

ANALOG

ISSUE 3



Editors Note

Welcome to Issue 3

Wow. Are we having fun yet? I'm pleased to present issue 3 of Analog, the first one of 2018!

If I just gave or sent this issue to you, I hope you'll appreciate the badge and wear it with pride. My intention for this issue was to highlight sexism and harassment in the games industry, but only one article was submitted. After witnessing men being a bit too touchy-feely or downright lecherous at various events, I wanted to highlight this as a key theme for this issue.

We also have articles on mental health, nervous breakdowns, turning Gamergate trash into something positive and some helpful guides on running events, networking and navigating LinkedIn.

Enjoy.

And as always, door is open.

Alex B

Just one example

By Anonymous

I've been sexually assaulted twice at industry events. The first time a large man came over to me, drunk, and began talking to me. I always assume at these events, people are there to work—to network, make contacts, and find out what people are working on. It doesn't seem strange to me, then, when a stranger comes over to strike up a conversation. About 3 minutes into our conversation he lunged in, grabbed my waist, and tried to kiss me. I turned my head and his sloppy, beery kiss landed on my cheek. I extricated myself from him, and grabbed my friends to leave. I explained what happened. A shy Japanese girl said he also kissed her. He had been going around the room, essentially, trying it on with everyone.

I left never went back to any event hosted by that organization.

I went to an industry-organized party at GDC. A senior game dev went to hug me, which is fairly normal, and hugs go around a lot at GDC. But when he pulled out of the hug his hands grabbed my breasts. I was just shocked silent as he walked away. This time, I thought I would do something about it. I told the organizer of the event, and he just laughed. The event still goes on every year, but without me. The next day, the same senior dev asked me where my hotel was. I was thankfully interrupted before I could tell him where to go.

The worst part of these experiences is they punish the victim. I feel like I can no longer attend events where there is alcohol involved. I'm afraid something worse will happen than "just" being grabbed. We all know that jobs are found not by advertising and applying, but through friendships forged and networking at industry events. How many other women have just stopped going, losing out on jobs because of experiences like these? How many others have decided to quit the industry altogether, knowing that spurning the advances of someone in power just shut a lot of doors?

But even more insidious than the obvious assaults and ongoing online harassment is the daily grind of being a woman in the industry. It's being at an event and someone introducing themselves to all the men but assuming I'm there as a girlfriend and ignoring me. It's commenting on my weightloss or what I'm wearing instead of asking me about my work. It's assuming I don't know what I'm talking about because I'm female, even though I've been in the industry far longer than they have. It's being the "token female" on panels, now desperate not to appear too male. And not getting asked questions at the end because everyone is focused on what the much more rambunctious male had to say. It's being talked over, constantly. Daily. The grind is much worse than the obvious harassment, but it all adds up.

I've taken a couple of years off from working in the industry, and to be honest, I don't know if I'll go back. I feel so jaded by it all now. The shine, the enthusiasm I once had, the love I once had for the industry, is marred and black now. I just feel sad, and hurt, and let down by those I complained to who did nothing. By those who think I'm making a mountain out of a molehill because my body should be my own. By those who see these things happen and refuse to speak out. It's exhausting, and my job should be exhausting because of the amazing work I'm doing, not because of the way I'm treated as a woman.



What I learnt from a mental breakdown *by Nick Hatter*

In March earlier this year, following the completion of my company's latest funding round, I suffered a debilitating mental breakdown which resulted in several trips to A&E and a trauma therapist. However, there is a saying that "a breakdown can be a breakthrough".

I can't really emphasise this enough: fundraising is NOT good for your health. It is all or nothing, and every entrepreneur is very conscious of this.

Unfortunately for me, I was not only was dealing with the stress of fundraising and insomnia. Little did I know that I was also carrying the post-traumatic stress of growing up in a chaotic home environment and of the physical, intellectual, emotional, sexual and spiritual abuse throughout my childhood.

Through recovery, I learnt some valuable lessons:

Lesson #1: Self-help doesn't work

"Stop seeking", I remember Chris John telling me. Chris is one of Europe's leading trauma therapists who has trained extensively with Pia Mellody of The Meadows rehabilitation centre (and author of "Facing Codependence" and "Facing Love Addiction").

Before I started seeing Chris, I was a self-help addict, and I always thought that if I read enough self-help books, I could heal my wounds. After going over my history, he pointed out that I had experienced lots of trauma growing up. What?

Trauma isn't always caused by cataclysmic events such as war and earthquakes. A parent hitting you or a teacher shaming you in front of the class is felt very intensely as a child, and it traumatises us. These early frightful experiences get stored in the oldest part of the brain, the "Reptilian Brain", which doesn't respond to logic. It can, however, respond to feeling. As Chris says, when it comes to trauma: "feel with it, don't deal with it".

Most self-help books are about doing and achieving: the antithesis of feeling. I know several people who have read numerous self-help books but are still suffering from multiple issues including toxic relationships, addiction, codependency, etc. While self-help books can provide some useful guidance, they are by no means a cure for trauma.

However, self-help can be useful when it brings to light one's own unconscious or unhealthy behaviour. Awareness brings acceptance, and self-acceptance leads to growth. As the famous psychologist, Carl Jung, once said, "until we make the unconscious conscious, it will determine our lives, and we will call it fate".

Lesson #2: Death is a powerful reminder

When I was crying in a mental health unit in A&E, all my goals and resentments just fell away. It was then that I remembered what truly matters in life: health, well-being, love, family, friends and living a life that is true to myself.

I now keep a Latin phrase on my iPhone lock screen: "Memento Mori et Tu Ipse Esto", which means "remember death, and be yourself".

Lesson #3: Everything we believe about happiness is wrong

Back in March, my company was valued at £1.7 million. I was dating some beautiful women, and my body was in pretty good shape. However, it wasn't enough; I needed more. More money. More sex. More achievements. More more more. This phenomenon is known as "hedonic adaptation", where people quickly adjust to normal levels of happiness following a positive (or negative) event.

My workaholism and pursuit of more led to burnout and breakdown. It was after my ordeal I realised that lasting fulfilment and happiness comes from within.

How I am recovering

Recovery from my breakdown has been a long and painful journey. Though I still struggle with insomnia, fatigue, anxiety and depression, I am definitely on the road to getting better.

Here are some therapies that helped me a lot:

Trauma Reduction Therapy

According to Chris, conditions such as addiction, anxiety and depression disorders are the result of childhood trauma, thus, addressing that is treating the cause rather than the symptoms. This type of therapy can involve:

- Family of Origin work (examining your entire family system)
- Somatic Experiencing (wailing like a baby)
- Shame Reduction (having imaginary conversations with people who have hurt you and giving back their shame and fear)
- EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing - moving your eyes rapidly back and forth while recalling traumatic experiences)

Bioenergetics and Trauma Release Exercise (TRE)

When animals get attacked in the wild, they end up shaking afterwards, and this discharges fight-or-flight hormones and resets their nervous system. Trauma gets trapped in our nervous system for years after a traumatic event and induces post-traumatic stress.

Bioenergetics and TRE involve "charging" and releasing the muscles, which causes involuntary shaking. It is in the shaking that the healing of historical wounds can occur.

Guided Meditation

Mindfulness has been shown to decrease the size of our amygdala, the centre of our brain responsible for releasing fear hormones. However, like many workaholics, I struggle with meditation.

Calm is a guided meditation app that I have found helpful. Unlike other meditation apps, it has soothing ambient sounds, such as the sound of a flowing river, to help filter out background noise when meditating (a must-have when you live in a noisy city like London). The "21 Days of Calm" training programme allowed me to learn fundamental concepts of meditation quickly. There's also a new meditation available every day called "The Daily Calm", which has powerful messages in it to ponder during the day.

What's next

My mental breakdown caused me to re-evaluate my life and my priorities. I feel like a new man, and my goal now is to continue inner healing, as that is where true happiness lies. However, I need to continue to take it easy for a while.

On the self-help front, I often find that books on happiness are either too “self-helpy”, philosophical, too technical, or not visceral and relatable enough for me to be really interested. So when I am better, I plan to write a book called “The Great Deception” (working title) which is about the myths of happiness (such as “I’d be happier if I had a better body”), and I debunk them using personal anecdotes, celebrity case studies and research.

You can find out more about the book here:

www.nickhatter.com/the-great-deception



Playing with science to improve mental health...

“how do you feel about that?”

by Eva Flammensbeck

As opposed to many therapists that newly discover yoga as a complementary means of healing mental illnesses, Lorna Evans' story goes the other way round. She is a former successful producer/marketing manager in the games and TV industry turned yoga teacher, followed by training as a clinical psychotherapist.

Lorna is now using yoga as a tool for her clinical psychotherapy clients and training clinicians working in mental health about the benefits of using yoga by explaining the science behind it. Her work is timely, as interest in yoga's healing properties is growing throughout the UK due to the growing body of research backing it up and mental health is now a major talking point for all, especially men and young people within the games industry.

I took the opportunity to interview her to learn more.

How did you start out with yoga?

It was around 2000, I was working in London, in a games company called Eidos. They worked with massive games like Tomb Raider, Final Fantasy, for example, all exciting stuff. But there was something about yoga I was drawn to, even though I was working in that electric, fascinating field.

One day, I went to a swanky gym in Wimbledon, to attend a yoga class. But it felt uncomfortable and cliquey, so I never went back. Instead, I bought a video by Vimla Lalvani, a funny Indian lady doing yoga in India, in a place full of brilliant light. Through this video, I fell in love with Vimla and India at the same time. I had no idea what yoga was, all I knew was that I did what Vimla told me, and it made me feel good. So I kept doing it. Not daily but it was a tool I had in my pocket. It was the first time I experienced joy, without any alcohol or work—just pure joy.

As my career progressed, I was worked for Sky Television, Nickelodeon and MTV. I was successful in my career in production and afterwards in marketing and PR, at a young age. People knew me as the one who was at every party, drinking, funny, and always in a good mood. I was living the classic fast-paced London business life. But on the inside I was depressed.

One of the wake-up moments for me was when I was working at Sky Television. I was stressed, and experienced pain in my psoas major muscle, which become stronger over time. I thought it was caused by sitting at a desk all day and wearing high heels. During a trip to California, the pain became unbearable, and I nearly had to be flown home, as I couldn't walk anymore. I went to see an Osteopath, and he told me to cut out the high heels and do more yoga. And that's what I did—more of Vimla's video.

I knew yoga was doing something good for my body and my mind, and so, curious to find out more, in 2004 I—quite naively—jumped on a plane to India. And I did find a lot. In 2006 I started to train as a yoga teacher in the UK.

How did you manage to juggle training as a clinical psychotherapist, working in the games industry, and teaching yoga?

It was a lot. But there were a few things that gave me the energy I needed for it.

My curiosity drove me, and the fact that I needed to learn the clinical side of why yoga could be my medicine for depression. That's what pushed me forward. I needed to understand this from a clinical perspective to gain credibility and also to be able to explain it to my clients in a simple way—'Yoga works because...'—Without a clinical grounding; I was unable to do this. I knew that the combination of yoga and psychotherapy, the combination of body awareness and mind, was the work I am meant to do. To let people know there are alternatives to just taking medication, and our bodies and breath are the keys to our wellness.

Tell us about your work with clinical therapists.

People with mental health issues are starting to open up about their struggles and society is becoming increasingly aware of the problems, namely, in the workplace and also men are starting to talk about their mental health for the first time ever.

That's also thanks to many initiatives and charities in the UK raising awareness about mental health. One of them is Heads Together, spearheaded by members of the Royal Family, namely Prince William, Kate, and Prince Harry. Even they tell their own story now, the struggles they went through after their mother's death and how vital therapy was for them.

These great changes have allowed more people to feel safe to talking about their anxiety or depression without being judged. I am most proud of the young people and men I work with who are speaking out about their anxiety and depression whilst understanding the triggers of work stress, education and environment.

I also run workshops with Mind, the UK's leading mental health charity. In my workshops there, I work with people aged between eighteen and eighty-four. We focus on breathing and yoga to beat anxiety and depression. It's great I can now reach these people with both practices. The groups give me great feedback. Recently the eighty-four-year-old man told me,

"Lorna, I have had anxiety and depression all my life, but didn't know until the last hour, that they are different."

What is the focus of your work with the psychotherapists and counselors?

My focus is science and using yoga and breathing techniques as tools in clinical work. When talking to clinicians, I shine a light on the power of breath, prana (energy in the body), and the autonomic nervous system.

My clinical workshops are for mental health professionals with interest in the body and working somatically. It is a starting point, but this area is growing rapidly in the UK, and I am thrilled that interest is high and people are motivated to learn.

I am so joyful that every day yoga and meditation become more popular and talking about our mental health also grows. I'm fortunate that the topic gets this much attention today. It's a perfect time to be working in this field.

What scope is there for improving the treatment of people with mental illnesses in the UK?

Great progress has been made, but there is still a lot of work to be done. We still have a medical system whereby doctors are dishing out anti-depressants to people without looking at the bigger picture, the origin of the illness, their history, lifestyle or environment.

There are also many young people who are missed that are on the spectrum. One of the reasons I loved working in the games industry is that I got to work with these talented young people, many of whom were high-achievers. 99-Percent of them are on the spectrum and have so much talent to nurture. I saw tremendous success when I worked with them. Taking them out of their heads, and into their bodies.

It is essential to hold in mind that anxiety and depression are not diseases or curses we have to live with. There is always a trigger and we have options to be well...

- Anxiety is a fear-based primal normal reaction.
- Depression is often anger or frustration that is trapped in the body and not allowed to come out.

Both are often missed by doctors who are under pressure to process patients quickly, they have only eight minutes per patient. Handing out anti-depressants is just 'simpler.' Often people say "I don't want to take anti-depressants", my response is "so, what are you going to do instead?"

Working with the body and becoming grounded allows clients to identify their triggers and gain control over this. Clients will have to change their lifestyle. Alcohol, exercise, food and caffeine are big topics of discussion in therapy. However, people in therapy are motivated to be well and improve self care. Otherwise, they would not show up for sessions.

If you would like to start talking about your mental health, search your local qualified therapists on the BACP website : www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk and see you who like the look of.

To learn more about Lorna and her workshops for positive mental health in the workplace, contact her via lornaevans@yahoo.co.uk.



How Gamergate helped me become a better writer

by Joey Relton

One of the earliest memories I have is waking up to my mother's face above mine with "WAS" written in big letters on her forehead.

My loveable, if not highly eccentric, mother did all that she could to help me with my dyslexia, and "was", for whatever reason, was one of those words I struggled with the most. Needless to say, I never spelt "was" wrong ever again.

I'd always been disenfranchised and uninterested in the cookie cutter, straight white male protagonists that were prevalent in the video games of my youth. I preferred to see leads like Sarah Kerrigan – badass women who got shit done on their own. This, mixed in with the fact that I'd later come out as a flaming homosexual, led me down the path of writing as a hobby.

Back when I was younger I'd never really considered that writing would become one of my hobbies, let alone that I'd make something resembling a career out of it. Yet after a lifetime of observing how the industry treated women and queer characters, I'd developed a lot of opinions. I'd been inspired by the likes of Anita Sarkeesian's discourse on the industry, and soon after getting into university I began writing for small hobby sites such as Cubed Gamers (holla). The articles I'd written eventually landed me job as a Content Marketer at Aardvark Swift, and I found myself writing for the big boys: Gf.biz. The Guardian and Develop (R.I.P.).

Dyslexia, for myself at least, isn't as much of a problem anymore in the modern era of spellcheck. But after a childhood of struggling with spelling and copious amounts of external help, I was riddled with anxiety whenever submitting a piece of work. I'd receive good feedback from peers but told myself they were just being polite. A single spelling mistake would totally validate my fears that I wasn't worthy of writing as a dyslexic. That, or I'd worry that the piece just plain sucked.

Writing primarily about issues surrounding gender and sexuality in the industry, I naturally hold a... let's just say unfavourable view of the whole misogynistic Gamergate crowd. Although, I've got to hand it to them – they helped me overcome one of my biggest fears where friends, family, supervisors and even the occasional stranger had ultimately failed.

It was all unintentional of course, but the result is all the same.

Up until a year ago I'd managed to stay somewhat off the radar of Gamergate. The piece that pushed me into their headlights? A simple timeline of prominent women in the industry for women's history month published in Develop (This always puzzled me, as I'd previously written pieces that I would have considered far more "controversial" in their eyes, but oh well).

Almost overnight from when the piece was published there were articles written attacking me and whole reddit posts dedicated to slandering my name. I'd be lying if I didn't say I treated the whole experience as a badge of honour.

After spending some time shifting through the cesspool of gamergate platforms, I realised one small, yet vitally important (at least to me) point. While all of these angry men were attacking myself, my views, and everything I stood for, not one of them mentioned anything about the way the article was actually written.

These were people who owed me nothing. They didn't know me, they actively hated me – yet the one thing they could have homed in on to upset me, they didn't. This was all the validation I needed. I'd been put in front of the firing squad and came out relatively unscathed. So, oddly enough, thanks to a group of people who hate me, I am no longer paralysed with anxiety over the prospect of submitting my writing as a dyslexic. And that's a gift that no amount of help from teachers, friends and peers could have given me. So thanks Gamergate. You're still a bag of dicks though.

Networking and networking etiquette

by Lewis Brown

I'm going to spend some time talking about my experiences specifically aligned to the Games Industry. There are lots of very polished and corporate Networking guides to be found online, but I wanted something to feel closer to the gaming world we live in.

One more thing before we start. The single biggest advice I can give to any networker is to not just focus on what you are getting from the events you attend and the people you meet. Focus more on building a reciprocal business relationship with that person. You can never be owed enough favours in a world where everyone seemingly knows everyone, having a great reputation is important.

Firstly, let's look at networking approaches. Let's talk through some parameters you can use to more easily understand your approach to networking and setting a mindset.

- Focus on being easy to communicate with and making the other person feel at ease. Make them feel comfortable and be prepared to be the one driving the conversation without forcing it.
- Meeting new people can be interesting and rewarding, so try not to think of networking as work, instead view each conversation as a potential opportunity.
- Don't forget to use events and networking opportunities to catch up with someone you rarely see, facetime allows you to build much closer relationships with colleagues and longer standing partnerships.

Whenever you are attending an event you should try to think about Networking as a 3 part programme.

1, Network Preparation

2, During the event

3, The Follow up

1, Networking preparation

This for me is and always will be the most important stage. Whether is an informal and smaller event or a bigger event such as Gamescom or GDC. The prep is fundamental to success and as to whether you can gain measurable ROI from events.

- Ask the event coordinator if they have a list of attendees to help you in being prepared for the event. Consider who you want to focus on and I would always recommend checking name pronunciations.
- Research the attendees you want to meet with, look them up on LinkedIn, Google+ etc... The more you know, the more your conversation can be engaging. Part of networking is mingling with multiple people you may not know, but you also want to focus your pre-event efforts on identifying the people you are most interested in meeting.
- Use Social Media – Start following event hashtags/forum posts etc.. I like to use Twitter and Instagram using tools such as Tweetdeck/Hootsuite setting up columns and following the conversations about events.



- Time management. Book in slots that are long enough to be worthwhile, but not so long to limit the number of people you can meet (I prefer 30 minutes). If you can get people to come to you that's even better (anyone who has ever traversed Gamescom will know why this is important!) Only book back to back meeting if people are coming to you. Use time between meeting to make notes you will have met a lot of people and won't remember all the details.
- Evenings and Event parties. These can be just or even more important than the main events. There are always mixers and other parties going on and just asking around you can usually find out where to be. For long standing and larger events that's always opportunities at Hotel bars and certain pubs are often busy years after year.

2, During the networking event

When the day/evening of the event arrives, there are several details prior to arrival:

- Cultural Awareness – Although I wouldn't want to pigeon hole entire countries and regions, there is no doubt that this impacts how you interact with different people from different countries. Be considerate to these differences. When I approach colleagues in Finland for the first time my approach is very much more subdued the say my US colleagues. It is worth taking time to understand these differences.
- Dress Appropriately – By this I mean think about the people you are meeting with. I work for EA and I'm generally there to meet people we might hire. This means 2 things, if it's an event where everyone there is looking for work, such as a careers fair I'll be a walking EA beacon. If it's a general event where people attend for a variety of reasons, I won't wear anything with EA on it at all. Who wants there boss to see you chatting to a recruiter from the competition.
- Place your business cards in an easy-to-reach pocket. Place incoming cards from those you network with in a different pocket to avoid confusion.
- Some events will have name badges makes sure its somewhere easy to see and read, I always check its correct. I try to be positive and cheerful at these events. Note it's a fine line between this and looking crazed.
- Shaking hands – Lots of folks have opinions on this. I stick to a few rules. Eye contact, smile and please no hand crushing!



- Standing allows for flexibility and movement so you can meet new people, sitting down makes you closed off and harder to engage. Also think about personal space, know one like a space invader!
- Be considerate and use tact to dismiss yourself from a person you may be stuck with. Just because there isn't value in dialogue now doesn't mean there won't be in the future.
- I always thank everyone I meet for their time regardless of the level of usefulness. I would tend to offer my business card first. This works on two fronts. One, you can gauge their interest, and two, you know where you stand if they decline.
- Immediately on departure, look through your business cards and write any notes you may need, apart from business details I always note anything more trivial to. When you talk to someone down the line and bring up something non-business related and personal from that conversation it helps build deeper connections.
- Evening events – Don't get to drunk! Everyone has fun in the games industry, but you don't want to be that person.



3, The follow up

Post event activities are the most productive for you, because you have had the introduction. Now it is time to make the networking work for you and your business.

- Make sure you follow up with every contact you made, not just the ones you feel can help you in the short term. This is the opportunity to reach out and build relationships for the future.
- Generally, I would follow up by email unless we had already agreed on a phone call.
- Keep in regular contact, I will try to contact people every 3 months to keep a dialogue open.
- Do meet with the same people again and again. I have a number of people I have great relationships with at different companies. Without asking always to introduce me to new people, It's about trust and respect. They know that I represent them in a professional manner so don't mind making an introduction.

Wrapping up,

Networking comes to some people naturally and others have to work at it.

It's definitely something you should have in your locker and an activity that can be an enjoyable and have a real impact on your career, company or business.

I didn't always work in Games and compared to some other Blue chip industries the Game Dev community is an amazing industry to work in. Enjoy meeting the amazingly varied people, developers and cultures we have in the industry.

On that note if anyone would like to contact me to discuss any of my views or ideas further feel free to drop me an email (lbrown@ea.com)

Thanks Lewis
Senior Recruiter @ EA



Screw it... just do it!

by Byron Atkins-Jones

All month I've been trying to come up with some epic ground breaking subject I can write about and completely failing to. Nothing seemed to leap as something I just *had* to say. Then, by chance I get an email this morning inviting me to give a talk on best practices for thriving in indie business. That got me thinking. I've got a lot of so-called advice but recently I've been suppressing the urge to just scream out "SCREW IT... JUST DO IT!"

So I am and here it is:

I could tell you that making games is a lot easier than selling games but you're going to discover that the hard way anyway, so, screw it... Just do it!

I could tell you that chances are high that the indie game you want to make will barely register a whimper on launch day, that it will get lost in the crowd and you'll be lamenting over you're mere 23 copies sold but you know what? Screw it... Just do it!

I could say that you should heavily research what genre of games sell on Steam and to make that kind of game if you've any hope of selling enough copies to be able to pay the rent or eat any time soon, but, you know what? Screw it... Just do it.

I could say that before you even attempt to go indie you should have enough savings in your bank to allow you to go at least a year without money, but what do I know? Screw it... Just do it!

I could say that you shouldn't try to make your own engine rather than use something like Unity, but chances are you will do it anyway, so, screw it... Just do it!

I could say that you should really examine your motives and see if making games is something for you. Making games is *nothing* like playing games and over time you will lose that passion for playing games, ruining that one love you had, but screw it... Just do it!

I could say good luck trying to get the games press to open your email let alone cover your game. The competition for press coverage is fierce and your game had better be more click worthy than any other if you hope to get that attention. Awww Hell, screw it... Just do it!

I could say if you intend to snare a publisher in the hopes they give you the funds to complete your game then you had better be trendy right now and have a game with that special 'X' factor or give up hope now, that particular dance leads to frustration and broken dreams. Then again, screw it... Just do it!

I could say the proper response to somebody telling you that to succeed you just have to make a 'great game' is to thump them in the mouth, but I don't advocate violence so screw it... don't do it!

I could tell you that attracting VC's to invest in your game is as painful as being thumped in the mouth and losing a few teeth but you're going to be attracted to all that money, so screw it... Just do it!

I could say listen to all the advice other indies give you but the reality is that most of us are making this up as we go along, so in the end - screw it... Just do it!

Disclaimer: follow advice or not at your own risk. If you fail miserably and lose all your money it's on you. However, if you follow it and make a fortune you owe me 10%.

The Power of the Plumbob: Giving Kids a Mental Health Toolbox Via The Sims

by Natalie Griffith

Understanding, processing and dealing with any mental health issues, regardless of how serious they are, is a constant journey of learning and discovery. Like any journey, it's much easier when you come prepared. Most of us feel we don't always have all the tools we need, but at least our life experiences have usually taught us *something* that we can draw on in times of need.

But how do we help our kids to build their own mental health toolboxes when they've not yet had many of those experiences?

Something has become clear to me as I've watched my now ten and twelve year olds grow. No matter how many times you try to empathise with them by explaining that you've been through something similar, until they go through each issue themselves and experience the feeling of coming out the other side, they don't ever really believe you and they don't really take it on board.

As parents, we instinctively want to protect our kids from stressful situations, or explain their impact away so as to avoid upset. By doing that though, we rob them of the opportunity to understand their own emotional reactions to things, and therefore prevent them from building up resilience of their own.

The school system often makes kids feel that every situation has a definable and predictable outcome that they need to learn. The virtues of exploring possibilities and embracing uncertainty often seem to be cut out of this results-driven loop. So when a child is faced with emotions they don't understand or recognise, or the pre-teen hormones go into overdrive and confuse things even further, they can end up feeling like they're just not smart enough to understand what's happening to them.

So how can we help kids explore their emotions and start to build their own toolbox of self-awareness and coping strategies?

Discussing mental health and stripping it of any taboo or embarrassment is clearly the number one priority – I think we can all get behind that as an idea, and it's proven to work with us adults. But it's not always easy to even start those conversations with kids because they simply don't have the vocabulary to articulate what they're feeling.

It's hard to have a conversation with someone who's not learnt your language yet.

My kids have spent a not inconsiderable amount of their waking hours over the last six months playing The Sims 4, watching other people play The Sims 4, listening to podcasts about The Sims, and scouring Tumblr for custom content for The Sims 4.

Don't worry. They do read and go outside and stuff occasionally too. Honest.

It started as a fairly standard new game obsession but bit by bit it started to have a deeper impact.

I'm sure I don't need to explain how The Sims games work to anyone reading this, but it's clearly one of those 'friendly' games that get even the grandparents grudgingly saying "oh, well, at least it's educational". I think we all know that its behavioural simulations have become increasingly sophisticated over the years, but I wonder whether anyone on the dev team realises the tangible lessons that younger players might be learning, almost via osmosis.

What kind of lessons do I mean? Well, the constant balancing of each Sim's basic needs, combined with the cause-and-effect consequences of getting that wrong sometimes, can often be hilarious, but maybe those things can be instructive too.

I'd love to think that seeing their Sim perform badly at school after not getting enough sleep and being miserable in the morning would have a real-world impact on behaviour, but sadly it's not quite that simple! Not in my house at least. At one point I did think that we'd had a major breakthrough when I heard my 12 year old yell from the other room "For God's sake! Who left the TV going and all the lights on?! That'll cost us a fortune!". He was, naturally, talking about his Sim's house, and not our real-world one where, at that exact same moment, not only was the TV on in another room but there were three separate lights still on in his bedroom upstairs.

Maybe expecting such literal learnings from the game was over-ambitious.

Instead, the things that mine have picked up are more subtle but ultimately maybe they're more valuable too, and they relate back to my point about having vocabulary with which to describe how they're feeling.

It's one thing for a child to know the words for different emotions, but it's another thing entirely to see their impact play out on their day, their desires, their relationships with other people, or on their physical health too. This last one is particularly significant in my mind. It's often quite a big leap for even an emotionally mature child to recognise or accept the physical impact of stress or anxiety.

It may seem oversimplified, but seeing this happen in The Sims at an artificially sped up pace is something that has definitely had an impact on my kids.

I'm a Scout Leader in my spare time, and we ran a mental health evening at my group recently. The look of recognition and relief on almost all the kids' faces when a couple of them were brave enough to describe the physical ways their bodies experienced stress or anxiety was incredible. Many of them said they used games to unwind, and many play The Sims too. I've seen multiple kids, including my own, refer to the impact of their emotions in the context of how the game displays them or by recalling or imitating the 'uncomfortable' or 'exhausted' walks of the avatars.

By having a broad range of emotional states displayed so clearly in the game via colour-coded alerts and tool tips means that not only do players subconsciously absorb these kind of emotions, but they also see that it's 'normal' for one person to run the gamut of them through any given day or week. They also get to see what's triggered each of those responses too. Obviously it's not always as easy in the real-world to pin an emotional reaction on a specific trigger, but by seeing regular examples in the game, it's a fantastic and safe way for them to understand how complex the human mind's reactions can sometimes be.

And the game is smart about how it incorporates these too – it's not just the obvious $2+2=4$ consequences that play out. They might see someone with an orange emotional bubble when they're tense because work was stressful, or maybe a blue bubble when they're sad because they've not seen their friends in a while, or a bright green one when they're feeling energised by another Sim doing something to brighten their day. Whether their Sims are focussed, happy, sad, inspired, tense, angry, embarrassed, flirty, dazed, energised or confident, the detailed but easy to understand UI displays all these emotions, and explains how and why they change over time.

When your child starts to explain that they're "feeling a bit orange" because they're embarrassed to use the word 'tense', or that their "social bar is red" because they've been off school sick for a week, then you know they've added a few more tools that enable them to communicate how they feel in an unthreatening way.

And once we realise that we've a 'way in', it also makes it easier as parents for us to gently probe our kids when we suspect they're struggling with something. By asking them to put a colour on their emotion, or to draw a pretend 'needs' status bar, you can get them to open up without them having to say things that make them self-conscious or which they can't articulate at all.

It's not a foolproof, or indeed the only solution to helping kids understand their mental health but looking to things in their world that resonate with them is a great way to break down the barriers of discussing their emotions. I know it's helped in our house.

Now, if they can both absorb all the 'emotional control, conflict resolution, manners, empathy and responsibility' traits promised in the teenage life stage from the 'Parent-hood' expansion pack then my work here would be done...



Bringing Out The Big Guns

by Will Freeman

We've all been duped by the notion of a decades long entrenched console war.

With each generation of home gaming hardware that passes, the press, public and platform holders dutifully engender the idea that we should all take a side, enthusiastically staking our flag in one console while vehemently demeaning its closest rival. Where once Nintendo and Sega's hyped up rivalry was used as a mechanism to shift more hardware, today a curious subset of gamers feel compelled to take sides in the often vitriolic battle over which electronic box for playing games is best.

And all along most have missed the presence of the 'supergun'; a system that is at the centre of a family tree that unites most gaming hardware into a single union. But just what is this underrated contender in the arbitrary battle to win the hearts and minds of gamers? Imagine an arcade cabinet. Now strip the monitor, controls, any game cartridge or board inside it, and even the piece of furniture itself from the image in your head. That leaves you with the wires and circuitry that make up an arcade cabinet's guts. Pop that tangle of electronic components in a case, add a power supply, SCART cable to run to a monitor, and some ports for controllers, and you have a supergun. In other words, it's a homebrew console that lets you play arcade games from their original hardware at home, without the budget or space needed for a full blown arcade cabinet.

Strictly speaking, the 'format' of a common supergun is 'JAMMA'; a standard for arcade cabinets from 1985 to the present day, that let arcade owners switch different games between a single arcade cabinet, just as you do with a console. So you can ultimately consider JAMMA to be a format just like SNES, Dreamcast or PlayStation 3.

Now, many readers may be pondering the fact that you can play arcade games at a fraction of the price – and in an arguably more convenient form factor – on a home computer using emulation and ROMs. You've very likely come across those before. Emulators, loosely speaking, trick a computer into running as a different system; usually a game console or an arcade cabinet. ROMs, meanwhile, are the game files that originally lurked on cartridges, disks and so on.



Emulation certainly exists in legal murky water, but that isn't the only reason to give it a wide berth. Because despite the physical convenience, emulated games can be an utter pain. It can take a great deal of downloading arcane files from dubious websites, and all to get a game running at inaccurate or varying speeds, all the while never quite knowing if you're playing the right version at the right speed, or a even a peculiar prototype or region variant.

Playing on arcade hardware at home will never beat a real arcade, of course, but there's few of those left. And with a supergun, there's thousands of different games, and the pleasure of setting up slabs of circuit board and such, to play arcade games as intended, many of which never have seen any console release, or have had to endure sloppy, stodgy ports.

And in a roundabout way, the supergun is the source material of many existing consoles. After a time, arcade game developers started to find limitations in JAMMA, and as such the arcade add-on motherboard concept was born. An arcade motherboard would typically plug into a JAMMA cabinet where a game would usually go, and then specific game formats, often in cartridge form, would be plugged into that motherboard – or 'mobo' for short. So an arcade owner, for example, might add a 'Capcom CPS2' motherboard to their JAMMA cartridge, and then be able to switch in and out dedicated CPS2 cartridges that packed more punch than vanilla JAMMA game releases. After JAMMA came a slightly more advanced version, 'JAMMA Video System', or JVS, which required the addition of an I/O board to any set-up. There have been dozens of systems that expand on JAMMA or JVS; SEGA's NAOMI and Taito's G-NET, for example.

Ultimately, many of these systems were popped in their own console-shaped box to be released as home consoles. The NAOMI became the Dreamcast, while the NeoGeo AES home console was born from the NeoGeo MVS arcade set-up. It happened the other way too, with the G-NET being based on the original PlayStation's motherboard, and the Nintendo-Sega-Namco collaboration the Triforce developing out of Gamecube hardware. Hell, away from JAMMA the unnamed system on which Capcom released Tatsunoko Vs Capcom for arcades was based on the Wii, of all things. And Konami's M2 arcade format was based on the 3D0. In fact, if you played Tekken 6 in arcades, you were using a system based on the PS3, the Namco System 357.

The point is this; there are dozens of dedicated gaming hardware systems beyond the standard console and handheld options, and the supergun is about the best option for embracing some of those as home-gaming systems.

Where to get a supergun? You can brave building your own from scratch, or buy a simple kit, or even strip the guts of an arcade system and put it in a suitable casing. But the simplest option is to buy one premade. There are myriad options out there, from those built into arcade sticks, to options more comparable to a conventional console. You'll need some arcade sticks, of course, and an old tube TV will give you the most authentic experience, with crisp looking 2D visuals.

And if that all sounds like too much effort, at least you now know home consoles are only the tip of the gaming hardware iceberg, and part of one large family, rather than rivals in a war put on us by marketeers.

Some thoughts on the challenges of running events

by Dan Thomas

Venues

Finding suitable venues is tough and expensive. Capacity, layout, accessibility, wifi, parking, transport links, tech (projector/audio etc), food/drink, temperature, toilets are all things that go unnoticed until they're not right on the night.

Finding decent venues in London is REALLY expensive. Finding decent venues in not-London is REALLY hard (for all the aforementioned points).

Speakers

Speakers put in A LOT of effort. It's not just 20-40mins of talking. They have to write, create slides, practice and importantly, muster the courage to get up there in front of you. It's a tough gig, mostly done on top of a full-time job. Even if you don't particularly enjoy a talk, empathise and consider constructive feedback.

If you do enjoy a talk, tell the speaker and tell others.

Organisers, when at all possible, PAY YOUR SPEAKERS. They're the main reason your attendees turn up. Even a nominal amount (if you're a non-profit making event) shows appreciation. Get a sponsor to cover it if you have to, it's more important than swag, free drinks or anything else.

Diversity

Diversity is tough. But necessary. For tech events, straight, white men have endless role-models and reference points to indicate "You can do this". Women and other under-represented groups do not.

The confidence gap is staggering. As an anecdotal example, for any one event (with speaking slots) I organise, I'll likely reach out to 10-20 "not-a-straight-white-dudes" (i.e. women, people of colour, LGBTQ – basically, anyone under-represented) with a (paid) speaking opportunity and maybe one or two people will be cautiously interested. For the same event, I'll have at least five straight, white men approach me to offer themselves as speakers. To be clear, I have no issue with people approaching me to speak, it makes things easier for me. The challenge for us all to embrace is making everyone feel confident and comfortable enough to do the same.

This makes a diverse line-up challenging, but essential to help break the cycle.

Sponsors

ROI for sponsors is tough. Supporting community events comes down to “because it’s a good thing to do”. That doesn’t often sit too well with purse string holders.

Sponsor tip: get involved to maximise value and visibility, show up, meet the audience, be associated with “the good thing” you’ve helped enable.

Free events

Free events typically have 40-70% no-show rates. This is extremely hard to manage. Please cancel tickets for events you can’t make with as much notice as possible.

Many people are entitled. I’ve experienced a small amount of this, but it sticks out. Even for free events, someone will feel like their time is so valuable you owe *them* for showing up. Read this thread, be grateful or organise your own thing and make it better.

Organise events!

Contrary to all that, organising events is incredibly fun and fulfilling. If you’re thinking “I wish there was an event for X” you’re probably not alone. Do it. There’s still loads of scope for more not-London events, niche subject matter events and more diverse and inclusive events. Make that.

Speak at mine!

If you’re interested in speaking at an event, drop me a message on Twitter ([@dannyt](https://twitter.com/dannyt)) or email (dan@moov2.com) me with your areas of interest and I’ll do my best to help.



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