Toxicity in Video Games at Northeastern University

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Background

Toxicity is an ongoing problem in many communities, but especially in video games. Northeastern University is no exception to this. We decided to take a deep dive into the toxicity many Northeastern Students face when playing games and discover where this toxicity is more prevalent, in what forms, and why.

Research question

In which types of games do Northeastern students face the most toxicity?

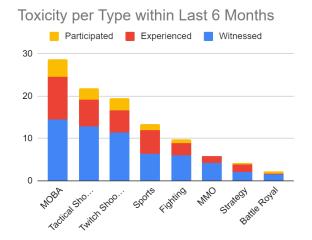
Hypothesis

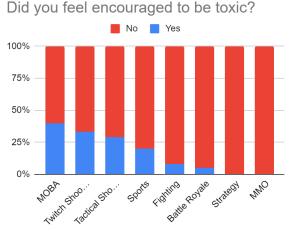
We hypothesize that of the Northeastern students who play competitive online games, MOBA players face the most toxicity

Procedure

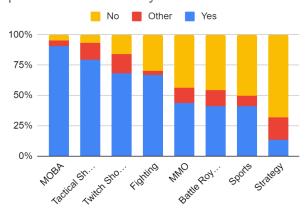
We wrote a survey on Google Forms asking about the respondent's experience with toxicity in games. Most of the questions were divided into sections based on 8 game types: Tactical Shooters, Twitch Shooters, Battle Royale, Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA), Strategy, Fighting, Sports, and Massive Multiplayer Online (MMO). Respondents were allowed to opt out of sections that were not relevant to them. Each section featured the same questions on the respondent's recent experience with toxicity. We asked respondents about toxicity they witnessed, were targeted by, and participated in. We also asked respondents for their opinion on each community as a whole, including online vs in-person, casual vs competitive, etc. This survey was sent to the Northeastern gaming community through various discord servers. Some were dedicated to specific games, others were general gaming communities, and some were not game-specific.

The Results: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Sf23mDf2j4j58EaNqQz-xBZoYWEIC-0 v3tmRweWxHU/edit

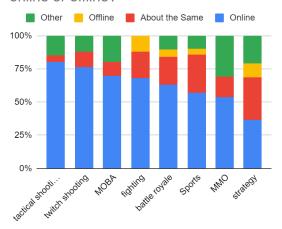




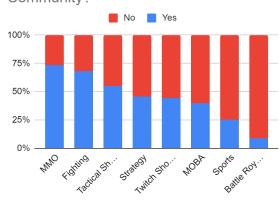
Do you feel that this game type has a problem with Toxicity?



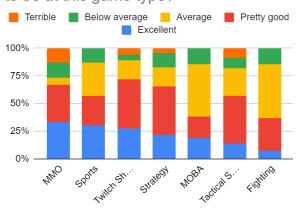
Do you feel this game type is more toxic online or offline?



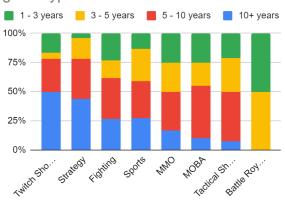
Are you a part of this game type's Community?



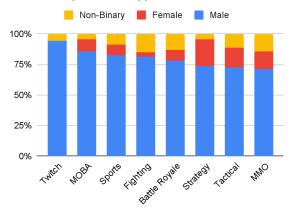
What would you consider you skill level to be at this game type?



How long have you been playing this game type?



Gender by Game Type



Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA)

League of Legends, Defense of the Ancients (DOTA), Smite, Paladins, Vainglory, Pokemon Unity

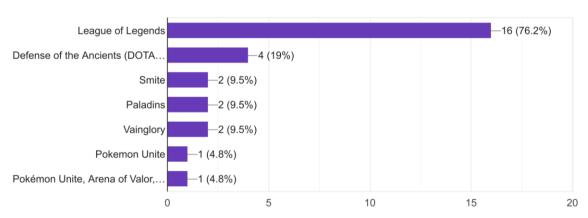
"The things people say in this community are absurd."

"League competitive play. If you start trash talking while winning you BETTER win the game otherwise I'm motivated to play out of my mind in order to win, and I'll give trashtalk back at the same level I receive it."

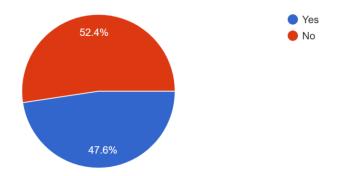
"MOBAs are designed for toxicity. It is especially bad when playing with friends and family members worse than you, as they enter more difficult games and play worse, and then you have to deal with angry teammates as well as the opposing team."



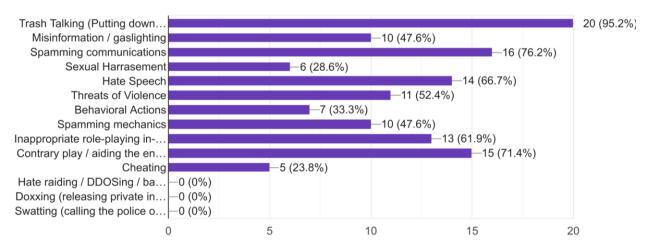
Please select any games you play on this list. 21 responses



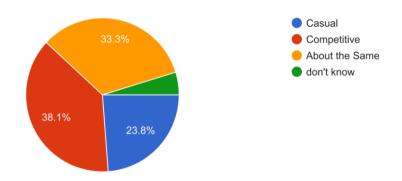
Do you find playing MOBA games makes you angry, impatient, frustrated, or otherwise upset? 21 responses



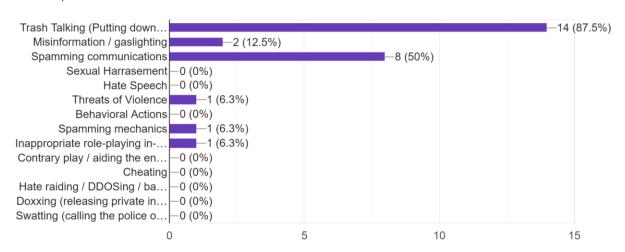
What kind of toxic behavior did you experience when playing MOBA games? 21 responses



Do you find that MOBA games are more toxic in casual or competitive circles? 21 responses



What kind of toxic behavior have you engaged in when playing MOBA games? 16 responses



Tactical Shooter

Rainbow 6 Siege, Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, Valorant, Overwatch, Team Fortress 2

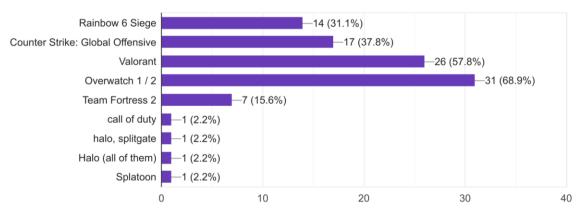
"There are different roles in Overwatch: tank, DPS, and support. I often get toxic when there's a player who can't manage to play decently in any of these roles, especially in competitive mode."

"I only act toxic in response to someone else acting toxic to piss them off."

"If someone talks down to me for performing badly even though I am performing my role fine and they are in fact the one causing the issue, then I will get upset. Otherwise, I don't engage at all in voice chat for fear of harassment."

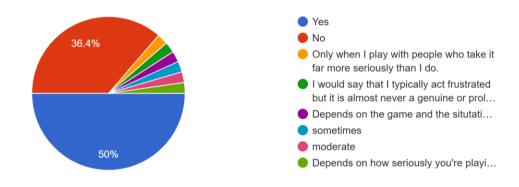


Please select any games you play on this list. 45 responses

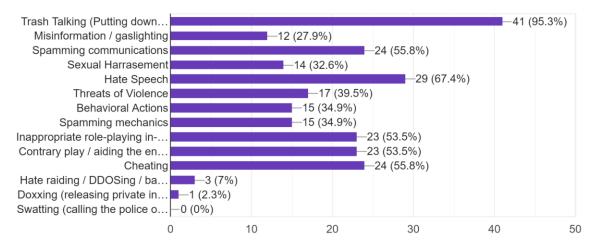


Do you find playing tactical shooter games makes you angry, impatient, frustrated, or otherwise upset?

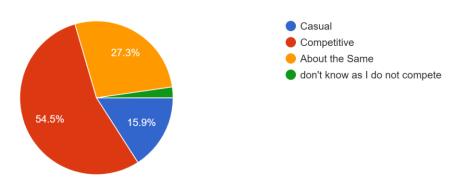
44 responses



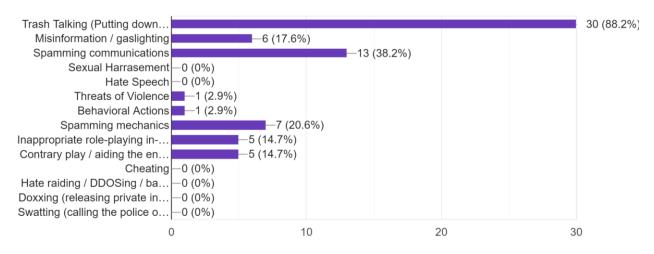
What kind of toxic behavior did you experience when playing tactical shooter games? 43 responses



Do you find that tactical shooter games are more toxic in casual or competitive circles? 44 responses



What kind of toxic behavior have you engaged in when playing tactical shooter games? 34 responses



Twitch Shooter

Call of Duty, Battlefield, Halo, Quake, Unreal Tournament

"Can't be mad if I kick ass at the game"

"They're the best. Arena Shooters are the real shooters."

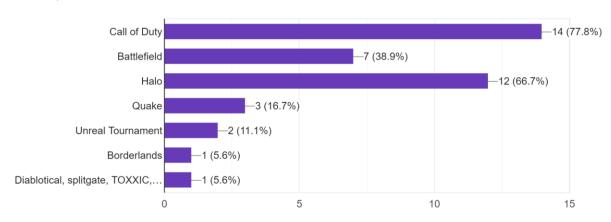
"I feel like cod lobbies are famous for their toxicity. Also is spamming in-game voice lines really considered toxic?"

"If someone talks down to me for performing badly even though I am performing my role fine and they are in fact the one causing the issue, then I will get upset. Otherwise, I don't engage at all in voice chat for fear of harassment."



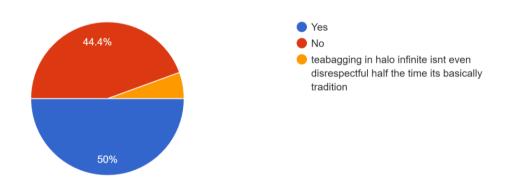
Please select any games you play on this list.

18 responses



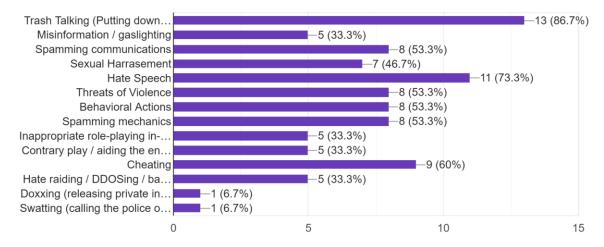
Do you find playing twitch shooter games makes you angry, impatient, frustrated, or otherwise upset?

18 responses

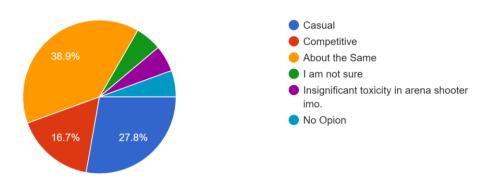


What kind of toxic behavior did you experience when playing twitch shooter games?

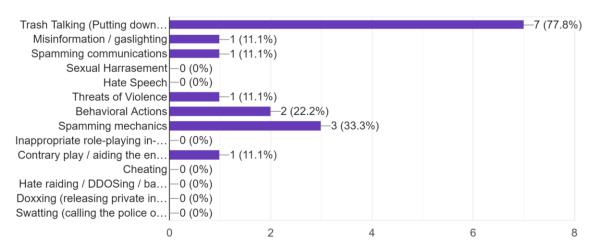
15 responses



Do you find that twitch shooter games are more toxic in casual or competitive circles? 18 responses



What kind of toxic behavior have you engaged in when playing twitch shooter games? 9 responses



Sports Games

Rocket League, Mario Kart, NBA2K, Madden NFL, FIFA, Forza, Formula 1

"If the other team says What A Save quick chats, I promptly shit on them and then reply with toxicity back e.g. What A Save! Close One!"

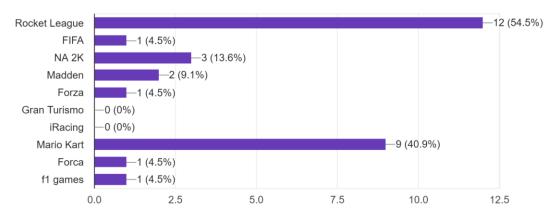
"I get rammed by someone while racing in Forza. Sometimes if I'm really annoyed I might ram them back."

"It's funny and I don't regret my actions."

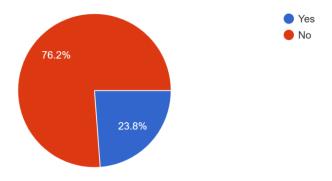
"I've gotten some angry comments in rocket league. My club's name is "We Play Fortnite" because some angry kid was like "I BET YOU PLAY FORTNITE" once during a salty 1v1."



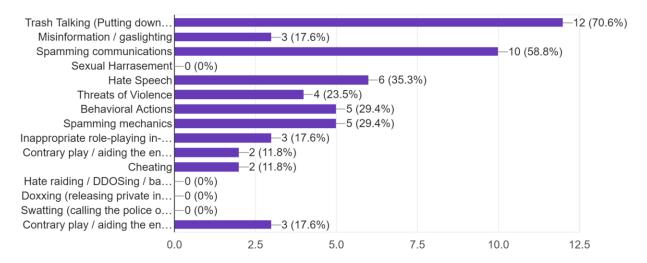
Please select any games you play on this list. 22 responses



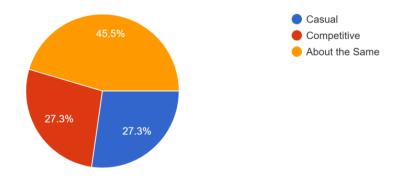
Do you find playing Sports games makes you angry, impatient, frustrated, or otherwise upset? 21 responses



What kind of toxic behavior did you experience when playing Sports games? 17 responses

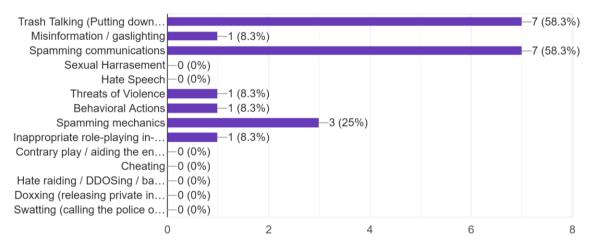


Do you find that Sports games are more toxic in casual or competitive circles? 22 responses



What kind of toxic behavior have you engaged in when playing Sports games?

12 responses



Fighting Games

Super Smash Bros, Guilty Gear, Dragon Ball FighterZ, Street Fighter, Tekken, Mortal Kombat

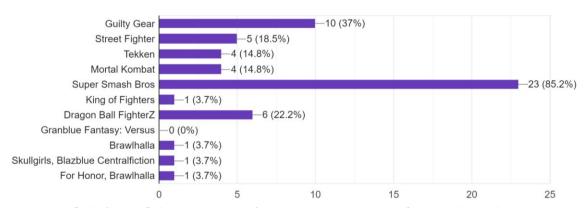
"I'm evil."

"Fighting games feel like they have far less toxicity than other competitive games simply because the communities surrounding them don't really give in to toxicity, but are usually very friendly and welcoming. For other competitive games, I've noticed that the communities, in general, are kind of known for being toxic, which isn't the case for fighting games."

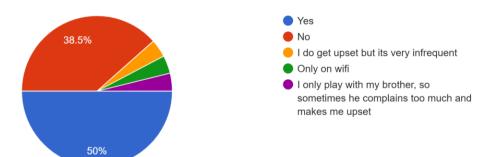
"The fighting game community is much better due to mostly being in person, but Twitter is a nightmare and people are really weird. I think the community and in-person aspect of the FGC generally contributes to a nicer atmosphere."



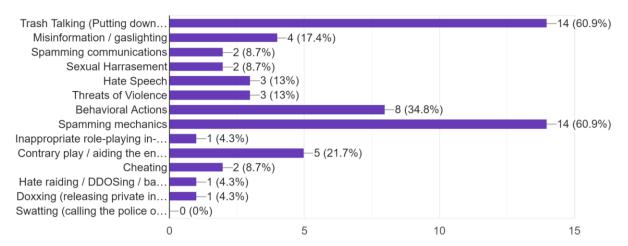
Please select any games you play on this list. 27 responses



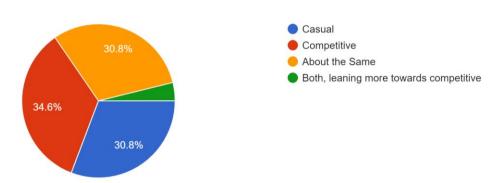
Do you find playing fighting games makes you angry, impatient, frustrated, or otherwise upset? ^{26 responses}



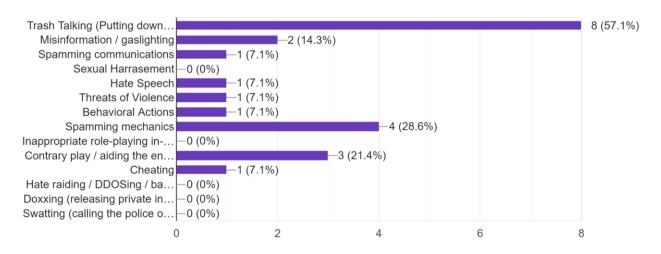
What kind of toxic behavior did you experience when playing fighting games? ^{23 responses}



Do you find that fighting games are more toxic in casual or competitive circles? ^{26 responses}



What kind of toxic behavior have you engaged in when playing fighting games? 14 responses



Massive Multiplayer Online (MMO)

World of Warcraft, Runescape, Lost Ark, Destiny, Final Fantasy 14, Star Wars: The Old Republic

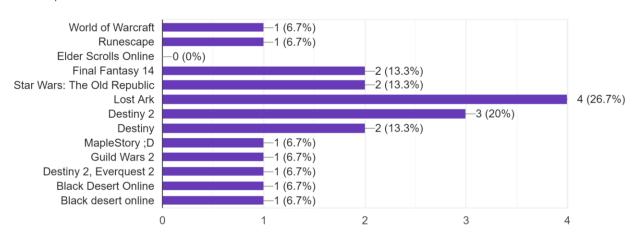
"People on Star Wars: The Old Republic are so nice."

"Toxicity comes primarily from gatekeeping, but it's generally avoidable."

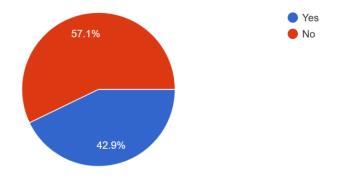
"Someone wasting time by joining a raid they don't know how to clear when we are in a party designated for expert clearers of said raid."

"Some content requiring a major reliance on teammate, and when a teammate refuses to communicate or change their wrong actions" saidavoidable encounter sessions primarily wrong encountering condend clear solo imes generally generally refuses imes generally generally generally generally generally was min starcearers old joining talking actions dailies gatekeeping time actions dailies gatekeeping of time hice expert trash know chances hard

Please select any games you play on this list. 15 responses

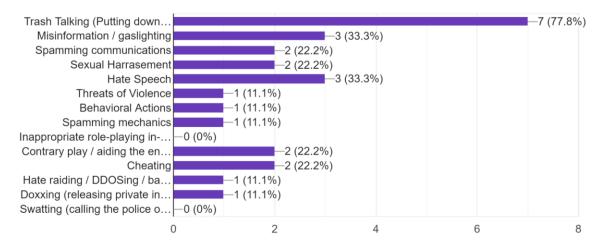


Do you find playing MMO games makes you angry, impatient, frustrated, or otherwise upset? 14 responses

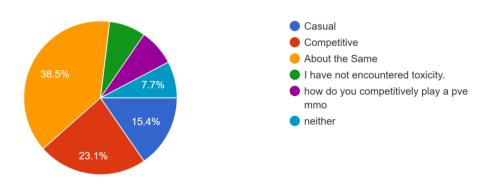


What kind of toxic behavior did you experience when playing MMO games?

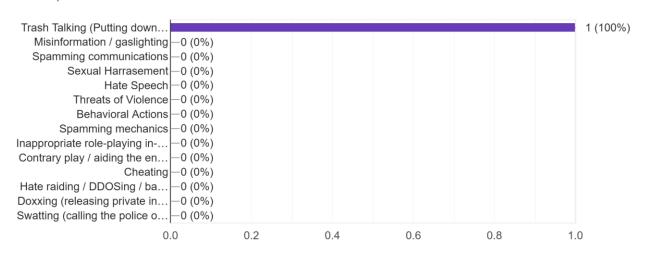
9 responses



Do you find that MMO games are more toxic in casual or competitive circles? 13 responses



What kind of toxic behavior have you engaged in when playing MMO games? 1 response



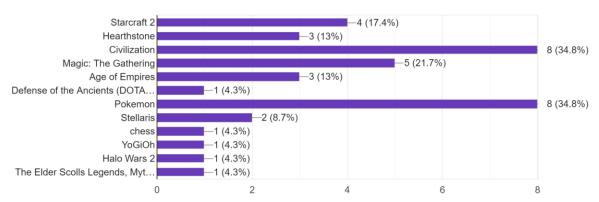
Strategy

Starcraft 2, Hearthstone, Civilization, Pokemon, Magic: The Gathering, Age of Empires

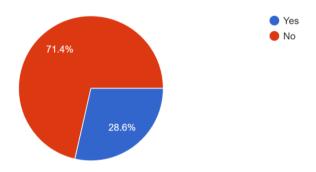
"When I first went to in-person tournaments I was often the only girl competing and there were other boys who would dismiss my abilities because of my gender. Once I got older and more people joined the competitive scene, this became more uncommon - also, online tournaments became more common so nobody could tell my gender, so I received less toxicity. The Pokemon competitive scene has a surprising amount of toxicity for being a game advertised to people of all genders and ages." "Strategy games are typically played either solo or with friends, so naturally I feel like there's less toxicity. When you add people who you don't necessarily have a personal relationship, then I feel like there's more opportunity for toxicity."



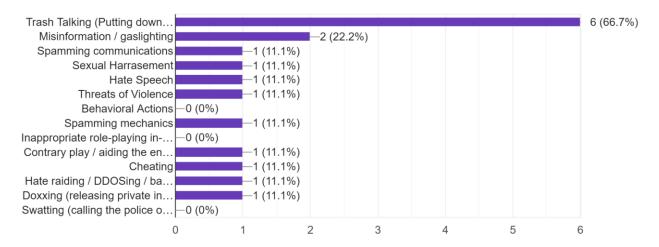
Please select any games you play on this list. 23 responses



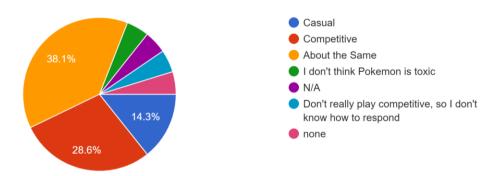
Do you find playing strategy games makes you angry, impatient, frustrated, or otherwise upset? 21 responses



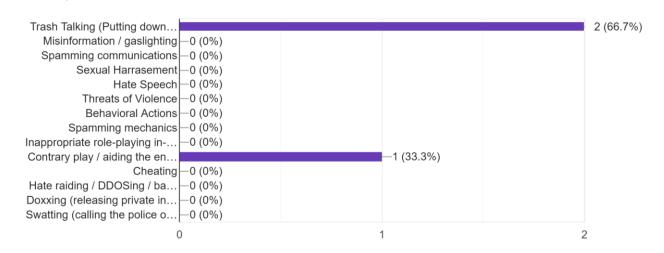
What kind of toxic behavior did you experience when playing strategy games? 9 responses



Do you find that strategy games are more toxic in casual or competitive circles? 21 responses



What kind of toxic behavior have you engaged in when playing strategy games? ³ responses



Battle Royale

Fortnite, Player Unknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG), Apex Legends, CoD: Warzone

"Battle royale games can be very slow at times, and luck overpowers skills in many situations."

"Hard to see toxicity when there is no way to communicate with other players."

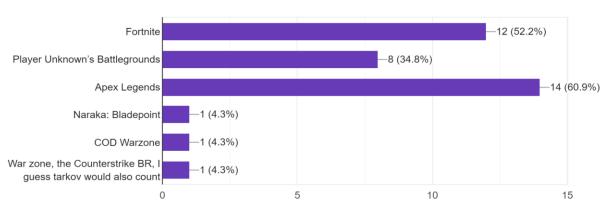
"If the teammate starts toxic talk first."

"Getting third partied."



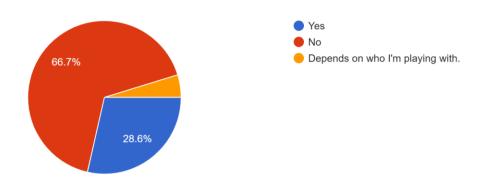
Please select any games you play on this list.

23 responses

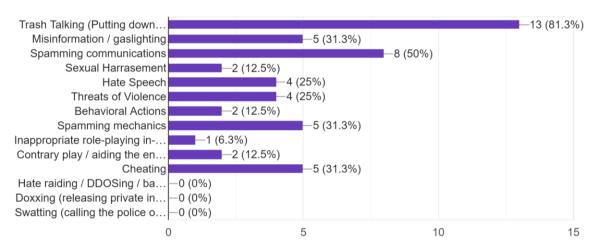


Do you find playing battle royale games makes you angry, impatient, frustrated, or otherwise upset?

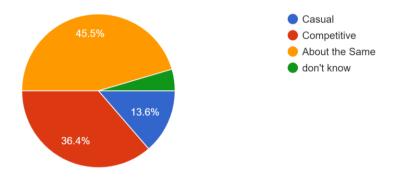
21 responses



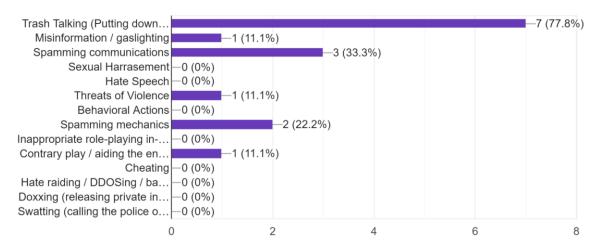
What kind of toxic behavior did you experience when playing battle royale games? 16 responses



Do you find that battle royale games are more toxic in casual or competitive circles? 22 responses



What kind of toxic behavior have you engaged in when playing battle royale games? 9 responses





Conclusion

Our hypothesis that Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) players face the most toxicity online was supported by our data. In the question "How many times have you witnessed toxic behavior in a MOBA game within the last 6 months?", MOBA players responded that 57.1% of them had observed toxicity in the game. 33% also reported that they had been a victim of toxicity in the past 6 months. These were the highest numbers observed out of any game in the survey. One of the major causes appears to be the nature of the game and the skill gap between players. MOBAs are team-based competitive games. Out of all MOBA players, only 38% of them consider themselves to be above average. In MOBAs, the individual player's skill level dramatically dictates their team's performance, and toxicity arises when an imbalance in skill level occurs. Out of all toxic behavior in MOBAs: trash talking, spamming communications, and contrary play ranked the highest. Tactical Shooters rank 2nd highest for similar reasons.

Of note is the relatively low level of toxicity in Fighting games despite how competitive the genre is. Many players attribute this to the greater emphasis on in-person competition. We also found the Battle Royales suffered the least from toxicity by a significant amount. This may be due to the game format discouraging communication between opposing players, or due to players being for accepting of unexpected or "unfair" moments, as that is a core feature of this game type.

We also received multiple accounts from women recounting experiences demonstrating significant discrimination based on gender. Also of note is that the vast majority of our respondents were men, although we did not see a correlation between the number of men vs women in a game type and the level of toxicity, it can be inferred that the generally male-heavy population among videogames at large contributes to this problem.