What Happened to Anita Sarkeesian Proves How Much We Need Feminism in Tech

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"The comments on any article about feminism justify feminism." So says the Internet meme Lewis's Law, and that goes double for any article about a predominantly male-dominated industry, whether it's science, tech, or gaming.

Read any story about feminism, and inevitably the comments will be filled with misogynistic trolling from a men's rights activism (MRA) perspective ("Not all men!") and/or threats of violence or rape against the author. It's so common that I'm not even surprised anymore, and that's sad.

Back in 2012, Anita Sarkeesian created a Kickstarter campaign, "Tropes Vs. Women in Video Games," to study and explore common tropes that surround female characters in video games under her YouTube channel Feminist Frequency.

Tropes are the patterns used in storytelling in creating stories. It's a convention, whether it's a narrative structure such as the hero's journey, or a

character type such as the fat slob. In this case, they're the recurring stereotypes seen in female characters.

She raised nearly $160,000 — well over her initial goal of $6,000 — and immediately received misogynistic backlash from the gaming community. She was sent images of her being raped by video game characters, and a game that encouraged beating her up was even created. Sarkeesian ended up disabling the YouTube channel comments, but stays vocal in other social media areas.

The situation escalated massively on August 26, 2014, when Sarkeesian — just hours after releasing the latest video in the series, "**Women as Background Decoration: Part 2**" — received a series of graphic tweets against her and her family that made her leave her home and contact the police. Out of respect for Ms. Sarkeesian, we won't be printing them here.

As a gamer and a feminist, I've been following stories like Sarkeesian's with trepidation. Unfortunately, these types of stories are not new.

The Mary Sue wrote an **article** in 2012 about the harassment of women online, especially in the gamer world, and how this has been an ongoing issue. In January, Pacific Standard detailed a **list** of ways female journalists have been harassed online, with many of the reactions landing in the "blame the victim" response. In fact, by writing this article, I know I am potentially exposing myself to much of the same kind of harassment, which — unfortunately — is not a new thing for me.

Video games are still a relatively new medium, and as such are still going through growing pains in defining themselves and figuring out a way to accurately represent characters, whether they're women, people of color, or LGBT characters/story arcs.

But it's not an easy battle: the company Ubisoft actually argued earlier this year the lack of a female protagonist in the latest Assassin's Creed game was

because women were **too hard to animate**. (Seriously?)

These days, with adult women now **the largest demographic in gaming**, female representation can no longer be something to acknowledge only if you have the time. Representation matters, whether it's on television, in books, or in video games. Sarkeesian's series seeks to show how women are typically portrayed in gaming, and the sad truth is, it's often closer to porn than real life.

Her intention is to start a dialogue about how women are treated in the storytelling style of gaming. Alas, the response has only proved how badly we need feminism not just in tech, but in all of society.

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