



Necklines and ‘Naughty Bits’: Constructing and Regulating Bodies in Live Streaming Community Guidelines

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ABSTRACT

This paper performs a qualitative analysis of the community guidelines of video game live streaming platforms like Twitch, Mixer, and Caffeine. Live streaming is becoming an increasingly prominent part of the contemporary landscape around video games, game cultures, and the games industry [34]. Recent research into video game live streaming has explored its financial structures [18], its potential as a platform for self-expression [10], and its novel affordances for communication [12]. However, community guidelines also play a significant, behind-the-scenes role in shaping live streaming practices. These guidelines, which shift over time in response to controversies and changing notions of acceptable behavior, set standards for what types of content can be streamed and how streamers present themselves on-camera. Here we assemble, compare, and interpret the community guidelines of a number of top live streaming sites. Our focus is on how these guidelines construct and regulate “legitimate” bodies -- both the bodies of streamers and the bodies of in-game characters -- especially the sexualized bodies of women. In varying ways, each set of community guidelines attempts to establish rules for how women’s bodies may or may not be presented on screen. Often these guidelines measure and quantify the body, for example by dictating precisely how high the neckline of a streamer’s shirt must be. Through our analysis, we articulate the unspoken yet active cultural work performed by these community guidelines, which try yet ultimately fail to render a definition of the sexualized body in precise, concrete terms. This research also offers new insights into larger issues of video games and gender. It points toward anxieties about the visibility of women’s bodies in gaming spaces and demonstrates that, although live streaming platforms like Twitch present their community guidelines as tools for protecting their community members, these same guidelines often enact the further marginalization of women and other diverse streamers.

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CCS CONCEPTS

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1 INTRODUCTION

Live streaming is becoming an increasingly prominent part of the contemporary landscape around video games, game cultures, and the games industry [34]. Recent work by game studies scholars has explored topics such as live streaming’s financial structures [18], its potential as a platform for self-expression [10], and its novel affordances for communication [12]. Academic work on streaming not only consider the novel technical features and affordances of streaming platforms, however. Such work is also interested in how streaming relates to broader issues in video games and game culture, such as a reliance on the free labor of users [22, 32, 34] and the marginalization of certain people, bodies, and identities [17, 20, 37]. In addition to providing a place where users can share their content, streaming platforms are designed to be community spaces. As they have grown in their popularity, streaming platforms have created increasingly detailed guidelines to regulate their communities. Community guidelines play a significant, behind-the-scenes role in shaping live streaming practices. These guidelines, which shift over time in response to controversies and changing notions of acceptable behavior, set standards for what types of content can be streamed and how streamers present themselves on-camera. Because many live streaming platforms attempt to regulate and remove sexual content, the subject of bodies comes up frequently in community guidelines, often specifically in regard to clothing worn by women streamers.

In order to better understand the content and impact of these guidelines, we have performed a detailed, qualitative analysis of

the community guidelines from three major live streaming platforms: Twitch, Mixer, and Caffeine. Within this analysis, we have focused on how these guidelines construct and regulate “legitimate” bodies -- both the bodies of streamers and the bodies of in-game characters -- especially the sexualized bodies of women. Through our analysis, we articulate the unspoken yet active cultural work performed by these community guidelines, which try yet ultimately fail to render a definition of the sexualized body in precise, concrete terms. This research also offers new insights into larger issues of video games and gender. It points toward anxieties about the visibility of women’s bodies in gaming spaces and demonstrates that, although live streaming platforms present their community guidelines as tools for protecting their community members, these same guidelines often enact the further marginalization of women and other diverse streamers. We conclude by suggesting actionable ways that live streaming platforms can improve their community guidelines in order to better support women streamers.

2 RELATED WORK

Our research builds off the growing body of scholarship on live streaming, as described above. At the same time, our work differs from (and therefore enriches) existing research in this area by giving careful consideration to the policies and rhetoric that surround live streaming, rather than focusing on live streaming practices themselves. This research also contributes to a tradition of scholarship that addresses the policing of women’s bodies, and breasts in particular, as a form of discrimination that can be enacted by regulatory forces such as the state [12] or algorithmically-trained computation tools used for online content moderation [14]. As this existing work shows, decisions about what constitutes “good” versus “bad” representations of women’s bodies—or what does or does not count as sexual content—are directly shaped by societal biases that reinforce inequality based on factors like gender and race.

The topic of how online platforms regulate their communities is of considerable importance for understanding how these platforms shape and are shaped by culture. Tarleton Gillespie, in his book *Custodians of the Internet* [16] tackles the issue of how platforms attempt to control the content they host. With echoes of work by Wendy Chun [8], Gillespie explains how the interplay between freedom and control shape users’ experiences in online environments. Gillespie describes how social media platforms are commonly imagined to have arisen out of the supposed freedom of self-expression that the internet affords. However, as Gillespie astutely observes, the “fantasy of a truly open [online] platform” will forever remain a fantasy precisely because platforms themselves and those who operate them always impose rules on their users. Moderation is a large part of these regulations. Platforms moderate content in order to protect their users, discourage offensive behavior, and retain commercial and social viability. This creates a fundamental tension between users and platforms, since platforms are constantly seeking to establish and enforce norms in the face of changing, emergent user behavior.

In her book *Watch Me Play*, which has been highly influential for our own research on live streaming, T. L. Taylor touches on some of the cultural issues that arise around Twitch’s community guidelines. Twitch is an important object of study because it has established a model that many other streaming platforms have drawn from. Taylor’s work demonstrates that streaming platforms have grappled with the question of adult content and acceptable bodies since their inception [34]. Most notably for our work here, Taylor discusses the regulation of streamer attire, a common feature of live streaming community guidelines, as one of the most hotly debated policies on streaming platforms. Taylor describes these debates as representative of larger tensions regarding gender and participation that exist on Twitch, as well as other streaming platforms, and within game culture more broadly [34]. As Taylor’s work suggests, the regulation of streamer attire is not only a practical issue. It also reflects the values of streaming platforms and what they perceive as legitimate content. The policing of streamer attire, and particularly the attire worn by women streamers, speaks to a moral panic within game culture about so-called “fake gamer girls” and the growing attention to feminist issues in games [34]. As Taylor points out, GamerGate was a particularly virulent demonstration of this panic. Perpetuated by a vocal minority of reactionary gamers, GamerGate attempted to reestablish normative assumptions about players and games [34]. In their own way, community guidelines also do the work of establishing normative assumptions around video games, especially with regards to gender. Our paper examines some of the ways that secondary materials that surround games, like community guidelines, shape and reflect anxieties about the visibility of women’s bodies in gaming spaces.

3 METHODS

This work uses the qualitative methodologies of content analysis and critical reading in order to perform a socially-informed critique of community guideline documents for live streaming platforms that have a strong video game presence. We have applied these methods to the community guidelines and related documentation (such as terms of service, where relevant) for three live streaming platforms: Twitch, Mixer, and Caffeine. This is not a comprehensive list of live streaming platforms; others, such as YouTube and Facebook, support streaming but focus on a broader range of functionalities or host live streams that are not related to video games, such as in the case of webcam sites. We have chosen to focus on these three sites because of their popularity as streaming platforms for video games. As case studies, these platforms and their community guidelines offer a valuable window into issues of gender, bodies, legitimacy, and regulation that exist within games culture in Western contexts and discourses.

Rather than studying live streaming practices themselves, our objects of study are the “paratextual” artefacts [9] that surround live streaming, i.e. community guidelines and related documents. These artefacts are valuable for contextualizing and adding important new dimensions to our understanding of how video games and gameplay relate to technology industries, player

reception, and society more broadly. Precedent for these methods has been set up by scholars like T. L. Taylor and Tarleton Gillespie, both mentioned above. In *Custodians of the Internet*, Gillespie similarly analyzes the community guidelines of social media and networking platforms. A difference in our work is that Gillespie documents how community guidelines have changed over time, whereas our primary interest lies in examining the cultural implications of current community guidelines. The methodologies of our work also share elements in common with scholarship like Paolo Ruffino’s *Future Gaming* [31], which looks at secondary texts like game publicity materials to address rhetoric of futurity around video games, and Shira Chess’ *Ready Player Two* [7], which argues that gendered player identities are constructed in part through the ways they are presented by the companies who develop them.

For this work, both authors read and analyzed the community guidelines and other related documents for each of the three live streaming platforms. Through these analytical readings, the authors identified key elements of the community guidelines that spoke to the regulation of gendered and sexualized bodies. These elements were then grouped into thematic threads and recurring topics, which are explored in the analysis section below. This process allowed us to discern an understanding of how each platform attempts to define, describe, and regulate the bodies of streamers, as well as how bodies are represented in video games themselves. We were particularly attentive to language around bodies, clothing, cameras, genders, sex, sexuality, nudity, and pornography. Though broader questions about what constitutes pornographic content and how that content is regulated on live streaming platforms are largely outside of the scope of this paper, we found that issues of gendered bodies were often inextricable from discussions of sexual content in these community guidelines. For this reason, our analysis often looks to sections of community guidelines devoted to nudity, mature content, or sexual content. Building from our analysis, we drew conclusions about how the language used to describe bodies in these community guidelines reflect the structures, logics, and values of each streaming platform.

4 LIVE STREAMING AND COMMUNITY GUIDELINES

In recent years, streaming platforms have become popular in part because they offer novel ways of playing video games online and connecting with other players. For many creators and viewers of game-related content online, these platforms have supplanted Let’s Play videos--in which players record themselves playing video games [10]--because they allow for more interactivity. Streaming sites like Twitch, Mixer, and Caffeine combine the functionality of “interactive computer services” [6] like YouTube with the ethos of hybrid social media/social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. Through these platforms, millions of people every month are streaming across these websites, though Twitch is easily the largest and most popular among them, with 10 million reported daily users [34]. Streaming websites are not only a platform for sharing play; they are also places where community building occurs. With so many participants joining these new communities, streaming platforms have established

(and regularly updated) guidelines for establishing community norms.

Live streaming community guidelines are documents that prescribe acceptable behavior and content for live streamers, their streams, and the ways in which viewers participate in live streams. For example, Twitch states that their community guidelines apply to “all user generated content and activity on [their] service.” The types of materials that are prohibited by community guidelines varies by live streaming platform. However, some of the most common types of prohibited materials include threats of physical harm to others, scamming, depictions of extreme gore, hateful conduct and harassment toward others, and content that features, encourages, or solicits illegal activity. The stated consequences for failure to comply with community guidelines also differs by platform. Some potential consequences include the removal of inappropriate content or the suspension of a user’s account. Though the term “community guidelines” may make these documents sound as if they have been created by a platform’s community of users, they are in fact created and enforced by the company behind the platform itself.

Broadly speaking, community guidelines differ from terms of service, another genre of regulatory document created and enforced by live streaming platforms (among many other types of online sites and services), in that terms of service are presented as legal and technical fine print. They are not designed to be read in depth by the average users of the platform. Community guidelines, by contrast, are more forward-facing documents. They typically use plain spoken language to lay out what the platform considers appropriate content and context. The stated purpose of community guidelines is to establish shared rules and expectations for the users of a platform. However, as a consequence, both community guidelines and terms of service documents alike also establish rules for what users may and may not do if they wish to be allowed to remain visible and active members of the live streaming “community.”

The regulation of content is a widespread practice for live streaming platforms, though standards of what content is or is not deemed acceptable (and how that content is defined) differ from platform to platform. Due to the “Good Samaritan” provision of the Communications Decency Act, online content distribution platforms are allowed to “restrict access to or availability of material that the provider or user considers to be obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, excessively violent, harassing, or otherwise objectionable” [6]. Live streaming platforms therefore have the leeway to identify and exclude any content they deem inappropriate. Often, guidelines for regulating content leave certain subjects ambiguous. This produces gray areas and results in disagreements between streamers, viewers, and representatives of the streaming platforms. As Gillespie writes, community guidelines are “discursive performances” that reveal the challenges of enforcing norms on platforms and demonstrate how platforms establish themselves as “ambivalent arbiters of public propriety” [16]. This ambivalence--or, we might more accurately say, this willingness to enforce discriminatory double standards--can be seen for example on live streaming platforms where women are banned for baking or dancing in revealing clothing [4],

but men who say racial slurs or even assault people on camera are only temporarily suspended [1].

Community guidelines are not static. As live streaming practices and platforms continue to expand and evolve, streaming sites are regularly changing their earlier decisions about appropriate content and conduct and updating their community guidelines. This makes those guidelines a moving target for a critical analysis such as the one we present here. The community guidelines of Twitch, for example, have changed multiple times over the life of the platform and will likely continue to shift. Indeed, Twitch describes its guidelines as a “living document that [they] regularly update based on the evolution of the Twitch community.” For this reason, any analysis of these guidelines by nature represents a snapshot in time: a look at the prescriptions and rhetoric of live streaming platforms from a specific moment in their cultural evolution. Here, for the purposes of this paper, we have focused our analysis on the official community guidelines of live streaming sites as they existed in December 2018. However, we have also compared current community guidelines to past versions of these guidelines in order to demonstrate how regulations and attitudes regarding content and streamers have shifted over time, often in response to controversy [21], community pressures [2,3], or changing legislation [30].

5 ANALYSIS

In order to understand how the community guidelines of live streaming platforms construct and regulate bodies, we have analyzed the guidelines and related materials from Twitch, Caffeine, and Mixer. Like the streaming platforms themselves, these three sets of community guidelines have much in common. However, they each approach the question of the body--and, more specifically, the question of what types of bodies are or are not acceptable to show on live streams--in different yet equally telling ways. In this section, we describe the places in these community guidelines where these discussions of the body take place and highlight notable language and logics we identify within these passages. Following this, in our discussion section below, we speak in more depth about the implications of these community guidelines within broader dynamics of gender and discrimination in video game cultures.

5.1 Twitch

Twitch is the most prominent of the live streaming platforms discussed here. It was the first website dedicated to hosting live feeds of amateur and professional video game play. Twitch launched in 2011 and by 2017 reported over two million unique streamers on the site [34]. Previously, live play of video games had only existed on “social cam” sites. In fact, Twitch is an offshoot of a social cam site that was known as Justin.tv [34]. While Twitch was originally dedicated exclusively to video game streams, today it offers a variety of channels featuring analog games, chat shows, artistic endeavors, and even social eating. Twitch allows users to communicate with streamers and fellow audience members and to personalize the viewing experience through notifications and subscriptions. Twitch also offers

exclusive member perks through its position as a subsidiary of Amazon, which purchased Twitch in 2014. This is just one example of how streaming platforms are increasingly becoming intertwined with other areas of online life and cultural production [19, 34].

First, it is useful to know about the framing elements of Twitch’s community guidelines and related documents, which set their tone and establish their underlying logics. Twitch’s community guidelines, for example, are framed through language that highlights notions of safety, community, and positivity. The stated goal of Twitch’s guidelines is to create a “friendly, positive environment” in order to ensure that “creators and communities can interact safely” and to “protect the integrity of our community” from “conduct that we determine to be inappropriate or harmful.” Twitch’s guidelines also emphasize a “common sense philosophy,” which presumes that readers share a common (i.e. normative) set of ideas about what constitutes reasonable behavior. The guidelines themselves cover a range of topics, such as breaking the law, avoiding punishment, threats against users, violence depicted in games, harassment, privacy, impersonation, scams and spamming, intellectual property rights, content labeling, and nudity and sexual content. To supplement these, Twitch has also created a handful of expanded, supporting documents that address certain topics in more depth. Among these topics are harassment, intellectual property, and sexual content. This suggests that these are the areas in which Twitch has experienced a proportionately high number of issues with its users and therefore has had the greatest need for more detailed regulations. It is telling that two of these three topics, harassment and sexual content, directly relate to gender--and, more specifically, to the ways that women’s bodies are presented and perceived on live streams.

Direct discussions of bodies can be found in Twitch’s official community guidelines [35], most notably in sections that discuss nudity, pornography, and streamer attire. As is the case for all three sets of community guidelines that we analyzed, discussions of the body appeared most frequently in Twitch’s regulatory materials in conjunction with questions about sexual content. Twitch’s guidelines state that the platform prohibits “nudity and sexually explicit content or activities, such as pornography, sexual acts or intercourse, and sexual services” as well as “sexually suggestive content or activities.” Though these elements of Twitch’s community guidelines remain vague, leaving the definitions of “nudity” and “sexually suggestive content” uncertain, Twitch’s guidelines also include a link to a second, expanded document titled “Nudity, Pornography, and Other Sexual Content” [36]. This document doubles down on the rhetoric of safety, clearly linking sexual content and potential danger. It begins, “We restrict content that involves nudity or is sexual in nature, and are committed to ensuring that Twitch is not used for sexual exploitation or violence.” In a section titled “Nudity and Attire,” this document offers a more detailed breakdown of what Twitch considers acceptable and unacceptable for how streamers present their bodies. The section reads:

Streaming is a public activity, therefore we recommend creators wear attire that is appropriate public attire for a given context, intent, or activity. For game streams, most at home streams, and profile/channel imagery, we recommend attire appropriate for public settings, such as what you would wear on a public street, or to a mall or restaurant. For example, for a fitness stream, or an IRL stream from a location such as a public beach, attire appropriate to those public contexts is recommended, such as workout clothes or a swimsuit, respectively.... Attire intended to be sexually suggestive and nudity are prohibited. Attire (or lack of attire) intended to be sexually suggestive includes undergarments, intimate apparel, or exposing/focusing on male or female genitals, buttocks, or nipples.

In this statement, understandings of what is “appropriate” in terms of clothing and the presentation of bodies are framed through notions of publicness and social norms of public respectability, which are themselves presumed to be stable and universal.

“Streaming is a public activity,” this document reminds readers, “therefore we recommend creators wear... appropriate public attire.” Though these guidelines acknowledge that the appropriateness of a given outfit is context dependent, the emphasis on publicness as a measure of supposedly commonsense decency remains constant across these contexts. What make attire acceptable for streaming is, apparently, whether it jibes with notions of public decency.

Ostensibly, Twitch’s community guidelines present themselves as gender neutral. They do not offer specific prescriptions for how streamers of specific genders should dress. Indeed, Twitch’s list of “attire (or lack of attire) intended to be sexually suggestive” is deliberately written to apply to many types of bodies; it references both “male or female genitals” and calls out buttocks and nipples, but does not mention other bodily features such as cleavage, which are commonly associated with cisgender women. At first glance, this element of Twitch’s community guidelines does not seem to be particularly oriented toward regulating the bodies of women over men or other streamers. This is admirable, to an extent, yet it also obfuscates the fact that these guidelines do have strong gender implications. Historically and in the present, the question of whose nipples are allowed to be visible in online space (such as on Facebook and Tumblr) has been highly gendered. In addition, this passage from Twitch’s “Nudity, Pornography, and Other Sexual Content” raises questions about intention versus reception. The guidelines state that “attire intended to be sexually suggestive [is] prohibited.” What about attire that is perceived as sexually suggestive, even when this is not the streamer’s intention? Especially when it comes to the experience of women live streamers, what does or does not count as a “sexually suggestive” self-presentation can be highly subjective. On a platform that is still male-dominated, in both streamers and viewers, what constitutes sexual content may well be more determined by the desires of straight male viewers than by the intentions of women streamers.

5.2 Caffeine

Caffeine is a startup established in April 2016 by two former Apple employees [28]. The live streaming platform is currently in a soft launched, “pre-release” beta phase. Caffeine markets itself as more user-friendly than other live streaming platforms, because it offers web and iOS streaming that can be launched at any time without configuration. Caffeine was designed to integrate with Facebook and Twitter, and the creators of the platform describe it as “[giving] priority to personal conversations among a creator’s friends” [5]. In September 2018, Caffeine partnered with 21st Century Fox to create Caffeine Studios, which produces exclusive esports, sports, and live entertainment content [29]. Currently, Caffeine has not disclosed its viewer or streamer numbers. However, it is clear that Caffeine is designed to facilitate streaming with and between friends, as opposed to building a broader audience of unknown viewers, as on Twitch and Mixer.

Of the three live streaming platforms whose community guidelines we analyzed, Caffeine has the most vague, broad prescriptions for how streamers may or may not present their bodies on camera. Like Twitch, Caffeine frames its community guidelines through the language of safety, community, and positivity. Caffeine’s guidelines begin: “At Caffeine, community comes first. Everything we do is in service of building relationships between our amazing creators and their friends, fans, and followers in safe and encouraging ways.” They continue, “We require certain levels of positive and supportive behavior from the community. Users who don’t participate in our community in a positive way may be suspended or permanently banned” [5]. This framing clearly suggests that any streaming content that is deemed inappropriate is considered “negative,” i.e. in opposition to the positivity of the streaming community.

Again, in the case of Caffeine’s community guidelines, discussions of the body often go hand-in-hand with discussions of sexual content. Caffeine’s guidelines do say that the platform allows streamers to broadcast “mature-rated content” in channels for adult viewers. However, these guidelines also state that streamers may not broadcast sexually explicit content. In a section labelled “Inappropriate Content,” Caffeine includes the following bullet point: “No pornography, pornographic imagery, or anything that is overly sexual or intentionally provocative, including games on the prohibited list, what you’re wearing, or how you position yourself relative to the camera.” This description of inappropriate content leaves a considerable amount open to interpretation. Like Twitch’s guidelines, it assumes a shared, commonsensical understanding of what constitutes “overly sexual” imagery. Yet it is interesting that Caffeine’s guidelines mention not only “what you’re wearing” but also “how you position yourself relative to the camera.” According to these regulations, a streamer’s body can be deemed more or less appropriate not only because of what that streamer is wearing, but also because of how that streamer holds their body in relation to the streaming hardware itself.

5.3 Mixer

After winning a startup competition, Mixer originally launched as Beam in January 2016. Several months later, the platform was

acquired by Microsoft [11]. Beam was built around gamification features (interestingly, Twitch did not establish a similar system until 2017), offered interactive streaming, boasted lower latency, and was designed at launch to be compatible for both desktop and mobile games [23]. Beam was renamed Mixer in May 2017. Around this time Mixer also introduced co-streaming, allowing multiple streamers to combine their streams into a single experience [33]--another feature which Mixer unique among current streaming platforms. Streamlabs, a third-party application used by streamers across multiple streaming platforms, reported that in the period of April-June 2018 that Mixer had approximately 53 thousand active streamers each month [18].

Mixer's community guidelines, which are titled "Rules of User Conduct" [25], take a more punitive tone in their opening framing than Twitch's or Caffeine's. Rather than imploring readers to uphold the standards of safety, community, or positivity, these guidelines begin by emphasizing the power of the platform to make decisions and enforce decisions regarding rule violations. Curiously, the language of safety, community, and care that we observed in other community guideline documents does appear in Mixer's "Rules of User Conduct," but not until the very end, in a section labelled "TL;DR" (too long, didn't read). This section states, "We are working to build a safe and fun community for streamers and viewers. Please be considerate of others, do not be a jerk, and do not do things that are illegal or dangerous. We care about you!"

As part of a section titled "Stream Rules," Mixer's community guidelines include a clause regarding "mature content and nudity." This clause states that "content of a mature or sexualized nature has different standards and requirements than other types." From here, readers are directed to a separate, expanded document of guidelines for Mixer titled "Mature Content Rules" [24]. The largest section of the "Mature Content Rules" document is dedicated to the topic of streamer clothing. This section reads:

Clothing is NOT optional. No topless streaming, that goes for males too. If staff members can't tell if you are wearing clothes from your camera angle, you will be asked to put a top on or turn off the camera. If you choose to stream in clothing that is revealing, you must be at least 18. Staff reserves the right to change the rating of or suspend any stream for clothing that is too revealing or otherwise deemed inappropriate for Mixer audiences.

Toplessness is a focus in the Mixer community guidelines. Whereas Twitch's guidelines stress a more holistic view of what attire is publicly appropriate, the Mixer guidelines admonish specifically, "No topless streaming." As we saw above in the case of Twitch, Mixer is attempting to make their prescriptions gender neutral (as seen in the comment about how topless streaming "goes for males too"), yet terms like "topless" remain culturally gendered. The word "topless" is associated with the bodies of cisgender women. Mixer could have chosen a different, less gendered version of this statement (e.g. "no streaming without a

shirt on"). It is also notable that here too, as with Caffeine, camera angle is part of the equation of determining when and which bodies are acceptable on live streams.

For readers who want to know how Mixer's moderators determine whether a streamer's clothing is or is not consider appropriate, the Mature Content Guidelines point toward a third document, titled "Streamer Clothing: 'When Is It Too Revealing?'" [26] This document offers extensive, detailed descriptions of what clothing can be worn on the platform and how that clothing can fit on the streamer's body.

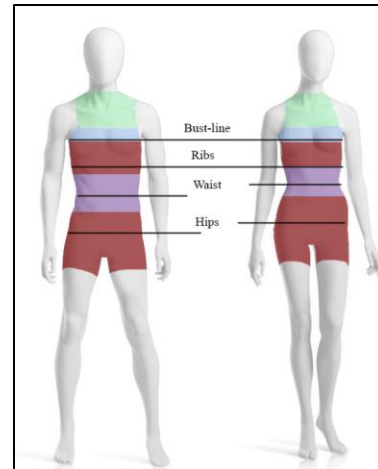


Figure 1: Visual aid provided by Mixer for streamer clothing

Mixer even provides a diagram (Figure 1) of what are presented as "typical" male and female presenting bodies and uses a color-coded key indicates what areas of the body are inappropriate to show while streaming. Anything below the "bust-line" (defined by Mixer as the "widest area below the shoulders and above the end of the rib cage") for the male and female figures is coded as potentially inappropriate or completely inappropriate. Only the head, arms, and legs are left unregulated in the Mixer diagram. Mixer encourages all users to stream in G-rated attire, which they describe as clothing that covers the entire visible body from a few inches above the bust-line and below. Anything that shows a hint of cleavage is "teen rated attire." Clothing that is adult rated is anything that reveals any part of the body between the thighs and the bust-line, strapless tops, and swimwear (with some exceptions). On Mixer, all parts of a streamer's bust-line must always be covered. Mixer addresses this aspect of the body in striking detail, going so far as to insist that streamers not show "under cleavage."

6 DISCUSSION

Community guidelines are an important consideration in the study of video game live streaming. They demonstrate how platforms form and maintain relationships with streamers and other participants. At the same time, they also highlight challenges and anxieties that these platforms grapple with, especially as part of

broader video game cultures. The cultural anxieties are in these community guidelines can be seen in their regulations, their choice of language, the issues that they address, the moments in which they are specific and prescriptive, and the moments in which they are presumptive, ambivalent, or strikingly unclear.

Indeed, vagueness itself is a pragmatic tactic for the regulation of live streaming platforms through community guidelines. All three platforms whose community guidelines we analyze here present rules that can be applied differently from context-to-context. This leaves considerable room for subjective or biased interpretation of these guidelines, which opens the door for the potentially uneven and discriminatory enforcement of the platform’s regulations. In fact, all three of the live streaming platforms we examined invoked the language of the “Good Samaritan” provision from the Communications Decency Act, which grants platforms the right to forbid anything seen as “objectionable.” This provision exists alongside Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which grants platforms freedom to set standards for content and guarantees limited liability for content posted by their users [6]. Platforms are given leeway to apply a commonsense, “I’ll know it when I see it” approach to issues on the basis of protecting the community. Interpreting the language and application of community guidelines is therefore difficult because these guidelines are deliberately designed to be interpreted broadly. Additionally, it is worth noting that companies like Twitch, Caffeine, and Mixer are motivated by profit--so, while they may frame documents like community guidelines through the language of positivity, their underlying motivation remains the financial success of the platform. This may mean crafting guidelines that undermine the presence of marginalized streamers while ensuring (or perhaps in order to ensure) that the dominant base of users remains happy with the platform.

What we found in our analysis of community guidelines was an emphasis on the body as always potentially inappropriate due to an imagined risk of nudity and sexual/mature/adult content. None of the three live streaming platforms we examined clearly articulated what was meant by sexual/mature/adult content except to say that this content was restricted or prohibited on the basis that it did not belong in the context of live streaming or presented a danger to some users, particularly children. These guidelines reflect a set of problematic, unquestioned assumptions: that nudity is never appropriate in “positive” gaming environments or more generally in public digital spaces, that making (women’s) bodies visible is always already sexual, and that nudity creates a potential for harm. Furthermore, while these community guidelines present themselves as adopting an objective, neutral, genderless tone, the language they use to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate content speaks to underlying anxieties about women streamers and their bodies as that which must be regulated. Because they inhabit bodies that others perceive as sexualized, women streamers are presumed to be represent rule violations waiting to happen.

We can see these gendered anxieties manifest in the discussion of swimsuits in live streaming community guidelines,

for example. Twitch and Mixer explicitly call out swimsuits (Mixer uses the more gendered term “bikini”) as garments whose appropriateness is context-specific. According to these guidelines, a swimsuit is appropriate for a stream broadcast from the beach or a pool because such clothing was designed for swimming. However, when worn in other contexts, swimsuits are considered to be sexually suggestive, making them inappropriate for streaming. However, this formula ignores situations where sexually suggestive clothing may itself be commonly considered appropriate attire--including similarly public venues, like nightclubs. Though these may seem like fringe cases, they illustrate the constructedness of attempts to dictate and regulate acceptable according to supposedly common sense logics, since these logics have their own slippages and exceptions. In addition, these guidelines do not account for the fact that articles of clothing that a streamer may not intend to be sexualizing can be read as sexually suggestive by viewers. This creates a considerable gray area -- one that is closely linked to gender -- because it sets the standards for acceptable attire against a fundamentally subjective measure. Mixer’s visual aide, for example, is only one possible interpretation of which areas of the body are acceptable to reveal in order to comply with “decency.” Whether something is or is not sexually suggestive is, in many cases, in the eye of the beholder. The same piece of clothing worn by one streamer (e.g. a streamer with large breasts) versus another (e.g. a streamer without breasts) may be read as either sexually suggestive or non-sexual.

These community guidelines also reveal a double standard regarding the presentation of sexualized bodies in live streaming content. Specifically, while the self-presentation of streamers’ bodies are closely regulated, the presence of sexualized characters in the video games themselves remains comparatively unaddressed by these community guidelines. It is still widespread practice for players to stream video games that include representations of women *characters* in revealing clothing that would not be deemed appropriate for women *streamers* to wear on screen. In some cases, the women characters in these games are even briefly nude. Women wearing bikinis are permitted on screen, provided they are in the game. (Similarly, platforms like Twitch, Caffeine, and Mixer continue to permit players to stream video games with violent content, though such content is also supposedly considered unacceptable according to the platforms’ community guidelines.) This suggests that the real motive behind regulating the presentation of bodies on screen may not be to “protect” viewers from sexual content, as these platforms state, but rather to exert control over streamers--and especially women streamers--by dictating the shifting yet somehow “common sense” norms for appropriate self-presentation.

7 CONCLUSION

Community guidelines are “discursive performances” that reveal the challenges of enforcing norms on platforms, while also demonstrating how platforms establish themselves as “ambivalent arbiters of public propriety” [16]. The term “platform” is itself a

discursive move oriented around “eliding tensions” between user content and commercialism, community and advertising, policing content and presenting a neutral face [15]. “Platform” suggests a stable place of universal opportunity, action, and insight. Game culture, and particularly the high-profile stages of streaming and esports, rely on similar universalizing ideas of meritocracy [27]: the seemingly neutral and egalitarian notion that opportunity is available to everyone and therefore everyone is capable of success, which conceals the values and assumptions literally built in to the platform and its accompanying materials like community guidelines.

Twitch, Mixer, and Caffeine all articulate a focus on streaming video game play and present themselves as champions of their respective communities, which in turn co-create the cultures on these platforms. When these live streaming platforms establish their community guidelines, they are presenting rules that reflect their values. Often, these platforms rely on vague, imprecise language in order to protect the operations of their sites and leave themselves room for broad, subjective, and potentially discriminatory applications of their rules. In regard to sexual content in particular, this creates a tension on video game streaming platforms between the opportunity that streaming affords for self-expression and the ways in which that self-expression is regulated, especially for women streamers and others whose bodies are more likely to be perceived by straight, male viewers as sexualized. As analyzed here, the community guidelines for live streaming platforms may present themselves as objective and gender neutral, but in fact they disproportionately regulate certain bodies, appealing to presumed notions of appropriateness. As a result, they further undermine the legitimacy of women in gaming spaces such as live streaming by suggesting that their bodies must be actively regulated in order to make a streaming platform a “positive” and “safe” for a mainstream gaming community.

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