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[http://howtonotsuckatgamedesign.com/?p=6506](#) by Anjin Anhut.
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Spelunky is made by Mossmouth

On July 8 I aired a [rant about Spelunky](#), in which I called the makers out for using very explicit sexist imagery and content.

While I was prepared for the typical knee-jerk defense reactions, that usually come up whenever a game is charged with sexism... I was surprised to see where those defenses came from, this time.

People I genuinely consider to be progressive and thoughtful „Äö/Ÿ“ indie developers, journalist and even feminists „Äö/Ÿ“ were jumping to Spelunky’s defense using a very specific set of arguments. And after I recently fell flat on my face using the exact same set of arguments to defend a sexist public statement on twitter, I recognized that the discussions and conversations about sexism are fundamentally broken.

Here is what needs fixing and why Spelunky still needs to be recognized as sexist...

Preface

I don’t think the original article is madatory reading to understand, where I’m going here. I will discuss some of the content and will try to make sure you are not missing out on important details. But if you like to get the full picture, you find the article and some comments [here](#).

I will use the terms *sexism* and *misogyny* synonymously.

Anger Management

Here are some quotes from reactions to my article:
(I highlighted a few words using bold font)

-I don’t feel Spelunky is any more misogynistic than Donkey Kong, but a few of its game mechanics make it appear as though it is. ... Well I don’t know, you’re the first person I’ve ever come across who found Donkey Kong **offensive**. It’s more **satirical** really.

-Since you die all the time, you’re like a failed Indiana Jones, so mishandling your damsels **doesn’t seem out of place**

- I just think that a **bit of comedy relief** isn't bad. Like knocking out the damsels to carry them, or getting a kiss for a heart.

-If you're **being offended** by something/someone, it is your problem and no one else's.

-The **intention** was to make a fun, challenging and addictive game with the thinnest veneer of story.

-I mean, to me this is **intentionally silly**, and calling this out as sexism looks pretty strange.

-The default „Äö/Ñ√/yeah, **girls actually find it funny too**,Äö/Ñ√/π defense goes here.

-Spelunky is most definitely not one of the games worth getting **offended** about.

-I seriously doubt it was done **on purpose**.

-This is silly, the game is in all essence **silly**, you are silly, everything about this is just silly.

-This article is a stretch based on loose assumptions and an **over reaction** to a game,Äö/Ñ√/Ÿs simple mechanics.

-The devs probably decided to go all out and put their own spin on it to **disperse any ideas that this is a serious thing**.

-It seemed to me like the author was trying to find **outrage**

And here are a few samples I uttered myself in a debate on twitter about a [sexist comment by Simon Pegg](#):
(again highlighted a few words. And please note, that I addressed a woman with my arguments)

-What I tweeted was to imply, that your **visible anger** over the issue may let you see things **less clearheaded** and accurate.

-That is a stretch. do you think he did something those girls are **not comfortable** with? Maybe they find his remarks coaxing?

Can you spot the theme here? All arguments assert in various ways that it is incorrect to call something sexist because it is incorrect to be angry about it. And it happens all the fucking time in debates:

Don't be angry „Äö/Ñ√/“ he didn't do it to make someone feel bad.
Don't be angry „Äö/Ñ√/“ it is a joke, all in good fun, have a little more humor.
Don't be angry „Äö/Ñ√/“ I wasn't. So at least we have two opinions now, right?
Don't be angry „Äö/Ñ√/“ it clouds your judgement. (still can't believe I went there)
Don't be angry „Äö/Ñ√/“ you are looking way too deep into this.
Don't be angry „Äö/Ñ√/“ you are too easily triggered. Lighten up.
Don't be angry „Äö/Ñ√/“-“ „Ä+it's your problem, if you are offended.
Don't be angry „Äö/Ñ√/“ men aren't, if it happens to them.
Don't be angry „Äö/Ñ√/“ some women aren't.
Don't be angry „Äö/Ñ√/“ others are more worthy of your spite.
Don't be angry „Äö/Ñ√/“ you really should be used to it by now.
Don't be angry „Äö/Ñ√/“ your complaints and attempts to censor stuff anger me.

Or the other way around:

Oh, you have been raped yourself? Well, I understand how you are offended, I will not make any more rape jokes for now.

Sexism Is Sexism „Äö/Ñ√/“ Anger Is Anger

Anger is not a determining factor in questions of sexism. Something can be sexist without anybody giving a crap and a lot of women can be angry about something that is not sexist. Sexism and anger are connected, but do not depend on each other.

Imagine you have an illness coming with strong pain. You complain about the pain, your pain needs to be treated, the pain alerts you to the fact that you may be ill, doctors take your pain into consideration when forming a diagnosis... ... but your pain is not your illness. Your pain is the result of your illness.

Taking painkillers doesn't make the illness go away. Trying to ignore the pain and to be cool about it also doesn't make the illness go away. Other people ridiculing you, pushing you or ignoring you, because you say you are in pain, sure as hell does not make you well again. And just because it doesn't hurt at the moment does not mean you are cured.

Women being offended or people from the rest of the gender spectrum being offended for women is not what makes sexism a reality. Sexism makes sexism a reality. Offense is just the pain that is caused by sexism.

Debating the offense away or ignoring it doesn't solve anything. On the contrary, it keeps us from tackling the actual problem.

Why I Say Spelunky Is Sexist And Problematic



The only female in this official promo shot is sexy and helpless, while the guys get all the sense of agency.

While my anger about the sexism gave me the motivation to sit down a couple of hours, do the research, structure my arguments and then write everything down and edit pretty pictures, „Äö/Ñ,“ my anger did not cause me to determine that the damsel is sexist and problematic. And while I articulated my anger and disapproval in the article, I did not use my feelings to add credibility to my sexism charges.

I used objective criteria to determine the sexism in Spelunky. I for example simply applied word definitions to what is presented in the game. The Damsel is objectified, because the player has to use her as an object. There is no opinion involved here. If you treat a person like an object, you are objectifying this person. Also if you treat a person as if this person is unable to accomplish basic things on her own like a toddler, you are infantilizing this person.

I also applied semiology to determine that the Damsel is sexualized. For this I analyzed two images: her appearance (red dress, cleavage, long blonde hair) and the event of kissing (a smooch on the cheek of the player character with an icon of a heart popping up). Both images are subject to individual interpretation, yes, and some people might not read any sexual connotations into it. Granted. But both images are more often than not commonly used to strongly articulate or imply sexual connotations for decades now and are read by most people this way. This assessment is based on statistics and research in visual language (I teach that stuff, btw).



One female character in the roster. her dominant defining factor is her gender, while the guys get ethnic and emotional qualities and clothing style to differentiate themselves. [The Smurfette Principle](#) in full effect.

This approach of using objective criteria was applied to my other detailed charges as well. Now regarding the question, if it is fair to call Spelunky sexist, since you can choose to have all the degrading imagery and gameplay driven abuse aimed at men and dogs as well: Yes it is fair.

Sexism is about gender inequality. Since men and women are not equally supported and protected by society, devaluation of men and women in popular media does not result in equal damage. Also just treating gendered attacks as some sort of damage score, „Äö/Ñ,“ and calling Spelunky therefore even, „Äö/Ñ,“ is a massive oversimplification. All the detailed charges I brought up in my last article are feeding into pervasive misogynistic arguments. The detailed charges

do not however feed into pervasive anti-male narratives (maybe anti-gay narratives, judging from the male damsels outfit). I also still don't see how the depiction of the female damsels gets improved by showing that the way she is shown and should be handled is perfectly applicable to dogs.

So, yeah, it's fair to call Spelunky out for prominently featuring sexist content and messages.

By The Numbers

How problematic the sexist content in Spelunky is regarding individual people's feelings is subject to your empathy with those individuals. I always like to advocate for empathy in general, but that's up to you. But don't be confused, when people think you are ignorant, if you don't care.

How much Spelunky feeds pervasive sexist narratives stands in relation with the exposure the game gets. XBLA, indie stardom, I say it's not just a little. (and yes, I'm aware that I contribute to its exposure here, thanks).

How problematic the sexist content in Spelunky and the sexist narratives are regarding societal health depends on numbers. For example:

ESA /Wikipedia/Slate

- Forty-seven percent of all game players are women. (so far, so equal)
- Wikipedia features 217 articles on **male videogame characters**, while only featuring 95 on **female characters**.
- only 27% of jobs in computer sciences (includes video games) are held by women.

NY Times:

Nearly one in five women surveyed said they had been raped or had experienced an attempted rape at some point, and one in four reported having been beaten by an intimate partner. One in six women have been stalked, according to the report.

CNN:

The earnings gap between men and women has narrowed, but a new White House report shows that on average women still only make about 75% as much as their male counterparts.

Wrapping Up

1. A piece of media is sexist because of content that supports and feeds a sexist narrative, not because someone is angry about it.
2. Sexist content feeds sexist narratives, ideas, stereotypes or behavior in people, no matter if they are entertained or appalled by the sexist content.
3. Sexist narratives, ideas, stereotypes or behavior is what makes us treat and see women as lesser humans and makes women feel like lesser humans.

In debates, fokus on the most objective and measurable aspects of the sexist media, not the feelings they trigger. We don't solve the problem by making it difficult to talk about one's feelings, by victim blaming, by treating offense as a subject for debate or conflating one result of sexism with sexism itself. ... we actually exacerbate problem by doing so.

Debating facts and caring about other peoples feelings. Understand the difference and do both.

Thanks.

Related posts:



25 THOUGHTS ON "BROKEN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SEXISM (AND SPELUNKY)"



Ymedron

on April 17, 2013 at 1:15 pm said:

Completely agree on both of your articles. I was pretty put off on the pc version by the horrors you can do to the

damsel. You didn't touch on the fact that you can take her (alive) to an evil altar and she will be sacrificed for some kind of reward that I don't remember what it was. The punishment was probably a lack of kiss or something like that.
8l
Can't believe there are folks still arguing that you can get a pass with anything just because it's supposed to be funny. I doubt anti-semitism or other references to recent acts of horror and injustice would get by so lightly.



Taran Blore

on **March 9, 2013 at 3:53 am** said:

Excellent article. It's fleshing out what seems to be THE hot topic in the industry right now, and it's a topic that seems to be making a lot of us uncomfortable (and rightly so). For if we can wade past the butt-hurt and objectively look at the arguments bandied about in this debate through empathetic eyes then it's easy to get excited about a new frontier where the (perhaps) inadvertent inequality no longer presents a tarnish on the medium... It's actually a pretty stimulating mental exercise to rethink prospective gaming scenarios to avoid the persisting offending tropes.

Come on guys, lets make sexism our bitch!



A Gray Phantom

on **November 3, 2012 at 11:03 pm** said:

You barely touched on the fact that the damsel's gender is subject to change at a whim. If you were only referring to the PC version of the game, then your interpretation would be just and accurate, but you only briefly acknowledge the other two damsels.

I've only watched and played the XBLA version of Spelunky, and I've come to the conclusion that the protagonist, whether male or female, is a huge jerk.

He/she is a roguish treasure hunter. They break into a mine haphazardly, killing anything and anyone that gets in their way, stealing treasure, and using the innocent damsels as a means to an end. There's nothing very heroic about that, for sure, but it's not overtly sexist.

The damsel can either be male, female, or a gender neutral pug. Whatever the gender, they are always dumb, and always treated as an object. It isn't sexist, it's simply a function of the gameplay that you tend to play as a jerk.

This is reinforced with the fact that there are several female protagonists to choose from. All protagonists play the same way, and again, all damsels act the same way. You would know this if you actually explored the game fully.



no no

on **November 1, 2012 at 10:16 am** said:

Imao internet warrior, the developers don't give a shit about you and your internet speech, I couldn't even read it all because you're just too stupid, it's a video game, that's all it is. Although thank you for getting the word of Spelunky out there, it deserves more sales and the developer is an awesome guy.

Give him more money people!



Lala

on **May 27, 2013 at 11:11 am** said:

How is it possible to say that something is stupid without seeing it? I was going to ask you to read the article, but that would obviously be impossible because "you're just too stupid". I don't believe that that is a legitimate reason for anything, like "because" or "I don't want to". Also, why would someone who read this article with an open mind then pay the developer for a game recognized as sexist?



c
on **August 4, 2012 at 12:22 pm** said:

as someone who is very tired of the sexism in the industry and in popular culture and embedded in American society, and as someone who is extremely irritated by the inability for much of the gaming community to talk about these things rationally, I'd just like to say that you are nowhere near as smart or insightful as you think you are, Mr. Anhut.



Anjin Anhut
on **August 4, 2012 at 3:37 pm** said:

Hey... Mr.C...

How about you actually add a few thoughts here and help out „Äö/Œ/“ y'know do something about this sexism in culture and inability to talk about it stuff „Äö/Œ/“ instead of rating my smartness and insightfulness. Because contrary to popular belief I don't write here to be a smartass, I write here to actually become smarter on the issue.



Paul
on **August 3, 2012 at 5:31 am** said:

My problem with your criticism is that you've ignored the necessity to make things this way from a game design perspective. Spelunky is a very unforgiving game, where one misstep can mean starting over from the very first room. The entire game relies on stereotyping because stereotypes are a very effective means of communicating ideas, regardless of how offensive they are. I think the reason why people have reacted negatively to your criticism is because they know there is no immediate alternative to the damsel that makes any sense. You are asking a game designer to sacrifice the quality of his game just so it can be a bit more progressive, which is ridiculous.

The Damsel exists because the designer wanted you to work for your health points. You need to find the health object, keep close watch over them, and carry them to the exit. Since there are many different objects you can carry with different levels of utility, this forces you to make choices about what to bring with you. Do you bring the health, do you bring your gun, or do you attempt to bring both and risk getting killed by the ghost? If the health object were an abstract symbol, that would denote an instantaneous effect. A floating heart always activates upon pickup. If it were an inanimate artifact, then its mortality wouldn't be prominent. You need an object that is mortal and is symbolic for life, so a sex symbol was chosen.

The thing I don't like about your previous article is you act as if a designer's decisions go something like: "Should I objectify women in my videogame? (Yes/No)", when it's a bit more of a complex issue than that.



Anjin Anhut
on **August 3, 2012 at 9:29 am** said:

Hey, Paul...

I ignored nothing here, your lack of imagination to solve the damsel mechanics with another symbol makes my demand out to be more than it actually is. I never ever asked for any changes to the game design what so ever, just a switch in metaphor would be great. I'd like to ask you to refrain from any such accusations and only refer to things I actually wrote. Anything else is just a distraction.

Immediate alternatives for damsel:

- pug (used, so damsel could have been ditched but was kept only for stylistic or nostalgic values)
- someone male (used, so damsel could have been ditched but was kept only for stylistic or nostalgic values)
- doctor
- native healer
- fragile vessel (walking mechanic would have been switched with uncontrolled rolling)
- other adventurers with medipacks to share
- chef cook, food as health upgrade is classic videogame symbol
- tourists, giving sandwich as reward
- spirits of lost adventurers, when carried outside who heal you.

All of the suggestion above would keep all the mechanics, (rescue, damage, throwing, adding health points, sacrifice for khali, crazy running ect...) in place, while still getting rid of the sexist connotations.



FBW
on **July 31, 2012 at 10:37 pm** said:

As I stated earlier in your previous article, this one is (also) a stretch based on loose assumptions and an (even more so now) over reaction to a game,Äö/Ñ/¥s simple mechanics. While you can make your straw man arguments and laundry list peoples valid points (again), it doesn,Äö/Ñ/¥t change the fact that you,Äö/Ñ/¥re (still) grasping at straws and looking into this a bit (way) too deep. And to add; your tirade about anger doesn't support your claims, it only further proves you have an emotional interest that might be stemming from a very personal place which is, and probably always will, skew your own views on what sexism is.

Also, deleting comments you don't like only further supports this. You don't want to engage in a debate, you just want to use the internet as your soapbox.



Anjin Anhut
on **August 1, 2012 at 12:10 pm** said:

Hey, FBW

There have been no deleted comments.

And not every argument does hold up long in a debate. Your's already did fall apart quite brutally and are therefore no longer a relevant part of the debate. So, you can add your thoughts if look like, but please do not expect much response to your statements. Your way of debating the issue, your false application of logical fallacies, your attempt at delegitimizing me as a debater are not of interest and change nothing in regards to how valid my point is.

Your broken reasoning though is a quite interesting case study for others to further debate about. So, I'd encourage you to add more comments. It's very enlightening.

Cheers.



FBW
on **July 31, 2012 at 10:16 pm** said:

As I stated earlier in your previous article, this one is (also) a stretch based on loose assumptions and an (even more so now) over reaction to a game,Äö/Ñ/¥s simple mechanics. While you can make your straw man arguments and laundry list peoples valid points (again), it doesn,Äö/Ñ/¥t change the fact that you,Äö/Ñ/¥re (still) grasping at straws and looking into this a bit (way) too deep. And to add; your tirade about anger doesn't support your claims, it only further proves you have an emotinal intrest that might be stemming from a very personal place which is, and probably always will, skew your own views on what sexism is.



HimawariChibi
on **July 24, 2012 at 10:16 pm** said:

Sorry, one more thing—denying objectivity because emotions are involved is a ridiculous and silencing tactic. People are quite capable of being furious and rational at the same time, although the prevailing rhetoric dislikes that, since the status quo is best defended by telling people to mistrust their own reactions and emotions. Thanks again.



HimawariChibi
on **July 24, 2012 at 10:13 pm** said:

Thank you VERY MUCH for writing this. When I read about the game mechanics, I tweeted about this extensively, not only to the creator, but to other so-called "feminist" or progressive people and got either completely ignored, or a big stream of talk that failed to address the misogyny in the game, but instead attempted to defend it. I feel like a lot of people will only call out something if enough people have gotten on board, and it has little to do with actual sexism but what is "safe" to join in. It's infuriating thinking that you're pretty much voiceless and alone unless a big enough bandwagon forms. So, thanks for having the guts to call something out that a lot of other people who are in the indie dev circle feel they need to defend and ignore and talk circles around.



Anonymous

on **July 21, 2012 at 10:08 pm** said:

I think you're right that the damsel is sexualized and, indeed, the representation in Spelunky is retrograde in some ways.

However, this may be a case of confusing a lack of progressive representation with sexist representation. It's not inherently problematic to have gender disparity in media, or to tie unfavorable or uncomfortable depictions to characters of specific genders or sexuality.

Spelunky is not progressive, but its not necessarily offensive.



anon

on **July 21, 2012 at 9:24 pm** said:

Just thought I'd point out that the "One female character in the roster" caption in the article is only true when you first start playing. Spelunky starts with four characters unlocked at the start (three of which are male) but you can find another four more playable characters in hidden coffins throughout the game, including two women.



Michael Weir

on **July 20, 2012 at 11:27 pm** said:

I guess I just understand your cause without any context. Why are you such a fervent champion for anti-sexism to the point where Spelunky is this offensive to you? Where does it come from?

I'm not sexist (Okay, I'm a dude, I'm probably a little bit sexist – I don't pretend to be perfect) – I treat women with dignity and respect, but I didn't even take note of any of these things about spelunky until I read your blog.



Anjin Anhut

on **July 21, 2012 at 3:17 am** said:

Hey, Michael.

Let me straight go to your last sentence in your question:

I treat women with dignity and respect, but I didn't even take note of any of these things about spelunky until I read your blog.

The sexism in Spelunky is very very normal, ,Äö/Ñ-ðso normal in fact, that accusations of sexism in relation to Spelunky appear to be totally off the mark. I would argue, that the mark itself is off. A couple of years back, I presume I would have had the same reactions like you did. I would have been offended by the implicit accusation, that I'm complicit in sexism by liking a certain game (or other media product). So, what changed? My profession led me to educated myself on societal paradigms (stereotypes, gender roles, all sorts of -isms) and how they relate with popculture media and advertising.

I come from a graphic design background as a freelancer for the advertisement and entertainment industry. For this I had to learn to create messages to pander to certain target audiences, had to learn what resonates with certain demographics and how to psychologically manipulate groups of people into buying consumer products. Many advertising agencies and media publishers are fully aware of how they systematically play stereotypes, prejudices, societal pressure, peer pressure, discrimination and other psychological levers to push people into the desired behavior (buying shit, of course). They do it because it has proven to be suuuper effective. I know it, because I've done it myself, got applause and a big paycheck.

For example, this is how sexism works for agencies and publishers:

1. Make the men feel entitled ,Äö/Ñ/' to sell them rewards (after work beer, grateful hot wife, quick sex), to demand from them to measure up to their entitlement (perform! compete! be the best!) and to sell them protection for their entitlement (a place where men can be men again).
2. Make women feel weak and useless ,Äö/Ñ/' so you can push them to compensate by being attractive (beauty products, died food, clothing), by being nice and helpful (housekeeping, taking care of the kids, opening the bottle of beer for husband or always being available for sex)...and ironically, you can then also sell the products to deal with the frustration this negative images gives them (a place where women can be women again).

You can't imagine how fucking confused and baffled I was after my work led me to admit that I myself am sexist as hell. I discovered that my favorite movies and games and comics and artists,Äö/Ñ-ð my own fucking work... are all packed with sexism. (I still enjoy them for all the great qualities they have, though the sexism is bothering to me). It is everywhere,

constantly, but it is so deeply rooted in our ideas about gender roles, it is so normal, that it is very hard to recognize it as a problem. It's not a big evil conspiracy or something, it's cultural, a self-fulfilling prophecy of memes that confirm themselves. It's normal. And this cannot stand.

My sense for fairness compels me to (amongst other things) viciously reject how current widely accepted gender roles put people into separate boxes and deals one box a big load of entitlement and privileges while the other boxes (I'm purposely including LGBTB people here as well) have to scrape for what is left. To put it bluntly: Fuck the system! My idealism in regards to games makes me believe that games have the potential to be the medium in which the paradigms finally will dissolve.

That's why I use the public platform I have here to point to the problem, discuss it, educate about it and hopefully get people to at least recognize, that the standard they take for granted does not work for everyone. That's why I founded my own game company to do things differently. That's why I went into teaching.

Aaand that's also why I really appreciate you taking the time to engage the debate here. The fact, that you returned to read this article here and started a conversation, after being so put off by my previous article speaks for you. And "I didn't even take note of any of these things about spelunky until I read your blog" even though we have yet to reach a consensus, it's something I consider a success. Thanks.

Cheers.



Scott Lewis

on **July 20, 2012 at 4:22 pm** said:

I honestly still don't see what you're upset about. If you were only talking about the PC game where you could only play as a male protagonist and there was only the female damsel, I would concede that the game could be considered sexist. But you can play as a female protagonist and you can rescue male damsels. There is no difference between the male/female protagonists and there is no difference between the male/female damsels. The protagonists look equally capable and the damsels look and behave equally helplessly. I don't think that the male damsel looks homosexual any more than the female one does, since they will both kiss people of the same sex.

I understand that this representation makes you upset, but I don't think you've explained to me so I understand. Honestly, if I can't understand why you're upset, I don't think anything should change.



Ben

on **July 20, 2012 at 3:46 pm** said:

Tycho said it best :

"I don't understand what it is about the idea of a medium that people find so confusing; it's a conceptual space where works that share certain characteristics may occur. Nobody is going to approve of the entire continuum. There's no shortage of games for the broadest possible audience – there isn't, and grotesque sums are being made seeking the wide part of the curve. There are also niches, as in any ecology. You can certainly find things you don't like, but those things aren't anti-matter; when they come into contact with things you do like, there is no hot flash which obliterates both. This totalizing dialogue, where everything, and everyone, is this or that, and here are the teams, and morality is a linear abstraction as opposed to its three dimensional reality is a crock of fucking shit.

The swooning and fainting and so forth about this stuff, the fever, is comical in its preening intensity. There is clearly some kind of competition to determine who is the most scandalized. It reminds me of church, frankly; I don't do church, either. I have no common cause with perpetually shocked viziers of moral pageantry. Indeed, I think it is fair to say that I am their enemy.

The answer is always more art; the corollary to that is the answer is never less art. If you start to think that less art is the answer, start over. That's not the side you want to be on. The problem isn't that people create or enjoy offensive work. The problem is that so many people believe that culture is something other people create, the sole domain of some anonymized other, so they never put their hat in the ring. That even with a computer in your pocket connected to an instantaneous global network, no-one can hear you. When you believe that, really believe it, the devil dances in hell."



Netter, bößliger Herr

on **July 20, 2012 at 1:46 pm** said:

"We are not past that sexist ideas yet, they are still mainstream. It is waaaaayyy too early to attempt at scoring funny points with a throwback to those ideas."

With all due respect. This is where your analysis goes dead wrong. Yes, sexism in modern society in general – and in video games specifically – is a serious topic we are nowhere near past yet. But if we can't see a "damsel in distress" as what it is, namely a tongue-in-cheek parody of a long past perception of women (quite frankly a perception that has never been meant to be taken seriously), I wonder in which century we live.



Marcel Jackwerth

on **July 20, 2012 at 11:21 am** said:

The problem with discussions on all polarizing, cultural issues is this: Once you start a discussion by emotional motives an objective and fruitful discussion becomes difficult. Compare "The unseen sexism in Spelunky (a scientific analysis)" versus "It's not okay, Spelunky!". Just by the headline you can expect the articles to have a completely different tone.

Also "It's not okay, Spelunky!" (which is similar to "I'm upset") will urge commenters to calm you down. But the only way to calm somebody down is to agree ("Yes, I see what you mean.") with him/her and maybe start a thorough discussion afterwards ("Is this game really that bad?"). This is close to impossible through blog comments.

I for myself learnt: each time you begin an article, you should decide if you want to do an pro/contra analysis of an issue or if you want to write an opinion (which will often require somebody to contradict and a moderator to make it an interesting and constructive read). It really will shape the type of feedback you get.



Anjin Anhut

on **July 20, 2012 at 11:34 am** said:

@marcel Abso-effing-lutely. I totally primed the way people read and discuss my article in a way that is focussed on personal approval/dissapproval or anger, by using the headline "It's Not Okay, Spelunky!". A mistake on my part. I had to do a lot of cleaning up afterwards, working to get the debates back on more or less objective tracks.



Ben

on **July 20, 2012 at 8:51 am** said:

Good points here. I had similar observations in my recent discussions (twitter/blog comments). People don't make the difference between "this is sexist" and "this offends me" (or, more sophisticated version "I can see how someone somewhere may find this offending, but, Äö/Ñ-ð video gaemz"). Sexism is seen as something related to feelings. If it doesn't hurt someone intentionally, it isn't sexism. Everything else is just your opinion, your anger, your feelings, Äö/Ñ-ð you can't argue with feelings. Let's agree to disagree. End of discussion. I even had women shouting at me, I should stop telling them how they should feel. For simply pointing out that super mario contains of sexist stereotypes. I thought I'd used objective criteria. I was wrong, apparently.

A lot of people ignore the definitions and the scientific research that sees sexism as a structural problem, deeply rooted in our society and culture. If they can't see it, it's not there. It's your over-interpretation. Women have equal rights, so everything is fine. Leave video gaemz alone! Maybe they're afraid of change, a world where less than 90% of video games have male leads. Maybe they lack the knowledge to argue against structural sexism (your best bet, imo) or it's simply anger 'cause you seem to hate, what they love.

Same for mixing up "this game contains sexist tropes" and "this video game is bad, it's wrong to enjoy it". Pointing out problems doesn't make the whole thing awful. I enjoy the f* out of the "24" TV-series, but hell, it's post-9/11 war propaganda. Torture for freedom! *urghs* I wouldn't think of defending it's narrative (or it's female characters, caring mother vs man eater.) Still, awesome show.

PS: Damn, my english is rusty.



Jackson

on **July 20, 2012 at 6:55 am** said:

Great article, makes "sexism" debates a little clearer as to why they fail so much.

I played the PC Spelunky for the first time last summer and came to the same conclusion as you. TBH I find it hard to

believe that people can defend a game system that actively promotes hurting and throwing around a helpless woman in a cocktail dress (who also happens to be the only woman in the game).

I'm glad Derek at least added more characters to the game, but he's seriously gotta grow as a character designer past stereotyping.