

Episode 31: I Think I Know What You Know

Show Notes

When playing games, we find it useful to consider what other players know, and how that affects game play. Psychologists study theory of mind, our concept of what other people know. Dr. Jennifer Blessing and I discuss how this relates to playing games.

Game References

Apples to Apples, Cards Against Humanity, Chess, Codenames, Decrypto, Kemet, Scythe.

Research References

Baron-Cohen, S., Leslie, A. M., & Frith, U. (1985). Does the autistic child have a “theory of mind”. *Cognition*, 21(1), 37-46.

Premack, D., & Woodruff, G. (1978). Does the chimpanzee have a theory of mind?. *Behavioral and brain sciences*, 1(4), 515-526.

Transcript

Hello! This is Episode 31 of the Cognitive Gamer podcast. I am your host, Dr. Stephen Blessing, professor of cognitive psychology at the University of Tampa. I use games to both explain and explore concepts in psychology. Today we’re going to have another discussion with Dr. Jennifer Blessing, a developmental psychologist at the University of Tampa. We’re excited to talk about this particular topic, aren’t we Jenn?

I’m sure you’ve caught yourself while playing a game, considering what your move should be, and thought to yourself, what is the other player going to do? Most games have that character, where you need to consider what your opponents might do in order to better plan what your current move should be. Or, maybe it’s the type of game where knowing what your teammates know or don’t know will allow you to make a better play in the game. That’s part of what makes games so entertaining, because you often need to figure out how another person thinks in order to help you play the game. That type of thinking is what we’re going to talk about today with Jenn. That sounds like it should be something psychologists have thought about and studied, right?

This reminds me a bit about chess, where most people believe that grandmasters think several moves ahead in order to play the game. That’s not really true, but when people play strategy games, there is this element of if I make this move, they will probably respond this way, so you try to maximize your position in the game and minimize your opponent’s position.

Our son, who is 16 now, really likes to play strategy games, with Kemet and Scythe being current favorites. It’s been interesting to see him through the years get better and better at playing these games, at least partly because he’s gotten good at figuring out what other people will do in response to his moves. Now Jenn, what more specifically have developmental psychologists studied here?

<conversation proceeds normally from there>

The Japanese have a particular word for this, yomi. I believe it grew out of Street Fighter type game in particular. The translation I've heard is "to know the mind of your opponent," which is exactly what we've been talking about with theory of mind. And, it has that character that if you know the mind of your opponent, then you can act appropriately to your advantage.

Until next time, remember to think about what you play, and have fun doing it.