



# FEMSTEAM MYSTERIES: STEAM SCENARIO

## Title

*Holding on to your passion: How one woman became a TV personality in the midst of opposition*

## Authors

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## Summary

Stephanie Bendixsen spent her youth trying to play video games in spite of her parents' decision to not allow her to play them in any form. In her teens, she pursued her secret hobby until her parents found out and, fearing a psychological addiction to video games, put her in therapy. Later, she would enjoy success beyond what she could have envisioned at that dark point in life: she was hired as a presenter on ABC2's gaming show *Good Game*, replacing the male outgoing host, Jeremy Ray. Following accusations on Ray's part that he was only removed from the show to make room for a female presenter, Bendixsen faced serious opposition from the Internet, including efforts to uncover her home address and regular cyberbullying. Nonetheless, she persevered in her career, hosting multiple other shows in the field and producing her own web series and hobby movie. This scenario aims to look at some of the complexities and social issues that follow prominent female gamers, and how the perseverance we so often encourage can sometimes be only part of the price of success in fields where social attitudes lag behind hiring policies. Television personalities, in both fiction and non-fiction, can serve as powerful role models for young people (e.g. 'The Scully Effect', where *The X-Files* character Dana Scully is credited with a statistically significant rise in females studying STEM courses; Source: <https://seejane.org/research-informs-empowers/the-scully-effect-i-want-to-believe-in-stem/>), and the example of Bendixsen's career and the difficulties she has faced, also has the potential to add value in the minds of younger students.

## Subjects

- **Computing:** Learning about the current and past state of gaming, focused on the appeal to, and split between, male and female gamers.
- **English:** Sympathetic and motivational writing to a specific audience and situation.
- **Science:** Understanding psychological addiction as an experiential danger in the pursuit of hobbies.
- **Computing:** Internet safety, focusing on an understanding of the dangers others present in such an environment, which can be both intensely personal and completely anonymous at the same time.

## Real- life questions

The real-life questions that students will be dealing are:

- Do you think there's ever a time when it's not worth it to pursue your life's passion or ambition? In what situations would this be the case?
- Why do you think people face opposition on the Internet?
- Can encouragement make a difference in somebody's life even when they're facing very difficult situations?

- How can we tell the difference between an enjoyable hobby which we participate in regularly and a psychological addiction?

### Aims of the scenario

*The scenario aims:*

- *To begin a dialogue about the effects of advertising on people, whether they are young people or parents.*
- *To build an understanding of the revolutionary nature of the home microcomputer era, and how it started an entire industry.*
- *To consider the impact of being a part of an industry as it is born, as opposed to being an outsider, or merely a consumer of its products.*
- *To build awareness of how advertisers use persuasive writing to appeal to a certain group of people, and how businesses harness that power to meet their goals.*
- *To promote consideration of how products can be marketed to wider groups rather than targeting one gender.*
- *To offer a practical opportunity to put these new skills and ideas into practice by creating a 'better' advertisement that might have caused girls to have been included more fully in the home computer revolution.*

### Connection to STEAM careers

*The strongest connection is with the gaming industry, which provides many and varied opportunities but is not without its barriers to entry. The performing arts, specifically the role of television presenter, are a minor emphasis. Mental health considerations and creative writing also feature as new considerations for the students.*

### Age of students

11–12-year-olds

### Time

**Preparation time: 1 hour (meetings to discuss the aim and content of the project to ensure it will be executed with consistency in its purpose and message across all subjects)**

**Teaching & assessment time:**

- **Computing (Gaming then and now; online safety): 45 mins**
- **English (Sympathetic fan mail): 45 mins**
- **Science (Psychological addiction): 45 mins**
- **Computing (FemSTEAM Mysteries game): 45 mins**

### Teaching resources (material & technological tools)

**Materials:**

Lesson tasks for Science and English.

**Online tools:**

*FemSTEAM Mysteries game.*

*Access to lesson tasks for Computing.*

### 21<sup>st</sup> century skills

This educational scenario will enhance among the students the following skills, defined as 21<sup>st</sup> century skills:



- Digital literacy through Computing lesson tasks.
- Creative skills will be employed in writing an encouraging and understanding fan letter.
- Career self-reliance will be learned through the example of Stephanie Bendixsen in her continued pursuit of her chosen career and passion in the face of heavy opposition.
- Critical thinking will be engaged through looking at gaming participation figures with the purpose of challenging assumptions and misinformation about the place of female gamers in the userbase.
- Perseverance will be promoted through the example of Bendixsen and the consideration of others who have likewise persevered under hostile treatment. With the polarised nature of conversation the subject, it is important for students to be able to understand that this was a genuine case of undeserved opposition, and that the conversation had specifically been made to be about gender, and that this had been instigated by Ray, not Bendixsen.

### Teaching approaches and learning strategies/theories

- Bendixsen’s story, and the context in which it occurred, must be presented accurately and in a manner that can be well understood by students of the chosen age range.
- With a good grasp on the story, students will be expected to write a letter to meet a specific audience (Bendixsen), context (heavy opposition on the Internet), and purpose (to sympathise and encourage).
- Psychological addition, which is a complex issue, will be taught at an age-appropriate level.
- The most relevant points of Internet safety must be covered in a clear and concise manner, focusing mainly on the issues faced by Bendixsen.
- Bendixsen must be presented carefully as a role model for her perseverance and as an innocent party in the controversy that came as a result of Jeremy Ray’s firing and subsequent public objections. It is likely that students will have only heard one-dimensional arguments on the subject of gender and gaming, and it is important that they understand this happened to a real person in a very public setting, and was a genuine injustice, rather than a matter of exaggerated Internet outrage.

### Educational scenario

Name of activity	Procedure	Time
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Lesson: Stephanie Bendixsen’s story and its Internet safety implications</b>		
<b>Computing</b>	Presentation on Stephanie Bendixsen: her childhood interests (including parental opposition to gaming), her start as a gaming presenter, and the public controversy over the firing of Jeremy Ray (and the Internet’s reaction to this and to her).	10’



Name of activity	Procedure	Time
	<p>CLASS DISCUSSION: What are your thoughts on her story, how she was treated, and how people behave through the Internet as opposed to in person?</p>	5'
	<p>Brief presentation on Internet safety, specifically on the treatment of public figures and the kinds of issues faced by people who are famous and/or 'Internet famous'.</p>	10'
	<p>TASK: Fame and Internet safety</p>	
	<p>Short presentation on how Bendixsen ultimately persevered, and where her continuing career has taken her so far.</p>	15'
<p>Discussion and preparation for the next lesson</p>	<p>Consider how Bendixsen felt at this time, and what it might have been like to have faced public opposition and threats through the Internet. This will help them prepare for the upcoming English lesson, where understanding and empathy will be required.</p>	5'
<p><b>2<sup>nd</sup> Lesson: Encouragement through fan mail</b></p>		
<p>English (Preparation for writing an encouraging fan letter)</p>	<p><i>This lesson will be spent preparing the class for the following lesson where they will write a fan letter to encourage Bendixsen in the midst of the opposition she faced.</i></p> <p>CLASS DISCUSSION: What do you remember of Bendixsen's story and the opposition she faced through the Internet? Remind the class of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Her situation, as a new, female presenter of a popular gaming show.</li> <li>- The outgoing presenter's public claim (whether genuine or false) that he was fired so a woman could be hired instead.</li> <li>- That Bendixsen had expected to join the show as an additional presenter, not as a replacement for a Jeremy Ray upon his dismissal.</li> </ul>	10'



Name of activity	Procedure	Time
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- That she faced intense, personal opposition through the Internet over an issue she did not start and was not even aware of until it was made public.</li> </ul> <p>Present the task: to write a fan letter to Bendixsen. The purpose is to encourage her in the midst of the opposition she is wrongly facing. While the audience is obviously Bendixsen, it should be noted that she is, at this point, she was only 24, had just gotten her big break in the entertainment industry, and was facing intense, and probably frightening, hostility from unknown people.</p> <p>Gauge the student’s preparedness to write an effective letter of this kind. Fill in gaps and deal with misconceptions as they arise.</p> <p>POSSIBLE TASK: Students write up notes for their letters (a list of points that they will cover in the actual letter) if time allows. Complete for homework.</p> <p>It should be noted that these messages won’t actually be sent, and that these events occurred years ago.</p>	<p>10’</p> <p>25’</p>
<p>Discussion and preparation for the next lesson</p>	<p><i>Complete notes in preparation for the coming English lesson.</i></p>	
<p><b>3<sup>rd</sup> Lesson: The science of psychological addiction</b></p>		
<p>Science (Psychological addiction)</p>	<p>Quick class discussion on the signs of psychological addiction. The major symptoms, where you could say somebody might be psychologically addicted to a <i>thing</i> are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A strong emotional desire for the thing</li> <li>- Using a lot of your time on the thing</li> <li>- Having no interest in doing other things</li> <li>- Being willing to miss out on other experiences that you used to enjoy so you can spend your time on the thing instead</li> </ul>	<p>20’</p>



Name of activity	Procedure	Time
	<p>- Believing that you <i>need</i> the thing to be happy, or to just get through the day</p> <p>Utilise real-life examples of gaming dependency as appropriate, for example:  <a href="#">At war with World of Warcraft: an addict tells his story   World of Warcraft   The Guardian</a></p> <p><i>It should be noted that this is not a laughable or unimportant issue. It has real-world impacts that are far beyond what most would imagine, for example, these stories (which should NOT be shared with the class, but help develop understanding of the severity of the issue): <a href="#">Gaming and the Rise of Child Neglect (hooked-on-games.com)</a></i></p> <p>TASK: What are the signs of a psychological addiction? How can games go from something enjoyable and become something addictive? What steps can be taken to limit, or handle, these risks?</p> <p>PLENARY (CLASS DISCUSSION):            Talk about how somebody could handle psychological addiction, whether to smartphones, games, or any other thing.            It would be good to know the following in advance:  <i>Cognitive Behaviour Therapy has shown some promise in treating gaming addiction. At its simplest, it uses the ABC model:</i>  <i>A: activating event</i>  <i>What is the event (or events) that trigger this behaviour?</i>  <i>B: beliefs about that event</i>  <i>What do you believe, at the moment, that leads you to carry out the addictive behaviour?</i>  <i>C: consequences of your behaviour</i>  <i>What things arise as direct consequences of your behaviour?</i></p>	<p>15'</p> <p>10'</p>



Name of activity	Procedure	Time
	<p><i>For example, for Bendixsen’s problem where she would play games all night and be unable to get through the following day in school:</i></p> <p><i>A: Family has gone to bed, so they can’t stop her from gaming</i></p> <p><i>B: This is her only chance to play the game she loves, and it’s worth being tired the next day</i></p> <p><i>C: It’s almost impossible to get through the school day without sleep, her studies will suffer, and she will be unable to cope</i></p> <p><i>These details provide enough information to work on handling the addictive behaviours. Often, it’s possible to avoid, or at least minimise, the triggering events, and careful evaluation of beliefs and consequences can help with making better decisions in the moment and establishing better patterns of thought and behaviour.</i></p>	
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Lesson: Writing an encouraging fan letter</b>		
<b>English (Empathetic writing)</b>	Recap on the facts of Bendixsen’s story at this point in her life. Ensure students remember the situation in sufficient detail to properly engage with it in their written work. Fill in any gaps as needed.	10’
	TASK: Students write their fan letters, using their notes from the previous English lesson and the techniques they have learned.	35’
<b>5<sup>th</sup> Lesson: Further role models</b>		
<b>Computing (FemSTEAM Mysteries game)</b>	Recap on Stephanie Bendixsen as a role model in the field of presenting and gaming. Present how to access and play the FemSTEAM Mysteries game.	5’
	TASK: Students play through the FemSTEAM Mysteries game, looking to uncover the identity of role models in the virtual environment.	35’
	CLASS DISCUSSION: What have they learned over the course of the project?	5’



### Assessment

Quality of work produced for lesson tasks. Degree of empathy and understanding demonstrated in letter-writing task.

### Initial assessment

Demonstration of student understanding with the initial Computing tasks, i.e. understanding of Bendixsen’s situation and the Internet safety issues at play in her life at that time.

### Formative evaluation

- Quality and completeness of notes for letter-writing task.
- Understanding demonstrated in class discussions on psychological addiction, and the work produced in the lesson task.
- Informal assessment of student responses to lessons and to the project in general, including while playing FemSTEAM Mysteries game.

### Final assessment

*Assessment of the understanding of students in terms of:*

- *The opposition public figures can face and the value of perseverance.*
- *The specific challenges that can arise for girls and women in this setting.*
- *The nature of, and dangers posed by, psychological addiction, focused on gaming issues.*
- *Recognising the gaming industry as a possible career.*

### Student feedback

*The students are expected to provide feedback on how the lessons were received and implemented.*

- The relatability of the role model was excellent; most students believe she was a strong role model for the scenario to focus on.
- Almost all students understood the point of the scenario and how the role model’s story and work served that point.
- Some students agreed that the role model proved the point well, but that she did not ultimately have a ‘world-changing’ impact through her career and would have preferred a more influential role model, as was covered in the Mapping project.

### Teacher feedback

*The teachers are expected to provide feedback on how the lessons were received and implemented.*



- While some students refused to engage with the material seriously, most engaged in intelligent discussion regarding the social and practical issues at play in Bendixsen's story.
- This story resonated particularly with some female students, as expected. One student stayed back at the end of the lesson to verify that the story was real, and was pleased to learn that she could find Bendixsen, her shows, and her story on the Internet.
- The male students were honest about how girls are perceived in the gaming world, and willingly discussed both the difficulties they face and the counterproductive things they see in the gaming world (assuming that both parties have the overall goal of becoming a cohesive, productive group).
- The fan mail portion of the project was very well-received; students were engaged in the task and several were excited to be writing a supportive fan letter, given the story of the role model's struggles.



# Appendices

## Internet safety and online gaming questions

1. Why is it so easy for somebody to pretend to be somebody else on the Internet?
2. Why are some people so nasty over the Internet? Do you think they would be like that in real life?
3. Do you think online gaming is a safe place to be? Why, or why not?
4. Do you think female gamers are treated well online? Why, or why not?
5. Do you think video games are designed mainly for girls/women or for men/boys? What makes you think that?



## Psychological addiction questions

1. How do you think somebody gets addicted to video games?
2. How could somebody avoid becoming addicted to video games?
3. How could we help somebody who is addicted to video games?

