

## Women at Warp Episode 88: All the Rage: Toxic Fan Culture

[Women at Warp theme]

**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 bi-weekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name's Jarrah. And thanks for tuning in.

Today, with us, we have our crew including Sue.

**Sue:** Hi, everybody.

**Jarrah:** And Grace.

**Grace:** Hey.

**Jarrah:** Before we get to our main topic, which is a very important topic, we have a little bit of housekeeping to do first. We also just wanted to give a bit of a content warning for this episode.

We're going to be talking about toxic fan culture. It's possible that this might include discussions of sexual assault. We'll try to keep it pretty high level, but that can be upsetting or triggering for some people. It also might include, although we're going to try and minimize sharing specific examples of some harassing and otherwise disturbing comments that have been made to actors and fans on the internet. So, just a warning. If that is something you are not comfortable with listening to, then feel free to skip ahead to the next episode.

But before we get into that discussion, our usual housekeeping. Our show is entirely supported 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 watchalong commentaries. And your support helps us do things like get out to conventions and just generally produce the show and otherwise make people aware of it.

**Grace:** Patronize us in the fun way.

**Jarrah:** Exactly. [Sue laughs] Visit [www.patreon.com/womenatwarp](http://www.patreon.com/womenatwarp). You can also support us by leaving a rating or review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts.

And speaking of conventions, do we have any other housekeeping type announcements?

**Sue:** I think for right now, the next thing upcoming is Star Trek Las Vegas. Find us there.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. Nice. We'll be sharing more details on the show and on our social media as the convention approaches. So, as I mentioned, our topic for today is toxic fan culture. This is something that has always been-- Since we started the show, this has been a concern to us. But the reason that it's particularly topical right now, is that we had an incident last week of a *Star Wars* actress, Kelly Marie Tran, basically being racist and sexist, bullied off of Instagram. This has brought the issue up back into the fore.

If you listen to our last supplemental episode, you will have also heard Sue talk with Chase Masterson a little bit about it. So, does anyone want to talk a little bit more about the context we're in right now and just how we're feeling about this situation?

**Sue:** I mean, it's disgusting.

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Sue:** [laughs] It's also not new, unfortunately. When I was talking to Chase, obviously, this is easier, which is a terrible way to put it because of things like social media. But I asked her and she told me that she and Nana and Terry, all had interactions with fans that were-- I don't want to say equivalent, but maybe similar to what's been going on recently on social media. And even with Kelly Marie Tran, it is not the only time recently. A year prior, the same thing happened with Daisy Ridley from the same fan base.

**Jarrah:** Some fans.

**Sue:** Yeah. We had the female *Ghostbusters* remake. People left social media. There was a huge backlash against the *Doctor Who* casting. I don't think anybody left over that. But we did have a show creator leave over people being unhappy with [Jarrah laughs] decisions he made in the show. Steven Moffat quit Twitter for a while. Whatever your feelings are about Steven Moffat, and mine aren't great, but I didn't bully him on Twitter. [laughs]

**Jarrah:** Definitely. I'm sure we'll talk a bit more about how social media has contributed to this issue and what role it plays. But before we started recording, we were talking about what are we even talking about when we talk about toxic fan culture? Does anyone want to take a stab at that?

**Grace:** Well, the quickest example that comes to mind is the Szechuan sauce. Let's be completely honest.

**Jarrah:** Yes. Would you like to enlighten our listeners?

**Grace:** Sure. This is a little case study that I'm pretty sure we're going to be talking about for literal decades based on just how weird it was to watch play out. And that was there are a few throwaway gags about Szechuan sauce from McDonald's, and how it was discontinued and how great it was on *Rick and Morty*.

Yeah. So, as a tie in promotion, McDonald's decided they were going to bring it back in limited quantities as a shoutout to the fans. The fans lost their minds, because there wasn't enough for everyone. When they said it was in limited release, they meant limited release. And people were losing their goddamn minds over packets of barbecue sauce, ketchup.

There was a level of indignity that, good Lord, I have not even seen happen [chuckles] in high art circles that was going on over this dipping sauce. People were getting intense and verbally attacking McDonald's workers, because there wasn't enough. They were getting aggro about it. It was really a level of entitlement of I, as a fan, am a good fan and I deserve this physical object that proves that I am one of the best fans. And again, it was a packet of dipping sauce. It was not the holy grail.

**Jarrah:** From McDonald's, guys. [chuckles] But yeah, I think that's a really good example. I think one thing that's important to note, is when we're talking about toxic fan culture, we're not saying, all fan culture is toxic, but there are these sides and they're occurring in fandoms across geekdom and beyond. I would argue there's elements in sports fandom, for sure.

**Grace:** We're not going to pretend that these elements don't exist in all different manners of niche cultures in different pockets, but we are specifically addressing the nerd-based ones here.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. Because there are some common elements. But we're talking about behaviors that are connected to a person's geek fandom that are the same types of things

that you would call toxic in a workplace, like sexual harassment, bullying, violence, exclusion, racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., that happen in the fandom and unfortunately, in many cases have recently resulted in some pretty gross social media bullying.

But as you mentioned with Chase, and we've heard from some other people that even before this, you could still bully an actor through the mail. You could still stalk someone. So, there's different levels of it, but it's serious and it's something that even though this is probably a minority of fans, they're loud and angry.

If they make people feel unsafe or literally not able to participate in that-- they make people unable to participate in their fandoms, then that's not cool. So, we're going to also just talk about what we think needs to happen going forward.

**Sue:** Well, we're absolutely seeing that in *Star Trek* fandom. Thank goodness, we haven't seen the kind of attacks on actors in the *Trek* universe. You express that you like the new show or you express an opinion that someone else doesn't share, and the attacks just start coming. In reading up on this today, I found myself on Reddit.

**Grace:** Oh, dear.

**Sue:** [laughs] In a thread that was simply started with the question, "Is there a subreddit somewhere where I can just talk about the show without people jumping and telling me how much they hate it?"

**Grace:** Here's a piece of free advice for all of our listeners. It really should go without saying. It is possible for someone to like something that you do not like or have an opinion that you don't necessarily share that is completely benign, and it costs you nothing to just say nothing about it. You can just let the conversation happen and say, "I don't need to engage in this. Not for me. Okay, moving on with my life."

**Sue:** Well, as you might imagine, the overwhelming majority of initial responses was like, "*Discovery* is garbage. It's not really *Star Trek* anyway. You shouldn't be watching that. You should be watching *The Orville*. What was it? Look at this PC Snowflake looking for an echo chamber," that sort of thing. There were a few people who popped in to say, "You know what? This is the same stuff that's been said about every *Star Trek* since they-- [crosstalk]"

**Grace:** Pretty much. Yeah.

**Sue:** Which they're not wrong. But I don't understand the inability that is there to allow people to enjoy things.

**Grace:** Again, it costs you literally nothing to just say, "Okay, not for me."

**Jarrah:** Yeah. I think it's on the less serious end of the toxic environment. But this feeling that it is concerning when people feel like there is going to pile on just because you like a show. But the same also works in reverse. Like, it's okay to say, "Well, I really wasn't a huge fan of the character of Rose Tico or how Kelly Marie Tran interpreted this one scene." It's not cool to then feel you have to jump down everyone's throats who disagrees with you and to elevate it to the level of racism and sexism, because unfortunately, there are elements of toxic fan culture that don't involve sexism, and misogyny and homophobia, but it's a lot worse when that becomes a focal point and it's become like a flashpoint for really.

We've seen examples of these white supremacist activists getting active on the *Star Wars* issue as well as, people calling *Star Trek: Discovery*, "White genocide." And brings in that

whole level of things as well, which makes things feel like really not a safe place to participate.

**Grace:** And again, when we say safe, we don't just mean, your personal physical safety being threatened. We mean also being able to feel safe expressing your opinion or having a conversation, because there are levels of safe that can come just from conversation and thinking to yourself, I don't feel safe expressing my opinion here, even if it's a benign opinion, because the people will get aggro over it. Even if it is, again, a benign opinion or just you saying, I like this thing. I know other people don't like it, but I do.

The weird thing about so much of this, is that when you're talking about toxic fandom, you really are in any niche subculture, like, we were saying. You really are kicking a hornet's nest there with a lot of people wanting to come to the defense of, "Oh, that doesn't happen in our group. Our group is above that." There's always this level of either that or people saying, "What? So, you just want us to police our group of people in this community?" which is an interesting point there.

I think about a year or so ago, an interesting op ed put out by rapper, Hoodie Allen, about a gay electronica band called PWR BTTM, had been outed as having some not-so-great behavior with fans and with people attending their shows. As a direct result of that, a ton of people in the gay electronica scene just instantly cut them off, just said, "No, we're not giving you an inch after that. None of that is okay."

I'm bringing this up, because in the article, he goes on to be like, "But we see in so many other musical genres or subgroups people whose unacceptable behavior is just treated as like part of their thing, or it's just an inevitable part of the scene. There's nothing you can really do. But seeing that in contrast to other musicians' behavior is proof that, 'Yes, you can police your scene. You can just tell unsavory people who behave inappropriately that there is no room for them there, that these things can in fact be taken care of. There's just some communities that are actually taking the trouble to do so.'" And yes, there's a rapper named Hoodie Allen.

[laughter]

**Sue:** I think that in terms of people claiming that groups are either under policed or not policed enough, common policies are important.

**Grace:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Sue:** They're rules that we follow, just like society has rules that we follow. But sometimes when a place has community standards, or posting rules or comment policies, you hear some people saying, "Well, you just don't want anyone to say anything bad about [crosstalk] or about the show or about whatever." There's a difference between a criticism, a comment that you didn't like something with an explanation.

**Grace:** And actively throwing your feces in the air.

**Sue:** And an attack on an actor or a creator.

**Jarrah:** Well, we have comments policies for our blog and our podcast. One of the reasons for that, is that even-- It's not like we actually haven't received. We have a few pretty gross comments that we have [chuckles] in a folder that we've saved. But overall, the vast majority of people engage with us are respectful, and insightful and courageous, and I just love reading our listener comments.

But the reason it's important is not just that the comments are in themselves disturbing, but because they do create this culture-- I worry that if, we let people just comment like that other people are going to see those comments and say, "Well, I'm afraid to comment myself, because these people are then going to pile on me."

**Grace:** There's an Ouroboros quality to it just-- is this the continuing standard of how conversation goes and the only way people really can communicate. If it is the only way to communicate or have your voice heard, that's the only way people are going to be able to continue communicating. It's going to reach a point where everyone's just screaming and drowning each other out in this endless sea of, "No."

**Sue:** [chuckles]

**Jarrah:** Yeah.

**Grace:** That was my sound effect for it.

**Jarrah:** Yes.

**Sue:** I got to say, it was really bizarre and also eye opening at the same time to be doing the reading for this and a lot of the research for this while I was tabling at conventions all weekend [crosstalk] and to just see it play out directly in front of me. I even had a conversation with somebody who came up to a table yesterday, who just out of nowhere began complaining about the latest *Star Wars* movies. I hope so and so's going to save the franchise and I'm thinking from what record breaking opening weekends.

**Jarrah:** [chuckles]

**Grace:** From massive merchandise sales?

**Sue:** But [laughs] then goes on to say, "Well, they need to be nice to the fan base. That's why they're here. They need to be nice to the fan base." I'm like, "First of all, what does that even mean?"

**Grace:** Also, you're making it very clear that you are talking about a very specific part of the fan base.

**Jarrah:** Yeah.

**Grace:** I will never stop saying this as a *Transformers* fan, the idea that one single movie can tank an entire franchise is just so adorable. How precious is that?

**Sue:** But it seems that the people who have these feelings think that they represent the entire fan base and overwhelmingly, not always, but overwhelmingly are white and male.

**Grace:** Which is really funny, because that is a very specific technique in both bullying and social manipulation, where you just decide that your opinion is the opinion of the general populace. When you don't say something, say, "Well, everybody is having trouble with this. Nobody likes this." And that sweeping generalization is really something that comes up a lot in people who just want to shut down the opinions of other people and say, "No, I am right here. You are not allowed to disagree with."

**Jarrah:** Totally. Should we take a second to talk about what people have said or what our thoughts are on why people behave like this, like where they're coming from on this issue?

**Grace:** Well, for one thing, the internet is still socially the Wild West. People are still coming from this idea from the early on www years that there are no real consequences linked to the internet or your behavior there that you're just screaming into a void. Even with social media where there's very clearly another person at the other end of the line, we have this idea of-- Because it's not happening in meat space and it is happening in cyberspace, it does not have actual consequence. And that's still really hardwired into a lot of attitudes about the internet.

You have all of these different accounts of various women who are being harassed and forced out of their places of work or business on Twitter or something, trying to talk to the police about it, and then having to explain to the police how Twitter works and that they can't just stop using social media, because it's part of their job as an online presence. What happens with that online presence actually does have real world effects on actual people.

**Sue:** For sure. And also, every analysis that I've read recently goes back to entitlement, entitlement and the sense of ownership that people think they're owed something.

**Jarrah:** That you were ruining my childhood. [chuckles]

**Sue:** Right.

**Grace:** I hate that. I hate that statement just of that your childhood is the universal and most precious one that needs to be protected, because it just says such a f\*\*\* you to all the other childhoods. Like, your specific childhood experience is the de facto one that needs protecting, which is bullshit.

**Sue:** But also, no, they're not.

**Grace:** You still have those memories. You still have all those good experiences. Just someone else is going to be having them now also.

**Sue:** Nobody has a time machine. Nobody went back in time and changed the thing that you watched when you were a kid.

**Grace:** There's a very good SMBC theater skit about that, actually.

**Sue:** Your copy of the *TOS* LaserDiscs did not burst into flames when *Discovery* started airing on CBS all access.

**Grace:** Nobody came into your house and started ripping the pages out of your *Harry Potter* books. I promise.

**Jarrah:** But I read something interesting, and we have a couple quotes pulled out from this article in *Wired*.

**Sue:** And that--

**Jarrah:** The quote that really stuck out to me from this, was that the new version, so the new movies or the new series in a franchise come to seem aggressive critiques of older work and by extension an existential attack on the people who love it.

**Jarrah:** Mm-hmm.

**Grace:** Uff. There's a loaded conversation right there.

**Jarrah:** You definitely see this defensiveness in some of the reactions that whole like, “Wait, wait, wait, are you saying that this was racist?” The defensiveness seems to be like, “Well then, I must be racist for liking it and I can't possibly be racist.” That's not what the discussion is at all. I love original *Star Wars*, I love original *Star Trek*, but you got to question it. It's okay to want things to change with the times and to include more people. And that doesn't mean that just because you liked that you were racist. But we all have something to do to take responsibility, move forward.

**Grace:** I love how this comes up with us so much just as a concept in the entirety of our show, this idea of you are allowed to enjoy something and address that something is wrong with it. That does not mean you hate it. That does not mean you are a bad person or much less a bad fan. That means you are just recognizing, not just the sum of the parts, but the parts that make up the whole of something, for good or for bad.

**Sue:** You can also recognize that something is problematic, but not intentional.

**Jarrah:** Yes.

**Sue:** The example that comes to mind for me, is that when *DS9* started, Sisko was a commander. He was also our first black lead, or really our first nonwhite lead. And so, he's starting at a rank lower than the previous two. In universe, the explanation is that he's on a space station. But out of universe in our world, from the fan perspective, the person of color starts off with a lower rank than the two white captains and have to work his way up the ladder. Is that intentionally racist? No. Is it a little bit problematic? Yeah.

**Grace:** Is that worth approaching and discussing why it's problematic? Absolutely. Just pretending that there is nothing wrong with something, because you like it, it does you as a viewer no favors. It does the work that goes into creating any piece of media, no favors. It really just does land you in this pop culture circle jerk of things needing to stay preserved in the perfect posterity of your memory exclusively, because that was the best way it could have ever been experienced.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. I want to go back for a second to the point about, like you're ruining my childhood thing, because I think that there is something to it which was expressed actually pretty well by Cameron Williams in a junkie article, where he talks about at least there's a certain generation of fans who are pining for the days when certain aspects of pop culture fandom were contained within a subculture were less mainstream. Actually, I've seen letters to the editor complaining about how the Marvel Cinematic Universe has ruined comic books, because now you can't go to a comic book store without all these mainstream people in there, and it used to be like a safe culture.

The people complaining like, “Well, Miles Morales. Spider Man's not allowed to be a person of color, and Thor can't be a woman. It's ruining our childhood.” But some of that comes from a place of growing up at a time when geek culture was really marginalized. The guys who were in it found a sense of solidarity and group acceptance in geek culture. Now this is becoming like a mainstream thing, they were the ones who were being bullied for this. I think there's a bit of sense of entitlement, because like, “Well, we went through the wringer for loving these things.”

**Grace:** That they earned their stripes as nerds. And so, we don't really know the true struggle.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. And so, Cameron Williams says, “Somehow in the past two decades, these geeks became the new jocks that now they're behaving like the way that they were bullied by excluding and pushing people out of the fandom.” One thing that kept coming up in our

comments from our listeners and in articles, is how one way this is really done is through geek gatekeeping and the whole fake geek girl stuff. Really questioning the credentials of particularly women and people of color trying to take their place, take up space in the fandom.

**Grace:** It's funny, because that's the exact same thing that you see happen in any music-based subgroup when a band that was part of an underground movement goes mainstream or suddenly gets a Grammy or is in a Volkswagen commercial, people lose their freaking minds being like, "Well, now everyone knows them. I was a fan of theirs from the beginning." So, people do not deserve this band or this band needs to stay underground the way I personally know them."

**Sue:** I was a season ticket holder at Yankee Stadium for over a decade. I can't tell you how many times somebody stopped me. Always a guy stopped me to quiz me on the starting lineup of the 1943 Yankees, or ask me what somebody's batting average was. Because clearly, I didn't deserve to be there.

**Grace:** Clearly, it is the worst possible thing if you care a lot about something for someone to just be mildly interested or want to learn more about it.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. You can empathize with where the feelings came from, how that originated, but people need to be self-reflective and also recognize that it's unlikely that your comic book store would still be open if it weren't for the success of these fandoms.

**Grace:** There's a level of self-reflection needed and there's a level of, get the fuck over yourself needed, [Sue chuckles] in any one of these scenarios.

**Sue:** Well, there's a question of, what does it hurt if someone's only passively interested in something?

**Jarrah:** It doesn't. Yeah.

**Grace:** Yes, exactly.

**Sue:** But also, you weren't born knowing the entire history of the Marvel universe.

**Grace:** No. Everyone starts off somewhere, and you could be the thing that's standing in the way of someone's lifelong love of these comics or these movies or this franchise. Do you really want to be that douche?

**Jarrah:** I've definitely seen-- And not just from guys either. I've seen from women as well. I remember at GeekGirlCon being in a line with some women who are complaining about the JJ verse fans that had never watched the other *Star Trek*.

**Grace:** Oh, my gosh. Yeah.

**Jarrah:** That was anomaly at GeekGirlCon, which I think has done a lot to ensure very safe and respectful space as much as possible.

**Grace:** See you in October, kids.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. The geek gatekeeping is a really unfortunate thing that is all over the place, but I think hits women more often. We had that as a comment from Eliza saying that they're getting gatekeeper-ish questions constantly. The spectrum of harassment runs from this all the way up to the outright purposeful nastiness other commenters have mentioned. All of it



should be called out by everyone, but especially other men. The only way to end toxic masculinity anywhere is for idealized masculinity to be antitoxic.

**Grace:** True. Unfortunately, no matter how much we do, there are some cases where there are men who are just not going to listen to anything if it comes from a woman. So, that's a good way to be an ally. Actually, stand up for when you see something messed up and don't just stew in it, act on it. Tell someone when their behavior is being unacceptable.

**Jarrah:** Totally.

**Sue:** And this is something I mentioned to Chase as well. But there is a tweet out there that I still don't have in front of me, so I can't attribute it. But to paraphrase, it says, "There are two types of people. The type of people who say, 'Well, I suffered. So should you,' and the type of person who says, 'I suffered and I don't want anyone else to have to.'"

**Jarrah:** Yeah. Let's talk a little bit more about conventions, because I think this is somewhere where there has been a lot of efforts over the recent years, but there's still a lot of problems. I know that there was a discussion between a bunch of us who go to Star Trek Las Vegas on Twitter, and one of my friends who has a *Star Trek* tattoo said that, "Twice she's had guys come up to her at the con and ask to lick her tattoo."

**Sue:** No.

**Jarrah:** No.

**Sue:** No. In what reality do they think she would say yes?

**Jarrah:** Marina Sirtis was on a panel once, and someone asked about bad, creepy fan experiences, and she was saying that one time someone licked her hand on a-- like, went to appeared to go to be shaking her hand on a London bus, but then licked her hand. And so, she said, "My advice for fans is, don't lick us unless you're Karl Urban."

[laughter]

**Jarrah:** Spoiler, you're not.

**Grace:** Karl Urban is an exception to many rules, I imagine.

**Jarrah:** [chuckles] But how have your experiences at conventions been, and what do you think has worked in conventions that you feel are better environments?

**Sue:** Wildly varied.

[laughter]

**Grace:** There really is this desire when you're in a crappy situation, at least if you've been socialized the way a lot of women have to-- If someone's being a jerk to you, you have to just nod and smile politely and take it. When really, sometimes the only thing that's going to get through to someone who's being an asshole to you is to say, you're being an asshole, which is really hard because there's years of conditioning, socially speaking to overcome just in calling someone out on shitty behavior sometimes.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. And sometimes what we do instead is we warn each other about creeps.

**Grace:** Oh, absolutely.

**Sue:** Yeah.

**Jarrah:** That is a good thing to do. But it is terrifying when people get away with being super gross and uncomfortable physical contact with women at conventions for, in some cases, years. This is something that happened to me and some of my friends without anyone speaking out about it or demanding accountability from their friends and groups, because they're just afraid that everyone will think this isn't reasonable and I should have been fine with it. Or, he seems like he's has so many friends and I would be the one who would be ostracized. So, yeah.

**Sue:** I think it's helpful that more and more conventions are adopting very clear and comprehensive antiharassment policies.

**Grace:** Absolutely. Even just the statement of cosplay is not consent is so important.

**Sue:** But a lot of them are going further to say, any of these things are harassment, really. With the advent of scheduling apps, which are just great for an attendee, in general, there are one tap calls to the security office, which is fantastic. Security will be there right away. They don't ask questions. They don't challenge you when you say something happened. They do their best to find the offender and take care of the situation. Even a few years ago, you would get, well, did that really happen or were you asking for it?

**Jarrah:** Yeah.

**Grace:** Well, you came to a convention full of these weirdos, what did you expect?

**Sue:** Well, look at the costume you're wearing.

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Sue:** I've also seen especially women become more emboldened to protect other women and themselves. Yes. But if you see somebody trying to take an upskirt picture or a butt photo.

**Jarrah:** Or, grope a cosplayer.  
Yeah.

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Sue:** Mm-hmm. Just on Saturday, sitting at my table, I saw someone asked to take a photo of a cosplayer, which is the correct thing to do, she stopped and she posed and took the photo. They said goodbye and she started walking away, and then he lowered the camera and started taking pictures of her backside. I stood up from my table and yelled, "No." And he was shocked. Somebody else realized what was happening because of that and stopped him, and they made him go into his camera roll and delete the photos.

**Jarrah:** That's good.

**Grace:** Because that is what enables people to keep doing unacceptable things, just not saying anything is how they get away with it. So, sometimes you have to be the shrillest person in the room. But if you aren't, who will?

**Jarrah:** Yeah, actually, this is not on that same level, but Amy Imhoff, who's been a guest on the show a couple times, and I were on a panel at Star Trek Las Vegas a few years ago, and

in that panel, we were talking about the women of *Star Trek: Voyager* and connecting them to women in sci-fi fandom that had come after, saying that Janeway was an influence on such and such a character from *Battlestar Galactica* or from shows that came after.

It was a like 45-minute panel. You can't possibly cover all of sci fi from 1995 to now in a 45-minute panel. Afterwards, we're walking around the vendor's room, and this couple comes up to us and the guy goes, "Oh, good panel." But I almost got up to the mic and said, "You forgot Amanda tapping, you dumb bitches." He was laughing, like, this would have been really funny. And Amy was just like, "That would not have been funny, and I'm glad you did not do that."

**Grace:** I would have jumped down into the crowd and hit you with the mic stand.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. We just both stared at him, and he just went white and was like, "Aah." and then walked away super awkwardly. But yeah, just that kind of thing that like, "I could be super sexist to you and you should find that funny."

**Grace:** No, I don't think so.

**Sue:** But I've been at tables and in costume as a representative of international costuming groups, and had people quiz me on the property or even the character I was dressed up as.

**Grace:** I'm pretty sure we had a point at our last Star Trek Las Vegas when we had a giant banner with our show's name on it right across from the Roddenberry booth. We had our names on it and everything, and people like, "But do you watch *Star Trek*?"

**Jarrah:** Ah, people seem to assume we were assistants, like we couldn't possibly be the real experts. Like, maybe we were just holding the table for someone else. [chuckles]

**Grace:** Yeah, that was--

**Jarrah:** Overall, I would say, comparatively, I've had a better experience at Star Trek Las Vegas than some of the more even bigger generalized cons. But GeekGirlCon has really been like a standout because of I guess the way that they started being organizers that had issues with other conventions, and wanted to be more inclusive and wanted to be more respectful. They've put in a lot of effort into that.

I think part of it is you have to staff it. You can't just have a policy that if someone complains about it, you don't know. You have to have somebody who's knowledgeable and trustworthy to be able to deal with complaints and incidents.

**Grace:** And you definitely have to hold yourself accountable and put your money where your mouth is. If you say you have a zero-tolerance policy, you have to maintain a zero-tolerance policy.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. Well, I think that luckily more people are starting to be heard. I think diverse programming is also a step in the right direction, because if you have more women in all positions during the convention, like as MCs and in panels, then it helps to send a message that it's like the gatekeeping and the assuming that women don't know what they're talking about and things that's not going to fly.

**Grace:** I love how the same people who say that gatekeeping isn't real are the same ones who are like, "Oh, now they're giving us all these rules for how you're supposed to interact at a con." What is this?

**Sue:** That kind of programming is something that I've noticed through even with teeny, tiny local cons,-

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Sue:** -that they're trying to do better in terms of diverse programming and addressing diversity as well, Like, having panels specifically about that or anything else. But that still creates a backlash within the con attending community, which is the subset of geek culture that goes to the cons. Because if this is something that you don't want, now you feel that your physical space is being invaded as well.

So, in some cases, there's complaints or even more backlash. I think that because the internet creates that degree of anonymity that's not there in person, that instead of being aggressive, or verbally attacking or thank goodness, physically attacking these people, they just don't go.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. Another thing that I've noticed at conventions in the past, is people being very rude to people with physical disabilities, particularly people in wheelchairs.

**Sue:** Yes.

**Jarrah:** And so, at Star Trek Las Vegas, it's a very big space. There's a lot of walking around at conventions, and a lot of times people get stressed, because we're a bunch of introverts in a crowd and trying to get where we want to go and trying to beat lineups.

**Grace:** And it's always hot and it's crowded.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. But the people who end up bearing the brunt of it are people in wheelchairs and women with strollers or parents with strollers. I find it particularly awful when you hear from people in wheelchairs who have attended conventions and say that people were just super rude to them, the whole time, and acting like they were in the way of them getting to their destination. Part of that is the convention needs to do a good job making it, so there are ways for people with disabilities to get where they need to go and not be competing with everyone else.

**Grace:** We recently had accounts of Ms. Tee Franklin, writer of *Bingo Love*, being scheduled to be on a panel that did not provide a wheelchair ramp for her.

**Jarrah:** Yeah.

**Grace:** It said she they would gladly lift her onto the stage,-

**Jarrah:** Oh, jeez.

**Grace:** -and her saying "No, if you are not willing to provide for me to be on this panel, I am not going to be on this panel." That is unacceptable and that is such an act of, I almost want to say an act of violence against an entire community that you are claiming is welcome here, but you are actively going out of your way to not have, be able to be a part of this.

**Jarrah:** At least in Ontario, where I live, if you did that to someone in a workplace, that would be a human rights abuse. You would have grounds for a legal complaint for yelling at people with disabilities for not providing them ways to get up to the stage, or places from which to view the programming. Of course there's other types of disabilities too. That's probably a topic for a whole other show. But even if it's not actively hostile, it can still be toxic by the fact that you're just-- [crosstalk]

**Grace:** Passively hostile is still hostile.

**Jarrah:** Yeah, that you're basically deprioritizing those concerns or completely ignoring them.

**Sue:** So, this is an issue that has been hot button at Dragon Con for the last several years. Anybody who listens to the show regularly knows that it's my favorite convention. The disability services program at Dragon Con is excellent. The problem is that the hotels aren't equipped for the number of people that are there. There's no way to attend things at this con without going up and down stairs, or on different levels of the convention center or the hotels and between the hotels, which means that anybody with a mobility issue has to take the elevator. And the elevators, there's not the capacity and yet there are able bodied people who just need to go one flight of stairs that push their way into the elevator.

**Grace:** Speaking of entitlement.

**Sue:** Right. Leaving somebody with a mobility issue unable to get where they need to go. I've heard stories of it taking hours to get from one hotel to the other because of these issues. More and more people are becoming aware of it and trying to be allies and saying to people, "No, if you need to get there faster and you can take the stairs," being outspoken about it, posting signs about it, which the con is doing, which is great, but it's the same. You still have the same issue with the lack of ramps up onto the platforms, because these aren't permanently there, and there are lots of doors and things open up and create bigger spaces this, that and the other.

One-track director told me that they've requested a ramp so many times, many years, because they have several panelists with disabilities that they have back again and again on this track, but they can never get up onto the platform and that they were told by the hotel they're in that a platform or a ramp would block the doors and create a safety hazard. You wind up having panelists with disabilities talking about diversity on panels. But sitting on the ground or on the floor next to the raised platform with the rest of the panelists literally looking down on them.

**Jarrah:** Not a cute look.

**Grace:** No. No, very telling. Unfortunately, you hear accounts of this all the time with people who are mobility impaired or visually impaired on public transit. I've known people in chairs who will have buses just see their chair and drive right by them, because who's got the time to stop and load up? Or, people who will just give them absolute shit for needing that wheelchair accessible seat, because they got an actual wheelchair there. And that's a little ridiculous. By a little, I mean, totally fucking.

**Jarrah:** Ugh.

**Grace:** Yeah. You do not get to say you welcome everybody if you are not taking steps to make sure everyone is able to be welcome.

**Jarrah:** Yeah, for sure. Okay. Well, we should spend some time again going back to social media, because I think, even though I don't think social media necessarily created people being toxic, it certainly added some nuance to the situation and maybe exacerbated or sped up or amplified the problems. What have you seen the influence of social media on fandom and toxic fan culture over the years?

**Sue:** Well, it creates 24/7 access.

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Sue:** Right. So, you can't get away from it. If you think about like, if you were bullied in school, you could go home. And when you got home, it stopped. You can't do that unless you leave social media, which is [chuckles] what is happening. It's just always there.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. We had a comment from Deanna who said one example. She said, "I think there is sexism in *Star Trek* Facebook groups. The repeated posts about a hot *Star Trek* babe or which *Star Trek* babe is hotter, and the comments on even non babe posts be filled with toxic masculinity. All of this inhibits me from joining in." So, I think that is fundamentally what we're getting at. Certainly, I'm a member of a few groups that have been okay, but I quit.

There was a general *Deep Space Nine* fan group, because there were people posting some really gross, violent jokes about how Miles O'Brien should just shoot Keiko already. Domestic violence jokes and comments about the various women character actors, things that guys in the group would like to do to them. It just feels scary, because it's like, "Well, what would these guys do to a real woman?" When you identify with these women who are on the show, then to have them even violence threatened against those characters, not even the actors, is scary.

**Sue:** Well, a friend of mine was telling me today-- She did a panel on this topic at a recent convention, and was talking about the fact that cosplayers, actors, other people who are known in a community often get death threats, and told me that somebody in the audience, unprompted, without raising his hand, just shouted from the back, "Well, there are death threats and there are death threats. You should learn to tell the difference."

**Grace:** Or, maybe you should not be an aggro piece of shit.

**Jarrah:** Yeah.

**Grace:** I feel like one of those is a lot easier on all of us.

**Sue:** That was maybe two months ago.

**Jarrah:** Joanna Robinson, who's a writer for Vanity Fair, wrote a review of *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, and talked about mansplaining of Poe mansplaining to Leia and Holdo, and says, "And I got called and-- Okay, yeah, trigger warning for this comment. "I got called cunt bitch and told to kill myself because of this. It sounds cynical, but I'm used to it at this point. But if you do take a step back, it's crazy that *Star Wars* fans have told me to kill myself repeatedly."

**Grace:** Yeah. I'm not sure what franchise they were watching.

**Sue:** I have a friend who cosplays Holdo. Regularly, the first thing someone says to her is, "I hated that character."

**Jarrah:** Why would you tell someone that? What could that possibly, constructively add to anything?

**Sue:** Then she'll look at them and then they go, "I mean, your costume looks great, but I hated that character."

**Grace:** It's amazing how freeing it can be to just every now and then say, "Why would you tell me that?" and watch someone try and backpedal.

**Sue:** That's basically the response that she's come up with. Again, this is somebody who is a member of a costuming group that is approved by Lucasfilm. When you're the member of that group, there's only so much that you can say back, because even though you're a fan group, you're also representing the series.

**Grace:** Ever wonder if that happens to the people to dress up as the characters at Disneyland?

**Jarrah:** Oh, I'm sure it does. I'm sure that there actually are some gross stories about people being harassed when they play princesses at Disneyland and stuff.

**Sue:** I 100% guarantee you. I could get some cast members on the phone right now. [chuckles]

**Jarrah:** Going back to social media, before we started this podcast, I tried to have a campaign to get a comments policy on the official *Star Trek* Facebook page, which is run under the CBS banner. And that campaign did not succeed. I think things have gotten a little bit better since then. Just like as an illustration, I monitored the Facebook page and I had to stop following it, because [chuckles] of this.

I monitored it for two weeks, and the comments by people with sexist, racist and homophobic comments were just awful. And you still see this. At the time, for example, there would be a post saying, "Describe Sulu in one word." And the comments were of a large group of them were just racial slurs.

Including some that make zero sense, like "Origamist." And you're like, "Oh, you're clever." And then, the rest of them were homophobic. So, there were people in there saying decent things-- [crosstalk]

**Grace:** Like, ripped.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. But there were also people using homophobic slurs against lesbians, talking about Tasha Yar and talking about how she-- Yeah, just really, really gross. Really gross stuff. And then, sexist to the point of talking basically rape threats, rape jokes. There was a photo of one of the characters and there's a joke about rape gangs talking about Yar. There was a really, really, really gross. Okay, I don't want to repeat it, [chuckles] so I won't. But there were serious rape jokes, including jokes about-- You know that episode in *TNG* where the ship is shifting and there's a woman ensign who gets cut in half by the floor?

**Grace:** Yeah. Oh, yeah. I remember that comment.

**Jarrah:** There was a whole series of just awful, awful jokes about what is happening to her lower half. It was so disgusting. And then, fans coming back objecting to it, but just being unable to stand against it because of the sheer volume. I think since then, the *Star Trek* page, even though they didn't ever directly respond to the petition or the examples, they did adjust some of the ways that they were posting. They've stopped doing those describe so and so in one word, which were like-- [crosstalk].

**Grace:** Because that's just a blank check for craziness right there.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. But where you'll almost always see it, which is super gross, is Happy Birthday posts. So, it's like Happy birthday, Kate Mulgrew. And you see people going in and commenting about her aging, and how she looks now and how they always hated Captain Janeway and Happy birthday, Rosalind Chao, and how awful Keiko was. That is an example,

because even the comments there where you're saying like, "Well, I wasn't really a huge fan of Keiko," why are you doing. Saying this in a happy birthday post to someone? That is, by definition, mean and disrespectful.

**Grace:** Do you think that they're going to actually read this? Do you think something productive will come from this other than you just, again, throwing your shit in the air, seeing where it lands?

**Jarrah:** What struck me in this sampling too and looking at it again, is this is largely not anonymous trolls. There's a big problem on Twitter and in a lot of these cases with actors, where there's anonymous people who are sending death threats. We're talking about people under their own names who just think it's funny to say racist and homophobic things about actors.

**Grace:** Don't you, guys, have shit to do?

**Sue:** I think that is the type of person who thinks everyone agrees with them.

**Grace:** Yes. Mm-hmm.

**Sue:** Because when they're challenged, it goes immediately to aggression.

**Jarrah:** Yup.

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Sue:** I was a member of a forum several years ago that had a sub-forum for babes and hunks of sci-fi. Of course, the conversations about the babes was different than the conversations about the hunks-

**Grace:** Of course.

**Sue:** -and much more graphic. But that's not the point of my story. Just know that it existed. In the general topic, catch all, say hi part of the forum, somebody one day posted a picture-- I think it was from *Planet of the Apes*. I don't even remember. The only thing he wrote was, "This is how I like my women, silent."

**Grace:** Oh. Girl.

**Sue:** I wrote back, I commented on it. I didn't attack and I just said, "I'm sure you didn't intend it this way, because it was a relatively small forum. So, it wasn't just some rando. It was someone I talked to several times before. But this is what it implies to me, and I'm bothered by it. If this is going to be here, can I request that you move it out of this forum and move it to the babes subforum? I thought I was being as reasonable as I could be.

The original poster actually wrote back, and he was like, "You're absolutely right. I didn't mean it that way. I see how it comes off that way," whatever. But then, everyone else decided to pile on, and get upset with me for being bothered by the original comment, and it turned into, "Well, you shouldn't be offended." Well, it's an opinion, like I shouldn't be offended?

**Grace:** You don't get to decide what offends other people.

**Sue:** It even went so far as I had to go to the forum rules that had been posted years before that literally said, "If someone is offended, regardless of the intention, the post should be



removed.” That’s what was written. I posted those rules. The response I got from the person who created the forum, from the moderator was, “Well, you shouldn’t have been offended, so it doesn’t count.” So, I was like, “All right, I guess the rules are different for a woman.” So, I quit. Bye. I don’t need to be there. Speaking of just making a place unsafe.

**Jarrah:** Totally. Yeah, it’s really frustrating. Let’s go back to what needs to change. And so, a couple things we’ve talked a little bit about comments policies.

**Grace:** Enforce them, Enforce them. [chuckles]

**Jarrah:** And harassment policies at conventions. So, what else needs to happen, or who else needs to act?

**Sue:** Well, I really, quickly just still on comment policies. There are some people who can read a comment policy, and just skirt the line over and over and over again. I think that we need to start paying attention to that as a group as well, and say, “If it keeps happening, if it’s the same person, maybe a conversation needs to happen there. Like, are you doing this on purpose? Are you trying to press buttons?”

**Grace:** “Do you think you’re being clever? Are you trying to be provocative?”

**Jarrah:** Yup, that’s a good point. I also think that when people feel okay to do so that politely redirecting, correcting misinformation-- I’m not talking about cases where people are being threatening, where people are being borderline that other commenters when you feel like you can to go in and just re-steer that conversation the right way. It’s not worth it if these are the trolls that are just trying to eat all your time, but it can help show other people that that’s not the only viewpoint out there.

**Grace:** If you are in a situation where you’re thinking to yourself, wow, someone should really say something about this and no one has, maybe you should be that person.

**Sue:** But if you feel safe.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. You can also message the page owner, if it’s not a moderated page, and say like, “Hey, this stuff is happening and it makes me feel not good, or unsafe or not respected. I think you need to do X, Y or Z.” I think there’s a lot of really good examples of comments policies if people don’t have them. The Mary Sue is a blog that has a pretty good comments policy. You can go check out ours on our blog. That’s a mishmash of that one. And one from Bitch magazine.

We can share some links to some more examples. If you’re part of a group that doesn’t have a policy and you want to politely suggest that maybe they adopt one, there’s some good examples out there.

**Sue:** Yeah. I think it’s really important that both online and in person-- I hate to say it, but police ourselves. If you see something wrong, call it out, draw attention to it. I mean, don’t public shame, because that is not good. But if you see something, say something. To quote my MetroCard, [chuckles] [Jarrah laughs] always make sure you feel safe. If you don’t want to do it alone, if you’re in person, grab somebody who’s with you or tell somebody else.

If you see someone at a convention taking a picture they shouldn’t be taking, if you don’t feel comfortable saying something, take a picture of them doing it and send it to security. Don’t post it on the internet, but give it to the people who are in charge of the safety of that event.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. I think there's also a responsibility on social media platforms to do better. And that's something that a variety of groups have taken up over time. Right now, for example, Amnesty International has a report on toxic Twitter, which is particularly about sexual harassment and abuse of women online around the world.

They have a series of recommendations that Twitter should publicly share comprehensive and meaningful information about the nature and levels of violence and abuse against women, as well as how they respond to it, improve their reporting mechanisms, provide more clarity about how they interpret and identify violence and how they handle those reports, and be far more proactive in educating users and raising awareness about security and privacy features on the platform.

So, we can put a link to that in the show notes. There have been similar campaigns on Facebook, which has very weird ideas of what types of content it should police and censor, and which ones it shouldn't. Obviously, Facebook owns Instagram, so same deal there. So, there are ways that we can also just collectively mobilize to put more pressure on social media platforms, as well as the government bodies that regulate those platforms.

Deanna also added that groups, in addition to having comments policies that she suggests, they need more people of color and women of color moderators specifically and have a zero-tolerance policy, like the Mary Sue. So, if you're violating the comments policy, then you're not going to be able to keep commenting. That is important too about diverse moderators and hopefully, compensated moderators.

It shouldn't be like, "If you're a company that's run by white guys," that you're asking people of color to volunteer to moderate your awful comments. [chuckles] But it's hard to fully understand how comments are going to affect people if all of your moderators are from one particular background.

**Sue:** If you're feeling some way that somebody liking something bothers you or you get upset that people are praising something you didn't like, before you say something, ask yourself why.

**Grace:** Ask yourself if starting this conversation actually does any good.

**Sue:** And know the difference between discussing why you didn't like something with someone and tearing someone down about it.

**Grace:** Also, know that one person's statement of their opinion is not an invitation to debate, not necessarily.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. I think that if you're having a respectful debate-- In a public forum, a public Twitter exchange, as a public figure, if I make a statement like, "I really thought that the new solo movie was super fun," and someone came back and was like, "Well, I guess it was okay, but I really dislike this part." That's totally fine. I don't have any problem with people or like, "I really disagree with you, because X and Y."

**Grace:** Not every statement has an unwritten change my mind at the end of it.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. But I'm totally fine with that happening. But as Wil Wheaton says, "Don't be a dick." Don't be disrespectful-- [crosstalk]

**Grace:** As Wil Wheaton says and the guys at Penny Arcade should understand by this point, really, "Don't be a dick."

**Jarrah:** Yeah. Don't be disrespectful. If you're going to disagree with someone, then be like, let's respectfully disagree. And then, if the person says, "Okay, agree to disagree," then you're done.

**Sue:** If your response includes a personal insult, don't send it.

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Jarrah:** If you're going to threaten someone, or use a slur, or complain about their politics or their personal identity or things like that, then no, not super helpful.

**Sue:** Their existence.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. [laughs] Yeah. I think that goes for everyone at all levels in the fandom. So, when we talk about just be respectful-- Being respectful, this is advice that and needs to be heard by fans, by fan spokespeople like podcasters or prominent cosplayers or prominent fan artists or experts, people behind the scenes as well as actors and just other people involved in the actual creation that this is our community and our culture. If we want to make it safer and more respectful for everyone, then it's something that people at all levels need to embrace.

**Sue:** Your favorite episode of *Star Trek* is someone else's least favorite.

**Grace:** And probably vice versa.

**Sue:** And vice versa.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. Even if your favorite episode is *And the Children Shall Lead*, I still think that you have the right to be a fan.

**Sue:** And we can talk about it without threatening each other.

**Jarrah:** [chuckles] In fact, I would be fascinated to learn why.

**Grace:** We got questions, for sure.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. I think that was hopefully a good conversation. We would always love to hear more from you, our listeners. We had a fair number more comments. We definitely couldn't get to them all. But these same threads kept coming up again about the responsibility of everyone, particularly men, to call out these types of behavior when they see it.

**Sue:** The importance of men calling out other men. We say it a lot, but I just want to address really quickly that the reason for that. And that is the men who attack women in this way, who are misogynistic, who are racist, don't see these women as their equals. They see them as lesser than. So, it's important for a peer to call them out and tell them it's unacceptable, or someone they see as a peer.

**Jarrah:** Yes, absolutely. The idea of gatekeeping as an aspect of this culture. A lot of common threads there. But if you have thoughts that you feel we didn't get to in this episode, then feel free to send us an email at [crew@womenatwarp.com](mailto:crew@womenatwarp.com). Or, you can comment on our Facebook page or our Twitter, [@womenatwarp](https://twitter.com/womenatwarp). We're also on Instagram, [@womenatwarp](https://www.instagram.com/womenatwarp) and we have a website, [womenatwarp.com](http://womenatwarp.com) with a blog, so you can comment there as well. And Sue, where can people find you elsewhere on the internet?

**Sue:** You can find me on [@spaltor](https://twitter.com/spaltor).

**Jarrah:** And Grace.

**Sue:** You can find me on Twitter, [@bonecrusherjenk](#) and in the women's room sharpening my knives.

**Sue:** [laughs]

**Jarrah:** And I'm Jarrah, and you can find me on Twitter, [@jarrahpenguin](#).

**Grace:** Be nice, be kind, be excellent to each other. Life is too short to be aggro about everything.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. Treat other people in the fandom how you would like to be treated.

**Sue:** And let people like things.

**Jarrah:** Yup. When in doubt, you can always come hang out with us on our website or social channels. We do have a comments policy, and we try our best to make sure that we are creating a safe as possible a space for our listeners.

**Sue:** And for more from the Roddenberry podcast network, including Mission Log, Trek Files and Priority1, visit [podcast.rodnenberry.com](#).

**Jarrah:** Thanks so much for listening.

[music]

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