Gaming - Where the Fun Ends

Gaming is a big trend, half of Europe plays video games. Playing games is fun and can transport interesting content. There is a lot of interaction on gaming platforms and in chats. However, they are also abused for spreading hate and agitation. This contributes to the division of our society. We have to do something about this!

#TAKEPART-Stories – an initiative of Deutsche Telekom AG
Facilitator’s guide for a workshop (approx. 90 minutes)


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In the course of this workshop, the topic “Gaming - Where the fun ends” will be explored in more detail: What is it about and why is it important to take action?

The workshop emphasizes the following key points:

1. The gaming industry becomes more and more relevant for our economy.

2. Games teach values – they can be anti-democratic or democratic.

3. Not every game or all gamers contribute to spreading hate - it is not about attacking the industry and the community, but about raising awareness of abuse and hidden manipulation.

4. Games and the corresponding platforms are underestimated as a communication medium and it goes far beyond gaming.

5. Special about games is that problematic values hide in game design and game elements. Extreme views appear more acceptable.

6. Gaming is especially interesting for abuse because platforms are little regulated.

7. There are approaches to stop hate in games and to convey positive values.

8. Everyone can do something against the division of society.

This guide is also available in other versions, for workshops of 25 and 45 minutes.

In the sections entitled “Structure” are recommendations on how to present and discuss each passage.

In the sections entitled “What to say” are suggestions on things to say and questions to ask.

In the sections entitled “Additional information” you can find background information for your preparation and in case of questions.

To conduct this workshop, you will need:

- a laptop or other device with internet access.
- a projector or monitor connected to your laptop or other device.
- a second terminal, e.g. a smartphone, is practical for the avatar exercise, in order to avoid switching between screens.

Additional information:

- The image pages provided in the module work best in full-screen mode. Full-screen mode is available in virtually all internet browsers (check settings).

- Suggestions for email invitations and communication after the workshop are provided as well.

Enjoy!
Be Whoever You Want to Be! (1/3)

STRUCTURE

Short welcome by the facilitators, introduction of the topic follows on image 2.

Start of the avatar exercise that accompanies the workshop throughout (see “Additional Information” for details). Important: do not say much about the exercise so that the surprise effect is not lost.

Leave a short break so that everyone can log-on to the exercise and get their avatar. Do not discuss this part or only answer clarifying questions.

WHAT TO SAY

“Welcome to the workshop “Gaming - Where the fun ends”.
I am (personal introduction).

Before we start the workshop, I ask you to use your smartphone or other device to scan the QR code or type in the link and open it.

A few questions will appear - please answer them spontaneously. Everything else will follow during the workshop - stay tuned!
Urgent request: don’t show your avatar to anyone until the end of the workshop - as it is in games, of course it’s also about winning: And not everyone arrives at the destination...”
This is where the avatar exercise starts, which on the one hand accompanies the workshop in a playful way, on the other hand brings a kind of self-know-ledge: You are easily caught in the game by the character and the story and hardly notice what is being transported at the same time! The avatars and their characteristics consciously correspond to certain stereotypes - but this should not be communicated to the participants and will be dissolved at the end. The game works like an interaction. However, the participants don't really have a choice - as it is sometimes the case in video games. The insight at the end is due to the fact that all three avatars face the same challenges during the game. Depending on the respective avatar and its stereotype, they react differently and without the possibility of taking influence.

Please do not comment on the avatars or the procedure at this point!

By scanning the QR code or typing the link with a separate device, the participant view opens first. The participants select an avatar here. The facilitator's view is hidden behind an invisible button. To get there, click in the upper left quarter of the screen. The password to open the facilitator’s view is “Game”. Here you can start the three challenges of the exercise individually.

After the first “log-in” of all participants on their devices, you take over the control via your device. There are three challenges in total. You, as the facilitator, can start them via your view. To do this, click on 1, 2 or 3. You can find out when to start the challenges in this guide. In addition, the corresponding places on the image pages are marked in color at the bottom right.

The number of participants for this exercise does not matter. But it should look like an individual assignment of the avatars, so don’t let them discuss it!

The conclusion of this exercise takes place at the end of the workshop together.

In the facilitator’s view, you cannot see what the participants see. We recommend that you try the avatar exercise yourself before the workshop. To do this, log in as a participant and also as a facilitator.

Attention: If you refresh the browser, a new QR code and also a new link will always be generated. A new login is then required.
If you are conducting the workshop face-to-face and not all participants have a device on them, you can simply skip the first page. For the face-to-face version of the avatar exercise, playing cards are available for download, which you can print out in the appropriate number. Cut them out and hand them over to the participants. In this case, we recommend you to randomly assign the avatars to the participants, without prior questions. The playing cards for printing can be found in TAKEPART-stories under Topics/Gaming and the corresponding workshop.

If participants do not take part in the avatar exercise, it is a pity, but not a problem - you can still conduct the workshop.
Show picture and read out speaker notes

"For the next 90 minutes, these are our topics:

- Gaming has long since arrived everywhere in our society.
- People play games on gaming platforms and interaction takes place.
- Games convey values - and they are not always positive.
- Gaming platforms and communities are abused for spreading hate and manipulating others.
- What can we do against it?

In this workshop, some terms will come up repeatedly, so here is their explanation in advance:

- **Gaming**: Generic term for playing video games and everything associated with them. This term is also used for the interaction of gamers via different media while playing the game, as well as the story that the game follows.

- **Gaming platforms**: Websites and apps for buying video games but also for networking and interaction. Example: Steam.

- **Gaming community**: Community of people who come together on the internet because they share the same interests, e.g. playing games, talking about them, or watching others play.

- **Streaming**: Gamers broadcast their games live on the internet and comment on the gameplay for their audience. Largest game streaming platform: Twitch.

- **Social media**: Websites and apps on which people interact, like, share and comment on content. Examples: Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, or Discord - a platform that is particularly popular among gamers.
Before we get started, let’s dive into a little introduction!

There are several alternatives for the introduction round, depending on how many participants are in the room and whether you conduct the workshop online or face-to-face. Here are just suggestions:

Classic introduction round with time limit:
Do you know the 10 sec. rule or match rule? Everyone has so much time to say something about themselves, until 10 seconds are over, or a match is burned down!

Topic related introduction round: Ask questions and have the participants stand up or make a sign in online events for everyone to see, e.g.:
- Who of you has ever played video games?
- Who of you has played together with others online and live?
- Who of you plays regularly:
  - At least 1 time per week?
  - At least 1 time per day?
  - More than 1 hour per day?
- Who of you has ever watched a video on a game streaming platform?
- Who of you has heard of eSports?
- Who of you has heard of hate in games or on gaming platforms?
- Who of you has been verbally attacked online?

Topic related introduction round with further inquiry: limit yourself to only a few questions, but call upon individual participants and let them explain their answer, e.g.:

- (Name), you just made it clear that you’ve already been confronted with hate on gaming platforms. Tell us briefly what the hate was targeted to/give us an example.

In the digital world, many things are possible. You can meet people, exchange opinions, get information, play video games by yourself or together with others. The gaming industry is booming. It stands for fun, interaction and teamwork.

But the digital world has its downsides as well. For many, this is unexpected when it comes to gaming, especially if you think it’s all about the game. When people are insulted and excluded in gaming communities or streams because of their gender, origin or sexuality; when games are programmed serving enemy images and stereotypes, this conveys values that have a negative impact on our society. That’s where the fun ends!
This workshop is not about a sweeping conviction of an industry. Not all games, not all gamers contribute to spreading hate and anti-democratic values. This workshop wants to draw attention to the fact that things happen on the internet, even if we don’t consciously perceive or notice them. To the fact that we all must raise our awareness for the abuse of digital platforms for hidden manipulation and for its possible consequences in the analog world - also in connection to gaming.

Now, let’s have a look at where the fun ends!”

Deutsche Telekom is fighting for an internet free from hate, also when it comes to gaming. This is only one example of how online hate shifts and spreads in unexpected ways. More information to be found in our topic special #TAKEPART – No hate speech at: https://www.telekom.com/no-hate-speech
First: Show picture and read out speaker notes

Then at the end: Start challenge 1 at that point in the moderation interface. Initiate the challenge by clicking on the corresponding button on your device and wait briefly until everyone has solved the task (this will happen very quickly, as everything is predetermined, even if it doesn’t seem so).

“Is gaming actually relevant? Isn’t it more of a marginal phenomenon? No. Gaming has arrived everywhere in society! Hard to believe? Well, here are some numbers:

Around 3.1 billion people play video games worldwide – that is about 40% of the world’s population. In Germany it’s more than 34 million people.

What do you think: Are there more men than women who play?

The proportion of female and male video game players is fairly evenly distributed. But the situation is changing. According to different studies the proportion of female video game players is growing rapidly. In terms of age it is also maybe a little different from what one would expect, it’s not only very young people that play video games: 5 million players are older than 60 years in Germany. The age average is 36 years.

And even if gaming sounds like a free time activity, many people make their money with video games. In 2019, the turnover of the video game industry amounted to 6.2 billion Euros in Germany. That’s more than the revenue of the film or the music industry. For example, in Germany in 2020 around 30,000 people earned their living with gaming. But you can also earn money by playing video games - with streaming, for example.

Streaming means filming yourself while playing a video game and broadcasting it via online platforms such as Twitch. You comment on the game and moderate the corresponding chat. So, it’s not just the gaming that’s important, but also the entertainment. Popular streamers can earn up to 40,000 Euros a month through advertising, subscriptions and donations. Their reach makes them interesting. Meanwhile, they are often approached by game publishers to present new games on their channels.
But gaming has also become a competitive sport. Gamers sometimes earn their entire living through video game competitions - also known as eSports. In addition to countless smaller tournaments, there are major international championships. They are held in stadiums and usually broadcasted live online. One of these championships paid out a record of 30.7 million Euros prize money. Almost 450 million people worldwide watched eSports events online in 2019 - and the trend is rising. Almost ¼ of Germans can imagine eSports becoming an Olympic discipline.

As you can see, gaming has become a relevant medium. But where does the hate come into play?"

eSports are divided into three categories:
• Shooters e.g. “Counter-Strike” and “Fortnite”
• (Real-time) strategy games e.g. “Dota: Defense of the Ancient”
• Sports or racing simulations e.g. the soccer simulation “FIFA 20”

The largest market share - financially as well as in terms of the number of players and viewers - is taken by real-time strategy games. This is followed by shooters and the sports simulation genre.
“Online hate is on the rise. In today’s workshop, we are particularly interested in strategic hate, also known as hate speech. Hate speech aims at excluding people based on their group affiliation and to drive them out of the internet. For example, in Germany around 75% of female politicians and journalists have already been victims of hate speech. It is not about them as a person, but about their role in opinion shaping. When they withdraw, their opinion and perspective is missing. This is a problem for a balanced opinion forming process, where everyone decides for themselves what is important to them and what should be considered.

The insulting language towards people and groups leads to an ever-greater division of society. Boundaries of what can be said are shifting, misanthropic statements are becoming the norm.

To clarify the terms around online hate:
Cyberbullying is understood as insulting, threatening, exposing or harassing people. Cyberbullying is clearly directed against a specific person who is targeted intentionally, systematically and on a long-term basis on the internet. Cyberbullying often has a history of bullying in the analogue world, e.g. in the schoolyard.

All of us can be confronted with hate comments - usually when posting something that others don't like - swear words to extreme language are used, but often they stop and are not as much directed at the person as at the statement.

Hate speech is strategically used hate, especially against minorities - clear goal: silencing - driving people and groups out of the internet. This is the type of hate we are referring to in this workshop.

There is a special workshop on the topic “Digital Civil Courage – How to get over the state of shock” and a topic special against online hate by Deutsche Telekom on the company website www.telekom.com/no-hate-speech.
But what does gaming have to do with hate?

On the one hand, there are increasingly strict regulations for social media such as Facebook and Twitter and for the responsibility they must take on regarding hate on their platforms. This leads to an increase in people’s awareness of online hate and to a better prosecution.

Unfortunately, it also leads to a shift of groups that spread strategic hate to less regulated platforms.

Games and the corresponding platforms are still clearly underestimated as communication media, and it goes far beyond gaming. This means that hate is also spread on gaming platforms.”
“Media have an enormous influence on our idea of reality. They also teach us a lot of things that determine our own norms and values. Games as a medium are of course no exception. Especially because they are very intense and combine language, text, sound and moving images.

Now let’s talk about the positive effects that games can have.

• Who of you has already played a game that taught e.g. democratic values or in which you could take on the perspective of another person and thereby get a realistic picture of their situation? Do you remember the name of the game or what it was about? What did you find interesting?

• And as a comparison: (number) of you said that you have already played a game that conveyed positive values. How many of you have played a shooter game where you had to kill other people or monsters?

How do games work in transporting positive values?

The interactive processes in games often require our decision. This is then immediately carried on in the game. While playing, we fall back on learned norms and values and apply them, for example when we meet other gamers. However, we also encounter predesigned characters and ways of acting that are laid out in the story. This also allows us to get to know new perspectives. Games can therefore make a great contribution to more diverse perspectives in our society.

Games also have the power to address social and political issues in a critical but playful way. With the help of playful processes, they can support media competence and the formation of democratic values. Serious games provide knowledge, train skills and our behavior in addition to being fun to play. Winning is not the main goal but gaining awareness of the conveyed content and going through a special experience is.
What Games Can Do as Well (2/3)

74% of the parents in Germany say they have already used serious games with their children.

What are the topics that those games deal with?

There are games that deal with historical facts. In the German game “Through the Darkest of Times” you can take on the role of a resistance fighter in Nazi Germany. Another game “The Game is not over” by Anne Frank educational institution simulates the life of a young person who slides into antisemitism and conspiracy ideologies. The aim of the game is that educators and young people can recognize such processes and prevent them in their peer group. There are also games simulating the life of refugees, like the game “Salaam”. It was designed by Lual Mayen, who himself fled from Sudan. Escape and displacement with all its consequences are brought to life, especially for young people.

Serious games can also teach people how to deal with fake news in the media. Examples are games such as “Bad News” and the German game “Fake it to make it”. They create awareness of how fake and misleading news can manipulate opinions. And we can learn to deal with the media in a competent and critical way.

Teaching knowledge or values and gaming therefore are a perfect match. Games make an important contribution to improving media literacy.

- Did any of the examples particularly appeal to you and would you want to try it out? Which one and why?”
The video game “The Game is not over” by the Anne Frank educational institution was still in production when this module was published.

Other examples of serious games:

“Darfur is dying”:
The video game deals with the situation of refugees in Darfur in Sudan. One of the central tasks in the game is to collect water from a militarily controlled source without being caught. In addition, you can help with various problems in the village and, in the final level of the game, you can rebuild a burnt village and cultivate fields together with other gamers.

“Jessika”:
This game draws attention to racism and radicalization in our society. You slip into the role of Jessika, who committed suicide. The game aims to demonstrate what makes people join radical groups.
Why Does Hate Play a Role in Games? (1/3)

Show picture and read out speaker notes

„Why does hate play a role and why is there room for hate in video games?

Chat features and comment functions in video games and on gaming platforms play an important role. On the one hand, they offer opportunities for interaction, for example for better coordination and alignment in the game. But they also offer space for hate. While many social networks today are regulated by laws, such as the German Network Enforcement Act, and counter speech and resistance exist, hate speech in games often remains without consequence. Thus, victims of hate speech in gaming feel unprotected. There are ways to report content and punish those who spread hate and agitation, but they often remain unused. At the same time, misanthropic statements in the game are hardly noticed or deliberately ignored in order to remain in the game.

Hate comments can arise spontaneously. If players lose the game, they might give voice to their anger. Hate speech, however, is planned and targeted, i.e. strategic manipulation that has nothing to do with the game.

Groups that have been banned from social networks like Facebook or have to fear regulation find a new space to manipulate and spread hate. Political ideologies, especially from the far-right spectrum, are spread on gaming platforms - sometimes hidden behind harmless-sounding statements, but sometimes also very explicitly and with a sharp tone. Uninvolved players cannot always withstand. Because what occurs in the social networks as a phenomenon of opinion-making also applies here: the more often certain messages are repeated, the greater the likelihood that they will be accepted as facts or “sayables”, because they automatically seem less absurd or off-putting. A habituation effect or dulling occurs.

But values and world views are also created by the game itself. Many game characters serve classic clichés and stereotypes - and thus reinforce the role models in the minds of gamers without them noticing. A rather unknown game is “Project Makeover”, addressed to girls in puberty. It’s about a girl’s boyfriend turning to someone else and you must decide whether to make him jealous or win him back. Both are achieved by revising the girl’s appearance, for which you also get feedback regarding the “fashion intelligence quotient”.
It’s clear that you’ll win your boyfriend back if you take off your glasses for 100 points and put on sexy clothes and make-up! Otherwise: Tough luck - the boy walks off with the other girl. Because normal, natural-looking girls don’t stand a chance in the battle for the first place with boys!

Political ideologies are also placed in games. An extreme example of this is the German game “Heimat Defender: Rebellion” (engl. “Homeland Defender: Rebellion”). The story takes place in 2084, and the people in Europe are controlled by a large corporation. But in the game, a resistance is formed whose fighters are real characters from the far-right scene. The game conveys right-wing extremist and inhuman ideas. At one point, for example, you can see a graffiti that trivializes and ridicules the violent death of the African American George Floyd. In the game, this world view seems acceptable, since the player needs to liberate people and thus do something good. The ideology is transmitted casually. The drive to win the game is used to anchor the ideology as something positive.

Regardless of the game setting, values are also conveyed through the logic of the game. For example, killing characters in the game demonstrates power and decisiveness. The one who decides about life and death determines who may continue to play a role. In a figurative sense, this means that success is not achieved by arguments or resistance against violence, but by violence itself.

Hate in gaming appears in different ways. However, the patterns are always the same. Supposedly weak minorities are attacked: because of their gender, their origin, their religion or their sexual orientation.”
What are the consequences of hate speech for our society and democracy?

Hate speech is dangerous for the social glue and respectful interaction. There is a habituation effect and a shift in the boundaries of what can be said.

It also damages the culture of democratic debate: social rules no longer apply; anyone who disagrees or does not fit into the role model is insulted, offended and silenced.

The consequences can be seen in real, violent outbreaks. The extent can vary greatly from individual racist attacks in public to larger massacres like those in Christchurch, New Zealand. Because hate does not stay on the internet and does not just arise online.
Sexism (1/2)

Show picture and read out speaker notes

“We lost because we have a woman on the team!”
“Why are you playing? You should be in the kitchen!”
“I’ll punch you in the face, you slut!”

“Even though half of the community is female, sexism is a big issue in gaming. Insults are not uncommon for many women. They range up to threats of and fantasies about murder and rape.

Women are not perceived to be on eye level. This does not make halt at women who are professionally active in the scene, for example in eSports. They are often reduced to their looks, and less attention is paid to their talent.

The Games themselves contribute their part to this phenomenon as well. In “Rape Day,” for example, players can slip into the role of a serial killer and rape and kill defenseless women during a zombie apocalypse. After an outcry from the Steam community and in social media, as well as lots of media criticism the operator Valve decided to stop distributing the game via Steam. In Germany, the game is now prohibited by law. Another game is “Red Dead Redemption”: Whoever lets a woman get run over by a train will get a trophy for it. If you put a man on the tracks, you come away empty handed.

Often, female characters are at maximum a pretty minor character, left aside and not taken seriously. There is only a limited number of roles: The victim who must be saved by the hero. The “damsel in distress” role, in which women are weak, incapable and ineffective. Or female characters running around the games world as sex objects. They are often poorly equipped and unsuitably dressed for the battles they must fight - unlike their male counterparts who enter the fight in full gear.
Sexism (2/2)

WHAT TO SAY

But where does the problem of sexism in video games come from? Some researchers reason that games used to be marketed primarily to male gamers and have long been a male-dominated hobby. Thus, the role of women in games reflects a traditional male view. Today, although there are many female gamers, acceptance for this change is unfortunately still lacking in many aspects, both among gamers and developers. In any case, this is an important example of how games convey anti-democratic and harmful values and make them acceptable - intentionally or as a side effect.”
Racism (1/2)

Show picture and read out speaker notes

“What to say

“Next to sexism, racism is one of the major problems in gaming.

Racism - the discrimination and degrading of people based on cultural characteristics such as skin color, ancestry or language – appears in various forms.

Conspicuously often, only game characters with white skin color are represented in games. Diversity is missing. If game characters of other skin colors appear, they often serve stereotypes: Blacks, who are portrayed as angry and scary. Asians who appear smart but physically weak. The evil enemies appear in the game as Arab Muslims, who are dangerous and aggressive and who must be fought. This is reinforced by their representation. For example, they wear corresponding headgear, loose clothing and have dark skin or wear striking symbols.

Racist hostility is also omnipresent in chats on the various gaming platforms. Insults such as the N-Word for non-white gamers often go uncommented or are dismissed as harmless. The fact that gamers give themselves racist usernames like “Master Race” or “Big White Man” is technically possible in almost every game and faces little resistance.

The far-right scene has recognized the potential of games and their communities. We have already talked about examples. Far-right groups also make systematic use of chats on gaming platforms to attract potential new members. The young, predominantly male gamer scene in particular can be reached in this way. The approach is organized and very casually. In chats or gaming forums, closeness is initially created, gaming successes are praised, and similarities are pointed out. After that, the exchange often shifts to other social media platforms such as Discord or Telegram. These channels are hardly regulated. This is demonstrated by the case of “Reconquista Germanica”. Under this name, right-wing radicals had joined forces on Discord in their own channel. They called themselves the “Association of Gamers and LARPers”, i.e. role-players. Their goal was to support the posts of like-minded people in social media and to provoke and weaken their opponents. They used gaming logic for their actions: For hate comments they received points until they were promoted. Their structure followed a military hierarchy.

Compared to the gaming scene as a whole, the proportion of right-wing currents is small, but their impact is large.”
Examples:

„The Witcher 3 - Wild Hunt“: One of many action role-playing games in which all characters are white.

„Call of Juarez - The Cartel“: In this first-person shooter game, you are rewarded for eliminating the invariably dark-skinned opponents.
“Jewslayer88” is a player name that you can find just like this on gaming platforms. Obviously antisemitic but also coded player names are not uncommon. The 88, for example, is a code for “HH - Heil Hitler”.

Similar examples can be found in games allowing user generated content. In the game “Minecraft”, for example, buildings and sceneries can be designed by the players themselves. It has gained sad popularity because statues of Hitler or recreations of concentration camps can be found.

“I think my mother was born in a concentration camp!” With this sentence, the eSports player “NoHandGaming” made negative headlines. The FIFA 20 player and Youtuber was contracted to the eSports team of a German soccer club and was thus an idol for many other gamers.

Such examples contribute to an atmosphere where antisemitic statements are considered fun and the word “Jew” is misused as an insult. Posts are often supported with memes. These are small pictures with pointed statements. The most famous example is “Pepe the Frog”. Pepe is a green comic frog who is portrayed as a Jew, Adolf Hitler, Ku Klux Klan member, soldier of the Waffen SS or even Donald Trump.

In addition, there are games that convey antisemitic content right from the beginning. An older game with a clearly antisemitic orientation is the game “KZ Manager”, in which the gamer’s task is to manage a concentration camp. It is not rated for minors and the distribution is prohibited in Germany. Another one is a variation of the game “Chicken Hunter”, in which users hunt Jews. In recent games, antisemitism is often presented in a more subtle way. In the German game “Homeland Defender: Rebellion”, for example, one of the opponents reminds us of George Soros. He is a US billionaire with Jewish origin who, among other things, supports civil rights movements and political activists. His name is used in antisemitic conspiracy theories as a code for “the Jews”.
And there are terrible examples that such attitudes do not stay in games. The terrorist from Halle, Germany is an antisemitic right-wing extremist. He streamed his acts on Twitch and designed targets like in a computer game. A part of the gaming scene tries to relativize this connection. Of course, not all gamers are fundamentally right-wing extremists or willing to use violence. But if parts of the gaming scene refuse to discuss antisemitism, racism and antifeminism in their own circles because they are afraid of a new killer game debate, then they are protecting those who abuse games to divide society and to radicalize people."
Show picture and read out speech text

“A young woman, Ellie, brown shoulder-length hair, freckles on her face. Her smile is shy. She is armed and sneaks through dark woods. Alone. Fighting against ruthless marauders who outnumber her by far. In a world where humans mutate into zombie-like creatures because of a mushroom. Ellie’s goal: survival. Scene change. A dance floor. Ellie embraces a woman. They seem to be very intimate. They kiss.... - These are clips from the trailer for the extremely brutal and real-looking action-adventure game “The Last of Us, Part 2”, released in summer 2020.

Two women kissing in a video game. This is not new and already existed 30 years ago. Nevertheless, such content in games still heats up the gaming scene today.

Laura Bailey, who gave her voice to one of the game characters in “The Last of Us 2”, shared on Twitter the insults she faced: “I will find you and I will kill your child.” The reason: some gamers do not like her video game character. The director of the game also commented: “You can love or hate the game and feel free to comment on it. Unfortunately, many of the messages I received were full of hate and violence.” Streamers who spoke about the game and its lesbian love story were insulted and threatened just like the developers and publishers. Gaming platforms were bombed with negative reviews and comments such as “You people are such trash.” or “Such a great game.... ruined by lesbians. Disgusting.”

An aversion directed against gays, lesbians and bisexuals and the associated fear of their lifestyles is called homophobia.

Games were for a long time primarily orientated towards a young, male, heterosexual audience. In the meantime, there are more and more so-called “queer” characters in the virtual world of games, i.e. characters who do not correspond to the heterosexual gender norm. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon that the evil characters are “queer” and at the same time portrayed as disgusting, creepy, threatening or ridiculous. Gay or lesbian heroes are underrepresented.

Homosexual game characters and actions continue to cause controversial discussions in the gamer scene and are sometimes perceived as offensive. Thus, homophobia is also present in the chats on games. Insults like “gay bastard” or
“transsexual bitch” appear acceptable and normal, barely provoking any counter speech.

But positive tendencies are emerging: There are more queer game developers, which means that queer characters are becoming more visible in games. And despite the wave of hate comments, “The Last of Us: Part 2” sold more than four million copies in the first 48 hours. No other game for PlayStation 4 has managed that before.

Nevertheless, the fear of causing a scandal with non-heterosexual characters or actions and thus achieving lower sales figures still prevents some game producers from including them in their games.

Examples of other games:
“Grand Theft Auto”: The game contains many queer characters, but portrays them mostly negatively, e.g. the main character makes love with women, men and teddy bears, and is characterized as crazy, irascible and merciless.
Reasons to Be Optimistic (1/3)

Show picture and read out speaker notes

„Do we have to put up with hate and exclusion in games? No!

There are a lot of initiatives against hate in gaming. Politicians have recognized the need for action. For example, Gilles de Kerchove, a Belgian senior European Union official, wrote a paper demanding for gaming platforms to be more strictly regulated. He therefore calls upon the EU to treat the online game industry in a similar way than the social networks by holding them accountable. So, there could well be legislative changes on the European level that regulate the gaming industry more strongly.

In Germany, the first changes are already coming into force.

• The German Youth Protection Act is being revised. It will be adapted to the possibilities of the digital world. Consistent age ratings will be introduced, and the possibilities of interaction with others in video games will be considered as well.

• The German Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) is also being reviewed. It is analyzed whether and which gaming platforms would have to be covered by the law, just like the classic social media platforms. For the future, this would imply: They must react more strongly, and they have to check hate comments regularly, give feedback and block accounts if necessary.

The gaming industry is taking action:

• The German game association is setting an example with its initiative “Hier spielt Vielfalt (engl. Diversity is playing here) #teamdiversity”. The members of the initiative stand for an inclusive gaming culture. They are campaigning for an industry that is free from prejudice and discrimination and treats people with respect, regardless of their origin, world view or way of life.

• The eSports Player Foundation aims to discover and promote talents in eSports in Germany. However, it also stands for a gaming culture that is characterized by teamwork, fair play and a willingness to perform, and not by exclusion and unfair behavior.
In the games themselves there are also first good approaches against the spread of hate and unfair behavior. There are games making use of artificial intelligence to recognize and mask insults in chats. Others rely on self-regulation of the community. In the game “League of Legends,” for example, there is a “tribunal”. This is a self-regulating system allowing the community to influence the behavior of individual players. At the end of each round, players can rate each other - positively and negatively. They can also make comments and reports on players who show particularly unfair behavior. If a person gets a negative report several times, their case is presented to the tribunal. This tribunal consists of other members of the community and it decides on the punishment - from warning to permanent exclusion.

Organizations are getting involved together with gaming communities. There are initial projects that make hate transparent and take action to fight against it:

- “Good Gaming - Well Played Democracy” is a German project of the research group Modellprojekte e.V. in cooperation with the Amadeu Antonio foundation. It analyzes how far-right movements are increasingly trying to spread an inhuman atmosphere on gaming platforms. The goal is to work with gamers from various networks in order to address group-related human hostility and to promote a strong digital civil society in gaming. For this purpose, they get in touch with gamers directly via games and forums. They show what hate can leads to and advise influencers on how they can inspire young people to reflect on hate and to start acting against it.

- “Keinen Pixel den Faschisten” (engl. No Pixel to the Fascists) is an initiative of websites, media professionals, research collectives and developer studios from the gaming industry. They are campaigning for an inclusive atmosphere in their communities. The initiative is still in its early stages and invites new members to join in shaping its focus. Still, the website offers articles and interviews on the topic already.

Communities are using their power towards platform providers:

- We can observe that platforms are starting to revise and clarify their terms of use and regulations. Thereby they take specifically action against hate and exclusion. The platform Twitch, for example, has clearly defined unacceptable behaviors and their consequences. Twitch itself states that the pressure from the community towards a more positive culture led to the revision.
Reasons to Be Optimistic (3/3)

**WHAT TO SAY**

- On the distribution platform Steam, there are also examples of games that were removed from the platform before they were prohibited by law. For example, in the case of “Rape Day,” the community put pressure on Steam so that the game was no longer available for download shortly after release.”
What Each of Us Can Do (1/3)

First: Show picture and read out speaker notes

Then at the end: Start challenge 3 at that point in the moderation interface. Initiate the challenge by clicking on the corresponding button on your device and wait briefly until everyone has read the task and the solution of the avatar. After this last challenge, the solution will appear on all participants' screens.

“We can notice first steps in the right direction: The gaming industry starts to fight against hate speech and gaming will gain greater consideration in laws.

Nevertheless, this is still not enough. All of us can and must take action to prevent hate becoming acceptable - not in video games, not on the internet, and of course not in real life! And we can do this regardless of our role: as a gamer, as a parent, or as a member of society.

Let's talk about what can be done. What do you think?

- What should politics/legislation do to oppose hate in games?
- Those of you who are parents/are regularly in touch with children and young people: what will you do differently from tomorrow onwards/what exactly can you do?
- If you’re a gamer: do you have ideas on what to do in the gaming community? Go crazy and don’t let yourself be inhibited by “that’s not possible”!
- And if we look at all of us: What can each of us do against online hate and exclusion – no matter if in online games or beyond?

Let's take a brief look at what else can be done and what you have already said:

Be attentive: Recognize hate speech
As a gamer, the first and most important step is to be sensitive and to recognize hate. Often you are in the flow of the game and statements that cross boundaries are not noticed. That's why it's important to pay attention!

Active counter-speech
If you recognize hate speech and do not want to accept it, you can take a stand by actively countering it. By the way, the effect of a counter comment is often underestimated. It not only shows solidarity with the victims, but also has a great effect on other readers and players. In the best case, they join in, become active themselves or at least think about it. Counter speech is already wide-
spread in social media. There are many organizations that help people to learn it and find arguments that do not serve hate with hate. The goal is to achieve a constructive dialog and to offer alternative points of view. In gaming, counter speech is still little used. How come?

**Report**
Reporting hate speech is also a way to oppose hate. In some gaming communities, there are “report buttons” that can be used to report hate. In addition, there are also regional NGOs for reporting hate speech. In Germany “HateAid” is one of many organizations that campaign against hate and cybercrime.

**Don’t ignore hate speech**
Sometimes hate is ignored, e.g. because people don’t want to make themselves ridiculous in front of their friends. Even if a friend posts a swastika as a joke: in some countries it is a criminal act that also has consequences, because the digital world is not a legal vacuum. Gaming in particular is about having fun together. Hate and inhuman statements destroy the fun - no matter who expresses it.

**Supporting children with gaming**
Particularly children and young people concentrate primarily on the video game itself. Hate and hate speech can occur casually and unnoticed. Parents therefore have an important role: It is not only essential to know which video games the children are playing and whether they are suitable for their age. It is at least equally important to keep an eye on what the game is about, what values are conveyed, and in which communities’ children are active. Parents must support their children, talk to them about the video games and chats, and get informed. Even without playing the game, you can find clips, game descriptions and ratings on the internet to learn what it’s all about.

It is important to always be aware of the effects that hate speech can have. Because behind every virtual victim there is also a human being. And unfortunately, words and mutual incitement also lead to attacks and crimes in the real life. We have already talked about the fact that hate speech is an attack on our democracy and on a society based on diversity.

Regardless of whether we are active in the gaming community, it is important to be attentive when it comes to online hate. The important thing is: No matter where hate occurs, it must never be left unchallenged! Because words must not become weapons!"
For those who want to learn more about counter speech and how to practice it, here is a short excerpt of the many offers:

- Media sure! but secure. with all Deutsche Telekom initiatives: https://www.medienabersicher.de/en/ and the initiative Teachtoday for educators and parents: https://www.teachtoday.de/en/
- #Iamhere - largest counter speech organization on Facebook and Twitter with thousands of volunteers and boot camps to get started on the topic: https://iamhereinternational.com/
- Digitale Helden (engl. Digital Heroes): https://akademie.digitale-helden.de/online-kurse/ (in German only)
- Love Storm: https://love-storm.de/trainieren/ (in German only)
Gaming – Where the Fun Ends

STRUCTURE

Show picture and read out speaker notes: Draw a conclusion and, if necessary, final discussion.

And afterwards, don’t forget to dissolve the avatar story on the next page!

WHAT TO SAY

„We are almost at the end of our workshop!
We have learned a lot about gaming and online hate and how to act against it.

On gaming platforms, people play video games. And a lot of interaction takes place. They are purposely abused for spreading hate and agitation. This contributes to the division of our society. We must do something about this!

A lot of good examples exist already: For resistance against hate and also for video games that teach democratic values.
Let’s be attentive and let’s have a look at where the fun ends!

Please take 3 minutes and write down a few words:
• What are you going to do differently from tomorrow onward?

(Possible questions for the final discussion:)
• What did you learn?
• What was new to you?
• What will you share with your friends and family?

Before saying goodbye: What’s the deal with the avatars...?"
Resolution of the avatar story (only on the picture for all to see, not on the participants’ devices).

Attention: Do not go immediately on the picture with your cursor so that the resolutions are not yet visible!

• First and very quickly: Cheer for everyone. All of them have reached the 3 points and arrived at the valley of enlightenment!

• Read out the sentence about the stereotypes on the picture.

• With mouse over (move computer mouse to the respective avatar) show and read out the background information about the avatars one after the other. There are short explanations for the statements in the speaker notes.

Attention: do not discuss the correctness of the statements, but rather let them think about it. All statements are supported by scientific studies. The key message is: a lot happens unconsciously and - like here in the game - without the influence of the player.

“Fantastic! Everyone managed to get to the valley of enlightenment and scored three victory points! But what was this game all about?

Who of you played which avatar?
• Beautiful Belle (the only woman among the avatars)
• Wild Strano (the dark-skinned avatar)
• Strong Ragnar (the light-skinned Viking)

By the way, all of you were facing the same challenges at the crossroads, the guarded gate and the river. But you mastered them differently.

Before we look at the characters and at the reason for playing this little game, here is a question for you:
• Did you notice anything? About the avatars? The reactions? Anything else...

This little game was about stereotypes hidden in games. Stereotypes are prejudices, classic role models, anything that is attributed to the characters and appears repeatedly - completely independent of the individual game. They occur frequently and influence your behavior at least in the video game.
Now let’s talk about what your avatars have experienced and what’s behind it. All avatars faced the same three challenges: The crossroads, the guarded gate and the river crossing. But for sure you noticed that you couldn’t take a lot of influence - as often in the real video game, characters and their behaviors are already determined by the design.

Let me remind you again: it’s not about a general condemnation of the gaming scene, but about making us more attentive to what is created by the video game and what happens around it: making us more aware of stereotypes, which often represent a reflection of society or influence it. It is easy to get caught up in the game character and the story and to not notice what is being transported at the same time!

Let us not discuss this now but take it home as food for thought.

I will now show the characters to you - one after the other - and what they have to do with reality. All statements come from scientific studies that have investigated the behavior of people and the stories of the games.

Of course, the avatars and their actions are partly exaggerated. And for sure, there are other games that show a more diverse world view and we have seen examples. What we will talk about here is a cross section of all games. Meaning that most gamers actually experience this - consciously or unconsciously.

(In the order on the picture from left to right)

Strong Ragnar:
(ask the group who played Ragnar).

- White, male avatars like Ragnar are the most common across all video games.
- Usually presented as strong heroes, with good physical condition, well equipped with weapons and protective gear, they are popular and powerful.
- Their willingness to use violence is often portrayed as “for the good cause” and killing is not an issue for them.
In Games You Can Be Whoever You Want to Be (3/4)

**WHAT TO SAY**

**Beautiful Belle:**
*(ask the group who played Belle)*

- Female diversities are not represented in games.
- People have assumptions about gender that they either find in the game or that lead them to certain behaviors. That’s why it doesn’t necessarily seem strange that Belle is carried all the time or doesn’t have an active part.
- Women are often portrayed in a sexualized way: with unrealistic body proportions, lots of skin, little protective gear, while men are well-equipped and highly prepared for what happens in the video game.
- Female characters in video games are often just pretty minor characters who need to be saved and protected and have less power.

**Wild Strano:**
*(ask the group who played Strano)*

- Non-white game characters are clearly underrepresented, i.e. rather unusual in games.
- When they do appear, they are often athletes, i.e. very sporty or the “alien threat” that needs to be fought.
- For non-white avatars it’s less likely that they are helped by other players, they are more often eliminated from the game e.g. killed if there is this option.

- What do you think about this?
- How do stereotypes in games influence our everyday life in the real world?
- What do we find “normal” and acceptable?

**Goodbye:**
You can conduct this workshop by yourself or you can go through it again. I will send you links to do so! *(if you as a facilitator want to use the template and know the email addresses).*

Thank you very much for joining this workshop today!
As a guideline for the avatars in the workshop:

**Ragnar:**
With his physical strength, equipment and willingness to fight, he is readily helped: The challenges are easy for him.

This is how he masters the challenges:
1. Crossroads: he asks for help and immediately gets directions from a teammate.
2. Guarded gate: After resistance from the guard, he wrestles him to the ground and goes through the gate.
3. River crossing: he doesn’t care about cold water, he swims across.

**Belle:**
She is always helped by men who show her the way, let her through the gate or carry her on the shoulders across the river.

This is how she masters the challenges:
1. Crossroads: she asks for help and a male teammate carries her in the right direction.
2. Guarded gate: she ensnares the guard, who then gladly lets her through.
3. River crossing: she asks for help and is carried through the water on her shoulders by a teammate.

**Strano:**
No one is willing to help him, he is perceived as a threat by the guardian and gets lost at the crossroads but is able to rely on his athletic superpowers every time.

This is how he overcomes the challenges:
1. Crossroads: no one helps him, he takes a bypass but easily catches up because of his speed.
2. Guarded gate: he considers taking out the guard, but the guard calls for assistance when he sees him. Strano takes a bypass and catches up again.
3. River crossing: He doesn’t care about cold water, he swims across alone and kills a crocodile on the way.