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Methods

4/19/2023

Final rough draft

The research object I have chosen to study is the misogynistic experiences of female creators within streaming and video creation on Twitch and Youtube. This issue has been present since the internet became a public space, but recently it has become a more prevalent and a more pressing issue. Because the research object I chose is newer and specific, not many scholars have talked about the topic. However, it has become a major point of argument on the internet itself with people creating movements or sharing their experiences on social media such as twitter. I want to touch on these misogynistic experiences in similar media jobs like the music or the television/movie industry, as well as talk about the encouragement of this behavior from some male creators that are present on the internet and the platform's pathetic attempt to stop it. Having background context on these things helps further understand the importance of the answers given during the interviews I plan on giving to 5 separate female creators actively making content on Twitch and Youtube.

Description and Context:

When looking at this topic we can see these issues being consistently present in any areas labeled “male dominated”, however one place considered closest to my topic specifically would be the film industry. I stumbled on an article titled *The Astonishing Sexism of Hollywood and What it Means for Them* by Rachel Simmons, this piece talks about an article over the comic

actress Anna Faris and elaborates on her thoughts on what some quotes from the article means to women right now. She uses a quote from Nicholas Stoller who says *“You need to make the actress completely adorable, or else she’ll be thought of as the straight man or the bummer...”* Simmons says that girls learn “1. Women can’t be powerful, confident or even self-possessed without getting knocked down a peg to ensure everyone knows they’re humble, not conceited and know their place. 2. Women cannot be liked unless their moods and behavior are pleasing to others above all.” Seeing how content creators and celebrities are often compared due to their similarities in work, these issues seem to carry over.

Although the internet is helping with social progressions like the acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community, it seems to be somewhat behind the times as misogyny is still prevalent and sometimes even encouraged. For example, there is a large figure on the internet named Andrew Tate and he consistently preaches things encouraging misogyny such as “women belong at home” and “they are just property”. The Print talks more about this in their article titled *“Who is Andrew Tate and how his ‘misogynistic’ philosophy has gathered legion of male fans online”* and even labels Andrews following as “The Cult Of Andrew Tate’ !. The authors focus on Tates larger actions in life more than his audience, but one quote that stood out the most when relating back to my RO was “The cult of Andrew Tate has origins in misogyny and violence. Tate frequently shows off his gun collection, and talks about beating women. “It bangs out the machete, booms in her face and grips her by the neck. Shut up bitch,”. And because his platform is so large, even when he was banned off Instagram, Youtube, Facebook and Tiktok, this “cult” he had made continued to push and almost worship him and his beliefs.

The misogyny towards women has been around for a long time and its presence on the internet has also been here since the beginning. When encountering it on the internet it usually

comes in the forms of reinforcing stereotypes such as women belonging in the kitchen or being nothing but a vessel for children as well as overly derogatory comments that are often very sexual. I think it's due to the anonymity of the internet that men feel so comfortable saying things to this extent. Rather than saying these things face to face they are able to hide behind a username within comment sections and livestream chats. On top of that you have the reinforcement of these things coming from larger public figures like Andrew Tate, and on top of that fact it's still around in larger industries like film and television to continue to push this idea of its natural.

Although there are no scholarly articles on this specific topic, I found an article written by the *New York Times* that speaks directly about the sexism and harassment of women in gaming. This piece talks about how there was an outcry from Gamergate in 2014 when women faced threats of death and sexual assault for simply critiquing the streaming industries male-dominated and sexist culture as well as the many other women who have come forward with allegations of gender discrimination, harassment and sexual assault through many social medias including Twitter, Youtube, and Twitch. This quote in particular stuck out to me, the author states “The gaming industry is particularly conducive to a culture of misogyny and sexual harassment, Ms. Gordon said, because straight white men have “created the identity of the gamer as this exclusive property.” When women, people of color or L.G.B.T.Q. people try to break into the industry, she said, the “toxic geek masculinity” pushes back in ways that often lead to sexual abuse and bullying.

I also wanted to touch on the topic of events that have happened recently that the internet has taken into consideration. A couple weeks ago a popular male streamer was caught having tabs of deep faked porn open while live. If that doesn't make you sick to your stomach in itself,

the Deep fakes (that he was paying to view by the way) were his female co-workers in the industry. One of the females being a streamer who goes by the name of QTCinderella, who is his best friend's girlfriend, and the other one being the most popular female content creator right now on Twitch, Pokimane who has stated many times she is very uncomfortable with people sexualizing her on the internet. In direct response to this issue the internet immediately started taking sides, and as statements from the girls began to release you could see the immense damage that was done to their health. The topic of deep fake p*** on the Internet is an issue I could talk about forever, but I want to focus on the effects that it caused on the women involved. When QT released her statement she was a wreck. She was on live sobbing talking about how badly it affected her body image, how gross she felt looking at herself in the mirror and how she feels as though she can no longer trust the people around her, especially the men. Poki's statement came through a tweet and she says "stop sexualizing people without their consent.....thats it....thats the tweet" I want to take these articles and events as well as the ones in my proposal and use them to emphasize the importance of how common and wrong this is, while also focusing on the effects of these issues on the female content creators to both their mental and their content creation in general.

From a consumers perspective Twitch specifically isn't doing enough to where the viewers are able to see a difference in the policing of behaviors within their website. For example, after doing a controlled study surrounding sexism on Twitch during 2015, author Johnathan Alklid concludes his paper by saying , "it would appear as if Twitch is not a breath of fresh air in cyberspace as it does not seem to deviate from the arguably standard sexist demeanor found on the Internet". *The New York Times* published an article December 2020 surrounding Twitch and how they are cracking down on harassment of their streamers. Author Kellen Brown

says “Twitch said the changes were its most significant policy updates in almost three years. They followed a nearly yearlong review that included consultations with streamers and academics who study cyberbullying, diversity and inclusion, the company said. The new standards will take effect in January.” Twitch did this once before in 2018 however later in the summer was under fire when dozens of gamers and streamers — mostly women — publicly shared that they had been sexually harassed and assaulted by others in the gaming industry, including on Twitch. I am still unsure if things have actually been changed but as someone who regularly consumes media from this platform, it feels as though things haven't changed.

Initial Conclusion:

My initial observation regarding my research object is that because of the anonymity of the internet as well as the encouragement from popular male creators such as Andrew Tate and lack of major punishment from streaming platforms, men take this as an opportunity to reinforce misogyny through forced gender roles as well as derogatory or sexual content. The effects that it has on the women within the industry is obviously very negative, causing low self-esteem, low self-worth, identity crises as well as questioning their enjoyment in their career. Once I interview these five separate female creators, I'm hoping to see a correlation within their answers to what I have found in my research so far. With these answers hopefully I can get a more detailed argument put together as to how negatively impactful this is and how Twitch and YouTube go about reinforcing and/or shutting down this horrible problem that is taking over the internet right now.

Lit Review

The research object in question would be the misogynistic experiences of the women within streaming and video creation on the platform Twitch. Although the internet is helping with social progressions like the acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community, it seems to be somewhat behind the times as misogyny is still prevalent and sometimes encouraged. Because we live in a patriarchal society where misogyny has been normalized for years, it makes it that much easier for people to come in and enforce these onto the people in the public of the Internet. There are some creators that even go as far as to encourage this type of behavior on the Internet. After speaking to a few of my friends who do this for a living, and from the experiences of men forcing stereotypes or making derogatory statements towards them they shared with me, I was able to narrow down specific events and experiences that are common among women in content creation. Before making interview questions I made a set of research questions, each having their own surrounding methodology to help specify and further my research into surrounding topics. Question one that came about was “how does misogyny emerge within the space of online content creation(streaming, and video content)?” Surrounding this question we have the male gaze, heteronormativity, mirroring and influence being present. Question two is, what are the effects of this misogyny on the women within content creation? Surrounding this question we have surveillance, gender performativity, forced ideals, hypersexuality, objectification and forced expectations. Question three How do Twitch and Youtube as social platforms work to reinforce or combat this misogyny? Use of power, change on the internet, Twitter and YouTube as platforms, and once again misogyny are the topics surrounding this specific question.

1) How does misogyny emerge within content creation (streaming and video content)?

Because of how large of a public the Internet is, these content creators with larger platforms are often put upon a pedestal like idols. Because the majority of the Internet takes this view when looking at creators with larger communities, this idea of having to be the “perfect person” is then pushed further onto the creators themselves. Unfortunately for female content creators, a lot of this idea of idol perfection focuses around the male gaze. With the history of over sexualization and extreme objectification of women within media, a lot of female creators are told they have to cater to the heterosexual male gaze not only to grow on the internet, but to even have what they do have recognition. Within Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." , she states “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” in reference to the male gaze within cinema. Mulvey also states that if “she's not the inspiration for the hero or the love interest in a film she's utterly useless”

Because of the foundation of these ideals, it is already difficult being a woman in any form of media. However, there are things that go beyond what is “normal” when shifting the context to Streamers and Video creators on the internet. For example, this article titled Fortnite streamers as influencers: A study on gamers' perceptions - the computer games journal speaks about the extreme influence that creators have on their direct community and how it's very easy for an audience to adopt the mannerisms and core beliefs, similar or directly from the streamer/video creator they watch. They specifically talk about Fortnite streamers within this

piece however, this concept carries no matter the type of Content being made. The author separates “streamers as influencers” into three separate sections, attractiveness (how relatable, the streamer and content that is shared is to the user), trustworthiness, and lastly, expertise. With the topic I chose, I want to focus on the section of trustworthiness. The author states “Trustworthiness is also considered to be a determinant for users to view an influencer’s content. A study by De Veirman et al. (2017) found that perceived popularity encourages trustworthiness, which touches on the notion of reputation. In this case, a positive reputation may encourage new users to trust the influencer faster than if they were not popular.

Lastly something important that belongs in this section is women in male dominant spaces, and within this topic it is the male gaming space. In an article titled No Girls on the Internet: The Experience of Female Gamers in the Masculine Space of Violent Gaming by Carina Assunção the author talks about an experimental study done in 2012 by Kuznekoff & Rose that shows how women are three times more likely to be the target of toxic behaviour during the game. “Albeit documenting an important aspect of the female gamers’ experience in online games, the methodology employed by Kuznekoff and Rose (2012) is susceptible to bias. Indeed, the researchers were playing the game themselves while using pre-recorded voices (female and male) to analyze reactions of other players” It is also highlighted within the article Nothing but a “titty streamer”: legitimacy, labor, and the debate over women’s breasts in video game live streaming where Bonnie Ruberg, Amanda L. L. Cullen & Kathryn Brewster further emphasizes this idea by saying “T. L. Taylor writes that “harassment is a common problem in game live streaming that affects both variety and esports streams in devastating, powerful ways” (2018, p. 154). In particular, women streamers are frequently the targets of gender-based harassment.”(p467)

(2) What are the effects of this misogyny on the women within content creation?

When being on the internet, you have hundreds of thousands of people watching what you say and what you do. You have fans, possible sponsors, the platform itself and possibly even the government. With Foucault's concept of surveillance (1975), he gives the example of prisoners being on their best behavior because they know they are being observed but are unaware of where and when the guards are watching them..This concept applies to streamers and how they are often on their best behavior when they go live. The amount of pressure that comes from the mystery of who is watching and having to watch what you can and can't say is a perfect example of this concept of surveillance. Just like in the prison, the prisoners cannot see the guards but they know they are watching. Multiply that by a couple thousand and you got the public of the internet.

Because of this constant surveillance, it's possible to feel like the topics of performance and performativity make themselves present within the world of content creation as well. This idea of playing into what is "ideal" or the idea of a "perfect idol" is very popular. Gender performance is what is most present with female content creators. Everything from leaning into extreme stereotypes of femininity and even underperforming gender can cater to a specific audience and protect not only image but self-esteem and possibly even your brand on the internet. Butler states " My point is simply that one way in which this system of compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced and concealed is through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with 'natural' appearances and 'natural' heterosexual dispositions."(p524) . Carina Assunção references Butler when saying "Gender can thus be seen as a performance, as it was theorized by Butler(1990). In her view, gender is constructed based on a series of acts wherein

individuals need resources (such as aggression, in the case of masculine acts) that will aid them in making those performances realistic. This will confirm a gender identity which gives them self-esteem (Burke, 2003) by confirming that they belong to a larger group (Brown, 2000).“(p.50). She also says that “Many studies have identified areas in which female masculinities disrupt gender categories by deconstructing traditional gender roles” (p50)

3) How does Twitch as social platforms work to reinforce or combat this misogyny?

There are a few things you can do on Twitch to protect you and your chat from harassment or uncomfortable messages like above. To start there is something called Twitch TOS or terms of service and according to Twitch, you need to adhere to all of these rules set out for you or your account gets deleted. Unfortunately This terms of service is mainly geared towards streamers on the platform rather than the chatters, letting them know that any form of nudity or public harassment towards other streamers and or their chat is something that can get their account banned. When it comes to the chat themselves, as a streamer, you are able to have moderators in your chat. Moderators are assigned to their roles by the streamer themselves, and their job is to delete messages, warn chatters when they are out of place, or ban anybody in chat who is purposefully disturbing the stream. Despite this making the smaller comments easier to handle, when it's a larger group there is not much the moderators can do but scramble to make sure every message is deleted and every account was banned.

When faced with this issue of harassment in women chats, Twitch as a company doesn't really do much to help. Maybe making a Twitter statement or announcing at an event that “things are changing” however since 2018 Twitch as a company has not made many advances to protecting their streamers against the constant harassment.

Analysis

Despite the fact that each woman was guided by the interview questions given surrounding their job, each woman's answers lead to many different topics that I had never really thought about. With the large amount of answers and stories shared, most of them still cohered together into some overarching themes. The three ways that men perform misogyny in this space that stood out the most to me were the common stereotyping, the oversexualization, and the lack of policing of male publics. These three things are all intertwined with theories such as performativity, the masculine/male gaze, feminism and intersectionality.

Stereotyping

These five female streamers were asked about what the most common form of harassment they receive. Three of them responded with the pushing of stereotypes of women. For example, one streamer named Galaxe says "I would be shocked if I could go a whole day streaming without somebody telling me to go make them a sandwich". When it comes in the form of a single comment, it's easy to blow it off and ignore, but Galaxe speaks on personal experience of being in her friend's stream when these comments come in waves. Galaxe says, "It's easy to handle on my own stream especially when it's just a single comment I can blow off. However, I was in my friend's stream a couple weeks ago, [someone] who just started content creation, and a group of people came in and proceeded to tell her over and over again 'You belong in the kitchen', 'Is your boyfriend gonna be working late? You should get his laundry done', and other comments of that nature. It hurts so much to know that there's nothing that I can really do besides argue through comments and sit there while her face drops and she has to end the stream". Obviously, the idea of these stereotypes have existed for a long time, but with the

progression of our society they have seemingly become lesser in face-to-face interpersonal communities in real life. However, with the anonymity of the Internet and its constant growth, these ideologies are common and are somewhat forced onto these female creators.

Two of these twitch streamers I interviewed identify as Muslim women. In both their responses to this question, and a few others, they talked about the large differences of being a woman of color, specifically a Muslim woman of color, and how they experience stereotyping. One of the streamers who asked to stay anonymous said this: “Of course, as a woman I get the consistent ‘Just go shopping’, ‘You should be making dinner’, and things of that sort. However, as a Muslim woman, I get many of men that come in my stream, saying things like ‘What a good Muslim woman staying home’, ‘I bet your hair is beautiful, you should show us’, ‘Why are you speaking English’ and the most common, ‘We don’t want you here go back to where you came from’. It’s unbelievably exhausting.” Although most women experience this type of behavior on the Internet, the comments between white women and women of color are quite different.

Women are already considered lesser when looking into societal heteronormative ideals, but the woman of color is on the very bottom of that list. Very obviously through these responses and experiences shared, they are treated as such online, if not worse. These women get everything from insults to their culture or country, to fetishization or extreme objectification. Due to the women openly showing their culture and religious ideals on a purely visual platform like Twitch, this unfortunately makes the chatters believe they have liberty to comment on it just because it's there.

Oversexualization

Another common response between these women was how they are objectified and oversexualized while doing their job. With the amount of research I had done and a few personal

encounters of my own, this did not come as a surprise to me. What did come as a surprise was the amount of aggression behind some of the comments these women have received. It wasn't just a simple "Oh my goodness you're so beautiful, do you need a boyfriend?" or "You should try touching your elbows together", but rather comments describing in graphic detail what the commenter wanted to do sexually to these streamers. One of the last women I had interviewed was a young Chinese woman just 18 years old who also asked to stay anonymous, and the things she shared were honestly terrifying to hear. She stated, "Ever since I began to stream with Facecam, the objectifying comments I have received continue to grow. I get comments from men on the daily saying things from 'Is it pink?', 'Does it jiggle?', to describing in deep detail what they would like to do to me in bed or how they have always wanted to rape an Asian girl. I'm 18 years old.....18!"

This young woman is not the only girl who proceeded to tell me that these types of comments happen more often than they should. It has proposed a problem to these female content creators where they feel like they are always treading a thin line between feminist sexual subjectivity and misogynist sexual objectifications. Because of comments like these, they are afraid to be strong feminine public figures due to the possibility that eventually they could cross the line of, "Oh you're asking for these comments because of the way you look or the way you act in the public eye." Some are even afraid once that line is crossed, there is no reversing it depending on your social status or the amount of viewers you receive on your streams.

I feel like this thought process can directly tie into Butler's idea of performativity. Butler states, "My point is simply that one way in which this system of compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced and concealed is through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with 'natural' appearances and 'natural' heterosexual dispositions." With the responses received, these women

could feel as though the only way to become a strong feminine public figure is to put up with the harassment and lean into their sexuality in order to control and be fully aware of how they are perceived online; however, the opposite reaction can also take place. One could also see comments like these and retract into themselves. They could begin to talk, dress, and act less overtly feminine and more androgynous in order to feel comfortable and accepted in a male-dominated public such as Twitch and YouTube. Zazii, a 19 year old Muslim interviewee says, “Towards the beginning of my streaming career, I felt as though I needed to be more laid back and I shouldn't fully be myself when live. There were constant thoughts of how I didn't belong in the streaming scene. I felt this not only because I was new to content creation, but also because I am a young Muslim woman unsure of how the internet would react to my appearance and beliefs. Even after months of streaming I noticed myself asking, ‘Should I stick with neutral tones for my hijab?’ or even some days, ‘Should I use facecam today?’”

When talking about both oversexualization as well as stereotyping on streaming platforms like Twitch and YouTube, they seem to be a direct reflection of the heterosexual male gaze being the standard by which women are viewed. Because the reactions of the men are so polar extreme to how women themselves want to be seen, it seems to leave women in an uncomfortable position either way. It leaves these women no middle ground or neutrality so they feel obligated to lean into these extremes broached by the men. Unfortunately there is always insecurity within the extremes, so with no place to go and no middle ground, they feel in a constant state of walking on hot coals. These women could never be fully comfortable on this platform because they are isolated or singled out no matter where they go, called out for being too feminine or not feminine enough, but never just the feeling like they can be themselves. “As I grew my content, I grew into myself, being able to stream with a facecam and show my true

personality. Unfortunately, as the numbers grow, so do the weirdos. Recently I feel like walking on eggshells because of comments I receive, and I fear that I won't ever be really comfortable on the platform.”

Policing of male publics; Anonymity As An Affordance

Many publics such as the internet are advertised to be a kind of middle ground or neutral space where the rules of society are either inverted or not present. However, the internet gives men a space where anonymity gives both motivation and power to speak out in ways that would normally be more inappropriate in face-to-face communication. Because of this sense of neutrality or equality online, they may feel the need to assert their perceived right to dominance in the space to reinforce hegemonic masculinity and feelings of superiority when threatened. When men enter a space where a woman is taking on a non-conforming role to the stereotypes perpetuated by a misogynistic society, they feel that they must reassert their normalized perspective and respond to what they feel is an unsteady shift in the social hierarchy they are used to. Within Hall's article titled Theories of Culture and Communication he states “culture is the deposit of knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, timing, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a large group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving” (Samovar, Porter & Jain, 1981, p. 24” (p52) This is present in almost every job industry, not just Streaming or other forms of content creation. For example, the title Doctor is seen by society as a male and tends to clarify when it's a “female doctor.” The fact that these men can stay anonymous online as well as have minimal to no punishment for their actions further fuels this idea in their heads.

The greatest challenge these women are put up against on Twitch is the live chat that occurs during their streaming. Chat, just like the general internet, is an anonymous forum that anyone on the platform can use. They have complete freedom to say whatever they want which could be good or bad depending on your chatters. People are even able to even make multiple accounts to avoid punishment, and for these girls, these types of men always seem to find their way back. A personal experience of mine happens to be directly related. I am a chat moderator for one of my streaming friends. During the stream one day, a group of about two or three people came into chat and started harassing me after discovering I was the only female moderator on the team. After multiple timeouts and other warnings, they continued and so they got banned. Even after permanently banning these men on their main account, one made a second and came back to stream. When he came back, he made it known that he was furious and not done harassing me with his new username being 'Whitneyisabitch'.

A few solutions on the Twitch platform specifically consist of the ability to ban certain words or phrases through chatbots. Having certain words or phrases already banned helps enormously with the trolls online, because you can end up catching them before they can even commit the crime. Another great solution is having a group of trusted moderators who, when chat gets too much to handle, can deal with the troublemakers by using chat timeouts or even permanently banning accounts after multiple offenses. Lastly, you could report the account to Twitch itself. Unfortunately that last one does not always work—actually I'd be surprised if it ever worked at all. So what about the women I had interviewed? How do they deal with these things if the ones just listed dont work?

Despite everything these women deal with on a daily basis, each one of them had positive things to say about their job. Two of the five even use the same phrase when speaking about it.

They each spoke about this idea of “growing with your content”. This idea of learning by experience on Twitch both strengthens your mental in regards to the comments and horrible people, but also your knowledge of the platform launching you and the content you make on a path for constant improvement. Obviously having thick skin isn't always going to work, and you shouldn't have to get used to it. The digs and the comments are going to get to you eventually, however these women have been able to build a community within themselves in order to have someone to lean on.

There is solidarity between female streamers across racial differences, ethnic backgrounds, sexuality, and anything else you can think of, which is an absolutely beautiful thing to see. Additionally Zazii says, “To me, the best part about having to put up with all of this crap is the fact that I'm able to build trust in other women within the communities because I know they experience this too! I have found lifelong friends out of it. Of course it hurts but at the end of the day it is my job and I could not be having more fun” These women are able to use a common shared experience to look past their differences and lean on each other for support. They build beautiful friendships, make amazing stream content together and serve as an escape for others when life gets hard. Hearing comments like this from these women on the platform give me extreme hope that things will take a turn in the future. The positivity rooted in these women despite everything that they deal with is the most inspiring and uplifting thing I could ever see, and I cannot wait for things to change in the future because of women like this.

After conducting and analyzing this research I think that these men representing older heteronormative white man power ideals should face harsher consequences not just on platforms such as Twitch, but on the internet as a whole. Comments made and Ideals forced onto the women of the internet is a hurtful and exhausting thing for them to deal with and it can slowly

eat away at their mental. Anything from questioning identity to wavering happiness when doing what they love. Despite the negative effects, it brings the women online close together.

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