



# Streaming as a Virtual Being: The Complex Relationship Between VTubers and Identity

Anna Birna Turner

*05.06.2022*

*Media and Communications Studies*

*First Year Master's Thesis*

## Abstract

The boundary between offline and online worlds is rapidly shrinking with improvements in technology. Virtual Youtubers (VTubers) have emerged in recent years as a new Twitch streaming phenomenon. Replacing the use of webcams, VTubers obscure their true physical appearance and instead choose to represent themselves through a fictional character. This character is most often controlled through facial tracking, motion capture, and additional software tools. While previous livestreaming research has focused on why people watch others play video games, or what an audience wants from the streamer they watch, there is very little current research available on VTubers. Current studies are scattered, and do not attempt to deeply engage with VTubers on a personal level to explore their thoughts and motivations. In turn, this study aims to answer the following questions: 1) *“How does livestreaming as a VTuber allow people to explore and/or express their identity?”*; 2) *“What makes VTubing unique when compared to standard facecam streaming?”*. 10 different VTubers were interviewed using semi-structured interviews, and their responses were analyzed by a framework centering Erving Goffman’s (1959) theory of self-presentation. Theories of online identity, imagined audience, online disinhibition, and parasocial interaction were also utilized to support the analysis. The results suggest that VTubing is a unique form of livestreaming which allows its users to overcome personal insecurities, explore different methods of self-presentation, and to affirm the identities of members of queer and ostracized communities.

# Contents

List of Figures and Tables .....	5
1.0 Introduction.....	7
2.0 Background.....	8
2.1 How VTubers are Made.....	8
2.2 The Role of Hololive and International Fandom .....	9
2.3 The Influence of Japanese Idol Culture .....	10
3.0 Literature Review .....	14
3.1 Technological Creativity .....	14
3.2 Niche Exploration .....	15
3.3 VTuber Identity and Experience.....	15
3.4 Twitch and Livestreaming .....	16
4.0 Theoretical Framework .....	17
4.1 Self-Presentation.....	18
4.2 Online Identity.....	19
4.3 Imagined Audiences .....	19
5.0 Methodology.....	21
5.1 Sampling.....	21
5.2 Method.....	22
5.3 Ethics .....	24
5.4 Limitations.....	24
6.0 Results .....	25
6.1 Becoming a VTuber .....	25
6.2 The Logistics of Being a Streamer .....	26
6.3 VTuber Model Designs as Byproducts of the Offline Self .....	27
6.4 Audience and Community Participation .....	28
6.5 Roleplay and Character Embodiment .....	30
6.6 VTubing Impact on the Identity of Nakanohito.....	31
6.7 VTubing Impact on the Offline Lives of Nakanohito .....	33
7.0 Analysis.....	34
7.1 VTubers as Another Facet of Self-Presentation: The Case of the Party Time Mask .....	34
7.2 VTubers and Online Identity: Vehicles for Queer Exploration .....	35
7.3 Imagined Audiences and VTuber Community Isolation.....	36

7.4 Don't Call Me a Femboy: Online Disinhibition .....	38
8.0 Conclusion .....	39
References.....	41
Appendix .....	47

## List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Kizuna AI as she appears in her YouTube videos (A.I.Channel, 2017) .....	7
Figure 2: Tokino Sora, Hololive’s first VTuber (Hololive Production, n.d.).....	10
Figure 3: Yuki Teraï promotional photo (Virtual Idol Wiki, n.d.) .....	11
Figure 4: Hatsune Miku promotional artwork (Crypton Future Media, n.d.) .....	12
Figure 5: Wedding-themed character illustration from The iDOLM@STER Cinderella Girls (BNE Entertainment, n.d.).....	13
Figure 6: The theoretical “loop” .....	20
Figure 7: Interviewees and their VTuber models. <b>Top row:</b> Manny, Andou, Chai; <b>Middle:</b> Natey, Seolfor, Juncker; <b>Bottom:</b> Nisha, Sleepy, Krimbo, Poffle .....	23
Figure 8: Andou’s more feminine-presenting alternate model .....	27
Figure 9: My username appearing in Natey’s Twitch chat. The pink color was my choice, while the blue and white crown icon indicates that I use Twitch Prime (an Amazon Prime subscription bonus) .....	36

*To my interviewees: Andou, Chai, Juncker, Krimbo, Manny, Natey, Nisha, Poffle, Sleepy, and Seolfor- thank you for sharing parts of your lives with me. As I stated at the end of all your interviews, I feel strange and somewhat uncomfortable dropping into your lives to collect “data” and then disappearing once the process is over. Thank you for your time, your energy, your excitement, your curiosity. This study has been a labor of love, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for making it possible.*

## 1.0 Introduction

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of November in 2016, a new YouTube channel called A.I.Channel uploaded its first video. It featured a fully rendered 3D anime girl who called herself Kizuna AI (see Figure 1). This character self-described herself as an artificial intelligence and stated that her goal was to “connect with everyone.” Kizuna was unique – a content creator focused on video production utilizing a digital character voiced and manipulated by a real person behind the scenes. Consequently, Kizuna has since become recognized as the world’s first virtual YouTuber—VTuber for short (A.I.Channel, 2022).



*Figure 1: Kizuna AI as she appears in her YouTube videos (A.I.Channel, 2017)*

Contrary to what the term might imply, VTubers are not restricted to the world of YouTube. In fact, a large portion of VTubers create livestreamed content through the popular streaming platform Twitch. Twitch VTubers rely on motion capture technology to fully embody their chosen character and convey a greater sense of emotion and expression than would be possible with a purely static model. Forgoing their real appearance, VTubers on Twitch embody a fictional character in real time to provide a unique form of entertainment and engagement for their audience.

Simply scrolling through the VTuber tag on Twitch will expose you to a wide array of VTubers. No two VTubers are the same, particularly at first glance, due to the immense differences in their visual characteristics. Some choose the archetypal 2D anime girl, others enjoy using anthropomorphic animals. Some VTubers veer towards the more absurd or comical, utilizing 3D models of popular meme imagery or even a cute little baby dinosaur holding a game controller. Considering this variety, it is important to study why they adopt these appearances, and to explore their thought processes behind that decision.

While originating in Japan, VTuber popularity has experienced unprecedented international growth in recent years. Even so, due to its novelty, VTubing is a relatively understudied phenomenon. Livestreaming has been heavily researched in the past, addressing concepts

like “Participatory Communities of Play Within Live Mixed Media” (Hamilton, Garretson, and Kerne, 2014), “Why do people watch others play video games?” (Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017), and “What online game spectators want from their Twitch streamers” (M. Kim, H. Kim, 2022). Building on this existing research, this study attempts to explore the prevalent research gap that exists within the realm of VTubing. Thus, this study aims to provide greater insight into the experiences and thought processes of VTubers. Specifically, it aims to explore VTubers’ relationships with and perception of their own identity through the process of livestreaming via virtual avatar. Through analysis of ten different open-ended interviews, this study will explore themes of constructed and performative identity, minority representation, and the influence of the Twitch ecosystem. My paper is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) How does livestreaming as a VTuber allow people to explore and/or express their identity?
- 2) What makes VTubing unique when compared to standard facecam streaming?

I will begin by providing background information about VTubing and its history so that the reader is better situated to understand the later sections of this paper. Next, I will provide a literature review that addresses the most important and relevant studies within the realms of VTubing and Twitch streaming. Following this I will establish my analytical framework and the theories that will support my analysis. I will then present and justify my methodological approach, present the most relevant results from my research, then discuss and analyze those results according to my analytical framework. The paper will conclude with a summary of the most important points, as well as discuss potential future research projects.

## 2.0 Background

### 2.1 How VTubers are Made

Traditional streamers on Twitch can vary in the specifics of their technological setups, but there are some established baselines. For those who stream gameplay, digital art, or other software-based activities, they will need to utilize screen capture software. For those who stream IRL for subjects like ASMR<sup>1</sup> and musical performance, a good quality camera and a decent microphone are essential. To add further levels of interaction with their audience, many Twitch streamers will also opt to use something called a Stream Deck. Essentially, it’s a kind of micro controller with programmable buttons. Streamers can assign different functions to each button, like playing a specific animation or sound effect (Elgato, 2022). This allows them to quickly produce certain effects or functions to appear on their livestream without having to interrupt what they are doing.

For VTubers, the technological investments are even greater, as they must incorporate these standard streaming tools in addition to VTuber-specific tools. Every VTuber needs a model, which must be either rendered (3D) or drawn (2D). The models must then be subsequently

---

<sup>1</sup> Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response. A sensation that people experience when watching or listening to particularly stimulating videos. Often described as a feeling of “tingles” across the head, neck, and back that is deeply relaxing; sometimes used to fall asleep (Lopez, 2018).



rigged in order for them to be able to move. For 3D models, this means constructing an invisible series of bones to represent a model's internal skeletal structure, as well as assigning weight values to bones to determine how the model interacts (Petty, n.d.). For 2D models, rigging is the process of defining every single animation that can occur for each moveable aspect of the model; not only blinking and mouth movements, but flowing hair strands, clothing adjustment, or even cleavage jiggle (Chen, 2020).

The other requirement for a VTuber model to function is some sort of motion tracking setup. The complexity of these setups varies from person to person. Some have complex setups that involve full body tracking, whereas others only capture their upper body or facial movements. Greater complexity requires greater technological investment, ranging from a webcam to a full motion capture body suit. There's also a plethora of different software that VTubers can use to tweak their tracking. Due to this variability, VTubers have the freedom to pursue a streaming setup that works best for them. Despite this, the lack of standardization can be challenging for newcomers. It can also quickly become a large monetary investment to acquire the various necessary technology.

## 2.2 The Role of Hololive and International Fandom

After Kizuna AI established herself as the world's first VTuber, the craze swept across Japan with people capitalizing on the popularity of anime aesthetics and idol culture. According to User Local, a Japanese data technology company, there were 1,000 VTubers ranked on YouTube at the start of 2018. In October of 2021, this number had jumped to 16,000. Notably, these numbers only included VTubers who applied for ranking, so the totals skewed lower than reality (User Local, 2021). International popularity boomed, and VTubers have become so prevalent that even major companies like Netflix and AirAsia have debuted models to drive marketing hype (Adlan, 2021a; 2021b). Despite this, VTubers were initially extremely localized to Japan, and the language barrier served as the primary deterrent for international interest. While individual enthusiasts were still able start their own VTuber channels, nothing had quite so much of an impact as Hololive Production, a VTuber talent management agency.

Cover Corporation was founded in Japan in June of 2016 and was initially focused on developing AR and VR technology. Their interest grew in developing virtual characters, drawing inspiration from Hatsune Miku, and eventually Hololive Production was born, along with Tokino Sora (see Figure 2 on following page), their first VTuber (Banda, 2020). Although quickly gaining popularity within Japan, Hololive would remain relatively inaccessible to English speaking audiences until November of 2019, when the agency released a collaboration with *Azur Lane*, a mobile gacha<sup>2</sup> game. The collaboration featured seven different Hololive VTubers whose designs were adapted to fit the aesthetics of the mobile game (Maruri, 2019). At the time of the collaboration, *Azur Lane* was available in Chinese, Japanese, and English, and had over five million active players, thus exposing a

---

<sup>2</sup> A term originating from Japan's "Gashapon" systems, which are vending machines that sell capsule toys; in exchange for a token, you get a random character. Gacha games operate under the same mechanic, but digitally. You spend currency to open boxes or packs and receive a random prize in return. (Vicente, 2020).

much larger audience to Hololive's presence and exposing them to the concept of VTubers (Bayguette, 2021).

This collaboration was followed up in 2020 with Hololive recruiting and debuting five new English-speaking VTubers as a group called "Myth." They would go on to deliver English-language interactions on platforms like YouTube and Twitter (Morrissy, 2020). Their content mostly includes chatting with their audience, giving singing performances, and playing video games; Hololive VTubers will also often collaborate with each other. Six other HololiveEN VTubers have debuted since then, bringing the total HololiveEN YouTube follower count to a whopping 13.6 million subscribers.



*Figure 2: Tokino Sora, Hololive's first VTuber (Hololive Production, n.d.)*

Founded in 2020, VShojo is a notable example of a successful VTuber agency based in the United States. They operate with a more hands-off approach than the "idol" focused Japanese agencies. According to their webpage, their management is a "slider that [their VTubers] control...autonomy is a huge factor in our company's mantra" (VShojo FAQs, 2022). VShojo does not control its VTubers' schedules or social media, instead providing support, management, and outreach. While not at the same level of popularity as Hololive, their VTubers' social reach totals over 9 million followers across YouTube, Twitch, and Twitter.

### 2.3 The Influence of Japanese Idol Culture

When discussing VTubers, it feels necessary to discuss the influence of Japanese idol culture when considering Hololive, VTuber designs, and performance expectations. While not the main focus of this thesis, it is impossible to ignore the influence of such a phenomenon. This is by no means an exhaustive exploration of the topic and I encourage readers to look elsewhere, particularly in Japanese sources, for greater insight.

Idols are not unique to Japan; South Korea is well known for its highly trained K-Pop idols<sup>3</sup>. Even so, there are clear differences in the roles and expectations of idols within each country. In Korea, “idol” refers explicitly to members of K-Pop groups. These young people are put through rigorous training from a young age and are challenged to compete against global celebrities. They are given very little leniency from the public, and are held to extremely high standards of singing, dance, and interpersonal engagement. In contrast, Japanese idols are seen as separate from artists. Their skills are not expected to be on par with professional dancers, singers, or actors. Instead, their main task is to please fans and develop their talents after they debut (Park, 2018).

In Japan, idols stand at the center of the music, television, and film industries. These highly produced and promoted singers, models, and media personalities have dominated the Japanese media landscape since their inception in the 1970s. Their cross-platform media ubiquity influences the movement of commodities to such an extent that some critics argue that the Japanese nation’s most important cultural products are idols themselves (Galbraith and Karlin, 2012). The idol market has grown to such an extent that the past decade has been described as a “warring states period” for the industry as groups vie for the public’s attention. This has naturally led to the exploration of *virtual* idol culture, in efforts to provide further marketability.



Figure 3: Yuki Terai promotional photo (Virtual Idol Wiki, n.d.)

The virtual idol Yuki Terai (see Figure 3) was launched in 1997, enjoying considerable success through the release of DVDs, photo books, music CDs. Although she was computer generated, her voice was provided by a human singer. Her marketing focused on appealing

---

<sup>3</sup> Highly manufactured Korean pop music stars that sing and dance, typically as part of larger groups. They are managed by agencies and undergo extensive training in dance and vocal technique.

largely to the otaku<sup>4</sup> subculture, though later developments allowed further posing and animation in order to reach a broader audience. Fans could purchase various Yuki Terai goods, but could never fully own Yuki herself (Black, 2006).

This barrier was eventually broken by one of the most prominent virtual idols in recent history, Hatsune Miku. Illustrated as a young girl with blueish greenish pigtails and a futuristic outfit, Miku is a singing voice synthesizer that has been featured in over 100,000 songs released worldwide (See Figure 4). Her copyright license allows her to be simultaneously used for both advertising and artistic creation. In the years since her inception, she has evolved into a cultural icon, performing sold-out holographic concerts across the world, and participating in corporate collaborations with companies like SEGA, Toyota USA, and Google (Crypton, 2022).

I would argue that virtual idol culture also includes idol-focused transmedia projects like *Love Live!* and *The Idolmaster*. *The Idolmaster*, a somewhat older series, focuses on the training of pop idols, showing their trials and tribulations as they rise to stardom (Lee, 2020). In *Love Live!*, the focus is on teenage girls who become “school idols” and participate in live performances, dancing to self-written songs (*LoveLive!* Website, n.d.). *LoveLive!*’s mobile game, *LoveLive! School Idol Festival* utilizes gacha mechanics in the same ways as the previously mentioned *Azur Lane*; the player collects various idols to affect their gameplay, so they are encouraged to collect as many idols as possible, similar to trading cards.



Figure 4: Hatsune Miku promotional artwork (Crypton Future Media, n.d.)

All of this is to say, Hololive’s production practices can be connected to aspects of virtual and live idol culture. As Colp and Deyo (2020) put it, “To work as a Hololive VTuber is to

---

<sup>4</sup> Within Japan it refers to geeks and artists that create fan-comics, and has a rather negative connotation. In the West it refers to fans of manga, anime, and Japanese culture (de Zwart, 2010).

be a mascot. The VTubers and their likenesses are leverage as both talent and product much like traditional idols.” With over 60 female VTubers to choose from, viewers can pick and choose those that appeal to them in the most basic sense of possible. The common defining factor for Hololive VTubers is their anime-influenced design, but no two VTubers look quite the same, and are voiced by a myriad of different personalities. Some designs are overtly sexual, whereas others play into the fantasy of devoted innocence and purity, a common persona utilized in idol marketing (Prusa, 2012). Concepts such as *debut* and *graduation* which refer to a VTuber’s first and last video appearance, are directly taken from existing idol practices. Livestream content may vary, but a notably large portion of Hololive VTubers are expected to sing and perform during their livestreams. Hololive even hosted a holographic concert (in the same fashion as Hatsune Miku performances) complete with a live audience and waving glowsticks (Booth, 2020).

Just like their live counterparts, Hololive VTubers put forth a controlled and maintained image that is meant to draw in fans. Their content must be universally appealing and maintain the appearance of being available to everyone while simultaneously being devoted to *you*, the viewer. The penultimate form of this devotion is marriage (see Figure 5), which is a common theme in various forms idol media and can also be seen in Hololive merchandising (E-Kon, 2022).



Figure 5: Wedding-themed character illustration from *The iDOLM@STER Cinderella Girls* (BNE Entertainment, n.d.)

Maintaining this kind of pure, pseudo-romantic relationship with an idol is so important that any mention of a partner or implication of outside romance can destroy an idol’s career (Ashcraft, 2010; Macias, 2013; Staff, 2015). Hololive pushes these same requirements onto its VTubers and has not hesitated in terminating the contracts of those who break these rules (Cover Corp, 2020; E-Kon, 2022). Furthermore, in order for VTubers to maintain their *virtual*



idol fantasy, they must take great care to not expose their face, especially during a livestream. While stringent adherence to this rule is a must for contracted agency VTubers, it is more of a personal decision for independents. The VTubers I interviewed, for example, all avoided showing their face, though this was also due to personal comfort.

Now that I have provided contextual information about VTubers and their origins, I will present relevant research that correlates with my research aim and the overarching themes of this study.

### 3.0 Literature Review

VTubing is still a relatively new concept and has only recently been addressed within the field of media and communication studies. Although it is a rich and complex topic, it is difficult to solely focus on VTubing within my review. It will therefore be important to consider existing and relevant studies that have addressed VTubers, motion capture technology, and livestreaming.

#### 3.1 Technological Creativity

Several studies have been conducted on the technological aspects of VTubing, particularly within the realm of motion capture, animation, and expression. Visual appeal and perceived model quality can have a strong influence not only on a VTuber's audience, but on the VTuber themselves. If they are unsatisfied with how their technological setups allow them to engage with their own model, it could affect their feelings towards the experience as a whole. The core of VTubing is utilizing a fictional character to represent yourself. This is done in lieu of using a webcam, and to avoid the lack of presence that could be felt without having someone or something to look at. This is largely done for expression or communication. VTubers even have a micro-niche called PNG tubers that incorporate a static 2D image which transitions to different "frames" or still poses to maintain a sense of liveliness (It's Just Kaeril, 2022).

A previous study from Tang et al. (2021) experimented with the development of an automatic animation system that gives VTubers high-level control over the movement of their avatar, while simultaneously allowing for more modest equipment setups. Despite the project's success and positive survey ratings, it is somewhat held back by its nonverbal limitations and extensive stream latency. Shirai (2021) provides another alternative streaming outlet for users with the REALITY platform. Users have the option to pursue full-body motion tracking or can use the app's real-time facial capture capabilities. REALITY is unique in that it provides its users with a dedicated VTuber streaming platform and puts strong emphasis on how such technology will "build new relations in current social media" through the integration of virtual models and human interaction. REALITY's advantage lies in its accessibility – the only thing someone needs to stream on their platform is an iPhone 10.

Taking Bredikhina et al.'s (2020) paper into consideration, it can be argued that the intersectional nature of VTubers is leading to the creation and extension of new creative and technological markets. With VTuber's influence on VRChat model design and the overwhelming popularity of anime aesthetics, digital artists can create works for a rapidly

growing audience. This line of thought is supported by increased VTuber adoption in corporate and professional spaces for the sake of promotional material.

### 3.2 Niche Exploration

Although VTubers exist primarily within the sphere of entertainment, recent research shows that people are exploring the true value of VTubers and how they can be applied to alternate contexts. Hsieh et al. (2019) discuss the effectiveness of virtual avatar presence and voice modulation within eLearning. Although a sizeable portion of students preferred to watch a standard recorded lecture with their teacher present, a *majority* preferred learning from a virtual avatar. A reasonable argument for this difference could be the novelty of a non-standard study method, but the results are still notable.

In a similar vein, Savchyn et al. (2021) experimented with adding a virtual moderator to an audience participation game with the aim to increase player participation rate. The study was directly inspired by the growing popularity of VTubers and suggests that the study's proposed system could be applicable to additional game settings. While the study did not quantitatively analyze the effects of the moderator, the system is independent, flexible, and compatible with potential artificial intelligence techniques.

Li et al.'s (2021) study of *AliMe Avatar*, a VTuber designed for livestreaming in the e-commerce field, dives further into the combination of artificial intelligence and virtual avatars within a live audience setting. The VTuber, powered by AI, was launched to support the emerging model of live-shopping; *AliMe Avatar* was designed to address the natural challenges of in-person broadcasting, and has served hundreds of thousands of customers on the Taobao e-commerce platform. The study specifically notes that "the threshold for live anchors is rather high, and thus prevents the majority of merchants from starting their live streams." Although this particular VTuber is driven by AI, this argument suggests that utilizing a virtual avatar during live performance situations can provide unique benefits which are unattainable by real people. By removing the potential mishaps that occur due to natural human behavior, communication and functionality is enhanced.

### 3.3 VTuber Identity and Experience

Lu et al. (2021) provides one of the most comprehensive studies on VTubers, exploring viewers' experience and perception of VTuber identity<sup>5</sup>. Its methodology centers on interviews with dedicated VTuber viewers, which renders it something akin to a foil for my research. One of the most notable takeaways from this study was the perceived distance between viewers and VTubers due to the digitally mediated nature of their interactions. This distance influenced several key aspects of viewer perceptions, leading some to feel like watching VTubers was more akin to watching a TV show with an ensemble cast, as they could easily switch to a different VTuber depending on personal tastes or aesthetics. Yet despite this, most interviewees felt that the "daily life content that VTubers share...brings them closer to viewers than typical anime characters" (p.6).

---

<sup>5</sup> Of published studies available in English

Notably, interviewees felt that the virtual nature of VTubers led to them having different expectations in comparison with real streamers. Several interviewees disliked real-person streamers' solicitation for donations and virtual gifts but deemed it an acceptable practice for VTubers. The act of directly asking viewers for money was instead associated with a VTuber's *character*, i.e. they were simply roleplaying, and was thus deemed acceptable. One interviewee noted that "Purchasing virtual gifts for VTubers seems like purchasing virtual goods in games. It feels less like tipping to a real person" (p.7).

Separation of *nananohito* (voice actor) from the character they inhabit is so strong that in the majority of cases, interviewees do not care if their favorite VTuber's *nananohito* were to be replaced (Lu et al., 2021). In this sense, it is clear that the interviewees perceived VTubers more as fictional characters than as real people. Despite these observations, it is important to acknowledge that the sample of this study was entirely Chinese and consisted mostly of young men.

Bredikhina (2020) surveyed 95 different VTubers on the subject of identity, and notes that in comparison with Asian VTubers, English- and French- speaking VTubers place heavy emphasis on individual expression. Their goals are rooted in community growth, positivity, and building a close-knit community with family-like atmosphere. In other words, there is a heavier emphasis placed on the VTuber as a complete entity and having a close-knit connection with their respective audience. Additionally, Japanese male *nananohito* were much more comfortable inhabiting a VTuber model of a different gender/sex than their Western counterparts; this could possibly derive from the practice of *babniku*<sup>6</sup>, in which one uses a *bishojo* (literally "beautiful girl") character to explore the mismatch between themselves and their outward presentation (Bredikhina, 2020).

For the sake of clarity, *nananohito* will be used throughout this paper to refer to voice actors when needed.

### 3.4 Twitch and Livestreaming

While VTubing is still a novel concept, livestreaming has existed since the 90's and has been the subject of extensive study. The precedent that Twitch set in terms of streaming norms and expectations affects all streaming subgenres and must be considered when conducting related research.

For viewers, stream engagement is largely dictated by the desire for social interaction and sense of community. This sense of closeness is often the strongest determinant of whether a viewer follows or subscribes to a streamer (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018; Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017). Ongoing interaction may often veer towards the parasocial; it also grants greater social capital within the streamer community as frequent stream attendance leads to stronger interactions with the streamer (Kuper and Kramer, 2021).

Streaming requires active multi-tasking, and combines different skills such as improvisation, public speaking, and social media management. To grow as a channel, streamers must utilize



various methods to learn about and engage their viewers (Wohn and Freeman, 2020a). Continued engagement can lead to both social and monetary success through various monetization methods. Subscriptions, donations, cheering, and advertising are the primary methods of monetary gain available to a streamer and are often built into the stream experience (Johnson and Woodcock, 2019). One such popular method is the *subathon*, in which a streamer continually streams until a count-down clock reaches zero. The audience can reset the timer by donating or subscribing, thus creating an incentive to continually donate and subscribe to perpetuate the stream. Emilycc holds the current record for longest subathon stream and is *still* going at the moment of this writing<sup>7</sup>.

Wohn and Freeman's (2020b) research analyzes female and LGBTQ+ streamers' gender and sexual representation. They noted that their participants approached representation as self-driven reflection and empowerment, as opposed to audience-oriented performance; they "chose not to let the audience shape their digital representations and streaming practices," (p. 817). Furthermore, the streamers felt they could intentionally manipulate the structural building blocks of streaming (webcam, microphone, appearance, voice) in order to control their self-representation to their viewers. Although Twitch streams are freely available, this research suggests that the act of streaming itself allows marginalized streamers to control the narrative they put forth with regards to self-representation and sensitive topics.

To conclude, more and more people are starting to study VTubing, but there is a lot left to learn. The earliest study I analyzed was published in 2019, and I'm sure there are more being developed at this current moment. From my literature review, we can see that not only is technology being improved for the use of VTubing, but VTubing itself is being experimented on within a larger context. As more people engage with the community, there is more to study about how audiences experience VTubers, and how VTubers experience their audience. While Bredikhina has made strides in exploring how VTubers engage with their own identities, there is still little known about the specifics of this process. Surveys provide a limited amount of information, whereas interviews give researchers a chance to further explore relevant concepts in the moment that they are brought up.

## 4.0 Theoretical Framework

In order to answer my research question, it is necessary to establish a relevant theoretical framework rooted in questions of constructed online identity. Sherry Turkle's (1995) early exploration of simulated identity, describing our online selves as "incoherent, multiply located and always shifting" has been influential in building ongoing understanding of the subject, although her assumption that our identities will inevitably become fluid and fragmented was a hefty generalization (Turkle, 1995 in Hodkinson, 2017, p. 273). I would also say that it is vital to keep in mind Butler's (1990) concept of performativity when discussing VTuber identity. Judith Butler argued that gender is a construct and a performance

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.twitch.tv/Emilycc>

that we have tacitly agreed to produce and sustain. Identity, then, is the effect of a performance, and not vice versa (Butler, 1990 in Bell, 1999).

In their paper regarding offline and online identity, Cover and Oak (2015) posit that one of the reasons Turkle's assumptions were flawed was due to her upholding a strict dichotomy between the real world and the virtual world. Compared to Turkle's time, the modern boundary between people and technology "is far less discernibly established and may be more usefully described in terms of a series of performances across a socio-technical network" (p.549). In contrast, the authors are more receptive to Turkle's (2011) more recent research, implying that constructing a cohesive self is further complicated as it becomes contingent on "technology that simultaneously catalyzes and problematizes identity coherence" such as Facebook (Cover and Oak, 2015, p.551).

#### 4.1 Self-Presentation

The term "self-presentation" can be attributed to Erving Goffman (1959), an extremely influential sociologist. It refers to when people try to control impressions of themselves. According to Schlenker (2012), the study of self-presentation involves examining how people attempt to shape the attitudes and behaviors of audiences through the presentation of self-relevant information, and their responses to the self-presentation activities of others.

In his treatise *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman notes that when an individual is in the presence of others, the others must accept that individual and their characteristics on faith. In turn, it is in that individual's best interest to "mobilize [their] activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in [their] interests to convey" (p.3). In other words, depending on an individual's intentions, they will present themselves in a specific way to communicate a specific idea to their audience. These "interests" can vary- whether to impress, inform, intimidate, etc.

Schlenker (2021) emphasizes that self-presentation should not be viewed from an explicitly superficial or manipulative angle, as it involves attempts to convey to audiences an accurate portrayal of oneself. Additionally, he notes that it takes "as much self-presentation skill to communicate an accurate, 'truthful' impression of self as it does to convey a false one" (p.493). If an individual lacked self-presentation skill, they would be unable to convince someone of their emotions even while behaving truthfully.

In summary, self-presentation includes a range of activities that are united by a central idea- that social behavior is a symbolically driven performance meant to communicate ideas about the self to others. Reflexively, the potential reactions of others to this information may influence the timing, form, or content of the self-presentational activity (Schlenker, 2021). Self-presentation can then influence a variety of factors and environments, including job performance, selection settings, loneliness, and even self-esteem (Morgeson et al., 2007; Marcus, 2009; Bober et al., 2021; Mandal and Wierzbichon, 2019).

Self-disclosure is closely tied to self-presentation. Defined as the act of revealing personal information about oneself to another, self-disclosure is central to the development of close relationships and good mental health (Collins and Miller, 1994). We tend to have a higher

affinity towards those who disclose to us, and in turn, continued disclosure often leads to us having a greater affinity for the recipient. Self-disclosure is an important factor within interpersonal relations, and influences factors such as attraction, friendship, intimacy, trust, and social support (Collins and Miller, 1994.)

## 4.2 Online Identity

According to Marwick (2015), media-based identity expression differs both across and within platforms and is influenced by a variety of factors. A phone call offers synchronous communication and tonality but lacks gesture and facial expression. Roleplaying is acceptable within gaming communities but would be considered unprofessional on LinkedIn. The term “online identity” implies that it is distinct from offline identity, but Marwick (2015) argues that this dichotomy is outdated. Modern social media usage has extended to “real life” context such as home, work, and school. Furthermore, portable devices are increasingly being incorporated into day-to-day life, with people using various social sites simultaneously. This “creates an ecosystem where they maintain the same username and basic information across social platforms, further complicating self-presentation on each site” (p.358).

This example suggests that there is no clear separation between online and offline identity. It follows logically, then, that although *nakano hito* might strive for complete online and offline separation, it is impossible for them to succeed. Whether it be through physical, verbal, text, or subconscious self-presentation, the offline and online are interconnected.

Simultaneously, online spaces allow for a certain kind of self-presentation that is impossible in an offline environment. According to Qin and Lowe (2021), online social spaces can serve as a vehicle for an individual’s idealized self or make up for perceived personal faults; if you are shy and introverted in real life, you can be extroverted and loud online. Online interaction may also lead to “the online disinhibition effect,” in which people reveal suppressed emotions, fears, and wishes that can manifest in either toxic or benign behaviors. These range from unusual acts of kindness and generosity to hateful behaviors, perversion, and violence (Suler, 2005).

## 4.3 Imagined Audiences

We have established that self-presentation is based on the perceived expectations of one’s audience, and that online identity can be uniquely shaped, while still deeply entangled with offline identity. VTubers, then, in their positions as online entertainers, experience exclusively mediated interactions with those who watch them. Thus, I feel it necessary to ground this study in discussions of Litt’s (2012) treatise on the imagined audience, defined as “the mental conceptualization of the people with whom we are communicating” (p. 331).

According to Litt (2012), the less we see or know our audience, the more we depend on our imagination. When we consider that a majority of viewers can only interact with a VTuber through a chatbox, distinguished solely by the color and words that make up their username, this feels deeply relevant. VTubers do not know the faces or names of their audience, they only know what they are able to see in chat. Speaking on this, Litt (2012) notes that the “use

of pseudonyms may limit one's cues about audience members causing them to envision a mass as an audience" (p. 336).

Litt states that the *actual* audience can influence someone's perception, such as believing that those who you interact with most frequently are in turn your imagined audience. A website's technical structures and affordances also influence this perception, which should be taken into consideration when discussing the alternate ways that Twitch stream viewers can interact with a streamer.

Where imagined audiences are relevant to the streamer, parasocial relationships are relevant to the viewer. Originally described by Horton and Wohl (1956), parasocial interaction theory describes a one-sided relationship that is experienced by an audience member during mediated interactions with a media-based performer or persona. While historically conceptualized as one-sided, Kowert and Daniel Jr. (2021) suggest that livestreaming results in a unique "one-and-a-half" way parasocial relationship, which accounts for "potential reciprocal interaction between a streamer and their audience" (p. 2). While considering a streamer's perception of their audience, it is just as important to consider an audience's perception of that streamer. If they feel close to a VTuber, they may attend more streams. If they attend more streams, a VTuber may feel that they are their imagined audience.

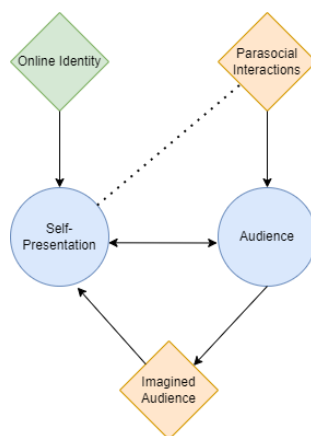


Figure 6: The theoretical "loop"

In this section I have established that self-presentation is the root of how we present ourselves to others. Identity is a performance that is continually affected by our thoughts about our audience. For VTubers, who are online entertainers, their thoughts are influenced not only by their real audience, but by an imagined audience which continuously reinforces their beliefs. VTubers are then able to take advantage of the technology around them and present themselves in a unique online manner. Through this process, they may or may not develop a parasocial relationship with their audience, which once again feeds back into their self-presentation. By considering these theories in tandem and their relationships to one another, a theoretical "loop" is created which can be mapped onto the experiences of my interviewees during analysis (see Figure 6 above).

## 5.0 Methodology

In order to guide my research approach, I turned to Blaikie and Priest (2019) to help situate my work within a research paradigm. It was not immediately clear to me which one would be most applicable to my choice of method, but it was important to select a paradigm whose understanding of knowledge took others' lived experiences into consideration. My data collection and subsequent analysis is based on the feelings and words of others, although I bring my own theoretical framework to the table. I find that my methodology best aligns with Interpretivism, as perceived social reality and intended meaning is essential to the deconstruction of VTuber identity. My analytical approach, while largely inductive, must also consider abductive principles due to the intrinsic unpredictable nature of conversing with another person during a qualitative interview

In laying the foundation for the formal analysis of my interviews, I consulted Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) for a greater understanding of the options available to me. While there exist several strategies focused on the analysis of both language and meaning, the authors concede that many interviews are analyzed without following any specific method. Instead, the researcher freely moves between different approaches to build ongoing understand of the interview materials, known as bricolage. The outcome may then be represented through any combination of words, figures, and techniques that the researcher deems appropriate.

In my case, analysis began with re-reading my interview transcripts and identifying passages that were relevant to either my overarching theme of identity or connected in some way to my theoretical approach. I color-coded sections of text based on category, then reorganized and regrouped the responses in a separate document according to their connections to the questions I asked, as well as the general themes that they addressed. Sometimes different themes were addressed in combination as a response to a single question. Sometimes a question rooted in community would produce a response that was directly connected to the idealized self. As I continued to look through my transcripts, I also took note of emerging topics that I had not considered but were a common thread that linked multiple interviews together. Once my general categories had been established and my results properly placed within the study, my analysis is then presented, loosely following the same order that my theoretical approach was introduced.

### 5.1 Sampling

While VTubers are active on various livestreaming and video content sites, I focused exclusively on those who stream on Twitch.tv. I wanted to explore those who experience VTubing as a *live* phenomenon, and the popularity of Twitch among English speakers made it more accessible to me. My sample was further narrowed by my only contacting those who label their Twitch channel with the "VTuber" Tag. This was largely for navigational purposes, but also driven by my desire to only contact those who self-identify with the term VTuber. The only requirements for potential interviewees were the ability to speak English and to be over 18 years of age.

In my initial point of contact, I endeavored to provide as much information as possible about myself and my thesis, including my name, my university, and the main themes of my thesis. While VTuber follower counts vary, many of them could be considered minor internet celebrities and may or may not take a more reserved approach to messages from strangers, or those outside of the VTuber community.

Initial channels were scouted using Twitch's "Browse" function, which displays an assortment of categories that can be organized either by view count, or through Twitch's recommendation algorithm. I searched for the key term "VTuber" which then displayed an infinitely scrollable list of live channels. I then manually opened every channel that I could find, except for those whose title and description were not in English. This was done over the span of two days.

While over 100 channels were initially identified for contact, this total was later reduced to 77 due to a lack of publicly available contact information. VTubers were contacted through business email, when possible, but otherwise contacted through Twitter Direct Messages. Out of 77 contacts: 10 responses declined my interview request, 14 responded with varied interest, and the remaining 53 failed to respond. Of the 14 who indicated their interest: 10 completed the interview process, 2 rescinded their interest, and 2 ceased communication.

## 5.2 Method

Collins (2019) describes interviewing as a technique that is primarily used to gain an understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations for people's attitudes, preferences, or behavior. Because my research question aims to gain an understanding of *nakano hito's* attitudes and perceptions towards their identity, it felt like the most appropriate choice- VTubing is a unique and understudied experience that requires understanding at an individual level. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were chosen; this was done to pre-emptively generate a series of themes and topics to later analyze, as well as give the interviewees ample opportunity to express themselves.

After the logistics had been handled, the interview itself consisted of three loose phases:

- ❖ The **first phase** involved me summarizing my thesis and the reasons for the interview, acquiring consent for audio recording, and giving the interviewee a chance to ask any questions they might have.
- ❖ The **second phase** was the core of the interview. Over the course of this phase I asked 15 different questions classified within 5 different themes- Channel, Experience, Character, Community, and Wrapping Up. These themes were not disclosed to the interviewee, but the questions were asked in this order whenever possible.
- ❖ The **third phase** consisted of asking for additional relevant information, asking for pronoun and pseudonym preferences, as well as giving the interviewee the opportunity to ask me any questions they might have.

On the advice of my advisor, an initial pilot interview was performed with a friend of mine who is involved in the VTuber community. The process was positive, and the results were relevant, so their interview is included in my results.



All interviews were conducted by me between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2022. The interviews had no set length and ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 45 minutes. All interviews were recorded, with explicit written and verbal consent received from each interviewee. These interviews were then later transcribed through a combination of manual transcription and Amazon Transcribe, whose data was wiped after the process.

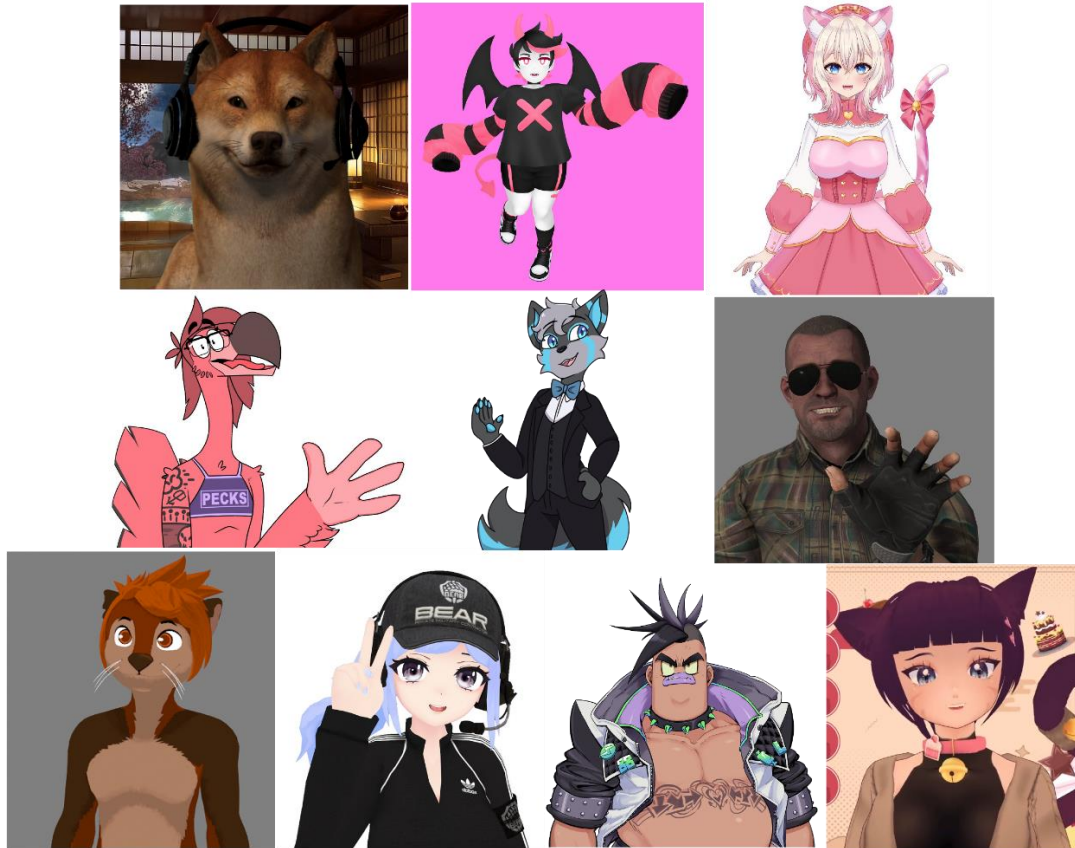


Figure 7: Interviewees and their VTuber models. **Top row:** Manny, Andou, Chai; **Middle:** Natey, Seolfor, Juncker; **Bottom:** Nisha, Sleepy, Krimbo, Poffle

Interviewee Name	Nakanohito Pronouns	Model Type	Twitch Followers	VTubing Start
Manny	He/Him	3D	376k	2015
Andou	He/They	3D	3.7k	Jan 2021
Chai	She/Her	2D	863	Mar 2021
Natey	They/Them	2D	4.1k	Aug 2021
Seolfor	He/Him	PNG	66	Nov 2021
Juncker	He/Him	3D	19.2k	Mar 2021
Nisha	She/Her	3D	5.1k	Apr 2021
Sleepy	She/Her	3D	2.6k	Oct 2020
Krimbo	He/Him	2D	6.6k	Mar 2021
Poffle	She/Her	2D	5.3k	Dec 2020

Table 1: Interviewee statistics

### 5.3 Ethics

According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2018), interview research is saturated with moral and ethical issues which can permeate every step of the research process. They describe an interview inquiry as a “moral enterprise” and note that problems can arise when “researching private lives and placing accounts in the public arena” (p.2) In order to combat this, it is extremely important for interviewers to keep ethical considerations in mind while conducting research and incorporate ethically sound strategies into their research design.

For my study, I was largely focused on informed consent and confidentiality. These subjects strongly informed how I wrote the initial email to contact potential interviewees- that these interviews would not be publicly shared, that I would be the only one with access to any information they provide me with, and that these materials would be deleted upon completion of my thesis. Once I had my list of potential interviewees, I made sure to explicitly ask for their consent, both in writing and at the beginning of every interview, if I could record the audio of us speaking. These recordings were a way for me to take notes while simultaneously staying fully engaged with each interviewee. These recordings will be deleted once my thesis project is complete.

Due to the nature of my study, I did not find it necessary to ask interviewees for particularly identifying information. Their real names were never discussed, and topics like gender identity, sexuality, or other sensitive subjects came about naturally through discussion, as opposed to being data points that I wanted to extract. I emphasized throughout each interview that if something felt too personal or uncomfortable to talk about, we should stop and move on. I wanted to explore themes of identity and their relationship with that concept, but I did not need to know specific identifying details about them as people in order to identify analytical threads.

Despite my best intentions, Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) note that “the openness and intimacy of the interview may be seductive and can lead subjects to disclose information they may later regret revealing” (p.7). They also suggest that an interviewer’s ability to listen attentively can lead the interviews to feel like a therapy session, for which I am absolutely not trained. This kind of personal closeness needs to be considered during questioning, and when deciding what results to share and analyze.

### 5.4 Limitations

The biggest and most influential limitation in this research project was my inability to interview VTubers from non-English<sup>8</sup> speaking countries. I find this extremely relevant due to VTubing’s Japanese origin and general popularity across the Asian continent. This restriction also influenced the composition and size of my sample. I interviewed 10 people: 6 are Americans, 3 are from the UK, and 1 is Danish; culture-based bias must be considered. With a sample size this small, it is also difficult to make any substantial generalizations based

---

<sup>8</sup> I am also fluent in Icelandic but did not locate any Icelandic-speaking VTubers.



on my findings. This was partly due to the timeframe of the thesis project, so I believe a larger sample size could be acquired if the study was extended to at least 6 months.

Another limitation was my exclusive usage of Twitch.tv. There are many VTubers who are active on YouTube, as well as the Chinese video sharing site Bilibili (though this would remain inaccessible due to my inability to speak Chinese). By utilizing Twitch to search for potential interviewees, I was also affected by its recommendation algorithm. I was unable to find any official Twitch source describing how their algorithm functions, but I feel it is important to acknowledge its role in my search results. Furthermore, the search function only shows channels that are live at the exact moment I am looking at Twitch, so I was unable to locate channels that were inactive during my search process.

Finally, it is important to consider the effects of human error and subjectivity with regards to interview data. I have done my best to remain as objective and neutral as possible, but all human beings are biased. This was also my first time undertaking an interview study. While I did my best as a researcher, there were times that I asked certain follow-up questions to one interviewee but not another. I was also able to get along more with certain interviewees, which may have influenced how I presented myself. Furthermore, due to the nature of audio recordings and transcriptions, there may have been instances where I misheard or misinterpreted something that an interviewee said.

## 6.0 Results

In this section I will present the most notable results from my interviews. Common responses will be shared, as well as any differing or significant statements. VTuber usernames have been used with explicit written consent from each interviewee.

### 6.1 Becoming a VTuber

Many of the interviewees reported being exposed to VTubing through either a friend entering the community, or friends discussing it on social media. Aside from knowing someone on a personal level, many of them also mentioned being exposed to Kizuna AI, Hololive, and Code Miko, an English-speaking VTuber who deeply engages with motion control technology (Kang, 2021). While Manny and Krimbo seemed to jump into it quickly, it took the other interviewees some time to fully embrace VTubing.

One main factor that attracted some interviewees to VTubing was the technological and creative aspect. Juncker was very interested in the 3D tracking of not only Code Miko but of fellow interviewee Manny. Krimbo, Sleepy, and Andou appreciated the more creative aspects of the process, with Sleepy noting: *“As an artist, that’s really interesting to be able to draw something and then, you know, have it move and react as you do.”*

Another main factor that many interviewees commented on was VTubing’s potential for interaction and going beyond the bounds of reality. From showing exaggerated facial expressions to allowing their viewers to throw objects at them, every single interviewee enjoyed the unique interactions that are only possible through VTubing. Many noted that

although similar things *might* be possible for IRL streamers, it would require additional tools such as green screens, lighting, and other tools.

Notably, Nisha, Natey, and Seolfor were all attracted to VTubing due to its compatibility with their identities as furies<sup>9</sup>. Nisha and Natey were initially put off by the concept, with Natey in particular warming up to it when he saw his fellow furies engaging with it. Nisha had previously existed as her fursona<sup>10</sup> within VR Chat, so she felt that moving over to VTubing would not feel very different.

By and far, the biggest commonality between interviewees was their aversion to showing their face on camera. This was due to a variety of reasons, including body insecurity, anxiety, or even a desire to save money on makeup. Poffle and Chai specifically mentioned that, through VTubing, they can focus more on what they are doing. Poffle noted: *“I definitely feel like I have more energy doing VTuber stuff because I’m not spending energy on, like, hey, am I looking alright in this camera?”*

On the other hand, many felt that a stream would feel empty or boring without some sort of visual representation for the audience to watch. Seolfor noted: *“It’s nice to be able to see the emotions that someone’s putting out- the way they’re reacting to it. It makes you feel, makes me feel more connected, more engaged with it.”*

## 6.2 The Logistics of Being a Streamer

Interviewees’ stream schedules varied wildly, particularly with regards to length. Seolfor’s streams were the shortest, ranging from 2-3 hours, while Manny’s were the longest, lasting anywhere from 4 to 36 hours; the average stream length was around 5 hours. Manny discussed how his content was often monetarily driven or kept monetary goals in mind. Considering this, he recently completed a 2 month-long uncapped subathon in which he was continuously live for two months straight. The stream length would be increased every time a viewer donated to his channel, so his audience was in full control. In comparison, Juncker and Andou expressed explicit dislike for lengthy streams, choosing instead to stream for a shorter 3-5 hours.

In terms of content, the interviewees categorized themselves in a variety of ways. Nisha, Chai, and Poffle identified themselves as variety streamers- they play games, chat, draw; they stream whatever they want, whenever they want. Natey and Andou mainly focus on streaming their artwork; Juncker and Sleepy exclusively stream a video game called Escape from Tarkov, with Sleepy occasionally deviating from this to play other games with friends. Krimbo and Manny did not easily fit into one category, though they both had a propensity for comedy sketches and engaging with their audience.

Another interesting occurrence that was discussed by Natey, Andou, and Poffle was the inspiration and fascination they felt towards Jerma985 as a streamer and entertainer. Jerma

---

<sup>9</sup> Furies are people who have an active interest in anthropomorphized animals; animals with human characteristics that walk and talk (Matthews, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> A fursona is an avatar which furies use to represent themselves within the fandom. This process involves picking and designing some sort of animal (Matthews, 2015).

is an American twitch streamer whose content can only be described as borderline surreal. He notably hosted a series of streams in August of 2021 where his audience could control his life in a similar manner to how someone would play The Sims, a life management video game (Diaz, 2021). In Andou's opinion: *"Jerma is an excellent example of an insanely good entertainer. And I strive to have that kind of energy."* Natey in particular enjoyed how chaotic Jerma's streams can get, and Poffle enjoyed the amount of interactivity that he provides, as could be seen in the Sims streams.

One logistics issue that was prevalent for all *nakanohito* was the potential for technological issues. Either having trouble creating assets for their model or being frustrated by unexpected problems while trying to stream. According to Sleepy, *"Your whole VTuber self kind of revolves around that working. If my model is laggy, that's a lot of interaction being lost because you're not seeing, you know, what I want you to see."*

### 6.3 VTuber Model Designs as Byproducts of the Offline Self

Model design for interviewees varies across the board. Chai, Krimbo, Seolfor, and Natey utilize 2D avatars, while Poffle, Sleepy, Nisha, Andou, Manny, and Juncker utilize 3D avatars.

One of the most prevalent themes that appeared when discussing model design was the propensity for individuals to incorporate aspects of themselves into each design, with the only exceptions being Manny and Juncker, whose models were directly adopted from another source. Chai, Sleepy, and Andou mentioned incorporating their hairstyles, while Krimbo and Natey discussed incorporating various physical features, but tweaking or exaggerating them in certain ways. Other times, personality traits or similar factors were incorporated- Poffle mentioned going by "Kitty" in her real life, as well as an ongoing joke among her friends that she would make a good maid, thus her model became a catgirl maid.

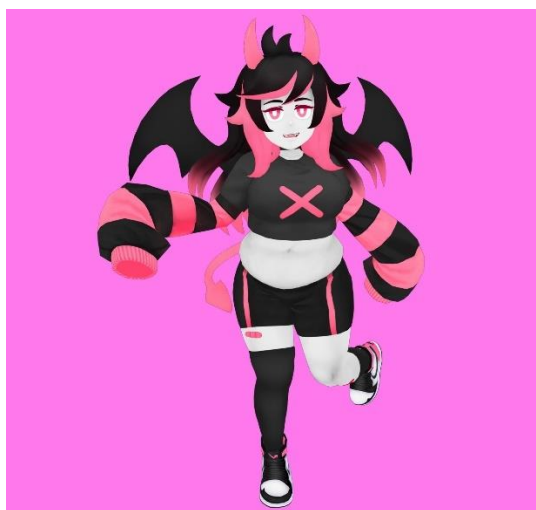


Figure 8: Andou's more feminine-presenting alternate model

Andou, who identifies as transmasculine nonbinary, had a particularly unique approach to design, as their streams utilize two different models. They described this alternative design as an

outlet for expressing their more feminine aspects after beginning their transition (see Figure 8 above). When drafting the initial design for his model, Krimbo discussed being inspired by JoJo's Bizarre Adventure<sup>11</sup> and its open approach to gender and expression- *"There's no insecurity, there's no feeling weakness because you've got lipstick on or you're doing a vague pose."*

Another core inspiration for the models of Natey, Nisha, and Seolfor was their fursonas. While the idea of fursonas can be off-putting to those outside of the community, Natey affirmed that *"There's a lot more to it. Sometimes it's very opening...Like I can express myself, I can be me, sure it's a dog but it's me. I'm the dog and it's really fun to be that person and I can express myself through them and through art and it's really awesome whether it's furry or not."* Andou in a similar manner mentioned that his design originated from his *artistsona*, a representation that is common within the artist community.

For several interviewees, technological accessibility was the deciding factor in choosing the format and appearance of their model. Manny's choice of Shiba Inu, a type of dog, was severely restricted by the fact that he began his career in 2015, before awareness of VTubers had properly spread and he could have commissioned someone for a model. Nisha in a similar vein had a pre-existing VRChat model that she simply reused for streaming, stating *"if I hadn't had that, I don't think I would have gotten into [VTubing]."* Many others stated that committing fully to VTubing would have been extremely expensive without their ability to create art or receive help from artistic friends.

#### 6.4 Audience and Community Participation

When asked why they think people like to watch VTubers, some interviewees had immediate answers, while others seemed to build and develop their thoughts as they continued to speak with me. Several interviewees looped this question back to their initial inspiration in joining the community, or why they personally enjoy VTubing. Generally, interviewees felt that the VTuber audience could be split into subgroups, although they did not necessarily agree on what those subgroups should be. This could be due to a difference in their imagined audiences, or due to a general lack of exposure.

Several interviewees emphasized their desire to come off as comfy and inviting, with Manny enjoying the idea of being "background noise". Krimbo noted that, due to feeling like an outsider while growing up, his channel aims to make people feel comfortable with themselves- *"Just, you know, being a little gross. Being a little weird. I'm a big freaking pervert criminal [in reference to his VTuber concept], come hang out with me and we'll joke about silly stuff."* Krimbo in particular embraced the concept of community as an important aspect of his channel. He feels a heavy sense of responsibility having an active audience and considers his role in the bigger picture, not only with regards to his viewers. After hitting

---

<sup>11</sup> An influential manga by Hirohiko Araki. His work is so renowned that it has been shown at the Louvre.

partner<sup>12</sup>, he has organized raid<sup>13</sup> chains to support his friends' channels. He has also adjusted his schedule so as not to overlap with his friends, as they share community members.

Every interviewee agreed that a core part of the VTuber fandom involves those who are interested in anime, manga, and cartoons. It would then follow that being able to interact with an animated character would be appealing to those fans. Similarly, a large part of the attraction to VTubers is their aesthetic appeal. While designs vary wildly, the same thing can be said about personal tastes and attraction. In the simplest of terms, it is fun to just watch a cute, sexy, or aesthetically appealing character. Some people are simply more interested in that than seeing a real person.

Andou also felt that a portion of the community was incredibly lonely. With a lack of human interaction or romantic aspects in their own lives, they turn to VTubers who purposefully present themselves in a romantic or sexual manner. There are VTubers who flirt with their chat, who encourage sexual jokes and produce “lewd” content. Some even advertise themselves as a “girlfriend/boyfriend experience” and encourage their viewers to engage with them in a romantic manner. For lonely individuals, they can watch those VTubers and imagine that that is someone they could date or have fun with, which would inevitably lead to the development of a parasocial relationship.

Another core aspect that every interviewee agreed on was the importance of interactivity, and specifically the level of interactivity that is possible *only* through VTubing and virtual space. A common example mentioned by *literally everyone* was the ability to pay Channel Points<sup>14</sup> to throw virtual objects at the VTuber's model; this interaction could then be exaggerated through motion control. These channel point payments, known colloquially as “redeems,” can be customized by each VTuber. As an example, Poffle's redeems allow the audience to change the color of her eyes, to prompt her with a reminder to drink water, or even to produce a large hand in the middle of the stream that continuously pats her head for a period of time. Depending on the redeem, the VTuber may react either physically or verbally; at times they do not notice or are distracted. Another popular type of audience interaction is the use of sound effects that interrupt a stream, which can be purchased through donations.

Some interviewees emphasized that the separation between “character” and “*nakanohito*” could be attractive to an audience. Krimbo described it as the difference between watching a show with real actors and a cartoon. The cartoon “*can make things feel brighter, can make things feel more fantastic. There are things that can happen in the cartoon that cannot happen in real space.*” In comparison, Andou was extremely uncomfortable with the thought

---

<sup>12</sup> Twitch offers two different streamer monetization options: Affiliate and Partner. Affiliate is the basic monetization requirement, whereas Partner offers additional and more in-depth monetization features. Affiliate is available once a streamer meets certain channel metrics, but Partner must be applied for and approved by an official Twitch employee.

<sup>13</sup> Raids are a Twitch functionality that allows streamers to “give” their viewers to another channel for a period of time. Raids are typically done at the end of a stream.

<sup>14</sup> Virtual Twitch currency that is passively acquired through watching a stream

of his audience fictionalizing him or separating his VTuber from him as a *nananohito*. Both he and Chai explicitly mentioned the existence of parasocial relationships and considered them a problem for streamers.

On the other hand, Natey believed that this kind of separation could also feel *safer* to a viewer, particularly to those in the furry community and the LGBTQ+ communities; those who do not feel comfortable in their own skin. They particularly highlighted trans expression and wishing you looked a certain way. For trans and gender non-conforming viewers, it is a way for them to work towards their personal ideals, and to feel safer and more affirmed in their own identities. Keeping this in mind, Nisha and Seolfor felt that VTubing was a more personal form of streaming. Although you do not get to see a real person, you are seeing the representation that they have chosen to put forth. It is what the *nananohito* wants you to see, as opposed to showing what they *happen* to look like. In Nisha's words, "*It may be even more of a representation of them than what they look like in real life.*" It is worth considering whether these beliefs stem from their *own* feelings about what VTubing provides to them, or whether it truly plays a role in attracting viewers.

Despite any differences in opinion, every interviewee was happy with their perceived community. They enjoyed having people who are willing to talk and hang out with them, as well as support them in their times of need. Poffle gushed about how appreciative she felt towards her community, which quickly helped her raise the funds she needed to purchase an upgraded VTuber model. Chai mentioned that it felt incredibly rewarding to see people wanting to come back and interact her. When she was going through difficult events in her personal life, her community rallied behind her, supporting her along the way through continued subscriptions and kind messages. Sleepy felt a similar sense of support and understanding from her audience with relation to her health issues and fatigue. Nisha's outlook was the most unique of the group- she specifically wants her audience *not* to grow. She wants to stay small and intimate, particularly because moderating a large chat sounds exhausting to her. Andou mentioned that he manages a private discord server that is heavily vetted. In his own words: "*To create a good community, you have to **create** it. You have to put some work into making sure that people in it are all behaving in a way that you deem appropriate.*"

Manny and Juncker took a somewhat different approach to community management, both admitting that their communities can skew towards the more chaotic, or "edgy." The humor can be a bit harsher, there is banter in the chat, relevant news and political events are joked about without too much thought. While neither of them lets it go totally overboard, it is something that they are both explicitly aware of. Manny notes "*I think it's just very, very important to have a sort of, you know, 'you're at a club' mindset. You can't take too much to heart if they don't explicitly mean it.*"

## 6.5 Roleplay and Character Embodiment

Before discussing the responses, I find it important to note that it is common practice for VTubers to have what is known as "lore." Someone's lore can be as simple as "I'm a computer virus that loves to eat hamburgers," while some VTubers have lengthy discussions



about their backstory and family during their debut streams. It's up to each individual *nakanohito* to decide how much they want their VTuber to reference or adhere to lore.

When asked if they commit to a character, most interviewees responded with a resounding no. Chai felt that it would be strange to act as a character after making her model an extension of herself and her personality. Nisha in particular was personally put off the idea, not only for herself but in other VTubers as well: *"I don't want to use the word cringe because that's not the right word, but it does make do that, like, expression of cringe."*

Andou specifically discussed the intention of humanizing himself and wanting his audience to remember that he is a person. He strongly emphasized that strangers on the internet can behave in outrageous ways when they are able to separate themselves from the streamer, so he makes every effort possible to avoid that sense of separation. Based on my understanding, this seems to work, and he generally has a very positive streaming experience.

Juncker and Manny felt that, while not pursuing an explicit character, they adopted a unique stream personality that was separate from their "normal" personality, with Juncker referring to it as a "party time mask." Krimbo similarly discussed exaggerating his own features, pushing them over the edge until they were funny or ridiculous. Despite this, as a lot of his content revolves around skits<sup>15</sup> and performance, there are times where he does find himself innovating and having to do things he would not normally do otherwise.

Poffle in particular felt that characters and roleplay VTubers were falling out of fashion, at least within the Western VTuber space. When asked about those who completely devote themselves to a character and separate themselves from reality, she said that she had never encountered someone like that. Nisha, Natey, and Manny felt that complete immersion was reminiscent of acting. Manny in particular mentioned how he felt like Twitch as a platform is generally moving closer to performance. He felt like this sort of devotion to a persona, and VTubers as an extension of that, constitute a big step towards performance, acting, and voice acting.

Several interviewees, including Natey, Chai, and Seolfor, felt like adopting that kind of separation made sense for those who desire a form of escapism. By diving fully into a character, they can separate themselves from their troubles in the real world. Perhaps they have anxieties or issues that they want to avoid, so fully diving into their VTuber provides them with that sort of escape. As Chai put it, *"All your daily struggles and worries are kind of put aside. You don't have to even think about that right now. You are here in this moment of being in this model and you get to do whatever you want."*

## 6.6 VTubing Impact on the Identity of Nakanohito

One of the most important questions I asked was "Do you feel like being a VTuber has impacted your relationship with your own identity in any way?" Many of the responses were quite personal, so it was difficult to neatly categorize them.

---

<sup>15</sup> A short comedic performance that is often a parody

When looked at, there were some common threads, but I find it important to emphasize that each individual's approach to this question was unique. Sleepy, for example, stated that she did not feel it impacted her, and moved on from the subject.

Juncker described that, after spending multiple hours streaming, being emotionally and mentally drained, he would feel strange. Streaming involves watching his 3D model replicate the movements of his face, hands, and arms for multiple hours, without seeing his *actual* face or body. After focusing on the model for so long, he felt a disconnect when looking at his own face in the mirror. Poffle's experiences mirrored Juncker's. She described moments in time where she forgets that she does not actually look like her VTuber model, particularly because the design is based on aspects of herself. She described the exact same feeling of disconnectedness as Juncker after watching her model mimic her movements for multiple hours.

In a similar theme of disconnect, Krimbo explained that his experience as a VTuber has led to him reconsidering the way he attends conventions and artist alleys<sup>16</sup>. He is uncomfortable with the assumptions or judgements that his audience might make when confronted with the "real" Krimbo. He compared it to an audience member getting to go backstage after a performance: *"I'm a cartoon character and you're not supposed to just be able to find me, you know."* He even mentioned the possibility of attending as his VTuber- sitting behind a screen or curtain and having customers interact with his VTuber through an iPad or display of some sort.

For some interviewees, VTubing was very deeply connected to their personal identities. Nisha was an active VRChat user before starting her streams and felt extremely immersed being able to exist as her fursona. She feels that VTubing, as opposed to being the catalyst, has served more of a supportive role in affirming that this is how she represents herself and how she likes to be represented. Natey expanded on this topic, explaining how they use their VTuber model to try out different fashion items and experiment with a more feminine presenting appearance that subsequently inspires them to explore that offline.

Seolfor also mentioned that VTubing has helped him think more about his relationship with his gender identity. Because VTubing allows for so much experimentation, it has led to him trying out he/they pronouns with close friends. Andou explained that having his VRChat model helped affirm his gender identity. While he is on testosterone, he has not had gender affirming top surgery, so seeing his avatar with his ideal body gives him a sense of gender euphoria. Andou emphasized that he felt VTubing aligned very strongly with the needs and desires of the LGBTQ+ community: *"If you can't have your ideal body, well, you can have a virtual avatar that does. If you can't have your ideal voice, well, there are voice changers that you can put on to help you have a voice that's more fitting and more gender affirming."*

---

<sup>16</sup> The section of a convention that is reserved for artists to sell their wares to convention attendees.



Manny identified more with general streaming culture. While allowing him to feel more comfortable speaking with strangers, streaming seemed to control almost every aspect of his life. He is now anxious going somewhere without a stable internet connection; he focuses on his viewer count, and seldom takes breaks for fear of seeing a decline in the growth of his channel. He very frequently emphasized keeping up his performance and not “dropping the ball.”

For Chai, VTubing has been a positive experience. She feels like she is finding out more about herself through streaming, and that it helps her overcome her shyness and anxiety. She specifically mentioned VTubing as vehicle for her establishing her personal boundaries, being able to set up her own space and her own rules and feel more confident in herself.

### 6.7 VTubing Impact on the Offline Lives of Nakanohito

Many interviewees described having much larger social circles now due to livestreaming. Whether it be meeting furies, VTubers, or facecam streamers, it was clear that VTubing resulted in much social joy.

Juncker, Manny, and Chai both attributed their creative growth to their streaming. Chai felt like it refreshed her creative spirit and that all the varying VTuber designs inspire her. Although Juncker was already creating 3D animations for his YouTube channel, creating additional assets to be used for VTubing helped grow his pre-existing skills, enough to the point of him wanting to join the film industry and utilize his skills in a more professional capacity.

Multiple interviewees also appreciated the financial aid provided to them through streaming. Some experience this more as pocket change, while others are able to stream fulltime as their career. In relation to this, Natey expressed that they sometimes feel a kind of FOMO driven by their worries of if they are doing enough as a streamer, or how they could improve. Nearly every streamer mentioned the challenges of pushing for partner, and both the mental and physical strain it can have on you. Andou pointed out that they now have trouble maintaining any other hobbies outside of streaming. Even if they are doing something for themselves, they wonder if it would make good stream content.

With regards to strain, Manny described how his streaming would at times completely take over his life. Earlier this year he participated in an uncapped subathon, described earlier in section 3.4. While not breaking Emilyyc's record, Manny's subathon lasted two months, which meant he was continuously live for two months straight. While not separate from livestreaming, this event was intrinsically tied to every aspect of his life: he slept on stream and spent every other waking hour with his viewers. Manny noted that while he didn't mind the process, it was an entirely financially driven decision: he'd like to be able to afford a house in the next few years, so this was a worthy transaction. Over the course of the two months, he made \$15k USD through donations and subscriptions, and another \$4k USD through sponsorships, bringing his total to just under \$20k. While financial impact was not a large focus of this study, I find this concept of constant livestreaming as a VTuber to be

*extremely* notable. Without the financial incentive, Manny would not have pursued to this, and in turn would not have lived as a 3D Shiba Inu for two months straight.

## 7.0 Analysis

### 7.1 VTubers as Another Facet of Self-Presentation: The Case of the Party Time Mask

When asked whether he roleplays embodies a character of any kind, Juncker responded with the following:

*“It’s kind of like just going out with friends. When you’re at home, you’re just like ... bleh. Then you put on your mask, you know, your party time mask.”*

This statement immediately caught my attention due to its near-perfect alignment with the concept of self-presentation. When at home, there is no audience for him to worry about. When he is out in public and accompanied by his friends, his self-presentation is influenced by his perception of their expectations, as well as the strangers around him. Furthermore, comparing these modes of presentation to “masks” implies that he is consciously aware of what he is choosing to show and what he is choosing to withhold.

Juncker was not the only *nakanohito* that expressed these sentiments. Krimbo specifically discussed exaggerating his own personality traits, intentionally acting in a goofier and more humorous manner than he would otherwise. This aligns with Goffman’s (1959) point that people will “mobilize [their] activity so that it will convey an impression to which it is in [their] interests to convey” (p.3). Krimbo’s goal is to entertain and to put forth a specific view of his VTuber, so he aligns his self-presentation with that goal.

Natey also provided an interesting comment:

*“I have a hard time **not** being me. I’m just me, and I’ve actually sweetly gotten a compliment even recently from another VTuber who said, ‘It’s really sweet that you’re just, like, unabashedly you.’”*

This brings up the concept of being truly authentic online, and what the best method is for communicating that to others. It connects to Schlenker’s (2012) point that it takes effort and skill to convey an accurate, truthful impression of oneself. Proving authenticity through mediated interactions can be challenging. Postigo (2021) states that authenticity is both a state of being and a process- it is performed: “Playing video games in front of other people, talking trash, laughing, raging, and/or having fun is something a great deal of people do. The audience knows what it’s like; therefore, for commentators, authenticity better mean equivalence between a performative and a private persona that the audience recognizes in themselves. That’s a high bar” (p. 119). While Postigo’s research was focused on video game commentators, I find that his logic can be directly applied to the construction of streamer, and therefore VTuber, authenticity. They must carefully craft something that can be perceived as authentic, but is always steeped in layers of performance that is dependent upon audience perception.

## 7.2 VTubers and Online Identity: Vehicles for Queer Exploration

Marwick (2015) emphasized that mediated identity expression differed across platforms, and that different platforms lacked certain communication methods. VTubing obscures your entire physical body. In order to communicate “better” you must have access to motion capture, eye tracking, and mouth tracking, as well as a model that can communicate these motions to an acceptable degree. Despite this, VTubing does not currently have the technological capabilities to perfectly mimic or replace the expression of the real human body. For members of the queer community, the beauty of VTubing resides within this very gap of “proper” communication. For those that are exploring gender expression, or do not identify with their physical appearance, VTubing can fulfill their desire to look a certain way.

According to Cavalcante (2018), “transgender identity is often culturally defined through an ideology of impossibility and systematically framed as abject and undesirable” (p. 96). The author goes on to say that despite this negative perception, transgender individuals combat this ideology, instead shifting towards transgender *possibility* that is “cultivated through encounters with media culture and communications technologies” (p. 97). While I did not ask about what stage interviewees were at with regards to gender identity or transition, it was clear that Andou, Natey, and Nisha felt extremely positive about VTubing and its connection to their identities. This directly aligns with Cavalcante’s point that gender non-conforming individuals are able to explore their identities through mediated interactions and technology and explore themselves through online identity.

Furthermore, engaging with other trans and gender nonconforming VTubers can serve as a kind of self-disclosure described by Collins and Miller (1994). While not a requirement, many VTubers will freely post their gender or sexual identity within their channel descriptors. Others may display flags, link to charities, or simply talk about it while they stream. Andou and Natey specifically describe their channels as safe spaces for the queer community, both during their interviews and in the text descriptions of their Twitch channels. By explicitly stating their support, providing their preferred pronouns, incorporating queer themes into stream assets, and openly discussing the queer community, their multi-faceted self-disclosure serves as a way for them to connect and convey empathy to their audience. This openness inspires a similar sense of openness in their audience, which reinforces the entire interaction. Buss, Le, and Haimson (2021) highlight that transgender social media users often curate the content and people appearing in their networks to create an experience that affirms their identity. By establishing a precedent at the fundamental level of their channel, queer VTubers can affirm not only their own identity, but the identities of those who watch them.

While I am by no means attempting to conflate the struggles of the queer community with the experience of being judged for a personal interest, I find that much of this logic can also be applied to the furry community: wanting to see yourself represented in a different way, seeking out others who share your feelings and experiences, VTubing as a method for exploring different representations or aspects of yourself, media and technology allowing for further exploration of the topic and community.

### 7.3 Imagined Audiences and VTuber Community Isolation

Litt (2012) states that the less we know our audience, the more we depend on our imagination to build up an idea of who they are. A Twitch viewer is only identified by their username, which can be customized in some ways: the color can be changed, various icons can be displayed, but the name itself can only be changed every 60 days (see Figure 9). While some users may decide to simply use their actual names, most usernames are a form of pseudonym, which Litt (2012) says limits an individual's cues about the audience members and can lead them to envision their viewers as a single mass. This point of view is *extremely* relevant in Twitch streaming, as nearly every single streamer on the website simply refers to their audience as "chat." While not part of the interviews, I observed the livestreams of all my interviewees, and all of them engage in this behavior. Chat is viewed as a single mass and treated like a pseudo-person. Streamers will ask questions like "Chat, what should I do?" or "Are you mad me, chat?" I believe this serves two major functions: 1) the streamer can easily address everyone in their audience; 2) it provides an immediate avenue for interaction. If a question is posited to the entire viewer base, then every viewer will feel validated in providing some sort of response or interaction.

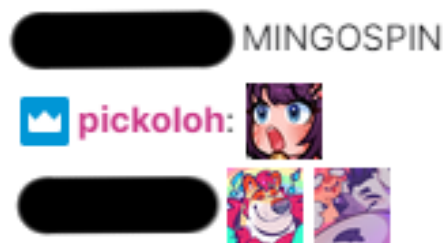


Figure 9: My username appearing in Natey's Twitch chat. The pink color was my choice, while the blue and white crown icon indicates that I use Twitch Prime (an Amazon Prime subscription bonus)

By envisioning their audience as a single mass, it becomes easy to ascribe certain characteristics to them, or place them into categories. When considering viewers that watch other channels or other VTubers, a *nakano*'s imagination must be pushed even further. Without even a username to base their assumptions on, they in turn create a reason that personally makes sense to them. I found this to be a prevalent thread throughout Manny's interview. After expressing that he enjoyed watching VShojo VTubers, he added the following: *"I guess it's very hard to find VTubers that I guess are different from the sort of basic anime style at the moment."*

While the anime community is a cornerstone of the VTuber fandom, I found this statement surprising. Before beginning this research project, I was not involved with VTubing at all. When searching for potential interviewees, I was immediately flooded with a range of VTubers. While many of them were stylized according to the classic anime influence, there were just as many who were not. The furry community immediately made itself clear, as well as 3D models who did not clearly belong in any specific niche. I would also argue that model designs such as Krimbo's, which are influenced by multiple forms of media, break the traditional 2D mold. To me, it felt bizarre that someone with as many followers as Manny

(nearly 400k) and such a unique 3D VTuber model (a hyper-realistic dog) held this point of view.

Through my interviews, I also find that VTubers' perceptions and intentions towards their communities result in a somewhat isolationist approach to livestreaming. Sleepy in particular gave a lot of insight into this topic, noting that *"It's just something I've definitely noticed. VTubers only interact with VTubers, and I guess it's because they only interact with each other, but they don't branch out."* Several interviewees emphasized the fact that collaboration is an important part of modern VTubing so that friend groups can be created, and in turn shared audiences are created. Considering Litt's (2012) statement that the most active members of an audience can influence the perception of someone's imagined audience, it follows logically that VTubers would want to limit themselves to the kinds of viewers they know enjoy their content, and only collaborate with those who attract those same kinds of viewers. While discussing this topic, Poffle shared an interesting anecdote:

*"I've been very close with [a facecam streamer]. She's going into VTubing soon, but she's like 'I can't collab with you until I'm a VTuber.' I'm like 'I don't care. You can collab with me' and she's like 'No, it's weird, I'm a fleshtuber.'"*

This suggests that the separation between VTubers and other streamers is not only upheld by VTubers themselves, but by other kinds of streamers as well. Even when actively invited by a VTuber, the facecam streamer does not want to collaborate until she is also a part of the VTuber community. While it is impossible for me to give the exact reason for her feelings, particularly because this is a streamer that I have not spoken to, the expressed sentiment feels notable and relevant to the topic at hand. Litt (2012) notes that "based on the role social media can play in the development of people's reputations and opportunities, users may feel pressure to present to whomever may actually be in the audience" (p. 335). Considering this, the facecam streamer may feel conflicted in collaborating with a VTuber due to their previous existence as a "fleshtuber." Their reputation up until that point had been built while streaming with a facecam, so they may feel a certain pressure to continue appealing to that audience. Once they debut as a VTuber, the situation changes, and the pressure alleviates.

The isolation may also be somewhat content-driven. Many VTubers are variety streamers, so they never spend too much time with one game. In comparison, Sleepy feels that many facecam streamers tend to main one game, or at least a genre. Sleepy and Juncker both mentioned attracting viewers who do not normally watch VTubers, stating things like "You're the only VTuber I'd watch," or "Other VTubers are kind of weird, but I still like to watch your content." Both Sleepy and Juncker felt that this was due to their adherence to playing *Escape From Tarkov*. By drawing in a typically more "gamer" audience due to the game they are playing, more people are exposed to the concept of VTubing. This is an *extremely* interesting topic but did not really fall within the bounds of this research. I believe it should be explored further in future studies.

#### 7.4 Don't Call Me a Femboy: Online Disinhibition

Throughout my interviews, I noticed the increasing relevance of both online disinhibition and parasocial relationship theory. Considering the popularity of the “Girlfriend Experience” that many female-presenting anime-styled VTubers offer, several of my interviewees mentioned that certain viewers would enter their chat and assume they could treat them in a similar manner. None of my interviewees encourage this sort of relationship with their viewers, so it was often a source of discomfort or weirdness.

Poffle, Chai, Sleepy, and Andou all specifically mentioned these sorts of negative interactions, with Andou being the most vocal about it. He repeatedly referred to these viewers as “freaks” and was extremely uncomfortable with the idea of them flirting with him. He has experienced viewers coming onto him, doing sexual advances, and calling him sexually derogatory names. In his words:

*“Randoms on the internet [think] it’s okay to be little freaks. People are so outlandish on the internet. And I think I’ve never had this problem in my life. Never. Not once. Not until I started VTubing.”*

According to Suler (2005), this kind of “toxic disinhibition” is largely a result of anonymity. When a viewer can separate their online interactions from their offline self, they do not feel vulnerable about acting out. In their mind, their behavior does not exist within a larger context: “Their online self becomes a compartmentalized self, a dissociated self. In the case of expressed hostilities or other deviant acts, the person can evade responsibility...People might even convince themselves that those online behaviors ‘aren’t me at all’” (Suler, 2005, p. 185). Furthermore Suler posits that physical invisibility can also lead to disinhibition; things like avoiding eye contact, or the lack of face-to-face visibility. Twitch chat is nothing but a wall of text; a viewer is not only invisible, but they can “melt back into crowd” so to speak. Considering these factors, it is not surprising that every single anime influenced VTuber that I interviewed has gone through these sorts of interactions.

I also find it notable that the only *nakanohito* that mentioned this were those who use feminine-presenting VTuber models (with Andou switching their appearance depending on how they feel). Uttarapong, Cal, and Wohn’s (2021) study highlights that women and queer streamers suffer five different types of harassment, including sexual harassment, hate speech, and attacks on their physical appearance. While not a major focus of this study, it is an extremely negative effect of livestreaming that VTubers clearly do not manage to escape.

While the extreme behaviors discussed so far have all been toxic, online disinhibition also refers to behaviors on the other side of the spectrum, known as “benign disinhibition.” This includes acts of unusual kindness, or when people go out of their way to be particularly helpful. Poffle mentioned how her viewers helped her raise \$1.5k within a week of her setting the fundraising goal. Several interviewees described their communities as extremely positive, and that viewers were helpful, engaging with each other, and generally providing a very pleasant mood.



Kowert and Daniel Jr. (2021) posit that “streamer communities are initially fostered by a shared adoration for the streamer and provides viewers the opportunity, both directly and indirectly, to communicate with the persona themselves” (p. 3). Furthermore, they suggest that relationships with other community members *also* serve as a method for viewers to feel more connected to their chosen media personality. By extending their social network to those who enjoy the same persona, they “socially reinforce the sense of community affiliation, and promote the longevity of the relationship” (p.3). Considering these points, I feel that benign disinhibition can be linked to the presence of parasocial streamer relationships. By acting positively within their community and forging bonds with other viewers, an individual may feel more confident in their perceived relationship with a VTuber.

## 8.0 Conclusion

VTubers emerged from a culture that is deeply connected to the concept of idols, men and women who exist solely for entertainment. As these idols transitioned into the digital sphere, the possibilities for what they could do and how they could be monetized grew by leaps and bounds. From the initial explorations of Yuki Terai to the world-wide popularity of Hatsune Miku, the boundary between offline and online worlds is shrinking. Hololive Production and its idol-inspired VTubers have created an expansive market filled with fans and creators alike. VTubing’s rapid explosion in popularity cannot and should not be ignored by media and communications scholars.

Through semi-structured interviews with 10 different VTubers, this study has attempted to explore how livestreaming as a VTuber shapes (or does not shape) a *naikanohito*’s relationship with their identity. Furthermore, this study has attempted to show the uniqueness of VTubing as a livestreaming niche, when compared to the more standardized practice of facecam streaming. The results were analyzed utilizing a framework that centered itself around Erving Goffman’s (1959) theory of self-presentation. Theories of online identity, imagined audience, online disinhibition, and parasocial interaction were utilized to map out the relationships between interviewee responses, and to build an analytical approach that was able to unify the disparate themes that appeared throughout each interview.

The interview results give us a glimpse into a unique form of livestreaming that allows people who are uncomfortable with showing their face on camera to embrace the role of a streamer. For some, VTubing is a way to escape from reality and to provide a relaxing community to those who want to enjoy themselves and to have fun. To others, VTubing is a way to embody a facet of themselves that they are unable to experience anywhere else. Others use VTubing to exaggerate aspects of themselves, to overcome aspects that they might perceive as negative or “not enough”; by shedding their physical appearance and embodying a design that they have complete control over, they can be as confident or as funny as they would like to be. VTubers are in total control of their presentation. Despite this, VTubers are not completely separate from their offline, *naikanohito* identities. This can be seen in the way that their own physical features or personality traits are incorporated into model designs, or it can be seen in the ways that VTubing has affected their outside lives.

While this study reveals interesting and notable phenomena pertaining to VTubers and identity, it is important to remember that the sample size is both small and homogenous. Keeping this factor in mind, as well as considering the novelty of VTubing as a research subject, I find that this study brings up more questions than it answers. With each interview that I conducted, I was exposed to more and more information that surprised me, that intrigued me. As the community and technology continue to grow, I feel there is still a massive research gap that should be tackled by media and communications scholars. In particular, I found two areas of research to be relevant:

Firstly, the phenomenon that Juncker and Sleepy experienced in attracting an audience that self-identifies as people who do not normally watch VTubers. Is this only affected by their choice of content? Does it have to do with personality? Is it the possibility it creates with regards to collaboration? Are VTubers who “main” video games that are traditionally played by facecam streamers not as engrained in the VTuber community as others? I believe a study that is able to generate a large sample size of these kinds of VTubers could produce academically notable results. Secondly, I am curious about the effect that Covid had on the popularity of VTubing. After compiling the various statistics for my interviewee information table, I realized that 90% of my interviewees began VTubing between 2020 and 2021. This could be due to my sample size, but it feels significant enough to be explored in another, more quantitative study which could analyze VTuber channel statistics, keyword searches, etc.

Furthermore, due to the length of the interviews that I conducted, many of them touched on topics that could not be sufficiently explored or explained within the scope of my study, but presented themselves as notable subjects for future studies. In particular, Poffle and Juncker’s experience of disconnectedness between their nakanohito appearance and their VTuber model appearance was especially interesting. I believe this phenomenon could be the focus of a long-term case study that observes VTuber’s experiences and perception towards their own identity, after *several years* of VTubing. While Manny has been VTubing for over 5 years, all my other interviewees were relatively new. I believe long-term identity studies might provide significant results.



## References

- Adlan, W. A. (2021a). *Netflix Introduces Vtuber Mascot For Its Anime Division*. <https://www.gamerbraves.com/netflix-introduces-vtuber-mascot-for-its-anime-division/>
- Adlan, W. A. (2021b). *AirAsia Vtuber Aozora Kurumi Debut Announced*. <https://www.gamerbraves.com/airasia-vtuber-aozora-kurumi-debut-announced/>
- A.I.Channel. (n.d.). YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/c/AIChannel/about>
- Ashcraft, B. (2010). *For Idols, Even Twitter Following Is Scandalous*. <https://kotaku.com/for-idols-even-twitter-following-is-scandalous-5708907>
- Banda, D. (2020). *Meet Cover Corp CEO Motoaki “Yagoo” Tanigo, The Man Behind Hololive’s Virtual YouTubers*. <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/feature/2020-09-02/meet-cover-corp-ceo-motoaki-yagoo-tanigo-the-man-behind-hololive-virtual-youtubers/.163495>
- Bayguette. [Bayguette]. (2021). *Hololive has come a long way since the collab event on Azur Lane....*[Online forum post]. Reddit. [https://www.reddit.com/r/Hololive/comments/n3pate/hololive\\_has\\_come\\_a\\_long\\_way\\_since\\_the\\_collab/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Hololive/comments/n3pate/hololive_has_come_a_long_way_since_the_collab/)
- Bell, V. (1999). Performativity and belonging - An introduction. *THEORY CULTURE & SOCIETY*, 16(2), 1.
- Black, D. (2006). FCJ-054 Digital Bodies and Disembodied Voices: Virtual Idols and the Virtualised Body. *Fibreculture Journal*, 9.
- Blaikie, N. and Priest, J. (2019). *Designing Social Research: The Logic of Anticipation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bober, A., Gajewska, E., Czaprowska, A., Swiatek, A. H., & Szczesniak, M. (2022). Impact of Shyness on Self-Esteem: The Mediating Effect of Self-Presentation. *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH AND PUBLIC HEALTH*, 19(1), 230. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.3390/ijerph19010230>
- Bredikhina, L. (2020). Designing identity in VTuber Era. *ConVRgence (VRIC) Virtual Reality International Conference Proceedings*.
- Bredikhina, L. (2021). Virtual Theatrics and the Ideal VTuber Bishojo. *Replaying Japan Vol. 3*. 21-32.
- Bredikhina, L., & Giard, A. (2022). Becoming a Virtual Cutie: Digital Cross-Dressing in Japan. *CONVERGENCE-THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH INTO NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES*. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1177/13548565221074812>
- Bredikhina et al. (2020). Avatar Driven VR Society Trends in Japan. *2020 IEEE Conference on Virtual Reality and 3D User Interfaces Abstracts and Workshops (VRW), Virtual Reality*

and 3D User Interfaces Abstracts and Workshops (VRW), 2020 IEEE Conference On, 497–503. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1109/VRW50115.2020.00103>

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2018). *Doing interviews* (Second ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529716665>

Buss, J., Le, H., & Haimson, O. L. (2021). Transgender identity management across social media platforms. *MEDIA CULTURE & SOCIETY*. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1177/01634437211027106>

Cavalcante, A. aut <http://id.loc.gov/vocabulary/relators/au>. (2018). *Struggling for Ordinary : Media and Transgender Belonging in Everyday Life*. New York University Press.

[Chen, D. \(2020\). \*Live2D Rigging Basics\*. <https://biro.ai/live2d-rigging-basics/>](#)

Collins, N. L., & Miller, L. C. (1994). Self-Disclosure and Liking: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 116(3), 457–475.

Colp, T. and Deyo, N. (2020). *The Vtuber Industry: Corporatization, Labor, and Kawaii*. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/akdj3z/the-vtuber-industry-corporatization-labor-and-kawaii>

Cover Co., Ltd. [@cover\_corp]. (2020). この度は、弊社所属タレント「常闇トワ」がご迷惑およびご心配をおかけし誠に申し訳ございませんでした。 今後は運営体制を強化し、再発防止に努める所存でございます。 社員及びタレント一同、ファンの皆様の信頼回復に全力を尽くして参りますので、ご支援のほど、何卒よろしくお願い申し上げます。

[https://twitter.com/cover\\_corp/status/1235508492145799169?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1235508492145799169%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1\\_&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.redditmedia.com%2Fmediaembed%2Ffda6s%3Fresponsive%3Dtrueis\\_nightmode%3Dfalse](https://twitter.com/cover_corp/status/1235508492145799169?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1235508492145799169%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.redditmedia.com%2Fmediaembed%2Ffda6s%3Fresponsive%3Dtrueis_nightmode%3Dfalse)

Cover, R., & Doak, S. (2015). Identity Offline and Online. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 547–553. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.95078-5>

De Zwart, M. (2010). Japanese lessons: What can otaku teach us about copyright and gothic girls? *Alternative Law Journal*, 35(1), 27–30. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1177/1037969X1003500107>

Diaz, A. (2021). A Twitch streamer let people control his life like *The Sims*, including when he peed. <https://www.polygon.com/22634146/twitch-jerma-sims-dollhouse-stream-livestreaming>

E-Kon. [@out\_sall]. (2022). *Hololive themselves were quick to monetize this unhealthy relationship, selling fake wedding rings and couples merchandise to further fuel this delusive fire, at a hefty profit too*. [https://twitter.com/out\\_sall/status/1496832030566457348](https://twitter.com/out_sall/status/1496832030566457348)

- Faber, T. (2021). *VTubers and the women behind the masks*. <https://www.ft.com/content/9d8ec8be-1329-4840-8428-e787058169ff>
- FAQs. (n.d.) Vshojo. <https://www.vshojo.com/faqs/>
- Freeman, G., & Wohn, D. Y. (2020). Streaming your Identity: Navigating the Presentation of Gender and Sexuality through Live Streaming. *COMPUTER SUPPORTED COOPERATIVE WORK-THE JOURNAL OF COLLABORATIVE COMPUTING AND WORK PRACTICES*, 29(6), 795–825. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1007/s10606-020-09386-w>
- Galbraith, P.W. and Karlin, J.G. (2012) *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan London. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137283788>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Hamilton, W. A., Garretson, O., & Kerne, A. (2014). Streaming on twitch: fostering participatory communities of play within live mixed media. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1315–1324. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1145/2556288.2557048>
- Hilvert-Bruce, Z., Neill, J. T., Sjöblom, M., & Hamari, J. (2018). Social motivations of live-streaming viewer engagement on Twitch. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 84, 58–67. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1016/j.chb.2018.02.013>
- Hololive 1<sup>st</sup> fes. <non stop story>Blu-ray DISC. (2020). Booth. <https://hololive.booth.pm/items/2166945>
- Hsieh, R., Shirai, A., & Sato, H. (2019). Evaluation of Avatar and Voice Transform in Programming E-Learning Lectures. *Proceedings of the 19th ACM International Conference on Intelligent Virtual Agents*, 197–199. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1145/3308532.3329430>
- It's Just Kaeril. (2022). *【Vtuber Tutorial】◆Time to Become a PNGtuber!◆* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plXx9D0pkWg>
- Johnson, M. R., & Woodcock, J. (2019). “And Today’s Top Donator is”: How Live Streamers on Twitch.tv Monetize and Gamify Their Broadcasts. *SOCIAL MEDIA + SOCIETY*, 5(4). <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1177/2056305119881694>
- Kang, Y. (2021). CodeMiko : an interactive VTuber experience. *SIGGRAPH Asia 2021 Real-Time Live!*, 1. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1145/3478511.3491309>
- Kim, M., & Kim, H.-M. (2022). What online game spectators want from their twitch streamers: Flow and well-being perspectives. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 66. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.102951>

- Kowert, R., & Daniel Jr., E. (2021). The one-and-a-half sided parasocial relationship: The curious case of live streaming. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 4. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1016/j.chbr.2021.100150>
- Küper, A., & Krämer, N. C. (2021). Influencing factors for building social capital on live streaming websites. *Entertainment Computing*, 39. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1016/j.entcom.2021.100444>
- Lee, J. (2020). *How to get into Idolmaster, 15 years later.* <https://www.polygon.com/2020/7/26/21334764/idolmaster-15-year-anniversary-how-to-get-into>
- Li, F.-L et al. (2021). AliMe Avatar: Multi-modal Content Production and Presentation for Live-streaming E-commerce. *Proceedings of the 44th International ACM SIGIR Conference on Research and Development in Information Retrieval*, 2635–2636. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1145/3404835.3464922>
- Litt, E. (2012). Knock, Knock. Who's There? The Imagined Audience. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 56(3), 330–345. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1080/08838151.2012.705195>
- Lopez, G. (2018). ASMR, explained: why millions of people are watching YouTube videos of someone whispering. <https://www.vox.com/2015/7/15/8965393/asmr-video-youtube-autonomous-sensory-meridian-response>
- Lu, Z., Shen, C., Li, J., Shen, H., & Wigdor, D. (2021). More Kawaii than a Real-Person Live Streamer: Understanding How the Otaku Community Engages with and Perceives Virtual YouTubers. *Proceedings of the 2021 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1–14. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1145/3411764.3445660>
- Macias, P. (2013). AKB Group Manager Answers Tough Questions About Apology Video. <https://www.crunchyroll.com/anime-news/2013/02/02/akb-group-manager-answers-tough-questions-about-apology-video>
- Mandal, E. and Wierzchoń, A. (2019). Shyness, self-presentation, adonization, and influence tactics in close relationships. *Current Issues in Personality Psychology*, 7(3), 189–202. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.5114/cipp.2019.88276>
- Marcus, B. (2009). “Faking” from the applicant’s perspective: A theory of self-presentation in personnel selection settings. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 17(4), 417–430. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1111/j.1468-2389.2009.00483.x>
- Maruri, R. (2019). *Azur Lane 11/27 Update: Hololive x Azur Lane Collaboration!* <https://gamepress.gg/azur-lane-1127-update-hololive-x-azur-lane-collaboration>
- Marwick, A. (2015). *Online Identity. A Companion to New Media Dynamics*. John Wiley & Sons.

Matthews, D. (2015). *9 questions about furies you were to embarrassed to ask*. <https://www.vox.com/2014/12/10/7362321/9-questions-about-furies-you-were-too-embarrassed-to-ask>

Morgeson et al. (2007). Reconsidering the use of Personality Tests in Personnel Selection Contexts. *Personnel Psychology*, 60, 683-729.

Morrissy, K. (2020). *Cover Corp Announces Hololive English Virtual YouTuber Group*. <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/interest/2020-09-09/cover-corp-announces-hololive-english-virtual-youtuber-group/.163819>

Park, J. (2018). *Why Japanese pop idol trainees are no match for South Korean rivals*. <https://www.scmp.com/culture/music/article/2153915/why-japanese-pop-idol-trainees-are-no-match-south-korean-rivals>

Petty, J. (n.d.). *Concept Art Empire*. <https://conceptartempire.com/what-is-rigging/>

Postigo, H. "6 Video Gameplay Commentary Immersive Research in Participatory Culture". *Creator Culture: An Introduction to Global Social Media Entertainment*, edited by Stuart Cunningham and David Craig, New York, USA: New York University Press, 2021, pp. 117-134. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.18574/9781479890118-008>

Prusa, I. (2012) Megaspectacle and Celebrity Transgression in Japan: The Sakai Noriko Media Scandal. IN Galbraith, P.W. and Karlin, J.G. (2012) Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture. *Palgrave Macmillan London*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137283788>

Qin, Y., & Lowe, J. (2021). Is your online identity different from your offline identity? - A study on the college students' online identities in China. *CULTURE & PSYCHOLOGY*, 27(1), 67–95. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1177/1354067X19851023>

Savchyn, R., Paliyawan, P., & Thawonmas, R. (2021). Cuteness in JUSTIN: Adding a Virtual Moderator for Entertaining User in an Audience Participation Game for Collecting Artwork Description Data. *2021 IEEE 10th Global Conference on Consumer Electronics (GCCE), Consumer Electronics (GCCE), 2021 IEEE 10th Global Conference On*, 843–844. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1109/GCCE53005.2021.9621802>

Schlenker, B. R. (2012). Self-presentation. In M. R. Leary & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of self and identity* (pp. 492–518). The Guilford Press.

Shirai, A. (2019). REALITY: broadcast your virtual beings from everywhere. *ACM SIGGRAPH 2019 Appy Hour*, 1–2. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1145/3305365.3329727>

Sjöblom, M., & Hamari, J. (2017). Why do people watch others play video games? An empirical study on the motivations of Twitch users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 75, 985–996. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1016/j.chb.2016.10.019>

Story. (n.d.). LoveLive! School Idol Project. <https://www.lovelive-anime.jp/otonokizaka/worldwide/story.php>

*Stream Deck: Evolve Your Content*. (n.d.). Elgato. <https://www.elgato.com/en/stream-deck>

Suler, J. (2005). The online disinhibition effect. *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 2(2), 184–188. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1002/aps.42>

Tang, M. T. et al. (2021). AlterEcho: Loose Avatar-Streamer Coupling for Expressive VTubing. *2021 IEEE International Symposium on Mixed and Augmented Reality (ISMAR), Mixed and Augmented Reality (ISMAR), 2021 IEEE International Symposium on, ISMAR*, 128–137. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1109/ISMAR52148.2021.00027>

Tarvin, A. (2021). YouTube fandom names in channel communities and branding. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 36. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2021.1879>

Tokyo Reporter Staff (2015). *Tokyo talent agency wins ‘dating ban’ suit over idol*. <https://www.tokyoreporter.com/japan-news/breaking/tokyo-talent-agency-wins-dating-ban-suit-over-idol/>

User Local. (2021). バーチャルYouTuber、本日1万6千人を突破（ユーザーローカル調べ）. <https://www.userlocal.jp/press/20211019vs/>

Uttarapong, J., Cai, J., & Wohn, D. Y. (2021). Harassment Experiences of Women and LGBTQ Live Streamers and How They Handled Negativity. *ACM International Conference on Interactive Media Experiences*, 7–19. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1145/3452918.3458794>

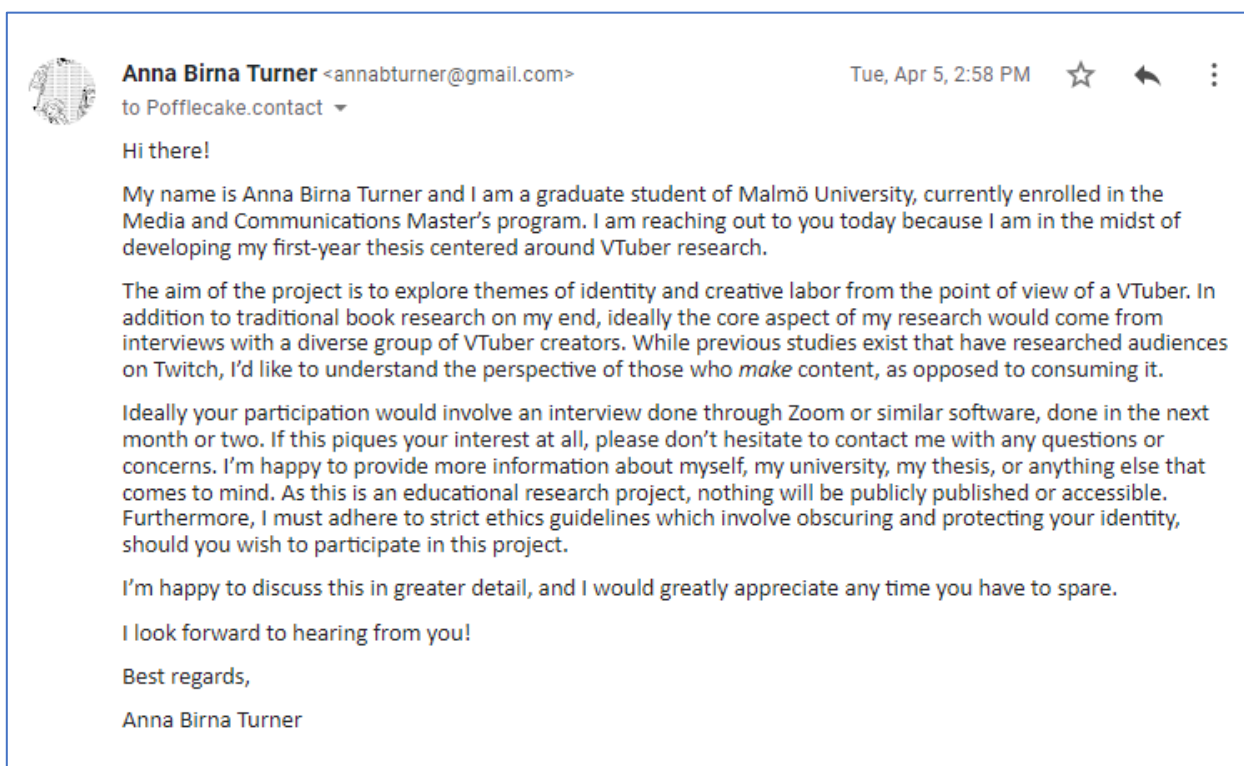
Vicente, V. (2020). *What Exactly Is a “Gacha” Video Game?*. <https://www.howtogeek.com/465429/what-exactly-is-a-gacha-video-game/>

*Who is Hatsune Miku?* (n.d.) Crypton Future Media. [https://ec.crypton.co.jp/pages/prod/virtualsinger/cv01\\_us](https://ec.crypton.co.jp/pages/prod/virtualsinger/cv01_us)

Wohn, D. Y., & Freeman, G. (2020). Audience Management Practices of Live Streamers on Twitch. *ACM International Conference on Interactive Media Experiences*, 106–116. <https://doi-org.proxy.mau.se/10.1145/3391614.3393653>



## Appendix



*My contact email to Poffle that was sent out during my interview requests.*

### My interview question list:

1. Can you tell me about the first time you heard about VTubers?
  - a. What interests you about it?
  - b. How did you decide to get into VTubing?
2. Can you introduce yourself and your channel?
  - a. What's a typical stream like for you?
    - i. How long?
    - ii. What sort of content?
3. How did you come up with the design for your model?
  - a. Why did you pick 2D/3D?
  - b. (If non-standard model) A large portion of the community designs their models around anime aesthetics. What led you to pick such a unique model design?
4. Do you watch other VTubers?
  - a. Do you have any role models?
5. Why do you think people like to watch VTubers?
6. How did you find your way to streaming?



- a. How has your experience changed over time?
- 7. Do you try to roleplay or produce a persona while streaming? Why/why not?
  - a. (If yes) Where did the idea for this persona come from?
  - b. What do you like about your persona?
  - c. Why do you think your audience likes your persona?
- 8. For some VTubers, it's very important to them that their audience does not address or talk about them as a content creator/person, and instead want the focus to be on their persona and whatever they happen to be streaming. What are your thoughts on this?
  - a. Is it something you enforce?
- 9. Do you feel like being a VTuber has impacted your relationship with your own identity in any way?
- 10. How would you describe the specific niche that your content fills?
- 11. What's the best part of your community?
  - a. Is there anything about it that's challenging?
- 12. How has VTubing affected your life outside the realm of livestreaming?
  - a. Financial stability?
  - b. Mental health?
  - c. Interpersonal relationships?
  - d. Interests or hobbies?
  - e. Worldview or personal values?
- 13. What do you find the most enjoyable aspect of VTubing?
  - a. What's the least enjoyable?
  - b. What's the easiest?
    - i. Hardest?
- 14. What advice would you give to someone who wants to start a VTuber channel?