

GAME OVER

Danny played multiplayer online games almost everyday. He loved curating a new identity online. It was a safe space to escape everyday life and the stress of school, and the virtual world helped him cope with the daunting reality of future planning and increasing responsibilities. Danny was dating Terra at school. They had been going out for almost a year and were both happy. She was kind and they had the same sense of humor and enjoyed the same music.

Danny was very active on video game forums. He had met some girls online in chat forums who also played the game. They always flirted back and forth and even discussed their characters dating. He didn't view it as cheating and thought he was being loyal to Terra. The virtual world felt separate from reality. The same way he would never fight or punch someone in real life, he wouldn't cheat on Terra with another person. He rationalized it by thinking of it like acting in a play. Terra was in theater at school and had an on-stage kiss in the last scene. Danny was fine with it, he knew she was playing a role, not cheating on him. His online identity was the same kind of role playing; it wasn't the real Danny.

Terra came over to Danny's house one evening and when he went to get some food for them, she turned on the TV. One of the forums was open and it was a conversation with a girl he played games with. Terra read through the romantic texts about how much she missed him and he responded with how much he loved her and wished they could run away together. Terra blinked back tears. She confronted Danny about the girl and he explained that it was his character talking. Terra was furious that he could have another girlfriend and demanded to see more chats. He willingly showed her, since he didn't think it was cheating, trying to explain himself. She realized that he spoke to these girls more than he spoke to her. She picked up her backpack and walked out. Before the door slammed shut she yelled, "We're over Danny. Have fun with your new virtual girlfriends, I hope you live happily together in your fairytale land."

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Guiding Questions:

- Do you believe Danny should or shouldn't flirt with girls on the forums? Why or why not?
- How would you feel if you were Terra? How would you have reacted?
- How is our online and offline self similar? Different?
- Are online rules and offline rules similar or different? Why?
- What happens when you lead different lives online and offline?

Topic: Cyberbullying and Digital Drama, Gaming
Age: High School