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**Aston Patrick**

“Ur so Hawt.”

The Presentation of Gender in Online Game Streaming

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## **Abstract**

This research involved the analysis of naturally occurring data from an online gaming stream for the purpose of assessing communicative strategies in multimodal contexts with a focus on gender and identity. An in-depth analysis of one stream from a female gaming streamer was conducted with analysis of audio and video of the game and the concurrent open chatroom available to her viewers. A qualitative assessment analyzed how she presented her identity to her viewers, and how she maintained or rejected aspects of the female gamer stereotype. The comments from the chat were quantitatively assessed for sexual/inappropriate references and were qualitatively assessed to determine how the viewers challenged or accepted the image that the streamer had presented. The analysis showed that commenters assigned her three identities: improper, manipulative, and unskilled. Raihnbowkidz counteracted these three identities by reappropriating negative comments, consistently showcasing her gaming expertise, and calling for validation from other players.

## Introduction

The popularity of video games has grown significantly over time. In 2017 it was reported that “sixty-five percent of American households are home to someone who plays games regularly,” and that the video game industry “contributed \$11.7 billion in value to the US GDP” in 2016 (ESA 2017). One of the more prominent forms of gaming is online multiplayer games in which players either work with or against other players through an on-line connection, typically through a PC or gaming console. There has been a broadening interest in online gaming in recent years, which has led to the rising popularity of gaming streaming sites such as Twitch and YouTube. On these sites, streamers play video games while simultaneously interacting with viewers through the stream’s accompanying chat. Viewers can subscribe to a particular streamer’s channel by making a monetary investment which generates revenue for the streamer. Each streamer presents an on-stream persona in order to gain more viewers and increase their number of paid subscriptions.

Gaming has been a male dominated field since its inception. The typical conception of a gamer is a white, heterosexual male. Several studies and organizations have shown that women make up nearly half of the gaming population, though this statistic is debated (Duggan 2015; ESA 2017; Chess et al. 2017; Shaw 2012). In regard to the gaming industry, the International Game Developers Association reported that in 2016 72% of game developers identified as male while only 23% identified as female, though the number of female developers has doubled since 2009 (Legault and Weststar 2016). In eSports, the gender gap is even wider with the lowest estimate of female players being 5% (BBC 2016). There is also a gender divide in eSports earnings with the highest paid male gamer earning nearly \$3,400,000 collectively and the highest paid female gamer earning just under \$200,000 (e-Sports Earnings 2017).

My research will involve the analysis of naturally occurring data from online gaming streaming for the purpose of assessing communicative strategies in multimodal contexts with a focus on gender and identity. I will be conducting an in-depth analysis of one stream from a female streamer to qualitatively assess how she presents her identity to her viewers and how she maintains or rejects aspects of the female gamer stereotype through her interactions with the commenters in her stream’s chat. I will also be quantitatively assessing the comments from the chat for

sexual/inappropriate references and qualitatively assessing the comments to see how the viewers challenge or accept the image that the streamer has presented.

## **Twitch**

Twitch was launched in 2011 and has a daily average of “15 million daily active users” and “2.2+ million unique content creators per month” (Twitch 2017). The main purpose for the founding of the site was to create a “social video platform and community for video game culture” (Twitch 2017). Its main use is for the facilitation of video game streaming. A stream typically consists of a live video feed of the game that is being played with a webcam minimized in the corner of the screen showing the streamer(s) playing the game. For each stream there is an accompanying chat that viewers and the streamer can post comments in. Chats are usually moderated by several moderators (mods) who can remove comments, timeout commenters (disallow them from commenting for a specific period of time), or ban commenters from the chat. In order for moderators to more effectively monitor the chat, a delay can be placed on the chat so that comments can be reviewed before they are posted. What comments or commenters are removed is determined by the general Twitch rules of service and the rules that each streamer sets for their streams.

One of the major reasons the aforementioned punishments may be used is harassment through commenting. This form of harassment (especially in relation to gender) is a common problem on Twitch as it is for many other social media platforms or sites; however, there are certain conventions that are mostly unique to Twitch. One of which “raiding” is when a streamer directs their followers to another’s stream, filling the comment section with references to their fan base. This can be a positive experience if both streamers are comfortable with the exchange and the “raiders” are respectful or friendly. In this way, streamers with a greater following can give exposure to newer or less recognized streamers. However, this practice is also commonly used to facilitate harassment especially towards female streamers. Charleyy Hodson in an article she wrote for the website Kotaku UK related her own experience with a negative raid:

I knew at once that I was being raided by a troll group, because I’ve had previous experience with this behaviour. As has probably any woman who’s streamed. But knowing that the camera was pointing at my face and being broadcast to numerous channels I couldn’t watch,

engage with or prepare for, I knew I had to be incredibly careful with every single movement to ensure they didn't 'win', they didn't get the reaction they were looking for. It was paralyzing. (2017)

Other female streamers and gamers have also shared stories of times in which they were harassed often for simply being a woman working in a "masculine" field like gaming (Chan 2017; Convery 2017; Powell 2016). The most common insults or criticisms aimed at female streamers are that they are incompetent and unskilled players or that their appearance or form of dress is too "slutty." Several controversies have arisen centered around the idea that female streamers who wear "provocative" clothing set a bad example for female viewers of their streams and negatively impact the reputations of other female streamers who do not dress in a similar manner (Grayson 2015). In response, many female streamers have come together to denounce this belief and encourage other female streamers to dress as they please (Grayson 2015). Their stance is that the rampant condemnation for certain female streamers is not based on their clothing choice but because they are female as seen in this quote from streamer Scarletr0se: "It's not a cleavage-caster issue. It's a being a female on the internet issue" (2015).

#### **Dickwolves and #Gamergate**

Two of the most prominent controversies in gaming from the last ten years are the Penny Arcade Dickwolves controversy and the Gamergate campaign. The Dickwolves controversy originated in 2010 after Penny Arcade, a popular online web comic, released a strip entitled "The Sixth Slave" (Figure 1). The strip's original intention was to satirize a common element of video games in which the player only needs to save a certain number of victims in order to complete a quest. A slave who is not being saved pleads with the player character to take him along because "Every night, we are raped to sleep by the Dickwolves" (Krahulik and Holkins 2010).



Figure 1. “The Sixth Slave” from the Penny Arcade web comic series by Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins.

This joke was discussed by several prominent female gamers and game bloggers who expressed discomfort or outright criticized the comic for making light of a real problem that “isn’t a central feature of (most) games—at least in the actual gameplay, totally aside from the language used by players” (Shaker 2010). This encouraged other female gamers to come forward and start a discussion about the flippant use of the word rape in gaming to mean “victory over an obstacle or fellow player” (Salter et al. 2012). The writers of the comic, Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins, responded with another strip mocking the concerns of the female gamers. The incident soon escalated into Penny Arcade creating Dickwolves merchandise and the continued harassment of the women who had spoken up about the issue by fans of the comic. This incident is reminiscent of similar situations in a nongaming context in which the fears and concerns of women are ignored or dismissed as shown in this quote by Elizabeth Arveda Kissling in her study about street harassment:

The recognition of street harassment as a tool of sexual terrorism is made problematic by men’s refusal to take it and women’s fears seriously. There is very little published work on street harassment; it is considered a topic too trivial for serious women to be concerned about. Ridicule thus becomes a tool of silencing, and both the ridicule and the silence support the system of sexual terrorism. (1991)

The #Gamergate campaign is another example of the underlying misogyny that is present in gaming culture. The purported intent of members of the Gamergate movement was to advocate for ethics in games



journalism (journalism related to video games or the industry surrounding them); however, the incident that triggered the movement involved a blog post written by Eron Gjoni in which he accused his ex-girlfriend, game designer Zoe Quinn, of “having slept with five journalists for reviews of her game—an accusation later amended to ‘favorable coverage’ when it was clear that the reviews did not exist” (Mortensen 2016). This spawned attacks on video game journalists as a whole for ethical violations, but the most vicious harassment was aimed towards female critics of the movement. Several women, including Zoe Quinn and feminist critic Anita Sarkeesian, were doxed (their information revealed online) and forced to leave their homes after receiving death and rape threats online (Dewey 2014; Mortensen 2016). Jenn Frank, another doxed, female journalist, wrote that “the endgame is to frighten *all* women out of the video games industry—no matter what they write, film, create or produce—and to additionally frighten anyone who would support them” [emphasis in the original] (2014). The actions of the members of this movement show the toxic nature of gaming culture and why women may be reluctant to become a part of the gaming community.

### **League of Legends**

*League of Legends* is classified as a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) in which “two teams of powerful champions, each with a unique design and playstyle, battle head-to-head across multiple battlefields and game modes” (Riot Games 2016). Champions are the characters that players can choose to play during a match. Only one of each champion can be used on each team during a match. Players can move up the *League of Legends* ranking system by winning matches against other players. The ranking system consists of seven ranks: Bronze, Silver, Gold, Diamond, Platinum, Challenger, and Master. Each of the first five ranks are divided into five more sub-ranks denoted by the roman numerals V - I (with V being the lowest rank). *League of Legends* is a highly competitive online game and, according to the game’s website, has the “world’s largest online gaming community” and “the world’s most active competitive scene” (Riot Games 2016). The developers for *League of Legends*, Riot Games, estimated in 2016 that over 100 million people were playing each month (Kollar 2016). *League of Legends* is also one of the most streamed games on Twitch. In September 2017, it was the most watched game

overall at 74.3 million hours and the most watched for eSports at 19.6 million hours (Newzoo 2017).

## **Literature Review**

### **Anonymity in an Online Setting**

Communication in an online environment is affected by the level of anonymity afforded to the user. One part of this phenomenon is known as the online disinhibition effect, which is “defined as a lowering of behavioral inhibitions in the online environment” (Lapidot-Leffler and Barak 2011). This means that a person’s behavior or communication choices can be affected by the online setting. There is also evidence to support that a lack of eye contact and heightened sense of unidentifiability can lead to more toxic online behavior such as threats or flaming (Lapidot-Leffler and Barak 2011; Laineste 2010). Flaming is characterized by the use of derogatory language and aggressive behavior directed at other people (Lapidot-Leffler and Barak 2011). In a setting such as Twitch, commenters are afforded a considerable amount of anonymity since they can be identified only by their usernames (which they select themselves). This may affect the ways in which chat participants choose to interact in the Twitch chat.

### **The Presentation of Women in Games Media**

Many studies have proven that a great majority of female characters in video games are hypersexualized (Downs and Smith 2009; Burgess et al. 2007; Ivory 2006; Dietz 1998). Burgess, Stermer, and Burgess found that on video game covers the female characters, if at all present, were usually placed in a background role, in a sexual position, or were cutoff in some fashion (e.g. at the waist) which presented them as objects rather than active characters (2007). Besides the physical presentation of female characters, their roles within games are typically of a secondary or tertiary position and are not playable characters (Ivory 2006). The roles of these characters within the narrative of the game are usually in the form of the “damsel in distress” or the “slutty warrior” archetype (Downs and Smith 2009; Dietz 1998). They are often in need of a male character’s help to save them from negative situations. This is often a major quest or a key factor in the main story arc of a game, in which the male protagonist (the player) must save the female victim from the antagonist (Dietz 1998).

## **What is a “Gamer”?**

One of the problematic parts of research into gaming is the definition of what is a “gamer.” Organizations like the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) seem to have defined a gamer simply as “someone who plays games” (2017) while other researchers have pointed out that it is not a person’s actions that constitutes his/her identity, but rather how s/he identifies him- or herself (Shaw 2012). Within the statistic from the ESA that 41 percent of gamers are female, it is unknown how many of the females or males who completed the survey actually identify themselves as gamers. This is an important distinction, as someone who plays more casual games may be identified as a gamer by these surveys, but not actively participate in “gamer culture” like forums, strategy guides, gaming conventions, etc. Such individuals are much less likely to be subject to online harassment based on their participation in gaming. By not taking into account the method of attaining this statistic (a survey of over 4,000 American households), it becomes much harder to obtain a more accurate picture of the rate in which women participate in gaming culture (rather than simply playing games). The need for an accurate definition of a “gamer” is important for gaming research in general, but also for my own research, as women who identify themselves as gamers (like the streamer I am analyzing) are much more likely to be harassed by others in the gaming community.

## **Women and Their Relationship with Gaming**

The issue of creating games that are appealing to women or have a more diverse representation is a well-researched topic. A great majority of earlier studies into gaming found that women preferred games with a social or communal aspect and story driven gameplay, and would avoid violence whenever possible (Jenson and de Castell 2010; Schott and Horrell 2000). However, newer studies have pointed out the fallacy of assuming that play preference is divided according to gender, and there is evidence that play preference actually varies more by age (Jenson and de Castell 2010; Yee 2017). These studies also did not take into account the varying motivations female gamers might have for playing the same game which newer studies have shown to be much more diverse than originally assumed (Hayes 2007; Eklund 2011; Taylor, T. 2003).

When discussing why women and men may play different games or play for different time intervals, other factors besides gendered preference are hardly ever taken into account. In several different interviews of female gamers, the gamers often cited a male presence in the household as a major contributing factor to either a reduction in gameplay time or for losing interest in gaming all together (Schott and Horrell 2000; Eklund 2011; Hayes 2007). Schott and Horrell found that male relations often monopolized gaming devices or discouraged the female gamers from playing, typically by invoking the idea “that males are ‘the experts’” (2000). In these cases, some of the women also reported that at the start of gaming they asked a male such as a parent, brother, or partner for advice on their gameplay or character creation while others had the “guidance” of their male relations thrust upon them (Schott and Horrell 2000; Eklund 2011).

Another factor is the harassment that female players often experience in multiplayer settings. Many women are afraid to join the voice channel of a game or reveal that they are female because of the backlash that they often receive from male players (Fox and Tang 2014; Gray 2012; Yee et al. 2007). Gray, in her study about the intersection of gender and race in gaming, interviewed female gamers of color about their experiences while playing in Xbox Live. All of the gamers relayed that they had been harassed because of their gender and because of their race. They also remarked on the ways that white women were often used by their male counterparts: as trophies (attractive but invisible) or as tokens (good gamer but exploited and used for bragging points) (Gray 2012).

More casual forms of sexism can also occur in multiplayer settings as described by female *World of Warcraft*<sup>1</sup> (*WoW*) gamers that Eklund interviewed. They reported experiencing unwanted flirting or advances from other players after disclosing their gender or because of their female avatar, being asked to perform the perceived feminine role of mediator for their guild and being teased for interests like collecting clothing options for their character (Eklund 2011). One gamer said male gamers “think that you need more help just because you’re a girl.”

Research has also been conducted to see the possible effects of stereotype threat on the performance of female gamers. Stereotype threat oc-

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<sup>1</sup> *World of Warcraft* is an online multiplayer game with a world-wide following.

curs when “negative stereotyping of a group causes its members to fear the risk of confirming it as a self-characterization” (Vermeulen et al. 2016). In two separate studies, participants were divided into three groups: female gamers exposed to negative stereotypes, female gamers exposed to positive appraisal, and a control group. Both studies found that the group of female gamers exposed to the negative stereotypes performed worse than the group whose confidence was boosted (Vermeulen et al. 2016; Kaye and Pennington 2016). One of the studies also included a male control group and found that the female gamers with the positive appraisal performed at the same level as the male gamers. This study also had all participants take a survey of female gamer perceptions. Across all of the female groups, the female gamers “implicitly endorsed” an equivalent level of skill between male and female gamers (Kaye and Pennington 2016).

At eSports gaming events women are typically placed in one of three roles: Halo hoes, cheerleaders, and booth babes (Taylor, N. et al. 2009). Halo hoes are women who attend the event simply to pick up male gamers. Cheerleaders are typically mothers, girlfriends, or other relations who come to the event to support a male gamer. Booth babes are models used to attract gamers to booths featuring new games or technology. They are often used as props in showcases (Taylor, N. et al. 2009).

Women’s relationship to gaming is therefore heavily affected by the roles they are expected to play, the sexism they must face in multiplayer settings, and the presumed expectation that they are unskilled players.

### **Interacting with the Female Gamer Stereotype**

The most interesting elements from the interviews of female gamers are the ways, across various platforms, time, and race, that the gamers chose to interact with the stereotypes that are often forced upon them. Four types of reactions were reported by the gamers: *rejection of stereotype*, *utilization of stereotype*, *avoidance*, and *adaptation from stereotype threat*.

The first, *rejection of stereotype*, occurred when the gamers chose to actively rebuke the sexist comments and actions being made toward them. The *WoW* players in Eklund’s study and the female gamers interviewed by Gray both spoke of times in which they proclaimed their equivalent competence as female gamers to male gamers who had been harassing them or would engage in “griefing,” purposefully irritating or angering the male gamer (Eklund 2011; Gray 2012). It could also be claimed that

the unequivocal agreement among the different groups of female gamers in Kaye and Pennington's study is another example of stereotype rejection (2016). The problematic version of this reaction is when a female gamer rejects the stereotype being placed on her but still places it on other women. An example of this is when the female gamer Fatal Fantasy insisted to Taylor, within her interview, that she was "just there to game" and was not like the other women who had come just "to pick up guys" (otherwise known as "Halo hoes") (Taylor, N. et al. 2009).

The second reaction, *utilization of stereotype*, occurred when the female gamers used stereotypes to their advantage to get items or help from male gamers who made negative assumptions about the female player's skill level and/or competence. However, Eklund makes note that this strategy is dependent upon the context of a heterosexual framework in which "the man helping you [needs to believe] you are a woman offline" (2011).

The third type of reaction, *avoidance*, is simply to avoid the situation all together. A *WoW* gamer, Sanna, stated that she tried to ignore gender whenever possible and, though she is playing a multiplayer game, mostly plays by herself (Eklund 2011). The gamers in Gray's study accomplished avoidance in multiple ways. They avoided male gamers by creating clans with only female gamers in order to create a safe space, and though many of the female gamers "were not aware of their own marginalization," they also actively avoided players who used sexist or racist language (Gray 2012).

The fourth reaction, *adaptation from stereotype threat*, occurred when the gamers actively practiced and increased their skill in a game so that they could exceed the low expectations male gamers had of them, thereby shifting the conversation from their gender to strictly the game. Gray commented that, though playing better than or beating male gamers did reduce or remove harassment, this strategy is problematic since the burden of change is placed upon the women who are being harassed and not the men who are doing the harassing (2012). The one clan that used this technique were often derogatory to other women saying they were "too sensitive" and should not play if they could not handle the harassment from male gamers (Gray 2012).

While some of the female gamers were more consistent with their reactions, it is important to note that some players remarked that their

reaction in a situation is often dependent upon their mood or the particular circumstances within a game (Eklund 2011). Context played an important factor in how the female gamers choose to react.

Overall, it is readily apparent that female gamers are at a disadvantage in gaming culture because of stereotypes that portray them as unskilled and as involved in gaming for the “wrong reasons” (i.e. not for a love of gaming). Women are sexualized, looked down upon by male gamers, and belittled when they try to offer criticism about gaming. All of these factors are a part of the greater context that the following analysis will be the focus of this paper.

## Data and Methodology

The data for this study is from a multimodal context in which naturally occurring data was recorded in its various forms simultaneously. The content of the data is 148 minutes of recorded video of a Twitch live stream in which a female streamer, Raihnbowkidz, is playing *League of Legends*. The video was transcribed and cross referenced with the corresponding log of chat interactions that was collected using the Chatty.jar add-on. The stream was originally broadcast July 15, 2015.

Over the course of the stream, Raihnbowkidz completes three matches of *League of Legends* while intermittently interacting with the chat during the matches. Between each match, she directly interacts with the chat by answering questions, telling stories and showing YouTube videos. The number of viewers as indicated by Twitch was sampled every five minutes, and from this the average number of viewers was 971. The chat that accompanied the stream contains 5,602 comments with 1,355 unique participants in the chat according to username. Using the recorded time for each comment, there was an average of 33 posts per minute. The rate of commenting increased between matches and decreased during matches.

After collection, the comments were coded for physical and sexual references, inappropriate language, and support or disapproval for the streamer. Raihnbowkidz’s behavior and language were qualitatively analyzed to infer how she presented her identity through her stream and to study how she reacted to sexual comments directed towards her in the chat. A key element was to assess how she maintained or rejected aspects of the female gamer stereotype through her interactions with the commenters.



For the Analysis section, comments from the Twitch chat will be shown with username first within < > brackets, e.g. <Raihnbowkidz>. Physical gestures are transcribed within 2 parentheses, such as ((leans forward)).

## Analysis and Discussion

### Raihnbowkidz

Raihnbowkidz (real name Anisa Jomha) is a female, early twenties, online gaming streamer who mainly streams herself playing *League of Legends*. She is highly ranked in the game, and during the stream that was analyzed, she was currently Gold IV and trying to rank up during the stream. She is a self-professed “boobie streamer” as she typically is showing off cleavage (Hernandez 2016). The main purpose of this specific stream was to show off a new build (item setup) for the *League of Legends* champion Vi, who Raihnbowkidz played as in all three games that occurred during the stream.

### Her Physical Representation

Raihnbowkidz’s physical presentation is meant to capitalize on her sexuality. The clothes she typically wears include a low-cut tank top, short shorts, and a push up bra. She also wears heavy makeup. Her appearance is meant to be attractive and provocative. Her movements are also, to an extent, purposefully done for a similar effect. There are several points during the stream in which she stands up to leave the room for a few moments either to go the bathroom or find an item. Each time she makes sure that as she gets up her chest is presented directly to the camera. This behavior is even remarked upon by several commenters.

- Ex. 1     <okeydope> she only stands up so we can get a closer look  
            and im ok with that kek
- Ex. 2     <r0senburg> see why wasnt she sitting down? she stayed there  
            for a second.... she knows what we want Kappa

Viewers often speculate that she uses her mode of dress and controlled movements to increase her number of paid subscribers and donations. The fact that this is necessary in order for her to make money is evident from comments like this:



Ex. 3 <nicola1420> Last time I watched your stream you were in t-shirt, nobody really enjoyed it lol jk

In a way, her choice of presentation gives in to the typical hyper-sexualization of women in video games. It seems to buy into the idea that women are only involved in gaming to attract the attention of male gamers or that a female gamer's appearance will always be more important to her than her gameplay, but in a situation where she is working within a masculine framework, one could argue that her choices are limited.

### **Comments Related to Physical Appearance or Sexuality**

After coding the chat, I found that 38 percent of the comments referenced physical appearance or sexuality. There were several different types of these comments. Some simply stated the word “boob” in some form and sometimes included the image of boobs created by the use of parentheses and periods as seen in Example 4.

Ex. 4 <bloodsharky> ( . Y . ) Kreygasm

She also received many requests during the course of the stream to do sexual acts or pose in a sexy way. Some were very simplistic while others were more graphic in nature. She was asked the most during the stream to either show her boobs or twerk<sup>2</sup>. Often these requests were in short phrases in the form of imperatives, as seen in Examples 5 and 6 below.

Ex. 5 <thebomber1234> TWERK

Ex. 6 <iceswordtv> SHOW BOOBS PLS

The most striking of the comments, though of a smaller amount, include graphic descriptions, in which the commenters described sexual acts that they wanted to act out with Raihnbowkidz or declarations about their own sexual actions as in Examples 7 through 11.

Ex. 7 <shabalabadingdong69> @Raihnbowkidz im wanking to you right now as we speak

Ex. 8 <vqwertyuiop> can i stick my cock between them

Ex. 9 <youwotmnine> nasty slut take my huge dick in ur oversized pussy

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<sup>2</sup> Twerking is a type of dance in which the dancer shakes their butt up and down.

Ex. 10 <doichimonic> Titty fuckkkking you must be amazing

Ex. 11 <1ststackhenry> @Raihnbowkidz I just came in my pants!

In an offline setting, all of these comments would be considered sexual harassment, as they contain unsolicited requests for sexual favors and verbal harassment of a sexual nature (EEOC 2017). The fact that these comments exist shows a level of permissibility perceived by anonymous users in online chats.

### **Impropriety, Manipulation, and Lack of Skill**

With this harassment and sexualized environment, Raihnbowkidz has three characteristics assigned to her by chat participants: improper, manipulative, and unskilled. These characteristics are based on criticisms that some of the viewers assert in their comments.

The commenters who consider her to be improper do so because they find her to be unladylike and that her choice of clothing is inappropriate as it is too revealing. The most consistent type of comment on this subject wanted Raihnbowkidz to stop showing her cleavage as seen in the comments below.

Ex. 12 <dayhack20> HIDE YOUR BOOBS EARN RESPECT!!

Ex. 13 <baltimorefan99> is it that hard to cover up? Christ.

Ex. 14 <nextgeninc> STOP WITH THE BOOBS

These commenters were not concerned about Raihnbowkidz's reasons for her clothing choices, but simply about the fact that she was dressed in a way that they felt was too provocative. In some cases, these criticisms of Raihnbowkidz's appearance and clothing were aggressive and even violent as presented below.

Ex. 15 <insanity1133> Please kill yourself you little slut

Ex. 16 <sweetcreamonnipples> sluuut sluuut slut slut sluuut am i the only one hearing this instead?

In contrast to comments about her impropriety, there was a smaller set of commenters who were angry that Raihnbowkidz was not showing enough skin or not being provocative enough.

Ex. 17 <bananagonnagetya> bye bitch no nipples no watch

Ex. 18 <onepumpchump09> give the viewers what they want

Ex. 19 <onepumpchump09> twerk or riot

As seen in the examples above, these comments contain a sense of entitlement on the part of the chat participants. They demand a certain level of physical exposure from Raihnbowkidz or for their requests to be fulfilled. By stating that if she does not enact their requests, then they will stop watching or will cause a commotion in the chat.

The second identity assigned to her was that she was manipulative in the way she conducted her stream. This assertion by the commenters is an expansion of the improper identity because they are stating that she is dressing too provocatively, and that her reason for dressing this way is to manipulate her viewers. This manipulation is being achieved by using her sex appeal to gain more paying subscribers and to raise the number of donations contributed to her stream. There was also a common idea that she was misleading viewers by claiming her stream is based on her playing *League of Legends* when in reality she is trying to show off her body for money. Below are examples of comments accusing Raihnbowkidz of this manipulation.

- Ex. 20 <ses1234567890> Hey you need to show your boobs?  
seriously, your are selling your body for donations?
- Ex 21 <sergio99811515> U are a fucking fox. Dont stream in the lol<sup>3</sup>  
chanel go to the worres ones
- Ex 22 <urgeofficial> LISTEN @Raihnbowkidz YOU REALLY  
ARE A GOOD STREAMER, BUT THE FACT I AM  
STARING AT YOUR BOOBS IN ORDER TO WATCH YOU  
IS DECEPTIVE, YOU NEED TO ACTUALLY REALIZE  
YOU ARE BEING A SUCCUBUS

In a sense, these commenters are correct in that Raihnbowkidz has chosen her attire and physical presentation for a specific reason. However, one of the reasons cited for this derogatory language is that she is somehow ruining Twitch as a platform or giving a bad name to female streamers, but this is simply not the case. In 2015, when this stream took place, only 8 women made it into the top 100 streamers on Twitch (Grayson 2015), and Raihnbowkidz's subscriber and view count are relatively low for the platform (Hernandez 2016).

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<sup>3</sup> "lol" is an abbreviation for *League of Legends*.

The third characteristic assigned to her is that of an unskilled gamer, which is part of the stereotype of female gamers discussed above. This form of criticism was not as prevalent in the comments, but comments questioning her skill are seen in Examples 22 and 23 below.

Ex 23 <ffamouz> why are you talking like you know this game, you suck and dont understand it one bit

Ex 24 <robstobbs123> how are you gold lol?

In the first example, the commenter is challenging the identity of skilled gamer that Raihnbowkidz is trying to create for herself by attempting to invalidate the gaming advice and explanations she is giving during the stream. They are blatantly calling her authority in to question. The second example is referencing the ranking that Raihnbowkidz has in *League of Legends* (Gold IV). They are questioning how someone with her (implied) lack of skill could progress to such a high ranking.

In response to these three characteristics that Raihnbowkidz is assigned, she utilizes several methods to challenge the commenters' presumptions.

### **Challenges to Assigned Characteristics**

Raihnbowkidz challenges the aforementioned characteristics assigned to her by reappropriating the negative comments, showing her gaming expertise, and calling for support.

The first type of challenge is in response to the comments that claim she is improper and that she is manipulative. Raihnbowkidz referenced the sexual comments in her chat a very small amount of the time during her stream (only 9.8 percent of her comments). When she did reference them, it was to reappropriate these comments for her own purpose, which was to generate entertainment value. Her main way of accomplishing this was by "attacking back" at the negative comments in a process similar to grieving (purposefully irritating or angering someone), which was mentioned in the Literature Review as "troll-baiting." Since a "troll" makes inflammatory or aggressive statements simply to draw a reaction and receive attention, "troll-baiting" is when someone antagonizes a "troll" to get them to react in the way that "trolls" want others to (i.e. becoming annoyed or angered). Raihnbowkidz often engaged with "trolls"

by responding in a way that would purposefully annoy or further irritate those commenters.

The following exchange is a clear example of “troll-baiting.” The commenter calls Raihnbowkidz a “whore” and belittles her for ‘whoring herself out for views’ (because of the way she dresses) with the possible intention of invoking a shocked reaction from Raihnbowkidz. Instead of reacting that way, she does the opposite by acting immediately hyper-sexual.

Ex 25 <androb123> You are such a whore please stop selling your self for views that is sad

Raihnbowkidz: I’m “such a whore. Stop selling myself for views.” ((leans forward and pretends to lick webcam))...If you- If somebody happened to have their dick right on their screen they would have had like a raihnbow lick. A raihnbow lick. ((roles R))

In theory, this would irritate the commenter further since she is engaging in the kind of behavior that the commenter was deriding her for.

In this next exchange, the commenter is trying to insult Raihnbowkidz by implying that she is overweight, so, in response, she hyperbolizes their statement by basically saying ‘I’m so overweight that it’s like I’m pregnant.’

Ex 26 <theicyballer2> have you gained weight recently?

Raihnbowkidz: “Have you gained weight recently?” Man, I’m pregnant. ((stands up to adjust shorts)) Pregnant...I have a goddamn child in me.

By choosing to not react defensively to the insult (insisting she has not gained weight or becoming angry with the commenter), she negates the biting nature of the original comment by turning the insult into a joke.

This form of reaction would fall under rejecting the female gamer stereotype discussed earlier in the Literature Review. It is a direct rebuttal to the comments only addressing her body or reproaching her behavior. She is invalidating the content of those comments by not responding to them in a serious manner. This shows that even though her appearance is crafted to be sexually appealing, she does not see that as the main purpose for her streaming as she rarely acknowledges the presence of sexual comments.

In order to challenge the assigned identity of unskilled gamer,

Raihnbowkidz consistently illustrates her expertise at playing *League of Legends*. Through the majority of the stream, Raihnbowkidz's focus is on her *League of Legends* matches whether she is commenting on other players' strategy or skill, her own gameplay, or shouting exclamations or reactions to what was currently happening in the game. Around half of Raihnbowkidz's comments pertained to gameplay or strategy.

Through these comments, Raihnbowkidz shows her proficiency in *League of Legends* and skill in playing the game. She often makes comments on other players' strategy, as seen in the examples below in which she criticizes other players' gameplay.

Ex 27 Raihnbowkidz: As soon as the Morgana<sup>4</sup> went missing from lane they should have backed off.

Ex 28 Raihnbowkidz: No, don't go back into that, Skarner<sup>5</sup>, dude.

In both of the examples, she is remarking that other players on her team should have refrained from hastily entering into battles that would be pointless for advancing in the match.

In other instances, she fairly evaluates her own skill by making note of when she is playing well but also admitting when she is playing poorly like in the example below.

Ex 29 Raihnbowkidz: I was trying to upgrade my R while that was happening and then my fingers slipped on the E. Fuck. I... uh... That was really bad. I tried to upgrade my R mid fight and fucking hit the E...out of panic.

In this comment, she is explaining to her viewers that her intention was to upgrade and activate certain powers (which would be triggered by hitting the E or R keys on the keyboard) for her character, but in a moment of panic, she accidentally hit the wrong button. Instead of pretending like she intended to activate the power or that the mix up never happened, she freely admits that she made a mistake, which shows that she understands

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<sup>4</sup> Morganna is a champion in *League of Legends*. In this case, the character is being played by a player on the opposing team.

<sup>5</sup> Skarner is a champion in *League of Legends*. Here Raihnbowkidz is using the champion name to address the player on her team who is currently playing as that champion.

the game enough that she knows when an action was the wrong one to take.

She also answers questions about the game from the chat to give advice or explanations.

Ex 30    Raihnbowkidz: “What is the build?” It’s Youmuus<sup>6</sup>, trinity, last whispers you’re ahead or a tank if you’re not ahead.

Ex 31    Raihnbowkidz: That’s why you build the youmuus on Vi by the way. Easy picks<sup>7</sup>. If you can lock down somebody, it’s an easy pick.

In the examples above, she explains to her viewers what the build (item set up) she was showcasing during the stream was composed of and why that build is effective in the game as it gets a player “easy picks.” This shows that she understands the mechanics of the game and what strategies are beneficial to becoming a better player.

It also shows that Raihnbowkidz wants to be seen as a gamer. She never explicitly says that she is one, but by vocally placing a heavier emphasis on the game and by consistently discussing strategy, she is placing her identity as a gamer at the forefront of the discussion instead of allowing the focus to be about her appearance. The purpose of this stream was to show off a new build of the character Vi, which also shows that she intended the stream to revolve around the game and her gameplay.

The final way that Raihnbowkidz challenges the assigned characteristic of unskilled gamer is by calling for validation from another *League of Legends* player. Towards the end of the stream, Raihnbowkidz reads a comment that says that she does not understand the game and that the build (item set up) she is using for the character Vi is a bad strategy. She responds by coming to the defense of the build, which she was showing off on the stream as shown below.

Ex 32    <ffamouz> why are you talking like you know this game, you suck and dont understand it one bit

Raihnbowkidz: “Why are you talking like you know this game? You suck, and you don’t understand it one bit.” I don’t think you’re a very

high elo<sup>8</sup> if you think that I suck. I- like I'm learning obviously, but like what's coming out of my mouth, or what I do know, comes from Challenger players.

She continues to explain the purpose of the build and then calls the Challenger player (a competitive ranking in *League of Legends*) that mentors her, Allorim, to further validate her knowledge. In this entire interaction, she shows that she is concerned with her viewers' opinions about the character build and the gaming strategy because she makes the effort to explain why the build works, and then calls another player to validate what she is saying. From the way that Raihnbowkidz reacts to these criticisms, and her focus on her gameplay, it is apparent that she wants to be identified as a skilled gamer.

## Discussion

Raihnbowkidz both rejects and capitalizes on aspects of the female gamer stereotype. She uses her sexuality and the hate she receives from commenters to create a beneficial circumstance for herself to make money and to use the derogatory statements as a form of entertainment for herself and her fans. She rejects the female gamer stereotype by focusing on and standing up for her gaming strategy when it is challenged.

It is also important to note that one major factor that has an effect on Raihnbowkidz's responses is that a stream is meant to be a form of entertainment. As the streamer, she has to find a balance between the demands of her audience and her desire to be seen as a competent gamer.

From the analysis of the chat, it is obvious to say that many commenters felt that it was acceptable or at least unpunishable for them to use language that in an offline context would constitute sexual harassment or threats. Though anonymity is a factor in the level of toxicity, the

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<sup>6</sup>Youmuus, Trinity, and Last Whispers are all items that a *League of Legends* player can purchase within a match for the character they are playing as.

<sup>7</sup>A "pick" is a knock-out or kill

<sup>8</sup>"elo" is a term used by *League of Legends* players that refers to the ranking system within the game. Raihnbowkidz is stating that she does not believe that the commenter has a high ranking in the game.



types of insults and demands are indicative of the way that women are still perceived in greater culture. The communal comments from her fans show that online spaces can be constructive and supportive. The fans of the stream have the same level of anonymity as the harassers in the chat, which shows that it is the individual in each situation who decides to be derogatory and this kind of behavior is not something inherent to the platform.

This research could be expanded in several ways. For one, an analysis of a greater number of female streamers would prove beneficial to identify patterns of inappropriate language or sexual comments, so that harassment can be better detected and managed in online settings. It would also be helpful to study male streamers to create a comparison between how the two genders are treated in online gaming streaming. This could lead to a better understanding of how harassment in gaming can be lessened or prevented.

I also noticed a similarity between the sexual/harassing comments and catcalling as both are directed at a female target, the harasser is afforded some level of anonymity, and there is the similar context of a woman “invading” a masculine space. Further research that compares online harassment to offline instances could be helpful in determining what aspects of culture are carried over into online settings and how much the anonymity that online discussion affords actually affects the way that people communicate.

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