

Diversity and Inclusion in SEO: BIPOC and LGBTQ+ SEOs Share Their Experiences

People around the world are having important discussions about systemic racism, overt and covert bias, and how we can all do better.

Understanding the problem is the first step. To get a sense of conditions within the SEO community, we asked people to take our **Diversity and Inclusion in SEO survey** as part of our ongoing project to study the state of SEO.

Due to the subject matter and the way we reached out, our respondents were not a snapshot of the industry as a whole. We were very pleased to have 326 SEOs complete the survey, including a significant number of female, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ participants. These are important voices that need to be heard, but as we analyzed the data, we were careful not to generalize the industry as a whole without accounting for potential sampling bias. We addressed this by looking at groups separately – straight white cisgender men, BIPOC women, LGBTQ+ men, and so forth.

We recognize that intersectionality is common. Many of the SEOs who shared their stories with us don't fit neatly into a single group. We addressed that by counting people in each category that applied to them, so a gay Black man's answers would be factored into both the LGBTQ+ and BIPOC analyses.

Who participated?

Of the 326 SEOs who participated, 231 respondents (70.9%) described themselves as white. Among the rest, 32 SEOs described themselves as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish; 28 Black

or African American; 18 Asian or Asian American; 11 Middle Eastern or North African; eight Indian or South Asian; four Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; and three American Indian or Alaska Native. (Some people were counted in more than one category.)

Our respondents included 203 SEOs who identify as women (including one transgender woman), 109 who identify as men (including two transgender men), and 11 who consider themselves nonbinary, genderqueer, two-spirit, or gender nonconformist. Three people preferred not to share their gender.

With regard to sexual orientation, 72.8% described themselves as heterosexual, 25.2% as LGBTQ+, and 2% preferred not to say.

About two-thirds (218 SEOs) of the participants were from the U.S., and about one in 10 (35 SEOs) were from the United Kingdom. The rest came from 26 other countries across the globe. The average age was 34.5 with 6.9 years of experience in SEO. (Please see the methodology section at the end for more details.)

How is the SEO community doing with diversity and inclusion?

We started our study by asking SEOs how our industry compares with the rest of the business world when it comes to discrimination and bias. More than half of our participants (57.7%) had a different career or significant job experience in another field before working in SEO, so we figured they'd be in a position to know.

Overall, most people (58.7%) think SEO is about the same as other professions. But among those who disagree, more think it's worse (26%) than better (15.2%).

Surprisingly, there was also no statistically significant difference between BIPOC and white respondents when we asked about prevalence of bias in the industry. However, when we asked how big a problem it is, things got interesting.

Both BIPOC and white SEOs felt much more positively about their own companies than the industry as a whole.

Slightly more than 40% of both BIPOC and white SEOs said discrimination is “not a serious problem at all” within their own companies. However, **almost three-quarters of BIPOC SEOs (74.0%) and more than two-thirds of white SEOs (67.5%) said bias is a “moderately serious” or “extremely serious” problem in the SEO industry.**

Emotions ran high in the comments for this section. Jamar Ramos, 38, the black male chief operations officer of Crunchy Links in Belmont, California wrote, “White men on SEO Twitter are the f***ing worst. They are defensive, uncouth, and destructive for the industry. So scared of losing power they will drive EVERY BIPOC from SEO if they could.”

Another Black SEO, a 29-year-old woman at a Chicago agency, commented, “As a Black woman (and queer at that), I have definitely not seen a woman like me. I always (somewhat) joked around that I’ll be the Queen of SEO, but underneath those words was because I saw not only women underrepresented in the industry, but other minority subsets of being a woman underrepresented as well, such as being a Black woman and/or a queer Black woman. Where are we?!!”

Other perspectives were represented, as well. Said another 28-year-old Black female SEO, “I’m thrilled to work in an industry where there is the freedom to find multiple agencies that are welcoming to all, and the additional freedom to strike out on my own if I ever felt I should.” Many comments

in later sections backed up these sentiments, with endorsements of the SEOs' own companies and their diversity and inclusion policies.

How bad is it? Frequency of racial or ethnic bias in SEO

Our respondents were more diverse than the SEO industry as a whole, so we expect that their experiences would be a bit different, as well. Also, our survey was based on self-reporting, which can be inconsistent. That said, overall, 48.7% of our respondents told us they never experience racial or ethnic bias. Among the others, **6.7% experience racial or ethnic bias at least once a week, 10.9% at least once a month, 9.2% every couple of months**, and 24.4% said it was rare but did happen on occasion.

Knowing that 7 out of 10 of our respondents were white, we broke the data down by the SEOs' self-reported ethnic backgrounds to get a clearer idea about the extent of racial or ethnic bias. Here's what we found.

Asian and Asian American SEOs were the most likely to say they experience ethnic bias at least once a week, followed by Hispanic or Latino SEOs.

Most Black or African American SEOs said discrimination was a monthly or bi-monthly experience for them. Not surprisingly, white SEOs were the least likely to experience racial or ethnic bias, although about a third said they do get discriminated against based on their heritage or cultural identity.

We'd like to know more about the racial and ethnic discrimination white SEOs are facing. Unfortunately, we

focused on BIPOC and LGBTQ+ issues in this survey and did not include questions about religion, so we don't know what role that might play. We also did not address ageism or disability issues. With each study we publish, we realize how much more we have to learn. We will be sure to explore those issues in future studies.

Gender and LGBTQ+ bias in SEO

There are a lot of forms of LGBTQ+ and gender bias. We let our survey participants interpret the phrase for themselves when asking how often they experience it. Overall, **94.1% of LGBTQ+ SEOs experience bias at least some of the time, and more than a third do so at least once a month.** However, 72.5% of the heterosexual SEOs also said they feel gender discrimination at least some of the time.

The impact of bias

About 4 in 10 SEOs said they experienced bias in the past year. We asked them what impact it has had on their productivity, career trajectory, and happiness. Here's what they said:

- **69.1% feel "Bias in the workplace has had a negative impact on my productivity and sense of engagement."** (38.3% strongly agreed; 30.8% slightly agreed)
- **72.1% feel "Bias in the workplace has had a negative impact on my career advancement and earnings."** (39.3% strongly agreed; 32.8% slightly agreed)
- **74.6% feel "Bias in the workplace has had a negative impact on my happiness, confidence, or well-being."** (42.6% strongly agreed; 32.0% slightly agreed)

The cost of bias

How do discrepancies in pay, being passed over for promotion, and other forms of discrimination add up over the course of a career? There are many variables when comparing incomes. For example, pay can vary based on years of experience, size of company, and specific expertise.

We did the best we could to compare the incomes of SEOs with similar career profiles. Ultimately, we chose to focus on SEO generalists working in the United States, which gave us the largest pool of responses. We broke them down by gender, ethnicity, and age. Our sample sizes for men ranged from 8 to 22 people in each subcategory. Our sample sizes for women ranged from 13 to 35 for each subcategory.

These were small groups, so the results are far from definitive. But the consistency of a disparity merits conversation. Here's what we found.

For **male SEO generalists** working in the United States:

- In their 20s, white male SEOs reported earning an average of \$75,312 per year. BIPOC male SEOs in their 20s reported earning an average of \$63,500 per year (**18.6% less**).
- In their 30s, white male SEOs reported earning an average of \$95,833 per year. BIPOC male SEOs in their 30s reported earning an average of \$89,091 per year (**7.6% less**).
- In their 40s, white male SEOs reported earning an average of \$115,937 per year. BIPOC male SEOs in their 40s reported earning an average of \$90,417 per year (**28.2% less**).

For **female SEO generalists** working in the United States:

- In their 20s, white women SEOs reported earning an average of \$75,384 per year. BIPOC women SEOs in their

20s reported earning an average of \$61,250 per year (**23% less**).

- In their 30s, white women SEOs reported earning an average of \$86,571 per year. BIPOC women SEOs in their 30s reported earning an average of \$86,094 per year (**0.6% less**).
- In their 40s, white women SEOs reported earning an average of \$109,375 per year. BIPOC women SEOs in their 40s reported earning an average of \$101,094 per year (**7.6% less**).

What does on-the-job bias look like?

"Where are you really from?"

"Are you the new diversity hire?"

"But you all look alike."

"You're Asian, so you're good at math, right?"

"You don't speak Spanish?"

"Do you play basketball?"

"I think what she was trying to say was..."

It can happen to anyone, but people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and women hear things like this often. A microaggression is a subtle behavior directed at a member of a marginalized group. It can be verbal or nonverbal, delivered consciously or not, and can pose a cumulative, damaging effect to the receiver.

Columbia University defines racial microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities" that contain "hostile, derogatory, or negative" content or subtext. The result, according to a City University of New York study, can be "anxiety and depressive symptoms over and above the effects of non-race-specific stress."

Minority racial and ethnic groups are often targets of

microaggressions, but these offenses can be directed at any marginalized group in addition to people of color, including women, people with disabilities, individuals in the LGBTQ+ community, those with mental illness, single parents, and people in lower economic classes.

Many SEOs reported experiencing a cascade of microaggressions and similar offenses. A 46-year-old white woman in the U.K. with more than 15 years of experience in the field wrote, “I don’t feel I get taken at all seriously as a female SEO – to the extent that I stopped attending events years ago. It’s a total boys club, to the point of afterparties at strip clubs. As a woman, I’ve had male SEOs expect me to do all the legwork because my time is less important, and then they try and take credit for my work. When I called them out, I was met with bullying. It’s a disgusting situation to still be in after this long in the industry.”

The most common microaggression reported during the past year, by more than 4 in 5 SEOs (81.4%) in our poll, was being interrupted or spoken over. Second on the list, however, was an actively offensive action: Nearly 6 in 10 reported having an idea taken by someone else (57.5%).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, 44.1% of respondents reported being paid less than similarly qualified employees. A 2016 Pew Research center report supported the data on this enduring travesty with regard to race and gender. Additionally, Census Bureau data from as recently as 2018 showed that women of all races still earn 82 cents for every dollar earned by men.

Among the 48.4% of respondents who report being talked down to or treated as less capable than similarly qualified employees, several made poignant comments to back up their responses.

A 26-year-old biracial woman at a small Midwestern agency

said, “I am constantly having to prove my case or strategies, even when the target audience I am marketing/optimizing for looks more like me than my colleagues. I am questioned constantly and asked to prove my work, despite being the only person at the company with the knowledge and skills to produce the work.”

And one technical SEO said, “I am a white, cisgendered woman, so I have a lot of privilege, but I still have clients who feel the need to verify my recommendations with their own ‘research’ (rudimentary Google search) or by checking my advice against the opinion of white men, many of whom have less experience than I do (‘My nephew learned about SEO in college, and he says ...’).”

Other common verbal microaggressions reported by survey respondents include being addressed unprofessionally (41.3%), hearing crude or offensive jokes about race and ethnicity (36.1%), or about sexual orientation or gender identity (38.5%).

Drilling down: specific microaggression experiences by group

We asked SEOs in our survey about the types of microaggressions they’ve been exposed to in the field, and found that some types of microaggressions are more commonly experienced by certain groups. We sorted respondents into six groups based on gender, ethnicity, and LGBTQ+ orientation to see how different issues affected each demographic. In some cases, we found surprising results.

At least half of SEOs in each group registered the most common

microaggression: being interrupted or spoken over. In all, 91.1% of straight, white, cisgender women and 90.7% of LGBTQ+ women report this happening to them, while a surprising 82.5% of straight, white, cisgender men share the experience. Men in the BIPOC group reported barely half as many incidences of this microaggression in their experience.

All three categories of women were most likely to report a pay gap and having their ideas stolen. Reports from straight, white, cisgender women (65.8%), LGBTQ+ women (60.5%), and BIPOC women (59.3%) were remarkably consistent, falling within just slightly more than six percentage points of one another.

Meanwhile, men in the BIPOC group were most likely to say they'd been passed over for a promotion (41.7%), followed closely by LGBTQ+ men (40%), and women (37.2%).

Bad-faith banter

Conversations on the job were fertile ground for verbal microaggressions of different types. What some might consider harmless banter may not be harmless at all. We explored jokes and other verbal interactions that SEOs reported as disrespectful and hurtful.

We defined four different categories and found that the most common complaint occurred among straight, white, and cisgender women, 68.4% of whom reported "being talked down to or treated as less capable than similarly qualified employees."

The other two most common complaints involved hearing "offensive jokes about race or ethnicity." A total of 58.3% of BIPOC men reported hearing such jokes, but interestingly, even more LGBTQ+ men (60%) said they'd been exposed to this kind of inappropriate humor. And 37% of BIPOC women endured the same

treatment.

A disappointing wealth of examples of this egregious behavior was described in the comments.

A 32-year-old white SEO who identifies as gender nonconformist described the time a “past employer, during the interview process, told me he wanted to make it clear to his (service industry) customers he wasn’t going to send any Black people to their homes. This job was rampant with racism and misogyny. I took the job out of desperation and got out as soon as I could.”

Another SEO, a 37-year-old Black woman, wrote, “When starting out, I worked at a boutique agency where many people felt comfortable telling Black and Asian jokes to me. I was on time for a business trip meetup at 5 a.m. and one employee joked that he didn’t realize Black people could get up that early. I left as soon as I could get another job that wouldn’t ding my résumé.”

Slightly more than 53% of LGBTQ+ women and men responded that they’d heard offensive jokes about gender identity or sexual orientation, the highest in that category. Likewise, LGBTQ+ men (20%) and women (14%) were most likely to have been asked how they got hired.

Mixed messages at work

Next, we considered four categories in which employees are implicitly singled out because of their membership in a marginalized group.

On the one hand, we asked whether group members had been singled out to promote an appearance of diversity – through tokenism or by assigning them to resolve problems of bias. The dubious value that such a request (under the best of circumstances) might signify, though, is negated by their

opposite and often accompanying tendencies: targeting certain people or groups with suspicion (by being monitored more closely) or with criticism for their being “too sensitive” to discriminatory language/behavior.

LGBTQ+ men were most likely to report instances of tokenism (26.7%) and being labeled “too sensitive” (33.3%) to discrimination. BIPOC women ranked next in those categories, with 22.2% and 29.6%, respectively. Similarly, one-third of BIPOC women (33.3%) reported being supervised more closely than similarly qualified employees.

The comments for this section were rife with examples, like the one from a 36-year-old Hispanic/Latino male who described “being asked to ‘woke-check’ social content to see if anything in it might trigger a backlash from the immigrant community.”

Unsurprisingly, straight, white, cisgender men and women ranked in the bottom half of those reporting in each of the four categories. But men and women in other categories reported varying results. Nearly three times as many LGBTQ+ men (26.7%) as women (9.3%) said they’d experienced tokenism. Meanwhile, BIPOC women were far more likely than men – 29.6% to 8.3% – to report being labeled “too sensitive” for calling out discriminatory behavior or language.

We specifically asked BIPOC respondents to our survey how often they’d experienced three common forms of microaggression, dividing participants into four groups:

- Middle Eastern/North African
- Black/African American
- Hispanic/Latino
- Asian/Asian-American

All four groups reported that the most common of the three

microaggressions we asked about was being complimented for being articulate or “well-spoken” – indicating an implied and unfounded expectation that they wouldn’t be. Three-quarters (75%) of Middle Eastern/North African respondents and two-thirds (66.7%) of Black/African American survey participants said this had happened to them.

In addition, nearly half (47.6%) of Hispanic/Latino group members surveyed said they’d been asked where they’re “actually” from. This was at least 20 percentage points higher than for any of the other three groups. The results appear to reflect a bias against immigrants from Mexico and Central America, and a baseless distrust of their status as citizens or legal residents.

The third question explored what researchers have identified as a tendency to view members of other racial or ethnic groups as interchangeable: a bias that can lead to stereotyping and discrimination. In this instance, Black/African American participants were significantly more likely (44.4%) to indicate they’d been mistaken for someone else of their race or ethnicity.

How diverse are SEOs’ workplaces?

Representation of diverse populations is a huge issue in the microcosm of the SEO industry, as well as the macrocosm of business and society in general. We were interested in how SEOs viewed diversity in the rosters at their workplaces, both in the rank-and-file employee roster and in executive or leadership positions.

Survey respondents were nearly evenly split between working for an agency and working in-house at a company (45.9% and 42.2%, respectively), while the remainder split the difference between freelancing (5.3%) and consulting (6.6%) in the SEO field.

Overall diversity levels never exceeded 15.3% for organizations of any size, hitting that level for companies with 2-10 employees and again for businesses with 251-1,000 workers. Companies with 11-25 workers turned in a percentage of 12.1%.

Percentages were lowest at the largest corporations, with the worst showing (5%) at companies with 5,001-10,000 workers. Companies with more than 10,000 employees (6.5%) and with 1,001-5,000 workers (6.9%) did only slightly better. One-person companies were also relatively less likely to be diverse than other small or midsize businesses, at 7.5%.

To further plumb the depths of representation in various SEO employment situations, we asked survey respondents to estimate the level of diversity in their organizations, including at leadership levels. We asked the same question for racial and ethnic diversity and for gender and LGBTQ+ diversity.

BIPOC diversity

In exploring diversity levels for SEOs with regard to race and ethnicity, we found a fairly even split between those that were rated “somewhat” or “very diverse” (slightly more than 54%) and those that were “not very” or not at all diverse (roughly 46%). At the extremes, roughly 16% were very diverse, and just slightly less were not diverse at all.

But, as mentioned, leadership is less diverse: Fully half (50.4%) of companies said they had no diverse individuals in leadership roles, and just over 7% reported more than half of their leadership was diverse. In total, 82.5% of respondents said diverse individuals comprised less than 25% of their company’s leadership or less.

At major tech companies such as Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft, the bulk of racial and ethnic diversity in 2017 was represented by Asian employees, with Black and Hispanic employees making up just small slivers of the workforce.

Gender and LGBTQ+ diversity

When it comes to gender or sexual orientation, diversity results are slightly higher than those for race and ethnicity. More than 6 in 10 respondents (61.8%) answered that their companies were either very (20.9%) or somewhat (40.9%) diverse, compared with just 12% who said they were not diverse at all.

More specifically, however, the data seems to indicate less diversity.

For women, a 2018 report by the National Center for Women & Technology found that their share of the workforce at tech-related companies was 26%, far shy of the 57% for the U.S. workforce in general. Meanwhile, Black, Latina, and Native American women made up just 4% of computing jobs, even though they accounted for 16% of the overall population.

The numbers for LGBTQ+ leadership in our survey were even less encouraging: More than 4 in 10 survey participants (41.7%) said their leadership teams did not include any LGBTQ+ members, while a mere 4.4% said that more than a quarter of those team members were LGBTQ+ individuals.

An interesting finding: 37.4% of those who responded said they were not sure about the LGBTQ+ membership composition of their leadership teams. This would seem to indicate that many team members choose not to share their sexual orientation, suggesting a bigger-than-expected separation between private

and professional life.

How important is diversity in SEOs' workplaces?

In answer to the question, "Is diversity and inclusion a priority in your company," the comments varied widely. Some respondents simply answered "No" – or if it was, they weren't aware of it.

At the other end of the spectrum were comments along the lines of "We don't need to try; our team is just naturally diverse and inclusive." (As with other responses, the survey cannot address the accuracy of self-assessment.) Several other comments indicated that the company strived to hire the best person for the job, "regardless of any stereotype."

Other responses were slightly more specific. Several said their companies had only started focusing on diversity in response to the Black Lives Matter movement after George Floyd's death in police custody.

Others indicated that their companies have an established focus on gender equality, but had only recently begun to address BIPOC or LGBTQ+ issues. A 34-year-old gay white man at a large company wrote, "Diversity and inclusion is a priority for the gender pay gap, but doesn't include or reference race or LGBT. There's a women's mentor program to help promote women to higher roles, and there's a women's network to raise visibility."

When asked whether diversity was a priority at their company, nearly half (49.7%) of the SEOs indicated that it was – nearly three times as many as those who said it wasn't (17.2%). One in five (20.34%) weren't sure, and 12.8% checked "Other" and were asked to elaborate with specific responses. Roughly 19% of those questioned elected not to answer.

What steps do companies take to encourage diversity and inclusion?

The prevalence of “Yes” answers was encouraging. Many of these were followed up with detailed descriptions of initiatives and programs in place to promote diversity and inclusion at the respondents’ workplaces.

For example, a 29-year-old Black woman who described her company as “very diverse” detailed the organization’s initiatives like this: “We have a diversity and inclusion council with men and women of all different backgrounds from across the world. We have a North American task force; we publish our diversity data; we do outreach to educational institutions including HBCUs [historically black colleges and universities] to source talent; and we have anti-racism and inclusion training.”

Also, a 28-year-old woman who identifies as American Indian or Alaska Native in Austin, Texas, commented, “Our leadership has recently made great strides to take action to ensure diversity and inclusion is a topic our entire company is knowledgeable about. We are also taking actions to raise awareness about inequality in the tech industry in a landmark report about BIPOC in tech as well as finding ways to volunteer with a BIPOC kids coding organization.”

The number and breadth of diversity and inclusion initiatives our SEOs described were also encouraging. These ranged from interactive activities such as diversity training sessions and workshops to company communication efforts like informative newsletters and the publication of diversity data.

When it comes to personnel management, some businesses are further seeking to instill diversity and excise bias in their criteria for recruiting, hiring, and promoting. And, especially important in response to the on-the-job-learning

aspects specific to the SEO field, participation in internships and mentoring programs is also a growing and well-supported option.

A 28-year-old Black nonbinary SEO described several initiatives at her large agency, saying, “They have a group focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. They are updating their practices around recruiting and interviewing to remove any unconscious racial biases. And, providing mandatory anti-racist training for all employees.”

For more detailed information on the measures companies are enacting to improve diversity and inclusion within their organizations, continue to the section below.

What are some solutions?

Diversity and inclusion data can look discouraging overall, but anecdotal responses told us that a breadth of measures are being taken to address disparities in representation, discriminatory practices, and inherent bias in everyday operations. Here are several of the initiatives cited by survey takers to enhance diversity and inclusion in the SEO workplace.

1. Initiatives at the corporate level

Employee participation in and consultation with advisory panels and task forces was a commonly cited effort, in addition to compiling and distributing informative resources like newsletters and reading lists. Several respondents described opt-in cultural activities designed to facilitate diversity, such as setting up Slack channels around particular affinities or topics, establishing employee book clubs, and spotlighting diversity in holiday celebrations.

One SEO generalist in the U.K., a 37-year-old white woman, described several activities of her company’s diversity

organization, among them “[organizing] events around different holidays so everyone feels included. We celebrate Eid and Diwali, for example, and everyone in the company is encouraged to share and request days organized around things that are important to them. It’s a great initiative and I’ve learned so much from people openly sharing and discussing.”

2. Employee resource groups

Affinity-based employee resource groups, or ERGs, were cited as extremely valued resources for SEOs. These groups foster safe and informed forums in which different groups can gather to discuss issues, devise requests, suggest solutions, and share information.

One SEO manager, a 58-year-old white trans woman with nearly 15 years in the business, commented, “I am a five-time elected board member of the LGBTQIA ERG diversity group, Pride. We have seven ERGs here at [my company].”

Depending on the workplace and its demographics and company culture, ERGs may center on shared issues of gender, age, race and ethnicity, LGBTQ+ orientation, disability, mental health, neurodiversity, religion, parenting, military or veteran status, international communities, women in leadership, and more.

Naturally, any group is most effective and receives greater respect and resources when it’s sponsored and promoted by leaders at the executive level – whether or not the leaders share the demographics of the group.

3. Personal education and growth

Each individual has a responsibility to self-educate on topics related to bias and discrimination, diversity, equity, and inclusion surrounding the struggle of groups historically targeted for exclusion and injustice.

4. Allies in leadership

The support and advocacy of leaders at the executive level is not only the only ingredient necessary for changing company cultures overall. The vocal and steadfast support of allies from other groups is essential – and, unfortunately, often still lacking.

One SEO consultant, a 49-year-old woman who is biracial Latina and white, put it quite succinctly: “I see a lot of women in the SEO industry speaking out about the lack of diversity and inclusion, but very few men in the industry. Whenever one of these conversations gets going on Twitter, most of the men in SEO whom I follow suddenly get very quiet. The industry is only going to change when men also start taking action and speaking out about how the industry treats everyone other than men. Silence is complicity.”

5. Speaking up: see something, say something

Many people witness incidents of bias but struggle with how to respond. Especially if a company has not formalized a set of procedures for addressing such conflicts, employees are left to figure it out on their own.

As we know, there is no standardized societal guidebook for how to deal with discriminatory situations, especially in the U.S., where attitudes can be polarized and discussions difficult to initiate or sustain. Consequently, people chose a variety of responses to these situations, as evidenced by these findings:

As part of our survey, we asked participants whether they’d witnessed discrimination or bias against someone in their

workplace during the past year based on race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. In all, 43.2% replied that they had, so we asked these participants to go further by telling us what they did in response.

Of that group, more than 4 in 10 (42.9%) took no action because they didn't feel comfortable getting involved. This was true even though the U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission has declared that workers "have a right to work free of discrimination" based on "race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, disability, age (age 40 or older) or genetic information."

One reason may be fear of retaliation, which the EEOC found was the most common issue cited by federal employees in discrimination cases. The same is likely true in the private sector. Respondents may fear the outcome if their employer fails to act on their report, and/or the accused discovers the source of the complaint.

In light of this, it was encouraging to find in our survey that 41.2% of witnesses to workplace discrimination told their supervisor. (Another option, reporting the conduct to Human Resources, was not included as a choice among our survey answers).

The most common answer: 56.3% confided in a colleague. This might indicate that these respondents weren't comfortable going to an in-house supervisor, but also that they felt distressed enough about the situation that they wanted to tell someone.

Among other responses, slightly more than one-third (33.6%) spoke out in the moment, while others addressed the situation later, either with the target of the discrimination (37.8%) or the perpetrator (21%). In the accompanying comments, several reported following up later with both the target and the perpetrator.

6. Mentoring someone from a different background

SEO is a peculiar field in that there isn't a well-defined path into the industry. The majority of SEOs are self-taught or learn on the job, figuring things out as they go. Or they have a mentor. **One in three SEOs surveyed (33.1%) said mentors were their most significant source of SEO knowledge early in their careers.**

Our survey asked four questions that went to the question of diversity among mentors. The first two asked whether respondents had worked with a mentor 1) of their own gender and/or 2) of the same race/ethnicity as theirs.

The results were interesting. While only 41.9% reported working with a mentor of their own gender, more than two-thirds (69.5%) said they'd worked with one of the same race/ethnicity. This would seem to indicate more diverse interaction among genders than exists between people of different races and ethnicities.

The next two questions asked whether respondents had worked with a BIPOC mentor and a member of the LGBTQ+ community. In terms of diversity, the results of the first question were disappointing, while answers to the second were encouraging.

A total of 10.8% said they'd worked with a BIPOC member, but that was far short of the U.S. population for that category, according to the U.S. Census. Black Americans alone accounted for 13.4% of the U.S. population in 2019, according to Census Bureau estimates, with Hispanic/Latino individuals checking in at 18.5%.

By contrast, 10.4% of respondents in our survey said they'd worked with a mentor from the LGBTQ+ community. That's nearly double the percentage of LGBTQ individuals in tech-heavy California during 2019, according to the UCLA School of Law

Williams Institute, which placed the figure at 5.3%.

Methodology

These insights were the result of a month-long survey of 326 SEO professionals conducted by North Star Inbound from August 24 to September 28, 2020. We promoted the survey on Twitter, our own blog, and by email. We're grateful to Moz and Search Engine Land for also sharing the link.

In terms of gender, the SEOs described themselves as follows:

- 203 identify as women
- 109 identify as men
- 1 is a trans woman
- 2 are trans men
- 11 are nonbinary, genderqueer, two-spirit, or gender nonconformist
- 3 preferred not to say

With regard to sexual orientation:

- 72.8% said they were heterosexual
- 11.5% said they were bisexual
- 4.1% said they were pansexual
- 3.9% said they were gay
- 3.3% said they were lesbian
- 1.1% said they were asexual
- 1.9% preferred not to say

The SEOs described their race or ethnicity as follows:
(Participants were able to check more than one box)

- 233 White
- 30 Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish
- 25 Black or African American
- 13 Asian or Asian American
- 7 South Asian/Indian subcontinent
- 5 Middle Eastern/North African/Arabian peninsula

- 4 Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- 2 American Indian or Alaska Native

The SEOs who completed the survey came from the following countries:

- 218 from the U.S.
- 35 from the U.K.
- 11 from Canada
- 9 from Germany
- 8 from Taiwan
- 6 from Spain
- 2 each from Australia, Brazil, France, India, Israel, Japan, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Poland, Romania, and Switzerland
- 1 each from Argentina, Austria, China, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Mauritius, Peru, Portugal, and Turkey

The survey respondents' average number of years in SEO was 6.9. The median number of years was 5. The average age was 34.5, and the median age was 32.

<https://feedpress.me/link/9375/13936882/seo-diversity-inclusion>