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Game Studies

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Virtual Realities in Games - Response

We had a class discussion talking about virtual realities in video games the other day, and a lot of our conversation was directed to the effect of these games on the players. I was never really too involved in these kinds of games myself, so I was mostly just interested in hearing about the rest of the classes' view on this kind of thing. It seemed that things like Tamagotchi, The Sims, and Club Penguin were the groups' most relatable games, even though I have never played any of those. The closest game series I can think of to a "virtual reality" that I have spent a lot of time in is the Animal Crossing series, which doesn't really go too far into the realistic or online aspects of the game.

One of the things we discussed was about people getting too attached to their online personas. Someone talked about news of parents letting their kids starve because they were too into the game Second life, and they thought their kids were fine. I think stories like this are crazy, and even though it shows that the developers did a really good job of making their game marketable and accessible, people definitely need to know when to stop. The name "Second Life" is really appropriate when people take it so far. I know that it's been at least a decade since that game was really popular, but even as a kid I remember hearing so much about and thinking that the concept was cool.

I can't remember the name of the game since I haven't played it in so long, but there was a stick-figure style game I played (gameplay was offline only) that was very adult in its themes. You would wake up, figure out how you wanted to spend your time each day to increase your stats, and do various activities around the town that would each tend to benefit your character in some way. You had a limited amount of time to complete your life cycle, so deciding how you spent your time was crucial. Some of the choices though could also harm you in some way, and were not very good influences on kids. In fact, some of the things you could do were smoke to relieve stress, rob stores to get money, and even take sleeping pills for more sleep. A big choice you could make in the game involved improving your strength just to participate in bar fights! I am normally pretty lenient in my opinions about kids playing these kind of games, but these kind of things I don't think are necessary to put in a game like this. Looking back on the game, it was fun, but I was probably a little too young for its themes even if it were stick figures.

Another focus of the discussion was about letting kids play these games as parents. In theory, I would like to be a believer of the practice of letting your kids have more freedom to make their own choices. I probably have this view because I witnessed a lot of the kids I knew in high school that were allowed less freedom back then, go a little crazy with it when college came around. It's only natural for kids to want to rebel against their parents, so I feel like it would be best to give them more freedom when they are younger and I can watch over them. However, with the amount that kids have access to the internet now and I know the bad things that can happen online, I probably will be a bit more restrained in practice. Everything that kids seem to want to do is online now, so I will probably want to have a bit more jurisdiction in these areas, games included.

I will probably prefer to just get my kids a home console if those are still popular when I have kids, since those are more restricted than home computers in terms of parental controls. Also, I will be able to see the physical games they buy and will have to give them permission before they play games online. Of course they will still find ways with other kids to play games online and with their phones, so I will probably just talk to them about it. I think it is important not to give away too much information online, since people are quicker to be mean to each other on the internet. One thing I am sure of is that I will probably still be playing video games at this time, so I am not too worried about not knowing what my kids could be doing. I will probably be aware of what games they like to play, so I will tell them what they should and shouldn't be doing in terms of privacy. Of course, like I said kids like to rebel, so who knows what they might be up to. The least I can do is tell them what I did when I was a kid and give them advice!