

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness, Cybbi Barton, and Megan Condis

JVN: Hey, Curious People. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and welcome to Getting Curious. Last year, I was minding my own business and one of my really close friends got very into video games. If you've been listening to the pod for a while, you may know that I've talked about her a few times. And if you have ever come to one of my shows, I do some stand up about video games as well. So, I think it's because like, once you get obsessed with something, then you start noticing the other news stories about it, so since I become obsessed with Fortnite, I just feel like I get more like articles about gaming on my Apple news. Um then I started hearing more people talking about like, I've heard stories about people meeting each other on Fortnite, starting relationships getting married uh from meeting online like, but from online gaming forums, um I've heard stories about like young people becoming, becoming completely like addicted to video games. I've heard stories of online radicalization with video games. Um and I also am like, butt-crazy obsessed with Fortnite, like it is so beautiful, it's stunning. It's like, I don't know how they make it. It's like, it, it just next level. And II, I, sometimes after I play Fortnite for a few hours, I was trying to go to sleep and I can't sleep because all I'm thinking about is like the, the sound that the treasure boxes make when you open them, it's like, "naaaahhhh", um, or just like the, the theme music of Fortnite. It's just, it's so good. And so really, the question that I'm asking is like, why am I so obsessed with video games. And so to talk about this, we're bringing on not one but two experts who both happen to be gamers themselves. Megan Condis is an assistant professor of Communication Studies at Texas Tech University. Her book *Gaming Masculinity: Trolls, Fake Geeks, and the Gendered Battle for Online Culture* was published in 2018 by the University of Iowa Press. Cybbi Barton is the director of the Esports Competition and Streaming Lab at Texas Tech and is a member of the Queer Women in Esports Organization. And stick around to the end of the episode where I'm gonna go through like the high points of what I learned and if I was able to answer my question. Megan, Cybbii, welcome to the show.

MEGAN CONDIS: Thank you so much for having us!

JVN: Obviously like, you know, Megan, I know you're at Texas Tech and Cybbi you're at, you're at the, you're, you're at the Streaming Lab at Texas Tech. You're both Texas Tech people but, like, what do you guys study and what are you, like, interested in, about, about games or about gaming? Cybbi go first only because my, my eyes looked at you first.

CYBBI BARTON: No. Fine. Um, yeah, I have been involved with video games as in, in a hobby for my whole life and when, um, the support from academics started supporting video games and curriculum and we'll talk about Esport teams and I'm sure here in a bit too, but how, you know, the nerds have always been cast away and now we're seeing a huge investment from our, you know, academic universities and colleges. And so I was able to get involved with that work um through my career and ended up getting a job. What I'm doing now is I'm teaching uh video game courses. It's part of a curriculum and a certificate that we have in the college. So when you think of baby Cybbi and I'm like, hey, this is what you're going to be doing sis in 30 years, I'm going to be ecstatic.

JVN: OK. So then Megan tell us about what you do.

MEGAN CONDIS: Yeah, so I came into this space uh starting as a researcher. So I was really interested in figuring out how it was that people expressed their identities through online games. And whether that was through, like, I'm gonna design an avatar that either represents like me in the real world or that represents this kind of like, you know, image of what I like to project of myself, whether it means choosing a screen name or whether it means um you know, how I organize and uh the kind of, you know, communities that I form around myself because a lot of gaming communities are kind of like, I'm gonna form a guild or I'm gonna form a team and like, we're gonna decide for ourselves like little governing principles, like what, what values we wanna express. And so that's what I did for my uh studies, when I was uh working on my doctorate, was trying to research these gaming communities and figure out like, how are they grappling with questions about gender and sexuality and like who was being invited expressly into these spaces and who were being kind of like gate-kept out of these spaces?

JVN: I grew up the youngest of four, but I very early, like those 2D like Mario games couldn't get enough Mario Kart, loved so much. Um and then, and then I think, and then they also loved Doom, which scared the shit out of me like that, that game scared the shit out of me so much so that I think it actually scared me away from games for a really long time. And then my figure skating coach um when I met her in 2018, she was really into Mario Kart and I was like, oh my God, I haven't been into Mario Kart in a minute. So then I started playing again. So like, since '18/'19, it's been like, I've been this like Mario Kart queen. Um and then I got to Switch, like, I gotta Switch again and there was like Mario Karting on there a lot. And then any time there was like a new Mario like game, I was doing that new Mario game. But they don't have like that many new Mario games. Like, it's kind of, they're kind of like, you know, not that often. So then I kind of like, then COVID happened and like a bunch of my gays, like got really obsessed with Mario Kart and then we were really deep into Mario Kart and I never really left Mario Kart, but you can only do so much before you're like, I never could do the one where you take the bumpers off. Like I just never graduated to that level. Like I need the bumpers thing, you know, and I just don't understand like the accelerate the slingshot like thing when you don't have the bumper thing and like all those little shortcuts. So kind of like figure skating, it's like once I got to the part where I was like, too scared to learn anymore, then I kind of just like gave up. So then, so then I got more into like in this last little bit, it's been more through my friends like, you know, GTA and like Fortnite. So um with all of the games that I just said, what were your first games that got you obsessed with games?

CYBBI BARTON: Yea, my, the first game I remember really getting behind was, uh, GTA was the first one that I really leaned into. I had to go sneak it out of my older brother's bedroom to bring it out and play in the late hours of the night when people were asleep. Um, for people who don't know, like GTA is a for mature adults kind of, uh, kind of game. And...

JVN: That's what I did. That was, that was my introduction to GTA and I still love it.

CYBBI BARTON: I think so too. And a lot of really exciting news with GTA, um, coming up with their new new game but with GTA...

JVN: Why? What is it? What's their new game?

CYBBI BARTON: Oh my gosh, go, you need to watch this trailer.

JVN: What is it? Is it like... Is it not Los Santos?

CYBBI BARTON: GTA 6!

JVN: Oh, it's like the new one.

CYBBI BARTON: Biggest map. Yeah, it's going to be really, really cool.

JVN: It's like really as big as Los Angeles. It's like a whole bigger Los Santos, honey.

CYBBI BARTON: Uh, we hopefully less traffic. But yeah!

MEGAN CONDIS: My game that I uh can't stop playing is League of Legends. So that's, that's kind of my Esport uh addiction and it's, I, I, for me, I think it's because you get a little ranked number and I want the number to go up.

JVN: What's that game about?

MEGAN CONDIS: Uh it's a 5 versus 5 game. I almost liken it to football because you're trying to protect your territory and advance into the other team's territory. And then every individual player has a different utility. So someone might deal a lot of damage. Another person might be like the big beefy guy that can absorb a lot of punishment. Someone else might be um like a healer who may, you know, restores their team. And so you have to coordinate with your teammates to make a good composition and then you have to cooperate with them to move tactically together. And you know, if it's online with strangers, sometimes you get a good group that cooperates and sometimes you don't. But that's the kind of general summary of it I would say.

JVN: When we talk about the gaming industry, like how big of an industry and amount of people are we talking about?

MEGAN CONDIS: So I went and grabbed some numbers on this. So Variety magazine recently published a report by Global Data that said that in 2022 the video game industry was at two valued at \$217 billion which is more than the film and music industry combined. Um so it is just humongous to the point that I think is maybe a lot of mainstream folks can't understand because it is so huge and yet also so invisible to certain segments of the population. Um and it is expected to be uh hitting \$300 billion by 2025. So it is like extremely massive, it's extremely global, it, you know, is connecting people all around the world. Um and that's kind of like from the numbers perspective, but Cybbi didn't know if you had some because you were a kind of our resident Fortnite gamer between the two of us.

CYBBI BARTON: I know. Yeah, I for now I got to get you on my duo. Um but yeah, I think the, the numbers speak a really important story. And also when we're thinking about gaming, I'm not just thinking Fortnite, I'm thinking mobile gaming. And when you see kids that are out, you know, waiting in the restaurant and they have like their tablet and they're playing a game or when I'm at a basketball game, I've sometimes seen a kid playing Minecraft on their tablet. So who are playing video games? It's really everybody. And if it's not in this specific silo of like Call of Duty or Fortnite, then it's not a video game. We're seeing it in a variety of different ways now that it's so accessible. And so the the billions of dollars that are invested in to video games, it makes sense because it's everybody like it's, it's so part of our, our culture and our everyday life that nobody's safe, everybody's playing games. Uh and yeah, it's, it's a really um impactful industry in a lot of different ways.

JVN: Um what are like the categories of games, there's like, there's like single player, then there's like, and, and, and then there's like, multiverse or like, what are like the fab five of genres of video games, like, or like what are like the top five or top three or something?

MEGAN CONDIS: I feel like you're trying to get us canceled because now we're gonna, we're gonna have like a controversial opinion because so genre differentiation is so disputed because it really depends like what part of the game you're talking about because you could talk about game genre in terms of like, like story and the same way you would a film, right? Like this is a fantasy game, this is a sci fi game, whatever. You could talk about genre in terms of like, what is the dominant mechanic; is it an exploration game or is it a building game or is it a fighting game or, or a tactics game. Or you could talk about the, the one that you were kind of uh gesturing towards was like, is this a single player experience or multiplayer experience? Is it cooperative or is it competitive?

JVN: What's cooperative? Oh, oh cooperative is like when you're working in a village and competitive is like when you're trying to kill everyone.

MEGAN CONDIS: Yes. Or it could be both, right? It could be, I'm working, you kill...

JVN: Oh 'cause you're a team killing another team. Oh Fuck. So like squad on Fortnite, like Battle Royale Squad that's like cooperative and competitive.

CYBBI BARTON: Oh, tell us, yes!

JVN: OK. OK. But then, but then, but what about 2D like are we even like, does 2D even count anymore, like a tandy girl or whatever?

MEGAN CONDIS: So, there's, uh especially in the indie game development scene, there's a lot of folks who are really into exploring kind of the retro aesthetic and kind of like rewinding games and saying, what were some of the interactions that we had on some of those older systems, like your, you know, your Nintendo entertainment system or your Atari or whatever? And what can we like do when we have these technical limitations on ourselves and we aren't going for like maximum realism and ultra 3D and smelevision and virtual reality and all that. Like what if we just rewind it back and we say you have two buttons, you have flat pixel, 2D graphics. Like, can we still tell a compelling story? Can we still create these interesting interactions? And I really, I really find that an interesting, like artistic challenge of like, if we impose all these limitations on ourselves, can we still create this like kind of satisfying gameplay experience?

JVN: Okay, so Fortnite, why am I obsessed? Is it just because it's so beautiful? Why is it so pretty?

CYBBI BARTON: It's a collection of art, right? And I think Fortnite is really impactful in a lot of different ways. But uh I think it's, yeah, it's such an exciting um game because it continuously is updating. So when you think about maybe people who don't play video games as much anymore, you play Golden Eye 007, that's the only thing you play.

JVN: That was a good one. That scared me. My brothers liked that.

CYBBI BARTON: A classic. Yeah, I mean, and kind of similar like GTA, you play the storyline and, and that's it and you do GTA things in GTA.

JVN: I really do like it, it's really fun. It's just Fortnite is like prettier. Like, I want to be a character on Fortnite so bad. Like, I like, can they, can we get a Queer Eye on Fortnite? Like, I just, like, I just think it, I heard that you can, it's like the Megan's like eyes just went, like, actually there's a way you're just gonna hop into...

MEGAN CONDIS: I would so watch that like a reality TV show set in a virtual world where you're remaking like a guild and you're teaching them. Like, so because it's like, I'm thinking about all the different angles, right, it would be like, someone helps you remake your avatars and make them stylish and then some, everyone else is like, let's work on your communication as a team and like another person like, let's rebuild your, you know, reorganize your guild.

JVN: I definitely need that with my friend who got me into Fortnite because she's always accusing me of like running away and she's like, "You're the only one who's not with the group right now." And I'm like-

CYBBI BARTON Oh, you're one of those.

JVN: No, she's just out with her. No, she's out with her. No, no, no, Cybbi, because she is out with Nate, who is the editor of this very podcast and they, THEY, will go out and do they go do all this stuff and then I, they just, you know, they have this whole code, this whole language and then I just, it's like, yeah, I don't pay attention for three seconds and next thing I know they're clear fucking over here and then, yeah, so what? I see a little battle I think, yeah, I'm gonna go kill these four people alone. Yeah, I do, I do that. I do it. Ok? I just learned about the gravel gun. I get drunk with power. I think I can do it alone and I can't, and that is reflective of my life. Ok?

CYBBI BARTON I love that reflection.

MEGAN CONDIS: Well, no, I mean, I, I just, I'm on a uh in a League of Legends group that we called the Desperados and we have a coach who works with us on, you know, how to communicate while you're in the game and how to coordinate everyone's attention and make sure that's like not a thing that comes natural.

JVN: Can I get their email? Because I need to call them in for therapy for our group,

MEGAN CONDIS: I invite you to our discord. They would freak out.

JVN: Yeah, because I really do need their work because my friend—whose name I was about to say but I'm not—they need a fucking lesson from. I don't, I'm perfect. I know I am. I have no, no notes for me. I am reliable. Always where I say I'm gonna be um...No, I know I get it. I also speaking of Fortnite, you had said earlier because it's so if you don't know about Fortnite, every three months, there's like a new like they change everything, like everything changes. It's like you get used to an island and then it changes and there and again, there's like so many different ways to play Fortnite. But in this Battle Royale world and is it true like, Cybbi, like if you play the other games, like does everything about every game change every three months or just the island?

CYBBI BARTON: No. Yeah. The Fortnite is unique in a lot of ways of just how much it, it changes these new chapters, new seasons. But Megan talking about League of Legends, I don't think that's changed much at all since it's existence. Megan, you can correct me if I'm wrong, but...

MEGAN CONDIS: Well, in little ways. So they'll make little tweaks. Um they'll change like the power level of various things or like they just for this season that just started in January, they made some small changes to the map, but definitely not in the sense that like we literally blew everything up, like literally exploded it and uh in a story event and then now everything is completely different. I was also just gonna say a thing that we didn't get to mention either is that Fortnite is extremely accessible across machines. So if you have a PC or if you have a console or if you like have a Switch or whatever, you are still able to play together, whereas a lot of multiplayer games...

JVN: They're not not cross-platform!

MEGAN CONDIS: Right. So I think that especially for young people, like, you know, if, if you are young enough that your access to video games is dependent on what system your parents bought for you, right? Like if my parents bought me a Playstation, they're not gonna go get me an Xbox, you already have a Playstation, right? And so so many of these games are siloed to like one system, this one you can play with all your friends from school no matter what system that they have. And I think that's a really big driver of the popularity of Fortnite.

CYBBI BARTON: I started playing Fortnite on my iPad.

JVN: And my husband just got me a thing to put on my iPhone so I can play in like the plane if it has like high speed WiFi, it's major. Um OK. Um So when we talk about gamers who are we really talking about?

CYBBI BARTON: You know what I mean? Not that person in the parents basement, eating Doritos and Mountain Dew and all that. Uh yeah, that, that stereotype that unfortunately still lives on. But I don't know, I think it's for everybody. I've always like to say when people are, yeah, I'm not a gamer or I don't play video games and I challenge them with you haven't found the game for you yet because it absolutely exists. There's so many options that I think everybody can be a gamer and I deep down they are. And if you don't think that you are, you just haven't found the right game yet.

MEGAN CONDIS: I agree with that. But I also think that because games are such a powerful cultural force right now, there are people out there who want to hold on to control of that space and who want to say there are only certain people within the space who really count. And so that's when you start to get people who look at games like the Sims or like certain mobile games and say, well, those don't count as real games, real games are like Fortnite or like Call of Duty or like GTA and that's, I mean—not to make everything about my own research—but like a lot of what my research is about is trying to figure out like where that story came from. Like why is it that certain genres of games or certain kind of um aesthetics of games have been elevated as the ones that we talk about in popular culture and the ones that really count it for, for those of you listening at home, I'm doing air quotes. I just realized no one can see me doing that. Um, but then, you know, there's all of these other groups, like the Sims is one of, if not the highest selling games franchises in gaming history.

JVN: I forgot about it and I played it; there was like a good three years there, like 7th to 10th grade. So that would have been like '99 to 2002. I had a major Sims moment. Absolutely loved it. Still holds a special place in my heart. But yeah, that's totally gaming. And we wouldn't necessarily like, that doesn't leap in mind to me as as, but it totally is, it just doesn't have like violence necessarily.

MEGAN CONDIS: Right. And there, there's a subgroup of gamers, like I kind of think of them in my mind as like capital "g" gamers, like people for whom um their love of video games is a big part of their identity. And it's really important for them to say like I am distinguishing myself from other people because I care about games. And so when, when that person gets confronted with this notion that like, well everyone plays games, your mom plays solitaire on her phone and they're like, well, I have to be different than that, that has, that has to be something else that's not the thing that is what my identity is built around. And a lot of that I think does come from the way that video games were marketed for a long time. So we can get into that if, if you're interested.

JVN: Yeah. And it's like, because it's like, Wordle, that can be a game like that can be gaming or like a crossword. It's like, it's really just like an evolution of, like, problem solving and, and talking about things with each other because, like, it's kind of fun to have something in common to, like, talk to, like, like, did you get that crossword answer? It's like, that's kind of what Fortnite can be like. It's like, how did you beat this person or do this task? Like, that's really fascinating.

MEGAN CONDIS: Have you seen, oh, sorry, go ahead.

JVN: No, you go ahead.

MEGAN CONDIS: I was gonna say, have you seen the Watermelon game on TikTok?

JVN: No. What's that?

MEGAN CONDIS: It's the most addicting thing. My brother and his wife and I spent about six hours playing it on New Year's Eve. It's, you know, it costs \$3 on the Switch. I don't, I don't know how much it costs on Steam, but it's just this little tiny thing. And we were screaming at our TV about it. We were just like, no, don't put it there. What are you doing? And it was just, and like, that's a video game and we had this amazing, like, bonding experience over it. If you show that same game to, you know, someone who's really invested in kind of gatekeeping the hobby, they might be like, that's just a, a mobile toy. Like that's not a video game. It's like, well, why not? It's digital, it's, you know, it's on the Switch, which is a video gaming console. It brought us together, we had a ton of fun doing it. Like, what's the, what's the purpose of bounding that off and saying, well, not that. And I think what I discovered through my research is the purpose is buttressing and holding up other parts of your identity. Like if gaming is how I express my masculinity or my heterosexuality, then gaming has to be aesthetically oriented around me using that as like a prosthetic to help me project that identity into the world and games like the Sims or like Barbie's Dream House or like this watermelon game, if they don't do that work well, then they must not count as video games because I've been told from all the marketing and the advertising that I've consumed that what video games are for is for helping me feel like a manly man.

JVN: Totally. Um I there's this thing in Fortnite where you can like emote and there's like these things where you can like go to this like part in the game and like the story, you like buy these emotes. So it's like these like different things that you can do. Um and some of them are like, actually, I think Fortnite is getting sued right now because sometimes they like steal choreography from like TikTok for emotes. Um and uh but like they just added this one where it's like fouettes, like, you know, fouettes like doing like this pirouette. It's like a dance thing. Um and I, I got it the second I saw fouettes on the store, I was like, oh my God, give me the fucking fouettes. I got it. I went to shop, I got my B bucks. I got my fouettes and now

when I kill someone, my favorite thing to do is like to emote on them doing fouettes. So like once I kill someone because you can see that like they're watching you. I love to do fouettes. And I always hope that it's like a Republican conservative young man just so that he knows that I am a big old fucking faggot who is literally doing fouettes on their grave. I want them to know! I want them to see!

MEGAN CONDIS: Do you stream at all?

JVN: Is that like Twitch?

MEGAN CONDIS: Yes.

JVN: I don't do that, no

CYBBI BARTON: Great idea.

JVN: Um OK. That's because usually on this podcast, I like pressure people to get on TikTok. I love that the roles have been reversed. And now I am like having the encouragement to join a new platform which is Twitch. I'm obsessed. I maybe I will, I'm going to research it. So I found that before I understood like the microphone on PS5 and like settings and like how much I wanted to hear other people talk versus not. I just like, couldn't believe the amount of, like, racism and, like, um, misogyny and, like, transphobia and homophobia. Um, and then I know that I'm bringing that up after I, um, you know, called myself a faggot but I do think it's, like, fine for me to, like, you know, emote with fouettes and I just, it's like, when you're calling yourself one, like, and to, you know, own the conservatives it's fine, you know, I love to own, I love to, we need to give them, yeah, we need to get it. Like what's like owning the Libs of the Conservatives, whatever. Um you know, we need to have our, have our terminology. Uh but so what is like the perm like is there a permeation or like just like a huge amount of like, alt-right, like hardcore men, dude, toxic man, bros in, in those sort of more violent games?

MEGAN CONDIS: I was gonna say I wanna separate out because there's, there's two issues, right? There's players who feel emboldened by the fact that this is a digital space and so they want to experiment with, I'm gonna say the words that if I said them at school, I might get punched in the face. And like one thing I want to make clear is I don't believe that video games as a form are because they are, you know, violent or because they are competitive are like making people do things that they wouldn't have done, usually. It's not like brainwashing the youth into making them worse. It's more like video games are the place where people congregate and when people congregate there's some percentage of assholes, right? Like, so it's not that the games are making people do this. So there's that part and maybe Cybbi could speak a little bit more to that. But I want to separate that out from like the alt-right like political, uh, people who are intentionally going into these spaces because they want to introduce young people to political ideas, it like with a strategy. And I feel like those, those two sometimes get conflated because the the bro assholes who just wanna like shout out naughty words or like horrific words because no one can touch them are providing cover for the people who are going into these spaces intentionally in order to try to expose people to their ideology in hopes that if 99 out of 100 told me to shut up and mute me and one out of 100 says, "Oh what Well, what is the great replacement like? Can you explain to me more about why you think the Holocaust didn't happen?" And if it's one out of 100 expresses some interest, you can put them, you can say, "Oh well, come join my discord, we'll tell you all about it. Come, you know, visit me and my friends and we can, you

know, on, on board you into some of this stuff.” And those are like, two separate questions. So, like, I wanna, I wanna kind of separate out like, the alt-right from, like, just toxic, racist and sexist.

JVN: Yeah, I only talk to, like, my two, like, I have like, three gaming friends and, like, I only talk to like, those ones. Like, I don't have it on. I can't just hear people like that anymore. It's too traumatizing.

MEGAN CONDIS: Yeah. Um, or a lot of people, uh, unfortunately, just completely disconnect from that, you know, and totally, they just don't talk when a lot. I know a lot of uh feminine presenting people who just say like, yeah, I just turn off talking because I know it's gonna be a problem every time. Uh I think a thing that is, that bodes well for the future is that a lot of game development companies are trying to look into like technical solutions. So whether that is um some sort of AI that can detect when things are going awry and that can offer warnings to players or that can mute, mute them. You know, if you're, if you're talking too much trash, you just get muted by the system or whether that means developing player feedback mechanisms so that if enough of your fellow players say like you are making my games worse, then you have some sort of thing that gets attached to your account. Um or even just, you know, I know a lot of games are also experimenting with alternate modes of communication. So what if you just don't get to chat? What if instead you have a range of like 10 different gestures or emotes or like little word balloons that pop up over your head? And you know, I did...that is not my area of research. So I don't wanna be like, and the most effective one is this, but to know that there are researchers and that there are companies who are looking into that and recognizing it as a problem is a big step in comparison to maybe 10/15 years ago when the answer was just, well, if you can't handle it, then don't play our game.

JVN: So Cybbi, you're a member of the queer women in Esports organization, I need to hear about this fun community about this. What, what, what's the deal with this?

CYBBI BARTON: Yeah, it's a great nonprofit. Um I, I think another hopeful future is that there are a lot of communities that their, their interests are the same like, hey, we all like playing video games. We're all queer women, let's talk about it. Uh and so it's a virtual space and queer women at Esports is one of many really great organizations that have popped up and been that layer of support. And you meet people from around the world and you have this connection on this very, you know, it could be a very, very specific thing or something that's more broad uh but the online community is alive and well. And queer women at Esports is a, is a great one among a lot of other, like, really impressive and uh important work that's going on.

JVN: I just had a full intrusive thought for a plot for a movie which is that um there is this like straight woman who desperately wants to join the um the queer women Esports like community and then like her big secret is that she's straight and she just like, really doesn't want to, she like, doesn't want to be found out for being straight, but she's like, really like prefers to hang out with all like the queer women, she's like, feels like she's just like, “Look like I am accidentally heterosexual and I also don't want to like, you know, colonize this like space for queer women. Um I just really want to be a lesbian. I just am not technically. I could be an asexual lesbian,” and like, that's like her like that's the plot and then, but I don't know how it would land and I don't know if the women would end up being like, “Bitch get out like we're like, get the fuck out of here.” Um I don't know, I don't know how it is. I'm not a

queer woman in, in, in gaming or Esports, I, I can't, I don't know but that was that I just had that thought.

CYBBI BARTON: I like it. I mean, but it allows that actor to have an experience of what they want, you know, of having that acceptance of who they are and you know, the internet for better or for worse, we can kind of be whoever we want to be. And I think also with the queer dynamic of it too is people know who I am in this space, you know, like I don't have to come out or you know what I mean? I, I have that relatable um experience in some way. So like, yeah, I, I think that movie speaks to this too and how people can show up in a video game of is it the superhero, the hero of your own story? And is it you and you want a place to feel accepted? Yeah, like that's, that's part of it. That's why community matters. That's, it's what we experience every day as humans and we can do it more accessibly now with the internet and with video games. Like how, how fun can that be to go through that with a video game as vessel.

JVN: And how come Megan when I'm or like how come when I finish a loop on Battle Royal No Build. I just am like one more like one more time. Like why? Like why do I love it so fucking much? Why do I love it so much?

MEGAN CONDIS: Yeah, I mean, so the closure of a loop is just like a thing that is uh evolutionarily, like, psychologically satisfying in the, in the same way like, do you ever watch, um, like Youtube videos where it's like a machine and the machine is, like, you know, stamping molds or something and it's just so repetitive and every time it's perfect and then you're just, like, yes, I could just sit here and watch this all day. And I think, like, what gaming loops do is when the loop gets completed, your brain releases chemicals that say like, you know, ah, like that feels good. It could be like the dopamine rush of a win or it could, could just be like, you know, the, the chemical that says, you know, ok, like this, this thing has been completed, we have reached an ending and that feels so good, especially because video games are very predictable. So you can know, like I can have the same chemical in about nine minutes.

JVN: I think I love predictability, you guys, I love predictability. You're right. That is a part of it. That's part of why I like weed because it's like, oh, I know how that's gonna make me feel. Is there anything that we didn't cover that you guys just think like, as someone who's like newly into gaming, as myself, and our listeners just need to know about gaming, history of gaming. Any final thoughts? It's like I used to say this on the podcast all the time. I haven't said it for a long time, but it's like Yogini recess. It's like it's the end of your yoga class. You get to do whatever pose you want to do. Uh do you want to share anything with the class, honey? It's, it's your guys' time. It's your moment.

CYBBI BARTON: Well, I, I think I want to start off by asking you a question, Jonathan. Of what do you, when you play Fortnite, what is it that you really enjoy about it?

JVN: Killing bitches.

CYBBI BARTON: I was hoping you would say get into play with my friends and you talk about anything in your site. But I think it's important to continuously like it's really easy to get sucked into the, this is why gaming is shitty or scary or you know, insert whatever...

JVN: It's like for connection, it's like for me to connect with my friends. And kill bitches.

CYBBI BARTON: I think it's, yeah, that's, it's wild that we get to do that. You know, we have the technology where, you know, in our lifetime we've seen this really grow. And so I think sometimes it's also uh as much as we can focus on the shitty parts of it, it's also what a cool way to be able to connect with my friends and get out this rage.

JVN: Yea, and also when I said killing bitches, I meant to say winning. I meant to say I really like attempting to win, competing. It's competing.

CYBBI BARTON: And you work with a team and you achieve the goal and you have, yea.

JVN: When you get a bit crown which is like when you get a crown and then you defend that title in the next game when you, like, I just think that's a bigger deal and I feel like these people don't really like, I feel like I feel like that means something and I feel like you should get like there should be something cooler for you when that happens, generally, it just like, it's like, it's like they don't even care and I'm like, I just won a fucking bit crown or you fuck what the fuck, what the fuck? It's like, it's like getting a turkey in bowling and like, they don't give you a fucking turkey on the screen. Like I want a stamp!

CYBBI BARTON: I know that is very real. That's a real feeling. And when you do get those...

JVN: Or like an emote that's only available if you have achieved a bit crown, that's what it should be. There should be that...

CYBBI BARTON: Send Epic an invoice. That's a great idea.

JVN: Right? It's just really more serious. Like my friend like, like my friend who I've been talking about this whole time, like if my leg got blown off like in an accident and she was my next of kin and she was attempting to get a bit crown, it's why she's not my next of kin because I'd be fucked. Like she won't answer the fucking phone because like, I know because like seriously like a bit crown like she doesn't fucking, she doesn't fuck around for that. And I just like for that level of involvement, they should be rewarding our addiction bigger and more majorly than with just like taking it for granted, is what I think.

MEGAN CONDIS: It makes me think about how, you know, again, just to, to circle back to what we've been discussing this whole time. Like the sense of accomplishment that you have when you achieve a goal in these spaces, it's like, it doesn't matter if the goal doesn't make sense to someone who doesn't live in, in this world; makes me think about the news stories that have been out recently, about the 13 year old who defeated Tetris. Yeah. And there was the, there was that reporter who was just like, this is an accomplishment. It's just a video game. Like people shouldn't be this excited about it. And it was just like, why? Like you can get a world record for, you know, longest surfing or, you know, biggest pancake or like, it's just humans like to push the boundaries of things and humans feel good when they set a goal for themselves and they accomplish it. And so, you know, if we, we learned this during COVID; video games were a way that people were able to experience like self-efficacy and feel like, you know, I don't have control over what's going on outside my window, but I do have control over this and I can strive and I can achieve in this space and So that is, that is a powerful force. And I, I too have a lot of hope that, you know, we can kind of marshal those forces towards, you know, making people feel happier and feel healthier and like developing their social skills and their intellect and their spatial skills and, and all these different things and we just do have to make sure that we're keeping our eyes on it and that we're, uh, you know, not just dismissing it as, oh, you know, that thing that doesn't matter because I don't

understand it. We need to make sure that, you know, experts and parents and adults are keeping their eye on that space and, and seeing how it's developing so that we can make sure that we nurture it in, in a healthy direction for society.

JVN: I mean, mic dropped on that y'all um stick around for us for our wrap up segment and see if I learned the things. Um In the meantime, Megan and Cybbi, thank you so much for coming and getting curious. We appreciate you so much and stick around for our final segment and we'll see about what I learned. Thank you guys so much.

MEGAN CONDIS: Thank you, our pleasure.

CYBBI BARTON: Thank you.

JVN: So we're going to include links to Cybbi and Megan's socials of whatever social they're using the most because I didn't actually get there in the recording. My bad, there was so much to talk about. Um but let's wrap this up: did I learn the thing when it comes to why am I so obsessed with Fortnite? I think I did learn why I'm obsessed on the surface. But it did make me really curious about like, the psychology of a loop. Like, what are the brain chemicals that my brain is making when I'm playing? Like, what's the actual, like, what is the chemical compositions going on uh in my brain when I'm playing Fortnite? But I think on the whole, it's about like loops, it's about there is some chemicals at play here, like the loop being like the beginning, middle and end of the story. Um I mean, we're seeing that, I mean, we do that on TV shows like where it's like, you know, when you finish a show, it's like, oh, I want to watch the next one. It's like, it's a psychological thing of like bingeing, but it's like, what, what is that oh, actually I think I did, it's like, it's like the predictability of it. It's like the knowing what you're going to feel, knowing that you're gonna think it's gonna be fun again. I think there's like the familiarity to it and it's also visually engrossing like it's this huge—Fortnite especially—is this like huge collection of bright and engaging art. So actually, I think I did learn about it. It's just that I'm so addicted to it. I want to keep learning more.

Uh um I think one of the most interesting things that I took away from this conversation is that gaming is a \$217 billion industry. It's bigger than the music and film industries combined. I think that's another thing that we didn't really get to but I am curious about for a future episode is like the industry of gaming and like who is at play in those lobbies. Um, because it's like I, I'd mentioned in the episode, like, it seems like gaming in large in a lot of ways is like the wild, wild west. Like, it doesn't seem like there's a lot of enforcement or like governmental regulation. And so I am curious about like, who's lobbying for gaming companies and gaming industries, like, how does the, the legislation around gaming come into play; safety um for young, for really just for anyone that, that are playing these games? Um I think that's really interesting. Also, I didn't know that you could hire a video game coach. That's fucking incredible. And then also like this stigma around video games that we think that it's like, oh, it's like, you know, the nineties is like leading to violence and even the way I was approaching the episode, it's like, I'm leery of like fraud or like online radicalization. It's like, yes, we should be leery of those things. But I do think that some of that stigmatization of like, and maybe it's, I, I spoke about an episode about like the the negativity or the your survival complex, like, you know, the snake is gonna kill you, the warm fuzzy bunny is not going to kill you. And so it's like, I think because you know, a lot of what we perceive as like either like are you a warm fuzzy bunny or are you a snake? And it's like being a non-binary bitch, I should be able to see the snake and bunny in one thing because really everything is a spectrum. And so I just think that's interesting why I more notice the

negative things as the positive things which also now makes me more curious about like the psychology of threat, the psychology of not a threat. Um Why do we react to things in certain ways? Um Oh I'm curious that like the industry and like the future of gaming, like what money does Meta want? Because it's like if it's worth 217 now, 217 billion now and it's only going up no wonder like Netflix and Meta and other people are trying to get to the table of like the gaming money. So it's like what's the money at play and what's the government at play when it comes to gaming? Yeah, that okay, so interest and also like, do I need to get on Twitch? And would you guys watch it? Um Anyway, uh what an episode of Getting Curious! And I feel like this because gaming is something I've been getting so much more into and spending so much more time on. I really feel like I'm only scratching the surface on this topic on the pod and I'm sure we'll be coming back for more of it. So thanks for listening to Getting Curious and we'll see you next time.

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