

THE GEN Z CENSUS

Canadian Edition

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wattpad brand partnerships



EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GEN Z RIGHT NOW

In **marketing**, **brands live and die by data**. And in a world where there's a metric for just about everything, one group refuses to fit into a single checkbox. Gen Z—the cohort of Canadians aged 10-24 born between 1995 and 2009—have tended to elude marketers. After all, how do we quantify or qualify a group of youth whose own self-definitions are constantly evolving? For the first time ever, we're doing just that. Introducing our first-ever Gen Z Census—our deep-dive into everything Gen Z.

In the latest Canadian census conducted in 2016, it was recorded that **50.9%** were female while **49.1%** were male, however the census did not take trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming identities into account.

The most recent Canadian census was conducted in 2016, when even the oldest Gen Zs hadn't yet entered the workforce, with many still in highschool. It's the best source of demographic data we have available in Canada, but even it has shown its weaknesses

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GEN Z RIGHT NOW

when it comes to representation. According to its data, **50.9%** of Canadians were female while **49.1%** were male. But what about trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming identities—of which Gen Z reports higher than average numbers? If you look at the mainstream data, they don't exist. Our census tells us otherwise.

52%
of Gen Z reported
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well-represented in
today's marketing
and branding

Herein lies the challenge for those who live outside the typical norm represented to us in everyday life, whether it's through government forms or our favourite TV shows. The world is changing, and each new generation brings its own set of expectations of how they want their stories told. The kinds of stories being told are beginning to expand and shift. Are brands keeping up? Gen Z doesn't think so.

When we asked, **52%** of Gen Z reported that they do not feel well-represented in today's marketing and branding. Topics like racial identity, sexual orientation, and gender representation are top of mind for this progressive group. If "you do you" is the Gen Z mantra, brands need to amplify and embrace it. They are, after all, a group who celebrates their diversity and radically embraces co-existence. Gen Z's identity is not static, it's dynamic. They refuse to be labelled. There's your easy answer as to why Gen Z hasn't been accurately captured by demographics and census data until now—they don't all fit into the same box. So, for our Gen Z Census, we gave them as many boxes as they needed to truly tell us who they are.

INTRODUCING OUR FIRST COMPREHENSIVE CENSUS OF GEN Z



Adina



Azima

**Some of
our focus group
participants**



Melvina



Ishan

In order to provide brands with a detailed, accurate picture of Gen Z, Wattpad tapped into our voluntary youth panel, Generation Wattpad, representing our most engaged community members, to create a census on Gen Z. We conducted two separate surveys in Canada among hundreds of our panel members and through these surveys we were able to get a grasp on who Gen Z is and what Gen Z looks like as a whole and individually. The results tell us that Gen Z is a unique group focused on social purpose and seeking out all the diversity the real world has to offer. Their online world is important enough to them that they expect it to reflect the real world they live in as opposed to a “perfect” and unrealistic curation.

REPORT METHODOLOGY

Unless otherwise indicated, all data represented in this report is the result of ongoing research with the Canadian members of Wattpad's North American youth panel, Generation Wattpad, made up of youth ages 13-24. The data in this report reflects insights from two surveys conducted each with **380-492 responses** between April and June 2019, as well as from a focus group with 7 participants conducted in Toronto on July 17, 2019. The results are reported at a **95%** confidence level.



WHO IS GEN Z? THE SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS GENERATION.

Summing up Gen Z is a hard task. They are a generation made up of unique individuals who genuinely enjoy and celebrate their differences.

The famous Canadian line, "Canada is not a melting pot, it's a mosaic" applies to Gen Z like no generation before them. Consider this: **45%** of Gen Z identify as a visible minority. One-third (**33%**) were born outside of Canada. **28%** identify as mixed race. And that's just ethnic/racial background. When we delve into sexuality, **25%** of Gen Z say their sexual orientation has changed within the last two years. The change may have come via being exposed to various representations of the LGBTQ+ community or simply through self-reflection.

45%
of Gen Z identify
as a visible
minority

While you can't paint Gen Z with the single stroke of a brush, there are some traits that this generation seems to have in common. Their unique personas and individuality sets them apart from one another but that particular idea of personhood is also what bands them together as a generation.

33%
of Gen Z were
born outside
of Canada

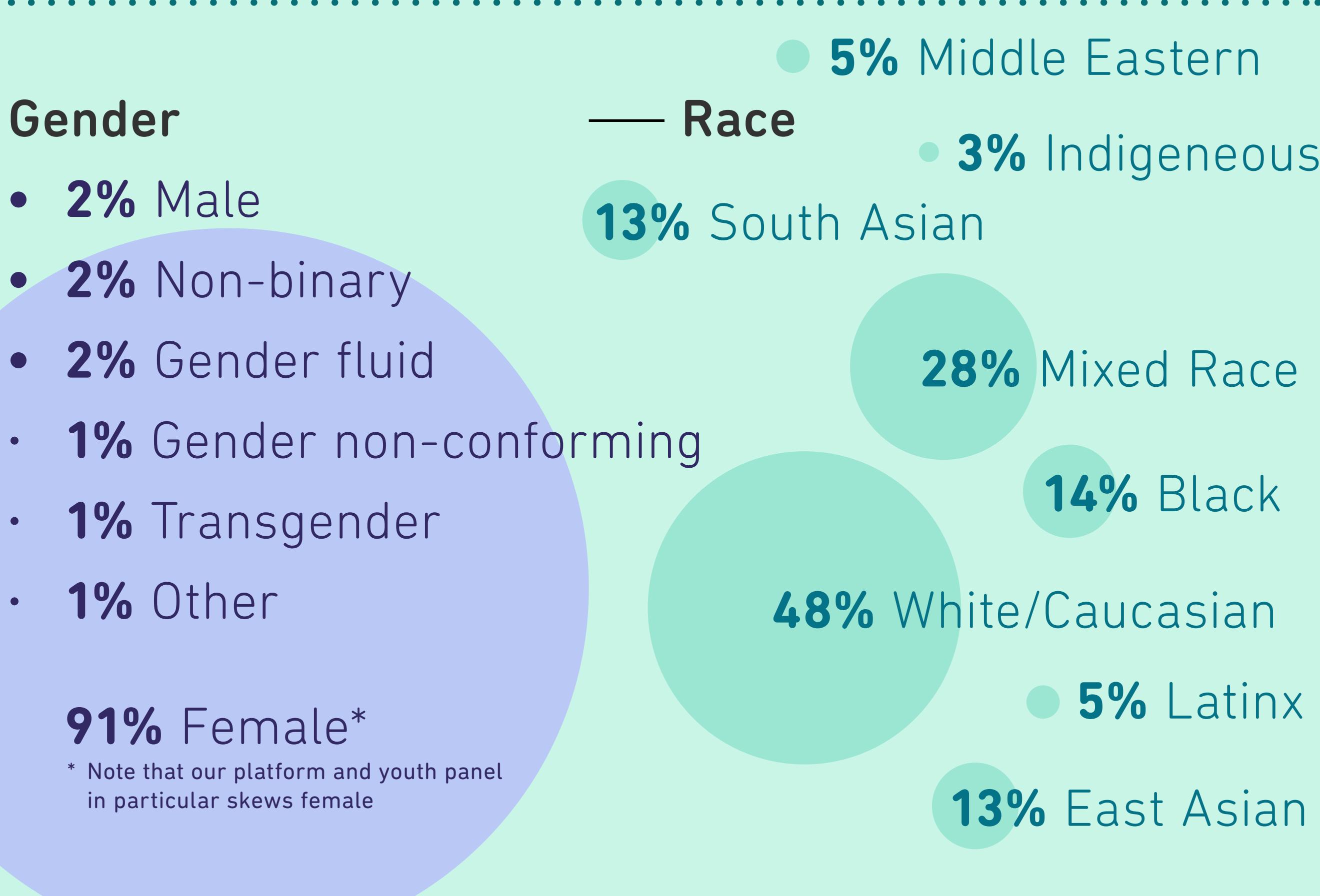
WHO IS GEN Z? THE SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS GENERATION.

Get to really know Gen Z. Based on what we learned about their personality traits, passions, sexual and gender identities, and career aspirations, we created fictional characters that represent the makeup of Gen Z found in the research. In wanting to reach Gen Z, you can ask yourself if your messaging will resonate with the different personas below.



Prefers to keep a small but close circle of friends

- Straight (someone who is attracted to the opposite sex)
- An engineering student
- Loves watching superhero movies
- Is a creature of habit—new things? No thanks.
- Hides from the camera at social events



WHO IS GEN Z?
THE SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS
GENERATION.

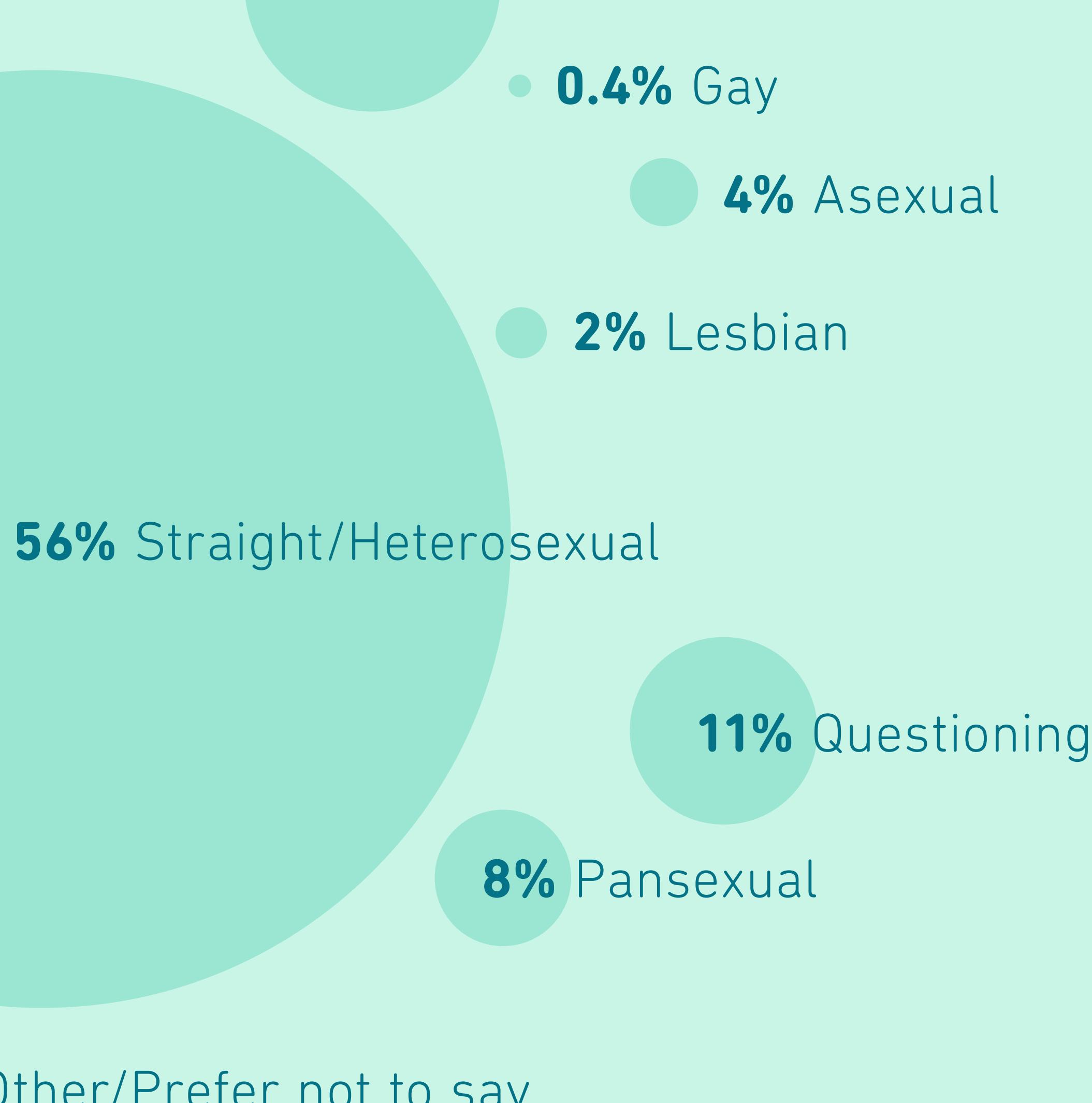
THE EMPATHIZER



Sympathizes with others' feelings and is interested in other people's problems

- Pansexual (not limited in sexual preference with regard to biological sex, gender, or gender identity)
 - Bank teller and part-time writer
 - Loves writing fantasy novels
 - Resident group-chat therapist
 - Wants social equality for everyone
-

Sexuality



WHO IS GEN Z?
THE SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS
GENERATION.



Has a vivid imagination and no shortage of ideas

- Bisexual (sexually attracted to individuals who identify with a partner's sex or gender identity of either male or female), goes by the gender-neutral pronoun "they"
- Media student who wants to work in animation
- Loves watching eGirl/eBoy videos on TikTok
- Loves expressing themselves through personal essays

A photograph of a young man with dark hair, wearing a red and white horizontally striped t-shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a thoughtful expression, his hand resting against his chin. The background is plain white. Overlaid on the left side of the image is the text "THE PHILOSOPHER" in large, stylized letters. The letters are partially cut off by the edge of the frame. The letters are colored in shades of teal and purple.

Loves to think outside the box

- Straight
- Already has three new ideas for his next side-hustle
- Captain of the university debate team
- Sees political action as a route to social justice
- Loves gaming

WHO IS GEN Z?
THE SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS
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Brooklyn THE FEELER

Gets upset and excited easily

- Straight
- Reads Tarot cards as her side-gig
- Posts personalized astrology videos on YouTube
- Is an advocate for mental health

— Relationship Status

88% Single • 1% Engaged

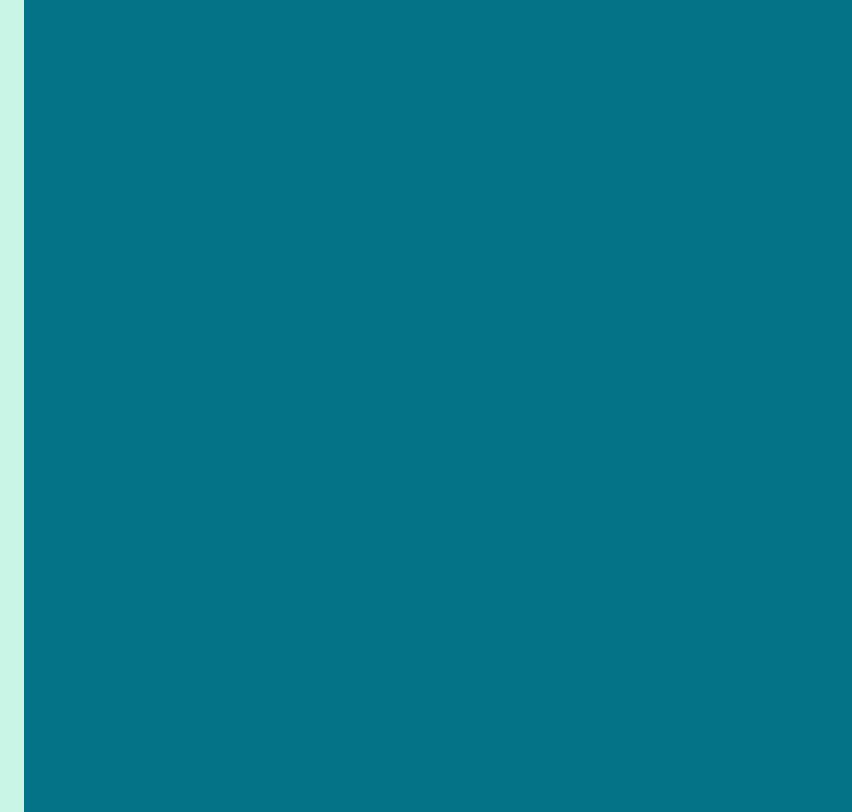
• 8% In a relationship

— Political Stance

7%
Very conservative
to moderately
conservative

33%
Very liberal
to moderately
liberal

60%
Centrists or no
strong opinion



WHO IS GEN Z? THE SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS GENERATION.



Is personable and the life of the party

- Lesbian (an individual who identifies as a women and is solely sexually attracted to women)
 - Studying music
 - Has aspirations to be an influencer
 - Loves volunteering with a local kids' soccer league
 - Is anything but camera-shy
-

— Family Makeup

● **6%** Unmarried/common-law parents

- **0.6%** Same-sex parents

91% Have siblings including step/half/adopted

● **16%** Divorced parents

— School/Work

- **2%** Unemployed and looking for work

● **5%** Part-time/internship

- **4%** Working full time

87% In school

WHAT DOES GEN Z CARE ABOUT? EQUALITY.

Gen Z told us they know individuals who identify across a spectrum of identities. For example, **51%** of Gen Z know someone who identifies as transgender (a person whose sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond with their biological sex). **44%** of Gen Z know someone who identifies as non-binary (a spectrum of gender identities that are not exclusively male or exclusively female). **34%** know someone who identifies as gender fluid (a person who does not identify themselves as having a fixed gender). **33%** know someone who is gender non-conforming

"In order to move forward as a society, we must be inclusive and considerate of all, even if we view things differently than they do."

(gender expression by an individual that does not match masculine or feminine gender expression and performance) and **49%** know someone who uses gender-neutral pronouns such as "they", "them", or "ze." Even **4%** choose to use gender-neutral pronouns themselves. It's unsurprising that they don't feel well-represented in the media, after all respectfully showcasing trans people and gender non-conforming individuals has become a rather recent concept.

WHAT DOES GEN Z CARE ABOUT? EQUALITY.

On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being strongly agree), Gen Z's support for gender-neutral washrooms ranked **4.2** on average. Their belief that everyone should have access to equal rights regardless of race, sexuality, religion, gender and citizenship ranked an average of **4.9**. Gen Z's support of minority groups is loud and clear. One member of Generation Wattpad stated, "In order to move forward as a society, we must be inclusive and considerate of all, even if we view things differently than they do." Overall, equality and equity are obvious human rights to Gen Z. They don't ask why minorities should have equal rights, but instead they ask *why not?*

On a scale of 1 to 5, Gen Z's support of a numerical intake of immigrants in Canada ranked **3.6**. "I don't think I have to write an essay on why all human beings should be treated equally," said another member of Generation Wattpad. It's a no-brainer. To Gen Z, all humans deserve equal rights and all humans deserve to see themselves represented in the brands they support.

"We're all human,
why can't it be
that simple?"

"I don't think I have
to write an essay on
why all human beings
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Spectrum of Identities



On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you...

...believe that public spaces should provide access to gender neutral bathrooms?

4.2 Very supportive

...agree that your country should increase rights for people who identify as transgender?

4.3 Very much agree

...agree that your country should increase the number of immigrants accepted each year?

3.6 No opinion to fully supportive

...agree that everyone should have access to equal rights regardless of race, religion, sexuality, gender and citizenship?

4.9 Strongly agree

CONFIDENCE IS MORE THAN JUST A #SELFIEMONDAY

While individuality may be celebrated (and protected) amongst Gen Z, it can still be a point of contention amongst the group. As the first digital natives, Gen Z has grown up in an online world every bit as real as the “real world.” Because of this, Gen Z has become very concerned with how they look, which, perhaps, is the reason why they have become known for being such a “vain” generation. It goes deeper than that, though. According to Business Insider¹, Gen Z is the most photographed generation, they just can’t seem to escape the camera.



“Parties, gatherings, going out with friends somewhere. I was afraid someone would start some sort of typical high school drama and share videos where I am included somewhere in the back, or that they’d judge me for how I looked.”

¹www.businessinsider.com/gen-z-most-photographed-generation-changes-shopping-habits-2019-6

CONFIDENCE IS MORE THAN JUST A #SELFIEMONDAY

A full half (**50%**) of Gen Z told us they have opted out of extracurricular activities due to the way they look while **25%** of Gen Z have opted out for fear of themselves being recorded/photographed and posted on the Internet.

When asked to elaborate on some of their concerns in regards to their confidence and social media, one Generation Wattpad member said, “[I avoid] parties, gatherings, [and] going out with friends. I was afraid someone would start some sort of typical high school drama and share videos where I am included somewhere in the back, or that they’d judge me for how I looked.” Another member said, “I opted out of participating in student council/other assemblies at school because I was worried that people would laugh at me and send Snapchats of me to others.”

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"I opted out of participating in student council/assemblies at school because I was worried that people would laugh at me and send Snapchats of me to others."

A lack of self-confidence seems to be a common concern amongst Gen Z, which often happens when only one type of media representation is considered “valid.” It’s difficult to have confidence in one’s individuality and unique characteristics when society keeps telling you those traits are wrong or unattractive.

A MENTAL HEALTH EPIDEMIC

Unsurprisingly, it can be hard to hear that something is wrong with your generation day in and day out. As a whole, **17%** of Gen Z have experienced mental illness and **46%** identify with experiencing a mental health challenge. The most commonly diagnosed mental health challenges within the generation are depression and anxiety. Part of this epidemic seems to stem from the pressures of growing up and the constant expectation to succeed.

Making the transition from childhood to adulthood can be a difficult one, especially in a stage of your life where you're unsure of what you want to do or who you want to be. A whopping **83%** of Gen Z said they agreed or strongly agreed with the following statement: "I feel [or felt] overwhelmed navigating the transition from being a teenager to an adult." **From our focus group, one of the participants described university as being the step between being a teenager and becoming an adult.** It's not surprising that Gen Z feels overwhelmed in regards that truth. **Their generation is growing up in a climate in which no other generation has experienced.**



As the first digital natives, Gen Z are faced with the reality of seeing “success” in a variety of forms within their Internet world. The pressure can mount, quickly becoming overwhelming and causing a direct need for personal support. When it comes to finding the support they need, two thirds of Gen Z turn toward religion or spirituality while **88%** say they have at least one close friend they can share their personal troubles with.

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GEN Z HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

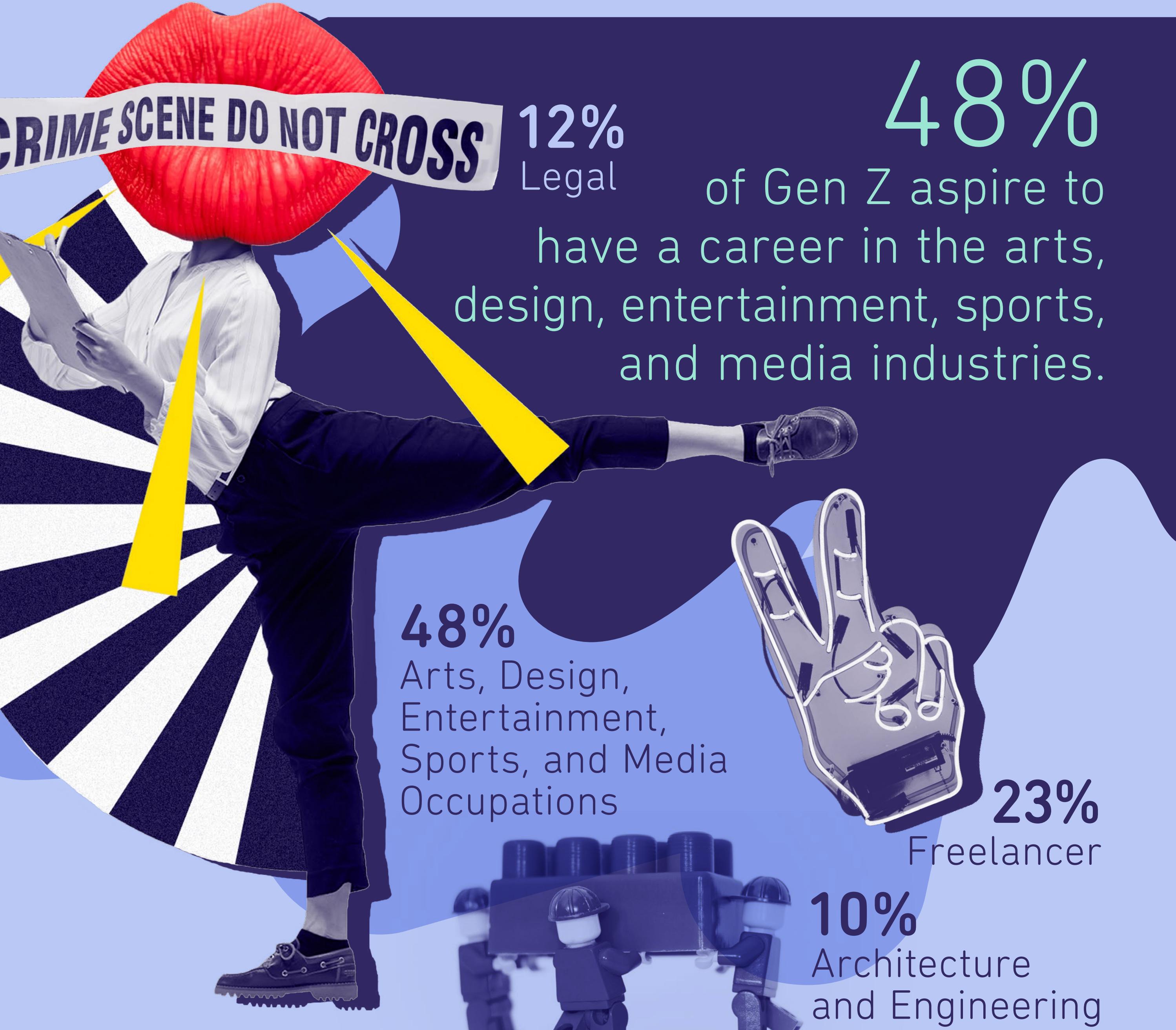
As noted, Gen Z have faced extreme pressure to succeed. They have been raised by Gen X, a generation born between 1965-1980 (39-54 years old) commonly known as the “cynics”. Many of them fell out of job security during the recession and they encourage their children to strive for society’s definition of “stability.” For this reason, Gen Z is fairly aspirational, but this shouldn’t be mistaken for being overly confident in

“Society expects you to choose a job that benefits others and that is useful. Your parents either expect you to follow in their exact footsteps or do something that will make you money more than it will make you happy.”

their ability to find success. One member of Generation Wattpad said, “There is pressure to figure out what we want to do with our lives now, which can be stressful for a high school student.” The idea of basing your life goals and dreams around the thoughts you have as a teenager can be terrifying. What if you grow up to hate your job? Or what if you realize you’re no good at what you picked at sixteen? It’s a difficult choice to make.

“There is pressure to figure out what we want to do with our lives now, which can be stressful for a high school student.”

Career Aspirations



On a scale from 1 to 10 (with 10 being strongly agree), Gen Z said they feel a **6.6** in terms of feeling pressure from parents, teachers, peers, and society to succeed. Another member of Generation Wattpad said, "Society expects you to choose a job that benefits others and that is useful. Your parents either expect you to follow in their exact footsteps or do something that will make you money more than it will make you happy."

"When I was a kid I was really pressured to be a doctor or a lawyer, but as I grew up I convinced [my family] that I like animation and film."

Much like previous generations before them, Gen Z feels immense pressure to achieve stable careers in medical and law fields, but unlike previous generations almost half (**48%**) of Gen Z still aspire to have a career in the arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media industries (when asked to select all that apply).

More interestingly, despite the pressure for stability, plenty of Gen Z aspire to be their own boss and work as a freelancer, controlling their schedule and work-life balance without the looming figure of a boss. However, many see the notion of pursuing freelance work full time to be a career risk in terms of its stability and longevity, and with the pressure from society to have traditional careers, they may choose to gain stable full-time jobs and pursue their passions as a side hustle. Surprisingly, **11%** of Gen Z have aspirations to become an influencer, a career path that has only recently gained traction in the past decade. Although as a whole, power/influence is the least motivating career motivator.

Despite the pressure from their parents, Gen Z also aspires to prove that their dreams are worth fighting for. From our focus group, one member said, "When I was a kid I was really pressured to be a doctor or a lawyer, but as I grew up I convinced [my family] that I like animation and film." It took some time, but eventually their parents were able to see that his dreams were valid and worthy of pursuing. Another focus group participant said that her Nigerian parents were once strict about the idea of her becoming an engineer but since moving to Canada they have become more relaxed in their expectations.

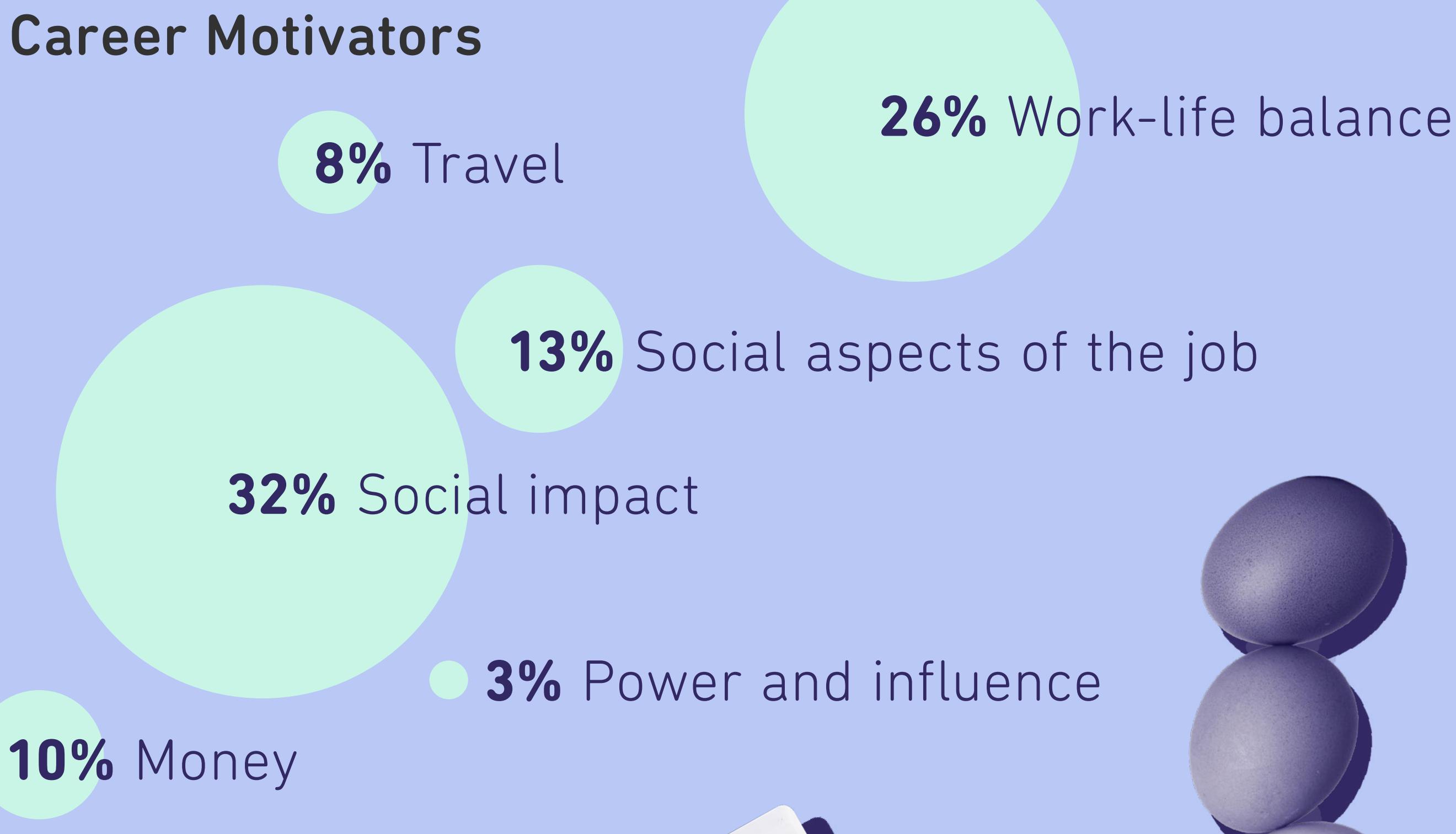
Career Aspirations



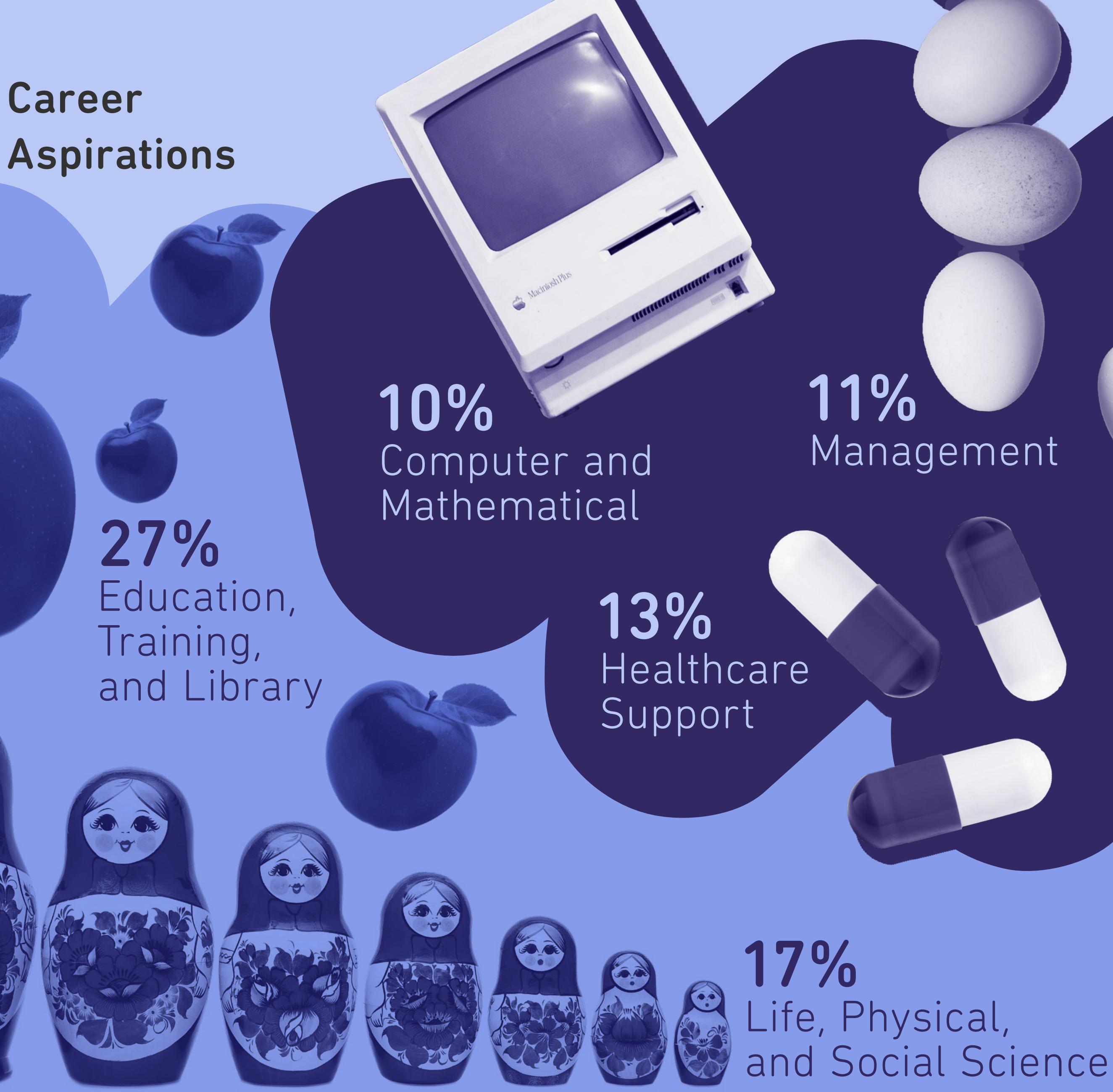
GEN Z HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

Regardless of the societal pressure put on them to succeed, Gen Z remains cautiously optimistic about their aspirations. Only **17%** feel unsure of which career path they would like to pursue in general. Taking this a step further, only **15%** of Gen Z feel that money is the main motivator for their future career. The most important motivator for their career is social impact-making a difference by working for a company that truly cares is **32%** of Gen Z's greatest aspirations.

Career Motivators



Career Aspirations



MARKET TO THE INDIVIDUAL

Understanding Gen Z requires an empathetic point-of-view. They are a generation not only looking to be seen but also to be heard. As a social group, Gen Z celebrates their differences but still have their own insecurities about the things that may set them apart from one another. While insecurities are a natural part of life, there are active decisions that can reduce the anxiety Gen Z feels in their everyday lives. Striving for better representation in marketing and allowing Gen Z to see themselves in the face of their favourite brands would invoke confidence and a deeper connection. Gen Z's attitude toward equality is a powerful indication in regards to the types of marketing Gen Z reacts strongly to.



As they are a colourful mosaic, representation of Gen Z is not a one size fits all solution. They are discerning in regards to which brands deserve their attention and support, thus marketers need to be aware of what they're putting out there and who it's for. It's not enough to capitalize on trends or hop on bandwagons,

as Gen Z can tell the real from the fake. The real isn't always beautiful, nor does it need to be presented that way, but so long as the real is represented we can strive to make a change for the better. Already, pop culture is striving toward making a difference with the types of representation given—take for example HBO's diverse cast in *Euphoria* or Netflix's children's series *Julie's Greenroom*, which gives representation to children of colour, children with disabilities, and children who are gender non-conforming. While we could consider these to be "trends," they aren't trends to be taken lightly. Diversity is more than just a simple hashtag, it's the reality of Gen Z.

In order to create a genuine connection with Gen Z, brands need to care about celebrating the differences that make everyone an individual. Don't just market your brand, help Gen Z market themselves. Running a successful brand of the future, marketers should expect to not only mimic the values of their audience but learn to understand those values and why they're important. As a social platform, Wattpad is home to the most diverse and inclusive group of Gen Z on the internet. Our previous research (such as **JOMO: The Joy of Missing Out - How Gen Z is finding balance in an upside down world**) revealed to us that they come to Wattpad because they can be their most authentic selves without fear of criticism or exclusion. It's no wonder, then, that brands who want to reach a diverse, Gen Z audience, are looking to Wattpad. It's the platform where 80 million monthly users go to find their voice and connect through the power of story. As a community, Wattpad is home to virtually every background, belief, and identity, and a place where anyone in the world, from LGBTQ+ people to racial minorities, can find a community that represents themself.

WANT TO REACH GEN Z? WORK WITH A GEN Z-FIRST COMPANY.

To learn how some of the world's top brands have tapped into the diverse and positive community on Wattpad, from T-Mobile's #UnlimitedPride write-a-thon to National Geographic's #PlanetOrPlastic global writing contest, get in touch.

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