



# GAMING FOR ALL

A study of toxicity and plans for inclusivity

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

3

Methodology

5

Executive summary

6

Nurture vs. nature

8

What we found

10

What we're doing

12

Targeting our guilds

14

Race and ethnicity

16

Gender and sexuality

18

Diversity and inclusion

20

Changing the game

22

Getting out

24

Pursuing careers

26

Creating opportunities

28

Conclusion

30

About Evil Geniuses / YouGov

# METHODOLOGY

To better understand and build an action plan to address toxicity in the gaming industry, Evil Geniuses collaborated with YouGov, a global market research and data company. We surveyed 924 people in the United States who self-identified as either a “moderate gamer”

(plays 7 to 27 hours/week on any device) or a “hardcore gamer” (plays 28+ hours/week). We then compared several characteristics of different sub-segments of the gaming community to those of the general public, leveraging YouGov’s proprietary Profiles data set.

# TERMINOLOGY

**Toxic behaviors take many forms**, but in order to collect consistent results, we limited our definition to the following: gender discrimination, racial discrimination, sexual harassment, discrimination based on sexual orientation, bullying, shaming, stalking, and/or threats of physical abuse.

**Identity occurs on a spectrum**, especially as it concerns race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. For the purposes of this research and whitepaper, all respondents were classified according to their own self-identifications, without specific guidance or definitions provided.





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gaming outgrew the basement a long time ago.

The platforms have evolved and so has the culture. There are billions of gamers globally, and esports has become a billion-dollar industry. Our community is increasingly diverse in racial, sexual, and gender identities. And players across this spectrum have incredibly powerful experiences: making friends, discovering new interests, and feeling like they belong.

But we haven't left all the dark places behind. Toxic behaviors like bullying, shaming, and discriminatory language still pervade our industry. Some gamers think it's getting worse.

Our mission at Evil Geniuses is to bring together diverse talent for elite gaming performance. To live that mission, we need to bring to the table ideas that combat toxicity—perspectives directly from the community, as well as plans to take action.

That's why we partnered with YouGov—a data company with one of the world's largest research networks and strong expertise in this industry—to explore toxic behavior in gaming. From what we learned from this study, we created programs to make a difference.

Now, we're sharing what we found and what we're doing. We hope this helps fuel the fire of conversations already happening in boardrooms and bedrooms. Because gaming should be a place where anyone can go—for fun, for a career, to belong.

**We're not pretending this is the solution. It's just a start. But together, this is work we can finish.**

— Nicole LaPointe Jameson  
CEO, Evil Geniuses



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## Chapter 1

# NURTURE VS. NATURE

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**Toxic behavior doesn't seem to be inherent.** Gamers don't typically start experiencing toxicity until their teens or later. And as a group, they're not naturally inclined to discriminatory beliefs.

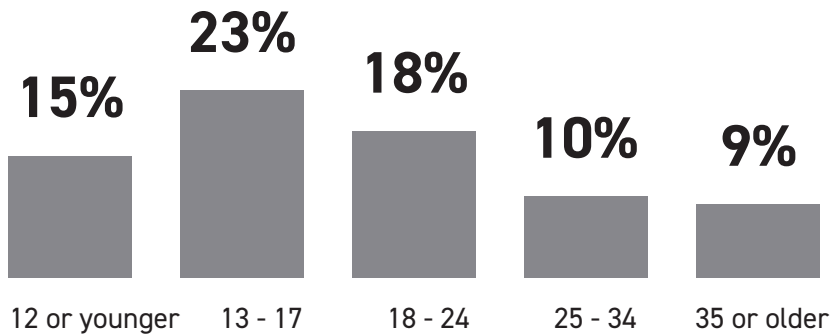
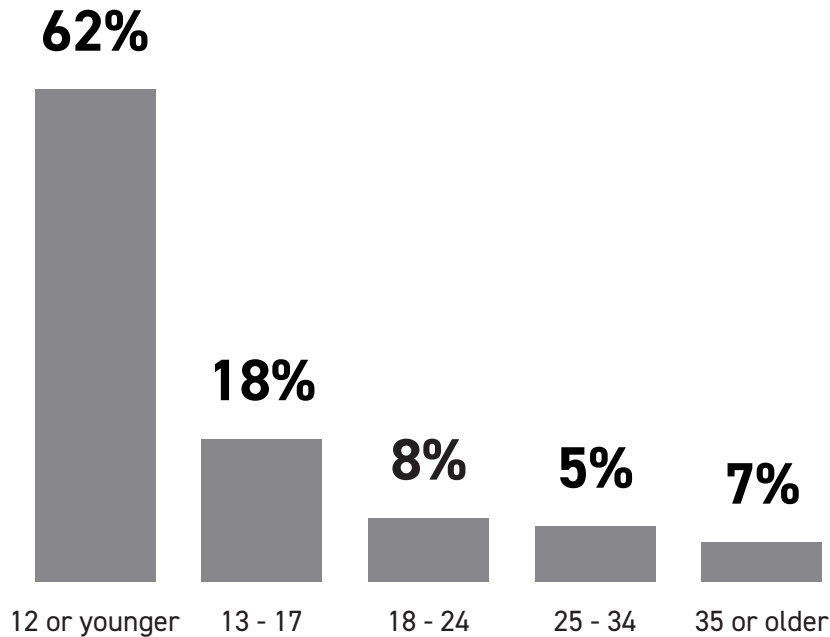
WHAT WE FOUND

Video games positively influence players in many ways, from increasing cognitive and emotional functions to enhancing spatial skills. While gamers start experiencing those benefits from an early age, our data suggest that they don't experience toxic behavior until later.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of gamers (62%) start playing before the age of 12. But of the gamers we surveyed who've experienced toxic behavior, almost 80% didn't first encounter toxicity until after they turned 13.

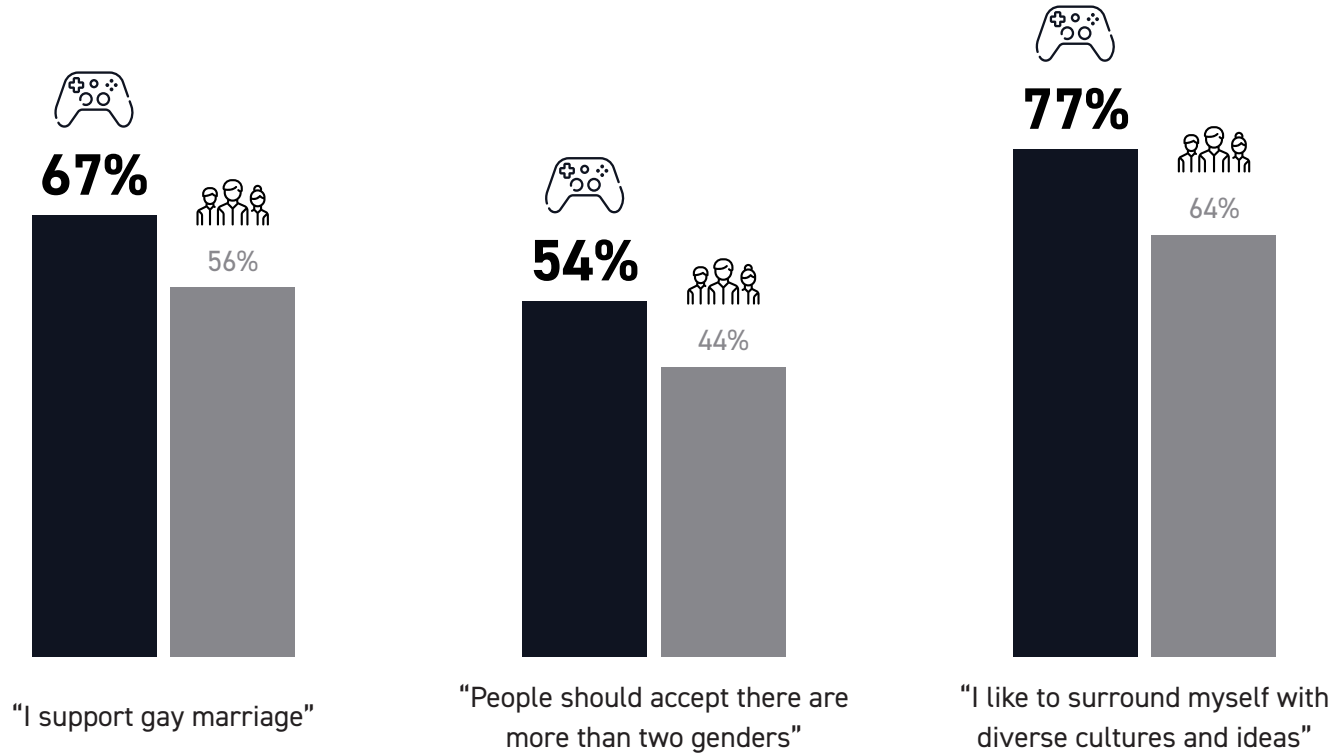
Gamers of all ages don't seem to be naturally inclined to discrimination, either. Compared to the general population of the United States, gamers express opinions that are more open-minded and inclusive.

When it comes to toxic behavior, it's something that isn't necessarily inherent to our community, but it is grown here.



GAMERS ON DIVERSITY

Compared to the wider population, gamers show signs of being more inclusive of genders, sexes, and cultures.

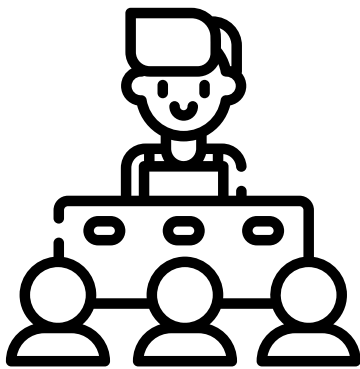


“This community is actually very supportive of LGBTQ, racial differences and socioeconomic difference. More so than society as a whole.”

– Bisexual, Identifies Male, White

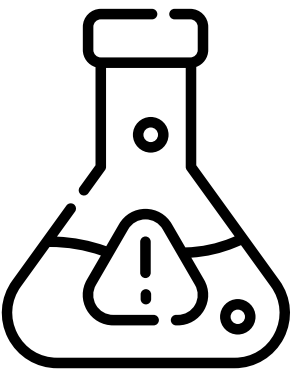
WHAT WE'RE DOING

Because we see a window of time where toxicity is learned, we also see that time as an opportunity to disrupt toxic behavior. That's why Evil Geniuses is investing in long-term solutions that teach tolerance, respect, and alternative behaviors that support young gamers and their parents.



Youth Gaming

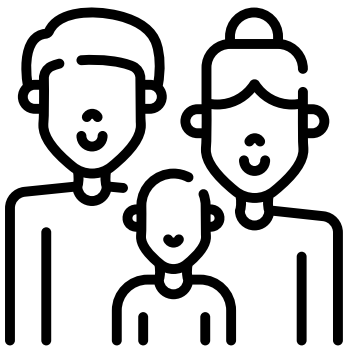
In spring 2021, Evil Geniuses will launch a series of camps to teach young people about esports competition and STEM career opportunities. Gamers will learn how to improve their gameplay in titles such as League of Legends and Dota 2. But most importantly, our curriculum will cover toxicity prevention, mental health and wellness education, and social media.



Toxicity Prevention

Most of the gamers in our study first experienced toxicity as teenagers. Whether or not the majority of toxic behavior is first experienced then or earlier, we need to help young gamers build the skills to confront toxicity as early as possible.

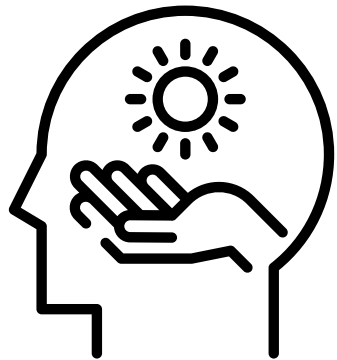
By teaching the effects toxic actions have on specific groups, we hope to dissuade young gamers from adopting bad habits they learn from the community. We believe this will also help them stand up and challenge bullying when they see it.



Empowering Parents

Camps will also educate parents about the teamwork, collaboration, and communication skills children learn while gaming. We'll showcase how embracing a child's passion can lead them on the path to cultivating a career.

We'll also equip parents with the tools they need to help their kids respond to negative emotions and experiences. In doing so, we aim to help them raise confident leaders who know they deserve a place in our community.



Mental Health and Wellness

Anecdotal evidence from our survey suggests that toxicity can significantly impact the mental health of teammates and peers within our community. Our research, in addition to many previous studies,<sup>2</sup> confirms that gamers tend to have higher rates of social anxiety. This made us realize we need to supplement gamers' existing social habits and help them develop healthy communication methods while they're still young.

During these camps, we'll teach gamers how to manage their emotions and communicate with teammates so they can give constructive criticism.

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## Chapter 2

# TARGETING OUR GUILDS

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**Gamers of all races, genders, and sexual orientations are targets of toxic actions.** But marginalized groups within the community experience the most toxic behavior.

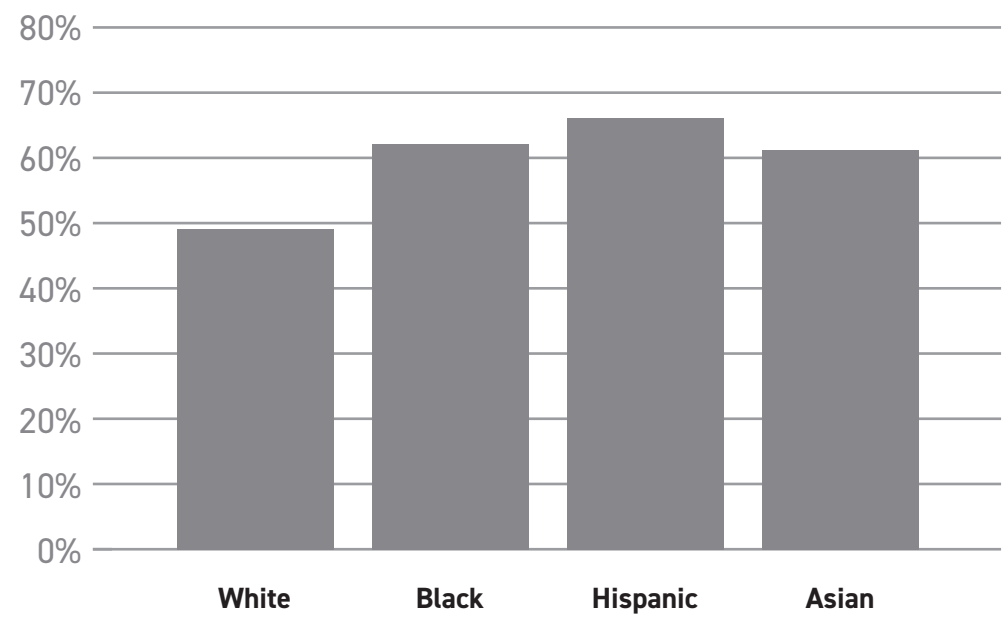
WHAT WE FOUND

Shaming and toxicity are prevalent in gaming. And the majority of gamers we surveyed (54%) have been the target of some form of toxicity in the last 12 months. But, unsurprisingly and unfortunately, gamers who self-identify as part of minority groups in the United States experienced higher rates of toxic behavior.

Hispanic gamers encountered the most toxic behavior directed at them overall. About two-thirds (66%) experienced some form of toxicity within the last year. However, when broken down by types of discriminatory behavior, specific groups experienced more toxicity compared to others.

Asian gamers experienced the most racial (43%) and gender (29%) discrimination. Hispanic gamers experience the most threats of physical abuse (34%) and stalking (20%). White gamers, despite encountering the least amount of toxic behavior overall, report experiencing significantly higher levels of general bullying (51%) than other groups.

Toxicity Experienced by Race  
in Last 12 Months\*



\*Participants self-identified within these categories

TYPES OF TOXICITY EXPERIENCED

	Hispanic	Asian	Black	White
Threats of Physical Abuse	34%	13%	22%	22%
Bullying	33%	36%	30%	51%
Racial Discrimination	30%	43%	29%	21%
Shaming	30%	38%	25%	37%
Gender Discrimination	26%	29%	20%	23%
Sexual Orientation Discrimination	22%	23%	18%	20%
Sexual Harassment	22%	16%	12%	22%
Stalking	20%	17%	14%	13%

“Games...can get racially charged...that’s one of the main reasons I don’t use voice chat in the online games I play.”

– Heterosexual, Identifies Female, Black



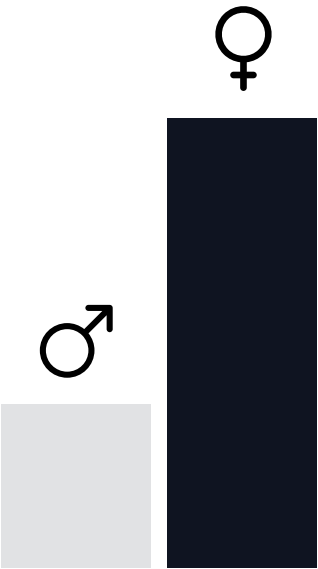
WHAT WE FOUND

As with race and ethnicity, shaming and toxicity impacts gamers of all genders and sexual orientations. But those who identify as women and/or LGBTQIA+ experience more acts of discrimination.

Nearly half (44%) of women gamers report experiencing gender discrimination in the last year, compared to 16% of men. And many of the women we surveyed said they regularly took actions to disguise their identities—whether changing their profiles and characters to appear more neutral or masculine, or abandoning voice communication.

Disturbingly, almost all (92%) of the trans gamers we surveyed were targets of sexual harassment and discrimination in the last year. And LGBTQIA+ gamers report experiencing more sexual harassment and discrimination compared to cis-gendered heterosexuals (59% compared to 53%).

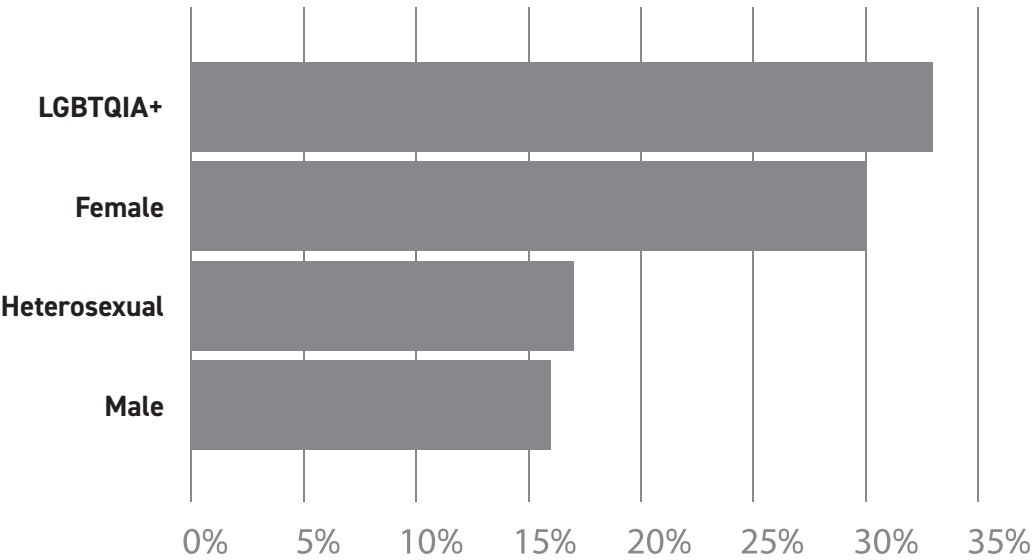
Who experiences gender discrimination?



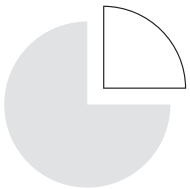
**44%** of female gamers report experiencing gender discrimination

**16%** of male gamers report experiencing gender discrimination

Who experiences sexual harassment?\*



\*Participants self-identified within these categories



A quarter of women surveyed say they often disguise their gender when they game.

“As someone with an identifiably female voice and name, [harassment] is one of the reasons I refrain from playing online games.”

- Bisexual, Identifies Female, White

**92%** of trans gamers experience toxicity.

“Queer people are always fetishized. Toxic behavior in the gaming community keeps us as marginalized as we are in public.”

- LGBTQI+ (Unspecified), Identifies Female, White

WHAT WE'RE DOING

To fix gender inequity in our ecosystem, we're launching a series of summits focused on making gaming more diverse and inclusive.



Diversity and Inclusion Summits

We advocate for the gaming community to be a diverse collective of bold characters who feel like they belong. To educate and empower gamers, we're launching a series of summits to promote equity in gaming, starting in spring 2021.



Young Women in Technology and Gaming

The goal? Inspire young girls to embrace their passion for gaming, by seeing and hearing from women who work in all sectors of our industry.



Health and Wellness

The goal? Equip all gamers with techniques to cope with social anxiety and manage emotions during competition, so they possess more productive ways to communicate with the community.



Equity in Gaming and Esports

The goal? Empower gamers by giving them the stage to speak about their experiences. And help them demonstrate their passions and skills so they can create games that better more represent our community.

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## Chapter 3

# CHANGING THE GAME

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**Gamers want to feel like they belong.**

Toxic behavior marginalizes the diverse perspectives our industry needs most, and it keeps gamers from engaging personally and professionally.



WHAT WE FOUND

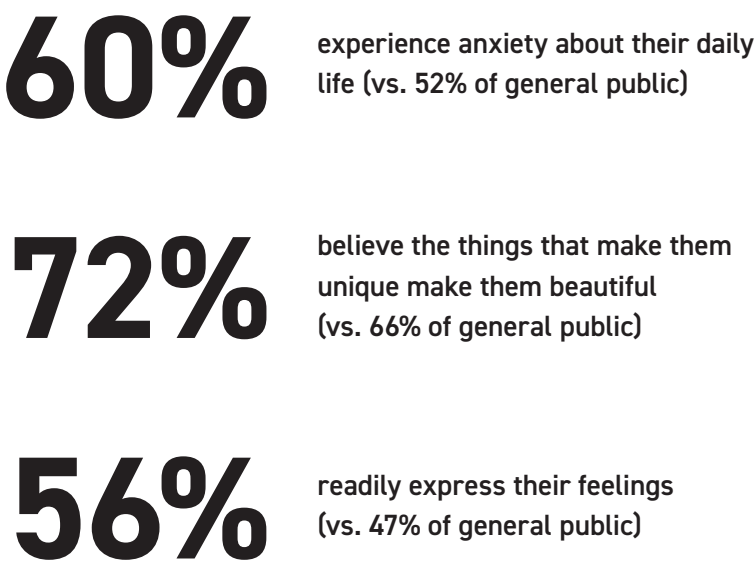
Permanently or temporarily. Personally or professionally. Toxic experiences contribute to players leaving the games industry behind.

More than half (51%) of gamers we surveyed either quit or considered quitting games because of toxic behavior. While the most common response was to temporarily stop playing a specific game (19%), 13% have temporarily or permanently quit video games overall.

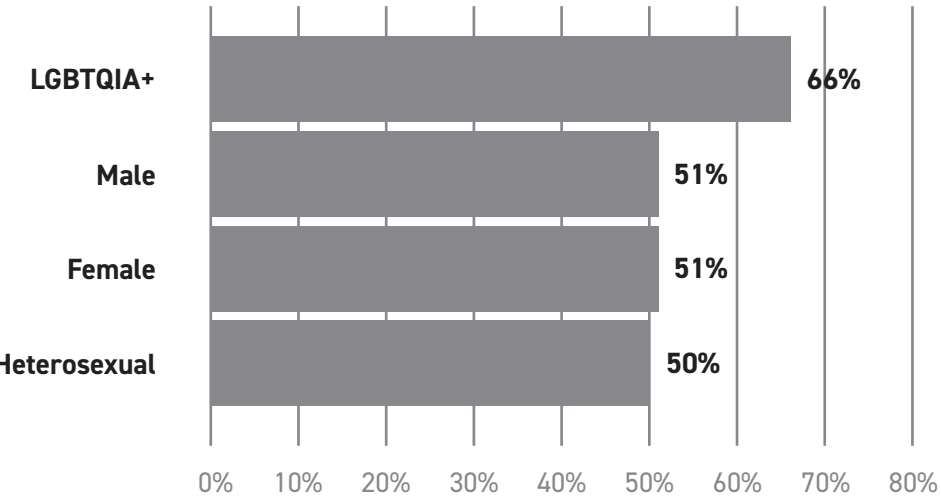
Unsurprisingly, the groups that are most heavily targeted are the most likely to leave. Of the racial, gender, and sexual identities we've previously discussed, gamers who identify as LGBTQIA+ (54%), women (51%), and Hispanic (60%) are the most likely to leave/consider leaving a game or gaming.

“[The] lack of ability to deal with psychological damage has caused me distress in the past. I am still not sure if I am able to deal with it or recover. I try.”

– Bisexual, Identifies Female, Asian

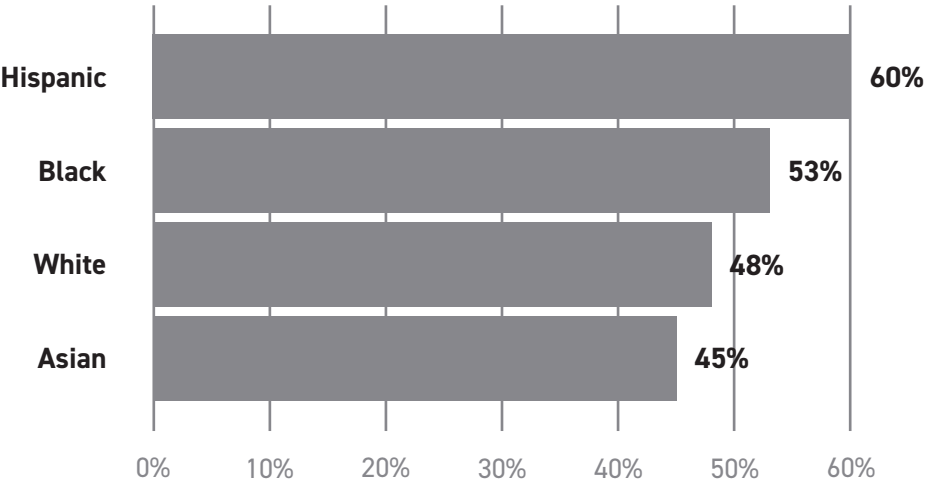


Leaving by gender and sexuality+\*



+Either left or considered leaving  
\*Participants self-identified within these categories

Leaving by race and ethnicity+\*



+Either left or considered leaving  
\*Participants self-identified within these categories

WHAT WE FOUND

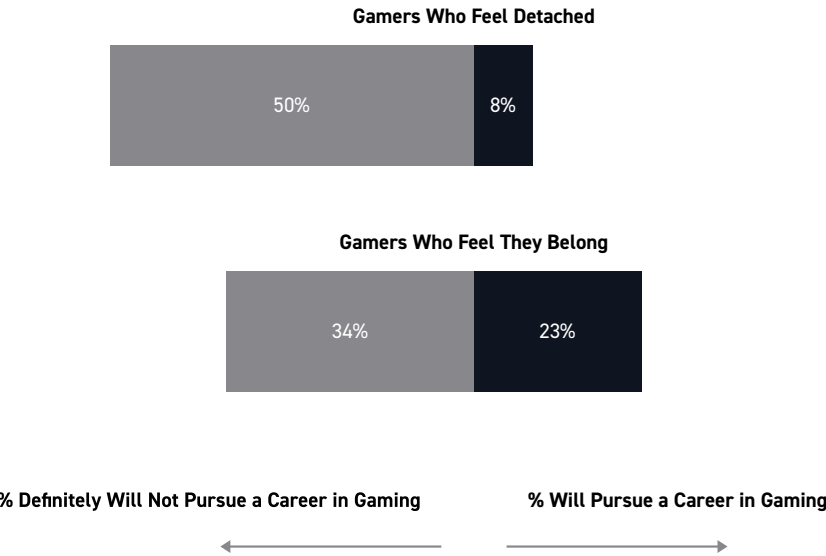
Just having a personal experience with toxicity isn't enough to discourage gamers from pursuing a career in the industry. In fact, there's very little in our data to suggest that it does. But when combined with a lack of response—from fellow gamers and from the industry— toxicity leads gamers to feel detached from the community, and they're less likely to pursue

career opportunities. Of those who feel like they belong, only a third (34%) said that they would definitely not pursue a career. For gamers who feel detached, half of them (50%) said they definitely will not pursue a career. Being excluded from a team or clan, or lacking friends with whom to play the same game, also leads to a decreased desire to pursue gaming as a career.

Of note, gamers who identify as female are both less likely to feel they belong in the gaming community, and in turn also less likely to pursue a career in the industry. Moving forward, promoting female players and leaders may help them see themselves in a position of power in gaming.



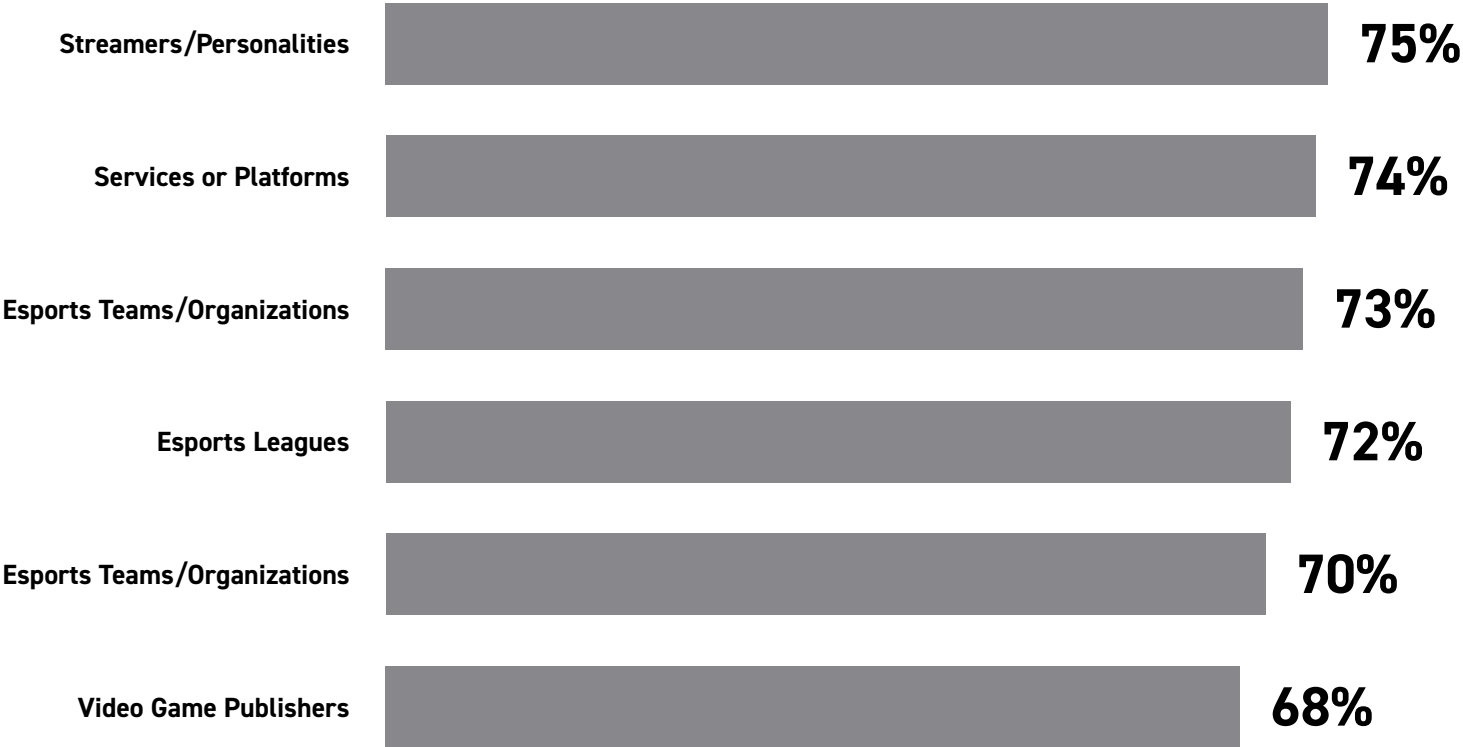
55% of female gamers don't see themselves in a career in the video gaming industry.



WHAT WE FOUND

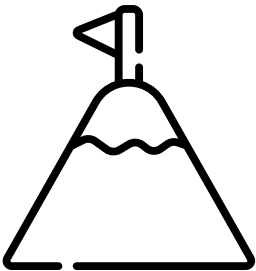
Gamers hold the entire industry accountable for addressing toxicity, but they're split on who they believe owns the most responsibility.

Who's responsible for inclusion?



WHAT WE'RE DOING

The people spoke. More than 70% think that responsibility for inclusivity falls on teams. So this is how we plan to do our part.



Career Summits

In spring 2021, we'll launch a series of career summits for aspiring esports professionals to be the change they want to see. During these events, gamers will get the opportunity to network with industry leaders in tech, gaming, and esports while advancing their career trajectory.



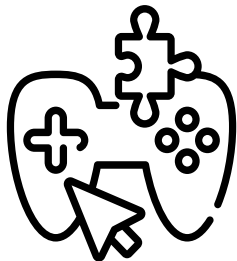
Competition in Esports

Attendees will get a look inside at how professional esports teams operate and practice. They'll also learn how to be "good sports" and uphold integrity as competitors, so they can negate toxicity at the highest levels of competition.



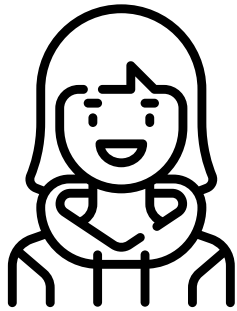
Running an Esports Business

During this workshop, we'll start from square one. Gamers will learn entrepreneurial skills, get exposure to which skills are most impactful in esports, and explore the nuances of building and leading organizations big and small.



Game Design

Our data suggests that gamers who experience toxicity want to see themselves reflected in games and in the community. This track of workshops builds up hard skills attendees need to create games, like coding, multimedia software development, and the narrative structure of gaming.



Tech and Innovation

Young women will get the opportunity to meet women leaders in the technology industry. Here, attendees will learn first-hand the skills and experience they need to innovate and succeed in this fast-paced field.



# CONCLUSION

Our message is one of hope. For our players, our fans, and the gaming community as a whole.

For all the bad we need to address—like shaming, bullying, toxic language, and discrimination by race, gender and sexuality—our community is increasingly diverse and inclusive. And we're working toward solutions.

**Will you join us?**

# EVIL GENIUSES

Evil Geniuses is one of the largest and most iconic esports organizations in the world. And our mission is to bring together diverse talent for elite gaming performance.

Founded in 1999, we shaped the history of esports with our long-running legacy. But we value what's right over what's typical, which is why we consistently raise the bar on how we treat our players, viewers, and fans. And always will.

Learn more at [evilgeniuses.gg](http://evilgeniuses.gg)



# YOUGOV

YouGov is an international research data and analytics group headquartered in London. Our data-led offering supports and improves a wide spectrum of marketing activities of a customer-base including media owners, brands and media agencies.

We work with some of the world's most recognized brands. Our line of products and services includes YouGov BrandIndex, YouGov Profiles, YouGov Omnibus, YouGov Custom Research, YouGov Crunch and YouGov Direct. With over 9 million panelists across 44 countries, YouGov's market research covers the UK, USA, Europe, the Nordics, the Middle East, and Asia-Pacific.

Our panelists come from all ages, socio-economic groups, and other demographic types – allowing us to create nationally and internationally representative online samples of consumers.

Learn more at [yougov.com](http://yougov.com)

