

330. Dungeons&Dragons in Therapy with Megan Connell (with Intro Takes)

[00:00:00] **Dr. Megan Connell:**

when we come at a tabletop role playing game from that fused concept of a video game, where you have only a certain number of choices that you can make in a setting. And we go to this, like, let's no, defuse. You can do anything. What do you want to do? That is such a powerful tool for people to be able to go oh my God. And to give them permission to be creative and to try stuff again in that safe environment where there's no real world consequences.

[00:00:23] **Michael Herold:** That was Dr. Megan Connell on Psychologists off the Clock. We are four experts in psychology here to bring you cutting edge and science based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work, and health.

[00:00:46] **Debbie Sorensen:** I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, a clinical psychologist practicing in Mile High, Denver, Colorado, and author of Act for Burnout, Act Daily Journal, and the Act Daily Card Deck.

[00:00:56] **Emily Edlynn:** From America's Heartland, I'm Dr. Emily Edlynn a clinical [00:01:00] psychologist based in Chicago, Illinois, and author of Autonomy Supportive Parenting.

[00:01:04] **Michael Herold:** Calling in from Vienna, Austria. I'm Michael Herold, ACT coach, confidence trainer, and author of an upcoming book on being a better conversationalist and making friends.

[00:01:13] **Jill Stoddard:** And from coastal New England, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard, author of Be Mighty, The Big Book of Act Metaphors, and Impostor No More.

[00:01:20] **Emily Edlynn:** We hope you take what you learned here to build a rich and meaningful life.

[00:01:23] **Michael Herold:** Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off The Clock. I'm here with Jill to talk about my interview with Megan Connell. So Jill, what did you think about it?

[00:01:39] **Jill Stoddard:** Well, this was a real, uh, shift, I think, for us on Psychologists Off the Clock to be talking about, um, tabletop role playing games and Dungeons Dragons specifically, and I, I mean, I love anything we do that's like creative, fun, play oriented. I think people who already have some knowledge in this area will, [00:02:00] absolutely know and get and love everything Megan's talking about, but I think for some of our listeners who maybe don't have as much, Experience or zero experience like Emily and Debbie and I before this episode that it might help for us to sort of lay some really basic groundwork for like what, Michael, what do our listeners need to know and understand about the basics of dungeons Dragons, because that's really kind of the focus of the episode, in order to get the most out of this episode with Megan.

[00:02:31] **Michael Herold:** Yeah, you're right. this was definitely a conversation between two total geeks. I think that becomes obvious really quickly. So, um, what our listeners need to know is that first, um, and both, um, Megan and I talk about this in the episode. It's, it's really just tabletop role playing games in general.

We just use dungeons and dragons because it's the most, Known game out there. So how does a game like Dungeons and Dragons work? You have [00:03:00] a group of people sitting around on a table and they tell a story together Each one of them takes on the role of a character that they have made for themselves. This could be a wizard.

This could be a dwarf. This is the barbarian warrior. This is the elven scout

[00:03:22] **Jill Stoddard:** And so, is that just something they come up with off the top of their head, or does Dungeons Dragons give you, say, like, six characters to choose from and you pick one?

[00:03:32] **Michael Herold:** Um, what I like to do, and I've done this when I played with you as well, I've given you characters to choose from. Now, this is a really quick way into the game, because here are a couple of characters, which one speaks most to you to your fancy, what would you like to play? Now, others, uh, might go more into the detail.

They want to be more specific. They want to pick all the [00:04:00] fine details themselves. The thing with character creation is that it, it does take a little bit of time. Like you might spend an hour putting that together. Which in a coaching or a therapeutic context is actually really useful because Jill, if I were to work with you, um, in a therapeutically applied role playing game, we would look at

your personal strengths and your personal weaknesses and say, okay, Jill, in this game, we're going to play for 10 weeks.

how do you want to grow in the game? What do you want to learn? And you might say, okay, so and I'll just totally make this up. You'll say, you know what? I'm often, um, I don't like conflict, um, this is something that I want to work with. So we might say, okay, you know, what would make sense for you? You could play a fighter or you could play a barbarian, because if you're a wizard throwing fireballs, you'll be standing in the back all the time anyway.

And I want you in the front. I want you to be the one who's like taking a risk.

[00:04:59] **Jill Stoddard:** And so then [00:05:00] once you have your character chosen, what's next? Like, what does the game really look like from

[00:05:05] **Michael Herold:** So we sit, together. Uh, on a, on a table and I take on the role as the, the game master and I kind of like orchestrate the game as a, as a narrator, I take care of the, the storyline and it really comes down to a group of people telling a story together.

So in this game that we played together, for example, the story developed to a point where you were getting in conflict with this barbarian orc that was kind of like, uh, intimidating all of you. And now the big question was, how do we solve this? So in a role playing game, you often have, you have scenes that have problems that have conflict that have riddles.

And the question is how do we as a group solve this together? And the beautiful thing here compared to the video game that Megan and I also talk about is that when you sit [00:06:00] together at a table, everything is possible. You can do whatever you want. You can, uh, I mean, Emily in our game, uh, gave a really good example of creatively solving a problem like this.

[00:06:12] **Jill Stoddard:** Well, and, you know, if people listen to us play the game, we have a bonus episode, as you mentioned. In this episode, we have a bonus episode where the four of us play this. And I'll say, as a player who knows nothing about this, I felt, like, kind of self conscious, and I wanted to know, well, like, what's the right thing to do?

So, in some ways, like... The ability to do absolutely anything made it sort of harder for me as kind of like a, I don't know, type A, role governed and type of person. And of course we only played for 45 minutes or so, but I could see how with, first of all, it was like a really lovely team building exercise. I think for us

as co hosts. And I could see with more time how the comfort level would grow and how the self consciousness would reduce and how the [00:07:00] permission to be creative would really come about in this game. And so, of course, we weren't playing in a therapeutic or coaching sort of context. We were just playing to have fun and to experience it.

But I could see how even playing just for fun, there could be... Some of these benefits is that so, so you do this in a coaching context. And is that something that you tend to see with your players?

[00:07:24] **Michael Herold:** Oh yeah, definitely . So Megan uses this, um, in a therapeutic context. I, uh. Not being a therapist. I use this for confidence and social skills coaching purposes and I Will often have situations where people now dare to do things that in real life they wouldn't want to say, they wouldn't want to try out, they wouldn't want to speak up.

I have, for example, in one group that I run, I have a player who's the nicest guy you'll ever have [00:08:00] with you, uh, but put him in a role playing game and he, he becomes a badass. Like, like this, this guy will speak up, like you cannot talk him down. He will not do what he doesn't want to do. Why? Because now playing a character.

We're more open because we're playing through an avatar, we're more open to try out new things, because it's not us who gets rejected, it's not us who gets embarrassed, it's, it's that character. And in that way, however, we now get to train skills that, if you pull them off in the game, why not pull them off?

When you're out at a social event, if you learn how your barbarian dwarf talks to people in a tavern and negotiate sales and just convinces people to help out, you're now training skills that you can transfer into your real life. And you know, it's like, I know how to complain if I get the wrong meal. I know [00:09:00] how to start a conversation with the table, uh, next to me.

[00:09:04] **Jill Stoddard:** Um, okay. So one last question. Tell our listeners about the dice. I think even people who don't know much about Dungeons and Dragons know that there's this wonky, multi sided die.

What is, that all about?

[00:09:15] **Michael Herold:** The polyhedral die. Yeah. Um, so rolling the dice in the game just adds a bit of randomness, which can surprise both the players and me as the game master. So for example, given the characters that you're

building at the beginning of the game, you have different strengths and weaknesses. So for example, Debbie in our bonus episode was playing a wizard, which means she's really good at knowing stuff. She's really good in history, in doing magic, really not strong, really not dexterous, right? So if the wizard tries [00:10:00] to You open a door, break open a door, you roll a die to see how, how well did that go? And depending on the characters you're playing, you have either bonus or a, what's the opposite of a bonus?

Deficit.

[00:10:19] **Jill Stoddard:** Yeah, like plus or minus a specific number,

[00:10:22] **Michael Herold:** yes, exactly. So if you have a barbarian warrior and a wizard both tried to break open a door, both will roll a die, but the barbarian gets to add like 10 points and the wizard needs to subtract four. And this is not to say that, some character types can do certain things that others can't, everyone can do exactly the same stuff.

It just, it, that random element tells you, well, you should play to your strengths.

[00:10:51] **Jill Stoddard:** Right, your likelihood of success will vary depending on your strengths and

[00:10:55] **Michael Herold:** how you put your team into effect as well, because if you're, faced [00:11:00] with a problem, it's now up to you to sit down and say, okay, which one of us should tackle this and how can the rest of us help as opposed to me, me, me, me, me, because that will not often go. Well,

[00:11:14] **Jill Stoddard:** that, that, right, so like this is not a one player game or even a game master and a single player, so what, how many people are needed to have a

[00:11:22] **Michael Herold:** so, so you would, you would play with One Game Master and then three to six people in the group.

[00:11:28] **Jill Stoddard:** So at least three, yeah. So that team element is really strong. Well, and I had shared with you, Michael, and my daughter gave me permission to share this, that when she was, um, wrapping up her own therapy, her counselor had recommended, my daughter's 11, and she had said that she thought a therapeutic, Um, role playing game would be something that would be really beneficial for her, and it's something that you do in your own coaching.

So if this is something our listeners were interested in doing with you, where would they find you to be able to do that?

[00:11:59] **Michael Herold:** [00:12:00] So they find me under roll for confidence.com. Four is the number as in your roll die. Uh, for confidence roll for confidence.com. And

[00:12:10] **Jill Stoddard:** Okay, so R O L L, because you're rolling dice rather than the role you play in Dungeons and Dragons. So it's R O L L, number four, confidence. Okay, got it.

[00:12:22] **Michael Herold:** All right. And now without further ado, here is Dr. Megan Connell.

I am beyond excited to have Dr. Megan Connell with me today. Dr. Connell is a licensed psychologist and a therapeutic dungeon master. She graduated from Argosy University Hawaii in 2010 and served as a psychologist in the US Army for seven years.

While in the army, she received specialty training focused on trauma and PTSD. In 2016, she left active duty and started to work in private practice there. She has focused to work [00:13:00] primarily on challenges related to anxiety, panic changes in life, depression, trauma, and helping women on the autism spectrum through her work with lay line geek therapeutics.

She has helped to train other mental health professionals, including me on what the culture is and how we can use the culture to lead to better and more fulfilling lives.

Hello, Megan. I'm so excited to talk with you today. Welcome to the show.

[00:13:27] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Thank you so much for having me. It's an honor to be here.

[00:13:30] **Michael Herold:** Yeah, so we have an hour to geek out about therapeutically applied tabletop role playing games, which is quite a mouthful. So to set up our listeners who may or may not be familiar with tabletop role playing games and what they are, how they are played, uh, can you give us a brief introduction of what those games are and how they're played?[00:14:00]

[00:14:01] **Dr. Megan Connell:** And I'm going to you to and your friends are coming up with characters that are going to be the main characters of a story.

And one of your friends will serve as what's called the game master, or you can think of them more as the narrator.

Uh, tabletop role playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons, Pathfinder, the new, Cobalt Press, um, system are based on sort of this idea of an epic fantasy, so think maybe like, you know, kind of a Lord of the Rings Wheel of time kind of setting, but there are hundreds of different settings and hundreds of different methods that you can play. And there's an Avatar the Last Airbender setting, there's cyberpunk, there's zombie apocalypse settings, there's 1980s Stranger Things esque kind of settings, And so it's just really fun where you are sitting around with your friends and you're telling a story about what kind of adventures you're going on together. Oftentimes you're going to use a random mechanic such as rolling dice to determine how successful you are at something. So like if you want to break down a door using all [00:15:00] your strength, you might roll a dice and if you get a high number it works. And if you get a low number something kind of funny happens or something interesting happens. And they are just a lot of fun and really allow us to explore in our collective imaginations what happens.

[00:15:14] **Michael Herold:** Yeah, my bookshelf definitely speaks to the fact that there are a lot of systems out there and I always have to restrain myself from getting yet another one. Um, right. and uh, So the thing with tabletop role playing games, I've played them as a teenager excessively, like they kept me mentally safe during a teenage years playing them with my, best friend. So I have very fond memories of them, and then I, uh, lost that part of gaming in my life for 20 years or so until until the pandemic, uh, kind of came to us all And what i've noticed over the last couple of years is that games [00:16:00] like specifically dungeons and dragons They've made their way into mainstream media and people really see them Left, right, and center, Stranger Things, uh, Big Bang Theory. I had, uh, when I played my first round of Dungeons Dragons with my friends last year, one of them said, I, don't know what's coming, but I've seen this on Big Bang Theory. Uh, there's the, the Dungeons Dragons movie. There's, uh, Baldur's Gate 3 that came out just a few weeks ago. It's one of the biggest games of the year. Uh, Minecraft now has a D& D game. I'm not too familiar with what they are doing. I

[00:16:38] **Dr. Megan Connell:** haven't played it Yeah. I've seen it. I want to check it out. I think it's really cool, like, all the stuff that's coming out and everything that's going on. and Baldur's Gate 3 is such an amazing game, which you know, we're recording this in the year of 2023 when we've been blessed with some incredibly amazing video games.

Um, and to think that, like, [00:17:00] one of the best ones, if not potentially the game of the year, is a D& D inspired video game is really cool.

[00:17:06] **Michael Herold:** Yeah. And my hope is that people play this game and then they pick up the air quotes, real game, the pen and paper and dice variety and say, I want to play more of this with my friends. okay. so now we're talking about therapeutically applied tabletop role playing games. One of the favorite words, uh, in my vocabulary and role playing games happen in, in three, what's called three frames. So you have the frame of the player at the table. Uh, you have the frame of the rules of the game. And you have the frame of the character. in the game. So if I, as a player, I might at one point say, okay, I'm going to sneak around the tower where the dragon is sitting, which is, you know, the, the character in the game, then okay, I roll a dice to see how good I am at sneaking around, which is the rules.[00:18:00]

And then, hey, Megan, can you pass me the bottle of Mountain Dew, please, which would be the third frame of me as the player sitting at the table. And with the therapeutically applied aspect, we now add a fourth frame to it. So how does the game change or how we play it? How does that alter when we add the therapeutic element to it?

[00:18:25] **Dr. Megan Connell:** So what the therapeutic element really does is it adds a different layer of intentionality to the interventions and to what's going on. Like, for example, if you look at most Dungeons and Dragons modules, so by the way, I'm going to talk pretty much exclusively about Dungeons and Dragons, not because It's the most therapeutically beneficial game, but because it's the rule system, I am the most familiar with, and it's the game I run.

There, like, people out there use Kids on Bikes, use Emberwind, use Pathfinder, it, like, there's lots of different systems out there that you can use for a therapeutic game. I just happen to use Dungeons [00:19:00] and Dragons, so don't hear me talking about D& D and think that therapeutic, therapeutically applied games have to be D& D.

They certainly don't. It's just what I use.

[00:19:07] **Michael Herold:** And, I do the same, I play primarily D& D, um, and for me the, the main benefit there is simply that there's a vast variety of books out there. People are familiar with it. If I talk to them about Tales from the Loop, people might never have heard of that, but everyone has heard about Dungeons and Dragons and also when they, um, after playing with me they move to a new city or they go to a new school.

they have an easier access to potentially more people playing this game just because it is one of the main mainstream games out there. Yes.

[00:19:40] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Yes. Yeah, exactly. And that's another reason that I utilize it. It's like, I want my, the people who are in my groups to have a skillset that's going to enable them to meet new people in new places. And I like one of the games I really want to use as a therapeutic game is Outbreak on Dead, which is a zombie apocalypse kind of game that I've invented over and helped you develop.

[00:20:00] It's a lot of fun. You actually build a character based off of your own skills and stats and explore that. But it's not as popular as D& D, and so finding people who would play that would be a little bit more difficult, but to answer your question about making those, you know, applied games, so like in most typical Dungeons Dragons modules, if you read through like the low level first to fourth level, you're going to have something that involves you exploring the environment, so doing different perception checks, tracking checks, survival, stealth, those kinds of things, something

[00:20:32] **Michael Herold:** you're going through the forest and you want to build a hiding place because you hear a band of orcs coming along. And now, okay, where do I build this? How successful am I with this? How do we work on this together?

[00:20:47] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Yeah. So like, if you think through like, um, one of the best modules, I think the Indie created for fifth edition is ironically the first one, which is their starter box with the lost minds of Phandelver. The starting thing is you come to an, [00:21:00] sorry for anybody who has not played this yet, but you come to an ambush site, you can get ambushed.

So you get a really quick thing of like learning perception, learning your combat, then you have to do some tracking. You have some social checks as well, and then you do a dungeon crawl, you know, which is all, it's fine, it works, it teaches you kind of the basic mechanics of playing, and so, in that way, like, it's a very intentional structure to be like, okay, here are the different types of things you're going to do in this kind of game.

In a therapeutic sense, what we're all adding into that in that fourth frame is the skills that we're wanting the player to learn. So for example, like I run groups where we're learning about how to build good social interactions and and social connections. And so having a first setting where it's like you're going to

introduce yourself to new people And like we all have been in groups where it's like say something interesting about yourself.

It's awful, right? But it's like okay. No, no, what's going to happen now is your characters are all Strangers to one another, and they have [00:22:00] just gotten thrust together in the meet cute of the game, and now they gotta figure out one another. How does your character introduce themselves? How does your character engage with these people, right?

And so what we're doing there is we're role playing meeting new people in a new strange situation, in a way that doesn't feel like us, it doesn't feel like me doing it, it's my character, and I'm engaging with this, and I'm trying to figure that out. And so it's intentionally taking those skills that I'm wanting the player to learn and weaving them in through the narrative of the story.

It's sort of like self therapy. You

[00:22:31] **Michael Herold:** Mm. Mm.

[00:22:32] **Dr. Megan Connell:** like, you're learning this stuff, you're learning these therapeutic skills, but it's not really intentional, right? like, role playing and behavioral rehearsal has been a part of therapy for, you know, 50 years,

[00:22:43] **Michael Herold:** Mm.

[00:22:44] **Dr. Megan Connell:** At this point, which is kind of weird to think 70s were in 50 years ago, but they were, um,

[00:22:48] **Michael Herold:** yeah,

[00:22:50] **Dr. Megan Connell:** yeah, sit with that for a second.

Okay. Um, but like it. feels awkward, right? If we're doing some sort of rehearsal thing, like I'm sure everybody has had an experience [00:23:00] like this, where like you're getting ready for an interview. You're getting ready to meet somebody new, to go on a first date, to meet someone who's going to seemingly be important in your life.

And you're kind of going through, Hi, it's nice to meet you. I'm so and so. No, that sounds stupid. Hi. It's, you know, and that's rehearsal, right? But it feels awkward. We get in our head, we get really tied into this a lot. There is something really powerful that happens when we are playing a tabletop

roleplaying game where it's like, it's no longer you introducing yourself, you know, it's Kulahan, the great warrior of the Isles coming forward.

It's like, okay, how does this dude do it? And it's like, ah, you do this and say these things and this kind of stuff would happen. And that is really powerful because then we have that rehearsed experience, right? And, uh, Sarah Bowman, who talks a lot about this concept of character bleed, um, which I've kind of coined it to more clinical terms just because bleed does not sound good clinically.

[00:23:55] **Michael Herold:** you don't want to tell your clients they'll experience bleed. [00:24:00] Yes.

[00:24:00] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Yeah, that just, it does not sound good. But yeah, that idea of we practice a skill, right? And so it's like, man, I wish that my character were here right now because my character would know what to do. And like getting to have that little like, but I play my character. I can channel my character in this moment.

And I can engage with this, you know, like I remember at some point I heard TJ Storm giving an interview talking about this, that like, he was traveling internationally to a place where bartering was commonplace. You know, it's not something that is done in the U. S. And he had this kind of panic moment of like, I don't know how to barter.

And then he's like, wait a second, I've been role playing bartering for years in D& D. Of course

I can bring them into our own lives and rehearse them. And so we're rehearsing it in this space that is very safe. Right? No real life consequences are going to happen. We're just rolling some dice and telling a story with our friends. And we get to get these new experiences that can really help us grow and [00:25:00] develop as a person.

[00:25:01] **Michael Herold:** Yeah. This is, this is so, interesting that you mention, uh, introducing yourself as, as the example, because that is when I experienced.

I'm going to use is imagine you're in a tavern and you need to introduce yourself to someone else because a lot of the clients that I work with, so I work in in two areas. And one, in real life, where people that primarily identify as introverted, I don't have many friends, I don't know what to say, I'm awkward in social

situations, and I would throw them into exposure exercises, and we'd go out into the street, either like together or with a workshop with a group, and they tell Stupid jokes to strangers. Or they ask for high fives to with strangers or things things like that And that is for a lot of people very helpful.

It's it's quite scary, but it's it's very helpful And it's also [00:26:00] difficult for those that need to do it on their own when they don't have me by their side. When they don't have a group of supportive peers by their side So, a way to make this easier, especially when I'm working with clients, uh, virtually through, through Zoom and so on, Um, is that we transition over to skill building through role playing games, where I say, Hey, okay, so you're in a bar, you're at a party, you don't know what to do, right?

You don't know what to say. And then, yeah, exactly, I just look at my phone, I stand in the corner, I pretend I'm busy. Okay, now let's put you into the skin of this barbarian dwarf who needs to get together a group of people to defeat the dragon in the valley. You're in the tavern, describe the tavern, what do you do?

And look at that, immediately they get up, they walk to the next person, and they say the first thing that comes to their mind. Now, given, like, if you're now going to your friend's birthday party, you can't recruit them to battle dragons. I mean, you can try, but that will probably be more awkward than not saying [00:27:00] anything at all. But now they've practiced opening their mouth. And for the lack of a better word, saying the first thing that comes to mind and then collecting feedback and seeing what works and, and developing that homeopathic level of exposure to, I'm just going to say something, I'm just going to open my mouth and I'm going to see how, how it, it works and, how it works. Um, it will hopefully get into that a little bit more later on as well, but something that the role playing and the high fantasy world allows me to do as well is to give them magical scrolls or potions where they're suddenly really eloquent for the next hour and then they have me kind of in their ear a little bit as the Bell scroll saying, Hey, in a conversation like this is what you do here. You'd ask a question, you'd respond with a statement, you ask open questions. They might get the spell of open questions. And whenever they ask a close question, I'll pause them, correct them and be like, Hey, let's, let's try it. What would this question [00:28:00] sound like? If it's, if it's an open question, they're still the barbarian dwarf, but they're practicing the skills and they have nothing to lose. Because the worst that can happen is that their Dwarven Barbarian, who can very well deal with situations like that, gets rejected and has to move on to the next person.

[00:28:17] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Yeah. and it's really interesting, too, that Like, with the conversation pieces, so like, with my group, we were just introducing ourselves, and like, the group, we started introducing the concept of like saying stuff out of character, and then versus saying stuff in character, and so like, you know, group members sharing things like, oh, hey, Um, my character is carrying this particular item and it's here, you know, you all don't know this, like your characters don't know this, but here's what you all, I'll tell you all, it's important to my character because of X, Y, Z.

And then getting to say like, oh, so it would be really awesome for another character to say, hey, I noticed this thing you have can you tell me about it? And it's like, yes. And so like, we're rehearsing those things of like, [00:29:00] what are the things I want to talk about with my character? What are the things I want you to notice about my character? the things I want you to say about my character.

[00:29:06] **Michael Herold:** And there's also, so I find that, getting my players into their actual characters, so not speaking third person, even though that is an option as well, but getting them to speak through the perspective of their character and I might prompt them when they say, so I'm, I'm, I'm going to turn over to, um, Kari and I'm going to tell her to please help me.

I might just prompt them. Hey, how do you say that? What do you say to her? And like with a magic wand, they put on a face and they say, Kari, can you please help me put this together? Because I have two left thumbs. He's like, yeah, perfect.

[00:29:41] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Yeah. Yeah. Or even like learning how to express that nonverbal stuff of like, I look over at Kari and I give, a panicked look, right? And then we can roll some dice or something and just, and go, okay, so now like, and you can run with that in sort of a funny way too, of like, okay, so maybe we're going to have Kari now roll an insight [00:30:00] check of like, did they actually pick up what you were trying to communicate?

Or are we kind of learning that when you do indirect communication, Yeah. It doesn't always go the way you want it to, and how do we get more, you know, appropriate with our explicit language versus implied?

[00:30:14] **Michael Herold:** So here's the difference that I see between playing this, uh, therapeutically or playing it air quotes just for fun is the role of the dice. Because the, the powerful thing of the dice is they add a certain amount of randomness to a situation. I want to break open that door.

Well, okay. Let 20 sided dice at your. And then let's see if that works or not. Which can lead to hilarious situations where I once had a brown bear trying to break into a house and just horribly fail at the roll. And basically you had a 500 pound brown bear run against the wooden door and bounce back off. and the other thing that dice do is that my players can come [00:31:00] up with an outrageous idea. But I, as the game master, well if their dice. Say, no, they're pretty good at this. I need to roll with it. Okay, you know, this was highly unlikely Unlikeable unlikely. That's that's it. Highly unlikely That you took this action for my view as a DM, but you managed it And okay, now I, on my side, have to wrap the story around the fact that you actually managed to swing on the chandelier and take the Warhammer from that orc. So here is the question now. So this is the dice rolling, adding that random, piece of fun or frustration into the playing game. Now, I would imagine that if I play this more therapeutically, I want to reduce the amount of randomness and base that more on the actual behavior of the players.

[00:31:56] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Yes and no with that because you can [00:32:00] do everything right and bad stuff can still happen in real life. Right. And that is incredibly important. And like talking about that of like, but I, you know, my bard gets a plus seven to performance and I rolled a natural one and I think it sucks. It's like, dude, we all have nights where we're bad. And how, how does your bard recover from that? What do they do? Like, how do we come through that? You know, and like, I think it's really important. And so sometimes it's degrees of success. So if they role played something really well, so let's say like, they're trying to give an inspiring speech and they role played a really, really awesome one. I mean, say like, okay, you're going to roll a D20 with advantage. This isn't like you are successful, like this is, you have hit the floor for success. The number now is going to be how successful for you. And what, what is the outcome of that? Or like, that didn't go very well, you've failed, we're going to kind of see like, how bad of a blunder was that? Or like, with investigation or um, specifically like investigation checks [00:33:00] for things like shops, or they're looking for a particular person or something, the role isn't about do you succeed or fail, it's about how much time does it take? Right, it's like if you're looking for the one elephant person that lives in the city, you're gonna find them on a nat one. It just took six hours, right?

[00:33:18] **Michael Herold:** okay, So I feel we, uh, should explain a little bit about the, how a character is built because we've been, throwing around words like intimidation checks and perception checks and, and all of that. so

over to

you,

[00:33:31] **Dr. Megan Connell:** In any, like, role playing game in general, you're going to create a number of statistics that describe the abilities of your character. Generally speaking, most of the role playing games out there have some form of dexterity or agility, some form of toughness or strength, um, your constitution, which is basically how hardy, how many hit points does your character have, how much they've studied, so that's in D& D terms called intelligence, just kind of how intuitive they are, which is... D& D terms is wisdom, and then how [00:34:00] good they are at interpersonal skills, which is your charisma. And then based upon those numbers, you get a bonus to your bonus or a detriment to your roles on the dice for doing checks that are related to it. So something like, I'm trying to talk somebody into doing something would be a persuasion check, which is related to how good you are sociably, so your charisma.

If you're trying to break down a door, that's going to be your might, your strength. And so it utilizes those scores. Um, in a game like D& D, you get certain proficiencies. So based upon your character class and your background, you might be better at some things than others. So, for example, in D& D, there's a ranger class that is very more like, uh, think Lord of the Rings Aragorn kind of ranger.

Yeah. And so like, you might be really good at tracking, which in D& D is called survival. And so you get to add, I think survival is wisdom, and then you also get another bonus on top of that. And so there are [00:35:00] numbers that you get to add. So like, you could have a plus six. So you roll your 20 sided die, and then you add six to whatever you roll. So like, you also get to really practice a lot of basic math

[00:35:10] **Michael Herold:** Basic math,

yeah?

[00:35:11] **Dr. Megan Connell:** is cool.

[00:35:12] **Michael Herold:** So to contrast the range of the Aragorn, there might be another player who's playing a wizard, Gandalf. So the important thing to point out, that for most things in the game,

[00:35:24] **Dr. Megan Connell:** come on.

[00:35:26] **Michael Herold:** Okay, okay, okay. We'll have a longer discussion after this recording about that. Um, so you have two players and they both can do the same thing. they both can say, oh, you see something on the ground, there's some tracks on the ground, and both say, I want to find out where those tracks are going. They both can do exactly the same thing. It's just that because the way that their characters are put together, one is a ranger specialized in nature, and the other is a wizard slash sorcerer, maybe, who is specialized in reading books and casting fireballs and all of that.

They can both [00:36:00] track, just when you roll a dice. So at die, one gets to add plus six and the other gets to subtract four, maybe. And so we have like statistically quite a difference, which means that when you put a group of players together, you have a ranger, you have a rogue, you have a wizard, you have a bard.

They are all. A little bit better at certain things than the others in the party. So this also lends itself to teamwork and cooperation. Because maybe when it comes to tracking and building a hideout in the forest, maybe that's something you would want to leave to Aragorn Ranger and tell like Gandalf to stay really far away with his fireballs from the wood building endeavor.

[00:36:44] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Exactly. Yeah. And it's interesting because in the early 1980s, there was a, um, what we call this like a quasi study. So this is more of like a case observation where, a New York afterschool program for at risk youth was running [00:37:00] different programs. And one of the programs was somebody was running games of D& D, and they started noticing that the Kids who were playing D& D were developing skills that the other kids weren't, uh, in a very positive way. They were learning conflict resolution was a big one. They were also learning how to, you know, have a diverse group of people. And that, like, they really valued having friends who had different skill sets because that was more valuable than having everybody with the same skill set. And so it's a really cool thing to see. Now, like, I feel I have to mention, too, like, one of the reasons we don't have a ton of research on tabletop role playing games and their effectiveness and what, just generally, what skills they teach us, I think, is because of the satanic panic of the 1980s, where there was this moral panic that playing games like Dungeons and Dragons was going to cause you to worship Satan and go to hell or something? I don't know,

[00:37:53] **Michael Herold:** a mix of both and worse. Yeah. Hmm.

[00:37:55] **Dr. Megan Connell:** yeah, it was, just, um, it is terrible. Some [00:38:00] people, like, it's really died off. There's a handful of people who are

still like, wait, isn't that that thing that causes you to like Satan? It's like, no, that's. but like, it does really show that there is a benefit in this and so like, you know, I mentioned that the video game Baldur's Gate and like one of the cool things with that is you get to have companions at your camp, but you can only ever have four people in your group at once.

And so you get to pick and choose in your camp who you need on a certain quest like who's going to be the best person to have and like they did something really clever to where the voice actors so, Recorded things to know if their character was doing something that they weren't good at so like the barbarian character If you have her trying to sneak her dialogue is like I am not good at this Or if you try to have her go lock pick something she's just like why can't I just break

[00:38:53] **Michael Herold:** Now, this is different though, than playing together on, on a table or virtually because you are for better or worse [00:39:00] stuck with the group that, you're in. You don't get to say, Hey, uh, Johnny, like this, this week is not for you. Like, can you please go home? We're going to

pick someone else.

[00:39:09] **Dr. Megan Connell:** You could, though, right? Like, you could have everybody roll up two characters, and, they get, to choose, it's like, okay, these character sheets are going to go over here, and not be part of this quest, I'm going to be this character for this quest, and what that's going to be.

[00:39:23] **Michael Herold:** Okay. So now we need to come back to, um, so rolling up. the character. So there's, you know, the different classes, You have different, um, you can be a halfling, you can be a half orc, you can be a

human, You can

[00:39:36] **Dr. Megan Connell:** You can be anything

[00:39:37] **Michael Herold:** be anything

[00:39:38] **Dr. Megan Connell:** species, like,

[00:39:39] **Michael Herold:** by now, you can basically be, be anything up to and including a pink elephant.

Um, So how do you approach the character creation of your clients? How do they, do they build the characters they play then around their own strengths and weaknesses, what they want to achieve?

[00:39:59] **Dr. Megan Connell:** I [00:40:00] built the characters for them. Um, and so it's interesting my colleague and I, we have kind of a differing thing with this. It's like, he's very explicit. And like, give your character an aspirational trait. Something that you want to work on I'm a little bit more indirect. And I say like, let's pick out how you want your character to grow over the course of our campaign. And what You want them to work on. Because like, I've noted that

It seems as though, I have to do research, you. know, research needed on this, that the players choose something that they need to work on. That it's very natural for them to, they either pick something that they're in the process of consciously working on or something they kind of unconsciously know they need help with, but aren't working on, but I make the characters for them, I talk them

through it, um, I utilize a tool called D& D Beyond, it's an official, like, digital tool set from Wizards of the coast, um, but like, you know, I have them pick out what species they want to be. Then I ask them, what job do you want your character to have? You, two jobs. You can either be a fighter, or you can be a magic user, or an artificer. And it's like, okay, cool. You want to be a fighter?

What kind of fighter? Did you [00:41:00] train for a long time? Are you more like, cutthroat in the streets kind of person? Are you more natural? do you like using your hands more? Do you want to just hit things really, really hard and not have to think very much with

what

[00:41:10] **Michael Herold:** you're gonna do.

So you give them, You give them, uh, easy to understand questions so that you can then build their character for them. And you've had the experience that people naturally tend to then create characters that uh, will grow in a way that they want to personally grow as well. So let that be, I don't know, leadership, assertiveness, self advocacy, courage. Hmm.

[00:41:37] **Dr. Megan Connell:** All those kinds of things. So yeah, it's a really interesting mix. And like, I let people change stuff all the time, but like, I'm

working on a player journal right now through Leyline Therapeutics. I did a Dungeon Master's journal. Um, on my own, I'm going to be doing a player journal that's going to be helping players really think through and so asking really important questions of like, you know, where did your character grow [00:42:00] up?

what was their childhood like? all of us, even if we had a bad childhood, have like one or two really good memories. What are those for them? Who are the important people in their lives? Like, what are the things that they stand for? What are the principles they have? What are some bad habits that they have?

What are things that cause, you know, like, I'm very explicit too, and like, you're going to be a part of a party. You're going to be part of a group. So what is causing your character to decide to travel with these people? What is helping them want to connect with the group as a whole? What is helping them, be there and stick around and come week to week and not wander off on their own? Because like that doesn't, that's not fun for anybody to have somebody wander off on, their own. but it's really interesting because I'm very kind of loosey goosey with the character. Like, I'll build them, I'll give them their proficiencies, give them their spell, I usually, like, for people who are spellcasters, I say, okay, give me just kind of a flavoring of, like, what kind of spells do you think your character would cast, because there's way too many spells to go through, which, for

[00:42:54] **Michael Herold:** Ah, you really

make this easy. Yes.

[00:42:57] **Dr. Megan Connell:** oh yeah, it's like, like, I had somebody recently [00:43:00] go, like, I like the idea of ice magic, like, cool, any kind of cool damage stuff. We're going to give you that's going to be your, your spell stuff. But then like, if they go home and they research stuff and like, Oh my God, I want magic missile.

Like, okay, cool. Take it like that. You got to trade out something, but like, I, I'm not too fussed if people change their character, um, you know, mid campaign into like reclass and respect it into something. Unless like I had some special stuff designed for the character they had. And then we'll have a little discussion of like, how do we build that stuff back in.

Um, But like that way people don't get analysis paralysis and try to make all the decisions

because there's a lot now.

[00:43:37] **Michael Herold:** Yeah, which I find by the way, quite an interesting learning experience as well, because it's FOMO, the moment you get to pick your spells, you realize there are 30 awesome spells, but you only get to pick four, and when you have some gold coin to spend on new armor, weapons, potions, you realize you can only [00:44:00] afford two of the ten that are there, which is such an incredible skill to learn that there is abundance on one side, and you're kind of limited, and no matter how long you play, no matter how engaged you are in play, you'll never get all the spells, you'll never get all the potions, you need to pick Uh, based on your values, your goals, your personal journey, your purpose, you need to pick, and then you need to learn to let go of all the other potential spell scrolls you could run off with, but there's only so much you can memorize as a wizard and, um,

[00:44:37] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Mm hmm. Yeah. And it's really hard, you know, and like limiting those choices and, you know, but it, it is important to have those limitations and to kind of push people to go like, okay, come on, let's, let's open up in these different ways and let's find this stuff to kind of help you specialize in the way that's going to be the most fun and most interesting for you as well.

Um, [00:45:00] because like that's life as well, you know, like you go to college and you're required to take these classes. But then there's like 50 classes that are really cool and you want to take, but you're only allowed to take three of them.

[00:45:11] **Michael Herold:** Hmm.

[00:45:13] **Dr. Megan Connell:** And it's like,

[00:45:14]

[00:45:14] **Dr. Megan Connell:** that's really hard. and you know, very similar way of like, okay, what spells, what abilities are you going to take because you don't get them all.

[00:45:24] **Michael Herold:** So I have a story around the character building process. Translating then into my own personal development. And this was me taking Ley Line's Therapeutic Game Master course earlier this year, which you correct me if I'm wrong, but you developed the course.

[00:45:43] **Dr. Megan Connell:** a large part of it. Yes. Yeah,

[00:45:45] **Michael Herold:** Yeah, so the way that this course was run over eight weeks was that we had our theoretic training and then the videos, which many of them you recorded.

Um, and I got very jealous about all the amazing miniatures and toys and books in the [00:46:00] background. Um, and during our live sessions, our game Master would lead us through a therapeutic role playing game as a group with the six people in our cohort Hello, by the way to cohort 63 if anyone's listening and this journey of eight weeks Culminated and I still get goosebumps when I think about this it culminated with Nick our DM He had our characters in a dark cave and we kind of knew that this was the final showdown of our adventure And he asked us before the session to send him a little bit of a challenge that we have, a fear that we might want to work on.

Not one that is, tremendous. That's something hard, but just something that we'd like to work on a little bit. And I, um, told him that. A big struggle that I had as a teenager was being bullied and I built my character for the game was a small halfling artificer who built like [00:47:00] little inventions and he tinkered with a lot of stuff and built stuff.

And my game master then threw me in a situation where this witch that was in the cave would, um, create this kind of like dream or vision for me, where I was being bullied by all the other halflings in the village. And he played them. He described how they walk up to me, they look at my inventions, they laugh at them, they tell me I'm good for nothing.

And, what I, as someone sitting at the computer playing this through Zoom with my character sheet next to me and the dice ready to roll, like this brought up a lot of the stuff that I was going through as a teenager. And at the same time, I had two things by my side. One was my party that was having my back.

The other was, I wasn't Michael. I was a Frederick. Fiddlefoot, the halfling artificer. So I was speaking through someone else's [00:48:00] persona, which made it less real, but just a little bit removed from the, from the, stimulus, if you will. and then I had as an adult sort of a little bit of the skills and how to deal with bullying.

And, Nick for five minutes, he was bullying me and my little Frederick was like firing back with all the diplomacy and humor And so, yeah, this combination of the character and, and that the party we're playing with and, uh, the game master

telling the story and building these encounters, these conflicts or riddles or, um, role playing possibilities that are there is just so incredibly powerful. It's really hard to describe how these games play. Like we've been talking about them for, for half an hour. And I still feel like it's for someone listening um, it's quite something different to actually see people, [00:49:00] play

them.

[00:49:01] **Dr. Megan Connell:** it really is. And like, we have this wonderful benefit now of Twitch and it's such a great onboarding thing. Like, um, I'm a big fan of Critical Role. I love, I love their game, but I will say, uh, when Brennan Lee Mulligan led the, uh, was it Exandria Unlimited calamity? It's a four part series, each part is like four hours, so it's still a long series. But it is some of the best role playing. It is incredibly emotional. There's just so much that is there, and it is... Just fascinating and beautiful. And like, I, Um, my husband actually started watching the intro to it and he got like 15 minutes in and he came out and he's like, I'm hooked. I don't know what this is, but like, even just the first 15 minutes, like what is going on with this?

This is amazing. There is so much here and it's really cool because like in. You know, the player's manual and the different books that came out for not just D&D, but like Vampire's masquerade, uh, Grups, like all of these. They would put [00:50:00] examples of like, here's what a session might look like, but you're reading the text of it and it just doesn't make sense. It doesn't translate. And to actually see people sitting around a table being like, okay, so I'm going to walk in and do this. And then like talking in character and role playing and all of that. And it's like, oh, that's what this is. And like, there is this interesting moment for people when you can step out of the video game mindset that a lot of folks have, where it's like, no, you can do anything, right?

[00:50:25] **Michael Herold:** yeah, the mindset they have is I can do 10 things. So I'll, I have to pick, it's like, no, You can literally right now go to the innkeeper and say, I would like to go to your kitchen and make my famous strawberry muffins. can do that.

[00:50:41] **Dr. Megan Connell:** You can do that. You

[00:50:42] **Michael Herold:** If the

[00:50:43] **Dr. Megan Connell:** can

try

[00:50:43] **Michael Herold:** lets you, yes.

[00:50:45] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Yeah, and like, it's one of the frustrations I have. Like, it's one of the, it's really funny. To go back to Baldur's Gate, because I've been enjoying playing it a lot, obviously. But like, they did such a good job of capturing a lot of D& D and a lot of creative things.

[00:51:00] But like, of course, it's a computer game, so it has to be limited by the program. if like, One of the designers of the game didn't think of an option, it's not going to be there. And that can be really frustrating at times when you're a veteran D& D player and you're very used to, like, getting to do anything.

Like, I love using Disguise Self to become an enemy or something so I can walk around in there. You can't do that in Baldur's Gate.

Which is really frustrating, you know?

[00:51:26] **Michael Herold:** So come to the real

table. Yeah.

Yeah.

[00:51:29] **Dr. Megan Connell:** exactly. And so like, it's really cool to have that openness to just do whatever you would like and to try things. I was on a panel with, um, Kate Welsh, who, she was a writer for Wizards of the Coast for a while. I'm not sure what she's up to these days, but she said this awesome thing of like, the code of tabletop role playing games is your imagination. if you can imagine it, you can try it.

[00:51:55] **Michael Herold:** So, uh, so here's a special, announcement that, uh, some of the listeners, when this [00:52:00] episode comes out, might have already realized, because I was anticipating this problem, that we talk about this on a cognitive level, but it's like, what's the game actually like? So, I, uh, No, I didn't volunteer. They volunteered. So I'm playing Dungeons and Dragons with the other co hosts of Psychologists Off the Clock.

Uh, we're playing for one hour and we're releasing that episode, together with us two here talking about the, theoretical side behind it So the listeners will have two hours of Psychologists Off the Clock. Um. Dr. Megan Connell and then psychologists off the clock play Dungeons and Dragons, and so I made the mistake.

I didn't I didn't foresee this. I should have sent them like a 30 minute clip of a D& D game being played because that was exactly the challenge we ran into when I introduced them and they all sat down [00:53:00] in a tavern, all three of them sat down on the table, and it's like, okay, yeah, you can introduce yourself now.

And they're just staring at each other for like a minute, like some terminal introverts who didn't know what to say, but because they were in the sport game mindset of, okay, usually I can do like three different things. What are my options? And this, and that, that

[00:53:20] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Well, but like, it's it's awesome that you didn't send them that stuff, because like, if the goal of your program is to kind of show and walk people through the game, right? Like, showing those growing pains is important, because like, you know, as much as I like Critical Role, the fact that they started broadcasting their campaign midway through it like the players were already very comfortable.

They knew what to do They had like some shorthand of how they did things and so it can be very confusing. It's like what am I watching? I don't know what's going

[00:53:48] **Michael Herold:** Because they are already so much enmeshed with each other that it just naturally flows, which is not what happens in reality when you play this on the table for the first time.

[00:53:59] **Dr. Megan Connell:** [00:54:00] Exactly. And so sitting down and watching like a group of newbies playing is really powerful. like um, I've done a few through my media company, Geeks Like Us. I've done a few like introductory videos of like, uh, bringing people into D& D and introducing them. I did one that was really fun with, um, Dr. Jonathan Anzalo and Dr. Fantasy, uh, Oh my gosh, Phantasy, I'm forgetting your last name! It was Lamanza. Lamazia? Ah, I forgot. I'm so sorry, Phantasy. She's awesome. Um, and just both of them had never played D& D before, and so walking through and getting to see those moments of, like, wait a second, I can do, you know, like, coming up to something and being like, I want to try something crazy right now. I want to do I want to take this thing that I have and I want to use it in this really creative, amazing way. Yes! It might not work. But let's try it, right? And that's this fun thing of like, all of a sudden it's like, those, that limited spell list all of a sudden expands because it's like, wait a second, does [00:55:00] Magic Missile create some force?

Could I use Magic Missile, if I'm in a boat, to push the boat along? Like, could I use, you know, this thing for this really interesting reason? Like, for those who want to see like, just incredible uses of, uh, spells and things. Anything with, I think Emily Axford is her name. She's on uh, Dimension 20's from Dropout.

Um, she does their, Dimension 20, which is their role playing game. And like, her creative use of spells is just, it will break your mind.

[00:55:33] **Michael Herold:** Well, I will say that, uh, the psychologists off the clock have an Emily now, too. And Emily actually surprised, us in the game when they were, uh, being intimidated by a massive, Um, orc with a war hammer that threatened to attack and Emily did some acrobatics parkour stuff, grabbed the hammer and ran away.

So, you know that there's there's power in the Emily's in being, um, [00:56:00] flexible with their approach towards problem solving.

[00:56:04] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Yeah. And it's so fun to be able to see those moments come forward and to do that. And like, that's that other piece of this because like, um, the therapeutic style I utilize is acceptance and commitment therapy. And so we've talked a lot about fusion and being Um, and not accepting and rolling with things.

And so when we come at a tabletop role playing game from that fused concept of a video game, where you have only a certain number of choices that you can make in a setting. And we go to this, like, let's no, defuse. You can do anything. What do you want to do? That is such a powerful tool for people to be able to go oh my God. And to give them permission to be creative and to try stuff again in that safe environment where there's no real world consequences.

[00:56:45] **Michael Herold:** This is actually something that I wanted to, uh, discuss with you as well And this is a nice question to wrap this up because it was also the very first time I saw you present on, on the matter. So this is a nice bookmark. Um, the very first time [00:57:00] I saw Dr. Megan Connell was when at the ACBS world conference, I think 2020 or 2021, you presented on acceptance and commitment therapy and how it overlaps with Role playing games and since all of us at the psychologist of the clock use acceptance and commitment therapy in our work Let's do a persuasion check to hear you explain the overlap between the act hexaflex and role playing games

[00:57:28] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Yeah, so is it safe to say you're from your listeners are going to be familiar with actor should I explain those pieces as

[00:57:34] **Michael Herold:** let's say they are familiar and dear listeners, those of you who are not, uh, check out our episodes on act to get caught up.

[00:57:41] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Okay, perfect. So, yeah, with act with the hexaflex, it's got these different pieces, right? And so, you know, the very top is mindfulness, And so mindfulness is being here being now. Right. And in a tabletop role playing game, if you're not paying attention to what's going on, if you're not immersed in the narrative of it, you're going to be missing what's happening. You're not going to be able to engage with [00:58:00] this content. So if your anxiety is trying to take you off and bring you over here or you're, you know, lamenting about the bad day that you had earlier, you're not in the game, you're not in the midst of the moment. And So because one of the Mindfulness is a difficult task to do. Learning how to be in the moment is actually quite difficult, but when you're highly rewarded and incentivized by having a lot of fun and getting to roll funny shaped dice and tell a story, it becomes a lot easier to be in the moment. It's not easy it is just easier. Right? And so when we think about, you know, values and our committed actions, right? That's really kind of like the rule set of the game, that we are agreeing to abide in this rule set that we're going to be in. Like the values would be sort of the overarching goal of the campaign or of your character, right? those can be two different things. Um, and then like how we achieve that.

So that's our committed action is through the structure of the game that we're playing in. And so like, yeah, Slightly different for Kids on Bikes, which [00:59:00] is slightly different for Dungeons Dragons, slightly different for Pathfinder, Outbreak Undead, whatever. It's like, we utilize that rule set to work and move towards our goals.

Whereas we talk about like the selfless context, it's like, it's our character, it's not us. It's that really easy way to jump between those frames of play. Like, I'm in the game, I'm in the therapy, I'm in the moment, I'm in the character, I'm in me. And so Getting to kind of get that idea of like myself is ever changing.

We get to really actively practice that in those moments when we're talking in and out of character around the table. You know, diffusion again is that idea of like opening yourself up, right? And seeing what happens, you know, that like. Again, magic missile doesn't just have to be, I'm going to do damage.

It could be something else, you know, and thinking through like, how do I want to do these things creatively and kind of opening yourself up to all of the possibilities that are before you. And then I see acceptance really well

represented in dice rolls, in the random chance of things. And like, I can be very skilled at something and still flop.

[01:00:00] You know, like a musician can be, you know, you can be a yo yo ma and still botch a performance. It can happen. It's not likely, but it can happen.

[01:00:11] **Michael Herold:** Yeah. And

[01:00:11] **Dr. Megan Connell:** And so

[01:00:12] **Michael Herold:** Yeah. You rolled

a

[01:00:13] **Dr. Megan Connell:** dice rolls. You roll the one. Yeah, you busted a string or something. I don't know. Like, it just didn't, quite hit the way you wanted it to. And when we get all of those things together, we are engaging in flexibility.

We're adapting. We're changing. We're jumping in and out of our different personas. We're in the midst of the moment. We're abiding by the rules, the game to move towards the goals

[01:00:35] **Michael Herold:** Beautiful.

[01:00:36] **Dr. Megan Connell:** overlap incredibly well.

[01:00:38] **Michael Herold:** Yeah. It's incredible. Yeah. Okay. So, um. Um, there are so many resources you alone put out there into the world of, the internet. You mentioned your media company Geeks Like Us already written with threes, not E's because That was apparently a taken. uh, [01:01:00] where. Where do you, so with all the stuff that's out there, I mean, I want to say, where do you want to point our listeners, but also maybe just give us a little bit of an overview of all the things you have, out there.

[01:01:13] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Yeah. Yeah. Like I said, I'm quite busy. Um, you know, I do some work with Geek Therapeutics. I also just, uh, co founded a new psychology practice in the Charlotte area called, uh, HealthQuest Innovative Therapeutics, where we have, like, if you follow me on Instagram or Twitter or whatever, you're going to see all the pictures of our amazing space. If people want to follow me at Megan sidey. So M E G A N P S Y D is pretty much how you find me on any platform

[01:01:37] **Michael Herold:** Is it,

true, that You have a

D& D room?

[01:01:40] **Dr. Megan Connell:** we have a D& D room and it is beautiful. We have a artificial fireplace in there. We have, um, wall sconces with flames. We put, covers on all the lights to make it look like a night sky. It's a wizard library. It is amazing. It is beautiful. I love it. Um, and it is a place to collect all of my Kickstarter bad habits.

Um, [01:02:00] so it is an amazing thing, but we're doing a lot of cool initiatives through HealthQuest. so we have VR therapy, we've got the tabletop role playing therapy. Um, Through myself and a couple others here, we're able to offer services almost across all of the U. S., uh, with the exception of 10 or 11 states right now.

Um, but it's really cool to be able to do that and to have that. Um, we're going to be branching out and doing some like educational materials as well. So healthQuest does have a YouTube as of recording, we don't have anything up on it yet, but that will hopefully be changing in the next six months. Um, as I mentioned my media company GeeksLikeUs we do a lot of different geeky and amazing things. I just wrapped up a series of our book club talking about Kate Elliott's Crown of Stars series, which is a really fun series. I highly recommend it. but then I do Clinical Role, which is a live play D& D game with other clinicians who utilize tabletop role playing games as a form of therapy.

We're on hiatus right now as, um, opening a practice is kind of hard. It takes a lot of energy, so I don't have a ton of time, [01:03:00] unfortunately.

[01:03:00] **Michael Herold:** And, uh, just to, just to plug, uh, my previous guest, Dr. Janina Scarlett was a player on, on clinical role. Yeah.

[01:03:11] **Dr. Megan Connell:** And she did phenomenal, like, and she was a new player to D& D and she was learning it and she, did great. It was so much fun having her. And then, um, yeah, and I do the Brain Noodles podcast, Psychology at the Table, which is a resource for game masters to learn how to be more accommodating for people who have struggles such as depression, anxiety, learning disorder, autism, things like that, and just how you can kind of mindfully Um, engage with that material at your table, or with folks who are having struggles like that at your table, what you can, it's not about how to be a

clinician, so that series is not for clinical use, it's more for just, my friend gets panic attacks, and they really want to play D& D, and I want to be a good supportive friend, what are some things I can do to support my friend?

Um, is the point of that. And then I would be remiss to not plug my book, uh, Tabletop Rolling Therapy, The Guide for the Clinician GM, uh, just came out in March from Norton Publishing. Uh, it's [01:04:00] doing very well, and I'm really proud of it. It's a lot of summarizing what little research there is, but then talking through how to do research, and I, The second half of the book walks people through from concept to creation of their own tabletop role playing therapy group.

Uh, we taught I have a whole chapter on ethics I have a chapter on diversity about chapter on marketing and thinking through note taking, you know How to write the notes and clinical documentation so if you are a psychologist who is already trained on, utilizing tabletop role playing therapy and you're trying to Help explain this or pitch it to people there's a lot of resources in that book to help you as well. Also, if you are just a person who loves playing tabletop role playing games, and you would like to understand more of like, why does this game make me feel so much? Why does it mean so much to me? It's a great resource for that as well.

[01:04:48] **Michael Herold:** This was actually one of the other questions that we'll have to, uh, we'll have to wait until we do a part two of this interview. Why does this game make me feel so much? Because this is, [01:05:00] this game really brings out the feels.

[01:05:02] **Dr. Megan Connell:** It really does. Yeah, I, I do also for graduate students out there, I have an appendices in the book that is research topics that need to be explored with some good research questions there, um, because there is a lack of research and that, why does it make us feel things, what's going on in our brain is something I'm absolutely fascinated by and nobody's studying that right now.

[01:05:25] **Michael Herold:** well, on my, I'm on my third reading of that book. So you get like two, two thumbs up and a bunch of magic missiles shooting up in the air doing fireworks. it is phenomenal. This was the first book published on that matter. Um, and it's just, yeah, it's such an interesting read to see all the intricacies and the psychology behind what's happening at the table.

So thank you so much for writing this and thank you so much for being on the show. This has been a true honor. [01:06:00] And I can't wait to again, roll some dice with, friends and clients. thank you so much for, for your time, Megan.

[01:06:08] **Dr. Megan Connell:** Thank you so much for having me.

[01:06:09] **Jill Stoddard:** thank you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock. If you enjoy our podcast, you can help us out by leaving a review or contributing on Patreon.

[01:06:26] **Emily Edlynn:** You can get more psychology tips by subscribing to our newsletter and connecting with us on social media.

[01:06:31] **Michael Herold:** We'd like to thank our podcast production manager, Jaidine Stoutt Williams.

[01:06:36] **Debbie Sorensen:** This podcast is for informational and entertainment purposes only and is not meant to be a substitute for mental health treatment. If you're looking for mental health treatment, please visit the resources page of our website, offtheclockpsych.com.

com. [01:07:00]