I STREAM, YOU STREAM, WE ALL STREAM: GENDER, LABOUR, AND THE POLITICS OF ONLINE STREAMING

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

YORK UNIVERSITY

TORONTO, ONTARIO

September 2020

Abstract

This dissertation examines the experiences of women who livestream videogames on the Twitch.tv platform. Like other areas of video game culture, participation in livestreaming is shaped considerably by identity, making the space more welcoming and accessible to some, while excluding and ostracizing others. To date, much of the research that has been done in the area of streaming is concerned with streamers who have a large following and/or derive their main source of income from streaming. Rather than directing more attention to those streamers who have attained 'success' as Twitch would frame it, this study is centered around a group of streamers unique from those who are typically the focus.

Qualitative, ethnographically informed methodologies frame this research project. Data was collected from several sources using four methods. First, I examined Twitch's policies in detail. Second, I maintained my own Twitch channel for 2 weeks. Third, I purposively sampled 50 Twitch channels run by women, then recorded and analyzed 90 minutes of each of their streams (all publicly available). Finally, I conducted semi-structured interviews with five women who stream on Twitch.

Using the lens of intersectional feminism and that of affordances, I argue that the Twitch platform and its features shape, guide, limit, and even manipulate interactions between and with humans. This is especially evident when examining the myriad ways monetization of the platform influences interactions, social practices, and relationships, irrespective of any given streamer's intention to monetize their channel. In particular, the transactional nature of social connections made through the Twitch platform change people's perceptions of their relationships to each other and their sense of community.

Acknowledgements

I am so grateful to all the folks who supported me, pushed me, and sometimes dragged me kicking and screaming to get to where I am today. I'm sure most people who will read this have heard me say it before - if Jen Jenson was not my supervisor, I would not have finished this degree. She is easily one of the most generous and kind people I know, but she can also be tough when she needs to be. Dr. Jenson often knew what I needed even before I did, whether it was space and time to regroup and think things through, a side project to inspire (or distract) me, or deadlines to hold me accountable. She showed me the difference between an educator who is just doing their job and someone who truly cares about their students and works tirelessly to ensure their success. Her efforts to make space and opportunities for women and other folks who don't see academia as a place for them is so inspiring. Thank you so much.

I want to thank my committee, especially Natalie Coulter and Jason Boyd who were generous with their time and energy in pushing me to think through my research in different ways. Dr. Coulter is an incredible cheerleader, always pointing out opportunities where I tend to see mistakes or flaws. She pushed me to think through next steps for my research in ways I hadn't considered. Dr. Boyd offered different perspectives that made me check my own assumptions and to reflect more deeply on why I made the choices I did throughout the research process. Another heartfelt thanks for my external examiners, Helen Kennedy and Estee Fresco. Dr. Kennedy and Dr. Fresco both made me think about the bigger context of my research that pointed to new and exciting directions to pursue.

I have been so fortunate to bump into incredible women along my academic path who have given me a chance to learn and grow. Jeji Varghese was the first professor to take a chance

on me. Dr. Varghese employed me as a research assistant in my 3rd year of undergrad. Her mentorship and support completely changed my academic trajectory. It was that summer, I realized how much I love research and started thinking about graduate school. I will be forever grateful to her for opening up paths for me that I had never considered possible. Suzanne de Castell is another woman whose mentorship I am extremely grateful for. I learned so much through our work together on various research projects. Dr. de Castell taught me so much about working with other people and how exciting it can be to draw from each other's ideas and expertise.

I want to shout out all the wonderful and amazing people I met through ReFig and other conferences over the years. This is especially the case for Emma Westecott, T.L. Taylor, and Kishonna Gray. Dr. Westecott gave a talk at Queen's University when I was doing my MA. It was the first time I came across a real live game scholar. Her talk was exciting and inspiring and was a big part of why I decided to write my MA thesis about games. Dr. Taylor and Dr. Gray both gave me invaluable advice about my work and new perspectives to consider at conferences and workshops. Their work has inspired me, and has been central to how I think about games, streaming, and the internet for years.

Friends! You know who you are. I especially want to thank Sarah, Tatyana, and Sam for all the coffee dates and pub chats. Without you I surely would have given up. Each of you made this PhD journey a little easier by listening when I needed someone to listen, pointing out when I was being silly, and cheering me on when I needed a boost. Thank you friendos.

Finally, to my favorite three people in the world. Well, two plus one really. Dad, Anne, and Ginny. As most of you probably know, Ginny is my dog. It might seem silly to some that

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"I didn't have gamer friends ... and it's not something that you would just stumble across" ... "When I found Twitch and saw that so many people have all these friends and were doing amazing things and sharing their experience together, I just really wanted to get on board".

– Mia "seriesofBlurs", *The women who make a living gaming on Twitch*

"I don't play with female gamers" ... "If I have one conversation with one female streamer where we're playing with one another, and even if there's a hint of flirting, that is going to be taken and going to be put on every single video and be clickbait forever".

– Tyler "Ninja" Bevins, *Ninja explains his choice not to stream with female gamers*

Background and context

The last few years have seen massive growth in the popularity of livestreaming video games. The most prominent livestreaming platform Twitch.tv reports that nearly ten million unique users access their site each day to watch just over two million unique streamers, for an average of 106 minutes each (Twitch, 2017). Livestreamers use this platform to broadcast[1] the diverse range of entertainment content they produce, from playing video games of all genres, to competitive gaming, to creative activities like cooking or painting, to editorial and news content. For some, producing or viewing livestreams is a way of engaging in fan culture or sharing their interests with friends (Consalvo, 2017). For others, it is an avenue into the realm of professionalized gaming (T.L Taylor, 2017). Livestreaming is now one of the major conduits through which video game information and culture is circulated. This makes Twitch and other livestreaming platforms important cultural spaces that necessitate interrogation. Like other areas of video game culture, participation in livestreaming is shaped considerably by identity, making

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[1] It is important to note that Twitch uses "stream" and "broadcast" interchangeably. Throughout this dissertation, use of the term broadcast is in reference to an individual streaming their content through the Twitch platform.

the space more welcoming and accessible to some, while excluding and ostracizing others. Perhaps Twitch.tv articulates the stakes best, "If it's a big deal, you'll find it on Twitch. And if you're not on Twitch you're missing out" (Twitch, 2017).

The ins and outs of video game culture: gender, race, sexuality

Video game culture has been extensively critiqued for the multiplicity of ways women, people of colour, queer people, and others not fitting the "gamer" stereotype (straight, white, young, male) have been subject to erasure, harassment, violence, or have been otherwise made to feel unwelcome in online and offline gaming spaces (Gray & Leonard, 2018; Ruberg & Shaw, 2017; Vossen, 2018). In this section I will discuss how women, people of colour, and queer people have been making and playing video games since their inception, but that historically, their contributions have been hidden, disregarded, and met with disdain.

It is widely recognized that women and girls make up about half of the game-playing population (Duggan, 2015; Entertainment Software Association Canada, 2018), yet many aspects of video game culture favour and cater to predominantly male participation (Kafai, Richard & Tynes, 2016). By and large, video games are made by men, featuring male protagonists, and are marketed to the male demographic (Near, 2013; Petit & Sarkeesian, 2019; Williams et al., 2009). Carolyn Petit and Anita Sarkeesian from the website Feminist Frequency track statistics related to gender representation in games announced yearly at E3, one of the largest annual video game industry events. In 2019, they reported that only 6% of upcoming AAA games featured a female protagonist, which is the scarcest representation of female protagonists in games since prior to 2015 (Petit & Sarkeesian, 2019).

Although women/girls reportedly play as much as men/boys, some scholars point out that they play very differently based on the context and technologies in use (Jenson & de Castell, 2011; Yee, 2008). For example, Jenson & de Castell (2011) found that girls did not have the same level of consistent access to gaming technology as boys, and so were less familiar with how gaming works. Girls and women who play video games often have access through a male relative such as a brother (Jenson & de Castell, 2011) or through a romantic partner (Yee, 2008) resulting in less freedom to play how and when they want. Jenson & de Castell (2011) also report that when girls do display proficiency with a game, they often dismiss their own abilities or engage in self-deprecating commentary about their gameplay, while boys are quick to celebrate their own successes. Yee (2008) suggests that female players face a great many social and cultural constraints in online gaming spaces that influence the ways they play (or choose not to). These include the overwhelming objectification of women in video games, the flat-out rejection by male players to acknowledge the presence of female players, the assumption that all female players are incompetent, and the likelihood of frequent unwanted sexual propositioning directed at female players.

The generalized disdain and misogyny directed toward women in gaming has most clearly been put on display by the amorphous collection of disgruntled gamers who stylized themselves part of "gamergate". Starting in 2014, prominent women in game culture were targeted by organized hate campaigns largely as a response to their perceived connection to feminism and/or social justice. Gamergate rested on the assumption that video games and culture are spaces for white, heterosexual, men. Anyone who challenged that assumption was seen as dangerous to the status quo. Feeling that their position of supremacy in video game culture was being threatened, men directed vitriolic attacks at cultural critics, journalists, game developers,

and academics whom they labelled "social justice warriors" - the vast majority of them women, people of colour, and queer people. The ramifications of these attacks were extensive. They were economically damaging and deeply hurtful for many of those targeted, but they also brought to the fore a larger cultural conversation about who belongs in gaming spaces and how they can be made safer and better for everyone. I will not give any further detail or space to this so-called movement here, because it has been well-documented elsewhere (see: Gray, Buyukozturk & Hill, 2017; Massanari, 2017; O'Donnell, 2019; Quinn, 2017).

Increasingly, researchers have turned their attention to the challenges people of colour encounter in video game culture. Kishonna Gray (2011) writes about some of the ways Black and Latinx youths have been ignored by the video game industry. She argues that the digital frontier has so-far mirrored the American frontier where racial minorities supplied much of the labour required to develop it, but have been largely excluded from enjoying the benefits of that labour. People of colour spend time and money buying and playing games, and yet the industry almost exclusively markets to middle-class, white, male youth. The video games industry has been roundly criticized for its inability to recognize and deal with racial inequities. According to the International Game Developers Association's 2019 Developer Satisfaction Survey, only 22.5% of respondents identified as people of colour (IGDA, 2019, p.13). Further, when they compared their racial statistics to those of the US population, they found that people identifying as white were greatly overrepresented, people identifying as Indigenous and as Asian were slightly overrepresented and people identifying as Black or Hispanic/Latinx were greatly underrepresented (IDGA, 2019, p.13). There is a long-held belief that if there were more diverse game developers, the games they make and the culture around them would become more inclusive (Nakamura, 2017).

Shana Bryant writes about what it's like to be a Black woman in tech/games, explaining that being a woman in games is rare, but that being a Black woman in games makes her "practically a *unicorn*" (Bryant, 2016, Obligatory Backstory, para. 8). That unicorn status comes with a variety of barriers and burdens that others generally don't even perceive, never mind experience personally. Bryant (2016) writes about the burden of always being asked to participate in diversity promotions. While white coworkers had the time and freedom to work uninterrupted, she was asked to take time away from her work to be in promotional material and events as the face of diversity. Meanwhile, she knew that most prospective employees of colour would be rejected because of the industry's desire for what they call "culture fit". Culture fit is simply shorthand for hiring more people who are like those who already work there, namely straight, white, unmarried men in their 30s. Reflecting on the start of her career in game development and the difficulty of networking, Karisma Williams writes, "Most white male game developers don't run in the same circles as African American women from Chicago. So, how would I ever break in?" (Williams, 2017, p.47). Williams was ultimately successful in breaking into the industry, but after years of work and reaching her dream job, she noted that she felt lonely, "I could not help but look around and feel lonely. There was no one to relate to. No one like me" (Williams, 2017, p.49).

Apart from the problem of underrepresentation in their workforce, video game companies have also come under fire for their desire to remain "apolitical". In late 2019, during pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, professional Hearthstone player Chung "Blitzchung" Ng Wai called for the liberation of his country during a post-game interview. Blizzard, the company that makes Hearthstone, reacted by removing Ng Wai from the tournament, withholding his earned prize money, and banning him from competing in Hearthstone esports for 12 months (Plunkett,

2019). At the time I am writing this, there are massive demonstrations being held in the US and around the world protesting anti-Black racism and police violence, sparked by the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer. Many game companies have released public relations statements in response to the demonstrations – including Blizzard. On May 31st, 2020, the Activision Blizzard Twitter account tweeted, "Today, and always, we support all those who stand against racism and inequality. There is no place for it in our society – or any society. Black lives matter". This statement rings empty and hollow when juxtaposed with the way Ng Wai was treated for speaking out about inequality just six months earlier. Other companies made similarly vague statements in support of Black Lives Matter. For example, EA tweeted, "We need to do more, and must do more. This is a long term commitment. Here are the actions we're taking today", then announced they will donate $1million to organizations like the NAACP, that they will hold meetings with their Black EA team employee resource group, and that they will provide one paid day off each year for employees to volunteer (Gach, 2020). Other companies like TakeTwo and Rockstar have not made any public statements at all. Regardless of the public statements made in support of Black Lives Matter and the alleged commitments to support the Black community however they can, none of these companies have mentioned doing anything about the systemic underrepresentation and racism in the games they make and the communities that play them.

Generally, people of colour are rarely represented in video games outside of stereotypes and tropes. Black people are often depicted as gangsters, criminals, or thugs and Middle Eastern people are depicted as terrorists (Shaw, 2010b). Barrett (2006) argues that these depictions are aimed at middle-class white youth, allowing them to act out pop culture fantasies. He suggests that games like Grand Theft Auto glorify violence and position Black bodies as disposable.

Writing about the connection between current events and occurrences in popular video games like Luke Cage and Maffia III, Samantha Blackmon (2017) reflects:

> What does it mean that a white man is able to gun down two young Black men who come to ask for help after having their car break down only to go initially uncharged and ultimately supported by the in-game community and be forced to compare that to Renisha McBride who was gunned down on the porch of a Dearborn Heights, MI home that she went to seek help in 2013?... How do we ignore the in-game stories of police brutality and vigilante justice against young Black men when…we are still watching as young Black men and women are being murdered on the streets of America by police officers who are rarely charged and never convicted? (p.108)

Although Black representation in video games has been increasing over the past few years (Blackmon, 2017), it is as if game developers are too scared or simply unable to imagine Black characters outside of harmful stereotypes. Kishonna Gray (2020) writes about the ways Black characters in video games are coded to reify Black identity within the context of white narratives. Using the character Lee Everett from The Walking Dead, a game highly praised for its progressive representation of a Black man protagonist, she illustrates how the character is still framed within stereotypes of Black criminality. The character is lauded by progressive game critics and scholars alike for the more nuanced and complex representation of Black masculinity than typically found in games. Yet, the opening scene begins with Everett in the back of a police squad car having been arrested for murder, just before being forced to kill the police officer in self defense as he turns into a zombie. Treaandrea Russworm (2017) uses this same character

(and others) to critique the ways Blackness is used in dystopic and post-apocalyptic stories to signify suffering, and relentless determination to survive.

A vibrant "queer games scene" has been growing over the past decade, with popular, well-attended events like GaymerX (a queer gaming convention) and the Queerness and Games Conference (QGCon) being held annually. LGBTQ topics have received increased attention in games journalism and popular culture commentary. Even the video game industry has demonstrated a marked improvement in their awareness of LGBTQ issues, though to be sure, the bar was set very low. Adrienne Shaw and Bonnie Ruberg (2017) point out that a lot of this enthusiasm can be attributed to capitalism and market logic. They argue that although LGBTQ players have *always* played video games, the industry sees them as a new market to be capitalized upon.

As in other forms of media, queer representation and participation in video games has a fraught history. Before the mid 2000s there was very little academic attention given to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) topics in video games. Adrienne Shaw was one of the first scholars to grapple with the idea of LGBTQ representation in video games and culture. Early in her work, she found that gaymers generally did not place nearly as much importance on queer representation as identifiable homosexual characters in games as she expected, but rather emphasized the importance of spaces to express their identity as one that understands "the artifice (and humor) of gender and sexual norms, even if they did not all share a preference for non-normative sexual practices" (Shaw, 2012, p.69). In a more recent project, Shaw and a team of collaborators have amassed a LGBTQ video game archive (https://lgbtqgamearchive.com/), that documents the history of LGBTQ game content over approximately 30 years and over 500 games (Shaw, 2017, p.88). She explains the need for the

project because over the years of writing about and presenting her research, people constantly asked her about what was *in* the games. In generating this archive, Shaw and her team found that LGBTQ content takes many forms, not simply the characters (Shaw & Friesem, 2016). Instead they categorized LGBTQ content as characters; character sexuality; character gender; relationships, romance, sex; actions; locations, mentions, artifacts, and traits; queer game/narrative; and homophobia/transphobia. Shaw and Friesem (2016) argue that the recent uptick in enthusiasm for LGBTQ game studies, necessitates this more nuanced approach to examining queer representation and content in video games to do it justice.

Outside of representation, scholars have spent a great deal of time and effort documenting harassment, homophobia, and heteronormativity in specific online games and communities. Games like World of Warcraft and Star Wars: The Old Republic have been the site of ethnographies that tell detailed stories of harassment, exclusion, bullying, and rejection on the basis of non-normative sexuality (Pulos, 2013; Skardzius, 2018; Sundén & Sveningsson, 2012). Pulos (2013) writes of the normative regulation of sexuality in World of Warcraft from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives. He argues that from the top-down, the game's design is entrenched in a heteronormative framework where binary notions of femininity and masculinity are played out regardless of the fantastical nature of the game's world. Meanwhile, homophobic and toxic behaviour between players regulates players' sexuality from the bottom-up. Online games can and do, as I have previously argued (Skardzius, 2018), also afford players the ability to build their own communities and spaces free from the oppression and harassment they are subject to in gaming culture at large. Kishonna Gray (2018) also writes about the liberating potential of online gaming communities. In her research about lesbian women of colour in Xbox Live, she found that an online gaming community built around sexual and racial identities

created a space for individuals who otherwise did not have an outlet (physical or mediated) to share experiences and truly be themselves.

Game culture and streaming. Who is streaming? Who is watching?

The most recent statistics suggests that livestreaming is another aspect of gaming where those already marginalized in game culture more broadly are taking a backseat. A 2014 report commissioned by Twitch.tv indicated that 75% of Twitch.tv users were male (LifeCourse online survey, 2014). Livestreaming has grown considerably since then, but Twitch no longer makes any demographic information about their users available to the public. Business of Apps reports that as of March 2020, Twitch is home to 3.84 million broadcasters, with an average of 56,000 concurrent broadcasts (Business of Apps, 2020). They also report that Twitch's viewership has grown significantly with an average of 1.44 million concurrent viewers at any given time (Business of Apps, 2020). GlobalWebIndex statistics suggest that as of mid-2019, Twitch users are 65% male and 35% female (Business of Apps, 2020). While the gender gap in usership seems to have shrunk, it is still disproportionately male.

In 2018, StreamElements, a company that develops tools and software for streamers conducted a survey about gender and race-based bullying on Twitch (Yosileqitz, 2018). They found that 26.6% of viewer-respondents saw racial or gender-based bullying in Twitch chat and that 13.4% of streamer-respondents had themselves been victims of bullying. The only statistics I was able to locate about race also come from the StreamElements survey, where they reported that 71.5% of respondents (viewers and streamers combined) identified as white, while the other 28.5% identified as Hispanic/Latino, Black, Asian, Native American, or other (Stream Elements, 2020). There are no public statistics available in relation to sexual orientation or identity of

Twitch users. Twitch, purchased by Amazon in 2014, has seen enormous growth over the past five years in both usership and in revenue, with 2019 revenue estimates at approximately $1.54 billion (USD). Through all of this growth, it seems that white men, from Jeff Bezos to newly partnered streamers, are the people benefiting the most.

Streaming is Work – whether you get paid or not

As with all social media platforms, Twitch requires an immense amount of unpaid labour on the part of its users. Streaming takes a ton of time, effort, and resources to do, yet very few people are reaping the economic rewards. At the same time there is a strong cultural belief in meritocracy, and faith that if you just work hard enough and deserve it, you can be successful. One of my favorite streamers exemplified this perfectly when one of her viewers asked her if she had any advice for new streamers. Her advice was to go in with no expectation of making money or being successful. Ask for nothing in return. She said you should start streaming because you love the games you play and because you want to meet new people and build a community, but *definitely not for the money*. She explained that when she started streaming, she did it in her free time. She figured since she was already spending her time playing, she may as well meet some new people while she played (as I will discuss later, this is a common narrative). She spent weeks streaming to nobody and eventually she got one loyal follower and built her community from there. She was eventually able to quit her full-time job and now considers herself successful, but not stable. She emphasizes that it took her years. This is a really common 'success narrative' to hear from streamers.

Rosalind Gill (2014) describes the characteristics of work in the cultural and creative industries as: getting paid to do what you love; being your own boss/making your own hours;

irregular or bulimic patterns of working; work intruding into every moment of our lives or having to be always "on", and never getting sick or taking time off (p. 515). These same traits are often echoed by those speaking about streaming on Twitch. Expectations around streaming are deeply entwined in the notion that the streamer is there for the love of gaming and the love of their community, not for the money. The paycheck (if there is one) is perceived as a privilege, or an added benefit to being able to stream. In terms of work hours, being a streamer doesn't only mean maintaining a Twitch channel, but also being active on many social media platforms. Streamers are pressured to always be available and accessible to viewers to deliver new content and to reassure them that they have not been forgotten, lest they move on to support another streamer instead.

Gill (2014) also writes about how the cultural and creative fields are pervaded with gender, class, and race-based inequalities. At the same time, the overarching narrative that emanates from these fields is one of hard work, fairness, and meritocracy. Focusing on gender and sexism, she argues that in order to survive in these fields, workers must often disavow sexism, even when experiencing it. Essentially, that the pressure, or the *need* to disavow inequality and promote meritocracy is itself one of the main mechanisms used to reproduce inequality of all kinds. Gill (2014) calls this the "new sexism" (p. 514). She argues that sexism is becoming "more flexible, agile, and mobile, is itself innovating, making it harder to recognise, to critique, and to resist"…meanwhile gender inequality is becoming "increasingly "unspeakable" perhaps even unintelligible in a post feminist, individualist, and neoliberal climate in which the new labouring subjectivity seems to demand a repudiation of structural inequalities" (Gill, 2014, p. 517). This was exemplified repeatedly and publicly in an exaggerated way during the heyday of gamergate. Even the slightest mention of feminism, calling out of sexism, or any idea even

loosely related to social justice in a public forum (and sometimes private ones) seemed to act as a summoning charm for hateful trolls, ruthless spam, and distressed cries of "social justice warriors" coming to destroy video games. Those folks have not gone anywhere, they just seem a little less organized than they were a few years ago. It is within these cultural conditions that some women seek entrepreneurial success through streaming.

A Quick Note on Style

Parts of this dissertation are informed by my own lived experience. The choice of topic, the theoretical underpinning, and the methodological framing of this project are, in some ways, deeply personal. I want to begin by acknowledging that I am a white, cis woman who enjoys many privileges, not the least of which has been access to education. I grew up with a generally conservative background. As a kid, I was often labelled a tomboy and most of my friends were boys. I was a nerd who loved Star Trek, videogames, and music. As a teen and then in my 20s, I often found myself in spaces dominated by boys and men. I was the only girl in my "computer service and maintenance" class in high school and one of only a few in my computer science classes. That was fine by me, I was more comfortable with guys anyway. Through childhood and early adulthood, like all women, misogyny was something I experienced regularly. Through all that time, I didn't have the language or the concepts to understand the feeling I would get in my gut telling me something wasn't quite right. Like so many other women and girls, I would ignore it, brush it aside, or tell myself I was being silly – I (as I will explain later in chapter three) eventually stumbled across feminism and a whole new world opened up to me. Sarah Ahmed gets right to the point when she writes, "feminism helps you to make sense that something is wrong; to recognize a wrong is to realize that you are not in the wrong" (Ahmed, 2017, p.27).

What is this Project About?

This project is focused on the experiences of women who livestream video games on the Twitch.tv platform[2]. To date, much of the research that has been done in the area of streaming is concerned with streamers who have a large following and/or derive their main source of income from streaming. Rather than focusing on those streamers who have attained 'success' as Twitch would frame it, my aim is to focus on a group of streamers unique from those who are typically the focus. I am more interested in hearing a multiplicity of perspectives. The main goal of this project is to answer the following questions: What is it like to live-stream for women and why do they do it? Who is being promoted in this space and how? In what ways are women supported as streamers (or not)?

What is Twitch and Why not Study other Platforms?

In short, Twitch is an American company in Silicon Valley that provides a digital platform for people to broadcast video content to a live audience who can view it at no cost. While most of the content on Twitch is related to gaming, the company has recently made a push to incorporate a wide variety of content that also includes music, talk shows, sports, travel & outdoors, just chatting, food & drink, and special events. The company describes itself saying, "Twitch is where millions of people come together live every day to chat, interact, and make their own entertainment together" (Twitch, 2020).

Twitch was spun off from Justin.tv in 2011. Justin.tv, was a website created in 2007 that allowed people to broadcast live video online with very few restrictions. In 2014, Amazon

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[2] This is an explicitly feminist project that only studies female streamers. It is not meant to be a comparison to male streamers. I reject the notion that this comparison is necessary as it assumes that male streamers are somehow the standard by which others should be tested.

purchased Twitch for $970 million USD. The company generates revenue mainly through advertising, subscriptions, sponsorship deals, and Amazon services that have been integrated into the Twitch site (e.g. retail video games and other gaming related products). Twitch's two main competitors are YouTube (owned by Google) and Mixer (recently sold to Facebook by Microsoft). However, since the platform was launched in 2011, it has experienced rapid growth making it the most prominent live-streaming platform by far (Consalvo, 2017). This is the main reason I opted to focus exclusively on Twitch for this project. The other reason is because opening the project up to multiple platforms would have made it unmanageably large for the resources and timeframe I had available to complete the project.

What does Twitch Look Like?

Main Page

This is what the front page of Twitch looks like in a web browser (see figure 1). From here, you can see a list of the channels you follow and who is currently live, you see the channels that are highlighted that day, a list of channels Twitch thinks you might enjoy, and other recommendations based on your past viewing preferences. You can also access links to your account/profile, notifications for any loot you can collect if you're an Amazon Prime member, the browse by game page, and the search bar.
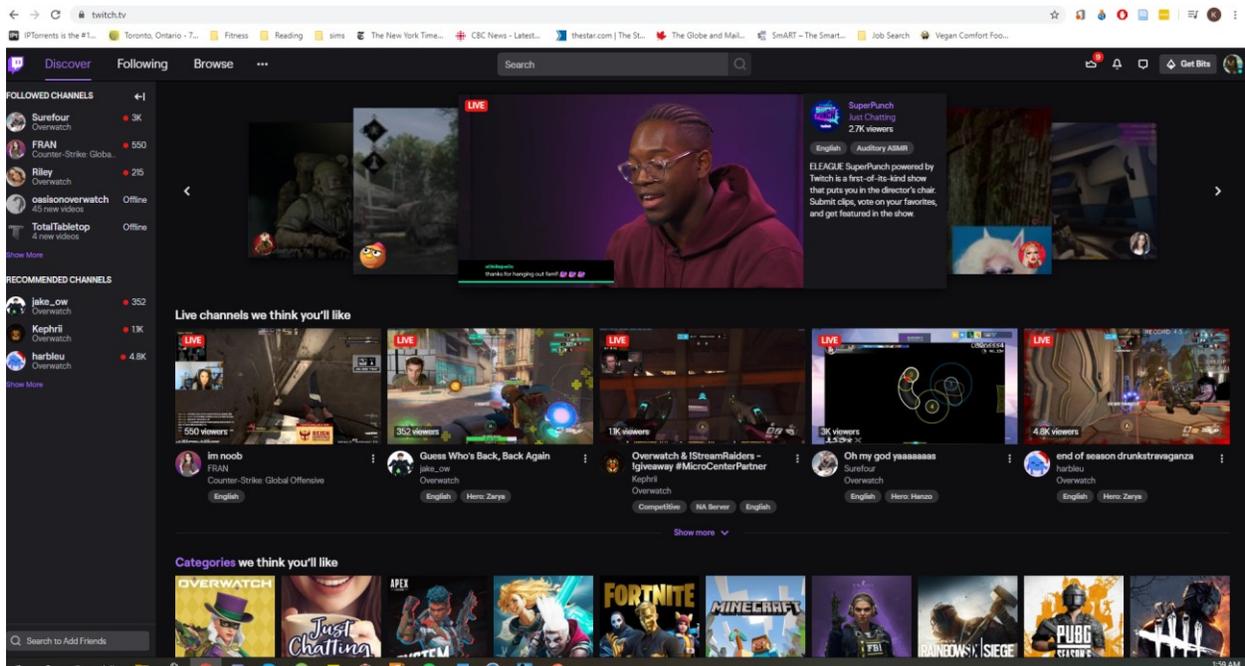
FIGURE 1: SCREEN CAPTURE OF WWW.TWITCH.TV TAKEN JUNE 14, 2020

Browsing Page

When you click on the "Browse" link, Twitch shows you all of the games/content being

streamed at that time listed by number of viewers (see figure 2).
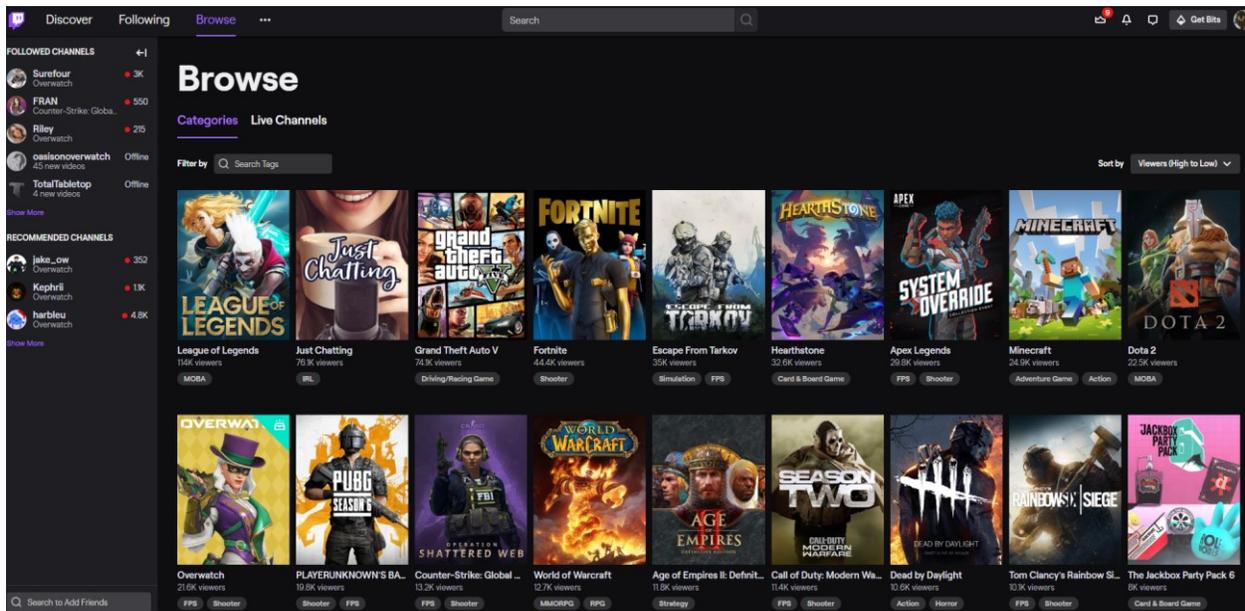
FIGURE 2: SCREEN CAPTURE OF WWW.TWITCH.TV/DIRECTORY TAKEN JUNE 14, 2020

Directory

Each game/category content has its own directory (see figure 3). When you select a game from the directory, Twitch will show you all of the channels broadcasting that game. By default, they are ordered by number of viewers.
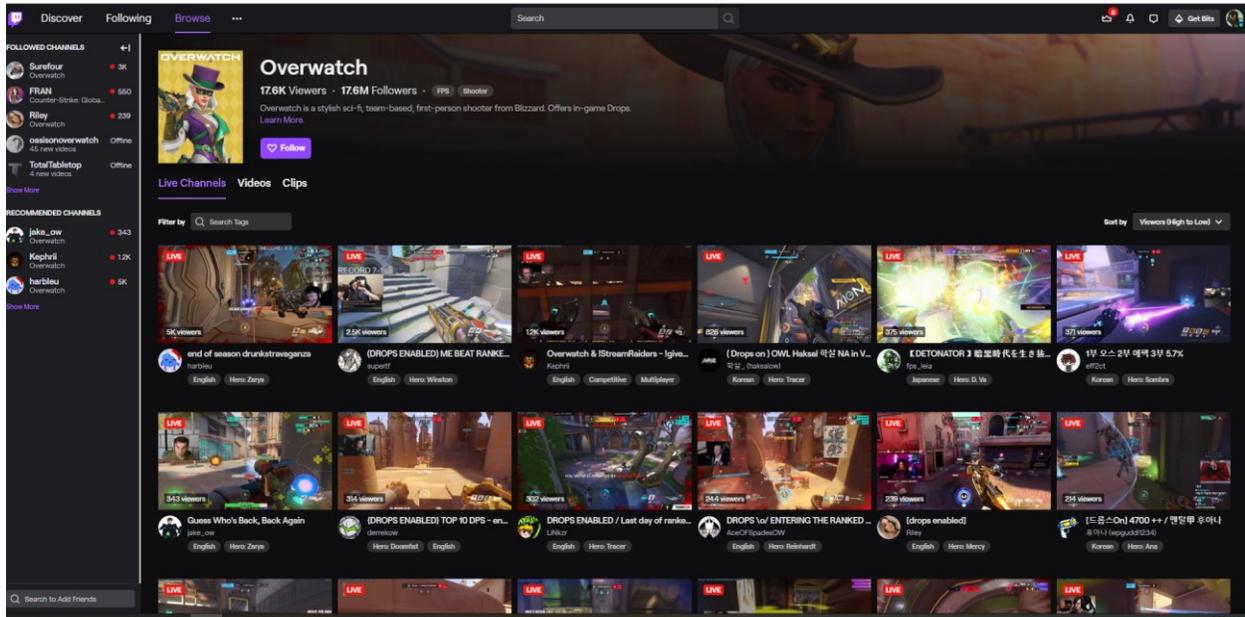
FIGURE 3: SCREEN CAPTURE OF WWW.TWITCH.TV/DIRECTORY/GAME/OVERWATCH TAKEN JUNE 14,2020

Channel

When you select a specific channel, you are directed to their main page. This is a pretty

representative image of what an average gaming channel looks like (see figure 4).
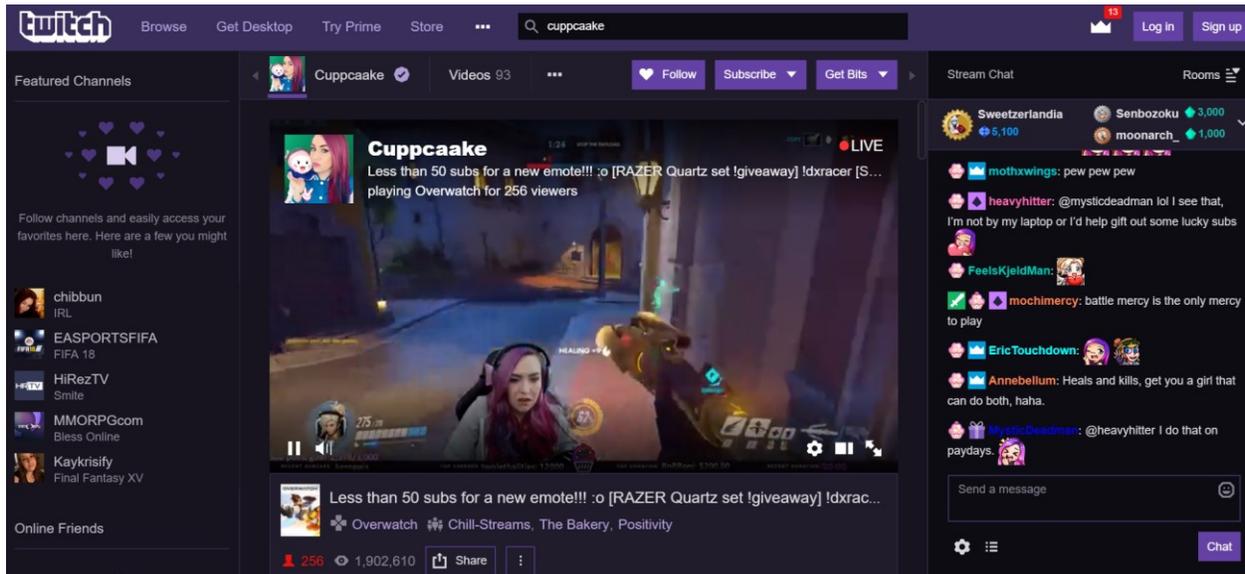
Dissertation Overview

This chapter, *Introduction*, made a case for the growing significance of livestreaming to

the study of video game culture. I provided a brief overview of how scholars have discussed and

critiqued video game culture in relation to gender, race, and sexuality. I outlined what basic

statistics are available about Twitch usership. I then explained why streaming is considered work

and how it fits into contemporary notions of entrepreneurship. Finally, this chapter introduced

the Twitch platform and its basic functions.

Chapter 2, *What do we Already Know About Livestreaming?* Is a literature review that

draws on three fields of study. The first is that of celebrity studies. It is reviewed to establish a

framework for understanding the relationships between broadcasters and their audiences. The

second is labour studies. More specifically, of literature related to work and labour relations in the culture industries and forms of precarious labour. It is reviewed to establish the concepts necessary to think through the work of streaming and the economic influences that shape that work. The third is social media and platform studies. It is reviewed to better understand the role that technology companies and their products play in shaping how people connect to each other online, who profits from these connections, and how.

Chapter 3, *Theoretical Framework,* begins with a personal reflection on the importance of feminism in my life and in this work. I then make an argument for the importance of recognizing citational politics and explain some of the deliberate choices made throughout the dissertation in who is cited prominently. The rest of the chapter explains the theoretical underpinnings of this research, including the design, data collection, and analysis. I include here an in-depth discussion of the kinds of feminism that informed the project and why that matters. Finally, I end with an introduction to the theory of affordances which provides the organizational framework for a large portion of this dissertation.

Chapter 4, *Methodological Framework,* outlines the methodology that informed this study. It includes a discussion of ethical concerns related to the project, as well as the data collection and analysis methods employed.

Chapter 5, *What Can Affordances Tell Us About Twitch?* is an analysis of many of the features of Twitch through the lens of affordance theory. Ten separate features are identified and analyzed to answer the questions: What is the feature? What is it intended to do? How do people use this feature? In what ways does it constrain users? How does it promote certain

activities/actions and for who? Do streamers/users talk about these features? If they do, what are they saying?

Chapter 6, *Monetizing Relationships. It's All About the Bits Baby!* focuses more closely on the five qualitative interviews conducted with streamers. It includes an analysis of what it means to work (paid and unpaid) through a platform largely shaped by monetization. I discuss how monetization plays a role in how community is understood on Twitch. I then critique the way the platform incentivizes viewers to pay for attention and conversely how streamers feel pressure to pay more attention to those who pay. I then move to a discussion of the tension between authenticity and monetization and how these two ideals are in constant competition for streamers. Finally, I end with a discussion of how monetization mechanisms can create competition between streamers leading to friction rather than a sense of community and collaboration.

Chapter 7, *Concluding Thoughts,* concludes the dissertation. Here I summarize the main arguments of the previous chapters, revisit my initial research questions and outline the original contributions of this research. I discuss a possible future trajectory for research about streaming. I end the dissertation with a final personal reflection.

To conclude, the goal of this dissertation is to centre the livestreaming practices and stories of women who stream on Twitch in a way that highlights their unique experiences. With this goal in mind, I turn my attention to Chapter 2, the literature review.

Chapter Two: What do we Already Know About Livestreaming?

Introduction

This dissertation is centered around the experiences of women who livestream video games on Twitch. While there is rapidly increasing popular interest around livestreaming and a growing collection of livestreaming research to review, there is a lot of understanding to be gleaned from previous research in other areas. As with other forms of emergent media, a lot of what is happening on Twitch is not entirely new phenomena, but rather a variation of something previously studied. This literature review draws on the areas of celebrity studies, labour studies, and social media and platform studies to support and complement what has already been learned about livestreaming.

Livestreaming involves a kind of performance on the part of the broadcaster. For some, it is not the main focus of their streaming style, but for others livestreaming is a carefully crafted creative endeavour (Taylor, 2018). Streaming also requires a great deal of interaction with the public, be it through their Twitch channel, other social media platforms, or at live events. Celebrity studies is an area of research that can explain different ways broadcasters relate to their audiences and how performers are tailored to meet audience expectations (Abidin, 2018; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Marwick, 2013; Rojek, 2012; Turner, 2010, 2016).

As streaming is a form of work, I draw from labour studies to provide the concepts to articulate the economic conditions in which this work is being done. Livestreaming video games as a career (or for those aspiring to make it one) presents a relatively unexplored form of labour that can be informed by the vast amount of existing work specifically around the culture industries, digital labour, relational labour, aspirational labour, and precarious labour (Arcy,

2016; Baym, 2015, 2018; Duffy, 2016, 2017; Friedman, 2014; Gill, 2010, 2014; Hochschild, 2003; Jenson & de Castell, 2018; Terranova, 2000).

Finally, because livestreaming is mediated through the Twitch platform and often through a variety of other social media platforms, I look to social media and platform studies to get a sense of how these platforms operate. Social media scholars have examined questions about how these platforms work socially, politically, technically, and economically for several decades, providing steady ground from which to think about live streaming video games and Twitch (Marwick, 2013; O'Reiley, 2012; Srnicek, 2017). I focus especially on how their technical design and business models shape the ways people connect online, and who profits from it. While each of these areas offers unique perspectives, they complement and support each other compellingly when considering them in the context of livestreaming.

Celebrity – Why are women interested in gaming in public?

One of the main goals of this dissertation is to learn more about what it is like for women to livestream their gameplay on Twitch and why they do it. Celebrity studies is a rich area of academic scholarship that has been asking similar questions of people and communities who broadcast seemingly mundane activities through various forms of media, like reality TV and web camming. Before getting into specific examples of media, I first want to explore the concept of celebrity.

What is celebrity?

Graeme Turner (2010, 2016), among others, (Abidin, 2018; Marwick, 2013; Rojek, 2012) has written about what makes someone a celebrity. Or in other words, what are the conditions required to become a celebrity? Typically, celebrities come from the sports or entertainment

industries, they always have a strong media presence, and their private lives generally draw more interest and attention than their professional lives. A common misconception of celebrities is that they are 'discovered' or plucked from the masses because of some exceptional skill, talent, achievement, or position (Turner, 2010). In reality, there is an entire industry devoted to commodifying individuals as a means of generating celebrities (Abidin, 2018; Turner, 2010, 2016). Celebrities do not *emerge* from the masses, but instead are cultivated through a process of deliberate media attention that commodifies them, thereby turning them into a celebrity. This commodifying process involves a dissolution of the separation between an individual's public and private life. The products that celebrities create (e.g. movies, TV shows, sports) are only part of what they are selling. The audience's fascination with a celebrity's personal or intimate thoughts, activities, and relationships is a big part of what keeps people coming back to spend their time and money reading about a celebrity, listening to them, or watching them. Audience attention given to celebrities through various media can be turned into exchange value by selling attention to advertisers.

As technologies and the forms of media we consume have evolved over time, so have the processes by which celebrity is constructed (Turner, 2016, p. 11). Traditionally, celebrities have been coached on how to manage their public persona. They have been groomed, trained, and marketed to look and behave a specific way in the spotlight (Abidin, 2018). In late 2019, actor Jennifer Aniston joined Instagram. The very first photo she posted was of herself and the other members of the widely-beloved TV show 'Friends', even though the show has been over for 15 years. So many people tried to follow her, it crashed her profile causing a flurry of media attention to be directed her way (Sorto, 2019). Shortly after, Aniston announced in an interview

that she would be willing to take part in a 'Friends' reunion. Her joining Instagram and posting

the Friends photo, was very clearly a calculated decision to generate hype about the reunion.

The Demotic Turn

This coaching and grooming strategy started to change when ordinary people began to be

ascribed celebrity status, which Turner (2010) terms "the demotic turn" (p.1). Turner (2010,

2016) argues that this trend began largely as the product of commercial television's intentional

foray into the formation of celebrities. Rather than using celebrities who had already been

through the celebrity construction industry – those who identified as singers, actors, athletes, etc.,

several TV genres (e.g. reality TV, talk shows, talent quests, docu-soaps) were devised with the

goal of making everyday people into celebrities simply by being on TV and in the spotlight. One

example of an everyday normal person turned celebrity is Nicole Polizzi, who you likely know

as "Snookie". Snookie was cast as a housemate on the reality TV show Jersey Shore. The show

followed eight housemates in their alleged 'everyday' lives while they lived in a vacation home

together. The series became a pop-culture hit running for six seasons. Snookie became a

celebrity in her own right and in 2012 was given her own spinoff show with Jersey Shore co-star

JWoww. While traditional celebrity status was associated (however loosely) with some special

skill, talent, achievement, or position, in the demotic turn, ordinary people were being elevated to

celebrity status by representing what was being framed as an authentic representation of

'ordinary' or 'everyday life' (Turner, 2016).

Unlike traditional celebrities, these supposed *ordinary* people do not receive preparation,

training, or commercial treatment before being thrust into the spotlight. Because of this, their

interactions with the world and people around them tend to be less filtered, and they exhibit

intense emotional responses that traditional celebrities generally work to temper (Abidin, 2018). An example of this kind of emotional outpouring is captured between Vienna Girardi and Jake Pavelka. Shortly after ending their relationship, Girardi, a contestant (and winner) on the TV show The Bachelor in 2002, and Pavelka (the 2002 bachelor), participated in an interview on the TV show The Bachelorette (on which Girardi was the Bachelorette). During the interview, Pavelka rudely snapped at Girardi to "please stop interrupting me" and she broke down in tears, the two had a short interaction, then through tears Girardi told him he's the rudest person she's ever met and stormed away from the interview (MsMojo, 2018). This difference between traditional celebrity and ordinary-people-as-celebrity lends to a sense of authenticity that piques audience interest and holds their attention. These ordinary people are presented as being unscripted and 'real' in what are often highly staged situations and environments designed to provoke emotional responses as a way to generate interest and entertainment value.

Microcelebrity

The introduction of digital and mobile media has afforded the emergence of phenomena some have described as micro-celebrity (Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2008) or DIY celebrity (Hartley, 2002, 2008, 2011; Turner 2016). Micro-celebrity refers to the closeness and accountability in the relationship between a celebrity and their online audience (Marwick, 2013). Unlike conventional celebrities (as discussed above) who are marketed to a mass audience or the broader public, micro-celebrities offer a very specific presentation of themselves to a much narrower audience, or what is often referred to as their community (Turner, 2016). Meanwhile, the advent of social media has given people the tools they need to produce, broadcast, and control their own cultural and media content. DIY celebrity bypasses the traditional entertainment industry entirely, relying instead on social media platforms and networks. Consider British Columbia-based daddy blogger

James R.C. Smith (https://www.socialdad.ca/). Smith maintains a blog about being a father, but also writes posts about things that interest him, like social media, photography, camping, and cars. Apart from his blog, he also creates content for Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, and hosts a podcast on Spotify. Unless you are someone living in Canada, actively looking online for someone writing about father-related content, it is unlikely you would ever come across Smith's content or know who he is. At the same time, Smith has amassed enough of an online following that he receives sponsorship deals from a variety of companies and is listed on several 'best of' parenting blogger lists from various media outlets.

Theresa Senft (2008) first coined the term micro-celebrity. She defines it as, "a new style of online performance that involves people 'amping up' their popularity over the Web using technologies like video, blogs and social networking sites" (p.25). She argues that there are very distinct differences between conventional celebrity and micro-celebrity. One important distinction is that traditional celebrities are constructed in a way that entices audiences to think about what the celebrity is *really* like (Marshall, 1997). As much as fans might like to think they know everything about Jennifer Aniston, her public persona is carefully curated and maintained. A fan can't simply message her on social media and expect a response. There is an enforced separation between the celebrity and their audience that leaves space for fans to imagine and wonder. The entertainment industry uses, or even relies on, that curiosity for marketing and promotion, but there is always an obvious separation between what is reality and the projected image.

In the case of micro-celebrity, Senft (2008) points out that audiences are specifically interested in the obligations to those who made a web personality *who* and *what* they are (e.g. subscribers, donors, supporters, etc.). Web personalities rely on a connection to their audience

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that typically involves a significant amount of public disclosure of their private and personal lives. Thinking again of James R.C. Smith, his popularity with his followers relies on his heartfelt writing about his personal experiences with his daughter, and stories about things that are interesting to him specifically. Marwick (2013) adds that the connections between micro-celebrities and their audiences involve significant direct interaction with their fans. These celebrities spend much of their time online answering emails, responding to comments, and replying to instant or direct messages from their audience – essentially giving individuals direct access to their time and attention. For example, Smith has a question and answer section on his blog, where followers can ask questions about parenting or relationships and Smith will give them his advice. Senft (2008) argues that the camgirls she studied between 2000 and 2004 served as a 'beta test' for techniques now used by platforms like YouTube and Facebook to: 1) generate celebrity, 2) build a self-brand, and 3) engage in emotional labour (p. 8). She uses her own camming experience to demonstrate how she was able to leverage the celebrity of others to generate more of a following for herself. When links to her site 'Terricam' were made available on other more popular cammer sites, the traffic to her site increased substantially. She then felt pressure to adhere to her brand of "the camgirl writing about camgirls" because of what she perceived as increased expectations from her new audience (Senft, 2008, p.9).

As Crystal Abidin (2018) notes, the world in which Senft was studying women who videocammed as a hobby has changed significantly over the last 15 years. While for many, participating in this kind of activity is still very much an unpaid hobby, a great many people make their living (or part of it) as content creators and/or influencers on social media platforms. One of my personal favorite micro-celebrities is an Australian YouTuber who goes by the name Deligracy and whose sole income is derived from making video content about the game The

Sims. She creates a variety of Sims content including Lets Plays, building tutorials or challenges, and news/community information updates, though she occasionally branches out to try other games or do more of a personal vlog. During her videos she frequently tells very personal stories about her struggles with anxiety, hilarious (albeit embarrassing) stories about some bathroom emergencies she's experienced due to some health related problems she has, or gives her audience an update on her Chow puppy Bowser who moved in with her in 2019. Deligracy has just over 1 million subscribers on YouTube at the time of writing and her videos regularly reach between 200k and 400k views. Her popularity within *The Sims* community means that EA[3] gives her early access to new game content and permission to share it with her audience. In so doing, EA leverages the intimacy Deligracy shares with her audience to advertise their new product, while Deligracy is able to generate more views by having access to rare content. Deligracy is just one example of a micro-celebrity whose community interests are very niche, but has made a sustainable career out of it.

The required technology to participate has become more powerful, more accessible, and more mainstream. At the same time, the platforms that support micro-celebrity have become more plentiful, more popular, and more profitable. The concept of micro-celebrity has been taken up by academics to theorize a variety of topics, such as: branding (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017; Mishra & Ismail, 2017; Page, 2011); intimacy (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Raun, 2018); self-presentation (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018), and labour (Abidin, 2016; Duffy, 2016).

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[3] EA is the company that makes The Sims.

Internet Celebrity

The most recent iteration of celebrity is that of the internet celebrity. Crystal Abidin (2016) argues that the high level of commercialization of microcelebrity has resulted in a clear distinction between microcelebrity and what she terms internet celebrity. She situates social media influencers, YouTube gamers, beauty bloggers and the like in this category, all of whom may also be categorized as microcelebrities. She suggests six ways of differentiating between the two forms of celebrity. To illustrate these differences, I will use the examples of Deligracy, the microcelebrity I described above, and Ninja, a livestreamer who started out streaming on Twitch, but in August 2019 agreed to an exclusivity deal with Microsoft's streaming platform Mixer for what his talent agency reported was worth between $20 million and $30 million. First, microcelebrity tends to be small scale and opposes traditional media while internet celebrity is equivalent to or surpasses it. For Deligracy, it is unlikely she will ever get any media attention or branch out beyond her relatively small Sims community. Ninja, however, is assumed to be so popular by a large company like Microsoft that his transfer to their platform would help generate more traffic to Mixer to make it more competitive. Second, microcelebrity exists almost exclusively on the internet and through social media while internet celebrity exists across multiple platforms simultaneously even crossing into traditional media. Deligracy's content is exclusively on social media – mainly YouTube. Ninja on the other hand, has appeared on shows like *The Tonight Show* and *Ellen Degeneres*, he receives plenty of press coverage from journalism outlets, and is well known by most parents who have kids that play Fortnite. Third, microcelebrity generates a niche audience while internet celebrity sustains a global audience. Deligracy's audience remains exclusively internet-bound and is largely female. It was just announced in May 2020, that Ninja will be hosting a weekly Fortnite tournament series called

Ninja Battles Featuring Fortnite with a $400,000 prize pool and featuring 60+ professional Fortnite players. Fourth, microcelebrity is generally born out of a hobby or network while internet celebrity may be born from hobby, networking, chance, or an existing vocation. In this case, both Deligracy and Ninja began playing games as a hobby. Fifth, microcelebrity is very much based around the disclosure of personal information while internet celebrity is often grounded in a skill, talent, or ongoing everyday life. Deligracy's content is personal, often vulnerable, and she often follows content requests from her audience. Ninja, however, does not like to divulge much personal information. He instead relies on his ability to win games and his bombastic personality to entertain his audience. Sixth, the impact of microcelebrity generally remains confined to the privacy of individual audience members while internet celebrity can have wider industry/commercial impact and reach (Abidin, 2016, p. 15).

Para-social Relationships

As the way celebrities have been constructed has shifted with the development of new technologies, so has the relationship between celebrities and their audiences. Sixty-odd years ago, Donald Horton and Richard Wohl (1956) were concerned with the relationship between mass media celebrities and their spectators. They argued that one of the most intriguing aspects of radio, television, and movie performers (who they call 'persona') was the way their work produced the illusion of a face to face relationship between celebrity and spectator, which they termed a "para-social relationship" (p. 215). Para-social relationships are one sided in that the spectator has no responsibility to the performer and can abandon the relationship at any time, while the performer retains full control over the interaction. Importantly, these relationships hinge on a sense of intimacy. Horton and Wohl write of this intimacy from the perspective of a viewer:

They "know" such a persona in somewhat the same way they know their chosen friends:

through direct observation and interpretation of his appearance, his gestures and voice,

his conversation and conduct in a variety of situations. Indeed, those who make up his

audience are invited, by designed informality, to make precisely these evaluations – to

consider that they are involved in a face-to-face exchange rather than in passive

observation. (p. 216)

What is made clear here is that these celebrities (and the industry forces that created them)

intentionally cultivate this sense of familiarity and intimacy. They argue further that this serves

the purpose of generating a social history and even loyalty to the performer. Many scholars have

taken up the concept of para-social relationships with media performers since Horton and Wohl's

1956 paper (see: Grant, Guthrie & Ball-Rokeach 1991; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Rubin

&McHugh 1987).

Horton and Wohl could not have known how the development of the Internet would

reshape the way celebrities interact with their audiences. Theorizing about para-social

relationships has provided insight into how and why audiences feel connected to their favorite

performers and brought attention to the importance of intimacy between celebrities and their

fans.

Intimacy

The advent of social media has caused a shift in how celebrities and their fans interact.

Where previously, media mostly afforded only a one-sided relationship between performers and

their audiences, increasingly technology is enabling and even requiring direct interaction

between them. In her work studying musicians, Nancy Baym (2018) shows how social media has

collapsed distinctions between professional and personal relationships in terms of frequency and intimacy. In order to promote and sell their work, musicians are required to form and maintain emotional connections and relationships with their audiences.

Similarly, in her work about camgirls, Theresa Senft (2008) writes about how intimacy and immediacy work together to create a connection between broadcasters and their audiences – or what she calls social richness. Social richness is a framework or measure to assess a medium's ability to transmit rich information or in other words convey more "real" personal communication. This kind of intensified interaction and connection between public figures and their audiences or communities is incredibly important in the context of Twitch, where the entire platform is designed as a tool to afford real-time interaction between a performer and their audience, as well as between audience members. As such, these relationships and interactions will be discussed in detail throughout my dissertation.

Celebrity and Identity

Another area of celebrity scholarship considers how identity shapes celebrities' interactions, opportunities, and relationships. Research has been done to show how gender, race, class, and age all play a part in how celebrity operates (Adamson, 2017; Favara, 2015; Genz, 2015; Jermyn & Holmes, 2015; Ringrose, Tolman & Ragonese, 2018; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2017; Tyler & Bennett, 2010). Female celebrities face particular demands or challenges associated with being a woman. Some have argued that the postfeminist and neoliberal contexts within which celebrities now operate creates an environment where female celebrities must embrace and perform a certain level of femininity, but only insofar as it adheres to and promotes neoliberal cultural norms (Adamson, 2017; Genz, 2015; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2017). Genz (2015)

considers the relationship between brand culture, celebrity femininity, and commodified authenticity, ultimately suggesting that commodifying and gendering authenticity are fundamental to generating the affective and commercial appeal of postfeminist celebrity culture. Toffoletti & Thorpe (2017) focus particularly on female celebrity athletes and the ways in which their relationships with fans via social media are largely governed by gender norms within the postfeminist frames of empowerment, entrepreneurialism,

FIGURE 5: IMAGE OF TAYLA HARRIS

and individualism. In early 2019, Australian TV network Seven Network posted an incredible image of Australian football player Tayla Harris to their Twitter account (see figure 5). Rather than appreciating it for the remarkable feat of athleticism that it was, many replied to the image with misogynist and hateful comments about her body that she described as sexual abuse. Rather than being seen as an athlete, Harris was being regarded as a sexual object. In response to the hateful comments and trolling, Seven Network initially removed the image. After receiving backlash, they eventually reposted it with an apology.

Others have written about the ways pregnancy and motherhood play a role in the lives of female celebrities. Allen et al. (2015) use case studies of mediated celebrity motherhood to critique austerity politics, arguing that it reinforces unequal class relations and punishes women and mothers. O'Brien Hallstein (2011) writes about the rhetoric of the "post-pregnant quickly slender, even bikini-ready, body" as a means of re-establishing motherhood and beauty as paramount components of femininity and to both acknowledge and erode feminist gains (p. 111). Favara (2015) considers media coverage of Angelina Jolie's transnational adoptions, arguing that post-feminist narratives of choice, individualism, and mobility contribute to perceptions of her as

a figure of successful femininity, which is then reinforced by her gendered, raced, and classed position.

Of course, being a woman is not the only aspect of a celebrity's identity that plays a part in a celebrity's interactions, opportunities, and relationships. Ringrose et al. (2019) explore mediated constructions of sexy femininity at the intersection of class and race. They found that girls from different backgrounds had internalized messages about what it means to be feminine in different ways and as such they use different strategies to navigate and manage their expectations around racialized and classed sexiness. Tyler & Bennett (2010) also take up the issue of class in relation to celebrity, arguing that celebrity is increasingly being used to evaluate and communicate class attitudes, allegiances, and judgements and that at the same time, class is central to the construction of celebrity.

Digital Labour and Streaming

Whether a streamer is paid or not, one thing is very clear, streaming video games is work. To get a sense of how to think about this kind of work, I refer to the abundance of literature around digital labour and the digital economy (Arcy, 2016; Friedman, 2014; Gill, 2010, 2014; Jenson & de Castell, 2018; Srnicek, 2017; Terranova, 2000), relational labour (Baym, 2015, 2018), and aspirational labour (Duffy, 2016, 2017).

Conversations about the digital economy emerged in the late 1990s as a way to characterize rapidly transforming economies (Scholz, 2016; Terranova, 2000). The shift to a more digitized, culture, and service-based economy brought with it changes to how, where, and when people work, as well as what counts as work. As with most big changes, digital labour comes with both upsides and downsides. Before discussing them, what do I mean when I refer to

the digital economy and digital labour? In general, the digital economy consists of companies that rely on the internet, data, and/or information technology as the foundation of their business models (Srnicek, 2017). The most obvious examples would be companies like Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Apple, and Amazon. In conversation and popular writing, many refer to the digital economy as the 'sharing economy' or the 'gig-economy' and use them interchangeably. Every time someone requests a ride in an Uber, they are being serviced by the gig-economy. Other common gig-economy work includes food delivery services like Skip the Dishes and DoorDash. Digital labour is the work that needs doing within the digital economy.

There are several characteristics of digital labour that distinguish it from other kinds of work. First, work in the digital economy is characterised by flexibility and short-term employment (Friedman, 2014). Workers are typically hired on a temporary, contract basis to perform a particular job. Examples of this could be hiring an uber driver to pay them for one trip or hiring an adjunct professor to teach one university course. Second, this work is mostly part-time, casual, or freelance (Scholz, 2016). Increasingly what were once full-time, permanent jobs are being broken up into temporary, precarious, part-time positions that do not include an extended benefits package or retirement plan. Third, because so much of this work is part-time or piecemeal, many of these workers have multiple sources of income that tend to fluctuate in amount. Finally, because they are fulfilling contracts rather than being employed long-term, these workers are frequently considered self-employed.

At first, people were highly optimistic about the potential of the digital economy to open up new opportunities for people who have struggled to find work in the traditional economy (Scholz, 2016). Yet over the past 20 years, many critiques have been made about how the digital economy has taken shape. There is extensive research and literature around the digital economy

from a plethora of disciplines, and it can be difficult to disentangle concepts and arguments from one another. Much of the debate around digital labour that is relevant to streaming has centred around three tensions: entrepreneurialism versus free labour, flexibility versus precarity, and meritocracy versus marginalization. While I have found this way of organizing concepts helpful in making sense of and writing about what is known, it is impossible to completely separate any one of them from the rest, for example free labour from precarity. After discussing these tensions in the digital economy, I will discuss relational labour and aspirational labour as lenses through which we can look at these tensions in relation to streaming specifically.

Entrepreneurialism Versus Free Labour

Brooke Erin Duffy (2017) writes that "the entrepreneur has become contemporary culture's benchmark of success" (p. 2). What she means by this is that a great many young people want to work for themselves. It is culturally understood that self-employment is a path to freedom, happiness, and overall success. Moreover, there is often a sense that so long as you work hard enough, you can achieve entrepreneurial success and *live your dream*. The idea of working for yourself is almost always paired with the cultural imperative to "*do what you love*". On the surface, doing what you love seems like an ideal situation – far better than doing what you dislike or even hate (as so many do). The idea of doing what you love reframes work as something you do to feel good, to better yourself, as opposed to something you do for compensation (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Tokumitsu, 2014).

Some argue that being self-employed blends the professional and the personal in problematic ways. Through her study of musicians, Nancy Baym (2018) demonstrates how all of musicians' time and relationships become associated with or devoted to work as they scramble to

get attention and maintain relevance. In other words, what used to be free time with friends becomes networking with potential business contacts and it is increasingly difficult to separate when (paid) work time ends, and (unpaid) leisure time begins.

In the literature, this debate often gets framed as a tension between digital platforms that enable free expression and the exploitation of free labour (Scholz, 2012; Terranova, 2000). But some have pointed out that it is much more complicated than that because really it is both simultaneously (Duffy, 2015). Terranova (2000) shows that the basic digital tools we use regularly like websites, mailing lists, and software modifications rely on unpaid, volunteer labour to exist. This has only intensified over the last 20 years with the advent of social media and user-generated content platforms. Services like YouTube and Twitch rely on vast amounts of content being created and uploaded to their platforms for public consumption, while only compensating a very small fraction of the individuals expending their time, energy, and resources to create cultural and economic value for the company (Taylor 2018). Duffy (2017) points out that a lot of the hype around working for yourself is just that - hype. Brands commonly use social media producers/content creators – or more specifically, their social networks, to market their products. Duffy (2017) writes that in doing so, "marketers effectively cloak participants' freely provided labor" and instead compensate them with "exposure" (p. 162). Free labour, uncompensated work that another is profiting from, is highly exploitative in that corporations are profiting economically off of the work of what essentially amount to volunteers.

It would be naïve, and even demeaning to entrepreneurs to assume they do not recognize some of the exploitative aspects of their work. Being aware of the fact that someone else is profiting from one's labour does not necessarily take away from positive feelings associated with being self employed. Nancy Baym explains (2018), "When so many feel alienated in their places

of employment, the freedom from institutions and bosses can help 'keep body and soul together' even at work" (Relating in the Gig Economy, para. 2). Plenty of workers have to supress their feelings of boredom, frustration, lack of personal autonomy, etc., at work. When you are your own boss, you can have more control over how you feel about the work you do. This is echoed by Ursula Huws (2014) in her discussion around creative workers. She explains that for many, the feelings of pride associated with work that is created, even if done for free, is important to many of these workers. Creative work that is done without monetary compensation can still be experienced as "a form of personal fulfillment" (p. 110). She points out that there are other incentives for creative workers to engage in free labour like publicity, increased artistic freedom, and relationships with audiences/customers.

Flexibility Versus Precarity

Jobs in the digital economy are generally advertised as offering flexibility and freedom (Baym, 2018; Friedman, 2014; Gill, 2010; Mosco, 2017; Srnieck, 2017). Frequently these jobs are advertised as work that you can do when you want, how you want, where you want, and however much you want. This supposedly gives you the opportunity for greater work-life balance, and the flexibility to fit work into your already busy lifestyle, to pick up an extra job if you need it, or to make as much money as you want/need. For example, as a student, reconciling scheduling between coursework and a part-time job can be challenging. Working through the Uber or Lyft app as a driver would theoretically afford the student the needed flexibility to work more often during the hours and times of year that would interfere less with their studies. The notion of increased flexibility and more freedom or personal autonomy at work can be appealing, but it raises the questions *flexibility for whom*? And also, *what kind of flexibility?* While workers may have the flexibility to set their own hours and work from home, gig-economy jobs also

create a great deal more flexibility for employers to hire/fire who they want when they want and to pay what they want when they want. This increased flexibility for employers essentially shifts risk from the employer to the worker putting them in a much more precarious position (Friedman, 2014; Gill, 2010).

Before the rise of the gig-economy, workers typically had long-term relationships with their employers. In traditional employment relationships, employers had a vested interest in hiring, training, and retaining employees who would be loyal to the company and saw a benefit in ensuring their employee's welfare (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Friedman, 2014). Increasingly, employees are being hired as casual/temporary workers, consultants, and independent contractors (Friedman, 2014; Srnieck, 2017). In traditional employment arrangements, workers who stayed at the company long-term would typically be assessed on performance and tenure and receive pay-raises accordingly. The ability to demonstrate dedication, competence, and value by workers has been virtually eliminated in the gig-economy, where workers are understood as disposable and interchangeable temporary human labour (Friedman, 2014). As such, the same work that used to be high-pay with perks and a sense of job security has been replaced by largely low-wage work and a sense of precarity (Mosco, 2017). Workers know they may be replaced at any time or that their contract is temporary, and so planning for the future becomes very difficult if not impossible. Many of these workers hold multiple jobs simultaneously in an attempt to safeguard themselves against financial ruin.

Meritocracy Versus Marginalization

The discourses that flow through digital and creative labour industries celebrate ideals of egalitarianism and meritocracy, yet are markedly unequal in terms of gender, class, and

race/ethnicity (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Gill, 2014). Technology has been popularly celebrated as equalizing and democratising, yet this has been repeatedly rejected by researchers (Gill, 2008, Gregg, 2008; Duffy, 2015, 2017). Rejection of the premise of technology as neutral, or as a tool equally available and accessible to everyone by academics has done very little to sway common opinion. Although women and minorities of all kinds make up only a small percentage of media and/or creative workers, the common refrain from industries (e.g. video game industry, social media companies, etc.) is that 'they're not interested' or 'they're not good enough'. In reality, there are a variety of systemic cultural problems and poor employment practices in these fields that push people from minority populations out (de Castell & Skardzius, 2019; Duffy, 2017; Gill 2014). Some of these problems have been discussed above (i.e. lack of job security, lack of benefits, the appropriation of free time, etc.) some others include 'bro-culture', sexual harassment, and the sexual division of labour (Duffy 2016; Hepler, 2017; Kafai et al., 2017). Gill (2014) suggests that in this neoliberal, post-feminist moment in which the culture industries have thoroughly embraced entrepreneurialism and individualism, women are required to deny, renounce, and reject structural power relations, namely sexism, or risk being pushed out of the field entirely.

In her work with social media producers, Duffy (2017) found that the social media industry is similarly framed as a meritocracy, where most people whole heartedly believe that if they simply work hard enough, they can become successful on a given platform. Duffy's research however, found that success really comes down to access to economic and cultural resources – and oftentimes a great deal of luck. More specifically, Duffy (2015) argues that contrary to the common refrain of 'anyone can be successful', those who were able to turn their passion into a full-time career tended to be, "white, middle class, well-educated, and typify

conventional beauty standards" (p. 711). Typically, those who become 'successful' on any given

social media platform have dedicated a great deal of free labour for months, or even years before

they are able to financially support themselves (Duffy 2017; Johnson & Woodcock, 2017).

During this time, the content creator must have significant savings to draw on or be supported by

someone else, and/or work several jobs. Further, many of these jobs (e.g. fashion/beauty blogger,

YouTuber, streamers) require significant up-front costs for the initial set-up. This could be

camera/video equipment, microphones, computers, editing software, among a variety of other

expenses specific to what kind of content they create. Moreover, doing this kind of work

(especially as an entrepreneur) typically necessitates learning many skills that you probably did

not need before that job became part of the gig-economy (Taylor, 2018). For example, media

workers did not need to know the ins and out of the technical equipment, never mind actually

doing all the technical work to be a media personality, but social media producers have to do it

all. This of course highlights some barriers related to level of education, access to financial

resources, and any time restrictions for those looking to make a name for themselves, further

contradicting the notion that this space is a meritocratic one.

Relational Labour, Aspirational Labour, and Streaming

Given the drastic shifts from manufacturing-based economies to information and service-

based digital economies and from secure employment to precarious employment, many scholars

have paid particular attention to the consequences of these changes. Some have written about

affective and immaterial labour (Carah, 2014; Dowling, Nunes & Trott, 2007; Hardt, 1999;

Jenson & de Castell, 2018; Oksala, 2015; Raun, 2017), some about emotional labour (Arcy,

2016; Hochschild, 1983), and others about hope labour (Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013). There is far

too much to review all of the literature in this area, so my review focuses more narrowly on

research about relational labour (Baym, 2015, 2018) and aspirational labour (Duffy, 2015, 2016, 2017). I argue that these are most pertinent to livestreaming. Relational labour is relevant because of the intensity and frequency with which streamers are required to maintain interactions and relationships with their audiences. Aspirational labour provides a framework for understanding why so many people engage in the unpaid work of streaming. For the vast majority of streamers, all of the time and effort they put into this work will not result in any economic compensation.

Nancy Baym (2015) developed the concept of relational labour to make up for what she saw as a gap in the existing literature to explain the relational work of musicians. She defines relational labour as "ongoing communication with audiences over time to build social relationships that foster paid work" (p. 16). While relational labour has some consistencies and overlaps with other conceptualizations of labour (immaterial, emotional, creative), Baym points out several qualities that make it distinct. One major distinction is that the relationships fostered through relational labour are always connected in some way to the pursuit of income. Another distinction is in terms of how feelings are managed in relational labour. Emotional labour scholars, like Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983), discuss emotional labour as alienating in that it requires workers to manage the emotions of customers in one-off situations like in a typical retail setting. Baym suggests that relational labour is similar in that emotions must be managed; however, it is different because it is through ongoing, continuous emotional management over time that relationships are built.

Relational labour is a very useful concept for examining the work of streamers on Twitch. The platform is designed entirely around the premise that streamers must attract a loyal audience through connection and interaction to be successful. For streamers to monetize their

channel through ad revenue, attain affiliate or partner status, and gain full access to the perks affordeded by Twitch, they are expected to develop and maintain relationships with their viewers (Twitch, Achievements, 2019). In fact, most streamers refer to their viewers as communities or families. In T. L Taylor's (2018) work about Twitch streamers, she writes about the importance of sharing personal information and details on stream with viewers as a means of establishing relationships and even friendships. For variety streamers specifically, the sense of community, intimacy, and close relationships are the main reason to view regularly, or to participate in any given streaming community. Relational labour is useful for examining already established streaming channels where the streamer is engaging in ongoing relational labour to maintain their community and maximize their profits. In the case of a streamer like Cuppcaake, she is an established, full-time Twitch streamer. A big part of the work she does is maintaining relationships she has already developed and creating a tighter, stronger community so that she maintains the economic support of her subscribers and fans. This kind of relational labour sometimes takes the form of movie nights with subscribers, playing games with them, or just sitting and chatting/answering questions for a few hours. For streamers who are just starting out or are one of the majority who have not (and likely will not) monetize their channel, I draw upon Duffy's (2017) notion of aspirational labour.

Duffy (2017) defines aspirational labour as "a mode of (mostly) uncompensated, independent work that is propelled by the much-venerated ideal of getting paid to do what you love. As both a practice and a worker ideology, aspirational labour shifts content creators' focus from the present to the future, dangling the prospect of a career where labor and leisure coexist" (p. 4). For those engaged in aspirational labour, there is an expectation that eventually all the free work they are doing will pay off, that eventually they will start to be compensated for their work.

Duffy also discusses the importance of the blurring between work and play in aspirational labour. She highlights how the women she interviewed skirted or resolved that tension in their accounts of starting out in social media production through narratives of "*creativity as accidental entrepreneurship, managing uncertainty in the post-recession economy,* and *breaking into the creative industries*" (Duffy, 2017, p. 52). These ideas are revisited in more detail in chapter six.

Newcomers to streaming on Twitch must invest heavily in their channel and their technical set-up in order to get started. Not only does a streamer have to have the up-front economic resources to acquire the necessary hardware (computer/console, camera, microphone, lighting, etc.), but they must invest time to learn how to use a variety of third party software (e.g. Open Broadcaster Software or XSplit) to set up their channel and broadcast (Taylor, 2018).

Johnson and Woodcock (2017) identify the two most common routes to beginning a streaming career as those who already have a career in gaming (e.g. esports) and those who have a large following on another platform (e.g. YouTube or Reddit). Even for these newcomers who may already have a massive following on another platform, this can be a large investment in the hope of being monetized on Twitch in the future. Twitch's affiliate and partner programs (pathways to monetization) require that a streamer meet criteria related to the number of concurrent viewers over a long period of time before they can be considered for the programs (Twitch, Achievements, 2019). These programs will be discussed in detail in chapter five, but for now it is enough to know that streamers on Twitch, regardless of how popular elsewhere, must typically be willing to work completely uncompensated for several months before being given the chance to monetize their channel.

Social Media Platforms

Twitch streamers obviously use the Twitch platform, but the vast majority of them also use other social media and platforms to supplement, augment, and amplify their channels. We all have a basic understanding of what social media and digital platforms are, but mostly we use them without really considering what they do and how they do it. Over the last few decades, a tremendous amount of research has been dedicated to figuring that out. Given how extensive this literature is, I have selected a few particular areas of research to focus on. First, I will discuss digital platforms primarily from a technical and economic perspective. Second, I will review social media as it pertains to identity and to audiences.

Digital Platforms

Before going into detail about digital platforms as experienced today and on a daily basis, it is useful to understand the context within which they emerged. Following the dotcom crash of the late 1990s, technologists and entrepreneurs in San Francisco were looking to transform people's (and investor's) perception of the internet (Marwick, 2013). The Language of 'Web 2.0' emerged around the companies that had survived the crash as a way of delineating the optimistic future of the internet from the disastrous past. Tim O'Reilly (2012) argues that there is not one thing that can differentiate something as Web 2.0 as opposed to Web 1.0, but that there are several principles and practices that mingle in various combinations to create what could be understood as Web 2.0. He argues that the seven principle features of Web 2.0 include: the web as platform; harnessing collective intelligence; data ownership/control; software as service; simple programming models; software that can travel across a variety of devices; and rich user experience. As new companies emerged with products and services that fit this new model, the rhetoric around Web 2.0 filled the public's imagination with utopian perspectives of technology

and optimism about the new possibilities it could bring (Marwick, 2013, p. 22). Political activism attracted to web 2.0 focused on net neutrality, open access information and software, and enabling peer to peer communication. The label web 2.0 was quickly being applied freely to all sorts of things including blogs, wikis, and social networking sites - what are now commonly thought of as platforms.

So, what then is a platform? The word has been in use since the sixteenth century, but over time has come to mean a variety of things. Scholars have set themselves the task of clearly articulating and analyzing the features, architecture, and essence of platforms (Apperley & Parikka, 2015; Montfort & Bogost, 2009). Nick Srnicek (2017) provides an everyday commonly understood explanation of platforms as "digital infrastructures that enable two or more groups to interact. They therefore position themselves as intermediaries that bring together different users: customers, advertisers, service providers, producers, suppliers, and even physical objects (p. 43)". This is how I think about the applications so many people use day-to-day like Google, Amazon, and Imgur. Baldwin and Woodward (2009) consider platforms in more depth, carefully articulating three of the most recent ways they have come to be understood while pulling out commonalities between them. First, from the field of product development they show how 'platform' is used to describe "projects that created a new generation or family of products for a particular firm" (Baldwin and Woodward, 2009, p. 20). Second, they suggest that 'platform' has been used by technology strategists to describe "valuable points of control (and rent extraction) in an industry" (p. 21). This, they add, plays a large part in driving competition between companies and consequently stimulates product evolution. Finally, they explain that industrial economists use 'platform' to "characterize products, services, firms or institutions that mediate transactions between two or more groups of agents" (p. 21).

What I argue is important to take away from these definitions of platforms is that they are more complicated and have a lot more impact on our day-to-day lives than the average person considers when interacting with them. Digital platforms are transforming our social relationships, our understanding of politics, and virtually every aspect of our everyday lives. What is most important however, to this section is the ongoing transformation of our economies. This discussion is closely related to the previous discussion of digital labour and the gig economy, but here I will focus more closely on the economics of platforms rather than the labour of workers.

The Changing Economy

As digital platforms play an increasingly important and influential role in advanced economies, scholars have become more interested with how this change is happening and what the ramifications are. It may sometimes seem that digital platforms are taking over every industry and that soon everything will be done through a digital platform, but this is not the case. They do however have significant influence over how companies with other models operate. Rahman & Thelen (2109) argue that "Platform firms are important not for their ubiquity, or because all firms do or will look like them, but because they represent the leading edge of emerging business models and, as such, increasingly set the terms of the markets they enter" (p. 179). When the average person thinks of a digital platform, they are likely to think of Amazon or Uber, however there is some variation in models within digital platforms. In their study of the ideologies of production transmitted through digital platforms, Karatzogianni & Matthews (2018) found that there are three dominant ideological threads that run through digital platforms. First, that of 'the sharing economy' which essentially works to legitimize neoliberalism. Here you can think of Uber. The company's business model and their arguments in opposition to

regulation are that free competition in the market should guide success or failure. Second, that of 'the commons' which they suggest is concerned with a retooling or transformation of capitalism to be more humane. Crowdfunding platforms are a good example here. Where the platform is used to circumvent the need for one large capital investor, instead relying on a group of people who often share a say in how the project is completed. Finally, that of 'platform cooperativism' which is aimed at resisting privatization. The authors give an example of a group of Airbnb hosts in Barcelona, who had decided to break away and create their own cooperative online platform. I note here that Twitch is most easily placed in the first category and so that is where the discussion will be focused.

Digital platforms have significantly different business models than those of previous corporate forms. Rahman & Thelen (2019) develop three features that make digital platforms unique from the previously dominant model they term a "network of contracts" (p. 178). By network of contracts, they are referring to the shift in power that occurred in the late 20th century from firms and managers to shareholders, when stock price became the measure of success resulting in outsourcing and reductions in labour force. First, they argue that platforms work to attract long-term or 'patient' investors, rather than the quick turn-around (make a quick buck then sell it off) models of the past. Second, they reward these long-term investors by achieving market dominance and concentration. Third, these platforms have a more direct, even intimate link to their consumers through portable devices that are with them at almost all times (Rahman & Thelen, 2019). Amazon was the first company to begin this shift in shareholder perspective. Scott Galloway (2017) explains that unlike the average venture capital backed company in the 1990s who generally raised less than $50 million before being expected to provide a return on that investment, Amazon raised $2.1 billion before they could demonstrate they were no longer

losing money (p. 28). He argues that the company was able to do this mostly through broad vision and good storytelling. While other companies were rewarding their investors, Amazon reinvested in the company and continued to grow. Amazon uses its marketplace platform to collect data about profitable products, then produces its own version and gives it a more prominent spot in their marketplace. This is one of the ways the company is able to achieve and maintain market dominance in retail.

Nick Srnicek (2017) also writes about how digital platforms are changing advanced economies through a discussion of 'platform capitalism'. He writes about platform capitalism as the dominant system through which economies are increasingly ordered. Since manufacturing is significantly less profitable than it used to be, he argues that capitalism has turned to data as a new source of prosperity. In the same vein as Rahman & Thelen, he suggests that "The platform has emerged as a new business model, capable of extracting and controlling immense amounts of data, and with this shift we have seen the rise of large monopolistic firms" (Srnicek, 2017, p. 6). He likens data to "the raw material that must be extracted, and the *activities* of users to be the natural source of this raw material" (p. 39). What oil is to Enbridge, data is to Facebook.

Srnicek (2017) demonstrates how the platform capitalism business model gives digital platforms several advantages over previous models for data extraction. First, because digital platforms facilitate interactions between users, they have an advantage in terms of access to recording that data. I refer again to the example of Amazon. If an independent pet shop owner makes really cute pet costumes and they want to sell them online, Amazon is the most likely place they would turn. If those pet costumes sell well, Amazon has access to all the data in terms of price points, consumer demographics, and demand to use as they wish. Second, the more people engage with or use a given platform the more valuable it becomes. If given a choice

between two platforms that essentially do the same thing, but one affords access to millions of other users and the other only to hundreds, that which affords millions will inevitably achieve better results. This is the reason that Facebook has not *really* gone away. For years, the company has been plagued by scandals and subject to criticism, and yet, it still remains one of the most populated platforms because it is where the people are. This same characteristic also allows the platform to record increasingly more data making it increasingly valuable. Third, platforms can use "cross-subsidisation" (p. 46). In this case, one branch of the company can offer a service at a reduced rate or free, while another branch of the company makes money to pay for it. Finally, digital platforms are inherently political and have immense control over how those politics are shaped. The platform firms control the architecture, interactions, and rules of how the platform works and so have supreme control over what happens, or is *allowed* to happen on them.

While there is a strong case that technological innovation and economic influences are the main factors that promoted the evolution of the digital platform business model, others have also pointed out that there are other factors that explain why these mega-dominant platform capitalists have thrived in the US in particular. Rahman & Thelen (2019) point to the "fragmented policy landscape" in the US, where regulations are weak and decentralized; to a "legal institutional regime" that fosters the foundational premise of the platform economy; and to the "heavily financialized US political economy" which is abundant with patient capital and eager investors (p. 181). Steven Vallas (2018) echoes the weak policy argument but adds that in the US, long-term wage-stagnation coupled with increased costs-of-living has fostered growth (and surplus) in the labour supply, which inevitably leads to people being more willing to accept the conditions of contingent work.

Now that I have reviewed the basics of the technical and economic influences of platforms, I turn to the social aspects of social media and digital platforms.

Social Media

While there are many definitions of what social media is, I find danah boyd's (2015) articulation particularly useful. She writes:

> it refers to a set of tools, practices, and ideologies that emerged after the dot-com crash by a network of technologists primarily located in the Bay Area. As a buzzword, "social media" was far from being precise, but it still set the context and shaped the contours of a phenomenon rooted in the social, technical, and business dynamics of what would become Web 2.0. (p. 1)

The development of social media fundamentally changed the way people interact with the Internet. It provided new ways for people to interact with each other, to share information, to connect with people (boyd, 2015). The emergence of social media is also often thought of as a turning point when people began co-creating media content (and the subsequent economic value) rather than it being made for their consumption largely without their input as with traditional media (Fuchs, 2014). When referencing social media, most people are referring to the applications (or platforms) many of us use regularly like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Twitch among others. Because streamers are working within a highly networked social media ecology, it is useful to have at least a cursory glance at how social media works and what people do with it. Three areas of academic interest relevant to streaming include discussions around identity, audiences, and the relationship between public and private spaces online.

Identity

Researchers from a wide range of academic fields have long been interested in how people negotiate and/or present their identity through social media. Each field brings with it its methods and theories and overviewing them all would not be possible to fully review here. For that reason, this will only be a short overview of some of the literature most pertinent to streaming. I start with a discussion of identity because identity work is fundamental to the production of all social media. Whenever an individual interacts with social media in any way, their perception of their own identity and that of others is continuously informing and being informed by that interaction. In the early days of the internet, some celebrated the idea of being able to maintain anonymity online. The internet was thought of as a democratic utopia where people could interact without the social baggage of prejudice. Lisa Nakamura (2002) was early to point out that while an individual's physical body was hidden, parts of their identity would seep through in other ways – through their use of language and the images they use to depict themselves.

The internet, digital technology, and how we interact with it has changed drastically since those early ideas. Many people work online, play online, go to school online, and socialize online. In her study of Black and Latina women in Xbox Live, Kishonna Gray (2012) examines women's experiences of racism, sexism, and heterosexism through the lens of linguistic profiling. She makes a strong case that one's offline identity does not get left behind or made anonymous when one goes online. As digital technology improves and increasingly becomes embedded in our everyday lives, the idea that one can easily maintain any kind of anonymity online is absurd.

One commonly studied area of online identity is that of self-presentation on social media. There is common agreement among scholars that users tend to maintain highly curated versions of themselves on social networking sites (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010). Atrill (2015) argues that individuals engage in impression management online to varying degrees based on what context they are operating in and what their goals are. For example, if the goal is finding a romantic partner through a dating app, an individual is likely to tailor their self-presentation favorably, but accurately because exaggerating or lying would not help them meet their goal.

Another common lens through which to consider online identities is through performance. Hugo Liu (2008) also found that Myspace users used their profiles to engage in taste performance to convey their individual prestige and their differentiation from others. Rob Cover (2010) laments that while there is significant research about online identity, a great deal of this research assumes "that the identities of users are fixed, static, and merely represented or expressed through online activities" (p. 55). Instead he suggests that identity should be considered "an ongoing reflexive performance and articulation of selfhood that utilizes the full range of tools made available" (Cover, 2010, p. 55). Using Facebook as an example, he demonstrates how social networking sites provide the tools to constitute one's identity over time through many performative acts. Zizi Papacharissi (2012) examined the performative strategies of Twitter users and found that affect, redaction, and deliberative improvisation shape ongoing performances of the self through Twitter.

Audience

How the 'audience' relates to and consumes content through social media has been written about extensively. Henry Jenkins (1992) developed the concept of participatory culture to

explain how audiences, fans, and others engage with media to create their own culture. Participatory culture is often defined in contrast to notions of cultural engagement as passive media spectatorship (Jenkins, 2006b) and has been used often to examine the relationship users have to social media (Fuchs, 2014). Jenkins (2006b) argues that previously there was a very clear distinction between media producers and media consumers, but that increasingly that boundary has become blurred. There is plenty of research dedicated to understanding participatory fan cultures (Berry, 2005; Hutchins & Tindall, 2016; Jenkins, 1992, 2006a, 2006b; Lowood & Nitsche, 2014; Scott, 2012), and others have written about the democratic potential for politics and activism through participatory creative culture (Bae & Ivashkevich, 2012; Burgess & Green, 2009; Falero, 2016).

Marwick and boyd (2010) have a different take on audiences in relation to social media. They suggest that audiences outside of social media that are separate and distinct become one networked audience once they move online. For example, without social media it is highly unlikely that you would speak to a grandparent and your employer as part of the same audience. With the advent of social media, it is entirely possible, perhaps even likely that those same people would be privy to your communications online. Marwick and boyd (2010) term this 'context collapse', and argue that when people post on social media, they always have an imagined audience in mind. Marwick and boyd write:

> Participants have a sense of audience in every mediated conversation, whether on instant messenger or through blog comments. The audience is often imagined and constructed by an individual in order to present themselves appropriately, based on technological affordances and immediate social context. (Marwick & boyd, 2010, p. 115)

The way users imagine their audience is varied but is frequently related to the number of followers they have and the application they are using. Those with fewer followers tend to think of them as friends, while those with many followers tend to think of them as fans to be managed (Marwick & boyd, 2010). Importantly, Marwick and boyd outline some of the strategies people use to navigate situations where people must speak to multiple audiences. For some, this includes maintaining multiple accounts, for others it involves creating a pseudonym, and for others still they will only post content that would be acceptable to the broadest possible audience.

Conclusion

While this is not an exhaustive review of all the available literature about Celebrity, Labour, or Social Media/Platform studies, I have provided a foundation for analysis of the conversations and debates relevant to live-streaming digital games in each of these respective fields. Celebrity studies contributes to an understanding of why people are willing and/or eager to put themselves in the spotlight, and what that spotlight entails for different kinds of celebrities. It also provides several explanations of the relationships between celebrities and their audience(s). Labour studies research offers nuanced ways of understanding the relationship between work and play. It has also offered some clarity in the debates around entrepreneurialism, free labour, flexibility, precarity, meritocracy, and marginalization. Importantly, labour studies scholars contribute the concepts of relational and aspirational labour that I argue are so important to understanding livestreaming. Finally, social media and platform studies research has helped tease out important understandings of how platforms work, and how they shape interactions between individuals, be they friends, employees, or politicians. Social media scholars especially, have discussed the importance of identity, and how it is not something that can be differentiated

between online and offline. All of these topics are of direct relevance to live-streaming on

Twitch and in some way have informed how I think about women who live-stream.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

Why Feminism? A personal Reflection

As I hope I have stated clearly, this is an explicitly feminist dissertation and so I have approached each stage of the project through a feminist lens. Feminism is often a fraught term with many meanings and connotations depending on the context, but for me feminism and social justice have become synonymous and are central to how I interpret and move through the world. As I mention in the introduction chapter, it has not always been that way. Here, I offer a short personal reflection on why I think a feminist education is so important and why it is so deeply important to me that this project reflect that. As you know, I spent a lot of my early years in male dominated spaces. A lot of being the only girl in the room meant doing everything I could to fit in as 'one of the guys', although I didn't always realize it at the time. When I was 15 and hanging out with the guys at a friend's place, one of the boys pulled out a VHS tape of porn for us all to watch together. It seemed completely reasonable to watch with them and join in on the critiquing of women's bodies and 'techniques'. It didn't matter that I felt gross about it afterward – that was obviously *my* problem, not theirs. When I was 16, I often wore my hair in pigtail-style buns. That is, until the teacher in that computer service and maintenance class I mentioned earlier nicknamed me "handlebars" and a group of boys snickered and laughed. When I asked a friend what he meant after class, he explained that my hair made it easy to "point my mouth at dicks, like steering a bike". I didn't tell another teacher, or my dad about it. I just wore my hair differently because I thought it was my fault, that I was inviting that kind of 'teasing'. When I was in my 20s it seemed completely ordinary to laugh about and even make rape jokes with the guys while playing games online – sometimes about myself – in order to fit in - to be seen as funny and as *one of them*. I mean come on – it's *only a joke,* right? And it was a totally-okay-

everyday thing for one of the guys to interrupt me speaking to another guy friend in order to joke about how bad I "must really want to fuck him" to give him all that attention. Because why on earth would a woman want to speak with a man if not to have sex with him eventually?! I would just brush it off as funny. This was so normal. I never really thought anything of it.

Skip forward to my late 20s. I was desperate to quit the job I had been at for nearly seven years but had no idea what to do. I had a college diploma in police foundations, but knew I definitely did not want to be a police officer. The economy was still in shambles after the 2008 recession and full-time jobs were hard to come by. In college, I had enjoyed the Intro to Sociology course I had to take, so I enrolled in an online Sociology course at the University of Guelph while I was still working as an Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Agent. The next term, I decided to enroll as a full-time student so I could get a BA in Sociology. I had no clue what a Sociology degree would be good for – but I didn't need to know math to get into the program and it meant I could quit my emotionally devastating job! I had a rocky start, but eventually found my way and discovered that I had a knack for getting good grades. I had always been interested in media and technology, but there were no communications courses at U of G (that I knew of) so I somehow convinced a professor to let me do an independent reading course with her and to create my own reading list. That's when I stumbled across Dr. Jen Jenson and Dr. Suzanne de Castell's work about video games. The very first article I came across was *Theorizing gender and digital gameplay: Oversights, accidents and surprises.* I was shocked – I had NO IDEA you could combine school and video games! And more importantly, this paper was about gender <u>and</u> video games.

At this point in my university degree I was nearing the end of third year and feminism was completely alien to me. My 'contemporary theory' course was taught by a Libertarian-

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leaning professor who loathed the idea of feminism. During the obligatory 'gender' week of the course, he told the class that post-modernism is a joke and makes a mockery of reality, then assigned Camille Paglia's writings for the weekly reading. Dr. Jenson and Dr. de Castell's article was my very first introduction to the likes of Judith Butler, Dorothy Smith, and Donna Haraway. Thinking about it now, I'm sure I didn't really understand most of what I was reading at the time, but it was captivating nonetheless. I remember a feeling of adrenaline coming over me, excitement about what I was reading, and a desperate desire to read more. I had always been a very instrumental student – do what must be done to get the A. My satisfaction and validation in education came from getting good grades, not from actually learning anything. But this was a turning point for me. By lucky accident, I had stumbled across something I was genuinely interested in and it fuelled my desire to really *learn*.

I eventually came across Anita Sarkeesian and Feminist Frequency. I eagerly watched all of the FemFreq videos that were published at the time. I followed with intense curiosity as the targeted hate campaign began against Sarkeesian when she launched her Tropes vs. Women in Video Games series. Seeing the hate and vitriol spewed at her made me so angry, but also reminded me a lot of the ways I interacted with my gaming friends. I had never thought much about that. I started to reflect on how I was treated by my friends, how I treated myself, and how I treated other people. I thought a lot about those kinds of interactions I described earlier and how awful and damaging they were. I thought about how I *actually* felt about the things I had experienced. Being introduced to feminism changed everything for me.

When I first started at U of G it had been as a means to an end, but by the end of my third year, learning had become something I craved more of. I applied to grad school and was accepted into the Sociology program at Queen's University. My whole worldview had started

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shifting during my last year of undergrad and I embraced that shift with gusto during my MA. I took a feminist theory course as one of my electives and wrote as much as I could about gaming and feminism. The more I read about feminism and games, the more I couldn't help but see structures of oppression in every part of life. Rather than blaming individual people for making bad choices, I started to feel more empathy for the situation they found themselves in. When I recognized something as being sexist, racist, homophobic, etc. I would call it out for what it was – when only a few years prior I likely would have participated.

Over the last decade I have come to understand the world and my place in it in a very different way. Again, I refer to Sarah Ahmed's explanation that "feminism helps you to make sense that something is wrong; to recognize a wrong is to realize that you are not in the wrong" (Ahmed, 2017, p.27). For so long I had internalized the sexism and misogyny around me, that being done *to* me, and *by* me. Being able to name it for what it is and understand at least part of why it happens has been such a freeing experience. It of course makes me angry at times, but righteous anger is so much easier to manage – and is so much more productive - than uncontrollable guilt and self-loathing. Now, I don't know that I could do this project without a feminist, social justice orientation because it is such a fundamental part of who I am and how I understand the world. What I do know is that I wouldn't *want* to do it any other way. I am so eternally grateful to the women scholars who decided to write about feminism and games because that's what initially got my attention and hooked me in. If my dissertation or other work generated by it can be that hook for even one person I would be overjoyed. Finally, as somebody who was (and still is) given the privilege of space and time to make mistakes, learn, and grow I feel a great responsibility to help others along that path in whatever way I can.

Citational Politics and Knowledge Production: #CiteHerWork #CiteBlackWomen

Reviewing the literature through a feminist lens means ensuring I included the work of women and people of colour, particularly those whose work often gets overlooked or ignored. Sometimes, when there was too much to include this meant omitting the work of well-established white men who many might consider important or even necessary to acknowledge. I want to be clear that this was an intentional decision and not an oversight. Sarah Ahmed writes, "We cannot conflate the history of ideas with white men, though if doing one leads to the other then we are being taught where ideas are assumed to originate. Seminal: how ideas are assumed to originate from male bodies" (Ahmed, 2017, p.16). Women's scholarship and labour and that of people of colour are overlooked and undervalued everywhere in academia. I would much rather be a part of undoing that trend than part of adding to it.

In my narrow area of academic influence, both Kishonna Gray and Crystal Abidin have each been outspoken about citational politics and gatekeeping in the academy. Gray began a social media campaign to #CiteHerWork after providing an interview to a journalist and citing Dr. Adrienne Shaw extensively only to find she was not mentioned once in the published article (Gray, 2015). Gray also encourages scholars to ensure their work meets the "Gray Test", which requires that academics cite at least 2 women and 2 people of colour in all of their written work. Abidin recently tweeted about how she came across a published academic article where her work was cited by the same author three times, each time spelled differently and incorrectly (Adibin, Abedin, and Abiding) within only a few pages of the article (https://twitter.com/wishcrys/status/1175643240566886400). Abidin has also been frank about her experiences of coming up against white male gatekeepers in academia. On September 23rd

2019 she tweeted, "There is a whole networked Academia that may be the norm of many such white male academics, so much so that they find it difficult to accept how the Rest Of The World do it – he let slip that my track record was surprising cos my PhD degree/supervisors/uni are not "well known"" (https://twitter.com/wishcrys/status/1176172126954377217). Her tweet highlights the importance of doing what we can to ensure that marginalized scholarship is valued and cited in feminist (and all) work. Finally, I want to acknowledge the #CiteBlackWomen campaign. They argue that "Citation as a practice allows us to engage with voices so often silenced or left behind"…and further that "Citing Black women is both feminist and antiracist, pushing back against White male heteronormativity prevalent in academia" (Smith, 2018).

Western science, technology, and knowledge have largely been generated and validated by institutions and structures dominated by elite, white, men. Through these structures, their interests have been privileged and so they permeate traditional scholarship (Collins, 2000). Far from being neutral, value-free, rational and objective, science is political. Sandra Harding (1991) argues that "Groups with conflicting social agendas have struggled to gain control of the social resources that the sciences – their "information," their technologies, and their prestige – can provide" (p. 10). Because white men, have generally been in control, other groups' contributions, including ways of thinking and knowing have been subjugated, devalued, and excluded (Collins, 2000; Harding, 1991; Wajcman, 1991). Moreover, when women do make contributions, particularly women of colour, they are often not credited or cited appropriately. One poignant and recent example of this is highlighted by Moya Bailey and Trudy (2018). They share their experience of having had their labour and contribution to the creation and dissemination of the term 'misogynoir' ignored and erased over time. It is ironic, but they say not surprising, that two Black women would coin a term to describe "the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women

experience" (p.762), only to experience that exact thing in direct relation to the intellectual knowledge they produced. It is with this history of the erasure of women's work in mind that I have endeavoured to include and cite contributions that are sometimes overlooked, ignored, or not deemed canonical.

Feminism + Feminism = Feminism!

Now that I have explained why feminism is important to me and nodded to the work of feminist and anti-racist scholars who have fought for visibility and fair citation politics, I want to get more specific about what kinds of feminism I find compelling and can do the work of helping to understand what is happening with women streamers on Twitch. My dissertation's main theoretical lens is intersectional feminism. Intersectionality informed the planning of this project from the very start and is central to the way study data was collected and analyzed. Given that Twitch and gaming are deeply embedded in popular culture, an understanding of popular feminism is valuable for examining how women are moving in and through this media space. Finally, there is some need to briefly discuss post-feminism given that discourse on and about Twitch and video games are riddled with echoes of it.

Intersectionality

What is intersectionality and why is it the best choice for this project? In simple terms, intersectionality is a framework to explore the ways various forms of oppression or discrimination (racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, transphobia, classism, etc.) intersect. The term intersectionality was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1988) who argued that feminist theory, the legal system, and antiracist activism were all failing to capture the complex nature of oppression experienced by Black women. Feminist theory had failed to acknowledge the oppressions Black women faced due to racism, while antiracist politics had failed to address the

oppressions they faced due to sexism. Further, she argues that, "The value of feminist theory to

Black women is diminished because it evolves from a white racial context that is seldom

acknowledged. Not only are women of color in fact overlooked, but their exclusion is reinforced

when white women speak for and as women" (p.154). Instead she calls for recognition of

difference and the acknowledgement of multiple intersecting oppressions, "placing those who

currently are marginalized in the center is the most effective way to resist efforts to

compartmentalize experiences and undermine potential collective action" (Crenshaw, 1989,

p.167). While the framework is used to examine sites of oppression, it is important to remember

that all identities reside at an intersection. Jasbir Puar (2012) writes that "The theory of

intersectionality argues that all identities are lived and experienced as intersectional – in such a

way that identity categories themselves are cut through and unstable – and that all subjects are

intersectional whether or not they recognize themselves as such" (p. 52). Since Crenshaw's

initial use of the term, intersectionality has been picked up and used widely (Cho, Crenshaw &

McCall, 2013). In fact, use of the word intersectionality became so widespread that it was added

to the Merriam-Webster dictionary in April of 2017.

Although Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality, there is a long history of Black

feminist thought that formed the foundations of intersectional scholarship. Black women such as

Sojourner Truth, Maria Stewart, and Anna Julia Cooper were speaking and writing about the

unique and distinct experiences of Black women as early as the nineteenth century (Thorton Dill

& Kohlman, 2014). Patricia Hill Collins (2000) traces the intellectual histories of some of these

women as well as the ways their knowledge has been suppressed. In response to this tradition of

marginalizing and supressing Black women's intellectual production, she suggests that the tools

for intersectional analysis and social resistance to oppression have come out of the lived experiences of those who have struggled against multiple intersecting oppressions.

Intersectionality is a framework widely used by feminist scholars, by social justice activists/organizers, and in policy making (Bilge, 2013; Carbado et al. 2013; Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013; Heaney, 2018). Because of its wide usage and uptake in popular discourse, some have dismissed intersectionality as becoming a buzzword (Davis, 2008), while others find that it often leads to a simple listing of differences that are often reduced to identity categories (Anthias, 2013). Vaiou (2018) points out that, "The ability to perform certain identities and not others relates closely to the power-laden spaces in which individual experiences are lived" (p. 580). The usefulness of intersectionality is in moving beyond the listing of identities, while still recognizing them, to find shared meanings and foster collective action. Vaiou (2018) explains:

> social power and inequality continue in many ways to be constructed along binary lines of gender, race, sexual preference, class, etc. – by legal systems, local and global institutions, established and legitimized everyday practices, all of which put individual subjects 'in their place', having defined what this place is. Such systems, institutions and practices have different organizing logics…which need some kind of collective coming together and organizing by those 'strangers' who inhabit (urban) space – collective organizing in order to challenge or cope with multiple forms of power. (p. 580)

It is important to recognize that intersectionality is not meant as a tool to explain all intersectional power relations and systems in full, but rather to identify problems and work towards solutions. Carbado et al. (2013) conceptualize the theory as an 'analysis in progress' (p. 304). This leaves room for the extensive variations in how, where, and by whom the framework

is employed. Instead of thinking about what intersectionality is, Carbado et al. (2013) encourage us to think about what intersectionality can do and where it can be used. As example, Bilge (2013) puts forward two cases where an intersectional approach to coalitional politics would have been powerful. First, she outlines the Occupy movement as being roundly criticized for lacking decolonial awareness. An intersectional perspective would have centered indigenous people, who pointed out that the movement was calling to "Occupy" land that is already occupied. Second, Bilge outlines the SlutWalk movement's failure to recognize its racial blindness. Given that Black women have historically been stereotyped as hypersexual, claiming the space to call oneself 'slut' is a matter of white privilege.

Putting intersectionality to work in various ways and spaces is part of what makes it such a powerful framework. Bilge (2013) convincingly argues that intersectionality has been "systematically depoliticized" within some feminist academic circles (p. 405). She writes specifically about what she calls "disciplinary feminism" which is centered around institutional success and not social justice. Instead of being invested in social change and counter-hegemonic knowledge production, this kind of work remains confined to the university in the form of theoretical musings. In the same vein, Petzen (2012) points out the propensity of academic feminism to talk about *how* intersectionality works and what *can* be done with it rather than actually doing empirical work with it.

Employing an Intersectional Framework

Explaining how intersectionality can be used as an analytic tool, Collins and Bilge (2016) highlight six core ideas that they think of as 'guideposts' when using an intersectional framework: social inequality; power; relationality; social context; complexity; and social justice

(p. 23). They are careful to point out that these concepts are not relevant to *all* cases and studies, but rather these ideas tend to appear in different intensities and combinations when an intersectional framework is employed.

First, social inequality is often at the core of how and why people think about intersectionality. Collins and Bilge (2016) argue that intersectionality as a theory only exists because of social inequality, and further, that it provides the added complexity to recognize that social inequality is almost always a product of multiple influences. Rather than focusing on only one form of oppression, intersectionality pushes us to consider interactions between various categories and oppressions.

Second, they discuss how from an intersectional perspective, power relations are understood as mutually constructed. No single factor shapes a person's life or identity on its own. On the contrary, multiple systems of power, be they race, gender, sexuality, age, ability, etc., work together to create the experiences of an individual's life. They write, "Within intersectional frameworks, there is no pure racism or sexism. Rather, power relations of racism and sexism gain meaning in relation to one another" (p. 25). In addition to relations of power, they also discuss the importance of analyzing 'domains of power'. Here they are referring to "structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal" domains (p. 26). They argue that it is important to examine the relations of power *within* various domains of power within each case of study.

Third, the intersectional approach to analyses requires a relational way of thinking rather than a binary one. Instead of thinking about relationships as either/or, they should be thought of

as both/and. This is a general way of thinking about *everything* as being in a relationship and not as being static.

Fourth, they point out the importance of considering the first three ideas mentioned above in *social context*. Using intersectionality requires being aware that historical, political, and intellectual contexts influence how we think and act. They argue that "Attending to social context grounds intersectional analysis" (p. 27).

Fifth, Collins and Bilge acknowledge that employing intersectionality and considering the themes of social inequality, power, relationality, and context together gets complicated. They suggest that the complexity of looking at the world through an intersectional lens reflects the complex, messy nature of the social world. They simply want those who claim to use intersectionality to acknowledge that it can be complicated, difficult, and at times frustrating to work through.

Finally, Collins and Bilge discuss social justice. While social justice is not a necessary part of intersectionality, they say that people who are invested in one are very often invested in the other. Here, they argue that it is important to keep in mind that not everyone accepts the importance or value of fighting for social justice. Many people in many contexts believe that justice has been achieved – (e.g. racism and/or sexism are things of the past). They argue that an intersectional analytical approach to problems of social justice can be fruitful for teasing out the possibilities for (and necessity of) complicated solutions to complicated problems (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Feminism and Popular Culture and Misogyny, Oh My!

Given that this project is centered around women who stream video games, a conversation about the culture in and around video game culture and popular culture more broadly is helpful. Video game culture is first and foremost about the consumption of a medium. Often game culture is discussed in terms of who belongs and who does not; who claims the identity of gamer and who does not. This discussion often starts off with a repetitive refrain along the lines of '*even though people assume only boys/men play video games, the number of girls/women who play is nearly equal'.* While true, this is becoming a tired, worn-out point that doesn't seem to be getting us anywhere. A more productive conversation is one about why there is still a widespread assumption that women and girls don't play games, don't want to play games, and when they do, they're 'bad' at them. This assumption has been around for a long time. Prior to the 1990s, marketing video games to girls/women was not even considered because they were not seen as a feasible market. As Brenda Laurel (2008), a veteran of the video game industry puts it, "Everyone knew girls simply didn't like computer games and wouldn't play them" (22). Plenty of research has been done to debunk these assumptions (see: Eklund, 2011; Gray & Leonard, 2018; Jenson & de Castell, 2010; Kafai et al. 2016; Sunden & Svenningson, 2012).

While women/girls reportedly play as much as men/boys, some scholars point out that they play very differently based on the context and technologies in use (Jenson & de Castell, 2011; Yee, 2008). For example, Jenson & de Castell (2011) found that girls did not have the same level of consistent access to gaming technology as boys, and so were less familiar with how it works. Girls and women who play video games often have access through a male relative such as a brother (Jenson & de Castell, 2011) or through a romantic partner (Yee, 2008). Even when girls

did display proficiency with a game, they would often dismiss their own abilities or engage in self-deprecating commentary about their gameplay, while boys were quick to point out their own successes. Yee (2008) also points out that female players face a great many social and cultural constraints in online gaming spaces that influence the ways they play (or choose not to). These include the overwhelming objectification of women in video games, the flat-out rejection by male players to acknowledge the presence of female players, the assumption that all female players are incompetent, and the likelihood of frequent unwanted sexual propositioning directed at female players. Some (if not most) of this behaviour can be explained by Sarah Banet-Weiser's (2018) understanding of the relationship between popular feminism and popular misogyny.

Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny

Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) discusses how feminism has become a part of popular culture in the form of popular feminism. First, it is found in media discourses and practices, and not solely in academic or activist circles. Instead of being confined to academic journals and textbooks, popular feminism is prominent in magazines, blogs, social media, broadcast media, and other digital spaces. Second, popular feminism and those who espouse it can be understood as being appreciated or accepted by like-minded others, in other words, they're *popular* feminists. Third, drawing on Stuart Hall (1998), Banet-Weiser argues that the "popular" is a site of struggle and contestation. Popular feminism has contested meanings and is a site of struggle over what feminism is and can be. She sums it up:

> Popular feminism is networked across all media platforms, some connecting with
> synergy, others struggling for priority and visibility. Popular feminism has, in many

ways, allowed us to imagine a culture in which feminism, in every form, doesn't have to be defended; it is accessible, even admired. (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 1)

Although it has made a recent resurgence, the idea of popular feminism is of course, not new. The women's movement of the 60s and 70s saw feminism making its way into popular culture – and the first mentions of 'popular feminism' - by way of Ms. Magazine. The magazine was filled with content relevant to the women's movement but took the form of popular women's magazines in an effort to co-opt capitalist consumer culture and media (Munford, 2014, p.2). More recently however, popular feminism exemplified by the likes of Beyoncé, Emma Watson, and Leena Dunham, has been distinguished by a break from postfeminism where it is generally understood that the need for feminism is over (Dejmanee, 2018).

Current iterations of popular feminism are firmly entrenched in neoliberal consumer culture. The most prominent popular feminist messages are centered around individualized notions like self-love and self-care. Moreover, there are a plethora of retail items emblazoned with the word feminist - from shirts to buttons to jewellery – available to buy and wear or display (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017). The commodification of feminism is again, nothing new, however Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer (2017) put forth the notion of the 'traffic in feminism' to explain how the "market-based production and reproduction of…popular feminism…seems to explicitly recognize that inequality exists while stopping short of recognizing, naming, or disrupting the political economic conditions that allow that inequality to be profitable" (p.886). It is through the traffic in feminism that a privileged, white, western woman who identifies as a feminist and practices feminist politics can at once purchase and wear a T-shirt that reads "this is what a feminist looks like", while a poor woman of colour makes

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those very same T-shirts for low-pay in deplorable working conditions on the other side of the world.

The recent rise in popular feminism has also been accompanied by a rise in popular misogyny (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Popular misogyny shares much with popular feminism, in that it is transmitted via a multiplicity of media, there is a sense of popularity or common understanding between those who subscribe to it, and it is a contested site of cultural meaning. Banet-Weiser (2018) agrees with the commonplace understanding of misogyny as a hatred of women, but adds that *popular* misogyny is the, "instrumentalization of women as objects, where women are a means to an end: a systematic devaluing and dehumanizing of women" (p. 2). For every blog about positive representations of women in media, there is a disparaging comment saying women should 'stay in the kitchen'.

Banet-Weiser (2018) explains the relationship between popular feminism and popular misogyny through the concept of an economy of visibility (p. 2). She argues that "economies of visibility fundamentally shift politics of visibility so that visibility becomes *the end* rather than a means to an end" (p. 23). This is different from the politics of visibility, which is typically seen as part of a social movement or struggle. Instead, an economy of visibility can be exemplified through the desire to be "trending" on social media or to purchase and wear a button that says feminist on it. In these cases, the economization of the desire for visibility transforms the goals and consequences of that visibility as something to be managed and controlled. The goal becomes more about normalization and recognition in the broader attention economy. It is this desire for space and recognition in the economy of visibility that fuels the relationship between popular feminism and popular misogyny. Banet-Weiser (2018) argues that both popular feminism and popular misogyny are informed by discourses around capacity and injury. The

neoliberal notion of the capacity to perform work, success, confidence, etc. and the injury or harm through sexism for popular feminists or through feminism/social justice for popular misogynists that diminishes that capacity (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

One of the main differences between popular feminism and popular misogyny is that the former is active while latter is reactive. Banet-Weiser (2018) explains that "For popular misogynies, every space or place, every exercise of power that women deploy is understood as taking that power away from men" (p. 5). Although historically feminism has always faced backlash from misogynists, the surge in the popularity and visibility of feminism in combination with the ease of connection and communication afforded by new technologies has created a fever-pitch of toxicity and vitriol directed at women - mostly by men who feel like feminism is harming them in some way.

Affordances

This dissertation also draws on the theory of affordances to examine how streamers and viewers use the Twitch platform. The term affordance has become somewhat of a buzzword in communication and media scholarship, the concept being used frequently but not consistently in its meaning. First coined by cognitive psychologist James Gibson (1977), he discussed affordances in terms of the relationship between people/animals and the environment around them. He argued that the environment holds certain physical properties that suggest an assortment of actions for those people and/or animals who perceive them as such. For example, when approaching a door with a simple metal plate or horizontal bar rather than a doorknob, generally, people perceive that they must push the door to pass through rather than pulling to open it. This does not mean that nobody will try to pull at the door, however the affordance of the door hardware is that a person passing through it will push to open it. Gibson explains that

while people may perceive things differently, the affordances of objects remain constant. He writes:

> The affordance of something does *not change* as the need of the observer changes. The observer may or may not perceive or attend to the affordance, according to his needs, but the affordance, being invariant, is always there to be perceived. An affordance is not bestowed upon an object by need of an observer and his act of perceiving it. The object offers what it does because it is what it is. (Gibson, 1979, p. 138-139)

Gibson's work established a foundation for the theory of affordances in ecological psychology. Since this early work, the theory of affordances has been taken up and adapted to suit the needs of many fields of study.

One early adaptation of Gibson's original work came from Donald Norman who wrote about affordances, constraints, and conventions primarily from a design perspective. He asks, "When you first see something you have never seen before, how do you know what to do?" (Norman, 1999, p. 39). Much of the answer to this question comes down to the design of the thing. Any given object or device provides the critical information required to make it useful. At a basic level, affordances "specify the range of possible activities" for a given object or device, though Norman writes about the importance of distinguishing between physical and digital environments (1999, pg. 41). He specifies that in digital environments designers are left with mostly perceived affordances and the interplay of conventions and constraints to guide users. Put simply, perceived affordances are the range of activities a user believes are available to them, however, that range of activities is limited by constraints and conventions.

Constraints, Norman (1999) explains, can be physical, logical, or cultural. Physical

constraints might make some actions unfeasible, while cultural and logical constraints can be

violated. Cultural and logical constraints provide appropriate feedback and shared cultural

understandings of how things can be used. In addition to affordances and constraints, Norman

adds the notion of conventions, writing, "A convention is a cultural constraint, one that has

evolved over time. Conventions are not arbitrary: they evolve, they require a community of

practice. They are slow to be adopted and, once adopted, slow to go away " (Norman, 1999, p.

41). This understanding of affordances and constraints is commonly employed by

communications and media scholars, though some have argued that the theory of affordances is

in need of updating to capture a more nuanced conception of technological affordances (Nagy &

Neff, 2015, p. 1).

Nagy & Neff (2015) put forward the concept of imagined affordance to modify what they

see as a "misappropriated [and] outdated definition of affordance from psychology" (p. 1). They

argue that communication and media scholars have relied on the concept of affordance to ease

tension between the theoretical positions of social construction and technological determinism,

and in so doing have wrongly accentuated the ways technology empowers users while often

neglecting the influence of the technology. Gibson's original theory of affordances was meant to

describe entirely material environments – how organisms perceive and act given what surrounds

them. Designers took up the theory of affordance to highlight the ability of designers to

intentionally influence people to use their creations in particular ways – to encourage certain

actions and constrain others. In the context of communications theory/communications

technology, the emphasis placed on human agency and the assumption that rational human actors

make choices that are afforded to them via the intentional design of those who create

communication technology has exaggerated the 'power of users' and neglected the role of perception and possibility.

Nagy and Neff's (2015) notion of imagined affordance is meant to highlight the importance of perception and of affordances 'existing in the world' that came from psychology, while modifying the theory to reflect the mediated nature of contemporary human reality. Imagined affordance emphasizes how affordances are borne out of the *imagination* of users and to a lesser extent, that of designers. No matter the designer's intention for their creation, once it is in the world its affordances facilitate social relationships between material things in unpredictable ways.

Similarly, Jonas Linderoth (2011) puts forth the argument that the distinction between digital and non-digital affordances in a heavily mediated society like ours is outdated. Unlike Norman's emphasis on the digital/non-digital divide and intentionally designed guided actions, Linderoth suggests that the important distinction is between perceiving affordances and using them. For him, affordances involve continuous learning. Not only must we learn how to *use* affordances, he draws on Gibson & Pick's (2000) notion of perceptual learning to argue that we must continually learn in order to develop our capacity to first *discover* new affordances.

People draw on all of their available senses to gather information, then act based on either an exploratory aspect of action or a performatory aspect of action (Linderoth, 2011, p. 5). As Gibson & Pick (2000) explain, the *exploratory* part of actions "function[s] to yield knowledge" about the affordances of the given situation (p.21). The *performatory* part of actions "have certain expected results; they are performed to produce them" (p. 21). This ecological approach

to affordances, Linderoth argues, can be used to understand gameplay. I suggest that it is also useful for understanding the use of the Twitch platform.

In this chapter I have explained my personal convictions around the importance of feminism in daily life and of employing a feminist lens to this work. I outlined the theories of intersectional feminism and of affordances which lay the foundation for explaining my study design and methodological choices. In the next chapter, I will discuss further how these theories were used in practice.

Chapter Four: Methodological Framework

Methodology

Qualitative, ethnographically informed methodologies frame this research project. O'Reilly (2009) outlines several fundamental criteria of ethnographic research. It is "iterative-inductive research", meaning that research design evolves throughout the study (p. 3). Rather than testing a hypothesis, inductive research allows theory to emerge from the data (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 104). This type of research aims to generate rich, detailed accounts of the human experience generated from a variety of methods that involved watching, listening, and asking questions. I employed four strategies to do this. First, I examined Twitch's policies in detail. Doing so allowed me to understand more of how the company understands its position, or role, in the streaming industry and what its priorities are. Second, I maintained my own Twitch channel for 2 weeks. This gave me a better understanding of how the platform works from a streamer's perspective. More importantly, it gave me an idea of the affective experience of what it is to livestream. Third, I purposively sampled 50 Twitch channels run by women, then recorded and analyzed 90 minutes of each of their streams (all publicly available). In so doing, I gained insight into social trends and discontinuities across multiple channels maintained by a diverse group of women. Finally, I conducted semi-structured interviews with five women who stream on Twitch. The interviews were essential for getting detailed, personal descriptions of women's experiences of livestreaming. The goal of this project was to answer the following questions: What is it like to live-stream for women and why do they do it? Who is being promoted in this space and how? In what ways are women supported as streamers (or not)?

Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by the Ethics Board at York University (STU2019-048). Potential research participants were notified that the project is part of a PhD dissertation. Participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions, share any concerns and discuss any other matters before, during, and after the interviews. Participants were entered into a draw for one of two CDN$100 pre-paid Visa's as renumeration for their participation.

Once individuals agreed to participate in the research, they were emailed an informed consent document and advised that if they had questions about it, they could email me or discuss them before the interview. I outlined the purpose of the study and explained that research participants could withdraw from the study at any time and that their identities would be protected. There were no anticipated physical or psychological risks related to participating in this study. Signing the consent form documented the participant's willingness to engage in this research study. Participants retained an electronic copy of the informed consent document for future reference.

To ensure confidentiality, only participant codes were recorded on transcripts used in the data analysis. All consent forms and data are stored on an encrypted external hard drive and accessible only to me. After five years, all data and records from this study will be destroyed.

Virtual Ethnography

The overarching approach employed in this dissertation is virtual ethnography. In plain language, virtual ethnography is the study of everyday life lived by people in virtual spaces (Boellstorff et al., 2012). As many have pointed out, culture is at the heart of ethnographic research (Boellstorff et al., 2012; Hine, 2015; Sundén & Svenningsen, 2009). The goal of this

kind of research is to understand how people make meaning in their everyday lives by embedding yourself within that culture. Hine (2015) writes that "An ethnographer is required to immerse herself in the setting, and to try to see life from the point of view of those who habitually populate that setting" (p. 19). For some ethnographers, this immersion involves fully participating in everyday life.

My approach generally (though not entirely) involved what Hine (2015) calls "unobtrusive exploration of online landscapes" (p. 158) and "non-reactive research methods" (p. 159). Rather than actively participating in Twitch chat channels, I opted to record streams so that I could slow them down (when needed) and observe all that was going on and revisit them when necessary. This approach was useful for collecting data that would have been difficult or even impossible to collect it by other means. Hine (2015) explains, "In general, non-reactive research methods are very useful where it may be difficult for respondents to give honest or authentic answers about their behavior, possibly because answers might be seen as socially undesirable, or because it is too trivial to remember, or because the researcher's line of questioning may lead respondents to frame their comments in a particular way that they might not otherwise use" (p. 159). One very obvious example of how participating directly could have been problematic would be if I had asked streamers direct questions about their feelings related to monetization in their chat channels. With their entire community watching, their answers would likely not be the same as having asked them in an interview privately.

An ethnographic approach necessitates a plurality of research methods to generate thick descriptions and immersion within the space or culture being studied (Hine, 2015; Sundén & Svenningsen, 2009). For me, this included learning everything I could about the Twitch platform (as described below), a short stint running my own Twitch channel, watching nearly 100 hours of

streams, and interviewing five women who stream on Twitch. These methods worked together to produce the immersive, rich, detailed experience of Twitch streaming I needed to answer my research questions. Hine (2015) highlights the adaptive nature of ethnography. Going into a study with an open mind about what you will find and the expectation that you will come across unanticipated information that requires revising your approach is par for the course. What follows is a more detailed explanation of how each method was employed.

Getting Familiar with Twitch

The first step I took to get familiar with Twitch was exploring the website. I spent some time browsing through game directories to look at what kind of browse/search features were available. I also spent some time watching one of my favourite streamers and actually paying attention to what features were available should I want to actively engage with her community. For example, I had subscribed to her channel for a few months, but had never joined the community discord server. I joined it and spent a few hours scrolling through previously posted messages and content.

Up until this point, I had really only looked at the parts of the Twitch site required to view a channel, so I dove into the reams of information pages most people don't look at. I started with the "about" page and worked my way into the weeds of the legal pages. I reviewed the policies including the community guidelines, terms of service, and the affiliate and partner program agreements. I read the pages related to their products, like bits, subscriptions, and Amazon prime, then about the advertising products Twitch makes available. Finally, I read all of the content Twitch makes available for people interested in streaming, including the "learn the basics" pages, the "build your brand" section, and the "engage your community" sections. I completed a thorough review of all of this content just once at the start of the project, and have

relied on Twitch's announcements to changes to programs, policies, and features since to stay informed. Studying Twitch over the span of a few years has proven to be an interesting challenge due to its rapid pace of change. It seems like every month the company is rolling out a new program, revamping a feature, or updating its terms of service. Another important way to keep up to date with the goings on at Twitch is through what is being reported in the news. Rather than carefully combing through pages and pages of rules, guidelines, and policies to see if anything has changed every so often, it is much easier to keep up to date through tech and gaming outlets like The Verge or Kotaku. Often it seems cultural events and social controversies that happen on and around the platform inform updates and changes to how things work, so keeping up with the news has been a useful strategy.

My 2 Week Streaming Adventure

When I was first starting this project, I was only familiar with Twitch as an occasional viewer. I would sometimes watch a stream of a game I was playing to improve my own gameplay. I had never really participated in chat, grown familiar with a community, become a fan of a particular streamer, and I had certainly not broadcast my own stream. As I was thinking about the platform and how I might go about studying it, I decided to make my own account/channel so that I could at least see what it looked like from the broadcaster side. What I didn't realize at the start is how quickly and intensely I would become absorbed by the process.

When a streamer logs into their Twitch account to stream for the first time, the first place they are directed to is the dashboard. From there, there is a link to achievements which serve as a kind of beginner's guide (more on this in chapter five). Although I'm not usually someone who is all that interested in achievements when I'm playing games, I found myself looking at the Twitch achievements and thinking to myself 'that's not so hard, I can do that' and feeling

immense satisfaction whenever I completed one. That feeling of *I can do it* quickly turned into *this isn't so hard, I can totally be a streamer*. I didn't have a webcam, but I did have a decent gaming computer, a good internet connection, and a lot of curiosity, so sometime mid-afternoon it began…

Before I knew it, I was downloading 3rd party streaming software, pouring over user's guides and stream set-up forums, making my own logo/icon/graphics, and looking at other streamers' profile pages so I could mimic them. I was fiddling with software, setting the stage design for my soon-to-be (or so I thought) regularly visited channel. I set it up so when someone followed my channel a small graphic would pop up on screen and thank them, I set up a point/reward system that was linked to mini games that could be played in chat, and I set up a bot that would remind people of my chat rules regularly.

I was running test broadcasts trying to figure out the broadcast settings – *why is the framerate so low?!?* – when my stomach started to grumble loudly in protest. That's when I realized it was 2am. I had spent an entire day working just to set up a channel. This taught me a few things. First, streaming looks simple, but it's really not. There are plenty of tools, software, and guides available to help you get started, but there really is a lot of reading, learning, and figuring stuff out through trial and error required. Second, it is really fun to do. At least for me it was. I derived great satisfaction each time I solved a problem or got one step closer to being able to start streaming. Third, I realized how much my lack of knowledge (of the technology *and* the culture) resulted in me mimicking what others had done. I felt the need to follow what seem like standardized practices across Twitch. For example, the follower pop-up. Before I had even started trying to broadcast, I was already designing my channel to imitate those of popular streamers.

The next day, I broadcast my first 4 hour stream…to nobody. I was playing *Overwatch* on my left monitor with my Twitch chat up on the right. It was terrifying. I'm not a terrible player, but I'm not great either. My performance statistics tell me I'm pretty average. When I'm playing by myself that doesn't bother me at all, but inviting others to witness my mediocracy was uncomfortable. I had a bad case of performance anxiety. For the first little bit, I would glance at the viewer count every 30 seconds or so with mixed feelings of trepidation and eagerness to see if anyone was watching. Nobody was.

The following evening, I booted up Twitch to stream for a second time, but this time I was much less nervous. Nobody was going to watch anyway. About an hour into my broadcast the viewer count changed to 2! The first viewer was me on my phone. As soon as I realized someone was watching I said hello and asked them how they were. No reply. I didn't know what to do, it was so awkward. I could feel my cheeks getting hot and was thankful I didn't have a webcam. I decided to focus really hard on the game and take over the role of shot-caller for my team, so at least I would be saying something. Then the viewer count went back down to 1 and I felt a combination of relief and disappointment. A few minutes later a message popped up in chat – "oh hey, I just moved from my Xbox to my PC. I didn't think you would talk to me. I have a keyboard now". They were back! I was surprised at how happy I was that they came back. I welcomed them back to my stream and gleefully informed them that they were my first viewer ever. They followed my stream (yay, my first follower!) and we chatted. At first it was just about the game and a bit about why I was streaming. Then we moved on to casual unimportant chit-chat. It turns out he lived in the UK, had a black lab named Odin, and had just lost his job. After about an hour and a half of playing competitive Overwatch and having this really long small-talk

sort of conversation with a complete stranger, I was spent. I told him I was going to log-off for the night, but that I hoped I would see him again. I didn't.

I streamed another few nights that week and a few more the next week for a grand total of eight streams that were each between 3 and 6 hours long. During all that time, I only ever had that one conversation. Occasionally the viewer count would go up to 2 or 3 for a few minutes but it never lasted longer than that and nobody ever replied to my eager greetings. After those 2 weeks I decided that I had learned all that I could from my little experiment without devoting far more time than I had available. Afterall, I had never intended to actually broadcast myself – I just wanted to know what the platform looked like for streamers. I am very glad that I went through the process, as it gave me some valuable perspective on the amount of effort and expertise required to set up even the most basic of channels. I am also glad of the conversation I had with that one random guy from the UK. He gave me an opportunity to experience at least a little bit of what it's like to perform gameplay and conversation for a stranger. To feel the weird combination of anxiety and excitement in knowing someone is watching you play and evaluating whether you're worth giving their attention to.

To anyone reading this who is doing or considering researching streaming, I highly recommend you give it a shot yourself. As I tried to convey in my description above, I learned so much about the affective experience of streaming through this process. I felt the *frustration* when some technical piece wouldn't work, the *satisfaction* of resolving problems, the *excitement* of noticing the view count tick up, the *anxiety* of noticing the viewer count tick up, the *disappointment* when realizing nobody wants to watch the stream. It is one thing to hear about these things when a streamer talks about them, but it is another entirely to experience them in your body; to feel the heat in your cheeks when embarrassed, the exhaustion in your head after

hours of small-talk with a stranger, or the flutter in your gut when you get a new follower. It is also instructive to experience how much energy and attention all of these emotions demand of a streamer. Through this exercise, I experienced what it is to invest time and labour into a project that ultimately has no monetary return.

Sampling

For the recordings I set out to obtain a diverse sample of 50 women who maintain/maintained a channel on Twitch. Most streamers have a detailed profile page that provides some demographic information, answers questions about what type of content the streamer broadcasts, lists any corporate sponsors, and provides contact information (either social media or email). Over the course of three days I browsed through the broadcasts that were live on Twitch in the top 20 game categories at three different times during the day (morning, afternoon, evening) and made a list of all streamers who identified as women on their profile. This resulted in a list of 136 streamers. I created a spreadsheet to keep track of several criteria as indicated on their profiles: if they identified their race/ethnicity, if they identified as transgender, their listed geography, if they were dedicated to one game only or played a variety of games, if they also did creative streams, and if they used a facecam or not. I also kept track of their number of followers and whether they were partnered with Twitch.

To generate a sample of 50 streamers, I intentionally included all women of colour (16) and women who identified as transgender (3) on their profile. I then randomly sampled five women from each of four categories (no facecam, unique geography, dedicated games, and creative content) using a random number generator (random.org). Finally, I sampled the remaining 11 women from categories separated by number of followers (<5,000; 5,001-99,999; 100,000+). I did this to ensure the sample included some small, medium, and larger streams. The

goal here was not to achieve a representative sample, but instead to elicit as diverse a sample as possible. As mentioned previously, most research on livestreaming is focused on popular, monetized streamers. Including streamers with different audiences, different goals, and different identities allows for a richer understanding of what it's like for women to livestream.

This all worked very well for the recording sample, but when it came time to reach out to potential interview participants it was another matter entirely. Out of those 50 women in my initial sample, I was able to obtain contact information for 36 women. After contacting them, only two were willing to be interviewed. As T.L. Taylor kindly explained to me, when you start a research project you plan it exactly how you want it, and then 90% of it needs to be revised along the way to make it all work. Obviously, my initial sample was not a big enough pool to interview from, so I went back to my initial list of 136 streamers and contacted another 42 women for whom I could find contact information. This gave me another two interviews. From this point on, I spent hours in Twitch directories skimming through to find women streaming who had contact information listed. In total, I contacted 120 women, but was ultimately only able to interview five women. Moreover, all five participants identified as white.

There are several reasons why I believe I had difficulty recruiting interview participants, particularly women of colour, queer and trans women, and others inhabiting marginalized identities. It can be difficult to establish relationships with people online without going into physical spaces to find and meet people. For all I know, my emails to streamers could have been going to spam folders or defunct accounts. I also found that women of colour, queer women, trans women, and those who identify as struggling with their mental health were much less likely to post contact information on their profile pages. It stands to reason that these women likely experience increased harassment and abuse online compared to others and so they would be

more reluctant to post contact information publicly. Finally, given that I was mostly looking for women who did not support themselves financially through Twitch, a majority of them were working other jobs and streaming on the side. With a full-time job and a part-time streaming gig, these women are assuredly very busy and likely do not have time, or do not want to spend time participating in research.

Why only women? Why *these* women?

Much of the live-streaming research to date is concerned with streamers who have a large following and/or derive their main source of income from streaming (see: Johnson & Woodcock, 2017; Taylor, T.L., 2018; Witkowski & Manning, 2019). Rather than focusing on those streamers who have attained 'success' as Twitch would frame it, my aim was to focus on a group of streamers unique from what other research has explored[4]. For example, Hilvert-Bruce, Neill Sjoblom & Hamari (2018) conducted a study examining the social motivations of viewers on Twitch. Their project sample was over 95% male and they did not report any other demographic information (p. 61). Christopher Bingham (2017) conducted a critical discourse analysis of a podcast that focuses exclusively on professional streamers. Woodcock and Johnson (2019) examined affective labour and performance on Twitch, but again focused on professional streamers. I am most interested in hearing a multiplicity of perspectives. In line with that aim, I used an intersectional approach to sampling. I also chose to study exclusively streamers who identify as women. I did so for two main reasons. First, gaming and tech spaces are heavily influenced and dominated by men and masculinity. The male subject position is generally the assumed default when people think about streaming video games. I wanted to challenge this idea by making my project entirely about women. This obviously does not mean that studying the

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[4] Notable exceptions to this generalization include the work of Kishonna Gray and Samantha Blackmon.

diverse perspectives of men is not important, but that there is other research (most research) which does that work. Second, is more a matter of practicality. As a woman and an early-stage academic without name recognition, it was much more likely that women would be willing to engage with me and my work.

Recording

Using free software called Open Broadcaster Software (OBS), I recorded three 30-minute segments that were separated by at least one week for each of the 50 channels I sampled to get a sense of each streamers' style and audience. This resulted in a total of 150 recordings that translates into 75 hours of recorded streams. Observing the same channel at different times helped to give a more comprehensive picture of their channel, its community (or lack thereof), and accounted for one-off occurrences that can sometimes happen in a live environment (e.g. technical difficulties with the streamers' equipment). Each recording also included a capture of the streamers' profile page for further data collection and analysis.

Interviews

As I mentioned above, although I originally had the goal of conducting at least 20 semi-structured interviews, I was only able to successfully recruit five women willing to participate. Interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. Interviewees were selected with the goal of accessing a diverse range of stream content and streamer demographics to elicit as many perspectives as possible. Given that participants were geographically located around the world and work largely in an online context, interviews were conducted and recorded (with permission) via either Skype or Zoom, or through email with a request for permission to follow up through text-based communication (IM chat/email) afterward if needed.

DeVault & Gross (2012) argue that "Interviewing is a powerful research tool for feminist researchers interested in exploring women's experiences and the contexts that organize their experiences" (p. 36). For this project, there are several overarching goals in conducting interviews: First, to find out why these women engage in streaming and often other content production. Second, to find out more about their lived realities and experiences of practicing this craft. Third, to discern a better understanding of the contexts in which they work and play. I opted to conduct semi-structured interviews because they offer a combination of preparation and flexibility that allows for in-depth responses and reflection (Boellstorff et al. 2012). I mostly used my prepared interview questions as a way to guide the conversation when needed. I also took the opportunity to ask participants if they had any questions for me several times throughout the interview, which in some cases produced fruitful conversation that would not have occurred had I not asked.

Analysis

To analyze the recordings, I took detailed notes and selectively transcribed portions of each recording. Then I used the qualitative software Nvivo to organize data into themes through several rounds of coding. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed similarly.

First, I observed one 30-minute recording from each of the 50 women I had sampled. During the observation, I drew on Adrienne Shaw's (2017) work on affordances in which she argues that merging Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding theory and that of affordances theory can provide a useful way to examine the political implications of audience activities in interactive media spaces. This involved observing the recordings with a series of guiding questions in mind: What is the feature? What is it intended to do? How do people use this feature? In what ways does it constrain users? How does it promote certain activities/actions and for who? Do

streamers/users talk about these features? If they do, what are they saying? While observing the recordings, I took detailed notes in Nvivo in relation to these guiding questions, but also anything else I thought was interesting or could be important later. I then proceeded to do an initial round of coding to organize data into themes. I used these themes to inform interview questions for participants. I then repeated this process for the remainder of the recordings, refining themes and categories, and creating detailed memos throughout the process. All five of the interviews I conducted were recorded and transcribed. Each interview transcription was coded using the same process that was used for the recordings.

Overall, this process resulted in a unique dataset that captures some of the practices, and experiences of women who are not often the focus of academic attention. In the next chapter, I discuss some of the prominent features of the Twitch platform and the affordances thereof.

Chapter Five: What Can Affordances Tell Us About Twitch?

I think the best place to start thinking about what it's like to be a woman who streams on Twitch is with the platform. The ways Twitch and its features shape, guide, limit, and even manipulate interactions between and with humans play an important role and should not be underestimated. Only those actions which are afforded by Twitch are possible through the platform. For example, viewers are only able to communicate through text, not speech as streamers can. At the same time, Twitch's design and the culture that has grown around it have a great deal to do with what actions are *perceived* by those who use it. For example, emotes[5] have particular cultural meaning attached to them and are used by viewers to convey messages and feelings that might not be possible without emotes. This chapter is dedicated to looking very closely at some of Twitch's most prominent features: achievements, affiliate and partner programs, bots, commands, rules, auto-mod and moderators, and monetization features (advertisements, bits, subscriptions, donations). Each feature is part of the structural design of Twitch that users interact with. Drawing on data collected through the Twitch website, stream recordings, and interviews, I will discuss what each of these features is, some of the ways they are used, how the feature promotes or restricts certain actions, and how people talk about the feature.

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[5] Emotes are small graphics used by viewers in any Twitch channel's chat. They are similar to the emojis used on smartphones.

Features

Achievements

One key feature of the Twitch.tv platform is a series of achievements outlined for broadcasters. I wrote about achievements briefly when I was recounting my own short-lived streaming experience, so I won't repeat what was said there. Twitch's achievements serve as a beginner's guide, or a task by task list to follow for someone just starting out. They work like achievements in any game – as you complete the task(s) your progress is tracked. Once you complete the task, the related achievement icon lights up and moves to the 'completed' section.

The very first set of four achievements are blocked into a section titled "so it begins" with a short message reading "You've started your path as a twitch streamer" (see figure 6). To
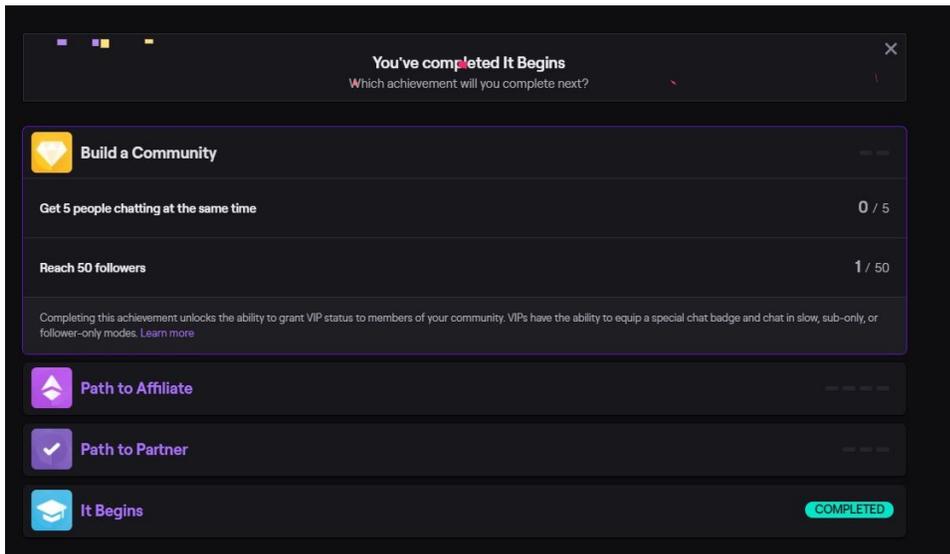
FIGURE 6: SCREEN CAPTURE OF "IT BEGINS" ACHIEVEMENT STREAMER DASHBOARD

accomplish this first block, you must explore your dashboard, update your stream title, update your game/category and community, and start your first stream. These steps are simple and easy to achieve. Once you have completed the four achievements a check mark appears, that achievement block collapses, and another block opens up. That block is called "the path to affiliate" and it is followed by another called the "path to partner" – these are the sequential *minimum* requirements for monetizing one's stream. I will revisit those later.

The rest of the achievements are mostly goals based on things like time spent streaming, the number of followers a stream has, the number of concurrent viewers a stream has, the number of unique days a streamer has broadcasted in a given time period, and the number of users talking in the channel's chat simultaneously (e.g. see figure 7). Achievements generally have four tiers. They start with small goals and as the streamer progresses the
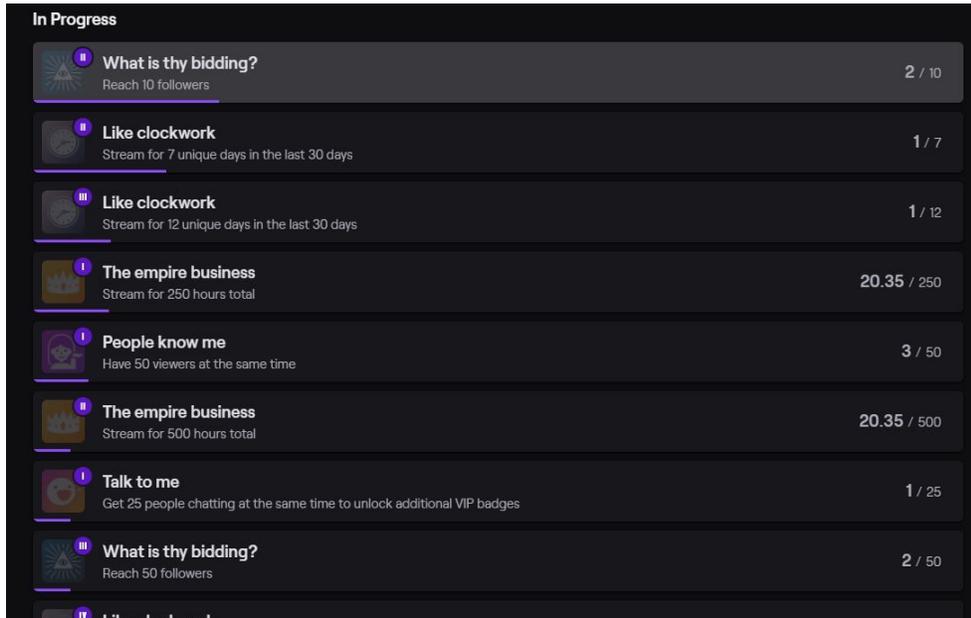
FIGURE 7: SCREEN CAPTURE OF IN PROGRESS ACHIEVEMENTS ON STREAMER DASHBOARD

objectives remain the same but with bigger targets. At tier one, they begin with goals like reach 10 followers and stream for 25 hours in the last 30 days. They then progress incrementally to much higher goals. Tier four achievements include goals like stream for 2000 hours total and reach 200 followers. There are also a few achievements that encourage broadcasters to use some of the platform's functions. For example, one achievement requires that a streamer add five channels to their auto host-list.

What is the purpose of including achievements? What are these achievements intended to do? The most obvious answer is to provide an easy-to-follow set of instructions for new streamers in a format they will (likely) be familiar with. They break down the bigger goals (e.g.

reaching 50 followers) into small more accessible goals (e.g. reaching 10 followers). Streamers

often talk about how when they first started broadcasting, they streamed to nobody or an

audience of one for weeks and sometimes months before they started to build a bigger audience,

which could easily be discouraging for new broadcasters. Completing the starting, smaller

achievements allows the broadcaster to perceive that they are making progress toward successful

monetization without actually being given any monetary compensation. Achievements ease the

drudgery by turning the process of starting out into a mini-game that rewards users for making

progress. Anyone who plays games knows that feeling – even if you don't actively seek out

achievements, when you do accomplish one and the message pops up, you get a little thrill – a bit

of excitement and the satisfaction of having completed something.

When you click on an achievement, the majority of them display a helpful tip. For

example, "The more you stream, the more often viewers can tune in. Take a break whenever you

need to" and "Keep your viewers around by welcoming them to your channel and responding to
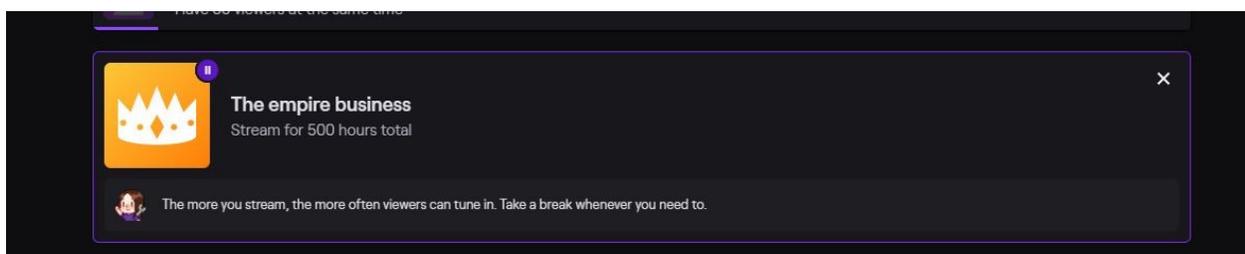
FIGURE 8: SCREEN CAPTURE OF A "HELPFUL TIP" LISTED ALONGSIDE AN ACHIEVEMENT ON THE STREAMER DASHBOARD

their comments" (Twitch Dashboard, 2018). While these tips can be innocuous and helpful, they

also allude to the pressures (and often requirements) of working in a precarious gig-economy

job. Afterall, the more you work, the more opportunities you have to make money, without any

actual guarantee thereof. For Twitch, this seems like an easy way to encourage people to create

content for their platform without having to hire them, train them, or pay them. These tips also

emphasize the significance of relational labour for broadcasters (Baym, 2018). Both viewers and Twitch expect that the streamer will interact and form relationships with people watching the stream regularly. This is made evident by the fact that the vast majority of streamers refer to their viewers as their community – more on that later.

There are also several specialized achievements apart from the main monetization paths. There is a series called "kind of a big deal" that has another four tiers. At tier one, these achievements require that a broadcaster have 250,000 hours total view time on their stream. This increases incrementally up to 10,000,000 hours at tier four. Rather than displaying a helpful tip, these achievements indicate a prize that the streamer will get when they successfully complete each one. The prizes consist entirely of Twitch swag (t-shirts, mugs, etc.) and are only available to Twitch partners.

This benefits Twitch in two obvious ways. First, these achievements encourage streamers to grow their channels - all the while producing content Twitch profits from. It gives newly partnered broadcasters more goals to work toward while they organize their own monetization/business plan for their channel. Second, Twitch swag acts as free advertising for the platform. When broadcasters display Twitch swag, they are promoting the company and promoting the perception that there is a connection between broadcasters and partners. When a streamer displays their Twitch branded clothing and items, they are claiming their place as *part* of Twitch. In reality, none of the streamers I spoke with (including those who are partners or affiliates) had any regular contact with anyone from Twitch – not even a helpdesk for technical or financial/business inquiries related to the platform.

The way the achievements are designed and presented also constrains users in some ways. The vast majority of the achievements direct the users' focus toward the analytic measures that Twitch prioritizes. Regardless of what the streamers' priorities may be, progress for a channel is assessed in relation to very particular measurements (e.g. number of sustained, concurrent viewers) and so broadcasters are going to pay more attention to these numbers. When I first read the achievements, it seemed obvious that this would cause tension between what content a broadcaster might like to stream and what content is successful according to these metrics. For example, a streamer may be interested in streaming a variety of games, or perhaps doing a weekly creative session, but finds that more viewers stick around when they play one specific game. Because these achievements very clearly indicate that more viewers is better, the streamer is pressured to play a game that gets them higher viewership.

Many of the women I spoke with brought up this tension without me prompting them. In one case, a woman had been aggressively trying to grow her channel and says she became obsessed with the analytic dashboard. She quickly recognized that when she did IRL streams she gained significant viewership, but she much preferred broadcasting video games. For months she followed the analytics and tried to base her content on what was growing her channel, but it made her very unhappy. Later, she made the decision to put her focus on maintaining her channel's existing community instead of continuing to try to grow her channel because she wanted to focus more on the content she liked and enjoyed. Achievements work to reinforce the perception that Twitch's analytic measures should be the driver behind content creation. This tension between what the

Figure 9: Meme widely circulated by streamers in 2018

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streamer wants and what they feel they need to do is captured in this meme that was circulating around Twitter in early 2018 (see figure 9).

Affiliate and Partner Programs

As I mentioned earlier, Twitch has two main programs through which a broadcaster can monetize their channel. Individuals can stream on Twitch without being an affiliate or a partner, however they have less access to Twitch features and no access to monetization programs. The first step toward monetization is to achieve affiliate status, which is then followed by partner status. Affiliates get access to more features and perks than non-affiliated streamers, and partnered streamers get even more access to perks and features than affiliates.

The notion of meritocracy is deeply embedded in the way these programs are promoted and explained by Twitch. Under the 'Twitch 101' subheading on their website, Twitch explains, "Achievements let you track your progress and once you reach the requirements, you'll see a link on your dashboard inviting you to Affiliate onboarding" (Twitch Creator Camp[6], 2019). Then they go on to explain the analytic numbers/achievements required to achieve partner status. Underneath the explanation and chart of what is required for partner, in small italicized font they add, "*Meeting the requirements for Partner does not guarantee Partner status. Once you become eligible, you can submit a Partner application form through your dashboard" (Twitch Creator Camp, 2019).

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[6] Twitch.tv/creatorcamp is a website that gives potential streamers information on how to set-up and start streaming.

The way the programs are outlined in the achievements and the language used on the Twitch website would have people believe each program requires just a few simple steps/tasks and that if you complete them you will be successful. This assumes that everyone is beginning from the same starting point, be it technical, financial, or social, and that they are able to negotiate and move through Twitch's culture in the same way. This chart (see figure 10) outlines what features are available to all streamers, affiliates, and partners respectively. Although the affiliate and partner

Feature	All Streamers	Twitch Affiliate	Twitch Partner
Monetization Tools			
Cheering with Bits	No	Yes No Custom Cheermotes	Yes With Custom Cheermotes
Subscriptions	No	Yes Up to 5 Unlockable Sub Emotes	Yes Up to 60 Unlockable Sub Emotes
Ads	No	Yes	Yes
Video Tools			
Transcoding	As Available	As Available, with priority access	Full access to Transcode Options
Squad Stream	No	No	Yes
Subscriber Streams	No	Yes	Yes
VOD Storage	14 Days	14 Days	60 Days
Stream Delay	No stream delay option	No stream delay option	Stream delay up to 15 minutes
Reruns and Premieres: Rebroadcast past content and show off new videos to your audience.	No	Yes	Yes
Payment Terms			
Chargeback Protection	N/A	Yes Bits Only	Yes Bits Only
Payout Timeframe	N/A	15 Days	15 Days
Payout Fees	N/A	Covered by Affiliates	Covered by Twitch
Other Features			
Stream Team Creation	No	No	Yes
Access to Self-Service Emote Tool	N/A	No	Yes
Customer Service	Standard Support Queue	Standard Support Queue	Priority Partner Support, Access to Partnership Team
Verified Channel Badge	No	No	Yes

FIGURE 10: SUMMARY OF THE FEATURES AVAILABLE TO ALL STREAMERS, AFFILIATE STREAMERS, AND PARTNER STREAMERS ON TWITCH

programs share some similarities, it is worth discussing them separately in more depth.

Affiliate program

As a Twitch affiliate, broadcasters get access to the subscription function, cheering with bits (more on bits later – for now think of them as Twitch currency), up to five sub emote slots[7], access to advertisements, game sales revenue[8], 14 day VOD storage[9], and a payout on the 15th of every month. Affiliates, however, are responsible for "payout fees". Payout fees range from $.60 USD to $25.00 USD each time the streamer is paid depending on where streamers live and how they choose to be paid (cheque, direct deposit, etc.). Further, an affiliate will only be paid once their account has accumulated a minimum revenue of $100 USD from the various revenue sources they have access to.

To become an affiliate, the streamer must 1) stream for 500 minutes in the last 30 days; 2) stream for 7 unique days in the last 30 days; 3) reach three average concurrent viewers in the last 30 days; and 4) reach 50 followers. To accomplish this requires enough economic capital to set up a stream – you need a decent computer or gaming console, a microphone, most streamers use a webcam, and you also need a fast enough internet connection to support the stream. This is at minimum well over $1000 just to start – far outside the reach of many. You also need the technical expertise to set up your stream. For example, I like to think of myself as a moderately tech savvy human – I don't often run into hardware or software problems that I can't fix myself with relative ease. Setting up my stream with fairly basic functionality took significantly longer than I thought it would. I unintentionally spent hours trying to get bots to do what I wanted them

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[7] Emote slots refer to the number of channel-specific emotes a broadcaster has access to.
[8] Digital games are made available for purchase through Twitch. When viewers purchase a game through a streamer's channel, they receive a share of the revenue.
[9] VOD storage refers to the ability to house video content on Twitch servers.

to, to set up basic notifications and alerts, creating a profile, and playing with currency and mini-game options. What began as a short writing break to fiddle with stream settings, ended in me looking at the clock realizing it was 2am and having accomplished very little that day. Streaming is not as technically simple as it seems, nor as easy as Twitch tries to make it seem.

Trying to achieve affiliate status is often an uphill battle for new streamers. When the vast majority of people first start broadcasting, their channel is buried at the very bottom of the directory because streams are ordered by number of viewers and typically, they don't have any. This means someone might potentially need to scroll through hundreds of channels before they come across someone just starting out. Even in my own short attempt at streaming I considered asking friends and family to open my Twitch channel on a browser on a minimized tab just to get myself a bit higher up on the game's directory during my two-week streaming stint.

So, starting out requires some social capital – you need to have people who can help out and click some buttons for you, be they friends and family, or a following from another platform. One participant I spoke with had been struggling to grow her Twitch viewership, but had a lucky unintended break on YouTube. She had posted a video on YouTube intended only for family and friends that happened to go viral. Given her success on the platform, she uploaded a few more videos then decided to stream simultaneously on YouTube and Twitch. Her YouTube community grew much faster than her Twitch community and so when she was offered affiliate status on Twitch *the first time* she actually rejected it because the affiliate contract stipulates that broadcasters cannot stream to another platform concurrently with Twitch while contracted as an affiliate. Each platform is competing with one another for advertiser dollars, so they limit the ability of content creators to upload the same content to other platforms in any way they can.

Although her YouTube viewership was much larger than her Twitch viewership, after several months she ultimately decided to stream solely on Twitch because she preferred the platform. She estimates that she was able to bring approximately one third of her YouTube viewership over to Twitch, which gave her a significant boost. This is consistent with Johnson and Woodcock's (2019) finding that many Twitch broadcasters who rely on Twitch as their main source of income already had a significant following on another platform (e.g. YouTube, Reddit, etc.) before they started streaming on Twitch.

Finally, you need a lot of free time to stream. A big part of convincing people to come back to your stream is being there when they show up. Generally, time is one of our most precious resources. This is particularly true for women and people who need a source of financial support to survive. There is plenty of research showing how women's time is often devalued compared to that of men (Freysinger, Shaw, Henderson, and Bialeschki 2013, 13-14) and that women typically do not have as much control over how their time is spent. For someone who needs to work 40+ hours per week to keep a roof over their head and food on the table, spending another 20-30 hours per week starting up a streaming channel without any guarantee of success or financial compensation might seem like a colossal waste of time. For those who do achieve affiliate status, the next step to further monetizing a Twitch channel is to apply for the partner program, which I will discuss next.

Partner Program

The minimum requirements to be partnered are similar to those for affiliates, but the numbers are much greater. Within the same 30-day time period, a broadcaster must stream for 25 hours, stream on 12 different days, and maintain an average of 75 viewers. Again, as Twitch

stipulates in the fine print, these are the *minimum* requirements to apply for partnership and do not guarantee it. Along with the inflated output requirements for broadcasters come obviously inflated input requirements. A streamer needs more of everything to attract and retain more viewers – usually a better equipment/technical setup, better creative planning and branding, and more money and time invested to make these things happen. This system works really well for Twitch – they get to have their 2.2 + million broadcasters attracting millions of people to their platform to generate ad revenue, meanwhile the broadcasters are the ones assuming all of the financial risk with very little, if any, consequence to Twitch if they fail. Twitch states that "Out of over 2 million active broadcasters, around 27,000 are Partners" (Twitch Partners FAQ, 2019). This works out to only about 1.35% of all active broadcasters being partnered.

Partners do get significantly more perks than affiliates. Like affiliates, partners get access to the subscription function. According to several participants I spoke with, the base contract stipulates that Twitch receives 50% of subscription income (for affiliates and partners). The advantage partners have over affiliates is that, depending on their performance metrics, they are able to negotiate the percentage of subscription money they get in relation to how much Twitch keeps. Additional partner perks include: the ability to unlock up to 60 sub emote slots (including the ability to customize emotes); game sales revenue; advertising revenue; 60 day VOD storage; the ability to delay their stream by up to 15 minutes[10]; Twitch covers their payout fees, which operate the same as explained in the affiliate section; the ability to create stream-teams (essentially a collection of broadcasters who work together on their independent channels); squad

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[10] This is helpful for streamers who are trying to prevent being stream sniped. This refers to a situation when a viewer intentionally queues for an online multiplayer game at the same time as the streamer in an attempt to get into the same game. There are several reasons a viewer might do this, including to harass the streamer, to cheat by strategizing using the streamer's viewpoint, or because they want to play with the streamer.

streams, where a handful of partners can co-stream so their streams appear split screen on all participant's channels; and finally they have access to "priority partner support". This priority support is meant to be a perk of being partnered with Twitch, however, as I mentioned earlier when talking about achievements, this priority partner support is not considered useful by the women I spoke with. One participant told me,

> There is a form that you can fill out if you need help with stuff…but there's so much…many people in different departments that I wouldn't know who to contact if I needed to. I just kind of email the general support if I ever need anything…Twitch support is kind of like a meme. They're not very helpful, which is unfortunate (Streamer B)

Streamer D was also unimpressed with Twitch support saying:

> If you are one of the small league partners who sits with maybe 100 viewers, you are still a small fish in the pond. You might have gotten the partnership, that doesn't mean anything. Four years ago, if you've got partnered, that meant that you have a specific staff member who was at your beck and call at all time. Now, there's too many of them to do that. So, a small partner streamer does not mean much.

Something very important to note is that the differences I have outlined between affiliate status and partner status so far are those that Twitch outlines in their recruitment documents. Something that came up a few times during interviews is the differential treatment partnered, and particularly 'successful' partnered, streamers get from Twitch when it comes to things like policy enforcement. Streamer D said:

There are some people who get away with things they shouldn't get away with according to [Twitch's] own TOS and had that been someone else, they [would be] banned immediately. And that inconsistency is just ... I don't deal very well with unfairness, but that is a very big injustice in my opinion.

It seems that Twitch is more lenient with those streamers with a big following who generate a lot of revenue, or at the very least that is a perception held by many streamers. Twitch updated their nudity and attire policy in the spring of 2020, after facing frustration from streamers and viewers alike in regard to inconsistent TOS enforcement (Good, 2020). In the fall of 2019, Twitch suspended several high profile streamers for streaming "sexually suggestive content", which included cosplayers, and women in gym attire. In an interview with Kotaku, Overwatch streamer Fareeha, who was given a warning and 90-day probationary period

FIGURE 11: IMAGE OF FAREEHA THAT RESULTED IN A TEMPORARY SUSPENSION FROM TWITCH

for posting the image (see figure 11) on her channel, expressed her frustration saying, "I'm aware another streamer was just recently banned for a cosplay that showed a little bit of leg…It baffles me that she and I are the people getting reprimanded for 'not sticking to TOS' while others who have honestly done way worse go under the radar" (Grayson, 2019). Fareeha also recounted a time when she was being targeted by a YouTuber known for leading online

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harassment campaigns against particular streamers. As a result, she received a hate speech ban from Twitch. Reflecting on the incident, she said, "The people responsible for it were saying disgusting, racist, sexist and homophobic things about me on all kinds of platforms, and when I needed Twitch for support and help, I was the one who got punished for it" (Grayson, 2019). Further, when a popular streamer flagrantly breaks the rules and gets away with it, it will inevitably generate a lot of controversy. That controversy then serves to promote the offending streamer to a bigger audience, which leads to more revenue and the cycle continues on and on. Streamer E explains:

> I guess in general it's frustrating that Twitch doesn't really enforce like certain types of ban measures very evenly across the board. It seems that people who aren't partnered get a permanent ban so much more often for accidental or one time mistakes or one time slip-ups, compared to your partners who intentionally fuck up and just get like three-day bans. Which are just basically an advertisement, because they like put on social media. They put on Reddit like, "I got banned…And like look at this clip. All I did was show half a boob or half a nut sack or whatever. (Streamer E)

The accounts of the experiences these women have had with Twitch demonstrate a missed opportunity for both the company and for female content creators. Twitch could be using their partner program to promote female content creators, to highlight their creativity and talent, to show that Twitch is a place where women belong. Instead of offering support to their partners and potential partners, in these cases Twitch has either ignored the women, or has actively made things more difficult for them by punishing them seemingly arbitrarily. Three of the women I interviewed are affiliates with Twitch, but only one of them is actively trying to achieve partner

status. The other two have decided that there is not enough benefit to them personally to jump through the hoops required to get partnered.

Bots

Another feature used almost universally in Twitch channels is bots. Bots essentially enable automated messaging that a streamer can set up in a variety of ways in their channel. It requires 3rd party software (there are many options). Streamers commonly have bots that announce: reminders to follow and/or subscribe; links to their social media accounts and YouTube channels; P.O. box information for sending gifts; listing perks offered exclusively to subscribers; providing information about giveaways or upcoming events; information about channel sponsors; info about how to purchase channel-specific merchandise[11]; and more of the like. These kinds of announcements are set on a timer – so every 'X' minutes, the bot will cycle through these preprogrammed, customized messages

FIGURE 12: EXAMPLE OF THE USE OF A BOT IN TWITCH CHAT

in the channel's chat. For example, in one channel, every 20 minutes a bot would announce in

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[11] Many streamers have customized, channel themed merchandise for sale online.

chat "Easy way to help the stream? Please retweet my going live tweet <link to tweet>" (e.g. see figure 12).

Reminding viewers to follow or subscribe is easily the most common use of bots on Twitch, however, bot announcements can seem impersonal and streamers use and/or mitigate this in different ways. In one example, a streamer was using a bot to encourage viewers to use their Amazon Prime account to subscribe to her channel. Her bot announces every so often "If you have Twitch Prime click the sub button over the stream to see if you have a free sub available to use in this stream! #SELLOUT". In this case, having a bot make the announcement works to distance the streamer from the act of asking for financial support. Much like in other digital culture industries, there is a lot of tension between authenticity and 'selling out' (Duffy, 2017). In the case of streaming, viewers want to see the streamer as an idealized 'authentic' 'gamer' who is streaming because they 'love games'. While that may well be true, they are also an actual human being who is working to generate income to support themselves. Even in her bot message, this full-time streamer is trying to diffuse some of that tension between authenticity and making a living when she jokes about being a sellout.

Bots are sometimes used to provide afk (away from keyboard) messaging if the streamer needs to step away from their desk for a few minutes – which happens quite often in most streams. In one example, the streamer needed a bathroom break, so she switched her stream set-up to afk mode. In chat, the bot announces "F off guys. Lemme pee in peece" then about 30 seconds later it announces "thanks for watching the stream! If you would like to support the stream further, stay for the 3 minutes of ads! Subs and twitch prime users do not see the ads[12]

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[12] This is a perk that ended some months ago, but those who were already Amazon Prime subscribers retained their ad-free viewing. New Prime members are now subject to all advertising.

and it helps out <streamer name>. Thank you!". Every 30 seconds or so, the bot would cycle through these two messages until the streamer came back. While I was observing this happen in her channel, she went afk for a few minutes, a viewer popped into chat and asked if there were ads playing because the streamer was ending the stream. No humans replied, but the bot cleared things up for them shortly after the viewer asked. The viewer continued to watch the channel and as a result the streamer generated ad revenue while she was away and didn't lose that viewer to another channel. In this case, the bot works akin to an automated assistant while the streamer is away by providing information about why the streamer is away and for how long while simultaneously encouraging people to support the stream in a way that doesn't seem pushy.

Bots also provide instant feedback to people's interactions with the stream in case a human (the streamer or a moderator) is immediately unavailable. Streamers can set up their channel so that interactions like follows, subscriptions, hosts, donations, and cheers are recognized and celebrated by a bot. When viewers/subscribers give a streamer money they generally want some kind of recognition for it and streamers usually make a really big deal about it. Typically, when someone subscribes to a channel a bot will make an announcement that usually involves a lot of channel-specific emote spamming and exclamation points. Sometimes the donator/subscriber will have an opportunity to have a message read aloud either via text-to-speech or by the streamer. Although streamers virtually always acknowledge the subscription/donation personally, they are often engrossed in the game they are playing and don't have the time to acknowledge the sub or donation for a few minutes. In that scenario, bots serve as a sort of stopgap between when the viewer's interaction occurs and when the streamer can react to it.

Commands are another feature worth mentioning briefly here as they often work hand in hand with bots. Commands are interactions viewers and/or moderators can initiate in chat. Twitch does have some basic commands (ignore, timeout, ban, slow, etc.), while 3rd party software gives a plethora more options and allows streamers to create their own custom commands. There are many commands that are commonly found across channels, for example: current song, time live, age, song request, social media, schedule. These kinds of commands are often used by streamers and mods as canned responses to questions that are asked frequently in chat. Often the information given in command responses can be found on the streamer's profile page, but the person didn't bother to scroll down and read it. Using a command to remind viewers of the chat rules is done regularly across channels. Commands provide a quick and easy way for the streamer and her moderators to convey information that is either requested from viewers frequently or that the streamer wants to disseminate broadly to her community.

Customized commands are where the more creative and interesting commands come into play. One example of an interesting command comes from a streamer who is often asked to be people's girlfriend/wife. In response she made a !marry command. If you type !marry in her channel's chat, the bot spews this message <commenter's name> your request for marriage got registered, you are number 1656 in line, please hold". Whenever someone asks the streamer to marry her, a mod or a viewer will chime in with !marry. The number in the bot response acts as a counter and goes up every time the command is used. In one way, this command eases the streamer's mental burden of having to even think about those kinds of interactions because they become automated. When someone says 'marry me' or something to that effect in chat, someone else will inevitably add them to the 'marriage queue' using the command. I think this strategy

also takes away some of the power of these kinds of comments – it shows that the person making them is not special, they're one of over a thousand idiots who say stuff like this and they're not worth the streamer's attention. Their interaction with her has been relegated to a bot response that mocks them.

Another surprising occurrence that appears to only occur on women's channels[13] are commands that count bodily functions. Several of the streamers I observed had commands that counted their hiccups, burps, or sneezes. In a search of "streamer hiccups" on YouTube, I found hundreds of videos with thousands of views that are just clips of women streaming on Twitch while having the hiccups (I could not find any of men). Perhaps when streamers create these command counters, it's a way of acknowledging that a hiccup or burp or whatever has happened (or having viewers/mods do it) without having to engage in a conversation about something that (some) viewers apparently seem interested in. None of the women I interviewed had one of these commands on their channels, so I did not have the opportunity to ask someone about it directly. Commands seem to function largely as a tool to organize and automate information gathering and dissemination - as a tool to reduce labour required to manage a busy channel. Further, commands highlight the kinds of information requests streamers get repeatedly or that they think is important for viewers to have.

Channel Currencies and Minigames

A feature that was only introduced by Twitch in early 2020 is channel specific currency. Twitch calls it channel points. Given how recently this was added, it was not present in any of the channels I observed for this project, however streamers have long been using 3rd party

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[13] It should be noted that I have never systematically watched men's streams as I have those of women.

software to create their own channel currency and mini-games to go along with them. These currencies are usually specific to the branding of the stream. For example, one of my favorite streamers Cuppcaake calls her community the bakery, and so the currency for her channel is called sprinkles. How people can accrue currency, who can accrue it, and how it can be spent is entirely up to the streamer. Usually, all viewers get a baseline amount for just watching the stream say 1 point every 5 minutes for nonsubscribers and 3 points every 5 minutes for subscribers. There are also a variety of games that can be set up – like boss battles where anyone can join in by contributing a certain amount of currency or spin the wheel, there are also a variety of gambling and betting options.

How people are able to spend the currency is when things get particularly interesting. Some streamers require that viewers spend a certain amount of currency to enter giveaways or contests as a way to ensure that only committed viewers get access to the contest. More commonly, currency can be spent as a means of exercising control over some aspect of the stream. One minor, but common way is through song requests – streamers can set it up so that viewers or subs can purchase songs to be played on stream, some streamers offer viewers the opportunity to buy a spot on the streamer's team for a given number of games in multiplayer games, and one of the most interesting I've seen allows viewers to spend a certain amount of currency to silence another viewer in chat for a given period of time.

The first time I came across the silencing option was in a fairly active chat. A subscriber asked the streamer if she would consider wearing her hair in a ponytail – the streamer responded that it was uncomfortable to wear her hair that way with a headset on, but pulled her hair back with her hands to demonstrate what it would look like. The streamer had dyed their hair a vibrant colour, but it was growing out, so when in a ponytail it looked like she had brown hair. Another

subscriber chimed in with "no ponytail with those roots please" and a surprisingly long

discussion about her hair ensued. The general consensus was that the ponytail would look bad.

The subscriber who had recommended the ponytail in the first place, spammed a bunch of angry

emotes and then spent a ton of currency to time out (silence) everyone who had said they didn't

like the ponytail for ten minutes. Then someone else retaliated with a ten minute silence for the

subscriber who silenced everyone else. So many viewers had been silenced as a result of the

ponytail controversy, the chat became very quiet and it completely altered the feel of the

channel. Creating these kinds of interactive currencies and mini-games can be a fun way to

engage viewers and/or subscribers with a channel and its community, but that is very much

dependent on what kind of rewards people can purchase and how much influence people can

exert over the channel.

Rules

Many streamers (not all) have a detailed profile section of their channel that outlines

important information for viewers. This typically includes some combination of a short

biography, a description of the streamer's gaming set-up, social media links, P.O Box

information, subscriber/donation perks and processes, stream schedule, sponsor advertisements

and links, and a frequently asked questions section. I also noticed that 26 of the 50 women whose

channels I had sampled for this project also had a 'chat rules' section. Several questions came to

mind. Why did half of them have rules and the other half not? Did the rules follow similar

themes between channels? Do men make rules sections for their stream profiles? How do

streamers use these rules? Do people follow them? What if they don't?

What I think makes the rules most interesting is what problems they must be trying to

solve. If streamers were not experiencing the behaviours they make rules about regularly, it's

unlikely they would feel the need to create rules dictating what behaviours are not acceptable in their channels. For example, streamer D told me she originally posted chat rules because "someone came in [to her chat] and said, "Show me your (beep)". I read through the profiles of the 50 women whose streams I have recordings of looking specifically for rules sections making note of any rules that appeared more than once. I then did the same thing for 50 randomly selected male streamers for a quick comparison. This is what I found (see Table 1).

As I mentioned, 26 of the 50 women included a rules section in their profile. For the men only 18 out of 50 included rules. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the two most common rules for everyone were to be respectful to the streamer, the mods, and/or each other and no isms – sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, or hate speech. For the men 'don't be a jerk' was tied

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF RULES FOUND ON STREAMERS' PROFILE PAGES

Rules	Female Streamers (n=50)	Male Streamers (n=50)
Has a "rules" section	26 (52%)	18(36%)
Be respectful	16(32%)	6(12%)
No ism(s)/hate speech	14(28%)	8(16%)
No promoting other streams or advertising	12(24%)	5(10%)
Specific language only (e.g. English)	11(22%)	3(6%)
Don't be mean/jerk/rude/ "a dick"	11(22%)	6(12%)
No posting links without permission	10(20%)	5(10%)
No backseat gaming	9(18%)	4(8%)
No spam or trolling	9(18%)	5(10%)

No vulgarity, swearing, or offensive language	6(12%)	1(2%)
No talk of politics or religion	2(4%)	3(6%)

for second place. I found the third one a bit surprising at first, but it makes a lot of sense – "no promoting other streams or advertising". These streamers are in a situation where they are vying for the attention of as many people as possible. Having other broadcasters advertised in their channel risks their viewers leaving the channel for that being advertised. Most rules regarding language were asking for English only – which again makes sense given that you can't moderate what you can't understand and my project only includes English-language channels. When I originally saw the "no backseat gaming" rule pop up nine times, I admit that I assumed this was heavily influenced by gender. In my own experience, it is often assumed that women don't know how to play a game or that they will benefit from the assistance of a man. While it was not as prevalent, four men included this rule in their list too.

When I asked participants about their chat rules, almost all of them immediately referred to a feature that Twitch introduced a short time ago. When a viewer tries to type in chat for the first time on a given channel, if the broadcaster has set it up to do so, the viewer will be confronted with a pop up that outlines the chat rules and must be acknowledged with a click before they are able to type anything. The women each indicated their appreciation of this new feature, as one participant said in reference to their profile page, "No one really reads that stuff though, unfortunately…People come in and always ask questions that are in people's profiles, and it's like, 'just take two seconds'. Nobody does. They get to the video, and they just want to

interact and then don't do anything past there" (Streamer B). This new feature forces viewers to acknowledge the rules set out by the streamer in a way that stops them from interacting before they at the very least are made aware of what kind of behaviour is acceptable in that specific channel. Although this feature obviously doesn't stop everyone from violating a channel's rules, the women I interviewed all spoke very positively about it.

Several participants talked about how clearly articulated chat rules made moderating their chat easier. One explained:

> So if someone comes in and they just say something right off the bat, you give them one warning. And then that just automatically gives me the right to say, you literally have to, like before you even start typing for the first time in chat, it pops up for you, right. So its like, if you just hit okay and you ignore those rules, that's not my problem. That's yours. So you just kind of have that right to be like you get one warning, and then you're gone after that. (Streamer B)

Streamer A said something similar:

> I think I used to not have that section, but then people would come in and they would get banned, and then they'd be like, "Well, you don't have any rules, so I can say whatever I want." So it's basically like having a, "Hey. This is the law, and if you don't obey the law, then get out," sort of thing.

Having clearly outlined rules allows streamers to put the onus on individual viewers and creates a sense of fairness within their community when the streamer or a moderator sees the need to restrict someone's access to chat or the channel.

Honourable mentions

I did come across five examples of rules that really stuck out to me as having a specific story behind them or just didn't fit into one of the categories that I think deserve some attention. First, **"Boobs will not be shown"**. Clearly this is a request this particular streamer has received often if she felt the need to make this a specific rule. This harkens back to conversations around camgirls and the widespread assumption that women somehow have it easier in the world of streaming because they can simply show some cleavage and be successful.

Second, **"If you're ever in doubt about what/what not to say, just realize we're all real, live people here. if you wouldn't say something to someone's face, then don't say it over the internet"**. This rule speaks to the belief that people act very differently on the internet from how they do offline. The assumption implicit in this rule is that the people who say egregious and offensive things online wouldn't do the same when face to face in a physical space. I think that's far too generous an assumption. The people who would make comments that are so outside of normal social interactions that they require a rule to moderate their participation are very likely either people who don't understand that how they are behaving is problematic and would do the same in any situation, or they are behaving that way on purpose to elicit a response.

Third, "**Trolls need love too! If you see a troll, give them a big internet hug and help them know that they're welcome to join us as the positive contribution that they can be and that we'd love to meet their amazing authentic self**". This streamer encourages her community to embrace trolls and try to overwhelm them with positivity. This same streamer did a five hour IRL stream mainly focused on discussing bullying and sexual harassment on Twitch with her viewers. She talked about her own experience, what she's heard from others, and what

she thinks can be done about it, so this is obviously a topic that is very important to her and she finds Twitch to be a useful platform to speak about it. While it is closely related to the previous rule highlighted above, her approach to it is more about blatantly showing trolls that she knows they exist, and is a performative move meant to demonstrate that they have no power over her. That said, trolls have obviously had enough of an impact on her streaming experience that she devoted space on her profile page to acknowledging and condemning their behaviour, and devoted an entire stream worth of free labour to discussing trolling and bullying.

Fourth, "**Here are some comments you might want to make while backseat gaming…it's an attempt to save you some energy so that you can just chill in chat with everyone else**" – she then lists a handful of common gameplay mistakes she makes. This quote comes from the profile of a streamer who does not have a rules section – but does has an entire section devoted to preventing backseat gaming. In fact, the first stream of hers that I observed, she spent a full 15 minutes talking about how frustrated she was by people who try to give her advice…specifically, she said:

> If you're wanting to say anything about my game - you can scroll down bellow and see…listed in my bio panel - I've got every single thing that is wrong with my playstyle down there and if there's something that's not listed and I ask directly, then you are more than welcome to make a comment about my game. But 100% of the time I go back through my games whether it's in replay or in the charts and I usually talk about it pretty thoroughly and I also make comments during the game…I'm just saying you're going to get very tired of saying the same things because I know I do. So just come into the front seat with me, you don't have to sit in the backseat, it's all right guys, there's plenty of room for everyone…this isn't my practice…I'm just playing star craft to chill, to have a

good time, to hang out with you guys. There's no way I can practice on stream. I've said

this a million times, I'll say it again, you can't practice on stream.

This streamer was clearly very frustrated and struggling to find an effective way to manage this

problem. I think part of the issue here is that this streamer plays one game exclusively and it is a

strategy game. Viewers watching her stream are likely to be more focused on her gameplay

choices than if she was playing a different genre. By explicitly stating that she is aware of some

of the flaws in her strategy and what they are, she is hoping to prevent that behaviour.

Finally, this last rule "**no racism/sexism**" belongs to the only male streamer out of the 50

that I looked at who mentioned sexism specifically. Further down his rule list was another rule

"**worthless e-girls = BBB-BAN**", so he's essentially violating his own rule in his rules list. This

speaks to the fact that only particular people are accepted in these spaces. Perhaps this is a

performative defensive move to refute any viewers who might tease him about interactions with

or playing games with women.

Although these last five rules were not repeated in multiple channels, I think they are still

important to pay attention to. No matter what the intended purpose of the rules, I argue they do

important work in telling viewers a story about what kind of channel, or what kind of

community, to expect from a given streamer. They give people a sense of how to speak to each

other, how to engage with the streamer, and what the culture of that stream is like.

AutoMod

Moderation (or lack thereof) plays an enormous role in each channel on Twitch. Before

discussing the humans behind it, I want to note that Twitch does have an automatic moderation

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function that the streamer can enable through their dashboard (see figure 13). It includes four

categories: Identity language (race, religion, gender, orientation, disability, hate speech, etc.);

Sexually explicit language (sexual acts, sexual content, body parts); Aggressive

language (hostility towards other people, bullying); Profanity (expletives, swearing, vulgarity).
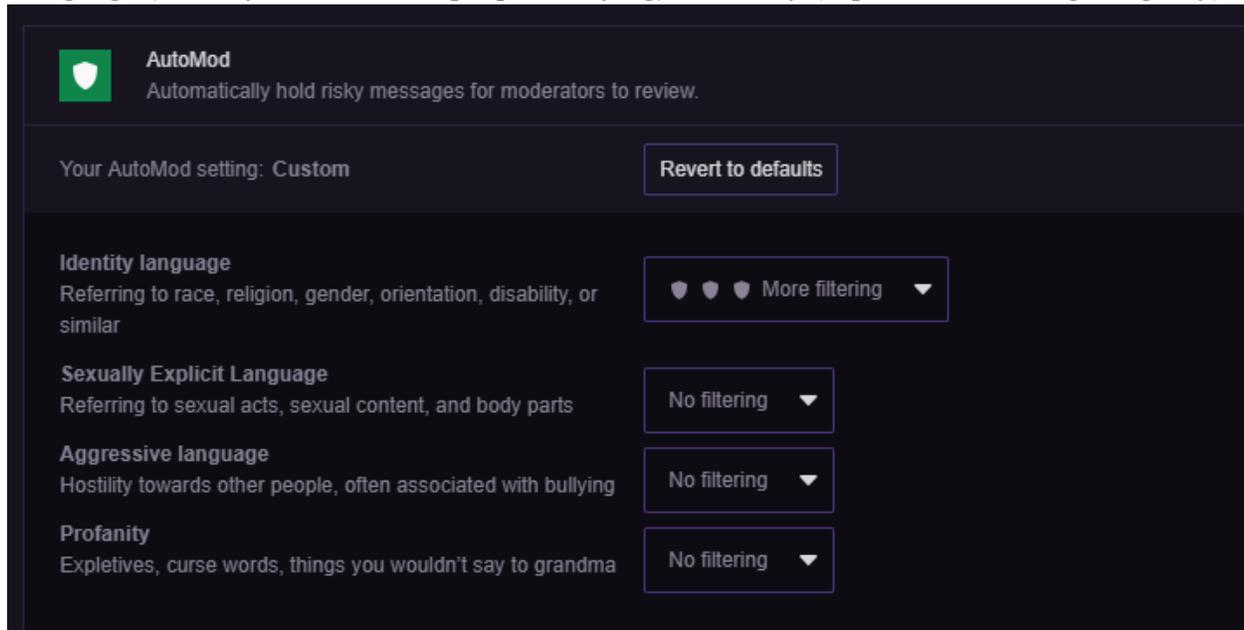

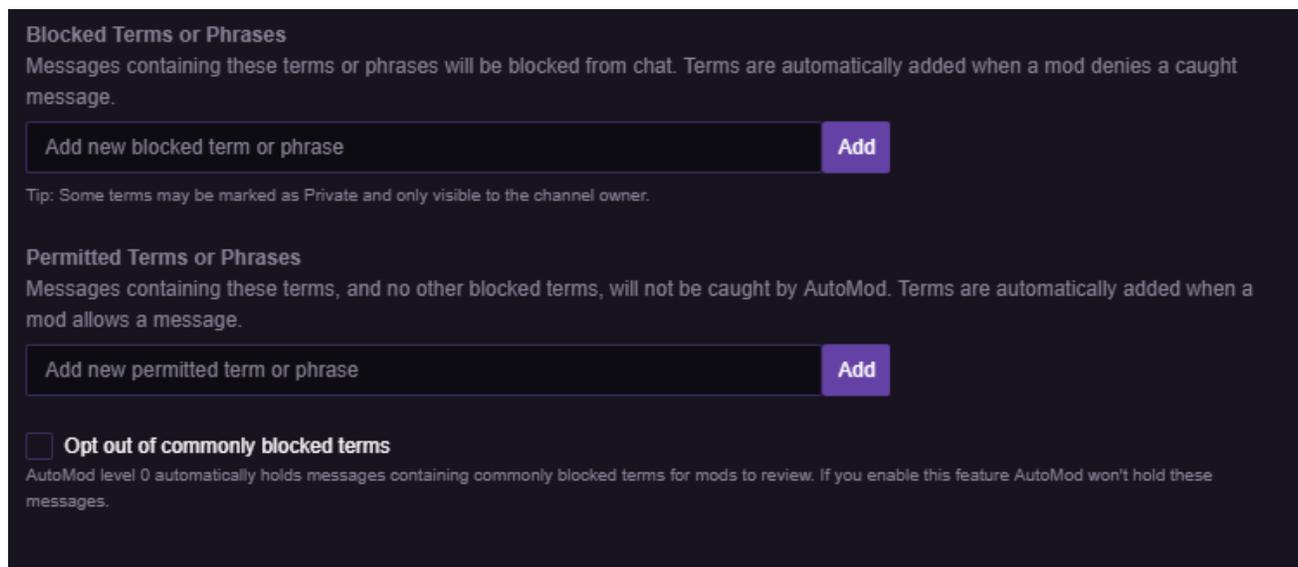FIGURE 13: SCREEN CAPTURE OF TWITCH AUTOMOD TAKEN JUNE 14, 2020

FIGURE 14: SCREEN CAPTURE OF AUTOMOD CUSTOMIZABLE OPTIONS FOR STREAMERS TAKEN JUNE 14, 2020

The auto mod function can be set to one of five levels. Twitch (2019) explains "Level 0: Only commonly blocked terms; Level 1: Only remove hate speech; Level 2: Also remove sexually explicit language and abusive language; Level 3: Remove even more identity language and sex words; Level 4: All of the above, plus profanity and mild trash talk". There is also an option to flag customized words (see figure 14). The automod feature doesn't outright block messages, but rather hides them and alerts human moderators appointed by the streamer to decide whether or not to allow the message to go through to chat. It also notifies the viewer or commenter that their message is being held for review by moderators.

Moderators

Human moderators are given special chat privileges in a specific channel by the channel's owner. Generally, moderators monitor the chat and ensure that a given channel's rules are followed, they assist the streamer with administrative tasks, and they answer viewer questions. The streamers I spoke with tend to be very picky about who they assign to moderate their channels because they put a lot of trust in them. Streamer B prefers to know her moderators in person. She told me, "And yeah, so usually if I've met you in real life, I'm willing to mod you easier, because I know you. You're a real person to me at that point". Streamers D and E both rely on their romantic partners to be moderators, while streamer B's brother is a moderator for her. The women I spoke with placed a lot of importance on the relationship between themselves and those they select to moderate their channels.

What role moderators play and how much influence they have greatly depends on the channel(s) they moderate for. When I asked her what her moderators do for her in her channel, Streamer B replied:

My mods are pretty hands-off, I would say. Mostly they're just there, and they ban people if I need people banned, and they keep ... make sure that the chat is going well. I know some people whose mods do everything for them, like if they need anything done community-wise, if they need, I don't know, alerts done. If they need anything, the mods do it all. And I'm like, "This is a volunteer thing. I'll do most stuff, and then if I need something, I know you guys are there," so yeah.

Streamer B felt like asking too much of her moderators would be taking advantage of their free labour, while at the same time recognizing how helpful they are. That said, from observing the 50 channels over a few months, it was very apparent to me that moderators can have a significant amount of power and influence over the tone of a stream's chat, who can interact in chat, and how.

One of the most obvious things you see moderators doing is deleting inappropriate messages. They use their moderator privileges to decide what can be posted to the public chat and what violates the rules for Twitch or the channel. When I asked streamer G what her moderators do for her, she told me:

Well, obviously they're going to moderate the chat. They can protect you from a lot of stuff. So you can concentrate on what you are supposed to do as a streamer, entertain people. Whenever you get distracted, have to focus on, "Hey, is that toxic in my... I just have to look, read it." You use time on that instead of focusing on entertaining. So the moderators there are helping you with that, and I trust them a lot.

I find this idea of being protected very interesting. Moderators might very well be protecting the streamer from having to see or engage with toxic behaviour, but nobody is doing that for them.

While some inappropriate chat behaviour is targeted directly at streamers, that does not mean it has no impact on those tasked with managing that content.

In a relatively popular channel I was watching (she averages approximately 1000 concurrent viewers at any given time), the moderators deleted the message "Who is even watching the gameplay?". Without context this doesn't seem like an overly offensive message, but perhaps just an offhanded comment from someone who is not very interested in the stream. At the time this message was deleted, there were a handful of viewers commenting about how "beautiful" and "sexy" the streamer was, as well as making specific references to various body parts. When this message appeared, it was deleted almost instantly. It is unclear why this specific message was deemed inappropriate while the others were allowed to pass, but it illustrates the subjective and perhaps arbitrary way moderators can impose their control over the interactions occurring in a channel's chat. Interestingly, when that one message was deleted, the comments about the streamer's looks intensified drastically to the point where many messages were being deleted. The streamer did not comment at all about what was happening in chat, instead she spoke only about what was happening in the game she was playing.

It seems common that when moderators start deleting messages, the offending commenters tend to start spamming messages that get deleted and others join in. I'm not entirely sure why they do this. It might be that they think if the mods are overloaded, some of their messages might get through. Perhaps it's just more fun when you're part of a group spamming inappropriate messages. Streamer D touched on this briefly when talking about inappropriate chat messages in her channel. She told me, "If it is a lewd comment or something like that, I ignore them outright. I don't address them at all and act like I have not noticed. Because from

experience, I think most of them just want a reaction. And the less you give them, the easier it is to get rid of them".

Moderators are a voice of authority for their given channel; what they say and how they say it can shape the tone of the chat and how others behave. For instance, in one example, a viewer was being extremely racist in chat and the mod responded, "can you not be racist pls you Brexit fuccboi". This is a small stream that I would best describe as grungy. The streamer is often drunk and smoking on stream, she uses profanity regularly, and often the topics of conversation would likely not be deemed acceptable to the average person. The way her moderator reacts to the racism in chat clearly articulates that it's acceptable to be rude, to swear, to mock others, but that racism goes too far.

Moderators are often expected to model behaviour that is acceptable and punish behaviour that is not. In another example, the streamer was playing *Dead Space* for the first time and a viewer was being a bit overenthusiastic with hints and suggestions for the streamer. Eventually, the mod chimed in with "there's a difference between !spoilers and hints". This !spoiler command prompted a bot to announce that "spoilers of any kind – games, tv, movies, etc. are not allowed in chat and will result in a timeout".

Another way moderators are used is to encourage viewers to interact with the stream. In one stream, a moderator was periodically writing in chat "hey guys, don't forget to hit that follow button if it is your first time here and you're enjoying yourself!". Each time she repeated the message, she would phrase it a little bit differently. Like, most channels, the streamer also has a timed bot announcement that says something similar every 15 minutes or so. After the mod had made this announcement a few times, a viewer chimed in saying "tbh still don't see why you

even do that. The bot is saying what you're wanting to say". The moderator explained that they were making sure people see it because not everyone pays attention to bots. She then asked if it was bothering the viewer. The conversation quickly escalated into a bigger (somewhat heated) debate between the moderator, the viewer, and a handful of subscribers who were supporting and defending the moderator. During this time, the streamer was focused on her gameplay, but after a few minutes her match ended and she joined the conversation. The streamer addressed the viewer, saying that she thinks her moderator's approach is "more personable" and "cool" and that people are more likely to read it. She emphasized that she appreciates the moderator and the effort they're putting in. She then said directly to the mod "seriously, don't listen to him now. Cuz I love it". She then questions the viewer as to why they would think it's off-putting, saying:

> honestly, [moderator name] was doing stuff like that before she even got moderated. That's what made me realize she would be such a great mod, is because she would do little things like that, go above and beyond in the stream, to get the community closer together…bring awareness to what we have to offer other than the stream. So, don't discourage her from doing the things she's doing that everyone appreciates. It lets people know that we're more than a stream, we're a community. And even our mods are getting involved with it and it's not just bot messages telling you to follow me and join the discord just cause.

This conversation demonstrates how much streamers value the relational labour their moderators provide. In fact, volunteer moderators have played a key role in online social life for over 40 years (Matias, 2019). Volunteers moderated early message boards, Social media sites like Facebook and Reddit, Wikipedia relies on volunteer moderators, and so do livestreaming

platforms like Twitch. This allows platforms, and in this case, streamers, to reduce labour costs while being able to claim they are creating safe places for to interact (Gillespie, 2010).

Twitch sells its platform as highly interactive. In their advertising they exclaim "With chat built into every stream, you don't just watch on Twitch, you're a part of the show" (Twitch, 2018) and so this is the experience many viewers expect. The streamers' task of playing a game, performing for the stream, and interacting with chat simultaneously is a difficult one. Moderators help take up some of that work, and in so doing have a lot of influence in shaping the culture and feel of a channel's community. Although this work is deeply appreciated and often needed, I was unable to find any examples of streamers who pay their moderators and none of the women I interviewed provide monetary compensation to their moderators.

Monetization Features: How streamers make money

"Earning on Twitch is the icing on the cake, so let's make the most of your time on and off stream to make some money. Get tips from popular streamers on how to optimize subs, merch, ads, and sponsorships to help you make a living sharing what you love" (Twitch 2019, creator camp).

The first half of this chapter discussed several of the most commonly used features available to streamers on Twitch. This half of the chapter will focus specifically on the features that allow streamers to make money. Here I will explain how video advertising, bits, subscriptions, and donations work through Twitch, how the features are used, and what users have to say about it.

Video Advertisements

Twitch offers prospective advertisers several options for how they want to advertise including video ads, and several display products that can appear on the Twitch homepage and other non-channel specific spaces. Here, I am only going to discuss video advertising that is run on individual channels, specifically pre-roll ads and mid-roll/ad breaks as they are the ads that streamers can receive revenue from. Whenever a viewer first clicks their way to a Twitch channel run by a streamer who is part of the affiliate or partner program, they are confronted with a ~30 second advertisement video. There are a few exceptions to this. First, streamers have the option to offer ad-free viewing to their subscribers as a perk (only on their channel). Second, streamers have the option to disable pre-roll ads for incoming viewers by choosing to have mid-stream ad breaks instead. The longer the ad-break they run (30, 60 or 90 seconds), the longer their channel will be free of pre-roll ads (10, 20, or 30 minutes). Third, Twitch has a program called Twitch Turbo that users can subscribe to for $8.99 CDN per month that has several perks including ad-free viewing across all of Twitch.

Twitch only recently made changes to their advertising program that gives affiliates access to advertising revenue and removes video advertising from non-affiliate/partner channels. Twitch explains the need for ads on the platform on their blog:

Advertising is an important source of support for the creators who make Twitch possible. This change will strengthen and expand that advertising opportunity for creators so they can get more support from their viewers for doing what they love. We want Twitch to remain a place where anyone can enjoy one-of-a-kind interactive entertainment, and ads allow us to continue making Twitch the best place for creators to build communities around the things they love and make money doing it. (Twitch, blog, 2018)

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The way Twitch explains it runs very much in contradiction to how my research participants spoke about advertising. The perception from the streamers I spoke with is generally that ads are really only useful for the bigger streamers and actually harmful for the smaller ones. Streamer D explained:

> they've just opened it up [for affiliates] with ads as well. But that is again, another one of those predatory situations where it's, you have to have a certain amount of viewers watching this to actually be worth it…It's just that you have to hit a certain amount of viewers to actually earn enough offered. And let's face it, for a small streamer that has less than 50 viewers, you putting an ad up will most likely get viewers to leave. Then it's not worth it when you get maybe 3 cents for that ad. It's not worth it…someone like Dr. Disrespect sits with 40,000 viewers. He can run them every 15 minutes and no one will blink an eye. (Streamer D)

Advertising revenue for streamers is based on how many people view the ads they run. Twitch "expects" that a streamer running 90 seconds of advertisement video every 30 minutes will receive between $1 and $2 per viewer monthly. For an affiliate trying to grow her channel so she can apply for partner status, running an ad every 10, 20, or 30 minutes might drive away precious viewers at a time when every single viewer counts toward the concurrent viewer statistic that Twitch requires. While Twitch suggests that their advertising program creates more opportunities to support content creators, it seems to mostly reinforce the success of streamers who already have significant viewership. A streamer who is partnered can offer their subscribers an ad-free experience on her channel. That makes it less likely for those viewers to check out an affiliate's channel if they are then subject to regular ad-breaks. The change that removes video advertising from streamers who are not eligible for ad revenue is a positive one, in that it gives fledgling

streamers a small leg-up. It seems in the case of advertising, affiliates and/or partners with a small following get stuck with the worst of both worlds – plenty of advertising on their channels, but little revenue as a result.

Bits are a virtual currency sold by Twitch, that viewers can only use through the platform. Twitch explains that bits:

> give you the power to encourage and show support for streamers, get attention in chat through animated emoticons, get recognition through badges, leaderboards, and acknowledgement from the streamer, and even unlock loot during special esports events like Overwatch League Cheering. Bits also allow you to chat in Sub Only chat rooms. (Twitch, Guide to Cheering with Bits 2019)

To purchase bits in Canada is $1.85/100 bits, $9.25/500 bits, $26.35/1,500 bits, $85.06/5,000 bits, $166.42/10,000 bits, or $406.81/25,000 bits. Donating bits to a streamer is called cheering. For every individual bit cheered in their channel, the streamer receives one cent. The idea behind it is that bits are supposed to provoke and/or contribute to a celebration of the streamer in chat. Twitch promotes cheering as a fun and interactive *chat* feature that can bring streamers and viewers closer together by emphasizing the social aspects of cheering. And yet, Twitch is essentially explaining bits in very transactional terms where the person cheering is trading encouragement and support for the streamer in exchange for attention, recognition, and acknowledgement from them. The platform is commodifying the relationships and intimacy streamers have built with their audiences. They of course leave out the part where Twitch makes

a tidy profit off of the exchange by inflating the cost of bits beyond the monetary value actually given to the streamer.

Twitch incentivizes cheering (rather than direct donations) in several ways. First, they give the option for streamers to enable cheer badges. Cheer badges are emotes that appear before a viewer's name in chat. Once enabled the streamer has the option to use the default badges or to customize their own. Viewers can then unlock these badges based on how many bits they have cheered in that particular channel. Second, Twitch introduced cheermotes, which are only available on partnered channels. Cheermotes are emotes (customizable by the streamer) that viewers can use only when they are cheering. The idea is that the more bits being cheered, the more exciting and fun the emote should be. Third, there is a feature that allows streamers to display the top three cheerers for either the week, month, or all-time in a panel on their profile. There are also special cheer badges that come with being a top cheerer. All three of these incentives promote a sense of competition between viewers who take pride in showing off their fandom and support for a given streamer. At first glance it seems like a good way for viewers to support their favorite streamer and for streamers to encourage their fans to support them. But in reality, Twitch takes a very large cut of the money, which Streamer B pointed out is rather predatory during her interview. Twitch does not offer a way for viewers to donate directly to streamers because there would be no profit in it for them.

Subscriptions

Viewers are able to subscribe to Twitch channels so long as the streamer is either an affiliate or a partner. It is an extremely user-friendly system. At the top of the streamer's page there is a "subscribe" button. When a viewer clicks on it, they are presented with several options for how they can subscribe to the streamer's channel. Each month, Amazon prime members can

use one 'free' subscription that will support the streamer. The standard option is a "tier one" subscription for $4.99 USD/month. Each streamer customizes what perks their subscribers receive and they are listed in this section. There is also the option for a "tier 2" subscription for $9.99USD/month or a "tier 3" subscription for $24.99USD/month. Finally, tier 1, 2, and 3 subscriptions are able to be given as gifts. As I mentioned earlier, base contracts for both affiliates and partners stipulate that Twitch receives 50% of subscription income.

Subscriptions and subscriber status have a lot of influence over how people interact in any given channel. Being a subscriber comes with a certain status. An identifiable icon appears next to a subscriber's name in chat so that everyone else is made aware that they support the channel financially and they also gain access to several channel-specific emotes that can be used in any Twitch chat. Subscribers also receive special perks for the channel(s) they subscribe to. Common perks that streamers offer are ad-free viewing, special chat privileges (e.g. the ability to post a link), the ability to participate in sub-games where streamers play multiplayer games with their subscribers, and sub-only discord invites. Essentially, being a subscriber to a channel offers individuals more access to the streamer, her moderators, and other subscribers. Streamers are also much more likely to respond to subscribers' comments in chat than they are to those of non-subscribers.

When someone subscribes to a channel, the streamer almost always makes a big fuss about it, especially if it is a first-time subscriber or a long-time subscriber. Like I mentioned in the section about bots, when someone subscribes there is typically a visual alert or graphic of some type that pops up on the screen, an audio queue (a song or noise) that plays, and people (and bots) spam cheerful and hype emotes in the channel. The streamer usually thanks the individual who subscribed by name for however many months they have been subscribed for or

welcomes them to the community if they are a new subscriber. This is interesting in that a viewer could have been active in a channel for months or even years prior to subscribing, but is only deemed "part of the community" once they have subscribed, or financially invested in it.

An interesting phenomenon that happens often across Twitch is commonly known as a sub-train. In this case one or two people will subscribe within a short period of time, which then creates energy and excitement around subscribing and then many more people subscribe in rapid succession. This usually results in the streamer taking a break from whatever they are doing and demonstrating a very emotional response to the outpouring of support they are receiving.

In a similar way to sub-trains, sometimes an individual will gift one or two subscriptions in the channel, then after a short time they go on what seems like a gifting spree. Streamer A told me about a subscriber who gifted 200 subscription in her channel in one day. Describing her reaction, she said:

> And I was like what is going on? Like me? And it was just one of those things that it's not things that can necessarily happen on a prerecorded video where they feel like they can't interact with you, you know. So I must've said or done something right because that person is like you're awesome, here. And I'm like oh my God. Are you okay, do you have money for food at home? (Streamer A)

I've observed this happen a few times while watching streams for fun. I was watching a stream just last week when this occurred. In the space of 30 minutes (that's how long I watched), the person gifted over 50 subscriptions to other people in the channel. This created much conversation in chat, with some people speculating that this person would gift a sub to everyone in chat who was not already subscribed. Other people started questioning if the credit card they

were using was stolen. The streamer was very thankful and gracious giving the person a lot of attention at first, but over time because of the constant (yet spaced out) subscription notifications, you could tell the streamer was starting to get uncomfortable. In a way, the person gifting the subscriptions was taking control of the channel. There is an expectation that the streamer will always acknowledge a subscription, but when she receives more than one alert per minute, it becomes repetitive and excessive. I would argue that this also takes on a gendered element, where women are especially expected to be grateful and show an 'authentic' and emotional response to support. Streamer D spoke about this expectation saying:

> I've always felt that pressure that I can't just be myself and just, "Thanks. I appreciate it." No, you have to almost make it a big deal. Okay. And it feels uncomfortable, but I think there's something you just have to because otherwise you seem rude or you seem really bitchy or something like that. And that is a very clear distinction between men and women on Twitch. (Streamer D)

For the streamer in the gift-spree example, I imagine it was difficult to figure out how to react in an appreciative way while still maintaining focus on the game she was playing and keeping the rest of her audience entertained. As a viewer, at first, I thought it was a nice thing he was doing, but after a few minutes I found the whole thing to be quite obnoxious on the part of the person gifting. He was essentially demanding that the streamer give him undivided attention. If all he wanted to do was support her channel, he could have made a direct donation to her or gifted the subscriptions privately (an option given at the time of payment). Instead, this individual tried to monopolize the streamer's time and attention and it was very obvious that the streamer was struggling with trying to do that while not alienating the rest of her audience.

Donations/Tips

Given that Twitch does not provide a fair donation function for streamers, many have set up their own donation system through a third-party like PayPal. Many of the streamers I observed use Streamlabs or Streamelements to facilitate donations through their channel. In

order to donate, viewers click on a link in the channel's profile page which takes you to the streamer's donation or tip website. Underneath the donation or tip link there is more often than not a message along the lines of 'donations are never expected but always appreciated' or 'donations are used entirely to improve the quality of the stream' as if streamers need to justify even giving their viewers the option to donate to them directly. Streamers are very keenly aware of

FIGURE 15: EXAMPLE OF A DONATION PAGE COMMONLY USED BY STREAMERS

the tension between promoting their work as building a community around a shared passion for a leisure activity and actually trying to make a living off of it.

Once donors have accessed the donation page (see figure 15), they can typically choose the amount to donate, type a message to the streamer to a maximum of 255 characters, and some streamers give the option for the donor to select a graphic/animation effect that will appear on

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the stream's overlay for a brief time. Because donations are not made directly through Twitch, streamers who are not partnered or affiliated can devise their own donation program. Doing so, of course, requires significant knowledge in terms of how to select an appropriate platform to use, how to configure the software and account(s) to facilitate the exchange of currency – particularly if the streamer wants to accept donations from countries outside their own.

Donations play an interesting role in how a streamer monetizes her channel given that it if often the only form of financial support they receive that Twitch does not get a percentage of. Twitch has designed their monetization features in very user-friendly ways, so that users are encouraged to support streamers using bits or subscriptions. Further, those come with the added benefit of badges and emotes for supporters. Streamer E reflected on this when she told me:

> I mean it used to be a few years ago that tips through PayPal, were the way that people would get funding, but now that there's Patreon and now that there's subscriptions and bits through Twitch, a lot of it's going through that. The amount of money is actually gone down. I think it's also because there's a lot more streamers on the platform now, so people are okay, I have $100 to like spend on fun. And they split it between 10 people instead of just two every week. I think that's a big part of it. And then also Twitch itself has much more integrated abilities to be able to have someone subscribe or have someone throw bits in the chat and Twitch gets 50% of that cut…Twitch used to get non of that…Now half of the money is gone because of the ease of access. (Streamer E)

I thought this would create a situation where streamers try to incentivize supporters to support them through PayPal, but that was not the case for the channels I observed. In fact, streamer A told me that she appreciates the monetization features Twitch offers.

Conclusion

So far, I have spent a great deal of time discussing specific features of Twitch and some of the practices that have emerged around them. In doing so, I have criticized some of the ways Twitch promotes and frames their platform as a meritocratic space where anyone with the drive, determination, and passion to stream can succeed. Analyzing these features through the lens of affordances has brought to the fore considerations about how platform design can deeply influence how people interact. As more and more of social life becomes digitized, the need to understand how digital platforms shape and influence our ability to connect with others in meaningful ways should be interrogated. This is especially the case when one or more parties are reliant on the platform and online engagement to make money. It is with this in mind that I turn to chapter six to discuss monetizing relationships.

Chapter Six: Monetizing Relationships. It's all about the bits baby!

It's no secret that Twitch's primary mission is to generate profit; after all, it *is* a corporation. They certainly don't want people to think of them that way though. In their own words, Twitch's reason for existence is to "build communities around live content that's interactive, diverse, and always next level" (Twitch, company, 2020). Like other forms of social media, this intersection between profit motivation and the goal of creating something akin to a public space can become complex, messy, and tricky for their users to navigate. Twitch sets the rules and regulations, designs the platform's features and programs, and has strict control over various aspects of how people can use their product. Twitch is far from a public space. At the same time, it would be highly cynical to claim that the communities and relationships that have emerged through Twitch have no meaning or social value as there is plenty of evidence to the contrary. The streamers I spoke with told stories of deep connections and sometimes finding life-changing relationships through Twitch. That said, they also didn't shy away from discussing confusion, misunderstanding, and even distrust in some situations.

During the many hours of Twitch streams I watched for this project, variations of one question kept popping into my head: What happens when money and technology play central roles in facilitating our connections to others? This chapter is dedicated to answering that broad question in relation to streaming. First, I will talk a little bit about the streamers I interviewed: why they started streaming, how they feel about streaming, and what their working lives are like. Whether it's their main source of income or not, streaming requires time, financial investment, effort, energy, expertise, and a great deal of managing people and their emotions. Then I want to return to a more in-depth discussion around monetization. Specifically, I will outline some of the

ways monetization influences the notion of community on Twitch, some of the implications of paying for attention, the pressure streamers feel to perform a particular kind of authenticity around monetization, and how monetization creates friction and competition between streamers.

The Five Streamers: The Content Creator Hustle (and Avoiding it)

"I mean for the most part, when I'm working full time, it's waking up at 7:30 AM showering, getting on the subway for an hour, getting to work, working, whatever work entails. It's usually full time, 40 hour week job. Finish around five or six, get on the subway for an hour, get home around like 6:30 or 7:00 and then realize like, okay, I want to stream but so does everyone else. That's prime time streaming hours and that's a big reason why I haven't grown over the last five years, because I was streaming in like a very specific time slot that everyone was streaming in. A lot of the time that's why I would usually only do two or three times a week, because I didn't have energy to do anything else. Even if it was just an hour stream, I'd be so exhausted afterwards I would nap and then it would ruin my whole sleep schedule. And then like work would be horrific. Then there would be things around the house that wouldn't be done. I wouldn't dust for like months on end or whatever" (Streamer E).

When asked about why they started streaming, everyone I interviewed talked about wanting to meet people who played the same games they did, about making new friends, and that they were already playing games anyway so they might as well do it with other people. Although their initial goals were not necessarily to turn their gaming hobby into a full-time job, each of them referred to the appeal of getting paid to play.

This is in keeping with Nancy Baym's (2018) argument that the relationship between work and leisure has become more complicated with the advent of social media, and further that the "commodification of intimacy" (Hochschild, 1983) "increasingly includes an expectation that people use always-on media to turn their selves into products and personal relationships into career opportunities" (Baym, 2018, Relating in the Gig Economy, para. 6). Each of the streamers also talked about having, at some point, attempted to grow their channel, to trying to attain partner status and while maybe not fully supporting themselves through Twitch, at least aspiring to make more money. As I discussed in the literature review, Brooke Erin Duffy (2017) writes

about this kind of work as aspirational labour. For two of the participants I interviewed, their aspirational labour did eventually pay off. Streamers A and B were both initially working full time jobs, one as a human resources coordinator and the other at Starbucks, when they started streaming on the side as a hobby. Streamer B explained:

> I was working full time and making more streaming one day a week than I was ... I mean, I had some very generous donors at the time, but I was like, "Why am I working my butt off at Starbucks and getting in trouble all the time for not doing every single thing that they want when I could be doing this thing that I love and really enjoy for more money?" and ... yeah, which, at the time, I thought would be half the amount of work, but I'd say it's double the amount of work, but that's okay.

As of winter 2019, both Streamers A and B considered themselves full-time streamers and relied on content creation as their 'sole source' of income. The idea of either of them having a 'sole source' of income is extremely misleading though. Each described a variety of revenue streams they rely on to make a living. In fact, the vast majority of the 50+ Twitch channels I observed over the course of this project were linked to some combination of YouTube pages, Patreon[14] pages, Podcast links (which are often linked to Patreon), channel specific merchandise stores, and corporate affiliate links[15]. As Johnson and Woodcock (2017) found previously, part of the motivation behind using multiple platforms is the fear that one could disappear or be demonetized at any time without notice. When I asked her what it was like to start streaming

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[14] Patreon is a platform where people who make creative content/art can sell monthly memberships to people interested in their work.
[15] Often companies that sell products related to gaming (e.g. Secret Labs computer chairs) will provide streamers with a unique link to their website. When someone makes a purchase using that link, the streamer receives a previously agreed upon sum.

full-time, Streamer A touched on this anxiety. She had been struggling to find a full-time job commensurate with her education and experience:

> And before I knew it once I was honest with my community, they're like "stream more, we'll be here". And I was like are you serious? Going from three days a week to five or six, going from two or three hours to four to eight, you're okay with that? You're not annoyed with me, and they're like "no, do it". So just kind of being honest with my husband and building those other streams of revenue, at least if YouTube stopped paying people, I would be okay. If Twitch cut down their portions of pay, I would be okay. So, it was pretty much just feeling you're comfortable in each of those outlets, and then slowly start to add more to each when you get the chance, that you feel like you can handle. So, it's never putting all your eggs in one basket as one of my favorite mentors always said. Don't rely solely on YouTube because they could go like nope, no more money, and then like, ahhh my livelihood! (Streamer A)

This intense need to 'hustle' wasn't specific to full-time or partnered streamers either. When I asked Streamer E, a Twitch affiliate, where her financial support comes from, she replied:

> I have a bunch of savings and I'm in a decent spot with streaming, so I've just been doing that a lot lately. And also like a lot of freelance photography, videography, animation commission…And the same with like Patreon and tipping through PayPal. But yeah, those are like the main like sources of income. I also have like affiliate links through Amazon and different games selling websites. I have a sponsorship with a CBD oil company right now, through being like a Twitch influencer. So, like those are where most of my income is coming from at the moment, the influencer side (Streamer E).

She had just recently been laid-off from her previous full-time job and was on the lookout for a new one. As economies move increasingly toward gig-economies and precarious labour, this kind of non-stop, do what you can, convert leisure time into paid work, hustle is becoming more and more common.

Streamer D, when interviewed, had a full-time job and streams on the side. She was previously a full-time streamer, but lost most of her followers/support when she took an extended break. When I spoke with her, she was in the process of rebuilding her channel/community in the hope of being able to leave her current job. The other two women I spoke with have decided that there is too much of a trade-off involved in growing their communities to bother pushing for partnership with Twitch. Streamer E explained, "I've never really wanted this to be a full-time job because that's way too stressful…I don't want this to stop feeling it's fun because video games are a way for me to relax and de-stress and hang out with my friends and my family". Streamer G has a similar perspective. Although she used to stream full-time, when I spoke with her, she had just started a new full-time job and was streaming as a hobby. She told me, "Now I'm at a point where I [stream] if I want to… I like where I'm at with the community. I know a lot of gamers. So, I've got out of it what I wanted. Not that I'm done and now I don't want to do it anymore. But yeah, I'm back to what motivated me in the beginning" (streamer G).

Paying your friends, paying for friends, paying to play with friends…

Creating community

At the time I started writing this chapter, I had been watching a lot of Sweet Anita's streams on Twitch. She was not part of the project sample, but I found her channel interesting

and entertaining, so I watched it in my free time. One evening, she was discussing how grateful she is for all the support she receives and all of the heartwarming stories she hears from her viewers about how her channel has given them confidence, helped them find friendship, and given them a place to feel at home. Sweet Anita has been diagnosed with Turret's Syndrome and Coprolalia, and so she spends a lot of time talking about her condition and what it's like for her to move through the world – literally and figuratively.

In this conversation, she was explaining her joy at helping to connect people, but also described Twitch in a way that really stuck with me. She called Twitch "a hub of loneliness". She explained that a lot of viewers just seem really lonely and want someone to talk to and hang out with. AnneMunition, another prominent streamer, discussed the situation from a streamer's perspective, and also points to the complicated nature of discerning the difference between people truly seeking friendship and those with other goals (see figure 16). We hear about loneliness all the time in mainstream media (e.g. Abraham, 2020). It seems perfectly reasonable that a generation of people who have grown up with and/or have

FIGURE 16: SCREEN CAPTURE OF ANNE MUNITION'S TWEET, TAKEN NOVEMBER 18, 2019

access to social media, online dating, online schooling, remote work, and who are interested in video games would turn to Twitch to find friends, community, and to alleviate loneliness.

The notion of community is central to how people think about Twitch. As I mentioned earlier, it's how Twitch markets itself and it is the language streamers use when they talk about their supporters. Against the backdrop of knowing that streamers are often caught up in the gig-

economy 'hustle', I want to talk about the ways people monetize their channels and ergo, their communities. The ideas of community and friendship become messy through Twitch, even when making money isn't the primary goal for a streamer. Given that Twitch's main purpose is to generate profit, the platform is designed around monetization strategies. Because Twitch is all about monetization, the platform itself pushes people to act/think about how others are acting in a certain way even if money isn't their focus. This is exacerbated by the fact that Twitch is focused on interactivity and that those real-time interactions are often centered around some kind of financial incentive. In many cases, there's very little distance between social interactions with a streamer and the financial transaction. Next, I'm going to discuss several ways the presence of monetization and/or financial incentives can influence the way people think about or treat each other.

For the most part, the streamers I interviewed were all very positive when speaking about their communities, and yet they talked about them in rather transactional terms and often in relation to channel size/income. Streamer E said, "I have a lot of really loyal and consistent community members… I love my community members. There's a few of them that have like transcended past just like members and I have them as friends on Facebook and their mom comments on my stuff and like they're friends of mine that I've made. But it's very few people". Streamer G was even more explicit when she said "It's all about the community. But there is a slight... When you start getting into this game, streaming game, there's a lot of numbers, it's a lot of statistics. And you lose everything if you don't stream on a regular basis".

Both of these women recognize the importance of centering "the community" as an idea, but instead of emphasizing the relationships they have formed, when asked about their respective communities they refer to them using the language of Twitch's analytics. Interestingly, these are

the two streamers who choose to intentionally keep their channels smaller in order to foster

closer relationships and to avoid some of the pitfalls of maintaining a bigger channel. When

talking about her channel growth and going full-time, Streamer B speaks to that sense of loss

when she told me "Now I'd say, because I'm a bigger streamer, we still have a really good

community, but I don't know everyone by name and where everyone lives and what they do for

work, so it's become a little bit less community focused, I guess, over time". Although Twitch

channels are strongly promoted as community-oriented spaces where people can make friends,

and to some degree they are, the way they are perceived by those who host them is shaped by the

size of the community, which is in turn related to the streamer's dedication to monetizing their

channel.

Paying for attention

One of the most obvious ways money influences sociality through Twitch is when people

literally pay for attention. As I mentioned last chapter, when a streamer receives a donation, they

typically make a big fuss about it, including a personal thank you and having the option to have a

message read aloud. When discussing financial support and donations, Streamer D commented

on the expectations that come with receiving donations:

> I actually think that if it was up to me, I'm very much of the opinion that for me it's not
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> about the amount that you give, it is the mere fact that you even want to support. It
>
> doesn't matter how much it is, all of it matters, no matter how much it is. It matters to me.
>
> But unfortunately, there are just some of them, if they contribute more, they want more
>
> attention for it because it is more, it should mean more. Whereas, for me it shouldn't. Or I
>
> cannot ignore it either because that seems rude. And let's face it, girls who do not say,

thank you, they just seem bitchy…They can't be that rational cold like boys can. They

have to be caring, otherwise they're just bitchy. (Streamer D)

Here, streamer D is speaking to the expectation some supporters have that the response and

attention they get from the streamer should be proportionate to how much money they donate. In

this sense, streamers and their attention are seen as more of a commodity to be purchased than a

creative labourer whose work should be supported by those who enjoy it. She also begrudges the

gendered expectation woman streamers are confronted with in terms of how they interact with

their viewers.

To some degree, all streamers have to deal with a certain amount of emotional

management, making their community feel welcome and included in order to garner their

attention and support. But as in other social contexts, women are expected to act in keeping with

heteronormative ideals of femininity. Brooke Erin Duffy (2017) discusses these expectations in

relation to aspirational labour arguing that it "has conceptual similarities to traditional forms of

"women's work" (domestic labor, reproductive labor, care labor)" in that it is a continuation of

unpaid female labour that has been propagated by patriarchy and capitalism (p. 9). She further

argues that irrespective of their gender, individuals engaged in aspirational labour participate in

gendered practices that combine and perpetuate the systems of patriarchy and commodity

capitalism. In the case of streaming, the women I interviewed can see a marked difference in the

expectations around care and attention between themselves and their male counterparts.

Sometimes if a streamer is unable to keep up with chat, or a viewer *really* wants to get

their message through, they will donate specifically in order to ensure the streamer reads their

message. In one particularly extreme example of this phenomenon, a streamer was playing Dead

by Daylight and was asking chat for information about an upcoming update to the game. Tons of viewers were answering her, and she was reading a handful of responses, but not all of them. One viewer was clearly dissatisfied that their own contribution to chat wasn't being acknowledged because they started cheering in 100 bit increments to get her attention, they used each cheer to initiate/respond to the conversation. By using the cheer function in this way, this viewer effectively jumped the attention queue. They spent around $7 CDN to engage a streamer in pretty trivial conversation. Perhaps that's an inconsequential amount of money for that person. But the idea that someone would be willing to pay money not only to the streamer, but also to the platform (because they used bits) in order to participate in such a small interaction is surprising.

I think this example highlights two important points. First, because people can buy bits in bulk and they are not tangible things you can touch and feel, it doesn't seem like you're spending money when you use them; you're just clicking a button for something you may have paid for weeks ago. Second, it also demonstrates the clear demarcation between those members of the community who spend and those who do not and the hierarchy of attention that exists on the monetized platform. I tried to imagine what this would look like in another similar context where a group of people who may or may not know each other congregate in a space to appreciate some form of leisure activity. Can you imagine having a face to face conversation at a book club where instead of waiting your turn to speak, you handed someone a dollar every time you wanted to be the one to speak? That seems absolutely ridiculous. Not only is that a very expensive way to have a conversation, it would very obviously frustrate the other people in the book club who perhaps didn't have a pocket full of change and wanted to contribute their thoughts. On Twitch, this is a fairly normal occurrence, and nobody seems to think twice about it. I think this little

thought experiment shows how influential monetization is when interacting through Twitch, even if you're not the one spending or receiving any money.

In a less obvious way, the relationship between attention and monetization is also at play when streamers make decisions about how people can participate in their channel. Viewers engage in all kinds of behaviours to try and get the attention of streamers. In fact, when I asked Streamer D what she liked least about streaming, she talked specifically about attention seekers:

> I have a love-hate relationship to streaming, if I have to be completely honest. Because as much as I love this getting together with people also, I absolutely hate people who come in and want attention. I absolutely hate it. It's like they see someone coming in and then screaming for attention is the most infuriating thing for me and I have to just ignore it. But I find it annoying and it's an internet culture thing, I think. It's very easy to do. So I think that is probably the thing I like the least. It is this thing of someone coming in with some absurd message that has no context in anything that's being talked about just to get attention. And then it's just, huh, I just want to tell them to get the hell out (Streamer D).

Sometimes attention seekers will simply make rude or inappropriate comments, (e.g. show me ur tits), sometimes they will spam the chat in all capitals, some write silly poetry. For example, one viewer wrote, "Roses are red. Violets are blue. Add me on twitter @[twitter handle] so I can talk to you. Like really though". These kinds of attempts at attention seeking are usually completely ignored by the streamer, or result in a warning or ban from a moderator. The exact same behaviour with $1.00 attached to it though, is usually rewarded with a smile, a personal exchange, and a thank you. Does that mean behaviours that are otherwise infuriating are charming when accompanied by currency? Obviously not. The platform encourages streamers to

stifle their genuine reactions in order to get paid. At the same time, this can work to promote bad behaviour among viewers so long as they pay for it. This practice of rewarding people who pay with attention on Twitch might lead some viewers to have outsized expectations when they make donations. Streamer G told me a story about one donor:

> I had one viewer who thought I was... I got super upset…I was just being a friend with him. He donated a lot and then all of a sudden he just lashed out on me, and he was super upset that I didn't write back to him every day. And that was because I was hinting at him. "Dude, you and I are not friends, IRL. I'm a streamer and you're a fan of me. And I want to be in contact with my viewers to some extent, but I draw the line." I didn't say that to him. And I was pretty close to him, somewhat because he was my moderator. And I'd talked to him a few times and we played together a few times. I actually got upset because he got upset. He was crying at some point and I was like... Yeah, that was a bit of a rough one. But he had some delusional thing, where he thought he could take me out on a date.

In this example, the donor and the streamer had very different expectations about their relationship. For the streamer, this was a work setting where she had a friendly relationship with her moderator, who was essentially a fan and a volunteer who donated to her channel to support her creative work. For the donor, he interpreted the relationship as getting special attention above that of other community members leading him to think Streamer G was romantically interested in him. So much of what happens through Twitch revolves around financial transactions that it can make it difficult to navigate social relationships.

This kind of transaction-motivated expectation is also reinforced through the popular assumption that women get more money for streaming because they flirt for cash or lead 'unsuspecting' men/boys on. Streamer D brought this topic up during a conversation about having a smaller Twitch channel. She told me it didn't matter that she had a small channel,

> Because girls earn more money on Twitch…There is no doubt about it. Girls earn more on Twitch. They might not get as many viewers as men, but they earn more…There's a lot of theories around that. And one of them can easily... It was in an article not long ago, maybe a year ago where they talked about this. Girls on Twitch often get viewers and money because there's a lot of ... I don't want to say young boys, no. Men in general who liked their girlfriend experience…Even though I don't give that at all, it's without a doubt the fact that I am female, it more inclined that they want to support…I don't know if it's biological maybe that men have it, they want to take care of girls (Streamer D).

Streamer D is again referencing gendered assumptions about how woman streamers are expected to interact with their audience. Malin Sveningsson wrote about this phenomenon in the context of the MMO World of Warcraft in 2009. She explains that because gaming culture is so male-centric, being a woman in some spaces can make you somewhat of a unicorn. As with the well-documented sexism and the negative discrimination women are confronted with in gaming spaces, she demonstrates that they are often also on the receiving end of positive discrimination. This positive discrimination might come in the form of special attention, extra help in-game, gifts, and other advantages *whether they are sought out or not*. She is very explicit in her argument that these advantages are **not** free, but rather that they come at a cost paid with other less obvious currencies. She writes, "These currencies have to do with the specific values that they are expected to bring into the gaming communities, and the positions that they are expected

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to occupy" (Sundén & Sveningsson, 2009, p. 40). She then goes on to describe much of what I have discussed these last few pages in terms of how women are expected to be the kind, caring, community-oriented, mother-like figure. In fact, in the recordings I observed, viewers often call streamers "mom". So, it could very well be that women receive larger donations, or more committed subscribers (I do not have the data to say one way or the other), but they certainly have smaller communities on average and receive less exposure than do their male counterparts. Further, this cost of positive discrimination that Sveningsson refers to explains why Streamer D in one sentence describes her annoyance at having to be nice to people online, and then a few sentences later talks about how women make more money.

Selling your 'authentic' self

Plenty of research has been done around the expectations and tensions around authenticity and being a "sell-out" in digital gig-economy style work (See Duffy 2015, 2016, 2017). Twitch is no exception to this trend. For some streamers this comes in the form of the complicated feelings about being grateful to those who support the creative work they do, but also feeling like they have to display that gratitude in gratuitous or inauthentic ways as I discussed in the previous section. Another way streamers (particularly women) might feel tension between being authentic and monetizing their stream is through which products they choose to promote or be affiliated with. Duffy writes that "Aspirational labor…relies on historically constructed notions of femininity— particularly discourses of community, affect, and commodity-based self-expression" (p. 9). This is evident in the way the women I interviewed spoke about the products they promote through their channels. Streamer E explains how important it is to her to only promote products she thinks are authentic to the streamer's identity. She says:

If you're an E-sports professional being sponsored by like Logitech or HyperX or something. Makes sense…Everyone understands you need to make money, like go, go hustle, go do what you do. But like if you have too many of those sponsorships at once and you're not really vetting them properly and there's this disconnect of…you say you're about like being an E-sports professional, but you're sponsored by this inferior hardware product. Everyone knows it's the inferior a hardware product and yet because they're giving you $1,000 every quarter, you're still touting them. It's like, okay, well you know, that kind of thing.

Here, streamer E is speaking to the pressure to be seen as authentic in her decision to promote certain products. In this sense, she sees herself as a community leader rather than someone doing a job and trying to get paid. Later in the interview she gives a more business-oriented explanation, specifying that this is more important for smaller streamers because they need to rely on their authentic appreciation for the product to convince their community to actually use the affiliate or sponsorship links. If the streamer wants to get a contract renewed and have a shot at making money off of it, they need their community to use the links.

"Girls on Twitch are Vicious": Competition between streamers

Another way I observed monetization influencing the way people engage with each other through Twitch is through conversations with participants about supporting other women streamers. When I set out to do this research, I assumed that women would be supportive of each other and would try to help each other succeed - especially given how hostile gaming and internet culture can be toward women. I have seen some of my favorite streamers streaming with and promoting other woman content creators. When I asked participants about if they have ever

worked with other streamers or if they have any kind of female-friendly support networks I was surprised by the answers they gave. Most of them haven't worked with other streamers and one was outright hostile to the idea, particularly with other women. Streamer D told me:

Like one of my very close friends who was a close friend between me and my fiancé. She is a streamer, but she can't stream that much. But every time she does, she is a hoot to be around because she's just herself. She doesn't have any vision of becoming anything. She is just there to hang out with her friends…Other streamers who have ambition to become anything? No. And I am very careful of who I trust on Twitch. It's both this of it becoming a competition, but it's also like if something works for me and I just sit and have an idle conversation with someone, I think I can trust very quickly, they will just take it and benefit on it… It is a very, extreme competitive and very harsh, yeah, it is…Women are the worst on Twitch. They are catty, they are mean, and they will throw you out as fast as they can and take your spot. So, if you talk about competitive nature on Twitch, the girls are the worst…It's because we are territorial. That's what it is. Girls are territorial. We do not like to share attention and we definitely do not like to share any content with anyone else. I am the only girl here, and especially in a nerdy world, and that becomes life. You become vicious towards each other. (Streamer D)

While this is only one example, I think it speaks to the larger trend of competition between streamers, especially when they work within the same directory (play the same game). In a casual conversation I had with a friend about her experience streaming, she told me that the competition and drama that occurs between streamers within a directory can be intense and pushes some streamers out of the community. Streamer D experienced this when she acted as a

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sort of mentor to another newer streamer within her directory. After several months of supporting her, Streamer D noticed that the newer streamer was copying her. She told me:

> And it went fine to begin with. Then she started copying me on everything I did. She started inserting herself in specific people that I normally hung out with who was a bigger content creator to me. And she really got in with all of them, where you start questioning, "How the heck did she do that?" And I was fed up at the end that I felt like she was trying to liberally to push me out of my position to take over.

This incident led to drama and backlash within the directory that caused Streamer D to begin streaming a different game to escape the directory. When she switched games, she lost most of her supporters and was no longer able to support herself financially. She quit streaming for nearly a year before just recently coming back to it.

Conclusion

Although Twitch is marketed as a kind of public meeting space, where people are free to create content, connect with each other freely, and foster communities, I argue in this chapter that people are far from free to do any of those things. Rather than an open space for sharing, interaction and communication is intensely influenced by money. Individuals are able, even encouraged, to buy their way into conversations. By supporting a streamer financially, individuals can skip the line and get the kind of attention they want, which in some cases requires streamers to act differently than they otherwise would toward an individual.

Chapter Seven: Concluding Thoughts

Throughout this dissertation, I have worked to centre the experiences of women streamers who have generally been ignored by research to date. Instead of examining the practices of popular, mainstream, successful streamers, this research intentionally focused on what it's like for those who do not have a massive following, most of whom rely on income from sources other than streaming to survive, and who generally don't fit the stereotypical description of someone who livestreams video games. In this concluding chapter, I will give an overview of the dissertation beginning with a review of the research questions. I will then briefly discuss some of the limitations of this research. I will highlight the original contributions of the research. Finally, I will discuss possible future research.

Back to the start

Situating livestreaming within the broader context of video game culture, I started this dissertation by arguing that more attention should be paid to average, everyday streamers, and particularly those from marginalized populations. I further argued that regardless of whether streamers get paid or not, streaming should be considered work. I provided a basic overview of the Twitch.tv. I began my project asking the question what it is like to livestream for women and why do they do it?

In order to start thinking through this overarching question, I looked to celebrity studies to get insight into how relationships between performers and their audiences have been previously understood. Next, I turned to labour studies to obtain the necessary vocabulary and concepts to think through what it means to work as a streamer with and without pay. I then rounded out the literature review by looking at social media and platform studies to further

consider the role of digital platforms and their business models in shaping social connections online.

Chapter 3 began with a personal reflection of my own relationship to feminism. I made an argument for the importance of citational politics, explaining some deliberate citational choices I made throughout the dissertation. I then spent time outlining intersectional feminism and explaining how it informed the research design, data collection, and analysis. This chapter ended with an overview of the theory of affordances, explaining why it is a useful frame through which to examine a platform like Twitch.

Chapter 4 was a methodological breakdown of the entire project. Here I explained my decision to conduct a qualitative research study. I discussed the ethical considerations relevant to conducting the study. I then outlined the specific data collection methods employed throughout the project.

In chapter 5, I did a very close examination of the most prominent features of Twitch, including achievements, affiliate and partner programs, bots, commands, rules, moderators, video advertising, bits, subscriptions, and donations. Using the lens of affordances, I answered the following questions, what is the feature? What is it intended to do? How do people use this feature? In what ways does it constrain users? How does it promote certain activities/actions and for who? Do streamers/users talk about these features? If they do, what are they saying? Here I argued that the platform's affordances play an important role in shaping how people interact with one another.

In chapter 6, I focused on the influence of monetization of relationships on Twitch. I argue here that regardless of whether or not a channel has been monetized, or if the streamer's

intended goal is to earn income, monetization greatly influences how people engage with the

platform. Further, the platform incentivizes users to pay for attention from streamers, which runs

counter to the idea of making connections and creating community. I outlined the tension

streamers experience between monetization and authenticity. The chapter ends with the argument

that Twitch's monetization mechanisms can actually create friction and competition between

streamers rather than fostering a sense of community as they suggest.

In conclusion, this dissertation has highlighted the importance of examining everyday

women who livestream videogames rather than focusing mostly on exceptional streamers who

are deemed successful. Now I return to the research questions that I introduced at the beginning

of this dissertation.

What did I actually find out?

In the introduction chapter, I outlined 3 overarching research questions that guided my

study design, data collection and analysis. My research questions were:

1. What it is like to livestream for women and why do they do it?

2. Who gets promoted in this space and how?

3. In what ways are women supported (or not)?

Here I will summarize my research findings in regard to these questions. The first research

question was examined and answered in both chapters five and six. In chapter five, I paid very

close attention to the everyday practices of women who livestream on Twitch by examining the

affordances of the platform's features and how streamers and users interact with and through it.

One main finding is that there are many tensions between what women want to do in their

streams, and what they must do (or perceive that they must do) to meet cultural expectations of streaming. This tension was displayed in terms of what content streamers chose to broadcast, whether or not a broadcaster chose to apply for partner status, and in how streamers use automated systems to distance themselves from undesirable, but necessary actions (e.g. asking for subscribers), among many other examples. Each of the women I interviewed spoke of this tension and how they deal with it. For some, it means only streaming part-time, to a smaller community and having to find sources of revenue outside of Twitch's partner program. For others, it means forgoing some of their own interests and desires to satisfy those of their audience. In terms of why women stream, community and the relationships established within them are what streamers reference the most. For some streamers it is the desire to maintain a closer-knit community that makes monetization less appealing.

The second question was discussed mainly in chapter five, but I also touched on it briefly in chapter six. Much of this discussion was had within the context of the partnership program and how Twitch enforces their terms of service agreement. Being partnered with Twitch is one way to gain access to special promotional opportunities offered by the platform, but as I demonstrated throughout chapters five and six, there are several barriers to becoming partnered. Some of these barriers include access to sufficient technological and economic resources to start broadcasting, the social and cultural capital to either bring an audience from another platform or to attract a new audience, the time and space to do so, and the willingness to tailor broadcast content based on Twitch's metric priorities. Although Twitch markets its partnership program through a lens of meritocracy, it assumes that all prospective streamers are beginning from the same starting point.

Women who stream on Twitch have also been outspoken about the inconsistency in how terms of service agreements are enforced on Twitch and how this seems to punish smaller streamers (often women) and benefits those with larger audiences. When a popular streamer breaks the terms of service and is either not held accountable or only receives a mild/short punishment, this actually serves to bring more attention to their channel via controversy and word of mouth over social media. Conversely, when a smaller streamer is given a suspension for a minor mistake, it can have an outsized effect on their channel's momentum or growth. This unfairness is exacerbated when women are seemingly punished more frequently and harshly[16] for broadcasting alleged nudity or "sexually suggestive content".

The third research question was discussed in chapter six. All of the women I interviewed relied on a romantic partner or a sibling to do volunteer moderation for their channels. They each indicated that they needed a high level of trust to give someone that much control over their channel, and that the support of moderators is important to their success. Generally, the streamers did not find Twitch supportive of their streaming efforts, regardless of if they were partnered or not. Instead, these women felt like they relied on friends or family to help with emotional support, but also technical support. In terms of economic support, not a single one of these women relies exclusively on streaming on Twitch as their sole source of income. For some it is the main source, but all were keenly aware that generating revenue on Twitch is unpredictable, and so they rely on a variety of income sources to ensure their economic security.

I would also like to add here that I initially assumed that women would be supportive of each other's streaming goals. Some of the content creators I watch for fun on Twitch and

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[16] This is only supported by anecdotal evidence, but is a widely held perception in the streaming community.

YouTube have a tendency to work with and promote other women (this is one of the reasons I enjoy their content), so I assumed this would be a more widespread trend. Instead, what I found is that most of the women I spoke with were encouraged to start streaming by men – either a romantic partner, brother, or friend. Further, some of the women I spoke with were more inclined to view other female content creators as direct competition for a smaller audience, as so were not as likely to work collaboratively with them.

Limitations

As with any research project, this study has some limitations. Arguably, the biggest limitation was my inability to recruit more than five research participants. One reason it was so difficult is that I did all of the recruitment online. I was not able to attend any events where streamers congregate in physical locations to network, spend time getting to know people, and to recruit that way. Instead I was reliant on streamers posting some kind of contact information online (usually an email address). Part of this decision was because I was unsure that less-known streamers would attend physical gatherings, but mainly it was due to time and financial constraints.

Another limitation is that while I was able to generate a diverse sample of women's Twitch channels to record, the women I was able to interview were all cis, white women. I think one reason for this is related to the first limitation. People who are visibly identifiable as being part of a marginalized community are more likely to be targeted by harassment and hate online. This in turn makes it more likely that they would be less willing to make contact information publicly available online.

Summary of Contributions

At the time of writing, there has been very little investigation into the experiences of streamers who are not considered popular, successful streamers. This dissertation has produced a unique data set that was intentionally generated through an intersectional feminist process to include perspectives that are often overlooked. By highlighting these perspectives, I was able to outline some of the limitations of Twitch's platform and policies in terms of how some streamers are celebrated and promoted, while others remain underestimated and undervalued.

This project offers an in-depth analysis of some of the most prominent features of the Twitch platform. Given the rapid pace of viewership growth on streaming platforms, having an understanding of the social implications of this emerging form of online engagement and interaction is essential.

This research demonstrated that while popular opinion might think of being partnered with Twitch as an indicator of success and a desirable goal, some streamers actually reject this notion of success. Instead they emphasize community, relationships, and friendship as their main metric of success in streaming. This finding reaffirms the importance of paying attention not only to the most famous streamers, but of ensuring researchers place as much importance on examining the diverse perspectives of average streamers from a variety of backgrounds. With that in mind, I turn to a discussion of future research possibilities in the realm of livestreaming.

Future research

It is imperative that future research projects include more of the experiences and perspectives of people of colour and gender nonconforming streamers. An adequately resourced

project that would allow for networking with streamers at gatherings in physical spaces would go a long way toward generating a more diverse participant sample.

Two areas worth paying closer attention to are the streaming audience and moderators. How do audiences interact with the platform(s), the streamers, and each other? Why do moderators invest so much time and effort in moderating someone else's channel? While research about streaming is a rapidly growing area, there is very little that we know about the audience as most research has been focused on the broadcasters exclusively. Similarly, moderation is an area where researchers have seemingly only scratched the surface.

Finally, there is a lot more to be learned by actually engaging in livestreaming as a researcher, and perhaps involving students in some way in an educational context. Livestreaming is a generative area of exploration. I envision the possibility for a project with students who collaborate with each other to create educational media content.

One Last Reflection

Now that I have reached the end of this iteration of my project, I wonder what my teenage self would think of this work. Dr. Coulter told me after reading an early draft that my 15 year old self would be proud. I actually don't think that's true. 15 year old me didn't have the experience, the tools, or the language to understand the value of a feminist perspective. I was also deeply rooted in my worldview and unwilling to think more broadly. It's uncomfortable to admit, but I probably would have laughed and said something awful and misogynist about it. It took a lot of poking and prodding from ideas I was unfamiliar with in a setting with a lot of people who had different experiences than I did (i.e. when I went to university) to get me to even consider a different worldview from that I grew up with. Instead of lamenting my stubborn youth

though, my own transformation gives me so much hope. I hear a lot of friends and colleagues say that "people don't change", or that some are just too far gone (racist, sexist, homophobic, generally hateful or ignorant) to be reached, especially with the trend toward far-right nationalist movements and the rise of the 'isms' happening globally over the past few years. I disagree with that premise. I think it can be a long, slow journey encouraging someone to open up to new ideas and to shift their perspective, but it is an important one. It is also important to meet people where they are. Gaming and social media are spaces rampant with people who could use a little feminist poking and prodding, and so that's what I intend to do.

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