



IDEAS REPORT

**The year is 2020. A pandemic has
collided with the creative world.
It's time to make sense of it all.**

What does a global pandemic do to a creative mind? WePresent's Holly Fraser examines the impact of a chaotic 2020 on the creative process.

Unprecedented. The new normal. Together alone. Bet you're a little sick of these 2020isms by now, right? There have been plenty of phrases attached to a year that has been indescribable for so many reasons. Put plainly it's just been hard. In fact, the first question in this year's Ideas Report asked people to sum up 2020 in one word, and a large majority of our 35,000 respondents came back with words that were almost too rude to print. (Hint, most rhymed with ducked.) Our 2018 and 2019 reports looked at how we generate and develop ideas, but this year it seemed apt to examine what happens when ideas come face-to-face with challenge.

WeTransfer's audience has always found solace in creativity—a metaphorical punching bag to get it all out if you will—and if there was ever a year to look for an escape, this was it. If we think back through history though, moments of hardship have often led to creative renaissance. Following the 1918 pandemic came the Roaring Twenties. Surrealism, Art Deco, and the works of authors like Scott F. Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway had their genesis during this time. The decay of 1970s New York spouted Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring. The recession of the early 90s inspired the work of the now famous YBA group that included Damien

Hirst, Tracey Emin, and Rachel Whiteread. And it would appear that, despite the challenges they've faced this year, this may also be the case for the class of 2020. Our key insight found that almost half of our respondents are having more ideas due to the changes they've faced this year, half again have more confidence in those ideas, and a third of people are feeling more creative than usual.

If we're being honest, this wasn't what we were expecting to hear, but after crunching the data from the report it started to become clearer.

Emotions can drive creativity, and when heightened they can stimulate new ideas in ways that we least expect.

We're often taught that in order to think clearly and efficiently we should eradicate our emotions and not let them get in the way of decision making. And while that works in certain situations, there is more and more research to suggest that harnessing emotions—particularly negative ones like anger or frustration—can motivate us to work more effectively. Our emotions drive our creativity, and when heightened this can stimulate new ideas in ways that we least expect.

Now, a global pandemic is on the extreme end of the spectrum when it comes to heightened emotion, but in the case of our respondents it would seem that this jolt has actually furthered their creative thinking.

For others, the pandemic has eliminated distractions that often diverted focus from ideas. Almost half of respondents are reprioritizing and reflecting more on what they want in life. Significantly, this is the first year too, that work is no longer at the top of the list of what interferes with our ideas, almost halving 2019's result. And it turns out that activities that we perhaps previously perceived as taking up valuable time in a busy day are exactly the things we need to inspire creativity in the first place. Our audience has been returning to simpler pursuits to find inspiration; appreciating nature, spending time cooking, and learning new skills.

And while our world has become smaller, our imagination hasn't. Almost half of people report relying on the day-to-day to generate ideas, turning to family and friends to kickstart their creativity.

However, while a lot of creatives report renewed energy and creative thinking it's not the case across the board, and sadly gender disparity has once again reared its ugly head. More than half of the women who answered are experiencing more feelings of uncertainty and doubt about their futures, while 42% question whether they have the skills to pull off a new idea before starting. This drops to only 29% for men. Moving into 2021 we need to ensure that we don't undo years of work towards a more equal creative industry. When minority voices of any kind become quiet, creativity suffers.

If this year has taught us anything it's that (as nice as it sounds) it's very hard to predetermine your path, and even harder to stick to it. Life gets in the way. But if we can accept change, respond to challenges, reprioritize and adapt our ways of thinking, then our creativity doesn't have to be another victim of a turbulent year. And through the insights we share in this year's Ideas Report, it sounds like our audience has figured out just that.

Holly Fraser,
Editor-in-chief WePresent

METHODOLOGY

Creative thinkers around the world, thank you for letting us get inside your brains once more.

Way back in the year of 2018 we set out on a mission to discover how our community generates their best ideas—and things really took off. In 2019, we went a step further by shining a light on the ways that ideas grow, once conceived.

**We're back
(and better
than ever) for a
third installment.
This is an
unflinching
look at how
creativity has
been impacted
by the pandemic.**

We've learnt a thing or two from the previous editions of the Ideas Report. So this year, with some careful tweaking and poking in all the right places, we've solidified the findings better and flushed out what we reckon are some of our most golden insights yet.

The research was conducted in the middle of the mental and emotional rollercoaster that was 2020. Remember that distant time of cancelled holiday plans and sweaty face masks? We were busy running a survey linked to a WeTransfer wallpaper (that's one of those big background images you see on wetransfer.com).

The responses started to fly in, and we soon realized the number was going to be almost double that of 2019. Perhaps this had something to do with the fact most people were essentially housebound and constantly in front of their computers, but we'd like to think it was just pure enthusiasm.

All in all, we topped out at 34,851 responses—painfully close to a lovely and round 35k. However, 2020 does not seem like the year for demanding a recount.

As the number of responses soared, so did the pool of countries they came from. Our survey reached a whopping 183 countries (we'll get you next time, Nauru, Mali, Niue, Liechtenstein, Palau, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Mauritania, Greenland, Eritrea, Djibouti, Bhutan), painting a pretty strong picture of a worldwide creative outlook.

In terms of the industries that were represented, we also scored well. We dug through answers from people working in music, film, tech, photography, publishing, advertising/marketing and

PR, to name a few. We should also take this moment to congratulate design for ultimately coming out on top this time with around 16% of the responses (the same score as last year but enough to clinch the title for 2020).

Once we'd taken a breather after looking at all that data, we started to get down to business and crunch those numbers. With a swish and flick, all of this turned into the insights you see before you.

We got 34,851 responses, painfully close to a lovely and round 35k. However, 2020 does not seem like the year for demanding a recount.

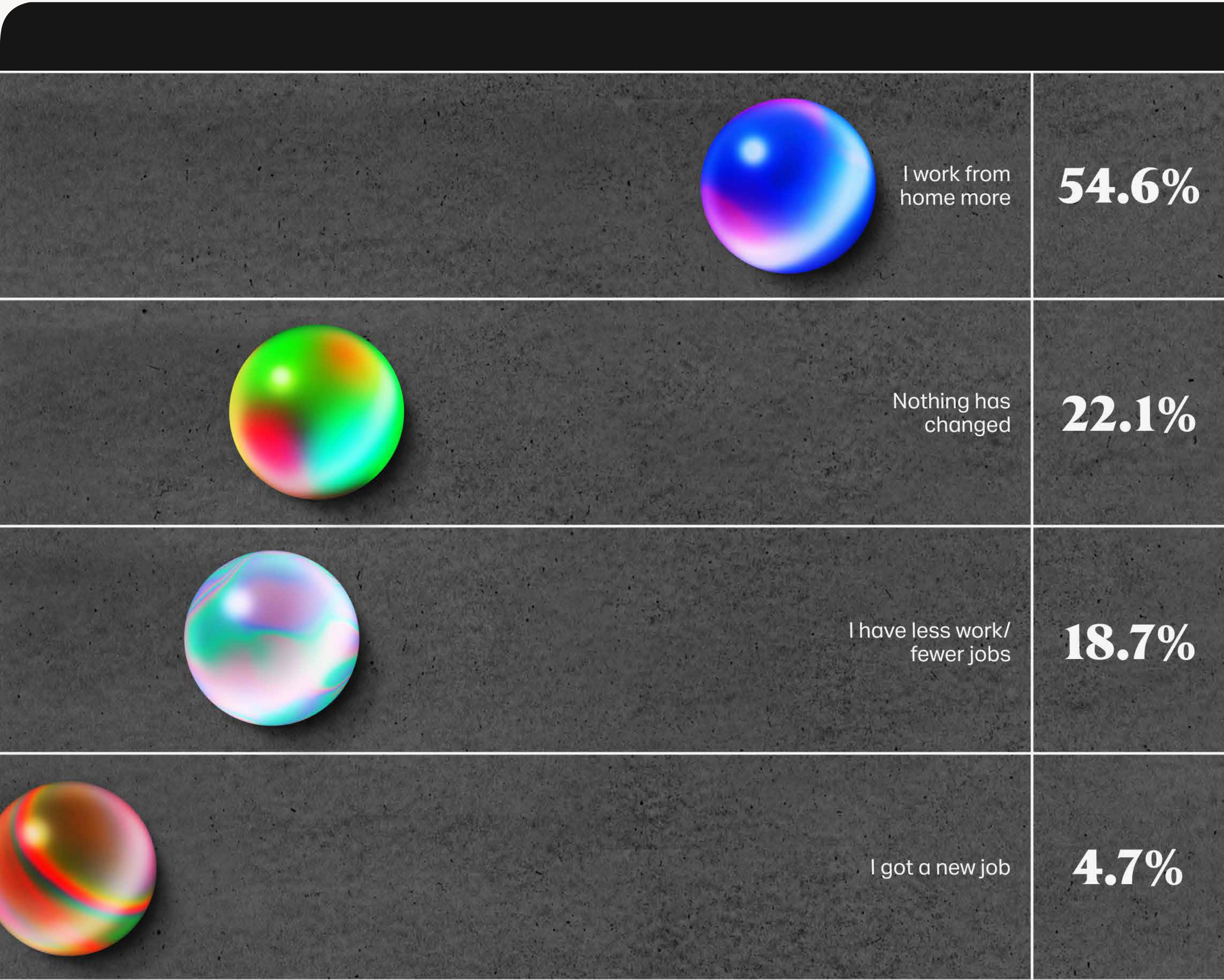
RESULTS

**2020, this is what
34,851 creatives
said about you
(Spoiler: it wasn't
always nice)**

Phew, what a year.
What’s one word
you’d use to
describe 2020
so far?

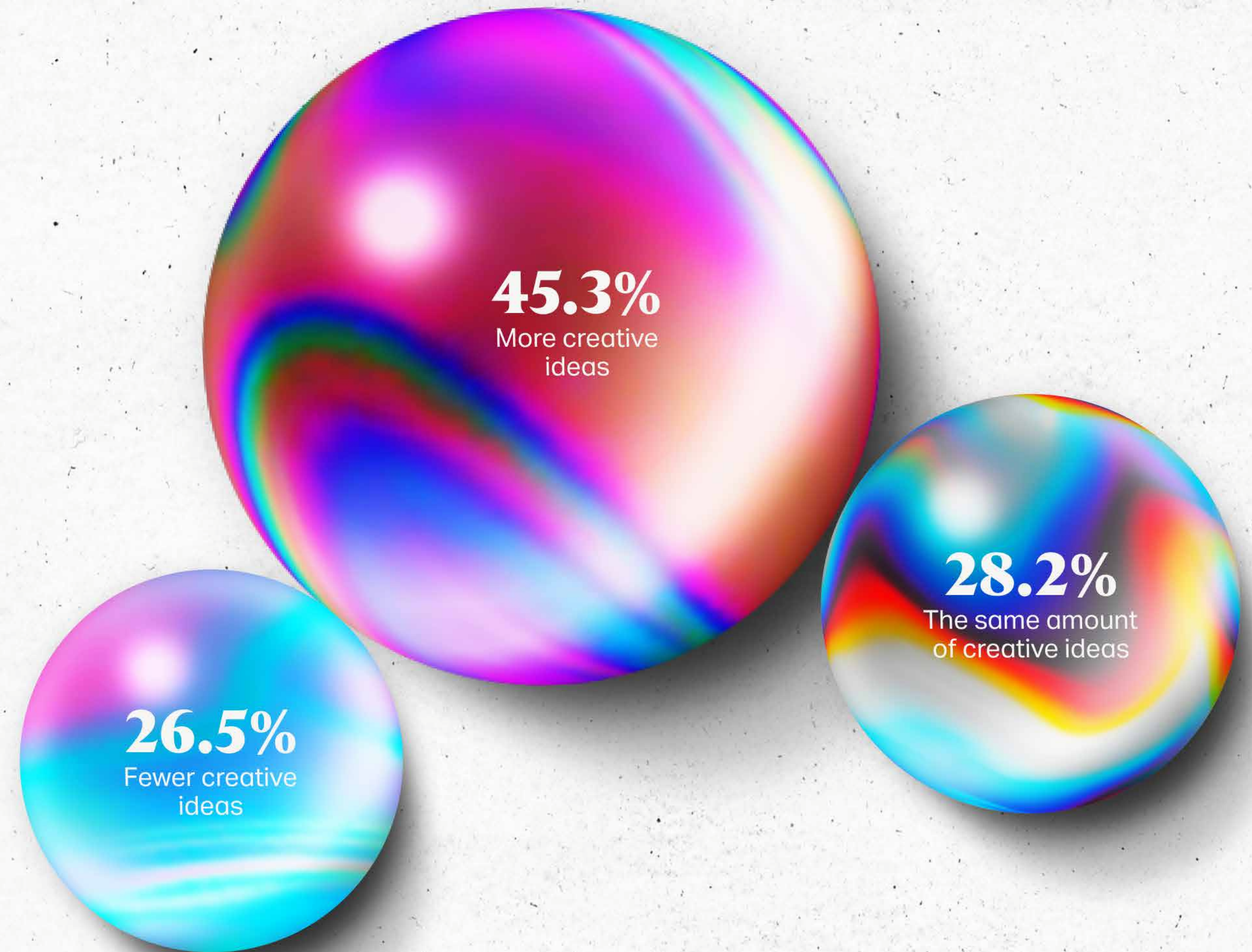
(Results unsuitable for young eyes)

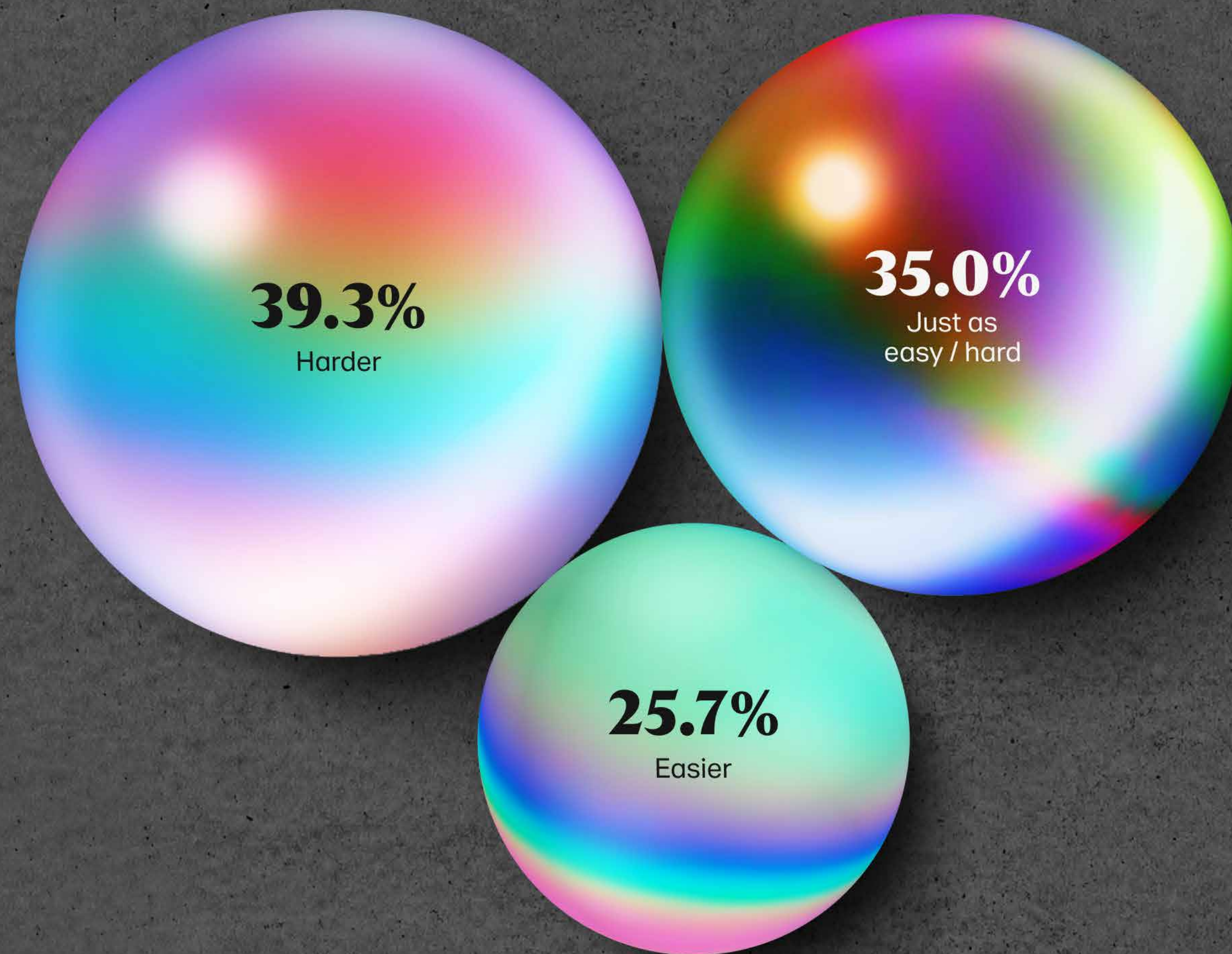
different	509 x
challenging	450 x
strange	432 x
shit/shitty	431 x
unexpected	375 x
bad	365 x
weird	352 x
unpredictable	329 x
fuck/fucked	322 x
difficult	304 x
disaster	285 x
horrible	253 x
stressful	214 x



How has your working environment changed due to the pandemic?

Due to those changes in my working environment I've had...





Due to those changes in my working environment, I find that making impact with my ideas is...

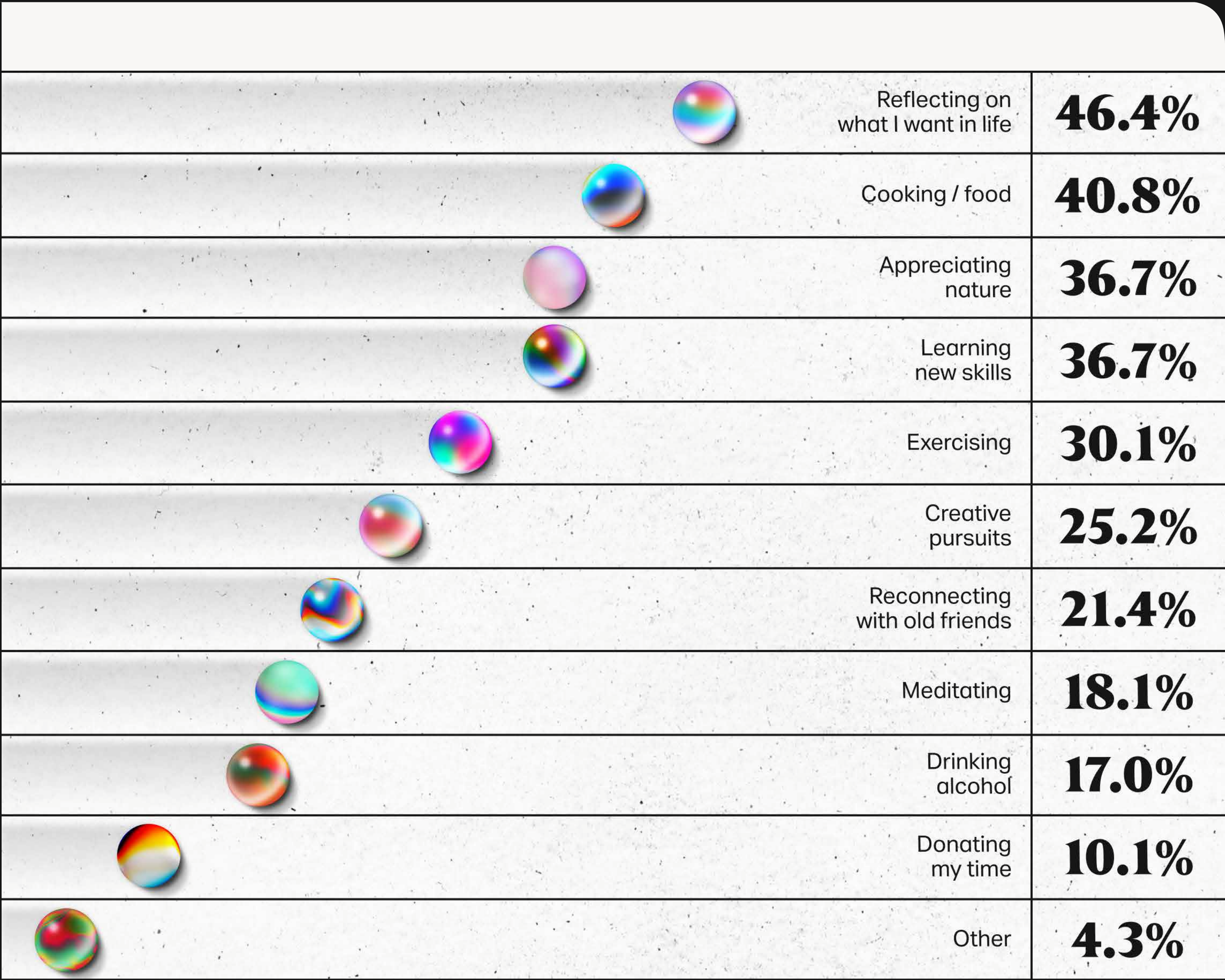
Due to those
changes in my
working
environment
I have...

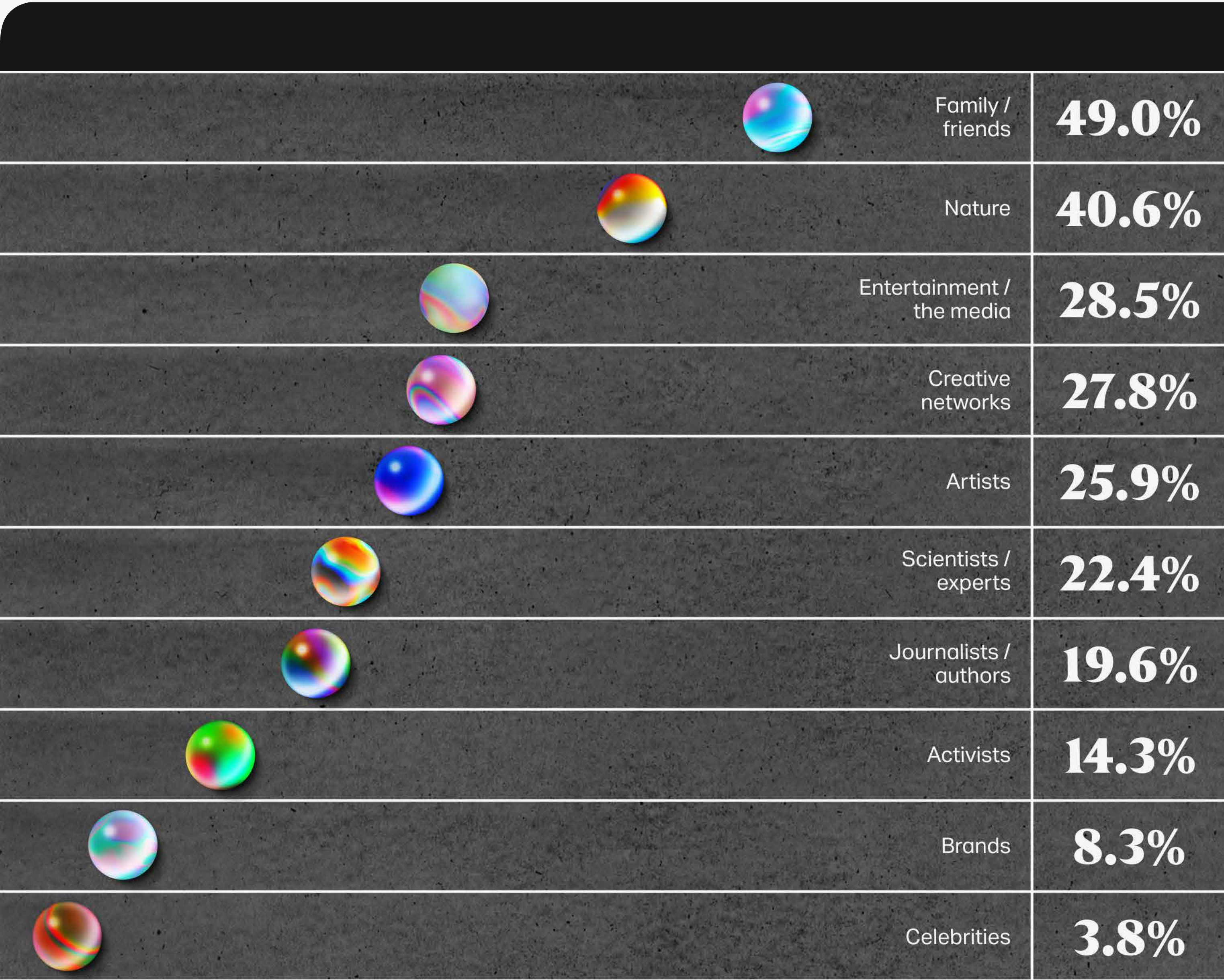




Which of the following have you experienced more than usual during the pandemic?

Which of the following have you been doing more than usual during the pandemic?
















What have been your main sources of inspiration during the pandemic?

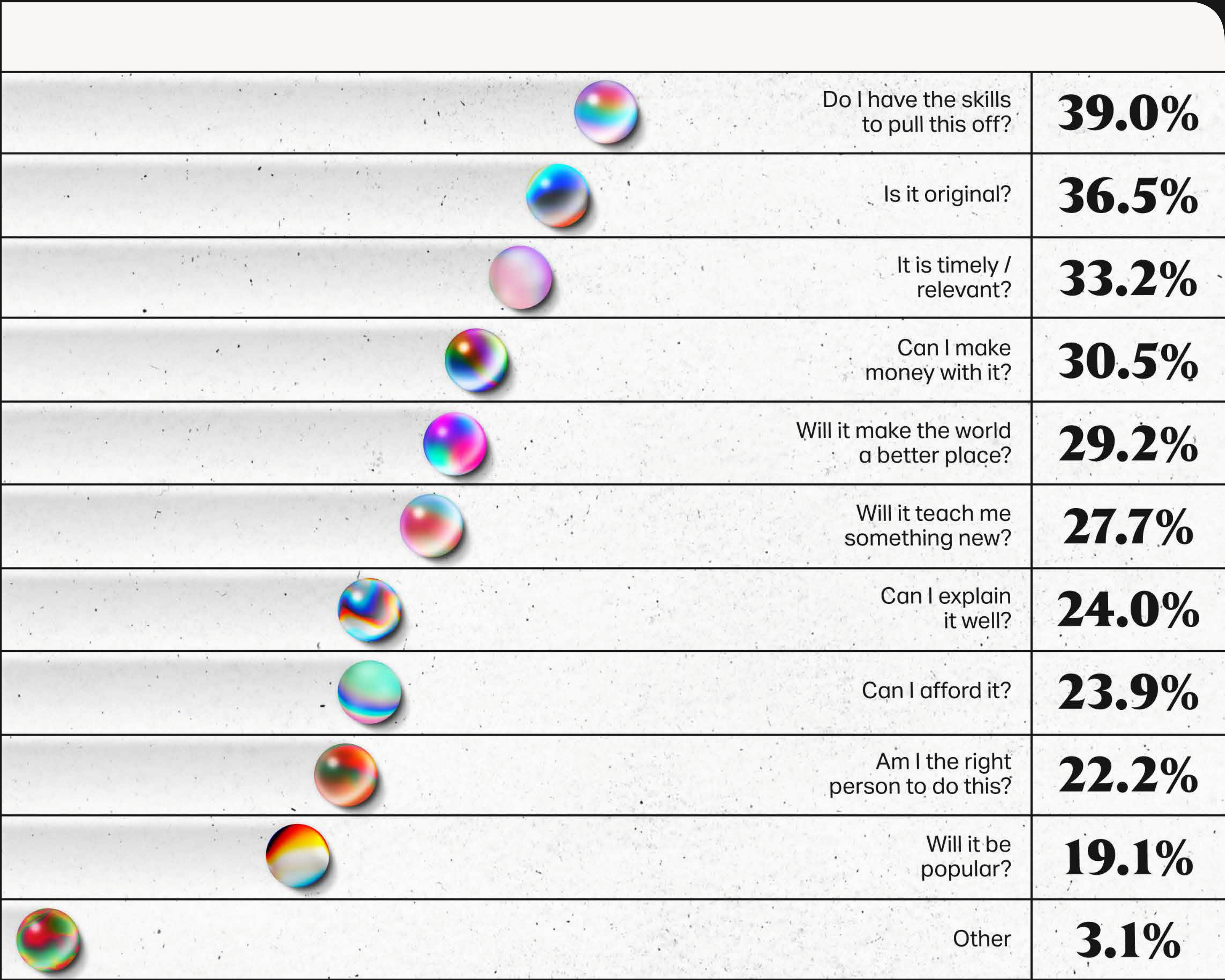
Which person, company, brand, or other has been exceptionally inspiring in 2020?

myself	439 x
my wife	307 x
Nike	295 x
Black Lives Matter	285 x
Amazon	233 x
Zoom	222 x
family	221 x
Donald Trump	177 x
Elon Musk	170 x
Apple	161 x
Google	138 x
NHS	134 x
Tesla	134 x
Bill Gates	132 x
Youtube	129 x
Netflix	119 x

	Staying inside	31.7%
	Money worries	28.9%
	Social media / TV	28.9%
	Effects of COVID-19	27.2%
	My job	25.3%
	My mental health	23.0%
	My family / housemates	21.0%
	Racial / political issues	19.7%
	Boredom	17.9%
	My physical health	14.4%
	Environmental issues	12.8%

What’s been distracting you from your creative ideas during the pandemic?

When getting started on a new idea, which of these questions do you ask yourself?



INSIGHTS

Tough times call for deep understanding.
Here we present to you the five most
significant insights from our findings.

INSIGHT 1 **When the going gets tough, the tough get creative**

INSIGHT 2 **It's okay to be okay**

INSIGHT 3 **The stakes have changed**

INSIGHT 4 **Nevertheless the gender gap persisted**

INSIGHT 5 **Inspiration is closer than we think**

If history is anything to go by, moments of change, uncertainty, and civil unrest inspire some of our greatest creative ideas.

Dadaism brought light to post-WWI gloom, experimental art exploded out of New York City's turbulent 1980s, and it seems 2020's global pandemic has kickstarted our creative thinking. While almost half of respondents report having more ideas due to changes in their working environment, almost a third of people feel more creative than usual, and a fifth are more inspired.

What's more, the brave soldiers who've taken on new jobs this year are reporting the highest level of creativity as well as the most confidence in their ideas. This makes us think, does creativity thrive outside of our comfort zones, or is it an effective coping mechanism when times get tough?

When the going gets tough, the tough get creative

61.6% of people in new jobs say they're having more creative ideas than ever

It's okay to be okay

40% of people are feeling more creative than usual

Ask almost 35,000 people to sum up 2020 in one word, and it shouldn't come as a surprise the resulting word cloud was almost too rude to print. Although shoutout to the one optimist who simply wrote "epic".

But it's when we compare these answers to our other findings that things get interesting. There's a tension between craving our "old" lives and adapting to the new.

While 2020 has a bad rep, almost half of us have more confidence in our ideas. Add that to the 35% of us who feel more grateful than usual and the 20% who feel excited, efficient, and connected, and it seems we're underestimating our ability to adapt.

It's okay to feel stressed, angry, cheated, upset, and to crave a return to "normal". But it's also okay, if this "new normal" kinda fits, if it fuels a new age of creative thinking and more confidence in the work we produce.

In 2018 41% of you said other work pressures get in the way of having good ideas. One year later, in 2019, things were eerily similar: 42% of people placed work as their number one distraction. This year's results have bulldozed that trend (classic 2020).

Work has jumped from the top spot to distracting only 25% of respondents. Yes, we have bigger fish to fry but we're also prioritizing family, friends, and our health—both mental and physical—much more than previous years. Almost a half of us are reflecting more on what we want from life, we're also cooking more, spending more time in nature, and taking the time to learn new skills.

The world we live in often teaches us to reward ambition, to strive for more, that bigger is better. But in a moment of intense change these values have been called into question, and we're (re)turning to the simple things in life.

The stakes have changed

46.4% of people are
reflecting more on what
they want from life

Nevertheless the gender gap persisted

42% of women question whether they have the skills to pull an idea off

2020 has stirred up a whole lot of feelings for everyone, but it seems (as usual) women are bearing the brunt of a year of uncertainty. Compared to male respondents, women are more likely to feel depressed and concerned about the future, and this is having an impact on their creative ideas.

When getting started on a new idea, almost half of women (42%) question if they have the skills to pull it off. Only 29% of men ask themselves the same question.

Sadly this is nothing new, we already know women are more likely to suffer from imposter syndrome. But COVID-19 is setting many women in the workplace back even further. How can we, as a creative industry, get on top of this before we miss out on more great ideas from more diverse voices?

Our 2018 Ideas Report showed us inspiration is found in real-life experiences—like museums, nature, and travel (remember that?)—rather than online platforms or social media. And although the “real world” feels further away than ever, the same idea continues to ring true.

Almost half of respondents say family and friends are their main source of inspiration this year, while 40% of people have been turning to nature to nurture their ideas. What’s more, we asked people what or who they’ve found exceptionally inspiring in 2020. And in a move that would make Beyoncé proud, the words “me,” “myself,” and “I” led the way.

As we slow down, we’re looking inwards and realizing everything we need is perhaps closer than we think. We’re questioning our relationship to big brands and celebrity influencers, and rearranging our pedestals—giving ourselves and our families pride of place.

Inspiration is closer than we think

49% of people say family and friends are their biggest source of inspiration

EXPERTS

2020 was a weird one.
We gathered five powerful creative minds to share
five of their wisest words for getting through it.

Alice Aedy Filmmaker and activist

Antwaun Sargent Art critic and writer

Ben Hammersley Futurist

Natasha Jen Partner at Pentagram

Holley M. Kholi-Murchison Artist and entrepreneur



Don't let doubt define you

Alice is a documentary photographer, filmmaker, and activist whose work focuses on forced migration, environmental issues, and spotlighting female storytellers.



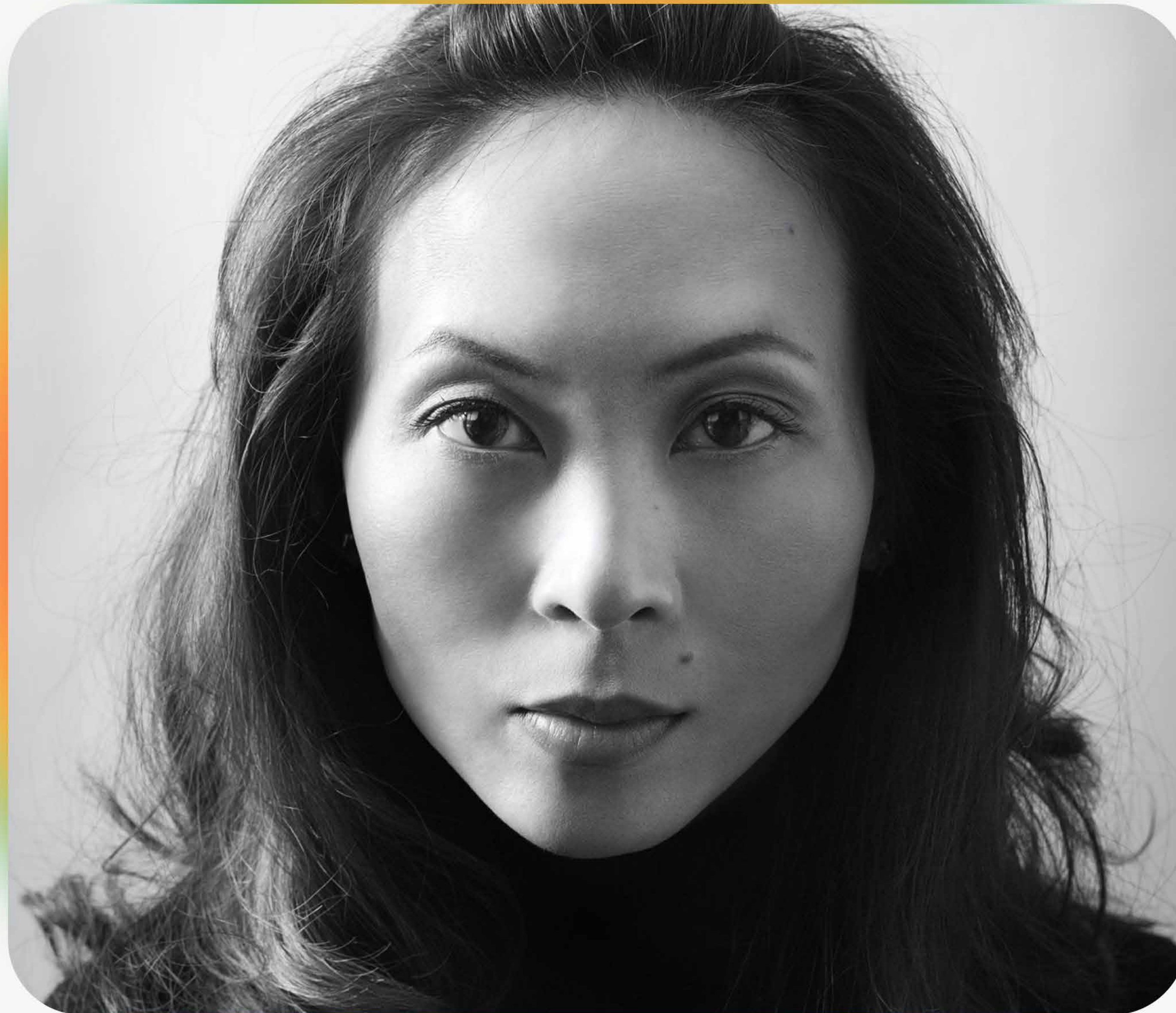
Over-coming doubt is trusting yourself

Antwaun is a writer, lecturer, organizer, and critic living and working in New York City. His writing has appeared in the New York Times, New Yorker, New York Review of Books, W Magazine, Vogue, and others.



Better people have bigger problems

Ben is a futurist, journalist, author, and consultant, previously editor-at-large at Wired UK. He specializes in adaptive futurism and cognitive risk. Fun fact: Ben coined the term “podcast” back in 2004.



Making prevents that sinking feeling

Natasha is an award-winning designer, an educator, and a partner at Pentagram. Natasha's work is recognized for its innovative use of graphic, verbal, digital, and spatial interventions that challenge conventionality.



Move from isolation to intimacy

Holley is a social practice artist and entrepreneur with experience in multimedia storytelling, experiential learning, and talent development. She strives to allow marginalized voices to thrive through her studio, Oratory Glory.

FUN FACTS

The cherry on the top of every Ideas Report is the fun facts section.

Here we've gone ahead and handpicked a few of our favorite bite-sized insights from the data for you to enjoy responsibly.

A more mindful youth?

Younger people seem to have taken the time to pause and reflect the most during the pandemic. 55% of those under the age of 36 have thought deeply about life more often, as opposed to just 45% in the age category above.

Mexico and India have the skills to pay the bills.

We found that they're much more inclined to want to show off their dexterity as creatives, with around 45% of them spending more time learning something new, compared to just 26% in the US.

India and France care least about originality in their work.

Only 32% are bothered if their creative work is unique.

It would seem that a little isolation can serve as a creative catalyst for many.

Only 23% of extroverts report having fewer creative ideas, compared to 31% of introverts. 52% (!) of the extroverts actually report having more creative ideas as a result of the pandemic.

Living up to their boozy stereotype, creatives in the UK have squared up to the deadly pandemic using a lot of liquid courage.

More than 31% of respondents reported drinking more during the outbreak—that's significantly higher than 21% in the US, 17% in Germany, and 14% in the Netherlands.

COLOPHON

2020 was a wild ride indeed.

We hope this year’s Ideas Report has been both illuminating and inspiring. If we’ve learnt one thing, it’s that adversity spawns renegade thinking and unleashes creativity where you’d least expect to find it.

So, keep letting down the net of your human imagination into the chaos below and pulling up for the big ideas.

Eventually the storm will pass.

2021, we’re ready for you. Give us your worst.

(Actually, maybe go easy on us for a while.)

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We’re here for you.

WeTransfer was founded in 2009 as the simplest way to send big files around the world.

Since then we’ve grown into a whole set of creative tools to keep your ideas moving. There’s Paper® to capture your ideas, Paste® to communicate your ideas, and Collect to, well, you can probably guess that one. We also launched WePresent, to tell creative stories and spark new ideas.

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