



Cool Tools Show Podcast Episode 142: Anita Sarkeesian

Transcript

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Our guest this week is Anita Sarkeesian. Anita is a media critic and the host of Feminist Frequency Radio. She has a new book Called History vs Women, which she wrote with Ebony Adams.

Mark: Welcome to the Cool Tools Show. I'm Mark Frauenfelder, editor-in-chief of Cool Tools, a website of tool recommendations written by our readers. You can find us at cool-tools.org. I'm joined by my cohost Kevin Kelly, founder of Cool Tools. Hey, Kevin.

Kevin: Hey, it's great to be here.

Mark: In each episode of the Cool Tools Show, Kevin and I talk to a guest about some of his or her favorite uncommon and uncommonly good tools they think others should know about. Our guest this week is Anita Sarkeesian. Anita is a media critic and a host of Feminist Frequency Radio. She has a new book called History Vs. Women which she wrote with Ebony Adams. Hey Anita, how are you?

Anita: I'm great. Thanks for having me.

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. I'm really looking forward to talking to you about your new book, but let's get started with talking about your tool picks. I took a peek at the list and they look really fun, interesting ones. Why don't you tell us about calendly.com?

Anita: Yeah, okay. You know when you're trying to schedule a time to meet with someone, and you do 20 back and forth emails to find the date and time that works for everybody?

Mark: Oh boy, do I ever.

Anita: It is the most annoying thing especially for those of us who are just in meetings all the time. So earlier this year, I found this app called Calendly and what it is, is you just send a link and then the other person finds the time on your calendar and just automatically

schedules it. It's like heaven. The way it works is you put in your calendar constraints. So, if you want to have availability open from nine to five, Monday through Friday, you do that. You can also change it and be like, "Oh, I'm not available from one to five or whatever might be." It's very customizable, and then it only shows the other people the dates and times that you are available. It's awesome.

Mark: Like office hours?

Anita: Yeah.

Kevin: So, have you seen a Doodle?

Anita: Yes. Okay, so this is not necessarily in replace of Doodle. So, I use Doodle when I'm trying to coordinate a lot of people together in one call. This is more like one-to-one, although I think there are premium versions of Calendly that you have to pay for that will let you put groups together and coordinate that way.

Kevin: Okay. For the listeners, the thing is that Doodle is something that you use for a lot of people you're trying to schedule a meeting. You have 10 people and rather than having any kind of email, everybody checks off the days or the times that they're available with their name, and then you can see visually even what's one or two times when everybody's available and that becomes the meeting time. This Calendly is more for one-to-one when you have some dates you know you're available, and they can pick the one that they want from it. Is that how that works?

Anita: Yeah. Again, I think there's premium versions where you can have more people, but in my experience I'm just using it one-to-one. So, it definitely works that way. I've also seen people use it who work in a customer service scenario where they're scheduling meetings to introduce new clients to their product or what have you, and so they set it up and then they're just like, "Here, pick your time that works."

I've seen people use it for events. So, if you're at a conference and you're scheduling a bunch of meetings, you can use it that way for that week to make sure that everyone can just schedule in and it's not all these back and forths.

Kevin: We actually use Calendly for me for when I'm trying to schedule interviews or things.

Anita: Great.

Kevin: My assistant will send that out and then they'll come back with some time that works, and it's free. Is that right?

Anita: It is. Yeah. There's a free level and then a premium level.

Kevin: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mark: Do you use the free level Anita?

Anita: I do.

Mark: It's interesting how often premium versions are good enough.

Anita: Yeah. I mean, the free version just lets you have one meeting type, but that's all that I need for what I'm doing. Man, I'm telling you, it has made scheduling meetings so much easier. I don't really know what I did before I started using this.

Mark: Yeah, that's so great. That's just a cognitive load of going back and forth with emails, and what time to do it, and losing track is horrible.

Anita: Yeah. It's not fun.

Mark: Yeah. So this looks really cool, calendly.com is what it's called.

Kevin: Except it's hard to say.

Mark: Yeah.

Anita: Luckily, it's just a link that you send in an email.

Kevin: Yeah, that is correct.

Anita: I don't usually have to say it.

Kevin: Yeah. It's not hard to read. It's easy to read but hard to say.

Anita: Yeah. It really is.

Mark: Okay. So, this is something that I have and love. So, I can't wait to hear your take on the instant pot.

Anita: Yes. Do you feel like it's a bit of a cult?

Mark: Oh yeah, so much of a cult.

Anita: Yeah. So, I encourage all of the listeners to join our cult of the instant pot. I have a WhatsApp text group that has 50 people in it, and we all just share instant pot recipes.

Mark: Oh my God.

Anita: So, here's what it is. The instant pot is a slow cooker, pressure cooker, rice cooker. It's a multi-tool thing in your kitchen that lets you cook kind of everything. It is remarkable. I actually had the instant pot sitting in my house for a couple of years and never used it, and I finally pulled it out earlier this year, and I don't know why I waited so long. You can

make so much with it so quickly. You can sauté in it. You can do roasts in it. You can make soups. I boil eggs in it. I make the most perfect soft-boiled eggs every time. I love it.

Mark: Wow, I didn't know about eggs. That is an awesome thing because my daughter just tried to make some hard-boiled eggs for school a couple of days ago and then when she brought them to school, she said, "They were like super runny."

Anita: Oh no. No, you could put 20 eggs in it and cook it at the absolute perfect. It will be absolutely perfect every time, because it's the exact same pressure and there's no juggling when did the water start boiling and all of that stuff.

Mark: Also, I haven't done this yet, but I am getting ready to is it makes yogurt also.

Anita: Yes, it does. I was just about to say that.

Mark: Have you tried it, the yogurt?

Anita: I haven't. Well, I've seen other people make yogurt with it. I haven't personally done that, but that's so cool. I love it.

Mark: Yeah. It does it where you put in the milk, it heats it up to 180 degrees to kill all the bacteria and then drops the temperature, and then it beeps and tells you when it's time to have a spoonful of yogurt as a starter. Then, it keeps it as there's slow temperature to do the fermentation process. So, it's kind of automatic.

Kevin: For many years, I made yogurt from milk with my own homemade thermostat controlled, and I never heated the water up first.

Mark: You never heated the milk up first?

Kevin: No, I didn't because it was already pasteurized.

Mark: Right.

Kevin: I just skip that stuff. It was never a problem.

Mark: Yeah. It is probably safe to do it that way, but why not?

Kevin: Because I was lazy.

Mark: Exactly. The other thing I like about it Anita is I used to have something called the Fagor, which I like but it broke down. So, I bought an instant pot because everybody was telling me it was better, but the instant pot has a stainless steel cooking pot as opposed to a lot of those that are coated with Teflon or other kind of dicey, plasticky coatings.

Anita: Right, yeah.

Mark: This is stainless steel and not aluminum, either which some people are concerned about.

Anita: Yeah absolutely, and just the versatility of it. I come from a family where my mother has every single kitchen gadget known to humankind. I somehow end up with all of these kitchen gadgets, and this is a one-stop shop. You don't need a rice cooker, and a pressure cooker, and a slow cooker, and all of these different things because it literally does everything. I actually just heard from a friend who for some reason her building isn't going to have gas for a while. So, she's switching to the instant pot as her primary tool for cooking.

Mark: I think you easily can because you can sauté stuff in it.

Anita: Absolutely.

Mark: I wonder if it can make bread? Has anyone ever tried to make bread in one?

Anita: I'm curious about that. I feel like I may have seen recipes floating around about it, but I've never tried because I don't really eat bread. I'm curious about baking in instant pot.

Mark: Right.

Anita: I'm seeing more and more cookbooks coming out. I just got one that was this 25 Affordable Easy Instant Pot Recipes. So, this is becoming kind of a craze and a thing that people are using. So, we're seeing more and more experimentation and more and more options of how to use it.

Mark: Yeah. I have a Paleo instant pot cookbook that we use, and it's a-

Anita: I do too. Yeah, it's great.

Mark: It's pretty awesome.

Anita: What did I make? I made some carnitas the other day that I was like, "Oh." It's perfect every time because you're not dealing with like, "What is your oven temperature versus my oven temperature, versus the recipe test kitchen?"

Mark: Right.

Anita: It's the same every single time.

Mark: Yes.

Anita: So, you just have these perfect cuts of meat that are just so good, highly recommended.

Mark: That's a good point. So, do you have the six-quart or the three-quart?

Anita: Oh, I don't know. I don't have the big fancy one.

Mark: Okay.

Anita: I have one of the more basic models.

Mark: Okay. The three-quart is pretty small and it's only 60 bucks, and then the big six-quart one is you can usually get for about \$100 on Amazon. We have the six. It's big, and the three-quart, half the size but three-quart still a pretty good amount.

Anita: Yeah, absolutely. It depends on how many people you're cooking for.

Mark: Right.

Anita: How often you're using it, what you want to do with it? Yeah, it's a little magical device.

Mark: Yeah. You've got to get one Kevin [inaudible 00:10:45].

Kevin: Yeah. We're not big meat eaters.

Anita: Oh, I have friends who are vegan that use it. You can make pots ... I made lentils in 15 minutes the other day because it's just super quick, and you don't have to soak the beans. I was experimenting with ... So, I can't eat chickpeas unfortunately but I love hummus, and it's the easiest thing to make. So, I've been trying to experiment with alternatives to that. So, I cooked fava beans in the instant pot, and then I made hummus with the fava beans instead of chickpeas and it worked perfectly.

Mark: Wow, that sounds great.

Anita: Yeah.

Mark: We will have to try that. That sounds really good. Cool. Okay, so instant pot. Everyone get one.

Anita: Yeah.

Mark: Okay. The next one you have are some packing cubes. I know you do a lot of traveling because you do tons of public speaking, so you probably have some good packing tips. Tell us about this kit.

Anita: I am a little bit neurotically obsessed with packing efficiency. I will sometimes go through YouTube rabbit holes of the best way to pack things. It's kind of a problem but also I travel so much, and I hate checking in luggage. I don't like to bring a lot of stuff, so I am constantly looking for more efficient ways of bringing the least amount of things especially when I'm going on month long multi-city trips. So, packing cubes are one of the things that I started introducing into my travels.

They're basically like little bags, and instead of just folding your clothes up and throwing it in the suitcase, you fold your clothes up and you stick them in these little bags, and it lets you pack in more, more efficiently. Then, the cubes just sort of form it to the size of your ... Well, they don't form to the size of your luggage but you can make them sit in whatever ways, which is this nice tidy collection.

So, if you do have to pack a little bit more and don't want it sort of popping out everywhere, these bags help contain it. I particularly like a brand or rather a style, and the brand that I use is Eagle Creek.

Kevin: The Eagle Creek.

Anita: Eagle Rock is a city.

Kevin: Eagle Creek.

Anita: Eagle Creek because they're a little more shaped. They're a little more stable and structured in size as opposed to once that are more flimsy. You can pack them, you can just fold your clothes as you would and stuff them in or you can roll your clothes. There's ones that are really long. Sometimes, if I have a bunch of shirt, I'll roll them and then you line them up, and you can see all of your shirts laid out, rolled in over the little view screen that ... View screen, wow. It's not technological, but the little window that you can see through it. There are lots of different ways to use them.

So for clothes, but you can also like I have a small one that I have a bunch of non-liquid toiletries that I keep those in that bag packed in my suitcase. I basically have two of everything, the ones that I travel with, and the ones at home. That contains all of it and holds it all together.

Mark: That's cool, and so how do you deal with separating clean clothes from dirty clothes when you're on the road? Do you have a special way to identify? That's always something that I struggle with, besides sniffing the clothes.

Anita: What I'm doing right now which I don't necessarily think is the best way. I have one of the Away Suitcases and it comes like a "laundry bag." So, I put my dirty clothes in that laundry bag, and I then try to form it with the cubes, so that the cubes are going to be more empty when your clothes are in the laundry bag and I try to make it all fit properly, but it doesn't always work that cleanly.

Mark: Yeah.

Anita: Cleanly, how to do that? You can also get compression bags where it actually ... It will let you pull it tighter. So, almost like a vacuum seal without a vacuum seal, and I know some folks who use those for laundry to really tighten it down so that you're not taking up so much room.

Mark: It's like a one-way valve and you just press on it and it pushes the air out. Is that what you're talking about?

Anita: No. There are those, but what I'm talking about is it basically just like there's a string and it makes you pull it really tight.

Mark: Okay.

Kevin: It's like a stuff bag what they used call in backpacking a stuff bag.

Anita: That sounds right, yeah.

Kevin: You just really squeeze it and then you tie it. What's the word? You noose it down or something, draw it down, and there's a little lock on it. Okay. I could imagine a one-way valve, something where you pump the air out. You basically suck all the air out and you make it like a vacuum. That might work too.

Mark: Yeah, and they do have those. You pack it, and then you stand on it or sit on it, and it squeezes the air out and then when you unzip it.

Kevin: Right. I should try that because right now, I just have a plastic bag that I put it in.

Anita: Yeah. I have one of those ... One of the bags that you're talking about, but I don't really like that. They're plastic and noisy, and I don't like them as much personally.

Mark: Interesting. Since we're in the genre of travel stuff, what do you do about water? Do you bring a plastic water bottle with you and then fill it in the airport?

Anita: Yeah.

Mark: I haven't figured that out yet completely. I've tried different things.

Anita: It depends on where I'm going and how long I'm going in my mood, but I usually have some empty bottle with me that I refill. It depends on like there are several cities and several places where I don't think tap water is particularly good, so I will usually just buy a bottled water and then fill up my bottle but somewhere like San Francisco, the tap water is fine so I can just fill it up at the airport.

The bottles that I use, I tend to try to use ones that have really wide rims because I like to use a protein powder and shake it up, and it's easier to fill in to the bottle. I lose bottles constantly, so I try not to spend a lot of money on good, those really nice fancy water bottles.

Mark: Right. Yeah, they can be pricey.

Anita: They also take up a lot of room. So if you don't have a bag with a separate water pocket, then it's taking up precious space in your backpack or whatever bag you're bringing on the plane.

Mark: Yeah. I have a little collapsible bag, but it's too small. I'm thinking about maybe getting a bigger one. Then, that way they roll up and they're tiny, and then you can fill them with like ... A lot of airports now have filtered water, and you can just fill them up there and bring it on the plane with you.

Anita: You mean like the little plastic? The not plastic bottles but plastic bags that you fill up?

Mark: Yeah. It's like a bag with-

Anita: Oh, yeah. I've seen those.

Mark: ... a screw top. They work pretty well. I have one, but it's only 12 ounces or something, or 16. It's not enough. I need a bigger like a 32-ounce one. All right, so, let us talk about the Gender Knot. I think this is a book, is that correct?

Anita: Yeah, so the Gender Knot ... It's called The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy by Allan G. Johnson. This is a book that I always have. Once I read it for the first time, I was like, "This is foundational and instrumental to my feminism, to my activism work," and the reason I love it so much is because it takes these very big concepts of systems of oppression. In this case specifically, talking about patriarchy and distills it down into very easy to understand language.

It takes it out of the theoretical academic realm and explains it in ways that's really easy for folks to understand, and I found it to be so instrumental in my understanding, or the early days of understanding feminism that I highly recommend it to everyone who wants to get a better sense of what is patriarchy. What are systems of oppression? How do they affect you? How do they affect our world, and what do we do about it?

Mark: That's great because so many books along these lines are really academic and the writing is impenetrable. I mean, the work you're doing also makes the subject accessible.

Anita: Yeah. This book was absolutely instrumental in helping me to understand how to do that. Allan Johnson, folks like bell hooks, I think just do such a beautiful job of taking complex theory and being able to present it in a way that doesn't dumb down the theory. It doesn't make it any simpler. It just makes it more accessible. It uses language that we can understand. It makes it more available to more people instead of keeping it trapped in these academic spaces.

Kevin: So you mentioned that you travel with it, carry it around.

Anita: Oh I don't, sorry. I meant I always have like I've had it on my bookshelf for years.

Kevin: Oh, I see it. I see it.

Anita: Yeah. No, I don't carry it with me.

Kevin: I was wondering what you'd get from it when you re-read it. Do you keep finding new things or is it something that you change your mind each time you read it?

Anita: I don't. I think what I get sort of reinvigorated when I re-read it. Sometimes when I'm stuck on a particular script or trying to articulate something, I will go back and read passages that I had marked. It's like, "Wait, how was this explained to me previously?" and that can help me be able to articulate the point that I'm trying to make better, or just remind of some different kinds of metaphors for discussing these issues. I find it a great resource to come back to in those moments when I'm feeling a little bit stuck or inarticulate.

Mark: That's cool. What is actually meant by the Gender Knot? What's the knot?

Anita: I think what he's trying to elicit with this title is that gender is this incredibly complex ... It's a very complex thing in our society when in terms of how we identify what gender is. The complicated idea of patriarchy and how patriarchy is rooted in gender, and dominance, and that sort of thing. So, I think what he's trying to say is this doesn't need to be this complicated. Let's unpack it. Let's unravel this complex knot of theory and of our society, and of all of the things that we deal with on a daily basis but might not fully understand. Let's unravel it.

Let's take it a part bit by bit slowly, in the same way that when you have a ball of yarn that's knotted out, you have to slowly take it apart in order to make it whole again. So I think that this is really about in the title, he says Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy. It's about this long history that we have, this deep gender oppression in our society and what do we need to do to fully understand it and to move on from it.

Mark: Cool. Let's talk about your own book. It's brand new, and I just received a review copy. It's just a beautifully illustrated book with incredible illustrations of women's portraits, and you co-wrote it with Ebony Adams. Tell us about the book and what you were aiming to accomplish with it?

Anita: So, the book is called History Vs. Women: The Defiant Lives that They Don't Want You to Know. We profiled 25 women who have been erased from history. The book actually came out of a series that we did at Feminist Frequency called the Ordinary Women where we told the stories of five women that we thought were very interesting and that we wanted other people to learn about. So, with History Vs. Women, we obviously got to tell more stories and dive in a little deeper.

I think one of the things that this book does is we're trying to root the fact that women have been written out of history and the erasure of women's experiences, women's lives, women's contributions to our contemporary time and the way women are treated

today. So, we write in the book about why you should care about these women. Why you should care about these forgotten stories and how it affects us today and in the future. So, it was really important to us to be intersectional in the way that we approach the women that we chose. It is intergenerational, so we tried to do a very wide span of history, and we tried to look globally as we could. So, I'm really excited about it. It's my first book.

One of my favorite parts of the book is we actually have a section of villains, and part of the reason why we did that is because we wanted to show that the project of feminism isn't simply to celebrate women who we deemed good or only the women who are acceptable to us, but that women are complex creatures and that we are capable of all the values, and traits, and emotions of people of all genders. So, there are women who have done some pretty nasty things in the world, and I don't think we should erase that out of our history.

It's pretty ranging in terms of talking about a pickpocket like a common criminal versus a Chinese pirate who was ruthless. Then also, we put Margaret Thatcher in there because I was getting real sick of people talking about Margaret Thatcher as some kind of feminist icon when she is kind of a monster and did horrible things. We wanted to re-contextualize her story specifically for young readers.

Mark: Right. I love this like you said the criminal mall cutpurse. That's such a great name.

Anita: Yes. She's great.

Mark: Like I said, the illustrations are just incredible. They're pencil portraits that-

Anita: Yeah. The artist is T.S. Abe, A-B-E. We looked at a ton of different artists. We specifically wanted to work with a woman of color artist. So, we went through a huge list and her portraiture just is so beautiful and really stood out to us, and we were delighted when she agreed to work with us.

Kevin: I'm curious how you accumulate that list of artists whether there was a website or a place that was indexing artists particularly if you wanted artist of color. How did you accumulate that list?

Anita: It was a combination of the publisher had a list of people, and then me and Ebony had a list of people. So with Feminist Frequency, we worked with artists over the years doing different illustrations for us. So, that was some of it. Then also, just like looking up ... Just being on Twitter and being in the right places on Twitter, and starting to just note artists when we see them or when someone posts an artist being like, "Oh wow! That looks amazing. Let's look them up." Then, also just asking friends in the industry who they would recommend. So, it was a combination of a lot of different sources over several months.

Kevin: I was just wondering if there was something like a DeviantArt or equivalent that would allow you to sort or filter-

Anita: I'm not sure.

Kevin: ... in different ways?

Mark: Yeah. That would be really cool.

Anita: Yeah, I'm not sure. That would be great though.

Mark: Yeah, that sounds good. The book is called History Vs. Women: The Defiant Lives that They Don't Want You to Know. It's I'm sure will be available on Amazon online, in bookstores, and things like that published by Feiwel & Friends.

Anita: Feiwel & Friends.

Mark: Feiwel, sorry.

Anita: That's okay.

Mark: It's a Macmillan, actually is the parent company.

Anita: Yeah.

Mark: It's a beautiful book. My 15-year-old daughter is really into women pirates. So, I'm excited to show her this Chinese woman pirate.

Anita: Excellent.

Mark: Yeah.

Anita: It's a great story.

Mark: Yeah, that sounds good. Well, Anita, thank you so much. This is really fun talking to you. I love all the tools that you picked are super cool.

Anita: Thanks. This was a delight.