Enduring Play S3 E3_ Victoria Alexeev

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SPEAKERS

Cheryl Platz, Victoria "V" Alexeev, Enduring Play Computer

E **Enduring Play Computer** 00:00

Initializing Enduring Play podcast season three engine. Decompressing audio. Synchronizing waveforms. Reticulating splines. Launching podcast lobby.

C **Cheryl Platz** 00:14

Welcome back to Enduring Play, the podcast where we explore what it takes to make games that don't just survive but thrive. I'm your host Cheryl Platz, video game developer, author, professor, just video game person.

E **Enduring Play Computer** 00:27

Loading podcast demo level.

V **Victoria "V" Alexeev** 00:30

And I started to link what I was feeling physiologically and what I was thinking and how I was playing. And then I started to think about, oh, I feel these similar sensations in real life, so I was able to link how I was feeling while playing these games and being dysregulated or being regulated, and how I felt similarly in real life when I was regulated or dysregulated. The hope, and the hope continues to be, is to continue to use Souls games as a way to practice regulation skills, and thus Boss Fights and Better Coping was born.

C Cheryl Platz 01:08

Part of the fun of recruiting for Enduring Play is bringing in a wide variety of guests that challenge your perspectives and help you look beyond your day-to-day, whatever it is in games, whether it's playing or designing or producing. Here in season three, we're trying to reclaim the narrative about games in the mainstream media because they're so much more than a time sink. Today, you're going to learn how behavioral neuropsychology might just be one of the keys to helping us reclaim gaming as a positive force. But what is behavioral neuropsychology, and what the heck does it have to do with video games? Behavioral neuropsychologists combine behavioral therapy, talking to humans, and clinical neuropsychology, the study of the function of the brain in a medical environment, to better assess, understand, and treat proper functioning of the nervous system, brain, and human cognition. And in particular, games like Dark Souls push our brains and sometimes our bodies to the limit. There are a growing number of folks in neuropsychology growing interested in video games as an applied tool for improving outcomes in their patients. Today's guest, Victoria Alexeev, who goes by V, is the founder of the VGTx Research Initiative, dedicated to supporting a growing body of research and helping folks to heal through the use of video games. As a graduate student at Bradley University, V is currently touring the world with her Boss Fights and Better Coping framework while launching longer-term research. This is a fascinating discussion that serves as a direct case study on how the intentional use of video games in a therapeutic environment may help folks build resiliency and embrace failure as a learning opportunity. This podcast was inspired by my book, The Game Development Strategy Guide. So, if you like what you're hearing and you want to learn more, head to rosenfeldmedia.com. And at the end of the podcast, there's a discount code for you. Let's get into the game.

E Enduring Play Computer 02:57

Player one, Cheryl Platz. Pronouns: She/her, player two, Victoria Alexeev, A.K.A. V. Pronouns: Sheher. Podcast level start.

C Cheryl Platz 03:10

Welcome back to Enduring Play, the podcast where we explore what it takes to make games that don't just survive but thrive. And I am excited to have Victoria Alexeyev here with me today, and we've been vibing for several weeks trying to figure this all out. We've finally made it happen, but you and I are both very excited about what motivates people to play games. Thank you for being here with me today.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 03:33

Thank you for having me. I was very very happy that we were able to collaborate and have this conversation. It's a very passionate topic of mine, and I'm excited we get to share our experiences.

C Cheryl Platz 03:43

Now, I often start by asking my guests to introduce themselves to the audience as they would at a conference. You know, I do a little thing at the front, but it's often better to hear people's experience in their own words. So, would you mind introducing yourself to our audience?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 03:56

Sure. My name is Victoria Alexaev. I go by V, and I am a founder of VGTX, which is the Video Game Treatment and Diagnostic Research Initiative, where our major goal is to continue to research the potential of treatment and diagnostic measures and help heal people through video games. So part of that is developing frameworks and running experiments. I am a graduate student at Bradley University, and I'm studying clinical mental health with a focus in neurocounseling. I have a background in behavioral neuropsychology in my undergrad, and I'm currently running a graduate thesis called Playing with Emotion. So I could get into it more later, but that's kind of my chunk. I'm an author and a speaker. I'm also a teacher on occasion, a professor on occasions. Yeah, and a gamer, a lifelong gamer.

E Enduring Play Computer 04:48

Podcast level paused. Begin host commentary.

C Cheryl Platz 04:53

V brings an amazing amount of radical candor to our talk today. She slays stigmas about. Illness by sharing her very personal journey about how video games shaped her personal and professional journey. She has gone through a great deal with gaming as her shield in cognitive combat, and brought back her own strategy guides for others in the process. If gaming could help V slay these demons, how many other people could these stories and coping mechanisms help if they were shared. Much of this work is in the context of neuropsychology, a field where doctors investigate how brain conditions affect your behavior, mood, and thinking skills.

E Enduring Play Computer 05:33

Loading podcast level one, choosing gaming as an academic path.

C Cheryl Platz 05:39

"Lifelong gamer." What inspired you to walk this path? What was seminal for you when you were like "Games as as potentially... mental health as therapy?"

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 05:48

I will say we'll go all the way back to the beginning. When I was five years old, I came from a really chaotic and full transparency traumatic household, and I was given ColecoVision and Atari by my godfather, and so whenever I had any free time, I wasn't necessarily parented. So I spent most of my free time playing video games, and it was entering these worlds that felt controllable despite all of the chaos. You know, games coming out back then, we were just starting to see hero's journey games narratively, and it felt amazing and it felt calming to step inside of a world that I can control. Fast forward to when I was 13 years old, because I had a chaotic home life, I wanted to make a lot of sense of it. I wanted to understand why the people around me were hurting myself and hurting themselves, and so I found the path to doing that by learning about psychology. And I'm very self-motivated, so I took to the internet, whatever internet we had at that time, and all the resources that I could find, and I started to learn about psychology. And my cousin handed me a book called Abnormal Psychology. I'm looking at it on my mantle, and that inspired me. When I opened it up, I said, "I'm going to get my PhD in psychology." Ever since then, I've wanted those letters. I have been dedicated to learning about psychology, and so I went to undergrad. I dropped out of my undergrad for reasons that I'll write about one day. Had quite the journey. Trauma is definitely something that is affected my life in a lot of ways. Look, I had been gaming this entire time.

E Enduring Play Computer 07:30

Launching tutorial level: The academic world.

C Cheryl Platz 07:34

We've had a number of folks on the podcast with a background in higher education: several PhDs, adjunct professors, assistant professors, and with more researchers to come, what exactly does it mean to be an academic? Technically, Merriam-Webster defines being an academic as someone working or studying as a scholar, researcher, or educator, and in many cases, this is done within some form of educational institution that can be a college or university, but not always. I am technically an academic as I have recently taught university courses, and I write books that are used in teaching contexts. Victoria, or V, our guest today, is a scholar, researcher, and educator fitting all three of these definitions. As a scholar, she is pursuing a common path, obtaining a master's degree on the path to a doctorate or PhD. Thesis and dissertation are two terms used to describe long-form research completed in support of an advanced degree. Different countries prefer different terminology, but both are basically really big research. These thesis and dissertation projects are big, multi-year research efforts, and so anyone who's managed to get a research-focused master's degree or a PhD has shown that they can investigate uncertainty and come back with clarity. And in a world where research budgets at actual game developers are being cut left and right, our academic partners are a critical way for us to learn about what's actually happening in the world of player behavior.

E Enduring Play Computer 08:53

Loading podcast level 2: Discovering self-regulation through gameplay.

C Cheryl Platz 09:00

This was kind of like your superhero origin story in a way, because that gaming helped you find your academic purpose, right? Can you tell me about the role gaming played in helping you get back into academics, and how that inspires your work now?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 09:15

A couple of years ago, when I finally had settled and my life became secure and safe. I started playing video games regularly, and by this point, I had been diagnosed with bipolar and CPTSD and borderline personality disorder. And I was on medication. I had been going to therapy for about six years at that point, and I was just finding that my treatment, both therapy and DBT, CBT, and my medication, I felt like I had reached what I could accomplish with those tools alone, and so I just started playing video games a lot. And I realized that if I played, I realized this with Skyrim: if I played Skyrim two hours a day. I could actually stay completely regulated with no manic swings or with no lower depressive moods. So I was regulating in that way, of course, alongside my therapy and my medication and my other tools. And one day I was sitting on the couch, and my husband reminds me that I had written a whole play. I wrote a play once! And he said, "Why don't you work on the play?" And I finished the play, and then a couple months later, he reminds me, "Didn't you want to go back to school?" And I was like, "Oh yeah, I want a PhD." And he's like, "I'll help you facilitate that dream." Got accepted into Bradley, and I just started thinking about behavioral neuropsychology. I guess I kind of jumped around. I ended up going back to school to get my undergraduate degree. I went in my late 20s, early 30s, and I ended up studying behavioral neuropsychology. Whereas when I was in undergrad, the only class that I got an A plus in was advanced neuropsychology, so we already knew that I was on the way there. I just that learning format at that age was not for me. So I thought about my experience with Skyrim and with video games and how I could use this regulation or use these tools for regulation, and it all just came together. I started diving into the literature. I started to think about what questions I wanted to ask really viable to be able to use video games as healing mechanisms or as mechanisms for behavioral change. Then I was off. That was two years ago. I was off to the races. Created VGTx as a way to have an umbrella to keep all of my work, and hopefully the goal is to bring other researchers and creatives on, and we can all work together to try to create this community of exploration with mental health and video games.

E Enduring Play Computer 11:45

Loading tutorial level: Coping with clinical psychology.

C Cheryl Platz 11:46

As gamers we're steeped in the culture of acronyms, right? FPS, KDA, HUD, PS5, PC, GLHF. Anyway, let's get our psychology acronym game on. EBT stands for evidence-based therapies, and it represents mental health treatments that academics and practitioners prove effective through a combination of scientific research and clinical trials. Practicing clinical psychologists then choose from a variety of EBTs for their clients based on needs, values, and culture. A lot like gamers choose a gaming platform right for them. Two examples of EBTs are CBT and DBT, which are used in talk therapy, aka psychotherapy. Cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT, is just a goal-focused approach to teaching patients techniques for managing emotions, stress, and disruptive thought. It's often used in the treatment of mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Lots of people have engaged in CBT to help get better techniques for coping with their lives. DBT stands for dialectical behavioral therapy, and it's an extension of CBT developed in 1970 by Marcia Linehan, intended specifically for the regulation of intense emotions by exploring techniques like mindfulness, distress tolerance, interpersonal effectiveness, and emotional regulation. That term regulation or regulated comes up a lot today. In this context, emotional regulation means having awareness of and control over one's emotions. Something many of us aspire to in our more difficult moments, and V's theory is that video games can help. CPTSD is complex post-traumatic stress disorder, a form of PTSD seen when patients are subjected repeatedly to traumatic experiences.

E Enduring Play Computer 13:32

Loading Podcast Level 3: Growing Beyond Compulsive Play

C Cheryl Platz 13:39

Thank you so much for like candor and for that amazing relatable journey, and and also like Skyrim is such a point in time, right? Like what talk about powerful pieces of work. First of all, I think there's refrigerators that run Skyrim now, probably it's everywhere. But what a powerful statement, right? That something that people created for recreation can provide that anchoring for people.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 14:01

Totally, and it just dawned on me that one of the reasons why I dropped out of undergrad was because my grades had dipped, and it was when Skyrim first came out.

C Cheryl Platz 14:12

Interesting.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 14:14

Yeah, I don't know why that didn't click for me until right now.

C Cheryl Platz 14:17

That's interesting because,

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 14:18

Right?

C Cheryl Platz 14:18

You know that revelation... Like some parents might listen to that and be like, "Oh no, video games are a risk." So, like, you're talking about both positive and negative in the same sentence, right?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 14:27

Oh, absolutely.

C Cheryl Platz 14:28

Short-term negative, long-term positive.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 14:30

Yep. It was definitely. I mean, I was also a different person back then, and I was looking for escape. I had not yet been to therapy, and I definitely struggled with a lot of different behaviors that I have since grew out of and worked on, including excessively playing video games. And now, one of the messages that I teach children when I teach high schoolers in advanced psychology courses, video game psychology courses, is and tell parents. Is that video games are neither good nor bad. They are tools. They are forms of media. It's your relationship to them. Now, there's of course some some games that I would I would not necessarily recommend for anyone, let alone children. With that said, I believe that when they are played healthfully and intentionally, or even obviously recreationally, we love to play video games. They're fun. There's a lot of value it can bring. So it's all about knowing yourself and knowing what games mean to you and how you can create a healthier relationship with them. And I think parents deserve to have an understanding of that, so there's less fear and concern.

E Enduring Play Computer 15:41

Loading podcast Level 4: Helping Parents and Kids Game Constructively

C Cheryl Platz 15:51

I love that. I love that you're out there talking to children and parents. Like one of the things I talked about in my bonus episode was this theme from the Thriving in Games Group around reclaiming the narrative of gaming because there's documented benefits of things like esports, but parents still perceiving gaming as negative.

C Cheryl Platz 16:06

And I wonder because you've lived this so thoroughly, and you're studying the science. What's one example of a coping mechanism or a tool you might give to parents and children to help them wrangle with that instinct to immerse to excess? Right, because we know immersion is a motivator at play, but as you you very candidly described, right? Like... it can lead us to harm in the short term if we don't have tools for coping with that. So, how would you help parents and children get to a place where they can live in the balance?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 16:35

Having open dialog about screen time or about what exactly your child is doing, what games they're playing, who they're playing with, and approaching it from a place of non-judgment, being open to hear what your child has to say, what they're playing. I would even go so far as to try to connect with your children to understand, obviously, what makes them play games, but sit down and play with them and see. As far as actionables, I'm a big fan of hard stop rules or guidelines. I talk about this a lot in my framework, Boss Fights and Better Coping. It's pre-established stop rules, and I think it's also important to cultivate trust with your child in a way that when you are asking your child to disengage from a video game, that they understand why you're asking them to do that, and it's not coming from an authoritarian place. It's coming from a place of we're going to work together. Let's move on from this activity. And now, of course, that's in a perfect world. That you know, kids, someone who was very has been a compulsive game player. This the stop rules and getting up and stretching are just implementing this from the beginning seems to have shown to be beneficial in creating good boundaries around gaming with children. But sit down, play with your children, see what they're playing, talk to them about it. Hopefully, that you'll be able to form a bond with your child over gameplay, but I don't think having harsh judgments about gameplay does anyone any favors when it comes to whether or not you're going to let your child play a video game. I think openness and curiosity is the way that you'll be able to have any input or any way to support regulation with compulsion, compulsive game play, with your children.

C Cheryl Platz 18:27

A great example of openness that we just talked about in another episode I recorded with Dr. Christopher Maverick was the Mike Tomlin example, which you're probably following right now, right? Mike Tomlin being an NFL coach whose kids were playing Minecraft, so he started to play Minecraft to understand what they were doing, and that helped them connect in the short term. But interestingly, it also ended up becoming self-regulation for Mike Tomlin, who went on to play that for over a decade, and and now is sharing what is apparently a very authentic representation of Pittsburgh in walkthroughs on YouTube. In a way, I see some of your journey in that.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 19:04

Yeah, I think it's of course a journey, and if you already have a child that is experiencing compulsive gameplay habits, there's definitely resources that parents are able to check out. I'm not an expert in compulsive gaming habits or addictive gaming habits, but like I said, I really do believe it's the sit down and talk with your with your children about it.

E Enduring Play Computer 19:28

Loading podcast level 5: Gaming as common ground

C Cheryl Platz 19:28

How does gaming show up in your family?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 19:36

My cousin specifically has said she hates video games, hates them, and both her children are gamers. And I'm very proud. My niece is a gamer. I saw her first boss fight when she was four years old, and I cried. So we're very happy that they're both gamers. They're very regulated about it. They will put the screen down, they'll put the switch down, everything down, and walk away and be like, I want to be outside right now. And I suggested to her find a game to sit and play with your daughter. She's 13. Who knows? You can find an amazing narrative game that has a beautiful art. There's so many great games, so you can find a game to play together. And oftentimes, from what I've read, and I can't attest to this personally or scientifically, I've read that children have more of a propensity to open up and talk about their daily lives when you are sitting playing a game or even in the car. It's less intense of a expectation of interaction. So there's just so many opportunities to connect with your child in so many different ways while you play side by side.

C Cheryl Platz 20:40

It makes sense if you think about it. As adults, we find other activities to serve as the background for our social connections. You know, you go bowling, or you go to the movies, or you you go to a bar. But kids don't have that. So how do you get the thing that connects you and gives you the excuse to go deeper? Games in many cases.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 20:59

Absolutely, the third space problem that we've been facing, and we're seeing a lot of third spaces show up in digital environments. And I think that's a beautiful thing. There's so many opportunities. I know so many people, and have met so many people through digital space third spaces. I think it's it's important to explore and to safely allow your child to explore as well. You know, obviously there's a plethora of of things we could talk about that we could warn parents about, but we're not here to to do any moral panic.

C Cheryl Platz 21:33

As I often say, multiple things can be true. Kids benefit from digital third spaces, and they also benefit from parental guidance to prevent them from encountering the worst that the internet has to offer.

E Enduring Play Computer 21:44

Loading podcast level 6: Introducing VGTx

C Cheryl Platz 21:53

When we talk about you created VGTX, VGT itself is that a term you created, or is that a term that is reflective of things going on in the academic community.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 22:02

So VGT, the earliest recognition that I have had of it was Dr. Bocci and a research article that he wrote on an experiment that he did using commercial over-the-shelf video games. And then the most recent use of it was Dr. Colder Carrus. So those are the two examples that I have of VGT. I'm not sure that it has been entered into any kind of formal taxonomy quite yet, so I didn't want to adopt that as a brand identity. We're going to be a nonprofit soon, so I didn't want to adopt that name. And my goal was to ultimately be able to research how we could use video games as treatment and diagnostic. So TX is the medical acronym, or it's the shortened version of treatment. So VGTX felt supernatural for me to kind of adopt as as a name. Plus, it's my name is V, and V from VGTX is really fun to say.

C Cheryl Platz 23:00

You know, I am a big fan of alliterations myself. So sometimes when it works, it works.

E Enduring Play Computer 23:11

Loading narrative cutscene: Demystifying VGT

C Cheryl Platz 23:13

The root term VGT is what we in the computer science sphere call an overloaded term. It has multiple meanings depending on the context, in a general interpretation, VGT stands for video game technology, and this designation is used by scholars like Dr. Michelle Colder-Carris, a public mental health researcher affiliated with the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. She has published multiple research studies in the gaming space, including one in particular that seems very aligned with V's work.

E Enduring Play Computer 23:40

Stakeholders' consensus on strategies for self and other regulation of video game play: a mixed methods study.

C Cheryl Platz 23:46

That'll be linked in the show notes with the other reference material. In another context, VGT is video game therapy, a registered trademark of the scholar Dr. Francesco Bocci, a psychologist and psychotherapist with decades of experience, which he has channeled into a structured framework, which connects potential patients to treatment via video games, matching them to the right genres and techniques using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator personality test. You know, the one with the four letters. I'm an ENTJ. In particular, the VGT framework is noted as associated with positive results in emotional literacy, social feeling, sense of identity, and activation of cognitive processes, and as B indicated, TX is a common abbreviation for treatment, just like DEX is an abbreviation for diagnosis. So that's how you end up with VGTX, which is both a reference to ongoing research and its own thing.

E Enduring Play Computer 24:37

Loading podcast level seven, building a new knowledge skill tree together.

C Cheryl Platz 24:44

Another thing too that was interesting in our back and forth before the podcast was you were talking about the journey of the birth of academic concepts, right? You were talking about trying to get frameworks out there, and we're seeing that both on the micro with something we're about to talk about, which is your your boss fights framework, but also. Like this VGT concept itself, right? Like you've got several people in the community that are starting to rally around a concept, and and like trying to get to critical mass where we like, okay, we're going to talk about this. We're going to use these terms. All ideas start from nothing, and then they get to something, and we take it for granted almost overnight once it gets to critical mass that these things are like, oh, that's just knowledge humans have. It wasn't.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 25:24

Yeah, it really is a trip, honestly. I. But for me, something that's super important to me is to acknowledge the foundation from which I was able to grow my mission. And I, I always say, I am not able to stand on any stage unless had I not stood on the shoulders of the researchers that came before me, and so even on my website, I shout out Dr. Bachi, who is just really great man. We work, we are working together currently, and so yes, does does not necessarily appear out of nowhere, though it seemingly does, and I'm happy to be able to contribute to this growing body of work, and there are so many people in the field that are doing wonderful things, and I am so blessed to be able to interact with them and to speak to them and potentially work with them as peers. Even though for me, I feel very new to this environment. Two two years is for if you're thinking about it quantitatively, two years is nothing compared to 15 years with some of the people that I speak with, and they have welcomed me in my contribution thus far with open arms and gentle, hilarious critiques and wild affirmations. So I love that.

C Cheryl Platz 26:37

I love that description, and I, you know, I know there's mixed stories about academia, and it can be challenging. So I'm glad to hear that that has been your reception. And I mean, it's we should also acknowledge first of all, imposter syndrome is a thing we all deal with all the time. Second of all, when you make a step into academia mid career, it's not like you just sort of erased your brain. You are coming with all your lived experiences as a person, and you chose path that's speaking to your lived experience. While you're just one person, and it does reflect everybody's, you are coming to it with a specific vein of insight that does inform your work, does make it unique, does make it powerful. And so I'm glad that the people around you see that and welcome the voice. That's one of the things I love about like the whole pro-social movement in gaming. Like there's just such a positive knowledge is shared vibe where like everybody's welcome to the table. We we're not gonna hoard this thing.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 27:24

Yeah. Oh my goodness. So when I first started to muse about fully doing academia, because originally, bless my husband, he's like, he'll go to therapy school. I was like, yeah, I'll be a therapist. So enthusiastic. Not that I don't want to implement therapeutic practice into my work because I do.

E Enduring Play Computer 27:50

Loading podcast level eight, building your academic adventuring party.

C Cheryl Platz 27:57

Can you tell me a little bit more about your experience wading into this hybrid academic video game community, how did you finally make the leap, and what's it like working with people who share the same passions?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 28:11

Well, after I realized that I don't think I actually want to be a talk therapist, we'll just say that I realized I wanted to get into academia, but I had gone on psychology academia Reddit, and I was reading everything, and I was just like, "Oh no, oh no!" There's very specific things about me that may make me very unwelcome in this environment of old school academia. And then, obviously, having grown up a gamer, there's certain things about me that might not make me so welcome in gaming spaces, and I remember sitting down talking with my husband, and I'm like, "It's going to be a battle. It's going to be a journey trying to break into these spaces and be accepted because I am doing academic video game neuropsychology, psychology, behavioral psychology, and I think neuropsychology, behavioral psychology, research psychology on its own still has the potential to be a little bit gatekeepy and might not necessarily make me feel confident in being vulnerable, which you are when you get up on a stage and you're like, "Here's my idea. I hope you like it," or comfortable being myself. And then I started talking to the community, and I was like, "Oh, this is different. These are scholars that are rigorous, and they are, I would argue, very important contributors to our field. And they're, I want to curse. They're really, really freaking welcoming, supportive. They know how to do the shit sandwich really well, you know, where they offer the they empower, give you a little bit of a critique, and then they empower you again, which I appreciate for myself and my nervous system. And the amount of powerhouse women that I have met, I talk to them and I get chills because their contributions, their focus on their research. Literature that they've already contributed to the field. I again have not known these women very long, and we're cultivating relationships. We're talking every day. I am inviting one. Once I might be flying to the Netherlands for another conference, and I'm doing my workshop in a in a format I never had done before, but I think it's going to be a fun format or an engaging format, and I just I I knew the right person for the job, and I'm excited to bring her on. And I haven't felt this authentic, I think ever, and that's saying something, right?

C Cheryl Platz 30:34

That is saying something. I'm so glad that it exceeded your initial expectations. Yeah, and it's you know it. As someone who is a game developer, right? Like it's it's interesting to to navigate spaces like YouTube comments or Reddit or things like that, and live with the multiple truths, right? Those are people with lived experiences that are true for them, and then also there are many people who are not reflecting their lived experiences on that space, and how do you find and balance those things? And and you know, one thing I've told my team also is like, it doesn't necessarily apply the same to academics, but like one thing I try to get my team through is like, okay, yes, this that this comment seems negative, but it's coming from a place of strong emotion, and if they feel that strongly about the game. That means they care about the game, and that's a gift in a world with like countless other games, right? Yeah. The worst thing in gaming is a quiet Reddit. Yeah.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 31:32

Oh yeah. Yeah. What do they say? There's no such thing as bad press.

C Cheryl Platz 31:36

Yeah. They do. I mean, there's days when you're like, I don't know if I agree, but most, but like in jet, like I have seen, I have been on games with quiet Reddits, and I'm like, oh yeah, I I would rather I would rather people be complaining right now because at least that's a direction.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 31:52

Yeah, that's a really good point. It's a direction. It's feedback and and information, and the only way that we can grow or improve or adjust is to have feedback. Maybe the delivery could have been a little different. Like I didn't need all of those curse words in there, or the anyway.

C Cheryl Platz 32:10

It's it's we're all on a journey, and I'm glad that your journey is is pointing you towards hopeful places, and hopefully that that'll that'll get us to to to good outcomes for everybody.

E Enduring Play Computer 32:25

Loading podcast level nine, a real life video game research fetch quest.

C Cheryl Platz 32:31

I'd love it if you could tell our listeners more about what it's like to transform your experience as a gamer into academic insights and frameworks for people to use when applying games to psychology,

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 32:44

I'll start with my journey into creating a framework. Last year, or two years ago, time is an illusion with me because I'm I'm just working and playing video games and laughing in the sun. A couple years ago, I wrote an article on a scoping review on TTRPGs in therapeutic spaces.

C Cheryl Platz 33:02

You mentioned a term that not all listeners may know about: the scoping review. Can we talk a little bit about that?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 33:06

Sure. Yeah. Basically, you just you have a research question. You determine a list of keywords that kind of describe the central question or the topic that you're looking to research. You do this logical equation called Boolean string, or you can use now an AI, an LLM at this point. But you gather the body of literature. You have inclusion criteria. So, for example, I have a huge library that I'm doing called the VGTX library, where I am compiling a just a database for any video game psychology research that I can find. So the inclusion criteria is video game psychology therapy, mental health clinical applications. So anything that would be akin to psychology or mental health plus video games specifically. The exclusion criteria is AR, VR. I'm looking, you know, directly at games that don't involve any kind of virtual, augmented, or mixed reality. So you can do the same for any topic that you're interested in looking at, and then you read all of them. You write summaries. You synthesize the information. You identify what the established literature has focused on, and where the gap it, and basically you just compile this into a big paper. Hopefully you have a bunch of tables, and then you send it in for peer review, which maybe listeners are familiar with. It can be a rewarding and grueling process. My first peer review, I thought I was actually going to cry from the feedback, but I took it very well, and I'm very proud of myself for that because I'm a perfectionist. So yeah, you can compile all of the literature and you get it published, and then hopefully other researchers will use that as their database to identify what they can research in the future.

C Cheryl Platz 34:59

That. Is a real life fetch quest in the academic world. Thank you so much for sharing that context. Really helpful.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 35:06

Thank you for the question.

E Enduring Play Computer 35:08

Loading podcast level 10, finding an academic framework in Souls games.

C Cheryl Platz 35:15

Okay, so we've got that definition in, and you were talking about doing a scoping review on TTRPGs or tabletop RPGs in therapeutic spaces, which sounds super interesting, by the way. Tell me more about what you were trying to do there.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 35:28

The goal was to find the gap and then report that gap back to the researcher that I was working with. I did it because I wanted to prove to myself that I could do a really intense scoping review to teach myself to do it. I wasn't going to be doing it in my graduate course, so I did it. The researcher I was working with says, "Great, can you write a framework?" And I said, "No, I do not have enough information or experience as a clinician or even as a graduate student to comfortably write a framework that I believe could be helpful and that I believe could not potentially accidentally do harm. That was two years ago. Fast forward to a year ago, and I am diving into Souls games more than I have ever. I played DS1. It was great for a bit. I have my opinions, but I was playing Cyberpunk, and I realized that I wanted to continue to explore heavier combat in games, so naturally I went straight to the souls genre because I I like myself a good challenge, just like the TTRPG scoping review. Anyway, so I played cyberpunk. I wanted to get into harder combat. I got into Wu Chong, and over the course of this year, I found myself having this metacognition about how I was actually experiencing the gameplay, and what I was feeling in my body, and I was narrating it to myself to my phone for a year. And because I was so goal oriented, I just wanted to get good at these games, and I wanted to be the boss. The skill check bosses still have me 60 attempts. People are like, "Oh, you're good at Souls games." I'm like, "No, what gave you that idea?" Never have I said I'm good at the Souls genre. Souls like, "I'm not. I'm terrible." But it all takes practice, right? So I was narrating my experiences, and then I started to identify that around two hours of warm up, I'm ready to go and attempt the boss. So I grind farm for two hours, and then I attempt the boss. And then if I go over, and this is going to sound maybe like extreme gaming, but if I go over three hours of attempting the boss, I'm just I have to call it because I and I have experience with the term tilt, which is cognitive narrowing, it's the inability to adjust. There's a lot more I can say about it. We can go into it later, but particularly on the point of what got me to the framework was understanding this concept of tilt. I realized that I was I could be potentially entering it, and my gameplay would start to fall apart. I was no longer doing the inputs that I thought I was putting in was the opposite of what was happening on the screen. I was just dysregulated, and so I called it. And then the next day, I just started adjusting times, and I started adjusting certain things, and I was recording all of it as I was doing it. And I came down with this formula that was getting me through these skill checks and these bosses much more effectively, and I noticed that within that formula, it had a lot to do with what my body was doing psychophysiologically. I noticed what I was saying to myself and how that affected my gameplay. I noticed my hand tension, whether I was clenching my jaw, whether or not my my shoulders were tight, if I had to take breaks in between attempts, if had I rapidly reattempted the boss, was that affecting how I felt in my body? And I started to link what I was feeling physiologically and what I was thinking and how I was playing.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 38:57

And then I started to think about, oh, I feel these similar sensations in real life, so I was able to link how I was feeling while playing these games and being dysregulated or being regulated, and how I felt similarly in real life when I was regulated or dysregulated. And then I started to think about when dysregulation happened in real life, what the cause was and how I was able to regulate myself in real life. The hope, and the hope continues to be, is to continue to use Souls games as a way to practice regulation skills, and thus boss fights and better coping was born.

C Cheryl Platz 39:37

Thank you for that context, and I love the way you described your journey with the Souls games because, in some ways, especially from the outside of video gaming, I feel like it's sometimes viewed as like a bit you have you're good or you're not good at games. And the way you described it was very situational, very growth mindset, but also very, very much like a sport or something. Right? There's days when you're good at running, and there's days when you're like, I cannot run that thing. You're talking about a warm up curve, and then you're talking about efficiency peak, and then you're and we're done. The body is not capable. It acknowledges that we are humans, and souls like games and souls games. They really do kind of they're designed to push us to the edge of our physical capabilities and our mental capabilities at the same time. So it makes sense that there would be this curve

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 40:20

Cognitively. Yeah.

C Cheryl Platz 40:21

I love that you've described it that way, and I love that you're looking at the self-regulation piece.

E Enduring Play Computer 40:29

Loading podcast level 11, boss fights and better coping.

C Cheryl Platz 40:34

So, Boss Fights and Better Coping is one of the best framework names I've ever heard objectively. How would you describe this framework to listeners?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 40:44

Imagine that you are seeking therapy for, let's say, patients, or let's say your goal is to start taking 10 seconds before you respond to something instead of reacting to something, and you go to your therapist and you talk about all of these instances, which is very valuable, of course, and should be done prior to the framework, regardless. But let's say you go to your therapist that you've been seeing, and you realize that you have this goal, and your therapist has all of the information about your previous history, and we can retrospectively talk about situations that have created the environment for you to not have the ability to pause before reacting. Imagine being able to sit down with your therapist and experience an environment where you can practice and observe first observe where you would need to pause for 10 seconds and reflect or observe and then respond, or where you wouldn't need to do that. So you're you have this observation arena where you can watch your client or you as the client you can have your therapist observe you and observe what situations are creating your need or your want to say compulsion again, but your your reaction, right? So then, once you can observe and you debrief with your therapist about what the potential cues are, or what situations, or what's happening in your body that's causing you to not take a pause to respond and to have a reaction. You can practice a certain number of skills that feel good to you, and I tend to talk about EBT, CBT a lot, DBT is great for this also, and mindfulness you can incorporate a bunch of different interventions into this framework, and you and your therapist can sit down and practice that goal of taking a 10 second pause before you react, and you can very I don't want to say very easily because I wouldn't say it's an easy framework necessarily. It is something that you do have to learn, like with all things. But what I have found is that there are plenty of connections between a goal that you have for behavior change, or for regulation, or for just bettering your mental health, and an in-game situation that relates to a high intensity situation, and high intensity could be Souls games. High intensity could be Sims games. Navigating the daily task stack that you have to do. So the 10 second pause, like I was saying, particularly in boss fights, could be all right. I'm going to work on remembering the 10-second pause, I'm going to respond and not react. In game, that looks like staying farther away from the boss and observing the move set, and coming up with a strategy that is then that feels good to respond instead of react. Whereas react, which I I definitely do, would be panic rolling all over the place, or you know, or just like going chip for chip, face tanking, and you're just totally lit. Just now, you know, you're all over the place. So, there are the hope and the goal of future research is to continue to find these links between the goals that we can set in therapy, the interventions between the goals, and then whether or not the practice that we can do within the framework, within these arenas, their practice arenas, boss fights, and whether or not the skills that we learn in practice can then transfer to everyday life.

E Enduring Play Computer 44:37

Loading podcast level 12, attempting self-regulation as a single player.

C Cheryl Platz 44:43

Thank you. And so, what you're describing is something that's intended to be done not solo, but in tandem with a therapist or somebody who's trained in the framework, but with video games as this this arena for training that sort of gives us a safe place. To practice skills that we would need in real life, but where the stakes would be much higher in real life.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 45:06

I don't want to close the door on the idea of the accessibility of the framework. I've seen and read and spoken to people anecdotally who have said specifically, "How do I regulate in this game. I can't stop panic rolling, panic dodging. Right. So we're already seeing, and we're already seeing players, and we're already seeing people who are experiencing dysregulation, and and they have the desire to regulate for a number of different reasons. I would be curious to see the efficacy of doing so using the framework on your own. I certainly did, but I I come with years of of EBT practice and therapy, of course, medication. Let's leave the door open for the potential of people being able to run this on their own. Eventually, I would like to publish non-academic, peer-reviewed literature after we do some testing, of course, how this could potentially be something that people can use to regulate on their own.

E Enduring Play Computer 46:06

Loading Podcast Level 13: From Clinical Use to Commercial Release

C Cheryl Platz 46:14

Now, building on that desire to potentially enable people to self-direct with this framework, eventually your aspirations actually include engaging with game development itself at some point. Can you tell me more about that?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 46:28

Another big goal of VGTx is not only to incorporate video games into therapy, but to make the experiences of video games and therapeutic intentions more accessible. The game that I want to create, I want direct to consumer at some point at a very low price. The goal, and I find that for a lot of people that I've met within aims for health and in ed tech gamification, they all want accessibility. None of us are in here to make a profit because we all know how that goes. So the idea of having a hard boundary on players doing the framework only with clinicians or under supervision doesn't inspire me as much as the potential.

C Cheryl Platz 47:11

So thank you for the clarification. So what are the next steps for you and your framework to get from where you are to where you want to be?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 47:19

I think the next step. Well, I'm running an autoethnographic study that I've recently paused, and an autoethnographic study is basically where you are observing yourself in your natural environment, and then you are observing these behaviors, and then you're coding these behaviors to create a more systematic observation of what's occurring within that that moment, right? So I'm sitting down and I'm I'm playing WuChang specifically, and I'm running boss fights and better coping on myself, and I have three cameras set up. I have a transcriber happening. I have a face cam and gameplay. It's it's a ridiculous setup. It it sounds like I'm doing some laboratory work, but it is ridiculous. My Xbox is about to light on fire. This I'm doing my best out here, so I'm taking my time to compile a large body of data on myself while taking a step out, trying to zoom out and observe myself neutrally and see what comes up during each session to see if the framework is even feasible, is it actually producing intended results? What's going on? Is it happening? Is is the framework showing up? So I am doing that now, and I took a pause. But once things slow down for me for traveling, I'm going to pick it back up again. And then the intention is to have another person take a look at all of the data, and anyone who wants to do that, please hit me up to take a look at the data and see if the coding matches up. Right. So, are we both observing the same thing, or do I know that a muscle twitch in my eye means I'm about to throw a controller? Does does it translate? Does this framework in observation with someone who's using it make sense to at least one other person when they're observing it, right? And then once I get through that data, I would love to be able to do a clinical trial.

E Enduring Play Computer 49:08

Loading podcast level 14, workshopping and testing with the academic community.

C Cheryl Platz 49:15

So we're talking about the future now, but what would it mean for you to take what's currently autoethnographic or self-directed, and bring it to a broader audience.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 49:24

I would love to be able to. I always think big, and I have to be careful with that because while it has gotten me here already, I do want to make sure that I'm doing the best possible job that I could do, so that I'm not producing work that is overstated in its effectiveness or its efficacy. I want to hand something to the community and to the public and say, "I really did the best work that I could to create this research project the best way that I could." And so the idea is to get it into the hands of clinicians and to see how they're responding to it. The. Immediate next step, besides going to conferences and and discussing the idea with my peers and with people who are much more experienced with therapeutic spaces and learning through video games, is to do a workshop. I want to get it in the hands of some people at a conference, and I may have an opportunity. I'm in talks with another conference in Netherlands that want me to do a presentation and then a workshop, and so the idea would be to run the workshop with another a wonderful clinician, and to see how the attendees who may just be gamers or the attendees who are teachers, they're researchers or clinicians themselves. Let's see how how does it work when they run boss fights and better coping on me, or they run it on my friends. What are they observing when I'm running it on my friend? And so just to get this kind of just get it in the hands of people in a controlled, safe way that isn't that isn't collecting data, but that could just be discourse. It's the next step of discourse, and then getting into the clinical trials where I really lock in. I'm building a bit of a research project, but with research, there's so many things that you can look at, and there are so many questions that you can ask that I'm taking that slowly, so that I and I'm trying to gather as much information about it before I really lock in the research scope and design, so that I can validate or attempt to validate that there is a nugget of possibility that boss fights and better coping can work. But I would love for multiple clinicians to try it. I would love to continue to obtain data on how clinicians are experiencing it and how their their clients or patients are experiencing it as well formally, and that takes time and money, also. So just one step at a time. But I'm excited about it.

E Enduring Play Computer 51:50

Podcast level paused. Begin host commentary.

C Cheryl Platz 51:54

I know it can be a little hard to project your mind into another world like academics, but basically, what V is describing is play testing an academic framework. Taking what she's developed into workshops in academic circumstances is getting other academics to engage with this before bringing it into clinical trials. They're play testing, and then a clinical trial is really the psychology or medical equivalent of a beta test, you get everything in your final conditions and you put it out in the world and you hope that everything's working properly. But if it's not, you go and fix it.

E Enduring Play Computer 52:30

Loading podcast level 15. Building a new research study.

C Cheryl Platz 52:36

So you're a master's student who has completed a lot of your coursework and created space for you to kind of get a head start on PhD level research early, which is pretty exciting. Can you tell me more about the playing with emotion work that you're doing and how that fits into your long term vision?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 52:58

I'm running this experiment now called Playing with Emotions, and I am using that as the foundation to create a research body of work. Basically, so playing with emotion will then it'll evolve and continue to evolve and continue to evolve until it's on the desk doctoral board, and that research scope and project will hopefully inspire a university to take me on as a as a doctoral candidate. So that's where that's going. But Boss Fights and Better Coping also feeds into that larger goal, where I'm approaching the end goal to start as a clinician who is able to use video games in the immediate with what we have available as interventions for treatment and interventions for setting goals and obtaining goals, and then also coming from from the other side doing empirical research, mixed method research on the game that I developed, and that's my thesis now. So I'll get a graduate degree in two years, and then we'll see where I'm at.

C Cheryl Platz 54:03

I wanted to acknowledge, like, when we were in the back and forth while we were getting set up for this, like, I misinterpreted the title a little bit. Oh, you're trying to control player emotions. You're like, no, no, no, that's not what that is. So let's talk about what is playing with motion. What is this project that you're working on?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 54:17

I developed a very bare bones retro mini game that isolates mechanics in a neutral environment across three levels, and I'm not going to say what mechanics those are

C Cheryl Platz 54:30

Because the study's still going on right now, right?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 54:33

The study is still recruiting. I need. I'm just going to say 1,100 people. So if you're listening and you're 18 and over, yes, the study is still recruiting, and it's a browser-based game. Participants enter, and they are either exposed to the mechanic in the neutral environment, or they are not exposed to the mechanic, which then has your experimental variable and your control. Everything is randomized, and as there is exposure to the mechanic, the client is asked. To self-report how they're feeling.

C Cheryl Platz 55:02

For listeners, we're being intentionally generic right now because the study is in progress. But that gives some context for this playing with emotion concept. And you know, if you want to participate, you can go and read the conditions and the disclosures of research, and and that'll be in the show notes, like all of our episodes.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 55:17

You are eligible if you're interested. No pressure. We're just here trying to learn about how mechanics can help facilitate mood change. If they do,

C Cheryl Platz 55:26

Yes, as always, read the disclosures, check in on yourself, make sure it's the right for you.

C Cheryl Platz 55:31

Absolutely. And please reach out to me directly if you have any concerns or questions. I am available to any participant that would like to talk more. Anyone, actually, reach out? I love having conversations about this kind of work.

E Enduring Play Computer 55:46

Podcast level paused. Begin host commentary.

C Cheryl Platz 55:50

The story we're about to hear about a presentation V gave regarding her boss fights and better coping framework at a conference that didn't go as intended might sound like a tangent, but it's not. Listen carefully to the way she self-regulates and uses video game references to refer to how failure is okay. V is literally modeling for us in real time how her work has enabled her to gracefully adapt to unexpected high-stakes circumstances in real life. While Boss Fights and Better Coping may not be clinically validated yet, I think this is a great case study.

E Enduring Play Computer 56:22

Loading Podcast Level 16: Speedrunning a conference presentation.

C Cheryl Platz 56:29

So shifting back to boss fights and better coping, you recently had an experience where you got to present that work at a conference. Why don't we talk about that experience and what you brought away from it?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 56:41

Yeah, this particular conference is is a funny one to talk about. I will start by saying that my first experience with presenting boss fights and better coping was a two hour continuing education course where I was approved by the APA to teach clinicians how to use this framework.

C Cheryl Platz 56:58

That's intense to go from zero to 60 that fast.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 57:01

Okay, wait. I went for it... It's just the whole experience. I I just really threw myself in there and did it, and it feels really good that I was able to do that. But that beginning, that entry into teaching boss fights and better coping, definitely informed my most recent experience at Carnegie Mellon. In between that, I presented at Serious Play. It was an hour and 15. I had a wonderful time. It's a great conference, and it was my first time presenting the information without it being a continuing education course. It was just wonderful. Both both times were wonderful. Meaningful play at Carnegie Mellon was wonderful in a different way. The format was 20 minutes.

C Cheryl Platz 57:41

Okay. Yeah.

E Enduring Play Computer 57:44

Podcast level paused. Begin host commentary.

C Cheryl Platz 57:48

A couple of things before we move forward. Two conferences are mentioned here with similar names. Serious Play, hosted at Duke University in 2026, is oriented more towards practitioners and the application of the power of play, games, and gamification to transform education, training, and knowledge management. Whereas Meaningful Play, which was hosted at Carnegie Mellon University in 2026, is an academic conference that explores how games and play can change people's lives. On the conference circuit, workshops are interactive sessions where participants do hands-on exercises, as opposed to talks where the speaker delivers information in a single burst, particularly post-pandemic, as attention spans wane, micro talks of 20 minutes and under are becoming more common.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 58:27

Yeah, need I say more? It was 20 minutes, so I I really thought that I the 20 slides would be great. I could do it in 20 minutes. I know the framework. I've been going up without notes. Serious play. I had no notes. I know it. It's my baby. I talk about it all the time. I do it all the time, and I'm a yapper, as I'm sure you have come to know. And so I get up on that stage, and I'm like, okay, I got this. And I got to the fourth slide, and my time was up. And thank God for the Q and A because I got to the skills and play framework, which is the basically the loop that you would do if you were participating in the framework or you are working with your client within this loop. The Q and A portion was great. I had a lot of really amazing people in the audience. Shout out to Jordan from Games for Change for asking the two most important questions that I didn't get around to actually answering.

C Cheryl Platz 59:22

So you went over time, but the audience response made it wonderful. Tell us more.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 59:27

Yeah, it was great. I feel that it was great because it was not my best work, but it was great because I got off that stage and I had people who were engaged regardless, and people who were curious, and then people who are talking to me after the after the talk, and so I do also want to say it is very hard to transfer a full 16 page framework into a 20 minute session. And I'm just I'm not a 20 minute session kind of girl. So I got off stage and I went outside and I was like, oh, I need a breath of fresh. Air and I stood into the sun. It was a beautiful day that day, and I just laughed. I laughed. I was like, "Well, shit, that was rough." Very dramatic, exactly. So way back in the day, this is like old lore. I used to be a performer, and the first performance I ever did. I met. I fell off stage. Basically, big first one, big finale moment. Fell off the stage. I got off. I laughed hysterically. The person I was doing the duet with started crying. For me, I realized that if you mess up your first performance, it will never feel as bad if you mess up any other time. So I already had the experience of just really fumbling. I had not had the experience of standing on a stage and just feeling a little out of control of where the direction of information was going that I wanted to get out of my body because I get excited and there's so much to talk about. An hour is fine. Two hours is great. My my audience is comprised of teachers, of game devs, of clinicians of all sorts, psychiatrists, psychologists, and of people who just play video games. So I can't go into a talk and assume that people know concepts. So I love to be able to dive into the concepts. Even when I hand out my manual digitally, I have a vocab sheet for people who aren't familiar with video games or aren't familiar with therapy, so I could not condense that, or I had failed to condense that in a way that I felt good about when I got off stage. But I laughed anyway, and I again, like I didn't light on fire, I didn't die. No one laughed at me. It was just something that happened. I went home. My husband was like, "I have a video for you." I recorded the whole thing, and I was like, "I'm not going to watch that right now. No way. There's no way I would watch that

C Cheryl Platz 1:01:48

Because you remember all the little things."

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:01:50

I hate myself on that stage right now. I am not going to watch it. Still felt good. I felt good that I had done the thing right. I I did it scared. I I powered through it, even though I immediately when I got up there, I had the 10 minute marker go off, and I was like, "Oh, I'm in trouble. I'm in danger. I'm in danger." And I had to blast through slides. I was like, "I'm so sorry. I'm not going to be able to talk about this." But it was human. I was very human. I went up there, and I was myself, and I just did my best. That's it. I all I can do is do my best, and I can't hold myself to such a high standard that I feel like I can't get back up again. Oh, and it feels so much bigger because you have the adrenaline drop. So you're just going to be your harshest critic right after the experience, in my opinion. And so I go to the games expo, talking to so many people.

C Cheryl Platz 1:02:41

What does it look like when people are being that supportive?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:02:44

I have someone who I really love, and she has been to most of my talks. And I look at her in the audience because she's always active listening. She's nodding, and so whenever I feel flustered, I look to her and I call her my beacon. So when I need that boost that I'm doing well, I look to her, and she's like, "Yeah." So I talked to her, and she said I did a great job. You know, people are telling they're being very supportive. I go up to someone who I know we've never met before, but I have seen him at the conference that I went to previously, Serious Play, and he came to my hour and 15 minute talk on boss fights, and we get to talking. He's like a two decade experienced game scholar. He's. I respect his work so much. I really appreciate him. And so we're talking about how to create a community. He was doing a poster on how to create research communities for gaming and behavior, specifically on campuses. And and I felt comfortable being like, oh, thank you for coming to my talk. It was a little rough. Like I felt rough, and he goes, "Yeah, it looked rough." Yeah, and I was like, "Huh? Yeah, you're right. It was right." And he was like, "Yeah, if you had stopped apologizing so much, you would have had time to get through the rest of the information." And the way that he delivered it was just, I used to have a hard time. I used to take things very personally, and after getting my ass kicked by so many bosses, failure is just part of the game. And so I use the word fail very intentionally when referencing my 20-minute talk. Not because I I actually failed, but it felt like I had failed to accomplish the goal of delivering the information in a concise and tangible way for my audience, and I feel like I didn't do that. So personally, I feel like I failed, and that's fine. That's fine for me because failure is part of the game. So to hear him say that, yeah, it was really rough. It was it it felt good to hear because he had also seen what I was capable of doing before, and so the comparison it felt real. It wasn't like it didn't feel like a personal attack. It felt like someone being like, "I see you. You're doing great, but oh boy, was that rough?"

C Cheryl Platz 1:04:54

And it's validating to your own internal sense because you had these two barometers. You're like, "Ooh, this one felt.". Like an eight, this one felt like a five. Would like to trust my instincts, and then somebody's like, "Yes, hello, and they're good." Different feedback for different reasons, right? Supportive people are are valuable for different reasons, but it's frustrating when you know you could get better and no one is giving you concrete, actionable feedback, and that can be tough when you're on stage or you're a leader, right? And so it's a gift when there's enough mutual trust that someone's like, yeah, that didn't go great. Here's a thing that we could do better to avoid this in the future. I deal with that as a leader. Sometimes people like, oh, a failure is not safe. Like you're not getting disciplined, but we're talking constructively. That line went down, and so now we're going to talk about how we can get better. I love how grounded you are that you're able to say, yes, okay, that validates this, and I feel seen. And there's this constructive thing. Oh, hey, I could not do this thing next time, and I'm gonna have more bonus time. What a great story and example for everybody. And yes, but yes, micro talks are hard. I love the other thing you pointed out though too, because you're self-regulating in the moment. You're like, I know that I have an ally in the audience, so what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna get the serotonin or the support I need by looking at that ally. People don't realize that the smaller audiences are harder than the larger audiences. Yeah,

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:06:11

hell yeah.

E Enduring Play Computer 1:06:14

Loading podcast level 17. The speaker life as a souls-like.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:06:20

It's funny. Like the reason why I I built Boss Fights and Better Coping was one of the reasons I built was to accept failure as part of the journey and and see how we respond in the face of failure and to be able to recover from failure and to remain reflexive and and be able to problem solve after failure, and to regulate in the moment when you're feeling dysregulated. So, I'm on stage and I'm dysregulated. I'm I'm nervous. I you know I'm I'm new to public speaking in this way. I've done it before. I've led workshops, things like that. I've been a performer for 15 years in New York City, like I'm used to it, but in this way, it's my work that I'm delivering is very important to me, and I want again. I keep saying I want to do my best, and so I I actively try to regulate when I'm up there, and I'll shake out my hands. I'll sometimes do a little shimmy. I'll remember to take a deep breath. I'll look at a friend. I I laugh. I'll laugh if it's appropriate. And I like the idea that I get to embody regulation on stage as an example, and then leaving specifically that 20 minute talk feeling like I may have failed in in a way. I'm proud that I was able to laugh and to give myself grace afterward because there's going to be another boss fight, and I'm going to get my ass kicked again if I am able to be on stage more. If I am given, if I have the honor of sharing my my work, there's going to be another boss fight that's going to kick my ass, and I'm going to have to get up, and I'm going to have to do it again, and it just happens. So I felt like I could I could I learn I was embodying my everything that I had learned from my framework in that moment too, which was get back up.

C Cheryl Platz 1:08:20

You are living the speaker life as a souls-like, and and modeling that for everyone, and it's it's great, you know, like because we do like to bring it back to games, like we're getting real time feedback from the audience. You're looking like if you were to play a souls like you're not getting any feedback about whether you're hitting the boss. How do you know if you're doing well? If you're doing a talk and you're not getting feedback from the audience that is the talk on hard mode. Like if you're doing a show and you're not getting laughs from the audience, that is the show on hard mode. But if you're doing a serious show, that's what's going to happen, and so it's harder to do. Like in many ways, it is harder to do serious stuff, the comedy, because you're not getting the right amount of feedback. And so it's interesting too what our brains tell us, right? Sometimes quiet, and sometimes those things are hyper focused, but we want feedback as players, as humans, who want to know that we're doing well. So being self-regulated enough to be like, what is my way of getting feedback so that my limbic system doesn't freak out and tell me I'm doing a bad job? That person, that person is going to give me a good thing. I'm going to ignore everybody else.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:09:16

Yep, I need a little. I need a little pick me up, a little pep. I just look at Marielle. But going back to the feedback that I had gotten from the scholar, the game scholar that I know, saying that it was rough, validated, like you said, but then it was followed up with something so empowering, and then he he actually messaged me again to tell me that he was serious and not just trying to make me feel better, and I think that also makes the failure even more valuable because I I don't think that conversation would have come up. I don't think I would have received that information that really makes me feel like I am that I that I am in the right line of work. I'm I'm asking that. Right questions, and so when I say that meaningful play was amazing in a different way, that's ultimately what I mean.

E Enduring Play Computer 1:10:10

Loading podcast boss level: inspiring audiences by starting the right conversations.

C Cheryl Platz 1:10:18

That's great. Not only did you get that initial feedback, but you got deeper feedback. It started the right conversation. When you said to me, "Oh, I didn't know if it went well, but I got everything in the Q and A." My initial response was, "Well, if they were asking questions, then your audience was with you the whole time. If you can't get to everything in 20 minutes, your job is to inspire curiosity to get people to want to have the conversation. And if they're all asking you the questions, you started the right conversations. That is why talks exist, like to have an impact on the audience.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:10:46

Yeah, yeah, that's what I want. Curiosity, that's all I want. And when people are inspired, I want questions. I embrace questioning. Right before I started doing talk, I realized that something that I I've been practicing for a very long time in my life, is the art of saying I don't know, and I think that it's a really powerful tool that more people should use. And so, being nervous about not understanding a question or not having the answer. If I had all the answers, I wouldn't be a researcher. My life is asking questions, so my fallback is I don't know. Let's talk about it, or I don't know. What do you think? And I just love that format where I can have the opportunity to learn, or there can be discourse. Someone I've had people disagree with me, and that it feels good because we're only getting stronger together in that moment. We're learning together in that moment, and when it's done in a respectful, and I want to say safe emotional like safe way, in a way that's not intended to gotcha or hurt you. That part of academia can be really amazing. Makes the the vulnerability worth it.

C Cheryl Platz 1:11:54

And that's one of the things that excited me about you reaching out and you talking about your work in the Motivators Play. Like the Motivators Play in my book is a framework that I put out there, and I was like, "I hope I will have conversations with the community to test this because I don't think that they will stay this way."

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:12:08

Totally.

C Cheryl Platz 1:12:09

They reflect changes in player motivation over decades. They may not be perfect; they're probably not perfect. But if I start the right conversations and we get to a clear understanding, or we find the vein where it's changing and we continue to document it, then that's great. But it's tough when you come out and you have the podium, you have the power, you have the stage, because it can be tough to like really convince people. Like, "no, no, I want to talk about it. The motivators of play." I have nine of them. One of them is fun, and I'm like, well, fun. I mean, obviously, people play for fun. There's the whole theory of fun, but that's actually the one I get the most feedback on because people are like, "this isn't helpful." Okay, let's dig into that. Does it belong here? Does it need more context here? Does it need to get split up? Let's have the conversation. Yes, people for fun. Does it? But but if it's not helpful, let's dig in. But like, but I'm glad we're having the conversation.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:12:53

Yes. Yeah. And actually, some of the feedback that I received from the same scholar was, "You're an expert, even if you don't feel like you've gotten there yet. And I was just like, I like I didn't know how to respond to that. I mean, I obviously it feels very, very, very, very good to hear something like that. I don't know that I consider myself an expert, and honestly, I think that you can be an expert while still continuing to learn and to develop and to receive that feedback, and you become more of an expert from receiving that feedback and having people who are curious and being able to take the feedback and chew on it and potentially implement it or know when okay I'm going to maybe discard that or I'm going to put that on the shelf, just living in the embodiment of of flexibility with that, I think, is what really makes the difference between someone who is doing the work to do good work and doing the work to just have work out there.

E Enduring Play Computer 1:13:55

Loading podcast bonus level: Your professional game loop is creation, magic, and change.

C Cheryl Platz 1:14:03

When I started teaching, I became acutely aware of the radical pace of change in the games industry.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:14:08

Yeah.

C Cheryl Platz 1:14:09

And so it's like if you want to be an expert in games, you have to be constantly learning. Genres were popping up while I was writing my book. I'm always going to be a little bit behind the curve because there's just so much happening. And so if you're not willing to just be like, "Cool, why do I not know today?" Teaching my class has been like that too. Even though I have my whole curriculum, I would okay. I'm going to teach this subject. I'm just going to do a quick check to see if the whole industry has changed on this topic. Cool. Yep. Going to get a couple updated things there. Great.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:14:35

There was an anecdote that I was reading in one of the books I have behind me. Oblivion was made right on the cusp of the game industry changing dramatically, and the sentiment in that chapter was some of the some of the best games have been made while the industry is changing in a different direction, or let's say some of the most successful games have been. On the cusp of the industry changing, and I thought that was really interesting. And I feel I feel that sense of urgency, where like I have all of this knowledge of this now. How do I get to my game? How do I like? I have everything for the game. I just have to figure out the mechanics, which is they're only going to come in time because I can't do all of the research at once. But you feel that sense of urgency because it is the industry is constantly evolving. Stresses me out sometimes.

C Cheryl Platz 1:15:24

That is a valid feeling, and having been in a hot second, it's a really cool observation. And yes, the industry changing like the whole Animal Crossing pandemic. But if it's not this wave of change, then there will be another wave of change, or you will be the catalyst for the change. It's just a changey industry, and so it looks like change in the back, but it doesn't mean that you weren't the cause. And that's the thing about games development too: is like it takes a while, and Oblivion happening at the time when the change was happening. They didn't necessarily know it was going to land there when they started calling that shot. That is true. Like Animal Crossing didn't know it was going to land the pandemic. We've had these X years of layoffs, and GTA has been delayed X number of times, and now there's a World of Warcraft happening and a Zelda happening. You're like, okay, so November looks like a little bit of a thing. But did any of us know that November was going to be the nexus of space and time that we're all just going to wait with bated breath? No. And so, like, you can't be mad at yourself for not being psychic. And the game industry will continue to change. But you're leading with curiosity. You will keep your finger on the pulse. You'll figure out where it's going, and you'll continue to adapt. And maybe the next opportunity is even better than anything we have right now. Maybe there's a new platform or a new trend or something. You're like, oh, that's what I was waiting for.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:16:32

This - I think about making things possible that other people might think are impossible, and they very well may be impossible or not possible in this moment, but there's hope along with the urgency and the anxiety, and there's opportunities. I think that there's opportunities for me to even if a game comes out that's almost one to one, something like mine. Then I'll learn. Maybe I'll join their research team.

C Cheryl Platz 1:16:54

Is there anything else? Any other messages you want to leave listeners with?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:17:00

Compassion and curiosity are the most important things to me in this world. I think they're super valuable and they're important. You need compassion and you need curiosity. Compassion to be able to explore things with a curious mind in an ethical and considerate way, and curiosity to be able to continue to learn and to cultivate more compassion for what you are experiencing, and always to make room for magic because it's there, and that could come in the waves of creativity that could come with a connection that you didn't realize you would make because of technological failure constantly. And as a creator, as someone who has been a performance artist, a visual artist, an artist of many genres. Stay creating. I see that people are feeling really disempowered because they aren't able to work and engage with the industry as they want to. Stay creating. And I, when I first took a game design course, and the main message was just create something, and I created a dice game. Just continue to create. You may not be working, you may not be able to make money, and I know I'm not in the same position, so I can't possibly understand how it feels to not be able to participate right now. But keep flexing the muscle, and creativity will hopefully bring in the magic, and we'll see. We'll see what happens. But your soul and your art doesn't have to pause just because it's not making you money right now. Some of the best shit ever made was made without expecting any money from it, and we see that with a lot of indie games too.

C Cheryl Platz 1:18:36

Yes, multiple things can be true. You deserve insurance and food and healthcare.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:18:40

Oh, absolutely.

C Cheryl Platz 1:18:41

And the amount you're being paid for your work doesn't establish the value of the value of it.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:18:47

Yeah, of course.

C Cheryl Platz 1:18:47

I think we see that quite a bit in the games industry right now, and we are that is part of the change we are seeing. I don't know where it's going, but things like your work, things like this podcast, is people staying connected to whatever their creation is, we are making literal worlds. That is magic. If you were to ask someone from the Middle Ages, is Skyrim magic? They would be like, "Yes, that is objectively magic. What did you do? How did you get the dragon in that in that box?"

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:19:11

Yes, it is magic. It's called the magic circle for a reason. It's magic. Make room for it and let it in.

C Cheryl Platz 1:19:19

Hopefully, all this curiosity and compassion and research can help us figure out a way to thrive as an industry instead of declining as an industry, and that means thriving as a collective of people who make and play games, not just a collective of games. And if V has anything to say about it, a collective of people using games for therapy.

E Enduring Play Computer 1:19:42

Loading final podcast level: Links and followup

C Cheryl Platz 1:19:47

Thank you, V, so much for this conversation. How can people follow you and your work?

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:19:52

Thank you, thank you so much for this conversation. This has been a real treat. You can follow me on Instagram. It's VGTX Research. That's. VGTX Research, and you can follow me on LinkedIn. I am Victoria Alexeeev Zajak. You can also find my work, my entire corpus, at vgtx.com. And if you're interested in participating in the game, that's playingwithemotion.com.

C Cheryl Platz 1:20:18

And as always, we'll get those into the show notes as well, so you can head to the Enduring Play website to check that out. If writing that down, if you do not have paper, don't worry about it. We got you. Well, thank you so much, V. I am wishing you tons of success on your next talks. I hope that the timers are always in your favor. I hope that your your participants find you, and I look forward to following the outcomes and seeing what we all learn together.

V Victoria "V" Alexeev 1:20:44

Thank you, and I hope to continue to keep having these conversations with you and with everyone else who's curious too.

C Cheryl Platz 1:20:49

Thank you for your work, and thank you, everybody. Until next time, keep thriving.

C Cheryl Platz 1:20:58

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E Enduring Play Computer 1:21:58

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