Meet The Teenage Girls Who Made The Feminist iPhone Game "Tampon Run"

Alison Vingiano, February 6, 2015

Sophie Houser and Andrea Gonzales, two New York City-based teenagers, are changing the game for young women in tech.

The duo just launched an iOS version of their hit 8-bit web video game Tampon Run, which they created to "combat the menstrual taboo through humor," Houser told BuzzFeed News.

Houser and Gonzales first met in July at the Girls Who Code summer immersion program in New York City, a course girls can take to learn to code.

Gonzales said she wanted to make a video game addressing the hypersexualization of women in video games, while Houser was interested in making a video game with a social message; the two naturally paired up to brainstorm ideas, and Houser jokingly suggested a game where somebody throws tampons.

"We joked about it for a while, but decided to look into it more and quickly realized that the menstrual taboo is a global issue that needs to be addressed," said Gonzales. "Women are taught throughout their lives that their periods are embarrassing and crude, something to feel ashamed of. As a result, Tampon Run was born."

tamponrun.com

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They released the game the day before the first day of school in September 2014, and it quickly went viral online.

"Overnight I went from being a normal high school kid to answering press inquiries between classes and after school," Houser said. "The feedback was almost overwhelmingly positive."
The teens even presented their game during a TED Talk.
The mobile launch of Tampon Run was in part due toPivotal Labs, a development firm that dedicated a team to help the girls create the iOS game pro bono.

The mobile version is slightly different than the version online, the girls said — including a new feature that turns enemies into flying pads once they're hit.

"The iOS version has the same concept and message as the web game, however it includes new features to make the game more engaging. It now gets harder over time, includes a new enemy, a leaderboard and Game Center achievements," said Houser. "Also, when enemies are hit with tampons they now turn into pads that fly away."

Gonzales added, "We also added a new enemy, and developed our gaming algorithm so that the enemy generation increases over time, as opposed to just randomly generating.The teens eventually want tomake a game for Android, and are considering writing a book to get "more girls excited about coding."

"In light of everything that's happened with GamerGate, we hope Tampon Run shows people that women have an important place in gaming. I hope the next generation of game developers (and engineers in the tech world in general) includes a lot more women," Houser said.

"Tampon Run is the product of a larger movement," Gonzales added. "A movement to teach teens and kids to code, and of course in the case of Girls Who Code, to close the gender gap in tech."