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For International Women’s Day, NativeVR releases UTURN,

An innovative Virtual Reality experience that fosters gender equality in tech.

San Francisco, CA: Tomorrow on International Women’s Day, NativeVR, a Virtual Reality studio crafting unique VR experiences that foster diversity, will be releasing UTURN-Episode 1: The Tech Startup, as a featured experience on the SamsungVR store. UTURN is an award-winning Virtual Reality experience which explores themes of gender discrimination and sexism within the tech industry in a new way. It uses the 360-degree medium to capture group dynamics and unconscious bias within the workplace in a first-person point of view. It also makes a number of storytelling innovations by creating an interactive experience of seamlessly walking between parallel storylines from two different perspectives. One perspective is from a male founder’s point of view who has to make a pivotal pitch to investors the next day. The second perspective is from a female coder who is crunching to get their site up and running again after a data center failure sweeps the nation. Viewers have the agency to choose a perspective at any point during the story by simply turning their body around. The spatial audio experience reacts to the viewer’s gaze by dynamically mixing together conversations from different perspectives, so that only the perspective being looked at can be heard. Like in real life, no one experiences the same story, which creates a perfect starting point to foster dialog on gender issues within screening groups.

After 25 years of working in male-dominated fields, first in computer science and artificial intelligence, then in film and animation, and finally in Virtual Reality, NativeVR founder and creative director Nathalie Mathe decided in 2016 that it was time to use her creative voice to raise awareness of what it’s like to be a woman working in tech. The Virtual Reality industry and its audience of early adopters themselves are at the intersection of several male-dominated fields, so that the same attitudes and behaviors are now being reproduced in the VR industry, as some recent news have unfortunately highlighted. At the same time, VR has also been shown to be a very powerful tool for impacting viewers’ behavior and for creating empathy through a higher sense of presence and embodiment than other media. So Nathalie figured this was the right tool for the right audience, and that the best way to achieve her goal was to create a Virtual Reality experience allowing viewers to directly walk a mile in the shoes of a young female coder working at a tech startup.

After several failed attempts at getting financial support for this project in 2016, Nathalie decided to take the risk of self-producing UTURN. She partnered with co-creator Justin Chin (a cinematographer and former Electronic Arts and Lucas Arts video game designer), with screenwriter and director Ryan

Lynch (*SanFranLand* Web series comedy writer and former Pixar story developer), and with sound designer Shaun Farley (*House of Cards*, *Angry Birds*), to create *UTURN-Episode One: The Tech Startup*, a short live-action comedy which viewers can explore from a male or female perspective. *UTURN* was completed at the beginning of 2017, with invaluable post-production work done by Tippet Studio and Mikros Image. It successfully toured the festival circuit last year in the US and abroad, winning the *Special Jury Prize* at *Jump into VR Fest* in New York City, getting nominated for *Best Interactive Experience* at FIVARS (Festival of Intl Virtual Reality & Augmented Reality Stories) in Toronto, and for *Best Cinematic Narrative Experience* at Raindance International Film Festival in London, among other screenings.

Viewers' reactions have been very enthusiastic and positive. In general female viewers always react in a similar manner, saying: "Oh my gosh, this is so realistic, this is my everyday life at work!" And male reactions are much more diverse: from being overly excited about the possibility of "editing their own movie" that they fail to notice what the story is really about until being asked; to feeling frustrated with the behavior of some of the male characters and wanting to "punch them in the face"; to saying "Yeah, but this is not that bad, she is only being dismissed, it's not like she was physically aggressed or anything"; to a few even doubting that this is real because "it's a fiction, it's not a documentary".

More formally, a user study was conducted by a Stanford University researcher in the summer of 2017, which will be published in April 2018. Results have shown that viewers shift perspectives about 10-15 times within the 10 minutes of the experience. Each person has a different way of watching it, and their gender has no impact about which perspective they follow the most or when they switch. Most viewers wish to see it a second time to catch what they missed. They mostly identify with the main female character and it increases their likelihood of taking responsibility for advancing gender equality at their workplace.

Nathalie Mathe is now taking *UTURN* to universities for group screenings and discussions. She is also collaborating with development and leadership consultants to design diversity and inclusion workshops around *UTURN* that tech companies could implement. NativeVR is also looking for funding to create new episodes of *UTURN* illustrating more gendered-biased behaviors in different stages of a woman career.

UTURN experience can be viewed in a GearVR headset (best) or on a mobile Samsung phone, using the SamsungVR player link: <https://samsungvr.com/view/4McqObQAlvC>

NativeVR, LLC is an independent VR studio focused on crafting unique VR experiences celebrating diversity in all its forms. It was founded in 2016 by **Nathalie Mathe**, an award-winning VR creator and short animation and documentary director. She contributed to over 35 cinematic Virtual Reality projects since 2013, including *Paul McCartney in concert*, *The North Face Climbers*, and *Nepal* for Jaunt. For twelve years, she was one of the few women creating visual effects on feature films like *Fast & Furious 6*, *Skyfall* and *Dark Knight Rises*. She led innovative research for NASA Ames Research Center AI Lab; holds a PhD in Computer Science and an M.A in New Media. She is also a 360 video instructor at the Bay Area Video Coalition.