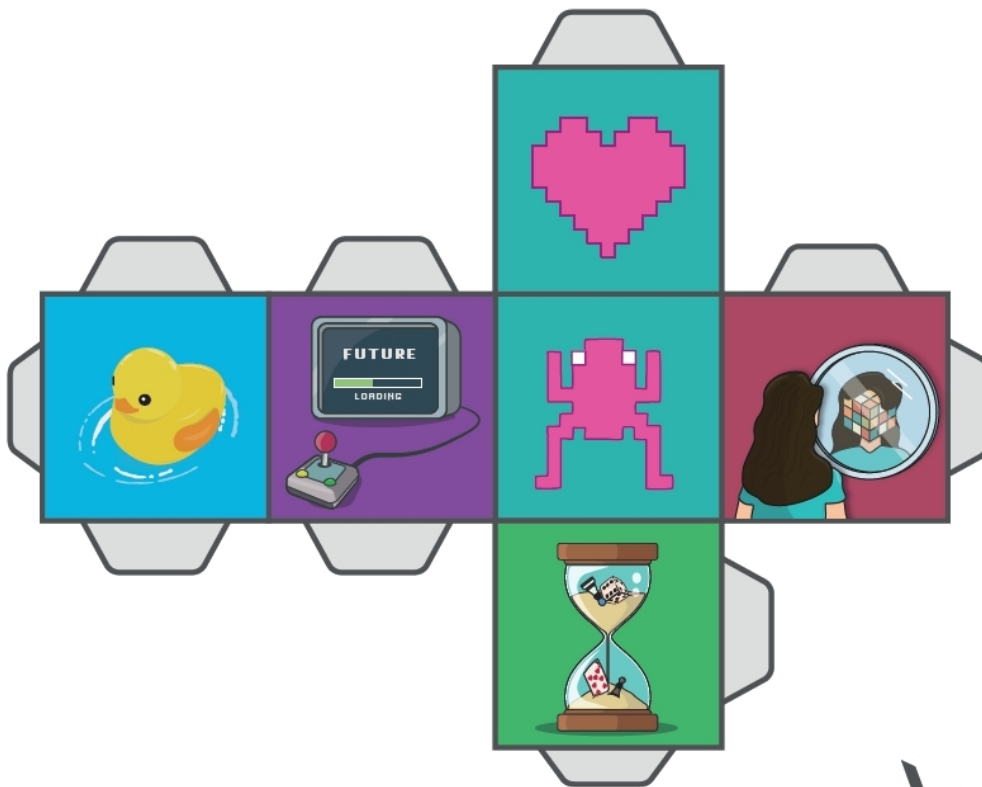# A LUDIC SOCIETY

Edited by
Denk N., Serada A., Pfeiffer A., Wernbacher T.

CAN'T DECIDE WHICH
CHAPTER TO READ FIRST?
THIS DICE WILL
HELP YOU

Natalie Denk, Alesha Serada,
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A LUDIC SOCIETY

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Contents

Global History, Facts and Fiction in Early Computer Games: *Hanse, Seven Cities of Gold, Sid Meier's Pirates*!

Benjamin Kirchengast

"That's not how it was!": Through the Darkest of Times in the Context of a Culture War

Pascal Marc Wagner

Becoming Their Enemy – Antifascist Gaming Network "Keinen Pixel den Faschisten!" and its Right-wing Backlash

Michael Black, Jared Derry, Kathryn Friesen, Josey Meyer, Montserrat Patino

Reamifton North: A Game About the United States Postal Service and the Complexity of 2020 American Politics

GAMES, PLAY AND A BETTER FUTURE

Daniela Hau

Games@school… Does it really work?

Natalie Denk, Alexander Pfeiffer, Thomas Wernbacher

Addressing Video Game Culture Phenomena in Education - opportunity, challenge and necessity

Constantin Kraus, Simon Wimmer, Thomas Wernbacher

Ride2Park

Thomas Wernbacher, Alexander Pfeiffer, Alexander Seewald, Mario Platzer, Constantin Kraus, Simon Wimmer, Dietmar Hofer

Cycle4Value

Mario S. Staller, Swen Koerner

It Plays Who Plays – The Potential of Non-Defining Gamification

GAMES, PLAY AND SOCIETY

Alexiei Dingli

AUTHORS

PREFACE

Natalie Denk, Alesha Serada, Alexander Pfeiffer, Thomas Wernbacher

Everybody plays. We find play in every corner of our world in all its multilayered manifestations. Whether in digital or analogue form, games have long since become an important part of our society. As economic products, they are at the core of an industry that generates a higher turnover worldwide than the film and music industries combined. However, the importance of video games for society goes far beyond their mere entertainment value. As communication and learning tools, games can make even the most difficult topics tangible, experienceable and easy to master. Game-based learning, the methodical use of games in a pedagogical framework, has been established in the educational sector throughout its entire history.

So far, teachers, psychologists and game scholars have collected enough evidence to demonstrate that playful approaches can make positive changes to people's behaviour. As this book will demonstrate, such changes may happen in such diverse fields as health, environment or mobility. Some companies use game-based methods to increase the motivation and satisfaction of their employees, to initiate innovation processes or to make training measures more effective. At the same time, however, many negative developments in our society cannot be understood without thinking about their often hidden but all the more determining game character: the distribution of fake news is just as much an example of this as cyber-bullying or the clever hunt for user data by major marketing companies and 'information brokers'. The good news is that we also have serious games that teach players about privacy, trust and informational hygiene. Besides, many beloved popular games in the 'cyberpunk' setting openly discuss these problems in

their narratives, warning about the dangers of cyberspace in the most fascinating manner.

Last but not least, games are a cultural phenomenon. In the current mode of production, they become essential goods as well as legitimate means of artistic expression. Video games shape our identities, offer new ways of communication and contribute to our symbolic vocabularies to perceive and explain the world. Gaming practices create social ties and personal bonds that underlie vibrant online communities with their own unique 'game cultures', opening up new spaces for negotiating ideas about society and ourselves. Of course, there is always the dark side to such abundance of expressions, not necessarily prosocial, which further stresses the importance of game research and education in the times of global 'virtualization'.

Since Covid-19 turned our world upside down, more than ever before, many things in our lives take place in virtual space. Thus, the participants of the 14th Vienna Games Conference "FROG - Future and Reality of Gaming" in 2020 came together for the first time in virtual space. The international conference brings together scholars, players, students, game designers, developers, educators and experts from various disciplines to discuss the Future and Reality of Gaming. In 2020 the conference was hosted by the Center for Applied Game Studies (Danube University Krems) in cooperation with the Austrian Federal Chancellery and was dedicated to key challenges of a "Ludic Society". With this anthology, we invite our readers to engage in discussions between game scholars who present a multitude of viewpoints on games, learning, society, identity, and change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to dedicate this book to the ever-growing FROG community, to all those who attend the "FROG - Future and Reality

of Gaming" conference year after year. We thank you for your loyalty, commitment, interest, discourse and support. Especially in the Covid-year 2020, the cohesion of the community was a crucial factor for the success of the conference and is always present even in the virtual space. Special recognition goes here to Herbert Rosenstingl, who has been committed to the conference since its very beginning.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary game scholarship offers a broad palette of theories and methods inherited from such fields as sociology and communication studies, experimental sciences, literary analysis, educational sciences and cultural critique. At large, this inherently interdisciplinary research aims for a holistic perspective on the 'ludic society', which is also our goal here. With that in mind, this book is organized into four sections that present related and often intertwined ideas and observations about the ways we manifest ourselves in games and play, how games represent us in the present and in the past, how games and play change us, and what it all may mean for contemporary society.

GAME, PLAY & IDENTITY

Video games provoke a full spectrum of emotions in their players, from passion and jubilation to hostility and fear. Whether these emotions and attitudes can bleed into real life situations remains the subject of active research, even though the 'media panic' around violent video games has been relatively stagnant recently. Today's research places a special importance on emotional development of gamers, as well as the potential of serious games for nurturing compassion and promoting prosocial behavior. For the reader to catch up with the current state of related research and game design, **Ricarda Goetz** provides a thorough review of identity, empathy and the Proteus Effect in video games. Teaching empathy for often most marginalized groups, such as immigrants (the intended mission of *Papers, Please!* (2013)) or transgender people, which is the case of *The Missing* (2018), autoethnographically analysed for this book by **Josephine Baird**. She questions the prescriptive 'queer pedagogy' of LGBTQ+ games and comes to the conclusion that the success of this

particular game partially relies on its intentionally 'misdirecting' strategy to present the most traumatic experience of exclusion.

But how authentic is the identity that can be acquired in a video game? This is not a simple question: therefore, in their chapter, **Mona Khattab, Tanja Sihvonen and Sabine Harrer** reveal the Orientalist gaze on ancient Egypt in the game and connect it to the idea of 'identity tourism'.

Video games can help us understand who we are, in new and fascinating ways, as they require active involvement of the player. In his work in progress, **Steve Hilbert** explores the potential of the game Gris in selfreflection and emotional growth of a person, particularly in relation to the self-shattering experience of depression. **Doris Rusch** and **Andrew Phelps** propose the project for existential games - "games of the soul" that appeal to myths and symbols at the deeply personal level. Finally, **Frank Pourvoyeur** provides a Jungian perspective on user experience in games by introducing synchronicity and verisimilitude as analytical categories for the experiential journey of the player.

GAME, PLAY & HISTORY

History in games has everything to do with the history of games. **Eugen Pfister'**s work bridges the gap created by the Anglo-American focus of most published game histories by turning to the most turbulent years of the Austrian games industry instead. Furthermore, the author connects notable events in local game history to the political and economic atmosphere of these times: one important discovery that he makes is the proliferation of business simulators in Austria in the 1990s and 2000s.

How do we connect with (or, in some cases, disconnect from) our historical past? To many gamers, the first lessons in world history came from the settings of their favourite games, and this is also true for the first generation of digital gamers. In their chapter, **Wilfried**

Elmenreich and Martin Gabriel study representations of colonial history and international trade in three critically and commercially successful video games released in the 1980s, played on the Commodore 64. This unique gaming experiment provides the backdrop for critical reflection about how historical storytelling developed since then.

Representations of history become powerful weapons in political arguments. Historical accuracy is a particularly troublesome concept, as it often relies on 'selective authenticity'. There is no shortage in representation of World War II in videogames, but they rarely provide realistic depictions of that time's society: an authenthic interaction with a Nazi would not be so much fun for consumers of digital entertainment. To further explore this paradox, **Benjamin Kirchengast** has studied negative reviews of the controversial game *Through the Darkest of Times* (2020). Kirchengast applies qualitative content analysis to negative reviews to discover several directions of criticism, which can be seen as symptoms of the current political atmosphere. Meanwhile, **Pascal Wagner** deals with another similar controversy in his own study, and active involvement into the antifascist network "Keinen Pixel den Faschisten!", uncovering and confronting extremist tendencies in some of the German-speaking video gaming communities.

Since the first installment of *The Oregon Trail* (1971-2021), serious games have been created with the direct aim to teach history to their players. In this book, **Michael Black, Jared Derry, Kathryn Friesen, Josey Meyer and Montserrat Patino**, a group of students from Texas A&M University, share the development process for the game that they have developed about the prominent event in the contemporary history of the United States - the 2020 presidential election.

GAME, PLAY AND A BETTER FUTURE

The educational potential of games and play has been discovered early at the beginning of pedagogy. Nevertheless, the implementation of digital games into the study process has been comparatively slow. In her chapter, **Daniela Hau** presents an extensive empirical study of digital game-based learning that summarises the results of 13 teaching projects in Luxembourg. 17 different games were used to teach social studies, media literacy, mathematics, sports, foreign languages and other subjects in formal school context.

What is video game culture? Is it a culture of inclusion or exclusion? Video game culture inevitably enters educational spaces such as schools, being brought there by the most curious and progressive generations of younger gamers. In their summarizing chapter, **Natalie Denk, Alexander Pfeiffer and Thomas Wernbacher** place video game culture in the perspective of Cultural Studies and focus on its societal situatedness. They suggest the directions for research in the pedagogical potential of video games in schools, such as gender equality, career orientation, social inclusion, and more. Two practical projects are introduced, already running in Austrian schools.

Siding up with Jane McGonigall's powerful statements, many believe that games can help solving large-scale real-life challenges. In their presentation of the gamified Ride2Park project, **Constantin Kraus, Simon Wimmer and Thomas Wernbacher** present the study of a smart incentive system for car pooling that can potentially contribute to slowing down climate change. **Thomas Wernbacher, Alexander Pfeiffer, Alexander Seewald, Mario Platzer, Constantin Kraus, Simon Wimmer and Dietmar Hofer**, the research group around the Cycle4Value project, is developing a gamified reward system based on blockchain technology to increase the attractiveness of cycling.

However, gamification is not a universal solution, even though it can be a powerful tool in the right context. **Mario S. Staller and Swen Koerne**r call for the critical assessment of its commonplace understanding, and present their concept of 'non-defining gamification' for pedagogical practice. This concept has been tested in a gamified learning environment already in use for educating police recruits.

GAME, PLAY AND SOCIETY

Is the virtual world for real? It is most certainly so to cybercrime researchers and lawyers. Unregulated internet activity may result in 'mixed reality crimes', as **Alexiei Dingli** names them. Dingli takes a closer look at the mischievous adventures of children on the dark web in his chapter "Children in an online world, victims or perpetrators? - A collection of case studies". Although the younger generations become better accustomed to the virtual realms provided by digital technologies, they still easily fall victim to their dangers and even turn to the dark side themselves. Based on his summary of unlawful deeds, Dingli calls for the new approach to ensure safety of underage dwellers of the internet.

It remains the question what exactly constitutes violence and crime in a digital world. However, there is no question that verbal abuse, 'doxing' and online bullying can lead to psychological suffering and long-lasting traumas, withdrawal from social activities and, eventually, lower quality of life. As an example, **Sonja Gabriel** extensively covers the topic of hate speech in digital games and outlines the possible measures to deal with this problem.

The state of lockdown has drastically influenced ordinary life and the wellbeing of people all around the world. The feeling of helplessness can scale up to the state of 'anomie', when social ties are undone, and society may slip into chaos. For this reason, it becomes particularly important to claim one's political and social agency, and

video games can offer the space and the tools for practicing it. In his chapter, **Tobias Unterhuber** carefully examines the situations of the loss of agency in three games and comes to the conclusion that game mechanics are particularly important and meaningful for mapping the limits of one's political agency, not only in games, but in society and culture in general.

The portrait of a typical male gamer as an asocial competitive achiever is often found to be a stereotype. Yet another evidence may be found in the study of **Bastian Krupp** on the effect of games on the development of emotional intelligence (EQ) in the context of media effects research. Based on the results of his online survey, there was hardly any difference between genders in terms of emotional intelligence of gamers, apart from one specific aspect, which was empathy. As a valuable addition, Krupp presents an interesting breakdown of preferred game genres preferred by male and female participants.

Virtual spaces gained special importance during COVID-19, providing comfort, the sense of community and the experience of adventure that became unavailable to many in real life. In their study, **Wilfried Elmenreich and Mathias Lux** compare user activity during the lockdown in three games: *CS: GO, Drawful 2* and the old-school MMORPG *Eternal Lands.* All these saw the influx of old and new players during the pandemic times, but they demonstrated different patterns of player activity.

COVID-19 has pushed us to create completely new formats to reach and connect people - despite (or often because of) local distance. **Swen Koerner and Mario S. Staller** are using gamification to facilitate online lessons in Krav Maga during the COVID-19 pandemic at the German Sport University Cologne. The story of "Sneak Gaming" is yet another example of overcoming the challenges of the global pandemics with a new format of gaming

events, carried out by **Simon Wimmer, Natalie Denk and Jogi Neufeld**.

GAMES, PLAY
& IDENTITY
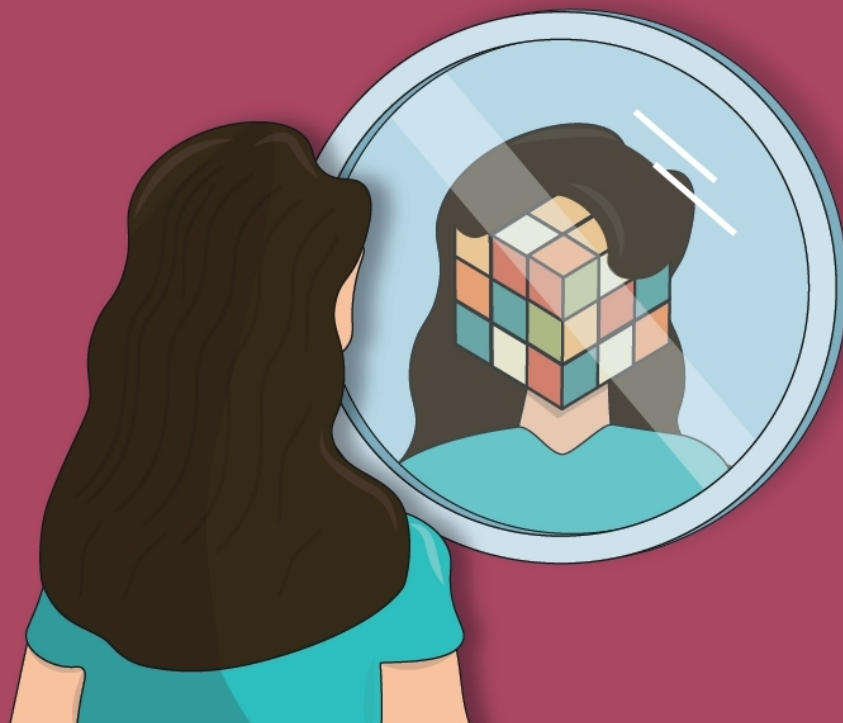
GAMES, PLAY AND IDENTITY

EMPATHY AND INCLUSIVITY IN GAMES AND THE PROTEUS EFFECT

Ricarda Goetz-Preisner

Games have become more varied and inclusive. The hero and protagonist is not only a 30-something white heterosexual man anymore. Protagonists in games, often represented by playable avatars, look and behave differently nowadays. Women-avatars can be warriors, protagonists in games can represent different ethnicities or abilities, and avatars can have same-sex relationships and follow new narratives. "The Sims" is one game that has offered these possibilities for a long time. Players can create virtual characters with or without any physical attributes. This inclusive attitude toward the appearance of gender, visual identity traits and sexuality, once a rarity in video games, is becoming more common as games take on more diverse and weightier subject matters. There are different reasons for creating these sometimes called 'serious games' or 'empathy games'. Many of the reasons can be linked to the Proteus effect. The Proteus effect proposed by Yee and Bailenson (2007) suggests that the human embodiment in digital avatars may influence the self-perception of the player both online and offline, based on their gaming avatar's aesthetics or behaviors. Different studies (e.g. Fox et. al 2013) since then focused on how players can be influenced by their avatars. She found that women may be at risk for experiencing self-objectification when their avatars wore revealing clothing (ibd.) or that participants responded better to avatars modelled closely on their real appearances (Fox 2009). Future studies need to clarify the extent of these and show how different avatars can be created to elicit positive changes in attitudes, game play and self-image. This paper provides a literature review

and different close readings of games within the concepts of inclusivity, diversity and the Proteus effect in and of games.

EVOLUTION OF GAMES AND CHARACTERS

Video games have been in a constant state of evolution. From the early beginnings where pixilated graphics and simplistic story lines were the norm, the aesthetics of games have developed into crystal-clear high definition pictures with multi-varied narratives. One example where we can clearly see the development of games is a comparison of the graphics of *The Legend of Zelda* in 1986 and Zelda: Breath of the Wild in 2017. The later game provides 3D graphics with a detailed appearance of the main character *Link*, and even though the game is a fantasy adventure game, it creates the illusion of really exploring imaginative forests and landscapes. The world and perspective that players find themselves now is utterly emerging with the 3rd person perspective and abilities one has, nothing close to the rudimentary graphics and bird perspective from the game in 1986.

Games have also changed in the way gamers are able to interact with them and with their game characters. Characters that players control now have gone from simple forms like squares and circles to hyperactive realistic human-looking avatars. „In early games like Asteroid or Pac-Man, player representation was quite simple (…) as technology advanced, player representation became more detailed" (Graner Ray 2004:94). Game characters now display unique traits in their appearance and embody different genders, groups of ethnicity or body and ability types. Playable characters also offer unique personalities that easily create an empathic experience for the gamer. According to Graner Ray, the better a game character, she uses the word avatar, is created, the more players feel comfortable and the

longer they play (cf. ibd.). A long and intense engagement in a game is in that regard the goal of every game producer. That might lead to the assumption that inclusive player representation in avatar design is benefitting all parties involved in a game.

In this paper, the concepts of game characters and avatars are used synonymously, however in different research the latter is often referred to as a digitized image of the player itself. As different studies use these concepts within their respective definitions in more or the same way, this author will refer to avatars and game characters following a definition by Ahn et al:

> "Broadly defined, any form of representation that marks a user's entity can be considered an avatar. (…) Over time, avatars have become more complex creations, rendered in three-dimensional forms with an extensive range of animated movements that aid in the expression of the avatar's personality and supplement various social interactions. Options for individual customization of avatars have increased significantly as well, allowing users to modify a number of physical features including eye color, hair style, height, body shape, clothing, and even facial expressions. Using these diverse features, users have great freedom to build not just a graphical marker of themselves, but virtual humans with distinctive personalities, unique appearances, and individualized behavioral patterns" (Ahn et al 2012).

Another change has become noticeable in long-time beloved characters like *Lara Croft* from *Tomb Raider* or *B.J. Blaskovics* from *Wolfenstein.* These game characters have changed drastically over time with both new technical possibilities as well as feedback from the side of gamers. *Lara*, still appealing to a broad audience as a strong attractive fighter, now wears slightly more clothing when she fights evil and has more realistic body features. *B.J.* is still muscular and hyper-masculine in his appearance but also resembles more or less a real person with realistic facial features and body shape. *Lara Croft* has been subject to different academic papers, focusing broadly on her role, her importance for players, as one of the first women avatars or her sexualized aesthetics. Kennedy (2002) gives an extensive insight in different research about the game character *Lara Croft* and sums up that:

"it is impossible to securely locate Lara within existing feminist frameworks, nor is it entirely possible to just dismiss her significance entirely. These readings demonstrate the range of potential subversive readings, but there exists no real 'extra-textual' evidence to back this up – hence the focus on the text itself, which is on its own inadequate to explore the range of pleasures available from playing as Lara – we can only conjecture." (Kennedy 2002)

Figure 1. © Crystal Dynamics [https://whatculture.com/gaming/10-legendary-video-game-heroes-you-wont-recognise-now?page=9]

METHODOLOGY

This paper provides a literature review of both theoretical game studies works as well as reviews of game experiments that are concerned with identity and empathy in digital games focusing on the so-called *Proteus effect.* Additionally different close readings of games will give empirical examples. The focus lies on so-called triple AAA games, playable on PC and consoles who feature human looking gaming characters. Triple AAA games refer to games with high production value, extensive budgets for advertising and marketing their games and a high number of players. Compared to other media texts they can be referenced to Blockbuster-movies (cf.

Demaria & Wilson, 2002). Rather than independent movies or games that are done both as the name suggests, by either independent producers or smaller development teams, big game production companies have more means to create more elaborate games which differ in the way a game is then playable. Games that will be discussed in this paper range in the genre of Role Playing Games (RPGs) which on the one hand offer rather realistic game opportunities, and on the other feature mostly human looking characters.

These games represent different opportunities to explore aspects of our own or different identities and stories. They are also story-driven games that put more emphasis on the narrative within the game, contrary to other genres where the emphasis lies strongly on game play itself (how the game is played). Story-driven games like RPGs also spend more time and resources developing the protagonists of their games with regard to aesthetics and personality traits and pay greater attention to details such as dialogues. Sometimes these games also become other media texts in form of movies or TV shows, like for example *The Witcher, Tomb Raider* or *Assassins Creed* have been franchised into high grossing movies.

That said, a (video) game is still a game, so even though these games try to feature realistic narratives or characters, they still provide a some-what out of this world experience where real-world physics, human abilities or stories are not the main objective per se. Nonetheless these games present means to broaden our own empathy towards the lives of others and let the players experience different worlds.

INCLUSIVE GAMES

Inclusivity in games with regard to this paper means to show and include representations of different identities of humanoid characters, as well as the game story shows varied narratives and

realities. The term identity describes the way individuals and groups define themselves and/or are defined by others based on their gender, orientation, ethnicity or ability. Identification, as a concept has been studied in the context of interactive and traditional media, and functions to understand how attitudes and stereotypes about groups can manifest themselves in virtual environments. Identification is especially important in the context of video games, because players act "as", as opposed to "with" a game character (Cohen, 2001 qt. in Ash 2015:3). As Bayliss explains, the terms avatar and character are often used interchangeably to describe the player's means of engagement with a game (Bayliss, 2007). A game character however, "exists in a world where meaning is always-already present, perhaps even more so since both the character and the game-world that they inhabit are designed as part of a greater system. Simply put, both the character and the game-world in which they operate are consciously designed things, created to fulfill the specific purpose of providing a gameplay experience to the player." (ibd.). Players may or may not act with several game characters in a game. An avatar can be most of the times customized to the player´s design wishes (within the game logic), if there is an avatar, players mostly play like that embodiment throughout the game. Avatars are in that logic modeled after real people (sometimes also after celebrities). A thorough analysis of the differences of the distinctions or means of creation of playable characters will not be provided, in this paper avatars and game character are used more or less without distinction except when the references literature distinguishes between these concepts in the way it influences the research.

When we look at inclusivity in games, more often than not the question will be raised of: "Who is represented as lead protagonist?" which leads to another question "In a game, can you really play anyone?" Or do you mostly play muscular, brown haired, slightly-bearded, able bodied 30 year old white heterosexual men who display little emotions?

Figure 2. © https://kotaku.com/brooding-white-male-video-game-protagonists-ranked-1762597481

The answer to that lies in the inherent history in and of games. Historically, young white men have been perceived as the main demographic for the gaming industry (Soukup, 2007). This reflects what type of people are traditionally thought of as gamers and what kind of games and game characters are developed to satisfy these player´s desires and in that regard identities. Game developers tend to cater to that perceived audience, which in turn leads to viewer representation for other people who play games who do not fit this identity (cf. ibd.). Other gamers are then perceived as nontraditional gamers who simply do not fit into this narrow-minded target audience. Nontraditional gamers is a term used to describe anyone who falls outside the established gamer stereotype, such as women, older gamers, people of color, LGBTQ communities (ibd.). Richard (2017) explains that video games and in that regard computing and technology "have significant and historically documented diversity issues, which privilege whites and males as content producers, computing and gaming experts (…)" (Richard, 2017:36). With the

words of Leonard, "just as video games are an area about and for males, they are equally a white-centered space" (Leonard, 2003, p. 3). More often than not, when for example women or POC were included in games, they would reproduce sexist or racist stereotypes. When for example black women appear in games, Dall`Asen (2020) says, more often than not they are depicted in a hyper-sexualized way and held to white beauty standards. She notices that in black female game characters like *Jade* from *Mortal Kombat, Sheva Alomar* from *Resident Evil 5,* and *Purna* from *Dead Island,* the avatars are portrayed as having straight hair, light skin and sometimes light-colored eyes (cf. ibd.).

Furthermore queer (or LGBTIQA+) characters in games are still not regularly included. The main protagonists represent heterosexuality. In his master thesis, Wilberg (2011) focused on how race, gender, and the lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities are represented in video games. He analyzed 1.083 video game characters and found only 29 of them to depict queer characters. Of those, 12 were female,17 were male and all were white. The author mentions that certain instances of queerness are more accepted, such as female bisexuals and lesbians, due to some appeal to male fantasies. He also found that white women were consistently shown as fearful, while women of color mostly appeared angry at first, then fearful, with no emotion from lesbian or bisexual women (Wilberg, 2011).

Video game characters are also mostly able bodied and rarely show any disabilities. Carr (2014) points out that ability is so natural in games that "it hides in plain sight when it comes to critique or reflection." While discussions of the need for more diverse characters in terms of gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity are increasingly common, little attention has been paid to the presence of disabled characters in games (Disturbing Shadow, 2013) (qt. in Gibbons, 2015:32).

But, do we actually need more inclusive games?

If we just consider a recent study from Austria (ÖVUS, 2019), that shows that 5.3 million people play games and that the average gamer is around 35 years old and of all those gamers 46 % are women, we do need more inclusive games. It makes sense that game characters have to get more inclusive. Because in the end game developers want to sell their games to a wide audience. There is also a 2019 survey conducted by Electronic Arts, one of the biggest game producers, of popular games such as *FIFA, Star Wars* or *Battlefield,* which states that 56% of the 2,252 survey participants consider that it important for companies to make their games more inclusive. Only 13% of the people surveyed felt that inclusivity in gaming was explicitly not an important topic to them (Gravelle, 2019).

If you analyse online comments about new (inclusive) game characters you will however find the typical misogynist or racist slurs next to praises for these changes. In a 2019 *YouTube* video with more than 110.000 clicks and the title "*The Desire for Representation in Games - An Honest, Open Conversation*" for example, you can find comments such as:

> "'The whole point of diversity is that it should feel natural' (…) As a mixed-race woman, I always enjoy seeing this kind of character on screen, and though I think representation is important - when it's well-done and natural - as long as the character is well-written and the movie/game/series is good, I don't mind if I don't "see" myself. I have nothing in common with John Marston or Joel and yet they're ones of my favorite video games characters. If diversity is used to make more money, one can tell, it doesn't ring true." (Simbi)

> "People are too concerned about 'relatability', when actually that doesn't matter if you enjoy the content. That only matter if you are an extremist or a blind activist, if you are normal person the only thing that actually matter is 'is it good?'. (…)." (Isori)

It is interesting that the commenter with the nickname Isori references "normal people" because the discussion in video games as well as other forms of representation in media surrounds the question of what is the norm and the need to represent it and/or others, which leads to another discussion of "othering" when talking about any form of representation that differs from the inherent logic

of media codes that have been reproduced for a long time as mentioned above in the inherent history of game production.

Shaw (2017) describes the responses to her study about the need for representation that can be summed up in three categories: Some participants did express the possibility that representation had a great effect on others, particularly on children and young adults. "However, they rejected market logic-driven forms of representation that only represent groups well when they are being targeted as consumers." (2017:55) The second group of participants insisted that they did not necessarily need to see one specific aspect of their identity (like sex, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.) represented in their media texts, "because their identities and relationship to media characters were complex enough to let them feel like they could connect with a wide array of media characters" (ibd.). But what the third category needed, was to see people like them, in an expansive intersectional sense, to be seen. Representation matters because it makes their identity legible (cf. ibd.).

Inclusive Game Characters

Games from the perspective of this paper can be seen as rather influential on gamers. Gamers often infer gender, age, race, and personality traits from human-like avatars, just as they would when meeting another person (Guadagno et al., 2011 qt. in Fox et al., 2013:930). Game scholars like Kaye and Bryce (2012) say, that games exist not just as entertainment but powerful tools of social integration. When different people are able to share their experiences with others through games, some sort of integration and in wider sense cultural capital is built. That cultural capital permits the feeling of inclusion in society. Gibbons (2015) quotes Cross (2014) that there is a vital need to address exclusion and harassment in gaming communities, arguing that we need to embrace new cultural scripts that will allow for greater inclusion of women, people of color and LGBTQ people in gaming culture and design.

Representation of different identities and realities can strongly contribute to these new scripts. Shaw (2017) argues against the constant justification and perspective of defense for inclusivity, or as she calls it representation in games. She claims that she has "yet to hear a good articulation of why diversity in representation is bad for anyone. All of the arguments I have seen dismiss the discourses in favour of "representation does matter" out of hand, but they never actually make the case that diversity in media is a bad idea. At most, they point to specific failed commercial examples, but even then fail to take into account marketing explanations for those failures. New arguments for representation can offer new possibilities for what representation and critiques of representation can look like" (2017:56).

Games in that sense and in recent years have definitely become more varied and more inclusive. The hero and protagonist can be strong female warriors who wears non-revealing clothing and does not have to be saved by their male counterparts. Male characters can show feelings and play in narratives that are more diverse and avatars can have same-sex relationships, be of color or differently abled. The difficulty for these depictions as already mentioned is not to recreate stereotypes. Inclusive games can be achieved more easily, when people from diverse backgrounds are included or heard in the respective game development. Some recent examples of inclusive game characters shall be mentioned at this point.

Women game characters

Rather than assets, sexy booth babes or damsels in distress (Sarkeesian, 2013), female protagonists do not have to be tropes anymore. There are different examples nowadays of strong female characters who wear body-covering clothing and do not represent sexist stereotypes about women. Such as game characters like *Aloy* from *Horizon Zero Down* who is a fierce fighter that wears armor that covers her whole body. The same game also features more than one