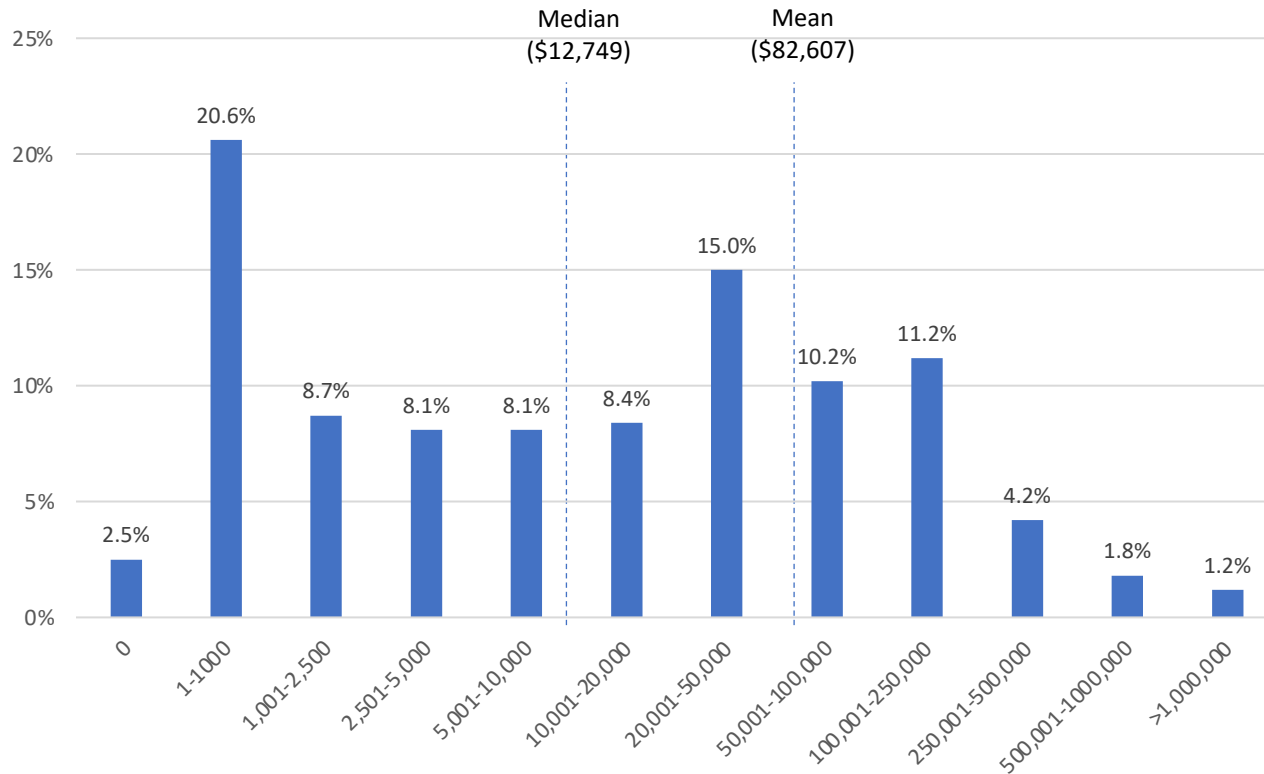
Currency*	Median Income (survey responses)		Median Income (normalized to \$US)		# of respondents	Annual % Growth
	Last year	Year Before	Last year (\$USD)	Year before (\$USD)		(each currency and total)
USD	13,477	9,000	13,477	9,000	1,137	50%
GBP	8,000	5,000	9,725	6,077	376	60%
AUD	24,000	16,150	16,034	10,786	119	49%
EURO	14,500	8,000	15,430	8,513	99	81%
CAD	14,000	9,000	10,173	6,540	99	56%
NZD	14,900	10,550	8,743	6,589	23	33%
<b>Total (Weighted Average)</b>			<b>12,749</b>	<b>8,334</b>	<b>1,853</b>	<b>53%</b>

Currency*	Average (Mean) Income (survey responses)		Average (Mean) Income (normalized to \$US)		# of respondents	Annual % Growth
	Last year	Year Before	Last year (\$USD)	Year before (\$USD)		(each currency and total)
USD	88,500	73,100	88,500	73,100	1,137	21%
GBP	87,500	48,500	105,297	58,365	376	80%
AUD	41,750	32,500	27,484	21,395	119	28%
EURO	20,136	11,031	21,460	11,756	99	83%
CAD	85,539	81,674	62,195	59,384	99	5%
NZD	29,500	21,000	18,083	12,873	23	40%
<b>Total (Weighted Average)</b>			<b>82,607</b>	<b>61,694</b>	<b>1,853</b>	<b>32%</b>

\*Currencies with fewer than 10 responses ( 15 in total) are excluded

The majority of respondents (56%\*) indicated total incomes of \$20,000 or less, while almost 18% reported income over \$100,000 per year

Q. What was the gross revenue (before costs) brought in by your total writing and self-publishing business in your last financial year and the year before that?



\*This figure varies slightly from that reported on p. 6, probably a result of further thought when asked for a specific number in this separate question.

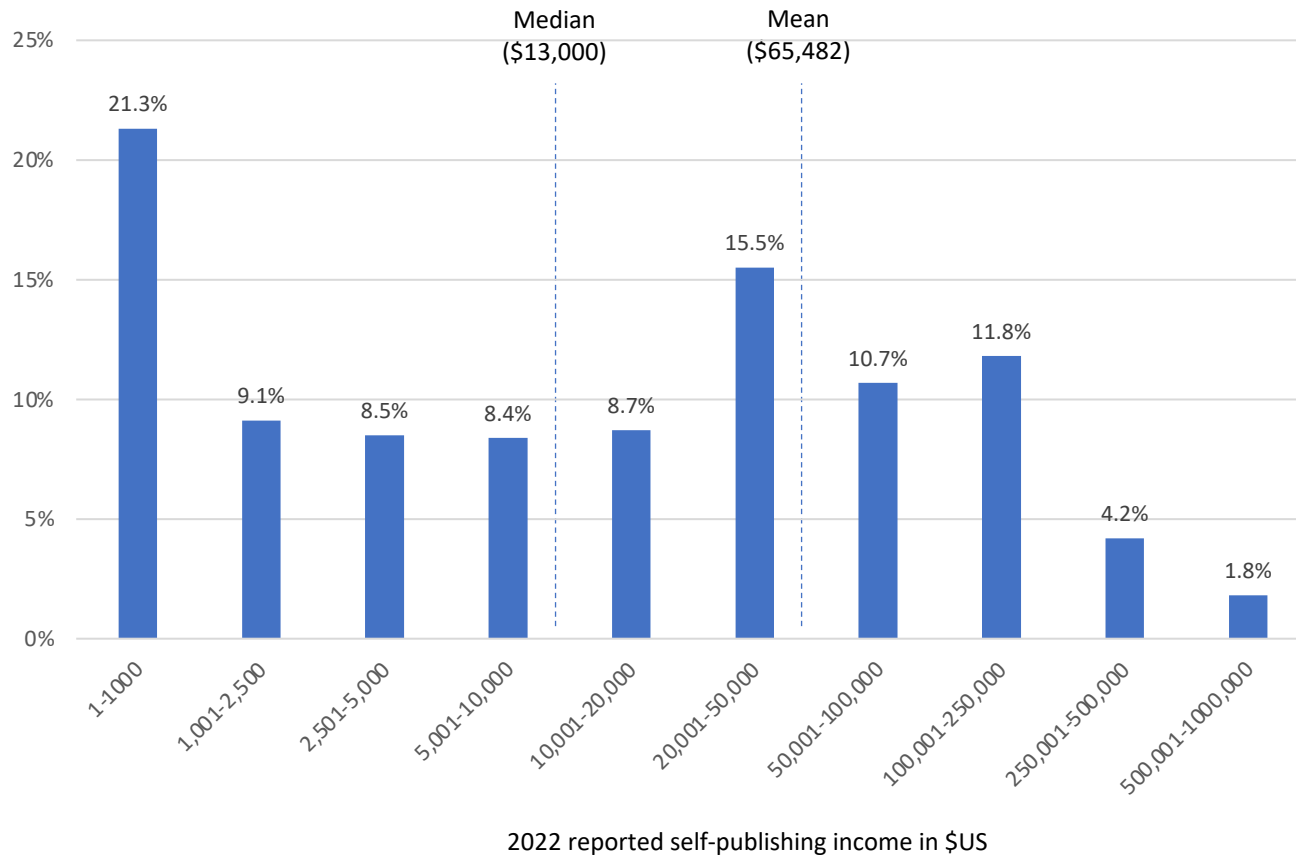
2022 reported self-publishing income in \$US

N = 1,853

## Income: Frequency Distribution of 2022 Incomes (Eliminating Outliers)

Removing the outliers from provided income estimates (i.e., respondents reporting no income or income above \$1,000,000) had little effect on frequency distribution but did lower the mean average income

Q. What was the gross revenue (before costs) brought in by your total writing and self-publishing business in your last financial year and the year before that?

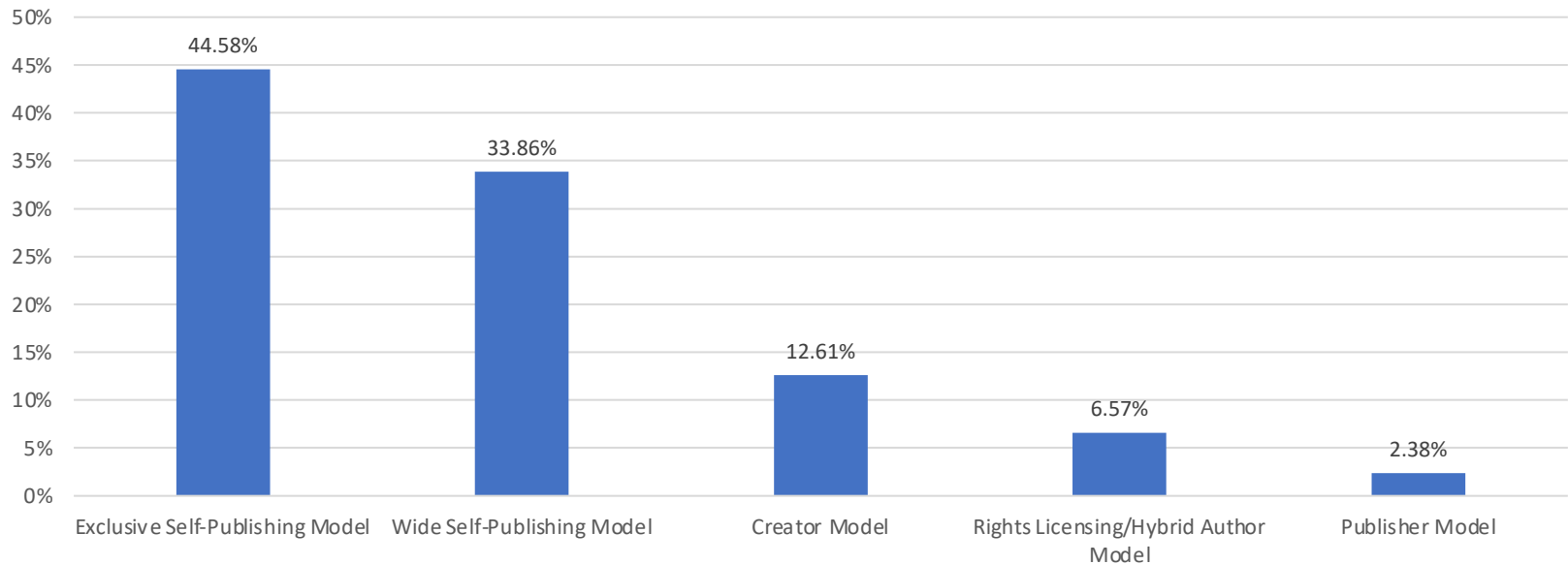


N = 1,774



Over three-quarters of self-publishers were using either exclusive self-publishing or wide self-publishing models, but other approaches were employed by some practitioners

Q. Which of these business models most closely matches yours?



N = 1,874

“You publish books exclusively with one self-publishing platform / retailer, e.g., Amazon.”

“You publish books non-exclusively with a range of self-publishing platforms and aggregators, e.g., Kobo, Apple, or aggregators such as Draft2Digital.”

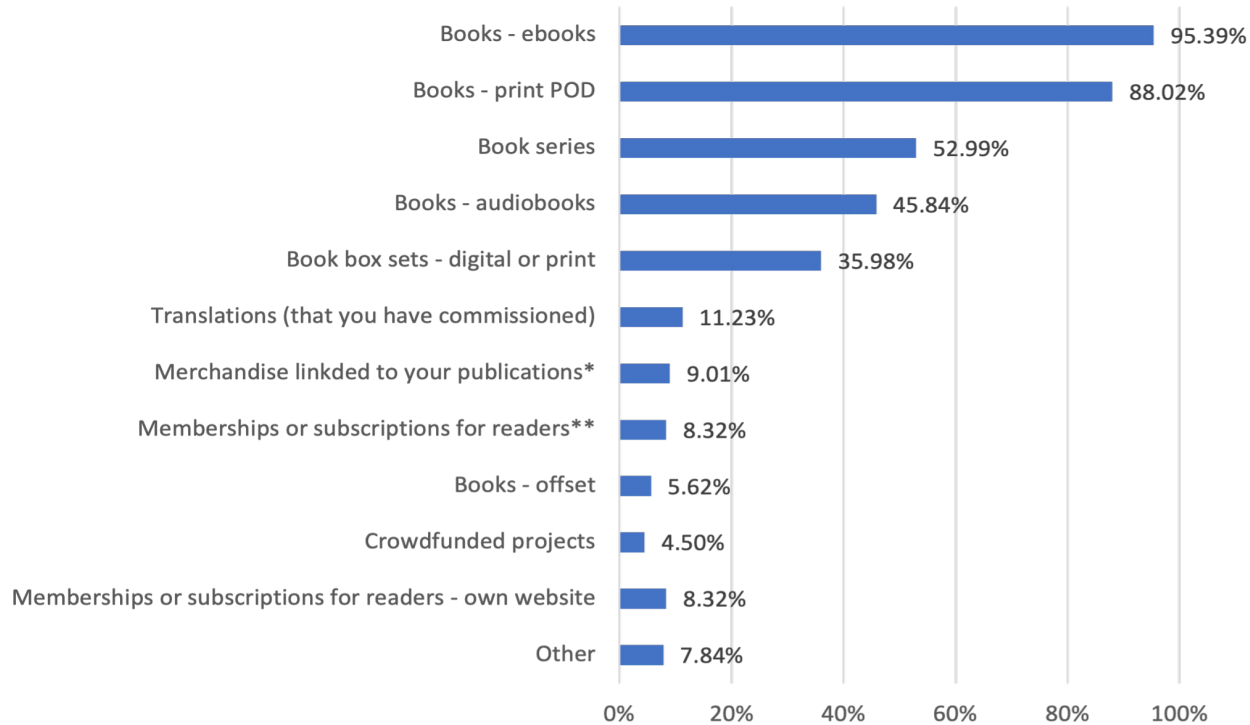
“As well as using self-publishing platforms, you sell books and other products directly through your own website and/or other outlets, e.g., Shopify store, Kickstarter (50%+ of business income).”

“As well as using self-publishing platforms and./or selling direct, you license some rights to third-party publishers, producers, and other rights buyers (50% of business income).”

“You publish other authors’ books as well as your own (for business purposes).”

Self-published authors derived income from a variety of products and formats, though books in mainstream formats comprised the main sources

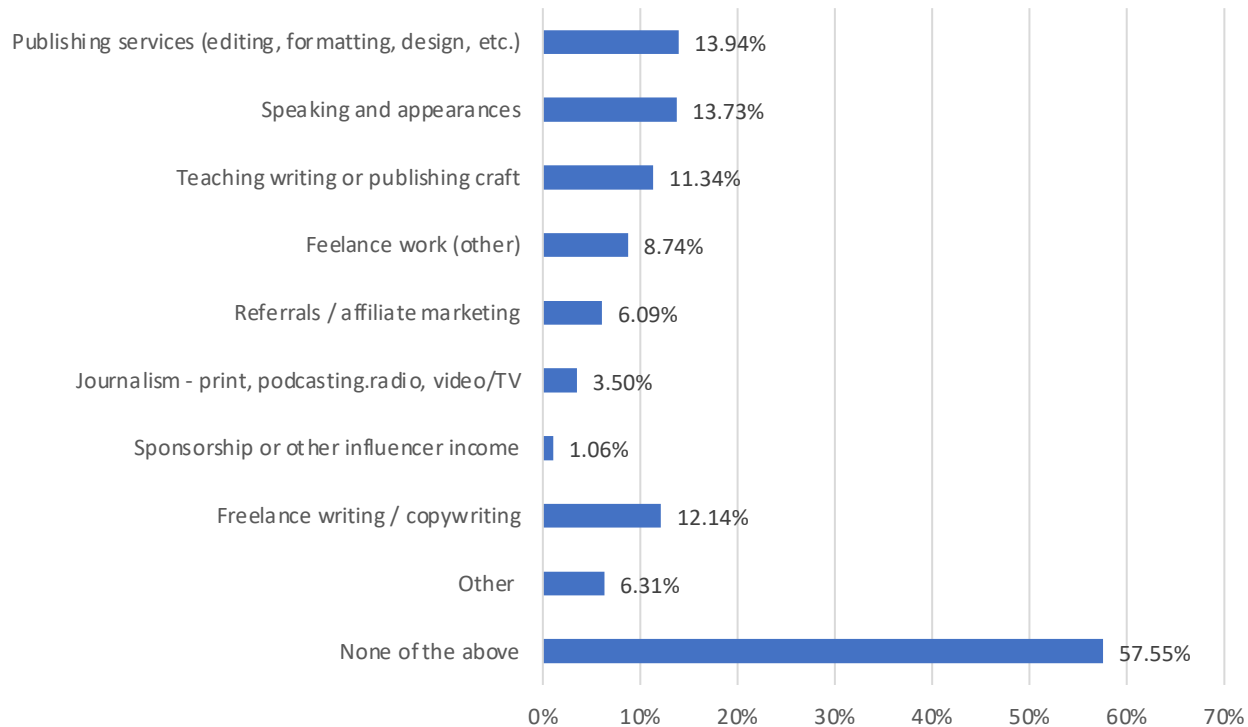
Q. From which of the following products do you derive income?



N = 1,877

Most respondents derived no income from publishing-related services; however, income from each of publishing services (e.g., editing), speaking, and teaching was received by more 10% of the respondents

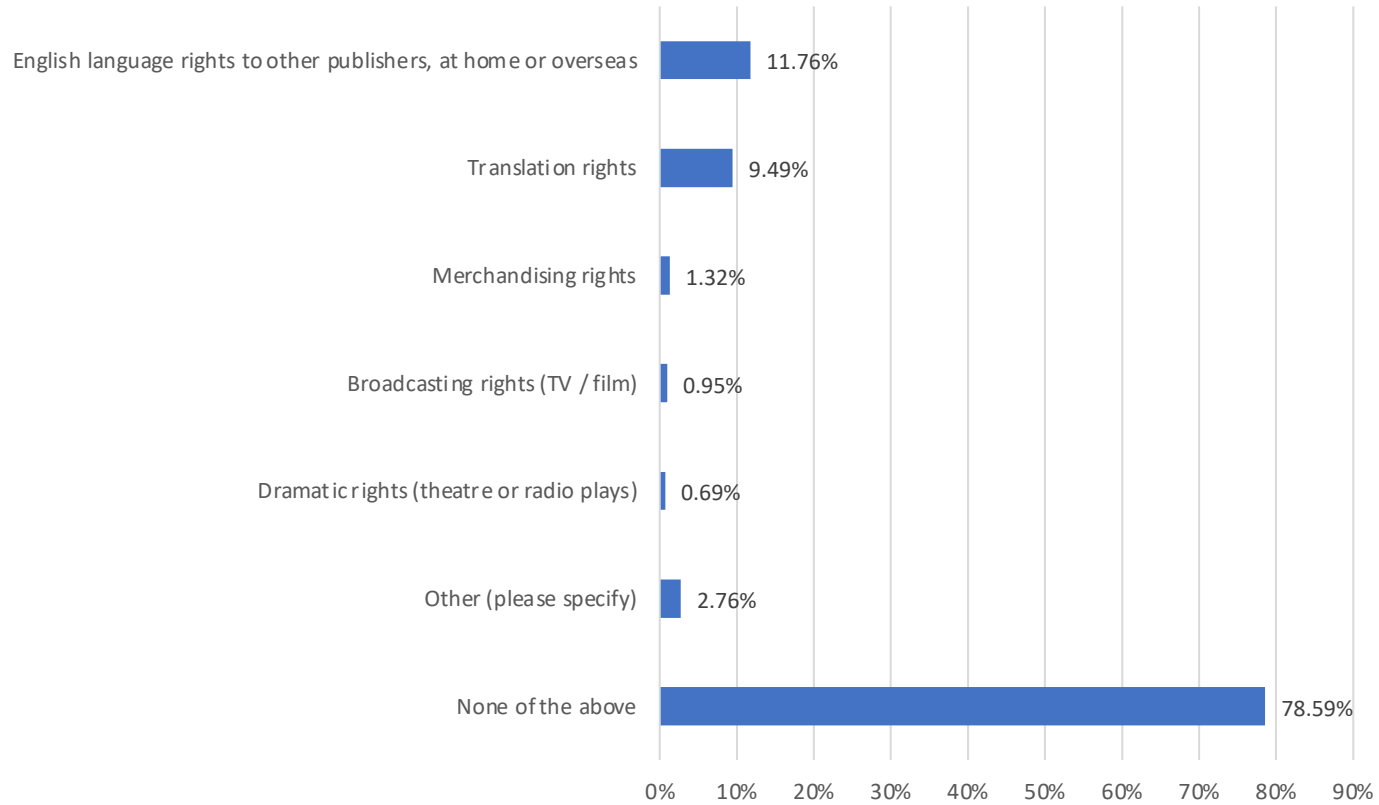
Q. From which of the following services do you derive income?



N = 1,877

Few self-published authors were deriving income from licensing their works; among those who were, licensing English language rights to other publishers, and translation rights were most prevalent

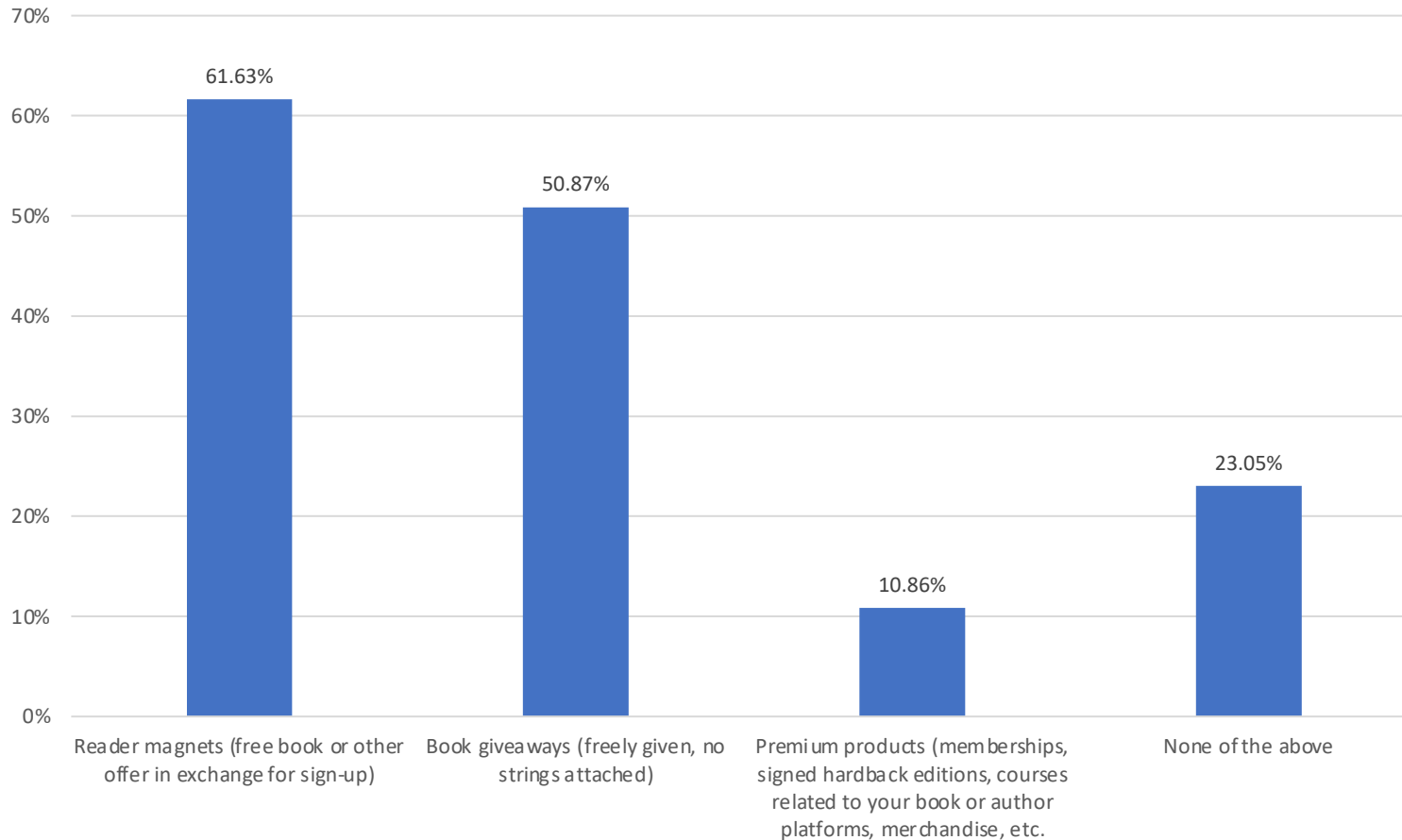
Q. From which of the following licenses do you derive income?



N = 1,877

A majority of self-published authors were using “reader magnets” (such as a free book for sign-up) and/or book giveaways to attract readers

Q. Which of the following do you use to attract readers??

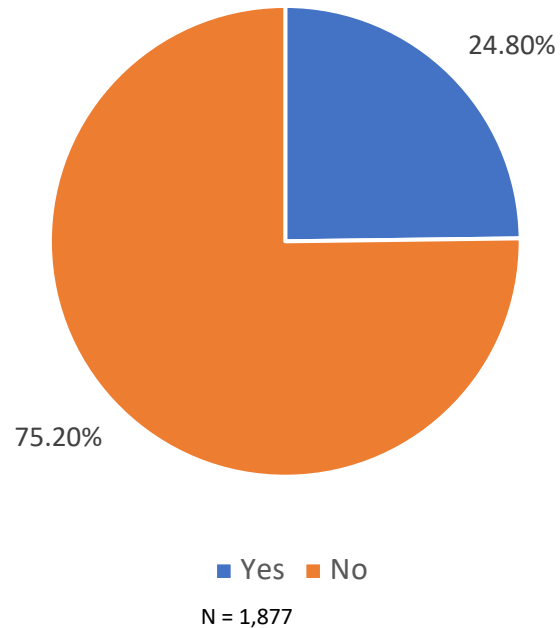


*Self-publishers are evidencing considerable marketing savvy.*

N = 1,877

## Only one-quarter of self-published authors reported having a will or estate plan covering their copyright or publishing rights

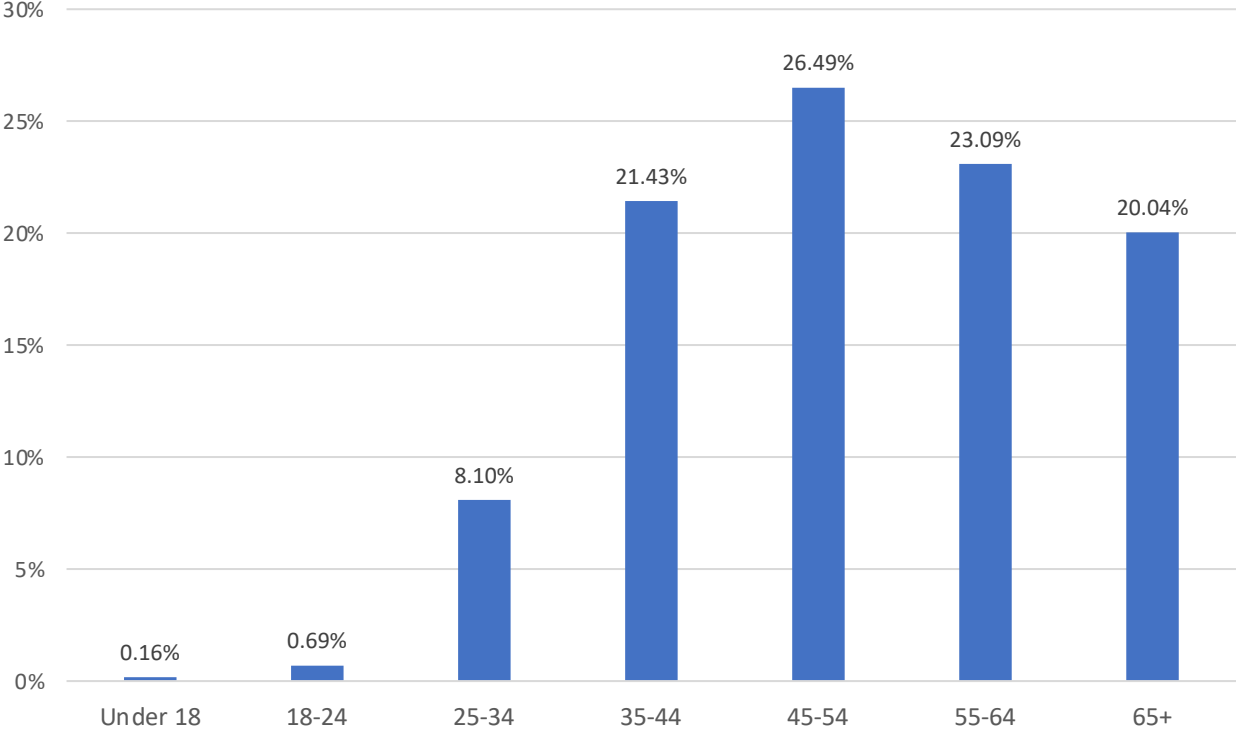
Q. Do you have a will or an estate plan that covers the ongoing management of your copyrights/publishing rights beyond your lifetime?



Demographic Characteristics: Age

More than 90% of self-published authors identified themselves as 35 years of age or older, and 43% were 55 or older

Q. What is your age?

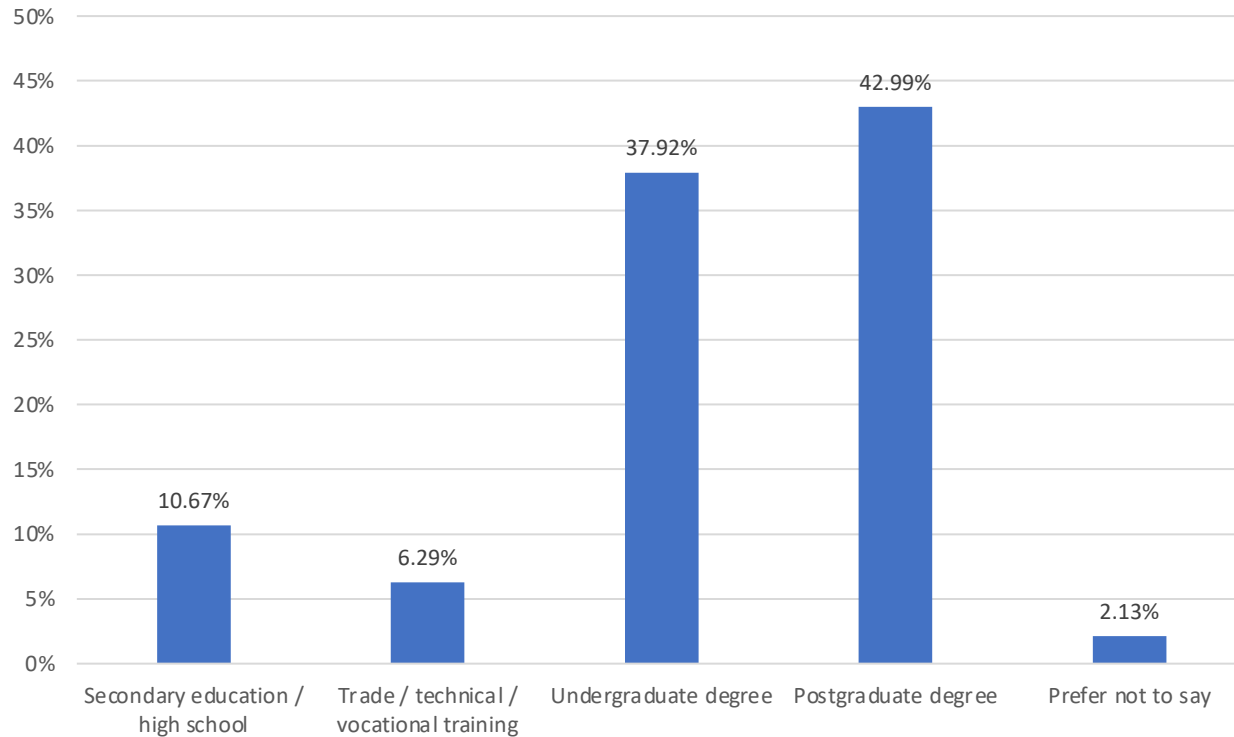


N = 1,876

## Demographic Characteristics: Education

Regarding highest education level completed, only 17% indicated secondary school or vocational training, with college graduates and postgraduates predominating among the respondents

Q. What is the highest level of education you have completed?



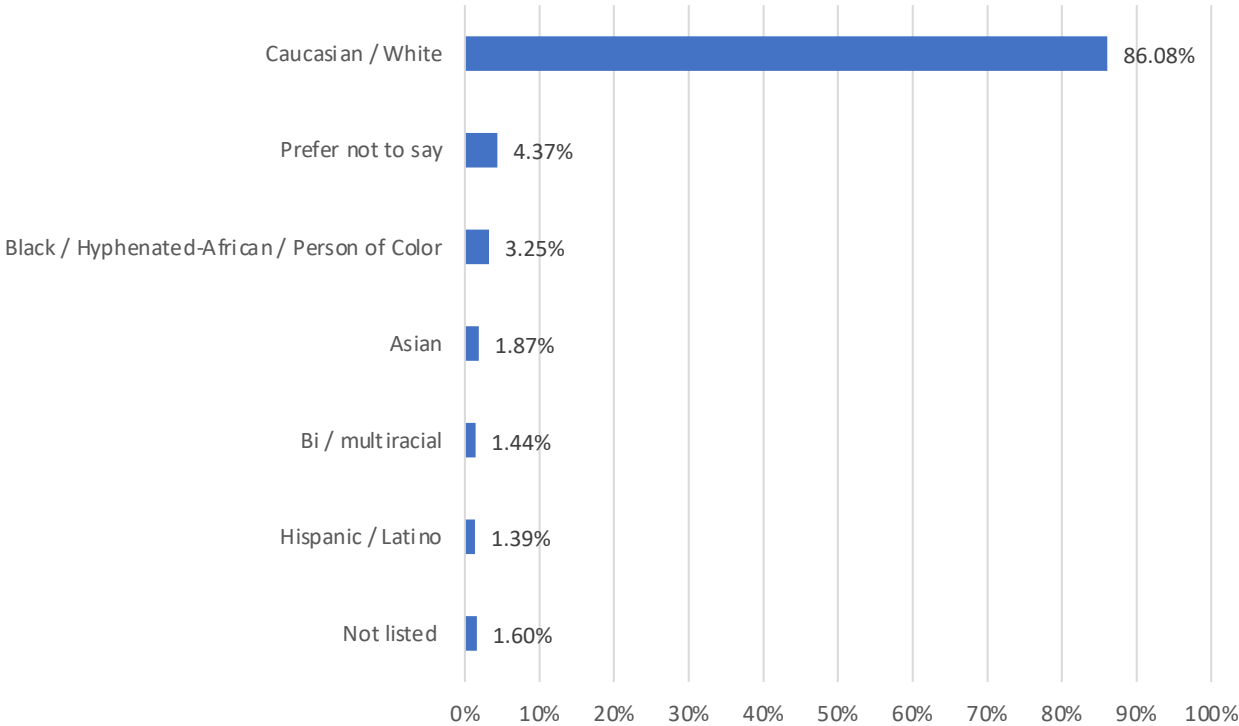
N = 1,875



Demographic Characteristics: Race

# 86% of respondents identified as Caucasian/White

Q. Please select the race group (physical ancestry) with which you most closely identify

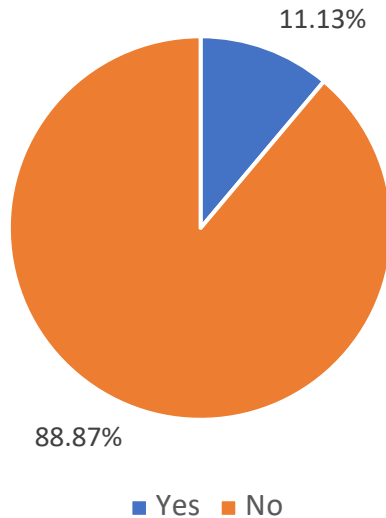


N = 1,875

## Demographic Characteristics: Disability

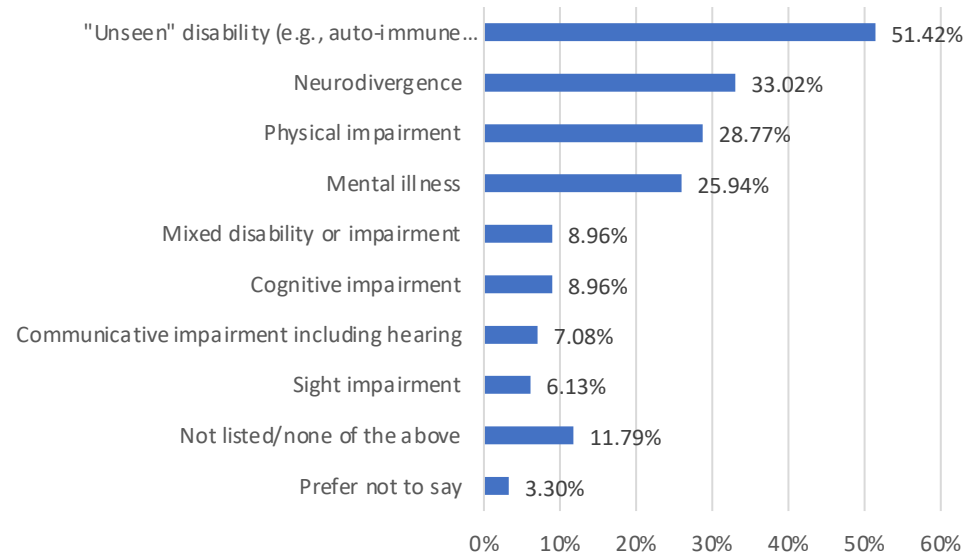
11% of respondents considered themselves to be disabled, of whom over half cited “unseen” disabilities such as auto-immune disease, diabetes, asthma or epilepsy

Q. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?



N = 1,877

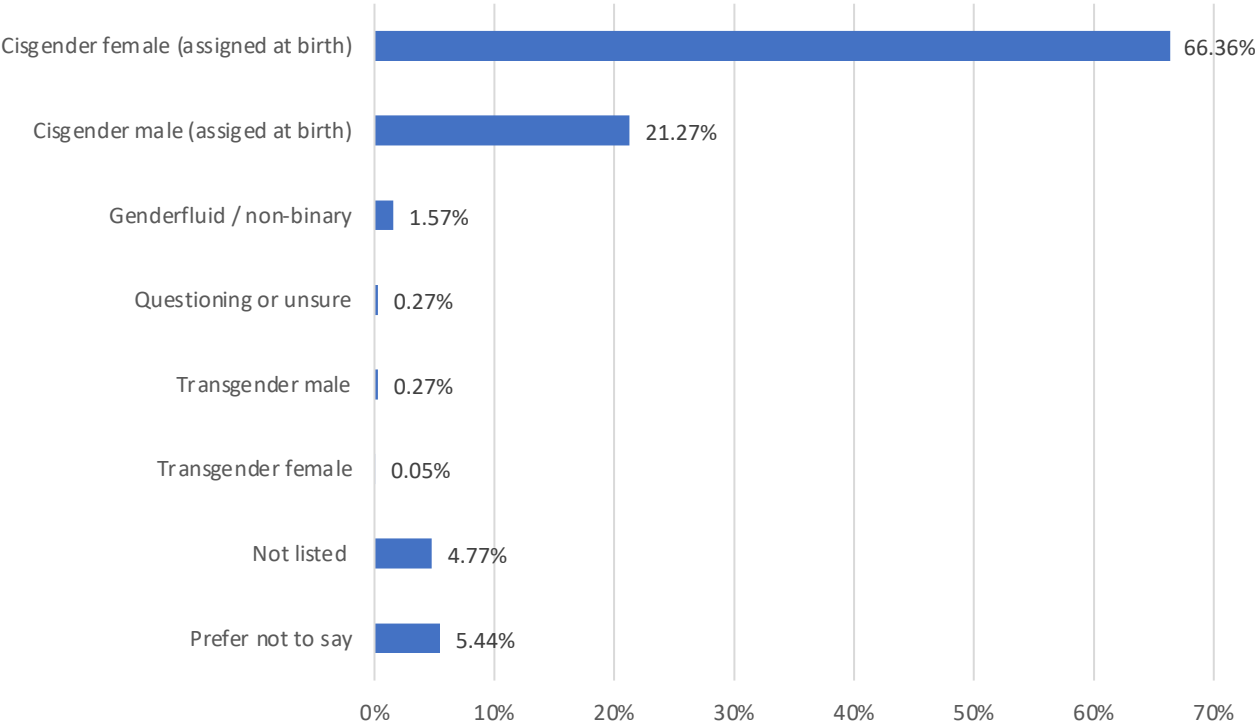
Q. Please select your challenge(s):



N = 212

# Two-thirds of the respondents identified themselves as cisgender female

Q. Please select the gender with which you most closely identify

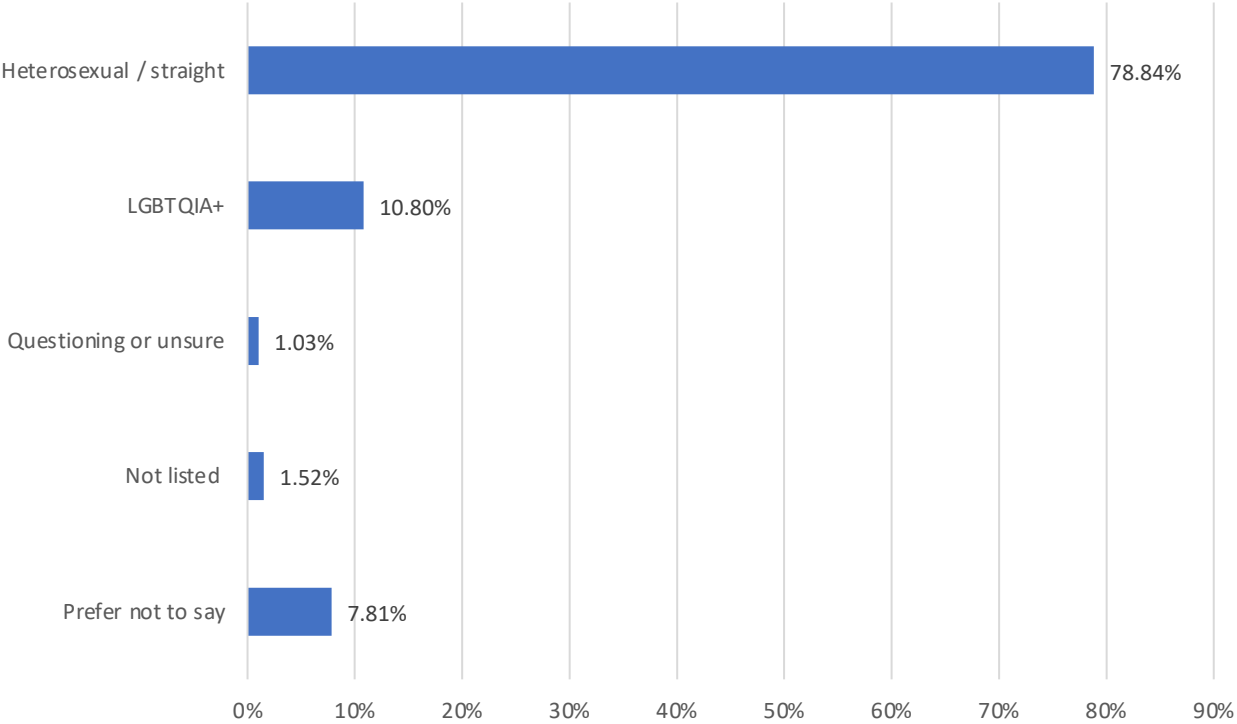


N = 1,843

**Demographic Characteristics: Sexual Orientation**

Almost 80% of the respondents identified as heterosexual or “straight” and just over 10% as members of the LGBTQIA+ community

Q. Please select the sexual orientation with which you most closely identify:



N = 1843



## CONTACTS

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