

# Outdoor Tourism in Virginia: Is the industry inclusive?

Sarah Jones and Anja Whittington, EdD, Recreation, Parks and Tourism  
OURS, Radford University

## Introduction

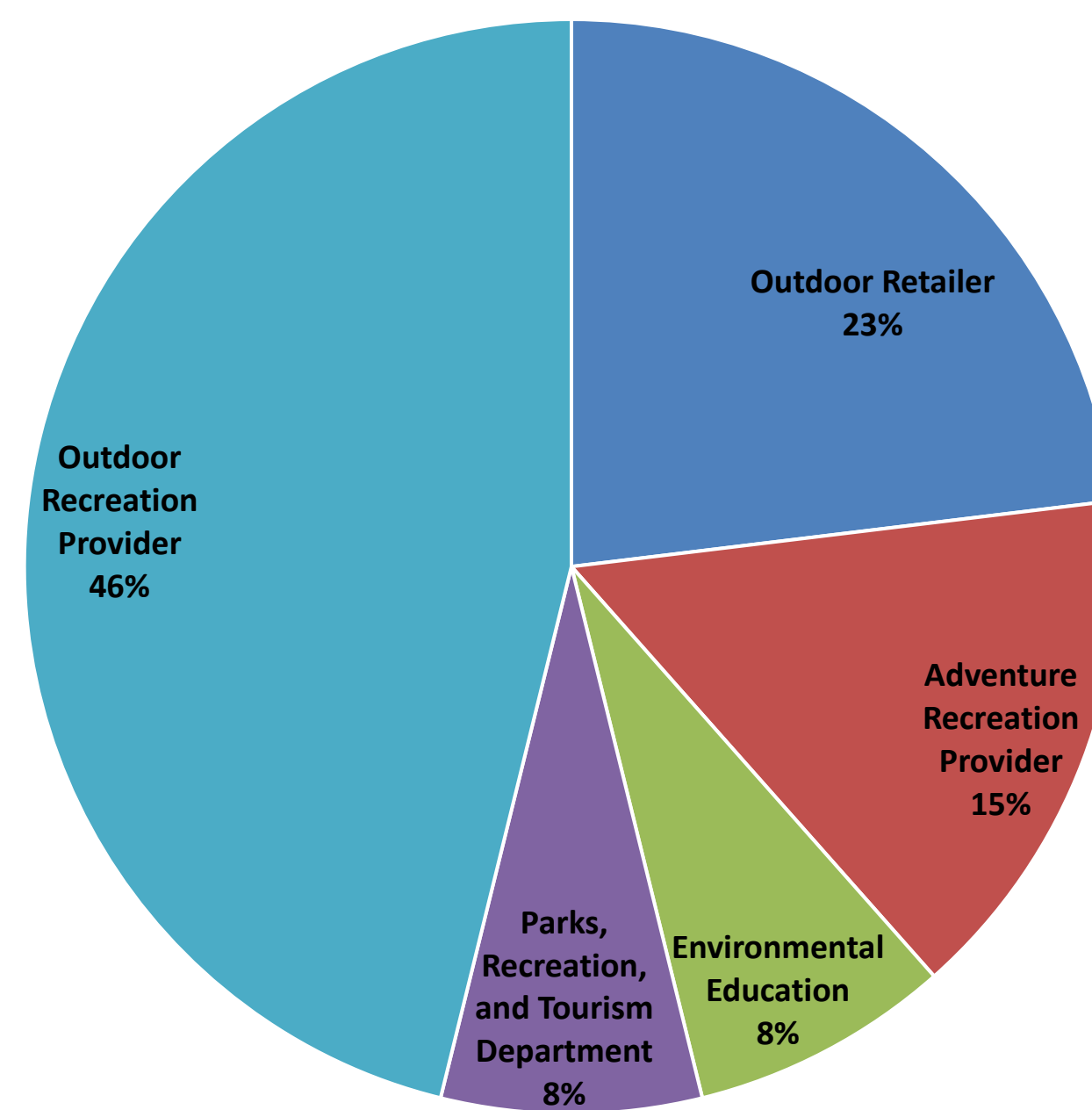
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ) tourists can significantly benefit companies in the outdoor recreation industry as these consumers travel more frequently and stay longer. By developing marketing efforts that target this population, agencies will be able to attract consumers and increase profitability. Visibility within the LGBTQ community has continued to be an issue due to the social constraints found in a predominately heteronormative society. While major retail corporations have begun to promote same-sex families in advertising, there remains backlash from the public causing some companies to be hesitant when using LGBTQ individuals in advertising. The recreation industry is mostly dominated by Caucasian males thus increasing the visibility of these minority groups is necessary to improve the diversity in the outdoor industry. Given the plethora of media outlets that have been introduced by social media, the methods of connecting businesses to consumers has been significantly amplified. In the future it is critical that outdoor professionals gain better insight, visibility, and marketing toward LGBTQ individuals in the outdoor recreation and retail industry.

## Significance

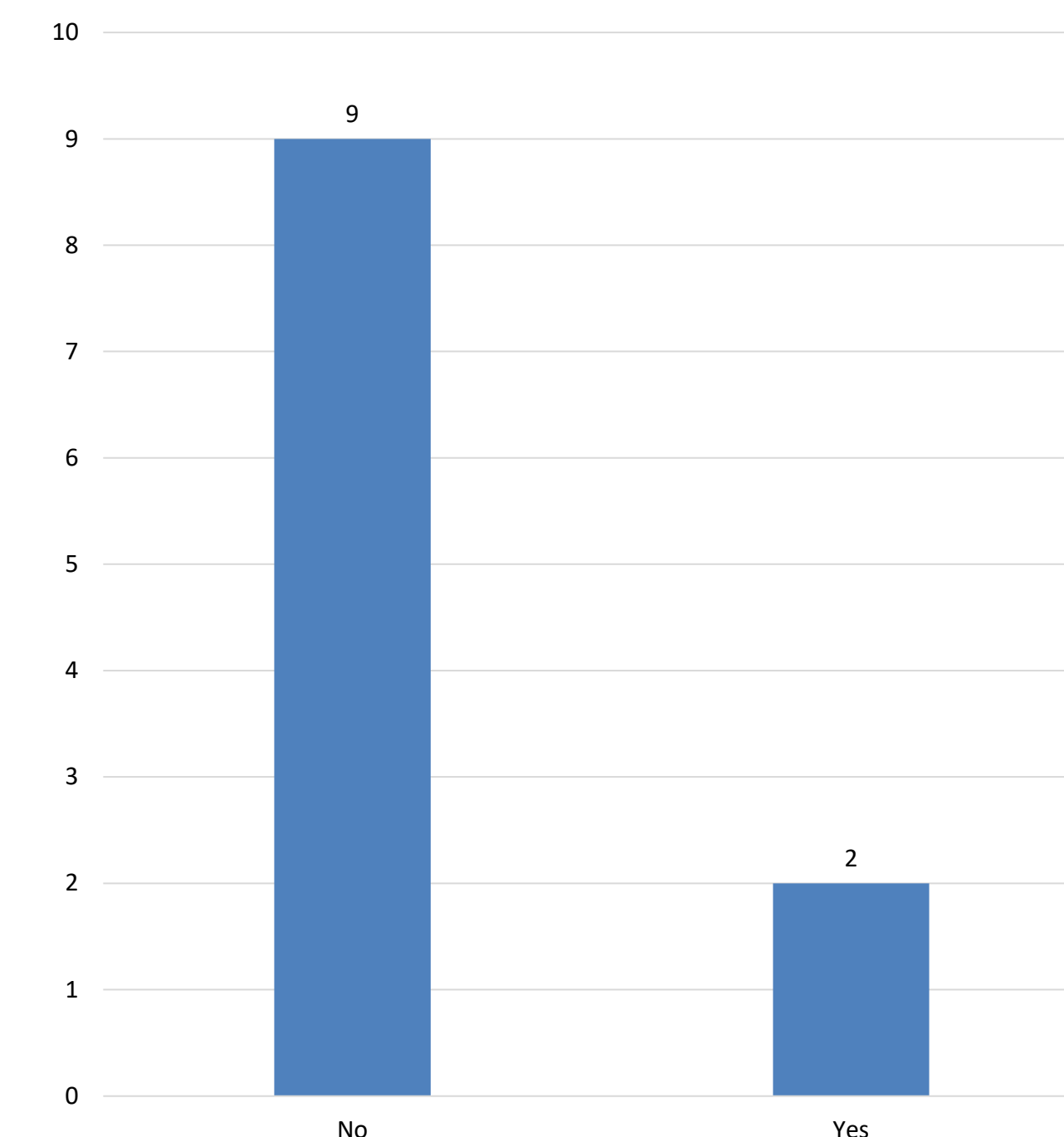
- Queer and transgender consumers spend an estimated \$70 billion on travel annually (McLean & Hurd, 2015)
- LGBTQ demographics has also increased in the United States from 3.5% to 4.1% within four years (Gates, 2017)
- There is a significant growth in millennials identifying as queer and transgender (Gates, 2017)
- LGBTQ+ travelers have the largest disposable income than any other group (Kivel, 2008)
- LGBTQ+ consumers make up 5-10% of the U.S. economy (Gates, 2017)
- Forty-five percent of consumers under the age of 34 were more likely to repeat business with companies that identified as being LGBTQ-friendly (Snyder, 2015)

## Results

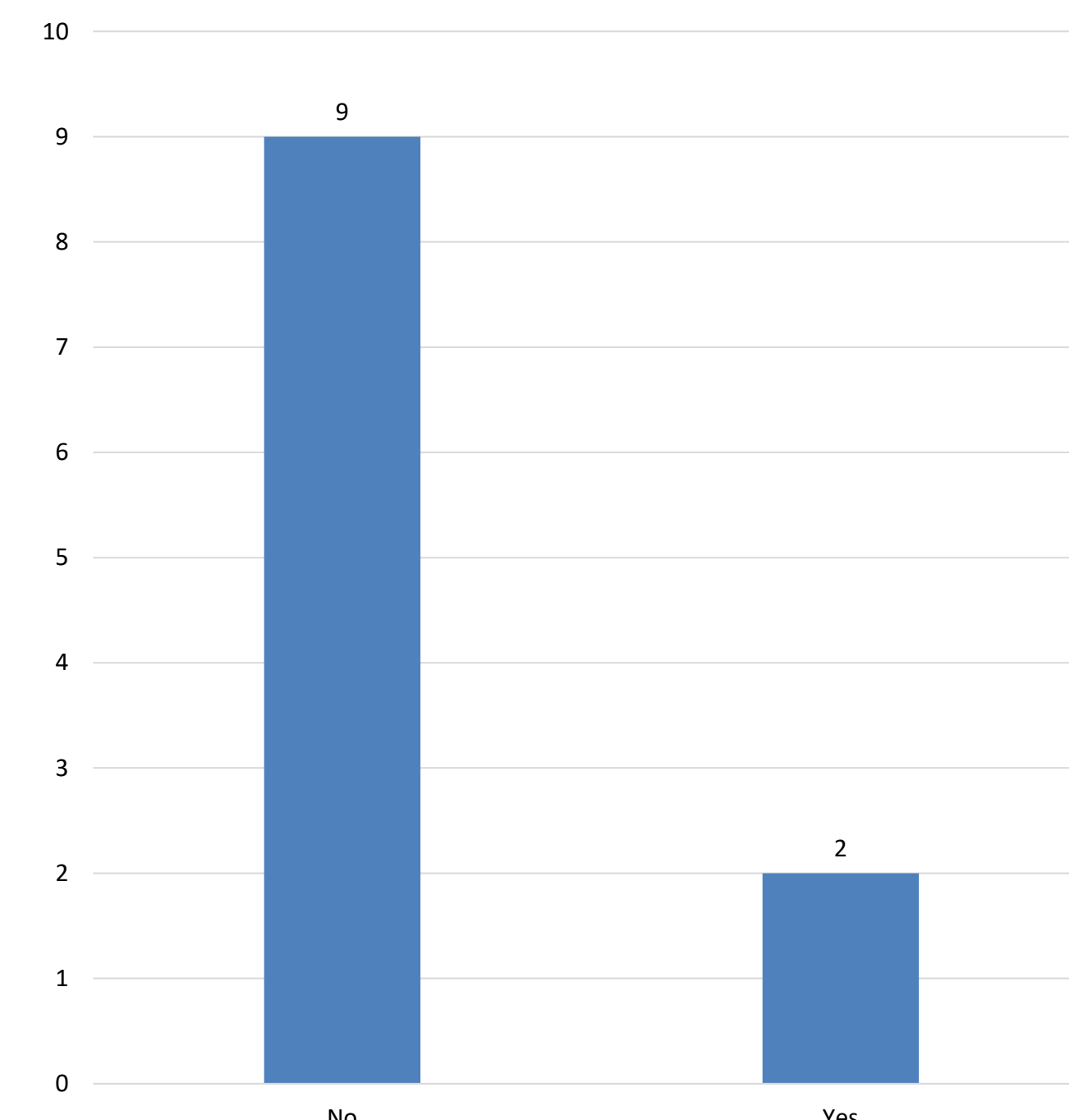
How would you best identify your agency:



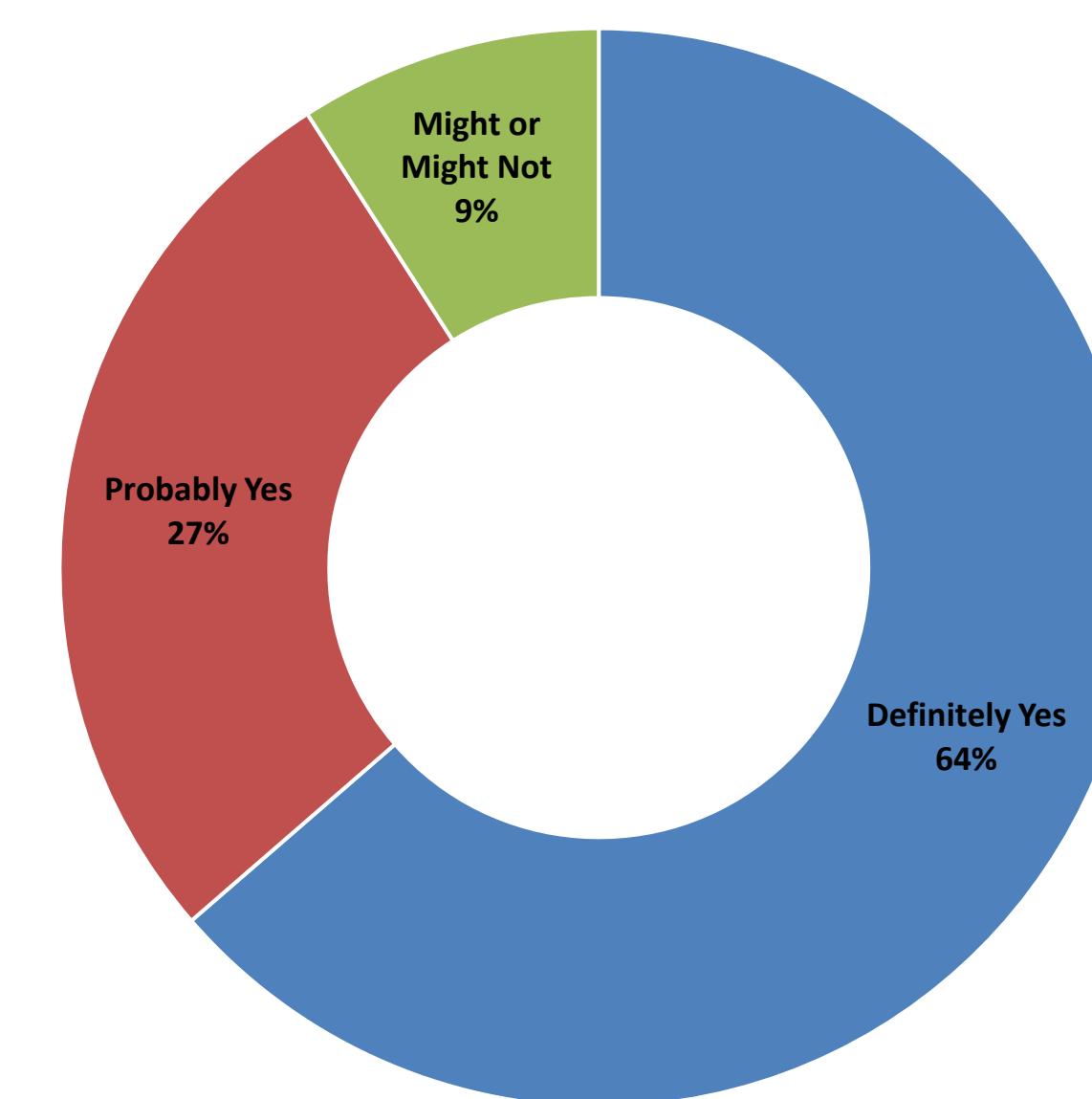
Are you aware of Virginia's LGBTQ Marketing Initiative?



Are you aware that LGBT travelers spend more money and stay longer than any other traveler?



Do you feel like your agency establishes a safe environment for LGBTQ members?



Ways to Promote Visibility and Incorporate Social Responsibility:

- Include LGBTQ+ individuals on promotional materials
- Create anti-bullying and inclusivity policies
- Know how to eliminate or defuse harassment
- Provide employees with minority sensitivity training
- Reach out to LGBTQ+ agencies, strengthening community relations
- Eliminating gender and heteronormal assumptions

*"Inclusion to me is opening my doors with open arms to everyone, treating everyone the same way, with respect and common courtesy."*

## Methodology

For this study, quantitative data was collected from fourteen outdoor recreation and retail companies in Southwest Virginia. An online survey was created using Qualtrics and emailed to sixty-one companies. The purpose was to gain better insight regarding the safety and experiences of LGBTQ individuals in the outdoor recreation and retail industry. The study examined whether or not outdoor recreation professionals are: developing policy statements, implementing diversity training, creating supportive environments, developing inclusive program plans, and maintaining gender neutral facilities and products.

## Summary and Discussion

The response rate to the survey was low at twenty percent. Out of the sixty-one emails, six bounced back as a result of an email error. However, from the responses, the study did show that outdoor recreation facilities in southwest Virginia were making progress toward growing a more inclusive customer base. While some were unaware of the states campaign to recruit more LGBTQ travelers, there were no negative responses.

## References

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