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# Convergence of Rhetoric, Labour, and Play in the Construction of Inactive Discourses on Twitch

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## Abstract

*Twitch is a complex space that involves both laborious play and “playbour” through the commodification of streamers time and the gamification of streamer interaction through emotes and bits. As a result, this creates a rhetorical space where celebrity, race, and gender are tension points that reflect disproportionate power structures on Twitch. Coupled with the fact that Twitch also functions as the main broadcast platform for esports tournaments, understanding how streamers rhetorically position themselves and interact with audiences as content creators, streamers, celebrities, and, for some, esports athletes it is important as video games increasingly become a mainstream form of entertainment. In addition to examining streamers, we also need to understand how average audiences, both casual, non-competitive gamers, and mainstream audiences will consume and react to streamer discussions and discourse and how that impacts attitudes in the community, particularly in relation to toxicity towards minorities. My paper uses Tyler “Ninja” Belvin’s statement “I don’t play with female gamers” (Frank 2018) as a rhetorical case study for examining rhetorical power, celebrity, and privilege on Twitch. I ultimately argue that Twitch is a site of laborious play and “playbour” that perpetually remains socially inactive in supporting and accepting minorities on the platform. To support this argument, I use Carolyn Miller’s “Genre as Social Action” (1984) to situate the rhetorics around this situation using her features (context, recursive patterns, discourse, mediation, and exigence) to analyse two interviews with Ninja, labour and commodification structures on Twitch, and Twitch chat. Through these, I identify the rhetorical implications of Ninja’s statements, how it affects the Twitch gaming community, and reveal a complex power structure that ultimately fails to acknowledge the streamers’ rhetorical power and influence while continuing to perpetuate toxic gaming attitudes towards minorities.*

**Keywords:** Twitch, rhetoric, playbour, gender, feminism

## Introduction

As Twitch begins to expand beyond gaming into other IRL categories like, Twitch Sings, Food and Drink, and Science and Technology, it is significant to remember that live streaming is a site of playbour – “where professional-like activities are undertaken under the drive of intrinsic motivation” (Törhönen et al 2019: 17). No one embodies that more visibly in live streaming than Tyler “Ninja” Blevins. Ninja began streaming the game *Fortnite* before the game exploded in popularity, and then the rapper Drake did a joint stream with Ninja playing *Fortnite* together, launching Ninja into insta-fame. In September 2018 Ninja was featured on the cover of the ESPN magazine where he was hailed as “gaming’s first crossover star”; in October 2018 his collaboration on the Samsung Galaxy S9 advertisements and sponsorship hit airwaves, and Time Magazine listed him under their Top 100 Influential People of 2018. While the latter half of 2018 was a relatively good year for Ninja, in August, before any of these events, Ninja made a highly controversial statement that also became the headline of an interview with the gaming news site Polygon: “I don’t play with female gamers.” (Frank 2018). If the most popular streamer in the world, playing one of the most popular games in the world, blatantly states he does not play with a particular group of people, what does that mean for that group? What does the statement reflect rhetorically about streaming and how do labour and monetization structures affect this discourse?

In this paper, using Carolyn Miller’s features of genre, I assert that due to Ninja’s status as a celebrity, he has the privilege to pick and choose what he does and who he associates with. By choosing not to stream with women, he is purposely avoiding issues of marginalization towards women and minorities on Twitch and blocking them from accessing his social and economic capital. This exemplifies how Twitch is ultimately a discourse of *inaction* and perpetuates a discourse that marginalizes minorities.

Carolyn Miller’s (1984) *Genre as Social Action* outlines what defines a genre rhetorically through five features: rules, hierarchy, recurrence, discourse, and exigence (ibid: 163). While Miller uses this to define genre, these concepts are also helpful in exploring new areas of rhetorical discourse in emergent online spaces. As I move through this paper, I use these features to frame the argument alongside an understanding of playbour. In the first section, I focus on Ninja through the features of hierarchy and rules to understand what could motivate him to make the polarizing statement. This sets up a contradiction between his intentions and the messaging of the statement itself. This is important as I move into the second section where I discuss the recurrent pattern of marginalization through discourse on Twitch. Because Twitch is a site of playbour, the rhetorical impact of inaction also has monetary and social consequences. Lastly, with the pattern explained, I return to Ninja and examine discourse of the statement “I do not play with female gamers” by other streamers and media outlets, and the exigence of his statement in the larger context of the pattern, his celebrity, and his audience.

## Ninja's Rules and Hierarchies of Twitch Celebrity

The first feature of genre I examine are two features combined: rules and hierarchy. Miller (1984) states that “genre is interpretable by a means of rules” and that genre is a “fusion of lower-level forms [of hierarchy] and characteristic substance” (ibid: 163). In these definitions, Miller implies that the hierarchy creates a set of guiding rules to understand the motivations and goals of the rhetor. To understand the rules and boundaries Ninja has set for himself, we need to construct his hierarchy. Miller uses the paradigm of hierarchies proposed by Frenzt and Farrell, and describes the hierarchy as comprised of context, episodes, and symbolic acts. To understand Ninja’s self-imposed rules and the hierarchy that constructs them, I use the ESPN feature article/interview with Ninja, which came out a month after he made the statement, “I don’t play with female gamers”.

### Hierarchy 1: Context

In order to understand the rhetorical implications of Ninja’s statement, we first need to understand Ninja’s context for making the statement, which is supported by the ESPN feature article that follows the incident a month later. Context is at the top of Frenzt and Farrell’s hierarchy and “specifies the criteria for interpreting both the meaningfulness and propriety of any communicative event” (Miller 1984: 160) and consists of “form of life” and encounters. “Form of life” refers to the cultural patterns that give significance to actions, both verbally and non-verbally (ibid: 160). Encounters are “points of contact” that provide context based on environment (ibid: 160). The ESPN article frames Ninja as a sudden celebrity and describes the fervour around an appearance at a tournament, while also placing an emphasis on his wife, Jess: the article quickly set the tone that while Ninja is a popular figure, he prioritizes his family above everything. The article reinforces this messaging by describing the negative impact of Ninja’s newfound celebrity in various ways from his rigorous streaming schedule to moving into a gated community to prevent fans from showing up on his doorstep. The article also highlights the high value he places on his relationship with his wife, and that his goal for streaming is not just for fun, but that his hard work will allow he and his wife to “set ourselves up, and our family and our family’s family, for the rest of our lives” (Teng 2018). For Blevins, “[he] compares himself to the owner of a small business, and the only product is Ninja” (Teng 2018).

In addition to Ninja’s work himself, his wife is not a bystander in Ninja’s celebrity because she is his manager:

They typically spend half an hour together in the morning, then he streams, usually for about six hours while she takes business calls. [...] The couple are aware of the pitfalls of working together, and Jess often has to make clear whether she is talking to Tyler as his wife

or as his manager. When she herself is conflicted, they seek advice from his support team, which includes an agent, managers from Red Bull and Jess' mother (Teng 2018).

This statement from the ESPN article is important because this means that Jess and their family is the focus of Ninja's work, but Jess is also part of that work. Törhönen et al. (2019) recognize that this conflation of the professional and the personal in playbour leads to an increase in professionalization and the "digital celebrification" (ibid: 2), which sets up the second layer of hierarchy, episode.

## Hierarchy 2: Episode

Episode, according to Frenzt and Farrell, is the "rule conforming sequence of symbolic acts generated by two or more actors who are collectively oriented toward emergent goals" (Miller 1984: 160). While I have not discussed symbolic acts in detail yet, we can focus on the latter half of the definition by examining multiple actors that are focused on particular goals. In this case, focusing on streamers as celebrities allows us to focus on how they interact with each other, how viewers and fans interact with streamers, and how monetization fits into these interactions.

Twitch is a two-way rhetorical space – streamers audibly and physically communicate with viewers while viewers can only respond with text through Twitch Chat. The lack of an audio and visual response puts distance between the viewer and streamer while simultaneously elevating the streamer's rhetorical presence and value since the streamer can convey so much more than chat. Streamers are major actors in the interaction and often cultivate their own communities by growing connections with long-time viewers. In fact, most streamers dislike referring to their viewers as an "audience" and prefer "community" and "family" (Taylor 2018: 90). "Community for esports audiences is typically a mix of their own focus on playing a specific title, a passion for competitive gaming, and finding a specific esports broadcaster they admire. On variety channels, the personality of the broadcaster is so central to the content [...] that they become the anchor" (ibid: 93). To interact with their community and viewers, many streamers receive moderator rights to call out text from subscribers, people who donate monthly to the streamer, or long-time followers who have gained status in that streamer's community. Viewers can also communicate through spamming emotes and send links for music or other sites the viewer wants to share.

Viewers are interesting actors because they are distanced from the streamer through the technological systems of interaction in place. They can only communicate on Twitch through the chat through text or emote. Viewers can also donate, subscribe, or send bits to streamers as a way of monetarily supporting the streamer. As actors, viewers are in some ways a minor actor – they have no control over the stream and are spectating and participating in a limited way. One example of this is a streamer setting the chat to Subscriber Mode. This mode only allows viewers

who are paid subscribers to interact with each other and the streamer in chat, while all other viewers are excluded from this interaction. However, without a large consistent following, a streamer cannot be successful. In this way, as actors, viewers have no overt control over the stream, but are critical to the growth, development, and maintenance of a streamer's success. Or, more simply put, viewers are critical to contributing to the streamer's social capital.

Celebrity is a status that streamers contend with, but most prefer to avoid using terminology that implies a level of celebrity and status, such as referring to viewers as "fans" (Taylor 2018: 90–91). This is now in stark contrast with fanart of esports players, such as Overwatch League team LA Valiant's fan art auction, and popular streamers like Lily "LilyPichu" Ki. Despite not wanting to be viewed or treated like celebrities, fan culture is being impressed upon streamers regardless. Ninja also feels this celebrity status and the problems that celebrity brings: "With fame comes scrutiny of everything you say or do, [Ninja] suggested, and that can sometimes lead to questions about who you're sleeping or flirting with on the sly" (Frank 2018). Polygon backs Ninja's suggestion by bringing up two other Fortnite streamers, Ali "Myth" Kabbani and Imane "Pokimane" Anys who began playing with each other on stream, and, "viewers began to ask: Are they dating? Fans assume Twitch streamers are in a relationship just as often as they speculate on their marital status" (Frank 2018).

The path from a popular streamer becoming a newfound celebrity is difficult because most of them are being pushed into celebrity without real management or preparation. Ninja's response to his celebrity is to simply avoid the aspects he does not like or want to engage with: "he one-on-one stream especially, where two people game and talk for hours at a time, is 'very intimate in a way,'" and Ninja is okay playing with women in a group setting because he can "control the narrative more, without stupid drama and rumours flooding into our [Ninja+Jess] lives" (Teng 2018). The celebrity status also extends to Ninja's wife Jess who states, "My Instagram is flooded with ridiculous comments. I post a picture with our best friend or a brother-in-law and it's like, 'She cheated on you'" (Teng 2018). At this point, it is worth remembering that Ninja's wife is also his manager, and she will be privy to internet gossip and YouTube tabloids about Ninja as part of her job. When Ninja states that his decision to not stream with women is to directly protect his wife, he feels as though he is protecting her as a spouse and work partner.

Episode allows us to examine the human rhetorical actors and we can see how streamers and viewers interact with each other in positive and negative ways. Taylor (2018) links notions of celebrity with other kinds of labour, such as the gig economy, relational work, and performance (ibid: 134–135). As Törhönen et al. (2019) describe above, celebrity is inevitable in today's playbour live-streaming industry. Also supporting this notion, Pink et al. (2018) reference Gregg's idea of "presence bleed" in how work and play is experienced (ibid: 33), and that it is "possible to understand ambient play as part of how people reconstitute the expe-

rience of work and home by bringing the ambience of play into work” (ibid: 33). Celebrity causes friction in the presence of work and play in the home, and Ninja’s statement is his way of handling that friction. With this mixing of work, play, and celebrity, the symbolic acts that streamers make are important for the way streamers represent themselves to their viewers and an increasingly mainstream audience.

### Hierarchy 3: Symbolic Acts

Symbolic acts are the “component” of the episode: the “verbal and/or non-verbal utterances which express intentionality” (Miller 1984: 160). In Frenztz and Farrell’s hierarchy, components are the base of the structure, which we can infer to mean they have the most weight and significance. Indeed, looking back at context and episode, these two tiers are impacted directly by the symbolic act. As *Fortnite* also reaches mainstream ubiquity, Ninja’s status follows with it. He is no longer an internet celebrity, but now a fully-fledged mainstream celebrity, appearing on the Ellen Show and having a major sponsorship deal with Samsung. As Kücklich (2005) describes, content creators as a skilled labour force (modders in his specific example) play a significant role in marketing by reducing game developer marketing costs for little to no initial cost (ibid: 4). Thus, Ninja’s words carry beyond his stream and to a myriad of audiences outside of the general gaming community. Notably, these audiences include young and adolescent children who come to learn about Ninja through *Fortnite*.

This brings us to the crux of my argument as we look at Ninja’s interview and statement itself: “I don’t play with female gamers” (Frank 2018). Contextually, Ninja is focused on his family and as a celebrity, he wants to protect his family from tabloids and other gossip. However, by making such an exclusionary statement, Ninja is cutting off women from his social and monetary capital. The messaging also signals that women are not worth dealing with the issues of celebrity and, through his own status, he is able to side-step issues that women face on the platform.

It is here that I want to reassert my main criticism and argument: due to Ninja’s status as a celebrity, he has the privilege to pick and choose what he does and who he associates with. By choosing not to stream with women, he is purposely avoiding the pitfalls of celebrity and the negative experiences that women go through specifically because of their gender. If Ninja is in control and has the ability to dictate expectations to his streamers, what is preventing him from doing that to his viewers when it comes to streaming with women one on one? Through Ninja’s sidestepping issues of celebrity, he is perpetuating issues of exclusion and othering of minorities on Twitch. In the next section I discuss recurrent patterns and show examples of the pattern of marginalization in Twitch discourse that are compounded by social capital, celebrity, and monetary capital.

## Perpetuating the Pattern

The next feature of genre is recurrent patterns, which Miller (1984) describes as a way to “help constitute the substance of our cultural life” (ibid: 163). There are several ways to think about recurrent patterns in genre and Miller cites several ideas, but the one that she latches onto the most is from Jamison and Campbell. In relation to rhetoric, they state, “the exigence of the recurrent provides insight into the human condition” (ibid: 156). In order for recurrence to provide insight, situations are interpreted based on comparable or analogous experiences (ibid: 156). Thus, Miller states, “Situations are social constructs that are the result, not of ‘perception,’ but of definition... we define, or ‘determine’, a situation” (ibid: 156). When examining recurrence as a social construct that results from definition, this gets to what many streamers perceive is the real problem: patterns of toxicity and harassment that are ultimately reflected in Ninja’s statement. Based on this I assert that Twitch culture is centered around the definition of women as Others from the “default gamer” – white, male, Caucasian or Asian – which is supported by many recurring instances of online harassment.

## Otherring Women on Twitch

There are several ways that women are commonly othered discursively on Twitch. One of the main, and most common complaints from male harassers is that female streamers are predators that use their bodies to generate views and donations from adolescent boys. This was something that *League of Legends* streamer Sky Williams purported in his controversial “Dear Female Streamers” video in 2015, and still continues to be a prevalent “determination” by many male streamers and viewers. Female streamers that use sexuality as a marketing tool admit that it is simply part of their streamer persona, but that sexuality will not keep viewers long term and will not contribute towards the community that they are building.

But even women who do not use sexuality as a marketing tool still experience harassment constantly in chat. In the podcast *Dropped Frames*, a special episode called “Streaming as a Female” several well-known female streamers, such as René “LoLRenaynay” Reynosa and Kacey “Kacytron” Caviness, and Twitch moderators reacted to Sky William’s video and discussed how it does not matter what a female streamer is wearing – they always get harassed. While they point out that harassment is an issue for male and female streamers, they show that, “it’s a different sort of thing when someone is harassing you based on your gender [...] and it’s all pointed that you’re a chick. That hurts a lot more; I can’t do anything about that. I don’t want to apologize for that” (itmeJP 2015).

Black women online are even more targeted than white women and research has shown that blackness is “punished the most violently online” (Gray 2016: 356). As Kishonna Gray (2016) states “gamers of color, as Twitchers, are excluded from this area of discussion to decide what an appropriate contribution to the

field is; it is decided for them by the default gamer” (ibid: 356). As part of her research in black cyberfeminism, she shares a forum post to exemplify this reality: “I never SAY I’m black, not in game. That’s almost as bad as admitting you’re a girl” (ibid: 362). The harmful accusations and harassment towards minorities based on gender and race negate the immaterial labour and energy required to cultivate a strong following and continue to grow and expand on the stream. Taylor et al (2015) summarize this work as “the emergence of nonmaterial commodities and their attendant modes of production, and to the increasing subsumption of lived experience (leisure, personal relationships) into means of generating more capita” (ibid: 372). Archer (2019) in describing mum bloggers from Australia, describes how “often the blogging mothers’ playbour (Scholz, 2012) is derided (or at least reported in a slightly condescending tone) by mainstream media as indulgent and somehow not legitimate” (ibid: 150). Additionally, PR is embodied in neoliberal and post-feminist issues of playbour though “the profession’s reliance on a ‘passionate’, predominately female workforce, often expected to be young, glamorous and hard-working (Fitch and Third 2010), simultaneously cultivating a personal brand both on and offline through their emotional labor (Bridgen 2011)” (ibid: 155). Much like Archer finds in mommy bloggers, female streamers are also derided, delegitimized, and sexually objectified. This is despite female streamers performing the same work as male streamers: content production, performance, “small business designers, accountant, contract negotiators, agents, community managers, and technical staff” (Taylor 2018: 115).

On top of this labour, earning Twitch Partnership requires streamers to prove that they have a consistent viewer base and have been streaming consistently over an extended period of time. Twitch Partnership opens new avenues for revenue, such as bits, custom emotes, and subscriptions. By attributing this work to simply being due to gender or race degrades the time and labour put into building a successful stream and community.

### **Twitch “Thots” and the development of Parasocial Relationships**

Othering on Twitch based on gender and race leads into more recent conversations about the term “Twitch thot,” which is a now-common insult (or “meme” in Pewdiepie’s opinion) hurled at female streamers as an extended slur with the original prostitution inferences with the term – Twitch thots are simply on camera and manipulating viewers through their sexuality for donations. In an interview with Polygon, streamer Alinity describes the term as the next verbal insult for the same stereotype: “I did not hear the term ‘Twitch thot’ until a year ago,” Alinity told Polygon. “The first term I heard was ‘booby streamer,’ and that was attributed to all girls who showed some kind of cleavage during their streams. Then the term started being attributed to almost every single girl, regardless of how they dressed.” (Alexander 2018a).

Another example of this term is from a tweet quoted by Polygon, where streamer “WitchyTwitchy” posted a clip of a random male streamer who came upon her stream for the same game. His opening reaction to her stream is, “Oh god it is a Twitch thot... RIP viewers man... she’s one of those people that gets views because [she is] a girl, you know what I mean? I’m not trying to mean that in a sexist way... that’s just legitimately the reason why.” In a more recent controversy involving popular streamer and cosplayer Amouranth, the increasing prevalence of the dangers of Twitch celebrity and parasocial relationships are brought to light. In a Polygon article titled, “Streamer Amouranth is latest example of ‘Twitch thot’ harassment problem” the author describes how “a rumour spread that Amouranth lied about her relationship status, pretending to be single so men would donate large amounts of money, according to accusations from one YouTuber” (Alexander 2018a). Trolls responded to this by repeatedly calling her a “Twitch thot” and even doxing her house. In a recent interview with SyFy, she stated that she did not feel safe and had to report suspicious behaviour around her home. As for “lying” to viewers for donations she stated: “People don’t donate to me because they think it improves their chances with me in some romantic way any more than do people donate to large male streamers because they fantasize about a romantic engagement with Soda, Lirik or Ninja,” Amouranth told SyFy. “That mentality is just a condescending meme perpetuated by viewers of other streams who want to feel better about themselves and their content preferences.” (Alexander 2018a).

The accusation of women manipulating men and boys for donations is being complicated and troublingly built parasocial relationships between viewers and the streamer. Parasocial relationships “focus on the persistence of these parasocial experiences outside of the viewing of the media figure. The most complete conceptualization of parasocial relationships describes the phenomenon as, ‘a longer-term association that may begin to develop during viewing, but also extends beyond the media exposure situation’” (Blight 2016: 9). Parasocial relationships are described in all forms of media but as Twitch becomes increasingly more mainstream, this phenomenon is increasingly affecting female streamers more than male streamers. “Twitch thot” is simply the evolution of formalizing the way that female streamers are othered on Twitch. This is problematic as this is what is becoming the definition of how women are discussed on Twitch or on media or controversies surrounding Twitch.

### **“Twitch thots” do not belong in Esports**

This leads to the problem of women in esports. While I do not want to dive too much into this topic, it is worth mentioning because, many esports players are also streamers and streaming is a significant part of building their notoriety among fans, demonstrating their expertise, and building a community (Taylor 2018: 82). One example is when Overwatch League player “Geguri” initially burst onto the scene in 2016. Her impeccable play on hero Zarya was consid-

ered cheating, in part because it was unbelievable that a woman could be so accurate. Geguri ended up recording live on Twitch to prove that she was not cheating. In another example, in 2015 the *Hearthstone* community was embroiled in a conspiracy theory that player “MagicAmy” was not real and that she was a front for her ex-boyfriend, in part because she did not stream on Twitch. This was proven false by the prominent *Hearthstone* esports team Tempo Storm, to which she belonged, but MagicAmy ended up leaving *Hearthstone* esports regardless.

These are just several examples of how this affects women in esports or who are trying to get into esports. Harassment on Twitch contributes towards gatekeeping for minorities trying to get into esports, which can discourage marginalized groups from entering tournaments and getting visibility to teams (Romine 2019). As discussions around how to include women in esports continue to circulate, it is important to acknowledge the association between Twitch and esports.

## Discourse and Exigence

In this last section, I pull assertions from the rules and hierarchy and patterns of recurrence to define Twitch discourse and the exigence of Ninja’s statement in order to examine the mediation of Twitch to demonstrate how Ninja failed to recognize his rhetorical influence.

### The Discourse of Twitch Culture

Miller (1984) defines discourse as “the rhetorical experience of the people who create and interpret discourse” (ibid: 152). Additionally, genre is discourse based because it is actionable and gains meaning from situation and social context (ibid: 163). Like the other features of genre, she also reviews other definitions of discourse. The one that is most relevant to our discussion is from Campbell and Jamison. They define discourse as “constellation of recognizable forms bound together by an internal dynamic” (ibid: 152). This leads to Miller defining genre as a “connection point between intention and effect” and explains how social reality evolves (ibid: 153). If discourse is associated with action and movement, then we can assert that recurrent patterns of language and perceptions constitute discourse. This means that Twitch discourse revolves around othering, marginalization, and overlooking women’s experiences. In this article, I mentioned SkyWilliam’s infamous video in 2015 that criticized female steamers who use sexuality as a marketing tool as predatory and trying to take advantage of young men and boys for monetary profit. In 2018, we see the same stereotypes repacked through the “Twitch-thot” and the development of parasocial relationships, which, in turn, dismisses female labour in streaming. There are many more instances similar to this discussed and published online, but as time passes they are ignored until the

next controversy occurs; no meaningful action is taken to address this problematic discourse, and the potential negative economic consequences as a result of this discourse; thus, the discourse is perpetuated and maintained through the lack of action.

## Ninja's Exigence

Examining discourse brings us back to Ninja and his statement "I do not play with female gamers." Miller (1984) states that "exigence must be seen as neither as a cause of rhetorical action nor as intention, but as social motive. To comprehend an exigence is to have motive" (ibid: 158). Exigence is social knowledge that links discourse and recurrent patterns while being a social need. Ninja's exigence is that he wants to embrace his celebrity, and the social and monetary benefits that come with it, while intentionally avoiding marginalization issues on Twitch. The exigence of those who are discriminated on the platform because of gender and race simply want to be seen as equal to the default gamer within the space and community they share on Twitch.

Streamers and media reactions to Ninja's statement show how Ninja's exigence is called into question against the exigence of those who are marginalized. Inside the Twitch community, reactions by other streamers and gaming media outlets were mixed. Some female streamers such as Laura "Darth Lux" Lux and "100T Valkyrae" both supported Ninja's decision based on an understanding how toxic gossip and rumors can be. Many streamers, like Pokimane, were sympathetic and critical of the statement and primarily mentioned that while they understand why Ninja made his decision, making such a divisive statement is ultimately harmful. Austen Marie (2018) stated, "We're saying that his saying he won't is problematic and doesn't help in any way for women making their way in the industry that constantly calls anyone with tits a thot." Samantha "TheSamethyst" Rae echoes this sentiment by adding "the thought of someone (not even necessarily a top streamer) not wanting to collaborate with me as a creator because of my gender feels demeaning."

Many streamers also strongly opposed Ninja's statement as sexist and hurtful, such as Riley Dennis and Renée Reynosa. Adam "skinnyghost" Koebel in his opposition focuses on how this statement affects all genders and non-cis relationships: "It's a narrative that erases the possibility for straight men and women to be friends and collaborate. It fucks with gay and straight men being friends. It fucks with pan and bi folks existing and not being seen as fuck-crazed maniacs." It is also worth noting that there are many streamers who collaborate with many different people and simply ignore the gossip or squash it quickly, such as prominent streamer David "Grand POOBear" Hunt, whose wife is also part of his business. This mixed reaction is very internal to the Twitch community, and outside of the Twitch community, the social climate is different. News outlets consistently criticized Ninja for the statement as sexist and largely negative – Variety, the Verge, and

even ABC Australia. This criticism is consistent with how gender related scandals in the technology workforce are perceived by the press throughout the past several years, Uber and Google being notable examples. More recently, labour workforce problems in the gaming industry, which are being shown to disproportionately affect women, are also criticizing corporations, such as the exposé and lawsuit against *League of Legends* developer Riot Games (D’Anastasio 2018).

The ESPN interview with Ninja is interesting to review in light of these differing opinions because it was released one month after Ninja’s statement. Teng (2018) mentions that toxicity on Twitch is “fierce” against women, and that “Support from a man with Ninja’s influence, especially among children, would go a long way toward overcoming barriers”. I find this quote to be significant because it acknowledges three things. First, Ninja has influence that reaches far beyond this streaming community. Second, Teng identifies Ninja’s primary audience as children and adolescents, in part due to *Fortnite*’s popularity with this demographic. Third, Ninja has the ability to positively influence a community that is hostile towards women. While Teng’s statement summarizes why Ninja’s influence is significant, it is unclear if Teng even brought this up during her interview with Ninja. While Ninja reacts to the controversy overall, the specific assertion of his influence is not mentioned or addressed. Because of this, Teng’s poignant statement ends up being lip service to ensure that ESPN acknowledged the situation but does nothing to challenge Ninja or provide real commentary on the issue.

Ninja’s social motive was to protect himself from gossip and discrimination at the expense of ignoring those that are routinely marginalized. While many streamers were sympathetic to Ninja, they saw his statement as a by-product of marginalization and harassment on the platform. Strong opposition to Ninja’s statement rightfully points out that he does nothing to help marginalized groups on the platform and highlights how problematic this is. This leads us into the last feature of genre, mediation.

## Mediation of Twitch Discourse

Mediation is the resolution of examining the features of genre: rules, hierarchy, recurrent patterns, discourse, and exigence. Miller (1984) states that “a genre is a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence; it motivates by connecting the private with the public, the singular with the recurrent” (ibid: 163). By connecting the exigence of Ninja and the marginalized groups on Twitch to Ninja’s rules and hierarchy of importance and value in his brand and the recurrent pattern of marginalization, we can assert that Twitch discourse is one of *inaction*: marginalization and harassment is well known on the platform, and Ninja’s statement “I do not play with female gamers” is the culmination of a community routinely sidelining these issues.

In light of the backlash, Ninja followed providing an explanation for his controversial statement: “the issue I’m addressing is online harassment, and my attempt to minimize it from our life” (Blevins 2018) and that he supports female streamers and names a few streamers he and his wife enjoy watching. But if streamers hold the most power in their streams and community – is avoiding online harassment the same as addressing it? I would argue no. Streamer David “Grand POOBear” Hunt, who I briefly mentioned before, also has gossip videos created about him since he regularly streams with female friends. “The scrutiny is hard, [Hunt] admitted, but a video someone posts on YouTube or comments in chat won’t convince him to quit streaming with women. ... [The gossip] doesn’t bother me. It doesn’t worry me” (Alexander 2018b). While Hunt acknowledges that he does not have “9 billion videos” made about him daily, he does state “people are always going to be interested in streamers’ lives even more so than like an actor to some degree. Your life is your product. I get that [gossip culture] is only going to become bigger for us” (Alexander 2018b).

This sentiment is significant in understanding the implications of Ninja’s statement. As streamers are increasingly treated like celebrities, issues with marginalization and othering become magnified. Marginalization based on race and gender masks the immaterial labour required to make a successful stream and privileges white, cis, and abled streamers who run successful streams. Twitch streamers recognizing their influence with their viewers and in the overall Twitch community allows streamers to exert the rhetorical influence they have amassed to change the discourse of Twitch from inaction to *action*. This is ultimately where Ninja fails – his inability to recognize his own rhetorical power and reach, which is entangled in playbour. As most popular streamer on the platform and as gaming’s first “cross-over” star (Teng 2018), Ninja does nothing to address online harassment. Instead, he enables and perpetuates it by omission.

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