

Women at Warp Episode 68: “Unlikable” Women of Trek

Jarrah: Hi, and welcome to Women at Warp, a Roddenberry Star Trek podcast. Join us, as our crew of four women Star Trek fans boldly go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name is Jarrah, and thanks for tuning in. Today with us we have crew members Sue;

Sue: Hi, everybody.

Jarrah: ...and Grace;

Grace: Hey, everybody.

Jarrah: And we also have a very special guest from one of the other amazing Roddenberry podcasts “Priority One” and that's Kenna.

Kenna: Hello!

Jarrah: Thanks for joining us today. You actually suggested this topic which we're pretty excited about which is that we're going to talk about “unlikable” women in Star Trek.

Grace: Which is a likable topic.

Jarrah: Yeah!

Kenna: [laughs] I hope so.

Jarrah: Yes, and we'll get a little bit more into that, but we have a little bit of housekeeping to do first. So first, our show is supported entirely by our patrons on Patreon. If you'd like to become a patron you can do so for as little as a dollar a month and get awesome rewards from thanks on social media to silly watch-a-long commentaries. We just finished one on “The Naked Now”.

Grace: It is a doozy.

Jarrah: [laughs] Yes.

Sue: That's the TNG one.

Jarrah: We feel strange, but also good.

Sue: Mm-hm!

Jarrah: You can just visit patreon.com/womenatwarp and hop on over there and support our show. Thanks so much. You can also support us by leaving a rating or review on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcast. And that just helps people discover us. So thanks to everyone who's done that so far. And if you haven't, hop on over to where you get your podcasts and tell people what you think. Other housekeeping, Sue, do you want to talk about our plans for Discovery?

Sue: Yes, it's a question that we've been getting a lot obviously is what we're going to do about Discovery. We are not going to be discussing Discovery episodes as they air on the podcast. We're going to wait until all of season one has aired and then we'll do a season overview sort of like we've done with some other series like

DS9. And I think we did one for Voyager, yes? Yes. So that's the plan. So sometime in the spring we'll be doing that season one of Discovery. But Andi will be recapping Discovery episodes on Monday mornings as the shows air. So if you'd like to get those recaps those will be on the Women at Warp blog womenatwarp.com/blog and we're hoping to also review some of the tie-in media such as the books and comics. So that will be on the blog as well.

Jarrah: Awesome. And there's also a couple more conventions left. You wanna talk about those?

Sue: Well, Grace you're heading to Geek Girl Con, right?

Grace: I am. I'm afraid I won't be paneling this year but I will be there to mingle and mix.

Sue: And I will be at New York Comic-Con. I think they're either the same weekend or back to back weekends. I also will not be paneling technically at New York Comic-Con but I will be a Star Wars-ing it up with Saber Guild and Rebel Legion.

Jarrah: Well, watch out for our Twitter during those cons and if you're not there in person you can also follow along with what we're getting up to. So that's great. All right. So let's talk "unlikable" women. So Kenna, can I start with you, about why you suggested this topic?

Kenna: It's an idea that I've been kind of kicking around for a while and it was probably based on, I was listening to old Mission Logs and old Women at Warps talking about Pulaski. It started with Pulaski really, I didn't like her, originally, you know way back when, and it's funny because as an older woman now, I find an appreciation for her and I kind of started thinking about the idea of the fact that you know lots and lots of people don't like her, and actually women of my age now sort of seem to be coming to a consensus that actually she's kind of alright. But me personally, I struggle with this whole requirement, I guess, societal requirement that women are likable. And I especially started thinking about it last year with the presidential election, here in the States, and how much likability is a requirement for women in a lot of different places. And then I started thinking about when do we actually see women who are not likable and like boldly not likable. And we can get a little bit more into the definition of what I mean by that in a bit. But I just I wanted to talk to other women about what that meant to them. And also like, how it affects them in real life and what we'd like to see, you know, going forward.

Jarrah: Yeah, absolutely. I think that when you suggested the topic to us, certainly the first characters that came into my mind as the ones that are commonly labeled unlikable are Pulaski and Keiko and we're going to talk about both of those

Kenna: Yeah.

Jarrah: But yeah and we also talked a bit about this with Janeway too, in terms of that pressure to be likable that, you know, people were worried that if she was, you know, too emotional that she would be perceived as not competent. But...

Kenna: Right

Jarrah: There was a particular concern that if she was too hard or tough that she would be seen as like, basically a bitch.

Grace: Oh, the worst possible thing you can be, as we all well know, as opinionated ladies.

Kenna: Well yeah. But for a leading woman, in a traditionally sort of male lead franchise, that's a totally valid concern that if the men who are watching the show because obviously only men like Star Trek. If they don't like her they won't watch it.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Kenna: Which I think there might be some merit to, you know, because of society. But I also think it's kind of a weak excuse.

Grace: Definitely.

Jarrah: And I mean it can result in characters that are I think like a little bit one sided because you actually came across an interesting BuzzFeed article by Roxane Gay, who's awesome, and it's called "Not Here to Make Friends" and it's about unlikable women in literature. And she says that in many ways likeability is a "very elaborate lie, a performance, a code of conduct dictating the proper way to be. And characters who don't follow this code become unlikable." So basically saying that the problem is critics who are uncomfortable with people who flout societal norms and therefore label those characters unlikable rather than trying to understand them or just view them more neutrally I guess.

Kenna: Yeah, can we talk a little bit about what the actual definition or at least what I consider the definition of unlikable to be, because I started thinking about what qualifies somebody as unlikable versus just like, mean.

Grace: Yeah.

Kenna: Right? And for me what qualifies a female protagonist, I'm talking about protagonists. Obviously if a woman is or the character is meant to be a villain of course you're not meant to like her but that's a different thing. So for me in an unlikable protagonist woman would be somebody who is not a villain. So they are the good guys. And then you'd have to be avoiding the trope that there's a reason that she's unlikable, like you find out halfway through the series that she was abused as a child so that's why she acts like a bitch to everyone. Or she had a really bad relationship so that's why she's mean to men or something like that. Like there has to, it's like a trope that there has to be an excuse for her being gruff and rude and all of that.

And then the other thing is somebody who's being used as part of a redemption arc so they start off unlikable but by the end of whatever arc you're telling, they are cured or they're redeemed and then they're likable by the end, so those three things are not what I'm talking about when I'm saying unlikable, I just mean people who just are, it's just there by virtue of the way they are. People like them. For me Pulaski is an archetype of that because she was kind of gruff. She was kind of rude. She didn't get on that well with the other members of the crew but she was still well-respected and she still had her place and she still, she was a female protagonist that was unlikable. So that's kind of where I'm coming from.

Jarrah: Yeah, like she didn't get any, she didn't really change, she got like slightly nicer toward Data but she didn't really change fundamentally in terms like, you know she did something wrong and needed to be redeemed. And she also didn't have a particular reason for being particularly gruff.

Kenna: Yes, this was the way she was.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Kenna: Somebody actually, Jarrah, you might have mentioned this earlier. Is the critique of being unlikable, is that a gendered critique? Which I think is a really interesting question because I started thinking on the other

side, of men who are unlikable. And would you call them unlikable and because we were talking about Pulanski in a lot of ways she's the mirror image of Bones. They're very similar. They're kind of gruff, kind of grumpy, really technically skilled and an important part of the crew, yet Bones was kind of like, I mean totally beloved and Pulanski was like, everyone hated her, you know? And in that way it's kind of a double standard

Grace: Supposedly there was intent for her to be kind of like a female version of Bones and we really do in a lot of media, but in TV it's very prevalent, we see male characters who are downright nasty to other people, people who are hostile, rude, talk down to other people. I'm think about "House" right now honestly.

Kenna: Yes, "House" is a good example.

Jarrah: Oh yeah.

Grace: A sort of explanation of, "but he's a genius" so really we can't just stand in his way and let him not be a genius. We don't really have a female equivalent of that on TV. We are taught that if a woman is any of those things that is a debilitator for her and that she is flawed beyond our ability to see her as a protagonist.

Sue: Right. I mean we're socialized for women to be demure and soft spoken and follow rules and not talk back and not assert themselves. And I mean that's diminishing but it is still definitely there.

Grace: And beyond that we are given this idea that guys are allowed to be rough, guys are allowed to be rough on the edges, they are allowed to be anti-heroes. Women, if they are flawed are just irredeemable.

Sue: So, I think a lot of the unlikable women that we find in media are women who have traditionally masculine traits. In that sense. But I mean this applies not only to media, Kenna you brought up the recent election. But this is, at least for me, this is in our day to day lives too.

Kenna: I've really struggled with that in the past you know where I've held positions of authority in different companies and it was made very clear by usually a male superior that for whatever reason I needed to be more emotionally compatible with whoever.

Sue: I've generally heard "softer".

Kenna: Yes. Yeah. Or, I need to take people's feelings more into account or, which to be fair, OK that's fine I'm quite happy to do that. But I feel a tremendous amount of pressure to be likable in my position of authority that I have to be friends or get along, very carefully, with the people that I work with. By contrast I've had some really awful male colleagues that don't seem to be under the same pressure. Now, I'm not in the boardroom with them. I'm not in their team meetings or whatever or their performance meetings. So I can't speak to that, but I feel as though there's a lot of pressure on me, as a professional woman, to be presented as a likable person.

Sue: There's a very fine line, it seems, between being assertive and competent and being a bossy bitch, basically.

Jarrah: In all kinds of like, gendered language that we have to describe women, like "ice queen" and "ballbusting" and things like that, that we don't have that same kind of terminology to imply that like, men are too big for their britches and should stick to their knitting and things like that it doesn't look like that happens to that same degree.

Sue: But to return the conversation to Pulaski, we talked about this in our Pulaski episode that one of the major differences between the Pulaski-Data relationship and the Bones-Spock relationship is that Spock could give it back. Right. He was sassy. He understood that Bones was “just picking on him”

Kenna: Right.

Grace: Whereas with Data it was really punching down.

Sue: Right. Pulaski was punching down to Data. Data didn't respond. But also Pulaski wasn't coming from a place of poking fun. She was truly just not getting it.

Kenna: Camaraderie.

Sue: So the intent is a little bit different, and the response was a little bit different. But regardless of that relationship dynamic that the both of them had they're very, very, similar characters, and the other complaints you hear people have about Pulaski you never hear about McCoy.

Jarrah: Yeah, another comment, a couple of commenters on our Facebook page actually also compared Pulaski to Odo which I thought was really interesting and like Anika said that she thought that comparison had gendered nature. Even if you you know take aside the whole McCoy situation that she said Odo's afforded leeway and even respect for things that Pulaski is raked across the coals for and certainly he is way grumpier than Pulaski.

Grace: Oh yeah, definitely. It's like the first word you use to describe him.

Sue: Curmudgeon, for sure.

Jarrah: I named my cat Odo partly just because he looked so grumpy all the time.

Sue: And see? Odo it's endearing. And in Pulaski it's rude.

Kenna: But I think that's part of the gender disparity.

Sue: Oh for sure.

Kenna: Because, you brought up “House” before, who is, I had a bit of a crush on House. He's kind of, he ends up being charming and lovable despite the fact that he's a total jerk, like really really bad, and you really shouldn't see him that way and yet you do. I mean OK there's probably something to do with the writing in there but you know a woman who behaved like that would be written off, whereas he then becomes powerful.

Grace: And the one woman we did on “House” who was like that was literally known as cutthroat bitch. So...

Kenna: Yes.

Grace: Yeah. Let us never forget.

Kenna: Yes.

Jarrah: Yeah, and I mean she also ended up being basically punished.

Grace: Yep.

Jarrah: And that's like, the redemption narrative thing came up a lot in articles about this idea. That, for example Black Widow would be another one that if Black Widow didn't regret killing people

Kenna: Yeah.

Jarrah: Then would we feel the same way about allowing her to be like, on the same team as Captain America?

But Diablo Cody had a good quote saying, "We think of women as a safe haven in some ways. It's something that goes very deep. And then when that warmth isn't there, it's jarring." And she personally thinks that it's not really fair that women need to have a redemption arc to be considered interesting. So I mean I think Ro would be an example of someone that could have been more unlikable if she hadn't had a redemption arc not because she did, that grew on people in addition to great acting and stuff but, so Diablo Cody wrote the movie Young Adult with Charlize Theron and on that one was one where the character was criticized heavily by critics for being totally unlikable. But at the same time, the same year Sideways came out that character is essentially the same like an immature alcoholic who's trying to break up someone else's relationship.

Grace: But he's a guy

Jarrah: But that's like a critical critically acclaimed movie. And like people weren't writing about how unlikable the guy was. So this idea that

Grace: They were, just people weren't listening.

Jarrah: Yeah, like, the woman either needs to be a tragic figure and be punished for her sins or to be redeemed at the end of the thing for us to like, accept the fact that she exhibited these not socially acceptable behaviors. So, how do we think that Keiko fits into this whole thing? Because I think that Pulaski is a clearer example...

Grace: Keiko, Keiko, Keiko.

Sue: Keiko, there are so many different ways that even just our commenters described how they saw Keiko, or how they thought others saw Keiko, but I think the most common was that she was ballbuster. Right?

Grace: Again, the very worst thing to be, apparently.

Jarrah: I've seen a lot about how she was like really like pulling Miles down kind of idea that she would never let him have any fun. She was always trying to make him eat crappy food.

Grace: And that was weird. That was weird.

Jarrah: Why isn't he just cooking his own food? Although I guess he doesn't eat terribly sometimes. But it gets established in our society can't clean the house basically when she doesn't clean when she's not there. There's a lot of like very kind of stereotypical sitcom family stuff that happens with them that I really dislike. But I don't think it's about her necessarily.

Yeah, we had a really interesting article on our blog actually by Michelle who did sort of a linguistics analysis of the dialogue between Miles and Keiko and talked about like who's actually being more aggressive or like conflict oriented and found that it was actually pretty even. But I think there is this perception that like, Keiko is

kind of instigating fights and she's also, I mean, there are times that she's both of them like they aren't very good communicators with each other they don't really say what's wrong when they feel that something's wrong it's like always this kind of weird game. But yeah people see her as like, kind of like shrill and like, "Oh poor Miles to be saddled with her" which is kind of awful.

Grace: Saddled rather than chose as a life partner.

Kenna: But do you think some of that is because your affection for O'Brien is meant to outweigh your affection for her because he's part of the core you know what I mean?

Sue: But he's kind of terrible.

Kenna: So but if you looking at a normal... I mean they could be... Forgive me I don't have an awful lot of experience you know dissecting their relationship but if they're like a normal relationship that can be at times strained. But if you've been conditioned from back in TNG to see O'Brien as a sympathetic character, aren't you predisposed to dislike her?

Jarrah: Yeah I think that that would make sense so that you certainly even though he's not a major character you you know him a lot better than you know her. And you only get to meet her in Data's Day and right away it's conflict between them, so.

Kenna: Because that's why she otherwise if there wasn't going to be any conflict or any point to her being there she probably wouldn't been written into that episode.

Jarrah: Yeah

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Grace: Fair enough.

Sue: We got a comment from Ariel on Keiko and she wrote, "I think there's a lot to unpack with the Keiko hate. I'm in a DS9 group and a lot of guys like to joke about what a ballbuster she is. Sure the writers could have done better but I find her reaction is pretty reasonable. She has to deal with a lot of shit including sacrificing her own career for her husband's and having a husband who would rather play in the holosuite then spend time with his newborn child. I haven't watched TNG so maybe she's terrible on there, but on DS9 she acts like a reasonable person would to unreasonable circumstances."

Grace: Yeah, usually her being kind of nasty is in response to O'Brien being kind of a giant baby.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Kenna: Don't forget, he didn't he like threaten her when he was being taken over by those people?

Jarrah: Yeah, that is a scary moment.

Kenna: That probably is hard to forget as well. [laughs] Poor Keiko.

Jarrah: Yeah, I was saying like, that was a moment that shouldn't have been that easily forgiven and like, forgotten, that you would just think like, "Yeah, sure, he's taken over by an alien but you don't just forget someone threatening you like that who looks like your husband."

Kenna: Not to mention the time that she got turned into an actual child.

Grace: Yeah.

Kenna: So she has had to deal with a lot of crap.

Jarrah: Well and the one where she's possessed by the pah wraith... Yeah, she goes through a lot. And I mean, when Grace and I were talking to Ira Steven Behr at STLV he said like, right out he thinks that they failed Keiko and I wouldn't disagree. Like, I'm not saying that they did the best job.

Grace: We didn't argue with him. We certainly did not.

Jarrah: He said like, they didn't have great ideas and that didn't take the time to really think for any good ideas. After, like that first season. But it's challenging and actually the other thing, I don't know how much this plays in with Keiko, but I just want to raise that reading a lot of the articles about like the idea of unlikable women in literature and stuff that, it was race... Like, by the way almost all the unlikable women we have seen succeed in literature and media especially since then are like white upper middle class straight women so that like all of those things it's like gives you more permission so you have like the more marginalized you are the less permission you have to exhibit these "unlikable traits".

Grace: Because you have to earn your space in the story, you have to earn that by having everyone be comfortable with you there.

Kenna: Yeah, and if you're going to go into it being challenging those societal norms in addition, then...

Grace: Then what's even the point for these poor, poor people who want it to be simple.

Jarrah: Yeah, there's even more of this like, "you need to know your place" if you aren't part of the dominant group.

Grace: Yeah.

Jarrah: So I think like, that has gotten better in media for white straight middle upper class women but still a little behind. But yeah we're going to talk about some examples in a little bit later. But yeah anything else on Keiko? Should we talk about some of the other examples that people raised?

Kenna: Yes.

Jarrah: Sue, do you want to throw out a Facebook comment from someone else?

Sue: Well, I actually was just thinking I'm going to throw you off for a little bit.

Jarrah: Sure.

Sue: I did not put her on the list but I think I only recently discovered that a lot of people found B'Elanna unlikable.

Grace: Oh, yeah.

Sue: I had no idea. No idea.

Kenna: That's funny because I wouldn't have thought that either.

Grace: I know, I've had guys refer to B'Elanna as the Meg Griffin of Voyager and it's like, what?

Kenna: What?

Grace: They both have brown bobs, but they're like, "No, just she can't do anything right and she's whiny." It's like, what are you talking about?

Jarrah: She's always engineering mad cool things.

Grace: Right? I think they just take her as an antagonistic woman who's standoffish, and from that they take whiny.

Jarrah: [skeptical] Mmm.

Kenna: You know it's really funny because she is one of the women in Star Trek that I identify with the most because I went to school for engineering and, you know, it's a very male dominated discipline and I really identified with her. So maybe that's why it's a surprise to me that she's unlikable because I mostly think I'm likable.

Sue: But I wonder with B'Elanna if there's not a degree of racism to it as well.

Grace: Oh, yeah. We can also bring that up with Keiko, definitely.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: I think especially with B'Elanna we have a basically a black woman who is struggling with her anger, her Klingon side all the time. So how many people are looking at her and seeing the stereotype of the angry black woman.

Jarrah: That is an interesting question. I don't know the answer to that, I think that in the show like when they show her father and like, her cousins that they're supposed to be Latinx, Latino. But. And I think that the actress the way that the makeup is done like really lightens her which is a whole other issue. So, I'm not sure...

Sue: They definitely made her half-Klingon in order to soften again the Klingon look.

Jarrah: But yeah I mean it certainly it would be interesting to hear from more people from that, because that's also something I hadn't heard a ton of but I'm not shocked. I mean certainly when we're talking about those types of traits that aren't really considered like feminine and comfortable she has all of those especially going in without a ton of reason talked about as to why she is like that until later on.

Grace: For one thing, she shouldn't need a reason. I mean that's part of what we were talking about earlier the fact that women who are unlikable should be allowed to just you know be as they are rather than having to need some wider reason behind it and part of why I think at least some of us really like B'Elanna is because that's just how she is. That's just how she rolls.

Kenna: It's funny that you say that, because referring back to the BuzzFeed article that we were talking about a few minutes ago there's a comment in there about how Roger Ebert... here's the quote it says, "In his review Roger Ebert lauds young adult screenwriter Diablo Cody for making Mavis an alcoholic because according to

him without such a context Mavis would simply be insane and Ebert and many others require an explanation for Mavis's behavior." And I do think that's true in a lot of cases there has to be a reason. It's not just because that's just the way they are.

Jarrah: Yeah. Anyway, it's a challenging thing to do and the thing is that we're not saying like we should only have characters that are amoral and angry and whatever but that you should have the same range of characters in all genders.

Grace: Absolutely.

Kenna: Well, you can argue that the class of unlikable women is underrepresented in media, TV, and film and possibly even in real life. There are probably other underrepresented minorities who probably need a bit more attention first. But it falls all under the same umbrella that we need more diversity not just racial diversity but diversity of the types of people, types of characters in our media to reflect the sort of broad society that we live in.

Jarrah: Like, if we look at some of the men that are sort of universally disliked or are considered unlikable in a different way on Star Trek you would consider probably people like Jellico. But people don't talk about it in the same like "Oh it's so awful! I can never watch an episode with him in it because he was so awful."

Grace: They are not disdained the same way.

Jarrah: No, it's in a way just like admiration for what any character that was.

Sue: Well, he is also presented as a villain.

Jarrah: Yeah. And even some of our women villains don't really get to be really like that, they have to have a reason why they were like that. Like...What's her face from the crystalline entity? Or Admiral Satie? Like, they sort of get a backstory that explains a bit why they are like they are. Which isn't a bad thing it's just a note again that it's easier for us to accept if we can rationalize, "Oh well, it's just an exception."

Kenna: Yeah, there's a reason there's a reason for her being the way she is like it's an excuse. And it's like we're uncomfortable accepting that sometimes people just are that way, that sometimes people just are brusque and rude and don't care about being polite all the time.

Sue: I feel like they did this to Tasha too. I don't know if the backstory that they gave her was always planned. The little bit of the one that we get, but I do feel like they were very much trying to explain/excuse her masculine traits, her assertiveness, and her strength, even like her physical strength.

Jarrah: And that happens with Kira as well, actually.

Kenna: When did we start learning about those traits? Because Tasha Yar didn't last that long in TNG. And I....

Sue: She actually mentioned some of it in the second episode and "The Naked Now"

Jarrah: And even in the first episode she's at the court and talking about the people, "I lived on a planet like this" kind of thing. So that starts, and the second one furthers and then there's "Code of Honor" where she's all hand-to-hand combating and like showing the people how to do martial arts.

Sue: Mm-hmm.

Kenna: It's a little disappointing that you get that back story so early on I would have liked to see that as well, they probably missed an opportunity by just letting her be the bad-ass that she was

Grace: They did show a lot of cards early with her.

Kenna: Yeah. Well they didn't have that long.

Grace: Awww.

Jarrah: Yeah, there is a Facebook comment from Kerry who said, "I know a lot of people who thought Tasha Yar was unlikable. I've even heard stories about people cheering when she died. The reasons I've heard for people not liking her is that she was too masculine, too bossy, too annoying etc.. These are sexist reasons not like her and that's pretty unfair."

Grace: Yep.

Kenna: It's funny that you say that actually because one of the other articles that they came across today is actually posted on multiple places. It's called "The 10 Habits of Unlikable People" and it's by somebody called Travis Bradbury who I don't know who that is. And so it's a man who's written it and it's the article is gender neutral referring to men as well as women. But as I was reading through it what I found interesting was a lot of his 10 Habits of unlikable people are things that are very often attributed to women only. Things like emotional hijacking, not asking enough questions, being too serious, gossiping, sharing too much. These are all things that he identifies as making people unlikable. And as I was reading it these are these are things that people it's not common to talk about men as gossiping too much. It's normally used as a derogatory comment against women, because you know we all get around the watercooler and we gossip all day. And I thought that was very interesting.

Jarrah: No kidding. There was another interesting comment that actually, Carrie made which I think is something to consider is like to look at some of the other male characters in Star Trek that are disliked and sort to compare some of the reasons why they get disliked versus like Pula ski, Keiko, Vash, Shelby et cetera. And so a couple of the raised she raised Wesley Crusher.

Kenna: Huh. Interesting.

Jarrah: Orin also raised Neelix and said that, "the problem is not with the actors or the idea of the women characters but in how the characters were designed and implemented. Most of that being done by men of course we can see the same issue with Neelix but for him the discussion just doesn't have to get first get past the river of sexism."

Kenna: Yeah.

Jarrah: So, I mean, we talked about Wesley a bit when we've talked about Mary Sues because he's the closest you have to a Gary Stu.

[laughter]

Grace: Wesley Stu...

Sue: I would argue that Kirk is pretty... a Gary Stu as well.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Grace: We've got a couple to choose from with Star Trek.

Jarrah: But the whole, like obnoxious, like you're too smart for your age thing, does that, I think gets applied to women as well. If it had been Leslie Crusher it probably would have been the same.

Sue: Can you imagine?

Grace: How dare you be a precocious child? How dare you?

Kenna: Yeah. I always thought that was one way that Wesley and Neelix are very similar is that they both, neither of them is particularly physical, and obviously Wesley because he's a young teenage boy he's not particularly masculine because he's a young teenage boy, and I mean Neelix is the chef. So you know are they disliked because they're not masculine enough?

Jarrah: Good question.

Grace: That is a really good question.

Sue: The most common complaint that I have heard about Neelix is that he's where he shouldn't be. Right? Like, what's this guy doing on the bridge in the middle of a crisis.

Kenna: [chuckles] No, that is true.

Sue: You know, why is he solving the problems? And that can be applied to Wesley as well, like why is the 16 year old kid the smartest person on the Federation flagship?

Grace: Also they're just so insistent with Neelix that we like him. The audience loves Neelix! They want more Neelix. No. No. No.

Jarrah: Yeah, but I think you're right to raise that about Neelix especially because he is kind of like the buffoon character but he's very insecure about his relationship with Kes. He is not just the cook, but also the morale officer so he's like in a caring role. He is not particularly good in hand-to-hand combat. He's kind of timid in dangerous situations. So I think it's fair to point out that a lot of the other men that you talked to as aggressive or things they aren't challenging masculine traits and if you look at you know unlikable men in broader media you have like Fight Club and you have like American Psycho and it's not like people are saying these are like the way we think men should be but it's like they're clearly exemplifying aspects of traditional masculinity or accepted masculinity.

Kenna: Well even if you go back to the original series "The Enemy Within" we literally see the unlikable Kirk and by the end of the episode, "but he needs that part of him to be who he is". He literally needs that unlikable side of him in order to be Kirk. Right? But when does that happen to women?

Jarrah: Yeah. Good point.

Grace: We do kind of get that in the episode with B'Elanna where she split into her human and Klingon half, but the idea of making all of these traits that she considers about herself negative are related to race or species is kind of reductive.

Kenna: It is, it goes back to that, that there is a reason that she's like that. It's not just because for whatever reason she just can't be bothered to deal with people

Grace: If I was in her situation I probably wouldn't want to either.

Jarrah: Another character who came up a fair bit was T'Pol actually, Jodi said, that she was a character that she hasn't liked but have had had likable moments, but we also had a message from Janet who talked about how we've talked in the past on the show about how we felt Trip wasn't maybe the best partner in the relationship and kind of what pushes her to be more human. But Janet said that in the Trip-T'Pol shipper community it's a lot more widely accepted that T'Pol is not a good partner to him and that like she is maybe not behaving fairly and things like that so that was interesting. Any thoughts on to T'Pol being like unlikable character.

Grace: Well, there is definitely a lot to go into but I think for one thing you can chalk up a lot of the problems with none of the characters are really being very likable in Enterprise. But that might just...again that's my take on it, we get a lot of really inconsistent writing to the degree where, gosh! There's just so much inconsistency with the characters that there's the personality we are told they have and the one that is presented to us on screen can kind of be.... there's a gap there definitely, which definitely makes it hard to like a character.

Sue: I think for T'Pol a lot of it probably comes back to the the Vulcan-ness right. She's supposed to be cold logical and distant. She has a bit of disdain almost for the humans and they don't treat her well either. So even her relationships on the show aren't friendly I guess is the best word for it, there's nobody on the show likes her so why should anybody in the audience like her.

Grace: Fair enough.

Jarrah: Yeah and I mean Janet also pointed out that Trip is kind of like Miles in that they're both kind of the every man engineer. And so that could be why you know the audience or at least part of the audience wants to side with them and be more critical about their woman partners' behavior in the relationship. But I think that there's a lot of really unfair expectations placed in T'Pol by characters and audience alike throughout the Enterprise and I think the idea that she would be like how you would expect an ideal human woman partner, after never having had a relationship like that is pretty ridiculous.

Grace: Let's establish they're both going into that relationship looking for heartache.

Sue: What is ideal anyway?

Jarrah: I don't know.

[laughter]

Kenna: That's a topic for a for another episode I think.

Jarrah: I think like, in that one of the things that's raised is the end of "Harbinger" and like the way that T'Pol gets cold feet and when T'Pol has like started a relationship with him but decides to leave to go back to her Vulcan arranged marriage and like that she is criticized for sort of stringing him along or drawing things out, but I don't know. It's like, how would you expect it to be otherwise?

Kenna: Now forgive me because I've not watched Enterprise. Is there something around the comparison if you compared T'Pol and how people view her versus how people view Spock because they're in a similar position on the bridge aren't they? And they're both Vulcan.

Grace: It's very different, yeah

Kenna: Whereas he, and he's cold and he's non-emotional and all of those things and she's very similar. Why? Why would you not like her for those things and why would you find him to be? Because a lot of people find Spock very admirable.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. Great question. We actually had a good article on our blog recently I think it was by Brianna asking basically that exact question looking at how T'Pol is even more "othered" than Spock and part of that you can chalk up to the you know there's the time they set Enterprise and how the Vulcans weren't as integrated into Starfleet like they were by the time of the original series, and the Vulcan culture is supposed to be slightly different and more isolationist at that time, but the biggest difference is that like Grace said, everyone on the ship kind of acts like they don't even like her and they're constantly badgering her to be more human and that they are never really like that isn't really ever checked, there's numerous examples where like T'Pol is right about something and Archer just like brushes it off is like boring and science-y or just not his idea, so it's not right. Then she turns out to be right, and no one ever acknowledges it or apologizes.

Sue: And just like when we were talking about Pulaski and Data, Spock gives it back. Like we're told that in the original series that Vulcans are cold and unemotional, but one Spock's only half Vulcan and two that's not what we see from him at all. Like count up the number of times that Spock smirks or is sassy at McCoy and it's going to be a lot more than when he's just stoic.

Jarrah: We get like a tiny bit of sassy T'Pol and nothing near what Spock gets and it's just like she even she wears a different uniform. There is a lot of things that sort of separate her out from everyone else and the "captain not liking her" thing. We talked about that a bit in the Pulaski episode too about this idea that where in "The Child" which is Pulaski's first episode like the way that she's introduced. It sounds to Picard that she's like, drinking in Ten Forward yeah and she's actually meeting with Troi and Picard starts out not liking her and it makes it hard for us to get over that because we all respect Picard and same thing with like Archer starting out not liking T'Pol.

Kenna: But here's an interesting thing, both to T'Pol and Pulaski Would you agree that they were both respected members of those crews?

Grace: They should have been.

Jarrah: Yeah, mostly.

Kenna: Yeah, mostly. And that's what I think is really important and why I want to see more unlikable women on the screen, because they both had things that you would have a hard time maybe identifying with, you don't like them as a viewer. And yet despite that they're still protagonists they're still an important part of the story and they're an important piece of that crew an important piece of that team and that is kind of something that I think we need to see more of.

Jarrah: Yeah, absolutely. So should we move into talking about some examples that we have in media today and sort of ask the question that like, well maybe in Discovery or in Star Trek yet to come, can and should we see more of these characters?

Kenna: Yes please.

[laughter]

Sue: I would just like them to stop being considered unlikable.

Kenna: Yeah. For it not to even be a thing.

Jarrah: Yeah, so like, who are some characters that meet that today that or some shows that show that today that we don't really use that term so much even though like those are the same traits essentially. Are they're kind of anti-heroes?

Grace: I think we've kind of got that going with Viola Davis' character Annalise on "How to Get Away with Murder". She's definitely complicated. And it's one of the few situations where we were talking about with the House example earlier she can be outright nasty to people, she knows how to manipulate, she's not afraid to do it, but with her it is true that, "Yeah, but she knows exactly what she's doing and none of us can say the same, so we've got to respect her and let her do what she do". She's one of a few examples I can think of where her ability to think in a manipulative way and acting manipulative is not treated as this huge debilitator. Sure she has you know a bunch of... she's got her fair share of drama. No foolin'. But there is... it's not treated as nearly as much of a stigma I see it done with some other women characters specifically in the aspect of being intelligent and smarter than a lot of the men around her.

Jarrah: Yeah, that's a really good examples. That's important. And I mean I think that I'm I have not really watched "Scandal" but I think "Scandal" has some other examples if we're looking at the Shonda Rhimes oeuvre of unlikable women, especially women of color. There's been some work there by Shonda Rhimes for sure.

Sue: Jessica Jones also comes to mind.

Kenna: I was thinking about her though because we learn and I can't... it's been too long since I watched it. I can't remember when exactly we learn about her. It was a sexual assault by the Purple Man wasn't it in her past. I can't remember now whether she was like she is before or whether that was because of...

Jarrah: It's sort of in the comics it's a lot more clear that it's because of because you see her like flashbacks to her days as a superhero in the comics and she's like all happy in her superhero name is Jewel and she has like this spandex bodysuit. But it seems like it's after the assault that she became like kind of dark and gritty. So it doesn't meet that test on that front of things. And she also has a little bit like she definitely has at least a partial redemption arc, but I think that still like she's an example of how media is changed. I would say a comedy example would be "Veep" and we do have some more, like, women like that now in comedy in that are you know comedic anti-heroes who you know maybe in case of "Veep" and not super competent, not super nice, but I don't think that that is like perpetuating sexist stereotypes because it's like part of this broader cast. So that would be one I threw in there. I mean another one is Game of Thrones.

Kenna: There's quite a few unlikable women in Game of Thrones. It was funny...

Jarrah: Also men.

Kenna: Yeah. I saw your note on Game of Thrones and I thought because the first one that springs to mind obviously is Cersei Lannister. I mean she is. And it's funny because I first went you know but she's a villain. Well, she's not really that much more of a villain than anybody else iss. What I find really interesting about Cersei Lannister is I desperately want her to be redeemed and that in my brain started me thinking about why

is it? Because I will try not to do any spoilers but in the last episode of the last season, there's a moment where you think oh my god look at her she's going to be good. That doesn't exactly happen. And I was devastated because I really wanted her to turn out to be kind of OK. And it's interesting that that made me start thinking about yeah but why? Why do I want her to? Why can't she just be that way? Why can't she just be rude and ruthless and all of those things and just let her be?

Jarrah: Yeah, I think that Sansa is another example, obviously some awful stuff has happened to Sansa, but she was considered a spoiled brat before that stuff happened. And so there are some people who are not huge fans but a lot of people are super huge fans because she's really complicated and same with a lot of the other women like Cersei and other women on Game of Thrones.

Sue: So this might sound weird, but I think that Leslie Knope is supposed to be unlikable not to the audience but in her town.

Grace: I think that's definitely a point there. I think we're supposed to from the get go see her is like unrealistically optimistic and kind of a bubblehead.

Sue: But we even deal with her throughout like the storyline of the show of having trouble getting her work done or getting elected because she's seen as bossy or bitchy or overambitious and it's something that we see the character struggle with.

Jarrah: You mentioned Orange Is The New Black Grace did you want to talk about that as well.

Grace: I would love to because I think it's very telling that with a character like Piper who's our lead for some god damned reason, cause apparently with all these fleshed out non white non-straight, well she's bisexual but you know but you can't use the b word, not on TV with all of these really interesting characters. She's one of the least interesting. And she is very clearly very privileged and not... Of all of the characters she's easily the one that you are least likely to have be your favorite character. But she is our lead and that in and of itself very annoying and very telling also.

Kenna: Well, I think that part of that is because it was based on her on Piper what's-her-faces? True story.

Grace: Also, read her book and you won't like her very much, either.

Kenna: I think it's quite you know I think it's quite interesting that she's the she's unabashedly unlikable nowadays.

Grace: But it was funny that even from the start that people were very much like, "I hate this character, she's the worst, kill her off the show" kind of thing. And this is a really interesting example I think it was Lindsay Ellis who brought it up, it's like compare the hatred for Piper and, why is she the main character ? Get rid of her as the main character versus like a classical literary character like Humbert Humbert in Lolita who is a kidnapping murdering pedophile. But we just kind of accept that he's the main character and that makes him sympathetic. We don't have a female equivalent to that. And that is so telling. And the fact that we at least have a character where now they're going out of their way to be like she is our lead, but we're going to have her do some messed up stuff and make her be you know not someone you like and that will be at least acceptable. It's not great. It's flawed but it is sort of a step in the right direction.

Kenna: Well I kind of like Orange is The New Black for for the fact that like literally everyone is unlikable.,

Grace: Absolutely yeah.

Kenna: A lot of them, they have their own quirks and in a way as a viewer you may kind of like some of them but they're literally all criminals you're not... they're not supposed to be likable, and I love the way that the writers on that show play with the audience by taking the white woman who's supposed to be privileged white woman I'm really screwing with you, she's been one of the worst behaved people in a couple of episodes and I love what they're doing with that. I love what they're doing that because it's, it's important. I feel that those women are... I feel that those women are real, and even though you might not look up to any of them, maybe? There's a lot to identify with. And there's a lot to come away feeling... I'm not quite on my own.

Grace: I'll take a complicated woman over a woman who was very clearly someone who the writers bent over backwards to make sure that she was likable and inoffensive.

Jarrah: Yeah, I think there's some examples in Orphan Black too and particularly I was thinking of Rachel Duncan I mean she does have a backstory that at least partly explains why she is like she is. And

Kenna: Which one is Rachel?

Jarrah: She's a corporate one that was raised...

Kenna: Oh yeah with a little Bob.

Jarrah: Yeah

Kenna: I was trying to remember because I can only remember them by hair.

Jarrah: Yeah. She is super cold and calculating. And I won't give any spoilers away. So like she doesn't totally fit with their definition in that she has backstory and at least like flirts with redemption. But, certainly like for a very long time in the show is just like super cold and had like the sort of the epitome of like that ballbusting manager that we were kind of talking about before but I think that she's really interesting. And there's also other characters in that show that are kind of like irritating like you would not want to be friends with them and this was something that kept coming up in these articles was this quote from the author Claire Masud about like, "Does anyone ask if you would want to be friends with Hamlet or if you want to be friends with Humbert Humbert and like why do we keep asking if you should want to be friends with these women characters?" Like I wouldn't want to be friends with pretty much most of the Clones except for maybe Cosima in "Orphan Black".

Sue: Yeah but she's got to get rid of the dreads.

Jarrah: Yeah that's fine.

Sue: I would say that most of the Clones are unlikable.

Jarrah: Yeah. And in one way or another I like Allison is like highly obnoxious.

Kenna: She is just awful.

Jarrah: Soccer mom. You have... I would say that the one that I would consider like not super positive unlikeable although I really enjoyed her as Crystal who's like the ditzy blonde. And that's because I'd say she's like the most of a caricature of any of them. But she's still hilarious and just kind of like fun watching that character. But that only one that I would say like you know these characters can be good characters because

they can have more depth. But if you're just going to make someone like a dumb blonde that people don't like because they're a stereotype that's different you know.

Sue: So we have a comment from Deirdre that kind of fits in with this and she writes, "Spock is emotionless, and calculating, Kirk is a playboy, Picard is a bit of a tight ass. But all of that adds to their likeability. It's almost like if a woman isn't polite and smiling and spewing rainbows all the time she's hated for it."

Grace: Right?

Jarrah: Yeah. Well yeah. I think it's getting better. I would hope that we were going to see a little bit more range of women characters going forward in Discovery.

Grace: God willing.

Kenna: Yes, I hope so.

Jarrah: Should we go round and do a round of final thoughts?

Grace: Yeah.

Jarrah: Okay, can I start with you Grace? Do you have any final thoughts?

Grace: I said it before and I'll say it again. I will take a complicated woman over a woman who is two dimensional just so that I'll like her any day of the week, both as a character and you know as a person really.

Jarrah: Sue?

Sue: I would say if there is a character that you immediately think of as somebody you hate when we say unlikable women, go back and give that character a second chance because sometimes when you're older or you have more perspective on a situation it will totally change how you see them and you will find them totally reasonable.

Jarrah: Totally. Kenna?

Kenna: I think on the whole I do think that generally speaking the film and TV industry is moving towards a better representation of a "unlikable women" I think we still have a long way to go. And I'm hopeful about the future and I'm going to try and go out of my way actually to you know to pay money to see these portrayals because I think that what we've struggled with in this discussion about what is it that qualifies as the unlikable woman. And I think there is... it can feed into a lot of things that are other issues in feminism like the gender pay gap and you know, just societal roles in terms of you know, parental roles and fashion and all sorts of things, so I'm hoping that we'll be able to kind of open it up and have a bit more of a discussion and I hope Star Trek is part of that so people start talking about Star Trek and similar critical veins as they talk about Game of Thrones or Orange Is The New Black, for instance.

Jarrah: Yeah, that's a good point. I have a hard time believing that like we could have seen a mom on Star Trek treat their kid the way that Worf treats Alexander the whole way and still like remain a favorite character.

Sue: Do you think that Discovery being on a paid platform and basically being content you have to pay for, in a way like Game of Thrones is on HBO or Westworld is on what, Starz? that simply by being behind a paywall of

some kind it will make critics and reviewers take the show more seriously than they have taken other Star Trek franchises or series in the past.

Kenna: I'm not sure. I think it ends up. I think it will depend on how big the audience ends up being. And right now that this is a common thing that I complain about on Priority One all the time that CBS All Access is a small platform and if they're not getting the viewer numbers that some of the bigger shows are getting I don't think critics will take it seriously because it's not it's not a big enough fish.

Jarrah: You know I think from the cast that we're aware of I don't think any of those women are going to fall into this category that we have sort of laid out in the way that we've laid it out. I don't think that like L'Rell the Klingon woman is going to be considered like, unlikable in that way because we're like, she'll be displaced onto the whole Klingon side of things. I definitely don't think we're going to see that from Georgiou or Michael Burnham. That doesn't necessarily mean it's not going to be awesome but maybe something that could be developed as the show goes on.

Kenna: I hope so

Jarrah: I was also just going to say that I think one way to help with this is to have more women in the writers room, that especially when writers are trying to create and flesh out women villains and women who are less conventionally likable it can help to avoid... I guess just question like, "Why do you need a redemption arc?" Or "Would that woman behave like that? Or is that just kind of like a stereotype?" So that's also just something I think we need going forward.

Kenna: It's interesting you said that because that was one of the things that I'd written down that didn't quite come to, was you are asking whether characters have to be likable and in order to succeed and I think as a character in universe, probably not, but as a character on screen like as an audience is viewing, it's really hard to succeed unless you have really committed writers who are like, "No, she's unlikable, just leave her" because otherwise they would be so easily bowed to pressure to give her that backstory that explains her gruffness or give her... ok, people are sick of her being so mean. We'll give her a redemption arc so she can not be mean anymore. You have to have committed writers. I think you're right about the writers room.

Jarrah: Absolutely. All right, well we're heading to the end of our time so let's do the outros? Kenna thanks so much for joining us today. It's awesome to have you on from our sister podcast Priority One. Where can people find Priority One and you elsewhere on the Internet?

Kenna: Okay, well first of all I just want to say a big thank you to all of you for having me on, I am such a huge fan of Women at Warp, and I'm really excited about the stuff that you guys do. Priority One, the best place to find us, you can go to priorityonepodcast.com, we're also on Facebook at [Facebook.com/priorityonepodcast](https://www.facebook.com/priorityonepodcast) and we're on Twitter @priorityonepod. Me in particular, I'm on Twitter @adastra1930 but you can also go to priorityonepodcast.com everything is on there including all of our episodes and blogs and contact information et cetera. We're actually, unlike you guys, are going to be talking about Discovery so we normally do like news and current events that sort of thing where we're actually switching our publishing day to Friday so we'll be able to get a little more information about Discovery and that's starting next week. We're coming out on Fridays. So a little bit of a change and should be fun.

Jarrah: Great. And Grace where can people find you.

Grace: You can find me on Twitter at @BonecrusherJenk and on the streets of Seattle fighting crimes and spitting rhymes.

Jarrah: And Sue?

Sue: I'm on the tweets at @spaltor.

Jarrah: And I'm on Tumblr at trekkiefeminist.tumblr.com and on Twitter at @jarrahpenguin and if you would like to contact our show you can e-mail us crew@womenatwarp.com You can also leave comments on our website womenatwarp.com or our Facebook or our Twitter @womenatwarp or through wherever you get your podcasts, so thanks so much for joining us.