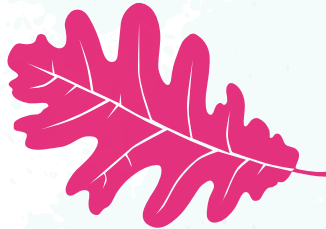




RESEARCH & EDUCATION

# On Diversity: A Survey of Canadian Readers 2021



**BOOKNET  
CANADA**

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## Introduction and methodology

We opened our 2018 report, [Demand for Diversity](#), by writing “We have heard a growing demand over the last few years to increase the diversity of books that are published and available in the trade market.” In 2021, the demand for books with a diversity of content and identities represented both in the content and in terms of contributor identity has only grown. The conversation has become more nuanced and initiatives that once allowed for discovery of, and served, historically-excluded creators perhaps no longer do.

The 2021 update on our 2018 survey asks Canadian readers if there’s continued demand for diversity. We wanted to know: How do they define “diversity”? What type of diversity do they want to see? What do they think about industry efforts to diversify books and the publishing workforce? Through this study, we intend to help content creators and purveyors in fulfilling that possible customer demand for readers’ discovery.

This survey was fielded in January 2021 to 1,306 Canadians. We asked the 1,000 readers the full questionnaire. The 306 Canadians who said they didn’t read or listen to any books in the last year were excluded from the survey.

Some things to note:

- The survey focused on English-speaking Canadians.
- Respondents were 18 years of age or older, located throughout Canada, and representative of the Canadian population based on age, gender, and geographical region.
- There is a margin of error of  $\pm 3$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level, meaning that statistics for this group could fluctuate about 3% in either direction if this survey were fielded to the entire Canadian population.
- The data is unweighted to represent the behaviours and habits of individual Canadians.
- The online survey was limited to those with internet and computer access who were able and wanted to participate in our panel in exchange for incentives.
- When we refer to the 41% of readers who belong to a non-dominant identity throughout this study, we are combining those who said always and those who said sometimes to the question: “Would you describe yourself as belonging to any non-dominant identity?”

## Diversity in the Canadian context

In the [2016 Statistics Canada survey](#) census, the Canadian population was 35,151,728. That's a lot of potential for diversity.

For this survey, we defined non-dominant identity fairly broadly, and left it up to the individual survey respondents to decide whether they identified as or belonged to a non-dominant identity. We cannot compare this one, broad question to the more specific questions that Statistics Canada asks of the Canadian population, but we can share some of their data.

- **Visible minorities:** [Statistics Canada](#) found that the “visible minority” population of Canada, “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour,” was 22% in 2016: South Asian (6%), Chinese (5%), Black (3%), Filipino (2%), Arab (2%), and 1% each of Latin Americans, Southeast Asians, West Asians, Korean, and multiple options.
- **Indigeneity:** Aboriginal peoples in [Canada in 2015](#) represented 5% of the total population: First Nations (60%), Métis (36%), Inuk (Inuit) (4%).
- **Sexuality:** In 2015, Statistics Canada’s [Canadian Community Health Survey](#) found that about 6% of Canadian men and women identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.
- **Disability/neurodiversity:** The [2017 Canadian Survey on Disability](#) found that 22% of Canadians over 15 years old living in private dwellings had at least one disability.
- **Class:** In 2019, [10% of Canadians lived in poverty](#).
- **Religion:** The [2014 General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety](#) found that 20% of Canadians were not affiliated with any religion and 7% were affiliated with a non-Christian religion, mostly Muslim (3%).
- **Language:** 22% of respondents spoke “immigrant languages” as their first language (74% spoke English, 21% French, and 1% Aboriginal languages).

## Key takeaways

### Who is reading more diverse books?

- These readers were 44 or younger (57%) and were more likely than the average reader to belong to non-dominant identity groups.
- Those who read more diverse books read more than the general reader. They read more prose/non-fiction and short stories.
- They were more likely to have bought from places that share their values.
- Those who read more diverse books think that diversity in books means books about perspectives, opinions, or stories that are different from their own. They were more likely to say they wanted to see more of that in their books than are all readers or readers who belong to a non-dominant identity.
- They agreed the most strongly that libraries, bookstores/retailers should have and that publishers should publish more books by a greater variety of authors.

### How do you reach people who read more diversely?

- Reach them online. For readers who increased the amount of diverse books they read last year: online browsing and online search were ranked higher than for all other groups.
- This group also discovered books from a wider variety of places than all readers.
- This group was more likely to buy online and borrow books than the average reader.

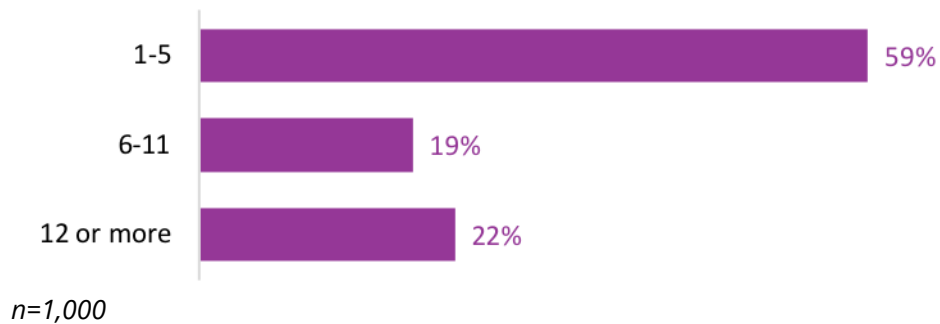
### What are the behaviours of readers who belong to a non-dominant identity?

- Readers who belong to a non-dominant identity were mostly 44 or younger (62%).
- They listened to more audiobooks and read more ebooks than all readers. They read fewer novels but more comics/graphic novels, textbooks, and poetry than the average reader.
- They were more likely to choose their book's format based on availability and price and they were more likely to have read a diverse book in the last year.
- This group was slightly more likely to buy online or download or stream for free than the average reader.
- They did not completely agree with readers in general when it comes to what makes a book "diverse" and they were more likely to think that the book industry has done too much when it comes to its response to calls for diversity.

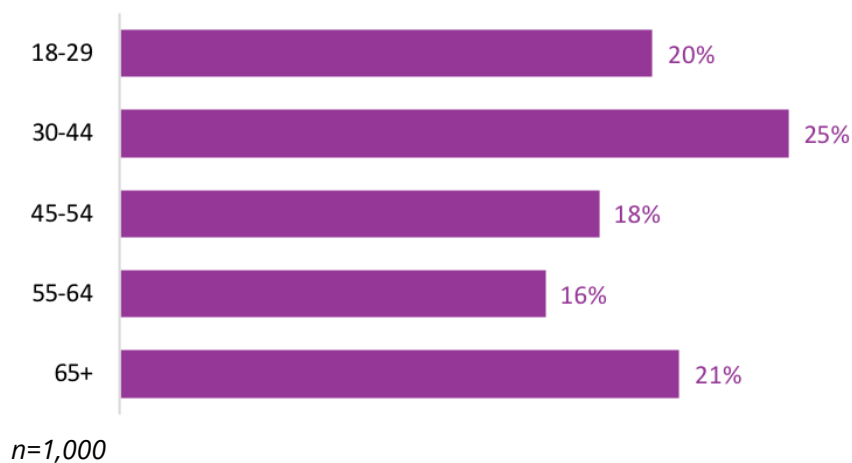
## Respondent demographics

The typical respondent to this survey read 1-5 books in the previous year, was 48 years old, and lived in a city.

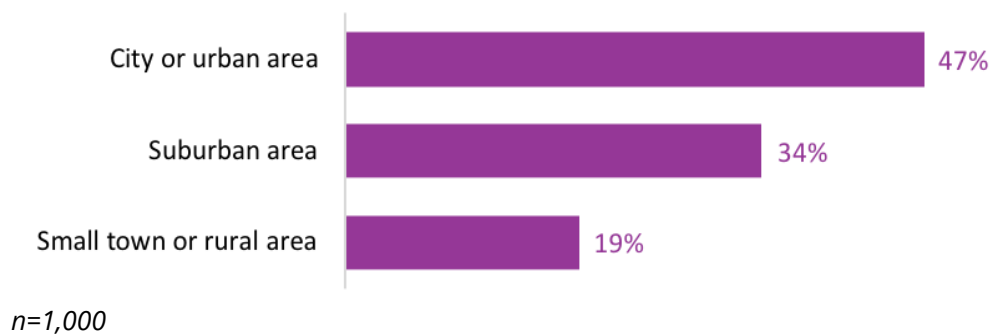
### Number of books read



### Age distribution



### City vs. rural distribution



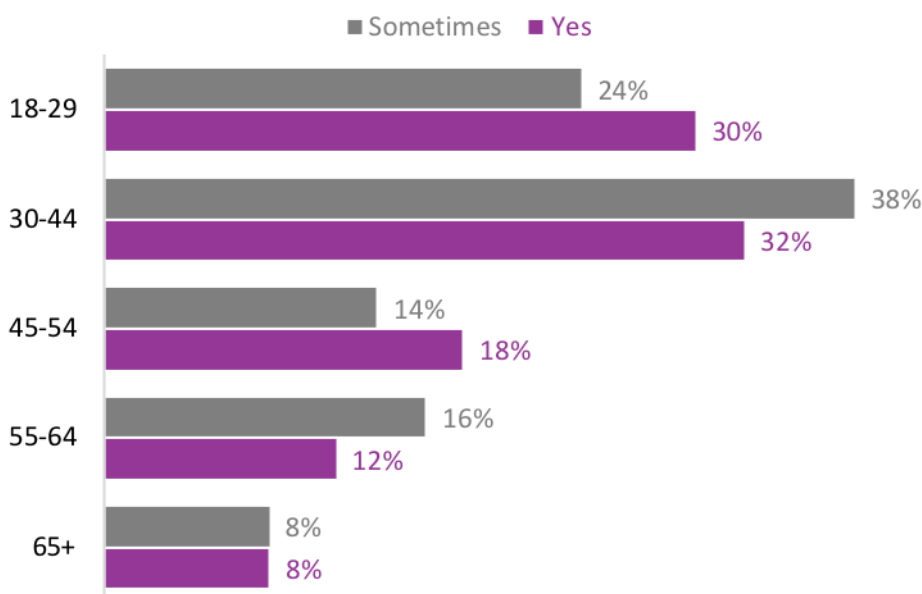
## Non-dominant identity

For the purpose of this study, we asked respondents if they identified themselves as belonging to a “non-dominant identity” which we defined as one or more of Blackness, Indigeneity, gender, sexuality, disability, neurodiversity, class, family structure, age, religion, language, or other identities that are generally poorly represented or not advantaged. While 57% of Canadian readers would not classify themselves as belonging to a non-dominant identity, 41% would (split evenly between doing so sometimes and always), and 2% chose not to answer the question.

Interestingly, when we compare these results from our 2018 survey, we find a significant difference in those claiming no marginalized identity — 69% of respondents did not classify themselves as belonging to a non-dominant identity. Granted, our 2018 question was different. In that survey we asked respondents whether they identified as one or more of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and/or a person of colour), differently abled, religious minority, or LGBTQ+. So, it is likely that the broader scope in this year’s survey captured more people who identified with the expanded definition of non-dominant identities.

Those respondents 65 years old and over were least likely to claim a non-dominant identity.

### Age distribution of readers who belong to a non-dominant identity



*Sometimes n=204; Yes n=205*

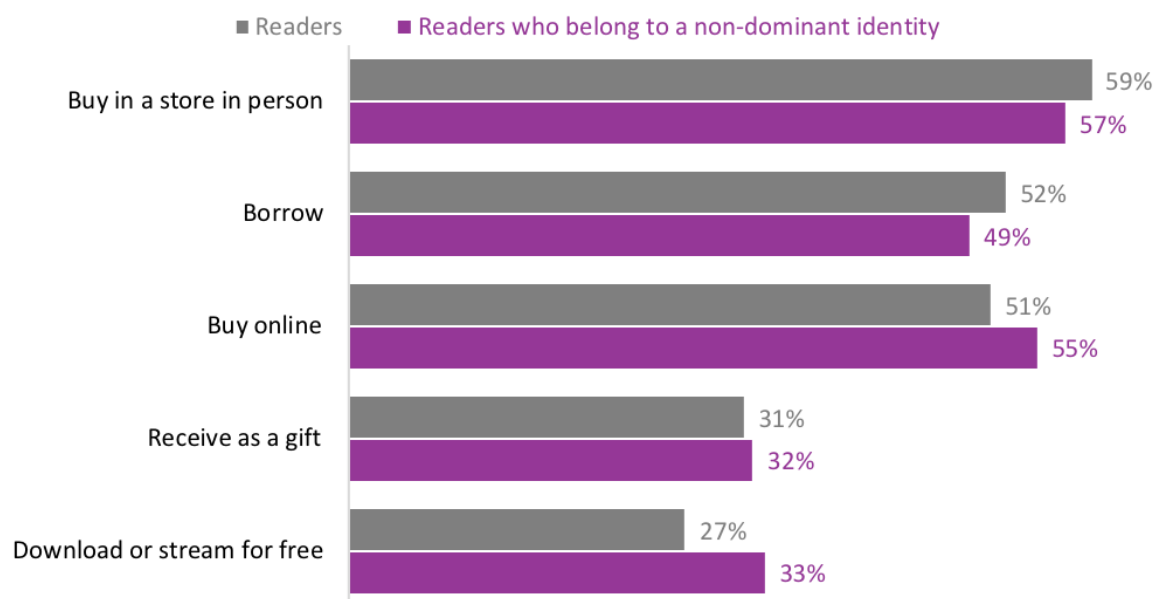


## Acquisition

How do readers get their books? Looking at the count of individual readers, we found that 77% bought books and 73% of readers got books for free (borrowed or otherwise). To get more specific, 59% of readers bought in person in a store, 52% borrowed, and 51% bought online. Other methods of acquiring books included receiving as a gift (31%) and downloading or streaming for free (27%).

Of the 41% of readers who describe themselves as belonging to a non-dominant identity, slightly fewer bought in a store in person (57%) and borrowed (49%). Slightly more bought online (55%) or downloaded or streamed for free (33%).

Where readers acquire their books



Readers n=1,000; Readers who belong to a non-dominant identity n=409

Of the 17% of readers who read more diverse books last year (we talk [more about them later](#)), more of this group both borrowed (60%) and bought online (59%) than did the overall reader.

## Buying

For all types of purchasing, when it comes to where they buy their books 18% of readers said they bought from places that explicitly share their values, 41% sometimes align their values with their purchasing, and 15% are unsure, either of their own values or of those of the stores they shop at.

For those 18% who bought from places that explicitly share their values, a much higher percentage bought from a store in person (63%), received books as a gift (38%), and a slightly higher proportion downloaded or streamed for free (33%).

Notably, readers who align their purchasing habits with their values describe themselves more often as belonging to a non-dominant identity than general readers (57% vs. 41%). On the flipside, of the respondents who belonged to a non-dominant identity, 25% bought from places that explicitly share their values (higher than the 18% of all readers who did).

## In-person book buying

Over half of all readers bought books in a store in person (59%). Most acquired their books from major book chains (60%), general retailers (50%), or used bookstores (49%).

### Where readers buy their books in person



Readers n=589; Readers who belong to a non-dominant identity n=232

The 39% of those who bought books in a store in person and who described themselves as belonging to a non-dominant identity had extremely similar acquisition breakdowns to all in-store buyers, with the exception of the following which were higher:

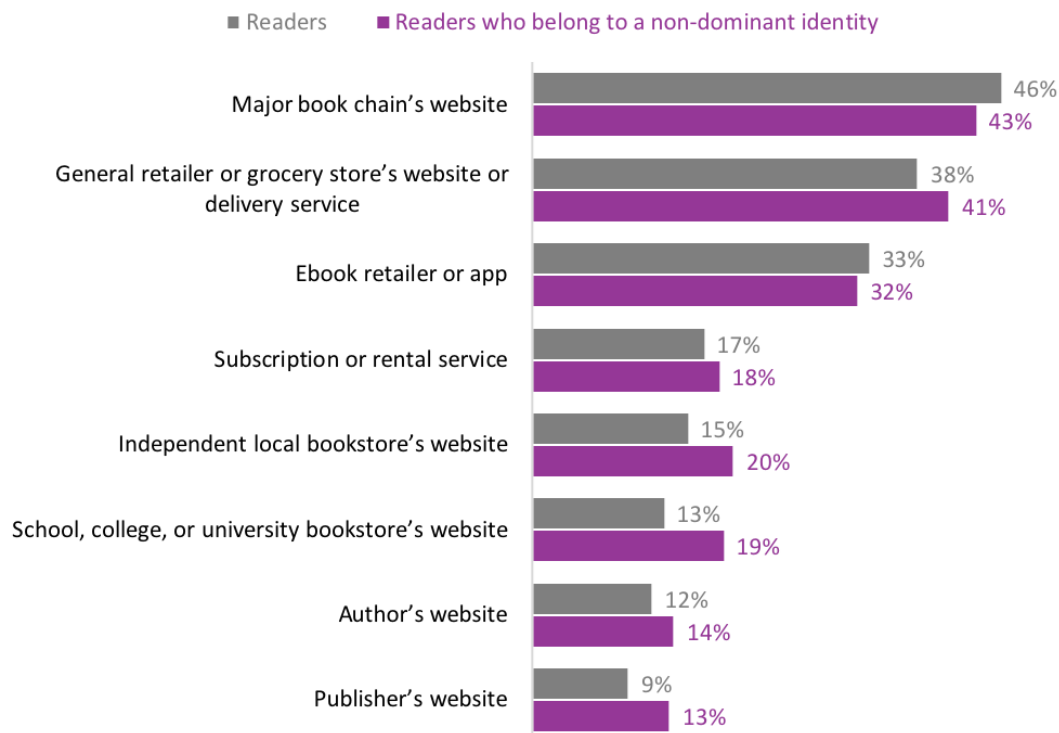
- school, college, or university bookstore (20%)
- publisher (15%)
- author (11%)

When the 18% of readers who bought from places that explicitly share their values bought in person, where were the top five places they shop? Mainly at a major book chain (58%), second-hand store, used bookstore, thrift store, or discount book store (48%), a general retailer, department/big box store, grocery store, or delivery service (46%), an independent local bookstore (43%), and school, college, or university bookstore (24%). This last one is likely much higher because of the higher representation of 18-29 year olds in the age breakdown of this group (33% of readers who bought from places that share their values vs. 20% of general readers).

### Online book buying

Again, just over half of readers bought books online (51%). The breakdown online is similar to the distribution of in-person book buying — the first two most popular methods are websites for major book chains and general retailers. But where third place for in-person buying is used bookstores, for online that spot is filled by ebook retailers or apps.

### Where readers buy their books online



Readers n=509; Readers who belong to a non-dominant identity n=223

When the 18% of readers who bought from places that explicitly share their values bought online, where did they shop? Mainly at the same places as general readers. Though they shopped at the following at higher rates:

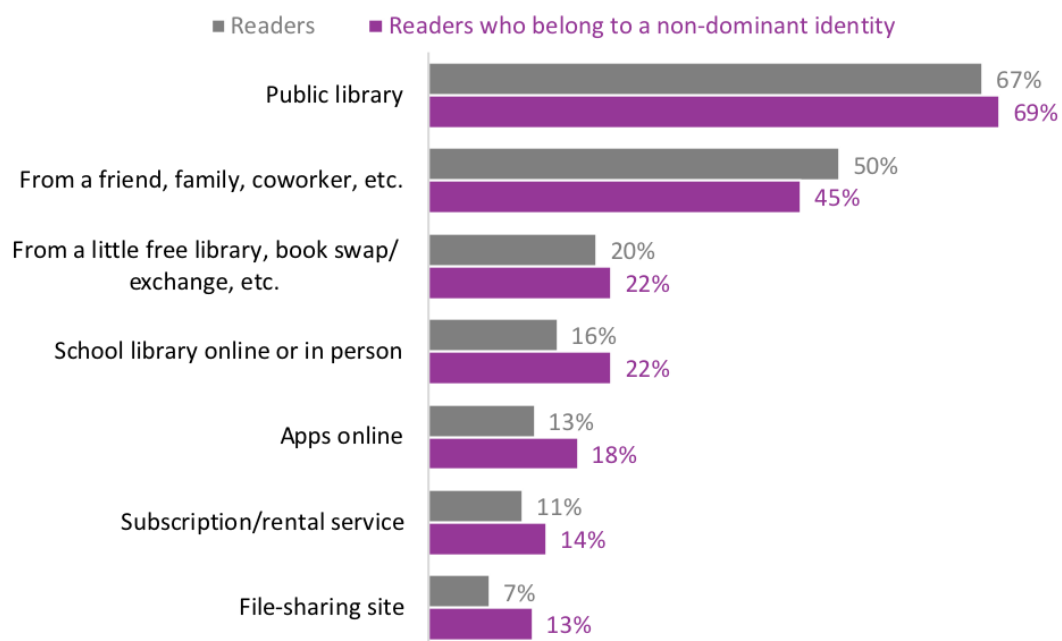
- general retailer, department/big box store, or grocery store's website or delivery service(43%)
- independent local bookstore's website (23%)
- school, college, or university bookstore's website (22%)

### Borrowing

As you may remember from above, 52% of readers borrowed their books. For borrowers, the public library was the primary choice for all readers (67%) and for the 41% of readers who belong to a non-dominant identity. Borrowing from a friend came in second at 50% for all readers, and 45% for readers who belong to a non-dominant identity. These two borrowing methods made up the majority of all borrowing with all other options making up a much smaller share.

This demographic does have a younger age breakdown, so the school libraries, apps, and file-sharing sites might reflect some of the behaviours and aptitudes of university-aged readers.

### Where readers borrow their books



Readers n=625; Readers who belong to a non-dominant identity n=253

## Reading

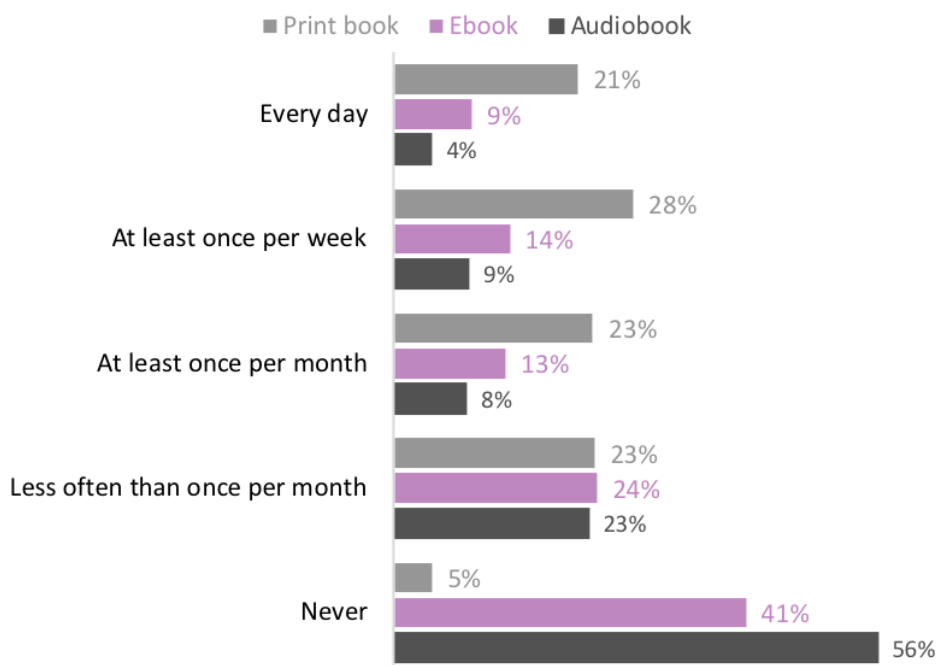
The majority of our survey respondents read from 1 to 5 books last year (59%), followed by the 22% who read 12 or more books, and then the 19% who read 6-11 books.

### Formats and frequencies

Readers generally read more print books than digital books last year — 95% of readers read a print book, 59% read an ebook, and 44% listened to an audiobook. This preference for print books falls along the same lines as what we found about reader preferences in our [Canadian Leisure & Reading Study 2020](#). In that study, we asked a slightly different question about readers' preferred formats. Overall, print books were preferred by 65% of readers, digital books were preferred by 24%, and 11% didn't have a format preference.

In terms of this survey, the frequency with which readers read print books was split pretty evenly between once per week (28%), every day (21%), at least once per month (23%), and less than once per month (23%). Readers read ebooks and audiobooks less frequently — the most popular frequency for reading both of those formats was less often than once per month (24% of ebook readers and 23% of audiobook listeners).

#### Reading frequency by format for all readers

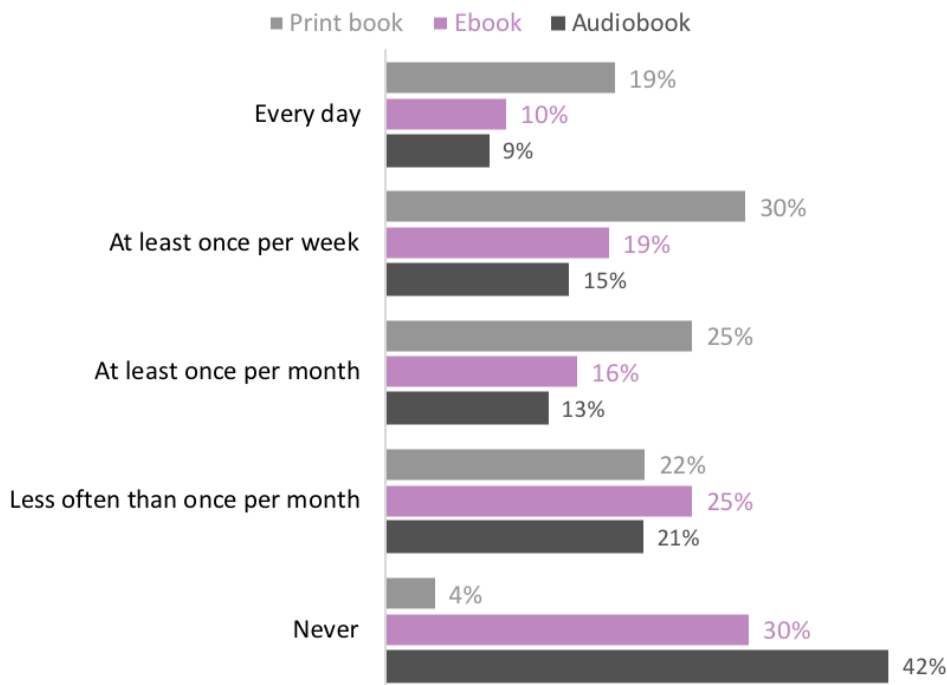


*Print book readers n=955; Ebook readers n=593; Audiobook listeners n=442*

When we look at the 41% of readers who describe themselves as belonging to a non-dominant identity, we find that this group listened to more audiobooks. They also listened to them more frequently — 9% listened every day, 15% at least once per week, and 13% monthly.

Readers who belong to a non-dominant identity also read more ebooks than all readers (70% did compared with 59% of all readers) but the frequency of ebook reading was fairly similar to that of all readers.

### Reading frequency by format for readers who belong to a non-dominant identity



*Print book readers n=392; Ebook readers n=286; Audiobook listeners n=239*

Though we don't know why readers who identified as belonging to a non-dominant identity read more in digital formats (audiobooks and ebooks) than all readers, it's possible that people from some of the marginalized identities we considered to be non-dominant (as a reminder: Blackness, Indigeneity, gender, sexuality, disability, neurodiversity, class, family structure, age, religion, language, or other identities that are generally poorly represented or not advantaged) may choose these digital formats because of their accessibility features (narrated audiobooks, font and contrast options provided in ebooks, etc.). It's also possible that the books they were interested in reading were more easily accessed in digital formats.

## Genres

We asked what kind(s) of books people read and we found that the majority of books that readers read or listened to are novels or fictional stories (70%). Personal stories or prose non-fiction was a distant second (45%).

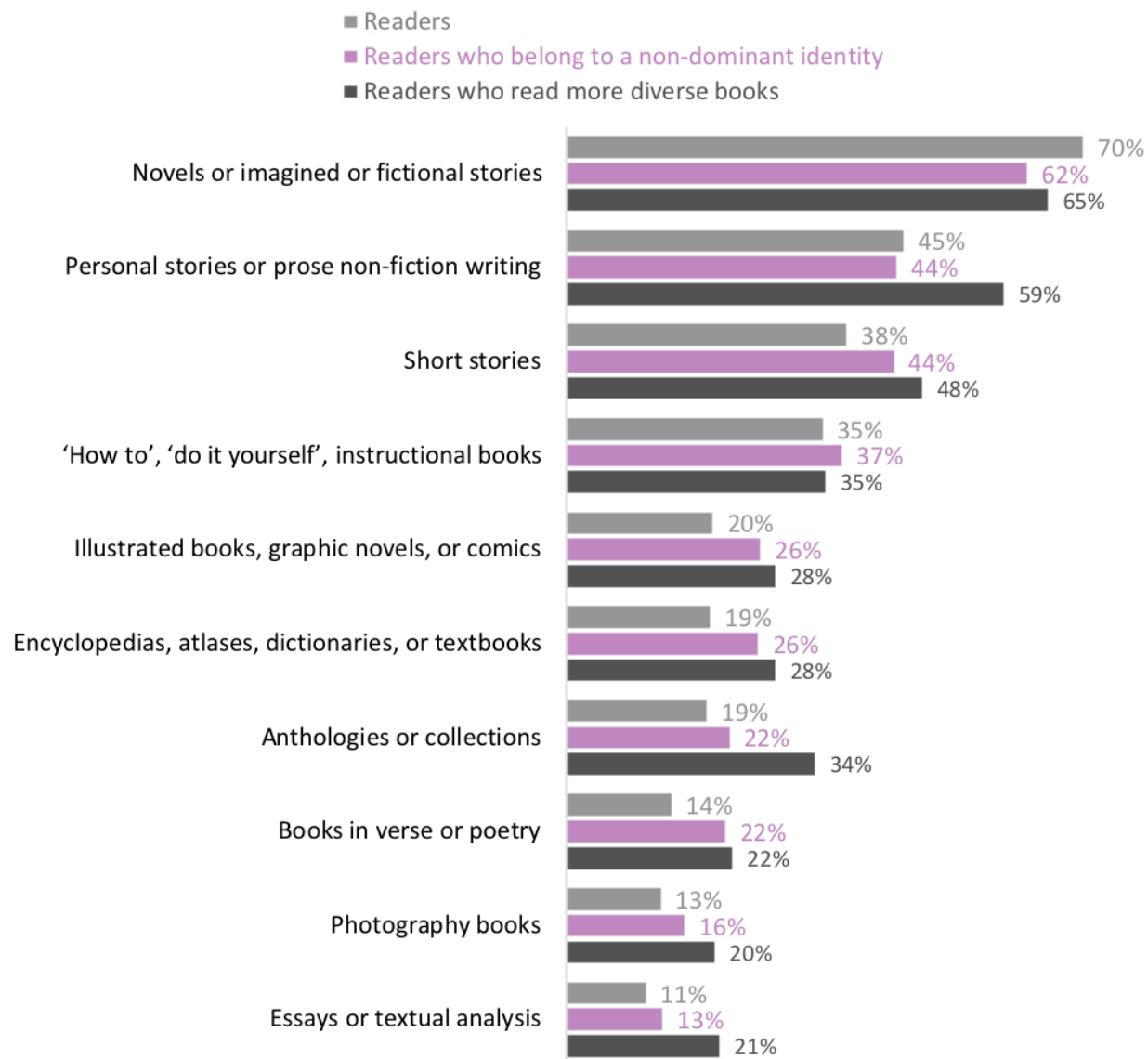
Of the 41% of readers who describe themselves as belonging to a non-dominant identity, the proportion who read novels is lower than all readers generally (62%). This group did read more comics and graphic novels (26%), reference books or textbooks (26%), and poetry (22%) than did all readers. This is perhaps a factor of the age breakdown of the readers who belong to a non-dominant identity surveyed. Younger readers favour graphic novels, consult textbooks more frequently, and may be bigger consumers of the fast-rising [Instapoets](#) category.

The readers who belong to a non-dominant identity also read marginally more short stories (44%), instructional books (37%), anthologies or collections (22%), photography books (16%), and essays or textual analysis (13%).

When we look at the top five kinds of books read by the 17% of readers who read more diverse books last year, the first four are the same as for all readers, but anthologies sneaks up two places higher than for all readers to fifth place. This group also read much more non-fiction and short stories than did all readers.



### Kinds of books read last year



Readers n=1,000; Readers who belong to a non-dominant identity n=409; Readers who read more diverse books n=170

### Subjects and formats

When we asked readers more questions about which subjects or kinds of books they read in which formats, we found that 66% of all readers usually read educational or instructional books in print book format and just over half of readers said they read or listened to the same subjects in different formats (53%). Though more people used different formats for the same subjects only sometimes (38%) rather than always (13%).

Some choose their formats by convenience; 65% of readers read or listened to a format depending on what was available or stocked. Yet if we break down that number, 41% only sometimes chose their format depending on availability and only 24% always did, fewer than the 29% who never did.

Some respondents are more price sensitive — 52% of readers read or listen to a format depending on which had the lower price.

Reading subjects in different formats for all readers

I read or listen to the same subjects in different formats.

Yes 13%	Sometimes 38%	No 43%	N/A 6%
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I read the print book or ebook before or while listening to the audiobook.

Yes 17%	Sometimes 17%	No 52%	N/A 14%
------------	------------------	-----------	------------

The format I read or listen to depends on which has the lower price.

Yes 17%	Sometimes 34%	No 42%	N/A 7%
------------	------------------	-----------	-----------

I mostly read or listen to fiction books in digital formats.

Yes 17%	Sometimes 26%	No 51%	N/A 5%
------------	------------------	-----------	-----------

The format I read or listen to depends on which is available or stocked.

Yes 24%	Sometimes 41%	No 29%	N/A 6%
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I mostly read educational or instructional books in print, not digital.

Yes 36%	Sometimes 30%	No 27%	N/A 7%
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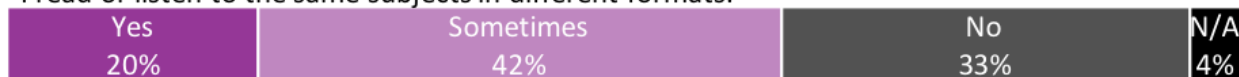
*n*=1,000

Perhaps surprisingly, 68% of readers who always or sometimes bought from places that explicitly share their values belong to the group of respondents who read whichever format is priced the lowest. It's possible that it can be expensive to shop your values if they don't align with those of the big box stores or online retailers who compete for the lowest price. These readers could also be choosing to save money by selecting a cheaper format so as to not compromise their values.

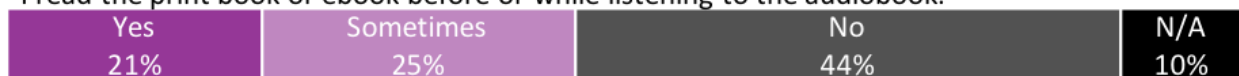
The 41% of readers who describe themselves as belonging to a non-dominant group are more likely than all readers to agree or sometimes agree with all of the statements.

#### Reading subjects in different formats for readers who belong to a non-dominant identity

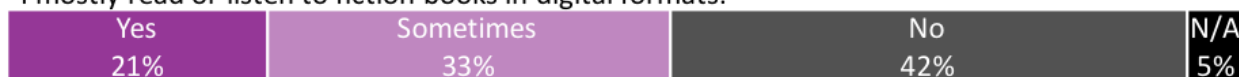
I read or listen to the same subjects in different formats.



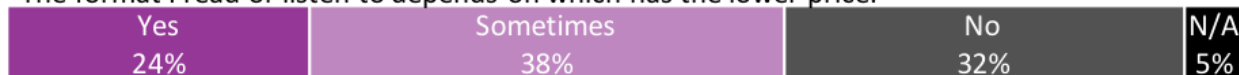
I read the print book or ebook before or while listening to the audiobook.



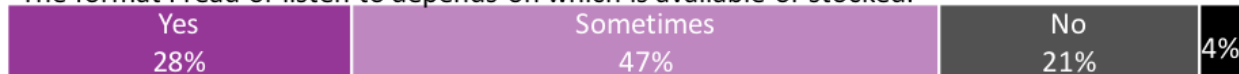
I mostly read or listen to fiction books in digital formats.



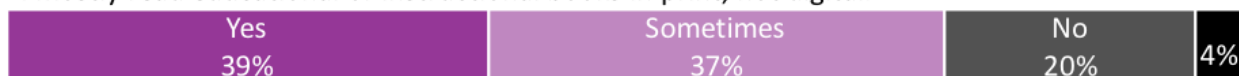
The format I read or listen to depends on which has the lower price.



The format I read or listen to depends on which is available or stocked.



I mostly read educational or instructional books in print, not digital.



n=409

#### Reasons for reading

When it comes to why people read, most respondents believed that books are for enjoyment, entertainment, or leisure (63%).

- A slightly lower percentage of readers who belong to a non-dominant identity (56%) agreed that books are for enjoyment, entertainment, or leisure.
- And a slightly higher percentage of the 18% of readers who say that they bought from places that explicitly share their values agreed (74%).

A smaller percentage of readers (41%) agreed that books are for learning or education.

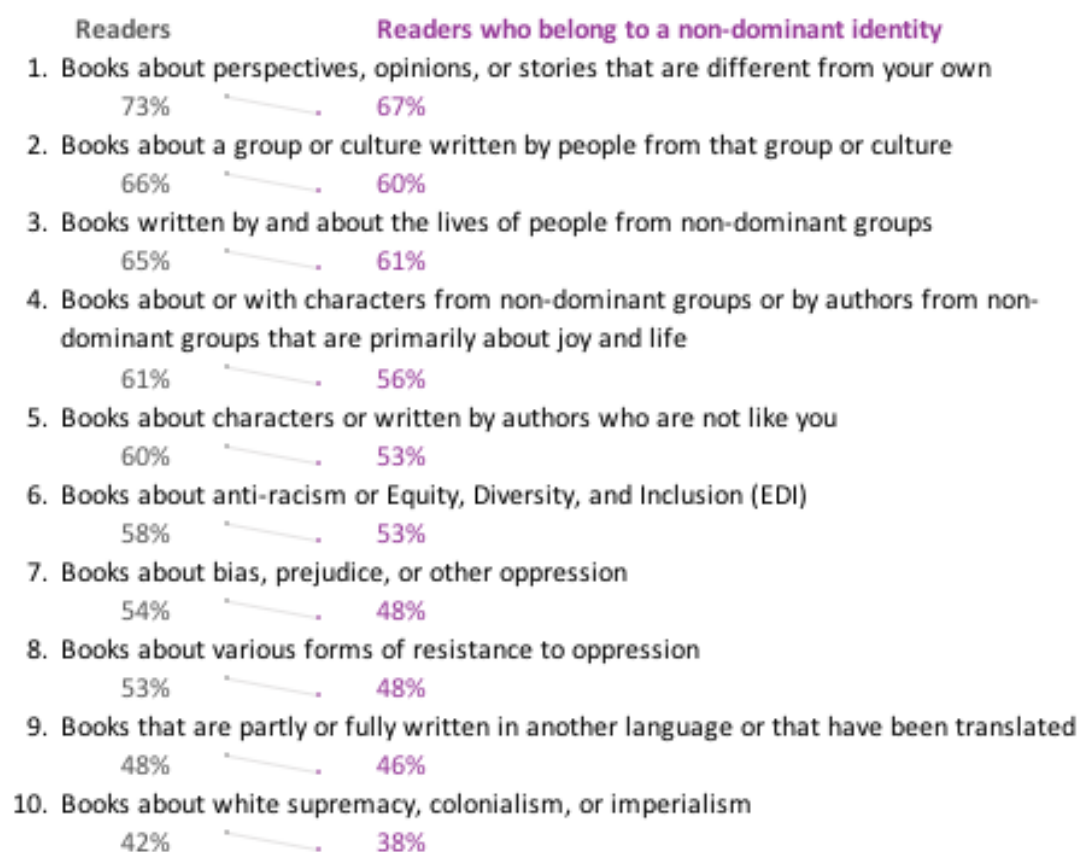
- The segment of readers who belong to a non-dominant identity agreed at much the same rate (43%).
- And again, people who shop at places that explicitly share their values tend to want to learn or educate themselves from books more than the general reader — 66% agree books are for learning or education.

## Diversity in books

What are diverse books/authors, and what do readers want to see in more books?

To 73% of readers, diversity in books means books about perspectives, opinions, or stories that are different from their own. Survey respondents could choose as many answers as they agreed with from a long list. The 19% of all readers who chose all of the above were counted in each answer option for the list below.

What “diversity in books” means to readers



Readers n=1,000; Readers who belong to a non-dominant identity n=409

When we look at the 41% of readers who describe themselves as belonging to a non-dominant identity, we find the breakdown shifts slightly and that respondents in this group agreed less with almost all statements. The statements where significantly fewer readers who belong to a non-dominant identity agreed are:

- “books about perspectives, opinions, or stories that are different from your own”
- “books about a group or culture written by people from that group or culture”
- “books about characters or written by authors who are not like you”
- “books about bias, prejudice, or other oppression”

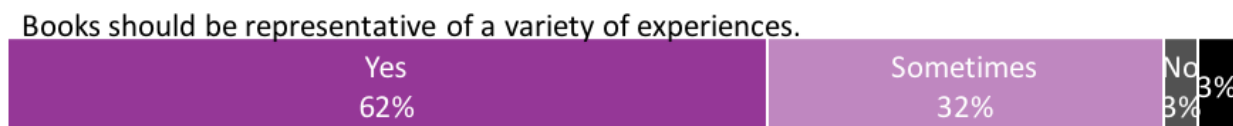
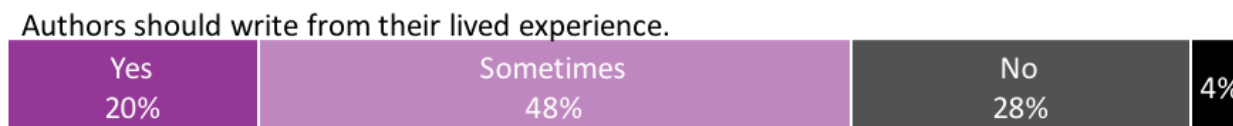
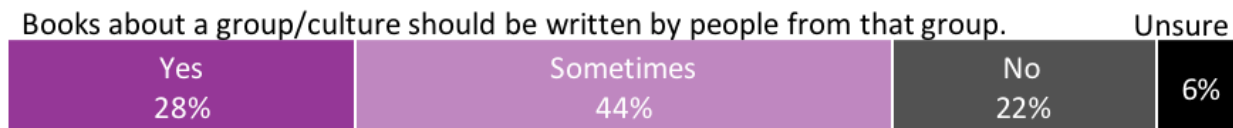
These shifts make sense when we consider that non-dominant groups have been consuming media about perspectives, opinions, or stories that are different from their own and about characters or written by authors who are not like them as a matter of course, since dominant groups have much more space dedicated to them in Canadian culture.

The lower percentage of readers who belong to a non-dominant identity who agree with the statement “books about a group or culture written by people from that group or culture” ties into a growing conversation around the previously widely-used term [#OwnVoices](#). This hashtag was coined in September 2015, by author Corinne Duyvis as a way to give authentic voices a seat at the table. Her suggestion was to use #OwnVoices to recommend books about diverse characters written by authors of that same marginalized group. However, since the hashtag’s inception, it’s grown to be a larger part of how publishing markets authors from historically excluded groups. The organization We Need Diverse Books [decided on June 6, 2021 not to use the term](#) anymore since it has “ been used to place diverse creators in uncomfortable and potentially unsafe situations.” Authors have similarly [been asking questions](#) about whether identifying themselves as an #OwnVoices author has value or whether it further marginalizes them in the publishing industry.

Elsewhere in the survey, we also asked all respondents how much they agreed with the following statement: “It is important that books about a group or culture should be written by people from that group or culture.” About one third of readers agreed (28%), 44% of readers sometimes agreed, and 22% disagreed. About two in ten readers agreed that it’s important that authors write from their lived experience (20%), 48% agreed sometimes, and 28% did not agree.

Readers also agreed that books should be representative of a variety of experiences (62%). This percentage holds true even when we only look at both the segment of readers who identified as belonging to a non-dominant identity (62%) and those who did not (62%). Those readers who buy their books from places that explicitly share their values (18% of all respondents) tended to support this statement to a higher degree, 78% agreed with the statement.

Statements about a variety of experiences and #OwnVoices



n=1,000

### Examples of diversity in books

We asked survey respondents for examples of authors they would classify as a “diverse author” or books they would consider a “diverse book.” Almost half of readers provided at least one example (of a book/author, group, or event) they considered diverse (47%). The types of books and backgrounds of authors varied widely.

Amongst the authors that readers mentioned were some Canadians: Lawrence Hill, Tanya Talaga, Eden Robinson, Kim Thuy, Katherena Vermette, Mordecai Richler, Joseph Boyden, Carol Matas, Ruth Ozeki, Eric Walters, Padma Viswanathan, David Adams Richards, Margaret Atwood, Silvia Moreno-Garcia, Richard Wagamese, Thomas King, Humble the Poet, Desmond Cole, and Jesse Thistle.

A sampling of some other authors provided as an example of a “diverse author”: Khaled Hosseini, Michelle Obama, Barack Obama, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Celeste Ng, Kendi B. Ibram, Alice Walker, Angie Thomas, Roxane Gay, Maya Angelou, Harper Lee, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Toni Morrison, Chimamanda Adichie, Elie Wiesel, Danielle Steel, Junot Diaz, Edwidge Danticat, Min Jin Lee, Miriam Gurba, Sarah Waters, Alexander Weinstein, Anne Frank, Stephen King, Jodi Picoult, and J.K. Rowling.

A sampling of diverse books specified: *The Colour Purple*, *Seven Fallen Feathers*, *White Fragility*, *Kite Runner*, *The Help*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Untouchables*, *Les Miserables*, *The Break*, *The Good Immigrant*, *Twilight*, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, *How to Be Anti-Racist*, *The Subtle Art of Not Giving A F\*ck*, *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, *The New End of the World*, *Wonder*, *The Hate U Give*, and *Love, Simon*.

Other comments by select readers specified that they considered books to be diverse if they were books written by Indigenous authors, books written by Holocaust survivors or their descendants, a person of colour writing about their life, or books with LGBTQIA2S+ characters.

Readers also commented that to them diversity could mean a variety of genres, fiction versus non-fiction, political affiliation, or even book format.

Almost half of readers answered that they didn't know — either they didn't know how to define diversity in a way that would allow them to come up with an example or they didn't know author's names in general; that they couldn't think of an example; that they didn't pay attention; or that they didn't care about this topic (45%).

About 2% shared that classifying one author or book as diverse did not make sense to them, stating it didn't "really make sense unless the book somehow covers a large number of topics" and that the "usage of diverse is grammatically and logically incorrect. Only a plurality of authors can be diverse!"

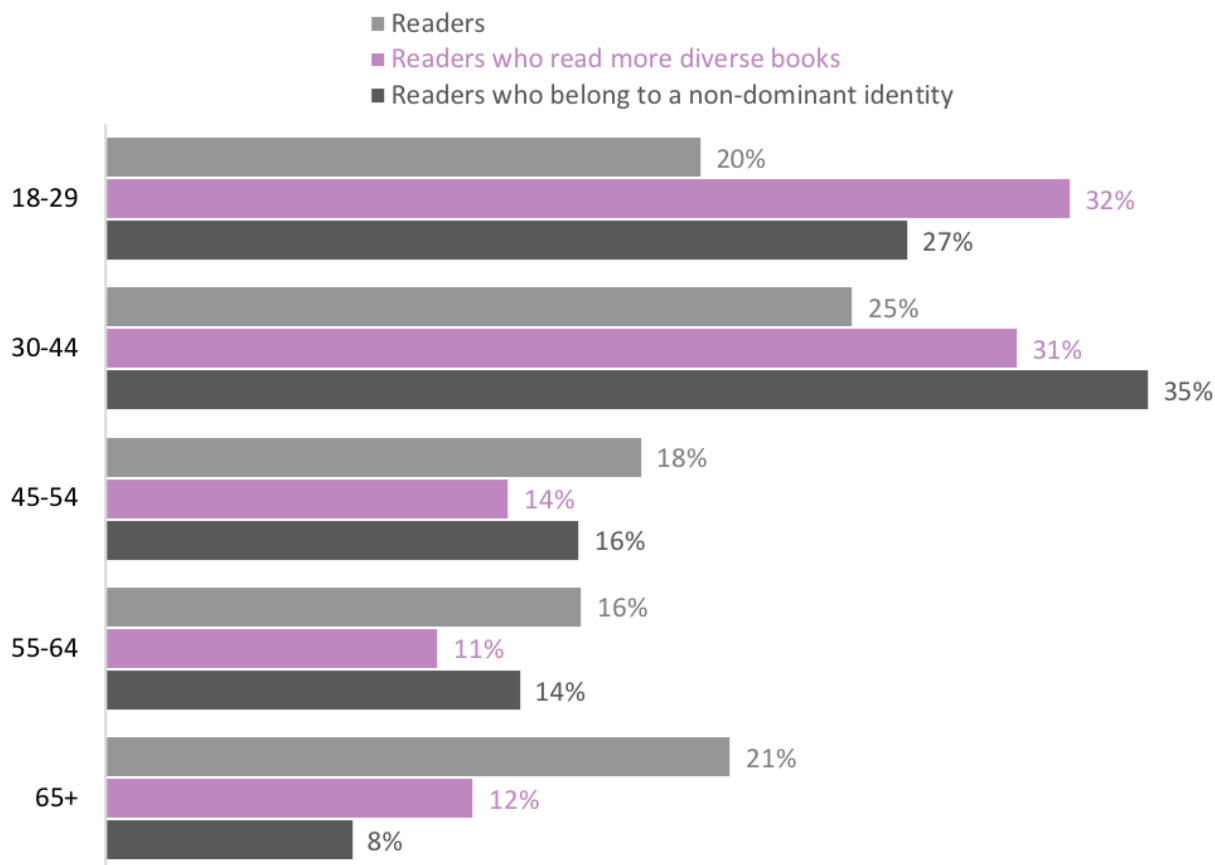
They make a valid point about terminology. As Jodie Lea Martire, an author writing about [identity in the Australian publishing industry](#), put it "I refer to 'difference' rather than 'diversity'. 'Diversity' implies variance from and inferiority to dominant traits, while 'difference' removes the latter judgement." The Canadian industry is also looking at how best to describe author identity. The Equity, Diversity & Inclusion in Metadata Working Group was formed in September 2020 "[to examine how to represent and distribute information about equity, diversity, and inclusion in metadata.](#)"

### Readers who read more diversely

From the section above, we have a better idea of what readers consider to be diverse books, but did they read more of those types of books last year? Of the total respondents, 17% said they had and 31% said they sometimes had read more. For the 41% of readers who belonged to a non-dominant identity, a higher proportion said both that they had (25%) or sometimes had (38%).

What do we know about this group? Those 17% of readers who read more diverse books were made up of more people who described themselves as belonging to a non-dominant identity than general readers (60% vs. 41% of all readers). The age group who seemed most interested in reading more diverse books than they had previously were 18 to 44 year olds.

Age distribution



*Readers who read more diverse books n=170; Readers who belong to a non-dominant identity n=409; Readers n=1,000*

We also know that of the 17% of readers who read more diverse books 75% agree that books should be representative of a variety of experiences (compared with 62% of all readers); 63% agree that books are for enjoyment, entertainment, or leisure (the same as all readers); 51% agree that books are for learning or education (compared with 41% of all readers); and a much higher percentage of them bought from places that explicitly share their values (35% always did compared with 18% of all readers and 38% sometimes did compared with 41% of all readers).

These 17% of readers who have read more diverse books also read a higher number of books in comparison to all readers — 41% of them read 1-5 books (vs. 59% of all readers), 30% read 12 or more (vs. 22% of all readers), and 29% read 6-11 books last year (vs. 19% of all readers).



When it comes to coming across more diverse books, it shouldn't be surprising that those 17% of readers who read more diverse books also noticed or specifically looked for more diverse books than did the average reader (66% noticed more vs. 23% of all readers and 49% specifically looked for more vs. 11% of all readers).

### Seeing more diverse books

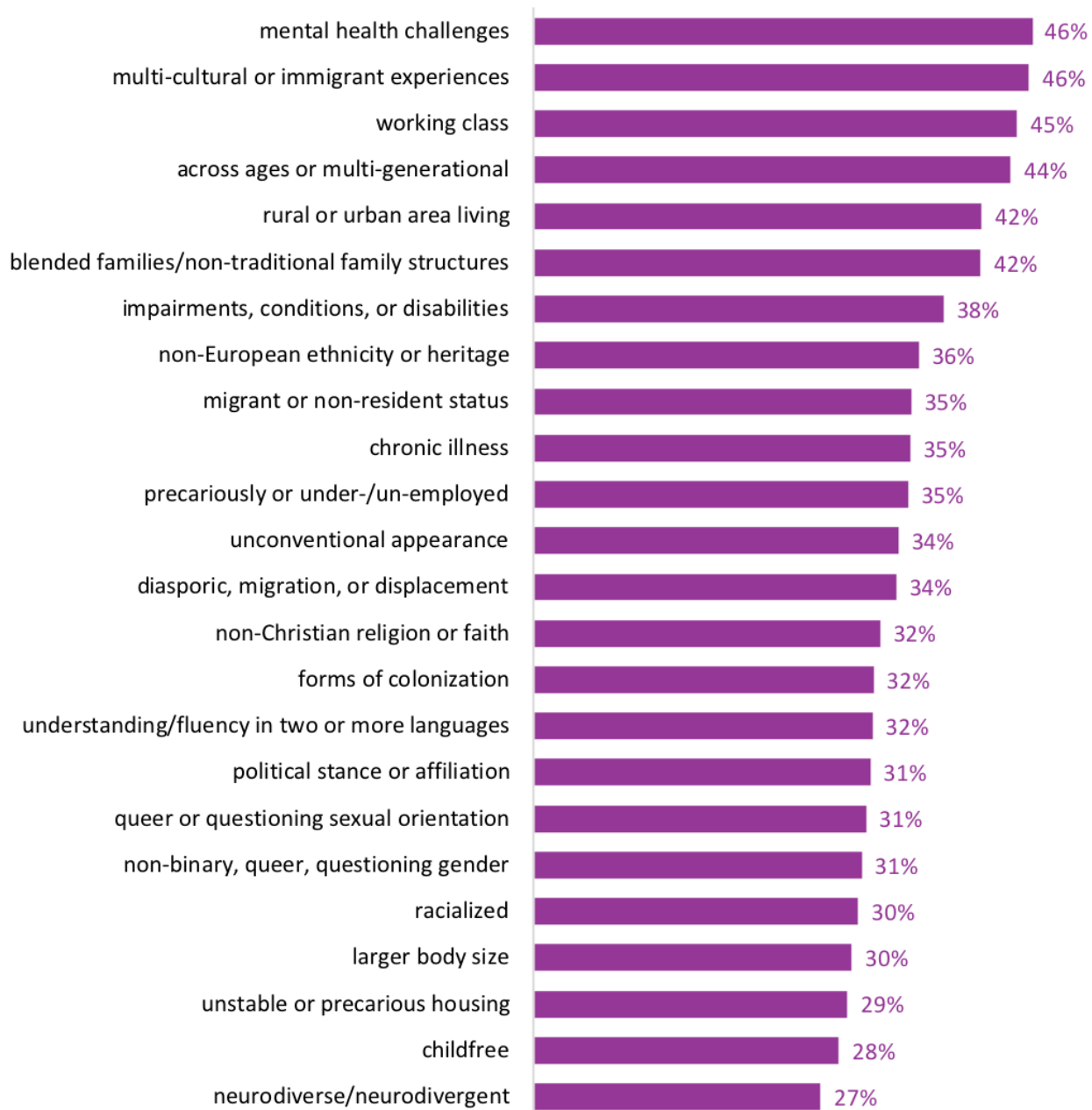


*Readers n=1000; Readers who bought from places that explicitly share their values n=180; Readers who read more diverse books n=170*

### What else would readers like to see in diverse books?

We asked readers what they wanted to see more of in the books they read. The top experiences or perspectives that readers want to read more about or see more often in their books are mental health challenges (46%), multi-cultural or immigrant experiences (46%), working class experiences (45%), and stories across ages or multi-generational (44%). Although, 14% of readers did not want to see more of any of the options listed.

What readers want to see more of in their books



*n=1,000*

Of the 41% of readers who describe themselves as belonging to a non-dominant identity, the breakdown for the top 10 chosen was very similar to those for all readers.

What readers who belong to a non-dominant identity want to see more of in their books

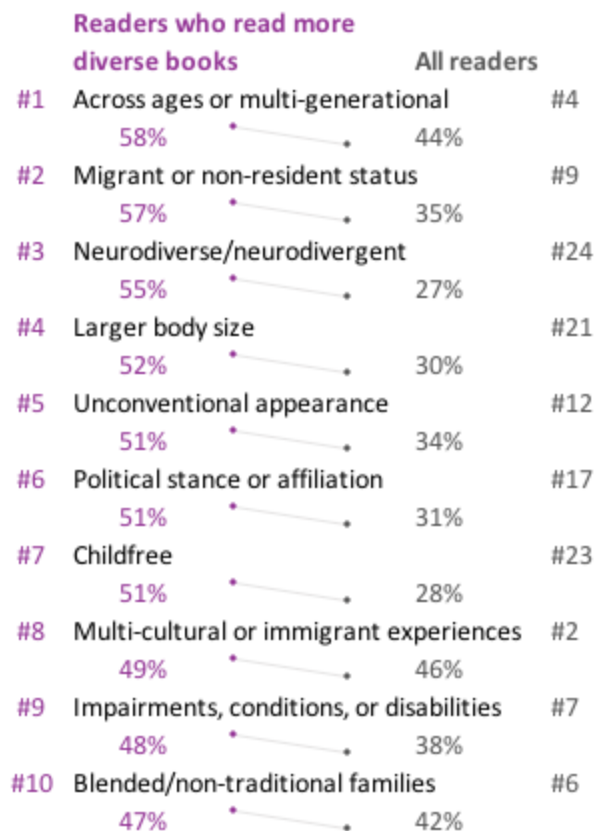


Readers n=1,000; Readers who belong to a non-dominant identity n=409

On the other hand, the ranking of which experiences that the 17% of readers who read more diverse books last year wanted to see was quite different when compared to all readers and almost half of their top 10 most interesting perspectives were nearer the bottom rankings for all readers.

This group were much more likely to want to see many more of the listed perspectives and experiences in their books — this group had 7 items at over 50% and 19 over 40%, by contrast, general readers had no items over 50% and only 6 over 40%.

What readers who read more diverse books want to see more of in their books



Readers n=1,000; Readers who read more diverse books n=170

Readers want more of these perspectives to be represented in books regardless of how they acquired them. The 77% of readers who purchase their books and the 73% of readers who get their books for free, either from the library or elsewhere, provided rankings of these experiences that were similar to those by general readers.

### Statements about diverse book offerings from the industry



Readers n=1,000; Readers who belong to a non-dominant identity n=409; Readers who read more diverse books n=170

### Perceptions of diversity in the industry

People, social movements, and grassroots organizations have called on the publishing industry (publishing, bookselling, and library sectors) to increase the variety and quality of book content for readers and to have more “diverse books” that reflect the lives of all people. When we asked readers what they thought about the book industry’s response to this call, 8% of readers said that the book industry has done too much, 29% thought the industry has done enough, 24% thought the industry has not done enough, and finally the largest share of respondents were not sure, at 39%.

Of the 41% of readers who describe themselves as belonging to a non-dominant identity, fewer of this group were unsure than general readers and more chose the done too much option: 13% said the industry has done too much, 30% said the industry has done enough, 29% said the industry has not done enough, and 28% are unsure. However, when we look at the rest of the survey respondents, those who did not claim a non-dominant identity, we find a much lower percentage of people who said the industry has done too much (5%) as well as a much higher percentage of people who were unsure (46%).

Of the 17% of readers who read more diverse books last year, when compared to all readers, fewer were unsure of the amount the industry had done to further diversity efforts (19%), more thought the industry has done too much (15%), and more thought the industry has not done enough (34%).

When we slice the data to look at the 18% of readers who align their purchasing habits with their values, we see that they are more sure than the general reader — 16% said the industry has done too much, 33% said the industry has done enough, 28% said the industry has not done enough, and only 24% were unsure.

## Discovery

In BookNet Canada's [Canadian Leisure & Reading Study 2020](#) we asked readers about their book discovery in 2020. When respondents were asked to select the top three ways they discovered books, the most popular answers were word of mouth (34%), bookstores (26%), public libraries (25%), online book retailers (25%), and social media (22%).

The responses to this survey were markedly different, though partially that's due to the wording and answer options in the survey question being different. In this survey, readers told us they discovered their books through a variety of methods: someone else suggesting it to them (47%), browsing in person (42%), browsing online (41%), searching online (32%), from another book (28%), and from a review (27%).

Different segments of our respondents are more likely to choose or find different discovery methods more helpful than others.

Interestingly, for the 41% of readers who belong to a non-dominant identity, online browsing took top spot over a suggestion from another person. They were also least likely to discover their next read from another book than any other group.

For the 17% of readers who read more diverse books last year: online browsing and online search (Google, Ecosia, Bing, etc.) were ranked higher than for all other groups. This group is also discovering books from more places than all readers are. This could be because this group reads more than other segments of readers — 59% read six or more books last year, compared to 51% of all readers.

## Discovery methods

	Readers who purchased books	Readers who borrowed or got books for free	Readers who belong to a non-dominant identity	Readers who bought from places that explicitly share their values	Readers who read more diverse books last year
Someone suggested it to me	47%	53%	41%	43%	51%
Online browsing	45%	44%	47%	39%	51%
In person browsing	45%	44%	39%	38%	44%
Online search	34%	32%	39%	34%	43%
From another book	29%	32%	25%	26%	38%
From a review	29%	30%	31%	27%	36%
From a book list	21%	22%	23%	32%	32%
Came up as a suggestion online	19%	19%	19%	17%	24%
<b>Total percentage of readers</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>17%</b>

For retailers and publishers who are trying to reach readers in general, and readers of diverse books in particular, the fact that online browsing and searching rank in the top four for all readers, as well as all segments of readers, shows the importance of a book's metadata — Thema, BISAC subject codes, keywords, description, etc. — to [surface books when readers are browsing or searching online](#).

Though ads were not called out explicitly above as a heavy discovery driver, marketing campaigns play into many of the top discovery methods. We wanted to know if readers were seeing and noticing marketing campaigns or ads for the types of books they were interested in reading. Only 16% said that they did. Most respondents either said they sometimes saw them (42%) or that they did not see them (38%).

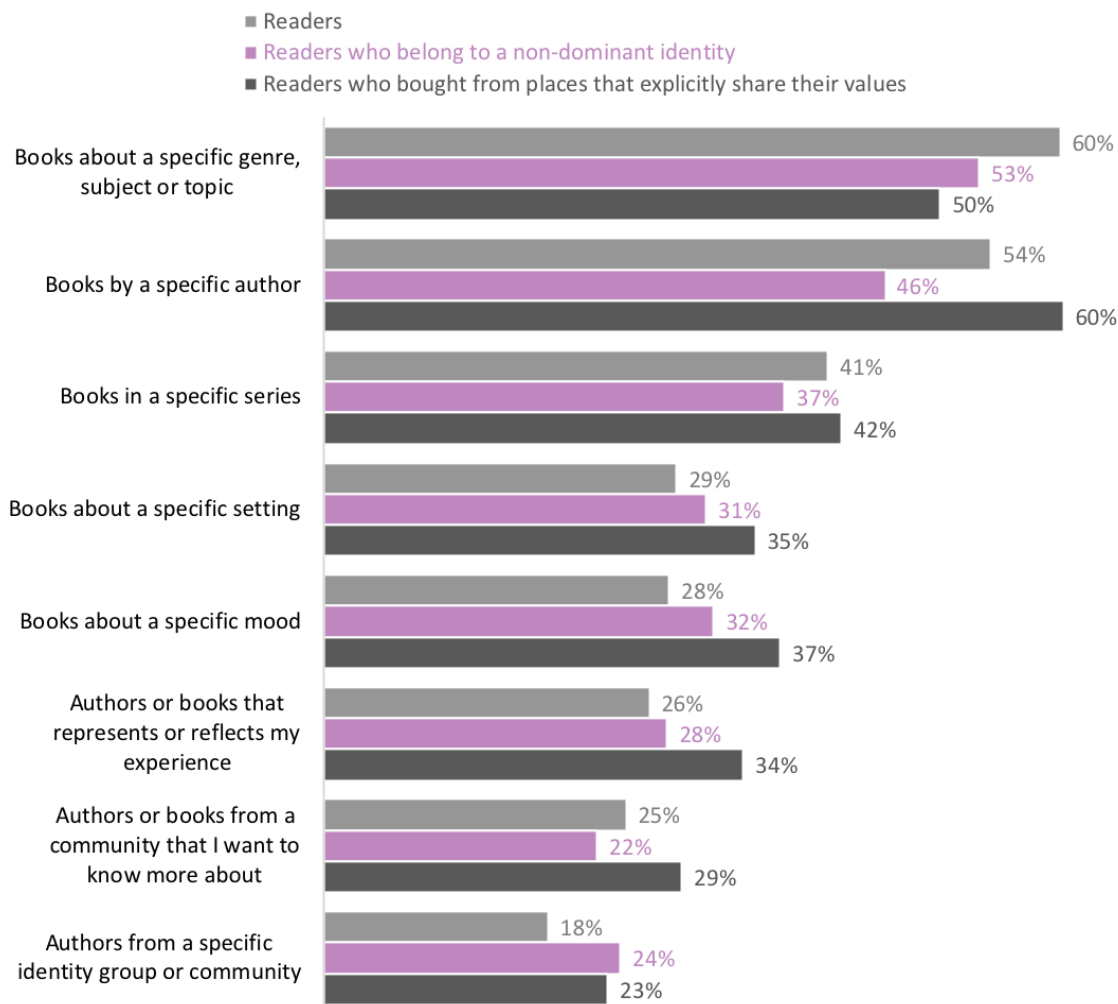
For readers who describe themselves as belonging to a non-dominant identity, 21% did see ads and marketing campaigns for the books they are interested in, 44% sometimes did, and 31% did not.

Seeing these marketing campaigns and ads was much higher for the 18% of readers who bought from places that explicitly share their values: 43% did, 37% sometimes did, 18% did not. It makes sense that a retailer who shares your values might be more likely to not only have books that interest you, but to also have them in a place of prominence where the respondents who shop there will see them.

## Online searching

When we look at the 32% of readers who searched online to discover their next book, what did they search for?

## Online searches



*Readers n=318; Readers who belong to a non-dominant identity n=158; Readers who bought from places that explicitly share their values n=62*

In comparison to all readers, the 41% of readers who describe themselves as belonging to a non-dominant identity are more often searching for lower ranked items, implying that those are more important to this group than they are to general readers. The one exception is for “authors or books from a community that I want to know more about” — the readers who belong to a non-dominant identity searched for it slightly less than did all readers (22%, compared to 25% of all readers).

For those 18% of readers who bought from places that explicitly share their values, their rate of searching was higher for all, except for when it came to “books about a specific genre” — they searched for that much less than the general reader. The rate of searching for books in specific series was also similar to all readers.



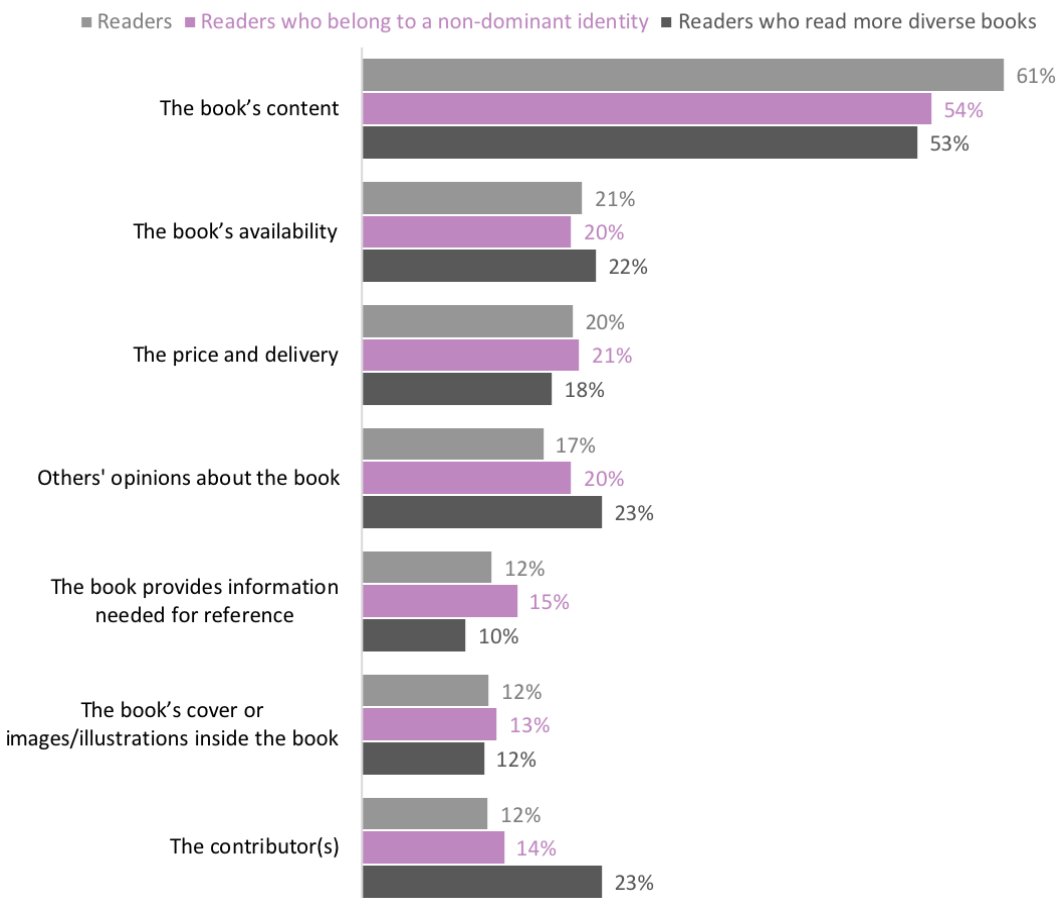
### Why readers choose one book over another

Something has to sway the reader in choosing what to read next and it turns out that the most important thing to our respondents is the book's content: the topic, subject, setting, characters, mood, or style (61%). This was the biggest factor by a large margin.

The next most important considerations for readers were:

- the book's availability
- price and delivery
- and others' opinions about the book

### Most important factors when choosing a book



*Readers n=1,000; Readers who belong to a non-dominant identity n=409; Readers who read more diverse books n=170*

Of the 41% of readers who describe themselves as belonging to a non-dominant identity, the book's content had slightly less of an impact on their decision whether or not to read a book (54% compared to 61% of all readers), but the following three aspects were ranked higher than for all readers:

- others' opinions about the book: it was recommended or selected for me, it was made into a movie/film or TV show, it's a bestseller, or it was nominated for or won a literary award
- the book provides information needed for reference
- the author/contributor(s): their identity, membership in the community of which they write, or social or political opinions

For the 17% of readers who read more diverse books last year, again only 53% selected the book's content as the most important factor. The following four options were more important to this group than to all readers:

- the author/contributor(s): their identity, membership in the community of which they write, or social or political opinions
- others' opinions about the book
- the book's materials written by others: endorsements, blurbs, the foreword
- the book's extra materials: author interview, a readers' guide or discussion questions

For the 18% of readers who bought from places that explicitly share their values, others' opinions about the book ranked one spot higher than for all readers.

The differences in decision-making factors between the 77% readers who bought books and the 73% who borrowed them from the library or got them for free were not very different at all. As you might expect, book buyers were slightly more sensitive to price and delivery times, while readers who get their books for free were more likely to be influenced in which book to read based on its availability — the wait to acquire it or whether it was available in their preferred format.

Lastly, if we further segment by how respondents perceived the book industry's response to calls for more diversity, we can see some interesting things:

- The 8% of all respondents who thought the industry has done too much to address diversity were much more likely than the average reader to be swayed to read a book by the book's extra materials. This includes those written by others (13% compared to 6% of all readers), or interviews, reading guides or discussion questions provided by the publisher (13%, compared to 5% of all readers).
- They were also much less likely to have chosen the book's content as the main driver in their decision to read it (40% compared to 61% of all readers).
- The 24% of respondents who thought the book industry has not done enough to address diversity concerns were more likely to point to the author and contributors'

identity as a factor when choosing which book to read (19% compared with 12% of all readers).

## Looking forward

When we asked all survey respondents what they would like to “see from the book industry going forward in terms of the variety and quality of book content and availability,” and what they wanted “the publishing, bookselling, and library sectors to know,” we got a range of responses. Most respondents weren’t sure, many were happy with the selection and availability of books currently in the market. Some were pragmatic “I would like to see more diversity but I do understand that the content still has to be good, well written to be sold.” Some warned of doing too much: “Don’t go overboard with diversity otherwise it turns people off.”

But of the people who left comments with suggestions, most were interested in changes that reflected a more diverse world: “It is important that the dominant culture in my society is challenged and its hegemony smashed.”

Respondents also wanted a better quality of representation in books: “More diverse books about intersecting minority perspectives such as [B]lack atheists or LGBTQ racialized stories. Not just stereotypical representations of minority stories.” They were interested in books “as learning tool[s] [to] help others understand different perspectives.”

It seems trite to wrap up the report with a statement about how the demand for diversity is still out there for Canadian readers, or that it’s not likely going away any time soon. Though both statements are true. What we should say is that there is a large group of people, 41%, [and likely growing](#), who feel that at least one dimension of their identity is not represented by the dominant group at least some of the time. Those people will want to see themselves reflected in the books they read and the authors they hear speak at events. As one respondent wrote: “I just don’t want the people like me to be entirely unrepresented.”

## About BookNet Canada

BookNet Canada is a non-profit organization that develops technology, standards, and education to serve the Canadian book industry. Founded in 2002 to address systemic challenges in the industry, BookNet Canada supports publishing companies, booksellers, wholesalers, distributors, sales agents, and libraries across the country.

BookNet Canada acknowledges that its staff, board, and partners work upon the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Anishnawbe, Haudenosaunee, Wendat, and Huron Indigenous Peoples, the original nations of this land. We endorse the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and support an ongoing shift from gatekeeping to spacemaking in the book industry.

The book industry has long been an industry of gatekeeping. Anyone who works at any stage of the book supply chain carries a responsibility to serve readers by publishing, promoting, and supplying works that represent the wide extent of human experiences and identities, in all its complicated intersectionality. We, at BookNet Canada, are committed to working with our partners in the industry as we move towards a framework that supports “spacemaking,” which ensures that marginalized creators and professionals all have the opportunity to contribute, work, and lead.

BookNet Canada’s services and research help companies promote and sell books, streamline workflows, and analyze and adapt to a rapidly changing market. BookNet Canada sets technology standards and educates organizations about how to apply them, performs market research, and tracks 85% of all Canadian English-language print trade book sales through BNC SalesData.

BookNet Canada has extensive research available on our [website](#), both free and for purchase.

- [Canadian Leisure & Reading Study 2020](#): This free report looks at how Canadians are spending their leisure time and the behaviours of Canadian readers in 2020.
- [Canadian Book Consumer Study 2020](#): This free study shares the results from our quarterly survey on why and how Canadians acquired books in 2020 — from awareness and discoverability to the reasons why Canadians decide to read, buy, or borrow specific books. It also compares Canadian book buyers and library book borrowers
- [The Canadian Book Market 2020](#) is a comprehensive guide to the Canadian market with in-depth category data. It's an indispensable tool for publishers, booksellers, librarians, authors, and anyone interested or involved in the Canadian book industry.
- [The State of Publishing in Canada 2019](#): This free study provides a comprehensive overview of the Canadian English-language publishing landscape. It surveys Canadian publishers for a snapshot of the industry as of 2019 and pulls in results

from other BookNet Canada research — including our *Impact of COVID-19 on Reading* survey — to provide a fuller picture of the entire publishing landscape.

We also feature our research on the [BookNet Canada Podcast](#) and our [blog](#). To stay updated on current and future research, including our forthcoming study on what readers think about diversity in the Canadian book market, subscribe to our monthly [BNC Research newsletter](#). To stay up-to-date on all BookNet Canada news and information, subscribe to our [weekly eNews](#).

If you have any questions or comments about this or other studies, please contact the research team at [research@booknetcanada.ca](mailto:research@booknetcanada.ca).

Industry-led and partially funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage, BookNet Canada has become, as *The Globe and Mail* puts it, “the book industry’s supply-chain nerve centre.”

Learn more at [booknetcanada.ca](http://booknetcanada.ca).