



 culture, debate, feminism [<http://howtonotsuckatgamedesign.com/?p=6610>] , August 13, 2012
<http://howtonotsuckatgamedesign.com/?p=6610> by Anjin Anhut.

This article is filed under [game criticism](#).



Dear Mr. Pitchford.

Today [eurogamer.net](#) published an [article](#) in which Borderlands 2 lead designer John Hemingway got quoted to refer to a game mode „Äö/Ŋ“ specifically designed to accommodate people “who suck at first-person shooters” „Äö/Ŋ“ as “girlfriend mode”. In the quotes provided by eurogamer.net, he dubbed this mode “girlfriend mode” on two occasions and no additional qualifiers were given.

I’d like to address, what Hemingway’s statement does to the discourse, how eurogamer.net adds to the problem and how I think you failed to address the situation properly.

So in the way the article quotes Mr.Hemingway, the lead designer of Gearbox Software publicly labels people “who suck at first person shooters” as “girlfriends”, without any additional information to qualify his statement. This, on face value at least, is a crass and derogatory statement to make. Especially in an environment like the video game community, where women and girls have to struggle for recognition, it is also a very toxic statement to make.

Of course any assumption regarding if Mr.Hemingway actually wanted to make this toxic comparison or if he actually thinks that girlfriends suck at first person shooters is nothing more than an assumption. And any attack based on that assumption is of course unwarranted and unfair. Unfortunately Hemingway’s original intent „Äö/Ŋ“ how inclusive and women-friendly it may have been „Äö/Ŋ“ doesn’t offset the crass, derogatory and toxic properties of that published statement.

The statement as published on eurogamer.net feeds into a very strong and damaging narrative, in which female gamers are deemed second class gamers. This narrative comes in many forms, like the fake-geek-girl or the incompetent girlfriend. It also feeds into another even stronger and even more damaging narrative, in which women and girls are considered less competent in regards to technology than men. This narrative comes in many forms, like the meme that women can’t park cars or the incompetent gamer girlfriend.

Even worse, Hemingway’s statement did not only feed into those two narratives, it officially sanctioned them. Hemingway is a lead designer, he is someone who made it big in the game community, an authority. And he is your lead designer, working on the next big first person shooter from Gearbox Software...

Now this got a lot of people angry. Not unexpected for me. And definitely not unexpected for the writers at eurogamer.net, who realized how controversial Hemingway’s wording would be and then had the audacity to put it into the headline. They even phrased the headline in a particular way, suggesting that “girlfriend mode” is the official name of newly revealed game mode.

So it is completely understandable, that you called eurogamer.net out for being sensationalist and it is also very much understandable „Äö/Ŋ“ admirable even „Äö/Ŋ“ that you do not throw your employees under the bus, when a controversy comes up. So, it’s very much okay for you to jump to Hemingway’s defense.

But „Äö/Ŋ“ and this is a big but „Äö/Ŋ“ you failed to address the damage, that this statement did to the state of female gaming and therefore to the gaming community at large. All your damage control focussed on Gearbox, Borderlands 2 and John Hemingway and no consideration to the crass, derogatory and damaging attack females have suffered today was given. On the contrary! In your efforts to make Hemingway’s statement a non-issue, you declared the anger around the statement a non-issue, you declared the sexist connotations a non-issue... You threw concerned and affected people under the bus.

Whoever is responsible for the official Gearbox Software tweets treated the issue much smarter and not only corrected Hemingway's stance by making a gender equality statement ("Gaming is divided by skill, not gender.") but also managed to slip in two apologies to the female gaming community. Whoever that is, deserves a raise!

Anyway, I hope you understand how your narrow focussed defenses only perpetuated the problem. Though in the end you seem to be quite alright with how crass, derogatory and damaging the "girlfriend mode" remarks are since it obviously pays out for you:



Randy Pitchford @DuvalMagic

1h

In related news, Borderlands 2 is currently the #1 trending topic on Twitter.

[Expand](#)

Congratulations.

Anjin Anhut

Below are screenshots of all related tweets of Gearbox Software and Randy Pitchford as of the moment the article was written:



Randy Pitchford @DuvalMagic

4h

There is no universe where Hemmingway is a sexist - all the women at Gearbox would beat his and anyone else's ass.

[Expand](#)



Randy Pitchford @DuvalMagic

4h

Meanwhile "boyfriend mode" or "girlfriend mode" is an idea that suggests that a gamers SO isn't as hardcore as the gamer him/herself.

[Expand](#)



Randy Pitchford @DuvalMagic

4h

The TBD DLC char skill in question gives a chance for missed shots to reflect and hit an enemy.

[Expand](#)



Randy Pitchford @DuvalMagic

4h

I'm sure Hemmingway is getting noogied now, but not his fault. A personal anecdote has been twisted and dogpiled on by sensationalists. Fun!

[Expand](#)



Randy Pitchford @DuvalMagic

4h

If Hemmingway happens to have a noob friend he wants to play with, it is not an indictment of the skill of *anyone* else in the world.

[Expand](#)



Randy Pitchford @DuvalMagic

4h

It's not a thing. Just sensationalism. There's a TBD skill for a future DLC char that is helpful for noob coop buddies. That's a good idea!

[Expand](#)



Randy Pitchford @DuvalMagic

4h

@newsmary If he happens to have a noob friend he wants to play with, it is not an indictment of the skill of anyone else in the world.

[View conversation](#)



Randy Pitchford @DuvalMagic

4h

@jinxcellent I didn't know it was a nickname. It's not even a thing - just a skill built from the idea of playing coop with noob friends.

[View conversation](#)



Randy Pitchford @DuvalMagic

5h

The future DLC Mechromancer class has a skill tree that makes it easier for less skilled coop partners (any gender!) to play and be useful.

[Expand](#)



Randy Pitchford @DuvalMagic

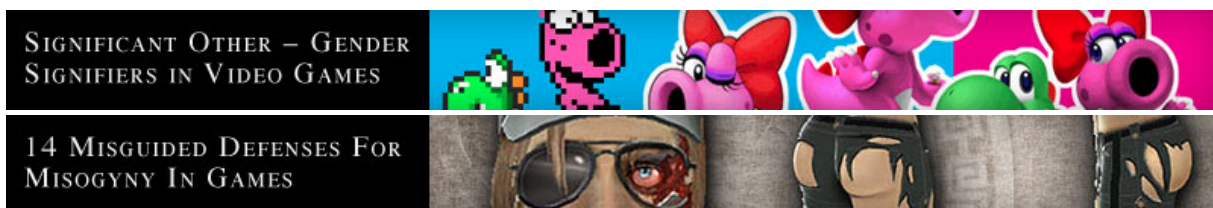
5h

Borderlands 2 does NOT have a girlfriend mode. Anyone that says otherwise is misinformed or trying to stir up something that isn't there.

[Expand](#)

-  **Gearbox Software** @GearboxSoftware 4h
@ElisaRockDoc Stereotypes are dangerous and can be very harmful, no doubt. Please check our recent tweets / responses for more context.
[View conversation](#)
-
-  **Gearbox Software** @GearboxSoftware 4h
@Marc_Normandin Agreed. Our designer spoke specifically about his significant other -- not all women. Apologies that wasn't made clear.
[View conversation](#)
-
-  **Randy Pitchford** @DuvalMagic 4h
I'm sure Hemmingway is getting noogied now, but not his fault. A personal anecdote has been twisted and dogpiled on by sensationalists. Fun!
[Retweeted by Gearbox Software](#)
[Expand](#)
-
-  **Gearbox Software** @GearboxSoftware 4h
@NeoNacho @eurogamer Not used in-game or otherwise. Our designer shared an anecdote about gaming with his SO that was taken out of context.
[View conversation](#)
-
-  **Gearbox Software** @GearboxSoftware 4h
@RampagedDeath @duvalmagic That's not how it's referred to in-game. Sorry that wasn't made clear. Lots of misinformation going around.
[View conversation](#)
-
-  **Gearbox Software** @GearboxSoftware 5h
Gaming is divided by skill, not gender. Our goal with Mechromancer is for co-op partners of any skill to have fun together.
[Expand](#)

Related posts:



7 THOUGHTS ON “OPEN LETTER TO RANDY PITCHFORD, PRESIDENT OF GEARBOX SOFTWARE”



Hash

on **October 3, 2012 at 3:14 pm** said:

Sehe nicht wo hier ein Schaden entstanden sein soll. Die meisten M,äö-ßdels sind schlechter in Shootern und kommen nur durch ihren Freund damit in Kontakt. Das ist statistisch belegbar. Wenn diese Verallgemeinerung nun auf jemand nicht zu trifft hat er noch kein Schaden, nur jemand mit EXXTREM niedrigen Selbstwertgef,äö-fhl w,äö-fjrde sich angegriffen f,äö-fhlen. Oder jemand mit zu viel zeit ;)



ste

on **August 27, 2012 at 12:29 am** said:

Hello. Apologies for posting this on an unrelated post.

I just recently (today) discovered your blog, and I'm loving it. The problem is, it's very hard to navigate. There is no search box, no menu, no jump box, nothing. Not even a contact form, or an email (or maybe I'm bad searching, apologies if this is the case).

Any future plans to improve this?

Cheers.



Anjin Anhut
on **August 27, 2012 at 10:12 am** said:

A proper navigation front page is in the works. I recently got rid of the sidebar (which had all the necessary navigation widgets), and now work on a proper frontpage instead. Gald you dig the contant, navigation tools are on their way. :)



Chris
on **August 19, 2012 at 7:15 pm** said:

Did you sent it to him? Did he react in any way?



FBW
on **August 15, 2012 at 10:54 pm** said:

Was wondering if you would have a knee-jerk reaction to this. But an over-reaction open letter to a guy that will never even see this? This blog is not exploring sexism in gaming and furthering knowledge on the subject. It truly is nothing more then you venting about sexism from some past or present experience based off of your favorite hobby. Until you get past that, your articles are not helping anyone as they are just bogging down real discussions about the topic at hand.



Ben
on **August 14, 2012 at 9:29 am** said:

eurogamer did a pretty bad job here. This is exactly where a "journalist" has to ask again. "Are you serious with 'girlfriend mode'?" Make a statement against sexism yourself and give your interview partner a chance to rephrase his words. The problem, for me at least, isn't one stupid word. We're all (most of us) sexists, we all think and say sexist things. I don't think it's a good thing that one word causes a huge outrage without looking at the person's work or the context.

But here, the problem is the context: Borderlands. It's the textbook example of sexist game design. Character class design based on gender stereotypes, strong males using big weapons and brute force, small females using magic and robots. Male siren or female Gunzerker? Nope. How is this divided by skill? The tweet is pretty hilarious,Äö/Ñ~ð even an outright lie. Same goes for "Hemingway isn't a sexist" (look at his game) or "out of context" (look at,Äö/Ñ~ð yupp, the game).



Anjin Anhut
on **August 14, 2012 at 10:14 am** said:

@Ben

Yeah, eurogamer should have drilled deeper and should have asked for clarifying statements... but that would kinda miss the point of digging for sensationalist quotes, wouldn't it? ;)

While I think that Gearbox has a less the stellar track record of gender inclusive design *koffkoffdukenukemkoffkoff* I didn't feel like putting an Ad hominem attack in here.