UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
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Playing with the Double Bind: Authenticity, Gender, and Failure in Live Streaming

DISSERTATION

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Informatics

by

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Dissertation Committee:
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the women in my family who made sacrifices to give me a better life. They taught me by example to be compassionate, joyful, and resilient.

My great-grandmother, Neta Marteney Daniel Hoopes, a real-life Rosie the Riveter.

My grandmother, Judith Roach Daniel, who smiled every day of her life.

My mother, Katherine Daniel Lawson, stronger than any other person I know.

Mom: A piece of you is in everything I do. Don't ever think you aren't a part of my story. You are always there for me (with me), just as you have been my entire life. I'm proud to be your daughter.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my niece, Kiaya. Watching you grow in both curiosity and kindness gives me a lot of hope for the future.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to me and any other person who has ever been made to feel like a failure because of who they are or where they come from. I hope we always remember that failure is the realm of possibility and alternatives.

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VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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Misogyny and meritocracy in video game live streaming culture are powerful forces that shape the experience of streamers according to social norms and stereotypes regarding authenticity and gender. In streaming culture, feminine gender performances and authentic performance as a streamer are considered by many streamers to be mutually exclusive. Using the framework of double binds as patterns of competing expectations, I explore how popular notions of authenticity and the figure of an authentic player in video games culture interact with stereotypes about women in the context of the live streaming ecosystem. Using qualitative methods of discourse analysis, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews, I present an account of how marginalized streamers experience and deal with labor, harassment, authentic expression, and the social failure that comes with being deemed inauthentic. The central double bind revealed in this work is between gender and gamer identity. In this double bind, stereotypes about the skills and motivations of women place women further at odds with the streamer subject position when they are forced to choose between skillful play or emotional engagement. I argue that these double binds restricting women in streaming, while powerful, are paradoxical because streaming is a creative cultural industry fundamentally based in gendered labor. Harassing women and situating them as failures are therefore actions meant to disavow the many gendered aspects of live streaming labor. Discussing these issues with 17 femme non-binary, genderfluid, and women streamers, I found that many have struggled with issues of gender and authenticity in streaming. This manifested through their decisions to stream with the camera on or off, to

practice a game before streaming it, and conversational topics they have to avoid in chat. Despite these experiences, they persist in engaging in the work of streaming for the sake of their communities, for reasons of personal fulfillment, and to politically assert their presence on the platform. However, this persistence continues to expose them to abuse and objectification. What I contribute with this research is an understanding of how women in live streaming perform for or despite the sociotechnical affordances of live streaming that enact a meritocratic hierarchy, enforce notions of commercialized authenticity, and police and politicize gender performance. This account demonstrates a further need for an understanding of how streamers are marginalized and who benefits from this marginalization.

Chapter One: Introduction

One day in January 2022 I was on the phone with my mother, talking over some of the post-PhD job opportunities I was pursuing and an upcoming interview I had lined up, when she abruptly asked me, “Are you going to talk about your father like you always do?” I was slightly taken aback. “What do you mean?” I asked. She replied, “Well, in a lot of the things you do you mention your father and it's like I’m not there.” And that is true to an extent. In much of what I have written or presented during my PhD I have only discussed my father. He is a central figure in my personal history of video games. It was my dad who introduced me to the Nintendo, then the Super Nintendo, then PC gaming during my childhood. Subsequently, video games became a lifelong hobby and then eventually a research interest for me. In many ways, my dad set me on the path I am on now. And in the present, video games remain as one of the few subjects on which we can relate. But while it is true that my dad has had a strong presence in my PhD pursuits, it was my mom that partially inspired the direction of this dissertation on gender, labor, and authenticity in video game live streaming. In many ways, I write this dissertation for her as well as for myself and my research participants. To make the connection between her and my reasons for undertaking this dissertation project, I must briefly share a few more anecdotes from my life and my relationship with my mom. These threads will all come together, I promise.

On a morning in April 2018 I was reading through the Google Alert I had for the Blizzard Entertainment game *Overwatch* when I saw the article, “In South Korea, Gamers Stage an Inquisition Against Feminists” (D’Anastasio, 2018). Because I am a feminist and a game studies scholar who is particularly interested in the experiences of women in games, the article caught my eye and I wondered why it was in my pile of *Overwatch* news. The answer: Famerz. Famerz was a South Korean feminist organization that used to be known as both 4DVa and the National

D.Va Association. D.Va, also known as Hana Song, is a character from *Overwatch* whose fictional backstory describes her as a professional gamer from South Korea. Famerz adopted D.Va as a mascot and used a variation of an image associated with her, a white rabbit head, to promote themselves during marches for women in South Korea- including the worldwide #MeToo marches on January 21, 2018. Before April 2018 I had seen coverage on how D.Va had been used as a feminist symbol during the #MeToo marches, but Famerz was new to me. I began looking into additional coverage on Famerz (Deyo, 2017; Krishna, 2018) and I came to realize that everything I was reading linked professional competitive *Overwatch* player Kim "Geguri" Se-yeon to both Famerz and D.Va.

Geguri is a South Korean professional esports player and is the only woman who has ever competed in the Overwatch League (at the time of this writing). I was already aware of Geguri, but I admit I had not thought about her or her position in esports beyond a cursory hope that she was not driven out of the arena like other professional women have been. I began to investigate media coverage of Geguri (Ashcraft 2016; Frank 2017; Kimes 2017; Morrison 2018; Myers 2018) and I found a phrase that was applied to her several times: "reluctant icon," with a few variations describing her as a "feminist icon." Geguri: The Reluctant Feminist Icon. I began to ask: What made Geguri reluctant, feminist, or an icon? Why would she fail to embrace the feminist icon title that others were offering her? The reason she was being adopted as a feminist icon by groups like Famerz was because she had successfully and dramatically dispelled accusations made by men in competitive gaming that Geguri was too good for her gender; therefore, she must be cheating. In a high-profile event that was live streamed, Geguri played several competitive rounds of *Overwatch* with cameras on her face and hands and proved them all wrong- she was just that good (Ashcraft 2016). Geguri's very public defense of her own skills

is presumably what inspired feminist gamers across South Korea to take her up as a feminist gaming icon.

While I was thinking about Geguri's experiences, I was still thinking about the D'Anastasio article on feminism in the South Korean games industry (2018). In the article, D'Anastasio described how some forms of feminism in South Korea are viewed as antisocial rhetoric; feminism, the ideology of women who have failed to fit in to society. I began to wonder about linkages between feminism and failure in Western society. Exploring the answers to these questions led me to consider the place of failure in the lives of women who play video games- particularly those who play professionally- as well as connections between failure and feminism and the place of postfeminist subjectivities as a tactic for survival in the face of social condemnation that limits participation and success for women.

It was a conversation with my mom about the D'Anastasio article that pushed me to go beyond reflecting on these questions of feminism, social authenticity, and gender to pursuing a firsthand understanding of women who deal with these questions every day. In yet another phone conversation, this one taking place sometime in May 2018, I was explaining to my mother the major points of a paper I was writing on insights gained from the D'Anastasio article and research on women in esports; particularly about Geguri and what I was calling the double bind of gender and feminist expressions she had been placed in between fans and detractors. Something I was saying prompted my mom to reply that while she considered men and women to be equal- I think she went so far as to suggest she is better and more capable than most men she has met- she does not consider herself a feminist because she was not "one of those types to complain." This was striking to me, because earlier in our conversation she had been detailing the difficulties she was facing as the first woman to serve as commander of her military veterans'

organization. I think we both knew those troubles were stemming from preconceptions and stereotypes about her gender. When I pointed this out to her, she insisted that even if that were true she could overcome those obstacles through hard work; because anyone can achieve success if they work hard. All my life I had heard similar comments from her, about how hard work would help me overcome any obstacle and prove my worth. So, meritocracy enters the conversation; or rather, has always haunted my life in the background without a name.

While I honestly believe that my mom believed, and still believes, what she said about hard work overcoming the obstacles of gender- after all, she did reach the rank of Sergeant First Class in the United States Army- to me it was evidence of the kind of postfeminist sensibility I had been thinking of in the case of Geguri. My mother helped me toward the realization that there are conditions and structures, particularly in contexts that are traditionally thought of as predominantly masculine (like the military and video games), that discipline women to accept a status quo based on patriarchal notions of what success is (especially if they achieve success within that status quo) and furthermore to internalize any failure to succeed as a personal failure, not a systemic or structural one.

This realization is not particularly novel; it has been proven time and time again by a number of brilliant researchers working in the spaces of gaming and streaming (Paul 2018; Gray 2020; Phillips 2020). Nor was it the first time I had been introduced to the idea. But I began to really think through how this truth was being reproduced in new ways and in new contexts that are familiar and close to me. These questions and the research I was already doing in esports that was adjacent to live streaming is what ultimately brought me to the technologies, spaces, cultures, and communities of video game live streaming as the focus for my dissertation. I began to investigate what the daily re-entrenchment of meritocracy, neoliberal, and patriarchal values

has meant for the everyday realities of streamers who are not cisgender straight white men. In a culture that is simultaneously growing in feminist awareness, popular and post-feminist sensibilities as well as popular misogyny (Banet-Weiser 2018), what problems do people with identities and practices that run counter to the social norms encounter in live streaming? And considering the technical affordances of video game live streaming, how might those problems be magnified when you, your identity, and your body are constantly under surveillance?

Currently I am not a live streamer, and I may never be one, but I am invested in this research and the success of other women playing and working in this space because the stakes are important for all of us. I want a world where there are alternatives to play and multiple ways to be a feminist that are not also harmful and regressive. While this dissertation is attempting to be mindful of the complex and varied forms of feminist expression, I am in no way advocating for the point of view of trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFS) or other exclusionary forms of feminism. But I must acknowledge that I am white as well as a feminist who embodies the aspect of the tempered radical, the cautious feminist, the feminist damp blanket as opposed to the fiery feminist killjoy. And it is my privilege that has allowed me to occupy that place in the world. Live streaming is a context where the attainment and leverage of privilege is fraught with complications, particularly for those who are not already social and technically set up for success. What motivated me to meet and speak with femme non-binary, genderfluid, and women streamers was a desire to understand the complex and varied ways that people are living in live streaming, experiencing sexism and misogyny, and dealing with an assortment of what I refer to in this dissertation as double binds.

My History of Live Streaming

I first discovered video game live streaming in 2014 when a friend sent me a link to the live feed of the very first *Twitch Plays Pokémon* run of *Pokémon Red*.[1] *Twitch Plays Pokémon* was designed to allow live stream viewers to individually or collectively make choices that directly dictated how the game progressed. I watched periodically for the next few weeks in fascination as memes and a narrative arose out of the interactions between viewers and the mechanics of the game. I remember saying to my partner, "There's a paper in this. I wish I could write it." At the time I was beginning a graduate program that prioritized professional development over academic research and I was frustrated that I had neither the time nor the resources to explore this phenomenon. This frustration made me realize that what I loved most was research and ultimately led to my decision to apply to a PhD program for a chance to explore the type of research I had always longed to do but could never accomplish due to a lack of support. Twitch and *Twitch Plays Pokémon* revived my dream of being an academic who studies video game culture. I was also simply charmed, like many were, by the events of *Twitch Plays Pokémon* and the premise of sites like Twitch.tv for new ways to be social online.

In 2016 I was admitted to a PhD program at a university on the other side of the country, a university that launched an esports program as I arrived on campus. Far from everything I have ever known, I fell in love with video games all over again because playing online allows me to maintain the friendships that I left behind. At that time, I was drawn to *Overwatch* as a player and as a researcher because of the sociality and player culture which grows around it. The growth of esports and the popularity of *Overwatch* at UCI, my own love of playing *Overwatch*, and my feelings of loneliness resulted in a great deal of time spent watching *Overwatch* live

[1] Thank you Drew.

streams in the first few months of my PhD, particularly professional *Overwatch* competitions. It was during one of these professional matches that I had my second most memorable brush with the possibilities for social interaction magnified by live streaming platforms. I cannot remember who was playing or the results of the competition; what I remember is how Twitch chat reacted to the presence of a woman on screen. Up until this point all the people visible to me onscreen- players, tournament staff, shoutcasters- had been men. Then the match ended, and a woman appeared on stream to interview one of the players. The accompanying chat was inundated with comments about her appearance. They criticized her hair, makeup, and clothing. They made jokes about women not actually existing in games. They obviously did not take her seriously as a professional. They told her she did not belong. I have heard all of this, too, gaming as a woman online. I learned very quickly in my earliest days gaming online to not use public voice channels or indicate in any way that I was a woman due to the rude or outright skeevy comments I would receive as a result.

Witnessing this treatment of another woman at a time when I was surrounded by positive narratives about the growth of live streaming and esports, I began to think more about the visibility and treatment of women in these spaces. My interest in *Overwatch* grew to examine esports and video game live streaming as realms of opportunities for professional development, financial success, and social participation. Realms that were inhospitable to the presence of people whose visible presentations as women subjected them to discipline from a games culture steeped in meritocracy and misogyny. I began to consider how women interested in being professional players are subjected to the standards of male peers who have had more time and support to develop as players, who imagine themselves as the rightful benefactors of what games have to offer, and who seem invested in denying women the same opportunities to succeed as

professionals and social participants in these growing fields. This consideration in turn led me to wonder about the decisions women make while playing as live streamers, the different forms of labor that constitute the work of live streaming, and their encounters with harassment and disciplining from viewers. Why do women persist as players and streamers when they are so often perceived as inauthentic and illegitimate participants?

Situating this Project

There exists within video games a structure that several scholars have described as the "hegemony of play." Originating from an influential paper written by feminist game scholars, the concept refers to the existence of technological, commercial, and cultural influences which have established both exclusionary practices and a narrow standard for the products of play and games (Fron et al. 2007). In other words, the culture and products of video game culture have created a status quo where the needs of a "power elite," which Fron et al. describe as "predominantly white, secondarily Asian, and male" (2007, p. 1) are constantly emphasized over all other player groups. This power elite in gaming finds power in categorizing themselves as the authentic and real members of the community, while everyone else must earn their place by appealing to this imagined primary audience.[2] This hegemony has been examined by a series of feminist scholars to understand how it is constructed and entrenched through misogyny, sexism, racism, and homophobia in video games themselves as well as video game communities (Shaw 2014; Gray 2020; Phillips 2020). These exclusionary practices have found expression in a variety of ways; a lack of representation or outright negative representations in video games, rhetoric which

[2] I use this term imagined primary audience to indicate that while this group retains a lot of power and influence in video gaming, and now streaming culture, research has shown that the range of people who actually play video games is more diverse and greater than what is seen on the surface.

positions subjects like women as less capable players, and more active forms of violence such as harassment, doxxing, and swatting. Additionally, this hegemony has been examined through the lens of capitalism and neoliberalism, both of which are used to justify and reinforce the right of the "majority" audience in video games to engage in exclusionary practices (Fron et al. 2007; Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 2009; Paul 2018). The onus of succeeding or failing in a system that is actively hostile to particular players and forms of play are placed on the individual. Considering video games in relation to these social, economic, and ideological practices has become even more important in the current moment, when video game production and culture has become increasingly intertwined with popular culture and global economies. This has also become true of live streaming, which in recent years has figured largely in political actions in the United States (Bonilla and Rosa 2015; Gray 2020) and across the globe (Davies 2020; Kavada & Treré 2019) and acted as a foundational element of the "new normal" established during the COVID-19 pandemic (Khobra & Gaur 2020). In my work, I examine the ways that exclusionary norms and beliefs established in video games, particularly misogyny and meritocracy, have found new economic, social, and cultural footholds in the influential online context of live streaming on Twitch.

Twitch.tv is a live streaming platform which hosts user-generated content that is broadcast to live audiences. A spinoff of the homecamming site Justin.tv and currently owned by Amazon, Twitch has largely been associated with the live streaming of video game content but has changed over time to accommodate other creative pursuits such as musical performance, crafting, and cooking. Utilizing a combination of features from both traditional broadcast television and video hosting sites like YouTube, Twitch offers a customizable infrastructure where individuals can plug in and go live on a "channel" of their own where they are both the

producer and the star of the broadcast. I use the term star to refer to streamers deliberately, because many streamers have found fame, celebrity, and influence through their efforts on Twitch. Indeed, it is the possibility of this success and the idea of a like-minded community that draw many to the Twitch platform, which as of April 2021 had approximately 9.3 million active streamers and an average of 30 million daily viewers (Clement 2021; Twitch 2021a). However, its strong association with video game culture and misogynistic and meritocratic ideologies stemming from within that culture has led to both formal and informal hierarchies among streamers on Twitch that make it difficult for many to "break through." Additionally, this hierarchy has very definitive gendered lines. Similar to how women are often considered less skilled at video games, they have come to be constructed as less capable streamers as well, often through accusations of an overreliance on their appearances or bodies. In a recent exposure of Twitch streamer earnings, it was found that only three women are in the top 100 earners (Jiang 2021). Each of those women have been publicly harassed because of their gender.

But what makes this gendered harassment so striking for me is that many of the different forms of labor that make up live streaming, which I will collectively refer to as streaming labor throughout this dissertation, are primarily based in the work of relational and emotional management most commonly associated with women. The emphasis streaming places on growing community and providing emotional satisfaction to viewers for all streamers is very much akin to the labor that minoritized people, like women, have been coerced to provide in a number of contexts that predate live streaming. Thus, the harassment of women in streaming seems to me to be a disavowal of streaming's foundation in feminine labor. And because Twitch like television has such an emphasis on visuals, the differences of players and streamers- and the disparate ways they are treated- are visibly highlighted and even heightened. What I argue in this

research is that this heightening of visual differences, especially along gender lines, serves to police and politicize gender performance in live streaming. Furthermore, a concurrent increased attention to a meritocratic hierarchy in live streaming magnifies the complications of streaming labor for those of minoritized genders.

Research Aims, Objectives, Methods, and Questions

The thesis motivating this dissertation is that misogynistic and neoliberal conceptions of gender and authenticity are interacting in video game live streaming in a way that significantly and uniquely alters the experiences of femme non-binary, genderfluid, and women as live streamers. My argument, based in a review of the literature on live streaming as well as my own research and experiences with live streaming, is that these conceptions found in the dominant video game culture justify the perpetuations of a set of practices which limit the participation of women in games and in streaming by suggesting that their presence is illegitimate or even harmful. While the trials and tribulations of those experiencing misogyny are frequent fodder in the popular press, the academic literature on live streaming has, through an overreliance on convenience sampling methods, underreported the experiences of non-binary, genderfluid, and women streamers. My aim therefore is to provide an account of the experiences of these streamers so we can better understand how the labor of streaming is different for them, how this labor is made more complex by sexist expectations, and how they are able to express various forms of femininity and feminism. By addressing the ways that values such as meritocracy and misogyny continue to find purchase on Twitch, I reveal how popular notions of authenticity and the authentic player in video games culture interact with stereotypes about women in the context of the live streaming ecosystem. I demonstrate how the experiences of non-binary, genderfluid,

and women online and on platforms like Twitch, and their motivations for seeking those experiences, are more varied and complex than popular narratives online and in streaming would suggest. While I use a variety of methods to address my argument in this dissertation, I place the greatest emphasis on the interviews I conducted with 17 streamers in late 2020. While my work in discourse analysis and participant observation has been valuable for gaining an etic understanding, it was crucial for me to actually speak with those with actual insider experience in the processes and culture of streaming and who this work, and work line mine, might be of greatest benefit. This account is their accounts of streaming, interpreted from my perspective as a white, woman, feminist games scholar.

In order to ethnographically explore the practices and concerns of women who stream, and the stakes of their participation in that space, my dissertation utilized a combination of discourse analysis, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews to explore the following research questions:

(1) What is the relationship between labor and gender in live streaming? How do different life experiences, personal stakes, and identities influence this relationship?

(2) What is the relationship between normative conceptualizations of meritocracy, authenticity, and gender in live streaming? How does this impact labor in live streaming?

(3) What are the outcomes of stereotypes and harassment on performances of gender and streamer identity?

(4) How is femininity and feminism expressed, performed, politicized, and policed in live

streaming? How is surveillance and policing magnified by the sociotechnical affordances[3] of live streaming?

In addition to answering these specific questions, I grapple with the place of failure in all of this. Continuing themes from other work I have done (Cullen 2018), I consider failure as a social status for players and not just an outcome of the experience of play. At the risk of being overly simplistic, I suggest that women are placed in a double bind in the dominant game cultures and in the spaces where its values promulgate (like live streaming platforms) of having to perform forms of femininity that are acceptable to games culture or to align themselves with feminist values that are antithetical to the masculine meritocracy that dominates games. In either case, women risk being interpreted as failures as either gamers or as feminists because these identities are considered incompatible. Ultimately, I try to present an understanding of how feminism can exist in live streaming while also being attentive to the choices of women who reject feminism in order to be accepted as legitimate social participants, who embrace capitalist constraints and rhetoric in order to be seen as authentic and real.

This dissertation exposes the "toxic politics" (Phillips 2020, p. 21) of gaming and streaming, interrogates how difference gets constructed in these spaces, and describes the impact on the everyday experiences of live streamers. By examining how misogynist and neoliberal principles have orchestrated a logic where gender, player, and streamer hierarchies seem natural, this contributes knowledge to ongoing academic research to understand how these things have become embedded as common sense in our cultures. The most significant problems for streamers experiencing misogyny are not high-profile events like GamerGate, but the inferential sexism,

[3] This term is meant to reflect how the possibilities and opportunities for meaning making on community platforms like Twitch are constrained by both socio-cultural configurations as well as technical capabilities (Fragoso, Rebs, and Barth 2012).

stereotypes, and harassment that they face every day. My intention is that by sharing and interpreting the accounts of these streamers through my own experiences as a woman, player, and feminist that I will help others find new avenues of realization, action, and research that will begin to relax the pressure caused by the double binds found throughout these chapters.

A Note on Gender Language in this Dissertation

This introduction is also a good opportunity to briefly address my use of gendered terms like "woman/women" and "man/men" throughout this dissertation. As Theresa Senft noted in her work on camgirls, research on digital life has had the unfortunate tendency to assume "offline identity to be material rather than performative" (2008, p. 36)- often due to assumptions made about gender, the body, and what is real, authentic, and valuable. Senft calls on Donna Haraway's image of the cyborg to argue that real bodies are both organic and technological, or in another word; constructed. Gender performativity is the result of several fluctuating conditions; building from Judith Butler who made these ideas most famous, gender is constructed iteratively. This is true in all contexts where identity is performed and expressed. For my dissertation interviews, I invited any woman, feminine non-binary, or genderfluid individual who identified with the issues of women and feminine individuals in streaming to volunteer to be interviewed. I was interested in speaking with anyone whose gender identity and performance had exposed them to experiences of misogyny. My reasoning for this is like that of Amanda Phillips in their recent work on gender and digital culture (2020, p. 21)- I want to make meaningful and recognizable gestures at popularly held beliefs about gender and the reality of living with or against those beliefs. It is not my intention to essentialize the experience or identity of anyone or to say that others do not share the concerns that I outline throughout this document, but it is my

intent in this dissertation to recognize the lived truths of those who struggle in digital culture with the consequences of being perceived as feminine or as women (and any related ostracization in games and streaming culture), acknowledge the constructive and changing nature of these perceptions, and consider how these may have factored into their performances as streamers.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of eight chapters, with three chapters of results at its heart. Chapter 2, Background and Context, presents an overview of previous research on gender, authenticity, meritocracy, labor, and harassment in games and live streaming. This background information is accompanied by a description of the context of my research, the live streaming platform Twitch, as both a site and a community.

Chapter 3, Theoretical Foundations, explains the overarching theories and concepts that provided the framework for my approach to this dissertation project, such as those relating to double binds, disciplining, popular feminism, habitus, meritocracy, performance, performativity, and sexism. Those theories and concepts largely derive from the work of feminist and gender scholars from within the fields of popular culture, digital media, video games, and live streaming.

Chapter 4, Methods and Positionality, describe the methods I used to conduct my dissertation research- discourse analysis, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews- and suggest their value and importance for research in online contexts and digital labor environments like live streaming. This chapter also presents my personal relationship to a qualitative methodology and the feminist ethos which underscores its use.

Chapter 5, Femininity, Feminism, and Failure, is the first of the results chapters and is a

detailed exploration of the ideologies I believe lie at the core of this live streaming structure that uses experiences of misogyny to bind, entangle, and shape a streaming subject. The femme non-binary, genderfluid, and women streamers I interviewed often encountered gender discrimination and stereotypes that were used to justify their mistreatment and positioning as inauthentic and fake in the context of streaming culture. The feeling for many of these streamers is that live streaming favors a softer, more traditionally feminine, and white form of gender performance. These streamers must balance a thin line between being appealing while not seeming artificial, caught up in a tension between being authentic to viewer expectations and being "really real." Failure to not live up to the expectations is seen as either a privilege or a radical act that will lead to marginalization, devaluation, or even abuse, which is why even those streamers who do identify as feminist often downplay this and take on more a tempered radical role

Chapter 6, Streaming as Gendered Labor, presents my argument, supported by statements from the streamers I interviewed, for how live streaming is inherently feminized labor due to its reliance on emotional performance, care work, and community building. In fact, the social and technical structure of Twitch enhances the gendered labor aspects of creative digital work in live streaming. The streamers I interviewed are all engaged in and preoccupied with emotional engagement of their audience, a common concern for streamers of all genders. However, the feminine aspect of this work is often downplayed in favor of a masculine preference for skillful game performance.

Chapter 7, Harassment, Meritocracy, and Performance, takes a deeper look at how practices of harassment and investment in the myth of meritocracy in video games and live streaming impact gender, streamer, and player performance. Streamers face several common stereotypes and forms of harassment which are predicated on assumptions about the inferiority of

women and femininity to participate fairly. Performance in streaming, therefore, is a careful negotiation within or against these presumptions and harassment is the policing mechanism which reinforces norms of performance favored by the masculine status quo.

The final chapter of this dissertation is the conclusion. In this chapter I weave together the concepts, topics, and themes revealed throughout the results chapters. Not with an eye toward saying anything definitive about what authenticity or femininity or feminism should look like in live streaming, but rather to provide an overview of how those things are currently imagined and experienced.

Chapter Two: Background and Context

Before discussing the experiences of women live streamers that I observed or that were described to me, I want to offer some context to these conversations and my analyses by presenting previous research on gender, authenticity, meritocracy, and harassment in games and live streaming. It has been well established that there are differences in the way gender is represented in games (Shaw 2014; Salter and Blodgett 2017; Paul 2018) and that there exists a common misperception that gender dictates differing relationships with, and even the ability to play, games (Consalvo 2012; Paaßen et al. 2017). Adrienne Shaw described this issue of difference in games as "a disjuncture between how players are imagined and who actually plays games (2014, p. viii)." Shaw is referring to the popular stereotype that centers heterosexual, white, cisgendered men as the primary players of video games. Kishonna Gray utilized Fron et al.'s term to describe this construction of white straight men as the imagined primary audience in games as the "hegemony of play" (2020, p. 33). The hegemony of play describes a complex layering of technological, commercial, and cultural power structures that have entrenched a status quo which positions women as "non-gamers" (Fron et al. 2007).

These hegemonic stereotypes have been examined in the context of the video game industry itself and have been used to explain why mainstream games lack diverse representation, but Shaw's research demonstrated that representation in games themselves matters less to some players than how they were perceived and treated by other players. Like Shaw before me, I am less interested in games and more interested in players; in particular, the attempts of some players to deal with how perceptions of the "authentic player" are limited in a gendered way that has very real implications for the participation of women. My work seeks to understand how in the current moment in video game culture that notions of legitimacy, authenticity, and realness

have become linked to gender by examining video game players and fans in the context of video game live streaming.

This chapter begins by presenting a selection of previous research on women in games that has informed my thinking, and which acts as the foundation in this dissertation for understanding both the stakes of participation for women in spaces where they are rendered illegitimate and for demonstrating how norms in video game culture have reproduced in the space of live streaming. After this overview of research on women in games, this chapter then situates Twitch as a site, as a culture, and as a community where women face both opportunities and challenges for participation by presenting relevant literature on live streaming. I develop this context by summarizing the preexisting works on live streaming that inspired my own research around the topics of labor, gender, and performance and by highlighting areas where my own research contributes to this growing body of work. Combined, these sets of literature establish a background for how women play and socialize in video games by presenting common motivations for limiting or denying their participation, I extend this research into the space of live streaming to explain how the social and technical structure of Twitch reinforces misogynistic and meritocratic trends in gaming while also presenting new avenues for exploring personal expression and community building.

Women Have Always Been in Games

It is well documented that women have been a part of contemporary gaming cultures since the very beginning, making and playing games (Shaw 2014; Chess 2017). But it is equally well-documented that there remains a great deal of resistance to their participation (Salter and Blodgett 2017). One question this suggests is: why do some men feel they must define and police

authenticity among video game players? One answer is that the history of women's involvement in video game culture has been obscured or erased. T. L. Taylor suggested in her work on esports that a positive increase in the valuation of skills related to technology and computing in the 1980s and 1990s prompted a cultural shift wherein the early contributions of women in those fields were devalued or ignored in favor of recuperating geek masculinity into the larger social structure (2012, p. 114). This is not dissimilar to larger cultural shifts that have attempted to obscure or devalue the contributions of women in technology more broadly; for example, the work of black women as the original computers at NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) was also obscured for a time in favor of a growing masculine association with space technology (Edwards and Harris 2017). After the video game market experienced a brief collapse in the early 1980s, it reemerged with a focus on the people who played through the collapse as their core audience, the young white men who could afford to keep playing, and they have remained the perceived core audience ever since (Kocurek 2015; Shaw and Chess 2016; Gray 2020). As video gaming grew into mainstream culture and strong associations with technological skill, it also grew in cultural legitimacy and financial viability. In the process, the presence of women in video game culture was increasingly minimalized, manipulated, and mocked. Attempts to reclaim those spaces that have now been perceived as wholly masculine for decades has prompted hostility from men and an investment in a definition of the "authentic player" that excludes women. As a result, women, and other players who do not match the stereotypical image of a video game player as a straight, white, heterosexual man, are consistently asked to justify themselves as players to the game industry and to other groups of players (Shaw 2012, p. 29).

Another answer to the question as to why some men deny women a place in video game

culture is that they are attempting to protect a gendered gamer identity that they find valuable. Following the reasoning of both Adrienne Shaw (2012) and Christopher Paul (2018), gamer in this dissertation does not refer to anyone who plays video games, player is used in that case. Instead, I use gamer to reference a subgroup of players (of largely straight white men) who deliberately choose the term "gamer" as a core identity category for themselves. I will also use gamer as a shorthand to refer to the subculture in gaming that adopts this identity and the exclusionary and misogynist values it has come to be associated with since GamerGate. Prior to the mainstream success of video games, players and games were often subjected to critique and ridicule (Shaw and Chess 2016), which prompted the development of an "outsider group mentality" that persists in the present; indeed, the growing mainstream popularity of games, the efforts to show how women have always been a part of games, and the new influx of women in games seem to reinforce that mentality (Salter and Blodgett 2017; Condis 2018). In her book *Raising the Stakes*, Taylor describes how men who play games developed their own formulation of masculinity that she refers to as "geek masculinity" (2012, p. 112). While some formulations of geek masculinity have recognized the difficulty of being an outsider and welcomed those of different identities and practices, there are also those that have responded aggressively or even violently to perceived intrusions and have become known as toxic (Salter and Blodgett 2017; Condis 2018). In 2012 Taylor theorized that geek masculinity goes through cycles of tensions in relation to hegemonic masculinity, which according to Taylor not only influences other forms of masculinity but formulations of femininity as well. Geeks (including video game players) have often been subordinated to other forms of masculinity in culture and have occupied places in a gender hierarchy not too far removed from women (Taylor 2012). Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett further developed Taylor's formulation of geek masculinity to suggest that elements of

video games themselves, and the corresponding culture around games, have encouraged a form of hypermasculinity to grow in games; a hypermasculinity that encourages sexism to protect the integrity of an insider status (2017). Indeed, this hypermasculinity or toxic geek masculinity in video game culture has persisted despite attempts to show that the "imagined difference between men and women as gamers" (Taylor 2012, p. 119) is a social construction. In 2012, Mia Consalvo suggested that displays of toxicity in gamer culture were indicative of an investment in reasserting patriarchal, masculine privilege in video games (2012). "The 'encroachment' of women and girls into what was previously a male-gendered space has not happened without incident, and will probably only become worse before it (hopefully) improves" (Consalvo 2012). In the same year, Lisa Nakamura commented that "the more gaming capital becomes identified with white masculinity, the more bitter the battle over its distribution, possession, and circulation will become" (2012, p. 3). These comments predate and even predict the events of GamerGate, perhaps now the most famous and illustrative instance of patriarchal violence in games which will be discussed later in the chapter, by only a few years.

In addition to obscuring the history of women in games and anxiety about threats to the social capital offered by the gamer identity, previous research in games has also demonstrated that there exists an enculturation of particular forms of aggressive and misogynistic behavior amongst gamers. For example, verbal harassment in games has become a common occurrence and is characterized as originating in competitive game play which encourages trash talk directed towards opponents as well as open criticism of those who are perceived as less skilled (Tang and Fox 2016, p. 513), skill being one of the potential markers of a subcultural insider- the authentic gamer. In fact, some players have suggested that harassment, including sexual harassment, are a necessary part of gaming culture (Hamilton 2012). Participating in harassing behavior in gaming

culture can then be seen as one way of signaling insider status as well as targeting outsiders for exclusion. Women are often the targets of this harassment because they are more likely to be considered both an outsider and inherently less skilled game players because of their gender (Consalvo 2012). In many ways, a claim to success through skill and not appearance has become a sort of moral high ground for gamers to take (Zhang and Hjorth 2017, p. 813).

The threat of harassment also serves to constrain discussion and behaviors in gaming along lines favored by the hegemony of play. In her work examining geek masculinity, Megan Condis draws on Foucault to explain how systems respond to challenges of authority by intensifying and proliferating discussion of problematic subjects to render them "knowable (and thus containable)" (2018, p. 45). Defining women in games as problematic subjects allows them to be kept on the margins, but also allows them to be integrated into systems of exploitation. The participation of women is seemingly only valuable insofar as that participation upholds the hierarchy; although, the resistance of women to that hierarchy is still valuable in that it can justify a re-entrenchment of the hierarchy. Despite the fact that men (particularly young, white, heterosexual men) are no longer the single largest demographic in games, they are still prefigured as the most important because the system of designing and marketing games already favors them (Chess 2017). Individuals who do not match that market image are constantly pressured to perform to the concept of authenticity favored by the masculine and meritocratic logics of the hegemony of play (Shaw 2012, 29; Gray 2016; Gray 2020). But some bodies, as I argue in this dissertation, are socially constructed to fail to live up to the values inherent in the system; for example, the continued objectification of women in games and games culture is a contributing factor to their continued outsider status (Paaßen et al. 2017; Salter and Blodgett 2017). It is difficult to achieve respect and success in any conventional way when the cultural

norms around you constantly focus on the ways your body and play are different.

Work that has dealt with authenticity and realness in games has largely considered these topics in relation to games themselves. Salter and Blodgett describe how in the late 2000s and early 2010s, when online multiplayer gaming experiences were hitting their stride, much of the debate about who could claim to be a real player of video games was being articulated along a hardcore versus casual dichotomy (2017, p. 73); the types of games a player plays influenced their social capital in games culture. Between 2010 and 2012 there was a shift in the games market and games that did not appeal to the core audience began gaining public recognition; *Farmville* won Game of the Year in 2010 from the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences and in 2011 the New York Times published a piece on *Angry Birds* (Shaw and Chess 2016). Despite the success of these games, many gamers still supported a distinction between hardcore/authentic players and casual/inauthentic players based on game genres. Casual players were framed as less authentic than hardcore players because the hardcore epithet denoted someone who had supposedly invested more time, money, and even feeling into the kinds of games that bring the most social capital in video game culture. Hardcore games have been broadly characterized as more difficult in terms of skill and emotion than casual games (Juul 2010; Chess 2017). Over time, gamer as an identity became associated with a rejection of casual play and players (Shaw and Chess 2016, p. 277; Phillips 2020). A casual player is not an authentic player because they are perceived as not playing the right kinds of games and not investing as much in game communities and culture. Salter and Blodgett's examination of this debate established how gamers continue to be emotionally invested in creating boundaries to indicate who belongs to video game culture and who are imposters (2017, p. 74).

Taking the hardcore versus casual debate at face value, casual play and players are

rejected because the growth of the casual market is disrupting the value of identifying as hardcore (Shaw and Chess 2016, p. 284). However, there is absolutely a gendered component to the rejection of casual games and players. It is not a coincidence that women are more commonly associated with casual gaming and that both have developed reputations for ruining games (Chess 2017). Recognizing the growth of both the industry and the diversity of players is threatening to those who used to dictate what it meant to be a gamer. For several years, women were the primary example of the growing diversity in games, and it is women who are more associated with casual games and gaming. In an article published in 2017, Paaßen et al. reported that the stereotypes about women as casual, less skilled players have persisted, and they suggested this as an explanation for why almost all the most visible figures in gaming culture at that time were men (2016). What drew me to conduct research on video game live streaming was the narrative that streaming represented a space in video game culture where more women could achieve visibility and success based on merit. But not only are women derided for their association with casual games, women who play so-called hardcore games, even at the competitive level, and demonstrate the level of skill and commitment that has been used to gatekeep the entrance into games continue to be thought of as outliers and interlopers in spaces they do not belong (Taylor 2012; Chess 2017; Cote 2020).

Feminism and Fear

However, it is not only gender differences that mark many players as outsiders in video game culture, but ideological ones as well. Video game culture, of the kind embraced by gamers, is invested in preserving a patriarchal status quo based in meritocracy and misogyny and is therefore largely resistant to differing ideologies, namely feminism. The resistance to feminism

seen in video game and streaming culture can be seen more broadly as its popularity and presence grows across all types of media and platforms. This growth is often met with fear, aggression, and even violence as feminists confront patriarchal structures and highlight inequalities (Banet-Weiser 2018). Sarah Banet-Weiser has argued that feminism is often framed in media as a set of risks to society because "feminism threatens conventional definitions and performances of masculinity" (2018, p. 3). In video games and live streaming, women who play differently, make critiques of the mores of video game cultures, and who perform as streamers in ways that contradict expectations for women are often judged as inauthentic or "what is wrong with games" (Ruberg, Cullen, Brewster 2019) due to the threat of introducing casualness and feminization in the "real" and "serious" space of games (Taylor 2012, 118). Toxic geek or gamer masculinity of the kind that I am discussing in this dissertation is rooted in a fear of change and a loss of power represented by the inclusion of feminist ideals. Intrusions from feminine coded objects, people, and ideologies into the spaces of games, which many consider to be by default both patriarchal and masculine, have been met with increasing public resistance for the past several years (Consalvo 2012; Salter and Blodgett 2017). Amanda Phillips has reasoned that the community which claims a gamer identity has come to define itself by its resistance to differences and dissent in games, particularly those that are introduced by women and feminists (2020, 29). "Real" gamers don't ruin the fun by criticizing the details of games or attempting to introduce new (or any) ideologies (Phillips 2020, p. 9). By this identitarian logic of the gamer, as Phillips describes it, feminists can never be "real gamers" or "real streamers."

The most well-known instance of this resistance to the participation of women and incorporation of feminist principles in games is perhaps GamerGate. GamerGate was a series of events beginning in 2014 orchestrated by organized groups using patriarchal rhetoric and

gamified tactics of harassment and violence (ironically in the name of ethics) that were meant to silence feminist critiques of structural issues surrounding games (Cross 2016; Salter and Blodgett 2017; Chess 2017). GamerGate was essentially a very strong response to attempts to diversify, or highlight pre-existing diversity, in video games and video game culture because these attempts were seen as a threat to the system in place that privileged white men- the hegemony of play. GamerGate on a large scale demonstrated how segments of games culture uses harassment, or the potential for harassment, as a way to constrain participation and police notions of authenticity. The events of GamerGate were horrible and should not be overlooked or downplayed, however the behaviors and beliefs on display during GamerGate were already present in mainstream gaming (Gray et al. 2017; Phillips 2020). Ultimately, what is most notable about GamerGate is how it highlighted the very real consequences that actions taken online can have while underscoring how frequently women are forced to grapple with these consequences as part of their everyday experiences in gaming culture (Cross 2016; Gray et al. 2017). GamerGate also highlighted a larger trend of resistance to critical analysis and assessment of structural inequalities in video game culture (Paul 2018). Although live streaming is a subculture all its own, it has strong associations with games culture and many of the ideologies underlying video game culture have found new life in the space of streaming. As a result, participating in streaming culture carries the expectation that women must conform to masculine notions of feminine performance and the belief that feminism ruins the fun for everyone.

You're Already One of Us: The Growth of Twitch

Returning to the previous discussion of toxic geek/gamer masculinity and its resistance to feminism, this research contributes to that body of work by extending its arguments into the

space of live streaming. In the first chapter of her book *Watch Me Play*, Taylor likens live streaming to broadcast television, describing live streaming as "an interesting collision of the televisual, computer games, the internet, and computer-mediated communication" (2018, p. 2). Indeed, as early as 2009 the disruptive media potential of DIY broadcasting and Justin.tv (the progenitor of Twitch) was recognized by academia (Bruns 2009). Taylor, like myself and many others, chose Twitch as the primary site of their analysis because it is the most prominent example of this collision. Inherent in this collision and within the medium of live streaming, which I will focus on for the remainder of this chapter, are the values of video games and internet culture. Foremost, I wish to demonstrate how practices of gatekeeping and policing video games as a masculine space, reflecting meritocratic and misogynistic values, has found purchase in video game live streaming (Salter and Blodgett 2017; Scott 2019). In order to make this demonstration, I first offer a description of Twitch as a platform, a place, and a community, highlight some relevant aspects of the history of live streaming that has shaped the context of Twitch, and then summarize the pre-existing literature on video game live streaming that primarily focuses on labor, performance, and gender- or an intersection of two or all of those topics.

Twitch.tv is an online live streaming platform for video games that spun off the homecam site Justin.tv in 2011 and was purchased by Amazon in 2014. Twitch is an aggregate of live streams known as "channels" that are run by individuals, groups, or organizations and which broadcast content to a live, interactive audience. Twitch has grown incrementally in the past several years, both in terms of its participation numbers and its cultural influence. When Taylor published *Watch Me Play*, the first book on Twitch and video game live streaming, she reported there were 2.2 million streamers registered on the site as of 2017 with around 10 million active

daily viewers (2018). In comparison, in April 2021 Twitch had approximately 9.3 million active streamers on the site (Clement 2021) with an average of 30 million daily viewers (Twitch 2021a). This increase in both active streamers and daily viewership was due in part to the isolating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Perks 2020), but during the pandemic Twitch was also the site of several events and discussions of cultural importance in the United States alone, including: Black Lives Matter protests all across the country in 2020, the voter outreach *Among Us* game hosted by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez for the 2020 presidential election, and the U.S. Capitol insurrection of January 2021. All these events are connected, speak to matters of great political and social importance, and participation in each of these events was facilitated in part by live streaming platforms like Twitch.

Twitch, A Platform and A Service

Before describing how Twitch works in a little more detail, I want to consider the term platform. In the course of this paper, I largely rely on the understanding of platforms proposed by Tarleton Gillespie (2018). A platform is an online site and/or service that: hosts, organizes, and circulates user generated content or social interactions; does not produce or commission the bulk of its content; is built on an infrastructure for processing data for customer service, advertising, and profit; and moderates the content and activity of users (Gillespie 2018, pp. 18-21). Twitch absolutely provides a service where users can host broadcasts of their own unique content on the site Twitch.tv and Twitch then organizes and circulates that content both on its own platform and across other sites like Twitter. Twitch has continually been criticized for the way it incorporates streamers into the platform as independent contractors and relies on their work to thrive while simultaneously holding them away from the interior power structure. Twitch does not consider or classify streamers as full-time employees of Twitch- although Twitch does have a system for

sharing revenue with its content producers and will occasionally commission them for special activities with compensation (Woodcock and Johnson 2019a).

However, as Taylor has previously noted, Twitch differs from Gillespie's definition of a platform in that Twitch does produce its own content (one example being Twitch Rivals, their series of competitive gaming tournaments) and in its approach to moderation (2018, p. 263). Twitch has several mechanisms for moderating and constraining content and activity on its site, including a combination of algorithmic content filtering, community guidelines, and some paid professional moderation, but the bulk of everyday moderation falls on volunteer moderators (Wohn 2019; Cullen and Kairam 2022).

But Twitch does rely on a system of advertising and even merchandising- Twitch's CEO Emmett Shear said in a 2018 interview with Fortune magazine "Twitch earns money when our streamers earn money." (For every $5 a streamer earns from viewer subscriptions, Twitch takes upwards of 50%.) But Twitch's infrastructure is not uniquely their own. As mentioned above, Twitch was purchased by Amazon in 2014 and a significant portion of their infrastructure is now built on Amazon Web Services (AWS) (Vanian 2018).[4] While Twitch is purportedly given the freedom to act independently of Amazon, their material reality- and by extension that of streamers on the platform- is built on and shaped by Amazon.[5] Will Partin, for example, has made the distinction between Twitch-the-company and Twitch-the-platform to signify the complex interplay within that organizational structure (2020). That organizational structure is of course situated within a broader platform ecosystem that includes other organizations, various technologies, and all of the users whose content supports this structure (Partin 2020). For me,

[4] AWS now uses Twitch to promote itself. Amazon Web Services has a Twitch channel for highlighting its services and products: https://www.twitch.tv/aws.

[5] The material reality of Twitch is certainly owned by Amazon. In 2020 Amazon announced a plan to potentially sell/license Twitch's streaming technologies to other companies through AWS (Ingraham 2020).

thinking through the structure and infrastructure of Twitch begs the question: where are the divisions between Twitch, Amazon, and streamers? I think posing the question is valuable because it brings to bear the point that the arrangement of a system like Twitch defines what is possible according to its own logics (and in this case those logics are bound up in those of Amazon) and that those technical and technological logics intersect with the norms, needs, and tactics of the millions of people interacting on that system (Gillespie 2018). What interests me most are the ways that "infrastructures, like politics, are systems for distributing (in)security" and inequality (Partin 2020, 3; Berlant 2016).

What Twitch Looks Like

The content of channels on Twitch is largely video game focused, but there are channels devoted to creative pursuits such as painting, dancing, musical performance, and crafting (Nakandala et al. 2017; Phelps and Consalvo 2020). Additional channels topics focus on IRL (in real life) pursuits like podcast development, coding, cooking, and travel. In a way, Twitch is returning to its Justin.tv homecam roots while also matching the capabilities and offerings of related platforms, like YouTube. Twitch channels are often associated with one person (the streamer or content producer), but individual streamers often choose to affiliate with other streamers in "stream teams" and many channels are managed by groups and organizations. Streamers typically broadcast a combination of visuals and audios from their computer, console, or mobile device in the Twitch provided interface where viewers can leave comments. An example of the interface current as of November 2021 is presented in Figure 1. Communication between the streamer and the chat is asymmetrical in that viewers can only communicate using the text chat with words and emotes while a streamer may choose to use text chat, a microphone, a webcam, or a combination of those things.

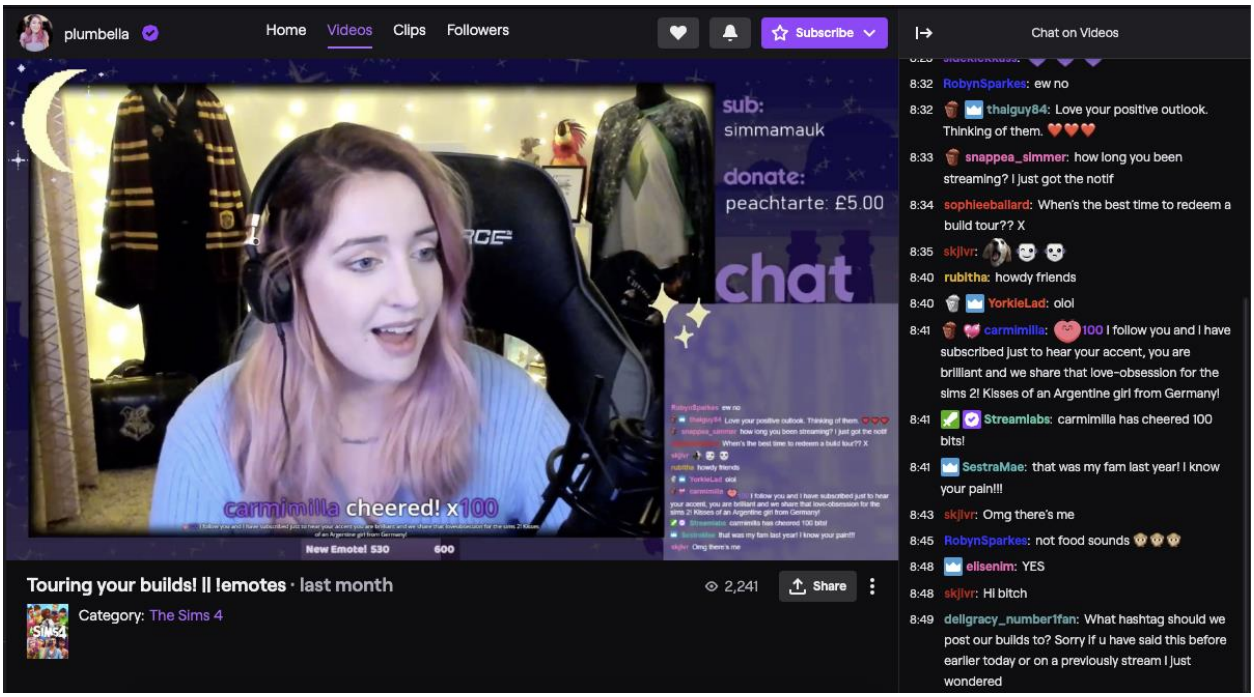


Figure 1. Example of Twitch user interface from a viewer perspective.

There are four broad user categories that Twitch users can occupy in a channel, sometimes simultaneously: streamer, moderator, subscriber, and viewer. All user types, except streamers when they are live, are in the channel as a form of viewer, but subscribers and moderators have additional abilities. A viewer can only watch the stream, participate to a limited extent in the chat room, and donate money or the Twitch currency (known as bits). Subscribers are users who pay a monthly fee to gain special privileges in the channel (Seering et al. 2017) such as unique emotes, channel commands, and interaction with the streamer when the chat room is closed to regular viewers. Subscribers often have greater access to streamers off the platform as well because many streamers set up special social media presences for their subscribers on community chatting platforms like Discord. There are hierarchies and further categories of distinction amongst viewers and subs, denoted through special viewer badge designations marking someone as a special supporter of the channel (either socially or monetarily), commonly

referred to as a VIP (very important person) (Figure 2). Streamers can also recognize subscribers who pay more or viewers who donate more with chat badges unique to that channel.

Moderators are chosen by streamers to assist them with the functionality of the stream and to influence behavioral standards in the chat room. Moderators have administrative privileges to change technical settings in the stream, enforce chat rules, and even mute or ban viewers from the channel. Moderators are often streamers themselves and form mutual support groups with other streamers to moderate each other's channels (Cullen and Kairam 2022).

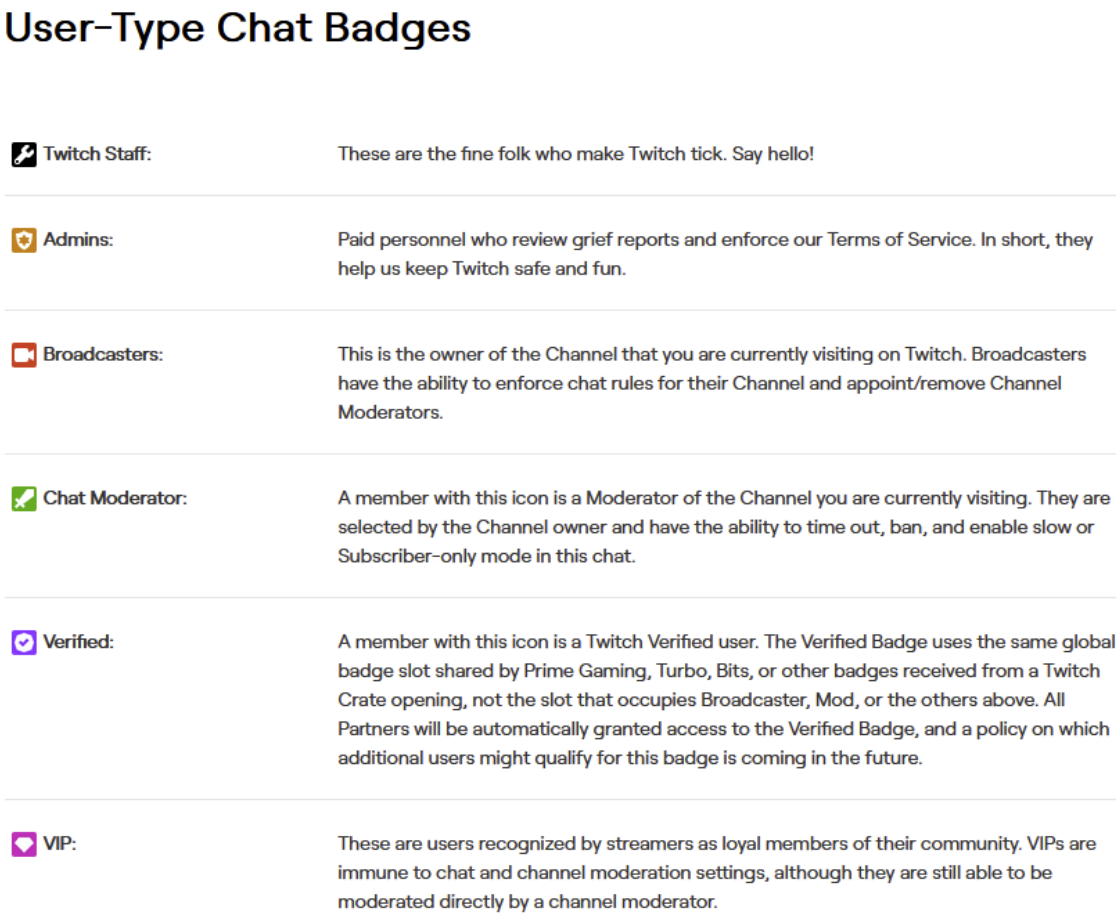


Figure 2. A list of the primary user chat badges on Twitch. They are: Twitch Staff, Admins, Broadcasters (Streamers), Moderators, Verified Partners, and VIPs. Image taken from Twitch Chat Badges Guide (2021b).

The streamer (also referred to in academic literature as the broadcaster or the content producer) of a channel often occupies several roles in their own channel, not the least of which is

content producer and performer. The streamer determines the content of the stream, performs the content for the viewing audience, oversees management of viewers, and is typically the only person in the channel receiving income in the form of subscriber fees, Twitch bits, advertising revenue, and sponsorships. In addition to the channel hierarchies of subscribers and viewers, there are cross-platform hierarchies of streamers. Informally, there is a distinction made between small streamers and big streamers (roughly assessed by average audience size) and a formal distinction made by Twitch between streamers, Affiliates, and Partners. Only Affiliates and Partners share revenue with the platform (Taylor 2018), and so the goal of many streamers on Twitch is to achieve Partner status and its increased social and financial benefits. However, out of the millions of streamers on the platform as of October 2021, only 27,000 Twitch streamers are Partners (Twitch 2021c). The ability to make Partner, as well as perceptions on the legitimate ways to participate in streaming culture, are wrapped up in arguments of access, privilege, and meritocracy. There is also a hierarchy, a system of evaluation, for assessing who are authentic streamers and who are not that is likewise largely based in misogynistic and meritocratic principles that ignore the reality and history of platforms like Twitch.

The Origins of Twitch

In her book on homecams and camgirls in the early 2000s, Theresa Senft describes the original live broadcast made from a webcam over the internet in 1991 at Cambridge University as an attempt to "level the playing field" when it came to the breakroom coffee pot (2008, p. 15). Webcams were very much wrapped up in early narratives of the empowering potential for participation seemingly inherent in internet technology. Regardless of how true that sentiment remains in the present context and what we know now, it is certainly true that many women in the 1990s began to explore new ways of everyday living, communication, and community

through webcams. The exploration of webcams led to the establishment of dedicated homecam sites (homecamming is defined here as streaming live, unscripted, and with relatively low production values from domestic spaces as opposed to a television production studio), the most famous of which is perhaps JenniCam that launched in 1996 (Senft 2008). These homecams were sites where people would show continuously updated images and videos of their homes and private spaces; they were often accompanied by forums and chat rooms where viewers could interact. What Senft describes in *Camgirls* as the common norms and concerns of those early camgirls are almost identical to the concerns of streamers on contemporary platforms like Twitch: offering subscriber only benefits, performing authenticity, and striving to access the best equipment and internet connections (2008). As Senft also points out, the demands of coding and hosting a website were often very strenuous for these early homecam productions (2008). This burden of developing sophisticated technical expertise on individual users is likely one factor that led to the proliferation of "do it yourself broadcasting services" like YouTube and Justin.tv that could provide people with a place to upload and host content in a pre-built interface (Bruns 2009).

In a 2012 interview about their spin-off site for gaming, Twitch.tv, Justin.tv co-founders Justin Kan and Emmett Shear refer to their idea of "lifecasting" as a new form of reality TV streaming everyday people's lives (Rice 2012). However, as Bonnie Ruberg has noted, the histories of women and their cultural practices that were instrumental in shaping contemporary live streaming are often left out of the histories of video game live streaming (Ruberg, 2023). Indeed, that is the case here with Twitch. The comments of Kan and Shear are particularly striking when you contextualize them against this overlooked history of women online: Jennifer Ringley of JenniCam had made similar comments about the radical potentials of

camming in an interview with ABC News nine years before Justin.tv launched (Senft 2008; Rice 2012). The founders of Justin.tv (and subsequently of Twitch.tv) are frequently credited with launching a "lifecasting revolution" and "democratizing live video" (Rice 2012), work that several women had already done before them through homecamming (Senft 2008; Giles 2018). Obscuring this work by camgirls may have initially been an oversight by the founders of Justin.tv, but it may also be a deliberate choice due to the way "camgirl" as a term has changed to connotate sexual content and to distance Justin.tv and Twitch from the history and practices of webcam modeling, which are so similar to those of video game live streaming (Giles 2018; Jones 2020; Ruberg 2023). Obscuring the groundwork that women laid for sites like Justin.tv and Twitch is evidence of a pattern that continues in the present with more recent events, which has featured attempts to limit or deny the influence of and connections to women, femininity, feminism, and sexual content in video game live streaming (Ruberg, Cullen, and Brewster 2019; Ruberg 2021; Uttarapong, Cai, and Wohn 2021).

A Review of Academic Work on Live Streaming

While it is true that the work of women past and present in games and internet technology has frequently been overlooked in general and in the case of Twitch in particular, it is also true that Twitch has "dramatically reshaped the landscape" when it comes to the way that millions of people engage with game content and with each other (Taylor 2018, p. 3). Although, Will Partin has argued that this process was less a dramatic reshaping and more an incremental consolidation of power (2020). Regardless of the speed, it is the breadth and depth of this reshaping that has led many scholars of video games, digital culture, and platforms to study sites like Twitch. Although publications on live streaming often include a disclaimer about the recent nascency of

research on live streaming, at the time of finishing this chapter in November 2021 there are over 250 recorded peer-reviewed publications on live streaming and Twitch that have been published in the past ten years (Seering 2021).[6] The ranges of topics covered by live streaming research include studies of recommendation algorithms (Yang et al. 2013; Liu, Lin, and Huang 2016; Groen 2020), linguistic studies of the unique slang and emotes used on Twitch (Olejniczak 2015; Barbieri et al. 2017; Ford et al. 2019), audience studies on the motivations of viewers and streamers alike (Sjöblom and Hamari 2016; Bründl and Hess 2016; Todd and Melancon 2018), and work on parasocial relationships and play between streamers and viewers (Scully-Blaker et al. 2017; Wohn, Freeman, and McLaughlin 2018; Jodén and Strandell 2021). This is of course not a comprehensive list of all the topics being pursued in live streaming research; it is merely a selection meant to highlight the range and variety of topics. My focus here is to summarize the pre-existing literature on video game live streaming that is the most relevant to my dissertation on issues of labor, performance, and gender in order to reveal the shape of current conversations on these topics, highlight connections between these topics, ground the theory I introduced in the previous chapter in examples from live streaming, and identify places where my work contributes to these growing conversations.

Labor

Playing games suggests a certain level of frivolity and the idea of watching someone play typically evokes scenes of casually watching friends play on the couch (Scully-Blaker et al. 2017; Woodcock and Johnson 2019b). While the labor of live streaming is absolutely caught up in neoliberal processes of transforming leisure activities into work (Guarriello 2019) that will be discussed in this section, the fact remains that the work of live streaming is made up of several

[6] Shoutout to Dr. Joseph Seering for the work he does voluntarily maintaining a publicly accessible bibliography of streaming research.

different kinds of labor that streamers rely on for their day-to-day financial stability and social connectivity. In this section I present previous work that has examined the material and immaterial labor that make up live streaming, with an emphasis on their gendered and performative aspects.

Labor and Social Capital

A survey conducted by Simon Bründl and Thomas Hess (2016) of over 500 streamers (of which 83% of respondents were men) on Twitch suggested that while the quantity of content in live streams is determined almost entirely by the motives of individual streamers, their intention to continue creating content is primarily determined by their perceived social capital on the platform. In other words, streamers may begin streaming because they are interested in creating and sharing content, but they will not continue unless they perceive that they and their content are valued. Bründl and Hess concluded that while affective enjoyment for creating content may be a driver for creating a stream, monetary incentives are perhaps the greatest driver for sustaining a presence on Twitch and continuing to stream. Similarly, as Johnson and Woodcock demonstrated in their research, for many Twitch streamers the desired reward for growing the channel and gaming the metrics on the paths to Affiliate and Partner is access to more monetization opportunities (2019a). These findings are important because they appear to contradict the standard public narrative from streamers about the most important motivation for successful streamers being a love of sharing their content. Part of the myth of authenticity in streaming is an assertion that real or authentic streamers do the work because they love games and the community, not for the money (Ruberg and Cullen 2020). There is a tension in streaming between different forms of value; among them, financial compensation and social capital.

Turning to viewer motivations to watch streamers, a survey administered to 230 Twitch viewers (with a 71% male response rate) in 2018 by Wohn, Freeman, and McLaughlin suggested that viewers are interested in and more likely to support streamers with whom they feel a personal connection. This and the findings of Bründl and Hess suggest that the development of parasocial relationships is important to both streamer and viewer. However, another survey administered to 96 Twitch viewers in 2016 by Enrico Gandolfi, with a response rate that skewed male at 88%, suggested that viewers who identify as gamers and prefer "hardcore" game genres care more about the content of a stream than they do about the streamer. The contradictions in these findings yield three implications that are important to my work: the first is that there are different populations of stream viewers who have differing motivations for watching streams. The second implication is that the social and financial success of streamers is dependent upon understanding, at some level, the motivations of these different populations of viewers for watching (or not watching) their streams. The third implication is that surveys of streamers and viewers thus far have primarily reported on the experiences and opinions of men in streaming.

The first implication makes sense when considering the breadth of content, both gaming oriented and otherwise, on the Twitch platform, the reputation and marketing strategies of Twitch, and the interconnectedness of all channels on the site, which taken altogether often suggests a monolithic streaming or Twitch community. But the reality and sometimes the risk for many streamers lies in the second implication, to be explored throughout this dissertation, and the fact that there are not only differing audience motivations on the platform (whose tastes can be difficult to predict and match [Gandolfi 2016; Woodcock and Johnson 2019b]) but there are audiences who are openly hostile to certain types of streamers. At the time of writing this chapter, many women, queer, and people of color who work as streamers on Twitch have lately

been inundated with hate raids- mass messages repeating sexist, homophobic, or racist sentiments (Grayson 2021b). This leads me again to the third implication, because not only is it a problem that women are targeted on Twitch (which jeopardizes participation in their communities and makes the already laborious processes of streaming even more intense), they and their experiences are also underrepresented in the academic literature on live streaming.

Four separate surveys of streamers and viewers conducted in 2016 (Gandolfi; Bründl and Hess), 2017 (Wohn, Freeman, and McLaughlin), and 2018 (Todd and Melancon) received responses primarily from streamers and viewers who identified as men, with response rates ranging from 71-88% from men across these surveys. While these surveys often acknowledge this gender bias in their results, they rarely offer an explanation, and the result is still the same: the perspectives of women in live streaming are underreported and understudied in academic research both quantitatively and qualitatively and therefore our understanding of live streaming is shaped by masculine perceptions. These previous surveys usually restrict examination of gender differences to explaining viewer perceptions of streamers, rather than focusing on gendered experiences of streaming. For example, recent surveys concluded that women streamers are often judged by viewers to be less credible players than men (Todd and Melancon, 2018), their content is viewed less often than content created by men (Wohn, Freeman, and McLaughlin, 2017), and many viewers believe that the most important criterion for the success of a woman streamer is physical attractiveness (Uszkoreit 2018). In the survey conducted by Wohn, Freeman, and McLaughlin (2017), 83% of respondents reported that their favorite streamer was a man. But it is not only surveys that have under sampled women; qualitative studies of streaming have also achieved relatively low participation from groups other than men (Woodcock and Johnson 2019b) and lacked a focus on the experiences of other genders. A few

notable exceptions are the dissertations undertaken by Lena Uszkoreit and Karen Skardzius, who like me specifically focused on gendered differences in streaming experiences (2017; 2020), Zhang and Hjorth's study of women streaming in China (2017), and Mia Consalvo's case study of Kaceytron (2019). These viewer perceptions and low participation rates from women are likely linked to larger beliefs and assumptions in game culture about the greater skill of men when it comes to playing video games.[7] In other words, being perceived as masculine in streaming yields greater social capital, or more specifically gamer capital (Bourdieu 1986; Consalvo 2007). What these surveys largely reveal are that beliefs about the inherent differences between genders in games are also found in the body of live streaming, hiding the motivations and work of women viewers and streamers.

Body Work and Emotional Labor

The labor of live streaming is fundamentally an embodied one, not only because of the physical effort it takes to play video games while working as an entertainer, but also because most streamers choose to stream with cameras on, so their bodies are visible and become part of the apparatus and the technology of streaming. Live streaming is also an economy of visibility- its currencies are the visuals from cameras and games, the appearance of the streamer, and obvious performances that suggest authenticity- and that visibility increases the potential for experiencing sexism and misogyny (Banet-Weiser 2018). While most women in online gaming contexts have the option to deploy a variety of measures for hiding their gender and avoid the problems of sexism (Cote 2020), the model of success for streaming pressures streamers to show themselves while they play, make themselves vulnerable, and perform an ideal of authenticity (Woodcock and Johnson 2019b; Ruberg and Lark 2020).

[7] These same beliefs also likely account for response bias in these studies.

In fact, inherent in video game live streaming is embodied affective labor and forms of care work typically associated with women. Similar in situation to the flight attendants originally described by Hoschchild in 1983 (2012) who feel that they must always be "on" and smiling, cultivating positive emotional responses, and building relationships is a key aspect of the labor of live streamers (Woodcock and Johnson 2019b; Baym 2018). Streamers too feel pressured to constantly be "on" (performing a friendly and engaging mien that makes their work easier and more successful) in addition to being frequently live online (Woodcock and Johnson 2019b; Consalvo, Lajeunesse, and Zanescu 2020). Live streaming demands streamers be available to viewers outside of stream time, building relationships in Discord communities and producing content to share on other social media platforms (Johnson 2021). These forms of labor that rely on managing the emotions of others and the feelings of your own body are commonly described as "women's work," (Arcy 2016; Hochschild 2012). Nicholas-Brie Guarriello describes live streaming as the intersection of paid emotional labor with traditionally feminized unpaid care work (2019). The knowledge and work of women, activities such as listening, being attentive, and community focused, that were once undervalued are now considered essential for achieving strong emotional investment from viewers in live streaming (Guarriello 2019). But acknowledgement of the emotional aspects of live streaming is often divorced from this gendered understanding and history in favor of a focus on who belongs and who cares about the right things in the right way; a logic of care subsumed by a neoliberal logic of authenticity. This logic of authenticity, rooted in white patriarchy, provides the foundation of the current hegemonic pathway to visibility and success in streaming. As Brian Chan and Kishonna Gray observed, this means women and streamers of color of a necessity must cultivate different approaches to streaming in a technoculture where attention is a resource that is most often

diverted to their white male counterparts (2020). For many of these streamers, these alternative approaches often assert a commitment to an ethos of self and community care (Chan and Gray 2020; Taylor 2018) that run contrary to the commercialization practices and affordances favored by the platform.

Neoliberalism and Labor

In his 2016 study of labor and play on YouTube, Hector Postigo describes how YouTube designed the technological features (affordances) of their platform in such a way that activities straddling the line between labor and leisure, such as creating Let's Play videos, could be captured into a commercial framework while simultaneously encouraging user practices that make that capture easier for the platform. This model, Postigo argues, can be applied to any platform that primarily relies on user-generated content. What Postigo was describing in the case of YouTube, and what I argue is also true for Twitch, is that this structure of observing user behavior and values in order to capture both their labor and their leisure are structures that favor neoliberalism. There have been several studies in live streaming that have explicitly called out this structure and the behaviors and ideologies that it supports. Jamie Woodcock and Mark R. Johnson, who have published extensively on Twitch, describe live streaming as "the context of play becoming work" (2019b, p. 813). Furthermore, they elaborate that Twitch streaming is shaped by a "neoliberal subjectivity" because it encourages an entrepreneurship of the self and promotes meritocratic notions of success (2019b, p. 821). Initially Twitch only provides the infrastructure for hosting a channel; while they may provide special recognition and support to Partners of a certain level (it is not uncommon for the most famous, successful, and popular live streamers to be described as microcelebrities or social media influencers [Chan and Gray 2020; Woodcock and Johnson 2019a]), most of the millions of streamers on the platforms are left to

follow the affordances of the platform and the dictates of gaming culture. Many Twitch streamers feel compelled to develop themselves as a brand in order to differentiate themselves from the thousands of others that may be streaming at the same time. Additionally, this brand should read as authentic according to the logics and practices of game culture. In live streaming, this means an emphasis on happiness and gratitude, a de-emphasis on politicization, and embracing meritocracy, the conceit that those who work hard and truly love the work deserve and achieve success (Guarriello 2019; Paul 2018). As Guarriello describes, the model that then becomes lucrative for streamers and favored by the platform consists of tactics and performances that portray a level playing field and ignores exploitative, unstable, and abusive conditions inherent in the system (2019, p. 1752). The very process of streaming has become one where the lines between public and private, work and leisure, and online and offline are blurred and all are caught up in systems of monetization (Guarriello 2019; Ruberg and Cullen 2020; Ruberg and Lark 2020). When examining Twitch and other live streaming platforms like YouTube and Facebook against broader trends in society and technology, it is not surprising that individuals are being self-disciplined into pursuing a model of "(not) getting paid to do what you love" (Duffy 2017).

Streamers whose technologies of entrepreneurship of the self are successful become re-entrenched in the meritocratic ideals of gaming, which find new life in self-replicating models of streaming success that one of my interview participants described as a "The Devil Wears Prada" trickle-down effect.[8] As Christopher Paul asserted in his work on toxic meritocracy in games culture, the danger of neoliberalism is that those who achieve success believe they have done so solely on the quality of their efforts (2018). This leads to a hierarchy in which some individuals

[8] In the film, *The Devil Wears Prada*, the fashion industry is described as a hierarchy where the ideas and preferences of top designers' trickle down into and dictate the rest of the market.

are presented as inherently better or more deserving than others. I add to Paul's work by suggesting that in streaming these norms of meritocracy have led to a system where so called "big streamers" become the models of success and dictate the norms of the community, norms that favor people and behavior that look like them. This is the trickle-down effect observed by my interview participant; smaller streamers are impacted by what the big streamers encourage, support, and model. As a result of the establishment of this hierarchy, people and practices that seek to analyze or disrupt those models are not welcome. And in streaming as in video game culture more broadly, the hegemony of play is at work. As the recently leaked Twitch income data reveals, the streamers at the top are overwhelmingly men; in 2021 there were only three women in the top 100 earners on the platform and only one of them was a woman of color (Jiang 2021).[9]

Gender: Material Girls Living in an Immaterial World

If there are not very many women at the top of the hierarchy dictating the standards for success, why is there a preoccupation with things like titty streamers and hot tub meta? What I suggest is that there is an assumption that women can (and will) somehow "cheat" the supposedly meritocratic system of live streaming by gaining viewership through their appearance instead of their skill or personality. The obvious presence of women's bodies in live streaming, made even more visible by the prominent use of webcams, prompts heightened forms of policing to ensure women adhere to standards that are acceptable to men (Ruberg and Cullen 2020) and that they do not draw "undue" attention to themselves or their bodies (Ruberg, Cullen, and Brewster 2019). For many, live streaming of a necessity must be based in the masculine and meritocratic logics of the hegemony of play (Shaw 2012, p. 29; Gray 2016; Gray 2020), and

[9] It is worth noting that these rankings were calculated on Twitch payout earnings and does not include money from sponsorships or off-platform donations.

therefore the participation of women is policed to fall within these constraints and deny any form of feminism or feminine practices that disrupt the masculine power of meritocracy. In her work on black cyberfeminism and the intersections of gender and race in live streaming, Kishonna Gray describes this using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic exclusion;" the hegemonic power of video games lies in the privilege of some to enforce their particular notions of authenticity and disparage the realities of others, defining and devaluing their participation (2016, p. 358).

Even with the knowledge that there are only three women in the top 100 Twitch earners, there are those who are compelled to point out that because these women exist, that the system works. As Amanda Cote has noted in her work on gaming sexism, the success of high-profile women in games is frequently used as an excuse to maintain the status quo (2020). The reasoning is, if these women are finding success that means the meritocratic system is working and so the existence of these exceptional women becomes further proof that women in general are not capable of achieving success in streaming based on merit, which in streaming consists of skillful game play, an entertaining personality, or a combination of the two. And yet, these women continue to be othered and forced to seek recognition for their work that isn't qualified by their gender- what game developer Brenda Romero calls the "female tax" (de Castell and Skardzius 2018). Reconsidering Jack Halberstam's point about feminine success being measured by masculine standards, I argue that the reverse is not true. Feminine success may be measured by masculine standards of success, but feminine failure is not measured by masculine standards of failure. What I mean is that women are not allowed to fail to the same extent or degree as men and are not permitted to learn and grow from failure in the same way, which can be seen in game culture. The meritocracy which sustains game culture rewards the mediocrity of men in

streaming and punishes mediocre- and even exceptional- women. Women who are visibly successful are pressured to act as role models (Cullen 2018) while simultaneously increasing their visibility as targets for criticism and harassment and women who are mediocre (even by masculine standards) are positioned as failures and they have even less protection against the pressures and punishments of the system. The consequences of the hate raids which recently afflicted Twitch were felt most strongly by women who are so-called "small streamers," particularly those from marginalized communities (Grayson 2021b). These public pressures and punishments coerce women to adopt conventionally successful streaming strategies or to quit streaming altogether. There is also a pressure for women to reject other women for playing to stereotypes, like that of the titty streamer or the hot tub streamer, which is a performance that reinforces the meritocracy (Cote 2020). One common example of this treatment is the case of the streamer Kaceytron, who trolls the trolls by playing into all the worst stereotypes about women in games and streaming (Consalvo 2019). Furthermore, in streaming as in games, the less obvious presence of women at the highest levels seemingly naturalizes discourses that imagine men as the primary audience and drivers of the platform, implementing a cycle of exclusion (Cote 2020). The impact of this coercion and exclusion on women, feminine non-binary, genderfluid, and other marginalized streamers is physical, psychological, social, and financial.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the perspectives of women as streamers and viewers have been under sampled in live streaming research in addition to being less advertised on the platform. The research that has been done, therefore, is mostly from the perspective of men and suggests that men find women to be less credible (less authentic) as streamers, professionals, and experts, that content made by women is less interesting, and that the most important metric of success for women is physical attractiveness (Todd and Melancon, 2018; Wohn, Freeman, and

McLaughlin, 2017; Uszkoreit 2018). In a 2016 research study in which Nakandala et al. analyzed over one billion messages posted by six million viewers over a 76-day period on Twitch using a variety of computational methods to identify the most commonly used words correlated with the gender of the streamer, they similarly found that in channels belonging to women the most used words typically refer to the physical appearance of the streamer. Meanwhile, in stream channels run by men, the language was more frequently game-related (2016, p. 8). Overall, Nakandala et al. revealed that conversation on Twitch is strongly gendered and that the gender of a streamer was significantly related to a viewer's choice to watch their channel (2016, p. 12). What is also interesting about the Nakandala et al. study is that they found that objectifying language was more prevalent in the channels of popular women streamers than in the channels of less popular women streamers (2016, p. 13). Nakandala et al. surmised that more popular women streamers may be stuck in a cycle of behavior where they are pressured to maintain their success by performing to the expectations of a male audience and to permit or even encourage the objectification of themselves or other women in order to achieve financial success as streamers (2016, p. 13).

In her 2017 dissertation examining viewer perceptions of women streamers, Lena Uszkoreit conducted quantitative research correlating personality, gameplay, and attractiveness of streamers. She found that the quality of gameplay from women streamers was negatively correlated with the importance of their attractiveness; in other words, women streamers were assumed to either be good at games or be attractive, but not both (2017, p. 96). Furthermore, while personality was considered an important factor for streamers regardless of gender, personality was determined to matter less for women streamers who were also judged to be attractive by viewers (Uszkoreit 2017). Uszkoreit also demonstrated an association between the

belief that women are bad video game players and the belief that the overall population of video game players has a small percentage of women (2017, p. 105). These findings by Uszkoreit reconfirm the prevalence of the assumptions being made about women in streaming.

In her 2020 dissertation on women in streaming, Karen Skardzius came to similar realizations about the cultural tensions between viewer expectations and platform affordances constraining what women feel like they can do as streamers (p. 156). Through participant observation and interviews Skardzius found that despite these pressures, the desire for community was the strongest motivating factor for women to stream. Women streamers rely on trustworthy community members for both emotional and technical support, but Skardzius found that beyond their own micro-communities they are still inclined to view other women streamers as competition. This is likely a result of the myth of the meritocracy prevalent on the platform, and the notion that many of the currencies of success in streaming- such as audience attention- are finite.

In addition to social norms and rhetoric that encourages gendered discrimination and technical affordances that support neoliberalism, the policies of Twitch have also had an impact on gender, streamer performance, and gender performance. Much of the literature that has been done around gender and streaming has revealed an anxiety not only from other users, but from the platforms themselves about how the community should be protected from the potential of sexual or suggestive content seemingly inherent in the bodies of women. Indeed, the May 2021 update from Twitch on hot tub streaming featured what will surely become an infamous policy statement: “Second, while we have guidelines about sexually suggestive content, being found to be sexy by others is not against our rules, and Twitch will not take enforcement action against women, or anyone on our service, for their perceived attractiveness,” (Twitch 2021d). While a

memorable (and memeable) statement, it also serves as an acknowledgement of the harassment faced by women on their platform while subtly reinforcing their policy of ambiguous interpretation when it comes to sexual content. This ambiguity to allow freedom of expression that can be captured and commercialized results in a structure and a system where the platform does not protect women streamers from being harassed or otherwise disciplined by other users (Ruberg 2020; Vitak et al. 2017). Rather, it protects the platform as it extracts value from women's bodies while simultaneously making them vulnerable.

But Twitch is far from the only platform to have evidenced a concern for protecting others from women's bodies. In their examination of the Chinese live streaming platform Douyu, Ge Zhang and Larissa Hjorth also determined that streaming in the Chinese context features a preoccupation with how women's bodies are presented (2017). Interestingly, both Douyu and Mixer, the Microsoft owned live streaming platform that shut down in June 2020, both featured infographics on their sites of women's bodies which illustrated what areas were or were not appropriate to show on stream (Zhang and Hjorth 2017; Cullen and Ruberg 2019). Zhang and Hjorth found that the structures, policies, and cultural objects involved in the production of live streaming both reinforce and allow for divergence from gender stereotypes.

In their examination of Twitch's policies, community guidelines, and terms of service, Bonnie Ruberg concluded that one of the main purposes of this assemblage of documents was to "regulate the ways that streamers perform (with) their bodies on Twitch, lest these performances look too much like camming," (2021, p. 1696). The term camming is a reference back to the history of camgirls described by Theresa Senft, but more directly refers to the practices of modern sex workers online who use many of the same techniques as video game live streamers. Platforms like Twitch are invested in directly and indirectly constraining the performances of

streamers in ways that support their financial gain, and in the case of Twitch this means performing to the hegemony of play.

Performance

All this talk of the hegemony of play is not intended to reinforce the idea that women lack agency in the context of video game live streaming. Rather, I have taken up a framework built on the ideas of Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, and Saba Mahmood to suggest that while performance and performativity are constrained in streaming, the agency of women lies in their everyday choices to embody- or disconnect from- institutional norms. What is at stake for women in these choices as live streamers, as Zhang and Hjorth put it so aptly in their own research, is that "A live streamer can either conform or transgress designated genres and gender stereotypes in order to gain popularity," (2017, p. 811). The performative practices of women in live streaming must be carefully considered given their individual goals and the attention economy within which they are situated. While considerations of performance and presentation affect all streamers, my purpose in this dissertation is to show how women are inordinately burdened by standards and concerns of performance.

The work of streaming has been described as entertainment and improv, which are particular genres of performance, but ultimately all of live streaming is performative. Playing games is a form of work that involves a constant performance of enacting gameplay in a social digital environment, in a closely watched context where performance has a direct relation to income (Woodcock and Johnson 2019b) and cultural cachet. During a live stream, streamers are typically playing a game/playing music/creating art in a way that is entertaining, while simultaneously engaging with viewers in the chat and making them feel welcome. Woodcock and Johnson have argued that although there are multiple ways to perform and engage an

audience, nonetheless the fact remains that success in streaming often relies on a streamer's ability to perform several selves, personas, or characters simultaneously to maximize their impact (2019b, p. 4).

Returning to the metaphor of being "on" that I used in the section on emotional labor, streamers interviewed by Woodcock and Johnson used the same metaphor, describing streaming as a practice of "turning parts of your personality off and on," (2019b, p. 5). In live streaming a great deal of focus is placed on performing an animated version of the self, a countenance which speaks to a truth that is mediated through the technology and structure of feeling in streaming, usually with the goal of making connections for financial and social support (Woodcock and Johnson 2019b; Hochschild 2012; Baym 2018). In my study of advice from women streamers conducted with Bonnie Ruberg, we found that these streamers put an emphasis on cultivating positive feelings in viewers through bodily management of the self to appear authentic (Ruberg and Cullen 2020). Much of the work of streaming is about "public embodied performances of authentic, natural feeling" (Baym 2018, p. 17) that emotionally engage the viewer. In live streaming, performance is very much a process of building intimacy. This stems from expectations that viewers have that live streams- which often take place in people's homes and even their bedrooms- are presenting an intimate and real look into someone's everyday life (Ruberg and Lark 2020). Therefore, having a persona benefits streamers by allowing them to distance themselves from the stress and demands of viewers, exert greater control over their emotional labor, and build their self-brand (Woodcock and Johnson 2019b).

But while a persona or a character is a construction carefully designed to look authentic and real, this does not mean that it is entirely a falsehood (Duffy 2017; Butler 1990). All identities are performative in the sense that they are constructed from the stylized repetition of

acts dictated by the cultural context and social norms (Butler 1988), they are rooted in choices and beliefs that people make. But as Woodcock and Johnson state, to find popularity and success in streaming, “It is no longer adequate to just be oneself, as one must shape the kind of subject one appears to be on stream,” (2019b, p. 6). For women, one consequence of the performance of intimacy expected from streamers is that they more frequently open themselves up to objectification and harassment.

Performing publicly as streamers exposes women to systems that attempt to critique and control them on the basis of their gender and preoccupation with their bodies. The work of streaming is already a precarious embodied experience -frequently involving several hours of sitting in place, focused on a task while attempting to be personable- but women are forced to be extra attentive to the work their bodies are doing. Indeed, publicly playing and streaming as a woman continues to be “not just a leisure activity but also a political act” (Consalvo 2019, p. 87). But something this dissertation is trying to point out is that many women streamers do not see themselves as engaging in political acts- many merely desire to build communities and make money. There are a lot of variations and nuances to the practices of individual streamers, many of whom do not desire to fight or even criticize the status quo. But as Zhang and Hjorth remarked in their work, desiring money or having other aims does not necessarily exclude the possibility of subversive performance in streaming (2017).

As I mentioned earlier, Kaceytron is a famous example of a streamer who has adopted a persona that variously plays into, exaggerates, and contradicts “girl gamer” stereotypes (Consalvo 2019). Indeed, at the time of this writing in November 2021, Kaceytron’s Twitch channel is tagged as “#FEMALE, #FEMALEGAMER, #GAMERGIRL, #IAMAGIRL, #GIRLGAMER” (Kaceytron 2021). Over the past several years, Kaceytron has made a name for

herself as a streamer who invites abuse from viewers and returns it in kind. Kaceytron strategically utilizes things like low-cut shirts, mispronouncing video game terms, and deliberately playing games badly to build up her "girl gamer" persona and drive viewers to hate watch her channel. In her examination of Kaceytron's streaming practices, Mia Consalvo noted in particular how Kaceytron leverages both the social and technical affordances of Twitch for her financial gain. Kaceytron, through her outrageous gamer girl performance, riles up viewers to the point where they will pay- through the form of donations and subscriptions- for the chance to insult her. I mention Kaceytron as an example of a streamer whose performance plays into all the "worst" stereotypes about women in games and streaming, but who has found success through playing with and subverting expectations (Consalvo 2019). But as a result of these performances, Kaceytron has been described as a scam artist and a streamer whose actions hurt other streamers, particularly in her role as a "titty streamer" which presumably reflects badly on other women. Reactions to Kaceytron illustrate many of the ways in which the gender performances of women in live streaming are conflated with sexuality and social menace, placed at odds with notions of authenticity in games, and made responsible for the reactions of men to their performances and their bodies (Consalvo 2019; Zhang and Hjorth 2017).

Conclusion

In this chapter I provided an overview of the stereotypes and pressures faced by women in video games and live streaming. First, I described many of the ways- and some of the reasons for- women have been erased in video game history or excluded from participating in cultural production in games. Then I gave an account of Twitch as a live streaming platform and culture, with an emphasis on how it constructs subjects. Finally, I focused on common perspectives and

issues affecting women streamers through an overview of academic analyses on those topics. The main effect of these stereotypes is to position women on the margins of games and streaming culture through rhetoric and practices that use visible differences as justification for forcing conformity or exclusion. By describing these stereotypes and how the social norms and technical affordances of Twitch produce and perpetuate them, I provide a foundation for discussion later in the dissertation on the pressures faced by women in streaming and the choices they make in response and resistance to these pressures. In the attention economy of live streaming, issues of gender, labor, and performance are inextricably connected and co-constitute the field of possibilities for personal expression.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Foundations

In this chapter I introduce the theoretical frameworks and concepts that I engaged and applied to analyze the social, cultural, and political factors influencing the participation of women in video game live streaming. These frameworks and concepts are largely derived from feminist theory and gender studies to describe the impact and reception of feminism in video games and live streaming and to explain the existence of patriarchal structures in these social contexts. This framework includes the works of Sarah Banet-Weiser, Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, and Jack Halberstam. In this chapter concepts from these theorists will be explored alongside emerging theories in media and game studies on gender and feminism in games from scholars like Mia Consalvo, Amanda Cote, Kishonna Gray, Christopher Paul, Amanda Phillips, and T.L. Taylor. The theories and concepts covered in this chapter include disciplining, popular feminism, habitus, meritocracy, gender performance, and gaming sexism.

From this theoretical background I offer a theory on how notions of social authenticity and gender interact within a disciplining meritocratic, patriarchal ideology in relation to several forms of games culture and live streaming and how this interaction affects the everyday experience of being a live streamer for women. In gaming culture, as in any culture, there are benchmarks for beliefs and behaviors that those with power dictate. To be considered a legitimate or valid member of the community, your actions must convey a sense of commitment to those same beliefs- this is how authenticity becomes a public performance. Authenticity is an externally perceived or self-perceived set of standards for identity performance within a cultural context. My theory is this: Anxious men in games and streaming culture have cultivated a particular form of masculinity which they use as a justification for judging, policing, and

constraining the performances and expressions of women in streaming around a concept of an "authentic" participant that models masculine and neoliberal logics. In this formulation, the anxious group of men I am referring to are those that feel compelled to gatekeep the gamer identity and ascribe to a harmful form of geek masculinity whose core principles are meritocracy and misogyny. These harmful forms of geek masculinity found in video game and streaming culture stem from anxieties about gender hierarchies and a related need to justify sexist practices that position masculinity as the privileged form of gender expression in video games (Taylor 2012; Consalvo 2012; Salter and Blodgett 2017). This type of masculinity favors rhetoric and practices that exclude women from the arenas of play and power to preserve a sense of privilege for men by defining women as inauthentic, less skilled, and less knowledgeable (Salter and Blodgett 2017). This logic of masculine privilege in streaming is encoded in the everyday performances of live streamers (as evidence by whose performances are praised and whose are derided), in the conversations of their audiences on Twitch and across the streaming social ecosystem on platforms like Twitter and Discord, and even in the memes circulating throughout this system (Figure 3). The rhetoric and the practices involved in retaining this privilege formalize and encode a logic that women, feminists, and others who differ from the norm represent visible threats to games culture that need to be repressed. Furthermore, there are women who support this system because they benefit from it, believe in it, or feel they have no other choice and therefore they also enforce and reinforce particular forms of femininity and gender expression.

Figure 3. “Female Twitch streamer starterpack” taken from Know Your Meme website.

Due to the strong association between video games and live streaming, video game live streaming has emerged as a site of composite sociality, incorporating values from games culture as well as developing its own unique practices, including unique beliefs about the participation of women. Others have already demonstrated how women in games are habitually punished for deviation (real or perceived) from the norm through methods of symbolic and actual violence for being or performing visible differences from the hegemony of play (Gray et al. 2017; Cote 2020). As a result of this punishment, or even the threat of punishment, women find themselves making decisions about both their gender performance and their performances of streamers that produce and reproduce misogyny and the neoliberal values favored by games and streaming culture. Examining this claim in the context of video game live streaming allows for

consideration of how women respond to these pressures and initiate their own practices concerning self-expression and performance in the context of streaming and against an "authentic" standard in a space that claims to be meritocratic and post-feminist.

Additionally, what I wanted to accomplish with this research was to demonstrate the varied and complex ways that women express femininity and feminism inside and despite this patriarchal, meritocratic system. By looking at this, I complicate ideas of women lacking awareness of their own situations or acting against the interests of other women in their decision-making regarding feminist expression in games and live streaming. Presenting these frameworks and concepts in this chapter allows me to establish an introduction to the overarching arguments outlined above, to explore them in greater detail, and to highlight how I see them as connected. Many of these concepts will then be reintroduced as needed throughout the remaining chapters to further emphasize connections to the concepts discussed here or to propose new contributions to those concepts, supported by my analysis of both primary and secondary sources.

Bindings, Double and Otherwise

The concept of the double bind originates from the work of anthropologist Gregory Bateson; a double bind as Bateson described it refers to "unresolvable sequences of expectations" or "patterns of competing injunction," (1972, p. 156). This concept has been very useful for many feminist projects, as Katherine Jenkins explains in her own analysis of the double-binds faced by feminist researchers in academia (2014). In fact, Jenkins offers the clearest explanation of a double-bind and its consequences that I have found:

> The agent is given two (or perhaps more) injunctions as to how to behave, and these injunctions conflict, so that it is not possible to fulfill them both. Furthermore, failure to

> comply with one or more of the injunctions has negative consequences, and the person cannot leave the situation. Finally, there is no way for the person to seek clarification or a meta-injunction about what to do. It is characteristic of a double-bind situation that any action taken to try and evade the problem will in fact make the negative consequence more likely," (Jenkins 2014, p. 266).

In the case of a double bind, one choice is usually positioned as so abhorrent that the other becomes the only possibility, but both carry their own limitations and penalties (Crosby 2016). Or, as Keith McNeal more succinctly put it, people in a double bind are "damned if they do, damned if they don't," (1999, p. 369). In the decades since Bateson's initial formulation, the concept of the double-bind has been used to examine the positions of feminist academics, drag performers, women in sports, women in politics, and women in professional creative fields (Jenkins 2014; McNeal 1999; Crosby 2016; Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth 2018; Duffy and Pruchniewska 2017) to explain how individuals in these groups are burdened by expectations to achieve desired traits in contexts of double standards and outright hostility and where the consequences for failure are more impactful. I was unaware of this history of the concept of the double bind when I began using it to refer to Geguri's situation (Cullen 2018). At the time, it simply felt like the most apt term to describe the situation Geguri seemed to be experiencing: one where both her identity as a woman and her masculine gaming gender performance were put at odds. Her inability to reconcile the two to the satisfaction of masculine standards seemed to mark her as an illegitimate and inauthentic participant in streaming and competitive gaming environments. Furthermore, Geguri was feeling the pressure of being cast as a feminist icon when she herself did not identify as a feminist and worked in high profile environment and culture that was feminist averse.

It was this latter pressure, or double bind, that led me to think through the discomfort or harm that feminism possibly causes women like Geguri. This is a subject close to me because I have experienced pressure like what Geguri has endured. I have been at once too feminine and not feminine enough; too much a feminist on the one hand and yet not feminist enough on the other. Caught between the values of my rural conservative background and my radical beliefs developed through time spent in academic critical studies, I often find myself taking the position of the moderate or the tempered radical in order to sustain connections that are important to my sense of self. As organizational scholar Debra Meyerson has described them, a tempered radical is someone who pursues a change agenda through subtle, incremental, and patient tactics in situations where their values are at odds with those of the dominant group (2008, p. xi). And because I seek that middle ground, in almost any context I am made to feel as if I have not committed to the right sense of self. And to be more particular, as I will explore throughout this dissertation, I have felt that being a feminist places me at odds with other members of the broader gaming community who favor a status quo that explicitly rejects feminism. Like any other ethnographic project, this dissertation is partially based in my own self-interest. And like many of the people whose accounts I will be sharing in this dissertation, I grew up playing games amidst a social and cultural environment that told me that video games were an interest only for boys and men.

This concept of the double bind which winds its way throughout my dissertation is also a lens for thinking through intersectionality, the concept proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to explain complications arising from simultaneous racial and gendered discrimination in the legal system. In digital contexts such as live streaming, intersectionality is useful for observing “the digital contour of white, masculine, cis-heterosexual power that is often hidden” (Gray 2020, p.

27) and how it impacts the experiences of others who are marginalized in technology and culture. As Emily Deering Crosby noted in her 2016 analysis of the media treatment of Olympian track star Lolo Jones, the concept of the double bind- as well as feminist analysis more generally- tends to "highlight the experiences of privileged White women," (2016, p. 228). In the case of Lolo Jones- and many of the groups and participants addressed in this dissertation- the notion of a double bind "does not offer an adequate framework for understanding interlocking oppressions," (Crosby 2016, p. 229). Applying an intersectional approach to the concept of the double bind allows for more in-depth and nuanced examination of the additional and inseparable oppressions that further complicate the lives of women of color. What many in gaming and streaming experience, including several of the streamers I spoke with for this dissertation, are not so much double bind situations, but triple bind situations. Or maybe it is more appropriate to say what they deal with are severe knots or entanglements with several threads.

The primary double bind that I examine throughout this dissertation, and which I argue is felt by all the participants I observed or conversed with, is the double bind between performing as a streamer and a feminine gender. There still exists in video games and streaming the idea that being feminine, or a woman, or anyone that plays against white, masculine, cis-heterosexual ideals is personally failing to belong. As Kishonna Gray discusses throughout her book, Intersectional Tech, there are consequences for gamers (and by extrapolation video game streamers) who do not adhere to established norms; namely, social exclusion. These people occupy what Gray describes as an "intersectional social location between political and social cultures" (2020, p. 24). As a result, these people have less access to opportunities and the mechanisms of power. However, Gray suggests that while individuals currently feel the pressures and consequences of that social location- the site of the double bind (or complex

knots)- they are not “bound to or limited by this marginalization” (2020, 24). Gray’s project is to reveal the new possibilities and alternatives being explored in black technocultures against these constraints. What I appreciate is her assertion that there are different ways of being digital, and this dissertation attempts to reveal what some of those are in the everyday experiences in video game live streaming for women, non-binary femme, and genderfluid streamers.

Theorizing Everyday Experience in Games and Streaming

This second section introduces theories of the everyday, broadly speaking theories which have attempted to explain the norms and practices that manifest and dictate common experiences, by foregrounding the contexts which produce them. Overall, these theories argue that everyday activities are not just ordinary material in the background of life, that they are instead some of the strongest indicators of what is valued in a society. Although much more can be said about the power of the everyday, for this dissertation I present theories of the everyday combined with literature from game studies on gendered harassment to demonstrate how particular moments and practices in video game and streaming culture which are often touted to be extraordinary or abnormal are in fact very ordinary. Explaining how the extraordinary in games is, in fact, ordinary allows me to further link to discussions of habitus in order to demonstrate how pervasive meritocratic and misogynistic beliefs and practices are, how they are embedded in the culture of games and streaming, and the structures of power and participation that are rendered as a result.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) Michel de Certeau introduced games as an example where the rules and practices of society (Western society) are manifested in a space which appears to be isolated from the everyday (pp. 22-23). In particular, de Certeau refers to a

"formalization of tactics" (1984, p. 22) that game structures provide its players, opportunities to practice decision making that they can then apply to concrete situations. Part of what makes games so powerful as a medium is that they teach a formal logic for making decisions and acting both within the game context, but also in everyday life. The power of everyday life for de Certeau was the potential to subvert established and accepted forms of cultural practice; and in games, de Certeau saw a space where the "weapons of the weak" (1984, p. 23) were protected from the social order, and where tactics of resistance were made possible and practiced. But de Certeau also described games as detached spaces where the moves made in that space are proportional to the situations which dictated them. This is very similar to Johan Huizinga's concept of the "magic circle," which he described as a temporary world within the ordinary world" (1944/1980, p. 10). However, Huizinga described the value of these spaces as using performance and play to create order, not to subvert.

Indeed, today many players describe using games as a space to subvert established forms with which they grapple in everyday life. Games, virtual worlds, and live streaming are not separate from what we think of as everyday life; they overlap with one another, inform each other, and to many degrees dictate the shape of each other. This is what makes these contexts so valuable as possibility spaces. In the introduction to their book, *Gamer Trouble,* Amanda Phillips describes how video games were and are an essential space for exploring their gender and sexuality in an otherwise gender restricted landscape (2020, p. 2). In addition to gender and sexuality exploration, video games and live streaming have supported powerful moments of activism and political change such as the Occupy movement in the U.S. and protest activity organized through *Pokémon Go* (Kavada and Treré 2019; Davies 2020). Clearly some of the beneficial and radical potential of games proposed by de Certeau continues to be born out

decades later. However, I am not sure de Certeau ever imagined the extent to which the "magic circle" of games would become collapsed into "real life" (creating contexts like video game live streaming, where play becomes work) or imagined how the tactics of everyday life would come to be used by a marginalized group to victimize and police groups that are still further marginalized. Of course, the magic circle never really existed at all, except as a social and cultural space that gave men power. In their book, *Toxic Geek Masculinity*, Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett note, "Once defined by their outsider status and victimization, geeks are now powerful enough as a subculture to make victims out of others, particularly those perceived as lacking the credential earned through suffering that makes one a 'true' outsider geek" (2017, p. 12). This outsider mentality, and the need to enforce boundaries that increase power for one group while denying the participation of others, is absolutely evident in video game culture and streaming, through the practices of harassment and gendered rhetoric like "gamer girl" and "titty streamer" that suggest the actions and values of women are inextricably linked to their gender in a way that is not true for men. This statement from Salter and Blodgett also indicates a commonly held belief in both gaming and streaming culture that struggling and suffering, that toxicity, are a natural part of the social environment, revealing again the ethos of neoliberalism.

In many respects, Huizinga's declaration that "games demand order absolute and supreme" (1944/1980, p. 10) and that any deviation ruins things for everyone seems even more true today according to the sentiments of many players and streamers who benefit from enforcing a hierarchy. GamerGate is an example of this sentiment, as well as an example of how the formalization of game tactics were applied in very tangible ways to the harassment of women to police the bounds of authentic participation, although the professed goal was to maintain the

ethical standards of the gaming community (Cross 2016; Shaw and Chess 2016).[10] But in reality, GamerGate was a public manifestation of the long-held sentiment that games and Western society belonged to men and were being encroached upon simultaneously by women and political correctness, leading to a moment where the mechanics and rhetoric of games became part of a playbook for trolling and harassment "in real life." Not only did this moment in games culture underscore the need to abandon the distinction between the virtual and the real (Cross 2016; Boellstorff 2016) in both academic and popular understandings of everyday life, but ultimately what GamerGate accomplished was to highlight how the violence encountered by women during GamerGate were things which women had already encountered (and continue to encounter) every day in contemporary gaming culture. GamerGate was an ordinary event in the lives of women in games, not an extraordinary one (Gray et al. 2017; Phillips 2020). The attention placed on it as an extraordinary event only serves to further elide the everydayness of harassment received by women in games and streaming. So, if GamerGate was a moment that allowed patriarchal game culture to practice and codify a strategy for disciplining women based on strategies they were already using, what strategies and tactics are being practiced in turn by women in the space of games to mitigate these disciplining forces? Extending the work of game scholars like Amanda Cote, Amanda Phillips, and Kishonna Gray who have addressed this question in the space of games more broadly (2020), my focus is on how these strategies and tactics are now practiced by women as live streamers.

Habitus and Meritocracy

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus was influential in my master's thesis and his ideas have continued to resonate with me, particularly his arguments against binary categorizations of

[10] For even more detailed discussions of GamerGate's events and repercussions, please see Mortensen 2016, Cross 2016, Shaw and Chess 2016, Gray et al. 2017, Massanari 2017, and Cote 2020.

the world (1990; 2001). I am putting Bourdieu's concept of habitus in discussion with game studies scholars Christopher Paul, Amanda Phillips, and T.L Taylor to make a case for how values associated with men and masculinity, and a related resistance to the presence of women, femininity, and feminism, have seemingly established themselves as the natural and logical structure of game culture. Furthermore, by incorporating Saba Mahmood I can search for agency, subjectivity, and the individual within the structuring structures that structure structures (Bourdieu, 1990; Mahmood 2009).

What I find valuable for the present work of my dissertation is not only his principle of rejecting binaries; Bourdieu also argued for recognizing vagueness as a part of culture and the everyday because life would be impossible without it (1990). Combining this with de Certeau's consideration of what makes subversion possible (finding space in the rules and schema of life where resistance can be practiced and introduced), I assert that acts of resistance would not be possible without vagueness. However, de Certeau and Bourdieu are often thought to be slightly at odds with one another when it comes to the possibility of resistance in the everyday as Sarah Pink has described (2012). This is because de Certeau focused on the activities of people as consumers and their deliberate tactics for manipulating the systems of power, whereas Bourdieu's concept of habitus suggests that the practices of individuals are based in internalized structures that encourage reproduction of power as opposed to transgression. While de Certeau's work may seem more radical and less deterministic, Bourdieu left room for something beyond the binary of power depicted by de Certeau (the powerful and those that subvert the power). Bourdieu described the practices of everyday life as something that existed between de Certeau's strategies and tactics- actions that are not totally unconscious, but neither are they fully calculated. Bourdieu's work accounts for vagueness that I believe is closer to the truth of

experience; a third mode where people are not always calculatingly dominant, resistant, or submissive- but they can be. Interestingly, like de Certeau, Bourdieu also used the example of games to illustrate his point.[11] In *The Logic of Practice* (1980/1990), Bourdieu described play as both free and determined, because while movements are limited by the rules of the game and the actions of others, players are still free to make choices.

And like Michel Foucault, Bourdieu considered the everyday in terms of fields of power that impose rules on individuals that constrain their choices and condition them to follow those rules. Foucault very similarly described disciplines which pressure a subject and render it docile, allowing for control and the incorporation of the body into the system of power that subjugates it (Foucault 1979, p. 136). Combined, this suggests a habitus of the docile and subjugated body. I believe Bourdieu is still valuable because he leaves room for human consciousness and self-determination; the very power of habitus lies in its taken-for-grantedness, the ease in which it is easy to assume the role that structures have structured for you. Misogynistic and meritocratic practices are not typically taught in a formal capacity (although they certainly shape formal practices like education); they are more commonly encountered through acculturation and practices in everyday life that are tacitly accepted as "common sense." In the example of gaming and streaming culture, stereotypes about the inferiority and cheating practices of women abound as a natural part of the environment, as the comments from my interview participants will reveal in subsequent chapters. But nowhere did Bourdieu disclose the possibility of resisting or learning a different habitus, for individuals to change what has long been perceived as common or communal sense in games and streaming.

[11] Bourdieu also described academia as a game, one that is won when your name is turned into an adjective. My thanks to the late Dr. David Graeber for that amusing piece of information (2004, p. 4).

This is crucial to the topic at hand because I think there are women who choose to model geek masculinity (Taylor 2012) as a strategy for conforming to what games culture believes is most authentic performances of gamer identity and femininity and that there are women who deliberately choose to transgress against these norms in favor of a different idea of the authentic self (Consalvo 2019), but I also think there are women who choose points in between or who perform what they believe to be real without considering how their options may be controlled or constrained. Throughout this document, I plan to follow the suggestion of feminist anthropologist Saba Mahmood that we think of individual agency "not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create" (2009, p. 15). I am not proposing that there is or that there should be any one way to be authentic or true to oneself; in fact, I am arguing the opposite, that it is binary, black-and-white ideas about what it means to be authentic that is at the heart of many of the problems of participation in games and streaming. One concern I address in this dissertation is how authenticity may be further complicated in the context of streaming, where decisions about how to seem real and authentic to viewers, an authenticity that might actually be at odds with other authentic versions of the self, are a requirement of the job.

In works such as *Masculine Domination,* Bourdieu argued for the importance of "dismantling the processes responsible for the transformation of history into nature, of cultural arbitrariness into the natural," (2001, p. 2, emphasis original). Of particular relevance for my work, he argued against the "natural" differences between men and women as arbitrary and contingent and referred to these differences as "socio-logically necessary" (2001, p. 2). This is a revisitation of the term from *The Logic of Practice*; "sociologically necessary" describes practices that seem to be the only acceptable way of doing things based on supposed natural

logic and social legitimacy (1990, p. 210, emphasis mine). In *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu links this term to Virginia Woolf's "hypnotic power of domination" and her project of the demystification of the rituals of gender domination (2001, pp. 2-3). Masculinity, Bourdieu argues, finds its strength in neutrality, as seemingly inherent and default in the logic of social order, as part of the habitus.

I see a linkage between Bourdieu's concept of habitus and recent work done on meritocracy and masculinity in video game culture that contributes to the explanation for how these ideologies and perspectives appear to be the default state. Bourdieu argued that the development of habitus stems from what is considered objectively possible in a given context. In his work on toxic meritocracy in games, Christopher Paul (2018) has demonstrated how neoliberal principles of meritocracy operating in video game culture have created a context where structural inequalities are ignored in favor of supporting a system that appears neutral through its emphasis on a natural logic of skill. Failure (a lack of skill) in this context is what marks social illegitimacy, and this belief is inculcated in a dominant segment of video game culture. Amanda Phillips has further described this as a dehumanizing logic whose optimization strategies are "inextricable from the representational practices marginalizing people of color, women, and queers" (2020, p. 181) in media like games and streaming.

What has developed is a habitus in line with meritocratic beliefs that presents the space of games as naturally male dominated. Women in games and streaming therefore grapple with a system that either tells them they are illegitimate participants or encourages them to engage in practices and performances that help reproduce the status quo of the masculine logic of meritocracy. This is particularly true in streaming, as I will demonstrate, where so much emphasis is placed on the individual streamer for their successes and failures, ignoring systemic

cultural issues in games like toxic meritocracy, misogyny, and anti-feminist rhetoric. Because meritocracy in video game culture and streaming primarily rewards men while simultaneously encouraging a habitus that imagines men as the dominant force, more authentic players, and the natural authority in video games (Salter and Blodgett 2017), it seems difficult to imagine alternatives for identity, performance, and success and other forms of authenticity.

Authenticity and Realness

One of the major issues that arises around women's experiences in streaming is that they are categorized as inauthentic or illegitimate participants in video game culture. Men benefit from the meritocratic, patriarchal principles that have come to dominate video game culture and they are therefore invested in coercing women to invest in the meritocracy or, failing that, to limit or deny their participation and agency. The reality of the presence of women, both contemporarily and historically, is also denied or underplayed. Personally, I cannot count how many times as a young woman playing games online I was told that I was not real because "everyone knows girls do not play games." Calling me a girl and telling me I did not exist were ways of denying my realness, my feelings, and my legitimate stakes in video game culture. This type of denial also served the function of marking my participation as an aberration in games, reinforcing the idea that men and their concerns are the default state (Cote 2020). A fear of change brought on by the growth of feminism and diversity initiatives in media (Banet-Weiser 2018) has encouraged members of video game culture to reject the future and focus on the past (Cote 2020).

Definitions and Concepts

Even for social media scholars who recognize that authenticity is a major factor in the digital economy, the term can be tricky to define (Banet-Weiser 2012; Duffy and Hund 2019). I admit to experiencing a similar difficulty when pressed to say what I mean by authentic or

authenticity as well as the related terms real and realness in this dissertation. Before continuing this section, I will briefly account for both authentic and real as social concepts in streaming, illustrating how one informs the other in my research.

While these terms are often used as synonyms, or even to define one another, there is a distinction to be made between authentic and real. In their paper on the authenticity bind faced by Instagram influencers, Erin Brooke Duffy and Emily Hund comment, "In a cultural moment when authenticity remains a resonant- albeit confounding- ideal, it is perhaps not surprising that social media users' activities are structured by a command to project themselves as 'real'" (2019, p. 4989). Authenticity is used as a judgment, a pattern, a standard, a model to evaluate something as worthy. Being authentic means to be deserving of inclusion and recognition for meeting the standard, fitting the model. This is what imparts a subject position as real and the ability to participate relatively unhindered. (However, what I and many others have argued is that meeting these standards of authenticity in game and streaming culture is still a risky proposition for women and oftentimes is not enough to prevent them from being policed and harassed for not being real enough [Duffy and Hund 2019, Phillips 2020, Gray 2020, Cote 2020]). Conversely, being seen as real is also what grants or reinforces authenticity. What (and who) that is seen as authentic is deemed trustworthy, and what is trustworthy is what is real or speaks to an essential reality. Therefore, in live streaming and many other social media economies, authenticity and realness are also wrapped up in issues of performance, as the quote from Duffy and Hund illustrates. One concern many women have in the "economies of visibility" (Banet-Weiser 2018, p. 2) is calculating the correct performance of real that will keep them in the "perceived boundaries of the authenticity ideal" (Duffy and Hund 2019, p. 4989). And yet, as Sarah Banet-Weiser has noted, "the performance of authenticity is a profoundly and inherently gendered issue

which implicates women in particular and exclusive ways. We constantly define and measure — and reward—appearances of authenticity even as we know it is always a performance," (2021). In the case of the latter sentence, Banet-Weiser is speaking to how political figures like Donald Trump and Jair Balsonaro have been rewarded for their performances of exaggerated masculinity.

In her book on brand cultures, *Authentic*, Banet-Weiser explored emic, grounded understandings of the concept. That is, her project became one of "thinking about how, and in what ways, the concept of authenticity remains central to how individuals organize their everyday activities and craft their very selves," (Banet-Weiser 2012, p. 10). She was also thinking about "what it means that authenticity itself is a brand, and that "authentic" spaces are branded" (Banet-Weiser 2012, p. 11, emphasis original). The emphasis on authenticity as brand is prominent in live streaming culture, due to its normalization of feminized "self-branding" practices. As Mia Consalvo, Marc Lajeunesse, and Andrei Zanescu observed in their interviews with Twitch streamers, many "took care to create a channel that was representative of them in some way, via their streaming personality, channel aesthetics, game choices, and other elements," (2020, p. 2). What streamers are expected to provide to their audience is consistent and constant gameplay coupled with a performance of unscripted vulnerability. And yet for many on the Twitch platform, the performance matters less than who is doing the performing and the identities they are seen to represent.

Real Authentic

In 2015, Sun-ha Hong described video game culture as obsessed with defining what is real and constructing its own reality by "borrow[ing] ceaselessly from the past" (p. 35). Hong further characterized this construction as a cultural imperative that sacrifices accuracy in pursuit

of an idealized heroic and superlative past. This sacrificing of accuracy also results in the creation of gendered stereotypes that support these fantasy ideals. Therefore, this cultural imperative continues through attempts to deny the participation and the reality of women in video games and the newer context of video game live streaming. This construction of a particular sense of real is also an attempt to reclaim an imagined time when games were "great," i.e., appropriately catered toward a core audience of young, white, straight men (Cote 2020). In this moment, my focus remains on providing an understanding of the role that notions of "authenticity" and "real" play in the conceptual construction of culture and the practices of everyday social norms in video games and live streaming. Indeed, authenticity as a cultural concept is often deliberately ambiguous and imprecise so that it can be shifted and used to resonate with whatever audience or set of imagined values are celebrated by those in more privileged positions (Duffy 2017, p. 133).

Debates around realness are core to this project. Yet, this dissertation is not intended to directly address "real" as it relates to concerns of embodiment and place in online contexts, except in detailing the ways "ideas, metaphors, power relations, and even forms of materiality" exist and move between the virtual and the actual and have impact on the world (Boellstorff 2011, p. 513). As Tom Boellstorff and many others have argued, the virtual is as real as any other place and that includes the world of games and the spaces of digital culture. But the unique possibilities and freedoms of virtual worlds and online spaces do consequently support unique forms of expression. As Katherine Cross has astutely observed, people in popular culture continue to be socialized to believe that actions they take online are less real or serious (2016). In his examination of griefing in *Second Life*, Boellstorff refers to this social outcome online as a general state of disinhibition (2008, p. 187). Using the example of GamerGate, Cross

demonstrated how the structures of video games and its attendant culture encouraged the dehumanization of problem people (2016), people who transgress against the social norms and values of real players. GamerGate revealed the existence of a contradiction in video game culture where players only value who and what they imagine to be real (authentic) and discount everyone and everything else. This contradiction encourages investment in maintaining specific notions of realness and authenticity that are convenient for whom they benefit, namely men. To extrapolate from Cross (2016, p. 26), people and things in video game culture are real only when they are convenient to the patriarchy in games, and unreal or illegitimate when they are not. In their work on how "real games" are defined, Mia Consalvo and Christopher Paul approach the issue by asking "What do we learn by examining when a game's gameness is called into question, when it's challenged, mocked, or even rejected? (2019, p. xx). For Consalvo and Paul, the boundaries of games are often lacking in both history and context as well as the details of how both those things are implicated in the creation and definition of those boundaries.

I am suggesting that it is the same for many players and streamers, that the boundaries drawn around them often do not account for systemic inequalities that deny them access to the social and gamer capital (Bourdieu 1986; Consalvo 2007) that would put them on the authentic/real side of the boundary. Amanda Phillips suggests that the primary purpose of the "gamer" identity is to create differences through an identitarian logic of authenticity (2020, pp. 8-9), a fiction that establishes a group of "real" gamers and those in opposition striving to be legible and included. But a result of "nontraditional gamers" being folded into the mainstream, Phillips observes, is the reinforcement of corporate structures and unjust systems because they can capture everyone (2020, p. 9). How then can the cycles of marginalization be broken by alternative ways to be a player? I want to build from the work outlined here by offering my own

contribution on how real players and streamers are being defined in games and live streaming. Rephrasing the question put forth by Consalvo and Paul, what do we learn by examining how a streamer's reality and authenticity (streamerness) is called into question, when it's challenged, mocked, or even rejected? I seek to engage with the contradictions and ambiguities in and between gaming culture, streaming, and identity politics that suggest an authentic or real self in the context of streaming is possible or even exists.

Performance and Performativity in Live Streaming

In the context of live streaming, notions of authenticity are wrapped up in both performance and performativity. I distinguish performance as deliberate actions undertaken in a situation by an individual to convey a particular sense of self (Goffman 1956) and performativity as a continuous process whereby a subject is produced and naturalized (Butler 1990; Butler 1993; Kulick 2003). In this section, I engage with the performance theories of Erving Goffman and the concept of performativity proposed by Judith Butler to illustrate how notions of authenticity are central to discussions of both performance and performativity and to further connect them with practices and norms in live streaming. I suggest that live streaming encourages particular forms of performance and produces a particular subjectivity or subject that is unique to live streaming.

Much of the labor of live streaming involves performance work; talking aloud as you play, exaggerating your emotions, crafting a persona. Scully-Blaker et al. observed in their paper on play and performance on Twitch that it is not uncommon for streamers to focus on playing games as a form of performance and that for many streamers the larger their audience grows the less they are able to "play along" with that audience and the more they become a performer

"playing for" the audience (2017). As Erving Goffman noted in his famous work The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, what is "true" or "real" about an individual can only be ascertained indirectly through their behavior or performance (1956, pp. 1-2). Goffman defined performance as "the activity of a given participant on a given occasion" (1956, p. 8). Goffman reasoned that individuals will be induced to express to others any information which they feel will best serve their interests in that context. But of course, identity is not a simple matter of self-constitution and the interests of an individual are influenced by external forces. Indeed, streamers on Twitch are incentivized to grow their audience by a gamified system of performance metrics that encourages them to stream more often and to more people (Johnson and Woodcock 2019), which has the effect on many streamers of pressuring them find a style of performance that appeals to the most people. As the more successful streamers find performance and monetization strategies that work, more and more streamers begin to emulate these performative practices and sitewide norms are created.

Several prior research studies on live streaming have shown that many streamers explicitly think of the work of streaming as performance (Pellicone and Ahn 2017; Gandolfi 2018; Yu et al. 2021). However, as I have noted in previous research (Ruberg and Cullen 2020), appearing authentic- "being real"- is described by streamers as both the key to success in live streaming and the most crucial commandment of streamer performance and audience interaction. But while streamers may recognize and treat their work as a performance, there is the expectation from viewers that streamers, often streaming from intimate personal spaces like their bedrooms (Ruberg and Lark 2020), are presenting a real and authentic self and that is what they want to reward. What seemingly goes unacknowledged by viewers is that the labor of streaming is inherently performative for all streamers and that the combined pressure of audience

expectations and platform performance metrics has created the norms that dictate what is interpreted and rewarded as acceptable realness in streaming. As a result of all this, streamers become invested in performing authenticity, often along lines that have proven successful both financially and socially.

Jesper Juul, in his analysis of how authenticity is conceptualized in independent games, described authenticity as a "double-edged sword," a process of creativity, inspiration, and self-expression that can easily devolve into fighting, accusations, and unattainable goals (2019, p. 10). Juul also builds from Julia Straub's concept of the paradox of authenticity (2019, p. 9). Authenticity is inherently performative, but this is obscured by an assumption that what is authentic is pure and unmediated. Live streamers are left balancing on this knife edge of appearing to not be trying too hard while being incentivized and rewarded to try very hard at being authentic. I examine the processes that produce a streaming subject and suggest that these performative practices and expectations for authenticity in live streaming, when combined with masculine and meritocratic values from games culture, can create very limited options for the expression of particular identities and ways of being.

This is where the element of performativity lies in live streaming culture. Many of the sociotechnical aspects of live streaming as both culture and practice produce a particular kind of subject whose performative choices are linked to and constrained by the social and technological context of streaming. I am interested in live streaming as a field of cultural production that relies on social norms of performance to reproduce itself (Bourdieu 1986; Pellicone and Ahn 2017). As Martina Leeker, Imanuel Schipper, and Timon Beyes argue in the introduction to their edited volume on digital performance and performativity, digital cultures are inherently performative cultures. In the same volume, Martina Leeker describes performativity as a "complex amalgam

of a performance and production history" (2017). In digital culture contexts, the social and technical affordances shape the possibilities of performative practice- that is performativity (Leeker, Schipper, and Beyes 2017). While performance accounts for the deliberate choices in a given moment made by embodied agents, following Goffman this would be the stagecraft of everyday life, live streaming is also performativity because it is a set of continuous processes producing a subject within and through various conditions and coercions (Butler 1990). In his early work on live streaming, Austin Walker described the "streaming posture," a public identity developed by streamers through interaction with the surveillance technology of streaming and relationships with other streamers and viewers (2014, p. 439). Digital cultures develop specific ways of developing a self, a self which is not indistinguishable from other versions of the self but is nonetheless specific to the logic of that digital culture (Leeker 2017). In the case of live streaming, social expectations for streamers, such as always being visible on camera, expressing gratitude to viewers, combined with the physical and technical infrastructure of streaming- cameras, OBS, the moderation tools provided by Twitch- contributes to the field of possible performance and subjectivity. The importance of technology in a live streaming configuration of performativity cannot be understated; in a very real sense, the performance of the technology dictates the performance of the streamer.[12] The social norms of streaming and the surveillance technology of streaming (Walker 2014) together are used to police and coerce the performances of marginalized streamers, particularly women. Understanding what is coercive and seductive about these power structures is key to understanding how to subvert them (Leeker 2017).

[12] While it is interesting to consider the agency of technology in digital culture- see Leeker 2017 for more on this point- this is not to suggest a techno-deterministic point of view. Performance technology and the performance of technology in streaming is only one factor in the processes of performativity and are not the sole constraint by any means.

Feminism in Media and Games

In this section I outline work that has grappled with public perceptions of feminism in broader culture and media like video games in order to demonstrate the presence and effect of similar perceptions in live streaming. My intention with this demonstration is to offer part of an explanation for why women and feminine individuals are judged as inauthentic participants in gaming and streaming culture in part because of associations (true or otherwise) with feminism. To put it succinctly, feminism is equated with social failure and a threat to social norms in games and live streaming.

I have primarily relied on the work of Sarah Banet-Weiser for considering feminism in the context of video game live streaming. In her book, *Empowered*, Banet-Weiser presents a case for how the popularity and presence of feminism is growing across all types of media and platforms, but she also demonstrates how this growth is often met with fear, aggression, and even violence from those invested in patriarchal structures. The resistance to feminism that she is describing can clearly be seen in video game culture and streaming; resistance which I describe in greater detail throughout the background and analysis chapters. For now, I want to focus on the concepts and stakes of feminism in media and video games that I have found relevant to my work on streaming. One of these conceptual elements is a linkage between feminism and failure. Banet-Weiser argues that feminism is framed in media as a set of risks to society, "feminism threatens conventional definitions and performances of masculinity…and it threatens conventional performances of heteronormative femininity, particularly ways that femininity functions to reassure men of their dominant position (2018, p. 3). I found this sentiment echoed in an article from the video game news website *Kotaku*, "In South Korea, Gamers Stage an Inquisition Against Feminists (D'Anastasio 2018). In the article, Cecilia D'Anastasio described

how in South Korea some forms of feminism are viewed as antisocial rhetoric and so the beliefs and participation of South Korean feminists are often minimized. As a result, women in South Korean gaming contexts have been compelled to call for more equality in games or to reject any association with feminism. D'Anastasio's article is what initially prompted me to consider linkages between feminism and failure in society.

Often in conversation with the work of Banet-Weiser is that of Rosalind Gill. Gill's work engages with the concept of postfeminism, or more accurately postfeminist sensibility, to explain trends and feelings in popular culture which emphasize the autonomy, confidence, and self-empowerment of women (Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg 2019). Gill's work suggests that a postfeminist sensibility is often adopted by women as a method for survival in a given social context (Gill 2016; Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg 2019). This postfeminist sensibility often disavows the need for feminism, arguing that women are already equal, and the playing field is level. The consequences of failing to fit in and succeed is therefore placed on the individual, a common aspect of neoliberalism and meritocracy which I discuss further in the next section. Exploring the concept of postfeminist sensibility led me to consider the place of failure in the lives of women who play video games as well as connections between failure and feminism in games and the place of postfeminist subjectivity as a tactic for survival in the face of social condemnation that limits participation and success (Cullen 2018).

Women in video game culture are often positioned between a rock and a hard place; on the one hand, they are marginalized when they participate in areas of video game culture that prides itself on having objective notions of real gaming experiences. Women in these contexts, like online hardcore games, competitive gaming, and live streaming are often derided for a lack of skill based on their gender. Of course, it has been proven that women in games are usually not

unskilled due to their gender, but because of structural inequalities in games socialization (Paaßen, Morgenroth and Stratemeyer 2017; Freeman and Wohn 2017), but the myth of women being bad at games persists. On the other hand, attempts by women to broaden what it means to be a player and the kinds of games that are played are met with contempt and rejection. Women who value casual games, perform femininity, and critique the mores of video games (or even all three) and who are attempting to reclaim more space in games are often judged as inauthentic or "what is wrong with games."

What I have sought to understand are the ways that women choose to participate in the gaming adjacent and populated context of live streaming despite the very real possibility they will be discounted as real/authentic or even encounter some form of violence. I am interested in what this continued relationship between gender and social legitimacy in games and streaming might mean for the future of feminism in video game culture in the context of the United States as revealed through popular discourse in streaming as well as the choices of the women streamers observed, surveyed, and interviewed in this dissertation. One question I pose for consideration: Are women in games who identify as feminists considered social failures in video game culture? How do women in the context of live streaming negotiate differing expectations for their presence as women and feminists? How do people in the live streaming ecosystem express feminist beliefs or signal themselves as beyond feminists? How are both femininity and feminism politicized in live streaming? But I also wonder if women who fail to identify as feminists are also considered failures to other women, particularly by those who are adamantly feminist in video games culture.

As feminist anthropologist Saba Mahmood astutely observed, many analyses of gender relations that attempt to highlight women's agency within patriarchal systems often fall victim to

reinforcing binary models of masculine/feminine, oppressor/oppressed (2009, p. 19). Agency, Mahmood argued, should be read as a capacity to realize one's own power against "relations of domination," a capacity that is often enabled by and created within those relations (2009, p. 15). Like Mahmood, I want to move beyond the binary of resistance and subjugation and consider how agency can be found not only in resistance, but in the "multiple ways in which one inhabits norms" (p. 25) that "constitute the very substance of her intimate, valorized interiority" (p. 31). Mahmood built her case on Foucault's "paradox of subjectivation," (2009, p. 27), his premise that the processes that secure a subject's subordination are also the means by which she gains agency. While Mahmood's project was to examine the vexed relationship between feminism and some religious traditions in Islam, her motivation for doing so is very much in line with my own.

> [I]t is important to interrogate the practical and conceptual conditions under which different forms of desire emerge, including the desire for submission to recognized authority. We cannot treat as natural and imitable only those desires that ensure the emergence of feminist politics. (Mahmood 2009, p. 25)

Mahmood's project unites Foucault with Judith Butler, who commented on the role of norms and how they create the subject, musing that without norms maybe the sense of self is lost- attaching to norms is how we make ourselves recognizable to society. But Butler further suggests that norms, those things "we live without recognizing, which we persist in through a sense of disavowal, for which we have no vocabulary" and that are a "source of suffering," are the site of new possibilities (2004, pp. 189-190). Indeed, while the stability and repetition of norms is what gives them their structuring power, Mahmood argues that Butler's conceptualization of agency is grounded in "the essential openness of each iteration and the possibility that it may fail or be reappropriated or resignified for purposes other than the consolidation of norms" (2009, pp. 28-

29). Building from Butler and Foucault as Mahmood did, I seek to understand how agency may be grounded in iteration and the possibility of failure- performance and failure being important elements of live streaming- without foreclosing the agency of women who chose some form of consolidation.

The Authentic Feminist

Many of the questions I proposed on the last page are based on observations I have made of popular discourse in live streams and on streaming forums. I have seen phrases like "not that kind of feminist" and terms like "feminazi" from both men decrying aggressive women and from women who identify themselves as the "right kind of feminist" (Cullen 2022). In her book on esports and professionalization in computer gaming (2012), T. L. Taylor described how women in competitive gaming often feel compelled to mimic the forms of geek masculinity found in those spaces to increase their chances at being included and being socially successful. This continues today in the present context of streaming, where women will suggest that the presence of other women who are doing things the wrong way (often by emphasizing their gender, sexuality, or feminist beliefs) are ruining things for everyone (Ruberg, Cullen, and Brewster 2019; Cullen 2022). This sort of behavior, signaling authenticity and participation in an "in-group," is not new in games.

In their 2016 article considering the linkages between the casual video game market and GamerGate, Adrienne Shaw and Shira Chess reference #NotYourShield, a hashtag used by women who aligned themselves with the values of GamerGate. I raise these points about geek masculinity and women who seemingly align themselves with the patriarchy because not only do I want to examine the breadth of feminine and feminist expression in live streaming, I also want to leave room for understanding the complexities underlying these expressions. Particularly, I

want to account for the experiences of women and others who feel that we are living in a post-feminist moment or who define themselves against feminism as harmful to individuals and video game culture. Repeating Mahmood's point, "We cannot treat as natural and imitable only those desires that ensure the emergence of feminist politics," (2009, p. 25).

Failing Like Men

To think through failure in relation to feminism, I turn to Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure,* which offers a consideration of how failure has always been a refuge for queerness. I extend this to consider how femininity, womanhood, and feminism might find refuge in failure. As I indicated earlier in this chapter, failure in my mind is an important conceptual linkage to how both gender and authenticity are structured and perceived in the meritocratic cultures of gaming and live streaming. In this section I rely on Halberstam to demonstrate that there exists a double bind in which the way a person chooses to be feminine, to be a woman, to be a feminist is always the wrong way in games and streaming.

Halberstam himself discusses failure from the perspective of feminism, pointing out that feminine success is always measured by masculine standards (2011, p. 4), and so women are almost always rendered as failures. What can women do in situations where failure is practically assured? More commercially acceptable forms of feminism, like popular feminism and postfeminism, appear to provide women with a pass to success by buying into meritocratic principles favored by men and performing a form of feminism that seems less risky. This of course assumes that performing the correct form of feminism insulates you from being perceived as harmful, which is not always the case in gaming and streaming culture. In her critique of Foucault and how his conceptualization of the docile body does not consider the unique

challenges of the bodies of women, Sandra Lee Bartky proposed that growing independence from disciplining processes for women often results in even more surveillance from the "dominating gaze of patriarchy" (1997, p. 150). Following this Foucauldian perspective, women appear to have two choices: allow themselves to be disciplined, transformed, and "improved" or risk being surveilled and punished as social failures. But Halberstam suggests another possibility; embracing failure as a way of life and seeking alternative ways of being in forms of subjugated knowledge. Failure can allow us an escape from the norms which discipline behavior and have the intent of transforming the individual into a figure that is orderly and predictable (Halberstam 2011), a docile body that can be "subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (Foucault 1979, p. 136). However, this seemingly suggests that alternatives are only possible when you are willing or able to survive the consequences of failure, which I argue is a position of privilege similar to the ability to "learn from failure."[13]

Connecting this idea of embracing and learning from failure in games and streaming is an easy task; Jesper Juul wrote an entire book on failure in games and how they provide opportunities for experiential learning (2013). In the introduction of his book The Art of Failure, Juul references the quote "success has many fathers, but failure is an orphan" (2013, p. 19). This observation is meant to support his point that it is human nature to distance oneself from failure and its consequences and that this holds true also in video games and games culture. Juul's project, similar to that of Halberstam, is to encourage seeking out failure. But let's consider the critique of Juul offered by Bonnie Ruberg (2019), who assessed Juul's conceptualization of failure as making a set of normative and universalizing assumptions about who plays games and why. Ruberg's argument is that queer failure in games escapes these normative assumptions and

[13] For more on failure and exit as privilege, please see Sarah Sharma's 2017 essay in transmediale, "Exit and the Extensions of Man."

allows for broader understanding of experiences that are "no-fun" like failure (2019). If what Juul is proposing is a heteronormative- and presumably masculine- conception of failure, then it has to be asked: what fun is failure for femininity?

Jesper Juul was concerned with failure as it specifically relates to video games, but how do we define failure more broadly? The Merriam-Webster dictionary offers four different variations on the word failure: an omission of an occurrence or performance; a lack of success; a falling short; a person that has failed (Merriam-Webster, 2018). Juul's real and fictional failures focus on the second variation and are concerned with a "lack of success." In my considerations of failure, I want to focus on the omission of performance, falling short, and the person who fails. I argue that there is an additional performative element in playing games and as a streamer where failure can occur, not just a failure to perform in the game pointed at by Juul, but a failure to perform games culture or as a gamer in the correct way- a failure to be authentic. I argue that there are judgements of deficiency that occur outside the context of play and beyond boundaries of the game, judgements that are based in a meritocratic system that is actually biased and flawed. I also argue that there are individuals who are marked as unacceptable in games culture (women, queer folk, and people of color) and where they are often set up to fail by a system that promulgates a toxic white masculinity. They are failures before they even start playing.

In *The Art of Failure*, Juul focuses on two types of failure related to video games, which he refers to as "real failure" and "fictional failure." Real failure occurs when a player invests a lot of time in a game and fails in the playing while fictional failure describes how characters fail in fictional game worlds (Juul, 2013, p. 25). This sets up a binary between the feeling of failure the player experiences as real and the failure experienced by characters but witnessed or caused by the player as having consequences that are less real or significant for the player. This binary

has very material consequences as the work of Katherine Cross outlined earlier in this chapter, but more importantly this simple binary does not consider the other very real types of failure that can accrue in the space of play and games. Real failure is also what happens when players and streamers are punished for not being real enough.

Juul goes on to discuss how failure is an opportunity for learning on the path to success and personal growth (2013, p. 59), but this presupposes that everyone has equal access to these opportunities, the ability to use these opportunities in the same way, and the desire to achieve in a way that matches societal norms of success. Here I am thinking of the spoilsport (Huizinga, 1949), the person who plays games not to have fun or with the intent to ruin the fun of others, but I am also thinking of those who are not allowed to learn and grow as a result of their failures as well as those who are conscientious that fun is not a universal concept. This leads me to the figure of Sara Ahmed's feminist killjoy, whose presence ruins the success and happiness of others (2017). In *Metagaming*, Stephanie Boluk and Patrick Lemieux combine Johann Huizinga's spoilsport and Ahmed's feminist killjoy to describe the figure of the feminist spoilsport (2017). They present the figure of the feminist spoilsport as someone who critiques the ways happiness, fun, and play in video games are used to justify social norms in video game culture, even when these norms are harmful. I propose that in a mainstream masculine games culture that fears a lack of control, the feminist killjoy is also cast in the role of the spoilsport so that they and their critiques of the magic structure of games are discounted and controllable.

Failure and Meritocracy

In addition to linking standards of success to masculinity, Halberstam also defines failure as inherently linked to capitalism, which like meritocracy also relies on an ideology where the deserving- who are already primed to be deserving- acquire profit at the expense of others, who

fell short in their inability to do the same (2011, p. 88). Included in Halberstam's account of those norms which subjugate individuals is the "toxic positivity of contemporary life" (2011, p. 3); evidence of meritocratic attitudes that can be found in many institutions that rely on the American notion of success as belonging to those that deserve it/have earned it and posits failure as the consequence of an unwillingness to strive and sacrifice. As a result, Halberstam explains, success is predetermined or easier due to factors of race, class, and gender. Furthermore, that success is predicated on the failure of others who are taught that if they think positively and work hard they will also achieve success and an inability to do either is their own fault. This again, as Christopher Paul explained (2018), is due to meritocracy's neoliberal underpinnings which places the burden of failure on the individual, nevermind the structural conditions that influence success and failure, and this can be seen in games and streaming.

In video game culture, it is men who are primed for success and profit, both economically and socially and both as players and as employees in the industry. Because women do not consistently read as authentic participants in gaming culture, when they do ascend to the highest levels of gaming, their skills and competency are often questioned (Paaßen et al. 2017). Again, what Halberstam has proposed is to question the need to be taken seriously and that what is lost in the adoption of a serious mien is the freedom to be frivolous (2011, p. 6), but for many video games is a serious business where they want to succeed within the structures of gaming culture. In fact, what Halberstam may be identifying is a loss of authenticity in trade for a more socially acceptable form of authenticity, assuming there is an essential core of authenticity. That is, gaming and live streaming are structures where an actual authentic self is subsumed by the performance of one that reads as more real or authentic. Recalling the earlier discussion of authenticity in this chapter, I am proposing that all forms of selfhood are constructed and

performative and furthermore that those constructions are commodified, so all forms of authenticity simply reflect different forms of mediated experience. Our idea of an authentic self is encouraged by our positions as capitalist subjects; authenticity is valuable insofar as it can be measured (Oksala 2016). This may be unsatisfying to some, but for this project I am not trying to make an argument for the existence of an authentic self, I am more interested in the external consequences of performances and perceptions of authenticity.[14]

The acceptance of toxic meritocratic gaming and streaming culture likely continues because it seems difficult to imagine alternatives, especially when this culture is so pervasive it seems natural (Paul 2018). For many, the principles behind meritocracy seem logical and persuasive; everyone starts at the same place and finishes based on individual merit. Again, this ignores the structural differences which places people in disadvantageous positions. In their article exploring the intersection between gender and gamer identity, Benjamin Paaßen, Thekla Morgenroth, and Michelle Stratemeyer observe, "Women…can only embrace *either* a gamer identity or a gender identity," (2017, p. 424, emphasis in original). A similar dilemma is likely experienced by others who do not fit what many imagine to be the dominant, default, and ideal gender in games. Amanda Phillips has similarly described this as the "slippage between identity and politics (women vs. feminist)" (2020, p. 18) that all women and feminists in games become familiar with, because either identity can act as a marker of exclusion. While it certainly is not true that someone cannot be both a woman and a video game player (or even a gamer), the power and prevalence of this exclusionary dichotomy exists. This dichotomy is at the heart of the double-blind alluded to in the title of my dissertation.

In the context of games and streaming, women and feminists are often perceived as

[14] For discussions of gender, labor, and the notion of an essential self, please see Hochschild 1979/2012. For a rebuttal of Hochschild, please see Weeks 2007.

failures before they have even begun to play and to bring awareness to the inequality evidenced by this double standard is to invite harassment. Furthermore, the logic underlying meritocracy and the practices demanding authenticity in streaming entangle issues of gender and feminism in the demands of capitalism, which does not allow someone to permanently quit or fail (Phillips 2020, p. 183). This identifies yet another double bind- even if women desire to quit gaming culture, gaming culture relies on their desire to be included and makes it difficult to pursue alternatives. The bodies of women are useful to the power relations of gaming culture because that power relies on a body that is both productive and subjugated (Foucault 1979, p. 26); as is the case in streaming, women are invested in the success of a system that is indifferent- at best- to their individual success but which nonetheless relies on their labor.

Streaming Labor and the Labor of Streaming

These concepts of authenticity, gender, and meritocracy have a very material impact and presence in the lives of streamers, and this manifests most particularly in the forms of labor undertaken in streaming. I will introduce the various concepts of labor such as digital labor, emotional labor, and aspirational labor and provide an overview of how these concepts have been linked to gender, with a focus on their forms and intersections for women in streaming. Using concepts and research from Nancy Baym, Brooke Erin Duffy, Arlie Hochschild, and Hector Postigo, my intentions in this section are: strengthen my case for the connections between capitalism, streaming, feminism, and gender; suggest linkages between inauthenticity, labor, and harassment in streaming; theorize how streaming might be considered a form of gendered labor.

The work of live streaming involves several forms of labor, both material and immaterial, that require specialized skills and which many streamers find to be very demanding. I will go

into more detail about these skills and demands in the subsequent chapter which offers background information and explanations regarding video games, live streaming, and the platform Twitch.tv. For now, I would like to outline the theories and concepts of labor that I think will highlight the structure of live streaming and offer a basis for understanding the examples in subsequent chapters.

Immaterial and Digital Labor

Technological systems that rely on user generated content in the digital age, like live streaming, have frequently been examined using the lens of immaterial labor, a concept originating in the work of Maurizio Lazzarato to describe "activities that are not normally recognized as work- in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion" (1996). In his famous essay on immaterial labor, Lazzarato also deployed the concept to define a larger trend in society where the skills of direct labor were increasingly focused toward producing informational and cultural- immaterial- content (1996). This new production of immaterial content through different levels of interfaces necessitates that the worker's "personality and subjectivity have to be made susceptible to organization and command" (1996). Tizziana Terranova extended this work in 2000 to suggest that the internet and its networks not only highlights the existence of immaterial labor but speeds up its transformation from the virtual to the actual (that is, transforms immaterial labor from activities with potential to content that is harnessed for profit by corporate establishments). This transformation is shaped by hierarchies characterized by the "minoritarian, gendered, and raced character of the internet population" (Terranova 2000, p. 42). Terranova also noted of the digital economy online, "it is the spectacle of labor changing its product that keeps the users coming back. The commodity, then, is only as

good as the labor that goes into it," (2000, p. 48). As I will demonstrate in my examples throughout this dissertation, the work of live streaming absolutely relies on spectacle and constant change.

Hector Postigo defines digital labor as "a process undertaken by media consumers and configured in digital networks as productive in its own right," (2016, 334). You can see how this was informed by the concept of immaterial labor, through its emphasis on activity that is not traditionally described as labor. Digital labor emphasizes and recognizes the "organizing elements that are different than previous mass media structures and processes" (Postigo 2016, p. 334). Immaterial labor can be applied quite broadly, but the concept of digital labor indicates a focus on contemporary digital environments. However, digital labor still places an emphasis on productivity and what can be captured by the network, following Terranova, and Postigo (2016) contrasts this concept of digital labor with the work of Henry Jenkins (2006), who champions a participatory cultural view that positions user-generated content as an opportunity for everyday consumers to have input into the discourse and production of media. What Postigo posited in his own study of gaming culture on YouTube was a way to reconcile these perspectives through an attention to the ways that user generated content and culture is captured by platform architectures and affordances and therefore enters the organizational logics of the platform owners. Building from Postigo, I seek to understand how streamers have agency and create within a system of digital labor that captures, inventories, and converts their practices into something that is monetized.

Emotional and Aspirational Labor

The fact that companies in our digital media economy rely on consumers to create and circulate content has been demonstrated by several researchers in several different contexts

(Postigo 2016; Gillespie 2018; Gray and Suri 2019). What I seek to contribute to is the growing understanding of the gendered dimensions of this immaterial digital labor (McRobbie 2010; Banet-Weiser 2012; Jarrett 2014; Arcy 2016; Duffy 2017). In this dissertation, I argue that live streaming is inherently a form of gendered work that lies within the "feminization of work" (McRobbie 2010, 67) trend due to streaming's reliance on and commodification of forms of labor and skill sets associated with "women's work." The characteristics of feminine (or women's) work can be summarized as "precariousness, flexibility, mobility, fragmentary nature, low status, and low pay" (Oksala 2016, p. 281). While live streaming does in rare instances offer high status and high pay to the lucky few, capitalism is an economic system where resources are primarily distributed to individuals according to their ability to compete in a rigged game, as opposed to their actual need or right (Oksala 2016). For many the work of streaming is overwhelmingly precarious, flexible, and fragmentary. In particular, the form of labor I argue that most characterizes live streaming is emotional labor.

Arlie Hochschild conceptualized emotional labor as the "management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" that is "sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value" (1979/2012, p. 7). Applying this to live streaming, I argue that social and financial success for streamers- and by extension the platform- relies on the careful performance of particular feelings to make others feel cared for, to inspire them to consume content and participate in a brand. The technological affordances of live streaming and the norms of live streaming culture pressure streamers to convey an emotional response to everything (the example I gave earlier was expressing gratitude for every follow, tip, and subscription). More specifically, the emotional labor of live streaming could be best described using Nancy Baym's expansion of the tenets of emotional labor into the new media performer concept of "relational labor," which

recognizes the primary work in digital labor contexts (like live streaming) is to emphasize authenticity and relationship building in addition to emotional performance (2018, p. 18). Relational labor is defined by Baym as the "ongoing, interactive, affective, material, and cognitive work of communication with people over time to create structures that can support continued work" (2018, 19). Live streaming is absolutely a context that relies on creativity, experimentation, performance, and critical thinking to establish relationships with viewers. This is seen through custom notifications, chances for viewers to vote on changes to the content or the channel, and the careful navigation of being entertaining without being offensive (usually). Furthermore, building from the work of Brooke Erin Duffy, I suggest that video game live streaming is an example of a cultural industry that relies on highly gendered and entrepreneurial creative practices that offer the promise of social and economic capital, otherwise known as aspirational labor (2017). One aspect of aspirational labor is that it coerces streamers to build a personal brand, and an appearance of authenticity, through emotional appeal to a consumer audience. Branding in live streaming is meant to reflect the authenticity or "realness" of a streamer's individualism but in reality compels streamers to create performances of authenticity that are compliant with the logics of neoliberalism and the demands of capitalism due to their emphasis on objectifying your own body and sense of self (Gershon 2017; Baym 2018). This process of branding and this logic of authenticity obscures the ways in which streaming is very much a gendered form of labor and that any performance of authenticity is just that-performative. The objective of personal branding, as Baym conceptualizes it, is to provide "stability, financial success, and career advancement" (2018, p. 8) to combat the "precariousness, flexibility, mobility, fragmentary nature, low status, and low pay" (Oksala 2016, p. 281) reality of streaming. The results of these processes are that women are captured by neoliberal logics that

make alternative ways of being difficult to imagine or achieve, women are forced to engage in extra forms of labor to escape the consequences of violating the norms of authenticity (e.g., harassment), and a masculine metric in streaming continues to dictate whose labor and experiences are "real" and valued.

What I have attempted to do here is to briefly illustrate how live streaming might be conceived of as a form of gendered labor- in particular feminized labor- in that it primarily relies on emotional performance, care work, and community building and maintenance. Bound up in this labor, however, are the norms and practices of a culture and the affordances of a technological infrastructure that attempt to deny the inherently gendered labor of this work while simultaneously capturing that work for the social and economic profit of a privileged few.

Conclusion

"One does not have to be a feminist to experience the force of rage that comes from antifeminism" (Phillips 2020, p. 31). This quote for me exemplifies what motivated me to undertake this research; the figure of a woman and a feminist is a cause for anxiety in games and streaming and no matter what choice a woman makes, she is being assessed according to a logic that presumes her to be a potential threat and which condones a range of violence to contain that threat. What is it at stake in the burgeoning space of video game live streaming is that there remains a social structure that purports to be built on natural logics of meritocracy, individual expression, and equality which places women, femmes, and feminists in situations where they are pressured to conform to masculine ideals of authenticity or face consequences such as rejection, failure, and even violence. For many, it becomes difficult to imagine alternatives for success outside the mainstream space of play and performance, and indeed the room to do so

may in itself be a form of privilege (Sharma 2017). For many others, they simply are not looking for those alternatives- they want success in the mainstream, and so they embrace meritocratic rhetoric and misogynistic constraints. Either way, managing all these expectations (or seeking alternatives) as a streamer adds additional elements of labor to the already physically and emotionally demanding digital labor inherent in the activities of a live streamer.

What I have come to is this question: Is there a future anywhere for games and feminism that allows for identity slippage without risk or compromise? Frankly, I am not sure it is possible, and I do not have an answer. Indeed, what I do have to offer is the observation that streamers and everyone else must live within a system where failure is much more possible than success, and so more pleasure must be found in failure. Uniting some of the strands of theory I have presented in this chapter, I suggest that it is through friction, ambiguity, and failure that women find something real for themselves and that understanding these lived experiences in gray areas is more important than any definitive conclusion on “realness” and “success” in games and streaming that you or I can offer.

Chapter Four: Methods and Positionality

My overall approach to this dissertation research was ethnographic. Ethnography as a term broadly refers to "an approach for studying everyday life as lived by groups of people" (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce & Taylor 2012, p. 1). In particular, ethnographic research is attentive to how "cultural domains constitute and influence each other" (Boellstorff et al. 2012, p. 3). In the case of this dissertation, this meant recognizing and articulating how games culture and live streaming- as places, cultures, and communities- overlap in many ways and inform each other but are still distinct fields of knowledge. Rather than neatly isolating an element of culture or life and studying it, ethnography is about immersion in the social context and in the complexities. This immersion and its allowances for ambiguities and complications is what gave me the space to ask how gender performance might intersect with streamer performance and ideas about authenticity in games culture.

Ethnography is not a single method, but rather a collection of methods meant to attempt a holistic image of a given context. As Tom Boellstorff noted in the discussion of his methodological approach to his work on Second Life, it can be difficult for research participants to articulate the knowledge which they take for granted in their everyday lives during interviews (2008). This is perhaps why ethnography is most associated with the practice of participant observation, because when combined with other methods like interviews it allows for both emic (insider) and etic (outsider) interpretations to be present in the research.

I favor an ethnographic approach because it also recognizes how the researcher is the instrument of evaluation, whose own practices and gendered experiences impact the research (Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day 2012). Furthermore, an ethnographic approach acknowledges that the researcher often has both embodiment and stakes in the research, which encourages self-

reflexivity on the uniqueness of meaning making in a given context and the researcher's influence on that meaning (Hanson and Richards 2019). In her book, Situating Everyday Life, anthropologist Sarah Pink describes the ethnographic approach as one that both shapes and responds to understandings that emerge from the research (2012). Like Pink, I also consider ethnography to be "the study of individuals as they are engaged in practices" (2012, p. 21). Focusing on the intersection of broader social and cultural practices and individual performances of those practices allows for insight into both wider social issues as well as the changes wrought in situated times and spaces through the recreation, modification, and misinterpretation of those practices on the part of individuals.

For this dissertation, I used a variety of data collection and analysis methods to observe behavior and communication in the natural setting of live streaming, question participants directly, and understand the cultural context around video game live streaming. I modeled my approach on previous academic studies of live streaming conducted by T. L. Taylor and Ge Zhang with Larissa Hjorth. Both Taylor (2018) and Zhang and Hjorth (2017) used combinations of participant observation, cultural analysis, and interviews to create detailed observations of Twitch streamers and Douyu streamers respectively. However, while Zhang and Hjorth also conducted a study of gender and performance in live streaming, it was in the cultural and linguistic context of the Chinese live streaming platform Douyu. And while Taylor's project was more broadly focused on Twitch as a platform in an English speaking (and largely American) context, it included less emphasis on gender distinctions and disparities between streamers. I seek to offer an understanding of gendered disparities and disjunctions faced by women in Western streaming contexts. In this dissertation on the experiences of women live streamers on Twitch, I: conducted discourse analysis on forums that featured discussions of gender,

performance, and feminism in live streaming; watched hundreds of hours of live streams on Twitch as a participant observer alongside other viewers; and interviewed 17 women, femme non-binary, and genderfluid streamers about their experiences.

This chapter begins with a discussion of my methodological orientation and the disciplines and ideologies which have informed my approach. This is followed by a brief consideration of the Institutional Research Board (IRB) and a few points of reflection that were prompted about research projects like mine during my negotiations with the IRB at the University of California, Irvine (UCI) about the potential for harm in this research. The chapter will then conclude with an explanation of each of the primary methods I have used in my inquiries and my methods of analysis for those techniques, which are: discourse analysis, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews.

Research Orientation

My orientation as a researcher is that of a feminist who critiques and rejects the "scientific methods that privilege masculine notions of objectivity, scientific detachment, and value neutrality" (Olive and Thorpe 2011, p. 424). For me, research is an active and political practice in which I am personally invested, and through which I am striving to make the experiences of women more visible by revealing the structures of power in the cultural field of video game live streaming. That is to say, I embrace a feminist habitus, a term coined by Leslie McCall in 1992 as a play on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus. The feminist habitus is a disposition to "challenge binary oppositions inherent in gender symbolism either by eliminating them, bypassing them in favor of a diverse field of gendered dispositions, or reversing the valuations associated with them" (1992, p. 857). Overall, I operate from a social constructivist

approach largely based in the philosophy of Bourdieu. The best account I have found for why Bourdieu is useful, in general but particularly for me, was in an essay on international political economy by Anna Leander (2002). As she explains it, the ultimate value of Bourdieu's constructivist approach lies in three parts. First, it accounts for the power of structures and the structures of power without denying agency to individuals or the materiality of their everyday social reality. Second, his approach maintains a link between agency and the "taken for granted dimension of social reality" (Leander 2002, p. 5). Third, it stresses the significance of reflexivity. This reflexivity complements my overall approach as a feminist and an anthropologist very well, in that I recognize myself as the instrument of evaluation in my research and acknowledge how my own characteristics, values, and beliefs impact my interactions with participants and analysis of materials. Being both a reflexive and a feminist researcher means not only ethically accounting for participants and peers in the current context, but also working to improve conditions for future generations in the spaces we leave behind as researchers (Olive and Thorpe 2011). This suggests that feminist researchers have a responsibility to be openly engaged in feminist praxis.

But it is my own positionality as a feminist researcher that also led me to think about feminist failure in society and in live streaming. Have there been times when I failed to correctly perform as a feminist? As I have discussed in other writing and as my participants will share in succeeding chapters, associating with or identifying as a feminist in live streaming and video games can be a dangerous prospect. Furthermore, suspicion of and even outright anger toward feminists is a common reaction in video game culture (Gray, Voorhees, and Vossen 2018). This is true for the feminist researcher as well. Not only do you potentially expose yourself to criticism from peers- again for a perceived lack of objectivity and research rigor- many feminist

researchers in the field find themselves being judged or even harassed by their own participants (Olive and Thorpe 2011; Hanson and Richards 2019). As a researcher and even an instructor in video game studies classrooms, I often take the position of the tempered radical, a person who resides within a context which they hope to change but where they are forced to negotiate contradictions between themselves and the dominant logic (Meyerson and Tompkins 2007).[15] What this has meant for me is that I try to model what I value and the change I hope to see through my actions, but I often avoid using overtly feminist language that can be interpreted as inflammatory to those opposed to feminism in my day-to-day life to describe those actions. I have firsthand experience with what happens when you identify yourself as a feminist in a room full of "gamers" (Farokhmanesh 2019) who believe that feminism is an ideology fundamentally opposed to gaming culture.[16] This what I mean by a feminist failure. Instead of openly advocating for my beliefs, owning them, and allowing myself to be categorized as a feminist, I have learned to rely on the silent small changes I am able to effect to speak for me and my perspective as a feminist.

This habit of mine is worth mentioning for two reasons. First, because with this dissertation I deliberately embraced a more pronounced feminist habitus, identifying myself as a feminist to my interview participants and inviting them to discuss their perspectives on feminism with me. Second, as a result of that invitation I found that several of my interview participants also see themselves as tempered radicals within the social and institutional context that is Twitch. Many of the streamers I spoke to earnestly believe that being visible and available and authentically themselves in a structure that disfavors them is in itself a radical act of feminism.

[15] My gratitude to Dr. Paul Dourish for introducing this concept to me during my comprehensive exam.
[16] I was the lead teaching assistant (TA) for the toxic game development classroom described in this article.

As a result of conducting this research, I have become fiercer in my belief that individuals should be able to practice whatever form of feminism works best for their lives and suits their conscience. I do not want to judge them or myself for perceived "feminist failures." You will find throughout this dissertation that while I may analyze and critique what is happening in the context of live streaming, I am careful not to condemn my participants for anything that might be construed as a failure to perform feminism.

Institutional Review Boards

The semi-structured interview portion of this dissertation project was approved by UCI's Institutional Review Board (IRB) in August 2020. IRBs are made up of rules experts who review research projects that intend to use "human subjects" and decide whether these projects should proceed (Stark 2012). IRBs are, as Laura Stark has described them, empowered to turn hypothetical situations into realities and to change the shape of what is knowable through their decisions. IRBs often meet together as groups and always without the researcher and the research participant; the former because they are under review and the latter because they do not have permission to be involved until after the review (Stark 2012). This means the researcher and the participants rely a great deal on the expertise and knowledge of the IRB members in the process of assessing risk. Risk is one of the principal concerns of the IRB, and its goal is to assess whether any potential harm (social, legal, or physical) from participation in a research project would be greater than what "a participant would experience in her everyday life" (Stark 2012, p. 14).

As you might imagine, some research projects and ethical dilemmas are easier to assess than others, especially those that fall within the established guidelines of medical research

projects of the type that IRBs were created to oversee in the first place. However, there are many projects that fall into areas of ambiguity that IRBs struggle to resolve. For example, due to increasing datafication in many aspects of everyday life, a huge range of human activity can be inferred through data collected from social media, wearables, and search histories (Shilton et al. 2021). Recent events and research have shown to what extent this data can be used to cause direct harm to people as well as institutions (Kennedy 2018). Unfortunately, many IRBs "interpret data gathered through scraping or purchase as exempt from informed consent" due to the assumption that this data is public and its capture poses no undue risk to subjects (Shilton et al. 2021, p. 2). But this assumption ignores the purpose of the IRB, which Laura Stark has asserted is to "see like a subject" (2012), and ignores the lived reality for many people online, where they may be alarmed to know how their data is being used or that a space they interpret as private is being delineated as publicly available for research. The IRB at many institutions have not adjusted to realize the potential for harm that can be done online, and I became aware of this during my own IRB review process.

I submitted the semi-structured interview protocol of my dissertation for evaluation to the UCI IRB, despite suggestions from my peers, committee, and even the IRB that I would be self-exempt. I sought IRB review due to my conviction that life online presents the potential for very real harm to people and that potential should be assessed by a professional third party. In the case of this dissertation, speaking out or being thought to have spoken out against any perceived inequality in games culture or live streaming could result in unfriendly attention or even harassment for my participants that could have impacted them socially, emotionally, and financially. I was being attentive to that risk when designing my recruitment materials and interview protocol and in asking for them to be officially reviewed by the IRB. The questions I

received in response from my IRB reviewer revealed both a lack of expertise and awareness of the context of my research and at the beginning of the review a lack of agreement that online spaces inherently carry a risk of harm. While it may be assumed that pseudonymous contexts online "facilitate nonidentifiable content," the reality is that social media users are vulnerable, especially because of the increasing growth and interrelatedness of platforms (Morrow, Hawkins, and Kern 2015; Gerrard 2021). Over the course of two months of back and forth between myself and the reviewer, through a very patient intermediary, I was able to successfully convince the reviewer of the potential harm that could be present in my digital research in the ways I have indicated above while also getting the reviewer to recognize the unique situation of Twitch and potential for harm there. Twitch is designed to deliver live publicly observable experiences and I felt that activity there does have the expectation of being publicly viewable, which I will discuss more during my account of participant observation. But I felt it was important to stress- to the IRB and here in this dissertation- that not all spaces and communities online expect to be treated as public spaces or resources, that harm done online is just as devastating as harm done in person. Indeed, feminist geographers Oona Morrow, Roberta Hawkins, and Leslie Kern observed that IRB protocols tend to lag behind technological developments and that "institutional approaches tend to reinforce (or ignore the messiness of) problematic distinctions between categories such as private/public, personal/political, and virtual/material," (2015, p. 527). I would add that IRBs lag behind social practices and developments as well. IRBs- especially after the Covid-19 pandemic- need to be more prepared to reflect on the ethics and harms of life online, to urge researchers to continually reflect on ethics and consent in messy online spaces, and to address the proper ways to approach digital research contexts.[17]

[17] For more information on this topic as well as practical advice for conducting ethical research online, please see the "Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0" published by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR).

Discourse Analysis

I will now pivot to discussing the individual methods used in my ethnographic research, beginning with discourse analysis. To better understand the kinds of conversations and topics that preoccupy streamers and viewers, and in particular the conversations about women, gender, and feminism in streaming, I collected textual data online from sites like Reddit and Twitter as well as popular news articles about women and/or feminism in live streaming for discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a "qualitative, interpretive, and constructionist" methodology for exploring how social ideas are created and held in place through text and language (Hardy, Harley, and Phillips 2004). Discourse analysis finds validity through performativity and the demonstration that "patterns in the meaning of texts are constitutive of reality in some way," (Hardy, Harley, and Phillips 2004). Discourse analysis also attempts to understand the meaning of social reality for participants (Hardy, Harley, and Phillips 2004; Geertz 1973). The discourse analysis I was engaged in was very much Foucauldian, in that I was primarily interested in the constitution and reconstitution of social power through language and knowledge production (Macgilchrist and Van Hout 2011). Analyzing conversations about streamers, between streamers, and between streamers and viewers added additional context to my observations and interviews by highlighting practices and ideologies in video game culture and in live streaming communities that can be connected to the everyday labor, participation, and expression of women in live streaming. As Felicitas Macgilchrist and Tom Van Hout noted in their overview of ethnographic discourse analysis, approaches that integrate ethnography and discourse analysis are very well suited, and commonly used, for Foucauldian analysis of power relations and understanding "the constitution of hegemony, understood in a Gramscian sense as the organization of consent through the complex social, cultural, and political processes of lived

experience," (2011, p. 1). What I am doing in this dissertation project is using a combination of ethnographic methods and discourse analysis to highlight the power structures and complex lived experiences undergirding video game live streaming.

Social Media

While I regularly visited subreddits like r/Twitch, r/GirlGamers, and r/gaming to stay current with community discussions, on several occasions between 2018 and 2021 I systematically searched these subreddits and Reddit overall with keyword searches such as "woman," "women," "feminist," and "feminism" paired with combinations of words like "streamer," "streaming," and "Twitch" to uncover threaded conversations that expressed meaningful opinions related to these populations and subjects in live streaming. I also conducted keyword searches for popular terms in live streaming that were used to describe and disparage the work of women, such as "titty streamer," "camgirl," and "hot tub streamer." I searched through the results of each keyword search and separated out the most relevant results, which overall totaled approximately 30 threads. These threads varied in length, ranging from only a few comments to thousands of responses, but they represent participation from thousands of individuals in conversations about and making meaning in live streaming culture. The results of these searches revealed a frequent and long-standing preoccupation with both gender and feminism. Topics under discussion included excessive cleavage, the preferential treatment shown to women streamers by the Twitch platform, and the correct kind of feminism for streaming. It is in threads of the latter type where I first noticed comments from women in streaming disavowing other women and feminism.

The oldest thread I uncovered on Reddit, discussing the place of feminists in live streaming, was created in September 2014 and the most recent thread I analyzed was from June

2020. I analyzed one thread that had approximately 4,000 comments alone. Posted in October 2017, the original post has no text- it simply presents a comparison of "girls vs guys streaming" by showing an image of a woman playing video games in a tank top (with cleavage visible) next to an image of a man gaming with only his face visible. The juxtaposition was an obvious call-out and condemnation of so-called titty or boobie streamers. The comments on these juxtaposed images included interesting debates on gendered pressures and expectations in live streaming, as well as derisive comments about how easy it is to "sell sex," which ironically belie the entrepreneurial and neoliberal foundations of live streaming. This thread and the others I analyzed represent participation from thousands of individuals in conversations about live streaming culture and reveal prevailing attitudes towards women, femininity, and feminism in video game live streaming.

Many of the conversations I analyzed on Reddit were several years old- many had been locked and archived for some time. For me, Twitter was also a valuable context for using a methodology that is attentive to both ethnographic methods and discourse analysis. Twitter was a useful space for me to generate an understanding of current conversations about and around streaming and additionally for conducting participant observation in streaming networks. While it is common for streamers to set up private or semi-private Discord spaces for their communities or even to have subreddits set up, most streamers leverage Twitter as their preferred platform for public facing modes of interaction with viewers, other streamers, and even sponsors. Twitter is an easy way for streamers to send out mass notifications of their streaming activities, like a warning that their Twitch channel is about to go live or to provide information about a giveaway for subscribers. Whereas Discord groups can control who becomes a member (and how) and rules on Reddit may not permit the identification of particular streamers (Cullen 2022), Twitter is

often conceptualized as a public space and its moderation practices do not prevent most user conversations about or directed at specific streamers (unless those conversations otherwise break official rules and policies). In addition to getting a sense of the big "D" discourses in live streaming, Twitter also allowed me to enhance my understanding of norms in the community. Many of the Twitter comments and threads I have encountered over the course of this dissertation project were influential in how I approached data gathering, interactions with participants, and the construction of interview questions. They also shaped the way I thought about the pressures women and minoritized genders face in streaming and the ways that they can respond. Every time an instance of a live streamer being harassed on account of their gender went viral on Twitter- which happened several times during this research project- I was able to observe trends and arguments regarding the participation of women, as well as the emergence of new practices and conversations within streaming communities.

Popular Press Articles

Several of these viral moments I mentioned made their way into popular press news articles and so I paid attention to the framing of issues in these articles alongside the conversations on Reddit, Twitter, Discord, and Twitch. In fact, the popular gaming press article that partially inspired this dissertation, "In South Korea, Gamer's Stage an Inquisition Against Feminism" (D'Anastasio 2018) was coverage of the intersections between gender, video games, and feminism. Since reading that article, I have paid more attention to the language around feminisms in video game culture and what it might mean to be a social failure vis-à-vis any perceived association with feminist beliefs (Cullen 2018). What I ultimately realized is that women like Geguri are constantly under surveillance; I realized, as Austin Walker proposed before me (2014), that live streaming is a surveillance and disciplining apparatus. I doubt too

many would debate the truth of this, and in fact several others have published on this point about live streaming platforms (Walker 2014; Partin 2019; Guarriello 2019), but what became important to me was to consider how women in particular were being impacted by this structure and the pressure of being watched and often judged. It is made very clear in the popular press and on public forums that women in live streaming are talked about differently and held to different standards.

As early as 2013, sites like *Kotaku* and *Polygon* that cover issues in video games and live streaming were publishing articles about the double standards faced by women in live streaming. In 2013, Patricia Hernandez discussed how the term "camwhore," was being used to stigmatize and construct women as "fake" for doing the same things that men were doing in live streaming: using their bodies to make money (2013). In 2018 the language used against women became more platform specific and included terms like "titty streamer" and "Twitch thot" (D'Anastasio 2018; Alexander 2018; Ruberg, Cullen, and Brewster 2019). More recently in 2021, the "hot tub meta" emerged, which was yet another way of critiquing the way that women were performing within the rules and constraints of the system (Grayson 2021a). What analyzing the conversations within and represented by these popular press articles revealed was a preoccupation with the bodies, presentations, and performances of women. In particular, they reveal a system that attempts to define and categorize gender, authenticity, and the appropriate performance of both those things. Keeping up to date on the issues and debates within live streaming through both social media and popular press coverage was an invaluable way to understand what mattered to live streamers but also what they were forced to be aware of due to the expectations and practices of others.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is the defining method of ethnographic research and involves the "embodied emplacement of the researching self in a fieldsite as a consequential social actor" (Boellstorff et al. 2012, p. 65). Before discussing my participant observation activities, I briefly consider this concept of embodiment and what it means in the context of a project like mine.

Boellstorff once suggested that the contemporary ethnographic practices of anthropologists are bound up in the assumption that physical embodiment is paramount and that this keen awareness of physicality and materiality is a result of the turn away from "armchair anthropology" (2008, 134). A common response to virtual or digital ethnography therefore has been to discount what happens in virtual and digital contexts as unreal or an attempt to place importance on mind over body, fiction over reality. How can a person be real or authentic when they are in a context that allows them to craft everything about themselves? Boellstorff discusses this in *Coming of Age in Second Life*: the physical bodies we inhabit are in many ways constructed by technologies (technes)- technologies that are social and cultural as well as digital and mechanical (2008, p. 135). What creating a self, or a sense of self, a selfhood online does is bring to the fore the ways that "embodiment is shaped by human intentionality" (Boellstorff 2008, p. 135). For me the work of Boellstorff is a great place for beginning to question what it means to do participant observation, and ethnography in general, online. For me the answer is: the everyday that happens in digital and virtual contexts, the sense of self that we express there and the activities we undertake, are just as real and significant as those in other contexts. But as many others before me have observed, ethnography online is messy because life online is messy (Postill and Pink 2012). For example, Boellstorff's work has largely dealt with virtual world contexts where it is possible for participants to "wear a whole embodiment" of their creation and

therefore avoid appearance-based judgements (Boellstorff 2008, p. 135). On Twitch- and many other sites like it- that is largely not the case.[18]

Many Twitch streamers, due to various social, technical, or technological constraints, are limited to partial embodiments ("unchosen embodiments" [Boellstorff 2008, p. 148]) in the modifications and expressions they can embrace for their streaming personas and performances. The processes of streaming- appearing on camera, sitting for long hours, performing positive affects- are absolutely processes of embodiment that foreground both materiality and virtuality. There is an expectation in streaming that what is being presented is real and authentic, and these concepts apply to the material body presented virtually. What my dissertation accounts for are the myriad ways that "online articulations of gender, sexuality, and embodiment are intricately interwoven with people's physical embeddings in everyday life" (van Doorn 2011, p. 532) in the context of live streaming culture and labor.

To account for these myriad articulations in live streaming and the multi-sitedness of live streaming communities and culture, I conducted participant observation on Twitter, in a few Discord servers, and on Twitch.tv. As Postill and Pink (2012) concluded in their discussion of social media ethnography, internet users do not limit their expressions and interactions to any one platform. "The movement of the digital ethnographer involves traversing interrelated digital and co-present contexts" (Postill and Pink 2012, p. 132). While my main focus was on Twitch and Twitch streamers, seeing how these streamers and others liked them interacted and discussed issues related to streaming in a social media ecosystem was important to understanding individual practices and common trends.

Twitter

[18] Recently there is a growing trend on Twitch of streamers using partially or entirely virtual avatars. The practice grew to popularity on YouTube and those that utilize virtual avatars are called VTubers.

Twitter, as I briefly discussed earlier, was useful both for its opportunities to stay up to date with discourses and practices in live streaming, but also for giving me opportunities to interact with streamers directly. When it came time for me to recruit participants for my interviews, I turned to Twitter due to its active and engaged community of live streamers. Beginning with my own networks and working outward, I began to observe and interact with members of what could loosely be called the Twitch/streaming community on Twitter. I regularly read tweets and retweets from individuals who identified as streamers in either their comments or profile descriptions. Like Bonnie Stewart in her study of "academic Twitter," I found Twitter to be a useful space for understanding live streaming as a professional culture that is situated across platforms based around curated identities and content with its own unique emergent practices across those platforms (2016). I did not follow any particular accounts and none of the Twitter threads I read will be shared in this dissertation. While Twitter could have been a site and a focus on my research, I instead primarily used Twitter as a way to stay updated on developments in the lives and careers of my dissertation participants and to improve my sense of common practices and ideas in "streaming Twitter."

Discord

As I identified and began to learn more about the streamers who volunteered to be a part of my dissertation research, several of them invited me to join Discord servers they had established for their streaming communities. Again, these servers were not the main focus of my dissertation and I do not intend to go into much detail about any of those servers individually. While much of Twitter can be conceptualized as public space, although there is some debate about that point, Discord servers are often deliberately made to be a private space for a particular community. Many servers feature authentication and verification processes that ensure

authenticity and accountability on the part of its members. What I want to stress is that overall what they had in common was a focus on providing safe and welcoming spaces. All of the streamers I spoke to were very conscious of their communities and the kinds of harms they face online, so many of their Discords were meant to be spaces for women only. As one server states in its guidelines, women in video game streaming need private places where they can connect with and support each other. (The unspoken premise being that they do not find that support in the larger streaming community or even from Twitch itself.) Additionally, all of these servers were broadly inclusive of what it meant to be a woman or femme person. As one server stated in their FAQs, "Not all women have a uterus and some chicks have dicks."

Similar to Twitter, these Discord servers were useful for me to understand how situated knowledge is being developed in streaming culture. On Twitch conversations in chat are rarely saved for longer than a few days due to both streamer practices and the affordances of the platform. But unlike Twitter and Twitch, Discord servers are meant to serve as an archive and a record for the community and they typically carry the expectation of privacy. It was often the case that heavier or more serious topics were discussed on Discord rather than "in public" on Twitter or Twitch. These conversations ranged in nature from discussing personal struggles, technical problems, and harassment faced by them and others in live streaming. And, unsurprisingly, much of these conversations were instigated by events or threads seen on Twitch and Twitter. On one Discord they regularly updated an informal blacklist or blocklist of users to stay away from or proactively block in their communities. Most often these were other streamers who were recognized as pests, harassers, and bullies.[19] On a more positive note, these streamers also used their Discord servers to share resources for setting up live streams with tips on

[19] In fact, "harassment streams" are a regular problem on Twitch. These are streamers and channels who devote time to streaming other channels for the purpose of ridiculing, harassing, and even doxxing other streamers (Dale 2017).

personalizing content and promoted each other's channels.

Being an observer and a participant in these activities and conversations informed and corroborated much of what my participants shared in interviews about their communities, their streaming practices, and the pressures they faced on Twitch. I did not systematically analyze any of the threads or comments in these Discord servers; rather I would try to drop in on a regular basis and stay up to date on what the community found important. I am leaving this dissertation project with the notion that future research should focus more on the overlap and importance of Discord servers for marginalized streamers and their communities. For example, it became clear to me during this project and the one I did on behalf of Twitch itself that much of the work of moderators- the first line of defense for these streamers and communities- is accomplished not on Twitch but on Discord (Cullen and Kairam 2022).[20]

Twitch

I began formal participant observation of Twitch streamers in early 2019 and engaged in this activity for several months. I went through several rounds of observation where I would randomly select a category on the home page of Twitch (usually game related) and a channel to watch for several minutes or even hours. During these observations, I typically took notes on the following elements: the type of content being streamed; the appearance, performance, and personality of the streamer; the number of viewers and active participants in the chat; the number of subscribers and followers; the number of moderators; and a paraphrased list of the channel rules. This gave me some context for understanding the size of the streamer's community, the type of audience they may be attracting, and the concerns they had for monitoring the chat and

[20] This is the first time I have brought it up, but I do think I should say it somewhere that I was an intern at Twitch during the summer of 2020. I learned a lot about the platform that shaped my thinking in my dissertation research, but so much of what I learned is sealed under an NDA (non-disclosure agreement) and will not be discussed in this dissertation.

encouraging good behavior from viewers. I also took notes on the interactions I witnessed between the streamer and their chat, sometimes going so far as to write out detailed (albeit paraphrased) transcripts of these interactions. I offer one of these later in this chapter as an example of the power and usefulness of participant observation.

In addition to my random browsing, I also conducted observations of channels where I sought out either streamers with specific identities or streamers who were playing specific games. My participation ranged from being a lurker (or passive observer of the stream) to engaging in the chat with other viewers and the streamer. At the time I began this work I did not think it was ethical (or even affordable) to escalate my participation to subscriber or moderator in any of these channels, although that would have added an additional facet to my research. I know from personal experience and from the research I conducted at Twitch that donors and subscribers are often treated differently by both streamers and moderators. At the time of writing this I am of slightly different opinion, that maybe it is unethical not to compensate these streamers for the time I spent learning from them in their channels. I urge future live streaming researchers to consider when and how streamers should be compensated for active or even passive contributions to research.

The initial rounds of formal observation were useful for informing the design of my survey. Alongside this more formalized approach, where I would systematically find channels and streamers to watch and record details and analysis of what I was seeing, I also participated informally as a Twitch user in my personal life. In fact, I continue to participate in these channels at the time of this writing and I suspect I still do at the time you might be reading this. There are several channels that I watch regularly, and a few where I am a subscriber or even a moderator, and my interactions in those channels and communities have also influenced my perspective and

my approach to this dissertation research.

My goal was to gather insights into streaming through observation of a variety of streamers engaged in different styles of streaming (gaming, cooking, crafting), but I primarily focused on women engaged in video game live streaming. Overall, I conducted hundreds of hours of observational work in the channels of nearly three dozen different streamers. These observations allowed me to observe trends in both streamer and viewer behavior across Twitch. This is important given that Twitch hosts millions of channels, none of which exist privately or in isolation on the platform. Trends and behaviors in other channels, especially those belonging to so-called big streamers, tend to spread (or trickle down) to smaller channels and communities. Twitch is very much a "viral culture" (cf. Stewart 2016).

Twitch, like most other social media platforms, has its own language and slang that requires regular immersion in the context to understand without effort. Take for example the title of the research paper on Twitch chat coherence by Ford et al., "Chat speed OP PogChamp" (2017). In the context of Twitch, that is a complete and coherent sentence offering a commentary on the speed (OP [overpowered], meaning fast in this context) of conversation in a Twitch chat and expressing excitement (PogChamp).[21] In the transcript below, you will see mention of the Twitch emote "BabyRage." The BabyRage emote (Figure 4) is typically used to call someone out for "acting like a baby" (behaving petulantly or immaturely), but in this case it was being used by a viewer to reference a streamer's pregnancy and viewer desire for more information about that pregnancy.

[21] "PogChamp" refers to a Twitch platform emote used to indicate surprise or excitement. The original emote featured the face of one the earliest Twitch streamers, Ryan Guiterrez, but was replaced when Guiterrez made public comments of support for the U.S. Capitol insurrection on January 6, 2021 (Kelly 2021). For an analysis of the use, replacement, and politics of PogChamp please see Jackson 2023.

Figure 4: ‘BabyRage’ Twitch emote. Depicts a blurry close-up of a crying baby.

Participant observation also informed the design of my interview protocol by helping me to understand what the “everyday” looks like for streamers on Twitch.tv. While discourse analysis of threads on Reddit and popular press coverage of scandals and controversies in live streaming helped me understand some of the broader issues, spending time in the minutiae of a Twitch channel gave me insight into the meaning making and sociality of individuals and individual channels in light of those issues.

To illustrate this connection and to present an unscripted moment of everyday interaction in live streaming I present the following anecdote. In 2019 I joined a Twitch stream in progress of a woman playing a recently released horror game. I will refer to this streamer as Brigid. When I joined the channel, Brigid had 102 viewers. Of those 102 viewers, I observed only about a dozen were active in the chat- meaning they were regularly engaging the streamer or each other in conversation. The rest were presumably lurking. Her chat rules at the time were “keep swearing to a minimum, no posting without permission, no spamming, be respectful and friendly.” Brigid was visible on the screen from the chest up, streaming against a green backdrop that allowed her to present herself against the game screen. She was engaging and adept at performing exaggerated responses to this new horror game for her audience, which kept me in the channel past the point I had planned to move on. After a particularly intense moment in the

game, Brigid stood up in front of her camera to reveal she was pregnant. The following is a transcript of the conversation that occurred between Brigid and viewers in her chat.

Brigid: It looks like I have a beach ball up my top. Like I literally ate a soccer ball. [Brigid gestures to her abdomen]
Viewer A: Looks weird to me
Viewer B: We can't wait to hear of your arrival
Viewer C: Quite the baby bump
Brigid: Yes, because I'm quite pregnant now
Viewer D: Can you dance while pregnant?
Brigid: What do you mean? I don't think I'd want to dance. Is it possible to do so? Of course!
Viewer E: Are you pregnant?
Brigid: What gave it away?
Viewer F: No, she ate a soccer ball. Didn't you hear?
Viewer D: She's 33 weeks pregnant
Viewer G: Are you getting an epidural?
Brigid: I don't know yet. We'll see how it goes.
Viewer G: You should
Viewer H: Chat is going to scare the baby out with scare donos [donations]
Viewer I: First baby born live on Twitch lol
Viewer D: Not sure Twitch would allow births on stream, but they do allow breastfeeding now
Viewer J: I'm sure most people don't want giving birth streamed to thousands of people
Viewer D: Did you know you can get pumps to bottle your breast milk so baby can still have all the nutrients
Brigid: Of course I know that. It's still a big thing to do though.
Viewer K: [Spams 'BabyRage' emote]
Viewer G: What is baby's name?
Viewer K: ['BabyRage' emote]
Brigid: You'll have to wait and find out
Viewer L: We'll know when there's a birth announcement. Can be stressful enough waiting for baby, let alone hearing everyone's opinions on every little thing!
Brigid: Yeah, with people like, "I don't like that name. I knew someone by that name and she was awful."
Viewer G: Are you waiting for birth to find out gender
Brigid: No, we're having a girl
Viewer D: And we don't find out the name until its born
Viewer K: Can you die giving birth?
Brigid: Can you die giving birth? Well, you can die doing just about anything dude. What a question! Oh dear. Yes, you can die giving birth. You can but it's quite rare. And you can die doing anything dude.
Viewer L: What a question
Viewer I: Some strange questions in chat today
Viewer M: What a horrible question

Viewer N: Horror games bring out weird questions in chat
Viewer K: sorry
Viewer O: Another scare like the last one and you'll have the baby live

What this interaction demonstrates is how live streaming is an overlapping of contexts where bodies and identities are subjected to scrutinizing and disciplining behaviors that enact marginalization (streaming, pregnancy, playing games as a woman). Being visibly pregnant and a woman in a sociotechnical environment that commoditizes both intimacy and visibility put Brigid in a position where her viewers felt comfortable asking her uncomfortable questions about her body and her pregnancy. Streaming has normalized interactions where the sharing of personal information from streamers is expected. As unusual as this interaction may appear to be, I want to stress that this kind of interaction and stigmatization is the everyday experience for many women and others with marginalized identities who are visibly different in streaming (Rines 2023; Gray 2020; Johnson 2018). The bodies of women, people of color, individuals with disabilities, and queer folk are caught up in cultural industries that promise to celebrate the authenticity and diversity of experience, but instead constrain or tokenize their bodies according to cisgendered white heteromasculine logics. People within this system are therefore not only struggling to extract any benefit while still being denied participation in the surrounding industries and cultures, but their experiences are also being commodified and packaged for entertainment to benefit the status quo of streaming culture. The economy and culture of streaming demands both intimacy and vulnerability from streamers every day, but this interaction is one of many I witnessed that suggested that streaming demands- and extracts- even more intimacy and vulnerability from women.

Interviews

While discourse analysis and participant observation were useful for understanding broad conversations about women in streaming and for seeing how women streamers go about the everyday work of streaming, I felt it was important to speak directly with these streamers about their experiences and their personal understandings of how the platform and culture worked. Again, recognizing Twitter as a place where streamers spend a lot of time interacting and networking when they are not live on Twitch, I posted a tweet [Figure 5] asking for participants to contribute to this dissertation project on labor, gender, and harassment in live streaming. In the tweet thread, I provided information about the research project, what benefit I hoped the research might have, details on compensation, and a clarification that I was not limiting my recruitment to cisgendered women, that anyone who identified as non-masculine was welcome to participate (Cullen 2020).

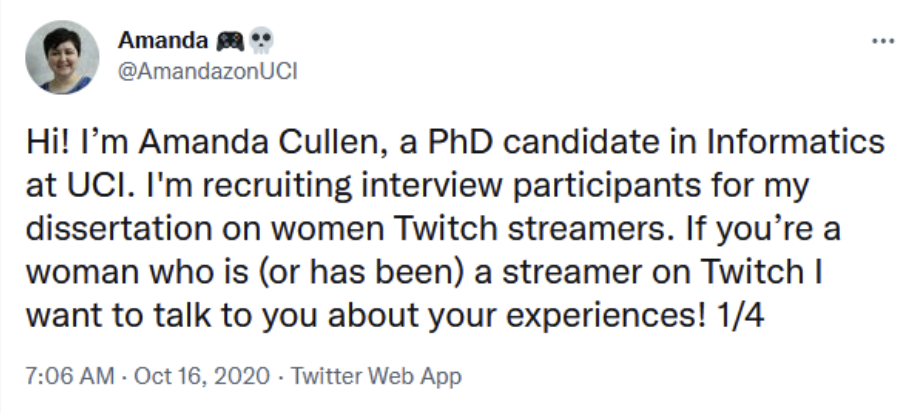


Figure 5: Screenshot of recruitment tweet posted on the researcher's Twitter account.

Using an informal, semi-structured interview protocol I spoke with 17 femme non-binary, genderfluid, and women streamers over the course of several weeks in October and November 2020. (I originally recruited 18 participants, but one person dropped out and I decided not to

recruit again.) Brief descriptions of each streamer can be found in Appendix A. I spoke with these streamers on Zoom, Discord, or Google Meet depending on the choice of the streamer. I also gave each streamer the option to use video or audio only during our conversation, whichever made them most comfortable. I responded in kind, video on or video off. I recorded the audio of each interview using OBS (Open Broadcaster Software), a program that many streamers on Twitch use to support video recording and sharing during their live streams. Although I never engaged in live streaming myself, I felt it would be useful to familiarize myself with the tools that my participants use in their streaming work. During the interviews we discussed their personal experiences of live streaming, the forms of labor involved in their work, and typical social interactions in their channels. The interview questions for streamers [Appendix B] were designed to prompt reflection on how patriarchal structures in video game culture and stereotypes about women impact participation in streaming. Topics for the interviews included participant backgrounds and contexts; gaming and live streaming experiences; senses of community and identity; practices of self-expression; understandings of success and achievement in live streaming; pressures faced by live streamers; and opinions regarding feminism in streaming. While women were the original focus of my dissertation, I also interviewed femme non-binary and genderfluid streamers who felt that their experiences of streaming were similar to or closely aligned with those of women in streaming. I do not want to present a dissertation that suggests that expressions of feminism and femininity are linked exclusively to womanhood or experiences of misogyny- because they absolutely are not.

I was lucky enough to obtain fellowships from Twitch, Google, and the UCI Steckler Center for Responsible, Ethical, and Accessible Technology (CREATE), and so I was able to compensate each interview participant with a $50 Amazon gift card for a 45-60 minute

interview, although a few of the interviews ran slightly longer than 60 minutes. While initially I was reluctant to use Amazon gift cards as compensation as opposed to more straightforward methods, after some reflection and a conversation with a department administrator I decided that Amazon gift cards would be easiest to distribute, and my participants could use the funds however they liked- gifts for themselves or family or even to purchase items to support their Twitch channel.

The fellowships I obtained also made it possible for me to pay for third-party transcription. I knew from previous ethnographic and interview research projects that transcribing an interview by hand takes 2-3x times longer than the actual length of the interview and honestly I wanted to spare myself that labor. After some research I chose the company GoTranscript because it offered human transcription services and "clean verbatim" transcripts (removing filler words) and submitted one interview recording as a sample. I was satisfied with the results and submitted the remaining 16 recordings. All 17 interview recordings were transcribed and returned to me within a week. This process cost $730 for approximately 18 hours of audio recording.[22] I then went through all of the transcripts and anonymized them- removing references that might identify participants or people in their networks- and corrected for game culture references and Twitch jargon that the transcribers may have had difficulty recognizing. The original recordings and transcripts were saved to a password protected flash drive and I kept anonymized versions of the transcripts on my personal computer for data analysis. I am belaboring this point about the logistics and software of my research because I find these details are often omitted or overlooked, but the truth of the matter is that these processes and the tools I

[22] While this may make for dry reading, I am including details on how, where, and why I spent my research funds for the benefit of future scholars. I find reading work like this, these sort of nitty-gritty details are omitted and therefore difficult for other scholars to research and replicate.

used shaped my analysis as surely as my feminist perspective. A few of my research participants requested copies of their interviews during the interview phase and I sent them copies of the transcripts after they had been anonymized.

Pseudonyms

Before I describe my interview coding process, I outline my process for choosing pseudonyms for my participants. Providing pseudonyms to research participants in projects like mine is the scholarly norm (Gerrard 2021; Lahman et al. 2015), ostensibly to provide participants safety and confidentiality from any harm they may cause themselves by participating. And while this is completely understandable and the norm for a reason, during the course of this research I became aware of a competing suggestion that automatically applying pseudonyms to participants without their knowledge or input was perhaps infringing on their desire to be seen and heard (Gerrard 2021), which was likely a motivation for their participation in the first place. It also has come to seem downright patronizing. In social media contexts like Twitch, whose design and culture is focused on building a following that will support you, reputations and even financial considerations hinge on a name. Indeed, pseudonyms/gamertags/usernames are very important to Twitch streamers because their name (and that of their channel) is a part of their brand and the work of perception management that makes up their everyday life as well as how they make a living (Gerrard 2021; Goffman 1956). At least in my case, I know that streamers put a great deal of thought into what they say, how they perform, and how they are represented- the usernames they select is part of that. I was convinced that a feminist ethics in online spaces must account for the power dynamics between researcher and participant and be attentive to how subjectivities are assigned (Morrow, Hawkins, and Kern 2015).

Following the advice of Ruth E.S. Allen and Janine L. Wiles (2016) that allowing participants to choose their own pseudonyms grants them more ownership and importance in the research, I invited my research participants to select their own pseudonyms or to work with me to create one. My only suggestion to participants was that they do not choose a name or username that might be reminiscent of one they have used in the past, might use in the future, or which associates with them with the kind of content they stream; I specifically advised the video game streamers against adopting game themed pseudonyms. Six of my participants chose a pseudonym for themselves, four asked me to choose one for them, and seven never responded to my follow-up requests. (Admittedly, this may be because a year of time elapsed between the interview and the follow-up request about pseudonyms.) Of the six participants who named themselves, one chose a name that she had always liked the sound of, one chose a username she felt was emblematic of her playstyle, and another chose a name to show her pride in her multiethnic heritage. For the eleven participants I was responsible for naming, I tried to carefully select names that evoked their personality, interests, or what seemed to be important to them based on our interviews.

Interview Coding

I used the MaxQDA program to code my interview transcripts. I coded the interviews using an inductive approach, where I read each transcript several times to apply relatively simple codes that I felt spoke to the common themes in the transcripts. Over time I began to refine, combine, and connect these codes. During the process of developing a code system I also left comments in the digital margins of each transcript, detailing new thoughts inspired by the interviews as well as noting linkages between the interviews. Thanks to the MaxQDA program, it was possible to generate a searchable code system that could be organized and queried for

particular codes, phrases, and connections. One MaxQDA feature I found particularly useful was "Complex Coding Query," which can generate a list of interview segments that share multiple codes in common and highlight how and where those codes overlap. For example, I was able to identify an association between feminism and harassment in comments made by my participants by searching the overlap between my codes "Feminism" and "Toxicity/Harassment." The association for my participants, by the way, was that identifying as a feminist in live streaming makes you vulnerable to trolling and harassment.

Conclusion

As part of proposing this dissertation in 2019, I conducted an extensive review of the then current literature on live streaming. What became clear to me is that women were under sampled in the academic literature on streaming and that there was sparse discussion of the gendered differences in the work of live streaming, with some exceptions (Gray 2016; Zhang and Hjorth 2017; Uszkoreit 2018; Consalvo 2019). A meta-review of the methods used in Twitch research indicated that surveys- particularly large quantitative surveys- were the primary method researchers were using to study Twitch streamers, viewers, and the platform itself (Harpstead, Rios, Seering, and Hammer 2019). Furthermore, these surveys administered by researchers to streamers and viewers alike appear to have suffered from response bias; they solicited and/or garnered responses from mostly men. I became interested in a qualitative project that engaged directly with streamers who did not identify as men or as wholly masculine.

This dissertation therefore adds to the growing body of ethnographic research on video game live streaming platforms (Hamilton, Garretson, and Kerne 2014; Zhang and Hjorth 2017; Taylor 2018; Johnson 2018) by contributing an understanding of gendered disparities and

disjunctions faced by non-binary, genderfluid, and women streamers in Western streaming contexts, using a combination of ethnographic methods based in a critical feminist approach. In the following chapters I present the accounts of 17 streamers and their experiences of Twitch as a culture, place, and platform. These accounts are contextualized by larger discussions in the following chapters on gendered labor, authenticity; harassment, performance, and meritocracy; and feminism, femininity, and failure.

Chapter Five: Femininity, Feminism, and Failure

This chapter on femininity, feminism, and failure is near and dear to my heart, because worrying over the intersections of these topics is what sparked my overall concern for the social environment in live streaming and this dissertation project specifically. It deals with subject matter and dilemmas that are common for marginalized groups in streaming, such as streamer performance, gender performance, and social belonging. This chapter explores the values which I believe lie at the core of many of the social problems impacting participation in video gaming and streaming. These values are not just abstract concepts to consider, they actually determine the social and technical features of everyday life experiences in live streaming. By combining theories on femininity, feminism, and failure in video games with accounts from streamers about their personal experiences navigating these topics, I offer insight into the various ways that live streaming binds, entangles, and shapes a streaming subject to standards dictated by misogyny and neoliberalism.

The chapter begins with an overview of the ideas which provide the framework for my argument that the social and technical affordances of live streaming favor, and in many cases enforce, particular ideals of feminine expression, feminism, social authenticity, and success. The chapter continues by demonstrating how these social and technical affordances have impacted the practices, performances, and well-being of the femme non-binary, genderfluid, and women streamers I interviewed. The first section following the theoretical review is a consideration of how ideas of authenticity or an authentic self have impacted streamers. This is followed by a section that takes a deeper dive into gendered issues of gender discrimination and stereotypes that threaten attempts to achieve or present authenticity in streaming. The third section details and analyzes the conversations I had with my participants about the place and fate of feminism

and feminist expression in live streaming. In the penultimate section I consider the state of failure against the previous sections and where the alternative pleasures of failure may lie in live streaming. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the variations and potentials for identity and expression in streaming revealed by these complex and interwoven negotiations.

Setting the Stage

One of the focal points of this research has been the patriarchy and the differential treatment and diminished opportunities of women due to logics which mark them out as inherently different and incapable of being authentic to the norm. This is because in the mainstream cultures of video games and streaming, masculinity and the concerns of men are presented as the default by the industry and among player communities (Paul 2018; Cote 2020). Authenticity, or being authentic, involves conforming to a social model of success and worthiness while providing a visible performance of that model that can be evaluated. Women, as well as any person with a marginalized gender in streaming, are often situated as failures before they have even begun due to their visible differences to the "default." The visibility culture of live streaming and the technical affordances of the Twitch platform magnify practices of social surveillance, construct a reality according to a limited model of authenticity, and bind women in notions of authenticity and gender that even when rejected are still valuable to the status quo. What I mean by this latter point is that even when gender binaries and expectations for "how to be a streamer" are renegotiated or rejected, the result of this labor exploration still benefits the platform by providing it with more content to commodify and also benefits the status quo- and specifically those who benefit from the status quo, cis-gendered men- by giving them something to other and thereby reinforce their boundaries and gatekeeping.

The logic of meritocracy and the practice of demanding authenticity in streaming entangle issues of gender and feminism in the demands of capitalism, which typically does not allow someone to permanently quit or fail in a way they choose (Phillips 2020, p. 183). At the same time, it is not easy for women to pursue forms of expression and performance that they find empowering, satisfying, and successful without discrimination or harassment, as the preoccupation with titty streamers and hot tub streaming has shown. Even some of the most successful women on the Twitch platform cannot escape the double binds of gender and authenticity in streaming. In fact, their very visible success is what makes them so vulnerable. Additionally, the experiences of those who do not perform as titty streamers or hot tub streamers also reveal the limits of simply performing on stream for women. As my interview participants describe throughout this dissertation, just being in a feminine coded body is often enough to incite criticism and abuse. And yet, the reality remains that the forms of labor that primarily make up the work of live streaming are those typically coded as feminine- such as emotional labor and self-branding. In many ways, the disavowal of women, feminism, and feminine expression in video game live streaming is a disavowal of how the work of live streaming is uniquely suited to feminine and feminist modes of identity and expression.

Authenticity

Popular notions of authenticity are often built around the idea of there being an essential inner self and a performative outer self. As Sarah Banet-Weiser notes in her book *Authentic* this binary has been disproven in several ways, but the popularity of this idea persists. In particular, this binary often presents itself along the lines of noncommercial/authentic and commercial/inauthentic. What complicates matters in economies of visibility and attention like

social media- and live streaming in particular- is that authenticity has become commercialized and furthermore the logics of branding and performing the authentic self are used to "structure, rationalize, and cultivate" everyday life in these contexts (Banet-Weiser 2012, p. 11). Authenticity is also used by groups to create and police social categories, particularly in-group and outsider status. Using examples from Sarah Palin's political campaigns and advertisements from Levi's, Banet-Weiser demonstrates how appeal to emotion is a key part of these authenticity structures. I assert that a similar tactic was used in events like GamerGate and such tactics continue to be used in gaming and streaming culture. That is, a fear of change and diversity and what women and feminism will "ruin" about games, and conversely a nostalgia for what it used to mean to be a gamer, is what mobilizes and structures the logics of authenticity in games. Drawing on the theories of McKenzie Wark, Amanda Phillips suggests that concerns over the gamer identity, alienating particular groups of players away from that identity, and positioning feminism as toxic to the branding of that identity and the gaming community is an emotional response to a capitalist drive, the "the individual's desire for potency and advancement" (2020, p. 8). There is power in exclusion and deciding the authenticity and the reality of other people.

In this section I will use statements from my interview participants to explore how notions of authenticity and realness have impacted them as players, as members of the streaming community, as individuals and individual brands, and as people with minoritized gender identities experiencing misogyny.

During our conversation, ScarletWitch recounted her experience of a live streamed gaming tournament she competed in a few years ago:

> They were talking to each other in the chat. ‘This girl looks suspect. She doesn't look like a real girl.’ ‘Oh, she won a match on stream. There's no way she could have won a match if she's a real woman.’ All these things that I half expected and was half surprised by because I clearly won that match 2-0. The guy didn't beat me at all, and so then they discredited me as not being a real girl, but then they just credited the other player for being so bad that he lost to a girl.

ScarletWitch added that being in the fighting game community has helped her build a thick skin, but she still gets exasperated and upset with the things she sees in a Twitch chat when she is competing live. She clarified she is not concerned for herself, but for how other women are made to feel when they see her being disparaged in chat or when they are similarly disparaged in their own channels. “Our community can do so much better,” she said with a weary sigh. That snippet of conversation ScarletWitch witnessed during her tournament was an attempt to deride her performances as both a player and a woman. It reiterates the gender stereotype in games that women are not good at games, that women cannot occupy both the gamer and woman subject positions. The conversation also suggested that the person she beat is not a “real” gamer because he allowed himself to be beaten by a woman; it questions his ability to perform gamer authenticity while simultaneously questioning her gender because she beat him. Again, this situates the position of being a “real gamer” and being a “real woman” at odds with one another.

Skill in video game and streaming culture is often presented as the deciding factor when it comes to being an authentic member of the community. Presumably, people who have worked hard to “git gud” are worthy of belonging and anyone can do that hard work. Authenticity is absolutely bound up in meritocracy. NovemberJewel characterized a type of interaction she sees in her chat often where her gender presentation leads to an assumption that she is a bad player,

but then a performance of her gaming skills actually affirms her subject position as a "gamer." Describing reactions from new viewers she has seen, NovemberJewel said, "Sometimes people are like, 'Oh, you suck.' Then they'll watch and they're like, 'Okay, it's not actually that bad. You're pretty decent. You're actually a gamer.' I feel that's so far less common now. Back in 2015 that probably was a little more common." The difference between 2015 and the time we were speaking in 2020 for NovemberJewel was that live streaming had grown in popularity and that she had seen a shift in the demographics of streamers towards something that was more diverse and inclusive. This period of streaming growth also overlaps with the height of GamerGate and then a subsequent period across the gaming industry of programs and initiatives attempting to address the issues and harms publicized and politicized by GamerGate. Again, turning to ScarletWitch, who considers herself a skilled player with a thick skin, one of her standout opinions was that being a woman in games or streaming should not be considered something that needs to be recuperated or justified by demonstrations of skill. ScarletWitch stated emphatically that, "No woman in our community should ever have to hear 'You have to get good and earn respect in order to be someone who doesn't get talked to in a certain way.'" The right to participate in games and streaming should not be based on skill and a lack of skill should not be used as a justification for harassment. And yet, the unfortunate reality for many streamers is that these standards for policing authenticity persist.

Gabriella Muriella described a regular struggle of dealing with the pressure to be good at games while she was playing live, stressing that she felt she had to work hard to get above the level of being "good for a girl." Huntress, who works in the games industry, says that when she was a more active streamer she did not stream her gameplay because "unless I'm in the top whatever percentage of a player base, I didn't feel like I deserved to stream those games, so I

stuck to more IRL type streaming." Even though Huntress is a professional in the games industry she did not feel like she had the leeway to just play around or perform less than optimally in a game on stream. Gabriella Muriella and Huntress are both speaking to limits and pressures being placed on them due to the model of authenticity in games that emphasizes masculine notions of skillful gameplay. Neither is identifying a situation where they have the freedom to be mediocre or to make mistakes. And even when they are permitted that room, their casual play is often interpreted by viewers as an inability to play well. DeareDrop recounted to me that an expectation she and other women in streaming have is "We're either going to get heckled or we're going to be offered help. But they only want to help so they can get closer to us. It's really scary because it feels like you can't win either way." DeareDrop's comment reveals another iteration of the stereotype that women are not good at playing games, that they need help to play or need to be heckled to grow as players and real members of the community. "You can't win either way," she says, referring to the double bind she sees in her own life where she can either play well on her own terms to a point where men feel threatened and respond with harassment or she can play casually and deal with attempts from viewers, who possibly have ulterior motives, to exert some level of control over her and what she is doing in the stream.

But for some, it did not feel like it was enough to play games well- they also felt pressured to play particular kinds of games and in particular ways. Huntress stayed away from games where she was not top ranked. MintyFresh felt like she was not permitted to play anything on easy mode. Mimicking comments she hears regularly, MintyFresh said, "'You're not a real gamer if you're using easy mode. Easy mode compromises the integrity of the game design.' That whole thing. That, very much, is a really good example of where we see that there is still a lot of gatekeeping, there is still a lot of gaslighting of these issues." One of the common

stereotypes still prevalent in video game communities is that women favor easy/casual games, but it can be difficult for women to access or play the so-called hardcore games. MintyFresh is also speaking to how this gatekeeping of who gets to be a real gamer impacts individuals not only along the lines of gender, but also along avenues of access and ability. Many players out of necessity and a lack of support from game hardware or software have to play games in an "easy mode." And for some streamers, they find it is easier to balance their performance as an entertainer with their performance as a player if they set a game to the lowest difficulty level. Strawberry at one point commented to me that when she is practicing for gaming competitions she often has to give up the entertainment factor in order to focus, which is partially why she will practice a game or even a segment of a game she plans to stream before she ever goes live. This is because she does not want a potentially poor performance as a player to expose her to critiques on her gender and streaming performances. A few streamers noted a double standard wherein men can dial down their presence as emotional performers in favor of skillful play while they are streaming, but that women rarely get away with the same because viewers expect different things from women in live streaming. In the case of video game live streaming, women are being held to a higher standard of performance both as players and as streamers.

Trickle Down Streaming

An idea that came up across the interviews, as well as in the observational research and discourse analysis I conducted, was a theory on the economy of streaming I am going to refer to as "trickle down streaming." Simply put, it was the notion that the most successful streamers on the platform had the largest impact on the Twitch streaming community and that the trends and behaviors they adopted would work their way down to the bottom of the pool, affecting both

viewers and other streamers. In many ways, these streamers at the top of the ladder were seen as the arbiters of Twitch culture, or the meta.[23] Due to their audience size and the security that this may bring them, these streamers often have the most leeway to explore new ideas and in a rush to gather social capital and success, viewers and other streamers are quick to emulate them. Many of the women I interviewed cited Pokimane as an example of a streamer deciding the trends. But as the exposed Twitch financial disclosures revealed (Jiang 2021), Pokimane is an exception and not the rule when it comes to financially successful women on the Twitch platform. Indeed, as Strawberry put it when discussing the hierarchies of streaming, "there's this elitist group that is almost all men and they just feed off each other." Both in spite of and because of their success, trendsetting streamers like Pokimane are frequent victims of harassment and exclusionary rhetoric. While some women may get to be trendsetters in streaming, there are even more men who make it part of their brand to ridicule and demean these women. For example, when a man with visible influence in streaming directs his followers to engage in hate raiding this establishes a precedent for continuing to harass the victim. Even seemingly innocuous behaviors, such as referring to someone as a titty streamer or a hot tub streamer, reinforces sexist stereotypes and expectations about women, their "inauthentic" relationship to games, and a reality where these individuals use their identities and bodies to cheat the meritocracy. As I have argued earlier in this dissertation, terms like titty streamer are used to divorce bodies with breasts from a subject position as a "legitimate streamer" (Ruberg, Cullen, and Brewster 2019). These practices create patterns of abusing feminine, feminist, and women streamers for social clout in

[23] In their book *Metagaming*, Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux define the term metagame as a "signifier for everything occurring before, after, between, and during games as well as everything located in, on, around, and beyond games, the metagame anchors the game in time and space" (2017, p. 11). This term is shortened to just meta in common vernacular and is applicable to live streaming as well. Meta refers to knowledge, mechanics, and the beliefs about them that structure the everyday spaces of streaming.

streaming.

These patterns are aided by the technical structures of the Twitch platform, which scholars like T.L. Taylor have described as being modeled off more traditional broadcasting methods and content (2018). Twitch is organized into "channels" which typically feature a single personality who is broadcasting, hosting, and entertaining. Despite the interactive chat element, there is still a distance between streamer and viewer reminiscent of television. DeareDrop mused on one outcome of this for streamers:

> Being treated as unreal by viewers. I think a lot of it comes from reality TV, Instagram models, things like that. We see people acting all the time. They'll tell us, 'Oh, this is real and it's unscripted,' and we know it's not, but for some reason, we see real not-actors on Twitch and we want to treat them like they're on a reality TV show, and they don't have emotions, and they're just following a script and doing whatever.

DeareDrop is identifying one of the central tenets and tensions of social media and being a professional influencer that scholars like Banet-Weiser have been investigating, that is "We constantly define and measure —and reward—appearances of authenticity even as we know it is always a performance" (Banet-Weiser 2021). The visibility and popularity of live streamers implicates them in a structure where they are expected to contrive a performance that appeals to viewers and where viewers can constantly assess and interrogate the authenticity of streamer performances.

Branding and a Self

Live streaming platforms, particularly Twitch, brand themselves as spaces where individuals can explore themselves in a community of like-minded others. Marketing slogans

that Twitch has used in the past include “Broadcast yourself,” “Your passion, rewarded,” and “You’re already one of us.” These slogans speak to notions of there being an authentic self, that this authentic self is legitimate and will find legitimacy on and through Twitch, and that there is financial, social, and personal fulfillment to be had for sharing that self. In reality, there is a tension between being yourself and being a self that successfully appeals to others, as Sarah Banet-Weiser has noted in her work.

> Social media amplifies this tension, as it is often positioned as a kind of open space, where one can be “oneself,” while at the same time it is also structurally designed as constantly manipulable. This has particular relevance for young cis-gendered women who perform authenticity on social media, because normative hetero-femininity is always constructed in terms of its artifice, where femininity is defined as a necessary contrived performance, from make-up to bodies to behaviors. (Banet-Weiser 2021)

This quote from Banet-Weiser underscores how the mutually constitutive nature of artifice and authenticity in live streaming is generally accepted as a given but it is also weaponized against feminine and women streamers because their gendered identities are considered contrived and artificial in the first place. Performances of authenticity in live streaming rely on manipulation in a number of ways- lighting, camera, bodies, emotions, games, branding- but it is those performances conducted by women that are the most scrutinized.

Despite -or possibly because of- this scrutiny, many of the streamers I interviewed felt it was essential that their performances and their brands as streamers speak to what they saw as their authentic selves. Metal_Melissa for example, told me about how important it is for her to tell new viewers in her channel what they can expect from her (her brand) and why she finds streaming valuable to her sense of self:

> When people come to my channel, the thing I usually intro with is that I am a trans woman and I am a variety streamer on Twitch, and I focus a lot on community building and being very close to my audience. Being easy to reach and also putting a lot of myself out there, not really putting on a face at all. Performing, it's like a safe place for me to practice my gender expression.

MintyFresh felt similarly, stating "Streaming is a weird intersection where you can be yourself. Or you can be yourself through a persona. I think that ultimately, I just try to be myself while trying to have good streamer habits. The thing is I like talking, which I guess might be a persona, but I still feel authentic to myself through it." For streamers like Metal_Melissa and MintyFresh, there is value in being able to give a contrived performance to viewers because that performance may actually be leading to a more authentic sense of self. In contrast, streamers like SmackArtist and Brianna chose to stream without having a camera because it meant investing less energy into their appearance and bodily performance, leaving them freer to be themselves on mic and concentrate while they played games.

DeareDrop mentioned during our conversation that opinions about authenticity and personas in streaming often overlook the multiplicity and mutability of the self. She said, "I just try to be myself as much as possible. But that self has changed since I started streaming. I think both because I definitely believe that you fake it till you make it. If you fake being happy, hopefully, you'll feel happy. I've seen a few people get made fun of for dropping that whole persona and being real." This "fake it until you make it" and fake being happy mentality as necessary for the work of streaming and coming off as authentic is a common narrative in streaming (Ruberg and Cullen 2020). DeareDrop's comment alludes to the consequences of dropping the "fake happy" performance and actually "being real" for viewers- ridicule and a

potential drop in that viewership. Sera saw this mentality of having a constantly positive brand impacting content creators of all types:

> This is something I've noticed in video creation as well as streaming is that you have to be very careful of your mood going into it, because you can be a really good actress but if you go into a stream or filming and you're just really angry or you're really sad it shows, in that your energy goes way down and the atmosphere gets very uncomfortable and it feels inauthentic and uncanny valley artificial in a sense.

As the comments here from both DeareDrop and Sera suggest, streaming viewers make and enforce an association between expressing negative emotions with being inauthentic. Therefore, successful personal branding strategies in streaming have become equated with a performance of positivity, satisfaction, and happiness. In fact, negativity in general is set up as antithetical to streaming and gaming culture, which is where part of the problem for feminism and feminist critique lies, as I will discuss in greater detail in an upcoming section.

But for many streamers there is a distancing and even at times a dissonance between who they feel they are and who they are when they are streaming. Beyond the theoretical and philosophical debates about the existence of an authentic self, these streamers often describe themselves as having different aspects that are connected and a part of some whole. NovemberJewel felt that while she does “behave somewhat differently online and in person which I think most people do” these personalities are just parts of an “actual personality.” Huntress described this in terms of there being “a huge gap between [a streamer] and the personality on screen” no matter how well viewers may think they personally know a streamer. As my participants will recount in upcoming chapters, a persona in streaming is useful for not only attracting viewership but for offering a sense of protection for what could be described as

the real self. And as we have demonstrated in this chapter, a persona is also useful at times for exploring and reinforcing an authentic self and sense of belonging that streamers are seeking in streaming.

Gender Discrimination and Stereotypes

While this section could have been included in the chapter on performance and harassment I place it in this chapter on femininity, feminism, and failure because, in addition to disrupting the practices and labor of streaming, these tactics of discrimination are based in stereotypes that establish streamers with non-masculine gender performances as inherently inauthentic in gaming culture. From a social standpoint, this means many are assessed by their peers in streaming as inauthentic and as failures before they are given a chance to prove themselves in the so-called meritocracy of streaming. What I suggest is insidious and dangerous for feminine, feminist, and women streamers are not the dramatic instances of harassment, but rather the everyday moments of being treated differently, as an outsider, as not belonging, as unreal and inauthentic, as having failed already. I cover these stereotypes in later chapters in more detail, but to briefly outline a few of them: feminine and women gender performance is already artificial/unnatural; women are not skilled players; women use their appearances and bodies to cheat meritocracy; women just want attention from men. In addition to these that are broadly found in games, my interview participants also enumerated examples that uniquely impact them as participants in the cultures and structures of live streaming, such as unsolicited advice about their streaming or channel, backseat gaming, accusations of claiming unfair attention, being artificially feminine or not feminine enough, or performing a "wrong" or "harmful" form of femininity.

Unsolicited Advice and Backseat Gaming

One of the most common issues described by my interview participants can be broadly described as unsolicited advice that casts judgment and doubt on their streaming and gaming practices. From the perspective of most of these streamers, this tendency for viewers to give them advice was based in gendered stereotypes about women and their ability to play games. Even when these practices were not personally experienced by these streamers, it was something they commonly witnessed happening in other channels. ScarletWitch characterizes her experiences visiting other channels:

> I go into women's streams and it's the same thing. It's a mix of cat calls or 'Oh, here's advice. Here's some backseat gaming. Here's some mansplaining. All these things that I need to tell you how to do because you're clearly just a beginner.' Sometimes even a beginner doesn't want to get to a better place. It's like that unsolicited advice. I feel like in a streaming space women tend to get more unsolicited advice but they also get more unsolicited comments and get this more negative tone.

What ScarletWitch is describing here is similar to what DeareDrop was getting at with her comment about heckling in the previous section- the advice that viewers are offering on the surface seems helpful, but also carries undercurrents of things they assume or expect from women streamers. In fact, DeareDrop's follow-up to that earlier comment about heckling was that,

> In a lot of ways women get the short end of the stick in terms of being stereotyped. I feel like while we will get stereotyped and get harassed, we're also more likely to get offered help. If you see a guy who is newer to Call of Duty starting out, [viewers] probably won't

> really offer him help. They'll just heckle him, while a woman will get heckled and offered help. It's confusing.

Heckling- or trash talk- is a commonly accepted part of video game culture and the scale of broadcasting on Twitch magnifies the opportunities to engage in trash talk. And giving advice is simultaneously a way to perform expertise and knowledge about the subject matter and to lord that expertise over someone else.

The related implication, based on common stereotypes about women, is that they are more in need of this help and the dictates of gendered emotional labor which structure live streaming implies that women seem more receptive to this feedback, or at least less inclined to push back. The emotional receptiveness that all streamers, but particularly feminine and women streamers, are expected to perform seemingly prompts an unleashing of emotional expectations and requests from viewers. What all this means is that viewers feel emboldened to treat feminine and women streamers differently. For example, Celeste mentioned how their friends commonly deal with "people going into their chat and asking for feet pics and things, or telling them that they're doing things wrong, or that they're playing the game wrong." Nicole described first-hand how she has dealt with this and has recognized a gendered double standard: "When I mess up in a game I get a lot of criticism and people try to backseat game where they try to tell me what to do. There's that weird dynamic where I don't know why I get treated differently if I mess up in a game whereas when I see my male counterpart and other men in the gaming space mess up too. It's not the same treatment." What Nicole has recognized is that she in particular, but women more generally, have less freedom to be mediocre players and make mistakes while streaming live. This comment from Nicole also speaks to the level of scrutiny, surveillance, and judgment

that is brought to bear on the activities of streamers.

Limited Attention Economy

Another stereotype dealt with by streamers is that it is easier to be a streamer when you are a woman, when you are conventionally attractive, and especially if you are an attractive woman. In an economy of attention and visibility like live streaming, where number of viewers, number of subscribers, sponsorships, and recognition on the platform are thought to determine success, there are notions that the capital which circulates does so unevenly and is limited in availability. When the capital is attention and the logic underlying its distributions is that the attention of viewers is finite, this leads to anxiety about who is getting attention and how. Furthermore, the Twitch platform's emphasis on visuality and visibility heightens anxieties that certain bodies will be privileged over others. In particular, it is thought that women have an easier time being streamers because men are eager to attend and be attentive to women as objects of attraction. Strawberry had this to say about such a stereotype:

> There's definitely the stereotype that women who stream automatically have better numbers or have an easier time because they are women, which doesn't make any sense and I don't know where anyone got that from. There's the stereotype, 'Oh, if you're a woman with your facecam on, people are coming just because you look pretty.' Definitely something I see from people who don't stream for themselves and people who don't really understand how Twitch works.

Huntress gave me an example of a related attitude she has encountered often. "They're like 'Women have it so easy because if I played at the same level I did but I were a woman I would stand out because I would be better than all the other girls on the platform.' They're like, 'People

donate so much to women. They're able to use their sexuality or their physical features to get ahead of the game." Not only does this narrative about the ease of being a woman streamer perpetuate gender stereotypes and heteromasculine norms of beauty, but it also belittles the work that these streamers put into their streaming.

In fact, Huntress then told me a story where some of her friends (all men) suggested that she stage a stream where they actually played the game (again, presuming they play better than her) while she engages the viewers on stream to make them all money. Their reasoning was that it is easier for an attractive woman to make money in live streaming and that an attractive woman who was "actually good" at games would make even more money. Huntress said sadly, "I can't believe that the people that brought that up were people that I respected and I thought respected me, but still felt that if I slathered enough makeup on or I wore the right clothing or acted a certain way that I would just click of a button just instantly be super popular and that I would need their gameplay to make it complete." Huntress' own friends were suggesting to her that being a woman inherently comes with a way to cheat the meritocracy. Furthermore, they wanted her to engage in deceitful behavior because it would benefit them monetarily. In this case, cheating was apparently okay when it was making men money. Huntress finished her story with this realization:

> I think the most bizarre thing is I think it's a lot harder to stream as a woman. I gave [my friends] some examples like 'Have you seen the level of harassment? Have you seen the death threats, the DMs they get, the stalking?' For them, that's not what they care about. They're like, 'Okay, well, I would probably be down to receive death threats and to be stalked if it meant getting the money.' Yes. That's what they say.

So not only were Huntress' friends willing to expose her to the risk of harassment while clearly discounting the labor she put into streaming on her own terms, but their assertion that the death threats would be worth it in exchange for the money highlights beliefs about women being in streaming for the money as well as money being the primary motivating factor in streaming. It also downplays the stakes and consequences of harassment; the suggestion is there is no basis for complaint when you are getting paid as part of the attention, whether negative or positive.

Twitch streaming is set up and marketed to be about garnering attention for your own passion project, your channel, but women are often criticized for wanting this attention. Continuing her discussion of stereotypes in streaming, Strawberry stated:

> It's so blatantly obvious that people are biased and they definitely have different expectations of what's going on and what it's like for you as a woman. It's not like, 'Oh, you're just pushing for Partner.' It's like, 'Oh, you're just trying to force people into coming to watch you and you're just being really needy.' That's such a thing that people say about women. They're not doing anything differently than these men over here.

As Christine Tran accurately describes this situation for women in streaming as being caught "between attention and authenticity in streaming cultures" (2022, 5). Strawberry added that she feels this is particularly true for black women, based on encounters she has witnessed between black streamers and viewers.

Brianna echoed this through descriptions of her own experiences on the Twitch platform as a black woman. Brianna felt that she faced more criticism as a streamer for being a black

woman with a “loud personality.” In the following, Brianna recounts a story of abuse she received from another streamer and viewers within their community:

> I was looking at it from a combination of my gender and my race. He probably sees it as, ‘Oh, you're just a black girl who's sassy and you’re mean.’ He literally said you're just mean to everybody, even though he's the most negative person I've seen in my life. Anyways, I feel like everybody that turned against me was like, ‘Well, you're the mean black girl. You deserve to be abused by this narcissist. We don't care.’ I feel like if I was a black man, it would have changed things probably, but I definitely think me being a woman did make it worse. I think me being a black woman and just my personality made it absolutely horrible.

Brianna was being abused and then being abused again for the way she brought attention to that abuse. Not only was she having to deal with gamer and gender stereotypes about attention, but Brianna was also dealing with racist stereotypes about her existence in the world and in streaming. An additional implication in this story is that she “deserved” to be abused because her personality is too aggressive. Black women in Western society and popular culture have long dealt with stereotypes and negative associations revolving around the “loud” or “angry black woman” (Gray 2020). This stereotype “flattens the complexity of black womanhood” (Gray 2020, 118) and is used to further distance black femininity in particular from what is seen as authentic and acceptable performance and expression in streaming.

Performance that is Feminine, but Perhaps not too Feminine

Several streamers described to me the pressures they felt to perform femininity, even recognizing that this put them in a double bind with calls to authenticity in streaming. This led to a heightened awareness of their gender, player, and streamer performances and the standards they were expected to meet for each. As TheHobbitJedi said succinctly, “I was always aware of my gender on stream. I don't think ever had a chance not to be, if that makes sense? I never had the choice to not feel it.” For many streamers, it was impossible to not be aware of gendered assumptions in gaming due to its strong association with masculinity, as Metal_Melissa explains:

> Because gaming is traditionally seen as such a masculine thing, when people come to me, on first blush you could assume I was a cis man tuning in. I think there's just that association in people's heads until they get to know me. I don't do my makeup on stream often and I'll just wear a band shirt. A lot of the time I'm not wearing feminine clothing. Presenting overly feminine is something that I like when I am really feeling it.

According to Metal_Melissa, unless she is in makeup and obviously feminine clothing, many viewers in her channel initially assume she is a cisgendered man. Celeste, who is genderfluid, described a similar problem where viewers were not interpreting their gender correctly.

> I have to be on top about my gender identity all the time because part of being genderfluid is if you want people to gender you correctly, they either have to know you really well or you have to present the way you want to be seen. My new favorite trick is I wear a green shirt in front of my green screen and suddenly I don't have cleavage anymore. If I wear a backwards cap too, then I'm good.

In Celeste's case they also admitted to enjoying a bit of mischievous glee in confusing viewers with their green screen trick- to viewers they would have appeared only as a floating head with a baseball cap on. Celeste clarified this practice of disembodiment on stream is also meant to draw the focus where they want it, away from the appearance of their body and on to the performance of their body. "I know that I'm attractive and gorgeous and sexy, blah, blah, blah, blah, and yes, I like being looked at sometimes, but that's not the point of my stream. The point of my stream is, 'I'm going to play a video game, and you can come watch if you feel like it.'" For Metal_Melissa and Celeste, streaming is an opportunity to explore their gender expression on their own terms.

Many streamers feel like self-expression (that authentic sense of self) is harder for feminine and women streamers to achieve in streaming, which is why the moments where it does happen can feel valuable. There is often still this sense that there are expectations for being feminine that must be met for those streamers who appear feminine or claim a feminine identity, in streaming but also more generally in life. According to DeareDrop, "I feel like the male streamers get a lot more freedom to be themselves and we, just as in any other job, have to tone ourselves down and make ourselves softer." TheHobbitJedi also commented on this association between femininity and a performance of softness, that being soft and polite is one way for women to be safe in streaming- not only in terms of brand choices, but in terms of personal safety. DeareDrop, however, says she gets tired of playing safe.

> I think being a woman in streaming, you're expected to come off as softer. If you are abrasive in any way, you stand up for yourself, people will flock to that in a bad way. But I want to do that to show other women that you can stand up for yourself. You don't have to be quiet; you can be abrasive and be a bitch and tell these people, 'Suck my dick' and 'Go away.'

What DeareDrop is aggressively asserting is the right for streamers to establish their own boundaries as well as having more control over how they express themselves emotionally, regardless of gender stereotypes.

But the concerns of streamers and hegemonic performances of femininity are not limited to emotional performances and the appearances of their bodies, they also extend to how those bodies are positioned and highlighted by their home streaming infrastructures. Cherry Tomb describes how her approach to lighting and camera positioning emphasized her gender.

> I feel like male streamers are typically more head-on [with their cameras]. My camera was more off to the side typically. Partially just because I didn't have the most convenient setup. But that was also a deliberate choice on my part. With the main league streamers, of course, they figured it out. They, I think, have a better understanding of where to position cameras and lights. I would say yes, in comparison to other smaller streamers, my camera setup was more feminine.

Cherry Tomb explained that what she meant by a more feminine camera set-up was that she was "optimizing them angles" to present her facial features in the best possible light. She described this awareness- how to photograph and stream your body- as something women "are just more attuned to because of all the social pressure" to be attractive and appealing. But at the same time, Cherry Tomb was careful not to appear too attractive and appealing. That is, she made sure her camera set up was set at an angle that would highlight her face but not her chest- she even wore concealing clothing to ensure she would not be accused of using her body to garner attention in the wrong way.

Returning to Brianna's comments about her experience as a black woman in streaming, they also speak to the different standards for femininity and feminine expression that exist in gaming and streaming. For Brianna and Cyan, both black women, there is an awareness that streamers who can meet a white feminine standard of beauty find more success on Twitch, because the primary audience of white young men are already primed to find them more attractive. As an Asian-American, Huntress felt that not only was she expected to be "warmer, more welcoming, and grateful for attention" she also found that some viewers expected her to "be subservient" and perform to their stereotype of an Asian woman. "It was very strange to see how people around the world would act differently based on their own social stereotypes when they joined my stream," Huntress added.

While most of the streamers I interviewed and observed were in their 20s and 30s, Sharp_Meringue was in her 50s and experienced differing expectations of feminine performance on the platform and from viewers due to both her gender and her age. "I'm looking around Twitch in my gaming community and seeing apart from one other person, there are no older women really on there. I was thinking I'm just too old to put my face on the screen there. I'm not 18 anymore." To avoid this, Sharp_Meringue used a virtual avatar and was the only streamer I interviewed who did so. She used this avatar in part to avoid discussion of her disability and partly to avoid discussion of her age. As Maria Ruotsalainen has observed in her paper on the use of a virtual avatar by a middle-aged Chinese streamer, the aging bodies of women are often absent in games and streaming, due to hegemonic standards of feminine beauty (2022). Similar to how Gabriella Muriella felt that conventionally attractive streamers are safer from criticism, and how Brianna and Cyan felt that attractive white streamers are more financially successful, Sharp_Meringue felt that the social and technical affordances of Twitch were made to favor the

young. Furthermore, Sharp_Meringue also felt that a different sort of feminine performance was expected from her because of her age. Sharp_Meringue felt like she was expected to be "someone who came across as very caring and looking after you, and just very approachable. Looking around at the women generally on Twitch, the younger ones seem to have a different tact. If you're past a certain age, obviously that's not going to work." What Sharp_Meringue is gently alluding to is titty streamer and hot tub meta and the possibility that an older, disabled body like hers has greater difficulty finding value in this attention economy when that is the expectation for women. Sharp_Meringue is also suggesting that there is a sexist expectation is for older feminine and women streamers to do more emotional labor to compensate for a lack of sexual desirability.

Finally, there was a concern about calibrating an appearance of feminine attractiveness that did not feel obviously contrived or artificial. That is, a femininity that was not at odds with what men were expecting. Streamers like Huntress commented that the bigger women streaming on Twitch have entered a realm of influencer culture where they are allowed to be more obviously made up. For Huntress, this complicates things for smaller streamers like her as that expectation is established and then spreads across the platform. "I think a part of it is seeing other women who have streamed and like a double standard. I don't know how to do makeup. I don't know anything about influencer culture. I was like, 'Okay, you either have to look amazing and have an amazing personality or you have to be the best person at this game.' I gave myself this impossible task." Huntress felt like her performances as a player and as a woman were being caught between the standards for an esports level athlete and that of a polished entertainer with no in-between. Again, there is this stereotype that women should ideally be both attractive to men and good at playing games. Gabriella Muriella described this balancing act thusly: "You

have to walk that fine line of being like, 'I can hang with the guys because I'm a streamer.' At the same time, it's like, 'I also like to do my hair and nails and makeup.'" This expectation for women is something I am loosely associating with the girl next door fantasy trope, and I am placing it at odds with the figure of the titty streamer.

Madonna or Whore, Titty Streamer or Girl Next Door

The existence of a set of binary expectations for women in streaming was frequently discussed during my interviews. This state of being structured and policed to align with either the titty streamer stereotype or the girl next door fantasy was very pronounced to them, especially given the obviousness with which men are not so neatly pigeonholed on the platform.[24] Sera explains:

> I feel with guys there's a default. Do you know what I mean? You can be a neutral guy. There's not really a neutral woman. There are definitely expected types of female streamers especially on Twitch. I feel my audience tends to, particularly the male audience that I have, view me in a girl-next-door kind of way, which is better than the alternative I guess. But it's definitely difficult sometimes to be viewed directly as a peer or a neutral peer.

The undesirable alternative to the girl next door that Sera is referring to is the titty streamer.

Titty streamer is a derogatory term used to describe streamers "who are perceived as drawing undeserved attention from viewers by presenting their bodies in sexualized ways" (Ruberg, Cullen, and Brewster 2019). I will be using the term titty streamer specifically

[24] The girl next door is an image which absolutely appeals to a notion of authenticity. The girl next door is an archetype that presents a femininity that is both "pure" and "real" while at the same time sexually appealing to a masculine gaze. This would be in juxtaposition to the figure of the whore or titty streamer whose appeal is based in artifice and whose charms are not exclusionary or ownable.

throughout this section, but there are related terms that have been used in the same way in streaming such as boobie streamer, thot, cam girl, e-girl, and more recently hot tub streamer. Their usage is meant to deride video game streamers who are considered to be overemphasizing their artificial appearance purely for attention and monetary gain. Because of this seeming overemphasis on physical beauty, these streamers are also considered to be less invested in video games generally and skillful play in particular. Titty streamer rhetoric is therefore used to mark out these cheaters of the meritocracy and delegitimize their practices and labor by constructing them as inauthentic, as cheaters, as undeserving. Titty streamer is an accusation of not being a real streamer. As I have discussed in previous work, differentiating between "real" (men) gamers and "fake" (women) gamers is part of the cultural project of establishing and upholding a gaming masculinity (Ruberg, Cullen, and Brewster 2019, p. 470). It is almost entirely women who deal with the consequences of titty streamer rhetoric.

I was aware of the harms and popularity of titty streamer rhetoric going into this project and the interviews with streamers, but I had never truly noticed that there was an opposite but no less restricting stereotype for women in streaming- that of the girl next door. Reflecting on the literature around gender in video games and streaming, as well as the comments of my interview participants, the existence of this stereotype makes sense. As Cherry Tomb points out in the excerpt below, something like the girl next door has been in games for quite some time, in the figure of the "gamer girl." The "gamer girl" stereotype is something that I have personally dealt with in video game culture, but I never looked for its corollary in live streaming. Because she is a streamer, Cherry Tomb had no choice but to face the gamer girl image:

> There's this big paranoia of being perceived as a gamer girl which has gotten that whole stigma and weird fetishization thing, I think has gotten somewhat better. But when I was

> a preteen and teenager, that stuff was toxic. You know about it. I imagine. If you like video games or geeky things, you clearly only like those because you're trying to get a boyfriend type of situation.

The gamer girl/girl next door stereotype is on the surface seemingly at odds with that of the titty streamer, because it suggests a femininity that is actually acceptable in masculine gaming culture. However, as Cherry Tomb has noticed, there is a double bind created in performing to this expectation, found in the attendant assumption that this is a performance meant to be attractive to men, rather than a simple expression of personal identity. In their book *Toxic Geek Masculinity in Media*, Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett summarize this binary bind with a few questions: "Fake geek or fan girl? Sex object or feminist bitch? For women, there's often no answer that doesn't lead to further pigeonholing and silencing, and either extreme can be used as an insult or excuse for marginalization," (2017, p. 12). Titty streamer or girl-next door, damned if you do and damned if you don't.

The lingering problem in streaming for those with lived experiences of misogyny and sexist rhetoric is that the stereotypes they are based in are so pervasive in their everyday lives, as well as the social and technical structures of live streaming that amplify and worsen these experiences. TheHobbitJedi described streaming as a woman as "fighting idealization of what you're up against. I think a lot of female streamers struggle with that. It's the idealization of what [viewers] want, versus what you can give them and what you feel comfortable doing." Many streamers are forced to recognize the power of stereotypes and often have to make a choice to fight, accept, or find an alternative way through. However, this struggle to be true to themselves and trying to perform in ways deemed authentic enough is often downplayed or overlooked-even by those with a higher level view of the platform.

During a discussion of gender stereotypes in streaming, such as the titty streamer, SmackArtist described a sexist encounter she had with a Twitch staff member where she was confronted with exactly how far-reaching and pervasive assumptions of what attractive, sexually available women can presumably get away with on the Twitch platform. It is worth noting here that SmackArtist is a Twitch Partner, and one sexist stereotype about women who make Partner is that they have exchanged sexual favors with Twitch staff in order to earn this status.

> I'm sure you've heard of the stereotype on Twitch that women have more leniency when it comes to things because they must send pictures to Twitch staff or something like that. The funny thing is, I was once in somebody else's chat after my username got changed to [SmackArtist's real name], which it's hard to get just your name. A ton of people were like, 'How did you get that? How did you get that?' Then the funny thing is a Twitch staff member was in the chat and asked, 'Who did you blow to get that?' I was like, 'Really, bitch?' Yes, it was a woman. She did say right after that, 'I shouldn't have typed that,' but still, I'm like, 'You're staff and you're a woman and you're literally saying that to me.' Like, Oh, my God.

This story of a woman on the Twitch staff making a comment like "Who did you blow to get that?" even as a joke reveals the pervasiveness of sexist stereotypes in live streaming. Again, there is a suggestion that the easiest way to find success in streaming if you are a woman is through the sexualization of your own body. This also speaks to a continued association between video game live streaming and camgirl modeling, despite the attempts by real streamers and even the platform to distance themselves from this. It seems the mere suggestion and presence of a woman's body evokes images of sex, but the expectation in streaming that streamers

(particularly women) are there deliberately seeking attention seems to reinforce this. As a result, an assumption appears to be made that women want to sell their bodies in more ways than one. This was actually brought up several times, unprompted, during interviews. Sera at one point said to me, “I don't know a lot of male content creators, but I never hear them talking about having strangers try and convince them to basically talk them into doing sex work even though they're not sex workers.” Later in the interview Sera jokingly said of being a woman in streaming, “You know you've made it when some weirdo comes into your DMs offering to pay you money for pictures of your feet.”

Feminism in Streaming: “We cannot avoid politics, that is our existence”

Complicating the binary I presented above, there is perhaps a third feminine archetype which haunts live streaming- that of the feminist killjoy or feminist spoilsport. Building from the work of Sara Ahmed (2017) and Stephanie Boluk and Patrick Lemieux (2017), the feminist spoilsport is someone who critiques the ways happiness, fun, and play in video games are used to justify social norms in video game culture is a prominent figure of concern in streaming culture. That is, feminism and feminists are considered harmful to streaming. In a discourse analysis I did of threads on Reddit about live streaming and feminism (Cullen 2022), I found a belief that feminism is an ideology that is incompatible with video games and live streaming, both because it questions the efficacy of meritocracy and because it ostensibly promotes negative and anti-social behavior. Surprisingly, I did find some indication that there is a “right kind of feminist” that can exist in streaming. The “right kind of feminist” accepts the status quo, protects the meritocracy, criticizes women who engage in negative behavior, and more importantly does not criticize the patriarchy. The “wrong kind of feminist” is the feminist spoilsport, who is

constructed as actively harmful to other streamers and to the community more broadly. But the line between the two is not always clear cut, so many streamers find it easier to avoid any association with the term feminism. When asked about her thoughts on how feminism is perceived in live streaming culture, Huntress commented, “If you're called a feminist, my first guess is this is an insult and someone's trying to put you down for caring about something or being too sensitive. I don't know when that started, but it does seem like [feminist] is very much a negative connotation.”

TheHobbitJedi, DeareDrop, Metal_Melissa, Strawberry, Celeste, Nicole, Cherry Tomb, MintyFresh, Gabriella Muriella, and NovemberJewel each described feminism as important to their lives and practices as streamers. Feminism leads many of these streamers to think of themselves as role models for a community. As Nicole states:

> Streaming in the feminist way would be making sure that female voices are heard. I talk a lot with my chat, the struggles I feel as a female. Related to that, supporting people of color who need a better platform. Trans folk, all different types of people, I just want to make sure they have a welcoming safe environment to be in because that should be the norm.

Similarly, Metal_Melissa said, “I feel like as a trans lady, it's hard not to be a feminist. I feel like by existing on the Twitch platform, I am doing it a feminism.” In the interviews with these streamers, feminist concerns were heavily intertwined with an ethos of caring and responsibility for the community.

For a few of the streamers, like the TheHobbitJedi, their feminist praxis calls on them to engage in more direct education and activism while they are streaming.

> About being a feminist, my tolerance for bullshit has gotten less the older I get. But I do think there is something to say about education. I've seen streamers that I think do a really good job of directly talking to people, when they are problematic and toxic, and can handle that, and are really, really good at it. I know a lot of bi-women streamers who are very proud about their identity, and who can just so eloquently rattle back to people who bring bullshit in their streams. They're really good at that, where this is technically problematic for X, Y, Z. Here's what you should do X, Y, Z. It's incredible feminist work, lowkey, like being able to get boots on the ground with people who are attacking you for who you are as a woman.

What TheHobbitJedi is describing as effective "low-key" feminist work is the modality of a tempered radical. The tempered radical pursues a change agenda through more subtle means when their values are at odds with the larger organization or culture. Additionally, TheHobbitJedi suggested to me that most feminist streamers on the Twitch platform take that low-key or tempered approach because "they don't want trolls to come in chat and call them bra burners and all the other stupid shit." Not only can it be an effective position, but the role of the tempered radical may also shield them from some of the harm publicly being a feminist may bring.

This position of the tempered radical, while not expressed in those terms by any of my participants, was a common one. Celeste, NovemberJewel, MintyFresh, and Cherry Tomb each mentioned that while feminism is important to them, they avoid identifying as feminists while streaming because they do not want to deal with trolls, TERFs, or any other set of bad actors.

NovemberJewel wants to do the sort of activist or education work that TheHobbitJedi was referring to, but she finds it difficult sometimes to balance that desire with the necessity of managing a chat where anyone feels safe to engage in conversation.

> I want to make sure that I create a safe space, but I do think it's really valuable to have those conversations and to discuss certain topics because of how heavily weighted they are and how important they are in our society to talk about. But a lot of the time I try to stray from having those kinds of conversations and just be like 'We're just going to play games and we're going to have fun.' I want to make sure that people are happy and are safe.

The implication in NovemberJewel's statement is that it can be uncomfortable or even unsafe for both feminist streamers and feminist viewers to engage in discussion about issues that matter to them, and as a streamer NovemberJewel feels that she must be cognizant of that reality. A similar sentiment was shared with me by MintyFresh while we were discussing how she incorporates feminism into her streaming practices, "Taking feminism as an understanding of taking care with others, being mindful of others, and to myself, is how I approach it. I think that that's very easy to enact a subtle feminism, if you will, versus getting into actual feminist related topics on stream. The ramifications of Gamergate have not gone away. There is a certain precarity in identifying as a feminist." In a social context where feminism has a negative connotation and literally creates a hostile working environment, the tempered radical can be a comfortable and effective position for a feminist streamer.

Cherry Tomb identified still another set of difficulties with trying to educate viewers as a feminist streamer which stem from the technical structure and format of communication in a

Twitch channel. “If you don't know the face of the person you're talking to, it's hard to get a read of what they're feeling or thinking. Unless I was just on my toolbox giving a rant, which is a very one-sided communication style. I don't want to talk to someone about a topic like that usually unless I can see them. With the internet they could always say something outrageous, inappropriate and there's no repercussions to themselves.” What Cherry Tomb is describing is how in a Twitch channel only the streamer can be seen on camera and respond in real time on a mic; moderators and viewers are only capable of engaging in the chat through emotes and text. For a potentially rocky conversation of the kind feminist issues presumably will inspire, Cherry Tomb wants to be able to see the visual emotional responses of her fellows- otherwise the conversation feels unequal and imbalanced.

Furthermore, Cherry Tomb is also identifying how the feeling of anonymity provided by usernames on Twitch can encourage others to engage in bad faith. Cherry Tomb is very conscious of her unseen audience, who she characterizes as mostly “young men with low self-esteem” that she believes will be resistant to discussions of “the feminist agenda.” She clarified that she also believes their resistance comes from ignorance and a “backwards empowerment” gained from the social prevalence and performances of wrong ideas about what feminism is and who it is for. TheHobbitJedi also opined that abusing women streamers is a bid to “look cool” and possibly build social capital amongst their peers. TheHobbitJedi characterized two types of anti-feminist and sexist trolls she regularly sees on Twitch: those that are doing it for the lols and those that are deeply committed to a misogynistic ideology. Strawberry divided her trollish viewers into a related but differing set of categories: those that can be educated about feminism and those that cannot or refuse to be educated. Strawberry explains,

> Sometimes talking, educating people helps. I know when to stop because it's not going to be productive anymore. I want to be vocal and talk about things that happened or are happening to me because genuinely, a lot of people just don't see it, but while not engaging and not feeding the trolls or people who are just blatantly trying to gaslight me and don't believe me. I'm just going to block you. Move on. There is no hope for you and I do not need to interact with you. I don't need to spend my energy on you. You do not have control over my energy. I do.

A few of the streamers I spoke to did not think of themselves as feminists at all, even if they were sympathetic to feminist ideals. SmackArtist, for example, said that while she felt "women should be equal to men," she did not see a need to engage with feminism or feminist issues in her personal life or in her streaming work. Her statement "women should be equal to men" felt like a diplomatic response and I got the impression she was hesitant to even tell me what her personal beliefs were on the matter. This perhaps reveals a flaw in my attempt to build rapport or a general hesitancy or preference on SmackArtist's part to not discuss her personal politics. Conversely, Brianna declared to me, "I've never looked up the definition of a feminist, but I'm definitely the type of girl who stands up for women that are doing the right thing. If that's the definition of a feminist, then I guess that might be me." In a remarkably similar response, Cyan told me "I don't think I've ever used the word feminist to describe myself. I think a lot of my ideology and practices are consistent with feminism. That's just never a word that I've used to describe myself." SmackArtist, Brianna, and Cyan did not align with any set of feminist values due to a lack of interest or need to have a term to describe that aspect of themselves.

Meanwhile, Huntress, Sera, and ScarletWitch each declined to comment on their personal beliefs regarding feminism. In Huntress' case, she stated that she thought more education about

feminism would be beneficial for streaming culture, but she never came out and described herself as a feminist, so I did not code her as one. Huntress, Sara, and ScarletWitch each avoided answering any direct questions about their own relationship with feminism. I did not press them in an effort not to make them uncomfortable. As stated earlier, this reluctance to share with me may be a byproduct of a failure on my part to build rapport. It could also be the result of habits built over time as women and as streamers not to discuss politics. In the case of live streaming this habit is beneficial because you never know who might be watching.

When asked about her experiences with feminism in streaming, Sharp_Meringue began her answer with a statement that the gaming and role-playing community she belonged to has a "noticeably right-wing-ish" player base. Because of this, the community has an unspoken agreement to "steer clear of anything vaguely political" in order to keep the peace and the sense of escapism provided by their play. So, while Sharp_Meringue may be a feminist in her personal life, she feels that discussing feminism in her activities as a streamer would cause harm to her gaming community and her role in that community. Sharp_Meringue's position is understandable and possibly an iteration on the tempered radical position, but for streamers like Strawberry this kind avoidance is a privilege. During our conversation Strawberry emphatically stated that the reality for many streamers is that "We cannot avoid politics. That is our existence." The personal is political for many streamers.

Like Strawberry, DeareDrop also felt that being able to identify as a feminist while being a streamer was a privilege that very few are capable of fully embracing or benefitting from without repercussions. However, her point of view is more sympathetic to those shared and enacted by streamers like Sharp_Meringue. Specifically, DeareDrop felt that only "conventionally attractive" women in streaming are capable of discussing feminist issues live

while maintaining a chat that will “be calm, listen, and not fight with them.” This comment ties into many of the assumptions made about the demographics of Twitch viewers and the kinds of streamers, and streamer bodies, they want to see and reward. At the same time, DeareDrop felt that if “the person who's talking about feminism isn't ‘conveniently attractive,’ they will get harassed and there will be no chance of a civil conversation. It's going to be nothing but arguments.” In this formulation, DeareDrop points to a belief where only those who measure up to the established conventions- and have already achieved conventional success- have the most leeway for deviance; in this case, streamers who already perform according to streamer and gender norms established by the streaming patriarchy. This speaks to a recognition that many of the streamers had about what forms of femininity and feminism are understood and rewarded on the platform.

TheHobbitJedi described the distinct types of feminist identity and praxis she has seen across the Twitch platform that are broadly conflated together despite their differences.

> I think there's an interesting dichotomy and difference between feminism and lipstick feminism, which again, I don't think the normal viewership would know about. I think that is a little bit at work, which is good- fellowship of women, empowering women, lots of women-only orgs, a lot of women-only streams, a lot of the girls' night, the girl's stuff where we're passing the Bechdel Test, that's good. There are a couple of Twitch streamers who do initiatives that are surrounding women's issues that are feminist, even if they aren't marketed as that.

By lipstick feminism, TheHobbitJedi was referring to a form of popular feminism which Banet-Weiser has characterized as a central part of economies of visibility like live streaming. Lipstick

feminism embraces conventional beauty standards and positions that embrace as empowerment, as reclaiming what makes women unique. The implication is that other forms of feminism are too negative, radical, and controversial and that they completely disclose particular forms of feminine expression- like wearing lipstick. What makes lipstick feminism perhaps more palatable to streaming culture is that it does not seek to correct any perceived wrongs or power imbalances in society- it merely seeks to empower women. This of course links such feminisms with neoliberal ideas of individualism and meritocracy. Due to its emphasis on traditional feminine beauty standards and disinclination for social critique, such forms of feminism are a neat match for the neoliberal structures of live streaming whose sociotechnical affordances are built to reward attractive visuals and aesthetics. Live streaming is positioned as empowering for women; you can have fun, express yourself however you want, help your community, and be your own boss. The suggestion in live streaming is that there is money to be made in being visible and being visibly authentic, as long as that authenticity is the kind that is recognized and rewarded.

Conclusion

TheHobbitJedi's comment also speaks more generally to the existence of multiple kinds of feminisms on the Twitch platform, but specifically to the notion I described earlier of a "right" kind of feminist and a "wrong" kind. This is also seen in the comment made earlier by DeareDrop about the ability of "conventionally attractive" women to be more publicly feminist. I think what both DeareDrop and TheHobbitJedi are recognizing is that more critical forms of feminism are being degraded in favor of more popular forms that do not make people- particularly men- uncomfortable while still playing to their viewing pleasure. Those streamers

who are already privileged or successful through conventional means have the most leeway to play with social deviance. Perhaps conversely, NovemberJewel at one point commented that she felt that streamers who “try to leverage the gamer girl or manic pixie dream girl myth in their favor are particularly at risk for harassment. It sucks because it’s one of those things- or almost is- this empowering thing that just unfortunately gets distorted by the audience.” Something I also observed in my analysis of streaming subreddits is that appealing to the masculine formation of the gamer girl/girl next door is presented as a method of acceptable empowerment, but it still empowerment on the terms of a patriarchal structure that could changes its mind about the value of that empowerment to the patriarchal hegemony of play.

But because of, or perhaps despite, the acceptance of some forms of feminism in gaming and streaming culture, many of these feminist streamers expressed a sense of hope for the present and the future. Metal_Melissa:

> It has slowly started getting better. It is slow, it's taking time. I think the Feminist Frequency was a very big deal. I don't think we would be at a place where this is even a question that comes up if it wasn't for it. I think it's getting to a place where the pushback is stronger than it's ever been, but I think it's from a smaller group of people than it's ever been. I think there's room to talk about social issues, like issues of gender and race and stuff in games in a way there wasn't even like five years ago.

Metal_Melissa sees a future, and even a present, in live streaming where self-expression and success is available to a greater range of people.

Chapter Six: Streaming as Gendered Labor

In this chapter, I demonstrate how live streaming is a form of gendered labor- in particular feminized labor- in that it primarily relies on emotional performance, care work, and community building and maintenance. Through analysis of interviews conducted with 17 femme non-binary, genderfluid, and women streamers, Reddit threads about women and feminism in live streaming, and YouTube videos created by women streamers about working as a streamer, I examine the various ways that live streaming labor relies on practices traditionally associated with "women's work."[25] I argue digital labor environments and creative cultural industries, like live streaming, actually enhance the gendered aspects of the labor of streaming. Bound up in this labor, however, are the norms and practices of a video game culture and the affordances of a technological infrastructure that attempt to deny the inherently gendered labor of this work while simultaneously capturing that work for the social and economic profit of the platform and a privileged few. What I mean by this is that despite the fact that success in live streaming is predicated on care work and emotional performance, the intersection of live streaming with a masculine heavy video game culture means that the inherently gendered and feminized aspects of this work are positioned as less important, in favor of prioritizing video game playing skill and cultural knowledge- arenas in which the participation and capabilities of women have been downplayed and ignored. Double standards abound in these discussions and perceptions of authentic live streaming labor and success.

For example, all live streaming work undertaken by streamers is embodied in that it relies on a great deal of physical effort from streamers, from set-up, to being live and conversing with

[25] Some of the writing in this chapter draws from ideas and insights from my previously published articles "Feeling for an Audience," (Ruberg and Cullen 2020) and "Nothing but a Titty Streamer" (Ruberg, Cullen, and Brewster 2019).

viewers, from managing things offline, in addition to making aspects of your body visible. But it is primarily women who have been largely and publicly chided for the ways they present their bodies as streamers. Here I am referring to the titty streamer debates of 2017-2018 and the hot tub meta of 2021, a set of "controversies" that focused discussion on the appropriate display of women's bodies. In both instances, at the heart of these controversies were women who made themselves emotionally available and/or presented their bodies in what were deemed overly visible or salacious ways who were chastised by others (primarily men) for allegedly cheating their way to success. These streamers were well within the limits of acceptable practices and performances permitted by the guidelines of the Twitch platform, and yet they still frequently found themselves censored or siloed to other parts of the platform (Twitch 2022a). But they seem to be rarely ejected from the platform, much to the chagrin of their detractors, perhaps because the Twitch platform does profit off their exposure.

In short, these women were doing the things that live streaming encouraged them to do- make themselves available, visible, and vulnerable to audiences- and they were being punished by that same audience and the platform which profits off their labor. In addition to presenting the case for why live streaming is inherently feminized labor, I also consider how the femme non-binary, genderfluid, and women streamers I interviewed understand and live with this double standard of labor they are simultaneously encouraged to provide and punished for providing. This chapter discusses the different kinds of labor that streamers are involved in, with an emphasis on the pressures resulting from those labors, viewer expectations, and platform constraints. In particular, I will be examining emotional labor, branding and appearance concerns, and how streamers learn and model expectations through the experiences of the streamers I interviewed.

Women were among the first people online to embrace the creative potential offered by webcams and streaming life online. As recounted by Theresa Senft in her book *Camgirls* (2008), it was women who originally set up some of the most popular and influential homecamming websites in the 1990s. These early camgirls experienced many of the same struggles and dealt with similar concerns around performance, labor, and making a living that streamers on platforms like Twitch still contend with today. Camgirls like Jennifer Ringley were monetizing their lives and pushing the boundaries of streaming over a decade before the creation of Twitch.tv.[26] In the current moment, streamers on platforms like Twitch still have a great deal in common with camgirls that operate on modeling and sex work platforms (Ruberg 2023). Both sets of platforms are focused on monetizing the human body. But in the case of live streaming, the history of women and the obvious focus and objectification of the body is occluded in favor of a culture that prioritizes a masculine purity culture where physical skills associated with men are prized and those that are feminized are policed.

In this chapter I present an argument for how the structures and practices of live streaming are built from minoritized and feminized work practices, and to do so it was necessary to reintroduce this reminder that the groundwork and the history upon which contemporary streaming is built was literally and figuratively established by the work of women.

The Traits of Feminized Labor

Live streaming is a form of immaterial digital labor in that it consists of activities that define and fix cultural standards, consumer norms, and opinions that occur within an interface that makes personality and subjectivity "susceptible to organization and command" (Lazzarato

[26] During my internship at Twitch in 2020 I had the opportunity to ask CEO Emmett Shear if Justin.tv had been inspired in any way by homecamming sites like JenniCam. He said he wasn't aware of any connection.

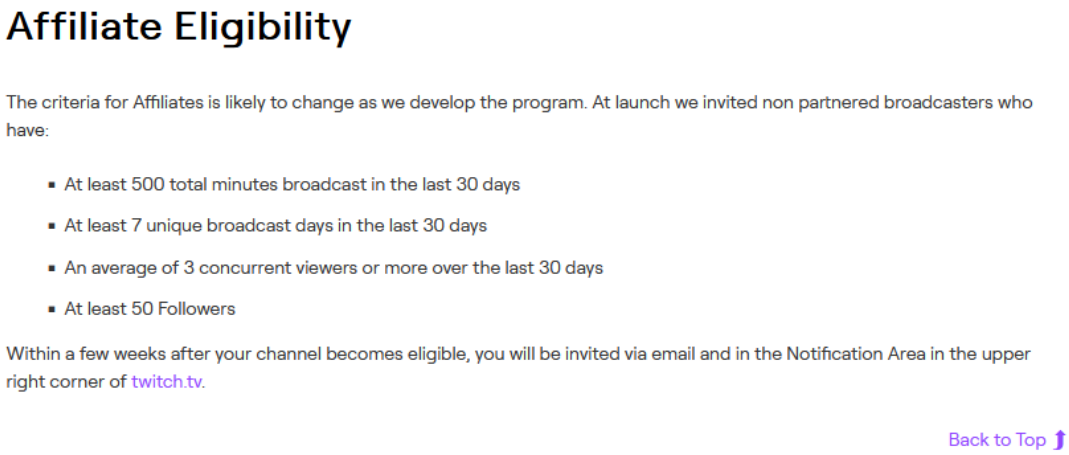
1996). Like similar forms of immaterial digital labor, success in live streaming relies on the commodification of labor and skills most commonly associated with women, commonly referred to as "women's work" (Arcy 2016). In this dissertation, I will be referring to this as feminine or feminized work or labor. The defining characteristics of feminine (women's) work are "precariousness, flexibility, mobility, fragmentary nature, low status, and low pay" (Oksala 2016, p. 281). In the information age, "knowledge, affects, and relationships" have come to play a foundational role in production processes (Oksala 2016, p. 283) where material forms of labor mix with immaterial forms and together produce products that are intangible. Immaterial labor like affective labor is the labor of human contact and interaction, whose products are relationships and emotional responses. A logical point of comparison for these forms of labor is the domestic work of the housewife and the service work of the airline stewardess or waitress (Jarrett 2015; Hochschild 2012), labor that involves producing and managing affects, relationships, and communication. I will now briefly discuss how these feminine work characteristics are applicable to live streaming.

Live streaming is precarious, in that only approximately two percent of the over nine million streamers on the Twitch platform have achieved the coveted Partner status, the point at which live-streaming could be thought of as primary or full-time employment. The majority of the remaining 98% of streamers are unable to rely on live streaming as a consistent or significant source of income. (It is worth noting that some streamers are actually uninterested in making a profit from their streaming activities, including a few of the streamers I interviewed.) Streamers are gig workers, much in the same way as Uber drivers, in that their employment with the Twitch platform is not based on a traditional contract or structure. This means that pay is erratic, employer provided benefits like health care are nonexistent, and streaming cannot be relied on

(for most streamers) to entirely cover life's necessities: it is therefore precarious work.

Live streaming is marketed around flexibility, again just like other gig work contexts. Work on your own time! Work when you feel like it! Work from home![27] Again, there is no traditional structure, no office to report to for a traditional 9-5 workday. But on Twitch, to achieve Partner status or even the part-time equivalent of Affiliate, you have to meet certain requirements like streaming so many hours in a month. So, there is flexibility, but it has its limitations if you want to be a success story. In reality this flexibility means you have all the time in the world in which to work. To earn Affiliate status on Twitch, for example, you must stream yourself for at least a total of 500 minutes (roughly 8.5 hours) across seven unique days (Figure 6). Affiliate is the point at which a streamer can finally monetize their channel and begin to take in revenue (that they share with Twitch). During this period, streamers are likely trying to work another part-time or full-time job. Streaming activity before hitting Affiliate is almost entirely aspirational labor because streamers are creating creative content for the platform for free and engaging in entrepreneurial practices of selling themselves and their time based on only the promise of success in the future. And the pressure to continue these habits only increases on the path to Partner, which has larger time and viewer targets to achieve.

[27] This last point was probably way more exciting before the Covid-19 pandemic.



Affiliate Eligibility

The criteria for Affiliates is likely to change as we develop the program. At launch we invited non partnered broadcasters who have:

- At least 500 total minutes broadcast in the last 30 days
- At least 7 unique broadcast days in the last 30 days
- An average of 3 concurrent viewers or more over the last 30 days
- At least 50 Followers

Within a few weeks after your channel becomes eligible, you will be invited via email and in the Notification Area in the upper right corner of twitch.tv.

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Figure 6. Eligibility requirements for becoming a Twitch Affiliate, current as of March 2022 (Twitch 2022b).

Meanwhile, streamers often feel a sense of competition with others who are in a similarly precarious position. In our analysis of comments from the Twitch subreddit, Bonnie Ruberg, Kat Brewster, and I frequently found expressions of concern that both money and attention are in limited supply in the live streaming market (2019). The neoliberal and meritocratic ethos of flexible, mobile, work as an opportunity for success for anyone willing to work hard seems to provoke a fear of competition and a scarcity mindset; a mindset that also suggests that the greatest slices of success should be reserved for those who deserve it by performing the right kind of identity in an imagined economy of authenticity.

Intersecting Areas of Chaos: The Labors and Tools of Live Streaming

Mark Johnson noted in his exploration of the intersection of disability and streaming technology that the Twitch platform is "predicated on a deeply new and under-examined media technology which is complex, demanding, and technically and socially sophisticated" (2019, p. 509). I would add that what also makes streaming so complex and demanding are the social affordances that encourage gatekeeping and harassment, which add an extra set of burdens to

streamers struggling with, or against, the social and technical norms. In this section, I provide an overview of the tasks and tools that the streamers I spoke to mentioned as part of their work, as well as a discussion of some of the challenges complicating streamer labor that are frequently encountered. While I will be highlighting the gendered aspects of many of these elements, my primary goal in this section is to simply present perspectives on the work of streaming from streamers whose experiences are typically underrepresented; streamers who are genderfluid, non-binary, women, queer, disabled and people of color.

Belabored Perceptions

When asked to talk about the different forms of work that make up streaming, many streamers began their response by describing how other people feel about the work of streaming, rather than beginning with a rundown of tasks like I had anticipated. This could be because the work of live streaming is so outwardly facing and dependent on the attention of others. Both NovemberJewel and Strawberry provided me with examples of common statements they get from viewers in their channels. NovemberJewel: "Oh, you just turn on your camera and turn on whatever game and just go." Strawberry: "You're just playing games on the internet and people are paying you? Why?" The word "just" in both those statements is meant to double down on the implication that streaming is easy to do. However, NovemberJewel and Strawberry- and everyone else- were quick to assert that streaming is work. This is typically the point in our conversations where most streamers began to list all of the different elements that have to be dealt with while working as a streamer, what TheHobbitJedi referred to as "intersecting areas of chaos." Comments related to tasks and tools I have separated out into their own subsections; this one continues by examining higher level comments about labor and work in live streaming.

Several streamers referred to the physical, emotional, and mental endurance that is

required to be a streamer. As I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, these aspects are complicated in a variety of ways for streamers, particularly those who have to deal with social and technical affordances that discourage or do not support their participation. A streamer is often expected to sit in place for hours, concentrating on the task or game at hand, and maintain a performance of care for the viewers in their chat. And that only describes what is going on while the streamer is live on the channel; as I will detail in the section on tasks, streamers are expected to perform other duties when they are not broadcasting live that can be just as taxing on the body, mind, and heart.

While streaming is certainly physically demanding, perhaps the two most significant forms of labor in streaming are emotional and relational labor. Emotional labor, a concept that derives from the work of Arlie Hochschild's interactions with airline stewardesses, describes "the calculated exhibition of feelings through bodily registers…carefully administered by 'feeling rules' that enjoin workers to under or over-perform particular feelings to make others feel cared for (Arcy 2016, p. 366; cf. Hochschild 2012). In a work environment, emotional displays are a powerful way to make a brand appealing to an audience. As I have mentioned several times throughout this chapter, much of the work of streaming is emotional labor and emotional labor "has been disproportionately tasked to women" (Arcy 2016, p. 366). Streamers have to work to cultivate feelings in viewers, perform feelings, manage their own feelings, and find ways to use feelings as a way of establishing their personal brands. Although they appear to be "just" playing games, what many live streamers are providing is entertainment and care work to viewers. In the YouTube videos on how to be a Twitch streamer made by women that Ruberg and I analyzed, we found that much of their advice centered on emotionally managing an audience, setting the "right mentality" and emotional register for yourself and the channel, and

ensuring your brand is linked to authentic (positive and acceptable) emotion. This is accomplished in a number of ways; for example, by using a language of "appreciation" and thanking viewers by name for tips or offering viewers a sense of intimacy by streaming from their bedrooms (Taylor 2018; Ruberg and Lark 2020).

Relational labor is a form of emotional labor and describes the "ongoing, interactive, affective, material, and cognitive work" (Baym 2018, p. 19) of building connections with people to support creative work. Streamers build relationships through emotional engagement and entertainment with viewers, interacting with them in their Twitch channels and Discord servers. TheHobbitJedi, Sera, and NovemberJewel all made various statements that they considered connecting with viewers and giving those viewers what they want to be the essential work of live streaming. And through it all, there was an awareness of how this work of relational performance was being monitored and received by others. As Sera observed, "You have to remember that people are watching you. People are there to watch you and they are consistently and constantly watching you." This monitoring and surveillance, and the resulting highlighting of differences, is what can further complicate the already complicated work of streaming for streamers.

One such complication to the work of streaming is that double standard of differing expectations for feminine and women streamers. A few of the streamers I spoke with explicitly called out a gendered component to this standard by making comments about famous (and infamous) male peers who have found success as a type of streamer that ignores viewers in favor of concentrating on their gameplay. The complaint from these streamers is that women and feminine presenting streamers do not get to be that inattentive with their viewers. At one point, Cyan said in frustration:

> “Most of the biggest streamers on Twitch are men and they'll just sit there and not say anything. People are blowing up their chats, spamming things, trying to get them to talk. People would just sit and watch them for hours. The only girl streamer I can think of right now, one of the bigger ones, is Pokimane. When she's in there, there is all kinds of stuff going on and she's expected to look pretty on the stream. She's expected to also be good at the game so people aren't just calling her a titty streamer. I feel like there's much more work that women have to do that men don't have to do. They can stream without face cams. It's all about their gameplay and that's it.”

It seems that women are held to a higher standard of interactivity and emotional care work in their channels. Several streamers made similar comments about this double standard, often using the word “perfect” to describe the image they were supposed to present in live streams. As Nicole simply stated, “As a female, I feel like I have to try a lot harder and be almost more perfect at everything I do so that I can be valid in the gaming space.” This expectation of perfection covers not only skilled gameplay, but physical appearance as well. Cyan described how finding an outfit and a makeup look that made her feel pretty and confident was a key component of her streaming preparation routine. In a way, control over her appearance acts as a sort of armor. Overall, the streamers I interviewed reported that they often dealt with unwanted remarks about their appearance or bodies. Strawberry recounts a time in her channel when she was practicing for a speedrunning competition and several viewers kept commenting on her outfit: “People aren't talking about my gameplay, they're talking about how I look. That's really

frustrating and typically happens more to women. It's like just because I'm a woman you get a free pass to talk about what I look like? That's really frustrating."

Furthermore, gender discrimination and harassment were described as the most significant factors complicating the work of streaming for women. For example, needing to develop strategies for preventing harassment, or even what is known as trash talk, dealing with it when it happens live, and then dealing with the fallout in the channel or the Discord is time taken away from the other professionalization and growth tasks that make up streaming.

Another complicating element is the extra work that people of color have to perform in order to get attention to their content and concerns from viewers and the Twitch platform itself. TheHobbitJedi called out Twitch for only doing "surface level" work to support black and Chicano people on the platform, whom she described as a few of the groups in need of the most support due to a lack of attention and promotion from the platform as well as the outright harm they receive from viewers and other streamers. TheHobbitJedi explicitly denounced the way Dr. Disrespect was handled by Twitch as evidence of a white double standard when it comes to streamers, particularly the big or large streamers that have made the Twitch platform famous.[28] Brianna made a similar comment, saying, "I've just seen these white males getting away with everything under the sun on Twitch. I've seen and experienced black women and just black people in general, but specifically black women, making reports to Twitch and having these issues [with harassment] and nothing being done. I've experienced that firsthand." What these streamers have noticed is what Kishonna Gray described as "the digital contour of white, masculine, cis-heterosexual power that is hidden beneath the structure of and is coded into

[28] Dr. Disrespect, a white man known for his over-the-top and belligerent streaming persona, filmed himself in a public restroom at the E3 convention in 2019 when others were present. He was only suspended from Twitch for two weeks and claimed his mistake was a result of being "too focused on authenticity" (Webb 2019).

existence within tech industries" (2020, p. 27). People of color therefore inhabit precarious positions within such structures and often have to carve out spaces and support networks of their own. While there is power to be found in being visible, there is still difficulty when inequality is literally coded into the structure. When talking about supporting other black women in streaming, Cyan stated:

> "I think that there are a ton of black women streaming. I think that there are a ton of black women that are lesbian streaming. I think that there might be a ton of black trans women streaming. But what keeps getting recommended on Twitch is all of the people that are already popular. I don't know what's up with Twitch. It just feels like there's a ton of white people on the platform everywhere and I can't always find people of color."

What Cyan is describing here is that without the deliberate adjustments that Twitch might make during an event like Black History Month, the recommender algorithms of the platform favor white, straight, cisgender men. When you are trying to find other streamers to support, as a viewer, a fellow streamer, and a member of a shared community or group, Twitch makes it difficult. Cyan characterized this search to find other streamers of color she could connect with and support as physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting.

There are also elements of ageism and ableism making streaming difficult work. Sharp_Meringue observed that most streamers are younger people capable of withstanding the physical exertion of streaming. Indeed, the majority of the other streamer interviewees were in their 20s and 30s. Sharp_Meringue identified as a woman in her 50s with severe physical disabilities; this means that streaming is an incredibly demanding activity for her for several

reasons. Achieving Affiliate status according to the qualifications laid out in Image 1 is extra challenging for someone like Sharp_Meringue, who admitted she can only stream for a few hours at time before she is physically and mentally exhausted. In his paper on disability and mental health in live streaming, Mark Johnson identified four issues impacting the work of streaming for disabled streamers: the working hours, trolls, the need for constant monitoring of metrics, and the social norms of Twitch to constantly acknowledge viewers (2019). Streamer Celeste described how she had difficulties meeting that standard of consistency that so many streamers, and the Twitch platform metrics, prioritize as the model of success. "I'm on a schedule, but that schedule is pretty loose," Celeste said. "I've canceled a lot just because I'm disabled and I go through a lot of chronic pain. If I'm just not feeling it, I won't stream."

Some streamers described what they did as creative work, even those who are video game or variety streamers. There are strong ties between modern creative culture industries and feminized labor, through the harnessing of the skills and passions of individuals in digital environments for the benefit of platforms. The idea that you might find "empowerment" through your own creative sensibility has become very attractive in digital economies structured by neoliberal principles (Banet-Weiser 2012; Duffy and Pruchniewska 2017; Banet-Weiser 2018). Cherry Tomb and TheHobbitJedi both mentioned that the possibility for creative expression is partially what motivated them to begin streaming in the first place, with TheHobbitJedi further adding that she believes live streaming is inherently creative expression. But not only does the content itself need to be creative, perhaps more significantly streamers felt they were tasked with finding creative ways to share, perform, and market that content (and themselves). NovemberJewel credits the pressure to share, enjoy, and keep sharing and enjoying something she considered a creative outlet as one of the reasons she temporarily stopped broadcasting on

her channel for several months.

One comment from Nicole neatly wraps up many of the overall concerns these streamers had about the work of streaming: “You're not just playing video games but you're being an entertainer. And you have to be super creative. You need to stay relevant. There's those types of problems. There's also an emotional toll to a degree that goes with it too when you're involved with a community. Having to always be present.”

Streaming Tasks

With live streaming becoming increasingly professionalized (Johnson 2021), some tasks and tools have become standard elements of a streamer’s working environment. I am going to summarize those tasks here in three categories: preparation that occurs primarily before going live, tasks that are managed while the channel is live, and post-production and marketing tasks that typically occur after the channel has gone live.

Preparing to Stream

In preparing a channel, many streamers are concerned foremost with the visual and aesthetic elements. These are dictated both by art assets and custom interactive elements, but also the layout of the user interface. So, in working on this, streamers often develop skills in creating or identifying good art while learning to use programs that integrate those things alongside the content (be it music, a video game, hanging out in a hot tub) being captured. Not only does preparing these things create an experience that will hopefully be appealing to viewers artistically but figuring out programs to implement them can increase automatization and make it easier on the streamer to do things like acknowledge a viewer who has tipped or subscribed. This is important because providing an interactive and personalized experience for viewers is seen as

crucial to the success of a streamer. This is also important to an authentic notion of realness and consistency streamers are expected to provide. For many streamers, these things are managed by a physical infrastructure that has to be acquired and managed in its own way. Beyond the ability to even access the physical equipment necessary to stream (consoles, computers, webcams, mics, lights, and capture cards), streamers also have to develop a proficiency to use these items in various combinations. NovemberJewel commented that she has spent "hours, days, even weeks" at a time crafting the elements of her channel to make everything seem "professional looking, seamless, and connected."

Relatedly, due to the pressure to perform as a good player, a few streamers like Sera and Strawberry mentioned that they practice the games they are going to play live on stream. They stressed that getting visibly frustrated or repeatedly failing a sequence were easy ways to "kill the vibe" in a stream (and possibly face trash talk or harassment). Strawberry commented that practicing a game in advance is beneficial to providing a more polished stream as well as a visible demonstration of expertise, making it easier to deal with viewers and keep them engaged.

Beyond the technical interface and the content, there is also the environment around the streaming setup to be considered. On Twitch many streamers work out of spaces in their own homes, and that space is often in their bedrooms. In their observations of streamers live from their bedrooms, Ruberg and Lark discovered that women streamers are more likely to be obviously broadcasting from their bedrooms than men (2020). Ruberg and Lark argue that streaming from the bedroom carries with it cultural connotations of intimacy, embodiment, and erotics. The place a streamer is streaming from builds expectations of spatial and emotional access in viewers, but these expectations are heavier on women and femme presenting streamers. Given this, many of the streamers I spoke to are very thoughtful about what things appear in their

streams. DeareDrop particularly spoke of the importance of good lighting and props in the background that match your user interface aesthetic and give viewers an insight into your personality. A few streamers, however, were hesitant to provide too much insight. SmackArtist and Gabriella Muriella, for example, are both streamers who took great pains to hide or obscure the space beyond their streaming set-up for their own sense of privacy as well as the protection of their loved ones while they are live.

Live!

In response to a question about what work Strawberry is doing when she is live on her Twitch channel, she said, “When I'm live, I would say a lot of the work is balancing between playing the game well and interacting with viewers.” Other than the privileged few discussed earlier (famous men in streaming), most streamers feel that they have to provide entertainment and personalized conversation at the same time while they are live. Streamers like Strawberry and TheHobbitJedi referred to this as the proper balance of a stream, although TheHobbitJedi lamented that in reality most of these streamers have to choose one over the other. For the most part, the streamers I interviewed fell on the side of prioritizing personalized and interesting conversation. This is perhaps another way that these streamers are put at odds with their male counterparts who are video game streamers. Although ScarletWitch is herself a video game streamer, she stressed “For the most part, chat interaction is more important than what I'm streaming at the time. That's always chat engagement above all else. Most of the time we talk about whatever they want to talk about.” ScarletWitch is again stressing the importance of making viewers happy- “we talk about whatever they want to talk about.”

If any problems should arise during these conversations, many streamers act as their own moderators- or as additional moderators supporting the volunteers and bots they have in place.

Nicole and Huntress stressed that finding and managing a good moderator team was important for a smooth experience while live, because the attention of the streamer is already so divided. But streamers felt a sense of responsibility over their channel and felt they had to do their part to discourage negative behavior that was potentially damaging to the communities they were trying to cultivate. Streamers often describe having to timeout or ban someone causing a problem and frame it as for the good of the channel. Although several streamers admitted that dealing with that stuff also took an emotional toll on them. In addition to issues arising in chat, TheHobbitJedi and NovemberJewel also noted that streamers are often acting as their own quality assurance, being forced to anticipate, troubleshoot, and resolve any technical issues that arise during their streams.

Post-stream

Many of the tasks in a post-stream period are repeats of the tasks from the preparation stage. Streamers may spend time adjusting or updating their audiovisual components and their user interface setups. This is also the time when social media becomes critical. Many streamers will often post on Twitter when they are going live, but after the stream several spent time editing recorded live streams or splicing clips together to post to other platforms like Instagram or YouTube. SmackArtist in fact said the bulk of her post-stream time is taken up with preparing content for YouTube. Again, this is essential for streamers because the video archive Twitch offers to even Partners like SmackArtist is short-term. Sharing these clips and edited videos permits viewers to grow their audience, attracting viewers to their Twitch channel from other places, as well as earning revenue on other platforms. Relatedly, sharing content is another way streamers support other streamers, or find other streamers to support. Metal_Melissa, TheHobbitJedi, and Nicole all mentioned the value of having content and a consistent brand that

other streamers can promote; it is essentially networking.

Streaming Tools

Partially inspired by the research I conducted with Twitch interviewing moderators about their tool usage (Cullen and Kairam 2022), I asked the streamers I interviewed for this dissertation about the tools they relied on to perform the work of streaming. Many of the Twitch moderators I spoke with believed that not only were the right tools essential for managing a community, but that they were also necessary for protecting the streamer from harm, especially if that streamer identified with an oft-targeted group. The majority of the tools described by Twitch streamers overlap with what Twitch moderators reported as important to running a Twitch channel: chat bots for sharing information with viewers and assisting in chat moderation, Discord for "behind the scenes" work on the Twitch channel and interacting with the community, and programs like Google Docs for developing community guidelines and keeping track of schedules and special programming. Discord in particular was mentioned by several streamers as essential for "offline" maintenance of and interaction with the community they had developed while they were "online." Moderators typically learn how to manage all of these things, as unpaid volunteer workers, in order to help streamers. However, there are many tools that only the streamer may develop an expertise in, due to their focus and position at the center of the broadcast network. Twitch as a platform provides a place and an infrastructure for the streamer to create a channel, but a lot of external pieces are required to make a stream successful, both in terms of hardware and software.

The most frequently mentioned third-party tool was OBS (Open Broadcaster Software). Thirteen of the streamers I interviewed referenced OBS during our conversations. OBS is a free

and open-source program for screencasting and streaming. OBS allows streamers to record and share screens from multiple sources, manage unique themes and scenes (like a “be right back” screen overlay), and monitor video and audio bitrate. OBS also offers a “studio mode” (Figure 7) where changes to all of these things can be made “behind the scenes” and unseen by viewers while the stream is live (Jack0r 2022). OBS was frequently described as difficult to understand and use for beginners, but many streamers like NovemberJewel came to regard OBS as the “main backbone” of their streaming activities. When paired with assets, screens, and images made by the streamer or a commissioned artist, OBS often becomes the primary means for a streamer to package and deliver their aesthetic and desired user experience to viewers in the channel.

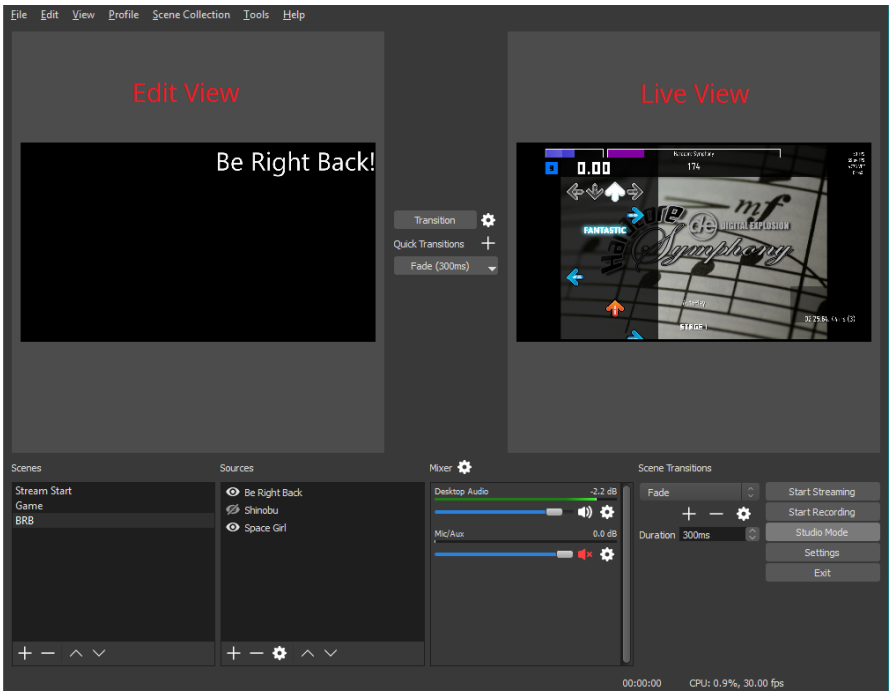

Figure 7. An example of Studio Mode in OBS (Jack0r 2022).

Another common tool used by streamers was StreamLabs, often in combination with OBS. StreamLabs is also a free live streaming and recording software, but it provides some features that OBS does not. While OBS is great for implementing the base layout of a channel user interface, StreamLabs provides functionality for implementing custom alerts (special sounds that occur when a viewer follows, donates, or subscribes) and additional overlays, as well as a system for managing donations and merchandise sales.

One aspect that makes Twitch preferable over YouTube or Facebook Gaming, according to my interlocutors, is that it allows relatively easy integration of third-party support tools. It also makes it easier to market yourself as a brand. For example, MintyFresh actually began streaming on Facebook Live, but soon became frustrated by its user interface and inability to create and store a collection of recordings. Sharing videos and clips from a live stream on social media sites like Discord, Reddit, and Twitter is a very popular way to drive traffic to a Twitch channel and build something akin to "brand recognition." As long as Twitch remains popular, recognizable, and easy to use live streaming platform, it will continue to be the one people turn to when they want to explore an interest in live streaming, even if they are aware of potential problems caused by the social atmosphere.

Expectations Structuring Expectations

In addition to questions about common tasks and tools, I also asked the streamers I interviewed how they initially learned to stream. While I have seen research on how live streaming can facilitate learning in viewers (Smith, Obrist, and Wright 2013; Lu et al. 2018), at the time of this writing I have seen very little about how streamers learn to become streamers-particularly streamers who are not cisgendered straight white men. In *Watch Me Play*, Taylor

comments that in addition to dealing with stigma and harassment, women in professional game contexts are also hampered by a lack of access to networks, role models, and informal learning opportunities (2018). It was this question of learning and role models that partially motivated my work on "How to be a streamer" YouTube videos with Bo Ruberg (2020). My thinking was that in this current project, in a future project, or even in the project of another researcher that my interviewees could help highlight differences in how different genders approach learning how to stream and act as streamers.

The most common way that these streamers learned what to do and what was expected of them as streamers was by watching other streamers on Twitch. While a few watched streamers of any gender, the majority decided to observe what women were doing live on stream. This involved studying their layouts, how they presented themselves on camera, and how they interacted with viewers. After a period of study, these nascent streamers would go live on their own in a period of trial and error, testing what worked in other channels and deciding what worked in their own channels. Several streamers mentioned getting one-on-one assistance from a friend or family member to set up the technical elements of the stream or to provide their graphic design skills for layouts and emotes. Only a few of the streamers I spoke to mentioned that they had watched "how to be a streamer" or tutorial videos.[29] NovemberJewel told me that she had "binge watched" tutorial videos on tools like OBS and tried to emulate those examples. Eventually, she decided the best way to learn was to go live, so she started streaming and fine-tuning as she went in response to her own feelings and those of her viewers.

[29] This was a small, surprising discovery from my interviews. Several of the tutorial videos Ruberg and I examined had views in the thousands, so I had expected more than a couple of the streamers I spoke with for the dissertation to mention them as a resource.

Producing Your Own Life: Branding, Appearances, and Affect

As I demonstrated earlier in this chapter, live streaming is made up of several forms of labor, like many of the modern cultural industries are, particularly aspirational labor, a concept developed by Brooke Erin Duffy (2017). Duffy characterizes aspirational labor as that which relies on gendered (feminized) and entrepreneurial creative practices to achieve a promise of social and economic gain. Aspirational labor is extremely salient to cultural industries like video game live streaming, particularly in that it encourages the building and selling of a personal identity through performance and emotional labor. One element of this is that in order to be an entrepreneur of oneself, that self has to have a brand that can be interpreted and consumed by others. Branding, and appearances related to branding, are very important to live streamers attempting to stand out in what they see as an oversaturated market. One streamer I spoke to, Nicole, used those exact words while describing the work of streaming as "trying to come up with new creative ideas that maybe other people aren't doing that will set your stream apart from others, because the streaming market is just so oversaturated right now."

In fact, I asked all of my interview participants if they thought about themselves or their channel on Twitch in terms of a brand or branding. This question felt reasonable to ask, given the breadth of previous live streaming research that has noted that branding, and the practices of entrepreneurial self-promotion known as self-branding, are common concerns for live streamers (Dargonaki 2018; Woodcock & Johnson 2019a; Consalvo, Lajeunesse, and Zanescu 2020; Meisner and Ledbetter 2020). In their study of self-branding practices in live streaming, Colten Meisner and Andrew M. Ledbetter noted how these practices are rooted in Goffman's (1959) idea of "everyday life is a performance of identity through facework" and linked to popular discourses of authenticity. In particular, they invoke the work of Sarah Banet-Weiser. In her

consideration of the linkages between feminism, self-branding, and authenticity, Banet-Weiser credits the rise of self-branding as a normative social media strategy to shifts in capitalist consumer cultures and constructions of gender (2012). Banet-Weiser invokes Foucault's concept of "technology of the self" to explain the work of women in social media. Specifically, she states, "Technologies of the self have vast and often contradictory implications for women in the 21st century, where 'putting oneself out there,' and the ensuing quest for visibility, is an ever more normative practice" (Banet-Weiser 2012, p. 55). In many ways, the freedom to brand yourself, egged on by neoliberal and capitalist ideologies of consumption, has become entangled with feminist ideals of empowerment and authenticity. Authenticity, or at least a performance and identity that appeals to notions of authenticity, is an important element in almost any social media context that involves microcelebrities or influencers, but in video game live streaming this element is heightened because liveness itself and the affordances of Twitch reinforces expectations of realness and authenticity in viewers (Consalvo, Lajeunesse, and Zanescu 2020; Woodcock & Johnson 2019a).

Part of this performance of visible authenticity for streamers often means both intentional and unintentional moments of emotional vulnerability. Meisner and Ledbetter (2020) also placed an emphasis on the connection between labor and affect in the work of streaming, particularly noting how the structures and affordances of the Twitch platform itself dictate an affective performance (2020, p. 13). Ruberg and I found in our analysis of YouTube videos made by women who worked as streamers on Twitch that they similarly emphasized a connection between self-branding, emotion, and authenticity in their work (2020). Essentially, what they described was that part of a streamer's brand should be appearing authentic and to be a streamer you must be authentically enjoying the work of streaming and interacting with viewers, which

reinforces the affective power and authenticity of the brand. What the answers of my interview participants collectively revealed when they were asked about branding was a reaffirmation of the belief that branding and self-branding were important parts of the model of success Twitch streaming. They also highlighted the connection between branding and affect, describing appeals to emotion being an essential part of establishing a brand, maintaining a successful persona, and building relationships with viewers.

Branding for Success

All of the streamers I spoke with discussed a pressure to engage in self-branding, a brand to describe themselves, as well as developing a brand for the channel (that would be intimately connected with their self-brand.) As noted by Duffy and Hund, the neoliberal ideologies that have transformed and shaped mainstream culture industries have leveraged notions of individuality and self-governance to position self-branding as a smart, entrepreneurial decision against the backdrop of an oversaturated web 2.0 market (2015, p. 2). Although many of the streamers I interviewed began their streaming activities without thinking through these things, they all found over time that the affordances of the Twitch platform, this sense of needing to stand out in a competitive market, and expectations from viewers forced them to reflect on these things. For example, ScarletWitch shared how over time she felt compelled to "clean up her channel" and "make it look more consistent according to a brand," because she repeatedly encountered the idea that having a brand was a key element to achieving success as a streamer. It was suggested to her that a brand would help her market herself against other streamers, seem more approachable to viewers, and inform the creation of a more aesthetically pleasing user interface (layout) on her channel. Indeed, ScarletWitch followed this up by affirming that

crafting a unique identity for herself and for her channel did seem to help her channel grow in viewership. She also credits having a clear brand with helping her to secure a corporate sponsorship. For Huntress, one of the distinctions she made between being a casual streamer and taking it seriously was having an established self-brand that would appeal to corporate sponsors. MintyFresh also equated having a brand with being a successful, serious, professional streamer- although it was not something she was personally interested in- stating: "Streaming gives me something to do when I enjoy it. Having a brand and having a persona doesn't really matter as much. I think that could shift if I ever decided that I wanted to work towards Affiliate, but I think for now having a brand and having a very intentional persona just really isn't that important." Perhaps TheHobbitJedi best summed up the importance of branding to a streamer's success:

> "You have to be a good producer of your own life, because a lot of the best streamers I personally know are really good managers of themselves as a brand and also of their time, because your time is so valuable if you want to get partner and then if you want to keep making money as a partner. One thing with streamers is consistency, because people want something almost like television."

When TheHobbitJedi says streamers "have to be a good producer of their own lives," she does not mean only in the sense of being visible and presenting that visibility as a product for viewer consumption; she is also invoking the idea of a producer in the vein of a television or theater producer, suggesting a careful orchestration and performance of liveness.

The logic of adopting a brand for themselves and their channel asserts that this will help streamers stand out against other streamers and to potential sponsors both in the sense of

presenting a unique conceit and showcasing themselves as a good investment for a larger brand. And as TheHobbitJedi points out, part of that individualized brand development is being consistent- providing a similar performance and experience to viewers over and over. As I discussed earlier in the chapter, consistency was a commonly used term by the streamers I spoke with to characterize a model of success. In cases both big and small, the brand of a streamer (their ability to consistently present a performance and create an affective experience) becomes the streamer while the streamer literally becomes the brand. When describing her model of a successful streamer's brand, which she developed by watching the channels of "big" women streamers, Strawberry emphasized that the brand encompasses not only the user interface, emotes, and sub badges, but the personality and appearance of the streamer as well.[30] Strawberry stressed the importance of being able to promote and sell the whole package when it comes to a Twitch channel. This often presents a choice between a sort of objectification of the authentic self or finding a way to protect that self, which is why so many streamers rely on personas- personas allow them to do both.

In her work, Illana Gershon found that a self-brand is generally conceived of as a reflection of an "authentic self" that allows a person to appear both flexible and coherent at the same time (2017). "It is the managing impulse [to appear consistent and predictable] that defines what constitutes the authentic self" (Gershon 2017, p. 35). But as streamer Metal_Melissa notes the channel brand is indelibly wrapped up in the streamer and their politics. In Metal_Melissa's case, the visual branding elements of her channel layout were designed to an aesthetic of "a black metal album in a trans rights color palette." Not only was this a choice to make her channel stand out visually in appearance, but it was also meant to convey her identity and values to

[30] Terms like "big" and "small" were used by my interlocutors to refer to channels with a larger prominence on Twitch in terms of viewership and prestige on the platform.

channel visitors. Relatedly, Gabriela Muriella told me that the branding elements of a streamer and their channel can be used to assess what beliefs and behaviors that streamer promotes or tolerates in their community. The example Gabriela Muriella used was emotes; for her, emotes are an easy way to assess not only the streamer and their values, but the intent of the viewers who use those emotes. Seeing emotes from a well-known streamer in the context of a particular channel or event can tell a streamer a lot about what to expect in interactions with their followers. Indeed, emotes have become an easy way to tell a person's politics at a glance on Twitch, with many streamers' emotes explicitly invoking specific political beliefs. Following the riot in the U.S. Capitol building in January 2021, Twitch made the decision to remove the universal platform "PogChamp" emote because the streamer whose face it depicted had made public statements in favor of further violence (Kelly 2021; Jackson 2023). On her channel, Strawberry banned all variations of the Pepe emote because she felt "they're used really nastily against queer and trans people."

Branding for Affect

When asked about branding, Metal_Melissa also stressed that thinking through what kind of emotional and social environment you want to cultivate on your channel and in your community was one of the most important factors for a streamer when developing a self-brand. Several of the streamers I spoke with, when asked about a channel brand, described a feeling or "vibe" they sought to elicit in their viewers through their performance and play as a streamer. Philosopher Robin James defines vibe as a "vernacular term for describing something like a milieu, an ambient atmosphere, or a qualitative orientation" (James 2022). Vibe can also be used to describe an activity, an experience, or something someone can do or perform. MintyFresh described her channel as "laid back and chill" and Nicole said she wanted her viewers to feel

"comfy." Many of the streamers explicitly linked a persona they had developed for their Twitch channels to the emotional response and register they were looking for in viewers. Examples of these included "your older sister that isn't good at games" (Celeste), the "cutesy younger sister/girl next door" (Sera), the "artsy geek girl" (Cherry Tomb), and the "sassy and cute friend" (Brianna). These vibes and personas, while mostly aimed at appealing to viewers, are also important for the streamer to maintain investment in their own channel. During her several years as a streamer, Sharp_Meringue has observed that having a brand and a persona that you personally enjoy as a streamer is crucial for sustaining emotional and physical investment in your own channel. This echoes many of the comments Ruberg and I found in our analysis of "how to be a Twitch streamer" YouTube videos made by women in streaming (2020); there is no point in enduring the labor if you cannot find something to enjoy in the work.

Live streaming is an economy of attention and an affective economy in that the focus is not on the ownership of a tangible product, but rather control over the emotional milieu and the resulting networked relationships (cf. Jenkins 2006). In *Watch Me Play*, Taylor states, "Streamers I've spoken to over the years emphasize, almost more than any other element, how central chat and interaction with the audience is" (2018, p. 89). Taylor links this with the concept of affective economy, and Sara Ahmed's assertion that emotions align individuals with communities (2018, p. 89). In a context like live streaming, building and managing emotion in your audience is seen as the key to success. There is a reason so many of the streamers I spoke to during this research were concerned with having control over the vibe in their channel.

In fact, as my previous analysis of r/Twitch comments indicated, streamers do think of streaming as an attention economy, and furthermore one where the attention of viewers is finite and limited. This notion that this limited amount of attention should go to the right people (those

who are authentic, real members of the community, who have "earned it the right way") is one of the underlying causes of the mistreatment of women streamers (Ruberg, Cullen, and Brewster 2019). Relatedly, I suggest there is also a sense that not only is viewer attention limited, but that the number of emotional connections viewers are capable of maintaining is limited. This is why so many streamers are concerned with maintaining a "positive," "welcoming," or "laid back" emotional milieu, or vibe, in their channels; to encourage viewers to engage and invest emotionally. This is also why many streamers try to discourage, or lean away from, "negativity" in their chats and to downplay or hide aspects of their own identities that might not appeal to viewers; for example, their feminist beliefs. Sera stated in her interview, "The thing with Twitch, you have to learn how to be more in the headspace of your 'persona'- which is less a persona and more a version of you that doesn't experience any serious emotions. People come to you to forget their issues; they will not be interested if you are upset." A persona therefore can be useful for not only performing authenticity, but for providing a shield that protects an authentic self (Gershon 2017). As Taylor has noted, tapping into (and performing) positive feelings is a component of financial success in the affective economy of live streaming (2018). "Many [streamers] expressed that what shifts viewers from audience to something else, be it community or family, are gestures of reciprocity, familiarity, or intimacy," (Taylor 2018, p. 91). At one point in our conversation, Gabriella Muriella stated emphatically, "If you want to build a community, you have to build relationships. You also have to be a certain level of vulnerable." The ability to turn a casual viewer into a regular, into a subscriber or a donator, relies on emotional appeal and management.

However, a few of the streamers I spoke to reject the necessity and the implications of branding, saying that these practices are at odds with being true to themselves or building

community. For these streamers, having a brand or a self that is obviously managed violates any appeal to authenticity or realness and they denied that they used a persona or thought of what they did in terms of branding. While these streamers are concerned with the emotions of their viewers, it was positioned as a pure concern for a community and its members as opposed to emotional leverage toward the success of the streamer or the channel. Cyan for example stated that streaming is something she does to support her LGBTQ community and she thinks of her channel as providing a safe place to come together; she emphatically stated she does not want to get paid for participating in her own community. Even though Cyan qualified for Affiliate status, she declined the offer of enabling the monetization features of her Twitch channel and she does not accept donations. Streamers putting distance between themselves and the appearance of "being in it for the money" is not uncommon as a way to cement an identity as authentic (Taylor 2018; Ruberg and Cullen 2020), but Cyan is the only streamer I have met who felt it was more authentic to distance herself from the revenue accrued by her labor entirely. The consistency of being a brand and offering that brand to a viewing public is ostensibly meant to benefit the streamer, but this primarily benefits the platform Twitch in growth and revenue. While Cyan's choice is a noble and well-intentioned one, she is likely still being interpreted by viewers- and almost certainly by Twitch- as a brand with particular values. Her community building and activism efforts a black and queer streamer are still being consumed and commoditized by Twitch. But this suggests that the only way to avoid having her labor captured is to avoid Twitch entirely. An attractive thought for many of the streamers I spoke to, including Cyan, but we share the same concern- that the power and potential of Twitch would be left entirely to those who are already pushing to exclude streamers like Cyan in order to further consolidate their power.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented a case for how streaming is a form of gendered labor, because it relies on emotional performances, care work, and relationship building practices that have a history in so-called "women's work." Digital labor environments and creative cultural industries, like live streaming, actually enhance the gendered aspects of the labor of streaming. The defining characteristics of feminine work based in emotional labor are "precariousness, flexibility, mobility, a fragmentary nature, low status, and low pay" (Oksala 2016). Live streaming exhibits all of these features because it is difficult to convert streaming into full-time employment, the majority of streamers exist on the platform with low status and low pay, Twitch is constantly available as a workplace, can be done from anywhere, and does not require any training. This leads to a precarious situation where streamers aspire to turn their hobbies, creative pursuits, and passion projects into ready income or to use them to build a community. And in the case of streaming, the body is made visible and caught up in neoliberal and hegemonic masculine value systems. Greater emphasis, from streamers, viewers, and the Twitch platform, is seemingly placed on men in streaming who can be held up as models of skilled gaming, even if they refuse to follow the norms of streaming or support practices that are detrimental or harmful to other streamers. Meanwhile, minoritized femme, feminine, and women streamers are expected to provide both entertainment and care to their viewers, have difficulty achieving success along either avenue, and are often derided for failing at both; damned if they do, damned if they don't. It is the prioritization of a masculine technical skill over more feminine skills like care work, relational labor, and networking that leads to an occlusion of the history and contributions of women in streaming and contributes to their positioning as surveilled bodies and objects of harassment.

Chapter Seven: Harassment, Meritocracy, and Performance

One hypothesis I carried into this dissertation project and that I have expressed in previous chapters is that dealing with harassment creates an extra burden of labor for streamers whose appearances, performances, and identities do not match up with the heteronormative, cisgendered, white masculine status quo in gaming. This issue warrants its own chapter, especially as I also see linkages to broader phenomena in streaming and gaming culture that I want to give careful attention. In the interviews I conducted with streamers dealing with the effects of misogyny in live streaming, every streamer I spoke to voiced a concern with how harassment was impacting participation on Twitch, either their own or that of others like them. There is a concern amongst these streamers that harassment is making it difficult for minoritized streamers to exist on the Twitch platform and perform in the meritocracy of its culture.

As I stated in the theoretical foundations chapter, my theory is that many men in games and streaming culture have been encouraged to cultivate a particular form of masculinity which they use as a justification for judging, policing, and constraining the performances and expressions of women in streaming around a concept of an "authentic" participant that models neoliberal logics. In other words, I propose that expectations for what a streamer does and looks like are dictated both by patriarchal stereotypes and by a belief in meritocracy that reinforces those stereotypes. Harassment in this model is deployed as a corrective measure, a punishment, a way of calling someone out for not fitting the supposed ideal, for not working hard enough to achieve the standard metric of success. While I have conducted discourse analysis and participant observation projects that seem to support that theory, for me it was not sufficient, appropriate, or even right to suggest that this may be true without first speaking to those who are impacted by these beliefs and practices. Although these topics often arose in intersection with

other questions I asked, when I interviewed the streamers whose experiences are shared in this dissertation I also presented a series of explicit questions on their opinions of and experiences with harassment in live streaming and video game culture. This chapter therefore discusses the social difficulties that streamers face in their performances as streamers and as femme, feminine, or women individuals and how those performances and responses to them are dictated by misogyny and meritocracy.

This chapter is sectioned into six parts. The first section provides a brief revisitation of theories of performances and meritocracy presented in earlier chapters to establish an overall framework for this specific chapter. Building from this framework, the second section explains a few of the most common stereotypes and forms of harassment faced in streaming, interwoven with comments from the streamers I interviewed. The third section then lays out some of the personal and broader cultural consequences anticipated and experienced by these streamers as a result of harassment. This is followed by a consideration by myself and my interview participants of "trash talk" in gaming, how it is differentiated from harassment, and when and where and why it may cross over the line into harassment. The fifth section is a discussion of how all of these things, ideologies and practices and social norms alike, impact both streamer and gender performance. I conclude the chapter with a summarization of the stakes for participation, power, and identity negotiation that are complicated by meritocratic and misogynistic norms in live streaming.

Misogyny and Meritocracy in Games: A Review

In *Gaming Sexism,* Amanda Cote explores the paradox of how video game audiences have become more diverse than ever in recent years while at the same time video game culture

has become more exclusionary. Cote proposes that this paradox has arisen due to the response of some groups in games culture whose identities have been defined by their fannish love for games and who now feel threatened by a perceived diminishment of power and privilege that the growth of the gaming audience represents. This is that harmful form of gamer masculinity, which stems from anxieties about gender hierarchies, observed by other video game researchers (Taylor 2012; Consalvo 2012; Salter and Blodgett 2017). As a result of these concerns with hierarchies between players and along lines of genders, responses have primarily taken the form of sexism and misogyny. Indeed, Cote suggests that sexism and misogyny have become inherent mechanics in video game culture, whose structure is oriented towards a traditional masculinity that is exclusionary of all other gender expressions. When the assumed dominant gender identity in games is masculine, this frequently means that femme, genderfluid, and women players are positioned as a threat to the consistency of the structure and are punished for attempting to intrude where they are not perceived as belonging. This punishment, as I mentioned earlier, comes in forms of harassment that are meant to make participation in the culture difficult, uncomfortable, or impossible. Furthermore, being a woman and being a video game player are set up as contradictory subject positions (Cote 2020; Paaßen et al. 2017). In their article exploring gamer identity, Benjamin Paaßen, Thekla Morgenroth, and Michelle Stratemeyer concluded, "Women…can only embrace *either* a gamer identity or a gender identity," (2017, p. 424, emphasis in original). In games, women are often perceived as failures before they have even begun to play, and to bring awareness to the inequality evidenced by this treatment is to invite harassment, particularly for those with a higher profile such as professional players and live streamers. They do not get to call themselves gamers and complain about the sexism inherent in the culture. Even when the behavior directed their way is not aggressively negative,

women are often being marked as different; hence terms like “female gamer,” “girl gamer” and in streaming things like “e-girl” and “camgirl” which are used to set them apart.

And their exclusion is further justified by the dictates of meritocracy; a logic which suggests that people are unsuccessful due to personal deficiencies, not structural or cultural problems. In his book, *The Toxic Meritocracy of Video Games*, Christopher Paul provides this definition of meritocracy from the sociologist Jo Littler, as “a social system which allows people to achieve success proportionate to their talents and abilities as opposed to one in which social class or wealth is the controlling factor.” (Paul 2018, p. 12). The principles behind meritocracy seem logical and are persuasive; everyone starts at the same place and finishes based on individual merit. However, these principles ignore the structural differences which place people in disadvantageous positions. In the case of women in video games, they historically have had less social support and access when it comes to video game technology and cultures, which has reinforced their placement as second-class players. The nature of live streaming in particular enhances these player and gender hierarchies based in misogyny and meritocracy. Indeed, meritocracy reifies and even institutionalizes these differences. As Paul explains, “Meritocracies require sorting people into categories where some are adjudged more worthy than others…Meritocracy isolates, individualizes, and strips out context” (2018, p. 13). In the context of video games and live streaming, this process hooks into stereotypes about women as less skilled players who derive success based on their physical appearance. This meritocratic logic and associated stereotypes are so pervasive in video games and live streaming that prominent players and streamers have publicly asserted that “sexual harassment is part of the culture” (Paul 2018, p. 76). What is being asserted in a statement like this is the right of authentic players, real members of the community, to engage in boundary policing and the punishment- the harassment-

of those who do not naturally belong and who also by these same logics could never conceivably earn a place by merit.

The Shape of Harassment

When it comes to harassment online, there are many forms that carry across and through the social media ecosystem. Here I am thinking of bullying, hate speech, intimidation, and even more extremist forms of harassment such as stalking, SWATting, and doxxing that are enabled by the visibility and availability of personal information online. This is particularly true in the case of influencers or microcelebrities like Twitch streamers who are encouraged to be both visible and vulnerable to gain social and financial capital. In *Watch Me Play*, T.L. Taylor enumerates many of the different techniques streamers use to shield themselves and their loved ones from this negative behavior, which includes: making sure all online accounts are secure and monitored, avoiding using their full name or the names of their loved ones, avoiding any conversation or action that would give away their specific location, using P.O. boxes for any correspondence, and deploying things like VPNs and Discord to mask their personally identifying digital information (2018, pp. 103-104). This is another way in which a persona, brand, and an online moniker can be useful not only for building an audience, but for controlling disclosure to that audience. These safety and distancing practices are particularly crucial for those who are most likely to face harassment from their audiences due to their marginalized gender or racial identity.

The Reality

In this subsection, I provide an account of the different forms of harassment, or potentials for harassment, that the streamers I interviewed had either experienced, witnessed, or heard

about anecdotally. Streamers recounted stories of being "stream sniped" by users with racial and homophobic slurs in their usernames (Metal_Melissa),[31] experiencing aggressive backseat gaming (Gabriella Muriella, SmackArtist), seeing racism, homophobia, and bigotry in their Twitch chats (DeareDrop, Strawberry, Celeste, Metal_Melissa, Brianna, Cherry Tomb), dealing with negative commentary or attacks on their appearance or identity (Sharp_Meringue, NovemberJewel, Huntress, Sera), witnessing the sexual harassment of another streamer (TheHobbitJedi, Sera, ScarletWitch, Huntress, MintyFresh, Nicole), and being sexually harassed themselves (NovemberJewel, TheHobbitJedi, Cyan). This list reveals both the broad shape of harassment faced by femmes and women in streaming while also hinting at its pervasiveness in their everyday activities. Every streamer I spoke to voiced a concern with how harassment was impacting participation on Twitch, either their own or that of others like them. In a few cases, it was also a concern with how this harassment has impacted people in their personal lives. For example, TheHobbitJedi was stalked for a period of time by a person who followed all of her social media content and somehow found information about her family. She felt that this behavior stemmed in part from an overall trend in streaming and social media to treat content creators less like actual people and more like fictional characters. This distancing or objectification of a person makes it easier to treat streamers as a source of entertainment or a "quintessential problem to be overcome, not a person with feelings, thoughts, or motivations," (Cross 2016, p. 26).

While Twitch has its own unique problems and forms of harassment, which I will discuss in more detail in a moment, what I want to stress first is that I do not think that these problems

[31] Stream sniping describes both the process of "a viewer purposely gain[ing] access to the streamer's in-game lobby with the intention to derail, assist, or even aggravate the streamer" (Busby 2021) and "exploit[ing] the livestream of a person they are playing against in an abusive, advantageous, or annoying way," (Witman 2021). It manifests both as a form of harassment and as a technique for in-game cheating.

seen on Twitch are isolated to Twitch. In fact, a great deal of harassment on Twitch is enabled by intersecting digital networks and linkages to other platforms, such as Twitter and Discord. For example, a streamer who goes live on Twitch may find that their post on Twitter about going live has been retweeted with demeaning comments and threats or that their Twitch chat has become inundated with racial slurs instigated by a group that organizes hate raids on Discord. Metal_Melissa experienced such a disruption in her Discord community when a group organized a campaign to accuse her of grooming minors. Metal_Melissa had to take a break from streaming on Twitch and interacting on Discord to reassess her own performance and the safety of her community. This was very hurtful for Metal_Melissa, who designed her channel and Discord to act as safe spaces for queer people. Furthermore, she had felt that streaming was a safe space for her to practice and affirm her gender expression. Unfortunately, accusations of pedophilia are frequently used to police and derail the lives of trans women and are deployed in a huge number of contexts both online and offline (Robertson et al. 2019). For many streamers it is the inattention to the interconnectedness of social life and politics both online and offline, policies of ambivalence related to expression and harassment, and technical affordances prioritizing viewer access over safety streamer that has led to many of their biggest struggles on Twitch.

Hate Raids and Hate Streams

However, there are most assuredly forms of harassment that are unique to live streaming and Twitch which are enabled by the specific affordances of the platform. In this subsection I will be focusing on two of these: hate raids and hate streams. Both forms of harassment operate as twisted versions of social and technical affordances on Twitch that were originally meant to offer support to streamers.

Raiding originally started on Twitch as a practice of "surprising a small streamer with

positive attention" (Taylor 2018, p. 236) by sending viewers from a larger channel that was going offline over to a smaller channel as a show of support. Typically, what happens in a raid is that as a streamer is going offline they choose another streamer they want to support, usually on the basis of a shared social identity or an interest in streaming the same types of content and ask their viewers to do the same. Those viewers are then directed over to the other channel en masse to add to the viewer count and share chat messages of support from the other streamer. Metal_Melissa credits a raid from another streamer with helping her to find and grow her community. Elaborating, she said, "Raiding is such a big part of Twitch culture, sending audiences around. It's very nice when a friend that I know raids me at the beginning of the stream, and then I get to raid a friend at the end of the stream." Metal_Melissa is highlighting how raiding can be a useful way to build a network of support and community across channels. When describing her own raiding strategy as a practice of support, Strawberry stated, "I would say I raid women 90% of the time. I try and keep it within our community and lift each other up because I know we come from a place where it's just harder to break out and be successful sometimes." Raiding also involves the larger channel "hosting" the live feed of the smaller channel in order to boost viewership for that channel as well. (This ability for one channel to broadcast the feed from another also ties into the practice of hate streams.)

Unfortunately, this process that can be so beneficial to streamers was maladapted by groups of streamers and viewers who began raiding channels not to show support, but to post hate speech and personal attacks on the streamer. This became known as "brigading" or "hate raiding." Practices of hate raiding have ebbed and flowed on the Twitch platform over the years as the platform implements new policies and technology to prevent this activity and then bad actors find loopholes and ways around the preventive measures. At the time of writing this

chapter in March 2022 I have seen warnings on Twitter, Discord, and popular gaming websites that the hate raids are "starting up again" (Chalk 2022). This is an interesting follow-up from the last wave in September 2021, because that wave culminated in the decision by Twitch to file lawsuits against two users who were running hate raids with bots targeting black and queer streamers (Hatmaker 2021). Hate raids disproportionately impact streamers with marginalized gender, sexual orientation, and racial identities. Raiding therefore can be a great moment of tenseness and suspicion for a streamer with one or more of these threatened identities, as Gabriella Muriella explains: "I may change the way I interact with chat if I get raided by another channel because it's suddenly people who I might not know. I might not even have seen them ever before and I suddenly have to figure out who sent you here, why were you sent here?" As a precaution against these unexpected and dangerous raids, streamers can make the choice to limit raids on their channel to only "friends, teammates, and followed channels" (Twitch 2022c). However, this also limits the chance for surprise raids from well-intentioned strangers and larger channels that might boost viewership and grow the community. Streamers who are vulnerable to hate raids must face a tradeoff between visibility (and therefore success) and safety.

But there are instances when these limitations are not enough to protect a streamer, like in the case of hate streams. What I am referring to as "hate streams" in this dissertation are a form of "hate-watching," which is the practice of watching something (presumably of poor quality) and also taking pleasure in pointing out its flaws (Gilbert 2019). Hate-watching, as media scholar Anne Gilbert has argued, is a social performance that reifies social norms and social hierarchies. In the context of Twitch, a hate stream is when a streamer broadcasts the live feed of another channel to their community for the purposes of criticizing or deriding the other streamer. This practice is very much a social performance meant to establish greater authority and authenticity

in live streaming culture. I first encountered this phenomenon in an article about "harassment livestreams" on *Kotaku* by Laura Kate Dale in 2017. In a period of 90 minutes searching the IRL category on Twitch and public reports of harassment on Twitter, Dale and her colleagues were able to find 25 different Twitch channels that were engaging in this re-streaming practice, seven of which were actively engaged in or had a clear history of engaging in negative behaviors. These behaviors included "threatening to rape women, mocking disabilities, throwing around homophobic and transphobic slurs, spamming sexually explicit comments at streamers, threatening to doxx streamers mid-stream, and harassing the followers of streamers to quit their channel" (Dale 2017). This form of hate-watching on Twitch is a very public display of dominance, of laying down categories and hierarchies in streaming to show who belongs and is worthy of respect and who is not. These hate-watching streamers are visibly demonstrating practices of exclusion. Not only do streamers engage in these behaviors, but they also typically encourage the followers of their channel to do so as well. Figure 8 is an anonymized screenshot of a post from Twitter by a streamer describing how a viewer, through the point redemption system, led her to raid and host a streamer that had been hate streaming her channel only moments before the raid.[32] This is one way a hate stream can become a hate raid, as viewers decide to get in on the "fun" of a hate stream in the most direct way possible. This is the source of the caution and suspicion that Gabriella Muriella is exhibiting when her channel gets raided by followers from a previously unknown channel. A hate raid can come from another platform,

[32] From Twitch's channel points guide: Channel Points is a customizable points program that lets streamers reward members of their community with perks, including a taste of benefits typically reserved for subscribers. It's available to all partners and affiliates. Channel Points comes with built-in, automated rewards that streamers can customize. Streamers can also create custom rewards that they fulfill on their own, such as "choose the next channel I host", "set my background music", or "make me dance on stream" (Twitch 2022d). While basically playful in nature, this program can also be misused, as Figure 8 indicates.

but it could also come from another community on Twitch on the heels of a hate stream.

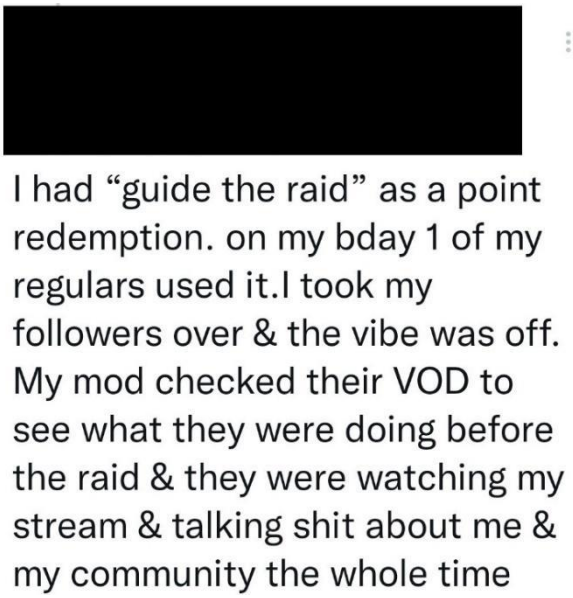

Figure 8: A story of encountering a hate stream

Like raiding, re-streaming can be a relatively harmless and even beneficial practice. The re-streaming of content from more traditional broadcast streaming services, for example, can be a useful way to create conversation and build community. The day I reviewed Dale’s search, March 22, 2022, was the second day of hearings for Supreme Court Justice nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson and several streamers were providing commentary on the senate committee hearings. Hosting “watch parties” for events like Twitch Rivals, gaming competitions featuring other streamers, by pulling in the feed from the Twitch Rivals channel or even one of the participating streamers is a well-established practice. But re-streaming, like raiding, has been maladapted in various ways to reinforce the marginalization of people on Twitch. In the context of a hate stream, this takes the form of commentary featuring misogynistic and meritocratic logics and rhetoric for justifying this marginalization.

Rhetoric

There will be a more detailed and focused discussion on the implications of specific rhetorical devices used in live streaming in the "Feminism, Femininity, and Failure" chapter, but for now I provide a brief overview of some of the rhetorical devices used in live streaming to delegitimize and destabilize the positions of some streamers with the meritocratic hierarchy of streaming. In this dissertation I am leveraging an understanding of rhetoric as a practice of crafting a persuasive speech act, writing, or process. Borrowing from games scholar Gerald Voorhees, I am interested in how rhetoric develops as the product of interaction and acts as a force which shapes the ways games and live streaming "will be understood and articulated to more persuasive knowledge formations that make ontological claims about the nature of the self and epistemological claims about the management of human difference," (2009, p. 256). In other words, my interest is in how particular terms and narratives come to be the source of knowledge and authority on what streaming is and who a streamer can be.

Earlier in the chapter I mentioned how terms like "female gamer" and "girl gamer"- even when they are used without ill intent- still serve to mark femmes and women as different where their subject position is qualified first and foremost by their gender. The same thing happens in live streaming. Huntress told me a story about a live streamed competition she joined where the organizers, without her input or permission, advertised her as a "female esports professional."

> One of my friends in the community who was also ranked in that tournament messaged the person that authored that article saying, "Hey, I don't like the fact that you call out her gender as her job, as part of that, because it just doesn't make sense. Look at all the other examples you listed. You should just say esports professional if anything." He showed

me the message, so I know exactly what he said. I also messaged them. I was like, "Hey, would you mind making it match everyone else a little more and not calling attention to my gender as much?" They had another section in which they pretty much just discussed my gender for a paragraph. I was like, I guess that's okay because they really want to highlight that more women should be in the space or something. I think they were trying to do something good with that paragraph, but I was like, "At least stop describing me as the female whatever." The organizers said, "Oh yes, we'll take a look at it," to me. To my friend, they actually said, "Okay, how would you want us to phrase it?" They asked him how he would actually rewrite those words. I was like, "Wait, why are you asking him? Why aren't you asking me?" They actually changed it into something else like female esports athlete or something. They changed the something but not the female part. That was the weirdest thing, is that they didn't see it as a problem at all so that when they were called out about it they didn't even understand what we were upset about.

As Huntress generously surmises, perhaps the tournament organizers were focusing on her gender as part of an attempt to highlight diversity in the sphere of that competitive community. But in this case not only could they not "see" a problem when it was pointed out to them, they consulted with Huntress's male friend for advice on how to resolve the issue instead of asking her how she wanted to be represented. Huntress went on to describe this focus on gender in streaming as "pervasive" and one of the reasons she was initially reluctant to start streaming. She said she knew from the very start that she would be positioned as different, harassed for that difference, and that she would be expected to just "put up with it." This pressure to accept mistreatment relates directly to something else that is also pervasive in gaming and streaming,

even amongst women, that I call the "thick skin narrative."

In several of my research projects related to streaming I have seen iterations of this thick skin narrative. For example, in a thread on a subreddit for "girl gamers," I observed one poster ask for advice on how to deal with possible harassment they might receive as a feminist woman streamer. Several others replied to this post that harassment will almost certainly occur and that it's a normal part of streaming that cannot be avoided and must be endured by "growing a thick skin." During her interview with me, ScarletWitch described experiences like viewers calling her an idiot in chat or deriding her for being a woman as "the typical things you would expect" when you are streaming on Twitch. Therefore, a thick skin, an ability to endure emotional suffering without flinching, acts as a way to mitigate a streamer's emotional response and that of their viewers. This very much relates to the popular "don't feed the trolls" narrative of harassment online; that if you can manage harassment without becoming visibly distressed, the trolls/harassers will not get the reaction they want and will give up. NovemberJewel described herself as "seasoned" to this kind of behavior, stating: "I feel seasoned where it's like I've just been online for so long that I've been objectified. I've been judged very heavily. I've grown a tougher skin for it." A thick skin is often described as necessary to the work of streaming, but for some that necessity has also become a motivator. One of the most vivid accounts of this belief is encapsulated in a comment I encountered in the work I did with Bo Ruberg analyzing "how-to" videos from women streamers on YouTube (2020). In a video she made, Pokimane described how harassment is to be expected and that some Twitch viewers will even pay for the privilege of insulting you. Pokimane ended her statement with the following words of encouragement: "Girl take that two-dollar donation, wipe your tears with it, get your nails done because when people waste their time and money trying to hate on you all they're saying is that you're worth

their time and money." The thick skin narrative also reinforces neoliberal notions present in streaming of self-sufficiency, that the right way to achieve success is to work hard, solve problems on your own, and take personal responsibility for any difficulties you encounter.

A concern, and even a fear, of being described as a titty streamer loomed large in the minds of many of the streamers I interviewed. Being labeled as a titty streamer, in addition to simply signaling an outlier status, is in a sense an accusation of cheating the meritocracy and therefore a justification for mistreatment. Several of the streamers I interviewed go to great lengths to avoid being called a titty streamer. Nicole, for example, when describing how she appears on camera, stated, "I know there's a lot of stigma out there about females; they call them titty streamers or boobie streamers. I honestly make sure to wear the right clothes. I tend to wear t-shirts or sweatshirts so I'm not lumped into that." This potential to be called out as different, as not belonging, for streaming the wrong way (and in the wrong kind of body) is a motivating factor in the decision of many streamers to create or join spaces where these issues can be discussed. This statement from SmackArtist illustrates how she deals with titty streamer rhetoric by finding other women to commiserate with in her gaming community.

> The funny thing is when people IRL find out that I stream on Twitch, their first question is always, "Is she a titty streamer?" Because apparently, yes, of course, if a woman's on there, she's not playing games. That's why I think us ladies in our Discord have sectioned off to have our own safe space. It's just nice to have a place to go where they all know what you're going through, if it's something related to streaming.

Having a place where issues like harassment and gender stereotypes can be discussed, typically Discord servers, were described as essential to the work of streaming for many of the streamers I

spoke to. This practice highlights how streamers often feel that they have to deal with the problem of harassment on their own- and by on their own I mean without the broader support of the community or the platform- so they develop their own communities of support.

Toward the end of our conversation, Huntress expressed optimism for how the next generation of players appears to feel more strongly about calling out negative behaviors and stereotypes, lessening the need for future streamers to have to "grow a thick skin." She lamented that it is people her age (in their late 20s and early 30s) that reinforce the mindset that "this is just how things are." Huntress also stated that her overall impression of problems like harassment in streaming is that the "onus is on you to deal with it" and that even Twitch seems to encourage the thick skin narrative. Indeed, as Guy Harrison argues based on his interviews with women in sports media, narratives like that of the thick skin normalizes harassment for women, creates a burden of emotional management, and reinforces post-feminist and neoliberal values that place the responsibility for their own experiences of harassment on women and not the social actors or institutions making it possible for the harassment to occur (2018). Huntress ended this part of our conversation by stating emphatically that she believes Twitch as a platform should take more responsibility for its users and their behavior in both proactive and reactive ways.

Platform policies and attitudes

One reason I suggest that Twitch does not and will not take the level of responsibility that streamers like Huntress are searching for is due to its policies of ambivalence, policies which avoid weighing in definitively on issues- and groups- that might result in lower traffic to the site and therefore less revenue. In many ways, Twitch is based on the old internet promise of free speech everywhere online, where everyone has equal access to opportunity and self-expression.

As I recounted in a previous publication on Twitch community guidelines (Cullen and Ruberg 2019, 7-8):

> The term "platform" is itself a discursive move oriented around "eliding tensions" between user content and commercialism, community and advertising, policing content and presenting a neutral face. Platform suggests a stable place of universal opportunity, action, and insight. Game culture, and particularly the high-profile stages of streaming and esports, rely on similar universalizing ideas of meritocracy: the seemingly neutral and egalitarian notion that opportunity is available to everyone and therefore everyone is capable of success, which conceals the values and assumptions literally built into the platform.

In the free speech approach to platform moderation, platforms present an ambivalent position in the name of neutrality, fairness, and meritocracy. In reality, taking this neutral position allows the platform to take in more user generated content- in the name of supporting everyone's creative expression- and relieves them of the burden of direct interference in the communities they host. Meritocracy suggests that capitalism grants the right to choose and therefore creates equality.

Communications scholar Anna Gibson contrasts this with the safe space moderation approach, where policies are implemented that reserve the right to protect the ideals of the space by removing dissenting opinions and problem actors (2017). This safe space approach is often described as a censorship model, which lends it a negative connotation that suggests it is stifling and harming voices. But the rhetoric of free speech and civility are often abused in the name of

causing harm, especially on platforms that grant some form of anonymity. In live streaming not only are streamers discouraged from blocking viewers because it will harm their metrics, but because they are signaling to a certain crowd that they are not open to free speech, which in the United States is often a rallying cry for abuse. It is the intolerance in the name of tolerance conundrum.

Once again, streamers are placed in a position where they must perform in ways that might contradict their personal beliefs and preferences despite the call to authenticity. Several of the streamers I spoke to recognize this dilemma in their streaming work. Strawberry, for example, stated she does not want to sacrifice her sense of comfort and safety so that viewers can have unlimited access to her in the name of fairness. While streamers can limit interactions from viewers in their channels, such as banning them from the channel chat, Twitch has introduced a mechanism where viewers can send an unban request to the streamer and their moderators-again, all in the name of fairness and equity. Strawberry recounted an example of banning someone from her channel for being transphobic and then being forced to deal with that person again when they sent an unban request. In frustration she said, “The unban request just provides a channel for trolls and for assholes to still interact with the streamer. It’s just a means for harassment.” Twitch’s focus on growth and supporting the broadest possible user base again places a huge burden of problem solving on streamers and their moderators. Twitch helps streamers achieve visibility, but often that visibility only increases exposure to harm.

In addition to an overall ambivalent policy creation and enforcement strategy on Twitch, streamers like Brianna believe the harassment faced by women and people of color can also be attributed to the way that they are particularly and regularly overlooked on and by the Twitch platform. Brianna commented:

> I would say Twitch is primarily full of men from teenager age to maybe-- I don't know-- late thirties, somewhere around there might be the main demographic, so that's why you're going to see a lot of them go towards the younger, Caucasian-passing girls. Then also, I think the issue is that Twitch in general is not run by people that care about people that look like me or just women in general or people of color. It's easier for them to ignore our issues and appease the cis white man versus going against the cis white men trying to help us out because now they're going to piss off the large demographic of their viewers on the channel or on the website.

What Brianna is describing here is a structure that strategizes around the presumed main demographic and then supports streamers and content that caters to that demographic, which then reinforces its place as the primary audience. As a result, the problems of those streamers are more visible, more noticeable, and perhaps even more important to the platform compared to streamers like Brianna. Cyan, who like Brianna is a black woman, similarly stated that the impression she had of Twitch was an explicit favoring of young cis-gendered white men as their main audience. As a consequence, Cyan felt that Twitch was not only exposing her to harmful behavior, but that this system of favoritism was also making it more difficult for her to build community and find other black women streaming to support.

The Consequences

What the social and technical shape of harassment in live streaming reveals is that performing as a woman or a streamer with any identity that is marginalized is to risk exposure to

harassment and abuse, limiting any benefits that may be gained from becoming professional streamers. Using the theory of Nicholas Mirzoeff, Kishonna Gray presents an argument for how visuality reinforces social authority (2020, p. 52). Visuality makes it obvious at a glance what- and who- belongs to the status quo and who is distinctly other. Connecting that to Foucault (1979), visibility also makes it easier for authority to be enacted. Putting it all together in the case of streaming, being visible forces an awareness, if not outright adherence, to what is normalized and establishes mechanisms for marking things and people as abnormal. As Taylor has argued, "being in the public (versus domestic) sphere and able to intensely engage with a domain is deeply woven with power" (2012, p. 120). Of course, power dynamics in streaming are further complicated because what is public and what is domestic are also woven together (Ruberg and Lark 2020; Ruberg and Cullen 2020).

Experiencing harassment, or even the anticipation of experiencing harassment, can be a powerful motivator for policing one's own visibility and behavior. Fear of harassment or critical blowback often leads women in public facing positions to engage in self-policing of their own bodies and the content they produce (Duffy and Hund 2019). For example, Nicole, as well as many other streamers, has edited her wardrobe for streaming to only include pieces that hide the shape of her body. There is a constant concern with doing things the "right" way and that someone will notice, and punish you, for doing things the wrong way. Experiencing harassment was also the cause of a few streamers, like TheHobbitJedi, Metal_Melissa, SmackArtist, and Cyan to take measures to lessen their visible presence (turning off their cameras and/or mics) or to quit streaming temporarily or even permanently.

ScarletWitch provided a comprehensive overview of some of the biggest outcomes of harassment on streamers: the stress on mental health, the lessening of participation from women,

and a refusal by male peers to recognize the growing problem. She was speaking specifically to her experience of being a woman in streaming, but many of her points are applicable to any person or group that attempts to raise awareness of the effects of harassment as exclusionary and detrimental. It is an evergreen truth that those who are not impacted by a problem do not see a problem. ScarletWitch's commentary on this specific point was lengthy and I have decided to provide it here in total. Her comment preceding this quote was that women in streaming are often told- even by other women- to ignore the prevalence of harassment and negative behaviors in streaming and accept it as part of the landscape- to grow a thick skin.

> It's difficult because it leads to a different world where a lot of women in streaming, the ones that have gotten enough courage to do it, are now experiencing potentially other deeper things like mental health issues. That's something that's definitely worth bringing up. The women who get bullied so much after becoming a big Twitch streamer or just streaming at all that they start to feel this lack of confidence, or they feel like they're personally being attacked, or they feel like streaming was the worst thing that ever happened to them. You know what I mean? It's sad, but it's a deep level of negativity that affects people's well-being. That's not an open conversation. People aren't willing to have that because it mostly becomes a thing where I see a lot of women reaching out to each other and opening up that conversation to be like, "I know how you feel." But then all the guys around that are like, "Oh, you need to just move on. Just get over it. You all experience the same thing. Just ignore those stream monsters and just get over it." You can't just keep telling thousands of women to get over it because clearly there's a problem.

What ScarletWitch is describing in the first part of this statement is how processes of exclusion, but particularly the violence of harassment, is impacting the confidence of women to see themselves as authentic participants in the community. Instead, they are being marked as something different and dangerous. These moments of actual and symbolic violence (Gray et al. 2017) are driving women to give up live streaming, to learn to accept behavior that is harming them, or to not even attempt streaming in the first place. In the second portion of this statement, ScarletWitch's comments are illustrating a re-entrenchment of the status quo through the "just don't feed the trolls" narrative. This bad behavior is an open secret that is being discussed between women, but the reality and the consequences of this behavior are being denied in the broader context by those whose participation is not at risk.

This statement from ScarletWitch also speaks to how trolling is considered a normal part of the streaming environment, and how it is differentiated from more "serious" practices like doxxing. Trolling is often positioned as a harmless practice that can be easily ignored. Or, following the logic of meritocracy, if you cannot overcome such a simple obstacle through sheer power of will you are not working hard enough to belong. Similarly, "trash talk" in games culture and streaming is also described as something that is inherent in games and streaming culture and the ability to deal with it- and dole it out- is one way to signal membership in the broader group.

Trash Talk

One of the first conversations I remember having with my co-advisor Aaron Trammell when I started my PhD was about the line between trash talk and harassment. This line of thinking stemmed in part from reading Whitney Phillip's book on internet trolls, *This is Why We*

Can't Have Nice Things, and Katherine Cross' article on gamified harassment tactics "Press F to Revolt," as well as my own gaming experiences and habits. When does something shift from being playful to harmful? How often is harm done in the name of play? So, I resolved to ask the streamers I interviewed, who negotiate this blurred line often and in very visible ways, what their thoughts were on the practice of trash talking and particularly how it may differ from their perceptions of harassment.

Trash talk is commonly associated with sports but has also become a norm in gaming and streaming and involves wearing your opponent down with words. I myself engage in trash talk when I am playing games like Mario Kart. A tame example of something I have said: "Man, you are slower than molasses on a cold day." In the introduction of her book on internet trolls, Phillips loosely characterizes trolling as the intent to disrupt conversation and upset people for the purpose of getting a laugh (2015). While Phillips was focused on the "subcultural troll," my participants and I refer to trolling as a practice anyone engages in when they try to upset someone for fun. Metal_Melissa characterized the internet as a place where snark and sarcasm are normal. Indeed, it is easier to make edgy statements and crack jokes in the mediated distance provided by the internet, as opposed to an in-person environment. But despite this expectation and because of this distance, there are times when something goes too far, intentionally or unintentionally.

What Metal_Melissa, Strawberry, SmackArtist, Nicole, Cherry Tomb, and Brianna all identified as the most important aspect for interpreting something as trash talk versus harassment was context. The streamer, their content, and their relationship to viewers are all taken into account. For example, Nicole said when she is not sure how to feel about a comment she will ask herself, "How well do I know this person? Is this their first time in my chat or are they a long-

time viewer?" As I found in my study of Twitch moderators with Sanjay Kairam, greater leeway for borderline inappropriate behavior is often given to regular viewers and supporters of the channel (Cullen and Kairam 2022). The assumption is that a long-time viewer may have mistakenly carried a joke too far and deserves a chance to correct their behavior. However, Cherry Tomb also recognized how even this method of evaluation can be risky, "If it's trash talk from a stranger it's trolling. If it's trash talk from a friend it's probably okay. But both of these could be abuse in theory." When it comes to comments from unfamiliar viewers that may be borderline disrespectful, Gabriella Muriella says that tone is the most important indicator for her assessment. She asks herself, "Is this comment in good fun?" But of course, reading tone through text can be very difficult. In their channel, Celeste accounts for this by normalizing the use of tone indicators. For example, encouraging viewers to type /s after a comment to indicate sarcasm.

Even when the tone from viewers is difficult to read or might be disrespectful, streamers often want to give viewers the benefit of the doubt or a second chance to do better. Streamers and moderators alike have concerns of over moderating a channel and driving viewers away (Cullen and Kairam 2022). Several streamers spoke to an awareness of how confusing it may be for viewers to understand the different expectations and norms in each channel as they move across the Twitch platform. As DeareDrop explains, many are just trying to fit in and show that they belong. "I feel like there are some people who are doing it intentionally. Then I feel like there are some people who get swept up into it and it's a side effect. They end up trash talking and harassing people. I feel like they don't really mean it, but text doesn't convey voice very well so there's a bunch of disagreements, things like that." What DeareDrop is highlighting is that many viewers may not recognize a line between trash talk and harassment.

For streamers like TheHobbitJedi, Sharp_Meringue, ScarletWitch, and DeareDrop, the line between trash talk and harassment is a line between commentary on the content and commentary on the streamer. While trash talk and trolling may be directed at a person, it is not seen as a problem until it becomes personal. Below I am going to present a series of quotes from each of these streamers, set up almost as a conversation between the four of them. I think presenting their comments side-by-side drives home the consensus of their opinions.

> TheHobbitJedi: “I think once the antagonism becomes about the person, that's when I have to go, "I'm out." As long as you're at each other over the game, and over what you're doing, rather than their identity. If it becomes about gender, race, sexual identity, or queer expression that's when I'm not into it anymore.”

> ScarletWitch: “The FGC [fighting game community] trash talks, but when you're talking trash to someone you're not attacking their looks, you're not attacking their demographic, you're not being racist, you're not being discriminatory, you know what I mean?”

> DeareDrop: “What's that rule? If they can't change it in five seconds, don't talk about it. If there's something in their teeth, you can point that out because they can change that. Don't talk about weight, don't talk about their gender, don't talk about their skin color. All of that is nonsense. It doesn't need to be brought up.”

> Sharp_Meringue: “When it gets too personal it is less trash talk or trolling, more like harassment.”

In their official policy on harassment, the language Twitch uses to delineate the line does not quite line up with what these streamers have said. In a subsection of their harassment policies titled "The Line Between Hateful Conduct and Harassment," Twitch states that "Harassment becomes hateful conduct when the behavior is targeted at an individual(s) on the basis of protected characteristic(s)," (2022e). Twitch defines harassment as "attention seeking behaviors that are designed to disrupt, harm, or hijack a community or stream" (2020) and defines hateful conduct as "behavior that is motivated by hatred, prejudice or intolerance," (Twitch 2022e). While Twitch lists both hate raids and hate streams as prohibited forms of harassment, they suggest that there is a distinction between harassment that is taken personally and harassment that is motivated by personal hate. Their reasoning for not classifying all harassment as hateful conduct is that "we want to enable users to express themselves naturally with their friends and communities without fear that these interactions could be misidentified as harassment" (Twitch 2022e). This may be true, but Twitch benefits from allowing the greatest amount of free speech to exist on their platform and from having ambiguous policies that do not force them to take the safe space approach. And for the streamers mentioned above, harassment is always hateful conduct and is always personal.

But of course, there is a gendered component to this discussion of trash talk that must also be noted, as TheHobbitJedi reminds us. While it is probable that all streamers must learn to recognize the line between trash talk and harassment while assessing their personal level of comfort with that line, TheHobbitJedi stresses that this line is even more nebulous for women. "I do think it's a fine line because what we as women have been conditioned to think is okay, versus what's not really okay." What she is calling attention to is that not only are women in streaming conditioned to grow a thick skin, but women in Western contexts more generally are

also often socialized to be polite, non-confrontational, to grin and bear it. This can cause a problem as a streamer learns to balance their performance as a streamer with their gender performance, and to make judgements about their personal safety and also what their community may be exposed to.

For these streamers, trash talk can be an extremely stressful situation to navigate as streamers and as women. Understanding both trolling and trash talk in the context of harassment is important because of its normalization in streaming. “Streamers who actively trash talk and troll other players while live-streaming their content are likely to perpetuate their audiences’ beliefs that aggression in games is normal and acceptable” (Hilvert-Bruce and Neill 2020, p. 308). When discussing her reasons for taking breaks away from Twitch, Cyan said in exasperation of Twitch viewers: “They're little kids ranging from 13 to 17, and a lot of them will watch bigger streamers and they'll just mimic all of their behavior. All of this stuff that they do, they take that on as a personality trait and they want to start doing that. It's really annoying.” When DeareDrop was commenting earlier on how viewers go with the flow of conversation, she was also revealing the responsibility that streamers have (but may not accept) for the social norms of the Twitch platform.

Conclusion

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, one of the core motivations for me undertaking this project was to examine if dealing with harassment creates an extra burden of labor for streamers whose appearances, performances, and identities do not match up with the heteronormative, cisgendered, white masculine status quo in gaming. After analyzing and contextualizing the conversations I had with my participants throughout this question, I can

safely say that yes, harassment does complicate the labor and participation of those who identify as women, femme non-binary, genderfluid, people of color, queer, and disabled. For example, feeling forced to do extra practice before playing live for fear that you will be judged purely on the basis of gender or putting more work into back-end tasks like moderation to ensure you and your community are safe from hate speech and hate raids. The streamers I spoke to describe being prevented from growing their channels and building community by the social and technical affordances of Twitch that permit harassment. Being streamers exposed them to the meritocracy of gaming culture and stereotypes about their ability to perform as players and as people. Being visibly different or performing to expectations differently exposed them to policing and harassment based on those meritocratic and misogynistic principles.

Streamers cannot do the essential work of streaming- emotional management, providing entertainment, playing games- when they are faced with hateful comments from their viewers or worse. Crafting a persona for the performance work of live streaming may provide some emotional armor, but the fact of the matter is that streamers are vulnerable enough to need armor and that persona is still a facet of that streamer as a person. The expectations of viewers and the Twitch platform for streamers to be accessible, vulnerable, and visible not only places streamers at risk, they place limits on the expression and subjectivities that could be made possible through live streaming.

In their paper on authenticity binds in the lives of Instagram influencers, Duffy and Hund (2019) share this quote from sociologist Sarah Sobieraj: “If women curtail their online participation as a result of harassment, the end result is likely a reduction in diversity of thought and opinion in the commons.” While Sobieraj was speaking to the efforts of women in academia, I believe this quote perfectly illustrates the stakes for people in live streaming as well. What

generally attracted the streamers I spoke with in this project to live streaming was that it presents itself as a field of opportunity, a creative force and outlet transforming the face of video game culture. These streamers were interested in live streaming as a space where they could build community and maintain safe spaces for its members; this was particularly important for streamers with multiple marginalized identities. However, the ambivalent free speech policies of the platform (except when it comes to the sexual risk posed by women's bodies [Cullen and Ruberg, 2019]) and the prioritization of viewer interaction and pleasure often means that streamers with marginalized identities interested in community building are forced to spend their time appealing, appeasing, and managing viewers who expect access to streamers, particularly women streamers. Additionally, embracing opportunities for self-expression and alternative performance promised by the platform often means that streamers must expose themselves to potential harassment and abuse from viewers who feel entitled to police and enforce social norms for gender, streamer, and player performance.

Unfortunately, every streamer I spoke to has at one point or another come face-to-face with different forms of harassment designed to exclude them or others like them. What harassment does is deny people opportunities to explore the possibilities of this space and find alternative forms of creative and personal expression. Many of these forms of harassment are commonly found in the internet ecosystem (which speaks to the need for renewed attention to how harassment is organized and enacted across multiple platforms), but many of the forms of harassment discussed in this chapter are unique to the context of live streaming. Communities and tools that ostensibly should support their labor are instead weaponized against marginalized streamers in an effort to further marginalize them away from the success "deserved" by "more authentic" members of the community. In addition to dealing with double standards of emotional

engagement and performance placed on feminine and women streamers, these streamers are also pressured to accept that mistreatment is part of their labor burden. They are told to develop a thick skin and accept trash talk as part of their working environment. Not only does the thick skin narrative tie into ideas about authentic participation, but it also normalizes gendered discrimination, creates greater burdens of emotional management, and places the responsibility for the success or failure of their labor and social belonging on individuals.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

While the work of live streaming is not easy, it is often marketed as an opportunity which anyone can embrace. Recall the Twitch marketing slogans I mentioned near the beginning of the chapter on femininity and feminism, slogans that suggest it is easy to stream: "Broadcast yourself," "Your passion, rewarded," and "You're already one of us." These set up the expectation that success- socially and financially- are practically guaranteed. But the reality for many, as we have covered throughout this dissertation, is that stereotypes about femininity and masculinity in gaming and streaming suggest that anyone with a non-traditionally masculine gender is less capable of existing in a meritocracy.

I return to Jack Halberstam's work on queer failure to mull over the question: What is gained by choosing to fail or be a failure? Here is what the experiences of my interview participants, as well as what I have observed and experienced firsthand for myself, have made me think about failure. The pressure of being a representative of femininity, feminism, queerness, blackness, etc. confines streamers to narrow ideals of success, largely determined by models of cisgendered white men in streaming, while simultaneously limiting the possibilities found through failure. What Juul's work most successfully demonstrated is that while rules in a game practically guarantee failure, players submit to this anyway in order to achieve a sense of belonging or satisfaction when they are empowered to fail in the right ways (2013). In fact, many gamers define a "real game" by the existence of a failstate, the ability to parse winners and losers (Consalvo and Paul 2019, p. 121). Marrying this with Paul's ideas regarding meritocracy (2018), live streaming is similarly predicated on the idea that there must be a clear way to parse winners from losers, that there is naturally a hierarchy. From this point I want to present two dovetailing ideas found in the comments of the streamers whose experiences have been shared throughout

this dissertation.

First, failure is an opportunity for alternatives and radical departure from the norm. Failure is seeing things for what they really are, defying the taken-for-granted assumptions based in "common sense" about gender and streaming and therefore failing to support its disciplinary structure. There is a revolutionary potential to be found in the practices, performances, and stories of streamers that fail to meet pre-established expectations and norms. Failure, or feeling like a failure, can be a powerful catalyst for personal growth and expression, as many of the streamers in this dissertation have demonstrated.

Second, failure is a site of agency for multiple ways of acting in the world. Failure and feminism should also be open to the choices of many to compete in the game, whether or not they consider it rigged. To make this point, I turn to the incredible work of Kishonna Gray. To wit, this observation she made in the middle of *Intersectional Tech*, "Despite the extreme discrimination, lack of inclusion in the gaming industry, misrepresentation, and a host of other concerns, black women still participate in a culture that continues to delegitimize their participation," (2020, pp. 106-107). I am not here to suggest that the continued participation of any person in such an environment is wrong or even inherently wrong. At that moment in *Intersectional Tech*, Gray is speaking to the efforts of black women to survive a hostile culture and to coexist with masculine hegemony online. What I am saying is that agency is not found only in radical actions, but also in decisions to conform, and that agency should be understood and respected.

There are always multiple ways to be wrong, and as I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, the consequences for being wrong, or being perceived as wrong, as a woman or a feminist in streaming can be steep. In fact, this whole dissertation has mostly focused on pointing

out ways of being and beliefs in live streaming I personally believe are harmful. But I refuse to say that those who live with this have failed to empower themselves or escape their entrapment in unequal systems of power. Failing as a feminist is not the worst sort of failure that many of these streamers face. To condemn them would suggest that people who chose to avoid these consequences are being inauthentic or untrue to themselves.

Publicly playing and streaming as a woman continues to be "not just a leisure activity but also a political act" (Consalvo 2019, p. 87). Faced with a situation where their gender performance, the way they play games, or their very bodies can be used to discount their participation, streamers must make careful decisions about how they will engage with the demands placed on them by viewers, the platform, and their own sense of identity. The emphasis on visibility, emotional availability, and authenticity found in live streaming on Twitch creates a system of surveillance that prefers and rewards a particular kind of streaming subject; a streamer that has been conditioned to be accessible, vulnerable, conventional, and appealing. Even when gender binaries and expectations streamers are renegotiated or rejected, the result still benefits the platform by providing it with more content to commodify and by giving others the opportunity to reinvest in the platform through a focus on reinforcing their hierarchies and gatekeeping. The logic of meritocracy and the practice of demanding authenticity in streaming entangle issues of gender and feminism in the demands of capitalism. The visibility and popularity of live streamers implicates them in a structure where they are expected to contrive a performance that appeals to viewers and where viewers can constantly assess and interrogate the authenticity of streamer performances. This is the reason the imperative "fake it until you make it" and the thick skin narrative have become so widely circulated amongst the streamers I interviewed and their communities; they recognize the power of toxic positivity and meritocracy

in live streaming.

There is no room for neutrality in the lives, performances, and feelings of streamers who routinely experience harassment and misogyny. Streaming has very specific, and very limited, ideas of what femme, feminine, feminist, and women streamers are capable of as players and streamers. This is why streamers are so preoccupied about their appearances, their ability to play games, their public facing beliefs. Being on the platform is, in ways big and small, a struggle for many for the right to be neutral, mediocre, to simply exist. Authenticity, and attempts to perform authenticity, structure everyday life in streaming and are commercialized to the benefit of a limited few and at the cost of alternative forms of gender and feminist expression.

It was never my intention in this dissertation to "prove" that women experience harassment in video games and live streaming- there is ample evidence of that on social media, in the popular press, and in academic literature. Rather, what I wanted to achieve was an account of the experiences of women in live streaming that demonstrated the impact of this harassment on labor and social authenticity. Instead of thinking through these issues in the abstract or merely as an observer, what was most important to me was to speak to people who experience sexism and misogyny every day as they try to develop as individuals and belong as members of communities. What I contribute with this research is an understanding of how the sociotechnical affordances of live streaming enact a meritocratic hierarchy, enforce notions of commercialized authenticity, and police and politicize gender performance. The result of this process for many of the streamers I spoke to are increased burdens of gendered labor, harassment and judgment, and the strain of carefully negotiated self-expression.

Throughout this dissertation I presented a series of double binds which impact the labor, gender performance, and social authenticity of femme, feminine, and women streamers. My

awareness of these double binds in streaming came about through discourse analysis of streaming subreddits, participant observation in dozens of Twitch channels, and semi structured interviews with 17 streamers. These double binds were revealed through discussion of double standards and conflicts which impact the work of live streaming and the lives of streamers.

The primary double bind is between gender and gamer identity. Stereotypes that position women as inherently less skilled and less capable as video game players continue to have a strong presence in live streaming. Their impact can be seen on the choices of streamers to practice playing before they go live, to avoid certain games, or to not even play games at all out of concern that they will not be judged fairly or granted leeway to be mediocre or even fail. While failure can provide a great moment of entertainment, very few streamers who are not men felt like this was something they could indulge in regularly. Conversely, this supposed disconnect between femininity and games meant that many of these streamers relied on methods that have been used for years in games to minimize or conceal their gender when they were playing games live. This often meant avoiding the facecam or even mic that viewers expect and reward in live streaming, because they facilitate a greater feeling of intimacy, authenticity, and access.

The seeming separation of gender and gamer identity is, as the preceding paragraph has indicated, absolutely bound up in a related double bind between gender and streamer identity. In the case of video game live streaming, women streamers are often forced to choose between a concentration on skillful gameplay or emotional engagement as an entertainer. It is difficult to perform as both player and streamer at the same, and doubly difficult for women who must overcome stereotypes about women in games and meet the expectations viewers have for emotional availability and vulnerability for women. While all streaming labor is entirely made up

and characterized by feminized labor, particularly emotional labor, women streamers are expected to engage in this type of labor more often and with greater subtlety. Subtlety is important because without it many are quick to decry the attempts of women to attract more than their fair share of attention, even though all streamers are working for the attention of viewers. This is why terms like thot, titty streamer, and hot tub streamer are in constant rotation. Gender discrimination and harassment are the most significant factors complicating the work of streaming for women. Being authentic to gender performance can, in many cases, result in denouncement as a fake streamer and then lead to harassment.

Both of these double binds result from and inform the double bind between gender and authenticity. The pursuit of authenticity in streaming is perhaps intended to be a process of creativity and self-expression. It is certainly marketed that way by Twitch. However, in a culture and economy of attention, authenticity has become commercialized and to be commercial is to be interpretable by and consumable for viewers. This has led to a system of surveillance, identity policing, and hierarchy that is reinforced by the technical structures of the Twitch platform which is designed with mechanisms to support surveillance, identity policing, and hierarchies. These hierarchies are very meritocratic and neoliberal in nature, in that they are seemingly designed to reward those who "work hard" and because they place the responsibility of failure on individuals. Due to the stereotypes about women in games and streaming, the routes to conventional success are limited and fraught. But even when women achieve success the right way, by acting feminine in the right way, by ascribing to the "right" kind of feminism, their authenticity and belongingness continues to be invalidated with epithets like "girl gamer" or "woman streamer" or statements like "good for a girl."

Finally, there is an expectation that gamers and streamers cannot be feminists. Most

forms of feminism are considered to be entirely at odds with the meritocracy and toxic positivity enforced in streaming culture, even by feminist streamers. In streaming culture there is a disavowal of negative emotion, being open about struggles and inequalities, or engaging in criticism- all of which are also associated with feminism. Feminism is seen as potentially ruinous to the comfy vibe that streamers are using to engage their audiences. Even the "right" kind of feminists, those mostly ascribing to postfeminist or popular feminist ideologies, risk being recategorized as the wrong kind of feminist if they break character and suggest the meritocracy is a lie.

Several of the streamers in this dissertation went through periods where they streamed less or stopped streaming altogether; many others knew of other streamers who had stopped participating on Twitch. While a few cited personal or family reasons, the majority cited harassment as the reason they or others like them had given up on streaming. Live streaming in general, and Twitch in particular, is an important site of cultural meaning, with the power to shape the future of games. What is needed is more intervention in order to ensure live streaming is not only a source of entertainment, but a welcoming space where new possibilities for community and creative content can be explored. The streamers I interviewed by and large want what they were promised by that platform, to have their passion rewarded instead of punished. What they hope to see in the future is increased diversity of both the streamer and viewer populations, and more control over the visual and safety elements of their own channels.

This account also serves as a call to build similar understandings of how streaming on Twitch is not a uniform experience, especially for groups of players marginalized for any number of reasons in addition to their gender performance along the lines of sexuality, race, culture, and socioeconomic background. I hope that future work on live streaming will examine

the experience along these axes of identity and existence, undertaken by myself or other researchers, to further understand how difference is constructed in live streaming as well as the influence and interpenetration of outside social forces and platforms with Twitch.

The continued rejection or even abuse of women has, and will continue to have, significant implications for the ways in which women can create, share, and participate in media creation, particularly in areas like live streaming. Women persist as players and streamers on live streaming platforms like Twitch because they are not merely sources of entertainment; they are battlegrounds where clashing ideologies play out and where these women have a stake in what is defined as authentic and real. The streamers I interviewed overall love what they do and want to be recognized for who they are without being essentialized or wholly defined by those identities. They just want a space where they can be a woman and a streamer and have the complexities of those intertwining identities recognized without being stereotyped as a "woman streamer." So in addition to a broader awareness of how toxic politics and ideologies are entrenched and cultivated in games and streaming culture, we need to continue to deepen our understanding of the experiences of those caught in the middle and negotiating their way through every day. Streamers, players, anyone online experiencing misogyny should not be categorized as failures for finding their own agency and authenticity or have that failure used to justify their continued experiences of misogyny.

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Appendix A: Meet the Streamers

A brief description of each streamer, using language they used to describe themselves during interviews.

1. **Huntress:** Chose her own pseudonym. Asian-American woman who works in the video game industry. Late 20s. Video game and IRL streamer. Likes competitive games, but rarely streams them. Felt pressured by stereotypes about both her gender and her Asian heritage to stream in a way that was "subservient" to her viewers. Did not openly identify as a feminist. Twitch Affiliate.

2. **SmackArtist:** Straight white American woman. Early 30s. Video game streamer. Works a full-time job in addition to streaming. Streams without a camera to avoid comments on her appearance. Does not explicitly identify with any form of feminism, believing that isn't necessary in her life. Started a Discord server exclusively for women that stream the same game as her. Twitch Partner.

3. **TheHobbitJedi:** White cisgendered straight Jewish American woman. Mid 20s. Video game streamer. Full time student, part time streamer. Motivated to stream because it allows for creative expression. Strongly believes in the value of branding as a streamer. Feminism is an important part of her personal and streamer identity. Twitch Affiliate.

4. **Gabriela Muriella**: Chose her own pseudonym to honor her heritage. Hispanic Latina woman. Late 20s. Parent. Queer. Video game streamer. Feels pressured to work hard to seem better than "good for a girl" when it comes to games. Consciously works to separate streaming life from "real" life to protect her family. Feminism is an important part of her personal and streamer identity.

5. **Metal_Melissa:** Chose her own pseudonym. White American woman. Variety streamer. Trans and queer. Focus in streaming is on community building. Mixes a trans color palette with metal music references for her brand aesthetic. Feels that streaming allows her to be herself. Feminism is an important part of her personal and streamer identity.

6. **Celeste:** Chose their own pseudonym. Chicane genderfluid (AFAB). Video game streamer. Trans and queer. Autistic and disabled. Loves a little mischief and confusing viewers about their appearance and gender. Feels strongly the point of their stream is their gameplay, not their appearance. Described their streaming persona as "your older sister that isn't good at games."

Feminism is an important part of their personal identity but avoids identifying as a feminist while streaming to protect themselves.

7. **DeareDrop:** White American woman. Believes that "fake it til you make it" is the way to go in streaming because actually being yourself is risky. Also believes that men in streaming get more freedom to be themselves. Wishes more women were safe enough to say "Suck my dick, go away" to troublesome viewers. Feminism is an important part of her personal and streamer identity.

8. **Sharp_Meringue:** British woman. Mid 50s. Video game streamer. Disabled. Uses a virtual avatar when she streams. Enjoys fantasy and science fiction games. Feels the social and technical affordances of streaming are not designed or welcoming of someone her age. Commented that the gaming community she belongs to is too "right wing" to accept feminists, so she keeps her feminism to herself when gaming.

9. **Sera:** Chose her own pseudonym. White American woman. Early 20s. Creative streamer who also plays games. Very cognizant of how the mood of a streamer has an impact on viewers. Says that viewers consider her a "girl next door" type, but that doesn't stop strangers from sexualizing her. Joked that "You know you've made it when some weirdo comes into your DMs offering to pay you money for pictures of your feet." Avoided commenting on her personal thoughts regarding feminism.

10. **ScarletWitch:** Asian-American woman. Mid 30s. Video game and Science & Tech streamer. Twitch Affiliate. Plays in competitive gaming tournaments, which she cites as the reason she has a thick skin when it comes to streaming. Believes women shouldn't have to be good at games or have a thick skin. Avoided commenting on her personal thoughts regarding feminism.

11. **Cyan:** Black American woman. Trans and queer. Video game streamer. Full time student, part time streamer. Twitch Affiliate but declined the offer, deliberately chose to remove all monetization features from her channel (that she could on her end). Streams to support her queer community. Frustrated that women- and black women in particular- have to work so much harder for recognition on Twitch. Described her practices as consistent with feminism but does not identify as a feminist.

12. **Strawberry:** White American woman. Queer. Video game streamer. Works full time job in addition to streaming. Plays in competitive gaming tournaments. Feels very strongly about trying to educate Twitch viewers on social justice topics. Goes out of her way to support other women in streaming. Feminism is an important part of her personal and streamer identity.

13. **Brianna:** Chose her own pseudonym. Black American woman. Video game streamer. Likes Twitch because it allows her to let loose and connect, despite being an introvert. Categorized her streaming persona as the "sassy and cute friend." Streams without a camera to avoid comments on her appearance. Described her practices as consistent with feminism but does not identify as a feminist. Twitch Affiliate.

14. **Nicole:** Chose her own pseudonym. White American woman. Full time video game streamer. Feels that as a woman in streaming she has less room to be mediocre. Believes streaming is a super creative activity. Strives to make her viewers feel "comfy" in her channel. Feminism is an important part of her personal and streamer identity.

15. **MintyFresh**: White Hispanic American woman. Parent. Part time student, part time employee in the games industry, part time video game streamer. Started streaming on Facebook Live before switching to Twitch. Having a brand and hitting Affiliate isn't important to her right now, streaming is more about casual fun- describes her channel as "laid back and chill." Feminism is an important part of her personal identity but avoids identifying as a feminist while streaming to protect herself.

16. **NovemberJewel:** White American woman. Early 30s. Video game streamer. Has streamed for several years and feels that she's seen a shift for the better, but still deals with gendered stereotypes about her gaming skills. Invested a great deal in a professional, seamless streaming setup. Wants to engage in more activism in streaming but worries about making an unsafe environment in her channel. Feminism is an important part of her personal identity but avoids identifying as a feminist while streaming to protect herself.

17. **Cherry Tomb:** White woman. Full time student, part time video game streamer. Motivated to stream for possibilities of creative expression and social interaction. Presented an "artsy geek girl" persona and describes herself as energetic. Stopped streaming after four months because the emotional payout wasn't worth the effort. Feminism is an important part of her personal identity but avoided identifying as a feminist while streaming to protect herself.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Before we begin the interview, I want to remind you of the purpose of this interview and your rights as a participant.

This interview is part of my dissertation project to explain in academic research what many of us know already anecdotally/experientially: the experience of being a gamer and/or a streamer is different for people who are typically minoritized or marginalized in gaming and streaming culture. Through these interviews, I hope to explain what it is like to work as a streamer with a marginalized gender and to offer a contrast to the current literature that has overstudied and oversampled cisgendered white men.

This interview will last approximately 60-75 minutes, but it may take as long as you care to talk. I will only be recording the audio of this call. You may choose to skip any question. If you wish to stop our conversation at any time and for any reason you are welcome to do so. Compensation is not dependent upon your completing the interview.

All research data collected will be stored securely and confidentially on a laptop computer in an encrypted file that is password protected and physically secured. In the transcription of this interview and the write-up of this dissertation, you will be assigned a pseudonym.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Do I have your permission to begin recording? **[*CLICK RECORD*]**

How would you describe your personal identity?

You've mentioned XYZ aspects of your identity, are there any other aspects you'd like to mention such as race, ability, etc?

How would you describe your identity as a streamer? The brand of your channel?

What interested you in Twitch and why did you start streaming?

How long have you been streaming/how long did you stream?

What has motivated you to continue streaming?

Have you ever stopped streaming? Why?

How did you learn to stream?

Tell me about your favorite Twitch streamers? What do you enjoy about them? Are you modeling from these streamers and channels, and if so, what?

Describe the different types of activities/work that go into your work streaming/being a streamer.

What different types of work are you doing while you're live?

Describe how you present yourself and perform while you're streaming (your persona).

Why did you decide to present yourself in that way?

How does your gender identity and presentation figure into your performance?

How do others perceive/react to your self-expression/performance as a streamer?

How has your performance as a streamer changed over time?

Describe the general social and emotional atmosphere of your channel. How do you promote a sense of community?

How do you typically interact with your channel community?

In what ways do you find yourself managing your feelings as a part of your streaming?

In what ways are you managing the feelings of others as a part of your streaming?

Describe your sense of belonging to a Twitch community/community of streamers.

Have you ever been part of a specific, supportive group of streamers? (Like a stream team.) Why or why not?

What opportunities are there on and around Twitch for building support and community?

Why might it be important to find support and community with other streamers?

What is your sense of standards and stereotypes that viewers have of Twitch streamers? Is there a standard of authenticity for what a streamer is/does?

How much pressure is there to adhere to these? What are the consequences for disregarding them?

How important is it to success as a streamer to address/perform these expectations?

Are you aware of/encountered stereotypes about women streamers?

Have you encountered any discrimination or gatekeeping from other streamers?

Have you ever been made to feel like you don't fit in as a streamer or a gamer?

How have you noticed different standards for how different kinds of people are treated on Twitch and in streaming? This can be related to factors like age, race, sexual orientation, disability, gender-.

How does this treatment typically manifest itself?

What consequences have you seen, or experienced, as a result of this treatment?

What do you think motivates this behavior?

In your opinion and experience, is harassment a problem on Twitch? To what extent is it a problem?

How do you personally define and identify harassment?

What in your opinion is the line between trash talk and harassment?

Have you ever been harassed while streaming? Harassed on Twitch?

If you're comfortable, please describe?

Have you ever changed anything about yourself, your streamer performance, or your channel in response to harassment? Please describe those changes.

How has harassment impacted you personally?

How do you think feminists/feminism is perceived in streaming as a broader culture/community?

Why do you think Twitch users/streamers generally feel that way about feminism/feminists?

Are you feminist and does that figure into your approach to/performance of streaming and how you interact with viewers?

If not a feminist, what is your opinion of overtly feminist streamers?

What aspects of streaming are the most challenging?

What about streaming is the most enjoyable?

What, in your opinion, needs to happen to make Twitch as a platform and a community more inclusive and welcoming?

Is there anything else you'd like to add- or any other topic- you'd like to mention or discuss before the interview ends?

I'm ending the recording now. **[*STOP RECORDING*]**

Thank you again for sharing your time and your experiences with me. I'm going to send your $50 USD Amazon gift card digitally to whatever email address you prefer within 24 hours of the end of this interview.

In the future, if you have any questions or would like a copy of the interview or any published materials that may result from this research, please send me an email.

Do you have any questions before I end the call?