

How to Represent Mental Illness in Games

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GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE

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Content Warning

- Suicide
- Mental illness
- Swearing





Disclaimers

- Please don't sue me, I do not represent any character or franchise, whatsoever
- Mental illness is also a legal term, but we are using the colloquialism
- This talk is symptom based as opposed to diagnosis based
- This is not medical advice

Spoilers

- Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice
- Celeste
- The Last of Us
- Life is Strange
- Stardew Valley (Shane)
- Max Payne 3
- God of War (2018)





Highly Prevalent

25-50% people have a mental health issue





Highly Stigmatized

25% people feel "uneasy/fearful" around a mentally ill person

46% people believe a diagnosis of mental illness is an "excuse for poor behaviour"

People with mental illness are 10x more likely to be a victim of violent crime





Highly Undertreated

2/3 people with mental illness never get professional help





- Improving attitudes
- Promoting help-seeking
- Protecting the vulnerable
- Saving human lives





GUIDELINES: LAPSES

Language
 Stereotypes

Accuracy
 Empathy

PurposeSupport





Specific Conditions and Symptoms

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Psychosis
- Trauma and PTSD

- Borderline
 Personality Disorder
- Substance Abuse and Addiction
- Others





Depression

Myth

Just sadness

Antidepressants make you feel "numb"

A sign of weakness

Requires meds

Reality

Apathy, ↓ enjoyment, ↓ concentration, ↓ motivation, physical symptoms

All meds have side-effects, many people get none

Can effect anybody at any time, many people hide it

Psychotherapy/lifestyle treatment options





Myth

Just panic attacks

It's emotional sensitivity

Shy people, stuttering, etc

Meds are sedatives

Anxiety

Reality

A range of disorders e.g. GAD, social phobia etc.

A physiological response to perceived threat

Many people with anxiety disorders are very outgoing and can be irritable

Medication of choice is antidepressants





Myth

Evil, psychopaths

They see things

Split personality

All in "asylums"

Psychosis

Reality

Vulnerable, detached from reality.

Psychopathy is a totally unrelated thing

Key symptoms are hallucinations, delusions, thought disorder, lack of insight

A myth from the etymology of "schiz"

Most people recover and live independently





Myth Only soldiers

Must be the victim

Lack of resilience

Violent/unpredictable/ psychotic

Trauma and PTSD

Reality

Anyone impacted by any threat to life or safety

Vicarious trauma also can cause PTSD

Many contributing factors

Can present with hypervigilance, flashbacks, nightmares, irritability, emotional detachment



God of War Santa Monica Studios, 2018

> The Last of Us Naughty Dog, 2013



Borderline Personality Disorder

Myth

Rare

Split personality

Attention seeking

Untreatable

Reality

Incredibly common, often misdiagnosed as bipolar disorder, anxiety and depression

Key symptoms are emotional instability, black and white thinking, fear of abandonment, +/- deliberate self harm

Help seeking

There are many evidence based therapies





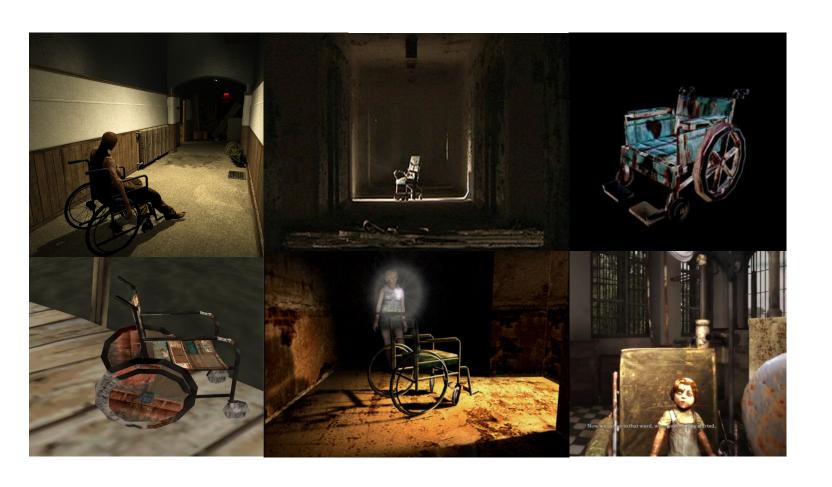
Others

- Bipolar Affective Disorder
- Dissociative Identity Disorder
- Antisocial Personality Disorder (and psychopathy)





Jen's Specific Gripes



- Why so many wheelchairs why
- 2. "Asylums" are not scary, and psychiatrists are not all evil (or British)
- 3. Get the meds right please
- 4. Yes we still use ECT, it's very effective





Other Considerations

- Support the team (and yourself)
- Don't be scared to ask
- Verify with professionals





Thank you

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