Games, Geeks and the Parent's Dilemma - Audio

Children

<u>Key:</u>

AS: **Angela Saini**
B: Boy
G: Girl
F: Female
VC: Victoria Cooper
KS: Kieron Sheehy
PS: Phil Stuart
TF: Tia Fisher
J: James
C: Caroline
V: Vicky
Fel: Felicity
Ba: Barney
DH: Dawn Hallybone
Mi: Miranda
Ma: Martha
H: Hamish
JPG: John-Paul Gayford

[Children play a computer game]

AS: **As for these six-year-old boys, the way children play games appears to be instinctive and totally immersive.**

[Children continue playing game]

AS: **The Open University's Centre for Childhood Development and Learning has a commitment to exploring the lives of children and young people. Its researchers are a multidisciplinary team with backgrounds in social anthropology, ethnographic research, psychology and education. They work with children using participatory methods of research and combining qualitative and quantitative approaches.**

     Dr Victoria Cooper has been researching the way children play games, how gaming makes them feel, how it affects their identity and she uses some interesting research methods.

VC: And what's the object of the game?

B: To beat each other.

AS: **Victoria Cooper talking to Aiden and Barty, both aged 11.**

VC: My own interests in children and gaming really reflect my interests particularly as a researcher in understanding children's lived experience but also from the parent's perspective, observing my own children. So those two interests are, sort of, met really.

I wanted to explore the difference between playing and living and experiencing in a virtual world and why I have concerns with that in comparison to the real world. I was very interested in exploring how do they play games, what do they play, why do they choose to play particular games and not others, what do they like, what do they dislike? And, also, the amount of time they spend gaming.

I think one of the things we are committed to doing at the university, particularly in the Centre for Childhood Development and Learning is rather than conducting research on children, we are committed to researching with children so we use participatory research methods which encourages the children to take direction and lead within the research process.

VC: Can you talk to us about the games you like playing?

B: Well, recently, I've been into this game called Super Paper Mario.

VC: Now many children are quite comfortable with interview situations and are quite happy to express their views verbally, but I am mindful that many children aren't and some children are more comfortable with expressing their views in different ways. So what we have done in the centre is create research methods which capture children's experiences using multimodal research methods. So it might be that we asked children to express their views through art, taking pictures, role play, video diaries, playing games. There are a number of different ways and it would be very much responsive to how the children prefer to work.

So as methods, they are just a way of accessing children's worlds and it's this idea of children as other. From an adult, we have to enter a child's world and for that moment we have to, sort of, suspend our own views and thoughts and perceptions and try and find a way to work in partnership with the children so that they can lead and they can express freely.

AS: The relationship between the experience of gaming and reality can raise some profound, existential questions.

Mi: Well, I used to play Sims and I still do. I found it really interesting…

AS: Here is Victoria Cooper talking to two girls, Miranda and Martha, both 12.

Mi: When I was about 7, I got a tiny bit addicted to it and, like, 24/7 playing on Sims and it's, kind of, got better over the years. I was, kind of, in a Sims world.

VC: What do you mean a Sims world? I quite like that idea.

Mi: Well, I, kind of, felt that I was in the computer game so I was, kind of, connecting with the Sims in a way and it's normally a one player game so you don't get much social with it but…

VC: That's an interesting point which, Martha, you have talked about before, how you feel that gaming is in some way not very sociable.

Ma: As Miranda said, you can't really do it with your friends. I mean, on some of them you can talk to your friends online, not properly, and you are, like, playing a character. You get so involved in the game that you don't think anything else matters.

Mi: Like some of them are quite violent and it changes your personality afterwards. When they come off it they are, like, always angry and, like, mad.

VC: Has a parent the right then to perhaps control how much time you spend playing games?

Mi: Well, yeah, I think the parent should be able to say to the child that you've got to stop playing on this now, you've had your half an hour or whatever. But when you are off the game, you can get very angry and it's quite hard to get a child off a game that's really into the game. It's like pinching a lollipop off a little, tiny child about five years old; it's probably going to be impossible.

AS: Victoria Cooper with Miranda and Martha. We have heard already from parents about how it's sometimes difficult to get their children to stop playing. Here is Antony Finn and Aidan with some ideas on why that is.

B: Games which have checkpoints or stuff that you can't really save are probably a bit more addictive than the ones you can.

B: My parents always say, "Save and quit."

VC: Do they?

B: When I need to go to bed, I always try and find a way to sneak away from the saved blocks so I can continue.

B: Because if they are easy you get bored of them quite quickly and you, kind of, move on.

AS: Even if they might be reluctant to stop, children are very aware of what constitutes normal or acceptable levels of gaming and what is excessive.

H: No-one is, like, anti-gaming because it's such a big part of many people's lives.

AS: This is Hamish, aged 16.

H: Most people play on consoles. There is, like, no-one that I know who hasn't played on a Wii or an Xbox. But I think if you play in excess, people start to think you are a bit weird because that seems to be all you are doing. You are not actually, like, going out and meeting up with your friends; you are just, like, staying indoors.

        Some of these games are, like, really violent compared to what I was used to playing a couple of years ago – a bit more violent, a bit more, like, on edge. A

lot of my friends who do play on games quite a lot, they seem to talk about it so much that it becomes an everyday part of their lives. Whatever they are playing, they are usually violent games and that, sort of, drags them into watching violent films and then doing karate or some sort of martial arts that they can get their kicks from.

AS: **There does seem to be a difference between the kinds of games boys and girls choose to play. It might seem stereotypical but boys, particularly teenage boys, really do prefer shoot 'em up and sports games.**

B: I would say definitely more boys play video games than girls but then again, girls could become addicted to Facebook or Twitter.

AS: **Girls like games and other online activities which are more sociable.**

Mi: And it can sometimes be a bit dangerous because children don't know who they are meeting on the games and people pretend that they are five when they are actually much older.

AS: **When it comes to concerns about online safety, children actually seem reassuringly well informed.**

Mir: If you meet someone you need to know the simple rules of a game really - don't talk to strangers, don't give away any information to any other people, even if they are your friends because you don't know if it's them. Just stick to those rules and you will just be fine with it and just carrying on playing.

AS: **With thanks to Aiden, Barty, Hamish, Anthony, Finn, Miranda and Martha.**

In the next track, you can hear some teachers give their opinions on games and hear about Kieron Sheehy's research at the Open University into the inclusive benefits of games.