

## Community highlights

Written by The Conversation USA

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The Conversation receives a lot of comments each day and you can't read everything. That's why we occasionally end the week with a selection of community highlights: comments we enjoyed or thought interesting. Read on for six comments or discussions I thought worth highlighting.

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### ['No Vax, No Visit'? If mum was vaccinated baby is already protected against whooping cough](#)

[Patrick Stokes](#) provided a counterpoint to the article:

This seems to be taking an unduly narrow view of benefit. It may be that one unvaccinated visitor engaging with one unvaccinated infant isn't going to cause any measurable harm. But then, one person smoking one cigarette near your child one time probably doesn't do any measurable harm either - yet there is enormous value in reinforcing the now well-established social norm that it is never acceptable to do this. Likewise, people need to get the message that being unvaccinated is a socially and morally unacceptable abrogation of one's responsibilities to the community.

So I'm surprised this article says nothing about the importance of systemic behavioural change, increasing the adult booster rate etc. I'm also surprised that "division in social groups, and guilt of friends feeling irresponsible" are cited as reasons against NJNV, as if the feelings of people who are being irresponsible need to carry equal weight with those of parents doing the right thing.

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### [The real reason more women don't code](#)

A few commenters shared their experience coding or in IT, to which Karin Verspoor, the article's author replied.

[Jennifer Norton](#) commented on the understanding of what a "coder" is:

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Having been in IT 35 years ago, I find this article interesting. And I wonder if the definition of “coder” excludes many women in the workforce who code, but for whom it’s not the only part of their job?

Most of my jobs have required some coding, but I’ve never worked in an IT department and have never studied IT (it was only just starting in universities when I began, and everyone was trained on the job in those days). I have been an actuarial clerk who coded; a manager who coded, a lecturer in programming and business analysis; taught myself OOP and started a coding consultancy for gov’t; worked as a consultant for a consulting company, including coding, business and systems analysis and project management (most of us had multiple roles).

Coding and a BA work were always there when I needed money, even though I disliked working in “business” and preferred to something more socially oriented.

The I found a job with a great mix—at a semi-gov’t organisation where the work was valuable, and I got all of the really interesting jobs that required technical/IT know-how. 50% of the jobs in that organisation required some coding (usually in 4GLs like SAS) and ~70% of the employees were female. So plenty of women doing coding, but not the main or only part of their job. Most of us had to be able to write, liaise, and organise too.

Along the way, I’ve worked with numerous other people. Anecdotally, I would say that of the few people who just wanted to code, all were male. Of those who were good at coding, it was ~50/50. Most women who started out in coding, moved into positions where coding was less needed (as business analysts, project managers etc.) and were better paid. And there were women who had non-IT/coding roles, and took on some coding.

While I could do it well, I would be bored and unchallenged in a job that was 100% coding. And I would rather be able to use my other skills and abilities as well.

So I don’t think it’s that women can’t or don’t want to code; it could be that they don’t just want to code. And perhaps our current university offerings don’t meet their needs.

### [Karin Verspoor](#)

The numbers I quote are based on a study published by the Australian Computer Society which includes a very broad definition of an IT professional, including many non-coding roles such as IT project management. I agree that many women don't just want to code (and I certainly do a lot more than "just" coding in my current role!); many men too for that matter. Luckily there are many options for studying Information Technology or Information Systems that include a broad range of technology-related offerings, not strictly coding.

[Angela Noel](#) shared her experience as a touch-typist when computers were just entering the media industry:

Thank you professor Verspoor for a nicely unrancorous article. I am very suprised at the lack of women coders. I have always thought computing would be woman-friendly as it is language based, one of our acknowledged strengths.

That men seem to be more driven to master machinery may be because they have been socialised to recognisre the power-potential of possessing such skills.

That boys and men are good at protecting their territory from each other let alone from girls and women is not surprising either, given the rewards of exclusion.

I am a touch typist and was working in the television media when computers came into that industry here and just as with typing, I was asked to access it to find the information my male editor and some colkeagues wanted to source?

At the time I was amused to find the men who had refused to go near atypewriter for fear of looking incompetent or feminine, took to spending their lunch hours fiddling around on the new computer with one finger trying desperately to understand how it worked.

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Of course we were soon all relying on computers without much apparent difference in ability. However, I have seen people coding, and it is to me a bit like watching my grandmother crochet. - ingenious but also physically monotonous. So why would I want to do it? Persuade me!

[Karin Verspoor](#) :

I personally find coding not at all monotonous! Sure, there are monotonous aspects – as with most work! – but even debugging code is like a game to me ... thinking logically through what could be causing things to go wrong and then getting rid of the problem. I find that coding actually lets me automate some of the most monotonous tasks (for instance, if you needed to replace every number in a document with its word form by hand (1-> one, 125 -> one hundred twenty five, etc.) you could do it programmatically). More importantly, coding to me is about solving problems using the computer, not really about writing code. It's about taking an idea for something, and working out how to translate that into the steps that the computer would follow. It's a logical puzzle that I find really engaging.

[Sue B](#) covered her experience in online coding communities:

In online communities for open source software, I always use a masculine username. Otherwise, my questions or posts will be totally ignored (it took me a while to notice LOL). Changed my username to something ridiculous like ThorWarhammer and question answered in no time at all. I never, ever, use a feminine username online (here excepted).

I think there's a long way to go before women coders will be generally accepted. In over 20 years of IT, I've known one (there could be others but their screen names may be "ThrobbingDriver" or something).

[Karin Verspoor](#) :

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Your experience is corroborated by the github study I mention in the article. It's unfortunate that you feel that you have to hide your identity.

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### [Love by design: when science meets sex, lust, attraction and attachment](#)

[Barbara Mintzes](#) explained the potential risks to a drug mentioned in the article:

Julian Savulescu's characterization of the drug flibanserin (Addyi), recently approved in the US, as a "a real-life love genie in a bottle" reflects a strong dose of wishful thinking about the scientific evidence supporting this drug's US approval.

The FDA rejected flibanserin three times before approving it. The reason? Flibanserin is not very effective in increasing a woman's level of desire, and there are serious safety concerns. Women should not drink at all when taking this medicine, even if they take it for months and months or years on end.

That's right: if you're thinking of a romantic glass of wine in a beautiful setting with your lover, think again, as this drug can lead to dangerous drops in blood pressure, fainting and loss of consciousness when taken with alcohol.

Savulescu presents an optimistic picture of the likelihood of more 'satisfying sexual events' compared with a recent systematic review of all of the scientific evidence. (Jaspers et al. JAMA Internal Medicine, 176, 453-462). Women reported on average one more satisfying sexual event every two months. And he is right that some did better than that, but an equal number did worse, as with all average effects. According to FDA reviewers, around 1 in 10 women on the drug did better than those on placebo. But more women than this experienced fatigue and sedation, dizziness or nausea.

This drug puts a new spin on being, "dizzy with love".

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When it comes directly to desire – what flibanserin is meant to improve - it was no more effective than placebo on pre-planned measure of desire in the studies, a daily desire diary. Only when the company changed this score to another measure, based on woman’s memory of the last 28 days, did flibanserin do better than placebo (or a ‘sugar pill’). Changing the goal posts in a scientific study is usually frowned upon, and the FDA reviewers were not happy with this change. The medical and clinical team recommended against approval but were overridden by management.

So why did the US FDA approve flibanserin? An intensive public relations campaign, orchestrated with funding by the manufacturer, claimed that the FDA was being sexist to reject this drug because men had many drugs to improve their sex lives, women had none. A prominent figure on the US women’s movement spearheaded this campaign, and it is likely that many of the women’s health groups and Congress people petitioning the FDA were unaware of this commercial connection.

So there is an interesting ethical story here. But it is not the story of the “real-life love genie in a bottle”.

Savulescu also mentions that this drug can be bought on the Internet and presents no caveats that such sales are not only risky but illegal.

Flibanserin is a prescription-only medicine not approved for use in Australia. In the US, its use is strictly controlled beyond the controls for most prescription-only medicines. Doctors and pharmacists must get special certification to provide it and there are several ongoing safety studies. The main concern is that a person should not drink alcohol or take a number of commonly used medicines while taking it, and they must take it daily for months or years on end.

Beyond the risks to health of Internet sales of prescription medicines, there are several risks with buying a medicine on the Internet: losing your money and getting nothing; no guarantee that the pill you get is what you thought you bought; and customs seizures of an illegal substance entering Australia.

When it was tested against placebo, it’s not really clear that flibanserin did better. More women

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in the trials on flibanserin voted with their feet by leaving the trials early than women on placebo.

But placebo may not be the answer. Flibanserin was never tested against that cold glass of chardonnay in a beautiful setting with your new lover. Need I say more? Now there's a treat for your neurotransmitters.

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### [The link between chronic pain and depression: which comes first?](#)

Finally, [Peter Wilkin](#) offered some advice for those with pain or depression:

Find a distraction, get very distracted and then stay distracted.

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Read a comment you thought interesting? Let me know during the week. You can leave a comment below or send me an [email](#).

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