



culture, debate, feminism [<http://howtonotsuckatgamedesign.com/?p=8963>] , March 11, 2013

[<http://howtonotsuckatgamedesign.com/?p=8963>] by Anjin Anhut.

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

A Revisit And Correction // regarding: A Serious Question For Anita Sarkeesian

This article was originally published on monday, march 11th. Since then I had a couple of very productive debates regarding this article, which kinda forced me to do some self-examination and revisit the article. ...and correct myself on a couple of things.

Here we go:

Okay, so the premise of my article was basically this:

- 1: Anita Sarkeesian published the first video of her Tropes Vs. Women series, in which she examines tropes in video games concerning women and the way they are used.
- 2: She points to tropes and the way they are used as contributing factors to sexist ideas in the gaming community, culture and society at large. And she advocates for not using the tropes, at least not as much as it currently is done.
- 3: I kinda got stuck on the point, that I consider those tropes – like the damsel in distress for example – to be valid story telling tools. I think that they have a strong appeal to certain audiences and that it is okay to enjoy them. But this is something I did not see mentioned strong enough in her videos.

So what did I do with that premise? I wrote a public letter addressed to her, where I basically called her out for sending “dangerous” and “harmful” messages in the subtext of her videos, when she focusses only on how bad and sexist the tropes are, while underplaying their narrative value.

And with “dangerous” and “harmful” I was referring to some sort censorship idea, as if those tropes are in danger of becoming a taboo and therefore becoming basically unavailable as storytelling tools for those who want to use them and the players who want to enjoy them.

Interestingly, I basically knew all along that those tropes weren't in danger. Like at all. But I still got riled up enough to write this very very confrontational letter, in defense of my precious male centered tropes.

And then conversations started.

Some of my readers were outright angry with me. I understand how the confrontational tone of the article might have read, like I'm attacking Sarkeesian for a lot of stuff she didn't say. But in fact these kind of attacks are not in the article (which is below this correction for reference). I made sure to not be presumptious about what she said or meant, but to focus my questions on how things could be interpreted by a portion of her viewers. So I was accused of putting words in her mouth, while with this very accusation people were putting words into mine. Funny how that goes.

Anyway... I had a lot of very very helpful responses. Helpful in the sense, that they were written in a thoughtful manner, directly challenged what I wrote, not attacked my person or motives and actually made me rethink a lot of what I wrote. Or maybe think through for the first time?

As much as I still think Sarkeesian could be more ...uhm... appreciative of the narrative value the tropes in question have, I really don't think she should.

When it comes to gaming culture, male

centered tropes are really in no need of protection or explicit appreciation. And they won't be for the foreseeable future. Damsels won't go away any time soon.

But alternatives to them and awareness for their negative impact on women and games is very much something that needs to be appreciated and worked on.

This I knew already. Many of my articles on sexism in games stand on that basic premise. Still, I kinda got whipped up about what Sarkeesian was doing. Kinda irrational.

So I'd like to apologize to all the readers, whose time I wasted. It happens. And I like to extend a big thanks to all readers who earnestly engaged me on this thing. You certainly have not wasted my time.

Below is the original article for reference:

After me sharing Anita Sarkeesian's first video and me being someone speaking up about sexism issues in gaming, I had a few conversations about the issues of sexist content in games and Sarkeesian's work and I was viewed as someone who approves of her in a way that did not make me comfortable. Something that happens in comments under my articles as well. So I think it is time for some clarifications. From me and from her.

Here is an open letter to Anita Sarkeesian:

EDIT: With the article being up just a bit over an hour, I already had quite a few interesting conversations about the article and will amend a few things tomorrow to reflect that. A few things I need to clarify myself and maybe correct one or two things. Please keep adding comments, it was very helpful so far. Thanks.

Hey Anita...

It would be great, if you could clarify something for me and your considerably large viewing audience. Actually, I think it's quite important that you do.

Your videos are something everyone should see. You have a great way of treating content, collecting data and presenting it in an easy to grasp fashion. I think what you do enhances media literacy, which is a big important thing and one of my driving forces. I would love to just share your videos around and say "THIS!".

But I can't. Because what you actually advocate with your videos – explicitly and in subtext – is in my opinion harmful to progressive ideology, art and harmful to feminism... I realize that my understanding of what you advocate is just the way I read your videos and this might not be congruent with your intent. Still, it needs to be addressed, intentional harm or not.

What is my beef? In most of your videos you examine tropes, patterns of reoccurring similar depictions of women in pop culture media. You point to their characteristics, anecdotally point to where they can be found, sometimes show alternatives and explain the subtext or even explicit messaging of those tropes. So far so good.

But then you move on and condemn the use of the trope. You point to the trope itself as the source of a societal problem and leave it at that. And that is not okay. Not at all.

By saying "these tropes promote objectification", you are directly linking the existence of those tropes with real life oppression of women. And then your video is over. The only thing left – after you ripped a trope to shreds – as a possible remedy is getting rid of the trope, stop using it. Is this really the line of argument you want to make? There is media content that promotes unhealthy behavior and now let's get rid of it? Do you really want to use your significant media power for that kind of argument?

There are games, which promote gun use. Games promote violence. Games promote eating fast food. Games promote reckless driving. Games promote stealing. Games promote vandalism. Should all tropes in those cases be removed as well? If not, what makes sexism related societal problems "promoted in video games" so special, that they should get a special taboo-in-art treatment?

I apologize if I missed something here, but I watched all your vids and was actively looking for a clarification here. I was actively looking for you to explain what we should do about the problematic tropes. And all I found was various flavors of disapproval for those tropes and an explicit link to societal ills. Are you really arguing for making certain types of images and messages a taboo? Do you really think removing those images and messages is a proper remedy for the related problems?

Again, I understand that this is just how I read your videos and I'm not asserting any motives on your end. But I don't think that my reading is an unreasonable one and you may want to do something to clear things up. You of all people should have an interest in getting your subtext straight, since that is exactly what you call the media industry to do in regards to sexism.

As a critic, I struggle to make a case against sexism without making a case against artistic freedom and sexual liberty myself. Sometimes I fail. But I try and I hope I improve over time. It is important to me that I clearly state in my articles, that the creation and consumption of sexist content itself is not the problem.

Imbalance, lack of media literacy and systemic sexism are the problem. They result in sexism to be viewed as a default, which makes sexism in media hard to spot, which demonizes critics of sexist content, which downplays the negative effects or even the existence of sexism and which leaves little room for alternative concepts and excludes people. The problem is not tropes promoting unhealthy ideas. It's the unhealthy ideas themselves. It is that designers and audiences need to recognize the promoted ideas as unhealthy and then deal with the ideas accordingly.

It is my goal to give everyone access to a medium, which currently is dominated by a certain demographic. I want new ideas, concepts, people, fans and makers to join in on culture and make it bigger for everyone. To me then going out and saying "You like submissive sexy objectified girls in your game? Get out!" would be incredibly hypocritical. If I want a space for everyone to explore and express their interest, I cannot be picky about what interests I deem legit.

EDIT: This sentence originally stood here in big fat letters: "Simply put: You cannot fight marginalization by marginalizing the currently privileged party." This sentence totally backfired by making it appear that I was somehow worrying about the privileged status of men in games culture. Which would be silly. But looking at it now I don't know how you could read it differently and I actually struggle to find a way to say what I actually want to say. Kinda fucked this up. Maybe I get back to it later.

We cannot take part in creating a precedent for the suppression of ideas and expression because we disapprove of them. But that is what your videos are saying. "This trope hurts women... so stop it."

Is this what you are advocating for? Marginalizing players for liking easy girls in their games as much as blowing heads off? Marginalizing designers for indulging male-centered power fantasies? Are the tropes themselves really the problem for you? You damn well make it appear so. You realize what the title of many of your previous and upcoming videos implies, right? Tropes versus women?

If you are advocating for limiting the use of the tropes instead of expanding the media savviness of audiences, we are in severe odds with each other and I can no longer support you. Because then you advocate for people to become dumber instead of making them smarter. I'm not naive, I understand that media influences how societies tick. Things that are represented as norms and values in pop culture media easily do their part in shaping the norms and values of the people who consume them. Helping people to understand the trope and the harmful ideas behind them (what you do quite well imho) does make people more capable in general to deal with unhealthy ideas. Kudos for that. But taking the trope away does not make anyone more equipped to do anything.

I really hope I'm making things out to be bigger than they actually are. But even if you don't intend to basically promote censorship here, I have trouble supporting you as long as this dangerous message festers in your subtext without clarification. Why? Because I don't believe in censorship and don't want to promote it... even accidentally. Actually, I will look at my previous articles on that subject and see where I feel they need to be amended to avoid having this damaging subtext in my work.

So what do you want? Is it really "Tropes Versus Women" or "Lack-of-Understanding-of-Tropes Versus Women"? or "The-Lack-of-Female-Friendly-Tropes Versus Women"?

A quick written disclaimer at the beginning of a video would be enough. Or an acknowledgement, that everyone has the right to enjoy the very tropes you are dissecting, without being viewed as an asshole. Or making a explicit appeal to designers to consider female friendly tropes, instead of guilting them into it?

I know it's busywork, an act of courtesy maybe and often feels like a formality. But this stuff matters.

Thanks for the attention.

Cheers.

21 THOUGHTS ON "A REVISIT AND CORRECTION // REGARDING A SERIOUS QUESTION FOR ANITA SARKEESIAN"



Kia

on **May 8, 2013 at 8:50 am** said:

I don't actually see any problem with the original article. Your point boiled down to "I love what you have to say about the tropes but I would like it if you proposed a solution other than a maybe-implied just-get-rid-of-it". And it's a good message. I have observed watching her videos that very few include anything other than straight criticism, lacking the "constructive" element that I would love to see from her.

While she does a good job pointing out problems, it'd be great if she would just tack on a little "and here's some things that can make them less awful" (ie giving power to damsels in distress who can help in their own release, not making the damsel a prize, etc) instead of just pointing out a bunch of different instances of the problematic behavior.

While some of the bold sections weren't so great, as you said, the original was a good article.

(And whoever keeps critiquing your grammar/spelling in so many of your articles... you are a) not a native speaker of English, and b) when you critique someone's grammar/spelling in an argument, unless that is what the argument is about or it is causing honest confusion, you lose the debate, so that guy can hush.)



Jana Reinhardt

on **March 18, 2013 at 1:15 pm** said:

Strange to read such an article by you. Weren't you the one who argued about the damsels in Spelunky, although they are just cartoonish characters? But it's cool to have two different viewpoints from the same person. Regarding the narrative value of tropes or clichés, I think it's always a difference if you are a consumer searching for a character to identify yourself with (like Anita) or a developer in the need of stereotypes to communicate simple ideas.



admin

on **March 18, 2013 at 3:34 pm** said:

Yeah, I know. I try to have nuanced opinions about things, which sometimes causes me to write stuff, that I don't feel so sure about later. Weird.



Philipp

on **March 12, 2013 at 11:36 am** said:

This is complicated. I love what you wrote there. But!

It's too long. Why can't you make your point within 500 words?

It's an open letter. Why? With all due respect: Is she even gonna read this?

Why didn't you chose to send her a personal message first? Tell her about your problem. Ask kindly for a reply within a few days time. Tell her that you will publish that on your blog.

I don't see me writing to President Obama in an open letter published in the Kreiszeitung Syke.

Your open letter isn't a letter to her but to the people who read your blog. So you could've told them directly.



SwadianKnight

on **March 11, 2013 at 8:09 pm** said:

Before I start, I'd like to point out that she did say, right at the beginning of the video, that the viewer should remember that it is "both possible (and even necessary) to simultaneously enjoy media while also being critical of it's more problematic or pernicious aspects".

Now to address the specific points you seem to be making:

1. You argue that the use of sexist tropes in media is not a problem in itself, but merely a result of institutional sexism. While it's incontrovertible that their abundance is symptomatic of larger social issues, these tropes also reinforce the often exclusionary quality of the gaming industry, actively working to prevent the diversification of the community.

2. You argue that the promotion of sexism in games is being given special treatment in her video, rather than the

promotion of violence, crime or other attitudes. To me, criticizing her video for what it's not seems to be a rather disingenuous attitude. One simply cannot approach an entire form of media from a generalist perspective, and it's wise to pick your battles so as not to be superficial – in Sarkeesian's case, the perspective chosen is feminism.

3. You argue that criticizing the use of these tropes is an argument against artistic freedom. This is simply not the case. Criticizing a form of media for being problematic is not a move to shut it down; it is the establishment of a dialogue about ways in which it could have been better or more creative. The video itself mentions that episode three will be about positive examples and creative ways to subvert sexist usage of this trope, so I don't know where you got the idea that she was calling for censorship.

As a final note, I feel like I need to point out how privileged the subtext of your article seems. You seem more worried about the people who enjoy or employ these sexist tropes not feeling guilty than about the people who are marginalized by them.



admin
on **March 11, 2013 at 8:53 pm** said:

Hey there.. thanks for chiming in.

It is really helpful that you repeated in your own words, what you understood from my article before addressing it. Because I see there seems to be a lot lost in translation here and I can revisit my article to see where stuff was lost.

1. You argue that the use of sexist tropes in media is not a problem in itself, but merely a result of institutional sexism.

No, i don't. I argue that the trope itself is not the problem. The USE OF sexist tropes is very much the problem. I would even label it overuse and abuse. The rest of number one, we are in violent agreement.

2. You argue that the promotion of sexism in games is being given special treatment in her video

No, I don't. I ask, if(!) she considers the remedy for sexism to be the suppression of sexism promoting tropes, what makes violence promoting tropes or theft promoting tropes in games different in her opinion or does she advocate the suppression of violence promoting tropes as well. The rest of number two, we are also in violent agreement.

3. You argue that criticizing the use of these tropes is an argument against artistic freedom.

Again, I don't. I argue that criticizing the trope itself is against artistic freedom, since if(!) that would be what she is doing, she would argue for a tool to be removed from the box.

As a final note, I feel like I need to point out how privileged the subtext of your article seems. You seem more worried about the people who enjoy or employ these sexist tropes not feeling guilty than about the people who are marginalized by them.

Well, I recommend checking all articles of the about sexism tag. You will see that this one article where I am concerned about potentially dangerous messaging for feminism is just one so far, with quite a few arguing for feminist positions. I hope, even though I am a white male ablebodied hetero guy and have that admittedly limited perspective, I'm allowed to have a nuanced opinion about things. Thanks.

Cheers.



SwadianKnight
on **March 11, 2013 at 10:35 pm** said:

I don't see where you were trying to go with that, then. Did you really suspect she was suggesting an abolition of the trope itself? Because that notion seems too absurd to entertain. For one thing, tropes are more about classification than anything else, and the series uses them to catalog media and provide data on the stories it tells, not as a checklist for what kinds of plot devices writers are 'allowed' to use. Sarkeesian even explicitly says in the video that episode three will be focused on examples and methods of subversion of this trope rather than its outright exclusion, which I at least feel to be the best approach in this scenario. Your problem seems to be more with the project's title than its content.

As for that last note, I really hope I didn't come across as dismissive of your opinion, but this was a confusing piece to read with some downright problematic paragraphs, that last bold one in particular (especially since it was also a complaint she directly addressed at the very start).



admin
on **March 11, 2013 at 10:54 pm** said:

I don't see where you were trying to go with that, then. Did you really suspect she was suggesting an abolition of the trope itself? Because that notion seems too absurd to entertain.

Well I don't thinkn it is too absurd to entertain but I also think it is really really unlikely, that she means it that way. But independent from that, I'm not the only person watching those videos. Some will never get the idea that abolition is on the tabel but others will. That is why I explicitly state that it is just a way to read it and that I can be totally wrong in seeing it that way...and that's why I ask for clarification.

I never put her to task for waning to abolish problematic tropes, I'm taking her to task for leaving this as potential subtext in her work, while she could be clearer about that and dismiss the idea herself.

For one thing, tropes are more about classification than anything else, and the series uses them to catalog media and provide data on the stories it tells, not as a checklist for what kinds of plot devices writers are 'allowed' to use.

I understand that. But she does not just catalogue the tropes... she puts value statements on them and labels them harmful.

Sarkeesian even explicitly says in the video that episode three will be focused on examples and methods of subversion of this trope rather than its outright exclusion, which I at least feel to be the best approach in this scenario.

She does? In the end she says "flipping the script on the damsel", which could mean anything: Doing the opposite of problematic tropes, replacing them completely or as you suggest subversion.

As for that last note, I really hope I didn't come across as dismissive of your opinion, but this was a confusing piece to read with some downright problematic paragraphs, that last bold one in particular (especially since it was also a complaint she directly addressed at the very start).

Yeah, she addressed it. She even did that to a degree where I personally would be satisfied with. That's why I think it is so really unlikely, that she calls for abolition.

But my understanding of her videos is not the basis of this article. I point a various ways to read her work, describe why one of those ways would be harmful and counter productive in my opinion, ask her if she associates with that problematic way of reading and if she doesn't I ask for clearer communication on her part to minimize that misreading in future work.

If for you abolition of the sexist tropes is "too absurd to entertain", that is cool. But your understanding –and mine for that matter – are not guaranteed to be shared by every viewer of the clips.

"Hey, Anita, your videos could easily be understood top be a call for the abolition of sexist tropes and for the demonization of people who enjoy them. Is that what you mean? If yes, here is why I think this is problematic. If no, you might wanna be more explicit about that idea and minimize the misunderstanding here. Thanks." – That is all.



SwadianKnight
on **March 12, 2013 at 12:21 am** said:

Okay, now I'm starting to worry that we have not watched the same video. Sarkeesian explicitly states the following:

"Just to be clear, I am not saying that all games using the damsel in distress as a plot device are automatically sexist or have no value. But it's undeniable that popular culture is a powerful influence in our lives and the Damsel in Distress trope as a recurring trend does help to normalize extremely toxic, patronizing and paternalistic attitudes about women."

That is as close to an assessment of value of the trope as she comes in the video. I don't think it's possible to misunderstand this as a call for abolition unless you're actively trying to do so.



admin
on **March 12, 2013 at 9:52 am** said:

Hmmm,...

Yeah, I got pointed to that quote by other readers as well. I already stated that I will amend my article, due to reader feedback. I'm sure this bit will have a heavy influence in kinda rebuilding my argument and probably will severely tame it down.

Thanks for the conversation. I appreciate the result oriented tone.



SwadianKnight
on **March 12, 2013 at 11:48 am** said:

Thank you for listening and responding.



Cal-cla

on **March 11, 2013 at 7:09 pm** said:

Hi there! I'm a big fan of your articles, but also of Anita's work, which is why I found your criticism extremely interesting. First off, we seem to agree that Anita is especially good at illustrating problems and providing examples (as if the Damsel in Distress was short on those). That's something I find incredibly valuable in regard to her broad audience. I'm happy that these comprehensive videos exist in order to explain these problems properly (because I'm frequently having issues putting my thoughts in words, so that might be kinda selfish, too).

I'm also a frequent tvtropes lurker, so I'm more than familiar with not only various tropes, but also the different ways in which they can be used. A pretty fundamental idea about tvtropes, or tropes in general, is that Tropes Are Tools. Inherently, they're neither good nor bad. I personally cannot imagine that Anita doesn't know this or, even worse, disagrees. (An important clue for my thesis is the fact that she directly quotes Tvtropes and is familiar with the site.) However, now that I've read your article, I have to agree with you that she does not explicitly state this aspect about tropes. I have to admit that I personally don't get much out of her videos (apart from some interesting facts), because I'm already past the stage of understanding fundamental sexism in media. (Not to say I'm perfect at using my knowledge – I simply don't need it explained all over again.) Seeing as I missed this pretty important flaw (or rather lack) in her videos, I'm very thankful that you put it into words. I wouldn't go as far as to call it censorship on her part, but I agree with the sentiment that people should be educated rather than tropes destroyed. On top of that, tropes hold tremendous power to be used against sexism – all the possibilities to subvert them! I hope her second part will go into that in some way.

Lastly, I'm interested your plea to not hate everyone who enjoys problematic uses of tropes. Naturally I understand the logic behind it – why should someone keep others from enjoying something for their own purposes and why should we ban certain tropes if we've just established that they're not inherently bad? However, I'm frequently having problems with this. First and foremost I want people to understand why certain things are problematic. Sometimes it's really hard to explain, though, and usually takes more than a quick talk. In the interim I'm just extremely unhappy that they keep consuming sexist stuff even though I know that it doesn't automatically make them horrible people. Any suggestions on that?

Well basically I agree with you, but I don't think Anita is as bad as you think when it comes to tropes.



admin

on **March 11, 2013 at 8:39 pm** said:

Hey Cal-cla...

Thanks for chiming in and I'm happy you get something out of my articles here. :)

A pretty fundamental idea about tvtropes, or tropes in general, is that Tropes Are Tools. Inherently, they're neither good nor bad. I personally cannot imagine that Anita doesn't know this or, even worse, disagrees. (An important clue for my thesis is the fact that she directly quotes Tvtropes and is familiar with the site.)

A friend jsut minutes ago pointed me to the tropes-are-tools-article on tvtropes, which I haven't yet seen. I will definitely incorporate the concept into the coming revised version of this article, since it exactly points to one thing I'm kinda missing in her videos.

However, now that I've read your article, I have to agree with you that she does not explicitly state this aspect about tropes. I have to admit that I personally don't get much out of her videos (apart from some interesting facts), because I'm already past the stage of understanding fundamental sexism in media. (Not to say I'm perfect at using my knowledge – I simply don't need it explained all over again.) Seeing as I missed this pretty important flaw (or rather lack) in her videos, I'm very thankful that you put it into words.

Allright. I'm happy that you see it that way and actually – except from the “asshole”-stuff later – this is one core thing I wanted to bring across.

I wouldn't go as far as to call it censorship on her part, but I agree with the sentiment that people should be educated rather than tropes destroyed.

Nah, I would not do call it censorship again either. It's totalitarian language, doomsday speak and I kinda think now it's not helpful in this case. Will be amended later. Sometimes you need your readers perspective to clearly see what you wrote yourself.

On top of that, tropes hold tremendous power to be used against sexism – all the possibilities to subvert them! I hope her second part will go into that in some way.

Exactly! And this is one aspect why I find it harmful to bash on the tropes themselves without imho being clear that certain usage of the trope is problematic. in an earlier video – about Kanye's Monster clip – I found myself shaking my head a lot because she was either missing or ignoring the satirical subtext and got worked up about the images themselves, without acknowledging that there are various ways to read those images.

This made me give more attention to the way she makes her cases. I still overall enjoy here work, one video I disagreed with wont change that.

Lastly, I'm interested your plea to not hate everyone who enjoys problematic uses of tropes. Naturally I understand the logic

behind it – why should someone keep others from enjoying something for their own purposes and why should we ban certain tropes if we've just established that they're not inherently bad? However, I'm frequently having problems with this. First and foremost I want people to understand why certain things are problematic. Sometimes it's really hard to explain, though, and usually takes more than a quick talk. In the interim I'm just extremely unhappy that they keep consuming sexist stuff even though I know that it doesn't automatically make them horrible people. Any suggestions on that?

Yeah, I understand that. And it's tough. I struggle with that in my articles as well and have to do a lot of clean up work afterwards. Like today. ;)

I think it's the problem does not sit with the tropes or with the signal so to speak. It sits with the way it is received and processed. For comparison, I assume you would not look at GTA games and wonder if the game maybe turn people into horrible car thieves and reckless drivers. Or look at Pokemon and wonder if that makes people enjoy dog fights.

That is because most people agree that those things are wrong to do. And not just on principle, most people think it's so wrong to do, that they refrain from it, are repulsed by it or jump to persecute people who do it. This clear concept of "stealing cars is wrong and a punishable offense" and "letting animals fight each other for sport is wrong and a punishable offense" makes fantasy play with those elements be fantasy play. Same goes for gun violence. In games it's super entertaining, but in real life you wanna be as far away from it as possible.

Unfortunately with issues around sexism, it's not that clear cut at all and that is what makes sexism in media problematic. To use a crass but clear example: Rape. Everyone says rape is wrong, but in practice there is so much shit going, that actually rape is treated like okay in way to many instances by way to many people. And not just fringe people, judges for example who lay the blame for the incident in the way the women was dressed or men not caring for clear consent and just going ahead when the girls is too drunk to say no and then later getting high 5 from some of his friends.

You cannot trivialize or promote chainsaw massacres with Gears of War, beyond chainsaw massacres are beyond that. But you damn well can promote or trivialize rape with the constant conflation of sex and violence and female objectification in games. And you can damn well trivialize and promote domestic violence, when you basically have a whole medium treat women as property.

In my opinion making people recognize why the sexist images are problematic, how they relate to societal problems, how strongly they actually affect women in their day to day is the way to go. They then can enjoy the tropes without becoming horrible people. I for example can get behind a male power fantasy with a hot chick to rescue, it's appealing, but when the disempowerment of the female character gets too insulting or I feel it's just lazy writing, I get repulsed by it. And on the other hand I really really appreciate powerful women protagonists in stories and the positive messages that carries for girls who look at those, because how few and far between good female role models are in media.

I can enjoy sexist tropes in fantasy but hate sexism in reality and the understanding I have about how those two things relate help me make the best of both (i hope).

If I you would just have waved your finger at me a couple of years ago for drooling at sexy female character models, I would just have thought you are wanting to limit me or make me feel bad or you are a kill joy or something like this... and I would have thought your claims about social relevance of sexist media would just be false pretence.

That's why I try to walk the "it's totally okay if those tropes appeals to you" and "realize how the tropes are harming women, when used wrong" tightrope.



Mizahn-X

on **March 11, 2013 at 6:00 pm** said:

Actually there are several issues with the first video on the "Tropes vs. Woman in Games" and in general with all of Anita's 'Tropes' series.

First, the overtone of the talk about Crystal shows it like if Shigeru Miyamoto were some sort of evil chauvinist mastermind, instead of someone that took the decision to stick to a very known character instead of risking introducing a potentially innovating but financially risking new main character in the Star Fox franchise.

Second, in the part that talks about the Nintendo princesses, she fails to take into account that both princesses are, in normal conditions, way more powerful than the protagonists of the series themselves. Zelda can rally the whole armies of Hyrule at a whim, the same is true with Peach and the Mushroom Kingdom. Its only because of a sneaky, deceitful plots of the villains of that series that they are temporarily powerless.

They don't escape for themselves not for lack of ability but because they are way more valuable than any expendable male. Solid Snake has to escape by itself because if he dies, its no big deal, other stealth spec ops will take his place. Mario can die hundreds of times, and so Link, but Zelda or Peach are unique irreplaceable, worth thousands of Marios or Links.

Anita fails to tell the whole trope, that is: A humble peasant (Link's house and attire are humble, compared with Zelda's castle and silky dress, Mario is dressed as a plumber) hears of the sudden kidnapping of a woman way higher than him in social status (a Princess), so, the peasant will risk his life, and get injured, just for the chance of saving her, defeating the evil monster (Bowser, Agahnim, Ganondorf, etc.). The trope is against men too, tells that men are expendable, that men have to risk everything for a woman, etc. But Anita fails to address this point, the existence of the Rescuing Peasant trope as match to the Damsel in Distress.

And last, Anita is strongly sex-negative. For her any way of portraying female sexuality is degrading to women. That is not so evident in the Damsel in Distress video but is a recurrent theme coloring all of her other videos. She is from the Andrea Dworkin school of feminism that teaches that every form of male-female sex interaction is a form of rape. Don't let radical feminism shape the minds of the new generation of game developers. Even if they are so vocal, their

claims have to be scrutinized.



admin
on **March 11, 2013 at 6:21 pm** said:

First, the overtone of the talk about Crystal shows it like if Shigeru Miyamoto were some sort of evil chauvinist mastermind, instead of someone that took the decision to stick to a very known character instead of risking introducing a potentially innovating but financially risking new main character in the Star Fox franchise.

What?!?!?! I mean it would be hypocritical to write an article about possible problematic subtext and then just go on and dismiss your reading of the videos. But how the hell did you get that idea?

Second, in the part that talks about the Nintendo princesses, she fails to take into account that both princesses are, in normal conditions, way more powerful than the protagonists of the series themselves. Zelda can rally the whole armies of Hyrule at a whim, the same is true with Peach and the Mushroom Kingdom. Its only because of a sneaky, deceitful plots of the villains of that series that they are temporarily powerless.

Her core argument is that female characters get disempowered for the sake of the story arc of a male protagonist. Of course they are powerful until they get disempowered by deceitful plots of the villains, so the hero can save them from their temporal powerlessness. I apologize. I know I'm super rude. But think!

They don't escape for themselves not for lack of ability but because they are way more valuable than any expendable male.

Yes, of course they are valuable. They are a prize. Prizes are valuable. You got me spinning on my chair with your ignorance, wow.

Solid Snake has to escape by itself because if he dies, its no big deal, other stealth spec ops will take his place. Mario can die hundreds of times, and so Link, but Zelda or Peach are unique irreplaceable, worth thousands of Marios or Links.

Yes many men will die in pursuit of the treasure. That is the case with every chest of gold, lost ark, holy grail or objectified princess stereotype character. All died, except the hero, who finally gets her. That is no value statement regarding gender... that is objectification at its finest. It's a writing trope that is used to enhance the stakes of the treasure hunt, to make it feel dangerous and futile... so the hero can be the one dude who did not get wasted by the pursuit.

Anita fails to tell the whole trope, that is: A humble peasant (Link's house and attire are humble, compared with Zelda's castle and silky dress, Mario is dressed as a plumber) hears of the sudden kidnapping of a woman way higher than him in social status (a Princess), so, the peasant will risk his life, and get injured, just for the chance of saving her, defeating the evil monster (Bowser, Agahnim, Ganondorf, etc.).

It's not the "whole" trope. It's a different one.

The trope is against men too, tells that men are expendable, that men have to risk everything for a woman, etc. But Anita fails to address this point, the existence of the Rescuing Peasant trope as match to the Damsel in Distress.

No, it's not. It's a trope of empowerment through action. Men are not expendable. Men are people, who despite their low status can elevate to be something similar to a prince when they are brave. While at the same time, no matter what the princess is the prize for the active competent male.

Who told you all this bullshit? In what kind of sad world do you live, where even the most empowering and glorifying tropes make you feel "expendable"... wow, this is fucked up.

And last, Anita is strongly sex-negative. For her any way of portraying female sexuality is degrading to women. That is not so evident in the Damsel in Distress video but is a recurrent theme coloring all of her other videos. She is from the Andrea Dworkin school of feminism that teaches that every form of male-female sex interaction is a form of rape.

You can mind read? Impressive. Sorry I only have ridicule left for you. You are so screwed in your perception of gender in society, you are way beyond my abilities to get you to a clear thinking state. I understand what I write to you is not helpful, but so be it.

Don't let radical feminism shape the minds of the new generation of game developers. Even if they are so vocal, their claims have to be scrutinized.

This is the battle you chose to engage in? Really? That is very sad.

Wow, you blew my mind.



Mizahn-X
on **March 11, 2013 at 7:59 pm** said:

I will try to rescue your valid arguments from the sea of ad hominem attacks that is your answer post.

First, the way in which the Crystal issue is presented makes it like if it were only a decision based on sexism. It has a component of sexism, but the real reason behind that decision is surely to match with the main demographics that were teenage males in the timeframe of release of that Star Fox title.

Second, yes the mechanics of the gameplay made both princesses lacking of agency during the game plot of most of the titles of the series. But game lore-wise, the mission of Mario/Link is not to get the Princess to 'keep' it as some sort of valuable prize, but to set her free. The freedom of the princess is the real prize. Bowser / Ganondorf instead want the princesses as something to keep, as a valuable 'thing' to have. The goal of the game is to restore that agency that they had before the kidnapping. So even when there is objectification in the form of temporary depriving of agency, there is a positive message in the goal of the game.

Third, the idea of the male traditionally viewed as disposable is not mine, is based on research about the history of the roles of males and females in the human species. A man requires minimal effort to reproduction, while a woman requires 9 months of care, so, in the beginning men tended to do the hard and dangerous work because if a man died, any other one could take his place, while if a female died, it represented less production of population for the next generation. That's how the traditional roles for men and women arose, later perpetuated by a ruling class. But this is outside the scope of this post.

Fourth, attacking me personally only shows your lack of ability to reason about concepts too alien to your current mentality. And no matter if I live in a 'sad world' or a 'happy world', the veracity of my statements doesn't depend on it. It's logic. That you have forgotten because of your current emotional state.

And last, feminism as a movement is actually positive, and has a lot of work to do even today. Part of this work is criticizing how media and advertising shape our ways of thinking about gender roles and 'box' us on these roles. But unfortunately, as with any movement, the radicalized, circular-reasoning part of feminism tends to be more vocal than the actual gender equality faction.



Patrick Murphy

on **March 11, 2013 at 5:33 pm** said:

You ask what the difference is between the systematic marginalization and disempowerment of women characters in video games and a video game encouraging the player to eat fast food, and I would posit that one of the main differences is that the latter is a personal decision, whose ramifications would only have an indirect effect on others at best, whereas the former harms the position of a particular cultural minority.

I may be assuming a few things, but I don't know that the final goal of the videos are to offer up solutions to the problems. The series, as far as I can tell, is an examination of video game culture through a specific lens, not necessarily with the goal of looking for solutions in mind. I think Anita provides some groundwork for potential solutions in the video, and I think it's worth waiting for future installments before lobbing that criticism her way, but I do agree that pointing out a problem without offering a solution can be frustrating.

But, she does make mention of the fact that video games do not exist in a vacuum, and says that our world already has deeply sexist attitudes and beliefs, so I do think she realizes that it's not specifically video games that are the problem, but the sexist beliefs of the people developing, writing, and marketing them.



admin

on **March 11, 2013 at 6:05 pm** said:

I actually think the thing with the agency in the fastfood-versus-sexism comparison is a pretty good point. What do you see in terms of wreckless-driving-versus-sexism for example? Because both types of tropes would "promote" unhealthy behavior inflicted on others. It's kinda tricky.

Otherwise I totally agree with your observations here and it might as well be that she is not in the solution-offering business. We don't know.

Though I don't think it is too early to throw that criticism at her. Because criticism for me is about improving things, problem solving and not making people look bad. Nobody gets anything out of pointing at people and criticising them after their done, without giving them the time to maybe correct things. Every video she puts out there with the to me ambivalent subtext is already problematic. The earlier this stuff would get fixed the better.

I'd rather voice my concerns early and maybe see them fixed, then wait until it's over to check if I can finger point or not.



endolex

on **March 11, 2013 at 5:19 pm** said:

In case you are interested in how others view this: I don't read her videos that way at all. I think she makes it very clear that it's about more variety, not about entirely doing away with anything. Right now, those tropes she talks about

are all over the place – so in order to get more variety, we need more games who dare to subvert them. That of course means the “percentage” of games with tropes vs. women played straight will decrease somewhat (even if the amount stays the same in absolute numbers), but I think we don’t need to be afraid of marginalization any time soon. As long as AAA publishers don’t dare to try something different because they think it might hurt their bottom line, things have to get a lot more equal before there might be a need to talk about ‘white male heroes’ as an endangered species. Maybe a good question would be: At how many % of games featuring a white male hero as a protagonist would you start to consider them being ‘marginalized’?



admin
on **March 11, 2013 at 5:52 pm** said:

Hey endolex... thanks for engaging the article.

In case you are interested in how others view this: I don’t read her videos that way at all. I think she makes it very clear that it’s about mote variety, not about entirely doing away with anything.

Awesome. I think you are reading it in a very helpful and progressive way. I can easily read the videos the same way, but I also already have these opinions myself. I’m just worrying about the other way to read it which is in my opinion easy to do as well and I’m not in the business of asserting anyones intentions, so I left it open if she means for these tropes to be a taboo or if it is just an easy way to misread her output.

Right now, those tropes she talks about are all over the place – so in order to get more variety, we need more games who dare to subvert them. That of course means the “percentage” of games with tropes vs. women played straight will decrease somewhat (even if the amount stays the same in absolute numbers), but I think we don’t need to be afraid of marginalization any time soon. As long as AAA publishers don’t dare to try something different because they think it might hurt their bottom line, things have to get a lot more equal before there might be a need to talk about ‘white male heroes’ as an endangered species.

Interesting. This part of your comment is written like it is meant to challenge my article, while actually we both are in severe agreement here. You don’t talk about the tropes themselves here, you talk about quantity, relations. There is a spot in the article where I explicitly make imbalance and systemic sexism out to be the actually problem.

Maybe a good question would be: At how many % of games featuring a white male hero as a protagonist would you start to consider them being ‘marginalized’?

This question is not really for me. Because white hetero male guys like me have so few threats to their privileged status, I really don’t know when any sort of real marginalization could even be on the horizon. I see, I have to revisit that term “marginalization” again... it’s way more heavy than I intended.



endolex
on **March 11, 2013 at 7:31 pm** said:

Hi there again! It’s kind of fascinating to see you editing the text and commenting on earlier versions – like watching a “Making of”, but live. Great experience.

Yes, I guess the notion of a ‘counter-marginalization’ got me kind of riled up. It’s something I hear and read a little too often in “sexism-skeptic” texts and comments, so that probably got me a little jumpy.

Anyway: I believe the problem may not be specific to Anita’s videos. Yes, many people seem to think that any criticism automatically means you should get rid of the thing in question, should stop consuming the article or that someone tries to “censor” it (though it’s always the opposite, I think: Criticism is what makes these things and their issues *visible* to a larger audience in the first place).

At first glance, it does sound like a good idea to me to take the effort and disclaim any meaning of “You’re not allowed to have fun playing these games, you should not buy or support them” – (btw believe Anita said in ‘Damsel in distress pt. 1’ that she enjoyed playing Mario and Zelda very much).

But I’m not sure if this would make the whole effort sound much too tame. Because, well, the same way people who may think now “omg she wants us to give up on these tropes entirely”, could falsely simplify the message as “oh, she say’s it’s kinda wrong, but not that bad? Okay, then...”

I know it can be really, really challenging to explain criticism as something analytical and constructive, something that should be taken seriously but at the same time can by no means be understood as a holy crusade on the whole thing. And I understand your concern quite well. But, like I said, I think Anita is and has been doing alright in that department, and I think it would be nearly impossible to safely explain to “all” the “omg-she-wants-to-take-away-our-fun”- what she actually means to achieve with her videos.