



Photo anita sarkeesian smiling  
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# Why do male gamers hate Anita Sarkeesian?

Anita Sarkeesian is a clever, good-looking, young woman who, in her own words “ accidentally became the villain of a massively on-line game in real life.”

She is a feminist media and popular culture critic and blogger. Anita, for the past few years has been the author of a video blog called Feminist Frequency and an on-line video series called Tropes Vs. Women. She looks at the way women are portrayed in popular culture and the media and she provides the tools and language that would allow people to talk about sexism and issues of gender by using accessible language from popular culture such as tv shows, films, comic books and video games.

Video games, in Sarkeesian's view, are the fastest growing form of mass media today. She soon became aware of its enormous potential to benefit for instance abilities in respect of problem solving, team building, creative thinking, multi-tasking and building cognitive abilities. She also recognised that the gaming industry is promoting the most sexually objectified and offensive stereotypes and oppressive portrayals of women.

Having realised this, she launched a fundraising campaign on the crowd funding website, Kick-starter. She proposed to create a series of videos that would look at how women are represented in video games. Specifically, she wanted to highlight the problem of on-line harassment that many women are subjected to. The idea behind Kick-start was that if someone was interested in having such a project developed, they could donate, and if

they were not interested, they could choose not to donate to that project.

This attracted a lot of attention, including a lot of negative attention and sexist backlash and an on-line hate campaign against her specifically from male gamers. Her social media sites were flooded with threats of rape, violence, sexual assault, even death. The Wikipedia article about her was vandalised with sexism, racism and pornographic images. Gamers and hackers tried to knock her website offline, they hacked into her email and other accounts and tried to collect and distribute her personal information including her home address and phone number.

There were pornographic images made in her likeness being raped by video game characters and sent to her repeatedly. More disturbingly perhaps is that the perpetrators openly referred to this harassment and hate campaigns and their abuse as a “Game”. There was even a multi-player on-line game in which players were encouraged “to beat the bitch (Sarkeesian) up.”

Anita thinks that her tormentors were actually trying to maintain the status quo of video games as a male dominated space and all of the privileges and entitlements that come with an unquestioned “boys club.” We say “boys” even though in reality most of Anita's harassers are/ were adult men who spread their misogyny from unidentified message boards and forums.

Anita describes what has happened to her as a “cyber mob.” The main objective of

this mob is/was to discredit and silence Sarkeesian and women like her and to maintain video games as a male-dominated space, ultimately to maintain and “normalise” a culture of sexism. In this culture, men, who harass Sarkeesian specifically and women in general, are supported by their peers and rewarded for their sexist attitudes and behaviour. In this manner, women would be silenced, marginalised and excluded from participation.

Fortunately, this has not silenced Anita. If anything, it strengthened her resolve and boosted support for her project. So many outraged people contributed to the kick-start project that she raised 25 times what she initially has asked for. Now, instead of producing five initially- intended Tropes Vs Women video games, she was able to produce thirteen games and a free classroom curriculum for educators and Feminist Frequency became a fulltime project. She is now considered an international expert on games shows. For the future, Anita sees a global cultural shift in attitudes of gamers and game developers who are fed-up with the way in which women are treated and portrayed in video games. These changes are slow and tentative, but they are coming.

By demonstrating true grit and resilience, Anita Sarkeesian has become the hero in a story where the female protagonist, not only conquers the forces of evil, she shows that the forces of good can and will prevail!

By Laura Sasman