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AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF TWITCH STREAMERS:

NEGOTIATING PROFESSIONALISM IN NEW MEDIA CONTENT CREATION

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AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF TWITCH STREAMERS:
NEGOTIATING PROFESSIONALISM IN NEW MEDIA CONTENT CREATION

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

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Dedication

For Gram and JJ

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Abstract

Twitch is an online video distribution platform that allows individuals to broadcast live video of themselves playing video games, and includes features that allow viewers to financially support their favorite Twitch streamers. Therefore, the entrepreneurial Twitch streamer has become a new type of media professional. This dissertation works from the perspective that money is a form of communication, and that professional Twitch streamers can read money's movement within this social setting. Therefore, the relationship that streamers experience with their income is explored in order to map the ways that streamers develop conceptualizations of what professionalism means within Twitch content creation. First, critical discourse analysis is used to document the ways that streamers' channel pages articulate what is "for sale" on Twitch. This analysis demonstrates that the main commodity that streamers sell is increased ability to participate in a channel's community. Second, the Twitch-based talk show *Dropped Frames* is analyzed using critical discourse analysis to document the ways that streamers experience and make sense of the precarity (job insecurity) present in their industry. Third, interviews with streamers were conducted to provide a description of the industry from an insider's perspective. Interview data indicated that the central function of a streamer's job is not the creation of video content, but instead the leadership offered to a community of viewers. Finally, a semiotic analysis of the space of TwitchCon, a trade show for the streaming community, is presented to show how professionalism and play are commodified. Ultimately, this dissertation presents an ethnography of Twitch streamers: an exploration of the interdependent webs of

meaning, and constituent contexts, from which they perform their job, highlighting the nature and nuance of neoliberal subject positions.

Chapter 1

Introduction

An animated character in a dark trench coat, wielding a large axe flees down alleys and between buildings that sport gargoyles and neo-gothic spires. The muted sepia color palate pervades both the character and the setting, such that the scene looks almost monochromatic. The hound - which is chasing the character - does not give up, its stamping paws and heavy breathing audible over the character's own footfalls. Fighting this hound could prove detrimental, as healing items are scarce. This scene from *Bloodborne* (2015) showcases the game's dark beauty and unforgiving gameplay. The player, Ezekiel_III expresses annoyance that the hound has chased him this far, adding that monsters usually give up pursuit long before this. Ezekiel_III, a young man of about thirty, can be seen just below and to the left of the character (See Figure 1). There is a brief pause after the breathing of the hound ceases, when the character stops, waiting to ensure that the pursuit has ended. Ezekiel_III takes this reprieve to read and respond to questions from his audience.

The above story represents one moment experienced on Twitch, a web portal where individuals can broadcast live video of their video game play over the Internet to (potentially) thousands of viewers. While many Twitch streams are amateur productions, a subset of practitioners has turned this hobby into a career. As of March 2017, Ezekiel_III has operated his Twitch stream as his full-time job for over two years. While some may scoff at the idea of being paid to play video games, innovative Twitch streamers have made this social practice a viable career choice.

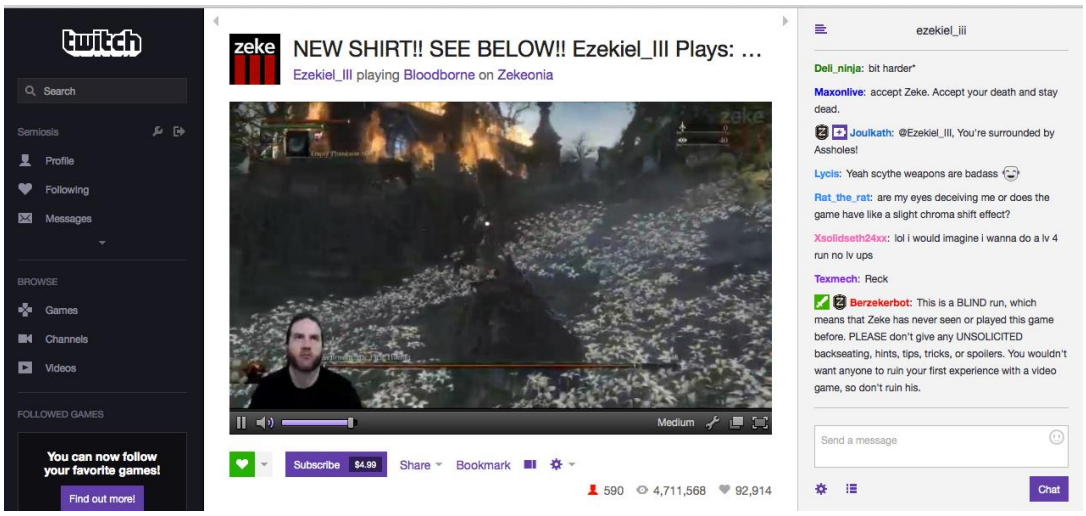

Figure 1: Ezekiel_III plays *Bloodborne*.

The sheer reach of Twitch as a media outlet marks it as a social phenomenon worthy of scholarly enquiry. Twitch CEO and founder Emmett Shear states that Twitch has an average viewership of 622,347, reaching peaks of up to two million viewers at a single time. 2.25 million individuals broadcast on Twitch and over 17,000 of them are *partners* (people with whom Twitch shares advertising and subscription revenue)[1]. Internet security specialists Deepfield states that Twitch is the fourth largest source of Internet traffic after Netflix, Google, and Apple; but ahead of Hulu, Valve, and Amazon (Fitzgerald & Wakabayashi, 2014). These statistics demonstrate that Twitch is a major player in the online media distribution industry.

Twitch's importance to the contemporary media environment demonstrates the necessity for research. Many scholarly disciplines stand to benefit from a better understanding of Twitch. As a form of computer mediated communication (CMC), Twitch offers insight into the ways that people interact through an Internet-mediated

[1] These statistics were stated by Mr. Shear during TwitchCon 2016's keynote address which opened the convention. The statistics given reflect the state of Twitch between September 2015 and September 2016. Video of the keynote can be found at the following web address (statistic evidence presented at 42 minutes): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zi-lnyUu-xw.

social space. Considering its strong emphasis on community, Twitch provides CMC scholars a rich venue for documenting the processes of computer mediated community building. Additionally, the constructed nature of Twitch is also culturally important; interactions between a Twitch broadcaster and her viewers occur though several channels of communication, facilitated by an infrastructure designed to foster certain types of interactions. Specifically, Twitch's infrastructure allows streamers to broadcast digital video, moderate chatrooms, and track subscriptions in real time. However, many Twitch streamers emphasize immediacy[2] and the importance of familiar connections with their audience members. Therefore, Twitch offers an excellent space to examine the ways that nonverbal communication is influenced by both the webcam and a sense of familiarity with performers. Furthermore, the optional nature of subscribing and donating to streamers invites the application of political economy and related critical economic theory to Twitch. Communication scholars are ideally suited to research the Twitch phenomenon because of communication's interdisciplinary nature, which incorporates diverse perspectives such as telecommunications business, social theory, economic critique, and anthropology.

COMMODIFIED PLAY AND NORMATIVE THEORY

Twitch provides a technological infrastructure, not only for broadcasting video streams, but also for allowing audience members to financially support broadcasters. Applying a revenue stream to the actions being performed by these streamers (playing a video game) is noteworthy because money's presence changes the nature of their actions. Generally, we speak of video game play as a type of leisure - something one

[2] Immediacy is here defined as the sensation that there is no mediating form, that the connection between streamer and viewer is direct and unadulterated by any medium.

does for fun. However, through a successful Twitch channel, play can generate revenue, even become a career. In other words, Twitch allows gamers to successfully turn the act of video game play into a form of labor. Therefore, Twitch broadcasters participate in a form of *commodified play*. Here, the phrase commodified play does not refer to the standard way that leisure exists as commercial exercise, that – for example – skiing is commodified when a resort requires payment for a lift ticket, thereby commodifying the play by selling the experience to a customer. Instead, I argue that the action of a leisure activity – the play – is commodified by transforming it into a type of labor, such as when a skier becomes sponsored and turns the leisure of skiing into a career. Play is commodified when it becomes something that is done for revenue (i.e., sold in some way). Defining video game play as a type of labor changes the way that we should conceptualize it within the examination of political economy. Furthermore, by exploring how individuals within this industry make sense of this type of labor, we gain insight into the assumptions that practitioners have about the relationships (social and economic) inherent in this line of work.

Journalism scholarship provides one useful tool for dissecting the ways that individuals conceptualize the meaning of their labor: normative media theory. While there is much written on the topic of *normative* media theories (how a media professional should approach their job and why), most focus specifically on traditional print and television news journalism. Second, when many media scholars examine online video distribution platforms such as Twitch, they describe the content found within as "user-generated" or "amateur." This, I feel, is a mistake, especially in regards to professional Twitch broadcasters. For the attentive viewer, it is obvious that

financially successful Twitch broadcasters are professionals, *not amateurs*. The term *professional* carries a number of relevant meanings (both denotative and connotative), and Twitch streamers fulfill the two most important. First, professionals are people who earn money in exchange for the completion of a specific activity (i.e., a professional football player receives an income for playing football). Similarly, professional Twitch streamers are professionals because they earn money from streaming. Second, invoking the word professional also invites connotations of professionalism, which connects the label's target to assumptions about their competence and demeanor. This connotative association is also accurate to the professional Twitch streamer and highlights (appropriately, I argue) the competence and professional demeanor of successful streamers. The ability to draw a paycheck from streaming activities is not the sole reason that we should consider successful streamers as professionals. Many streamers demonstrate a theoretical understanding of how their industry functions, knowledge which they then use to make business decisions. This practical competence demonstrates streamer professionalism.

In other words, successful Twitch broadcasters have a normative theory for streaming, even if it is not often stated. Subsequently, forums such as *Dropped Frames* - a talk show were professional Twitch streamers meet to discuss the business and profession of live streaming - are intellectually fascinating, not because they educate novice broadcasters, but because they document media professionals of a relatively young industry actively negotiating the nature of their own professionalism. This is a new social space, begging to be addressed in the mass communication literature.

Scholarly research on the nature of Twitch is especially important for our undergraduate students who want to work in the media industry, and find that many programs focus primarily on more traditional forms of media, such as newspaper journalism and studio television production. Out in the "real world" the nature of professional media production is shifting; and we, as educators, must address these shifts for the sake of our students and our research. Media production entrepreneurship on Twitch and YouTube is an industry, and many have carved out viable careers there. Our students know this, and some are interested in learning how these new media industries function. As college educators, we need to be able to assist the undergraduate media students who are interested in these new media industries. This dissertation takes the essential first step of exploring the practice of Twitch streaming from the perspective of professionalism, by asking: "What does it mean to be professional in this industry?" This question will be answered using ethnographic methods to document streamer professionalism from an emic perspective.

Being a professional implies that one earns income from an activity. This dissertation is written from the theoretical assumption that money carries its own semiotic baggage, and that the presence of income changes the meaning of an attached practice. In other words, professionalism is the outcome of industry practitioners negotiating the relationship between activity (video game play) and income (money). Just as journalists use normative theory to determine their day-to-day actions, professional Twitch streamers consult underlying theories about how the profession should work to inform the way each channel is run. Therefore, while this dissertation seeks to outline a normative theory for live streaming, this endeavor is grounded in the

assumption that such a theory, created from within the community of practitioners, is the outcome of considering actual practices and their financial outcomes.

Unlike traditional employment which provides a salary or wage (and from which one can be fired) Twitch streamers are entrepreneurs, and they need to make enough money to continue streaming. Simple financial solvency establishes the importance of being able to *read viewers* – both what they want and how to attract more of them. Therefore, the necessary presence of money in this relationship moderates and mediates the constituent interactions and their meaning. A normative theory of streaming is the result of money's semiotic work at changing the interpretation of video game play.

Additionally, since a normative theory of streaming should spring from the group of practitioners (the streamers themselves), ethnography is an appropriate method for exploring the nature of such a theory. This dissertation seeks not to impose an etic normative theory from without, but endeavors to discover a theoretical understanding developed from within the community. Data for this research was collected using methods designed to discover such a theory from an emic perspective: documenting how the culture of a profession (i.e., standard ways of behaving in this social setting and how those behaviors are decoded by different actors) gives meaning to the actions of group members.

DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

This first chapter will function as an introduction to this research by outlining the rest of the dissertation and providing a rationale for the importance of this study. Chapter Two will provide a brief description of Twitch itself - its format and aesthetics,

its history, its uses, and trends within the content found there. Chapter Three will provide a review of scholarly literatures relevant to the current endeavor. This review will include theories of media practice including those described as "normative;" critical media theory, accounting for the ways that economic and market forces influence production practices; theories of political economy and labor; the nature of play in human interaction; and a primer on semiotics as it relates to the interpretative nature of income. Chapter Four will detail the methods used in this dissertation, in terms of both data collection and analysis. Chapters Five through Eight document case studies, each focusing on a different data set relating to the production of Twitch content. Chapter Five examines *channel pages* (the web page found below the video window on Twitch broadcasts) to better understand how each individual broadcaster *sells* his or her channel. This chapter examines channel pages as a type of advertisement, and determines the products and services for which money is exchanged. This chapter argues that on Twitch, money moderates the experience of being part of a community, but in ways that go beyond simply buying access to said community. Chapter Six examines a Twitch-based talk show titled *Dropped Frames,* in which professional Twitch broadcasters meet to discuss topics that are important to the business and profession of live streaming. This chapter brings us closer to a normative theory of streaming by providing insight into the underlying considerations of professional streamers, which in turn highlight the important tensions that these broadcasters must negotiate to successfully navigate their career. Chapter Seven uses interview data to explore how Twitch streamers become professionals. This chapter demonstrates the ways that streamers cultivate their community, view the nature of their

income, and seek external legitimacy for their profession. This chapter allows professional streamers to express the important aspects of their profession in their own words. This analysis demonstrates the importance of leadership to a streamer's skill set. Chapter Eight critically dissects TwitchCon: a tradeshow for the greater Twitch community. This chapter argues that at TwitchCon commerce moderates professionalism and identity. Chapter Nine serves as a conclusion for this dissertation, connecting the themes and findings of Chapters Five through Eight. This chapter will also acknowledge the limitations of the study and suggest avenues for future research.

Coda

In the moments that Ezekiel_III took to read his chat window (after the hound had abandoned pursuit), a viewer subscribed to the channel. This is when the screen exploded. Where once there was the character, there is now a roiling ball of fire and Ezekiel_III, now dominating the frame in full medium shot, poses with his arms crossed then dramatically outstretches them (See Figure 2). He is saying something, but now his voice is artificially deepened to sound like a demon, or a god. The electronically induced deepening and reverb distort his voice such that it becomes difficult to determine exactly what he is saying, although a "thank you" is clearly audible, along with the subscriber's Twitch username. A moment later, as suddenly as it has appeared, the fire is gone, Ezekiel_III's face has returned to the lower corner, and the character is running again, about to jump off the roof of a cathedral. The virtual world of *Bloodborne* spins wildly, as though the camera has rotated around the character - left, then right then left again. Ezekiel_III gives a short chuckle and admits he might be lost.

Figure 2: Ezekiel_III thanking a subscriber.

Chapter 2

An Introduction to Twitch

Before analyzing any aspect of Twitch one must understand what it is, both in form and function. Twitch is a website that allows individuals to broadcast[1] themselves playing video games over the Internet, allowing some to make money from the practice. However, this description is overly simplistic and misses many important aspects of Twitch and the community that uses it. This chapter will address that necessity by providing a brief description of Twitch. First, a chronology of Twitch and related websites is presented to place professional streaming within the history of online video distribution. Second, the format of Twitch - the way it looks and how it presents video content to audiences - will be described in detail. While Twitch's central function is to broadcast video, a description of its formal aspects is necessary to fully understand how channels are indexed and retrieved throughout the website. Finally, this chapter will end with a discussion of the types of video content streamed on Twitch.

A HISTORY OF LIVE STREAMING

Two important historical developments must be tracked to understand how and why Twitch evolved into its current state. First, Twitch owes much of its current format and popularity to the geographically diverse, but technologically savvy, group of people who first attempted to broadcast eSports[2] events. The growth of eSports in the U.S.

[1] This dissertation uses the word "broadcast" (and broadcasting and broadcaster) in a specific way. For the scope of this dissertation, broadcast will not refer to the terrestrial dissemination of radio waves (as seen in the term "broadcast television"). Instead, the conceptual definition of broadcast (where communication is *cast broadly* in distribution) is used. While this definition often carries a one-sided connotation (that one speaks to many, but the many cannot respond to the one) is not implied since twitch streamers can read audience chat in real time. Despite being able to see viewer responses, Twitch streamers often refer to themselves as broadcasters.

[2] ESports are the practice of turning video game play into a professional sporting event, where the best players compete against each other for prize money in front of an audience. For example, *Dota 2* is a

occurred alongside general increases in bandwidth across the internet. Indeed, such increases were necessary to make eSports broadcasting technologically and economically feasible.[3] Second, some types of Twitch content trace their roots to "Let's Play" Videos (LPV's), where individuals would post (on the Internet) videos of themselves playing video games. Twitch exists at the intersection of these two social spheres (which likely contained much overlap in terms of participants, prior to Twitch).

ESports

TwitchCon 2015 began with a keynote presentation, where professional streamer and eSports commentator DJwheat (Marcus Graham) recounted his personal history in regards to video game live streaming, and how it progressed alongside the developments in Internet infrastructure that made Twitch possible. DJwheat (2015) traces this history back to 1999, when software developer NullSoft developed Shoutcast, a program that used IRC (Internet Relay Chat) for real-time transmission of voice across the Internet. This technology allowed for nearly instantaneous vocal interaction between participants. Gamers interested in QuakeCon (a convention and competition surrounding the game *Quake*, 1996) and other eSports events used Shoutcast to broadcast events live, using the Internet as distribution infrastructure. DJwheat (2015) suggests that one innovative aspect of this system was the capacity for two-way interaction, where audience members could respond to the commentators.

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competitive game that has become popular in the eSports community. For the past five years Valve (*Dota 2*'s publisher) has held a tournament called "The International" in Seattle. The winners of the 2016 tournament won $9 million for finishing first, and the event sold out Seattle's KeyArena, where the event was held (Aitchison, 2016). See T. L. Taylor's *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming* (2012) for an in-depth discussion of eSports and its players.

[3] The historical relationship between Twitch and eSports was provided in nostalgic detail during the keynote for TwitchCon 2015 by DJwheat (real name: Marcus Graham), a long-time streamer and eSports broadcasting pioneer. Video of the keynote can be found at the following web address: https://www.twitch.tv/twitch/v/17714623.

However, streaming video over the Internet was expensive. DJwheat recounted that he once personally tried to broadcast QuakeCon over the Internet, and received broadband bill for $18,000.[4]

Justin.tv launched in 2007 as a video streaming portal attempting to compete with YouTube, but providing live video feeds rather than static, on-demand video files. The idea for *Justin.tv* came from Justin Kan, who planned to live stream every moment of his life. Additionally, *Justin.tv* allowed users to stream a plethora of different types of video content, and channels broadcasting live video game play were among the most popular. DJwheat recounts watching *Justin.tv* for the first time and seeing it simply as "free bandwidth" (2015). In fact, it's common to see many of today's professional streamers discuss with each other what they were doing back in the days of *Justin.tv*: whether they were broadcasting there, or on one of its less successful rivals. Backed by venture capital, *Justin.tv*'s popularity soared, mostly on the back of its live streamed video game play. In 2014 *Justin.tv* dropped most of its non-gaming content and renamed itself Twitch as part of a rebranding strategy. Twitch would focus solely on game-related content. Later that same year (and after an attempted buyout by Google) Twitch was sold to Amazon.com for $970 million (Wawro, 2014). Video game live streaming had become big business.

Let's Play Videos

While Twitch owes much of its financial success to eSports (At any given moment the games with the most viewers are mostly eSports titles) the formal aspects of most Twitch channels draw heavily from LPVs. According to the *Let's Play Archive*

[4] This story was recounted during the 2015 TwitchCon keynote. Video of the keynote can be found at https://www.twitch.tv/twitch/v/17714623.

(n.d.), the practice began in 2006 when users of the webpage *SomethingAwful* decided to post screenshots (digital images) of the video games they were playing, alongside a text-based narrative of their subjective experience of playing the game. Often the players' commentary took a humorous tone, which made the *Let's Play* discussion threads some of the most popular content on *SomethingAwful*. The popularity of these posts led *SomethingAwful*'s web developers to design a second website to host and archive them in early 2007. Videos, rather than image and text narratives, soon become prevalent and the *Let's Play Archive* was forced to upgrade their servers in 2009 to handle the load. As of March 2017, the *Let's Play Archive* contains over 2,000 LPVs (both video and text) that can be accessed through the archive's search functions. Additionally, many thousands of LPVs can be found on YouTube, catering to a wide variety of audiences.

PewDiePie (Felix Kjellberg) is arguably the most visible LPV producer on YouTube. His channel boasts over 14 billion views and 52 million subscribers (YouTube, 2017), and he made an estimated $4 million in income in 2013 (Grundberg and Hansegard, 2014). PewDiePie's success and cultural relevance is further demonstrated by his appearance on a 2014 episode of *South Park*. PewDiePie's success is evidence – anecdotal though it may be – that LPV production can be an extremely profitable career[5].

[5] Additionally, in February 2017, Maker Studios (the talent management agency that represented PewDiePie) allegedly cut ties with PewDiePie over a series of videos that contained anti-Semitic sentiment (cf., Hernandez, 2017). Maker Studios is a subsidiary of Disney. The fact that PewDiePie had direct ties to a giant of traditional media, yet can still make money from production after losing traditional corporate representation, demonstrates the difficulty in disentangling entrepreneurial content creation from corporately produced media.

But PewDiePie's success is not the norm for the online content creation industry. Twitch streamers and YouTubers are like musicians in that there is great variance in the career potential of each practitioner. Not everyone who picks up a guitar is Eddie Van Halen, and most guitar players do not make money from playing. But some do. Similarly, most Twitch streamers do not make money from their streaming activities. Only a select subset of the streaming population can turn their online video game play into a career.

THE FORMAT OF TWITCH

Twitch presents the viewer with streams in a manner similar to Google: by listing the most popular results first. On Twitch's *front page* (the first page one sees when accessing www.twitch.tv) the viewer is presented with a list of six streams that are being showcased at that moment, one of which will be playing in an embedded video viewer. If a popular eSports event is occurring, it often takes one or more of these coveted spots. The rest of the spots generally link to the streams of popular broadcasters. Often one slot is reserved for a "featured partner," a channel whose viewership is small but growing. On rare occasions, outside entities rent these front page channels to broadcast their own content. For example, the 2016 Republican and Democratic National Conventions were (somewhat awkwardly) featured on the Twitch front page. Below these "curated" streams, the Twitch front page lists the most popular games and channels, based on current viewership (the number of people watching them at that moment). The twelve most popular games are displayed, followed by the six most popular channels. The page ends by listing the six most popular channels for games being played on specific consoles (PS4 and Xbox). When a viewer clicks on the

link to a channel, their browser opens that channel as a webpage. When a viewer clicks on game they are given a list of every channel playing that game. Again, the viewer is shown the most popular channels first (in terms of total current viewers).[6]

When one clicks on a channel and the page loads, one may first get the impression that the visual aspects of Twitch closely mimic what one finds on other Internet portals for streaming video, specifically YouTube. The site is focused on the small video window embedded in the middle of the page. This window provides a video stream - a continuously running, live video feed from a broadcaster. In this window, the frame is generally filled with the video game being played. Many live streamers (especially professional ones) include live video of the broadcaster as well, often in a lower corner of the frame. This presentation allows the audience to see both the game and the player, as the game is played. Audio from both the video game and the player is present, and is often mixed so that the player's voice is dominant and the game's music and sound effects are in the background. While most of the action takes place in the embedded video window, the rest of the screen appears as a normal web page. The Twitch logo at the top of the page sits next to a search bar, so that users can find video streams of their favorite games or streamers. The left margin provides links to other portions of the Twitch website. Below the video screen is the *channel page*, a document of varying length describing the broadcaster and explaining the nature of the channel.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the right margin of the screen features the chat window, where audience members viewing the gameplay can comment on what is happening, interact with each other, and with the streamer who is currently playing the game. Understanding the chat window is necessary to comprehend the labor

[6] While the format is subject to change, the description here was accurate as of the time of March 2017.

of professional Twitch streaming. Returning to the example from the previous chapter, When Ezekiel_III talks he is speaking to viewers at home, especially the individuals that participate in his chat window, who can then reply to him. Additionally, audience members can "subscribe" to Ezekiel's channel for five dollars per month. The presence of the "subscribe" button is an obvious instance of money mediating the relationship between the individual streamer and the requisite labor (a commodified form of play).

Two additional aspects require explanation. First, one does not need to subscribe to the channel to watch it. Chapter Five explores the benefits that subscriptions provide to the viewer. Second, subscriptions are not the only way that live streamers generate income. Professional streamers also accept tips or donations from viewers, they receive a small amount of advertising revenue, and they may make money from one-time or ongoing sponsorships with larger companies in the video game and computer hardware industries. When loading most channels, one is first shown a commercial (similar to a 30 second TV spot), while a small banner ad appears over the chat window that must be clicked to close. The aspects presented here indicate the places where commerce intervenes in the practice of Twitch video distribution.

TYPES OF STREAMERS

No two professional streamers offer the same product. In fact, attempting to describe Twitch streaming as a *genre* of media is inherently flawed, as there are many diverse types of channels present on the site. The remainder of this chapter will detail the different types of streamers and what makes their content distinct.

First we must realize that there are different levels of economic interdependence between individual streamers and Twitch. This dissertation focuses only on professional

streamers – those who derive income from streaming. Yet, even that description is not sufficiently nuanced. Some streamers are obviously professional, deriving their entire income from Twitch streaming and related activities. Other streamers aspire to be professional. These broadcasters may or may not be partners (people who receive subscription and advertising revenue from Twitch), and they may or may not have a "day job" outside of streaming. Some broadcasters use the money made from streaming to supplement other income. On the other hand, there are individuals who jump into streaming full-time, by buying the necessary equipment and then quitting their previous job to stream[7]. Even before they are partnered, some streamers broadcast full-time without a second occupation by living solely on tips and donations.

The number of professional streamers is impossible to accurately determine. As of September 2016, there were 2.2 million channels on Twitch, 17,000 of which were partnered.[8] While it's impossible to say how many of those partners earn a sustainable living from Twitch, professional broadcaster ItmeJP estimates that figure to be around 600 individuals in the U.S., but offers no data to support his assertion.[9] Additionally, some streams do not focus on a single broadcaster, but are instead corporately owned, such as the official channels of eSports events and some game developers. Some individual streamers occasionally break from Twitch's requirement to focus on game-related content to broadcast other activities - such as creating art, playing music, and cooking. The more time one spends on Twitch, the more one realizes that adding detail to a description of Twitch content will not lead to a more focused and specific

[7] Most professional streamers suggest **not** to take this approach.
[8] As per Emmett Shear's TwitchCon 2016 Keynote.
[9] ItmeJP is a professional streamer that runs a weekly talk show on Twitch called *Dropped Frames*, which will be further explored in Chapter Six.

definition. Rather, a thorough understanding of Twitch is recognizes its complex and interdependent aspects, which can be either global or niche in nature, and which also result in a multidimensional culture.

There are also varying levels of technical expertise present in professional streaming. While a handful of professional streamers do not show themselves on camera, most do. Many Streamers use Chroma Key technology[10] so that their face appears in front of the video game screen rather than in a "box." Many broadcasters also provide information relevant to the game and their channel at various positions within the frame. A common practice is to have the names of subscribers and donors appear somewhere in the video window whenever they donate or subscribe. Occasionally, some broadcasters will switch the main video feed from that of the game to focus on the streamer when they want to directly address the audience. The explosion described above on Ezekiel_III's channel is one example of this practice. Another example is when FuturemanGaming takes the audience back to his "underground command center,"[11] when he finishes playing a game. Theatricality can be found in many Twitch streams, and can become part of a streamer's brand.

Streamers attempt to provide their audience with distinct types of content that can be categorized into a set of *genres* of live streaming. While some broadcasters play the same game repeatedly, others focus on new games that they have never played before. Some of the more common types of broadcasters are variety streamers, speed runners, and professional competitive players.

[10] Chroma Key is commonly known by the phrase: "green screen."
[11] FuturemanGaming is a broadcaster that was interviewed for this dissertation. His underground command center is simply a picture of such a location that is presented behind him using Chroma Key technology.

Additionally, Twitch is a global platform, allowing users to stream video from all over the world. Scrolling through Twitch channels one finds many streamers working from Russia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Australia, Brazil, and many other countries. As of March 2017, job postings on Twitch's website advertised open positions for "partnerships associates" in Spain, Korea, London, and Nordic Europe. These positions demonstrate that Twitch is either trying to find more professional streamers in these international markets, or that they need additional middle management to coordinate with local streamers that are already partnered.

Known Genres

Ezekiel_III, mentioned above, is a variety caster (sometimes phrased variety streamer), meaning that he plays a wide assortment of games, and that the main draw for viewers lies in his personality and theatricality. Variety casters are those that attract a loyal following by being fun to watch. These streamers often develop a quirk or gimmick to distinguish their channel from others. For example, Ezekiel_III is known for getting angry, KaceyTron is known for her satire[12], and FuturemanGaming has an extensive backstory about traveling to the past (our present) to defeat video games and save the future.

SnarfyBobo[13], is a part-time speedrunner, meaning that he repeatedly plays four or five specific games, with the goal of becoming faster at completing each of them. Speedrunners often provide a timer along with other numerical data comparing this *run* through a game with their personal best times (PBs), as well as to the world records.

[12] KacyTron uses her stream to critique and mock negative stereotypes about female gamers.
[13] SnarfyBobo is one of the professional streamers interviewed for this dissertation.

Some streamers favor a specific game and play it on stream every day. These channels often contain an element of implicit competitiveness, focusing on a game that favors online multiplayer over narrative, or that is known for extreme difficulty. Often these games have a ranking system for comparing the skill level of every player. These games include first person shooters (FPS's) like *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* (2012) and *Overwatch* (2016); battle royale survival games like *Arma III* (2015) and *H1Z1* (2016), and multiplayer online battle arenas (MOBAs) like *League of Legends* (2009) and *Dota 2* (2013). Although they do not have a global leaderboard, massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) are also popular for this type of broadcaster, since (1) their content takes years to complete, and (2) players seek bragging rights by achieving "world firsts," or being the first on their server to complete new game content when it is released. Some streamers find success with single player games, such as Wyvern_Slayr[14] who only broadcasts *Dark Souls III* (2016). Some single player games become competitive on Twitch when streamers play them with artificial constraints (e.g., choosing not to use health items).

Professional competitive gamers could also be considered part of the previous category because they only stream one game. However, unlike the streamers mentioned above, professional competitive gamers are eSports competitors first, and broadcasters second. These individuals are often part of eSports teams and derive some of their income from winning competitions and securing corporate sponsors. For these individuals, streaming revenue supplements eSports income.

In addition to the streamed video game play described above, Twitch offers other game-related content. There are gaming talk shows that exhibit varying levels of

[14] Wyvern_Slayr is one of the professional streamers interviewed for this dissertation.

professional production. These shows include professionally produced host segments where commentators talk about upcoming games, and game industry professionals discussing game design while working on actual projects. Finally, eSports events, in which professional gamers compete for prize money in tournaments, feature prominently on Twitch.

The business model for most professional streamers relies on three main revenue sources: subscriptions/donations, advertising, and sponsorships. First, the subscription button is a direct way for audience members to support a streamer. While each broadcaster handles subscriptions differently, common benefits of subscribing are increased versatility in the chat window and the ability to skip ads when accessing the channel. Additionally, streamers often provide a link that allows users to "tip" or directly donate to the broadcaster's Paypal account. Second, on Twitch, whenever one clicks on a link to channel, one must first watch a short advertisement (often a 30 second spot) before accessing the content of the channel. Additionally, a stationary ad is often placed in front of the chat window, and one must click an "x" to close it and access the chat. While the exact percentages are not publicly available, Twitch notes that they do share advertising revenue with partnered streamers. Third, popular streamers can solicit sponsorships from hardware companies and video game developers. Sponsorships with hardware companies often take the form of free equipment. However, when video game developers sponsor a streamer, they sometimes pay the streamer to spend a specific amount of time playing the developer's game.[15] Professional streamers use these three types of revenue as income.

[15] The practice of producing sponsored content is discussed in Chapter Six as one of the aspects of Twitch broadcasting that prompts discussion of professional ethics.

ON VOCABULARY

For the scope of this dissertation, the phrases “live streamer,” “streamer,” “caster,” and “broadcaster” will be used interchangeably to denote an individual who broadcasts using Twitch. Since this research focuses on professional streamers, the word “professional” may generally be assumed, unless otherwise stated or implied in the context. Finally, remember that the word “Twitch” can refer to (1) the social setting of this research, (2) the proprietary online infrastructure that facilitates streaming, and (3) the corporation that runs that infrastructure. In this dissertation, context will dictate the appropriate definition. Additionally, Chapter Six addresses the importance of the polysemy of the word “Twitch.”

Chapter 3

Relevant Theory

While the notion of a for-profit video game player may seem revolutionary to some, the phenomenon of commodifying play is nothing new. Consider common adages, such as "follow your bliss," and "if you do what you love you'll never work a day in your life." Transforming vacation into vocation has long been pursued, especially in the realm of (non-team) sports, with those talented few finding employment as professional skiers, cyclists, fishermen (and women), skateboarders, snowboarders, and mountain climbers. For every activity that an individual can do for fun when they have the money, there are hundreds, even thousands, of people that do that activity for work[1]. For these people, I posit that money mediates the meaning of their leisure – that income influences the ways that they decode the activity that for us is leisure and for them work.

This chapter will consider money's meaningful relation to professional leisure by surveying the relevant scholarly theories. First, this chapter will consider the nature of leisure by reviewing the scholarly literature on play, focusing on the specific areas where play is theorized as a form of work. This section will also include specific definitions of work and play. Second, the chapter will review critical theory and its relationship to social theory. Since the relevant social theories are centrally concerned with society's use of symbols, this section will begin with a review of semiotics before

[1] One topic that must be shelved for the moment is the structural inequality ignored by the platitudes cited above. While a professional skier may get gear for free from sponsors, he or she was not always a professional. One must participate in the activity for fun before one has the reputation sufficient to be paid for it. Therefore, the equipment one buys before "going pro" represents a portion of the price of admission into the professional ranks. Similarly, if one never has the funds to purchase a computer powerful enough to play the latest games while up-streaming video, then one has no chance of becoming a Twitch streamer, let alone a professional one.

explicating the critical approaches to social theory that inform this research. The emphasis on semiotics (the process by which people attribute meaning to signs) will lay the foundation for this dissertation's ethnographic approach. Finally, a review of the literature on media and how its industries function under neoliberal capitalism will set the stage for the exploration of Twitch streaming as a contemporary media profession.

WORK AND PLAY

Work can be a difficult concept to define due to its complimentary, but ultimately distinct connotations. Indeed much of the difficulty in explaining Twitch streaming as a job stems from the seeming inseparability of *work*'s thoroughly separable connotations. On one hand, work is often defined as the activity that one does for money. In this sense, Twitch streaming can certainly count as work. However, work can also refer to activities that are productive, but do not include the aspect of income (such as working as a volunteer, or working on one's taxes). Furthermore, work often references connotations of "seriousness." Another common connotation includes the assumption that - were it not for the money involved - work would include actions that one would not choose to engage in. Ignoring the use of work in American English parole[2], would do a disservice to the complexity of this seemingly simple term. While nothing empirically separates activities accepted as work from those defined as play, they two are often seen as opposites. However, their oppositional nature rests solely in their American connotations and need not have a role in their functional or specific definitions[3]. Indeed, it is the general American cultural difficulty in deconstructing the non-oppositional nature or work and play that makes the exploration of the relationship

[2] See Saussure (1986) for a discussion of parole, or the actual use of language by individuals.
[3] See page 28 below for a definition of play.

between work, play, and income sociologically fruitful. For the scope of this dissertation, work will refer to an activity that is done in exchange for income. The connotation of seriousness that often accompanies work is not included in the definition for the scope of this dissertation - but it will be helpful to keep knowledge of this connotation in mind.

Baudrillard (1975) implies a relationship between work, play, and money when describing the way that money represents both work (Marx's "congealed labor time", cf., Marx and Engels, 1978) and non-work in the form of leisure activities. Baudrillard (1975) posits that an individual feels as though she produces the purest form of herself when engaged in leisure activities. Most of us are familiar with the superficial level of this relationship: we work today, saving our money, so that we can play later. Sociologist Robert Stebbins (1982, 2004, 2009) argues that we cannot conceptualize work and leisure as two separate activities since some people enjoy their jobs and others turn their leisure activities into careers. These theoretical positions demonstrate the necessity for reevaluating our understanding of how professionals (such as Twitch streamers) comprehend their relationship to video game play.

Several influential scholars have contributed to the theoretical understanding of what play is and how it functions in society, including Huizinga (1950), Caillois (1961), and Sutton-Smith (1997). Many of these scholars attempt to map the relationship between play and necessary processes within society itself, working from the assumption that humankind's ability to engage in play is of foundational importance to how society functions. Presented below is a brief exploration of play theory, paired with

a consideration of how the work of specific theorists relates to the practice of professional Twitch streaming.

Nearly all contemporary, scholarly work on play theory references Huizinga, and his book *Homo Ludens* (1950). Huizinga emphasizes the *free* nature of play: that it is an activity that exists outside of *real-life* - within a *magic circle.* Like ritual, play creates an imagined world, separate from the real one[4], and that participants experience it as immediate while in the act of play. Huizinga separates true play from professional sports, stating that when real world outcomes (such as income) are present, the activity is no longer true play. This is an important specification because it allows us to consider the applicability of the term "play" to the activity of live streaming. Since income is potentially at stake for professional streamers, one must ask - based on Huizinga's framework - is the act of playing video games online for money no longer play?

I posit that we should instead use Huizinga's position as an opportunity to add nuance to the discussion - by separating the streamer from the audience. While the presence of income may problematize the nature of the streamer's activity as true play, one must question whether engaged audience members enter an imagined social space distinct from the "real world," marking their participation as a type of ritualized play.

Mood is the heart of the play experience (Huizinga, 1950). Mood is also central to the audience's experience of a broadcaster's channel. As documented below, in their speech and advertising, professional Twitch streamers endeavor to cultivate communities and chat rooms that express specific types of atmosphere. In other words, mood is a large part of what professional streamers manufacture through the way they

[4] For example: when grade schooler's play make believe in the park, the imagined world where their pantomimes make referential sense is more important to their current actions than their actual surroundings. For Huizinga this is true of adult play in religious rituals as well.

run their channels. Therefore, Huizinga might have argued professional streamers have lost the ability to truly play, but have done so for the sake of a new kind play, which they offer to their audience. Additionally, I find Stebbins' (1982, 2004, 2009) argument - that leisure and work overlap – sufficiently compelling due to the complexity that exists in the ways that leisure and economics intersect in contemporary society. Play activity carries its own financially-relevant aspects and requirements.

Caillois (1961) has a problem with Huizinga's conceptualization; Huizinga deliberately ignores broad categories of play - such as games of chance or ones that have real world outcomes (such as gambling). Caillois posits a typology of games that focus on competition (named agôn), chance (alea), mimicry, and vertigo (ilinx), all four of which are present in online streaming. Many streamers compete (specifically speed runners and those that concentrate on a single game), but one can argue that all video games are subject to chance, as the algorithms that run games almost always include randomized calculation of variables. Additionally, on a meta-level, streamers compete for viewers. Players use an amount of mimicry when controlling a character, which may or may not lead to feelings of identification. Finally, truly engaged audience members let their emotions experience downfall when a streamer fails in the game, potentially marking the empathic connection as a type of vertigo, or ilinx. In short, Caillois demonstrates Huizinga's shortcomings as an analytical framework for understanding play on Twitch.

However, applying Caillois's typology to Twitch streaming is messy, forcing us to consider the experiences of different agents within this social milieu. Like Huizinga,

Caillois's theoretical work functions best when one separates the experience of the streamer from that of the audience member.

Writing much later, Sutton-Smith (1997) argues that previous scholarship in play theory has failed to account for the ways that scholars' individual definitions of the term *play* are influenced by their own rhetoric. Sutton-Smith adds that any socially relevant definition of play must be inclusive to play by adults, be broad, not be constricted by western values that label play as not serious, describe more than simply an attitude, include specific performances, and include both short and long term commitments. Sutton-Smith's argument about widening the definition of play includes attributes that are inclusive of Twitch live streaming.

Sutton-Smith (1997) examines the ambiguity of play - the assumption that the end is not predetermined - and questions whether this ambiguity is inherent in play or an outcome the various rhetorics that seek to define it. Ultimately, Sutton-Smith (1997) argues that *adaptive variability* - the ability to amend practices in response to changing situations - is the heart of what play is. By broadcasting video game play, streamers display adaptive variability, both in the playing of the game and by adapting to the needs of their audience. These forms of adaptability cement streaming practice as a form of play, should one decide to use this definition.

In his theorizing of video games, Juul (2005) discusses play only in the way that the term relates to acts that constitute gaming. Even if play is a term whose scope goes well beyond that of games, I posit that foundational assumptions about the activity of playing a video game are inherently playful. In other words, even if Huizinga would argue that our use of the word "play" to describe Twitch streamers' interactions with

video games is incorrect, we should still consider the use of the word in this context. The fact that most people would still label the activity as play (there is no other commonly used English word to describe how one interacts with a video game) demonstrates something about the way most people make sense of the activity. Juul may help us understand the playfulness of serious leisure. Most people perceive games as "free:" that participation is voluntary, and that the worlds games create are outside of and distinct from the real world that we all share[5]. The important aspects of Juul's conceptualization are the fact that play may or may not include real-life consequences and his central focus on the necessity of rules in games. Rules are important for both the streamer and the community. When playing, streamers are as bound to the coded roles of the game as any other player. Similarly, the audience must adhere to the rules of the channel.[6]

Rules are not the central concern of play for the scope of this dissertation. Additionally, Huizinga's (1950) definition of play runs afoul of the popular usage of the term *play*. For Huizinga (1950) an activity can no longer be considered play if it involves real world consequences (such as drawing an income). However, I argue that we cannot ignore the semiotic value of how we talk about Twitch streaming as a career. Stating that Twitch streamers "play video games" as a part of their job does not imply that we are misusing the word *play*. Instead, the fact that the above phrase conveys a meaning that we can easily understand says something about our cultural understanding of the nature of the activity inherent when we use video game software. The activity of

[5] Huizinga's (1950) description of games existing in a special social space outside of physical reality seems to align nicely with the imagined spaces that are realized in the mind of the player when confronted with the digitally created world that video games present visually and aurally using screens and speakers.
[6] See Chapter Five for a discussion of channel rules.

interacting with a video game is *playful*, even when money is at stake. Therefore, for the scope of this dissertation, play refers to any activity that involves a mental separation from "normal" reality (accounting for a liberal plethora of definitions), requires some amount of adaptive variability, and can have real-life outcomes (or not). Occupying a special space also implies adopting a set of special scripts for interacting with in this space, but they need not be as rigid as a set of rules coded into a game. Play is also an activity that has the intention of being pleasurable, even if it does not succeed in this aspect during execution.

Finally, Juul's (2005) conceptualization of play may be less important for understanding how streamers approach video games, than it is for theorizing the social space occupied by the community. On Twitch, the community interacts in the chat window, a space somewhat distinct from the wider *real* world, much like Huizinga's (1950) magic circle. This dissertation will return repeatedly to the nature of community and its importance to professional streaming.

The important terms listed above (work, play, and community) all influence the way that we understand the practices and structures to which we apply such labels. Therefore, the creation of meaning out of symbols (such as words) is centrally important to understanding Twitch streaming. Attempting to understand the ways that symbols interact with meaning implies a semiotic approach to research.

SEMIOTICS

Much like "culture," the word "semiotics" carries several different definitions in scholarship. Broadly speaking, semiotics concerns the study of signs, sign systems, meaning, and the process of signification. Nöth (1990) posits that semiotics concerns

philosophy while semiology concerns linguistics. Additionally, semiotics is often seen as a broader discipline, examining the nature of signs and the process of signification, while semiology is a subfield which focuses on the lives of specific signs in the world (See Nöth's, 1990, discussions on Saussure, Barthes, Hjelmslev, and Peirce). Still, semiotics and semiology can be useful tools in dissecting the meaning making that occurs around leisure and income.

Many semioticians favor Peirce as the founder of their discipline. Peirce, however, never provided a comprehensive overview of his semiotics, and his ideas need to be pieced together from a handful of different writings. Peirce is meticulous when he divides up the signification process into nine conceptually distinct aspects. Peirce is perhaps most useful here in that his vocabulary can help us define income as an object of study.

A brief description of Peirce's typology (Nöth, 1990; Peirce, 1991) follows. The representamen (or sign vehicle) can be examined through the level of firstness (direct experience) as the qualsign, through the level of secondness (comparison) as the token (or sinisign), and through the level of thirdness (integrated rule) as the legisign. In other words, when a Twitch streamer receives a tip, she will notice a larger balance on her PayPal account (the token or sinisign), which will invoke a type of experience related to money (qualsign), which she will understand based on the rules for interpreting money as income (legisign). For our purposes the token or sinisign is not as important as the qualsign, as we are more concerned with the experience of getting paid rather than the amount of payment. The legisign is also conceptually relevant, and may tell us something about the meaning of money, but on the level of semiology. From the

legisign we may be able to construct a "dictionary" on the meanings of money, but it only scratches the surface of semiosis, the process of meaning making.

For this project, we are more interested in the interpretant, the structure within the mind that creates meaning out of the "dictionary" of signs that the mind processes. On one hand the interpretant is learned in that it is constructed over time by experiencing related signs, and remains malleable while also achieving a state of relative stability. The interpretant exists in the mind prior to subsequent sign processing, in that it is ready to be accessed when a new token becomes available. For the interpretant, the level of thirdness (governing rules) is defined as a sign's *argument*, an assertion about truth in relation to a sign. For example, Hiedegger (2013) might posit that the a*rgument* of "technology" is progress for its own sake. This dissertation is partially concerned with the argument of money: what "truth" does streaming income assert during the mental processes of understanding it (i.e., the interpretant)? I posit that a normative theory of streaming practice will work as an index, guiding the researcher in unpacking the "truths" asserted through streaming tips and subscriptions.

If Peirce's legacy is semiotics, then Saussure's legacy is linguistics. Saussure (1986) posits several theoretical points that are necessary for examining language (and I would argue are necessary for understanding money as well). Saussure posits a dyadic (two-part) model of the sign: On one side, the signifier (the visible word or sound image), and on the other side, the signified (the meaning, thought or idea). It's important to note here that neither side represents the physical object (since physical objects are outside the mind they are "extra-semiotic"). Saussure notes that symbolic languages are arbitrary, and are held together only by convention. He also notes that

language is arbitrary in a real sense but not in a personal sense (i.e., one cannot decide to make up new words and expect others to understand them, one must follow the legisign). Money fits well into this discussion of language because (as we have seen above) it fits many of the aspects discussed by Saussure. The meaning of income is not empirically enforced, but arbitrary in Saussure's sense of the term: there is no physical connection between the act and the meaning. But tipping a streamer does mean something, and that meaning is symbolic, arbitrary, and open to interpretation. The streamer must strategically interpret the meaning of that money and act on that interpretation in specific ways, because the economic aspect of the tip is empirical rather than arbitrary - money still spends.

Therefore, what follows is a more-or-less structuralist perspective on the life of objects[7] and the individuals who perceive them. Objects achieve importance through the way they are interpreted by individuals, and are made meaningful through a process of ordering (placement based on a category and then possible re-categorizing, etc.) - being placed into a network (or web) of related objects (or signs of objects) in the mind of the individual. In short, it is the ordering of objects that give them meaning to an individual. Additionally, the meaning of income is ordered by an understanding of how it was earned, creating a theoretical conceptualization of how one's industry functions. In other words, the examination of streamer income explores the ways that the meaning of

[7] For the scope of this conceptualization, I should explicate what I mean when I use the term "object." Since the focus of this question is on meaning, I will expand the definition of object to the interpretations of individuals, and not simply define it as a "thing" in "physical space." The focus of the question is on interpretation, and the life of objects in an individual's perception and mental processes. This approach aligns with Peirce's assumption that the nature of meaning is outcome based and that objects only exist in that they have an effect on us (even if it is not physical). Words and tips, for example, are "objects" for the scope of this dissertation.

money received as income is incorporated into wider semiotic webs or structures of related sign arrangements from which understanding is derived.

Many theorists have worked from the knowledge that money communicates. Weber (1992) wanted to see how money functioned in society, especially in the cases where it was not spent (either horded or invested). Weber posits that the long-term effects of Calvinism influence the way that wealth is accumulated but not recirculated. Weber argues that for Protestant Christians work is a *moral* enterprise while consumption is not. Therefore, having a lot of money in the bank was indicative of one's moral standing. This assumption also implies that the poor are poor because they are immoral (i.e. do not work hard enough, or spend what they earn too quickly). However, Weber also acknowledges that the equation between money and morality is different in America, appearing more as a "sport" than a religious obligation.

In Weber, we begin to see how money works as a sign system; it becomes an indicator of morality. Money here is data to be interpreted by the moral Calvinist Christian. Veblen (2007) takes the connection between money and communication a step further in his *Theory of the Leisure Class*. Veblen acknowledges that amongst the upper classes in America there is a web of meanings - where the items one consumes places one into a hierarchy vis-a-vis other wealthy individuals. There are many rules and (while abstract in Saussure's terms) they are compulsory for the participant. Just as one cannot make up a word in the English language and expect others to understand it, so too must the wealthy American properly participate in conspicuous consumption. Similarly, Bourdieu (1984) argues that personal taste references a hierarchical web of meanings that both indicates a person's social class, and determines how one evaluates

artistic works. Additionally, Mauss (2000) demonstrates that the movement of money and gifts creates, maintains, and enforces social pressures and expectations. The fact that a gift is not "free," indicates that its movement between individuals carries meanings which participants must properly decode. The scholarship of Weber, Bourdieu, Veblen, and Mauss demonstrate that money (and the indicators of money) is read by individuals, referencing a web of meanings which are arbitrary yet obligatory, and require interpretation by participants. Money is a sign.

Baudrillard (1981) follows Veblen closely in his *Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. Baudrillard rejects Marx's materialist approach and argues that consumption is a process by which exchange value (money) is exchanged for sign value rather than use value; one buys a Ferrari not because it goes fast but because of how others decode it in relation to the owner. Furthermore, there could be no use value for an object if it lacked sign value. Therefore, the political economy of signs (rather than material conditions) is the more appropriate critique of contemporary society. For Baudrillard, the acquisition of a new car or a new television does not serve the purposes of granting the buyer the use value of the object, but rather demonstrates their social mobility and relative level of wealth. The use value of an object becomes an *alibi* for the object's ability to distinguish the owner from lower social classes (Baudrillard, 1981, 32). Consider the role of modification in the aesthetic value of pickup trucks. Consumer grade trucks cost more than standard sedans, but in exchange for the increased price the consumer receives more use value (the ability to go off-road, haul heavy trailers through the use of a hitch, and carry material in the bed). However, some people modify trucks by adjusting the suspension so that the truck is lowered, and

replacing the (generally larger) tires with noticeably smaller ones. These modifications, made for aesthetic reasons, decrease the use value of the truck (i.e., it can no longer go off-road as easily). Therefore, among some circles, the aesthetic value of the truck is partially based upon modifications that make it less useful. This process assigns social capital to individuals who can demonstrate that they do not need the money they are spending by using it to remove use value from their own property (Much like Veblen's discussion of dresses which are valuable because they prevent the wearer from contributing physical labor). Baudrillard's theoretical work follows Veblen in that it posits a hierarchical network of signs which people navigate in order to place themselves and others into a social hierarchy[8], and this web of meanings is determined by the indicators of disposable financial capital.

Not only does Baudrillard discuss money as the vehicle of exchange value, but money also fits his definition of the sign. Money has no real use value and relies on its admittance to a hierarchy of signs (of wealth, of commodity, of capital) to function. Money is not separate from the sign economy. If money functions at all it must function as a sign.

Consider the outcomes of money's movement through Twitch. Streamers express their emotions when someone tips. The notion that money determines the mental states of individuals implies a Marxist (cf., Marx and Engels, 1978) reading of economics. In Marx, the base (real relations) determines the superstructure (ideology). In other words, *real* material resources have the ultimate power, determining the nature

[8] Much like Veblen's conspicuous consumption, streamer hierarchy includes class, race, and gender distinctions and expectations. Although these distinctions are important, they are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Future research on gender, race, and class in live streaming would certainly be an important addition to the literature.

of the world and how we think about it. Those who have more resources, have more power. The nature of power is top-down for Marx, and realized in the material relations. Marx also posits that the "ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas" (1978, 172); the ruling class presents its interests as "common" and universal to everyone. However, the truth of the matter is that the ruling class's interests are simply the "ideal expression of the dominant material relations" (Marx, 1978, 172). In other words, the ideas that support the continuation of the current ruling class are the ideas commonly held through society (regardless of class) as the natural state of affairs. In contemporary society these relations are capitalist in nature, and the ruling ideals concern the continuation of shareholder capitalism, which is seen as a natural order. Therefore, since Twitch is a business venture, with the stated goal of generating capital, it brings the ethos of wealth accumulation into the medium's communicative processes. In other words, the social practices on Twitch exist *because* they support the processes of commerce. This assumption meshes well with Barthes' (2012) discussion of the myth: that the stories that help us understand (i.e., order) the world advantage the bourgeoisie by making their position as seem natural by hiding the distinction between them and the proletariat. The ideal relations (from the bourgeoisie's perspective) are maintained through myth, which is itself a network of meaningfully connected signs.

The fact that these "ideal relations" are not so ideal for the working and lower classes leads us to Marx's definition of ideology, that of *false consciousness*. For Marx, ideology is a lie, as the material relations can be empirically mapped and shown to be detrimental to the masses while simultaneously making the bourgeoisie comfortable. Whether Twitch streamers are empirically exploited for their labor is not the focus of

this study. However, the importance of Marx's notion of false consciousness cannot be exaggerated. If the dominant relations are that of capitalism, to what extent does false consciousness moderate an individual's (e.g., a Twitch streamer's) relationship to play? Does the fact that the play has been commodified demonstrate the influence of dominant material relations?

Semiotics provides us with a vocabulary for examining money as a form of communication. The first step is documenting money's various signifieds. Here, Althusser's definition for i*deology* becomes useful: it is the "imaginary relation to real relations" (2006, 82). In other words, the amount of money I have is real. The fact that the money is "mine" and I can consider how to use it is imaginary. When I put this imaginary relation into a system with an imaginary representation of how it should work on a macro scale, I'm starting to form an ideology about it (in Althusser's terms). Following Marx, Althusser argues that ideology has "no history" (2006, 84) and no real referent (like false consciousness). Practice is the physical manifestation of ideology. Althusser goes on to state that we have numerous ideologies, such as a familial one that regulates our behavior at home and a factory ideology that regulates our approach to work (if we work in a factory). As Žižek would say, "fantasy organizes how we see reality" (2006). And all workers, including twitch streamers, organize the reality of their working practices based on a fantasy concerning their proper and intended use. Therefore, one can argue that streamer professionalism (or indeed the normative assumptions of any professional) are ideological in nature.

The common thread throughout this literature is that the way that we see the world is ordered by thought processes that one can describe as ideological: Marx's

(1978) false consciousness, Barthe's (2012) mythology, and Althusser's (2006) imaginary relations. Since these theoretical approaches each attempt to explain the same phenomenon (that the dominant class's ideas become the default ideas), and that professional streaming brings play into a capitalist exchange relationship, we must ask the question: How does one's understanding of income (a type of money within a hierarchy of signs) influence one's approach to professional video game play? Additionally, does this influence demonstrate that broadcasters have a normative theory of Twitch streaming?

MEDIA IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The fact that professional streamers earn money from their practices means that the ways that streamers approach their work may tell us something about how they interpret their income. Streaming income may take the form of subscriptions, tips or donations, sponsorships and advertising revenue. The exact nature (or amount) of the payment is tertiary to the current endeavor. Instead, this dissertation focuses on the interpretation of money as payment, which turns the play aspect of video gaming into labor. Therefore, by changing play so that it becomes also labor, money (income) changes the experience of gaming. In other words, money mediates or moderates the relationship between a professional streamer and her play.

Twitch is a website that embodies the promise of web 2.0, where commercial web portals provide individuals with the tools and infrastructure necessary to create and globally distribute their own media content. Early forays into the broadcasting of oneself include *JenniCam*, where college student Jennifer Ringley would periodically upload webcam images of herself to the internet, a process that was quickly adopted by

the adult entertainment industry (Butler, 2002). The democratizing potential of the internet lies in the ease in which technologies allow untrained individuals to create and distribute content. This technological possibility opened the door to web 2.0: the idea that businesses could implement the infrastructure necessary for individuals to easily distribute media they create online, where it would be available to the entire world. This allowed web 2.0 companies to become media "metabusinesses" – media corporations that do not create content themselves, but derive revenue from the content freely created by users (Burgess and Green, 2009; Fisher, 2010; Jenkins, Ford, and Green, 2013). Web 2.0 offers individuals (skilled and unskilled, professional and amateur) the ability to create and globally distribute media content without the average user having to learn HTML and Java. Contemporary social media sites such as Facebook (and MySpace and Friendster before it), YouTube, Twitch, LiveJournal, BlogSpot, and LinkedIn are all platforms that attempt to fulfill the promise of Web 2.0 (both for their users and their shareholders).

When viewed optimistically, Web 2.0 presents an opportunity for both commercial and non-commercial applications. While YouTube was originally advertised as an archive for personal videos, it also offered a broadcasting platform for large corporations (Burgess and Green, 2009). In addition to corporate producers, YouTube and Twitch have emerged as spaces where creative individuals can turn small-scale media production into a business. Since people earn a living from such practices, YouTube and Twitch are venues where user-generated content becomes a professional product, not an amateur one. Therefore, media scholars should examine these web portals (along with podcasts and blogs) as part of the media industry that exists within

corporate media structures, but where the production of content is *flatter* – where individual content creators have more control over the product, rather than a hierarchal bureaucratic structure of producers, executives, and studio heads.

Critical media scholarship is often concerned with the structures, practices, and products of large media corporations. In the media industries, the trend has been to consolidate (and conglomerate): forming fewer, larger firms (Bagdikian 2004, McChesney, 1999, 2014), and seeking new forms of vertical and horizontal integration. Due to Twitch's flat structure, Twitch streams are born vertically integrated. An individual Twitch streamer can make her own decisions about the nature of her channel's content, and then implements those decisions herself. While she must abide by Twitch's terms of service, she does not need to adjust her content to appease the tastes of a hierarchy of production executives.

For most media corporations, the main commodity to be sold is the audience (Ang, 2006, 2010; Alusutaari, 2010; Smythe, 2006), which prompts producers to tailor content to the fit the desires of the advertisers (Herman and Chomsky, 2006). Beyond simply courting advertisers, producers also use content to attract (and in a way construct) certain types of audiences that can be demographically defined, and sold to advertisers that want to reach specific types of consumers. The analysis of audience as commodity also applies to Twitch streamers. Twitch channels function as a *flow medium* (Havens and Lotz, 2012), meaning that its revenue relies on bringing audiences back day after day, rather than selling them a product once. Working from this model, revenue is derived from advertisers paying Twitch (and its partnered streamers) based on the number of audience members present for advertisements. Therefore, much like a

terrestrially broadcast television station, Twitch's potential for revenue rests on its ability to sell an audience to advertisers.

In contemporary media industries, producers keep costs down through contingent labor (e.g., hiring employees on a temporary, project-based capacity). Therefore, individuals working within the journalism and video game development industries find increasing precarity - the experience that one's job is not secure (cf., Deuze, 2007). Deuze (2007) notes that precarity may be normalized through culture: that the general public's expectations about how media professionals navigate their careers influences how production companies approach the employer/employee relationship, and that these assumptions benefit the corporations at the expense of the employee (specifically their financial stability). Precarity may become common across all industries as nations lean towards increasingly neoliberal practices. Chandler and Reid (2016) posit that the ability to thrive from within a vulnerable position defines the experience of contemporary neoliberal subjectivities.

Professional Twitch streamers certainly feel the weight of vulnerability and income insecurity (as will be further explicated in Chapter Six). One central question of this dissertation is: "How do professional streamers tailor their professional practices to ensure continued financial solvency?" The fact that one can answer this question indicates that professional streamers have a theoretical understanding of how their industry (nascent and unpredictable though it may be) should function. In other words, streamers develop what McQuail (2010) would describe as a normative theory of professional streaming - a theory of how one *should* practice streaming, based on underlying assumptions about how the industry functions.

In communication literature, normative theory is generally discussed in respect to journalism, and how it should function. Additionally, American media scholars generally focus on the ways that the tensions between the free market and assumptions of social responsibility interact, which determines how journalists go about their working life (cf., McQuail, 2010). A journalistic normative theory would address the underlying assumptions of the practice: that the press is supposed to inform the public so that individuals can better understand their world and act within it (e.g., through competent voting decisions). However, with revenues and personnel dwindling under increasingly neoliberal (read here as market-driven) industry regulation, much journalism has become been reduced to simply reporting *who said what*, rather than investigating stories and placing facts into context. Under a politically polarized media climate, reducing reporting to simply who said what is a logical trajectory for producers whose content is supported by advertising revenue. By not analyzing the statements of politicians (and other prominent figures in the media), producers sidestep backlash from viewers who do not wish to hear their opposition's position supported. This distancing of reporting from analysis carries implications for online news sources as well, where the number of clicks determines advertising revenue. However, while the traditional media may seek to find a wide audience by being inoffensive to any politically partisan viewer, online news sources may seek (in some cases) to court controversy in order to stimulate the viewer into clicking a link. In short, even though the processes may look dissimilar, both old and new media strategically tailor content to increase audience size in order to secure advertising revenue.

The important aspect to note of normative theory is that the individual journalist must negotiate what it means to be a member of the press within the context of her own job, including the expectations of her employers. Similarly, Twitch streamers are economically constrained by their viewers, and must make decisions in the context of ensuring the economic solvency of the channel. In other words, Twitch streamers make decisions about their channel while anticipating how such changes will likely influence the accrual of subscriptions, donations, tips, and sponsorships. Being able to anticipate likely revenue outcomes supports the notion that streamers understand their industry on a theoretical level. Additionally, since tipping and subscribing are voluntary, streamers must learn to interpret these actions when they occur - to properly place tipping into conversation with a theoretical understanding of how the industry functions. Since broadcasters interpret tips and donations, I posit that for professional streamers, money (in the form of tips and subscriptions) carries meaning, and that streamers *read* their revenue streams, which helps them make sense of their profession. Therefore, a theoretical understanding of professional practice in this community will help us understand the ways that money conveys meaning within Twitch's social space.

The discussion of the relationship between income and interpretation has wide-ranging implications. While the current study focuses on Twitch streamers, much of the data and analyses presented within may be applicable (directly or indirectly) to other entrepreneurial content creators - such as bloggers, YouTubers, podcasters, freelance journalists, and graphic artists. Comparing and contrasting the professional orientations of any of these workers to the Twitch streamers examined in this dissertation, may be fruitful in understanding the lifeworld of new media content creators. Additionally,

everyone who earns an income should have interpretive strategies for making sense of that money's movement. In short, the study of income as communication has wider implications, well beyond the scope of Twitch.

By commodifying play, Twitch streaming provides a venue for examining a larger theoretical and philosophical issue: the semiotic nature of money. This chapter has explored the field of semiotics to demonstrate the communicative nature of money. However, considering money's importance in contemporary society, there is a noticeable dearth of research articulated from the position that money functions as a form of communication. I argue an ethnography of professional video game players will prove beneficial, not only to understanding the profession of streaming, but also to exploring the communicative nature of income. The semiotics of money should be mapped for professional Twitch streamers, not simply to document how they make sense of their income, but to explore how they evaluate their relationship to it. Additionally, describing a normative theory of Twitch streaming will further inform the relationship between money and meaning.

Chapter 4

Methods

This research agenda aims to create an ethnography of online content creators, partially informed by a normative theory of professional streaming. Several factors support ethnography as a suitable approach to studying the experience of labor amongst professional video game players. First, the ability to earn a living from video game play is a relatively new phenomenon which has seen very little documentation in scholarly literature. While there is some literature on professional, competitive video game players[1], there is not yet an in-depth analysis of professional Twitch streamers. This is an ideal situation for ethnographic exploration as ethnography begins from questions rather than hypotheses (O'Reilly, 2005). Ethnography utilizes a data driven approach to research (Geertz, 1973a) in which theory emerges from the data (O'Reilly, 2005). Since there is no previously extant theory that directly addresses Twitch streaming as a profession, the novelty of the phenomenon suggests that a data driven approach is necessary.

Second, ethnography attempts to explore the semiotic webs in which individuals live (Geertz, 1973a). Since one goal of this research is to better understand the communicative nature of income (i.e., money's semiotic webs) ethnography is ideally suited for exploring the interpretation of income on a phenomenological level. Malinowski (1922) states that ethnography functions through a description of details and texture to explore ways of thinking. Additionally, Malinowski suggests that ethnography's value lies in exploring the underlying meanings of practices rather than simply surface descriptions. As stated above, this research is less concerned with

[1] Taylor's *Raising the Stakes* (2015), and portions of Jin's *Korea's Online Gaming Empire* (2010).

creating a "dictionary" of interpretive strategies (understandings of tokens, sinsigns, paychecks, etc.) than with the experience of professionalizing as a Twitch streamer – a process that requires the interpretation of subscriptions, donations, and tips on denotational, connotational, and affective levels. I seek to answer the question: "How does creating a streaming career create meaningful semiotic webs incorporating income, labor, and play?" This type of phenomenological question is best answered through ethnographic methods.

Conducting ethnography often requires travel to field sites to establish contact and rapport with the participants. The nature and duration of contact needs to explicated, in light of the current study. O'Reilly (1995) argues that ethnography requires direct and sustained contact, while Walcott (1995) laments that the length of time spent in the field with participants is shrinking. The problem of insufficient time spent with the target community can be felt keenly in the realm of communication literature, where ethnographies can be published based on fieldwork consisting of only a matter of days (cf., Domingo, 2008). Unfortunately, contrary to the ideal ethnographic study (consisting of a year or more in the field) this study will not accrue that amount of time in the direct, physical presence of participants. Subsequently, two issues must be addressed relating the current study to duration of contact in the field. First, the community in question is a geographically dispersed. There is no single town (or country for that matter) where a researcher can travel to "find" the Twitch community. Live streamers can broadcast from anywhere in the world that has a fast Internet connection. Second, the connected nature of this community means that communicating via the Internet is the standard means of interaction, and is therefore an appropriate way

to collect data. Since many of these individuals communicate with each other using online communications infrastructure (such as video chat programs), it would make less sense for the researcher to take lengthy research trips for face-to-face data collection. Video and voice chat software, such as Skype, Discord, and Zoom are technologies that streamers use daily, and integrating these programs into the interview process made the entire endeavor more comfortable for the participants.

Interviews are integral to ethnography because they allow the participants to speak for themselves, to express their subjective experiences on their own terms. Briggs (1986) suggests that interviewers should strive for *metacommunicative competence* by understanding the power relations at play in the interview, and the norms of communicating from within specific contexts. Additionally, one should avoid *communicative hegemony*, the approach that assumes that the researcher dictates the outcome of the interview (Briggs, 1986). Holstein and Gubrium (1995) suggest that interviewers cautiously attempt to promote *multivocality* in their participants. In other words, the interviewer should prompt the participant to address the complexity of an issue, allowing them to convey the thoughts of diverse voices, rather than simply answering questions. Additionally, one should always be ready to ad lib follow up questions (Thomas, 1993). Interviews allowed participants to provide depth and detail to their experience of work and income, which, in turn, increased the richness of the data.

Questions used during the interviews concentrated on the relationships that the Twitch live streamer has with her work, her income, her sponsors, and her audience. Just as some contemporary journalism scholars explore what it is like to be a journalist

in the current market (cf. Deuze, 2007), this study explores what it is like to be a professional Twitch streamer, focusing on how participants make sense of their professional lives and their relationships with the community that financially supports them. Addressing these aspects will not only provide insight into the lived experience of this social practice, it will also examine how money (in the form of income) communicates within this social sphere. By understanding the producer's conceptualization of her economic relationships, one can partially define what money *means* as it passes from viewer to streamer. Therefore, while superficially this is an ethnography of a specific type of media industry professional, the underlying issues involved (the relation of labor to income) will illuminate other, broader concerns, specifically the semiotics of money in contemporary society, and in neoliberal labor markets specifically.

Here, one must remember that ethnography also refers to a style of writing which has its own form and expectations. Clifford (1988) posits that ethnography involves the *invention* of a culture, rather than its representation. As outsiders, we can never truly understand the experiences of another individual, but ethnographers can strive to present a vision of their participants' experiences that conveys some aspects of those lives to a reader. The goal of this dissertation is to provide the reader with insight into the lives of Twitch streamers, specifically in relation to their understanding of labor and income. Analyses will partially take the form of O'Reilly's (2005) cyclical process. One asks a question and, having received an answer, thinks about that answer before asking another question. The process is distinct from the *constantly comparative* methods which seek to streamline the creation of generalized typologies. Following

Walcott (2005), I will look for patterns within the data, while remaining skeptical about the *truth* they profess. In ethnography, the researcher attempts to form a model of a reality, one that appears correct to the participant, but also one that can be effectively conveyed to the academic audience (Clifford's "invention"). Ethnography uses data to generalize *within events*, rather than across them (Geertz, 1973a), exploring the ways that a single event is deconstructed rather than attempting to describe a trait common to all participants.

The product of ethnography often utilizes thick description (Geertz, 1973a), wherein the researcher unpacks communicative events to trace the layered symbolic forms that constitute the community's broader semiotic web. In other words, after collecting participant observation and interview data from professional streamers, I must retell the story of this data in a way that illuminates the plethora of layered sign connections. This description must ring true for the professional streamer, while remaining accessible to the reader, who is an outsider.

Additionally, this research agenda will address Nader's (1969) argument that we should "study up" by examining groups and practices within western society, and economically dominant groups. By choosing to study Twitch streamers we have already begun to address Clifford's (2005) call for ethnographic surrealism. Clifford (2005) argues that to study cultures that look like one's own, one must find ways to make the familiar seem strange. While most many people understand the relationship between labor and income, some may be taken aback by the notion that playing video games can count as income-worthy labor. Exploring a novel form of occupation, allows for the examination of the taken-for-granted nature of earned income. I posit that by studying

professional video game players, we can better understand how we all make sense of our income.

ETHNOGRAPHY AND SEMIOTICS

By examining the trends and processes of professional Twitch streaming, one can discern patterns of interpretation and meaning making. Particularly useful are those instances of meaning construction that occur in response to economic movement (i.e., subscriptions, donations, and tips). The meanings enacted at these transactional moments are imperative for understanding the communicative nature of money within this social milieu. These meanings are not spontaneous or natural; like all language they must be learned, and are colored by the history of their use. By examining the discourse surrounding live streamer professionalism, and common features within broadcaster self-promotion, we will illuminate how the meanings of money's movement are manufactured. In other words, self-disclosed speech where streamers articulate their industry's normative theory, and the presentation of what is offered in exchange for subscriptions, donations, and tips, will provide a map to the interpretive network enacted through money's movement on Twitch. Since these interpretive networks are consulted as streamers experience their daily working lives, I will use ethnographic methods to examine how Twitch broadcasters develop theoretical understandings of their industry and income.

Semiotics is the process of meaning making in relation to signs, while semiology investigates the meaning of signs themselves. The current investigation of money's meaning and professional considerations will utilize semiology. Semiology seeks to answer the how and why of specific instances of meaning, rather than attempt

to encompass a philosophy the meaning making process. While this trajectory may use semioticians such as Peirce (1991; see also Nöth, 1990) as a guide for investigating money's argument, the analytical portion of this research will follow scholarship that examines the relationship between sign and meaning. Therefore, analytical methods such as critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010; Locke, 2004), mythic analysis (Barthes, 2012), thick description (Geertz, 1973a, 1973b), and ethnographic content analysis (Altheide and Schneider, 2013) will be employed to analyze Twitch streamer data.

The analytical methods above were chosen because they are epistemologically appropriate for the current project. For example, Geertz (1973a, 1973b) borrows the phrase "thick description" from Gilbert Ryle, who emphasizes the importance of the social aspect of symbols: to create a meaningful message, the communicator must purposefully enter the realm of shared cultural symbols. It is impossible *not* to enter the symbolic world. Cassirer (1953, 1974) posits that symbolic forms mediate the data sent from the sense organs to the mind, leading him to define humans as "animal symbolicum" (1974, 26). The symbolic system takes "chaotic," "immediate impressions" (Cassirer, 1953, 87) and subjects them to a symbolic order, tidying them into a "meaning" which "endures" past the moment of experience (Cassirer, 1953, 89). In a way, Cassirer's symbolic forms function similarly to Peirce's interpretants and Barthe's myth, which turns "the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical, into the 'natural'," (1977, 165). However, for Cassirer these symbolic forms are specifically social (rather than simply mental) in nature. Gurwitsch (1970) argues that Alfred Schutz instigated this social turn in philosophy. Instead of focusing on the nature of the world

or the mind in-and-of-itself, Schutz demonstrated that we should examine the human as a social (rather than thinking) subject (Gurwitsch, 1970). In fact, defining professionalism for a group seems to acknowledge Schutz's assertion that groups have a "stock of knowledge at hand" (Guerwitsch, 1970, 49-50) that dictates how individuals interact within a specific context. Since much of the work of streaming involves interacting with others (with viewers, other streamers, sponsors, artists, managers, accountants, etc.), adhering to a proper manner for interaction distinguishes the competent, professional streamer from the amateur. These rules for interaction can be complex, as an individual constantly negotiates between many acquired symbolic systems (Cassirer, 1974, 26). Indeed, Geertz (1973b) suggests that part of a thick description analysis requires the unraveling (like yarn) of multiple meaning structures. Ricoeur (2016) further explicates the necessary vocabulary by stating that symbolic forms are not like dictionary definitions; they are cultural processes that give form to experienced reality. Most importantly, symbolic systems provide context for description. This is key to understanding the benefit of thick description: its ability to help us understand (in our own way) the meanings used by different groups. In other words, we need to understand the layered symbolic systems (contexts) native to Twitch for my description of streaming professionalism to convey in-group meanings and inferences to out-group spectators.

Thick description is more than simply seeing the difference between a wink and a blink (cf., Geertz, 1973a); it is explicating the layered symbolic systems that provide context to the action, so that readers can appropriately decode the action. The ability to properly decode the action is important because communicative events can enact,

sustain, or even subvert power structures and ideologies. Ricoeur argues that signs can "point to the sacred" (1974, 289) establishing power relations, whose function can be mapped using Barthes' (2012) methods for dissecting myth. Adding this critical dimension to the analysis is important because thick description seeks to examine the "semiotic ordering of the world" (Geertz, 1973b, 14). As discussed above, money functions as a form of communication. Therefore, Twitch's "semiotic ordering of the world" is itself ordered through strategically designed avenues for the movement of money.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

To an outsider, these contextual semiotic layers can be difficult to recognize, may be effectively invisible, or even deliberately hidden. According to Locke, critical discourse analysis is concerned with "the *opacity* of texts and utterances – the discursive constructions or stories that are embedded in texts as information that is less readily available to consciousness," (2004, 40, emphasis in original). As highlighted by the italic font, the opacity of a text is the focus of CDA. In other words, CDA seeks to explicate worldviews present the text that are not directly stated. This follow's Fairclough's assumptions about the nature of speech:

> Opposition and struggle are built into the view of the 'orders of discourse' of social institutions as 'pluralistic', each involving a configuration of potentially antagonistic 'ideological-discursive formations' (IDFs), which are ordered in dominance. The dominance of one IDF over others within an order of discourse results in the naturalization of its (ideological) meanings and practices. (Fairclough, 2010, 26-27)

In short, every social institution (one of which is Twitch streaming) can be understood as ordered in a number of different ways. Each of these orderings is determined by and enforced through language, in the form of IDFs. When one of these orderings (a specific

IDF) is dominant, it is seen as the 'natural state' of whatever institution it is connected to. In other words, if the majority of influential, successful streamers speak in a specific way about the practice of streaming (i.e., from within a specific IDF), one can determine what conceptualization of streaming is treated as *natural* within the community. While the *natural* ordering of the community may not be specifically stated in the streamer's speech, by defining the IDF from which the statement is issued, one can then map the *natural* order of streaming. Of course, the word *natural* simply refers to what a streamer assumes is the default and standard nature of the world, and not what is empirically objective. Here the 'natural' status of an institution is solely located in the understandings of the in-group members.

CDA was used to map how streamers talk about their industry in order to move past the opacity of their speech and describe the underlying assumptions. Trends within these underlying assumptions are indicative of prevalent IDFs that have become dominant within the community and now define the practice of Twitch streaming. In short, this dissertation uses CDA to analyze streamer speech in order to map and critique the underlying, unstated assumptions of the profession.

DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected from several relevant sources within the Twitch streaming social milieu, and each subsequent chapter focuses on one venue for data and the analysis thereof. First, I explore the products and services offered in exchange for payment by examining the channel pages of professional streamers. Second, issues related to streamer professionalism are explored through *Dropped Frames* - a talk show run by professional streamers as an outlet for discussing their career. Third, interview

data from professional streamers is reviewed to document how they articulate their relationships to both their income and their viewers. Fourth, TwitchCon - a convention for the streaming community - is explored to document the triangular relationship between the professional streamer, their community, and relevant economic processes. Each of these four investigations are explicated below.

Channel Pages: What's For Sale on Twitch

Exploring Twitch, one notes that the video screen on which one views the broadcast is only the top of a lengthy web page. How this space is used is at the sole discretion of the channel's owner/broadcaster, and is a convenient venue for informing viewers about the stream. As such, this web page is a prime location for streamers to advertise, providing the viewer with reasons to return to the channel and participate (both socially and economically) with its community. Many channel pages document what viewers can expect to receive, both directly and indirectly, in exchange for subscriptions, donations, and tips. As a place where streamers can describe the benefits viewers can receive in exchange for monetary support, these channel pages can aid in our understanding of how money functions - in terms of meaning making - in this social milieu. In short, an examination of what's for sale (as articulated through channel pages) will bring us closer to understanding the communicative nature of money on Twitch.

> RQ1a: What do professional streamers offer viewers in exchange for subscriptions, donations, and tips through their channel pages?
>
> RQ1b: Based on the goods and services advertised on channel pages, what does a streamer provide in exchange for financial support?

Data for these pages were collected by finding professional streamers and copying all channel page content below the video window into MS Word formatted documents (.docx). These word documents include both textual and visual (e.g., image files) aspects of the page. NVivo qualitative data analysis software was used to analyze these documents.

The sample was collected through Twitch systematically; by exploring the pages listing popular games and applying an inclusion criteria to the individual channels found within. Only games for which concurrent viewers totaled over 3,000, were included. Individual broadcasters' live streams were also examined to determine inclusion. First, the broadcaster must have a sub button (the ability to allow viewers to subscribe for $5 per month) to be included in the sample. Second, each broadcaster needed to be a variety streamer, speed runner, or specific game streamer, to be included. Professional eSports tournaments with non-playing commentators and corporately produced pages were excluded from this sample. Third, streamer pages needed to be in the top twenty positions (in terms of viewers) for each game, and needed to have over 100 current viewers at data collection, to be included. Fourth, the pages must be in English. Data collection for these channel pages occurred between March 28th and April 22nd, 2016, ending when the sample had reached 100 cases. While the total number of professional Twitch streamers in the world is relatively small, they display a wide amount of variance in their video content. Therefore, selecting 100 channels for inclusion represents an attempt to cast a wide net over a small but diverse population.

Focusing on the most popular streams (in terms of viewership) helps ensure that the majority of channel pages included in the sample are run by the professional

streamers[2]. Attempting to uncover the underlying functions of the channel pages, this analysis follows Barthes' mythic analysis (1964), which states that samples should include "only one and the same type of document," and "be wide enough to give reasonable hope that its elements will saturate a complete system of resemblances and differences," (1964, 97). While the specific numbers listed here as inclusion criteria are somewhat arbitrary, these figures were used to ensure that the streams included in the sample represented the proper "discoverability." On Twitch, channels are presented to the audience based on current viewers; the channels and games with the most viewers are presented first, and each subsequent channel or game is the one with the next highest number. Streamers choose which games to play strategically, in order to make their streams more visible on these ordered lists. Therefore, channels that fit the inclusion criteria are more likely to be those run by successful streamers who know how to manipulate their analytics. In other words: those who have developed industry-specific professional skills.

Upon selection, the contents of the page below the video window was copied and pasted into a Word document, and saved. This file was loaded into NVivo for analysis. These pages were analyzed by asking the question: "What does this content do?" Each channel page was first coded based on the sections of text (and graphics) present on channel pages. Many of these sections are obviously indicated on the page as they are visibly labeled by headings and graphics. The coding system found twenty-six

[2] "Professional" here means that the streamer derives income from their stream. Generally, more viewers equals more streaming income, and more streaming income increases the likelihood that the streamer approaches their channel like a job rather than a leisure activity. In short, by focusing on numerically popular channels, I aim to make the sample reflect the more professionally oriented streamers.

distinct sections, and topical saturation was reached after approximately 20 cases, with no new codes being generated thereafter.

The second step of this analysis involved taking a second pass through the data, first through the descriptions of the section types developed in the first step, and then through the channel pages themselves after having mapped out the different types of recurring sections. This pass condensed the content of the channel pages into the three general functions that channel page content fulfills. While the first step of coding involved examining the sections that are empirically present on each channel page, the second step arranges these instances of empirical data into coherent and interdependent norms within the professional streaming community. In other words, the way that streamers advertise on their channel pages are the product of dominant IDFs concerning the purpose of Twitch streaming.

Dropped Frames *and the Profession of Streaming*

Many professions provide workers with spaces to discuss the nature of their jobs, vent about the inherent difficulties, gossip about potential futures, and grow as professionals of a specific career path. While some of these venues may be private - such as break room discussions and drinks after work - many are public. Some public venues for career-specific discourse include trade shows, industry-mandated training, and discipline-specific academic conferences. In the professional streaming community, *Dropped Frames* is one public venue for discussing the profession of streaming. Beginning in January 2015, *Dropped Frames* is a weekly talk show, broadcast through Twitch, that provides professional streamers with a public forum to discuss topics relevant to Twitch streaming as a career. As such, *Dropped Frames* provides a space for

successful streamers to demonstrate their professionalism. In short, if we want to know more about what it means to play video games online for money, *Dropped Frames* can be a useful venue for collecting such data. Professional streamers must have an understanding of how their industry works in order to find success. Furthermore, a talk show dedicated to streamers openly discussing their industry, and their place within it, will allow us to examine how they conceptualize the relationship between money (in the form of subscriptions, donations, tips, sponsorships, and other forms of income) and their work.

Dropped Frames is broadcast on Twitch every Wednesday afternoon (times occasionally vary, such as during a specific event like E3, TwitchCon, etc.). In addition to the initial live broadcast, each episode is archived on YouTube in its entirety[3]. Beyond the fact that the show is not live on YouTube, the main difference between the two venues is that Twitch allows for the live audience to chat (the hosts often interact with chat as well), while YouTube does not (nor does the archived video contain the chat log). The show is hosted by three popular, professional streamers: ItmeJP, CohhCarnage, and Ezekiel_III. Most weeks the show includes a special guest, often another streamer or member of the streaming community. Each episode focuses on a different topic related to the profession and business of streaming. Weekly topics include transitioning from YouTube to Twitch, the ethics of G2A (a game vendor that sponsors streamers), and how to work with charities. Often, the chosen guest will dictate the topic of the week's conversation. For example, during the week that successful YouTube broadcaster CinnamonToastKen was the guest, the discussion

[3] *Dropped Frames* is archived on YouTube, and can be accessed using the following link: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-oTJHKXHicT61ztYmcNGKaKBf03aOUuN

focused on the differences in how income is accrued between the competing venues of YouTube and Twitch. By exploring the content of *Dropped Frames*, we can examine how streamers define, describe, and delimit their profession, relative to the movement of money.

> RQ2: What are the underlying tensions and concerns of live streaming as a career, as indicated by the speech of *Dropped Frames'* hosts and guests?

A sample of archived *Dropped Frames* episodes was examined to explore how streamers approach the idea of professionalism within this career. For this study, 20 episodes of *Dropped Frames* were examined to explore streamer professionalism. While 97 episodes are available in the archive in March 2017, a convenience sample of 20 were specifically chosen based on the importance of their discussion topics to the profession of live streaming. Some of these episodes were chosen based on their titles, while others were chosen based on my previous experience with them, having previously taken extensive notes on early episodes (and therefore knowing that they contained fruitful discussions of the streaming profession). Episode topics included: discussions of the difference in entrepreneurship between Twitch and YouTube, episodes where the hosts critiqued other aspiring streamers, sponsored streams, discussions of travel to TwitchCon and PAX, the ethics of a questionable sponsor, the specific difficulties faced by female streamers, how to collaborate with charities, and a discussion of career management with the owner of an agency that represents Twitch streamers. For these 20 episodes, a total of 28 video files were indexed, averaging 89 minutes in length each, and totaling over 43 hours of video content.[4]

[4] Appendix 2 contains a list of the *Dropper Frames* episodes chosen for inclusion in this study.

To excise extraneous data (such as prolonged discussions of a specific game) these videos were time indexed rather than transcribed in their entirety. The time index files describe instances of conversation when broadcasters discuss the aspects of streaming most relevant to professionalism, the activities required to be financially successful, and knowledge gained about how the industry functions. In short, any discussion that addresses the question "How does streaming function as a profession?" is included in the time index file. The data contained within the time index files paraphrases the individual streamer's speech and contains remarks about the tenor of how each topic is discussed. The instances coded in these files include time codes to facilitate direct quoting of the individual speakers. In other words, when a portion of the data was selected for inclusion in the chapter, the time index was used to find the moment in the video file so that it could be transcribed and quoted verbatim in the chapter.

The time index files were loaded into NVivo qualitative data analysis software to map trends within the speech of streamers relevant to professional development and orienting streaming practice to function as a viable career. The data were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2010; Locke, 2004) to explore the ways that streamers spoke about different professionally relevant topics. After a detailed examination of common topics, a second pass through the data was conducted to map their underlying considerations. In other words, the speech of professional streamers was used to determine what types of unstated considerations broadcasters have when running a live stream. Finally, important tensions that streamers must contend with as a

result of these considerations are discussed. The resulting web of meaning will be explicated in depth in Chapter Six.

Articulating an Approach to Professional Streaming: Interviews

As with all research into meaning and the nature of human practices, the outsider's etic view must be tempered with the emic self-report of those individuals whose ways are under the microscope. In short, it is an ethical and methodological requirement for the researcher to allow community members a chance to speak for themselves, to articulate the meanings attached to the practices of their lives in their own voice. For this purpose, professional streamers were interviewed to address their emic perspective of their chosen profession. However, interviews are not a perfect solution; the participants are still reacting to a question designed by the researcher. Therefore, the process of interviews implies that meaning is being taken out of its native context and articulated in the foreign space of an academic interview. However, allowing the participants to speak with their own voice lies closer to the goals of emic scholarship than simple textual analysis or applying media theory from without. Ethnography of online communities is no different, and emic data from within the professional streaming community is necessary for any analysis of professionalism or economic interpretation of this social practice. To satisfy this need and to give professional streamers a voice within this dissertation, ten in-depth interviews were conducted in accordance with the expectations of the University of Oklahoma's Institutional Review Board (IRB). These interviews focused on streamer professionalism and the various relationships that streamers must form an understanding of in order to be successful.

RQ3a: How do professional streamers create meaning out of tips, donations, and subscriptions?

RQ3b: How do professional streamers conceptualize their relationship to their audience?

Professional streamers were identified through their Twitch channels and they were contacted through publicly available email addresses. Inclusion criteria for recruitment included the fact that each contacted streamer needed to have a channel that included a subscription button, and a publicly available email address. Many professional streamers keep their email addresses private, and without a viable way to contact them, those streamers were excluded from this study. Streamers who had a subscription button and publicly provided their work email address were contacted via email. Those that responded positively to the recruitment email were sent a copy of the IRB approved research consent form and a time was scheduled to conduct the interview. One hundred fifty-six (156) professional Twitch streamers were contacted in this manner, twenty-two responded to the initial recruitment email (14%), leading to a total of seven interviews (4.5%). Additionally, three shorter interviews were conducted at TwitchCon, a tradeshow for professional streamers and the wider Twitch community. The participants interviewed at TwitchCon were approached in person, asked if they would be willing to participate, and given a copy of the IRB approved consent script.

Since professional streamers live across the globe, interviews were conducted using various online video and voice chat software, including Skype, Discord, and Zoom. The online interviews range in length from 34 to 54 minutes each, averaging 44 minutes. The short, in-person interviews range from 6 to 11 minutes each, averaging 8 minutes in length. Each interview began by ensuring that the participant had read and

understood the IRB approved consent form. Then, each participant provided verbal permission to audio record the interview, and stated whether they wanted to remain anonymous in published reports. In every case, the participant stated a desire to be referenced in scholarly publications by their Twitch username[5]. The interview questions focused on live streaming as a career and the participants' subjective understanding of the economic processes involved in the profession[6]. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for impromptu follow-up questions, and for the participant to expand on their answers. Upon completion of the interview, the participant provided proof of consent by filling out a short survey using OU's Qualtrics survey portal. The online consent form provided checkboxes, allowing the participant to grant the researcher permission to audio record the interview and directly quote from them in publications. At the end of each interview, the participant was thanked and dismissed. As compensation, the researcher agreed to subscribe to the participant's channel for the duration of the research (approximately 6 months). Streamers interviewed in person provided verbal (rather than written) consent as per the IRB's determination of the minimal risk entailed in participation.

Detailed demographic data for the participants was not collected as there was no hypothesized relationship between streaming professionalism and either age or sex. Since no other quantitative data were collected, there would be no variables over which to measure the moderating potential of age and sex. In general, all participants were over the age of 18 (as indicated by their response to the IRB approved consent document), and all appeared to be under 50 years old. Of the ten interviewees, only one

[5] One participant stated that he did not care if he was referenced by his Twitch handle or his real name since his username is a reference to his actual name.
[6] A full list of interview questions is provided in Appendix 1

was female. All of the participants worked from within the United States, but two mentioned having European audience members (further highlighting the global nature of Twitch).

Interviews were transcribed to facilitate the inclusion of direct quotes in written reports. Due to the minimal risk associated with this research, the audio-recorded interviews are to be kept by the researcher indefinitely (as approved by the IRB), except when participants request anonymity through the use of a pseudonym. While no participant requested the anonymity of a pseudonym, one did cite specific monetary figures and later requested those specific numbers be removed from the data. For that interview the specific dollar amounts were not preserved in the transcript and the audio files for the interview were deleted once the transcript was complete.

Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010; Locke, 2004) and narrative analysis (Labov, 1972; Reissman, 1993; Brummett, 2009) were used to examine the speech of interview participants to analyze not only what they said about the profession of live streaming, but the tenor in which they discussed its relevant aspects. Narrative analysis is similar to Burke's dramatism in that the process involves analyzing speech (or other forms of text) by taking the stories found within and defining their constituent aspects (How does it begin? Who are the protagonists? Who are the villains? How is the conflict resolved?). While Burke uses the vocabulary of the theater, narrative analysis uses the language of storytelling (Labov, 1972; Reissman, 1993). Additionally, the representative anecdote (Brummett, 2009) takes a common story among group members and distills it down to its basic parts. A common story told by many participants can highlight the values and dispositions that are important for the group. The critical

discourse analysis employed for this chapter follows the same process described above. The narrative analysis utilized for this chapter derives from both Riessman's (1993) suggestion that some stories should be analyzed by their structural features rather than their overarching themes and Brummett's (2009) reading of Burke's representative Anecdote. Both approaches suggest that once a narrative has been mapped its meaning can be explored through a discussion of its constituent elements (cf., Labov, 1972). The results of these interviews are discussed in Chapter Seven.

Commodified Play at TwitchCon

A mentioned above, one place to examine the ways professionals articulate and negotiate the nature of their careers is at industry-specific events such as tradeshows. As long as there have been professional Twitch streamers it has been common practice for many of them to travel to tradeshows for the consumer electronics (Electronic Entertainment Exposition, or E3), entertainment (San Diego Comic Convention, or ComiCon), and video games (Games Convention, or GamesCon, and Penny Arcade Expo, or PAX) industries. While these events are noticeably more consumer-oriented than tradeshows for other industries, they provide professional opportunities to Twitch broadcasters. September 2015 brought the first TwitchCon, a convention held specifically for Twitch Streamers. TwitchCon was designed to speak to several groups within the live streaming community, including streamers (both professional and amateur), viewers and fans, game developers, hardware vendors, and charity promoters. While TwitchCon was built from the ground up with the fans in mind, it also served as a place where the practice and business of streaming could be discussed in detail. Many panels were designed with this focus in mind; providing established, popular streamers

with a venue to discuss their profession, so that aspiring amateur streamers can learn from the expertise of those who have found success in the industry. While some postsecondary institutions bring in alumni to speak to upcoming graduates about how to get started in specific careers, TwitchCon offers a space for established streamers to discuss the process of professionalization to aspiring streamers. Therefore, TwitchCon presented itself as an excellent place to explore what it means to be a professional streamer.

RQ4: How is streamer professionalism addressed at TwitchCon?

For this portion of the study, the researcher traveled to two successive TwitchCons to explore the ways that the streaming profession was presented within. TwitchCon 2015 took place in San Francisco, CA at the Moscone West Convention Center from September 25th to September 26th. TwitchCon 2016 took place in San Diego, CA at the San Diego Convention Center from September 29th to October 2nd.

This study consists of participant observation, observing panel discussions, and analyzing the physical space in which the convention was held. With an eye and an ear focused on these aspects of the TwitchCon experience, the event was analyzed through the lenses of semiology (Barthes, 2012) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010, Locke, 2004). While the panel discussions provided further support for the trends of streaming professionalism found in the other data sets, the physical space of TwitchCon presented its own underlying assumptions about the nature and orientation of professional streaming. In other words, TwitchCon demonstrates that the Twitch Corporation holds a different IDF for streaming than is found in streamer speech. The analysis of TwitchCon is presented in Chapter Eight.

Chapter 5

What's for Sale on Twitch: Channel Pages

Professional Twitch streamers derive a portion of their income from viewers subscribing to the channel, tips, and donations. As a financial relationship, it is assumed that the subscriber (or donator[1] or tipper) receives something in exchange for their payment. The question is: What? To address this question, we examine the channel pages of broadcasters to determine exactly what is offered in exchange for payment. In short, we will now explore the ways that broadcasters advertise on their channels to determine, essentially, what is "for sale" on professional Twitch streams. Since subscriptions and donations comprise a sizeable percentage of a streamer's income[2], the direct connection between payment and service rendered should give us insight into Twitch professionalism by helping to define what the "product" specifically is. Unfortunately, the loose economic processes (subscriptions and donations are voluntary) and the un-monetized nature of Twitch video content (the video itself is always free to watch), makes this a difficult question to answer. In an interview, BouseFeenux states: "It's a paradox, there's nothing you can technically provide," adding later: "It's content creator street knowledge to be like 'By donating you're not paying for a service or a product, you're not purchasing anything,'" (personal communication, June 28, 2016). Creating video for Twitch streams is not like selling movie tickets at a theater or retailing DVDs. Indeed, the economic relationships present in professional Twitch streaming are worthy of scholarly inquiry because, while being part of a corporate media landscape, its content is produced outside the hierarchical

[1] Streamers often refer to their supporters as "donators" rather than "donors."
[2] On *Dropped Frames*, both Ezekiel_III and ItmeJP have stated that subscriptions represent the "lion's share" of a broadcaster's income. These assertions are discussed in some depth in Chapter Six.

corporate processes and structures of traditional media outlets. Twitch broadcasting does not rely on the exchange of video content for revenue, as one finds with traditional media outlets.

GENERATING INCOME

Despite the ephemeral nature of what is "for sale" on Twitch steams, less esoteric is the nature of streamer income. Twitch broadcasters make money through varying outlets, many of which are only viable because of their channel. Streamers make money from subscriptions, through tips and donations, through direct and indirect forms of advertising revenue, and through merchandising.

Professional streamer Ezekiel_III states that subscription income is the "lion's share" (*Dropped Frames*, April 1st, 2015) of a streamer's income. Once a streamer's channel becomes popular enough, the streamer can petition Twitch to become partnered. Around the time that a streamer becomes partnered, they generally also get a "sub button" (short for subscription button), or the ability for viewers to subscribe to their channel. Subscriptions to individual channels provide the subscriber with a set of privileges, many of which will be detailed later in this chapter. Subscriptions are $4.99 per month (prices differ between countries). When a viewer subscribes to a broadcaster's channel, the money is paid to Twitch, who then relays a certain percentage of the subscription amount to the streamer, to whose channel the viewer subscribed. Subscription revenue is split between the individual streamer and Twitch. It is common knowledge within the Twitch community that contracts between individual streamers and the Twitch corporation include language that forbids any partnered streamer from directly discussing the percentage of their portion of subscription

revenue[3]. Discussion among un-partnered streamers at TwitchCon 2015 demonstrated that many assume the split to be around 50/50. Regardless of the specific split of subscription revenue, streamers can use subscription numbers to track one type of monthly income. Specifically, the number of people who subscribe (or continue their subscription) in any given month translates into an easily calculable amount of monthly income: X subscribers times Y cut from subscription revenue equals Z income. Subscription revenue is important enough that many professional streamers pay close attention to their number of subscribers on a daily basis. In addition to Twitch's built-in subscription functions, some casters also use outside donation portals. For example, RipTidePow uses Patreon[4], while CohhCarnage has designed his own subscription service[5], which offers benefits that are distinct from Twitch's subscription perks.

Becoming partnered also means that Twitch shares with the streamer a portion of the revenue generated from advertisements played on the streamer's channel. This functions as an indirect form of advertising revenue as the advertisements themselves are not directly tied to the specific channel on which they play. The ads are coordinated by the Twitch corporation, and the exact same ad can be seen on many Twitch channels, just as a television commercial can be seen across different networks. Streamers also benefit from direct advertising revenue when they work with game developers, or are sponsored by hardware manufacturers, whose products they use. For example, game developers pay popular streamers to play their games prior to release in order to generate excitement about the game, and hopefully increase sales. Indeed, popular

[3] The "gag order" discussed here was mentioned repeatedly in each set of data collected for the other chapters: interview responses, *Dropped Frames* discussions, and on panels at TwitchCon.
[4] The following link directs to RipTidePow's Patreon page: https://www.patreon.com/Riptidepow
[5] The following link directs to the Cohhilition, CohhCarnage's subscription service: https://www.cohhilition.com/

streamers' ability to showcase games to their audience is the central reason that game developers and marketers label Twitch broadcasters as "digital influencers"[6]. Therefore, Twitch streamers occasionally draw revenue from game developers and publishers in exchange for playing upcoming games on their streams.

Finally, streamers also collect income by directly selling merchandise to their audience. When a streamer has a t-shirt designed and sold through companies like TeeSpring or Design by Hümans, they receive a portion of the sales revenue for the shirt.

But why would a viewer want to buy a shirt, subscribe to a channel, or donate to an individual streamer? The video is not locked behind a paywall, and access to Twitch channels is universally free. Before I discuss the complex relationship between streaming, money, and community present in Twitch's social norms, I must examine the ways that such benefits are presented in advertisements. Therefore, I begin by exploring what advertising content is empirically present on Twitch channels. This chapter describes and analyzes the content of channel pages to determine what is "for sale" - what is offered in exchange for financially supporting the channel and the streamer who runs it. By examining what streamers articulate as being offered to viewers, one can illuminate the broader considerations that streamers must have to conceptualize their craft as a practice that provides specific benefits to consumers. While the data analyzed in this research derives from content found on streamer channel pages, occasionally

[6] Digital influencer is a marketing term that is now applied to popular online content creators, and indicates that Internet personalities can influence audience members to buy products without having to be part of an ad. On *Dropped Frames*, ItmeJP expresses annoyance at the term while also acknowledging its utility.

other sources of information are consulted (such as Twitch broadcasts and interview data) to add support and nuance to the analysis below.

CHANNEL PAGES

When one accesses a Twitch stream, one first notices the video window where the live stream occurs. When one scrolls down, one can see a web page, split into labeled sections, that provides information about the channel, the streamer, and the benefits of subscribing. The web page that exists below the video window is the channel page[7]. The channel page allows the streamer to advertise to potential subscribers by providing information about the channel. The examination of streamers' channel pages is the result of a two-step process. First the channel page is coded using NVivo qualitative analysis software to find and label the various sections found on the channel page and the function each tries to accomplish. The first step utilized NVivo to code the channel pages based on the specific content of each page. Each channel page is divided into sections and each section fulfills a specific function (See Figure 3). This coding scheme simply tracked the types of sections that were found on each page. Presented below is a comprehensive list of the types of sections that one commonly finds on channel pages. Not every channel page contained each type of section. For inclusion in this examination, each type of section found had to exist on at least three channel pages from the sample, demonstrating that they are not specific to a single streamer. One can argue that this list is exhaustive because from the sample of 100 channel pages, each section described occurs on more than one page, and from the sample, there are no

[7] For this dissertation, I will use the phrase "channel page," but it is a somewhat problematic signifier. In various venues, steamers have referred to this specific part Twitch as: the "page," the "info page," the "info section," the "Twitch page," the "profile," the "panels below my screen," and the "area." Since there is little consensus among streamers on what to call this portion of the site, I will use the phrase "channel page" because it is phrase used by the Twitch corporation.

sections discovered that do not fit (in some fashion) into twenty-six types of sections described below.

Figure 3: Smokaloke's channel page

CHANNEL PAGE CONTENT

Each channel page contains several of the following attributes: (1) brand themed headings, (2) links to the broadcaster's other media, (3) a donation button or tip jar, (4) a list of top donators, (5) the rules for participating in chat, (6) a streaming schedule, (7) a list of games played on the channel, (8) a subscription request, (9) a sample of the chat icons, (10) an explanation of the chat commands, (11) third party ads, (12) links to stream-branded merchandise, (13) invitations to community building, (14) the streamer's P.O. box, (15) an invitation to chat, (16) an advertisement for raffles, (17) an explanation of loyalty tokens, (18) the goals for the stream or the streamer, (19) personal information about the streamer, (20) an invitation to play games with the streamer, (21) an explanation about what will be read out during broadcasts, (22) technical specifications of the streamer's computer and other hardware, (23) evidence of expertise, (24) evidence of gamer credibility, (25) charity information, and (26) shout-outs to artists. While this list is not entirely in order of popularity, the more common sections are generally listed earlier. When two sections are related in some way they are discussed sequentially regardless of their relative popularity.

(1) Brand Themed Headings

Most professional streamers (as well as many non-professional streamers) utilize thematically consistent pictures to mark the different sections of their channel page. Figure 4 provides examples of branded headings for Admiral Bahroo, BroBQ, TheJWittz, and HubrisLive. Note that the specific heading type used for these examples is the broadcaster's link to their Twitter account, demonstrating the variance present in the visual representation for a specific function of the channel page. These branded

themes are personalized for each channel page and often represent some aesthetic, genre-relevant, or thematic context from which the individual streamer works. Streamers that focus on one game (or one genre) often utilize branded headings that reference that game (or genre). Figure 5 demonstrates game themed headings with AAlaguna's *Blade & Soul* themed Rules heading and Elajjaz's *Dark Souls* themed YouTube heading. As pictures, brand themed headings are important because they communicate to the viewer information about the channel: both its professionalism and its tone, while also providing aesthetic cohesion.

Figure 4: Brand themed headings from Admiral Bahroo, BroBQ, TheJWittz, and HubrisLive.

(2) Broadcaster's Other Media

Almost every professional Twitch broadcaster uses other new media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. These additional media outlets are an essential aspect of the streamer's online presence. These media allow broadcasters to direct viewers' attention during the hours that the stream is not live.

Figure 5: Game themed headings from AAlaguna and Elajjaz.

Many streamers maintain a YouTube channel where they archive highlights of past broadcasts. Additionally, some streamers began their new media career on YouTube and switched to focus on Twitch after having already been established as an online personality. With the addition of YouTube Gaming (YouTube's recently implemented live-streaming service) the two services are now, more than ever before, in direct competition with one another. Despite this competition, many professional streamers maintain a presence on both sites, but with each broadcaster finding her or his own balance. For example, many professional Twitch streamers use YouTube simply as a place to store highlight reels and past broadcasts. On the other hand, many content creators who focus on YouTube for income use Twitch as an outlet for testing new games. While the inflections of their use may be different between individual content creators, many find a comfortable balance by using both services to some extent. For those creators who use both services, linking between the two provides an important function: directing audience members to one's other work.

While YouTube use is prevalent, Twitter is essential. Nearly every professional Twitch streamer has a Twitter account and maintains a presence there by tweeting

regularly. Often a streamer will “tweet out” what they will be playing about an hour before they start their stream as an advertisement, so that their followers know when to tune in and what to expect. Streamers often tweet out a “thank you” to their viewers not long after a stream ends, to express appreciation for time spent watching. Streamers often tweet out their thoughts, annoyances, and excited moments throughout the day, often engaging in Twitter-based discussions with other streamers about relevant, contemporary topics (such as news about an upcoming game). Streamers also tweet on their days off, posting pictures of food that they are about to eat, how they are occupying their time as they wait for airplanes on travel days, and sharing their personal lives when completing menial tasks (for example, Futureman once tweeted a picture of himself at the laundromat). Twitter allows streamers to remind their viewers of the channel when the stream is not running - an attempt at viewer retention.

Discord is another service used by Twitch streamers. Discord is a chat program that allows for both text and voice interaction. Streamers who start a community in Discord provide their viewers with a place to directly interact, both during and off stream. For these streamers, Discord also functions as a place to post news about the channel and to keep viewers informed about the channel’s schedule.

Other social media sites, such as Facebook groups, Instagram feeds, and Snapchat accounts are also represented on these channel pages, but not as often as YouTube and Twitter.

The final media linked to from these channel pages are the business websites of individual streamers. Some streamers use personalized (read: brand themed) websites to coordinate their communities, post news about the streamer and the channel, and

administer the rewards of repeat viewing (explicated below under loyalty tokens). Like Discord, through channel-specific websites, streamers provide viewers with a place where they can interact outside of the stream's chat room and where news about the channel can be disseminated.

(3) Donation Button / Tip Jar

All professional streamers (and many non-professional ones) provide a donation button or tip jar on their channel page. Unlike the subscription button (which is an official function of Twitch, and implemented by the Twitch corporation), the donation button is not part of Twitch's official services. Donation buttons and tip jars utilize third-party money exchange services (usually PayPal) so that viewers can give money directly to the streamer.

There is some disagreement within the professional streaming community about whether this financial process should be called a donation or a tip. On many channels, this link is depicted as a clickable button with the word "Donate" displayed on it. However, some streamers argue that calling this process a donation is incorrect, and that professional streamers need to unanimously refer to it as a tip. In an interview, Wyvern_Slayr was adamant that these transactions should be described as tips, not donations (personal communication, May 1, 2016). In another interview BouseFeenux analogized streaming to busking on the street (personal communication, June 28, 2016). Busking, however, is a problematic term to use in relation to this process, as American culture often dismisses the busking street performer as *unprofessional*. Even if denotatively the label of busking makes sense in relation to professional streamers, busking is sometimes compared to panhandling, incorrectly insinuating that it does not

require any skill or planning. Successful streamers often put much thought and effort into planning and researching how best to approach their broadcasts, and demonstrate creativity and flexibility in designing their channels. Professional streamers often exhibit rigor and an enthusiastic work ethic, and we should take care not to use vocabulary that insinuates a cavalier approach to streaming as a career.

It is important to note how individual streamer's channels solicit donations and tips. Often these instances of communication focus on the fact that live streaming is the broadcaster's sole source of income, or by claiming that the contribution will help the channel, rather than focusing on the financial benefit enjoyed directly by the streamer. ALOHA, Circon, DFieldMark, and many others, indicate that donations are important because streaming is their full-time job. GBay99's channel page states:

> Every cent of money donated directly to me will go right back into the stream. I'll use that money to either get a better setup, upgraded equipment, or food to eat so I don't get dizzy and faint. All donations are super appreciated. Seriously dude, if you're even reading this because you think you may donate, you're the best <3

Ezekiel_III's channel page asks: "Want to support the stream by simply throwing money at it? Do so here!" foregrounding the importance of tipping to the health of the channel, rather than the wallet of the streamer.

(4) Top Donators

After the donate button, a small but noticeable portion of streamers provide a list of top donators, those viewers that have donated the most (in terms of dollar amount) over the life of the channel. While "Top Donators" is a common label, some streamers give this section a unique name. AAlaguna lists important donators as part of the "Hall of Fame." CinCinBear describes them as "Contributors," while DeeJayKnight lists his

"Stream VIPs." Despite the difference in names, they all reference the people who have donated the largest amounts of money to the channel. Often the specific amounts cumulatively donated are posted along with the names. These amounts can reach into the thousands of dollars per donator. ALOHA's top donator has contributed over $6,000 to the channel, as indicated in the top donators list with the entry "$6500.00!!!!! - xzl999[8] [4x $1000, $970, and $805 single donations!]." Additionally, these lists can range in length, from brief to extremely long. AmoneyTV lists his "Top 5 Donators," while Annie Bot's list contains the names of 246 individual donators.

These Top donator lists serve at least two functions. First, the list allows the channel owner to thank the individuals most responsible for supporting the stream through donations. One side effect of this recognition is that it establishes and maintains the status of large-amount donators as important members of the community. This recognition is something donors receive for their donations, which carries implications for their status in the community. Additionally, some streamers list donators not by dollar amount given, but by what their donations bought, often computer components and other gear necessary for streaming. Streamer AAlaguna thanks donator PopstarPaci for "Keyboard/Webcam + $190," indicating that this individual donated a webcam, an essential piece of equipment for live streaming. Streamer AlfieRules includes the following line in his list: "Dexbee25 = $177 TY FOR CHAIR!" Finally, JBrunzGaming thanks three viewers who "Donated A PIZZA ON STREAM and $135.00!" Donating streaming equipment (or money specifically for that purpose) is important, as it demonstrates that the donator has done something to directly increase

[8] xz1999 is the user name of the donator.

the quality of the channel. Thus, the donator is not simply helping the streamer, but helping the entire viewer community.

The second function of the top donators list is to potentially gamify the practice of donating. Competitiveness may compel some of the top donators to donate more, in order to surpass others on the list. This potential outcome can be seen on a micro-level during broadcasts. While it doesn't happen very often, donation "bidding wars" have been known to occur on LolRenaynay's and Spooleo's channels during broadcasts, where two or more viewers try to top each other's donations, in real time.

(5) The Rules of the Stream

Nearly every stream posts a set of rules detailing the behavior that is and is not acceptable in the chat window. Some rules are present because they violate Twitch's terms of service (TOS). For example, posting links to pornography in a Twitch chat window is against the TOS and streamers who are caught allowing that practice can temporarily or permanently lose their channel. Most rules, however, refer to what the chat participants are and are not allowed to say in chat. Common rules include not saying anything racist, sexist, or homophobic in chat. This specific set of rules is almost ubiquitous amongst the most popular Twitch streamers; so much so, that some streamers simply use phrases such as "Don't be a jerk!" (Viss Games), "Be Awesome. Don't not be awesome," (MillBee) and "Don't be a DoucheCanoe" (DeeJayKnight), in the rules section of the channel page assuming that viewers will know what that means. The rules referenced in these sections are important to multiple aspects of the stream and will be explicated in the branding and community sections below.

(6) Streaming Schedule

Posting a schedule lets viewers know when to expect the stream to begin and end each day. Successful professional streamers argue that having a stable schedule, and strictly adhering to it each day, is much better than simply streaming as much as possible. On *Dropped Frames*, CohhCarnage occasionally laments his early days of streaming without a schedule as a terrible time, when he would stream every waking moment and not see any viewer growth. CohhCarnage contrasts that difficulty with having a daily schedule that allowed him to have a life outside of streaming, while also telling potential viewers when and where to find him tomorrow. See Figure 6 for an example of streamer schedules from QueenE and Trumpsc.

Streaming Schedule (All times in Pacific, Everyday)
1:00 PM - 6:00 PM: Hearthstone mostly, sometimes other game(s) at later half
6:00 PM - 6:30 PM: Dinner
6:30 PM - 8:30 PM: Other Game(s), or no evening stream due to other commitments

Figure 6: Examples of streamer schedules from QueenE and Trumpsc.

(7) Games Played on Stream

Many channel pages provide a list of games played on stream. This list may serve several different functions depending on the type of streamer that owns the channel. Some variety streamers list games that they often come back to when no new releases are available or desirable to stream. For various reasons, many streamers like to pick one specific game as *their* game, the one they come back to time and again for streaming. For some this means having a "fall back" when there is nothing better to play on stream, while others may decide to focus on one specific game, ignoring the new releases. Playing only one game can be beneficial - because it allows the broadcaster to establish a solid community dedicated to a specific game. However, some streamers find this practice undesirable, wanting to play other games but experiencing anxiety that sections of the community might leave if they switch games. In an interview, Wyvern_Slayr lamented that his community expects him to play only *Dark Souls* games, while he would rather be more of a variety caster and play different types of games (personal communication, May 1, 2016).

Occasionally, unreleased games appear on these lists when individual streamers, excited for a future release, let the audience know that a specific upcoming game will be a priority for streaming. For speed runners (players who attempt to beat specific games in record time) this section usually includes their personal best[9] times for each game on the list. Some streamers go so far as to schedule different games for different days, meaning that the games list is integrated into the official schedule. Therefore, viewers

[9] Speed runners often talk about their PBs or PRs for specific games, their "personal best" or "personal record" times.

will know that this streamer will be playing *World of Warcraft* every Monday, *Grand Theft Auto V* every Tuesday, etc.

(8) Subscription Requests

Some channel pages contain subscription requests, statements posted by the streamer that actively solicit viewers to subscribe to the channel. Subscription requests often focus on the importance of subscriptions to sustaining the community. NickBunyun states "Subscribe: It helps out the channel," while OneRandomDolly lists the channel as the main beneficiary of subscribing:

> Thank you for being here! If you are thinking about subscribing to my channel and/or would like to know more about what subscribing will entitle you to, here is a list of the benefits that the little purple button and $4.99 give us both.
> 1. Supports the stream directly.
> 2. Stand out with your own little sparkely UNICORN!!! (Sub Badge)

Additionally, most subscription requests list for the potential subscriber exactly what they will receive in return for subscribing. The most common benefit to subscribing is the use of chat icons which will be detailed below. All channels with subscription buttons provide a badge (displayed by the subscribers name in the chat window) that marks them as a subscriber. Other perquisites to subscribing include (but are not limited to): not having commercials play when accessing the channel, being able to chat during broadcasts that are for subscribers only, first priority for inclusion when the streamer is playing multiplayer games with viewers, and the ability to participate in community events through loyalty tokens (also explicated below).

(9) Chat Icons

The channel pages for many professional streamers contain images of the channel's chat icons. Chat icons are small pictures that one can place into the chat

window on Twitch. These pictures are universally useable on Twitch (i.e., you can use one broadcaster's chat icons in another channel's chat window), and most are accessed by subscribing to specific channels. For example, Ezekiel_III's channel has a chat icon that looks like a heart on fire. One cannot use this chat icon until one subscribes to Ezekiel_III's channel. However, having subscribed to Ezekiel_III's channel one can use that burning heart chat icon in any chat window on Twitch, even those not on Ezekiel_III's channel. The ability to use this chat icon on other channels across Twitch serves an important identity function, and will be documented later under the section on community. Figure 7 demonstrates how chat icons are displayed on iSkys's channel page. The pictures provided on channel pages show the potential customer what icons they will have access to should they decide to subscribe. However, as discussed below, an icon's visual appearance - while serving aesthetic continuity - may not be the main benefit of purchasing the right to access it.

Figure 7: iSkys's chat emotes, only available to subscribers.

(10) Chat Functions

Many channel pages contain sections detailing the various chat commands specific to the channel. Chat commands are strings of letters typed into the chat window that provide the viewer with some information, such as the streamer's goals, a list of the background music played on channel, or a link to the streamer's Twitter account. Listing chat commands gives audience members new ways to interact with the stream and the community.

(11) Third Party Ads

Much of the revenue that keeps Twitch and its streamers going comes from advertising. Accordingly, channel pages often contain third party ads. Twitch makes ad revenue on the commercials that play during broadcasts and the banner ads that appear over the chat window. Individual streamers increase their advertising income by playing ads during broadcasts, and by placing ads from third parties in the content of their channel pages.

While streamers may be directly compensated for placing these third-party ads on their channel page, they are often compensated for them indirectly. Amazon and G2A[10] are two companies that are heavily advertised on channel pages and that compensate streamers indirectly. Both companies offer streamer partnership programs where broadcasters receive kickbacks when their viewers purchase products online. For example, a viewer can purchase something from Amazon. If a streamer has an Amazon partnership, the viewer can say that they decided to purchase from Amazon based on Amazon's advertisement on the streamer's channel. Once the transaction is complete Amazon will share a small portion of the price of the purchased item with the streamer.

[10] G2A is a company that facilitates the selling of "keys" for digital games.

Streamers often discuss these partnerships as not especially lucrative, amounting to only a handful of cents per transaction. The same is true for running advertisements during a broadcast. On *Dropped Frames* ItmeJP states that showing an ad to 1,000 viewers generates only 30 to 50 cents in revenue for the streamer.

(12) Merchandise

Many professional streamers sell merchandise that is designed to exemplify the channel's brand. The most common item offered by most professional streamers is a channel-specific t-shirt. These shirts are often designed, printed by, and sold through professional shirt vendors such as Design by Hümans and TeeSpring. The streamer receives a percentage of every shirt sold. The shirts contain images that reference the streamer's brand (See Figure 8). While these shirts are "for sale," Twitch does not directly benefit from these sales.

Figure 8: LolRenaynay's shirt design referencing both her community and the *Fallout* franchise.

(13) Community Building

Streamers often use the channel pages as spaces for community building, often by inviting viewers to take part in activities that establish a group of viewers as a distinct community with a specific identity. First, professional streamers name their community and invite viewers to become a part of it. Examples include: BrownMan's "Rayders," CohhCarnage's "Cohhilition," Ezekiel_III's "Berzekers," Amoney's "Amoney Squad," AuSlove's "AuSlove Sub Family," AvoidingThePuddle's "CatFaces," LolRenaynay's "Team Red Solo Cup," and GassyMexican's "Sombrerbros," just to name a few. Beyond the evocative name, efforts at community building often contain requests to interact in some way. This request to interact is often the point at which viewers encounter the channel's pay wall; here, broadcasters solicit subscriptions. An aspect common to this portion of the channel page is stating that subscribers gain access to the subscriber-only sections of the chat window and the Discord voice chat server, as well as the possibility of playing multiplayer games with the channel's owner. Through inviting participation, the channel page works toward community building, but also illuminates the relationship between subscriptions and the pressures of group membership.

(14) Post Office Box

Many professional Twitch streamers post the details for their personal P.O. Box on their channel page. AnneBot introducers her PO box with the statement "PO Box Address if you wanna send something fun!" MattMelvin states: "I have a PO Box! Send me weird food to eat on stream!" TheHunterWild suggests "SEND ME SHIT! (figuratively)." However, the presence of a P.O. Box is common enough that many

streamers that provide one do so without any sort of message about how their fans should use it, or what kind of items should be mailed to them.

Streamers generally do not list the items that they have received by mail on their channel pages. However, some streamers do discuss these items during their streams, often directly thanking the person who sent the item. Since these discussions do not occur in the channel page, they are outside the stated scope of this chapter. Items received through a P.O. Box range from personal letters to new equipment for streaming. One commonly featured item sent through the mail to streamers is the handcrafted piece of art that references the brand of the channel.

(15) Invitation to Chat

Many streamers invite viewers to interact with them and with other viewers through Twitch's chat window. DeejayKnight suggests "If there's anything else you'd like to know about me, ask away!" while ALOHA offers "Please feel free to ask me any questions in chat about the game itself or my progress…" The importance of the chat window to the processes of Twitch streaming and viewer participation cannot be overestimated. At TwitchCon 2015 DJWheat suggested that interacting with an audience is what has always made Twitch (and previous attempts at live streaming) so successful, while in an interview Wyvern_Slayr argues that community interaction is what separates Twitch from YouTube (personal communication, May 1, 2016). Additionally, making viewers excited about participating in chat would logically have a positive influence on subscriptions since one of the main benefits of subscribing is the increased chat functionality. While inviting people to chat is an attempt to lead viewers to an enjoyable activity, it is also an activity that makes a subscription enticing.

(16) Raffles

To increase viewership, many streamers also conduct raffles where viewers can win prizes. Raffles on Twitch channels often work similarly to those at your average county fair. The streamer will announce a raffle and every viewer will be able to enter for a chance to win the prize. Raffles are usually administered using third party software, designed by programmers working for the streamer, and that pulls data from Twitch's chat window to run the raffle. The prizes offered through raffles are usually video games - specifically digital copies of games available by download, or gift certificates to game vendors such as Steam[11]. Playing on the viewers' desire to win free games, streamers attempt to increase their viewership by administering raffles. Bajheera states "Random giveaways will happen on stream at any time! Following and subscribing is much appreciated, but not required to win." On other channels the announcement of raffles also functions as a request for subscriptions when streamers suggest that subscribers have better odds at winning than non-subscribers. Amoney TV offers: "There will be Sub giveaways as well as viewer giveaways with Sub luck (usually at 8x luck)." In other words, the broadcaster will run some raffles where only subscribers will be able to participate, while other raffles are open to all viewers - but that subscribers will have better chances at winning. Similarly, Annie Bot advertises that subscribers receive "10x chance to win in giveaways/raffles!" This is a somewhat muddy example of a service that is directly rendered for money. Having paid for a subscription, the viewer is given a greater chance to win. However, the subscribing viewer is not guaranteed to win anything.

[11] Steam is a very popular company that sells downloadable games over the Internet.

(17) Loyalty Tokens

Some professional streamers gamify the viewing experience by offering loyalty tokens. Although they utilize a variety of different names[12], loyalty tokens are electronically tracked counters that slowly accrue for each individual viewer as they watch the channel or when a viewer subscribes to the channel. See Figure 9 for AuSlove's explanation of AuScoins: the loyalty token system for her channel. In addition to time spent watching, some streamers give out bonus tokens at random, simply to whoever is watching the channel at that time. Loyalty tokens are "spent" when the viewer who holds them uses the tokens to "purchase" some item or service through the stream. For example, if a streamer wants to play a multiplayer game with viewers, she may "sell" a spot in the game to the viewer willing to spend the most tokens. Additionally, some streamers use loyalty tokens to allot tickets during raffles by stating that each raffle "ticket" costs a specific number of tokens. Therefore, a viewer with a large amount of tokens can spend them by entering multiple times while someone with fewer tokens may only be able to enter once. Like raffles, loyalty token systems are often implemented using third party software, which interacts with the Twitch chat window.

[12] "Token" is a common label because of the term's connection to video gaming history: Many arcades used tokens instead of quarters to run their coin-operated arcade games.

What are Auscoins?

Royalty points for being in the stream. They will be added to your account automatically. Check by typing !auscoins

How much do you receive?

Current Generation Rate: 0.1 Auscoins Per 2 Minutes
Subs/Bronze Vips Receives Twice, 2X
Silver Vip Receives 3X, **Gold Vip** Receives 4X

What can you do with Auscoins?

Prizes from **Prize List**- Type !prizelist in the chat.
Place bettings during the battles.
Use commands which costs coins.
Play **Mini Games** in the chat like !robcoins , !dragrace etc.

- **Best Ways To Earn Auscoins:**
- Watching The Stream
- Leaving Your Devices On Stream While AFK
- Bankheist - Chat Game (Can Lose Auscoins)
- Betting While Battles Are On.
- Subscribing (1000 Auscoins Every Month)
- Becoming a VIP (2,3,4 Timex Extra Boost)

1000 Auscoins = Shiny Battle Ready Pokemon
Prize Lists:
Click Me For The List

Figure 9: AuSlove's explanation of the Auscoin system.

(18) Goals

Streamers often list what their specific goals are for their Twitch channel. These goals are often straightforward, and are related to the focus of the channel. Amoney TV states his goal as: "My mission is to entertain you guys as well as educate all of you to get you better." This goal is consistent with his brand as his channel is meant to be entertaining while also providing strategies for fighting games. Other goals are far grander. Gross Gore's stated goal is to save up £200,000 for a specially designed "streaming penthouse" from which to run his channel. ALOHA states a game-centered goal: "to achieve all major drops from bossing."[13]

(19) Personal Information

As a type of celebrity, professional Twitch streamers live with more aspects of their lives in public than most people. Additionally, an amount of personal information is often present on the channel pages for most streamers. Activater lists important aspects of his life:

> Age
> I'm 29 years old.
> Location
> I live in San Francisco, California.
> Occupation
> I work in the film industry in the camera department. I primarily work as a 1st AC and sometimes I work as the Cinematographer / Director of Photography
> Twitch Streamer
> I've been streaming since April 3rd, 2015.

DeejayKnight takes a more narrative approach:

> I'm a Space and Sci-Fi focused US Air Force Veteran, massive gaming enthusiast and the Editor-In-Chief & Founder of GAMINGtruth, which is a gaming news, reviews & editorial site. It's been online since November 2006,

[13] In MMORPG's, in-game items, such as gear, "drop" from enemies, meaning that the player receives the item when the enemy is defeated. Unique enemies, such as "bosses," drop better gear, but are more difficult to defeat and drop more desirable items (which have to be split between more people).

> and is partially the reason I play a reasonable amount of games before their official launch.

CinCinBear shares her passion for animals:

> I am an Animal Lover and I donate monthly to Pet Shelters. If you love animals and want to give them a fighting chance, even a $1 donation is sufficient. It's easy to make a difference, especially if we work together. Please help save a life :) If you are not fond of this charity, I encourage you to donate to local shelters! There are millions of Cats and Dogs out there who need your help!

PhallofPhariss expresses a desire to help people dealing with depression:

> DON'T Feel that you are alone get help reach out to 1-800-273-8255 or to me I want to help. FIRST AND FOREMOST I am here for you and to be a little bit of joy for those who are struggling with depression.

The personal information that streamers decide to share on their channel pages varies widely between broadcasters. Some describe their likes and dislikes, others talk about their spouses, and yet others provide their age and hometown (information that other streamers like to keep hidden). Some broadcasters discuss their employment history, their military service, or address difficulties in their life such as physical disabilities and battles with depression. Streamers also discuss the history of the channel, such as by listing the date that they first started streaming or detailing when they become partnered.

(20) Play With Me

As mentioned above, some streamers attempt to increase viewership by allowing audience members to play multiplayer games with them - although this practice is often reserved specifically for subscribers. Playing games with the streamer during a live broadcasts can take many forms. Ezekiel_III occasionally plays the competitive party

game *Drawful*[14] with his moderators and subscribers during broadcasts. FuturemanGaming once hosted a "boat party" in *Grand Theft Auto V: Online*, where he invited viewers to join him for some of the boating-related activities available in the game. At the time of his offer there were several hundred people watching his channel, and around forty of them showed up in the game to take part in the event. AvoidingThePuddle suggests subscribers can "Play games online with Aris." Dfieldmark states that subscribers are "Priorities in Sub Games." Similarly, TheJwittz offers subscribers "Priority for multiplayer games (Smash Bros./Mario Kart/etc.) as well as some subscriber-only multiplayer days." The ability to play games with a streamer seems to be an attractive proposition for some viewers and subscribers, and one important enough for streamers to use the channel page as an invitation to play.

(21) Reading Out Viewer Names

Generally, the video screen is the realm of the broadcaster while the chat window is the realm of the participating viewer. However, streamers often like to acknowledge viewers when they demonstrate support for the channel by following, subscribing, or donating. As documented in the introduction, the way a streamer acknowledges a subscription can be memorable and theatrical. Some streamers use the channel page to make it clear what forms of viewer support will be verbally (or visually) acknowledged during the broadcast. Beyond simply shouting a thank you to those who subscribe, many streamers read out any short message sent to them from viewers that tip or donate. Stating in the channel page that a streamer will say the name of a subscriber or read aloud the message of a tipper/donator provides viewers with a

[14] *Drawful* is a party game where 4-8 players draw pictures of awkward phrases and then have each other guess the original phrase. The game is a mixture of *Pictionary* and *Balderdash*.

way to have a voice within the stream beyond the chat window. XRizzo00 offers: "Donations are always appreciated and the text to speech lady will read what you say." Trihex has tiered responses to donations: "Minimum $4.20 to trigger banner, $10.00+ triggers a more hype song! Donations below $4.20 are still read/replied on stream and still appreciated." Tessachka, who often streams horror-themed games has integrated the process of tipping into the brand of her channel by having the computer loudly play scary sounds whenever a tip is received:

> Tips in these amounts and above now make different scary sounds to make my heart race and scare everyone in chat! ($3, $10, $20, $50, $100, $250, $500) ALL tips get a huge thank you!!! <3

(22) Computer Specs

Most channel pages contain a detailed list of the components for each of the streamer's computers[15]. These include both the names of the different parts and their individual qualities. Dfieldmark's entry is thorough:

> Gaming Computer
> Motherboard : ASUS Maximus Hero VII
> Processor : Intel I7-4790k
> RAM : 16 GB G.Skill DDR3
> CPU Cooler: Corsair Hydro H105
> Graphics Card: EVGA GTX 980
> Memory: 2 TB SSD + 4 TB HDD
> Computer Case: Corsair 400R-Series MidTower
> Power Supply: Corsair 750W PSU
> Streaming Software: OBS
> BroadCaster Peripherals
> Monitors: 24" Acer Monitors (3x)
> Gaming Monitor: 144 hZ benQ Monitor
> Mouse: Razer DeathAdder
> Keyboard: Razer BlackWidow Chroma (Stealth)
> Headset: Audio Technica ATH M50-X
> Microphone: Audio Technica 2035
> Audio Interface: Line 6 POD UX2

[15] While it is possible to use a single PC to broadcast on Twitch, most professional streamers prefer to use a two-computer setup, where one PC plays the game and a second machine runs the stream.

Some streamers who advertise for computer vendors also place third party advertisements for their sponsor next to their computer specs so that the viewer can easily follow the link to the vendor's webpage and buy a machine with the same specifications as the broadcaster uses to stream.

(23) Expertise

Many streamers use the channel page to document their expertise in some specific aspect of gaming or streaming. Often this takes the form of listing past accomplishments, such as being part of a professional gaming team or winning some past tournament. AlohaDance boasts: "During my Dota 2 career I played in such teams as FlipSide.ru, Ahead Gaming, Insane Gaming, TR, HellRaisers, AlbumSheet, Team Empire." These references can be ongoing rather than historical, with a streamer posting their current global standing on a game they play competitively.

Some streamers have expertise outside of professional competitive play, and that expertise is often listed here. Streamers who have worked as game developers, artists, or in other fields of video production often demonstrate their expertise on their channel pages. DeejayKnight establishes credibility by reminding the audience that he is "Editor-In-Chief & Founder of GAMINGtruth, which is a gaming news, reviews & editorial site." BmKibler's page states:

> I am one of the designers of the SolForge Digital CCG and the Ascension Deckbuilding Game. Previously, I was one of the initial engine designers and Head Developer of the World of Warcraft TCG and also worked on the VS System, Quickstrike, Redakai, and Chaotic TCGs.

Expertise is garnered not only through the achievements of competitive play, but also by having a history in game development and related industries.

(24) Gamer Cred

Often linked to both the personal information and the documentation of expertise, many streamers provide information about themselves that establishes credibility within the gamer community. In other words, streamers use the channel page to establish the video game version of "street cred." Rather than documenting a history of professional competition, the gamer cred section uses personal narratives to lend detail to the streamer's life that focuses on video gaming, such as by stating the early age at which they received their first console, or the number of hours they played in a specific well-remembered game. JBrunzGaming states that he has "been gaming since the day my hands touched regular Nintendo." By mentioning that he started playing video games with a "regular Nintendo" JBrunzGaming establishes his credibility as a gamer *affectively*, by accessing the nostalgia of others who also remember first playing games on the old Nintendo Entertainment System. Similarly, AlfieRules states "I started gaming when I was four and my dad bought me a PS1, crash bandicoot [sic], best game ever." Again, by referencing a well-respected, older game, AlfieRules establishes himself as "one of us" amongst the gamer community. Therefore, for AlfieRules, these statements are both a performance of a gamer identity, and a means of establishing oneself as an in-group member. While the *expertise* section often focuses on quantitative support though winnings and rankings, gamer cred can be established qualitatively using personal narratives that resonate with other gamers. Speaking accurately and lovingly about an important game that was popular when one was young works toward gamer cred by initiating similar memories in the minds of viewers similar in age. Here it is the perceived authenticity of the story, and the nostalgic sensations it

evokes that establishes gamer cred, rather than the impressive numbers that demonstrate expertise.

(25) Charity

Many streamers regularly coordinate events that raise money through viewer donations to support specific charities, St. Jude being the most popular. When a streamer supports a specific charity she commonly provides a link to its website on her channel page. This practice was demonstrated above in CinCinBear's call to support animal shelters. Similarly, AuSlove boasts of having raised $637 in donations for victims of the Nepal Earthquake, and $700 for UNICEF kids. Charity work is important as it cultivates pride and a communal sense of ownership within a community. AuSlove did not send $700 of her own money to UNICEF Kids; that money was collected from his channel's community while broadcasting. Therefore, it is not only the broadcaster, but the community members that can feel proud of the donation. In this instance, pride is what is exchanged for money when donating during a charity drive.

(26) Artist Shout-Outs

This section began with a discussion on the necessity of graphical headings that are designed to be consistent with the channel's theme or the streamer's personal brand. A handful of streamers end their channel page by acknowledging the artists with whom they collaborate to give the channel its consistent theme. AAlaguna writes: "Who made these awesome panels? Laufie." ALOHA lists several graphical artists as contributors: Huge thanks to Orionwaves (emotes, below stream banner shape), LetsStreamRS (Below stream banners), Asphyxiuh (on-screen banner), and IronCorvis (emotes) for the help with all of my graphics!" It truly takes a village to run a stream.

THE FUNCTIONS OF CHANNEL PAGES

On an empirical level the content of channel pages fulfills several immediate needs for the viewer, from providing links to external social media, to documenting the streamer's weekly schedule, to even providing a P.O. Box for mailing items to the broadcaster. While each of these twenty-six sections provide distinct (yet interdependent) benefits to the viewer, they also serve as a foundation from which the broadcaster can address three of the most important attributes to being a viable professional Twitch streamer. These twenty-six aspects work toward three specific functions that help streamers maintain a healthy and growing community, which is necessary for continues financial solvency. The three functions that the channel page fulfills are: (1) building a brand, (2) building a community, and (3) building credibility. Each of these functions will be explicated in detail below.

Building a Brand

Many streamers acknowledge the importance of building a personal brand on Twitch. Branding is perceived as so foundational, that during TwitchCon 2015, not only did many broadcasters mention the importance of person branding, one panel session was dedicated to the topic: "Your Brand on Twitch." Describing streamers as brands carries some difficulty because the scope of what a streamer's brand encompasses is broad and occasionally abstract. In short, a streamer's brand is everything that occurs within and around their channel (and their other media) including audience interaction in the chat window and the expectations of repeat viewers. How a streamer acts on stream, the thematically consistent graphical headings, and graphical overlays that appear in the video window are all part of a streamer's brand. Additionally, the tone of

interactions in the chat window are also considered part of the channel's identity, prompting the participants in the "Your Brand on Twitch" panel to state that one's community is an important part of one's brand. Nearly every one of the twenty-six aspects listed above aid the streamer in defining the nature of his or her brand, and provide an opportunity to advertise the brand by emphasizing its desirable qualities.

One obvious place that streamer's branding can be examined is through the graphical elements of the channel page, and the stream itself. Thematically consistent graphical headings can be found on most channels, such as the Viking motif on Elohime's channel, the railroad iconography on Trainsy's channel, and the pixel art on Smokaloke's, BrownMan's, and Admiral Bahroo's channels. Often, chat icons are designed to graphically fit with the brand, such as Ezekiel_III's flaming heart icon and Lirik's iconic sad cats. These visual elements are repeated in the streamer's other media, such as their YouTube videos, their personal website, and their Twitter account. Regardless of which web 2.0 portal the viewer uses to access the streamer's content, the *feel* of the content must be familiar and thematically appropriate to the brand. Additionally, the visual themes present in the brand are always emphasized in the merchandise sold by the streamer. Ezekiel_III's shirts almost always contain flames or weapons - references to the spectacular aspects of his brand. Finally, while some streamers design their own graphics, others outsource artistic work, either to paid professional artists, or to volunteer artists who are fans of the stream. Therefore, when a streamer uses a portion of the channel page to give credit to the artist(s) who designed graphics for the channel, they are also demonstrating appreciation for someone who has helped develop the look and feel of the brand.

Semiotics can demonstrate how these brands function, both in general and in reference to specific streamers. On a general level, when the visual aspects of a brand are consistent, the style in which they are rendered becomes an index and a signifier for a broadcaster's brand. TheJWittz's consistent use of a cartoon-styled image of himself dressed as different video game characters becomes an index of his brand. Therefore, when a member of his community sees an image of TheJWittz dressed as Link from *The Legend of Zelda* on his Twitter page, it evokes the web of meanings surrounding his Twitch channel. The style of the image now reminds the viewer of his channel in general, including aspects that are not visual in nature. Second, some streamers use these graphics to connect themselves to broader notions of gamer identity. Such a connection can easily be seen with the streamers who use pixel art in their headings (Smokaloke, Admiral_Bahroo). The presence of images that mimic the eight and sixteen bit[16] visuals of older video games links the streamer to the *feeling* of those older games. Therefore, the signified of pixel art headings is affective in nature, connecting the brand of the streamer to nostalgic memories of older games.

The games that streamers choose to play can also be an important aspect for branding a channel. For example, Sacriel, who often plays military-themed games and first person shooters, refers to his channel's community as "The 42nd", mimicking the regimental numbering system of a military unit. One logo for Sacriel's channel resembles the type of patch that soldiers might wear on their uniform - again referencing (through knowing signifiers) the types of games he plays in the visual style

[16] The consoles of the 80's and 90's are often described by their processing capacity; the Nintendo Entertainment System was eight bit, while the Super Nintendo was 16 bit. The limitations of processing power on games of that era produced visuals that were not as detailed as the screens of the time, creating images that appeared "blocky." While contemporary games have long since lost the technological necessity for blocky graphics, some games mimic the old visuals as an aesthetic choice.

of his brand. Some streamers bring specific game references into their branded merchandise. The merchandise LolRenaynay sells often incorporates references to the *Fallout* video game series (See Figure 8). Even though she plays more than just *Fallout 3*, the fact that she returns to that series time and again has led her to incorporate its iconography into her brand.

We've already discussed the idea that the community surrounding a channel is part of its brand, but it is worthwhile to demonstrate how that relationship manifests on the channel page. The rules section builds the brand by establishing social norms and behavioral expectations for the community. Establishing rules forbidding racist and sexist comments carries several benefits for professional streamers. On a personal level, some professional streamers do not want hateful communication to be an accepted aspect of their social setting. Some, like BouseFeenux, feel that there is too much racism and sexism in the chat, and would like to see less of it in their daily lives (personal communication, June 28, 2016). On a marketing level, banning hateful statements from the chat window may increase the appeal of a channel to more diverse audience. Much like contemporary film and television studios - which want to produce content that has the widest possible audience - cleaning the chat of racist and sexist comments may also make female and non-white viewers feel more comfortable with the channel. Additionally, since unwanted material can often be removed before too many viewers see it, the absence of racist and sexist content can help set the expectation for chat participants. Obviously, there is potential for difference between the rules and their enforcement. Nearly all professional streamers use moderators (often shortened to simply "mods") who police the chat window by erasing comments that break the rules

before too many viewers can see them, and by banning repeat offenders (removing their ability to participate in chat). The extent to which mods police the chat window varies from channel to channel. However, mods for the most popular streams are extremely quick at removing unwanted chat content. Dodger, for example, praises her mods because she no longer has to see sexist comments while running her broadcast[17]. In short, the rules and the mods that enforce them are essential in growing and maintaining a brand on Twitch by ensuring the cultivation of a specific type of chat environment for the channel's community.

Occasionally the schedule can aid in developing a brand. Knowing when a streamer broadcasts and what games they play on which days can help potential viewers by setting their expectations for the channel. CohhCarnage speaks often on the importance of timing for the success of his channel. CohhCarnage starts his stream at 8:00AM EST every morning, a decision he made when realizing that few popular streamers were up that early. While many English-speaking streamers broadcast in the afternoon, evening, and late at night, CohhCarnage has established himself as popular streamer for the American morning crowd[18], an expectation that has become part of his brand.

As documented in later chapters, there is a complex connection between a streamer's personal identity and their online, streaming persona[19]. Therefore, the

[17] Dodger expressed this view during an episode of *Dropped Frames.*

[18] We may need to overcome stereotypical assumptions about what Twitch viewers are like, to fully grasp the importance of the American morning viewership. Streamers often talk about the people, mostly adult and middle-aged males, who watch Twitch while at work. Jobs that require long periods of down time with limited physical movement, such as security guards watching CCTV monitors, bus drivers between routes, and on-call EMTs have been known to watch (or at least listen to) Twitch throughout their workday, according to *Dropped Frames*.

[19] While this distinction may seem to imply the applicability of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy and the discussion of the "front" and "back" stages, we should explicate potential differences between Goffman's

personal information section of the channel page also establishes the broadcaster's brand. In addition to the gameplay and the chat community, the main attraction that a broadcaster (especially a variety streamer) can offer their audience, is personality. This has prompted many streamers to suggest that the way one acts on stream should be to be themselves, or at least close enough that maintaining the persona will not be mentally and physically draining. Participants in the "Your Brand on Twitch" panel at TwitchCon 2015 emphasized that it is less exhausting to be yourself than to be someone else. Therefore, the personal information section of the channel page grows the brand by providing viewers with an idea of what to expect from the streamer's personality. The channel page helps the streamer sell him- or herself to the audience.

The importance of personality to branding is apparent when streamers discuss their approach to game commentary. Knowing whether a streamer is supposed to be funny, conversational, silly, or educational[20] tells the audience what to expect; that expectation becomes part of the channel's brand. A visitor to Wyvern_Slayr's channel will know that asking questions about strategy in *Dark Souls* games is a fundamental part the channel, while a visitor to Ezekiel_III's channel may know that it is perfectly acceptable to mock him, as long as the insult is original. These idiosyncrasies are more than simply expectations about behavior: they are aspects of each streamer's brand.

Finally, running streams that raise money for charity are often a source of pride for professional streamers. When a channel page mentions a charity, it illuminates an

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concepts and the focus of this discussion of streamer persona. Goffman's theory focuses on behaviors while my discussion above considers self-perceived, ontological states, which implies conceptual distinctions between Goffman's "back stage" and a streamer's identity when not performing. Rather than "front stage" and "back stage," I posit that it will be more fruitful to examine this duality of streamer identity as the distinction between a brand and its commodity as an object.

[20] Some streamers market themselves as being able to teach their viewers how to play a competitive game better.

aspect of the channel's brand that is a point of pride, for which the entire channel community can feel somewhat responsible.

Building a Community

The fact that streamers see the community cultivated by their channel to be an essential part of the brand highlights the importance of community building. Indeed, many portions of the channel page establish and maintain the channel's community.

While the community does revolve around a video program (the stream) that is broadcast at specific times, many aspects of the channel that *give it value* exist outside of the video stream. Indeed, aspects of community building occur outside of Twitch and outside the time of the broadcast. The channel page serves as a gateway to those outside aspects by providing links to the streamer's other media - such as Twitter, Snapchat, and Facebook. Repeat viewers use these social media portals to keep up with the channel, to feel connected to the streamer, and to express their identity as a fan of the channel. Twitter is perhaps the easiest place to see these interactions in action. Streamers use Twitter to convey a plethora of concerns to their audience: from news about when regularly scheduled broadcasts may be cancelled and what they're doing on their day off, to commentary about upcoming video games. Therefore, viewers need to access the Twitter feed of the streamer to stay current with what is occurring in the community. Additionally, viewers may start to experience a form of social or parasocial relationship (cf., Auter, 1992; Horton & Wohl, 1956) with the broadcaster, as the streamer conveys mundane aspects of his or her personal life (such as by tweeting pictures of their meals or laundry)[21]. Viewers also show direct support to streamers

[21] Considering that streamers can (and often do) respond to viewers' tweets the amending parasocial relationship theories to Twitch streaming could be a fruitful addition to that literature.

when they buy the streamer's shirts. It is common for viewers to tweet a picture of them in the new (stream branded) shirt, which the individual broadcaster will often immediately re-tweet. The process of automatically retweeting shirt pictures demonstrates a limited form of gift economy (Mauss, 2000) within Twitch norms. When a viewer buys a shirt (merchandise revenue for the streamer) and then tweets a picture of themselves wearing it (free advertising for the streamer), the streamer seems almost obligated to retweet the picture (creating prestige for the viewer in the channel's community). Here, the "free" sharing of different types of social capital is moderated by economic relations and reciprocal obligations of behavior. Following Baudrillard (1981) and Veblen (2007), tweeting behavior is somewhat governed by the strict rules of conspicuous consumption and the relations of valued signs within a community. Twitter interactions are so important, that some streamers build Twitter into their subscriber loyalty program, with GeekandGamerGirl stating that when someone subscribes for 12 months, she will follow the subscriber on Twitter. Twitter serves as a space for the community to interact and reinforce their identity as in-group members outside of the broadcast.

Some streamers design an outside website for their channel, and link to it from their channel page. This website acts as a place for audience members to interact outside of the broadcast. Many of these websites provide forums, or places for audience members to discuss a variety of issues. CohhCarnage uses his website to solicit community feedback, and make community-informed decisions about the stream. For example, CohhCarnage uses his community's message boards to determine which games he will play next and what type of character he will play in those games. The

channel page fosters this type of community behavior by offering links to such websites.

For many channels, the focus on community is built in to the discussion surrounding tips, donations, and subscriptions. Requests for subscriptions, donations, and tips can reference their importance to the longevity of the community, and allow the viewer to better interact with the community. Buying new equipment to make the stream run better is often cited as a way that individual community members, through donating, enhance the quality of the channel for the entire community. Additionally, community members can circumvent the process of donating money by using the listed P.O. Box to physically mail the streamer hardware components that increase the quality of the stream. The entire community can enjoy the crisp, clear audio provided by a new microphone, and know that it was donated by a specific individual. Viewers also use tipping and donating to provide direct benefit to the community by stating how their tip is to be used. Tippers to CohhCarnage's stream occasionally stipulate that the tip must be used to purchase a specific game to be awarded in a raffle, to be conducted immediately during the stream. Additionally, in the weeks leading up to events (such as PAX and TwitchCon) Ezekiel_III's tippers have been known to stipulate that their tip must be used to take the channel's mods to an expensive dinner during the event. In short, the donation and tipping processes enacted through the channel page allow the community to support itself. Additionally, tips that have a specific purpose (creating raffles, feeding mods) also carry implicit messages. Here the movement of money from viewer to streamer carries meaning about the running of the channel and the nature of

community. In these situations money becomes the signifier of the commitment experienced by community members.

Many aspects of the channel page clue the informed viewer into what type of community congregates around a particular stream. The rules set the tone for how the community is expected to behave, which aids the viewer in choosing a channel appropriate to the type of interaction they desire. While most professional streamers forbid or discourage racist and sexist comments, streamers also decide how "mature" they want their stream to be. Here, the term "mature" means the extent to which swearing and adult conversations are allowed. While some streamers strive for a "PG" or "family-friendly" chat atmosphere, others allow various amounts of cursing and adult conversations. Explicitly stating what is and is not permitted in the rules allows viewers (and parents of younger viewers) to determine which communities they feel comfortable with. Statements about game commentary are also important for the community, because the broadcaster functions as a leader, demonstrating to the audience how interaction on this channel should be approached. Whether the goal is to laugh together or to discuss strategy, game commentary - and its description on the channel page - sets the tone for community interaction.

Posted schedules also allow for instances of community building. Successful streamers note that when they start their stream each day, there are already viewers waiting in the channel's chat before the broadcast even begins. Community is also coordinated outside of streaming hours during events such as PAX and TwitchCon, where community members can meet in person.

Game choice and visual motifs of the brand also provide a space for community building through identity expression. This is perhaps easiest to see in multiplayer games where community members can play the same game that the channel's owner is playing. Single player games also allow for community building by providing members with a shared, game-specific vocabulary and jargon, knowledge of which begins to indicate in-group membership. As game-relevant themes bleed into the design of channel's graphics and chat icons, these themes become symbols of community membership. The Viking helmets and medieval weaponry that Ezeziel_III employs serve a similar community building process as Sacriel's use of military-styled phrasing with "The 42nd;" with both streamers providing for their viewers a set of symbols, upon which to hang notions of identity, and inclusion in a community. The merchandise sold by streamers not only helps the community by financially ensuring its longevity, but also displays the symbols of the community, so that customers can display their loyalty (which they often do via selfies on Twitter).

The brand-themed chat icons do more than simply display the symbolism of the channel, they become a way for the subscribers to interact with one another. Drew Harry[22], Twitch's Director of Science, posits that when viewers fill the chat with a streamer's emotes, it becomes a form of cheering (2015). This phenomenon is further referenced in an interview, when FuturemanGaming describes how new subscribers are welcomed to his channel:

> I'll definitely give them a big shout out when they join in. And then I've got the emote[23] that's like a handshake, like two hands kind of like clasping together.

[22] Drew Harry is Twitch's Director of Science and works for Twitch's Science Team. The team applies data science to various parts of Twitch's infrastructure in order to improve user experience. Prior to working for Twitch, Drew Harry completed a Ph.D. from MIT's Media Lab.
[23] Here, emote is another term for chat icon.

> And the chat will just light up with some of those and you'll get some "nice moves!" going, that's like the go to motto that's just like nice moves! (personal communication, April 3, 2016)

In this statement FuturemanGaming describes the way that viewers fill (spam) the chat with the "clasping hands" and "nice moves" chat icons to cheer on new subscribers. Cheering in chat is so popular that Twitch has developed other methods for allowing viewers to cheer for streamers. This endeavor lead to the implementation of the Bits system in summer 2016, which is a more formal system for cheering, but one which costs the viewer (even more) money to use.

Subscription and donation requests also become instances of community building practice, based on how they are worded on the channel page. The requests can be phrased in terms of how the money will support the community, such as AuSlove's declaration that a subscription "is one of the best ways to support the stream." Therefore, these economic relations become instances of community building by arguing that participation in them supports and maintains the ability for this channel to remain open, sustaining it as a viable meeting place for the individuals who are a part of this community.

Finally, many aspects of the channel page foster a sense of community by facilitating the personal communications between streamers and individual viewers. The personal information section provides viewers with a peek into the life of the streamer, and gives viewers a way to personally identify with the broadcaster. Invitations to chat with the streamer are designed to motivate viewers into using the chat window. The chat window is important, not only because it is what separates Twitch from non-interactive videos on YouTube, but also because it is where the community interaction

occurs. Additionally, reading out the names of subscribers and donators on air, listing top donators, and recognizing the work of the artists that design the channel's graphics, all provide ways for the community to celebrate the contributions of individual members.

However, as important as the idea of fostering a community is to professional streamers, we must note here the distinction between traditional notions of community and how the term is invoked in streamer discourse. In the social sciences, most conceptualizations of community stem from Tönnies' notions of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* (Almgren, 2000; Bender, 1978). Gemeinschaft (or community) is rooted in nostalgia for the past, a sense of what it must have been like to be part of a small preindustrial village, where fellow community members knew each other on intimately personal levels (Bender, 1978). The social sciences (cultural studies and media studies in particular) have long been interested in the supposed replacement of gemeinschaft with gesellschaft, or society (i.e., mass society), a process that accompanies modernization and broadcast media (Almgren, 2000; Bender, 1978). While many lament the loss of the truly connected community, Anderson (1983) critiques the notion that nationalism can replace the deep connections experienced by community (gemeinschaft) membership. Some scholars sidestep the inherent question (whether gesellschaft has replaced gemeinschaft) by focusing on the experience of the individual (Chavis & Perry, 1999; McMillan, 1996). In other words, people experience community if they feel that they experience community, regardless of whether an outside observer labels the interaction as gemeinschaft.

The nature of community is relevant to Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) scholars, in that they must address the ways that communities can experience cohesion without the channel-rich aspects of face-to-face communication (Walther, Bunz, & Bazarova, 2005; Walther & Jang, 2012). Such studies are often outcome driven, and determine success not by the feelings of community membership but by the successful completion of tasks required of the group. While Twitch (writ large) is a social space for CMC, its constituent communities are voluntary and not task-contingent. Therefore, CMC scholarship that treats task completion as a dependent variable are less relevant to the current research.

More relevant are phenomenological approaches that treat the participant as honest when they describe their personal experience of Twitch as community-driven (and then explore what that means) rather than externally applying a definition of community and demonstrating how streaming audiences come up short. For this endeavor, McMillan's (1996) *sense of community* serves as an entry point for understanding Twitch channel communities. McMillan (1996) focuses on four aspects of the experience of community membership: (1) a spirit that dictates that community belongs together, (2) a trust in the structure of the community, (3) the experience that the trade that occurs between community members is mutually beneficial, and (4) the moments in which community is experienced favorably linger, as though they are preserved as art. While the examination of Twitch audience experience is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is clear that each of these four aspects are present in streamer discourse. Therefore, while Twitch streamers may not be physically proximate to their audiences, on an experiential level, they may feel echoes of gemeinschaft in

their Twitch community. The extent of this communal experience is further explored in Chapter 7.

In short, the channel page indicates how the community that grows around the channel is sustained while also celebrating those community members that directly (often financially) support it in various ways.

Building Credibility

Streamers often seem interested in building upon several conceptualizations of credibility in their professional practices, including the design of their channel page. Brand themed headings that are visually interesting and thematically consistent provide the first layer of professionalism that streamers convey to their audience. Channel pages should look sleek, and provide aesthetically pleasing graphics while also efficiently conveying information to the audience. Not only must the channel page be *designed* (meaning thoroughly thought-out and planned to repeatedly reference the brand's themes), the implemented design must express professional quality. The graphical headings, chat icons, and social media pages all need to demonstrate a consistent, polished, professional look and feel. This is especially true of the streamer's greater media presence (Twitter, Instagram, etc.), which are accessed outside the times that the streamer broadcasts. Without the commentary of the broadcaster immediately present, it is key for the outside medias' presence to resonate with the style and character of the streamer in order to feel consistent between the on-air personality and the after-hours social interactions. Even when the stream is not *on*, the brand must be.

Furthermore, these graphical touches often convey meaning not only through their quality, but through their content as well. Through the examples documented

above, one can see that streamers' headings use art style and subject choice to enhance their credibility as gamers. Admiral_Bahroo and Smokaloke both use pixel art headings that mimic the type of graphics one would see in an 8 bit (Nintendo Entertainment System) or 16 bit (Sega Genesis, Super Nintendo) video game console. Since many of these games from the eighties and early nineties are often considered to be more difficult than contemporary games, these "blocky" headings connect the streamer to connotations of skill and mastery. While pixel art graphics are also used outside of Twitch (see Lipkin, 2014, for their contemporary use in the "indie" game scene), content creators use them to strategically position themselves within a hierarchy of perceived skill that is based on cultural knowledge of video game history.

Rules demonstrate credibility in several ways. First, they demonstrate authority through ownership. The streamer is (in some respects but not all) the owner of this space, the channel through which viewers interact. Second, by stipulating rules, streamers demonstrate that they are popular enough that they do not need the viewers who would hurt the atmosphere of the stream. Since many professional streamers set similar rules for their chat, it is now expected for channels to do so, and not having some formal code of conduct would appear unprofessional.

Finally, credibility is cultivated on the channel pages by stating the things that a gamer ought to know. First, and most importantly, this type of credibility is established through listing the specifications of the streamer's computer(s). Showing the quality of the hardware one uses, as well as the technical know-how to put it together, demonstrates that the streamer has knowledge beyond simply how to play games. Therefore, hardware as a signifier enters the streamer into the political economy of

signs (Baudrillard, 1981), similar to Veblen's (2007) conspicuous consumption. High quality computer specs place streamers into a hierarchy of signs and social capital based on consumption patterns.

Additionally, demonstrating this technical expertise addresses cultural assumptions within the gamer community that argue that PCs are the preferred way to play video games. PCs are thought superior because they offer sharper graphics and higher frame rates (FPS) than consoles, meaning that PCs allow good players to play better than is possible on consoles (such as Sony's PS4 and Microsoft's XBox One). Therefore, the ability to build a gaming computer speaks to a technical knowledge of computer components, and hints at the skill and seriousness of the streamer in playing games. Such implications about the gaming skill of the streamer are further cemented on the channel page under the expertise and gamer cred sections. Both aspects suggest that the streamer is someone who "knows their stuff," which supports their position as an authority figure in the video gaming community.

DISCUSSION

One goal for this chapter was to explore the various products that professional streamers offer to viewers. There is a certain conceptual difficulty when discussing the profession of live streaming (and indeed other careers that revolve around the creation of online media content). While many Twitch streamers (and YouTubers) describe themselves as "content creators," defining what counts as "content" can be tricky. Industries outside of the media offer tangible or otherwise empirically concrete outcomes: Ford manufactures automobiles and accountants file their client's taxes. Within the traditional (i.e., corporate) media industries, writers produce scripts, editors

turn footage into a coherent sequence, and directors manage crews of diverse professionals. However, what counts as "content" on Twitch is difficult to describe because it is so much more than simply the streamed broadcast. Additionally, the program itself cannot be described as a "product" exchanged for money, since the monetized aspects of streaming are not required to view the video. Twitter feeds and community interactions (over which the streamer has only tenuous control) may both be considered aspects of content by some streamers. Additionally, unlike subscription based media services like HBO and Netflix, a Twitch broadcast is equally available to all viewers regardless of whether they subscribe. We can return, here, to the quote from BouseFeenux: "It's a paradox, there's nothing you can technically provide," and later: "It's content creator street knowledge to be like 'By donating you're not paying for a service or a product, you're not purchasing anything,'" (personal communication, June 28, 2016). While a producer working in a traditional media industry delivers a specific object to their financiers (a film, an episode of a television show, a recording of a song) in exchange for money, the Twitch streamer must provide that content for free in the hopes of garnering voluntary financial support from their audience. Their video content is free for everyone to watch, meaning that they are not directly paid for their work in creating it. Additionally, when they do receive income, it is not in exchange for any physical object or any specific service (while subscribers are offered first chance at multiplayer game inclusion, it is by no means guaranteed). For new media content creators, what they create and what they sell are emphatically different, defying traditional classifications of products and services. Despite this difficulty, the channel

pages of individual streamers provide insight into what "content" is and what is "for sale."

So, what is content? And what is for sale? Obviously, content includes the streamer's broadcasts. On Twitch, the individual broadcaster is not simply a presenter, showing up as the curtain raises and retiring once the lights go down. Every aspect of the stream, from the graphical overlays on the video window, to the chat icons used by subscribers, to the channel page itself, are designed by the streamer, or at least are the result of collaborative work between the streamer and professional artists. Additionally, for most professional streamers, every hour spent streaming is matched by at least one hour (often more) spent planning, designing, and building. Twitch broadcasting is not just time spent streaming: it is the outcome of numerous hours spent outside of the broadcast, designing every aspect of it, and solving technical difficulties when they arise. Content is also the way the community interacts. When a viewer leaves one channel to find another whose community is less "toxic[24]," more helpful, or appreciative of humor (or any other reason), then specific types of community interaction become part of the package that a professional streamer offers to viewers. Throughout this chapter I have shown how streamers create a sense of what their specific content is, both in terms of style and interaction. Through the channel pages, streamers define, for the audience, what their content is like by (1) building notions of the channel's brand, (2) building certain types communities as well as expectations about how they interact, and (3) building the credibility necessary to attract specific types of viewers.

[24] Streamers often use the word "toxic" to refer to chat sessions that are contagiously negative and that cultivate insulting and hateful interaction.

Of course, the more difficult question to answer is the one regarding what is for sale. Streamers provide audience members with a number of different products and services for the money that subscribers, donators, and tippers use to support the channel. In answer to RQ1a, subscribers receive badges and chat icons, small graphics used in Twitch's chat windows. These items both exemplify the channel's brand and demonstrate the economic value of community. Badges serve as an index, marking the subscriber as a dues-paying member of the community, while knowledgeable use of the chat icons demonstrates one's ability to speak the local language. Subscribers also get preferential treatment in multiplayer games and raffles, demonstrating that the streamer appreciates the financially engaged community member. Donators get their names and messages read out in real time during broadcasts. This practice amounts to the streamer sharing social capital with the donator by publicly acknowledging her. Additionally, top donator lists bestow even more prestige, by naming those viewers most responsible for the quality and continued solvency of the channel. Finally, when viewers purchase stream branded merchandise they receive their ordered items and the potential for further recognition in the channel's community. Cash can be exchanged for a t-shirt, but that exchange also often includes the possibility of the streamer retweeting the viewer, as per the norms of the community. In short, the movement of money between viewer and streamer is a form of communication that mediates a viewer's interaction with (and standing within) the community.

Professional Twitch streamers collect income from many different sources. Some of these sources are easier to map than others, in terms of what benefit is exchanged for money in any given transaction. For example: sponsored streams - ones

where game developers pay the streamer to play their games as a way to advertise to potential customers - are obvious examples of the audience commodity (Ang, 2006, 2010; Alusatari, 2010; Smythe, 2006). In these cases, the audience is what the broadcaster has sold to the game developer, just as CBS or FOX will sell The Super Bowl audience to national beer and automobile vendors.

Both ItmeJP and Ezekiel_III describe subscriptions as the "lion's share" of a streamers income. If most of a streamer's income comes from subscriptions, then we should examine the subscription as the central commodity that is sold by the streamer. Through this examination of channel pages, we have noted many of the important benefits that subscribers receive in exchange for their money. The most common benefits are chat icons, access to subscriber only chat, the ability to play multiplayer games with the streamer, loyalty tokens, and fewer commercials. We must explore these items on their own to compare their inherent merits with their wider meaning in order to satisfy RQ1b. In other words, comparing what a chat icon is to how it is used will illuminate the value of a subscription. Having access to the icon is only beneficial when the subscriber has a meaningful way to use it. Having access to TheHunterWild's bear head icon means nothing in and of itself. But it becomes meaningful when one spams[25] it into the chat window along with dozens of other subscribers to "cheer on" TheHunterWild's success in the game or a large tip having been donated. Subscribing to the channel is not about receiving chat icons in exchange for money; subscribing is about increasing the level of one's participation in the community that surrounds the channel. Subscribing is being a team player and a local VIP. In short, notions of

[25] Here the word "spam" is used as a verb to mean sending a communication repeatedly. When one fills the chat log with a chat icon, one is "spamming" it.

community and identity, and the ability to enact them, are “what’s for sale” on Twitch. Therefore, Twitch broadcasters are advertising experiences of community and identity through their channel pages.

Chapter 6

Dropped Frames and Professional Discourse

Having covered the nature of "what's for sale" on Twitch in the previous chapter, I now examine the ways that professional streamers talk about the product that they produce and how they develop professionally. Like most professionals, Twitch broadcasters interact with other industry insiders regularly to discuss their jobs, often in attempt to become better at them. The weekly talk show *Dropped Frames* provides just such a forum for examining the speech of professional streamers - one that covers many aspects of the profession, and how each broadcaster approaches it as a media industry professional. While this program may not explicitly describe a comprehensive normative theory of Twitch broadcasting, it provides glimpses of such a concept in the ways that professional streamers discuss different aspects of their working lives. By mapping the tensions that streamers deal with in their profession, a picture starts to emerge detailing the important considerations present in a streamer's working life. This picture can help us understand the profession and how professional streamers make sense of their industry. Considering that professionalism concerns the perceived relationship between the professional and the work she does, an intricate knowledge of streaming professionalism will be helpful in mapping the ways that Twitch broadcasters conceptualize the many activities required for generating revenue. In short, a study on streamer professionalism is a study on the ways that streamers make sense of their moneymaking practices. Therefore, this chapter will explore streamer speech to examine the ways that money influences meaning making among professional streamers.

This chapter will explore *Dropped Frames* (*DF*), a talk show broadcast weekly on Twitch, which provides professional streamers with a public forum to discuss live streaming as a profession. First, the show will be described below to demonstrate its viability as a source for emic data from live streaming professionals. Second, the speech of live streamers on *Dropped Frames* will be examined to empirically document how streamers talk about topics relevant to the profession of live streaming. Data analysis will take the form of thick description (Geertz, 1973a, 1973b) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010; Locke, 2004) to map the foundational meanings and important professional considerations implicated in the speech of talk show participants. This chapter will end with a discussion of the important tensions that lie at the heart of these professional streaming considerations.

DROPPED FRAMES

Dropped Frames is a talk show that broadcasts weekly on Twitch. One purpose of the show is to provide professional streamers with a place to discuss the profession and business of live streaming video game play. As a venue for these types of discussions, *DF* represents an excellent opportunity to examine the professionally-oriented speech of successful live streamers.

The name of the show itself, "*Dropped Frames*" references a technical problem that is a common, sometimes recurring issue that professional streamers must deal with. Film generally captures images at the rate of 24 FPS[1], American (NTSC) video at about 30 FPS, and many contemporary video games run at 60 FPS. When video is live streamed and the broadcasting computer or distribution infrastructure cannot keep up

[1] Frames Per Second. A "frame" is a single image in a succession of images that, when shown rapidly, creates moving video images.

with the flow of the data, errors in playback can occur. A common error is for one or several frames from the video feed to simply disappear, meaning that the frame prior to the disappearance stays on screen longer than it should to fill the gap[2]. Video that is "dropping frames" in such a manner will seem "choppy" and viewers often find such choppiness annoying to watch. Dropping frames during a live stream is often a symptom of some hidden technical problem, and functions as an indicator that something is wrong with the computer, Twitch's systems, or the Internet environment, that is causing less than the normal amount of data to flow from the broadcaster to the viewer. As a symptom of a technical problem, dropping frames tells the broadcaster that there is something that needs to be fixed. Therefore, all professional Twitch streamers need to be able to diagnose and fix the technical issues that cause dropped frames. By naming the talk show *Dropped Frames*, the presenters are indicating that the contents of the show are directly relevant to people who work in the streaming industry.

Dropped Frames broadcasts weekly. As of March 2017 the show airs at 5:00 PM EST every Wednesday. The timing of broadcasts varies somewhat on weeks that contain special events such as PAX, TwitchCon, and E3. For example, at TwitchCon 2015, *DF* broadcast from the main stage at the convention allowing that week's show to take place in front of a live audience. Therefore, the week of TwitchCon, *DF* aired at 4:30 PM PST on Friday, because that was the time they were allotted the main stage. Each broadcast generally lasts three hours, with a short break in the middle of the episode. Since *DF* is broadcast on a Twitch channel (and not a television network or cable channel), the broadcast can run long or end early, without creating programming

[2] Which is distinctly different from NTSC, which occasionally drops frames on purpose, as a way to "fix" the discrepancy between its stated framerate of 30 FPS and actual framerate of 29.97 FPS.

issues. Shortly after each episode finishes airing, it is uploaded by one of the producers to an archive housed on YouTube. Therefore, viewers can watch it on Twitch when it first airs, or later on YouTube. However, viewers can only interact with the chat if they watch it live on Twitch, and not when the archived recording is accessed on YouTube.

While viewership fluctuates depending on the weekly guest, *DF* reaches thousands of viewers. The July 20th, 2016 episode had over 10,000 viewers during the live broadcast. Within a month of being posted on YouTube that same episode had amassed a further 16,000 views.

DF has three regular hosts: ItmeJP, CohhCarnage, and Ezekiel_III. These three individuals are established, successful Twitch Streamers. While each host considers himself to be a variety streamer, each brings different skillsets and perspectives to *DF*. ItmeJP's background is in media production, having completed a degree in telecommunications, and having worked on the production of eSports events. On February 17th, 2016, ItmeJP stated that "my channel got noticed because of talk shows," rather than simply streaming games. ItmeJP is the one who designs and runs *DF*, acting as the equivalent of a technical director in a television studio: cueing up different video feeds, cutting between them in real time, and generally making the show happen. He also runs several other shows on Twitch that broadcast tabletop *Dungeons and Dragons* games, as well as talk shows about eSports events. He often contributes to discussions on computer technology, providing advice about what hardware to use and how best to set it up. CohhCarnage is a variety streamer who focuses on franchise play-throughs: playing every game from a franchise in order, back to back. CohhCarnage's background is in computer programming and IT. He holds a college degree and has worked several

jobs in the software development industry. Beyond his work as a live streamer, CohhCarnage is also the co-owner of a small game development firm. CohhCarnage lends his experience and expertise to discussions on the relationship between game developers, marketers, and live streamers. Ezekiel_III once joked that he dropped out of college about the same time that ItmeJP and CohhCarnage were finishing their degrees. Ezekiel_III has experience in the entertainment industries outside of the video gaming milieu, having worked as an actor, both for local commercials and in community theatre, and regularly performs stand-up comedy at local clubs[3]. Based on this experience he often adds his expertise to discussions comparing Twitch to other entertainment industries, and theorizes how Twitch streaming is a type of performance. Additionally, Ezekiel_III started on Twitch as a moderator for another channel before eventually designing his own, giving him a comprehensive experiential understanding of the different types of labor that go into broadcasting on Twitch.

In addition to the three regular hosts, nearly every episode focuses partly on a specific theme, for which a weekly guest is invited to provide insight and expertise directly relevant to that week's topic. Often these guests are professional streamers, but they can also be members of related industries that provide outside perspectives. For example, during the episode on charity events, Zachary Whitten - the Video Game Liaison for the fundraising department of St. Jude Children's Hospital - was the guest, and he discussed the history of how streamers have worked with St. Jude on charity events. Another week's guest was Danny Baranowsky (DannyBstyle), the music composer for video games such as *Super Meat Boy*, *The Binding of Isaac*, and *Crypt of the NecroDancer*, who discussed how independent game developers score games and

[3] "Local" here means Montana.

how one gets noticed in the games development industry as a musician. Several episodes have been dedicated to mapping the differences in entrepreneurship between Twitch and YouTube. Guests on these episodes included TotalBiscuit, CinnamonToastKen, and 2MGoverCsquared, owners of popular YouTube channels who occasionally stream on Twitch. In short, nearly every episode of *DF* focuses on a specific topic that is centrally relevant to the profession and business of live streaming.

Some episodes focus on personal and quality-of-life issues, rather than the nuts and bolts of technical and industry processes. Depression in streaming and sexism within the greater Twitch community are two issues that have been discussed on *DF*. The weeks where the topic was "Streaming as a Female" often involved the male hosts abstaining from the broadcast for the week so that four female streamers can express their perspectives, difficulties, and strategies for dealing with sexism, in a forum that amplifies female voices. *DF* is a program where streamers openly discuss many diverse aspects of the streaming profession, including the economic, technical, psychological, and social aspects of the job. For the present research agenda, *DF* functions as a source of data, where one can examine many of the tensions that professional streamers experience in their work.

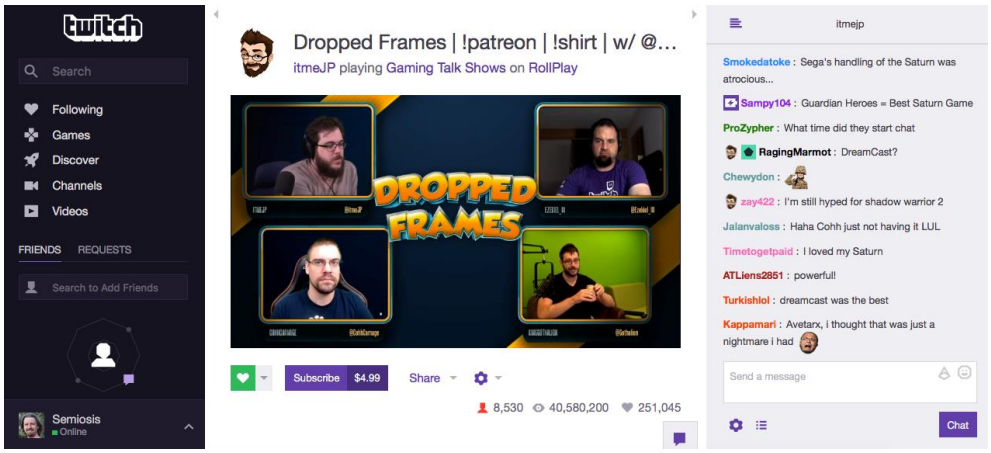

Figure 10: *Dropped Frames*, as it appears live on Twitch.

Visually, *DF* differs dramatically from a traditional talk show, mostly due to the constraint of working in an industry where geography is irrelevant. Having the standard talk show set (including a desk, table, or couch from which to present) would be impossible when one host lives in Texas, another in Montana, the third on the East Coast, and the guests call in from all over the world. While occupying geographically distant physical spaces, the digital infrastructure of Twitch (and similar communication platforms such as Skype and Zoom) allows them to appear in visually contiguous spaces as talking heads on a screen (See Figure 10). This manufactured sense of proximity is enhanced by the speed of the streaming video feeds - which are virtually instantaneous - allowing the hosts and the guests to interact in real time, as though no communications lag is present. While the interior "screens" for each discussant are generally given an equal quadrant of the overall frame, they are occasionally minimized and pushed to the periphery, for the exposition of a relevant visual aid, such as a prerecorded video, viewing the stream of another Twitch broadcaster, or examining documents on the Internet to support an argument (See Figure 11).

Chronologically the episodes are divided into several different segments that last for varying amounts of time and whose topical content often overlaps with one another. The most common segment, the one present in nearly every broadcast, occurs when the hosts ask each other "So, what have you been playing since last week's episode?" and "What do you look forward to playing in the near future?" These segments function partially as advertisements for the channels of each of the hosts and that week's guest. By outlining what they've been playing, each broadcaster is given the opportunity to tell the audience what kinds of gameplay can currently be found on his or her channel.

Generally, half of each week's episode focuses on the week's chosen topic. Often these segments begin with pre-written questions for the guests, before becoming a roundtable discussion, while also taking questions from the audience (i.e., chat window). Finally, *DF* almost always contains some discussion of relevant news from the video game industry. Early episodes also contained a segment where the hosts would watch a smaller streamer (in terms of viewership) and critique the channel, but that segment does not occur regularly in more recent episodes.

Figure 11: *Dropped Frames*, with hosts and guest examining the list of jobs for which Twitch is hiring.

ANALYZING *DROPPED FRAMES*

Dropped Frames provides professional streamers with a forum to actively negotiate the nature of their professionalism. This chapter will first present the speech performed by Twitch streamers on *DF* and then use critical discourse analysis (CDA) to map the various considerations that streamers have when they go about their work. Following Locke (2004) and Fairclough (2010), CDA involves close readings of texts (or in this case speech) to determine and explicitly state the underlying assumptions of

the writer (or in this case, speaker). For this study, the speech of professional streamers will map not only their stated concerns, but also the deeper, underlying, implicit considerations that inform those concerns. In other words, CDA can get us closer to a normative theory of the live streaming profession by highlighting the underlying assumptions that streamers have about the way their profession ought to work. Additionally, the articulation of these considerations will also illuminate important tensions that exist within the profession. To say that income influences the nature of an action is to imply that money's presence creates tensions within the participant, which are then acted upon (either by addressing them or ignoring them). Therefore, this chapter will end with a discussion of the tensions inherent in professional Twitch streaming, as they are necessary for exploring the ways that money changes the meaning of video game play.

This study begins by examining the empirical speech of professional streamers on important topics relevant to the profession of streaming. Topics that Twitch broadcasters find important (based on their recurring nature), are investigated by asking the specific question: "How do professional streamers talk about…" each topic. By examining the ways that streamers talk about each topic, we can start to determine types of considerations streamers experience in relation to each topic. In short, *DF* will tell us much about the considerations that Twitch streamers have in their professional lives as well as the underlying tensions. While these issues are not in response to direct questions from the researcher (*DF* is not a scholarly interview), this study does rely on the self-report of individuals. Therefore, the emic data presented within should be taken with both the benefits and the potential drawbacks of self-report in mind.

HOW DO STREAMERS TALK ABOUT…

Listed below are 12 topics that occur repeatedly on *DF*, paired with examples of professional streamer speech on each topic. Many of these topics will also feature some basic explanation - when necessary - to reinforce the importance of the topic to professional streaming, or to distinguish it from other topics that seem similar but are conceptually distinct.

Twitch Corporate

While streaming on Twitch is the central focus of their day-to-day working life, most streamers do not work for Twitch. Ezekiel_III states "We're not employees of Twitch, we are performers on the platform of Twitch," (December 12, 2015). Most professional Twitch streamers are "partners," not employees. The importance of this distinction (between partner and employee) to contemporary neoliberal economic assumptions and processes cannot be overstated (and will be explicated below and in later chapters). For the purposes of this chapter on *DF*, the important aspect to note is the tightrope walk that professional streamers execute which places them as members of the Twitch community, yet unquestionably outside of Twitch (meaning Twitch's corporate entity).

CohhCarnage elaborates: "We're doing our own thing, and Twitch is facilitating that. So, it's like at any point that could become unfeasible, for any myriad of reasons," (December 12, 2015). This quote demonstrates the experience of many professional streamers, highlighting the peripheral and precarious nature of their occupational position relative to the Twitch corporation. True, without the streamers, Twitch would not be what it is today. On the other hand, as semi-outsiders, professional streamers are

particularly vulnerable to any decision that Twitch (the corporation) makes. Streamers' anxiety over this relationship is evident in CohhCarnage's utterance above. On another episode, professional streamer Ellohime, looking directly into the camera, emphatically states "If there's any Twitch people… if you want to invite me to anything, you go right ahead! OK? I will do anything!" (January 28, 2015). This further demonstrates that, for many professional streamers, Twitch corporate is something of a black box, one can see its output, but not what occurs inside. While professional streamers are, in some ways, Twitch insiders, in other ways they certainly are not.

A simple dichotomy begins to emerge in the ways that professional streamers use the word "Twitch" on *DF*. Often, when paired with a preposition ("on Twitch," "with Twitch," "through Twitch," etc.), "Twitch" refers to a venue, a social space that leads to a certain species of interpersonal interactions and relationships, and the technological infrastructure that sustains the entire system. Without a preposition, "Twitch" refers to the corporation, the opaque black box around whose walls even the most skillful streamers cannot peer. Dividing the usage of the word "Twitch" based on its pairing with a preposition follows Locke's position that CDA should "draw on a linguistic toolkit to deal analytically with textual opacity," (2004, 41). The importance of Twitch corporate to each individual streamer is implicit in how they speak about it. Behind its opaque walls lies important decisions, on matters both known and unknown, the outcome of which could have drastic and immediate consequences for professional streamers. When discussing the decision to allow only game related content, CohhCarnage explains that, "This is all up to Twitch... At some point Twitch has to decide…" (January 8, 2015). ItmeJP reminds us that, "I'm not in those board rooms,

hearing those decisions," (January 8, 2015) about what rules Twitch may implement in the future. Even though they are both successful Twitch broadcasters, they speak about Twitch corporate from the position of outsiders.

Becoming Partnered

Discussions on *DF* and chat-submitted questions demonstrate that one main audience for the show is the group of people who are attempting to become professional Twitch streamers. Many discussions focus on the process by which an individual transitions from being someone who streams for fun, to a professional streamer who can survive on the income generated through Twitch broadcasting and related activities. Tips on how to become partnered are common. CohhCarnage posits that success comes from "Consistency, don't worry so much about how long you're streaming, be more about a good time slot with good games, at a consistent rate," (February 18, 2015). ItmeJP adds that, "One of the best ways to grow a stream, is to stream when no one else is. Because you're going to catch the numbers on those bigger games and grow much quicker than if you're streaming when someone else has 30k plus viewers on their stream," (February 18, 2015).

Just as common are the stories of how one became partnered. These stories often hinge on the importance of a specific event that instigated viewer growth, or the playing of a specific game that spiked viewership. ItmeJP tells the story of a streamer who went from 15 followers to 1,700 followers after being to linked to on Reddit, then "got his partnership four days after that, sub button two days after that," (February 5, 2015). CohhCarnage states that the game "*Final Fantasy* got me my sub button and my partner on the same day, I literally went from 200-300 average viewers to 1,600 for three weeks

straight… For me, that's when I made it on Twitch, was with *Final Fantasy XI*" (February 4, 2015).

Often, the importance of these stories is indicated by how the storyteller is treated during the recounting. Generally, everyone else in the conversation tends to quiet down and hold comments and opinions until after the speaker is finished. Rarely does one talk over someone else's story of becoming partnered. Additionally, since the hosts of *DF*, and nearly all the guests, are professional streamers, practically everyone on the program has their own "becoming partnered" story.

Production

Participants on *DF* often talk about the production aspect of streaming, focusing on the technical (rather than artistic) knowledge that is required to create and maintain a successful channel. ItmeJP states:

> I've been building PCs for the better part of my life so I … know about that. But if you don't know… Build it yourself, you'll save a lot of money. You'll also learn a lot about everything, so when it breaks you'll know how to fix it…. It's hard to buy a full-on [already built] PC and repair it yourself. (ItmeJP, October 7, 2015)

While technological expertise is important, it is not viewed as necessary to the success or failure of a channel. CohhCarnage states: "You don't need any of this stuff to get started… I've heard people say straight up 'Yeah, I'd love to stream… but I don't want to be on camera.' I was like 'That's what's holding you back?' Like, don't worry, do not worry about that!" (October 7, 2015). While the hosts state that someone wanting to begin streaming should not feel obligated to have the best hardware, they also demonstrate the importance of such knowledge by continually referencing it in

conversation. These discussions may be extremely useful to any aspiring streamers in the audience, who are considering what components to purchase.

The importance of knowledge and expertise is reinforced by telling stories about the ever-present menace of technical difficulties. The June 24th, 2015 Episode begins with CohhCarnage's camera not working, and the other hosts joke about it while the problem is fixed. Ezekiel_III laments a time when his cooling fan broke:

> My computer started using 100% of its CPU. We looked all over for the problem, found out that my cooling fan, or my cooling system had completely just conked out. So, I've been down. And I tried to get my one-PC setup back up and going. I did that yesterday, just in case. It was basically just a test cast to see if I could do the one-PC again. I can. It's not exactly what I want. (Ezekiel_III, February 4, 2015)

Within this discussion, one can see the importance of technical expertise coupled with being prepared to stream with less-than-optimal equipment. Expensive and redundant computer hardware is suggested, but it is not essential for one to be a successful streamer. The relationship between money, equipment, and professionalism will be covered in more depth in Chapter Eight.

Labor

The labor that goes into a live stream is repeatedly referenced when streamers discuss two major topics: work ethic and the back end/behind the scenes aspects of production. Ezekiel_III states that, "For me this is full time, forty plus hours a week," (February 18, 2016). ItmeJP highlights the connection between the time required to produce a stream and the requisite technical knowledge, when commenting on one of CohhCarnage's statements:

> If any of what Cohh said sounds foreign to you, it probably will and should. … You have to be the type of person who can sit down and learn something by yourself or go out and find the resources to do it. Because there's a lot of stuff in

> streaming, especially when it comes to… getting the video stuff right, getting in the software, getting all that crap right, getting the audio stuff right, where either you need to have people that know what they're doing, you need to be able to find guides, or you need to be able to do it yourself. And it can be pretty daunting as you start taking those steps yourself… (ItmeJP, October 7, 2015)

To which CohhCarnage replies: "That's one of those parts about putting in the work that you need, to get what you want out of your stream," (October 7, 2015). In addition to technical and business matters, some streamers must deal with harassment outside of their broadcasts. ShannonKiller describes harassment as occurring "Very off camera. It's the stuff that pops up when you've turned your stream off… Everything happens when you turn your stream off and you're alone again, because all those viewers are not there to help you," (March 20, 2015).

While these examples highlight the activities outside of broadcasting that are compulsory in professional Twitch streaming, they all highlight the importance of time spent working on the stream that is not seen by the audience. The presenters sometimes seem concerned that their viewers do not understand the amount of time and effort that goes into a stream. GassyMexican posits that the energy required to run a stream is "something that people still don't realize," (April 1, 2015). Additionally, these statements function as both a learning moment and a warning for the aspiring streamers in the audience, a clear statement about how busy one should expect to be when trying to grow a channel.

No Rules or Guarantees

The hosts of *DF* often express uncertainty about the whole milieu of professional Twitch streaming by repeatedly reinforcing the idea that the system has not real rules, and as an outcome, no guarantees. Even though they may offer the aspiring

streamer tips and guidelines to streaming, they also convey the idea that there is no right way and no wrong way to grow a stream. Professional streamer LolRenaynay states that there is no "Special recipe" for being successful on Twitch (March 20, 2015). An extremely successful streamer named Lirik is often cited as proof that there is not right way to stream, because he does everything "wrong" and is still successful. One never knows which streamers will find popularity. This unpredictability means that no matter how hard a streamer tries, there is no guarantee of success on Twitch. CohhCarnage states that, "Anyone who could be an authority would say that there's no right way to do it," (February 17, 2016). To which, ItmeJP adds, "There's definitely data driven things that you can do… But at the end of the day, a lot of it is luck," (February 17, 2016). Accordingly, with no guarantee of success, one should not jump blindly into the business. Kaceytron adds "I hate seeing the entitlement of some people who come into streaming and they're like 'I quit my job to do this. I think I should get money,'" (March 20, 2015).

The tenuous and unpredictable nature of streaming as a profession is repeatedly reinforced, especially when addressing a specific question that arises on *DF*: "What would you do if this all goes away?" This discussion occurs during three episodes from this sample. This discussion is common because it stems from two constant concerns: (1) Something could change at Twitch corporate that changes how streamers can make money, and (2) one can accidentally do or say something on stream that gets one banned from Twitch. ItmeJP warns "Even if you're established, none of this is solidified. It could just stop tomorrow," (December 12, 2015). Ezekiel_III adds: "If the Twitch boat sinks, man, we're kind of fucked, a little bit," (December 12, 2015). The

idea that it is not just the individual channel, but the entire industry that lacks stability, seems to be ever-present in the backs of everyone's minds.

Unfavorable Self Comparison

The many difficulties of streaming are regular topics for discussion on *DF*. In addition to the legal and physical challenges, hosts warn viewers to consider the implications of psychological distress caused by comparing one's self to other streamers. ItmeJP suggests:

> The easiest thing to do on Twitch is to look at someone else and say 'Why not me?' Don't do that. If you're going to start streaming, stop watching other streams if you're going to pay attention to the viewer count, because it's going to do nothing but harm to you…. And I say this as someone who breaks this rule once a week. (ItmeJP, February 18, 2015).

Later Ezekiel_III describes the practice as "self-destructive behavior," (February 18, 2015). As an outcome of not being able to predict the relative popularity of various streamers, the practice of comparison (in terms of popularity, viewership, and profitability) is discussed as a dangerous use of a streamer's time.

The dangers of comparison are further complicated by the admission that most streamers feel compelled to do so based on a competition mindset. When discussing a charity, ItmeJP states: "I like these [leaderboards]. It fits right into the idea that gamers like being the top-scoring individuals, and this is perfect," (April 13, 2016). In short, the speech of *DF* participants suggests that streaming is a profession for which only certain types of people are well suited. One must be able to mentally deal with the potentially psychologically debilitating act of comparing oneself to others who are more successful: a necessary difficulty in the streaming profession.

The Streamer/Viewer Relationship

What product or service does the streamer provide to the audience? If the amount of viewers and subscribers indicates that a streamer is successful, how does an individual streamer work toward those goals? As mentioned in the previous chapter, the importance of community, and its facilitation within the chat window, cannot be overstated. CohhCarnage states that one of the most important parts of streaming is "managing community expectations," (February 17, 2016). ProfessorBroman elaborates "When I was building my channel I wanted to emulate that [helpful] attitude for myself, and always be kind and always give the right answers, and foster a community that did that," (March 9, 2015). Interacting with one's community beyond the chat window is also important. Ezekiel_III described a broadcast in which he named in-game characters and monsters after his subscribers and moderators to make them feel involved in the outcome of the game (February 11, 2015). ItmeJP liked the idea because "You can shit on your subscribers and not feel bad about it," (February 11, 2015). CohhCarnage highlighted the interactive aspect by stating "the fun part is … holding them [subscribers] personally accountable for every negative thing that character does," (February 11, 2015). Through this practice, streamers bring community members into the game, creating a sense of immediacy and connection despite being geographically distant. In short, the ways that professional streamers talk about community interaction supports the assertion made in the previous chapter: that the community - much more so than the video stream - is the marketable commodity for a Twitch channel.

Followers and Subscriptions

Followers and subscriptions are important because they directly and indirectly determine a streamer's income. Subscriptions directly influence a streamer's income in that each streamer receives a percentage of every subscription to their channel. Followers indirectly influence income in that they represent a statistic that attracts business opportunities. According to *DF*, the number of followers and subscribers a channel has is never far from a streamer's thoughts. ItmeJP discusses the exception that demonstrates the rule:

> I talked to someone about it [watching follower numbers], and they were like 'I don't really know how many Twitch followers I have, I think I'm at like 150k, or something. I don't know.' I was just like 'How the fuck do you do that? Like… how do you do that, you idiot?' He was just like 'I just stopped caring about it and I'm a much happier person.' I'm so fucking jealous of that. (ItmeJP, April 1, 2015)

To which Ezekiel_III adds:

> Anyone who has like 3,000 or less subs I bet they know within ten how many exact subs they have at any given time, 24 hours a day. If you came to me tomorrow and asked me how many subs I have, a week from now, a month from now, I could tell you exactly within... I could probably, within like three numbers. (Ezekiel_III, April 1, 2015)

In another episode, ItmeJP explains: "Once you get into, like the 5k plus range, that number [subscriptions] is changing on almost an hour-by-hour basis," (June 24, 2015). To which CohhCarnage responds "Just for reference, I've lost 395 subs in a day," (June 24, 2015). These numbers are closely watched and fretted over.

On *DF*, discourse demonstrates that the practice of subscribing carries both social and economic ramifications. Through their speech, DF hosts and guests demonstrate that, for professional streamers, audience-based revenue generation processes implicitly carry meanings that are affectively, financially, and socially

interpreted. In short, subscribing, tipping, and donating are both economic and social in nature. Additionally, since these practices are decoded by the streamer, the act of subscribing or tipping becomes a signifier that references a network of related meanings for the broadcaster.

Personal Touches

In addition to the community, some streamers discuss the aspects of their channels that they use to attract and maintain viewers. Often these relate to the streamer's personality, a high-concept or "gimmick" persona, or their skill as a gamer. Kaceytron, who presents herself as satirically embodying the negative stereotypes that plague female streamers, laments:

> I really hate it whenever people say that I'm like, playing a character… I guess to a certain extent, I guess I am. In most situations I find myself being my sarcastic self and people take it as me playing a character, whenever it's really just me being sarcastic. (Kaceytron, March 20th, 2015)

While some streamers become known first for being professional competitors at eSports events, Ezekiel_III acknowledges that his channel includes "gimmicks" (February 17, 2016), and states "No one would ever watch me play a game for skill," (March 9, 2016,). FuturemanGaming is an oft-discussed streamer whose concept is that he has come from the future to play video games in the present day. Futureman's channel experienced rapid growth early in its development. CohhCarnage describes FuturemanGaming as someone who "Burst onto the scene with a completely unique idea… rocketed off," (February 17, 2016). *DF* participants also note the limitations of creating such expectations among the viewers. Returning to FuturemanGaming, Ezekiel_III suggests that streamers should:

> Be yourself, just be a bigger version of yourself. Just be a more energized version of yourself… People can smell bullshit, I think. And Futureman is a character, but it's not bullshit… That person is inside of them, it's just accentuating that. (Ezekiel_III, October 7, 2015)

But one should not try to stream as someone whose energy they cannot sustain. ItmeJP expresses relief that: "I don't have to put on that face, basically. And it's also exhausting [being constantly excited]," (February 7, 2016). While many streamers find success by asking "what makes me *me*?" and then applying those aspects to the stream, they also acknowledge the inherent difficulties, limitations, and boundaries implicit in such an approach.

Other Streamers

Participants on *DF* emphasize the importance of being part of a community of streamers. In many ways, this community is different than the one that congregates around one's channel, although there may be some overlap. There are many ways that streamers can work together: from simple networking, to creating a *stream team*. Chapter Eight documents professional streamers suggesting that aspiring broadcasters should talk to others with similar viewerships in order to know what to expect from streaming.

Inter-channel etiquette is also important. ItmeJP states that advertising in another streamer's channel may "alienate" them, and that streamers "notice if you're in chat and all you're doing is promoting your own stream, rather than being a part of that streamer's community. And it will really piss off the streamer. That's one way to really, really, not make friends on Twitch," (October 7, 2015). It's important to network with

other streamers because of the benefits of sharing viewers, but one must always remember not to steal viewers from another streamer.

Games

Large portions of *DF* are devoted to discussing video games directly. Nearly every episode contains a lengthy discussion where each participant answers the question: "What have you been playing lately?" While much of this portion of the conversation focuses on subjective individual preferences leading to the types of helpful evaluations that would be useful for the interested consumer, there are specific ways that hosts talk about games that are immediately applicable to the profession of streaming.

Specifically, video games are often discussed based on aspects that mark games as good or bad to stream on Twitch. These assertions are supported by connecting the game (through its play style and features) to the aspects of Twitch streaming that are helpful for maintaining audience engagement. When discussing *Warhammer: Vermintide*, CohhCarnage states:

> For streamers, one of the things I really like about this game, which unfortunately isn't the norm, is it's very easy for people to join in on you, without being on your friends list… So you can just jump in the chat room and your subs can just join in on you. (CohhCarnage, September 30, 2015)

This passage highlights an aspect of the game that not only makes it fun and convenient, but also helpful to the process of broadcasting. Therefore, these discussions are not just about games, but come from a streamer's perspective, documenting one's approach to game choice in broadcasting. After an excited and enthusiastically positive review of augmented reality goggles, ItmeJP laments "I don't think it can be streamed at all," (June 24, 2015). As fun as innovative technology can be, one must always come back to

the central issue: is it feasible for Twitch broadcasting? Discussing games based on their broadcasting potential demonstrates that streamers have a theory-driven knowledge of what aspects of games make them good for streaming. Not only does this indicate a normative theory about the profession of streaming, the individualized nature of these utterances indicates that there are numerous, sometimes opposing ideas about the relationship between game choice and audience growth. Furthermore, these decisions can be used to map the assumptions that streamers hold about the desires of their audience.

Game Developers

As mentioned above, streamers regularly have close relationships with game developers. Not only do some streamers and developers forge mutually beneficial working relationships, streamers often comment on the quality of specific game developers based on how the developers interact with streamers. These conversations demonstrate that streamers evaluate the quality of game developers, not solely on the quality of their work (their games), but also on how they conduct business and interact with the streaming community. CohhCarnage applauds one game developer when:

> The CEO of the company went around personally to everyone [streamers] on Skype and offered a chance to, like, 'Do you want to talk about the patch changes?'… And I ended up having like a twenty minute Skype conversation with him where he went over everything. (CohhCarnage, March 9, 2016).

Later in the same episode ItmeJP chastises a developer for having a game be poorly supported on its first day of release, stating: "We're helping you guys promote your game! Work with us!" (March 9, 2015). These instances demonstrate that professional streamers expect to cultivate mutually beneficial relationships with game developers.

Consider the above statements from CohhCarnage and ItmeJP. What is at stake in these statements is not the review of an outsider, evaluating the quality of an artist's work. These statements, uttered from a professional streamer's position, imply that the streamer and the developer share a common professional space and that their job responsibilities are interdependent. The streamer, in some way, contributes selling the game (marketing for the developer), while the good developer will prioritize programming tasks (fixing bugs, implementing features) to make the game more amenable to streamers (helping broadcasters stream). To the professional streamer, good game developers should design their games while considering streamers' marketing abilities. The utopian ideal here is that the game development and live streaming industries should be more than simply symbiotic: their assumptions and processes should be interdependently wired into each other's operations.

PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The discussions presented above, concerning how presenters on *DF* talk about different aspects of streaming, can inform a list of considerations from which streamers make professional decisions. While the previous section dealt with strictly empirical concerns (instances of speech uttered by professional streamers in the format of a talk show), this section seeks to explicate the normative theory underlying streaming practice. In other words, professional streamers make professional decisions based on the considerations presented below; considerations that determine the nature of how they speak about certain topics, as demonstrated above. This section follow's Locke's (2004) suggestions that CDA should seek the underlying assumptions concerning a topic that are indicated in the ways that people discuss it.

Uncertainty

Uncertainty is a recurring theme in the discussions on *DF*. Uncertainty is expressed directly when streamers talk about not knowing what happens at Twitch corporate, expressing the fact that there are no rules or guarantees in this profession, and worrying about what happens if "it all goes away." Additionally, uncertainty is indirectly implied in other interactions. For example, when discussing when Amazon bought Twitch, Ezekiel_III reminisces: "Remember when we were all shitting our pants over that? I know I was," (January 28, 2015). *DF* presenters use discourse on uncertainty to warn aspiring streamers about the precarity inherent in this line of work.

Earlier, this chapter examined several examples of speech where *DF* presenters either addressed uncertainty directly or highlighted its importance to personal income by suggesting that individuals should not quit their other jobs until they have a steady streaming income. This point is further supported by what are best described as *failure stories*. Most failure stories are hypothetical and phrased in generalities. For example, ItmeJP suggests that "A lot of people get into streaming, expecting it to work after a year because you put in a year of work, and it's not like that at all," (October 7, 2015). Failure stories are like exclamation marks; they lend a sense of urgency to the discussion on uncertainty.

Streamers focus on professional uncertainty to communicate responsibly about a fun and sought-after vocation (at least in the perspective of regular twitch viewers) in front of an audience who may want to take up the work, regardless of its precarious nature. In short, *DF* participants do not want excited viewers to quit their jobs to be become streamers and then have their quality of life suffer as they go into debt waiting

for the stream to pay off - which is unlikely. Professional streamers have fun in their job, and they understand the importance of demonstrating enjoyment in their work. However, the panelists on *DF* also understand that people are going to want to join their profession, and very few will find financial success as streamers. The knowledgeable professional streamer understands that they make the work "look easy," but finding a reliable income stream is also the result of sheer luck. TotalBiscuit states "A lot of us got popular randomly, and yes, of course we worked on it for a long time, but we got popular through a random confluence of events that we probably didn't deserve," (February 18, 2015).

Through discussions of uncertainty, failure stories, and the acknowledgement of luck as a factor for success, *DF* hosts are attempting to be responsible role models to aspiring streamers. The hosts know that their position is worthy of envy, and that many viewers would like to follow the same career path. However, *DF*'s hosts also know that most who seek that career path will fail to support themselves through streaming. If *DF* fulfills its goal of providing information on the profession and business of streaming to aspiring streamers, the treatment of uncertainty within the conversation serves to remind viewers that they are unlikely to be successful (especially immediately successful) in this profession. As role models on Twitch, the *DF* hosts and panelists demonstrate compassion for the community by warning individuals away from decisions that hold devastating financial implications. The *DF* hosts do not discourage viewers from jumping into streaming full time simply to protect their own viewership (they are well-established and any viewers lost to a newer streamer would be negligible), but out of a concern for community members and their financial wellbeing.

Being Yourself

There are many discussions on *DF* concerning what it means to be a broadcaster and the relationship between who you are and who you present yourself to be on stream. The nature of one's personality is mentioned above in the discussions of personal touches and interacting with viewers and other streamers. LolRenaynay states "If you go in to Twitch being … confident and genuine with who you are and what you want to do, then I think you'll be successful as long as you stick with it," (March 20, 2015). CinnamonToastKen notes, "It's a question that's asked all the time. What did you guys do when you started out to get you your first growth spike? Were you just sitting there having fun, being yourself? More than likely," (February 17, 2016). ItmeJP states that to be a streamer "you want to be sincere," (October 7, 2016). In the same episode, Ezekiel_III recounts the importance of FuturemanGaming's approach, which is worth repeating here:

> Be yourself, just be a bigger version of yourself. Just be a more energized version of yourself… People can smell bullshit, I think. And Futureman is a character, but it's not bullshit… That person is inside of them, it's just accentuating that. (Ezekiel_III, October 7, 2015)

This consideration has many antecedents and further implications. At TwitchCon 2015, several streamers lamented that they spend so much time working on their channels that they have lost most of their non-Twitch friends. Indeed, the notion that one should be one's self (or a version thereof) is an important consideration for Twitch streamers, who may lose social interaction outside of work.

For the most part, Twitch streamers are not actors. One phrase that has been used to describe Twitch streamers is "Internet personalities." This descriptor seems as vague and broadly defined as the term "content," that was examined in the previous

chapter. Despite its vague nature, this phrase is awkwardly appropriate in describing the nature of a Twitch streamer's professional presence. As stated in the discussion on being true to one's self in streaming, there is a certain importance placed on the idea that you should be a slightly larger version of yourself. In other words, Twitch streamers become marketable based on their personality, especially when it is "turned up" a bit. It may be appropriate to describe a streamer as an Internet personality, especially when their presence is less an act and more a showcase for a version of their personality. Kaceytron's sarcasm and Ezekiel_III's saltiness are less an act (in their eyes at least), and more an aspect of their genuine personalities, but an aspect that has been brought to the fore during their Internet broadcasting careers.

Difficulty rests with how one should describe the activity that is exchanged for money when one's role is that of the Internet personality[4]. If an actor acts, what does an Internet personality *do*? This rhetorical question may be American in nature. Comparing North American media practices to that of England, one can start to see that the British already have entertainment professionals in their established traditional media industries (specifically radio and television) whose jobs mimic that of the Internet personality. Where American media employs comedians to run talk shows and disk jockeys to run radio shows, the BBC employs what they call "presenters." The notion of a professional "presenter" may be a useful analogy when attempting to unpack the nature of an "Internet personality." While on news broadcasts the title "presenter" may simply be used to mark an individual as not a journalist, in entertainment venues, the presenter

[4] The phrase "internet personality" refers to a person whose web presence cultivates a large following, and whose appeal is partially based on their personality, rather than their knowledge base or relevant skills.

often works as a facilitator - drawing out and managing the speech of contributors who are themselves less accustomed to speaking in a way that sounds good "on air."

Discussions about "being true to yourself" highlight an aspect of professional streaming that is worthy of further inquiry. Much like other new media professionals - bloggers, some print authors, and the reality television stars - professional Twitch streamers maintain personal and professional identities that contain a large degree of overlap. CohhCarnage, whose real name is Ben, once mentioned that even his non-Twitch friends refer to him as "Cohh," blurring the lines between online and offline life. This aspect of streaming mimics Deuze's (2012) discussion of "media life" in the era of ubiquitous social surveillance: that it is impossible to separate the "you" that exists as a person, from the "you" that exists as a mediated amalgam of communications. We live our lives increasingly in the media, and when our career centers on our media presence, life and the job can lose their separate natures. The implications of this collapse of the distinction between private and professional spheres will be further dissected in Chapters Eight and Nine as a strategy for navigating the contemporary neoliberal world.

Ethics and Responsibility to the Community

Most journalism schools offer classes on journalistic ethics and the debates surrounding their nature, importance, and antecedent concerns. Much like the traditionally trained journalist, professional streamers understand themselves as having a responsibility to their viewers, which manifests as a (often ad hoc) code of professional ethics. Additionally, this code influences the nature of streaming practice by limiting the behaviors of streamers to exclude those actions deemed unethical. One must understand that each streamer approaches such ethical decisions as an individual,

and two streamers may have extremely different views on what types of behaviors are considered unethical; each streamer must decide for herself where her ethical boundaries lie. Ezekiel_III states "It's a moral line that each streamer draws for themselves," (January 21, 2015).

Professional streamers value the community they cultivate and feel a responsibility to its members. One recurring discussion on *DF* focused on professional streamers responding to skeptical community members who were concerned that streamers' evaluation of games would be positively influenced when the games were provided for free or when the game developer sponsors the stream[5]. ItmeJP states "Streamers are actually getting a lot of shit for, I think I've seen the term 'selling out' being thrown around, 'shill,' yeah… I think a lot of people are under the impression that streamers are getting paid [for positive game reviews]." (January 21, 2015). CohhCarnage adds: "[viewers say] 'This is a Sony sponsored stream.' I get that all the time. 'Don't listen to what this guy says, its' a Sony sponsored stream.' No, it's not." (January 21, 2015). The streamers were quick to (1) deny the assertion that free games or sponsored streams would influence their evaluations, (2) explain that receiving free games and sponsorships are simply part and parcel of how this industry works, and (3) suggest that they would not, indeed *could not* falsely praise a game even if they wanted to, because their audience would know.

First, the streamers engage in damage control by stating that free games and other benefits offered by developers do not make them evaluate a game more favorably. Some even go so far as to tell stories about unfavorable reviews that they have given to games they received for free. ItmeJP recounts: "I've been hyper-critical of *Stardew*

[5] Sponsored streams are when game developers pay streamers to play their new games on Twitch.

Valley and I've been given a free key to that," (March 9, 2015). Second, they reiterate that this is simply how the industry works. ItmeJP explains:

> Streamers are a part of the gaming sphere. We're not paying customers. Which is a good and bad thing. We've been roped in to this developmental cycle. We're part of the game industry as, like another facet. "Digital influencers" is the stupid buzzword that we are now. But, like, we're not the same as a normal customer. We're the people that have the ability to reach out to people that the company might not be able to because our communities and our viewers trust us to give an unbiased opinion on this particular game. And we can sell units because of that… You guys, as normal people don't have that because you don't have that reach. That's something that I think is starting to become the norm and people are understanding that. (ItmeJP, March 9, 2016)

At this point the hosts seem almost defensive in their explanation of the normalcy of receiving free games. Their speech seems to indicate that because such processes are a standard feature of the industry that they are not biased. While this may be non-sequitur logical fallacy, it serves the purpose of defending a whole set of industry processes, not simply an individual accusation. Here the hosts acknowledge their role as "digital influencers," and discuss what that means. While some express unease of the term (as in the quote above), the repeated message is that free games and sponsored streams are not bribes, and are not provided as quid pro quo for favorable reviews.

Finally, the hosts explain that they couldn't lie about the quality of a game even if they wanted to because their audience would know better. ItmeJP recounts the experience of his own sponsored streams, explaining that he was almost certain that he would like the game before he agreed to the sponsorship. He posits:

> I will think that most streamers would do that. They're not going to sign something because the monetary value is so large that they're like: 'Yeah! Fuckin' *Pony Brigade 2015* is the best game I've ever played! Thumbs up!' No streamer's actually going to do that. Because the second that you do, your audience will know that you sold out[6]. Your audience will immediately pick up

[6] In this context, "selling out" means falsely representing oneself for financial gain. One becomes a sellout when one says a game is good only because one is paid to do so. Audiences expect authenticity,

> on that you are completely lying, because these audiences know every one of these streamers. That's what a community is. (ItmeJP, January 21, 2015)

Explaining that a streamer's community would know better if a streamer was falsely praising a game is centrally important to understanding the nature of streamer responsibilities and ethics.

Streamers feel a responsibility to their communities. Professional streamers also understand that a portion of what they are expected to do is to discuss games in ways that are helpful to viewers who may consider purchasing them. In other words, streamers evaluate video games in ways similar to games journalists and online game review outlets such as IGN. Therefore, it is incumbent on the streamer to be honest when evaluating games because members of their community may base purchasing decisions on what the streamer says about the game. From the perspective of game developers, this power makes professional streamers (the ones with large audiences) attractive venues for advertising. Simply getting a popular streamer to broadcast herself playing a game instantly exposes that game to thousands, potentially tens of thousands, of viewers who are all potential customers.

The relationship between game developers and Twitch streamers is discussed above as a mutually beneficial agreement in the process of marketing games. However, for streamers it also represents a tension that must be dealt with, considering the skepticism of audience members. While a portion of the streamer's work includes evaluating games, the community is a group of people to whom the ethical streamer feels responsible. Throughout the discussion on whether streamers' evaluations are

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even honesty from streamers. With its emphasis on community, Twitch's culture is one in which streamers are expected to be honest when they do not like a game because their viewers expect to be respected enough to warrant honesty.

influenced by free games and sponsorships, *DF* participants continually reassure the audience that their personal and professional loyalties lie with the community more than with the developer. The ethical dimension of this relationship is enforced on both a personal level (one does not want to be seen as a "sellout"), and an economic one (being known as a sellout may scare away viewers, and therefore revenue).

The argument that a community would know when a streamer is falsely praising a game also warrants discussion. Developers often provide games for free to streamers without streamers even having to ask. Additionally, developers have been known to quickly offer a free version of a game when a streamer expresses interest in playing it. Sponsored streams allow developers to pay popular streamers to spend a specific amount of time playing their game in order to get exposure in the marketplace. Streamers become attractive to developers and marketers when they have a large audience, and losing a large portion of your audience will turn developers away. Since lying to one's audience by falsely evaluating bad games as good can cause viewers to leave, financially it makes sense for the streamer to be honest about game evaluation. The long-term support of an engaged community is worth more to the professional streamer than the short-term gain of a one-time advertising deal. Therefore, for reasons that span from social to ethical to financial, it makes sense for professional streamers to feel responsible to their community and to respect that relationship over their relationships with video game developers and marketers. The speech of *DF* participants supports this mapping of values and relative responsibility.

Ethics and Responsibility to Other Streamers

Professional streamers also emphasize the importance of holding an ethical responsibility to other streamers when navigating Twitch. The most important rule, stated time and again, was that one should never advertise for their stream when they are in the chat room of another channel. CohhCarnage explains "When you first come to Twitch and you don't know that you can't just drop your link in other channels. You do it a few times, get banned," and you learn "Twitch Etiquette," (February 18, 2015). This rule highlights the importance of interdependence between streamers. If one were to advertise her channel during another streamer's broadcast, the implication is that she wants viewers to leave this channel to watch hers. This is considered a type of theft among the streaming community. There are proper and improper ways to ask other streamers for support. One proper way is to invite them to watch your channel while you broadcast. This approach does not attempt to steal viewers, and preserves Twitch's culture which values a sense of community. The fact that they are in your channel means that people will follow them into your space and potentially stay around after they leave. Also, if the other streamer likes what she sees, she might seek further collaboration in the future. Finally, the other streamer might direct people to your channel by mentioning it during a broadcast, or even conduct a raid[7] when they sign off. The raid is considered a high honor, a demonstration of support, and directly beneficial to the channel that has been raided. However, these actions must be the decision of the aiding streamer and not the one seeking help. It is important to let people help you in

[7] A raid is when one streamer tells all his or her current viewers to go to another streamer's channel all at once, and flood the chat with the first streamer's chat icons.

ways that do not damage their own viewership. In a sense, viewers become currency in a type of gift economy on Twitch.

Of course, it's an unbalanced gift economy when one examines it through the lens of political economy. Twitch hierarchy, which favors those channels that have more viewers, is preserved and enforced through the norms discussed above. The proper way for a streamer to network is to spend time in the more successful streamer's chat, adding value to the larger streamer's audience's experience. However, this "gift" carries no immediate expectation of reciprocity (cf., Mauss, 2000). Streamers with larger audiences are not required or expected to direct their viewers to smaller streams unless they think the smaller stream is worthy. Therefore, more successful streamers become gatekeepers, managing access to an important local resource (viewers). Twitch networking functions as a social form of trickle-down economics[8], where viewers replace money as the commodity in question. Owners of smaller streams should help more successful streamers add value to their channels in the hope that one day, benevolent successful streamers will share some viewers with the smaller broadcasters deemed to be worthy of them. When one notes that for streamers there is a connection between viewers and income, the application of political economy is appropriate.

Anticipating the Future

One recurring conversation on *DF* concerns what Twitch (meaning Twitch corporate) will do next. While the present and the future seem filled with uncertainty, there is near-constant excitement about what Twitch could do next. To demonstrate Twitch's potential, ItmeJP shows the current list of jobs for which Twitch is hiring and

[8] Here, Trickle-down economics refers to the assumption that allowing wealthy individuals to make more money (through less taxation etc.) will benefit the poor who rely on wealthy for jobs and other financial opportunities.

describes the list as “gigantic,” expressing excitement for the fact that Twitch is growing, (June 24, 2015, see Figure 11, above). Considering the timing of this segment, CohhCarnage quips: “We are looking at the initiative of competing with YouTube right there,” (June 24, 2015). In addition to a general enthusiasm, hosts also express excitement about specific features that they hope or expect Twitch to implement. Competition with YouTube is a common concern as the hosts suggest that Twitch should have a better video on demand (VOD) system, with CohhCarnage stating: “Right now [Twitch’s] VOD system is a poor man’s YouTube,” (June 24, 2015). When asked if the VOD system should be fixed first, CohhCarnage adds “For me it’s the subscription system. Allow us to monetize our professional life,” (June 24, 2015). Streamers are always looking forward to the next development that will make Twitch better.

Speech about the future, and in anticipation of what features Twitch will roll out next, does more than simply demonstrate that the hosts and guests of *DF* are knowledgeable professionals with an eye on the future of their industry. These discussions are indicative of the speaker’s awkward professional position as both an insider and an outsider to Twitch. Remember that most streamers are not employees of Twitch, and do not know what the corporation will do next. Professional streamers want Twitch to do right by them by implementing decisions that both help the streamers and ensure the longevity of the site. As much as streamers hope for Twitch to make good decisions, they are outside of the decision-making process. By discussing the future, which is outside their control, professional streamers are expressing the uncertainty they

experience by virtue of their awkward position as both a part of, yet distinctly outside of, Twitch.

Monetization

The subject of monetization was directly referenced during discussions that explored the differences between live streaming on Twitch and video posting on YouTube. For Twitch streamers, subscriptions account for most of their revenue. ItmeJP explains "In terms of revenue it's probably like 95% to 5%, sub to ad revenue in terms of what's actually being gained on the stream," (January 8, 2015). Discussions on growing viewership may implicitly be about income generation even if the direct financial benefit of viewership is not mentioned. Therefore, discussions about the specific processes of income generation only occur when *DF*'s hosts speak with content creation professionals who prefer YouTube. These discussions offer more insight into how (and when) income is generated by professional content creators between the two venues. These discussions are especially important for this study because they highlight the behaviors that streamers perform to track their income.

Reading statistics, and tracking and analyzing viewer data, are important skill sets for content creators on both platforms. During these discussions, streamer speech indicates that advertising revenue is not as important to Twitch streamers as it is to YouTubers[9]. This assertion is supported, not only by ItmeJP's focus on subscription money, but also on the suggestion that YouTubers have a higher "CPM." CPM refers to the cost per (thousand) impression(s), or the amount of money paid to a content creator whenever an ad runs on their channel in front of 1,000 viewers. CPM is a necessary data point for professional video producers to measure and anticipate their expected payment

[9] Individuals who make a living creating videos for YouTube often refer to themselves as "YouTubers."

for running ads. Differences in CPM between venues could explain the different values that creators hold, dependent on which service they focus on (YouTube or Twitch). *DF'*s hosts and guests often discuss the ways that Twitch streamers seem to support one another while YouTubers are more competitive. This distinction makes sense considering the differences in income generation. When one's primary income is generated based on the number of ads seen by audience members, then the publicly-displayed number of views becomes a rough indicator of income. When one's primary income is paid based on the (often hidden) number of monthly subscribers, then cultivating an engaged and growing community makes more sense, financially. In short, CPM, page views, and subscriber numbers, as a signifiers, reference different semiotic webs for YourTubers than they do for Twitch streamers.

The importance of subscription-based income cannot be overstated. Ezekiel_III tells the story of a friend who could not make money on Twitch until "When the subscriber program came around, it was like overnight [that he could make money]," (February 17, 2016). To which, ItmeJP replied "The subscriber program saved Twitch. It made Twitch what it is," (February 17, 2016). This statement is important for two reasons. First, it generally highlights the importance of subscription revenue to the macro-level understanding of how Twitch streaming functions economically. Second - and perhaps more importantly - these statements highlight the importance of monetization processes for new media content creation in general. Above, I argued that Twitch streamers are professionals not because they make money from streaming, but because they have a theoretical understanding of how the industry works, and they apply that theory to their daily activities. Working from this assertion, we cannot forget

that the ability to make money from the process is a necessary antecedent to this entire endeavor. For professional streamers, Twitch's role as communication broadcasting infrastructure is an amazing feat, but broadcasting ability is not the aspect that makes Twitch successful. The ability to monetize the experience, to provide content creators with an avenue to income, in a way that is intelligent and makes sense for everyone involved (for Twitch, for the streamer, and for viewers), is what makes Twitch work (from the perspective of the professional streamer).

However, there is always room for improvement. Many of the discussions where *DF* hosts and guests attempt to anticipate the future focus heavily on aspects of Twitch that could be monetized better. One example is the regular call put forth by CohhCarnage for a tiered subscription system. He states:

> People like me have been screaming for the ability to do more with our subscribers, let us have different amounts that you can subscribe per month and let us give benefits to those subscriptions… all these ideas we've wanted to do for years… If they [YouTube] start doing it, maybe Twitch will go 'It's time for us to start.' (CohhCarnage, June 24th 2015)

The desire here is for Twitch to allow broadcasters to offer more than just one simple subscription option. Instead of simply having subscriptions cost $4.99 per month, some streamers would like to offer different subscription packages where viewers can choose to pay $5 a month or $10 a month, with the $10 subscribers gaining access to additional features which are unavailable to the $5 subscribers. Since Twitch keeps a percent of the streamer's subscription revenue, Twitch corporate would also increase their revenue should such a system be implemented. The fact that such a system has not been implemented has led some streamers to find alternative methods for adding nuance to the subscription structures, and the benefits granted to subscribers. Some streamers use

Patreon instead of Twitch to handle their subscriptions. Other streamers create their own personal websites outside of Twitch and offer a second subscription there, which further enhances the benefits bestowed by Twitch's subscription system. In short, since subscriptions are so important to professional streamers, clever broadcasters will find ways to add nuance to their subscription offerings even if Twitch does not implement official tools for reaching that goal.

Finally, the lesson we should learn from the discourse on monetization is the foundational importance of subscriber revenue for the professional Twitch streamer. Furthermore, the nature of subscriber revenue (rather than advertising revenue) has immediate implications for how one ranks the relative importance of professional considerations. The centrality of subscription revenue further supports the idea that fostering a community is the primary goal for live streaming professionals.

DISCUSSION

This chapter examined the speech of professional streamers as they appeared on *Dropped Frames*, a talk show dedicated to exploring the profession and business of live streaming on Twitch. After listing the types of discussions empirically present on *DF*, I explored beneath their surface to examine the types of professional considerations that inform each broadcaster, in how he or she speaks about each topic. Finally, this discussion addresses RQ2 by summarizing two of the most important tensions experienced by professional streamers, as indicated by their speech on *DF*. First, streamers must manage the tension between certainty and uncertainty in an industry at the mercy of the latter. Second, streamers must manage the tension between economics and friendship, in an industry that places expectations on both.

Certainty and Uncertainty

The fact that streaming is a career that holds no guarantees, and that many aspiring streamers will not find adequate professional success, has been made clear time and again in the speech examined in this chapter. A recurring theme on *DF* is the search for certainty when it seems to be in short supply. Stating that one should not quit their job until they have sufficient streaming income to sustain themselves is an example of doing as much as one can to be certain that one can survive this career. And even that step is not certain. The recurring echo that "this could all go away tomorrow" indicates the uncertainty for the future experienced by even the most established live streamers. CDA helps us cut through the opacity of speech, illuminating the idea that professional live streamers continually search for, if not certainty, then the concrete data points that would indicate that forward progress is viable, even in the face of irreducible uncertainty. Therefore, streamers put their faith into these data points, such as analytics that track viewership numbers, interactions with their community, and knowing which forms of revenue to prefer over others. Certainty is a luxury that is difficult to find in professional streaming. Furthermore, dealing with the absence of certainty is integral to understanding some aspects of the streaming profession, and therefore the professional considerations looming over the worldview of Twitch broadcasters.

The certainty/uncertainty dialectic present in streamer speech on *DF* demonstrates the presence of precarity in this career. The term precarity indicates the level to which employees in an industry suffer from a lack of job security, which in turn controls their professional practices. The presence of precarity connects the streaming industry to other, traditional media industries. According to Deuze (2007), many

professions within the media industries - such as journalists, television crew, video game programmers, and marketers - have been living with precarity for over a decade. The ability to live with and work from a place of precarity is increasingly common for many industries, and the media sector in particular.

Julian Reid alludes to precarity when describing neoliberal subjectivity as one "that proclaims its own superior capacity to seek not security from the sources of its vulnerability, but to live in open relation with them, prospering and growing from them from the continual practice of an entrepreneurial resilience…" (2016, 152). Compare this sentiment to the precarious position of professional streamers whose position outside of a salaried job enables them to prosper in a system of no guarantees. The ability to thrive in uncertainty and adapt to changing markets is standard practice for the contemporary neoliberal subject. In relation to professional Twitch streamers, the term "subject" here should not be taken as a pejorative: professional live streamers are not a collection of "dupes" who have been tricked or coerced into assimilating an ideology that describes their lack of financial stability as morally and ethically right. Instead, prominent professional streamers have cultivated mindsets and behaviors that allow for professional adaptation in a society where stable employment is increasingly rare (or at least where such an assumption has entered the national zeitgeist). Also important to this analysis is the nature of play as "adaptive variability," (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Streamers, who play games as a foundational aspect of their work, are perhaps culturally primed to accept and react to neoliberalism's precarious assumptions about employment. Perhaps one of the aspects that help prominent streamers thrive is their ability to navigate a career along the ebb and flow of precarity, treating it like a game.

While one cannot say that Twitch corporate directly benefits from uncertainty, the cultural expectation of career precarity allows Twitch to bypass a large number of expensive requirements that would be compulsory if Twitch were required (or even expected) to treat their "partners" like employees. Twitch corporate needs not worry about health insurance, severance packages, or workman's compensation for the tens of thousands of streamers with whom they are partnered. By distancing itself from content creators, by not labeling them as employees, Twitch can use their content, and sell advertising against it, while reducing its overhead. Here one can see the practical mechanics of neoliberal new media industries which erode expectations of employment stability under the guise of making work more meaningful for the worker, as theorized by Fisher (2010).

The connection between employment precartity and neoliberal subjectivities will be further reviewed in Chapter Nine.

Economics and Friendship

The importance of community asserts itself throughout this study, and is an ideal that cannot be ignored when investigating the professional nature of video game live streaming. The fact that each broadcaster fosters and maintains, not merely an audience, but a community of viewers, is foundationally important to how the whole Twitch phenomenon perpetuates itself - at least from the perspective of the streamer. The perceived relationship between the community member and the streamer is more akin to a type of friendship, rather than that of a spectator, fan, or customer. Obviously, this assertion raises questions regarding the applicability of parasocial relationship theories (cf., Auter, 1992; Horton & Wohl, 1956) to the act of Twitch spectatorship. However,

since these theories focus on the viewer - rather than the broadcaster – they are outside the scope of the current endeavor. What is important, here, is the fact that successful professional streamers treat their community members like friends. Whether it is saying good morning to them individually like CohhCarnage does, or by inviting them to multiplayer games, the emphasis on the communicative act is in reinforcing the notion that this relationship is a type of friendship. Additionally, this friendship cannot be forced or faked. Professional streamers assume that their communities know when they present themselves in ways that are not genuine.

But still, these relationships are built on economic foundations. If streamers were not able to make a living from streaming, they would not be able to conduct many of these activities in the first place. This is not to imply that we must be cynics who view every interaction as economically suspect, or that we should assume that streamers are not genuine when they address their audience members as friends. On the contrary, we have already established that streamers assume they must be genuine in their communications, because their communities can smell a fake. But we as researchers (and they, as streamers) cannot ignore the financial aspects of streaming that are part and parcel of the friendships fostered between broadcaster and community member. The overlap between community and friendship on one hand, and economics on the other is important, as a better understanding of it may aid a theoretical understanding of other forms of entrepreneurial new media, such as YouTubers and bloggers.

Most of the time these competing aspects, friendship and economics, do nothing to preclude one another. However, when discussions turn toward the benefits of streaming (specifically receiving free games and other gifts from developers)

broadcasters must address the tension inherent in this apparent conflict of interests. When these discussions occur on *DF*, streamers demonstrate a level of thoughtfulness. It becomes obvious to the attentive viewer that individual professional streamers have grappled with the nature of this tension, and have each arrived at some conclusion about where they stand. Since these ethical conclusions occur on a personal basis, they can be difficult to uncover for the purpose of comparison.

Even if streamers don't often choose to address it directly, the tension between friendship and economics - as an aspect of their relationship to community members - is something that many streamers have thought through. As they come to their own decisions about what constitutes proper and improper behavior, many have created something approaching a code of professional ethics. One approach to professional ethics is to only advertise products that you had been using prior to being offered a sponsorship for them. CohhCarnage described this practice as "the golden rule of sponsorships: only sponsoring things that you use, or would use but you don't have already. And if you stick to that, it's beautiful, you're never selling out," (February 17, 2016). Even Twitch's corporate headquarters is presented as a bastion of authenticity against greed as a motivator. Comparing Twitch to YouTube, CohhCarnage states "One group [Twitch] is the dedicated, passionate people that want to bring entertainment to the masses. One group [YouTube] is the people who saw something that can make money and want to get in on it," (June 24, 2015). While ethical journalists may feel it's their duty to report the truth of a story, Twitch streamer ethics are based on a feeling of responsibility to their audience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what the attentive viewer finds in *DF* is more than simply a list of topics empirically present in streamer conversation. Informing the ways that streamers talk about each topic are specific considerations that one should have to function as a professional streamer. These considerations reference tensions native to streaming, including those that concern economics and those related to community and friendship. Since these considerations reference not only practice and behavior, but also underlying motivations and relationships, it becomes clear that professional streamers work from a normative theory of streaming - a theoretical knowledge of how streaming should work. Beyond normative theory, streamers also experience, think through, and overcome, tensions that occur between the constituent aspects of the job. Not only that, but broadcasters also engage in public forums where they openly discuss their own conclusions about the limits of ethical behavior in response to tensions between the economic and social realities of their work. The most striking difference in how journalists and streamers approach the topic of professional ethics is that one group has a library's worth of literature to reference while the other does not. This dearth of scholarly discussion does not limit in any way the ability of professional streamers to contemplate the ethical dimensions of their career. If anything, streamer conversation on *DF* demonstrates that live streamers take ethics seriously, and supports the necessity for continuing scholarly research of the phenomenon.

Chapter 7

Broadcaster Interviews: Community, Value, and Leadership

In this dissertation, I have examined two specific types of data – streamers' individual channel pages and the weekly talk show, *Dropped Frames* that features professional streamers discussing in detail the business of live streaming. What's missing from these data sets is a direct and subjective discussion of how professional streamers make sense of their working lives. To address this discrepancy, interviews were conducted with professional streamers. This chapter documents and analyzes interviews conducted with professional streamers to allow them to speak with their own voice, and from their own subject positions, on the matter of new media professionalism. One-on-one interviews allow participants to speak their mind without having to concern themselves with genre conventions or audience expectations. This is not to imply that interviews occur in a vacuum, or that participants feel completely free speak with total honesty. Indeed, the potential distortion from perceived power relations and the interviewer's position as outsider are addressed below in the discussion on limitations. However, the nature of personal interviews opens the door to emic data by providing participants with a place to speak freely, outside the constraints of their more formalized communicative processes. At the very least, interviews allow the participant to speak from a different set of constraints and assumptions, increasing the comprehensive nature of the overarching project.

While this chapter does allow streamers to openly discuss their professional dispositions in an open forum, data will be presented and analyzed based on its relation to relevant topics of professionalization. This chapter will begin with a brief description

of the participants and interview format. Data will be presented based on four interdependent aspects of the streaming professional orientation present throughout the interviews. Growth, the first aspect, is discussed in both its personal and economic forms. The economic form of viewer growth informs the second aspect, that of community, and its foundational importance to the processes of professional streaming. The third aspect is the nature of the stream itself, where the streamer functions as the mediator at the intersection of community and technology. Finally, the nature of value will be discussed, both in how the streamer creates it and in how the viewer is expected to experience it. The chapter will conclude by discussing the implications of this data, and its inherent limitations.

INTERVIEWS

To document emic data on Twitch professionalism, professional streamers were contacted and asked to participate in interviews. Ten professional Twitch streamers were interviewed, representing a number of different perspectives within the streaming community. Since their business includes expectations about being a semi-public figure, each participant requested that their Twitch handle (and in one case actual name) be used when referencing them in this dissertation. Additionally, each interviewed streamer occupies a different place in the streaming community; the sample represents a wide variety of channels in terms of audience size and content type. Some participants are variety streamers while others are speedrunners; most are partnered while a few are still working toward that milestone. To add nuance to the presented data, each of the interviewed streamers will be described below so that their relative positions within the community can be better understood.

FuturemanGaming (Futureman) is a variety caster, meaning that he does not focus on a single game, but rather plays a plethora of different games. For viewers to return day-after-day, they must be gratified by non-game related content, such as the chat community, Futureman's constructed persona, or simply his personality. Futureman's pleasant and amicable personality is present in his stream, but he also provides a certain theatrical element by playing a character from the future (hence the name) that has traveled back in time to fight video games, to nerf[1] them before they can destroy us. At the time of this interview, Futureman had been a fulltime streamer for almost a year and his channel was experiencing rapid growth (in terms of viewership).

At the time of his interview, Wyvern_Slayr (Wyvern) focused on only playing games from the *Dark Souls* franchise, and had built his community specifically out of people interested in that game series. Becoming a fulltime *Dark Souls* streamer was something that he implied was both happenstance and strategic: that his original intent was not to become focused on only one game, but that once it was apparent that his viewership preferred it, he happily complied. As of his interview, he was considering ways to branch out, to play other games on stream, and become more of a variety caster.

Mogee is a variety caster, and the only female participant in this study[2]. She is a fulltime variety streamer whose audience includes many European viewers. Sean Poole[3]

[1] In this community the word "nerf" is often used as a verb. To nerf something is to downgrade it, to make it less effective, less dangerous.

[2] There are no reliable sources available that document Twitch's demographics. While Twitch likely has this data, they have not made it public. The website Infogr.am (sic, 2017) claims that "just under 20%" of "The Top 2500 channels on Twitch by follow count, and a random selection of 2500 channels with a size of 15 viewers and larger" are run by female streamers. However, there is no way to corroborate this figure.

[3] Sean Poole, or Spooleo, is the only streamer to state that he would not mind if his real name is used when publishing the data. When I mentioned that most streamers prefer to be identified by their Twitch username, he stated that his username is based on his real name, so it did not matter as much which way he was identified.

(Spooleo on Twitch) is a fulltime variety caster who uses audience surveys to make decisions about how to run his stream. Smokaloke is a fulltime variety caster who describes his channel as "mature," meaning that it features regular cursing while still maintaining a friendly attitude. SnarfyBobo (Snarfy) is a fulltime variety streamer who occasionally speedruns Nintendo branded games. Snarfy's channel often features a stopwatch, which is updated in real-time to provide the audience with information about how well he is doing on each run. MrLlamaSC (MrLlama) is a speedrunner who focuses on *Diablo 2* (2000). He prides himself on cultivating a community that helps each other at their chosen game. MrLlama also has a full-time "day job" where he works 40 hours a week in addition to his streaming business, which occupies 35 to 40 hours a week.

BouseFeenux started his career on Twitch before deciding to focus on his YouTube channel[4]. As a fulltime content creator, BouseFeenux focuses on a specific game called *WarFrame*. While he produces mostly YouTube content, BouseFeenux occasionally broadcasts on Twitch as another way to interact with the community he has cultivated. Trainsy is a fulltime variety caster who had not yet received a sub button (at the time of the interview) and sustains his endeavors through tips and donations. His channel has seen steady growth and he hopes for a Twitch partnership is in the near future. HeavensLast is a creative streamer, meaning that instead of gameplay his stream focuses on the production of a craft that is related to video game culture. Specifically, HeravensLast crochets video game related items (clothing, hats, etc.) on his stream and

[4] Many content creators use both YouTube and Twitch as to distribute their video content.

then sells these items at an online storefront linked to from his Twitch channel. Like Trainsy, HeavensLast is not yet partnered, but continually working toward that goal.

QUESTIONS

While each participant works from different levels (and distinct corners) of Twitch's hierarchy, each approaches the processes of streaming as a profession (an activity whose purpose is to generate income), rather than leisure (An activity whose purpose is to have fun). The questions asked of these participants attempted to tease out the ways that each streamer approaches the professional nature of broadcasting. First, streamers were asked whether they feel more accountable to themselves or their audience. Second, each streamer was asked to what extent they consider subscriptions, tips, and donations, instances of economic or social relationships. Third, they were asked what kinds of activities they engage in to foster professional development. Fourth, each streamer was asked how streaming influences their approach to playing video games. Finally, streamers were asked if there were any additional questions not asked by the researcher that would be important to answer to better understand the working life of a streamer. Additional follow-up questions were asked as appropriate, in accordance with the answers to the questions described above. A full script of the interview questionnaire is provided in Appendix 1.

RESULTS

Critical discourse and narrative analyses were conducted on the interview data, interrogating the underlying assumptions of speech acts and the commonly recounted stories of professional streaming. The results of these analyses are presented below, divided into four interdependent, thematic aspects of streaming. First the theme of

growth will be discussed, as it relates to both the development of the streamer as a professional, and the accumulation of viewers. Second, I will address the nature of community by problematizing the distinction between competing experiences of accountability. Third, the nature of the stream itself will be explored, with the streamer sitting at the nexus of technological infrastructure and community leadership. Finally, the way that streamers describe their value will be explored, both in how they attempt to add value to the channel and what benefits they theorize that viewers receive from becoming part of the streaming audience.

Growth

When considering how to run a stream, growth is the foundational concern for a broadcaster. As documented below (and as discussed in previous chapters), streamers engage in many activities that are designed to increase viewership. Community growth is only half of the equation. Streamers must also grow as professionals to cultivate a community around their channel. Learning how to effectively use technology, putting that technology to work to make a more professional stream, and integrating these technical outcomes into a strategy for engaging viewers, are central to growing a community. Many interview participants recounted stories documenting how they grew as streamers, and how this type of growth was central to fostering a community of committed viewers. Futureman emphasizes the importance of self-education and experimentation when getting started:

> When I first started streaming, it was more of just like: "How does streaming work? How do people do this?" Like, you can google anything these days, and so I just started looking around, and I downloaded this software, and got myself just a crappy little microphone and I had a webcam that I had from years ago, and just hit "go live" one day, and I had my friends come in, and I was testing the audio and stuff like that, and it was fun. It was fun, it was super bare bones

> but I was live and I was streaming and I did that, you know, for maybe a couple weeks. (FuturemanGaming, April 3, 2016)

Wyvern reemphasizes the importance of self-education when he states:

> The last two years I have learned more about live broadcasting, about audio, and about computer technology than I have in my whole life. Just because I've had to teach myself. (Wyvern_Slayr, May 1, 2016)

Self-education has practical outcomes, such as knowing how to implement technology to produce a more professional looking steam. Consider MrLlama's statement:

> I've added green screen to my stream. I've added some big old lights, I've got better microphones, I've got three monitors now. I've *increased* a lot, or all of my equipment multiple times, multiple cameras. I've gone through … to always be bringing a *new* something to the stream, in that regard. (MrLlamaSC, June 11, 2016, emphasis his)

MrLlama's statement describes more than simply strategic consumption patterns (items that were necessary to buy in order to improve the stream). Items such as green screens and professional lighting are tools that require industry-specific knowledge to use. Buying a green screen implies learning how to use it in order to implement its value into one's broadcasts. In short, the materials one buys for the stream are signifiers of professionalism. However, they are more than simply compulsory items that one should have to enter a profession, but items that require skill to properly use. Unlike Veblen's (2007) conspicuous consumption (in which consumer goods reference money spent and the inability to work), the green screens and higher-end computer components of a professional streamer are signs referencing a hierarchy of symbols referencing competence, expertise, and legitimate labor.

Furthermore, streamers also indicated specific events that lead to channel growth. When this topic was not directly discussed during the interview, MrLlama suggested:

> You might want to question how the stream grew. And… what sorts of pieces really grew the stream. Because there's definitely moments throughout my streaming career where, such as going to AGDQ[5], that was a very big moment for my stream because when I came back from AGDQ I had a pretty large pool of interested people, to kind of sell my product to. So I would say that's kind of a big piece. Like *what* professional improvements or things during your stream really excelled you to the next level, that you felt? (MrLlamaSC, June 11, 1016, emphasis his)

In general, the events that lead to viewer growth are important topics for professional live streamers.

Increases in technical knowledge and skill (e.g., self-educated green screen use) and transformative events for individual streamers are important because there is an assumed relationship between personal, professional growth as a streamer (in terms of skill and presentation) and the number of viewers one can attract. In short, streamer growth and community growth are hypothesized to positively correlate. As discussed in the *DF* chapter, hard work and perseverance are theoretically rewarded with increased viewership (even if that is demonstrably not always the case).

Participant responses also indicate that the self-education is never-ending. MrLlama strives to "always be bringing a *new* something to the stream," (June 11, 2016, emphasis his). This is further supported by Futureman's assertions that "You just kind of adapt to each situation as it kind of comes to you, and you learn as you go along, and you continue to expand and grow as a person…" (April 3, 2016). If the stream is to continue - and continue to grow - one must never stop learning and adapting.

[5] AGDQ is Awesome Games Done Quick, a yearly gathering of speedrunners that showcases their abilities while also raising money for charity. AGDQ and similar speedrunning charity events are broadcast live on Twitch, and often receive large numbers of viewers.

The end goal of this continual learning and adapting is to achieve viewer growth: increasing the number of people that are watching the channel at any given time. Increasing the number of monthly subscriptions may be the aspect that pays the bills, but to get there a streamer must also seek ways to increase the sheer number of viewers watching them. The chapter on *DF* already mentioned the importance of viewer growth to streamers by repeatedly indicating that streamers always know (often precisely) how many subscribers and followers they have at any given moment. The importance of viewer growth is further supported in the interview data.

Futureman provides a detailed account of the events that contributed to his relatively rapid growth in viewership:

> It takes some time for things to develop but there was a moment last year, February or something, where somebody from Twitch… passed along a highlight to somebody else and it got in the hands of somebody who worked in the Twitch partnerships division and they saw my numbers and they were like "Oh we can't just straight up partner this person," because I was getting twenty, thirty viewers… [A Twitch employee] tweeted it out, said "We can't just partner this guy," but he tweeted it out: "This guy's got a professional looking stream, he's got professional content, awesome theme, he's having fun. How is it he's not got more viewers?" … And then next thing you know I've got 3,000 people in my channel at once. And I was … sick on a Tuesday, coming home with a cough, and I was like something's a little bit different. … This could be something - this could be the moment. … And it was the moment because a couple days later I was still getting hundreds of people in the chat and they partnered me. … So the channel blew up and … I finished out the school year[6], and then was able to make the jump to full-time Twitch streaming last summer and I've been doing that ever since. (FuturemanGaming, April 3, 2016)

This excerpt is particularly rich in regards to several relevant aspects of streaming. First, this text reemphasizes the importance that streamers place on their numbers. Here, about a year after the events that led him to decide to stream fulltime, Futureman remembers with precision the average number of viewers he had before, during, and

[6] Futureman was a teacher before becoming a professional streamer.

immediately after the event. This story also demonstrates the importance of specific events that lead to the growth of a channel, as suggested by MrLlama above. Third, this story demonstrates the importance of the greater Twitch community. In addition to Futureman's hard work in creating an engaging online persona, his rise to fulltime streamer was also facilitated by others in the community tweeting and retweeting his channel. His sudden spike in viewers would not have occurred if the Twitch community, and its strategic use of Twitter, was not so firmly established and wide reaching. The networked nature of Twitch users mobilized an audience for Futureman, sowing the seeds for the growth of his channel's community.

Much like YouTube (cf., Burgess and Green, 2009), the attention economy of Twitch has been integrated into the monetary economy through advertising. This intersection of economies allows Twitch to generate revenue, and therefore allows streamers to become professionals. Twitch streamers certainly understand these economic relationships and can make sense of their profession in terms of commerce. Smokaloke explains the "market" on Twitch:

> You know where the market is? What's you level of exposure? If you're playing a game that one hundred other people are playing, and given your average number of viewers, where's that going to put you on the list[7]? Where's that going to leave you in terms of being exposed? So game decision, game choice is a big consideration for a majority of broadcasters. At least the ones that I feel are doing it properly, in the business sense…. If you want to fire up an old Sierra[8] *Space Quest 4* game or something, and I guarantee you that there's somebody that's going to watch that. But is there a big market for that? Is there a large

[7] Remember that Twitch presents search results to the viewer based on how many other viewers are watching each channel. So if a viewer is looking at the list of streamers currently playing a specific game, the list will be ordered with the channel with the most viewers presented first. For a streamer, knowing where one's channel will appear on that list is important because the lower on the list one is, the less chances there are of someone scrolling down to discover them. Channels with the highest number of viewers are likely to get more incidental traffic.

[8] Sierra is a game developer that produced games in the 1980's and 1990's. Stating the company name here simply emphasizes that the game in question has less contemporary relevance to the wider gaming audience.

> number of potential new viewers, or in this case subscribers or supporters who are willing or want to watch that? Is it new? Is it fresh? Is it still relatable? (Smokaloke, May 19, 2016)

When prompted to succinctly state his definition of "the market," Smokaloke provided an answer that, at this point, should be obvious: "By market I mean viewers. When I refer to the market I refer to the viewers," (Smokaloke, May 19, 2016). This statement directly links the outlook of a professional streamer to the attention economy – the approach to communication that treats the attention of viewers as a resource for which multiple agents in the market (in this case, streamers) compete.

Additionally, when streamers discuss the "size" of a stream (i.e., describing a stream as "big" or "small,") they are speaking in terms of audience size, or the number of viewers. Such an assumption is implicit in Sean Poole's recounting of his early days in streaming:

> I actually tried streaming with another friend of mine, like when Twitch first started, three or four years ago. *But our channel was really tiny*. I wasn't like on YouTube and stuff yet, so *I didn't have a … viewer base*, and then [that stream] kind of went away. And then eventually I started up my own channel two years ago, and it took off from there… (Spooleo, August 11, 2016, emphasis mine)

Here Spooleo directly ties viewer base to the "size" of a channel. Like Futureman and Spooleo, BouseFeenux describes the way that increasing viewership and the collaboration of other businesses helped him turn content creation into a career:

> This [streaming] is what I did when I got home from work. I just got on and I would turn my computer on, and I'd turn on a game, and I'd just, like, stream it to three or four people, you know. And from there it grew. And BouseFeenux was just a name that I had used as a handle online and eventually people began to know me by that name and they began to associate me with a … consistent product. They would see me putting out consistent *WarFrame* content, and they came to trust that content, and look to it for answers to help them get through that game. And then soon, BouseFeenux became partnered with … Digital Extremes, the developer of the game, and received certain benefits … Once you start getting people under you that like your content and watch you, it kind of

> validates you, and you're like "all right," … You get to a point where it's like 'I could take this seriously or I could just continue to do it for fun' ... (BouseFeenux, June 28, 2016)

With BouseFeenux we again see that the path to viewer growth (especially in the early days, before one can truly make money from content creation) is important enough for streamers to remember with a high degree of narrative detail.

And the type of the viewers one accumulates as a streamer is also important, especially as one tries to build a loyal community that will come back to the channel every day. Wyvern states his preference for quality over quantity in terms of viewers:

> A lot of like my colleagues … grow a lot faster, because I don't feel like I really push the subscribers as much. But the thing I've noticed about my community, which I absolutely adore them for, is that the people that are there, are there because they want to hang out with *me.* (Wyvern_Slayr, May 1, 2016, emphasis his)

This sentiment is further supported by Snarfy's preference for viewers to find his channel themselves rather than being led there by another streamer:

> And so even if they come to your stream, they follow, that kind of thing, they've probably already got another streamer they like more. Versus, if people are finding you organically - they're just looking at the games and they happen to [find your channel]. Those are the ones that are going to want to stay more. If someone happens to find you that way, you already have something in common. (SnarfyBobo, October 1, 2016)

High quality viewers are the ones who are going to come back to the channel time and again, subscribe for multiple months in a row, and engage in friendly chat both with the streamer and the community.

In total, the above examples demonstrate two important aspects of growth as it relates to Twitch professionalism. First, viewer growth is sufficiently important to professional streamers for them to construct theoretical knowledge about how growth happens and how to accumulate the right kinds of viewers. This process supports the

idea that streamers have an underlying normative theory concerning their career. Second, based on their ability to recount events in the history of their streams that led to viewer growth, one can use the representative anecdote (Brummett, 1984) to analyze streamers' speech.

The representative anecdote of growth starts with the streamer operating a non-commercial stream. In the beginning the stream is either too small (in terms of viewers) to support a viable revenue stream, or the streamer only broadcasts for fun. In short, stories always stem from a pre-commercial beginning. In Futureman's story, he only has 20-30 viewers, while BouseFeenux had only three or four, and the channel Spooleo shared with a friend was "tiny." When Mogee started streaming she only wanted to help her viewers have a "better day" (August 5, 2016), and didn't immediately realize that she could turn her channel into a career. Then something happened for these streamers that dramatically increased their number of viewers. A Twitch employee prompts a Twitter discussion about Futureman. BouseFeenux finds an audience for a specific game, who then come to rely on him for expertise. Mogee notices that she has about 150 regularly returning viewers. The story always ends with an acknowledgement of the transition into a more officially professional state – Futureman gets partnered by Twitch, BouseFeenux enters a partnership with a game developer, and Mogee leaves college behind to stream fulltime.

Each of these stories begins with an acknowledgement that streamers were once amateurs, not professionals. Having lesser equipment, no real goal for the stream, or simply streaming for fun, often sets the tone for the beginning of the story. The middle of the anecdote is where a transformative action happens. An event occurs, one that is

somewhat outside of the streamer's control, but relies on the social nature of web 2.0. A Tweet goes viral, people find a website around which to discuss a specific game, communities form and solidify. The middle of the story is the place where communication becomes community and networked connectivity between individuals gets translated into an audience for a specific content creator. The third act, and final part of this representative anecdote, occurs when the streamer becomes professional *as a result of the community*. The newly grown community allows access to a new profession, which (for many) was always the stated goal. The end of the story demonstrates the indexical nature of the community – the community functions as a signal to the streamer that this career path is viable.

This representative anecdote integrates well with neoliberal ideologies that place the onus of responsibility on the individual worker rather than the corporation. These stories do more than simply celebrate the hard work of an individual and the reward they justly deserve. Precarity is normalized from the outset by defining a nonprofessional state as the default in relation to their labor. The ability to "go fulltime" is the outcome of a mixture of hard work and luck. In this industry, employment is not guaranteed and viewership (the ticket for entry into the profession) is tenuously obtained. Streaming guarantees no rewards for hard work. And being a streamer takes a sufficient amount of creativity, an enormous amount of work, and a little luck at just the right moment. Often that little bit of luck is dependent upon a fortuitously timed action from someone in the wider streaming community.

One must not forget the importance of community to the professional streamer. A broadcaster's hard work and the hours spent developing the stream, are meant to

cultivate a loyal community of viewers. As discussed in the chapter on *DF*, the nature of the community becomes an important part of the streamer's brand. In the next section, we will consider (from the streamer's perspective) her relationship to her community, the group for whom this labor is undertaken.

Community

As discussed in previous chapters, professional streamers often consider the community they have fostered to be the most vital aspect of their channel. However, streamers have also described themselves as entrepreneurs and expressed enjoyment about "being their own boss." These two ideas conflict when one considers the nature of accountability: do successful streamers feel more accountable to themselves or to their audience? This is an important question to answer as it will shed light on the motivations and the pressures broadcasters experience in the course of doing their job. Portions of the interview attempted to examine how professional broadcasters negotiate accountability.

The answers provided when asked to whom one feels most accountable (the community or one's self) highlighted a number of different positions on the matter. SnarfyBobo and Trainsy both imply that they feel most accountable to themselves, but the way they phrase their answers highlights the complexity of their thoughts. Trainsy states that for him, he feels accountable

> One hundred percent to myself, because if I don't wake up in the morning, if I don't turn on the stream, and if I don't follow up with people to create the community that I want to see come to fruition, then I'm essentially going nowhere, you know, I'm just a face on a stream, and Twitch really isn't about that. (Trainsy, September 26, 2015)

This sentiment is supported by Snarfy, who explains:

> I usually focus on me more in that sense. My workflow… I always figure if … as long as I'm in a good mood, well rested, and ready to go, and that kind of stuff, I'm going to have much more success in a stream because … I'm going to be more positive, I'm going to be happier. (SnarfyBobo, October 1st, 2016)

In these two quotes one can start to see the ways that concerns about the audience color the streamer's experience of accountability. Both streamers highlight the importance of bringing a personality (Trainsy wants to be more than "a face," and being happy and positive are aspects of Snarfy's personal brand) to the act of streaming. Feeling like you are your own boss does not release you from being accountable to your community.

MrLlama expresses the idea that streaming has no chain of command:

> I don't feel anybody has as much power over me here, as they would, say, at my fulltime job. Right? Where it's like, I have a boss and my boss can come over and say work on this assignment and stop this one, be here at this time, come to this meeting, or not. (MrLlamaSC, June 11, 2016)

MrLlama goes on to explain that simply having supportive viewers creates a sense of social pressure on the streamer:

> I feel more accountable [to viewers] because there's so many people that *do* support me. I feel a little bit of accountability to put on some sort of show. … To get up and at least go out there and have a good time and put on a show … and stream, and play my games, and whatnot. (MrLlamaSC, June 11, 2016, emphasis his)

MrLlama's explanation echoes Mauss's (2000) dissection of gifts in society, that they are not "free;" rather they come with implicit social expectations. As discussed above, there are no guaranteed commodities exchanged when a viewer subscribes or donates. The voluntary nature of such transactions places them on a similar footing to the gifts discussed in Mauss's work. The presence of financial support from a community prompts the streamer to feel loyalty to them in return, creating a sense of social pressure to continue streaming. Spooleo seconds this reading:

> Personally I definitely feel more accountable to my fans, or like my viewers, and stuff like that. Especially my subscribers because they're paying that little extra. (Spooleo, August 11, 2016)

Futureman provides even more detail:

> It's … understanding that your community is a group of people that are supporting you in a way that is completely optional. Like, nobody has to subscribe. The fact that I'm doing this full time is just the most amazing thing … For people, out of their own pockets, wanting to make this whole community happen… And so I almost feel like to answer to them, to say thank you to them... I am trying to work as hard as I can to continue to produce good content for the people who support me… I would say, in terms of accountability, that there is some accountability to the community because it is sort of this reciprocal thing... But it's a very respectful accountability. They understand that I am gonna not make it to some shows. Things are gonna come up and I'm gonna have to cancel. And I try as best as I can to be on top of that ahead of time, and letting them know when that's gonna happen, and what's going on at what times. But I think that the accountability is to the community because … I want them to feel like they can count on me… Even with the Futureman persona, I think they expect me to be as real as possible and I try to be as transparent as possible in so many ways, in terms of what I'm doing and why I'm doing it. And I think that that mutual respect is there. But there's a little bit of accountability there. There's a little bit of accountability to the community because I feel like nobody *has* to pay. Nobody has to. It's totally optional. So that's where the accountability comes in. (Futureman, April 3, 2016, emphasis his)

Wyvern_Slayr goes so far as to state that he feels more accountability to his community than to Twitch itself: "I would say I probably feel more of an accountability to my community even though I have the legalities and the [Terms of Service] in the back of my head, always ringing," (Wyven_Slayr, May 2, 2016). By referencing Twitch's terms of service, Wyvern acknowledges the legal and economic relationships that - taking the form of a written contract - are real in an enforceable way. Through its subscription feature, Twitch allows Wyvern to sustain a streaming income, and through the terms of service, Twitch can enforce rules for streaming by reserving the right to deny Wyvern access. To state that he feels more accountable to his community than to Twitch, is to

demonstrate the importance of the community by comparing it to Twitch's very real, legally-enforced authority over the mechanisms that enable his livelihood.

Beyond simply the importance of community, BouseFeenux questions the "be your own boss" mentality directly, stating:

> In my experience, I'd say you're not your own boss. I would say that your viewers very much dictate the content on your channel. (BouseFeenux, June 28, 2016)

A sentiment which is seconded by Smokaloke when he states: "When it comes to accountability my community is first and foremost," (May 19, 2016).

In short, most successful professional streamers feel accountable to their community first and to themselves second. In fact, the streamers that do state that they feel accountable to themselves first, often phrase their explanation in ways that demonstrate that feelings of self-accountability simply help the streamer hold up their commitment to their audience. Remember that Trainsy addressed accountability as:

> One hundred percent to myself, because if I don't wake up in the morning, if I don't turn on the stream, and if I don't follow up with people to create the community that I want to see come to fruition, then I'm essentially going nowhere, you know, I'm just a face on a stream, and Twitch really isn't about that. (Trainsy, September 26, 2015)

In this quote, Trainsy emphasized the fact that it is not enough to simply be "a face on a stream," that implicit in the Twitch milieu is the nature of community, the necessity to "follow up with people." Both statements emphasize Trainsy's relationships to others. Snarfy provides even more detail:

> Streaming is a really weird business… Say you're in a bad mood, in a normal job you can go to work and be very productive… But with streaming, if you're in a really bad … you really can't… The stream's going to be *bad*. It's not going to be good. And it can actually have a negative effect on your overall success. You can actually … do a stream, and it will negatively impact you. So it's always very important to focus on yourself as a streamer…It's going to make

> the community happier. They're going to enjoy the stream more. (SnarfyBobo, October 1, 2016, emphasis his)

Again, accountability to the self is simply a way to increase the quality of his stream for the viewer. Ensuring that he is in a good mood means that he will have a more positive attitude when broadcasting. Having a positive attitude when broadcasting will make the viewer's experience better. The better the viewer's experience, the more they will be willing to subscribe or donate. Snarfy's reply succinctly explains why feeling accountability to the self is simply a way to enforce one's accountability to the community. A professional broadcaster's commitment is first and foremost to their community, even when they seem to indicate otherwise.

The community is important to the channel. As discussed in previous chapters, many streamers consider the community they cultivate to be an important aspect of their personal brand. The next section will explore the ways in which the boundaries between conceptually (even ontologically) distinct entities can merge, even confound, as stream, streamer, and community become seemingly synonymous.

The Stream

As discussed above, the elements of a stream are so intimately interdependent, that they occasionally resist extraction for individual investigation. To demonstrate the cohesion that complicates conceptual dissection, we will consider the ways that streamers discuss the types of actions they perform when "working on the stream." When a streamer works on their stream, what are they doing and what is the product?

Streamers indicate that the atmosphere of the chat window is something worth cultivating; in other words, something to work on. When discussing his aversion to

streams that feature "toxic" chat[9], MrLlama stated that he tries to ensure that his chat is friendly and inviting:

> I think that's part of the product. I would say. So I think that's … one of the products of my stream: is that that is the environment that it brings… that's one of the aspects that you are going to get when you come to my stream…. It's a selling point in a way… It's interesting because you find out what your product is. You don't exactly know what you're selling until *the stream* kind of latches onto things and then you find out what you're selling. (MrLlamaSC, June 11, 2016, emphasis mine)

This quote highlights several aspects that help us understand the interconnected nature of the various components of MrLlama's channel. First, MrLlama is discussing environment of his stream, which encompasses both his speech (how he speaks to his viewers), and that of his community (how people in chat interact with each other). By stating that the friendly environment of his chat is a product, he implies that his viewers help create an aspect of his channel that contains value. Second, he states that "you find out what your product is," directly referencing the importance of the audience. Successful professional streamers do not simply create a stream and send it out into the marketplace for people to either buy or not. Successful professional streamers listen to their audience and determine how to run their stream based on what the audience tells them to do. These streamers do not fill a niche, so much as they bring together a community, and the community then creates a niche that the streamer is suited to fill. As highlighted by MrLlama's quote, the streamer needs to be sufficiently cognizant of the nature of her audience to fill the needs created by them. Third, in the clause "the stream kind of latches onto things," MrLlama is using the phrase "the stream" to refer to the community; viewers interacting in chat "latch onto things." Therefore, when

[9] Consider this goal in relation to the discussion from Chapter Five on the rules that most streamers enforce for their channels.

discussing Twitch with a professional broadcaster, the term "the stream" can refer to several different referents, including the audience. MrLlama concludes:

> Because that's the product that you're selling: a big piece of it is like: "*Be involved in my community*!" And then when you're involved in my community you become a viewer … you start watching a lot more and that's where it gets good, because the viewer itself is worth something. (MrLlamaSC, June 11, 2016, emphasis mine)

By now it should be apparent that the video that the streamer broadcasts through the infrastructure that Twitch provides is only a small portion of the streamer's product. A committed community with its own distinct *feel* can be more important to the success of the stream.

Wyvern might agree with MrLlama's position; as he also emphasized the importance of community to running his stream:

> We … try to bring a sense of … community [so] it's not just me sitting and playing a video game…I'm going to always Tweet out and tell people that I'm going to be broadcasting, [or] if the stream's going to be cancelled. So it's like Twitter's my phone call to them… If you really … want to be part of the community, check out/follow me on Twitter and then I'm going to keep you updated there… I also like to be connected with my subscribers… My subscribers actually get a newsletter once a month that your typical viewer doesn't get. (Wyvern_Slayr, May 1st, 2016)

Again, highlighting the importance of other types of social media for coordinating community, Wyvern actually goes to the trouble of writing and distributing a monthly newsletter to subscribers. BouseFeenux agrees that the time spent engaging with social media is essential to the business of content creation:

> Discord is a fantastic invention. It helps keep your community together even after your broadcast, so you can continue to keep them engaged. And keeping your audience engaged is a twenty-four hour job, one hundred percent. (BouseFeenux, June 28, 2016)

Time spent working on the stream almost always includes some form of communication from the streamer to the community outside of the regularly scheduled broadcast.

However, connecting with the community is not the only activity that occurs outside of the broadcast, streamers must also spend time building, maintaining, and upgrading their technology. Wyvern goes on to reemphasize the economic limitations of streaming by describing his approach to hardware:

> A philosophy I have towards that is: anything that I can do I want to do to the absolute best that I can afford. And I have to add that little tag line, "that I can afford," because obviously I can't go out right now and get the microphone that I want, I can't get the camera I want. I can't get the dual PCs… So what we do is we try to find those points where we can make everything the best quality that we can afford. (Wyvern_Slayr, May 1, 2016)

This statement returns us to the question of technical competence: being able to provide the highest possible quality stream in terms of video and audio. Smokaloke describes the constant upgrading of equipment that one experiences as a professional streamer:

> If you look back at my old highlights, you'll see that I started out just like most people. [I] have a pretty bare-bones rig, headset microphone, no green screen, nothing like that. And we are, you know, spending money... Now we have a completely professional setup, lighting, audio mixers, monitors, the works…. (Smokaloke, May 19, 2016)

Regularly updating and improving equipment is a part of the professional streamer's day-to-day practices. Looking at one's current equipment and thinking "this seems good enough," is unlikely for the professional streamer.

Streamers also work on the aesthetic aspects of their streams, such as art, graphics, sounds, intro videos, "be right back" screens, and the like. The relationship between labor, its outcome, and the broadcaster's revenue stream is important. Consider the following statement by Smokaloke:

> We started *Uncharted 4* here yesterday. And one of my guys I work very closely with… We spent about an hour and a half working together… And we did some Photoshop imaging, and we made a GIF that doesn't exist anywhere but on my show. Very simple, unique… It is basically… the *Uncharted 4* logo that fades in, and out, and in and out, and in and out. And it doesn't net me anything, but it just makes the quality of the cast a little bit better. (Smokaloke, May 19, 2016)

The modern employment assumptions - that income is generated from hourly or piecemeal revenue sources - are less applicable to the workflow of the professional Twitch broadcaster. At times during the interviews, streamer labor and income seemed to be calculated cumulatively. Everything that is done to improve the stream should have a positive influence on viewer experience, benefitting the community, which in turn should lead to subscription revenue. The inverse is similarly compelling. Each individual subscription or tip may not be in response to any specific action done by the streamer or her team, but instead is the result of the cumulative experience of the channel, including labor provided by the community.

Content creators across Twitch (as well as other new media portals such as YouTube) regularly examine the numerical data collected by the site in order to determine what works and what doesn't in terms of cultivating viewership. On the topic of data, BouseFeenux explains:

> That's something every content creator should learn to do. It's just a very important part of the day-to-day of running your channel: is learning to analyze your metrics and keep a close eye on them. Like for instance I check … my metrics at least several times a day. (BouseFeenux, June 28, 2016)

Being able to read your number of viewers and subscribers is how one grows a channel. But analytics goes beyond the numbers provided by the hosting site. It can also include a thoughtful consideration of one's community. Spooleo describes how he researches his audience:

> I did a poll towards the beginning of the year… The first phase was … more general … like what kind of content would they like to see more of? … More RPGs? More first person shooters? More strategy games? Horror games? (Spooleo, August 11, 2016)

Informing oneself to make better broadcasting decisions is a never-ending process, and one that can be taken directly to the community.

Finally, some streamers have additional commitments that require labor outside of the broadcast, such as the need for speedrunners to be fast at the games they play. SnarfyBobo explains:

> From a professional sense, putting in practice outside of the stream … trying to improve your time [is something] the majority of speedrunners do. And I've certainly been doing that lately with a game or two… (SnarfyBobo, October 1, 2016)

Therefore, playing games when not streaming can be another way in which broadcasters work on their stream.

All these varied activities provide a definition of what "the stream" is. These diverse aspects create a complex definition. The stream is the technological infrastructure (such as cameras, software, lighting, and sound mixers) that allow the streamer to broadcast. The stream is the feel of the broadcast, in terms of the themes present in the channel's art and the professional finish of high-quality graphics and slick animations. The stream is the community and how the streamer engages with them outside of the broadcast. The stream is an amalgam of data points representing viewership, presented to the broadcaster for the purposes of calculation and planning. The stream is a complex interweaving of these different, yet interdependent aspects, products, and processes.

What's more, the stream and the community cannot be separated when considering the professional practices of streamers. The next step in this discussion is to consider what the streamer *is* in relation to the channel. By now it is obvious that a broadcaster is a lot more than simply an individual who distributes video streams of him or herself playing video games. Additionally, the streamer is also more than just some creative individual who coordinates a number of artistic productions (video, graphics, etc.) in order to create a quality broadcast. I argue that a professional Twitch streamer is a point of agency: a strong personality mediating the intersection of technological communications infrastructure and a group of geographically dispersed, networked individuals. Although streamers often prefer the term "content creator," I find the label "creator" to be inaccurate in relation to the actual workflow and perceived value of the successful professional streamer. The creation of different pieces of video and graphical content is only a portion of what they do in their day-to-day working life, and indeed is not the most important aspect of the job. Instead streamers functions like a ship's captain, charting a course for the community they have cultivated. At times, the creation of video seems almost incidental to the leadership roles they inhabit. For the scope of this dissertation the definition of *leadership* will place more weight in an individual's ability to set a specific atmosphere, with task delegation taking a less important role. Of course, it's much easier to explain your job to outsiders using the vocabulary of video production, rather than trying to explain that you earn a living being a leader to an online chat community. The fact that many professional Twitch streamers feel accountable to their community first is as outcome of what their job really is - which goes far beyond simply creating online video "content."

Value

Being a good leader obviously has value. However, when discussing entertainment-focused groups (such as fan communities) translating social value into economic value can be conceptually (and realistically) difficult. Therefore, I must now address the question of how streamers create value for the audience. Here one must remember the scope of the interviews as it relates to the scope of our assertions. Value, as discussed below is expressed from the streamer's point of view, not necessarily that of the audience or the community. Of course, these two realms should not be wholly different. A successful streamer should be one that understands what her audience wants from her, and successfully delivers whatever that may be. Indeed, streamers can internalize what they think their audience wants and focus on those imagined concerns more than their own opinions. During one interview, BouseFeenux suggested that I should also ask about how streaming affects the lives of streamers rather than focusing on what audiences get out of the content. When I pointed out that my questions did not ask for the viewpoint of the audience, BouseFeenux wondered if his time in the industry had left him "brainwashed," in that he now automatically thinks of his audience's perspective before his own. This vignette documents the extent to which professional streamers focus on the experience of their viewers.

Indeed, demonstrating the ways that streamers provide value for their audience is one aspect of the job that broadcasters want the wider world to understand. Many interviewees expressed concern and annoyance that people who don't watch Twitch don't understand what they do, and therefore don't understand how difficult the job can be. While this lack of understanding can lead to social difficulties, it can also lead to

financial difficulties. Getting a home loan from a bank can be difficult when the loan officer cannot comprehend how you earn a living. MrLlama states expresses the frustration:

> I talk to friends about Twitch, who don't use Twitch, but that are interested. They know that I stream and stuff, and they're always so surprised that somebody would subscribe or donate, or anything like that. Because why? Right? (MrLlamaSC, June 11, 2016)

Beyond the simple difficulty of explaining how voluntary payments can add up to a livable income, streamers have yet to find a good term to describe their job to outsiders. Futureman emphasizes the concern:

> There's just *so* many people who are just like: "You're doing *what?"* And like don't understand it. (Futureman, April 3, 2016, emphasis his)

Wyvern relates a common misconception about online video:

> I don't really like to label it as an online entertainer, because if I tell people I'm an online entertainer, almost immediately people think it means porn. (Wyvern_Slayr, May 1, 2016)

Simply having the ability to tell people outside of the Twitch community what one does for a living without having to deal with listener confusion and disbelief is a constant social concern for the professional streamer.

So, what do streamers provide to viewers? Most streamers answer this question in regards to the social nature of interacting with a steady online community, one that has specific norms and communicates in a certain tone. Mogee elaborates on the positive social benefits of her work:

> You know I'm sitting in an apartment in Georgia, but somebody in the Netherlands is watching my stream and we can have, like, this relationship where, you know, if somebody's having a bad day, you make them laugh and… Honestly it's one of the best feelings in the world: is that you're having like an impact. It doesn't matter how big it is, it's the fact that you're impacting, you know, your community that you're reaching out to. They start to … rely on you

> and when they're … having terrible days, and they just need to laugh … they can come and, not even talk to me but my chat as a whole, they will … talk amongst themselves and they'll feel better. And I wouldn't give that up for anything. (Mogee, August 5, 2016)

Similarly, Smokaloke compares the Twitch viewing experience to more common social practices surrounding mediated sporting events when he states: "Basically it's like getting together, watching a sports game with your buddies at the bar, and having a drink," (May 19, 2016). The value of twitch channels comes from the community's ability to emulate, or indeed become, venues for cultivating friendships. The ability to read community as a form a friendship addresses RQ3b. Furthermore, Twitch communities may serve as prime examples of new media "third places," spaces for informal socialization outside of the home and work (Oldenburg, 1999). Much like MMORPGs (cf., Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006), media scholars have considered the potential for Twitch to function as an online third place, replacing the pub and the coffee shop as informal meeting places for friendly social groups (Hamilton, Garretson, and Kerne, 2014).

The facilitation of community behavior is often the desired goal for implementing new processes and technologies in a stream. MrLlama highlights the importance of using outside technologies to enhance the interaction of the community he has built:

> The community that I have in Discord has also become a huge selling point… I've opened it up to subscribers and non-subscribers. And … there's probably two hundred, three hundred… people in it … if not more… But there's a good chunk of my viewers that hang out in there, and … a lot of them play *Diablo 2*. And so now they've … created this *Diablo 2* community within my Discord community. And so they'll go around, constantly keeping the Discord moving, saying they're always getting to know each other. Thus, they're wanting to stick around because they're building friendships within my community. They are playing games, they are trading, giving items away... So that's a huge selling

> point, because I can say: "Hey, if you play *Diablo 2*, here's a great place where a bunch people play *Diablo 2* and are willing to help you out, are willing to be friendly, chat, give stuff away, whatevernot." (MrLlamaSC, June 11, 2016)

Wyvern distills the community aspect to a "philosophy" (his word) that places a higher importance on community interaction than gameplay:

> And [viewers will] be coming home from work like "yeah, I didn't want to really do much of anything. And I didn't want to be alone, so I'm going to grab a beer, and I'm going to hang out, and I'm going to talk with Wyvern." I mean that's what I do. So … our philosophy is not so much … that we are on a gaming channel … focused on the game. It's more about us hanging out and enjoying something that we all enjoy together. (Wyvern_Slayr, May 1, 2016)

Similarly, HeavensLast tries to enrich the community on his creative channel by focusing on education:

> *They learn from me*, basically. I've been doing this for five years and they learn … stuff that I've been doing for a long time… What I do is for people that have questions, I can answer them, like right then on that spot. Like while I'm crocheting, if they have a question about how to do a certain … pattern and I can jump to what they're looking at and then I can help them right on stream. (HeavensLast, October 1, 2016, emphasis mine)

It should be noted that HeavensLast's comment about learning is not unique to creative streams. Many channels that focus on gameplay also include educational elements. *Dark Souls* streamers like Wyvern and speedrunners like MrLlama routinely provide value to their audience by providing tips and answering questions about strategy as they play.

But why would a viewer voluntarily send money to a streamer in the form of a donation or subscription? Chapter Five examined the social benefits of subscribing to a channel, that the use of chat emotes increases the ability of a viewer to properly communicate within the community. BouseFeenux describes the act of donating as a type of philanthropy:

> It's almost like philanthropy… There's this really cool thing, [The donator thinks:] "I want to support it. There's nothing that I'm really going to get out of it except it's continuation, if I want to stop by and see it every once in a while." (BouseFeenux, June 28, 2016)

BouseFeenux goes on to describe the business of steaming as a type of busking, the way that street performers ask for voluntary tips from those passing by. The idea that donators want the stream to be here in the future so that they can return to it, is also connected to community. Wyvern_Slayr states that many people, when they donate, include messages such as: "I just felt like I wanted to pass this on to Wyvern for such an amazing community," (May 1, 2016). Viewers, especially those that become part of the community surrounding a channel want that community to still exist a week from now, a month from now, a year from now; so whenever they want to hang out in that space again, that space will still be there.

There is also a common story that is told by nearly every professional streamer: that of the troubled viewer who finds comfort in the community. Wyvern_Slayr states:

> I have had … about 3 or 4 people that have sent me direct messages saying "Hey, I really appreciate what you're doing. I'm having a hard time in my life right now, and I come here because you make me laugh, and you help me to forget about all the shit going on in my life." … I actually cried when I read that, because the person … gave me a whole bunch of other details … and my wife and I were reading that after a stream and we both just looked at each other like "Wow!" … It's so amazing to see somebody go from this … very, I don't know if I want to say "depressed," but a very downtrodden life, to now they got things turned around and knowing that in their toughest time they came to hang out in our community because it helped them to cope. (Wyvern_Slayr, May 1, 2016)

Wyvern's narrative provides the basics of the story that are generally preserved across many stories originating from different streamers. Smokaloke elaborates a similar experience:

> I've actually had people approach me via message and say: "I was in a really dark place," and I've had people mention [that] they were even considering

> suicide, and then they found this very welcoming wholesome community - I say wholesome very loosely, we're a mature stream – but they say that the stream has actually helped them to get over some really dark places and some pretty bad depression. So the stream helps in a lot of ways, I feel. (Smokaloke, May 19, 2016)

Mogee expresses the same experience in her career, stating that helping people who are having a hard time as part of what made her want to stream in the first place:

> Most of the time it's very emotional things, like somebody will have a death in their family, and … they need that outlet of not thinking about what's going on in their current life. And they can just come to … the community and… They can kind of talk about, like: "This is what happened" But they don't have to focus on what happened, they can just vent about it, and forget about it for as long as they're there, and … laugh, smile, … anything… I've received a lot of these and it never gets easier… A lot of people who have … wanted to kill themselves and they said that my stream and my community is the reason that they … are still around. And it just hits you… It's just this overwhelming feeling that … if you weren't there, this person might not be here right now. And I'm not saying that I'm the sole reason they're alive, because maybe they would have had something else, but the fact that … they found that much in the community … is why I feel so accountable to … them. (Mogee, August 5, 2016)

By now the representative anecdote should be clear. The setting is the community that the streamer has created and maintains. The two main characters in the story are the broadcaster and an individual experiencing a difficult time in his life. The streamer continues to run the channel as normal. The individual begins watching the channel and finds some solace there in terms of either escape (that they can temporarily forget about their problems) or basic social support (that they receive positive psychological feedback from participating in the community). After an amount of time the viewer notices that they feel much better and send a private message to the streamer, thanking them for providing the social space that allowed them to feel better. Upon reading the private message the streamer is moved emotionally. The streamer is both extremely happy for having had such a positive effect on a viewer's life, but is also

occasionally confused by the fact that their stream has had such a positive impact on a viewer's mental well-being.

These stories are common even outside of interviews. For example, similar stories occur occasionally on the *Dropped Frames* episodes examined for Chapter Six. Stories about psychologically helping viewers are common, and serve the function of describing a type of value that the streamer can provide for the audience, that an outsider can understand and appreciate.

Of course, the cynic would question the veracity of these stories and the motives of their telling. Streamers regularly complain that people outside of the Twitch social milieu do not understand what they do, how they can make money through streaming, or why viewers would voluntarily support them financially. In short, professional streamers express concern that the outside world does not see them as legitimate, or may not respect them and their work. By demonstrating that they provide the direct benefit of social support to people who need it, professional streamers may be seen as strategically tailoring their responses to stake a claim at legitimacy beyond their social sphere. The representative anecdote of the depressed viewer could be seen as a strategy for cultivating the respect of people who don't understand Twitch.

Instead of interrogating the veracity of the stories on a factual level, I find it more helpful to consider them as one aspect of the overlapping blend of ways that streamers conceptualize the value they bring to the viewer. MrLlama provides the case that bridges the chasm between the previous two topics: relaxing viewer escapism and beneficial, positive social support:

> That's one of the best parts of streaming, is when somebody just writes in the chat, or sends me a private message … and says: "Hey, I was having a really

> terrible day. Coming to your stream always cheers me up. You're always so positive, and ... even when … you're having terrible, terrible luck in … your games," they say, "It's been really awesome, just because you've turned my day around." And … *that right there* is … [there's no] better reason to do it than that. (MrLlamaSC, June 11, 2016, emphasis his)

Interactions like this one occur regularly on Twitch. The consistency of such occurrences undermines the cynical interpretation of this representative anecdote. Twitch is a social space and not simply a video distributor. By creating a consistent type of content that includes expectations about community interaction, professional Twitch streamers maintain a space where people who need positivity can find it. Official channel rules such as "Don't be an asshole," may exist for reasons that are purely personal or purely financial. A streamer may simply not want to be part of a toxic social environment. Alternately, knowing that loyal communities (ones that subscribe and therefore pay the bills) congregate around streams that enforce such rules on chat may compel a streamer to ban troublemakers for financial reasons. It doesn't matter if these rules are enforced for personal or economic motivations, the fact of their enforcement can create a more positive, supportive (potentially safe) space for viewers. Therefore, even from a cynical perspective, if a hypothetical streamer were to run their channel for selfish reasons, it is still in their best interest to cultivate a stream that is positive, friendly, and safe.

One final note on these anecdotes is that they reinforce the idea that the value streamers provide for the viewer is social rather than technological[10], that community takes precedent over the video produced - which is, ostensibly, the product that content

[10] In his interview, BouseFeenux suggested that streamers constantly integrate better gear in order to compete with other streamers, and that most viewers do not really care about the improvements (BouseFeenux, June 28, 2016).

creators make. These findings support analyses presented in Chapters Five and Six regarding the importance of community.

DISCUSSION

As demonstrated by the interview data presented above, community is the central item of value on Twitch. Not only does a sense of responsibility to one's community drive a streamer's working life, but there are also financial benefits for adopting such a perspective. Furthermore, I argue that the term "content creator" falls short in describing the occupational role of the professional Twitch broadcaster. To the outsider, "content creator" seems to imply that gameplay video, broadcast using Twitch's infrastructure, is the central *good* that the streamer creates. Indeed, many of the professional practices and personal dispositions of the interviewees seem (on a superficial level) to support this definition. However, the interview data demonstrates that technological skills and thematically consistent graphics - while helpful - are not the aspects of a stream that solidify a steady group of recurring viewers. Repeat viewers are drawn to streams based on the communities that surround them. Streamers understand this as indicated by the importance that interviewees place on community. Comprehending this reality, professional streamers work hard (perhaps harder than they work at video production) to cultivate and maintain channel communities that exhibit a specific type of culture. Additionally, since the loyalty of community members has an influence on subscriptions and donations, there is a financial benefit to focusing on community.

Finally, through subscriptions and donations, community interaction has been monetized. While voluntary, subscriptions were described in detail in Chapter Five to

examine the ways in which they moderate community member behavior. Purchasing a subscription increases the number of ways that a viewer can interact with the community. In other words, a subscription buys you additional ways to be part of the community. Tips and donations are also voluntary, but bind the streamer to the donator in some informal way. This places tips and donation into a gift economy (Mauss, 2000), where items given freely come with implicit social pressures. Streamers feel as though they owe it to their donators to put on a good show. Indeed, Spooleo suggests that he will go out of his way to spend more time with prolific donors at industry meetings such as PAX and TwitchCon. Tips and donations are another aspect of streaming where community interaction has been monetized. When donating to a stream, one is not paying for video content (the video content is free), they are coordinating their access to community interaction. The ability of subscribers and tippers to create feelings of social obligation indicates the ways that streamers create meaning from their income, which addresses RQ3a.

Limitations

There are several limitations inherent in this type of research. First, the problems of self-report are obvious, in that participants might choose to self-censor answers (cf., Caldwell, 2008). More pressing is the question of selection bias, the possibility that the data collected might be influenced by which participants chose to participate and which did not. Selection bias is a problem if some unforeseen factor influences both a participant's answers and their choice to participate. Of course, the worst part of selection bias is that the researcher my not receive any indication of what aspects of the

data might play out differently if the sample were indeed completely random (and therefore, more "representative").

Selection bias is a concern for this study due to the ways that professional streamers manage their contact information. If a researcher wanted to contact television journalist for an interview it would be appropriate for the researcher to contact the journalist using her professional or work email address. However, most professional streamers do not publicly provide an email address. Additionally - and perhaps tellingly - many streamers that do provide an email address list it as their "business email." This raises an interesting question concerning whether the qualifiers business-, professional-, and work- function as synonyms when they inform the noun "email." It may be that the "business email" is a simple affectation, and since they are running a business, streamers use their business email to conduct all their electronic, professional communications. However, we must consider the possibility that they are not synonyms; that "business email" means what it says - that it is to be used for business *opportunities* only. If professional streamers mean for this email address to exist only for marketers to contact them for promotional deals, then that could explain the extremely low response rate for participation requests (14% responded to the email, and only 4.5% agreed to an interview). On the other hand, it's certainly plausible that most email recipients did not respond simply because they were swamped with work. Remember, it has been established that many professional streamers work well over the standard 40-hour work week.

In short, we cannot say for certain whether designating an email address as a "business email" has any bearing on response rates. However, the use of the word

business (rather than work or professional) may be telling, in and of itself - and seems a phenomenon worthy of semiotic investigation. The importance can be seen simply by considering the semiotic web of related signs as they are used in general and online vernaculars. Professional aspects are those that are relevant to one's working life broadly defined, whereas business aspects are those that concern sales, markets, and the exchange of goods. Therefore, all things that count as business also fall under the umbrella of professional. But the inverse is not true: there are professional considerations that do not fall under the heading of business-related. If that is the case, then having a "business email" rather than a professional- or work email changes the scope of what is expected through that communication channel. In other words, by articulating an email address as for "business" only, are streamers using contextualization cues to displace the aspects of employment that are not directly related to revenue? This could explain the difficulty in acquiring interview participants. While an interview with a researcher regarding professionalism may be related to one's work, it certainly isn't a business proposition.

Therefore, this digression raises an epistemological concern about this study. All of my participants expressed deep concerns regarding community. Many of my participants seemed excited that someone was documenting their work *as* a profession. Could it be the case that my participants were simply the ones for whom professionalism is a part of business? Could it also be that many of those who did not respond chose not to because discussions of professionalism are not business opportunities, and therefore not an appropriate use of their "business email?" If those who self-selected out of my study would also have been those to answer questions

differently, then some aspects of my data may be the outcome of selection bias. Of course, since ethnographic interview data is not meant to describe greater populations in a generalized manner, selection bias should not invalidate the data and analyses presented above. Indeed, further research into the rhetorical nature of describing one's email address as a "business email" rather than a professional- or work- email might provide insight into the neoliberal subjectivities that evolve under the conditions of web 2.0 entrepreneurship.

Chapter 8

TwitchCon and Commodification

When the doors opened at 10:00 AM on Friday morning, a sea of purple shirts[1] flooded into San Francisco's Moscone West convention center. This deluge of streamers, gamers, cosplayers, game developers, charity spokespeople, hardware vendors, and fans surged past the exposition hall, up the escalators, skipped the "Education Zone," ignored the meeting rooms, all the way up to the third floor. Here the flow had reached a wide delta, the massive Kappa Theater with seating for thousands. The wave dispersed, settling into increasingly occupied seats under jumbotron screens that displayed a countdown. When the countdown reached its conclusion several Twitch personalities addressed the crowd to thunderous applause. Streamer and eSports commentator DJwheat relived the cultural history of streaming games online. Afterwards, Twitch CEO Emmett Shear detailed the statistical evidence that Twitch is a serious cultural force in the contemporary entertainment media landscape. From my vantage amongst a sea of purple, I am inclined to believe it. This mad rush to find a good space from which to watch TwitchCon's 2015 keynote was not the last of the weekend. Long lines of excited fans formed well in advance of many panel sessions, a massive crowd formed around the Intel Gaming Lab (a venue for LAN competitions) for the *H1Z1* invitational Battle Royale Tournament, and the line to attend the after-party stretched to over one city block in length, five people wide.

[1] Purple is the official color of Twitch.

TwitchCon was hyped[2] as the premier convention for the Twitch community: an alternative for the fan who loves PAX[3], but one that is more directly involved with the streaming community. The importance of community to Twitch broadcasting has already been established in previous chapters. Like PAX, TwitchCon stands in opposition to traditional video game conventions, such as the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3), the Consumer Electronics Show (CES), and the Game Developers Conference (GDC), which are focused on developments within the video games industry such as game design, publishing, and retail. While both PAX and TwitchCon are positioned to be *for the fans*, Twitch prides itself on its extremely tight-knit community. TwitchCon is necessary because, unlike PAX, TwitchCon is specifically built with the streaming community in mind. More than simply a meeting of fans, TwitchCon sought to address the nature, practice, and business of streaming. Directly addressing the practice of streaming, panel discussions often focused on professional concerns as well as the culture of Twitch. At TwitchCon, assumptions about the business of broadcasting and the culture of streaming are not easily separable, marking the practice of professional streaming as an appropriate space for investigating contemporary neoliberal subjectivities.

TwitchCon was advertised as a new type of tradeshow: a fun tradeshow. On one hand, most of the scheduled panels espoused a professional focus; with many panels offering helpful advice for aspiring streamers who would like to turn their stream into a

[2] The video gaming community often uses the word "hype" in specific ways. Generally, hype is both excitement about something, and the process of spreading excitement about something. Among this community the word does not always carry the standard connotation that the excitement is unwarranted (recalling that the word hype is a derivative of "hyperbole"). "The hype is real" is a common phrase among live streamers to express that the excitement about a product or event has reached a high level, and that the product or event will deliver on its promise of quality.

[3] Penny Arcade Expo – A video game convention created with the intention of focusing on the fans rather than the developers, publishers, or distributors.

lucrative career[4]. On the other hand, leading up to TwitchCon, many streamers continually hyped the event by discussing how much fun they expect to have there. While presenting itself as being helpful to streamers, and fun in general, TwitchCon also provided space for relevant vendors and advertisers - an opportunity to sell their wares. As with many aspects of contemporary life, commerce and culture are not easily separable at TwitchCon. Many streamers and fans say that they "Bleed Purple," demonstrating excitement and loyalty for Twitch in a way that unites the interdependent aspects of fandom, professionalism, and commerce.

As an academic, my agenda for the weekend was notably different from that of my fellow con-goers. My purpose for attending the convention was to collect ethnographic information on the Twitch community through participant observation and brief interviews. Like most of the con-goers, I arrived with a camera and the appropriate level of excitement. However, I also brought a notebook, a digital audio recorder, a microphone, a folder containing my IRB documentation, and the hope of returning home with data. This chapter will document my journey to and through TwitchCon, emphasizing the practices and cultural norms that mark this space as particularly neoliberal. This will be accomplished first by examining how TwitchCon aligned with its advertised goal of being a "fun trade show." Second, this chapter will explore how TwitchCon's achievement of this goal implicated the neoliberal subject by (1) functioning as public relations, (2) commodifying professionalism, (3) normalizing the redirection of financial risk away from the corporation and onto the workers, and (4) collapsing the distinction between individual and professional identities. As a cultural

[4] When this chapter was first written (January 2016) the TwitchCon 2015 schedule was still available on the website and with some effort, viewers could access video recordings of TwitchCon Panels at "http://www.twitchcon.com/schedule/." The site has since been taken down.

space, TwitchCon demonstrates how the business of online streaming creates "commodified play," which, in turn, is considered a virtue of the contemporary neoliberal subject.

My approach to TwitchCon was that of an academic and a fan, similar to Henry Jenkins' (1992, 2006a, 2006b) explorations of fan culture, or of Andrew Wood (2010) as he approached his fieldwork on Route 66. And much like Wood, I sought to use my critical training to analyze the experience beyond a simple description of the event; I sought thick description over thin. The rationale for this approach begins with the assertion that money is a form of communication. Eco (1976) recognizes the importance of interpretation to communication, stating that anything that can be interpreted is worthy of semiotic investigation. Following Eco's suggestion, commodified play (turning the labor of a play activity into a commodity that can be sold) allows economic processes to influence the meaning and interpretation of the practice of play. Therefore, play becomes an important space for critical investigation when streamers begin to generate income from playing video games. In short, when one plays video games for money, it changes what it means to play. Play becomes commodified, not because people buy play as a commodity (the way one buys a lift ticket at a ski resort) but that the act of play becomes something that is sold by its creator, the live streamer. Therefore, it is important to understand the ways that successful streamers approach professionalization because they will indicate some of the ways that the meaning of play has been influenced by the interpretation of money's presence in the relationship. By positioning itself as a "fun trade show," TwitchCon has designated itself as an appropriate venue for studying commodified play.

Many scholars have theorized the relationship between money and meaning (cf., Marx and Engels, 1978, Baudrillard, 1975, 1981; Bourdieu, 1984; Weber, 1992; and Veblen, 2007) and the way that media industry economics influence message construction (cf., McChesney, 1999, 2014; Herman & Chomsky, 2006; and Bagdikian, 2004). Since commerce is a central concern of TwitchCon, I posit that examining the different types of labor that coalesce into the TwitchCon experience will highlight its neoliberal aspects.

Many participants attend TwitchCon as part of their job. For example, Twitch representatives must be present to supervise and coordinate the logistically complex event. Additionally, game developers attend to promote their products. Most important to this study are the professional streamers who attend to generate positive PR (Public Relations) for their channels and Twitch in general. Therefore, the fans in attendance function as the "audience commodity" of critical media theory (Smythe, 2006; Ang, 2006, 2010; Alasutaari, 2010): a mass of potential consumers sold as an audience to the vendors, developers, streamers, and other entities in pursuit of advertising exposure.

Another crucial category of TwitchCon participant is the non-professional streamer who hopes to someday become professional. Analyzing the role that these aspiring streamers play in TwitchCon's complex matrix of economic relations should provide valuable insight, and a more comprehensive understanding of the event and the relevant social expectations. A cursory glance at the convention program would suggest that the convention is designed for the aspiring, not-yet-professional streamer, where panels titled "Passion to Paycheck: Making a Career out of Broadcasting," and "Broadcasting on a Budget: Tips for Beginning and Veteran Broadcasters," seem to

focus on the actions necessary to turn a stream into a viable career. Additionally, one might assume that the "Education Zone" would be an excellent place for prospective streamers to learn valuable career-enhancing information.

However, in the Education Zone, many of the booths existed simply to advertise products to potential consumers. As one entered the second floor from the escalators, one looked back into the Education Zone. Walking straight to the back of the hall, one passes on the right a number of booths for software companies that specialize in streaming related products, such as Elgato, Gameshow, GameWisp, Skreens, Skype, and XSplit. To the left was a larger oval-shaped desk, inside which Intel's marketers were available to extoll the virtues of their technology for gaming computers. Behind Intel's commanding booth, along the southeast wall, was a small stage surrounded by beanbag chairs and small benches where industry insiders gave helpful tips to aspiring streamers about the many specific career-related topics. Eventually the aisle ends in a "T" with more vendor booths stretching out to the left, eventually reaching the back of the small stage. To the right are more booths where representatives for several charities talk to streamers about how to integrate charity broadcasts into streaming.

The Education Zone functions as a synecdoche for TwitchCon as a whole - where the focus on professional development is problematized by its commercial nature. This raises the question: To what extent is this convention *for* the aspiring professional streamer, representing a space to learn to grow as a professional; and to what extent is TwitchCon *for the vendors*, creating a space for them to sell their wares? Does TwitchCon create a space for streamer discussion simply to package an audience that can be sold to vendors looking to advertise? The layout and function of the

Education Zone heavily supports reading it as a tool for creating an audience commodity (Ang, 2006). Additionally, does the commercial nature of the "educational" content exploit the aspiring streamer? I will return to these questions later in the chapter. First, I must examine the ways that TwitchCon legitimately functions as a trade show.

TWITCHCON AS A TRADE SHOW

Trade shows are events that allow many individuals working in or around a specific industry to meet, discuss contemporary issues that the industry faces, and see how others are addressing those issues. Many people attend trade shows to learn how to become more successful at their career. Learning how to be a better Twitch broadcaster was advertised as one important function of TwitchCon. In the "save the date" article that officially announced the event, Jason Maestas, Twitch's Director of Customer Experience, described TwitchCon as the place to "Learn how to take your Twitch game to the next level," (2015). During a July 20th, 2015 broadcast of *Dropped Frames,* Twitch streamer and Lead Community Manager, Aureylian described TwitchCon as a place where individuals can find answers to questions such as "How can I start broadcasting?" and "How can I better myself as a broadcaster?" In the same program, ShannonKiller, another streamer and Twitch's Community Manager of Education, posited that TwitchCon will be a place for "any level of broadcaster" to participate in "helpful discussions" on how to cultivate a more successful stream (2015). Additionally, ShannonKiller also suggested that TwitchCon would be a better resource for developing streamers than several recently published books that supposedly detailed how to accumulate followers quickly.

The idea that TwitchCon is a place for potential streamers to learn the business of live streaming can also be seen in the titles of the various panel discussions held at the convention. Panels with titles such as: "What Hardware is Best for Streaming?" "Leveling up: Developing the Framework for Success," and "Building a Better Channel: PR Companies that Watch + What You Can Do About It," suggest that learning how to cultivate a more successful Twitch channel is a central purpose of TwitchCon. The panel names directly address broadcasters who are interested in becoming professional Twitch streamers. This professional focus marks TwitchCon as a tradeshow, where professionals in a specific industry gather to share information relevant to their careers. Following Locke's (2004) version of critical discourse analysis, which stems from Althusser's (2006) *interpellation*, the panel names hail audience members into the subject position of an aspiring Twitch broadcaster.

Panels did often provide directly useful career advice to aspiring streamers. Many panels took the time to discuss career related topics, such as: how to interact with game developers, how to manage your "brand," what a work-life balance in streaming looks like, when to hire a manager[5], and how the practice of networking functions in this industry.

One oft-repeated subject among the panels was that of taxes. Professional streamers state that it is quite difficult to properly file taxes for income generated as an online content creator. In the panel about hiring managers, one panelist discussed going to several tax professionals because the first one had filed the streamer's taxes

[5] Streamers who spoke about "managers" at TwitchCon used the term to represent individuals or companies who help the streamer in some way on a regular basis. The term "manager" was applied to (1) Individuals who simply respond to business emails so that the streamer doesn't have to, and (2) companies that specialize in negotiating contracts between streamers and advertisers.

incorrectly. As per these discussions, the Internal Revenue Service seems to not have any items within its classification of jobs that resembles the income streams of a Twitch broadcaster. Since it falls to the individual streamer to file taxes correctly, such discussions are directly helpful to streamers who do not want to run afoul of US tax law. In the panel on building your business, another streamer argued that the first action any professional streamer needs to take is to hire a trustworthy CPA (Certified Public Accountant). The CPA is key because a quality accountant should have the contacts and experience necessary to suggest which tax professionals and lawyers will best understand how to account for income generated through streaming. By advising on tax law, TwitchCon panels succeeded in functioning as a tradeshow designed to help streamers professionalize. Fans and vendors do not need to discuss tax law with their favorite streamers; fellow professionals do.

The panel titled “Taking Teams to the Next Level” taught the audience how to effectively use “stream teams,” or groups of streamers that work together to share audiences, grow viewership, and attract sponsorship opportunities from game developers. This panel discussed how to coordinate a team to reach specific goals. The team comprising the panel, named “The Main Menu,” also discussed their complex and rigorous invitation and interview process. The panelists emphasized their professionalism by showing how seriously they take the process of creating and coordinating a stream team. Specifically, The Main Menu used industry knowledge, backed by experience and their own demonstrated skill at growing viewership, to determine whether candidates would work well with the already established team. Twitch broadcasting is fun, but to do so professionally requires a rigorous work ethic.

The panelists reiterated the advice given by other successful streamers: (1) that one should maintain a community focused stream, (2) to find a gimmick that is also a way to be yourself, and (3) to "just stream," even when you don't want to. This panel, like many others, provided advice from financially successful broadcasters, designed to help aspiring streamers turn their broadcasts into a successful business.

One aspect that was lacking in many of the panels was any discussion of specific details. Tax rates, actual incomes, and the percentage cut of advertising revenue from Twitch are potentially useful pieces of information, but panelists consistently avoided them. Panelists often advised aspiring streamers to talk to peers about their finances, but make sure to find a fellow streamer whose channel has a similar number of regular viewers as one's own. But always, as one panelist emphasized, remember to be polite when asking to talk about money, and never force the conversation if your partner does not want to disclose anything. This focus on finding polite ways to speak about money mimics the broader cultural expectation that to discuss personal income and related matters (such as tax rate and the real estate cost) is considered rude, overly personal, or an invasion of privacy. However, in a professional context, knowing what others of the same profession earn is vital to ensure that each professional receives a fair wage. Additionally, US workers are legally protected so that employees can discuss income with each other without fear of dismissal[6]. However, social norms that regulate speech about income make discussing this aspect of streaming business difficult. In short, these panel discussions tended to be generally useful to aspiring streamers, while also being somewhat vague and lacking any specific details or expectations.

[6] The National Labor Relations Act of 1935

The vague suggestions offered by panel discussants mirrors the precarity of the profession. Panelists often mentioned that no one knows what will work or who will "blow up" in terms of popularity and viewership, and discussions often emphasize the importance of hard work and perseverance in general. These ideas manifested through reminders that producing video content takes a lot of time outside of the stream itself.

Additionally, panelists shared stories about forcing themselves to stream even when they felt burnt out by the process. On one hand, professional streamers emphasize that you should not pretend be something that you are not, and that it takes an unsustainable amount of energy to maintain a mask that you do not like. On the other, panelists often championed the story of FuturemanGaming, a streamer whose channel was not viably popular until he meticulously researched what other streamers were doing and devised a high-energy persona that was immediately successful in terms of viewer growth. Success is the outcome of both hard work and luck[7].

Even when speaking in generalities, the panel discussions at TwitchCon were presented as useful tools for aspiring professional streamers to learn how to operate within this career. In short, TwitchCon ostensibly lived up to its hype by providing aspiring steamers with venues for discussing processes within the streaming industry with established professionals. TwitchCon operated as a tradeshow, but it also functioned as a source of hype as well. Beyond the business of streaming, TwitchCon

[7] Luck is defined here as the seemingly random chance that an unlikely event will happen resulting in significant viewer growth. Consider the hard work of an aspiring streamer as similar to the processes that created the primordial soup from which life first sprang on Earth. Much like a well-designed Twitch channel, that soup exhibited many aspects that were all necessary to make life possible, but the aspects were by no means a guarantee of life occurring. The fact that life did occur, was a long shot. Similarly, streamers may cultivate a stream that has all the correct characteristics, but it is no guarantee of success; success still takes some amount of luck to happen.

also worked as a PR generator whose messages were designed with the contemporary neoliberal subject in mind.

TWITCHCON, PUBLIC RELATIONS, AND THE NEOLIBERAL SUBJECT

As a space for public relations, TwitchCon functions like a router, through which many different individuals create and distribute positive self-advertisements, with the aim of sending these messages to a wide variety of different receivers. Through TwitchCon, professional streamers attempt to sell their personal brand to potential viewers, to vendors that are looking to sponsor streamers, and to game developers that need exposure for upcoming titles. Additionally, game developers can advertise their products directly to consumers, with the ability to focus on streamers who can provide free (or cheap) advertising. Twitch represents the promise of the World Wide Web: the democratizing potential for personal media production paired with widespread digital distribution. Twitch provides the technological infrastructure necessary for anyone to become a (potentially) successful broadcaster. I argue that the structure of TwitchCon and the content of its events demonstrate the ways in which professional Twitch streaming aligns with the assumptions of the contemporary neoliberal subject (Chandler and Reid, 2016).

For the scope of this chapter, the term *neoliberal subject* does not function as a pejorative, but rather as a descriptor of an individual subjectivity whose worldview successfully aligns with the context and culture of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. The neoliberal state is one where government power and decision making is kept to a minimum, because such authority is continually relocated to the market and private industry, as well as the cultural assumption that such an ordering of society is natural

and desirable (Stiglitz, 2003, 74; McChesney, 1999, 6; Espozito, 2016, 87). Cultural indicators of neoliberalism include a depoliticized public (McChesney, 1999), valorization of the entrepreneur as hero figure (Pilotta, 2016), removing public welfare from the state's list of responsibilities (Fairclough, 2010), and generally replacing assumptions about the public good with that of individual responsibility as fundamental cultural values (Martinez and Garcia, n.d.). In the context of this chapter, defining the neoliberal subject does not entail labeling an individual as a "dupe" who has been coerced into following an exploitative ideological stance. Rather, the neoliberal subject refers to an individual whose approach to life and work can be subjectively viewed (from their own perspective) as helping them financially succeed within an era of neoliberal policy and culture. Rather than a *false consciousness* that keeps them subservient (cf., Marx and Engels, 1978), the neoliberal subjectivity is a response to the world, which provides a way to create strategies to successfully navigate contemporary employment trends. Provided below are the three ways in which TwitchCon aligns with the assumptions of the neoliberal subject. At TwitchCon (1) a streamer's individual identity becomes merely an aspect of professional identity, which is itself a commodity (2) every aspect of the event functions as a node within an interconnected web of advertising and positive PR generation, and (3) professionalism is demonstrated through strategic consumption.

Self as Commodity

As stated above, many streamers mentioned the importance of cultivating a personal *brand*: a trend that warrants closer enquiry. Treating one's self as a brand is similar to Goffman's (1959) "Face Work" in that the process focuses on the

construction of a version of the self, one designed to present a specific image to others. However, since a brand is also a marketable commodity, branding one's self is also an instance of self-objectification and self-commodification. This trend is not confined to online broadcasters alone. As an educator, I regularly see student speeches that argue for the importance of "growing your brand" to make one a more attractive applicant on the job market. In the contemporary US, considering one's self as a commodity to be sold is not only an acceptable outlook, it is sometimes seen as a necessary requirement for contemporary life.

The redefinition of self as commodity streamlines well with neoliberal ideals. During the "Your Brand on Twitch" panel, broadcasters discussed several aspects of streaming that are important for broadcasters to cultivate. First, one should make sure that the visual aspects of one's stream are consistent with the brand, including the color scheme. However, one must also consider the importance of community, meaning that how a streamer interacts her viewers, and how the viewers interact with each other, is part of a broadcaster's brand. Both the "Your Brand on Twitch" and "Building Communities on Twitch" panels posited that the interactions of your community represent the streamer herself, and that is part of what is sold to the audience. In short, branding is an important part of being a successful professional live streamer, and an aspect of the self that takes the everyday face work described by Goffman (1959) into the commercial realm.

The practice of considering one's self as a brand is vital to this analysis because it illuminates the relationship between a streamer's sense of self and the nature of his or her labor. Professional streamers do not highlight the alienation of their labor when

discussing the profession. Indeed, it seems that a streamer‘s ability to define her personal brand indicates that she is personally invested in her product, precluding the possibility of alienation. Of course, this perspective can be critiqued by noting the loss of personal financial stability inherent in contingent labor (Fisher, 2010).

Professional streamers often discuss the immense amount of time it takes to be financially successful. The job entails much more than simply turning on the camera and video game. Many streamers described it as the best job in the world, but because of the time commitment, they must get all of their social interaction through Twitch as well, precluding other forms of sociality. The “always on” nature of the streamer lifestyle begs the question: Are professional streamers “gaming the system” by finding a way to turn play into a revenue stream? Or are they being exploited by creating advertisements for game developers below the market rate for advertising professionals? As easy as it may seem to describe streaming as miraculous for the streamer (the streamer does get to play video games for money), one must also consider the potential negative aspects of the lifestyle. Many streamers discuss burn out, and having days when they just do not want to stream. Other streamers discuss the toll that streaming has on their social life and the very real prospect of losing any friend that is not part of the larger Twitch community. And as *partners,* rather than *employees,* there is no guarantee of continued income.

Finally, and most tellingly from a financial perspective, is the way that professional streamers discuss negotiating contracts with video game developers. Since Twitch streaming is a new and under-defined career, streamers admit that it’s difficult to know what to charge a developer who wants to pay the streamer to play their game

on stream. During the "When Do You Need a Manager?" panel, streamers suggested that one easy way is to calculate one's monthly budget is to see how much one "makes" in an hour based on averages, and use the estimated amount of time one would need to work on the developer's game to reach a price based on one's "hourly rate." Since it is difficult to measure an advertisement's value, charging "by the hour" seems like the appropriate answer to the question of payment.

Webs of PR

TwitchCon provides several ways for professional streamers to create hype, both for their own channels, and for specific products and games. Structurally, PR for other corporate interests (such as Blizzard, TeeSpring, and Sony) was built into the convention. Friday morning, the keynote did not end, but rather seamlessly segued into an interview, conducted by a streamer with an official from Blizzard[8] who was there to promote an expansion for the game *StarCraft 2*. The inclusion of this interview is not surprising, considering that eSports constitute Twitch's most popular channels, and *StarCraft 2* is a popular eSports title. What was surprising was the effortless way in which the keynote (general PR for Twitch) transitioned into the interview (a direct advertisement from Blizzard); so seamless that it left me wondering if the keynote was over or if it would "return after a brief word from our sponsors."

Marketers and advertisers were seamlessly inserted into many of TwitchCon's events. The panel titled "Gamer, Broadcaster, Entrepreneur: Building a Business Through your Channel," was not moderated by a professional streamer, but instead by Jack Altman, TeeSpring's Head of Business Development. TeeSpring is a company that produces and sells limited edition t-shirts that display logos and promotional material

[8] Blizzard is a company that makes video games, such as *World of WarCraft*, *Diablo 3*, and *StarCraft 2*.

for streamers. So, while the panel fulfilled its ostensible function of helping streamers learn how to acquire new revenue streams, it did so by focusing on the ways in which TeeSpring specifically works with broadcasters to develop marketable shirts. As helpful as this panel may have been to aspiring streamers, it was also used to increase the visibility of TeeSpring as a preferred shirt vendor to the Twitch community.

Games such as *H1Z1* and *Paladins* both held LAN tournaments and/or demos of their games, played by both streamers and fans. One of the largest crowds of the entire convention congressed around the *H1Z1* Battle Royale Tournament, which served as PR for both Sony (the developer) and the streamers who competed.

During the convention, streamers also worked hard to sell their own brand, usually by participating in highly visible convention activities. In addition to participating in scheduled panels and meet-and-greets, many professional streamers also made "unscheduled[9]" appearances to challenge each other at multiplayer games or to sign t-shirts at the booth run by their shirt vendor. In short, performing PR both for one's own channel and for one's business partners is required of broadcasters. TwitchCon can be a constant, hectic rush of events, appearances, and meetings for the professional streamer.

The nature of networking is another important aspect of this social scene, both functionally for the participants and analytically for understanding the nature of TwitchCon PR. When the topic of networking was addressed during panel sessions, successful streamers repeatedly provided a specific definition of the term. Within the Twitch community, networking generally requires "hanging out" in the chat rooms for

[9] Obviously coordinated in advance but not listed in the program - often these "unscheduled" appearances were advertised shortly before they occurred by having the streamers Tweet to tell fans where they would be.

other streamers' channels and amicably conversing with their communities. The idea is to help other streamers by adding value to their users' experience. While this is viewed as helping the other (usually more successful) streamer, it's important not to ask for anything in return. One helps the established streamer, who should return the favor, but only when one's stream is big enough to warrant their help. Additionally, one should never advertise one's own channel when conversing in someone else's chat, because that is considered rude. With networking, streamers emphasize that community should come first, and that one should interact with other streamers' communities because one enjoys the activity. Seeking to gain tangible rewards (such as viewers) from the practice would indicate that one is participating for the wrong reasons, approaching the entire social setting in an improper way. The suggested approach presents an interesting tightrope walk of advertising one's self by being there and interacting, but explicitly forbids advertising one's own channel.

The importance of community and the social value of streaming practice were constantly emphasized throughout the convention. While many streamers praised the Twitch corporation, they also posited that the most important aspect of Twitch's structure was its "hands off" approach to streamers. While there are rules about what one can and cannot broadcast, streamers praise Twitch for being very lenient in enforcing these rules. For example, Twitch requires that content be game-related[10] but allows for a broad interpretation of what that may mean. For example, Twitch allows streams that simply show individuals coding games, working on game related artwork, playing video game themed songs on a piano, and discussing games in a talk show

[10] Twitch's Rules of Conduct states: "All content that is neither gaming-related nor permitted in our Creative or Music categories is prohibited from broadcast"

format. Therefore, Twitch's main benefit is that it provides infrastructure while also staying out of the way of broadcasters[11]. Everyone agrees that streamers and their communities are what make Twitch great. Streamers and their communities give Twitch *value*.

With a growing population of viewers that averages 550,000[12] at any given moment, Twitch must seem like an excellent opportunity to advertisers. As a commodity, Twitch is just a feature of the contemporary commercial media landscape. However, as a practice, streaming is a resource that carries exploitable possibilities. While E3 started as a tradeshow for industry insiders, it has become the premier place to announce upcoming games, not only to the industry, but to consumers as well. E3 was not born the PR juggernaut that it is today; it began as way for distributers and publishers to convince retailers to carry their games. Eventually fans started attending, developers realized that the E3 stage extends beyond retailers, and now the PR focus is a defining aspect of E3. Like PAX[13], TwitchCon grew itself from the fans up, taking its first steps in the convention scene, as a confident and competent vehicle for PR. Similarly, TwitchCon is about selling: Twitch selling its distribution platform and its advertising potential, broadcasters selling their personal brands, and hardware and software developers selling their products to streamers. TwitchCon exists for the end user, not to place copies onto retail shelves.

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[11] While the culture of the greater Twitch community may be anti-authoritarian in its support of laissez faire handling of streamers, it's certainly not anti-corporate.
[12] According to the TwitchCon 2015 keynote address.
[13] According to PAX's website (n.d.), the problem with E3 was that it was somewhat gated, and you needed to be part of the industry to get in. By focusing on video games specifically, and allowing the wider public to attend, PAX created a space for game developers to speak directly to consumers, while also giving consumers a convention experience approximating the one that they felt they were missing out on with E3.

My journey to TwitchCon illuminated nuances and interdependent aspects of professional streaming, such as the importance of hype, community, and branding. Nowhere were these aspects more apparent than in ubiquitous declaration that TwitchCon participants are "bleeding purple." Twitch streamers and their communities are very loyal to Twitch, even if they also utilize other distribution outlets (i.e., YouTube) as well. To "bleed purple" is to feel and demonstrate your loyalty to Twitch; it is a statement of identity. Panelists even showed an amount of derision for Twitch's main rival, YouTube, who had recently announced a live-streaming service similar to that of Twitch. Many panelists and attendees expressed the opinion that YouTube is not a credible rival, stating that Twitch's community is more cooperative, less competitive, and therefore superior to YouTube's. To "bleed purple" acknowledges the belief in Twitch's strong community, but also demonstrates the company's positive PR. Twitch community membership becomes more attached to notions of identity than simply choice in leisure activity. Additionally, hype for Twitch and its community is a necessary defense against the competitive threat of YouTube Gaming, a venture backed by YouTube's powerful parent company, Google.

Professional Consumption

While emphasizing the importance of community, TwitchCon also accommodated commodification by redefining various social expectations as different types of consumption. An example of this lies the "Education Zone," discussed above - a space on the tradeshow floor set aside for amateur streamers to learn about the business of streaming. In addition to the numerous panels on the business of streaming, the Education Zone hosted both planned and (seemingly) impromptu discussions and

presentations about how to be a (financially) successful streamer. However, this "educational" space was problematic, due to the nature of the communication conducted there. Most of the booths located in the "Education Zone" were simply vendor booths, where the manufacturers of professional-grade streaming software and headphones could sell their products under the guise of "educating" people about how to stream successfully. In short, while my purpose in attending TwitchCon was to learn how streamers professionalized, the Education Zone presented a problematic message about the relationship between learning and buying. TwitchCon's "Education Zone" seemed to confound learning how to be a professional with adhering to a set of consumption patterns. Chapter Seven discussed the semiotic connection between high end hardware and professionalism - and BouseFeenux's assertion that expensive components are bought so that broadcasters can impress other broadcasters, and that their viewers rarely care enough to comment (personal communication, June 28, 2016). Therefore, using the education zone to turn professionalism into a set of consumption patterns parallels streamer discourse that holds hardware as signifiers of professionalism.

In the end, the TwitchCon's Education Zone serves as an apt synecdoche for the entire event. The name itself, "Education Zone," elicits connotations of helpfulness and learning, a place where the knowledgeable can teach the eager. But after passing by the Education Zone's booths for Amazon.com, GameShow, GameWisp, HoneyLedger, Intel, Skreens, TeeSpring, and XSplit (all companies specializing in products that professional streamers need), it became obvious that "education" often means buying something. In some respects, being knowledgeable in the realm of professional streaming is about making purchase choices as a consumer, and expertise is knowledge

about how to best consume. Much like TwitchCon itself, the Education Zone is a venue for PR presented as a helpful space for individuals to connect, share experience, and learn together. The economic imperative is omnipresent, transforming play and professionalism into commodities that can be packaged and sold. The purpose of TwitchCon is to facilitate the commodification of play.

DISCUSSION

TwitchCon is a place for commerce and PR - for streamers and others in the video game industry. When buying a ticket to TwitchCon, one is buying a ticket to a "fun" tradeshow, a place to explore the exciting social milieu of video game live streaming. However, the ticket also allows one entry into a set of economic relations and professional processes, where the act of play is commodified, and notions of the self are re-conceptualized as commodity. Many streamers stress the necessity of cultivating your brand identity while also acknowledging that real-life social relations suffer outside of Twitch. Not only must one adhere to the expectations of one's brand, there is also no reprieve from them. To what extent can the non-branded self be nurtured in such an environment? The processes and situations found at TwitchCon support Deuze's (2012) descriptions of *media life*: the idea that we increasingly live *through* media technologies, rather than simply alongside them. Merging the mediated self with the economic sphere (e.g., by cultivating one's personal "brand") increasingly makes sense for the savvy neoliberal subject.

TwitchCon works as a tradeshow by addressing necessities, both conceptual and practical, that the aspiring professional streamer needs to address in his or her approach to streaming. Discussions on networking, branding, and work ethic demonstrate that

streamers fashion their practice after a theoretical understanding of how streaming should work. In other words, their practices stem from a normative theory for Twitch broadcasting. Networking is a form of "upward" assistance, helping more popular streamers without any expectation that they will help you in return. This expectation is closely related to "punching your weight" in terms of collaborations (i.e., one should associate with other streamers of similar size of viewership, rather than "bigger" streamers). While many streamers enjoy the fact that they do not have a boss (other than themselves), larger streamers represent something of a gatekeeper, an entity whose assistance could be the gateway to larger audiences, more revenue, and increased solvency in this new and unpredictable career. TwitchCon panels also directly addressed practical concerns like using "color moods" to design graphics, talking to NPCs[14] when viewers are quiet, not interrupting when there is a good discussion in the chat window, and other specific actions and behaviors a streamer should adopt to become a better broadcaster and increase her viewership.

TwitchCon panels also spoke to the promise of democratization that the Internet represents, both conceptually and practically. These aspects can be seen in the conflicting messages that professionals had for aspiring streamers. Two common messages provided by successful streamers were that "anyone can do this," and that "not just anyone can do this." Anyone can create a Twitch account, buy a $5 microphone, fire up a game, and start streaming. However, streaming day-in, day-out, takes a lot of effort and energy, not to mention time outside of broadcasting to design the visual aspects of the stream and troubleshoot equipment problems. Additionally,

[14] NPCs or "Non-Player Characters," are characters within the video game whose role, actions, and dialogue are not controlled by the player.

there is no way to predict which streamers are going to "blow up" in terms of viewership. Constant suggestions to "just stream" and "don't wait for better hardware, start today," continually reemphasize the idea that anyone can do it, that nothing is standing in your way.

However, panels also acknowledged that not everyone can be lucky enough to make this career work financially. Ultimately, the aspiring streamer is left with the somewhat conflicting message that: "You can do it! But don't get upset when it turns out that you can't." While the "You can do it!" portion of the message may be focused on the processes of production, the second half references the extremely low likelihood of financial success from streaming. This perspective naturalizes the neoliberal shifting of financial risk onto the backs of the workers rather than the corporation, turning precarity into *common sense*. As mentioned in Chapter Six, professional streamers are *partners* with Twitch, not employees. This shift supports Fisher's (2010) argument that new media provide personal, artistic expression as an alibi for media corporations to withdraw from the cultural expectation that employers will provide support for their employees. Adopting this orientation primes the neoliberal subject with an appropriate worldview for approaching Twitch streaming as a career.

This sense of precarity[15] is increasingly common throughout the neoliberal economy, especially in the media industries (cf., Deuze, 2007, 21). Precarity has been mapped in the journalism industry for some time. Staff positions such as reporters and editors, in both print (newspaper) journalism and on television news have repeatedly been downsized over the past two decades, partially in response to pressures from the

[15] Precarity is defined here as the sense or knowledge that one has no job security, that employment and income are provisional, temporary, even fleeting.

Internet. Most Twitch streamers - even the professional ones - are not employees of the Twitch corporation (or its parent company, Amazon). Twitch streamers are self-styled entrepreneurs, much like the bloggers and freelance reporters who carve out a sustainable niche using new media technologies. A contract to become partnered with Twitch guarantees the streamer a certain share of the advertising and subscription revenue, not a salary or any guarantee of steady income. And while the Twitch corporation will benefit from a successful streamer (and will often provide opportunities to help the streamer's channel succeed in finding viewers) the individual streamer is more susceptible to financial ruin should viewership dwindle. For the neoliberal subject, it is natural for the benefits of hard work to be shared with the corporation while the risks of failure are not. This unequal division of benefits and instability are not morally or ethically problematic from this worldview. One difference between streaming and employment with traditional media is that new media's history is shorter, and without established industry norms. While the steamer's precarity has always been present (and is therefore an assumed aspect of the industry), the journalist's represents a shift from previous, more stable employment, and the assumptions that accompany job security.

My own position as a media researcher, a critical scholar, and a fan, undoubtedly colors my interpretation and analysis of TwitchCon. As a researcher, I sought to collect data in the form of field notes, perform participant observation, and record short interviews with professional streamers. As an academic I sought to maintain an emotional distance from my quarry, the "disinterested interest" of the social scientist. However, as a fan, there were streamers that I wanted to meet, to have my picture taken with them, and have my convention badge signed. TwitchCon certainly

delivered for the version of me that came as a fan. I also learned something about how successful streaming professionals operate in the convention environment - how the nature of being a professional streamer dictates time management at such events. The streamer is always on, always presenting his or her brand, always managing the tension between subjective self and self as commodity. Additionally, the "always on" nature of this job is just as true in the day-to-day operations of the stream as it is during the convention. The above concerns are central to understanding the professionalization of Twitch streamers, and ultimately their worldview as neoliberal subjects who have acquired appropriate "equipment for living" under global neoliberal capitalism.

Finally, and addressing the complexity of RQ4, TwitchCon presented a contested space for the aspiring professional streamer, rearticulating the nature of commodification as an aspect of professionalization. While successful streamers offered valuable practical information, aspiring streamers were also confronted with notions of professionalism redefined as consumption. This is especially true of the Education Zone that existed primarily as a space for vendors to sell their wares. The potential harm of redefining professionalism simply as a type of consumption is that it exploits an already vulnerable population within the work force: the not-yet-successful content producers whose income is not guaranteed. "You have to spend money to make money," is a dangerous adage for those who must spend money they cannot afford in the drive for professional success. Professional streamers did attempt to remedy this by stating that the most important aspects of streaming are not the expensive computer equipment, but one's dedication, perseverance, and approach to community. However, presenting

strategic consumption patterns as professionalism shifts the burden of financial risk onto the individual streamer, whose job it is to consume for the audience.

As a site for commodified play, TwitchCon provided a space to explore the worldview of the contemporary neoliberal subject, the individual whose approach to life and work aligns well with the neoliberal state. First, TwitchCon exemplified commodified play by presenting an onslaught of advertising and layered PR as a "fun" tradeshow. Second, streaming industry professionalism was presented as strategic consumption through the Education Zone. Third, successful Twitch streamers normalized the precarity of their careers and advised others to do the same during panel sessions.

Twitch, however, is not alone in providing a space for creative individuals to carve out a living (sometimes a very comfortable living) by creating media content outside of the traditional media corporation. YouTubers, bloggers, and freelance journalists all present populations which are ripe for documenting contemporary neoliberal subjectivities.

Examining the relationship between identity and economics among the creative workers who turn distribution platforms such as Twitch and YouTube into entrepreneurial opportunities is necessary for the future of media research. The student sitting in a telecommunications class today may be preparing for a career that bears less and less resemblance to the traditional, corporately owned media production processes (e.g., television news production), which we as educators have consistently taught. Twitch and TwitchCon provide opportunities for scholars to better understand trends in contemporary neoliberal ideology, its relationship to corporate structures, media

industry precarity, and content creation practice. The theoretical understanding of these interdependent concepts is, in turn, necessary for helping future media industry professionals orient to the practices and assumptions of the contemporary media labor marketplace.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Twitch is growing, and its importance to contemporary culture grows with it. This dissertation has explored Twitch by examining four aspects of its constituent social scene: the channel pages on which broadcasters advertise, a talk show that streamers use to discuss their work, interviews with professional Twitch streamers, and participant observation at TwitchCon. The results found within have implications, not only to the industries of online content creation, but to the wider media industry, and society in general. On a micro level, this study provides a glimpse into the world of professional Twitch broadcasting and a better understanding of the people whose working lives revolve around playing video games for an audience. On a meso- level, the lives and views documented within outline wider ranging issues related to the media industry as a whole. For example, the discussion of sponsorships demonstrates that streamers negotiate professional ethics. Finally, on a meta- level, this study of new media professionals adds nuance to our theoretical understanding of neoliberal subjectivities.

The exploration above demonstrates the importance of two topics relevant to the current discussion on new media professionalism: the creation of a normative theory for new media production, and the semiotics of money. By documenting a normative theory of new media production, one can start to see how this industry works, from the perspective of the individual media producer. Additionally, by examining subscriptions and donations one gains greater insight to the ways that meaning in mediated by money for members of this professional community. In short, through streamer income we can examine the semiotics of money.

This concluding chapter will begin with a brief review of the dissertation, followed by a general discussion. Limitations will be discussed before offering a final word on the importance of this research, both for media scholarship and higher education.

REVIEW

In Chapter Five, the content of channel pages was examined to determine what was "for sale" on Twitch. In short, the act of subscribing to a stream has more to do with identity and community than simply the exchange of commodities. Chat icons are only worth five dollars a month because they increase a user's ability to interact with the community. Chat icons are not, in-and-of-themselves, valuable, but they allow participants to communicate in locally meaningful ways. In other words they provide a path to social value, rather than an economically measurable use value. In Chapter Six the professional discourse present on *Dropped Frames* provided insight into the ways that successful streamers negotiate ideas about precarity and friendship. First, the precarity of streaming entrepreneurship is highlighted through discussions of uncertainty. Second, the nature of online, channel-focused communities is considered at the intersection of economics and friendship. Eventually, a code of streamer ethics emerges which favors honesty and long-term maintenance of a relationship with the audience over the potential short-term gains of disingenuous promotional opportunities. In Chapter Seven, streamers were interviewed, allowing them to describe their career on their own terms. Interview data provides an emic view of the industry, while also highlighting the perceived benefit of the streamer's work. Specifically, much of a streamer's value lies in her leadership skills, not her gaming talents or her video

production ability. Ultimately, this assertion – that a streamer's foundational skill is leadership – supports the importance of community to this group of professionals. In Chapter Eight, TwitchCon (a trade show for streamers and fans) was explored to further examine the relationship between professionalism and commerce. On one hand, broadcasters at TwitchCon continually emphasized the neoliberal precarity present in the career of a live streamer. On the other hand, the physical space (designed by the Twitch corporation) transformed con-goers into the audience commodity. This transformation is acutely apparent in the "Education Zone" where professionalism was presented as a form of strategic consumption.

DISCUSSION

The nature of Twitch professionalism opens the door to many new discussions, each with its own potential for future research. Below we will use Twitch to discuss the implications for normative theory, media ethics in live streaming, neoliberal culture, and commodified play. This section will end by applying wider critical theory to the practice of professional Twitch broadcasting by exploring the question of labor alienation.

Normative Theory

One benefit of this research is that it allows one to construct a normative theory of professional streaming. However, I must set the scope of what normative theory is in this context, by defining it as distinct from the version found in journalism scholarship. For journalism scholars, normative theories are those that dictate how professional journalists should go about their job and why (McQuail, 2010). These normative theories generally place the profession of journalism in relation to a larger web of social

structures that facilitate democracy and political decision-making. The journalist's role is to accurately inform the public about the world so that voters can make informed decisions. Journalists are given the intellectual tools to navigate the theoretical nature of their work – the profession's relationship to democratic decision making – so that they can make decisions about how to do their job. In short, professional journalists use theory concerning the purpose of their profession (i.e., informing democratic constituencies) when making practical decisions about how to carry out the day-to-day actions of their job (e.g., choosing who to interview, determining how a story should be written, etc.). Normative theory is important because journalists use theory to determine practice.

However, Twitch streamers need not concern themselves with the role their broadcasting practices play vis-à-vis political decision-making. Therefore, one difference between Twitch broadcasting and television journalism is that a normative theory of streaming will not be based on the triangular relationship between the press, the people, and governance. However, that is not to say that Twitch streamers do not have a theoretical understanding of how their industry should function. On the contrary, streamers have a deep theoretical understanding of how their relationship to their viewers should work, and this understanding informs their daily activities. Therefore, streamers have a normative theory for streaming because they have a theoretical understanding of their profession that they use to determine actual practices.

But what does a normative theory of streaming look like? According to the data presented in this dissertation, any attempt at constructing a normative theory of Twitch streaming must be centrally concerned with community. Streamers cite this community

focus in every venue available to them (in their streams, on their channel pages, on *Dropped Frames*, during panels at TwitchCon, etc.). A channel's community congregates around the streamer. Therefore, supporting the community is the streamer's first responsibility. In *Spreadable Media*, Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) state that all media entities (both entrepreneurial and corporate) must learn to listen to the participatory segments of their audience to survive in the contemporary media landscape. Successful streamers have understood this necessity for a long time. This prioritization is indicated by broadcasters' continual adjustment of content to better serve their community. Beyond simply giving the community what they want, streamers often strive to move their community in specific directions by cultivating (and, at times, enforcing) a specific type of atmosphere within the community. Therefore, the nature of a stream is collaborative: an outcome of the work of both the streamer and the audience. However, the streamer does occupy a favored seat within the group. The broadcaster is the captain of a ship run by volunteers. As captain, the streamer benefits from leadership skills to maintain the course of the ship. However, since the crew are volunteers, the streamer/captain must never forget where the crew wants to go, if they are to assist in traveling there. And the community's assistance is necessary for the vessel to move; a ship cannot sail by a captain alone.

This social milieu is ripe for future research on new media processes and economics. While this dissertation focused solely on the professionalism of the broadcaster, there are many other social actors taking part in this process that deserve further examination. An ethnography of audience members is the obvious next step. Such a study would augment this line of research in that it would examine the meaning

of money's movement from the other side: why do audience members subscribe and donate, and how do they see their role in the production of the channel? The audience's role in the production of the channel is also relevant from an artistic perspective. Twitch has its own set of aesthetics that distinguish it from other forms of video media. An examination of how formal streaming aesthetics develop and evolve on Twitch could also document the relationship between the broadcast and the audience. If film aesthetics connote meaning, then streaming aesthetics connote audience participation. The addition of aesthetics brings the study of Twitch beyond the scope of the social sciences and into the realm of the arts and humanities.

Finally, we must also reiterate that the scope of this discussion is limited to variety streamers and some speedrunners. Players that compete in tournaments for prize money but also broadcast on Twitch, likely have different revenue streams, and distinct approaches to making Twitch's infrastructure work for their career trajectory. Additionally, this research focuses on the profession of the individual, entrepreneurial streamer, not the Twitch corporation. While it may accommodate entrepreneurial streamers, Twitch's business model (and therefore its worldview) will be noticeably distinct from that of the individual streamer. Therefore, another way to extend the scholarly literature on Twitch would be to examine the live streaming industry from the perspective of the Twitch corporation.

Streamer Ethics

Journalistic ethics are built on a foundation of honesty, depth, aversion to bias, and attempted objectivity. These considerations harken back to the normative theory discussed above; if voters are to be well-informed then their press needs to be honest

and not misleading. The ethical tensions placed on journalists are visible in contemporary media, where partisan news sources and native advertising (companies paying journalists to write positive news stories about products) are increasingly the norm.

Similar tensions play out on the working lives of streamers once they have reached a certain level of success. On *Dropped Frames* streamers regularly addressed the question of "selling out:" being paid to positively review a product, such as a new game or computer equipment. A common concern for successful streamers was how to manage these sponsorships while not appearing to sell out. In Chapter Six, CohhCarnage suggests that streamers should only accept sponsorships for products that they would use anyway, thus removing the potential accusations of "selling out." In addition to social capital generated through honesty, such ethical behavior also carries a financial benefit for the streamer. While a sponsorship may include a significant check, successful streamers view one-time payments as unfavorable when compared to the long-term benefits of an engaged community. Discussions of authenticity were common among the data sets, and streamers appreciate the value (both economic and social) of community longevity. Indeed, several streamers acknowledged that their viewers know them well enough to tell when they are not being honest. Therefore, lying about the quality of a product could cause viewers to leave and not come back. In this sense, the market (subscribing and donating Twitch viewers) self regulates by providing an economic incentive to keep professional streamers honest in the face of tempting sponsorships.

Can similar processes be devised for other industries? In everyday life, ethical conflicts arise because a profitable action is often at odds with an honest one. Twitch, then, represents a place where ethical reasoning is (occasionally) enforced economically. Future research should determine whether Twitch's model for economically enforcing ethical behavior can be adjusted and implemented into other industries that are prone to unethical behavior. This is especially true of other new media entrepreneurs, such as YouTubers, beauty vloggers, political bloggers, and podcasters. Many of these professionals rely both on a committed regular audience and advertising revenue. A better understanding of Twitch broadcasting ethics could teach us much about the potential for new media ethics.

Neoliberal Culture

Among scholars, neoliberalism is often discussed either as policy trends toward the deregulation of markets and the dismantling of the social contract, or as the cultural and mental outcomes of living under such processes. Professional Twitch streaming is one industry whose relationship to neoliberal policy and culture is direct and apparent. First, by treating professional broadcasters as "partners," and not employees, Twitch has created a professional structure that places the majority of economic risk onto the backs of the individual worker, rather than the corporation (even though the corporation benefits greatly from the worker's efforts). This neoliberal development mimics other industries, and is apparent in other new-media-reliant ventures such as Uber and YouTube. Second, successful Twitch streamers often describe themselves as entrepreneurs, a label that has achieved "hero" status under the culture of neoliberalism (Pilotta, 2016). Twitch streamers live with normalized occupational precarity and the

successful ones thrive in a competitive media marketplace (cf., Chandler and Reid, 2016).

Normalized precarity connects professional Twitch streaming to several conceptual arguments posited by previous scholars. For example, Fisher (2010) suggests that digital discourse (talk about technology) strategically hides the fact that careers created by technological innovation are exploitative because they normalize the absence of employment-based social support (e.g., employer provided health insurance). Fisher's argument stems from the idea that work under a Fordist (industrial, factory) model turns people into objects (i.e., workers become simply production machinery) and that their interchangeable nature separates their skillset from their identity, but with the benefit of providing social welfare. Digital discourse, however, seems to fix the problem of alienation (workers are no longer simply cogs), but ignores the fact that in return, social welfare is reduced or erased. Therefore, Twitch represents exactly the type of neoliberal professional turn that Fisher (2010) argues is made possible, even desirable, by digital discourse.

Twitch's version of normalized precarity is also indicative of Chandler and Reid's (2016) discussion of contemporary neoliberal subjectivities. Successful Twitch streamers are not only comfortable in an environment marked by precarity, they thrive in such situations. Chandler and Reid describe the neoliberal subject as one "that proclaims its own superior capacity to seek not security from the sources of its vulnerability, but to live in open relation with them, prospering and growing from them from the continual practice of an entrepreneurial resilience…" (2016, 152). Such

occupational resiliency makes the entrepreneurial Twitch streamer a test case for Chandler and Reid's theoretical work on life under neoliberalism.

The relationship between professional Twitch streamers and neoliberal cultural trends indicates that broadcasters can help us understand cultural and social outcomes of living under neoliberalism. However, professional Twitch streamers should not be conceptualized as dupes, living under a false consciousness (to use Marx's terms). Indeed, some professional streamers thrive in this cultural environment while working at jobs they find rewarding, even fun. The question of whether streamers' work should be considered alienating or exploitative will be discussed in more detail below. Additionally, one should also consider the extent to which streamers' neoliberal ontology represents unfortunate "equipment for living" in the late modern, western world.

Commodified Play

Professional Twitch streaming sits at the intersection of work and play. Some consider the two realms to be irreparably divided: that once an activity becomes work it can no longer be play. Stebbins disagrees (1982, 2004, 2009), arguing over the course of his career that work can be fun (cf., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), and play can merit compensation. While his rationale is overly sunny (i.e., that increased efficiency will lead to shorter work weeks and more free time to pursue hobbies), his descriptions of occupational devotion (finding enrichment in one's job) and serious leisure (being paid for activities normally defined as leisure) both describe the entrepreneurial Twitch streamer quite well. This, however, does not answer the question of what changes in one's life when one turns a leisure activity into a career. Most people would agree that

playing video games for income is qualitatively different than most other "serious" occupations. If so, what makes it different? How is commodified play different from normal, uncompensated play?

In the scope of this study the answers are varied. Some interviewees said that they no longer played video games outside of streaming anymore, while others did. Some interviewees said that they had to change the way they play games to accommodate streaming, while others suggested that they worked hard to get better at streaming so that they wouldn't have to change how they played. Nearly everyone suggested that they had to think about their channel and community when determining which games to play, but each weighted the importance of that consideration differently. Game selection may be one aspect of streaming that indicates the ways in which play changes when it also becomes work. Comparing this aspect of Twitch broadcasting to other serious leisure activities may facilitate a more generalizable theoretical perspective on commodified play.

On the other hand, broadening the definition of "play" beyond simply the playing of a video game, may demonstrate how the commodification of play on Twitch is mediated by economic movement. When discussing their value to the audience, Twitch streamers often focus on connecting the experience of watching Twitch to a familiar social setting: sitting on a couch, next to one's friends, having a drink, and playing some video games. This description of broadcasting places emphasis on the social aspects of video game play: the way that the game provides a space for friends to socialize. To many gamers this description of "sitting on the couch," playing games together, has an authentic ring that mirrors the real-life social setting, to which many are

accustomed. By citing the importance of the couch, streamers are once again describing a practice that focusses on interaction and community.

However, this description does present a conceptual problem. Most people would not pay their friends to let them sit on the couch and watch them play video games. What makes a streamer *more worthy* of payment than a physically present friend? If play is partially defined as the social setting of "hanging out," then commodified play is the strategic coordination of the hanging out process. Highlighted again is the importance of leadership as a useful skillset for professional streamers. If commodified play on Twitch is about leadership, then interactions on Twitch are fertile ground for research on leadership - especially from those positions that define leadership as the ability to cultivate a positive atmosphere, and not simply delegate tasks from a position of power.

Twitch and the Marxist Alienation of Labor

Noting that Twitch broadcasting as a career meshes well with neoliberal markets and cultures highlights an important question in terms of critical theory: is Twitch's format and business model exploitative of labor. Well, yes and no. One concern of Marxist (Marx & Engels, 1978) theory is the state of alienation, the reduction of the worker to a tool. Do Twitch broadcasters experience this type of alienation? The answer is complicated.

On one hand, they certainly do not. For Marx, it was the move from the farm to the factory that fostered alienation in the industrial worker. A lifelong farmer should identify strongly with his product and feel a deep connection to the process of cultivating it. This connection gives meaning and personal enrichment to the act of

production. Factory workers, however, are interchangeable; once an individual has the skill to operate a machine in an automotive factory he or she can move to an appliance factory, or an arms factory, or a toy factory, and be properly skilled to operate the machines there. Since the act of work can be applied to any number of different products, there is a more tenuous connection between identity of the worker and the commodity she helps produce. Additionally, factory workers are generally paid by the hour, not piecemeal, meaning that the worker sells her labor time, not her productivity. Factories are designed to make identical copies of the same item, meaning that products are not evaluated on their individual craftsmanship, and workers are not rewarded based on their individual skill. Therefore, factories create alienation by disconnecting the factory worker from the product.

Twitch broadcasters do not experience this type of alienation as their products are intimately tied to their personal identity. Indeed, the fact that streamers pride themselves on their personal "brands" indicates that their products are unique, and cannot be successfully copied by competitors. A broadcaster's stream is valuable because it is distinct from others, and individual craftsmanship is acknowledged and rewarded by viewers. Since every stream is different and creates its own unique value, professional streaming becomes a career that can be personally enriching. The entrepreneurial streamer is not an identical, and easily replaceable cog.

However, the profession of Twitch streaming satisfies Fisher's (2010) argument about digital discourse with a high degree of verisimilitude. The nature of the work allows for increased personal enrichment, which negates alienation while also erasing the expectations of the social contract that were expanded under Fordist capitalism (i.e.,

job security, provided health insurance, severance pay at termination, etc.). Indeed, professional streamers must plan in accordance with this lack of support as they navigate their careers, both in their everyday workflows and their long-term financial planning. The regular discussions on *Dropped Frames* about what happens if this "all goes away," the repeated annoyance about having to find tax professionals that know how to properly handle streaming income, and warnings about not quitting your "day job" until you're certain you can make it, all highlight the precarity of the streaming profession, while not flagging it as a negative aspect of the career.

I argue that the equipment for living under neoliberalism includes a type of alienation that is slightly different from the conceptualization above. While streamers may not be interchangeable cogs (e.g., Fordist factory workers), they do exemplify the cultural practice of voluntary self-objectification. Twitch streamers often describe their channels, and *even their selves* as "brands" that need to be sold. The ability to think of oneself as a brand (rather than an individual, a soul, or a mind) indicates a shift in the mental and cultural fabric of contemporary western society. What does it mean that people can define and market themselves as a brand? The ability to use the concept of a *brand* as an explanatory metaphor for the self indicates that we are increasingly able to turn ourselves into marketable objects. While perhaps not a cog, we are a commodity, and we should therefore continually strive for flashier packaging.

The current cultural logic of self-branding aligns well with Baudrillard's (1981) political economy of the sign. Baudrillard posits that a society (as a system) manufactures individuals whose function is to serve the needs of the system and ensure its longevity. Additionally, Baudrillard argues that commodities no long have use value;

that their value lies solely in their work as a sign which places them in relation to other signs. These two theses are exemplified by the mental work of self-branding; individuals now agree that they are a commodity, and one whose value lies in their ability to function as a sign (remembering that brands are traditionally collections of signs strategically designed to differentiate between similar products). The successful entrepreneurial new media content creator finds success by consciously realizing and manipulating her sign value.

Twitch streamers provide a rich opportunity to study this cultural trend towards personal branding and voluntary self-objectification. Research into this worldview is imperative to better understand the human condition under contemporary neoliberal society. From what ontological and epistemological assumptions does the contemporary *branded subject* operate? In the realm of cultural studies, such questions are immediately necessary to understand wider issues of politics, hegemony, and emancipation. Additionally, we can see that the branded subject is likely a foundational aspect of any normative theory of streaming; streamers must make practical work decisions based on a theoretical ordering of the world that defines the self as a marketable product. Additionally, this worldview speaks to the communicative nature of money. If the self is a commodity, then income (money paid in exchange for access to the commodified self) must be read (and readable) by the streamer. Income is made meaningful to the streamer from the social context which assumes a commodified and objectified subject position.

In the case of Twitch streaming, we can use Marxist alienation to answer the question of emancipation. From an emic perspective, the work of live streamers is

emancipating because it solves the problem of alienation. Successful professional streamers enjoy a career that is personally enriching. If broadcasters successfully plan for the future, and cover the necessities of the lost social contract (a viable retirement, health insurance, etc.), there is no reason to believe that Twitch will have been anything to them other than the gateway to the happiest possible life.

However, from an etic perspective, there are some complications - ones which are relatively minor for the individual streamer, but indicate potentially exploitative cultural trends. I question the extent to which the ability of streamers to successfully navigate their personally enriching careers is a happy accident, a fortunate symptom of the greater cultural shift towards voluntary self-objectification. The brand mentality may be generally dehumanizing, but a subset of the population, specifically successful streamers, have subverted the hegemonic function and carved out a successful worldview that has ultimately secured them comfort, community, and happiness. I label this a "happy accident" because it benefits streamers, but their benefit is a symptom of wider-ranging cultural changes that are exploitative in nature.

LIMITATIONS

The research conducted for this dissertation is subject to limitations in both method and practice. These limitations can be articulated through the following three categories: the accuracy of self-report, the semi-absence of the audience, and opacity of the system.

Self-Report

The issues of validity related to self-report are well known. Professionals may practice self-censorship when speaking about their career. Participants at a trade show

may assume that speaking about a topic in specific ways can have potential benefits or drawbacks, either of which may cause them to amend their speech. Caldwell (2008) finds this issue particularly problematic when interviewing employees in the media industries, where gaffers and electricians are more likely to be honest and openly negative than producers and studio executives who stick to a memorized script. As leaders of their personal brands (and diplomats for Twitch in general), successful streamers may be inclined to stick to the well-developed, status-quo-supporting script. However, relying on streamers as informants is the best way to collect emic and phenomenological data. The only more comprehensive way to explore the work-a-day life of professional streamers would be to become one (i.e., full participant observation turned autoethnography), an approach that would be infeasible and carry its own methodological drawbacks. Additionally, one might instead conduct extensive field observation of streamers engaging in their work. Unfortunately, this approach may be unfeasible for studying Twitch streamers. First, since streamers need not be geographically close to one another, one can only observe a single streamer at a time in most cases.

A further complication of the self-report issue is selection bias. As documented in Chapter Four, the vast majority of contacted streamers chose not to be interviewed (or, at least chose to ignore the email). Therefore, we must question whether those few who chose to participate share some quality that is not as present in those who didn't. Do similar responses only seem that way because a specific and definable subset of streamers chose to respond, or because participants felt similarly about the topics under discussion? As an ethnography, this research does not intend to speak for all streamers

and need not be generalizable for the industry as a whole. As stated in Chapter Four, the purpose of ethnography is to generalize within, not generalize across (Geertz, 1973a). Even though maximum generalizability is not the goal, the difficulty in cultivating research participants was a significant limitation for this research. Finding ways to better access the streamer population is a necessary next step.

The Audience

The nature and disposition of the audience is both tertiary and foundational to this research. Since this dissertation focused on streamer professionalism, the experience of audience members is outside the scope of this study. However, data demonstrates that the experience of the audience is the central concern of professional streamers. This was indicated when streamers assumed that questions about their professional approach were actually about how their audiences are gratified. Conceptualizing and anticipating the audience is so important to streamers that it often dictates how they go about their professional practices.

An examination of the audience is integral for future research on Twitch streaming and its economic contexts. Future research should interrogate the processes by which audience members turn themselves into a commodity. Streamers acknowledge the importance of making the audience's role participatory. Audience members interact with the stream to varying degrees, and highly engaged viewers often become moderators, and occasionally start streaming themselves. One must never assume that the Twitch audience is passive, but instead find methods to examine how it functions, since its active nature is a necessary aspect of this industry.

Opacity

Finally, the opacity of the Twitch corporation places a limitation on the types of data that can be collected. Each Twitch partner has a contract with Twitch that defines the nature of their working relationship, its limitations, and liabilities. Included in these contracts are exact calculations that determine how much subscription and advertising revenue a partner receives when streaming on Twitch. These figures are not public knowledge as Twitch includes in the contract a "gag order" preventing the streamer from publicly disclosing the specific division of revenue. Therefore, any discussion of streaming income is hampered by the inability of streamers to talk about their cut. While specific dollar amounts are tertiary to the current study, their exact nature could prove helpful for a better understanding of the relevant economic processes.

ACADEMIC IMPORTANCE

In closing, I should note the greater social importance of Twitch, and how we - as scholars - should use this knowledge. First, considering Twitch's increasing popularity, researchers must determine what its presence can teach us about the contemporary media landscape. This trajectory indicates that for the foreseeable future we will see more channels, more streamers, more professionals, and more money moving through this industry. Understanding Twitch, from a streamer's perspective, can teach us about how new media venues work, circulate, thrive, and fail. An examination of Twitch is not the study of a cult audience or a niche subculture, it's the study of how the media industry is changing in response to technological developments and cultural shifts. Technological innovation has put the tools and skills of video production into a greater number of hands than ever before. Neoliberal cultural assumptions are

redefining the role of the individual in society, occasionally mediated by notions of work and Leisure. Twitch can help us better understand these changes, how they are implemented, why, and to what end.

Finally, we must consider our roles as educators working in higher education. Most college departments that cover media communication – be they designated communication, mass communication, telecommunications, or media – still prepare students for employment within the traditional media industries. But our students aren't blind, and some who see the shifting sands of the professional media landscape plan accordingly by considering careers in new media. As an instructor, I've already taught undergraduates who generate income by developing YouTube content between classes. We need to stay ahead of the curve in understanding new media business practices and processes. As our students increasingly look at new media as a potential career path, scholars need to be able to help them prepare for that potential future, in both practice and theory. Theory is especially important for our students. While an aspiring undergraduate content creator may educate herself on the technologies of production, it is on our shoulders, as educators, to instill ethics and explicate understandings of political economy. To produce content for new media is to enter into a hierarchy of power relations, the knowledge of which may not be made salient by technical documents and "how to" videos. Understanding the complexity of economic and professional processes on Twitch is just the first step in developing programs to help students learn to navigate new media markets. As new media develop and evolve, we as scholars need to be at the forefront of change to be of maximum benefit to our students, and society in general.

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Appendix 1. Interview Protocols

Online Interview Recruitment Email:

Hello! My name is Chris Bingham and I am a PhD student at the University of Oklahoma. I am currently working on a dissertation that focuses on content production in new media. Your status as a professional Twitch streamer means that your perspective would be an extremely helpful addition to my research. Therefore, I am asking you to participate in a research study entitled: "An Ethnography of Twitch Streamers: Negotiating Professionalism in New Media Content Creation." Your participation is requested for this study because you are a Twitch broadcaster that makes some portion of your personal income from steaming video / content creation and related activities. The purpose of this study is to explore the ways that streaming video broadcasters negotiate the nature of their professionalism.

Participating in this study will involve conducting a 30-60 minute interview online using Skype or Discord. These sessions will be audio recorded using digital audio recording software. If you wish for your responses to remain anonymous, a pseudonym will be given to you during transcription, after which the audio files will be deleted.

Obviously, your participation in this study is voluntary, and should you agree to participate, you can always change your mind and quit at any time.

Should you agree to participate in the interview process, I would be happy to subscribe to your channel for the duration of the study (approximately six to twelve months).

If you are interested in participating in this study please reply to this email. Additionally, if you would like more information, I have attached a document to this email detailing the rationale and purpose of this study.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.
Chris

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PS: Rationale for study…
There are two trends that one notices in the scholarly literature on mass communication. First, while there are more books than you could read in a lifetime on the topic of "normative" media theories (how a media professional should approach

their job and why), 90% of them focus specifically on traditional print and television news journalism. Second, when many media scholars examine content distribution tools such as Twitch and YouTube, they describe the content found within as "user-generated" or "amateur." This, I feel, is a mistake, especially in regards to professional Twitch broadcasters. To me it is obvious that many Twitch broadcasters are professionals – *not amateurs* – not only because they make a living off their broadcasts, but because they run their channels with specific considerations in mind. In other words, successful Twitch broadcasters have a normative theory for steaming, even if it is not specifically or comprehensively stated. Subsequently, I find *Dropped Frames* endlessly interesting not because it provides novice broadcasters with streaming tips, but because it documents media professionals of a relatively young industry actively negotiating the nature of their own professionalism. That's exciting, and something that needs to be addressed in the mass communication literature. This is especially important for undergraduate students who want to work in the media industry and find that they can only take classes on traditional television studio and field production. The nature of media production has shifted and we as educators and researchers must address this shift for the sake of our students and our research. One essential first step is ethnographic interviews, which will allow streaming professionals to address the reasoning and theory behind their professional practices on their own terms.

Online Interview Script:

For writing up this research (dissertation, published journal articles, etc.) would you prefer the researcher use your real name, your Twitch username, or an anonymous pseudonym?

For your stream, do you have anyone who you consider to be your boss? If so, how would you characterize your interactions with them?

Some streamers state that they enjoy being their own boss, implying that they feel accountable mostly to themselves. Others say that they always consider their community first when making decisions, implying that they feel accountable to their audience. What about you? In your stream, to whom do you feel accountable and now does that accountability influence the process live streaming?

What does it feel like when someone subscribes to your stream?

When someone subscribes to your stream, to what extent is that an economic relationship, and to what extent is that a social relationship?

What does it feel like when someone donates to your stream?

When someone donates to your stream, to what extent is that an economic relationship, and to what extent is that a social relationship?

How do you address the idea of professional ethics?

How do you approach the idea of professional development? (Specific examples: Do you do anything to self-educate to make your stream better? Do you ever travel for the stream? How do you network?)

What types of things do you do for your stream that are not directly required for it to run?

How does streaming change the experience of playing video games?

How does streaming change your approach to playing video games?

Knowing that I am interested in the professional development of streamers, and having heard my questions, do you feel that there is anything I *should* be asking about that I didn't cover?

Having finished this interview would you like to change your response regarding the researcher's use of your real name, Twitch username, or anonymous pseudonym?

In-Person Recruitment Script:

Hello! Would you be interested in participating in a research project I are conducting at the University of Oklahoma? I'm interested in your experience as a Twitch broadcaster. I'm conducting this research project because I are hoping to learn more about how Twitch broadcasters address the idea of professionalism. About 20-30 people will participate. If you agree to participate, I will ask you to answer four or five questions about how you approach the practice of streaming. This should take about five minutes.

Your participation in this research doesn't involve any direct risks or benefits to you.

To protect your confidentiality, you will be assigned an anonymous pseudonym for when this research is written up. If you would prefer that your real name or your Twitch username to be used, please state so verbally at the beginning of the interview.

All of the information I'm collecting will be kept secure and confidential, and only my advisor, myself, and the Institutional Review Board of the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus will be able to look at it. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant or any concerns or complaints regarding your participation, you can contact me at cbingham@ou.edu or OU's IRB at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Before you agree to participate, remember that your participation is completely voluntary, you don't have to answer any question, and you can stop at any time. If you do choose to participate and then change your mind, you won't be penalized in any way. Finally, if you would like a printed copy of the information I've just read to you, you are welcome to have this one.

In-Person Interview Script:

Some streamers state that they enjoy being their own boss, implying that they feel accountable mostly to themselves. Others say that they always consider their community first when making decisions, implying that they feel accountable to their audience. What about you? In your stream, to whom do you feel accountable and now does that accountability influence the process live streaming?

When someone subscribes to your stream, to what extent is that an economic relationship, and to what extent is that a social relationship?

When someone donates to your stream, to what extent is that an economic relationship, and to what extent is that a social relationship?

How do you approach the idea of professional development? (Specific examples: Do you do anything to self-educate to make your stream better? Do you ever travel for the stream? How do you network?)

How does streaming change your approach to playing video games?

Knowing that I am interested in the professional development of streamers, and having heard my questions, do you feel that there is anything I *should* be asking about that I didn't cover?

Thank you for your time!

Additionally, if you wish to continue to participate in online interviews and focus groups past this initial interview, and you are chosen from the pool of potential participants, I will subscribe to your channel for the duration of the study (up to one year).

Appendix 2. *Dropped Frames* Episodes

All episodes of *Dropped Frames* can be accessed using the following URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ds4QP3doIzU&list=PL-oTJHKXHicT61ztYmcNGKaKBf03aOUuN

Dropped Frames EP01 - Pilot, Jan. 8, 2015
Dropped Frames EP02 w/ guest Bacon_Donut (Part 1), Jan. 14, 2015
Dropped Frames EP02 w/ guest Bacon_Donut (Part 2), Jan. 14, 2015
Dropped Frames EP03 (Part 1) - H1Z1 Talk, Jan. 21, 2015
Dropped Frames EP03 (Part 2) - Sponsored Streams + User Questions, Jan. 21 2015
Dropped Frames EP04 (Part 1) - Dying Light, Jan. 28, 2015
Dropped Frames EP04 (Part 2) - PAX South and More, Jan. 28, 2015
Dropped Frames EP05 (Part 1) - Darkest Dungeon! Feb. 4, 2015
Dropped Frames EP05 (Part 2) - Stream Critiques! Feb. 4, 2015
Dropped Frames EP06 (Part 1) - Survivor GameZ, Darkest Dungeon, Evolve, Feb. 11, 2015
Dropped Frames EP06 (Part 2) - G2A Discussion (Strong Opinions!), Feb. 11, 2015
Dropped Frames EP07 (Part 1) - We Rant about Games w/ TotalBiscuit, Feb. 18, 2015
Dropped Frames EP07 (Part 2) - YouTubers on Twitch, Feb. 18, 2015
Dropped Frames, Special Edition (Part 2) - Streaming as a Female, Mar. 20, 2015
Dropped Frames, Week 12 (Part 2) - Depression and Streaming, Apr. 1, 2015
Dropped Frames, Week 16, Part 2 - OPGroup.TV w/ Omeed, Apr. 29, 2015
Dropped Frames, Week 23, Part 2 - Twitch & YouTube Gaming, Jun. 24, 2015
Dropped Frames, Special Edition #2 (Part 1) - TwitchCon Commercial, Jul. 20, 2015
Dropped Frames, Week 28, Part 1 - Interview with GDQ's Romscout, Aug. 5, 2015
Dropped Frames, Week 36 - TwitchCon Recap, Sep. 30, 2015
Dropped Frames - How to Stream, Part 1, Oct. 7, 2015
Dropped Frames - Week 45 w/ Dodger - (Part 1), Dec. 12, 2015
Dropped Frames - Week 45 w/ Dodger - (Part 2), Dec. 12, 2015
Dropped Frames - Week 52 - Twitch n YouTube Chat (Part 1), Feb. 17, 2016
Dropped Frames - Week 55 - The Division (Part 1), Mar. 9, 2016
Dropped Frames - Week 55 - Video Games! News! (Part 2), Mar. 9, 2016
Dropped Frames - Week 58 - DannyBstyle talks Music (Part 1), Mar. 31, 2016
Dropped Frames - Week 59 - St. Judes Talk (Part 1), Apr. 13, 2016